

DICTIONARY
of
LABOUR
BIOGRAPHY

VOLUME XV

Edited by
Keith Gildart & David Howell



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Contents

| | |
|---|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | vii |
| NOTES TO READERS | ix |
| LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS | xi |
| LIST OF BIBLIOGRAPHIES AND SPECIAL NOTES | xiii |
| BIOGRAPHIES | 1 |
| CONSOLIDATED LIST OF NAMES VOLUMES I–XV | 289 |
| INDEX | 303 |

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Within a politics increasingly shaped by a narrow and regressive variant of English identity we emphasise our continuing benefit from the holdings of the National Library of Scotland and the National Library of Wales. Local depositories provide invaluable information. Our thanks go to Barnsley Archives, Birmingham Public Library, Calderdale Archives, Denbighshire Record Office, Flintshire Record Office, Hull History Centre, Kent County Record Office, Kirklees Archives, Leeds City Library Local Studies, Middlesbrough Public Library, Norfolk County Record Office, Strathclyde, Regional Archive, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

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We noted in our acknowledgements to the previous volume that it had been prepared 'in a period of exceptional political turmoil'. The turmoil has intensified; all that is solid melts into air. The insistence on an unsentimental understanding of the past in all its complexity is essential.

Notes to Readers

1. Place names are usually quoted according to contemporary usage in the period covered in each entry.
2. Where the amount of a will, estate or effects is quoted it is normally that given in *The Times*, in the records at Somerset House in London, the Probate Office in Manchester or at the Scottish Record Office in Edinburgh. For dates before 1860 the source is usually the Public Record Office. Additional information has been provided by www.ancestry.co.uk and www.gov.uk.
3. Under the heading **Sources**, personal information relates to details obtained from relatives, friends or colleagues of the individual in question; biographical information refers to other sources.
4. The place of publication in the bibliographical sources is London unless otherwise stated.
5. The *See also* sections that follow some biographical entries include names marked with a dagger—these refer to biographies published in Volumes I–XIV of the *Dictionary of Labour Biography*; those with no marking are included in the present volume.
6. A consolidated list of entries in Volumes I–XV can be found at the end of this volume.

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List of Bibliographies and Special Notes

Bibliographies

The subject bibliographies attached to certain entries are the responsibility of the editors. The entries under which they will be found in Volumes I–VI are as follows:

British Labour Party

| | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|
| 1900–1913 | LANSBURY, George | II |
| 1914–1931 | HENDERSON, Arthur | I |
| Chartism to 1840 | LOVETT, William | VI |
| Christian Socialism, 1848–1854 | LUDLOW, John Malcolm Forbes | II |
| Cooperation | | |
| Agricultural cooperation | PLUNKETT, Sir Horace Curzon | V |
| Cooperative education | HALL, Fred | I |
| Cooperative Party | ALEXANDER, Albert Victor | I |
| Cooperative production | JONES, Benjamin | I |
| Cooperative Union | HAYWARD, Fred | I |
| Cooperative wholesaling | REDFERN, Percy | I |
| Copartnership | GREENING, Edward Owen | I |
| International Cooperative Alliance | MAY, Henry John | I |
| Irish cooperation | GALLAGHER, Patrick | I |
| Retail cooperation | | |
| Nineteenth century | HOLYOAKE, George Jacob | I |
| 1900–1945 | BROWN, William Henry | I |
| 1945–1970 | BONNER, Arnold | I |
| Scottish cooperation | MAXWELL, William | I |
| Guild socialism | SPARKES, Malcolm | II |
| Mining trade unionism | | |
| 1850–1879 | MACDONALD, Alexander | I |
| 1880–1899 | PICKARD, Benjamin | I |
| 1900–1914 | ASHTON, Thomas | I |
| 1915–1926 | COOK, Arthur James | III |
| 1927–1944 | LEE, Peter | II |
| Scottish mining trade unionism | SMILLIE, Robert | III |
| Welsh mining trade unionism | ABRAHAM, William (Mabon) | I |
| New model unionism | ALLAN, William | I |
| New unionism, 1889–1893 | TILLET, Benjamin (Ben) | IV |

Special Notes in Volume V

Parliamentary Recruiting Committee and Joint Labour Recruiting Committee in the First World War, *see* **BOWERMAN, Charles William**

1917 Club, *see* **HAMILTON, Mary Agnes**

Mosley Industrial Commission, *see* **STEADMAN, William (Will) Charles**

Special Notes in Volume VI

Woman's Industrial Independence (1848, reprinted), *see* **BARMBY, Catherine Isabella**

Boggart Hole Clough and Free Speech, *see* **BROCKLEHURST, Frederick**

Ca'canny, *see* **DAVIS, William John**

Special Notes in Volume VII

League Against Imperialism, 1927–1937, *see* **BRIDGEMAN, Reginald Francis Orlando**

Gateshead Progressive Players, 1920–1980, *see* **DODDS, Ruth**

Meerut Trial, 1929–1933, *see* **GOSSIP, Alexander (Alex)**

Execution of Francisco Ferrer and the Labour Movement, *see* **WARD, George Herbert Bridges**

Special Notes in Volume VIII

Guild of St Matthew, *see* **HANCOCK, Thomas**

Church Socialist League, *see* **MOLL, William Edmund**

Twentieth Century Press, *see* **QUELCH, Henry (Harry)**

British Labour Delegation to Russia, 1920 *see* **TURNER, Sir Ben**

Special Notes in Volume IX

Aid for Spain Movement in Britain, 1936–1939, *see* **BROWN, Isabel**

British Trade Union Delegation to Russia, 1924, I, Official Report, II, The Zinoviev Letter, *see* **GRENFELL, Harold**

British Joint Labour Delegation to Hungary, Inquiry into the White Terror, May 1920, *see* **JOWETT, Frederick William**

Special Notes in Volume X

Churches of Christ as a Labour Sect, *see* **TAYLOR, John Thomas**

Further Notes, *see* **HANNINGTON, Walter**

Further Notes, *see* **CONNELL, Jim**

Special Notes in Volume XI

Laski Libel Trial, *see* **HASTINGS, Patrick, Sir**

Labour Parliament, 1853–1854, *see* **JONES, Ernest**

Independent Socialist Party, *see* **SANDHAM, Elijah**

Special Notes in Volume XII

Nenni Telegram, *see* **BRADDOCK, Tom**

Keep Left, *see* **LEE, Fred**

Special Notes in Volume XIII

The Making of National Labour, *see* **ELTON, Godfrey (First Baron Elton)**

Special Note in Volume XIV

The Working Class Movement Library, *see* **FROW, Stephen Edmund and Ruth**

Special Notes in Volume XV

The British Workers' League (The National and Democratic Labour Party), *see* **WALTON, James**

Patriotic Labour 1918, *see* **SPOOR, Benjamin Charles 'Ben'**



Biographies

ARTHUR, James (1791–1877)

CHARTIST

A staunch radical who, for the whole of his adult life, refused to purchase salt because the government raised revenue from its sale, James Arthur was an important organiser in Carlisle during the first phase of Chartism. He was described as ‘a disciple of Feargus O’Connor and an associate of Bowman and Hanson and other local Chartist leaders ... from his shop in Rickergate most of the Chartist literature of the day was disseminated’ [*Cumberland Packet*, 14 August 1877].

When Arthur joined with Henry Bowman and Joseph Broom Hanson to launch the Carlisle Radical Association in 1838, he was already forty-seven years old and a well-known radical figure. Born in Coylton near Ayr, the son of Hugh Arthur and Mary Goldie, on 22 February 1791, he had arrived in the town in 1818, and in the announcement of his marriage to Elizabeth Ellis, a stay maker, the following year was described as a ‘number man’ [*Carlisle Patriot*, 26 June 1819]. In 1821, and for fifteen successive years, Arthur was elected by the select vestry—the men who governed the parish—to be assistant overseer in Rickergate. By the early 1830s, when he openly supported parliamentary reform, he was also running a book shop. He was one of the new electors and ‘voted at the first election after the Reform Act but never again’ [*Carlisle Patriot*, 22 December 1871].

Almost all Chartist activity in Carlisle flowed through Arthur’s book shop in Rickergate—from the sale of the *Northern Star* and the *Northern Liberator* (‘the best paper in the universe for working people’) and of tickets for such celebrations as O’Connor’s visit at the end of 1841 to the collection of signatures for the petitions and of funds for the support of arrested and imprisoned Chartists [*Carlisle Journal*, 25 July 1840]. In May 1841, the wife of John Frost received one shilling from ‘a few female Chartists per J. Arthur’ and in November 1843 five shillings was sent, one shilling of it from Arthur’s own pocket, to assist the wife of the transported William Ellis [*Northern Star*, 22 May 1841]. Arthur even provided accommodation for Chartist lecturers—Dr. John Taylor lived with him for three weeks at the beginning of 1840. However, his ambition that he might edit a local Chartist journal from his shop, with working men providing the funds by purchased 5s shares was not to be realised.

Arthur did not consider himself to be a natural public speaker and preferred to organise meetings and occupy the chair, on occasion appearing ‘in his elegant white hat’ [*Carlisle Journal*, 29 August 1840]. In the second half of 1840, he brought the Urquhartite missionaries William Cardo and John Richards to Carlisle who duly set out why Chartists should fear Russia. It was not only at Chartist meetings that Arthur filled the role of chairman but also at meetings the Chartists had taken over—for example, in May 1840, he was elected as chairman at a meeting organised by the Anti-Corn Law League. Without occupying the chair, Arthur would seek to direct public meetings. At a meeting called by churchmen in December 1839 to promote better use of the Sabbath, he proposed an ironic vote of thanks at the end for the use of the room, declaring that ‘before this he and his friends could not get it for either love or money; but now they had it for nothing’ [*Carlisle Journal*, 21 December 1841].

The bitter feelings the Chartists felt towards the Whigs found no better outlet than through Arthur who could be relied upon to denounce them ‘in terms most racy’ [*Carlisle Journal*, 26 June 1841]. During a by-election in East Cumberland in summer 1841 he circulated an address which accused the Whigs of being ‘the most treacherous, cruel and persecuting government which ever existed on the face of the earth’ [*Carlisle Journal*, 6 June 1840]. The interference of the Chartists greatly angered the local Whigs:

Mr Bowman is the keeper of a beer shop and until lately had no visible means of obtaining a livelihood. Mr Arthur is a bookseller, not supposed to be abundantly supplied with this world’s goods. Yet these men have their horse and gig at Cockermouth, are living at a first

rate inn and, if dress were any indication of character, might be mistaken for “gentlemen”. We ask, who pays for all this? [*Carlisle Journal*, 6 June 1840].

They answered the question themselves, branding Arthur and his friends as ‘the physical force orange Chartists of Carlisle ... the acknowledged Swiss troops of Toryism’ [*Carlisle Journal*, 6 June 1840]. Long after his Chartist career was over, Arthur continued to express his contempt for the Whigs. Almost certainly he did take Tory money in the early 1840s.

The Whig newspapers certainly detested Arthur. In its leaders the *Carlisle Journal* would refer to his appearance and his personal circumstances. Arthur unsuccessfully sought to sue the newspaper in February 1841; the following month the paper gleefully reported that he had drunkenly disturbed a meeting of teetotallers. There was, however, great admiration for Arthur amongst the Chartists. Hanson described him a ‘pure and honest patriot’ and a Dalston working man named his son after the Chartist newsagent [*Carlisle Journal*, 20 June 1840].

At the critical Chartist conference in Manchester called amidst the turn-outs of August 1842 Arthur occupied the chair. He made clear that he supported a general strike to secure the Charter. This led to the arrival at his shop at the end of September of two police officers with a warrant for his arrest. This ‘very unexpected and unpleasant news’ was followed by a search of his shop and house, including ‘even the drawers in the chamber of my wife’, and his departure in handcuffs for New Bailey prison in Manchester [*Northern Star*, 15 October 1842]. Arthur was charged with inciting a riot, but, when the *Northern Star* reporter-turned-informer William Griffin was unable to identify him, he was released. ‘Never in the whole course of my time did I feel more indignation than I did looking at the vile wretch Griffin’, an embittered Arthur said on his return to Carlisle. Securing his release had cost him £10 [*Northern Star*, 15 October 1842]. His ordeal was, however, not yet over. Arthur was one of the large group of Chartists who faced the charge of conspiracy at Lancaster in March 1843. ‘My Lord, I deny the whole of it for I have never fired a gun in my life’, he declared in court [*Carlisle Patriot*, 22 December 1871]. Though Arthur’s case got as far as the Court of the Queen’s Bench, he returned from London, after a prolonged stay, without being sentenced.

Despite this experience, Arthur continued to express his support for the political and economic rights of the working class, often in collaboration with Hanson. He was chairman of a meeting addressed by O’Connor in Carlisle in November 1843, and the following month of a meeting addressed by William Hill, recently dismissed as editor of the *Star* (which ended in furious exchanges when men loyal to O’Connor turned up). He publicly supported the claims of the handloom weavers for improved wages and called for the release of the imprisoned Richard Oastler: ‘There was no man in England had ever done more or had a better spirit, thank God’ [*Carlisle Journal*, 3 February 1844]. In 1845 Arthur found himself dragged into William Ashton’s rancorous quarrel with O’Connor, Ashton alleging that, in late 1839, John Taylor had planned to go ‘to Carlisle and put James Arthur in possession of that town and barracks’ [*Northern Star*, 3 May 1845]. Arthur played no part in the Land Plan or the revival of Chartism in 1847–1848.

The census of 1851 indicates that James and Elizabeth Arthur were living separately. Arthur’s wife and son had taken over the book shop whilst he ran a small newsagent, where he was the agent for such concoctions as Dr. Lacock’s Pulmonic Wafers (a treatment for coughs) and Brodie’s Purifying Vegetable Pills (to be taken ‘for the cure of scorbutic affections’) [*Carlisle Patriot*, 29 October 1849]. He was regularly to be seen delivering newspapers to his customers by hand.

From time to time Arthur re-emerged in his old Chartist colours. He acted as chairman when Bronterre O’Brien addressed a poorly attended meeting on the Crimean War in January 1856. When town meetings were called to petition for parliamentary reform, such as in January 1858, Arthur was present. His long-standing political ally Joseph Broom Hanson died in September 1864, but Arthur continued to argue for what they had both always believed in. At a reform meeting called in December 1865 he interrupted a speech to complain about the timidity of the

plans. Amidst cries of ‘turn him out, turn him out’, he was denounced as a ‘snake in the grass’ [*Carlisle Patriot*, 2 December 1865]. Without manhood suffrage, Arthur refused to use the vote he had secured many years earlier. A few years before his death a correspondent to a local newspaper observed that ‘Mr James Arthur could give more information about the Chartists in Carlisle than anybody in the city’ [*Carlisle Patriot*, 1 September 1871]. From Arthur there was silence. He had stories to tell, but he wasn’t telling them. Described as ‘industrious and peaceable, if rather eccentric ...’ Arthur died at his home in Crosby Street, Carlisle, on 9 August 1877.

Sources: (1) **Periodicals:** *Carlisle Journal*, 1838–1877; *Carlisle Patriot*, 1838–1877; *Cumberland Pacquet*, 1877; *Northern Liberator*, 1838–1840; *Northern Star*, 1838–1844. (2) **Books:** *The Trial of Feargus O’Connor and Fifty-Eight Others on a Charge of Sedition, Conspiracy, Tumult and Riot 1* (1843; 1970 edn.); J. Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O’Connor and the Chartist Movement 1832–1842* (1982); O. Ashton, R. Fyson, and S. Roberts (eds.), *The Duty of Discontent: Essays for Dorothy Thompson* (1995); M. Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (2007); W. Farish, *The Autobiography of William Farish: The Struggles of a Hand-Loom Weaver* (1996 edn. ed. O. Ashton and S. Roberts); W. Hamish Fraser, *Chartism in Scotland* (Pontypool, 2010). (3) **Articles:** J. Barnes, ‘“The Men of the North”: The Chartist Movement in Carlisle 1838–50’, *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, vol. 15 (2015), 195–209. (4) **Thesis:** J. Barnes, ‘Popular Protest and Radical Politics: Carlisle, 1780–1850’, (Lancaster, PhD, 1981). (5) **Obituaries:** *Carlisle Journal*, 10 August 1877; *Carlisle Patriot*, 10 August 1877; *Cumberland Pacquet*, 14 August 1877.

STEPHEN ROBERTS

BARKER, Sara Elizabeth (Dame) (1904–1973)

LABOUR PARTY OFFICIAL

Sara Barker was the eldest of the three daughters of George Barker and Ethel nee Brier. She was born and raised in 4-6 Jubilee Road in the Siddall area of Halifax in the West Riding. Her father, George, would prove to be a great influence on her. He had been an apprentice gardener before becoming a licensed grocer in his family’s business. A keen member of the Halifax and District Off-Licence Holders’ Association, he was its chairman from 1917 until his death in 1940; he was also, in 1933, the Chair of the National Federation of Off-Licence Holders’ Associations [*Halifax Courier*, 5 August 1939].

George Barker was also involved in Labour politics in Halifax. A lifelong member of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) he became a Labour councillor for Southowram Ward in 1920 [*Guardian*, 23 January 1961]. He was actively involved in civic affairs; as a councillor he served on the Improvements Committee at a time of major redevelopment in Halifax and in 1932 became an Alderman [*Halifax Courier*, 5 August 1939]. He became a Magistrate in 1933; the pinnacle of his career was his election as Mayor of Halifax in 1939 [*Halifax Courier*, 5 August 1939, *Guardian* 23 January 1961]. George Barker firmly believed in serving his community, indeed the *Halifax Courier*, described him as ‘salt of the earth’, one of those people whose ambition was only to ‘improve the lives of citizens ... and succeeding generations’ [*Halifax Courier*, 11 November 1939]. The Barker family involved themselves ‘in service of what the French call the commune’ [*Halifax Courier*, 11 November 1939].

Such Labour Party activism was not peculiar to Halifax. Across the country, party activists believed they could ‘work practically to ameliorate conditions, notably through local government, and to raise hopes and expectations’ [Tanner (2000) 260]. Although the character and significance of such altruism are often questioned by modern scholars, its importance should not be ignored. This was the moral driving force behind civic politics at the time, transcending conventional party divisions [Shapely (2012) 310–314]. Understanding this commitment is

fundamental to appreciating what drove and informed the behaviour of men such as George Barker.

At the time of her father's death, Sara Barker was Secretary-Organiser of the Halifax Labour Party. She had been immersed in Labour politics from a young age, brought up by her father to respect and adhere to the doctrine of collective endeavour and local representation. In an interview with the *Guardian*, many years later, Barker explained her father's influence, revealing that some of her earliest memories were 'going door to door, collecting subscriptions from members' [*Guardian*, 23 January 1961]. At 16, whilst still in college, she had become secretary of the women's section of the Halifax Labour Party. She later claimed these early experiences and the understanding of the minutiae of local organising helped her throughout her career [ODNB (2004); *Guardian*, 23 January 1961]. She was one of the volunteer activists who, together with a small professional core, worked to sustain the young Labour Party's organisation and help it grow from a movement that represented working-class interests into a potential party of government [Tanner (2000) 248]. In later life, Barker would speak of her idealised memory of a golden age when 'socialism was a family affair', and where local party officials 'could be great visionaries' [*Guardian*, 23 January 1961].

Barker was educated at Siddal Elementary School and then at Halifax Technical College where she studied commerce. At the age of 17, she took a job as an accounting clerk at one of Halifax's many engineering firms [ODNB (2004)]. Further education was an important aspect of life for many working-class socialists and Sara was no exception [Taylor (1986) 14]. She took night classes in English, Economics and Social Sciences for many years and as often as three nights a week [ODNB (2004)]. Barker had two passions during the early years of her life, her education and the Halifax Labour Party.

By 1935 Barker had been active within the party for 15 years and had held a number of senior voluntary posts, including President of the Halifax Labour Party, Secretary of the Women's Section and Secretary of the Halifax, Huddersfield and District Labour Women's Advisory Council [Barker (1955) 2]. Years of hard work within the party as a voluntary official paid off. In 1935, the role of Secretary-Agent of the Halifax Labour Party became vacant. The holder of this full-time post was typically the only paid employee of a local party. The Secretary-Agent's core responsibility was to coordinate and utilise the results of an annual registration of electors, and undertake a meticulous canvass of the constituency, alongside her administrative duties [Pugh (2010) 51–52]. Barker was the successful candidate out of 135 applicants. It was her first full-time job in the Labour Party [*Guardian*, 19 April 1962]. Being appointed as a Secretary-Agent when only in her early 30s was a remarkable achievement, but given that she had been climbing the ranks and learning the trade as a political organiser since her teenage years, in a community where her family were politically well-established the ascent was perhaps less unsurprising.

During the 1930s, she became involved in a national campaign that attempted to provide local parties with greater standing and influence within the wider party. Party members were dissatisfied with the comparative weakness of local parties. During this time, trade unions maintained overwhelming control over party policymaking structures such as the Conference and National Executive Committee. As a conference delegate in the 1920s, Herbert Morrison had begun to argue that the Labour Party should have more effective representation for its local organisations. In July 1933 campaigners formed the Association of Labour Parties. This initiative was significant, as it was the first time the ordinary members of the party had organised in the hope of improving their representation within Labour's structures [Worley (2005) 189–190]. Barker was no radical, and became concerned about the campaign's links with the left-wing Socialist League and in particular the influence of Sir Stafford Cripps. Under Hugh Dalton's chairmanship the party was committed to tabling proposals for the 1937 party conference. Early in 1937, Barker had persuaded the Halifax party executive of the need for constitutional reform. She convened a meeting in Leeds attended by 93 delegates; 28 Divisional Parties were represented. A regional committee representing local parties within Yorkshire was

formed. Barker was elected its secretary and Lady Mabel Smith, a leading activist in Yorkshire who had previously sat on the party's National Executive Committee, became its chairman [Pimlott (1977) 124–125, 128]. Barker subsequently endorsed an argument put forward by Wakefield MP Arthur Greenwood that trade unionists were often amongst the most active and involved members of any local party. She therefore argued against 'tampering with the block vote' at the local level and persuaded the Halifax party executive to follow suit [Worley (2005) 191]. This shift may seem a case of career before beliefs, a prudential acknowledgement of the power of trade unions within the Yorkshire party, but such an assertion would need to be balanced against Barker's personality and priorities. She was more concerned with the unity of the party and its effectiveness as an electoral organisation rather than her own ideological purity. Her concerns endured throughout the 'Phoney War' and beyond. Between January and June 1940, Barker led a number of recruitment drives that succeeded in recruiting 460 new members for the Halifax party. Membership income was better than it had been in September 1939 and the socials committee even organised a trip to Whitby and Scarborough for party members [Halifax Labour Party Minutes, 20 June 1940].

In 1941, the Labour Party restructured its regional operation. After the piecemeal development of county organisations during the interwar years, local parties 'were anxious to utilise the expertise that national employees (such as regional organisers) could provide' [Wilson (1975) 36]. Such assistance would assist local organisation and allow the greater sharing of best practice. As part of this reform project Barker became the first Organiser for Women for the Yorkshire Region [Gould (2016) 64]. She was appointed on account of her effectiveness over the previous seven years as Secretary-Organiser in Halifax [Thorpe (2009) 110]. For Halifax Labour Party, this was mixed news. Whilst they congratulated their hard-working Secretary-Agent on her promotion, at a special executive committee organised to accept her resignation, they told Barker that they regretted that she was leaving [Halifax Labour Party minutes, 6 February 1942]. She was a respected and effective agent, and subsequently throughout the war years the party were plagued by their inability to hire and retain a permanent replacement [Thorpe (2009) 110].

During the war years she authored a document that would be updated and republished several times over the following three decades. In 1945, Barker published *How the Labour Party Works*, a comprehensive pamphlet that described the party's structure at both the national and local level. It also detailed the processes by which candidates were selected as well as a section, republished often in *Labour Organiser*, a journal for party organisers that she later edited, regarding the 'rights and duties of local representatives' [Barker (c.1962) 11–12]. Her work as organiser of women in Yorkshire through the years of Labour government was the springboard for her ascent to work for the national party.

In January 1952, Barker was appointed as Assistant National Agent. This role involved assisting the party's newly appointed National Agent, Len Williams in the management of the agency service, which supported agents at the local level. Their working relationship had begun in Yorkshire. Williams had previously been secretary of Leeds Labour Party 1936–1944 and for the following two years Yorkshire regional organiser. Barker was the first woman to hold the post [*Times*, 24 January 1952]. She began work at Transport House during the factional battle over the party's direction after its defeat in the 1951 General Election. She was a pragmatist who believed that working people needed a Labour Government, not a theoretical policy debate over the merits of socialism. Barker worked closely with the Leeds Labour MP Alice Bacon, who chaired the party's organisation sub-committee during the mid-1950s [Healey (1989) 153–154]. Their roles included the vetting of candidates and often the maintenance of discipline within the party. Throughout the years of so-called 'Bevanite conspiracy', they 'belonged to a group of formidable and right-wing women in and around the NEC', along with Edith Summerskill, Bessie Braddock and Alice Horan [*Guardian*, 31 March 1993]. These women were elected to the Women's Section of the NEC with the backing of major right-wing unions and were at the core of the party's disciplinary regime. Barker and her colleagues

believed that prospective candidates should be judged on their political reliability. They sought to block the candidacies of those they saw as having politically dubious associations and to marginalise them within the party [Healey (1989) 153].

A classic illustration of this process came prior to the 1955 election; Barker in concert with sympathetic NEC members sought to prevent three candidacies—Konni Zilliacus (Manchester Gorton), Frank Allaun (Salford East) and Ernie Roberts (Stockport South). Zilliacus a Labour MP in the 1945 parliament had been expelled from the party for alleged pro-Soviet sympathies although his support for Tito's Yugoslavia subsequently led to his vilification by Communists. Allaun and Roberts were similarly considered by Barker and her allies too close to Communist sentiments. All three candidacies were permitted despite Barker's citation of their misdeeds. Allaun and Zilliacus were subsequently elected albeit with significant reductions in the Labour majorities. Barker was also involved in defences of sitting Members who had incurred the hostility of the left within their local parties. Thus when the Coventry Borough Party in 1955 passed a vote of no confidence in the right-wing Coventry South Member, Elaine Burton, Barker along with the West Midlands Regional Organiser attended a meeting of the constituency party. They said that the NEC would block any attempt to unseat the Member and if necessary, disaffiliate the local party. This ultimatum proved sufficient.

Barker kept files on MPs and their utterances during this period. Ian Mikardo organiser of the left, argued that these files rivalled MI5 in their thoroughness and would later refer to them as 'McCarthyite dossiers' [Mikardo (1988) 130–131, 190]. He also noted that when left-leaning official Ron Hayward became national agent in 1969, the first thing he did was to 'tip out all of Sara's secret service dossiers and make a fire of them' [Mikardo (1988) 130–131]. Barker was certainly sympathetic to the party's right wing, but above all she and the National Agent, Len Williams defined themselves as loyal servants of the party who approached the challenges of party management through bureaucratic imperatives. Behaviour must be tightly governed by rules; directives from the centre must secure prompt compliance. Their professions of impartiality could be sincere yet the preoccupation with party administration and electoral success meant that anything that diverted resources from these tasks was necessarily seen as damaging. Thus critical movements on the left were seen as disruptive. Deference towards constitutional authority and acceptance of hierarchy facilitated an effective pursuit of key goals. Barker's conception of a properly run party demonstrated a powerful mobilisation of bias in favour of the *status quo* [Shaw (1988) 57].

This bureaucratic style of party management embraced responsibility for the managing of Labour's Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC). The committee was central to the running of what party managers considered a 'good conference'. From 1956 until 1960, Barker acted as its secretary in her role as Assistant National Agent. The CAC's major role was its management of the agenda. In his classic study *The Labour Party Conference*, Lewis Minkin argued that the most important part of the conference organising process was the decision about which resolutions should form the agenda [Minkin (1980) 67]. The CAC had the power to decide which resolutions from the trade unions and constituency parties would be debated at conference and would also be charged with developing 'composite resolutions'. These combined supposedly similar resolutions to produce a more efficient agenda. Compositing allowed for abundant employment of the darker arts of political management. The controversial could be combined with the untenable to ensure defeat [Minkin (1980) 136–137]. One of the party's Assistant Organisers acted as secretary to the CAC until the 1960 conference, after which an administrative officer was appointed. Barker held the post at the height of intra-party tensions over a number of issues, not least the maintenance of Clause IV and unilateral nuclear disarmament.

During her time as secretary to the CAC, Barker worked alongside its chairman, the trade union official Harry Crane [Minkin (1980) 70–71]. Both the CAC's chairman and secretary were drawn from the loyalist wing of the party, 'it was not without significance' that the secretaryship of the committee was held by officials noted for their 'orthodoxy ... loyalism and ...

hostility to organised dissent in the party' [Minkin (1980) 71]. The imperatives of party unity, protection of the leadership and disdain for factionalism, drove the members of the party's traditional management class. Once this generation of officials began retiring during the late 1960s, this focus on control was relaxed [Minkin (1980) 148].

Barker's philosophy of party management could be seen in her articles for *Labour Organiser*. Her contributions focused around the concepts of loyalty and responsibility. They offered suggestions for effective campaigning as well as reviews of the party's successes or failures in elections. In a 1952 article on how Labour Council Groups should be managed, she argued the core principle should be majority rule. How effectively the party succeeded at the local level was important. Barker concluded that 'it would be a failure of a Group if after discussion and decision individual members of the group failed to accept majority decisions' [*Labour Organiser*, June 1952]. Barker argued that as Labour Councillors fought under a Labour banner, they were 'collectively responsible to the electorate for their actions' [Shaw (1988) 74–75]. In a later publication, Barker argued that 'working as a team', 'loyalty to decisions' and the 'privilege' of representing a local community were the core of traditional Labour [*Labour Organiser*, May 1965]. She insisted that 'an organisation like ours is more than just a machine. It represents the fundamental belief of individuals in a cause' [*Guardian*, 23 January 1961]. The political and organisational caution exercised by Barker and her generation of activists was based on practical, ground-up experience, developed over decades of practical effort.

The position of National Agent became vacant in 1962. Len Williams had been appointed the party's General Secretary on the resignation of Morgan Phillips. Barker was the most senior candidate to apply for the post; she had been appointed Senior Assistant National Agent and Chief Women's Officer in 1960. Regional Organisers and future National Agents Reg Underhill and Ron Hayward, both applied, as did West Midlands Organiser Jim Cattermole [*Times*, 19 April 1962]. Barker was the internal Transport House candidate and was close to the new General Secretary, she offered a competent and safe pair of hands. Barker threw herself into the role. During the year she paid a visit to the West Lothian constituency, in which Tam Dalyell was campaigning in a hard-fought by-election against a strong Scottish National Party candidate. The *Times* reported how she was 'almost frighteningly efficient and effective' [*Times*, 19 April 1962].

Almost immediately after her appointment, Barker had to extract the party from an embarrassing situation. She had initially supported George Brown, during his tenure as Chairman of the party's Organisation Committee, in enforcing the party's rules against a number of members who were intending on taking part in a conference organised by the World Council of Peace [Shaw (1988) 62]. The Council's UK wing, the British Peace Council was declared a proscribed organisation. Members of any proscribed organisation could not simultaneously be members of the Labour Party. Amongst the members of the British Peace Council were Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) founders Bertrand Russell and Canon Collins, as well as Lord Chorley and Baroness Wootton, all of them veteran party members.

Whilst the others compromised with the party organisers, Russell decided he would not, and refused to withdraw his sponsorship from the conference [Shaw (1988) 62]. The incident caused a great argument in the party, with Richard Crossman giving a powerful speech to the NEC over the issue, criticising the Organising Committee's treatment of elderly activists. During her investigation, Barker discovered that Russell had yet to be issued with his membership card, meaning he was not formally a party member. The disciplinarians could climb down without rescinding their original decision [Shaw (1988) 63]. The fiasco led to an attempt by Brown and Barker to tighten the rules on proscribed organisations. Baroness Wootton had pointed out that the party's rules did not prohibit association with a proscribed organisation as distinct from membership. Their response was to propose a constitutional amendment that would extend probation to include such association. The 1962 party conference rejected the amendment; in the aftermath of McCarthyism 'guilt by association' was a bridge too far. Even at the high noon of centralised control the party's culture imposed constraints.

In April 1963 Barker became involved in controversy over the prospective candidacy in Putney. The seat had never been held by Labour, but after the 1959 election it seemed to have become a credible target. The local party had historically been on the right but the membership was changing. A selection conference early in 1963 chose Hugh Jenkins, Chair of the left faction, 'Victory for Socialism' and a member of the Executive of the CND. CND was not a proscribed organisation but the 1961 conference had reversed the previous year's backing for unilateralism. Barker wrote to the Putney party soon after Jenkins's selection asserting that the local party decision to participate along with its banner in the Aldermaston march was 'quite unconstitutional'. Barker and her allies on the NEC took two proposals to the NEC on May 22; that for an enquiry into the Putney party was carried, but the one for the deferral of Jenkins's endorsement was defeated. The enquiry after much deliberation and visits to south-west London 'severely censured' the CND section and commended their critics for their 'courage and loyalty'. Contrary to the expectations of some on the Right, Jenkins won Putney in the 1964 election and remained an MP for 15 years.

Barker's suspiciousness towards factionalism was not directed solely towards the left. She was dubious about the activities of the pro-Gaitskell Campaign for Democratic Socialism (CDS). Set up to protect the leader and promote an appropriate agenda CDS attempted to influence candidate selections. Meetings took place in the Chief Whip's office attended by the CDS secretary Bill Rodgers but not by Barker nor anyone else from Transport House [Minkin (2014) 25–26]. CDS could count on the co-operation of several regional organisers; in contrast Barker with her antipathy to factionalism was perturbed. Seeking to manage candidate selection without reference to Transport House officials was a notable departure from previous practice. Barker would have raised the issue at the NEC; only a personal request from Gaitskell dissuaded her.

Labour's disappointing result in the 1959 election precipitated scepticism in some quarters about the party's prospects. Some felt that the party's identity and priorities were at odds with the sentiments of an electorate that in many cases felt secure and increasingly affluent. There was criticism of an approach to campaigning that could be seen as increasingly anachronistic; in contrast the Conservative strategy had effectively used contemporary advertising techniques. Labour organisation had decayed in the fifties. After the 1955 defeat an investigation into its shortcomings under Harold Wilson's chairmanship had characterised the party as having a penny farthing machine in the jet age. But the telling image had little effective impact. Barker and Williams were seen by some as part of the problem. Richard Crossman portrayed them as 'splendid old war horses' but with 'incredibly reactionary ideas' on organisation and finance. The swing to Labour in the 1964 election was significant but the size of the task meant that the consequential majority was miniscule. The national campaign built around Wilson's meritoric persona showed some response to the challenges of television and image building, seeking a response to a more socially diverse electorate. In the constituencies however the party campaigned much as it had for decades.

The changing electorate posed an immediate challenge to the new Labour Government. Despite Labour's general electoral advance, in some constituencies the party had lost votes over the issue of Commonwealth immigration. Under Gaitskell's leadership the party had mounted a principled opposition to the Conservative Government's restrictive legislation in 1962; Wilson's strategy was perhaps more ambiguous. Labour's Campaign Committee had decided against emphasising the issue [Campaign Committee Minutes, 31 August 1964]. This low profile did not prevent the loss of two Labour seats, Eton and Slough and Birmingham Perry Bar, probably on the issue and a defeat in Smethwick where immigration was unequivocally the principal focus.

The defeated Smethwick incumbent Patrick Gordon Walker had been expected to be appointed Foreign Secretary in a Labour Government. Wilson made the appointment despite Gordon Walker's lack of a seat. Barker faced the challenge of finding him a safe constituency. She worked in tandem with the Government Chief Whip Ted Short. Reginald Sorensen

was persuaded to vacate his Leyton constituency and to accept a peerage. The contest on 21 January 1965 was a disaster for Labour and for Gordon Walker. The Tory vote increased by 830 compared with the general election but Labour's fell by 7301; the consequence was Walker's defeat by 205 votes in a seat Labour had held since 1935 [Short (1989) 52].

Barker attempted to make sense of the debacle. She wrote to Sorensen thanking him for a report on the reasons for the defeat. She suggested that the party machine had been caricatured as 'a great bogey that had ruthlessly compelled Leyton to take Patrick' [Sorensen Papers SOR149/A]. But she suggested that 'immigration was a much deeper current than some people think'. The suggestion that the machine had forced a poor candidate on the local party was rejected by both Sorensen and Barker. The suggestion that Gordon Walker had been a neglectful constituency Member for Smethwick had been a strand in the Conservative campaign in both contests. It could serve as a fig leaf for the racism that had been integral to his earlier defeat. The Leyton result had been devastating for Barker. Crossman met her outside Wilson's office in tears. The certainties that had characterised her approach to party management were coming under pressure. The challenge posed by immigration and race would become more intense. Three years later Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech would help to weaken Labour's position especially in the West Midlands. Moreover, the Leyton disaster made a sharp contrast with the record of the Attlee Government which never lost a by-election in a seat won at the previous general election. Labour's re-election with a sizeable majority in March 1966 suggested misleadingly that the instabilities had been exorcised. But economic difficulties and the immigration issue soon devastated Labour's electoral base. Barker as National Agent would preside over a plethora of losses from the summer of 1966. Supposedly safe seats were lost in by-elections; municipal disasters meant Labour lost control of town halls that had been party fiefdoms for decades.

Whatever the electoral problems Barker remained committed to the marginalisation or expulsion of dissenters. For some she was the instigator and implementer of witch hunts. The journalist, Alan Watkins, recalled her reign in terms reminiscent of the Soviet Union's treatment of dissent in Eastern Europe. 'A hint of heresy, a whiff of recalcitrance, and Sara's tanks would emerge at the dead of night from the concrete garages deep under Transport House and move unstopably towards the offending part of the country' [Shaw (1988) viii]. She responded forcefully to suggestions that the party was the target for infiltration by Trotskyists of diverse pedigrees; she saw the Young Socialists as a significant Trotskyite target. Such challenges were reminiscent of the older concerns with Communist infiltration that had shaped her early career as a party activist and organiser. Above all she remained preoccupied with the need to ensure a united and electable party.

Barker was heavily involved in the expulsion of Ken Coates, President of the Nottingham Borough Labour Party together with the disciplining of three other Nottingham members. The root of the affair lay in a tension increasingly characteristic of the sixties, the polarisation between a local party moving to the left and the majority Labour Group on the city council indicted by sections within the party for passivity and conservatism. Replacement of a sitting councillor by a left winger led to a reprisal. Coates was expelled locally on three counts—seeking to discredit both the Labour Council and the Labour Government and active involvement with a Trotskyist organisation.

Coates was a high profile member of the left. A former coalminer, he had studied as a mature student at the University of Nottingham, had been prominent in the National Association of Labour Students and had subsequently worked in adult education. A member of the Communist Party until 1956 he had joined the Labour Party in 1961. He had contemporaneously helped to form a small group based in Nottingham, the Internationalist Group which later would become the International Marxist Group (IMG), the British affiliate of the Fourth International. Coates' Trotskyism was expressed not through a rigorously disciplined organisation but as one element within a coalition aligned against the local Labour establishment. He was a strong supporter of CND and a vigorous critic of the Wilson Government's policy on the

Vietnam War. His support for radical trade union activism would soon be expressed through the creation of the Institute for Workers' Control.

Coates appealed against his expulsion to the NEC. His opponents demanded that the NEC investigate the city party; the NEC agreed and two of its members accompanied by Barker spent three days in Nottingham. Coates's recollection underwrote the image of Barker as heresy hunter. His discussion with her was a 'long and utterly barren wrangle with ...this grey, implacable little old lady who looked as if she ought to be selling toffees in a village shop, vested instead with all the dank, meaningless and mindless power of a great machine' [Coates (1971) 94]. Coates' expulsion was upheld. The grounds given began with the claim that his criticisms had transgressed the bounds of fairness; in itself this was an unusual basis for expulsion. Rather the claim should be placed within the assessment that Coates was a Trotskyite infiltrator. This judgement suggested a misunderstanding of Coates's politics and a more fundamental inability on the part of party managers to empathise with the diverse currents of radicalism that were becoming involved in the party. The basic concern for Barker and her colleagues was not the fine print of Marxist theory but the attempt by the city party to limit the autonomy of the Labour Council Group. The investigators were seemingly unconcerned with the political inadequacies of the councillors. Their model of party management inexorably painted the city party left as the disrupters. Their solution was punishment not accommodation. Along with confirming Coates's expulsion they banned three other members from party office for three years.

The case demonstrated the resources controlled by party managers. Detailed files had been kept on Coates's alleged transgressions; the Nottingham Labour establishment had the active support of the Regional Organiser Jim Cattermole. Yet the aftermath showed that this approach to management was becoming less effective. The disciplined trio obtained a legal opinion that the NEC had breached the party's constitution. The NEC secured no encouragement to stand fast from their own lawyers. The three had their sanctions removed. The moment marked a significant weakening of the old order. The NEC's powers and the practices of Barker and Williams were revealed as falling short of legal norms. Coates remained expelled; Barker dug her heels in against his reinstatement. With her retirement and that of Williams a more liberal regime would bring his readmission.

The party organisation had stagnated under Williams and Barker. Richard Crossman commented in October 1966 that 'in their six (sic) years nothing has been done to reorganise Transport House despite quite a volume of complaints from some of the more intelligent members'. He felt that party reform should be addressed quickly and thoroughly otherwise little could change before the next election. The incumbents were an obstacle.

What we really need, therefore, is for Len and Sarah to retire within the next twelve months and for new people to be brought in time to carry out the reorganisation. Len and Sara could possibly retire if they are offered really big jobs outside but if they are not offered these jobs and don't retire then they must go on up to the election and we must give them loyal support [Crossman (1976) 60–61, 65].

Crossman felt that an independent investigation would be an implicit attack on Williams and Barker. The outcome was setting up of a NEC inquiry under Will Simpson of the Foundry Workers. The result was two reports successively to the 1967 and 1968 party conferences. Crossman dismissed the process as 'utterly futile ... since it is dominated by Len Williams, the man into whose activities we need to inquire'. Williams eventually left his post on 18 April 1968 with a knighthood and appointment as Governor of Mauritius. His successor as general secretary, Harry Nicholas took over on 4 November; in the interim Barker combined her National Agent's post with filling in as General Secretary. These months proved difficult. Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech was followed by devastating results in May's municipal elections; the party's performance in by-elections remained bleak. Barker returned to Yorkshire; she would become a Dame in Wilson's resignation honours list in 1970.

Barker's replacement as National Agent by Ron Hayward was politically significant. An unusually left-leaning regional organiser, his rival, the Assistant National Agent Reginald Underhill was viewed as part of the old, Williams/Barker regime. Hayward was believed to favour a more liberal approach. Some left-leaning members of the party, including Tony Benn, were happy to see Barker being replaced by her less 'musty' successor [Benn (1988) 277]. Hayward justified these liberal expectations. He symbolically burnt a stack of disciplinary files. He was central to liberalising the party's approach to discipline [Shaw (1988) 171–172; *Guardian*, 23 January 1969]. Conflicts should be solved by conciliation not by the imposition of one side's position. Criticism should not be equated with dysfunctional disruption. The Williams-Barker approach to party management was effectively abandoned. This shift reflected changes within the wider party. The Left presence on the NEC was growing; some trade unions were shifting away from solid loyalty to the party leadership; the disciplinary ethos within the Parliamentary Party was more liberal.

On her retirement Barker found the Halifax party in a poor state after years of neglect. Only four out of 15 ward sections were functioning; effective membership was down to 98. On Barker offering her services, the Halifax Labour Party accepted her help 'with acclamation' [Fielding (2003) 220]. She initiated an energetic reorganising drive which significantly improved the state of the party [Fielding (2003) 220]. Shirley Summerskill the sitting Member described how Barker spent her time canvassing in all weathers and organising social events [*Times*, 21 September 1973]. Despite this 'remarkably energetic revival campaign', the party was still in a weak state; when an election was called for 18 June 1970, the functioning ward sections had risen to eight and membership to 230. Labour only succeeded in retaining the Halifax constituency by 198 votes, compared with a margin of 5702 in 1966.

Those who attended the Halifax party's campaign meetings were seasoned veterans, and included Joyce Gould, who was now Labour's Yorkshire regional organiser. She described addressing the committee in an old-fashioned school room as a nerve-wracking experience. This was due to the collective experience of the seasoned activists assembled by Barker, but Gould recalled how Barker 'instructed the delegates to listen to the wise words of their regional organiser' She also found Barker was 'friendlier than ... expected' and had 'a wicked sense of humour' [Gould (2016) 75–76]. Barker's loyalty could not disguise the fact that the Halifax party was fighting a 1970 election relying on what Fielding called a 'venerable Labour voluntarism' [Fielding (2003) 220]. The approach seemed reminiscent of an Edwardian civic party activism that belonged to the halcyon days of coal and steam. Her commitment could also hide the fact that the decay of the Halifax party, like many others in the late 1960s reflected disenchantment with the record of the Wilson Government.

Dame Sara Barker died on holiday in Scotland on 19 September 1973, at the age of 69 and left £7480. She was not the only grocer's daughter, with a father active in local politics, to become involved in the higher echelons of post-war British public life. Yet her seeming disinterest in seeking elected office contrasts her with Margaret Thatcher. As befitted someone who had 'bettered' themselves through extra-mural education, an annual memorial lecture was created. The Sara Barker Memorial Lecture was organised every year after her death during the 1970s. Promoted by Labour's Yorkshire Regional Office, the inaugural lecture was given in Halifax by Sir Harold Wilson [Mirfield Labour Party Minutes, KC481/1/1]. The lecture was his first major speech after his retirement as Prime Minister [*Halifax Courier*, 10 May 1976]. Despite their differences, Wilson gave a 'glowing' eulogy of Barker's commitment to the Labour Party nationally and in Halifax. Wilson observed both he and Barker shared the belief that without social democracy, there could not be real democracy [*Halifax Courier*, 10 May 1976]. The series continued throughout the 1970s, and included contributions by senior figures including John Silkin and Roy Hattersley [*Guardian*, 14 May 1977; *Observer*, 14 December 1980]. Denis Healey in his contribution in September 1979 attempted to encapsulate Barker's political beliefs, and perhaps the ambitions of her career [*Guardian* 10 September 1979]. He discussed voluntary activism, as well as the degree to which the party was representative of the

electorate that votes for it [Healey (1989) 472]. The Shadow Chancellor then quoted Polish philosopher Laszek Kolakowski's analysis of social democracy.

The trouble with the social democratic idea is that it does not stock and does not sell any of the exciting ideological commodities which various totalitarian movements – Communist, Fascist or Leftist – offer dream-hungry youth. It has no proscription for the total salvation of mankind ... Democratic Socialism requires, in addition to commitment to a number of basic values, hard knowledge and calculation ... it is an obstinate will to erode by inches the conditions which produce avoidable suffering, oppression, hunger, wars, racial and national hatred, insatiable greed and vindictive envy.

Healey concluded that it was 'not an ignoble vision', and that it would do more for improvement than the 'cloudy rhetoric' of ideologies or the 'tidy blueprints of academic theories' [Healey (1989) 472–473]. This form of socialism was what Barker represented. Her sense of what the respectable working class wanted could jar with the sentiments of Labour leaders. Crossman attended a Home Policy Committee dinner at the St. Ermin's Hotel. Barker said little but suddenly she 'looked across the table at me very severely and said, "I tell you what really matters now, all these scroungers getting more social benefits than they deserve"'. Crossman reflected, 'what odd views you hear expressed at Labour dinners' [Crossman (1977) 72].

To criticise her as 'loyal but narrow', is to misunderstand how she saw her role [Crossman (1976) 429]. She saw herself not a politician, but as an organiser. Yet within this territory she appeared by the sixties anachronistic. Many younger party activists were frustrated by Barker's unwillingness to innovate [Benn (1987) 50]. She seemed a street-to-street campaigner in the television age. In a time of greater access to education and with politics being fought on a national scale through the media, Barker's traditional door-to-door methods seemed inadequate. Barker believed that 'an organisation like ours is more than just a machine. It represents the fundamental belief of individuals in a cause' [*Guardian*, 23 January 1961]. To deliver social and economic improvement, working people had to organise, campaign, and most of all, be loyal to the party and the ideas it stood for. By the 1960s senior figures within the party felt that an army of activists belonged to a bygone age; in contrast many committed to radical campaigning saw their agendas as impeded not facilitated by Wilson's Labour Party.

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MARC DAVID COLLINSON

BELL, John Robert (1862–1924)

TRADE UNIONIST

Born in County Durham in 1862, and raised in South Shields, John Robert Bell is buried in Hull’s Western Cemetery. He spent his most active years as a trade union official in Humberside—from the moment, in 1910, when he was sent there by the National Seamen and Firemen’s Union (NSFU) until his forced retirement from his position as district secretary in 1923. Considered as ‘one of Havelock Wilson’s right-hand men’ [*Eastern Morning News*, 26 August 1924], he was also, over most of the same period, the President of the Humber Transport Workers’ Federation.

Of Bell’s formative years little is known, apart from the fact that ‘in his early manhood he sailed the seas’ [*Eastern Morning News*, 26 August 1924]. At around the age of thirty, in the early to mid-1890s, he became involved in trade unionism. He joined the Seamen’s Union in the United States; in July 1894 he travelled to Britain to assess the work of the Labour Electoral Association (LEA) and recently formed Independent Labour Party. Both

organisations were responses to the increasingly perceived need for the political representation of labour. The LEA typically worked with the Liberal Party, the ILP in contrast insisted on its independence and had a socialist objective. Bell met Havelock Wilson. He had been elected Member for Middlesbrough in 1892 on an independent platform but subsequently co-operated with the Liberals.

In 1887, for the first time ever in the British Isles, the myriad local seamen's unions had come together and formed, under Havelock Wilson's leadership, a National Amalgamated Seamen and Firemen's Union (NASFU), with its headquarters in Sunderland. Initial success was evident in the union's affiliation of 58,790 to the 1890 TUC. With the boom in transport by steam, maritime trade was the arena for a fierce international battle between the shipping magnates and their precarious but ever growing workforce. Precipitous decline followed for the union as a newly formed Shipping Federation launched a counterattack. By 1892 the union's TUC affiliation had fallen to 20,000; in 1894 the union was dissolved. A successor union was formed quickly, the National Seamen and Firemen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland (NSFU). Bell joined with Wilson in an organising tour. His report to his American colleagues was positive. The tour had been a 'a thorough success' but both he and Wilson were 'war weary' [for Bell in Britain see Yearley (1957) 69–70, citing his reports back to the *American Federationist*]. This optimism was unjustified; for many years Wilson's new union struggled to establish a credible presence. Effectiveness was difficult in a harsh environment where employers were ruthless and workers were often rowdy. The response was the building of a centralised union with professional activists who were able to withstand both employers and impatient members. Bell would develop those qualities. By 1912 he was recognised in Hull for his 'strength, grit and determination', evidence of an 'independent spirit and rugged character' [*Workers' Gazette and Monthly Record*, March 1912].

Bell's first full-time experience as a trade union organiser was in the United States. He seems to have spent most of the 1900s there, as an official for the International Seamen's Union of America (ISU). The ISU, founded one year after the NSFU, in 1895, was the new name of the National Union of Seamen of America, which had been created only three years earlier (1892). Bell's expatriation was hardly exceptional, as technological progress and globalised exchanges were making seamen, who were already, by definition, a mobile professional group, increasingly cosmopolitan. Bell's return to Britain and to the NSFU is not surprising either, as the British union was present in most North American ports. Besides, Havelock Wilson, who understood the value of transnational networking, was eager to recruit collaborators with a cross-continental background.

The NSFU's president's decision to send Bell to the Hull district in 1910 is obvious enough: he needed a man with proven fighting capacities to help the NSFU grow roots in a hostile field. Indeed, after a short period (1888–1893) during which the port had been almost 100% unionised, due to the choice made by the main local employer, the Wilson Company, to collaborate with the dockers' and the seamen's unions, Hull had become, since the 1893 great lock-out and the crushing of the dockers' union by the Shipping Federation, 'a hotbed of blacklegs'. Travelling to several European countries in the late 1890s on behalf of NSFU, Bell had heard for himself, notably in Hamburg and Antwerp, just how bad Hull's reputation was amongst foreign dockers and seamen. The port-city had become home to a 'Yellow Battalion' of labourers, which the British Shipping Federation moved around the North Sea to break strikes, and thus support itself as well as its sister organisations. The battalion's peak of activity was reached in 1907–1908. In Hull, the minority of seamen who were organised generally belonged to the Hull Marine Firemen and Seamen's Union (or simply HSU). It had been founded in 1881 as the Hull Sailors' Mutual Society, renamed the Hull Seamen's and Marine Firemen's Amalgamated Association in 1887, and was led, from its headquarters at 4 Junction Dock Street, by a certain James B. Butcher, whom Bell described as 'out of date and out of sympathy with all progressive movements' [*The Seaman*, April 1911]. Butcher made no mystery of his attachment to friendly relations with the employers in general, and with the Wilsons in particular, who in return made minor concessions to his union so as to keep the more combative NSFU at bay.

Bell's deeds and words are more precisely reported from 1910 onwards, with his arrival in Humberside as Havelock Wilson's emissary. At first he was not sent to Hull, where a certain William Lewis presided over the NSFU branch, but to Grimsby. There Bell soon distinguished himself by signing an agreement with the owners of the steam fishing boats, whom he praised for being 'a democratic body' that believed in 'the principle of collective bargaining' and whom all shipowners should emulate [*The Seaman*, April 1911]. Bell's central mission, however, was to undermine the influence of the HSU. On 6 September 1910, he had a letter published in the *Hull Daily Mail* in which he questioned Butcher very directly about the nature of his relationships with the shipowners, a provocation that Butcher of course castigated as 'bickering and mud-slinging' [*The Seaman*, May 1911]. Bell also invited the HSU rank and file to visit the NSFU's new headquarters on Posterngate.

Towards the end of 1910, a more important matter focused Bell's attention: the preparation of the first ever 'International Seamen's Strike' that Wilson was hoping to organise in 1911 with the support of both the ITF and the National Transport Workers' Federation (NTWF). The latter was a unitary body set up in November 1910 to coordinate the efforts of the biggest transport unions. The NSFU president felt that, with the ongoing shipping boom, time was ripe to 'strike and strike hard'. In particular he aimed at ditching the 'Federation Ticket', a device introduced by the shipowners in 1891 to refuse employment to the members of trade unions. In the run-up to the international strike, Bell participated in several preparatory conferences on the continent and mass meetings in London. In Humberside, the movement was promoted on 19 March by 'a splendid meeting at St. George's Hall' in Hull [*The Seaman*, April 1911], and on 9 May by another one in Goole. As a response the Humber District branch of the Shipping Federation covered the streets of Hull with circulars attacking the projected strike—which, according to Bell, proved counterproductive: 'The more filth the Federation (poured) on Wilson', the more the people of Hull felt that the NSFU was 'doing its duty' [*The Seaman*, June 1911]. In the days preceding the strike—now fixed for 14 June—the NTWF decided it would not back it, its secretary Robert Williams describing it as 'a gambler's last chance'. What is worse, of the ITF sections, only the Belgian and Dutch ones agreed to participate. Surprisingly enough, those setbacks did not hinder the movement—which turned out to be particularly spectacular in Hull.

The 1911 strike paralysed the port of Hull for three weeks. After about a week the sailors' strike was reinforced by the dockers, who ceased work in sympathy with the seamen, but also with claims of their own regarding pay and working hours. From that moment onwards, the strike was led by a 'joint strike committee', on which Bell collaborated with the dockers' leader, a certain John Burn, like him a new leader who local employers and authorities feared might be an agitator under Tom Mann's syndicalist influence. But Bell, like most NSFU chiefs, was anti-socialist, and the Board of Trade's mediator, George Ranken Askwith, quickly understood that he could lean on him to try and restore social peace: 'The leader is a very good type', Askwith wrote to the Home Office [HO 45/10 648/210 615/22]. 'He and the other leaders have little control and are now frightened, but are doing all they can. With them I arranged that they should hold mass meetings in a field outside the city and preach order, which they did, as far as their voices, which had almost gone, would allow' [HO 45/10 648/210 615/26a]. Bell and Burn's call to accept the employers' concessions and resume work, on 30 June 1911, was nonetheless a fiasco. They were booed, and the city centre and the docks were soon occupied by the strikers and their supporters. It took a second attempt, on 2 July, to bring the movement to a halt. Two days later, the army and police forces surrounding the city were at last ordered to withdraw.

The success of the strike allowed the NSFU to finally make a breakthrough and recruit a large number of members, notably on the occasion of mass meetings held in the following months under the chairmanship of Father Charles Hopkins and other NSFU figureheads. Yet the concessions made by the shipowners in the heat of the fight were not easily implemented, and Bell was contacted time and again to intervene in favour of groups of sailors who felt their new rights were not being respected. Some of the written concessions were open to interpretation, and the interpretation was likely to be in favour of the employers now that pressure from

below had boiled down. In January 1912 the Board of Trade announced that the 1911 agreement granting seamen a half-day holiday per week applied 'only to seamen whilst in the ports of Hull and Goole', and not to Hull seamen 'while in any other place or port' [*The Seaman*, January 1912]. The decision, which Bell decried as 'not satisfactory', led to a ballot on 7 January 1912, in which the Hull seamen voted in favour of a strike by 2817 votes to 81. The vote, however, did not lead to a work stoppage, nor did a meeting held later on in the year demanding that the half-day holiday be extended to Grimsby.

The way the agreement was applied in Goole was also contested. Bell and the local secretary of the NSFU branch, H.S. Wishart, were informed by Goole seamen that holders of the Federation Ticket were still given preference of employment, and that union members were therefore still discriminated against. The Goole Steamship Owners' Association rejected the accusation [*The Seaman*, March 1912]; still no collective militant response was organised. Bell, who had just moved from Grimsby to Hull and now lived with his family at 34 Mayfield Street, on Springbank, was apparently reluctant to revive the modes of action that had proved so efficient in June 1911. This can be seen as a harbinger of the NSFU's growing reluctance to resort to strikes on the national level. On 10 June 1912, when the NTWF declared a national ports strike, it was only mildly supported by Wilson, did not affect Hull, and fizzled out after a week. That strike was actually the last one ever called for by the NSFU. The union's attitude towards shipowners was becoming less confrontational, as 'direct action' was being replaced by 'winning and dining' as the favourite means to settle issues. For Hull seamen, at least initially, that evolution was not perceived as a betrayal, since their wages were standardised locally on 28 June 1912, and harmonised nationally in 1913—which in most cases meant a wage increase.

Bell's efforts to give the NSFU solid foundations in Humberside often led him to formulate judgements over rival unions that could be perceived as 'rash and reckless' [*Humberside Transport Workers Gazette*, October 1912]. For example he signed a letter condemning the breakaway British Seafarers Union (BSU) that had sprung UP in Southampton and Glasgow, accusing its leader Emmanuel Shinwell and his comrades of being nothing but hirelings of the Shipping Federation [*The Seaman*, October 1912]. He also condemned the decasualisation agreement signed by the National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL) in Liverpool, a scheme he compared to a new form of Federation Ticket [*Humberside Transport Workers' Gazette*, October 1912]. Burn and his union complained about this 'grossly silly and impertinent remark' made 'with consummate folly'. But Bell, in line with Wilson's approach, was still hoping that some kind of closed shop system could be reached whereby the NSFU would be recognised as the Shipping Federation's sole interlocutor and partner. Such was the objective behind the mass meetings he organised on 9 January in Hull and 14 January in Goole under the auspices of the National Movement for a Conciliation Board—a permanent body for negotiation that did not materialise until the war.

In his struggle to appear as the Hull sailors' champion, Bell also defended their interests in the courts. For instance, he spoke out in favour of donkeymen protesting that they had not been paid the agreed rate for overtime, and of fishermen imprisoned for not having joined their ship on time. He relentlessly denounced the overloading of ships, which remained a threat in spite of the appointment of inspectors by the Board of Trade [*The Seaman*, 13 June 1913]. Yet he was not able to displace the HSU. On 27 March 1913, an agreement over the wages of the stewards and the cooks employed by the Wilson Company was signed not only by the NSFU but also by two HSU delegates. The HSU had managed to retain a sizeable membership [J. Kew membership cards, 1896–1905, MSS 175/6/Hu/3/4-14]. Butcher had even found an alter ego and successor in the person of George William McKee. Even *The Seaman* had to admit, in May 1913, that the NSFU in Hull was progressing 'steadily if slowly', as if the impulse of 1911 was now waning. One area in which progress was significant was the organisation of the fishermen. In the autumn of 1913, Bell was the main speaker at a mass meeting at the Hessle Road Picture Palace, where a national minimum wage for fishermen and their inclusion in the Workmen's Compensation Act were demanded. On the national level, the NSFU had managed to increase its presence amongst fishermen from just above 1000 members in 1910 to almost 20,000, and Bell was in charge of facilitating the same upward spiral in Hull and Humberside.

An unofficial but massive strike in which Hull dockers were engaged from 17 to 21 July 1913 led to an agreement that affected the seamen. It confirmed that no priority of employment should be given to seamen holding the Federation Ticket, and that all seamen employed in Hull and Goole were entitled to a half-holiday per week. The novelty was that, if a conflict relating to the interpretation of the agreement should arise, 'no stoppage of work (should) take place, but the matter (should) be referred to the Board of Trade' (NSFU, Official Wages Agreements 1913, MSS 175/6/Hu/3/17). The text was meant to keep the unruly dock workers under control and contain their reactions, a goal that Bell and the NSFU executive shared with the government at a moment when rampant labour unrest was menacing both public authorities and trade union bureaucracies.

Bell, a typical 'Wilsonite', was hostile to socialism and made very clear that his union would not affiliate to the Labour Party—insisting that affiliation to the Trades Council was strong enough a link with the rest of the labour movement [*Hull Daily Mail*, 16 May 1912]. What he did not explain was that Wilson had never severed his connection with the Liberal Party, and that such a bond made a move towards Labour impossible for the NSFU leadership. 'Don't get your eye on Westminster and forget the present needs of the transport workers', his comrades warned him [*Humber Transport Workers' Gazette*, March 1912]. But the warning was untimely, as Bell did not contest a parliamentary seat until 1918, in his one and only parliamentary campaign.

On Wednesday 15 April 1914, Bell sat on a platform alongside Wilson, inside Hull's City Hall, for the launching of the NSFU's national campaign against what it called the 'Yellow Peril', i.e. the employment of Asiatic seamen on board British ships. The coloured seafarers, known as 'lascars', whatever their precise geographical origin, were accused by the union of being incompetent, of stealing British jobs, of corrupting British women, of invading and colonising Great Britain. As early as 1911, Bell had denounced 'the shipowners who (employed) Chinamen in preference to their own countrymen' [*The Seaman*, June 1911]. At the 1914 meeting, the crowd adopted a resolution declaring that underpaid workers from the East were a threat to British standards and morals, and that they should therefore be expelled from British ships by all means necessary. In the days following the meeting Bell fought and won to make sure the Asiatic workers employed on a steamship from Glasgow, the Auchendale, were replaced by an 'all-white' crew [*The Seaman*, 1 May 1914]. However the campaign was interrupted by the outbreak of the war, which considerably diminished unemployment amongst seamen and placed other priorities on the agenda.

Bell was nonetheless able to defend international solidarity between seamen. In June 1911, he had praised a crew of Hull trawler men for rescuing a Norwegian fishing smack in December 1913 [*The Seaman*, 26 December 1913]. More generally, he was in regular contact with trade union officials representing the NSFU across the seas, in English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish ports, as well as in the districts of Antwerp, Rotterdam and Hamburg, all the way to New York City. 'The Workers of the World must be linked up in *one huge army*, well equipped, well drilled, and above all, well disciplined': Bell could surely have signed that declaration made on 30 June 1914 by his Hull rival G.W. McKee. But his sense of class solidarity stopped at the colour line.

In 1913, Bell had rejoiced when the sailors embarked on the German steamer *Deutschland* had rescued the crew of a Cardiff steamer and brought them back safely to Hull. But that international brotherhood of the sea was shattered when the war broke out in August 1914. Inside a British labour movement that saw most of its leaders advocate a 'social truce' and only a minority stick to their pre-war internationalism, the NSFU was the union that took support to the war effort and Hun-bashing the farthest. From the very beginning of the conflict, the NSFU guaranteed that it would collaborate fully with the State and the employers, and that the seamen's grievances would be shelved until the nation was saved. As soon as Britain declared war on Germany, the NSFU broke its links with the ITF; and though there is no evidence that it happened in Hull, "Captain" Edward Tupper is known to have provided groups of seamen to break up pacifist meetings. Imbued with the same jingoism as his mentor Wilson, Bell never missed an opportunity to affirm his union's devotion to Britain's war aims. This was the case every

time a Hull ship—for example the Imperialist, in October 1914—was sunk in the North Sea by the explosion of German mines. Month after month, the list of names on the NSFU's Roll of Honour grew longer, and Bell was systematically called to speak during the services given in memory of the deceased. The sinking of the Lusitania, on 7 May 1915, added fuel to the NSFU's nationalist discourse—as did, more generally, the fact that up to 15,000 British seamen died at sea between 1914 and 1918.

The war was a turning point insofar as it accelerated the rapprochement between the NSFU and the HSU. Now that the HSU had asserted its right to coexist with the NSFU, now that it no longer feared displacement and annihilation, collaboration under the umbrella of the National Transport Workers' Federation (NTWF), and even steps towards amalgamation had become imaginable. Bell and McKee, whatever their personal antagonisms in the past, shared the same sense of patriotism, the same thirst for recognition from the employing class, and the same desire to 'cool' their members' 'heated blood' (HSU, Report and Balance Sheet for Half Year ended June 30, 1914). Because the seamen's wages, in Hull and all over the country, went up by 100% during the war, due to the workforce shortage, the NSFU was capable, most of the time, to control its grassroots.

On Sunday 1 July 1917, Bell, as the President of the Humberside Transport Workers Federation, should have presided over a meeting of dockers. They were threatening to go on strike to prevent the Ministry of Shipping from cutting their wages with a new 'penalty clause', and Hull's trade union officials wanted to persuade them that the threat was imaginary, that it would be more reasonable to wait and see. Due to some 'indisposition', Bell was excused, and this is the only instance of this strong man not being capable of facing opposition from below [*Hull Daily Mail*, 2 July 1917]. Maybe the trouble with him was no more than physical—later on that year, he was sent to London for a cancer-related operation. But, with the rise of anti-war sentiments from 1916 onwards, Bell could rightfully have felt under pressure. In the last year of the war, Bell broke away from the local Trades Council and Labour Party, as he disagreed with their more and more affirmed pacifism. This local evolution replicated the NSFU's growing distance, on the national level, vis-à-vis the bulk of the British labour movement. Bell, of course, adhered whole-heartedly to Wilson's choice, in 1917, to found an International Seamen's Federation (ISF) excluding federations and workers from non-allied countries.

In the December 1918 general election, in spite of his health problem, Bell stood as 'the Seafarers' candidate' in the new constituency of South West Hull. He was one of the only five candidates officially sponsored by the NSFU in the whole of the United Kingdom. But the labels he claimed or those that were chosen for him by the local press varied quite a lot, from 'National Democratic' to 'Imperial' and even 'Coalition candidate'—even though he was in competition with Major Entwistle, a Liberal who was the only official Coalitionist. Bell's candidature was no surprise, as the NSFU had evoked it long before the war [*The Seaman*, December 1911 and January 1912].

The campaign kicked off on Sunday 13 October, with a meeting at the Lyric. Wilson having cancelled his participation at the last minute, Bell stood alone in the limelight. Whilst stating that 'the sailor never hated anyone' and that 'the sailor was a great internationalist', his speech revolved around the idea of a 'Boche Boycott' that should last 'for ever', to make 'the Huns'—the 'land and sea criminals'—pay for their 'barbarity' [*Eastern Morning News*, 14 October 1918, and *Hull Daily Mail*, 15 October 1918]. Paying homage to the British seamen who had lost their lives in the war, he insisted that the government should settle for nothing less than 'unconditional surrender' from the Kaiser, the Junkers and the German nation and people. The meeting proceeded with a shorter speech by J.A. Seddon, a former TUC president of 'Lib-Lab' sensibility, who accused the Hull Labour Party of being nothing but 'a Bolshe Brigade', made of people acquainted with a 'Russian Research Society' of ill reputation and 'who professed friendship with every country but their own'. During the same campaign, similar expressions were used by docker John Burn in his speeches in favour of Conservative candidate Sir Mark Sykes.