



## **University of Huddersfield Repository**

Dalton, Raymond David

Labour and the municipality : Labour politics in Leeds 1900-1914

### **Original Citation**

Dalton, Raymond David (2000) Labour and the municipality : Labour politics in Leeds 1900-1914. Doctoral thesis, University of Huddersfield.

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/4872/>

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: [E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk](mailto:E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk).

<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/>

**LABOUR AND THE MUNICIPALITY:  
LABOUR POLITICS IN LEEDS 1900 - 1914**

**RAYMOND DAVID DALTON**

**A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Huddersfield**

**October 2000**

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the emergence of the Labour Party in Leeds, from its establishment as the Leeds Labour Representation Committee in 1902 up to the outbreak of the First World War. This will include a description and analysis of the very different political features of the Labour Party in Leeds in the parliamentary and municipal elections in this period.

While only able to have elected one member of parliament before 1914, the Labour Party was to obtain a presence on the City Council in 1903 and by 1914 became the second largest party.

The success of the Labour Party in municipal politics was due to the willingness of most trade unions in Leeds to join with the Independent Labour Party in giving it political and financial support. This was achieved by the Party's advocacy of municipal government as a vehicle of social reform. In particular, they argued in favour of using the trading profits of municipally owned services for the financing of these reforms.

A powerful voice in the Leeds Labour Party was provided by the unions organising municipal workers. As a result, the Labour group was to act as their defenders on the City Council in the face of a hostile Conservative-Liberal majority. However, the Party in Leeds was to establish a broad base of support from the trade union and socialist movements in the city, which enabled it to survive relatively unscathed the defeat of a general strike of municipal workers in 1913 and 1914.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to my Supervisor, Professor Keith Laybourn, for his oversight, suggestions and advice.



# CONTENTS

## Page

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Abbreviations	vi
List of Tables	vii

<b>CHAPTER ONE:</b>	<b>THE EMERGENCE OF LABOUR POLITICS IN LEEDS: 1890-1905</b>	<b>1</b>
	a) The Focus of Historical Debate	1
	b) From Liberalism to Labour: early Leeds Labour Politics: 1890-1900	4
	c) The Formation of the Leeds Labour Representation Committee	33
	d) Leeds Labour Representation Committee 1902-1905: The Consolidation of Authority	42

<b>CHAPTER TWO:</b>	<b>THE POLITICAL GROWTH OF LABOUR: 1904-1914</b>	<b>60</b>
	a) The Quest for Parliamentary Representation until 1905	60
	b) Labour under the Shadow of Parliamentary Liberalism 1905-1914	71
	c) Labour and Municipal Politics 1902-1914	92

<b>CHAPTER THREE:</b>	<b>LABOUR AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF IN LEEDS: 1900-1914</b>	<b>116</b>
-----------------------	--	------------

<b>CHAPTER FOUR:</b>	<b>THE LABOUR PARTY AND THE CITY COUNCIL 1902-14: MUNICIPAL SOCIALISM, THE TRADE UNIONS AND THE SEARCH FOR A REFORMED LOCAL GOVERNMENT</b>	<b>153</b>
	a) The Background	153
	b) Labour, the Trade Unions and the Corporation	162
	c) The Municipality and Social Reform	181
	d) Labour Isolated	186
	e) Labour and the Lord Mayoralty	193
	f) Conclusion	196

<b>CONTENTS (continued)</b>	<b><u>Page</u></b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: THE ROAD TO THE MUNICIPAL STRIKE OF 1913</b>	<b>203</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX: THE LEEDS CORPORATION STRIKE AND ITS AFTERMATH</b>	<b>239</b>
a) The June Strike and the Federal Council	239
b) The Onset of the Strike	261
c) The Progress and Collapse of the Strike	265
d) The Aftermath	287
e) An Assessment	292
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: THE LEEDS LABOUR PARTY AND THE ILP</b>	<b>321</b>
a) Introduction	321
b) The Socialist and Labour Alliance	323
c) The Move towards Professionalisation	333
d) The Creation of a Labour Identity	342
i) Club Life	342
ii) Women and the Labour Party	347
iii) Syndicalism and Labour in Leeds	352
iv) Labour Party and Peace	359
e) The Tenants' Rent Strike 1913-14	364
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION</b>	<b>380</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>392</b>

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>LRC</b>	<b>Labour Representation Committee, official title of the Labour Party from 1900 to 1906.</b>
<b>LLRC</b>	<b>Leeds Labour Representation Committee, official designation of the Labour Party in Leeds 1902 - 1914.</b>
<b>ILP</b>	<b>Independent Labour Party</b>
<b>SDF</b>	<b>Social Democratic Federation</b>
<b>BSP</b>	<b>British Socialist Party</b>
<b>GGLU</b>	<b>Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union</b>
<b>ASRS</b>	<b>Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants</b>
<b>ASLEF</b>	<b>Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen</b>
<b>LTC</b>	<b>Leeds Trades and Labour Council</b>
<b>LM</b>	<b>Leeds Mercury (Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury, October 1902 - October 1907).</b>
<b>YP</b>	<b>Yorkshire Post</b>
<b>YEP</b>	<b>Yorkshire Evening Post</b>
<b>LWC</b>	<b>Leeds Weekly Citizen</b>
<b>YFT</b>	<b>Yorkshire Factory Times.</b>

## **LIST OF TABLES**

		<b><u>Page</u></b>
Table 2.1	ILP Contested Seats on Leeds City Council 1893 - 1898	103
Table 2.2	Participation of LRC in November Municipal Elections 1902 - 1913	104
Table 2.3	3 November - Municipal Elections - Party Results	105
Table 2.4	Labour Contests 1903-14 (including by- elections and SDF Candidates)	106
Table 2.5	Labour Contests 1902 - 1914	107
Table 6.1	Number of Corporation Workers on Strike, 12th December 1914	310
Table 6.2	Number of Strikers reinstated in the immediate aftermath of the settlement on the following dates	311
Table 6.3	Municipal Employees, 1 June 1914	312-13

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE EMERGENCE OF LABOUR POLITICS

#### IN LEEDS 1890-1904

##### a) The Focus of Historical Debate

The decade and a half leading up to the outbreak of the First World War has been contrastingly analysed as the high water mark of Liberal Party <sup>fortunes</sup> failures in British politics and alternatively as the period when its future electoral collapse was heralded by the rapidly growing challenge of the Labour Party. That the Liberal Party saw a resounding reversal in its electoral failures, seeing its parliamentary representation drop from 400 in the House of Commons in 1906 to only 40 in 1924 (and 59 in 1929) is beyond dispute. Also <sup>with a</sup> the fact that the Labour Party grew from 30 M.P.s <sup>since 1906</sup> in 1906 to 191 in 1923 to become capable of forming a minority government. The reversal of fortunes of the two parties was paralleled in most urban areas of Britain. This has prompted the question among historians of why this change occurred and at what point did the Liberal Party start its long decline.

The historical debate has been to analyse the reasons for, and the timing of that change. The issue was whether the change in political support from Liberalism to Labour was decisive before 1914, or <sup>whether</sup> that the progressive vote was largely retained by Liberalism up to the First World



War. The historical debate has been divided between those who argue that the Liberal Party was undermined by the emergence of class politics up to 1914 and those who attribute its downfall to the accident of the First World War and the split between Asquith and Lloyd George in 1916.

On the one hand, the advocacy of the rise of Labour at the expense of Liberalism in this period has included such historians as Henry Pelling, Paul Thompson and Ross McKibbin, who have argued that Labour's closer association with the trade union movement up to 1914 captured for it the support of the working class. The national perspectives of those historians have been supplemented by the regional analysis of such historians as Laybourn, Reynolds and Bernstein. (1)

This class-based explanation has been challenged by a significant number of Liberal 'revisionist' historians, commencing with Trevor Wilson in 1966, and continuing through the books and articles of Roy Douglas, P. F. Clarke, K. D. Brown and Chris Cook through to Duncan Tanner, which have attempted to explain the collapse of the Liberal Party as a consequence of the profound cultural and social changes brought about by the First World War. They have portrayed the Liberal Party as politically healthy in 1914 and more than holding its own against any potential challenge from the Labour Party. They attribute this to the Liberal Party's convincing showing as the principal party of progressive social reform which captured the support of a larger part of the electorate.

(2)

The contention between the rival groups of historians has centred on whether the existence of a large body of unenfranchised males adversely effected the electoral growth of Labour's share of the parliamentary vote up to 1914. Historians supporting the growth of Labour thesis have speculated that most of these unenfranchised men were working class and youthful and a potential source of support for Labour. On the other hand they have cited the cases of constituencies like Holmfirth and Crewe where Labour did well in by-elections immediately before the First World War. This was in spite of the disadvantages which the Labour Party experienced because of the restrictions on trade union financed support as a result of the Osborne Judgment in 1909, and its lack of a nationally organised body of skilled political agents.

The work of Duncan Tanner, 'Political Change and the Labour Party', has used evidence from municipal elections to argue in favour of Liberalism's political vigour up to 1914, and Labour's inability to supersede it as the principle of progressive reform. Opposing Tanner, a number of regional and local studies have been used to demonstrate that Labour was a more dynamic political force in local government in this period and making real electoral inroads into Liberalism's traditional support. (3) These studies have also sought to cast doubt on the commitment of the Liberal Party's local notables to any ideology or programme of advanced social reform known as 'New Liberalism', and to demonstrate that in fact most of them looked back to traditional Liberal Party rallying points as Free

Trade, Temperance and religious Nonconformity. In the face of increase trade union militancy after 1911 many of the local leaders of Liberalism became closely linked with business interests, were to become even more Conservative in their attitudes to social politics.

Studies of the Labour Party at the local level has begun to throw light on particular factors affecting the changing fortunes of Liberalism and Labourism. The studies of the Bradford and the West Yorkshire woollen towns have shed light on political developments in areas long the strongholds of Liberalism, dominated by one or two major industries like the manufacture of woollens and worsteds. In Bradford for instance, the Manningham Mills Strike of 1890 was a catalyst for the emergence of strong ILP support among workers in the worsted and allied industries. The existence of a large and industrially and commercially diverse centre such as Leeds holds out the prospect of an analysis of the varying fortunes of Labour and Liberalism in a major metropolitan area up to 1914, set in the wider national context and debate discussed above. (4)

**b) From Liberalism to Labour: early Leeds Labour Politics 1890-1900**

An analysis of the development of Labour politics in Leeds provides a useful point of contrast with such early strongholds of socialism as Bradford, where the decline of one industry encouraged dissent and the



growth of Independent Labour politics. Until the end of the last decade of the nineteenth century Labour politics in the City seemed destined to remain subordinate to Liberalism, which appealed to the narrowly organised top strata of skilled craft workers in a town of many industries whose economic fortunes varied from time to time in such a way as to ensure that the depth of depression experienced in the textile towns like Bradford never occurred.

The representative body of workers, the Leeds Trades and Labour Council, had, after a brief foray into municipal elections in 1891 and 1892, been content to promote by discreet negotiations the choice of leading trade unionists as Liberal candidates for seats on the City Council. The majority on the Trades Council was made up of representatives of craft unions of skilled workers, mainly Liberal in sympathy. Since 1890, and the successful outcome of the Gasworkers' Strike in that year, they had been forced to admit as their affiliate the Socialist led Gasworkers and General Labourers' Union, which organised unskilled and semi-skilled workers. The attempts by the GGLU to win the majority of the Trades Council to support independent socialist candidates had been vehemently rejected. In the early 1890s relations between the craft unionists and the mainly GGLU supported socialist minority had been acrimonious, but by the end of the century antipathy between them had almost disappeared. (5) The Trades Council majority still regularly voted down attempts to obtain its backing for Independent

Labour Party candidates in municipal elections and was content to see the return of the Trades Council's secretary and treasurer, Owen Connellan and William Marston respectively, as city councillors in the Liberal interest. (6) Without the backing of the Trades Council, the Leeds ILP failed to make any electoral impact when it put up candidates for the City Council and by 1899 it had stopped fielding candidates at all.

A series of major industrial disputes between 1895 and 1897, affecting members of the Boot and Shoemakers' Union and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, both leading craft unions resisting attempts to impose more adverse employment terms by means of lock outs, had brought all parts of the local labour movement into closer union in defence of trade unionism generally. The Independent Labour Party (ILP) and its socialist ideas began to attract younger members of the craft unions such as Arthur Shaw of the ASE who was elected President of the Leeds Trades Council in 1895. Other members of the ILP followed him on to the executive of the Trades Council, blurring the distinction between the political stances of craft unionists and the representatives of the new general unions, particularly the Gas Workers. The new alignment between craft unionists and the Gasworkers' Union was signalled by the Resolution of the Trades Council in 1897 in favour of setting up of a political fund to support Labour candidates in future elections. (7) The integration of the ILP and the Gasworkers' Union into the mainstream of Leeds trade unionism was signalled by the election of

Walt Wood, the Gasworkers' organiser and veteran of the 1890 strike, as President of the Trades Council in 1900.

However, the increasing harmony between the ILP and Trade Unionists in Leeds could hardly disguise their meagre political achievements compared to most industrial districts in West Yorkshire. The local ILP remained small in membership compared to that of Bradford and it had never come close to electing a city councillor between 1893 and 1900, even in two-way contests. The representation of Labour on the city council was limited in effect to Owen Connellan and William Marston, the two permanent officers of the Trades' Council who were both part of the Liberal group. A third city councillor supported by the Trades' Council was James Tetley, nominally a member of the Engineers' Union but in fact a senior officer of the Leeds Co-operative Society. In the lock-out of the engineers of 1897 he had held back from giving them any public support, but, in spite of criticism at the time, was still drawing on the Trades Council's political fund in 1900. Any influence these councillors may have had was reduced by the Conservative capture of control of the City Council in 1895, a control which was to remain largely unbroken up to 1914.

Whilst Marston was to remain a staunchly loyal Liberal councillor, holding office as the Trades Council's treasurer up to 1916, Connellan was to steer the Trades Council to a more independent political position.

Connellan was a member of the elite Typographers' Union and had been a delegate to the Bradford Trades Council, prior to its capture by the ILP. Coming to Leeds in the early 1890s his administrative skills led him to be chosen as the Trades Council secretary, a position he was to hold until 1924. Although not a socialist, he had joined the Leeds ILP in 1893, and appeared willing for the Trades Council to work with the ILP in campaigning for a solution to the problem of severe unemployment that afflicted Leeds and the West Riding textile district between 1892 and 1895. (8) By 1895 he had distanced himself from the ILP and with the support of anti-socialist elements in the Trades Council organised in the Leeds Electoral Association and Irish Nationalists in East Leeds [ He was adopted and elected as a Liberal Labour city councillor for the East Ward. (9) Allowed complete freedom to vote as he wished in connection with Labour matters, he became in effect the Trades Council representative on the City Council. Although willing to see the Trades Council work with the ILP and middle-class reform groups for such causes as slum clearance and the provision of municipally-owned working-class housing, he remained opposed to it giving any mark of support to ILP candidates, which might be construed as approval of their socialism. (10)

At the same time as the Trades Council eschewed support for independent Labour or Socialist candidates at municipal elections, it nevertheless became more concerned with broader measures of social reform. As early as 1895 the Trades Council had joined with the ILP to



publish a pamphlet entitled *The Unemployed: A Discussion of Causes and Remedies for Securing of Employment - Special Reference to Leeds*, advocating the institution of the eight-hour day. From 1897 the Trades Council joined in campaigns to persuade the City Council to commence building of affordable working-class housing to let and affiliated with national reform organisations such as the Land Restoration League and the Land Nationalisation Society. In January 1899 the Trades Council played host to a national conference in favour of a state-funded old age pension. (11) Two years of unsuccessful lobbying in favour of municipal housing culminated in the Trades Council setting up a Housing Committee in 1899, including the ILP, which became an embryonic Labour Party. (12)

(refers to ?)

The increasing co-operation of the Trades Council and the ILP, at the end of the 1890s, coincided with a period of stagnation and decline in Labour politics throughout West Yorkshire. In Leeds, where the ILP had never made any electoral impact, the temptation to abandon all electoral activity and concentrate on propaganda and joint campaigning with the Trades Council was considerable. In the 1898 City Council elections the Leeds ILP was widely suspected of doing a secret electoral deal with the Conservative Party and had been strongly criticised by Owen Connellan. (13) Significantly, in November 1899 the ILP failed to field any candidates in the City Council elections.

f.

121

The emergence of an independent Labour movement in Leeds was to be precipitated by the establishment of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) at the Memorial Hall, London, on 27 February 1900, following the passing of the resolution of the Trades Union Congress in favour of independent Labour Representation on 15 September 1899. The newly-created Labour Representation Committee was endowed with the authority of the TUC, when it set out through its secretary Ramsay MacDonald, to promote the setting up of local committees pledged to the election of independent Labour representatives to Parliament and to municipal bodies.

The establishment of the LRC coincided with significant developments in Leeds. The MP for East Leeds, T. R. Leuty, had signified his retirement at the next general election, owing to ill health. Leuty represented the poorest constituency in the city, with its large Irish population concentrated in the district known as the Bank. A radical, he was known as a supporter of the programmes of old Radicalism such as Temperance and the newly reformed Liberalism based on the 1891 Newcastle Programme. An industrialist who was sympathetic to trade unionism, Leuty was well regarded by many of the craft unionists who were still influential in the Trades Council. His popularity was enhanced by his role as mayor in 1892 and 1893, when he acted as a conciliator between the Leeds City Council and unemployed demonstrators represented by the ILP. Leuty's retirement cleared the way for the promotion of the

candidacy of Owen Connellan, who would combine the attributes of being a leading trade unionist, a Liberal city councillor and, by descent, an Irishman.

The supporters of Connellan took advantage of the Trades Council meeting on 28 March 1900 to move in favour of joining with the East Leeds Liberal Association <sup>and</sup> endorsing him as the prospective parliamentary candidate for East Leeds. (14) It was agreed that the individual unions affiliated with the Trades Council should be polled on this proposal before any action was taken in committee. The response was far from unanimous; of twenty-five replies received by 11 April, only ten were in favour of approaching the Liberal Party with a view to their endorsing the candidacy of Connellan. A further seven affiliates came out in favour of 'out and out' direct Labour Representation, while another nine responses were either non-committal or opposed to any action being taken. (15)

This was a significant set back to Connellan and his supporters, particularly as the 11 April meeting of the Trades Council decided to support a candidate representing the newly-formed Labour Representation Committee and to approach its secretary, Ramsay MacDonald for assistance. A favourable response from MacDonald led the Trades Council to resolve in favour of supporting an independent parliamentary candidate for East Leeds. This was soon followed by the

formal affiliation of the Trades Council to the Labour Representation Committee on 30 May 1900. (16)

It was still possible that Connellan would be able to carry enough support within the Trades Council to enable him to obtain its endorsement as a Liberal Labour candidate, as he had done in 1895 when he first stood for the City Council. At a meeting held on 4 May 1900 at St. James Hall, Connellan argued that the trade unions were not strong enough in themselves to field a successful candidate but could still obtain their object by joining with the Liberals in putting up a jointly sponsored "Progressive" candidate. (17) His followers <sup>argue</sup> could argue in his support that the East Ward which he represented on the City Council comprised the largest part of the East Leeds parliamentary constituency, and he <sup>brought</sup> could bring his local popularity and the ward Liberal organisation to bear in any parliamentary contest.

Leeds Trades Council's affiliation with the LRC was to see MacDonald throw his influence behind the selection of W. P. Byles, an advanced Liberal who had previously represented the Liberal Party as MP for Shipley between 1892 and 1895. In the 1890s Byles had sought the support of the ILP and non-socialist trade unionists in Bradford and Shipley for a policy of pushing the Liberal Party in the direction of being the vehicle for promotion of legislation to improve the conditions of the working class. His support for social reform and his sympathy for the



trade unions did not endear him to most of his fellow Liberals in Bradford. He possessed, however, a powerful political vehicle through his part proprietorship of the newspaper the Bradford Observer, through which he propagated his views in favour of a Liberal-Labour alliance.

By 1900, no longer a proprietor of the Bradford Observer, and unable to obtain any nominations as a parliamentary candidate from the local Liberal organisations, he approached the newly-formed LRC as a vehicle for his return to Parliament on an advanced radical platform. He found the support of MacDonald and the ILP leadership forthcoming for his intervention in East Leeds. Already obtaining the backing of the East Leeds branch of the United Irish League, he appealed to the anti-war sentiments of many Liberal activists by his well-publicised opposition to the Boer War. (18) In subsequent correspondence with Connellan and the Leeds Trades Council, MacDonald made it clear that he and the LRC were in favour of their adopting Byles as the Labour and Home Rule candidate for East Leeds. (19)

The calling of a general election in 1900 gave greater urgency to the issue of finding a suitable Labour candidate. Following the announcement the Trades Council immediately drew up a questionnaire for submission to all parliamentary candidates in Leeds to ascertain their attitude to the legal position of the trade unions. At the meeting of the Trades Council, where it was resolved to affiliate to the LRC, a resolution was proposed

to appoint a delegation to confer with the Irish Nationalist party about a suitable candidate for East Leeds. A further amendment was proposed that the Trades Council agree to be addressed by Byles. Neither resolution was successful, but the intention of Byles to seek nomination was now public, and clearly was backed by the local ILP and many Irish Home Rulers. (20)

Connellan's prospects of adoption were to decline rapidly in the ensuing months as the Liberal Party organisation in Leeds showed no inclination to consider him as a prospective parliamentary candidate. In contrast, the Trades Council was to receive an invitation from the Liberal - Non Denominational group on the School Board to propose a candidate for inclusion on their slate in the forthcoming election to the Board. The invitation was considered at a heavily attended meeting of the Trades Council on 11 July 1900 and it was variously proposed that the Liberals' offer be accepted, that an independent Trade Council candidate be nominated or that the council approach both the Liberal and Conservative parties to include a trade unionist on their lists. Eventually, it was left to the Trades Council executive to nominate a candidate for the Liberal list. Their choice fell on Alfred Holgate, a craft unionist from the Carpenters' and Joiners' union, who was elected on the Liberal slate in November 1900. Independently, the Federation of Building Trade Unions had put up their own candidate, Thomas Heal, who was elected to the School Board as an independent in spite of failing to obtain the endorsement of

the Trades Council at its meeting on the 11 July. (21) The decision to put up Trade Union candidates was to reduce electoral support for the ILP candidate at the Board election. Unlike the previous ILP candidates, Arthur Shaw and Dave Cummings who were both prominent Trade Union leaders, the current candidate, George Gale, an estate agent, failed to be elected to the Board. At the meeting of the Trades Council, held on the 25 July 1900, when the Executive reported the nomination of Holgate to the School Board list, a letter was read from the Leeds branch of the Irish National League asking whether or not the Council would give a hearing to an address by Byles on Labour topics. (22) Several of the delegates asked whether the matter was a political one, but the meeting by a large majority decided to hear Byles at a special meeting called for that purpose.

Reflecting the move towards independent trade union representation at the municipal level, a meeting of members of the Gasworkers and General Labourers' union held at their York Street premises on 24 August 1900, resolved, after long discussion, to set up a committee composed of a member from each branch to seek out a ward where there was a chance of winning a seat. The committee was to report to a further meeting of members on the matter of a suitable candidate and the raising of supporting funds. (23)

The issue of an independent parliamentary candidate and the choice of

Byles was brought to a head at the Trades Council on 29 August 1900 when a letter from Ramsay MacDonald to the Council was read out by Connellan. MacDonald wrote that: "I am sure we all very much regret that there is no Labour candidate for East Leeds", and in response to this prompting a resolution was carried unanimously to endorse Byles for East Leeds and to give him "hearty support".

Byles was quick to intervene in the campaign gathering in his favour, making an address at a meeting held under the auspices of the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Movement, an organisation bringing together middle-class social reformers and socialists, at St. James Hall on 14 September 1900. Consenting to stand on behalf of the organisations of working men, he said that the wage earning class was hardly represented in Parliament and that the claims of the labourers and the needs of the poor were grossly neglected. He claimed to represent these needs during his three years as MP for Shipley and spoke of the grave injustice done by monopoly, privileges and vested interests that enriched the few and impoverished the many. Byles called for this to be redressed by more drastic measures than those ever proposed in Parliament. He called for taxation of land and mineral values, enlargement of death duties, severely graduated Income Tax, legislative encouragement to trade unions, and generous state provision for the worst off labourers. Turning to foreign affairs he condemned the Salisbury Conservative government for isolating Britain through its colonial and foreign policy and unnecessary



war in South Africa. He ended by calling for peace instead of war, retrenchment instead of extravagance, reform instead of stagnation. Finally, making a play for the Irish vote he described Ireland as overtaxed and overpoliced, and called for an Irish parliament which would attract the Irish to the Empire. (24)

His speech combined elements of old Gladstonian anti-imperialism with a programme of social reform which would appeal to working-class voters loyal to Liberalism by looking for political representation more responsive to their class. Byles was not interested in creating a distinct Labour Party on a national scale but was pursuing the strategy he had adopted at Shipley in 1892 and 1895, when he had sought to build a local Labour Electoral Association made up of Socialist and Non Socialist trade unionists which would work to capture control of the local Liberal Party organisation. (25)

It became clear that Byles would be opposed by an official Liberal candidate, James Rochefort Maguire. Maguire was a financier and associate of Cecil Rhodes in South Africa and a supporter of the war against the Boer republics. In addition, he had previously been an Irish Nationalist MP but had subsequently transferred his allegiance to the Liberal Party. There was widespread opposition to the War amongst the rank and file Liberal activists and the Irish Nationalists and Maguire was doubly disliked as a "Rand Lord" and a renegade nationalist. For the first

time, many of the Irish voters in Leeds were willing to consider an alternative to their formerly staunch support for official Liberalism. In contrast, Byles was an outspoken opponent of the War, like T. R. Leuty, the outgoing MP, which endeared him to many trade union and ILP activists.

Byles, however, was not without enemies in the Trades Council, not least Connellan whom he had displaced as its favoured candidate. Connellan, who originated from Bradford, and was a compositor, had through his union been involved in a bitter dispute with the Bradford Observer in the 1890s over the introduction of new technology and union recognition.

(26) After attempting, unsuccessfully, to dissuade MacDonald from supporting Byles by arguing that he was too unpopular with the majority of the Liberal Party in Leeds to receive an unopposed run if adopted by the LRC, Connellan came out in opposition to Byles.

At the adoption meeting on 20 September, Maguire was to receive unexpected support from Connellan, who attacked Byles' past record as an employer in Bradford. (27) On the same day, at a packed meeting chaired by Walt Wood, current President of the Trades Council, Byles was adopted as the official Labour candidate. His nomination was moved by William Kennedy of the Tailors' Union, <sup>its previous</sup> last year's Trade Council president, an Irishman and former Liberal-Labourist. He said it was only right that the Labour Party should have a vote in one of the five

parliamentary divisions of Leeds. Discounting the objection that this would split the Liberal vote, he called on the working man not only to rally around the old flag but the new flag of trade unionism.

In his acceptance speech, Byles declared that he had been sought out by the electors themselves and it was from the cottage and not the mansion that he had been called. He emphasised his New Liberal beliefs, citing the support he had from Sir Charles Dilke, an advanced Liberal reformer, while also stressing that he was the candidate of the Trades Council denouncing all who stood against him as enemies of the trade union movement. Before a meeting, made up of trade unionists, he played down the fact that he was really hoping to obtain the official endorsement of the official Liberal Party and concluded by denouncing the South African war and Maguire, although he held back from attacking the Liberal Party.

Connellan now elaborated his attacks on Byles' record as an employer, accusing him of being a member of the anti-union Master Printers' Association in Bradford and of having victimised a former employee. Instead of politically undermining Byles, these accusations succeeded in isolating Connellan from many trade unionists in Leeds, including hitherto staunch supporters of the Liberal Party. A showdown took place at the Trades Council meeting on the 26 September 1900, when William Kennedy demanded that Byles be allowed to defend himself before the

Council delegates. This was allowed and Byles, on being admitted, denied any knowledge of any anti-union clauses in the Master Printers' Association when he was a member of it. If the delegates found his explanation less than convincing this was outweighed by their indignation at Connellan's conduct, who they suspected of concealing this information until the last moment in order to damage Byles' campaign. A resolution was carried in favour of Byles and Connellan tendered his resignation as secretary. Although Connellan's resignation was refused at a subsequent Trades Council meeting on the 17 October, and he agreed to stay on, the days were past when he was able to carry the majority of non-socialist delegates to the Trades Council on political matters. (28)

In subsequent addresses to political meetings, Byles was to play up his identity as a true Liberal who was opposed to the official party machine. His attacks on Maguire grew more extreme; at a meeting on 27 September he said he would rather see a Tory win rather than Maguire. (29) At further meetings, Byles described Maguire as an adventurer, not a Liberal and referred to himself as associated with the objects of the Liberal Party, a party of the future, as opposed to the Liberal electoral machine. (30) In spite of Byles's reluctance to put his Liberal allegiances behind him, prominent members of the Leeds ILP were to be found on the platform at his electoral meetings alongside Irish Nationalists and Lib-Lab trade unionists. At the final poll, Byles came bottom, his intervention probably contributing to the Conservative gain of the seat



from the Liberals. Cauntley, the Conservative candidate, obtained 3,453 votes to 1,586 for Maguire and 1,266 for Byles, indicating that Byles had been able by his intervention to effectively split the Liberal vote. Byles' candidacy and advocacy of a New Liberal programme had gained working-class support without making any inroads into the official Liberal Party organisation in Leeds. Not even the East Leeds Liberals wavered in their official support for Maguire, a candidate imposed on them from above. In spite of his Liberal professions, Byles' campaign ultimately had to fall back on the national LRC and the Trades Council. He was soon to move back into the orbit of the Liberal Party and eventually be elected to Parliament for East Salford in the Liberal landslide of 1906.

The failure of Byles to win the Leeds Liberal Party to the cause of New Liberalism, a programme of extensive social reform by the State to promote social consensus, did not prevent some of its programme being adapted in a modified form under the shortlived guise ideas of a Progressive alliance between the Liberalism and Labour.

Following the General Election, a less controversial but, in the long run, more important campaign was launched in favour of Walt Wood for a seat on the City Council for the South Ward. On the 16 September 1900, the Gasworkers had selected him to stand and following this on 30 September, a further meeting decided to widen his backing at a large

public meeting to be held at St. Judes schoolroom in the following month. The meeting which took place on 12 October, saw the Trades Council represented by non-Socialists such as John Buckle and leading ILP trade unionists such as W. T. Newlove and T. B. Duncan. Old differences were forgotten as, by a unanimous motion, Wood was adopted as a candidate. As the election drew near a growing number of craft union branches such as those of the engineers and boilermakers pledged their support for Wood. (31) Significantly, his campaign had the support of the Liberals, who refrained from putting up a candidate against him. At a further meeting at St. Judes on the 25 October, attended by leading non-Socialist and ILP trade unionists, Wood felt able to declare that he had been given the support of Joseph Henry, leader of the Liberal group on the City Council and the whole Liberal organisation in Leeds. At this and subsequent meetings, Wood advocated a municipal programme of improved sanitary facilities, better wages for corporation employees, improved housing, the municipalisation of the coal trade, cheaper tram fares and the provision of working-class housing by the City Council. (32)

The campaign was run in tandem with that of Holgate for the School Board, and enjoyed the support of the Liberal Party, which came out in open support of Wood. The Liberal's gift of South Leeds Ward did not cost them a great deal as it was a semi rural and safely Conservative in allegiance. It did, however, put their local association at the disposal of Wood's campaign, and indicated the Liberal's desire to see him eventually

elected to the City Council as an ally. The Liberal Party hoped that by eventually obtaining the election of Walt Wood to the City Council they could satisfy the political ambitions of the new socialist led trade unions just as they accommodated the craft unions in 1895 with Connellan. Wood failed to be elected, obtaining 750 votes to the 1740 gained by the victorious Conservative candidate. The vote for Wood was similar to that gained by Liberal candidates in the ward in previous years, suggesting that much of his electoral support came as a result of the organisational support of the local Liberal party. (33)

This informal collaboration between Lib-Lab trade unionists, the ILP and the local Liberal Association was to be given organisational form with the setting up of the Leeds Progressive Electoral Committee on 10 March 1901. At the inaugural meeting, chaired by John Buckle, a deputation was chosen to approach the local leaders of the Liberals with a view to securing one or two seats on the city council for Trade Union candidates. (34) It was agreed, without dissent, to support Walt Wood as candidate for the South Ward and to endorse Progressive candidates for the forthcoming Board of Guardians elections for the Leeds, Holbeck and Bramley Poor Law Unions. The activities of the Progressives coincided with those of the Trade Council led Housing Committee, which was now affiliated with the National Housing Council. The Progressives were to act as its political arm, dedicated to persuading the City Council to adopt a policy of erecting working-class housing, including municipal lodging

houses for single workmen. On 16 March 1901, the Housing Committee played host to a national conference on housing of the working class at The People's Hall under the auspices of the National Housing Reform Council, the Trades Council and the Leeds Cooperative Society. (35)

This was shortly after the Trades Council had sent Connellan and Walt Wood as its delegates to the Manchester conference of the national Labour Representation Committee. (36) Connellan was elected to the Committee for Trades Councils, despite the fact that he was sitting on the City Council in the Liberal interest. The Trades Council still remained the official affiliate to the national LRC but appeared to be passing the initiative to promote working-class representation to the newly-founded Progressive Election Committee. The movement towards the setting up of an independent Labour party in the city seemed likely to be side tracked into a Liberal-led reform movement.

Nevertheless, at a mass meeting held by the Progressive Committee on 13 May 1901, organised to celebrate Walt Wood's campaign, the 120 attenders were drawn from the ranks of the trade union's most active members including ILP members such as D. B. Foster, who moved the motion of appreciation in favour of Wood. In reply, Wood urged all workers to combine, advocated housing reform and a reform in the letting of contracts by the City Highways Department. (37) The cause of working-class politics was already becoming linked with that of reform



through municipalisation, marking a dividing line with even the most advanced Liberal politics at the city level.

The campaign for Wood soon gained increasing impetus. At a meeting held at the Gasworkers' rooms in New York Street held on the 2 June 1901, (38) it was agreed to launch supporting meetings throughout the city. The South Ward Liberals were to be approached again to obtain the adoption of Wood as their candidate in November. In the following months almost weekly indoor and outdoor meetings were held by the Progressive Electoral Committee to advocate support for Wood's candidacy and by implication, the cause of Labour Representation and Social Reform.

A by-election in the South Ward in August saw the local Liberals standing down to give Wood a free run against the Conservatives, resulting in his obtaining 751 votes to the 943 gained by the successful Conservative candidate. In addition to the Trades Council, the campaign was to receive the open support of well-known Liberal politicians, particularly Dr. Arthur Hawkyard, chairman of the Hunslet Board of Guardians, an advocate of sanitary reforms and a more humane operation of the Poor Law system. (39) At a meeting held on 10 September 1901 at St. Jude's School, Hunslet under the auspices of the Progressive Electoral Committee, Hawkyard took the Chair and declared that the election was being fought on progressive lines and there was room in the Council for

men of Wood's calibre. Also present at the meeting was Councillor Fred Kinder, a rising figure among the younger Liberals and an outspoken advocate of sanitary reform. (40)

Addressing the meeting <sup>Kinder</sup> he took to task the ruling Conservatives for their indifference to the "scourge of consumption" and their mismanagement of municipal sewage schemes. He implied that support for Wood would contribute to the remedy. Wood in his speech said that in his work as a trade union official, it was his business to interview the Corporation committees on wages and other questions and it was his opinion that their greatest opponents were the Tory councillors. He was sure that if the progressive forces worked together in the City, as they ought, in a very short time the Tory majority would disappear.

On the 13 September, under the heading "Fight for South Leeds" the Leeds Mercury reported:

The combined Liberal and Labour forces in Leeds South ward are pursuing the candidature of Walter Wood with an energy which augurs well for their triumph on Monday. (41)

At a large and enthusiastic meeting the previous evening, held at the South Accommodation Road Boarding school, Hawkyard took the chair again and was joined on the platform by a diverse array of Labour and Liberal activists. On the one hand there were ILP veterans, such as Frank

Fountain, and leading craft unionists, such as R. M. Lancaster of the Leeds Typographical Society, and Arthur Holgate, the Trade Council representative on the School Board. Representing the Liberal Party were three city councillors, including Joseph Henry, leader of the Liberal group on the Council. Sounding the note of progressivism, Hawkyard announced that in this election the two branches of the Progressive party had joined forces to see if something could not be done for the ward, which was the most neglected in the City. In Walter Wood they had a man with an idea, a man with a programme and one who would give of his best in the interests of the ward. He concluded by remarking that it was really owing to the efforts of the Labour Party and some Liberals that the tramways were municipalised and he asked the electors to further strengthen those forces by returning Wood.

Councillor Henry was to highlight the note of Liberal-Labour unity, declaring that the Tories were professing to oppose Wood because he was a socialist whose principles sought to undermine the government of the country. Yet he reminded the meeting as Sir William Harcourt, the former Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer, had done, that they were all socialists now; the only difference being in degree. He continued, that on Labour questions Wood would as a member of the City Council, be as free as the other Labour members were and only in political issues would be expected to vote with the Liberal Party, and if the Liberals failed to support him on this occasion it would be to their lasting disgrace.

In his address, Walt Wood said his position on the City Council would be exactly that described by Joseph Henry, the Liberal group leader; for proper conduct of municipal affairs it was absolutely necessary that men representing all sides of the questions discussed should sit on the City Council. He continued by suggesting that he had already much practical knowledge of the conditions of employment under the corporation, and in the gas works alone could save the corporation hundreds of pounds because of his knowledge. The meeting ended on a more customary trade union note when a number of the succeeding speakers spoke out in support of the locked-out fishermen of Grimsby who were being assisted by Wood and his union.

The following day, 13 September 1901, a further large meeting in support of Wood was held at Christ Church school, again chaired by Dr. Hawkyard, and had on its platform the Liberal Chief Whip, Councillor George Ratcliffe, the three Lib-Lab Councillors Connellan, Marston and Tetley. The trade union movement was represented by John Buckle, the then president of the Trades Council, and J. F. Smith, the district secretary of the Gasworkers' Union. The ILP was represented on the platform by two of its leading local members, D. B. Foster and James Brotherton. Foster, moving the resolution in support of Wood's candidacy, appealed to the traditional Liberal and Temperance sentiments of many of the ward's electorate by accusing the Tory party of being under the heels of the drink traffic. If victorious in the ward, they would



be represented by two publicans or ex-publicans as councillors and an ex-publican alderman. They would have in the ward three out of four representatives belonging to a trade which Foster regarded as not of great benefit to the community. (41)

Connellan next spoke of the great advantage of increasing the Labour representatives they now had on the council. Councillor Ratcliffe followed by declaring how proud he was to see Mr. Wood fighting now under the banner of the Progressives with the object of gaining a seat on the City Council. Wood in his address, spoke on the housing question, the purification of the notoriously polluted river Aire and the abatement of smoke nuisances and the carrying out of necessary improvements in the ward.

The Liberal-Labour alliance seemed to reach its apogee by the time that Wood was re-nominated to stand for the South Ward on the 10 October 1901, at the meeting at the South Accommodation Road Board School. The platform, again chaired by Dr. Hawkyard, was made up almost exclusively of local Liberal activists. They showed themselves eager to appropriate the mantle for social reform for the Liberals, advocating financial support for the treatment of consumptives, the erection of working-class housing by the corporation and even the municipalisation of the telephone service. (42) Speaker after speaker claimed Wood as a representative of Liberalism as well as of Labour. The Leeds Mercury of

the 22 October 1901 spoke of Wood as the real progressive candidate of the South Ward, who was

... making the most gratifying headway. He has the full support of the ward Liberal Party and Dr. Hawkyard is working strenuously on his behalf. In addition Mr. Wood carries with him the Labour Forces.

This new-found harmony between the ILP, the trade unions and the Liberal Party did not result in any change in the Liberal programme for the other wards in the city, which emphasised balanced budgets as opposed to the Conservative Party's extravagance in running the city. In addition there was no sign of the Liberals opening up many more seats for trade union candidates. For the third year running the ILP had refrained from putting up any candidate under its own banner, appearing to concede that only through the Liberal Party could the social demands of Labour be articulated.

Running parallel with Wood's campaign was the re-adoption of Connellan as the Liberal candidate for the East Ward on 26 September 1901. (43) At his formal nomination meeting he was chosen as a "Progressive" in the presence of Joe Henry and other leading Liberals. He made the housing of the working class his major concern, demanding what was being done to re-house people displaced by slum clearance schemes being carried out by the city council. Significantly, he received the support of the Gasworkers' district secretary, J. F. Smith, who praised

his record on the City Council and called on those Irish voters who harboured resentment against him for his opposition to Byles to exercise forbearance and not to vote for a Tory backed "Irish" candidate who was standing in the ward. Connellan was elected for the third time with Liberal support but was soon, in his capacity as Trades Council secretary to be drawn closer to the cause of independent labour politics in the aftermath of the November 1901 municipal elections.

In the immediate aftermath of the November elections the Progressive Electoral Committee continued to function with the backing of the local trade unions. On 24 November 1901 it met to draw up a financial report relating to its campaigns for Wood and Connellan and to agree to another meeting to define future policy. At a further meeting, held on 18 December 1901, long discussions are reported to have taken place with a further adjournment to the new year. (44) The committee was still chaired by John Buckle and included pro-ILP trade unionist such as the secretary, W. H. Leach of the GGLU and the treasurer, J. Jones of the Miners' Federation. A week earlier the South Ward P.E.C. had held a committee meeting on 12 December, and a discussion had followed the presentation of accounts. Again, it was decided to adjourn to the new year before taking any further action. Subsequently, all reference to the Committee ceases in the local press and in The Yorkshire Factory Times, the major source of trade union and socialist-related news in West Yorkshire, thus indicating that it had ceased to function without even a

formal dissolution.

Up to now the rebirth of interest in labour representation by the Leeds Labour Movement seemed to be pointing in the direction of wholesale inclusion within the Liberal Party camp, with the apparent support of the ILP. From its foundation in 1900 the national Labour Representation Committee had been a weak countervailing force though in favour of full political independence. Comprising of representatives of the affiliated trade unions, the ILP and initially the SDF, the LRC had been slow to pick up support from the trade union movement. By early 1901 the total membership of the 41 trade unions affiliated to the committee was 353,070 out of a total of 1,272 unions with an aggregate membership of nearly two million in Great Britain. A big impetus to recruitment came with the decision of the Law Lords on the Taff Vale Railway case which subjected trade union funds to heavy punitive damages in legal actions taken against them by employers. The LRC and the ILP's vigour in mobilising opposition to the decision, linked to their advocacy of increased labour representation, gave a further impetus to trade union affiliation so that by 1902 there were 65 unions affiliated with 455,450 members. (45) The withdrawal of the SDF from the committee in August 1901 failed to stop the growing support for it within the labour movement, which owed much of its impetus to the active campaigning on its behalf by the ILP.



### **c) The Formation of the Leeds Labour Representation Committee**

The links between the Leeds Trades Council and the LRC had been flimsy up to the end of 1901. After its affiliation, the LTC had, on the prompting of Ramsay MacDonald, the LRC secretary, supported Byles as its candidate in East Leeds. Byles had, however, financed his campaign out of his own personal fortune and wrote his own programme independently of the LRC. The unsatisfactory outcome of his campaign had led the LRC annual conference in February 1901 to prescribe that all LRC candidates be genuinely promoted and financed by an affiliated organisation. (46) The LTC which acted as the local LRC had as its secretary Owen Connellan, a Liberal supporting city councillor, and many of its delegates and executive members were still uncertain in whether to give priority to the independence or the representation of Labour.

New impetus was given by the holding of a special conference held to promote Labour representation, under the joint auspices of the LTC and the national LRC at Leeds Town Hall on 16 November 1901. The platform included Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald representing the LRC, leading trade unionists such as Pete Curran of the Gasworkers and John Hodge of the Steel Smelters, and representing the LTC, John Buckle and Owen Connellan. In attendance were delegates from 40 trade union branches, the Leeds Co-operative Society, six branches of the ILP, the

Fabian Society and some from as far away as the Spen Valley, Keighley, Dewsbury and York. A resolution was proposed by Newlove, the LTC vice-president, declaring the adhesion of the conference to the principles of labour representation in Parliament and on local governing bodies, welcoming the formation of the LRC and pledging itself to do all in its power to advance the interests of that committee, especially among trade unions. Seconded by leading Leeds engineering trade unionist and ILP stalwart Arthur Shaw, the resolution was amended to include co-operators at the prompting of Keir Hardie, and carried unanimously. However, this was not before some opposition had been voiced to the inclusion of co-operators on the grounds that they sometimes employed blackleg labour. A further discordant voice came from an Irish Nationalist delegate who asked whether he was bound to support trade unionist, socialist or a co-operator who was opposed to Irish Home Rule. MacDonald was quick to assure him that their friends in the Labour movement who would do justice in England would not fail to do justice in Ireland. These matters having been aired to the satisfaction of the delegates, the conference went on to pass a resolution proposed by Walt Wood, that in order to secure the best possible result from a body of labour representatives in Parliament, the Labour movement should unite in promoting Labour candidates in favourable constituencies; and that these candidates be run on a distinct understanding that if they be returned, loyally co-operate with the Labour Party in Parliament in advancing the interests of Labour and on all matters they shall act

independent of other parties. Pete Curran was to declare that if the worker was true to himself he did not need a compact with any other party. In the shadow of the Taff Vale decision, which hit the funds of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, the conference concluded with an appeal from A. Savill of that Union, urging all delegates to take immediate steps to affiliate with the LRC if not already. (47)

The momentum generated by the conference continued into the new year, with Connellan and Arthur Shaw attending the national conference of the LRC in Birmingham between 18-21 February 1902. The Local ILP had already started to campaign for a local Labour Party through a series of outdoor meetings held in the city's numerous municipal parks and in the Vicar's Croft, the oldest and best known of the meeting places used by trade unionists and socialists.

The Leeds Trades Council soon followed the lead given by the ILP; on 26 March 1902, after hearing Connellan's report on the Birmingham conference it voted to take immediate steps to implement the resolution passed in Leeds on the 16 November. The resolution was put by J. D. Macrae, the corresponding secretary of the Central Socialist Club, the most lively and long established of the ILP's branches in Leeds. The Trade Council's executive promptly sent out invitations to its affiliated trade unions, the ILP, the Leeds Cooperative Society and the Fabian Society, to attend a conference on the 23 July to draft a constitution for a

Labour Representation Committee. The delegates drew up a draft constitution which was approved with only minor amendments on 10 September. (48) On 17 September the Trades Council appointed its executive as delegates to the newly-established Leeds LRC, on which it now held only a minority representation. The new organisation was led by some of the ILP's leading activists such as J. D. Macrae, Walt Wood, D. B. Foster, Arthur Bannister and W. T. Newlove. Other leading figures included well known trade unionists such as Leary of the Dye Workers and Thaxton of the Railway Workers who were sympathetic to independent labour politics. They had been given a free hand to draft the new constitution and they ensured that the power of the LTC would be reduced to the minimum in the new organisation.

The newly-founded Leeds LRC met on 23 September 1902 to select candidates for the November City Council elections, opting initially for two seats on the executive's advice, but this was regarded as too cautious by the other delegates, particularly after a sub-committee had recommended contesting all sixteen wards. After much discussion and counter amendments the decision was finally made to contest five wards. On the 24 September a full meeting of the LTC met to consider the Leeds LRC's decision and W. T. Newlove, the current Trade Council president and LRC executive member read out the report. (49)

Considerable opposition to the LRC's decision was voiced by the



delegates. Arthur Shaw said contesting five seats was a mistake, they had a splendid opportunity of cementing all the advanced thought of the City with a view to increasing Labour representation on local public bodies. He lamented that he was afraid that the LRC's decision had removed all hope of the solidarity necessary for such an enterprise. Finally, after concluding that a great deal of injury had been done to the Labour Movement, he said that as a delegate he wished to disassociate himself from the decision. Rushton of the bootmakers' union, NUBSO, also condemned the decision, saying that his members would revolt at such a hasty action by the LRC, which would go far towards ruining their cause. He was joined by Wescoe and Buckle, also local leaders of NUBSO, who added their condemnation, Buckle declaring that if they did not make a good fight in the elections, Labour in the future would have a bad time in regard to representation. A resolution disapproving of the LRC's decision to contest five wards was carried with only three dissenters. It appeared that the majority of the trade unions were still reluctant to see the newly-founded Leeds LRC become an out-and-out opponent of the Liberal Party and forfeit the possibility of gaining more Labour representation through amicable negotiation with its more reform minded leaders.

That the Liberals could still mobilise extensive popular support for a traditional radical cause was manifested in the campaign against the 1902 Education Act, introduced by the Conservative government and abolishing the elected School Boards and replacing them by nominated

committees. This was considered by the Liberal Non-Conformist interest as shifting the political balance in favour of the Anglican denominational schools. There was apparently no objection to the Leeds Trade Council's vote to support a demonstration against the Education Bill, on the 27 August. (50) An intervention in the North Leeds parliamentary by-election by the ILP was reversed by the local party on being notified by the party's National Administrative Council that it would be contrary to their policy. (51) The local trade union movement provided a major part of the huge Anti-Education Act demonstration held on Woodhouse Moor on 20 September 1902.

The Trade Council's vote did not, however, inhibit the fledgling Leeds Labour Representation Committee (LLRC) from making more than a token presence in the November election. In spite of the Trade Council's vote they proceeded to put up four candidates in North West, Central, West Hunslet and Armley and Wortley wards. Significantly the South Ward which Walt Wood had come so close to capturing as a "Progressive" was not contested, indicating the almost complete reliance upon the local Liberal Party organisation in the previous contests and the absence of any organised ILP presence in the ward. All of the wards were contested by official Liberal and Conservative candidates and the LLRC candidates came last. In the mainly commercial and strongly Conservative Central ward the Labour candidate, Trainer, an ILP activist only obtained a derisory 78 votes. In the more industrialised wards the

LLRC candidates fared better. In North West ward William Withey, a trade union organiser, received 290 votes and in Armley and Wortley, Morby, another prominent trade unionist gained an impressive 1,042 votes. In the West Hunslet ward the LLRC candidate William Newlove, the current Trades Council president, obtained the less impressive sum of 578. (52)

Out of a total vote of 17,869 in the contested wards, the LLRC had obtained 1,988, with the prospect of gaining considerably more had they put up candidates in wards previously contested by the ILP. These results were obtained in spite of a less than half-hearted endorsement from the Trades Council and demonstrated that the impetus to form a local LRC had come from the local ILP, reversing its previous tactic of working to obtain Labour representation in co-operation with the Liberals. Instead the ILP opted to show the electoral viability of independent Labour politics once the right amount of political and financial backing was obtained from the local trade unions. By the end of 1902 the lack of Socialist and Labour candidates in Leeds was becoming more anomalous compared to the situation in other large cities where the electoral benefits of ILP and trade union co-operation were being demonstrated. 117%

Of the previous good relations between the Liberals and the emerging Labour Party, there was scant trace by the end of 1902. The Liberals found it hard to ignore the new challenge for the progressive vote from



the LLRC. In the North West Ward, the chairman of the Liberal nominating meeting felt compelled to defend the Liberal Party from the charge of disregarding the interests of the working class in relation to representation on the city council, citing the example of Connellan, Marston and Tetley. He described the Liberal candidate, James Lapish, as in sympathy with everything that could improve the social condition of the working class. Lapish, an accountant, claimed to be a working man who knew the interests of working men and was in sympathy with them. A note of asperity was brought to the West Hunslet contest, with the defending Liberal councillor engaging in an ill-humoured attack on Newlove and his supporters for circulating an election bill that implied he had voted on the council a donation to the anti-union Tramways and Light Railways Association. He added that he had never given a vote against the interests of the working man and had received a letter from William Marston, the Trades Council treasurer and Liberal city councillor that testified to the services he had rendered where Labour was concerned. (53)

The defending Liberal Councillor was supported by The Leeds Mercury, which in its coverage of the ward campaign accused the LLRC of adopting the tactics of the Tories "whom they always contrive to assist willingly or unwillingly at election times". Going on to berate "certain members of Labour Party in West Hunslet with whom honest Labour would have nothing to do" it accused them of "taking refuge in the



subterfuge of innuendo". At a series of crowded campaign meetings the Liberals continued to attack Newlove's supporters for not doing enough to repudiate the allegations against their candidate and defended the City Council's record on wages given to those on relief work which they claimed were in accordance with Local Government Board guidelines.  
(54)

The brief period of Liberal and Labour co-operation had ceased by the end of 1902 because the meagre political concessions made by the Liberal Party organisation in Leeds to the trade unions were no longer acceptable to a large part of their leadership. The presentation of the unpromising South Ward to the Trades Council in 1900 and 1901 did not demonstrate any serious commitment by the Leeds Liberals to the promotion of a significant Labour presence on the City Council. Even if they had given a free run to Walt Wood in a safe Liberal ward it is doubtful whether by 1902 they could have satisfied the political aspirations of the ILP and many trade unionists in the city. The national momentum in favour of Independent Labour politics since the foundation of the LRC made the acceptance of anything less increasingly anachronistic. The old established craft unions had declined relative to the new unions such as the Gasworkers in their representation on the Trades Council. Many of their younger delegates were members of or sympathetic to the goals of the ILP and were willing to consider the benefits of Independent Labour politics by means of a Labour

very. of generation

Representation Committee separate from the Trades Council.

**d) Leeds Labour Representation Committee 1902-1905: The Consolidation of Authority**

The LLRC was not deterred by the hostility of the Liberals and the lukewarm support of a section of the Trades Council from pressing ahead with setting up an electoral organisation on a permanent basis. The aftermath of the elections had shown up the necessity of obtaining a reliable source of funding at future electoral interventions. A meeting of the LLRC, held in the aftermath of the elections, revealed outstanding expenses of £80. A request for assistance from the LLRC to the Trades Council, asking for a largest possible grant was met by an offer of only £3 from the Council's executive. (55)

The LLRC had, however, taken steps to ensure that future trade union funding for political purposes would come direct to it rather than through the intermediary of the Trades Council. At a full meeting of the Trades Council on 7 November 1902, Newlove introduced a motion that it should be a standing order:

... that any action taken by any local governing bodies or by the national parliament, affecting the labour movement from a political standpoint, the Leeds Trades and Labour Council take joint action with the Leeds LRC and also with the national LRC, seeing that this Trades and Labour Council is affiliated with the above named organisations for this very purpose to look after Labour interests, politically speaking. (56)



This motion was put to the Trades Council's Annual General Meeting on 25 February 1903 and carried by the narrow margin of 38 to 35 votes. By this somewhat convoluted formula the political primacy of the Leeds LRC was asserted by the Trades Council along with its own subsidiary relationship in political matters.

Throughout 1903 the Trades Council moved gradually in the direction of closer collaboration with the LLRC and ILP. On 28 January 1903, it had replied to the LLRC's invitation to support the annual May Day demonstration by instructing its delegates to it to vote in favour. Previously the Trades Council had rejected all invitations from the ILP to take part, being reluctant to be associated with what it considered a political and socialist demonstration. At a special meeting held on 10 February, the LTC replied to the LLRC's invitation to consider supporting more Labour candidates at the next municipal elections by agreeing to two wards being contested. (57) However, as late as 4 March, the Trades Council's sub-committee that dealt with the funding of the LLRC resolved only to pay £15.3.2d each to Connellan and Marston, the two principal officers of the LTC and city councillors in the Liberal group. This was balanced to some degree by the payment of £6.6.8d. to Arthur Bannister, the ILP member of the Holbeck Board of Guardians. (58)

At a follow-up meeting on 29 April 1903, the Trades Council voted to increase slightly its contribution to the LRC, from £3 to £4 per annum,

resolving at the same time that the executive committees of the LTC and LLRC should meet and confer on the selection of Labour representatives to be nominated to the newly formed Education Committee established by the 1902 Education Act. Accordingly a joint meeting was held between the two organisations on 17 May to discuss the selection of nominees to the Education Committee. (59)

The Trades Council was now showing a willingness to treat the LLRC as an equal partner and to accept that its own influence on the new organisation would be on an equal level with that of individually affiliated trade unions and the ILP. At the same time the influence of the ILP and LLRC over the Trades Council was considerable with many of its leading officers members of the ILP.

A further sign of the Trades Council's embracing independent Labour politics followed on the 12 August, at a special meeting which passed a resolution:

... that this council, whilst emphatically protesting against any return to the reactionary policy of protection, declares nevertheless that Free Trade of itself is no solution of the Labour problem which can only be finally solved by substituting common for private ownership of land and capital, and co-operative production for use for competitive production for profit, and as a first step towards this end, and in order to give immediate relief to trade and commerce, calls for legislation for nationalisation of minerals and railways and a heavily graded tax on all incomes of £1,000 a year.



In conjunction with this resolution, a further one was passed at the meeting, calling on all affiliated trade unions to at once affiliate with the LLRC and ordering copies of the resolution to be sent to all trade unions not already linked. (60)

A few weeks previously the Trades Council had sent a letter of congratulations to Arthur Henderson for his victory for Labour at the Barnard Castle by-election. (61) By 30 September 1903 the LTC voted without reservation for the endorsement of the five LLRC candidates and ordered the issuing of a bill at its expense urging the electors to support the Committee. A further motion to support William Marston, the LTC treasurer and Liberal councillor, was defeated by 48 to 29 votes, leaving open the possibility that in 1904, Connellan would not be endorsed by the Trades Council if he stood for re-election as a City Councillor, as a Liberal. (62)

All this occurred against the background of the build up of the LLRC's campaign for contesting the City Council elections in November 1903. The first annual meeting of the LLRC held in March 1903 saw the election of the former LTC president, William Newlove, as its president, indicating the tight links developing with the trade union movement. Building on a decade of ILP propaganda, the new LLRC carried on a campaign of indoor and outdoor public meetings, where seasoned speakers equated labour representation with the prospects of social

justice. (63)

A meeting to consider the nomination of candidates held on 1 May 1903 was attended by over a hundred delegates and came out for contesting five seats in November. A follow-up meeting held later that month nominated the prospective candidates who included Walt Wood for South Ward, W. T. Newlove for West Hunslet, W. Morbey for Armley and Wortley, William Trainer for North West Leeds and most surprisingly of all, John Buckle for New Wortley Ward. (64) Buckle was the most prominent of the Lib-Lab craft unionists, a veteran anti-socialist who had been involved in the Leeds Electoral Association in 1895, which had been set up to prevent the development of independent Labour politics by seeking an alliance with the Liberals. His position as secretary of the Leeds Boot and Shoemakers' Union had set him at odds with most of his colleagues on the Trades Council, when he had supported the Aliens Bill, designed to restrict the immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe. Earlier he had resigned from the Trades Council executive after the passing of a resolution critical of the pending bill and implicitly repealing a previous resolution passed in favour of restricting 'alien' immigration. He had accused immigrant Jewish slippermakers of undercutting members of his union and being a major cause of their misfortunes. (65)

The willingness of such a Conservative craft-minded trade union leader to stand as a LLRC candidate signified the increasing linkage between the



trade union and political wings of the Leeds Labour movement. This was particularly marked because all the other candidates were well known as members of the ILP. As if to emphasise this, Walt Wood had said when nominated that he would "cut up" men like Thomas Burt and Charles Fenwick (both Lib-Lab MPs) who said workers must throw in their lot with the Tory or Liberal parties. (66)

The LRC commenced a build up in propaganda in the ensuing months, and the Yorkshire Factory Times of 5 June 1903 reported all the parks and recreation grounds of Leeds to be alive with speakers on Sunday in the Labour cause. A relay of well-known Socialists and trade unionists addressed "large crowds" through the day in the city's parks, all driving home the message of the need to elect Labour representatives to public bodies.

The Labour cause gained increased impetus from a vacancy caused by the death of one of the sitting councillors for West Hunslet in June. The Liberal and Conservative parties agreed not to contest the seat for the balance of the unexpired term which ended in November. The LLRC promptly nominated Newlove for the vacant seat, forcing the Liberals to put up a candidate with Conservative support. The candidate Fred Peaker, had been a leading opponent of the 1902 Education Act, and had previously headed the poll in the 1900 School Board election as a representative of the Liberal non-denominational slate, which had the

backing of most non conformist voters.

The Liberals, who would previously have taken for granted the election of such a candidate as Peaker, were to devote much of their campaign message trying to prove that the Liberal rendered unnecessary the need to have independent Labour politics. At his nomination meeting, Peaker said he had a great deal of sympathy with the ideals of the Labour Party, but its tactics were to smash the only party that had made a practical attempt to realise these ideals. Denying this was a contest between capital and labour; he declared himself in favour of all improvements the City Council could pay for. (67)

At the final electoral meeting for Peaker on 9 July 1903, the Liberal group leader Joseph Henry, felt compelled to make an apologia for the Liberals' claim to be the party of the working class and of progress. He expressed regret that they had been compelled to enter into such a contest in which the parties of progress were opposed to each other. There was no other course open as they were forced to treat their opponents as a hostile party. He went on to claim that he had tried to keep himself in touch with the Labour Party both inside and outside the City Council and was entirely at a loss to understand how the party hoped to improve its position by standing aloof from those who travelled 19/20ths of the journey with them. Concluding, he said that the Liberal Party had always stood for Labour representation on the council, and citing as evidence of



the high respect in which working men were held, the allotment by his group of three seats on the Education Committee to the Labour representatives. (68)

The by-election results, though marked by a low turn-out, showed a significant gain for the Labour candidate. (69) For the first time the Liberals were thrown on the defensive by a Labour Party intervention and expressed alarm at the defection of a significant part of their working-class electoral supporters to an organisation that had existed for little more than a year.

The growing challenge of the Leeds LRC was demonstrated by the capture of the New Wortley seat by its candidate John Buckle at the 1903 municipal elections, in a three sided contest. His election was assisted by the support given by the GGLU to the re-election of William Marston as City Councillor, even though he was a Liberal. His considerable standing as a trade unionist enabled him to retain the support of trade unionists and the ILP. In return many craft unionists felt less inhibited in supporting Buckle, whose standing as a trade unionist was almost equal to that of Marston.

how many of his "peasants" Buckle?

Significantly, Buckle was the first Labour candidate to be elected to the City Council without being under the banner of the Liberal Party. He defeated a Liberal candidate, a member of ASLEF who had the backing of Richard Bell, the national secretary of the ASRS and former LRC MP

who had rejoined the Liberals. Only two years ago it was considered unrealistic by the local ILP and trade union movement to expect the return of any Labour candidate other than with Liberal support. By the end of 1903, the Leeds Labour Movement was belatedly emerging as a political force, if as yet only a modest one.

The fact that Buckle was, as yet, the only successful LLRC candidate, provided little comfort to the Liberals. Buoyed up by their good showing at the West Hunslet by-election, the LLRC had proceeded to contest six ward seats. To the annoyance of the Liberals, the LLRC put up a candidate in North West Leeds, which they had expected to remain unchallenged because their candidate Harold Bee James was well known as advocate of advanced views in the local Liberal party and had acted as solicitor for the Trades Council. (70)

Although many of the seats had been contested for the first time the total LLRC vote jumped from 1,988 in 1902 to 4,957 in 1903. In some wards, such as Armley and Wortley, there was a straight contest between a Liberal and LLRC candidate, and the leap in the vote given to the latter, from 1016 to 2264, could be attributed to the tactical voting of some Conservative electors. By contrast in West Hunslet where there was a three-sided contest, the LLRC candidate gained 925 votes, slightly up from the number received in the previous by-election. Of the five seats contested, four involved the intervention of candidates from the Liberal,



Conservative and Labour parties. That a distinct Labour-voting electorate was emerging was exhibited by a ward by-election in Armley and Wortley in January 1904, when in a three party contest Labour's candidate came second with 1775 votes when the Conservative in the contest gained 1466, and the victorious Liberal candidate held on to most of the votes gained by his predecessor in November. (71)

The Labour advance drew the ire of the Liberal Party which considered that it was at their expense rather than of the Conservatives. In the electioneering for the 1903 Council elections The Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury in its issue of 31 October 1903, hinted that the Labour Party was receiving 'Tory Gold'. Liberal candidates in the 1903 Council elections accused the Labour candidates of defaming certain Liberal councillors by casting aspersions on their commitment to social reform and calling on the Labour Party to withdraw the offending election leaflets. (72)

In the aftermath of the Labour victory at New Wortley, The Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury drew some comfort from the fact that the successful candidate was John Buckle. On 3 November 1903 it declared that "Liberalism has got a good radical who fought under the banner of Labour, in place of a Liberal nominee. The voting strength of the progressives in the city council is unchanged". The paper speculated that the particularly large gain in Labour votes in the Armley and Wortley and New Wortley wards was caused by many Tories voting for the Labour

candidate - either because they had no candidate of their own standing, or, as in the latter ward, the Conservative candidate stood no chance of election. (73)

Further evidence of the declining influence of the Liberal Party over the Labour movement in Leeds, was demonstrated when Connellan, at the Leeds Typographical Society's Annual General Meeting of 1904, announced that if he stood as parliamentary candidate for East Leeds, it would be under the banner of the LRC. (74) By this time the municipal politics of Leeds Labour Party were increasingly overshadowed by the issue of obtaining parliamentary representation. To stand any chance of beating James O'Grady (the ILP candidate), Connellan had to align himself with the national LRC and to sever formal contacts with the East Leeds Liberal Association.

These developments occurred at a time of severe trade depression which lasted on and off from 1902 up to 1911. This was marked by the return of severe unemployment and distress not seen since the early 1890s. With the return of heavy unemployment came the re-emergence of organised demonstrations of the unemployed to compel the City Council to initiate paid relief work schemes at trade union rates. At the same time the fastest growing section of the Council employed workforce, the tram workers were locked in almost permanent dispute with an increasingly authoritarian management.



By the end of 1904, the LLRC was to make its decisive political breakthrough in the municipal elections. By concentrating on wards where there was strong organisation, the LLRC was able to capture two out of the five seats it contested and the gains came from both the Liberal and Conservative parties. Further by-elections in November 1904, following vacancies caused by elevations to the aldermanic bench, saw a further gain for Labour in the West Hunslet ward. (75) The recapture of New Wortley by the Liberals was a minor setback to the LLRC which at the end of 1904 could claim three councillors and one alderman, John Buckle, who was now the leader of the newly formed council group. In contrast, the departure of Connellan from the City Council left only James Tetley and William Marston as Lib-Lab representatives.

The Liberals were the principal losers as the result of the Labour advance, not even the issue of Free Trade versus Protectionism, which they were campaigning on nationally at the end of 1904, could prevent the continuing inroads into their electoral support in the industrialised wards of Leeds. Liberal candidates continued to proclaim their friendship to the working class and to berate the LLRC for damaging the progressive cause by secretly combining with the Conservatives to damage the Liberal Party. (76) The increasing Liberal stress on municipal economy and retrenchment was to conflict with their claims to be the party of social reform in Leeds in contrast to the LLRC, which advocated increased expenditure by the local authority to remedy such social evils as bad

housing and unemployment. The growing incompatibility of the programmes of the municipal Liberals and the Labour Party was to be emphasised with the publication by the LLRC, of a thoroughgoing plan of social reform through municipal government in 1905.

From 1905 until the outbreak of the First World War, in 1914, the political fortunes of the Labour Party at the parliamentary and municipal level were to show a marked divergence in Leeds. The Leeds Labour Party was to make steady and sustained progress in obtaining representation on the City Council, culminating in their becoming the second largest party in 1913. However, the parliamentary record of Labour in Leeds was one of tortuous political manoeuvring and qualified gains, leaving the Party in 1914 with only one parliamentary representative. In its contests for representation on the Council the local Labour Party had a free run against the candidates of the opposing political parties with little hindrance from the national Labour Party organisation. In marked contrast, the national Labour Party was to play the leading role in designating which parliamentary seats were to be contested, particularly after the unofficial pact with the national Liberal Party in 1903. As a consequence, the eventual acquisition of a parliamentary seat for Labour in Leeds was conditional on the Party abstaining from contesting at least one seat which had a potentially strong Labour vote. The Labour Party in Leeds was to find itself under considerable constraint from its parent organisation in developing a local strategy for increased parliamentary representation.

✓ Detail  
10 analysis  
frequent need



## CHAPTER ONE - Footnotes

- (1) Henry Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party (1954); Paul Thompson, Socialist, Liberal and Labour: The Struggle for London 1885-1914 (1963); Ross McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-24 (Oxford, 1974); The Rising Sun of Socialism, ed. K. Laybourn and D. James (Wakefield, 1991), K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1880-1914 (1984); George L. Bernstein, Liberalism and Liberal Politics in Edwardian England (1986); and Bill Lancaster, Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism: Leicester Working Class Politics 1860-1906 (Leicester, 1987).
- (2) Examples include: Trevor Wilson, The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914-1935 (1966); P. F. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, (Cambridge, 1971); R. Douglas, Labour in Decline 1910-1914: Essays in Anti Labour History, (ed.) K. D. Brown (1974); Duncan Tanner, Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918, (Cambridge, 1990); and Chris Cook, A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-1976 (1977).  
For an extended analysis of the debate see K. Laybourn, The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism: 'The State of the Debate' in History, 1995, pp.206-226.
- (3) David Clarke, Colne Valley: Radicalism to Socialism (1981), and The Rising Sun of Socialism, ed. K. Laybourn and D. James (Wakefield, 1991), including articles by K. Laybourn on Bradford, M. Crick on Dewsbury, P. Dawson on Halifax and D. James on Keighley.
- (4) The Emergence of a Socialist current in Leeds in the 1890s and the reaction to it of the local Liberals is treated in Tom Woodhouse, Nourishing the Liberty tree: Liberals and Labour in Leeds, 1880-1914, (Keele, 1996).
- (5) R. Dalton, 'False Dawn: The Leeds Trades Council and the Socialist Challenge: The Origins of Independent Labour Politics in Leeds 1890-1902' (MA Dissertation, Huddersfield, 1992) pp.97-99.
- (6) In 1897 the Trades Council's executive had voted in favour of an increase in its affiliation fees to create a political fund to support 'Labour representatives' on public bodies, Leeds Trades Council Minutes, 29 September 1897.
- (7) LTC Minutes, 29 September 1897. The Trades Council had since the 1880s supported a representative on the Leeds School Board; in 1891 it had agreed to the inclusion of a representative on both

the Liberal and Conservative slates in face of criticism by the Socialist minority.

- (8) Dalton, 'False Dawn', pp.82-83.
- (9) Leeds Express, 11 October 1895 and 12 October 1895.
- (10) Leeds Mercury, 27 October 1898.
- (11) LTC Minutes, 26 January 1899.
- (12) LTC Minutes, 6 September 1899 and 26 October 1899.
- (13) Leeds Mercury, 27 October 1898.
- (14) LTC Minutes, 28 March 1900.
- (15) Ibid., 11 April 1900.
- (16) The resolution was carried with only 12 dissentients, LTC, 30 May 1900.
- (17) Yorkshire Factory Times, 11 May 1900.
- (18) His wife addressed a women's meeting against Militarism at St. James' Hall on 27 September 1900, while he denounced the Boer War and the pro-War stance of the prospective Liberal candidate for East Leeds, James Rochefort Maguire.
- (19) MacDonald had written to the Leeds Trades Council regretting "that there is no Labour Candidate for East Leeds", LTC Minutes 29 August 1900.
- (20) The Home Rule element included the East Ward United Irish League which sent a deputation to the Trades Council on 12 September 1900 to press for their support for Byles. LTC Minutes, 12 September 1900.
- (21) LTC Minutes, 11 July 1900.
- (22) Ibid., 25 July 1900.
- (23) Yorkshire Factory Times, 31 August 1900.
- (24) Ibid., 28 September 1900.
- (25) K. Laybourn 'One of the Little Breezes Across Bradford'. The Bradford ILP and Trade Unionism 1890-1914, pp. 17-18, in K. Laybourn and D. James, The Rising Sun of Socialism.



- (26) Leeds Mercury, 28 September 1900.
- (27) Ibid., 21 September 1900.
- (28) Ibid., 27 September 1900.
- (29) Ibid., 28 September 1900.
- (30) Ibid., 13 October 1900 and 26 October 1900.
- (32) Ibid., 27 October 1900.
- (33) In 1899 the Liberal Candidate had gained 783 votes compared with 1900 when Wood obtained 750 votes and the successful Conservative Candidate 1746. Leeds Official Yearbooks 1899 and 1900.
- (34) Yorkshire Factory Times, 15 March 1901.
- (35) Ibid., 22 March 1901.
- (36) Ibid., 8 February 1901.
- (37) Ibid., 17 May 1901.
- (38) Ibid., 17 June 1901.
- (39) Ibid., 28 June 1901.
- (40) Leeds Mercury, 14 September 1901.
- (41) Ibid., 15 September 1901.
- (42) Ibid., 11 October 1901.
- (43) Ibid., 26 September 1901.
- (44) Yorkshire Factory Times, 29 November 1901, 20 December 1901.
- (45) Philip Poirier, The Advent of the Labour Party (1958) pp.139-141.
- (46) F. Bealey and H. Pelling, Labour and Politics 1900-1906: A History of the Labour Representation Committee (1958)
- (47) Yorkshire Factory Times, 22 November 1901.
- (48) LTC Minutes, 10 September 1902.
- (49) Ibid., 24 September 1902, Leeds Mercury, 25 September 1902.

- (50) Ibid., 27 August 1902.
- (51) Leeds Daily News, 5 July 1902.
- (52) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 2 November 1902.
- (53) Ibid., 25 October 1902 and 29 October 1902.
- (54) Ibid., 29 October 1902
- (55) Yorkshire Factory Times, 5 December 1902.
- (56) LTC Minutes, 7 November 1902.
- (57) Ibid., 10 February 1903.
- (58) Ibid., 4 March 1903.
- (59) Ibid., 17 May 1903.
- (60) By 1903, the ILP members of the Trades Council executive included T. B. Duncan (President), W. Newlove and Arthur Shaw.
- (61) LTC Minutes, 12 August 1903.
- (62) Ibid., 29 July 1903.
- (63) Ibid., 30 September 1903.
- (64) Yorkshire Factory Times, 20 March 1903.
- (65) Ibid., 8 May 1903 and 5 June 1903.
- (66) LTC Minutes, 23 March 1903.
- (67) Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury, 30 May 1903.
- (68) Ibid., 10 July 1903.
- (69) Newlove with 890 votes came second to Peaker who obtained 1383 votes in West Hunslet. In November 1902 he came third with 578 votes behind the Liberal and Conservative candidates.
- (70) Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury, 30 October 1903.
- (71) Ibid., 12 January 1904.
- (72) Ibid., 31 October 1903.

- (73) Ibid., 3 November 1903.
- (74) Ibid., 15 February 1904, he cited the National Typographical Society's affiliation to the national Labour Representation Committee as the reason for his breaking with the Liberal Party.
- (75) Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury, 24 November 1904.
- (76) Ibid., 23 October 1904; in particular reporting electoral addresses by the sitting Liberal Councillor for North West Ward, Harold James.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE POLITICAL GROWTH OF LABOUR: 1904-1914**

#### **a) The Quest for Parliamentary Representation until 1905**

The first venture of the Labour Party into a parliamentary contest occurred in 1900 as a result of a split within local Leeds Liberalism over the issue of the Boer War. The alliance of convenience between the dissident radical Liberal W. P. Byles and the Leeds Labour movement was not continued in the aftermath of his unsuccessful attempt to capture the East Leeds Parliamentary division. Byles appears not to have continued his links with the Leeds Trades Council or the national LRC, resuming his political career within the Liberal Party and eventually being elected to Parliament in its interests for Salford.

Up to 1903, the emerging Labour Party in Leeds was preoccupied with establishing its independence of the Liberal Party and gaining a foothold on the City Council. In East Leeds the local Liberal organisation continued to search for a candidate who would appeal to its overwhelmingly working class electorate and stand under the banner of Liberalism and Labour. Initially it appeared most likely that the choice would fall on Connellan, already councillor for a ward that was comprised in the East Leeds parliamentary constituency. Connellan could call on the support of the Leeds Typographical society, the oldest



and most wealthy of the craft unions. However, his opposition to Byles in 1900 and support for the unpopular official Liberal candidate Maguire, alienated trade union and Liberal activists and prevented him gaining enough support to be chosen as a prospective parliamentary candidate in the immediate aftermath of the general election. (1)

By 1903, the initiative in the East Leeds Liberal Party had passed to the local branch of the Yorkshire Miners' Association which possessed a significant membership in the East Leeds constituency. In February 1903 they proceeded to put forward as a Liberal and Labour candidate the agent of the Yorkshire Miners' Association, William Parrott. (2) By June 1903, the momentum in favour of Parrott was so great that the Leeds LRC was forced to acquiesce in his selection for East Leeds in the hope that he would eventually bring the miners into the ranks of the Independent Labour representation movement. (3) The widely-read trade union paper The Yorkshire Factory Times came out in his favour on 29 May 1903, its editor Ben Turner opining that:

A number of Labour men think with me that it would be unwise not to let Parrott, the miner, win East Leeds and I am hoping for the day when even the miners will join with me in wishing the Labour Representation movement success. (4)

However, the momentum in favour of Parrott was to dissipate quickly as ill health made the prospective candidate back away from accepting nomination. According to The Yorkshire Factory Times of 4 September

How  
Parrott  
is this

1903, the executive of the LLRC had the previous week held a meeting to consider the ill health of Parrott and the possibility of his withdrawal. The secretary, J. D. Macrae, was instructed to communicate with the national LRC on the matter and it was agreed that in the event of a withdrawal a further meeting be held to consider the nomination of a suitable Labour candidate.

By October 1903, Parrott was sufficiently recovered to announce he would be addressing a meeting of his future constituents at an early date. Little action was taken by Parrott to make himself known to his prospective constituency, if the absence of any mention of him addressing meetings in the local press is an indication of his interest. The surprisingly good results obtained by the Leeds LRC in the November 1903 municipal election demonstrated the feasibility of running a Labour candidate for at least one of the parliamentary divisions in the city.

The uncertainty over Parrott's commitment was ended with the death in February 1904 of Ben Pickard, the Yorkshire Miners' leader and MP for Normanton. This was to be followed by Parrott's speedy withdrawal as Lib-Lab candidate for East Leeds and his acceptance of the Liberal nomination for Normanton. (5) A meeting of the executive of the East Leeds Liberal Association held in February 1904, after hearing Parrott's explanation for his withdrawal, appointed a deputation to wait on Connellan to ask him to come forward as their candidate. Reporting this,



The Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury remarked:

Mr. Connellan would prove quite as powerful as an opponent as Mr. Parrott and the organised workers in the division are not likely to regard it as a point in Mr. Cantley's favour that he was one of the council for the colliery company in the recent Derby case which struck so severe a blow to trade union organisation. (6)

Connellan no longer felt free to accept this invitation. At the annual general meeting of the Leeds Typographical Society, held on 13 February 1904 he announced that he could only stand as a parliamentary candidate under the banner of Labour. He gave as the reason the affiliation of their parent union, the National Typographical Union to the LRC and its decision at a delegate conference to fund a member of the association as an MP. (7)

With the backing of his union, Connellan proceeded to obtain the endorsement of the Trades Council. On 30 March 1904, a special meeting of the Trades Council received written notification from the Leeds Typographical Society that its executive had recommended Connellan as a suitable parliamentary candidate for East Leeds. The Typographical Society secretary, R. M. Lancaster moved that the Trades Council promote Connellan as its candidate for East Leeds. (8) Connellan then addressed the meeting, saying that he intended to abide by the rules of the LRC and had written to the East Leeds Liberal Association declining their offer to adopt him as a Liberal and Labour

candidate. He stated that he was quite satisfied that the movement for securing a Labour group in the House of Commons would grow and it seemed to him that the conditions that candidates must be free from all party obligations was a justifiable and reasonable one. Apparently without any recorded opposition the resolution in favour of Connellan's adoption was passed unanimously and notification was sent to the Leeds LRC (9)

This attempt to put up a Trades Council candidate met a decided rebuff at the special conference held by the LLRC to choose their candidate for the East Leeds constituency. At the conference held on 10 April 1904, there were two major candidates; Connellan and James O'Grady, a national organiser of the Furniture Trade Association. In the ensuing ballot a majority voted for O'Grady who was then nominated as the LLRC's parliamentary candidate. The successful candidate was an ILP member based in Bristol, who had been a regular visitor to Leeds since he had helped to settle a major Furniture Trade strike there in 1898. (10)

In response to an article in The Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury on the 15 April 1904, which insinuated that the LLRC was under the control of "the extreme socialist party", not recognised by the national LRC and repudiated by the Typographical Union, two letters were sent to the paper by the LLRC secretary J. D. Macrae in response. (11) Macrae attempted to deny there was any rift between the LLRC and the local unions,



particularly the Typographical Society. He stated that the national LRC had been in contact with the LLRC for some months and had recommended O'Grady as an endorsed candidate who was financially backed by his own union. He maintained that the National Typographical Society had not supported a Labour candidate for East Leeds for financial reasons, but had given the Leeds society a free hand to promote Connellan.

Despite Macrae's assurance that all was in harmony in East Leeds, the national LRC decided to act as a peacemaker and a letter was sent from Ramsay MacDonald to the Trades Council recommending a special meeting of the two disputed candidates, the Trades Council executive and MacDonald and David Shackleton MP. The letter, which expressed the national LRC's anxiety to have the matter settled harmoniously, was read out at a Trades Council meeting on 27 April, which agreed to the immediate holding of a conference. (12)

The ILP supporters consolidated their position in advance of the conference by moving at the LTC meeting on 11 May for a change in standing orders which would have definitely subordinated it politically to the LRC. The resolution

... that it be a standing order of this council that any action taken by any local governing bodies, or by the national parliament affecting the labour movement from a political standpoint, the Trades Council take action jointly with the Labour Representation Committee and also with the national

Labour Representation Committee ... this Trades Council to affiliate with the above named organisations for this very purpose to look after labour interests politically speaking ...

was identical to a motion carried by the LTC on 4 March 1903. A heated discussion followed with feelings among the delegates running high, opposition to the resolution coming not only from craft unionists but also from J. E. Smith of the Gasworkers' Union who resented what was seen to be a take over by the ILP. In spite of the opposition the resolution was finally passed by 123 to 25 votes. The outcome of the meeting was to be the undisputed political dominance of the LLRC over the local Labour movement and the final eclipse of the political influence of Connellan. (13)

This was soon to be demonstrated at the special meeting held under the auspices of the national ILP on 13 May at the Leeds Assembly Rooms. Chaired by David Shackleton, representing the national LRC, submissions were received from the LTC and LLRC in favour of Connellan and O'Grady respectively. Over the objections of Connellan, the chairman found in favour of a report supporting O'Grady and recommended his endorsement, which was carried at the meeting by 225 votes to 10 against. (14)

That this was taken as a rebuff to the Liberal interest in East Leeds was indicated by an acerbic editorial of The Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury

which stated:

So the LRC has achieved in a grand manoeuvre the double object of displaying its despotic rule of Labour and its venomous hatred of Liberalism. Last night's decision is about the only circumstance which could have retained East Leeds for the Conservatives. (15)

not this U  
same as Con

The adoption of a policy of winning over the Liberal and Irish vote by O'Grady, following his selection should be seen in the context of the 1903 Liberal-Labour secret pact which gave Labour candidates a free run against the Conservatives in a number of constituencies. The intervention of MacDonald and the national LRC in the choice of a parliamentary Labour candidate for East Leeds had carried the nomination of O'Grady in a seat that had been secretly reserved for Labour in the Liberal-Labour pact. At his first public appearance after his adoption as the LLRC candidate at Roundhay Road Board School, he denied that he was sent to Leeds by the LRC, but that the need for cohesion among the local Labour forces could only be secured by the adoption of an outside candidate. Avoiding any mention of the word 'socialism', he berated the Conservative and Liberal parties for their indifference to the working class. Referring to the continuing high unemployment levels he called on the state to find useful employment for men out of employment and the setting of a minimum wage and the public maintenance of school children. (16)



Following up this appearance, O'Grady addressed a meeting at Richmond Hill school in the predominantly Irish Catholic Bank district on 7 June 1904. With the platform made up almost entirely of ILP stalwarts such as Macrae, Bannister and Walt Wood together with Councillor John Buckle, O'Grady announced that he was a socialist, but could not see that this had anything to do with his ability to represent the constituency. (17) He proclaimed his support for the Newcastle Programme of the Liberal Party, but only as a first step to the goals of Labour and declared that he supported the LRC which went in not for more steps, but root and branch alteration. After denouncing the Liberal and Conservative parties, he declared that the only party likely to give Home Rule to Ireland was the Labour Party. Concluding, he looked forward to the time when the old party lines should be broken down and the only two parties in the state would be the classes that have and the classes who have not. O'Grady was making an appeal to the Liberal voting trade unionists and the Irish Nationalists, while evading any declaration on the question of the 1902 Education Act, which set nonconformists against Anglicans and Roman Catholics.

The initial opposition to O'Grady was to disappear in the following months and by September he was to give his electoral addresses a more radical and openly socialist colouring. At an electoral meeting on 6 September 1904 at Primrose Hill Council School, which had on its platform the Trades Council President George Thaxton and Ben Tillet,

he blamed the failure to obtain the passing of the Trades Disputes Bill, the solving of the unemployment question and the feeding of starving children to a vast mass of concentrated capitalist interests. (18) Equating the workers with the nation and denouncing all those who were not as parasites, O'Grady predicted that Labour strong and united would carry the country before it if they abandoned their traditional political allegiances for the Labour Party.

*Liberal friendly*

The selection of O'Grady for East Leeds, with the support of the national and Local LRC, disguised the growing difference between them over the number of parliamentary seats to be contested at the next general election. The impressive gains by the Leeds LRC in the November 1904 municipal election demonstrated the potential electoral support for Labour in the West and South Leeds parliamentary seats. The ambition of the Leeds LRC to contest these seats was soon to bring them into conflict with the national LRC and Ramsay MacDonald and to highlight the existence of the unofficial electoral pact between the Liberal and Labour parties.

The Gladstone-MacDonald pact of 1903, as the unofficial accord was known, was a trade off of seats between the fledgling LRC and the Liberal Party represented by its chief whip Herbert Gladstone, who was MP for West Leeds. MacDonald hoped it would give Labour a free run in up to fifty-two seats mainly held by the Conservatives. (19) The



Liberals expected to be spared three-sided contests in areas where the Conservative vote was strong. The pact was an open secret from its inception and was bitterly opposed by many local Liberal associations. Leeds was no exception, Gladstone's letters to local Liberal associations, setting out the attitude to be taken to Labour candidates, who were to be allowed a free run against the Conservatives, brought forth the ire of The Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, which declared:

It would have been more helpful, perhaps, if Mr. Gladstone when dealing with the subject (of Labour representation) had done so a little more fully and with more reference to the special difficulties that have arisen in particular constituencies between the Liberal organisation and the Labour party.

It denied that the shortage of working-class MPs was caused by a lack of a large minded view of Labour representation by the Liberal Party members. On the contrary, it argued it was the new Labour Party that treated the Liberals ungenerously, regarding them as the greatest enemy of working-class candidates. (20)

The central Liberal organisation through its Leeds branch ensured that no candidate was nominated to succeed Parrott as the prospective Liberal candidate by the beginning of 1905. In the meantime, O'Grady continued to consolidate his position in the constituency. He was assisted by the declaration made on 30 December 1904 by the pro-Home Rule Irish League of Great Britain in favour of nationalist voters supporting Labour



candidates in the next parliamentary election. Its praise for the Labour Party as a courageous and steady supporter of the Irish national cause marked a considerable departure from the former antipathy of the Irish in England to any party that threatened to split the Liberal Party vote. (21)

In East Leeds, O'Grady continued to seek the support of Liberal voters by adopting a policy of studied moderation. At an electoral meeting on 30 January 1905, expressing the hope that the Liberals would allow him a straight fight with the sitting Conservative candidate, he called for a new government relying on Labour Party support in the House of Commons. He stated that the first objective of the Labour Party was to reverse the Taff Vale decision, reform the Labour Laws, promote better factory legislation and find work for the unemployed. He further advocated adult suffrage for men and women, the abolition of the property qualification, payment of MPs and shorter duration of parliaments. Finally, he made a call for Irish Home Rule in the innocuous guise of Home Rule all round for counties and boroughs. (22)

**b) Labour under the Shadow of Parliamentary Liberalism 1905 - 1914**

The uneasy truce between the Liberals and Labour in Leeds was to show signs of strain early in 1905 when the Leeds LRC began to campaign for intervention in the West and South Leeds constituencies, ignorant of the

limits placed on them by the secret pact. As a shot across the bows of Labour, a new Liberal candidate emerged for East Leeds in the person of General Sir William Butler, who consented to stand for the East Leeds Liberal Association on 8 February 1905, with the backing of Herbert Gladstone and the national organisation. A soldier, administrator, author, Irishman and catholic, he was therefore able to appeal to a significant section of the electorate that had been cultivated by O'Grady. (23)

This marked a small victory for the local Leeds Liberal organisation in forcing the hands of the Liberal chief whip, Herbert Gladstone, who appeared to come out in favour of the adoption of Butler. The Labour Leader accused him of having given in to the pressure of the Harmsworth element which through its control of The Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, consistently attacked Labour candidates, including Parrott. (24)

O'Grady, and his supporters, were initially taken aback by the Liberals' decision to oppose him and in February 1905 the LLRC held a conference in Leeds to consider whether to support the running of Labour candidates in the West and South Leeds parliamentary divisions at the imminent General Election. (25) A further Labour conference was called in Leeds on 20 March 1905 to consider how to respond to the selection of Butler. Arthur Henderson, the Chairman of the LRC, carried to the conference a recommendation of the National Executive that the South and West Leeds divisions should not be contested, but instead all efforts

be focussed on the election of O'Grady. The local Leeds activists were unimpressed with Henderson's arguments, respectfully disagreed with the LRC executive and refused to commit themselves to any restrictions on their freedom of action. (26)

Henderson's intervention did succeed in arresting all moves to oppose Gladstone and consequently with the backing of the national party, O'Grady was able to maintain his campaign and eventually see the withdrawal of Butler from the contest before the end of 1905. Thwarted in contesting West Leeds, the Leeds LRC turned to South Leeds, which was held by the Liberal MP, Sir John Lawson Walton. In the face of National Executive disapproval, a campaign to run a candidate for South Leeds was inaugurated in April 1905, and by May, Albert Fox, the national secretary of ASLEF was the front runner. (27)

Albert Fox was a a potentially strong candidate, being the General Secretary of ASLEF, the oldest and wealthiest of the railway trade unions, in a city with a significant section of the workforce directly and indirectly dependent on the railway companies. Unlike James O'Grady, he was less dependent on support from the national leadership of the Labour Party and not susceptible to pressure exerted through his union. On the debit side, he was marked by a narrow craft mentality and a scarcely disguised disdain for trade unions attempting to organise unskilled railwaymen.



Until November 1905, the Leeds LLRC held back from officially adopting him as the candidate for South Leeds, but the very good results of the municipal election for Labour led them to put aside caution and to test the prospects of intervening in the South and West Leeds Divisions. At a LLRC meeting on 26 November 1905 to consider the question of supporting more Labour candidates in the pending General Election, backing was given to Fox in South Leeds. (28) Following it, on 1 December, a joint meeting of the ward committees of the LLRC within the West Leeds division agreed to poll their members on the choice of a prospective parliamentary candidate. (29) With the backing of the local ILP, Albert Fox launched his campaign without waiting for the approval of the national organisation. He justified his standing for Parliament by calling for a fair share of parliamentary representation for the working class and declared that in place of the old Liberalism and Toryism they were coming to an honest contest between capitalism and labour. Also advocating that the 90 per cent of the people who were working class should have the equivalent representation in Parliament, he linked the repeal of the Taff Vale decision and the solution of the problem of unemployment with the electoral advance of Labour. In spite of their initial reluctance to approve additional Labour candidates, the LRC in London finally endorsed Fox while resolving against any further candidates for Leeds. (30)

The differences between the London and the LLRC were brought to a

head when J. D. Macrae notified MacDonald in November 1905 of the local party's intention to put forward a candidate for West Leeds. (31) This brought forth a strongly-worded reply from MacDonald, who predicted that a very strong resolution would be passed by the National Executive Committee (NEC) against putting up any additional candidates. He said that O'Grady had been allowed to contest East Leeds by his union on the recommendation of the NEC that no other Labour candidates for Parliament would be fielded in Leeds. MacDonald hinted darkly that the NEC might go back to O'Grady's union to persuade its executive to reconsider their support for his candidacy in Leeds. (32)

This brought a defiant reply from Macrae, hinting that MacDonald had come to a secret political arrangement with Herbert Gladstone. (33) MacDonald replied with an angry letter denying the accusation and implying that the NEC would publicly denounce any further steps to promote a candidate in West Leeds. (34) For the time being the matter rested with no further action being taken in West Leeds with the NEC grudgingly sanctioning the Labour campaign in South Leeds.

For a short time it seemed that O'Grady might face opposition from a strong candidate fielded by the Liberals. On 14 December 1905, the same day that the Labour NEC announced there would be no candidate for West Leeds, the East Leeds Liberal organisation nominated as their parliamentary candidate, councillor Fred Kinder, leader of the Liberal



group on the City Council. (35) However, in January 1906, Kinder declined the invitation to stand, leaving the way clear for a straight contest between O'Grady and the sitting Conservative MP. (36) His intervention, like that of Butler, was more a threat than a serious challenge to Labour in East Leeds but emphasised how O'Grady was dependent on the goodwill of the Liberal Party and the continuance of the 1903 pact.

The General Election in January 1906 saw a landslide victory for the Liberal Party and its programme of social reform. With the tacit support of the Liberals, the LRC, renamed the Labour Party, now controlled 53 seats in Parliament. In Leeds the Liberals were for the first time to capture every parliamentary seat except East Leeds, where O'Grady was to win in a straight contest with the Conservative by 4,299 votes to 2,208. (37) As significant was the vote for Fox in South Leeds, who in a three-sided contest came second with nearly a third of the parliamentary vote, and nearly twice that obtained by the Conservative candidate. (38) The victory of O'Grady was greeted with great enthusiasm by the Labour Party workers, and according to The Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury there were scenes of wild elation when he entered the trades club after the news of his election. He expressed confidence that the new government would be pushed in the direction of radical social reform by the presence in Parliament of a large bloc of Labour MPs who would ensure the passing of legislation that would be for the benefit of the working class. (39)



The 1906 General Election <sup>saw</sup> was to see the Liberals not only holding on to their seats in South, West and North Leeds but also gaining the hitherto safe seat in Central Leeds. Representation remained in the hands of Liberal notables such as the Chief Whip Herbert Gladstone (West Leeds) and the new Attorney General, Sir John Lawson Walton (South Leeds). Their locally-based equivalents, Rowland Barran (North Leeds) and Robert Armitage (Central Leeds), both industrialists, came from prominent Liberal families steeped in a background of non conformism, Temperance, opposition to state aid to denominational schools and reverence for Gladstone. Only in Leeds South was the Liberal candidate forced on to the defensive by the intervention of a Labour candidate in a three-way contest. (40)

At an election meeting on 4 January 1906, at the Hunslet Mechanics Institute, Walton, the defending Liberal candidate accused his Labour opponent, Albert Fox, of being an avowed and pronounced socialist. Going on to remark that Fox advocated a number of measures which had his support, he considered it unfortunate that he linked these with the advocating of such measures as the nationalisation of the industries of the country. Following his re-election, addressing a Liberal mass meeting on 14 January 1906, he again concentrated on attacking his Labour opponent, saying that trade unionists would gain nothing from deserting the Liberal Party and by stirring up bitterness against them made it harder for it to render them the service they deserved. (41)

In East Leeds, without the opposition from a Liberal candidate, O'Grady's campaign benefited from the support rendered it by representatives of the Irish Home Rule Party. At a meeting at Leeds Market on 14 January 1906, Michael Davitt took the platform with the blessing of J. E. Redmond, the Home Rule leader, and after claiming to have addressed nineteen meetings in favour of Labour candidates in the last ten days, he called on the working men of Leeds to vote for the two Labour candidates. The support of the veteran Land League campaigner demonstrated how far relations between the Irish Nationalists and the fledgling Labour Party had developed since barely a decade ago, when the Irish electorate <sup>was</sup> were the most solid basis of Liberal support in Leeds. (42)

After the 1906 General Election, the focus of the LLRC shifted to local politics and the question of who and what parliamentary seats were to be adopted remained dormant until the death of Sir John Lawson Walton in January 1908. His constituency, Leeds South, included the South, East Hunslet and West Hunslet wards, all of which had seen a marked growth in the Labour vote in the previous few years. In the November 1907 municipal elections the Liberal vote had been 4,132 compared to 3,576 for Labour and 1,865 for the Conservatives. (43)

The obvious candidate for Labour would have been Albert Fox, but since the last election he had incurred the extreme enmity of railwaymen in the



constituency who were members of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. This had arisen from the intense rivalry between the two railway trade unions, the ASRS and ASLEF, which was aggravated by the intense mutual antipathy of their respective general secretaries, Richard Bell and Alfred Fox. In the major national railway dispute of 1907, Fox had not only refused to back up the ASRS but had made derogatory remarks about Bell and the membership of his Union. This had angered many other trade unionists who were not involved and attributed Fox's behaviour to an extreme craft unionist mentality to the detriment of the wider Labour movement. (44)

The repercussions were soon to be demonstrated when a nominating meeting of the Leeds Labour Party, held on 24 January 1908, rejected Fox in favour of an ILP activist T. B. Duncan. The charge laid against Fox at the meeting was that he was not a suitable member as he had refused to endorse the attitude taken up by Richard Bell and the ASRS in the recent dispute with the railway companies. In his defence Fox said that the programme of the ASRS meant a reduction in the wages to members of his society. Those delegates who brought the charge declared that if Fox were adopted members of the ASRS would offer a strenuous opposition. (45)

Hostility to this decision was soon manifested by the decision of Fox to contest the seat as an independent Labour candidate which he announced



on 28 January. This followed a stormy meeting of the Leeds Labour Party held the previous evening when Duncan and the two other candidates who had been shortlisted stood down, making it necessary to make another selection. Over the opposition of the ASLEF delegates the meeting chose a Sheffield trade unionist and professed socialist, James Painter of the Pattern Makers' union. Fox had already announced his intention to run independently from the Leeds LRC and his union had threatened to withdraw their support from both the local and the national Labour party. (46)

The disarray in the Labour ranks was made more serious by the newly-chosen Liberal candidate, Sir William Middlebrook, opening his campaign with a platform of new radical planks such as state supported Old Age Pensions, Women's Suffrage and an eight-hour day for mine workers. These were engrafted on more traditional radical demands for Licensing reform, Free Trade and no religious tests in state aided education. (47)

The Leeds LRC defended its decision by maintaining that Fox was an impossible candidate from every point of view, particularly following his role in the recent railway dispute. They doubted whether they could find many party members who sat in Parliament to come up and speak on his behalf. At the same time the national ILP had blocked the nomination of any of its members to stand in place of Fox in the interest of maintaining

harmony with the trade union movement in general. (48)

A bombshell was soon thrown into these proceedings by the national Labour Party which on 29 January refused to recognise Painter as their candidate for South Leeds. In their announcement they explained their support for Fox as:

... being present on our list of candidates for South Leeds and, further having further regard to internal differences in the constituency, cannot recommend the patternmakers to sanction the candidature of Mr. Painter unless further evidence of greater unanimity is forthcoming, including the concurrence of Mr. Fox's union. (49)

Already MacDonald had telegraphed Fox 'Executive is meeting and instructs me to ask you in view of press reports to wire definitely your decision on South Leeds'. Fox promptly replied:

My executive meet tonight to decide. It would help them if Labour Party will reply and inform them where I have violated the constitution of the Labour Party as signed by me and which of the rules of the constitution authorise opposition by members to candidates who are contesting seats of the Labour Party.

On the evening of 29 January 1908, a meeting of Fox's supporters at the Victoria Hotel received a deputation from the Patternmakers' union announcing their withdrawal of support for Painter. They resolved to run

Fox with or without the backing of the Leeds LRC, knowing they had the support of the National Labour Party and that any other candidates put forward could not possibly be the official labour candidate. On the same night the Leeds LRC held a meeting in which they expressed their hearty appreciation of the Patternmakers' Union and James Painter for their previous assistance and expressed their regret for the circumstances which had compelled them to refuse to endorse his nomination. Significantly they omitted to make any reference to the endorsement of Fox or the support he had received from the national party organisation.

The rejection of Fox by the local party was signalled at a full meeting of the Leeds LRC on 31 January 1908 at the Leeds Trades Hall. A stormy and ill-tempered meeting saw vehement opposition to Fox being met by that of support from his followers. His supporters carried a motion to rescind a previous motion that he was not a fit and proper person to represent the division of South Leeds. A further motion to adopt Fox was lost by 89 to 85 votes with 70 abstentions. Without the official support of the Leeds LRC, Fox had to rely on support from members of his own union and of such national figures in the party who could be persuaded to speak on his behalf. (50)

Fox's campaign seemed to be ill starred from its start, firstly the local Catholic diocese backed the Conservative candidate because of his support for funding of denominational secondary schools. (51) This



resulted in the loss of support from the not insignificant Irish population who lived in the West Hunslet area, which was compounded by the announcement of the Irish League that they were not supporting any of the candidates who had not shown a satisfactory degree of support for Home Rule in their election addresses. (52) In addition, the ASRS declared openly that it would advise its supporters to vote for any candidate who would deny victory for Fox. (53)

Fox's campaign seemed a lifeless shadow of his previous contest in 1906. Although the presence of Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden raised its profile, the lack of organisation and support from most local activists ensured that it never really took off. This was confirmed by the election results on 14 February 1908 when Fox came bottom of the poll behind the victorious Liberal candidate and the Conservative with only 2,451 votes compared to more than double that amount in 1906. As The Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury correspondent put it:

The election was marked from start to finish by a singular absence of effervescent enthusiasm and something approaching apathy on the part of the artisan voter, in contrast to the usual boisterousness of elections fought in busy industrial constituencies.  
(54)

The 1908 by-election was to mark a decline in the effectiveness of the local party in mobilising support in the parliamentary elections. To the immediate-after-effects-of-the-South-Leeds-was-to-be-added-the

local party in mobilising support in the parliamentary elections. To the immediate after effects of the South Leeds was to be added the consequences of the Osborne Judgement of 1909 which severely curtailed the ability of trade unions to use their funds for political purposes. Only a brief, poorly organised intervention in the second 1910 General Election marked the activity of the Party in South Leeds. Until after the First World War, O'Grady was to be the sole parliamentary representative of Labour in the city reliant on the forbearance of the national Liberal Party, which vetoed the selection of a local candidate to contest East Leeds. The continuing price for this abstention was a corresponding 'hands off' policy by the national Labour leadership in respect of the West Leeds parliamentary constituency. This veto was to be the cause of continuing resentment by the local Labour activists who were to make a number of abortive attempts to field a candidate in West Leeds.

A sign of the reluctance of a section of the local Liberal Party to concede East Leeds was demonstrated on 16 March 1909, by the invitation of the East Leeds Liberal Two Hundred to E. H. Foster, a well-known solicitor with advanced social views to stand as their candidate. His campaign was met by a hostile reception from Labour activists who kept up a steady barrage of heckling at various public meetings held to promote his candidacy in East Leeds. Attacking O'Grady for his supposed advocacy of the state takeover of all the means of production, distribution and exchange, Foster argued that the dominant question was the radical



reform of the House of Lords, without which there could be no meaningful social reforms. (55)

Foster's intervention was short-lived, being brought to an end by the national Liberal organisation alarmed at the prospect of the Labour Party retaliating in West Leeds. The Labour NEC, likewise, moved to prevent any local moves to increase the number of parliamentary seats to be contested. With the undoubted approval of the NEC, the executive of ASLEF decided in December 1909 not to run a candidate in South Leeds. (56) Their rivals the ASRS had rebuffed overtures from the Leeds Labour Party as far back as February 1908, a decision made easier by the fact that the prospective candidate was the detested Albert Fox.

The Leeds LRC attempted to force the hand of the NEC of the Labour Party by resolving on 16 December 1909 to run candidates for West and South Leeds at the next General election. This was to be conditional on the decision of the special conference of the Labour Party held in Manchester the following day. The conference's prompt rejection of their moves, for the moment, terminated action to find candidates for these constituencies. Under the shadow of the crisis between the Liberal Government and the Conservative dominated House of Lords arising from Lloyd George's 'People's Budget', O'Grady was re-adopted in January 1910. In a series of electoral meetings early in 1910, O'Grady both denounced the House of Lords in the strongest terms and played



down the significance of its reform by saying the real issues were the relief of unemployment and the question of poverty. (57) Going beyond the Liberal programme he called for the abolition of the House of Lords and the compulsory feeding of necessitous children and the reduction of the age limits for old age pensions. (58) As in the previous election O'Grady was opposed only by a Conservative candidate, who this time was the more formidable City Alderman William Clarke, Chairman of the Education Committee who had gained the sympathy of the Catholic Church in Leeds for his championing of grants in favour of denominational secondary schools. (59) It was clear in the first General Election that year that the Liberal Party was able to improve its electoral performance and benefit from the national groundswell in favour of the Government's social reform programme. (60)

The Leeds LRC was not to be dissuaded from the attempt to contest the Liberal hold over South and West Leeds. On 23 February 1910, a delegation from South Leeds Labour organisations interviewed Alderman John Badlay, leader of the Labour Party group in the council and asked him to contest the election. (61) A movement in favour of contesting West Leeds was also developing, culminating in a request to T. Russell Williams to stand in defiance of the Central Labour Organisation. Williams, a radical member of the ILP, had on a number of occasions attempted to obtain the nomination of local party organisations to stand for parliament in defiance of the National Labour Party's 'hands off'

policy in certain constituencies covered by the pact with the Liberals. At this time he was seeking to obtain the backing of the Spen Valley Labour Party, but according to the interview he gave to The Leeds Mercury which was published on 27 August 1910, he said he was approached by the West Leeds party to stand for parliament and had agreed to discuss the matter with them on condition they regularised his candidature in accordance with the constitution of the Labour Party and raised £150 to meet the expenses of the election. (62)

He further hinted that at the time he received a written invitation to stand for West Leeds, he was unaware that the South Leeds party had decided to back the candidacy of Badlay. He seemed resigned to the likelihood of not receiving the national Labour Party's sanction, even though West Leeds was much more ripe for an ILP candidate than South Leeds. Williams' departure soon after from the political scene in Leeds in favour of the Spen Valley left the way clear for Badlay and his supporters to concentrate their resources in South Leeds.

In response to this the Leeds Liberal Party appeared to resurrect the candidacy of Ernest Foster in East Leeds, when an invitation went out to him to stand against O'Grady from the East Leeds Liberal Association on 12 September 1910. (63) Yet, no further steps were taken to set up his campaign and the Labour Party moved towards a belated formal endorsement of Badlay on the eve of the second General Election on 30



November 1910. An attempt made by John Buckle, his predecessor as leader of the Labour Group on the City Council, to challenge his eligibility to stand on the grounds of his failure to maintain his union subscription was defeated. (64)

The Labour campaign proved to be hastily arranged and poorly organised and as a result the Labour Party came third with 2,795 votes, compared to 6,604 for the victorious sitting MP, Sir William Middlebrook and 3,804 for the Conservative. In a two-way contest between the Liberal and Conservative candidates in the first General election that year, Middlebrook had obtained 8,969 votes. This drop in Middlebrook's vote closely approximated the total vote obtained by Labour in the second election, indicating that a solid core of voters would support a Labour candidate even when faced with a three-way choice.

*Doesn't this also  
highlight limited  
lab support?*

In East Leeds, O'Grady successfully contested the two elections against the Conservative candidate, with the official backing of his party. Up to 1914 he had to rely on a weak constituency organisation run on the cheap, with only limited expectations of support from the cash strapped city organisation. (65) How successful he would have been in a three-way electoral contest cannot be determined except to note that in the two working-class wards in his constituency, East Leeds and North East Leeds, prior to 1910 virtually no Labour councillors were elected. In contrast, in every municipal contest but one, from 1910 to 1914, a Labour



candidate was successfully returned. A definite shift to Labour voting, particularly among the Irish Catholic electorate indicated that O'Grady was becoming increasingly independent of Liberal support by 1914. However, Leeds unlike most large and industrial cities, was still unable to return a Labour MP independent of some degree of Liberal electoral support.

In contrast, West Leeds remained safe for Liberalism from 1910 onwards. The elevation of Gladstone to the House of Lords in 1910 saw his replacement by T. E. Harvey, a former warden of Toynbee Hall and an advanced radical, the epitome of New Liberalism. Through his brother-in-law, Arnold Rowntree, he was linked with social reform minded Quakerism and as a member of a prominent family of Quaker chemical manufacturers in Leeds, he had the backing of a considerable section of the Liberal Party organisation in the city. (66) Enjoying the backing of the veteran Liberal notable Joseph Henry, he was a formidable adversary to be faced by any candidate that might be put up in the Labour interest. As a result the national organisations of the ILP and the Labour Party remained resolved to prevent any such intervention.

The movement to contest West Leeds gained impetus from the adherence of the British Socialist Party (BSP), a quasi-Marxist organisation which had emerged from the old solid Democratic Federation, to the Leeds LRC in 1913. This increased the self confidence of those in the local ILP and

LRC who chaffed impatiently at the restraints imposed on them, particularly in West Leeds. The groundswell for movement in the constituency culminated in the holding of a selection contest for West Leeds on 14 January 1913 to choose a parliamentary candidate. Enjoying the support of the local Labour organisation in Leeds, it was attended by up to 70 delegates representing local trade unions and branches of the BSP and ILP, and nominated Leonard Verity, a prominent middle-class socialist member of the ILP. Verity's nomination received the enthusiastic backing of The Leeds Weekly Citizen, the semi-official newspaper of the Leeds Labour Party who wrote of his acceptance speech:

His exposition of policy was as clear and militant as could be desired and yet couched in a reasoned and convincing phraseology. (67)

In commenting on the viability of a Labour candidate in the constituency they pointed out that all four wards in West Leeds had been contested by the Labour Party since 1905, often with success.

Verity's campaign began auspiciously in May with series of meetings addressed by him in West Leeds. Marking an increased professionalism in the Party's organisation was their systematic attempt to obtain the registration of lodgers as voters in the constituency. The Leeds Weekly Citizen observed:

There must be hundreds of young labour men  
scattered among the city living in lodgings or with  
their parents, who are entitled to have a lodgings vote.  
(68)

The local Labour Party backed its campaign by voting in favour of a resolution on 24 June 1913, calling for the national party to run a candidate at the Leicester by-election. (69)

The campaign for West Leeds again failed to obtain the sanction of the national party and by September had virtually ceased. The Leeds Weekly Citizen attributed this partly to the sitting member T. Edmund Harvey, having many staunch friends among Labour supporters, and some of these were trying to prevent a candidate being sanctioned who might cause him to lose his seat in the General Election. (70) By the winter of 1913, the imminence of a municipal strike eclipsed the interest in parliamentary contests, all the Labour Party's efforts being now focused on winning a majority on Leeds City Council and the West Leeds campaign sank without trace.

On the eve of the First World War, the parliamentary position of Leeds Labour Party was unimpressive. The Liberals possessed all the seats except East Leeds and two of the seats, Central Leeds and North Leeds, which were considered so hopeless by Labour that no attempt to contest them was made up to 1914. Other than East Leeds, only South Leeds was contested and the electoral fortunes of Labour saw a marked decline



after 1908. The veto of the national Labour office prevented any attempt to set and run a campaign against the sitting Liberal MP in West Leeds. The Liberals used the threat of running a candidate against O'Grady in East Leeds, with the prospect of bringing about his defeat, as a means of deterring the National Labour Party from challenging the Liberals in other parliamentary seats.

On the other hand, the position of O'Grady in this period was strengthened, particularly after 1909 by the growing Labour vote in the wards comprised within the East Leeds constituency. This made it less likely that Liberal intervention would automatically result in his defeat in a three way electoral contest. The growing electoral support for Labour in the city, particularly in West Leeds, was manifesting in increasingly self confident and well organised attempts at challenging the National Party's political veto.

c) **Labour and Municipal Politics 1902-1914**

In contrast to the erratic and unimpressive record of the Labour Party in parliamentary elections, was its increased participation and success in the elections to the City Council after 1902. From a position of insignificance, the Labour Party in Leeds had become, by 1914, the second largest party on the council, pushing the Liberals into third place.

Little more than a year after the creation of the Leeds Labour Representation Committee. By November 1913, there were sixteen councillors and two aldermen in the Labour group on the council. (71)

Before 1902, the ILP had a decade of contesting council elections; in all it had fought fourteen elections between 1893 and 1900, all unsuccessfully. Its share in the poll varied from three per cent in the North East ward in 1894 to nineteen per cent in the same year in the North West ward. Eleven candidates had stood in these elections and included such future leaders of the Labour Party in Leeds as John Badlay and D. B. Foster, who were to become respectively the Council group leader and Party Secretary. (72)

After 1902, the Labour Representation Committee in Leeds was to benefit from the financial resources of its affiliated trade unions, enabling it to contest more elections and to garner support from a growing section of the working-class electorate which had previously supported the Liberals. The number of seats contested grew from five in 1903, to eight in 1909 and twelve in 1913 at the main November elections. At the same time, Labour's share of the total municipal vote grew from 8.8 per cent in November 1903 to 25 per cent in 1906, and after a number of years of relative stagnation jumped to 29 per cent in 1913. (73)

The pronounced electoral growth of the Labour Party from 1988 votes in

1902 to 15,618 in 1913, occurred while the total municipal electorate grew from 79,392 in 1903 to 90,656 in 1913. (74) The total votes cast, however, remained stationary at 53,195 in 1903 and 53,497 in 1913. The Liberals only gained 20,135 votes in 1913, compared to 28,276 in 1902, when the first Labour Party candidates appeared, although still leading in the total number of votes cast. The Labour Party appears to have made inroads into an already existing Liberal vote rather than bringing a new <sup>more Liberal</sup> and previously untapped source of votes into the electoral process. <sup>ev. 1902</sup>

In view of the previous lack of harmony between the socialist led general unions supported by the activists of the ILP and the non-socialist craft trade unionists, the most marked feature in the Labour Representation Committee was the growing cooperation between them after 1902. Up to 1914 the local Labour Party was to be almost free of defections to the other parties by any of its leading figures. After 1905, the right of the Leeds Labour Representation Committee to politically represent all the trade unions affiliated to the Trades Council went unchallenged. (75)

This growing harmony was less apparent up to 1908 when the first Labour leader on the council, John Buckle, was at loggerheads with the rest of his group, largely made up of members of the ILP. An opponent of the ILP in the past he was more at home with members of the Liberal group, particularly after his elevation to the aldermanic bench in 1904 and his appointment to the City Council's Parliamentary District



Committee. During his membership of the Distress Committee which dealt with the relief of the unemployed on public works, he was harshly criticised by the local ILP for his lack of sympathy for the interests of unemployed relief seekers. (76)

Buckle's resignation as leader of the Labour group on the City Council, owing to their refusal to send a delegation to greet the King and Queen on their visit to Leeds in June 1908, was the culmination of four years of conflict with the ILP. Buckle's replacement by the ILP supporting John Badlay and subsequently his expulsion from the Leeds LRC failed to result in any significant defections from the Party. Only one councillor, T. C. Wilson, resigned from the Labour group and later stood unsuccessfully as an 'Independent Labour' candidate. (77) Former Liberal Labour trade unionists like Connellan continued to sit for the Labour Party on the City Council, firstly from 1906 to 1912 for New Wortley ward and from 1914 for East Leeds. Buckle was to be restored to membership of the Leeds LRC and stand successfully as its candidate in a council by-election in 1913. (78)

Occasional differences occurred within the Leeds LRC. These included Walt Wood's vocal opposition in 1908 to the decision of the LRC to support the Liberal Party in its stand against the subsidising of Roman Catholic secondary schools by the Conservative majority on the City Council. (79)

A more formidable challenge to the political unity of the local Labour movement came from the Social Democratic Federation and its post-1911 continuation the British Socialist Party. A branch of the Social Democratic Federation had been established in Leeds in 1884, but had broken away, almost immediately, to join the Socialist League of William Morris before becoming the nucleus of the future ILP. Re-established in Armley in West Leeds in about 1897, it had begun to attract significant support from disgruntled ILP members, opposed to the Party's compromise of its socialism, after it had affiliated with the national LRC. Having, except for a brief period in 1900, stood aloof from the Labour Party, the SDF through its leader, H. M. Hyndman, launched sustained attacks on the Labour Party's ability to represent the interests of the working class, denouncing it as the "Dependent Labour Party". (80)

The Leeds SDF received great impetus from its local organiser, Bert Killip, an able platform speaker and journalist, who equalled Hyndman in his vituperative attacks on the Labour Party in Leeds. In 1909, 1910 and 1911 he stood for the City Council in the latest contest, standing against an official Labour candidate. After 1911 when the Party was reconstituted as the British Socialist Party, it took a more conciliatory attitude to the Labour Party particularly marked in Leeds where the Party led by Killip and Harold Clay moved to end its political isolation by allowing its West Leeds branches to affiliate with the Leeds LRC in

1913. (81) So slight was the opposition to their affiliation with the ILP and the Leeds LRC that Killip was selected to stand as an official Labour candidate for the West Leeds ward in November 1913. (82)

From 1904, the Labour Party in Leeds had a published municipal programme which was issued after it had set up a group on the City Council. It called for the extension of municipally-owned services to include the supply of milk and coal and the provision of a municipal bank, going beyond the other two parties, who only supported the local authority ownership of the gas, electricity and tramways utilities. (83) Furthermore, a Labour-controlled council would become a model employer and an example to employers in the private sector.

The programme of municipal reform they advocated was to be funded out of the profits of the City Council's trading services such as the tramways and the gas works, which were to be ploughed back to reduce the charges for their use borne by working class users. The manifesto denounced the current practice of the Conservative dominated council of using trading profits in relief of rates, benefiting the wealthiest rate payers and the owners of the largest factory and commercial premises in the city. It further decried the resort to outside borrowing to finance expanded municipal services, adding to the already heavy burden of debt repayments. (84)



Whilst denouncing the increased salaries paid to senior local government officers, the Labour programme continually campaigned for increased municipal expenditure as a means of social reform, particularly the provision of cheap and affordable working-class housing. At the same time the Labour group played the role of defenders of the municipal workforce against increasingly authoritarian departmental managers and the Conservative and Liberal majorities that supported them. As a result the Labour Party was to be both an advocate of rate reduction and of increased payments to meet the claims of the main municipal trade unions like the Gasworkers' and Tram Drivers' unions, whose senior officials were members of the City Council's Labour group.

The Party's municipal programme was most vigorously advocated by John Badlay, the Labour group leader from 1908 to 1913. Persistently denouncing the increasing burden of municipal debt owing to London and provincial moneymarkets, he attempted to reconcile this with the advocacy of increased expenditure on social reforms by using trade profits and the proceeds of higher business rates. Significantly lacking in this programme was any resort to increased central government funding through the provision of grants in aid raised by the proceeds of more progressive national taxation. (85)

Labour politics in Leeds became focused on municipal elections and the performance of the Labour group on the City Council, finding them more

frequent and accessible than elections to Parliament and holding out the prospect of achieving practical social reform more quickly. Its composition represented the diverse basis of the party's support. Old-style craft unionists like John Buckle and Owen Connellan sat alongside Walt Wood of the Gasworkers' union, organiser for the City's largest trade union, comprised overwhelmingly of the unskilled, many of whom were employees of the City Council. The engineers were represented by the veteran ILP supporter Arthur Shaw, and other trade unionists on the Council included George Layton, a locomotiveman, George Thaxton a railway guard, and George Pearson, Secretary of the Tramdrivers' Union.

Increasingly represented on the City Council, the Labour group were self employed, self-educated ILP activists, employed in white collar and commercial activities. Among them were insurance agents like John Badlay and J. H. Barraclough and the self-made electrical contractor, D. B. Foster, ILP veteran and secretary of the Leeds LRC from 1902 to 1903 and 1911 to 1916. By 1913, this tendency to choose candidates from small businessmen was becoming more pronounced, with a wealthy high street optician, Leonard Verity, joining the Labour group with two more insurance agents, F. H. Gath and W. A. Byrnes. All three of them were active in the ILP and considered well on the left of the Party. (86)

Reflecting this increased white-collar composition of the Council Labour group, was their increasing attempts to attract the electoral support of



small shopkeepers, clerks and shop assistants. (87) Especially from 1912 onwards, the Labour platform held out the Party as the defender of the small ratepaying shopkeeper from the big trusts and combines. On the eve of the great municipal strike of 1913, the Labour group was attempting to forge links with non-party organisations of rate payers that were highly critical of the City Council's financial policies.

The drawbacks of having a prominent role in the Party and being reliant on business acumen for a living were demonstrated by the cases of John D. Macrae and John Badlay. Macrae, a former carpenter, then full time secretary of the Leeds LRC from 1903 to 1911, became insolvent owing a considerable sum to the Party and had to resign under a cloud. In contrast, Badlay had to resign his position as Labour group leader and alderman when his acceptance of a directorate of the Royal Liver Insurance Company in 1913 and the salary that went with it was deemed by his Party to be incompatible with his position as a representative of the working class. (88) In addition, venturing into political controversy resulted in two Labour councillors having to pay heavy libel damages to Liberal and Conservative electoral opponents. (89)

A major factor unifying the Party was its increasing political isolation on the City Council. Between 1903 and 1914, virtually every resolution and proposal it put forward in favour of reform was voted down by a combination of the Conservatives and Liberals, often accompanied by



derision and verbal abuse from their councillors. As a result the Labour Party could hold itself out as the only progressive party in the city and be free of the risk of any significant defection of its following back to the Liberals. The City Council's suppression of the direct works department in 1908 which had employed significant numbers of unskilled workers, during the depths of a trade depression, and its open hostility to the wage claims of the city's municipal workers, were to strengthen the conviction of all sections of the Labour Party that there was nothing to choose between the Conservative and Liberal parties.

By 1914 the Labour Party had become a significant force in the municipal politics of Leeds. In spates of electoral growth, particularly in 1904 to 1906 and 1912 onwards, it had made considerable inroads into previously safe Liberal wards, turning them into Labour strongholds. These gains were in diverse areas of the city: in East and West Hunslet, centres of heavy engineering, iron and chemical manufacturing, and in West Leeds areas where the economy was still based on woollen manufacture. In East Leeds, the poorest area of the city, the Labour Party made substantial electoral gains amongst its considerable Irish population after 1910. (90)

The Labour Party's success was, however, qualified. In 1914 it was still only weakly represented in many wards with a considerable working class electorate. In particular, in recently built suburbs of North Leeds

such as Harehills and Meanwood where relatively more affluent working class residents were moving, there was almost no Labour organisation at all, leaving the field open to the Conservative Party to make its appeal of patriotism and anti-socialism.

Even where there were Labour ward organisations, they often operated on a shoestring budget, with only limited financial support from the city Labour Party. Only in 1914 did the Party appoint a full-time agent, D. B. Foster, who was able to put the Party's electoral organisation on a more professional basis. On the other hand, its lack of success in gaining reforms from the City Council, reflected the limitations of the Party's programme of obtaining reform on the rates, without focusing on the role of central government as a source of local government finance funded by progressive taxation. (91)

**Table 2.1****ILP Contested Seats on Leeds City Council 1893-1898**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Ward</b>	<b>Candidate</b>	<b>ILP Vote</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Total Vote Cast</b>	<b>ILP % of Vote</b>
1893	East Hunslet	Pennington	564	3	2,957	18%
"	East Hunslet	Pennington	574	3	3,564	16%
"	Holbeck	Bingley	124	3	3,165	4%
1894	West Leeds	Burns	414	3	3,268	16%
"	N.W. Leeds	Oram	427	2	2,232	19%
"	N.E. Leeds	Braithwaite	103	3	2,836	3%
1895	N.E. Leeds	Mahon	186	3	2,761	6%
"	Holbeck	Foster	313	3	3,236	9%
1896	West	Badlay	234	3	3,254	7.5%
"	Holbeck	Foster	253	3	3,503	7%
1897	East Hunslet	Shaw	287	3	3,929	7%
"	Armley & Wortley	Foster	508	3	4,815	10%
1898	North East	Burgess	281	2	1,872	16%
	New Wortley Ward		405	3	2,776	14%

Source: Leeds Official Year Book; Morrison's Leeds 'Blue Book' and City Record.



**Table 2.2**      **Participation of LRC in November Municipal Elections 1902-1913**

Year		Wards Contested			
1902	14 Liberal	14 Conservative	2 Non Contested	<u>4 Labour</u>	
1903	26 Liberal	15 Conservative		<u>5 Labour</u>	
1904	15 Liberal	11 Conservative	2 Non Contested	<u>5 Labour</u>	
1905	14 Liberal	7 Conservative	3 Non Contested	<u>10 Labour</u>	
1906	14 Liberal	8 Conservative	2 Non Contested	<u>10 Labour</u>	1 Independent Catholic
1907	16 Liberal	13 Conservative	11 Labour	1 Independent	
1908	13 Liberal	11 Conservative	9 Labour	3 Non Contested	
1909	15 Liberal	14 Conservative	8 Labour	2 Non Contested	
1910	13 Liberal	10 Conservative	9 Labour	3 Non Contested	
1911	13 Liberal	11 Conservative	10 Labour	2 Non Contested	
1912	14 Liberal	13 Conservative	7 Labour	1 Independent	1 Non Contested
1913	16 Liberal	12 Conservative	12 Labour	1 Independent	

Source: Leeds Official Yearbook; Morrison's Leeds 'Blue Book' and City Record.

**Table 2.3:** **3 November - Municipal Elections - Party Results**

Wards	1913	1912	1911	1910	1909	1908	1907	1906	1905	1904	1903	1902
Mill Hill	C	C	L	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
West	L	C	C	C	L	L	C	L	L	L	L	L
North West	L	C	C	L	L	C	C	C	C	L	L	C
Brunswick	C	C	L	L	C	C	C	C	L	L	L	C
Central	L	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	L	C	C	C
North	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	L	L	C	C
North East	Lab	C	Lab	C	Lab	C	L	C	L	L	C	L
East	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	C	Ind	C	C	Lab	L	C	L
South	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	L	C	L
East Hunslet	Lab	Lab	L	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	L	Lab	Lab	L	L
West Hunslet	L	L	Lab	L	L	L	L	L	Lab	L	L	L
Holbeck	Lab	Lab	L	L	Lab	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
New Wortley	L	L	Lab	L	L	C	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	L
Armley & Wortley	Lab	C	C	L	L	C	L	L	Lab	L	L	L
Bramley	L	Lab	C	L	L	C	L	L	L	L	L	L
Headingley	C	C	L	L	L	C	C	C	C	L	L	L
Roundhay	C	C	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Net Returns												
Conservatives	6	13	7	6	6	11	9	8	4	2	6	3
Liberal	6	2	5	8	7	3	5	7	7	12	9	11
Labour	5	4	4	2	3	1	2	1	5	2	1	-
Independent	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Position of Parties after November Elections												
Aldermen:												
Conservatives	9	8	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	16	16
Liberals	6	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	-	-
Labour	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	-
Councillors:												
Conservatives	25	26	19	24	27	29	21	14	12	13	18	18
Liberals	12	15	20	18	15	15	18	26	29	32	29	30
Labour	14	10	9	5	5	3	9	8	7	3	1	-
Independent	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Members of Council	68	68	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64

Source: Leeds Official Yearbook; Morrison's Leeds 'Blue Book' and City Record.

**Table 2.4      Labour Contests 1902-14 (including by-elections and SDF Candidates)**

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Successful</u>
1902	4	-
1903	6	1
1904	8	3
1905	10	5
1906	9	1
1907	15	3
1908	10	1
1909	8	2
1910	11	5
1911	9	4
1912	8	3
1913	15	8
1914	1	1
	<hr/> 114	<hr/> 37

**Party Votes - 1902-14 November Elections**

	<b>Liberal</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>(%)</b>
1902	28,276	52.5	23,584	43.8	1,988	3.7
1903	28,016	49.5	23,566	41.7	4,957	8.8
1904	27,894	52.4	16,489	30.9	8,890	16.7
1905	19,679	46.3	8,840	20.8	13,952	32.9
1906	22,635	45.9	13,756	27.9	12,349	25.
1907	21,905	41.5	18,072	34.3	12,776	24.2
1908	19,507	38.2	18,845	36.9	11,263	22.1
1909	21,647	39.8	20,710	38.1	11,976	22.2 + Ind 2.8
1910	19,027	45.8	12,074	29.	10,469	25.2 + Ind
1911	19,302	38.2	16,424	36.9	13,688	22.1 + Ind 2.8
1912	17,947	37.4	19,481	40.6	9,643	20. + Ind 1.9
1913	20,135	37.7	17,196	32.1	15,618	29.2 + Ind 1.

Source: Leeds Official Year Book; Morrison's Leeds 'Blue Book' and City Record.



**Table 2.5****LABOUR CONTESTS 1902 - 1914**

		Wards	Candidates	Position	Vote
1902	Nov.	North West	H. E. Withey	(3)	290
		Central	W. Trainer	(3)	78
		Armley	W. Morby	(3)	1042
		West Hunslet	W.T. Newlove	(3)	578
1903	July By election	West Hunslet	W. T. Newlove	(2)	890
1903	Nov.	South	W. Wood	(3)	220
		North West	G. Thaxton	(3)	384
		West Hunslet	W. T. Newlove	(3)	925
		Armley & Wortley	J. Buckle	(1)	1164
1904	Jan. By election	Armley & Wortley		(3)	1775
1904	Nov.	West Hunslet	T. C. Wilson	(2)	1418
		New Wortley	J. H. Barraclough	(1)	1125
		Armley & Wortley	W. Morby	(2)	2440
		Bramley	B. Black	(2)	1249
1904	Nov	West Hunslet	T.C. Wilson	(1)	1686
		New Wortley	S. Johnson	(2)	1019
1905	Feb. B/e	West Hunslet	W. T. Newlove	(3)	1397
	March "	Holbeck	J. Brotherton	(2)	818
1905	Nov.	West	J. E. Smith	(2)	803
		North West	J. Knipe	(3)	600
		East	G. Layton	(1)	1792
		East Hunslet	J. Badlay	(1)	2228
		West Hunslet	T. C. Wilson	(1)	2057
		Holbeck	J. Brotherton	(2)	1413
		New Wortley	A. Shaw	(1)	1390
		Armley & Wortley	J. D. Macrae	(1)	2210
		Bramley	E. Black	(2)	1459

Cont'd .....

# LABOUR CONTESTS 1902 - 1914

		Wards	Candidates	Position	Vote
1906	Nov.	North East	W. Wood	(3)	993
		East	W. Morby	(2)	1263
		East Hunslet	I. Brassington	(2)	1874
		West Hunslet	F. Fountain	(2)	1515
		Holbeck	J. Brotherton	(2)	1468
		New Wortley	A. Connellan	(1)	1113
		Armley & Wortley	G. Cole	(2)	1603
		Bramley	G. Clay	(2)	1037
		Headingley	R. M. Lancaster	(3)	1025
1907	March	North East	W. Wood	(1)	849
	November	West	J. E. Smith	(3)	646
		N. West	R. Escritt	(3)	756
		Brunswick (b/e)	R. Escritt	(3)	235
		North (b/e)	W. T. Newlove	(3)	928
		North (b/e Dec)	W. T. Newlove	(3)	626
		North East	W. Slater	(3)	940
		East	W. Mitchell	(3)	972
		East Hunslet	I. Brassington	(1)	1994
		West Hunslet	F. Fountain	(2)	1582
		Holbeck	J. Fleming	(2)	1340
		New Wortley	J. H. Barracloough	(1)	1120
		Armley & Wortley	R. C. Hyde	(2)	1490
		Bramley	D. B. Foster	(3)	805
		Headingley	R. M. Lancaster	(3)	1131
		Headingley (b/e)	W. H. Milnes	(3)	762
1908	April	New Wortley	W. Morby	(3)	655
	November	West	G. Gale	(3)	374
		North East	W. Wood	(2)	1379
		East	W. Mitchell	(3)	1026
		East Hunslet	J. Badlay	(1)	2029
		West Hunslet	T. C. Wilson Independent Labour	(2)	1648
		Holbeck	J. Brotherton	(3)	1277
		New Wortley	W. Morby	(2)	868
		Armley & Wortley	J. D. Macrae	(3)	1812
		Cont'd .....			

# LABOUR CONTESTS 1902 - 1914

		Wards	Candidates	Position	Vote
1908	Nov.(cont'd)	Bramley	D. B. Foster	(3)	850
	Dec.	Headingley (b/e)	W. H. Milnes	(3)	762
1909	November	New Wortley	A. Connellan	(3)	800
			B. Killip	(4)	
		Armley & Wortley	J. D. Macrae	(3)	1896
		Bramley	D. B. Foster	(3)	954
		East Hunslet	F. Fountain	(3)	1965
		West Hunslet	W. H. McShane	(3)	1353
		Holbeck	G. H. Pearson	(1)	1569
		North East	W. Wood	(1)	1829
		East	J. Jones	(2)	1442
1910	November	West	J. Ruddock	(3)	548
		North East	F. H. Gath	(1)	1041
		East	W. A. Byrne	(1)	1732
		East Hunslet	I. Brassington	(1)	1684
		West Hunslet	W. H. McShane	(2)	1152
		Holbeck	A. Tallant	(2)	1542
		New Wortley	R. Escritt	(2)	630
			B. Killip	(4)	
		Armley & Wortley	D. B. Foster	(2)	1497
		Bramley	J. H. Ellis	(2)	698
	Nov. b/e	Hunslet	J. D. Macrae	(1)	1551
		New Wortley	W. Morby	(1)	754
1911	November	West	J. Ruddock	(2)	664
		North West	B. Killip (BSP)	(3)	478
		North East	F. H. Gath	(1)	2001
		East	R. Escritt	(1)	1363
		East Hunslet	J. D. MaCrae	(2)	1750
		West Hunslet	D. B. Foster	(1)	1740
		Holbeck	A. Tallant	(2)	1687
		New Wortley	W. H. McShane	(1)	1198
		Armley & Wortley	H. E. Candler	(2)	1557
		Bramley	L. Verity	(2)	1242

Cont'd .....



# LABOUR CONTESTS 1902 - 1914

		Wards	Candidates	Position	Vote
1912	November	West Ward	G. Kaye (BSP)	(3)	254
		North East	W. Wood	(2)	1904
		East Ward	G. Layton	(1)	1635
		East Hunslet	G. Thaxton	(2)	1640
		West Hunslet	W. Gill	(2)	1383
		Holbeck	G. H. Pearson	(1)	1874
		Armley & Wortley	H. E. Candler	(3)	1450
		Bramley	L. Verity	(1)	1407
1913	November	West	B. Killip	(3)	414
		North West	J. Thornton	(3)	602
	December	By election	J. Thornton	(3)	629
		North	G. Gale	(3)	1080
		North East	C. E. Mulholland	(1)	1915
		East	W. A. Byrne	(1)	1991
		New Wortley	A. Tallant	(2)	976
	November	By election	A. Tallant	(1)	1300
		Armley & Wortley	W. Wood	(1)	1900
		Bramley	A. Dobbs	(2)	1395
		South	F. Fountain	(2)	421
		West Hunslet	W. Benton	(1)	1692
	November	By election	F. Fountain	(1)	1655
		West Hunslet	A. C. Relton	(2)	1362
		Holbeck	J. Arnott	(1)	1070
	November	By election	J. Buckle	(1)	2007

Source: Leeds Official Year Book; Morrison's Leeds 'Blue Book' and City Record.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Footnotes**

- (1) Connellan incurred the displeasure of prominent Irish trade unionists like William Kennedy of the Tailors' Union, who was Trades Council President 1899-1900. Kennedy effectively procured the passing of a vote of confidence in Byles on 26 September 1900 at the Trades Council and an implicit condemnation of Connellan; Leeds Trades Council 26 September 1900.
- (2) Yorkshire Factory Times, 5 June 1903, containing short biography of Parrott.
- (3) This did not stop William Newlove, Trades Council delegate to the Federation of Trades Councils in Yorkshire and the Leeds LRC President from strongly deprecating Labour candidates allying themselves in any way with either the Liberal or Conservative Parties at a meeting held on 25 July 1903 which severely criticised Parrott for refusing to give his adherence to the Labour Representation Committee. Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 27 July 1903.
- (4) Yorkshire Factory Times, 29 May 1903.
- (5) Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury, 12 February 1904.
- (6) Ibid., 12 February 1904.
- (7) Ibid., 15 February 1904.
- (8) LTC Minutes, 30 March 1904.
- (9) Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury, 31 March 1904.
- (10) Ibid., 10 April 1904.
- (11) Ibid., 15 April 1904.
- (12) LTC Minutes, 27 April 1904.
- (13) Ibid., 4 March 1903.
- (14) Ibid., 11 May 1904.
- (15) Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury, 14 May 1904.
- (16) Ibid., 7 June 1904.

- (17) Ibid., 8th June 1904.
- (18) Ibid., 7 September 1904.
- (19) H. Beales and H. Pelling, Labour and Politics 1900-1906, p.146, 151 and 155.
- (20) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 7 May 1903.
- (21) Ibid., 1 January 1905.
- (22) Ibid., 31 January 1905.
- (23) Ibid., 9 February 1905.
- (24) Labour Leader, 14 April 1905.
- (25) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 17 February 1905.
- (26) Ibid., 21 March 1905.
- (27) Poirier, The Advent of Labour, p.255-6
- (28) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 27 November 1905.
- (29) Ibid., 2 December 1905.
- (30) Ibid., 27 November 1905, Poirier, The Advent of Labour, p.256.
- (31) LRCP 28/213 Macrae to MacDonald, 26 November 1905.
- (32) LRCP 28/216 MacDonald to Macrae, 6 December 1905.
- (33) LRCP 28/217 Macrae to MacDonald, 8 December 1905.
- (34) LRCP 28/218 MacDonald to Macrae, 8 December 1905.
- (35) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 15 December 1905.
- (36) Ibid., 6 January 1906.
- (37) Morrisons, Leeds Yearbook 1906.
- (38) Fox with 4,030 votes came second to the sitting Liberal M.P., Sir John Lawson Walton, who obtained 6,620 votes, but ahead of the Conservative Candidate's 2,126 votes, Leeds Yearbook 1906.
- (39) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 16 January 1906.



- (40) E. D. Steele, 'Imperialism and Leeds Politics (1850-1914), in D. Fraser (ed.), A History of Modern Leeds, pp.341-348. (Manchester 1980).
- (41) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 5 January 1906 and 15 January 1906.
- (42) Ibid., 15 January 1906.
- (43) Leeds Official Yearbook 1908.
- (44) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 27 September 1907.
- (45) Leeds Mercury, 25 January 1908.
- (46) Ibid., 29 January 1908.
- (47) Ibid., 1 February 1908.
- (48) Ibid., 30 January 1908.
- (49) Ibid., 30 January 1908.
- (50) Ibid., 4 February 1908.
- (51) Ibid., 5 February 1908.
- (52) Ibid., 6 February 1908.
- (53) Ibid., 10 February 1908.
- (54) Ibid., 14 February 1908, the election results were Middlebrook (Lib) 5,274 votes, Neville (Con) 4,915 and Fox 2,451.
- (55) Leeds Mercury, 16 December 1909.
- (56) Ibid., 17 March 1909.
- (57) Ibid., 17 December 1909.
- (58) Ibid., 17 December 1909 and 18 December 1909.
- (59) Ibid., 10 January 1910.
- (60) Ibid., 2 January 1908 and 7 January 1908.
- (61) The Liberal Party retained all four parliamentary seats with O'Grady in East Leeds.
- (62) YFT, 24 February 1910.

- (63) Leeds Mercury, 30 August 1910.
- (64) Ibid., 13 September 1910.
- (65) Ibid., 1 December 1910.
- (66) D. Tanner, Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-18 (1996), pp.260, 261.
- (67) Ibid., pp.257-8, 272-3.
- (68) Leeds Mercury, 15 January 1913.
- (69) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 17 January 1913.
- (70) Leeds LRC Minutes, 24 June 1913.
- (71) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 5 September 1913.
- (72) Leeds LRC Year Book 1913-14.
- (73) Ibid., Annual Reports 1906-14.
- (74) Ibid.
- (75) Morrison's Leeds Blue Books 1905-14.
- (76) Following the resignation of Connellan from his seat on the City Council where he had sat as a Liberal up to 1904, and the adoption of O'Grady as the Parliamentary Candidate of the Leeds LRC for East Leeds.
- (77) He was deputy to Herbert Brown, Chairman of the Distress Committee and Leader of the Liberal Group on the City Council.
- (78) Leeds Mercury, 28 May 1908 and 24 August 1908.
- (79) Buckle was not elevated to the Aldermanic bench following his return to the City Council.
- (80) Leeds Mercury, 2 January 1908 and 17 January 1908, for details of the Labour split.
- (81) Yorkshire Factory Times, 18 November 1909, for reaction of ILP to the SDF's attacks.
- (82) From early 1913 the British Socialist Party had a regular columnist in the Leeds Weekly Citizen, who wrote under the pseudonym of

'Jotum'. In the 31 January 1913 edition of the Leeds Weekly Citizen he denied that his Party was anti-trade unionist.

- (83) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 32 October 1913.
- (84) Leeds Labour Manifesto 1904-5, (Leeds 1905).
- (85) Ibid.
- (86) The City Council received extra funding from Central Government to carry out its increased responsibilities as a result of the 1902 Education Act.
- (87) Verity figured as a possible Labour choice for Parliamentary Candidate for West Leeds in 1914 in face of the disapproval of the national Labour Party.
- (88) Leeds Labour Manifesto 1904-1905, and a pamphlet of the elected Labour City auditor, Municipal Muddle (Leeds 1912).
- (89) In particular, see D. B. Foster's letters to the Leeds Mercury of 23 May 1913 and to the Leeds Weekly Citizen, 13 June 1913.
- (90) In 1912 Badlay was successfully sued for libel by the veteran Liberal notable, Joseph Henry; in 1914 the defeated Conservative Councillor for East Leeds, Richard Firth, successfully sued the victorious Labour Councillor George Layton for libel. As a result Layton was made bankrupt and a by-election declared.
- (91) Leeds Weekly Citizen. In June 1914 Connellan was returned to the City Council for East Leeds in the by-election following Layton's bankruptcy. His Liberal opponent enjoyed the tacit support of the Conservatives who did not field a candidate.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **LABOUR AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF IN LEEDS 1900-14**

The previous chapter has shown the marked contrast in the political fortunes of the fledgling Labour Party in Leeds in its impact in parliamentary and municipal elections. While the hold of the Liberal Party on parliamentary representation was increasing up to 1914, with even the sole Labour MP dependent upon its negative support, in the field of municipal politics the Labour Party was to oust it as the principal representative of the working-class. The contrast in their political fortunes indicating that the working-class electorate looked for different benefits from the parliamentary and municipal voting.

If the period up to 1914 seemed to illustrate the Liberal government's ability to retain its working-class vote in Leeds, as a result of its progressive programme of social and political reform, the differing futures of municipal Liberalism indicate that it was increasingly failing to meet the expectations of the working-class voter. The working class Liberal voters could still find in the Liberal government's legislative achievements, such as the setting up of a framework for old-age pensions, unemployment benefit and social insurance, a reason for not shifting their preferences to the Labour Party. But in municipal elections, especially after 1903, more working-class voters were finding the local Liberal and

Conservative programmes wanting in their ability to satisfy working-class needs.

In contrast, the Labour group on the City Council advocated increased municipal expenditure as a means of social reform. Such expenditure might be for improved sanitation, provision of affordable working-class housing and cheaper tram fares for passengers travelling to work, but up to 1910 the relief of unemployment by the provision of municipally financed works figured as perhaps the most important demand of the local Labour movement. It was here that the major difference between the Labour Party and its opponents marked the way for it to win over a significant new working class vote.

The change in the City's politics occurred in a long period of slump and heavy unemployment which was experienced here in line with national tendencies, particularly in the periods 1892-1895, and from 1903 until 1911 Leeds was hit hard by the prolonged trade depression, with heavy unemployment experienced by the unskilled and casually employed. The latter were particularly affected because they were not, in the main, members of trade unions or covered by Friendly Society benefits adequate to tide them over prolonged periods of unemployment. Resort might be had to such sources of working-class credit as the pawnbroker, but if this proved inadequate, there loomed up the grim prospect of having to apply for relief to the Poor Law authorities or private charities

under the umbrella of the Charitable Organisation Society.

If not so directly affected, skilled workers suffered weakening in the bargaining power, by the existence of a reservoir of unemployed as a reserve of potential strike breakers. The local trade unions of the skilled had met major defeats at the hands of employers, particularly in the engineering and boot and shoemaking industries in the 1890's. (1) This resulted in the pushing through of technical and organisational changes which resulted in the increased employment of the semi-skilled and unskilled in place of the skilled worker. Periods of recession saw the removal of many male workers from employment, but at the same time the increased recruitment of women and children as part-time workers, with an increased sense of insecurity even among the most skilled and well paid. By the 1880s, the trade unions were increasingly sympathetic to legislation restricting the length of the working day for adult male workers.

The lack of enthusiasm of the guardians of the various Poor Law unions in Leeds to be involved in large-scale relief giving in times of acute unemployment, left the way open for the Municipal Council to intervene by providing unemployment relief work. As early as 1878-9 the Borough Council (City Council from 1893 onwards) had taken action to provide relief work through its labour employing committees, in place of private charity and the Poor Law authorities. It was accepted that the Municipal



Council was a body capable of providing alternative temporary relief to that provided by the traditional agencies, who were seen as inadequate in times of trade depression. (2) In the following decade these remedies were not followed up, even though unemployment remained an intermittent problem, reliance being placed on voluntary remedies such as the Mayor's appeals and relief funds.

The position of the unemployed was transformed in the 1890s by the emergence of organised pressure under socialist leadership, following the success of 'New Unionism' in Leeds with the Gas Strike in 1890. This was reflected in the organised protests of the unemployed, which were a permanent pressure on the Municipal Council and the Poor Law authorities from 1892 to 1895, when the slump was at its most acute. (3)

From December 1892, the ILP began organising mass protest meetings of the unemployed in Victoria Square facing the Town Hall and the Leeds Poor Law Union offices. These meetings continued on a daily basis and compelled concessions from the Municipal Council such as in the speeding up of relief work and the setting up of a municipally supported labour exchange. Initially, leadership of the movement was provided by John Lincoln Mahan and Tom Paylor, both prominent members of the Gasworkers' Union and the ILP.

These campaigns were to influence the actions of the municipal council.

In 1886, the Local Government Board Circular empowering local authorities to set on foot relief work, had produced no response in Leeds. By 1892-3 the Borough Council was busily promoting relief work, as the Board of Trade Report noted "there are a few centres, such as Leeds, where the unemployed agitation attracted a special amount of public attention ..." A series of meetings were held at the Town Hall Square, demanding work before the Corporation undertook extensive relief works. (4) The Trades and Labour Council was at first reluctant to involve itself with the agitation, but under the pressure of the Gasworkers' Union and other new unions it was eventually forced to intercede with the Borough Council on behalf of the unemployed. (5)

In May 1893, the Trades Council executive joined with the ILP in sending a deputation to urge further relief work. The deepening of unemployment in 1893 was to lead to the use of more militant tactics by the Unemployed Committee, including picketing the homes of leading Aldermen and crowding the main shopping streets with threadbare demonstrators. (6) This was parallel with the more moderate policy of lobbying by the Trades Council's specially set up Unemployment Committee. (7) Distaste at the tactics of the militant Campaigners led to the temporary withdrawal of the Trades Council from their campaign in February 1894. (8) By the end of the year, with no relief from the slump in sight, the Trades Council and the ILP resumed cooperation to pressure the Corporation to provide relief works for the unemployed. This was

institutionalised by the setting up of a Joint Committee of the Trades Council and the ILP in February 1895 to examine practical means of dealing with unemployment in Leeds. (9)

The culmination of three years of agitation by the Unemployed Committees occurred on the 6-14 February 1895 when ILP led demonstrators besieged the City Corporation and the Leeds Poor Law Guardians by effectively taking over Victoria Square and the adjoining streets. As a result, both organisations were compelled to make substantial concessions to the unemployed by authorising the batch processing of applications, setting up local ward committees including unemployed campaigners and the putting in hand of public works relating to sanitary improvement. (10)

Contrary to its previous stance, the Corporation decided to appoint a Committee to deal with the Trades Council and the ILP in discovering the best methods of dealing with unemployment in future. The invitations were extended to the Chamber of Commerce and the Poor Law Unions and the Chamber of Commerce signalled its willingness to cooperate by joining in the setting up of another Special Committee, including as well the Trades Council, the Corporation and the ILP. An initial report issued in May 1895, with the support of the Trades Council, advocated the general introduction of the eight-hour day, the setting up of a municipal direct Works Department and a policy of slum clearance and municipal



house building. (11)

In contrast, the interim and final reports of the Corporation were unsympathetic to innovations in unemployment relief, advocating only the setting up of a permanent register of the unemployed, otherwise leaving relief to the Poor Law except in times of exceptional trade depression. The reaction of the Labour representative was unenthusiastic, suspecting that the register was of limited value and potentially harmful as a means of recruiting non-unionist strike breakers. The industrial recovery from mid-1895 appeared to render superfluous the activities of these committees, and their only legacy was the setting up of municipal relief works by the Corporation in 1902, when depressed trade conditions and heavy unemployment returned.

The decline in interest in the problem of unemployment was reversed in 1902, following the end of the Boer War when the running down of war industries and the return of volunteers and reservists began to flood the labour market. This became more marked as the trade downturn turned into a fully-fledged depression. The government's lack of interest in taking significant remedial action, which seemed to be matched by that of the Liberal opposition led sections of the Labour movement to set up nationwide bodies to coordinate campaigns on behalf of the unemployed. (12) Following a conference on unemployment on 15 December 1903 in London, in which the LRC, the Fabian Society and leading public and

Labour figures were represented, a new National Unemployed Committee was set up to campaign for central government involvement in its relief.

(13) Established as a permanent body in 1903 it set up affiliated branches in most large towns but failed to maintain its momentum and virtually ceased to function by 1904.

A far more effective and sustained organisation of the unemployed was carried out by the SDF which adopted, both in London and in major provincial towns, a policy of promoting street processions and out of door rallies. Eschewing the pressure group politics of the National Unemployment Committee it used street demonstrations to show that it was the real champion of the unemployed. Their campaign in London in 1902, of mobilising the unemployed through a team of picked organisers, was to be followed in provincial towns including Leeds. In the ensuing years, the campaigns for relief of the unemployed was to be divided between the more cautious lobbying of the Labour Party, TUC and most Trades Councils in favour of national legislation to enable local authorities to increase their relief giving powers and the demands of the SDF for more radical 'Right to Work' legislation.

*intellectual  
-thick  
with  
actual  
reality  
suffering*

In Leeds, both kinds of campaign were to be organised from 1902 onwards. The onset of high and sustained unemployment in 1903 found the traditional sources of relief as ill equipped as they had been in the previous decade in comprehending the needs of the new poor created by

the trade depression. The Poor Law Institutions were represented by the guardians of the Leeds, Hunslet, Bramley and Holbeck Unions, the Leeds Union being the largest and wealthiest in raising income. In 1894, it had been resorted to in large numbers, and possessing the power to give outdoor relief it had proceeded in doing this with only the requirement of nominal "test work" at its Beckett Street workhouse. The stigma of claiming, with the risk of the loss of voting rights, meant that it was used as the very last resort. Offers, in 1903, by Arthur Willey, Chairman of the Leeds Guardians, to welcome claims for relief from the unemployed, were rebuffed by the unemployed organisations and the Trades Council.

(14) The other Poor Law Unions were located in heavily industrialised but poorer districts of Leeds, and their guardians were, by the early twentieth century, beginning to distance themselves from the image of being workhouse authorities and relief givers in favour of concentrating on improvements in hospital facilities in the workhouses.

From 1895 onwards, with the election of Arthur Shaw as an ILP guardian in Holbeck, a growing number of Labour and Socialist candidates were elected to the guardianships of heavily industrial unions such as Holbeck and Hunslet. The growing influence of Labour on these unions did not see any change in their policy of concentrating on improving existing facilities rather than becoming unemployment relief providers in times of trade depression.



Private philanthropy in Leeds was represented by the Leeds branch of the Charity Organization Society. Like its counterparts in other towns, it acted as an umbrella organisation and investigating agencies for the charities of the City. It was widely disliked by claimants because of its underlying ethos that poverty was the result of individual failings. Help was given to those regarded as deemed worthy, after the most rigorous investigation of the intended applicant's circumstances with the object of forcing them into self reliance. Although acknowledging that there was exceptional distress in Leeds, with applications rising from 1,817 in 1901 to 2,253 in 1904, it firmly repudiated any role as a reliever of the unemployed in times of slump. In its annual report for 1904 it opined:

We do not and cannot attempt to deal with the distress caused by the slackness of trade and want of work. This we must leave to the Guardians of the Poor and other agents. (15)

In default of significant relief from the above bodies, voluntary relief might be available from the intermittently raised funds realised by the Lord Mayor's Appeals. The proceeds of these appeals would often be turned over to the Corporation to pay for minor public works with labour provided by the relief fund committee. The amounts raised by these appeals were vary variable, and often in competition with other appeals for relief of a semi-official character. After the setting up of the officially sanctioned Distress Committee in 1905, donations to the Lord Mayor's fund tended to decline steeply, evidencing the existence of 'compassion

fatigue' in a period of sustained and intractable unemployment.

This left the municipality as the only real source of unemployment relief for male workers, whether funded from local rates or grants from the Central Government. Demands for relief varied from such short-term expedients as temporary employment on public works to the taking on permanently of extra labour by the growing public services managed by the Corporation. Fear of the unemployed being used by an anti-trade union majority on the City Council as a strike breaker's force, was reflected in their suspicion of municipally-instituted labour exchanges. The campaigns for unemployment relief demanded that all employment provided would be at trade union rates and conditions. The fact that relief work often fell far short of this became a continuous preoccupation of the Leeds Labour Movement until the return of full employment in 1911.

The above reservations did not prevent the Trades Council and the Leeds LRC from initially welcoming the setting up of the unemployed bureau in 1902 and the parliamentary approved Distress Committee in 1905. In November 1903 the Trades Council joined with the Committee representing the Leeds Unemployed to approach the Lord Mayor to use his influence in re-establishing on a permanent basis the unemployment bureau which had been allowed to lapse in the summer. (16) The two Liberal-Labour inclined City Councillors, Buckle and Connellan pressed

the Corporation to start up relief works for several hundred men for the duration of the depression. In response, it approved the setting up of the Unemployment Bureau on a permanent basis. Commenting on the City Council's decision to authorise its labour employing committees to employ as many men as possible on work in hand, The Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury remarked approvingly:

It is better that men should be engaged on honourable work than that the streets should be marred by protests of the unemployed. (17)

The Bureau was opened on 4 December 1903 as a registration office for the unemployed, with the backing of the Corporation's Parliamentary Committee which recommended the labour employing committees to take on extra hands.

A reluctance to condone relief work alone was shown by further deputations from the Trades Council to the City Council on 16 January 1904, led by Walt Wood, Arthur Shaw and John Buckle, calling for the setting on to useful public works those who were out of work. They maintained that they did not want the Corporation to go on with unprofitable work, instead they wanted to be repaid by road widening and sanitary improvements. (18)

Further evidence of the official labour organisations' desire for respectability was shown by their indignant refusal of relief aid offered



by the Leeds Poor Law Guardians in 1903. Addressing the Trades Council, the veteran ILP trade unionist, Arthur Shaw, denied the competence of the Guardians as judges of the question of unemployment, being only rightfully concerned with the lowest class of tramps and vagrants. Buckle followed by reiterating that the idea of the Trades Council was to provide labour that would not have a tendency to degrade, and to make application on behalf of a body of men who were respectable citizens and who were prepared to serve the City to the best of their ability in giving an equivalent in work for what they received. To applause from other delegates, Buckle compared the thirteen applications to the Guardians for test work to the nearly two thousand names on the register maintained by the Bureau. (19)

Faith in the efficacy of the Labour Bureau was not shaken by a tendency for it to be shut down by the Corporation in the Spring, after the worst rigours of seasonal employment were considered to have passed. In June 1904, when even The Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury was to remark:

Careful inquiry leaves no doubt that the working man is having a much worse time than is usual in this season of this year ... and poverty and hardships are more prevalent than is usual in the summer time ...

the official labour movement found itself compelled to demand the restoration of the bureau and the setting on of large numbers on public works. (20) Sustained outdoor protest by unofficial organisations of the

unemployed under SDF and other ultra-radical leadership throughout June, July and August, of a militancy not seen since 1895, gave added impetus to the Trades Council and the Leeds LRC and ILP to advocate ambitious schemes of relief work on a City Council made more amenable by fear of the prolonged and noisy outdoor protests of the unemployed.

The Trades Council and its affiliated unions, feared both the loss of their reputation for respectability through being associated with the Unemployed agitation and the competition from the Poor Law authorities, as a source of relief. Any large-scale rush for relief from this source would have entailed the disenfranchisement of a significant number of working class voters. In October 1905 the Leeds Guardians had requested the Local Government Board to approve their exercising greater flexibility in giving outdoor relief. (21) The Labour movement in Leeds responded by campaigning vigorously from 1904-1905 for the Corporation to proceed with the building of new waterworks at Colsterdale in North Yorkshire (22), the work to be carried out directly by the Corporation, without the resort to outside contractors. Connellan, leading a deputation to the Lord Mayor on 2 December 1904, argued that if the works were carried out by the Corporation the City would be relieved for some years of anxiety as to the "unemployed difficulty". (23) Another member of the deputation, J. D. McCrae, ILP and LRC Secretary, advocated direct employment by the Corporation. He considered it desirable as there was great scope for unskilled labour in

this work and under the Corporation men would be able to do a good day's work after a little while, who perhaps under a contractor would be dismissed before they had got fit for heavy work.

Any expectations from the Colsterdale Project were set back by the Corporation's decision in January 1905 to let construction work out to private contractors. (24) Intermittent pressure on the City Council in 1905 failed to modify its decision to employ a largely non-Leeds workforce recruited through private contractors. The ending of hopes that the scheme would provide a local panacea for unemployment led the Trades Council and the Labour Group on the City Council to seek more modest projects of improvement, which would disguise relief work under the mantle of public utility.

In 1905 the enactment of the Unemployed Workman's Act, which authorised the setting up of distress committees by local authorities, gave the local Labour Movement an opportunity to participate in a body which might have power to deal with unemployment on a more serious and systematic basis than the City Council. (25) The Act creating these powers was subject to strong criticism by the SDF and many ILP and trade union members and denounced as a sham which avoided the responsibility of Central Government to deal with unemployment as a national question. Most criticised was its delegation of authority to local committees and its failure to raise relief funds through rate aid. Also



objected to was the regulation that a man could not receive work for more than two years in succession if assisted by the Committees, and the fact that each applicant was now required to fill in a very detailed personal record form, reminiscent of the inquisitorial investigations of the Charitable Organization Society.

Whatever reservations they had, the Leeds LRC and Trades Council accepted places on the newly-established Leeds Distress Committee alongside representatives of the City Council and the Boards of Guardians. The new Committee's expenses were to be defrayed out of a fund supplied by voluntary subscription plus a contribution from the rates not exceeding £4,000. (26) The Labour representatives were then to find a substitute for the Colsterdale Project which was abandoned by the City Council at the end of 1905.

The Distress Committee was formally established by the City Council on 19 October 1905, composed of 18 selected from the City Council, 14 members chosen from the four Boards of Guardians and 8 nominees regarded as experienced in relief work. A deputation from the trade unions had asked for five of the eight seats to be filled by their representatives and four places were allotted to them, resulting in the appointment of well known social reformers such as Isabella Ford and the Cooperator Mrs. Moorhouse. The local trade unions were well represented among the City Council's nominees, being led by Labour

group leader John Buckle and Owen Connellan. However, the Labour presence on the Committee was a minority one, and the Committee Chairman Herbert Brown, one of the leaders of municipal Liberalism, was a wealthy pawnbroker and not known for possessing any advanced views on state intervention against poverty.

Trade-union support for the Committee was strengthened by the choice of John Buckle as Vice Chairman, who soon demonstrated that he was happy to play the role of loyal deputy and defender of Herbert Brown. At the inaugural meeting of the Distress Committee on 26 October 1905, the Labour Bureau was transferred over to it, and Buckle attempted to assure a sceptical public that the spending committees of the Council would do their best to find work for those relieved. (27)

The Distress Committee was to be subjected to continuing oversight by a Right to Work Committee which had emerged from a LRC sponsored campaign of rallies and demonstrations in favour of the Unemployed Workmen's Act. The Right to Work Campaign was nationally organised and designed to act as a means of pressuring the Conservative Government to modify the regulations under the Act in favour of the unemployed and to ensure that the maximum number of Labour representatives were included on the Distress Committees. (28) Following campaigns in July and August 1905 for the passing of the Act, organised in Leeds by the LRC, ILP and the Trades Council, the strategy

of the Right to Work Committee was set out at a Conference in the People's Hall on 7 October 1905. About 240 delegates were present from the trade unions, Co-operative Societies, socialist societies and other Labour organisations and the platform included Keir Hardie as well as leading local trade unionists like Walt Wood, Arthur Shaw and Ben Turner. (29) Keir Hardie declared that unless a great deal of pressure was brought to bear the Act was likely to become a dead letter. Believing that the worst of unemployment was over, he saw the Act as a means of compiling statistics of those seeking work, and advocated that the Labour Party press for the exclusion of COS representatives from the Distress Committees. Other delegates expressed less confidence in the potential of the Distress Committees. The LRC and ILP Secretary, J. D. Macrae declared the Act ludicrously inadequate as a means of solving unemployment difficulties, but advocated that it be used as a means of pressuring the City Council to provide more necessary work for the unemployed over the winter months. In the final resolution setting up the Leeds Right to Work Committee, its purpose was defined as assisting the unemployed agitation, guiding and directing public opinion and overseeing the implementation of the Act. Dissatisfaction with the new Act was demonstrated by the passing of a further resolution calling for full powers to be conferred on the new authorities to provide work for all the unemployed, mainly by training and fitting people to resettle deserted land, the bulk of which was to be finalised by Central Government.



Initially, the Labour Party and trade unions had some cause to be satisfied with the workings of the Distress Committee. Although not reducing the numbers claiming relief to any great extent, it seemed to meet the demands of the trade unions by finding more employment through the corporation direct labour department which was set up within weeks of the establishment of the Distress Committee. The Chairman, Herbert Brown and his Deputy, Buckle, held out hopes of acquiring by purchase land upon which to farm colonies, and in the meantime concentrated on putting in hand small-scale works of improvement in the outer suburbs of Leeds, such as road widening and levelling. (30)

By the end of 1906 the Leeds Right to Work Committee was pressing the Trades Council to join it in persuading the Distress Committee to obtain extra powers from the Local Government Board to enable it to pay full trade union rates to those it employed. It urged the need for Central Government funds through Exchequer grants to supplement the proceeds of local penny rates. They had the support of the Trades Council President William Morby, who was also on the executive of the Right to Work Committee, and who urged this on the grounds that it would prevent workers being used as strike breakers in future trade disputes. Morby stressed that this addition to wages should only be given when trade union or other pay was not sufficient for a man to maintain his family on. (31)

The reaction of the Distress Committee to a Trades Council delegation on 1 February 1906 hardly inspired much confidence in its usefulness. Herbert Brown informed them that the Lord Mayor's Fund had failed to collect more than £30. Buckle freely admitted that the Act had proved a failure because it gave the Committee no money to spend on wages except those coming from voluntary subscriptions. The Distress Committee agreed to the Trades Council proposal that all workers insuring against unemployment through trade unions or similar organisations such as Friendly Societies, should have their out of work benefit supplemented by 75 per cent in wages for work done, once additional funds were available. (32) By February 1906, of 2,705 listed on the register of the Committee only 307 had been found work.

Over the following year the Distress Committee made little progress in extracting Central Government funding that would enable it to provide wages for men to be employed on small-scale public works that would satisfy the trade unions. By early 1907 what little confidence the trade unions and Labour Party had in the Committee had almost entirely vanished.

They were to clash over the treatment of men sent on afforestation projects in the Washburn Valley, north of Otley, who were drawn from the unemployment register. Unlike in local work schemes, those employed had to stay in specially constructed huts during the week and to

make their own way home at the weekends on foot, as the cost of the public transport that was available was prohibitive. Buckle and Connellan had criticised the quality of men sent to Washburn Valley, calling for the weeding out of the unsuitable long-term unemployed from the register. (33)

At a subsequent meeting of the Distress Committee in March 1907, Morby criticised the treatment of those engaged on those works, drawing attention to their lack of adequate food and shelter. He also referred to the excessive deductions from their pay for board and lodgings and the hiring of work boots. Rebutting allegations of laziness levelled at some of those employed at Washburn Valley, Morby referred to men having to walk seven miles to Otley railway station and to pay the fares home out of their own earnings, and spoke of cases where some had to walk from Washburn to Leeds, in all seventeen miles. Buckle's response was to dismiss these allegations as unfounded, citing the lack of complaints received from those engaged under the scheme. (34)

Criticism of the conditions of those employed on the Washburn Valley scheme was made by branches of the Leeds LRC, with the South Leeds Socialist Union being particularly outspoken. Although Buckle's ward Party in New Wortley gave him a vote of confidence, most of the Labour Party were confirmed in their total disenchantment with the Distress Committee. Similar sentiments were raised in the trade unions, at the



Meeting of the Trades Council held on 24 August 1907; even Connellan said he could not account for the desire of some to sit upon the Distress Committee, which had done less for the unemployed since its establishment than had been done before. (35)

The Distress Committee was to continue in existence up to 1914, but ceased to be a source of controversy with the Labour Party and trade unions in Leeds. By 1908 they were increasingly focused on national legislation to bring in a Right to Work Bill, after the expiry of the 1905 Unemployed Workmen's Act. Under this legislation a Central Committee for the unemployed would have been set up, overseeing a national plan of public works and appointing local commissioners to develop and coordinate local activities. (36) Under the Bill, local authorities would be compelled to find work for all registered unemployed through local unemployment committees with powers of rating for this purpose. The campaign for this Bill along with campaigns for National Labour Exchanges and National Unemployment Insurance, diverted attention away from the local Distress Committees, which were regarded as increasingly irrelevant as an object of agitation.

From 1902 until 1911, with the lifting of the trade depression, the official Labour Movement in Leeds found itself persistently challenged in campaigning on the unemployment issue by the mainly SDF led militant demonstrators of the workless. In August to September 1904, July to

August 1906 and October 1908, noisy and riotous campaigns climaxed under the militant leadership of autonomous organisations not connected with the official Labour Movements.

From the end of 1902, much of the work in organising demonstrations and marches on a national scale was carried on by the SDF. In Leeds this resulted in the continuing picketing of the Town Hall by groups of the unemployed, which in the winter months grew significantly in number. The protests harked back to the ILP demonstrations of the early 1890s in their lack of deference to the local civic dignitaries, and their leadership by small groups of organisers who did not hold positions in the trade unions or the Labour Party. In the summer of 1904, the demonstrators took on a more formidable character, when a deputation of between 200-300 men assembled outside the Town Hall to demand the re-opening of the Labour Bureau of the City Council. (37)

Their spokesman, Walter Woolham, led a noisy deputation into the City Council Chamber and called for the Corporation to take immediate steps to find relief work for the unskilled and long term unemployed. The City Council's refusal to take anything but the routine action of recommending the labour engaging committees to take on more men, led to increasingly noisy and riotous demonstrations. (38)

On 12 August 1904, The Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury under the heading

'Unemployed in Revolt' reported the attempted storming of the City Council Chambers the previous day by unemployed demonstrators led by Woolham and Bertie Rowe, a member of a Christian anarchist commune in the suburb of Beeston. (39) Arrested by the police and brought before the magistrates, both Woolham and Rowe showed a lack of deference to the court and a willingness to undergo the experience of a week in custody for the publicity benefit it gave to their cause.

Further examples of the lack of deference to the idea of respectable protest were demonstrated on 10 October 1904, when Wareham was arrested again for calling on demonstrators to draw up in a line and make themselves a "damned nuisance" for the police, remarking:

They would have to draw a lot of bobbies from  
Headingley (an affluent suburb of Leeds) ... suppose  
there was a lot of burglaries, wouldn't that be nice.  
(40)

Arrested and eventually sentenced at the end of October, Woolham showed no sign of deference to the bench of magistrates, which veered on the side of caution by fining him £1 plus costs. (41)

If the official Labour Movement distanced itself from the tactics of Woolham, they were not averse to imitating them in a less militant way in the summer of 1905, by organising a series of demonstrations in favour of the Unemployed Workmen's bid. The large numbers who attended the



meetings and marches in this campaign, helped the LRC and ILP in taking the leadership of the unemployed from the SDF. (42)

Respectable protest was to be challenged in the wake of dissolutionment with the outcome of the passing of the Unemployed Workman's Act. A wave of land seizures and setting up of 'self supporting' labour colonies began in July 1906. The SDF adopted this protest as a means of drawing attention to the continuing plight of the unemployed. A number of seizures of land followed in Salford and East Plaistow in East London, resulting in eviction by the police. Inspired by the example of a camp organised by Albert Glyde of the ILP on land belonging to the Midland Railway Company near Bradford, a 'Libertarian Camp' was set up in Leeds on private land on Woodhouse Cliff, which lasted for three days before being evicted by hired thugs. Once again William Woolham figured prominently in the attempted land grab. (43)

'Respectable' trade unionism was to take up the cause of land colonisation for the unemployed in Leeds. On 28 August 1906 The Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury reported a scheme was under foot to give work to the Leeds unemployed by securing at a reasonable rent vacant pieces of land belonging to the Corporation, to be cultivated by those out of work. A committee had been formed including Arthur Shaw, William Morby and J. H. Barraclough, all leading trade unionists, and it was asking the Distress Committee for a grant towards this object. (44) Lack of response

from Central or Local government led to a rapid decline in the backing to the land strategy of combatting unemployment, and a shift back to non-militant campaigning in favour of a 'Right to Work' Bill.

However, in 1908, the largest and most riotous challenge to established protest in the City was to occur over the continuation of unemployment in the most severe form. On 8 September 1908 The Leeds Mercury reported that unemployed meetings were to be held, stirred up by news of demonstrations in other parts of the country. The previous night, a crowd of men estimated at about 700 gathered in Victoria Square outside the Town Hall, demanding that the City Council should at once open the unemployed register, which had been allowed to lapse, and take some practical steps to deal with the growing distress in the City. (45)

At the close of the meeting, an organising committee of fifty was elected and it was decided that meetings would be held daily to publicise the plight of the unemployed by every means available. If the City Council refused to receive a delegation from them, the militant tactics of the Glasgow demonstrators would be followed, such as raiding places of worship and interrupting services. On the following day, Badlay and Morby addressed another outdoor meeting, attempting to steer the campaign into less militant channels. A deputation was elected from the meeting to escort them to the City Council meeting. The City Council was sufficiently alarmed by this new upsurge of protest, not to reject its



demands out of hand and to send a deputation to the Local Government Board President, John Burns, made up of Herbert Brown, John Buckle and the Conservative Council Leader, Charles Wilson, to request a larger grant to assist the Corporation in providing work for the unemployed of the City. (46)

Record numbers of unemployed registered with the Corporation, but the Council Committees seemed unable to provide anything but token amounts of employment. Another gathering under the auspices of the newly-formed Permanent Committee on Unemployment, held outside the Town Hall on 17 September 1908, resulted in Alfred Kitson and Duncan McNeill, two of the unemployed committee leaders, forcing their way into the building and gaining an audience with the deputy Lord Mayor, Ambrose Butler. On their statement that at least 300 members of the crowd outside had not tasted food all day, the deputy Lord Mayor agreed to authorise a collection for them in the Council Chamber. (47)

Little progress in the relief of the unemployed led, on 24 September 1908 to the largest demonstration yet seen, with an estimated crowd of ten thousand according to The Leeds Mercury. (48) Another deputation led by Kitson and other permanent Committee Members received from the City Council no more than promises of eventual relief and no satisfaction in their demand that the rates of remuneration paid to men on relief works should be such as they could be in a position to maintain their families. (49)



Middle-class opinion was beginning to harden against the demonstrators. At a meeting of the Charitable Organisation Society on 1 October 1908 at the YMCA, C.F. Kelly, former High Chief Ranger of the Ancient Order of Foresters, denounced the leaders of the unemployed demonstrators, declaring that:

There is a tendency today to weaken the stamina of the working men of the country. Ask the men in Victoria Square if they are members of a Friendly Society, I will be bound to say that not one of them are. (50)

The Leeds Mercury of 3 October 1908 in an editorial endorsing the National Liberal programme of public works, old age pensions and land reclamation, denounced the unemployed agitators, saying that:

... a determined effort is being made by some of the 'leaders' of the unemployed to create the impression that Leeds is in the throes of an industrial crisis and that unless immediate steps are taken, acts of violence may be expected. (51)

That the unemployment campaign was taking on a more violent character seemed evident by the smashing of windows of one of the pawnbroking shops of Herbert Brown which took place on 7 October. On the following day, after the City Council rejected a Labour motion that the Lord Mayor be granted £10,000 immediately to redress the prevailing distress, following several hours of heated debate, attacks on the shops of

Brown were resumed. These resulted in the breaking of his windows and damage to a considerable quantity of stock displayed there. The Labour group leader, John Badlay had introduced the unemployed delegation to the Council and had warned there might be trouble if the grant of £10,000 was not passed, saying:

I do feel that unless something here today of a drastic character is done, the restraint that has been exercised on the unemployed by their leaders cannot be maintained. (52)

Brown continued to be the particular target for the ire of the unemployed; on 9 October a public meeting in support of his nomination for the City Council elections was nearly broken up by numerous interruptions led by Alfred Kitson. Brown was forced to leave the school building in which the meeting was held by a ladder placed at the back window, under police protection. Later that night a baton charge by police broke up a demonstration outside his Burley Road shop. (53)

The unprecedented violence of the campaign was to reach its crescendo on 11 October 1908 when the Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, visited Leeds to address a large Liberal Party gathering at the Coliseum on Cookridge Street, a frequently used venue for public meetings. Two unconnected demonstrations of the unemployed and the suffragette Womens' Social and Political Union converged on the Coliseum after Asquith's arrival and attempted to rush its doors. Stones and missiles



were thrown at the police, and windows of adjoining shops were broken. One policeman hit by a stone later died of his injuries. Arrests of Kitson and members of the WSPU followed before the demonstrators were driven back. (54)

The unrest was to subside as quickly as it emerged. Sections of the trade unions led by J. E. Smith, the Gasworkers' organiser, repudiated all connection with the unemployed campaign and the attacks on Herbert Brown. (55) This did not prevent an electoral setback for Labour at the November elections, which was attributed partly to the adverse impressions caused by the riots. The unemployed leaders held in custody, unlike the WSPU activists arrested, did not court imprisonment and vanished into obscurity after being bound over by the magistrates to keep the peace, in November. (56)

A few more flickerings of militant activity on behalf of the unemployed continued until the end of 1908. Brown was still subjected to heckling at his electoral meetings up to the outcome of the Municipal elections. A flippant letter to the Lord Mayor from a small group of Jewish anarchists, demanding a face to face interview, which was refused, failed to obtain the backing of the unemployed committee which was highly critical of its tone. (57) A proposal by the unemployed committee to join in the Assize Judge's procession to Leeds Parish Church on Assize Sunday failed to produce any action. A final gasp of protest occurred with the setting off



of a hunger march from Leeds on 8 December 1908, which passed Sheffield but ended with the arrest of a number of its members in a Stroud public house. (58)

The rapid reaction of the authorities to the question of relief may well have helped to neutralise the challenge of the Unemployed Committee in the immediate aftermath of the Cookridge Street riot. The recently opened Lord Mayor's Appeal brought in £1,914 by mid October, with large donations from Becketts Bank, Lord Airedale, Edward Lindley Wood (the future Lord Halifax) of Temple Newsam, and members of the Kitson and Barran families. (59) The setting up of a network of Ward Committees enabled members of the Unemployed Campaign to take part in the distribution of the relief rather than being passive recipients. The flow of money, clothing and other gifts to the committees helped to alleviate some of the worst privation. Not even the Leeds Poor Law Guardians were immune to the pressure for a more liberal attitude to the claims of the unemployed. On 10 November 1908, on receiving a deputation of the unemployed demanding the institution of a scheme for the provision of work, they resolved to increase pay on test work to 9d. per day plus 6d. extra for wives of claimants and 2d. for each child. (60) The Yorkshire Factory Times of 28 November reported the setting up of self help organisations, chiefly composed of unemployed single men, to carry out odd jobs around the City. (61)

Although the trade depression lasted until 1911, Right to Work demonstrations in Leeds had disappeared by 1909. This reflected national developments, where a long period of ILP and SDF cooperation in the national Right To Work Councils from 1908 to 1909, was followed by the ILP and the Labour Party distancing themselves from the SDF's campaigns, alarmed by the militancy they engendered. By the spring of 1909 the Lloyd George budget had stolen the thunder of the Labour Opposition in Parliament by setting out a programme of State backed old age pensions and unemployment insurance. The Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission in 1909, among its proposals recommended the setting up of a network of State provided labour exchanges to supersede the work of the Distress Committees, and these proposals were taken by the Labour Party, which also advocated the creation of a Labour Ministry as a means of tackling unemployment. (62)

The issue of unemployment was to be largely shifted to the terrain of parliamentary politics and by 1911 with the implementation of the bulk of the Liberal Government's programme of reform, the economic climate had changed drastically. (63) If in the short term, the unemployment agitation had a detrimental effect on the electoral fortunes of the Labour Party in Leeds, such as the losses in the November 1908 Municipal Election, in the long run it may have demonstrated to hesitant voters that only the Labour Party could use the instruments of local government for the purpose of social reform.



The Distress Committee in Leeds had to a large extent, been reliant on the City Council for the provision of employment for the unemployed, having few powers of its own. The City Council seemed to show little real commitment to taking on more employees from the unemployed, evidenced by its hiring of Civil Engineering Contractors from outside Leeds for the building of municipal reservoirs in June 1908, and its suppression of its Direct Labour department in December 1908, in the face of bitter protest from the Council's Labour group and the trade unions. (64) The Liberal and Conservative Parties that formed the majority on the City Council differed little in their response to the plight of the unemployed, this reducing even more the slight reputation of the Liberal Party as a progressive alternative to the Conservatives. The influence of the old Liberal-Labour politicians, like John Buckle, was reduced by their cooperation with the Liberals on the Distress Committee. When Buckle defied the Labour Group's directive to boycott the Royal Visit to Leeds in 1908 in protest at the plight of the unemployed, his temporary expulsion from the Leeds LRC provoked virtually no sympathy from the Labour Movement. Even his long-time collaborator Owen Connellan, failed to follow him out of the Party in sympathy. (65) The failure of the old Craft learning trade unionists in the party to find a common basis of co-operation with the Liberals in the implementation of unemployment relief, indicated the increasingly unbridgeable gap between the local Labour movement and the Liberals and Conservatives on the City Council.



### **CHAPTER THREE: Footnotes**

- (1) Tom Woodhouse, Nourishing the Liberty Tree: Liberals and Labour in Leeds 1880-1914, (Keele, 1996) pp.89-94.
- (2) Brian Barber, Municipal Government in Leeds 1834-1914, in Derek Fraser (ed.), Municipal Reform and the Industrial City, Leicester 1982.
- (3) R. Dalton, 'False Dawn, Leeds Trades Council and the Socialists Challenge: The Origins of Independent Labour Politics in Leeds 1890-1902'. M.A. Huddersfield, 1992, pp.67-69, 72-75.
- (4) Leeds Express, 17 May 1893.
- (5) Leeds Trades Council Minutes (LTC), 6 December 1893.
- (6) Leeds Times, 3 February 1894, 17 February 1894 and 24 February 1894. Those who had their houses picketed included veteran radical Aldermen like Archie Scarr and Sir Edwin Gaunt, who had voted down unemployed relief resolutions put forward on behalf of the Trades Council at the previous meeting of the City Council. Both had started their political careers as chartists.
- (7) Leeds Mercury, 3 January 1894.
- (8) Ibid., 21 February 1894.
- (9) LTC, 6 February 1895.
- (10) Leeds Mercury, 6 February 1895.
- (11) B. Barber, p.95.
- (12) Kenneth D. Brown, Labour and Unemployment 1900-1914 (L1971) pp.22-23.
- (13) Ibid., p.34.
- (14) Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury, 26 November 1903.
- (15) Leeds Charity Organisation Society, Annual Report of 1904.
- (16) LTC, 26 November 1903.
- (17) Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury, 3 December 1904.
- (18) Ibid., 17 January 1904.

- (19) Yorkshire Factory Times, 6 February 1903.
- (20) Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury, 3 December 1904.
- (21) Ibid., 20 October 1904.
- (22) Ibid., 3 December 1904.
- (23) Yorkshire Factory Times, 3 February 1905.
- (24) Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury, 3 December 1904.
- (25) Ibid., 24 January 1905.
- (26) Brown, Labour and Unemployment, pp.65-6.
- (27) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 20 October 1905.
- (28) Ibid., 27 October 1905.
- (29) Brown, pp.72-74.
- (30) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 9 October 1905.
- (31) Ibid., 27 October 1905.
- (32) Yorkshire Factory Times, 14 September 1906.
- (33) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 1 February 1906.
- (34) Yorkshire Factory Times, 1 March 1907.
- (35) Ibid., 15 March 1907.
- (36) TCM, 24 August 1907.
- (37) Brown, pp.86-87.
- (38) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 7 July 1904.
- (39) Ibid., 12 July 1904.
- (40) Ibid., 13 August 1904.
- (41) Ibid., 14 October 1904.
- (42) Yorkshire Factory Times, 7 July 1905.

- (43) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 28 August 1906, also Brown, Labour and Unemployment, pp.77-8.
- (44) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 29 August 1906.
- (45) Leeds Mercury, 8 September 1908.
- (46) Ibid., 9 September 1908.
- (47) Ibid., 18 September 1908.
- (48) Yorkshire Post, 25 September 1908, Leeds Mercury, 25 September 1908.
- (49) Leeds Mercury, 2 October 1908.
- (50) Ibid., 3 October 1908.
- (51) Ibid., 8 October 1908.
- (52) Ibid., 10 October 1908.
- (53) Ibid., 12 October 1908.
- (54) Ibid., 14 October 1908.
- (55) Ibid., 20 November 1908.
- (56) Ibid., 21 October 1908.
- (57) Ibid., 9 December 1908.
- (58) Ibid., 13 October 1908.
- (59) Yorkshire Factory Times, 7 November 1908.
- (60) Ibid., 28 November 1908.
- (61) Brown, op cit., pp.119, 120, 2173.
- (62) The number of those registered with the Distress Committee dropped from 6,819 in July 1909 to 1,758 in June 1912, Morrisons Leeds Blue Book, 1912.
- (63) Yorkshire Post, 3 December 1908, Leeds Mercury, 3 December 1908.
- (64) Leeds Mercury, 3 December 1908.



- (65) Ibid., 2 June 1908; however Connellan was not to receive a nomination for a safe seat on the City Council until the 1914 by-election for East Ward.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE LABOUR PARTY AND THE CITY COUNCIL 1902-14: MUNICIPAL SOCIALISM, THE TRADE UNIONS AND THE SEARCH FOR A REFORMED LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

#### **a) The Background**

The decade before the outbreak of the First World War saw the parliamentary ascendancy of the Liberal Party in Leeds reach its apogee, resisting the potential parliamentary challenge from the Labour Party to be the principal party of social reform. Far from overturning the parliamentary dominance of the Liberal Party the Labour Party in Leeds failed to maintain the momentum it had gained on acquiring a seat in East Leeds in 1906, remaining dependent upon the continuance of the officially secret Liberal-Labour pact for any parliamentary representation it possessed in Leeds. Similarly, the National Liberal Party was able to marginalise the Socialist and Trade Union Programme of the Labour candidates in Leeds in all the General Elections from 1906 to 1910. The existence of a reforming Liberal government, with momentous solid legislation to its credit, pitted against a diehard reactionary majority of Conservatives in the House of Lords, seemed to undercut the need for the election of Labour MPs in Leeds except among a small core of trade union and Socialist activists. (1) In contrast, however, the municipal

politics of Leeds up to 1914 saw the Labour Party grow from insignificance to the position of second largest party on the City Council. Here the Labour Party's candidates captured the representation of the City's most industrialized wards, mainly in three-way contests, and without resort to open or secret election pacts with the competing parties.

(2) Unlike the parliamentary contests, the Labour Party's political gains were mainly at the expense of the Liberal Party, which showed itself increasingly incapable of retaining its working-class vote or its reputation as the main progressive party.

Indeed, the field of municipal politics was to be the true battleground between the rising Labour Party in Leeds and the representatives of the old parties and the business class, whose interests they had upheld. Unlike parliamentary elections, where the possibilities of intervening and propagandizing were limited by their infrequency and expense, Council elections provided the Labour Party with an annual platform to criticise the running of the City Council by their opponents and to advocate an alternative policy which would benefit those who were not solidly or politically privileged. From 1904, the existence of a vocal and growing Labour Group on the City Council, provided the Party with an even more frequent platform for the Party. (3)

The emergence of Labour as a participant in Leeds's municipal politics coincided with a period of rapid expansion of the services and facilities



provided by the City Council. Enabling legislation such as the Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890, put into the hands of local authorities the means to promote ambitious social reform at the local level. (4) While the Liberal and Conservatives on the City Council only used these powers grudgingly and with an eye to minimising expenditure, the Labour Party in Leeds saw them as an ideal foundation for the extension of municipal ownership and the achievement of socialism on a gradualist basis. Far from promoting a 'progressive consensus' in Leeds politics, embracing the Labour and Liberal Parties, the Labour Party's advocacy of municipal reform was to result in its increasing political isolation in the face of a hostile majority as the number of its elected representatives increased. (5)

The decade prior to the entry of the Labour Party into the City Council was marked by significant political change in the municipal politics of Leeds. The victory of the Gasworkers over the Liberal-dominated Corporation in 1890, which paved the way for the unionisation of Municipal Workers, also discredited the radical ruling group and their policy of municipal parsimony, which left Leeds far behind many other cities in the quality and efficiency of its public services. (6) The failure of the Corporation to gain the support of most of the business community and middle class for their lock-out of the Gasworkers was one of the major features of the dispute. (7) In 1895 the Liberals lost control of the Corporation after sixty years of unbroken rule. The Conservatives who

controlled the City from 1895 to 1904 adopted a policy of financing expensive municipal improvements and the virtual creation of a first-class tramway service by appropriating the profits of the Corporation's trading service to keep the rates level in the face of rising expenditure. Coinciding with a period of economic prosperity in the City, the Conservative regime was able to sustain a high rate of expenditure by using assigned revenues from the Central Government and a steep rise in the yield of local rates. This was brought to an end by the onset of sustained trade depression from 1902 onwards and the ruling group were forced to rely on rate rises and borrowing on the financial market at onerous rates of interest to fund their expenditure. A decade of Conservative rule had seen extensive expenditure on slum clearances and improvements in the city centre, but the lack of any commitment to solid expenditure such as affordable working-class housing, had aggravated the chronically poor housing conditions of the poor. (8)

The Liberals in opposition had, on the contrary, committed themselves to the principle that the trading operations of the Corporation should not be used to subsidise the city's ratepayers. Beyond this the Liberals confined their opposition to the Conservative's policy, to criticising individual details relating to revenue raising and expenditure accounts and a general adherence to the Liberal shibboleth of economy. Significantly, lacking any programme for social reform other than support for the clearance of insanitary areas, the Liberal Party in Leeds was ceding to the Labour



Party the role of being the city's progressive party. This was accentuated when the Liberal Party came back into power in 1904, when its leaders entered into a 'Concordat' with the Conservatives, firstly regarding the distribution of aldermanic seats between the parties and the choice of Lord Mayor and finally in 1907 agreeing with them to jointly draw up the estimates. The Liberal's justification that their 'hands' were tied by the mismanagement of their predecessors and the current trade difficulties was a virtual admission that their role as a reforming party at the municipal level was at an end. To quote The Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, the Concordat was:

Designed to raise the finances of the City above the considerations of party advantage and to place them on a sound business footing. (9)

The Labour group protested that the Concordat was bound to result in a stultification of the opinion of the electors. (10)

While the Liberal Party was conceding any claims to being an alternative to the Conservatives in a widening field of municipal finance, the Labour Party was advancing under the banner of its manifesto which it had issued in 1904. The contents of the manifesto were with little modification, to be the municipal programme of the Labour Party up to 1914. Prominent in the manifesto was an ambitious programme of municipalisation of services such as the supply of coal and milk, banking



and the establishment of the Public Works Department which would assist the adoption of Part III of the Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890, to enable the Corporation to carry out a programme of building of affordable working class houses. (11)

It was a major principle of the manifesto that the City Council should not only treat its own workers fairly but should set a good example to other employers in respect of rates of pay and hours worked. It called on the City Council to grant its employees an eight-hour day and six-day week, with trade union rates of wages, with a minimum of 6d. per hour. Thus the Council would become a model employer, setting higher standards of employment which private business would be compelled to follow. (12)

The manifesto repeated the trade union movement's long-established support for the outlawing of contracts given by the City Council to firms that failed to pay 'fair' rates and adhere to union conditions. Underlining this, the manifesto called for the rigorous suppressing of sub-contracting and the maximum use of direct labour by the City Council. In contrast, the manifesto called for the Council to jealously control the increase of large salaries and to promote employment by merit in place of the exercise of political cronyism. Also property owners who were the beneficiaries of City Council Compulsory Purchase Orders would be taxed on the enhanced values of their land. A fairer rating system would lift the burden from the working class householder but would tap the

hitherto untaxed commercial wealth in the city. (13)

Underlying the manifesto was a belief that a practical socialist programme could be carried out at the municipal level by the extension of municipal ownership which would evolve into the socialist organisation of the future. Considering municipal politics as the equal in importance to national politics, the strategists of the local Labour Party such as John Badley and D. B. Foster set the Labour Party in Leeds in the direction of capturing control of the City Council. Once this was achieved, the Labour majority would be able to restructure the finances of the city, so that through progressive taxation from heavier rating of the wealthy and businesses, less recourse would be had to borrowing from the money markets on onerous terms and the profits of municipal enterprises such as gas, tramways and electricity could be used to finance the Party's programme of social reform. (14)

The manifesto also attempted to reach out for support of the City's Clerks and small tradesmen, admitting that "hitherto, the small tradesman has fought shy of the Labour Party, believing that their policy was one of increased rates". It called on the small tradesman to save themselves from being

eaten up by the trusts or combines who are taking up large stores in the centre of the city, where the tramways pour in the people, by supporting the Labour Party, which would benefit them by raising the workers' wages and purchasing power, and reducing the rates burden by ending the existing policy of handing over municipal trading profits over to the relief of rates, and financing services by onerous borrowing.



By helping us "the small trader helps himself" the manifesto proclaimed. The Labour Party backed this up by attempts to join forces with such representatives of the middle-class ratepayers as the Non-Political Ratepayers Association over a period of years stretching from 1903 to 1912. (15)

Instead of a policy of revolutionary class struggle, the Labour Party looked to a policy of developing a civic identity around the concept of municipal citizenship, which would unite all classes around the Labour Party and its policy of enlightened municipal rule with stress on public ownership. This was emphasised by its first regular weekly newspaper established in 1911, which was named The Leeds Weekly Citizen. (16) The people of Leeds would be invited to be participants in the government of the city in contrast to the present circumstances where the tight control of the Council by the Liberal and Conservative parties made it a prey to the vested interests of wealthy contractors, developers and financiers.

The Labour Party's attempt to enunciate a municipal programme that combined a tight rein on borrowing and unnecessary expenditure with a policy of expanding social expenditure, was repeatedly put forward by its most vocal proponent, John Badlay, who led the Labour Group from 1908 to 1913. In City Council debates and numerous articles, particularly in The Leeds Weekly Citizen, he repeatedly propounded the message that



the City Council's trading profits were being sacrificed for the benefits of the wealthy ratepayer and the city was being increasingly mortgaged to banking interests by a policy of independent borrowing. This message was reinforced by the Labour Party's policy of contesting the position of elective auditor, the only major office in the city which was chosen by the ratepayers and not by the City Council. From 1910 the message of Labour being the guardian of the ratepayers' interest was put forward by the successful elected Labour auditors, Westwood and L. Verity. (17)

Although the Liberals remained the largest party on the City Council from 1905-1909, and again from 1911-12, they failed to provide any real alternative to the policies of the Conservatives, being content to divide up the Chairmanships of the Council's major committees. The various Concordats made with the Conservatives ruled out any options for the Liberal Party that could have given them the appearance of being a progressive and social reform party. Thus, while their formal control of the City Council coincided with the high water mark of the Liberal Government's social reform, it produced little impact on the municipal politics of Leeds. The Labour Party could project itself as the party of social reform and financial prudence in the face of the two old parties which were becoming increasingly indistinguishable.

## **b) Labour, the Trade Unions and the Corporation**

It was in its attitude and links to the trade unions in Leeds, particularly those organising municipal employees, that the Labour Party exhibited its polarity to the old established parties. The Gasworkers' Union had been the forcing house of Independent Labour politics in Leeds. The Union had been the power behind the ILP in Leeds in the 1890's, and after the founding of the Leeds LRC had been its major supporter. (18) Based on the organisation of the Gasworkers at the New Wortley and Meadow Lane Gasworks it had expanded to cover a wide range of unskilled municipal employees plus the labourers of many industries in West Yorkshire. Among its principal officers, Walt Wood sat on the City Council almost continuously from 1907 onwards, while its District Secretary, J. E. Smith, had been the Trades Council President at the time the Leeds LRC was established.

The self-confidence of the Union's officials was emphasised by J. E. Smith's declaration to The Yorkshire Factory Times in 1903 that:

I think the time ought to have arrived when strike as a weapon should be obsolete. Common sense and reasoning across the table should take the place of what is after all, a cruel and hard instrument to use, but we cannot expect to have it renewed unless capital on one side and trade unionism on the other agree to that across table policy. (19)

Smith's pronouncement seemed to be justified by the absence of strife between the Corporation Gas department and the Gasworkers between 1890 and 1912. Other categories of unskilled Corporation workers also appeared to benefit from membership of the Gasworkers' Union without having to resort to the strike weapon.

The success of the Gasworkers' Union gave an impetus to rival unions to organise other Corporation employees. It was in the fast growing tramways service that the rise of trade unionism was to bring the growing Labour Group on the Council into conflict with an increasingly authoritarian political majority of Liberals and Conservatives, along with a corresponding style of departmental management. In contrast with the Gasworkers, the relationship of the tramway employees with their management was to be marked by endemic discontent in the decade preceding the great Municipal Strike of 1913.

The development of the tramways was one of Leeds Corporation's success stories. Taking over a run down tramways service from the privately owned Leeds Tramways Company in 1894, the City Council was led to a policy of out and out municipalisation. In the ensuing years the tramways were to be transformed by the adoption of fully-electrified traction and the extension of many new suburban routes. The electrification and improved management in the 1890's resulted in huge increases in the net profits of the service and increased usage led to a



policy of cheap fares leading to the increased use of workmens' cars. The result was that increasing numbers of workers became reliant on the tramways for their journey to distant places of work. (20)

The municipalisation of the tramways was to have a marked effect on the wages and working conditions of its employees, which under private ownership had a poor reputation. Long acquiescence in low wages and long hours appeared to be challenged in 1889 in the aftermath of the formation of the Tramway Employees' Union in Liverpool and a strike for recognition by tramway mechanics in Bradford. On 19 October 1889 a meeting of Tramwaymen was called at the invitation of a number of middle-class philanthropists, chaired by the editor of the Leeds Mercury, Talbot Baines. The aim was to form a Committee to improve the working hours of the employees by publicity and negotiation with the Tramway Management. Baines advocated the forming of a Union to include both drivers and guards. (21)

Following this meeting the Tramway Company made small concessions to their employees but promptly dismissed the six men who were attempting to form an organising committee to set up a union. In spite of promised aid from the Trades Council, this put an end to trade-union activity on the tramways until they were taken over by the Corporation in 1894. Significant reduction in the hours worked followed and fresh impetus was given to the movement for union organisation. Under

Trades Council auspices, a local branch of the Manchester-based Tramways Union was set up in April 1895. (22) This Union failed to satisfy the varying demands of the tramway workers and in 1896 the GGLU set up a branch for the Tramways. The GGLU benefitted by the upsurge of trade unions in Leeds, in recruiting tramway employees but was unable to entirely displace the Tramways' Union, now known as the Amalgamated Association of Tramways & Hackney Carriage Employees & Horsemen In General. Working with the GGLU, the Union was able to win substantial concessions from the Corporation in increased wages and improved conditions between 1897 and 1901. Two major strikes of tramwaymen in 1897 and 1901 were of short duration and appeared to have been successful. (23)

The period between the acquisition of the tramways by the City Council and the appointment of a new management geared to the running of a fully-electrified tramway system, was a transitional one. Most of the old managers inherited from the days of the privately owned and horse drawn services, were initially kept in employment but the real power was passing from them to the City Council which was now represented by the newly-established Tramways Committee. In this period, up to 1902, the tramway employees were able to make substantial gains with only a minimum of friction. In 1897, the City Council took the side of the Tramway Workers against the then General Manager, William Wharam, who had been inherited from the days of the private company and was



widely considered as inept and out of sympathy with the new system of transport. As a result, the brief strike of tramwaymen was to lead to the effective recognition of their trade union, the Gasworkers and General Workers' Union. (24)

A change in the working regime on the tramways was to follow the appointment of John Baillie Hamilton as the new General Manager in April 1902. Hamilton had previously been Traffic Manager of the Glasgow Corporation Tramways and was responsible for the electrification of Glasgow's Tramways. He was invited to accept the post of General Manager of the Leeds City Tramways at a salary of £900 per annum, to be advanced to £1,000 after two years in service. This made him one of the highest paid local government officers in Leeds. (25) His appointment came at a time of extreme success for the tramway service which was producing in the year ending of 1902 a net surplus of £48,000, a 55 per cent increase on the previous year. He was to be the prime mover in a policy of extensive and ambitious expansion of the tramway service into the outer suburbs of Leeds. He enjoyed the backing of Robert Smithson, Chairman of the Tramways Committee and a Conservative City Councillor. In addition, Smithson, who was one of Leeds' leading accountants, had acted as auditor for several tramway and light railway companies and exerted his powerful influence in favour of Hamilton's design for radically reorganising the running of the City tramway system.



From the first, Hamilton adopted a policy of centralising his authority over the tramway employers by transferring the licensing of motormen, conductors and tramways from a sub-committee of the Watch Committee to the Tramways Committee in November 1902. (26) With the backing of the Tramways Committee he was able to give effect to his recommendations for widespread changes in the running of the tramways. Hamilton's innovations failed to address long-term grievances of the tramway employees such as inadequate allowances for meal time, the firing of men for trivial reasons and lack of job security.

The grievances of the tramway unions were brought to a head when Hamilton brought in a system of "split turns" which were a form of employment where the tramway drivers' shifts were broken up into smaller periods and staggered through the day. This was intended to provide extra services to passengers at busy times of the day, but was bitterly opposed by the tramway employees as an encroachment on their leisure time; putting them at the disposal of the tram service even when nominally off work. (27)

The introduction of "split turns" on a newly-opened tramway led to early opposition from the tramwaymen, culminating in a meeting on 21 September 1903, jointly organised by the GGLU and the Amalgamated Association of Tramways, and Vehicle Workers which had just affiliated with the Trades Council. A resolution was passed by a crowded meeting

protesting strongly against the introduction of "split turns" and calling for their abolition. The opposition was justified on the basis that split turns would deprive the men of reasonable freedom because the period between the turns was too small. (28) This growing resistance intensified existing discontent among the tramwaymen over the length of hours and insufficient pay which the Tramway Committee had failed to address earlier in the year.

Hamilton was not moved from his previous determination to impose split turns, making a further report where he maintained that the Post Office men had to adapt their hours to the requirements of the work. He dismissed the men's fears of hardship as mere fanciful theories. Failing to obtain any concessions of substance from the Tramways Committee at a joint meeting with the trade union representatives on 17 December 1903, a meeting of tramwaymen held on 3 January 1904 decided to reject on principle the entire scheme and to consider the option of striking. (29)

At the full City Council Meeting on 6 January 1904, the Tramway Committee Chairman, Robert Smithson, minimised the changes that were to occur through the introduction of split turns. (30) The opposition in the Council Chamber was led by Owen Connellan, who denounced it as "a bad system, and could not tend to safe working of the cars". After two hours of discussion the Council approved the Tramways Committee's plans. After a ballot of tramwaymen had rejected the new system by an



overwhelming majority, the City Council began to introduce the split turns by stages. The GGLU reluctantly agreed to a trial period of sixteen weeks up to 31 May 1904, to see how the new system affected its members.

At the end of the trial period the tramwaymen were no nearer being reconciled to the introduction of split turns than before. A meeting held on 19 May 1904 by the Amalgamated Association of Tramway Workers chaired by its Secretary, James Kelly, expressed its "abhorrence" of the system, which it castigated as little better than slavery. (31) This was followed by a general meeting of tramwaymen who were members of the GGLU, with a turnout of 700 to 800, who voted a resolution calling for the abolition of split turns and an early meeting with the Tramway Committee. Almost simultaneously a meeting of the Amalgamated Association passed a resolution expressing their members' resentment at any further continuance of split turns, accusing the system of destroying any reasonable opportunity for relaxation and domestic comfort enjoyed by other workers. It ended by calling on the Tramway Committee to revert to the double shift principle which had been worked for a number of years previously by the City's tramways. (32)

In response, the Tramways' Committee met the representatives of the tramwaymen on 6 June 1904 and offered them the opportunity to vote on whether they were in favour of rotation of duties on all routes worked



from their depot. In the ensuing vote the tramwaymen came out overwhelmingly against any rotation system and demonstrated their preference to working one route continuously rather than periodically changing to another. The Tramway Committee agreed to modify the system in favour of the union's demands and the controversy over split turns was ended. (33) Its long-term consequence was to sow the seeds of suspicion between the tramwaymen and their unions on the one hand and Hamilton and the Tramway Committee on the other. This was to merge with an increasingly hostile attitude towards Hamilton adopted by the local Trade Union Movement and the nascent Leeds Labour Party.

Hamilton's first year as General Manager had been a successful one and his salary of £900 per year was substantial. He was given implicit power by the Tramway Committee to act as a private consultant to other tramway companies, which considerably augmented his earnings. In 1903 he advised the Birmingham City Council which was negotiating to take over a local tramway operating company. In July 1903, the Leeds City Council was faced with the unwelcome news that Hamilton had been asked to take over as General Manager of Birmingham Tramways with an annual salary of £1,500, with superannuation, making him about the highest paid tramway official in Britain. Hamilton intimated to the Leeds Tramways Committee that he would stay in Leeds if a similar raise in his salary would be granted eventually. The Tramway Committee agreed to engage him for five years at an increased salary of £1,200 per annum to

rise by annual increments of £100 to £1,500 in March 1906. (34)

This decision was to bring forth the first large-scale opposition to the conditions of employment of a senior Corporation Official. The City Council meeting on 5 August 1903 was prolonged by a discussion on Hamilton's salary, lasting three and a half hours. A large outdoor meeting was held in Victoria Square by the Leeds Non-Political Ratepayers' Association. (35) An attendance of 4 to 5000 was reported by The Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury and among the Speakers was D. B. Foster of the Leeds LRC and ILP, who moved a resolution condemning as atrocious the proposal of the Treasury Committee, hoping that it would not be confirmed and calling for the voters of the whole City Council to be recorded so that the ratepayers might know how to deal with members who voted for it. The resolution further declared that the time had come for putting a full stop to the mania for increasing the salaries of already highly- paid officials, especially considering the great depression in trade and the heavy rates and taxes. A deputation from the Association attended and protested to the City Council on 5 August. (36)

Significantly, the protest meeting was marked by the cooperation of old-style economy Liberals and supporters of the fledgling Labour Party. In the stormy debate in the City Council on 5 August, a large and noisy contingent filled the galleries, including the possible presence of a large working class component in the ratepayers protest, mobilised through the



Labour Party. As yet, the Labour Party was unrepresented in the City Council, but the large turnout of Liberal Councillors, many of Radical sympathies, led to the voting down of Hamilton's salary increase by 30 votes to 25 in spite of support received from leading Liberals, who backed the Conservative dominated Tramway Committee. (37)

In face of such large-scale opposition, Hamilton had to withdraw his application for an increase but stayed on as General Manager in Leeds. Controversy was to arise again over his salary when early in 1906 a proposal was put forward on his behalf for an increase. This brought forth a strong protest on 28 March 1906 from the Trades Council, which adopted a unanimous resolution condemning the proposed advance in salary and empowering the Executive to make arrangements with the Leeds LRC for the purpose of calling public meetings to protest. During the discussion of the Trades Council a number of leading trade union delegates like Connellan and T. B. Duncan expressed the opinion that the salary of the General Manager and other Corporation officials was greatly inflated. (38)

Hamilton had put in an application to increase his salary by £900 to £1,200 per annum. The opposition of the Trades Council and the Labour Party was added to by the Leeds Non-Political Ratepayers' Association which arranged protest meetings which were supported by the Trades Council. Resistance among councillors who formed the Liberal majority



was so strong that Hamilton was once more forced to withdraw his request. (39)

Opposition to Hamilton was to be more focused politically in 1908. Hamilton had exercised his informal right to seek consultancies from outside bodies and in 1908 he became Chairman of the newly-formed Electro-Mechanical Brake Co. Ltd. in which he held a substantial interest. The Company's business was to manufacture mechanical spares and electro-mechanical brakes, and Hamilton was to receive a royalty of £4/10/- on all brakes sold. Such an overall conflict of interests forced Hamilton's resignation as Chairman of the Company. (40)

Labour Party opposition came to a head on 3 February 1909, when the Labour Councillor Brassington condemned Hamilton's connection with the Company during the Council meeting. He was backed by Badlay, who moved a reduction of Hamilton's salary from £1,000 to £700 per annum. Badlay called on Hamilton to devote the whole of his time to the duties of his office and to repay the Corporation £1,900 received from private work from outside bodies including other local authorities, as well as 2½ per cent profits and his pay for the whole of the 19 days he was away for work on the Constantinople Tramways' Concession and his retainer of 400 guineas paid to him by Thermit Ltd. He also requested that Hamilton paid 5/- per hour when he used the Corporation motor car for week-end trips and holidays. Badlay concluded that whatever the

result of the vote on the resolution, good would result from it being placed on the agenda. (41)

Throughout the debate he referred to Hamilton as "this man" and declared that if the position of Tramway Manager was worth £1,000 per year it was of sufficient importance for a man occupying it to give whole time to it. He ventured to say that the majority of the City Council had no knowledge that "this man" was spending 112 days of one year in private practice. Badlay referred to one case where Hamilton was representing Halifax and Bury as an expert in the House of Lords and got ten guineas from each Corporation, and declared it was nothing less than a scandal that the Tramways Committee had allowed this to go on to the extent it had. (42)

The Labour Group had little chance of passing a resolution against Hamilton and the policy of the Tramway Committees as the Conservative and Liberal majorities combined to shield them. Hamilton could rely on the backing of Councillor Smithson, who in spite of sustained interruptions from the public gallery, entered into a sustained defence of Hamilton. Smithson said that if the finances of the Corporation warranted it, he would vote for Hamilton's salary being increased, arguing that the Tramway Manager's hours could not be defined like an ordinary workman's, his services had been available at every moment the Council had requested them. Maintaining that the present position of



Leeds City Tramways was best proof that Hamilton was giving the best in him and giving to the work all that could be given by any man in the country, he further declared that when Hamilton was appointed to his position it was stipulated that he should be allowed to advise outside authorities such as had been done, with the full knowledge of the Tramways' Committees. Smithson also defended Hamilton's receipt of a retainer of £100 per year from Thermit Ltd. which specialised in welding tramway rail joints, saying that the retainer had expired in 1908.

Joining in with Smithson, Councillor Arthur Willey described Hamilton as a man of "inestimable value" and so appreciated in other parts of the country that his services had been called for by other authorities to assist them in getting bills through Parliament. Willey described the attack on Hamilton as being made because those associated with Badlay wanted to have their revenge upon him because of his strong management and the courage he had shown at times when Leeds might have been plunged into a great crisis. Following a lengthy discussion, a confidence vote in Hamilton was passed with the Labour Group opposing and the Liberals abstaining. Alderman Ellis Midgley, the Liberal Spokesman, having previously called for the setting up of an Independent Committee to investigate the charges against Hamilton and to report to the City Council.

At the next City Council meeting on 3 March 1909, the Labour Group



kept up their campaign against Hamilton. Unity of the Conservatives and Liberals was achieved by their agreement to set up an Independent Committee to investigate the charges against Hamilton. The Labour Group failed to have discussed a number of queries put down by Badlay in relation to a number of tenders offered by outside contractors to the Tramways Committee. Reluctantly the Labour Group nominated one of its members to the Investigating Committee, which was otherwise comprised of Liberals as the Conservatives boycotted it. (43)

Hostility to Hamilton by the Labour Group was to be ignited again when on 1 December 1911 two reports appeared: a majority one signed by the Liberal Committee member and a minority one by the Labour member, J. D. Macrae. (44) The majority report, noting that Hamilton had never been given a written agreement of service when appointed, advised future definition of officials' functions by written contracts of service, and mildly criticised Hamilton for taking a retainer from the Therman Company and using the Corporation motor car for touring in Scotland. The report was discussed at the City Council meeting on 6 December 1911. Alderman Badlay protested that it had failed to report the case of a 44 ton yacht put at Hamilton's disposal by the proprietor of a quarry in Argyllshire, who supplied setts for paving the streets of Leeds. He attempted to have a report referred back for further consideration, but it was approved by the City Council with only the eight members of the Labour Group voting against.

The draft agreement of service between Hamilton and the Corporation was discussed in the City Council on 5 June 1912. The Labour members taking strong exception to the proposal to give Hamilton power of appointment and dismissal of employees in the Tramways Department, voted to refer back the agreement. Their principal spokesman, Councillor Brassington, urged that the employees ought to be allowed to appeal to the Tramway Committee in disciplinary matters. Badlay opposed the agreement because in regard to private practice they were practically in the same position as they were before the Special Inquiry. (45) With the Liberal Group, now in control of the City Council, behind Hamilton, the Labour Group stood no chance of carrying any resolution against him. This marked the last occasion when the Labour Group raised the issue of Hamilton's position as General Manager, but the years of hostility to him were to influence the municipal trade unions in their distrust of the municipal department heads, and the opposition of their members to what they considered the increasing authoritarianism of their management practices, particularly after 1911 when a new wave of industrial unrest was to break out in Leeds.

The Labour Party's campaign against municipal waste on behalf of the City ratepayers was not exclusively focused on Hamilton. As early as 1903 the Labour Party had joined forces with the Non-Political Ratepayers' Association in their long-established campaign against over-remunerated municipal servants. By 1907 the Labour Party was regularly



putting up candidates for the post of elective auditor, a position which was filled by ratepayers' election every year, giving the holder of the office the right to examine the Corporation Accounts in detail. From 1907 onwards the two posts were regularly filled by the Labour nominees, James Verity and W. H. Westwood, the latter of whom was able to use "financial information from his position to publish in 1910, 'Municipal Muddling', a pamphlet condemning municipal 'extravagance' and the financial policy of the Liberal-Conservative council majority".

(46)

Large rate rises announced in March 1910 saw the Labour Party attempt to win over middle-class ratepayers by joining their protest meetings. Attempts by Badlay to engage the support of some ratepayers groups like the Leeds Property Owners' Association, met with no success, Badlay himself being howled down when he attempted to address their protest meeting held on 16 March 1910. Growing opposition from the previously Liberal sympathising Non-Political Ratepayers' Association to the financial Concordat between the Liberals and Conservative groups on the Council, revived attempts by Badlay to capture leadership of the movement for 'Economy' for the Labour Party.

At the Municipal election in October 1910, Badlay had published a report on the administration of Leeds, referring to the:

... octopus like tentacles of the men with money  
to lend and property speculators who would not  
be denied.



He attributed the ills of the City's finances to 'graft' and the clutches of the money lenders, attributing the high level of rates to the burden of interest payments for past loans incurred on onerous terms, he also cited instances where sellers of land to the City Corporation, who possessed political connections had obtained a price far in excess of their real market value. Appealing for the support of the small business rate payers of Leeds, he concluded:

In Leeds it is a golden summer for the money-lender but for the life of the businessman, it is a black winter's day. (47)

At the City Council meeting on 4 January 1911 Badlay attacked the multiplication of senior officials in the Corporation. Referring to changes in departmental organisation he accused the controlling groups of councillors of breaking up different departments and placing over them expensive heads with well paid assistants. Badlay declared that he believed that a man with £1,000 a year ought to give thorough supervision to the department without a man to do the supposed work that the man who had obtained the appointment was doing. (48)

Badlay continued the campaign into subsequent Council Meetings, for example, on 2 March 1911 he initiated a lively debate on a proposal for raising the salaries of the Chief Cashier in the City Treasurer's Department. During the same debate, Macrae mentioned that in the

Education Department adult male employees were being replaced by boys and that the number of School Attendance Officers were being reduced for economy's sake. (49) Further attacks on salary increases for senior officials of the Council followed intermittently into 1913. In January 1912 Badlay and the Labour Group denounced the high salary paid to the Chief Constable, linking this with their denunciation of the use of police in various major strikes that had occurred in the City in 1911. Badlay took care to emphasise his support for the wages of ordinary police, declaring "Not the Chiefs, but the men must be our first consideration". (50)

In spite of campaigns and programmes that were designed to appeal to the Liberal voter and some of their councillors, the Labour Group failed to break out of their political isolation in the Council or to gain the political support of outside ratepayer associations. From 1902, the areas of difference between the Conservative and Liberal Parties on the Council had steeply declined, particularly after the 1907 financial Concordat. The design of the Concordat to raise the finances of the City above party controversy and to place them on a sound business footing, intensified the growing lack of difference between the Conservative and Liberal Parties at the municipal level. The prolonged trade depression affecting the City after 1902 which lasted until 1911, and the increased financial burden on the City caused by the expansion in expenditure on elementary and secondary education, slum clearance and improved and



expanded utilities, accentuated the solid Conservatism of the Conservative and Liberal Parties in municipal affairs.

**c) The Municipality and Social Reform**

The effect of these developments was shown by City Council's hostility to the Labour Group's support for social reform through municipal government and the alignment of the Conservative and Liberal Groups against the growing Labour Party presence in the Council Chamber. If the parties trade union councillors, like Connellan and Buckle had enjoyed acceptance by the Council majorities and places of responsibility on Council Committees, the Labour Group members experienced an increasingly pariah status. Along with this went a complete rejection of virtually all the Labour Group's municipal programme and a blanket dismissal of them as impractical and Utopian. (51) Added to this was a system of awarding Aldermanic status and Chairing of Committees in which the Labour Party was systematically unrepresented.

Until 1914 the record of achievement of the Labour Group on the City Council was to be minimal. This may be illustrated by the cases of three of the Labour Group's persistent demands; for feeding of poor children by the municipality, the provision of working-class housing, and the setting up of a direct Labour Organisation to perform Council contracts



and provide municipal services. In all three cases they were to be met by a persistently negative reaction from the Liberal and Conservative groups on the City Council.

The health of poor working-class children had become a political issue following the Boer War, when the indifferent physical condition of many army recruits pointed to the need for ensuring that the next generation of school children should be fed and maintained in a healthy state. Following the reports of the Royal Committee on Physical Training in Scotland and of the Inter-Department Committee on Physical Deterioration, a movement was set in foot for undertaking the feeding of poor children by the State. (52) The Labour Party took up the cause of feeding poor children and the matter was raised in the Leeds City Council in April 1905 by T. C. Wilson, who put a resolution calling on the Lord Mayor to convene a meeting of voluntary workers to consider the question of providing meals for underfed children, the cost to be defrayed by voluntary subscription. Wilson further called on the City Council to grant £300 to the Lord Mayor, to be used if necessary for free dinners for poor children. This would only be used if the yield from voluntary donations was insufficient. The resolution was opposed by the Liberal and Conservative Party leaders, Joseph Henry and Charles Wilson, but on the assurance of Fred Kinder, Chairman of the Education Committee and one of the more progressive Liberal leaders, that if the voluntary subscription was insufficient the Council would consider the scheme, the

resolution was withdrawn. (53)

The matter was further debated in the City Council in December 1905, when Kinder declared that the local Education Committee could not implement the feeding of poor children and instead reliance should be put on the local Boards of Guardians, some of which, like those of Leeds Union, had promised to procure a milk supply to be sold for 1d. a head. Little was done to implement these promises until after the election of the Liberal government and the passing of an enabling Act that gave powers to local authorities to provide free schools meals for needy children on the rates. (54)

The Leeds City Council continued to rely on voluntary subscription for funding the feeding of the children. The Labour Party in Leeds continued to press for feeding on the rates through the schools and on 4 March 1908, they organised a deputation of underfed children to meet the City Council in session. This moved Kinder to declare that the voluntary funds with which the Council had worked were now almost exhausted, and if more support was not forthcoming he would vote for the putting into operation of the Feeding of the Children Act, though regretting the necessity. (55) Kinder followed up this promise by moving at the next Council session in April 1908 that the enabling Act be implemented by an application to the Board of Education for authority to raise money for feeding out of the City rates. (56)



The implementation of the feeding by the Council fell short of the Labour Party's Programme, being in force only during school terms. Walt Wood attempted to raise this issue in the Council Meeting on 6 July 1910, complaining that in previous committee meetings he had been prevented from expressing his views on the question of feeding children in holiday time. He pointed out that thirty-two other local authorities were feeding children during the holidays and called for the setting up of a Committee to consider the question of establishing canteens for this purpose. (57) In spite of his strictures, the feeding of the children continued to be carried out through outside contractors rather than by the municipality, as in Bradford, a fact which the Labour Party continued to bewail in its campaign literature up to 1914, advocating instead the setting up of Council owned feeding centres.

In the field of public housing, the Labour Party failed to make any significant impression on the City Council majority's firm intention to build no municipal owned dwelling houses in any circumstances. Leeds had a long record of slum clearance joined to the issue of providing affordable public housing to those families displaced. The failure of the City Council in 1897 to build homes on the Ivy Lodge Estate clearance area, and to sell it off to private contractors was one of the facts that brought into being the alliance of the Trades Council, the ILP and other reform organisations in the Housing Committee, which became the nucleus of the later Leeds LRC. The City Council resisted



implementation of Part III of the 1890 Housing of the Working Class Act which would have enabled it to build working class lodging houses for those displaced by the clearance of insanitary areas. There was strong antipathy among the Conservative and Liberal Councils to the City Council venturing into any kind of house building, evidenced by the resignation from the Chairmanship of the Improvement Committee, of Alderman Francis Lupton in 1906, when the Corporation agreed to erect some tenement houses in the Marsh Lane area. (58)

Although advocating public housing the Labour Party in Leeds tended to subordinate it to its advocacy of direct labour and the extension of municipal trading. In June 1907, Connellan spoke in favour of a City Council resolution to obtain legislation to enable it to raise money for carrying out the Marsh Lane Scheme. Connellan pointed out that large numbers rendered homeless by the previous clearances could not pay an economic rent to the private sector and needed special housing. (59) In April 1909 the Labour Group failed to prevent the City Council majority supporting the creation of new back-to-back housing in Leeds. Further attempts to commit the City Council to municipal house building in December 1910 and July 1911, to provide accommodation for those displaced by slum clearance remained equally unsuccessful. (60)

Coinciding with the period of most acute unemployment in the City was the Labour Party's support for the creation of a direct Works Department

in the Corporation and its bitter resistance to its eventual closure. The Council's fair-wage resolution to adhere to trade union rates of pay in granting outside contracts failed to satisfy the Labour Party, particularly when wage rates were being driven down in the city by sustained high unemployment. A direct Works Department, it was hoped, would cut out the expense of outside contracting and provide more work for semi-skilled and unskilled workers, more satisfactory than the short term and demeaning relief work projects on offer from the City Council and the Distress Committee. Particular beneficiaries of the City's Direct Works department were members of the building trade unions, who found growing employment prospects from the City Council's increased expenditure on new offices and depots.

#### **d) Labour Isolated**

The Direct Works department had been set up in September 1906 by the Liberal-controlled City Council, with the backing of the Liberal leader, Joseph Henry. Henry had stressed that the Department's work was to be on a very small scale and was not to take over the functions of the Gas and Electricity departments. It was to deal with minor repairs and building work and to that extent would be in competition with private contracts. The Labour Group supported its establishment in spite of it falling short of their expectations. Alderman Buckle, their leader,



advocated direct works as helping to save on costs and being more efficient as motivated by the urge to efficiency. (61) In June 1907 the Labour Group, in discussing the resolution in favour of raising money to pay for the erection of tenement blocks in Marsh Lane, advocated the use of the Works Department in funding the workforce. (62)

The fate of the Works Department was to be determined by the capture of control of the City Council by the Conservatives in November 1907. Their leader, Charles Wilson, lost no time in moving for its abolition in the November 1907 Council meeting. In the face of vocal opposition from the Liberal and Labour groups and a delegation of protesting building trade unionists claiming to represent nearly 22,000 workers, the Conservatives were forced to climb down after the Liberals and the Labour Group combined to pass a hostile resolution. (63)

The Conservatives were to wait until the outcome of the November 1908 elections to push through successfully the decision to abolish the department. The Labour Group and its leader, John Badley, engaged in a long and acrimonious debate followed by the exchange of insults with the Conservatives and open defiance by some of the Labour Councillors of the Lord Mayor's calls to order. The bitterness of the Labour Group was accentuated by the Council Majority's decision, coinciding with the most acute phase of trade depression and unemployment in the City. Unlike in November 1907, most of the Liberal Group voted with the Conservatives



or abstained, showing up the isolation of the Labour group on the Council. (64)

Linked with the demand for an enlarged direct work department was the Labour Group's perennial, but futile, demand that the City Council set up a municipal Coal and Milk Supply. In spite of the Labour Group's attempt to show that such schemes were in operation by other local authorities, these policies met complete rejection by the Conservatives and Liberals. (65) The Corporation majority remained equally unmoved when, with Labour support a delegation to the Council Meeting on 7 February 1912 of the Blind League and the Trades Council pleaded for concessionary fares for the blind. Herbert Brown, Chairman of the Treasury's Committee, said the trams had to be managed on a commercial basis and that if they allowed blind people to be carried for nothing they might as well grant the privilege to other deserving people such as the lame. (66) Widespread criticism, particularly in the press, forced the City Council to reverse their demand the following month and authorise the issue of free passes; one of the few cases where a Labour supported reform was adopted.

At the same time there was a marked change in the attitude of the Liberals to the Labour representatives on the City Council. As late as 1904, Joseph Henry, their Leader, proposed John Buckle as Alderman, observing that:

... the more working men of the style and character of Mr. Buckle who entered the Council the better it will be. He had been fearless on behalf of the people who send him, and straightforward and well behaved in his relations with all members of the council. (67)

By 1907, if the goodwill of the Liberals to Buckle still survived, little was to be found in their attitudes toward most of the Labour Group on the Council, and particularly their de facto leader, John Badlay. In July 1907 when Badlay tried to talk out a resolution in favour of advancing the Town Clerk's salary by a fillibuster lasting two and a half hours, the Liberal Alderman, Ellis Midgley, attacked his speech as:

... an insult to the intelligence of the City and a blot on the good name of the Party to which he belongs. (68)

Similarly, Liberal Councillor George Radcliffe described Badlay's methods on the Council as unscrupulous in February 1909, after his recent campaign against Hamilton. (69)

The Labour Group's right to represent the Council's employees was also questioned by both the Liberal and Conservative Council members. (70) This was to culminate in the Labour Group's exclusion from the City Council's General Purpose Committee set up in 1914 in the aftermath of the Municipal Employees' strike. Alderman Arthur Willey quoted that:

The General Purpose Committee has a Committee to deal with the question of Labour and it was an irony in principle as well as an impossibility for a Labour Member to do his duty in a dual capacity. (71)

The Labour Group showed little inclination to ingratiate itself with the Liberal-Conservative majorities on the City Council. In June 1908, justifying the decision of the Labour Group to boycott the Royal Visit, Badlay described royalty as "the system of which the King is representative is one to which we are entirely opposed". (72) Brassington, addressing the City Council in June 1908 declared there were thousands who recognised that whether a state was a monarchy or aristocracy there "was little difference". (73) In the previous month's Council Meeting the majority of the Labour Group had opposed a resolution supported by the Conservatives and Liberals giving preference to employees of the City Council who were members of the Territorial Reserve on anti-militarist grounds and also in opposition to the practice of favouritism. Significantly, John Buckle the Labour Group leader supported the joining of the Territorials by Council employees, but opposed the preferential treatment to be given to them. (74)

In the face of a consistently hostile majority the Labour Party reached out for support from beyond the walls of the Council chamber. By bringing in large numbers of Labour supporters to the public galleries to provide moral and vocal support in debates of particular importance, the Labour Group could claim to be the expression of real public opinion outside.



Since 1902 regular meetings of the unemployed had met outside the Town Hall and the introduction of partisan spectators into the public gallery marked a further extension of the policy of pressure from without on the City Council. In the face of criticism on the misuse of the gallery by Charles Wilson, Badlay defended their use as making Council debates more open to the public. Particularly, opposition to the use of the gallery was to be voiced by the Conservative Leader, Charles Wilson. (75)

Attempts were made to restrict the outdoor activities of the Labour Party by the use of byelaws, particularly after the Conservatives captured power in November 1908. Closure of the public gallery in 1909 was followed by the City Council's closure of the long-established meeting place at Vicar's Croft in the grounds of the City Market. Vicar's Croft had been used since the nineteenth century by a variety of radical, socialist and trade-union organisations without previous restriction, and its closure was bitterly denounced as an exercise in blatant anti-Labour partisanship by the Conservative controllers of the Council. This was given extra credence by the City Council's refusal to allow ILP meetings on Woodhouse Moor, which was municipal parkland. The ending of the public gallery closure in September 1909, saw the resumption of the orchestrated interruptions in favour of the Labour Group, particularly in debates relating to the works of municipal employees or the increased remuneration of senior Council officials. (76)

The growth of Labour representatives on the City Council coincided with the growing centralisation of municipal leadership funded by hostility to both Socialism and the Labour Party. Although the Conservatives had dominated the City Council from 1895 to 1904, their role had not been marked by any pronounced anti-Labour sentiments. The defeat of the Conservatives precipitated to leadership Charles Wilson, an astute political manager, with a pugnacious manner and a larger than life public persona. With the Conservatives attaining the largest number of Council seats in 1907, Wilson moved to the Aldermanic bench and Chairmanship of the Finance Committee. To maintain his control of the Council he engaged the support of the declining Liberal Group by giving them a disproportionate share of the Aldermanship and Committee places and adopting an implacable opposition to the demands of the Labour group. (77) His reputation as an opponent of Municipal Socialism and the Labour was demonstrated by his engagement in heated exchanges of words with the Labour leader, Badlay in many Council sessions. (78) His frequent vociferous defiances of the leader dominated the public gallery, established his reputation as a bulwark against Socialism and the Labour Party. Wilson's consolidation of power as the Council leader was aided by the weakness in Liberal Party leadership, in which four leaders followed in succession between 1906 and 1912. (79)

The Labour Movement's suspicion of the growing authoritarianism of political management was increased by the setting up of a Council



Consultative Committee on the Corporation labour force by the City Council in September 1909. (80) The aim to promote greater flexibility in labour force was opposed by the Labour group which saw in the planned unification of wage rates, an attempt to level down most municipal workers' earnings. The Chairmanship of the Committee was taken by Wilson and it was comprised of the Chairmen of the Chief Labour Employing Committees. Already Wilson gained the suspicion of the municipal trade unions when he brought influence to bear on his Conservative colleague Arthur Willey, Chairman of the Waterworks Committee, to reverse his contention to propose more pay for manual waterworks employees. (81)

#### **e) Labour and the Lord Mayoralty**

The gulf between the Labour Group on the Council and the Conservatives and Liberals was shown up by its hostility to the office of Lord Mayor and the civic entertainment that went with it. The Lord Mayoral office was the visual symbol of civic pride of the City and was invariably filled by a wealthy incumbent who could stand the costs of entertainment on behalf of the City out of his own pocket. Since 1895, when the Conservatives captured control of Leeds City Council, the office had become even more than before the preserve of wealthy local businessmen, chosen in rotation by the Conservative and Liberal parties



under the 1902 Concordat. (82) The holder of the Lord Mayoral office was ex-officio Chairman of the City Council's monthly meetings and of many City Council committees. In addition he chaired many semi-official relief funds such as those raised for relief of the unemployed and the feeding of poor children, which were raised by voluntary subscriptions. (83)

The Labour Group's hostility to the office was increased by the fact that until 1912 no salary was granted to the office and, as a result, the Labour Party had no candidate who could afford the office. The Labour Group felt little reason to show great deference to the Lord Mayor when he chaired Council Meetings, which became heated and noisy. In December 1908 and February 1910 the Labour Group leader Badlay had defied the Lord Mayor's pleas by persisting in filibustering and appealing to a crowded public gallery. (84)

The Labour Group's attitude to the Lord Mayoral office began to be modified in 1912 when the Liberal Party regained control of the City Council and by a joint vote with the Labour Group granted an annual salary of £1,250 to the holder of the office. (85) The vote by the Labour Group was given without enthusiasm and in face of opposition from many of its own supporters. For example, one of the leading ILP figures, T. B. Duncan declared:

The action of the group in supporting the exceedingly high salary was incomprehensible. The idea of upholding the dignity of the Lord Mayor was absurd. [ He thought that] ... we, as working people, ought to strenuously oppose functions of the sort of type provided by the Lord Mayor and insist on the provision of adequate productive relief works instead of civic functions. (86)

The Labour Party unanimously agreed in 1913 not to propose a candidate for the Lord Mayoral office because of the Party's policy of not accepting Chairmanships of Council Committees as long as it was in a minority on the City Council. (87) The Party's reluctance to decide on whether or not to nominate a candidate persisted after the Conservative majority on the City Council abolished the official salary brought in by the Liberals in their brief period of control in 1911-1912. (88) The Labour Party was to hold back from nominating or receiving the hospitality of the Lord Mayor well past 1914 and only in 1919 with the voting of a salary for the holder of the office, did the Labour nominee, T. B. Duncan, accept the Lord Mayoral office. (89)

The exclusion of the Labour Party from what it considered its appropriate place on many of the City Council's major committees added to its sense of alienation from the majority. In particular, the Labour Party's representation on the Aldermanic Bench had only grown from one to two between 1903 and 1913, while the Liberals who had seen their numbers on the City Council drop from 40 to 18 between 1904 and 1913, only

relinquished two of the eight Aldermanic seats they had held since 1904, when they came to be outnumbered by Labour in November 1913. (90)

#### **f) Conclusion**

By 1913, the gulf between the Labour minority and the Liberal and Conservatives remained greater than ever, fuelled by the Labour Party's advocacy of municipally-financed local reform and its defence of the wages and conditions of the increasingly restive municipal workers. Deep-rooted distrust of the management of the Labour Employing departments of the City Council, in particular of J. B. Hamilton, was felt by the two major municipal trade unions, the Gasworkers and the Tramway Workers. Up to 1912, the growth of the Labour Party and trade unions in Leeds had occurred under the shadow of a prolonged trade depression, but with the economic upturn that year an upsurge of industrial unrest not seen since the late 1890's was to precipitate a full-scale confrontation between the City Corporation and the municipal workers in 1913. As late as the City Council meeting of 2 March 1910, Badley still saw the solution of the problem of Corporation Workmen's wages as resolvable in the main through re-grading, observing that:

... some men are doing very arduous work ... are not graded as they should be.

He saw no contradiction in his group's opposition to pay rises for those



salaries over £300 per year and the support for a pay rise for most manual employees. (91)

Finally the Labour Party's political isolation was noticeable, compared with the ILP in the 1890's which could draw on the support of a number of middle-class single issue reform groups in Leeds. Such organisations as the Sanitary Aid Society and the Social Reform Union, often including local clergymen of progressive views, gave a respectability to issues of social reform, such as the erection of municipal housing. As a result it was much harder for Conservative-minded members of the City Council to dismiss them out of hand. After 1900, such solid reform groups and the interest of well-known churchmen in them, seemed to have dwindled into insignificance. The cause of social reform thus became more and more the exclusive preserve of the Labour Party and its trade union supporters.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: Footnotes**

- (1) From 1906, all five Leeds Constituencies were represented by Liberals or in the case of James O'Grady, enjoyed Liberal backing. After 1910 all the Liberal M.P.s were drawn from well-established Leeds and Morley families; Robert Armitage of Central Leeds, an Ironmaster, Rowland Hirst Barran for North Leeds, a major clothing manufacturer, Sir William Middlebrook, a leading Morley solicitor, formerly Mayor of Morley and Lord Mayor of Leeds 1910-11, and T. Edmund Harvey for West Leeds from a prominent Quaker family engaged in the manufacture of chemicals. Only Harvey, a former warden of Toynbee Hall shared leanings towards progressive New Liberalism.
- (2) The number of seats where the Conservatives stood aside to give a Labour candidate a free run against the Liberals dropped from six in 1905 to virtually none by 1911.
- (3) The Labour group was established in 1904, a year after the election of John Buckle as the first LRC Councillor in Leeds.
- (4) For an illustration of the City Council's negative attitude to the implementation of housing legislation see F. M. Lupton, Housing Improvement: A Summary of Ten Years Work in Leeds, (Leeds 1906).
- (5) E. P. Hennock, Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth Century Urban Government (1973), p.281, for effects of convergence between Conservative and Liberals by 1907.
- (6) E. P. Hennock, op cit. pp.241-2.
- (7) Ibid., pp.242-3 for the attitude of the Leeds Conservative Party to the Liberal controlled Municipal Council's handling of the 1890 Gas Strike.
- (8) From 1889-97 the assessed rateable value of Leeds grew 19.1 per cent, from 1897-1905 37.1 per cent and from 1905-12 2.7 per cent. Source: Financial Statistics: Rateable Value in the Several Townships - Leeds City Treasury (1913), Hennock, p.279.
- (9) Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury, 28 June 1907.
- (10) Ibid., 28 June 1907.
- (11) Leeds LRC Manifesto 1904-5 (Leeds 1905).



- (12) Yorkshire Factory Times, 11 November 1909; for instance as outlined in an article by John Badlay celebrating Labour's electoral victories in November 1909.
- (13) Leeds LRC Manifesto 1904-5.
- (14) Yorkshire Factory Times, 11 November 1909.
- (15) Attempts by LRC to win support of the local branch of UK Property Owners and Ratepayers Association were rebuffed in December 1910, Leeds Mercury, 17 December 1910.
- (16) Leeds and District Weekly Citizen, No. 1 21.10.1911 refers to the working-class being ignored and Labour's political campaign being scantily reported. It also called for the 'Citizen' to embrace every healthy sphere of the life of the people of Leeds.
- (17) From 1910, the elective auditor's report on Municipal Finance was published in the LRC Yearbook; see for example, the report of W. H. Westwood in the 1913-14 Yearbook.
- (18) Prominent LRC leaders supported by the Gas Workers included Walt Wood, J.E. Smith and John Badlay, the two former full time professional organisers of the union.
- (19) Yorkshire Factory Times, 22 May 1903.
- (20) J. Soper, Leeds Transport, Vol.1 1830-1902 (Leeds 1985) pp.218-219.
- (21) Ibid., pp.220-221.
- (22) Ibid., pp.220-221.
- (23) Leeds Mercury, 24 October 1897 and 3 February 1901.
- (24) Ibid., 24 October 1897.
- (25) The Yorkshire Post, 6 March 1902.
- (26) J. Soper, Leeds Transport, Vol.2 1902-3, Leeds 1986), p.263.
- (27) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 22 September 1903.
- (28) Yorkshire Factory Times, 18 September 1903 and 23 September 1903.
- (29) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 18 December 1903 and 4 January 1904.



- (30) Yorkshire Post, 7 January 1904.
- (31) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 20 May 1904.
- (32) Ibid., May 1904.
- (33) J. Soper, Leeds Transport, Vol.2, pp.268-9.
- (34) Yorkshire Post, 6 August 1903.
- (35) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 6 August 1903.
- (36) Yorkshire Post, 6 August 1903.
- (37) Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 6 August 1903.
- (38) Leeds Trades Council, 28 March 1906.
- (39) J. Soper, Leeds Transport, Vol.2 p.311.
- (40) Leeds Mercury, 4 February 1909.
- (41) Yorkshire Post, 4 February 1909.
- (42) Leeds Mercury, 4 March 1909.
- (43) Yorkshire Post, 2 December 1909.
- (44) Ibid., 6 June 1912.
- (45) H. Westwood, Municipal Muddling and Fuddling, (Leeds 1910).
- (46) Leeds Mercury, 17 March 1910.
- (47) Yorkshire Factory Times, 27 October 1910.
- (48) Yorkshire Post, 5 January 1911.
- (49) Ibid., 3 March 1911.
- (50) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 6 January 1913.
- (51) For example, Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury, 18 October 1905.
- (52) K. Laybourn, 'The Issue of School Feeding in Bradford 1904-7' in Journal of Educational Administration and History 14, (2 July 1982)
- (53) Yorkshire Post, 6 April 1905.

- (54) Ibid., 7 December 1912.
- (55) Ibid., 5 March 1912.
- (56) Ibid., 3 April 1908.
- (57) Ibid., 7 July 1910.
- (58) See F. Lupton, Housing Improvement, Leeds 1906.
- (59) Yorkshire Post, 6 June 1907.
- (60) Ibid., 9 March 1910, 7 July 1911.
- (61) Ibid., 6 September 1906.
- (62) Ibid., 6 June 1907.
- (63) Leeds Mercury, 5 December 1912.
- (64) Yorkshire Post, 4 December 1908, Leeds Mercury 4 December 1908.
- (65) For instance at the City Council meetings of 9 April 1910 when the Labour Group unsuccessfully proposed the establishment of a municipal coal supply, Yorkshire Post, 10 April 1910.
- (66) Yorkshire Post, 8 February 1912.
- (67) Ibid., 19 November 1904.
- (68) Ibid., 2 August 1907.
- (69) Leeds Mercury 4 February 1909.
- (70) For example, Fred Kinder's accusation that the Labour Party policy in the Council was being dictated from outside, reported in Yorkshire Post of 11 November 1911 and his denunciation of the Labour Councillors in the City Council as "coming here and taking a narrow trade union role" reported on 4 September 1913 by the Yorkshire Post.
- (71) Yorkshire Post, 28 March 1914.
- (72) Ibid., 4 June 1908, Leeds Mercury, 26 May 1908.
- (73) Ibid., 6 June 1908.
- (74) Leeds Mercury, 7 May 1908.

- (75) Yorkshire Post, 7 October 1909.
- (76) Ibid., 2 September 1909.
- (77) W. R. Meyer, Charles Henry Wilson: the man who was Leeds, in publications of the Thoresby Society 1998, 2nd Series, Vol.8 pp.81-82.
- (78) See in particular Yorkshire Post, 1 August 1907, 7 October 1909 and 2 February 1910.
- (79) They included Joseph Henry up to 1906, Fred Kinder 1906-1908, Herbert Brown 1908-12 and John Rawlinson Ford after 1912; the latter three eventually joining the Conservative dominated General Purpose Committee in the 1913 Municipal Strike.
- (80) Ibid., 10 November 1909.
- (81) E. P. Hennock, Fit and Proper Persons, pp.262-264.
- (83) see Yorkshire Post, 8 October 1908 in respect of the recent Lord Mayoral appeal for relief of the unemployed through the Distress Committee.
- (84) Yorkshire Post, 4 December 1908 and 3 February 1910.
- (85) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 6 April 1912.
- (86) LRC, op. cit. LP2, p.45, 18 April 1912.
- (87) Ibid., RC, pp.91, 93, 95 and 102., October 1913.
- (88) Ibid., RC, pp. 240, 242, September 1914.
- (89) As late as 1915 the City Labour organisation disciplined one of the Labour City Councillors, Robert Escritt, for accepting the hospitality of the new Lord Mayor in November 1915, but his expression of regret was accepted and no further action was taken. LRC, pp.419-24, 20 November 1915.
- (90) As an example of the Labour Group's alienation from the City Council's Conservative and Liberal majority was Isaac Brassington's remark at the 9 November 1908 Council meeting: "Although we are small here, we are not small outside. If the Council is going to be intolerant to Labour, we are going to be intolerant to you." Yorkshire Post, 10 November 1908.
- (91) Yorkshire Post, 3 March 1910.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE ROAD TO THE MUNICIPAL STRIKE OF 1913**

The formal opening of the great municipal strike of 1913 can be traced to the outcome of the Conference of Municipal Workers held on 22 April 1913, setting up a federal council of municipal trade unions to advance their claims on the City Council. The shift from simmering discontent of the municipal workers to strike action was influenced by an upsurge of strike and related actions by sections of the Leeds working-class between 1911 and 1913, coinciding with the great wave of industrial unrest which affected Britain in this period. (1)

Up to 1911, the still acute trade depression had dampened any tendency to strike action by any part of the Leeds trade union movement. In October 1909 Council sanitary employees had joined with Waterwork employees to press for improvements in wages and conditions. Receiving no satisfactory response they had voted 9 per cent in favour of striking. (2) On the promise by the City Council Conservative Committee to recommend 1/- per week for horse drivers and channellers over 21 years of age and an adjustment of hours worked for waterworkers, the strike was called off. (3)

Discontent among council manual workers did not abate entirely. In December 1910, resentment by tramworkers at what they considered

bullying by their inspectors, led to threats of strike. (4) At a joint meeting on 17 December 1910, of the GGLU and Tramway Workers Union a vote to strike was taken. One of the union officials told The Leeds Mercury that what they complained about was a species of bullying on the part of officials, who made frivolous and irritating complaints against the men, the investigation of which caused much inconvenience, including their having to wait up to two hours at head office in connection with these complaints. (5) The discharge of one tramway conductor for refusing to obey an inspector's order to keep his hands out of his pockets, led to a lengthy communication to the Trades Council from the Tramway Workers' Union. This was read out at its monthly meeting on 22 December 1910 and a deputation from the Trades Council was appointed to accompany the Tramway Workers' representatives in calling on the Tramways' Committee to change its disciplinary proceedings to allow of an appeal from the decision of the General Manager, J. B. Hamilton. (6) Nothing further followed from this decision and the likelihood of a resort to a strike by any section of the manual municipal workers seemed as remote as it had been for most of the previous decade.

Little sign of strike activity was to be found among the majority of the City's workforce in private employment. The 1907 Railway Strike failed to bring out railwaymen employed in the Leeds Stations and goods yards even though it precipitated the breach between Albert Fox and the local

ASRS and ILP which resulted in the electoral fiasco in South Leeds in 1908. (7)

Evidence of a more combative stance towards employers was demonstrated by the weavers employed by Isaac Dodgshon & Co, who in November 1909 went on strike and successfully resisted the imposition upon them of new and more onerous factory rules and regulations. (8) Strikes of a sectionalist nature like that of the warp dressers employed by Samuel Wilson & Co at the Wellington Street Mills, against the introduction of female operatives which took place in March 1910, evidenced the still cautious and defensive character of trade union activity when unemployment still remained high and intractable. (9) A successful strike of women employed by the printers Chorley & Pickersgill, in 1909, endorsed the first sign of trade union revival among sections of the labour force largely untouched by union organisation. (10)

The failure of wages to rise in line with the cost of living was remarked upon by Owen Connellan in an article in the 9 June 1910 edition of The Yorkshire Factory Times. It maintained that the wage gains of the 1890's had failed to keep up with the recent price rise, noting that while in some industries the rates of wages had been stationary, in others the gross earnings had been reduced owing to the trade depression. It concluded that:



It appears to me that the increased cost of living has come to stay, and it behoves the workers to see that in the increased prosperity now taking place in many industries, they get a greater share than it has been their fortune to obtain in previous cycles of good trade.

He appeared to hint at the prospect of the local unions taking up a more combative stance in pending wage negotiation. (11)

That the prolonged trade depression in Leeds had not lifted as late as 1910 was indicated by the occurrence of the last of the major demonstrations of the unemployed, which had been a regular occurrence over the previous decade. Discontent with the effectiveness of the recently-established State Labour Exchange had led to the formation by some of those registered, of the Leeds Registered Unemployed Committee in December 1910. (12) Its object was to bring the grievances of those registered and their need for work before the public and the local authorities.

A letter addressed to the Lord Mayor by William Middlebrook on behalf of 1,200 registered unemployed sought to draw the attention of the authorities to the widespread distress prevailing among them. (13) At a meeting held on 12 December 1910, a resolution was passed calling on the City Council to undertake, with Government assistance, public works over the winter months to employ the hard core of unemployed registered with the Labour Exchange. The meeting condemned the inadequacy of

the Labour Exchange's facilities for advertising vacancies and for placing the long-term registered. (14)

This new movement of unemployed culminated in a deputation to the City Council on 19 December, where the Committee's Secretary, Ernest Briggs, declared that there was a permanent army of unemployed in the City, numbering over a thousand men, without prospects of employment and there was much distress among them. Briggs proceeded to give details of a particular case of suffering in a family, where the father and son were out of work and the mother lay seriously ill in the house. The son stood by Briggs, and after a word had passed between them, Briggs shouted out dramatically:

My God! My God! Mr. Mayor, send a doctor  
at once. This woman is dying! This is her son!  
There are tears in his eyes. (15)

This outburst caused consternation in the Council Chamber and after a Conservative Alderman had moved that Briggs be put out, Briggs banged a desk with his fists shouting:

"I don't care, put me out if you dare. The woman is dying. It would drive a man mad. Send a doctor please, my statement is finished. I cannot go any further until you send for a doctor. If you had been in that house this morning you would have gone mad as I am going. For God's sake do something for this poor man this afternoon.

When the Lord Mayor appealed for calm, Briggs retorted:

I don't care for you, nor your golden chain, nor all  
your bag of tricks. If you don't do it there will be  
some damage done.

In the face of the Lord Mayor's imperturbability, Briggs and the delegation withdrew. The only result was the passing of a resolution by the Council calling on the Labour Employing Committees to do their test to find employment for the unemployed. Significantly, the Labour Group showed no sign of taking the part of the delegation and confined its intervention in the ensuing debate to calling for a salary of £500 per annum for the Lord Mayor and the feeding of children during holidays from the rates. (16)

At the next City Council Meeting held on 26 January 1911, the matter of the long-term unemployed was brought up again by the Chairman of the Distress Committee, who gave the return of those registered with the Committee from 12 September 1910 to 24 January 1911 as 2,235, made up of 1,208 new applications and 1,022 on the old register. Of these, 321 had been found work and 173 had resumed their old employment. (17) He read out a letter from a Committee claiming to represent the 1,500 men registered at the Labour Exchange, calling on the Distress Committee to provide extra relief to alleviate the distress existing among them. The Committee's letter went on to claim that in addition to those registered with the exchange, there were 3,000 men registered as



unemployed at another Labour Bureau in Parkland Crescent, making in all no less than 5,000 men seeking work in the City.

The Distress Committee Chairman, Stephen Peckover, was sufficiently impressed with the contents of the letter to praise the moderation of the unemployed delegation, endorsing their suggestion that 1,500 jobs should be provided on a temporary basis to be funded by a grant from the Local Government Board under the provisions of the unemployed Workman's Act of 1905. (18)

In spite of Charles Wilson's dismissal of the accuracy of the numbers estimated to be unemployed, the City Council voted to send a deputation to confer with the Chairmen of the various Corporation Committees that provided additional work. The deputation contained Badlay and George Pearson as the Labour representatives alongside the Conservatives Charles Wilson and Richard Firth. This marked the end of organised agitation among the unemployed of the City, as trade conditions improved throughout 1911 and unemployment ceased to be a major problem for the first time since 1902.

The ensuing two years were to see the problem of unemployment disappear from view and be replaced by an upsurge in industrial unrest in Leeds without precedent. From 1911 to 1914 the City was to see a major strike of tramway workers in 1911, carters in 1912 and in 1913 the most

widespread strike wave bringing in such diverse groups of workers as carters, shop assistants of the Leeds Cooperative Society and manual employees of the City Corporation. In all cases the impetus was to come from below and to bring out large groups of workers on strike with a successful conclusion. Concentrated mainly in the area of distribution, retailing and the provision of municipal services, these strike movements gave impetus to union action among hitherto badly organised groups of workers such as the mainly female clothing operatives in 1913. In 1911 and 1912 this occurred against the background of widespread industrial unrest in Britain, of a scale and intensity without precedent.

Although no clashes between strikers and the police and army were to occur on the scale of those that took place in Liverpool and South Wales in 1911, the Leeds Carter strike was to challenge the control the local police had of the streets of the City and put the issue of strike control in the forefront of municipal politics. (19) As Leeds was as much a commercial and distributive centre as a centre of manufacture, the strikes affecting the railways and the Carters were to engage the support of employers for the City Council in its growing confrontation with the municipal trade unions, which increasingly became the major battleground between the employers and municipality on the one hand and the trade unions and Labour Party on the other.

The long-time discontent of tramway workers culminated in a conference



on their grievances held on 27 July 1911 and attended by the General Secretary of the Amalgamated Tramway and Vehicle Works and the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Tramways' Committee, Charles F. Tetley and Frederick Kitson, in the company of the Lord Mayor. (20) Failure to reach an agreement resulted in a lightning strike, which was settled on 4 August 1911 in favour of the Tramway Workers through the agency of the Board of Trade arbitrator H. B. Askwith. (21) The strike was marked by its speed and unanimity, appeals by the management and attempts to delay the threat of strike action being ignored. No attempt was made by the Tramway management to run the tramways and vigorous picketing at the City boundaries prevented the access of Wakefield and Bradford trams to the Leeds tramway routes. One tram at least was derailed by strikers at Thwaite Gate in South East Leeds and the 950 members of the Tramway Union including drivers, conductors and shed men, enjoyed the support of engineering workers employed in Hunslet Road, who came out in large numbers to jeer at the Wakefield tram drivers who crossed the Leeds picket lines. (22)

The effectiveness of the strike was illustrated by the plaint of The Leeds Mercury of 3 August 1911 that:

Leeds for the first time since tramways were inaugurated in the City will find itself today without a service of cars, the Tramway employees having decided early in the morning after a protracted meeting to strike forthwith.



After further noting that the appeal to adjourn the strike had been turned down unanimously it commented that:

... the absence of service of tram cars caused great inconvenience to the business population of the City during the day. (23)

The settlement with the City Council led to the granting of the most widespread concessions to the tramway workers, including higher hourly rates of pay, shorter hours and restrictions on the use of the detested system of split turns. The management's arbitrary control of working practices was curtailed by negotiated scales of remuneration and agreed promotion procedures. The settlement was to last for three years, subject to six months notice by either side. (24)

The City Council had to accept the settlement with the best grace possible. Previously, in appointing a Sub-Committee to negotiation with the representatives of the strikers, the Conservative and Liberal leaders, Charles Wilson and Fred Kinder had succeeded in moving for the exclusion of members of the Labour Group. Kinder had justified his vote by declaring that the Labour Party could not serve two masters, the ratepayer and the ratepayers' employees, following John Badlay's protest at their exclusion and openly voiced support for the strikers. (25) The sub-Committee which included Wilson and Kinder was forced to sign the settlement in the presence of the two Board of Trade representatives Askwith and D. C. Cummins. The exclusion of the Labour

representatives was opposed by some members of the Liberal Group, including the former leader, Herbert Brown and Councillor Alf Masser, who remarked after attending the strikers' mass meeting, that he had not the slightest idea that the feeling of the men on the question of split turns was so strong. The amendment excluding Labour only passed by a margin of 27 to 19, evidencing the widespread dissatisfaction with the Tramways Committee's handling of the dispute. (26)

Barely a fortnight after the conclusion of the Tramway Workers strike, the threat of a Railway strike loomed. Noting that the Leeds Railwayworkers were known for their caution in entering upon strikes, The Leeds Mercury of 14 August 1911 observed:

Among the more firey and impetuous workers in other districts, Leeds is regarded with something approaching contempt, it being one of the most difficult centres in the country to induce to support a strike policy. (27)

By 18 August, the national Railway Strike reached Leeds with the goods yards closed and passenger services almost at a standstill. A major feature of the strike was the militant picketing. There were reports of passengers with luggage, attacked by pickets and of some pickets being armed with knives to cut the harnesses of horse drawn carts. Carts were ambushed and the goods they carried were thrown into the road. (28)

Commenting on an incident where a cart driver who tried to drive



through a picketing crowd was dragged off his cart and badly beaten, The Leeds Mercury complained that not a single police officer was in sight the greater part of the day. (29) At the two central railway stations, groups of soldiers and police were stationed, without attempting to venture out. Later on 19 August 1911, they were relieved by 600 men of the 2nd West Yorkshire Regiment who took up position outside the Great Northern Station, accompanied by units of the Queen's Royal Lancers. The Infantry were armed with rifles, bayonets and revolvers and the lancers with tipped lances and heavy calibre sabres. They were later reinforced by units of the Royal Horse Artillery armed with carbines and side arms. (30)

The augmentation of the military at the two Central Stations failed to avert violent scenes outside the Marsh Lane Goods Station in East Leeds, which saw clashes between pickets and carters employed by the market merchants. By contrast, the Hunslet Yard of the Midland Railway Company was early secured by the forces of order; squadrons of mounted police using it as a base to break through the picket lines to protect a convoy of carts to the market. Widespread hostility was demonstrated by sympathetic crowds, Hussars conveying frozen meat in army wagons to a cold storage plant were followed by an immense crowd that cheered and booed. The Leeds Mercury expressed fear that the City's coal supply would be exhausted and the engineering and clothing industries would have to close. (31)



The conclusion of the national railway strike on 20 August 1911 saw no end to the clashes between the military and strikers in Leeds. On 20 August, the military charged a crowd in City Square, which had attacked a parcel cart carrying evening papers out of Leeds. (32) By then, the number of pickets were being curtailed by an increased police presence. Following the termination of the strike, strong protests were launched by commercial associations in Leeds against the practice of picketing adopted by the strikers, in particular the Leeds & District Chamber of Trade, representing many shop-keepers in the City Centre. A meeting held by them on 29 August 1911 called for the repeal of Section 24 of the Trades Disputes Act and for police intervention to prevent picketing. (33)

Almost contemporary with the railway strike was that of the City's engineering apprentices, which started on 13 August, at Fairbairn Lawson, Combe & Barbour Ltd's works on Wellington Street. It spread to major engineering firms such as Greenwood & Batley & Co. Ltd., J. Fowler & Co. Ltd., Thomas Green & Sons Ltd. and Joshua Buckton & Co. Ltd. (34) Their demand was for their wages to rise in proportion to other engineering raises recently granted, asking 1/- a week advance for all ages. Lacking support from the Engineers' Union they requested J. E. Smith, organiser of the Gasworkers' to represent them, to which he readily agreed, asking the Lord Mayor to mediate with the Iron & Trade Employees Association. The strike was significant as evidence of the spread of union activity to groups of workers who had previously been

unorganised and passive.

The incidents of the railway strike were to have major repercussions in the City Council debates at the next meeting on 6 September 1911. Badlay attempted to place a resolution on the agenda paper, censuring the Government for its "insidious move towards the destruction of civil liberty" by sending the military to the Strike Centres during the railway troubles. The discussion on the resolution dragged on for over two hours during which the Lord Mayor twice ignored efforts to draw his attention to the fact that there was not a quorum present. The debate culminated with the voting down of Badlay's amendment by 35 votes to 5. (35)

The debate showed up the isolation of the Labour Group on the Council, and its lack of support from any section of the Liberal Party. William Byrne, one of the group, had launched the debate by unsuccessfully calling on the Chairman of the Watch Committee to withdraw a resolution expressing the City Council's appreciation of the police force's conduct during the railway strike. His attempt to cite cases of police high handedness during the strike were dismissed by the Watch Committee Chairman E. E. Lawson, one of the City's leading engineering employers, who expressed the opinion that the police had behaved admirably throughout a very difficult period. (36)

Badlay, in support of his resolution, cited the case of the latest strike



where the Central Government had sent in troops without informing the City Council. He denied there was any need to call in the army and called the Government's action a serious subversion of the well-established civil powers of a corporate body and an overriding of the Leeds citizens and those they had placed in power. As the Central Government had acted unlawfully and adopted a course which seriously menaced civil liberty, he urged on the City Council as custodians of the City to determine alone whether it was appropriate to call in military aid.

The resolution of Badlay received a broadside of opposition from leading Conservatives such as E. E. Lawson (Watch Committee Chairman), W. H. Clarke (Education Committee Chairman) and Charles Wilson. All gave wholehearted support to the Government's action in the late railway strike and derided any suggestion that the presence of the military was a threat to civil liberty, rather that the strike was a threat to individual liberty. The Liberal leader, Kinder, surpassed his Conservative colleagues in the vehemence of his defence of the Government's action. He praised the Government for preventing bloodshed throughout the length and breadth of the land, arguing that for the time being it had converted itself into a Committee of Public Safety and had they not done this they would have been worthy of the utmost condemnation. (37)

There was little evidence of decline of the industrial unrest that had marked most of 1912 in Leeds. The women and girls at Lister & Co,



woollen manufacturers had gone on strike on 17 August 1912, and had received the support of the ILP and the Miners' Union which had put its hall, the Miners' Institute at their disposal. (38) After a demonstration round the City Centre with banners marked "Help Lister Girls on Strike", 150 new members were recruited to the Textile Union by Ben Turner, its General Secretary. Further strikes among women workers took place at Bucktons Linen Works of Hunslet, among cop winders in September. (39) Again, support came from the Textile Workers' Union and the Miners' Union, which again loaned the Miners' Institute.

September 1911 saw the strike of miners employed in collieries adjoining Leeds, followed by an employers lock-out. The dispute was marked from its inception by violent clashes between picketing miners and the police, particularly at the Waterloo Main Colliery. In character with other strikes in this year, the dispute was launched by juvenile workers, who came out in strike on their own initiative. Clashes with the police continued throughout September, with attempts at attacking the manager's house at Waterloo Main. (40)

The 3 October 1911 edition of The Leeds Mercury under the heading of 'Labour Unrest - Extensive Disaffected in Leeds' commented:

There is widespread disaffection among many classes of organised labour in Leeds, and unless friendly terms of settlement are arrived at within the next fortnight, there is a prospect of serious developments in more than one department. (41)

In the same edition it carried reports of movements for increased wages and reduced hours among Cloth Finishers, Leeds Corporation employees, boy workers at Stanley Shoe Works of C. Davison of Compton Road, Leeds and boy under-pressers and girl machinists at George Firth & Co., Ashton Road. In the last dispute, The Leeds Mercury reporter noted large numbers of factory hands wearing red ribbons and acting as pickets, gathered outside their works.

The matter of increased wages for municipal employees continued to arise. At the City Council meeting of 4 October 1911, J. D. Macrae moved for an eight-hour day for council employees, with a six-day week without reduction of wages per week. (42) The aftermath of the Tramway Workers' strike continued into October, with requests by their representatives to the City Council for another conference with arbitrators to settle matters in dispute ensuing from the August agreement. Among the complaints was that the clauses to make the hours of the conductors and motormen as similar as possible had been broken by the Corporation. (43)

The beginning of 1912 saw further strikes, including that of the Carters employed by the Leeds Cooperative Society following an application for an advance in wages, put forward by a representative of the United Carters' Association. On 18 January 1912 they agreed to return to work under a fortnight's truce, without victimisation and to submit to



arbitration after their union had denounced the strike as 'unconstitutional'.

(44) By 30 April, The Leeds Mercury was still reporting considerable unrest among a great variety of occupations in Leeds, citing the case of requests for wage advances among the City's joiners and cabinetmakers and the successful claim by warehousemen and shop assistants employed by the large woollen warehouses on Wellington Street. (45)

As the wave of industrial unrest declined through 1912, the City's authorities lost no time in building up the instruments to resist the return of militant demonstrations and picketing. By April 1912, nearly fifty men had been enrolled in the Leeds Police Reserve, following the instructions of the Home Office that the regular police forces should be supplemented in times of general public disorder. Difficulties arose almost immediately, due to resentment by the regular police that they were only being paid 27/- per week, while the reserves they were drafted to teach were earning 30/-. (46)

The relative industrial quiet of 1912 in Leeds was broken by the lightning strike of Corporation Scavengers on 24 October 1912. (47) This was the culmination of two years of agitation by the Scavengers for better conditions and after delays and threats of a strike, agreement had been entered into in 1911, between the Scavengers and the Corporation giving them a minimum wage of 6d per hour for a 48-hour week. Older workers were excluded from the minimum rates and had been paid from £1 to 25/-



An agitation had been started to pay the older men at a minimum rate of 6d per hour, but had failed to persuade the Conservative controlled Committee. (48)

At a mass meeting held on 24 October 1912 at Salem Hall, a decision was taken to strike immediately, bringing out between 600-700 Scavengers and 30 old men. The men were reported as treating the matter as a serious question of principle, considering that the payment of men at less than the minimum wage was a menace to their recent gains. The decision came as a surprise to the department and the Sanitary Committee. The Leeds Mercury of 25 October was given to comment:

The gravity of the strike is too obvious to need enlarging upon. The work is humble but the health of the City depends upon it, and with only a very few days cessation of the men's labour there would be a grave danger of an outbreak of pestilential disease.

The strike was successfully concluded within 24 hours, the Sanitary Committee, which had initially rejected the claim, giving in and granting a rise to all the old men. (49)

Discontent among the Tramway workers persisted, fuelled by resentment at the disciplinary powers wielded by the management that had lost none of their arbitrariness since the 1911 settlement. The dismissal of four tramway employees in November 1912 was bitterly opposed by members

of their union, who saw this as a demonstration of the arbitrary nature of the department's disciplinary procedures and a culmination of its policy of squeezing more work out of its employees by reducing the numbers employed without any reduction in the workload. George Pearson, the Union Secretary in Leeds had failed to persuade the management to reinstate two of those dismissed, leading to demands for a ballot for strike action. (50)

Relations between the tramwaymen and the department were not improved by an interview given to The Yorkshire Evening Post by J. B. Hamilton, where he derided the complaints of the men as:

... an agitation got up for a purpose. The union officials would like to get the control of the system into their own hands and then they might be satisfied ... All this talk of discontent and dismissals is nonsense so long as the men do their work properly and discipline is maintained ... (51)

However, the treatment of the dismissed tramwaymen was not enough to bring out the tramway workers; a meeting they held on 19 December 1912 resulted in the calling off of the intended strike as an insufficiently high percentage voted in favour. Walt Wood, present at the meeting, denounced the local press for bringing about this result, by their unscrupulous and misleading reporting. (52)

The tramwaymen sought the backing of the Trades Council, with both

George Pearson and Harold Clay addressing its full meeting on 8 December. (53) On Connellan's prompting a resolution was passed censuring the Tramway Committee for refusing to submit the matter of the dismissed men to arbitration and offering full support in the case of any stoppages taking place. Connellan moved from his usual stance of moderation, saying that neither party could afford to ignore the public. A stoppage of the tramways would be an inconvenience and loss to the workers, but they would put up with it in order to resist injustice to the men. The Trades Council delegates were influenced in their voting support by a recent decision of the Tramways Committee on 13 December, which upheld Hamilton's decisions after hearing a deputation of three employees representatives that had come to protest on behalf of those dismissed. (54)

Attacks on the tramway workers and their Union increased in the local press. On 20 December The Yorkshire Evening Post attacked the integrity of George Pearson, saying that he could not be a Councillor, Member of the Tramways' Committee and a trade union officer at the same time. It concluded:

In this dispute he has accepted the wholly illogical position of sitting on a Committee formed to administer an undertaking and devoting his energies to an attempt to throw that undertaking into confusion.  
(55)



The sole newspaper to support him was the Labour Party's weekly organ The Leeds Weekly Citizen. In its edition of the 27 December, it attempted to rebut The Evening Post's accusation, by stressing Pearson's moderation and his reluctance to stir the members of his Union into strike action. It cited the fact that Pearson was a direct representative of 1,500 workmen in the City, being more a representative than other members of the committee. In contrast, it denounced the £900 per year salary of Hamilton and his high paid assistants who had given evidence at the Committee, concluding:

Did they represent the City? ... they represented despotism, the system that will wrench from the City the control of its own enterprises and having got the property will squeeze it for their own advantage. It was quite all right for them to attend who were never elected. It is only the elected representatives of the Workers who is not all right. (56)

Marking the increasingly tough stance of the City Corporation to the tramway and other municipal workers was the Liberal Alderman, Herbert Brown's interview with the Yorkshire Evening Post on 20 December. Referring to the fact that municipal trade unionists officials sat on City Council Committees, he declared:

I have always been and shall be, dead set against the idea I have heard ... that any remarks I make on the Tramway Committee's meetings are conveyed straight to the men. Now there may be some members of the Committee who, knowing that whatever they say derogatory to the men will be taken straight to them, have not the courage to state their candid opinions in the Committee. They may be far able men than myself but it is not everybody who cares to face the mob. (57)

Growing assertiveness by private employers was also demonstrated by the setting up on 16 December 1912 of a new employers' association in Leeds. (58) Its founding meeting was attended by prominent local industrialists like Frederick Kitson, J. E. Bedford and Jonathan Peate, many of whom, like Peate, having a long history of hostility to trade unions. (59) Although formally set up as a pressure group, it could possibly be converted into a strike breaking body in the event of a major industrial dispute in the City.

The Labour Group remained isolated at the next City Council Meeting on 31 December 1912 when it tried to raise the issue of the dismissed tramwaymen. The Leeds LRC Secretary, D. B. Foster, tried to read into the Council Minutes a condemnation of the sole discretion of the Tramway Manager in hiring and discharging of his employees. Foster adopted a threatening note, saying that if the Council refused justice to the men, they would have Labour coming to their Chamber in strong and angry forces and some of those in the way would have to go. Following an interjection by a Conservative Alderman "You want to be master?", Foster burst out - "We want justice and if it is necessary to be masters to get it, we will be masters". (60)

The Council debate took on even more bitter tones after the Conservative and Liberal majority had rejected a Labour Group request for tramway ticket concessions in favour of corporation lamplighters. The Labour



Group complained bitterly about the rude and peremptory attitude of the Council majority, particularly Charles Wilson, the Conservative leader, to any proposals put forward on behalf of their supporters. John Badlay declared that if the Lord Mayor did not make Wilson give more consideration and courtesy to the men's representatives they would take care it was secured. Denying that the municipal trade unions wanted a strike, he warned that there would be strikes if they did not get favourable treatment in the Council Chamber. Councillor Isaac Brassington added to this by complaining that:

in no city in the kingdom did the Labour Party  
get worse treatment than in the City of Leeds, and  
in no city did the Tories and Liberals unite more  
completely to defeat their efforts.

He finished by noting that:

... they [the Labour group] had to come to the  
Council indignant at the treatment they had to  
endure in the Committees. (61)

As if to emphasise the Council majority's contempt for the Labour minority, it voted down its motion to have Brassington placed on the Street Lighting Committee, which had just been vacated by the removal of the previous Labour representative to another Committee. (62) It seemed that only the capture of control of the Council by a Labour majority would lead to the satisfaction of the grievances of the tramway and other municipal workers, and there was no chance of this before the November elections. (63)



The Labour unrest that had been a feature of the last two years in Leeds, continued in 1913 with a strike in February of the clothing operatives, demanding higher wages and the abolition of fines and deductions for minor breaches of regulations. The Clothing Workers were overwhelmingly un-unionised and the turn out of so many of them was without precedent, as was the duration of the strike which lasted into April. (64) They were joined by a city-wide strike of dyers in January, who were represented by the GGLU, the largest trade union of the unskilled and semi-skilled. (65)

The growing atmosphere of confrontation between the City Council majority and the trade unions representing the Council's employees was signalled by the formation of a Federal Council representing eight trade unions, whose membership included municipal workers, on 22 April 1913. (66) The founding conference was held at the offices of the Leeds Branch of the Tramway & Vehicle Workers' Union and the new organisation could claim to represent nearly 6,000 manual employees of the City Council. The 'Working Federation' as the alliance was termed, was explicitly set up for arriving at a common basis of action with a view to enforcing the recognition of grievances that arose from time to time, and to provide effective coordination a Federal Council was established. (67)

The principal trade unions represented at the Conference were the GGLU,

Tramway & Vehicle Workers' Union, the ASE, the Street Mason & Paviers' Society and a number of small craft unions with members employed by the City Council. Most extensive in its membership was the GGLU, with a virtual monopoly of representation of those employed in the highways, gas, water, lighting, electricity and sewerage departments. It also introduced a demand in the Conference for a 48-hour week and an immediate advance of 2/- per week. (68)

Reporting on the Conference, The Leeds Mercury was quick to grasp the significance of the new alliance. In its edition of 23 April 1913 it opined:

The formation of such a Council is of great importance not only to the unions themselves, but to the Corporation and the citizens as a whole ... in future when a strike of one section of Corporation workmen is considered necessary by the men's leaders ... the machinery is at hand for the calling of a general strike ... to emphasise the sectional demands. (69)

In contrast, the formation of the Federal Council of Municipal Employees seemed to have little impact on the rest of the Labour Movement in Leeds, particularly its political wing. Its establishment remained unreported in the Labour organ The Leeds Weekly Citizen, and discussions relating to the conditions of employment of municipal employees were completely absent from the pages of The Leeds Weekly Citizen after an initial report on 18 April, or the debates of the City Council before June 1913, when the paviers' strike was to focus attention



on it. (70) Similarly, no traces of the impact of the new Federation are to be found in the transactions of the Leeds Trades Council during April and May 1913. A request from the Tramway Workers that the President and Secretary of the Trades Council should attend the opening of the National Conference of their Unions was dealt with as a routine matter by the Trades Council executive on 22 May 1913, and agreed to without discussion. (71)

An opportunity to demonstrate that they were in the vanguard of municipal trade unions was provided for the Leeds Tramway Workers by the National Conference of their Union held in Leeds from 27 May 1913. On welcoming delegates to the Conference, George Pearson said he could not welcome them to a great city " ... where there was poverty, low wages and all the attendant evils". (72) Harold Clay in his address as President of the Conference, conceded that there had been an advance in wages for his members during the last year and one or two reductions in hours worked, but declared that there was little use in gaining increased wages when his members had to work long hours at degrading toil; being reduced to automatons. Referring to the significant section of his men who were not municipal employees, he condemned the hours worked by carters as not fit for horses. (73)

Pearson, in a further address to the Conference, took to task the National Executive of the Union for its failure to back the reduction of the hours of



tramwaymen in Hull; concluding on a militant note:

If Hull, if Halifax, if Hell is prepared to ask for a reduction of six hours a week, if they can get it, good luck to them, and our executive should help them to get it.

Pearson enhanced his standing in the union by being chosen as its delegate to the Trade Union Congress, over the opposition of the National Executive. (74)

Emphasising the combative nature of the union's delegates was the passing of a resolution calling on the executive to advise any branch of the union that desired to make an application to their employers for an advance of wages, that this should include a clause requesting a reduction in the hours of work. Pearson, speaking in support, added a note of levity when he declared: "... they ought to give a man a chance to be lazy for some part of his life". The Conference concluded with a call for a national eight-hour day or a 48-hour week for the union members, with a proviso that the eight hours should not be spread over more than ten hours, a reference to the practice of split turns. (75)

Coinciding with the Conference was an outbreak of a major strike of Carters in Bradford involving clashes between strikers and large deployments of police. The strike was not without its effect on Leeds, The Leeds Mercury on 30 May 1913 reporting the case of one large firm

of Leeds carters which was engaged in a large trade between Leeds and Bradford, having all its business practically at a standstill. With strikes of carters breaking out in Sheffield and Huddersfield, there was growing fear among Leeds carting contractors that the same action might be taken by carters in their employment, as a consequence of the echos of the Bradford strike. (76)

The Labour Group on the City Council was more preoccupied with the role of the Leeds police as strike breakers in other towns than with their possible use in Leeds. At the Council Meeting of 3 June 1911, a Labour Councillor, Frederick Gath moved in favour of stopping the use of Leeds police in other cities but was ruled out of order by the Lord Mayor. Gath continued to protest even after the Town Clerk pronounced that the use of police was outside the jurisdiction of the City Council and solely within the ambit of the Watch Committee. (77) The Labour Party seemed to exhibit little awareness of the implications arising from the setting up of the Federal Council in April, not until 15 August 1913 did The Leeds Weekly Citizen refer to the existence of the Federal Council, by which time the Leeds Municipal Workers had come out for an across the board advance of 2/- on the pre-June wage rates for every worker. (78)

On the eve of the summer of 1913, the Municipal Workers, the most strongly organised of trade unionists in Leeds, were united as they had never been before through a formal organisation and guiding committee.



Their influence over the Labour Party in the City never seemed so extensive, with Walt Wood the GGLU organiser now returning to prominence after his breach with the Party in 1908 and the Tramway Workers' Secretary, George Pearson, a City Councillor since 1909 and Leader of the Labour Group on the City Council after Badlay's resignation in August 1913. (79) In addition, the movement of the local BSP into all-out affiliation with the Leeds LRC was to ensure that Harold Clay, the other prominent figure in the Tramway Workers' Union, would play a significant role in the Labour Party, being elected its President in 1913. (80)

There were, however, differences in emphasis within the united front of manual municipal workers. Many of the categories of workers including the Gasworkers, had not been militant in the previous decade and had experienced steady erosion in their real wages. Catching up on their previous losses was their priority. In contrast, the Tramway workers were relatively well paid and continually restless over the previous decade or more, due to discontent with the conditions of their employment, which they perceived to be onerous. (81) In addition they harboured deep resentment and suspicion towards their management, particularly its head, J. B. Hamilton. Reduction in hours worked and the curtailment of split turns together with a desire for a less arbitrary management were of equal importance to the question of wage rises. Although Leeds had not experienced the great wave of militancy and



unrest that had marked other parts of Britain in 1911 and 1912, there had been significant strikes affecting sections of the workforce not previously well organised. While those employed in manufacturing remained largely quiescent in this period, strikes by carters and others handling the goods manufactured and distributed in the City, alarmed the business interests in the City and created a climate where the intransigence of Council leaders like Charles Wilson would be able to rely on their support in a future contest with a major section of the organised labour force.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: Footnotes**

- (1) The phenomena of intense industrial unrest under the last Liberal government is dealt with at varying length by G. Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England (1935/1966); T. Wilson, The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914-35 (1966). The impact of syndicalist thought and practice have been examined among others by Robert Holton, British Syndicalism 1910-14 (1976) and Walter Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain (1969).
- (2) Yorkshire Factory Times, 28 October 1909.
- (3) Ibid., at the meeting to consider terms held at Westminster Hall, New York Road on 23 October 1909, Will Thorne backed up the Leeds GGLU organiser J. E. Smith in promoting the settlement to a reluctant audience.
- (4) Leeds Mercury, 20 December 1910.
- (5) Ibid., 18 December 1910.
- (6) Ibid., 23 December 1910.
- (7) Ibid., 21 September 1907, 27 September 1907 and 10 October 1907.
- (8) Yorkshire Factory Times, 11 November 1909.
- (9) Ibid., 24 March 1910.
- (10) Ibid., 7 October 1910.
- (11) Ibid., 9 June 1910.
- (12) Leeds Mercury, 14 December 1910.
- (13) Ibid., 13 December 1910.
- (14) Ibid., 13 December 1910.
- (15) Ibid., 20 December 1910.
- (16) Ibid., 20 December 1910.
- (17) Ibid., 27 January 1911, Yorkshire Post 27 January 1911.

- (18) However, Charles Wilson took the opportunity to throw doubt on the numbers claimed to be unemployed and attacked the City Council's policy of giving monetary assistance to prospective emigrants as there was no provision for repayment through the Distress Committee.
- (19) Leeds Mercury, 19 August 1911 for details of disorders during the Carters' Strike.
- (20) Ibid., 28 July 1911.
- (21) Ibid., 5 August 1911.
- (22) Ibid., 4 August 1911.
- (23) Ibid., 3 August 1911.
- (24) Ibid., 5 August 1911; Charles F. Tetley, Chairman of the Tramways Committee estimated the increased cost of the settlement at £6,200 per year, less than the original claim of £10,000.
- (25) Yorkshire Post, 4 August 1911.
- (26) Leeds Mercury, 4 August 1911.
- (27) Ibid., 14 August 1911.
- (28) Ibid., 19 August 1911.
- (29) Ibid., 21 August 1911.
- (30) Yorkshire Post, 20 August 1911.
- (31) Leeds Mercury, 21 August 1911.
- (32) Ibid., 21 August 1911.
- (33) Ibid., 30 August 1911, Yorkshire Post, 30 August 1911.
- (34) Ibid., 16 August 1911.
- (35) Ibid., 7 September 1911.
- (36) Lawson was a director of Fairbairn Lawson, Combe & Barbour Ltd. which had recently been affected by the strike of engineering apprentices in August 1911.
- (37) Yorkshire Post, 7 September 1911.



- (38) Yorkshire Factory Times, 24 August 1911.
- (39) Ibid., 7 September 1911.
- (40) Ibid., 28 September 1911.
- (41) Leeds Mercury, 3 October 1911.
- (42) Yorkshire Post, 5 October 1911.
- (43) Yorkshire Factory Times, 26 October 1911.
- (44) Leeds Mercury, 18 January 1912.
- (45) Ibid., 30 April 1912.
- (46) Yorkshire Post, 30 April 1912.
- (47) Leeds Mercury, 25 October 1912.
- (48) The number of scavengers earning full rates stood at 600-700 with 30 classified as 'old men', Leeds Mercury 25 October 1912.
- (49) Leeds Mercury, 25 October 1912.
- (50) Ibid., 4 December 19, 12, 5 December 1912.
- (51) Yorkshire Evening Post, 2 December 1912.
- (52) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 20 December 1912.
- (53) LTC Minutes, 18 December 1912.
- (54) Leeds Mercury, 17 December 1912.
- (55) Yorkshire Evening Post, 20 December 1912.
- (56) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 27 December 1912.
- (57) Yorkshire Evening Post, 20 December 1912.
- (58) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 27 December 1912.
- (59) Jonathan Peate was a leading woollen manufacturer in the industrial village of Yeadon, an executive member of the Leeds Chamber of Commerce, heavily dependent upon exports abroad of woollen cloth. He was noted for his blunt manner and forceful responses to the claims of Labour, see Yeadon, Yorkshire, (ed.) T. Illingworth (Leeds 1991).

- (60) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 3 January 1913.
- (61) Yorkshire Post, 3 January 1913.
- (62) The Labour group had previously urged the granting of tram tokens by the Street Lighting Committee to its employees. Up to 1913 Charles Thaxton had been the Labour representative on the Street Lighting Committee, but had been voted off, and placed on the less influential Library Committee.
- (63) At a speech to Leeds Non-Political Ratepayers Association reported in Leeds Weekly Citizen of 10 January 1913, Charles Wilson had blamed the Council Committees for carrying too many inefficient men, hinting at the need for a reduction of the City Council labour force, particularly among the older men in council employment.
- (64) Leeds Mercury, 1 February 1913.
- (65) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 10 January 1913.
- (66) Leeds Mercury, 23 April 1913, Leeds Weekly Citizen, 18 April 1913.
- (67) Possible inspiration for the Federation might lay in the National Transport Workers Federation set up in 1910 to join maritime and dock workers in one big confederal union, representing the upsurge of militancy among those categories of workers; see Jonathan Schneer, Ben Tillet (1982).
- (68) Leeds Mercury, 23 April 1913.
- (69) Ibid., where the report of the inaugural meeting of the Federation was featured under the alarmist headlines "Municipal Trade Unionists - Workers form Federal Council to facilitate the General Strike".
- (70) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 13 June 1913.
- (71) LTC Minutes, 22 May 1913.
- (72) Leeds Mercury, 28 May 1913.
- (73) Ibid., 29 May 1913.
- (74) Ibid., 29 May 1913.
- (75) Ibid., 29 May 1913.

- (76) Ibid., 30 May 1913.
- (77) Yorkshire Post, 4 June 1913.
- (78) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 15 August 1913.
- (79) Badlay remained an Alderman until November 1913, but with his resignation as group leader, his influence in the Labour Party in Leeds ceased altogether.
- (80) Leeds LRC Yearbook 1913-14.
- (81) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 20 December 1912.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **THE LEEDS CORPORATION STRIKE AND ITS AFTERMATH**

#### **a) The June Strike and the Federal Council**

By 1913 the relations of the Leeds Labour Party with the governing Conservative and Liberal majority on the City Council reached an all time low. The Labour Group on the Council found itself blocked from achieving any measure of social reform, and barred from what it considered its fair share of the Aldermanic Seats and representation on the major committees by an unholy alliance of Conservatives and Liberals; the latter increasingly dependent on the favours of the Conservative Party, as its own political support declined. At the same time the main municipal trade unions, among the most important backers of the Leeds Labour Party, found themselves faced increasingly with a hostile and authoritarian management in the major labour employing departments of the City Corporation. With this the right of prominent trade union officials to sit on the City Council and speak up on behalf of Corporation workers, was impugned increasingly by the leaders of the Conservative and Liberal Parties. All this coincided with a period of increasing industrial unrest in Britain, which had its reflection in a number of major local strikes in Leeds.

A new stage in the relations between the City Council and its employees was signalled by a strike of 150 paviers' labourers on 5 June 1913. Their demand was for an advance of  $\frac{1}{2}$ d per hour in wages, with additional rates for overtime work. The strike spread to 150 permanent way workmen, 750 Scavengers and 150 park employees. (1) By 7 June, there were 1,200 on strike. These additional strikes were called in sympathy with the paviers, but also contained claims for higher hourly rates of pay, and in the case of the tramway permanent way workmen, demands for free travelling on tramways to and from work and compensation for loss of time through bad weather. (2)

The City Council was taken by surprise by the scale of the strikes and appeared to respond in a conciliatory manner. In the case of the claims of the maintenance of way workers, the Tramway Manager and the Chairman of the Tramway Committee promised George Pearson that they would concede whatever terms were agreed to by private contractors and the Highways Committee. At a meeting between paviers, labourers and contractors held on 6 June 1913 the whole of the men's demands were conceded, except for an hour's pay as compensation for work stoppages. This proved unacceptable to the men and they and the other groups of striking workers continued to hold out for their full claims. (3)

In response to what was perceived to be the evasiveness of the City Council to their claims, the paviers at a mass meeting held on 9 June



called on all the rest of the Corporation employees to cease work at once with a view to forcing the Corporation's hands and bring about a speedy settlement. In anticipation of the Corporation's Consultative Committee's meeting the following day, they called on tramway drivers, conductors, gas workers and electric light workers to come out on strike. Over the recommendation of the GGLU General Secretary, Will Thorne, that they should hold back from striking until hearing the Consultative Committee's decision, a resolution in favour of all-out strike by municipal employees was passed without dissent, accompanied by loud cheers. (4)

Through 10 June the strikers were joined by electrical supply workers, gas workers from the gas metre and store departments and smaller groups from the water main, sewage and electric cable departments. This was well below an all-round strike which had been anticipated and the City's lighting and tramway undertakings were not affected. Most of the gas workers held off from striking on the recommendation of their union officials that they first hand in the fortnightly notice which they were legally compelled to give. At the same time the Highways Committee had conceded all of the original claims of the paviers. (5)

The initial strikes in sympathy with the paviers were turning into separate claims for increased wages and better conditions. A mass outdoor meeting outside the Town Hall held in the afternoon voted a resolution calling upon "all the rest of the Corporation employes to cease



work at once to force the Corporation's hand". (6)

During the day a meeting of the Highways Committee decided to concede most of the pavior's claims, in advance of the meeting of the Consultative Committee on the following day.

The GGLU attempted to prevent the strike from spreading to the gas and electric light workers. Its Secretary, Will Thorne, addressing another meeting of strikers, declared that his union was not yet ready to call out the rest of the members in the employ of the Corporation until they had attempted negotiation with the Consultative Committee. The momentum in favour of spreading the strike was only partly arrested by the GGLU's officials' cautious stance. By 11 June 1913 the park keepers came out in support of their own claims and other groups of municipal employees seemed likely to follow. Attitudes were hardening against the Consultative Committee, which was blamed by the workers for the previous inflexibility of the labour employing committees of the Corporation. A strikers' mass meeting on 11 June had called for the abolition of the committee and pledged not to return to work in sections until they had achieved this. (7)

In advance of the critical negotiations with the Consultative Committee, the Labour members of the City Council lobbied the Lord Mayor to arrange a special meeting of the Council to override the authority of the

Committee. Walt Wood told the press that he was powerless to stem the tide of the dispute and blamed the Consultative Committee for the spread of the strikes. He stated that the concession of six holidays a year to the highway workers would settle the dispute. (8) By the evening of the 12 June, the strike began to spread to workers at the electrical power station in Whitehall Road and very few men turned up for the night shifts. The prospect of a considerable reduction in street lighting loomed large. The men on strike maintained that they were striking purely in sympathy with the paviors.

Walt Wood pledged at a mass meeting to call out the municipal workers if no settlement was achieved. George Pearson addressing a meeting of tramworkers, announced that the local executive of their union had asked the National Executive for permission to call a strike and this had been granted. He called the strike in support of the paviors' labourers. (9)

It seemed that only the matter of a concession of six days holiday a year to the paviors' labourers, two more days than their present entitlement, stood between a settlement of the strike. Press sympathy was shifting in favour of the strikers' case; The Leeds Mercury in its edition of 12 June, referring to the statesmanship of the Council's Special Committee, declared:

We are entitled to demand that they shall not be jeopardised either by unnecessary delay or by narrow views of responsibilities resting upon the City Council.



We venture seriously to urge upon the City Fathers that the onus of giving way rests more upon them than upon the workpeople. Great bodies of men do not face the hardships of a strike without some real even though unformulated grievances, behind them and it is one of the duties of the municipality to prove itself a model employer of labour." (10)

Faced with streets unswept for six days and the prospect of possible closing down of the City's gas and electrical supply stations, the Special Committee of the Council totally conceded to the Union claims on 12 June. Hailed as a commonsense settlement by The Leeds Mercury, it granted the six days holiday to the paviers' labourers, with pay, a wage of 28/- for all park rangers with uniform hours of working and to the rest of the parkmen 26/- for a 53 hours week. Other employees of the Corporation such as 200 men in the Gas Department received increases as well.

Addressing a mass meeting that accepted the terms of the settlement, Walt Wood said that the men had gained the greatest victory in the North of England for the last ten to fifteen years. There was undoubtedly, he continued, a feeling of union among the Corporation workmen which would make its weight felt in the near future. He also demanded for the gasworkers an advance of 2/- to be considered as part of the union's claim for a minimum wage of 30/- per week for a 48 hour week. In addition, their union would campaign for security of tenure to protect victimisation in the future, and above all they wanted a living wage and by getting this



for municipal workers they would be helping them to get it for workers outside the Corporation. Also addressing the meeting, George Pearson declared that although a victory had been gained, the tramwaymen would still continue their policy of supporting other municipal workers even to the point of striking in sympathy. (11)

The formation of the Federal Council of Municipal Employees and the union among municipal workers it had promoted, seemed more than vindicated by the outcome of the June strike in which 867 workers received increases ranging from one shilling a week to two shillings and over. In August 1913, the GGLU representing 3,000 municipal employees, submitted an application to the Town Clerk for an advance of two shillings per week for all of its members over the pre-June rates. (12) Representing the Union, Walt Wood pointed out that some men employed by the Corporation had received no advances for a number of years, the cost of living having increased, warning that:

We hope that there will be no undue delay in this matter as recent experience will give the various Committees some idea of the restlessness of the men at the present time. (13)

Most of the remaining municipal employees not included in the claim were members of the Tramway and Vehicle Workers' Union who were working under the wage agreement won from the City Council in August 1911 and not due to expire until 4 August 1914.

This application was to receive a blunt riposte at the City Council meeting on 3 September 1913, when Charles Wilson, Chairman of the Finance Committee, moved that all consideration of the Union's claim should be postponed until 9 November, following the municipal elections. Wilson unleashed a fierce attack on the municipal trade unions, particularly the GGLU, saying that for some time past applications like the present one for a general advance of two shillings had been made just before the elections and a pistol had been thrust at the heads of the Council, threatening a general strike if the demands were not immediately granted. With the clear intention of using the November elections as a means of rallying support for a tough stand against the unions, Wilson pronounced that the Corporation had guaranteed £9,000 in increased wages this year and was not to be met with a demand for an increase of £24,000 a year. Throwing down the gauntlet he continued:

If the ratepayers want this, let them say so at the elections. If that sort of thing went on, sooner or later there would be direct conflict between the Corporation and its employees. (14)

A heated debate followed in which Wilson said:

We intend to be master in our own house or we will abdicate ...

and Badlay replied that the Corporation employees had realised their power and would use it to get what they wanted. After an attempt by the



Liberal leader, Alderman John Rawlinson Ford to introduce an amendment to appoint a Committee of Six to investigate comparisons between wages paid in Leeds and other cities and then make a recommendation, the original resolution deferring condition of all claims until 9 November was passed by 30 to 23 votes, with a number of Liberals joining the Labour group in opposition. (15)

The reply to the vote of the City Council came on 21 September, at a mass meeting of the GGLU which authorised a written request to Wilson, in his capacity as Chairman of the Consultative Committee, that he arrange a meeting to discuss the wage claim. Failing this the union was authorised to call out its members not later than the 15 October. On 30 September, a ballot of GGLU members employed by the Corporation voted 2023 to 138 in favour of strike action. (16)

On 26 September a meeting of the Federal Council was held which decided to ask the City Council to revoke its previous decision and "to provide for a meeting being arranged between all parties to such application, thereby preventing any possible dislocation of the City's services". Although this initiative was taken on behalf of the 4,500 members of trade unions affiliated with the Federal Council, it was weakened by the decision of the Tramways' Secretary, George Pearson, that his union would not break the wage agreement which expired in 1914. (17)



The Labour Party joined in the controversy over the powers of the Consultative Committee and its power to override other committees' negotiations with the municipal trade unions. At the council meeting on 4 September, the Labour Group had called for the abolition of the Committee and its replacement by a fact finding committee. At the next council meeting on 8 October, the Labour Councillor, Leonard Verity, moved that all labour employing committees meet the representatives of those applying for advances of wages or alterations in conditions of service, in order to avert an impending strike. After Verity had moved for the abolition of the Consultative Committee and the rescinding of the September resolution, the Liberal leader John Rawlinson Ford again moved an amendment in favour of a special committee to make enquiries. (18)

Wilson rejected arguments for conciliation, saying that he believed they were going to have a strike in any circumstances and there was no need for anyone to lose their heads. Denying that he had refused to treat with anyone he refused to reconsider the matter until after 1 November. Brushing aside the objection of the Labour Councillor Layton that there were women and children of municipal employees wanting prime necessities of life, Wilson pronounced that the municipal workers were better paid than most private workers. (19)

George Pearson, speaking as Leader of the Labour Group, denied that he was in favour of striking and that the applications to the Consultative

Committee contained any threat of a strike, written or implied. On the contrary, he argued, the applications had been thrown ignominiously aside and the men were faced with an absolute refusal to consider their merits. The Liberal Alderman Joe Clarke, made an impassioned appeal for Alderman Wilson to relent and said that tomorrow it would be too late. After another Liberal Councillor Dr. J. A. Gordon, had spoken in praise of the moderation of many of the trade union leaders and appealed to Wilson to relax his opposition to speaking with them, it was decided by a narrow majority of one to accept a proposal by Alderman Clarke. This instructed each Committee of the Council when appointed on 9 November, to take into consideration the various applications relating to wages of workmen and any applications that may be agreed to, should be back dated to 1 October. The Labour Group considered this a victory for Wilson; one of their Councillors, R. Escritt, warned the Council that such a decision would not avert disaster, but an amendment moved by him was rejected. (20)

A mass meeting of GGLU Members was held on 12 October at the City Varieties Music Hall, and resolved to adhere to their previous decision to strike on the 15 October, but decided in favour of holding another meeting on 14 October. This gave time for the trade union officials to approach senior civic dignitaries to work out a compromise that would avert a strike at the last minute. That a 'peace party' existed amongst some elements of the Liberal Party and the Corporation's senior officials



was demonstrated by the Lord Mayor, A. W. Bain, and the Town Clerk, Sir Robert Fox, receiving a deputation from the GGLU led by Walt Wood on the 14 October, on the eve of the intended strike. (21) This had the support of Alderman Herbert Brown and the Liberals who had attempted to convene a special meeting of the City Council. Bain was well respected in the City, and had successfully acted as a mediator in the recently settled carters and Cooperative employees' strikes. Later that day the Lord Mayor, after interviewing leaders of the three parties on the Council, received J. R. Clynes, the GGLU national organiser, Will Thorne, Walt Wood, and members of the local executive and the Federal Council. Along with the party leaders a round table conference was set up which resulted in the Federal Council recommending to the men that they should "proceed with their claims before the Committees after 10 November". At the mass meeting on 14 October at the Albert Hall, on receiving the assurances of Walt Wood that their claims would be heard by the new Committees on 10 November, the strike was called off. (22)

The Federal Council leaders seemed content to defer action for another month, considering that they had won a significant concession from the City Council, in that instead of having to deal with the distrusted Consultative Committee in November they could negotiate state by stage with the more pliable labour employing committees of the Council. In addition, they anticipated increased gains for Labour at the forthcoming municipal election, in which case the Labour Party might take control of



the City Council or at least make such gains as would make it the leading party on the Committees. In which case the claims of the municipal workers might be largely gained without recourse to the strike weapon. The decision not to strike was also strengthened by the presence of the two national officers of the GGLU, Will Thorne and J. R. Clynes. They had initially come to Leeds in the summer, but had left the City after their advice against their advice against striking had been rejected by a mass meeting on 9 June (23). Returning to the City in October, they found the momentum in favour of striking had abated sufficiently for them to negotiate the temporary compromise, and have it accepted by the men, almost without dissent.

The Carters' strike, in particular, was marked by the large turnout of strikers, 4,000 within the first day of the strike and their exceptionally militant picketing. From the first days of the strike pickets had intercepted the carriage of most goods into the City and virtually shut down many of the City's railway goods yards. The few carts that tried to evade the picket lines thrown round the main roads into the City, were overturned and their drivers often assaulted. The police seemed to lose control of the streets, concentrating their forces on one or two railway goods yards, while leaving others like the Great Northern Goods Yard in Wellington Street virtually blockaded. Within a matter of days a large number of mills in the woollen, dying and finishing trades had been stopped for lack of coal and other raw materials and an estimated 10,000

had been thrown out of employment in addition to those involved in the strike. Clashes involving the police and striking Carters, in which the police engaged in baton charges, were frequent but the police were only able to escort a trickle of vehicles through the picket lines. (24)

Fear that the continuation of the Carters' Strike would influence a similar turnout by the municipal workers contributed to the calling of a peace conference under the auspices of the Lord Mayor, A. W. Bain. The Lord Mayor, acting as a mediator, brought the Horse Owners' Association, the Leeds Co-Operative Society and Carters' Union representatives together in the Lord Mayor's rooms on 10 October and brought out a settlement that conceded virtually everything to the strikers. The striking Carters gained a minimum wage of 26/- per week for drivers of one-horse carts and 29/- for drivers of two. All dismissed men were reinstated and this was followed by similar concessions in favour of the Co-operative Society employees. (25) Following this precedent the Lord Mayor, a Liberal, backed by an influential section of the Liberal Party, was able to bring about the calling off of the pending municipal strike on 12 October.

The outcome of these conferences was greeted with approval in the editorial of the Leeds Mercury. Referring to the settlement of the carters strike on 11 October, it enthused:

With the happy result achieved, it would be undesirable to refer to the origin of the strike were it not necessary to do so in order to point the obvious moral as to how other strikes may be



avoided. On the whole the settlement is in favour of the men and it may therefore be taken as proving that the claims of the men were not unreasonable. This suggests that the dispute should never have been allowed to develop into a strike and that a heavy responsibility lies upon those who allowed it to develop. The moral is clearly applicable to the dispute between the Corporation and their workmen. The cases are not dissimilar.  
(26)

Less satisfaction in the outcome of the strikes was expressed at a meeting of the Leeds Chamber of Commerce on 12 October, to protest against the action of pickets and to strengthen the hands of those in authority and assist them in maintaining law and order. The Vice President of the Chamber, Frederick John Kitson, declared:

I think I am not going too far when I say that practically all the business of this great City has been brought to a standstill solely through the action of the minority. This sort of thing should not be allowed ... We realise the right of men to belong to a trade union; but at the same time we say that every man has a right to work.

The meeting sent a resolution protesting against the action of pickets to the Lord Mayor, the Chairman of the Watch Committee, the Town Clerk and the Chief Constable. (27)

The option of taking strike action in early October, when the forces of law and order were most stretched by the carters and related strikes, was foregone by the municipal workers in favour of waiting on the outcome



of the coming municipal elections. That the Labour Party saw the solution of their claims through a pro-Labour majority on the Council was evidenced by its Secretary, D. B. Foster's article in the Leeds Weekly Citizen of 24 October. After referring to the decision of the GGLU to allow consideration of their demand to stand over until after the election, he pronounced it as 'undoubtedly one of the most important incidents that has happened to the City'. Declaring:

I regard it as a great triumph for the sense of citizenship which is growing very rapidly among our municipal employees ... goaded by the arrogance of Alderman Wilson they might very fittingly have proved their unity and strength by an immediate strike. Instead of doing so they have agreed to allow their case to be considered by the electors as one of the many important matters to be faced when casting their votes on 1st November. (28)

Referring to Wilson's desire to limit all the advances of Corporation employees to the standards set up by private employers, he cited Labour as on the other hand, standing for the Corporation being a model employer and setting up a standard for private firms to copy. Calling the November election as vital to the working class of the City he appealed to the GGLU members:

If you had been employees in a private firm, I should have urged you to strike at once and compel your employers to come down from the impossible position which they have taken up. But all along, I have realised that your position involves a great deal more than that of a private employee. You are both employer and employee. You are citizens as well as employees of citizens. In part you are your own employers, get that

fact thoroughly in your mind. Then realise it is only at election time that you can bring your influence to bear on the personnel of the City Council which through its Committees act as your employer.

In line with the attempt to play down the issue of the municipal workers, the campaign programme of the Labour Party largely ignored the issues raised by the deferred strike. In its edition of 24 October, The Leeds Weekly Citizen devoted most of its comments to the unfairness of the situation relating to the choice of the City's Lord Mayor now that the hospitality allowance of £1,250 granted under the Liberals, had been abolished. The question of the Tramways was dealt with obliquely in the Labour Party's denunciation of the Council policy of using profits on its services in relief rates for the wealthy of the City. In its manifesto issued on 31 October, The Leeds Weekly Citizen, expecting a great increase in the Labour representation in the City, declared:

.... it is so urgently required that we carry the appeal beyond the borders of trade unionists and socialists to the electors who are usually passive and perhaps indifferent to civic government. (29)

In numerous electoral meetings where veteran craft unionists shared the platform amicably with members of the BSP, the emphasis was on traditional demands of the Labour Party, such as municipal housing, and the feeding of school children out of the rates. Only Walt Wood, campaigning in the Armley and Wortley ward raised the question of the



Gasworkers' dispute, denouncing Alderman Wilson's threat to dismiss elderly corporation workers, with a view to cost saving, and ending:

If it comes to the point of having to cease work, the men were both united and determined. (30)

In contrast, the Conservative Party made the issue of the municipal workers and the possibility of an imminent strike, the centre of their campaign. At an address to the Conservative Club, Wilson declared:

The question is, who is to govern ... if these men can get all they want regardless of market value of their services on the threat of a strike time after time, they will become the masters of the situation ... In other words are 3,500 men to govern 95,000? (31)

Similarly, at the Nomination Meeting for the South Ward Conservatives, Alderman Arthur Willey made the question of the corporation workers the centre of his platform. Addressing the meeting he said:

There was only one question between the electorate of the City and it was the most important, which in my long experience had to be decided by the rate-payers. It was this, whether the ratepayers and the corporation were going to govern the City or whether the Socialist, the agitator and the paid Labour organiser was to do it. The time has come when the matter must be decided once and for all.  
(32 )

Parallel with the Conservatives' aggressive response to the Labour Party



and Unions was the setting up of a Citizen's League of Law and Order, which called on:

... all who realise that their freedom as citizens together with the honour of the City is at stake ...

to communicate with it with a view to organising a reserve of able bodied young men to 'take up the tools laid down by the strikers' in case of a Corporation strike being carried out. (33)

A similar note was sounded by the Yorkshire Evening Post which urged the ratepayers in their own interests, and of the community, to refuse to support any candidate, whatever his party, who would not stand firm against the demands of the corporation employees if found unreasonable. Concluding, it pronounced:

It is quite evident that the trade unions are out for a trial of strength. The ratepayers now have their chance to decide when they wish to manage their affairs ... Do they want the City Council to conduct the City's business or do they prefer to leave that task to a few trade union officials who sit in private and have no responsibility to the ratepayers for their decision? (34)

This atmosphere of confrontation was underscored by the monthly meeting of the Leeds Chamber of Commerce on 27 October, where several speakers vigorously denounced the Trades Disputes Act of 1906 and the protection it gave to trade unions on strike. They also condemned

sympathy strikes as 'striking at the root of liberty of the subject and inimical to the interests and prosperity of the nation'. The President, J. H. Wickstead, moved a resolution calling on Parliament to amend the Trades Disputes Act to limit the power and number of pickets. An amendment was successfully carried by John McLaren and Jonathan Peate, who advocated all out abolition of picketing, which Peate described as 'organised gangs of bullies'. (35)

The Liberal Party limited their intervention in the elections to attacks on the Conservatives' bungling on the wage question. James Bedford, the candidate for Headingley, a leading chemical manufacturer, criticised the Conservatives for rejecting the Liberal resolution for an enquiry into the wage rates paid in other towns nearby, bringing about a strike, then capitulation. Bedford said it would be impossible to deal with the claims of 6,000 men by 12 November. (36) At a meeting on 27 October, the Liberal Chief Whip, George Ratcliffe, said the Labour members of the Council showed no capacity for local government, instancing their support for the demand of all the 6,000 corporation employees for an advance of 2/- a week, where several hundred of the men received substantial advances in July. (37)

The Liberals' feeling of being trapped in the middle of the conflict in which they had less and less control, was summed up by the speech of Alderman Herbert Brown at a West Ward electoral meeting on 29



October. Brown bewailed the fact that the Liberal Party was the only sane one, accusing the Conservative Party of setting class against class and the 'Socialists' with always setting their minds on something that did not belong to them. He said the Liberal Party was to live and let live and to make it easier for the toilers to live than had been the case in the past and, if needs be, make the wealthy help to bring these conditions about. However, he nullified any impact of his reform promise, by admitting that owing to the legality of the Conservative financial policy, his party was unable to carry out the reform programme it supported. (38)

The November elections saw the Labour Party gain three seats, including the return of Walt Wood, but this was far short of challenging the Conservative dominance of the City Council. That there was little common ground between the Labour and Liberal Parties was soon shown when on 3 November, the former demanded four out of the nine Aldermanic seats up for renewal. The Conservatives refused point blank to give up any seats to Labour, referring them to the Liberal Group for any concessions. The Labour Group Secretary, Leonard Verity, said his party was determined to insist on having four Aldermen, which they were entitled to under the pro rata system. (39)

The Liberals expressed willingness to concede two seats to Labour but refused to give up any more, saying that under the Concordat the Conservatives should give up a seat. A heated, full meeting of the



Labour Party on 6 November resolved in favour of its claiming three seats in accordance with the *pro rata* system; in the event of this being refused, the Labour Party was to accept none. On the following day the Liberals conceded two seats to the Labour Group, which the latter was reluctant to accept as the Liberals had notified the end of the 1904 Concordat with the Conservatives. (40)

The rigidity of the Liberal leaders was strongly criticised by some prominent members of the Party and the rank and file letters of protest to the Party came from prominent Liberals like Dr. Arthur Hawkyard and James Lapish, the rate payers organiser. They were joined by the Young Liberals who in their programme issued some months before, favoured the principles of proportional representation for Aldermen. (41)

The Labour Group proceeded, on 10 November, to nominate three Aldermen, but refrained from nominating T. B. Duncan for the office of Lord Mayor in protest at the abolition of the hospitality allowance. The Conservatives and Liberals only nominated W. M. McShane and George Thaxton to the Aldermanic Bench over the bitter protests of the Labour Group. The Labour nominees asked for five days to give their replies, hinting they would turn down the nomination in protest. The Labour Group complained of the lack of consideration given them in the choice of members of Committees, Richard Escritt declaring 'unless there is more justice there will be no more work done in this Chamber unless I

am carried out'. D. B. Foster appealed for more Labour members to be nominated to the Watch Committee to give it any credibility among the workers. Remarking that throughout the country, the relationship of the police to the workers was one of the serious problems of the day, one of the most effective means of keeping the peace was to give the workers a sense of confidence in those who were responsible for its keeping. After an hour's wrangling, the new Committees were chosen by agreement between the Conservatives and Liberals, leaving the Labour Group feeling as excluded as before from the major committees. (42)

On the evening of the 13 November, at a Delegate Meeting of the LRC, after an address by McShane and Thaxton, the Labour Party reversed its previous stance and authorised their acceptance of the Aldermanic Seats. (43)

#### **b) The Onset of the Strike**

This opened up the prospects of Labour gaining three seats on the Council in the Holbeck, East Hunslet and New Wortley Wards; in the two former Wards the Labour Party had been successful in the last election. The Party's optimism was justified with the capture of all three seats in the ensuing bye elections. The Labour Group for the first time overtook the Liberals in the number of Councillors it had, and would



have been the second largest group had their Aldermanic representation been adjusted accordingly. (44)

By the time the Council Committees had been appointed on 10 November, detailed information from several major towns had been collected and the Committees proceeded to consider the application received from the corporation workers. By 3 December the Committees reported to the City Council, which approved their recommendations and the backdating of any increase to 1 October 1913. This included some workers who had benefited from previous wage advances earlier in the year. According to the Council's report which was published shortly after, the effect was to give an increase of two shillings and over to 1,202 workers, from 1/6d. to 1/11d. to 94, and from a shilling to 1/5d. to 1,449, but some workers did not receive any increase. (45)

On 7 December at a mass meeting of the men, it was resolved to give the City Council three more days in which to come up with a better offer. It was further resolved that if, by Wednesday, night their demand for two shillings a week for every municipal workman was not met, they would cease work immediately. At the mass meeting in the Assembly Rooms in New Briggate, the senior GGLU officials attempted to persuade the men from striking. Clynes appealed to the members of the union to give every opportunity for their executive to revise the details which had been submitted to the City Council. Walt Wood, after examining the offers in



detail, pointed out that there was still an open door for each section of workmen who had not yet received consideration. A resolution supported by the officials calling upon the Council's Committees to consider the men's demands, was overturned by an amendment which called for an all-out stoppage to take place immediately. Clynes, Thorne and Wood strongly urged the men to give the City Council two or three days to consider the matter and eventually they succeeded in carrying their point. (46) As a result they obtained a respite to the end of Wednesday, to reach settlement with the Corporation.

The following day, Alderman Wilson had an interview with Will Thorne, offering his union the option of reference to arbitration of:

... any fair-minded person outside Leeds and more particularly if the workmen so desired it, to Sir George Askwith as the sole arbitrator. (47)

This was rejected by the union, because it felt the matter had gone too far for an appeal to an outside arbitrator, and partly because they sensed that the suggestion was motivated by fear, as no such proposal had been previously put forward when the men's claims were before the City Council. (48)

Last minute negotiations took place on 10 December. At an interview on 7 December, the Lord Mayor, Edward Brotherton, told The Leeds Mercury reporter that he considered the men's notice of three days as too

short to allow the relevant committees of the Council to meet to reconsider their claims. He volunteered his own assistance in mediating a settlement, saying he was quite willing to look on the men's claims favourably and he hoped that they would be reasonable and give to others the opportunity of discussing the question. (49) On the following day Brotherton addressed a letter to the City Council and the unions involved, proposing a conference on the 11 December and urging a postponement of the strike. The letter was read to a crowded meeting in the Albert Hall at 10.15 p.m. The proposal to call off the strike was rejected by the men, who resolved however, to send a deputation to meet the Chairmen of the employing committees and representatives of the three parties in the Council at 2.30 on the following day, in accordance with the Lord Mayor's proposal. The Lord Mayor's attempt to set up a meeting between the men's representatives, the Committee Chairmen and the party leaders proved abortive and the strike became inevitable. (50)

The last days before the strike were not without attempts by the union's leaders to reach a settlement, particularly as the City Council seemed to have been taken by surprise at the men's determination to strike. Wood played down the expenses incurred by the meeting of the men's wage increases. In the City Council meeting of 8 December he estimated that the Committee's offer of increases would amount to £5,000 per year and if the whole of their demands were met, to £15,500. This was challenged by Wilson and other Council members, who put the figures at £6,500 and



£25,000 respectively. Wood took a major part in enlisting the Lord Mayor's aid in setting up mediation, stating that if the nearly a thousand applicants for wage increases, who had received no advances were to receive 2/- a week the dispute could be settled. (51)

That the chances of a settlement were receding was evidenced by the Federal Council decision on 9 December to support the GGLU in case of a strike being declared. This was followed by the tramwaymen's representatives on the Federal Council promising support and on 11 December holding a ballot to authorise a sympathy strike. (52) That the mood of the City's trade unionists was strongly against any compromise, was evidenced by the Leeds visit of James Larkin, the Irish Labour leader on 7 December, to drum up support for the striking Dublin Transport Workers. He addressed a crowded meeting in the Town Hall and the number of people who sought admission being so large that it was necessary to hold an overflow meeting. To an approving audience he lambasted the "so called trade union leaders" and the recent railway settlement of the North Eastern Railway Strike which he denounced as a sell out. (53)

### **c) The Progress and Collapse of the Strike**

The municipal trade unions lost little time in putting in hand the arrangements for an all out strike. Commencing on 11 December, around



3,000 municipal employees left work and another thousand found themselves out of work as a result of this. The Federal Council immediately set up a Strike Committee and sent out pickets to the main corporation depots. By the next day, those employed in the electricity station which generated power for the tramways and much of the street lighting, also came out. (54)

By then the effects of the strike were beginning to bite, with scavenging and sanitary work entirely stopped and most of the lamplighters coming out. In this situation, the tramwaymen still bound to the wage agreement expiring on 4 April 1914, met at the People's Hall, Albion Street, to plan their next moves in support of the striking municipal workers. At this large meeting, addressed by G. M. Pearson of the Tramway & Vehicle Workers' Union and Labour Group leader on the City Council, and D. B. Foster, the Labour Party Secretary, the result of a strike ballot was announced. Of the 1,229 members polled, 955 voted in favour of striking if non union labour was brought into the power stations. By 13 December, there were 4,292 workers on strike, following the accession of the tramworkers, who went on strike on being assured at the meeting that 'blackleg' labour had been introduced into the power stations.

By the weekend, on Saturday 13 December, the effects of the strike began to hit home. On the first day, scavenging and sanitary work had already stopped and the supply of gas was steeply curtailed. By the

following day the gas supply services were only just kept going by the use of the York Street and New Wortley depots of municipal clerks for carrying out manual duties, such as changing retorts and wheeling coke. The Meadow Lane depot had come to a complete standstill, throwing the burden of gas production on the other two works. In addition to most of the City's gas lights being unlit at night, many shops and factories were threatened by a shut down due to the drying up of the gas supply. (55)

The situation was complicated by the fact that many of the men employed in the gasworks and waterworks were subject to the restraints of the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875, which made it a criminal offence to strike in breach of a contract of service. This legislation was mainly designed to cover those employed in public utilities and in Leeds its provisions largely extended to the more skilled of the municipal workers. Only 200 of the 600 employed in the gas works were bound by the requirement to give notice of cessation of work. The stokers, firemen and coal wheelers gave the required twenty eight days notice, but on the first day of the strike, due to a foreman at Meadow Lane gasworks carrying out a job left vacant by one of the strikers, all the men left the works in breach of contract. (56) On the 12 December, the enginemmen, firemen, boiler and retort men at York Street and New Wortley gas works also left work. The dispute was less severely felt in the waterworks, out of 125 men employed, 85 had received increases of 2/- or more a week. A small number of turncock men and waste



inspectors left their work in breach of contracts but soon resumed work.

(57)

The relative newness of the electricity generating services meant that they were not covered by the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act, so the whole of the enginemen, stokers and cleaners working at the Corporation Electricity Generating Station stopped work at the beginning of the strike, although in breach of their obligation to give notice to their employer. (58)

For the first few days the initiative seemed to lay with the strikers. Although the City authorities stated that they were determined to keep going the major services as much as possible, they took little action to bring in any force of strike breakers, particularly from out of town. Initially the services were kept going by the use of other white collar municipal employees. For instance, at the New Wortley gas works, the largest source of the City's gas supply, a handful of non-strikers were assisted by clerks from the Education, Poor Rate, Water, and Gas Offices, who were paid 7/6 a day and promised compensation for spoilt clothing. They worked virtually under siege at the station; food and sleeping accommodation being found along with a permanent police guard to protect them from the pickets. Similarly, at the Whitehall Road plant, the non striking workforce was assisted by volunteers, as a result of which the electricity supply to the City was largely maintained. (59)



The use of non-union labour to break the strike was to produce clashes with the strikers in the Tramways department from the beginning. A core of 100 non-strikers along with the help of clerks, inspectors, electricians and various other categories of employees, succeeded in maintaining a skeleton service. They were accommodated at the Kirkstall Road depot under police protection. Their ability to maintain a service was made possible by the supply of electricity from the Whitehall Road plant and the large police reinforcements imported into the City from Liverpool, Huddersfield, Bradford, Hull and Sheffield. (60)

The build up of volunteers and police reinforcements was supplemented by the increasing inclination of the local stipendiary magistrate, Horace Marshall, to deal in a tough manner with pickets and demonstrators who attempted to obstruct or intimidate non-union workers or the police. On 14 December, a sanitary department employee was fined 20/- for putting out a lamp post and assaulting a policeman and two pickets were bound over for six months and fined £5 for using bad language and abusing the police near Meadow Lane gas works. On 15 December a 25 year old blacksmith was sentenced to six weeks hard labour for throwing a bottle at a tram carrying a police guard, and 25 gas workers for throwing missiles at tramcars on Sunday afternoon received 14 days hard labour. (61)

The clashes between non-union labour and strikers came to a head on 15

December with a demonstration by three or four hundred strikers led by C. A. Glyde, the well known Bradford Socialist, which marched to the bus offices on Ludgate Hill, which was the recruiting centre for strike breakers. The demonstration was broken up by mounted police, who, charging from both ends of the thoroughfare, effectively ambushed the demonstrators, who were dispersed by baton wielding police on foot. Increasing reinforcements of police time turned the gasworks, particularly New Wortley, into a state of siege with food and other supplies carried in under police escort. (62) The Trades Council on 13 December, summoned a special meeting to consider complaints against the police and passed a resolution condemning the importation of police into Leeds and the provocative attitude of the police to breaking up demonstrations of strikers. As a result letters of protest were sent to the Home Secretary and the Chief Constable, to little avail. (63)

The first few days of the strike saw the attitude of the Conservative and Liberal leadership harden against the strikers. On Friday 12 December at a Conservative Club meeting, Charles Wilson declared that the time had now arrived when the Corporation must say no to the men's demands and they were in for a struggle, the like of which they had never seen. However, he held out the inducements of further adjustments in the wage rates if the strikers returned to work and could show that their particular case had not been properly dealt with. Following this, Alderman William Penrose-Green, Chairman of the Gas Committee, told the meeting that if



the townsmen remained loyal to his committee he had no doubt that there would be sufficient men at the gasworks to enable them to keep the town lighted. (64)

Attempts were made by the Federal Council to keep up the morale of the strikers and whip up the support of other trade unionists in organising a series of large meetings held at the Town Hall on 12 December and on 14 December at Woodhouse Moor. At the former meeting, Walt Wood declared that the advances granted in June had long been overdue and dismissed the Corporation's offer of arbitration, saying:

Well, we have had arbitration in Leeds and the workmen know which way the arbitration goes.

A resolution was passed calling on the City Council to enter conference with the representatives of the strikers with the object of arriving at a settlement based on their justifiable demand for a 2/- per week advance. (65)

The Sunday march and meeting on Woodhouse Moor attracted a relatively small turnout of less than 2,000 and prompted the Federal Council Chairman, A. Gill, to complain that while the men's representatives were conferring with the Lord Mayor last Wednesday afternoon, food and bedding was taken into various Corporation departments. He seemed to half admit the possibility of defeat when he



concluded:

We made a big mistake in not striking in October.  
They have been getting ready for this since then.

G. H. Pearson called on the local authority to confer with the mens' representative for a settlement and Walt Wood ended on a defiant note:

Our demand is that an end should be put to the strike within 48 hours, otherwise we shall have to take up another attitude to all those who are public representatives on the City Council ...

threatening to close down the factories by cutting off their supplies by rail and by canal. (66)

The Labour Group on the City Council took the first move to bring the opposing sides together. Obtaining the approval of the Trades Council on 13 December, they requisitioned a short meeting of the City Council for Wednesday, 17 December at which they promised to put forward a resolution that would form a basis of settlement. The Council Meeting saw the Conservatives and Liberals so united that they prevented the Labour group from putting forward the resolution. The Labour group were isolated, when Charles Wilson put forward a proposal for the establishment of a special Committee with full powers to deal with the strike. The members appointed were two Conservative Aldermen, Francis Martineau Lupton and Robert Smithson, long-time Chairmen of

the Tramways Committee and ally of J. B. Hamilton and John Rawlinson Ford, the Liberal Group leader and Fred Kinder, the former Liberal leader, with Charles Wilson as Chairman. Of note was the total exclusion of Labour members from the Committee as well as the appointment of unelected Aldermen. The Labour Party's attempt to put a motion to broaden the basis to include members of their group was counted out in a meeting that had lasted ten minutes and without any debate. (67)

The Labour group held a special meeting immediately afterwards, to express their indignation at the methods adopted by their opponents to suppress discussion of the strikers' case. They resolved to take no more responsibility for the settlement of the strike, as they had been prevented from using the Council meeting to call for a conference between the Corporation and the representatives of the strikers.

The setting up of the Special Committee coincided with an increasingly unbending public stance by Wilson and other leading figures in the political and business life of the City. While the gas works and power stations of Leeds filled up with volunteers, many of them students at Leeds University, Wilson could pronounce before a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce on 16 December that the strike was practically over. After a resolution had been put by J. H. Wickstead, the Chamber of Commerce President, giving full support to the Corporation in its stand against the strikers, James E. Bedford, a leading industrialist and Liberal



Councillor, mapped out the future strategy of the City Corporation and the business community in dealing with the municipal workers after the strike was broken.

Bedford, after accusing the Labour Members of the City Council of not representing the real views of the working men of the City, said that the City departments were looked upon as refuges for men who could not get work elsewhere and who would not be employed by a private employer. He suggested that many of them were unemployables who had only been kept on because of the charity and generosity of the Council departments. Declaring that this policy had failed as being interpreted as a sign of weakness by the men, he advocated a different policy should be followed, of weeding out and that only the men who could really earn their money would be employed. (68)

To hearty applause Wilson said that, fortunately for the City, the representatives of the two old parties, without exception, had stood loyally together. It would be a satisfaction to them, he continued, to know that they had the support of the commercial men of the City because matters that day looked totally different from what they did a week ago. After referring to the City Corporation as having been threatened not merely during the past few days, but for years past, he concluded that he was glad to find an absolute unanimity of feeling on the part of the businessmen against any further extortion of the ratepayers. (69)



Using this platform to promote a rush to return to work, Wilson said the strike was practically over, and hundreds of tramwaymen had returned and the men in other departments were to be allowed to resume their duties. Describing the strikers as men who had been very much misled, he asked members of the Chamber of Commerce to treat the men who had been misled 'with a certain amount of generosity'.

Speaking as much to the general public as the Chamber of Commerce, Wilson accused the 'Socialists' in the Council of opposing the discharge of any man, no matter whether he was inefficient. Proclaiming the strike would settle whether or not the Council as employer would be master in its own house he ruled out any signs of yielding to the strikers. Perhaps a little whimsically he concluded:

I have been threatened with the destruction of my small cottage and I have had to remove my wife and children out of it, and for the moment I am homeless. All this will impress reasonable people. So far as I am concerned, however, there is no turning back.

All this time, the steady stream of volunteers into the gas works and electrical power stations and on to the tram cars was ensuring that the maintenance of basic services was not only being sustained but increased day by day. While only a minority of the middle-class volunteer strikebreakers, the accession of up to 200 students of the University proved a major propaganda success for the Corporation. From 14

December a number of them were deployed at the New Wortley gas works and by 18 December at Meadow Lane another 140 were engaged. The students enjoyed the full backing of the Vice Chancellor Michael Sadler, who was a vociferous apologist for the University's role in mobilising student volunteering in the strike. (70)

While the Gasworkers' support for the strike remained firm, there were signs that the tramworkers were to prove the weak link. By Monday the Tramways Department was reporting 90 to 100 trams running compared to 70 on Saturday. This was achieved by the police mounting guard at various termini and junctions, with strong forces of police at each depot. On 16 December the management launched a back to work campaign, announcing they had a large pile of letters from men willing to work and were putting on a number of cabs to transport them to the depots. An unfounded statement telephoned to various depots to the effect that the strike was at an end and the men returning, led many tramwaymen to return to work. The management eagerly took advantage of this to broadcast through J. B. Hamilton that between 500 to 600 uniformed men had returned to work and that men were returning so fast to the depots that they could hardly keep check of them. (71)

With the setting up of the special committee the propaganda offensive was now greatly increased. The committee on finding that 4,434 men were on strike, issued a statement instructing the chief officers of the



labour employing departments to receive up to 6.30 p.m. on Friday the 19 December 1913, applications for reinstatements from employees who were engaged in their respective departments at the date of the strike, and who had not returned to work. Notices were sent out to the Waterworks, Gas, Tramways, Highways (Street Cleaning only), Electricity, Sanitation, Sewerage and Street Lighting Departments, signed by members of the special committee. (72)

The ultimatum soon brought results, while a mass meeting of tramway workers on 17 December at the People's Hall had voted overwhelmingly to continue the strike, on Thursday 18 December, a further mass meeting at the Albert Hall decided to return if allowed to do so in a body, and on the understanding that they would not be asked to do any work at the power stations. A mass meeting of GGLU members on 18 December voted to continue the strike but indicated the union's willingness to 'enter into conference with the Special Committee'. (73)

At the expiration of the ultimatum on Friday 19 December, the Special Committee issued a statement, at 8 p.m., that out of a total of 4,993 men on strike, 2,028 were back at work. Most of those who returned were tramwaymen, leaving the gasworkers the overwhelming majority of those still out. The Special Committee gave an extension of time for those wishing to return to work until 10 a.m. on Monday 22 December 'after which all applications will be considered entirely on their merits and



quite apart from previous service'. (74)

A letter to the Special Committee was sent by Walt Wood, indicating his intention of entering into a conference. Wilson replied, acknowledging on behalf of the Special Committee, that they would be willing to give an interview. Little developed from this as a mass meeting on the evening of 19 December at the Albert Hall, under the auspices of the Federal Council, showed no sign of considering an end to the strike, even in the face of a return to work of the tramwaymen. (75)

A last minute attempt to bring about mediation from outside, occurred on 19 December when the Special Committee meeting was interrupted by a deputation led by Samuel Bickersteth, the Vicar of Leeds, the former Lord Mayor A.W. Bain, and Charles Lupton, a leading philanthropist. Through their mediation a meeting was set up between the Special Committee and the men's representatives at the Great Northern Hotel, which took place on Saturday 20 December. The negotiations were deadlocked from the start, concluding after an hour, but recommencing on Monday 22 December, with both sides sitting in separate rooms and exchanging typewritten statements. The Special Committee refused to make any concessions on wage claims of the strikers, saying that the wages of corporation employees were as good as in any other authority. In addition they refused to make any commitment to reinstating all the strikers. With this, talks were broken off again. (76)

At a mass meeting to discuss the negotiations held at the Town Hall on the same day, a resolution was passed condemning the Special Committee's handling of their case and calling for a continuation of the strike. Speaking in support, Will Thorne described the members of the Special Committee as "five little Czars" and declared that "the fight was now for the trade unionist movement throughout the country". He called on the men to show fight as the Leeds strikers had shown in the 1890 Gasworkers' dispute. Saying that in his day he had used his fists as well as his tongue and he was not sure that he was not prepared to do it again, he called any man who went back to work as a traitor who ought to be wiped off the map. Thorne ended his words on a violent note:

There is a lot of street sweeping ... going on every night. Turn out tonight, and do your duty like men, and not allow your wives and children to be victimised while these scallywags are taking the bread out of their mouths. Do your duty and fight as men should fight, as Yorkshiremen in days gone by. You will have to use both hands and your feet on this occasion. (77)

Thorne's speech met a mixed response from the Labour Movement in Leeds. On 23 December 1913 D. B. Foster, the Labour Party Secretary, wrote to The Leeds Mercury disassociating himself from the advice given by Will Thorne to the strikers. He concluded that:

My advice to them is to bend their energies towards making clear to the public the consummate arrogance of the Special Committee in allowing the idea to spread that they were willing to enter into negotiations when in reality they were only seeking an opportunity to insult Leeds' citizens. (78)



By now the prospects of settlement seemed more remote than ever as the Special Committee's refusal to meet the trade union representatives in a free and full conference struck at the principles of collective bargaining and effectively denied recognition to the unions they represented. This was accentuated when on 23 December 1913, in response to Thorne's speech, the Special Committee announced that all future representations in the negotiations should be made in writing only. They followed this up by instructing the chief officers of the labour employing departments of the Corporation to proceed with the filling up as quickly as possible of vacancies in their staffs. The Gas Department immediately started to advertise for workers, while the Special Committee announced that preference would be given to previous members of staff in all departments should they apply for their old positions. (79)

During the following week a stalemate ensued and reported returns to work in the local press failed to make a significant reduction in the numbers of strikers. A wholesale return to work at the New Wortley gas works predicted by The Leeds Mercury because of the imminent installation of new retorts which would enable the full return to gas generation, failed to materialise. Although The Leeds Mercury and Yorkshire Post continued to report daily of returns to full output by the gasworks and almost normal services, by the beginning of the New Year they were reporting the existence of a great deal of unemployment and short time working as a consequence of the impaired supply of gas. The



clothing industry was particularly affected, because gas was used for heating the pressing irons. (80)

While the strike entered into its third week, little change occurred in its conduct from its inception on 11 December. With few exceptions, it had been marked by little disorder or unruly picketing. Instructed to keep within the letter of the law, the pickets avoided large-scale confrontations with the rapidly growing police forces that were drafted into Leeds, while sympathy was shown to the strikes by other workers, there was no turnout of sympathisers to obstruct the working of the power stations and gasworks or to hinder the movement of police and strikebreakers as had happened in 1890. Morale among the strikers was maintained by a succession of indoor and outdoor meetings, where the platform was shared by the Federal Council officials and prominent members of the local Labour Party like Councillors Frank Fountain and D. B. Foster. The continued exhortations by leading officials like Walt Wood that the strike could be won and the Corporation be beaten sounded increasingly hollow in the face of the strikers' increasing isolation and in the face of an unbending Corporation. (81)

Signs of a change in the strikers' plans were demonstrated at a special meeting of the National Executive Council of the GGLU held at Leeds on 29 December 1913. After discussing the situation they agreed to increase the weekly strike payments from 12s.6d. to 15s. and to send out an appeal

for help to other unions throughout Britain. The Union's President, J.R. Clynes was instructed 'to intimate publicly our readiness to discuss immediately the points of difference with a view to an early settlement of the dispute'. A curt reply from the Special Committee requested the Union's proposals in writing. (82)

On 31 December, the Federal Council at a mass meeting recommended a resumption of work on the basis of a rise of one shilling a week, for those not already granted such in previous wage rises, the reinstatement of all strikers and the previous gains in wages being adhered to. This marked the Federal Council's abandonment of the strikers' previous claim of a 2/- advance. A communication to the Special Committee from the Federal Council offering a return to work on the above terms was again met with a refusal. The Special Committee said that the men who were reinstated would only be paid any increases granted on 3 December, from the time of reinstatement and not retrospectively to 1 October as had been the case of those who previously returned following the Corporation's ultimatum. (83)

Following this reply, on 1 January 1914, John Buckle attempted to arrange an interview with J. R. Clynes and the Special Committee. On the latter's refusal, Clynes wrote direct to the Committee proposing a conference. Again the Committee refused to depart from its previous stand, declaring that it had already replied at length to the points raised



and failed to see any advantage in a conference with Clynes which would be attended by the local representatives of the strikers. Clynes could only reply briefly regretting the terms of the note and citing that cases were numerous where advantages not apparent before a conference, became so afterwards. (84)

The response of the Special Committee to Clynes' overtures and the fact that the Corporation was only offering a thousand vacancies when 2,500 men were still on strike, led to a temporary hardening of the union's response. At a mass meeting at the Albert Hall on 2 January 1914, the Federal Council was authorised to continue the struggle for improved conditions and an appeal was sent out to trade unions in Leeds and the country for financial aid. The Federal Council sent a lengthy letter signed by Arthur Gill and Walt Wood to the Special Committee expressing disgust and disappointment at the "un-Englishlike" methods of the Committee in dealing with its employees. Criticising the Special Committee's return to work methods as excluding trade union organisations it called its actions in this respect a calculated attempt to destroy the central principle of trade unionism: collective bargaining.

The letter particularly criticised the decision of the Council to give back dated rises from October to strike breakers but only from the date of return to the strikers. The Federal Council, after expressing deep resentment at the insult to Clynes, who was refused a hearing, went on to



describe the communications from the Special Committee as 'being composed in the offices of the Free Labour Association and breathes right through with the spirit which animates Mr. Murphy and his Confrères in Dublin'. Asserting that 'the Committee's action is an organised attempt to crush trades unionism in the City of Leeds' it called for a plebiscite of the citizens 'so that the methods of Czarism adopted by the Committee may be submitted to the judgement of public opinion'. (85)

The Special Committee replied deploring the tone and language of the communication, but denied any insult being intended to J. R. Clynes or any attempt to crush trade unionism. It said it could not reinstate all strikers as 500 men were surplus to requirements and considered the City Council resolution respecting wage increases was no longer binding. Further exchanges of communication continued between the parties , leading The Leeds Mercury of 4 January 1914 to comment:

... the dispute seems likely to go down to history  
as famous for the voluminous nature of the  
manifestos and for the futility of most of them. (86)

A last attempt to keep the strike going was initiated by the Federal Council by extending the area of the strike. On the 4 January written appeals were sent out to trade unions in the city appealing to them to call out their members in the employ of the Corporation. A manifesto appealing to the general public and trade unionists not involved in the

dispute, to support the Federal Council in its demand for an open conference with the Special Committee, was also publicised. Federal Council officials initiated contacts with officials of the Carters' Union to broaden support for the strike and requests from the Number 2 branch of the Leeds NUR to its National Executive for permission to block Leeds Corporation until a settlement was arrived at, also resulted from these approaches. Some trade unionists, like Arthur Gill, suggested a boycott of schools by their children in protest at the complicity of the Director of Education, James Graham in the organisation of strike breaking. On the evening of the 4 January 1914 at a packed to the doors meeting at the Coliseum on Cookridge Street, The Leeds Mercury reporter was interested to note 'that womenfolk formed a large part of the audience' which voted to condemn the attitude of the Special Committee and called on the City Council to negotiate directly with the trade union officials. (87)

The results of these initiatives were slight, some bricklayers and carters working for corporation contractors agreed to withdraw their labour, on an approach from Walt Wood. Notable was an increase in violence and disorder with the growing frustration and despair of the strikers. The Stipendiary Magistrate sent strikers to prison for assaulting or intimidating strikebreakers. An explosive was thrown at the door of the boilerhouse at the Crown Point electricity station on 6 January, followed by a bomb being thrown at Harewood Barracks, which housed police



from Liverpool and Huddersfield. (88)

A breakthrough occurred when Clynes approached Fred Kinder, indicating that he would meet the Committee alone rather than at the head of a deputation. On this basis the Special Committee departed from their policy of negotiation in writing alone and admitted Clynes to an interview. Four meetings took place on 7, 8, 9 and 12 January 1914 with Clynes holding out for the three conditions put forward by the Federal Council on 31 December, which had marked a major retreat by the municipal trade unions. By 12 January Clynes had given way on all counts. In the crucial issue of reinstatement the Special Committee promised only to instruct the heads of department to take on as many strikers who applied as 'can be effectively employed'. After seven days from the end of the strike the Committee then promised not to prejudice the choice of former workmen being reinstated by engaging fresh men, unless 'essential to the needs of a particular case'. (89)

Clynes put forward the terms of the settlement to a mass meeting of men at 9 a.m. on 13 January. By a large majority, they accepted the terms and total defeat. With the end of the strike, Clynes left Leeds for London, having effectively abandoned a significant proportion of the strikers to permanent dismissal, with a consequent loss of his union membership. (90) The rapid return to work on the settlement day left significant numbers of strikers out of work. By 22 January, 1,000 to 1,500 were



reported as unemployed and the GGLU at a meeting at the Town Hall, expressed strong dissatisfaction with the process of reinstatement. (91) About 700 strikers were still unemployed in February, and they became increasingly forgotten men, as the Labour Party shifted most of its attention to organising resistance to a city wide rise in the rent for dwelling houses.

#### d) The Aftermath

Little comfort could be drawn from the actions of the Special Committee or the City Council majority following the strike. In its report on the strike, issued on 13 March 1914, it attacked the 'overmanning' of Corporation departments and promised drastic changes in its employment practices, involving the shedding of elderly employees in particular. It also proposed to perpetuate itself as a General Purpose Committee to control labour arrangements in all departments. A general commercial manager was to be appointed, none other than J. B. Hamilton, at a recommended salary of £500 per annum, in addition to his existing salary as Tramways General Manager. (92)

However, a reaction against the authoritarianism of the Special Committee began to manifest itself among sections of the Liberal Party, especially after the Special Committee's proposals were put before a City

Council meeting on 18 March. Among their recommendations was a committee of seven to deal with employment questions, and to be only subject to the review of the full City Council at quarterly meetings a year in place of on a monthly basis, making it effectively independent. (93) Following a meeting of the Executive of Leeds Liberal Federation on 25 March, where there was severe criticism of the Special Committee's proposals, Wilson was forced to make concessions at the City Council meeting on 27 March. (94) The General Purpose Committee was now to report monthly to the full Council for confirmation, although Wilson was still able to carry a vote in favour of Hamilton's appointment at a salary of £1,000 extra per annum.

Divisions among the Liberals were shown at this meeting with Kinder and Ford supporting their Conservative colleagues on the Council in opposing the appointment of a Labour Councillor to the General Purposes Committee. Opposing them were leading Liberals like their Chief Whip, George Ratcliffe and Joseph Clark, who had previously supported the Special Committee's stance against the strikers.

The fate of the thousand former employees not reinstated after the strike continued to draw attention to their plight. A number of letters by Clynes to The Leeds Mercury, accusing the Special Committee of failing to honour its promises to take on the overwhelming majority of strikers, culminated in Clynes' publication of a fifteen page pamphlet, entitled



Broken Promises in Leeds Corporation Strike, on 26 April 1914. (95) It was officially confirmed at the City Council meeting on 6 May that 859 ex-strikers were still unemployed and Charles Wilson held out little hope of their reinstatement. On 27 May, Clynes led a delegation of unemployed Corporation workers to the City Council demanding that their case be heard before the full Council. By only the narrowest of margins their request was refused. (96)

A sign that a significant section of the Liberal group on the City Council were unwilling to give unconditional support to their leaders on the General Purposes Committee was demonstrated by their voting with the Labour group to refuse a salary increase to James Graham, the Director of Education on 30 July. (97) Graham, along with J. B. Hamilton, was one of the two leading local government officers identified with the organisation of the Corporation's strike breaking policy.

Of the municipal alliance of trade unions, little survived the end of the strike. Considerable resentment was felt by members of the unions who had held out to the last against the Tramwaymen's union and its officials. The anger at their unilateral return to work in December was aggravated by the fact that their members were virtually unaffected by victimisation or cutbacks in employment. This came to a head at the Trades Council on 25 February, when the newly-elected President, Arthur Gill of the Paviers Union, launched a scathing personal attack on the two leading



Tramwaymen's officials, George Pearson and Harold Clay. Accusing them of setting up the Federal Council and then reneging on it by unilaterally balloting their union on the question of returning to work, he declared that:

... while sitting for a night and listening to the condemnation of the students, I thought it would be fitting to sit in judgement in the near future upon the trade unionists who "did the dirty on us during the strike" ... We have 850 men out on strike, men who loyally stuck out and these men (the union officials) have acted as traitors and have betrayed us. So far as the Federal Council is concerned, it is as dead as Queen Anne . (98)

At the following Trades Council meeting on 23 March, Gill objected to the invitation of John Badley to the May Day platform, because he alleged he had during the strike, entertained Fred Kinder in London. Gill expressed surprise because Badley, when an organiser of the GGLU, had advocated a minimum wage of 30/- per week, and now was entertaining one of the municipal workers' most bitter opponents at the time they were engaged in a struggle with the Corporation. (99)

Badley's explanation that he had met Kinder by chance in London and had dealt with him in his capacity as a director of the Royal Liver Assurance Company, was accepted by the Trades Council, but the bitterness between the formerly allied trade unions continued with little abatement. At a special meeting of the Trades Council on 13 May to

determine whether Gill's accusations were justified, over the objections of Walt Wood, Gill was allowed to denounce the Tramwaymen's Union and its leaders at length. Both Pearson and Clay protested against Gill's allegation, maintaining that their union's participation in the strike was purely sympathetic and their return to work was not in breach of the rules of the Federal Council. By now, with most union delegates wearying of the controversy, it proved easy to bring it to an end by an overwhelming vote finding the accusations against Pearson and Clay unproven. (100)

That the defeat of the Corporation workers had not put an end to unrest among the municipal employees was demonstrated in May 1914, when the Tramwaymen's Union put in new demands to the General Purposes Committee. These called for an enhanced scale of wages, now that the existing agreement was seen to expire in August. In addition, their claims covered matters relating to hours, wages and general conditions of labour of the men employed on the tramways. While giving the Committee until October to consider the claims, the union's officials contended that no real advances on the weekly wages of conductors and motormen had been obtained since 1903. Arguing that the cost of drivers and conductors was no greater than in March 1909, they argued that whatever concession had been granted in 1911 had been wiped out by the system of speeding up which had been in force. Little action had been taken to press these claims by August when the outbreak of the First World War was to transform the position of the Labour Movement in Leeds. (101)



## e) An Assessment

The outcome of the 1913 Municipal Strike invites comparison with the very different outcome to the 1890 Gasworkers' Strike in Leeds. While the latter strike was to be an unconditional success and inaugurate profound changes in the organisation of trade unionism in Leeds and the eventual development of Independent Labour Politics, the defeat of the municipal workers was to have a relatively slight effect on the organised Labour movement in the City.

The 1890 strike which comprised only the Gasworkers of Leeds, was fought to establish union recognition from the Borough Council, which had reneged on its previous agreement with the union and its members. (102) While in 1890, the Gasworkers and Labourers' Union in Leeds was struggling to establish itself in the aftermath of a wave of strikes of the unskilled, the Gasworkers' Union in 1914 was well organised and influential in the City's Labour Movement. With 3,000 members among Corporation workers alone, the Gasworkers' Union and its various branches in other industries, was an important factor in the Labour Party because of its large size and ample funds. In 1890 its leadership was made up of enthusiastic and committed socialist activists like Tom Maguire, Tom Paylor, William Cockayne and Walt Wood, who did not differentiate between propaganda for socialism and the support for strikes and union organisation. At the time, none of them were recognised as



*bona fide* trade unionists by the then totally craft dominated Leeds Trades Council. By 1914 the union had a group of professional organisers and full-time officials, many of whom, like Walt Wood had held important roles in the Labour Party and the Trades Council. (103) The Gasworkers' Union had enjoyed continuous recognition from the City Council employment departments since 1890, without recourse to any major strikes for nearly a quarter of a century.

In 1913 the strike involved an alliance of municipal trade unions, including not only the gas workers, but the Tramwaymen's Union and a number of specialist unions representing small groups of corporation employees. The issue bringing them together in the Federal Council, was a demand for increased wages. The main dispute followed an earlier strike of municipal employees in June 1913, where a number of workers had gained increases from one to two shillings a week. This caused ambiguity in the second wage claim for 2/- per week across the board put forward in November. (104) The Federal Council maintained that it was only claiming a single increase of two shillings per week on the pre-June wage rates for all workers. However, this was interpreted by the City Council and the Press as a demand for 2/- increase for every workman, irrespective of any gains previously obtained in June or November. This misreporting of the union's claims was to provide the City Council with a telling propaganda point against the strikers, who could be represented as asking for unrealistic and unreasonable wage rises, when they were

among the most highly paid workers of their kind. (105)

While in 1890, the City Council and its Liberal majority was isolated in its dispute with its workers, enjoying neither the support of the Conservative opposition nor a major part of the major business interests in the City, the 1913 strike saw a solid front of the Conservative and Liberal Parties and the Chambers of Commerce and Trade ranged against the strikers. The 1890 strike saw leading members of the Chamber of Commerce, Col. T. W. Harding and William Beckworth, come forward as mediators and force the Borough Council to negotiate with the representatives of the strikers. In contrast, leading figures in the Chamber, both Conservative and Liberal, exceeded the political parties in their hostility and vindictiveness towards the strikers, both during and after the strike. (106)

In the press coverage of the disputes, the most telling contrast is apparent. In 1890 the two major newspapers, The Leeds Mercury (Liberal) and the Yorkshire Post (Conservative) distanced themselves from the Council leaders and adopted critical attitudes towards their handling of the dispute. In addition, the strikers enjoyed the support of the Radical paper, The Leeds Express, whose editor and proprietor, Fred Spark, was a veteran supporter of Labour causes and social reform. The general impression conveyed by the local press was that the strike was the result of the incompetence and arrogance of a clique of Liberal Aldermen who



had become totally out of touch with the changing needs of local government. (107) The Conservative Party used the strike to point out the incompetence of the Council leaders and the folly of a system of political exclusion which kept the Conservative opposition off all major committees and therefore any part in the decision making of the Corporation. (108)

In 1913, by contrast, the treatment of the strike by the local press was one of the major factors in bringing about the defeat of the strikers. During the strike, the Special Committee had the support of the Liberal Leeds Mercury and Conservative Yorkshire Post. In addition, popular evening papers like the Yorkshire Evening News (Liberal) and the Yorkshire Evening Post (Conservative) with large readerships among the working class, rivalled the dailies in their hostility to the strikers. The only papers supporting the strikers' case were the Yorkshire Factory Times, published in Huddersfield, and the Leeds Weekly Citizen, the party organ of the Leeds Labour Party. Both of these publications, in contrast to the Conservative and Liberal press, were weeklies and had a limited circulation in Leeds. While the opponents of the strike could rely on a day by day monopoly of information and interpretation of the strike's development, the strikers and their supporters could only derive limited benefit from the newspapers that supported them. (109)

While both major newspapers opposed the strike and supported the



Special Committee's stance towards the strike, some difference was evidenced in their coverage of its development and aftermath. The Yorkshire Post representing the Conservative Party and the hardening of middle-class opinion against strikes, was the most vehement and unbending in its support for the Corporation. In the previous strike wave in 1913, it had advocated the use of more troops to move vital supplies in the City and in the aftermath of the outbreak of the municipal strike it had thundered:

The hotheads amongst the Corporation employees appear to have been permeated with syndicalist ideas and to have been anxious to put their wild anarchical theories to the test." (110)

The Yorkshire Post continued to portray the strike as a testing ground between the interests of the employers and overpowerful and militant trade unionism. On 15 December, for instance it declared that '... the trouble in Leeds is regarded in Labour circles as a sort of 'test strike'. Citing the example of an impending municipal strike in Blackburn, its London correspondent reported on 19 December that:

In official and administrative quarters in London there is the greatest admiration for the way in which the citizens of Leeds have risen to the occasion. It is recognised that they have not merely saved their own town from the designs of the most syndicalist of trade unions, but have performed a real service to the whole county. (111 )

In contrast, the Leeds Mercury adopted a slightly more conciliatory attitude to the municipal workers, while falling short of any criticism of the Special Committee's general management of the strike. Prior to the main strike of corporation workers, the paper had supported the mediation of the Lord Mayor, Arthur W. Bain in the major strikes in October. (112) It supported the Liberal Group's policy of appointing a committee to obtain details of comparable wages paid to other municipal employees, which had been rejected by Alderman Wilson on the 3 September. (113) Bemoaning the increasing industrial unrest in the City it commented:

We cannot avoid pointing out that the danger of a strike of municipal employees might easily have been avoided had the suggestions made by the Liberal members of the Council five weeks ago been adopted. (114)

In its 10 December edition the Leeds Mercury could still plead with the municipal workers not to strike but also conceding 'that the men have grounds for dissatisfaction, we are very ready to admit' but cited the fact that Alderman Wilson had agreed to outside arbitration as a good enough justification for not striking. Considering it appealed to the workers:

... in their own interests as well as in the interests of the City in which they are themselves citizens, the municipal workers ought to pause before they refuse the offer. (115)



During the strike the Leeds Mercury supported the Special Committee, arguing in its editorial of 12 December that in the case of a municipality which enjoys the monopoly of all public services:

... a dispute between the elected representatives who govern a City and the municipal workpeople who are responsible for the citizens as a whole, cannot be waged as though it were a private dispute between an employer and his own workpeople ...

The men would be wise in their own interests and in the interests of the City to submit the rest of their case to the judgement of an independent arbitrator rather than plunge the entire City into a long and bitter struggle, out of which no good would come. (116 )

The Leeds Mercury, in spite of its support for the Special Committee, in an article in its 2 January 1914 edition, poured scorn on the Tory Party's invoking of the bogey of 'syndicalism' to whip up hostility to the strikers. It advocated their coming to terms with the strikers on the basis of their reinstatement in full and a direct conference with the strikers' leaders. Warning the Special Committee that if it persisted in its intransigence:

It is not only the two thousand strikers with whom the Committee have to deal. Behind the strikers ... stand the mass of organised workers in the City who rightly or wrongly believe that their interests as trade unionists are at stake in the struggle.

It called on the Special Committee to stand up to a section of public



opinion 'who are against the workers in every labour dispute and whose press organ describes the Labour Members of the City Council as "traitors and spies". We believe that the Special Committee is strong enough to take the commonsense line in spite of everything these people say'. (117)

The most controversial aspect of the 1913 strike was the organised intervention of middle-class strikebreakers to run basic services such as the municipal gasworks and electricity stations. In 1890, the Town Council had attempted to break the Gasworkers' Strike by bringing into Leeds non-union labour to man the gasworks once the strike's notice to quit had expired on 1 July. Contingents from Manchester and London of strike breakers had been forced by the hostility of local crowds to take refuge in the Town Hall or the Meadow Lane gasworks. The attempt by the police to escort the main body of strikebreakers to the New Wortley gasworks, from the Town Hall ended in a complete rout with most of the strike breakers joining the strikers. The Town Council's plans had been frustrated by the large turnout of sympathetic crowds to support the pickets, who made it virtually impossible for the strikebreakers to move in safety to and from work. (118)

In contrast, the opening of the municipal strike saw the large scale use of middle-class strike breakers recruited from municipal and privately employed clerks and members of the Leeds University student body.

Their ability to maintain basic services on the trams, electrical power stations and gasworks had a demoralising effect on the strikers, particularly the tramwaymen, contributing to their early return to work. The large-scale deployment of these volunteers took the strikers and their leaders by surprise, until the outbreak of the strike the trade union officials had envisaged only having to deal with out of town strikebreakers, drawn from the refuse of the workforce, who could soon be persuaded or frightened into deserting their posts. (119)

Most notable was the intervention of the university and its Vice Chancellor Michael Sadler. From the second day of the strike students at the university were persuaded to answer the calls of the municipal departments for volunteers. In all nearly 200 students volunteered out of a student body of 663 full-time students. When confronted by a deputation from the Trades Council, Sadler and the Pro-Chancellor Arthur G. Lupton (brother of Alderman Francis M. Lupton) remained unapologetic about their role in the strike. Sadler justified the students' strike breaking by invoking the principle 'that every worker engaged in competitive industry had the moral right to strike' but not those in the employ of public monopolies, who should rely on external arbitration as a substitute. In the face of protests from many Labour organisations, Sadler remained adamant, even when the Leeds branch of the Workers' Educational Association, of which he was President, passed a vote of censure against him and demanded his resignation. (120)



However, the effectiveness of the strikebreakers and their ability to take up positions in the municipal utilities was determined in part by the passivity of the strikers. From the inception, the officials of the GGLU and the other unions had enforced on their pickets the need to adhere strictly to a policy of obeying the law. (121) While regular mass meetings were held to keep up morale, the streets were left in the control of the police, in contrast to the 1890 strike and the strikes of 1911, when large bodies of sympathisers and strikers had denied control of law and order to the police. Also the deferral of the strike from August to November 1913 allowed the Corporation to build up reserves of coal and to mobilise potential strikebreakers, so that when the strike began it proved far less effective than it might have been, considering that it was on the eve of the Christmas holidays, when demand for gas and electricity was at its height. In addition, the passivity of the strikers allowed the local press to wear down the morale of the tramwaymen through sustained emphasis in its headlines on the Corporation's success in maintaining essential services. (122)

The demand for the 2/- a week rise had come from the union's membership and had been of such strength that it carried along the union officials in the first wave of enthusiasm. There were indications that the senior officials' enthusiasm was much less than that of their membership. In his address to the City Council on 18 March 1914, Walt Wood claimed not to have misled his men, saying that they had come out against his



advice. (123) Previously on the 13 January, Connellan had told the Leeds Mercury:

Much has been said about this being a leaders' strike, but I have never seen anything to support this view. At none of the meetings that I attended was there any dissent from the action taken and it is well known that two or three of the leaders of the union were not favourable to taking the extreme step. My view is that it has been the men's strike from the commencement. (124)

Parallel with the industrial dispute was the low profile of the Labour Party during its height in December 1913 and January 1914. In spite of the fact that its group leader, George Pearson was a senior official of the Tramwaymen's Union and the GGLU was its most important subscriber, the Labour Party adopted a wholly self-effacing policy during the strike. The division between the political sphere of elected representatives and the industrial sphere of trade unionism and wage bargaining characterised the Labour Movement in general. Yet this was modified by the fact that the Labour Group on the City Council acted as spokesmen for the interests of its unionised manual employees. As a group, the Labour Party was potentially in the position of becoming a majority in the City Council and therefore effectively able to meet the demands of the municipal employees. Its failure to capture control of the City Council in November 1913 left it without a role to play with the onset of the strike. After failing to stop its exclusion from the newly formed Special Committee, the Labour Group largely conceded to it control of the

political agenda until February 1914, when it boycotted the Council Committees in protest at the exclusion of its members from the major labour employing committees.

A letter to the Leeds Mercury of 2 January 1914 from D. B. Foster, the Labour Party Secretary, calling upon the Special Committee to negotiate directly with the strikers union officials, was one of the few interventions by the Party in the strike. (125) The meekness of the Labour Party on the Council was in marked contrast with its behaviour in the Council Chamber in previous years, when it had led noisy protests at unpopular policies carried through by the Conservative and Liberal majority. The Labour group turned from the question of the strikes in 1914 with relief to take up the more agreeable policy of defending a City wide protest against rent rises which could unite manual workers and clerks in resistance.

The Labour Party was inhibited in its support for the strikers by its adherence to the rhetoric of Civic identity which transcended class divisions and united all inhabitants of the City in an imagined unity. (126) That the rhetoric of citizenship as a distinct category from employer and employee could be turned against strikers in the municipal sphere in particular had been demonstrated by the example of Philip Snowden, who had since September 1913, launched increasingly vitriolic denunciations of strikers which were widely reported in the Leeds press. (127)



The Leeds Mercury of 22 September 1913 reported on Philip Snowden's letter to the Morning Post, strongly denouncing the use of the strike weapon. Snowden, who perhaps ranked third only to Ramsay MacDonald and James Keir Hardie in the Independent Labour Party in the early twentieth century, had become increasingly alienated from the mainstream of the Labour Party and ILP but still enjoyed considerable prestige among many ILP activists. His scathing attacks on strikers, while alienating him more from the newer generation of the ILP members, lent credibility to the growing atmosphere of hostility to 'industrial militancy'. In his letter to the ultra-Conservative Morning Post he railed against:

... the irresponsible action of the trade unions that exercise an influence altogether beyond their numbers ... The leaders of the unions have been led more often than they have led ... This new policy of militancy on trade unionism will certainly run the movement if it is not subdued.

The public are now a third party to every big strike and their interests are quite as important as those of the other two parties. The trade unions will have to accept this fact. Where the public are so vitally concerned in the terms of a wage settlement they have as much right to a voice in it as either employers or workers. (128)

Snowden was to intervene in the Leeds Strike when his letter to the 'Christian Commonwealth' was published in the Leeds Mercury of 24 December. Referring to the Leeds Strike he opined:

In an ordinary strike the men may often rely upon public sympathy and support. But as the wide body



of citizens are the party against whom the municipal strikes are fighting it is hardly to be expected that they are going to assist those who are attacking them. Whether it be the fact or not, there is a general impression that the employees of a municipal body are better paid and better treated than workmen of like qualifications in outside employment. The corporation workman enjoys a security and regularity of work which the outside employment has not. Much of the work is of an unskilled nature and the class of men can be easily replaced. They (the corporation workers) ought to bear in mind that unless they have a quite exceptionally strong case they will find the use of the strike far less effective than it is when used against private employment. (129)

Snowden's attacks seemed to run parallel with the pronouncement of Charles Wilson that:

It was sought to place Corporation workmen in a privileged position - in the sense that they were to be paid higher wages than a similar class of men in other employ. The time had now come when they must say "no" to the men's demands for they might be certain of this - that if they gave way now there would be a further demand for a minimum 30/- a week before long. (130)

The Leeds University Vice Chancellor, Michael Sadler was to add his authority to the barrage of anti-strike pronouncements, when in reply to the protests of the Trades Council, he said in reference to the strike:

... that this was no ordinary trade dispute between private employers and the working classes ...

where those employed were engaged in services vital to the health and the convenience of the whole community, it was right for individual

citizens to carry out these vital services where there was a strike.

Sadler's actions enjoyed the support of the University Council, but dissenting voices came from within the University, among them Professor D. H. MacGregor of the Chair of Economics who at a lecture held at the Trades Council Hall on 14 January, criticised the University's stance. He said that:

I think that middle class strike breaking in view of all the social conditions under which we live is a matter of great responsibility, because it is difficult on the arguments employed to limit it to municipal industries. (131)

He cited the case where many private industries that were more essential to the health and welfare of the community than some of the industries which happened to be municipalised, such as the mining of coal. MacGregor and two of his colleagues, Henry Clay and Arthur Greenwood had incurred the condemnation of the Yorkshire Post of the 27 December, for publishing a letter calling on the Corporation Special Committee to hold a full conference with the strike's leaders, in an attempt to break the deadlock. (132) Greenwood carried their argument into the pages of the March edition of the Economic Journal, where he demolished the argument of vital services put forward by Sadler in justification of his strike-breaking activity. (133) Sadler and the Pro-Chancellor had on 29 December, in a communication to the Yorkshire Observer, stated that they had taken action:



... in the belief that the failure of certain municipal services would have consequences disastrous to all classes of the community. The University had not taken sides in the wage dispute which led to the strike. (134)

The 15 January edition of the Leeds Mercury contained another article by Snowden, who again lent his support to the Corporation by declaring:

If the men had succeeded in causing so much inconvenience to the City by the dispute, that the Corporation had granted the men's demands, such a settlement as that would have been the victory of force and disorder and not of reason and justice.

He modified his criticism to the extent that he considered that he believed:

... the most important lesson of the strike is that some machines should be devised by which strikes may be avoided under public authorities. (135)

The effects of the strike on the Labour cause in Leeds may have been mixed. On the one hand, the defeat of the Gasworkers had led to the ruthless cut backs in employment by the use of improved vertical retorts, while in other departments changes in machinery and work practices had reduced the numbers employed substantially. Such reductions were criticised by the Labour opposition as being excessive and motivated by the desire to cut costs and punish the strikers, rather than by a genuine desire to provide improved services. (136)



The strike had enjoyed the official support of the whole of the Leeds Labour Movement, however lukewarm, and in the aftermath of the strike this unity was maintained. On the contrary, the Liberal Party emerged more divided and demoralised, as one wing of it grew closer to the Conservative Party in its anti-Labour and anti-Socialist stance, while another under Joseph Henry, attempted to restore the Party's reputation as a progressive party of reform. (137) The immediate aftermath of the strike saw the Labour Party with trade union support, concentrate on organising a City wide campaign against rent rises and landlordism. As a consequence, the topicality of the strike was pushed into the background by the Party's new preoccupation. The First World War was to intervene before these developments were to manifest themselves in a municipal election.

Finally, it was noticeable that the political divisions within the political Labour Movement between the ILP and the BSP had virtually no effect on the outcome of the strike. The Labour Party, with the adherence of the BSP, was now apparently united in a spectrum ranging from old craft unionists like Connellan and Buckle, on the one hand, and long time BSP (and formerly SDF) critics of the Labour Party like Bert Killip. Such a leading BSP supporter as Harold Clay, who became President in 1913-14 of the Leeds Representation Committee, was one of the leaders of the Tramwaymen's Union, whose return to work in December sealed the outcome of the main strike. The conduct of the Labour Party and the

Strikers' Union representatives seemed to have passed without criticism from the BSP.

The strike occurred because of the stimulus of the industrial unrest in Britain between 1910 and 1914 which reached Leeds in 1911 and 1913. It did not however, obtain the active support of other trade unions in the city and the union leaders involved in the strike were content to adopt a passive waiting role. In contrast, the City Council under the combative leadership of the Special Committee were able to mobilise middle-class opinion on their side and to successfully overawe and demoralise the strikers by the extensive use of strike breakers drawn from mainly young middle-class volunteers.

**Table 6.1      Number of Corporation Workers on Strike, 12th December 1914**

Department	Number on Strike	Lowest Wage	Highest Wage
Parks & Cemeteries	73	26/-	28/-
Waterworks	85	27/-	37/-
Highways	281	24/5d. - 27/1d.	37/6d. - 41/8d.
Tramways	150	24/- - 27/1d.	38/- - 41/8d.
Electricity	300	27/1d.	39/-
Sewage Disposal	95	28/8d.	38/-
City Engineers	53	27/1d.	29/-
Health	45	27/-	33/-
Cleansing	700	25/-	34/-
Street Lighting	159	28/6d.	28/6d.
Gas	1,150	26/-	44/4½d.
	<u>3,091</u>		

Source: Leeds Mercury, 13 December 1913.

<u>Number on Strike, 17 December 1913</u>	
Waterworks	85
Gas	1,150
Tramways	1,494
City Engineers	53
Street Lighting	159
Electricity	300
Sanitary	745
Sewerage	95
Highways	280
Parks	73
	<u>4,434</u>

Source: Leeds Mercury, 18 December 1913



**Table 6.2      Number of Strikers reinstated in the immediate aftermath of the settlement on the following dates:**

Department	1914		
	January 15th	January 22nd	February 3rd
Gas	327	575	649
Cleansing	176	226	214
City Engineers	16	53	61
Sewage Disposal	22	31	31
Highways	7	35	31
Electricity	56	130	182
Waterworks	28	30	36
Tramways (Permanent Way & Power Station)	77	131	131
Street Lighting	-	28	28
Parks	-	22	22
Totals	709	1,261	1,385

Source: Leeds Weekly Citizen, 3 July 1914.

**Table 6.3      Municipal Employees, 1 June 1914**

Department	Employees reinstated after strike	Dismissed through reduction of staff (mainly temporary)	Dismissed (other reasons)	No. of employees	Reinstatement
Gas	634	257		1,003	
Cleansing	239	-	15	698	No prospect
Sanitary	33	-	-	128	2 or 3
Engineers	47	6	1	104	No prospects
Sewage	34	-	1	90	"
Highways	116	41	-	116	"
Electricity	263	9	20	479	"
Waterworks	37	-	-	101	"
Permanent Way - Trams & Power Station	131	36	-	208	Possible some more
Street Lighting	132	5	-	187	Probably further reductions
Parks	41	-	-	143	reduced
	<u>1,707</u>	<u>354</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>3,257</u>	

**Number of Workpeople in Various Departments, June 1**

Gas	1,003
Cleansing	698
Sanitary (Medical Office of Health)	111
City Engineer	104
Sewage Disposal	90
Highways	116
Electricity	479
Waterworks	101
Tramways	1,771
Street Lighting	187
Parks	143
Town Hall	72
Weights & Measures	11
Markets	38 + 4 Casuals
City Hospitals	275 + 3 temps
Education	194
Baths	67
	<u>5,460</u> Manual employees

**Table 6.3 continued**

Number of applicants registered April 20 to June 16 1914	
Department	
Cleansing	516
Highways	145
Gas Works	108
Gas Mains	22
Waterworks	22
Sewerage	30
Parks	23
Tramway works	7
Electric lights	17
Street lighting	15
	<hr/>
	905 + men not previously employed 204 = 1129

Source: Report General Purpose Committee, Leeds City Council, July 1914.



## **CHAPTER 6: Footnotes**

- (1) Leeds Mercury, 6 June 1913.
- (2) Ibid., 8 June 1913.
- (3) Ibid., 7 June 1913.
- (4) Ibid., 10 June 1913.
- (5) Ibid., 11 June, 1913.
- (6) Ibid., 11 June 1913.
- (7) Yorkshire Post, 22 June 1913.
- (8) Leeds Mercury, 13 June 1913.
- (9) Ibid., 13 June 1913.
- (10) Ibid., 12 June 1913.
- (11) Yorkshire Post, 13 June 1913, Leeds Mercury, 13 June 1913.
- (12) Report of the Special Committee on the Strike of Municipal Workers 1915-14, (Leeds 1914) p.8; J. E. Williams 'The Leeds Corporation Strike in 1913, in A. Briggs and J. Saville, Essays in Labour History 1886-1923 (1971), p.74.
- (13) Leeds Mercury, 13 August 1913.
- (14) Ibid., 4 September 1913, Yorkshire Post, 4 September 1913.
- (15) Report of Special Committee, p.9.
- (16) Yorkshire Post, 1 October 1913.
- (17) Ibid., 27 September 1913.
- (18) Leeds Mercury, 9 October 1913.
- (19) Yorkshire Post, 9 October 1913.
- (20) Ibid., 9 October 1913.
- (21) Leeds Mercury, 13 October 1913.
- (22) Ibid., 15 October 1913.

- (23) Report of Special Committee, p.9.
- (24) Leeds Mercury, 13 October 1913.
- (25) Ibid., 6 October 1913.
- (26) Ibid., 11 October 1913.
- (27) Ibid., 10 October 1913, Yorkshire Post, 10 October 1913.
- (28) Ibid., 11 October 1913.
- (29) Ibid., 12 October 1913.
- (30) Yorkshire Post, 12 October 1913.
- (31) Leeds and District Weekly Citizen, 24 October 1913.
- (32) Ibid., 31 October 1913.
- (33) Ibid., 31 October 1913.
- (34) Yorkshire Evening Post, 28 October 1913.
- (35) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 24 October 1913.
- (36) Ibid., 24 October 1913.
- (37) Yorkshire Evening Post, 21 October 1913.
- (38) Yorkshire Post, 28 October 1913.
- (39) Leeds Mercury, 28 October 1913.
- (40) Ibid., 28 October 1913.
- (41) Ibid., 30 October 1913.
- (42) Yorkshire Post, 4 November 1913.
- (43) Leeds Mercury, 7 November 1913.
- (44) Ibid., 10 November 1913.
- (45) Yorkshire Post, 11 November 1913.
- (46) Leeds Mercury, 14 November 1913.

- (47) Ibid., 26 November 1913; all three by-elections saw straight fights between Liberal and Labour candidates, returning to the City Council, John Buckle for Holbeck Ward, Frank Fountain for East Hunslet and Albert Talbot for New Wortley.
- (48) Report of Special Committee, p.14.
- (49) Leeds Mercury, 8 December 1913.
- (50) Askwith, Peter Baron Askwith was the Chief Industrial Commissioner 1911-19 and leading arbitrator of industrial disputes.
- (51) Williams, p.76.
- (52) Leeds Mercury, 7 December 1913.
- (53) Ibid., 9 December 1913, 10 December 1913 and 11 December 1913.
- (54) Yorkshire Post, 9 December 1913.
- (55) Leeds Mercury, 10 December 1913 and 12 December 1913.
- (56) Ibid., 8 December 1913.
- (57) Yorkshire Post, 13 December 1913.
- (58) Ibid., 15 December 1913.
- (59) Leeds Mercury, 12 December 1913.
- (60) Ibid., 13 December 1913.
- (61) Ibid., 14 December 1913.
- (62) Yorkshire Post, 15 December 1913.
- (63) Section 4 of the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act was later extended to persons employed in the supply of Electricity by legislation in 1914.
- (64) Leeds Mercury, 15 December 1913 and 16 December 1913.
- (65) Ibid., 16 December 1913.
- (66) TCM, 13 December 1913, Leeds Mercury, 14 December 1913.
- (67) Yorkshire Post, 13 December 1913.



- (68) Leeds Mercury, 13 December 1913.
- (69) Ibid., 15 December 1913.
- (70) Ibid., 18 December 1913.
- (71) Yorkshire Post, 17 December 1913.
- (72) Ibid., 17 December 1913.
- (73) Williams, pp.89-92.
- (74) Yorkshire Post, 17 December 1913.
- (75) Leeds Mercury, 20 December 1913.
- (76) Ibid., 18 December 1913 and 19 December 1913.
- (77) Report of Special Committee, p.25.
- (78) Leeds Mercury, 20 December 1913.
- (79) Ibid., 23 December 1913.
- (80) Yorkshire Post, 23 December 1913.
- (81) Leeds Mercury, 24 December 1913.
- (82) Yorkshire Post, 24 December 1913.
- (83) Leeds Mercury, 27 December 1913.
- (84) Ibid., 1 January 1914, Report pp.24, 32.
- (85) Ibid., 30 December 1913.
- (86) Report, pp.36-37.
- (87) Report, pp.37-38.
- (88) Leeds Mercury, 5 January 1914.
- (89) Ibid., 5 January 1914.
- (90) Yorkshire Post, 7 January 1914.
- (91) Report, pp.43-45.
- (92) Leeds Mercury, 14 January 1914.

- (93) Ibid., 23 January 1914.
- (94) Yorkshire Post, 14 March 1914, Report, pp.46-47.
- (95) Ibid., 19 March 1914.
- (96) Leeds Mercury, 28 March 1914.
- (97) Ibid., 27 April 1914.
- (98) Ibid., 7, 28 May 1914.
- (99) Yorkshire Post, 31 July 1914.
- (100) LTC, 25 February 1914, Leeds Mercury, 26 February 1914.
- (101) Ibid., 23 March 1914, 24 March 1914.
- (102) Ibid., 13, 14 May 1914.
- (103) Leeds Mercury, 2 May 1914.
- (104) B. Hendrick, Leeds Gas Strike 1890: Publications of the Thoresby Society Miscellany, Vol.16 Part 2, p.79 (Leeds 1972).
- (105) Wood had been President of the Leeds Trades Labour Council in 1900-1, and the first candidate for City Council to obtain the backing of the Trades Council in 1900, following its brief foray into municipal politics in 1891 and 1892.
- (106) The Special Committee in its post-strike report accused the Federal Council of formulating 'a general demand for an all-round advance of 2/- a week irrespective of advances which the City Council had previously granted'. Report, p.8.
- (107) For instance, Charles Wilson maintained that it was sought to place Corporation workmen in a privileged position, reported in Yorkshire Post, 13 December 1913.
- (108) For instance, at the meeting of the Leeds Chamber of Commerce of 16 December 1913 addressed by Charles Wilson, Leeds Mercury, 17 December 1913.
- (109) Hennock, Fit and Proper Persons, pp.240-1.
- (110) Ibid., p.242.

- (111) For instance, from 16 December 1913, the Leeds Mercury reported the defeat of the strike and the imminent return to work of the strikers on a daily basis.
- (112) Yorkshire Post, 12 December 1913.
- (113) Ibid., 15 December 1913 and 19 December 1913.
- (114) Leeds Mercury, 9 October 1913.
- (115) Ibid., 10 December 1913.
- (116) Ibid., 12 December 1913.
- (117) Ibid., 10 December 1913.
- (118) Ibid., 12 December 1913.
- (119) Ibid., 2 January 1914.
- (120) Hendrick, pp.87-89.
- (121) As instanced by the Leeds Mercury report of the Federal Council meeting of 12 December 1913, where Will Thorne , commenting on the rumoured recruitment of a hundred blacklegs from Litchfield, said "if they are willing to meet us in a friendly spirit, I believe the matter can be settled even before tomorrow night", Leeds Mercury, 13 December 1913.
- (122) Yorkshire Post, 19 December 1913.
- (123) Leeds Mercury, 17 December 1913, where it was alleged that many tramwaymen had returned to work following a false report published in the press that the strike was at an end.
- (124) Yorkshire Post, 12 December 1913.
- (125) Ibid., 18 March 1914.
- (126) Leeds Mercury, 13 January 1914.
- (127) Ibid., 2 January 1914.
- (128) Evidence by the title 'Leeds Weekly Citizen', founded in 1911 as the voice of the political labour movement in Leeds.
- (129) Leeds Mercury, 22 September 1913.
- (130) Ibid., 22 September 1913.



- (131) Ibid., 24 December 1913.
- (132) Yorkshire Post, 17 December 1913.
- (133) Leeds Mercury, 13 January 1913.
- (134) Yorkshire Post, 27 December 1913.
- (135) Arthur Greenwood, The Leeds Municipal Strike, Economic Journal XXIV (1914) pp.138-139.
- (136) Yorkshire Observer, 29 December 1913.
- (137) Leeds Mercury, 15 January 1914
- (138) Ibid., 14 March 1914.
- (139) At a speech at the Annual Dinner of the Leeds Chamber of Trade, Charles Wilson had called for a closer union of the two old political parties in order to fight socialism, Leeds Mercury, 3 February 1914.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **THE LEEDS LABOUR PARTY AND THE ILP** **FROM SECT TO PARTY OF GOVERNMENT 1900 - 1914**

#### **a) Introduction**

In examining the rising electoral fortunes of the Labour Party in Leeds, the question must be asked whether the growth in its electoral support was matched by the number of individual activists willing to make possible its electoral successes. Also the fact that the Labour Party was an alliance of Socialists of the ILP and the trade union movement of Leeds raises the question as to how far the Socialist beliefs and goals of the ILP were modified by their inclusion in the electoral process. The electoral successes of the Labour Party reflected a shift in the class allegiances of many working-class voters, but the degree to which socialist ideas affected their political consciousness remain to be explored. Finally, the question remains whether a vigorous socialist counterculture focused around the Party Branch, Labour Church and Socialist Sunday School, so characteristic of Bradford and the smaller textile towns of West Yorkshire, had a parallel in Leeds.

Central to the growth of the Labour Party in Leeds was the local ILP, which although never numerous in membership had a disproportionate influence on its policy and personnel. After the initial socialist upsurge

of the early 1890s the Leeds ILP, although influential in the causes of social reform in the City and increasingly within the trade unions, declined steeply in membership. From an estimated 1,000 members in 1894, the ILP could only claim 150 in 1899 and by 1900 had virtually ceased to function as a political organisation, with only 25 members claimed for that year and 1901. (1) During the same period, the City's lack of success was marked by its inability to field more than a handful of candidates at each municipal election or to obtain the affiliation of the Trades Council and most of the Leeds trade unions. By 1899, when it put up no candidates at all, it could be remarked by the ILP News that Leeds was not reputed an auspicious town in which to hold the annual conference of the ILP, the ILP has not prospered there. (2) The small membership and derisory votes for the ILP candidates disguised its growing influence in the Labour Movement with the growth of the Gasworkers' unions and the ability of its candidates like Arthur Shaw and David Cummings, both leading craft unionists, to gain election to the Leeds School Board. In the crucial years 1899-1902, the ILP activists focused on their Central Leeds Branch, were instrumental in the setting up of an Independent Labour candidate for the East Leeds parliamentary division in 1900, and the running of the campaigns for Walt Wood in 1900 and 1901. The setting up of the Leeds LRC in 1902 was their greatest achievement to date, with the key positions in the newly-founded body taken by ILP activists like J. D. Macrae and John Badlay. (3)



## **b) The Socialist and Labour Alliance**

The dominant position of the ILP in the Leeds LRC which saw off challenges by veteran Lib-Lab stalwarts as Connellan and Buckle, gave an impetus to its growth in membership up to 1914. However, this growth was extremely modest, rising to 290 in 1906 but thereafter stabilising at around 160 up to 1914. The smallness of its membership was exaggerated by the tendency of many socialist sympathisers of the Party to affiliate with the Leeds LRC, through such autonomous bodies as the South Leeds Socialist Union and in the case of many of its women supporters, the Women's Labour League. (4)

The growth of formal membership of the ILP was inhibited by the setting up of ward branches of the Leeds LRC, which in contrast to the trade union affiliation, allowed individual membership. By 1912, there were LRC branches in East Leeds, East Hunslet, New Wortley and South Ward. By contrast the ILP had besides its Central section, branches in Burley, Armley and West Ward. In contrast to the LRC branches, which could include both socialists and pure and simple trade unionists, the ILP membership was made up of those with a definite commitment to the ideals of Socialism. While the LRC branches were spread over industrial Leeds with a presence in South and East Leeds, the ILP's branches were located mainly in West Leeds, in industrial village suburbs like Armley and Wortley. In addition women sympathisers of the Labour Party had

the option of joining the eight (by 1914) branches of the Women's Labour League, which maintained local autonomy although affiliated to the LRC through its central organisation. Affiliation to the Ward Party was already drawing off membership of the ILP, as the fortunes of the Leeds LRC waxed after 1905. (5)

The Constitution of the LLRC emphasised the smallness of the size of the socialist organisations. In 1906, the socialist societies comprised only 7.7 per cent of the affiliated membership and in 1912-13 this had grown to 12 per cent. By contrast the trade unions accounted for 92 per cent of LLRC affiliated members in 1906 and six years later still an overwhelming 88 per cent. The ILP affiliated membership comprised only 2 per cent of the LLRC Membership in 1906 and by 1912 barely 1 per cent. The affiliated membership of 147 for the ILP in 1912-13 was overshadowed by the 125 members of the Bramley Socialist League, 80 of the South Leeds Socialist Union and the 75 of the Armley Socialist Party. Other Socialist organisations like the Armley SDF and the local Fabian Society which had been initial affiliates of the LLRC had vanished from the list of its affiliates by 1906. The increase in proportion of affiliated socialist members to the LLRC was between 1906 and 1912 as much the result of the disaffiliation of a number of trade unions in 1908 in protest at the boycott of the Royal Visit than a significant growth in the membership of socialist societies. In addition some unions disaffiliated in the aftermath of the Osborne Judgement of 1909, which made it illegal for them to have



a compulsory political fund for parliamentary elections. The small formal representation of Socialists in the LLRC was in contrast to their disproportionate influence in its leadership. Among ILP members who held important rank in it, were the group leader John Badlay, D. B. Foster, the LLRC Party Secretary and future Lord Mayors T. B. Duncan and Frank Fountain. (6)

The cooperation of socialists and the trade unions in a political alliance was now to be through the exclusive agency of the Leeds LRC (which became the Leeds Labour Party of 1914). The ILP and unaffiliated socialist societies were to be joined in 1914 by the British Socialist Party branches in Leeds. The official objects of the Leeds LRC called for the:

... running of Labour Candidates for Parliament and all local public bodies on the distinct understanding that they shall if returned, loyally cooperate with a Labour Party in such body in advancing the interests of Labour and that on all matters they shall act together independently of other parties. (7)

Affiliation to the LRC was open to all local trade union branches, cooperative societies and the political groups which included the Leeds Fabians, all branches of the SDF and ILP in Leeds, the Irish Nationalists and the Leeds Labour Club. As only one cooperative organisation, the Trade Union Cooperative Society, affiliated, the Leeds LRC was to be made up exclusively of trade unionists and political societies. The constitution provided a balance between the autonomy of its trade union



and ward affiliation and its need to centralise political activities, particularly at election time. A general committee acted as a full meeting of delegates, and allowed its policies to be carried out by an executive committee and its officers. All executive offices, except that of Secretary, were compelled to seek re-election every year, the Secretary becoming the permanent administrator of the party. Control over its ward organisation was affected by the right to endorse or turn down the selected candidate of the ward, exercised by the Central organisation. Ward agents vetted where more than one candidate was nominated in a ward, before being voted upon by the ward membership. Nominated candidates were to be interviewed by a Selection Committee consisting of the whole executive of the party. (8)

In contrast, the Ward LRS were empowered to carry out the preparatory work for elections such as canvassing and bringing out the vote and recommending candidates to the General Committee of the Leeds LRC. Each ward had to find the whole of the election expenses and be responsible for complying with all legal requirements for municipal elections. The Leeds LRC, while allowing ward parties some discretion as to agents, qualified this in the words of its Constitution:

Whilst allowing for a large measure of local autonomy, Ward organisations shall be under the supervision and control of the General Committee.

Rule 5 specifically barred from the delegate Committee any member officially connected with the Liberal or Tory Party.

Dissemination of the Party's programme was left to the affiliated ward parties who were empowered to hold regular outdoor meetings in open spaces and parks in the wards, backed up by distributions of suitable literature. The LRCS's opportunities to present its programme was enhanced by the marked growth of public parks and spaces in Leeds at the end of the nineteenth century. While long-established meeting places in the city centre, like the Vicar's Croft on Vicar Lane up to 1908, continued to be used, more and more suburban parks were to become the regular venue of Labour meetings. In 1912, the Holbeck Socialist Party held regular Sunday meetings at Holbeck Moor, Cross Flatts Park and the Socialist Hall in Domestic Street, the outdoor venues for the morning and the hall in the evenings. The West Hunslet Labour Party promised regular addresses by D. B. Foster and other speakers at its regular Sunday morning meetings at the Cross Flatts Park and other open spaces. (9)

The political societies had leeway in promoting themselves to prospective members. Often they were wealthy enough to hire permanent accommodation in adopted halls and to provide, besides a weekly fare of political meetings, a variety of recreational activities, including a Socialist Sunday School, a free library and reading room, billiards and Sunday lectures and musical recitals. Many of the Societies prominently



displayed their Socialist credentials, for instance the Bramley Socialist League called on all workers in its ward '... who are desirous to help to spread the gospel of Socialism and to send representatives to the Council and Parliament' to join them for a subscription of 2/6 per year. The Armley Socialist Party advertised as its aim:

The overthrow of the present Capitalist system, substituting collective ownership of all the means of life and the establishment of an industrial commonwealth. (10)

Most societies responded to increasing participation by women in the Labour Movement, by advertising the existence of Women's Guilds. For those women who did not wish to limit their political participation to serving refreshments and minding stalls at branch bazaars, there were openings in the five district Women's Guild and Labour League branches in existence by 1912. (11)

The location of affiliated societies showed up the unequal distribution of Party activity in the City. A marked preponderance of branches in West and South West Leeds was in evidence. In 1908, LRC branches were to be found in Armley, Bramley, New Wortley and North West Leeds. In South Leeds strong branches were to be found in Holbeck and West Hunslet. East Leeds representation was much weaker, paying nothing in subscriptions to the Leeds LRC in 1912, in an area where the only sitting Labour MP, O'Grady, was dependent on Irish Nationalist as well as



Independent Labour support. However, the East Hunslet ward LRC in the less industrialised part of Hunslet, was ahead of its western counterpart in its membership and financial contributions. By this time the setting up of such isolated outposts of LRC affiliation as the Burley ILP, South Ward RC and the North West Ward Socialist Society and the South Leeds Socialist Union, only emphasised the disproportionate concentration of party organisation in the West of Leeds and the most industrialised wards south of the River Aire. (12) The West wards such as Armley, New Wortley and Bramley, were areas where the manufacturing of woollen and worsted cloth was concentrated and also marked by a long tradition of adherence to Liberalism and non-conformity and a distinct sense of particularism as industrial villages on the outskirts of Leeds. The concentration in the West Leeds area was even more accentuated by the existence of the independent organisation of the SDF-BSP up to 1913, which vied with the ILP local branches in its membership and financial strength.

Overall, the total of individual members affiliated with the Leeds LRC remained small. In 1908 the Leeds LRC Yearbook reported 1,104 members of 12 non-trade union affiliated societies. By 1913, the membership had declined to 1,006 representing 17 societies which included ILP branches, independent Socialist societies and Women's Guilds and Labour Leagues. The real totals may have been significantly smaller, with the likelihood of double counting of multi-society members,

and the exaggeration of reported memberships by local secretaries with a view to gaining increased delegate representation on the LRC. (13)

The accession of the BSP to the Leeds LRC marked a significant increase in its membership and resources. The SDF/BSP had reversed its policy towards the local LRC between 1909 and 1913. The SDF branch in Leeds was the oldest-established in Yorkshire, maintaining a continuous existence since 1894, based in Armley. Their vigorous propagandist activity on Woodhouse and Armley Moor and organisation of the unemployed in the 1900's had raised their profile in Leeds. This was augmented with the arrival there of Bert Killip, as their organiser, in 1907. Under the impetus of his leadership, the SDF branches were holding a dozen weekly meetings and had formed three new branches within a year of his arrival. Whilst their Central Leeds branch boasted a hundred members by early 1909. Their initial reliance on propaganda for Socialism and hostility to the local Trade Union leadership and the ILP which had led Killip to intervene against Connellan in Wortley Ward in 1909, began to be reversed with the setting up of the British Socialist Party. By 1913, with the BSP affiliating to the LRC in Leeds, they could bring a new infusion of members and resources to the organisation. The BSP headquarters at the West Leeds Socialist Institute provided a haven for Socialists in both parties and a high profile for their cause in their strongest bases in West Leeds. The union with the Leeds LRC was however, on the ILP's terms as no merging of the two Socialist



organisations took place and the BSP's representatives on the LRC, like Killip and Clay, were outnumbered and overshadowed by ILP veterans like D. B. Foster. (14)

The growth of political clubs and branches of the Conservative and Liberal Parties were to put in the shade the profile of the Labour and Socialist ward organisations. In the late nineteenth century the Conservative and Liberal organisations were based in their Central Leeds offices with their Club organisation and well to do and socially aloof membership. From the beginning of the century there had been a rapid proliferation of ward clubs, combining politics and entertainments. For example, the Conservative organisations grew from 16 in 1890 to 26 in 1913, and the Liberal Clubs from 21 to 29 in the same period. Many of the clubs were set up in new working-class schools built at the end of the nineteenth century and provided an effective competition to the less financially resourced Labour and Socialist clubs. (15)

In contrast, the bulk of the affiliated membership and the fees payable to the LRC came from the trade unions. In 1908 the affiliation fees amounted to £185, of which nearly £180 came from the trade unions directly or via the Trades Council. This source of income was to be adversely affected by the results of the Osborne Judgement in 1909, which barred trade unions from levying political funds for the Labour Party. In 1911-12, the affiliation fees had dropped to £8.19.10 and only



after the passing of the Trade Union Act which allowed trade unions to ballot for a political levy did they rise appreciably to £160 in 1912-13. In the latter year nearly £152 of the subscriptions came from the trade unions and the Trades Council. (16)

An examination of the trade union contributions in the year 1908-9, the last before the Osborne Judgement, gives some indication of the balance of wealth and membership of the affiliated trade unions. The 'new unions' like the branches of the GGLU contributed £3.9.0d. and the Tramway and Vehicle Workers representing 45 members, sent £5.12.6. The GGLU's total may underestimate the real contributions to the LRC which could have been partly channelled through the Trades Council; in 1911-12 their affiliation fee rose to £9.10.0d. However, their contributions were still overshadowed by those of the long-established craft unions. The affiliated branches of the ASE paid £10 in 1908-9 and £18.2.6 in 1912-13. The Typographers, the oldest craft union in the City, contributed £11.7.6 in 1908-9 and £7.15.0d. in 1912-13. Among the proliferation of small craft unions stood out rising trade unions representing Railwaymen and Postal Employees. In 1908 the various branches of the ASRS alone contributed over £21, compared with £4 from ASLEF and £2.7.0d. from the Railway Workers. At the same time the Postmen's Federation contributed nearly £5 to the LRC. Overall, the influence of individual trade unions on the party leadership did not always match with the level of their affiliation fees. The GGLU and the

Tramway Workers were to provide significant leadership of the LRC, out of proportion to their subscriptions. On the contrary, the Boot and Shoe operators who paid £17 in 1908 and £15 in 1912 were not able to prevent the expulsion of their Secretary, John Buckle, from the LRC group in 1908, in spite of their considerable membership and financial resources. (17)

### **c) The Move Towards Professionalisation**

The financial impact of the Osborne Judgement was to have marked impact on the organisation of the Leeds Labour Party. The shortage of funds highlighted the casual and amateurish maintenance of accounts by the Party Secretary, J. D. Macrae. In 1911 he had to resign his position owing to a significant shortfall to the Party, which he agreed to make up by instalments from his own pocket. (18) His successor, H. A. Newell, having left the Party's accounts in greater disarray in September 1912, the Party chose as its Secretary D. B. Foster, who now filled one of the most influential positions in the Party. (19) The post had been made permanent and salaried in 1910 and was to be transformed by Foster's occupancy of it from 1912 to 1916.

Foster had shown himself willing to support tough measures to tighten up the running of the Party organisation. Prior to his being chosen as



Secretary, he had been in the forefront of the attempt to recover the Party funds dissipated by his predecessor Macrae. He had not hesitated to demand that legal action be taken against Macrae, who still retained some popularity as one of the ILP's leading figures in Leeds. (20)

From the commencement of his period in office, he had increased the supervision of the disposal of Party funds, which was aided by the introduction of a quarterly audit. Foster was to prove himself indispensable as the Party's chief official in charge of administration, aided by the fact that unlike the other officers of the Party, who were re-elected each year, he was employed on a permanent contract. In turn, Foster was to demonstrate a tendency to act independently of the Party in dealing with outside agencies such as the local press. In 1913 a series of letters to the Leeds Mercury sent by him, contrary to the Party's instructions, highly critical of Badlay's taking up of a highly paid position with the Royal Liver Company, had succeeded in forcing Badlay to resign from the leadership of the Labour Group even though he enjoyed considerable support among party members. (21) In January 1914, Foster had again, to the anger of many in the Labour Movement, denounced Will Thorne's speech to the striking municipal workers, where he had appeared to incite the use of violence against strikebreakers. The fact that he did this in a letter to the Leeds Mercury, which opposed the strike, increased their annoyance. (22)



Foster was able to survive these criticisms, because of his known integrity and reluctance to use his own expertise for securing personal gain. Foster had sacrificed a successful electrical business to devote himself to serving the Tolstoyan Brotherhood Workshop in Victoria Road, Holbeck and later the Labour Church in which he was President and prime mover. His role in the Labour Church emphasised his concern to make Socialism a religion, fusing spiritual feelings with an awareness of the need to improve the material conditions of the working class. In his letter to The Leeds Mercury he had said:

What is most wanted today is an increasing number of men and women who will give their time to acquiring and spreading knowledge, but who will refuse to use their knowledge for the securing of 'fat living' for themselves. (23)

On the eve of the outbreak of the World War, Foster was able to procure the support of the Labour Party executive for the appointment of an additional clerical assistant at a rate of 25/- per week, partly subsidised by himself. At the Executive Committee meeting on 14 May 1914, his letter requesting additional help carried a scarcely disguised threat of resignation if his request was not met by the Party. Foster, by recommending his principal rival, W. J. Armstrong, ensured that the special sub-committee to examine his claim would come out in his favour. The sub-committee's agreement to the establishment of a part time and temporary post of assistant secretary ensured its adoption by the

Party Executive on 20 May. Foster was to maintain control over the external correspondence of the Party, while Armstrong was to be responsible for the routine administration tasks such as bookkeeping and maintenance of correct records of all monies recovered and paid out. In addition Armstrong was to act as the Minutes Secretary at all meetings of the Party, leaving Foster to attend to further development of the Party's organisation among trade union branches as yet unaffiliated to the Labour Party and in wards where no party machinery existed. (24)

In addition, Armstrong was to be remunerated at the rate of 25/- per week, 20/- from the Party and 5/- out of the pocket of Foster. The major task of managing the Party's local organ, the Leeds Weekly Citizen, was also delegated to Armstrong, who was to be managing director of the publishing company. Foster also recommended that his deputy give what time he could spare in the afternoon to the Party office work. After initial reluctance at incurring any increased costs the Party agreed to the Committee's proposals. For the first time since the founding of the local Party, the risk that overwork and the immersion in office routine would lead to its secretary losing control of its financial affairs, was reduced to insignificance.

Foster's politics were marked by an adherence to the principles of ethical Christian socialism and a concern for efficient Party organisation directed at electoral gain. After a brief flirtation with Tolstoyan ideas of setting



up cooperative communes leading to his support for the short-lived Brotherhood Workshop in Holbeck in 1898, Foster firmly adhered to an electoralist strategy for the local Labour Movement. In his pamphlet 'The Logic of The Alliance, or the Labour Party Analysed and Justified' published in 1911, Foster expanded his strategy for the Labour Party at the time of the foundation of an enlarged British Socialist Party, when many activists looked upon it as a real political alternative to the Labour Party. Foster's aim was to prove the efficacy of the Labour Party in the future as an instrument for workers emancipation based on the alliance of Trade Unionists and Socialists. (25)

Foster based his programme on the assumption that there was a vital difference between the principles embodied in Liberalism and that in Trade Unionism. Arguing that Liberalism stood for the Freedom of the Individual, he attributed to Trade Unionism the principle of cooperation of individuals in societies. Initially, trade unions were agents of craft consciousness but they would influence the workers to evolve towards class consciousness, where the interests of particular trades would be subservient to the general interests of all workers. The Labour Party would be seen as a combination of men in various stages of progress on the road to Socialism. The final stage in the evolution of the workers movement through federation would be the elimination of the capitalist class (either by conversion to the workers' cause or 'annihilation') removing the last great stronghold of competition and ensuring the



principle of cooperation applied to all life. Class consciousness would give way to the highest stage of 'race consciousness' (or social consciousness) and complete human solidarity is realised.

He saw the Labour Party's task as promoting the growth of social consciousness and human solidarity through its members' experience of being in the Labour Movement. Class consciousness would be overcome and social consciousness in the British electorate would be fostered by the Labour Party to the extent that they would vote for the 'application of our principle to legislation' As a consequence of his desire to steer a middle course between mere trade union politics on the one hand and merely negative sectarianism of the Social Democratic Federation, Foster had maintained a dialogue with the SDF and BSP and supported the BSP's application to the local Labour Party.

If Foster was to be the local Party's strategist, the more mundane and practical policies for gaining votes were propounded by W. J. Armitage, the editor of the Leeds Weekly Citizen and President of the Leeds LRC in 1912-13. Lacking the eloquence and flamboyance of Badlay, or the pamphleteering skills of D. B. Foster, he was able to use the pages of the Leeds Weekly Citizen to press on the Party's activists the need for sustained and organised campaigning at election times. Particularly in the aftermath of the defeat of the municipal workers, he repeatedly called upon the Party's members to systematically canvas actual and potential

supporters on a street and house by house basis in the most industrialised wards. The main object of the canvassing was to be the working-class voters, still loyal to Liberalism, who he considered to be increasingly detachable from their historic allegiances. Unlike Foster, who regularly stood for the City Council, Armitage showed no inclination to seek elected political office, preferring to deal with the administration and propagandising side of the Party's activities through his position on the executive committee of the Party and the editorship of the Leeds Weekly Citizen. (26)

In the aftermath of the municipal strike, the Labour Party in Leeds was drawn to increasing its political effectiveness in the face of impending municipal elections in November 1914. This was to be achieved by the appointment of two specialist party organizers, whose talents would be of particular use in the event of the West Leeds Labour organisations being able to sustain a parliamentary candidate for the approaching General Election. The matter was first raised at the executive committee of the Party on 9 July 1914, after the receipt of a letter from the ILP Federal Council, asking for a contribution of 30/- towards the cost of securing John Arnott's services as an organiser, with a view to his assisting in the November election fight. Arnott, who had first been elected to the City Council for Holbeck in 1913, was one of the rising figures in the Party. The Party President, Harold Clay, after reading the letter, suggested it might also be 'possible and wise' to secure Bert Killip's services as well,



for the same purposes. (27)

The idea of engaging the two prospective organisers was not immediately appealing to the Party delegates, who at the general meeting on 16 July 1914, voted to defer consideration of the matter until a later date, by 47 to 24. Before this matter was further considered, the supervention of the World War was to suspend indefinitely any electoral plans for the local Party. The broaching of the services of Arnott and Killip did suggest that in the face of growing opposition from the Conservative and Liberal Parties, the Labour Party was willing to fight its campaigns on a more centralised and systematic basis at forthcoming municipal elections. (28)

However, at the level of parliamentary elections in particular, the Leeds Party had progressed little in organisation up to 1914, still lacking the services of a full-time election agent. This was in marked contrast with the long-established and highly professional political organisations of the Conservative and Liberal Parties with their highly experienced and remunerated agents. Labour Parliamentary candidates still relied on makeshift campaign organisation, hastily improvised on the eve of an election. Where the candidates were trade union officials, they often relied to a great extent for finance on the generosity of their national union. In 1900, the East Leeds Parliamentary Candidate, W. P. Byles, had effectively run and self financed his campaign as a dissident Liberal, even though officially supported by the National Labour Representation



Committee. The successful candidate for Labour from 1906 onwards, James O'Grady, financed his political organisation through the assistance he received from his union, the Alliance Cabinetmakers. With a small LRC organisation in East Leeds and the tacit backing of the Irish Nationalists, O'Grady considered that his supporting organisation had been run on the cheap. (29)

In the case of the South Leeds Parliamentary division, the danger of reliance on one major source of funding was demonstrated by the campaigns of Albert Fox, the General Secretary of ASLEF. In 1906 the candidates' union had provided the major support to his campaign, after the fiasco of 1908 when Fox alienated the ASRS and the majority of the local ILP, his union pulled out of campaigning. As a result no effective intervention in South Leeds Parliamentary elections took place up to 1914. Badlay's standing in one of the two general elections in 1910 was poorly financed and organised and did little to revive Labour fortunes in the South Leeds parliamentary division.

Above all, the continuing existence of the secret electoral pact between the Labour and Liberal parties inhibited the development of electoral organisation by the Labour Party in Leeds up to 1914. The two abortive campaigns by local Labour activists to put up a parliamentary candidate in West Leeds in 1910 and 1913 had shown their weakness in the face of the hostility of the Labour Party national organisation. (30) However, the

strong groundswell of support for a Labour candidate in West Leeds in a coming general election would probably have been only temporarily arrested had the outbreak of the World War not intervened. (31) With this, support could be brought to bear by the well established Labour and socialist organisations built up in West Leeds. By contrast, on the eve of the World War the parliamentary constituencies of Central and North Leeds, the latter possessing considerable pockets of new working-class residences such as in Burley, Woodhouse and Harehills, remained uncontested and unorganised by the Labour Party.

#### **d) The Creation of a Labour Identity**

##### **(i) Club Life**

The Labour Party's success in Leeds was attributable to its ability to fuse the aspirations of a minority of committed socialists with the immediate aims of non-socialist trade union leaders and their memberships. The ILP, later in conjunction with the BSP, was able to dominate the political Labour Movement without ever becoming an organisation with a mass membership. The greatest gains for the ILP had occurred in the early 1890's and then in the early 1900's in the aftermath of the setting up of the Leeds LRC. Even if the official returns of direct membership of the ILP are a marked underestimate, the Party did not experience a marked influx even in the aftermath of the period of industrial unrest and conflict



in 1911-1912. The ILP saw itself outstripped in the rapidity of its growth by the SDF (later the BSP) after 1907, when the energetic organisational skills of Fred Killip were to make it a major force for socialist propaganda in West Leeds. The SDF was to draw into its membership many old ILP veterans and newly-converted socialists who were repelled by the dilution of the ILP socialist message because of its alliance with non-socialist and sectional minded trade union leaders.

The membership of the combined socialist societies remained small but this did not act as an inhibiting factor in their political intervention in the Labour Movement. Creating a network of social and political organisations, they attempted to create in microcosm the future socialist society they wished to bring about. The first decade of socialist politics in the City had seen the setting up of the Labour Church and the first Socialist Sunday Schools under the auspices of the ILP. Apart from the ILP's central branch in New Briggate, the Party ILP and later LRC branches were to be found concentrated in the heavy industry dominated wards of Holbeck and West and East Hunslet. From 1905 the older branches were joined by new socialist clubs and Sunday schools set up by the SDF, predominantly in the West Leeds wards of Armley, New Wortley and Bramley. In the case of the Harehills Socialist Sunday School opened in 1912 its foundation was the first Labour outpost in the rapidly growing suburbs of Harehills with a large relatively affluent working class population. (32)



The various socialist clubs and socialist sunday schools inculcated a form of ethical socialism which gave its recipients a sense of moral superiority and apartness from the mainstream society. This could induce an optimism for the future in spite of present political rebuffs and be a spur to a life devoted to a round of political activities throughout the year. Like D. B. Foster, they could reconcile a political belief given over to a newer way of life, inspired by a higher social ethic with the day to day compromises of being a trade union or political activist in the Labour Party. The Socialist Sunday Schools, although sometimes attached to clubs or institutes, were marked by their powers of self government; the old Labour Church in Hunslet, a legacy of the 1890s Labour Church Movement, being now superseded by them. Between 1910-1912 a rapid growth in Sunday schools saw the doubling of the number of schools and the children attending. (33)

The sense of being part of a wider national and international movement of Socialists was enhanced by a yearly round of political activities, commencing with the election of new officers at each branch, followed by weekly or monthly outdoor meetings and indoor talks of a political, instructive nature. The highlight would be the annual May Day rally with its opening parade and large outdoor meetings, addressed by several platforms, including a national figure in the Party, such as Keir Hardie in 1906 and Ramsay MacDonald in 1907. The May Day rallies saw no decline in the number of societies and trade union participants they

attracted. In 1901 and 1902 the Yorkshire Factory Times had reported very poor turn-outs, but by 1912 and 1913 the Leeds Weekly Citizen was reporting crowds of over 4,000 at outdoor meetings. (34) By 1907 the outdoor meetings were supplemented by an evening rally at an available theatre or meeting hall, where a leading figure in the Party, like Ramsay MacDonald, would be given a platform to inspire the active members present to greater activity on behalf of the Labour Party and the socialist cause. Regular outdoor meetings in the parks and open spaces of the City would culminate in October with the nomination and the campaigning for the municipal elections.

The political side of socialist and labour activity was supplemented by the recreational facilities offered by the growing number of Labour and Socialist clubs and institutes. A solid programme of political and educational lectures was supplemented by social gatherings and bazaars where fundraising and recreation were combined, and a space made available for women supporters to participate in political activities, if only in an auxiliary capacity as storekeepers and tea makers. The SDF through the agency of Killip, promoted its branch activities by marketing 'Red Flag' toffees and after the 1911 Unity Conference 'Marseillaise' chocolate and cocoa along with mineral waters from the Socialist Institute in New Wortley. In contrast to the practice of the ILP branches which had shunned its introduction on to their premises, the SDF founded clubs, the Armley and Wortley Socialists and the Armley Socialist



Institute took out licenses for the selling of alcohol and provided facilities for playing billiards along with the use of a library and reading rooms. (35)

Beyond the active minority of socialists, a larger body of trade unionists were shifting towards electoral support for Labour without any change of adherence from trade union consciousness to a belief in socialism. The educational and recreational programmes of the socialist activists had little appeal to them, faced with the growing attractions of popular spectator sports and recreations. On the other hand, the growth in licensed club life in the first decade and a half of the twentieth century saw the setting up of a number of clubs connected with trade unions in Leeds. These clubs provided a location for trade unionists to meet, independently of the older clubs often founded under the auspices of middle-class patronage, and to develop an affinity with the idea of independent Labour politics as a natural extension of their union allegiances. In 1913 the Annual Return of Leeds Club reported a total of 113 licensed clubs with 43,016 members. Of these 10,668 belonged to 11 trade union or socialist related clubs. Towering over all in membership was the 6,800 belonging to the Leeds Trades Council Club, far ahead of the next largest club, the Jewish Tailors' Hall, with 1,100 members, or the Armley & Wortley Socialist and Armley Socialist Institute with 254 and 85 members respectively. (36)



(ii) Women and the Labour Party

In its handling of the issues of women's suffrage and the status of women in the trade union movement, the Labour Party was to be characterised by indecision and equivocation. Since the late 1880's there had existed a strong connection with socialist propaganda and the organisation of women, particularly in the clothing industry. In Isabella O. Ford and her sisters, the local socialist and labour Movement had indefatigable champions of socialism, women's suffrage and trade unionism. The establishment of the Leeds Tailoresses' Union and the Amalgamated Union of Clothing Operatives owed much to Isabella's initiatives. (37) By 1900 the Labour Movement in Leeds could claim, besides her, such activists as Agnes Close, Tom Paylor and Mrs. Watson of the General Union of Textile Workers in the cause of Women's Suffrage. (38) Active in the ILP and a delegate to the Labour Representation Committee in 1903, she was the motivating force in the collection of signatures in favour of Women's Suffrage presented to the LRC in that year. In the early 1900's Isabella O. Ford was joined as an active exponent of women's suffrage by the ILP member Ethel Annakin (later Mrs. Snowden). (39)

The period of trade depression in Leeds saw a hardening attitude among male trade unions to women in the workforce. Such unions as the Amalgamated Union of Operative Clothiers came close to passing a

resolution excluding women from its membership in 1904. Later in 1909 there were strikes at major clothing firms such as Joshua Wilson & Co, of male workers against the introduction of women into work previously reserved to them. During this period there was relative harmony between the women suffragists and the local Labour Party. Such activists as Lily Escritt, Maud Deighton and Marie Foster were simultaneously members of the Women's Social and Political Union, Women's Labour League and the ILP. At the same time Isabella Ford could combine membership of the ILP and the smallest and oldest women's suffrage society in Leeds, the Leeds Women's Suffrage Society, affiliated to the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

By 1908 there was a considerable hardening of the divisions in the women active in the ILP and Labour Party, with the growing dissolutionment of many suffrage activists with the Labour Party and ILP in their commitment to women's suffrage. On 10 October 1908, a WSPU demonstration merged with one of the unemployed in what turned into a riot outside the Coliseum Hall, where the Prime Minister Asquith was addressing a Liberal meeting. Among the suffragettes who were sentenced to five days after refusing to being bound over to keep the peace were the ILP members Bertha Quinn and Teresa Garnett. (40)

The putting forward of a Conciliation Bill, which would have enfranchised about a million female occupiers of householders, was to



receive a varied welcome among women in the Leeds Labour movement. After 1911, through the agency of Isabella O. Ford, support for the Bill was gained from most of the major trade unions in Leeds such as the GGLU. With the defeat of the Bill in 1912 and the decision by the government to introduce an Adult Suffrage Bill, which could be amended to include women, there was a growing union to support the Bill between the NUWSS and the Labour Party leadership. On the other hand there was a continuing militancy and resort to direct action by the WSPU. Isabella O. Ford was able to influence the Trades Council in Leeds to support the Bill in October 1912. (41)

The upsurge of strikes in Leeds between 1910 and 1914 resulted in the growth of numbers of women trade unionists in the textile and clothing industries. Propaganda for women's suffrage in the Labour Movement after 1911, passed into the hands of ILP members and full-time organisers of the Leeds Amalgamated Union of Clothing Operatives, Bertha Quinn and Emily Tate, who were instrumental in the passing of a resolution of the Trades Council on 26 July 1913, protesting against the 'Cat and Mouse Bill' recently passed by the Government and calling for its repeal. The principal sponsor, Bertha Quinn and seconder, Bert Killip, were backed by ILP veteran John Brotherton and the resolution as passed 'with enthusiasm'. The support from Killip was an indication of the changing attitude towards Women's Suffrage adopted by at least the local BSP, in contrast to the dismissive attitude that had long characterised the



national organisation and its SDP predecessor. (42)

A pointer to the attraction that the militancy of the WSPU had among working-class women in Leeds was revealed when they came to heckle Philip Snowden at an anti-militarist meeting in November 1913. The WSPU had gained a following in the North East and East branches of the Women's Labour League, most of whom were members of the ILP. This caused sharp divisions within the Women's Labour League, with the central WLL Secretary, Jeannie Arnott, wife of Councillor John Arnott, condemning the heckling of Snowden. She questioned the compatibility of membership of the WLL which was an integral part of the Labour Party and the WSPU which had consistently opposed the Party's leadership. On the other hand, Maud Dightam, Secretary of the East and North East WLL and wife of Edward Dightam, Vice President of Leeds LRC, defended the action of the hecklers by accusing the Labour Party of falling away from its commitments to sexual equality. (43)

The Labour Party's commitment to Women's Suffrage co-existed with a belief in the male wage earner receiving a 'family wage' which would obviate the need for their wives having to go out to work. The moderate NUWSS which had growing links with the Labour Party and a large section of the local WLL, looked to the projection of domestic qualities of women in their public political role.

The Women's Labour League took particular interest in the work of the Poor Law Guardians, educational bodies and hospital committees. By 1913 they had gained representation on the Board of Guardians, the Insurance Committee and the Holbeck Hospital Committee. Their aim was stated to be 'in the securing reforms which specially affect women and children' such as securing milk supplied for children, the establishment of school clinics and housing and other reforms. (44)

The auxiliary role of the women in the organisation was demonstrated by their role as canvassers and distributors of literature at meetings and assisting at social functions and fund raising. That the interests of women in the Labour Movement did not always coincide with the attitudes of some male trade unionists assisting at social functions and fund raising. That the interests of women in the Labour Movement did not always coincide with the attitudes of some male trade unionists was, however, demonstrated by the Amalgamated Union of Operative Clothiers' decision in 1913 to forego pressing for all out equality of male and female wage rates in the tailoring trade. This brought about the journalistic intervention of Isabella Ford, who pressed for the enfranchisement of women as the necessary condition for the strengthening of women's unions and the ending of the division of the sexes at the work place. (45)

On the eve of the outbreak of the World War, the growing support for



women's suffrage by the Labour Party and more and more trade unions, gave a greater impetus to the NUWSS in the local WLL. The growing links with the NUWSS and the Labour Party also extended to the ILP, with Isabella Ford addressing its annual conference in April 1914 and the Leeds May Day Rally. On the other hand the WSPU in Leeds seemed to be isolating itself from the mainstream of the Women's Labour League by its increasing militancy and apparent antagonism to the Labour Movement. (46)

(iii) Syndicalism and Labour in Leeds

The considerable industrial upsurge and social unrest of the years 1910-1914 were to have repercussions on the political attitudes of the local Labour Party. The unprecedented major strikes in the South Wales coalfield in 1910 and the Docks and Carters strike in Liverpool, saw the large-scale involvement of troops by the Liberal Government in a way that was seen by trade unionists as buttressing the employers against the strikes. The same period saw the spread of syndicalist ideas in the Labour Movement, which saw the growth of industrial militancy and combativeness as a more sure road to the establishment of socialism, than the reliance on parliamentary gradualism exemplified by the ILP and the Labour Party. Along with this went a staunch defence of the strikers and an attack on the role of the Army as an agency of class rule. The



prosecution of syndicalism's most famous exponent, Tom Mann, brought the issue of Civil Liberties along with the role of the military to the forefront of Labour concerns.

The growing concern of the Labour Movement with the role of the military in major industrial disputes coincided with the rising international tension between Britain and Germany after 1911 and the upsurge of agitation of peace societies. The Leeds Labour Movement, in common with the wider movement, was to become preoccupied with the legitimacy of the arms race and the ILP in particular was to move in an increasingly anti-militarist and pacifist direction. On the other hand, the growing influence of the BSP was to counterbalance this to some extent, as some of its leaders like Bert Killip adopted strongly pro-national defence positions before the outbreak of the World War. The combined concerns about increasing employer intransigence, the use of military and police repression and the denial of civil liberties to strikers, was to come to a head during the municipal strike, when the Leeds labour movement identified itself strongly with the striking workers of Dublin and played host to the deported Rand trade unionists from South Africa who were visiting Britain in support of their cause.

The executive committee of the Trades Council had on 22 October 1911 agreed to cooperate with the Leeds LPC in organising a protest meeting in respect of the employment of the military in recent disputes. The

arrest of Tom Mann for publishing his appeal to soldiers not to take the employers' side in strikes, saw a response from the Leeds Trade Council and Labour Party. (47) On 27 March 1912 the Trades Council protested against what it described as 'the unwarrantable action of the government in arresting Tom Mann and thus seriously attempting to interfere with the liberty of free speech', joining with the LRC and the BSP. In April 1912 a large demonstration of protest against his arrest took place in the Victoria Square, organised by the LRC and Trades Council. The Chairman of the Meeting, Robert Escritt, ILP Member and City Councillor for East Leeds, drew applause when he told the demonstrators that his message to young working class men was:

Don't don the King's uniform, don't take the King's shilling. Until you know that you will not be called upon to shoot your fellow working men, don't join the army. (48)

Escritt went on to denounce the setting up of a police reserve by the City Council as only another attempt to interfere with the liberty of the people. (49)

The strength of feeling at Tom Mann's arrest was emphasised by the speech of John Arnott in support of the resolution of protest, where he said there was more freedom in Russia than in Britain under the Liberal government. He said it was strange that whenever strikes had occurred and soldiers, police and gunboats had been called out, a Liberal



government had been in power. John Badlay also on the platform, contrasted the leniency of the government to Bonar Law and the Conservative leaders who were allied with Sir Edward Carson and the Ulster volunteers, who were openly taking extra constitutional means to resist Irish Home Rule with the treatment of strikes and secularist news vendors.

At the May Day demonstration for 1912 resolutions were passed in protest at Tom Mann's imprisonment. A number of the platform speakers carried strongly internationalist messages of support for socialists in other countries with particular emphasis on Germany and France. T. B. Duncan told demonstrators that as a magistrate he could unhesitatingly say that the administrators of the law look with different eyes upon the doings of the wealthy than they do upon the poor. Referring to the prosecution of Mann, he called on all young men to refuse to join the Army whilst it was possible that their arms might be used against those who were strugglers against poverty. Councillor Frederick Gath, referring to Mann, declared 'some people say there is no class war, I say there is always a class war ... between the rich and the poor'. (50)

The campaign in Tom Mann's support culminated in his visit to Leeds in July 1912 but this did not imply any widespread enthusiasm for syndicalism. Commenting on his eloquent speech, the Leeds Weekly Citizen of 13 July 1912 distanced itself from the anti-parliamentary



politics of syndicalism. Holding out its expectation that very soon every adult worker will soon have the vote, the newspaper's editor held out the 'splendid prospect of capturing political power and running all the great concerns and industries of the state'. Good personal relations with Tom Mann combined with opposition to syndicalism, marked the Leeds Labour Movement. (51) The 15 November 1912 edition of the Leeds Weekly Citizen advertised a 'Great Debate on Syndicalism' between Tom Mann and the Leeds LRC Secretary D. B. Foster, to be held at the Albert Hall at Cookridge Street on 26 November, the subject being 'Is industrial organisation sufficient to secure economic emancipation?' (52)

Unfortunately, no record survives of the debate, but the fact that sympathy with syndicalist strikes was not insignificant among Leeds socialists was shown at the time of the municipal strike which coincided with the great Dublin lock-out of 1913. James Larkin's tour in support of the locked out Dublin strikers attracted large crowds in December 1913, when he visited Leeds. The crowds were so large that the main Town Hall building could not accommodate them. On a platform containing such varied figures as Councillor Byrne of East Leeds, the BSP stalwart from Bradford, E. R. Hartley, and from America, Bill Haywood of the Industrial Workers of the World, Larkin could give free rein to his eloquence. The long ovation he was reported to have received stemmed partly from admiration of his role as a militant trade union and a sense of identification between the Leeds strikers and those locked out in Dublin,

which Larkin was keen to emphasise. (53) That the local socialist and trade unionists felt strong sympathy with other Labour leaders, who like them were perceived to be the victims of aggressive employers and policies, was shown again when two trade unionists from the South African Rand visited Leeds in March 1914. That they and a number of other trade unionists had been deported from South Africa, after leading a militant strike, by the Governor General Lord Gladstone (the former Herbert Gladstone) was a fact not lost on the Leeds audience at the meeting of sympathy held under the auspices of the NUR. The resolution in support equalled the methods adopted by the 'governing class' in South Africa, Dublin and Leeds. (54)

Sympathy with syndicalist led strikers and their leaders did not translate into any significant organisational support for syndicalism in Leeds. The only known organisation, the De Leonist Socialist Labour Party, had only a brief and flickering existence in Leeds. An intellectual syndicalism may have had a sympathetic audience among Leeds radical intelligentsia in the Leeds Art Club. In November 1913, the University Vice Chancellor Michael Sadler, on the eve of the Municipal Strike, was reported as addressing the Wortley Brotherhood (a Christian Socialist Group) expressing sympathy with many of the criticisms of modern industry made by French Syndicalists such as George Sorel, and equating Syndicalism with Ruskinism. (55)



However, Syndicalist influences may be indirectly seen in the local trade unionism with the rapid emergence of the Workers' Union, which had been formed in Halifax, in Leeds in 1913. The Workers' Union, which had grown up as a general union outside the structures of existing unions and sought to organise large categories of workers considered unrecrutable, emerged in Leeds early in 1913. Its major organiser was George Kaye, a BSP member, who claimed to have doubled its membership in three months. His example was cited by the Leeds Weekly Citizen's BSP columnist on 31 January 1913 as proof that his Party was not anti-trade unionist like its SDP predecessor appeared to be. (56) The 20 June 1913 edition of the Leeds Weekly Citizen reported that Miss E. Tate formerly of the Clothiers' Operative Union, had been organising on behalf of the Workers' Union, which had recruited 700 members in the past few months and was now joined by 200 women workers. (57)

The spread of the Workers' Union with its links to the BSP, was greeted with alarm by such unions as the GGLU. The Gas Workers' Union had lost out in the organisation of the tramway workers to the BSP dominated Tramway Workers' Union and feared that its hold over municipal and other general labourers would be undermined. Fear of this may well have prompted the GGLU leadership to fall in with its members in municipal employment, who in their movement for a large across the board wage rise, precipitated the municipal strike. The Workers' Union was to



overcome the disapproval of more established unions and was allowed to affiliate with the Trades Council in January 1913, producing a letter of protest from Walt Wood complaining that it was poaching members from his own union. An attempt by the GGLU to persuade the Trades Council to rescind the Workers' Union application, because of its poaching of GGLU members was voted in March 1913 by the narrow margin of 37 to 45.(58)

#### (iv) Labour Party and Peace

From 1911, with the increase in international tensions and the stepping up of international movements for peace, both pacifist and socialist, the issue of peace and anti-militarism was to become a major preoccupation of the Leeds LRC and ILP. It was among the latter's members rather than the BSP, that a sentiment of qualified pacifism and anti-militarism was to take root and survive the outbreak of the World War. Already existing hostility to the armed forces as strike breakers ensured a sympathetic reaction to the anti-war movement among the local party from 1912. The annual May Day meetings provided a platform for resolutions of international solidarity of the working class, but this was supplemented by major anti-war meetings. For example, in November 1912, a large meeting against war, in Leeds, held under the auspices of the ILP saw socialist parliamentarians from France and Germany speak in favour of working-class solidarity. From the platform, D. B. Foster said the

meeting was the proudest moment of his life and cautioned his audience to beware of the Boy Scouts Movement, accusing it of being a sinister influence on British life through its militarist martialing of boys. (59)

In April 1913 the Leeds LRC gave its full support to a protest meeting at Salem Hall, following a recent address by Lord Roberts in the Town Hall in favour of conscription. The May Day demonstration that year was made a vehicle for the demonstration of anti-war and internationalist sentiment, after D. B. Foster had, in the pages of the Leeds Weekly Citizen, called on the May Day demonstrators to demonstrate that 'human unity is a nobler and more powerful inspiration than human conquest'. Referring to the forthcoming May Day demonstration, he combined the issues of international peace, democracy and women's suffrage, writing:

I cannot close without reference to the fact that on Sunday we are to have the opportunity of demonstrating that the voters of Leeds realise that a reign of righteousness cannot be established in any country so long as the mothers of the nation are forbidden to help in framing the laws that govern the people. We shall not only send fraternal greetings to our comrades in other lands but we shall utter a determined protest against the indignity that is being persisted in by the government of this country in not granting the franchise to our women comrades. (60)

The 1913 May Day demonstration saw the making of a principal resolution sending greetings to the Workers of the World and



emphasising the wisdom of perfecting the means to overthrow the capitalist governments of the world, bringing on the International Cooperative Commonwealth. Among those present was James O'Grady who praised the anti-militarist German M.P. Karl Liebknecht and denounced the armament manufacturers. (61)

Opposition to the ILP's anti-militarism came less from old style Liberal-Labourite trade unionists, like Buckle or Connellan, but more from the ranks of the BSP. In the 2 May 1913 edition of the Leeds Weekly Citizen the BSP columnist 'Jotum' dismissed what he called 'ultra-pacifism' and supported H. M. Hyndman's stance in favour of a strong army and navy, with democratically elected officers. Jotum pronounced that the BSP while being in favour of universal peace, were neither quakers or tolstoyans, nor anti-nationalists, declaring that 'some of us think it just as essential to maintain our own national independence at any cost as to sympathise and support the claims of Poland, Ireland or India to local autonomy'. Advocating a well equipped and efficient army and an invulnerable navy as being essential, he declared that members of the BSP would grudge nothing that is necessary to attain them. Concluding:

We part company with those cosmopolitan  
communists who appear to have no regard  
whatever for national sentiment and ideals ...

he bemoaned the fact that socialism was regarded as synonymous with



anti-patriotism and indifference to national security. (62)

Under the auspices of D. B. Foster, a Labour-supported Peace Society held open-air meetings on a regular basis. One such meeting was addressed by the prominent ILP veteran J. Bruce Glasier, in June 1913. In the same week a large pro-peace meeting met in the Philosophical Hall under the auspices of mainly pro-Liberal Peace advocates and included on its platform such dignitaries as the Lord Mayors of Leeds and Bradford and most Mayors of industrial towns in West Yorkshire, and James O'Grady. (63)

The following week saw the holding of a National Peace Congress in Leeds. Addressing the assembly, W. C. Anderson of the ILP, dismissed the possibility of an armed invasion of Britain and declared that conscription would be the death knell of the liberties the Labour Movement had won. (64) The following months saw the Labour Party and ILP preoccupied with the growing rift between the City Council and the municipal trade unions. In November 1913 momentum was gained by a large demonstration against militarism held in the People's Hall and organised by the ILP. (65)

The principal speakers, Philip Snowden and the Reverend Rhondda Williams, were accompanied on the platform by leading local ILP members like D. B. Foster, J. R. Milnes, the ILP Leeds President and

John Arnott. Snowden called on the organised workers and the Parliamentary Labour Party to resist by every means in their power the present alarming expenditure and what he described as the 'new blood tax of the militarist movement known as National Service'. Snowden was subject to sustained heckling by suffragettes but his co-speaker, who said the greatest hope of the future was in the growing Labour Movement against war, was not interrupted.

The ensuing months once more saw the peace issue in Leeds overshadowed by the Municipal Strike and the campaign against rent rises. The crisis leading to the outbreak of war saw the local Labour Movement unprepared to cope with the fast movement of events. Attempts by the Labour Party, the Trades Council, ILP and BSP to hold a joint anti-war demonstration foundered on divisions within their delegations leading to the fixing of a date on 6 August 1914. The night before saw the calling off of the demonstration, now that war was declared. Overt opposition to the war was virtually non-existent, and even the BSP leaders like Killick, giving unqualified support for the war, in line with the views of the national body dominated by H. M. Hyndman. The ILP majority resigning itself to the war were instrumental in inserting in the last pre-war resolution of the joint executives of the LRC, ILP, LTC and BSP stated that 'We also declare that war is always antagonistic to the welfare of the people ...', following a following a call to the local authority to arrange basic food supplies. (66)



e) **The Tenants' Rent Strike 1913-14**

Almost coincidental with the Municipal Strike, was the decision of the Leeds and District Property Owners' Association to recommend its members to raise rents on the properties they let out to mainly working-class tenants. This followed a movement by equivalent bodies in other towns like Wolverhampton to raise the rents of their members. The decision to increase the rents was prompted by the rise in prosperity since 1911 and the growing demand for tenanted houses with the drop in unemployment. In Wolverhampton and the Birmingham suburb of Erdington, resistance had resulted in organised rent strikes led by Tenant Defence Leagues during 1913. (67)

In Leeds, on 28 February 1913, the Leeds and District Property Owners' Association resolved in favour of a general rent rise. Notification was given out over the following months to tenants in Holbeck, Harehills and East Leeds. Resistance was met from Holbeck tenants where sixty-four tenants formed an association to resist the rise, backed by the Leeds Weekly Citizen. (68)

A call to resist rent rises in the Labour Party had come from George Lansbury at a protest meeting in Erdington in May 1913. (69) In Leeds this was taken up by John W. Lake, Secretary of East Leeds Labour Party, and ILP stalwart who saw in the rent strike a means to take wealth from the 'idle classes and transfer it to the workers'. Believing that the



courts and police would not desire to carry out evictions , the working class would be free of the chain of rent which bound them in servitude, along with interest and profit. (70) The eviction of a Labour Party activist for allowing a front room as a Committee room during the 1912 municipal elections increased anti-landlord sentiments within the local Labour Party. (71)

The lack of resistance of tenants in Bradford to an organised rent rise acted to dampen the attractions of a rent strike to the Leeds Labour Party. (72) The Party preferred to concentrate on its housing programme for the coming municipal elections, making the implementation of Part 3 of the Housing of the Working Class Act of 1890 one of its major planks. It warned the voters that their votes would be cast either in favour of the landlord class, who were doing their best to raise rents in the City or in supporting a 'sensible policy which by implementing the Act to build houses at reasonable rents, would put the health and comfort of the people before the interests of the rent raising class'. In the meantime the landlords proceeded to evictions in Holbeck and boasted about the power to exploit housing scarcity to the utmost. (73)

The housing issues were accentuated by the fact that the scarcity of housing for the working-class was to be found in the middling range of working-class dwellings with rents at 5s. to 10s. a week. Of the 2,395 vacant dwellings in Leeds in September 1913, 1,919 were let at below 4s.

and considered unfit for occupation for the respectable working-class family. On this basis the property owners and the City Council majority denied there was a shortage of housing in the City or a need for municipal housing. Resistance to rent rises was to develop in better-off working-class areas such as Burley and Harehills, which had been largely developed within the last twenty years. (74)

The outbreak of the municipal strike in December 1913, coincided with notifications by the landlords of imminent rent increases on the pretext that these were needed to meet recent wage rises by the Corporation. In the 19 December 1913 edition of the Leeds Weekly Citizen, notice of the forthcoming increases was given by Tom Paylor, who called for the setting up of a tenants' defence league.

Organised resistance began in January 1914, when tenants in Burley received notice of weekly increases of 6d. or more. A rent boycott of the increased rates began and a petition of between 300-400 signatures was got up in protest. (75)

The matter had early become politicised, the Leeds and District Property Owners' Association wholeheartedly supported the City Council's stand against the union. At a meeting to discuss rent rises held in December 1913 the guest speaker, Cheverton Hall, after bemoaning that everything was free for the working class as a result of spoon feeding legislation, at



the expense of the middle class and the property owner, praised the stand of the Leeds City Council and property owners against Socialist and Syndicalists. (76)

At a protest meeting held in January 1914 by Burley tenants, Fred Patchett, one of three ringleaders of the resistance, who had received notice to quit, declared that they would refuse to submit without a struggle. Present at the gathering was R. M. Lancaster from the Trades Council, which had already convened a conference to consider the most effective resistance. Lancaster assured the meeting that they would not be fighting alone and expressed pleasure that the Burley people, unlike the Harehills residents, were not taking rent rises sitting down. (77)

The special meeting convened at the Leeds Trades Hall by the Trades Council on 17 January 1914, drew a large attendance. Presided over by the president of the Trades Council, the meeting adopted a militant tone of defiance, enhanced by the bitter sentiment produced by the almost concluded corporation strike. John W. Lake said that raising rents by the landlord class offered workers a splendid opportunity for ridding themselves of the landlord. B. Sullivan of the Clothiers' Union, who had moved the resolution in favour of the Conference at the Trades Council declared that:

In the recent strike we could have brought the Corporation to their knees by refusing to pay rents. We can make the landlords of Leeds sorry for their policy in the past few years.



George Pearson, leader of the Labour Group on the City Council called the rent rises the result of a conspiracy to create a dearth of houses between private landlords and the City Council. Connellan, in an untypically optimistic mood, told the delegates that if the tenants adopted a continued policy of resistance to unjust rent increases, the landlords would not take legal proceedings against all of them, but a select few and the meeting ought to be prepared to indemnify those selected. (78)

Harold Clay of the BSP urged that women should be asked to take a prominent part in the movement; for after all they were affected most, and that any protester sent to prison should be assured of their wives and children being looked after when they were away. Another BSP delegate from Armley sounded a more cautionary note: 'in the law of landlord and tenant ...' he declared ...'the landlord had it every time'. He ended by calling for the setting up of a Committee to bring a comprehensive plan of campaign to a subsequent meeting. Little concrete came out of the meeting, however, except the formal setting up of a Tenants' Defence League and the appointment of a delegation of twelve tenants to meet amenable landlords.

The following weeks saw a proliferation of Tenants' Defence League branches in Burley, West Hunslet, Harehills in the more prosperous districts, and in Wortley, Holbeck, East Leeds and North East wards in the areas where poverty was more widespread. (79) The 30 January

1914 edition of the Leeds Weekly Citizen carried optimistic reports of the protest movement in Leeds, reporting that steps had been taken to obtain 'the best legal advice', resistance was becoming 'active and united' and that some Burley landlords had given in to the protesters. Large meetings were held in Burley, where a resolution was passed calling upon the Local Government Board to look into the lack of working-class housing in Leeds. A clearly political note was sounded: one BSP delegate said that although the campaign was not run for political purposes, it was impossible to hide the fact that in Leeds there was a shortage of housing because the City Council had been party to a gigantic conspiracy to keep up rents. (80)

A meeting at Nowell Mount in Harehills took place under less militant and more Labour Party related auspices, with Councillor Mulholland on the platform. At a gathering, estimated at 300-400, resolutions were passed calling on the City Council to erect 2,500 working-class houses under Clause 3 of the Housing of the Working Classes Act. As in the case of Burley, a large contingent of women was reported by the Citizens' Correspondent.

Initially the momentum was kept up, with the appointment of deputations to the City Council and the sending of the protest letters to the Local Government Board. (81) The serving of the first notices to quit in the Burley area was welcomed by the Leeds Weekly Citizen, which predicted



that this would bring the tenants together in resistance, forgetting that they were Liberal or Tories. Further service of hundreds of notices at the end of January, led to a number of large outdoor meetings presided over by Fred Patchett, where petitions to the City Council and the Local Government Board were passed round for signing. The BSP figured prominently in other protest meetings, particularly in West Leeds. In Armley B. Sullivan was the principal organiser, while in other districts like Harehills and Wortley, Labour City Councillors took a prominent place in the proceedings and joined the local tenants' defence committees. (82) Morale was kept up by the legal advice given to the campaign by the radical solicitor, Walter Foster, assuring the protesters that they had a legal right to retain the increased rent without fear of eviction. (83)

During February, varying estimates of the number of rent strikes were given by the landlords and tenants' organisations. The Tenants' Defence League organised repeated canvassers to maintain the morale of the strikers and news of comparable campaigns in Liverpool, Edmonton and Glasgow helped to keep up the spirits of the campaigners. (84)

The Movement did not gain the official support of the Labour Party or Trades Council in spite of the sympathies of many of the City Councillors. The Leeds Weekly Citizen, while supporting the campaign, tried to divert it towards the continuing agitation in favour of municipal housing which was led by the Labour Party. (85)



The attempts by the Tenants' Defence League to engage the more active support of the Labour Movement in Leeds was only partly successful. On receiving a deputation from its committee, the Trades Council executive agreed to their proposal that a further conference to consider the housing question should be arranged for middle or late March. They sidestepped the Committee's request that they pressure the City Council to build more working class housing. The executive of the Labour Party agreed to move a resolution at the next City Council meeting in March in favour of the Corporation building some houses on properties that were municipally owned.

The Defence Committee found attempts at negotiation with the property owners fruitless. The landlords remained undeterred by the prospects of rent withholding, reckoning that the fears of eviction of the respectable working class protesters and the prospect of having to move into low rent slums, would bring about their eventual capitulation. Their strike seemed vindicated by the outcome of possession hearings at the County Court early in March, when the Judge found for the landlords, giving possession orders postponed for one month. (87)

This marked the effective end of the campaign: speaking in the aftermath of the Court decision, Harold Clay said that the fight had to be turned into other channels and they must force the Leeds Corporation into building working-class houses at an economic rent. By 13 March 1914 the Leeds

Weekly Citizen was reporting the rent campaign as at an end, quoting the tenants' leader, Fred Patchett, who told a meeting of Burley tenants that there was not the slightest doubt that those tenants who wished to remain in their houses would have to pay the increased demands of the landlords. (88)

From now on the campaign for working-class houses by the Council Labour group took centre stage. Action by them was postponed by them in March to await the outcome of a report on housing by the City Council's Development Committee. Its publication in April 1914 brought no comfort to the Labour Party, coming out against any attempt to commit the City Council to a public housing scheme. Its Chairman, William Carby Hall, a leading Leeds architect and City Councillor for the exclusive Roundhay, Seacroft and Crossgates Ward, strenuously opposed any scheme to involve the City Council in building working class houses. The full Committee resolved that there was no necessity for their provision as there was sufficient suitable accommodation existing and in course of erection to meet the demand. (89)

Carby Hall expressed the opinion that the best method to adopt would be to support voluntary initiatives on the lines of the Co-operative Tenants' Association of Letchworth. He further dismissed the Labour Group's claim that there was a housing shortage on the basis that the Local Government Board had released the City Council from its housing



obligations with respect to the York Street and Quarry Hill areas, which had recently been major areas of slum clearance.

The Labour Party through the Leeds Weekly Citizen could only complain that:

It is idle to pretend that no selfish motive dominated these discussions. As a matter of fact the one in question was very largely of a personal and selfish character. These same people, members of the committee, are members of the class that keeps down wages by most merciless methods.

In its edition of 8 May 1914, the Leeds Weekly Citizen could draw some slight satisfaction from the fact that Carby Hall's report was shelved by the City Council, attributing it to their embarrassment at its contents. (90)

The failure to move the Council did not see any revival of the direct action campaign of the early part of the year, Leeds playing no part in the subsequent wartime agitation for rent control. The Leeds Weekly Citizen continued to feature the housing question in its editorials, in particular linking the by election for East Leeds Ward with the opposition to rent rises in the city and the demand for municipal housing. On the eve of the First World War the Leeds Labour Party contented itself with awaiting the outcome of the winter municipal election, hoping that its consistent denunciation of the Conservative/Liberal majority's indifference to the needs of the working class for affordable housing would benefit it



politically. (91)

The rent agitation had shown the ability of activists in the newly-affiliated BSP to win the support of elements in the Labour Party and the Trade Unions in support of its campaign. It had however, not been able to win over the official Labour Party to support of its policy of direct action. The collapse of the rent campaign in March, left the rent rises by the landlords unopposed and the initiative back in the hands of the leadership of the Labour Party. The issue of housing had become a prominent plank in the Labour Party programme in Leeds, but remained stalled as long as Labour remained a minority on the City Council. On the eve of the World War, any progressive trend among the Conservative or Liberals in the City was conspicuous by its absence.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN - Footnotes**

- (1) ILP Annual Conference Reports, Leeds LRC Yearbooks 1906-1914.
- (2) ILP News, April 1899.
- (3) Tom Woodhouse, Nourishing the Liberty Tree: Liberals and Labour in Leeds 1880-1914, (Keele 1996) pp.14-116.
- (4) Leeds LRC Yearbooks 1906-1914.
- (5) Ibid., 1913-1914.
- (6) Woodhouse, Nourishing the Liberty Tree, pp.114-16.
- (7) Leeds LC Yearbook 1906-1907.
- (8) Ibid., 1906-1907.
- (9) Ibid., 1912-1913.
- (10) Ibid., 1912-1913.
- (11) Ibid., 1913-1914.
- (12) For details of Industrial concentration in early 20th Century Leeds, see E. J. Connell and M. Ward, 'Industrial Development 1780-1914', in A History of Modern Leeds, ed. Derek Fraser (1980), pp.170-1.
- (13) Leeds LRC Yearbook 1912-1913.
- (14) Martin Crick, The History of the Social Democratic Federation (Keele, 1994) pp.214-16, for details of the strained relationship between the SDF and the Leeds LRC, particularly after 1908.
- (15) Slater's Directory of Leeds 1897, Kelly's Directory of Leeds 1913.
- (16) Leeds LRC Yearbook, 1909-1910 and 1912-1913.
- (17) Ibid., 1908-1909, 1911-1912.
- (18) For Macrae's admission of liability for deficits owing to the Party see Leeds LRC Minutes op cit. P2, p.10, 29 February 1912.
- (19) LRC Minutes, LP2, pp.112-113, 17 Sept. 1912.

- (20) Ibid., 17 September 1913.
- (21) Leeds Mercury, 24 May 1913.
- (22) Ibid., 23 December 1913.
- (23) For the career of D. B. Foster up to 1911, see Woodhouse, Nourishing the Liberty Tree, pp.101-103.
- (24) Leeds LRC Minutes, LP3, p.195-196 and 205-209.
- (25) D. B. Foster, The Logic of the Alliance or the Labour Party Analyzed and Justified, (Leeds, 1911).
- (26) See articles contributed by Armitage on a weekly basis to the March and April editions of the Leeds Weekly Citizen 1914.
- (27) Leeds LRC Minutes, LP3, pp.231-232, 9 July 1914.
- (28) Ibid., LP3 pp.234-236, 16 July 1914.
- (29) Ibid., op cit. LP3 pp.131, 5 January 1914, Leeds Weekly Citizen, 17 December 1913 and 18 June 1914.
- (30) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 17 January 1913.
- (31) Ibid., in particular, the report of the West Leeds Parliamentary Conference where William Withey in proposing Leonard Verity as a prospective parliamentary candidate, cited the continuous and mainly successful record of contesting the four wards in West Leeds Parliamentary division by the Labour Party since 1902.
- (32) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 15 November 1912, referring to the establishment of a Socialist Institute and Sunday School at Franklands Place in the North Leeds suburb of Harehills.
- (33) Leeds LRC Yearbook, 1910-1911.
- (34) Yorkshire Factory Times, 10 May 1901 reporting very little attendance and the edition of 9 May 1902 referring to a 'poor attendance at Woodhouse Moor May Day meetings'; Leeds Weekly Citizen of 8 May 1913 by contrast described 'Great demonstration of 6-8,000 participants'.
- (35) For details of advertised activities of socialist clubs and societies, Leeds LRC Yearbook, 1911-1912.
- (36) Annual return of Leeds Licensing Committee 1913, Leeds Weekly Citizen, 13 February 1914.



- (37) Jane Hannam, Isabella Ford (1989), pp.44-46, 49.
- (38) J. Liddington and J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement, (1978).
- (39) J. Hannam, Isabella Ford, pp.110-11, for close relationship of Isabella Ford and her sisters with Philip and Ethel Snowden.
- (40) Leeds Mercury, 12 October 1908, 14 October 1908.
- (41) J. Hannam, Isabella Ford, pp.140-141.
- (42) LTC Minutes, 26 July 1913.
- (43) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 13 November 1913.
- (44) Leeds LRC Yearbook, 1913-1914.
- (45) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 26 January 1914.
- (46) Leeds LRC Yearbook, 1913-1914 for details of local Women's Labour League activities.
- (47) LTC Minutes, 22 October 1911.
- (48) Ibid., 27 March 1912.
- (49) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 20 April 1912.
- (50) Ibid., 11 May 1912.
- (51) Ibid., 13 July 1912.
- (52) Ibid., 26 November 1912.
- (53) Ibid., 12 December 1913.
- (54) The resolution indicated the municipal strike's identification with the Dublin strikes as objects of 'Murphyism', named after the Dublin employers' leader, William Murphy, the epitome of aggressive and uncompromising anti-trade unionism and strike breaking.
- (55) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 21 November 1913.
- (56) Ibid., 13 January 1913.
- (57) Ibid., 20 June 1913.

- (58) LTC Minutes, 9 January 1913, 26 March 1913.
- (59) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 23 November 1913.
- (60) Ibid., 23 April 1913, 2 May 1913.
- (61) Ibid., 2 May 1913.
- (62) Ibid., 13 June 1913, 20 June 1913.
- (63) Ibid., 20 June 1913.
- (64) Ibid., 21 November 1913.
- (65) LTC Minutes, 28 July 1914, Leeds Weekly Citizen, 7 August 1914.
- (66) David Englander, Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain 1838-1918 (Oxford, 1982) pp.141-152.
- (67) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 7 March 1913.
- (68) Englander, Landlord and Tenant, p.147.
- (69) The Daily Herald, 5 June 1912.
- (70) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 10 January 1913.
- (71) Ibid., 6 June 1913, Yorkshire Observer, 17 April 1913, 26 April 1913.
- (72) Minutes of Leeds LRC, op. cit. LP3 pp.69-73, 18 September 1913.
- (73) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 19 December 1913.
- (74) Ibid., 16 January 1914.
- (75) Ibid., 19 December 1913 and 26 December 1913.
- (76) Ibid., 16 January 1914.
- (77) Ibid., 23 January 1914.
- (78) Ibid., 30 January 1914 and 6 February 1914.
- (79) Ibid., 30 January 1914.
- (80) Ibid., 23 January 1914.

- (81) Ibid., 13 February 1914.
- (82) Yorkshire Factory Times, 23 February 1914, Leeds Weekly Citizen, 6 February 1914.
- (83) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 13 February 1914.
- (84) Ibid., 23 January 1914.
- (85) LTC Minutes, 11 February 1914.
- (86) Yorkshire Post, 26 March 1914, Leeds Weekly Citizen, 6 March 1914.
- (87) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 13 March 1914.
- (88) Leeds Mercury, 9 April 1914.
- (89) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 8 May 1914.
- (90) Ibid., 19 June 1914.
- (91) Ibid., 24 July 1914, LTC Minutes, 29 July 1914.



## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **CONCLUSION**

The study of the rise of the Labour Party up to 1914 has been conducted against the background of the wider debate as to whether or not the Liberal Party was able to pre-empt its social appeal by its policy of innovative social reform. The debate has been between those historians who see the Labour Party's post-1918 success as already pre-figured in its pre-First World War electoral growth, and those who maintain that the Liberal Party had gained a new lease of political life as a vehicle of progressive social reform. The examination of the parliamentary fortunes of the two parties has led to research into their fortunes at the local municipal level. A number of monographs and articles have examined the local repercussions of the emergence of Labour as a rival to Liberalism up to 1914.

The Labour Party emerged in Leeds under the impetus of the establishment of the national party in 1900. In the previous decade the cause of Independent Labour politics in the city had been advocated by the ILP with little success. With its basis in the Gas Workers' Union, the ILP engaged in an uphill and unsuccessful struggle to win over the still craft dominated trade unions of the city to the cause of Labour politics. Lacking trade union backing through the agency of the Trades and Labour Council, the ILP failed to gain any significant number of votes up

to 1900.

The foundation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 and the repercussions on local Liberalism of the Boer War, were the catalyst for change in the attitude of Leeds' trade unions to politics. The imposition of an unpopular Liberal candidate on East Leeds in the 1900 parliamentary election brought about a coalition of dissident Liberals, Irish Nationalists, trade unionists and the ILP behind the maverick candidate, W. P. Byles under the banner of the Labour Representation Committee. This was in spite of the opposition of the Trades Council Secretary, Owen Connellan, who had harboured ambitions to win Liberal support for his own candidacy for East Leeds parliamentary division.

The aftermath of the 1900 general election saw a period of co-operation between the local Liberal Party, the Trades Council and the ILP, culminating in the adoption of Walt Wood, the ILP veteran and Trades Council President as a Progressive candidate for the South Leeds ward in 1900 and 1901. This failed to satisfy the growing demand for significant trade union representation on the City Council, and by 1902 when the Leeds LRC was set up under ILP leadership, most trade unions affiliated to it within months of its establishment.

The initial goodwill of the local Liberals to the idea of limited trade union participation in municipal politics as a subordinate of the Liberal Party,



turned rapidly to hostility after the foundation of the Leeds LRC. The Leeds LRC not only put up more than token numbers of candidates but began to make electoral gains, mainly at the expense of the Liberals and by 1904 were organised as a group in the City Council. From this period up to 1914, the Liberal Party in Leeds was to adopt a consistently hostile stance to the Leeds LRC and its policies; particularly after their failure to detach from the Labour group, their first leader John Buckle, a non-Socialist former Liberal-Labourite trade unionist.

The gulf between the Labour and Liberal Parties in Leeds was increased after the Leeds LRC published its manifesto in 1905, which advocated the use of higher business rates and the profits of municipal trading as a means of financing a social reform program which included the provision of working-class housing and the feeding of needy children at the City Council's expense. This occurred at a time when under the spur of a sustained trade depression and a large municipal debt, the Liberal Party in Leeds moved closer to the Conservatives in their financial policies. This was to culminate in the 1908 'Concordat' between the Liberal and Conservative groups on the City Council that effectively established a bi-partisan approach to the raising of revenue and the use of municipal trading profits as a means of subsidy of the wealthier rate payers. By default the Labour group became the sole party advocating a policy of social reform in the face of a permanently hostile Conservative-Liberal majority on the City Council.



The fortunes of the Labour Party in Leeds politics were to diverge markedly in parliamentary and municipal contests. In spite of its early running of a LRC candidate in East Leeds in the 1900 general election, the Labour Party's parliamentary record in Leeds was unimpressive up to 1914. Nevertheless, because of growing ILP influence in the trade unions, the attempt of Owen Connellan to win the nomination of the Liberal Party and the Trades Council as a Lib-Lab Candidate in East Leeds, was defeated in 1904. This was to lead to the eventual adoption of the ILP trade unionist James O'Grady as the LRC parliamentary candidate in 1906. O'Grady's subsequent success in the 1906 and 1910 general elections, remained dependent upon the existence of the semi-secret electoral agreement between Herbert Gladstone and Ramsay MacDonald made in 1904. O'Grady was able to rely on a straight contest with the Conservatives, being given a free run by the Liberals. On the other hand attempts to put up a Labour candidate in Liberal held West Leeds were successfully vetoed by the intervention of the national Labour Party organisation and its Secretary Ramsay MacDonald. A promising intervention of Labour in the South Leeds parliamentary division ended in division and acrimony in 1908, leaving East Leeds as the only parliamentary district in the city with Labour representation up to 1914.

In contrast, considerable growth in Labour representation on the City Council occurred after 1904 in the face of the opposition of the Liberals and Conservatives. There was a rapid rallying to the Leeds LRC of the

craft unions of the city and there was an absence of significant splits and defections over potentially divisive issues such as support for Roman Catholic schools or participation in the reception of the King and Queen in 1908. While a few city Councillors and Alderman John Buckle either resigned or were expelled from the Labour group, this failed to produce any significant defections either to Liberalism or to the Social Democratic Federation. The growth of electoral support for the Leeds LRC was marked by the consolidation of areas of strong electoral support in West and South Leeds, which survived temporary set-backs such as the November 1908 municipal election.

The successful partnership of the ILP and the trade unions in the Leeds LRC was enhanced by the increasing role of the Labour Party as the main agency of solid reform in Leeds. The rise of the Leeds LRC coincided with the long trade depression which was particularly bad between 1902 and 1904 and 1908 to 1911. Here the ILP and the Leeds LRC were challenged by more militant organisations of the unemployed, led by the SDF and anarchists which adopted the more confrontational tactics that the ILP used in the 1890's. The Leeds LRC reacted by running its own campaign in favour of state supported relief work for the unemployed which would pay trade union rates, avoid the stigma of pauperism and prevent the under-cutting of the wages of the regularly employed. The establishment of the Unemployed Relief Committee in 1905 by Parliamentary enactment initially gained the support of the Leeds LRC.



Confidence in the organisation rapidly declined as it turned out to be another relief organisation established on a purely voluntary basis. In 1908 hostility to the Liberal dominated committee led to violent acts of protest against its Chairman, Herbert Brown, by members of the ILP. The overall effect of several years of agitation among the unemployed was to reduce the credibility of Liberalism in Leeds as an organ of social reform.

The Leeds LRC and ILP was to have its major source of support in the Gas Workers' Union (GGLU). By 1900, the Union was the largest and wealthiest in Leeds and was strongly represented among municipal employees at a time when the City Council's role as a provider of municipal services was growing rapidly. The gas workers were rivalled by the Tramway Workers' Union which captured the representation of most of those employed on the tramways after the service was municipalised in 1895. The latter union was also a major source of finance to the Leeds LRC and was engaged in continuous disputes with the Tramway Department's management over terms and conditions of employment. This hostility was accentuated after the appointment of J. B. Hamilton as general manager in 1902, inaugurating what was considered a more authoritarian regime of work discipline. The tramway workers' case was taken up by the Labour group on the Council and became linked with the issue of the large salaries paid to senior local government officers like J. B. Hamilton.



The importance of the tramways and other trading services such as gas and electricity supply was taken up by the Labour Group when they formulated a programme of social reform through city government. As expanded by their leader from 1908-13, John Badlay, they advocated trading revenues as a source of investment for upgrading of services and increasing the wages of municipal workers. This was opposed to the City Council's policy of using trading revenues in relief of rates for local businesses and the middle class and relying on external borrowing to meet the difference. The Labour group attempted to formulate a programme that would at the same time use municipal expenditure as an agency of social reform and reduce the burden of rate paying for working-class and lower-middle-class households.

The growth of the Leeds LRC's representation on the City Council did nothing to prevent its political isolation. Initially the Liberals on the Council had tried to separate the Labour group leader, John Buckle, from the majority of the members who were ILP supporters, but their lack of success and the departure of Connellan from the Council, where he had sat as a Liberal, led them to deride the Labour group as 'Socialist' and 'Utopian'. At the same time the Liberals consistently aligned themselves with the Conservatives in opposition to the program of the Leeds LRC.

The growth of the Labour group on the City Council was consistently at the expense of the Liberal party. Once solid Liberal strongholds like

West Hunslet, Holbeck and Armley were falling to Labour by the eve of the First World War. These were overwhelmingly working-class wards and demonstrated that the Liberals were losing their once assured solid base. This did not lead the Liberals to align themselves with the Labour group on the basis of a social reform programme, but on the contrary, to move closer to the Conservatives. It joined the Conservatives in accusing the Labour group of serving two masters, the Corporation and its employees respectively. In addition, the Liberals and Conservatives combined to keep the Labour group off influential committees like that of the Watch and to maintain the under-representation of Labour on the aldermanic bench.

The increasing alignment of the Liberals with the Conservatives in Leeds politics, coincided with the political exhaustion of the Liberal Party. After the financial 'Concordat' the Party became increasingly unable to formulate any convincing alternative programme to that of the Conservatives. The Conservatives, under the forceful leadership of Charles Wilson, increasingly won over long-established middle-class voters by their public stance of opposition to socialism and the Leeds LRC policy of social reform on the rates.

The position of the Leeds LRC and the trade unions was to be changed after 1911, when the decade of trade depression gave way to a period of economic upturn and widespread industrial unrest in Britain. In 1911 and



1913 significant groups of workers involved in the distributive trades of Leeds, such as the Carters, were able to win significant gains in wages by striking and the use of militant picketing. The local police were taken by surprise and lost control of the streets when the striking Carters mounted a blockade of the principal railway stations and depots in the city. The outcome was to harden the attitudes of local businessmen towards trade unions and strike action.

This upsurge of strikes was to reach municipal workers in June 1913 and to precipitate eventually the corporation workers' strike of 1913-14. A claim for two shillings a week increase for all manual employees of the City Council coincided with the establishment of the Federal Council of Municipal Employees, which was an attempt by the major trade unions with municipal employees to counter the power of the Leeds Corporation Consultative Committee which dealt with the labour claims of the municipal workers. The Federal Council, whose major unions were the GGLU and the tramway workers, was carried along by pressure from their members to make general the gains achieved by some of their members in June 1913.

The Leeds LRC group on the City Council attempted to channel the unrest into a more political direction by persuading the Federal Council to refrain from striking until the outcome of the November elections were known. While the Labour group anticipated that it would win control of



the City Council, the Conservative led majority organised to resist any anticipated strike of its employees. The victory of the Conservatives in November 1913 enabled them to establish a Special Committee which acted as a general staff of the City Council in the ensuing strike. The Special Committee from which the Labour Group were excluded, was granted unprecedented powers of dealing with any strike of municipal employees, and although it was comprised equally of Conservative and Liberal members, was tightly controlled by the Conservative leader, Charles Wilson.

The militancy of the municipal workers that was still very apparent in December 1913 when they voted overwhelmingly to strike for the 2/- increase, was seen to wilt before the solid resistance of the City Council majority and the mobilisation of middle-class strike breakers to man the trams and power stations. The defection of the tramwaymen in December left the rest of the strikers isolated, control of the streets and the picket lines being secured by the police. In spite of the political support of the Leeds Labour Party and trade unions the strikers were forced into terms which amounted to total defeat in January 1914. The strikers had expected a re-run of the 1890 strike and were utterly demoralised by the unexpected course of events during the strike.

The Labour Party and Trade Council's support for the strike remained largely verbal, virtually no action being taken to counter the City

Council's use of strike breakers. Their cause received even less support from the National Labour or trade unions in other towns. By contrast, one of the most important figures in the ILP and Labour Party, Philip Snowden, denounced the strike in the most vitriolic manner, giving the Leeds City Council extra political ammunition. The aftermath of the strike saw the Leeds LRC distance itself from the strikers and marked the end of the period when it had acted as the political arm of the municipal employees of Leeds.

The real victor of the strike was the Conservative Party under the leadership of Charles Wilson, who had chaired the Special Committee and consistently taken an uncompromising stance towards the striking unions. The Liberal Party emerged from the strike divided and demoralised, with a deep gap between its leaders who had participated in the Special Committee and its Councillors who resented the vesting of all effective political power in it at their expense.

The growth of the electoral strength of the Leeds LRC had coincided with the development of a network of socialist clubs and societies affiliated to the ILP and the SDF/BSP. The latter party made the largest contribution to the expansion of socialist activity, particularly in West Leeds, and after its affiliation with the Leeds LRC brought an experienced body of organisers and clerks to the Labour cause. The most marked feature of the Labour Party in Leeds up to 1914, was its ability to maintain political

unity and embrace such divergent figures as Buckle and Connellan on the one side and the BSP and its organisers, like Killip and Clay. Potential sources of division, such as that between militant suffragettes and moderate suffragists in the Women's Labour League, failed to divert support away from the local Labour Party. The Corporation Workers' Strike produced no split in the Labour Movement, such recriminations as there were being between trade unions involved in the strike.



## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **Primary Sources**

#### **Personal Papers and Collections**

Alfred Mattison Collection, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

#### **Political Party and Labour Organization Records**

ILP National Administrative Council Minutes 1893-1909 and 1909-32 (Microfilm Record, University of Bradford Library).

City of Leeds Labour Party: Leeds Labour Representation Committee, General Ledger and Memorandum Book 1911-31 (Leeds City Archives).

Leeds Labour Representation Committee, Minutes of General Executive and Executive Group Meetings 1912-16 (Leeds City Archives).

Leeds Labour Representation Committee Yearbooks 1906-16 (Leeds Local and Family History Library).

Leeds and District Trades Council 1882-1914 (Leeds City Archives).

Francis Johnson Collection (British Library of Political and Economic Science, London. Also available on Microfilm.)

#### **Newspapers**

The Labour Leader (1893-1932)

Leeds Express

Leeds Mercury (Leeds and District Mercury 1902-1907).

Leeds Weekly Citizen (1911-1990)

Yorkshire Evening news

Yorkshire Evening Post

Yorkshire Factory Times (1889-1926)

Yorkshire Observer

Yorkshire Post

Official Sources

Robinson's Blue Book and City Record 1902-1914 (Leeds 1902-14)

Report of Special Committee on the Strike of Municipal Workmen, 11 December 1913 to 13 January 1914 (Leeds 1914).

Articles

B. Barber, 'Municipal Government in Leeds 1835-1914', in D. Frazer (ed.) Municipal Reform and the Industrial City, (Leicester 1982).

R. Douglas, 'Labour in Decline 1910-14', in K. D. Brown (ed.) Essays In Anti-Labour History (1974).

A. Greenwood, 'The Leeds Municipal Strike', in Economic Journal XXIV (1914).

K. Laybourn, 'The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism, the State of the Debate', in History, (1995).

M. D. Pugh, 'Yorkshire and the New Liberalism?' in Journal of Modern History (1978)

J. Reynolds and K. Laybourn, 'The Emergence of the Independent Labour Party in Bradford', International Review of Social History XX (1975).

M. Savage, 'The Rise of the Labour Party in Local Perspective', The Journal of Regional and Local Studies 10 (1990).

P. Thane, 'Labour and Local Politics: radicalism, democracy and social reform 1880-1914', in E. P. Biagini and A. J. Reid (eds.), Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain 1850-1914, (Cambridge 1991).

J. E. Williams, 'The Leeds Corporation Strike in 1913', in A. Briggs and J. Saville (eds.), Essays in Labour History 1886-1926 (1971).

## Secondary Sources

### Books

- H. Beales and H. Pelling, Laour and Politics 1900-1906: A History of the Labour Representation Committee. (1958)
- J. M. Bellamy and J. Saville (eds.), Dictionary of Labour Biography, 9 vols. (Basingstoke 1972-93).
- G. Bernstein, Liberalism and Liberal Politics in Edwardian England (1986).
- K. D. Brown (ed.), The First Labour Party 1906-14, (London 1985).
- K. D. Brown (ed.), Essays in Anti-Labour History, (London 1974).
- K. D. Brown, Labour and Unemployment 1900-1914, (Newton Abbot 1971).
- P. J. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism (Cambridge, 1971)
- M. Crick, The History of the Social Democratic Federation, (Keele 1994).
- D. Englander, Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain 1838-1918, (Oxford 1983).
- D. B. Foster, Life Story, (Leeds 1921).
- D. B. Foster, The Logic of the Alliance or the Labour Party Analyzed and Justified, (Leeds 1911).
- J. Hannam, Isabella Ford, (London 1989).
- E. P. Hennock, Fit and Proper Persons, (1973).
- D. Howell, British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906, (Manchester 1983).
- D. James, T. Jowitt and K. Laybourn (ed.), The Centennial History of the Independent Labour Party, (Halifax 1992).
- J. A. Jowitt and R. R. S. Taylor (eds.), Bradford 1890-1914: The Cradle of the ILP, (Leeds 1980).
- B. Lancaster, Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism: Leicester Working Class Politics 1860-1906, (Leicester 1987).



- K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1880-1914, (London 1984).
- K. Laybourn, The Rise of Labour: The British Labour Party 1890-1979, (London 1988).
- K. Laybourn and D. James, The Rising Sun of Socialism: The ILP in the Textile District of West Riding of Yorkshire, (Wakefield 1991).
- J. Liddington and J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of Women's Suffrage Movement, (London 1975).
- R. McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party 1890-1914, (Oxford 1974).
- H. Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party, (1954)
- P. Poirier, The Advent of the Labour Party, (1958)
- J. Reynolds and K. Laybourn, Labour's Heartland, (Bradford 1987).
- J. Soper, Leeds Transport, Vols. 1 and 2, (Leeds 1985 and 1996).
- T. Steele, Alfred Orage and the Leeds Arts Club 1893-1923, (Aldershot 1990).
- D. Tanner, Political Change and the Labour Party, Cambridge 1990).
- P. Thompson, Socialist, Liberal and Labour: The Struggle for London 1885-1914, (London 1963).
- T. Wilson, The Decline of the Liberal Party 1914-35, (London 1966).
- T. Woodhouse, Nourishing the Liberty Tree: Liberals and Labour in Leeds 1880-1914, (Keele 1996).

#### Unpublished Theses

- J. Buckman, 'The Economic and Social History of Alien Immigrants to Leeds 1880-1914', PhD, University of Strathclyde 1968.
- E. J. Connell, 'Industrial Development in South Leeds 1790-1914', PhD, University of Leeds 1975.
- M. Meadowcroft, 'Transition in Leeds City Government 1903-26', MA, University of Bradford.

- B. Powell, 'A Study of Change in Social Origins of Members of Leeds City Council 1885-1953', MA, University of Leeds.
- M. F. Ward, 'Industrial Development and Location in Leeds North of the River Aire 1775-1914, PhD, University of Leeds 1972.
- T. Woodhouse, 'A Political History of Leeds Labour Movement 1880-1914, PhD, University of Leeds, 1984.