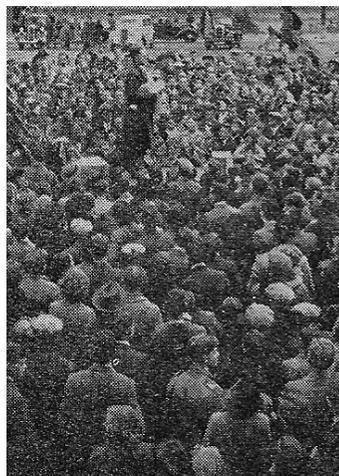
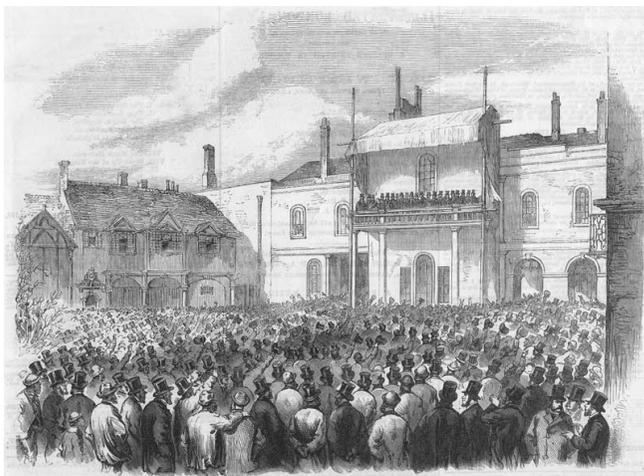


# REFORM & REVOLT

IN THE CITY OF DREAMING SPIRES

**Radical, Socialist and  
Communist Politics in the  
City of Oxford 1830–1980**



**DUNCAN BOWIE**

# Reform and Revolt in the City of Dreaming Spires: Radical, Socialist and Communist Politics in the City of Oxford 1830–1980

Duncan Bowie



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# Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Preface  | vi        |
| Maps   | viii      |
| <b>Part 1: Radicalism</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| 1 Oxford in the Early 19th Century   | 3         |
| 2 Reform Agitation, 1830–1832  | 7         |
| 3 The Development of Reform Politics and the Reformed Corporation, 1833–1836 | 12        |
| 4 Suffrage and Anti-Corn Law Agitation, 1837–1846                            | 16        |
| 5 Radicalism, Religion and the Poor Laws, 1843–1845                          | 25        |
| 6 Local Politics, Chartism and the ‘Little Charter’ Movement, 1846–1853      | 27        |
| 7 Corruption and the Radical Challenge, 1854–1857                            | 35        |
| 8 Reform Agitation and the Oxford Reform League, 1857–1869                   | 40        |
| 9 Education, the Ballot and Drink, 1870–1873                                 | 50        |
| 10 Republicanism and Early Trade Unionism, 1871–1873                         | 52        |
| 11 The Decline of Oxford Liberalism, 1870–1887                               | 55        |
| 12 The Nature of Victorian Radicalism  | 64        |
| <b>Part 2: Socialism</b>   | <b>67</b> |
| 13 The Political and Industrial Structure of Late Victorian Oxford           | 69        |
| 14 The Radical Tradition and the Oxford Socialist League, 1883–1900          | 73        |
| 15 The Early Years of the Oxford Trades Council, 1888–1900                   | 82        |
| 16 The Social Democratic Federation – Socialism in the Streets, 1896–1898    | 85        |

|    |   |            |
|----|---|------------|
| 17 | The Municipal Housing Association, 1900–1902  | 89         |
| 18 | The Municipal Labour Representation Association, 1902–1905                            | 94         |
| 19 | The Independent Labour Party, Unemployment Agitation<br>and Local Politics, 1905–1907 | 103        |
| 20 | ILP Propaganda and the Clarion Cycling Club, 1906–1908                                | 108        |
| 21 | Labour Divided, 1906–1909   | 113        |
| 22 | Labour and Politics, 1909–1914  | 118        |
| 23 | The Growth of a Socialist Tradition   | 122        |
|    | <b>Part 3: Labourism</b>  | <b>127</b> |
| 24 | Oxford Labour and Politics During the First World War                                 | 129        |
| 25 | The Industrialisation of Oxford   | 139        |
| 26 | Postwar Years, 1918–1919  | 141        |
| 27 | The Oxford Labour Party and the Communist Challenge,<br>January – March 1920          | 145        |
| 28 | The Militant Trades Council, March 1920 – December 1921                               | 149        |
| 29 | The Re-Establishment of the Oxford Labour Party,<br>December 1921 – June 1922         | 156        |
| 30 | Labour Divisions and Liberal Revival, June 1922 –<br>December 1923                    | 159        |
| 31 | Parliamentary Contests and the General Strike, 1924–1926                              | 165        |
| 32 | Labour in Retreat, 1926–1932  | 173        |
| 33 | The Rebirth of Militancy – Unemployment and Fascism,<br>1932–1934                     | 177        |
| 34 | The Rebuilding of the Oxford Labour Party, 1934–1935                                  | 179        |
| 35 | The Cutteslowe Walls and Florence Park, 1935–1936                                     | 182        |
| 36 | Communism, Fascism and Local Politics, 1935–1937                                      | 186        |
| 37 | Labour on the City Council, 1934–1939   | 195        |
| 38 | Popular Front – the 1938 By-Election and After  | 198        |
| 39 | The Oxford Labour Party and the Working Class   | 211        |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Part 4: Labour After 1940</b>  | <b>215</b> |
| 40 The Oxford Labour Party since 1940   | 217        |
| <b>Part 5: Progressive Politics</b>   | <b>243</b> |
| 41 Oxford and Progressive Politics  | 245        |
| <b>Appendices</b>   | <b>255</b> |
| Appendix 1 – The Impact of Franchise Reform on the Oxford<br>Parliamentary Electorate | 255        |
| Appendix 2 – Analysis of Parliamentary Elections:<br>1820, 1837, 1868                 | 257        |
| Appendix 3 – Analysis of 1837 Ballot Petition   | 262        |
| Appendix 4 – 1840 Election Leaflet  | 264        |
| Appendix 5 – Foundation Document of the Oxford Socialist League                       | 266        |
| Appendix 6 – Liberal and Labour electoral support by<br>wards, 1889–1979              | 267        |
| Appendix 7 – Labour versus the Caucus: The 1936 Local<br>Election Manifesto           | 268        |
| References and Notes  | 277        |
| Bibliography  | 314        |
| Index   | 319        |

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**Note:** Other images relating to the book may be viewed on the author’s website: <https://reformandrevoltinthecityofdreamingspires.wordpress.com>.

## Preface

This book is a study of local politics in the City of Oxford. Many historical studies have been published which focus on the University. The focus of this study is the interaction between university-based intellectuals and the working-class political activists in the city. In contrast with Cambridge, Oxford was more than just a university town with a concentration of medieval buildings – the ‘dreaming spires’ – it was also a commercial and industrial city. A political history which covers most of the 19th and 20th centuries is also a study of artisan politics and the politics of an organised working class. Oxford therefore presents an unusual case study of the relationship in the 19th century between artisans and the civic establishment, which included members of the university establishment, but also of the relationship in the 20<sup>th</sup> century between intellectuals and industrial workers.

While it is widely recognised that many leading national politicians gained their early political experience within the student politics of the university, primarily within the Oxford Union Society (the students’ union only being established in the mid 1970s), it is less widely known that some of these national politicians had, in their early political careers, also engaged in the politics of the city, either through the Oxford City Council or through a range of reform organisations. It is however perhaps significant that the majority of the biographies of these politicians listed in the bibliography, and their autobiographies and memoirs, pay no or little attention to these local political apprenticeships. I should emphasise that this book does not present a study of radicalism and socialism within the University – generally, academics and students only enter the narrative when they engage in the politics of the city. Moreover, I have sought to avoid too much of an emphasis on those

Oxford radicals and socialists who moved onto national political careers. This book serves as an intentional corrective to the focus of so much historical writing by giving due attention to local political activists. I have also sought in later sections to avoid engagement with the extensive speculative literature on which communists in Oxford may have been Soviet agents. There is already sufficient literature on this issue, to which I have referred in endnotes as appropriate.

A note of explanation as to why this study was undertaken may be of interest to readers. After graduating with a history degree from the university in 1976, with some involvement in student politics (standing unsuccessfully for student union secretary and president in successive years) and community action projects, I became active in the local Labour Party, first as secretary of a local Labour branch and then from 1979 to 1983 as a councillor for the St. Clement's ward. I was therefore interested in studying the political history firstly of my local area, but then of the city as a whole. I discovered that while some material had been published on the civic history of the city, this focus was mainly on the institutions of local politics – the city council and successive general elections – rather than on political movements. Moreover, much civic history tends to be self-contained and does not situate local events within a wider context. I also wanted to demonstrate that there was continuity in progressive reform politics, from the period of Victorian radicalism, through the early socialism of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, through to the Labour and communist politics of the interwar period. This is intentionally a partisan narrative.

The original text of this book was written between 1976 and 1980. In 1979, I completed a postgraduate degree in urban planning and took up a local government housing policy post in London. After commuting for four years between two local authorities, as a councillor in one and officer in another, I moved to London in 1984. This is the principal reason why the main narrative ends at 1980. The other reason is that 1980 represents a significant date in the narrative of progressive politics in Oxford, as it was the year that Labour won control of the City Council, for the first time with an overall majority. I am proud to have been a member of the city council Labour Group at that time.

I acknowledge the help of the various librarians who assisted me with access to sources, especially Malcom Graham, Oxford's local history librarian and David Horsfield, Ruskin College librarian, and also wish to belatedly apologise to the students of the Oxford WEA local history class of 1977 who once had to listen to a lengthy reading of part of an earlier draft. I also acknowledge the valiant efforts of those local journalists who over the 150-year period studied recorded local political developments, often in great detail. Without their work it would not have been possible to write this book. I also acknowledge the comradeship of my fellow councillors and political activists, many of whom have subsequently passed away. My thanks also to my wife Jackie, who proofread the final draft and, in doing so, learnt something of my personal prehistory. I would like to dedicate this book to the memory of two great Oxford socialists, Olive Gibbs and Raphael Samuel, who both encouraged me to undertake the research on which this book is based.



**Fig. 1:** Parliamentary and Municipal Boundaries: 1832 and 1835.

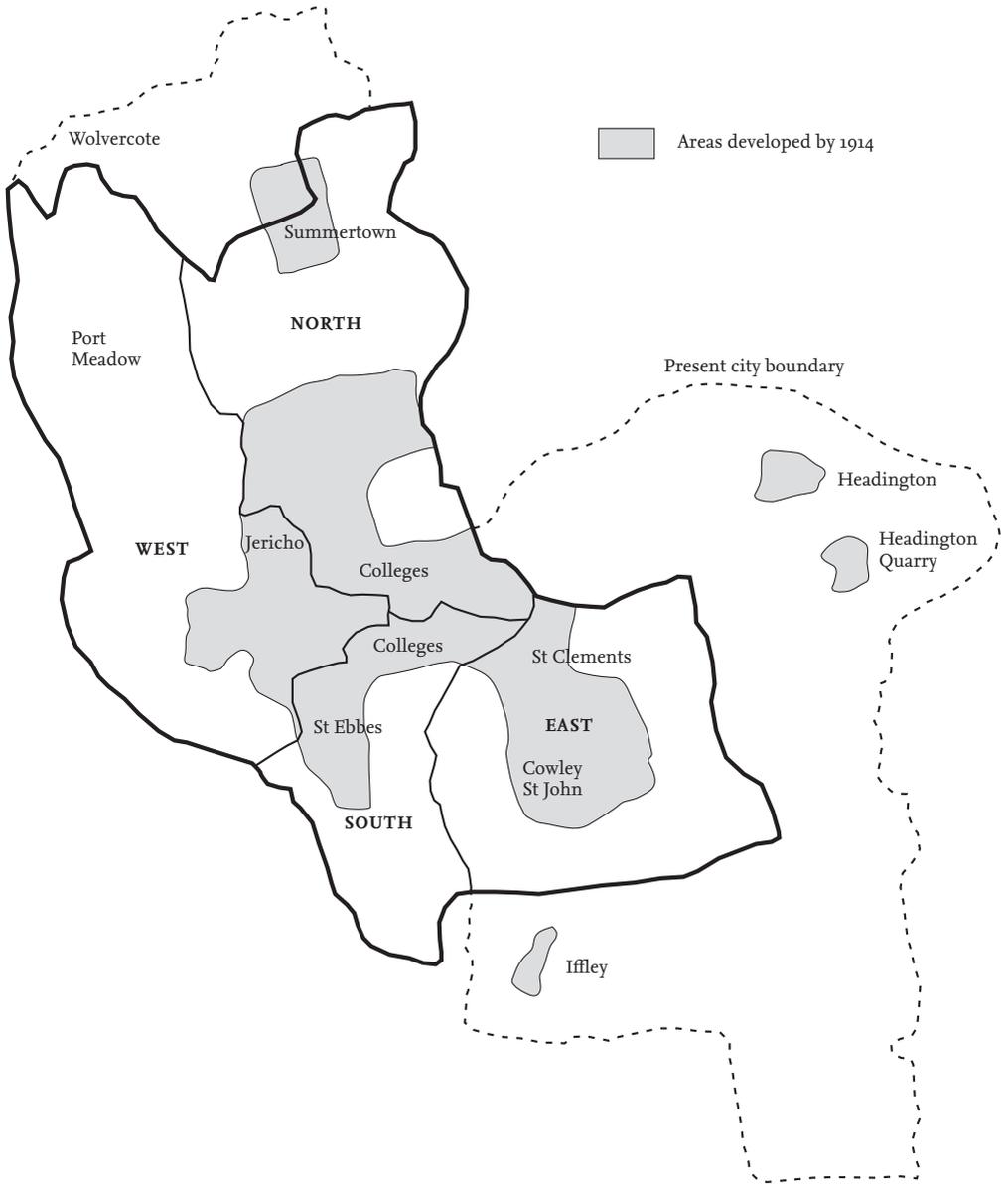


Fig. 2: Oxford City Extension: 1889.



Fig. 3: Greater Oxford, 1928.

In 1979, a new ward, Central, was created to cover the colleges. Donnington ward was split between the adjacent wards



Fig. 4: Parliamentary and Ward Boundaries: 1969-79.

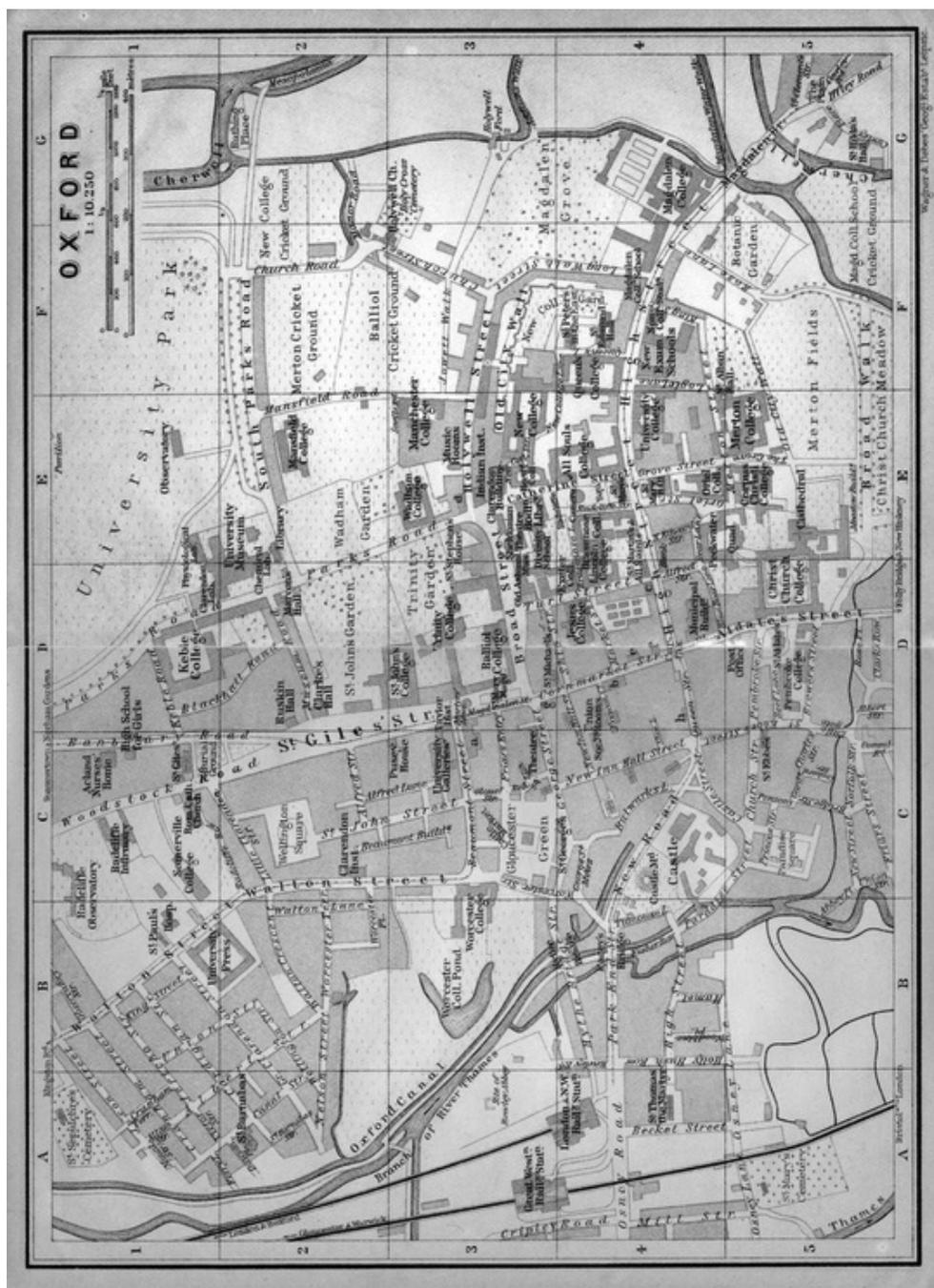


Fig. 5: Oxford, 1910.

PART I

# Radicalism



## CHAPTER I

# Oxford in the Early 19th Century

Oxford in the early 19th century was a flourishing city. A population of some 8,000 in 1750 had grown to 11,000 by 1801 and to 19,370 by 1831.<sup>1</sup>

The boundary commissioners of 1831 reported that

In the city (and viewed apart from the University) new streets, elegant houses in rows and detached, a new suburb, and several hundred smaller tenements, have been erected within the last ten years, and an active building speculation is going on at the present time, November 1831. As a town Oxford must be considered very flourishing; its municipal arrangements are excellent; it is maintained in perfect condition, lighted with gas, well paved and cleaned, and is a place of great thoroughfare; it has also the advantages of canal navigation, by which it is supplied with coal and all the more bulky articles of domestic consumption.<sup>2</sup>

Oxford had two characteristics that set it apart from other towns of a similar size. Firstly, the town was economically dependent on the University in its midst, and secondly, the life of the town remained dominated by the 'guild merchant' mentality for several decades after industrialisation had dramatically changed the economic and social structure of most of the country. The University's influence was not limited to its role as the provider of jobs for most of Oxford's population. It was also a political rival to the corporation. For example, while the corporation controlled the police during daylight hours, the University controlled them at night, imposing a curfew on students and citizens alike after 9.00 pm in the winter and 10.00 pm in the summer. The University controlled the market, this leading to many disputes with the corporation. Most symbolic was the annual humiliation of the corporation, when in penance for the St. Scholastica's Day riot of 1355 when the University was driven out of the city, the mayor had to take an oath to uphold the privileges of the University.

The guild merchant mentality remained because only freemen were entitled to trade in the city, and the council regulated apprenticeships. This restricted the economic growth of the city since individuals were unable to set up businesses without authorisation. In fact, the suburb of St. Clement's developed because, being outside the incorporated city, 'Shops can be opened here by people who are not freemen of the city, but who find their habitations sufficiently near to

answer to their purpose as tradesmen.' By 1831, St. Clement's had grown to a population of 1,885.<sup>3</sup>

Until 1835, the city was governed by a corporation under a charter of James I, consisting of a Mayor, High Steward, Recorder, four Aldermen, Assistants, Bailiffs, a Town Clerk, two Chamberlains and 24 Common Councilmen. There were four ways of becoming a freeman of the city – by birth (sons of freemen on reaching 21); by apprenticeship (apprenticeship to a freeman of seven years); by purchase (for individuals wishing to trade in the city) and by gift (honorary freedom of the city for eminent persons). Applicants had to pay fees: £1 10s 3d for freedom by birth, £1 9s 0d for freedom by apprenticeship and £27 15s 6d for freedom by purchase.<sup>4</sup> A report by the Commissioners into Municipal Corporations of 1833 has left a vivid picture of the way in which the unreformed corporation operated. Two candidates for the mayoralty were nominated by the corporation, with the freemen being able to choose between the two. The corporation could therefore nominate 'Two persons equally obnoxious to the great body of freemen, and equally opposed in their opinions.' The commissioners argued that the election was 'illusory' and that the system led to a 'general depuration in the morals and habits of the lower class of freemen, without any one of the advantages which are expected to attend a popular choice.'

The election process was described as follows:

The practice is to assemble, in a very confined space, as many of the freemen as choose to attend, there to await the announcement of the two names selected by the council chamber as candidates for the election. In the meantime, the friends or partisans of the candidate distribute liquor among their respective voters; a scene of riot and intoxication ensues, and when polling begins and the voters are passed, one by one, through a small opening, at which they are counted by the tellers, the scramble is such as to endanger life and limb, and in the confusion and struggle many persons are enabled to vote who are not freemen... the respectable and instructed portion of the freemen (tradesmen and shop keepers) studiously absent themselves from these elections, and although there is a body of more than 1,400 resident freemen, the annual vacancies of corporation offices are generally filled up by the votes of less than 500 persons, consisting of the inmates of the workhouses – who, on election days, have a holiday for this purpose – and of the most indigent, illiterate and worthless inhabitants of the city.

The commissioners commented that,

When it is considered that this process, or something equivalent, is repeated at the annual elections of no less than five of the civic offices – at the elections of town clerk, coroner, high steward – at the elections of various persons who in turn become candidates for charitable

loans – and at the elections of Members of Parliament – it will at once be seen how large a portion of the year must be devoted to idleness and debauchery, and how large a portion of the voters consigned to the purposes of corruption.<sup>5</sup>

Turning to Oxford's parliamentary representation, in the last three decades of the 18th century, Oxford was what was known as a 'pocket borough'. In 1768, the mayor and Corporation of Oxford had been in debt to the extent of £7,500. Attempting to save the city from bankruptcy, the mayor and aldermen offered to re-elect the two sitting Tory MPs, Hon. Robert Lee and Sir T. Stapleton 'provided they advanced £7,500 to discharge the debt upon the city.' The two MPs laid the matter before the Commons, and the mayor and ten aldermen were committed to Newgate prison. During their five-day stay in prison, they bargained with the Duke of Marlborough and Earl of Abingdon, who agreed to discharge the debt if their nominees were returned to parliament by the city.

Consequently, George Nares and William Harcourt, both Tories, were elected. Lord Robert Spencer, son of the Duke of Marlborough, sat for Oxford from 1774 to 1784, while the Hon. Peregrine Bertie, Lord Abingdon's son, sat from 1774 to 1790. Francis Burton, who represented the pocket borough of Woodstock from 1784 to 1790, sat for Oxford in the Marlborough interest from 1790 to 1812. Abingdon's seat was lost in 1796 to a banker, Henry Peters, who ran as an Independent candidate. Peters was succeeded in 1802 by J. A. Wright, an Independent Tory who sat until 1806 and from 1812 to 1820. The city's champion against the Marlborough interest was J. I. Lockhart, another Tory, who was defeated in 1802 and 1806, elected without contest in 1807 and who in 1812, together with Wright, defeated the new Marlborough candidate, the Hon. George Eden (a Whig, the Duke's politics having changed).<sup>6</sup> The 1812 contest was regarded as a historic one – 'A body of the most respectable voters, animated by a spirit of independence, took up arms against the influence of the House of Blenheim – they fought, they conquered, and they made Oxford a FREE CITY.' In 1818, Marlborough put up General St John, who was opposed by Lockhart. A somewhat partisan commentator, Joseph Munday, later recounted that 'a party, who looked only to a base principle of revenge, or to a gratification of their ambition or avarice made known their determination once more to rivet our fetters, and to surrender the representation of the city into the hands of the present Duke of Marlborough.' The Duke had his revenge – St John and Wright were elected, and Lockhart defeated.<sup>7</sup>

In 1820, St John was defeated, and the Marlborough interest finally excluded from Oxford, Lockhart being returned with a Tory colleague, Sir Charles Wetherell. In 1826, Wetherell retired to take up a University seat, and a gentleman called Hughes Hughes offered himself as a replacement. However, a group of Oxford freemen 'displeased at the prospect of being represented in Parliament by a gentleman of whom they knew so little' called a conference on the matter.

The Woodstock election had been held a few days before Oxford was due to poll, and J. Langston, who had unsuccessfully represented the radical interest

against Marlborough, was invited to stand for Oxford. Langston accepted the invitation and, having met the freemen outside the city,

arrived in Oxford, preceded by bands of music, banners, flags, and other emblems of triumph... There were in the cavalcade eight or ten stage coaches, each drawn by four horses ... The procession was one of the most cheering and delightful ever beheld in the city, extending at one time from Carfax to St John's College. The streets were filled by the people, who rent the air with their acclamations; the windows crowded by ladies elegantly dressed, who expressed their wishes for the success of the truly popular candidate by waving their scarfs and handkerchiefs.<sup>8</sup>

Langston was elected, together with Lockhart, though Hughes Hughes came a close third.

Hughes had considerable local support. In 1830 he was intending to contest Rochester but was persuaded by a letter from some 300 freemen to stand in Oxford instead. Both Langston and Lockhart sought to retain their seats. Whereas previous elections had been contested primarily on the basis of personalities, or as a struggle between the city's champion and Marlborough, the 1830 election can be seen as the first Oxford contest in which political positions played some part. Both Hughes and Langston declared themselves radicals, the latter as 'favouring every measure of constitutional liberty', while Lockhart, standing as a Tory, was booed at the hustings. The result appears to represent a victory for radicalism, for both Hughes and Langston were elected, with Lockhart, formerly the city's champion, trailing behind. Langston and Hughes had not run in tandem, but their election was seen by Oxford radicals as forcing the Tories onto the defensive.<sup>9</sup> They intended to petition against Langston's return but dropped the plan when their candidate became seriously ill.<sup>10</sup>

## CHAPTER 2

# Reform Agitation, 1830–1832

Following similar initiatives in Reading<sup>1</sup> and Abingdon<sup>2</sup> in March 1831, the Mayor of Oxford, Thomas Wyatt, called a town meeting in support of parliamentary reform, in response to a request from a 'large number of respectable inhabitant householders.'<sup>3</sup>

Hughes was prevented from attending the meeting by parliamentary business. However, he wrote a letter to the mayor which deserves quoting at length because of its recognition of separate class interests:

I am fully convinced that by far the soundest and best part of the population – I mean that part of it which, from its intelligence and virtue, deserves emphatically to be regarded as 'The People' – is altogether averse to the measures commonly advocated under the name of 'Radical Reform'. I am equally certain that the same large and sober-minded class is dissatisfied with the present state of the Representation, and anxious for the introduction of such temperate, wise, and practical amendments, as are consistent with the spirit of the Constitution, and the advanced civilization of the age in which we live. The class to which I allude are no parties to the fanatical and turbulent cry raised by some against Monarchy and Aristocracy—on the contrary, they are warmly attached to the great principles of our mixed Constitution, and fully sensible of the blessings of order, security and liberty. They would have the prerogatives of the Crown untouched—they would not invade the constitutional privileges of the peerage – they would not deprive property of its just influence—they only insist that the unquestionable right of the people to be fairly represented in the House of Commons shall likewise be held sacred.

... I hesitate not to express my conviction, that it is just they who are at present so tenacious of their monopoly of power and influence, who would first be swept away by the deluge of a ferocious Democracy ... I am persuaded that timely concession would be productive of the happiest results. .... I believe it would powerfully contribute to establish that sympathy so much desired between the several orders of the State ... and I believe it would restore to Parliament the reverence and confidence of the people. The legislators would thus acquire fresh claims to

the affectionate support of the nation, and the venerable institutions of which we boast, increased stability and permanence.

... the fears I at first had that it was too sweeping a measure have so far given way that ... I have made up my mind to vote for the first and second reading of the Bill about to be introduced, a determination which I now for the first time declare.<sup>4</sup>

The Reform meeting was attended by over 2,000 people, amongst them 30 city councillors including the mayor, Alderman Richard Cox and councillors William Slatter, John Hickman, Richard Sheen, Deodatus Eaton, W. Butler and J. Banting. The mayor announced that he had 'long considered a Reform of Parliament as just and necessary.' The reformers were clearly an influential group in the unreformed corporation. The meeting was not, however, unanimous. A tailor called John Green protested 'against the spoiliating measure on behalf of the poor and the single men and lodgers who were to be robbed of their rights.' According to *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, Mr Green –

had proceeded thus far when he was assailed by such clamorous indications of disapprobation, that it was impossible to collect another sentence that he uttered, although he continued his efforts, by the most vehement gestures and elevated voice, to compel the attention of the meeting for nearly ten minutes after. Thus engaged, and vainly endeavouring to engage others, Mr Green, unconscious of the amusement he was about to afford, was by degrees good humouredly jostled and elbowed by some juvenile neighbours till he came close to the Chairman, behind whose elevated seat there is a snug private closet, into which this untameable talker was in a twinkling popped, and the door closed upon him! This suddenly concluded his impassioned but inaudible harangue, and paved his unenviable exit from the Hall, by means of a convenient back staircase, with the most perfect pantamimic effect, and to the no small diversion of the now unanimous audience.<sup>5</sup>

The meeting eventually passed a series of resolutions:

1. that should the plan of reform in the representation of the people in the Commons House of Parliament, proposed by His Majesty's Ministers, and, therefore authorised by his Majesty himself, pass into a law, it will reflect the brightest lustre on the reign of William the Fourth, and ensure to him a continuance of that loyalty, affection, and devoted attachment now so generally prevailing amongst all classes of his Majesty's subjects.
2. that this Meeting is convinced the passing of the Reform measures into a law will have the effect of uniting all classes of his Majesty's subjects,

and of putting an end to the question which has so long agitated the country.

3. that this Meeting, confident of the absolute necessity of reform in the representation of the people in the House of Commons, is desirous to express its earnest wish that his Majesty's Ministers will not submit such alterations to their plan as will render it inefficient and unsatisfactory.
4. that this Meeting express its gratitude to Lord John Russell for having brought forward the measure of reform in so able and judicious a manner.<sup>6</sup>

The meeting also collected petitions, to be presented in the Lords by Lord Brougham, and in the Commons by Hughes and Langston. By the following Thursday, 2,100 signatures had been collected. In March, the reformers gave a dinner for Hughes, who in his speech referred to his role in the replacement of Wellington's Tory ministry by that of the Whig Earl Grey:

I cannot look back but with unmixed satisfaction on the independent vote whereby I assisted a small majority in overcoming the late administration, whose Great Captain had declared himself the settled foe of all reform, and the champion of the present corrupt system of Representation – I equally rejoice that the vote of your Representative may be said to have turned the scale in favour of the second reading of that Bill, which when passed into a law, will form another Magna Charta, as it were, of the rights and privileges of the people.

Hughes also thanked his election committee, chaired by Mr Butler, and the mayor for giving 'the assistance of his high station to advance the great measure of rational and constitutional (not revolutionary) Reform.' Toasts drunk included 'Lord John Russell and success to the Reform Bill.'<sup>7</sup>

At the end of April, a general election was called. Both sitting MPs confirmed their support for the Reform Bill, Langston 'believing that the people of England will never abuse the power to be placed in their hands, but that they will use it to the maintenance of those sacred institutions under which alone their liberty is secure.' This time, Langston and Hughes contested the election as partners. An Oxford Reform Committee was formed under Thomas Wyatt, 'for the purpose of promoting the interests of the two candidates who have pledged themselves to support the cause of Reform.' The committee advertised in the *Journal* that it was 'sitting at Mr Munday's in the High St' and that 'personal cooperation and written communication are earnestly solicited.'<sup>8</sup>

The Tories collected a petition opposing reform. At the nomination meeting Thomas Robinson, a banker and opponent of reform, attacked Langston and Hughes for supporting a 'revolutionary' measure. He did not however nominate a candidate, Lockhart being ill, and was shouted down by the crowd.<sup>9</sup> Langston and Hughes were returned unopposed. Opposition to reform in Oxford did not

however disappear. In May, 'one of the middle class' wrote to the *Journal* attacking the alliance between middle class and working class:

If the second class, unaware of the dangerous machinations of the third class, with whom they are now seemingly so cordially associated in supporting the Reform Bill, should continue such unfortunate and fatal association, no sober minded Englishman can doubt that a full end will speedily be made of the British Monarchical Constitution, and with it of all British prosperity, glory and greatness.<sup>10</sup>

In August, the council decided by 39 votes to 21 not to present the freedom of the city to Hughes. Hughes replied that he was surprised that he had received as many as 21 votes as he had always been opposed by the council.<sup>11</sup> It would appear that the reformers, though influential, remained a minority of the corporation.

The reformers were divided over the principles of the Reform Bill. Langston argued that reform would strengthen the nation's institutions. He wished 'most heartily the three estates of the realm might combine together, to give effect to the statutory measures so loudly called for and so unanimously approved by the people... He had no fears for the safety of our justly admired institutions.' He considered that reform was necessary for 'the honest administration of public affairs, and the establishment of mutual confidence between the Government and the People.'<sup>12</sup> Hughes however argued for amendments to the Bill to preserve the voting rights of freemen.

The Act was finally passed by the House of Lords in June 1832. It gave the franchise to every male person of full age who occupied as owner or tenant, any building 'of the yearly value of not less than ten pounds' so long as it had been occupied for 12 months, that rates had been paid and that the occupant lived within seven miles of the city (the property did not have to be residential). Freemen retained their votes, but only if they were resident in the city. The Act increased the register of electors for Oxford to 4,271, out of a population of 19,370, compared with the 1,387 votes polled in the 1820 election.<sup>13</sup>

After the Act was passed, an election was called. The dispute over freemen had broken the alliance between Langston and Hughes. The Tories, led by Charles Sadler, attempted to persuade Lockhart, who had changed his name to Wastie in order to inherit some property, to contest, claiming he had only been defeated in 1830 by 'the greatest duplicity and most ungentlemanly conduct.' Lockhart however wished to retire from public service. His withdrawal prompted Thomas Stonor, a Catholic and local landowner, to enter the contest. Stonor claimed that his political sentiments were 'based on liberality', that he wished 'to advance the general cause of freedom' and would therefore support an 'enlightened' Government. The Tories, faced with three Whig candidates, nominated the former MP Charles Wetherell.<sup>14</sup>

The election must have been somewhat confusing for the electorate. All four candidates had separate election committees and no alliances were formed. Stonor advocated reform and the amelioration of the condition of the working classes. However, despite being harangued by a man named Coulton at a meeting at the Three Cups Inn, he would not pledge his support for a repeal of the Septennial Act, which he felt would make MPs delegates rather than representatives. He did say he would support repeal ‘if the voice of the country demanded it’, which seemed to satisfy most people present.<sup>15</sup> Hughes pledged his support for the Act’s repeal and for the abolition of assessed taxes but mainly emphasised his record as a conscientious MP.<sup>16</sup> Langston gave his objects as ‘the correction of public abuses, the curtailment of public expenditure and the removal of those taxes which press most heavily on the trade and industry of the county.’<sup>17</sup>

Radical support was divided. Hughes’ supporters included ‘an individual who never loses an opportunity of deriding religion and its ministers.’<sup>18</sup> Langston had had to issue a public notice denying any alliance with another candidate. On the eve of poll, Stonor issued a notice clarifying his political position. His objects were now ‘to destroy the undue influence of the aristocracy – to increase the consequence of the people by an extension among them of the elected franchise – [These] were among the objects to be obtained by the late triumphant struggle of the nation – I am willing to extend that reform wherever and whenever a case calls for its interference.’ He also advocated a greater diffusion of education, the ‘welfare of the humbler classes’ and the abolition of slavery.<sup>19</sup>

On nomination day, Langston, Stonor and Hughes all made long speeches, Wetherell being shouted down by the crowd. Wetherell saw he was losing and retired from the contest in the middle of the 15-hour poll. The result was Langston 1260, Stonor 953, Hughes 919 and Wetherell 524. Hughes, surprised at being defeated, objected to Stonor’s return, claiming that ‘while the triumph of my hon opponent is merely temporary, mine is only a triumph deferred.’<sup>20</sup>

## CHAPTER 3

# The Development of Reform Politics and the Reformed Corporation, 1833–1836

Hughes' objection was successful. Stonor was unseated and a by-election was held in March 1833. Stonor's friends felt that their champion should be represented and some asked Mr Pusey, who had recently been defeated in the Berkshire election, to represent the Catholic interest. This proposal was not however supported by the majority of Stonor's supporters, who then agreed to ask Stonor's brother-in-law, a Mr Townsley, who lived in Lancashire, to contest the Oxford seat. Townsley, who accepted the invitation, had views similar to those of his brother-in-law. A Catholic, he was a 'firm supporter of Reform in Church and State, a friend of the abolition of slavery, an enemy of excessive and unequal taxation, and the staunch advocate of general education.' Townsley's proposer, Shayle, attacked the Irish Coercion Bill. The Tories put up Donald Maclean in support of the established church. Hughes was elected by a majority of nearly 100 votes over Townsley, with Maclean trailing a poor third.<sup>1</sup>

In December 1834, Langston gave notice of his intention to retire from parliament.<sup>2</sup> A group of reformers met at the Wheatsheaf and agreed to send a deputation to Stonor in Lancashire. Stonor's response was however 'vague and indefinite'. The reformers then held a meeting at the Old Masonic Lodge at the Maidenhead Inn. This meeting, crowded but orderly, was chaired by Mr Bristow, the 'self-elected tribune of the people.' Following a speech by Mr Warne, resolutions supporting Stonor were carried. 600 signatures were put to a declaration supporting Stonor as a 'Friend to Civil and Religious Liberty' and as an advocate of 'Cheap and Good Government.'<sup>3</sup> Stonor replied that he felt –

bound to obey the call made to me to stand for the CITY of OXFORD; neither can I for one moment doubt my success, unless the Reformers of Oxford are changed, which I cannot allow myself to suppose. I AM NOT CHANGED unless for the better, and I think it is for the better to advocate THE VOTE BY BALLOT; it is scarcely necessary for me to add that I remain the unflinching FRIEND OF CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, in their widest extent.<sup>4</sup>

Stonor came to Oxford, but not wishing to pre-empt Hughes' canvass, went away again for a fortnight. Meanwhile, the Tory champion, Maclean, conducted an 'assiduous and untiring canvass'.<sup>5</sup>

Hughes held a meeting at the Chequers with 300 present and called for plumpers (voting only for a single candidate). Stonor held a meeting at the Wheatsheaf at which Bristow delivered 'a strong anti-Tory speech, and roughly handled the Peel ministry, and showed the hypocrisy of their claims to be true reformers'.<sup>6</sup>

The contest was a lively one. Handbills appeared urging Protestants not to vote for the Catholic Stonor. Stonor countered by seeking to win over Hughes' supporters in St. Clement's. Maclean attacked the reformers as 'advocates of extreme and wild opinions'.<sup>7</sup> One of these extremists wrote to the *Herald*, under the pseudonym of John Hampden, attacking Hughes as a traitor to the radical cause:

We are again called to defend ourselves against the crafty wiles or open violence of our foes, and to renew the victory of 1832, which we hoped had laid to dust the enemies of our country. Yes! Toryism - has again reared its disgusting form before the eyes of an indignant and insulted nation; its rotten and putrid carcass has revived, through the false lenity of those whom it would now destroy; and, crowned with a mitre, and armed with a sword, animated with a spirit of ferocious intolerance, it threatens the destruction of all who do not yield to its arrogant usurpations... You have not forgotten the doings of 1817 - the crowded dungeons, the massacre of men, women and children at Manchester, actors and abettors yet unpunished -

The TIGER is the TIGER still, CRUEL and CRAFTY. Beware!

Again, beware! Hughes, loved, trusted by many of us, is charged by a responsible morning paper (Chronicle) with 'dark, deep, damning treachery and apostasy.'

Real Reformers - courage, unity; reserve your votes; wait the dissolution of Parliament. Then strike a resistless final blow and crush forever the implacable enemies of Civil Freedom and of Religious Liberty.<sup>8</sup>

Despite this attack, Hughes retained the support of the more established reformers such as Wyatt and Eaton. Ignoring a plea from an elector to 'Rally around the Standard of Freedom and Reform - and to forget all our minor differences,' the reformers remained divided; Maclean and his proposer Tawney were both shouted down at the nomination when they attacked Stonor as an enemy of the established church.<sup>9</sup> The *Herald* supported Stonor and Hughes, Maclean's political principles being seen as 'of a tendency adverse to the progress of national independence.' On being criticised for this position, the *Herald* argued that though it defended existing institutions and the established church, it also supported reform, the repeal of the test acts and Catholic emancipation.<sup>10</sup>

Division among the reformers led to Stonor's defeat. His supporters spoke of 'intimidation, cowardice and desertion.' Hughes came top of the poll with 1396 votes; Maclean became the junior member with 1222, Stonor trailing with 1019. The crowd was so hostile to Maclean that he refused the traditional chairing around Carfax. Instead he was carried to the Star, 'in a manner more resembling a convicted criminal than a freely chosen representative of the people; filth was liberally thrown at him, and the contents of vessels sacred to modesty bestowed.' Bristow made a speech denouncing 'the practices by which the election had been gained.'<sup>11</sup> In the lists of election victors, Hughes was given as a 'Reformer' although his election was due to considerable Tory support.<sup>12</sup>

The struggle over parliamentary representation was soon transferred to the municipal stage, since under the Municipal Corporations Act, the Corporation of Oxford was reformed, with elections fixed for December 1835. Six councillors were to be elected for each of five wards, making a total of 30. These councillors were then to elect ten aldermen. Voting was restricted to burgesses, that is to occupiers of rateable property in the borough who had paid rates for 2½ years and who lived within seven miles of Oxford.<sup>13</sup>

The radical reformers were first to organise themselves. A 'numerous and respectable' meeting was held in the Sherbourne Arms at which John Towle and James Josiah Faulkner were nominated for the South ward as 'fit and proper persons to represent the liberal interest in the Reformed Municipal Corporation.' The following week, the more established reformers organised a series of ward meetings to nominate candidates. About 100 people were at each meeting, voting being by a show of hands. The radicals succeeded in getting Towle nominated in South ward, but Faulkner failed to get on to the approved list.

The *Oxford Herald* protested at the political nature of these proceedings:

There is some danger of what we have termed the 'legitimate objects' of the new Bill, being lost sight of in party feeling; and that in the choice of Councillors, the political bias of several candidates, rather than their known and acknowledged fitness, that we venture to approach this subject. The Councillors to be elected should be men of RESPECTABILITY – OF BUSINESS-LIKE HABITS and OF PROPERTY.<sup>14</sup>

The poll resulted in 19 members of the unreformed corporation being returned. Towle was defeated in South ward, though the radical bookseller and printer, Talboys, was elected in East ward. Wyatt, the reformer who had been Lord Mayor, was elected in West ward and made an alderman. There was some protest that, of the ten aldermen appointed, none were from East ward and only one from Central ward, the two most radical wards. There was some dispute over the political colour of the new corporation. A London newspaper commented that the majority were anti-conservative. The *Herald* editor replied that 'the great majority of our new Council consists of men of firm, though moderate, constitutional politics.'<sup>15</sup> The question was soon answered, for at its first

meeting, the council passed a motion of a clearly party-political nature. The *Herald* reported that ‘an address was voted to His Majesty, thanking him for the various Reforms that had taken place during the present reign, and more especially for the Reform in the several Corporations throughout the country; as well as expressing entire confidence in the wisdom and integrity of the present Ministers.’<sup>16</sup>

The *Herald* carried a letter from a Tory councillor protesting that at least 14 council members had no confidence in the Whig government.<sup>17</sup> The *Herald* felt that the issuing of a political manifesto ‘was in direct opposition to the sentiments of a vast majority of our most respectable inhabitants.’

The *Herald* went on to express:

our deepest regret that the real welfare, the commercial prosperity, the good management, and public peace and harmony of the place, which are, as we think, the legitimate objects of consideration with our local government, should, in the present instance, be postponed to the bolstering up of an incompetent administration, in short, to the introduction of a political question, with which, in our humble opinion, the Town Councillors have, in their corporate capacity, nothing to do.<sup>18</sup>

The election prompted other comments about the purposes of local government. Among them was a suggestion by the reformer Thomas North that the council chamber should be opened to the public. He contended –

that, if, we are to have good municipal government, the debates must be conducted in open court; the burgesses will thus exercise a moral control over the acts of their representatives – nor will I rest satisfied till this desirable privilege is granted.<sup>19</sup>

Thomas North did not rest, and was to campaign for reform for several decades, eventually becoming mayor himself.

## CHAPTER 4

# Suffrage and Anti-Corn Law Agitation, 1837–1846

During 1836, the Oxford Tories, boosted by their victory in the parliamentary election, formed themselves into an organisation. They also took control of the *Oxford Herald*, which had formerly been sympathetic to the radicals. The reformers however maintained control of the corporation, and in February 1837 published their own newspaper, the *Oxford Chronicle*, the first issue carrying a statement of principles.<sup>1</sup> Editorials in March called for a secret ballot for all elections.<sup>2</sup> In the same month, a petition of some 648 signatures in support of the ballot was collected. The *Herald* attacked the petition and published the signatures.<sup>3</sup> (This enables many of the petitioners to be identified – an analysis of their occupations and voting in the subsequent parliamentary election is given in Appendix 2.) The *Herald* suggested that half of the signatures were forged. The *Chronicle* replied that –

No petition of a more bonafide character was ever presented to the House; the utmost care was taken that it should be so. It was not hawked for signatures; it was not signed by boys ... *The Herald* may indeed boast that gentlemen of Independent fortune did not sign the petition – this is not the class which requires protection, or which alas! feels much sympathy with the industrious many who are the working bees of the social hive.

The *Chronicle* attacked the *Herald's* publication of the names as a 'foul attempt to destroy the birthright of Englishmen – The Right to Petition,' and attacked the Tories as a 'knot of vindictive men, who have ever treated the citizens of Oxford with abominable insolence.'<sup>4</sup>

The *Chronicle* continued to make vitriolic attacks on its opponents and to make radical rallying cries. An editorial in March on the expected parliamentary election ran as follows:

There is however an indomitable spirit in our countrymen, and they will not easily be made to submit to the galling yoke of a 'Tyrant Minority' who for the most part owe their wealth and power to fraudulent

legislation ... They will be true to the cause for which political martyrs have pined in dungeons and wasted in painful banishment – they will remember the implacable enmity of Toryism to the spirit of freedom – they will remember the struggles of the past six years ... and make one effort more to obtain security for the future ... let individual electors and constituencies demand, in the sacred name of the law, protection in the exercise of the rights with which the constitution has endowed them.<sup>5</sup>

This article met with a response from a ‘freeman’ who in a letter to the *Chronicle* called for the establishment of a Reform Association.

I beg ... to appeal to the Reformers of this city no longer to remain disorganised; but if it be not their wish to perpetuate their own slavery and entail on their children hereditary bondage, let them at once imitate the example shown by their opponents and establish a REFORM ASSOCIATION here. Hundreds, I have not the slightest doubt, would join it, if a few of our leading Reformers would shew their sincerity to the cause they advocate, by the immediate adoption of some step towards the formation of such a society. A trifling monthly subscription would enable us to expose effectively the unconstitutional and foul influence exercised by certain parties ... the poor but honest elector would exercise his franchise more independently, from a knowledge that the shield of public sympathy and support would be thrown over him as a protection against injustice and oppression.

The writer went on to express his expectation that at the next election ‘we shall succeed in disenthraling ourselves from that yoke to which we are at present subjected.’<sup>6</sup>

A month later the same writer called for the reformers to reject their former champion Hughes, who was now in league with their Tory opponents:

I now appeal to my brother electors to relieve this gentleman from his parliamentary duties and allow him to retire into private life, where he may suitably employ the energies of his mighty mind in reading over the marriage ceremony, relating bad-box stories and holding stage-coach conversations.<sup>7</sup>

Two further letters attacking Hughes appeared, one signed ‘Agricola’,<sup>8</sup> the other ‘A Citizen.’<sup>9</sup> When the election was called in July 1837, the reformers, led by Alderman Browning, disowned Hughes and supported William Erle, a fellow of New College and a London barrister.

Erle was a ‘constitutional reformer’, rather than a radical, and was in fact opposed to the ballot.<sup>10</sup> So as not to offend the more established Liberals, a letter was printed in the *Chronicle* denying an allegation in the *Herald* that Erle was a

nominee of the Reform Club.<sup>11</sup> In the election campaign, Hughes again defended his parliamentary record. He attacked the ballot as ‘democratic’, saying that his ‘continued opposition to the ballot proceeds upon the principle that I like everything open and undisguised.’<sup>12</sup> The election proved to be a violent contest. At Hughes’ meeting, ‘a well-known pugilist and his satellites from St Thomas’ was so obstreperous and vehement in Mr Hughes’ behalf, that it appeared impossible to procure order, and the meeting was adjourned’, while after the close of poll, Erle was hit by a stone thrown from the roof of a house next to the Mitre Inn.<sup>13</sup>

The Conservative Maclean, known as the ‘Member for Don Carlos’ because of his support for the Carlists in Spain, came top of the poll. Erle came second, and Hughes, standing with Tory support, was defeated.<sup>14</sup>

The election was followed by increased agitation for the ballot. A letter in the *Chronicle*, signed ‘J. H.’, argued that –

the crooked sickle of Conservative policy has reaped a golden harvest. In many of the English elections – what by bribery, what by terrorism, what by adroitly-managed influence the Tories have been disastrously successful over the cause of freedom and human improvement, Liberal men of commonsense are now almost universally convinced that the ballot is become indispensable.

The writer called for reformers to send deputations to the government ‘to importune for the ballot’, suggesting that the government bring forward a bill, and that ‘if the House of Peers reject it, there was a means of convincing them of their error of judgement.’<sup>15</sup> A letter signed ‘Cotswold’ in November, called for reformers to ‘vote only for those candidates who will pledge themselves to the Ballot.’<sup>16</sup>

In February 1838, a second ballot petition was collected in Oxford, with more signatures than the first.<sup>17</sup> It was presented in parliament by Erle, though he himself still did not support the ballot. The *Chronicle* again supported the petition –

shall the representation be a mockery or a reality – shall the House of Commons be composed of men ‘freely and indifferently chosen’ or an assembly the collective result of bribery, bullyism, and every foul influence – shall it be a faithful mirror of the wants and aspirations of the people, or the mere vantage ground upon which the factions and selfish interests of individuals or classes may be advanced ... The Ballot alone, will enable the people of this country to return as representatives, men desirous of working out the national redemption.<sup>18</sup>

The reformers were not unopposed. A group of undergraduates organised a demonstration against the ballot, while the Oxford Tories collected a petition against the ballot’s introduction.<sup>19</sup> In August, the Oxford radical grocer

and temperance advocate James Josiah Faulkner attended a meeting of the Birmingham Political Union. Faulkner announced that he was ‘a member of the Reform Association in that nest of Tories, Oxford.’<sup>20</sup> Agitation in Oxford was however based on written arguments in the local press, rather than on mass demonstrations. For example, an article in the *Chronicle* in February 1839 listed eight reasons why the ballot should be adopted –

1. Because the Ballot will prevent intimidation.
2. Because the Ballot will eventually annihilate bribery.
3. Because the Ballot will secure secrecy.
4. Because the Ballot will secure independent voting.
5. Because the Ballot would emancipate timid but conscientious voters.
6. Because the ballot would make the House of Commons the bona fide representatives of the people possessing the franchise.
7. Because the ballot would make candidates anxious to possess the qualifications necessary to fit them for legislation.
8. Because the ballot has been successful where tried.<sup>21</sup>

There was considerable debate in the local press over the relationship between working and middle classes. In October 1838, the *Chronicle* argued that ‘the interests of the middle and working classes are one and indivisible’, since shopkeepers suffered if working people were poor.<sup>22</sup>

In May 1839, a ‘Looker On’ suggested that members of the Chartist National Convention ‘had lacked coolness and self-restraint’, and called for co-operation between working and middle classes.<sup>23</sup> An editorial in September 1839 abhorred the violence of some Chartists which had alienated middle class support.<sup>24</sup> In February 1840 a third ballot petition was collected. This time it was a petition to the Queen rather than to parliament. The petition lay at Mr Grubb’s, Queen St; Mr Hurcomb’s, the Three Tuns Inn; St. Ebbes, and at Mr Faulkner’s, grocers, St Aldate’s. Seven hundred signatures were obtained, which, according to the *Chronicle*, showed that ‘the spirit of liberty is still alive in our devoted city.’<sup>25</sup> The first phase of suffrage agitation in Oxford was both moderate and constitutional. This was in contrast with nearby Banbury, where the Chartist Henry Vincent addressed a meeting of some 6,000 people in December 1838 and stood for parliament in 1841. Oxford was not a centre of militant Chartist activity.<sup>26</sup>

During 1839, Oxford reformers transferred their interest from the suffrage question to the agitation against the Corn Laws. In February, the East ward radical Talboys proposed that the city council petition parliament for repeal of the Corn Laws. A long speech by Talboys provoked opposition from Tory councillors and the matter was adjourned.<sup>27</sup> When the debate was resumed the following week, Talboys claimed that the issue was not a party matter. The council favoured gradual repeal to total and immediate repeal by 22 votes to 13. The minority consisted of councillors Alden, Bartlett, Chaundy, Hester, Latchmore,

North, Slatter, Steane, Talboys, Turner, Waddell, Warne and Weaving.<sup>28</sup> A radical group can therefore be identified, though the group was in a minority position on the council. However, in alliance with the more established reformers, they were in a controlling position.

The council agreed to support the anti-corn law petition by 23 votes to 13, which gives us figures of ten 'moderate Liberals' and 13 Tories. The radicals and moderate Liberals were not always united. For example, when the radical Towle was defeated in the South ward election in 1838, the *Chronicle* suggested that this was partly due to the fact that he was 'not supported by a portion of the Liberals ... who indulged their personal likings and dislikings in the matter of candidates.'<sup>29</sup>

Following the council meeting, the mayor called a public meeting to draw up the petition. It was chaired by C. Dudley, a solicitor, the petition being advocated by the Rev Dobney, councillor Thomas North and Faulkner; between 1200 and 1500 people attended. The meeting was disrupted by students shouting 'Peel and the Corn Laws forever'. Students also broke windows, forced the doors and paraded in the streets until after midnight. A bullet or ball was thrown through the window of Talboys' shop.

The meeting was also interrupted by Green, the Conservative tailor who had heckled previous radical meetings, who 'spoke on railroads, plum puddings, reform, infanticide, suckling pigs and other irrelevant matters.' He proposed a resolution that –

this meeting sees with disgust and abhorrence the resolutions submitted to them, which under a specious pretext affect to alter or remove the corn laws, but whose true object is to keep in place and most tyrannical, sordid, factious and imbecile ministry as ever took in hand the government of this or any other country, and that this meeting is determined by all and every means in their power to frustrate their craft and foil their crooked machinations.

His proposal did not however find a seconder. At the end of the meeting, Towle gave a speech on cheap bread and the need for shorter working hours.<sup>30</sup>

In March 1839, the Tories formed a 'Conservative Association.'<sup>31</sup> In the local election in November, however, the radical/Liberal alliance was victorious. The radicals Latchmore and Slatter were re-elected in West ward, while Towle and a fellow radical, Hastings, were returned for the South ward.<sup>32</sup> The radicals printed an election poem, no doubt written by Faulkner, which included the following verses:

The state of the poll has been handed about  
And the *Herald* has swaggered away –  
As was always the case – some are in, some are out,  
But corruption has carried the day!

The Tories! oh no, the 'Conservative' crew,  
 With paid Brunner, commander in chief,  
 Have practised those tricks which we Rads will eschew  
 (A Tory, explained, means a thief!)

Their banquets and boozings have long been kept up,  
 To bribe all their traitorous elves,  
 After drunken carouse – (invitations to sup)  
 They lose all respect for themselves!

Thus The Chamber of Oxford is soon to be filled  
 with porters or cads from each college,  
 A true son of freedom will feel his blood chilled,  
 To be ruled by a set without knowledge.<sup>33</sup>

Another radical leaflet referred to the Tories' 'brandy and water debaucheries, beer and tobacco briberies.'<sup>34</sup> In the following year, the Tories gained a seat in South ward, the radical Issac Grubb being defeated.<sup>35</sup> The election produced another of Faulkner's poems, which is reproduced in full in Appendix 4.

In May 1841, the radicals collected a petition against taxes on food:

your Petitioners believe Taxes on the necessaries of life to be unnatural and contrary to justice; and that Taxes imposed in order to raise the price of the necessaries of life to all, for the benefit of a few, are an outrage upon humanity, and their continuance alike hurtful to the people and dangerous to the State.

The list of places at which the petition could be signed included, in addition to Grubb's, Hurcomb's and Faulkner's, Mr Howse's, Broker, St Giles and Mr Higgins', Jericho House. The petition, which called for an end to taxes on corn, tea, sugar and coffee, collected 1500 signatures.<sup>36</sup>

In June, a parliamentary election was called. Erle, the sitting Liberal MP, did not wish to contest the Oxford seat. Hughes showed an interest in another contest, but then withdrew, his supporters throwing their weight behind the Tory candidates Maclean and Malcolm. The Liberals held a meeting, chaired by Alderman Sadler, to select a candidate. Langston, the former MP, had put his name forward, emphasising his support for the repeal of the Corn Laws, which attracted Towle's support. Faulkner, however, 'wanted to know why they could not find men to represent them, who lived amongst them, who might have access to tell their wants and wishes', and proposed Sadler for the nomination. Sadler however declined, and Langston was selected.<sup>37</sup>

The radicals then called a public meeting in Batty's amphitheatre to discuss the issues surrounding the election. The meeting, chaired by Sadler, drew over 3000 people. A speech by Langston was followed by contributions from, among

others, Browning, Slatter, Dudley, Dobney, Towle, who spoke about the Corn Laws, and the 'Gallant Captain Faulkner' 'who kept thousands in a roar by [his] inexhaustible vein of humour and satirical mimicry.' The *Chronicle* expressed its surprise at the orderly manner in which the meeting was conducted:

Great and varied talents were displayed from unexpected quarters; and the fixed attention of the people, and their quick appreciation of a good point or well-conducted argument, would have astonished some of the contemptuous despisers of the 'swinish multitude' who had turned their backs upon the treating, and the flowing cans of the coalition, to listen to discussions affecting their interests, and the welfare of the country.

The meeting was followed by a grand demonstration of between 5000 and 6000 people, who followed Langston and a band through Cornmarket, down the High Street and into St Clement's, 'where they were separated by the peltings of a pitiless storm.'<sup>38</sup>

At the nomination meeting, Malcolm was shouted down for supporting taxes on corn with cries of 'Why Tax the necessaries of life?'. The poll was a victory for the radicals. Langston came top of the poll with 1349 votes (of which 1075 were plumpers). Maclean was elected with 1238, and Malcolm came third with 1041. As for the traditional chairing of the successful candidates around Carfax, the *Chronicle* reported that:

The band and banners, the acclamations of the vast assembly, the ringing of the bells, and last and chief, the joyous salutations of the ladies who filled the windows, presented a grand example of civic triumph.

Maclean was carried down the High Street in a 'handsome chair of blue silk'. Langston claimed that his result was 'tending to a change in the Commercial Policy of this Country, and hastening the period when unrestricted intercourse with other Nations may relieve the burthens, and repay the industry of England.' The *Chronicle*, which had supported Langston because he gave 'the strongest pledge of his sincerity in the cause of the oppressed and overtaxed people', saw the result as an assertion of 'the independence of the city' and as a defeat for the 'factious men who sought to degrade the representation of Oxford to the condition of a mere pocket borough.'<sup>39</sup>

The radical success was continued in the municipal elections in November. In North ward, the radical dissenter Steane was elected, while Grubb, also a dissenter, was elected in South ward. After the election, Grubb issued a handbill – 'The bigots and college servants and the Tories have been defeated and the cause of the people is triumphant', which produced a retort from the Tory *Herald* – 'Does Mr Grubb mean the Charter? Is the man a Chartist?'<sup>40</sup> The Tories then attempted to block the nomination of the reformer, Alderman Browning, for mayor, but were defeated by 17 votes to 14.<sup>41</sup>

Agitation against the Corn Laws was revived in 1843. In May, the *Chronicle* reported that the Anti-Corn Law League was active in the Oxford area.

We have heard much of the prodigious activity of the League, and the vastness of their printing operations, but hitherto this part of the country has not had any practical proof of their labours. We hear, however, that ten large packages of anti-corn law publications, weighing about half a ton, have been sent to Oxford for gratuitous distribution. The cost of this mass of paper cannot be much less than 200*l*. It is designated that every elector in Oxford should receive a packet.<sup>42</sup>

An anti-corn law meeting in Reading<sup>43</sup> was followed by one in Oxford in Gloucester Green, on 13 September, with Cobden and Bright as speakers.<sup>44</sup> The meeting was arranged by the high sheriff of Oxfordshire at the request of a group of Oxfordshire farmers and landowners, which included Langston and Lord Camoys. The agricultural interest which supported the Corn Laws did not organise opposition to the League's leading speakers, and no motion supporting the Corn Laws was proposed. Before the meeting began, some pro-corn law placards appeared in the market place. One placard 'was a representation of John Bull tossing a dog labelled "Cobden, the Anti-Corn Law Agitator and Friend of the Poor Law"' with a motto 'Protection to home produce. Union to the three vital interests – agriculture, commerce and manufacture.'

The *Chronicle* reported that, early in the meeting,

a protectionist champion presented himself ... in the person of a good humoured though somewhat eccentric printer, named Sparkhall, who had come from ... Cheapside, and who having armed himself with a large blue bag fitted with elaborate treatises upon the corn laws, and among other pamphlets a recent number of *Punch*, ... by kind permission of the meeting was permitted to essay a speech, about what nobody could divine, and in a manner truly original .... The monopolists of Oxfordshire did not accredit their volunteer champion, and even went so far as to request that he would 'bottle up' his eloquence for some future opportunity.

There were about 3000 people at the meeting, including Langston and Camoys, Lords Norreys, Harcourt and Henley (the three MPs for Oxfordshire) and Alderman Wyatt and Browning. The chairman was Samuel Cooper of Henley, the under-sheriff. Langston and Camoys proposed a motion calling for a fixed duty on corn, as opposed to the sliding scale.

Norreys was the only speaker to defend the existing Corn Laws, and was met by a 'burst of disapprobation which lasted for several minutes.' Towle and Grubb proposed an alternative motion –

That in the opinion of this meeting the principle of free trade is in accordance with the laws of nature and conducive to the interests of

mankind, and that all laws which interfere with and interrupt the intercourse of nations under the pretence of protection to agricultural, colonial or manufacturing interests, might forthwith be abolished.<sup>45</sup>

This motion was 'carried amidst loud cheers, only three hands being held up for the original fixed duty resolution.' The meeting closed with three loud cheers for free trade. The *Chronicle* again commented on the orderliness of the meeting, which was:

a very fair representation of the English people, and we are proud to say, a better behaved and more attentive meeting could not be desired; for more than four hours 3000 people stood wedged together, with the sun upon them, their attention only broken by those occasional sallies of humour which mark and enliven most public meetings.<sup>46</sup>

In the months following the meeting, The League's opponents organised themselves. In February 1844, 400 people attended a meeting of the Oxfordshire Agricultural Association at the Star Hotel, the association's object being to 'protect Agriculture against the operations of the Anti-Corn Law League'.<sup>47</sup> In March, the Oxfordshire Association for the Protection of Agriculture was established.<sup>48</sup>

Oxford's final contribution to the anti-corn law campaign was in January 1846, when a free trade meeting was called by the Lord Mayor, John Thorpe. The meeting was attended by about 1000 people and passed two resolutions. The first, proposed by Grubb and seconded by Towle, resolved that 'the present corn laws are unjust in principle and elusive in operation, being not only detrimental to commerce, but hurtful to farmers and extremely injurious to the industrious classes'. The second was proposed by Joseph Hemmings, seconded by John Brockliss and supported by Faulkner and called for the 'Total, immediate and unconditional Repeal of the Corn Laws'.<sup>49</sup> The Corn Laws were finally repealed in June 1846, which made further agitation on the issue unnecessary.

## CHAPTER 5

# Radicalism, Religion and the Poor Laws, 1843–1845

Radical activity in Oxford in the early 1840s was not limited to the Corn Laws and the ballot. Two other issues led to major agitation – the education clauses of the 1843 Factory Bill and the changes in poor law administration.

The object of the Factory Bill, proposed by Sir James Graham, was to reduce the working hours of children employed in textile factories, and it included rules for the supervision of children in factory schools. Nonconformists objected to the measure, which was seen as extending the powers of the established church, since trustees for factory schools were to be nominated by the church and the magistracy. In Oxford, a protest meeting was held at the Commercial Road chapel. It was chaired by H. Leake of Headington and was opened by a prayer from the Reverend Wilson, the senior Wesleyan preacher in the city. According to the *Chronicle*, Wilson ‘breathed a spirit of patriotism, and of earnest desire for the propagation of the liberty of Englishmen, and the prosperity of the State.’ The meeting felt that the Bill was an attack on nonconformist schools. The protest resolution was proposed by Dobney and seconded by Warne. The debate was however dominated by nonconformist ministers.<sup>1</sup> A petition was collected; the protest was successful in that the Bill was withdrawn. The rivalry between church and chapel however delayed the improvement of conditions in factories. The nonconformists of Oxford continued to take an interest in matters of ‘church and state’. For example, in April 1845, they protested at the ‘endowment of popery’ when the government made a grant to the Roman Catholic college of Maynooth in Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 had established a new system of poor law administration, based on a central authority of three commissioners, together with the grouping of parishes into poor law unions.

The Act did not establish a national system of relief but gave the commissioners powers to intervene in situations where the provision of relief was considered unsatisfactory. In Oxford, the Poor Law Union had been established under a local Act and was responsible to directly elected Poor Law Guardians, who in the 1840s included some of the city’s leading reformers. In 1843, the commissioners issued directives to the Oxford Union as to the way in which the workhouse should be managed. The Oxford Guardians, led by Isaac Grubb,

their chairman, resented this bureaucratic intervention and called a protest meeting. The city council refused use of the town hall and the meeting, of some 1500 people, was held in Chaundy's theatre.<sup>3</sup> A number of speakers, including Grubb, Brunner, Towle, Faulkner and Dudley, defended the management of the workhouse. It was argued that the 'poor were better fed and clothed, and more tenderly cared for, while at the same time the rate-payers were lower taxed than in any other city or town in the kingdom.' Warne argued that the new management of other Unions was extravagant. The meeting approved motions of confidence in the Board of Guardians and protest at the Poor Law Commissioners' interference. The meeting was not however to pass without incident, for it was brought to a sudden close by what the *Chronicle* called a 'catastrophe':

The central beams of the stage gave way with a crash, and the whole crowd sank down as though drawn by a vortex of irresistible forces. Many were thrust through a gap into the depths below, and for a moment or two the excitement was intense. People feared that the roof would crush them from above ... The panic was increased by the falling of uprights which seemed to be the only supporters of the machinery above, and to which in fact blazing lights were attached. The spectators of the galleries and pit cried fire, and there was at first an alarming rush made for the passages of egress.

The chairman, Dudley, however quickly recovered and stopped the crowd from panicking by reassuring them. It was then discovered that 'noone had suffered worse than a bruised limb or a broken shin.'<sup>4</sup>

In March 1844, the mayor called a meeting to protest against Sir James Graham's Poor Law Amendment Bill, which was seen as interfering with Local Acts, such as the one under which the Oxford Poor Law Union was governed. The meeting attracted about 900 people. Salter compared the Oxford Union with the Headington Union, which included the St Giles and St Clement's parishes of the city, and where rates had risen by 50%. He proposed a resolution –

that the Poor Rates are now moderate in amount, and are properly administered, and the wants of the suffering poor carefully attended to under the present Local Act; and therefore the change proposed by the new Poor Law Amendment Bill is both uncalled for and unnecessary, and will in the opinion of this meeting, greatly increase the Rates and decrease the comforts of the necessitous poor.

One speaker implied that new management would reduce the extent of outdoor relief. The resolution was carried, and a petition collected.<sup>5</sup>

## CHAPTER 6

# Local Politics, Chartism and the ‘Little Charter’ Movement, 1846–1853

In August 1846, it was rumoured that the sitting Tory MP Maclean was to resign his seat. The Oxford Liberals set up a committee, of which Faulkner was secretary, to consider suitable parliamentary candidates. They met Lockhart, the former Tory MP who was found to be ‘liberal and enlightened’. A meeting of Liberal electors, chaired by Dobney, invited Lockhart to address them, but the invitation was not taken up.<sup>1</sup> When the election came in July 1847, the Liberals nominated W. Page Wood. The Tories were disorganised, and Page Wood and the sitting Liberal MP Erle were returned unopposed. Not all Liberals were happy with this victory. A letter appeared in the *Chronicle* complaining that an Oxford parliamentary seat cost £1,000 to £1,500 and therefore could only be offered to wealthy men. The writer argued that ‘it were far better and more honourable to sustain defeat in the practical advocacy of right principles, than to obtain a victory by sacrificing them.’<sup>2</sup>

With the Oxford political scene quiescent, Faulkner, as the only militant Chartist in the city, had to go elsewhere for a platform. In Woodstock, the Marlborough pocket borough, the Duke’s son, the Marquis of Blandford, was to be returned unopposed. Faulkner had himself proposed as a candidate, in order to make a speech attacking the Blenheim influence. According to the *Chronicle*, the ‘notorious Radical of Oxford’ first informed his audience that he was a ‘freeman of the city of Oxford, a freeholder of the county of Oxford, a member of the Town Council, a commissioner of the streets, feoffee of the richest parish in Oxford (in which he was born), three times chosen member of the board of guardians, and the occupant of a palace (built by the first bishop of Oxford).’ Having established his respectability, he then ‘exhibited a tri-coloured cockade as that of ‘the national alliance for the complete suffrage movement.’ Faulkner declared that as ‘the interest of the Duke of Marlborough used to extend to Oxford in returning a member of parliament he now came to return the compliment by becoming a candidate for his “rotten” and pocket borough of Woodstock.’

In a diatribe that lasted three hours, Faulkner pledged that –

He would ever struggle to remove that monster monopoly of less than one million of electors in a population of twenty-six millions! Hence

the corruption of church and state and the overwhelming weight of taxation, preying upon the vitals of the unrepresented millions of the industrious class, the bees of the social hive, whilst the drones are idle and overtred.

At the end of the speech, Faulkner declared that he would not go to the poll 'as it would expose all those who voted for him to the fury of the splendid almshouse of Blenheim, deprive them of their farms, homes and occupations' and promised that he would return to Woodstock when they were protected by the ballot.<sup>3</sup> Faulkner's withdrawal does not however seem to have stopped his supporters from being harrassed by the Duke Of Marlborough, for in September, a Woodstock elector wrote to the *Chronicle* to complain that they were being refused use of the village hall.<sup>4</sup>

Faulkner also intervened in the Oxfordshire election, where the three sitting members, one Conservative and two Liberal-Conservatives, were to be returned unopposed. This time, he attacked the church, the aristocracy and the university and compared the income of the Queen, Prince Albert, and the Archbishop of Canterbury to that of the poor.<sup>5</sup> In a letter to the *Chronicle* two weeks later he argued that all church and college land should be taken by the state for the relief of the poor and that now the Liberals had won the city, they should take on the Tories in the county.<sup>6</sup> The following week, he was arguing against taxation:

My hope is in the virtues of the masses of non-electors in the country, who will learn to imitate the brave Americans, when they threw the cargo of tea into the sea, because they would not be taxed without their consent! as it is a well-known axiom that 'taxation without representation is tyranny' and half the money spent on intoxicating liquors and in groceries, is taxation to Government, when property and not poverty ought to bear the horrid burdens of £62,000,000 for a Church and State.<sup>7</sup>

Agitation for tax reductions combined with suffrage agitation to be the main focus of the campaigns of the Oxford radicals between 1848 and 1853. In April 1848, a letter to the *Chronicle* from 'One of the Middle Classes' asked 'Who does the House of Commons represent?', replying – 'Not the masses of the people. Every proposition for their peculiar relief or benefit is invariably and unhesitatingly rejected. Not the middle classes. The debates and divisions on the Income Tax removes this from doubt'.<sup>8</sup> In the same month, the city council held a meeting to discuss whether to petition the Queen for a reduction in taxation. Alternative addresses had been prepared by Alderman Thorpe and Alderman Warne. Thorpe called for 'all loyal subjects to rally around the throne and the constitution', while Warne felt that an address should 'express the hope that means will be taken to meet the just expectations of the people, both in respect

to the purification of the representative system and in the reduction of the national burthens.' This disagreement provoked a stormy discussion. Faulkner, attacking Thorpe's motion as out of date, 'wished the people were a happy people, for thousands now have no occupation to set down to, and many more were in a hopeless state.' Warne referred to the recent Chartist disturbances, and Towle called for an increased franchise. The meeting was adjourned, and a committee consisting of Alderman Sadler, Alderman Browning and councillors Ward, Mallam and Telfer was asked to draw up a compromise address. The following day, after another long discussion, the following motion was approved:

Having seen with great concern that recent circumstances and political changes in foreign countries have tended to excite a portion of our fellow subjects in Ireland, to the utterance of violent and seditious language, and to threats of employing the force of arms in order to effect change in the Government of these kingdoms; and having also seen a disposition amongst a portion of the people of Great Britain to seek for changes by means inconsistent with the maintenance of order and tranquility we humbly submit to your majesty that attention should be directed to the excessive and increasing amount of taxation of this kingdom, with a view to its reduction by wise and severe retrenchment, and in order to the more equitable distribution of the necessary burthens of the state.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the growing Chartist agitation in other towns such as Banbury, there was little Chartist activity in Oxford in 1848. In May, a letter in the *Chronicle* from a 'thorough going Chartist' in Wallingford, advocating the six points of the charter, stated that their 'Moral Force Chartist Association is in a very flourishing condition.'<sup>10</sup> In the same month, a school was opened at the Chartist colony of Charterville, near Minster Lovell. Faulkner acted as chairman at the ceremony, which was performed by the Chartist leader Harney, the crowd including about 30 people from Oxford.<sup>11</sup>

Most Oxford radicals appear to have supported the charter but were critical of the physical force Chartists. They therefore participated in the campaign for an extension of the suffrage while, with the notable exception of Faulkner, disowning the more militant Chartist propaganda. This moderate position was shown in a *Chronicle* editorial which attacked class legislation:

We should hail any measure by which the elected franchise should be purged, the peoples' choice should be unrestricted .... Then, and not till then, will Government be honest – will taxation be justly imposed, – will legislation be carried on for the public welfare, and the interests of trade, commerce and agriculture be duly consulted – then and not till then will both poor and rich find security and happiness under wise laws justly and equally administered.<sup>12</sup>

In June 1848, ten councillors and 22 other citizens requisitioned the mayor to call a town meeting in support of the motion of the radical MP James Hume, which called for household suffrage, vote by ballot, more equalised electoral districts and triennial parliaments – the so-called ‘Little Charter’. The main resolution passed at the meeting was proposed by Dobney and seconded by Grubb –

that the taxation of the country has become insupportable by its increasing and enormous amount, as well as by its unequal pressure on the industrious classes, and that we can see no remedy for this grievance but such a reform in the electoral and representative system as shall, by widely extending the suffrage, securing the freedom of election by the ballot, distributing the franchise into numerical districts, and shortening the duration of Parliaments, give the people at large their due share of influence in the legislative assembly of the kingdom.

Dobney stated the position of most Oxford radicals when he declared that –

we are no advocates for physical force – nor for revolutions – but we meet in a rational, peaceable, constitutional manner, to petition for reform of the Commons House of Parliament.

He continued:

I regard it as a sound principle, that all who are expected to obey the laws should participate in making them, either in person or by deputy. Had this principle been acted upon we should never have heard of the notorious corn laws, now happily in a galloping consumption; nor of the infamous game laws and a hundred other equally unjust, cruel and oppressive ... Is not the labour of the hard working son of toil as much property as the wealth of landowner or freeholder? .... and ought he not to have a voice in the government as well as the man who has that amount invested in the funds, or houses, or land?

Dobney was followed by Grubb:

It was lamentable to think how many aching hearts and starving bellies there were to be found. The wrong lay in a long continued course of aristocratic management ... The aristocracy ruled the roost in both church and state. The House of Commons was principally made up of sons or cousins of peers, and of officers in the army and navy. Such a house, instead of looking on labour as the only foundation of wealth, and the industrious man as the only truly honourable man, looked at every species of industry as beneath them.

Faulkner then proposed a petition calling for adult male suffrage, the ballot and triennial parliaments –

that your petitioners have seen with very great concern that the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832 has failed to secure to the people of these kingdoms a full and fair representation in your Honourable House and that, at the present time, the registered electors do not include more than one in seven of the grown up male population ... that your petitioners are deeply concerned that a full, fair and free representation of the people, while it is consistent with their ancient and indefeasible rights, affords the only security against grievous calamities, disturbances and national decay and ruin.

Faulkner said that 'he was almost tired of petitioning' and that 'he had been in the Houses of Lords and Commons, and he had been in both of our lunatic asylums, and from the noises he had heard in the former, he was led to think that the inmates of the latter would conduct themselves with more decorum.'

There was no opposition to the resolution or the petition.<sup>13</sup>

When Parliament considered Hume's motion in July, Page Wood was ill but was paired off in favour of the motion. Langston voted against the proposal because he was opposed to equal electoral districts.<sup>14</sup> A supporter of Langston's 'of twenty years standing' wrote to the *Chronicle*, attacking him for siding with 'those who stifle enquiry, who prop up abuses, who prevent improvement.' The motion was defeated by 351 votes to 84.<sup>15</sup>

In March 1849, the Oxford Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association was established, its main object being to reduce taxation. Its first general meeting, held at the New Inn, St Aldates, was chaired by a Mr Wickens. After a long speech on taxation by John Green, the meeting drew up a petition calling for a reduction in the armed forces, administration by practical and intelligent men not political partisans, self-governed colonies and an emphasis on indirect as opposed to direct taxes. Speakers included Dobney and Faulkner.<sup>16</sup> In April, a lecture on 'The Revenue of the United Kingdom' was given to the Association at the Town Hall by T. Beggs of Liverpool, secretary of the National Reform Association.<sup>17</sup>

In April 1851, Page Wood was appointed Solicitor General in Lord John Russell's government and therefore faced re-election. There was no contest, so the election was purely formal. However, the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association took advantage of the election to publish an address containing questions on the extent of the proposed suffrage extension. The address was circulated throughout the city, and a deputation from the association met Page Wood, who reaffirmed his support for household suffrage, triennial parliaments and financial reform.<sup>18</sup> This initiative did receive criticism. In December, a letter appeared in the *Chronicle* from 'J', a supporter of the Freehold Land Movement, a Chartist organisation. The writer attacked 'the respectable names composing the Parliamentary Reform Association (who) do but badly succeed in getting up a feeling in

the public mind in favour of its own purposes.’ However, by this time, as the writer himself admitted, the Chartist movement was ‘in the last agony of existence.’<sup>19</sup>

In January 1852, 800 people attended a meeting of the National Reform Association in the Town Hall, chaired by Warne, to hear Sir Joshua Walmsley MP and George Thompson MP. A petition was drawn up calling for the ballot, triennial parliaments and the abolition of property qualifications. Both Towle and Faulkner played a prominent part in the meeting.<sup>20</sup>

During this period, radicals in Oxford were active on a wide range of issues. In October 1847, Joseph Hemmings wrote to the *Chronicle* in support of a petition opposing war and calling on the Commons to establish a court of arbitration to deal with international disputes.<sup>21</sup> In January 1849, an anti-war meeting, chaired by Warne, was held in the Town Hall. A resolution was carried calling for a reduction in warlike establishments and for arbitration clauses in all international treaties.<sup>22</sup>

In January 1851, a meeting with 1,000 people to oppose ‘Popish aggression’ was held. The platform included Tories and Liberals, with the Marquis of Blandford, Mr Blackstone MP, the Earl of Abingdon and Alderman Sadler as speakers. Faulkner was called to the platform, from where ‘he addressed the meeting in a sarcastic and satirical strain’, attacking the bishops for opposing reform and calling for the separation of church and state.<sup>23</sup>

Meetings were also held in support of early closing of shops and the abolition of slavery.<sup>24</sup>

In the city council, the Liberals were in the ascendant. In 1847, they won a further seat from the Tories. Liberals were returned in South and West wards, Tories in Central, while in North and East wards, the parties won one seat each.<sup>25</sup>

In February 1848, the rivalry between city and university was revived when the university applied to parliament for a reduction in its contribution to the costs of lighting and cleaning the city. The mayor called a town meeting, which drew up a petition requesting parliament to keep the existing arrangement, until a new valuation of rateable property was prepared.<sup>26</sup> At a second meeting on the issue, Faulkner delivered his customary attack on the university. In October 1851, there was a town meeting on implementing the Health of Towns Act in the city, at which Faulkner made sarcastic remarks that the proposed scheme was worse than famine and pestilence and that medical men were only after their fees.<sup>27</sup>

After 1848, the Liberals met with some reverses in local elections. In 1849, Faulkner was defeated in South ward, while Chaundy, a radical councillor for eleven years, was ousted in West ward. As usual, Faulkner commemorated the event with a poem:

Farewell to the Council, its honours and treats,  
 Long debates, full committees and hard Windsor seats,  
 The Fates may decree that ‘The Captain’ must go  
 Tho’ his comrades all say that it shall not be so!

But the state is so great in the WEST and the SOUTH,  
 That the last seems determined to shut up his mouth.  
 The ward's overrun with Cads, Strangers and Snobs,  
 Who canvass about – always touching their nobbs.<sup>28</sup>

In 1850, the *Chronicle* commented on Liberal apathy,<sup>29</sup> while in 1851, Chaundy was again defeated.<sup>30</sup> By then, moderate Liberals on the council supported the Tories in excluding dissenters such as Grubb from all offices and honours such as the mayoralty and aldermanships. The 1852 parliamentary election saw the unopposed return of Page Wood and Langston. Though there was no contest, the rituals of election were still performed, as was remembered by Thomas Plowman, writing in 1918:

Page Wood's colours and banners were orange and green, and Langston's blue ... Each member was preceded by a band playing 'See the Conquering hero comes' and by a number of large banners, on which were emblazoned political watchwords, and was followed by a great procession of supporters decorated with party colours.

Each member had a bag of silver handy, and after he had been chaired three times round Carfax, he was escorted in triumph to his hotel, and then came the difficulty for him to get safely into shelter and to save from destruction his chair, which he usually desired to keep as a family relic. It was customary for the crowd to seize upon the chair, almost before the poor man could get out of it, in order to break it up into mementoes of the election. His only hope of getting himself and the chair safely housed was to divert the attention of the crowd, and this was done by a lavish distribution of the contents of the bag of silver. Whilst the crowd was engaged in the scramble for this the Member whisked out of his chair, and the latter was taken possession of by those who desired to rescue it, and he and the chair were hustled into the hotel, the large doors of which were immediately closed and barred. Then he was called by the populace to the bow window or balcony, where he expressed his obligations to the free and independent electors, who forthwith went off to liquidate some of the profits arising from the day's proceedings.<sup>31</sup>

Local elections were however quieter affairs, with few seats contested. In 1853 however, the 'ultra liberal party resolved upon making a great effort for securing the ascendancy of their principles in the council' and were victorious over the Tories and Liberal-Tories in South, West and North wards.<sup>32</sup> Towle and Grubb were elected the first dissenting aldermen. The radicals however remained in a minority, their nomination for the mayoralty being defeated by 19 votes to 16.<sup>33</sup> In 1854, the Tories nominated the ex-reformer Sadler, for mayor, and were opposed by Sadler's former colleagues.

The divisions in the Liberal ranks were apparent in the January 1853 parliamentary election, caused by Page Wood's appointment to the legal office of vice-chancellor. The Oxford Liberals selected as his replacement Edward Cardwell, the President of the Board of Trade, who had lost his Liverpool seat in the previous election. At a meeting of 1,000 people called to see Cardwell, Faulkner attacked the candidate as 'Hobson's Choice.' According to the *Chronicle*, 'he proceeded ... with pointed and humorous allusions to taxation, and other topics of public interest, and touching upon theological matters, expressed his conviction that there was yet a great conflict to come, and that even in the 19th Century, it was high time that the truth had some valiant champion.'

Philip Hurcomb asked Cardwell whether he was in favour of the ballot, but Cardwell was unwilling to give a pledge. He was then questioned on the extension of the suffrage and the length of parliaments but tried to avoid giving an answer. Hurcomb then threatened to nominate a candidate pledged to the ballot. Mr Green then moved a motion, which was seconded by Faulkner, 'that an indispensable requisite in a representative of the city should be that he support the ballot.' The motion was carried, and the meeting refused to adopt Cardwell as candidate.<sup>34</sup> The radicals however failed to find an alternative candidate and Cardwell was returned unopposed. Grubb, who surprisingly seconded the formal nomination, was optimistic:

He believed that any measure of reform, to be effectual, ought to comprehend the ballot, an extension of the suffrage, and a more equal distribution of the electoral districts; but if they could not get all they wished, let them get all they could. Mr Cardwell might not at present time come up to the mark in everything, but he believed that he would ultimately do so ...<sup>35</sup>

The *Chronicle* commented ironically that 'men hitherto reputed for extreme views are found to exhibit a traditional tendency towards a healthy support of the country's institutions.'<sup>36</sup>

## CHAPTER 7

# Corruption and the Radical Challenge, 1854–1857

Cardwell's election, and his position in parliament as a Liberal-Conservative, represented a defeat for Oxford radicals. Nevertheless, Faulkner remained active on the city council, where his aggressive behaviour antagonised the Tories. In 1856, an anonymous handbill appeared, alleging that Faulkner was making money from temperance meetings and that cards and dice were played in his coffee house. Faulkner in reply claimed that he had been a responsible councillor and that he had saved council money by stopping extravagant schemes such as a proposed new waterworks, and that he had supported 'economy and retrenchment'. He added that –

it may be recollected that on my first entering council as your representative, certain Gentlemen were exceedingly active in clearing away old systems of doing business, breaking up all Committees and throwing them open to all members of the House, when by dint of long speeches and crafty contrivances, staid old members of the Council were wearied out and driven away from the meetings

– and in a more vitriolic tone, some of the allusions remaining unexplained –

The 'Captain' is ready to prove that the last malicious lot of 'Pebbles' and other filthy missiles could only be thrown by a lying lawyer's lackey, who has been plundering the public for years at the County Court! – a Jew-looking-little-lurcher, who answers to the name of 'BAWDY'!!! and C-A-G-MAG the municipal money-monger !!! – (who kept a Girl at Reading and refused to pay the Rent till threatened with a visit to Verdant-Villa) – Three of the most impudent and shameless 'artful dodgers' of this age or nation.<sup>1</sup>

Faulkner also maintained his agitation on national issues. At an anti-tax meeting chaired by the mayor in January 1857, he supported a radical amendment to the original motion – 'that this meeting, whilst affirming the correctness of the principle of direct taxation, views with alarm the condition of the industrious classes, arising from the oppressive operation of the tax upon wages and

Labour and precarious incomes and will not feel satisfied with anything short of the immediate and total repeal of the income tax.’

A colleague, Joseph Taylor, ‘declared emphatically that they were not fairly represented in the House of Commons, and until they had a Peoples’ House of Commons, they would never be free from taxation.’ The fact that the meeting carried the amendment demonstrates that the radicals still had strong popular support.<sup>2</sup>

The radicals however lost their most vigorous spokesman when, the following month, Faulkner committed suicide by throwing himself into the river, apparently because his private affairs were in an embarrassing condition. The *Chronicle* commented that his ‘rich fund of humour, and an eccentricity of manner, joined with a style at once unmethodical and rhapsodical, abounding in startling antithesis and boisterous declamation.’<sup>3</sup>

In March 1857, Palmerston’s Liberal government was defeated in a vote on the Chinese war. Cardwell’s vote against the government finally lost him the support of Oxford radicals, but it enabled him to stand in the subsequent election with Conservative support. Langston also sought to retain his seat and appears to have had broad support.<sup>4</sup> Liberals were however divided and produced two alternative candidates for the second seat, while some continued to support Cardwell. Plowman categorised the candidates as follows:

- Langston – ‘a County landowner and a whig, who deferred to latter-day prejudices by calling himself a liberal.’
- Cardwell – a Peelite.
- Neate – Professor of Political Economy at Oxford – ‘a liberal, pure and simple.’
- Gaselee – Recorder of Portsmouth – a radical.

Plowman felt that Gaselee had little support and Langston’s return was assured ‘because he had always been very liberal with his money, and therefore derived support from many on both sides who were not anxious to have such a source of supply interfered with. The real contest was that between Cardwell and Neate for the second seat.’

According to Plowman, towards the close of poll, a group of forty to fifty electors offered their votes to the highest bidder. Cardwell refused to engage in bribery, and Neate won the second seat by 41 votes. Gaselee trailed in last place with only 225 votes.<sup>5</sup>

Cardwell petitioned against Neate’s return. The resulting inquiry unseated Neate, having discovered that during the election:

198 persons were employed by the Committee of the said Charles esq as poll clerks and messagers, 152 of whom voted for the said Charles Neate esq, payment in sums varying from £1 to 2s 6d; that these sums were paid under the pretence of remuneration for services as messengers and

runners during the Election, and although it was not proved before the Committee that these payments to the voters were the primary motive in deciding their votes, yet it appeared to the Committee that, in many of the cases, no adequate services or work were in reality performed.<sup>6</sup>

The report of the inquiry provides interesting information about the nature of election organisation. The constituency consisted of about 2,600 electors, of whom half had votes as freemen and half as householders. 62 special constables were employed to keep order on polling day. Neate's election committee employed 10 inspectors at £2 each, 30 poll clerks at £1 each, and 20 writers at 5s a day. The job of inspectors was on polling day to see the voters that were on the list. Two poll clerks were at each of the ten polling booths and one was at each of the district committee rooms. The writers were employed in committee rooms prior to the poll in making out the canvassing list the week before the election. 100 messengers were employed – five for each polling booth, and five for each district committee room.

The procedure was as follows:

The clerk was sent with a portion of the register, and then the ten special messengers ... were expected to be to and fro from the booth to the room in the district. It was their business of course to supply them with the slips. The slips were taken from time to time to those districts' committees, and they were then struck through, and a portion of the register had to be returned from the district to the central committee room. In addition to each district committee there were several copies, three at least, in all cases on sheets of foolscap of the same portion of the register, which the clerks had to strike through and deliver from time to time to the persons who were looking up the votes.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, 25 people were employed to carry placards prior to polling day, with 50 on polling day itself. On polling day, messengers were sent out every half hour to relay the state of the poll. It is tempting to comment that the system described here is similar to that used in modern elections, though it is questionable whether there are many local parties who have such a quantity of 'voluntary' labour available.

Cardwell was unwilling to stand in the election that followed Neate's unseating, but he was nevertheless nominated in his absence by the Oxford Tories, who did not wish to see a radical returned unopposed. Lord Monck considered contesting the seat but withdrew because he did not have sufficient support. Gaselee was too ill to stand. The radicals then produced the novelist Thackeray as their candidate. Thackeray appears to have been proposed because he was a friend of Charles Neate. He had been involved in the Administrative Reform Association, but had had limited political experience, though he knew the Prime Minister Palmerston and other leading Liberals. He considered himself

as a moderate radical – he had supported reform of the Corn Laws but had considered the Chartists as extreme. In his first statement on 9 July, he said he would use his best endeavours to broaden the constitution and ‘popularise’ the government of the country. ‘With no ill-feeling but that of goodwill towards the leading Aristocratic Families who are administering the chief offices of the State, I believe that it could be benefited by the skills and talents of persons less aristocratic.’<sup>8</sup>

On his arrival at the station, Thackeray had been met by:

a large contingent of supporters – not one in twenty of whom had a vote. Amid a scene of unbounded enthusiasm, the horses were taken out of the chariot awaiting his arrival, and the populace, with noble self-abasement, harnessed themselves, with ropes thoughtfully provided beforehand, to the vehicle. Thus, amid a cheering throng, was the champion of democracy dragged by his ‘disciples ...down New Road, Queen St, past Carfax to the Mitre Inn.’<sup>9</sup>

Thackeray was apparently ‘unversed in electoral methods’ and lacked a ‘command of platform oratory’, his delivery being ‘halting and hesitating’. Though supporting the ballot and calling himself a radical, his manifesto ‘dealt mainly in generalities’ and was ‘written in a subdued key’. Thackeray was apparently ‘a little hurt at the general ignorance of the electors respecting his own achievements’ and wrote to Dickens suggesting that he could help as he appeared to be better known!<sup>10</sup> At a meeting at the Town Hall chaired by Sherriff Speirs, who had run Gaselee’s campaign, Thackeray was introduced as a man of ‘popular sympathies’. Thackeray said he supported an extension of the suffrage, but not universal suffrage, claiming that –

the Government had promised them a Reform Bill next year, but if it was not sufficiently extensive and satisfactory, they must screw them and screw them until they obtained a larger measure ... the popular influence must be brought to bear on the present government of the country ... if they flinch remind them that the people is outside and wants more and more!<sup>11</sup>

In contrast, Cardwell, ‘cautious and non-committed’ was regarded as a ‘safe man’. According to Plowman, his ‘command of words enabled him to talk about a Bill for an hour in a way that satisfied his hearers without enabling anyone at the end of his discourse to be quite sure whether the speaker intended to vote for or against it.’ Cardwell was however neither seen nor heard during the election campaign. Liberalism was again in the ascendent in the city and it was expected that Thackeray would be elected, especially since ‘one of the most unpopular things a party can do in a constituency is to unseat a man for spending his money too freely.’

The main controversy during the election was over a statement made by Thackeray in his committee room at the Mitre that he was ‘in favour of opening museums, picture galleries and even Crystal Palace on Sunday’. This was overheard by a member of Cardwell’s committee who was listening at the window.<sup>12</sup> The Tories, seeking to win over nonconformist voters, published hand-bills attacking Thackeray’s confession.<sup>13</sup> Edmund Dore, the chairman of Thackeray’s committee, had to put out a statement denying the allegation, claiming that Thackeray had been referring to picture galleries and gardens rather than theatres, and including an assurance that ‘Mr Thackeray’s life and energies have been consistently devoted to procure the elevation of his poorer fellows ....’<sup>14</sup> A further handbill appeared, signed by Thomas Babbington, appealing to electors to:

Remember that, in supporting Mr Thackeray, you are not only voting for an Independent Liberal, and a real Friend of the People and the Poor, but you are assisting that great body of reflecting and thoughtful electors who think that Mr Neate had been scandalously ill-used and cruelly prosecuted by a small, but conspicuous body of men.<sup>15</sup>

Cardwell was elected by 1085 votes to Thackeray’s 1018 in an electorate of about 3,000 voters.<sup>16</sup> In his valedictory speech, Thackeray commented that he would ‘return to pen and ink at his desk and leave to Mr Cardwell a business which I am sure he understands better than I do’. The election cost Thackeray £831 17s 9d, and he later commented with reference to a notable part of the city – ‘I went down to Jericho and fell among thieves.’ The Tory celebrations were however shortlived, for Cardwell soon transferred his allegiance back to the Liberal party. Plowman commented that he and his fellow conservatives who had toiled and fought for him were indignant at what they regarded as a betrayal.<sup>17</sup>

## CHAPTER 8

# Reform Agitation and the Oxford Reform League, 1857–1869

The years following the two 1857 elections appear to have been politically uneventful in Oxford.<sup>1</sup> In 1859, Langston and Cardwell (the latter now a Conservative once more) were returned unopposed.<sup>2</sup> In 1863, Langston died and was replaced without a contest by Charles Neate.<sup>3</sup> There seem to have been few contests in council elections, the traditional party rivalry waning as the Liberals grew more moderate and the surviving radicals grew older.

The first evidence of a new radical movement in Oxford is a letter in the *Chronicle* in April 1865, signed 'Reformer', referring to a conference in Manchester called by the National Reform Union and suggesting that Oxford radicals should be represented.<sup>4</sup> The suggestion was taken up in an editorial, which pointed out that the list of supporters published by the Reform Union included T. H. Green and Thorold Rogers, both prominent university academics. The editorial commented that 'Oxford has done its duties in time past and we trust that the recognised leaders of the liberal party will come boldly forward and lend the weight of their influence and example to this important movement.'<sup>5</sup> In May, a further letter from 'Reformer' asked: 'are we to have a Government of the people, by the people, for the people, or a Government of the many by and for the few, claiming to exercise a divine right for that purpose' and arguing that 'the great battle of Reform must be fought and won.'<sup>6</sup>

At the parliamentary election in July 1865, Neate and Cardwell were returned unopposed. In seconding Cardwell's nomination, Joseph Castle spoke of the need for parliamentary reform.<sup>7</sup> Following the election, 'Reformer' wrote to the *Chronicle* objecting to the return of both Cardwell, who was opposed to the ballot, and of Neate, who was apparently undecided on the matter. The writer expressed his support for Oxford's two elderly radical Alderman, Towle and Grubb, and suggested that the state of things pointed to –

the necessity of some organisation of Reformers in Oxford, taking as the basis of their union Manhood Suffrage and the Ballot. The influence of such an organisation might be brought to bear with good effect on all future elections. The generation now rising into manhood have, many of

them, no idea of the glorious triumphs that have been won in the cause of Reform and Free Trade in Oxford. Such an organisation as I speak of, by the facilities it would afford for enlightening the public mind on great questions, would help to continue to the city of Oxford the proud position it has occupied in struggles of the past, by stimulating the present generation to emulate the example of their forefathers.<sup>8</sup>

In December 1865, Thorold Rogers organised a meeting to protest against the Government's action in putting down a slave rebellion in Jamaica. The Conservative Lord Mayor however refused permission to use the Town Hall, and Rogers won the support of some Liberal councillors for a letter of protest in the *Chronicle*.<sup>9</sup> This may have been the first attempt at co-operation between university radicals and city liberals. However, neither Grubb nor Towle appear as supporters of the cause. The controversy was followed by a letter from a 'working man', calling for 'free, open and public discussion of all great questions', adding that 'it may suit the self-elected leaders of a political party to thwart any movement likely to disturb their present comfortable arrangement', and concluding that 'surely will a retributive time come!'<sup>10</sup>

In February 1866, the *Chronicle* called for the establishment of a Reform Association in Oxford:

It is in the power of the Oxford liberals to aid materially in the achievement of this great result. Seven or eight years have elapsed since the voice of Oxford was expressed in favour of reform of the representation, and now that a crisis is at hand ... it is the duty of liberal and enlightened politicians to come forward and assist in organising and consolidating the public opinion in the city. There are amongst us many active and hearty reformers who have done good service in the past ... but individual exertions, however well directed, will be of little value in the great struggle which is approaching. What we want is a compact and well organised body, which will fairly represent the intelligence, wealth and the sentiments of the liberal party in this city.<sup>11</sup>

The 'working man' replied to this that the Liberal Party was 'dead for practical purposes' and that the Association must be formed on the basis of manhood suffrage and vote by ballot. He argued that 'it was the duty of all earnest reformers to agitate for the adoption by the Government of the above righteous principles' and hoped that 'a thorough going association may be formed and that its influence be so felt on future elections in Oxford, that instead of having men who need forcing up to our standard, we may have representatives whose opinions are in advance of our own ... men on whom shall worthily descend the mantle of such noble spirits as Mr Justice Earle and Sir William Page Wood.'<sup>12</sup> An 'Old Reformer' wrote in support of this call but suggesting that the middle class leaders might 'give working men the cold shoulder.'<sup>13</sup>

In March, Gladstone introduced the Reform Bill in parliament. It was estimated that the Bill would increase the number of voters in Oxford by 971.<sup>14</sup> In April, a public meeting, chaired by the mayor, J. Cavell, was held in the Town Hall in support of the Bill. There were about 1,000 people present and ‘the proceedings were of a most enthusiastic and unanimous character.’ Both the MPs, Cardwell and Neate, spoke from the platform. A motion supporting the Bill was moved by Alderman Sadler and seconded by E. T. Spiers. Thorold Rogers said that ‘he should have desired to see a larger extension of the suffrage and a greater measure of confidence shown towards the great mass of the community.’ After the meeting, the customary petition was collected.<sup>15</sup>

The meeting however was not as unanimous as it appeared. ‘Diogenes’ wrote to the *Chronicle* wishing that more working men had been present and that he could have heard a ‘few good radical speeches’, arguing that ‘every man who supports the state, pays the taxes, is unstained by crime, can read and write, and is free of parish relief, should be entitled to vote for members of Parliament.’<sup>16</sup>

A letter from William Ogden complained that at the meeting he had to listen to dreary speeches and that no working men had been asked for their opinions:

There was a consciousness of being ‘messed about’, ‘petted’, talked to for our own good, and of having our own tale told, and our case put, very kindly, by those who were speaking for us ... We of the working class see, and see plainly, that the great interests of labour are not only not fairly represented, but are almost totally unrepresented ... The working classes are not easily to be put off by specious arguments, nor their patience much longer tried by hope deferred.<sup>17</sup>

At the beginning of May, a meeting of reform supporters, probably instigated by Thorold Rogers, was held in the Music Room, Holywell. The meeting brought together leading Liberals such as the mayor, councillors Spiers and Towle and a younger group of radicals such as Ogden, Goold and Matthews. The beginning of the meeting, which was chaired by Alderman Carr, was disrupted by a group of undergraduates. Most of the disrupters however left after Rogers threatened to call the proctors. Rogers then proposed, in a very long speech, that a Reform League be established in Oxford –

for furtherance of an advanced measure of Parliamentary Reform, such measure to consist of the following principles – manhood suffrage, re-distribution of seats, vote by ballot, and the payment of electoral expenses from the local rates.

Ogden suggested that the Association’s principles ‘should be left to a meeting at which more working men were present’; he himself was not sure about the virtues of the ballot. Matthews urged an immediate decision, arguing that:

Mr Cardwell was an eminent man ... but he did not think that he represented the advanced opinions of the great majority of the constituency. If a change was necessary in the representation of the city, they would possess in the Reform League an organisation which could be brought to bear in an effectual manner so that a man could be selected whose political opinions were more in accordance with those of the constituency.

A Mr Lambert spoke for woman suffrage as well as manhood suffrage, a suggestion that was met by a mixture of laughter and cheers. A Baptist minister, the Reverend Allen, spoke on how as a Christian he supported reform. The meeting concluded with the formal establishment of the Oxford Reform League. The veteran radical Thomas North had declined an invitation to be the League's president, and Rogers was elected in his place.<sup>18</sup> The meeting was followed by a debate in the letters column of the *Chronicle* between Matthews and 'Diogenes', on the merits of the ballot.<sup>19</sup> This disagreement does not however seem to have hindered the League's development. At the end of June, the *Chronicle* reported that:

The Oxford Reform League bids fair to become one of the most important local political organisations which has been called into existence in this city for some years past ... One of the most remarkable features of this new movement is the fact that it has been originated and organised by the working classes themselves, with little or no countenance from those who have hitherto regarded themselves as the head and front of all political action in this city ... The working classes have determined to take the question of reform into their own hands.<sup>20</sup>

The League's second meeting, in the council chamber, discussed the progress of the Reform Bill in parliament. The Bill had just been defeated with 44 Liberals voting against the Government. Rogers suggested that the parliament should be known as the 'perfidious parliament' since so many of its members had broken promises made at the hustings. A motion was passed condemning the rebels and calling for a new election. Robert Castle wanted support for the lodger franchise included in the motion, and it was agreed to ask other branches of the League about this.<sup>21</sup> The fall of the Government provoked 'Diogenes' to launch a further attack on the rebels and an appeal to Liberals to:

Join our Reform League. Take the business in our own hands. The League will diffuse political information. It is a power; its influence will be too great for any obstructionists.<sup>22</sup>

In July, Rogers was sent as delegate to the Reform League conference in London, which was addressed by, among others, Goldwin Smith, the Oxford don.<sup>23</sup> At the conference, delegates from all the provincial branches signed a declaration

to co-operate with the President and Council of the National Reform League 'in further prosecution of the great question of reform.'<sup>24</sup> On his return, Rogers reported on the conference proceedings at a meeting in the Town Hall. According to a report in the *Morning Star*, Goldwin Smith commented that:

The struggle may in the end cease to be one between parties in parliament and become one between classes, the class represented by the House of Commons on the one side, and the class represented by the trade unions on the other ... The true statesman would almost drag the working men within the pale of the constitution by force than suffer them thus to organize themselves into a separate community outside it.

The meeting agreed to negotiate affiliation to the National Reform League and that money could be donated through Matthews, the Oxford secretary.<sup>25</sup> The relationship between the Oxford League and the National League appears to have been loose, the link being dependent on Rogers, who was a vice-president of the national body. Branches were usually grouped in regional departments, and though the Birmingham department seems to have considered the Oxford branch to be attached to it, the Oxford League was very independent and considered itself 'an equal to the great departments' such as Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. Oxford Leaguers did however support League activities outside the city such as demonstrations in London in February 1867, and in Birmingham in July. Rogers undertook a speaking tour of Lancashire for the League in 1868.<sup>26</sup>

During 1867, the Oxford League published a lengthy statement of its objectives, which is reproduced here:

It is alleged that the bestowal of the Franchise on a large number of the inhabitants of the county would swamp those who possess the present franchise. It appears more likely that it would give a reality to the Franchise, which is at present swamped by the dominant influence of a small number of persons, by the anomalies of our electoral system, and by the systematic corruption and intimidation which the monopolists of political power affect to denounce, but secretly uphold, as the machinery by which they secure their monopoly. It is not likely that a real extension of the Franchise would swamp anything but the vices and inequalities of our representative system.

The committee believe that the objections ordinarily taken to the Ballot are subterfuges, intended to cover the real purpose of the advocates of open voting, that of coercing the judgement and convictions of electors, and of retaining, under the forms of a free suffrage, the advantages of violence and fraud.

The expenses of a contested election have generally left the disposal of the county representation in the hands of a small junta of landowners and give the control of boroughs, as a rule, to legal and other agencies.

In most cases the object of those who are ambitious of a seat in parliament is that of serving some private end or ends of their social equals, and is very rarely connected with the public good.

The committee feel that a league like the Reform League is not bound to any political party. It is probable, indeed, that the members of the Society, would, as a rule, endorse what are called Liberal opinions, and those of an advanced character. But while they claim for all those who contribute to the income of the State, and are put in peril by the action of Parliament and Government, the right of expressing an effectual judgement on public policy, they refrain from giving any view as to what that policy should be, other than that it ought to be just and conscientious, and alive to all public interests.

The statement also referred to a meeting which had endorsed the three principles of Manhood Suffrage and Redistribution, the Ballot, and the Payment of all Election Expenses from the local rates.<sup>27</sup>

In September, a meeting was held in the Corn Exchange to receive a deputation from the National Reform League, which included the president Edmund Beales and Lt-Col Dickson. The meeting was chaired by Rogers, and the platform included Alderman Grubb, Alderman Carr, Thomas North, John Towle, Goold and Matthews, though the absence of Charles Neate, the MP, was noted. Rogers said that the meeting was 'to vindicate those political rights which had been denied to the great mass of the English people.' Beales claimed that 'he was no apostle of violence or revolution ... but he was the apostle of moral agitation and moral revolution.' The formal endorsement of the Reform League's principles was proposed by Alderman Carr and seconded by Mr Preston, the latter described as a 'working man'.<sup>28</sup>

Neate's failure to attend the meeting was not because he had some prior commitment. He apparently considered the Reform League to be unnecessary and wrote to Rogers in November to suggest that 'the working classes are quite sufficiently stirred up, and that the necessity of a large extension of the suffrage is generally felt and acknowledged.'<sup>29</sup> Rogers published his reply that the 'agitation needs to be more earnest and more persistent. Mr Neate knows very well that the House of Commons will yield to nothing but rigorous and continuous pressure. It certainly will not reform itself. He warned that disaffection would spread unless the Government opposition acted.'<sup>30</sup>

Neate further antagonised Oxford Liberals when in a speech at the annual dinner of the Druids in January 1867, he attacked the reform agitation. Alderman Carr and John Towle, who were at the dinner, spoke up in defence of free speech.<sup>31</sup> A *Chronicle* editorial attacked the MP:

He was sent to Parliament as an advanced Liberal, but he is so little bound by ties of party – perhaps we might say his advanced views sit so loosely upon him – that he is continuously 'bolting' and expressing

opinions which appear to the outside world utterly irreconcilable with the creed he professes.

The editorial went on to defend free speech, arguing that working men were –

Determined to have ... their fair share of political power. They are now engaged in a final struggle with powerful opponents to secure that object, and the electors of Oxford, remembering the principles upon which he was returned to Parliament, have some right to expect that he will be found in the ranks of that great party which is willing not only to entrust them with a larger share of political power, but has no desire to place an embargo on the free expression of political opinion on the part of the working classes.<sup>32</sup>

Matthews followed this with a letter on behalf of the Oxford Reform League, attacking –

Mr Neate, who went to the House of Commons in '63 as the avowed friend of the poor man, now that this latter is earnestly pressing his suit and pleading pertinaciously, but peacefully and carefully, for his rights, instead of extending to him his helping hand, in the language of the most antiquated Toryism threatens to put him down by physical force.<sup>33</sup>

The Oxford Reform League held a meeting in the Town Hall to discuss Neate's position. Neate, though not invited, was present. Thorold Rogers, in the chair, gave his opinion that 'every single measure of Reform had been forced from an unwilling Parliament by the influence of those who recognised the rights of the mass of the people.'

The meeting, before hearing Neate, carried a resolution supporting the action of Carr and Towle in defending free speech at the Druids' dinner. Neate then tried to explain what he had meant, seeking to distinguish between the 'right of public meeting, where the people might together exercise their judgement' and 'meetings for the display of numerical force', such as the recent demonstrations in Hyde Park in London. He considered it to be 'inconsistent with the peace of the metropolis that great out-of-door meetings should take place'. These remarks were greeted with shouts of 'nonsense', hisses and considerable disorder. Neate went on to suggest that the reformers should petition parliament and was met by cries of 'we are tired of petitioning'. He then denied he had broken any pledges.<sup>34</sup>

The League continued to hold meetings at monthly intervals. In February, Rogers was made an honorary oddfellow and spoke up for the League.<sup>35</sup> In March, the attendance included the Liberal Balliol don, T. H. Green.<sup>36</sup> The April meeting was addressed by George Mantle from London.<sup>37</sup> In July, the House of Lords introduced an amendment to the Reform Bill which would allow students to vote in their place of study. The city council called a special meeting to

oppose this amendment, it being argued that double voting would strengthen the Tories' position.<sup>38</sup> The amendment was overturned in the Commons. Neate again annoyed Oxford Liberals by supporting a bill to restrict public meetings in London parks, which was aimed at preventing a repetition of the reform riots in Hyde Park.<sup>39</sup>

In April 1868, rumours spread that Rogers was trying to replace Neate as one of Oxford's MPs. A letter in the *London Daily News* assumed that the Oxford Liberals would adopt Rogers, commenting that he had 'been courting popularity with a view to standing in the city.' Rogers replied that 'Mr Neate is a very valued friend of mine, and I could not, if I were anxious to be a candidate for the City of Oxford, put myself in opposition to him, however much I might dissent from his utterances.'

Rogers continued – 'I have never courted popularity in my life ... I am satisfied if any of the views which I am able to announce become popular; but I am bold to say that no one can charge me with keeping back an opinion which I know to be unpopular.' He concluded – 'I have never asked the electors of Oxford City for their suffrages, nor have the electors of Oxford City invited me to become a candidate for their representation.'<sup>40</sup> Rogers was in fact invited to stand in Birmingham, but he had to decline since he was ineligible for a seat in the House of Commons being an ordained minister.<sup>41</sup> He was able to resign from the priesthood in 1870, under the Clerical Disabilities Act, unsuccessfully contested Scarborough in the 1874 election and was elected for Southwark as a radical in 1880.

In the months after the Reform Bill was passed, the Oxford Reform League found it unnecessary to meet. The League was however revived in May 1868 to be addressed by Goldwin Smith on 'The Present Political Crisis.'<sup>42</sup> Disraeli had announced that his Government would dissolve in the autumn, when an election could take place under the new register. Neate gave notice of his intention to retire from Parliament. The Liberals adopted in his place William Vernon Harcourt Q.C., who had both local connections and a reputation as a radical.<sup>43</sup> Harcourt apparently chose Oxford on the advice of John Bright, the radical leader. He already knew Cardwell and spent part of the autumn vacation at his house. He also knew Goldwin Smith, who had now moved to Reading, and had worked with him on the *Saturday Review*. The main objector to Harcourt contesting the seat was his brother Edward, a high Tory who lived at nearby Nuneham Courtenay. Edward wrote to his brother –

I cannot imagine anything that would give me more annoyance and pain than your standing for Oxford as a Liberal. Whatever unfriendly feeling you may entertain towards landowners, there is no doubt that the inhabitants of Oxford are very much indebted to the owners of Nuneham for allowing them so free a use of property.

William Harcourt ignored his brother's feelings and in fact turned down an offer of a seat in Liverpool to contest Oxford.<sup>44</sup>

Harcourt's first meeting was in the Town Hall on 11 June. It was chaired by Joseph Castle, and Harcourt was supported by Goldwin Smith, the mayor, two aldermen and 17 councillors, as well as by the leaders of the Oxford Reform League, including Matthews and Goold. Dr Adams, an 'old Liberal' who had apparently been considered by the more moderate Liberals as a possible candidate, pledged his support to Harcourt 'who had the support of the whole Liberal party in the Constituency.'<sup>45</sup> In his speech, Harcourt referred to his opponents' main objections to him:

In the first place, they make merry about my large size which I can't help, and in the second place they say I am exceedingly bad tempered, which is my fault, and I must try to mend it. They say the same thing of Mr Gladstone, and the disciple cannot expect to fare better than his master.<sup>46</sup>

Cardwell stood for re-election. The Conservatives, disguised as the 'Oxford Constitutional Association' ran only one candidate, Dr Deane.

The enthusiasm generated by Harcourt's adoption led to the reconstitution of the Oxford Reform League as the 'City of Oxford Liberal Association'. The object of the Association was given as to organise registration of voters and the return of Liberal members of Parliament. The Association had been established by a group of fourteen Liberals in the city who had drawn up rules and enrolled members – 750 by 9 July. These members elected a general committee of 72 members, who then elected a smaller executive committee. The first public meeting of the new body was held in the Corn Exchange at the end of July and attracted about 1,500 people. It was chaired by the mayor, J. R. Carr, supported by two aldermen and twelve councillors, and addressed by both Cardwell and Harcourt.<sup>47</sup> In September, a second meeting was held in the Corn Exchange, at which both candidates spoke to an audience estimated at 2,000. The *Chronicle* commented on 'The unusual feature at a political meeting of a great number of ladies, completely filling the galleries, and who appeared to take a great interest in the objects of the meeting.'<sup>48</sup> In November, on the eve of poll, a third meeting was held, this time attended by about 2,500 people.<sup>49</sup>

Despite this enthusiasm, Harcourt was not supported by all Oxford radicals. In September, a temperance deputation including Matthews visited Harcourt, who was not prepared to vote either for the closing of pubs on Sundays, or for the Permissive Bill which would allow local magistrates freedom of choice as to whether or not the pubs should be closed.<sup>50</sup> A challenge was also presented by John Towle who threatened to enter the contest in support of the ballot and attacked the Liberal party as corrupt.<sup>51</sup> Towle however withdrew. He later referred to his 'feint at offering myself as a candidate in the interests of the working classes.' He argued that 'the extension of the franchise without the Ballot will be a curse instead of a blessing' and that open voting was 'a power

in the hands of the middle classes.' Towle however appears to have been preoccupied during the election campaign with devising a new sewerage system for the city.<sup>52</sup>

During the election, a handbill attacking Harcourt appeared, arguing that he would vote to disenfranchise freemen. The handbill also attacked one of Harcourt's leading supporters – the mayor, Alderman Carr:

He is known through personal pique, to have expressed a pious wish to see them all (the freemen) buried under the turf of Port Meadow and would trample under foot tomorrow your most dearly cherished rights.<sup>53</sup>

The poll was the last parliamentary election at which the voting was open, the Ballot Act being introduced in 1872. It is important to recognise that, before this act, voting was as public and open to abuse as it had been in the years before the 1832 Act described by the commissioners. Plowman wrote in 1918 that:

In those days we did not usually vote in nice comfortable halls and schoolrooms as we do now, but in open polling booths. These were only boarded up in front to about the height of a man's waist, so that the mob outside who crowded round the booth, could have the full benefit of your reply to the presiding officer's interrogatory 'Who do you vote for?'

Plowman's sympathies were Tory, so –

As soon as I had unburdened myself of my vote, I was saluted for my pains with a volley of groans and hisses from the immediate outsiders, and the word was soon passed round 'Here's another o' them blooming Tories' and I was shoved and hustled and rammed and jammed. It was enough to deter physically weak or timid folk from going to poll at all.<sup>54</sup>

Given this atmosphere at the poll, it is perhaps not surprising that Cardwell and Harcourt were both returned, with 2,755 and 2,636 votes respectively, with Deane collecting only 1,255, the electorate having been extended by the Reform Act to 5,033.<sup>55</sup>

## CHAPTER 9

# Education, the Ballot and Drink, 1870–1873

The enthusiasm of the election campaign spread over into municipal politics, where elections had not been contested on party lines for several years. The local elections were held a fortnight before the parliamentary contest, and the Conservatives decided to fight the election as an organised group. Consequently, the Liberals with their new organisation 'met the attack with the force and determination of a united party. Confident in a good cause, they hurled back the aggressors in signal and humiliating confusion.'<sup>1</sup> The poll gave the Liberals 31 seats to the Conservatives' nine and no doubt boosted their morale for the parliamentary struggle.<sup>2</sup>

Following their election triumphs, Oxford radicals were active on a number of issues. In January 1870, there was a meeting in the Town Hall 'to consider the best means of promoting a comprehensive system of education'. The speakers included T. H. Green of Balliol College. Thorold Rogers moved a resolution 'that it is necessary to establish a compulsory national system, which shall provide for the efficient education of every child in the United Kingdom.' A list of local subscribers to the National Education League, set up by Joseph Chamberlain in Birmingham, was read out and included Vernon Harcourt MP, Mayor Alderman Hughes, Alderman Castle and Alderman Carr.<sup>3</sup> In October, a meeting was held to establish a school board for Oxford.<sup>4</sup> The Liberals however split over the school board election, the moderate and mainly Anglican Liberals, led by Mallam, secretary of the Liberal Association, joining the Tories to ensure that dissenters were excluded. Consequently, only two 'friends of unsectarian education', Reid and Castle, neither of whom were themselves dissenters, were returned, together with three clerics and an Independent candidate, Miss Smith.<sup>5</sup>

Agitation for the ballot was also revived, though no demonstrations were held, or petitions collected. George Howell, formerly secretary of the Reform League, came up from London to speak on the subject to the Oddfellows.

Towle claimed that he was the only member of the ballot society in Oxford.<sup>6</sup> In October 1870, Cardwell declared himself a reluctant convert to the ballot.<sup>7</sup> In April 1872, Thorold Rogers chaired a meeting on the ballot bill, then before parliament. He had called the meeting because about 15 electors had written

to him complaining that Harcourt had opposed the penal clauses of the Bill. Rogers however antagonised the more moderate Liberals who opposed the manner in which the meeting was called. The *Chronicle* said it was ‘an outrage upon the public opinion of the city,’ that members of parliament should not be summoned to meet critics when busy in the House and that the critics could at least have waited until the end of the parliamentary session. At the meeting, which was held in a pub, councillor Eagleston attacked Rogers as a university man interfering in the city’s affairs. Alderman Speirs criticised Rogers for not inviting Harcourt to defend himself, and for meeting in a ‘Pot-House’ rather than in the Corn Exchange or the Town Hall. Spiers declared that ‘It really was the most extra-ordinary meeting he was ever at in his life,’ and moved a motion of confidence in Harcourt, to find the meeting divided. Beesly, a building worker, proposed ‘that as there appears to be some dissatisfaction amongst the constituency of Oxford in regard to their members’ conduct, they may be invited to meet their constituents as early as possible,’ which was carried unanimously.<sup>8</sup>

Radicals were also involved in agitation against the Licensing Bill. In May 1871, a petition of 1,400 signatures was collected. The licensing trade then collected a counter petition of 400 signatures supporting the Bill.<sup>9</sup> In September 1872, Oxford magistrates decided that pubs should close at the time determined by the new Act, which was 11.00 pm on weekdays and 10.00 pm on Sundays. On the first evening of early closing, several hundred frustrated drinkers gathered at Carfax, where they were harangued by a Frank Russell and a Mr Johnstone.

The mob then ran down St Aldates to attack the house of Alderman Randall. The police had to clear the streets with truncheons, something of an over-reaction since two policemen were later sacked for excessive use of violence.<sup>10</sup> The magistrates held a special meeting the following week to review the situation. Petitions were received from temperance societies calling for the earliest possible closing hours. Opposing petitions calling for an extra hour’s drinking time were received from the Druids and the Oddfellows. The magistrates agreed that the pubs could have an extra half hour and should close at 11.30 pm on weekdays and 10.30 pm on Sundays. They remained able to open as early as 6.00 am.<sup>11</sup>

## CHAPTER 10

# Republicanism and Early Trade Unionism, 1871–1873

In April 1871, six months after the Paris commune was established, a letter advocating republicanism appeared in the *Chronicle*. ‘A Republican’ argued that republicanism was ‘more favourable to the principles of Christianity than Monarchy’, and that ‘The whole civilized world knows what Monarchy has done for France, yea, and for England too, and when we think of the burden which Royalty always places upon the back of a nation, we are compelled to say, may God send us a republic.’<sup>1</sup>

Also in April, the General Council in London of the The International Workingmen’s Association (the I.W.M.A., also known as the First International), reported in the minutes of its meeting of 18 April that it had received a letter from a Mr Richards, claiming to be secretary of an Oxford Republican Club, setting out the club’s political programme and proposing common objects and co-operation with the IWMA.

In May, a letter in the *Oxford Chronicle* signed ‘Cosmopolitan’ attacked Monarchism as –

Degrading to the intellect, it vitiates morality in every stratum of society; it generates, stimulates and fosters social, class and religious dissensions; and it is directly the cause of wars between nations to whose interest it is, and who but for the pernicious influence it is constantly exercising, would continue on friendly and mutually profitable relationship.<sup>2</sup>

In October, St. Swithin Williams, a money lender in the High Street, proposed to establish an association for the promotion of ‘real Liberalism’. He suggested names such as ‘The Oxford Radical Society’ or ‘The Oxford Advanced Radicals’. He invited to join him, ‘every real Liberal, be he an Advanced Liberal, Radical or Republican’. The society would have no subscription. Its object would be:

The greatest happiness for the greatest number, so far that happiness depends on the enactment of just and wise laws. Our members will be pledged to no programme; we shall agree to differ. Amongst the subjects which we might discuss would be; an honest ballot; every taxpayer a

vote; representation in proportion to numbers; personal representation or true democracy; labour representation; a real senate, if senate there be; no work, no pay – from the very ‘highest’ to the ‘lowest’; no sinecures; a free church; national education; promotion by merit in army, navy, volunteers, yeomanry, and militia; reformed land-laws; no game laws; capital and labour in partnership, leading to labour, in co-operation, its own master; a foreign policy favourable to liberty and the peoples; justice to Ireland; tax-consuming M.P.s; no votes in questions of taxation; a free breakfast table; an honest income tax; reformed poor laws etc.<sup>3</sup>

The following week it was announced that the society would be inaugurated at a public meeting to be addressed by a republican lecturer, Charles Watt, on ‘Monarchy and Republicanism.’<sup>4</sup> There is however no record of the society actually having been set up.

In November 1871, Thorold Rogers started a series of lectures on political economy for tradesmen and artisans. Topics included: labour and wages, labour and capital, combination of labourers, co-operation of labourers, pauperism, general education and labour, skilled education and labour.<sup>5</sup> These apparently successful lectures no doubt put Rogers in contact with the building workers who were taking up the nine hours movement which sought to limit working hours. There is even a possibility that Rogers may have instigated the local initiative within the building trade.

In February 1872, Oxford building labourers threatened to strike. At a meeting of 300 workers in the Chequers Inn, chaired by John Harrison, a resolution was passed to invite the master builders to a public discussion of the matters in dispute.<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of March, the Lucy Ironworks adopted the nine-hour system, which clearly encouraged the builders, who held a mass meeting at the Corn Exchange.<sup>7</sup> The operatives had elected a committee, with Watts as secretary and John Harrison as chairman. They demanded a 54-hour week and 50% extra pay for overtime. The masters had however refused to meet them. Thorold Rogers, who chaired the meeting, said that the ‘workmen had just as much right to unite together in order to better themselves as capitalists had a right to unite together in order to get a better interest for the money they had accumulated.’ Alderman Castle, a leading Oxford Liberal and a builder, argued that the agitation would lead to work being taken away from Oxford, to which Watts replied by asking if the Cathedral, Colleges and other buildings be moved away on ‘wheels?’ and advised the workers to propagate their opinions without violence or disorder.<sup>8</sup>

Castle wrote to the *Chronicle* attacking Harrison and his committee as ‘reckless men, who were determined to become the real masters over the building trade in Oxford ... a clique of agitators issuing their resolutions from a public house’, and referred to ‘The intolerable vanity and ignorance exhibited by the working men who spoke at those meetings.’ He ridiculed the suggestion that the building industry could be run as a cooperative.<sup>9</sup>

When the operatives went on strike, the masters agreed to meet their representatives but, refusing to meet the committee, agreed only to meet a deputation of one man from each shop. The operatives held meetings at Gloucester Green and St. Giles, the former attracting some 2,000 people. The masters then gave way and agreed to introduce a nine-hour system from November, with Saturday as a half-holiday. Overtime payments were however to remain unchanged. At a subsequent meeting at the Chequers, most operatives seemed to be content with this agreement. The *Chronicle* commented: ‘We have much satisfaction in announcing that the unfortunate dispute between the master builders and the men in their employ has been settled. We regret that workmen should have thought it necessary to adopt coercive measures.’<sup>10</sup>

The nine-hour movement then spread to the print workers at the Clarendon Press. A meeting of the Compositors Society decided to ask for a 54-hour week and increased wages from 1 May. The tone of their request was somewhat different from that of the builders. Their petition stated: ‘We beg most respectfully to submit to your consideration that the time has now arrived when we may, we hope, without detriment to the interests of the firm, urge upon your notice the justice of our claim to an advancement in our scale of prices’, and ended ‘Trusting, gentlemen, you will acknowledge the justice of our request, we respectfully await your decision.’<sup>11</sup>

May 1872 also saw the beginning of agitation among agricultural workers in the Oxford area. This movement was based in the villages of Oxfordshire and has been documented in detail elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> The movement did however have links with Oxford radicalism which are directly relevant to this study. The agitation was organised by Joseph Arch’s National Agricultural Labourers Union. Meetings were held in Kidlington and Wolvercote, both on the outskirts of Oxford, in May,<sup>13</sup> and an Oxfordshire branch of NALU was formed at a meeting in the Cornmarket in July.<sup>14</sup> A second meeting the next week was followed by a march through the city.<sup>15</sup> During August, there was a further meeting in Oxford, while Arch spoke at Kidlington.<sup>16</sup> In October, Arch came to Oxford, and spoke at a meeting, sharing a platform with some of the city’s leading radicals – Thorold Rogers, Towle, T. H. Green – and two vicars – Fletcher of St. Martin’s and Duggan of St. Paul’s.<sup>17</sup> NALU organisation in Oxfordshire was built up over the subsequent months, but no further mass meetings were held in Oxford itself, though Oxford radicals spoke at NALU meetings in the surrounding villages.

## CHAPTER 11

# The Decline of Oxford Liberalism, 1870–1887

Oxford Liberals never regained the energy demonstrated in the 1868 election. The Liberal Association, which had been established as a mass organisation in the months before the contest, does not appear to have met regularly once the victory was won. In October 1870, Towle claimed that the Liberal party was going to ruin and that the Liberal Government no longer represented its supporters.<sup>1</sup> In July 1871, James Goold, formerly active in the Reform League, asked –

The Oxford Liberal Association – where is it? what is it doing? who are its leaders? Is it dead? Why not bury it? ... The Association obstructs the way, for it occupies the ground which another form of organisation for the Liberal interests of Oxford should take – an organisation which should be made to serve local as well as parliamentary purposes. It is evident that the so called Liberal Association is held together by its paid agents in the interests of Messrs Cardwell and Harcourt, and not to promote the general interests of Liberalism in the city, as witness the late School Board elections. Liberals are being betrayed by their leaders.<sup>2</sup>

In September 1872, Goold claimed that Oxford Liberal politics were controlled by the Order of Druids, and the Liberal Association had betrayed electors into their ‘bewitching arms’. He argued that it was the Druids who had persuaded Harcourt into opposing the limiting clauses of the Licensing Bill. He considered that the Liberals needed an organisation ‘To enrol and direct (as far as compatible with individual liberty) the great mass of voters on all municipal and parliamentary questions, then Druidism will sink to its proper level; at present it monopolises our local and parliamentary offices and officers.’<sup>3</sup> The point was taken up by Matthews who argued that the Druids and Oddfellows were ignoring the claims of the great body of the Liberal party in Oxford, which was dissenting and abstaining. He suggested that Cardwell and Harcourt should visit temperance societies and attend public tea meetings in the Corn Exchange, and he concluded that –

We may look on the Liberal Association as dead and buried. I would respectfully suggest that some new organisation is needed for the future, and that some means should be taken to organise at once. Progress, Retrenchment and Reform should still be our watchwords. Oxford has distinguished itself in its efforts in the past. Let us hope the past may be eclipsed in the more vigorous, united, and intelligent efforts of the future.<sup>4</sup>

In November, another burgess attacked the dominance of local politics by cliques:

We have seen that so long as a candidate would be content to support a certain party, it mattered little as to his ability or fitness for office.<sup>5</sup>

A leaflet of Towle's probably dates from 1872, given its reference to secret voting:

We are entirely under Aldermanic Government and shall continue to be so long as you send back to the Council those men who Alderman Carter boasts of being able to turn round his finger; that he can do, and has done what he likes with the Council; He has used them to his own purpose, which has led to the entire ruin of the city. Not only the Council, but the Aldermen are all at his feet; No power on earth can move him but an adverse vote in Council. Hence the necessity, the imperative duty to elect fresh men in every Ward. Now is the time to rid ourselves of this extravagant, wasteful and outrageously dishonest Aldermanic Government. Tell your friends in every Ward to vote for new blood. Make no question about politics, we are all in the same boat. Vote secretly if you wish it.<sup>6</sup>

With the Liberal Association inactive, the Lord Mayor was persuaded, in January 1873, to call a Town Meeting, at which Cardwell and Harcourt could address their electors. It was ironic that in the same week, both MPs also dined with the Druids.<sup>7</sup> In March, a Liberal wrote to the *Chronicle* about the weakness of the Oxford Liberals, attacking Mallam for deserting to the Tories and criticising Alderman Carr, chairman of the Liberal Association as 'A politician who does not inspire confidence'.<sup>8</sup> In April, another Liberal elector suggested that Liberals should provide a banquet for the two MPs: 'The leaders of the Liberal party appear to have abnegated their functions or are so immersed in their petty and undignified squabbles ... let the rank and file put their shoulders to the wheel and give their members a reception.'<sup>9</sup>

The Liberal Association failed to respond, and in September a group of Liberals formed the Oxford Reform Club, with premises in King Edward Street. The club was to be 'Of a social and political character, having for its main object the united action of the Liberal party in public affairs, and at the same time

providing for its members ample opportunity for social intercourse.' A subscription of one guinea was payable, with membership being by election. It was emphasised that all shades of liberal opinion should support the club.<sup>10</sup>

In January 1874, when a parliamentary election was called, Harcourt and Cardwell addressed the Reform Club. The moderate Liberals seem to have had control of the Club, for the adoption motion was unopposed.<sup>11</sup> The dissenters were however uncertain about supporting the two candidates. A special meeting was held at Matthews' house in St. Giles. Abstention was considered but it was eventually agreed to support the two sitting MPs. Abstention was also considered at a meeting of two temperance societies, the Good Templars and the United Kingdom Alliance, but both agreed to leave voting to the discretion of individual members.<sup>12</sup> The disputes of the previous years however had left the Liberals disorganised, and the register neglected. When the election came, it was nevertheless still possible to attract 2,500 people to a meeting in the Corn Exchange, the crowd including Prince Leopold. Cardwell and Harcourt were returned, but with a reduced majority over the Tory brewer Hall. Harcourt got 2332 votes, Cardwell 2281 and Hall 2198.<sup>13</sup> Following the poll, Tory undergraduates provoked the Liberal mob and a riot was narrowly avoided. The election produced a clever radical leaflet, which purporting to be official Conservative propaganda, gave five reasons for voting for Hall, which included:

- 1) Trade Unions should be put down by the strong hand of the law, and
- 2) Only true churchmen should be buried in consecrated ground.

Hall was obliged to deny these allegations, concluding that 'I feel sure that you will resent these cruel misrepresentations, and I ask you for the future to give credit to no statement of my opinions which is not signed by myself, the chairman of my committee, or by my Agent.'<sup>14</sup>

Following the contest, a Liberal wrote to the *Chronicle* that:

Although we have succeeded in re-electing Messrs Cardwell and Harcourt, it is no use blinking the fact that the Liberal cause in Oxford appears to be in greater jeopardy now than at any time during the life of the present generation. The result is no doubt attributable to a variety of causes, but the chief of these is the want of organisation on the part of the Liberals.

The great victory achieved in 1868 was due in a great measure to the Liberal Association – certainly the most powerful and efficient organisation which has ever existed in this city; and it is fair to assume that if it had continued to exist, instead of being allowed to fall to pieces, we should not have had to chronicle a victory closely bordering on defeat.<sup>15</sup>

The republican St. Swithin Williams wrote with the unhelpful suggestion of a discussion forum, which could consider such questions as 'Will the Squire win

at the next election?', and 'Has Mr Gladstone's Government justly forfeited the confidence of thoughtful Liberals?'.<sup>16</sup>

The Liberals' respite was short-lived, for immediately after the election, Cardwell was given a peerage, which left his seat vacant. The Oxford Liberals invited John Lewis, formerly MP for Devonport, to take his place.<sup>17</sup> The campaign was to be far from easy. Lewis seems to have started well, despite attempts by 'Brewer's men' to wreck his meetings. Lewis made special attempts to attract the votes of working men. At a meeting in St. Ebbes, he spoke of his interest in matters relevant to them, claiming that he 'was one of the first who recognised the propriety of throwing the Protection of the law over Trades Unions, and he was glad to see, irrespective of politics, that two working men candidates had been successful in the recent general election'. This reference to Alexander Macdonald and Thomas Burt however provoked the query as to whether or not Disraeli was a working man. Lewis also addressed a meeting of artisans in the building trade, in the council chamber. He stressed his support for changes in the Criminal Law Amendment Act and the Master and Servants Act. The meeting, chaired by Beanley, appears to have been sympathetic to Lewis' candidacy.

From this high point, Lewis found the going more difficult. At a meeting of 3,000 people in the Corn Exchange, a Tory mob created such a noise that Lewis could not be heard. After three quarters of an hour, and unsuccessful appeals for quiet from Aldermen Browning and Hughes, Lewis and his supporters finally gave up the attempt to address the crowd and left the gathering. Councillor Lowe declared that the crowd had got drunk on Hall's beer, which made the objects of this rebuke cheer even louder. In the absence of the candidate, the crowd was entertained by Chandler, the Oxford 'Blondin', 'who made several attempts to give play in the body of the hall to his ideas of the noble art of self-defence, and eventually succeeded, with the aid of kindred spirits, in forming a ring and "Squaring up" to show his "Guard"'. Eventually the police intervened, threw out the rowdiest of the mob, and cleared the building.<sup>18</sup>

A second meeting was held at the Corn Exchange the following night, entrance being by ticket only. Not surprisingly, Lewis received a more enthusiastic reception than on the previous occasion.<sup>19</sup> He then held a series of smaller meetings at Hinksey, Cowley and Summertown. He also addressed a meeting of college servants, and two meetings of Trade Unionists which included engineers, tailors, shoemakers, masons, joiners, plasterers, labourers, and printers, both being chaired by Philip Beasley.<sup>20</sup>

The main controversy of the election was not over trade unionism but over the Contagious Diseases Act. The Act, supported by Lewis, was to establish a system of registering prostitutes so that they could be medically examined. It was opposed in a national campaign led by Josephine Butler. The controversy had apparently lost Lewis his seat in Devonport, and Butler's 'Association for the Total Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act' intervened in the Oxford election, calling on all moral Liberals to support Hall who opposed the Act.<sup>21</sup> The

Tories also attacked Lewis for supporting the disestablishment of the Church of England. The Liberals attacked Hall for sacking employees for joining unions and for being a brewer, for which they composed a vitriolic poem:

While poor men toil through weary years,  
 Their bread bedewed with sweat and tears.  
 Who flaunts his wealth mid England's peers?  
 The Brewer!

For every needless cup of ale  
 Some WOMAN'S cheek with WANT looks pale.  
 Who thrives, while hungry children wail?  
 The Brewer!

Who doth the poor man's penny crave  
 Which he for WIFE and CHILD might save?  
 Who makes a man a SOT AND SLAVE?  
 The Brewer!

Who pours the liquor down men's throats  
 To steal their brains and win their votes,  
 Then o'er their degradation gloats?  
 The Brewer!<sup>22</sup>

The support for Hall from the unholy alliance of brewers and clergy, together with the ambivalent position of the temperance groups and the controversy over contagious diseases, ensured that Lewis was defeated. Hall was returned with a 462-vote majority as the first Conservative MP for Oxford since 1859. The Tories then sought to follow up their success by ousting Liberals from the city council. In the November election, they increased their representation by two, though the Liberals retained their majority.<sup>24</sup>

By the time the next election was called in March 1880, the Liberals had rebuilt their organisation. Hall had suggested an arrangement to avoid a contest, but Harcourt refused, and the Liberals adopted a lawyer, Chitty, as their second candidate.<sup>25</sup> They organised meetings in different wards, culminating in a meeting in the Corn Exchange. Entrance was by ticket only to avoid disruption.<sup>26</sup> A so-called Liberal attacked Chitty for 'engaging all the ROUGHS in the TOWN', and called for support for Hall as a 'thorough ENGLISHMAN and a friend to the PEOPLE'. The Liberals attacked Hall for supporting flogging in the army.<sup>27</sup> The Liberal campaign was however successful – Harcourt was returned with 2771 votes, while Chitty defeated Hall by a margin of only ten votes – 2669 to 2659.<sup>28</sup>

The Liberals rejoiced with a victory song, sung to the tune of Men of Harlech:

Men of Oxford, rouse to action!  
 Never let the Tory faction  
 In your ranks to spread distraction!  
     Answer to our call!  
 See your swords be sharp and flaming  
 See your blows be sure in aiming  
 Each some Tory mischief maiming,  
     Till it vanquished fall!<sup>29</sup>

As in 1874, however, the Liberal victory was shortlived. Harcourt was appointed Home Secretary in Gladstone's Government and had to face re-election. The Tories, smarting from their narrow defeat, were unwilling to see Harcourt returned unopposed as was customary following ministerial appointments. The Oxford electors therefore had to go to the polls for the second time in only six weeks. The Liberals again organised meetings in the wards, culminating in a mass rally in Gloucester Green and a torchlight procession down St. Giles on the eve of the poll.<sup>30</sup>

The election was attended by the customary exchange of allegations and abuse. A 'total abstainer' called for votes against Harcourt. The Liberals replied with a leaflet that ran as follows:

SATAN REPROVING SIN – The Devil preaching Morality!

Fellow electors!

The supporters of Mr Hall, the Tory Brewer, with his

SEVENTY PUBLIC HOUSES

Open in OXFORD every SUNDAY

Some of them the most notorious resort of Prostitutes, are holding up as the champion of Religion, Morality, and the Purity of Social Life.

What an insult to Oxford Intelligence!<sup>31</sup>

The Liberals also appealed to the electorate not to reject Harcourt as he was such a prominent politician:

If Sir William loses his seat, will not this city, which has been represented by Erle, Page Wood and Cardwell, be condemned in the future to a succession of second or third-rate representatives? What man of statesmanlike calibre would care to stand for a constituency which thus punished an old member for the merit which made him a Secretary of State?<sup>32</sup>

When the poll was declared, the Liberals' fear was realised and Hall was returned by 2735 votes to 2681 – a majority of 54. The Tory-supporting don Charles Oman gave his impressions of the election campaign in his memoir:

For long days before that by-election of May 1880 Oxford was a very gay city, so far as banners and gorgeous posters, endless orations, and free beer for the Conservatives at the 'Blue Pig' and for Liberals at the 'Welsh Pony' could enliven it. Bands never ceased to play party tunes, and processions, with flags by day and torches by night, were intermittent. Two odd exhibitions I shall never forget. One was a parade of twelve magnificent Oxen with yellow streamers down the High Street, each carrying placards on which was inscribed, 'This is good Danish beef, which Squire Hall would keep out of Oxford.' The other and more complicated show was devised by the Tory Party. A man dressed as a magician, in a tall pointed cap and a blue gabardine, kept reviewing a couple of dozen sandwich boys, each with large capital letters before and behind. At the magician's command they arranged themselves into lines, so as to spell exhilarating slogans, such as 'Hall for Ever, Oxford's old friend'; or 'Peace with Honour – vote for Hall' – there were a dozen varieties possible. Meanwhile Liberal urchins hooted, but I do not remember that they did anything more violent – though the provocation must have been considerable.<sup>33</sup>

The *Chronicle* accused the Tories of punching below the belt. Chitty offered Harcourt his seat but was declined.

The Liberals were to get their revenge. After the contest, a boy found in the street a note which showed that the Tories had spent money that had not been declared. The note was from a university professor, Montagu Burrows, to the public orator Thomas Dallin asking for a donation of £10 to Tory funds, referring to £3,000 raised by the Junior Carlton Club, and the certainty of victory if a further £500 could be found.<sup>34</sup> The information led to the Liberals petitioning against Hall's return. After an inquiry, Hall was unseated, his election expenses being found to be £5,601, with outstanding claims for another £1,896, as opposed to the declared figure of £3,610. Meanwhile, Harcourt had been found a seat in Derby, his adoption having been arranged by the MP Samuel Plimsoll.<sup>35</sup>

A fresh election was not however called. Instead, a Royal Commission was established to inquire into the alleged corrupt practices. The Commissioners' investigations revealed a web of corruption and intrigue. They concluded that there had been corrupt practices in the four previous elections. 134 individuals, including five councillors and two magistrates, were found to be guilty.<sup>36</sup>

Plowman recounted the way in which elections were fought:

There was practically no direct buying and selling of votes, colourable employment and renting of premises being the chief medium for the distribution of money to voters – rent paid for windows and housetops on which a flag was floated

Rents were paid for putting posters on walls and in windows:

The number of men required to carry one paste-pot and brush was something quite extraordinary. Then when the bills were posted, innumerable men had to be employed to watch them in order to see that the other side did not paste over them or tear them down, and then the services of still more men were required to watch the men who were watching the bills. Then the wives of the voters were taken in hand and were employed night and day, at a generous remuneration in making flags to keep pace with demand for them.<sup>37</sup>

Harcourt's campaign had been organised by Schnadhorst, secretary of the Birmingham Liberal Association and later the National Liberal Federation. As a result of the Commission, Oxford's second seat remained vacant. In the 1884 Franchise Act, Oxford's Parliamentary representation was reduced to a single seat.<sup>38</sup>

In September 1881, Chitty was made a High Court Judge and resigned his seat. With the second seat vacant, Oxford remained unrepresented until an election was called in November 1885. By then, the Liberals, both locally and nationally, were divided by the split between radicals and imperialists. Not surprisingly, the Liberal candidate, the historian Charles Fyffe of University College, a radical and supporter of land value taxation, was defeated, and the unseated Hall returned.<sup>39</sup> In July 1886, the Liberal organisation was so weak that Hall was returned unopposed. The Tories were to hold the Oxford seat until the return to parliament of the charismatic Liberal Frank Gray in 1922. The Tory Viscount Valentia was to represent the city from 1895 to 1917. The Tory supremacy makes the Liberal campaign song of 1895, again sung to the tune of Men of Harlech, sound rather hollow:

Men of Oxford! Grand Old City!  
 Seat of Cardwell, Harcourt, Chitty!  
 Tory lately – More's the pity!  
     England looks to you!  
 Send Valentia packing!  
 Give the foe a whacking!  
     Pay the Peers  
     Their full arrears  
 Obstructive lordings sacking!  
 Let the people reign for ever!  
 Freedom flowing like a river!  
 Oxford's colour red, and never –  
     Never – never—blue!<sup>41</sup>

The Liberals managed to retain control of the city council until the new corporation was established in 1889. However, with leading radicals such as Sadler, North, Grubb and finally Towle dead, the council had long lost its radicalism and had become a corrupt oligarchy. The spirit of the council in decline is probably best shown in an election spoof produced in 1887. It was aimed at Fred Bacon, a Conservative councillor for East Ward. It could with equal justice have applied to most of the Liberal councillors:

TO THE BURGESSES OF THE WORST WARD –

ladies and Gentlemen,

i hav'nt served you long, but jest long enough to put my snoke in with other of my Torey friends to prevent your sons receiving any of the advantages of the existing i skool.

i ham proud to say i ham rather obese & a highly inflated member of the party whom the late lord BACONSfield called the stewpid party, & as such if you return me as your representative at the next election i shall be only too please too spread all the ignorance i ham possessed of among the members of the town council & the other lower orders, as they all wants HEADicating, & cos the more they knows the wusser they gets & is as okkurd as pigs.<sup>42</sup>

## CHAPTER 12

# The Nature of Victorian Radicalism

Victorian radicalism in Oxford was not a working-class movement. The extent to which even the working-class aristocracy, the artisans, participated in politics was limited. In the first chapter, it was suggested that at the beginning of the 19th Century, Oxford was dominated by the 'guild merchant mentality'. Oxford radicalism was likewise dominated by a small group of shopkeepers and professional persons.<sup>1</sup> Oxford's leading radicals had votes. Of the 648 nominees of the 1837 ballot petition, 355 had voted in the 1837 election, while another 66 had voted in the 1835 election but not in 1837. Of the 355 voters, 197 (55.5%) were freemen and therefore had the franchise before 1832, the other 158 voting under the £10 householder franchise. Of the 369 petitioners who can be identified, which includes most of those who could vote, 47 were tailors, 25 victualers, 24 cordwainers, (shoemakers), 18 carpenters, 13 bakers – other leading groups being butchers, cabinetmakers, gentlemen, printers and grocers. Some artisans can be identified – painters, plumbers and college-servants – and no doubt there are many more among the unidentified petitioners. The picture of radicalism given is however one of a mainly middle-class grouping.

The link between radicalism and party politics is also interesting. Despite the polarisation of politics in Oxford, the Liberals did not have a monopoly of radical sympathies. In the 1837 election, for example, there were three candidates – Maclean, a Tory; Hughes, a Whig and Erle, a Reformer. Of the 355 petitioners who voted – some casting one vote (plumpers), others, two votes – only 283 (54.4%) votes polled were for Erle. The Tory, Maclean, received 139 petitioner votes to 98 for Hughes. However, 172 petitioners plumped for Erle, while only 12 plumped for Hughes and four for Maclean. There were a surprising number of cross-votes – 80 for Maclean and Erle, 55 for Maclean and Hughes, but only 31 for Hughes and Erle, the two 'Liberals'. All three candidates had declared their opposition to the ballot.

A picture of Liberal support throughout the city can be drawn from analysing the voting for Liberal candidates, as recorded in the poll books. Parish-by-parish breakdowns of voting are given in the 1837 and 1868 poll books (see Appendix 2). Unfortunately, the 1868 poll book puts freemen in a separate category, so parish figures analysed are for £10 householders only. The table for 1837 gives votes for each candidate and the ratio in each parish of the vote

for the reformer Erle to the Tory Maclean. The 1868 table gives the ratio of votes for the Liberals – Cardwell and Harcourt, to votes for the Tory candidate – Deane. It will be seen that Liberal support throughout the city was much stronger in 1868 than in 1837. Franchise reform, combined with the growth of the city, had increased Liberal support in the more populous and working-class areas such as St. Ebbes, St. Aldates and St. Clement's.

It is useful to follow these generalisations with a brief look at some of the leaders of Oxford radicalism. Two individuals appear as key figures for the two separate periods in which radical activity was concentrated – Faulkner in the 1840s and Thorold Rogers in the 1860s and 1870s.

Faulkner was Oxford's most active Chartist. Though a 'thorough-going Chartist',<sup>2</sup> he was never active in 'physical force' agitation nor did he publicly advocate violent revolution, nor republicanism. He was a leading temperance agitator, his base being a coffee shop in St. Aldates. Though he sought to speak for the working class, he was himself a middle-class radical. Though a popular hero, he did not have any organised support among the unenfranchised. He was an orator, not an organiser. He never established a Chartist or suffrage organisation to support his views. He was a one-man campaign as his intervention in the Woodstock election of 1847 demonstrated. The mob was perhaps drawn more by his humour and sarcasm than by his politics.

Thorold Rogers presents an interesting contrast – as one of the first of many university radicals to get involved in city politics.<sup>3</sup> He was one of a group of university liberal thinkers who made a major contribution to the development of political philosophy. Unlike most of his colleagues, such as T. H. Green, he took a deep interest in local radical politics, as well as supporting national campaigns such as the Jamaican agitation. He also made conscious efforts to make links with the city's emergent working class organisation, through his lecture series for artisans and his support for the building operatives and agricultural labourers. His intervention in Oxford politics, especially his opposition to the sitting Liberal MP Neate, antagonised the moderate Liberals on the City Council, who no doubt shared the view of the Tory *Oxford Times* that he was 'dogmatic, and not a little contemptuous of the ignorance of others. His speech thus becoming decidedly vigorous and sometimes ill-natured.' On his death in 1890, the *Times* viciously wrote that 'He is remembered only as a splendid political failure', and that 'It was indeed painful to witness the metamorphosis of the gentle dignified clergyman of the fifties into the grim beetle-browed demagogue of the eighties.'<sup>4</sup>

Both Faulkner and Rogers are noted for their eccentricities. More typical of Oxford radicalism were men such as the tailor John Towle and the baker Isaac Grubb, who started their political lives as radical critics of the establishment. Both became aldermen and Lord Mayor but retained their contempt for both the Liberal establishment and the University's attempt to dominate civic matters. Their radicalism was based on dissent, temperance and antipathy to

privilege. Radicalism was strong while dissent and temperance influenced the Oxford Liberal Party. As dissenters won their struggle against discrimination, many were incorporated into the establishment.

The actions of successive Liberal governments over licensing legislation weakened the faith of the temperance advocates in the local Liberal leadership. Perhaps most important in the changing fortunes of organised liberalism in Oxford was the successive betrayal of radicalism by the elected Liberal MPs – by Hughes, Neate and finally by Cardwell, all of whom had been elected on radical tickets. Conversely, it could be argued that each betrayal generated a new phase of radical agitation, re-affirming the radicals' distrust in the parliamentary system.

Despite the campaign of 1868, and the later attempts of Thorold Rogers, the Liberal Party failed to win over the newly enfranchised voters. Oxford politics became more exclusive and elitist as the political parties became dominated by the masonic Druids and Oddfellows. It was this decay that demonstrated the weakness of radical politics and was to generate the development of socialist and working-class politics in Oxford in the 1880s.

## PART 2

# **Socialism**



## CHAPTER 13

# The Political and Industrial Structure of Late Victorian Oxford

A picture of Oxford politics at the beginning of this period is given in the report of the Oxford Election Commission of 1880–1, which was established to investigate allegations of corruption in the parliamentary by-election of 8 May 1880.<sup>1</sup>

According to the report, there were 6,166 people on the electoral register of the constituency of Oxford, out of a population of 40,000 to 45,000. 3,280 of the electors were in the working-class districts of St. Giles, St. Thomas and St. Ebbes. The city council was dominated by the Liberals before re-organisation in 1889. In the five wards, there were ten aldermen and thirty councillors. The Liberals outnumbered the Tories by 32 votes to eight, with the Tories representing the North and Central wards.

The Commission concluded that ‘the constituency of the City of Oxford is not in our opinion generally corrupt. There is very little direct buying and selling of votes.’ Nevertheless, it was considered that about 1,000 votes were open to bribery. Investigation revealed corrupt practices in the previous four parliamentary elections. A member had been unseated in 1857 after a petition had been presented – corruption was hardly new to Oxford. The Tory agent in 1880 claimed that ‘he has never fought a pure election in Oxford.’ As for the May 1880 election, the Commission found 134 individuals guilty of corrupt practices, including five councillors and two magistrates, and, as discussed above, Hall, the successful Tory candidate and local brewer, was unseated.

Given the extent of corruption, it is difficult to accept the statement of the mayor, Alderman Galpin, when questioned by the commissioners, that ‘I have no reason to suppose corrupt practices have prevailed at the municipal election’, especially since he admitted that ‘at the election of councillors the contest generally proceeds on political grounds, almost as strongly as at the parliamentary elections’. In their conclusion, the commissioners presented an interesting view of local political organisation:

Of recent years local Conservative and Liberal Associations have sprung up in several districts, and have been found very useful for electioneering purposes; these district associations seem indeed to have been formed expressly for the purposes above mentioned; for although in

Oxford, as elsewhere, the majority of the constituency may have strong political opinions, there exists a large number of apathetic voters, sufficient to carry an election one way or the other, who are less likely to remain inactive at election times if they have been induced to join one of these Associations.

Under the Franchise Act of 1884, Oxford's parliamentary representation was reduced from two members to one, a decision no doubt related to the 1880 dispute.

Under an order of 1889, the city council was reformed, the city boundary being extended. The city was divided into four wards, the old Central ward being dissolved. Each ward was given nine councillors, three to be elected each year. The University was to elect nine councillors, three each year. There were also 17 aldermen, three of whom were elected by the University.<sup>2</sup>

The political clubs mentioned in the Commissioners' Report continued to be focal points for local political life throughout this period. A brief examination of the organisations existing in one part of the city – East ward – at the turn of the century helps to provide a background to the political struggles of this time.

In the East ward, there were Conservative and Liberal Clubs, both of which were expanding. It is difficult to judge to what extent these clubs were frequented by working men, but they were clearly the focal point of the social life of the respectable class and of those who were aspiring to that respectability in the community that appears as an ambition of so many working people in late Victorian England. The clubs were by no means purely political organisations in the narrow sense of solely providing a labour force for candidates at election time. They were important as centres of social activity and entertainment, which were not otherwise available. At one time, the chairman of East Oxford Conservative Club complained that members were not as interested in local politics as they ought to be, though the election the following year demonstrated that a little controversy soon stirred the enthusiasm of the members. Nevertheless, it was only through these social functions that the political parties drew members into the political arena. The Conservatives regularly held 'smoking concerts' at local pubs – The Port Mahon, Cape of Good Hope and Coach and Horses were all used. These concerts consisted of drinking and light entertainment, usually provided by the members themselves, with speeches kept to a minimum.<sup>3</sup> The Liberal Club's main function appears to have been a formal annual dinner, with a long speech from a prominent city Liberal.<sup>4</sup>

There were other societies flourishing in the area, whose objects were not political, but which were patronised by councillors and other prominent members of the community. A Horticultural Society was founded in 1897<sup>5</sup> and had an annual show on the Iffley Road running track; the 1908 show included a baby competition which attracted 80 entries.<sup>6</sup> An Allotments Association was formed in 1906 – all the nominees of one election candidate were to be found

among its members.<sup>7</sup> The 'Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Society' which organised political discussion while claiming to be 'unattached to any political party' had a local branch.<sup>8</sup> There were also branches of benefit and friendly societies, like the Oddfellows and the Foresters.<sup>9</sup> The latter held its annual dinner in 1902 in the Cape of Good Hope, and was addressed by Walter Gray, the Lord Mayor. Its 'juvenile branch' claimed 144 members. It also had a 'female court' of 24 girls, with members based at the Coffee House on St. Clement's.

The churches in the area, of a variety of denominations, also played a major role in community life. The ties between the Liberals and the dissenting churches were close, while at the time of the Education Bill controversy, Reverend Pilcher, the vicar of the parish church of St. Clement's, inserted a leaflet into the parish magazine supporting the Tory candidates in the 1902 election.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the local schools and other organisations such as the Volunteer Fire Brigade were dependent on the patronage of the Morrell brewing family, which at the turn of the century included the Tory MP for Woodstock, who lived at Headington Hill Hall, which no doubt increased the Liberals' difficulties in winning votes in the area.<sup>11</sup>

After 1889, the Conservatives held the majority in the council, though voting was not always on party lines. The rivalry in the council chamber was reflected in the press; the Conservatives controlled the daily *Oxford Times* and the weekly *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, while the weekly *Chronicle* represented the Liberal interest. Fortunately for a historian, the meetings of many organisations were reported almost verbatim so a study of local politics is possible despite the loss of many of the records of the local labour movement. Most of our information on the growth of the labour movement in Oxford comes from the *Chronicle*, which regarded itself as a trade union paper, since there was no independent working men's paper. It is interesting to note how the *Chronicle's* attitude to labour organisation changes – first sympathetic, in the belief that better labour organisation will help the Liberals, then hostile, recognising the Labour Party's intention of remaining independent, and the challenge to liberalism that involved.

The industrial make-up of Oxford clearly influenced the development of working-class politics in the City. Oxford before the First World War had a very different complexion from the motor industry-dominated city of today. In 1912, Miss G. V. Butler, one of the country's first sociologists, published a work entitled 'Social Conditions in Oxford' which included a detailed study of the local employment situation. In addition to using statistics on employment from the 1901 census, Miss Butler looked at pay and conditions in various trades. Though her survey was made towards the end of the period studied, her work is still extremely useful, for the structure of employment in the City appears to have changed little between the 1880s and the war.<sup>12</sup>

According to the 1901 census, of 21,827 males in the city, 13,000 men and boys were in receipt of wages; of 27,509 females, about 20,000 of whom were

over 15 years of age, 8,500 were earning wages. The largest industrial employer was the University Press, which employed some 600 men and boys and some 100 women and girls in various trades connected with printing. Because these employees were paid by piecework, wages varied. The printers were however the most organised of workers, the Oxford branch of the Typographical Association having 400 members. In 1901, there were 453 tailors in Oxford. According to Butler, most of them worked at home. For the best work, they could earn up to £2 per week, but employment was concentrated on termtime. Butler comments that 'not nearly all the tailors belonged to their trade union.' Bootmaking provided earnings of 30s to £2 per week for 'bespoke' work such as riding boots. Most bootmakers were paid trade union rates. Food trades provided 236 jobs in 1901 – most were bakers and confectioners, though there were 90 butchers and fishmongers in the city. The council employed 350 full-time workers in sanitary or engineering establishments or in the waterworks. In all these jobs wages were not high, but employment was fairly constant and 'except in isolated cases, conditions of work were quite good.' The University and Colleges provided direct employment for about 600 workers, who formed 'a caste by themselves.' Wages were low, but there was competition for the most menial jobs because of the 'social advantages,' and the possibilities of advancement.

Casual labourers were less fortunate, being engaged by the hour and paid accordingly. Butler commented that 'these workers have as a whole been very ill off in later years. Perhaps the carpenters have suffered most by the recent depression.' Plumbers were paid trade union rates and earned up to 38s per week. Painters could earn 8d-10d per hour for the best work during the busy season, but since there were many more painters than painting jobs, most painters were employed for 4-6 months in the year. Plasterers also faced long periods of unemployment; bricklayers were usually out of work in winter, though they earned 8d per hour when employed. Of 300-400 bricklayers in 1910, only 100 were in the union. Masons, of whom there were 200 in or near Oxford in 1910, were paid trade union rates of 8½d or 9d per hour. Unskilled casual labourers, of whom there were many hundreds, earned 4d to 5½d per hour. Butler comments that trade unions in the building trades were not very strong.

Of the 8,500 women working in 1901, 4,000 were in domestic service, 400 were teachers, 75 clerks or cashiers, 640 worked in laundries or took in washing regularly, 100 worked in bookbinding or printing and 1,558 in the clothing trades, mainly dressmaking. The number working in shops is unknown. The women in domestic service were best off – with free board, their earnings had a value of about £1 per week; dressmakers could earn 9s to 12s per week, while those in shops could earn 12-15s per week. Throughout this period, women's unions were weak or non-existent, the shop assistants being the only active women's union, with the exception of the women's section of the paper-workers union, just before the war.

## CHAPTER 14

# The Radical Tradition and the Oxford Socialist League, 1883–1900

The first socialist agitation in Oxford was a development of radicalism. The link between radicalism and early socialism in Oxford is personified by Bill Hines. Hines was the son of a Bicester chimney sweep and moved to Oxford in the 1860s.<sup>1</sup>

He was described by Viscount Samuel in the 1890s as –

by occupation a college chimney sweep, keeping a herbalist's shop, his real interest was in politics and his hobby the organisation of public meetings in the villages around Oxford. He was a radical reformer, of the type that had made the chartist movement in a previous generation, and was impelled by a deep bitterness against the injustices of the social system.<sup>2</sup>

Hines started his political life as a 'fast trotter' for the Liberal cause. He was expelled from the Oxford Reform Club because his views were considered to be too radical. He supported Bradlaugh's republicanism and the land nationalisation proposals of Henry George. Hines was clearly one of Oxford's characters and a target for student 'rags'. He once gave a talk on socialism to a group of undergraduates, the meeting being broken up by another group of students who threw stink bombs into the room and then locked the door, leaving Hines and his audience to climb out of the window.

In the 1890s he moved towards socialism and by 1895 was on the committee of the Oxford and District Socialist Union. His main interest was agricultural trade unionism, and he was one of the founders of the movement in Oxfordshire. Disillusioned with the local leadership, he left the National Agricultural Labourers Union in 1891 to join the Dockers Union, who were organising local labourers to stop them being recruited to break strikes in the docks. Hines used his university connections to win academic support for the cause. A colleague, Joseph Clayton, later described Hines as 'a singularly effective speaker to agricultural audiences, and his recreation was addressing public meetings in the villages'. Hines always liked to have singing at his meetings, and usually one or more of his daughters accompanied him for that purpose, one of whom appears to have had an affair with Keir Hardie.<sup>3</sup>

Another description of Hines is found in a biography of Professor York Powell:

he had a 'Fiery Sympathy' with country folk and the poor, and plenty of sharp political sense. A born speaker of the Open Air kind, his change-ful metallic voice, mobile hairless face, with strange sagacious wrinkles that seemed to have been gathered in the elf-world, and clear grey-blue eyes, were known on the village green and platforms round about.<sup>4</sup>

Hines was to publish in 1893, at a price of one penny, *Labour Songs for the Use of Working Men and Working Women*. York Powell wrote in a preface:

The men who wrote the songs in this little book were of many different classes, plowmen and gentlemen, artists and schoolmasters, authors and laboring men, but they all alike have felt that those who toil in England have not as yet had just recompense for their honest labour, and they have all alike felt that if those that toil are but true to each other and to their hopes. There is yet assuredly a good time coming in England for them; and the compiler earnestly hopes that the good time may come soon, and that this little book may be of some help to bring it by putting hope and independence into working people's minds.

In the 1880s, radicalism was represented in the City of Oxford by the Oxford Reform Club. An extreme section of the Reform Club was in the early 1880s led by J. A. Partridge, who had been founder and first president of the Birmingham Reform League and was now a member of the executive of the Oxford City Liberal Association. He was encouraged by Thorold Rogers, now Radical MP for Southwark. A challenge to the leadership of the Reform Club was made by Partridge in November 1883 in a lecture to the club on 'land nationalisation' chaired by Rogers, at which Partridge claimed that 'he was there that night to hoist the flag of social democracy in Oxford'. Rogers' contribution was to attack the profits St John's College were making from their North Oxford property.<sup>5</sup>

On 30 January 1884, Hyndman, chairman of the Social Democratic Federation, spoke to a meeting of the University Russell Club on 'Constructive Socialism'.<sup>6</sup> The meeting was chaired by Reverend Fletcher, the Club's president. William Morris, who had lectured to the club the previous term on 'Art under Plutocracy' was present, together with Professor York Powell,<sup>7</sup> Charles Faulkner of University College, the Fabian Sidney Ball of St John's and Partridge. The meeting had been put back 'owing to the plays which had created so much interest at the end of the previous term'. According to *Justice*, the SDF newspaper, there were about 400 people at the meeting, mostly undergraduates, and 'the audience was evidently prepared to be very critical of Mr Hyndman's utterances, but at times they were carried away and burst into loud applause'. Hyndman gave a long discourse on the factory system, the theory of surplus

value, quoting from Marx, and the need for state control of industry, and concluded by appealing to ‘Every Radical because he wished to go not merely over the surface of existing misery but to the very root of it.’ Partridge declared his opposition to the confiscation of property, arguing that ‘freedom of individual enterprise must not be interfered with.’ However, he was generally in favour of what Hyndman was proposing and invited him to address the working classes at Carfax, where ‘They would give him a splendid reception.’ *Justice* reported that ‘some amusement was caused by some one present apparently asking what Mr. Hyndman proposed to do with the Ten Commandments, but it turned out that the subject of the question was ‘Tenant Farmers’ and not the Ten Commandments.’ The SDF appear to have been pleased with the meeting, for *Justice* commented that ‘Altogether the meeting was very satisfactory and the seeds of socialism have been sown in Oxford which will certainly bear good fruit.’<sup>8</sup>

Two months later, Henry George, the American advocate of land nationalisation, spoke to the Russell Club on his recent book *Progress and Poverty* at a crowded meeting in the Clarendon Rooms, chaired by Professor York Powell. *Justice* reported that ‘The lecturer on rising was greeted with applause mingled with strong signs of disapprobation from a part of the audience. Mr George pointed out the strong contrast of extreme wealth and degrading poverty which exists at present’ drawing examples from Oxford and arguing that the cause was private property. Most of the meeting was taken up by a debate between George and Alfred Marshall, the prominent lecturer in political economy. According to *Justice*, Marshall’s first question ‘consisted in a rambling criticism on Progress and Poverty couched in most offensive terms, and on George suggesting that Marshall should put his question as he had not made his own lecture short for the purpose of hearing a discourse from Marshall, but to give an opportunity of questions being asked, there were groans and hoots from a large part of the audience who vociferously applauded Mr Marshall as their champion.’ George refused to answer questions on his book, and went as far as to state that it was some time since he himself had read it. His response to a question from Reverend Johnstone as to proof that land monopoly was the cause of destitution in England, was to ask the questioner to put the question in writing! George lost his temper when a questioner referred to his theory as ‘a nostrum.’ After considerable confusion and heated argument, George declared that ‘It was the most disorderly meeting he had ever addressed’ and refused to answer any more questions. According to the *Chronicle*, ‘The meeting then broke up with groans for ‘land nationalisation’ and ‘land robbery.’<sup>9</sup> *Justice* however concluded somewhat optimistically that ‘Much good has probably been done, as discussion on the subject is sure to ensure, and the very sign of there being such strong opposition is very hopeful.’ The meeting did lead to discussion of George’s proposals.<sup>10</sup> A fortnight later, a leading Oxford radical, Henry Buchanan, gave a lecture to the Reform Club criticising land nationalisation, and attacking George’s doctrines as impractical.<sup>11</sup> In April, an editorial in the *Chronicle* gave the Liberal verdict on George and his ideas: ‘He came as a terror; He departs an exploded

bomb ... He came, was seen and was disowned ... His science of the redistribution of wealth turned out to be the old and simple remedy - of robbery.<sup>12</sup>

George's visit to Oxford coincided with popular agitation for the extension of the franchise and the abolition of the House of Lords. In August 1884, Partridge addressed a large meeting in the Town Hall, again chaired by Thorold Rogers, on 'The House of Lords and the People'<sup>13</sup>. There was also a franchise demonstration at Kirtlington. These meetings were followed by a letter in the *Chronicle* signed 'Theomacist':

It is time for the Radicals of Oxford to be up and doing. Let them form themselves into an Association by which they may be brought together for mutual benefit and free interchange of opinion. In this manner, and in this alone, will they shake off the trammels that have been thrown around them by the wirepullers of self-interest and whiggery, and then they will again assume that position which is theirs of right in the vanguard of progress, as the pioneers of all reform. We have been too long tolerant of private and selfish interest, too apt to mistake the person for the principle. Politics in Oxford have been merely a pleasant game played by the few at the expense of the many, the stakes in which are the spoils of office and personal aggrandisement.<sup>14</sup>

A controversy about the representativeness of the Liberal 300 and the need for a Radical Association raged in the letters column of the *Chronicle*, which contributed an editorial calling for Liberal unity in the face of the forthcoming municipal elections.<sup>15</sup> In September, Partridge announced his resignation from the executive of the Liberal Association.<sup>16</sup> Though there is no record, the Radical Association appears to have been formed between September and December 1884 as an integral part of the Liberal Party 'in the hope of stirring up and organising the advanced Liberal element throughout the City.'<sup>17</sup>

In January 1885, Partridge's leadership of the Radical Association was challenged by Charles Faulkner, a mathematics tutor at University College and a friend of William Morris. In December 1884, Faulkner had held meetings of 'advanced thinkers' in St Clement's and Jericho to see if there was any support in Oxford for socialist ideas. The response was clearly positive for he then introduced a socialist programme to a meeting of the Radical Association. This meeting drew 40–50 members. Faulkner and his supporters – Robinson, who acted as secretary, Guggenheim and Ogden – put forward the programme which was discussed clause by clause. It included Free compulsory national and secular education, abolition of the House of Lords, Disendowment and Disestablishment of the Church of England, Manhood Suffrage, Restoration of the Land to the people, Transference to the people of all means of production, payment of MPs and election expenses out of the rates, election corruption to be penalised by imprisonment and hard labour. Many of the proposals led to heated discussion. A proposal for women's suffrage was defeated: there was a

debate over whether compensation should be paid to landowners after their property had been requisitioned. In the discussion on the means of production, Faulkner referred ‘to the tyranny of capital as one thing they had to fight against.’ Despite substantial opposition, the meeting agreed the programme, which led to Partridge’s resignation.<sup>18</sup> He wrote to the *Oxford Times* explaining his position:

The society, having under socialist influence, and against my advice and endeavours, avowed on Tuesday last, principles of confiscation as applicable to the great problems of land and capital, I am, of course, no longer connected with it.

Another member wrote to the *Chronicle* complaining that although the Radical Association ‘has done some good educational work ..., from the entrance of the socialist element, all became chaos, disorder and destruction.’<sup>19</sup>

A meeting of the victors, which attracted only 15 people, was held in the Druids Head a week later. A committee was elected: Robinson was to be secretary; Faulkner treasurer. They decided to have a different chairman at each meeting – this time it was Quelch. The rest of the committee were Guggenheim, Parker, Ogden, Harse and Burr. (Ogden had been active in the Oxford Reform League twenty years earlier.) Robinson declared that he was ‘in favour of nihilism. That is the only true outcome of socialism and radicalism.’<sup>20</sup> The landlord of the Druids Head appears to have been a loyal Liberal who was somewhat taken aback to find such fervent revolutionaries on his premises, for he stated afterwards that ‘He had no idea of the character of the meeting that was held at his house until he saw it in the papers, and he should not let the room for such a purpose again.’<sup>21</sup>

At a meeting the next week in the Elm Tree it was agreed to change the Association’s name to the ‘Oxford Socialist League’. Robinson said that this would make them a ‘Revolutionary Society’. Faulkner then gave a talk on socialism which lasted 1½ hours. Faulkner concentrated his energies on discrediting radicalism but also gave his own definition of socialism:

A man in becoming a socialist took one of the most serious steps it was possible for him to take in the course of his life. His object was the welfare of humanity. That was not the case with Liberalism, Toryism or Radicalism. Their actions belied their words.

At the end of the meeting it was agreed to affiliate to the national Socialist League. The fervent secretary then proposed that they should call each other ‘comrade.’<sup>22</sup>

The following meeting, again at the Elm Tree, decided to hold a meeting with William Morris as guest speaker. Faulkner had seen Morris in London and he had agreed to come to Oxford.<sup>23</sup> Faulkner was clearly worried about the

League's reputation for he proposed that the Morris meeting should be held jointly with the Liberal Russell Club. It 'would go a long way towards disabusing the public mind of the idea that socialists were the mere destructive revolutionists they were so often described to be.' The Morris meeting was to have been held in the Clarendon Assembly Room, but the owner cancelled the booking, and it had to be held in the Holywell Music Hall instead. The hall was packed, and Morris and his colleague Edward Aveling met with continual heckling from students as well as more restrained intervention from a Mr Weatherly. The proceedings grew even livelier when a stink bomb was released. At one point a student shouted out that when he had 'ventured to express dissent to one of the propositions made by Mr Morris, he was hit violently on the head by one of the stewards.' The chairman, Faulkner, said he had no doubt the steward would apologise. The student replied that the only apology he could get was a ghastly grin.<sup>24</sup> After the meeting, Robinson wrote to the *Chronicle* attacking the hecklers for their 'organised conspiracy' to disrupt the proceedings.<sup>25</sup> The *Chronicle* attacked the socialists for not practising what they preached:

Socialism is at present an idle crotchet, which may catch a stray adherent here and there, but has little likelihood of ever being accepted by the bulk of the community, by whom it is regarded with a feeling little short of ridicule and contempt.<sup>26</sup>

The branch's activities can be followed in the branch reports in *Commonweal*, the Socialist League newspaper. The first reference to Oxford is in February 1885 when it is commented that 'the Radical Association has gone beyond radicalism; our comrade C. J. Faulkner moved the insertion of a point which commits the Association to Socialistic principles ... The transference to the people of the means of production.'<sup>27</sup>

In the same month, Faulkner wrote to the Socialist League secretary, enthusing about his activities – 'It makes me feel fresh again to be aiming at something in which I can feel an interest after the miserable, dreary muddle of University life.'<sup>28</sup> Throughout 1885, the branch is reported as meeting weekly, holding 'some good debates on socialism.'<sup>29</sup> In August, at the first Annual General Meeting of the Socialist League, it was reported that the Oxford branch 'has founded a library which contains 600 volumes. Most of these are on socialist matters, but a certain portion of them are books of general literature.' Faulkner was elected to the League's Executive Council of 20 members.<sup>30</sup> In October, it was reported that 'The progress of the branch is slow at present, but we hope that its numbers will be greatly increased through the continued and widespreading of socialist literature among the working classes.'<sup>31</sup> By November, the branch was 'carrying on a good propaganda' and was 'in a sound financial condition.' In December, the League's national secretary reported that the Oxford branch 'has been having a 'lively time', to its other methods it had added the missioning of outlying villages with most encouraging results.'<sup>32</sup>

During 1886, there are no branch reports from Oxford in *Commonweal*, though it was announced that meetings were held in ‘The Temperance’, Pembroke Street on Mondays.<sup>33</sup> *Commonweal* could be bought at English, 38 St. Ebbes Street and Mrs Foy, 5 The Plain, St. Clement’s.<sup>34</sup> The branch’s subscription to the League was kept up throughout the year, and the branch was represented at the second AGM.<sup>35</sup> Faulkner was not elected to the executive council, which was reduced in size, but continued to write articles for *Commonweal*. In January 1887, the branch held a social gathering, ‘When nearly 60 members and friends sat down to tea. Afterwards we had singing, in which the ‘Marseillaise’, ‘March of the Workers’ and ‘England Arise’ featured prominently, dancing and short socialistic speeches.’<sup>36</sup>

In the same month, the branch received a lecture on ‘The Paths of Socialism’ from John Mahon, Secretary of the Socialist League, who was touring the provinces. Mahon reported on his visit in *Commonweal*:

At Oxford, the audience was fairly large and very appreciative. The only opposition was from a gentleman troubled with some ancient ideas of Free Trade, who entered into a glorification of Cobden. The branch seems fairly active, and although not large its members are steady and reliable. Very few students attend the meetings, most of those with socialist leanings prefer to work in the semi-Socialist societies, of which there are several in the Colleges. Oxford has no very large body of workmen, and a general spirit of flunkeyism pervades the poorer class; so that a very strong socialist movement is well-nigh impossible there at present. Still the branch is in a healthy condition and will keep the cause alive.<sup>37</sup>

By 1887, the group had apparently developed anarchist tendencies. In May, Faulkner, dubbed the ‘Alehouse Anarchist’ by the *Oxford Magazine*, wrote to the League in London that the Branch ‘refused to have anything to do with Parliamentary action ... The opinion was almost unanimous against anything less than Revolution. The very idea of mere reform is to keep the present institutions going.’<sup>38</sup>

Seventy to eighty people were present at the annual social in January 1888, over which Faulkner presided. The secretary, ‘M.P.H.’ reported that ‘Everyone enjoyed themselves very much and expressed a hope that we should have another meeting on the anniversary of the Commune of Paris.’<sup>39</sup> After this, the branch seems to have gone into decline. By August 1889 they were only meeting once a month.<sup>40</sup> Oxford is not mentioned in the series on Socialism in the Provinces in *Commonweal* in the summer months of 1890. Some members may have joined (or rejoined) the Social Democratic Federation although, as discussed in Chapter 16 below, its Oxford branch was not established until 1896. Charles Faulkner had died in 1892.

Within the University, there were other socialist or socialistic groups. A Marx club, which was a small group of undergraduates, first met in 1885,

and discussed papers and was organised by G. G. Brown, with a membership which included A. J. Carlyle, later fellow of University College and City rector, the Reverend John Carter of Pusey House and apparently J. A. R. Munro, the archaeologist and historian who later became rector of Lincoln College. The group lapsed sometime before 1892. An Oxford branch of Stewart Headlam's Guild of St. Matthew was apparently established in 1884 by E. L. Donaldson, at that time a postgraduate student at Merton. In 1889, John Carter established a local branch of the Christian Social Union. A University branch of the Fabian Society was established on 16 February 1895. An inaugural meeting was held in the rooms of Leslie Toke at Balliol College. L. R. Ollerenshaw of Christ Church College was secretary, Bradbury of Brasenose treasurer and Percy Widdrington, later founder of the Christian Socialist League, was the first vice-president. Membership was restricted to members of the University. However, a public meeting was held in a room behind Blackwell's bookshop in Broad Street with Joseph Clayton and Ramsay MacDonald as speakers. This was followed by a series of lectures at Manchester College, opened by Sidney Webb, and with Leo Amery, a society vice-president, as chair. (Amery went on to become a Conservative colonial minister under Stanley Baldwin and a leading imperialist.) Meetings were also attended by Graham Wallas and the national Fabian Society secretary, Edward Pease. The society discussed the Fabian Municipal Programme, drafted by Webb, and appears to have sought to study the municipal problems of Oxford, though Ashley and Saunders in *Red Oxford* refer to this as 'perfunctory'. The society continued to meet regularly until 1903. Hubert Bland from the national Fabians spoke on Nietzsche, E. C. Bentley of Merton on the French revolution, R. E. Vernede of St John's on the 'poetry of municipalisation' and Leonard Hobhouse, the Liberal political theorist and sociologist, on the 'foreign policy of collectivism'. Hilaire Belloc spoke on French republican economic theory, Sidney Olivier on the objectives of the national Fabian Society and Bernard Shaw on 'the probable effect of socialism on university education'. A separate group of Lady Socialists was established, based at Somerville College, with a Miss E. Shekleton as president and a Miss J. Malloch as secretary. A joint meeting of the two groups in June 1897 discussed 'the work of women inspectors'.<sup>41</sup>

A. D. Lindsay, then an undergraduate at Balliol, who had joined the University Fabian Society in 1898, became a vice-president in 1900. The secretary was R. C. K. Ensor. Both Lindsay and Ensor became presidents of the University's Union Society. From 1900 to 1903, meetings tended to focus on social policy issues. Speakers included Pease, Leslie Haden Guest, Beatrice Webb, Philip Wicksteed (speaking on August Comte) and Stewart Headlam (on the Education Bill). The secretary of the engineers' union spoke on trade unionism. Discussion topics included model villages, the state and the blind, and 'better homes for the people'. Many of these topics clearly related to the civic politics of Oxford, but limiting attendance to members of the University ensured that any impact of these extensive discussions with leading national politicians and

reformers on the politics of the city council would be indirect. However, it is noticeable that several of the academics involved in either the Christian Social Union or the University Fabian Society were to contribute to the development of the local labour movement over the next few decades, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters.

In November 1895, William Morris returned to Oxford at the invitation of the socialist chimney sweep and herbalist, Bill Hines. Hines was launching a new organisation – the Oxford and District Socialist Union – with Morris as the attraction for their inaugural meeting. The meeting was held in the Central School, Gloucester Green and chaired by Professor York Powell.<sup>42</sup> J. G. Grenfell acted as secretary, with a number of students present. Morris gave a lecture on ‘What we have to look for’, which he had given to the Hammersmith Socialist Society earlier in the year. Perhaps the choice of venue reflected the fact that the new Socialist Union was trying to reach out beyond an academic audience. After the meeting, the *Chronicle* accused Morris of being ‘cocksure’.<sup>43</sup> A ‘Socialist’ replied, appealing ‘to Radicals, to all those who are willing to go to the root of the matter, to come out from among them (the Liberals) and be separate, to help to make ‘equality of opportunity’ not a name only but an accomplished fact, and to help to realise also the time when no one shall be for a party but all shall be for the state; when the voice of complaining shall no longer be heard in our streets; and when class prejudices and caste distinctions shall have been submerged in the belief that all labour is honourable, and that the dishonest man is he who fattens on the labour of those whose faces he keeps to the grindstone.’<sup>44</sup>

Between 1896 and 1899, meetings held by the Oxford and District Socialist Union included George Lansbury on ‘Social Democracy’,<sup>45</sup> a lecture by the Liberal councillor Dodd on the Board of Guardians<sup>46</sup> and Harry Quelch on ‘Clericalism, Militarism and Socialism’.<sup>47</sup>

In January and February 1897, a series of lectures was given by Joseph Clayton on a variety of topics including ‘Francis Place and the Growth of Trade Unions’, ‘Richard Carlile and the Freedom of the Press’ and the ‘Rochdale Pioneers and the Cooperative Movement’.<sup>48</sup> All these meetings were chaired by respectable Oxford Liberals, the first by councillor Dodd, the second by Professor York Powell and the third by the Oxford Fabian Society’s Sidney Ball. In August, Clayton and his colleagues gave a series of talks on ‘The Land and the Parish’ at Horspath, Garsington, Islip, Beckley, Stanton St. John and Abingdon.<sup>49</sup>

However, after the turn of the century, the Socialist Union appears to have lost any contact it may have had with working people in Oxford and degenerated into a forum for the discussion of socialist topics by members of the University. In 1903, Edward Carpenter lectured on smallholdings<sup>50</sup> and in 1906 there were meetings on the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the Aliens Act. There is no evidence of any involvement in trade union or municipal affairs.<sup>51</sup>

## CHAPTER 15

# The Early Years of the Oxford Trades Council, 1888–1900

The first organisation to directly represent the interests of working men in Oxford was the Trades Council. Founded in 1888, it immediately took an interest in municipal politics, taking a surprisingly independent line. It decided to intervene in the first election for the new County Borough, which took place in November 1889. The council was mainly based on the printing workers of the Clarendon Press, so it was decided to contest North ward. The candidate was the Trades Council's first president George Hawkins, a compositor and member of the Typographical Association, who lived in Kingston Road.<sup>1</sup> He stood as an 'Independent'. His election address stated his position in some detail:

The Oxford Trades and Labour Council (an organisation of workingmen and of a non-political character) have invited me to become a candidate for the North ward in the labour interest. Labour questions at the present time are occupying public attention in a marked degree, and it is the object of the Trades Council to create a healthy public opinion on all the problems that present themselves for solution. The question of the fair and proper remuneration of the worker for his labour, together with the length of hours worked is one of those problems, and if elected I should take every opportunity of calling attention to the necessity of solving it in Oxford ... The practice of sub-letting contracts is one to be condemned by all thinking and humane people, for through its adoption the abominations of 'sweating' are introduced. I should insist upon clauses against sub-letting being inserted into all contracts. Believing that 'knowledge is power', I should essentially work for the extension of all educational agencies in the City. I am in favour of any legislation towards bettering the conditions of the labouring poor.<sup>2</sup>

Hawkins also stood for better housing, more open spaces and recreation grounds and the provision of allotments. His campaign achieved its object, which was the propagation of the needs of working people in the city. He himself said that 'whether they won or lost, the cause of labour in Oxford was won.' Hawkins' supporters were mostly working people – printers and

carpenters. The only middle-class sympathiser in evidence was the Reverend Duggan.

A series of public meetings was held. One was chaired by the printer Brownjohn, who was himself to be a Labour candidate several times over the next twenty years. At the meetings, Hawkins declared his position on other current topics. He advocated a 'Federation of Labour' to include employers' representatives; he was in favour of a stipendiary magistrate; he stressed the need for organisation among working women. He also attacked the *Oxford Times* and the *Oxford Chronicle* (the latter was no doubt included to demonstrate his independence of the Liberal party) for not paying their employees fair wages.<sup>3</sup> The *Chronicle* indignantly denied the charge, yet supported Hawkins' candidature, since North Ward was a safe Tory ward, carrying an editorial which ran:

We trust that he will be successful in securing election. He will be the representative of a class who ought to make their voices heard at the Council board, and the programme which he has enunciated will command the sympathy, if not the complete approval, of the great body of the people.<sup>4</sup>

The *Chronicle* also reported that the Liberal candidates in North ward 'are quietly furthering Mr Hawkins' candidature.'<sup>5</sup> However, despite this Liberal support, Hawkins came second bottom out of the 15 candidates for the nine places, with 484 votes,<sup>6</sup> a poll which however compares favourably with those of most Labour candidates fifteen years later. Considerable interest in working men's issues was aroused. The contest followed the famous London dock strike, which was the subject of an address to a group of academics by Ben Tillett, the dockers' leader, in the week of the election.<sup>7</sup> Yet the enthusiasm of the Trades Council's campaign was soon lost, for in the by-election that followed the election of aldermen, the 'labour' candidate Brownjohn held no meetings and came bottom of the poll with only 251 votes.<sup>8</sup>

The Trades Council did not run a candidate in the following elections. Their intervention took a different form. Following an idea introduced in 1889, a questionnaire with a series of questions on policy relating to labour issues was sent out to all candidates, and the results were published.

In 1889, the questions had related to the city council's proposal for a clause to be inserted in council contracts specifying that workers were to be paid at trade union rates, the provision of allotments by the council under the recent Allotments Act, and a proposal for a better Free Public Library, with branches in all wards. In 1890, two further proposals were added – that council meetings should be held in the evening when working men could attend without loss of earnings, and that the city and university rates should be reassessed so that the burden on poorer ratepayers could be relieved. A similar questionnaire was put to candidates in 1892 and 1893. After 1899, the Trades Council seems to have moved towards co-operation with the Liberals; Liberal councillors begin

to appear at Trades Council meetings. Hawkins himself was elected as Liberal councillor for West ward in the 1890 municipal election. He sat on the council until 1893, when he failed to secure re-election and was made a magistrate.

Although the Trades Council did not run candidates, the 1893 election in East ward had an Independent candidate with Trades Council connections – Mr Gibbs, an insurance agent living in Percy Street.<sup>9</sup> The Liberals and Conservatives in the ward had arranged a compromise to avoid a contest. Gibbs convened a meeting of working men, held in the Mission Hall, Magdalen Road, to consider ‘the advisability of selecting a candidate to contest East ward in the labour interest.’ The meeting was chaired by William Gray, a well-known local trade unionist and carpenter, who had been involved in Hawkins’ campaign in 1889. The initiative apparently followed a resolution passed at the Trades Council the previous May that it was essential that labour be represented on independent lines. The Liberals in East ward had been approached but had refused to select a working man as their candidate, saying that was best left until there was an extraordinary vacancy. D. A. Bear, a leading East ward Liberal, appeared at the Mission Hall meeting and tried to stop an Independent candidate being run, but his move was defeated by 28 votes to 18.<sup>10</sup>

The Liberals, speaking through the *Chronicle*, were furious and labelled Gibbs an ‘Independent Conservative’.<sup>11</sup> Gibbs however was clearly a ‘labour’ candidate as the *Chronicle* later acknowledged. His candidacy however appears to have lacked a programme, apart from reference to local issues such as the need to clean up the Cherwell river. His fight was presented by the *Chronicle* as one of personal spite. The Liberals need not have worried, for Gibbs came bottom of the poll with only 153 votes.

The Trades Council appears to have been at a low ebb between 1893 and 1902. In 1889, there were 800 trade unionists in Oxford, only 100 of whom could be regarded as active. There was little industrial unrest during the period apart from a carpenters’ strike in 1897. The weakness of the council can be seen in their feeble response to a suggestion made by Keir Hardie in 1899 that they should contest municipal elections. They could only point to Hawkins’ failure as an Independent candidate several years earlier. They appear to have accepted that independent labour representation was not as yet a practical proposition in the city.<sup>12</sup>

## The Social Democratic Federation – Socialism in the Streets, 1896–1898

It is to the Social Democratic Federation that we must look for the first example of an organisation propagating the socialist creed on the streets of Oxford. The local branch was formed in 1896, its instigator being ‘comrade’ Sinclair, the first chairman. The secretary was Leonard Cotton.<sup>1</sup> Their first activity was a series of open air meetings in the summer of 1896, usually held at Martyrs’ Memorial. The meetings led to street disturbances and caused some controversy in the press. They were resumed the following May, the *Chronicle* referring to the SDF as ‘a somewhat militant body, mainly composed of the more excitable and denunciatory believers in socialism.’<sup>2</sup> At the first meeting of 1897, remarks by the speaker about the recent visit of the Prince of Wales to the city led to a scuffle with the audience, during which the pole to which the SDF banner was attached was broken. Members of the SDF were chased by the crowd down Cornmarket and the High Street into St. Clement’s, where they took refuge in Black Horse Yard. The mob then attacked the house of the unfortunate Bill Hines, who was not even present at the meeting. An undergraduate from Trinity College was rusticated for his participation in the ‘rag.’<sup>3</sup>

This ‘rag’ was only one of a series of disturbances that accompanied the SDF’s weekly meetings, which quickly become a local sensation. The following week, a mob of several thousand appeared to taunt the socialist speaker, Martin Judge from Glasgow. When Judge announced the title of his talk, ‘What is Socialism?’, someone replied ‘Ask Bill Hines to expound it’. Judge was soon drowned by a chorus of the national anthem, followed by ‘Rule Britannia’ and finally ‘For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow.’<sup>4</sup> The third week, Sinclair, faced by a crowd of about 1,500, was unable to make himself heard. The disturbances soon led to protests from local residents and shopkeepers, so at the next meeting the police and university proctors jointly kept control of the hecklers. Since there were never more than seven or eight socialists at the meetings, the crowd was waiting for them either to give up or to bring in support from outside the city.

A rumour soon spread that a visit of a ‘Clarion Cycle Club’ (the cycling club linked to the socialist *Clarion* newspaper edited by Robert Blatchford) had been arranged to coincide with a meeting.<sup>5</sup> A ‘socialist’ wrote to the *Chronicle* denying the connection and explaining that ‘a large number of them [the

Clarion Cyclists] are certainly not in sympathy with the methods of propaganda employed by the SDF. The writer went on to attack the SDF – ‘the principles of socialism will not be advanced by futile endeavours to secure the attention or conversion of the blackguardly element of Oxford’ – a comment which only served to demonstrate that the small number of socialists in Oxford were divided amongst themselves.<sup>6</sup> The letter however did nothing to quash the rumour about the cycling club, and when on the day of the meeting, the mob spotted a man wearing a cycling suit, they chased him down the Cornmarket even though he denied having anything to do with the socialists.<sup>7</sup> The *Chronicle* noted that ‘The Socialists’ Sunday Saturnalia seem destined to become a standing source of amusement for the boys, girls and students who weekly frequent the St. Giles promenade.’<sup>8</sup> A report on the meeting in the *Clarion* however shows that the rumours concerning the cyclists were not unfounded:

There was a crowd of 4–5,000, mainly composed of undergraduates and small boys. A large number of police and detectives, together with the college proctors, were present to prevent the enlightened and leading ones from pulling us to pieces. Thanks to their help we got safely away, with the exception of one of our men, who was knocked down and kicked, and had to be rescued by the detectives. Poor chap; he fainted twice when it was over and has carried away a few good impressions of Oxford with him. When the London Cackler was speaking, the crowd contented themselves with booing and howling ‘God Save the Queen’ and ‘Rule Britannia,’ but when we put the Brummagen Spouter on them it was too much, so they fired off a revolver, and the meeting ended. The most curious crowd I have ever seen. I have seen mass meetings in Hyde Park, in Brum, Wolverhampton and other towns, but Heavens defend me from again addressing a mob of university roughs. The Meet was a great success and it was unanimously resolved to repeat it next year, the year after, and in the years to come.<sup>9</sup>

The most important consequence of the meetings was the public debate aroused on whether they should be allowed to continue and the right of free speech.

At a meeting in the middle of June, the authorities intervened – the police protecting the socialists, while the proctors controlled the students. For the first time, the meeting proceeded in an orderly manner, leading the *Chronicle* to comment that:

There is not the slightest doubt that the peaceableness and comparative quiet in the streets ... was in a great measure due to the precautionary steps taken by the proctors. One of these gentlemen, with his attendants, was stationed at every street leading directly to the Martyrs Memorial, and they appeared somewhat like sentries pacing with ceaseless tread backwards and forwards across the road. As soon as a junior member

of the University hove in sight, he was promptly ‘collared’ by a ‘bulldog’ and brought into the presence of a proctor who requested him to go to his rooms. Consequently, the socialists’ audience was composed of ‘townees’ who conducted themselves in a respectable manner.<sup>10</sup>

The following summer, the ‘free speech’ controversy was revived when the authorities again intervened, this time arresting the SDF speaker Partridge for obstructing the highway. Partridge refused to pay the fine and was sent to prison for six months. The SDF held a meeting to protest ‘before the infamous and unjust judgement that had been passed on our comrade, Cotton’ and contended that the police no longer kept order at their meetings because the Social Democrats had criticised the action of the City Corporation in regard to a proposed exchange of property. The police closed the meeting, fearing a riot, and arrested Cotton. After the departure of the SDF, the Salvation Army held their usual meeting on the same spot, without police intervention.<sup>11</sup>

The arrests, however, did not stop the SDF’s activities. They appealed to London for help and were sent L. E. Quelch of the Reading branch, who was the brother of Harry Quelch of the SDF executive. At the next meeting, the mob chased the socialists all the way to the police station in St. Aldates, where they were forced to take refuge. A sympathiser, Henry Baxett of Worcester College, applied to the magistrates for the protection of the socialists, but was referred to the council’s Watch Committee. The arrests, however, clearly helped the SDF in their propaganda, for they could claim to be victims of police persecution. An article in the SDF’s national journal *Justice* declaimed, ‘It is obvious that this is an attempt to suppress our propaganda.’ The SDF’s leader Henry Hyndman wrote a letter to the *Chronicle* asking all who ‘believed in free speech to contribute to the ‘Oxford Free Speech Fund’ whose treasurer was George Lansbury (later Labour Party leader).<sup>12</sup> A protest meeting with Lansbury as the main speaker was held in the Town Hall. Bill Hines was present to support the meeting’s resolutions.<sup>13</sup>

The police did not stop the next meeting at Martyrs’ Memorial. The SDF claimed a victory for free speech. *Justice* congratulated ‘the little band of SDF’ers in Oxford on the well-deserved victory they have gained by their sturdy stand for the right of preaching the gospel of Social Democracy in that centre of light and learning.’<sup>14</sup> The campaign reached its climax in a meeting at the Corn Exchange, addressed by Hyndman. The meeting was chaired by Dennis Hird, a former Anglican Minister and temperance advocate and now principal of the recently established trade unionist Ruskin College, who was himself a member of the SDF. The meeting celebrated the great victory, terminating in the singing of an unidentified socialist song.<sup>15</sup> The SDF’ers also arranged a complimentary dinner for their two ‘martyrs’, Partridge and Cotton, at the Blenheim, Little Clarendon Street, where it was proudly claimed that ‘the majority of their members were working men, they had no toffs in the ranks.’<sup>16</sup>

In 1902, the Oxford SDF provided a platform for the Irish socialist James Connolly. The meeting in St. Giles was however abandoned after an hour, when a student-led mob started throwing stones at the speaker. Connolly and Cotton were followed down Cornmarket as the mob tried to seize the flagpole to which a red flag was attached. Connolly broke the pole in two, and knocked down four of his assailants, losing his hat in the fight. The police eventually separated the two groups. Further attempts by Cotton and Connolly to hold meetings failed, and Connolly did not receive expenses since no collection could be raised.<sup>17</sup> Cotton left the SDF and joined Connolly's Socialist Labour Party.

## CHAPTER 17

# The Municipal Housing Association, 1900–1902

In 1901 there were some 800–900 trade unionists in Oxford.<sup>1</sup> At the Trades Council's AGM that year, there were delegates from the printers, electro-typers, carpenters and joiners, stonemasons, plasterers, plumbers, painters, builders, labourers, tailors, shoemakers, engineers and shop assistants. The recent loss of delegates from the bricklayers and railway servants had been counterbalanced by the accession of the painters and engineers during the year. A representative from the recently formed Oxford branch of the Union of Cooperative Employees was also expected. By 1903, the situation had worsened. The masons' society and the builders' labourers no longer sent delegates, while the painters' union, which the Trades Council had helped form to assist painters during periods of seasonal unemployment, had collapsed. The builders' labourers' delegate stated that his union's withdrawal was due to the shabby way they had been treated at a meeting on labour representation which had been dominated by the Liberal councillor English.<sup>2</sup>

It was the issue of labour representation which dominated the discussions of the Trades Council in these years. In June 1900, the Trades Council had discussed the question of federating with the United Labour Party by amalgamating with other Trades Councils.<sup>3</sup> The matter was repeatedly adjourned.<sup>4</sup> In September, Henry Harris was sent to a regional trades council conference at Maidstone to get more information.<sup>5</sup> On his return, it was agreed to leave the matter to individual trades unions.<sup>6</sup> In 1901, the Trades Council again discussed labour representation, this time agreeing that the secretary should write to affiliated unions to ascertain their views and whether they were prepared to do anything about it.<sup>7</sup> The response must have been poor for no further action was taken.

In January 1901, G. N. Barnes, general secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, addressed the council on the 'organisation of labour'. The meeting passed a resolution 'that it is the duty of members to take an active part in the organisation of labour, not only in the interests of any particular trade, but the labour movement generally.'<sup>8</sup>

The council had confidence in its ability to represent the working people of the city. The secretary reported to the 1901 AGM that 'the amount of zeal and

activity which has been manifested by the representatives of the various trade unions may be regarded as a sure indication that they at least, in so far as lies in their power, will see to it that no encroachments shall be made on the interests of the cause which they have so closely at heart.<sup>9</sup>

The Trades Council was clearly no longer independent of political parties. At the 1901 AGM there were seven councillors present, all Liberals, some of whom no doubt saw themselves as representing the interests of the Trades Council in the city council chamber. Dodd and Kingerlee, for example, were thanked by the secretary 'for their kind and practical assistance on the men's behalf.' The Trades Council was clearly no longer a basis for independent labour representation.<sup>10</sup>

As mentioned in chapter 2, among other organisations interested in issues affecting working people was the Christian Social Union, founded in 1898, and led by the City Rector A. J. Carlyle. The Oxford CSU involved ministers and progressive Liberals like Dodd and Meeking. In 1893, the CSU branch had drawn up a list of twenty local firms which had adopted trade union wage-rates and it encouraged its members and the public in general to buy only from such firms. By 1894, the list included 88 firms and by 1900, 146 firms. Other CSU branches took up this Oxford 'discriminatory purchasing' initiative. Among other issues discussed by the Oxford CSU in 1901–02 were temperance, the Poor Law and 'legal aid to the poor.'<sup>11</sup> The CSU continued to pursue its campaign against unemployment and 'sweated labour' in Oxford's Liberal circles.<sup>12</sup> In 1901, in co-operation with the Trades Council, the CSU undertook a study of conditions in four Oxford trades – the printers, tailors, shoemakers and bakers.<sup>13</sup> The University Fabian Society, the establishment of which was also discussed in chapter 2, was now led by Sidney Ball, a fellow of St John's, and also organised meetings on social issues. After the Taff Vale judgement on trade union membership, Barnes gave a lecture to them on the 'present position of trade unions,' arguing that their attention would now be more drawn to Parliamentary action.<sup>14</sup>

The initiative for an independent labour party in Oxford did not however come – at least not directly – from the Trades Council, the SDF, or the Socialist League, but from another organisation, the Municipal Housing Association, which was founded in 1900 with the aim of persuading the city council to build housing for working people. Before recounting the events which led to the formation of an independent labour party in Oxford, it is necessary to take a brief look at the 'municipal housing' issue and the related issue of municipalised trams.

In 1890, Parliament passed a Housing Act which included a section, part 3, enabling local authorities to acquire land and to erect dwellings for the working classes. Pressure from the Trades Council and individual trades unions had forced the Oxford Council to investigate the need for such housing. A report came before council in January 1901, including statistics on overcrowding in the City but not any recommendations. Alderman Hall, a leading Conservative,

argued that the council should build houses. He was opposed by a group led by Alderman Underhill who argued that the sanitary regulations should first be more rigidly implemented. Underhill's motion was defeated by 32 votes to 13. The turnabout came when councillor Butler moved that the legislation enabling the construction of dwellings should be considered rather than adopted. This amendment was carried overwhelmingly, and a new committee was established to investigate the matter further. It was in fact not until 1914 that any houses were actually built by the council.<sup>15</sup>

The Trades Council, supported by the advanced Liberals, also argued that the Council should take over the tramways company, which included the Conservative Alderman Buckell among its directors.<sup>16</sup> English and Carlyle joined together at a meeting in March 1902 to demand that the council refuse to extend the company's operating license.<sup>17</sup> Their argument was that if the company was municipalised, profits would accrue to the community instead of to the share-holders, fares could be reduced, and the tramways extended, so that working people could live in pleasant suburbs like Summertown and travel to work, rather than in the slums of the city centre.

The press and campaigners on both sides drew attention to the municipalisation of the London trams by the Progressive Party-led London County Council under Sir John Williams Benn. According to an irate shareholder at the Tramway Company's AGM who went on to present the argument against municipalisation, 'Mr Benn ... who was well known in London as being favourable to the municipalisation of everything that was possible, had been lecturing there, and he told the citizens of Oxford what great advantages the L.C.C. had obtained from the tramways which they ran in London.'<sup>18</sup>

The Municipal Housing Association, under Carlyle's chairmanship, responded to the Council's failure to build houses by threatening to contest the next municipal elections. At their AGM in March, they decided to oppose those retiring councillors who had supported Underhill's amendment.<sup>19</sup> It appears that the original proposal was to contest East ward, but the association's prospective candidate backed down.<sup>20</sup> A meeting in September, attended by four Liberal councillors – English, Meeking, Vincent and Salter – discussed the possibility of a contest in West ward, the retiring councillors being two Liberals (Kingerlee and Cooper) and a Tory (Curtis). Carlyle proposed to elect five delegates to a joint campaign committee, to join five from the Trades Council and five from the Builders' Labourers. A delegate from the latter reported that a meeting of 40 members had decided in favour of a contest. The Liberal Salter immediately stated his opposition to the proposal which he considered as 'suicidal to the interests of the association' since 'all three retiring members had done all they wished them to do in the interests of the housing question.' He moved that the three retiring members be asked their position before a contest was decided upon, a proposal which English supported. Charles Broadhurst, who was to be the Independent candidate, asked Salter what the three councillors had done on the housing question, arguing that 'they had not moved

a step. If the council would not take up the housing question, it was time the working classes took it up and fought it out.' He suggested that the 'excursionists' who were brought into the city should be shown not the colleges, churches and chapels, 'but the dry kennels in which the people lived.' If the association did not contest a ward this year they would find the builders labourers coming forward themselves next year', which demonstrated that the initiative for the contest did not come solely from Carlyle and his middle-class colleagues.

Broadhurst was not short of support. The ever-present Bill Hines added that they could not expect working men to vote for speculative builders who would do nothing to benefit the working classes in the shape of putting up new houses at reasonable rents. He would vote against the whole crew that were owners of property and hoped that members of the association who had a vote in West ward would do the best they could to throw out any of the three members and put working men and fair representatives in their place. Harse of the SDF added that sitting councillors always wanted to avoid a contest but was interrupted by Carlyle asking him to keep personalities out of it. Mr Grant commented that the candidates should campaign solely on the housing question, for they would lose control over a 'labour' candidate. Not surprisingly, Salter's motion was defeated, which led him to call his victors cowards for fighting West ward rather than East ward. But the liberals were not yet defeated, for Vincent stated his belief that municipal housing and putting forward a 'labour' candidate were two separate issues. He considered that a 'labour' candidate would be satisfactory if he had time to do the job properly but that was not a matter that was the concern of the Municipal Housing Association. Snow replied that previous candidates had broken promises made on the housing issue. Carlyle said he wanted a contest but warned that to poll only 100 or 200 votes would be counterproductive; the alliance with the Trades Council and builders' labourers was therefore crucial. Sidney Ball wanted the contest to be in East ward, and Carlyle had to remind him that the proposed candidate had withdrawn, and that Broadhurst was only known in the West ward.

It was eventually agreed to contest the election; the five delegates to the Joint Committee were to be Carlyle, Reverend Fletcher, Narroway, King – who was president of the Oxford Cooperative Society – and Francis. Although the Liberals were defeated at the meeting, they clearly still thought they could win the independents back to the Liberal fold, and so as not to antagonise them further, decided not to run a third candidate.<sup>21</sup> The Trades Council gave Broadhurst their support, agreeing to pay £1 of his election expenses and nominating five of their members – Gray, Snow, Robinson, Hopper and Laverick – to his campaign committee.<sup>22</sup>

Broadhurst went to the polls, as the Liberals had feared, not as a housing candidate but as 'labour' on a manifesto calling for, in addition to the building of houses for the working classes, the acquisition and administration of the trams by the council, and the payment of trade union rates to all workers on council contracts, policies which were to be the basis of the 'labour' programme for the

contests of the following years. Broadhurst's campaign did not however attract much public attention, and he came bottom of the poll with 338 votes.<sup>23</sup>

After the election, the Municipal Housing Association called a meeting of Trade and Friendly Societies, which was held in the old school at Gloucester Green. The Trades Council sent seven representatives – Buy, Samson, Quelch, Hopper, Snow, Francis and Brewer – and agreed to support in principle a Labour Electoral Committee but showed little enthusiasm for the organisation once it had been formed. Broadhurst proposed that 'in the opinion of this conference it is desirable that there should be some direct representation of labour interests in this city.' Carlyle, who again presided, spoke of the councillors as being representatives of class interests. He felt that 'it was the strong feeling among the labouring classes that until the working people were themselves represented in some measure, it was almost useless to look for any very serious or careful or thorough attempt to meet the difficulties which especially affected the labouring and artisan classes.'

The Reverend Fletcher proposed –

- 1) that the delegates be asked to report the preceeding resolution to their respective societies and to request them to express their opinion on the desirability of a contest being organised in one or two wards at the next election in the labour interest;
- 2) to ask the societies whether they would formally or informally be disposed to give any assistance towards an election fund.

Mr Heath of the Loyal Oxonian Court of Foresters said that Benefit and Friendly societies were bound by laws which precluded their participation, a point with which Mr Francis of the Oddfellows agreed. It was accepted that any candidate should be independent of all political parties. There were no Liberals present to disagree.<sup>24</sup>

## CHAPTER 18

# The Municipal Labour Representation Association, 1902–1905

The foundation meeting of what was to be called the Oxford Municipal Labour Representation Association was held the following month, January 1902, at Ruskin Hall, with Carlyle as chairman. Edwin English appears to have been the only Liberal present, unless we count as such the Fabian, Sidney Ball. Written proposals were laid before the meeting, the authorship of which is unclear. It would however be surprising if neither Carlyle nor Hastings Lees-Smith of Ruskin College, who acted as secretary, were involved in drafting them. The first paragraph gives the background to the proposal:

The time has arrived for a definite labour party to enter the municipal politics of Oxford. Although the working class forms by far the greatest portion of the citizens, it is without a voice on either the City Council, the Board of Guardians or the School Board. Such urgent reforms moreover as the provision of good and suitable houses at fair rents by the City Council and the ownership of the tramways by the City Council have not as yet been adopted in Oxford. Even the payment of the Standard Trade Union rate of wages to all workmen employed by our public bodies is not fully enforced. Reforms such as these demand a labour party to promote them. For this purpose the members here present form themselves into an Association.

The statement of principles in the second paragraph included:

- 1) Undertakings which have become necessary to the life and welfare of all the citizens should be owned and worked by the City Council, the proper representation of all the citizens, so that the profits of these undertakings could be used for the benefit of all the citizens;
- 2) The City Council and other public bodies should set a good example to employers of labour by treating their own workers fairly;
- 3) In a city in which most of the citizens belong to the working class, the City Council and the other public bodies should in justice contain an adequate number of working men.

The programme included:

- 1) the building of homes to let at a rent to cover cost and maintenance;
- 2) the Council should take over the Tramway Company and use the profits to improve the system and reduce the fares;
- 3) trade union rates of wages for council workers and employees on council contracts;
- 4) public bodies should meet in the evenings so that working men could attend without loss of wages.

Councillor English was again first to speak. He asked if he was entitled to vote since he was opposed to some of the proposals. Carlyle suggested he wait to see 'what was to be done' before voting. The main controversy was over the paragraph dealing with the constitution, which read 'The Association shall be open to all residents in Oxford and district, who will pledge themselves to disregard party considerations in municipal affairs, and, in case of a contest, to vote and work for the candidate of the Association against those of either political party.' English found himself fighting a lone battle to stop the split between labour and the Liberals. He urged that the word 'labour' should be left out of the Association's title, because the Association would force contests in a ward and oppose men who were really helpful to them in order that they might have a labour representative on Council. A fight would often take place, and in consequence of a labour candidate being in the field, an adversary would win the election. He could not disassociate himself from his party and bind himself to support the candidates put forward by the proposed Association. Mr. Francis then formally proposed the constitutional paragraph, seconded by Barroway who observed that 'until they shook themselves free from the trammels of both parties they would make very little progress.' English wanted to omit the phrase 'against those of either political party' and was supported by Sidney Ball. Lees-Smith was worried that the paragraph would prevent an alliance with either party. He sought to add 'unless specially absolved from doing so by a meeting of the Association.'

The coalitionists however lost the vote, the Association being established as an independent political body, though this did not stop Lees-Smith being made co-secretary with Carlyle. The other officers elected were Buy, chairman of the Trades Council, as president; Snow of the Trades Council as vice-president; Piper and Reverend Fletcher as treasurers. The academics appear to have been stepping into the background and passing control to the trade unionists.<sup>1</sup>

The Association was officially inaugurated at a meeting in the Town Hall on 4 June. Philip Snowden of the national Independent Labour Party was guest speaker and Carlyle presided, the published list of supporters showing the broad basis on which the Association was founded – Ball the Fabian; Buy, Harris and Snow from the Trades Council; Francis from the Housing Association; King the chairman of the Cooperative society; and Hird and Bertram Wilson, the warden and subwarden of Ruskin.<sup>2</sup>

The Liberals were apparently still hoping to win over the new party. An editorial in the *Chronicle* supported the foundation meeting, commenting that the constituent societies were ‘the backbone of the working classes, seeking to work out their own salvation.’<sup>3</sup> At the 1902 Trades Council AGM, Snow urged all workers to support the new association, and mentioned that a motion was being brought to the printing union’s AGM asking all members to contribute a shilling a year to return candidates ‘not only on local bodies but to parliament’ – a suggestion that was applauded.<sup>4</sup> It is, however, questionable whether Liberal influence had been completely excluded from the Trades Council, for at the 1902 municipal election, rather than giving full support to the Labour candidate, the Trades Council sent its own questionnaire to all candidates. In addition to the three main points of the Labour programme, this called for ‘the retention of allotments, more open entry to High schools and Technical schools, equitable rates and more kindly consideration towards deserving poor, by granting out-relief wherever possible.’ The Trades Council received sympathetic replies from several Liberal candidates as well as from the Labour candidate.<sup>5</sup>

The Labour Association decided to contest West ward, as the housing association had done the previous year. One of the retiring Liberal councillors had died, creating a vacancy. In early September, Snow was chosen to be the candidate.<sup>6</sup> A second candidature was considered, but the idea soon dropped. A contest between Liberals and Labour was avoided by the Liberals agreeing not to run a third candidate.<sup>7</sup> The Labour campaign got off the ground very quickly, the first leaflets being distributed in September. Public meetings were planned, and arrangements made ‘for deputations to visit various trade and progressive bodies in Oxford.’ Harris and Fox met the shop assistants’ union and received a warm welcome. The *Chronicle* reported that ‘if the other political parties are as energetically engaged on behalf of their candidates, we can anticipate some lively times.’<sup>8</sup> The campaign centred on magic lantern exhibitions and lectures. The Watch Committee soon banned the use of magic lanterns out of doors, so the campaigners had to retreat inside. The lectures were usually given by the association’s academic sympathisers, Bertram Wilson and Lees-Smith.

According to the *Chronicle*:

A great deal of interest was naturally aroused in the districts where the exhibition happened to pitch each night, and it was amusing to observe the somewhat bewildered faces of the citizens who are canvassed in this unusual way. A still more amusing feature of the meetings was the cheers of the children when the lantern revealed a familiar piece of slum property which aroused the ire of the labour party, and their groans when the lantern revealed nothing but a written argument in favour of the labour candidate.

The lecture usually first stressed the need for labour representation, then presented a portrait of Snow, led on to the housing problem using the housing

association's statistics and pictures of slums, then expounded on the advantages of trams which enabled workmen to live in healthier suburbs and concluded with the confession of faith of the labour party.<sup>9</sup>

The *Chronicle* backed Snow, since he wasn't opposing Liberals, but its support was qualified:

It is of course understood that the Liberal candidates, although in favour of many 'labour' proposals, do not in any way ally themselves with the labour candidate, for neither Mr Turrill or Mr Kingerlee feel that they can pledge themselves to attempt to perform what is generally considered at the present time as the impossible.

A Labour meeting in Walton Street was poorly attended. Snow claimed to have written his own election address: 'It was not written for the purpose of catching votes, it was an honest one.' He declared that 'the time was coming, slowly but surely, when labour would be adequately represented in Parliament and on all public bodies.'<sup>11</sup> At another meeting in Osney, he picked up the points in the Trades Council questionnaire and declared himself in favour of allotments and a local recreation ground. It is interesting to note that Sidney Ball, who was announced as chairman, went to a university engagement instead.<sup>12</sup> Despite the furious activity of the Labour campaigners, there was a low poll. Snow came bottom with 371 votes, the two Liberals holding their seats, despite not holding any meetings. There appears to have been considerable cross-voting between Snow and the Tory, Bradshaw. The *Chronicle* commented that 'Snow polled a larger Conservative than Liberal vote.'<sup>13</sup>

For the election, the Trades Council had, as mentioned, carried out its usual practice of putting questions to candidates. Some delegates were clearly dissatisfied with this form of intervention for at the March meeting, Brownjohn and Hopper proposed 'that we take steps to bring the matters contained in the questions to candidates to a successful issue on the council'.<sup>14</sup> In April, the Trades Council demanded that the city council put the city's drinking fountains in proper repair.<sup>15</sup> In June, a discussion on housing turned into a general debate on labour representation.<sup>16</sup> It was decided that the secretary should write to all councillors asking them to support Alderman Hall's position on the housing question. Following a lengthy discussion, it was agreed to hold a conference on labour representation, and Snow, Buy, Hopper, Goldsworthy and Lee were put on a committee to organise it.<sup>17</sup>

The Trades Council then decided to respond to a request from the MLRA for a joint meeting.<sup>18</sup> This was held in July. Lees-Smith of the MLRA argued that since that association was not representative of organised labour, the Trades Council should take over the work of labour representation in Oxford. Carlyle added weight to the proposal – 'If the Trades Council undertook the question of labour representation in Oxford, it would have a more official position.' Snow proposed 'that in the opinion of this conference Labour Representation should

be carried out entirely through and by the Oxford Trades and Labour Council.' Sidney Ball moved an amendment 'that in the opinion of this conference it is necessary that the Trades Council should confer with the Trades Societies and other societies as to the best steps to be taken with a view to the representation of labour on local bodies in Oxford.' Snow eventually withdrew his motion and Ball's was carried instead. A conference was to be held once the attitudes of affiliated trades unions were known. The Trades Council elected a new committee to deal with the matter. This time it consisted of Snow, Hopper, Brownjohn, Botter, Goldsworthy and Harris.<sup>19</sup> As had been the case three years previously, the trade union response was poor. The printers wanted to leave the matter to the MLRA; the engineers were sympathetic to the principle of labour representation but were opposed to action by the Trades Council.<sup>20</sup> By November, the Trades Council had given up and decided to leave labour representation to the MLRA, to whose committee they appointed two delegates, Allen and Kinley, to represent their interests.<sup>21</sup>

The Trades Council's failure to raise support for labour representation no doubt contributed to the lack of cohesion in the MLRA as plans for the 1903 election were formulated. Carlyle, as secretary, seems to have written to Liberal and Conservative branches in all wards asking them to concede a seat to Labour so as to avoid a contest.<sup>22</sup> This abandonment of the policy of independence was unsuccessful. Carlyle was not the only person seeking to avoid a contest, for the other two parties reached a compromise of their own. It was not until a week before polling day that they realised the seats would be contested. The trouble started when the MLRA declared that they were unhappy with the compromise in North ward.<sup>23</sup> They then decided to concentrate their efforts in South ward, where they selected King as candidate. The Liberals were not contesting this ward, so he faced three Tory opponents. King's sole recorded campaign statement was that 'the standpoint of working men should not be altogether ignored or misunderstood'. King was backed by the Liberals, though it is unlikely that many liberals were active in his campaign. Not surprisingly, he came bottom of the poll.<sup>24</sup>

The East ward contest witnessed an interesting development. The Liberals wanted to fight but were having problems choosing their candidate. English, one of the retiring councillors, was out of Oxford and very ill, perhaps still suffering the after-effects of his contest with the Independents in the MLRA the previous year. Ansell, who had lost his seat at the previous election, was unwilling to stand jointly with his absent colleague. The Liberals decided to back William Gray, a carpenter from Pembroke Street (now Rectory Road) who had been an active trade unionist for 27 years and had helped to get the fair wages clause into city contracts. He was also a member of the Housing Association.<sup>25</sup> Gray stood as a Labour candidate but with official Liberal support. The contest was regarded as the most exciting for years. The Tory Meadows was attacked for his poor record of attendance at council meetings; the

Liberals were attacked for having broken the ‘no contest’ agreement. A rumour that the Tories had tried to get English, a nonconformist, replaced by Ansell, a churchman, increased the tension. Gray came top of the poll with 1,231 votes, followed by the absentee English.<sup>26</sup> A ‘representative of labour’ had therefore become a member of council, though only with Liberal support, and although Carlyle had crossed the threshold of the Liberal Club to support Gray,<sup>27</sup> without the active support of the MLRA.<sup>28</sup>

The situation in West ward provided an interesting contrast. Ignoring the advice of some of his colleagues, Snow had decided to stand. He himself claimed that his candidature was non-political but was a protest against the ‘unenglish’ Tory-Liberal compromise.<sup>29</sup> He had no intention of canvassing the ward, a job which he left to his few supporters. Since his only opponents were three Liberals, the *Chronicle* reacted with considerable hostility, though its editorial tried to present the candidature as ‘vexatious rather than serious.’ The Liberals need not have worried, for their candidates were safely returned.

The *Chronicle* editorial presented an interesting summary of the Liberal attitude to the political organisation of working people. A correspondent had suggested that Liberal councillors should retire to make way for labour representatives. The *Chronicle* called for a different kind of co-operation:

this cooperation is not to be brought about by the Labour Association, or individual members of it, presenting a pistol at the heads of the liberal organisers at the last moment and telling them that they must withdraw their candidates or stand condemned of hypocrisy. Surely Liberals are showing their friendliness to Labour by the hearty support they are giving to Mr Gray and Mr King ... but progressive must not fight progressive. What must inevitably come of action like Mr Snow’s if it is repeated another year and in other wards, will be an increase in the number of those city councillors who are hostile alike to the interests of labour and of municipal progress.<sup>30</sup>

The MLRA’s lack of success in the 1903 elections was partly due to lack of organisation, but also partly to differences among the members. Snow appears as a hardline Independent, King as a moderate, while Carlyle maintained his Liberal connections. To be successful, they needed to be more united as well as better organised. The Independents had to decide between a series of further defeats or an arrangement with the Liberals. The years after 1903 saw a battle, not so much for electoral victory, but over whether to remain independent. The conflict led to divisions amongst the Labour leaders and to the formation of a branch of the Independent Labour Party, which was to adopt socialism as the basis of its political activities and consequently alienate many of those who had established the MLRA as an independent political organisation, but which did not accept the notion of class struggle.

After the defeats of November 1903, the MLRA decided not to leave its selection of candidates till the eleventh hour again. By February 1904, it had been decided that Piper of the Postmen's Federation and the Summertown Improvement Association, together with Brownjohn of the Typographical Association, should contest North ward in November. At a public meeting in Summertown, nine months before polling day, the candidates made the first speeches of the campaign. Brownjohn picked on the famous principle that 'representation and taxation should go together' while Piper attacked the existing councillors. 'There was the question,' he said, 'as to the working man's educational efficiency to sit on public bodies.' He had been present at a Council meeting and was of the opinion that there was too much education at present in the Council. There was not enough go'. The discussion that followed demonstrated the Association's current attitude to the other political parties. On being asked whether 'in the event of a candidate being put forward by either political party, who was in favour of taking up the housing question, improvements in tramways and other things, they would run their candidates,' Carlyle replied that 'they were quite willing if either of the parties chose to approach them in regard to running a candidate holding the views of the Association, to run him, but in the interest of the labour movement. They were not agreeable to a labour candidate being run as a party candidate.'<sup>31</sup>

The Trades Council was little interested in local politics at this time. Employment was good and trade unionism was growing, leading the Council to look for a permanent meeting room. The Trades Council was however preoccupied with the issue of Chinese slavery in South Africa. Eric Buy, the chairman, saw the introduction of Chinese labour into that country as a 'complete smack in the face to trade unionism.' Broadhurst accused the government of reintroducing forms of slavery: 'if they did not turn out the present government, it would turn out them into the gutters; it would turn them into doormats to wipe their boots on.' The Lib-Lab councillor William Gray proposed that the Trades Council 'organise a committee of the citizens of Oxford with a view to having a demonstration.'<sup>32</sup> Gray clearly won Liberal support for the idea, for the initiative led to a packed public meeting in the Town Hall with Carlyle as chairman and Herbert Samuel MP as main speaker.<sup>33</sup> For the Labour leaders, some of whom spoke from the platform, it must have been very different from their usual gatherings in schoolrooms and on street corners. Despite heckling from students, the meeting was successful, and no doubt a useful experience for the trade unionists in the light of the employment agitation the following year.

By September, the MLRA had decided to contest all four wards in the election.<sup>34</sup> In addition to Brownjohn and Piper in North, Harris of the typographers would stand in West, Broadhurst or Cleaver of the tailors in South, while the proposed candidate for East ward had withdrawn due to ill health and an alternative was being sought. The *Chronicle* complained that 'the Liberal and

Labour parties are still failing to work together so harmoniously as the interests of both Labour and Liberalism require ... It has been repeatedly shown that labour candidates can only be returned if they have the full support of the progressive electors in each ward; and that means that the Progressives must work together and not fight one another. These lessons have been brought home at past elections, but they have not yet been fully learned.<sup>35</sup>

By the end of September, the MLRA had moved from this ‘no compromise’ position. In West ward they were negotiating with the Liberals, hoping that they would adopt Harris. Broadhurst and Cleaver had both withdrawn from the South ward contest. For East ward, they had considered both King and the Lib-Lab compositor Walter Binham, neither of whom wished to stand. The *Chronicle* was happier – the MLRA ‘had prudently modified its intention of standing in all wards. The MLRA seems to entertain the idea that for the three vacancies, the Liberals and Conservatives should each name two candidates, leaving the ‘sandwich’ place for their nominee’.

The Liberals were not totally happy since ‘the theory looks well on paper, but there is too much probability that its practical result would be the ousting of one of the Liberal candidates.’<sup>36</sup> The MLRA however changed its mind again, and decided to run Jabez Clifford, a tailor, in East ward. This was decided just a few hours before a public meeting to open the campaign. The Liberals’ claim to be progressives was causing some confusion. Harris referred to himself as a progressive candidate but added that the ‘Oxford MLRA was the only purely progressive Association in Oxford, and that progressives should not be united by the “labour party throwing in its lot with the Liberal Party”’. Unity could not be on the basis of liberal policies, although he was willing to unite with progressives of all parties. Clifford stated, in a burst of enthusiasm that had little to do with any party dogma, that ‘he would advocate everything that made for freedom. Freedom of action would give them a greater power and would help the city’s welfare far better than by joining with either of the parties of today.’<sup>37</sup>

Despite this enthusiasm for independence, the MLRA were trying to avoid contests. They achieved a deal with the East ward Liberals, who adopted Clifford as a Lib-Lab candidate. In West ward, there were difficulties, since the Liberals were unhappy about supporting Harris who had consistently opposed them in the past. The MLRA gave way; Harris was replaced by King who had Liberal support. The MLRA then issued a statement to the electors of East and West wards – ‘The candidate of the Oxford MLRA is standing in conjunction with the candidates of the Liberal association for this ward. But we wish to make it clear to the burgesses of this ward, and of the city generally, that as we are not a political body, we shall at all times be ready to consider a similar proposal from either political party.’ No amount of propaganda could cover up the fact that the Association had clearly abandoned its independent position.<sup>38</sup>

The Liberals were happier with the agreement than were some of the Labour leaders. They allowed Carlyle a column in the *Chronicle* to present the

arguments for labour representation.<sup>39</sup> Carlyle took a very conciliatory line, which no doubt represented his own political position, if not those of his colleagues. He contended that democracy meant the involvement of representatives of all classes in the councils of the country. The Liberals had seen the wisdom of meeting Labour advances in Oxford, and he wished that the Conservatives would do the same thing: 'We take it that both parties, having now assented to the creation of the democratic machinery, must be prepared to welcome the complete development of the democratic principle.' He did however continue, 'It does appear to some of us that while the Liberal party considers itself the party of progress, it has not shown that resolution, that determination to carry forward the social reforms in the country which some of us might have hoped for.' On housing and sanitary reform 'on both sides (of council) there has been a certain lack of interest and of conviction as to the necessity of further progress. Working class councillors will be more likely to show a sustained energy in the working of reform.' The *Chronicle* editorial replied praising Carlyle's sentiments but was somewhat cynical: 'Difficulties only arise when the time comes to put these benevolent theories into practice.' Clearly worried by the MLRA's overtures to the Tories, the *Chronicle* stressed that since the Tories were the party of rich men 'hand in glove with the brewers and in the pocket of clerical obscurantists,' there was an impassable barrier between them and Labour. 'It is to the Liberal party that Labour naturally turns for sympathy and practical help: and it is in the Liberal alliance that, under existing conditions, its obvious opportunity of obtaining its object lies.'<sup>40</sup> Some Liberals were not so happy with the alliance, for in West ward some were reluctant to vote for King and the *Chronicle* had to urge that 'Ratepayers who give ... their third vote to one of his conservative opponents will be deliberately partially disenfranchising themselves.'<sup>41</sup>

The Liberal-MLRA agreement took all the excitement out of the elections. Clifford worked well with the Liberals. Asked whether he was a Liberal, he replied that he was 'cradled in Liberalism' and had worked for Sir William Harcourt. They would not expect anything but Liberalism from him if he was sent to Council, but if the Liberal party did not make it their business to see that the working man had fair wages, he should be 'down' upon them.<sup>42</sup> The MLRA's tactic of working with the Liberals proved just as unsuccessful as their obstinate independence over the previous two contests. Clifford came bottom of the poll in East ward, even though the Liberals captured a seat. The Tories in North ward were returned with large majorities, while in West ward, King with 510 votes was next to bottom. The MLRA must have been very disappointed with the results.<sup>43</sup> When immediately after the election, English retired due to ill health, Clifford declined to stand.<sup>44</sup>

## CHAPTER 19

# The Independent Labour Party, Unemployment Agitation and Local Politics, 1905–1907

Although some MLRA leaders continued to work with the Liberals, others recognised the futility of alliances. A group who had been involved in past campaigns formed an Oxford branch of the Independent Labour Party. The first meeting on 31 January 1905 was attended by Piper, Broadhurst and Cleaver together with some workers whose names are unfamiliar – Bowerman, Westell, Bolton, Furby, Gurney, Highholme, Stevens, Roberts and Parker. G. S. Beesly was elected president, Broadhurst secretary and Roberts treasurer. The declared objects of the organisation were ‘to secure for Oxford an Independent political party affiliated to the national organisation; to enable questions in the city to be treated from the Labour standpoint, and by means of propoganda to spread the ideas of the party.’<sup>1</sup>

The formation of the branch was reported in the *Labour Leader*:

Classic Oxford can now claim it is up-to-date, as well as up in dates. For it now has achieved a real live – and kicking – branch of the ILP. The preliminary meeting on January 31st last, resulted in a fair number of names being given in, and all the preliminaries having been duly observed, a meeting to distribute members’ cards and rules will be held on February 14th. All socialists, attached or unattached are invited to communicate with H. Highholme, 5 Beaumont Buildings, St John St, Oxford.<sup>2</sup>

By March, according to the *Labour Leader*, the Oxford branch was in full swing ‘and the dons and professors will have to look out.’<sup>3</sup> The new organisation did not however isolate itself from sympathetic bodies. On 16 May, a joint meeting was held with the Trades Council and MLRA ‘with a view to working together for the purpose of contesting the municipal elections.’<sup>4</sup> In June, the branch affiliated to the national Labour Representation Committee.<sup>5</sup> In an attempt to win over popular support, the branch decided to hold open-air meetings during the summer, as the SDF had done ten years earlier. These were held at Martyrs’

Memorial. One, chaired by Harris, was addressed by G. H. Allen, 'the record holder of the walk from Lands End to John O'Groats, on the theme 'Back to the Land'; another by Bruce Glasier, the national chairman of the ILP.<sup>6</sup> In August, a meeting was held in support of the Unemployed Bill. 500 people listened to speeches from Robert Young and John Arnott of Ruskin College. 'About three shillings worth of literature was sold, and the collection (which was not too well done) realised 12s 2½d.'

The branch also organised a series of rambles to historic buildings including Iffley Church and All Saints Church. The guide was usually Harry Paintin. A report in the *Chronicle* on the visit to All Saints commented that Mr Paintin 'gave a table showing the prices of labour, and their purchasing power at the various dates indicated in his remarks on the old and new church.' The rambles appear to have been well attended, with 80 members and friends on the visit to Iffley.<sup>9</sup>

Later in August, the *Labour Leader* reported further on the branch's activities. Bruce Glasier had visited Oxford as 'a representative of the National ILP Council' and at a splendid meeting 'the audience listened with rapt attention and applauded heartily.' The meeting was followed by a garden party at Ruskin at which 'working men and their wives and many friends from Ruskin Hall were present.' The ILP branch was clearly helped by the Ruskin staff and students: the *Leader* reported after an unemployment demonstration that 'Sykes and other Ruskin students are also taking a more active part.' The same issue gave a brief account of the history of socialism in Oxford, which was fairly perceptive if somewhat partisan:

It is appropriate that under the shadow of the ancient towers of Oxford, where Ruskin and Morris dreamed their earliest socialist dreams, that the new socialist movement should set forth a living branch. Yet it must be confessed that hitherto the political cause of Socialism has taken but small root in the town. There have been branches of the old Socialist League and the SDF, but neither of them has survived. The remains of what was the SDF has become a group of the irreconcilable Socialist Labour Party and consists of only one or two individuals. The young ILP branch, however promises well. It has already got into friendly working lines with the trade unions, and it has presented Socialism in a form more likely to win understanding and sympathy than was the case with previous organisations.

In September, further progress from 'Classic Oxford' was reported. 500 had attended a talk by R. Clark of Ruskin on Municipalisation; George Belt, the Labour candidate for Hammersmith, had lectured on 'Socialism and Politics' and there had been a public debate on the 'Desirability of the Socialist State' – all in eight days: 'A very creditable record.' The branch was reported as being 'engaged in an attempt (along with the Trades Council and other bodies) to

compel the City Council to municipalise the tramways.’ There was also an appeal from the new secretary Bayliss for speakers. The Leader commented that the ‘Oxford branch is holding the fort nobly in the centre of philosophical doubt and social reaction.’

The year also witnessed significant trade union activity. A recently formed Society of Bookbinders was making steady progress. The Trades Council, after the Chinese labour campaign, attempted to produce a ‘fair list’ of firms and had a request to the MP to see a delegation concerning trade union law refused. The Shop Assistants were active in a campaign for shorter hours, stressing the need to amend the ‘Early Closing Act’ to make it more effective.<sup>13</sup> The Railway Servants were also agitating for shorter hours and better wages, assisted by Mr Young of Ruskin. The Great Western Railway Company however refused to give way.<sup>14</sup> The majority of trade unionists were at this time primarily concerned with conditions and wages and winning new members and were prepared to leave the struggle over municipal representation to those already involved.

The MLRA, Trades Council and ILP co-operated over the 1905 election. The Trades Council, who had had meetings during the year with the ILP to discuss action to force the city council to take over the tramways, nominated their secretary Harris as a candidate, and forwarded his name to the MLRA. They also agreed to pay £1 towards his election costs. Blake proposed that the Trades Council should itself form a Labour Representation Committee. The latter proposal was however deferred so delegates could consult their unions. Again, no action was taken. The MLRA and ILP agreed to run Broadhurst in South ward and Harris in West ward where the Liberals were the only opposition. In North ward the situation was complicated by a by-election for one vacancy to be held two weeks before the usual election. It was agreed to run Brownjohn as an Independent in this contest, while the Liberals selected King, the Co-op president and former Labour candidate, to run as a ‘progressive’ in the November contest. The *Chronicle* was pleased by this arrangement:

It may be hoped that all sections of progressives are beginning to realise – though perhaps the lesson has not been fully learned yet – that the aim which they have in common can only be attained by mutual concessions and by united action, and that if official liberals think that the liberal vote can be dispensed with, or the labour organisers act on the belief that they can return their candidates without the help of the liberals, there will be no progressive majority on the City Council. On the other hand, the Progressive votes can carry everything before them if they were to exercise their full strength. If they had done so in the past, Oxford would have been a far more advanced municipality than it is today.<sup>20</sup>

Although the *Chronicle* also called for a compromise in West ward, responsibility for the situation was seen as Labour’s for ‘ostentatiously proclaiming in

advance that they intended to run candidates of their own.' The paper called for the withdrawal of the Labour candidate 'accompanied by an understanding as to future elections, by which some larger and more direct Labour representation on the city council might be assured.'

Brownjohn had difficulties in winning support for his contest. The first meeting had to be cancelled due to poor attendance while there were only 20 at the second, Ball and Carlyle being notable by their absence. Brownjohn was bottom of the poll with 198 votes. Two weeks later, the story was repeated. Harris came bottom in West ward with only 181 votes, to be attacked by the Liberals for letting a Tory in. Broadhurst withdrew his nomination in South ward. King as a 'progressive' won votes but still came bottom. The Labour candidates were consistent in their lack of success, whether or not they worked with the Liberals. There seemed to be no electoral advantage in either strategy.

By the winter of 1905–06, Britain was emerging from the economic boom that followed the Boer War and heading into a recession. The Trades Council in Oxford was no longer able to report that 'employment was good'. Debates on unemployment were no longer academic. Unemployment provided the ILP with an issue upon which they could mobilise working class support. In February 1906, a meeting was organised together with the Christian Social Union, which was attended by 200. An 'unemployment committee' was established under the chairmanship of F. C. Humphrey. The meeting was the start of a major campaign:

This meeting of Oxford Unemployed Workers hereby publicly asserts their claim on the community (to the wealth and prosperity of which they, when employed, equally contribute) to be provided with the means of earning a livelihood, and calls upon the City Council of Oxford to acknowledge their right to the work by all means within their statutory power, and make such provision as will relieve the distress prevalent in times of unemployment.<sup>25</sup>

The meeting proposed a long list of public works, which included municipal housing, the establishment of a land colony, the mending of roads in winter rather than in the long vacation when employment was generally good, and a municipal eight-hour day. A petition was collected, and delegates elected to present it to the city council. Most of the delegates were new participants in labour agitation. The majority were no doubt unemployed and represent a new type of labour leadership in Oxford – J. Bracknall, W. Hall, Arkell, Ballinger, and Pearce were chosen in addition to Humphrey and Broadhurst of the ILP.<sup>26</sup>

The Council responded by adopting some of the proposals and by co-opting four new members, including Harris, onto the existing committee established to implement the Unemployed Workmen Act. The ILP's committee was then expanded to include Trades Council delegates. Chaired by Frederick Charles of

the ILP, who had previously been active in the Socialist League, the committee consisted of Humphrey, who acted as secretary, Frimbley of the Trades Council, and Blake and Storey of the ILP.

The committee was addressed by Carlyle who, following a series of talks on unemployment for the CSU, had become something of an expert on the subject. Carlyle argued vehemently that unemployment was not due to something in the character of the unemployed, but to social conditions, an approach which no doubt agreed with that of the ILP. The May meeting agreed to campaign for a number of aims:

- 1) The amendment of the Unemployed Workers Act to give power to national or local authorities to take such action as will enable them to place useful works within the reach of all.
- 2) The voting of money from the national exchequer necessary to finance farm colonies and other works for dealing with unemployment.
- 3) Putting in hand of works of utility in order to give employment to the unemployed, such as afforestation, reclamation of land, and other similar national undertakings.
- 4) The issuing of reasonable regulations by the Local Government Board.<sup>28</sup>

In October, the CSU joined the committee, and drew up a detailed report on the unemployment situation in Oxford, district by district, which was adopted in February 1907. Carlyle was clearly using his position to support the aims of the labour movement. During Lent 1906, he organised a series of addresses on social questions. In the first, on 'The Church and the Labour Party', he argued that the church should not stand aside from the party's struggles: 'The Church should recognise that these principles of the Labour Party were its own principles.' He continued the campaign the following year. In March 1907, William Beveridge, then a don at University College, gave a talk on unemployment. In August 1907, the Bishop of Birmingham presided over a meeting in Exeter College on 'The duty of the Church in Social Reform.'<sup>32</sup>

## CHAPTER 20

# ILP Propaganda and the Clarion Cycling Club, 1906–1908

The unemployment campaign undoubtedly helped the ILP to grow. At the first AGM in February 1906, F. E. Blake was elected president, W. Roberts treasurer and Miss Colegrave secretary, with Humphrey, Wells, Storey, Bayliss, Cattle, F. Brown, Davies and Highholme elected onto the committee.<sup>1</sup> By March, they were meeting every week. Dennis Hird, the principal of Ruskin, usually participated in the proceedings, either as chairman or speaker. At one meeting, he commented that ‘the fact that a Labour Party has established itself in Oxford alone was bordering on the miraculous.’<sup>2</sup> In April, an appeal from J. Davies, propaganda secretary, appeared in the *Leader*: ‘Capable voluntary speakers wanted; hospitality provided. Now orators! Who says a weekend in the beautiful city of towers and spires?’<sup>3</sup>

In the same month, a debate was held with the St Aldates Debating Society with J. Taylor of Ruskin proposing ‘That Socialism is Desirable’, a proposal that was carried by 20 votes to 19 with many members undecided.<sup>4</sup> In May, there was a debate with the University Fabian Society on Class War.<sup>5</sup> The branch also met every Tuesday at 8 p.m. at the City Restaurant in Cornmarket. At one meeting, Dennis Hird spoke on ‘Is Socialism on the side of the virtues?’<sup>6</sup> At another, Reverend Spence, vicar of St Frideswide’s, spoke on ‘The State and the Education of Children.’<sup>7</sup> The previous summer’s open-air meetings were repeated, since the secretary felt that they were ‘the most fruitful way of getting at the ordinary man in the street.’<sup>8</sup> On 3 June, Miss Gawthorpe of the National Union of Teachers and a member of the Leeds ILP spoke at Martyrs’ Memorial, and then met members at a reception given at the house of Mr and Mrs Fred Charles.<sup>9</sup> On 10 June, H. Barrett of London spoke on ‘Objections to Labour Considered’;<sup>10</sup> on 17 June, J. Arnott of Ruskin spoke on ‘The meaning of the Labour Party.’<sup>11</sup> This was followed by J. Taylor on ‘Socialism – Its Aims and Needs.’<sup>12</sup> On 8 July, Margaret Bondfield of the Shop Assistants Union lectured on unemployment and ‘The evils of our present industrial and competitive system’, to remedy which she proposed ‘a commonwealth based on the nationalisation of land and industrial capital.’<sup>13</sup> In August, P. C. Hoffman, also of the shop assistants, lectured to 400 people on the theme ‘From the Capitalist

Jungle to the Municipal meadow.<sup>14</sup> The Martyrs' Memorial meetings attracted people from outside Oxford and led to the establishment of ILP branches in the county. In June, a branch was formed in Banbury and had 80 members by September, when an Abingdon branch was set up.<sup>15</sup> Speakers were exchanged with the Swindon ILP. On 8 September, the Oxford branch sent speakers to Bicester, Abingdon and Banbury.<sup>16</sup>

Balfour's Government resigned in December 1905. Parliament was quickly dissolved so the country went to the polls in January 1906. Oxford soon found itself caught up in the progressive enthusiasm that was sweeping the country. The Oxford Labour leaders however played little part in the campaign, although both Buy and Paintin were present at the meeting at which the Liberals adopted George Whale as their candidate to fight the sitting member, Valentia.<sup>17</sup> The working classes of Oxford were by no means solidly behind Whale: when he was defeated by only 100 votes, the *Chronicle* commented that among the reasons for the defeat was the 'adherence to the Conservative Party of a certain number of people of the poorest class, especially in the Friars and St Aldates districts.'<sup>18</sup>

During 1906, the MLRA made another attempt to push the Trades Council into action. In January, they wrote a letter proposing the formation of an organisation 'to promote the direct representation of labour on public bodies.'<sup>19</sup> In March, the Trades Council received Ball and Lees-Smith who tried to persuade them to take Labour representation into their own hands.<sup>20</sup> The Council could then, 'if they thought fit, invite the help of those outside the ranks of organised labour'. Ball argued that 'the workers themselves should be the foundation of labour representation and not leave it to those outside their ranks'.

Many trades council delegates were not however convinced. Some argued that it was not within the power of their unions 'to use their funds for the purposes under discussion'. Again, a committee was formed to consider the matter. This time it comprised Frimbley, Keefe, Richardson, Harris, Goode, Piper and Humphries.<sup>21</sup> In March, the committee suggested the matter be referred back to the individual trades unions. Blake and Humphries thought that the Trades Council should itself draw up a scheme, but their proposal was lost by seven votes to two. The council did however agree to increase the affiliation fee to 2p per quarter per member, to help pay towards election expenses.<sup>22</sup>

By their April meeting, the Trades Council had received replies from only two unions: the shop assistants unanimously supported the Trades Council taking on Labour representation, while the builders' labourers were 'dead against'.<sup>23</sup> The secretary then wrote to all the unions requesting a definite response of for or against the proposal – a delegation, consisting of Frimbley, Blake and Harris, would visit unions if necessary. At the August meeting, a proposal from Blake and Piper that the Council formally declare for Labour Representation on all public bodies was carried by 10 votes to two. A deputation from the ILP, who were seeking a joint arrangement for the coming local elections, was also

received. The deputation's members, Storey and Highholme, however made it clear that the ILP had already selected their candidates. After questions, they left the meeting, and a proposal from Blake that the Trades Council should join the ILP 'in running candidates ... providing a satisfactory programme can be arranged, and suitable candidates obtained' was carried. Seven delegates voted for the proposal, while nine abstained.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, the Oxford ILP continued to flourish. A Mayday festival drew 130 people. Arnott of Ruskin was sent as delegate to the ILP national conference at Stockton-on-Tees.<sup>25</sup> In the summer, more meetings were held at Martyrs' Memorial, including a talk by J. Smyth of Jarrow on the 'labour and socialist movement', at which a resolution concerning Russia was passed.<sup>26</sup> In August, a resolution protesting against the Government's use of force in dealing with the Belfast strike was carried.<sup>27</sup> At the last open-air meeting of the series in November, Fred Bramley spoke to 2,000 people on 'Socialism and Progress'. According to the Leader, 'the meeting was rather noisy, the 'Varsity element being especially unruly.'<sup>28</sup> Some speakers were clearly having difficulty in being heard, for in July, the secretary appealed: 'Members are urged not to enter into discussion on the meeting-ground, as the effect of addresses is often lost in this way. When meeting is closed please vanish.'<sup>29</sup> In August, an ILP branch was set up in Headington but, since it had only four members, it had to meet at Brown's house 'until ... strong enough to get a place of its own.'<sup>30</sup> The branch does not appear to have survived very long. The ILP's activities were not restricted to propaganda meetings; the branch had an important social function. In September, Fred and Charlotte Charles gave another reception, this time for 600 socialists, co-operators and their families.<sup>31</sup> In August, the branch held a picnic at Wytham Woods at which 'some 42 enjoyed a rare tea al fresco.'<sup>32</sup>

The socialists' social activity was not however based solely on the ILP but also on the Clarion Cycling Club that was set up in April 1907 and survived for two years due to the enthusiasm of its secretary, E. Lea of 21 Walton Street. Before the club had made its first trip, which was delayed by poor weather, Lea was advocating Oxford as the centre for a Cycle Meet – 'It's central and there could be no better place with its river scenery and its colleges.'<sup>33</sup> Lea was clearly carried away by the whole idea, and his enthusiasm pours out of his reports in the *Clarion*:

Can a man get his head fuddled with anything else but beer? Echo answers yes. Spirits (liquid form) and Clarion Cycling Clubs. That is my state at present. But though my head is fuddled the deed is done. We met and conquered. Nine turned up, and out we ran into the cowslips and slideslips to Nuneham, and there we formed up and elected officers. Mr Storey as head surrag, myself as serathattery, and five committee. We passed rules, and took all subscriptions. Have altogether 13 names down, and hope for more next Sunday.<sup>34</sup>

His enthusiasm continued throughout the summer:

The Child is growing nicely. Today we numbered thirteen, but in spite of that unlucky number, made three new members and two other likely ones. The run was enjoyed by all, and the fellowship idea is catching. We had a visitor from South London, Comrade Goodman, who gave us a thumping address on C.C.C. matters. We shall be pleased to see all Clarionettes that drift our way.

Another bakers dozen had a jolly run, and at Hopcroft Holt met the Banbury comrades. There is going to be an epidemic of C.C.C. here, and then we will have Oxford for an Easter Meet.

At John Hampden's monument at Chalgrove we swore to keep faith, and led by Comrade Storey, gave a lightening lecture on 'John Hampden.'

Once again the sun shone, and those who turned up enjoyed what those who did not missed. Next Sunday a scheme will be brought for a prize for the best attendance.

The most successful run of the year – to Sutton Courtenay. Comrades from North, East and West turned up to look at us, and we shall be pleased to see others. A true Clarion welcome to all.

Quantity small but quality good, last Sunday and a very nice run it was. Whose for William Morris' place next Sunday?

Our first day run was quite a success. As Kelmscott Manor House is now open to visitors, we changed our lore to Wantage, the Land of Alfred the Great.

Fair weather and a fair muster for the Baldons last Sunday. Exciting freewheeling contests took place amongst the rear guard; results not out yet. But one other result was talked of. Hush! Who said 'Jarow'?

A fair run to Charlton-on-Otmoor, and although an I.L.P. meeting, and we all I.L.Pers there, the Oxford C.C.C. can fairly claim to have had their baptism of fire at Bicester on thursday, as it practically ran the show.

Had a thanksgiving on Colne Valley, and collected 8s for van.<sup>35</sup>

The Club started up again the following March. Of a visit to Woodstock and Blenheim, Lea reported that 'We met our Waterloo on the return journey, having to battle against a very strong head wind and cold, pitiless rain.'<sup>36</sup> In April, it was reported that students from Ruskin were joining the club.<sup>37</sup> In the same month, the trips began to serve a propaganda function as well as being just for fun. Bayliss reported of a visit to Hacthampton: 'Clarion leaflets were distributed round the village, and we are going to make that a feature of our runs.'<sup>38</sup>

In June, the club set up shop at the ILP Headquarters in Alma Place: 'We have had a splendid board put up outside our headquarters and noone can come into the City without seeing our 'Clarion' in bright gold letters.'<sup>39</sup> Runs

were held with the Oxford Wheelers and the University Fellowship, the latter arriving 'in a motor lorry.'<sup>40</sup> After a trip to Chalgrove, the group 'formed a boating party and went round as far as King's Weir to select a spot for our summer camp.'<sup>41</sup> The camp however proved unsuccessful and was closed prematurely 'as the simple life does not appeal to the majority of our members.' The club does not seem to have recovered from the failure of the camp and appears to have collapsed soon afterwards.

## CHAPTER 2 I

# Labour Divided, 1906–1909

When one of the West ward Liberal councillors, Kingerlee, was elected an alderman, the ILP ran for the vacancy, although the MLRA had decided not to contest. The candidate was a printer, W. Brayne, whose name provided the slogan ‘The Council wants a Brayne’. He was endorsed by the Trades Council, but was run as an ILP candidate. His agent J. Taylor, after the election, ‘expressed gratification at the result of their first fight’ and added that ‘the foundation of labour representation has been laid, and on this structure would be built.’ The ILP’ers thus disassociated themselves from the previous efforts of the MLRA. The campaign was not however a very good start for this new independent approach, for Brayne polled only 253 votes, and the Tory was returned. The *Chronicle* attacked Brayne in an editorial, while a correspondent added ‘To the ILP with its cut and dried schemes for establishing the millennium at someone else’s expense, their achievement is as simple as A.B.C.’<sup>1</sup> In September, the Trades Council had a special meeting to consider the following proposal for a Labour Representation Committee:

- 1) Name Labour Representation Committee.
- 2) Constitution The committee shall be composed of two representatives from each society affiliated to the Council.
- 3) Candidates Any other organisation shall be entitled to nominate one or more candidates, and a nomination fee of £2 shall be paid by the Union for each candidate accepted by the committee.
- 4) Funds The funds for election purposes shall be raised on voluntary lines by the committee.

The programme was carried by seven votes to two abstentions.<sup>2</sup> The Trades Council’s action however failed to heal the split between the labour leaders. In November 1906, the ILP ran Harris in West ward. He came bottom and only antagonised the Liberals.<sup>3</sup> The Trades Council candidate in South ward was an engineer, J. Giles, who was supported by the Liberals but not by the ILP; he still came last. The ILP explained their defeat with the rather weak excuse that ‘most of the workers were either ill, away or exceptionally busy.’ The only local success was the election of two ILP’ers to the Council in Banbury.<sup>4</sup>

The Trades Council campaign had clearly run badly, for in January it was felt necessary to invite two representatives from each trade union to join the labour representation committee.<sup>5</sup> In April, it was agreed to send a delegation to each union to win their support.<sup>6</sup> By July, the Engine Drivers and Firemen and the Labourers Union were in support. The engineers again nominated Giles as South ward candidate.<sup>7</sup> In August, it was agreed to co-operate with the ILP, and ten delegates were appointed to a joint campaign committee. The Council also agreed to pay £6 towards Giles' expenses.<sup>8</sup> The ILP however were not at all happy about Giles, and at the end of September wrote a letter saying they could not support him and were therefore dissolving the joint committee. After some discussion, the Trades Council agreed to proceed with the contest, since the printers had donated £3.<sup>9</sup> It would appear that the ILP's suspicion of Giles was justified for the Liberals again helped by only running two candidates, and in a campaign speech, according to the *Chronicle*, Giles 'expressly disclaimed sympathy with the socialist views expressed by some of the wilder Independent Labour men.'<sup>10</sup> Giles was supported by Carlyle, Frimbley and Harris, but the ILPers were not in evidence. At one meeting, Giles was attacked for not being a working man, but 'in business.' He was accused of being 'a capitalist in every sense of the word.' Despite the Liberal support, Giles again came bottom of the poll.<sup>11</sup>

The ILP's contribution to the 1907 contest, given their hostility to Giles, was to send a questionnaire to all candidates. They added a number of proposals to the familiar demands, advocating the abolition of fees in elementary schools, the retention by the council of all land and property in its possession, the direct employment of labour as opposed to contracting by the Council and the feeding of schoolchildren in need – a clearly socialist programme.<sup>12</sup>

At the Trades Council meeting following the election, Giles criticised the ILP and considered the Trades Council had made a mistake in the past in being too closely identified with the socialists. The dispute continued.<sup>13</sup> In January, the ILP nominated Brownjohn as candidate in a North ward by-election. At the Trades Council, Binham, a Lib-Lab, proposed that 'we do not recognise the candidature of Mr Brownjohn and take no steps in this matter.' This was toned down by Bayliss to read 'We take no responsibility, financially or otherwise for Mr Brownjohn's candidature, but recommend his candidature to the burgesses of North ward.'<sup>14</sup>

The Trades Council had by now moved away from backing the ILP's dogmatic position. King, now an active 'progressive', commented at the 1907 AGM that the Council was 'not tied to any party or creed.'<sup>15</sup> Harris felt that 'the principal object to Trade Union organisation is to rescue men and women from their isolation and selfishness, to try and induce them to recognise the commodities of one towards the other.'<sup>16</sup> The MLRA as a coalition of interests had clearly collapsed. The Trades Council decided to 'take over' its work, a role that the ILP had clearly seen as its prerogative.<sup>17</sup>

In November 1908, the Trades Council ran two candidates: Binham, a compositor, in East ward,<sup>18</sup> with Harris again contesting West ward. They both received the nominal support of the ILP, which is a little surprising given Binham's actions only a few months earlier.<sup>19</sup>

Binham had previously been secretary of the East Oxford Liberal Club. The *Chronicle*, wishing he had run as a Liberal, backed him, though refused to endorse his views, commenting that he had 'chosen to walk the path which is perilously near the edge of the chasms of socialism. He cannot be in sympathy with the wild views many of his chief supporters expressed.'<sup>20</sup> Binham no doubt raised a few Liberal eyebrows when he announced that the 'only true remedy' to the housing question 'was that the workers should receive a fair proportion of the wealth they created' but no doubt put their minds at rest by writing to the *Chronicle* denying that he was a socialist.<sup>21</sup> In his denial, however, he expounded a kind of socialism that attracted much Liberal support: 'If to advocate better wages for the poorer paid workers, better housing, just dealing by the abolition of sweating and the like, and the fulfillment by local bodies of the duties entrusted to them by the state is socialism, then I plead guilty.'<sup>22</sup>

Binham went as far as to ask for his supporters to give their second and third votes to the Liberals.<sup>23</sup> He still came bottom, though he polled 690 votes.<sup>24</sup> The Typographical Association complained, and Binham was summoned to the next Trades Council meeting to explain his action. He was heavily criticised and the Trades Council agreed to ensure that future candidates did not support candidates of other parties.<sup>25</sup> In the following year, Binham was to support the Liberal candidates against a Labour candidate. In the West ward, Harris again antagonised the Liberals and came fourth out of six candidates.<sup>26</sup>

Although still involved in election campaigns, the ILP concentrated its energies on other activities. In July 1908, an office was opened in Alma Place, St. Clement's by Pete Curran, the recently elected MP for Jarrow. The opening coincided with a Conference of Trade Unionists in Oxford and was attended by Ben Tillett. The branch now claimed a membership of 60.<sup>27</sup> A social club and a library of socialist literature was formed. More meetings were held at Martyrs' Memorial: J. Ballantyne from Glasgow spoke on 'Socialism and Tariff Reform'<sup>28</sup> while Frank Organ from Swindon delivered an attack on Liberalism.<sup>29</sup> However, it was the unemployment issue that continued to dominate the ILP's activities. In October, Payne, one of the Banbury councillors, called for a parliamentary bill to make it compulsory for the local authorities to provide work for a living wage for the unemployed.<sup>30</sup> Together with some trade unionists, the ILP formed a Right to Work Committee, and sent a delegation to the mayor to ask for immediate steps to relieve suffering.<sup>31</sup> The Council responded by setting up a register of men seeking employment, at the Corn Exchange.<sup>32</sup> By February 1909, there were 829 names on the list. The Lord Mayor also established a fund to undertake public works and to provide unemployment relief. By February, the fund contained £230. The Council organised a programme of

public works, the first of which was the widening of Warneford Lane, which led to a dispute with the Morrell family over who owned the road.<sup>33</sup>

The Lord Mayor appealed for more funds and the Council appealed to employers for help. The success of this is shown in the response of the Electric Light Company, who reported that 'The Chief Engineer has been requested to put in hand immediately certain capital works involving casual labour which would otherwise not have been undertaken for two or three months.'<sup>34</sup> By May, 900 relief tickets had been issued, ranging in value from 1/6 to 5/6.<sup>35</sup> The *Chronicle's* comment that the 'Council has given substantial help to the workless' seems justified.<sup>36</sup> The initiative seems to have come, not from the mayor, but from the Unemployment Committee, of which both Harris and Carlyle were members. The Council was nevertheless accused of inactivity. The Trades Council had wanted a public meeting to boost the relief fund.<sup>37</sup> Fox of the ILP attacked the Council, since only 220 of the 800 on the register had been found work. He led a march of the unemployed around the city streets in January, led by a banner which proclaimed 'Oxford Unemployed. The Right to Work and Live.'<sup>38</sup>

There was however little evidence of further unemployment agitation until a meeting on 'Unemployment and Labour Politics' was held in the Town Hall in March. The speaker was Keir Hardie. The meeting saw a repetition of the student-socialist clashes of the early 1890s. A group of students had decided to use the meeting as an opportunity for a 'rag.' According to the *Chronicle*, 'A body of undergraduates exerted themselves to the utmost to prevent the chairman being heard ... Almost at the outset the discharge of Chinese crackers and the sounding of motor horns, interspersed with groans and cheers, indicated that the proceedings were likely to be more than usually lively.' Stewards tried to eject the main offenders, which caused a series of free fights. The junior proctor went to the platform to appeal to the students, for the sake of the University's honour, to respect freedom of speech. This appeal had little effect, for when Keir Hardie stood up to speak, he faced a barrage of oranges, apples and rotten eggs. The students tried to rush the platform, but the police intervened to stop them. However, although the meeting ended in rousing cheers for the labour movement, its liveliness appears to have been due to student rowdyism rather than to civic concern for the unemployed.<sup>39</sup>

Keir Hardie wrote an article for the *Labour Leader* front page giving his version of the meeting under the headline 'A BRUSH WITH THE RAGGERS'. He told how he had received a letter on arriving at Oxford station which said, 'Don't come, serious riots expected; meeting postponed', but realised it was a hoax. He remarked how the clashes during the meeting were good humoured: 'Young men seemed to push each other for the satisfaction it seemed to give them.' He said he had been told 'that the two principal leaders in the rowdy element were a young aristocrat ... and the son of a prominent Liberal member of Parliament.'<sup>40</sup> G. D. H. Cole later told a story of how he had hired quarrymen

from Headington to act as ‘ushers,’ because the Tories had hired the Bullingdon Boys from East Oxford to break up the meeting.<sup>41</sup>

The unemployment agitation soon died down. The ILP-led activism was replaced by lectures on Poor Law Reform, at which Sydney and Beatrice Webb advocated the proposals of the minority report of the Poor Law Commission.<sup>42</sup>

## CHAPTER 22

# Labour and Politics, 1909–1914

In March 1909, the ILP requested affiliation to the Trades Council, but the president, Piper, ruled that they were ineligible.<sup>1</sup> The ILP did not however give up trying to work with them. In April, the secretary of their 'Socialist and Labour Parliamentary and Municipal Election Committee', W. Shepherd, wrote to the Trades Council asking for representatives for a joint committee to plan the Labour campaign for the November elections.<sup>2</sup> By May, the ILP and Trades Council Committee had reached an agreement:

- 1) That all candidates be designated Labour candidates.
- 2) That not more than one candidate be brought out in West ward.
- 3) That the Trades Council advise its members to support all Labour candidates.
- 4) That the Trades Council only guarantee to finance the West ward.
- 5) That no candidate be supported who refuses to sign a declaration.
- 6) That the West ward be left to the Trades Council but that the whole of the workers and speakers of the four wards be interchangeable.
- 7) That the Trades Council delegates agree to distribute copies of the Oxford Leader in West ward.<sup>3</sup>

From the spring of 1909 through to early 1911, the central issue in Oxford politics was Lloyd George's budget and the ensuing constitutional crisis over the role of the House of Lords. For the first time since the education controversy of 1902–1903, local elections were dominated by issues of 'imperial politics'. Both the ILP and the Trades Council remained outside the controversy, which in Oxford was a clear conflict between Liberals and Conservatives. In July 1909, there were by-elections in South and West wards. The Tories accused the local Liberals of supporting Lloyd George's 'socialistic' attack on property. The *Chronicle* supported the budget but denied that the Liberals were socialists.<sup>4</sup>

Given the Liberal-Tory conflict, the Labourites made little impact on the November elections. Despite a demonstration in favour of the Labour candidates, one in each ward, organised by the ILP, the Labourites were far from united and were seen as peripheral to the contest.<sup>5</sup> For the first time, they appeared to be short of issues, and resorted to attacking the mayor for holding

public receptions instead of helping the unemployed, and demanding public baths in every ward.<sup>6</sup> Their candidate in South ward was an ILPer, Adam Briscoe, who was a gasworker. His campaign was based on the unemployment issue, but his attacks on his Liberal opponent tended to rebound. In West ward, Harris was again a candidate, this time aided by the Liberals. Frederick Willoughby, a gardener, stood in North ward, while a bootmaker, Walter Willis, contested West ward. Nevertheless, despite a joint campaign by the ILP and the Trades Council, Labour's claim to be the only real progressive party fell somewhat flat as all four candidates came bottom of their respective polls, which led the *Chronicle* to comment that unless the Labour Party's tactics were radically changed, 'there is not the slightest chance of any of its nominees entering the Council chamber.'<sup>7</sup>

The 1909 municipal election was the last time before the war that the Labourites contested all four wards. With the ending of the unemployment agitation, the ILP disappeared from local political life. It ignored the controversies of 1910. The Trades Council played no role in them either, although Liberal candidates in both that year's general elections addressed meetings of trade unionists. The history of the Oxford working classes between 1910 and 1914 is the story of the development of militancy in the trade union movement. Oxford had its share of strikes. There was a coal strike in 1912, which led to the cancellation of trains and threatened Oxford's millenary celebrations. The spring of 1913 brought a tramway strike, which became a *cause célèbre* as students ragged the strikers while Liberal dons made sympathetic pronouncements. The strike failed because the tramway company found new men to run the trams, forcing the strikers to find employment elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> In September 1913, 400 building workers came out on strike. This time it was the employers who gave way and the labourers won a wage increase.<sup>9</sup> While this chapter does not attempt a study of the strikes in Oxford, it is clear however that, during this period, the Trades Council focused its energy on supporting strikers and stopping their children from starving.

The Trades Council did not however completely forget about local politics. In April 1910, Ludlow, the vice-president, proposed a conference to establish a Labour Representation Committee, with representatives from trade unions, the Cooperative and the ILP. The proposal was carried by 12 votes to three.<sup>10</sup> A conference in July agreed a set of rules,<sup>11</sup> and in August, the Trades Council decided to contest the coming elections, although the recent Osborne judgement restricting the collection of political contributions by unions meant that the campaign would be dependent on voluntary support.<sup>12</sup> The Trades Council wanted to contest West ward but could not find a suitable candidate.<sup>13</sup> The ILP then asked the Trades Council to support Ludlow who was running with their support. The Trades Council agreed, but a proposal to donate 10 shillings towards his election expenses was felt to be illegal and dropped.<sup>14</sup> Ludlow appears to have had little effective support from his fellow trade unionists and

came bottom of the poll, as did Briscoe whom the ILP ran in South ward. In November, Trades Council members joined a demonstration calling for the reversal of the Osborne judgement banning trade union contributions to political parties, which was addressed by the Labour MP, G. H. Roberts.<sup>15</sup>

The following year, the Trades Council again found itself unable to contest the elections without the ILP's support. A proposal to ask unions for support was dropped, and a joint committee with the ILP set up instead. Again, only Ludlow was willing to stand. However, this time the Trades Council put £6 towards his expenses.<sup>16</sup> Ludlow's programme included municipal housing, an end to council contracting, 25s per week for council employees and a fair wage clause, municipalisation of gas and electricity, electrification of the trams and the feeding of hungry schoolchildren. Ludlow was again bottom of the poll.<sup>17</sup> The Trades Council secretary reported that their representatives on the campaign committee 'did not seem to be doing their share of work'.<sup>18</sup> It was decided not to contest the North ward by-election in January, and the Council concluded that there was little trade union interest in municipal representation.<sup>19</sup> Ludlow again contested West ward in November 1912, this time without even the nominal support of the Trades Council.<sup>20</sup>

In September 1913, the Trades Council again decided to intervene, this time in support of both Harris and Ludlow. It was stressed that 'Trade Union principles are to be the standard of the election and not personal politics.' John Gallop, postal worker and ILPer, was also supported in East ward. Nevertheless, the three candidates all came bottom of the poll.<sup>21</sup> The dullness of the previous elections was only avoided by the appearance of William Shepherd, an insurance agent and formerly an ILP member, as a candidate for the explicitly marxist British Socialist Party in South ward. The names of his backers are unfamiliar; he may have had some connection with Ruskin College where his only campaign meeting was held. His proposals, which the *Chronicle* considered to 'savour of megalomania' included: 'Full secular and free education from the primary school to the university; an immediate increase of the employees' wages and an 8-hour day, the finding of useful work for all unemployed at trade union rates of wages and the municipalising of all things that can be municipalised.'<sup>22</sup>

The *Chronicle* felt that 'It is really refreshing to meet with ideas in a region usually so sterile as Oxford municipal politics, but I fear these Louis Blanc proposals will not catch on very rapidly with our unimaginative Oxford burghesses.'<sup>23</sup> Mr Shepherd's position was shown more clearly as a Mr Hodgson of Reading explained at the Ruskin meeting that the workers must be educated before 'the economic and industrial world could be transferred from capitalism to the socialist commonwealth.'<sup>24</sup> Shepherd's candidature, if not his ideals, did 'catch on' to a surprising extent since, no doubt partly due to the low poll, he missed election by only 28 votes.<sup>25</sup>

Following the election, the Trades Council appointed another committee to advise it as to the best method of securing labour representation on public

bodies.<sup>26</sup> In January, it was agreed to support Ludlow in the West ward by-election.<sup>27</sup> In the same month, the sub-committee's proposals were stated as such:

- 1) That East and West wards are contested in November.
- 2) The establishment of Labour Representation Committees for each ward of nine members each, with powers to co-opt from other trade unions. These committees to be responsible to the Trades Council.
- 3) A selection conference to be held in September, to take over the activities of the committees.
- 4) Unions would be asked to nominate candidates.
- 5) The ward committees were responsible for raising funds.
- 6) There would be an emergency Trades Council meeting if a by-election was called.<sup>28</sup>

The East ward committee consisted of the following delegates: Skidmore, Allen, Bushell, Surman, Scragg, Vivian, Gurden, Ward and Bayliss; the West ward one: Nobes, Isaacs, Stone, Roberts, Wareham, Harris, Ellis, Brennan, Bilcher, Edwards, Beaver, Clements, Miss Gomm and Miss Hulekins. This was the first time that the election organisation had been put on a ward basis.<sup>29</sup> In February, it was decided to rent committee rooms in both wards at a cost of 1s per evening.<sup>30</sup> In September, an anonymous donation of £15 towards the election fund was received.<sup>31</sup>

The Trades Council's new election machinery was not however to be put to the test as the municipal contests ended with the outbreak of war.<sup>32</sup> In May, the Trades Council had held a meeting at which they were addressed by Herr Sassenbach of the International Federation of Trade Unions, who talked about the need to oppose expenditure on armaments and how only wider education and greater democracy could prevent war. There was however no talk of a general strike when war broke out: Carlyle, as city rector, preached for unity in the face of international conflict, implying that trade unionists should now put patriotism before wage claims.<sup>33</sup> The British Socialist Party formed a citizens' committee and wrote to the Lord Mayor – 'We wish to give you the assurance that members of the party will assist you as far as possible in helping to mitigate all sufferings.'<sup>34</sup> Frimbley, as president of the Trades Council, wrote to the *Chronicle* to say that the Labour Party would not provoke election contests during the war.<sup>35</sup> The ILP remained silent.

## CHAPTER 23

# The Growth of a Socialist Tradition

The attempts of 'labour' to win representation on the Council were consistently unsuccessful, yet despite repeated election defeats, the struggle was pursued. The participants in the struggle can be divided into three broad groups: the sympathetic academics, the 'respectable' Lib-Lab trade unionists, and the socialist leaders who were conscious and proud of their class. There are three prominent participants who fit into the first category.

A. J. Carlyle had been a curate in the slums of Westminster before coming to Oxford, so it is probably there that he developed his interest in social problems. As city rector in Oxford, he played a major role in the public life of the city, being active in the Christian fraternity and the temperance movement as well as among labour leaders. One of his platforms was the Christian Social Union, whose Oxford branch he founded, and which no doubt combined his commitment to Christianity with his interest in social issues. He considered himself a socialist, but was a socialist of the Fabian kind, and continued to be welcome in Liberal circles. He was also a studious academic and produced the voluminous 'History of Medieval Political Theory in the West'. Carlyle died in 1942, his obituary in the *Oxford Magazine* presenting him as an ideal don: 'He was the centre of an ever-widening circle as he taught generation after generation of students the true meaning of university – intellectual study combined with practical concern for the conditions of one's neighbours and the great public issues of one's community.'<sup>1</sup>

Sidney Ball was a close friend of Carlyle. Carlyle wrote the obituary in the *Oxford Magazine* when he met an early death, commenting that 'there were few men in the country who were concerned with social progress and labour movements, whatever their political creed might be, who were not of his acquaintance.' Ball, fellow and later senior tutor at St John's, was a prominent Fabian, focusing on its more philosophical aspects rather than their practical consequences. His one Fabian pamphlet, published in 1896, was on the 'Moral Aspects of Socialism'.

Ball was clearly influenced by the ideas of Toynbee and Canon Barnett on the social problems of the working classes. While a student at Oxford, he was one of the first residents at Toynbee Hall in London's East End. Later in his life, he was one of the key figures in the establishment of a social studies course in

Oxford, and in the foundation of Barnett House. He was also deeply involved in the organisation of relief for Serbia during the Balkan Wars.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas Ball and Carlyle were members of Oxford's 'liberal establishment', Denis Hird was an anti-establishment figure. Originally an Oxford don, he resigned his position in 1886 'owing to reactionary changes that were introduced ... into the non-collegiate system.' He was ordained and became secretary of the Church of England Temperance Society, and the secretary to the London Police Court Mission. He was forced to resign from the latter post by Dr Temple, the Bishop of London, when it was discovered that he had joined the Social Democratic Federation. He was later appointed as the first principal of Ruskin Hall, when it was founded in 1899. Though he was popular with his students, the college's executive committee saw him as responsible for a certain lack of discipline, and after an inquiry, forced him to resign in 1909. This led to the famous student strike and the establishment by the rebels, who formed the Plebs League, of a rival college, which Hird supported. The clash between Fabian and Socialist ideologies was demonstrated by the fact that both Carlyle and Ball, together with a number of Labour MPs, were on the committee that sacked Hird.<sup>3</sup>

Of the other participants in the formation of a Labour Party in Oxford, less is known. The Lib-Labs William Gray<sup>4</sup> and George Hawkins,<sup>5</sup> the first Trades Council president, both became Liberal councillors, the former becoming chairman of the housing committee, an ardent supporter of the radical Frank Gray in the postwar elections, and eventually Lord Mayor.

Nothing more is heard of Jabez Clifford who stood unsuccessfully in East ward with Liberal backing. Others were more successful: William King was co-opted onto the Council during the War, and Fred Ludlow returned from the front to become the first elected Labour councillor in 1919.

Of the independent socialists like Shepherd, Piper, Harris and Broadhurst, little is known, for their lifelong struggles did not warrant obituaries in the local papers. The independent stand of some of the later Labour leaders was supported by some of the Ruskin students, many of whom had already had experience of socialist propaganda and labour organisation. Notable among the Ruskin participants in the Oxford ILP are Noah Ablett and Noah Rees, both of whom were later leading militants in the Miners Union of South Wales.<sup>6</sup>

Making judgements on the contributions of the various groups to the struggle for independent labour representation is even more difficult than piecing together a few biographical details about the participants. The SDF deserves the credit for being the first working class activists, with the exception of Bill Hines, to publicly advocate socialism. They no doubt appeared eccentric, yet they were clearly sincere. They thrived on conflict and when the mobs died down and the free speech issue was settled, they were no longer in evidence. There seems to be no continuity between the membership of the SDF of the 1890s and the BSP of the 1913 election campaign. Even those SDFers who were involved in the

Municipal Housing Association were not visible when the Municipal Labour Representation Association was established.

The Trades Council retained at least nominally the leadership of the labour movement throughout the period. Its strength tended to depend on the economic situation. Its politics also fluctuated, taking first an independent line, then working with the Liberals, then moving towards the position of the ILP. It was never dominated by either group.

The Trades Council was the first organisation to contest a local election in the labour interest. Its involvement in municipal politics continued up to the war, even if at times there was little interest in the issue among trade unionists. The Trades Council must however bear some of the responsibility for the failure to get representation on the city council for the labour interest, for despite endless prodding by both the MLRA and the ILP, the Trades Council failed to win the support of its members for its election campaigns. Time and time again, the issue of labour representation was referred back to trades unions; again and again, a committee was established to consider the matter further. The Trade Union movement, as a whole, seems to have lacked the enthusiasm that was necessary if success was to be possible.

The role of Carlyle and the Municipal Housing Association is important, for Carlyle focused on an issue which united the labour leaders. Housing drew the sympathy of the Liberals, but due to their minority position in Council, they were unable to satisfy working class demands. It was on the housing issue that the Municipal Labour Representation Association was established. However, the Tory control of Council eventually rebounded on the Housing Association, and consequently on the MLRA, for it became clear that no amount of pressure would make the Tories build housing for the working classes in the city. The Labour leaders and their sympathisers therefore turned to other issues, such as unemployment.

The academics of the Municipal Labour Representation Association never sought to take the leadership of the working class for themselves. They appear to have seen their role as encouraging the working-class leaders to take action themselves, as their repeated attempts to persuade the Trades Council to take up Labour representation demonstrate.

The ILP in Oxford was an organisation that owed nothing to Liberal academics. Founded by printing workers from the Clarendon Press, it was socialist and anti-Liberal from the start. The ILP consistently opposed the compromises with Liberalism that candidates sponsored by the Trades Council were prepared to make. However, it never won the formal leadership of Oxford's working classes. After the collapse of the MLRA, the ILP had to dispute with the Trades Council its right to contest local elections. In some elections, co-operation between the two groups was possible if not successful, while at other times, for example during Giles' contest in South ward in 1907, the labour movement was split in two.

It was not until the employment situation deteriorated that the ILP really prospered. It took up the leadership of the unemployment agitation, organising marches and public meetings. The Trades Council was sometimes used as a formal channel of communication in dealings with the mayor, but it was Harris who was co-opted on to the Council's Unemployment Committee and, together with Humphrey (both ILPers) who managed the campaign and set up the 'Right to Work Committee'. However, in the summer of 1909, the employment situation improved, and the ILP agitation gave way to Fabian-sponsored lectures where the Webbs advocated the minority report of the Poor Law Commission.

After a period of comparative inactivity during the constitutional conflicts of 1909–1911, both the Trades Council and the ILP reappear, involved in the wave of strikes that took place in Oxford in the years before the war. Industrial militancy diverted the attention of the Labour leaders away from municipal contests and with good reason. The outbreak of war put both local politics and trade unionism into the background, however, as the labour movement united to defend the Empire.



## PART 3

# Labourism



## CHAPTER 24

# Oxford Labour and Politics During the First World War

The outbreak of war in the first week of August 1914 caught the Labour movement in Oxford by surprise. The most immediate consequence of the war was that the building dispute which had brought 400–500 men out on strike in July was put to arbitration, the builders returning to work.<sup>1</sup> The response of the labour movement seems to have been truly patriotic in that they were prepared to put aside their own interests as workers in order to defend the country against wicked foreigners. Only the British Socialist Party, though supporting the war, sought to use the crisis as an opportunity to restate its demands. Shepherd, secretary of the Oxford branch, wrote to the *Chronicle* calling for the operation of the Unemployed Workmen Act to keep down unemployment, for the provision of meals for needy schoolchildren, for an adequate milk supply for infants, and for the control of food supplies and prices.<sup>2</sup>

The city council established an Emergency Committee to deal with the problems expected to arise from the city being in a state of war. The mayor appealed to employers not to dismiss employees and suggested part-time working as an alternative to redundancies.<sup>3</sup> There seems to have been an assumption that war would lead to a slackening in trade and an increase in unemployment. By September, the committee was meeting weekly, its energies being concentrated on monitoring the employment situation and the problem of voluntary workers replacing paid labour.<sup>4</sup> In October, unemployment was said to have increased slightly; in November, it was reported that painters were out of work; by December, unemployment was decreasing, and in March 1915, a shortage of labour was reported, though there was still some unemployment among women workers.<sup>5</sup> In November 1915, the absence of unemployment was noted, though it was considered necessary to subsidise lodging-house keepers, since so few students were in residence.<sup>6</sup>

There seems to have been little or no opposition to the war in Oxford during the first few months, though there was some criticism by radicals of the Government's pre-war foreign policy, and concern at the excesses of patriotic fervour demonstrated by the press and the civic leaders. Two weeks after the declaration of war, A. J. Carlyle, the City Rector, gave a talk to the East Oxford Adult School in Alma Place on 'the restoration of the unity of European Civilisation'.

The *Chronicle* reported that 'the speaker appealed to his hearers not to be too swayed by war fever or the reports of the horrors of war which are sure to circulate freely but urged respect for enemies.' Walter Binham, the former labour candidate, also spoke, but his sentiments were not recorded.<sup>7</sup> Carlyle however never opposed the war; by May 1915, he was preaching the need for unity and restraint of criticism, implying that the trade unions should not pursue wage claims during the crisis.<sup>8</sup>

The only other evidence of local concern about the moral aspects of war is in the formation of an Oxford branch of the Union for Democratic Control, which sought democratic control of foreign policy. The branch was clearly student-based, its two key members being H. Harwood of Balliol and R. Graham of Magdalen. Edmund Morel, Congo Reform campaigner and founder of the UDC spoke at the inaugural meeting.<sup>9</sup> In October 1915, there was a debate on Democratic Control at the Oxford Union, and in December, a debate on 'peace conditions' in which Harwood and Graham participated.<sup>10</sup> It was only with the threat of conscription that opposition to the war, or at least opposition to forced participation in it, developed. In August 1915, in response to a letter from Ludlow, its vice-chairman, the Trades Council discussed conscription, and with one dissenter agreed to oppose its introduction. The Trades Council also registered a protest against the campaigns for conscription of the Northcliffe press and the National Service League.<sup>11</sup>

In November 1915, the Trades Council protested that Mr Cowley, who sat on the Recruiting Tribunal to 'represent workers,' was not representing their interests.<sup>12</sup> Opposition to conscription in Oxford was not however centred on the labour movement but on a group of radicals and socialists among the small number of students who remained in Oxford. In June 1915, 80 undergraduates signed a letter to the *Chronicle* registering their opposition to conscription.<sup>13</sup> In February 1916, leaflets opposing conscription from 'Liberty Press' were found in the city.<sup>14</sup> With the establishment of the Oxford Military Service Tribunal in March 1916, the extent of conscientious objection to the war was clearly demonstrated. The tribunals were held in public, and for the first few months drew the attention of the patriotic establishment. Many of the cases, all of which were carefully reported in the local press, gained a certain notoriety, and were clearly a topic of discussion among the members of Oxford's civic leadership.<sup>15</sup>

Most of the cases before the Tribunal were employees claiming exemption from war service on the grounds that they had dependants, or that their job was of national importance. Many of the city's leading employers appeared to give evidence on behalf of their employees. The majority of the conscientious objectors were students, many of them socialists or theological students. Graham from the UDC was exempted from combatant service, as was Albert Murray, the secretary of the Oxford Student Christian Movement; both had wanted absolute exemptions and appealed. Murray was eventually found unfit for service and discharged. The case of Albert Morrison, a student who claimed

that war was inconsistent with Christianity, led to an interesting theological exchange. Lieutenant Baldry, the army's representative on the Tribunal, who became something of a local hero and even considered standing for parliament, asked Morrison whether he agreed with the passage in the Bible, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' and was rather put out when Morrison quoted back the rest of the verse: 'but I say unto you that you resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.'

Of the socialists who applied for exemption, Raymond Postgate of St John's, future son-in-law and biographer of Labour MP and *Daily Herald* editor George Lansbury, was exempted from combatant service only, lost an appeal, was arrested, fined 40 shillings but, on refusing to pay, was sent to prison for a month. David Belloch, also of St John's, claimed to be an 'international socialist' and had his sincerity attested to by Sidney Ball, the college's senior tutor and Fabian socialist. Belloch was exempted from combatant service only, had an appeal dismissed, was transferred to the military and found fit for service, but eventually released. The application of R. P. Dutt, a student at Balliol and a member of the Universities Socialist Federation and the Oxford University Socialist Society, and later a leading theoretician for the Communist Party, was referred to the India Office. Herbert Runacres, another student, had his application for exemption turned down because it was discovered that he had been at a meeting of 'working men'. He was a member of the University Socialist Society, the Union for Democratic Control and the No-Conscription Fellowship. The case led to the secretary of the Central Labour Club writing to the *Chronicle* denying that Runacres had ever addressed them and claiming that all the club's members were either serving or had presented themselves as available for service. Other socialists coming before the Tribunal included Woolfe Rayman of Brasenose, member of the No-Conscription Fellowship and the Socialist Society, and Joseph Kaye of St John's, of the NCF, the Socialist Society and the Fabian Society. Kaye was convicted on 17 March 1916 of issuing circulars prejudicial to recruiting and was sentenced to two months in prison under the Defence of the Realm Act. His appeal was dismissed, but he was granted exemption conditional on him continuing to work for the Fabian Research Department in London. In May 1919, it was reported that he had committed suicide.<sup>16</sup> Another tribunal case was that of G. D. H. Cole, then a fellow of Magdalen College. Cole claimed exemption on the grounds that he was employed on work of national importance – in connection with the dilution of labour and the Munitions Act for the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. The application was granted, but Lieutenant Baldry appealed against the decision, claiming that Cole had implied he was working for the Ministry of Munitions. Baldry lost his case, and Cole was later granted an extension to his exemption certificate.<sup>17</sup>

The conscientious objectors received little popular support. Their treatment did however lead to expressions of concern from members of Oxford's liberal establishment. In March 1916, an editorial in the *Chronicle* advocated total

exemption from service where the objectors were sincere.<sup>18</sup> Norman Smith, the liberal bursar of Mansfield College, wrote criticising the unfairness of the Tribunal procedure.<sup>19</sup> The Bishop of Oxford and a group of free church leaders also expressed concern.<sup>20</sup> Another group of local religious leaders wrote that ‘conscience, however mistaken, ought not to be a subject for public ridicule.’<sup>21</sup> The Trades Council was less sympathetic. Its secretary throughout the war period, Frimbley, was a member of the Tribunal. By January 1917, the Council was represented on the National Service Committee by William King and Hazell. The Council’s viewpoint on the war is probably best demonstrated in Frimbley’s annual report for 1916, which concluded:

Fellow members, much is expected of us. Let us during this momentous year, endeavour to concentrate our energies on behalf of our nation, of our trade unions, and let each one of us feel it our bounden duty to keep the flag flying, ever remembering the self-sacrifice of our comrades who are bearing the brunt of this burden, that we might be free to preserve civilisation, free from military domination.<sup>22</sup>

The Trades Council would have nothing to do with any talk of peace. In August 1916, the Peace Negotiation Committee asked for a representative from the Council. The Council recorded approval of their object ‘but would not join the committee’. Instead of joining, a ‘few of the delegates signed a memorial to the Government.’<sup>23</sup> In November 1916, the Trades Council minuted that ‘it was thought advisable that we do not at present entertain peace circulars.’<sup>24</sup> In March 1917, the Council appealed to its members to ‘prosecute the war to a successful issue.’<sup>25</sup> In July, a proposal that the Council oppose the imposition of penal conditions on conscientious objectors was left on the table.<sup>26</sup> In September, Bayliss submitted a motion calling for ‘an immediate and abiding peace with the enemy.’<sup>27</sup> A special meeting to discuss the issue was arranged, but the landlord of the Three Feathers refused to let a room for a ‘peace meeting’, fearing the premises would be smashed up. At the following Trades Council meeting, a proposal to hold the meeting elsewhere lost by 15 votes to 13.<sup>28</sup>

Differences over the conscription issue would explain the failure of the University socialists and the labour leaders to work together during the war. In November 1915, a delegation from the University Socialist Society, consisting of Dutt and Kaye, both conscientious objectors, proposed the formation of a joint committee with the Trades Council ‘for social and propaganda work’. The Trades Council approved a delegation of five to meet the socialists.<sup>29</sup> The following month, they approved a proposal for a joint committee, to which all labour, co-operative and socialist organisations could affiliate. It was agreed to invite Ruskin College, the Central Labour Club, the Co-operative Men’s and Women’s Guilds, the Co-operative Educational Committee and the local branch of the Workers’ Educational Association to join. The Trades Council preferred the

name 'Oxford and District Joint Labour Educational and Social Committee' to the socialists' proposal of Oxford and District Joint Labour Committee.<sup>30</sup> In October 1916, the university socialists asked the Trades Council to support a meeting on 'Social Problems after the War' addressed by W. Anderson MP. The Trades Council agreed to co-operate but not to help with expenses.<sup>31</sup> By May 1917, the Trades Council had clearly lost sympathy with the socialists. The Socialist Society wanted to represent the Trades Council at a socialist conference in Leeds. The Trades Council 'would not commit its responsibility to the O.U.S.S. delegate who would probably have instructions of a much wider character than we could possibly support.'<sup>32</sup> There is no evidence of any co-operation between the two organisations. The Trades Council continuously requested the papers connected with the joint committee, requests that were never met. The committee appears to have dissolved as soon as it was formed.

Much of the Trades Council's energy during the war seems to have been taken up in representing the interests of workers on the various official bodies that were established for purposes connected with the war. In April 1916, the Council was represented on the City Local Tribunal and Advisory Committee, the City Emergency Committee and its sub-committee, and the Juvenile Employment and Aftercare Committee. By March 1917, they were also represented on the City and County Pensions Committee and the National Service Committee.<sup>33</sup> This representation appears to have resulted from parliamentary legislation rather than from the actions of Oxford's trades unionists. Between 1916 and 1917, the Trades Council's membership decreased from 19 to 13 unions, which was seen as being due to the war.<sup>34</sup> The main dispute in which the Trades Council was involved during the war was between the Co-operative Society and the recently formed Operative Bakers' Union. The union was negotiating for shorter hours and higher wages and complained that the co-management were opposed to unions. The Trades Council intervened after the bakers went on strike claiming that an employee sacked for union activities had been victimised. The Co-op agreed to reinstate the strikers and a joint Trades Council-Co-op Committee was established to negotiate a settlement. The Co-op however refused to pay the trade union rate of wages, and the Trades Council ran candidates for the Co-op management committee, five of whom were successful.<sup>35</sup>

The attitude of individual trade unions to the war seems to have varied. In April 1917, the printers remained 'determined to see war through to such a finish as will make it impossible for despotic militarism to challenge again the rights of free and peaceable peoples.' In contrast, Mr Carter, district organiser of the railwaymen, argued at a meeting in March 1917, 'that the Trade Unions had given up during the present crisis practically every right gained during many years of strenuous fighting for improvements in working conditions.'<sup>36</sup> But the railway and shipping companies had taken full advantage of the position to make a bargain much to their own benefit. The railway companies'

profits were guaranteed by the Government and the railwaymen were entitled to have their conditions guaranteed to the same extent; the shipping firms had made enormous profits. The Government was responsible to a great extent for not controlling the necessities of life, as the workman was fighting abroad and his family penalised at home.' After this speech, a resolution 'demanding 10s per week increase in wages owing to the increased cost of living' was carried unanimously.<sup>37</sup>

The last years of the war saw an increase in trade union activity. This seems to have been mainly due to the activities of John Amos, secretary of the Oxford branch of the Gas, Municipal and General Workers Union, which was formed on 16 June 1917. The branch's establishment was assisted by Frimbley, Carlyle and Ald Carter, who was librarian of Pusey House. Amos claimed that only one sixth of Oxford's workforce of 11,000 males and 4,000 females was unionised.<sup>38</sup> By October, his union had 363 members.<sup>39</sup> In October 1918, the Gasworkers won a national wage increase of 3/6. Amos argued that council wages were too low: 'conditions of working men in Oxford were shocking and disgraceful. They must work out their own emancipation. When the election came let them vote Labour' – a sentiment which could have hardly pleased the *Chronicle* and the Liberal councillors who had helped to start the union.<sup>40</sup>

Trades unions also got involved in a new campaign for council housing. In the first few months of the war, the Oxford Vigilance Committee, chaired by W. Geldhart, undertook a survey of housing conditions in the city. A letter to the *Chronicle* in January 1915 was signed by leading trade unionists as well as by Sidney Ball and Carlyle. Among the signatures were Bayliss of the engineers, Cox of the paperworkers, Frimbley, Goodman of the stonemasons, Gurden of the bricklayers, Harris of the printers, Hazell of the railwaymen, Horrobin and Stevens of the railway clerks, Morris of the tailors, Parsons of the carpenters, Richardson of the loco-engineers and Samson of the plasterers. The letter argued that a building programme would keep down unemployment. Despite a series of articles in the local press, the Council ignored the campaign.<sup>41</sup> Another petition in August 1917, initiated by Carlyle under the umbrella of the 'Oxford Interdenominational Council for Social Reform', also attracted the signatures of most of Oxford's leading trade unionists including Amos, Frimbley, Hazell, Judd of the stonemasons, Keefe of the engineers, Parsons, Samson, Timbrell of the loco-engineers and Timms of the postmen.<sup>42</sup> Although the gasworkers complained of 'the contemptuous and discourteous way in which the Council had treated their petition', the city council's General Purposes Committee decided to build 100 houses, though the full Council referred the proposal back for further consideration. The matter was thus deferred until after the war.<sup>43</sup>

The outbreak of war had put an end to the annual municipal elections. Vacancies caused by death or retirement were filled by co-option. In September 1916, a vacancy was created by the death of councillor Patey. Frimbley, the

Trades Council secretary, wrote to the mayor suggesting that a representative of labour should be co-opted.<sup>44</sup> The suggestion was not taken up. In September 1917, the Trades Council proposed that Harris be co-opted to fill a vacancy in West ward, a proposal supported by the Co-op and by Alderman Carter.<sup>45</sup> The Tories however argued that Harris had been rejected several times by the electorate, and co-opted one of their colleagues, Grundy, instead. Harris received four votes, those of Carter, William Gray, Smart and Armstead, the last-named being a member of Harris' union, the printers. There was clearly opposition to Harris in the Trades Council, for one of the delegates, Barnard, sought to refer Harris' nomination to a special meeting, and was only defeated by eight votes to five. In November, there was another vacancy. Barnard again opposed the nomination of Harris, claiming that he lived outside the ward in which the vacancy had arisen, which was North ward. Harris replied that he would prefer an open contest to co-option, but still accepted the nomination. Again, the city council ignored the Trades Council's claims. The Trades Council meeting ended in a dispute in which one of the delegates, Smith, accused Frimbley of being underhand in dealing with Alderman Carter rather than the mayor over the matter, which led to Frimbley tendering his resignation as secretary.<sup>46</sup>

When, a week later, a new vacancy was created by the death of Alderman Lucas, the Trades Council 'agreed to leave the question of candidates open.'<sup>47</sup> The Council co-opted a Liberal, Richard Evans. The Trades Council then set up a sub-committee on Labour representation, consisting of Amos, Barnard, Frimbley, Harris, Horrobin, Keefe and Miss Gomm. In January 1918, the committee proposed that:

- 1) The Trades and Labour Council should run one or more candidates in each ward at the next election.
- 2) Each Trade Union be asked to nominate one or more candidates for selection by the Trades Council.
- 3) Each Trade Union be asked for financial assistance.
- 4) The Trades Council revise its rules on the lines of the Labour Party's programme to allow working arrangements with other bodies.<sup>48</sup>

The Trades Council adopted these proposals without argument and wrote to individual trades unions asking for names of possible candidates.<sup>49</sup>

In the annual report for 1917, the Trades Council secretary considered it 'regrettable that we have not succeeded in convincing the city council to co-opt organised labour representation on that body, the insignificant reason given is absurd, and bears on it the impress that labour is not acceptable to our tortoise-like administrators of civic affairs ... Your council take this opportunity of pressing the justness of the course taken, and to claim the aid and support of every member of the affiliated unions, to see to it by their activity and

determination that Labour shall take its place in the general administration of the city, in which labour forms no mean proportion.<sup>50</sup>

The trades unions' response to these proposals was much better than their response to the Trades Council's pre-war attempts to win their support for labour representation. The gasworkers offered financial support, as did the railwaymen. The carpenters and engineers both agreed to pay 3d per quarter per member into the election fund.<sup>51</sup> By April, the Trades Council had received names of five possible candidates – Amos and Gardiner from the gasworkers, Parsons and Shakespeare from the carpenters and Shepherd of the British Socialist Party from the Railwaymen. In May, it was agreed to extend the time limit for nominations so that three candidates could be run in each ward, making a total of twelve.<sup>52</sup>

In March 1918, a vacancy arose in West ward. The Trades Council received a letter from councillor White, on behalf of West ward Conservative Association, saying they were prepared to support the co-optation of William King. White added 'We mention Mr King's name because it was felt that he would be acceptable to the whole of our association, who of course have the final decision ... I am to assure you that he would have perfect freedom and would be quite independent of our Association.' Frimbley also received a letter from Alderman Carter:

It is of course none of my business, but I hope you will forgive me for saying that it will be an enormous help in what I am trying to do for the citizens to have a man of Mr King's stamp to take a hand in the game. For God's sake, don't be too proud to take an odd chance of getting in one of your men at once. You may still prepare to sweep the board when an election comes!<sup>53</sup>

At the Trades Council, King said he had been asked to stand previously by his union and more recently by councillor Armstead and had declined on both occasions. He was prepared to be co-opted but only if he was a representative of the Trades Council and independent of the Conservative Association. After King had left the meeting, the other delegates discussed the matter. Smith and Barnard supported the nomination. Harris was opposed on principle. Nobes and Evans proposed that Harris be nominated but he declined, stating that 'he would refuse to toady to any political party', which led to a reply from a delegate called Coles that 'if the workers had carried out the principles of trade unionism which we represented and not party politics, we should have had a labour member on the city council years ago!<sup>54</sup> Eventually it was agreed that King be nominated and, in June, he became the first labour representative on the city council. Harris was left out in the cold: two months later he was nominated by the Trades Council to fill another vacancy but received only four votes, those of Carter, Gray, Amos George and King, against a Conservative, James Ray.<sup>55</sup>

The Co-operative Society also took an initiative over Labour representation, which probably arose from their dissatisfaction at the way in which the Food Control Committee was operating. In November 1917, a special meeting was held at the Clarendon Press Institute. It was chaired by E. King, the Co-op president, and attended by Carlyle and Ball as well as by trade union delegates.<sup>56</sup> In February 1918, a meeting on parliamentary and local representation was addressed by the Labour MP W. C. Anderson.<sup>57</sup> In March, a local electoral committee was formed, consisting of the Co-op's officers – King, Mrs Farn, E. Harris, Mrs Bolton – and eight elected from a general meeting: E. Cook, J. Holliday, W. Richardson, H. Simkin, R. Yelland, Mrs Dyer, A. Hughes, and Mrs Wakelin.<sup>58</sup> The initiative was in response to the recommendations of the Co-op conference at Swansea. The *Chronicle* attacked the proposed candidatures as sectional.<sup>59</sup> The Trades Council agreed that their candidates should be selected separately from those of the Co-op, but should run concurrently.<sup>60</sup> Two special meetings were held in June to work out a programme which was to go before a joint campaign committee.<sup>61</sup> It was agreed that Trades Council candidates be 'asked to watch prices and to try to stop profiteering.'<sup>62</sup> The Trades Council also discussed their candidates. Keefe of the engineers reported that he intended to contest West ward for the British Socialist Party. The Trades Council agreed to support King, and to ask Harris if he wanted to stand again. Three candidates would be run in South ward: Shepherd, Amos and Shakespeare or possibly Frimbley, who agreed to contest North ward if desirable. Timms and Parsons were chosen for East ward, and Kempson would be asked to be the third candidate. It was regretted that no woman candidate had been nominated by a trade union. It was however to be another fifteen months before the Trades Council could test its electoral strength, for the war ran on into November. The Labour movement did however receive some consolation in the appointment in August of King and Frimbley as magistrates, the first working class JPs since George Hawkins, the first Trades Council President, in the early 1890s.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to preparing for postwar municipal contests, the Trades Council was also preparing for the economic and social problems that were expected to follow the termination of the war. In November 1916, at the joint meeting with the university socialists on postwar problems, Carlyle contended that 'the war had cleared away an enormous number of difficulties, and it would be lamentable misfortune if they failed to take advantage of the opportunities which the war had given them.' The speaker, Anderson, spoke of the values of labour exchanges and the problems of demobilisation and reorganisation.<sup>64</sup> In June 1917, there was a conference on reconstruction and the industrial situation, chaired by Sidney Ball, with R. H. Tawney as the main speaker.<sup>65</sup> In February 1918, The Ministry of Labour set up a local Labour Advisory Committee, to advise on the employment of discharged soldiers, the supply of labour and the development of labour exchanges. The committee was chaired by Reverend Lancelot Phelps, the Provost of Oriel College, who had been chairman of the

Poor Law Guardians for many years; it had eleven Trades Council representatives, as well as eleven employee and two Independent members.<sup>66</sup> Within two weeks of the ending of the war, the Trades Council was calling for a conference on food control, the extension of the Rent Increase Prevention Act and the building of 600 council houses, attacking the city council proposals for being ‘absurdly inadequate’.<sup>67</sup>

The Labour leaders in Oxford, like the suffragettes, had dropped their main demands when war was declared, and fell into ranks to defend the Empire.<sup>68</sup> Not only was this done without complaint, the new struggle was undertaken with great patriotic fervour. There was no opposition to the war in the Trades Council; their initial opposition to conscription was not pursued when the system was brought into operation. With the exception of Bayliss, sympathy for the conscientious objectors came not from the labour leaders, but from liberal academics and nonconformist ministers. It is only during the second half of the war that trade unionists began to realise that they were making unnecessary sacrifices, and that the suspension of the industrial struggle was against their interests. The new initiative was taken by the railwaymen and pursued by the militant gasworkers under John Amos. It was on the strength of the gasworkers’ union that the postwar militancy of Oxford trade unionism was based.

It was during the war that Oxford’s Labour leaders joined the local establishment. The war made it necessary for Oxford’s traditional leadership to secure their co-operation. The majority of trade unionists were happy to cooperate and appear to have been proud of their new status. The Labour leaders remained unsatisfied at their continued exclusion from the city council and were prepared, with the exception of Harris, to forfeit their independence to be represented on it. It is rather ironic that a party which claimed to represent the vast majority of Oxford’s citizens should obtain its first council seat, not as a result of a popular vote, but as a gift from those ‘reactionary’ Liberal and Conservative councillors and aldermen whom Labour candidates had been opposing for thirty years. The effects of the war on the Oxford Labour movement were therefore twofold – by ensuring the participation of Labour leaders in civic affairs, the war gave them an influence they had not previously had, which led to the majority becoming ‘moderate’ and ‘responsible’; while at the same time the unions were able to use the full employment created by the war to strengthen their bargaining position, which was to serve as a basis for more militant trade unionism in the postwar years.

## CHAPTER 25

# The Industrialisation of Oxford

Until the First World War, the city of Oxford had remained dominated by the University. The largest employer, other than the colleges themselves, was the Oxford University Press. In the 1830s, the University had ensured that the Great Western Railway works were located in Swindon rather than in Oxford. The only sizeable industrial employer was the Eagle Iron works in Jericho. Until the war, therefore, Oxford's trades union movement was dominated by the craft unions – printers, bookbinders and carpenters. The only 'new' union which provided activists was the railwaymen. The General and Municipal Workers Union, founded during the war, made an advance in recruiting its members from the city's unskilled workers, such as college servants.

This situation was dramatically changed with the emergence of Morris Motors as the city's largest employer. William Morris had established a factory in Cowley in 1912, producing 450 cars in the following year. During the war, the factory produced munitions, reverting to car production in 1918. In 1919–1920, 2,000 cars were produced. By 1923, production had risen to 20,000 cars a year. After the war, Osberton Radiators was established in North Oxford and, in 1926, Pressed Steel was established at Cowley.<sup>1</sup>

The growth of Morris's led to a significant increase in the city's population. Between 1911 and 1921, it rose slightly from 62,000 to 67,000. The major increase came over the next ten years, with the population reaching 84,000 in 1931. The expansion then slowed, with a figure of 97,000 being recorded in the postwar census of 1951. This growth is shown more dramatically in the increase of the registered employed workforce of the city from 19,260 in June 1927 to 34,450 in June 1939.

In the early years, Morris's depended on local labour from the city and its surrounding villages. By 1926, however, the local labour force had been absorbed and in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the city attracted thousands of workers from depressed areas, especially South Wales and Tyneside. In the mid 1920s, unemployment in Oxford was only 1.9%; in the mid 1930s, Oxford was regarded as one of the most prosperous towns in Britain.

By 1939, Oxford had become a one-industry city, with 40% of the working population involved in the car industry. The Morris complex, including Pressed Steel and Radiators, now employed 9,800 workers, compared with 800 at the

University Press and 520 at the Iron Works. In 1938–1939, Morris's produced 105,000 vehicles, a third of the national output. During the Second World War, the Morris workforce reached a peak of 17,000.

The growth of the city's population led to a parallel expansion of the residential area, mainly on the eastern side of the city, adjacent to the factory at Cowley. Private estates were built in Florence Park and Headley Way; council housing in Rose Hill, South Park, Gypsy Lane and Cutteslowe in North Oxford. These developments were to play a central role in the political struggles of the 1930s.

## CHAPTER 26

### Postwar Years, 1918–1919

The signing of the armistice in November 1918 was immediately followed by a general election. At a national level, the Labour Party was divided on whether or not to stay in Lloyd George's coalition, eventually deciding to fight the election independently. In Oxford, the labour movement was unprepared for the contest. The Trades Council hastily considered the possibility of running a candidate – councillor King and Margaret Bondfield, trade unionist and leader of the Womens' Labour League (and later a Minister in the 1924 government) were two names considered, but King declined to stand, while it was felt that it was not the most opportune time for inviting a representative of Labour from outside the city. The Trades Council discussed the advisability of issuing a manifesto advising all trade unionists to refuse direct or indirect support for either the Conservative or the Liberal candidate. This proposal was put forward by Shepherd and Goldsworthy but narrowly defeated. The Trades Council therefore agreed 'to leave it to the individual judgement of trade unionists, it being thought that the majority will support the candidate they considered most favourable to Labour interests and principles.' The *Chronicle* sought Labour support for the Liberal candidate Higgins against the Tory Marriott, arguing that 'every vote given to Mr Marriott is a vote for Imperial Preference, and against Free Trade which alone can give us cheap bread.'<sup>2</sup> With an expanded electorate, women over thirty now having the vote, Marriott, a university history professor who had been selected as candidate in preference to the Tory alderman Walter Gray, defeated Higgins by 9,805 votes to 4,057, a majority of 5,748. Labour supporters in the university were more prepared for the election than their colleagues in the city – Henry Sanderson Furniss, the principal of Ruskin College, stood as Labour candidate in the contest for the two university parliamentary seats against two Tories and a Liberal, Gilbert Murray, professor of Greek at the university. Murray had been known to be sympathetic to the ILP in its early years. The Tories, Lord Hugh Cecil, who like Murray had helped to establish the League of Nations, and Rowland Prothero were elected, with Furniss bottom of the poll and losing his deposit with 335 votes.<sup>3</sup>

Despite their failure to intervene in the election, Oxford's trade unionists were far from inactive in the year after the war. By March 1919, the union branches affiliated to the Trades Council had 6,000 members.<sup>4</sup> The gasworkers' branch, established during the war, continued to grow and soon had 1,200 members.<sup>5</sup>

The Trades Council held a meeting in January 1919 at which college and university servants were urged to join a union. It was reported that most of the 600 servants were in favour of collective action; their grievances included inadequate payment, long hours, no Sunday leisure, insecurity of employment and their dependence on the caprice of university bursars. Keefe of the Trades Council pointed out that railwaymen's wages had been substantially increased as a result of the strong union.<sup>6</sup> About 100 college servants agreed to join the gasworkers. In March, the shop assistants' union, with Trades Council support, held a mass meeting calling for a minimum wage. The gasworkers held a meeting for demobilised soldiers.<sup>7</sup>

During 1919, the Trades Council was also involved in the railway dispute. In February, a national rail strike was threatened. The local branch of the railway clerks had traditionally been opposed to drastic action, but following a national conference, decided to come out on strike.<sup>8</sup> The strike was however averted when the Government recognised the union. The railwaymen went on strike in October instead,<sup>9</sup> and the Trades Council also supported the bakers in a dispute with the Co-op.<sup>10</sup>

The Trades Council's interests went beyond local industrial disputes. In November 1918, they called on the government to send the Labour MP Jimmy Thomas to the Peace Conference at Versailles.<sup>11</sup> In June 1919, a meeting was held to protest at the punitive nature of the peace terms. The speakers, Fred Ludlow, Keefe and George Lansbury, were heckled by students. In December 1919, the Trades Council called for the establishment of trade relations with Russia.<sup>13</sup> The Trades Council also had a meeting with the food commissioner to discuss problems of food distribution and in January 1919 called for the government to 'at once introduce a 47-hour week, piecework to be abolished and overtime paid at double rates, to prevent unemployment being caused by demobilisation.' Amos claimed that 'unless something was done there would be thousands of unemployed and there would be serious labour trouble during the ensuing year.'<sup>14</sup>

The Trades Council's involvement in local politics centred on their concern about the lack of 'Homes fit for Heroes' in the city. A meeting in January 1919 called for 500 council houses.<sup>15</sup> A second meeting in February was addressed by councillor William Gray, the new Liberal chairman of the council's housing committee, who welcomed the Trades Council's support and was warmly received.<sup>16</sup> In May, a public meeting was held on housing in St. Ebbes, and Horrobin, Ludlow and Shepherd were joined by Dr Stansfeld, the rector of St. Ebbes, in their call for 60 houses.<sup>17</sup> Stansfeld, who had founded the Oxford Medical Mission in Bermondsey, declared himself a Labour supporter. He was asked to stand for the council for Labour, but he was ineligible and had to decline.<sup>18</sup>

The housing campaign was linked to the Trades Council's preparations for the 1919 municipal elections. In April 1919, King announced his intention to retire from the council for 'private and personal reasons', but he changed his mind when the Trades Council agreed to compensate him for his loss of

income, estimated at £100 a year. The Trades Council agreed to press for city council meetings to be held in the evening.<sup>19</sup> It was suggested that six to eight Labour councillors would be returned. One meeting was addressed by the Liberal Alderman Carter on ‘How to make Oxford Safe for Democracy’, which no doubt stressed the need for Liberal-Labour cooperation.<sup>20</sup> In May, the Trades Council reaffirmed its decision to fight the elections. It was alleged that the Oxford City Council ‘was the most unprogressive and reactionary council in the whole country’ and that ‘they had shamefully neglected working-class interests.’ It was felt that ‘trade unionists were eager and anxious for the day of reckoning.’ Ludlow was appointed election agent and it was agreed that the Trades Council would work with the Co-op who had set up a local electoral committee the previous year.<sup>21</sup> This committee had met 17 times since April 1918. It had compiled a list of co-operators in all wards and proposed to submit a number of names of candidates to a joint committee with the Trades Council. The Co-op, who were still in dispute with the Trades Council over the bakers, declared that ‘they desired to sink all political differences and whole-heartedly support the object they had in view – municipal representation.’<sup>22</sup>

In June, a letter in the *Chronicle* from a trade unionist stated that organised workers realised ‘that the local City Council is a selfish, backward and reactionary body, representing property speculation, political timeservers, vested interests and exclusive university control.’ The letter argued that ‘The Council has persistently and systematically opposed progressive ideas ... Oxford was one of those sleepy, academic, mediaeval centres about twenty years behind the times.’<sup>23</sup> In July, the Trades Council was presented with an early test of strength, with a by-election in East ward. Timms, a postman and vice-president of the Trades Council, who had been a Conservative before the war, was nominated to fight the seat. Ludlow declared that ‘the workers were so thoroughly tired and disappointed with the present Council that their candidate had a splendid chance of success.’<sup>24</sup> At an election meeting in the Co-op Assembly Rooms on the Cowley Road, Horrobin declared that ‘on the Oxford City Council they had the most retrograde and reactionary men to be found anywhere, aldermen of a bygone bumbledomism.’<sup>25</sup> Timms advocated 800 council houses and a municipal bus service.<sup>26</sup> Further meetings were held on the Plain in St. Clement’s, in Chester Street, Bath Street and Caroline Street. Timms’ manifesto made a special appeal to the newly-enfranchised women voters. He attacked the Council’s housing scheme as inadequate, called for the interests of allotment holders to be protected, trade union rates for council employees, council action to stop profiteering, cheaper letting of Town Hall rooms, provision of public baths and recreation grounds and for the motor bus, gas and electricity companies to be municipally owned. The manifesto declared that ‘Our sole aim and object is to secure a Better, Brighter, Happier and Healthier time for the workers generally, and to make this grand old city a place really worth living in.’<sup>27</sup>

The contest led to the Liberals winning a seat from the Tories. The Liberal R. Powell won 975 votes, Mrs Pritchard, a progressive Conservative, 891, while Timms got 655. Ludlow claimed that 'the seat could have been won, and won easily, if only trade unionists had been loyal to their principles.' He felt that there had been a great deal of apathy and indifference in the ward. Canvassers reported that some electors had refused to vote for any candidate, since 'they were all alike – they had never done any good for the working class and never would do.'<sup>28</sup>

In September, the Trades Council and Co-op agreed to run a joint campaign in November. Seven candidates were agreed – Frimbley in North ward, Amos, Shepherd and Surrage in South ward, Keefe and Ludlow in West ward, and Timms again in East ward.<sup>29</sup> A proposal that two sitting Liberal councillors, Gillett and Stobie, run as Labour failed to materialise. There was no formal agreement with the Liberals, though the Liberals did not contest West ward and stated that they would welcome Ludlow to the council. The consequence was that Ludlow was the only Labour candidate not to come bottom of the poll – in fact he was returned in third place, beating the third Tory by only 13 votes.<sup>30</sup> There were now 21 Liberal councillors, 25 Tories, 12 University Independents and two Labour councillors – Ludlow, the first to be elected, and the co-opted King. The Tory majority was dependent on their seven aldermen, to the five Liberals, and on support from the University members. Horrobin regretted that Labour 'had not been so successful as they hoped, but there was no reason for discouragement.'<sup>31</sup> In December, Hyde of the workers union was returned unopposed to the Oxfordshire County Council.

Ludlow was clearly unimpressed by his new colleagues. Only one month after his election, he told the Trades Council that:

The atmosphere of the Council chamber was against anything of a progressive nature. They do not like, or rather, I am afraid, they fear a proper discussion; they do not want the facts to be faced – there is no room in any building in Oxford where you could enjoy a more comfortable snooze than you could in the Council Chamber.

He also commented on the 'soporific speeches of aldermen and councillors, coupled with either the absence of ventilation or the effect on the air of the hot water pipes', and claimed that the Labour members had been sent there to keep the city council awake.<sup>32</sup>

## CHAPTER 27

# The Oxford Labour Party and the Communist Challenge, January – March 1920

The postwar period saw the emergence of a number of left-wing groups in Oxford. Early in 1919, a branch of the Socialist Labour Party appeared, with Keefe of the engineers as secretary. The group had connections with Ruskin College and also involved T. Wigington who was to play a major role in the Oxford labour movement.<sup>1</sup> In February 1919, Keefe was involved in a branch of the Russian Freedom Committee which was addressed by Sylvia Pankhurst.<sup>2</sup> Early in 1920, the Oxford branch of the Independent Labour Party was revived at Ruskin, with Mr Good-enough of the Co-op Union as chairman. The speakers at the inaugural meeting were both Ruskin students, John Coley and George Smith. Ludlow was elected chairman, F. Smith of Ruskin as secretary, and Bayliss, who had been active in the Oxford ILP before the war, as treasurer.<sup>3</sup> An Oxford branch of the Communist Party was formed in November 1920, three months after the national founding conference. The branch soon embraced former members of the British Socialist Party (formerly the SDF) and some members of the SLP. The branch secretary was Hector Prickett.<sup>4</sup> A Labour club was formed at the university in November 1919, following the publication by the Labour Party of 'Labour and the New Social Order' and the appeal by Arthur Henderson and Sidney Webb for non-working-class support. The first secretary was D. Brundrit.<sup>5</sup>

In February 1918, the national Labour Party had adopted a constitution which provided for the establishment of divisional Labour Parties, based on individual membership, for each parliamentary constituency. In September 1919, Horrobin and Ludlow had represented the Trades Council at a meeting to discuss the establishment of a Labour Party for the North Oxfordshire constituency.<sup>6</sup> The body was formally inaugurated at a conference in Banbury on 5–6 December.<sup>7</sup> A parliamentary candidate was selected in March 1920 – Captain E. Bennett, who had been Liberal MP for Mid Oxon from 1906 to 1910.

It was not until January 1920 that the Oxford Trades Council discussed the possibility of forming a united Labour Party in the city. The Trades Council was in favour of such a body being established, based on trade unions, the Co-ops and members of local Labour clubs, 'with a view to more vigorously contesting

city council vacancies, and also, if possible, of securing a Labour parliamentary representative.' It was agreed that a conference be held at Ruskin College on 27 January.<sup>8</sup> In the same week, Horrobin wrote an article for the *Chronicle* opposing a Lib-Lab concordat, arguing that 'the strength of the Labour party lies in its absolute independence, freedom and liberty of action.'<sup>9</sup>

The conference had been initiated by Fred Ludlow, who was secretary of the Trades Council, as well as being a Labour councillor. It was chaired by Horrobin, the Trades Council president. Attendance was as follows:

Delegates:

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Co-op Education committee      | Mrs E. Bolton, Mrs E. Harris   |
| Co-op Electoral Council        | Mrs Farm, Mrs Dyer, Mr Simpkin   |
| Ruskin College                 | H. Sanderson Furniss, Sam Smith, F. Smith                                  |
| Bakers Union                   | G. Hind, A. Landon, McKenzie, J. Darby, M. J. Strange, Whittle, H. Goddard |
| Bricklayers                    | Wing, Hunt, A. King  |
| Gasworkers                     | Harris   |
| Paperworkers (women's branch)  | Miss Birchnall, M. Harris, E. White  |
| Paperworkers (men's branch)    | H. Belcher, Deeley, G. Evans   |
| Vehicle workers                | C. Brown, Allen, Harris  |
| Stonemasons                    | G. Judd, J. Holden, R. Morris  |
| Typographical Assoc (printers) | Cllr Ludlow, Cllr King   |
| Loco engineers and firemen     | P. Timbrell, Johnsey   |
| Railwaymen                     | Nobes  |
| Carpenters and Joiners         | Prickett   |
| Postal Workers                 | Buy, Backhurst   |
| Railway Clerks                 | Horrobin   |
| Engineers                      | Goldsworthy, Wilkes  |
| Asylum Workers                 | P. Plummer   |
| Bookbinders                    | H. Wareham   |
| Tailors                        | T. Stone, Williams, W. Chandler  |
| Socialist Labour Party         | T. Wigington   |
| YMCA Debating Society          | F. Nicholls, J. Strange  |

Individuals: Miss M. Pask, Mrs Wilsdon, Mrs Ludlow, A. J. Carlyle, Dr. Gillett, A. W. Bayliss, J. Edmonds, W. Crowther, L. Freidson, G. Wilsdon, J. Piper, A. Frimbley, J.P. A. Gurdon, J. Allen, W. Barnard, E. Morgan, Pratley, F. Timms

Expressions of support had been received from W. Shepherd, J. Amos, Dr. Stansfeld and Alderman Carter.<sup>10</sup>

Ludlow stated that he had been careful not to invite people with known party sympathies (meaning Tory and Liberal supporters). He considered that it was not possible for the Trades Council to combine industrial and political work and that the objective of the new body was to take over the Trades Council's political activities. A resolution, probably prepared by Ludlow, was put before the meeting:

That this conference is of the opinion that a Labour Party should be established in the City of Oxford with a view to:

- a) organising for parliamentary representation,
- b) organising more effectively for municipal and local government representation, and hereby resolves that a Labour Party be formed in this City.<sup>11</sup>

Only Frimbley, who had been Trades Council secretary during the war, voted against the proposal. The meeting then elected a committee of 12 – Ludlow, Wigington, Wilkes (engineers), Goddard (bakers), Prickett (carpenters), A. King (bricklayers), Buy (postal workers), Judd (stonemasons), Miss Birchnall (papermakers), Mrs Hine (Co-op), Piper, E. Morgan (YMCA) and A. J. Carlyle, the city rector. Wigington was appointed chairman and Morgan as secretary. The new committee then invited trades unions and other organisations to affiliate and individuals to become members.

This founding of a united Labour party for Oxford was however illusory. At the next Trades Council meeting, Wigington, the provisional chairman of the new organisation, who considered that the Labour Party was insufficiently socialist, proposed that 'this Trades and Labour council is not willing to sink its political activity in the formation of a local Labour party'. The proposal was deferred to the next meeting, so all delegates could be notified. Wigington claimed that the broader basis of the Labour Party would lose the support of the Co-op and the Socialist Labour Party. He considered that the Trades Council was committing suicide as a representative body and would lose its political power.<sup>12</sup>

At the reconvened meeting of the Trades Council, Wigington was supported by the moderates. Frimbley restated his objections to the Trades Council affiliating to the Labour Party. North of the gasworkers, supported by councillor King, wanted the question referred to individual unions, but this was defeated by three votes (25–22). Hyde of the workers union warned against attempts to run the Trades Council on socialist lines. Eventually, Wigington's resolution, seconded by Goldsworthy of the engineers, was carried by 21 votes to 12. The Trades Council decided to have nothing to do with the Labour Party.<sup>13</sup> The Labour supporters had been defeated by an alliance of delegates who thought the Party too advanced, and delegates who thought that it was not progressive enough. The *Chronicle* correspondent commented that 'The Trades Council stands much in the same position as it did previous to the discussion. They are

agreed upon certain industrial and political action and are generally agreed on contesting all municipal vacancies with the object of increased trade union and cooperative representation. There was no prospect of the successful adoption of a Labour parliamentary candidate.<sup>14</sup>

The Oxford Labour Party's committee met hastily to consider the consequences of the Trades Council's decision. The meeting, chaired by Ludlow, included Carlyle, Mrs Ludlow, Miss Birchnall, Piper, Goddard, Judd and Buy. A letter had been received from Wigington resigning his position as chairman. Carlyle expressed his disappointment since he felt that the party could not be established without trade union support. Ludlow said he intended to join the Labour party as an individual member. A conference would be summoned to reconsider the position. It had been rumoured that Wigington was trying to wreck both the Labour Party and the Trades Council.<sup>15</sup>

## CHAPTER 28

# The Militant Trades Council, March 1920 – December 1921

At its March meeting, the Trades Council established electoral committees for the city's four wards: North ward – C. King, Frimbley and Smith; South ward – Amos, Pinner and Slade; East ward – Miller, Williams and Gallop; and West ward – H. Harris, Hough and North. It also adopted new rules, with objects including 'political' as well as industrial propaganda. Horrobin retired as president; in the ensuing contest, Timms defeated Wigington by 37 votes to 19.<sup>1</sup>

The Trades Council's new electoral structure was put to the test when G. Smith was nominated for the St. Giles vacancy on the Headington Board of Guardians. He was defeated, receiving only 92 votes. Goddard was then appointed election secretary, and a request made for candidates for the November elections. A new electoral committee was set up, consisting of one representative from each affiliated union.<sup>2</sup> In May, a letter was received from the national Labour Party asking for help in the next General Election. This prompted another discussion on relations with the Labour Party. Frimbley condemned 'all this talk of politics' while Ludlow claimed that 'they were stultifying themselves in their own movement'. The meeting decided to take no action on the matter. It was also decided not to donate any money to the Labour Party's two million shillings fund, and to leave donations to individual members.<sup>3</sup>

In May and June, the Trades Council's energies were concentrated on the bus strike. After a seven-month-long dispute, the private bus company agreed to pay an extra hour to its drivers but did not extend this to its garage staff. The entire company workforce then went on strike, with the service being run by 'blacklegs'. The strikers were supported by the Trades Council and by a group of students with a series of protest meetings and a march, on which the protesters apparently damaged some buses and attacked the blacklegs. A Ruskin student, Ben Jones, was tried for assault but acquitted, having been defended by Henry Slesser, later solicitor-general in the 1924 Labour Government. Sanderson Furniss argued that the council should take over the bus company and run the service itself. The strike was successful, with the company agreeing to extend the pay rise to all its workforce and to recognise the trade union.

The Trades Council however also found time to pass a lengthy resolution on Ireland, Russia (supporting the Hands Off Russia campaign) and the

International Workers Movement.<sup>4</sup> In July, Goddard was replaced as election secretary by Miller. The electoral committee proposed as candidates Frimbley, Keefe, North, Surrage and Timms. Wigington proposed that 'all candidates be asked to express their views to Council, and state if in agreement with ownership and control of industry by the workers.'<sup>5</sup> Prickett objected to some nominees 'on the possible doubt as to their political convictions'. After a split vote, all five candidates were accepted. Wigington then proposed that the Trades Council affiliate to the Trades Union council, but it was pointed out that trades councils were ineligible for membership.<sup>6</sup>

Wigington and Prickett persisted with their campaign to capture the Trades Council from the moderates. In August, they supported a motion from the railwaymen to turn the Trades Council into a Council of Action, to enable co-options from political parties and the Co-op.<sup>7</sup> With the carrying of this proposal, and the formation of a Council of Action, the three leading moderate unions, the Typographical Association, the Carpenters and the Engineers, disaffiliated.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless the militants continued their scheme to radicalise Oxford's labour movement. When the local election manifesto was discussed in September, Wigington proposed that the reference to 'the interests of the whole community' be replaced by 'the interests of the working class'. This proposal was lost by 25 votes to 15. Wigington then made a further proposal: to add to the manifesto the statement, 'We are convinced that the position of the working class in Oxford and elsewhere cannot be considerably improved until the workers themselves take the ownership and control of industry into their own hands.' This was carried by 22 votes to 19, at which point Wigington declared that 'he was out to smash the system'. Frimbley, North and Surrage withdrew their candidacies since they felt unable to stand on the new platform. Timms was eventually forced to close the meeting because Wigington refused to stop talking.<sup>9</sup>

The split in the Trades Council was by now public knowledge. One delegate wrote to the *Oxford Chronicle* attacking the extremists. A reply from Fred Brown of the Postal Workers defended the socialists' position. Frimbley claimed that the extremists' victory was due to the poor attendance of moderate members. Timms then announced he was withdrawing from the local election. King and Ludlow announced that they would sit as Independent councillors and ignore the Trades Council.<sup>10</sup>

In September, the Trades Council reaffirmed their position on workers' control. The Council also rejected by 24 votes to 15 a call from the Typographical Association for Wigington to apologise for his behaviour. Although attendance comprised 60 members compared with 40 the previous month, many delegates abstained from voting.<sup>11</sup> In October, Timms resigned as president, despite a motion carried by 49 votes to 15 urging him to stay, and said he was considering standing in the elections as an Independent Labour candidate.<sup>12</sup> Hyde refused to be president and Timms was replaced by Harris of the gasworkers.

Five members of the electoral committee – Frimbley, Miller, Slade, Smith and Rainbow – had resigned. They were replaced by Bellinger, Manby, Shepherd and Forrest, with Buy as the new secretary.<sup>13</sup> Only two candidates remained: Keefe stood in East ward and Gallop in West ward; Piper was nominated for North ward but withdrew because of the lack of funds. They received no assistance from the Liberals who considered that ‘they represent but a section of Labour’. Even after the moderates had withdrawn, the Trades Council was still not united behind their candidates. The candidacy of Gallop, who was not an extremist, was only approved by 38 votes to 11. Financial support came from the railwaymen (£5), the paperworkers (£1), the postmen (£11 5/-) and the printers at the Church Army press (£4/-).<sup>14</sup> These funds had little impact for both Gallop and Keefe were heavily defeated.<sup>15</sup>

The Trades Council continued to disintegrate. In November, both the railway clerks and the boot and shoemakers disaffiliated. Applications for affiliation were received from both the ILP and the recently-formed Communist Party branch. Harris ruled them ineligible for affiliation, the Council of Action status apparently having been abandoned.<sup>16</sup> By-elections in North and East wards passed without any Trades Council intervention. In January 1921, it considered a proposal from the Electoral Committee that only unions who contributed funds should have a say in electoral policy. Hyde said ‘he admired the tactics and ingenuity of the committee, but to come before the council with a financial policy before deciding on an electoral policy, was like putting the cart before the horse.’ Supported by Frimbley, Hyde proposed that the committee think again. Turner of the postal workers said that ‘those who paid the piper were always accustomed to call the tune and it was not fair to pass judgement on those who subscribed funds and then to stand aloof.’ Rainbow of the carpenters feared that more trade unions would disaffiliate if ‘shut out’ from electoral policy. Ludlow said it was their duty to heal the breach in the local labour movement and to adopt a policy that was acceptable to all factions. Cherwin of the vehicle workers stated that ‘we are not Conservatives or Liberals but Labour men – Socialists if you like.’ When a delegate denied they were all socialists, Cherwin replied ‘well organised workers, if you prefer.’ Buy argued that trade unions did not all support Labour candidates. Keefe said he regretted the display of bitterness and personal feeling and felt that they ‘should sink personalities from that night onward’. The reference back to the electoral committee was carried by 28 votes to 10. Bellinger of the paperworkers cynically asked whether a policy would be acceptable if it was formulated by an electoral committee of seven, five of whom were bolshevists. The *Chronicle*’s labour correspondent commented after this performance that –

the half-hearted trade union spirit which has characterised Oxford workers ever since the day when the pioneer printers started their branch has been the means of keeping Oxford workers in the lowest

grades in most trades in the city. If conditions are bad and wages low the workers of Oxford have only themselves to blame. Meetings in St. Giles declaiming against the capitalist and preaching a new social faith is so much good energy wasted on thin air. What they ought to preach is unity in the labour ranks, unity at the trades council, unity at the trade union meetings and unity in the workshops.<sup>17</sup>

The Typographical Association tried to amend the Trades Council's constitution by replacing the reference to 'political propaganda' by 'municipal propaganda' and by deleting 'Labour' from the council's formal title of 'Trades and Labour Council.' They argued that the word 'Labour' was a 'hinge which opened a rather wide door', and that their proposal 'was to secure a definition more in keeping with what they considered should be the objects of the Trades Council'. Goddard put it more crudely – they wanted 'to keep out sections with purely political ends, such as communists'. The Trades Council however rejected the printers' proposal. It was commented that 'it would be difficult to find in any body of organised trade unionists more foolish politically and economically unsound principles' than those in the proposal. The *Chronicle* commented that 'Oxford workers have a long way to go yet on the path to redemption'.<sup>18</sup>

The Trades Council was not totally preoccupied with internal disputes. In January 1921, a committee was set up to organise the unemployed. It comprised Shepherd, Harris, Ludlow, Piper and Manby.<sup>19</sup> At the beginning of February, a meeting of unemployed workers was held in Gloucester Green and a deputation sent to the city council who were considering a public works programme. Manby, who led the deputation, claimed that there were 1,500 unemployed in the city – 'What we want is work not charity; charity stinks in the nostrils of every decent man and woman.' He stressed that 'a hungry man was made an angry man. They were trying in every way possible to keep the peace, to keep law and order and peaceful citizenship before the men, but it could not be denied that there were rumblings in the air. If the storm burst, it would be such a storm as this county has not experienced for a long time.' The city council responded positively to the deputation and set up communal kitchens and introduced public works schemes including £1,000 of work on the corporation farm, work at Pacey's bridge, painting of the meat market, £500 of improvements at Cold Arbour and the painting of the outside of the municipal buildings.

The St. Giles meeting, presided over by Manby, heard speeches from Shepherd and Miss Lister, a Ruskin student from the Federation of Women Workers, Guy Smith and Beechcroft, another Ruskin student. A further meeting at Ruskin, addressed by Shepherd and Ludlow, agreed to form a branch of the National Federation of Unemployed. The unemployed committee was expanded to ten members, nine of whom were unemployed, and a paid organiser appointed. In April, a further meeting in St. Giles passed a resolution calling for work or a 40s a week allowance.<sup>20</sup>

The Trades Council's attention was diverted from the unemployed by the threatened general strike of the triple alliance of miners, railwaymen and transport workers. Ludlow proposed that 'this Council approves the actions of the miners, cordially supports the Triple Alliance and pledges itself to do everything possible to bring the strike to a successful conclusion.' Shepherd argued that 'if the miners went down, the workers would lose all they had striven for in the last hundred years.' Ludlow claimed that 'if it came to the test, he would rather lose his life than go under,' while Wigington declaimed that 'capitalism was on its last legs.' Support for the strike did not go unopposed, for Bayliss argued that the miners' strike was sectional and was only in the interests of the 'best paid' section of the community. To shouts of 'shame', he proposed that 'the settling of the conditions of one body of workers was not sufficient to justify an all-round stoppage.'<sup>21</sup>

A meeting of support for the miners was held in St Giles, addressed by two miners – George Williams from South Wales and Frank Mackay from Northumberland. Ludlow declared that 'Oxford workers must be prepared to take their stand with the miners.' When the strike was called off on 'black Friday', the Trades Council reacted angrily. Ludlow called for trade unionists to 'set to work to devise ways and means of making a repetition of last Friday's fiasco impossible. The lesson we have learned, bitter though it be, will have been a blessing in disguise if Labour takes heed of it. If not, then we may as well throw the whole trade union movement on a scrap-heap and let the 'masters' have undisputed sway.' Shepherd declared that the 'miners had been grossly betrayed by the other sections of the Triple Alliance' and 'only when class consciousness rose above personality of individuals would the success of the common cause pass from indifference, doubt, confusion, despair and difficulty to triumph.'<sup>22</sup>

These fine words however failed to resolve the Trades Council's internal dispute. Attempts were made to patch up the split. The electoral committee agreed to support councillors King and Ludlow on the basis of the 1919 election manifesto.<sup>23</sup> In March, Ludlow referred to the fiasco of the previous municipal election and claimed that a united Trades Council could have got two more representatives onto the city council.<sup>24</sup> In April, an electoral policy was embodied into the Trades Council's constitution – 'to increase the power of unionism among all Trades and Labour organisations, to afford practical recognition and assistance in defence of union principles, to use its influence to help the workers to a successful issue in all disputes, and to benefit workers generally by considering any question affecting the interests or wellbeing of the working classes.'<sup>25</sup>

King announced that he would not be seeking re-election in November; it was suggested that Keefe should contest West ward in his place. Trades unions were to be asked to make donations to the election fund in order to 'prevent the recurrence of events of previous years, when candidates were severely handicapped owing to lack of time and money at their disposal.' The appeal was unsuccessful, for by May none of the £14 due to King and Ludlow for their council work had been paid.<sup>26</sup> In July, Wigington called for both councillors

to retire from their council committees. Ludlow refused, arguing that they had stopped a reduction in the wages of council employees.<sup>27</sup>

As the disputes continued and were fully reported in the *Chronicle*, the Trades Council considered closing their meetings to the press. Although the proposal was defeated, the *Chronicle* correspondent responded by printing a list of hints for Trades Council members:

- 1) Don't come to meetings.
- 2) If you do come, come late.
- 3) If the weather, or the railway service doesn't suit you, don't think of coming.
- 4) If you do attend a meeting, find fault with the work of the officers and other members.
- 5) Never accept an office as it is much easier to criticise than do things.
- 6) Get sore if you are not appointed on a committee, but if you are, do not attend the meetings.
- 7) If asked by the chairman to give your opinion regarding some important matter, tell him you have nothing to say. After the meeting tell everyone how things ought to be done.
- 8) Do nothing more than is absolutely necessary, but when other members roll up their sleeves and willingly, unselfishly use their ability to help matters along, howl that the association is run by a clique.
- 9) Hold back your dues as long as possible, or don't pay at all.<sup>28</sup>

During the summer, the Trades Council executive committee discussed the possibility of re-establishing the local Labour Party to put up a parliamentary candidate. This was in response to 'a certain gentleman' offering himself as a candidate. The 'gentleman' turned out to be Sir Sidney Olivier, baronet, Fabian and Governor of Jamaica. At the August meeting, the proposal was referred to the individual unions for discussion.<sup>29</sup> By October, only two unions wanted a Labour candidate – the garment workers and the transport workers. Six unions did not – the postal workers, the tailors, the tailoresses, the railwaymen, the upholsterers and the Typographical Association. Five unions favoured the establishment of a local Labour party; four were opposed.<sup>30</sup> Wigginton attacked the proposal to choose a candidate before forming the party and criticised Ludlow – 'I know he wants a Labour Party so that those who are not eligible to be trade unionists, such as Mr Sanderson Furniss, Dr Carlyle, Mr and Mrs Stocks etc, may join. We do not want a baronet as a candidate for the workers. What did Sir Sidney Olivier know of life in St. Ebbes for example! He was a baronet and Governor of Jamaica, 60 years of age, he supposed, or perhaps 70. The workers wanted young men to represent them – men in their twenties – not old fossils.'<sup>31</sup>

The discussion of the possibility of standing a Labour candidate should be seen in the context of the growing support of working people in the city for

the Liberal candidate, Frank Gray, who was the radical son of the former Tory mayor, Walter Gray.<sup>32</sup> In September 1920, the Trades Council had held a special meeting to hear Frank Gray. In November, he spoke at the Central Labour Club, with support from the Typographical Association.<sup>33</sup> In February 1921, Frimbley and Buy had been present at a meeting of Gray's in Jericho, at which he had stated his opposition to Lloyd George's coalition government.<sup>34</sup> A meeting in March which supported Gray was reported as including 'two dozen labourites'.<sup>35</sup> A Labour supporter wrote to the *Chronicle* calling for a vote for Gray since 'he is as sick of the present system as I am. There is no Labour candidate in the field.'<sup>36</sup> Throughout 1921, Gray took an interest in the problems of Oxford workers and made many visits to the slum areas of the city. He sought the support of the more moderate trade unionists – for example, he attended meetings of the workers union in August and November.<sup>37</sup> In September, a letter in the *Chronicle* claimed that 'Mr Gray had a large following of working men.'<sup>38</sup> Gray wrote to the Trades Council as well as individual unions asking to meet them to discuss matters of common interest; Wigington tried to defer meeting him until their attitude to a Labour candidacy was agreed but was defeated by 14 votes to 13.<sup>39</sup> The Trades Council asked Gray for his views on unemployment; he replied that 'work not dole' was a reasonable demand. He added that 'the obligation of the state should not be so discharged as to eliminate or diminish individual obligations which the state obligation does not exclude.'<sup>40</sup> The *Chronicle*, of which Gray was a director, argued that the effect of a Labour candidate would be to let in the Tory, Marriot. The labour correspondent suggested that 'the trade union leaders are going to be led by the nose by the voteless and somewhat visionary leaders of the University Labour Club, and the members of Ruskin College.'<sup>41</sup>

The Trades Council decided to run candidates in all wards for the municipal elections. The candidates were: West ward – Mrs Ludlow, Sweetzer of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), Timbrell of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF); South ward – Shepherd, Mrs Carter (wife of Alderman Carter), Mrs Sanderson Furniss (wife of the principal of Ruskin); East ward – Bullock (plasterers), Kempson (woodworkers), Prickett; North ward – Piper (postmen), who was chairman of the recently-formed Tenants Protection Association.<sup>42</sup> The *Chronicle* correspondent angrily retorted – 'When I see rich women (or the wives of rich men) whose only claim to stand for Labour is their theoretical advanced views in politics, standing as municipal candidates, then I doubt whether the interests of the working class are served by putting them on the Council.'<sup>43</sup> The Trades Council's hastily organised campaign was disastrous. With one exception, all the Labour candidates were bottom of the poll, and with King's retirement, Ludlow was left as the only Labour representative on the council. The *Chronicle* commented, no doubt with some glee, that 'the contests demonstrated the fact that it would not be the slightest use to run a parliamentary Labour candidate for the city of Oxford.'<sup>44</sup>

## CHAPTER 29

# The Re-Establishment of the Oxford Labour Party, December 1921 – June 1922

The lack of electoral support convinced the Trades Council that a local Labour party was necessary. The Trades Council's electoral committee therefore passed a resolution transforming itself into the 'Oxford Labour party'. Its objective was to 'consolidate all the forces working in the city'.<sup>1</sup> It was agreed to admit to membership 'individuals of both sexes' and to apply for affiliation to the National Labour Party. This proposal appears to have been accepted by the full Trades Council without opposition. Hyde congratulated Wigington on his conversion to parliamentary methods. Ludlow was enthusiastic: 'The recruitment of individual members from outside the trade unions will promote a healthy critical atmosphere ... I have reason to believe that the party may take a strong line to prevent itself from being a dumping ground for certain anti-social theories or their adherents.'<sup>2</sup>

In December, the Trades Council agreed to affiliate to the new body.<sup>3</sup> A subscription of 30/- was agreed and five delegates elected: Harris, Ludlow, Miss Heynes, Miss Birchnall and Morris. By January 1922, the party had been formally constituted as consisting of affiliated trade union branches, the Co-op, the Trades Council and individual members. Trades unions had one delegate per twenty members, the Co-op three per hundred members. Trade union secretaries became ex-officio members of the party's executive committee. No organisation could have more than ten delegates. Individual subscriptions were 1/- per annum. Secretaries were appointed for each ward: Mr Philips of the furnishing trade union for East ward; Parsons of the carpenters for North ward; Keefe of the engineers for West ward and Buy of the postal workers for South ward. The organisation was to operate as a divisional Labour party as determined in the constitution of the national party. It was announced that 'political propaganda will be the chief plank in its platform. It will aim at the unions and coordination of all Labour forces in the city and work for the return of Labour members to the City Council.'<sup>4</sup>

There seems to have been some confusion in the first few months of 1922 as to what the new Labour Party was doing. The *Chronicle* complained about 'private meetings'.<sup>5</sup> At the March meeting of the Trades Council, Hyde asked

about relations with the new organisation, to be told that ‘there was no one competent that evening to explain the intentions of the Oxford Labour Party.’ Ludlow added that ‘the Oxford Labour party is composed of men and women who are earnest but amateurs.’ It was also claimed that ‘they had found money for the November elections.’<sup>6</sup>

Ludlow gave a fuller report to the following Trades Council meeting at the beginning of April: ‘The party was in its initial stage ... Progress had been of necessity slow, as rules had to be drawn up and affiliation to the national party arranged. Membership was rapidly increasing and the outlook from the political point of view was encouraging considering that Oxford was Oxford and so many members thought it ought to be nothing else.’ £650 to £700 was needed to fight the parliamentary election. Ludlow added that the ‘pussyfoot brigade were ready with the money if the party would support prohibition’ (of alcohol), but he would not have anything to do with such a proposal. Shepherd felt that they should concentrate on local elections and that ‘the desire to send men to London was not the end all or the be all.’ The Trades Council agreed to nominate Wigington for the presidency of the Oxford Labour Party. The nomination was contested with Keefe receiving eight votes and Piper three, to 19 for Wigington.<sup>7</sup>

The Oxford Labour Party had its first annual general meeting on 16 April. Wigington became chairman (as the post of president was re-designated), Ludlow secretary and F. Smith of Ruskin, treasurer. The committee included Crutch of the engineers, Judd and Wing of the vehicle builders (from the Morris works at Cowley), Timbrell and White of ASLEF, Phillips of the furnishing trades, Russell and Tolley from the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), Miss Heynes from the Trades Council, and Mrs Ford, Mrs Furniss, Piper and Shepherd. The new ward committees met in the first week of May at the Mayday demonstration. Mrs Stocks, speaking for the Oxford party, argued that the Labour party was ‘the only party with a policy framed for the benefit of the great mass of the people ... There could be no economic system where there was no economic equality; where there was unequal education, there was unequal culture. The capitalist system was a dangerous and immoral system ... They must have nationalisation of the mines, and railways, all transport and nationalisation of land.’<sup>8</sup>

The party then adopted candidates for the November city council elections, together with the following manifesto:

- 1) A businesslike housing policy which will provide without delay suitable and convenient houses for all who need them
- 2) Free milk for nursing and expectant mothers
- 3) An educational policy which will secure to the children of the workers, the fullest opportunities of secondary and university education, with maintenance grants where necessary
- 4) Pensions for municipal employees.<sup>9</sup>

The Trades Council at their meeting also discussed electoral policy. Shepherd proposed a resolution which sought to commit the Trades Council to only supporting Labour candidates:

- 1) that where there is no Labour or socialist candidate the working class should not go to vote at all.
- 2) that the polling stations should be patrolled by sandwich men warning the workers of the dangers of having any political associations with any candidate outside their own movement;
- 3) where there are Labour candidates to urge all workers to vote for Labour and Labour only

Bayliss protested against this interference with 'political liberties' and proposed that 'it forms no part of the duties of the Trades Council to interfere with the thought and action of individual trade unionists.' This proposal was defeated by 14 votes to 9, Bayliss' supporters including Hyde and North. The meeting also argued over an application for affiliation from the unemployed organisation. The vote was tied at 12 votes for and 12 against. When the chairman gave his casting vote against affiliation, Shepherd and his supporters walked out.<sup>10</sup>

## CHAPTER 30

# Labour Divisions and Liberal Revival, June 1922 – December 1923

These disputes reopened the split within the Oxford labour movement. The 'picketing clause' (the second clause in the recent resolution) was felt by some to have contributed to the party's failure to win sufficient Liberal support to defeat the Tories in a by-election in West ward, where Mrs Sanderson Furniss polled only 405 votes to 966 for the Tory. An 'old Trade Unionist' told the *Chronicle* that 'now we know what to expect if ever the Labour Party, led by extremists, get into power in the House of Commons – a tyranny more drastic than ever was experienced under any despotic ruler'.<sup>1</sup>

North wanted the Trades Council to be reorganised as a 'purely industrial body'. He attacked the extremists for interfering in the election – 'How dare they presume to interfere with the political opinion of the working man or woman? It was no use getting away from the fact that there were strong Liberals among the working men and they would not be converted to Labourism by these tactics.' He argued that 'comrade Frank Gray is good enough for many of us just now, and we will make our opinions known. Frank Gray is the only likely man we can find, and he is a good friend to the workers'.<sup>2</sup>

Wigington was not re-elected by the postal workers as a delegate to the Trades Council but reappeared as a delegate from the transport workers. The woodworkers had withdrawn from the Trades Council over the picketing motion; the bookbinders resigned in protest at Wigington's behaviour. They claimed that the council 'did not reflect the spirit of trade unionism having become nothing more or less than a debating society.' North, referring to Wigington's change of trade union, argued that 'there is a certain section that was trying to get control of the Trades Council ... and that there was more behind that [Wigington's] move than some were aware of.' Wiginton replied with a challenge – 'if they wanted a fight, let them; and it would be to their sorrow and the sorrow of Labour in Oxford, and the Right Wing would go down, right down underneath'.<sup>3</sup> This outburst led to the withdrawal from the Trades Council of the postal workers, who said that they would rejoin when 'the business of the Council will cease to be conducted by one or two men – until the business is conducted properly'.<sup>4</sup>

The dispute was soon extended to the Labour Party. Ten members, led by Mr and Mrs Sanderson Furniss, demanded a special meeting to consider a

proposal to expel Wigington. Shepherd then proposed that the Sanderson Furnisses, Mrs Stocks and Ludlow should be expelled instead, a proposal which he refused to withdraw unless Sanderson Furniss withdrew his motion. Shepherd's proposal was defeated by 15 votes to five. The proposal to expel Wigington was then dropped, most of the 'right wing' members having left the meeting. The *Chronicle* commented that 'the Labour Party is becoming a theme for general satire ... the so-called Labour Party has been far too much in the hands of spinners of wild words and victims of their own unlimited egotism. As a result the Labour Party is on the eve of collapse.'<sup>5</sup> When, the following week, Ludlow resigned his position as secretary of the Labour Party, the *Chronicle* commented that both the Labour Party and the Trades Council 'are engaged in driving out of their ranks men and women of any sort of capacity or character ... The majority of sound, sane Labour men in the city have become alive to the peril, and the Oxford Labour dog will not any longer permit itself to be wagged by its Communist tail.'<sup>6</sup> Piper and Mrs Weaver were replaced by militants – Prickett and Mrs Marsh. When Ludlow reminded a Labour Party meeting of national party policy, North ward delegates proposed that the text of the membership forms should be altered to emphasise the policy of the local party. This was agreed. By October, the party's membership and finance were in confusion and F. Smith resigned as treasurer.<sup>7</sup>

While this dispute raged in the Labour Party, Wigington tried to get the Trades Council to fight the parliamentary election. At the August meeting, he suggested an appeal for financial support from trades unions. Harris, the Trades Council chairman, ruled that this was a matter for the Labour Party. Wigington challenged the chair, but lost by 12 votes to 10, with eight delegates abstaining. Morris, one of the Trades Council's delegates to the Labour Party, reporting on the last meeting, voiced his disgust with the 'rag and tangle': 'Talk about trade unions and Labour people standing together! I never saw such a wrangle ... I was always taught that Labour and trade unionism meant brotherhood, but I am afraid I was wrongly brought up. I expected a fatherly, homely sort of meeting.' This last comment provoked the retort – 'You ought to go to a mother's meeting.' Morris then resigned as delegate.<sup>8</sup>

Hyde wrote to the *Chronicle* to point out the seriousness of the situation. He suggested that the Trades Council 'owes its existence to men like King, Frimbley, Parsons, Harris and Ludlow ... Instead of devoting its attention to the task of industrial organisation, to the furtherance of the economic claims of the members of its constituent organisations and to the work of building up the effective representation of organised labour on municipal and other local authorities, the Council has allowed the Mad Mullahs in its midst to divert its energies to less practical matters.' Hyde referred to the left faction as "'pseudo Lenins and Trotskys'" whose object was that of obstructing the ordinary business, harrassing the chairman, dogging the secretary, and generally rendering the proceedings of the Council entirely futile.' He called for 'rank and file moderates' to unite to defeat the extremists, to save the Trades Council from degenerating 'into an

instrument for the use of a section which aims at the ultimate subversion of the trade union movement.’ Turning to the Oxford Labour Party, Hyde felt that that organisation ‘has under the chairmanship of an avowed communist, reached such a point of absurdity that no sane politician would accept nomination as its candidate and few sane electors could be found to vote for its nominee.’<sup>9</sup>

Harris resigned his post as Trades Council president; Miss Heynes resigned as assistant secretary, and Hyde threatened to disaffiliate the Tackley branch of the workers union. Wigington cynically commented that ‘resignations seem to be in the air’, while the *Chronicle* reported that ‘the Trades Council continues to decompose.’ Keen was elected to replace Harris. Bayliss then proposed that the Trades Council disaffiliate from the Labour party: ‘he objected to the Trades Council being exploited in the interests of any political party or faction.’ This proposal was only narrowly defeated – by 15 votes to 11. Several members declined to be elected as delegates to the Labour Party but eventually Hanger of the railwaymen and Allen of the paperworkers were volunteered.<sup>10</sup>

The Labour split had led to several of the adopted municipal candidates, including Mrs Stocks and Mrs Gillett, declining to stand. A special Labour Party meeting was called in early October, in an attempt to sort out the confusion. Ludlow had declared that he would not stand as a nominee of the Labour Party or the Trades Council. The unions in the building trades, which included the woodworkers, bricklayers, plumbers, painters, plasterers and general workers, then met and agreed to support Ludlow in West ward and Bullock in East ward. Shepherd, who wanted to contest West ward and considered running in all four wards, objected to trade unions supporting Independent candidates and declared ‘he would fight against this intrigue to the utmost.’ He attacked Ludlow for ‘stampeding the workers into the Liberal ranks.’ Ludlow replied that ‘No-one has fought harder than I have done in the cause of labour ... We can only have peace apparently if we are content to be led by the nose by Wigington and Shepherd ... He did not agree with communism if it represented anything like what they had seen in the last 12 months.’ As a city councillor, ‘he had put a Labour policy into practice – a Labour policy as he understood Labour ideals and policy to be.’

The Labour Party eventually decided to run Russell in South ward, Jarvis of the transport workers in West ward (carried on a nine to eight vote), to support Bullock in East ward and to leave Shepherd to choose his ward. Shepherd eventually chose South ward, where there was no Tory opposition.<sup>11</sup> Three Liberals were returned in this ward, with Shepherd receiving only 268 votes and Russell 211. Bullock came bottom of the poll in East ward with 640 votes. Ludlow was re-elected at the top of the poll in West ward with 1,174 votes. The overall result of the election was that the Liberals took control of the city council with 19 councillors to 16 Tories, each party having six aldermen.<sup>12</sup>

Hyde and North wrote to the *Chronicle* to argue that the election results had proved them right: ‘The triumphant return of Mr Ludlow and the equally decisive defeat of Mr Shepherd, has abundantly vindicated the position of

those who have always contended that Oxford trade unionists are opposed to communistic theories and revolutionary policies. So far from extremists like Mr Shepherd gaining ground in Oxford, the reverse is true. Their support at the polls becomes more and more negligible. We hope that this demonstration of the strength of the constructive element in the local trades union movement will serve to convince the citizens of Oxford that the extremist section is as unimportant as it is irresponsible.<sup>13</sup>

The local elections were closely followed by the long-awaited parliamentary contest. Both the Labour Party and the Trades Council were too preoccupied with their internal disputes to intervene. In October, Frank Gray, the popular Liberal candidate, had issued a Declaration of Faith, which included a statement on industrial policy. He supported:

- 1) diminishing the margin between wealth and poverty,
- 2) giving greater security of continuous employment to the employee,
- 3) limiting great aggregations of capital and growth of monopolies, and
- 4) the encouragement of the cooperation of employers and employees by their own creation of works and other councils.<sup>14</sup>

Though neither the Labour Party nor the Trades Council issued any statement on the election, a group of moderate trade unionists, including Frimbley, North and Miller, stated that 'to remain inactive at such a crisis when the future of the government of the country is to be determined is to betray the best interests of the workers.'<sup>15</sup> These views were widely shared for Gray was returned with a majority of 3,806 votes, defeating the sitting MP Marriot by 12,489 to 8,683 and becoming the first Liberal MP for Oxford since 1881.<sup>16</sup> The moderate trade unionists clearly identified themselves with this victory: Frimbley and Horrobin attended Gray's official victory dinner.<sup>17</sup> When Gray addressed a General Workers meeting in the new year, North voiced the feelings of many of his colleagues –

They were of course looking for Labour, and if ever a Labour representative stood then he would profit by the example of the work of Mr Gray. Mr Frank Gray had sympathy and humanity of heart; his heart was with the masses of the people, and it might be that one day he would belong to the great Labour Party of which he [North] and they belonged. There was no man for whom Labour would have a warmer welcome, and he only wished Labour had already more men like the city member.<sup>18</sup>

The Liberal victory in the local and parliamentary elections was followed by an attempt by Gray's supporters in the trade union movement to break the links between the unions and the Labour Party. The General Workers Union called a meeting of moderate trade unionists and proposed that a special conference

be held to settle some of the disputed issues such as the representation of the unemployed on the Trades Council, the basis of trade union representation, the enforcement of standing orders and affiliation to the Labour party. The Trades Council, on a vote of 21 to 13, decided to hold such a conference.<sup>19</sup> At the conference, held on 14 February, the General Workers argued that the unemployed should be disaffiliated, since 'a large number of them are not trade unionists, never have been trade unionists, and never intend to be trade unionists until necessity makes them.' This was carried by 20 votes to 13. North and Pimm then proposed disaffiliation from the Labour Party. Bayliss argued that 'the Oxford City Labour Party did not command the confidence of the workers.' He supported the proposal 'in the interests of trade union harmony and strength.' Ludlow vehemently defended the organisation, in whose foundation he had played a major role: 'Whether they disagreed or not, the Labour Party of yesterday, the Labour Party of today and the Labour Party of tomorrow was what they made. They could mould its policy. If they were outside they had no chance of doing this, and no right to criticise. The Oxford Labour Party was a young party. It had done, and it was doing splendid work with the assistance of the different classes.' Ludlow's speech seems to have won over the meeting and the disaffiliation motion was lost by 34 votes to four. The proposal to alter the basis of trade union representation was then defeated by 35 votes to nil. After the meeting, Ludlow commented that 'the debates of the Trades Council were more illuminating than those of the City Council.'<sup>20</sup>

While the Trades Council was deciding whether or not to support the Labour Party, the party was itself developing. Fred March was appointed secretary to fill the vacancy caused by Ludlow's resignation. By November 1922, it was claimed that the organisation had embarked on a 'campaign of useful and beneficial work'. Proceedings at meetings were now reported to be 'of an exceedingly friendly nature.'<sup>21</sup> The party was appealing not only to trade unionists but to sympathisers in the university. Dr Carlyle, the city rector, and Professor Soddy of Christ Church were made vice-presidents.<sup>22</sup> In its first few months, the party campaigned for the Board of Guardians to revise the unemployment relief rates, held a meeting on the French occupation of the Ruhr and protested at the deportation of Irishmen. Allen was sent as delegate to a Labour Party conference in London and a women's section was formed.<sup>23</sup>

In April 1923, the reconstituted party held its first Annual General Meeting. Wigington was elected president by 34 votes to Ludlow's 11; the five vice-presidents included Soddy and Carlyle. March was confirmed as secretary, while Prickett of the Communist Party became treasurer. March reported that 'the first year's working had been scarcely smooth' but contended that 'the foundation of the Party had been attempted in the face of big difficulties.' Ward organisation had been established and 'during the last few months, the individual membership had doubled, whilst trade union membership had also increased.' The party had £35 13s 5½d in the bank. The party's executive committee

consisted of Jarvis, Russell and Holmes of the transport workers, Hough of the railwaymen, Needle of the shopworkers, Allen and Miss Harris of the paperworkers, Keefe of the engineers, Mrs Ludlow and Mrs Hewlitt representing women individual members and Ludlow and Shepherd representing individual male members. The AGM was rounded off by a talk by Wigington on the history of May Day.<sup>24</sup> A week later, Wigington spoke with Ludlow at the May Day rally in St. Giles.<sup>25</sup>

The Labour Party failed to contest a by-election in North ward in February. When a vacancy was declared in West ward at the end of April, a candidate was adopted – Godfrey Elton, a history tutor at Queen’s College. Elton, previously a Liberal, claimed he had joined the Labour Party because ‘he believed it to be the party of truth and progress, and that it would accomplish what it set out to do so.’ Elton was the grandson of the Reverend Fletcher, who had been Rector of Carfax and an active radical fifty years earlier. According to the *Chronicle*, Elton’s election address was ‘on sound progressive lines.’ Apparently, he had been adopted mainly because ‘he had the time and the opportunity to give to the work of the City Council, and since he would not have to be paid by the Labour Party for any loss of earnings, which had been a problem for Ludlow.’ The *Chronicle* supported Elton, though expressing a reservation that his election ‘might swell the university influence on the Council, which is in the opinion of many ratepayers already excessive.’ Elton argued that the Labour Party ‘put the welfare of ordinary people above any other consideration whatsoever.’ He stood for securing ‘the best conditions for motherhood’, play spaces in West ward and a programme of public works.<sup>26</sup> He was however defeated by the Tory candidate by 1135 votes to 754. Ludlow thought that Elton would have won, had not ‘people who do not take their politics seriously turned the fight into a Town and Gown conflict’, Labour being ironically on the latter side. The election cost £16.<sup>27</sup> Frank Gray had lent a car, and Elton claimed that he had a relative of a cabinet minister working for him. Despite the high vote, Elton decided not to stand in the November elections; Mrs Stocks also refused to stand in North ward. The only Labour candidates were Sweetzer of the railwaymen in West ward and Herring, who sat on the Mental Deficiency committee, in South ward. Both came bottom of the poll; the former with 555 votes, the latter with only 269.<sup>28</sup> When the parliamentary contest came in December, neither the Labour Party nor the Trades Council intervened. Frank Gray was re-elected MP for Oxford with 12,311 votes to 9,618 for the Tory, Captain Robert Bourne.<sup>29</sup> At Westminster, the first Labour government took office.

## Parliamentary Contests and the General Strike, 1924–1926

The Trades Council rejection of disaffiliation in February 1923 seems to have been a turning point for the Labour Party in Oxford. The West ward by-election, though unsuccessful, apparently brought together all sections of the party. Ludlow claimed that ‘there was no doubt that the Oxford Labour Party had a solid base and had come to stay’ and that ‘in the course of the years the Party would have a marked effect not only upon the industrial but on the civic life of the city.’ He considered that ‘the party was the most successful attempt ever made in Oxford to unite the forces of Labour.’<sup>1</sup> In October, Ludlow argued at a meeting in the East ward that the Labour party in local politics ‘came as a class who carried the burdens of others, and in serving the interests of their own class they were better able to serve the interests of others. A strong Labour administration would mean less unemployment and improved educational facilities.’ With the next parliamentary election in mind, he stressed the need for a local Labour candidate – they wanted no ‘rich carpet-baggers.’<sup>2</sup>

The Trades Council was now looking at how it could support the Labour Party. A letter from the national Labour Party had requested the Trades Council to co-operate in a special conference to discuss the ‘unification of all Local Labour forces.’<sup>3</sup> A meeting seems to have been arranged between representatives of the Trades Council, Oxford Labour Party and the national Labour Party, but was deferred with the announcement that a parliamentary by-election was to be held. The merger proposal was therefore dropped.

The by-election was caused by the unseating of Frank Gray for corruption by an election tribunal. The Labour Party had been preparing for this eventuality. In January 1924, a parliamentary fund was established, and affiliated trade unions and the local Independent Labour Party and Communist Party, who also had affiliate status, were asked to make nominations for a parliamentary candidate.<sup>4</sup> In March, Oxford Labour Party representatives met G. R. Shepherd, the party’s assistant national organiser. The national party agreed to supply an election agent, a women’s organiser, two MPs as speakers and literature. The by-election was expected to cost £350–400 and a special appeal to wealthy sympathisers was suggested. Shepherd felt that, for a candidate, ‘the best type to do good in Oxford was one of the professional classes.’ He had two men in

mind – Kenneth Lindsay, who had founded the Oxford University Labour Club and had since been doing research for the Labour economist R. H. Tawney, and a Mr Markham, who was secretary to Sir Sidney Lee and a ‘man of the working classes who had worked up through university.’<sup>5</sup>

The Trades Council was divided over whether to support a Labour candidate. In November 1923, a long discussion had led to a decision ‘to support the Oxford Labour Party in any action they decided to take.’<sup>6</sup> In April, Ludlow expressed his concern at the selection of a candidate by party headquarters: he disagreed with the view that ‘a blackcoated man would stand a far better chance in so curious a place as Oxford.’<sup>7</sup> When the Labour Party adopted Kenneth Lindsay, Ludlow tried to get the Trades Council to disown the candidate but was defeated on the casting vote of the chairman March, who was also secretary of the Oxford Labour Party. March then had to deny a rumour that Lindsay had made a pact with the Liberals. Trade union support remained divided:<sup>8</sup> on the eve of the poll, a letter in the *Chronicle* from a group of trade unionists appealed for support for Commander Fry, the Liberal candidate, arguing that it was the Liberal Party ‘which gave organised Labour practically all the political and industrial freedoms which it now enjoys.’<sup>9</sup> Fry had been captain of the English cricket team and had previously stood unsuccessfully for the Liberals in Brighton and Banbury. It was rumoured that he had also turned down the opportunity of becoming King of Albania.

Lindsay opened his campaign with a meeting at Ruskin College. The Trades Council finished their meeting early so delegates could hear the candidate. In his speech, Lindsay stressed the Labour Party’s dependence on the trade union movement:

The Labour party believes that unless we organise industry on a basis of service to the community, with our first thoughts to the needs of the people in shelter, food and clothing, we should become more and more degenerate. We were drifting towards a condition of things in which there were more and more people at the top and more people living on the verge of starvation, and the only safeguard against that, was a strong trade union movement, a strong political movement and a strong cooperative movement, all linked together in the service of the people.<sup>10</sup>

The party agent, Croft, referred to the Labour Party as the ‘party of action and social reform’. Lindsay then held a meeting in the Town Hall. Ludlow, apparently reconciled with the ‘carpetbagger’, was in the chair. The speakers included Dr Haden Guest, MP for Southwark, Mrs Sanderson Furniss and Lindsay, the last of these dealing with the achievements of the new Labour government. A further meeting in the Town Hall was addressed by George Lansbury MP, Mrs Stocks and Lindsay. Lansbury, who had spoken in Oxford before the war, thought that ‘the men and women who had worked for years to keep the flag of

Labour and Socialism flying in Oxford, must be thankful they were alive to see a Labour candidate.<sup>11</sup> Further meetings were addressed by, among others, Fenner Brockway, George Buchanan, Frederick Pethwick Lawrence, Major Church, the Leyton MP, and Arthur Henderson's son. Ludlow commented that, in previous elections, the 'electors of Oxford seem always to have been talked to as if they were children.' Lindsay's manifesto emphasised the government's budget which reduced food taxes, the housing shortage, the fall in unemployment and its public works programme. The manifesto concluded – 'Don't vote Tory – Their Party is reactionary! Don't vote Liberal – Their party is dying! VOTE LABOUR and support the Good Work of the Government.'<sup>12</sup> Despite this rousing appeal, the poll resulted in a predictable Tory victory. Bourne polled 10,079 votes to 8,237 for Fry. Lindsay saved his deposit with 2,769 votes.<sup>13</sup>

Labour supporters were not too disappointed with this first effort. The Trades Council agreed to record the polling figures in their minute book and agreed to co-operate more closely with the Labour Party, suggesting periodical meetings 'with a view to the next parliamentary election.'<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, the Liberals were far from pleased. The *Chronicle* headlined the result with 'liberals lose through split vote.' The editorial raged – 'The whole Progressive forces would have supported Commander Fry and Liberalism had not the Labour Party introduced discord into the camp by the nomination of Mr Lindsay – one hopes that the Labour Party like the result of their handiwork.'<sup>15</sup> Lindsay wrote to the *Chronicle* defending his candidature. He argued that the spirit of liberalism was present more in the Labour Party than in the Liberal Party. He had come to Oxford 'to build up something new that had never existed in Oxford, a real fraternity of men and women from all walks of life, who are prepared to sacrifice something for the common good.' Lindsay pointed to the working conditions in the sweated trades and of the college servants and argued that 'this state of things will never be bettered until men and women workers by hand or brain join in an equal basis in support of a common cause. That means co-partnership in education above all things ... We shall have an end to class politics and the beginning of citizenship ... You may call my politics vague socialism, I prefer to call it practical brotherhood, because we have lost our values, both of human beings and of life in a profit-making world of make-believe and pretence.' The *Chronicle* replied that 'political victories cannot be won by the mere profession of admirable sentiments.'<sup>16</sup>

The *Chronicle* then tried to reopen the divisions in the Labour ranks. In July, the paper reported that 'there are strong murmurs of discontent in certain sections of the Oxford Trades Council' about the support for Lindsay and suggested that the Trades Council kept out of politics.<sup>17</sup> Any murmurs were not audible when, in July, the Trades Council renominated Lindsay for the Parliamentary seat, the nomination being seconded by Ludlow.<sup>18</sup> In October, it paid its affiliation fee to the Party and donated £5 to the election fund.<sup>19</sup> By then, however, Lindsay had been adopted as candidate for Harrow: he felt that living

in London, he should fight a London seat. Ludlow was adopted, apparently without opposition, to fill the vacancy.<sup>20</sup>

Ludlow's candidature was clearly welcomed by Labour supporters. Penny, the Trades Council secretary, felt that 'they must be represented by their own class.'<sup>21</sup> Ludlow stated that 'whether he won or lost the election he would not run away, but would continue to stand as their candidate as long as he enjoyed their confidence.'<sup>22</sup> In his manifesto, Ludlow claimed that his work on the city council and the Board of Guardians had given him an experience of public work which would prove invaluable and that 'that experience, coupled with an earnest desire to serve your interests' would be his incentive. The manifesto stated that Ludlow was in entire agreement with the Labour Party's programme as outlined in the national manifesto and set out the government's record on peace and foreign policy, housing, finance, education, agriculture and unemployment. Ludlow also stated his support for nationalisation of mines and railways. He claimed that 'not a single pledge given by Labour during the last election had ever been broken,' and that 'the Government had been forming schemes of real constructive value for the reduction of unemployment. It was untrue that Labour had not kept its promises to the unemployed.'<sup>23</sup> At a meeting in Jericho, E. Dowley of Ruskin proclaimed that 'Labour was fighting to remove the present order' and that the Government 'had solved problems which the other parties had failed to solve in 150 years.' At a meeting in East ward, Mr Hicks claimed that 'they must win because they formed the mass of the people, and that Mr Ludlow was a working man and that was one reason why he deserved support – The emancipation of the workers must come from the workers themselves.'<sup>24</sup> A meeting in the Town Hall was chaired by A. D. Lindsay, the Master of Balliol College, later to be a candidate in the notorious 1938 by-election.

One supporter said that '10 years ago no-one in Oxford would have believed that a Labour candidate in Oxford in 1924 would appear on a platform with the head of a college sitting behind him.' At a meeting in the Central Girls' School, Ludlow admitted to having sung the Red Flag but said this was not in Oxford. When the national anthem was sung at the end of the meeting, a Conservative supporter dashed to the front and led the singing, waving a Union Jack.<sup>25</sup> On the eve of the election, a meeting at the Corn Exchange was chaired by Gillett, a Liberal councillor, who stated his support for the Labour candidate, and his view that the contest was really between Labour and the Tories. The platform included G. D. H. Cole. One speaker, punning on the name of the Liberal candidate Robert Moon, thought that 'there would be an eclipse of the moon on the following day.' The poll however saw a fall in the Labour vote to 2,260, with the Tory MP Bourne being returned with 12,196 votes to Moon's 6,836. Kenneth Lindsay was defeated by a Tory in Harrow, while Frank Gray was defeated by another Tory in Portsmouth.<sup>26</sup> The election saw the Tories returning to power with Stanley Baldwin becoming Prime Minister. In the

local elections, which were overshadowed by the parliamentary contest, Labour had no success. Sarah Bowerman came bottom of the poll in South ward with 225 votes, while in East ward, Hughes, Collier and Batt were all defeated with 259, 257 and 233 votes respectively; in West ward, Mrs Ludlow came bottom with 446 votes. There were no contests between Liberals and Tories.<sup>27</sup> In a by-election in East ward, resulting from the election of the Liberal councillor Gray as an alderman, the Labour candidate Gallop trailed with only 176 votes to 1,768 for the Tory and 1,631 for the Liberal, to be mocked by the *Chronicle* as a ‘rather ridiculous figure.’<sup>28</sup>

The elections caused discord in both the Trades Council and the Liberal Party. Trades Council assistant secretary Moffat, addressing the organisation on the subject of the general election, commented that ‘What Oxford thought today, the rest of the world thought in the Victorian era’; the Liberal printer Binham objected that the speech was more suited to a ‘political meeting.’ He felt that ‘the way to stand together was not by extreme political propaganda but by bringing to Peoples’ minds more and more, what trade unionism really meant – Their attitude should be reason in all things, rather than to fight on everything.’<sup>29</sup> The discord in the Liberal Party was caused by Gillett’s support for Ludlow. George Beesly, a leading Oxford Liberal, called for Gillett to resign his Council seat and stand for Labour. Gillett replied that the mayor had not accepted his offer to resign. He claimed he had not joined the Labour party but had supported it because it had done more for peace than the Liberals. He was opposed to the ‘class-conscious’ element in the Labour Party and believed that the ‘Liberals without a leader’ should join the idealists in the Labour Party to form a new Central party. Beesly was not placated and continued to attack Gillett for supporting ‘a socialist candidate whose party is avowedly aiming at the destruction of liberalism.’<sup>30</sup>

The eighteen-month period following the general election was not a time of significant achievements for the Oxford labour movement but witnessed a consolidation of labour forces. Ward branches and the party womens’ section held regular meetings and socials.<sup>31</sup> In August 1925, a full-time agent, Trotter, was appointed.<sup>32</sup> The Party’s electoral fortunes however failed to improve. No Labour candidate was put up in a by-election in West ward in February 1925. Piper ran for a seat on the Headington guardians in April but received only 80 votes. In July, Mrs Bowerman lost to a Liberal in another by-election in West ward; a third by-election in the ward in October saw another Labour defeat.<sup>33</sup> The November elections saw further defeats – Mrs Bowerman and her son were bottom of the poll in South ward, while in West ward, Keen, Smith and Ludlow were all defeated, leaving Labour without representation on the city council.<sup>34</sup> A by-election in South ward in April 1926 passed without a Labour intervention.<sup>35</sup> In June 1925, the party had considered adopting a parliamentary candidate: two men, both from outside Oxford, were considered – Charles King and Ernest Robinson – but no action was taken.<sup>36</sup> The most dramatic

event of this period seems to have been a speech by the Glasgow MP David Kirkwood in St. Giles that same month. Kirkwood declared that he was 'an uncompromising revolutionary socialist – we are wild, and it is because we understand that the poverty abroad in our native land today need not be, that we are wild men.'<sup>37</sup> The May Day demonstration in South Park in May 1926, addressed by Lord Sidney Olivier, drew only a small crowd.<sup>38</sup>

The conflict between different viewpoints in the Trades Council continued, but in a relatively subdued manner. The printers' union wanted the Trades Council to run municipal candidates independently of the Labour Party, but the Council decided that all candidates must accept the Labour Party constitution. One delegate claimed that 'at least half the trade unionists of Oxford were not, nor were likely to become, members of the Labour Party ... the Trades Council delegates were not there as politicians ... they believed that in municipal matters trades unionism counted for far more than Labour party politics ... They ought to regard the Trades Council as being representative of no particular political opinion.' He wanted all trade union members to be balloted as to whether they supported the Trades Council's political activities.<sup>39</sup> In June 1925, when the Labour agent Trotter addressed the Trades Council on behalf of Mrs Bowerman, the by-election candidate, the printers' union objected.<sup>40</sup> The *Chronicle* took the opportunity to comment that the 'palpable decline of the Oxford Trades Council in authority and influence comes from the fact that instead of confining its attention to industrial matters – its proper business – it has allowed itself to become the tool of extremist politicians.'<sup>41</sup> This article led to the Trades Council banning the *Chronicle* correspondent from its meetings.<sup>42</sup>

Though the Trades Council did try to initiate campaigns on housing and unemployment, the main emphasis of its activities was a growing involvement in the wider Labour movement. In March 1925, it affiliated to the communist-sponsored National Minority Movement.<sup>43</sup> In July, it held a unity conference of trade unionists which set up an action committee consisting of the president and secretary of the council and a delegate from each union. This committee was established despite the fact that the delegates had no mandates from individual unions.<sup>44</sup> In September, two delegates – Holder and Bowden – attended a National Minority Movement conference in London. Their report was favourable, implying that the organisation 'was carrying on a good and necessary work for trade union unity and effectiveness.'<sup>45</sup> There was considerable debate in the Trades Council over whether it should support the Labour Party, or the Communist Party.<sup>46</sup> Only the printers' union wanted nothing to do with either organisation. The Trades Council nominated municipal candidates to the Labour Party, only to find that one of their nominees, Bowles, was turned down because of his membership of the Communist Party. It donated 10/- to the Communist Party's fund to defend their leading members who were being tried for treason and supported the campaign for the prisoners' release. At the same time, it also took several months to pay its affiliation fee of £1 to

the Labour Party and rejected a proposal for a donation.<sup>47</sup> In February 1926, the Trades Council considered leaving the Oxfordshire and Berkshire Federation of Trades Councils but the proposal was narrowly lost by ten votes to 14. A motion from the moderate Binham, ‘that it is not desirable for the Trades Council to affiliate to any political party’ was rejected by 25 votes to three, and affiliation to the Labour Party maintained. When reaffiliation to the National Minority Movement was proposed, one or two unions threatened to leave the Trades Council. Its secretary Penny, a communist sympathiser, supported disaffiliation, in an attempt to avoid a split; his vote was crucial, reaffiliation being defeated by 11 votes to 10.<sup>48</sup> In April, a joint propaganda committee with the Labour Party was established.<sup>49</sup>

A joint organisation therefore existed for the Oxford labour movement before the mining crisis developed. With the start of the strike, the Trades Council turned itself into an emergency committee, co-opting Barratt Brown and Trotter from the Labour Party and Kettle from Ruskin College.<sup>50</sup> The action committee set up a year earlier was revived and sat in permanent session. G. D. H. Cole, who had been booked to address the Trades Council on education, changed his topic to the coal crisis.<sup>51</sup> The Trades Council also issued a daily strike bulletin. The first issue listed the striking unions as the railwaymen, the loco-engineers and firemen, the railway clerks, the Typographical Association (printers), the plumbers, plasterers, furnishing trades, woodworkers, paperworkers and the building trades workers.<sup>52</sup> On the Tuesday, a demonstration was held in St. Giles. Ludlow insisted that it was a lockout and not a strike, industrial not political; the speakers included Cole and Trotter. The *Chronicle*, in an issue shortened by the strike, reported that ‘all the speakers were temperate in tone and implored their hearers not to give way to passion.’ On the Thursday, a further demonstration was held, this time chaired by Trotter and addressed by Cole, Horrabin and the left-wing MP Ellen Wilkinson.<sup>53</sup>

The *Chronicle* was hostile to the strike, supporting the opinion of Sir John Simon that it was illegal. An editorial commented that at Labour meetings ‘fallacies and economic heresies were talked, but there was a welcome absence of incitement to class feeling and ‘hot air’ generally.’ A printers’ meeting, chaired by the former Labour councillor William King, was reported as favouring negotiations. On the Friday, a further meeting heard Oliver Baldwin, the Prime Minister’s socialist son, and Lady Cynthia Mosley, the latter claiming that ‘she had been down several mines and knew the conditions and she appreciated the action of the miners in striking against a wage reduction.’<sup>54</sup>

During the strike, the Trades Council received full support from the other Labour movement organisations. East ward Labour party gave its support; Cole wrote a leaflet arguing that the strike was legal; the University Labour Club donated £80 and organised a cycling corps to distribute propaganda and take messages, the corps apparently including the future Labour leader, Hugh Gaitskell.<sup>55</sup> When the telegram announcing the end of the strike reached

Oxford, two meetings were cancelled, but a rally in St. Giles went ahead.<sup>56</sup> This rally demanded that the TUC General Council call a conference of all trade union executives to explain why the strike had been called off. They were also asked to send a speaker to Oxford or, failing that, 'an adequate written explanation'<sup>57</sup>. The Council of Action then reverted to its normal status of a 'Trades and Labour Council'. The minutes record a 'strong protest regarding the manner in which the settlement was being carried out by local railway officials.'<sup>58</sup>

## CHAPTER 32

# Labour in Retreat, 1926–1932

The unity of action built up during the strike was shortlived. Initially, the Trades Council and Labour Party co-operated in establishing a miners' relief fund and planned for the next municipal elections. At a Trades Council meeting in October, a speaker thought that the prospect was encouraging since 'following the General Strike the spirit of real unity had been quickened in all sections of the workers movement ... and that trade unionists will therefore gather together more united and more determined than ever before to secure representation on the City Council.'<sup>1</sup> This optimism was not justified: Ludlow declined to stand, and the three candidates – Sweetzer, Smith and Keen, all in West ward – were defeated.<sup>2</sup>

Divisions were soon created by the re-opening of the issue of the relationship between the Trades Council and the Labour Party. The national Labour Party had decided that communists were ineligible for membership. When the Trades Council secretary Bowles was nominated for the post of delegate to the annual Labour Party conference at Margate, the women's section secretary Miss Drysdale objected. When the Oxford Labour party confirmed Bowles' position, Miss Drysdale took her objection to the party's national executive.<sup>3</sup> In January 1927, the Labour Party asked the Trades Council for nominees for party positions; Prickett, a member of the Communist Party, argued that since communists were banned, no nominations should be made. Prickett was overruled but proved correct when the Labour Party rejected two Trades Council nominees – Richardson and Loynd.<sup>4</sup> Two Labour Party members were found – March and Tyler – but when Tyler resigned, a replacement could not be found.<sup>5</sup>

In April 1927, the Trades Council again became a Council of Action to fight the Conservative Government's Trades Disputes Bill which proposed banning any secondary strike action or any strike action which aimed to coerce the Government. Bowles, together with Smith and Wallis of the Labour Party, attended a conference on the Bill in Reading. When they reported back to the Council of Action, an Oxford Trade Union Defence committee was set up, to consist of three Trades Council officers, three Labour Party officers, a Ruskin student, a representative of the University Labour Club, one from an unaffiliated union, and one from the Co-op. The new organisation however had little success:<sup>6</sup> a conference in June was badly attended; an offer from the unemployed leader

Wal Hannington to speak was turned down and the National Minority Movement conference was boycotted. When the Trades Disputes Act was passed in September, the committee dissolved.<sup>7</sup>

The Labour Party was itself having little success: candidates were put up in the 1927 elections in West and South wards but all were defeated.<sup>8</sup> The Trades Council was forced by the new Act to disaffiliate from the Labour Party and at its AGM it was agreed that 'political propaganda' had to be deleted from the objectives in its constitution.<sup>9</sup> In order to bypass the law, it was decided that 'no political correspondence be made the subject of a vote but that all correspondence received by the secretary must be submitted.'<sup>10</sup> The Trades Council was however unable to take any action which the Labour Party might request. When in May 1929 the party asked for financial support for their parliamentary candidate, the Trades Council had to reply that they regretted 'being not in a position to subscribe.'<sup>11</sup> In 1928, Oxford's boundaries were extended to include both Headington and Cowley. A Labour Party branch had been active in the former since 1924 and now had nearly 200 members. The party decided to contest all six Headington seats in the election called for March 1929. The *Oxford Times*, Oxford's only weekly paper with the demise of the *Chronicle*, – a demise which reflected the weakening of the Liberal Party's role in the city – commented that Labour had 'brought in some of their "big guns."' Despite a thorough canvass, the six Labour candidates – Sam Smith of Ruskin, Mrs Uzell, Mr Uzell, Miss Moor, Mrs Bowerman and Mrs Sanderson Furniss – were all defeated by Independents. In the West ward, Ludlow, Keen and F. Smith were defeated, as were Percy Tolley and David Andrews in East ward, where Labour had not stood for several years. When Ludlow stood in a by-election, he was again defeated, though this time pushed the Liberal to the bottom of the poll.<sup>12</sup>

The local elections were quickly followed by a parliamentary contest. The Labour candidate John Etty had been adopted two years earlier, and though coming from Swindon, had done some canvassing in Oxford. During this campaign, Labour had a full programme of meetings, concentrating on the issues of unemployment and the international situation. At the May Day rally, it was claimed that 'the programme of the Labour Party was a very definite one and should command itself to the workers of the country and to everyone who wanted to see the restoration of industrial prosperity in this country and a condition of International peace.'<sup>13</sup>

At Etty's adoption meeting at the Town Hall, A. J. Carlyle declared that 'it was high time that the members of the progressive parties in Oxford made up their minds that they wanted a really progressive candidate, and that he must be a Labour one.' He appealed to their friends in the trades unions to wake up: 'The Trades Unions in the city were powerful and highly organised bodies, but in political zeal and force they were still lagging behind.' There seems to have been some criticism of Etty for his middle-class background. In reply, Etty claimed that he had no class but worked for them all, that he had been a

socialist at 17, and had ‘upheld the socialist argument in his school debating society.’<sup>14</sup> At another meeting, Etty commented on ‘how very little the great political issues of the day seemed to affect the people of Oxford, and how indifferent they appear to be to the sufferings of their fellows in less favoured areas.’<sup>15</sup> When Etty received only 4,698 votes to 8,581 for the Liberal Moon and 14,638 for the sitting Tory MP Bourne, he blamed his defeat on the fact that ‘the workers of the City of Oxford are not partisan ... He had been told that Morris’ was solid Labour’ – it seemed that the propaganda had frightened them – or their wives.<sup>16</sup> The Labour cause met with a small success when, in July, Ludlow was returned to the city council after a four-year absence. In a by-election in West ward, he defeated a Tory candidate who was backed by the Liberals.<sup>17</sup> At about the same time, a Labour party branch was set up for the Cowley and Iffley ward, with Mr and Mrs Uzell and George Currill as key members. The branch had no connection with Morris’ – Uzell was a boilermaker on the railways, his wife an organiser for the agricultural workers’ union and Currill a typewriter mechanic.<sup>18</sup> In the 1930 election, Walker, a builder’s foreman, stood in the ward for Labour; though unsuccessful, he got 287 votes, beating the Liberal candidate. Crutch in East ward came bottom of the poll.<sup>19</sup> Though Labour was in power at Westminster, these were lean years for the Oxford party. Even the strong Headington branch appears to have collapsed.

The creation of the National Government by Ramsay MacDonald in August 1931 was a further blow to the Labour movement in Oxford. The response was not united. The Oxford Labour Party declared its support for MacDonald’s government ‘in the confidence that it will pursue a policy aiming at international action for the revision of war debts and reparations and for the control of credit and that it will insist in future that British banking operations shall be brought under some form of public control, and that it will resume its propaganda in the country for socialist reconstruction, international peace and disarmament. Action along these lines can alone prevent a recurrence of our financial troubles.’<sup>20</sup> In contrast, the Trades Council pledged itself to ‘offer the most serious resistance to the threatening attack on the working class under the plea of equality of sacrifice to meet an alleged crisis. We say there can be no equality of sacrifice where there is no equality of income ... the only solution known to us is ... state control of banking and credit.’<sup>21</sup> The Trades Council also condemned the ‘black treachery of the Labour members who have joined or supported the so-called National Government. We declare this National Government to be one created specifically for the purpose of wage cuts and the further degradation and starvation of the employed and unemployed. We further regard it as a huge conspiracy to economise at the expense of the working class, and all at the dictation of bankers, rentiers, millionaires and industrial magnates.’<sup>22</sup> The National Government was also attacked by the University Labour Club, and the former Liberal MP Frank Gray.<sup>23</sup> When the General Election was called, the Oxford Labour party did not put forward a candidate. The prospective Liberal

candidate Mackenna supported the government, so Bourne was returned unopposed. The Oxford Labour party was in a state of shock,<sup>24</sup> and stood no candidates in the local elections in November. The University Labour Club elected G. D. H. Cole as president in place of Ramsay McDonald.<sup>25</sup> In 1932, Ludlow was returned unopposed to the city council,<sup>26</sup> but died four months later. Edgar Smewin, a signalman, tried to hold the seat for Labour, but failed to attract Ludlow's personal vote, and was defeated by a Tory by 784 votes to 520, leaving Labour again without a representative on the Council.<sup>27</sup> The Oxford Labour Party was now an organisation in name only.

## CHAPTER 33

# The Rebirth of Militancy – Unemployment and Fascism, 1932–1934

A group of hunger marchers from Lancashire passed through Oxford in October 1932. A reception was organised by the University Labour Club and the university-based communist October Club. A rally at the Corn Exchange was addressed by Wal Hannington of the National Union of Unemployed Workers.<sup>1</sup> A week later, an Oxford branch of the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) was established and immediately launched an attack on the city council for their administration of the means test. The group demanded full rates of benefit for the unemployed and asked the mayor to start a public works programme.<sup>2</sup> The Council had already set up an unemployment committee which had opened a club for the unemployed in Worcester Street. The public works programme, which the Council had postponed, was introduced in response to the agitation and provided work for 56 men.<sup>3</sup> In February 1933, Hannington returned to Oxford and spoke to meetings of unemployed workers at the Druids Head and at the October Club in Alfred Street.<sup>4</sup> In May, the NUWM national organiser W. G. Bayley met the local branch, which was chaired by W. Bullock.<sup>5</sup> By August, unemployment in Oxford was up to 2,406, though the following March the official figure had dropped to 892.<sup>6</sup> In April 1934, a NUWM meeting, chaired by the academic Labour Party member Patrick Gordon Walker, was addressed by the veteran socialist and communist Tom Mann, now 78 years old. The meeting was disrupted by scuffling between unemployed and ‘fascists.’ Mann argued that ‘so long as the workers were content to be subservient to the ruling classes, so long would they have unemployment and misery.’<sup>7</sup> Although unemployment in the city rose again, to 1,590 by February 1935,<sup>8</sup> the campaign collapsed as local activists, such as the communist organiser Waterhouse, switched their attention to other issues, though hunger marchers again visited the city, to be welcomed by local communists in 1936.<sup>9</sup>

The issue which led to the revival of labour militancy in Oxford was not unemployment but fascism. The British Union of Fascists first appeared in the city in the early months of 1933, a local branch being formed in February.<sup>10</sup> The group’s first activities were debates on politics with other organisations, such as the Imperial League and the YMCA.<sup>11</sup> At their first appearance, the fascists

were dressed in black and grey shirts and flannels.<sup>12</sup> By September, the branch produced 60 men and 40 women for a military-style review by Lady Makgill.<sup>13</sup> In May, a University Fascist Club was founded, with J. N. Tomes of St John's as president. Its first meeting was addressed by Mosley, the fascist leader.<sup>14</sup>

The Oxford Labour movement responded swiftly. In May, a meeting at the Town Hall set up a Council of Action against War and Fascism. The group was sponsored by a wide range of organisations – the Trades Council, the Labour Party, the engineers, transport workers, railwaymen, the Labour Party's League of Youth, the October Club, the University Labour Club, the Friends of the Soviet Union and the Red Shirt movement. The meeting was chaired by John Ida, a worker at Morris' who had become secretary of the Oxford Labour Party. The group intended to organise protests at fascist meetings. Loynd from the Trades Council, who was a communist, stressed the importance of a symbol of membership, since 'in case of a rough and tumble, they wanted to know they were not bashing the chap on their own side.' It was agreed that protestors would wear red jerseys, shirts, badges and armlets.<sup>15</sup> The first protest was against a Nazi speaker at a meeting of the University German Club at the Clarendon Hotel, at which anti-fascists gave out leaflets.<sup>16</sup> A week later, John Ida chaired a meeting at which Ellen Wilkinson spoke on Hitlerism. The University vice-chancellor tried to ban the meeting, thinking it was organised by the University Labour Club.<sup>17</sup> The Communist October Club was suspended by the university proctors later in the year.<sup>18</sup> By the end of May, the new Council of Action had 100 members from 40 different organisations.<sup>19</sup> Its activities were soon subsumed into those of the revived Trades Council and Labour Party.

The local fascist movement seems to have grown very quickly. In September, a fascist meeting with six German students as guests was addressed by Professor Joyce, an economist from London University. Local organisers were appointed: Vincent Keens as area admin officer and Mrs Hoosen Parker as women's organiser. An Oxford member, Miss Swein, was appointed to a position at the fascist HQ in London.<sup>20</sup> The anti-fascists had to wait until November for Mosley to return to Oxford. He was protected by stewards from London, Reading, Bedford and Birmingham. One communist was thrown out of the meeting, while other protestors were told to sit down 'with more force than politeness.' It was later alleged that some of the fascists were wearing knuckledusters.<sup>21</sup> After the meeting, Mosley declared that Oxford socialists had learnt their lesson, while the latter complained about the fascists' behaviour. Alfred Barratt Brown, the principal of Ruskin, sent sworn affidavits to the chief constable. A letter to the University magazine *Isis* attacked the 'fascist terrorism' and appealed to undergraduates to 'ensure that gangster tactics are not applied to Oxford politics.' The letter was signed by, among others, John Cripps of the University Labour Club, who was the son of Stafford Cripps, and Michael Foot, president of the Union Society, who at that time was also president of the University Liberal Club.<sup>22</sup>

## CHAPTER 34

# The Rebuilding of the Oxford Labour Party, 1934–1935

The enthusiastic militancy of the unemployment and anti-fascist agitation was channeled in the summer of 1933 into the revival of the Oxford Labour Party. The key figure in this revival was John Ida, who worked at Morris' and was active in both the TGWU and the Trades Council. Ida set up mass meetings and door-to-door canvassing and distributed leaflets. He produced a new Labour programme for Oxford, arguing for more working-class housing, playing fields, bathing places and wash-houses and better bus transport to the Cowley works.<sup>1</sup> In the November 1933 elections, he contested East ward, while Smewin again fought in West ward and an unemployed candidate, Spencer, stood in North ward with Labour support.<sup>2</sup> Though all three candidates were unsuccessful, the elections showed that the Oxford Labour Party was back in business.

The main factor in the party's revival was not so much Ida's organisational abilities but the impact of the first successful strike at Morris' in July 1934. The strike seems to have started in a spontaneous walkout of 180 workers in the press shop in a general protest against bad conditions and low pay, with no specific demands. There was little trade union organisation in the plant, though some workers were union members. There was no formal involvement by either the Labour Party or the Communist Party at the start of the dispute, although members of both were active in the factory. Oxford communists quickly seized the opportunity presented by the dispute, and their request to their London office for support resulted in the arrival of a full-time organiser, Abe Lazarus, known as 'Bill Firestone' for his involvement in a dispute at the Firestone tyre works in London. At Cowley, a strike committee was established, and a mass meeting addressed by two TGWU officials, Geobey and Packwood, and by Lazarus. The Oxford communists set up a Solidarity Committee under their local organiser Waterhouse to help the strikers. On the fourth day of the strike, a second mass meeting was addressed by Bowles from the Trades Council, Ida and Lazarus. Specific demands relating to wage scales were agreed. The Labour Party then held a special meeting which agreed to support the strike, and on the sixth day a rally was held in St. Giles. On the eleventh day, the management gave way and agreed both to a guaranteed basic wage and to the establishment of trade unions in the factory.<sup>3</sup>

This victory had a speedy impact on the Labour movement in the city. One striker, Emrys Williams, with the support of Roland Garrett and Henry Hamilton from the strike committee, revived the defunct Cowley Labour Party. The first meeting included four other members of the strike committee – Mick Murphy, John Welch, Harry Crook and Dai Huish.<sup>4</sup> For the first time, Oxford's major industry was having an impact on the city's politics. The re-establishment of the Headington branch soon followed. Sam Smith of Ruskin had made several attempts to revive the branch, which had dissolved in 1930; in January 1935, he succeeded in setting up a provisional committee. The women's section had continued on a social basis throughout the five-year gap and provided some continuity. Sam Smith became branch chairman, Kathy Lower secretary and Fred Smith treasurer.<sup>5</sup>

Both Cowley and Headington were outside the Oxford parliamentary constituency. The revival of the party in the old wards took longer. In April 1936, the West ward party was only meeting on a social basis; an attempt was being made to revive the South ward branch. The North ward branch remained in existence; in East ward, a branch was formally re-established in January 1936.<sup>6</sup> For most of the period up to the war, the Oxford Labour Party was in fact dominated by the members of the Cowley and Headington branches, with organisation and activity in the rest of the city somewhat sketchy. In 1933–1934, the Oxford party's membership was 120. The figure for 1934–1935 was 137. The revival came with the growth of membership to 225 for 1935–1936.<sup>7</sup> In the 1934 local elections, Labour again secured representation on the city council with the victory of Smewin in West ward. In South ward, George Clarkson, an organiser for the GMWU and Labour sympathiser, was returned as an Independent. Mrs Uzell was unsuccessful in West ward, while an Unemployed candidate, Francis Barrett, polled only 50 votes in North ward.<sup>8</sup> Clarkson soon identified himself with the Labour Party and called for 'more Labour members of the Council'. The GMWU branch chairman Loynd called for Labour organisations and trade unions to work together – 'There was a noble spirit of unity in their ranks.'<sup>9</sup>

During 1935, the Oxford Labour Party both built up its electoral organisation and developed an involvement in local controversies such as the disputes over the Cutteslowe wall and Florence Park, discussed in the next chapter. Patrick Gordon Walker, a history lecturer at Christ Church College, was adopted as parliamentary candidate in April 1935 and was well known in the city by the time the General Election was declared in November.<sup>10</sup> The Liberals did not put up a candidate and for the first time in the city's political history there was a straight fight between Labour and Conservative, though Bourne tried to claim that 'he represented all parties in the National Government'. The *Oxford Times* commented that the Labour position had 'been greatly strengthened by recruiting members from the Liberals, but still more by the industrial growth of the city, and the influx of people from places very alien from Oxford's political

traditions.<sup>11</sup> The Labour manifesto attacked ‘Four Years of Tory Misrule’ and outlined Labour’s plans to nationalise the banks, cotton, iron and steel, the railways and land, to raise the school leaving age and to increase benefits and pensions. The manifesto attacked the government’s rearmament plans and stressed support for the League of Nations. The manifesto also included an appeal to the ‘professional classes’ to support the Labour Party with the rather strange statement that ‘it is the middle class that suffers as much as anyone in the recurrent crisis of the capitalist system.’<sup>12</sup> Many of Oxford’s traditionally Liberal voters must have supported Gordon Walker, who received 9,661 votes to 16,306 for Bourne. Gordon Walker claimed both that the rain had militated against Labour and that if Headington and Cowley had been included in the constituency he would have won.<sup>13</sup> He need not have made excuses – the size of his vote showed the progress made by the Oxford labour movement since the 1929 contest.

## CHAPTER 35

# The Cutteslowe Walls and Florence Park, 1935–1936

The growing electoral support for the Labour Party was partly attributable to their involvement in two local controversies. These two issues, however, also gave the Oxford communists a grass roots base which was envied by their colleagues elsewhere, thanks to their party's intervention in what would now be called community politics.<sup>1</sup>

The Cutteslowe council estate, completed between 1932 and 1934, was in North Oxford. Developed next to it at the same time was a private estate, known as the Urban Housing estate. The developers of the latter built a six-and-a-half-foot fence round the estate, blocking off two roads which also ran through the council estate. This meant a 600-yard detour for council tenants trying to get to the nearest main road and the fences were soon broken down by children climbing over them. The private estate then replaced the fences with walls, despite the council refusing them permission to do so. The council tenants sent a petition to the Council and letters to the MP and the Ministry of Health.

Early in 1935, assisted by local communists, the tenants formed an association. The committee was chaired by Mr Hathaway and included Abe Lazarus. The communists called a meeting next to the walls for the evening of Saturday 6 April. In a leaflet advertising the meeting, headed 'Cutteslowe wall-paper No.1', the communists proclaimed that 'the two walls of Cutteslowe are a symbol of everything that is bad in present day society. These walls, which divide a middle-class from a working-class estate at great inconvenience to the latter show the contempt which the upper class have for the workers.' The leaflet pointed to the success of the Pressed Steel workers at Cowley and announced that the communists were ready to help the Cutteslowe tenants – 'the assistance of workers experienced at organisation – experienced in fighting for the working class.' The communists wanted to 'show by our actions that we are not what the boss-class (enemy) press says we are.' A second leaflet – the 'Cutteslowe wall-paper No 2' – included cartoons of 'walls through History' – 'The Chinese wall Failed in Foiling the Tartars', 'The walls of Jericho succumbed to the band of a band of Israelites', and 'The Cutteslowe wall yielded to the mass pressure of the workers'. The leaflet argued that 'the tenants of Cutteslowe can get the wall

removed for the simple reason that the wall has no right to be there ... workers of Cutteslowe, this wall is a challenge to our self-respect. It is an insult to our wives and our kiddies. Fellow workers of Cutteslowe, let us show that we are prepared to fight for our rights.<sup>2</sup>

On 29 April, a mass meeting was held at the Town Hall, jointly with the tenants of the Florence Park estate. Both groups marched to the town centre, despite police opposition. Banners included one which read 'Down with the walls' and another reading 'Must the workers always live behind barriers'. The meeting, which was chaired by Gordon Walker and included a speech from Lazarus, passed a resolution that 'the working class of this city will not tolerate police interference with the rights won through the years of glorious struggle by its forefathers, and will keep a vigilant eye on future events to prevent any further inroads on working class liberty.'<sup>3</sup> Lazarus had been advised by the leading Labour politician and lawyer Sir Stafford Cripps that the walls were illegal. He therefore argued that they would be taken down. A leaflet entitled 'Cutteslowe walls Jubilation' announced that 'the erection of the Cutteslowe walls was a breach of the city by-laws. The walls may thus be legally removed by anyone – we invite every Oxford citizen to help us take down the walls.'

The leaflet advertised a programme for this event, to take place on Saturday 11 May:

- 2.30pm. Band Plays and Childrens' Procession.
- 3.00pm. Meeting at Wren Rd. Speaker Bill Firestone (Lazarus)
- 3.15pm. Demonstration to the walls.
- 3.30pm. Removal of Walls.
- 4.00pm. Victory meeting and Demonstration over the site of the walls.
- 4.15pm. A Play by the Workers Theatre Movement.

The leaflet quoted sections 38 and 39 of the Oxford Corporation Act to justify the plan – 'we wish to point out that the removal of the walls will be carried out in an organised, dignified, disciplined and peaceful manner.'<sup>4</sup> On the great day, a large crowd armed with picks and shovels, led by Lazarus with a sledgehammer, met at the walls. A large cordon of police however stopped the crowd knocking the walls down.<sup>5</sup>

The communists' initiative was not however supported by the tenants' committee. This body insisted it was independent of political parties and disassociated itself from the attempt to take the walls down. After a 2½-hour-long meeting, at which tenants argued with communists, the tenants' committee decided to have nothing to do with the communists.<sup>6</sup> The latter however saw their campaign as a successful one. Arthur Wynn, an Oxford communist, wrote an article on the dispute in the *Communist Review*. Wynn commented that 'the whole committee had so far followed the Party lead unanimously, but at this point certain legalist members of the committee capitulated. The police warned certain members of the committee not to have anything to do with the Party

and spread the usual slanders about the Party 'being out for trouble.' The article claimed that the attempt to remove the walls had won tremendous prestige for the Party, and that 'at the next (tenants) committee meeting, the leaders of the anti-communist section were completely exposed and a unanimous vote of confidence in the Party was passed and sent to the press. A local parson attempted to discredit the Party by making an anti-communist speech, but this only served to expose him as against the interests of the working class.' Wynn concluded that 'The campaign in Oxford for the removal of the Cutteslowe wall is an example of street work from which comrades can learn many lessons. The experience gained by the Oxford comrades in the cause of the fight should be utilised.'<sup>7</sup>

On 20 May, the city council decided to take legal action against the Urban Housing Estate to remove the walls. The Ministry of Health decided to hold an inquiry and the Council suspended their action, to the fury of Independent councillor R. W. M. Gibbs, who stormed out of the council meeting.<sup>8</sup> The tenants' committee collapsed, and when a new committee was formed, led by Mr Ibson, it avoided political connections. In January 1936, on the proposal of Gibbs and Clarkson, the city council agreed to purchase the walls compulsorily, but the government refused to confirm the order. In December, Gibbs proposed that the Council sponsor a Bill in Parliament to remove the walls but was defeated in Council.<sup>9</sup> The tenants, supported by other Independent and Labour councillors, continued with their campaign. In August, the walls were damaged by a motorist but rebuilt. In June 1939, they were knocked down by council workmen but rebuilt by the developers. In 1939 and 1940, the developers refused to allow the walls to be demolished so as to provide access to the council estate for emergency services. When in 1943, after the walls had been mistaken by a tank driver for dummies in an emergency exercise, they were again rebuilt. It was not until 1959 that the Council was finally able to buy the walls and, at a little civic ceremony, legally demolish them, with councillor Gibbs' son, Edmund Gibbs, himself now a councillor, striking the first blow.

Florence Park was a newly-built private estate near Cowley, most houses being rented to workers at Morris and Pressed Steel. Many of the houses had structural defects and the site was very muddy. The owner Moss was unresponsive to complaints, so the tenants, led by Jimmy Kincaid, an AEU steward at the factory and Labour Party member, formed a committee in February 1935 to campaign for improvements to the houses and lower rents. A petition of 500 signatures was sent to Moss. The tenants also sent deputations to the council, and with some assistance from the Communist Party, produced a newsheet called 'The Rent Book.' Moss was a Conservative councillor for the Cowley and Iffley ward, while another Tory councillor, King, had supplied concrete for the development. This no doubt encouraged the involvement in the campaign of local Labour Party activists such as Mrs Uzzel, Elizabeth Pakenham, Mr Perryman, Richard Crossman and Patrick Gordon Walker. Abe Lazarus was co-opted onto

the tenants' committee to represent the Communist Party. A second committee was established, with representatives of the Cowley and Iffley Labour Party, the Communist Party and the Trades Council, with Wynn of the Communist Party as secretary, to investigate the problems of the estate.<sup>10</sup> An architect, F. Skinner, was employed, and the results of his enquiries were published in a report: 'The Oxford Rent and Housing Scandal'. The report called for 600 council houses to be built each year, a 25% reduction in private rents, a cut in electricity charges and the building of schools for new estates. The report also called for councillor Moss' resignation from the city council and supported the campaign to remove the Cutteslowe Walls. The document concluded that 'the Oxford workers can achieve these demands by organised united action. We, the tenants of Florence Park, have given the lead and call upon every Oxford worker to take it up.' A footnote thanked the Trades Council, the Labour Party, the Communist Party 'and other working class organisations' for their help in the campaign.<sup>11</sup>

The tenants' campaign continued with mass meetings in July and August. One leaflet carried a cartoon of people wearing gas masks, with the legend 'Is Florence Park a Government Experimental Area for Poison Gas?' The campaign was however unsuccessful, and the rent strike collapsed when four members of the tenants' committee were evicted for rent arrears. The tenants' movement did however revive in April 1939 when a Cowley and Iffley tenants' association was formed, with Harry Crook of the vehicle builders as secretary. Frank Pakenham, Yeatman and Dudley Edwards, the last-named a communist, addressed a tenants' meeting.<sup>12</sup> In July 1939, the Florence Park committee was revived with a new secretary, S. Langford.<sup>13</sup> In the same month, tenants on the Great Hadley estate in Headington went on rent strike. They were supported by the local Labour party and Pakenham and Crossman acted as trustees of the rent strike fund.<sup>14</sup> The tenants were however forced to pay rent or evicted, and the Oxford tenants' movement faded out with the outbreak of the war.

## Communism, Fascism and Local Politics, 1935–1937

The co-operation between the Oxford Labour Party and the communists in the Florence Park and Cutteslowe disputes led to discussions on the possibility of co-operation in municipal affairs and joint candidates in local elections. In June 1935, the Communist Party wrote to the Labour Party on behalf of their candidate in Cowley, Donovan Brown, a former Ruskin student, to suggest that the Labour Party should not stand more than one candidate for the two vacant seats in the ward. When this proposal came before the Labour Party's General Committee, Jensen, a communist sympathiser, proposed that the executive committee meet representatives of the Communist Party 'to consider whether the two organisations should fight each other.' Many of the delegates supported the principle of extending the united front to municipal contests. Heath, the party chairman, had himself moved the resolution supporting communist affiliation to the Labour Party at the 1934 Party conference. The proposal to co-operate in the elections was supported by Clarke of the Cowley Labour Party, who thought that since the Labour Party was 'very weak organisationally in the Cowley and Iffley ward, they could derive a good deal of benefit by coming to an understanding with the Communist Party, and that it would be in the interests of the working class to do so.' One delegate pointed out that 'it was entirely against the constitution of the national Labour party to enter into any joint action with the Communist Party.' Jensen's proposal was nevertheless carried by 16 votes to five.<sup>1</sup>

On 19 June, the Oxford Labour Party executive met a delegation from the Oxford Communist Party consisting of Wynn and Littlewood, to discuss electoral co-operation. The communists came to the meeting armed with an eleven-point programme:

- 1) That the number of council houses built each year should be 600, on top of building for slum clearance purposes, and that they should be built by the council's own direct labour workforce.
- 2) That the Council should reduce its rates by 25%.
- 3) Electricity charges in Cowley should be reduced to Oxford levels.
- 4) The building of schools on new estates should be speeded up. The school leaving age should be raised to 15. More free milk should be provided.

- 5) The Urban Housing Company should be prosecuted to remove the Cutteslowe walls.
- 6) Outdoor relief payments to the unemployed, aged, blind and disabled should be increased immediately.
- 7) A trade union clause should be inserted in all council contracts.
- 8) All possible efforts should be made to secure the complete withdrawal of Part 2 of the Unemployed Assistance Bill.
- 9) All possible efforts should be made to expose the war policy of the National Government.
- 10) All public services should be owned by the Council.
- 11) The two parties should co-operate in efforts to secure evening meetings of the City Council.

The meeting discussed each of these proposals 'at considerable length'. Wynn, for the Communist Party (CP), stated that 'every candidate put up by the Oxford Labour Party who supported that programme would receive every assistance from his Party.'<sup>2</sup> The CP's programme was also discussed by the Cowley and Iffley Labour Party, who supported it and mandated their delegates on the Labour Party executive committee (EC) 'to fight for the United Front.' A special meeting of the EC on 27 June agreed in principle with the CP's proposals. The Labour Party constitution forbade a formal agreement, however, so Gordon Walker proposed a reply to the CP which would bypass this difficulty by stating the formal position of no agreement then referring to the EC's decision that 'they will take no action resulting in there being more working class candidates than there are vacant seats in the Cowley and Iffley ward at the municipal elections in November next.' A letter was sent by the CLP secretary to the Cowley and Iffley Labour Party stating that 'as a democratic organisation, we feel that we cannot compel them to put forward more candidates than they wish to.'<sup>3</sup> This position was agreed by the EC without dissent and approved by the Oxford Labour Party General Committee (GC) two weeks later.<sup>4</sup>

This agreement was however challenged when the Cowley and Iffley Labour Party changed its position. In September, they endorsed two candidates, Mrs Uzell of the Agricultural Workers Union and W. Hawley, an electrician at Pressed Steel, rather than only the one required by the agreement with the Communist Party, and called on the Oxford Labour Party to reverse its decision. At the GC meeting in October, Garrett of the Cowley Labour Party wanted the Oxford Party to reaffirm its adherence to the party constitution. The meeting however refused, by 26 votes to 18, to change the party's position.<sup>5</sup> The Cowley Labour Party then sent a delegation of four – Hamilton, Lynam, Clarke and George – to meet the EC. They were supported by a letter from the regional organiser Croft, stating that the party's previous decision was 'ultra vires'. The EC agreed on the proposal of Bessie Kirk, the secretary, that two candidates should be stood. The Cowley party branch refused to support a communist candidate. The GC endorsed the EC's decision to stand both

candidates.<sup>7</sup> The communist candidate withdrew and Hawley and Mrs Uzell were returned to the city council with 1,047 and 1,044 votes respectively.<sup>8</sup> The Communist Party's election campaign was limited to Cowley and the Labour Party's election preparations were uncontroversial in the rest of the city. The Headington Labour party, which had only recently been revived, however had some difficulty in finding a candidate. Both the Reverend Record and G. Wallis, a member of the branch, declined to stand, but a don at New College, Richard Crossman, who had spoken to the branch on 'Education and Democracy' in March, agreed to contest the seat.<sup>9</sup> The branch pursued a lively campaign on Crossman's behalf with nine public meetings.<sup>10</sup> Crossman was returned with 1,378 votes. In South ward, a GMWU official, W. Wiltshire, was returned in second place with 658 votes, bringing the Labour gains to four.<sup>11</sup> After the election, the four new councillors and Smewin, elected in 1934 in West ward, were joined by two sitting Independent councillors – George Clarkson of South ward and F. Brown of Headington.<sup>12</sup>

Following the election, one of the sitting Cowley and Iffley councillors was made an alderman and a by-election called. The Communist Party insisted that, given the Labour success a month before, the Labour candidate should withdraw in favour of their candidate, Donovan Brown. However, the Labour Party EC endorsed the Cowley Labour Party candidate, Henry Hamilton.<sup>13</sup> When this was considered by the General Committee, there was considerable support for withdrawing Hamilton in favour of Brown: Hamilton's candidature was only endorsed by 27 votes to 16.<sup>14</sup> Brown refused to withdraw a second time. In his manifesto, he claimed the support of the Electrical Trades Union and 'other bodies of Oxford workers'. The manifesto dealt with electricity charges, housing, subway crossings and public services generally. It pointed to the Communists' record at Pressed Steel, Morris, in the Bus Company and over Florence Park and claimed that a Communist Party voice in the council chamber would 'challenge every move which is made to cheat and deny the worker', and that 'youth will initiate new ventures which the present hoary Council is either too timid or too disinterested to undertake'.<sup>15</sup>

Hamilton appears to have received only limited support from the Labour Party. The Headington party agreed to help, but only the moderates in the Oxford Party, such as Smewin and Clarkson, put in an appearance during the campaign. Both blamed the Communist Party for the Labour split. The result of the divisions in the Labour forces was the return of the Tory Sir Arthur Nelson with 1,104 votes to 748 for Hamilton and 453 for Brown.<sup>16</sup> The disagreement over Hamilton's candidature led to a dispute between the Oxford Party and the Cowley and Headington branches. At the December GC meeting, there was a row over leaks to the press and the Cowley and Headington delegates had to leave the meeting while a motion of confidence in the chairman and secretary was carried.<sup>17</sup> To clarify the constitutional difficulties, a meeting was fixed between representatives of the three parties and Croft, the regional organiser.

The Oxford party, on the proposition of Jensen, agreed that the Headington and Cowley parties should become ward branches of the Oxford party; a minority of delegates felt they should be autonomous.<sup>18</sup> The dispute was patched up with the drawing up of a new constitution for the party.

Early in 1936, the Communist Party again applied for affiliation to the Labour Party. The Oxford Labour Party EC supported affiliation, with two dissenting.<sup>19</sup> The GC supported, by 51 votes to five, a letter to the Party's National Executive calling for the acceptance of communist affiliation.<sup>20</sup> When the Communist Party's application was rejected by the NEC, the Oxford Labour Party passed a resolution to 'deplore the reactionary reply sent to the Communist party regarding their application for affiliation to the Labour Party and urges that immediate steps to be taken to hold a conference between the two parties to discuss a common basis for unity of action.'<sup>21</sup> At the AGM on 27 March, a reference to the communists in the chairman's annual report caused a row. The Chairman Evan Roberts and secretary Bessie Kirk had written 'we have to report, that on every occasion upon which we have had contact in any way with the Communist Party, we have found them extremely anxious to find a common basis for unity of action against the immediate issues facing the working class.'<sup>22</sup> A proposal by W. Townshend to delete this paragraph was defeated by 35 votes to 17.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, a substantial minority of Labour activists in the city were unhappy with working with the communists. The annual report also referred to the difficulties in the Cowley and Iffley by-election, adding that 'constitutional difficulties have now been amicably settled and we hope that we shall all have learned by bitter experience the necessity for some sort of understanding between all working class organisations must be clearly defined – in matters such as this, so that another catastrophe will be completely unheard of.'<sup>24</sup>

During 1936, the Labour Party in Oxford flourished. In February, Sam Smith of Ruskin won a seat in a council by-election in Headington.<sup>25</sup> The Headington councillors held a series of residents' meetings, at which they explained their activities on the council on matters of local concern such as footpaths, trees and park benches. Gordon Walker claimed that 'the Labour party in Headington was really beginning to be the real representative of the people.'<sup>26</sup> The Cowley Labour Party took up the issue of the need for new schools at Bullingdon, Westfield and Sunnymede.<sup>27</sup> In May, the Labour Party gave its support to the striking busmen, Crossman speaking at a demonstration in St. Giles.<sup>28</sup>

There was also considerable discussion on socialist strategy. Gordon Walker spoke at an East branch meeting of his view that 'Labour stood no chance of securing a victory by electoral methods,' which led to him being criticised for defeatism.<sup>29</sup> At Headington, G. D. H. Cole argued that socialists should not appear to be wishing to pull down the whole of the present structure, but to provide an alternative structure to increase the standard of living.<sup>30</sup>

The run up to the November elections revived the dispute over relationships with the Communist Party. In July, a deputation from the CP led by Abe

Lazarus met the Labour party EC to urge that ‘in the interests of the unity of the working-class movements’, the Labour Party should stand only one candidate in Cowley and Iffley.<sup>31</sup> The EC agreed, but the Cowley party objected, and the proposal was only carried at the General Committee by 20 votes to 17.<sup>32</sup> The Cowley party reluctantly agreed to stand only one candidate. There was also a dispute over candidacies in South ward. The city council Labour group did not want the ward contested since they wished the two Independents, Gillett and Yeatman, who generally voted with the Labour councillors, to be returned. The Labour Party was prepared to support Yeatman, a trade unionist, but not Gillett, and instead Foster of the railwaymen was endorsed.<sup>33</sup> For the first time in Oxford, the Labour Party had prepared, through a council co-ordination committee under Crossman’s leadership, a detailed two-year programme for the council. The programme concentrated on six objectives:

- 1) the completion of 500 houses,
- 2) the building of schools for new estates,
- 3) the provision of maternity and child welfare centres,
- 4) the building of five public baths,
- 5) council meetings to be held in the evening to allow working people to attend, and
- 6) the abolition of the system of appointing aldermen.

This programme was outlined in detail in a pamphlet, written by Crossman, entitled ‘Labour versus the Caucus’.<sup>34</sup>

The Communists attacked the Labour Party for lack of leadership and argued that ‘nowhere have you a more reactionary council than you have here in Oxford. They do everything for the rich and nothing for the poor.’ Lazarus claimed that the Communists had ‘an opportunity of delivering a smashing blow against reaction.’ He did however add that communists would not be stood where this might hinder the return of Labour candidates.<sup>35</sup> The Labour campaign, following the theme of the pamphlet, attacked the Council’s controlling group. Gordon Walker, at a Town Hall rally, said that Labour had drawn up a policy for the whole city, and not just for individual wards ‘to take up Oxford from its lethargy as far as local government was concerned.’ Crossman added that ‘the other side was not wicked but did not know the conditions of the people it governed.’<sup>36</sup> The Liberals and Tories reacted to the Labour challenge by forming an alliance. The *Oxford Times* supported the view of Alderman Miss Tawney that ‘the Labour group voting together menaces independence of opinion’ – it led to council business ‘degenerating into sheer partisanship and even into undesirable propaganda.’ *The Times* felt that the council members should be bound together not by ‘any political tie, but a desire for the common good. The City’s business has no place in the party game, and those who are seeking to exploit municipal affairs for political ends are better excluded from the council.’<sup>37</sup>

The *Oxford Times* attempt to support the traditional Liberal/Tory dominance of Oxford City Council failed to impress the electorate, the Labour Party gaining two seats. In Cowley and Iffley, Mr Uzell, a boilermaker, topped the poll with 1,860 votes, though a Tory was returned in second place; Lazarus for the Communist Party came bottom of the poll, but with the respectable total of 1,476 votes. Brown and Mrs Bowerman were returned in Headington. The two Independents in South ward, Gillett and Yeatman, were returned, with Foster at the bottom of the poll. The remaining wards were divided between the Tories and Liberals. Labour now had 12 seats on the Council, to 30 for the Conservatives, 17 Liberals and 9 Independents.<sup>38</sup> The contribution of the enlarged Labour group to council politics is discussed in the following chapter.

Electoral politics was only one aspect of the united front in Oxford. It was the activities of the fascists in Oxford that led to more effective 'unity of action' by the Labour and Communist parties. In February 1936, the city council's estates committee approved the letting of the Town Hall for a fascist meeting with Sir Oswald Mosley as speaker. Labour and Communist activists organised a protest campaign. A letter was sent to the council demanding that the booking be cancelled. The petitioners claimed that 'local and national experience has proved that at such meetings all democratic procedure as recognised by all other British political parties, is completely abandoned by the Fascists, who always import hundreds of Blackshirts, allegedly for the purpose of keeping order, but in fact to intimidate the audience.' The letter also referred to 'Oxford citizens being brutally treated' at the previous meeting in the city in 1933. The letter was signed by officers of the Labour Party, trades unions and Communist Party. The Labour Party passed a resolution calling for the meeting to be cancelled or 'if such a course is impossible, steps should be taken to ensure that the meeting shall be conducted in an orderly manner and that any stewarding necessary shall be undertaken by the police and not by the B.U.F.<sup>39</sup> At the full council meeting, the estates committee's booking was cancelled on a vote of 32–12, to the anger of the local fascist organiser, R. Goold-Adams, who argued that 'although the last time Mosley had a meeting here there was a disturbance, there is no reason to assume that there would be a disturbance again. In any case the onus is on the interrupters.'<sup>40</sup>

The Mosley meeting was eventually held in the Carfax Assembly Rooms at the end of May. Many Labour and Communist activists got into the hall and their heckling provoked a violent response. Although some students were involved in the disruptions, it was claimed by Crossman that 'most of the audience were Morris workers, busmen and other trade unionists.' Gordon Walker claimed that Mosley had deliberately 'provoked the audience beyond endurance.'<sup>41</sup> Frank Pakenham, a university don who had previously been a researcher for the Conservative Party, recounted his own involvement in the disturbance – 'I was rescuing an undergraduate who was being horribly maltreated by a gang of Fascist thugs. I dragged one of the nastiest Fascists off but took care to strike

no blows throughout. I was then tripped up by a most evil-looking Fascist but I rolled on him when he was on the floor.<sup>42</sup> The assault on Pakenham was raised in Parliament by Hugh Dalton and his story was published in the *Times*.<sup>43</sup> Pakenham and Gordon Walker also visited the Home Secretary Sir John Simon to protest at the fascist behaviour.<sup>44</sup> Basil Murray, the son of Professor Gilbert Murray, was also beaten up. He was fined by the magistrates' court for his contribution to the disturbance.<sup>45</sup> Four Blackshirts had to be taken to the Radcliffe Infirmary, so the violence does not appear to have been as one-sided as was argued at the time.<sup>46</sup>

Mosley did not hold any further public meetings in Oxford, but the fascists remained active in the city. Fascist leaders, such as William Joyce and John Beckett (like Mosley, formerly a Labour MP), attended local meetings, while the local fascists continued to hold debates with other local groups. At one debate, the opposition to the fascist team was led by councillor Gibbs.<sup>47</sup> In November 1938, the fascists were outvoted by 33 to 6 in a debate with the Left Book Club.<sup>48</sup> Mosley made an appearance at the University National Socialist Club dinner in January 1939, but there does not appear to have been any attempt at disruption. At this dinner, a Queen's College student, Guy Chesham, attacked the University Labour Club as 'socialism being prostituted in going around shouting slogans for Spain, shocking maiden aunts into believing you are a Socialist when you are nothing more than a hysterical exhibitionist.'<sup>49</sup> Though, no doubt, the fascists were a source of annoyance to socialists in university politics, they seem to have kept a low profile in city politics after the Carfax Assembly Rooms fracas. A statement that the Oxford parliamentary seat would be contested was hastily withdrawn.<sup>50</sup> Oxford socialists then became focused on the issue of international fascism rather than on the possibility of local street fighting.

On 17 January 1937, the Communist Party, the Socialist League and the Independent Labour Party published a Unity Manifesto. It called for the unity of all working class organisations 'to revitalise the activity and transform the policy of the Labour Movement'. The manifesto was based on opposition to fascism, imperialism, militarism and rearmament. It included a series of campaign demands including the abolition of the means test, increased unemployment benefits, a public works programme, a forty-hour working week, nationalisation of the mines, state control of the banks and 'making the rich pay for social amelioration.'<sup>51</sup> The Oxford Labour Party EC discussed the manifesto at the beginning of February and agreed that the party officers should sign it.<sup>52</sup> Gordon Walker, the parliamentary candidate, was inclined to sign, but feared that the Labour Party's National Executive Committee (NEC) would withdraw their endorsement of his candidature as they had withdrawn their endorsement of the parliamentary candidature of William Mellor, who was prominent in the Socialist League. He therefore wrote to all branches of the Oxford Labour Party and to all affiliated trades unions asking for their views, writing that 'I will only sign the manifesto if I am assured of strong support; because I feel that I can

only sign, not as an individual, but on behalf of the whole movement in Oxford. It is possible that Transport House may take a serious view of my signature and I do not want to involve the local movement in any trouble with headquarters unless I am sure that I am leading a united movement.<sup>53</sup>

The unity manifesto was discussed by the General Committee at their February meeting. The majority of branches and trades unions supported it. Delegates argued that unity was already established in Oxford, but Pakenham, now a Labour Party member, argued for a definite decision to support the manifesto to give a lead to other constituency parties. Crossman was more hesitant. He feared that if Gordon Walker went too fast, 'there was a danger of splitting the working-class movement in Oxford' and that 'in the past unity had been achieved in Oxford by working quietly and not by signing manifestoes.' Gordon Walker then proposed that 'in view of the critical situation in Spain and the urgent need for united working-class opposition to the Government's rearmament programme, the Oxford Labour Party calls on the NEC to answer the call of the Unity Campaign not with a heresy hunt, but by itself giving a courageous lead on the lines of the programme outlined in the Unity Manifesto.' This motion was overwhelmingly carried as was a motion to strongly recommend all branches and affiliated trades unions to endorse the manifesto and support Gordon Walker's stand.<sup>54</sup>

This recommendation was accepted by the majority of branches, a notable exception being the Headington Party, who considered such a step to be 'inadvisable'.<sup>55</sup> The only other branch to oppose the Unity Manifesto was the women's central section, whose leader Mrs Timbrell wrote to the *Oxford Mail* to state that the section could no longer support Gordon Walker as a parliamentary candidate. In March, Gordon Walker addressed the GC, arguing that 'these were critical days. Democracy was in danger, and we had to act as in a war crisis. The Unity Campaign should make the Labour Party politically active all the year and would weld the local Labour parties and trade unions together.' Support for the manifesto was carried by 34 votes to seven.<sup>56</sup> The Party decided also to set up an Oxford Unity Committee to organise a public meeting. The committee consisted of Evan Roberts, Frank Pakenham and Hector Prickett, respectively the party chairman, secretary and treasurer; Moxley and Jensen of the Trades Council and Waterhouse and Lazarus from the Communist Party.<sup>57</sup>

The Unity Committee held a public meeting in the Town Hall on 28 May. The meeting was chaired by Gordon Walker, the speakers being James Maxton of the Independent Labour Party, John Campbell of the Communist Party and William Mellor of the Socialist League. Gordon Walker appealed to Liberals to support the Unity Campaign, suggesting that the recent Liberal-Tory pact in the local elections had been a betrayal of Liberalism. He then outlined the Unity Campaign's programme, concluding that 'he was not disloyal to the Labour Party. He was ready to stand down at any time if the interests of the movement demanded it ... He must give the lead that he thought necessary

whatever the personal consequences to himself? Mellor pointed out that the purpose of the campaign was 'to strengthen and revivify the Labour Party not to divide and disrupt but to unite to bring back to the Labour Party the spirit and courage and hope which was so needed today.'

Campbell argued that the problem was not one of organisation but of policy. Maxton attacked Labour MPs for their recent support for the civil list grant of £5,000 to Princess Elizabeth. He considered that 'unless they had life, vitality, direction and purpose, a motive force constantly driving them forwards towards certain ends, the members of the Labour Party, the trade unions and the co-operative movement might as well be numbered with those in the cemeteries and graveyards in this country.' The meeting passed two motions – the first in support of the Spanish Government and calling for a Labour conference on Spain; the second in support of the unity campaign and protesting against the disaffiliation of the Socialist League from the Labour Party.<sup>58</sup>

The Oxford Unity Committee appears to have dissolved after the public meeting. Within a few months, Oxford Labour and the communists had switched their attention from a United Front involving themselves, the Socialist League and the ILP, to the principle of a broader alliance to include Liberals, consisting of all opponents to the National Government. It was this campaign for a 'popular front' which was to dominate the politics of the Oxford Labour movement in the last two years before the war.

## CHAPTER 37

### Labour on the City Council, 1934–1939

During the council year 1933–1934, the Labour Party had been unrepresented. Ludlow, who had been returned in a by-election in 1929, had died in February 1933. Smewin of the railwaymen was elected in November 1934 and was the sole Labour representative on the city council for a year. He was active on a range of issues, normally supporting opposition to the ruling group initiated by Independent councillors such as Gibbs and Clarkson: for example, he joined the Independents in their successful opposition to a salary increase for the librarians.<sup>1</sup> However, Smewin also pressed for higher wages for council workers with over forty years' service, for council contributions to employees' sick pay and for a day's paid holiday for council employees for the King's Jubilee.<sup>2</sup> He opposed a proposal that candidates in local elections should pay a deposit of £5, which he argued was to 'down the workers.'<sup>3</sup> He took up a number of local complaints over traffic lights, recreation grounds and bus routes. His main campaign was for more council housing: he claimed that the 'Council was shirking its responsibilities and had troubled nothing about the housing conditions of the worker.'<sup>4</sup> This led to the council considering a new housing scheme. However, he appears to have played no part in the controversies over the Cutteslowe Wall and the Florence Park estate.

In November 1935, Smewin was joined by six colleagues – four newly-elected councillors, Crossman, Wiltshire, Mrs Uzzell and Hawley, and two sitting Independent councillors, Brown and Clarkson. The Labour group won representation on some council committees but was excluded from the key committees on finance, highways, estates and valuation and parliamentary matters. Individual Labour councillors raised a range of ward issues during the year. There was not however any group unity on major policy questions. When the Independent R. W. M. Gibbs opposed a pension increase for the City Engineer, some Labour councillors supported him while others supported the increase.<sup>5</sup> The initiative in the continuing Cutteslowe dispute was also taken by Gibbs. In May 1936, Crossman led the protests against the letting of the Town Hall for a fascist meeting. The letting was cancelled, but Crossman's attempt to censure the police for not intervening in the Carfax Assembly Rooms fracas did not win the support of the Independents.<sup>6</sup> When Labour councillors raised the issue of a fight at the meeting, the Tories claimed that the agitation at the

council meeting 'was simply and solely because Mr Pakenham desired publicity.'<sup>7</sup> During the year, Labour councillors advocated the municipalisation of the bus service, and towards the end of the year, appear to have taken over from the Independents as the main challenge to the controlling group. One council meeting was reported as taking five hours because Labour councillors opposed all the committee reports.<sup>8</sup>

After the November 1936 municipal elections, the Labour group grew to 12 members. Crossman, who had written the party's election manifesto, was now recognised as the group's leader, though Smewin was the longest-serving Labour councillor. The Independent group had been reduced to nine members; the Tories had 30 seats and the Liberals 17. The Labour group was joined by two more Independents, Gibbs and Yeatman, and replaced the Independents as the opposition group, the Tories and Liberals having formed an alliance.<sup>9</sup> Efforts were therefore made to co-operate with the remaining Independents.

In November 1934, the Independent councillors had formed a group to seek representation on the committee which selected the mayor and sheriff.<sup>10</sup> Smewin attended one meeting of the Independents group, which however met irregularly and dealt only with procedural matters.

In January 1935, the Independents decided not to form a party grouping, though Gibbs favoured this proposal.<sup>11</sup> In July, a meeting of Independents discussed the role of a group and also the problem of street lighting, the only policy issue mentioned in the group's minutes.<sup>12</sup> By September, the group returned to the issue of nominations for the mayoralty.<sup>13</sup> The first meeting of Independent councillors after the November elections was attended by five Labour councillors but was adjourned 'in order that the Labour Party might consider their position in relation to other parties.' With the secession of Brown and Clarkson, the Labour councillors now outnumbered the Independents by seven to five.<sup>14</sup> In May 1936, the Labour and Independent councillors co-operated in nominating Crossman for the committee to select aldermen. Sam Smith, recently elected in a by-election, was nominated to the committee to select the mayor and sheriff.<sup>15</sup> The group however remained chaired by an Independent – either Gibbs, Gillett or Phelps. In September, Crossman gave the Independents a confidential list of Labour candidates in the forthcoming elections. Gillett was pressed to transfer his candidacy from South ward to North ward.<sup>16</sup> After the 1936 elections, with the Labour group now twelve strong, the Independents and Labour councillors agreed 'to meet together from time to time to discuss council matters.'<sup>17</sup> Only one further joint meeting was held, however, again to discuss the mayoralty.<sup>18</sup> The secession of the Independent Gibbs to Labour seems to have led to the collapse of the Independent group.

Although Labour councillors protested at their non-representation on the finance and watch committees, the growth of the size of the group and the collapse of the Independents did not lead to any formal co-ordination of the group's activities. No group meeting was in fact held until November

1938.<sup>19</sup> The group however secured representation on the estates and finance committees in November 1937, with the selection of Pakenham and Crossman respectively. Gibbs continued his protests on the Cutteslowe Walls;<sup>20</sup> Labour councillors supported attempts by Gillett to take over the electricity company,<sup>21</sup> while Pakenham raised the issue of fascist processions.<sup>22</sup> Even the *The Oxford Times* was forced to admit that ‘the members of the Labour Party in the City Council deserve credit for much excellent work in many directions and particularly for arousing the council from its former moribund condition.’<sup>23</sup>

Following the 1938 elections, the Labour councillors held a meeting which decided which councillors would raise issues at the council meeting: for example, Gibbs was to propose that St. Ebbes be zoned a residential area rather than as a business area; Smewin was to raise the issue of taxi licenses. The meeting also agreed that Crossman could join the ratepayers’ association.<sup>24</sup> In January 1939, a meeting was held at Ruskin College, and it was agreed that a group meeting would be held every Wednesday succeeding each council meeting.<sup>25</sup> At meetings in February and March, council papers were examined. The group also discussed broad policy questions such as child care. The group did not always favour having an agreed position: for example, it was agreed to leave a vote on cycling to individuals ‘as it was not considered to be a party matter.’<sup>26</sup> The group meetings were however poorly attended. In March, it was decided that Wednesday meetings would only be called ‘when necessary.’<sup>27</sup> In July, the four councillors who attended reported that ‘there was nothing of importance to bring to the notice of the group.’<sup>28</sup> Meetings in August and September had few councillors present. Group meetings were continued into the early months of the war but seem to have been abandoned in March 1940. The failure of the Labour councillors to work as a group was reflected in reduced activity in the council chamber, though some protests were made on matters such as city drains, allotments and air raid precautions. The last Labour proposal before war was declared was the nomination of Smewin for the mayoralty. This can be seen as signifying the acceptance by the Labour group of the Council’s civic rituals, of which they had previously been so critical.

## CHAPTER 38

# Popular Front – the 1938 By-Election and After

During 1937, the Oxford Labour Party remained militantly left-wing.<sup>1</sup> It repeatedly called for the Government to intervene on the republican side in the Spanish Civil War and supported industrial action in the Oxford area, such as a strike at Pressed Steel in April and another at the bus company in May. In the former case, the Labour Party and Trades Council put out a joint statement that ‘the struggle now being waged by the men at Pressed Steel is one of fundamental importance for the whole Labour movement.’<sup>2</sup> The TGWU called for a closed shop in the factory; work was resumed after a successful recruitment campaign which brought 90% of Pressed Steel Workers into the union.<sup>3</sup> For the duration of the bus strike, a Council of Action was in operation, which included Bessie Kirk and Hector Prickett as Labour Party representatives.<sup>4</sup> The principle of a united front was maintained, since the Council of Action also included two representatives from the Communist Party.

The movement for a popular front in the Oxford area originated in Banbury in May 1937 with the adoption of Patrick Early as a Popular Front parliamentary candidate. Early’s candidacy was supported by several leading members of the Banbury Labour Party and local communists. The intervention of the Labour Party NEC however led to the expulsion of Early’s supporters from the Banbury Labour Party.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the Oxford Labour Party came to an arrangement with progressive Liberals over a by-election in East ward. Labour had never won a seat there and was struggling to find a candidate; both Frank Pakenham and Evan Roberts had declined to stand. Both the branch party and the GC agreed to support the Liberal candidate Honor Balfour, who had participated in anti-fascist activity. Roberts, Pakenham and Gordon Walker issued a statement that ‘the Labour Party wishes to do its utmost to advance the cause of progressive forces in the city and wishes to avoid as far as possible any split between Liberals and Labour’. It was reported that the two parties had reached agreement on the issues of evening meetings of council, more council housing, better health facilities and better education and free milk and meals for schoolchildren. The alliance was however unsuccessful in that Honor Balfour was defeated by the Tory candidate by 1,041 votes to 692.<sup>6</sup>

The dispute in Banbury continued, with the emergence of pro-Early and anti-Early Labour groupings. The Communists switched sides to oppose Early. The arguments put forward for and against the Popular Front were soon to be familiar in Oxford. The pro-Early faction claimed that ‘the dissident minority threaten to waste their energies by attacking their fellow progressives’ while the anti-Early faction argued that ‘the Liberals and Labour Party differed in fundamentals. The issue would be quite clear cut. Either the present system of capitalism was to be upheld or a system of socialism must be put in its place.’<sup>7</sup> The dispute inevitably had an impact on Oxford politics. Early spoke in the city on the need for co-operation between Liberals and Labour.<sup>8</sup> G. D. H. Cole, who had recently published a book advocating a Popular Front, spoke in support of Early at a public meeting.<sup>9</sup> A. J. Irvine, then a Liberal, later a Labour MP, spoke on the need for a ‘Progressive Alliance’ at the University Liberal Club.<sup>10</sup> In September 1937, the Banbury Labour Party was reorganised, and the expulsion of Early’s supporters was confirmed.<sup>11</sup> The idea of a popular front had however already been taken up by Labour activists in Oxford, and they were not to be frightened by the threat of intervention from party headquarters.

On 12 March 1938, Hitler’s army invaded Austria. Richardson, the Oxford Labour Party chairman, called an emergency meeting of the party EC together with the Trades Council’s EC. The meeting formed the Oxford co-ordinating committee for Peace and Democracy. Six members were elected to serve on the committee and given powers to co-opt others; the six included Bowles, Ida, Prickett and Wilcox, with the last as secretary. The organisation was expected ‘to embrace all working class and progressive organisations who are prepared to work for the downfall of the Chamberlain government.’ The meeting approved the following plan of campaign:

- 1) To organise a monster meeting of Protest and Solidarity in the Town Hall during the next week or ten days.
- 2) To plan street corner meetings in every ward with the co-operation of ward Labour parties and also hold factory gate meetings.
- 3) To organise sending of protest cards to local MPs.
- 4) To issue leaflets for mass consumption.
- 5) To bring into activity everybody in the organised labour and trade union movement.
- 6) House to house petition sheets.
- 7) Special trade union branch meetings and general propaganda work.

The meeting agreed that notices be sent to all Labour Party members. Telegrams were sent to Clement Attlee and Herbert Morrison.<sup>12</sup>

The mass meeting was held in the Town Hall with Pakenham in the chair. A motion was passed attacking Chamberlain as a danger to peace and calling for

an embargo on trade with Japan which had invaded China, arms for republican Spain, and for the British government to be replaced by a Labour and Progressive government 'which will base its policy on collective security'. A University speaker claimed that 'the horrors of Barcelona may soon be reenacted in Oxford.' Tom Harris from Pressed Steel proclaimed that they would 'make arms only for democracies.' Lazarus claimed that the National Government was 'marching people into another war.' The meeting was preceded by a march along St. Giles, at which chants included 'Chamberlain must Go' and 'Arms for Republican Spain.' In the same week, a protest meeting was held in the Pembroke Hall, with Richardson in the chair, and speakers including Horne of the Labour League of Youth, Reverend David Garnsey, councillor Yeatman and Dudley Edwards from the Communist Party.<sup>13</sup> A demonstration and mass meeting in St. Giles on May Day was attended by a crowd of several hundred: most Labour councillors were present, and speakers included Pakenham, Roberts, Honor Balfour for the Liberals and Abe Lazarus for the CP. The *Oxford Times* reported the presence of Spanish Republican flags – 'On one banner was portrayed the head of Peter Ferguson, recently killed while fighting for the Spanish Government, and another bore the inscription 'Students demand arms for Spain.' The Oxford Left Theatre Guild's contribution was a horse-drawn cart, with figures apparently representing General Franco, Capitalism etc, and mothers with their babies, accompanied by a slogan 'Born to be cannon fodder.' The procession was headed by the Headington Silver Prize Band.<sup>14</sup> Two weeks later, a conference on the international situation was held in the Town Hall, with Sir Charles Trevelyan as the main contributor.<sup>15</sup>

Two days after the invasion of Austria, Pakenham suggested to the Oxford Labour Party that a deal should be made with the Liberals with respect to parliamentary candidatures. He argued that the Liberals should be persuaded to withdraw their candidate in Oxford in exchange for the withdrawal of a Labour candidate in favour of a Liberal 'in a not very promising contest' such as Aylesbury. He was supported by other delegates and it was agreed that negotiations be started to seek a Liberal withdrawal in Oxford 'without prejudice to the position of any Labour candidate.' Pakenham, Richardson and Prickett were appointed negotiators.<sup>16</sup>

The Labour Party in Oxford was not however united on the subject of co-operation with Liberals and Communists. The opposition to deals with the communists was led by John Ida, who had been responsible for the revival of the Oxford Labour Party in the early 1930s; he threatened to resign, and one member, Brooker, actually did so. A proposal to support the United Peace Alliance, a communist organisation, was only supported by 21 votes to 16, so the minority was far from insignificant. Opposition to co-operation with the Liberals was weaker: a proposal to arrange a joint meeting with the Liberals on the international crisis was carried by 21 votes to four.<sup>17</sup>

Labour Party headquarters at London's Transport House was clearly concerned at the development of Popular Front activities in Oxford. In April,

a letter was received ‘instructing members not to work in the United Front Movement.’ The letter was ignored, though the minute of the item in the party records was later amended to read ‘United and Popular Front.’<sup>18</sup> In June, Transport House threatened to disaffiliate the Oxford Labour Party unless it withdrew from the Coordinating Committee for Peace and Democracy within 14 days. The Oxford party’s EC reluctantly agreed to carry out the instruction to avoid a party split but also wrote to Transport House protesting at their attitude.<sup>19</sup> Transport House also objected to the Oxford Party’s intervention in the Aylesbury by-election by writing to the Aylesbury Party urging them to withdraw their candidate in favour of the Liberals. Shepherd, the national agent, wrote to Prickett, the Oxford Party’s secretary, to complain that sending such a letter to ‘a struggling C.L.P. which is fulfilling its obligations under the party constitution, is not the sort of thing that ought to be done by an affiliated organisation of the Labour party in its fight against capitalism.’ Shepherd added that ‘it has been reported to us that the Oxford C.L.P. is associated with a movement in the city consisting of Communists and Liberals and we shall be glad if you will let us know whether this is accurate or not.’ Prickett, in his reply on behalf of the EC, referred to the success of the Oxford Party, their support for Unity and the activities of the Coordinating Committee. He argued that the withdrawal of the Liberal parliamentary candidate ‘presents us with the possibility of winning the seat for Labour for the first time in history ... It is impossible for us, as keen and active Labour Party workers, to refuse to cooperate with local Communists, for if we did not, we should find ourselves cut off from many local campaigns and the remarkable progress made by the whole movement in the city bears testimony to the correctness of our policy.’<sup>20</sup>

In August 1938, the Tory MP for Oxford, Robert Bourne, died. Gordon Walker was immediately formally adopted as parliamentary candidate for the Labour Party to contest the by-election called for 27 October.<sup>21</sup> The Liberals had also adopted a parliamentary candidate – Ivor Davies. Before the Munich crisis developed, Labour spokesmen called for Davies to withdraw to avoid a split in the anti-Tory vote. Gordon Walker argued that ‘a Liberal candidate can only confuse the issue before the people of Oxford ... the days of the Liberals in Oxford are over.’ Davies replied that Labour had no chance of winning the seat, that their candidate was an obstacle to Liberal success and should withdraw. Gordon Walker retorted that ‘a progressive is the last person to want to waste his vote at the moment like this by voting for a party that has lost all its traditional vigour and is split into minute groups in the House of Commons.’ He attacked Davies as a ‘young outsider coming barging in like this and to make such pompous pronouncements about Oxford on what I believe is his second appearance in Oxford, is the height of effrontery.’ He referred to Frank Gray’s advice in 1929 to radical Liberals to join the Labour Party and argued that the Frank Gray tradition in Oxford had come down to the Labour Party – ‘If Frank Gray were alive today I am sure he would want to be the Labour candidate ... I would be only too willing to stand down for Frank Gray, if he were happily still among us.’<sup>22</sup>

Early in September, Davies made an offer to withdraw in favour of a 'progressive candidate without party allegiance' if Gordon Walker also withdrew;<sup>23</sup> this was a week before the Munich crisis. Gordon Walker's election campaign continued unaffected – he spoke to the engineers on foreign policy and to the unemployed association on the expected economic slump.<sup>24</sup> However, with the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the Chamberlain Government's concessions to Hitler, the feuding candidates joined together to organise a protest meeting at the Town Hall. The meeting was chaired by the Liberal candidate in Aylesbury, MacDonald, and speakers included Gordon Walker, Ivor Davies and Crossman. The platform party included Gilbert Murray, H. Etty, Patrick Early, councillors Smith, Gibbs, Mrs Bowerman, Roberts, Mrs Pakenham, Abe Lazarus and Hector Prickett. The Popular Front had been reborn.<sup>25</sup> The Headington Labour Party passed a resolution attacking Chamberlain, while Ivor Davies, at a meeting at the Plain, attacked the dishonourable peace.<sup>26</sup> The crisis had not however changed Davies' attitude to the election: at a meeting in East Oxford, he stated that 'you may take it as definite that I shall not withdraw from the contest in favour of any Labour candidate.'<sup>27</sup>

With less than a fortnight to polling day, Davies' earlier suggestion of an Independent Progressive candidate was taken up by the economics don, Roy Harrod, in a letter to the *Oxford Mail*. Harrod argued that there was agreement in the Liberal and Labour camps that a change in foreign policy was needed – 'If the Oxford seat could be won by the opposition at this juncture it might have a notable international importance. It would be a straw showing the way the stream was flowing in England. Such an event, small in itself, might be of great moment in the history of civilisation.'<sup>28</sup> There was considerable support for Harrod's proposition among progressive dons and students, both Liberals such as Alan Wood, the president of the Oxford Union who supported the Popular Front, and Labour supporters such as Pakenham, who had recently been elected to the city council, and Crossman, who had participated in joint action with the Liberals over fascism and Spain. A group of dons, including Crossman and Pakenham, approached A. D. Lindsay, Master of Balliol College, to see if he was willing to stand as an Independent Progressive against the Tory candidate, Quintin Hogg. Lindsay was a Labour Party member, though he had not been active in the Oxford Party.

Lindsay expressed his interest and a committee was set up to pursue the possibility with Harrod as chairman and John Fulton as organiser, neither being Labour Party members. Crossman and Mrs Le Gros Clark, who was married to the university's anatomy professor, then visited Gordon Walker at his home to put the proposal to him. An informal meeting of a group of members of the University and City Labour parties was then held to discuss the Labour Party response to an Independent candidacy. A meeting was also held with a Liberal party agent, Deacon, who proposed a Liberal-Labour conference of representatives from six constituencies to reach an agreement on joint candidates. There

was also a meeting of the Oxford Labour Party executive committee, attended by Windle, the assistant national Labour Party agent. It was agreed not to ask for the support of the national Labour Party, but only for its neutrality.<sup>29</sup> Lindsay approached the NEC to ask their view, explaining that he would ‘under no circumstances stand again for Oxford City at a general election’, and that the by-election was a separate issue from that of a general popular front. He was however told ‘of the difficulties which would arise, especially as Oxford has been the centre of Popular Front agitation.’ The NEC election subcommittee met on 12 October. Gordon Walker, who had been invited to attend, assured the committee that the mass of Labour Party members in Oxford supported him. He however pointed out that a number of leading members of the Oxford Labour Party were under Communist Party influence, mentioning the chairman Richardson, the secretary Prickett, Lawson who was secretary of the busmen’s union, Bowles of the railwaymen and councillor Roberts. The NEC told him not to withdraw from the contest.<sup>30</sup> Gordon Walker was clearly exaggerating the extent of his support: it has been claimed that all the party’s officers and 17 of the 21 EC members had requested him to withdraw. Gordon Walker claimed to the press that the NEC decision ‘puts at an end all proposals involving Labour’s withdrawal in favour of an Independent. I made up my mind that there were overwhelming reasons for continuing the contest as a Labour candidate; he differed fundamentally from those who said that the issue of foreign policy was so important that it excluded other issues altogether.’<sup>31</sup> Gordon Walker and his agent Ray Roberts tried to persuade the Oxford Party leaders to support his candidature and on failing to do so, took a deputation to see the NEC chairman Dallas, the general secretary Jim Middleton and the national agent George Shepherd at Transport House. Prickett, the Oxford Party secretary, argued that ‘It was of the utmost importance that we agree upon one opposition candidate going forward in the by-election in order that the progressive forces in Oxford can demonstrate their united hostility to Chamberlain and his Munich agreement.’ He was supported by Richardson, the chairman. Smewin criticised these statements on the ground that the local party had not yet made a decision on the issue.<sup>32</sup>

On his return from London, Gordon Walker reasserted his intention to contest the seat, despite being told that his agent Roberts was now unsure whether the campaign could be fought. He discovered that a rival delegation of Oxford Labour Party members had also gone to London to meet Shepherd and to persuade the national party to support Lindsay. The delegation comprised Lawson from the busmen’s union, Reverend Raymond Holt of Manchester College, Wallis from Headington ward and Mrs Le Gros Clark. Gordon Walker told the *Oxford Mail* reporter that – ‘There can be no question of my withdrawal ... Any delegation that may visit Transport House in no way represents the Oxford Labour Party, nor can speak for it. Apart from a few individuals who have made their position public, the great mass of the Labour Party in Oxford, without any

question, determined to fight the election as a Labour Party behind a Labour candidate.' He argued that the Labour Party locally was not divided and stressed the importance of social reforms – 'Some people seem to have forgotten that the majority of our fellow citizens, even at such a critical moment as this, are not rich enough to afford the luxury of worrying about foreign policy at the exclusion of other questions affecting the condition of their lives ... It is vitally necessary that domestic reforms should not be put aside, and that the Labour Party, which has a far better domestic programme than any other party, should frankly and openly put its case to the people.'<sup>33</sup>

On the evening of the deputation to London, a meeting of Labour Party members was held in Oxford in St. Michael's Hall. The meeting was attended by E. Windle, the assistant national agent, who had returned from London with the deputation. Windle's intention was to discuss the plans for Gordon Walker's election campaign. The meeting however insisted on discussing his withdrawal, and after a three-hour-long discussion, the meeting voted in favour of withdrawal by 109 votes to 34. Gordon Walker recorded in his diary that there were –

a good many Labour people, but also a large element of undergraduates and Ruskin students, one or two Liberals and some open Communists. Workers from Morris were brought in who were not members of the party. Richardson the chairman was very biased; picked on the whole speakers who were on his side; and at the end made an appeal for only members to vote but took no steps to see that this was carried out. Windle handled the meeting badly. He allowed the whole question of my withdrawal to be discussed and left the matter as if the whole decision rested with me. This gave the cue for an attempt to overbear me by a sort of organised hooliganism.<sup>34</sup>

When Windle reported back to Transport House on the extent of support for Lindsay, the NEC decided to leave the decision on withdrawal to the Oxford party's general committee. Gordon Walker and his agent then returned to London, supported by Yeatman, to try to get the NEC to change their position. Prickett and Holt also attended the meeting and produced their own list of party members who supported withdrawal of the Labour candidate. The deputation was received by Middleton, Dallas and Shepherd and three NEC members – Stanley Hirst, Barbara Gould and George Latham – who, given the clear division within the Oxford delegation, decided to leave the decision to the Oxford party. In their view, it had become clear 'that the by-election with Mr Gordon Walker as candidate had been rendered extremely difficult, if not impossible, [but] that the onus of withdrawing the candidate should not be accepted by the Executive Committee representatives.'<sup>35</sup>

On the following day, the Oxford party's general committee met to decide the issue. The meeting was attended by Shepherd and Latham on behalf of the

NEC. Gordon Walker attacked the NEC for not making up its mind. He then gave his reasons for resisting the ‘very great pressure which has been put on me to withdraw’ –

- 1) that it was a manoeuvre that played the Liberal game of preventing the growth of Labour,
- 2) the so called ‘Democratic’ Front was a very dangerous and mistaken word,
- 3) He believed firmly in putting forward the full socialist programme.

He claimed that he stood a good chance of election in a three-cornered contest. He refused to withdraw and claimed that ‘the responsibility was that of the G.C. Such a decision if taken was against his advice.’ Latham rejected the allegation that the NEC had been weak. He considered that they had carried out their duty ‘to recall local parties to fundamental principles and this they had done. The N.E.C. had decided to support the choice of Comrade Walker and would still do so.’ Latham also stated that the NEC had no intention of influencing the GC’s decision.

The meeting then started discussing Lindsay’s candidature but Shepherd intervened to remind the GC ‘that this question was not within the competence of their meeting.’ Hector Prickett, the Party secretary, then proposed a resolution that ‘in view of the continued gravity of the international crisis and the disastrous consequences of the policy of surrendering to aggression pursued by the Government, the G.C. considers it in the best interests of the party, both locally and nationally, to refrain from putting forward a candidate and to support the candidature of an independent progressive.’ Shepherd insisted on the last clause being deleted as out of order. Prickett argued that he was not sinking his political principles but believed that the defeat of the Government would strengthen the whole Labour movement. The motion was seconded by the Reverend Holt, the vice-principal of the unitarian Manchester College, who argued that ‘there would be no next generation if a stand was not made now.’ The motion was opposed by, among others, Rutherford and Yeatman; Crossman spoke in favour. Shepherd again intervened to state that ‘the Labour Party was under an obligation to put its policy before the electorate, and the N.E.C. believed Oxford should be fought.’ He then said that ‘he could not answer for the action of the N.E.C. if Labour withdrew’, but on being challenged, denied that this was meant as a threat. Pakenham then gave an account of the negotiations between individual Labour Party members and the local Liberals. He claimed that he and his colleagues had ‘stood firm against any demands by the Liberals which would commit labour in the future and prejudice its interests in any way.’ Prickett’s motion was then put to the vote and carried by 48 votes to 12. The meeting concluded with Pakenham thanking Gordon Walker for his services to the local Labour party.<sup>36</sup>

The Liberals were not entirely happy with the situation. They wanted Lindsay to resign from the Labour Party. They however agreed to withdraw their

candidate if Lindsay agreed that, if elected, he would not accept the Labour whip, and if their election expenses were reimbursed. Lindsay agreed not to take the Labour whip and Pakenham paid the Liberal expenses of £350. Ivor Davies' candidacy was then withdrawn, leaving a straight fight between Lindsay and Quintin Hogg.<sup>37</sup>

The alliance supporting Lindsay was a strange one. Abe Lazarus and his communist colleagues were joined by dissident Tory students such as Edward Heath. The Labour Party NEC stopped Stafford Cripps from speaking for Lindsay, but he was not short of prominent supporters, who included Randolph Churchill, Harold MacMillan, Megan Lloyd George and Richard Acland.<sup>38</sup>

The Oxford Labour Party however remained divided, and Gordon Walker obstinate. On 21 October, he told the *Oxford Times* that 'I am convinced that Labour has a policy, wide, popular and constructive enough to rally the country behind it. The Oxford City Labour Party had decided otherwise. I am not standing down. The local Labour Party is withdrawing the Labour candidate.'<sup>39</sup> Gordon Walker's protest also appeared in the party paper, the *Daily Herald*.<sup>40</sup> He nevertheless advised his supporters to vote for Lindsay. On the eve of the poll, a leaflet was published, headed 'Labour supports Dr Lindsay' which included a statement from Gordon Walker: 'Without qualifications, I urge all those who would have supported my candidature to vote in this election for Mr Lindsay. Democrats – especially in such a crisis as this – must on no account neglect to use their vote. The duty of democrats is to secure the defeat of the Government. Mr Lindsay is standing as an anti-Government candidate. I therefore call on you to vote for Mr Lindsay on October 27th.' The leaflet included an appeal from local Labour and trade union leaders to support Lindsay. It was signed by Richardson and Prickett, respectively chairman and secretary of the Oxford Labour Party; Bowles and Bush, the Trades Council chairman and secretary; Wallis of the Co-op; Powell and Lawson of the busmen's union; Tom Harris and Jock Villamure from Pressed Steel; Squires of the engineers; Moxley, the Labour Party treasurer; Abe Lazarus; councillors Crossman, Pakenham, Foster, Roberts and Gibbs; and Dudley Edwards of the Unemployed Association.<sup>41</sup> The GC minority was not entirely silent: Yeatman wrote to the *The Oxford Times* attacking the support for Lindsay as 'a gross betrayal' of Gordon Walker.<sup>42</sup> However, since Yeatman and his colleagues could hardly support Hogg, their only option was to abstain from the election altogether.

The Lindsay campaign was, predictably, a lively one. He had the combined organisations of the Liberal and Labour parties behind him. A popular front was put forward with Communists, Labour supporters, Liberals and dissident Conservatives sharing his platform, and even Gordon Walker was persuaded to speak for him at the eve of poll meeting at the Town Hall. Lindsay apparently believed he was going to win, and on the morning of the poll told Pakenham that he could not see how anybody could vote against him. Quintin Hogg was nevertheless returned by 15,797 votes to 12,363, a majority of 3,434, compared with Bourne's majority over Gordon Walker in 1935 of 6,645. Hogg claimed the

result as a victory for Chamberlain. Lindsay, though disappointed, stated that they had ‘started a movement that is not going to stop.’

Gordon Walker recorded in his diary his understanding of the components of the campaign for his withdrawal in Lindsay’s favour:

The elements locally that were drawn into or instigated this move were as follows:

- 1) The University and middle-class element. Many of them members of the Labour Party.
- 2) Left Book Club Socialists who had recently come into the movement.
- 3) The Communist Party which is still making its Popular Front [Liberal-Communist] Alliance. The CP has a considerable influence over the apparatus of the LP in Oxford. It was able to get behind it, in these circumstances, a good majority on the General Council.
- 4) The [University] Labour Club, which is wholeheartedly Popular Front and which has a large delegation on the General Council.
- 5) A certain number of very loyal LP members were won over either to support or to a confused state of mind and were obviously shaken by the war-scare.
- 6) Another factor that worked on people’s minds and overlapped with the above factors was the desire to hold the Labour party back. Especially amongst the University element there was the ‘Liberal’ desire to divert the working class from the Labour Party by crisis-talk.
- 7) A certain number of people were in the end won over by the argument that the campaign was now wrecked anyhow and it was impossible to fight.

Crossman, who initiated the scheme, was either consciously or subconsciously jealous of me and wanted the Oxford seat for himself as Labour candidate or independent. Some good Labour Party people had not forgiven me for having joined with the Cripps’ Unity Campaign.<sup>43</sup>

The election campaign intensified the divisions in the local labour movement. As soon as the result was announced, Gordon Walker reopened his attack on the ‘popular front’ deal. In a letter to the *New Statesman* a week after the poll he wrote ‘the Lindsay campaign was very largely initiated in middle class University or near University circles, fairly early on drawing in communist support ... The most infuriating thing of all is that a glorious chance has been missed to lead a real popular front, with organised Labour in the lead (instead of this inverted ‘democratic front’ led by the intellectuals).’<sup>44</sup> A letter from an ‘Old Socialist’ appeared in the *Oxford Times* – ‘As an old Labour supporter for many years in Oxford, I must now break away, with a good many more, although sorry to do it. Was Gordon Walker thrown overboard because he was a straight out-and-out socialist and would not tinker with Liberalism, or is it the ‘Rich Socialist’ – whatever that is – who affects the Labour caucus? For a man, after four years work, to be overthrown in favour of another

with apparently no chance of winning to me is absurd. There is a bitter feeling about this in Oxford Labour circles which may cause a flare before long ... I say 'Cripps must go – Pakenham will go!'<sup>45</sup>

A special GC was called to discuss the by-election campaign. The chairman Richardson spoke of the result as a great success but regretted that 'valuable time and energy had had to be wasted on considering disunity put about by a minority of our own members.' This statement provoked the opponents of withdrawal. Smewin attacked the party for not having the courage of its convictions. Rutherford argued that the party was 'too concerned with questions of high policy and national affairs and paying too little attention to local routine matters.' Gordon Walker and Rutherford wanted the decision to withdraw the candidate expunged from the minutes of the previous meeting. An amendment not to change the records but to invite nominations for a new parliamentary candidate was carried by 38 votes to four.<sup>46</sup> The repercussions continued: Yeatman resigned from the party and the woodworkers' union disaffiliated.<sup>47</sup> Transport House refused to approve the selection of a new parliamentary candidate until the by-election had been discussed.<sup>48</sup> A special meeting of the GC was called at the NEC's request, and was attended by Hugh Dalton, Latham and Shepherd. Shepherd stated that the NEC was disturbed by the Oxford party's actions over the Coordinating Committee for Peace and Democracy, the intervention in the Aylesbury by-election, and the Oxford by-election campaign. Dalton denied that the NEC was carrying out an inquest, saying that he wanted a friendly discussion. The NEC wanted an assurance that a future Labour candidate would have the party's support. Richardson criticised the NEC for lack of leadership. Smewin argued that the withdrawal of Gordon Walker had been engineered by 'Communists on one side and the University on the other'; he wanted a guarantee that conference decisions would be adhered to. Lindsay's supporters stressed the exceptional circumstances of the by-election, and Holt argued that a failure to act would have meant 'the end of democracy'. G. D. H. Cole said he had only supported Lindsay because it was a by-election, while Sam Smith called for greater flexibility from Transport House and Pakenham argued that Lindsay would have won if the NEC had supported him. Dalton's response to the discussion was to comment that the communists were more of a liability than an asset; he stressed that the Labour Party had a policy of no commitments to other parties. He denied that the NEC had failed to give leadership and referred to their activities on Spain. He concluded that the Labour Party was the only force capable of defeating the government. A motion proposed by Prickett to pledge the party to supporting a Labour parliamentary candidate was then carried.<sup>49</sup>

In January 1939, the Oxford Labour Party adopted a new parliamentary candidate. Gordon Walker had resisted pressure from the party chairman Richardson to stand down, and he and Pakenham were the two nominees, with eight nominations and four, respectively. Pakenham said he was standing because he thought that, after the by-election, Gordon Walker could not be elected. Gordon Walker gave his reason for standing as his concern at Pakenham's

rushed candidacy and to test his loyalty to the party. Pakenham was adopted by 43 votes to 11 for Gordon Walker.<sup>50</sup>

The NEC refused to endorse Pakenham unless the party gave a commitment not to make deals with other parties or interfere in other constituencies, and promised that he would contest the seat and not withdraw at the next election. Pakenham refused to accept these conditions, saying ‘he could not bind himself not to take action to avoid splitting the progressive vote by regional pacts.’ He had apparently discussed with the Oxford Liberals a proposal that they withdrew their candidate in his favour if he stood as an Independent. He considered the NEC’s action ‘as an attempt to destroy the elementary rights of discussion and as quite unacceptable to any self-respecting candidate in a democratic movement.’ A motion to ask the NEC whether the conditions of endorsement were standard practice was carried by 47 votes to six, the minority being led by Smewin and Rutherford. The GC then voted its unanimous confidence in Pakenham’s candidacy.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, leading members of the Oxford party were actively planning to extend the Popular Front movement.

A week after the meeting which rejected the NEC’s conditions, a special meeting of the GC was called to discuss the attendance of Richardson and Prickett at a meeting at Lindsay’s house. It was first claimed that the meeting was informal, but it then emerged that three representatives, one Labour, one Liberal and one Independent, had agreed to draw up a programme acceptable to both the local Labour and Liberal parties. Smewin and Rutherford, who had organised the petition to convene the special GC, wanted it to instruct the party officers not to attend any more Popular Front meetings. Richardson, the party chairman, said that the GC could not stop him attending ‘in a private capacity’. Smewin and Rutherford found their motion defeated by 24 votes to six.<sup>52</sup> The party’s AGM voted by 23 votes to nil to deplore the NEC’s expulsion of Stafford Cripps from the Labour Party and to endorse the memorandum supporting the Popular Front which Cripps had circulated throughout the Labour movement.<sup>53</sup> Cripps spoke at the Town Hall, while his supporter Aneurin Bevan spoke for the Popular Front at Wantage.<sup>54</sup>

A rumour that Pakenham’s candidature had been endorsed started to spread. His supporters claimed the NEC had capitulated, which forced the NEC to reaffirm their refusal to endorse him. Transport House sent a letter to the Oxford party threatening disaffiliation if it continued to support the Left Book Club, which advocated the Popular Front;<sup>55</sup> Prickett was then instructed by the Oxford party to query the NEC on the reasons for the threat. Transport House then instructed the Oxford party to turn down any membership applications from individuals who supported the Popular Front; this letter was ignored.<sup>56</sup> In his annual report, the party chairman Richardson proudly claimed that ‘the main feature of the local party is that every time we have a definite stand it has been supported practically unanimously by the party as a whole.’<sup>57</sup>

A special meeting of the GC in April reaffirmed the party’s support for Pakenham, despite his rejection by the NEC. A letter from Transport House

complaining that Prickett had asked the NEC Chairman Dallas embarrassing questions at a meeting in Abingdon was dismissed. Crossman was elected delegate to the national conference, with Prickett as reserve.<sup>58</sup> The party leadership pursued its campaign to extend the Popular Front outside the city: a Popular Front conference was held at Lindsay's house at Balliol, with delegates from Oxford, North Oxon, South Oxon, North Bucks, South Bucks, Reading, Abingdon, Newbury, Windsor and Hemel Hempstead. The conference called for co-operation in the constituencies to bring down the government.<sup>59</sup> The Oxford party was now well known in other rebel CLPs. In May, the disaffiliated Kingston and Surbiton CLP asked for support. The disaffiliated Widnes CLP sent a pamphlet. The Oxford party sent a delegate to the rebel national committee of CLPs, and Crossman was mandated to support Cripps at the national conference.<sup>60</sup>

Despite this growing Popular Front activity, the NEC decided to endorse Pakenham's candidature. Apparently, he had not given any guarantees as to his future behaviour, but he had assured the NEC that he had no plans to intervene in other constituencies.<sup>61</sup> The Oxford CLP's rebellion therefore lost its impetus. This was also affected by changes in the personnel of the Oxford party. In July, the chairman Richardson left Oxford.<sup>62</sup> In the same month, the secretary Prickett resigned to publicly join the Communist Party. This was in line with the Communist Party's decision that its members in the Labour Party should come into the open as Communist Party members. There is no evidence that Prickett had ever left the party since he had been secretary of the Oxford branch in the 1920s. He had been offered the position of paid agent for the Oxford Labour Party and was to have been paid £260 per year – Pakenham had donated £150 to start the fund. Prickett made a long statement to justify his resignation. He argued that 'Labour leaders are failing to warn the people of their immediate danger and are in fact leading the whole working-class movement into cooperation with the National Government.' He believed that in joining the Communist Party, he would 'strengthen the Labour movement in Oxford, since the Communist Party would provide the fighting leadership that the working class needed.' Pakenham, who does not appear to have understood Prickett's motives, could only comment that Prickett 'was throwing away a wonderful opportunity'.<sup>63</sup>

Within two months, the country was at war. Elections were postponed. The first GC after the war was declared discussed the co-option of Labour representatives on to public bodies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Evacuees Co-ordination committee. The Oxford Labour Party joined with the Trades Council to establish a vigilance committee to monitor the war situation and its effect on labour interests.<sup>64</sup> The party's years of rebellion seemed to have ended.

## CHAPTER 39

# The Oxford Labour Party and the Working Class

The Labour Party did not develop an effective political base in Oxford until the late 1920s and even then it was not the dominant factor in working-class politics in the city. In the 1920s, the trade union movement in Oxford was still largely based on the old craft unions such as the printers with their traditional liberal values. The initiative to form a Labour Party in Oxford in 1920 was taken not by trade unionists but by middle class socialist sympathisers such as A. J. Carlyle. Support from trade unionists was far from solid and the party was easily wrecked by the intervention of communists, led by the postal worker Wigington, who made a strange alliance with Liberal trade unionists to kill the Oxford Labour Party at its birth, and at the same time to create divisions in the Trades Council that split the labour movement in the city for a decade. The Labour Party in Oxford in the 1920s was not a party in the organised sense, but a group of constantly feuding individuals of diverse backgrounds. To the few local Labour leaders who had the support of the working-class electorate, the most prominent of whom was Fred Ludlow, the local labour movement was more of an embarrassment than a support. The failure of Labour in Oxford in the early 1920s was also due to the Liberal revival based on the enigmatic figure of Frank Gray. Gray became a working-class hero in the city and was on friendly terms with many of Oxford's leading trade unionists. While Gray was active in the city, the Labour Party stood no hope of winning working-class support in a parliamentary contest. It is significant that as late as 1938, the Labour Party was to claim Gray's inheritance. Yet, the Oxford Labour Party failed to recognise that Gray succeeded because he was local and repeatedly made the mistake of choosing middle-class candidates – Kenneth Lindsay in 1924, John Etty in 1929 and Gordon Walker in 1935. Many of Labour's candidates in the municipal elections in the 1920s had university connections and could easily be attacked by Liberals and Tories alike as 'rich socialists'. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, the Tories and Liberals retained substantial working-class support, especially in East Oxford, where no Labour candidate was successful until after the Second World War.

The General Strike was not a central event in Oxford in the development of the local labour movement, though it is often a focus of attention because

so many future Labour leaders, then at the University, served their political apprenticeship in that hectic week. The Labour Party was weak in Oxford in 1926 and many leading trade unionists in the city, such as the Trades Council president Bowles, were communists. During the strike, the Trades Council was heavily dependent on assistance from sympathisers in the university and at Ruskin.

The Oxford Labour Party was in the early stages of recovery when it was shaken by the defection of the national Labour leaders MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas in 1931. Defectors to MacDonald's National Labour Party included the first Labour parliamentary candidate in the city Kenneth Lindsay and the former municipal candidate Godfrey Elton, who was raised to a peerage by MacDonald. There was no Labour candidate in the ensuing parliamentary election in Oxford. The short-lived regeneration of the local Labour Party had been based on the traditional alliance of middle-class sympathisers and trade unionists from established industries and did not have the political base needed to survive the crisis.

The revival of the party after 1934 was primarily a product of the development of trade unionism at the Cowley factories. Trade unionism had been slow to emerge at Cowley and it was only with the 1934 strike that the labour movement began to build up a strong organisation in the city. The role played by the Communist Party, under the leadership of Abe Lazarus, in the Cowley dispute and the linked struggles in Florence Park and Cutteslowe, was to secure for it an influential and respected role in the local labour movement. It was the Communist Party's strength and the Labour Party's comparative lack of a political base in the Cowley area, that was the basis for the United Front developments in Oxford in the later 1930s.

Though the Labour Party revival was initiated by Cowley workers such as John Ida, the party soon attracted a new generation of academic sympathisers, such as Richard Crossman, Patrick Gordon Walker and Frank Pakenham, all of whom were to use Oxford Labour politics as a stepping stone into national politics and to serve in Harold Wilson's cabinet. These academics shared the interest of the Communist Party in opposing the growing fascist movement, and though the Labour Party gradually developed its role in municipal politics, the real excitement in local labour politics was centred on the fight against fascism at home and abroad. Crossman, while leader of the Labour group on the city council, also wrote regularly for the *New Statesman*. Pakenham, who had many contacts in national politics, tended to use the city council as a platform for wider issues. It was Gordon Walker who, though never a councillor, was most consistent in his commitment to campaigning on local issues such as housing and consequently was closest to the local Labour trade unionists.

The 1938 by-election represented the apogee of the Crossman/Pakenham period in the local labour movement. By 1938, the Oxford Labour Party was effectively controlled by communists and communist sympathisers. The party secretary Hector Prickett worked in the Communist Party's interests and may

have retained his Communist Party membership throughout his tenure of office in the Oxford Labour Party. He was supported by the majority of his Labour Party colleagues, especially Pakenham, in doing so. Given the extent to which the Oxford party was dominated by this communist-academic alliance, the party's stance in the by-election is not surprising. By 1938, the Oxford party had a considerable record of United Front and Popular Front activity, and in the atmosphere of Munich, this was logically extended into an electoral alliance, despite opposition from many of the Labour Party's working-class members. This development was assisted by the prevarication of the national leadership of the Labour Party.

To communists and academics alike, resistance to international fascism was the all-important issue, and Gordon Walker was jettisoned in favour of a progressive academic, A. D. Lindsay, who was largely unknown outside university circles. The by-election was a fight between two University dons which was only of limited relevance to the majority of the city's population. The extent to which the local Labour leadership was distanced from the working-class electorate they claimed to represent was evidenced by the fact that they, and Lindsay, failed to believe anybody could vote against them. When Lindsay was defeated, neither Pakenham nor his colleagues could recognise their mistake. With the by-election over, the party continued its Popular Front activities – Pakenham became parliamentary candidate, the party courted disaffiliation by the NEC, and several working-class activists in the party either resigned or became inactive. The Oxford Labour Party may have been dynamic and exciting, but it was far from being the united working-class party which it claimed to be. It nevertheless served as a nursery for the political apprenticeships of a cohort of future national Labour Party leaders.

While this book's main focus has been on the role of progressives, including communists, within the politics of the City of Oxford, the narrative of the inter-war period has involved a number of academics and students who were involved either in communist politics or in Marxist groupings within the University. Given the extensive literature on communist sympathisers in Cambridge who became Soviet agents, it is perhaps understandable that there has been considerable speculation as to whether there was an 'Oxford spy ring' to parallel the legendary 'Cambridge spy ring' of Burgess, Maclean, Philby, Blunt and Cairncross. While this issue is tangential to the main narrative, it is necessary to state that while a number of students in Oxford would have met Cambridge-based communist students including James Klugmann, the only clear case of an Oxford communist who acted as a Soviet agent is that of Arthur Wynn, who was an open communist, active both in community politics within the city and as a contributor to the *Communist Review*. The extent of the information provided by Wynn to the Soviet embassy may have been limited to information about other communist students and there is no evidence that he provided state secrets to the Soviets in later life. The recent revelation that the former Oxford student David Floyd was pro-Soviet during his postwar

career as a *Daily Telegraph* journalist is also rather tangential to the main narrative. Philip Toynbee, communist Oxford Union president and son of Arnold Toynbee (and father of Polly Toynbee), while being a close friend and drinking partner of Donald Maclean and writing a memoir of his communist student friends Esmond Rommily and Jasper Ridley, appears to have lost his communist sympathies after the war in favour of agrarian communitarianism and a spiritual form of religion. While it is perhaps questionable to speculate as to why, unlike some of their Cambridge colleagues, the 1930s cohort of Oxford communist students did not take up careers in espionage, it may be relevant to note that the politics of the City of Oxford provided sufficient opportunities for their youthful political energies as, in contrast with 1930s Cambridge, there existed an industrial base in the city and a vigorous local working-class movement with which communist students could actually engage.

More significant perhaps than speculation as to who may or may not have been a Russian spy is the fact that the one Oxford communist who went on to a significant role in national Labour politics, Dennis Healey, became a leading anti-communist, both as international secretary of the Labour Party and later as Minister of Defence. Two other members of the communist student group, Ronald McIntosh and Leo Piatsky, were to have prominent official roles as economists within Wilson's government, though a third, John Biggs-Davidson, was to become a right-wing Conservative MP. Of the two leading Oxford Labour politicians who collaborated with the Communist Party in the late 1930s, Frank Pakenham (later Lord Longford) was hostile to communism in the postwar period, while Richard Crossman can be regarded as a radical social democrat, especially during the Keep Left period, but certainly not a fellow traveller. Patrick Gordon Walker, who had been a supporter of the United Front, moved to the centre of the party, no doubt affected by his experience of communist manipulation during the 1938 by-election, while Christopher Mayhew, after moving from sympathising with communists within Oxford student politics to organising a social democratic breakaway group, opposed the left within the Labour Party by actively combatting Soviet-sponsored networks in his role as undersecretary to Ernest Bevin in Attlee's postwar government. Roy Jenkins and Tony Crosland, who were both active in Oxford student politics at the same time as Healey and were members of Mayhew's social democratic group, also had political careers on the right of the Labour Party. There is therefore a case for suggesting that the experience of progressive politics of a cohort of Oxford students in the prewar period actually drove some away from communism rather than towards it.

These comments, as all attempts to seek to understand the political and ideological trajectory of individuals, are somewhat speculative away from the book's focus on the politics of Oxford City, rather than on the future careers of specific cohorts of Oxford students or academics, a subject on which there is already an extensive literature. The final sections of this book will therefore return to the politics of the city.

## PART 4

# Labour After 1940



## CHAPTER 40

# The Oxford Labour Party since 1940

With the declaration of war in September 1939, the expected general election was postponed. The electoral truce agreed by the parties at national level also applied to local politics, and council vacancies, as during the first world war, were filled by co-option. The Oxford Labour Party nevertheless maintained its formal organisation, even if membership had dropped to about 150, and several branches had stopped meeting.

The Oxford Labour Party voted to support the war against Hitler. Liaison was maintained throughout the war with the Co-operative Society and the Trades Council through the Oxford Council of Labour. In the early years of the war, the party, together with their partners, took up issues such as the need for deep bomb-proof shelters in the city and under-production at the Pressed Steel works. Pakenham, the parliamentary candidate, was seeking a role on a wider political stage. In 1942, he stood for the party's National Executive Committee, coming 15th out of 22 candidates, with 28,000 votes. In 1943, he unsuccessfully opposed Herbert Morrison for the post of party treasurer. His campaign was based on advocating Beveridge's report on National Insurance which was fully discussed in Oxford, as throughout the party.

The prewar issue of the united front was revived when the Communist Party applied to affiliate to the Labour Party. The Oxford party's executive committee met representatives of the Oxford Communist Party but decided to oppose formal affiliation while supporting local co-operation. At the same time, councillor Sam Smith was reprimanded for attending a conference sponsored by the CP under the name of the 'South Midlands Labour Movement.' When, in 1944, the Headington branch suggested collaboration with 'other left wing political parties', the proposal was rejected as contrary to the party's constitution.

By the spring of 1945, the Oxford Labour Party was preparing for the election which was to follow the now expected victory. A panel of municipal candidates had also been drawn up and a draft municipal programme, prepared by Sam Smith, approved. A plan to appoint a full-time agent however had to be dropped for lack of funds. Despite the fact that the party organisation had not recovered from the war and membership was still under 200, Pakenham ran an enthusiastic campaign when the election was called in July 1945.

Following his adoption meeting, held in the university's Union Society, Pakenham held a number of meetings, at which he covered the full range of

party policies – on foreign affairs, housing, nationalisation of the mines, transport and steel, the minimum wage and the Beveridge report. He was supported by Stafford Cripps, who spoke on collective security and unemployment – again at the Oxford Union. Pakenham's manifesto called for a 'policy of planning along national lines and for using all the resources of the community as a whole'. The result was the increase of the Labour vote to 11,451 (from 9,661 in 1935). Quintin Hogg, the sitting Tory MP was however returned with 14,314 votes, the Liberal Anthony Norman trailing with 5,860. Four months later, Pakenham was appointed to the Lords by Clement Attlee as Lord Pakenham of Cowley, in 1947 becoming deputy Foreign Secretary with responsibility for the British occupied zone in Germany. Pakenham became a hereditary peer in 1961 and served as Leader of the House of Lords and Secretary of State for the Colonies under Harold Wilson.

In the local elections in November, the Labour Party captured four seats, winning 14 of the 23 seats contested, including all those in Headington and in Cowley, where the Communist Abe Lazarus won 2,184 votes, compared with 2,539 for the lowest successful Labour candidate. The Labour group on the city council now had 18 members. Two of the four non-retiring Labour members, Sarah Bowerman and Sam Smith, were elected as the first Labour aldermen. In the ensuing by-elections, Labour retained both vacated seats, and the group reached a total of 20 members compared with 13 at the beginning of the war. Although Labour was not the largest party on the Council, members of the group were allocated committee chairmanships. Sam Smith became chairman of the finance and establishment committees, Sarah Bowerman chairman of the mental health committee, and Frank Knight, who had been co-opted to the Council in 1940, chairman of the allotments committee.

The incorporation of the Labour group into the Council's decision-making structure immediately led to disputes with the party. The criticism seems to have been led by Penston, who had been appointed by the party as liaison officer to the group. In February 1946, the party's general committee (GC) had an emergency meeting to discuss the acceptance of aldermanic honours by Labour councillors. Although the regional organiser Wickham said that the group had not broken any party rule, the GC expressed its disapproval of the group by 11 votes to nine. In April, the group retaliated by criticising the executive committee for not fully supporting the Labour candidate in a by-election in East ward; the criticism was however rejected by the GC. In July, there was further criticism of party organisation after another by-election. At a conference to plan for the next municipal elections, there was a dispute over the role played by personalities, as opposed to policy, in election strategy. Sam Smith, as leader of the Council Labour group, led a discussion on election policy at the following meeting of the GC, dealing with council housing, schools and maternity and child welfare clinics. In the subsequent elections, Labour lost two seats to the Tories in Headington. Due however to a previous by-election victory and

the accession of an Independent councillor, the group still had 20 members, compared with 28 conservatives, five Liberals and five Independents. After the election, Smith gave up his chairmanships, but Knight became chairman of the housing committee, which led to renewed criticism from the GC. Smewin became the first Labour Lord Mayor.

With Pakenham's elevation to the House of Lords, the party needed to find a new parliamentary candidate. The selection was deferred for several months because of expected changes in the constituency boundary which, it was thought, would make the seat more winnable and thus more attractive to potential candidates. At a special GC in November 1946, the regional organiser agreed that the selection process could be started. Five candidates were short-listed, only one of whom, Evan Roberts, was local. There were complaints that some members were canvassing for nominees, which was against the rules. The West ward branch had invited all shortlisted candidates to a branch meeting. Attempts were made to stop this meeting, but it was eventually agreed that it should go ahead, but under the auspices of the constituency party. Branches were asked not to mandate delegates to the selection meeting, which resulted in the adoption as parliamentary candidate of J. Stewart Cook, a Labour councillor and trade unionist in Windsor.

Cook's adoption caused problems for the Oxford party. In April, the regional organiser wrote that Cook had been adopted as candidate for Aylesbury. Cook agreed he had been approached but denied that any agreement had been reached. In September, he got a job in London, working for the British Standards Institution, and stated that since this would be time-consuming, he could only come to Oxford a few times. He added that his car had broken down and he needed £365 to mend it. He also wanted travelling and hotel expenses for his visits. Both the EC and the GC discussed asking Cook to resign the candidacy but agreed to wait and see how the situation developed. Cook then asked for a loan of £150 towards the car, but this was turned down. He had been asked to come to Oxford twice a week but said he could not afford it; the party refused to pay his expenses. A proposal to 'terminate the candidature' was rejected in favour of accepting Cook's offer to come as often as he could afford. Over the following months, Cook failed to attend a number of meetings. The Oxford seat had now been designated as a marginal one by Transport House, and the GC was addressed by Reg Underhill, the new regional organiser, on the possibility of winning the seat at the next election given the necessary organisation and a good candidate. In September 1948, the EC decided by five votes to four to ask Cook to resign the candidature. The intention was to adopt a sitting MP in his place. At the following GC, a motion of confidence in Cook was however carried on the casting vote of the chairman Evan Roberts. Cook then fell ill with bronchitis and missed further meetings. In November, he agreed to a new selection meeting, provided he was included. The selection meeting was held the following March. Cook withdrew his nomination and the only other

nominee, Lady Elizabeth Pakenham, was adopted as candidate by 46 votes to six.

Difficulties with the parliamentary candidature were not the party's only problem. Its municipal campaigns suffered from the countrywide swing against the Labour government. During 1947, the party made efforts to improve its position on the council. All candidates were to attend courses on local affairs, which were set up by the Workers' Education Association. In July, a municipal policy was approved: the two-page statement covered housing, town planning, parks and playing fields, allotments, transport, municipal restaurants, education and health. The statement was not however published, but only sent to ward parties 'for reference.' These preparations were of limited value for in November six seats were lost, with only one Labour candidate being successful.

Attendance at Labour group meetings seems to have been poor throughout this period. At the party's AGM in 1948, the group was criticised for lack of unity. Individual councillors were voting against group decisions on matters of policy. One councillor admitted that the group was often divided on issues where the party had already reached a position. No local elections were held in 1948. In May 1949, all 17 Labour candidates were defeated: ten seats were lost, and seven sitting councillors, including Evan Roberts, Marcus Lower and Frank Knight, were defeated. (Sam Smith had retired from the Council.) The Labour group was reduced to five – Kinchin, Haydock and Warrell, together with Alderman Mrs Bowerman, and Smewin, who had been elected an alderman in Smith's place.

In July 1948, on being designated a marginal parliamentary seat, the Oxford Party appointed a full-time agent –Dobson. Six months later, Dobson resigned on grounds of ill health following complaints of slackness. He apparently had a nervous complaint and had been ordered by his doctor to have a complete rest. The party's original plan had been to have a joint agency with the Henley party and, with Dobson's resignation, it reverted to this proposal: Fred Ingram, the existing Henley agent, was appointed to the Oxford post on a part-time basis. In December, the Henley party ran out of money, and Ingram took on the Oxford post full-time.

The political position of the Oxford Labour Party in the late 1940s seems to have been on the left of the national party, though without adopting the explicit pro-communist position of the prewar years. A resolution to support the pro-communist MP John Platt-Mills on his expulsion from the party was defeated. Approaches from the Communist Party seeking co-operation in local elections were also rejected. At the other end of the Labour Party's political spectrum, a motion supporting Ernest Bevin's foreign policy, proposed in February 1948 by the then chairman Fogarty, was also defeated. The party called instead for a 'foreign policy in greater accord with the ideals and aims of a socialist government.' Oxford's delegate to the national party conference did not however support the pro-Moscow resolution put forward by Konni Zilliacus. The party

narrowly supported the recognition of the Israeli government; it also supported prohibition of fascist activities, greater priority for house-building, control of profits and prices and the nationalisation of iron and steel.

The local election defeats in 1947 and 1948 reflected the national swing against the Labour Government. In 1950, the Oxford party was strong and getting stronger. By March 1950, party membership was 1,435, an increase of 600 in one year. When the general election was called in February, the party had a good election organisation established and, with a popular candidate in Elizabeth Pakenham, ran a lively campaign. 28 schools and halls were booked for meetings and the party aimed to have 2,000 election workers on polling day. A meeting had been planned with Jim Griffiths, the Minister of National Insurance; with the declaration of the election, he was joined by Herbert Morrison, the Deputy Prime Minister. Cowley, Iffley and Headington were now included in the parliamentary constituency, and the Labour vote rose to 23,902 from the 1945 figure of 11,451, but Quintin Hogg was nevertheless returned with 27,508 votes. The Liberal Donald Tweddle polled 6,807 votes, and the communist Ernie Keeling, who had taken over from Lazarus as Oxford district CP organiser, 494. This was the only time that the Communist Party stood against Labour in an Oxford parliamentary election.

With the Labour government's parliamentary majority drastically reduced, a second general election would soon be necessary. Lady Pakenham announced that she did not wish to stand at another election so soon. The party first approached a number of possible candidates, including Mr Wedgwood Benn, but none were willing to contest the seat. It then drew up a shortlist for a new candidate, which included future MPs John Stonehouse and Hugh Jenkins, the former at the request of the GC. Both however withdrew their nominations and a Joe Huddart was selected, before resigning the candidacy in July 'for personal reasons'. A month later, the sitting MP Quintin Hogg became a peer as Lord Hailsham, and a by-election was called. Lady Pakenham was unwilling to be re-adopted, and the agent visited Transport House to obtain names of possible candidates. The Communist Party wanted to discuss the candidacy, but their approach was rejected by the agent. Five people were approached, the only positive response coming from Mr Sidney Kersland Lewis, a public relations officer and documentary film maker. No formal adoption meeting was held, and Lewis was appointed candidate without apparently coming to Oxford. The party was however assisted in its campaign by neighbouring constituencies and trade union officials. Lewis polled 20,385 votes to 27,593 for the Conservative Lawrence Turner, there being no Liberal candidate.

Lewis then resigned the candidacy, and the party had to find a new candidate before the general election was declared. Ingram asked branches and affiliated organisations for nominations immediately, without in fact getting the EC's approval. The Co-operative Society asked for more time to consider nominations but was turned down. The EC drew up a new shortlist, the only local

nomination being Max Parker of the Co-op. In January, the selection meeting adopted George Elvin, the general secretary of the Association of Cinematographic and Allied Technicians and a supporter of the left-leaning Labour journal *Tribune*. Elvin, though not local, was the brother of Lionel Elvin, who had been principal of Ruskin College between 1944 and 1950, and had made regular visits to the city and actively nursed the constituency. During the months leading up to the election, the party made unsuccessful attempts to get well-known speakers such as Emmanuel Shinwell, Aneurin Bevan and the trade union leader Arthur Deakin to the city. Arthur Henderson did however speak in Oxford in May. The party had several months to prepare its campaign. Material ordered included 4,000 window posters, 3,000 visiting cards and 25,000 leaflets. During the campaign, the only nationally-known speaker was Hilary Marquand, the former Minister of Health. Elvin concentrated his energy on defending the Labour government's record on housing and foreign policy, addressing 22 public meetings and 15 works meetings. He polled 25,427 votes against Turner's 32,367. Later in the year Elvin was readopted as candidate, but his union wanted him to be returned to parliament and considered Oxford an unwinnable seat. After lengthy negotiations he agreed to stay on – otherwise the party would have had to select their sixth candidate in two years.

The years 1949–1950 represented the nadir of the party's fortunes in municipal politics. In 1950, a seat was lost in South ward. The Labour group however returned to its strength of six with the accession of Mrs White, the previously Tory councillor for Cowley and Iffley. In 1951, another seat was lost in South ward, but Arthur Dent and Marcus Lower won seats in Headington. In a by-election in September, Frank Knight recaptured a third Headington seat, taking the Labour group to eight members. Lower was elected leader and the group revived the practice of regular meetings. This period saw the growing involvement of the party in municipal policy since the group was not strong enough to act independently. Before both the 1950 and 1951 elections, special party meetings were held to draw up a municipal programme. One new policy adopted was a call on the government to revise the rating system so that local firms paid higher rates to relieve individual ratepayers. The party also took up the need for a new technical college, the maintenance of the wartime municipal restaurants and the reorganisation of the bus service. It also called for greater representation for the populous Headington and Cowley wards, the main areas of Labour support.

The party's political position remained on the left, though with the series of elections, there seems to have been little time for political discussion. It supported a negotiated peace in the Korean War and Chinese membership of the United Nations Security Council. The agent was authorised to organise a Keep Left brains trust. A meeting was held with a Victory for Socialism speaker, even though Transport House refused to send a speaker to present the official party policy. A call for a special conference on the world situation was supported. The party took offence at a letter from the General Secretary Morgan Phillips

requesting them not to circulate resolutions to other constituency parties. In the mandating of the delegate for the 1951 conference, the party supported both left-wing candidates such as Tom Driberg, Ian Mikardo and Barbara Castle and candidates on the right such as Herbert Morrison, Bessie Braddock and Edith Summerskill; the mysterious 'E Bevan' minuted could have referred to either Aneurin Bevan or Ernest Bevin. Rather than being mandated on individual resolutions, the delegate was instructed to 'support all proposals in the drafting of the election policy which aimed at reduction of the high cost of living, the maintaining of peace and improving the standard of life.' The party subsequently moved to a Tribune position, perhaps aided by the parliamentary candidate Elvin: by November 1951, the party was itself ordering and selling *Tribune* publications. After the 1950 election, the general committee called on the Labour Party to 'stand by its socialist principles' and oppose a coalition. After the defeat of the Government in 1951, the party called for a special national conference 'to determine future policy'. In April 1952, a motion opposing German rearmament was carried. The Oxford party did not however return to its prewar communist sympathies. An offer from the CP to assist in the municipal election in Cowley in 1951 was firmly turned down. When the communist affiliation of a GC delegate, E. J. Faulkner of the Electrical Trades Union, was raised, the party decided that all new GC delegates should sign a statement that they were not members of any other political party.

With the fall of the Labour government, it was the Conservatives' turn to be unpopular with the electorate. In the May 1952 elections, 11 council seats were captured, and with the election of Mrs White as an alderman, the Labour group grew from five to seventeen. The new group was dominated by the Headington and Cowley wards, with six and four councillors respectively. On the basis of an earlier agreement, Labour made a claim for five aldermanic seats, which the Tories rejected. The enlargement of the group had one immediate consequence – the building of a new technical college. The group campaigned on other issues, but with little success – for a new municipal restaurant and a larger council house building programme, against closure of nursery classes and salary increases for senior council officers. In 1953, a further three seats were won, and in 1954, two more, taking the group to a total of 22. Lower became chairman of the education committee and Warrell chairman of the health committee. The Labour group however remained in a minority in a council of 68 members and faced a strong Conservative majority. Labour wanted the Council to have evening meetings but were outvoted; they argued for redistributing the wards but were defeated. Lower commented in 1954 that 'the arteries of Oxford Toryism have become very hardened.' The persistent pressure of Labour councillors on the housing issue does however appear to have led eventually to a doubling of the building programme.

In organisational terms, the party continued to expand in 1952 and 1953. By February 1954, the party had 2,395 members, with the membership of affiliated

organisations at 6,748. In 1952, the League of Youth was re-established. In 1953, the political education officer, the academic M. R. D. Foot (not to be confused with the *Tribune* editor and former president of the Oxford Union Society Michael Foot), ran a series of discussions, with speakers coming mainly from the university, which attracted up to 30 members. Of 17 meetings, 11 were on home affairs and six on foreign and colonial policy. An attempt by councillors to broaden out this discussion by holding 'citizens meetings' in each ward however failed due to lack of interest. In early 1955, the agent reported that 'full employment and overtime' had led to a reduction in the time members could give to party work, and that consequently fundraising activities such as bingo drives and the football competition had been 'abandoned.' In 1955, there was a substantial drop in membership for the first time since the war, but the figure was to remain at over 2,000 until 1957.

Though the party was expanding for most of this period, there were both personal and political divisions. In June 1952, the agent Ingram threatened to resign his post 'because of the strain of keeping friendly relations between certain members.' He was given a holiday and persuaded to stay on. In 1953, he complained that party members were spreading rumours that he was making money out of the party. The executive committee, on a split vote, expressed confidence in him. The political differences were exposed in December 1952, when the membership secretary J. Mathieson was expelled on the proposal of Arthur Dent and Ron Owen, by 25 votes to 14, for being a member of the Oxford Sponsoring Committee of the 'People's Congress for Peace' in Vienna, a communist front organisation which had been proscribed by the National Executive. This proscription had been opposed in the GC by Mathieson and Mrs Price, but support for the NEC's position was carried by 20 votes to 11. Mathieson then spoke at the Wolvercote branch and also at a public meeting organised by Mark Price, the North ward branch secretary. However, with the exception of this episode, there do not appear to have been any organised 'Left' or 'Right' groups in the party. Only one public meeting seems to have been held – a *Tribune* brains trust in March 1953, with a panel consisting of MPs Harold Davies, Michael Foot and J. P. W. Mallalieu, Lord Faringdon and Elvin. The non-existence of an organised left faction was apparent when the party made no comment when the ultra-left publication *Socialist Outlook* was proscribed in 1954. By early 1954, M. R. D. Foot's discussion groups were failing to attract interest and discussion in the party and had become limited to municipal issues such as housing. Personality clashes were not however overcome and in July 1954 the EC had to tighten up the rules for the conduct of meetings.

The second half of 1954 and the early months of 1955 were spent mainly on preparation for the general election. In the local elections in May 1955, the party had a setback, with the loss of five seats in a low poll; the agent spoke of 'rampant apathy'. The party ran an energetic campaign in the parliamentary contest a few weeks later. The trade unions set up a campaign committee to

help. A van toured the city with a loudspeaker. Ten meetings were held, and 38,000 leaflets and 4,000 posters distributed. The result was however disappointing: Elvin polled 19,930 votes to the Conservative Turner's 27,708; the Liberal Ivor Davies polled 5,336. Four years of Tory Government had had no negative impact on the Tory majority – 7,778 compared with 6,940 in 1951. Elvin resigned the candidacy and was replaced, despite calls for a local candidate, by Leslie Anderton, a councillor from Rugby.

In 1956, the Labour Group on the city council split over the question of a new road through Christ Church Meadow – an issue which was to be central to local politics for many years. The council majority supported a northern route by St John's College and Museum Road, and a southern route crossing the river near Eastwyke Farm. Three Labour councillors, Smewin, Foster and Warrell, joined ten Tories in supporting a road through the meadow. After an inquiry, the Minister Duncan Sandys supported the meadow route. The Council refused to accept this, and a new inquiry was held in 1957. The planning committee proposed a new road scheme which included a route through the meadow. This was rejected by the full council which preferred a road following the river towpath. The Labour Group remained divided: most councillors now supported the meadow route, but Mrs Olive Gibbs, a councillor for West ward, supported the Eastwyke Farm route. The issue was to cause major problems for the Labour group after they became the largest party on the council.

Despite developing differences, the Labour group were active, though many of their campaigns were negative, for example against the slum clearance programme and to defer construction of the Eastern by-pass. The local elections in 1956 saw four Labour gains and the election of the party agent Ingram. In February 1957, there was a dispute over who should be elected as an alderman: Foster, the senior Labour councillor, claimed the honour and resigned from the party when Kinchin was elected in his place. In November, the council carried through a rent increase of 25% and made council tenants responsible for repairs. Only 15 of the 24 Labour members however opposed these measures. The Trades Council led a protest against the rent increase, arguing that half of it should have been paid out of the rates. In 1957, the Council decided to buy the Cutteslowe walls, which had played an important role in the struggles of the 1930s described in chapter 37.

In November 1957, the party was involved in a protest meeting on the Suez crisis, organised by students at Ruskin College. Both Fred Ingram and Olive Gibbs, the latter now party chairman, spoke at the rally at Martyrs' Memorial which followed a march from the Plain in St. Clement's. A counter demonstration had been organised: Rule Britannia was sung; Ruskin students scuffled with army cadets, and one placard read 'Shoot the Wogs'. The Oxford Council of Labour, comprising the Labour Party, the Trades Council and the Co-op, sent telegrams to the Prime Minister Anthony Eden and the Oxford MP Lawrence Turner. In the same week, the Trades Council condemned, by 23 votes to

five, the Soviet invasion of Hungary. The Soviet intervention led to the breakup of the Oxford Communist Party, which had maintained an active presence in city politics since the 1930s.

In the May 1958 election, Labour won four council seats, and with the appointment of four more Labour aldermen, became the largest party on the council with 32 seats, though dependent on the independent university councillors for control. The Labour group took the major committee chairmanships: Ingram became chairman of the housing committee while remaining party agent, which led to the Tories objecting to a 'political' appointment; Edmund Gibbs (son of the prewar Independent and Labour councillor R. Gibbs, and husband of Olive Gibbs) became chairman of estates, Percy Bromley of planning, Frank Pickstock of finance, Frank Knight of the watch (police) committee and Kinchin of the establishment (personnel) and highways committees. Marcus Lower remained group leader. One early achievement of the group was to move full council meetings to start at 4 pm and major committee meetings to the afternoon, thus making it easier for those with full-time jobs to attend with only minimal loss of pay. The group then set about increasing the housing programme. On the main planning issue – the meadow road – the group remained divided. The Council adopted the meadow road plan by 32 votes to 26. Five Labour councillors however voted against the group's decision to support the road – Edmund Gibbs, Olive Gibbs, Bill Fagg, W. Beckett and C. Cliffe. The Gibbises claimed that they had pledged themselves to the West ward electorate to oppose the road, which involved the demolition of property around New Inn Hall Street. The Labour group, on the proposal of the secretary Arthur Dent, suspended the five dissidents for three months. In January 1960, the council reaffirmed its support for the meadow road, by 39 votes to 26, with the five rebels joining their colleagues. The dispute was given an overtly political dimension when the newspaper *Tribune* called for the councillors' reinstatement and attacked the group leader Marcus Lower and his colleagues as 'petty tyrants'. The meadow road had become a left-right issue, with Lower and Dent on the right of the party, the Gibbises on the left. The party's general committee condemned the group leadership's action on the close vote of 25–20.

The second half of 1959 saw further conflict within the group. In July, the printers went on strike. Len Ford, a Labour councillor who worked in the circulation department of the *Oxford Mail* and *Times*, which stopped publication, stayed at work through the dispute, provoking criticism in the party. The Typographical Association, the printers' union, called on trade unionists not to support Ford in the coming local elections. They were supported by the Trades Council, though not by all unions: the engineers, for example, supported Ford. At the Trades Council meeting, Lower and Dent spoke up for Ford, Lower claiming that he had been a useful member of the finance committee. The Cowley and Iffley party, which Ford represented on the council, refused to renominate him. Lower then arranged for Ford to be adopted by the

Headington branch instead, but criticisms in the party and the Trades Council however led him to resign from both the council and the party.

These disputes had an impact on the party's electoral fortunes. In the 1959 general election, Anderton campaigned on the issues of economic expansion, the reversal of the 1957 Rent Act and the abolition of health service charges. He polled 18,310 votes to 26,798 for the new Tory candidate Monty Woodhouse, a university don, and 7,491 for the Liberal Davies. The Tory majority was 1,500 higher than in the previous election. In the local elections in May 1960, the Tories captured seven seats and regained control of the city council. Lower was replaced as group leader by Edmund Gibbs; Ingram resigned as party agent.

The main division in the Oxford Labour Party in 1959 and 1960 was, as in the national party, over defence policy. Olive Gibbs, chairman of the Oxford party from 1957 to 1960, was active in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament at a national level and established a CND group in Oxford. As early as 1957, an advertisement for CND appeared in the Oxford party's annual report. The 'H' Bomb was the theme of the May Day march in 1958 – the first march for 20 years. The speakers included Mrs Gibbs, Leslie Anderton and Dennis Healey MP, the last of whom was not known as an opponent of the nuclear bomb. A few weeks later, CND organised a march from Oxford to the Brize Norton air base. A rally was held in St. Giles, speakers including Pat Arrowsmith of CND and Arthur Ledger, the parliamentary candidate for South Oxfordshire. A counter demonstration was organised by a group called 'Common Cause' and the CND speakers were heckled. Common Cause's placards included 'Nato for Peace', 'Communism means Genocide' and 'Cranko go home.' The explosion of a tear gas bomb caused some excitement. A rally was held in Witney, with Peggy Duff of CND, O. S. Davies MP and John Ennals, the secretary of Ruskin College, as speakers. Speakers at Brize Norton were Olive Gibbs, Alex Comfort, Mervyn Jones of *Tribune* and two members of the Quaker Society.

In December 1959, another march to Brize Norton was held, organised by the Oxford Area Committee for Nuclear Disarmament and sponsored by the Oxford University historian, A. J. P. Taylor. The march attracted 400 people and led to a 24-hour vigil at the base, which included a church service.

In April 1960, the party banner was taken on the Aldermarston march. In May, a CND questionnaire was circulated to ward parties and affiliated organisations. At the June meeting of the GC, it was agreed that the party support the basic principles of CND as stated in the questionnaire –

- 1) the independent and unconditional renunciation by Britain of the testing, manufacturing, stockpiling or intended use of nuclear weapons.
- 2) the removal of nuclear bases, whether for 'H' Bombers or missiles, from British territory.
- 3) the revision of or, if need be, withdrawal from any foreign alliances committed to nuclear weapons.

In July, the GC passed an emergency resolution, by 28 votes to eight, protesting ‘against American reconnaissance flights from Brize Norton, believing that such flights are acts of provocation rather than defence.’ The motion continued – ‘Furthermore, they are tragic, in view of the loss of American lives, and stupid, in view of the world situation ... We are appalled that the British government have no control, either secret or written, over these flights. We resolve that the danger of having US bases in this country far outweighs the advantage.’ The resolution was sent to the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, the local MP, the Labour Party NEC and the American Embassy. There were apparently objections to the way the motion had been rushed through as an emergency.

The Oxford party’s support for unilateralism was not unopposed. Early in 1960, a group of party members met to discuss how to counter the activities of CND supporters in the party. The group consisted of Philip Williams (a fellow at Nuffield College, a friend of Anthony Crosland and later biographer of Hugh Gaitskell), Brian Walden (formerly a student at Nuffield College and Chairman of the National Association of Labour Student Organisations, now a tutor at the University Delegacy of Extra-Mural Studies) and Ron Owen (formerly at Ruskin, now a mature student at Queen’s College, who had been a city councillor from 1952–1957). In May, they were joined by Frank Pickstock, the deputy leader of the council Labour group. They persuaded Pickstock to contest (unsuccessfully) the leadership of the group with the unilateralist Edmund Gibbs. The group then linked up with a group of Gaitskellite MPs – Tony Crosland, Patrick Gordon Walker, Douglas Jay and Roy Jenkins – and a non-parliamentary group in London consisting of Bill Rodgers of the Fabian Society, journalists Ivan Yates and Michael Shanks and former candidate Dick Taverne, to form an organisation which was known from November 1960 as the Campaign for Democratic Socialism or CDS.

Pickstock was the key figure in the first months of the organisation’s existence. He was secretary of the steering committee set up in August, with Rogers as chairman and Taverne as treasurer, and prepared the first draft of the group’s manifesto – apparently his own idea – which was redrafted with the assistance of Crosland and Williams. Pickstock approached potential sympathisers and obtained 26 signatures which were attached to the manifesto, 750 copies of which were sent to selected individuals two days before it was launched at a press conference on 18 October by Rodgers, Pickstock and Denis Howell MP. The Oxford signatories were Owen, Pickstock, Walden and Williams. The manifesto called for support for Hugh Gaitskell as party leader, and for the Labour Party to be not a doctrinal party but a ‘broadly-based national party of all the people.’ The manifesto supported NATO and the maintenance of the nuclear deterrent and criticised unilateralists who ‘expect justice, freedom or equality to survive under a communist monopoly of nuclear weapons.’

The activities of Pickstock and his colleagues were to have an impact on Oxford politics as well as on the national political scene. In early September 1960,

Pickstock approached sympathisers in Oxford to form an informal 'Labour Centre' group. When, on 26 September, the Oxford GC held a meeting to mandate its delegate Edmund Gibbs for the annual conference at Scarborough, the meeting was attended by many of Pickstock's associates – attendance was 50 compared with 31 the previous month. Pickstock proposed that the delegate be mandated to support the official defence policy against the unilateralist TGWU resolution; his proposal was carried by 22 votes to 21. It was then agreed, by 24 votes to 20, that the delegate oppose 'the AEU and any other unilateralist motions which might appear on the agenda.' The party's unilateralists then organised a petition to call a special meeting of the GC to reverse this policy. The meeting was held on 30 September with 94 delegates and members present. Arthur Dent and Marcus Lower objected to the meeting being called but were overruled. Roger Dudman, supported by, among others, Olive Gibbs and John Ennals, then proposed that the conference delegate support the TGWU resolution. He was opposed by Pickstock, Dent, Lower and Bill (now Lord) McCarthy. The motion was defeated by 37 votes to 34 and the unilateralist delegate Edmund Gibbs remained mandated to vote against unilateralist motions, despite the party's unilateralist record.

Following the Scarborough conference, at which the TGWU motion was carried, the Oxford party readopted its unilateralist position. In December, it passed a motion which welcomed the conference decision and called for a programme to 'relieve East-West tension' with –

- 1) the creation of a nuclear-free zone in central Europe.
- 2) the closing of American nuclear and missile bases in Britain and the cessation of the manufacture, stockpiling and distribution of nuclear weapons by NATO countries.
- 3) rejection of the concept of NATO as a fourth nuclear power.
- 4) approaches to the U.S.S.R. to reach an agreement on a nuclear test ban treaty and nuclear disarmament.
- 5) the admission of China to the United Nations.

The motion also called for Britain's withdrawal from NATO, should membership prove to be incompatible with these policies.

By June 1961, the party had moved away from unilateralism. Its motion to that year's conference was in support of the joint NEC-TUC statement on defence and disarmament – Policy for Peace – on the basis that this would 'help put Labour on the road back to power.' Although this was the party's own motion, the meeting to mandate the delegate in September saw only a narrow vote by 28 to 26 to support it. The unilateralists were rewarded by a vote of 28 to 23 to oppose Polaris bases in Britain and by 31 to 17 to oppose the training of German troops in Britain. The meeting also saw the first debate on an issue that was to replace defence as the main division in the party: it was agreed by

23 votes to 14 to leave to the delegate's discretion the question of entry into the common market.

Pickstock and his colleagues remained active in CDS. Pickstock remained secretary until February 1961, when he was succeeded by Bill Rogers who was based in London. Members of the Oxford Labour Party who became active in CDS included Allan Flanders, lecturer in industrial relations, David Buckle, TGWU district officer and a parliamentary candidate in 1955 and 1959, Peter Pulzer of Christ Church College, David Schapiro and George Jones of Nuffield and Oliver Walston from the University Labour Club. The Oxford group of CDS, with the exception of Buckle, was university-based. Pickstock was chairman of CDS's campaign council, established in February 1962, until the organisation was wound up following the 1964 general election. Olive Gibbs remained active in CND and succeeded Canon Collins as national chairman in 1964.

Unilateralism was not the only issue which caused divisions in the Oxford Labour Party. The question of the council's housing policy, and especially the subsidy from the rates to council housing, led to considerable acrimonious debate. The party decided that the Labour group should oppose the Tory plans to reduce the rate subsidy. The majority of the Labour councillors however ignored the party policy and a censure motion was proposed at the GC. A plea from Edmund Gibbs, the group leader, that the censure motion should be withdrawn, was ignored, and when the vote was taken, the resolution was only defeated on the casting vote of the chairman Arthur Church. The opposition to the rate subsidy was led by Ingram, formerly chairman of the housing committee. During the GC debate, Jenner, the Trades Council secretary, told Ingram he should join the Tories. In March 1961, Ingram resigned from the Labour group and in November did join the Conservative Party. The Labour Party issued a statement which commented that 'if he is true to his conscience, we cannot believe he will find happiness in the ranks of his lifelong political enemies.' Fred Ingram later became leader of the Conservative group on Oxford City Council and was leader of the council from 1976 to 1980.

Much of the party's energy between 1961 and 1964 was spent on regaining control of the council. In 1961, Marcus Lower was re-elected leader of the Labour group, after an absence of only one year. The party established a series of working groups to formulate municipal policy. Policies adopted for housing, for example, included opposition to selling council houses, for the redevelopment of St. Ebbes by the Council and that 'all council building should be for the purpose of reducing the waiting list.' In March 1963, Lower presented a policy document to the GC which was agreed as the basis of the local election manifesto. Labour captured two seats. The GC authorised group members to accept chairmanships and vice-chairmanships, despite considerable opposition. During 1963, the Labour group concentrated their attacks on the university – both on its representation on the council and its charitable status in regard to rates.

University representation was reduced from 12 to 8 seats, being eventually abolished altogether with local government reform in 1974. The university's relief from rates was reduced after both the NEC and the post-1964 Labour cabinet had been lobbied. The group reaffirmed its support for the meadow road, although a condition of no closure of Magdalen bridge until the Marston Ferry link road (the northern by-pass) was completed was added by the GC. A municipal publications committee drew up a series of policy statements – the education statement called for a comprehensive system of education.

In the May 1964 election, Labour again became the largest party on the council, with 29 seats, and took the major chairmanships, with the exception of finance and planning which went to one of the university councillors, no doubt to ensure their support. Lower took education, Tony Williamson housing, Frank Knight the watch committee and Evan Roberts the estates committee. There was however a row over whether the Liberals, who had won several seats, should be allocated an alderman. It was reported to the GC that 'the group lacked cohesion'. Labour also lost the chairmanship of some sub-committees due to non-attendance by councillors.

One of the Labour councillors' first actions on winning control was to stop the sale of council houses. This was only carried when dispensation to vote for councillors who were also council tenants was obtained from the Minister, and only on the vote of two Labour councillors who had themselves bought council houses. The council also stopped selling land, approved the City Development Plan which included the meadow road, and called for the abolition of the 11-plus exam. The group's limited achievements were however brought to a halt with the loss of control in May 1966.

In July 1962, the party selected a new parliamentary candidate. The shortlist included Saul Rose, the former international secretary of the party who had returned to Oxford, and Evan Luard, a don at St Anthony's College, who had served one term on the city council. Luard was adopted as candidate and soon thrust into a round of public meetings. An election sub-committee was established. In November 1963, the party general secretary attended a conference on 'winning Oxford for Labour'. Copies of Harold Wilson's pamphlet 'Labour and the Scientific Revolution' were distributed in the University. The general election in October 1964 saw a swing of 6.6% to Labour but this still left the Tories with a majority of 1,429. Luard polled 20,783 votes to 22,212 for Woodhouse and 8,707 for Davies. The seat was however designated as a marginal one, and Luard readopted. The following election in March 1966 saw a further 3.7% swing to Labour which led to Luard's return as the first Labour MP for Oxford, with a majority of 2,425: 24,412 to 21,987 for the sitting Conservative MP Monty Woodhouse, and 6,152 for the Liberal Alexander Peterson. Luard had concentrated his campaign speeches on education, calling for the abolition of the 11 plus exam and for more teachers. He defended the Labour government's achievements, pointing to the overcoming of the financial crisis, increased

housebuilding and the Ministry of Social Insurance. He called for a 'Fair deal for Everyone'. His supporting speakers included Richard Crossman, the former Oxford councillor who was now Minister of Housing. The agent commented in the party's annual report that 'the election came at a most inconvenient time, delaying the Elderly Members Tea.'

The years before 1964 were dominated by electoral organisation and there seems to have been little discussion of national political issues in the Oxford party: for example, the NEC's proscription of both Keep Left and the Independent Nuclear Disarmament Committee in May 1962 failed to provoke opposition. There was one dramatic incident in May 1964, when the Oxford Young Socialists were suspended when it was discovered that four undergraduate members were supporters of the Trotskyite Socialist Labour League. It was the return of a Labour government which revived political activity.

The two issues on which there were major disagreements between the Oxford Party and the Labour government were immigration and Vietnam. A motion in February 1965 attacked immigration controls as 'based on racial prejudice'. In August, the party attacked the government's plans as 'morally indefensible and economically unjustifiable'. A motion calling for the repeal of the 1962 Immigration Act and for the introduction of an open-door policy was however defeated. In October 1965, the party sent a delegate to a Midlands conference on Vietnam. In 1966, a petition on Vietnam with over 1,000 signatures was sent to Evan Luard, the Oxford MP. Luard sought to defend the government's record at the GC in December. He argued that the government did not support the American position and that it was seeking to reconvene the Vienna peace conference. In February 1967, the party condemned 'most strongly, the government's compliance with and excuses for America's policies and action in Vietnam.'

In September, the GC was addressed by Fred Porter, a party member, on behalf of the Oxford Vietnam Peace Movement. The party sent delegates to a local conference on Vietnam, speakers at which included Harry Urwin of the TGWU and Bob Sutcliffe, an economist at Ruskin College and member of the Oxford Labour Party. Some party members were critical of some of the comments made at the conference by one of their delegates, Peter Sedgwick, who was later to join the International Socialists. It may not have been entirely coincidental that a few months later, the Summertown and Wolvercote branch, of which Fred Porter was an active member, was reorganised.

The party also became involved in direct action over the issue of racial discrimination. In June 1967, Olive Gibbs was arrested on a demonstration for racial integration. Her treatment resulted in a meeting with the Home Secretary Roy Jenkins to complain about police procedure. In May 1968, a demonstration supported by the Labour Party against racial discrimination took place at Annette's, a hairdresser in Cowley Road. The party affiliated to the newly formed Oxford Committee for Racial Integration, but later disowned some of

the OCRI's statements on the case and commented that it was opposed to direct action.

Some of the criticisms of the Labour government were of a broader nature. As early as August 1965, a motion expressed 'alarm at the increasing elasticity between Labour Party policy and Labour Government action.' The motion was however defeated. In January 1968, in response to a motion attacking cuts in social services spending, Luard defended the government's policy, arguing that defence had been cut more than social services. The party also took up the issue of Rhodesia, urging increased sanctions against the Smith regime. In 1969, during the Nigerian civil war, it called for the government to supply Biafra with food to prevent famine. The nuclear weapons issue was raised again with the announcement that American F1-11 fighter bombers were to be based at Upper Heyford, to the north of the city. Luard defended the decision on the grounds that it would make Oxford less vulnerable to attack. In February 1970, on the initiative of Olive Gibbs, the party condemned the statement of the Minister of Defence Denis Healey that Britain could initiate the use of nuclear weapons. In 1968, a motion submitted to annual conference called for the manufacture of chemical weapons to be stopped.

The party also took a position on the developing conflict in Northern Ireland. In October 1968, it called for an inquiry into civil rights; in June 1970, the arrest of Bernadette Devlin was condemned and a ban on marches (presumably those of the Orange Order and other Protestant bodies) demanded. In August, delegates were sent to a civil rights meeting. In September 1971, a motion opposing internment was withdrawn at the GC and the conference delegate mandated to vote against the reunification of Ireland. In April 1972, a Young Socialist motion calling for the withdrawal of troops from Ireland and opposing direct rule was defeated. In May, the GC received a deputation from the Trades Council, consisting of Arthur Gillians, Mick Leahy and Nick Panes (the latter two, members of the Communist Party) opposing internment. The party agreed to support the Trades Council deputation to the MP on the issue.

The growing unpopularity of the Labour Government had repercussions on municipal politics. The Labour group had lost control of the council in 1966 and was reduced to 20 members in 1967, to 14 in 1968 and to only 9 in 1969. The group's left-wingers were the main victims of the swing, and the group was led by Percy Bromley in 1968 and by Frank Pickstock in 1969 until Olive Gibbs recaptured her seat in 1970. The group raised the issues of the bus service, university development, the motor industry, a two-tier system of education and rehabilitation of housing in Jericho, the oldest residential area. On the ever-present roads controversy, the group avoided a decision by calling for more information on the options. In the 1970 annual report, the group secretary commented that 'it has not been a very enjoyable year as we know at the start that no matter how good a case we make we know there will be a shoal of Tory hands held up against us.' The Tory group on the council was very tightly run

by Janet Young, who was later as Baroness Young to be Leader of the House of Lords in Margaret Thatcher's government. The Labour Party's fortunes reached a new low with the loss of the parliamentary seat in the general election in June 1970: Luard won 22,989 votes to Monty Woodhouse's 24,873. Edward Heath, who as a student had supported A. D. Lindsay in the 1938 by-election, became Prime Minister in the new Conservative government.

The main controversy in the Labour Party nationally after the fall of the Labour government was over the Common Market. In July 1971, the Oxford Party had a special meeting to mandate their delegate for the special conference called on the issue. A deputation from the Trades Council opposing membership was received. Two motions were discussed: one opposed entry on the Conservative Government's terms and was carried; a second motion opposing entry on the principle that the EEC was a 'Capitalist solution' was defeated by 15 votes to 14. The meeting also supported a free vote on the issue for MPs and called for no victimisation of MPs who took a pro-EEC position. In September, the delegate to annual conference was mandated to vote for withdrawal from the EEC and against the holding of a referendum.

The Oxford Party appears to have adopted a centre-left line on most issues. Though a motion putting the blame for the fall of the government on their failure to adopt socialist policies was defeated, the party called for more socialist policies during the period of opposition. The motion for the 1971 conference summarised how the party's objectives were viewed – to keep down unemployment, increase the social wage, reform the industrial relations system, to increase public ownership and to pursue a socialist foreign policy; the motion also supported an incomes policy. In the 1971 NEC elections, the left slate of Tony Benn, Barbara Castle, Joan Lester, Ian Mikardo, Eric Heffer and Stan Orme was supported, though so also were Tony Crosland and Shirley Williams.

In September 1972, a parliamentary selection meeting was held. Though several local party members had been nominated for the parliamentary panel over the previous two years, none were included in the shortlist, which consisted of Albert Elderton, a printer; Max Madden, a journalist; Arthur Taverner, a laboratory technician; and Evan Luard. The Young Socialists called for the candidate to commit himself to conference policy and to have 'experience of the conditions and interests of the working class.' This motion was ruled out of order, and Luard was readopted on the first ballot.

With the election of a Conservative government, the electoral swing now moved in Labour's favour. In 1970, the Labour group on the city council was increased to 12, in 1971 to 23 and in 1972 to 34, giving Labour control, with Olive Gibbs becoming council leader. This time, the Labour group did not depend on the university councillors for their majority, and took all committee chairmanships, with the exception of the libraries committee. Prior to the election, the party had prepared a series of detailed policy statements, and on winning control, was quick to demand reports from council officers

on implementing their policies. Within the first few months, the Eastwyke Farm road had been dropped, council house sales stopped and the building programme increased, concessionary bus fares introduced, a Housing Aid Centre established, single-sex secondary education abolished, the taking up of places at direct grant schools stopped, university development in St. Clement's restricted and a balanced transport policy (pro-public transport and restricting cars in the city centre) introduced. The Labour Council's reforms were however restricted by the reform of local government, which in 1974 transferred many of its powers, most importantly education and social services, to a new county council. In the Oxfordshire County Council elections in June 1973 Labour won 20 seats but was certain to be in a permanent minority in a Conservative-dominated council of 70 members. The Labour Party however retained control of the reformed city council, taking 30 out of 45 seats. Olive Gibbs became leader of the Labour group on the County Council, being succeeded by Arthur Gillians as leader of the Oxford City (District) Council.

In 1972 and 1973 there were divisions in the party as to how the Tory government's policies should be opposed. A call from the AEU for the council not to implement the Housing Finance Act which forced up council rents was amended so that it called only for opposition to the Act's introduction. The party later passed a motion in support of Claycross Council which refused to implement the legislation. The party called for opposition to the Industrial Relations Act and later supported the Shrewsbury pickets. Industrial action against the government's incomes policy was supported, but a call for a general strike was rejected by 34 votes to six. The party remained fairly evenly split between left and centre right. In the nominations for party treasurer in 1973, James Callaghan won 17 votes to 16 for the Tribunite Norman Atkinson. When a delegate was chosen for the special conference of the EEC in March 1975, the anti-market (and former communist) John Power won 50 votes to 47 for the pro-market Frank Pickstock. These figures also demonstrate the increase in attendance at the party's general committee over this period. Nevertheless, despite this increase in political activity, Evan Luard failed to recapture the parliamentary seat in the February 1974 election, losing by 821 votes to the sitting MP Monty Woodhouse though, at a national level, Labour returned to power. In the second election in October, Luard was successful with 23,359 votes to 22,323 for Woodhouse and for the second time, Oxford had a Labour MP.

The momentum built up by the Labour group on the city council in 1972–1973 does not seem to have been maintained. A number of conflicts between the party and the group developed. In August 1974, a special GC was called on a petition by 16 delegates on the issue of the East Oxford Middle School. The party had wanted a new school to be built on the university rugby ground. When the council decided to site the school in Meadow Lane, some party members in East Oxford opposed the proposed access through Bedford Street. The plea was ignored by the Labour group. There was a dispute over the

use by the neo-fascist National Front of the Town Hall. One councillor who opposed the letting, Harry Nimmo, was excluded from the panel of municipal candidates but reinstated by the GC. There was also a dispute over whether the council should repurchase the site of the Folly Bridge Hotel after the developer had gone bankrupt. A motion from the local party calling for repurchase was defeated by 33 votes to 32. In May 1976, Labour again lost control of the city council, its representation being reduced to 15 members. In June 1977, 17 of Labour's 20 seats on the county council were lost.

The Labour government's introduction of restraint on welfare spending, hitting education, social services and housing, led to considerable criticism from the Oxford party. The situation was not helped by the absence from party meetings of the MP Evan Luard, now a junior foreign office minister. The party agent Terry Johnston, in his letter of resignation, made comments to the effect that Luard should be more accessible if he wished to be re-elected. The party sent as its motion to the 1976 conference a resolution calling for parties with sitting MPs to hold selection meetings, rather than automatically re-adopting the sitting MP.

In July 1976, the party held a debate on the cuts in public spending, at which Evan Luard sought to defend the government's policy. Following the meeting, a committee to campaign against the cuts was established. The party was moving to a more left-wing position. In October 1976, it supported the election of the party leader by the annual conference, the introduction of a public works programme to reduce unemployment and the early implementation of proposals for industrial democracy – a step towards workers' control. The party also supported local strikes, such as those at the Randolph and Linton Lodge Hotels, and party members were active on the picket lines. In June 1977, a one-day strike by teachers was supported and party members joined a mass demonstration outside County Hall. The closure of the South Oxford Middle School was also opposed. A delegation was sent to the Minister of Education to stop the closure of the South Oxford nursery – some members participated in an occupation.

The MP continued his support for the policy of the government of which he was a member and, on his occasional appearances at party meetings, faced considerable hostility. In November 1977, he was severely criticised for his intervention in an inter-union dispute at Oxford Polytechnic; in February 1978, the party debated his accountability to the GC. A motion critical of Luard, proposed by the St. Clement's ward secretary Duncan Bowie, was defeated by 39 votes to 21, not because the party was happy with his behaviour, but because it feared the consequences of a public division. While the party however reinforced its support for the principle of reselection, no further attempts were made to challenge Luard's position and in May 1979, he was hastily reelected as candidate only to lose the parliamentary seat by 1,497 votes to the Conservative candidate John Patten, a geography lecturer at the university, in a campaign in which the

extent of party involvement was due more to the fact that the election was combined with the contest for council seats than to the popularity of the candidate or the government. One month later, in the first direct elections for the European parliament, in which the Oxford party took a minimal part, the Labour candidate for the Cotswold euro-constituency was predictably heavily defeated.

The party was also active on the question of racism, an anti-racism committee being established in May 1977. Public meetings were organised, leaflets distributed, and liaison with Asian groups arranged for the 1979 election. The return of the Conservative government led to an increase in the number of deportations of illegal immigrants, and during 1979 party members played a major role in two successful and one unsuccessful battles with the Home Office.

One major factor in the development of the Oxford Labour Party between 1977 and 1980 was the growing number of members of ultra-left groups who joined the party. Prior to 1977, there had been several supporters of the Militant tendency, led by economics lecturer Andrew Glyn, with support in the small Young Socialist branch; from 1977, there was an influx of members of the International Marxist Group and the Workers' Socialist League. In January 1977, a leading IMG shop steward at Cowley, Tony Homer, was refused membership of the party. He then attempted to organise an independent 'Socialist Unity' candidacy for the parliamentary election. Several other less well-known IMG members and supporters however succeeded in joining the party. In December, one of these, Anita Richards, narrowly avoided expulsion for involvement in Socialist Unity activity, though she was able to stand, albeit unsuccessfully, as a Labour candidate for a council seat in 1979. A more serious threat to the party however came from the Workers' Socialist League, an Oxford-based splinter group from the Workers' Revolutionary Party, which was led by Alan Thornett, another Cowley shop steward. WSL members first joined the Oxford Labour Party in February 1977 following a strike at Blackwell's bookshop, which involved a WSL member, Ted Heslin. The Blackwell's union branch affiliated to the party, giving them delegates on the GC. Heslin was elected to the executive committee, where he joined Bob Sutcliffe, formerly a supporter of Militant, who had transferred his allegiance to the WSL. In September 1978, two WSL supporters – Peter McIntyre, a journalist, and Ken Williamson, a doctor – were refused membership. The argument which developed resulted in Ted Heslin being expelled. The vote to expel Heslin was only carried by 37 votes to 35, though the majority increased as the dispute continued. Action over a number of other WSL supporters was deferred until the Heslin dispute was cleared up. Heslin, McIntyre and Williamson all appealed to the NEC which, after several changes in position, agreed that although the activities of the appellants were indefensible, McIntyre and Williamson should be allowed to join the party and Heslin should be reinstated. The Oxford party refused to implement the NEC decision. The Heslin affair, which received publicity in the national press, had a major impact on the Oxford party. Successive meetings were taken up with the

continuing dispute. The NEC's indecision weakened the Oxford party's position in that individual party members could not be stopped from publicly advocating policies totally at odds with party policy. One example of this was when some members of the St. Clement's branch, without ward authorisation, took the branch banner on a march through Oxford organised by the Provisional Sinn Fein, the political front for the Provisional Irish Republican Army; this generated adverse publicity in the local press. The constituency could express its disapproval but did not discipline the members responsible. Throughout the later 1970s, the Oxford Trades Council was affected by similar sectarian disputes, involving both the IMG and the WSL – at one time there were two rival Trades Councils operating in the city, and the reformed Trades Council was not a very stable organisation.

The problems of entryism, though time-consuming for the party's organisational bodies, did not however stop the Oxford Labour Party making advances in the field of municipal politics. In 1978, the policy working groups were re-established. Councillors and other party members participated, and reports were adopted by the party, although these were not as comprehensive as those prepared in 1971–1972. There were also party discussion meetings organised by the political education officer Duncan Bowie, with external speakers such as David Blunkett, at that time leader of Sheffield Council. In May 1979, on the same day as the parliamentary seat was lost, four council seats were gained, taking the Labour group to 19 compared with the Tories' 26. Labour's successes included two of the three seats in the Conservative-held St. Clement's ward, with the author, at that time a postgraduate student at Oxford Polytechnic and a teacher, defeating a local butcher and a local fishmonger, evidence of the extent to which former students and professionals had now superseded the local Conservative shop-owners and traders – the East Oxford Community Centre replacing the East Oxford Conservative Club as the dominant local political centre. During the succeeding year, the enlarged Labour group, under the leadership of Tony Williamson, maintained a persistent attack on Tory policies, which was rewarded in May 1980 by the capture of five more seats and control of the council. The Labour group was then faced with the problem of how to oppose the cuts imposed by the Tory government. Within a few months of winning control, the council was forced to increase rents and rates to avoid implementing cuts, a strategy which was only supported by a narrow majority after a lively debate at a special meeting of the GC. The group then faced the problem of how, having stopped council house sales, it should respond to government legislation in the 1980 Housing Act making sales mandatory.

The Oxford Labour Party in 1980, though not supporting the revolutionary politics of the ultra-left, remained on the left of the national party. In early 1980, it was involved in opposition to the siting of Cruise missiles at Upper Heyford and adopted a position which was not only unilateralist but called for the withdrawal of Britain from NATO. This brought it into conflict with Evan Luard,

who was a strong supporter of NATO and the nuclear deterrent. The party's cuts committee was revived, and the party supported the joint LP-TUC Campaign for Social and Economic Advance, which however made little progress in the Oxford area, apart from the Day of Action in May which involved a march through the city centre, while the ultra-left-dominated organisation 'Oxfordshire against the Cuts' organised separate protests. The party supported the traditional left-wing candidates for the NEC at the 1980 conference, although Shirley Williams, soon to be a founder member of the Social Democratic Party, was also supported. It also reaffirmed its support for the reselection of MPs, NEC control over the manifesto and the election of party leader by conference or, failing that, by an electoral college – all issues of major controversy at that historic conference.

The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a new trades union militancy which spread beyond the Cowley works. In addition to the aforementioned strikes at the Randolph and Linton Lodge hotels and at Blackwell's bookshop, there was also a strike at the Pergamon Press on Headington Hill, which was owned by the millionaire Labour MP for Buckingham Robert Maxwell. Many of the strikes were initiated by activists from the ultra-left groups, with left-wing students establishing an Oxford Student Trade Union Liaison Committee; while the Oxford Trades Council was militant, the strikes received little support from the more established trade unionists, such as David Buckle, TGWU district organiser and labour magistrate. This new militancy also led to a revived community politics, with protests against the cuts in welfare services initiated first by the Callaghan government, after the intervention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and subsequently, after 1979, by the Thatcher government. For example, the South Oxford nursery was occupied in 1977 after it was closed, and there was also a protest when Prime Minister James Callaghan visited Ruskin College in 1976 to launch his new education policy. There was a revival of anti-nuclear protest in the city, with a vigorous CND group (known as Campaign ATOM) and marches through the city to Upper Heyford and to Greenham Common, and support for the women's camp there. With the miners' strike of 1984–1985, a group of miners were based in Oxford with an active local support group chaired by the former Cowley shop steward and WSL leader Alan Thornett. In 1985, there were strikes against contracting out services at a number of Oxford hospitals, which brought militant trade unionists into conflict with the health authority, which was chaired by Lady Margaret McCarthy, a prominent member of the local Labour Party. It should be noted that the 1970s and early 1980s in Oxford also witnessed the flourishing of the Ruskin-based History Workshop movement led by Raphael Samuel, in which Ruskin students mixed with socialist historians, trade unionists, community activists and feminists in a project which sought to link socialist history and the contemporary working-class movement.

With the Oxford Labour Party moving leftwards, the former MP Evan Luard became a founding member of the Social Democratic Party established after

the 1980 Labour Party conference by Roy Jenkins, Bill Rodgers, David Owen and Shirley Williams. Luard however took only a few local Labour Party members into the SDP. Several ex-student local Labour Party activists – Roger Liddle, Matthew Oakshott, Keith Fitchett, Tony Halmos and Alec McGivan – joined the SDP and moved to London. Liddle, Oakshott and Fitchett had been Labour members of Oxford City Council but stood down in 1979. Liddle was at the time a special advisor to Bill Rodgers, the Minister of Transport. He was later appointed foreign policy advisor by Prime Minister Tony Blair, subsequently served as advisor to the president of the European Commission and was appointed to the House of Lords in 2010. Oakshott, who was a special advisor to Roy Jenkins as Home Secretary, later became an SDP peer and treasury spokesman. Fitchett stood for the SDP for Banbury in the 1983 general election, coming second to the Conservative candidate with 27% of the vote. He later became a LibDem councillor in Lambeth and cabinet member for housing in a brief period when the council was run by a Conservative-LibDem coalition. Halmos and McGivan were both appointed to posts at SDP headquarters. Luard was to stand unsuccessfully as parliamentary candidate for the SDP for the Oxford West and Abingdon seat in the 1983 general election; he died in 1991. The SDP however had little impact on municipal politics, although politics lecturer and former biographer of Keir Hardie, Ian Maclean, was elected for Central ward in 1982, taking a seat from the Conservatives. In 1987, the academic Andrew Adonis was elected for the SDP in North ward. Adonis, now Lord Adonis, was to become head of policy for Tony Blair, a minister in Gordon Brown's government and chairman of the National Infrastructure Commission, advising David Cameron and then Theresa May until resigning in December 2017.

Changes in parliamentary boundaries led to the division of Oxford between two constituencies, most of the city being included in the Oxford East constituency, but with North, West and South wards being included in Oxford West and Abingdon. The nomination for the Oxford East seat was contested between two councillors, both former University students – Andrew Smith, who was a councillor for the Blackbird Leys and member relations officer for the Oxford Co-operative Society, and Patrick Gray, a councillor for East ward. Smith was successful, partly because he won the support of ultra-left party members. However, in the 1983 election, Smith failed to win the seat, being defeated by the Conservative candidate Steven Norris. Smith however won the seat in the 1987 election, retaining it at successive elections until his retirement in 2017, when he was succeeded by the new Labour candidate Anneliese Dodds, an academic who had served as a member of the European Parliament. Smith was a popular local MP, continuing to live on the Blackbird Leys estate, and served in Tony Blair's government as Chief Secretary to the Treasury and Minister for Works and Pensions. In 1983, the Labour candidate for the Oxford West and Abingdon seat was Julian Jacotet. The seat was however won by the

Conservative candidate John Patten, the former MP for the Oxford city seat, with Evan Luard, standing for the SDP, coming second; Labour had only 17% of the votes cast. In the 1987 election, Patten retained the seat, though the SDP's Chris Huhne, an economic journalist, came a fairly close second. Labour's John Power, trade unionist and city councillor, came third with 15% of the vote. In 1992, Labour again came third, their candidate being Bruce Kent, the former chair of CND. In successive elections, the Labour candidate came in third place, generally with about 13% of the vote. In 1997, the seat was won by the Liberal Dr Evan Harris, who retained it until 2010 when it was won by the Conservative Nicola Blackwood, being recaptured for the Liberals by Layla Morgan in 2017.

Labour has been more successful in municipal politics. Having won control of the council in 1980, it has maintained its position for most of the succeeding years. By 1990, the opposition had been reduced to 10 Conservatives and 5 Liberals, with Labour holding 30 seats. However, the Liberal Party then recovered, taking many of the Conservative Party's votes and reaching a peak between 2006 and 2008 when the Liberal Democrats were the largest party on the council with 19 seats to Labour's 17. Between 2000 and 2002, 2004 and 2006, and between 2008 and 2010, Labour was the largest party but without an overall majority. The Conservative Party in the city collapsed, with only one Conservative councillor remaining in 2002 and none elected since. A new challenge to Labour came from a growing Green Party influence in the inner wards, with the party having 7 councillors between 2000 and 2002 and peaking at eight councillors between 2006 and 2008. The Green Party's Caroline Lucas served on Oxfordshire County Council between 1993 and 1997, later to become the first Green Party MP, representing Brighton Pavilion. In 1991, the Oxford city boundary was extended to include Old Marston, Risinghurst and Sandhills, and Littlemore, creating three new wards. At the time of writing, – December 2017 – the city council comprises 35 Labour members, 8 Liberal Democrats, 4 Greens and 1 Independent. The current council leader, Bob Price, has served on the council since 1983. The story of how the city council and the local labour movement responded to the challenges of a growing city with an expanding university and professional sector but a volatile industrial sector is, however, for a different author.



## PART 5

# Progressive Politics



## CHAPTER 4 I

# Oxford and Progressive Politics

The city of Oxford has had a long tradition of progressive politics. This book was written primarily as a search for a heritage, and the central theme is that of a changing, but ever present, radical and socialist current in the political life of the city. Oxford has traditionally been regarded as a conservative city and as dominated by the university which is itself a symbol of privilege. This book was written to demonstrate that the city of Oxford has a different history from the 'cuckoo in its nest'. As such it is a partisan history. There are numerous histories of Oxford University, including W. R. Ward's two studies of politics within the University – *Georgian Oxford* and *Victorian Oxford*. There is Ashley and Saunders' 1933 *Red Oxford* pamphlet which presents itself as 'a History of the Growth in Socialism in the University of Oxford'. Brian Harrison's 1991 extended journal article on 'Oxford and the Labour Movement' focuses on the growth of socialist politics within the University, both among the dons and the student community, and in effect seeks to bring *Red Oxford* up to date. Harrison's interesting and thought-provoking study focuses on how the University influenced the labour movement at a national level through organisations such as the Christian Social Union; the adult education movement and its relationship with Ruskin College and the Workers' Education Association; and the influence of the University Fabian Society and Labour Clubs, in their various incarnations, on the political development of generations of national Labour politicians. It treats the University as a single collective institution; as a centre for debate but also as an institution with an influence on labour movement ideology at a national scale. Harrison does not consider the impact of the University or of progressives within the University, on the electoral, municipal and labour movement politics of the city of Oxford, other than in terms of national events such as the General Strike of 1926. His interest is national rather than local.

This work focuses on the local scale. It has a somewhat different focus from previous studies in that it examines the role of progressive politics in Oxford from the perspective of the city of Oxford rather than from the perspective of the University. While seeking to present a continuous narrative over a 150-year timescale, it focuses on the progressive side of municipal politics. In doing so, this book seeks to describe the nature of the context in which the struggle

was fought. A history of Oxford municipal politics which focuses on the Conservative Party could no doubt also be written.

To assess the nature of the progressive tradition in Oxford, it is necessary to assess the political movements which were present in the city, to identify those which were relatively strong and those which were relatively weak and to relate these to political developments at a national level. This study started with the assertion of the city's political independence from the control of the local aristocracy and the development of the campaign for parliamentary reform in the 1830s. In this period, Oxford was a radical city and played a significant role in the national pressure for reform. There are relatively few studies of radicalism in other towns in this period to compare with the Oxford situation. It is clear however that agitation for reform was spread throughout the country. Oxford played its part in the agitation, though it did not play the role of London or Birmingham.

The next phase of political agitation was also centred on the suffrage question. It is significant that it followed the establishment of the reformed Oxford Corporation. The movement in Oxford culminated in a series of petitions and the rejection in 1837 of the sitting Whig MP in favour of a reformer. This was followed by agitation against the Corn Laws. It is perhaps surprising that in Oxford, the centre of an agricultural area, there was such support for the campaign. Yet it did in a way represent the assertion of the city's independence from county politics and, for the radicals, an assertion of their influence in city political life – in which, during this period, they were the dominant group.

Chartism did not play a major part in Oxford politics. The only local Chartist was James Josiah Faulkner, a colourful character effective at self promotion, although some others such as John Towle were sympathetic. Faulker was very much an individualist and failed to rally any real support behind his aggressive demagoguery. Oxford radicals did not desert the cause of suffrage reform. The suffrage agitation in which they participated did not however have the revolutionary content present in some Chartist struggles: the weapons of the Oxford radicals were petitions rather than threats of physical force.

The 1850s and early 1860s were the quietest period in Oxford's 19th Century political history. Nevertheless, there were radical parliamentary candidates, and one MP was unseated for corruption, a characteristic of Oxford politics throughout the Victorian period and well into the 20th century. Organised Oxford radicalism was revived in the late 1860s with the establishment of the Oxford Reform League. Oxford again became one of the leading centres of reform agitation. This phase probably witnessed Oxford's most significant role in progressive politics as seen from a national perspective, though much of this activity was led by the 'lights of liberalism' within the University.

The reform campaign was successful in that within two years of the revival of suffrage agitation, parliamentary reform was achieved. The local consequence was the founding of the Oxford Liberal Association and the return to

parliament of a reforming MP, William Harcourt. With the passage of the 1867 Act, Oxford radicals were satisfied with the extent of the suffrage and no further campaigns on the question were initiated in the city, except for a single public meeting on the ballot in 1872. (There was however some radical agitation on the education and drink issues.) Oxford's radicalism became part of the city's established political framework, and its liberalism dominated by a small group of ageing aldermen. Attempts to establish 'real radical' or 'republican' groups met with no success.

The next phase of progressive politics in Oxford was of a very different character. There had been little or no working-class element in the radicalism of Victorian Oxford, other than in the participation of the 'mob' in the city's numerous election riots and celebrations. The establishment of socialist organisations in the city in the 1880s was primarily a working-class-led initiative, though middle-class sympathisers did play an important role. The existence of branches of the Socialist League, the Socialist Democratic Federation and the Independent Labour Party in the city is perhaps surprising. While these organisations never had large memberships in Oxford, their presence in a southern provincial town is significant, and not generally acknowledged in studies of the early years of the socialist movement or the detailed studies of the three individual organisations. Whereas in London and many northern cities and towns, one or more of these organisations had considerable impact on local municipal politics, in Oxford the nascent labour movement met with no electoral success despite persistent attempts. It was not necessarily that the working class of Oxford were in thrall to the dominant Conservative forces (although clearly many were dependent on the University and colleges for their employment), but that the local working-class leadership were artisans and skilled workers who were content with working within the Liberal Party. In the period before the First World War, it was the socialists with connections to the University and Ruskin College who tended to be most radical. The Fabian Society also deserves a mention, however. It is to be expected that there would be an active Fabian Society in a university city, given their nature as a group of middle-class socialists. However, the Fabian Society in Oxford was centred on the University rather than the town, though together with the Christian Social Union, its activities did impinge on civic matters, primarily through the important role played by Rev A. J. Carlyle.

Oxford labour politics in the years immediately following the First World War were dramatic, with a long struggle for leadership of the local labour movement. The wrangles within the Trades Council and nascent Labour Party between militants and moderates, though primarily internal disputes with little relevance to the position of most of Oxford's working people, did however demonstrate the impact of the divisions in European socialism arising from the Russian revolution of October 1917 and the subsequent establishment of a Communist Party in Britain. Unfortunately, there are few studies of local

Trades Council and Labour Party politics in this period for other towns, with which the experience of Oxford could be compared. The narrative in the above chapters does however clearly demonstrate the damage to the local working-class organisations caused by these internal divisions. These were divisions not just over strategy and tactics but also over ideology. Again, some of the more radical and even revolutionary socialists had connections to the University or to Ruskin College, though it should be acknowledged that the most destructive of these revolutionary interventions came from T. Wigington, a syndicalist rather than an orthodox communist, who appears not to have had links with these institutions and who was at least at one time working as a postman.

In the late 1920s, when the Labour Party and working-class politics were having such an impact and electoral success in many parts of the country, with the first national Labour Government in 1924, the labour movement in Oxford was ineffective and internally divided. The General Strike in the city had little impact on the labour movement and is remembered more for the involvement of university students as either strike breakers or strike supporters. The movement's revival in the mid 1930s was a consequence of the industrial development of Oxford, centred on Morris Motors at Cowley, to the east of the historic city. For a few years, the Oxford Labour Party was led by trade unionists from Morris and Pressed Steel, a leading role being taken by John Ida. Then the tide of progressivism swept the university, with academics having a significant impact on the politics of the city. The consequence was that the Oxford labour movement went through a period of activism and controversy which appears to have been more acute than in most other cities and towns of a similar size in this period. The campaign for a 'United Front' between the Labour Party and the Communist Party threw Oxford politics into the national political arena, with the move to an extended 'Popular Front' in the 1938 Oxford by-election playing an important role in national political re-alignments in the months leading up to the beginning of the Second World War. It could be argued that this unusual alliance of progressive intellectuals and revolutionary trade unionists could only have occurred in a city such as Oxford where there were both a University and a strong industrial base, with radical academics and working-class communist leaders experienced at promoting their causes and their own leadership potential. Prewar Oxford politics was the cradle for several national political careers.

Oxford political life in the postwar period perhaps lacked the vitality of the previous 120 years. This characteristic was, however, perhaps not entirely confined to Oxford. Despite the fact that the early postwar years reflected the greatest period of Labour's achievements nationally, Labour in Oxford remained in opposition and with limited impact on the city. Within the local Labour Party, the Communist Party now having been marginalised, there remained conflicts between left and right, the party largely taking a Tribuneite/Bevanite position. The first major controversy within the party in this period

came with the debate over nuclear disarmament in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Oxford experience was common to that of other local Labour parties, though perhaps more intense, given the significant national role of some of the individuals involved. The campaign for unilateral disarmament appealed to the middle-class elements of the Oxford Labour Party rather than to the trade unionists, who had other concerns. The divisions between the competing factions were to have an impact on municipal politics, with at one stage a unilateralist challenging a multilateralist for the leadership of the city council Labour group. In the 1970s, the Oxford Labour Party again witnessed intense internal divisions with entryism into the party by ultra-left groups. Such controversies raged elsewhere, but the existence in Oxford of a substantial group of student and ex-student revolutionary theorists made the sectarian disputes in the Oxford labour movement unusually intense, though it had little impact on municipal politics and did not stop the Labour Party winning control of the city council in 1980.

Despite the growing industrialisation of the city, Oxford has never been a working-class city in the sense that Sheffield or Manchester have been. Progressive politics in Oxford have generally been dominated by middle-class activity, often with significant input from university academics or others with university connections. Radicalism in Victorian Oxford was a movement of shopkeepers, as the analysis of the suffrage petition demonstrates. Even Faulkner, the city's Chartist, ran a coffee shop. The lack of an organised working class in that period accounts for the weakness of chartism and the lack of agitation over the poor law or food prices. The first involvement of manual workers in Oxford politics was in the 1866–1867 reform campaign, in which they played a secondary role, the campaign being led by a university don, Thorold Rogers. The early 1870s saw the emergence of trade union activity with the builders' strike and the agricultural labourers' agitation. When the Trades Council was formed in 1888, it was dominated by craft unions, notably by the printers, and remained so until the late 1920s. Agitation over unemployment before the First World War failed to lead to the creation of any lasting working-class organisation. The prewar socialist organisations in the city remained under the influence of intellectuals like A. J. Carlyle. Oxford's working class remained deferential to Tories and Liberals. The slum districts of St. Ebbes, St. Thomas' and St. Clement's failed to support Independent Labour candidates. Much of this deference can be attributed to the presence of the university in the city and the dependence of a large proportion of the city's working population on it for employment. The role of the numerous Conservative and Liberal clubs in this process should not be underestimated.

The development of Morris Motors at Cowley did however lead to a significant shift in the dynamic of Oxford politics and that of the labour movement especially. Cowley workers soon outnumbered university servants. However, the impact of Cowley on the Oxford Labour Party was perhaps less significant

than could have been expected. Within a couple of years of the Party's revival, the university-based intellectuals were again in control – the party being dominated by academics such as Richard Crossman, Frank Pakenham and Patrick Gordon Walker. It is significant that the Oxford Labour Party has only once had a working-class parliamentary candidate – Fred Ludlow in 1924, at a time when the Party was perhaps at its weakest. All subsequent candidates (with the possible exception of the national trade union leader George Elvin in 1951 and 1955), not just up to 1980 but subsequently, have been people in professional occupations. Though manual workers still played a role in the organisation of the local labour movement, it was, and remains, a secondary one.

Another question raised was that of the relationship of local politics to national politics. This study has been dependent mainly on local sources and views political developments in the city from a local perspective. Reference to national political developments has been made only where necessary to show the context of a local political event or where there has been a direct local impact – for example, the fall of a national government generating an election contest. Though Oxford is a provincial town, it has never been isolated from national political forums. This is in contrast with many other provincial towns which have been dominated by county politics. This contrast owes much to the presence of the university in the city and the extent of political links with Westminster politics, and the fact that many university-based intellectuals operated at a national scale as well as the local one. The university often brought politicians of national stature to the city, though many passed through unnoticed by anyone outside the colleges. Some national figures such as William Morris and George Lansbury may have had some impact on local political developments. This is less likely in the case of others such as Clement Attlee and Harold Wilson, both of whom spoke in Oxford on many occasions but only once they had national roles.

Attlee was a student at University College until 1904 but had no political involvement during his time in Oxford. He disliked the Liberal Party and radicals and appears to have had some Toryish opinions. On graduating, Attlee attended his old school's Haileybury Club in Stepney and served his political apprenticeship at Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel, joining the ILP and serving on Stepney Borough Council, later becoming mayor.

Wilson was a student at Jesus College from 1934, and then a don at New College from 1937, at the age of 21. He was actually an active member of the University Liberal Club until coming under the influence of G. D. H. Cole, only joining the University Labour Club in February 1938 before taking up a role as a temporary civil servant and economist, assisting William Beveridge, who was himself a Liberal Party member. There is no record of Wilson having had any involvement in city politics, including the 1938 by-election, and he apparently joined the Labour Party as a more likely route to becoming an MP than the Liberal party. The only record of him having spoken at a Labour Party meeting

in Oxford before the war was a talk on electricity nationalisation. Wilson transferred from Oxford to Whitehall in July 1940 to join the newly-established economic section of the Cabinet Office.

The only other Oxford-educated Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair, was a student at St John's College between 1972 and 1975. He was not involved in Labour or wider socialist politics, either within the university or the town, and in fact avoided the two competing Labour Clubs (one leftist and one centrist), the ultra-left Socialist Society and the Communist Party-led Broad Left grouping and did not join the Labour Party until after he had left Oxford and was living in Hackney in London. He did participate (as did the author) in an occupation of the Examination Schools in the campaign for a central student union in 1973, and in fact his band 'Ugly Rumours' gave a performance in the occupied building. Blair also joined a protest against the National Front outside Oxford Town Hall but, other than that, his political activity appears to have been limited to reading the works of the Christian communist John Macmurray and other philosophers, though he revealed in an interview on BBC4 in August 2017 that he was briefly impressed by the ideas of Trotsky, having read the first volume of Isaac Deutscher's biography – one of his close friends at college was the Australian Geoff Gallop, a member of the International Marxist Group.

The city of Oxford's political role has not however been limited to its function as a training ground for future Labour Prime Ministers. It has had its own political tradition, independent of both the university and of national politics. This is shown most clearly in the history of the city council, which plays such a prominent part in this study. Though local election results were affected by the unpopularity or otherwise of the national government, political controversies were often over local issues such as university rates in the 1840s or the meadow road in the 1960s. Other controversies, whether over the Corn Laws or the United Front, though linked to national political movements, had their own local characteristics and should not be viewed just as inevitable consequences of national political trends.

The relationship between local and national politics is rarely one-way. The role of Oxford in a range of national political movements has been demonstrated. It has been argued that the city played an especially prominent role in the 1866–1867 reform movement and in the movements in the late 1930s, first for a United Front and then for a Popular Front. This was also the case for both the campaigns for unilateralism and multilateralism in the 1950s and early 1960s. There is another way in which Oxford has had an impact on progressive politics at a national level, though it is not a collective impact in the sense that South Wales or Glasgow as centres of radical and socialist agitation over a long period have had. One of Oxford's roles has been to provide the environment in which many leading progressives have served their political apprenticeship. Some, like Godfrey Elton, Noah Ablett, Richard Crossman, Frank Pakenham

and Patrick Gordon Walker, played major roles in Oxford politics before moving on to a national stage. Others, like Hugh Gaitskell and Edward Heath, played more minor roles, though roles which stand out in memoirs of first political experiences. Some Oxford academics, like Thorold Rogers, Charles Faulkner, A. J. Carlyle, Sidney Ball, and more reluctantly, A. D. Lindsay, were active in city politics while being more widely known as progressive thinkers. The role of successive principals and vice-principals of Ruskin College should also be acknowledged. Other Oxford academics – James Bryce, A. V. Dicey, Gilbert Murray and Christopher Hill would be examples – appear to have had little or no involvement in city affairs, although they may have been active in the university's internal 'political' disputes. Many students who were involved in University Labour Societies or the Union Society and later became prominent Labour politicians, such as Christopher Mayhew, Roy Jenkins and Douglas Jay in 1930s or Tony Crosland who chaired the University Democratic Socialist Club in 1945 (after its split with the 'socialist' Labour Club), do not appear to have been involved in the wider local labour movement. Others, like Evan Durbin and Hugh Gaitskell, supported the strikers in the 1926 General Strike but appear to have had no other engagement with politics outside the university. Denis Healey, then a communist but who also became chair of the University Labour Club in September 1939, had, like Edward Heath, campaigned for A. D. Lindsay in the 1938 by-election, with Healey speaking at a meeting at the Co-op Hall with Frank Pakenham and Abe Lazarus. He also spent a summer holiday taking a message to Paris for James Klugmann, the Cambridge communist who was organising aid for the Spanish republicans.

A central characteristic of progressive politics in Oxford has been the co-existence of working-class and middle-class elements. Co-existence is perhaps a more appropriate term than 'co-operation' since working-class activists have often resented the role of people in professional occupations, often university-based, often passing through Oxford on their way to careers elsewhere. The continuity in the local movement has largely been provided by people like Isaac Grubb, a baker in the mid-19th century, or Fred Ludlow, a printer in the 1920s, rather than by 'stars' such as Thorold Rogers and Pakenham. It could be argued that the involvement of 'intellectuals' in the city's progressive politics has made the local movement more vibrant, but it has at times been destabilising as interventions have sometimes had negative outcomes – the role of Wiginton in the 1920s is perhaps the clearest example of the destructive impact of pure political theory, though this example was paralleled in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This is not to argue that the working-class constitutes the right wing of the local labour movement and the intellectuals the left wing, but to demonstrate that the background of 'intellectuals' can lead to an advocacy of ideas which are of limited relevance to an essentially localised agitation and struggle, where achievable objectives, often in terms of municipal or electoral politics, are of more central importance.

This leads to a further important theme – the role of a local radical movement as a party of protest and as a party of government. Throughout most of the period examined in this study, progressive forces in Oxford were in opposition, both in the city council and in terms of the parliamentary representatives being Whig or Conservative, rather than radical or Labour. Progressive politics in Oxford have therefore mainly been the politics of protest. There have been exceptions. In the 1840s, the radicals in effect controlled the city council and returned sympathetic MPs. Since the Second World War, Labour has on a number of occasions been the largest party on the council and for most of the period since 1980 has held overall control; in 1964, a Labour MP was returned to parliament for Oxford City and Labour has held the Oxford East seat since 1983. The radical Liberal Frank Gray's short tenure of the parliamentary seat in the early 1920s can also be included in these exceptions. There is no record of disputes between the radical councillors and their electors in the 1840s but MPs such as Hughes and Charles Neate who moved away from radicalism were eventually rejected by their original supporters. Since 1945, there has been considerable conflict between the local party organisation and Labour representatives on the council and in parliament. As early as 1946, the Oxford Labour Party objected to their representatives on the council being associated with the governance of the city by taking on committee chairmanships. Evan Luard, Oxford's first Labour MP, was subject to criticism when the national government of which he was a member took decisions which were either unpopular or viewed as contrary to party policy. It should be pointed out that Evan Luard's politics were increasingly at odds with those of the local party, with which he finally broke by joining the new Social Democratic Party. The Labour Party nationally however continues to be divided between those who are prepared and often ambitious to take on the responsibilities of government, and those who prefer to maintain a critical position outside 'the system'. The dilemma in progressive politics between responsibility and protest is as critical at a local level as it is at the national level.

It is acknowledged that Oxford is a rather exceptional city and it should therefore not be argued that the themes drawn from Oxford's experience are necessarily relevant to other locations and other local labour movements. The purpose of this book was to seek to rediscover a heritage rather than to provide theoretical insights. One of the key themes of this study has been the exceptionalism of Oxford – a city with both an established, some would say world-class, university and an industrial base. It may be asked what the relevance of such a study is to contemporary politics, at a time when we are witnessing the revival of progressive forces within the British labour movement and the Labour Party specifically. As someone who is politically active as well as being a historian, I would argue that the main value of such a study is that, as political activists, we can draw inspiration from our predecessors and from their struggles and achievements. There is however one lesson which can be drawn from such a

historical study: that political interventions by middle-class socialists and intellectuals need to respect the interests of working people as a whole, or more specifically – the interests of the working class. Reform can be more effective than revolt. Governing can be more effective than opposition. Municipal and national politics are not just an extension of student politics or the internal politics of an academic institution, nor should politics be viewed as solely a means of personal career enhancement or ideological self-satisfaction. Politics can be enjoyable and even exciting but it is also a serious business.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 – The Impact of Franchise Reform on the Oxford Parliamentary Electorate

The table below compares the Oxford electorate at three parliamentary elections. For 1820, the figures given are for votes polled, while for 1837 and 1868, the number of those registered to vote is given. Since electoral turnout before 1832 was very high (probably about 90%) the figures are comparable. In the 1837, turnout was 91.7% while in 1868, turnout had fallen to 77.6%.

Before 1832, the franchise was restricted to freemen. Freedom of the city could be obtained by birth, apprenticeship or purchase as described in part 1, chapter 1. Under the 1832 Act, the franchise was extended to £10 householders, while in 1867, the franchise was extended to cover all male inhabitant occupiers, whether owner or tenant, who had paid rates and occupied the property for twelve months, and also to lodgers of twelve months residence if the lodging had an annual value of £10.

The table therefore shows the impact of the growth of the city combined with franchise reform on the size of the electorate. Unfortunately, the 1837 poll book does not list freemen by parishes, the parish figures being for £10 householders only. The 1868 poll book includes resident freemen in the parish figures. It will be noted that in 1837, the votes of freemen were balanced by those of £10 householders. After the 1867 Act, the freemen were only a small proportion of the Oxford electorate. By 1880, there were only 884 freemen in an electorate of 6,166. The table probably exaggerates the impact of the 1832 Act on the franchise, since the city grew considerably between 1820 and 1837. It is perhaps more useful to compare the figure of 2,312 voters in the 1832 election with the electorate of 1,779 freemen in the 1830 election - an increase of only 30%.

#### Oxford Electorate in 1820, 1837 and 1868

| Parish      | 1820 votes polled | 1837 electorate | 1868 electorate |
|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| All Saints  | 49                | 38              | 81              |
| Holywell    | 47                | 67              | 136             |
| St Aldates  | 111               | 73              | 264             |
| St Clements | 10                | 125             | 431             |
| St Ebbes    | 35                | 181             | 837             |
| St Giles    | 23                | 138             | 822             |
| St Johns    | 7                 | 11              | 19              |

| Parish               | 1820 votes<br>polled | 1837 electorate     | 1868 electorate                |
|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| St Martins           | 15                   | 25                  | 54                             |
| St Mary Magdalen     | 57                   | 132                 | 380                            |
| St Mary Virgin       | 6                    | 24                  | 57                             |
| St Michaels          | 38                   | 58                  | 134                            |
| St Peter in the Bast | 8                    | 57                  | 125                            |
| St Peter le Bailey   | 40                   | 62                  | 187                            |
| St Thomas            | 61                   | 106                 | 915                            |
| Cowley               |                      | 9                   | 297                            |
|                      | 507                  | 1087 + 1251 freemen |                                |
| Binsey               |                      |                     | 10                             |
| North Hinksey        |                      |                     | 46                             |
| South Hinksey        |                      |                     | 113                            |
| Headington           |                      |                     | 15                             |
| Iffley               |                      |                     | 2                              |
| Oxfordshire          | 62                   |                     | <b>included in 'elsewhere'</b> |
| Berkshire            | 31                   |                     | " "                            |
| London               | 115                  |                     | " "                            |
| Elsewhere            | 26                   |                     | 74                             |
| Total Electorate     | 741                  | 2,338               | 5,000                          |

## Appendix 2 – Analysis of Parliamentary Elections

### 1820 Election

### Analysis of poll book

Candidates: St John (Marlborough nominee); Lockhart (Tory), Wetherell (Tory).

Ratio: Votes for St John: Votes for Lockhart

|                      | St John    | Lockhart   | Wetherell  | Ratio      | Voters polled |
|----------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|---------------|
| All Saints           | 16         | 36         | 35         | 2.3        | 49            |
| Holywell             | 20         | 26         | 40         | 1.3        | 47            |
| St Aldates           | 60         | 55         | 89         | 0.9        | 111           |
| St Clement           | 3          | 7          | 10         | 2.3        | 10            |
| St Ebbe              | 35         | 29         | 54         | 0.8        | 62            |
| St Giles             | 23         | 40         | 45         | 1.7        | 58            |
| St John              | 7          | 3          | 6          | 0.4        | 8             |
| St Martin            | 15         | 28         | 29         | 1.9        | 38            |
| St Mary Magdalen     | 57         | 66         | 104        | 1.2        | 118           |
| St Mary Virgin       | 6          | 17         | 19         | 2.8        | 23            |
| St Michael           | 38         | 38         | 53         | 1.0        | 70            |
| St Peter in the East | 8          | 49         | 51         | 6.1        | 54            |
| St Peter le Bailey   | 40         | 38         | 59         | 0.9        | 71            |
| St Thomas            | 61         | 29         | 64         | 0.5        | 85            |
| <b>(subtotal)</b>    | <b>389</b> | <b>461</b> | <b>658</b> | <b>1.2</b> | <b>804</b>    |
| Oxfordshire          | 62         | 102        | 90         | 1.6        | 140           |
| Berkshire            | 31         | 49         | 38         | 1.6        | 66            |
| London               | 115        | 81         | 81         | 0.7        | 189           |
| Resident elsewhere   | 26         | 44         | 40         | 1.7        | 68            |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>623</b> | <b>737</b> | <b>907</b> | <b>1.2</b> | <b>1267</b>   |

Plumpers: St John 182; Lockhart 71; Wetherell 14. St John and Lockhart 107; St John and Wetherell 334; Lockhart and Wetherell 559.

The main theme of this election was the struggle to reject the Duke of Marlborough's nominee. This was successful and the Duke and his successors no longer put up candidates for the Oxford seat. Lockhart and Wetherell, especially the former, were regarded as representing the city's independence. The fact that St John was a Whig and that Lockhart and Wetherell were Tories was secondary. The Marlborough interest was strongest in St Ebbes and St Thomas, but with a restricted franchise, did not encompass the radicalism of these areas. The Independent Tories had their strength in North Oxford and the university area.

**1837 Election Analysis of poll book**

Candidates: Erle (Reformer) Hughes (whig), Maclean (Tory)%

|                                 | <i>Hughes</i> | <i>Maclean</i> | <i>Erle</i> | <i>Voters<br/>polled</i> | <i>Unpolled</i> | <i>Turnout</i> |
|---------------------------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <i>Freemen:</i>                 | 489           | 715            | 606         | 1166                     | 85              | 93%            |
| <i>Non-Freemen :</i>            |               |                |             |                          |                 |                |
| <i>All Saints</i>               | 16            | 21             | 18          | 34                       | 4               | 90%            |
| <i>St Aldates</i>               | 19            | 46             | 43          | 68                       | 5               | 93%            |
| <i>Cowley</i>                   | 5             | 3              | 5           | 9                        | 0               | 100%           |
| <i>St Clement</i>               | 37            | 62             | 85          | 118                      | 7               | 94%            |
| <i>St Ebbe</i>                  | 60            | 87             | 107         | 164                      | 17              | 91%            |
| <i>St Giles</i>                 | 58            | 88             | 67          | 127                      | 11              | 92%            |
| <i>Holywell</i>                 | 25            | 39             | 33          | 60                       | 7               | 90%            |
| <i>St John</i>                  | 5             | 8              | 3           | 9                        | 2               | 82%            |
| <i>St Martin</i>                | 8             | 12             | 14          | 23                       | 2               | 92%            |
| <i>St Mary<br/>Magdalen</i>     | 56            | 80             | 56          | 115                      | 17              | 87%            |
| <i>St Mary<br/>Virgin</i>       | 9             | 14             | 3           | 17                       | 7               | 71%            |
| <i>St Michael</i>               | 18            | 36             | 24          | 54                       | 4               | 93%            |
| <i>St Peter le<br/>Bailey</i>   | 24            | 35             | 39          | 60                       | 2               | 97%            |
| <i>St Peter in<br/>the East</i> | 27            | 38             | 17          | 46                       | 11              | 81%            |
| <i>St Thomas</i>                | 41            | 53             | 83          | 94                       | 12              | 89%            |
| <i>(subtotal)</i>               | 408           | 633            | 593         | 979                      | 108             | 90%            |
| <i>Total</i>                    | 897           | 1345           | 1199        | 2145                     | 193             | 96%            |

| <b>Plumpers<br/>for Erle.</b> | <b>as % of voters<br/>polled.</b> |     | <b>Ratio Erle:<br/>Maclean.</b> |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------|
| Freemen.                      | 288                               | 65% | 0.8:1                           |
| Non-Freemen:                  |                                   |     |                                 |
| All Saints                    | 10                                | 29% | 0.9:1                           |
| St Aldates                    | 20                                | 29% | 0.9:1                           |
| Cowley                        | 4                                 | 44% | 1.7:1                           |
| St Clement                    | 37                                | 31% | 1.4:1                           |
| St Ebbe                       | 47                                | 29% | 1.2:1                           |
| St Giles                      | 32                                | 25% | 0.8:1                           |
| Holywell                      | 15                                | 25% | 0.8:1                           |
| St John                       | 1                                 | 11% | 0.4:1                           |
| St Martin                     | 10                                | 43% | 1.2:1                           |
| St Mary Magdalen              | 24                                | 21% | 0.7:1                           |
| St Mary Virgin                | 3                                 | 18% | 0.2:1                           |
| St Michael                    | 15                                | 28% | 0.7:1                           |
| St Peter le Bailey            | 12                                | 20% | 1.1:1                           |
| St Peter in the East          | 8                                 | 17% | 0.5:1                           |
| St Thomas.                    | 45                                | 48% | 1.6:1                           |
| (subtotal)                    | 284                               | 29% | 0.9:1                           |
| Total                         | 572                               | 27% | 0.9:1                           |

With the rejection of the Marlborough interest and the franchise extension of 1832, the political divisions in the city had become clearer. St Thomas and St Ebbes had become radical strongholds. The turnout of both freemen and £10 householders across the city was very high by modern standards.

## 1868 Election

|                  | Harcourt plumpers | Cardwell plumpers | Deane plumpers | Cardwell/Harcourt | Cardwell/Deane | Harcourt/Deane | Ratio. Harcourt/<br>Cardwell + plumpers: Deane | % Turnout |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|--|-----------|
| All Saints       | 0                 | 3                 | 27             | 26                | 4              | 1              | 1.1:1  | 75%       |
| St Aldates       | 2                 | 0                 | 45             | 146               | 7              | 5              | 3.3:1  | 82%       |
| Binsey           | 0                 | 0                 | 5              | 4                 | 0              | 0              | 0.8:1  | 90%       |
| St Clement       | 5                 | 7                 | 57             | 280               | 1              | 2              | 5.1:1  | 82%       |
| Cowle            | 2                 | 6                 | 63             | 150               | 12             | 0              | 2.5:1  | 78%       |
| St Ebbes         | 15                | 15                | 94             | 485               | 16             | 8              | 5.5:1  | 75%       |
| St Giles         | 5                 | 15                | 198            | 379               | 42             | 8              | 2.0:1  | 79%       |
| Headington       | 0                 | 0                 | 10             | 3                 | 0              | 0              | 0.3:1  | 87%       |
| Hincksey (North) | 0                 | 0                 | 8              | 25                | 2              | 0              | 3.1:1  | 76%       |
| Hincksey (South) | 4                 | 0                 | 7              | 85                | 2              | 1              | 12.7:1   | 88%       |

|                      |    |    |      |      |     |    |       |     |
|----------------------|----|----|------|------|-----|----|-------|-----|
| Holywell             | 2  | 4  | 43   | 48   | 10  | 0  | 1.3:1 | 79% |
| Ifley                | 0  | 0  | 1    | 0    | 0   | 0  | 0.0:1 | 50% |
| St John              | 0  | 1  | 8    | 3    | 0   | 0  | 0.5:1 | 63% |
| St Martin            | 0  | 2  | 11   | 28   | 0   | 1  | 2.7:1 | 78% |
| St Mary Magdalen     | 2  | 12 | 86   | 178  | 11  | 3  | 2.2:1 | 77% |
| St Mary Virgin       | 0  | 4  | 20   | 16   | 3   | 0  | 1.0:1 | 75% |
| St Michael           | 0  | 1  | 38   | 56   | 4   | 0  | 1.5:1 | 74% |
| St Peter in the East | 3  | 6  | 25   | 51   | 8   | 2  | 2.4:1 | 76% |
| St Peter le Bailey   | 2  | 1  | 27   | 102  | 6   | 1  | 3.9:1 | 74% |
| St Thomas            | 6  | 4  | 219  | 436  | 23  | 25 | 2.0:1 | 78% |
| Out of Town freemen  | 1  | 0  | 21   | 29   | 2   | 2  | 1.4:1 | 74% |
| Total                | 49 | 81 | 1013 | 2530 | 153 | 59 | 2.6:1 | 78% |

The franchise extension of 1867 had led to a reduced turnout, but this still represents a high level of political participation. Liberalism in the city had been greatly strengthened with St Clements and St Ebbes being the Tories weakest areas. The Tories had a majority of voters only in the central university area.

### Appendix 3 – Analysis of 1837 Ballot Petition

The 648 names on the ballot petition were checked against the 1837 poll book. It was possible to identify which petitioners were entitled to vote, and for whom they voted. 197 were eligible to vote as freemen and 158 as £10 householders, the remaining 293 being unable to vote. Some 55% of petitioners were therefore registered voters. An additional 66 petitioners had been eligible to vote in 1835, but had since lost their vote. From the poll book, it was possible to identify the occupations of all 197 freemen electors, 106 of the £10 householders and the 66 who had voted in 1835.

The petitioners' occupations were as follows:

|                  |    |
|------------------|----|
| tailors          | 47 |
| victuallers      | 25 |
| shoemakers       | 24 |
| carpenters       | 18 |
| bakers           | 13 |
| butchers         | 10 |
| cabinet makers   | 10 |
| gentlemen        | 10 |
| printers         | 10 |
| grocers          | 8  |
| painters         | 8  |
| cooks            | 7  |
| coal merchants   | 6  |
| college servants | 6  |

|                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| plumbers              | 6   |
| coachmen              | 5   |
| confectioners         | 5   |
| hairdressers          | 5   |
| livery stable keepers | 5   |
| others                | 141 |

All three candidates in the 1837 election were opposed to the ballot, though Erle was regarded as a Reformer. 355 petitioners were qualified to vote. Their votes were distributed as follows:

|                              |     |     | All votes polled |     |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|------------------|-----|
| Plumpers for Erle (Reformer) | 172 | 49% | 572              | 27% |
| Plumpers for Hughes (whig)   | 12  | 3%  | 90               | 4%  |
| Plumpers for Maclean (Tory)  | 4   | 1%  | 184              | 9%  |
| Erle and Hughes              | 31  | 9%  | 135              | 6%  |
| Erle and Maclean             | 80  | 23% | 492              | 23% |
| Hughes and Maclean           | 55  | 15% | 672              | 31% |
| Did not vote                 | 1   |     |                  |     |
|                              | 355 |     | 2145             |     |

Nearly half the petitioners plumped for Erle - a much higher proportion than among all voters. However, a substantial proportion of the petitioners used both their votes. A higher proportion gave their second vote to the Tory, Maclean than to the Reformer turned Whig, Hughes Hughes.

## Appendix 4 – 1840 Election Leaflet

MUNICIPAL ELECTION. LEAFLET BY J. J. FAULKNER. SOUTH WARD ELECTION

ADDRESSED TO THE LIBERAL BURG-ASSES.

*Come all ye lib'ral burg-asses  
The Tories let us drub;  
And ye that long so for a meal,  
Shall plenty have of Grub!  
And I'll blow you out with Scotch oat meal  
Without the slightest stint,  
So mount your Sunday toggery  
And follow Captain Squint.*

*A Baker is a **weighty** man,  
And useful—there's the rub:  
So if you want a loaf of bread,  
You must look out for Grub!  
Oh, he is soft as the dough he works,  
And not as hard as flint;  
And the fittest man too for this Ward,  
Excepting—Captain Squint!*

*Then why should you be led for **Miles**,  
Or from the South Ward roam,  
When yon can get a **cake** close by,  
And lots of Grub at home!  
Stick to the bag of flour my boys,  
I merely give the hint:  
Eyes right my lads—I'd show ye how  
Were I not Captain Squint.*

*'Tis true we have got Mister Walsh,  
Who locates in the West;  
But, lacking of a better sort,  
We took of bad the best.  
And the West have pudding-head Chaundy got,  
From Central or from South;  
And the Binsey Squire that some have dar'd  
To call the 'Bull and Month.'*

*But that is no consarn to us,  
We wont be made a tool;  
It's odd if we ha'nt got a man,  
For us, to play the fool:  
So now I tell you all my lads,  
And the promise you may print,  
If no one else will mount the bells,  
You're sure of Captain Squint!*

Oh, seventeen ounces to the pound,  
 With me was all the go;  
 But long I've cut the sale of tea,  
 Which was a trade too **sloe**.  
 For Grafton new beat Grafton old,  
 By selling **better** tea,  
 And by that means the teapot lid  
 Was quickly shut on me!

And so i'll sarve that Peter out.  
 And if I can't him drub,  
 I'll smother him with bags of flour,  
 And surfeit him with Grubb!  
 I'll disarrange his curly hair,  
 Which him will much annoy;  
 And spoil his phiz that none shall know  
 The **man** from Miles' boy.

We'll have a Wardmote too my lads,  
 Old Larry in the Chair,  
 And he shall have his pipe and pot,  
 Provided he wont swear.  
 And Grubb shall make a **floury** speech,  
 Which you may read in print;  
 And then you'll say the South Ward Clowns  
 Are Grubb and his man Squint!

So for the Wardmote now prepare,  
 And get some decent clothes,  
 And shirts if you can borrow them,  
 And shoes to hide your toes.  
 A bit of soap wont hurt the face;  
 Your hands you clean must rub,  
 Or they'll say the show of **dirty paws**  
 As usual was for Grub!

This over, Larry with his stick  
 May hobble soon away  
 Down to the Wheatsheaf Old to smoke  
 His nightly yard of clay.  
 We'll hob and nob with him as pals,  
 And one another rub,  
 And damn all them that go for Miles,  
 When **here** they ran have Grubb!

I remain, and don't mind print,  
 Yours, chief of humbugs,

**CAPTAIN SQUINT**

Old Crafty House,  
 South Ward.

## Appendix 5 – Foundation Document of the Oxford Socialist League

Oxford March 9th 1885

*To the Executive Committee of the 'Socialist League'*

27 Farringdon St London EC

*We whose names are hereunder written, all being Members of the body known as the 'Oxford Socialist League', do fully accept the principles of 'The Socialist League' as stated in its Manifesto; and will do our best to uphold its principles, and will adhere to its rules.*

*We desire to become a working Branch of the 'Socialist League' whose Offices are at 27 Farringdon Street London E.C.*

*C. Bennett, 61 St Mary's Row, Cowley Rd*

*G. G. Brown, 15 Museum Terrace*

*F. T. Brown, 36 Gt Clarendon St*

*W. Burr, 11 St Mary's Rd*

*W.W. Burr, " "*

*A. Dyer, 28 Henley St*

*C.J. Faulkner, Univ Coll*

*F.W. Guggenheim, 8 Crown St*

*T. Hutchins, 37½ St Ebbe's St*

*M.P. Harse, St Mary's Rd*

*G. Harse, "*

*W. Harse, "*

*A.C. Harse, 2 Hurst St*

*W. Kees, Cowley Rd*

*James Knight, Grandpont*

*F. Martin, 25 Cross St*

*A. Needle, 27 Princes St*

*W. Tollett, 94 Holywell St*

*W. Ogden, Worcester St*

*W. Parker, 39 Pembroke St*

*A. Guelch, 129 Cowley Rd*

*A.S. Robinson, 29 Gloucester Green*

*A.E. Tymms, 2 Pensons Gardens, SC*

*E.J. Tymms, " "*

*H. White, 14 Henley St*

*H. Wright, 28 Henley St*

*Please forward Subscription Cards for the abovenamed members. Other names will be forwarded in due course, the above are the names of those present at the Meeting of March 9th, when this step was finally decided on.*

*This paper was drawn up at the desire of the abovenamed persons at a Meeting of the 'Oxford Socialist League' held at the 'Elm Tree Tavern', Cowley Road Oxford March 9th 1885. C. Bennett in the Chair. And it was further resolved 'that the Secretary be desired to forward this paper to the Executive Committee of the Socialist League', 27 Farringdon St London E.C. as soon as possible'.*

*By Order A.S. Robinson, Hon. Sec., 29 Gloucester Green Oxford*

*Source: Socialist League archives. MS 617. (International Institute of Social History Amsterdam*



## Appendix 7 – Labour versus the Caucus: The 1936 Local Election Manifesto

(written by Richard Crossman)

### LABOUR versus THE CAUCUS The Real Struggle in the Oxford City Council

NOTE: This pamphlet has been written by a member of the Labour Party on Oxford City Council. Leading members of the Oxford City Labour Party concur with the author's opinions, which are, in general, the expression of the Labour Party in municipal affairs.

### LABOUR versus THE CAUCUS I. INTRODUCTION

The Oxford City Council is at present dominated by a solid phalanx of Conservatives and Liberals who assert that they will allow no politics on the Council. What they mean by this is made clear when it comes to voting. *The Conservatives and Liberals will allow no politics except their own.* They are 'non-political' only if you assume that Conservatism is non-political and should never be criticized. In fact, they are nothing else than a political caucus.

This Caucus of 'Liberals' and Conservatives contains 42 of the 68 members of the Council. One would imagine that they need not be anxious, but not in a flurry they have formed a united front with the delightfully simple programme of *Keeping Labour out.* This is the sole plank in their platform.

In this pamphlet we shall try to show what the Caucus has done and is doing for Oxford, and what Labour's criticism of the Caucus is. The electorate must judge for itself which it prefers.

### II. THE 'LIBERAL-CONSERVATIVE' CAUCUS

If our University is the home of lost causes, our City Council is the den of lost chances. To look back at the history of Oxford since 1910 is to observe a dismal array of 'might-have-beens.' We might have our municipal Bus Service, if the Conservative-Liberal Council had not lost its opportunity and handed over our buses to a private concern. We might have preserved the amenities of our City from the ravages of jerry building and ill-planned housing schemes if we had started in earnest on Town Planning fifteen years ago. We might have preserved a 'Green Belt' and really adequate open spaces, if the need for them had been early recognised. We might have eased the housing shortage and reduced the scale of rents in Oxford, had the Conservative-Liberal Council, instead of selling part of Cutteslowe and Quarry Fields, bought land courageously at the proper time and undertaken an extensive housing scheme. We might have had model housing estates, each planned with its own open spaces, school and community centre,

had we co-ordinated the work of the various committees and planned the development of the City. All these things might have been done at reasonable cost if the Council had contained men of vision who could rely on obtaining a majority of votes for their plans.

Men of vision there were, but their warnings passed unheeded. False economy, a short-sighted regard for private interests, and a neglect of the outlying areas all contributed to the refusal of our Council to take the changing conditions of Oxford life seriously and to face the fact that statesmanship was needed to steer us safely through Oxford's Industrial Revolution. The Council, under the control of the Conservative-Liberals, paid no heed to the bitter experience of the industrial north. They allowed much the same things to happen here as happened there 100 years ago. Oxford has drifted into semi-industrialism, and the policy of drift continues to-day.

Two exceptions stand out in bright contrast to this gloomy picture—the municipalization of electricity within the old city and the pensions scheme carried through this year for a large majority of municipal employees. But it is noteworthy that the former was only passed in the teeth of Conservative opposition. Had it not been for the work of the Gilletts, Mr. Gill, and a few others, the Caucus would have crushed even this, as they will now try to delay its extension to the new Wards. The pensions scheme, to the working out of which Labour largely contributed, was less actively resisted, but it is noteworthy that under half the Councillors and Aldermen troubled to attend the meeting at which it was passed, and that the Chairman (Alderman Perkins) and Vice-Chairmen of the Committee by whom it was proposed did not honour the proceedings with their presence. The most important reform of the year was either misunderstood or not appreciated by the Conservative-Liberal majority.

It is no exaggeration to say that almost every measure of enlightened reform has been opposed or neglected by that august body. Dr. Gillett has experienced the gratitude which it feels towards him for his self-sacrifice and devotion to the cause of electricity. Reform is dubbed Socialist and condemned. Town Planning is suspect as a crank University notion. Land acquisition on a large scale is assailed as 'raising the rates,' Wide vision is derided as 'idealism,' and a demand for up-to-date and business-like administration is attacked as a high-handed assault on good old Oxford traditions.

Our case against the Caucus is indeed simple: the Caucus has never had a policy and is resolved that Oxford never shall have a policy. Foresight and planning in all departments of Council business are taboo. The Caucus wants Oxford to drift along in the good old way from confusion to confusion, out of one missed chance into the next.

What, the good old Oxford tradition means can be illustrated by three incidents, all of which occurred in the last six months.

(1) It became necessary this year to consider the selection of a new City Engineer, and a committee was set up to interview candidates. As no member of that committee could claim to be an expert in the duties of a City Engineer, a Labour Member dared to suggest that an assessor of national repute be appointed to give expert advice to the committee in interrogating the candidates. This suggestion was hailed as an insult to the Council and the reminder that it had been previously adopted with excellent results by the electricity committee settled the matter. The Caucus voted solidly against the motion. On the other side were ranged the Labour and the University Members. One of the applicants rejected by the Council was accepted by a great northern borough.

(2) A new scale of Officials' Salaries was put before the Council. In a preamble to it the excellent work of certain officials was given as a reason for raising the scale in their

cases. Labour pointed out that a scale should be fixed for the job not for the man, and that jockeying with the scales was bound to lead to jobbery. This was greeted with the usual abuse, and Oxford still refuses to lay down a well-defined scale of salaries for its Municipal Officials.

(3) When it gained a foothold on the Public Assistance Committee, Labour discovered that no scale of relief of any sort was used. The conditions of each case were set out by the relieving officer, and then any member of the committee proposed a sum which seemed to him or her suitable. In assessing this sum statutory regulations were often disregarded, and the amount given in one case would frequently stand in flagrant disproportion to that given in the next. Presumably this system has been traditional for decades. Within a few months of last November, Labour had proposed that a proper scale should be instituted and this is now actually on trial.

These three chance instances could be multiplied indefinitely. The regime of the Caucus is complacent and self-satisfied. Labour suggestions such as those mentioned are described as 'political' and generally voted down. To prevent their being made in the future the Liberal-Conservative alliance has come into being. It is for the citizens of Oxford to decide if they are as satisfied as the Caucus with the history of Oxford development in the last 25 years, and if it is not just possible that Labour's criticisms have a firm foundation in unpalatable facts. The Cutteslowe wall still stands a solid example of the results of slipshod Caucus administration. If the voice of the Caucus's critics had been listened to in time, the mess would never have occurred. Now we are all forced to pay for the follies of a clique which asserts that critics of its methods are party politicians who should have no place on the City Council.

### III. THE METHOD OF STIFLING CRITICISM ON OUR COUNCIL

Enough has been said to indicate the main lines of Labour criticism of the old regime. But before we turn to our positive proposals for reform, we must notice one or two facts about the Council itself which obstruct the work of Labour and Independent alike. Although there are 68 voting members of our City Council, only 42 of these are Councillors over whom the electorate has direct control. Twenty-six votes can be cast in open opposition to the wishes of the electorate by the 14 *Aldermen* and the 12 *University Members*. Even if Labour with 25 seats had a clear majority in the City, it could still be voted down by 17 anti-labour Councillors and the 14 Aldermen—not to mention the University Members.

This extraordinary position has arisen partly because we are a University town. In passing it may be said that so long as the old gang control Oxford City, the University members are well worth their place. Though they are sometimes ignorant of local conditions and out of touch with public opinion, they are generally honest, hard-working and conscientious. Were it not for the work of some of the University members on committee it is difficult to see how, with its present membership, the Council could carry on at all. Labour willingly recognizes the excellence of their work.

Far different is the case of the Aldermen. They are elected by the Councillors for a period of six years, and remain Aldermen by a continuous process of re-election. Thus the Aldermen are a sort of *House of Lords*, and in Oxford they seem to have modelled themselves after that august body. Chosen roughly by seniority out of the ranks of the 'Conservative-Liberals', they represent (with a few eminent exceptions) the most timid

and narrow minded elements in the Council. An alderman should be selected for his special eminence and capabilities: he (or she) should be a person of such undoubted quality that re election would be a useless formality. Instead, under the present system he is the oldest councillor who has ‘voted right:’ and given no trouble.

A few weeks ago this scandal was exposed in all its tawdry pettiness. A new alderman was needed. No sane man could doubt that Dr. H. T. Gillett—who was among those chiefly responsible for our municipal electricity—was the right man for the honour. But his activity in procuring this service for the citizens of Oxford had made him unpopular in Conservative circles. The senior Conservative councillor was put up—and Dr. Gillett was defeated!

The Labour Party stands for the end of this ‘spoils system.’ It demands that Aldermen should be chosen not merely for their narrow party loyalty, but for their services to Oxford. It *pledges* itself to look beyond narrow party rivalries in the election of Aldermen and to vote for the *best men* even if they are not always to be found in its own ranks. But the Aldermen are not the only flaw in a perfect Council. We have only to look for a moment at the occupations and professions of the 34 non-labour Councillors to observe one or two remarkable facts.

(1) Outside the Labour Party there is only one working-class member of the Council. At present there is not a single member of the Housing Committee who has lived in working class conditions, and therefore knows by personal experience what houses are needed in Oxford. On the Public Assistance Committee there is, apart from Labour, no representative who knows personally what poverty and unemployment mean. *But the Caucus wants to turn Labour off the Council.*

Whatever our political allegiance this state of affairs must shock us. If we are democrats we surely believe that all sections of the community should be represented in Municipal politics. Labour does not demand the exclusive representation of any class. *It does demand a voice for all.*

(2) But if we examine the 34 non-labour councillors a little further, we shall find that one section of the community is overwhelmingly represented—the shopkeeper and the small business man. Trade is an important element in our city life, and Labour naturally admits that its voice should be heard in the discussion of policy, but *not* that it should dominate and tyrannize our Council. We welcome representatives of all interests, we are by no means opposed to the continuance of genuine independents—of whom there are precisely six in the whole Council. But we condemn a situation in which too often the interests of the shopkeeper and the builder are assumed to be the interests of the whole city, Labour is resolved to restore the proper equilibrium. The Oxford City Labour Party is not concerned exclusively with the interests of any single class, not even the industrial workers. It is not composed of members of any single class, and it is proud that it includes within its ranks people in all walks of life who wish to clean up the politics of our city, to break the tyranny of the old gang, with their narrow blinkered outlook their petty jealousies and muddled hand to mouth methods. There is a growing feeling in Oxford that a City Council must be composed of vigorous, clear-sighted men and women who will *plan* ahead, who have courage and vision, and are prepared to reconstruct the outworn machinery of a little university town to suit the needs of a new and greater Oxford. To this feeling the Labour Party seeks to give concrete expression.

We stand, then, first and foremost, for a new and better *personnel* of our Council. If fear of Labour’s progress forces the Conservatives and Liberals into an open alliance, it only proves that they are all much of a muchness terrified of a new and healthy criticism which

makes their slipshod methods impossible and can only be answered by an intellectual activity to which they are not accustomed. The division on the Council is now at last clear.

| <i>Conservative Liberals</i> | <i>Opposition Genuine Independents.</i> | <i>Labour</i> |
|------------------------------|---|---------------|
| 30 Councillors               | 4 Independents                          | 8             |
| 12 Aldermen                  | 2 Real Liberals                         | —             |
| 42                           | 6                                       | 8             |

The Caucus certainly has a majority! But Labour has worse difficulties than mere numbers. In the first place the system by which the membership of the various committees is decided is such that: Labour is excluded from many key committees. *No Labour member sits on the Finance, Estates or Watch Committees*, and it was only a few months ago that a Labour member at last succeeded in gaining admission to the Highways. By maintaining that 'seniority' is the test of suitability for the vital committees, the Caucus deliberately prevents its critics from looking behind the scenes or seeing what is really going on. They prevent us from criticizing them in private session, and then complain that Labour is responsible for the length of the Council meetings at which the decisions of those committees is discussed!

This situation cannot be allowed to continue. The Finance and Estates Committees in particular, control and mould the policy of our City. By excluding all criticism from them the Caucus has turned itself into a petty tyranny which flouts every principle of democracy and fair play.

But Labour is still more desperately hampered in its task. It wishes to put up as candidates men and women in active life; but the very best candidates are excluded by the fact that Council meetings are at times when only retired people, tradesmen or business men with assistants enough on their staff, or university lecturers can attend. Morning meetings rob the Council of some of the ablest men and women in Oxford; and yet when Labour proposes any change, it is voted down by every Conservative. Why? Because the old gang desires not to see Oxford governed well—but to retain power.

Evening meetings of the Council would not only benefit Labour: it would improve the Conservative personnel; and Labour would welcome this. For there is nothing more depressing than to be faced by the subservient ranks of organised obstructionism. Let us be perfectly clear on this point, Labour, the few genuine independents and a majority of the University members are agreed that evening meetings should at least be given a trial. In the interests of every party it must be done. But it will never be done so long as the Caucus can keep its majority. *Every vote cast for a Conservative-Liberal candidate is cast for the exclusion of ability and vigour from the Council.*

#### IV. THE LONG-TERM POLICY OF LABOUR

The first constructive demand of Labour is that the Council should set its own house in order, reorganize its committees, restore the honour of the Aldermanic Gown, and at least try for six months the experiment of evening meetings of the Council and of the Council in Committee (General Purposes, Property Management, and Public Health).

This demand is made not only in the interests of Labour, but of all parties, and of the Independents too. Labour does not claim to be the sole upholder of fair play or of the spirit of freedom and it appeals to all who believe in these principles to support its attack upon the petty autocracy of the old regime.

But granted that we achieve these reforms, granted that Oxford refuses to obey the Conservative-Liberal coalition, and rallies to the cause of freedom, what policy would Labour propose for Oxford? How would it improve on the handiwork of the Caucus?

The Labour Party is a Socialist Party: but we realize that Socialism is something which must be put through not in the Oxford City Council Chamber, but in Westminster. We have no illusions about that, nor do we believe that the municipalization of transport, electricity, gas, etc., is the introduction of Socialism. We recognize that the job of the Labour Party in Local Government differs from its job in Parliament, and that many who are with us in our municipal policy may part company with us on national affairs,

But though it cannot introduce Socialism in Oxford the Labour Party can and does stand for the socialist spirit of fair play for all, and the removal of gross inequalities and injustices. There is a vast measure of social reform which our City Council could do if it *were willing to use its powers*. It could remedy existing abuses and improve the living conditions of the poorer classes: it could preserve the beauties of Oxford from the vandalism of the jerry-builder: and it could ensure that the coming generation shall be healthy in body and mind. But the 'Liberal-Conservatives' refuse to face these great responsibilities, because good government would make them unpopular with certain private interests. They deliberately prevent sound and business-like administration because they are afraid of their little clique of supporters.

The Labour Party is resolved to make the City Council the active centre of enlightened reform, and to use its powers to the full for the good of Oxford. Its long-term policy can be grouped under four heads.

(1) Labour demands the reorganization of the administration of the City, so that it can cope with the mass of problems presented to it. A semi-industrial city with close on 90,000 inhabitants cannot be run like a small university town. We must have highly skilled and talented officials with sufficient staff, and we must realize that the only true economy is to offer an adequate scale of salaries.

Our municipal civil service must be properly trained, and Labour would welcome examinations in the higher branches. Our housing department must be an independent office and look forward in the near future to the use of direct labour. Our municipal employees must be carefully protected from the economy which thinks nothing of a £150 bonus to an official, but boggles at 1/- a week rise for the man on the roads.

But officials and employees alike cannot give of their best unless the Councillors who give them orders know their job, and are clear in the policy they pursue. In any efficient Council there must be a *Cabinet* consisting of the chairmen of important committees who consult each other constantly and so co-ordinate their various plans. At present each committee works on its own. The Highways tears up the roads one day, the Waterworks the next. The Open Spaces have one scheme the Education another the Housing a third—and so on. There is no collective responsibility for the failings of individual chairmen and inefficiency *universally recognized* is allowed to continue year by year. The Labour Party looks forward to a time when collective responsibility of chairmen of committees is proved by weekly meetings, and when the Council votes an *annual budget* in which its policy for the year is clearly displayed.

(2) *The exposure of vested interests which put private before public utility.* The Labour Party regards it as its special task to prevent not only corruption, but 'honest graft,' to expose sell interest when it blocks reform and to see to it that no single section of the community tyrannizes over another. The laws of libel prevent further elaboration under this head.

(3) *The protection of Oxford from uncontrolled development.* Oxford is still a beautiful city: but now it must be prepared either to plan itself or to become yet another ugly industrial town. The City Council must either become the largest owner of property or watch others defile and desecrate our city. Open spaces and sites for housing estates do not fall out of heaven! They cost money, and we must face the fact and realize that the more niggardly we are in the short run the more we must pay in the end. This is true of Housing, Education, and Open Spaces alike. To nibble is to invite profiteering by landlords who become accustomed to the ways of a short-sighted council, and extort gigantic prices from its timid negotiators.

One instance will suffice to illustrate the results of false economy. The new Council estate at Marston was bought *piece by piece*. Timidity increased its price, and now that it is near completion there is no site for a community centre. As a result, a site has to be found on the ground which had been reserved for an open space! There in a nutshell you have an example of timid and muddled administration, to repair whose mistakes costs far more than to plan boldly and well. New Marston is typical of present Council methods.

(4) The provision of public amenities which private enterprise cannot provide.

(a) In the immediate future we should demand a building worthy of our excellent Public Lending Library. The present gloomy building might be useful to the police. Oxford should have a Library worthy of it, with reading rooms, lecture rooms and so on. There are two sites at least available, and the chance should not be missed.

(b) The present half-hearted decision to build two baths—at Hinksey and Cowley—is a miserable compromise. Swimming baths need not be luxurious or expensive. Labour would plan to build the other three which have been promised—at Wolvercote, Cutteslowe and Headington—within the next two years.

(c) Not immediately attainable, but constantly to be borne in mind is the need to take over the supply of Electricity to the outlying wards (Wolvercote, Cutteslowe, Headington, Cowley). The larger the area, the cheaper is the supply, and the demand for the unification of electrical supply in all Oxford must never be relaxed.

(d) Undeniably there are difficulties in the way of *municipalizing the Bus Service*. But the opinion of one legal expert on this matter will not be the last word. Labour is resolved that in the end the difficulties must be overcome and would welcome a special committee of the Council to consider the whole problem and to report both upon it and on the possibility of some form of disciplinary joint control by the Council and the Bus Company in the period before municipalization is finally achieved.

(e) *Housing.* It is the duty of the Council to ensure the provision of houses at rents which all sections of the community can afford. The well-to-do are already catered for by private enterprise, but decent houses at reasonable rents must be built for the working classes as well. The Council has refused to grapple with this task on the ground that private enterprise can and should do it: instead, it has mainly confined itself to slum-clearance schemes. It has built well, but it has not built enough. As a result, we are faced with a housing shortage and exorbitant rents.

To leave the construction of working class houses to private enterprise can only produce three results: either good houses at rents too high for the worker, or shoddy houses at working class rents, or, as in Florence Park, shoddy houses at high rents. Labour's policy is to use all the powers available under the various housing Acts, which have never been put into full operation in Oxford. Only by large-scale municipal building can the supply of good houses at working-class rents be ensured.

## V. LABOUR'S POLICY OF IMMEDIATE ACTION.

In the last section we outlined the general policy which Labour would adopt on our Council. But whatever our successes in November, we must remain a minority outvoted on most issues by the Caucus. This will not be so forever, but for the next two years at least we must content ourselves with a more limited programme which we can hope to push through the existing Council. The following six points, therefore, are the programme on which Labour is now fighting. *It does not include much that we want. But all that it does include could be done or at least commenced in the coming year.*

1. *Housing.* (1) Labour is not content with schemes for relieving slum-clearance and 'overcrowding' as defined by the Government. It demands that the Council shall, in addition to carrying out such schemes, build at least 500 houses at tents from 9/- to 12/- a week in the next two years to cope with the housing shortage and high rents now ruling in our City. This can be done, but it will not be done unless unremitting pressure is applied. (2) The byelaws which permitted Florence Park to be built were to be revised eighteen months ago! They are still the byelaws of our City. Labour demands their immediate revision.
2. *Baths.* We have already outlined our policy on this point. Within the next two years all five must be built. They need not be luxurious or extravagant. Oxford needs *baths*, and the trimmings can well be omitted.
3. *Education.* Labour demands that the Education Committee should (1) resolve to grapple with the chaos in the old city and work out a 3-year plan for reorganizing the existing schools. (2) Study the expansion of the City and plan new schools and housing estates together. The present hand-to-mouth policy is not good enough, as the plight of Cutteslowe and the Great Headley Estate, among others, proves. (3) Press on with the provision of Nursery Schools in all parts of the City.
4. *Health.* The existing maternity and child welfare centres are often inadequately housed and badly equipped. This is false economy. Splendid work is being done, but it is hampered by such deficiencies. Here again Labour demands that the Council look well ahead and plan to bring our clinics up to date in a set period of time.
5. *Evening Meetings of the Council* (see page 10).
6. The 'spoils system' of selecting aldermen must be ended and the good name of the City Council must be restored (see page 7).

These six points do not constitute our whole policy—but they summarize the positions on which the Labour attack will be concentrated in the next year. They are immediate objectives, but beyond them and inspiring them is our conviction that Oxford cannot

afford to rest content with the regime of a clique whose only positive policy is to keep Labour off the Council! Before it is too late, we must see to it that business ability and open-mindedness take the place of blinkered timidity, and that all interests and all sections of the community are fairly represented.

In this spirit Labour welcomes the declaration of war by the *Conservative-Liberal Caucus*. It is for the electorate to decide whether the Caucus shall silence its critics or no.

# References and Notes

## PART 1

### 1. Oxford in the Early 19th Century

<sup>1</sup> Fasnacht. R (1954). *History of the City of Oxford*

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Commissioners on Election Boundaries*, 1831.

<sup>3</sup> Fasnacht

<sup>4</sup> *Report on the Corporation of Oxford*, 29 October 1833, appended to the *Report of the Commissioners into Municipal Corporations*, 1835. See also brief summary of governance arrangements before and after 1835 on City of Oxford history website: <http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/government/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> *Report on the Corporation of Oxford*, 29 October 1833, appended to the *Report of the Commissioners into Municipal Corporations*, 1835.

<sup>6</sup> *Parliamentary History of the County of Oxford*; Fasnacht.

<sup>7</sup> *1818 Pollbook*, Introduction by Joseph Munday. For St John, see: 'History of Parliament biography': [www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/st-john-hon-frederick-1765-1844](http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/st-john-hon-frederick-1765-1844);

for Wetherell: <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/wetherell-charles-1770-1846>;

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for Francis Burton: <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/burton-francis-1744-1832>;

for John Atkyns-Wright: <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/atkyns-wright-john-1760-1822>

<sup>8</sup> *Jacksons Oxford Journal* (JOJ) 21.4.1826, 10.6.1826, 17.6.1826, 1. 7.1826.

<sup>9</sup> JOJ. 10.7.1830, 31.7.1830, 7.8.1830.

<sup>10</sup> JOJ. 29.1.1831.

### 2. Reform Agitation, 1830–1832

<sup>1</sup> JOJ. 22.1.1831.

<sup>2</sup> JOJ. 29.1.1831.

<sup>3</sup> JOJ. 19.3.1831.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> JOJ. 16.4.1831.

<sup>8</sup> JOJ. 7.5.1831.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> JOJ. 27.5.1831.

<sup>11</sup> JOJ. 27.8.1831.

<sup>12</sup> JOJ. 7.10.1831.

<sup>13</sup> JOJ. 8.12.1832.

<sup>14</sup> JOJ. 7.7.1832.

<sup>15</sup> JOJ. 20.10.1832.

<sup>16</sup> JOJ. 20.10.1832, 3.11.1832.

<sup>17</sup> JOJ. 3.11.1832.

<sup>18</sup> JOJ. 24.11.1832.

<sup>19</sup> JOJ. 1.12.1832.

<sup>20</sup> JOJ. 15.12.1832.

### 3. The Development of Reform Politics and the Reformed Corporation, 1833–1836

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Herald* (OH) 16.3.1833, 22.3.1833. For Hughes Hughes, who does not appear to have been very popular in parliament, see *The Victorian Commons: MP of the month for January 2013*: <https://victoriancommons.wordpress.com/2013/01/20/mp-of-the-month-william-hughes-hughes/>

Full biography: <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/hughes-hughes-william-1792-1874>

For Lockhart, see: <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/lockhart-john-1765-1835>

For Langston, see: <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/langston-james-1797-1863>

<sup>2</sup> OH. 29.11.1834.

<sup>3</sup> *A narrative containing notes of Facts, Opinions, Principles and Persons as exhibited and developed during the late election for the City of Oxford*. Printed by T Bartlett, 1835.

<sup>4</sup> OH. 29.11.1834.

<sup>5</sup> Bartlett narrative.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> OH. 29.11.1834.

<sup>9</sup> Bartlett narrative.

<sup>10</sup> OH. 10.1.1835, 31.1.1835.

<sup>11</sup> Bartlett narrative.

<sup>12</sup> OH. 10.1.1835.

<sup>13</sup> OH. 7.11.1835.

<sup>14</sup> OH. 12.12.1835.

<sup>15</sup> OH. 2.1.1836.

<sup>16</sup> OH. 16.1.1836.

<sup>17</sup> OH. 30.1.1836.

<sup>18</sup> OH. 16.1.1836.

<sup>19</sup> Election leaflet dated 17.12.1835.

## 4. Suffrage and Anti-Corn Law Agitation, 1837–1846

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Chronicle*. (OC) 4.2.1837.

<sup>2</sup> OC. 4.3.1837, 11.3.1837.

<sup>3</sup> OH. 25.3.1837.

<sup>4</sup> OC. 1.4.1837.

<sup>5</sup> OC. 4.3.1837.

<sup>6</sup> OC. 25.3.1837.

<sup>7</sup> OC. 22.4.1837.

<sup>8</sup> OC. 10.6.1837.

<sup>9</sup> OC. 1.7.1837.

<sup>10</sup> OC. 8.7.1837.

<sup>11</sup> OC. 15.7.1837.

<sup>12</sup> OC. 22.5.1837.

<sup>13</sup> OC. 22.12.1837, 29.7.1837.

<sup>14</sup> OC. 29.7.1837, 12.8.1837.

<sup>15</sup> OC. 19.8.1837.

<sup>16</sup> OC. 18.11.1837.

<sup>17</sup> OC. 17.2.1838.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> OC. 17.2.1838, 24.2.1838.

<sup>20</sup> OC. 11.8.1838.

<sup>21</sup> OC. 9.2.1839.

<sup>22</sup> OC. 20.10.1838.

<sup>23</sup> OC. 27.5.1839.

<sup>24</sup> OC. 14.9.1839.

<sup>25</sup> OC. 1.2.1840, 29.2.1840. Richard Chaundy was a tobacconist with a shop at 10 Cornmarket. J. J. Faulkner was an executor of his will when he died in 1856.

<sup>26</sup> OC. 1.12.1838, 3.7.1841.

<sup>27</sup> OC. 9.2.1839.

<sup>28</sup> OC. 16.2.1839.

<sup>29</sup> OC. 3.11.1838. For Towle, see Sephton, R. 'John Towle. Maverick Mayor of Oxford' *Oxfordshire Local History* Vol. 5 No. 2 pp.18–28 (1997/8). Towle first worked as a college servant before becoming a tailor and subsequently ran a papermaking business at Hinksey Mill. He was first elected to the city council in 1836 for South ward as an Independent radical, though deprived of the seat when the mayor and town clerk noticed that he was not on the list of burgesses. He nevertheless insisted on attending meetings to claim his seat. He regained his seat in 1839 having stood as an official Liberal candidate. He advocated repeal of the Corn Laws and supported the Chartists, disputing with Charles Neate who argued that the government should suppress them. Towle believed that the 'day would come when the working people of the country would have the same right to political privileges as other groups such as lawyers' – the academic Neate was a lawyer. 'The working classes were the source of the wealth of the nation and yet they were to be told that it was dangerous for them to meet together.' He argued that the 1867 Reform Bill did not extend the suffrage sufficiently. In 1868, he published a pamphlet arguing for a new sewage system, pointing out that sewage was flowing in to his mill. As mayor in 1857, he abandoned the customary ceremony at which the mayor took an oath to observe the rights of the University. This was legally

challenged by the University when Isaac Grubb also refused to take the oath the following year. Towle finally lost his aldermanic seat in 1875 when he was no longer supported by the Liberal establishment. He died in 1885. see [http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/1836\\_1962/towle\\_john\\_1856.html](http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/1836_1962/towle_john_1856.html)

Isaac Grubb was a baker with a shop at 16 St Clements. He was a Baptist. See: [http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/1836\\_1962/grubb\\_isaac\\_1857.html](http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/1836_1962/grubb_isaac_1857.html)

<sup>30</sup> OC. 23.2.1839.

<sup>31</sup> OH. 27.4.1839.

<sup>32</sup> OC. 2.11.1839.

<sup>33</sup> OC. 9.11.1839.

<sup>34</sup> OC. 2.11.1839.

<sup>35</sup> OC. 7.11.1840.

<sup>36</sup> OC. 29.5.1841, 5.6.1841.

<sup>37</sup> OC. 12.6.1841, 19.6.1841.

<sup>38</sup> OC. 3.7.1841.

<sup>39</sup> OC. *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> OH. 16.10.1841.

<sup>41</sup> OC. 13.11.1841.

<sup>42</sup> OC. 6.5.1843.

<sup>43</sup> OC. 20.8.1843.

<sup>44</sup> OC. 16.9.1843.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> OC. 3.2.1844.

<sup>48</sup> OC. 30.3.1844.

<sup>49</sup> OC. 12.1.1846.

## 5. Radicalism, Religion and the Poor Laws, 1843–1845

<sup>1</sup> OC. 15.4.1843.

<sup>2</sup> OC. 12.4.1845.

<sup>3</sup> OC. 30.9.1843.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> OC. 2.3.1844.

## 6. Local Politics, Chartism and the ‘Little Charter’ Movement, 1846–1853

<sup>1</sup> OC. 15.8.1846.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> OC. 31.7.1847.

<sup>4</sup> OC. 11.9.1847.

<sup>5</sup> OC. 7.8.1847.

<sup>6</sup> OC. 21.8.1847. An earlier intervention by Faulkner in Oxfordshire politics – at the unveiling of a monument to the 17th-century parliamentarian John Hampden in Chalgrove by the MP for Aylesbury Lord Nugent in June 1843, is the subject of an article by Robert Sephton in *Oxfordshire Local History* Vol. 5 No. 5 (1998–9)

pp.26–44. ‘The Grocer and the Baron: The Second Battle of Chalgrove.’ This article includes useful background material on Faulkner and an extract from a eulogy to him by the temperance advocate Joseph Taylor, published in the ‘Temperance Star’ in August 1870, several years after Faulkner’s death.

<sup>7</sup> OC. 4.9.1847.

<sup>8</sup> OC. 1.4.1848.

<sup>9</sup> OC. 29.4.1848.

<sup>10</sup> OC. 6.5.1848.

<sup>11</sup> OC. 20.5.1848.

<sup>12</sup> OC. 6.5.1848.

<sup>13</sup> OC. 10.6.1848.

<sup>14</sup> OC. 15.7.1848.

<sup>15</sup> OC. 29.7.1848.

<sup>16</sup> OC. 17.3.1849.

<sup>17</sup> OC. 5.5.1849.

<sup>18</sup> OC. 3.4.1851.

<sup>19</sup> OC. 27.12.1851.

<sup>20</sup> OC. 10.1.1852.

<sup>21</sup> OC. 10.10.1847.

<sup>22</sup> OC. 27.1.1849.

<sup>23</sup> OC. 4.1.1841.

<sup>24</sup> OC. 3.5.1841, 23.8.1851.

<sup>25</sup> OC. 23.10.1847, 6.11.1847.

<sup>26</sup> OC. 12.2.1848.

<sup>27</sup> OC. 19.10.1850.

<sup>28</sup> OC. 3.11.1849.

<sup>29</sup> OC. 20.10.1850.

<sup>30</sup> OC. 8.11.1851.

<sup>31</sup> Plowman, *Thomas. In the Days of Victoria*, 1918. P.114.

<sup>32</sup> OC. 5.11.1853.

<sup>33</sup> OC. 12.11.1853.

<sup>34</sup> OC. 1.1.1853.

<sup>35</sup> OC. 8.1.1853.

<sup>36</sup> OC. 15.1.1853.

## 7. Corruption and the Radical Challenge, 1854–1857

<sup>1</sup> Leaflet in Oxford City Library collection.

<sup>2</sup> OC. 17.1.1857.

<sup>3</sup> OC. 7.2.1857.

An obituary was published by the more critical *Jackson’s Oxford Journal* on the same day:

‘The deceased was a well-known public character, having always taken a prominent part as an ultra-Liberal in the various political movements in this city and county. On one occasion he was put in nomination to represent the borough of Woodstock, and on another he was nominated to represent this county, but as it was done chiefly to give him the opportunity of addressing the electors, no further steps

were taken in either case. His addresses were distinguished for a certain description of wit and humour, as well as for their rambling nature, and, accustomed as he was to suit the action to the word, he never failed to keep his audiences in roars of laughter. There was, however, a straightforwardness and integrity in all his doings, private and public, that won for him the respect of those who differed widely from him on public matters. At the time of his death, Mr. Faulkner was one of the councillors of the South Ward, having been elected in November last, after losing his seat for the West Ward, for which he was returned in 1858. He was first elected to the council in 1846 for the South Ward, and continued to represent it till 1849, when he remained out of it till 1853. The deceased was of a very excitable temperament, and while at times he was distinguished for a high flow of spirits, at others he laboured under extreme depression. This had been the case particularly lately, and it appeared that, notwithstanding his pecuniary circumstances were most satisfactory, and that he was saving money, as he had done for a series of years, still he labored under the delusion that he should come to want, and this apprehension preyed on his spirits to such an extent as to affect his reason. There are few men whose premature death has caused greater sensation in this city, and his place as a mob orator, and as an advocate of the Temperance movement, will not easily be supplied.'

<sup>4</sup> OC. 14.3.1857.

<sup>5</sup> *Plowman*. p117.

<sup>6</sup> *Report of Enquiry into 1857 election*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> OC. 11.7.1857. The extracts from Thackeray's initial broadsheet and from two subsequent speeches are quoted in Taylor, D. J. (1999), *Thackeray* (London: Chatto and Windus) pp.392–395

<sup>9</sup> *Plowman*. p.123.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>11</sup> OC. 11.7.1857.

<sup>12</sup> *Plowman*, p.123.

<sup>13</sup> Handbill in Oxford City Library collection.

<sup>14</sup> Handbill.

<sup>15</sup> Handbill.

<sup>16</sup> OC. 25.7.1857.

<sup>17</sup> *Plowman*. p123.

## 8. Reform Agitation and the Oxford Reform League, 1857–1871

<sup>1</sup> OC. 7.11.1857.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary History*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>4</sup> OC. 22.4.1865.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>6</sup> OC. 13.6.1865.

<sup>7</sup> OC. 15.7.1865.

<sup>8</sup> OC. 19.7.1865.

The role of university academics in the civic reform movements in Oxford is covered in Anthony Howe's essay 'Intellect and civic responsibility: Dons and

citizens in nineteenth century Oxford' in Whiting, R. C. (1993) *Oxford: Studies in the History of a University Town Since 1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press). This study focuses on two key controversies – that over the location of a railway works in Oxford and of a military barracks in the city in the 1860s. These controversies involved Charles Neate, Thorold Rogers and Goldwin Smith. The essay also discusses the involvement of Oxford dons such as T. H. Green of Balliol College and L. R. Phelps of Oriel College on local bodies including the Poor Law Board, the Paving Commission and the city council. While the essay is an important contribution to the study of the relationship between dons and the civic establishment in mid and late Victorian politics, it does not discuss in any detail the involvement of Oxford dons in the radical political initiatives discussed in this chapter and subsequent chapters.

<sup>9</sup> OC. 16.12.1865.

<sup>10</sup> OC. 23.12.1865.

<sup>11</sup> OC. 3.2.1866.

<sup>12</sup> OC. 10.2.1866.

<sup>13</sup> OC. 17.2.1866.

<sup>14</sup> OC. 31.3.1866.

<sup>15</sup> OC. 7.4.1866.

<sup>16</sup> OC. 14.4.1866.

<sup>17</sup> OC. 21.4.1866.

<sup>18</sup> OC. 5.5.1866.

<sup>19</sup> OC. 12.5.1866, 2.6.1866, 9.6.1866, 16.6.1866, 23.6.1866.

<sup>20</sup> OC. 30.6.1866.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> OC. 14.7.1866.

<sup>23</sup> OC. 21.7.1866.

<sup>24</sup> Bell, A. D. *The Reform League and its Origins to the Reform Act of 1867*. Oxford D. Phil 1961.

<sup>25</sup> OC. 11.8.1866. *Morning Star*, 24 July 1866, quoted in Gillespie, F. (1927) *Labor and Politics in England 1850–1867* p.269.

<sup>26</sup> Bell.

<sup>27</sup> Undated leaflet in Thorold Rogers papers Bodleian.

<sup>28</sup> OC. 15.9.1866.

<sup>29</sup> OC. 24.11.1866.

<sup>30</sup> OC. 1.12.1866.

<sup>31</sup> OC. 5.1.1867, 12.1.1867.

<sup>32</sup> OC. 5.1.1867.

<sup>33</sup> OC. 12.1.1867.

<sup>34</sup> OC. 19.1.1867.

<sup>35</sup> OC. 2.3.1867.

<sup>36</sup> OC. 30.3.1867.

<sup>37</sup> OC. 20.4.1867.

<sup>38</sup> OC. 6.7.1867.

<sup>39</sup> OC. 17.8.1867.

<sup>40</sup> Copy of letter dated 25.4.1868 in Thorold Rogers' papers. Christopher Harvie in *The Lights of Liberalism* (1976) at p.135 comments that in May 1867, the Oxford Reform League had enough confidence in Thorold Rogers 'to put him up for parliament, orders and all. While the possibility of a Rogers candidacy may have been discussed

at a Reform League meeting at this time, Rogers was never formally proposed as a parliamentary candidate in Oxford. Harvie comments that Rogers 'could talk the language of working men and gain their trust ... His speeches, broad, homely, combative, created a sense of shared involvement with his audience: he mastered political language'. Harvie contrasts this with 'Goldwin Smith, who never learned the distinction between style and intent. What was for Rogers a rhetorical flourish became with the more moderate Smith an apparently logical extremism ... a tap-room threat became a calculated challenge. He, and many of his political friends, risked political isolation, becoming too extreme for their own class, yet were unable to establish any real rapport with the working class.' pp.135–136. See Julia Stapleton's entry for Thorold Rogers in Baylen, J. and Gossman, N. eds. (1988), *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals* Vol. 3 pp.701–705.

For Goldwin Smith, see Elizabeth Wallace (1957) *Goldwin Smith: Victorian Liberal*. Written by a Canadian academic, this biography focuses on Smith's political activity after he emigrated to North America in 1868. Wallace's entry for Smith in Baylen and Grossman's (1984) *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals* Vol. 2 (1830–1870) at pp.460–463 has more information on Goldwin Smith's activities in Oxford. Goldwin Smith's main activity related to reform of the University. He was joint secretary of the Commission of Enquiry into the State of Oxford University in 1850–1852 and secretary of the committee to give effect to the Oxford University Act in 1854. He opposed religious tests for entry into the university and was a regular contributor to the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Fortnightly Review*. From 1858 to 1866, he was regius professor of Modern History at the University. He was also a member of the Jamaica committee chaired by John Stuart Mill and championed the cause of the North in the American Civil War. He was a leading critic of imperial policy. He considered himself to be 'a Liberal of the old school, as yet unconverted to state socialism, who looks for further improvement not to an increase of the authority of government, but to the same agencies, moral, intellectual and economical, which have brought us this far' (quoted in Wallace (1984) p.462). See also Harvie, C., *Lights of Liberalism* and Kent (1978) *Brains and Numbers*. Kent refers to Goldwin Smith as an 'unwitting Comtist' p.94. A more recent intellectual biography of Goldwin Smith by Paul Phillips, *The Controversialist* (Westport, 2002) has no reference to Goldwin Smith's involvement in the Reform League.

<sup>41</sup> Copy of article in Thorold Rogers papers.

<sup>42</sup> OC. 16.5.1868.

<sup>43</sup> OC. 6.6.1868, 13.6.1868.

<sup>44</sup> Gardiner, A. G. *The Life of Sir William Harcourt*. Vol 1. 1827–1886. (1923) p.183.

<sup>45</sup> OC. 13.6.1868.

<sup>46</sup> Gardiner.

<sup>47</sup> OC. 25.7.1868.

<sup>48</sup> OC. 5.9.1868.

<sup>49</sup> OC. 14.11.1868.

<sup>50</sup> OC. 26.9.1868.

<sup>51</sup> OC. 25.7.1868.

<sup>52</sup> OC. 21.11.1868.

<sup>53</sup> Handbill in Oxford City Library collection.

<sup>54</sup> Plowman. p134.

<sup>55</sup> OC. 21.11.1868.

## 9. Education, the Ballot and Drink, 1868–1873

- <sup>1</sup> OC. 7.11.1868.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>3</sup> OC. 29.1.1870.
- <sup>4</sup> OC. 15.10.1870.
- <sup>5</sup> OC. 28.1.1871, 4.2.1871.
- <sup>6</sup> OC. 5.2.1870.
- <sup>7</sup> OC. 22.10.1870.
- <sup>8</sup> OC. 27.4.1872.
- <sup>9</sup> OC. 6.5.1871.
- <sup>10</sup> OC. 14.9.1872.
- <sup>11</sup> OC. 28.9.1872.

## 10. Republicanism and Early Trade Unionism, 1871–1873

- <sup>1</sup> OC. 29.4.1871.
- <sup>2</sup> OC. 20.5.1871.
- <sup>3</sup> OC. 21.10.1871.
- <sup>4</sup> OC. 28.10.1871.
- <sup>5</sup> OC. 18.11.1871.
- <sup>6</sup> OC. 24.2.1872.
- <sup>7</sup> OC. 2.3.1872, 9.3.1872.
- <sup>8</sup> OC. 9.3.1872.
- <sup>9</sup> OC. 16.3.1872.
- <sup>10</sup> OC. 16.3.1872, 23.3.1872.
- <sup>11</sup> OC. 30.3.1872.
- <sup>12</sup> Horn, P. *Agricultural Trade Unionism in Oxfordshire, 1872–81*. Oxfordshire Record Society. Vol. 48 (1974); Horn, P. 'The Farmworkers, the Dockers and Oxford University', *Oxoniensia*. Vol. 32. (1967).
- <sup>13</sup> OC. 18.5.1872, 29.5.1872.
- <sup>14</sup> OC. 20.7.1872.
- <sup>15</sup> OC. 27.7.1872.
- <sup>16</sup> OC. 10.8.1872, 31.8.1872.
- <sup>17</sup> OC. 26.9.1872.

## 11. The Decline of Oxford Liberalism

- <sup>1</sup> OC. 29.10.1872.
- <sup>2</sup> OC. 22.2.1871.
- <sup>3</sup> OC. 28.9.1872.
- <sup>4</sup> OC. 12.10.1872.
- <sup>5</sup> OC. 10.11.1872.
- <sup>6</sup> Undated leaflet in Oxford City Library collection.
- <sup>7</sup> OC. 4.1.1873.

- <sup>8</sup> OC. 15.3.1873.
- <sup>9</sup> OC. 19.4.1873.
- <sup>10</sup> OC. 27.9.1873.
- <sup>11</sup> OC. 31.1.1874.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> OC. 7.2.1874.
- <sup>14</sup> Leaflet in Oxford City Library collection.
- <sup>15</sup> OC. 14.2.1874.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> OC. 21.2.1874.
- <sup>18</sup> OC. 28.2.1874.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> OC. 14.3.1874, 21.3.1874.
- <sup>21</sup> Handbills in Oxford City Library collection.
- <sup>22</sup> Handbill.
- <sup>23</sup> OC. 21.3.1874.
- <sup>24</sup> OC. 7.11.1874.
- <sup>25</sup> Gardiner. op cit.
- <sup>26</sup> OC. 20.3.1880, 27.3.1880, 3.4.1880.
- <sup>27</sup> Leaflet in Oxford City Library collection.
- <sup>28</sup> OC. 3.4.1880.
- <sup>29</sup> Handbill in Oxford City Library collection.
- <sup>30</sup> OC. 1.5.1880.
- <sup>31</sup> Handbill in Oxford City Library collection.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Oman, C. (1941) *Memories of Victorian Oxford*, p.145. Sir Charles Oman was a military historian and Conservative MP for the University of Oxford between 1919 and 1935.
- <sup>34</sup> Plowman. op cit.
- <sup>35</sup> Gardiner. op cit.
- <sup>36</sup> *Report of the Oxford Election Commission*, 1880–1881.
- <sup>37</sup> Plowman. op cit.
- <sup>38</sup> *Parliamentary History of the County of Oxford*.
- <sup>39</sup> OC. 21.11.1885., 5.12.1885. Fyffe was the author of a three-volume history of Modern Europe and a history of Greece. He gave a lecture on The Land Question to the Oxford Reform Club in November 1884. He was the Liberal candidate in Devizes in 1891. In 1891 he was accused of indecent assault by a man on the Brighton railway. Fyffe attempted suicide and never recovered, dying the following year.
- <sup>40</sup> *Parliamentary History*. Montagu Burrows, then professor of history, in his *Autobiography* (1908) describes how together with the bursar of Lincoln College and the brewer Herbert Morrell, he helped to rebuild the Conservative Party electoral machinery in Oxford. As vice-president of the Oxford Conservative Association, he was active in the selection and campaigns of Alexander Hall, Sir George Chesney and Lord Valentia as well as ensuring that *Jackson's Oxford Journal* was managed in the Conservative interest. Burrows comments that Alexander Hall, known as the 'little squire', 'showed himself to be a perfect master of open air, not to say mob oratory, and found no-one to compare with him in that respect ... was followed about

by thousands who hung on every word; but there was always good sense and a good deal of knowledge along with his remarkable eloquence, his appeals to the patriotic watchwords which the people thoroughly enjoyed, and his spirited denunciations of his political enemies, local or parliamentary'. Burrows also records how in the 1874 contest, as a former naval captain, he organised groups of 'Tory roughs to challenge a group of 'jeering youths of Radical colours' in Gloucester Green (pp.231–236). He does not however refer to his central role in the 1880 corruption scandal, the unseating of Hall and the loss of one of Oxford's two parliamentary seats. The story of the 1880 election and the corruption inquiry is retold in considerable detail in Fenby (1970).

<sup>41</sup> Handbill in Oxford City Library collection.

<sup>42</sup> Handbill in Oxford City Library collection.

## 12. The Nature of Victorian Radicalism

<sup>1</sup> Detailed figures for this analysis are given in Appendix 1

<sup>2</sup> Obituary in OC. 7.2.1857.

<sup>3</sup> Beehive 10.4.1875; Harvie, *Lights of Liberalism*. (1976).

<sup>4</sup> Obituary in OT. 18.10.1890.

## PART 2

### 13. The Political and Industrial Structure of late Victorian Oxford

<sup>1</sup> The information in the following paragraphs is taken from the *Report of the Oxford Election Commission*. 1880–1881.

<sup>2</sup> Fasnacht, *History of the City of Oxford*. The role of University representatives in civic governance is discussed in Howe (1993).

<sup>3</sup> Examples in JOJ. 19.12.1903, 23.1.1904, 20.2.1904, 11.3.1905.

<sup>4</sup> OC. 18.1.1901, 10.1.1902, 15.1.1904, 18.1.1907, 22.1.1909.

<sup>5</sup> Report of annual meeting in JOJ. 19.11.1904 and annual show in JOJ. 24.8.1907.

<sup>6</sup> Report of show in JOJ. 22.8.1908.

<sup>7</sup> Reports of shows in JOJ. 24.8.1907, 22.8.1908.

<sup>8</sup> PSA meeting on fiscal policy in OC. 13.2.1904.

<sup>9</sup> East ward Foresters annual dinners reported in OC. 24.1.1902, 29.1.1904. Report of Oddfellows dinner in JOJ. 18.1.1902.

<sup>10</sup> OC. 3.10.1902.

<sup>11</sup> For example, in July 1903, G. H. Morrell MP held a party for his son's 21st birthday. A dinner and tea were given for 800 brewery employees in South Park. A cricket match was held between the police and estate workers. Treats were organised for children at three local schools. G. H. Morrell was MP for the mid-Oxfordshire/Woodstock constituency in 1891–1892 and 1895–1906. Reports in JOJ. 11.7.1903, 18.7.1903.

<sup>12</sup> The following paragraphs are based on C. V. Butler, *Social Conditions in Oxford* (1912) pp.38–51, 62–75.

## 14. The Radical Tradition and the Oxford Socialist League, 1883–1899

- <sup>1</sup> Horn, P. op cit.
- <sup>2</sup> Samuel. *Memoirs*, quoted by Horn.
- <sup>3</sup> Clayton, Joseph. *The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain. 1884–1924*. (1926) For Keir Hardie and Annie Hines, see Benn, C. (1997) *Keir Hardie* pp.109–113. Hardie wrote a number of affectionate letters to Annie, whom he called ‘Sparks’.
- <sup>4</sup> Elton, Oliver (1906) *Frederick York Powell*, quoted in Clayton.
- <sup>5</sup> OC. 24.11.1883.
- <sup>6</sup> OC. 9.2.1884. see also Tsuzuki, C (1961) *H M Hyndman and British Socialism* p53.
- <sup>7</sup> York Powell was Regius Professor of Modern History. According to Clayton, he could ‘always be relied upon to support the socialist cause’. He was a friend of the Russian nihilist Sergius Stepniak and also befriended the French communal exiles in Britain after 1871. He later became an imperialist and chairman of the Oxford Tariff Reform League. See Oliver Elton (1906), *Frederick York Powell*.
- <sup>8</sup> Justice. 16.2.1884.
- <sup>9</sup> OC. 15.3.1884. see also Elwood Lawrence (1957) *Henry George in the British Isles*, pp. 70–71.
- <sup>10</sup> Justice. 22.3.1884.
- <sup>11</sup> OC. 29.3.1884.
- <sup>12</sup> OC. editorial. 19.4.1884.
- <sup>13</sup> OC. 16.8.1884.
- <sup>14</sup> OC. 23.8.1884.
- <sup>15</sup> OC. editorial. 6.9.1884.
- <sup>16</sup> OC. 20.9.1884.
- <sup>17</sup> Letter in OC. 24.1.1885.
- <sup>18</sup> OT. 24.1.1885, *University Herald* 7.2.1885, OC. 24.1.1885. Cuttings in file of papers in Bodleian.
- <sup>19</sup> OT. 24.1.1885.
- <sup>20</sup> OC. 31.1.1885, OT. 31.1.1885.
- <sup>21</sup> OC. 31.1.1885.
- <sup>22</sup> OC. 7.2.1885, OT. 7.2.1885.
- <sup>23</sup> OC. 14.2.1885. This meeting and subsequent meetings in Oxford at which Morris spoke are covered in Tony Pinkney’s 2007 book *William Morris in Oxford: The Campaigning Years 1879–1895*
- <sup>24</sup> OC. 28.2.1885, OT. 28.2.1885.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> *Commonweal*. February 1885.
- <sup>28</sup> Letter from Faulkner to Socialist League secretary, 1 February 1885, quoted in Thompson, E P. *William Morris. Romantic to Revolutionary*
- <sup>29</sup> Branch reports in *Commonweal*. April, June, July 1885.
- <sup>30</sup> *Commonweal*. August 1885.
- <sup>31</sup> *Commonweal*. October 1885.
- <sup>32</sup> *Commonweal*. November 1885.
- <sup>33</sup> *Commonweal*. April 1886.

- <sup>34</sup> *Commonweal*. February 1886.
- <sup>35</sup> *Commonweal*. June 1886.
- <sup>36</sup> *Commonweal*. 15.1.1887.
- <sup>37</sup> *Commonweal*. 5.2.1887.
- <sup>38</sup> Letter from Faulkner to Joseph Lane, 18 May 1887., quoted in Thompson op cit.
- <sup>39</sup> *Commonweal*. 21.1.1888.
- <sup>40</sup> *Commonweal*. 24.8.1889.
- <sup>41</sup> Information on socialist groups within the university is taken from Ashley and Saunders (1934) *Red Oxford* pp.4–12. Pinkney (2007) refers to the Marx club at pp.97–99, and the Fabian Society at pp.140–141 and 168–169. For Carter and the Oxford branch of the Christian Social Union, see Jones (1968) p.184
- <sup>42</sup> OC. 2.11.1895. see also Pinkney pp.140–141.
- <sup>43</sup> OC. editorial. 9.11.1895.
- <sup>44</sup> OC. 9.11.1895.
- <sup>45</sup> OT. 15.1.1896.
- <sup>46</sup> OT. 4.2.1898.
- <sup>47</sup> Clayton had been a student in Oxford in the late 1880s when he was involved in the Guild of St Matthew. He was later secretary of the Leeds ILP and ILP organiser in Southampton. These lectures were sponsored by the Hutchinson Trust. He published his memoirs in 1926.
- <sup>48</sup> OT. 13.2.1899.
- <sup>49</sup> *Clarion*. 16.1.1897.
- <sup>50</sup> JOJ. 20.3.1905.
- <sup>51</sup> OC. 6.4.1906.

## 15. The Early Years of the Oxford Trades Council, 1888–1900

- <sup>1</sup> Hawkins was born in Hereford in 1844, son of a miller who was an active Chartist. He came to Oxford in 1872 and joined the Oxford Co-operative Society on its foundation that year. He was president of the Co-op from 1879–1883 and 1884–1889. He was also president of the Oxford Typographical Society (printers) and father of the chapel at the Clarendon Press. In 1893, he was chairman of the Clarendon Institute. He was a staunch Anglican and a sidesman at St Philip and St James church. He became president of the Co-operative Congress and died in 1908. Biography in Bellamy and Saville, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. 1 pp.156–157.
- <sup>2</sup> Manifesto in Local History Library.
- <sup>3</sup> Hawkins' meetings are reported in OC. 5.10.1889, 19.10.1889, 2.11.1889.
- <sup>4</sup> OC. editorial. 5.10.1889.
- <sup>5</sup> OC. 26.10.1889.
- <sup>6</sup> OC. 9.11.1889.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>8</sup> OC. 23.11.1889.
- <sup>9</sup> OC. 4.11.1893.
- <sup>10</sup> OC. 28.10.1893.
- <sup>11</sup> OC. 4.11.1893.
- <sup>12</sup> OC. 15.4.1899.

## 16. The Social Democratic Federation. Socialism in the Streets, 1896–1898

<sup>1</sup> Cotton was to be one of the first intake of students at Ruskin College, resident at the college between February and August 1899. In a photograph traced in the college archives by Janet Vaux, he is standing directly behind the college principal Denis Hird. His name appears first on the register of the first student cohort. <http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/the-first-students-at-ruskin-college-oxford/>

At the 1901 SDF conference in Birmingham, Cotton proposed a motion repudiating the position of the SDF delegates at the Socialist International conference on the basis that opposition to socialist participation in governments was a matter of principle rather than tactics. The debate was sparked by the appointment of the socialist Millerand as a Minister in the French government. Cottons' motion was defeated by 37 votes to eight. A supporter of the American syndicalist De Leon, Cotton was elected to the SDF executive in 1902 but expelled later that year. He then became secretary of the Socialist Labour Party. In 1919, Cotton was forced out of this position after he had admitted to holding a secret fund, the implication being that the party was being subsidised by the Soviet government. The SLP had been invited to affiliate to the Third International, and the Soviet trade mission in London, led by Lev Kamenev and assisted by Theodore Rothstein, was known to be acting as a conduit for funds to sympathetic organisations in the UK. In 1921, Cotton left the SLP to form the Socialist Propaganda League on the grounds that the SLP had moved away from De Leonite orthodoxy. See Kendall, W: *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain. 1900–1921* and Challinor, R: *The Origins of British Bolshevism*.

<sup>2</sup> OC. 15.5.1897.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> OC. 29.9.1897.

<sup>5</sup> OC. 5.6.1897.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> OC. 12.6.1897.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> *Clarion*. 19.6.1897.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> OC. 30.4.1898.

<sup>12</sup> OC. 14.5.1898.

<sup>13</sup> OC. 21.5.1898.

<sup>14</sup> *Justice* article reprinted in OC. 21.5.1898.

<sup>15</sup> OC. 4.6.1898. For Hird see Beatson-Hird, J. (1999) *Dennis Hird*

<sup>16</sup> OC. 11.6.1898.

<sup>17</sup> Greaves. *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (1961) p.136. As a result of the incident, Cotton lost his job as a gardener at the Oxford Botanical Gardens. He had previously served a month in prison for breaking a Manchester Council bye-law relating to public meetings. (Challinor p.39)

## 17. The Municipal Housing Association, 1900–1902

<sup>1</sup> OC. 19.4.1901.

<sup>2</sup> OC. 1.5.1903.

- <sup>3</sup> Oxford Trades Council minutes (OTC) 27.6.1900.  
<sup>4</sup> OTC. 25.7.1900, 29.8.1900.  
<sup>5</sup> OTC. 26.9.1900.  
<sup>6</sup> OTC. 31.10.1900.  
<sup>7</sup> OTC. 29.5.1901.  
<sup>8</sup> OC. 22.1.1901, JOJ. 23.1.1901.  
<sup>9</sup> OC. 19.4.1901.  
<sup>10</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>11</sup> Reports in OC. 30.4.1898, 10.5.1901, 4.10.1901, 10.10.1902, 28.10.1904.  
<sup>12</sup> Reports in JOJ. 2.2.1907, 1 .3.1907.  
<sup>13</sup> Trades Council annual report in OC. 19.4.1901. see also Jones (1968) p183  
<sup>14</sup> OC. 28.2.1902.  
<sup>15</sup> City Council reports in OC. 23.2.1901 JOJ. 23.1.1901, 2.3.1901. For the campaign for housing reform at a national level, see Bowie, D. (2017) *The Radical and Socialist Tradition in British Planning*.  
<sup>16</sup> City Council reports. OC. 7.3.1902/14.3.1902.  
<sup>17</sup> OC. 7.3.1902.  
<sup>18</sup> OC. 7.2.1902.  
<sup>19</sup> OC. 15.3.1901, 10.3.1901.  
<sup>20</sup> OC. 27.9.1901.  
<sup>21</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>22</sup> OTC. 20.9.1901.  
<sup>23</sup> OC. 4.10.1901.  
<sup>24</sup> OC. 13.12.1901, JOJ. 14.12.1901.

## 18. The Municipal Labour Representation Association, 1902–1905

- <sup>1</sup> OC. 31.1.1902. Lees-Smith was a lecturer in public administration at the London School of Economics from 1906 and from 1907–1909 was chairman of the executive committee of Ruskin College, resigning when he was appointed to a professorship at Bristol University. He was a Liberal MP between 1910 and 1918. Joining the Labour Party in 1919, he became Postmaster General and then President of the Board of Education in the MacDonald government of 1929–1931 and was acting leader of the Labour Party and leader of the the opposition from 1940 to 1945, when the Labour Party leader, Clement Attlee, was Deputy Prime Minister. See entry by David Martin in Bellamy and Saville eds. (1993) *Dictionary of Labour Biography* Vol. 9 pp.175–181.  
<sup>2</sup> Leaflet in Local History Library.  
<sup>3</sup> OC. editorial. 13.12.1901.  
<sup>4</sup> OC. 18.4.1902.  
<sup>5</sup> JOJ. 1.11.1902.  
<sup>6</sup> OC. 5.9.1902.  
<sup>7</sup> OC. 3.10.1902.  
<sup>8</sup> OC. 10.10.1902.  
<sup>9</sup> OC. 17.10.1902.  
<sup>10</sup> OC. 24.10.1902.  
<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

- <sup>12</sup> OC. 31.10.1902.  
<sup>13</sup> OC. 7.11.1902.  
<sup>14</sup> OTC. 26.3.1903.  
<sup>15</sup> OTC. 29.4.1903.  
<sup>16</sup> OTC. 3.6.1903.  
<sup>17</sup> OTC. 24.6.1903.  
<sup>18</sup> OTC. 15.7.1903.  
<sup>19</sup> OTC. 24.7.1903.  
<sup>20</sup> OTC. 7.10.1903, 25.11.1903.  
<sup>21</sup> OTC. 4.11.1903.  
<sup>22</sup> OC. 30.10.1903.  
<sup>23</sup> OC. 23.10.1903.  
<sup>24</sup> OC. 30.10.1903, 6.11.1903.  
<sup>25</sup> OC. 23.10.1903.  
<sup>26</sup> OC. 16.10.1903.  
<sup>27</sup> OC. 30.10.1903.  
<sup>28</sup> OC. 6.11.1903.  
<sup>29</sup> OC. 30.10.1903.  
<sup>30</sup> Ibid. editorial.  
<sup>31</sup> OC. 19.2.1904.  
<sup>32</sup> OC. 1.4.1904.  
<sup>33</sup> OC. 6.5.1904.  
<sup>34</sup> OC. 2.9.1904.  
<sup>35</sup> OC. 30.9.1904. editorial.  
<sup>36</sup> OC. 30.9.1904.  
<sup>37</sup> OC. 7.10.1904.  
<sup>38</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>39</sup> OC. 14.10.1904.  
<sup>40</sup> Ibid. editorial.  
<sup>41</sup> OC. 21.10.1904.  
<sup>42</sup> OC. 28.10.1904.  
<sup>43</sup> OC. 4.11.1904.  
<sup>44</sup> OC. 11.11.1904.

## 19. The ILP, Unemployment Agitation and Local Politics, 1905–1907

- <sup>1</sup> First annual report in OC. 16.2.1906.  
<sup>2</sup> *Labour Leader*. 10.2.1905.  
<sup>3</sup> *Labour Leader*. 10.3.1905.  
<sup>4</sup> OC. 16.2.1906.  
<sup>5</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,  
<sup>7</sup> *Labour Leader*. 7.7.1905.  
<sup>8</sup> OC. 3.11.1905.  
<sup>9</sup> OC. 24.11.1905.

- <sup>10</sup> *Labour Leader*. 28.7.1905.
- <sup>11</sup> *Labour Leader*. 18.8.1905.
- <sup>12</sup> Oxford Trades Council annual report for 1905 in OC. 24.3.1905.
- <sup>13</sup> Reports in OC. 25.3.1904, 11.11.1904.
- <sup>14</sup> Reports in OC. 25.11.1904, 17.2.1905, 30.3.1906.
- <sup>15</sup> OTC. 24.5.1905, 26.7.1905.
- <sup>16</sup> OTC. 26.7.1905.
- <sup>17</sup> OTC. 25.9.1905.
- <sup>18</sup> OTC. 20.10.1905.
- <sup>19</sup> OC. 6.10.1905.
- <sup>20</sup> OC. 13.10.1905. editorial.
- <sup>21</sup> OC. 20.10.1905. editorial.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> OC. 3.11.1905.
- <sup>25</sup> OC. 9.2.1906, JOJ. 2.2.1906.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> OC. 18.5.1906.
- <sup>29</sup> CSU Report in JOJ. 2.2.1906.
- <sup>30</sup> OC. 23.3.1906.
- <sup>31</sup> OC. 1.3.1907.
- <sup>32</sup> OC. 16.8.1907. Fred Charles' original name was Frederick Charles Slaughter. He had been a leading member in the Norwich branch of the Socialist League and a colleague of Charles Mowbray, Tom Barclay and Fred Henderson. Charles ran a café and a socialist discussion group, with he and some other members moving towards a libertarian socialist position. The Norwich Socialist League was one of the largest branches in the country with 200 members. Charles then moved to London where he collaborated with the libertarian socialist Joseph Lane to establish an East End Propaganda Committee. He then moved to Walsall, where he became caught up in what became known as the Walsall Anarchist plot; Charles and colleagues were convicted of manufacturing a bomb in a case which is now widely regarded as a police provocation. He served seven years in prison, being released in 1899.

On moving to Oxford, he became involved in the Co-operative and Ruskin College as well as the ILP. Charles and his wife were involved in market gardening ventures before moving to the Tolstoyan commune at Whiteway in Gloucestershire. See Quail, J: *Slow Burning Fuse*; Thompson, E P.: *William Morris* and Cherry, S: *Doing Different? Politics and the Labour Movement in Norwich*.

## 20. ILP Propaganda and the Clarion Cycling Club, 1906–1908

- <sup>1</sup> OC. 16.2.1906.
- <sup>2</sup> OC. 16.3.1906.
- <sup>3</sup> *Labour Leader*. 13.4.1906.
- <sup>4</sup> *Labour Leader*. 27.4.1906.
- <sup>5</sup> *Labour Leader*. 4.5.1906.

- <sup>6</sup> *Labour Leader*. 11.5.1906.  
<sup>7</sup> *Labour Leader*, 28.5.1906.  
<sup>8</sup> OC. 8.6.1906.  
<sup>9</sup> *Labour Leader*. 8.6.1906.  
<sup>10</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>11</sup> *Labour Leader*. 15.2.1906.  
<sup>12</sup> OC. 29.6.1906.  
<sup>13</sup> *Labour Leader*. 6.7.1906, OC. 13.7.1906.  
<sup>14</sup> *Labour Leader*. 13.8.1906.  
<sup>15</sup> *Labour Leader*. 7.9.1906, OC. 7.9.1906  
<sup>16</sup> *Labour Leader*. 7.9.1906.  
<sup>17</sup> OC. 22.12.1905.  
<sup>18</sup> OC. 19.1.1906.  
<sup>19</sup> OTC. 31.1.1906.  
<sup>20</sup> OTC. 15.3.1906.  
<sup>21</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>22</sup> OTC. 28.3.1906.  
<sup>23</sup> OTC. 25.4.1906.  
<sup>24</sup> OTC. 29.8.1906.  
<sup>25</sup> ILP annual report in OC. 22.2.1907.  
<sup>26</sup> *Labour Leader*. 26.7.1907.  
<sup>27</sup> *Labour Leader*. 30.8.1907.  
<sup>28</sup> *Labour Leader*. 1.11.1907.  
<sup>29</sup> *Labour Leader*. 12.7.1907.  
<sup>30</sup> *Labour Leader*. 2.8.1907.  
<sup>31</sup> *Labour Leader*. 13.9.1907.  
<sup>32</sup> *Labour Leader*. 16.8.1907.  
<sup>33</sup> *Clarion*. 6.4.1907.  
<sup>34</sup> *Clarion*. 3.5.1907.  
<sup>35</sup> *Clarion*. 10.5.1907, 17.5.1907, 24.5.1907, 14.6.1907, 21.6.1907, 28.6.1907, 5.7.1907, 12.7.1907, 19.7.1907.  
<sup>36</sup> *Clarion*. 27.3.1908.  
<sup>37</sup> *Clarion*. 8.4.1908.  
<sup>38</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>39</sup> *Clarion*. 5.6.1908.  
<sup>40</sup> *Clarion*. 29.5.1908, 12.6.1908.  
<sup>41</sup> *Clarion*. 19.6.1908. For the Headington Quarrymen, see Samuel, R (1975) 'Quarry Roughs' in Samuel, R. ed. *Village Life and Labour*. Samuel has a photograph of a Conservative propaganda van tipped over by 'Quarry roughs' in September 1909.  
<sup>42</sup> *Clarion*. 31.7.1908.

## 21. Labour Divided, 1906–1908

- <sup>1</sup> OC. 14.9.1906, 21.9.1906.  
<sup>2</sup> OTC. 12.9.1906.  
<sup>3</sup> OC. 12.10.1906.

- <sup>4</sup> OC. 22.2.1907.  
<sup>5</sup> OTC. 2.1.1907.  
<sup>6</sup> OTC. 29.4.1907.  
<sup>7</sup> OTC. 31.7.1907.  
<sup>8</sup> OTC. 28.8.1907.  
<sup>9</sup> OTC. 2.10.1907.  
<sup>10</sup> OC. 8.11.1907.  
<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>12</sup> OC. 25.10.1907.  
<sup>13</sup> OTC. 13.11.1907.  
<sup>14</sup> OTC. 1.1.1908.  
<sup>15</sup> OC. 12.4.1907.  
<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>18</sup> OC. 25.9.1908.  
<sup>19</sup> OTC. 26.8.1908.  
<sup>20</sup> OC. 23.10.1908.  
<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>22</sup> OC. 30.10.1908.  
<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>24</sup> OC. 27.11.1908.  
<sup>25</sup> OTC. 30.11.1908, 27.1.1909.  
<sup>26</sup> OC. 1.10.1909, 8.10.1909, 15.10.1909 5.11.1909.  
<sup>27</sup> OC. 31.7.1908, JOJ. 1.8.1908, *Labour Leader*. 31.7.1908.  
<sup>28</sup> OC. 18.9.1908.  
<sup>29</sup> OC. 2.10.1908.  
<sup>30</sup> OC. 16.10.1908.  
<sup>31</sup> OC. 20.11.1908.  
<sup>32</sup> OC. 8.1.1909.  
<sup>33</sup> OC. 5.2.1909.  
<sup>34</sup> OC. 8.1.1909.  
<sup>35</sup> Oxford Trades Council annual report in OC. 14.5.1909.  
<sup>36</sup> OC. 5.2.1909.  
<sup>37</sup> OC. 14.5.1909.  
<sup>38</sup> OC. 15.1.1909.  
<sup>39</sup> OC. 12.3.1909.  
<sup>40</sup> *Labour Leader*. 12.3.1909.  
<sup>41</sup> The story is retold in the biography of G. D. H. Cole by L. P. Carpenter.  
<sup>42</sup> OC. 29.5.1909, 3.12.1909.

## 22. Labour and Politics, 1909–1914

- <sup>1</sup> OTC. 10.3.1909.  
<sup>2</sup> OTC. 21.4.1909.  
<sup>3</sup> OTC. 26.5.1909.  
<sup>4</sup> OC. 23.7.1909.

- <sup>5</sup> OC. 29.10.1909.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> OC. 5.11.1909.
- <sup>8</sup> The tramway strike received considerable coverage in the local press. e.g. OC. 30.5.1913.
- <sup>9</sup> See OC. 31.7.1914, 7.8.1914. The dispute was put to arbitration on the outbreak of the war.
- <sup>10</sup> OTC. 27.4.1910.
- <sup>11</sup> OTC. 27.7.1910.
- <sup>12</sup> OTC. 17.8.1910.
- <sup>13</sup> OTC. 31.8.1910, 28.9.1910.
- <sup>14</sup> OTC. 26.10.1910.
- <sup>15</sup> OTC. 12.11.1910.
- <sup>16</sup> OTC. 5.7.1911, 30.8.1911, 13.9.1911, 27.9.1911.
- <sup>17</sup> OTC. 27.9.1911.
- <sup>18</sup> OTC. 25.11.1911.
- <sup>19</sup> OTC. 20.12.1911, 10.1.1912.
- <sup>20</sup> OC. 4.11.1910.
- <sup>21</sup> OTC. 10.9.1913, 17.9.1913., 24.9.1913., 5.11.1913.
- <sup>22</sup> OC. 25.10.1913.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid. editorial.
- <sup>24</sup> OC. 31.10.1913.
- <sup>25</sup> OC. 7.11.1913.
- <sup>26</sup> OTC. 5.11.1913.
- <sup>27</sup> OTC. 10.1.1914.
- <sup>28</sup> OTC. 28.1.1914.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> OTC. 2.2.1914.
- <sup>31</sup> OTC. 8.9.1914.
- <sup>32</sup> OC. 15.5.1914.
- <sup>33</sup> OC. 28.8.1914.
- <sup>34</sup> OC. 14.8.1914.
- <sup>35</sup> OC. 9.10.1914.

### 23. The Growth of a Socialist Tradition

- <sup>1</sup> Obituary of Carlyle in *Oxford Magazine*. 1942 Vol. 3.
- <sup>2</sup> Obituary of Ball in *Oxford Magazine*. 31.5.1918. Ball, Oona ed. *Memoirs and Impressions of an Ideal Don*.
- <sup>3</sup> See Craik, W. *Central Labour College*. Chs. 3–5. Yorke, P. *Ruskin College\* 1899–1909*. (Ruskin Students Labour History Pamphlets No. 1. 1977); Beatson-Hird, J. (1999) *Denis Hird*
- <sup>4</sup> Obituary in .9.1.1931.
- <sup>5</sup> Obituary. JOJ. 28.3.1908. see *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol 1.
- <sup>6</sup> Biographies of Rees and Ablett in the *Dictionary of Labour Biography*.

## PART 3

## 24. Oxford Labour and Politics during the First World War

<sup>1</sup> OC. 7.8.1914.

<sup>2</sup> OC. 14.8.1914.

<sup>3</sup> OC. 28.8.1914.

<sup>4</sup> OC. 18.9.1914.

<sup>5</sup> OC. 30.10.1914, 4.12.1914, 25.12.1914, 5.3.1915, 26.3.1915.

<sup>6</sup> OC. 26.11.1915.

<sup>7</sup> OC. 21.8.1914.

<sup>8</sup> OC. 4.5.1915.

<sup>9</sup> OC. 12.3.1915.

<sup>10</sup> OC. 29.10.1915, 10.10.1915.

<sup>11</sup> OTC. 25.8.1915.

<sup>12</sup> OTC. 24.11.1915.

<sup>13</sup> OC. 11.6.1915.

<sup>14</sup> OC. 25.2.1916.

<sup>15</sup> OC. 3.3.1916, 10.3.1916, 17.3.1916.

<sup>16</sup> OC. 30.5.19. For Postgate see Postgate, J. and M. (1994) *A Stomach for Dissent: The Life of Raymond Postgate*. Chapters 4 to 7 cover Postgate's time in Oxford including short stays in Oxford gaol and at the Cowley barracks and includes considerable information on his circle including his close friend David Belloch, the Australian V. Gordon Childe, who was to work for the Australian Labor Party and be a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW or Wobblies) before becoming an internationally-known archaeologist and philologist, and Duncan Hall, an Australian Rhodes scholar who published a book on the British Commonwealth in 1920, who was Professor of International Relations at Syracuse University and New York State before working for the League of Nations, with responsibility first for controlling the opium trade and then with special responsibility for relations with the British Commonwealth. The Postgate biography includes photographs of Postgate and Belloch and the young G. D. H. Cole and Daisy Lansbury whom Postgate married, but also a photo of 'some fellow undergraduate socialists in 1917' – Heath, G. C. Hill and Drew. In 1918, Postgate published, at the age of 22, a pamphlet on 'The International during the War' and in 1920 a book: *Revolution from 1789–1906*; for Dutt see Callaghan, J. (1993) *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism* p.16. Herbert Runacres later became vicar of St Mary's, Newington Butts in Southwark. He was an active member of the Industrial Christian Fellowship and in 1952 published a pamphlet: 'Freedom, fellowship, citizenship'. Belloch served in the Friends Ambulance Unit from 1916 to 1919. He later worked for the International Labour Office and the United Nations. In 1969, he published 'State and Society in the Developing World'. In 1918, Postgate abandoned his degree and moved to London, in effect on the run from being called up for national service; Dutt to Cambridge. In 1920, Postgate was a founding member of the Communist Party. (Postgate and Postgate, pp.94–99).

<sup>17</sup> OC. 28.7.1916.; Cole, M. (1949) *Growing up into Revolution*; Ashley and Saunders (1933) *Red Oxford*, pp.15–27. See also Carpenter (1973); G D H Cole, pp.16–18; Wright (1979) *G D H Cole and Socialist Democracy*, pp.16–19. For Cole and guild

socialism, see Glass, S. T. (1966) *The Responsible Society; The Ideas of the Guild Socialists* (London: Longmans). Cole had joined the University Fabian Society in 1908 as soon as he arrived at Balliol College and had edited a journal *Oxford Socialist* together with F. K. Griffith. In 1909, the journal was retitled the *Oxford Reformer*. The first editorial in the *Oxford Socialist* announced that 'in the present contentious state of the various branches of the Socialist and Labour parties in England, we shall attach ourselves to no faction in especial' for they all have 'one real aim at heart, however different the methods they advocate for its attainment'. The latter journal announced its intention 'to take as broad an outlook upon social reform as can be secured'. ( Both quotes in Wright, p.17). On graduating, Cole had been appointed to a seven-year fellowship at Magdalen College. Cole's circle included Ivor Brown, conscientious objector, journalist, political writer and later editor of the *Observer*, A. L. Bacharach, later a musicologist, Raymond Postgate and Joseph Kaye.

The Universities Socialist Federation was founded by Clifford Allen of Cambridge University in 1912, with Cole becoming chairman in 1914. The Oxford University Socialist Society was established in June 1915, as a successor body to the Oxford Fabian Society. It remained affiliated to the national Fabians but operated on an autonomous basis. Its activities are covered in considerable detail in *Red Oxford*. A new statement of objectives for the Oxford Fabian Society was agreed at the beginning of 1915. This reflects the guild socialist movement, with which Cole had become associated. When this was not endorsed by the national Fabians, it became the basis for the new Socialist Society:

The Oxford University Fabian Society consists of Socialists. It recognises that under capitalism labour is bought and sold as an article of commerce, so that workers are degraded to a condition of wage slavery. It therefore works for the overthrow of this system and the economic, social and political evil it entails. With this object in view it aims at the extinction of private property in the means of production, and seeks to transfer the ownership of land and industrial capital to the community, in order that the industrial appropriation of rent, interest and profits may be eliminated. As a means to these ends it looks to the establishment of political and industrial democracy:

By the achievement of self-government, both national and local;  
 By the creation of a vigorous socialist movement; and  
 By the growth of a militant and class-consciousness Trade Unionism  
 ( quoted in Ashley and Saunders, p.21)

<sup>18</sup> OC. 10.3.1916.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> OC. 17.3.1916.

<sup>21</sup> OC. 31.3.1916.

<sup>22</sup> OTC. 3.1.1917.

<sup>23</sup> OTC. 30.8.1916.

<sup>24</sup> OTC. 17.11.1916.

<sup>25</sup> OC. 9.3.1917.

<sup>26</sup> OTC. 25.7.1917.

<sup>27</sup> OTC. 26.9.1917.

<sup>28</sup> OTC. 15.11.1917.

<sup>29</sup> OTC. 24.11.1915.

<sup>30</sup> OTC. 29.12.1915, 26.1.1916.

- <sup>31</sup> OTC. 26.10.1916.
- <sup>32</sup> OTC. 30.5.1917.
- <sup>33</sup> OC. 7.4.1916, 9.3.1917; OTC annual reports. 1916,1917.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> OC. 11.10.1918, 18.10.1918, 15.11.1918.
- <sup>36</sup> OC. 13.4.1917.
- <sup>37</sup> OC. 9.3.1917.
- <sup>38</sup> OC. 24.8.1917.
- <sup>39</sup> OC. 26.10.1917.
- <sup>40</sup> OC; 18.10.1918.
- <sup>41</sup> OC. 15.1.1915.
- <sup>42</sup> Petition dated 1917. OCL.
- <sup>43</sup> OC. 12.10.1917.
- <sup>44</sup> OTC. 20.9.1916.
- <sup>45</sup> OTC. 26.9.1917, 31.10.1917. OC. 28.9.1917, 12.10.1917, 2.11.1917.
- <sup>46</sup> OTC. 15.11.1917.
- <sup>47</sup> OTC. 28.11.1917.
- <sup>48</sup> OTC. 15.1.1918.
- <sup>49</sup> OTC. 31.1.1918.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>51</sup> OTC. 27.2.1918.
- <sup>52</sup> OTC. 29.5.1918.
- <sup>53</sup> OTC. 27.3.1918.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>55</sup> OC. 9.8.1918.
- <sup>56</sup> OC. 16.11.1917.
- <sup>57</sup> OC. 8.2.1918.
- <sup>58</sup> OC. 8.3.1918.
- <sup>59</sup> OC. 29.3.1918.
- <sup>60</sup> OTC. 29.5.1918.
- <sup>61</sup> OTC. 12.6.1918, 18.6.1918.
- <sup>62</sup> OTC. 26.6.1918.
- <sup>63</sup> OC. 9.8.1918.
- <sup>64</sup> OC. 17.11.1916.
- <sup>65</sup> OC. 8.6.1917.
- <sup>66</sup> OC. 10.5.1918.
- <sup>67</sup> OC. 20.12.1918.
- <sup>68</sup> For a study of the suffrage movement in Oxford, see Katherine Bradley: *Faith, Perseverance and Patience: The History of the Oxford Suffrage and Anti-Suffrage Movements 1870–1930* (Oxford Brookes PhD, 1997)

## 25. The Industrialisation of Oxford

- <sup>1</sup> Fasnacht, R. (1954) *History of the City of Oxford*. For the Great Western Railway, see Robert Sephton's articles on 'How the Railway Came to Oxford' in the *Oxfordshire Local History Association Journal* (1999–2000): Volume 6. No. 2 pp.3–28; No. 3 pp.18–37; No. 4 pp.17–35.

For the impact of the Morris, see Whiting, R. *The Working Class in the 'New Industry' Towns between the Wars. The Case of Oxford*. Oxford D Phil. 1978; Whiting, R. C. *The View from Cowley* (1983); Whiting, R. C. 'Association and separation in the working class' in Hayter, T. and Harvey, D. eds. (1993) *The Factory and the City*.

## 26. Postwar Years. 1918–1919

<sup>1</sup> OC. 29.11.1918.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> OC. 13.12.1918. For Sanderson Furniss' campaign, see Sanderson Furniss (1951) *Memories of Sixty Years* pp.165–168. The memoir focuses on Ruskin College both before and after the war and on Sanderson Furniss's role in the Workers' Education Association. There is no substantive reference to his role in local Oxford politics or the Oxford Labour Party. Prothero, who was a fellow of All Souls and President of the Board of Agriculture, was created Lord Ernle the following year and succeeded by another Tory, the military historian Sir Charles Oman, again defeating Gilbert Murray. There was no Labour candidate in the by-election, although there was an Independent candidate, J. Athelstan Riley, a writer of hymns who was seigneur of Trinity Manor in Jersey.

<sup>4</sup> OC. 14.3.1919.

<sup>5</sup> OC. 10.1.1919.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> OC. 14.3.1919.

<sup>8</sup> OC. 7.2.1919.

<sup>9</sup> OTC. 4.10.1919.

<sup>10</sup> OC. 4.4.1919, 29.8.1919.

<sup>11</sup> OC. 29.11.1918.

<sup>12</sup> OC. 20.6.1919.

<sup>13</sup> OTC. 9.12.1919.

<sup>14</sup> OC. 10.1.1919.

<sup>15</sup> OC. 31.1.1919.

<sup>16</sup> OC. 14.2.1919.

<sup>17</sup> OC. 9.5.1919.

<sup>18</sup> OC. 30.5.1919.

<sup>19</sup> OC. 11.4.1919.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> OC. 2.5.1919.

<sup>22</sup> OC. 4.4.1919.

<sup>23</sup> OC. 23.5.1919.

<sup>24</sup> OC. 11.7.1919.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> OC. 18.7.1919.

<sup>28</sup> OC. 1.8.1919.

<sup>29</sup> OC. 17.10.1919.

<sup>30</sup> OC. 7.11.1919.

<sup>31</sup> OC. 14.11.1919.

<sup>32</sup> OC. 26.12.1919.

## 27. The Foundation and a Collapse of the Oxford Labour Party

<sup>1</sup> OC. 7.11.1919. A branch of the SLP had apparently been formed in Oxford in 1902, when Len Cotton had left the SDF, but there is no local record of any activity.

<sup>2</sup> OC. 28.2.1919.

<sup>3</sup> OC. 26.3.1920.

<sup>4</sup> OC. 26.11.1920.

<sup>5</sup> OC. 21.11.1919.

<sup>6</sup> OTC. 27.8.1919.

<sup>7</sup> OTC. 9.12.1919.

<sup>8</sup> OC. 16.1.1920.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> OTC. 20.1.1920.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> OC. 13.2.1920; OTC. 10.2.1920.

<sup>13</sup> OTC. 17.2.1920.

<sup>14</sup> OC. 20.2.1920.

<sup>15</sup> OC. 12.3.1920.

## 28. The Militant Trades Council, 1920–1921

<sup>1</sup> OC. 5.3.1920.

<sup>2</sup> OC. 2.4.1920.

<sup>3</sup> OC. 14.5.1920; OTC. 11.5.1920.

<sup>4</sup> OC. 30.7.1920. According to Ashley and Saunders (1933) p.31, the bus strike received support from members of the University Labour Club who joined Ruskin students on a march on 29 May in support of the strikers to the house of the bus company manager. The marchers included Tom Wintringham, who appears to have been a member of a group of Bolshevik students at Balliol College who supported the internationalist faction of the British Socialist Party (the Communist Party of Great Britain being formed in July 1920 at a unity conference of the BSP, the Socialist Labour Party and some other small groups). As well as Wintringham, who apparently was a sub-editor of the Labour Club newspaper *New Oxford*, and later became a leading communist and then a leader of the Common Wealth Party during the Second World War, the group included Ralph Fox and Andrew Rothstein. Fox became a leading official in the CPGB and spent much of his life in Russia and worked for the Communist International before being killed fighting for the republicans in the Spanish Civil War. Rothstein was the son of Feodor Rothstein, Bolshevik historian and diplomat. Andrew Rothstein was a leading member of the CPGB until its dissolution in 1991. The three students established an Oxford Hands

Off Russia Committee to protest against British intervention in the Russian Civil Wars. The group distributed leaflets and may have promoted the Trades Council motion, though I have not found any links between the student group and the Trades Council militants such as Wigington and Prickett. Purcell's 2004 biography of Wintringham suggests that the student group used to 'gather at a health food shop on Magdalen Bridge to discuss socialism and read BSP pamphlets' (p.20). Rothstein visited Russia in the summer of 1920. On his return he was expelled from Oxford, apparently at the insistence of George Curzon, who happened to be chancellor of the university as well as Foreign Secretary. Rothstein then worked for the Russian Trade Mission in London, reporting to Nikolai Klyshko and Leonid Krasin. His activities were closely monitored by MI5, as revealed in Phillips (2017) *The Secret Twenties*, pp.53–62. Rothstein later published books on the 1919 soldiers' strikes and the British intervention in Northern Russia. Madeira (2014) quotes Sir Basil Thomson, head of the Special Branch, as commenting that Oxford's 'advocates of revolution were radicals of alien origin' and that the group 'belonged to the glib and raw type of young intellectual' (p.43).

<sup>5</sup> OTC. 28.7.1920., OC. 30.7.1920.

<sup>6</sup> OTC. 10.8.1920, OC. 27.8.1920.

<sup>7</sup> OTC. 25.8.1920, OC. 27.8.1920.

<sup>8</sup> OTC. 14.9.1920.

<sup>9</sup> OC. 17.9.1920, OTC. 14.9.1920.

<sup>10</sup> OC. 24.9.1920, 1.10.1920.

<sup>11</sup> OC. 1.10.1920, OTC. 26.9.1920.

<sup>12</sup> OC. 8.10.1920, OTC. 12.10.1920.

<sup>13</sup> OC. 15.10.1920, OTC. 12.10.1920.

<sup>14</sup> OTC. 19.10.1920, 27.10.1920.

<sup>15</sup> OC. 12.11.1920.

<sup>16</sup> OTC. 24.11.1920.

<sup>17</sup> OTC. 11.1.1921, OC. 14.1.1921, 21.1.1921.

<sup>18</sup> OC. 21.1.1921.

<sup>19</sup> OC. 28.1.1921.

<sup>20</sup> OC. 4.2.1921.

<sup>21</sup> OC. 15.4.1921.

<sup>22</sup> OC. 22.4.1921.

<sup>23</sup> OTC. 8.2.1921.

<sup>24</sup> OC. 11.3.1921.

<sup>25</sup> OC. 15.4.1921.

<sup>26</sup> OC. 13.5.1921.

<sup>27</sup> OC. 8.7.1921.

<sup>28</sup> OC. 1.7.1921.

<sup>29</sup> OTC. 17.8.1921, OC. 19.8.1921.

<sup>30</sup> OTC. 12.10.1921.

<sup>31</sup> OC. 2.9.1921. Mary Stocks was a member of the committee of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. She graduated with a degree in economics from the LSE in 1913. Married to John Stocks, a philosophy lecturer at St John's College, she later became president of Westfield College and was appointed to a peerage in 1960. She also wrote a history of the Workers' Education Association and a biography

of Eleanor Rathbone. John Stocks was adopted as the Labour candidate for the Oxford University parliamentary seat in 1934. In 1937, he became vice-chancellor of Liverpool University, though he died the same year. See Stocks (1970). However, while Mary Stocks' autobiography makes a reference to a dispute over the Oxford University Labour Club inviting Bertrand Russell to speak to a meeting in October 1921, there is no reference to her own involvement in the Oxford Labour Party.

<sup>32</sup> OTC. 22.9.1920. For the political career of Frank Gray, see Fenby (1970) *The Other Oxford: The Life and Times of Frank Gray and his Father*. See also Gray's own memoir: *Confessions of a Candidate* (1925)

<sup>33</sup> OC. 19.11.1920.

<sup>34</sup> OC. 25.2.1921.

<sup>35</sup> OC. 25.3.1921.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> OC. 25.8.1921, 18.11.1921.

<sup>38</sup> OC. 9.9.1921.

<sup>39</sup> OC. 16.9.1921.

<sup>40</sup> OTC. 12.10.1921.

<sup>41</sup> OC. 30.9.1921.

<sup>42</sup> OC. 14.10.1921.

<sup>43</sup> OC. 21.10.1921.

<sup>44</sup> OC. 4.11.1921.

## 29. The Re-establishment of the Oxford Labour Party, 1921–1922

<sup>1</sup> OTC. 9.11.1921, OC. 11.11.1921.

<sup>2</sup> OC. 18.11.1921.

<sup>3</sup> OTC. 7.12.1921.

<sup>4</sup> OC. 27.1.1922.

<sup>5</sup> OC. 28.2.1922.

<sup>6</sup> OC. 3.3.1922.

<sup>7</sup> OC. 14.4.1922.

<sup>8</sup> OC. 5.5.1922.

<sup>9</sup> OC. 26.5.1922.

<sup>10</sup> OC. 9.6.1922.

## 30. Labour Divisions and Liberal Revival, 1922–1923.

<sup>1</sup> OC. 16.6.1922.

<sup>2</sup> OC. 30.6.1922.

<sup>3</sup> OTC. 5.7.1922, 19.7.1922.

<sup>4</sup> OC. 4.8.1922.

<sup>5</sup> OC. 18.8.1922.

<sup>6</sup> OC. 22.9.1922.

<sup>7</sup> OC. 6.10.1922.

- <sup>8</sup> OC. 1.9.1922.
- <sup>9</sup> OC. 22.9.1922.
- <sup>10</sup> OC. 29.9.1922, 27.10.1922.
- <sup>11</sup> OC. 13.10.1922, 20.10.1922.
- <sup>12</sup> OC. 3.11.1922.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> OC. 6.10.1922.
- <sup>15</sup> OC. 17.11.1922.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> OC. 26.1.1923.
- <sup>18</sup> OC. 2.2.1923.
- <sup>19</sup> OC. 22.12.1922, 5.1.1923.
- <sup>20</sup> OC. 16.2.1923, OTC. 14.2.1923.
- <sup>21</sup> OC. 24.11.1922.
- <sup>22</sup> OC. 26.1.1923.
- <sup>23</sup> OC. 26.1.1923, 23.3.1923.
- <sup>24</sup> OC. 20.4.1923.
- <sup>25</sup> OC. 4.5.1923.
- <sup>26</sup> OC. 11.5.1923. Godfrey Elton (not to be confused with the Tory historian Geoffrey Elton) was to publish a biography of Ramsay MacDonald in 1939. He was history tutor to MacDonald's son, Malcolm. Elton was apparently converted to Labour after reading Chiozza Money's *Triumph of Nationalisation*. He stood unsuccessfully as a Labour parliamentary candidate for Thornbury in Gloucestershire in 1924 and 1929. In 1931, he followed MacDonald into the National Labour Party. In 1934, Macdonald raised him to the peerage as Baron Elton of Headington. In 1931, he published *England Arise: A Study of the Pioneering Days of the Labour Movement* and in 1938 an autobiography entitled *Among Others*. See also David Howell's entry on Elton in the *Dictionary of Labour Biography* Vol. 13, pp.108–116.
- <sup>27</sup> OC. 18.5.1923.
- <sup>28</sup> OC. 21.9.1923, 2.11.1923. William Morris, founder of Morris Motors, had apparently considered standing as Conservative candidate. See Fenby (1970) pp.142–149. Morris (later lord Nuffield) however took an active role in the election, supporting Bourne and attacking his former friend Frank Gray.
- <sup>29</sup> OTC. 21.11.1923.

### 31. Parliamentary Contests and the General Strike, 1924–1926

- <sup>1</sup> OC. 25.5.1923.
- <sup>2</sup> OC. 19.10.1923.
- <sup>3</sup> OC. 12.10.1923.
- <sup>4</sup> OC. 25.1.1924. For the unseating of Frank Gray for corruption, see Fenby (1970) pp.150–157.
- <sup>5</sup> OC. 21.3.1924.
- <sup>6</sup> OTC. 21.11.1923.
- <sup>7</sup> OC. 25.4.1924.
- <sup>8</sup> OTC. 23.4.1924.

- <sup>9</sup> OC. 30.5.1924.
- <sup>10</sup> OC. 23.5.1924.
- <sup>11</sup> OC. 30.5.1924.
- <sup>12</sup> Manifesto in Oxford City Library.
- <sup>13</sup> OC. 30.5.1924, 6.6.1924.
- <sup>14</sup> OTC. 11.6.1924.
- <sup>15</sup> OC. 6.6.1924.
- <sup>16</sup> OC. 18.7.1924.
- <sup>17</sup> OC. 11.7.1924.
- <sup>18</sup> OTC. 30.7.1924.
- <sup>19</sup> OTC. 8.10.1924, 22.10.1924.
- <sup>20</sup> OC. 10.10.1924.
- <sup>21</sup> 24.10.1924.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Manifesto in Oxford City Library.
- <sup>24</sup> OC. 24.10.1924.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> OC. 31.10.1924.
- <sup>27</sup> OC. 17.10.1924.
- <sup>28</sup> 14.11.1924.
- <sup>29</sup> OC. 7.11.1924, OTC. 5.11.1924.
- <sup>30</sup> OC. 7.11.1924, 21.11.1924, 28.11.1924. Dr Henry Gillett was a medical doctor with a practice in central Oxford and a prominent Quaker. He later became mayor of Oxford and was one of the founders of OXFAM. His wife was an active Labour party member and stood unsuccessfully for the council as a Labour candidate.
- <sup>31</sup> OC. 30.1.1925, 27.2.1925, 26.3.1925.
- <sup>32</sup> OC. 28.8.1925.
- <sup>33</sup> OC. 6.2.1925, 10.4.1925, 31.7.1925.
- <sup>34</sup> OC. 6.11.1925.
- <sup>35</sup> OC. 16.4.1926.
- <sup>36</sup> OC. 19.6.1925.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> OC. 7.5.1926.
- <sup>39</sup> OC. 24.4.1925.
- <sup>40</sup> OC. 24.6.1925.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> OC. 14.8.1925.
- <sup>43</sup> OTC. 25.3.1925.
- <sup>44</sup> OTC. 25.7.1925.
- <sup>45</sup> OTC. 9.9.1925.
- <sup>45</sup> OTC. 21.10.1925.
- <sup>47</sup> OTC. 16.12.1925.
- <sup>48</sup> OTC. 24.2.1926.
- <sup>49</sup> OTC. 7.4.1926.
- <sup>50</sup> OTC. 2.5.1926, 4.5.1926.
- <sup>51</sup> OTC. 6.5.1926.
- <sup>52</sup> OC. 7.5.1926.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> OC. 14.5.1926.

<sup>55</sup> OTC. 6.5.1926, 7.5.1926, 8.5.1926, 9.5.1926, 10.5.1926, 11.5.1926, 12.5.1926. See also Williams, P. (1979) *Hugh Gaitskell*, pp.17–19.

<sup>56</sup> OTC. 13.5.1926.

<sup>57</sup> OTC. 14.5.1926.

<sup>58</sup> OTC. 19.5.1926. A detailed narrative of the General Strike in Oxford is given in Robert Sephton (1993) *Oxford and the General Strike*. There is a reference to the involvement of University Labour Club members in the strike in Ashley and Saunders (1933) *Red Oxford*, p.40. This refers to a fight between pro- and anti-strike students at propaganda meeting, which became known as 'the battle of Hannington Hall' (presumably a pun on the NUWM leader, Wal Hannington and the meeting place of Headington Hall).

### 32. Labour in Retreat, 1926–1932

<sup>1</sup> OTC. 6.10.1926.

<sup>2</sup> OC. 5.11.1926.

<sup>3</sup> OTC. 6.10.1926, 20.10.1926.

<sup>4</sup> OTC. 12.1.1927, 9.2.1927.

<sup>5</sup> OTC. 9.3.1927, 20.4.1927.

<sup>6</sup> OTC. 12.5.1927.

<sup>7</sup> OTC. 15.6.1927, 7.9.1927.

<sup>8</sup> OC. 4.11.1927.

<sup>9</sup> OTC. 2.3.1928.

<sup>10</sup> OTC. 4.4.1928.

<sup>11</sup> OTC. 11.5.1929.

<sup>12</sup> (OT) 22.3.1929, 29.3.1929.

<sup>13</sup> OT. 3.5.1929.

<sup>14</sup> OT. 17.5.1929.

<sup>15</sup> OT. 24.5.1929.

<sup>16</sup> OT. 31.5.1929.

<sup>17</sup> OT. 9.7.1929.

<sup>18</sup> Whiting, op cit. p.236.

<sup>19</sup> OT. 7.11.1930.

<sup>20</sup> OT. 2.10.1931.

<sup>21</sup> OT. 4.9.1931.

<sup>22</sup> OT. 2.10.1931.

<sup>23</sup> OT. 23.10.1931.

<sup>24</sup> OT. 9.10.1931, 16.10.1931.

<sup>25</sup> OT. 21.12.1931.

<sup>26</sup> OT. 28.10.1932.

<sup>27</sup> OT. 10.3.1933, 17.3.1933.

### 33. The Rebirth of Militancy – Unemployment and Fascism, 1932–1934

<sup>1</sup> OT. 28.10.1932. The October Club was established in December 1931, with the object of ‘the study of communism in its world social, economic and cultural aspects.’ The club membership rose from 150 in early 1932 to nearly 300 by the end of the year. According to Ashley and Saunders (1933), p.44, it was mainly a discussion group rather than an active communist organisation. Speakers at meetings included H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw, Ivor Montague, film critic (and later recipient of a Lenin Peace Prize) and the former Communist MP for Battersea, Shapurji Saklatava.

There are a number of memoirs which refer to the student left in Oxford in the 1930s – on the Oxford communists, there is Healey (1989) and Toynbee (1980), on the social democrats, see Mayhew (1987).

<sup>2</sup> OT. 4.11.1932.

<sup>3</sup> OT. 18.11.1932, 2.12.1932 9.12.1932.

<sup>4</sup> OT. 10.2.1933.

<sup>5</sup> OT. 12.5.1933.

<sup>6</sup> OT. 4.8.1933, 8.12.1933, 30.3.1934.

<sup>7</sup> OT. 27.4.1934.

<sup>8</sup> OT. 8.2.1935.

<sup>9</sup> OT. 6.11.1936.

<sup>10</sup> OT. 17.2.1933.

<sup>11</sup> OT. 17.2.1933, 20.10.1933.

<sup>12</sup> OT. 17.2.1933.

<sup>13</sup> OT. 8.9.1933.

<sup>14</sup> OT. 12.5.1933.

<sup>15</sup> OT. 5.5.1933.

<sup>16</sup> OT. 19.5.1933.

<sup>17</sup> OT. 12.5.1933.

<sup>18</sup> OT. 10.11.1933.

<sup>19</sup> OT. 26.5.1933.

<sup>20</sup> OT. 8.9.1933.

<sup>21</sup> OT. 3.11.1933.

<sup>22</sup> OT. 10.11.1933.

### 34. The Rebuilding of the Oxford Labour Party, 1934–1935

<sup>1</sup> OT. 20.10.1933.

<sup>2</sup> OT. 3.11.1933.

<sup>3</sup> Whiting, pp.256–257; Exell, A. *Morris Motors in the 1930s*. Part 2 pp.88–89. An important biographical article by Geoff Andrews on Lazarus has recently been published in the *History Workshop Journal* – see Andrews (2017). For the Cowley strike, see also Dudley Edwards (1979) ‘1934. How trade unionism came to Pressed Steel.’

<sup>4</sup> Whiting, pp.349–350.

<sup>5</sup> Headington Labour Party minutes – 22.1.1935, 7.2.1935; Whiting, p.351: OT. 21.2.1936.

- <sup>6</sup> East ward Labour Party minute book starts January 1936. Reports from wards to Labour Party executive committee 22.4.1936. Minutes of Oxford Labour Party General Committee (GC) 23.5.1935.
- <sup>7</sup> Oxford Labour Party annual report for March 1935 to February 1936.
- <sup>8</sup> OT. 2.11.1934. For Smewin see: [http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/1836\\_1962/smewin\\_edgar\\_1946.html](http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/1836_1962/smewin_edgar_1946.html)
- <sup>9</sup> OT. 15.2.1935.
- <sup>10</sup> OT. 26.4.1935.
- <sup>11</sup> OT. 8.11.1935.
- <sup>12</sup> Manifesto in Oxford City Library.
- <sup>13</sup> OT. 15.11.1935.

### 35. The Cutteslowe Walls and Florence Park, 1935–1936

- <sup>1</sup> For a first-hand account see Exell part 2 pp.51–58, on which most of this chapter depends. For a sociological study, see Collinson, P. *The Cutteslowe Walls. A Study in Social Class* (1965).
- <sup>2</sup> Leaflets in Oxford City Library.
- <sup>3</sup> OT. 3.5.1935.
- <sup>4</sup> Leaflet in Oxford City Library.
- <sup>5</sup> OT. 17.5.1935.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> *Communist Review*, August 1935. Arthur Wynn was a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge and moved to Oxford to pursue his studies. An active member of the Communist Party, he at one time shared a flat with Abe Lazarus. He had married a German communist to help her escape from Nazi Germany. He was the author, with his second wife Peggy Moxon, of a book *Tory MP*, published pseudonymously under the name ‘Simon Haxey’ by the Left Book Club in 1939, which was a study of the financial interests of the conservative establishment. After the war, Wynn became a senior civil servant – as director of mining safety research at the Ministry of Fuel and Power and later at Tony Benn’s Ministry of Technology. In 2009, it was revealed that Wynn was ‘agent Scott’ a Soviet agent who had reported to the KGB on Oxford communists in 1936 and was apparently active until 1941, although it is unclear who else he recruited from the group of Oxford communists and sympathisers. He himself was apparently recruited by the photographer and Soviet agent Edith Tudor-Hart, who was a member of the ‘Cambridge spy-ring.’ See Andrews (2017) *Abe Lazarus*. See also Andrews (2015) and Davenport-Hines (2018) which both include references to Wynn. In February 2018, it was revealed that another member of the Oxford University Communist Party, David Floyd, who was a friend of Wynn and Moxon, and who had been arrested after an anti-war protest in 1933, had spied for the Soviets when he had been on the staff of the British Embassy in Moscow in the 1940s. Floyd later became a journalist on the *Daily Telegraph*. (*Sunday Times*, 25 February 2018). In 1963, Floyd published a book on the Sino-Soviet split: *Mao Against Khrushchev*. There is also a brief reference to Oxford student communists in Deakin (2015) *Radiant Illusion? Middle Class Recruits to Communism in the 1930s*, pp.34–35.
- <sup>8</sup> OT. 24.5.1935, 31.5.1935, 7.6.1935.

- <sup>9</sup> OT. 17.1.1936, 24.1.1936, 11.12.1936.  
<sup>10</sup> OT. 3.5.1935, 10.5.1935, 27.5.1935, 11.10.1935.  
<sup>11</sup> Report and Leaflets in Oxford City Library.  
<sup>12</sup> OT. 16.6.1939, 23.6.1939, 30.6.1939, 21.7.1939.  
<sup>13</sup> OT. 28.7.1939.  
<sup>14</sup> OT. 11.8.1939, 18.8.1939.

### 36. United Front, Fascism and Local Politics, 1935–37

- <sup>1</sup> Minutes of Oxford Labour Party general committee (GC) 3.6.1935.  
<sup>2</sup> Minutes of Oxford Labour Party executive committee (EC) 19.6.1935.  
<sup>3</sup> EC. 27.6.1935.  
<sup>4</sup> GC. 7.7.1935.  
<sup>5</sup> GC. 9.10.1935.  
<sup>6</sup> EC. 20.10.1935.  
<sup>7</sup> GC. 20.10.1935.  
<sup>8</sup> OT. 8.11.1935.  
<sup>9</sup> Headington Labour Party minutes 7.3.1935, 4.7.1935, 5.9.1935. For Crossman's political apprenticeship in Oxford, see also: Howard, A (1990) *Crossman*, chapters 4 to 7.  
<sup>10</sup> Headington Labour Party minutes 12.12.1935.  
<sup>11</sup> OT. 8.11.1935.  
<sup>12</sup> Minutes of the Independent Group of councillors on Oxford City Council. 9.12.1935.  
<sup>13</sup> EC. 17.11.1935.  
<sup>14</sup> GC. 12.12.1935.  
<sup>15</sup> Manifesto in Oxford City Library.  
<sup>16</sup> OT. 6.12.1935.  
<sup>17</sup> GC. 12.12.1935.  
<sup>18</sup> GC. 15.1.1936.  
<sup>19</sup> EC. 1.1.1936.  
<sup>20</sup> GC. 15.1.1936.  
<sup>21</sup> GC. 26.2.1936.  
<sup>22</sup> Annual Report for March 1935 to February 1936.  
<sup>23</sup> GC. 27.3.1936.  
<sup>24</sup> Annual Report opcit.  
<sup>25</sup> OT. 21.2.1936.  
<sup>26</sup> OT. 21.2.1936, 27.3.1936.  
<sup>27</sup> OT. 6.3.1936.  
<sup>28</sup> OT. 8.5.1936.  
<sup>29</sup> OT. 3.4.1936.  
<sup>30</sup> OT. 5.6.1936.  
<sup>31</sup> EC. 22.7.1936.  
<sup>32</sup> GC. 19.8.1936.  
<sup>33</sup> GC. 16.9.1936.  
<sup>34</sup> Copy courtesy of the late councillor Mrs Dora Carr. Produced in full in appendix.  
<sup>35</sup> OT. 16.10.1936.

- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> OT. 30.10.1936.
- <sup>38</sup> OT. 6.11.1936.
- <sup>39</sup> OT. 21.2.1936.
- <sup>40</sup> OT. 6.3.1936.
- <sup>41</sup> OT. 29.5.1936. The narrative of the growth of the BUF in Oxford and the response of the Labour Party and Communist Party is covered in Renton, D. (1996). From Renton's analysis, the BUF membership within Oxford seems to have been mainly within the student community, although some Conservative councillors attended some BUF meetings. Renton also quotes an unpublished memoir on 'Blackshirts' by Arthur Exell as stating that the anti-Fascist Unity committee initiated by the Oxford Communists split with the Communists and Labour Party and some trade unions, arguing that the BUF needed to be combatted, while 'liberal' elements such as the Oxford Peace Council argued that the meetings should be boycotted.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> OT. 17.7.1936.
- <sup>44</sup> OT. 10.7.1936.
- <sup>45</sup> OT. 26.6.1936.
- <sup>46</sup> see Pakenham, F. *Born to Believe* (1951) p.83; Skidelsky, R. *Oswald Mosley* (1975) pp.353, 412–414.
- <sup>47</sup> OT. 13.11.1936, 27.11.1936, 22.1.1937, 29.1.1937, 12.2.1937, 26.2.1937, 12.3.1937.
- <sup>48</sup> OT. 4.11.1938.
- <sup>49</sup> OT. 17.2.1939.
- <sup>50</sup> OT. 4.9.1936, 11.9.1936.
- <sup>51</sup> See Pimlott, B. *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (1977); Eatwell, R. *The United Front*. Oxford D Phil (1975). The Unity Manifesto is reprinted in G. D. H. Cole, *The People's Front*. (1937).
- <sup>52</sup> EC. 4.2.1937.
- <sup>53</sup> Letter in Headington Labour Party minute book.
- <sup>54</sup> GC. 18.2.1937.
- <sup>55</sup> Headington Labour Party minutes. 8.3.1937.
- <sup>56</sup> GC. 18.3.1937.
- <sup>57</sup> OT. 2.4.1937.
- <sup>58</sup> OT. 28.5.1937.

### 37. Labour on the City Council, 1934–1939

- <sup>1</sup> OT. 11.1.1935, 8.2.1935, 22.2.1935.
- <sup>2</sup> OT. 11.1.1935, 12.4.1935.
- <sup>3</sup> OT. 11.1.1935.
- <sup>4</sup> OT. 8.3.1935.
- <sup>5</sup> OT. 6.3.1936.
- <sup>6</sup> OT. 12.6.1936.
- <sup>7</sup> OT. 9.10.1936.
- <sup>8</sup> OT. 8.5.1936.
- <sup>9</sup> OT. 27.11.1936.

- <sup>10</sup> Minutes of the Independent Group of Councillors. 16.11.1934.  
<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 18.1.1935.  
<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 17.7.1935.  
<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 20.9.1935.  
<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 9.12.1935.  
<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 18.5.1936.  
<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 18.9.1936.  
<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 6.11.1936.  
<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 9.7.1937.  
<sup>19</sup> Labour group minutes start 21.11.1938.  
<sup>20</sup> OT. 9.4.1937, 30.4.1937, 11.6.1937.  
<sup>21</sup> OT. 7.1.1938, 4.2.1938, 11.2.1938.  
<sup>22</sup> OT. 8.4.1938.  
<sup>23</sup> OT. 6.5.1938.  
<sup>24</sup> Labour group minutes. 21.11.1938.  
<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 11.1.1939.  
<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 7.2.1939, 6.3.1939.  
<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 20.3.1939.  
<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 31.7.1939.

### 38. The 1938 By-election and After

- <sup>1</sup> See Pakenham, *Born to Believe* op cit; Eatwell, pp. 251–254; Gordon Walker, P. (1991) pp. 71–94  
<sup>2</sup> OT. 23.4.1937.  
<sup>3</sup> OT. 30.4.1937.  
<sup>4</sup> OT. 7.5.1937., EC. 3.5.1937.  
<sup>5</sup> Eatwell. pp 247–249., OT. 30.4.1937.  
<sup>6</sup> OT. 21.5.1937, 28.5.1937, 4.6.1937.,  
<sup>7</sup> GC. 13.5.1937, East ward LP minutes. Eatwell op cit.  
<sup>8</sup> OT. 18.6.1937.  
<sup>9</sup> OT. 15.10.1937.  
<sup>10</sup> OT. 22.10.1937.  
<sup>11</sup> OT. 29.10.1937, 5.11.1937, 26.11.1937. EC. 13.3.1938.  
<sup>12</sup> OT. 25.3.1938.  
<sup>13</sup> OT. 6.5.1938.  
<sup>14</sup> OT. 27.5.1938.  
<sup>15</sup> GC. 14.3.1938. Detailed accounts of support in Oxfordshire for republican Spain, and biographies of individuals with Oxfordshire connections who went to Spain to support the republicans are given in Farman, Rose and Wooley (2015).  
<sup>16</sup> GC. 26.5.1938, 23.6.1938.  
<sup>17</sup> GC. 28.4.1938.  
<sup>18</sup> EC. 3.6.1938.  
<sup>19</sup> EC. 9.5.1938., Minutes of Headington Labour Party. 2.5.1938, 13.6.1938.  
<sup>20</sup> OT. 26.8.1938.  
<sup>21</sup> OT. 9.9.1938.

- <sup>22</sup> OT. 16.9.1938.
- <sup>23</sup> OT. 23.9.1938.
- <sup>24</sup> OT. 30.9.1938.
- <sup>25</sup> OT. 7.10.1938, Minutes of Headington Labour Party. 3.10.1938.
- <sup>26</sup> OT. 14.10.1938.
- <sup>27</sup> OT. 21.10.1938.
- <sup>28</sup> OT. 21.10.1938; *Picture Post*. 5.11.1938.
- <sup>29</sup> See also Pakenham op cit; Scott, D – A. D. *Lindsay*; Whiting, p. 377, Eatwell, p. 255. Gordon Walker diary entry for 8 October 1938.
- <sup>30</sup> Minutes of NEC election sub-committee quoted by Whiting. See also Gordon Walker diary entry for 12 October 1938.
- <sup>31</sup> OT. 14.10.1938.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid; Eatwell.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> This was an informal meeting so there were no minutes. Gordon Walker's account is in his diary entry for 13 October 1938. See also OT. 14.10.1938; NEC report on by-election quoted by Whiting and Eatwell.
- <sup>35</sup> NEC report. Gordon Walker diary entry for 14 October 1938.
- <sup>36</sup> GC. 15.10.1938. Gordon Walker diary entry for 15 October 1938.
- <sup>37</sup> See Eatwell, p.258.
- <sup>38</sup> Accounts of the election campaign in *Picture Post*. 5.11.1938; Eatwell, pp.259–260.
- <sup>39</sup> OT. 21.10.1938.
- <sup>40</sup> *Daily Herald*. 21.10.1938, quoted by Eatwell.
- <sup>41</sup> Leaflet in Oxford City Library.
- <sup>42</sup> OT. 21.10.1938.
- <sup>43</sup> OT. 28.10.1938. Gordon Walker diary entry for 20 October 1938.
- <sup>44</sup> *New Statesman*. 5.11.1938, quoted by Eatwell.
- <sup>45</sup> OT. 27.1.1939.
- <sup>46</sup> GC. 10.11.1938.
- <sup>47</sup> GC. 10.11.1938, 24.11.1938.
- <sup>48</sup> GC. 24.11.1938.
- <sup>49</sup> GC. 2.12.1938.
- <sup>50</sup> GC. 20.1.1939. Gordon Walker's diary entry for 9 November 1938.
- <sup>51</sup> GC. 2.2.1939. Gordon Walker's diary entry for 16 February 1939.
- <sup>52</sup> GC. 8.2.1939.
- <sup>53</sup> GC. 22.2.1939.
- <sup>54</sup> OT. 3.3.1939, 17.3.1939.
- <sup>55</sup> GC. 30.3.1939.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup> GC. 22.2.1939.
- <sup>58</sup> GC. 13.4.1939.
- <sup>59</sup> OT. 12.5.1939.
- <sup>60</sup> GC. 25.5.1939.
- <sup>61</sup> GC. 22.6.1939.
- <sup>62</sup> GC. 20.7.1939.
- <sup>63</sup> GC. 7.7.1939.
- <sup>64</sup> C. 28.9.1939, 27.10.1939.

## PART 4

This section is based on minutes of the Oxford Labour Party, together with annual reports and other papers. The minutes of the GC and EC for 1946–1960 are missing; the surviving papers are held in the offices of the Oxford Labour Party. Coverage of Oxford politics in the local press since the war has been less full than previously, except during election campaigns. The paragraphs relating to 1946–1960 depend heavily on the reporting in the *Oxford Times*. The paragraphs relating to the Campaign for Democratic Socialism rely on Seyd, P., *Factionalism within the Labour Party: A Case Study of the Campaign for Democratic Socialism*. M Phil. Southampton, 1968. Hayter and Harvey (1993) focus on working relations and trade union politics at Cowley in the 1980s. The essay by Robert Waller in Whiting (1993) focuses on parliamentary contests and takes the narrative to 1990 but has a short section on municipal politics. For trade union militancy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, see Hayter and Harvey (1993) especially chapter 6 by Anne-Marie Sweeney on community politics, and chapter 8 by Teresa Hayter, which considers the relationship between Cowley trade unions, the city council and the Oxford Labour Party. For Raphael Samuel and the History Workshop movement, see Scott-Brown, S. (2017).

Biographies of the first three Labour councillors who became mayors are on the Oxford City Council website:

Edgar Smewin

[http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/1836\\_1962/smewin\\_edgar\\_1946.html](http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/1836_1962/smewin_edgar_1946.html)

Marcus Lower: [http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/1836\\_1962/lower\\_marcus\\_1955.html](http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/1836_1962/lower_marcus_1955.html)

Frank Knight

[http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/1836\\_1962/knight\\_robert\\_1957.html](http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/1836_1962/knight_robert_1957.html)

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*Clarion* (Bodleian Library)  
*Labour Leader* (Bodleian Library)

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 1935–1946. (Ruskin College Library)  
 1960–1980. (Oxford City Labour Party offices)  
 Annual Reports. 1935–1980. (Oxford City Labour Party  
 offices)  
 Minutes of the Headington Labour Party. (courtesy of  
 the late Mrs Dora Carr).

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# Index

## A

- Abingdon 7, 109, 210  
Abingdon, Earl of 5, 32  
Ablett, Noah 123, 251  
Acland, Richard 206  
Adams, Dr 48  
Administrative Reform  
    Association 37  
Adonis, Andrew 240  
Albania 166  
Albert, Prince 28  
Alden, councillor 19  
Aldermaston march 227  
Aliens Act (1905) 81  
Allen, Rev 43  
Allen, Mr (Trades Council) 98  
Allen, G H (vehicle workers) 104  
Allen, Mr (paperworkers) 146,  
    161, 163–4  
Allotments Association 70  
Allotments Act 83  
All Saints church 104  
Alma Place (ILP office) 111, 115  
Amalgamated Society of Engineers  
    (AEU) 89, 229, 235  
American embassy 228  
Amery, Leo 80  
Amos, John 134–8, 144, 147, 149  
Anderson, W C MP 133, 137  
Anderton, Leslie 225, 227  
Andrews, David 174  
Annette's hairdressers 232  
Anti- Corn Law League 23–4  
Arch, Joseph 54  
Arkell, Mr 106  
Armstead, councillor 135–6  
Arnott, John 104, 108, 110  
Arrowsmith, Pat 227  
Association of Cinematographic and  
    Allied Technicians 222  
Asylum Workers Union 146  
Atkinson, Norman 235  
Attlee, Clement 199, 214, 218, 250

- Austria 199  
 Aylesbury 200–1, 208, 219
- B**
- Babbington, Thomas 39  
 Bacon, councillor Fred 63  
 Backhurst, Mr (postal workers) 146  
 Baldry, Lieutenant 131  
 Baldwin, Oliver 171  
 Baldwin, Stanley 80, 168  
 Balfour, Arthur 109  
 Balfour, Honor 198–200  
 Balkan wars 123  
 Ball, Sidney 74, 81, 90, 92, 94–5,  
 97–8, 106, 109, 122, 131, 134,  
 137, 251  
 Ballinger, Mr 106  
 Ballantyne, J 115  
 Ballot 32, 50  
 Ballot Bill (1879) 50  
 Ballot Act (1872) 49  
 ballot petition (1837) Appendix 3:  
 262–3  
 Banbury 19, 109, 113, 115, 145,  
 166, 198–9, 240  
 Banting, J 7, 146  
 Barcelona 200  
 Barnes, G N MP 89–90  
 Barnett, Samuel 122  
 Barnett House Oxford 123  
 Barrett, Francis 180  
 Barrett, H 108  
 Bartlett, councillor 19  
 Barratt Brown, Arthur 17, 1781  
 Batt, Mr 169  
 Batty's amphitheatre 21  
 Bayley, W G 177  
 Bayliss, Mr (ILP) 105, 108, 111,  
 114, 121, 134, 138, 145–6, 153,  
 158, 161, 163  
 Baxett, Henry 87  
 Beales, Edmund 45  
 Bear, D A 84  
 Beasley, Philip 58  
 Beckett, John 192  
 Beckett, councillor W 226  
 Beesly, G S 51, 103, 169  
 Beechcroft, Mr (Ruskin student) 152  
 Bellinger, Mr (Trades Council) 151  
 Belloc, Hilaire 80  
 Bentley, E C 80  
 Beggs, T 31  
 Belcher, H 146  
 Belfast strike (1906) 110  
 Belt, George 104  
 Benn, John Williams 91  
 Benn, Tony 221, 234  
 Bennett, Captain E 145  
 Bertie, Peregrine MP 5  
 Bevan, Aneurin 209, 222  
 Beveridge, William 107, 250  
 Beveridge report 217–8  
 Bevin, Ernest 214, 220  
 Bicester 73, 109  
 Biggs-Davidson, John 214  
 Binham, Walter 101, 114–5, 130,  
 169, 171  
 Birchnall, Miss 146–7, 157  
 Birmingham 44  
 Birmingham, Bishop of 107  
 Birmingham Liberal Association 62  
 Birmingham Political Union 19  
 Birmingham Reform League 74  
 Black Horse Yard 85  
 Blackbird Leys 240  
 Blackstone, William MP 32  
 Blackwell's bookshop 80, 237  
 Blackwood, Nicola MP 241  
 Blake, F E 105, 107–9  
 Blair, Tony 240, 251  
 Blanc, Louis 120  
 Bland, Hubert 80  
 Blandford, Marquis of 27, 32  
 Blatchford, Robert 85  
 Blleloch, David 131, 297  
 (note 24:16)

- Blenheim Palace 111  
 Blunkett, David 238  
 Bondfield, Margaret MP 108, 141  
 Bolton, Mr (ILP) 103  
 Bolton, Mrs E 146  
 Bookbinders Society 105, 146  
 Botter, Mr (Trades Council) 98  
 Bourne, Robert MP 164, 167–8,  
     175–6, 180–1, 201  
 Bowden, Mr 170  
 Bowerman, Mr (ILP) 103  
 Bowerman, Sarah 169–170, 174,  
     191, 202, 218, 220  
 Bowie, Duncan 236, 238  
 Bowles, Mr (railwaymen) 170, 173,  
     179, 199, 203, 206, 212  
 Bracknall, J 106  
 Bradlaugh, Charles MP 73  
 Bradbury, Mr (Fabians) 80  
 Braddock, Bessie 223  
 Bradshaw, Mr 97  
 Bramley, Fred 110  
 Brayne, W 113  
 Brewer, Mr (Trades Council) 93  
 Bricklayers Union 146  
 Bright, John MP 23, 47  
 Brighton 166  
 Briscoe, Adam 119–120  
 British Socialist Party 120–1,  
     123, 129, 137, 145, 301–2  
     (note 28:4)  
 British Occupied Zone in  
     Germany 218  
 British Union of Fascists 177, 191,  
     310 (note 36:41)  
 Brize Norton air base 227–8  
 Broadhurst, Charles 91–3, 100–1,  
     103, 105–6, 123  
 Brockliss, John 24  
 Brockway, Fenner 167  
 Bromley, Percy 226, 233  
 Brown, C 146  
 Brown, Donovan 186, 188  
 Brown, G G 80  
 Brown, Fred 108, 150, 188, 191, 195  
 Brown, Gordon 240  
 Brownjohn, Mr (Typographical  
     Association) 83, 98, 100,  
     105–6, 114  
 Brundrot, D 145  
 Brunner, Mr 26  
 Brougham, Lord 9  
 Browning, (Alderman) 17, 22–3,  
     29, 58  
 Bryce, James 252  
 Buchanan, Henry 75  
 Buckell, (Alderman) 91  
 Buckle, David 230, 239  
 budget crisis (1910) 118–9  
 building labourers strike (1872) 53  
 builders strike (1913) 119  
 Building Labourers Union 91  
 ‘Bullingdon boys’ 117  
 Bullock, Mr (plasterers) 155,  
     161, 177  
 Burgess, Guy 213  
 Burr, Mr (Socialist League) 77  
 Burrows, Montagu 61, 286–7  
     (note 11:40)  
 Burt, Thomas MP 58  
 Burton, Francis MP 5  
 Bush, Mr (Trades Council) 206  
 bus strike (1920) 149, 301  
     (note 28:4); (1937) 198  
 Butler, Miss G V 71  
 Butler, Josephine 58  
 Butler, W 7, 9  
 Butler, councillor 91  
 Buy, Eric 93, 95, 97, 100, 109,  
     146–7, 151, 155
- C**
- Callaghan, James 235, 239  
 Cambridge spy ring 213–4  
 Camoys, Lord 23  
 Campaign ATOM 239

- Campaign for Democratic Socialism  
 (CDS) 228–230  
 Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament  
 (CND) 227–230, 239, 241  
 Campaign for Social and Economic  
 Advance 239  
 Campbell, John 193  
 Cameron, David 240  
 Canterbury, Archbishop of 28  
 Cape of Good Hope 70–1  
 Cardwell, Edward MP 34–40, 42,  
 48–9, 55–8, 65–6  
 Carfax Assembly Rooms 191  
 Carlyle, Rev A J 80, 90–2, 94,  
 98–102, 106–7, 114, 116,  
 121–2, 124, 129, 134, 137,  
 146–7, 154, 163, 211, 247,  
 249, 251  
 Carpenter, Edward 81  
 Carpenters and Joiners Union  
 146, 150  
 Carr, (Alderman) 42, 45–46,  
 48–50, 56  
 Carfax 14, 22, 51  
 Carter, Mr (railwaymen) 133  
 Carter, Alderman Rev John 80,  
 134–6, 143, 147  
 Carter, Mrs 155  
 Castle, Barbara 223  
 Castle, Robert 43  
 Castle, Joseph 48, 50, 53  
 Cattle, Mr (ILP) 108  
 Cavell, J 42  
 Cecil, Lord Hugh 141  
 Census (1901) 71–2  
 Census (1911 and 1921) 139  
 Central Girls School 168  
 Central Labour club 131–2, 155  
 Chalgrove 112  
 Chamberlain, Joseph 50  
 Chamberlain, Neville 199–200,  
 203, 207  
 Chandler, the Oxford ‘Blondin’ 58  
 Chandler, W 146  
 Charles, Frederick 106, 108, 110,  
 293 (note 19:32)  
 Charlton-on-Otmoor 111  
 Charterville, Minster Lovell 29  
 Chartism 246  
 Chartist national convention 19  
 Chaundy, Richard 19, 26, 32–3, 279  
 (note 4:25)  
 Chequers Inn 13, 53  
 Cherwell river 84  
 Cherwin, Mr (vehicle workers) 151  
 Chesham, Guy 192  
 China 200  
 Chinese war 36  
 Chinese slavery in South  
 Africa 100, 105  
 Chitty, Joseph MP 59–62  
 Christ Church Meadow Road  
 225–6  
 Christian Socialist League 80  
 Christian Social Union 80–1, 90,  
 106–7, 121, 245, 247  
 Church of England Temperance  
 Society 123  
 Church, Arthur 230  
 Church, Major 167  
 Churchill, Randolph 206  
 Citizens Advice Bureau 210  
 City and County Pensions  
 Committee 133  
 City Development Plan 231  
 City Emergency committee  
 129, 133  
 City Restaurant, Cornmarket 108  
 Clarendon (University) Press 54, 72,  
 124, 139–140  
 Clarendon Assembly rooms 75, 78  
 Clarendon Hotel 178  
*Clarion* 85, 86, 110  
 Clarion Cycling Club 85, 110–2  
 Clark, R (Ruskin) 104  
 Clarke, Mr (Labour Party) 186–7

- Clarkson, Councillor George 180,  
184, 188, 195
- Claycross Council 235
- Clayton, Joseph 73, 80–1, 289  
(note 14:47)
- Cleaver, Mr (tailors) 100–1, 103
- Clerical Disabilities Act (1870) 47
- Cliffe, councillor C 226
- Clifford, Jabez 101–2, 123
- Coach and Horses 70
- Coal strike (1912) 119
- Cobden, Richard MP 23
- Cole, G D H 116–7, 131, 168, 171,  
176, 189, 199, 208, 250, 297–8  
(note 24:17)
- Colegrove, Miss 108
- Coles, Mr (Trades Council) 136
- Coley, John 145
- college servants 142
- Collier, Mr 169
- Collins, Canon 230
- Comfort, Alex 227
- Commercial Road chapel 23
- Commissioners into Municipal  
corporations (1833) 4–5
- Commonweal* 78, 79
- ‘Common Cause’ 227
- Common Market 234
- Communist Party 131, 151, 163,  
165, 170, 173, 179, 182–194,  
198–9, 210, 212–3, 217,  
220–1, 223, 226, 233, 247
- Compositors Society 54
- Congo reform 130
- Connolly, James 88
- conscientious objectors 130–2, 138
- conscription 130
- conservatism 247
- Contagious Diseases Act (1864) 58
- Cook, J Stewart 219
- Cooper, councillor 91
- Co-operative Congress  
(Swansea) 137
- Co-operative Assembly Rooms,  
Cowley Road 143
- Co-operative Education  
Committee 132, 146
- Co-operative Electoral Council 146
- Co-operative Men’s and Women’s  
Guilds 132
- Co-operative Society 133, 135–7,  
142–3, 150, 240
- Corn Exchange 45, 48, 53, 55,  
57–9, 87, 177
- Corn Laws 20, 22–4
- Cornmarket 22, 54, 86, 88
- Corporation of Oxford 3–4
- Cotton, Leonard 85–8, 290  
(note 16:1, note 16:17)
- Council housing 134, 138, 142, 225,  
230, 238
- Coulton, Mr 11
- Council of Action (1920) 150–1;  
(1926) 171–2; (1927) 173;  
(1937) 198
- Council of Action against War and  
Fascism (1933) 178
- County Hall 236
- Cowley 58, 212, 218, 223
- Cowley and Iffley Labour  
Party 174–5, 180–1, 186–8,  
190, 226
- Cowley, Mr 130
- Cox, Richard 7
- Criminal Law Amendment Act  
(1871) 58
- Cripps, John 178
- Cripps, Stafford MP 178, 183,  
206–7, 209–210, 218
- Croft, Mr (Labour Party agent)  
166, 188
- Crook, Harry 180, 185
- Crosland, Tony 214, 228, 234, 252
- Crossman, Richard 184, 188, 190,  
195–7, 202–6, 210, 212, 214,  
232, 249, 251

Crowther, W 146  
 cruise missiles 238  
 Crutch, Mr (engineers) 157, 175  
 Crystal Palace 39  
 Curran, Pete MP 115  
 Currill, George 175  
 Curtis, councillor 91  
 Cutteslowe 140  
 Cutteslowe Wall 180–5, 212, 225  
 Czechoslovakia 202

## D

*Daily Herald* 131, 206  
 Dallas, George 203–4, 210  
 Dallin, Thomas 61  
 Dalton, Hugh 192, 208  
 Darby, J 146  
 Davies, Harold 224  
 Davies, Ivor 201–2, 206, 225,  
 227, 231  
 Davies, J (ILP) 108  
 Davies, O S MP 227  
 Deakin, Arthur 222  
 Deane, Dr 48–49  
 Deeley, Mr (paperworkers) 146  
 Defence of the Realm Act  
 (1914) 131  
 Demobilised soldiers (1918) 142  
 Dent, Arthur 222, 224, 226, 229  
 Derby 61  
 Deutscher, Isaac 250  
 Devlin, Bernadette 233  
 Devonport 68  
 Dicey, A V 252  
 Dickens, Charles 37  
 Dickson, Lt-Col 45  
 ‘Diogenes’ 42–43  
 disestablishment of Church of  
 England 59, 76  
 Dobney, Rev 20, 22, 30  
 Dobson, Mr (LP agent) 220  
 Dockers Union 7  
 Dodd, councillor 81, 90

Dodds, Annelise MP 240  
 Donaldson, E L 803  
 Dore, Edmund 39  
 Dowley, E 168  
 Driberg, Tom 223  
 Druids order 45, 51, 55, 66  
 Druids Head 77  
 Drysdale, Miss 173  
 Dudley, C (solicitor) 20, 22, 26  
 Dudman, Roger 229  
 Duff, Peggy 227  
 Duggan, Rev 54, 83  
 Durbin, Evan 252  
 Dutt, R P 131–2  
 Dyer, Mrs 146

## E

Eagleston, councillor 51  
 Early Closing Amendment Act  
 (1901) 105  
 Early, Patrick 198, 202  
 Eagle Iron Works 139–140  
 East Oxford Community  
 Centre 238  
 East Oxford Conservative Club  
 70, 238  
 East Oxford Liberal Club 70,  
 99, 115  
 East Oxford Middle School 235  
 Eastwyke Farm Road 225–6, 235  
 Eaton, Deodatus 7, 13  
 Eden, Anthony 225  
 Eden, George MP 5  
 Edmonds, J 146  
 education 50–51, 71, 231, 236  
 Edwards, Dudley 185, 200, 206  
 Elderton, Albert 234  
 Electric Light Company 116  
 Electrical Trades Union 188, 223  
 Elizabeth, Princess 194  
 Elm Tree 77  
 Elton, Godfrey 164, 212, 251, 304  
 (note 30:26)

Elvin, George 222, 224–5, 250  
 Elvin, Lionel 222  
 Engine Drivers and Firemens’  
     Union 114  
 Engineers Union 146, 150  
 English, councillor 89, 91, 94–5,  
     99, 102  
 Ennals, John 227, 229  
 Ensor, R C K 80  
 Erle, Sir William MP 17–18, 21, 27,  
     41, 64  
 Etty, John 174–5, 202, 211  
 European Parliament election  
     (1979) 237  
 Evacuees Co-ordination  
     Committee(1939) 210  
 Evans, G 146  
 Evans, Richard 135–6  
 Examination Schools  
     occupation 251

**F**

Fabian Research Department 131  
 Fabian Society (university) 80–1,  
     90, 108, 131, 245, 247, 298  
     (note 24:17)  
 Fabian Society (national) 228  
 Fagg, Bill 226  
 Faringdon, Lord 224  
 Farm, Mrs 146  
 Faulkner, Charles 74, 76–9, 252  
 Faulkner, E J 223  
 Faulkner, James Josiah 14, 19–20,  
     26–9, 31–2, 34–6, 65, 246,  
     249, Appendix 4: 264–5,  
     280–2 (note 6:6, note 7:3)  
 Federation of Women Workers 152  
 First World War 129–138  
 Fitchett, Keith 240  
 Flanders, Allan 230  
 Fletcher, Rev 54, 74, 92–3, 95, 164  
 Florence Park 140, 180–5, 212  
 Floyd, David 213, 308 (note 35:7)

Fogarty, Mr (Labour Party) 220  
 Folly Bridge hotel 236  
 Foot, Michael 178, 224  
 Foot, M R D 224  
 Ford, councillor Len 226–7  
 Ford, Mrs 157  
 Foresters friendly society 71, 93  
 Forrest, Mr (Trades Council) 151  
 Foster, Mr (railwaymen) 190–1  
 Foster, councillor 206, 225  
 Fox, Mr 96  
 Franchise Act (1884) 62, 70  
 franchise demonstration 76  
 franchise reform Appendix 1:255–6  
 Francis, Mr (Trades Council)  
     92–3, 95  
 Franco, General 200  
 Free Public Library 83  
 free trade 41, 141  
 freehold land movement 31  
 French occupation of the Ruhr 163  
 Friends of the Soviet Union 178  
 Frimbley, Mr (Trades Council) 107,  
     109, 114, 121, 132, 134–7, 144,  
     146–7, 149–151, 155, 160, 162  
 Fry, Christopher 166–7  
 Furby, Mr (ILP) 103  
 Fyffe, Charles 62, 286  
     (note 11:39)

**G**

Gaitskell, Hugh 171, 228, 251–2  
 Gallop, Geoff 251  
 Gallop, John 120, 149, 151, 169  
 Galpin, (Alderman) 69  
 Gardiner, Mr (gasworkers) 136  
 Garment workers 154  
 Garnsey, rev David 200  
 Garrett, Roland 180, 187  
 Gas, Municipal and General Workers  
     Union 134, 139, 142, 146,  
     162–3  
 Gaselee, Serjeant 36–8

- Gawthorpe, Miss 108  
 Geldhart, W 134  
 General Strike (1926) 171–2,  
 211–2, 245, 248, 306  
 (note 31:58)  
 Geobey, Mr (TGWU) 179  
 George, councillor Amos 136  
 George, Henry 73, 75–6  
 George, Mr (Labour Party) 187  
 German rearmament 223  
 Gibbs, Mr 84  
 Gibbs, councillor Edmund 184,  
 226–230  
 Gibbs, councillor Olive 225–7, 230,  
 232–5  
 Gibbs, councillor R W M 184, 192,  
 195–7, 202, 206  
 Giles, J 113–4, 124  
 Gillett, councillor Dr Henry 144,  
 146, 168, 190–1, 196, 305  
 (note 31:30)  
 Gillett, Mrs 161  
 Gillians, Arthur 233, 235  
 Gladstone, William 42, 48, 58, 60  
 Glasgow 85, 115  
 Glasier, John Bruce 104  
 Gloucester Green 23, 54, 60, 81,  
 93, 152  
 Glyn, Andrew 237  
 Goddard, H 146–7, 149–150, 152  
 Goldsworthy, Mr (engineers) 97–8,  
 141, 146–7  
 Gomm, Miss 121, 135  
 Goodenough, Mr 145  
 Good Templars 57  
 Goode, Mr (Trades Council) 109  
 Goodman, comrade 111  
 Goold, James 42, 45, 48, 55  
 Goold-Adams, R 191  
 Gordon Walker, Patrick 177, 180–2,  
 184, 187, 189–193, 198, 201,  
 203–211, 213–4, 228, 249, 251  
 Gould, Barbara 204  
 Graham, Sir James 25–6  
 Graham, R 130  
 Grant, Mr 92  
 Gray, Frank MP 62, 123, 155, 159,  
 162, 164–5, 168, 175, 201,  
 211, 253  
 Gray, Patrick 240  
 Gray, Walter 71, 141, 155  
 Gray, William 84, 98, 100, 123,  
 135–6, 142, 169  
 Great Hadley estate 185  
 Great Western Railway  
 Company 105, 139  
 Green, John 8, 31, 34  
 Green, T H 41, 46, 50, 54, 65  
 Green Party 241  
 Greenham Common 239  
 Grenfell, J G 81  
 Grey, Earl 9  
 Griffiths, Jim MP 221  
 Grubb, Isaac 19, 21–25, 30, 33–4,  
 40, 45, 62, 65, 252, 280  
 (note 4:29)  
 Grundy, councillor 135  
 Guggenheim, Mr (Socialist  
 League) 76  
 Guild of St Matthew 80  
 Gurdon, A 146  
 Gurden, Mr (bricklayers) 134  
 Gurney, Mr (ILP) 103  
 Gypsy Lane 140
- ## H
- Haden Guest, Leslie 80, 168  
 Hall, Alexander MP 57–9, 61–2, 69  
 Hall, (Alderman) 90, 97  
 Hall, W 106  
 Halmos, Tony 240  
 Hamilton, Henry 180, 187–8  
 Hammersmith 104  
 Hammersmith Socialist Society 81  
 ‘Hampden John’ 13  
 Hands Off Russia campaign 149

- Hannington, Wal 174, 177  
 Hanger, Mr (railwaymen) 161  
 Harcourt, William MP 5, 23  
 Harcourt, Edward 47–49  
 Harcourt, Sir William 47–8, 51,  
     55–6, 5–60, 62, 65, 102, 246  
 Harcourt, Vernon 50  
 Harney, George Julian 29  
 Harris, Evan MP 241  
 Harris, Henry 95–6, 98, 100–1,  
     105–6, 109, 113–6, 119–121,  
     123–4, 134–8, 146, 149–152,  
     155, 160–1  
 Harris, Mrs E 146  
 Harris, Miss (paperworkers) 164  
 Harris, M 14  
 Harris, Tom (vehicle workers) 146,  
     200, 206  
 Harrison, Brian 245  
 Harrison, John 53  
 Harrod, Roy 202  
 Harrow 167–8  
 Harse, Mr (Socialist League/  
     SDF) 77, 92  
 Harwood, H 130  
 Hastings, councillor 20  
 Hathaway, Mr 182  
 Hawkins, George 82–4, 123, 137,  
     289 (note 15:1)  
 Hawley, W 187–8, 195  
 Haydock, councillor 220  
 Hazell, Mr (railwaymen) 132, 134  
 Headington 110, 218, 223  
 Headington Hill Hall 71  
 Headington Labour Party 169, 174,  
     180–1, 189, 193, 217, 227  
 Headington Poor Law Union 26  
 Headington quarrymen 117  
 Headington Silver Prize Band 200  
 Headlam, Stewart 80  
 Headley Way 140  
 Health of Towns Act (1847) 32  
 Healey, Denis 214, 227, 233, 252  
 Heath, Edward 206, 234, 251–2  
 Heath, Mr (Foresters)  
 Heath, Mr (Labour Party) 186  
 Heffer, Eric 234  
 Henderson, Arthur MP 145) 93,  
     167, 222  
 Hemmings, Joseph 24  
 Henley, Lord 23  
 Herring, Mr 164  
 Heslin, Ted 237  
 Hester, councillor 19  
 Hewitt, Mrs 164  
 Heynes, Miss 156–7, 161  
 Hickman, John 7  
 Hicks, Mr 168  
 Higgins, Mr (Jericho House) 21  
 Higgins, George 141  
 Highholme, H 103, 108, 110  
 Hill, Christopher 252  
 Hind, G 146  
 Hine, Mrs 147  
 Hines, Bill 73–4, 81, 85, 87, 92  
 Hinksey 58  
 Hird, Denis 87, 95, 108, 123  
 Hirst, Stanley 204  
 History Workshop 239  
 Hitler, Adolf 178, 199, 202, 217  
 Hobhouse, Leonard 80  
 Hodgson, Mr (British Socialist  
     Party) 120  
 Hoffman, P C 108  
 Hogg, Quintin MP (later Lord  
     Hailsham) 202, 206, 218, 221  
 Holden, J 146  
 Holder, Mr 170  
 Holt, Rev Raymond 203–5, 208  
 Holywell Music Hall 78  
 Holmes, Mr (transport  
     workers) 164  
 Homer, Tony 237  
 ‘Homes fit for Heroes’ 142  
 Hopper, Mr (Trades Council) 92–3,  
     97–8

- Horne, Mr 200  
 Horrobin, Mr (railway clerks) 134–5, 142, 144–6, 149, 162, 171  
 Horticultural Society 70  
 Hough, Mr (railwaymen) 149, 164  
 House of Lords 10, 46, 76, 118  
 Housing Act (1890) 90  
 Housing Act (1980) 238  
 Housing Aid Centre 235  
 housing campaign 142  
 Housing estates 140  
 Housing Finance Act (1972) 235  
 Howell, Denis 228  
 Howell, George 50  
 Howse, Mr (broker) 21  
 Hughes Hughes, William MP 5–17, 21, 64, 66, 253  
 Hughes, (Alderman) 50, 58  
 Hughes, Mr 169  
 Huhne, Chris 241  
 Huish, Dai 180  
 Hulekins, Miss 121  
 Hume, James MP 30–1  
 Humphrey, F C 106–8, 125  
 Humphries, Mr (Trades Council) 109  
 Hungary 226  
 hunger marchers 177  
 Hunt, Mr (bricklayers) 146  
 Hurcumb, Mr 19, 21, 34  
 Hyde, Mr (Workers Union) 144, 150–1, 156, 158, 160–1  
 Hyde Park 46–7  
 Hydrogen Bomb, the 227  
 Hyndman, Henry 74–5, 87
- I**
- Ibson, Mr 184  
 Ida, John 178–9, 199–200  
 immigration 237  
 Imperial League 177  
 Imperial preference 141  
 income tax 28, 35–6  
 Independent Labour Party (ILP) 95, 103–110, 113–121, 124–5, 145, 151, 165, 192–3, 247  
 Independent Nuclear Disarmament Committee 232  
 India Office 131  
 International Marxist Group (IMG) 237–8  
 International Monetary Fund 239  
 International Socialists 232  
 Iffley church 104  
 Iffley 175  
 Immigration Act (1962) 232  
 Industrial Relations Act (1971) 235  
 Ingram, Fred 220, 224–7, 230  
 Interdenominational Council for Social Reform 134  
 International Working Mens' Association (First International) 52  
 Ireland 149, 163  
 Irish Coercion Bill 12  
 Irvine, A J MP 199  
 Israel 221
- J**
- Jackson's Oxford Journal* 8–10, 71  
 Jacotet, Julian 240  
 Jamaica 41, 154  
 Japan 200  
 Jarvis, Mr (transport workers) 161, 164  
 Jay, Douglas 228, 252  
 Jenkins, Hugh 221  
 Jenkins, Roy 214, 228, 232, 239, 252  
 Jenner, Mr (Trades Council) 230  
 Jensen, Mr (Trades Council) 186, 193  
 Jericho 39, 76, 139, 155, 168, 233  
 John Bull 23  
 Johnsey, Mr (loco-engineers) 146

- Johnston, Terry 236  
 Johnstone, Mr 51  
 Jones, Ben 149  
 Jones, George 230  
 Jones, Mervyn 227  
 Joyce, William 192  
 Joyce, Professor 178  
 Judd, G (vehicle builders) 146–7,  
     157  
 Judge, Martin 85  
 Junior Carlton Club 61  
*Justice* 74–5, 87  
 Juvenile Employment and Aftercare  
     Committee 133
- K**
- Kaye, Joseph 131–2  
 Keefe, Mr (engineers) 109, 134–5,  
     137, 142, 144–5, 150–1, 153,  
     156–7, 164  
 Keen, Mr (Trades Council) 161,  
     169, 173–4  
 Keens, Vincent 178  
 Keep Left 214, 232  
 Keeling, Ernie 221  
 Kelmscott Manor 111  
 Kempson, Mr (woodworkers)  
     137, 155  
 Kent, Bruce 241  
 Kettl, Mr 171  
 Kidlington 54  
 Keir Hardie, James MP 73, 84, 116,  
     240, 288 (note 14:3)  
 Kinchin, councillor 220, 225–6  
 King, A 146–7  
 King, C 149  
 King, Charles 169  
 King, E 137  
 King, William 92, 95, 98–102, 105,  
     114, 123, 132, 136–7, 141, 144,  
     147, 150, 153, 171  
 King Edward Street 56  
 Kingerlee, councillor 90–1, 113
- Kingston and Surbiton Labour  
     Party 210  
 Kinkaid, Jimmy 184  
 Kinley, Mr (Trades Council) 98  
 Kirk, Bessie 187, 189, 198  
 Kirkwood, David MP 170  
 Kirtlington 76  
 Klugmann, James 213, 252  
 Knight, Frank 218–9, 222,  
     226, 231  
 Korean War 222
- L**
- Labour Advisory Committee 137  
*Labour versus the Caucus* 190,  
     Appendix 6: 268–276  
*Labour and the New Social  
     Order* 145  
 ‘Labour Centre’ group 229  
 Labour Electoral Committee 93  
*Labour Leader* 103, 116  
 Labour Party League of Youth 178,  
     200, 224  
 Labour Representation  
     Committee 103  
*Labour Songs for the Use of Working  
     Men and Working Women*  
     (1893) 74  
 Labourers Union 114  
 Ladon, A 146  
 Lambert, Mr 43  
 Lambeth 240  
 Lancashire 44, 177  
 land nationalisation 73–5  
 Langford, S 185  
 Langston, James MP 5–6, 9–11,  
     21–3, 31, 33, 36, 40  
 Lansbury, George MP 81, 87, 131,  
     142, 166, 250  
 Latchmore, councillor 19–20  
 Latham, George 204–5, 208  
 Laverick, Mr 92  
 Lawson, Mr (busmen) 203, 206

- Lazarus, Abe 179, 182–5, 189–191,  
193, 200, 202, 206, 212, 218,  
221, 252, 307 (note 34:3)
- Le Gros Clark, Mrs 203
- Lea, E (Clarion Cycling Club)  
110–1
- League of Nations 141, 181
- Leahy, Mick 233
- Leake, H 25
- Ledger, Arthur 227
- Lee, Robert MP 5
- Lee, Sir Sidney 166
- Lee, Mr (Trades Council) 97
- Leeds 44
- Leeds socialist conference  
(1917) 133
- Lees-Smith, Hastings 95–6, 109,  
291 (note 18:1)
- Left Book Club 192, 207, 209
- Lenin 160
- Leopold, Prince 57
- Lestor, Joan 234
- Lewis, John 58
- Lewis, Sidney Kersland 221
- Liberal 300 (Oxford Liberal  
Association) 76
- ‘Liberty Press’ 130
- Licensing Bill (1871) 55
- licensed trade 5
- Liddle, Roger 240
- Lindsay, A D 80, 168, 202–210,  
213, 252
- Lindsay, Kenneth 166–8, 211–2
- Linton Lodge hotel strike 236
- Lister, Miss 152
- ‘Little Charter’ 30
- Littlewood, Mr 186
- Liverpool 47
- Lloyd George, David 118, 141, 155
- Lloyd George, Megan 206
- Lockhart, John MP 5, 9, 27
- Loco-engineers Union 146
- London 43, 46
- London County Council 91
- London Police Court Mission 123
- Longford, Lord (see Pakenham,  
Frank)
- Lowe, councillor 58
- Lower, Kathy 180
- Lower, Marcus 220, 222–3, 226–7,  
229–231
- Loynd, Mr 173, 178, 180
- Luard, Evan MP 231–6,  
239–241, 253
- Lucas, (Alderman) 135
- Lucas, Caroline 241
- Lucy Ironworks 53
- Ludlow, Fred 119–121, 123, 130,  
142–7, 149–150, 152–3,  
155–7, 160–6, 168–9, 171,  
173–6, 211, 250, 252
- Ludlow, Mrs 146, 155, 164, 169
- Lynam, Mr (Labour Party) 187
- ## M
- Macdonald, Alexander MP 58
- Macdonald, James Ramsay MP 80,  
175, 212
- MacIntosh, Ronald 214
- Mackenna, Mr (Liberal  
candidate) 176
- Mackay, Frank 153
- Maclean, Donald MP 12–15, 18,  
21, 27, 64
- Maclean, Donald (spy) 213
- Maclean, Ian 240
- Macmillan, Harold 206, 228
- Macmurray, John 251
- Madden, Max 234
- Magistrates (Justices of the  
Peace) 137
- Maidenhead Inn 12
- Maidstone 89
- Magdalen bridge closure 231
- Mahon, John 79
- Makgill, Lady 178

- Malcolm , Mr (Tory parliamentary candidate) 21–22
- Mallam, councillor 29, 50, 56
- Mallalieu, J P W 224
- Mallock, Miss J 80
- Manby, Mr (Trades Council) 151–2
- Manchester 44
- Manchester College 80
- Mann, Tom 177
- Mantle, George 46
- March, Fred 163, 166, 173
- Margate 173
- Marlborough, Duke of 5–6, 27–8
- Markham, Mr 166
- Marquand, Hilary MP 222
- Marriott, J A R MP 141, 155, 162
- Marshall, Alfred 75
- Marston Ferry link road (northern bypass) 231
- Martyrs Memorial 85, 87, 104, 115, 225
- Marx, Karl 75
- Marx club (university) 79
- Master and Servants Act (1867) 58
- Mathieson, J 224
- Matthews, Mr (Oxford Reform League) 42–3, 45–6, 48, 55–7
- Maxton, James 193
- Maxwell, Robert 239
- May, Theresa 240
- Mayday festival 110
- Mayday rally 164, 170, 174, 227
- Mayhew, Christopher 214, 252
- Maynooth, Ireland 25
- McCarthy, Bill (later Lord McCarthy) 229
- McCarthy, Margaret 239
- McGivan, Alec 240
- McIntyre, Peter 237
- McKenzie, Mr (bakers) 146
- Meadows, councillor 98
- Meeking, councillor 90–1
- Mellor, William 192–4
- ‘Men of Harlech’ 62
- Mental Deficiency committee 164
- Middleton, Jim 203–4
- Mikardo, Ian 222, 234
- Militant 237
- Miller, Mr (Trades Council) 149–151, 162
- Miners’ strike 153
- Minister of Education 236
- Ministry of Health 182–4
- Ministry of Labour 137
- Ministry of Munitions 131
- Mission Hall, Magdalen Road 84
- Mitre Inn 18, 40
- Moffatt, Mr (Trades Council) 169
- Monck, Lord 37
- Moon, Robert 168, 175
- Moor, Miss 174
- Moral Force Charter Association 29
- Morel, Edmund 130
- Morgan, E 146–7
- Morgan, Lyla MP 241
- Morning Star* 44
- Morrell family 71, 116, 287 (note 13:11)
- Morris, William 74, 76–7, 81, 250
- Morris, William (Lord Nuffield) 139
- Morris, Mr (tailors) 134, 160
- Morris, R 146, 157
- Morris Motors 139, 157, 175, 179, 248
- Morris’s (Pressed Steel) strike (1934) 179–180, 182 (1937) 198
- Morrison, Albert 130–1
- Morrison, Herbert 199, 217, 221, 223
- Mosley, Cynthia 171
- Mosley, Oswald 178, 191–2
- Moss, councillor 184–5
- Moxley, Mr (Trades Council) 193, 206

Munday, Mr 9  
 Munich crisis (1938) 202–3, 213  
 Municipal Corporations Act  
 (1835) 14  
 Municipal elections 14, 20–22,  
 82–4, 91, 99, 105–6, 113–5,  
 119–120, 142–4, 153, 155,  
 157, 161–2, 169, 173–5,  
 180, 190–1, 218, 220–1,  
 223–4, 233–4, 236, 238, 241,  
 Appendix 6: 267  
 Municipal Housing  
 Association 90–3, 125  
 Munro, J A R 80  
 Murphy, Mick 180  
 Murray, Albert 130  
 Murray, Basil 192  
 Murray, Gilbert Professor 141, 192,  
 202, 252  
 Music Room, Holywell 42

**N**

Nares, George MP 5  
 Narroway, Mr 92  
 National Agricultural Workers  
 Union 54, 73  
 National Education League 40  
 National Front 236, 251  
 National Government (1931–  
 40) 175, 200, 210  
 National Insurance 217  
 National Labour Party (1931) 212  
 National Liberal Federation 62  
 National Minority Movement  
 170–1, 174  
 National Reform Union 40  
 National service committee 132–3  
 National Service League 13–0  
 National Unemployed Workers  
 Movement (NUWM)  
 163, 177  
 Neate, Charles MP 36–40, 42, 45–7,  
 65–6, 253

Nelson, Sir Arthur 188  
 Newgate prison 5  
 New Inn 3  
*New Statesman* 207, 212  
 Nicholls, F 146  
 Nigerian civil war 233  
 Nimmo, Henry 236  
 Nobes, Mr (railwaymen) 136, 146  
 No-Conscription Fellowship 131  
 nonconformists 25  
 Norman, Anthony 218  
 Norreys, Lord 23  
 North, Mr (Trades Council)  
 149–150, 158–9, 162–3  
 North, Thomas 15, 20, 43, 45, 62  
 North Atlantic Treaty Organisation  
 (NATO) 228–9, 238–9  
 North Oxfordshire 145  
 Northcliffe, Lord 130  
 Northern Ireland 233  
 Nuneham Courtenay 47  
 Northumberland 153

**O**

Oakshott, Matthew 240  
 October Club (university) 177–8,  
 307 (note 33:1)  
 Oddfellows friendly society 51, 55,  
 66, 71, 93  
 Ogden, William 42, 76  
 Old Masonic Lodge 12  
 Ollerenshaw, L R 80  
 Olivier, Sidney Sir 80, 154, 170  
 Oman, Sir Charles 60–1, 286  
 (note 286:33)  
 Operative Bakers Union 133,  
 142, 146  
 Organ, Frank 115  
 Orme, Stan 234  
 Osberton Radiators 139  
 Osborne judgement (1909) 119  
 Osney 97  
 Owen, David 240

- Owen, Ron 224–228
- Oxford, bishop of 132
- Oxford and District Joint Labour Educational and Social Committee (1916) 133
- Oxford and District Socialist Union 73, 81
- Oxford Chronicle* 16, 71
- Oxford City Council Independent Group 195–6
- Oxford City Council Labour Group 195–7
- Oxford Committee for Racial Integration 232
- Oxford Conservative Association 20, 136
- Oxford Constitutional Association 48
- Oxford Cooperative Society 92
- Oxford Council of Labour 218, 225
- Oxford Co-ordinating committee for Peace and Democracy (1938) 199–201, 208
- Oxford county borough (1889) 82
- Oxford East constituency 240–1
- Oxford Election Commission (1880–1) 69–70
- Oxford Election Tribunal (1923) 165
- Oxford Free Speech Fund 87
- Oxford Labour Party 146–8, 156 ff
- Oxford Labour Representation Committee 113, 119
- Oxford Left Theatre Guild 200
- Oxford Liberal Party 27
- Oxford Liberal Association 48, 50, 55–6, 74, 246
- Oxford Herald* 13–16
- Oxford Magazine* 79, 122
- Oxford Medical Mission, Bermondsey 142
- Oxford Military Service Tribunal 130–2
- Oxford Municipal Labour Representation Association 95–103, 105, 109, 113–4, 125
- Oxford Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association 31
- Oxford Polytechnic 236
- Oxford Poor Law Guardians 25–6, 81, 137
- Oxford Poor Law Union 25
- Oxford Radical Association (1885) 76
- Oxford Reform Club (1873) 56–7, 74–5
- Oxford Reform Committee (1830) 9
- Oxford Reform League (1866) 43–8, 246
- Oxford Republican Club 52
- Oxford School Board 50
- Oxford Socialist League 77–9, Appendix 5 266
- Oxford student trade union liaison committee 239
- ‘Oxford spy ring’ 213
- Oxford Student Christian Movement 130
- Oxford Times* 71
- Oxford Trades and Labour Council 82 ff
- Oxford Trade Union Defence Committee (1927) 17
- Oxford Unity Committee (1937) 193
- Oxford University Democratic Socialist Club 252
- Oxford University Fascist Club 178
- Oxford University German Club 178
- Oxford University Labour Club 145, 155, 166, 171, 173, 175–6, 178, 182, 207, 230, 245, 252

- Oxford University Liberal Club 178, 250
- Oxford University National Socialist Club 192
- Oxford University parliamentary election (1918) 141
- Oxford University Socialist Society 131–3
- Oxford Vietnam Peace Movement 232
- Oxford Vigilance Committee (1914) 134
- Oxford West and Abingdon constituency 240–1
- Oxford Young Socialists 232–4, 237
- Oxfordshire 23, 54
- Oxfordshire Agricultural Association 24
- Oxfordshire County Council 144, 235
- ‘Oxfordshire against the cuts’ 239
- Oxfordshire and Berkshire Federation of Trades Councils 171
- P**
- Packwood, Mr (TGWU) 179
- Page Wood, Sir William MP 27, 31, 33–4, 41
- Paintin, Harry 104, 109
- Pakenham, Elizabeth 184, 202, 220–1
- Pakenham, Frank (later Lord Pakenham, Lord Longford) 185, 191–3, 196–200, 202, 208–210, 212, 214, 217–8, 250–2
- Palmerston, Lord 36–7
- Panes, Nick 233
- Pankhurst, Sylvia 145
- Paperworkers Union 146, 151
- Paris commune 79
- Parker, Mr (ILP) 103
- Parker, Max 222
- Parker, Mrs Hoosen 178
- Parliamentary elections: (1820) Appendix 2: 257; (1830) 9–10; (1833 by-election) 12; (1835) 13–4; (1837) 64, Appendix 2: 258–9; (1841) 21–2; (1846) 27; (1857) 36–9; (1868) 48, 65, Appendix 2: 260–1; (1874) 57–9; (1880) 59–60; (1885) 62; (1906) 109; (1918) 141; (1910) 118–9; (1918) 141; (1922) 162; (1923) 164, 166–7; (1924) 168–9; (1929) 174; (1931) 176; (1935) 180–1; (1938 by-election) 201–9, 248; (1945) 217–8; (1950) 221; (1951) 221–2; (1955) 225; (1959) 227; (1964) 231; (1966) 231; (1970) 234; (February 1974) 235; (October 1974) 235; (1979) 236; (1983) 240; (1987) 240; (1992) 241; (1997) 241; (2017) 241
- Parliamentary reform 8–9, 42–4
- Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association 31–2
- Pask, Miss M 146
- Parsons, Mr (carpenters) 134, 136–7, 156, 160
- Partridge, J A 74–7, 87
- Patey, councillor 134
- Patten, John MP 236, 241
- Payne, councillor (Banbury) 115
- Peace Conference (Versailles) 142
- Peace Negotiation Committee 132
- Pearce, Mr 106
- Pease, Edward 80
- Peel, Sir Robert 13, 20
- Penny, Mr (Trades Council) 168, 171
- Penston, Mr 218
- Peoples Congress for Peace (Vienna) 224

- Pergamon Press strike 239  
 Permissive Bill (1868) 48  
 Perryman, Mr 184  
 Peters, Henry MP 5  
 Peterson, Alexander 231  
 Pethwick Lawrence, Frederick 167  
 Phelps, Rev Lancelot 137, 196  
 Philips, Mr (furnishing trades) 156–7  
 Philby, Kim 213  
 Phillips, Morgan 222–3  
 Piatsky, Leon 214  
 Pickstock, Frank 226, 228–230, 233, 235  
 Pilcher, Rev 71  
 Pinner, Mr (Trades Council) 149  
 Piper, Mr (postmen's federation/ILP) 95, 100, 103, 109, 118, 123, 146–7, 151–2, 155, 157, 160, 169  
 Plat Mills, John MP 220  
 Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Society 71  
 Plimsoll, Samuel MP 61  
 Poll books 64–5, 257–261  
 Plowman, Thomas 33, 36, 49, 61–2  
 Plummer, P (asylum workers) 146  
 Poor Law Amendment Act (1834) 25  
 Poor Law Amendment Bill (1844) 26  
 Poor Law Commissioners 26  
 Poor Law Commission Minority Report (1909) 125  
 Poor Law reform 117  
 'Popular Front' 198–210, 213, 251  
 Port Mahon 70  
 Porter, Fred 232  
 Portsmouth 168  
 Postgate, Raymond 131, 297 (note 24:16)  
 Postmen's Federation 100, 146, 151  
 Powell, R 144, 206  
 Powell, Professor York 74–5, 81, 288 (note 14:7)  
 Power, John 235, 241  
 Pratley, Mr 146  
 Pressed Steel, Cowley 139  
 Preston, Mr 45  
 Prickett, Hector 145–7, 150, 155, 163, 173, 193, 198–206, 208–210, 212  
 Prince of Wales 85  
 Price, Bob 241  
 Price, Mark 224  
 Price, Mrs 224  
 Pritchard, Mrs 144  
*Progress and Poverty* 75  
 Prothero, Rowland 141  
 public works programme 115–6, 177  
 Pulzer, Peter 230  
 Pusey, Mr 12
- ## Q
- Quaker Society 227  
 Quelch, Harry 81, 87  
 Quelch, Lorenzo 87  
 Quelch, Mr (Trades Council) 93
- ## R
- Radcliffe Infirmary 192  
 Railway Servants/Railwaymen's Union 105, 146, 151, 154  
 Railway Clerks Union 146  
 railway dispute (1919) 142  
 Rainbow, Mr (carpenters) 151  
 Randall, (Alderman) 51  
 Randolph Hotel strike 236  
 Ray, councillor James 136  
 Rayman, Woolfe 131  
 Reading 7, 23, 173  
 Record, Rev 188  
 Recruiting Tribunal 130  
*Red Oxford* 80, 245  
 Red Shirt movement 178

- Rees, Noah 123  
 Reform Act (1832) 10, 31  
 Reform Act (1867) 47, 49, 246  
 Reform Bill (1830) 9  
 Reform Bill (1866) 42–3  
 Reform Association 17, 19  
 Reform League 43–5  
 Reform Club 18  
 reform of church and state 12  
 ‘Reformer’ 40  
 Rent Act (1957) 227  
 Rent Increase Prevention Act  
     (1915) 138  
 Republicanism 52, 73  
 Rhodesia 233  
 Richards, Mr 52  
 Richards, Anita 237  
 Richardson, Mr (loco-engineers/  
     Labour Party) 109, 134, 173,  
     199–200, 203, 206, 208–210  
 Ridley, Jasper 214  
 Right to Work committee  
     115, 125  
 Roberts, Evan 189, 193, 198, 200,  
     202–3, 219, 231  
 Roberts, G H MP 120  
 Roberts, Ray 203, 206  
 Roberts, W 103, 108  
 Robertson, Ernest 169  
 Robinson, Thomas 9  
 Robinson, Mr (Socialist  
     League) 76, 78, 92  
 Rodgers, Bill 228, 239  
 Rommily, Esmond 214  
 Rose Hill 140  
 Rose, Saul 231  
 Rothstein, Andrew 301–2  
     (note 28:4)  
 Royal Commission on Corrupt  
     Electoral Practices 61–2  
 Rugby 225  
 Runacres, Herbert 131, 297  
     (note 24:16)
- Ruskin College 87, 94–5, 104, 120,  
     123, 132, 141, 146, 155, 171,  
     197, 212, 222, 239, 245,  
     247–8, 252  
 Russell, Lord John 9, 31  
 Russell, Frank 51  
 Russell, Mr (TGWU) 157, 161  
 Russell Club (university) 74–5, 78  
 Russia 142, 149  
 Russian Freedom Committee 145  
 Russian Revolution (1905) 81, 110  
 Rutherford, Mr 205, 208–9
- ## S
- Sadler, Charles 10, 21, 29, 32–3,  
     42, 6  
 St Aldate’s 19, 51, 65  
 St Aldate’s Debating Society 108  
 St Clement’s 3, 13, 22, 26, 65, 76,  
     85, 249  
 St Clement’s Coffee House 71  
 St Ebbe’s 19, 58, 65, 69, 142, 154,  
     197, 230, 249  
 St Giles’ 26, 54, 60, 69, 88, 152–3,  
     164, 171, 179, 200, 227  
 St John, General Frederick MP 5  
 St John’s College 74  
 St Martin’s Church 54  
 St Michael’s Hall 203  
 St Paul’s church 54  
 St Scholastica’s Day riot 3  
 St Thomas’ 69, 249  
 Salter, councillor 91  
 Salvation Army 872  
 Samuel, Herbert 73, 100  
 Samuel, Raphael 239  
 Samson, Mr (Trades Council)  
     93, 134  
 Sanderson Furniss, Henry 141,  
     146, 154, 159–160, 300  
     (Note 26:3)  
 Sanderson Furniss, Mrs 155, 157,  
     159–160, 166, 174

- Sandys, Duncan 225  
 Sassenbach, Herr 121  
 Scarborough 47  
 Scarborough conference 229  
 Schnadhorst, Francis 62  
 Sedgwick, Peter 232  
 Septennial Act 11  
 Shakespeare, Mr (carpenters) 136–7  
 Shanks, Michael 228  
 Shaw, George Bernard 80  
 Shayle, Mr 12  
 Shekleton, Miss E 80  
 Sheen, Richard 7  
 Shepherd, George 165, 201,  
 203–5, 208  
 Shepherd, William 118, 120, 123,  
 129, 136–7, 141–4, 147,  
 151–3, 155, 157–8, 160–2  
 Sherbourne Arms 14  
 Shinwell, Emmanuel 222  
 Shop Assistants Union 96, 105,  
 108, 142  
 Shrewsbury pickets 235  
 Simon, Sir John 192  
 Simpkin, Mr 146  
 Sinclair, Mr (SDF) 85  
 Sinn Fein 238  
 Skinner, F 185  
 Slade, Mr (Trades Council) 146, 151  
 Slatter, William 7, 20, 22  
 Slavery 32, 41  
 Slesser, Henry MP 149  
 Smart, councillor 135  
 Smewin, Edgar councillor 176,  
 180, 188, 195, 197, 203, 208–9,  
 219–220, 225  
 Smith, Andrew MP 240–1  
 Smith, Fred 146–7, 160, 174, 180  
 Smith, George 145  
 Smith, Goldwin 43, 47–8, 284  
 (Note 8:40)  
 Smith, Guy 152  
 Smith, Miss 50  
 Smith, Norman 132  
 Smith, Mr (Trades Council) 135–6,  
 151, 169, 173  
 Smith, Sam 146, 174, 180, 189, 196,  
 202, 208, 217–9  
 Smyth, J (Jarrow) 110  
 Snow, Mr (Trades Council) 92–3,  
 95–9  
 Snowden, Philip MP 95, 212  
*Social Conditions in Oxford*  
 (1912) 71  
 Social Democratic Federation  
 (SDF) 74, 79, 85–8, 123,  
 145, 247  
 Social Democratic Party (SDP) 239,  
 241, 253  
 Socialist Labour League 232  
 Socialist Labour Party 88, 145–6  
 Socialist League (1880's) 78–9,  
 107, 247  
 Socialist League (1937) 192–3  
*Socialist Outlook* 224  
 Soddy, Professor 163  
 South Midlands Labour Movement  
 conference 217  
 South Oxford Middle School 236  
 South Oxford nursery school  
 occupation 236, 239  
 South Park 140, 170  
 South Wales, migration from 139  
 South Wales Miners Union  
 123, 153  
 Southwark 47, 74  
 Spanish Carlists 18  
 Spanish Civil War 199–200, 208,  
 311 (note 38:15)  
 Speirs, Sherriff 38, 42, 51  
 Spence, Rev 108  
 Spencer, Mr 179  
 Spencer, Lord Robert MP 5  
 Squires, Mr (engineers) 206  
 Stansfeld, D3 142, 146  
 Stapleton, Sir T MP 5

Star Hotel 24  
 Steane, councillor 20, 22  
 Stepney 250  
 Stevens, Mr (ILP) 103, 13  
 Stobie, councillor 144  
 Stocks, John 154  
 Stocks, Mary 154, 157, 160–1, 164,  
 166, 302–3 (note 28:31)  
 Stockton-on Tees conference 110  
 Stone, T 146  
 Stonehouse, John 221  
 Stonemakers Union 146  
 Stonor, Thomas MP 10–1  
 Storey, Mr (ILP) 107–8, 110–1  
 Strange, J 146  
 Strange, M J 146  
 Suez crisis 225  
 Summerskill, Edith 223  
 Summertown 58  
 Summertown Improvement  
 Association 100  
 Surrage, Mr 144, 150  
 Sutcliffe, Bob 232, 237  
 Sutton Courtenay 111  
 Swein, Miss 178  
 Sweetzer, Mr (railwaymen) 155,  
 164, 173  
 Swindon 109, 115, 139  
 Sykes, Mr (Ruskin student) 104

## T

Taff Vale judgement 90  
 Tailors Union 146, 154  
 tailoresses 154  
 Talboys, Councillor 14, 19–20  
 Taverne, Dick 228  
 Taverner, Arthur 234  
 Tawney, R H 137, 166  
 Tawney, (Alderman) Miss 190  
 taxi licenses 197  
 Taylor, A J P 227  
 Taylor, Joseph 36  
 Taylor, J (Ruskin student) 108, 113

Telfer, councillor 29  
 temperance 48, 50–51, 55  
 Temple, Dr 123  
 Tenants Protection  
 Association 155  
 Thackeray, William Makepeace  
 37–40  
 Thatcher, Margaret 234  
 ‘Theomacist’ 76  
 Thomas, Jimmy MP 142, 212  
 Thompson, George MP 32  
 Thornett, Alan 237, 239  
 Thorold Rogers, James 40, 42–7, 50,  
 53–4, 65–6, 74, 76, 252, 283–4  
 (note 8:40)  
 Thorpe, John 24, 28–9  
 Three Cups Inn 11  
 Three Feathers Inn 132  
 Three Tuns Inn 19  
 Tillett, Ben 115  
 Timbrell, Mrs 193  
 Timbrell, Mr (loco-engineers) 134,  
 146, 155  
 Timms, Mr (postmen) 134, 137,  
 143–4, 146, 149–150  
 Toke, Leslie 80  
 Tolley, Percy 157, 174  
 Tomes, J N 178  
 Towle, John 14, 20–4, 26, 29, 32–3,  
 40, 42, 45–6, 48, 50, 54–5, 62,  
 65, 279 (note 4:29)  
 Town Hall meetings 32, 38, 48, 76,  
 100, 116, 168, 174, 183, 190,  
 199, 209, 236, 251  
 Townshend, W 189  
 Townsley, Mr 12  
 Toynbee Hall 12, 2502  
 Toynbee, Philip 214  
 Trades Disputes Bill (1927) 173–4  
 Trades Union Congress General  
 Council 172  
 Transport Workers (TGWU) 154,  
 179, 198, 229

Transport House (LP London  
     Headquarters) 193, 200–210  
 Tramway Company 91, 119  
 Tramway strike (1913) 119  
*Tribune* 222–4, 226–7  
 Triple Alliance 153  
 Trotter, Mr (Labour Party  
     agent) 169–171  
 Trotsky 160, 251  
 Turner, councillor 20  
 Turner, Lawrence MP 221–2, 225  
 Tweddle, Donald 221  
 Tyler, Mr 173  
 Tyneside, migration from 139  
 Typographical Association  
     (printers) 72, 82, 100, 115,  
     146, 150, 152, 154, 170–1, 226

**U**

‘Ugly Rumours’ 251  
 Underhill, (Alderman) 91  
 Underhill, Reg 219  
 Unemployment 104, 106, 115–6,  
     119, 152, 163, 177  
 Unemployment committee (1908)  
     116 (1932) 177  
 Unemployed Workmen Act  
     (1905) 106–7, 129  
 Union for Democratic Control of  
     Foreign Policy 130  
 Union of Cooperative  
     Employees 89  
 Union Society (university) 80, 130,  
     178, 202, 214, 218  
 ‘United Front’ 194, 213, 248, 251  
 United Kingdom Alliance of  
     Temperance Societies 57  
 United Nations 222  
 United Peace Alliance (1938) 200  
 Unity Manifesto 192–3  
 University and colleges 3, 72,  
     79–80, 231, 245, 282–3  
     (note 8:8)

Universities Socialist  
     Federation 131  
 Upholsterers Union 154  
 Upper Heyford base 233, 238–9  
 Urban Housing Estate 183–4  
 Urwin, Harry 232  
 Uzzell, Mr 174–5, 191  
 Uzzell, Mrs 174–5, 180, 184,  
     187–8, 195

**V**

Valentia, Viscount 62, 109  
 Vehicle Workers Union 146  
 Vernede, R E 80  
 Victoria, Queen 28  
 Vietnam War 232  
 Villamure, Jock 206  
 Vincent, Henry 19  
 Vincent, councillor 91  
 Volunteer Fire Brigade 71

**W**

Waddell, councillor 20  
 Walden, Brian 228  
 Walker, Mr 175  
 Wallas, Graham 80  
 Wallingford 29  
 Wallis, G 173, 188, 203, 206  
 Walmsley, Sir Joshua MP 32  
 Walston, Oliver 230  
 Walton Street 97  
 Wantage 111, 209  
 Ward, councillor 29  
 Ward, W R 245  
 Wareham, H 146  
 Warneford Road widening 116  
 Warrell, councillor 220, 223, 225  
 Watch Committee 87, 96  
 Waterhouse, Mr (communist  
     organiser) 177, 179, 193  
 Watt, Charles 53  
 Warne, councillor 20, 26, 28, 32  
 Weaver, Mrs 160

- Webb, Beatrice 80, 117  
 Webb, Sidney 80, 117, 145  
 Weaving, councillor 20  
 Welch, John 180  
 Westell, Mr (ILP) 103  
 Wetherell, Sir Charles MP 5, 10–1  
 Whale, George 109  
 Wheatsheaf Inn 12–3  
 White, councillor 136  
 White, councillor Mrs 222–3  
 White, E (loco engineers) 146, 157  
 Whittle, Mr (bakers) 146  
 Wickens, Mr 31  
 Wickham, Mr (LP organiser) 218  
 Wicksteed, Philip 80  
 Widdrington, Percy 80  
 Widnes Labour Party 210  
 Wigington, T 145–7, 149–150, 153,  
 155–7, 159, 164, 248, 252  
 Wilcox, Mr 199  
 Wilkes, Mr (engineers) 146–7  
 Wilkinson, Ellen MP 171, 178  
 William IV 8  
 Williams, Mr (tailors) 146  
 Williams, Emrys 180  
 Williams, Philip 228  
 Williams, Shirley 234, 239  
 Williams, St Swithin 52–3, 57  
 Williamson, Ken 237  
 Williamson, Tony 231, 238  
 Willis, Walter 119  
 Willoughby, Frederick 119  
 Wilsdon, G 146  
 Wilsdon, Mrs 146  
 Wilson, Rev 25  
 Wilson, Bertram 95–6  
 Wilson, Harold 212, 218, 250  
 Wiltshire, W 188, 195  
 Windle, E (Labour Party  
 agent) 203–4  
 Windsor 219  
 Wing, Mr (bricklayers/ vehicle  
 builders) 146, 157  
 Witney 227  
 Wolvercote 54  
 Women's Labour League 141  
 Wood, Alan 202  
 Woodhouse, Monty MP 227,  
 231, 235  
 Woodstock 5, 27–8, 65, 71, 111  
 Woodworkers Union 208  
 Workers' Education  
 Association 132, 220, 245  
 Workers Revolutionary Party  
 (WRP) 237  
 Workers Socialist League  
 (WSL) 237–9  
 Workers Theatre Movement 183  
 Wright, J Atkyns MP 5  
 Wyatt, Thomas 9, 13–4, 23  
 Wynn, Arthur 183, 185–7, 213, 308  
 (note 35:7)  
 Wytham Woods 110
- Y**
- Yates, Ivan 228  
 Yeatman, Mr 185, 190–1, 196, 200,  
 204–8  
 YMCA Debating Society 146, 177  
 Young, Janet (later Baroness  
 Young) 234  
 Young, Robert 104–5
- Z**
- Zilliacus, Konni MP 220

## REFORM AND REVOLT IN THE CITY OF DREAMING SPIRES

Books about Oxford have generally focused on the University rather than the city. This original book on the local politics of Oxford City from 1830 to 1980 is based on a comprehensive analysis of primary sources and tells the story of the city's progressive politics. The book traces this history from Chartism and electoral reform in the mid-nineteenth century, through the early years of socialism to the impact of communism in the interwar period, the struggle between nuclear disarmers and Gaitskellites in the 1960s and the impact of the new revolutionary left in the late 1970s. Throughout the narrative, the book contrasts the two approaches of those engaged in progressive politics, those who focused on the politics of reform and improved government and those who preferred the politics of revolt, protest and revolutionary rhetoric. The author argues that a central feature of this history has been the co-existence and interaction of working- and middle- class elements. It rediscovers a rich heritage, a fascinating story and offers a rare wide-ranging chronological narrative of local UK city politics. Through its extensive quotes from primary sources, the book presents a vivid picture of local politics over 150 years.

**Duncan Bowie** was a Labour member of Oxford City Council between 1979 and 1983 and an active member of the Labour Party for most years since 1976. He is a professional planner and housing activist as well as a socialist historian and the author of several books including *Our History: Roots of British Socialism* (2014), *The Radical and Socialist Tradition in British Planning* (2016) and *Radical Solutions to the Housing Supply Crisis* (2017).

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