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THE EMERGENCE OF THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY IN BRADFORD

Opening the 21st anniversary of the ILP in Bradford in April 1914, J. H. Palin, one of Bradford's most prominent trade unionists, remarked: "Of ordinary historical association, Bradford has none. In Domesday Book, it is described as a waste, and the subsequent periods of capitalist exploitation have done little to improve it. [...] The History of Bradford will be very largely the history of the ILP."¹ Palin's remark – unjust as it is, perhaps, to a distinguished list of Victorian philanthropists – stands as testimony to the authority and influence which the labour movement in Bradford had acquired by that date. It also provides a clue to the origins of that authority and influence, for it demonstrates the importance which he and other Bradford trade unionists attached to their association with the independent labour movement. Whatever the reactions of trade unionists in the rest of the country, in Bradford, trade unionists were vital to its success. Indeed, strong trade-union support proved to be an essential corollary of effective independent working-class political action.

The purpose of this article is to examine the characteristics of the Bradford movement, and in particular to elucidate its relationship to the trade-union movement. The early protagonists of the ILP – trade unionists and others – shared a passionate enthusiasm, a millenarian conviction derived from their commitment to Socialism as they defined it, which gave many of their utterances a revolutionary fervour, and kindled violent antagonism among many respectable Bradford business men. Yet their programme in practice differed little from those of more radical progressive Liberals. The initial spurt between 1891 and 1893 was followed by several years of difficulty and set-back. By 1897 the corner had been turned, and from then on the Labour interest made steady progress. By 1911 it was regularly taking about 30 per cent of the vote at municipal elections. Explanations lie in the crucial relationships with the trade-union movement. Between 1890 and 1892, the

¹ Yorkshire Observer Budget, 13 April 1914.

Bradford ILP, acting through its supporting unions, took control of the Bradford Trades and Labour Council, ousting from the executive almost all representatives of the hitherto dominant Lib-Lab adherents. The subsequent resentments were eventually, and apparently successfully, contained with the creation of the Workers' Municipal Election Committee in 1901.¹ The value of the organisational strength thus obtained is incalculable.

It was not until the late 1880's that much evidence of the potential strength of the Bradford movement could be discerned. In February 1884, William Morris, after a lecture he had given on behalf of the Democratic Federation, had written:

“The Bradford lecture went off very well: a full house and all that: but they are mostly a sad set of Philistines there, and it will be long before we do anything with them: you see the workmen are pretty comfortable there because all the spinning and weaving is done by women and children; the latter go to the mill at 10 years old for 5 hours a day as half-timers: I don't think all my vigorous words (of a nature that you may imagine) shook the conviction of my entertainers that this was the way to make an Earthly Paradise.”²

It was more than eighteen months later, in September 1885, before the reaction came. The Bradford Trades Council passed a resolution to the effect:

“That this Council do appoint a deputation to wait upon the Liberal Executive Committee for the purpose of trying to induce the said Committee to accept a working man as one of the Liberal Eight for nomination as a candidate at the coming School Board Elections.”³

The ensuing episode revealed the lack of fervour behind the demand for labour representation. The Liberal 600 somewhat contemptuously rejected the request despite the fact that the proposed candidate was John Hollings, journeyman tailor, president of the Trades Council, and a respected life-long Liberal.⁴ A resolution of the Bradford branch of the Typographical Association in March 1885, declaring that the question of a labour candidate for Bradford was inopportune, reveals

¹ Bradford Trades and Labour Council, Yearbook 1912, pp. 21-22.

² The Letters of William Morris to his family and friends, ed. by Ph. Henderson (London, 1950), letter dated 25 February 1884.

³ Bradford Trades Council, minutes, 16 September 1885. In the possession of the Bradford Trades Council, Textile Hall, Westgate, Bradford.

⁴ Bradford Observer, 25 September 1885.

the trade-union movement's lack of faith in its own ability.¹ A letter to the *Bradford Observer*, from a "Radical Burgess", reflected that "working men are greatly to blame for not taking up, as they ought to do, the question of their own representation and giving it practical shape. There must be many of them, who being on their own account, would even under present arrangements make eligible candidates for the part?"² Clearly, such enthusiasm as had been generated in the late 1860's and early 1870's for working-class representation – an enthusiasm which had led to the stone-mason James Hardaker's parliamentary candidature in the election of 1874 – had been exhausted.³

Then, in five dramatic years between 1888 and 1892, the independent labour movement was created. By 1891, the Bradford Labour Union, the first of its kind, was in existence – determined to fight local and national elections with candidates representing the working classes, in total independence of the established parties. The new labour press was widely read, and the *Bradford Labour Journal* was the most flourishing organ of the labour movement in the whole country. By the end of 1892, a bitter general election had been fought in the West Division, and Ben Tillett had given Alfred Illingworth, the commander-in-chief of Bradford Liberalism, wealthy manufacturer and local employer, and a national politician of some importance, a much closer run than anybody could have expected. All three councillors in the Manningham Ward were Labour men, though only two were of the ILP. Labour clubs, a Labour Church and the local Fabian society strengthened and diffused the organisation through the town.⁴ It was a tribute to the strength of the Bradford movement that the meeting held in January 1893 to inaugurate the National Independent Labour Party took place at the Bradford Labour Institute on Peckover Street. The Bradford Party was to remain one of the strongest in the country until well after the 1914 War. Paul Bland was able to claim in 1895 that the Bradford ILP provided one-thirteenth of the National Administrative Council's entire income and one-sixth of its affiliation fees. Though Bradford returned no Labour MP until 1906, at municipal elections its position was progressively strengthened until in 1913 it took 43 per cent of the vote and could claim 20 seats on the council.

¹ Bradford Typographical Society, minutes, March 1885. In the possession of the Bradford Graphical Society, Textile Hall, Westgate, Bradford. Also in the possession of Mr J. Reynolds.

² Bradford Observer, 25 September 1885.

³ Bradford Observer, 22 December 1873; J. Reynolds, *A Short History of the Bradford Graphical Society* (Bradford, 1971).

⁴ H. Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1965), pp. 114-15.

I

THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CLIMATE

The economic and social climate in the 1880's could hardly have seemed propitious for the development of a powerful working-class movement. Crucial in the situation had been the weaknesses of trade-union organisation. In the principal branches of the major industry of the town – worsted textiles – unionism had been virtually non-existent since the technological transformation which had taken place between 1820 and 1850. Indeed, the situation was to improve but little until the eve of the First World War.

The smallness of the industrial unit was a vital factor inhibiting the growth of textile trade unionism. With a vast supply of labour to choose from the small employer could easily identify and victimise any worker who showed an interest in trade unionism. W. H. Drew, prominent ILP'er and a founder member of the Weavers' Union, and one-time secretary of the Trades Council, complained of such action when he presented his evidence to the Royal Commission on Labour (1892). He had found difficulty in obtaining a living as a weaver, and he explained the weak organisation of the weavers in terms of "their want of education and their fear of employers".¹ It was a situation which also provoked contending loyalties – between what one owed to one's class and neighbours and what one owed to a paternalistic, well-known and perhaps personally friendly employer. It immeasurably complicated the problems of organisation, by its fragmentation of the potential membership.

The larger firms could also exploit the paternalistic environment of the textile trade. They were all family-based firms. Their heads – Salts, Listers, Illingworths, Mitchells, Tankards and Ripleys, for instance – carried immense social and political prestige as the creators of nineteenth-century Bradford. On the occasion of the dyers' strike in Bradford in 1880, Henry Ripley, MP for Bradford and owner of the Bowling Dyeworks (the largest such concern in England), objected to dealing with the newly-formed dyers' union. He refused to be bound by the decision of the Yorkshire Master Dyers' Association, stating that "Many of your grandfathers, fathers and sons have worked at Bowling all your lives and this is the first occasion on which you have, during a long series of years, ever assumed a hostile attitude. I appeal to you not to listen to the advances of men who really care nothing about you, and have not your real interests at heart."²

¹ Royal Commission of Labour, Vol. I [Parliamentary Papers, 1892, XXXV], q. 5537.

² Bradford Observer, 7 February 1880.

The difficulties of trade-union organisation were amplified by the fact that not only was the textile labour force composed very largely of women and children but, as the depression deepened during the late nineteenth century and employers searched for means of cutting costs, their proportions actually increased. This influx of labour created a pool of surplus male labour, and Mr Downing, president of the West Riding Power Loom Weavers' Association, stressed that "There are some able-bodied men, competent men who are unable to obtain employment in consequence of the competition of women." W. H. Drew, the Bradford regional organiser of the Weavers' Union, was insistent that women ought not to be employed since "The labour market is too crowded and their exclusion would raise the wages of their male relatives."¹ The fact was that female weavers had increased in number from about half the total in the 1850's to nearly two-thirds in the mid-1880's. Only a small percentage of these were organised before 1914, for women tended to move in and out of the mill as family considerations demanded and so had little opportunity to develop consistent interest in, or loyalty to, trade-union ideals. In 1895 only about 2,500 of the 23,000 female woollen and worsted weavers were organised, and of another 80,000 to 90,000 spinners and assistants only about 500 were unionised.

Trade-union organisation was naturally more general in the established crafts and in the male preserves of the textile industry such as woollorting, pressing and the minor executive or overlooking grades. W. Cudworth, in *The Condition of the Industrial Classes in Bradford and District* (1887), has shown that few trades had adequate control of such matters as apprenticeship.² Even the printers, with their long-established traditions of chapel organisation, high premiums on trained skills and generally superior levels of education, could not claim complete control of the labour market. As late as 1892, one-sixth of the journeyman printers in Bradford were not members of the Typographical Society. It was not until the turn of the century that the outlying townships and villages in the growing conurbation around Bradford could be infiltrated to any degree. Thus there was always a ready pool of unorganised labour available to the employer, and a large number of men who had to depend on casual, day-to-day employment. Indeed, until the end of the century, the relations of the printers with their employers was marked by deference rather than aggressive militancy.

¹ Royal Commission on Labour, *ibid.*, qq. 4782-5238, 5374-5842, particularly qq. 5618-20.

² W. Cudworth, *Condition of the Industrial Classes* (Bradford, 1887).

The Bradford Trades Council had emerged (after an abortive start in 1868) out of the agitation against the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1872, and had begun to make an impression on the town. Its agitation had, for instance, been sufficiently effective to force the appointment of a stipendiary magistrate to reinforce the voluntary bench and (hopefully) offset its middle-class bias in favour of the employer. But the Trades Council ran into serious difficulties and was on the point of collapse by 1880. In such circumstances, the demands of working-class supporters of both political parties for more effective working-class representation could be, and were, largely ignored. No powerful trade union commanding the loyal votes of hundreds of workers, and able to maintain a political campaign out of its own financial resources, dominated Bradford politics – a marked contrast with, for example, some of the mining constituencies where early concessions had to be made; and the reasonably well-established craft unions were too fragmented to provide consistent and irresistible pressure.

The electoral prospects of an independent labour movement were further diminished by the complexity of the political geography of Bradford. During the nineteenth century, Bradford had developed in such a way that it was difficult to define any one ward as specifically working-class. Only Manningham, East and West Bowling, Little Horton, North, South and West Wards could in any sense claim this designation. And in every one of them there were special problems which hindered the growth of strong centres of independent labour activity. Manningham, indeed, housing the celebrated Salt Street Labour Club, consistently returned Labour men in the municipal elections after 1891 – but it also contained the richest and most impressive areas of suburban villas in the town and one of the most active Conservative Men's Clubs. East Bowling had been dominated politically by the Conservative management of the Bowling Iron Works since the late eighteenth century. In 1891, there were two Conservative Working Men's Clubs in East Bowling and no Labour Club. West Bowling was under the influence of the Ripley Dyeworks, and in any case owed a special allegiance to Samuel Shaftoe, the leading Lib-Lab trade unionist in Bradford. Little Horton contained the middle-class areas around Horton Green and responded to the affluence and influence of Sir Francis Sharp-Powell of Horton Hall – Bradford's nearest equivalent to a local squire. North, South and West Wards contained the worst slums and the most desperate poverty. Their inhabitants were generally considered to be so sunk in apathy that no hope of political activism could be expected. E. R. Hartley wrote in the *Bradford Labour Echo*, in 1895:

“The South Ward is a Liberal anti-Labour ward. What we have to think about the position is very little. It is not from people such as those who are to be found in this locality that our emancipation will ever come. Socialism is a science of government. It requires intelligent men and women to grapple with its tenets and to look for such among the mass of unfortunate wretches who make the sum total of wretchedness in the South Ward is to look in vain. The very people for whom we are working and toiling are our worst opponents – bitter and intolerant, unsympathetic and insolent, prone rather to live on charity than upon the rights of manhood and womanhood and if ever such places are captured at all, they must be captured from outside, for not until the death rate, the insanitation and the horrible mode of life are changed shall we ever see the South Ward of Bradford taking an intelligent interest in the affairs mostly concerning it. This is no skit but a sorrowful admission of the plain facts as I see them.”¹

Though there was much truth in what he wrote, Hartley had overlooked one important political fact – South Ward, like West and North, contained a strong Irish vote, which retained its allegiance to the Liberal interest long after independent labour representation became a possibility. The potential independent labour vote tended to be scattered in the better-off working-class areas of back-to-back housing and small terrace houses which had sprung up in profusion between 1870 and 1890, forming the outer ring of the town and spread throughout most of the wards. In these circumstances, Liberal leadership saw little reason to make concessions.

II

THE EMERGENCE OF THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR MOVEMENT

By 1892, however, it seems reasonable to consider that in Bradford the two-party concept had been undermined; the independent labour movement was established, and its basic characteristics determined. This transformation was brought about in the context of a worsening economic situation following the introduction of the McKinley Tariff on British exports to the United States. It was engendered, paradoxically, by the very situation described earlier – for if, because of electoral geography and trade-union weaknesses neither Liberals nor Conservatives needed to give way to demands for working-class representation, this was only going to be obtained through an in-

¹ Bradford Labour Echo, 30 November 1895. E. R. Hartley wrote as “Echoist”.

dependent labour movement. Furthermore, the urban geography of Bradford, complex as it was, included by 1890 a number of working-class enclaves both socially coherent and, through the forming of Independent Labour Clubs, politically organised by the spring of 1891. Though these enclaves could not always dominate election results, they nurtured the solidarity of the Bradford working classes and provided firm bases of loyal support. Such a one was the triangle between Otley Road, Undercliffe Street and Ripon Street – the home of Paul Bland and James Bartley and Edward Roche (and later Victor Grayson Feather), and served by three Independent Labour Clubs.

Three lines of development converged to make up the new movement. First, a small branch of Morris's Socialist League was in existence in 1886. It brought together a number of those men who were to form the backbone of the ILP for the next generation – among them Halford, Jowett and Minty. Most of them, who would appear in any hagiography of the independent labour movement, were prominent trade unionists. Jowett, the power-loom overlooker, established a strong position in the municipal politics of Bradford before being returned as the first ILP MP for Bradford in 1906.¹ Both Halford and Minty, members of the Bakers and Confectioners' Union and the Vehicular Workers' Union, respectively, were original members of the Bradford Labour Union, the forerunner of the ILP, when it was formed in May 1891, and both played important roles in municipal politics. The Socialist League appears to have injected into the movement that sense of utopian idealism which lifted the ILP above the level of simple bread-and-butter issues. It drew its inspiration certainly as much from Ruskin, Morris and the Sermon on the Mount as it had from Marx and Engels. By 1887, it had broken with Morris on the question of parliamentary action, thereby proclaiming what was to be a characteristic of the movement for the future – its evolutionary nature.

This small band of Socialists was already committed to the need for independent political action by, and on behalf of, the working classes, and the pressure of events would soon lead them to seek the political support of trade unions and consequently to think in terms of a homogenous Labour Movement. Fred Jowett first warned, in 1887: "A Labour Party cannot in justice to their interest identify themselves with either party."² About the same time, he joined the Power-Loom Weaving Overlookers' Union. An independent political party representing labour needed to establish links with trade unionism; and

¹ F. Brockway, *Sixty Years of Socialism* (London, 1946), p. 69.

² *Bradford Observer*, 8 February 1887.

increasingly Jowett, and the others, began to see socialism and trade unionism as merely different aspects of the strategy of recreating society.

Secondly, trade unions, stimulated by short-term boom conditions, began a remarkable period of expansion. In 1883 there were some 3,500 trade unionists in Bradford, 2,500 of whom were affiliated to the Trades Council. In 1891, these figures had increased to 7,000 and 3,000 respectively, and by 1892 dramatically to 13,000 and 11,000. While the weaving and spinning branches of the textile industry remained badly organised, trade unionism made dramatic strides in the male-dominated preparatory and finishing sections. The Amalgamated Society of Dyers, refounded in 1878, had grown from 700 members in 1888 to 2,000 in 1892. The newly-established National Union of Woolsorters – the first union of semi-skilled sorters as distinct from the highly paid aristocracy of woolsorters organised since 1838 – had a membership of 1200, and the Bradford and District Woolcombers' Society, founded in 1890, 1500. There had been a successful strike of gas-workers led by Paul Bland, and the Gas Workers and General Labourers' Union which sprang from it added to the strength of the new unions on the Bradford Trades Council.

But the improvement in the trade-union situation was not merely due to the extension of trade unionism into the ranks of the unskilled and semi-skilled. The craft unions were also becoming more aggressive in their negotiations with their employers and their missionary efforts among their non-union fellow workmen. Engineers and printers, in particular, became increasingly pugnacious and, it is worth noting, among the earliest and most effective advocates of independent labour action. The simple fact was that they were at last exposed to the threat of technological revolution in their industries, and were defending their livelihood with all the force they could muster. The Thorne Composing Machine was first introduced into the offices of the *Bradford Observer* in 1889, and its appearance inaugurated a protracted and acrimonious series of negotiations about its use in the Bradford printing offices, which were not completed until 1896. In 1891 there had been about 50 non-union men in the town and a number of "unfair" offices, including one of the principal newspapers, the *Daily Telegraph*, and one of the largest printing offices, George Harrisons. Seven years later it could be claimed that there was not a single non-union firm in the town, and a number of chapels in the outlying districts had been brought within the jurisdiction of the Society. The printers also spoke with increasing confidence to their employers. They had initiated the "Fair Contracts" movement through the Trades Council, and complained and threatened when public bodies made use of non-union

firms.¹ It was a far cry from the time in 1867 when the union felt obliged to assure its masters, in the obsequious terms of a letter which read: “your employees do not wish to press their claims arrogantly, nor do they intend to use anything but moral suasion to attain their object.”²

Thirdly, leading trade unionists, hitherto prepared to accept the leadership of the well-to-do, became increasingly disillusioned with the effectiveness of the political representation they enjoyed both at the municipal level and the national level. Dissatisfied by the evidence which Henry Mitchell, leading Conservative, and Sir Jacob Behrens, Liberal Unionist (both prominent Bradford industrialists and former presidents of the Chamber of Commerce), had given to the Royal Commission on the Depression in Trade and Industry (1886), trade unionists began to express their discontent in the local press and in the monthly meetings of the Trades Council. Contrary to the impression given by Mitchell and Behrens, Bradford working men had been badly affected by the depression and unemployment was high.

The dissatisfaction thus engendered was translated into political action by the formation of the Bradford branch of the Labour Electoral Association in 1887. This event followed a conference at Bradford in February 1887. Attending the conference were most of the important members of the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC, as well as the main members of the Bradford Trades Council. The conferences had little difficulty in convincing men like John Hollings (tailor), president of the Trades Council, Samuel Shaftoe (skip maker), secretary, and John Sewell (tailor), treasurer, of the need for positive action on the question of labour representation. They were not, however, so convinced of the need for independent political action – preferring to act as a Labour group within the Liberal party. Shaftoe, particularly, had made a local political career within the Liberal party. He was financial secretary of the Bradford branch of the English Home Rule Union, a member of the Bradford Liberal 600 and on the Executive Council of the Eastern Division of the Bradford Liberal Association. He had stood for the East Bowling Ward as a Liberal in the municipal election of 1884. Like many of his type in Bradford and elsewhere, Shaftoe saw nothing incompatible between his membership of the LEA and his connection with the Liberal Party.

Other working-class political activists were of a different opinion. The most prominent member of this group was James Bartley, an

¹ Bradford Typographical Society, minutes, passim 1891-94. See also J. Reynolds, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-26.

² Letter of Bradford Letter Press Printers to Employers, 23 November 1867, in the possession of Mr J. Reynolds.

Irishman who had arrived in Bradford in 1870 and had joined the Bradford Typographical Society. He later worked as a reader for the *Bradford Observer* and as sub-editor for the *Yorkshire Factory Times*. He was a prolific writer and a formidable opponent. He played a leading role in the *Bradford Daily Telegraph* strike of 1891, and established a nationwide connection through his journalistic ability. The much respected C. L. Robinson, a relative of Jowett's, a member of the Amalgamated Society of Cabinet Makers, a Labour Radical from 1870 and a Republican in his youth, also belonged to this group.

These men threw in their lot with Jowett and the Socialists, and in fact, given their experience and maturity, assumed for a time the leadership of the movement. Bartley could write in 1887: "I believe it to be extremely undesirable to mix trade unionism with politics. [...] If we wish to keep trade unions in the secure position they have, after long struggling, attained, we must be careful not to endanger their political neutrality."¹ Two years later, he led the attack on the dominant Lib-Lab faction in the Bradford Trades Council. In 1891, Robinson, elected unopposed at a by-election for Manningham Ward, became Bradford's first ILP councillor. The alliance between socialism and trade unionism in Bradford had laid down its roots. As a first step towards independence, the Socialists and their allies joined the Bradford branch of the Labour Electoral Association. Like its parent body, the National Labour Electoral Association, the organisation was divided from the start. Its birth was caesarian rather than natural. It fell precisely into the trap against which T. R. Threlfall had warned when he stated that trade unionists ought not to "halt between two opinions. They must form the nucleus of the Labour party or sink into comparative insignificance."² The first political organ of Bradford trade unionism, the local branch of the LEA, was divided into two camps – the Liberals led by Shaftoe and the Socialists led by Jowett and Bartley.

The Bradford TUC Conference of 1888 brought the underlying conflict into the open. Shortly before the opening of the Congress, the Bradford branch of the National Electoral Association held a public meeting, at which most of the national leaders of the LEA were present. At the meeting Threlfall and Uttley were savaged for their action at an election in Ayr in supporting the Liberal candidate – a man who had refused even to acknowledge the principle of manhood suffrage. This ugly scene was the precursor of a parallel situation in Bradford. The Congress itself created tension between Shaftoe, who acted as

¹ *Bradford Observer*, 16 July 1887.

² TUC Report 1885, pp. 17-19.

president, and the Bradford Typographical Society. Shaftoe criticised the typographers for a delay in printing the congress reports, the publication of which was the responsibility of the Bradford typographers. He had also inhibited discussion of the situation at the *Daily Telegraph* – a non-union shop, employing a great deal of non-apprentice labour. The Society passed a sharply critical resolution “That this Branch expresses regret that Mr. Shaftoe as President of the Trades Council thought fit to prematurely close a discussion on a matter of considerable importance to the members of this Society, viz the Bradford *Daily Telegraph*. That a copy of the foregoing resolution be forwarded to the President and Secretary of the Bradford Trades Council.”¹ The position of the Socialists within the Society was further strengthened when, two months later, Shaftoe supported a Liberal School Board candidate who also happened to be an “unfair printer”. The dispute occurred in the School Board elections of November 1888. The Bradford LEA had joined with the Trades Council in putting forward the names of Shaftoe and Bartley to the Liberal 600 for their inclusion in the Liberal “Eight”. Both candidates were rejected, though after some acrimonious discussion another Trades Council candidate was accepted. This was Walter Sugden, an insurance agent. Shaftoe had lost his nomination to Mr Martin Field, a printing employer who consistently failed to pay union wage rates. Despite Field’s record, Shaftoe not only refused to stand against him but instead supported him on the electoral platform. A clearer demonstration of the incompatibility of the Liberal allegiance and working-class solidarity could not have been tailored expressly as a comment on the political viability of the LEA. In the printing union at least the running was to be made by the Socialists led by James Bartley and Edward Roche. Bartley raised the matter in the Trades Council and a resolution was passed censuring Shaftoe’s action. The Typographers went further and committed themselves to positive political action. Initially, they passed two resolutions condemning Mr Field’s candidature.² Subsequently, after Walter Sugden’s nomination had been accepted, they decided to act rather more circumspectly. It was

“Resolved that seeing that a working man candidate has been adopted by the Liberal Party, this Committee considers that under the altered circumstances it would not be advisable to publicly oppose the candidature of Mr. Field as specified in the resolution at the last Committee meeting.”

¹ Bradford Typographical Society, minutes, September 1888.

² *Ibid.*, November 1888.

This resolution was immediately followed by one which stated

“That this meeting regrets the action of Mr. Shaftoe in appearing on the same platform and advocating the claims of Mr. M. Field, a non-unionist employer; and considers that his conduct in subordinating trade unionism to party politics is inimical of the interests of the working man.”¹

III

THE FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENT LABOUR

The Shaftoe-Field affair was crucial to the emergence of the Independent Labour Party. It was a significant demonstration of the intransigence of Bradford Liberalism. Moreover, it extended the battle within the ranks of Labour from the strictly political into the industrial organisations of the town, for it clearly showed the importance of unity on all fronts, and the folly of supporting a man politically whom one was pledged to oppose as an employer. It alienated the powerful Typographical Society from the Liberals on the Trades Council and deflected it towards independent action. It exposed the anomaly of Shaftoe's position and indicated that his domination of the Trades Council could be challenged. It also marked the beginning of the end of the alliance of Socialists and Liberals on the LEA. Henceforward the principal arena was to be the Trades Council itself, and in the ranks of the unions.

The challenge to Shaftoe emerged in the ensuing months, the attack being launched by James Bartley in the Council. Though the record for the period between July 1889 and January 1893 is deficient, it is possible to trace the major events in this period from the pages of the *Bradford Observer* and the *Yorkshire Factory Times*.² It appears that hostilities began in earnest in August 1889. At the monthly meeting the Trades Council voted that Shaftoe should represent it at the Dundee TUC. 19 votes were cast for Shaftoe, 2 for Bartley and there were 9 abstentions. Bartley demanded a re-contest on the grounds that many delegates had not been informed of the meeting. He was deliberately provocative and attacked Shaftoe specifically on the question of the eight-hour day: “I categorically stated that Mr. Shaftoe was not in favour of an eight-hour bill, thereby stamping him as an adherent of the older Trade Unionism, while I as an advocate of the eight-hour bill represent the principle of state interference.”³ Shaftoe

¹ *Ibid.*, December 1888.

² Shaftoe, secretary of the Trades Council, refused to surrender his minute book.

³ *Bradford Observer*, 26 August 1889.

rejected the criticism and declined the re-contest. It was significant however that although Bartley had been soundly defeated, there were 9 neutral votes. A large number of delegates were undecided and a less extreme Socialist than Bartley might well have secured these votes. Indeed, shortly afterwards Bartley reflected that "As matters stand, at present, it cannot be said that he [Shaftoe] is the representative of the majority on the Council."¹

In 1890 Bartley was prepared to stand for election as Secretary, but once again there appeared to be some irregularity in the calling of the meeting, and Shaftoe remained in office.² For another two years a rearguard action was fought by Shaftoe and the Liberal members of the Council. But during that time there were important changes in the organisation of the trade-union movement in Bradford. As already indicated, trade-union membership rose sharply with the formation of many new unions. Yet if it had been simply a matter of the new unions supporting the ILP, there would have been a ready explanation of the ILP's influence in the Trades Council by 1892. In fact the political relationship was much more complex; it was not – as has often been supposed – a straightforward clash between new and old unionism, between the unskilled, on the one hand, and craftsmen somewhat desperately trying to avoid proletarianisation on the other.

Certainly the Gas Workers and General Labourers, led by Paul Bland, gave their allegiance to the ILP. The delegates of the three largest textile unions were evenly divided between the ILP and the Liberal Party. All the delegates of the Amalgamated Society of Dyers supported the ILP; a group which included important members of the ILP such as Theophilus Warner, Joseph Hayhurst and J. W. Burgoyne. But the activities of these men were offset by the delegates of the Machine Woolcombers' Society and the National Woolsorters' Society, both of whom were dominated by prominent Liberal trade unionists. Shaftoe, a skip maker, had accepted the leadership of the Woolcombers' Society, and T. Grundy and Edward Hatton were joint secretaries of the Woolsorters' Society. Ironically, it was the older crafts which provided substantial support and leadership for the independent movement – and this despite the obvious difficulties and splits within their own ranks. The changing economic circumstances, technological threats, the menace of new industries and new ways of

¹ *Ibid.*, 10 January 1890.

² Bartley maintained that Shaftoe's opponents had not been informed of the date of the meeting in time for them to attend, the post arriving on the following day. It appears that the election meeting had been brought forward without their knowledge.

making standard products, and, perhaps as important though less explored, the polarisation of the classes achieved in the more stable circumstances of late-nineteenth-century Bradford provided the backdrop to a rapid succession of events – the Shaftoe-Field controversy, the Manningham Mill strike, the Tillett election –, out of which the Bradford Labour Union was born.

IV

MANNINGHAM MILLS AND ITS AFTERMATH

Of these events, the decisive one was undoubtedly the strike at Manningham Mills in 1890-91. E. P. Thompson has shown how vital the defeat of the workers was in the political education of the West Riding working classes, in his essay "Homage to Tom Maguire".¹ It polarised both working-class and middle-class opinions, the *Bradford Observer* reporting that "The struggle took on the character of a general dispute between capital and labour since it was well known that a large number of prominent Bradford employers agreed with the action Mr. Lister had taken."² The *Yorkshire Factory Times* announced the end of the strike with the prophetic statement that "Labour has so associated itself that even defeat must be victory."³ Economic defeat ensured the later political success of the ILP. The Manningham dispute conflated (at least temporarily) trade unionists of all persuasions into one body. Shaftoe and Sugden stood alongside Drew, Hayhurst and Jowett in their common defence of the Manningham weavers. It led directly to the formation of the Bradford Labour Union as a rival to the Liberal Party for the allegiance of Bradford working-class voters, for it clarified more generally and precisely than the Field affair the relationship between economic and political authority.

The dispute began on 16 December 1890. S. C. Lister and Co. of Manningham Mills (who were to pay a dividend of 8 per cent on the year) responded to the threat of the McKinley Tariff by a decision to cut wages amongst their silk and plush weavers by varying amounts ranging from about 15 per cent to 33 per cent. The workers, completely unorganised at that time, came out and called for help from the struggling Weavers' Association. They held out until April 1891, by which time the whole factory was idle, some departments having come out in sympathy whilst others had been locked out by the management. The strikers had lasted so long by widening the relevance of the

¹ Essays in Labour History, ed. by A. Briggs and J. Saville (London, 1960).

² *Bradford Observer*, 28 April 1891.

³ *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 1 May 1891.

dispute. The Strike Committee issued 25,000 copies of the *Manifesto*, in which it was stated that

“In the face of these low wages we are of the opinion that we should be doing not only an injustice to ourselves but the whole of the textile industry in the West Riding of Yorkshire by accepting the proposed reduction. [...] Help us fight against this enormous reduction. Our battle may be your battle in the immediate future.”¹

The appeal evoked a remarkable display of working-class solidarity. The Trades Council gave its unswerving support, as did all the Bradford unions, and the Yorkshire Miners' Association sent both money and speakers to Bradford. In the nineteen weeks of the strike £11,000 was collected and expended. This commitment to the strike provided a ready-made platform for the leaders of the Independent Labour Movement – Drew, Jowett, Turner, Hayhurst and others, who virtually took over the leadership of the conflict.

The majority of the middle classes repudiated the actions of the strikers. W. H. Drew remarked: “The leaders of the strike know perfectly well that to a great extent the sympathies of the wealthier Bradford citizens were not with the workpeople in their struggle to obtain what they believe to be their rights. There were of course a few exceptions, and to these people every honour was due.”² W. P. Byles, proprietor of the *Bradford Observer* and a shareholder in Listers, his wife, and one or two parsons, such as W. Anderson of Horton Lane Congregational Chapel. But generally employers, church and chapel stood firmly against the strikers, and the strike could be seen on every side as a test case in the struggle between capital and labour.

Towards the end of the strike it also assumed the pattern of a struggle between labour and the political authorities. Presumed cases of intimidation were increasingly harshly treated, often on flimsy evidence, and in the last month, public meetings in the Town Hall Square, one of the traditional meeting grounds of Bradford, were forbidden and broken up.³ The crescendo was reached on 13 April when the military were called in to break up a meeting held in protest at the action of the Chief Constable and the Watch Committee in prohibiting a meeting on the previous day. The ensuing battle, ranging through the centre of the town, became something of a legend in the folklore of Bradford. W. R. Donald, the president of the Typographical Association, recalled the crowds surging up the narrow streets of

¹ Bradford Observer, 17 December 1891.

² Ibid., 2 January 1891.

³ Ibid., 17 April 1891.

Ivigate in Bradford pursued by troops with "bayonets drawn", an experience which reminded him of "scenes from the French revolution".¹

The incident was followed immediately by a meeting on Peckover Walk, attended by a "vast audience". Here in fact the Bradford Labour Union was both conceived and the first definition of its future policy expressed. Speaker after speaker pinpointed the lessons of the strike; the message of Trafalger Square was reinforced. The need for political action was manifestly obvious, for working men could no longer trust either Liberals or Tories to look after their interests. Working men and women would not get what they wanted until they had men in public life who spoke for them out of their experience of working-class life and conditions. Shaftoe and Sugden were as firm in their denunciation of the misuse of political authority as Drew and Bartley. Shaftoe declaimed: "The Labour Party intended to have labour representation in the Town Council and to take the whip out of the hands of those who have been flogging them in the past fortnight."² No one was left in any doubt about the depth of feeling aroused by the conduct of the police and the Watch Committee when the "aristocratic", well-paid, Power loom Overlookers' Union passed a formal resolution condemning the action of the Town Council, and when the Trades Council refused the Mayor's formal and annual invitation to the public celebration of his accession to office at St George's Hall. Charlie Glyde summed up the frustrations: "We have had two parties in the past; the can'ts and the won'ts and it's time we had a party that will."³ By the end of the strike rumours were circulating that the labour movement intended to contest all three parliamentary seats in Bradford. Even the usually sympathetic *Bradford Observer* was shocked: "A startling statement is being circulated by some of the leaders of the labour movement in Bradford to the effect that at the next General Election the Labour Party is to run Independent Labour Candidates in each of the three divisions."⁴

The "party that will" was formed officially about six weeks later at a meeting at Firth's Temperance Hotel in East Parade. A meeting was called by notice in a local paper for Thursday, 30 April. Very few attended; those present, however, included Drew, Bartley, Roche, Halford, Edwin Tolson and George Minty. A small committee was set up to continue the battle and a further meeting was arranged by means of a circular on 28 May, which advertised a meeting at Firth's

¹ Yorkshire Factory Times, 16 September 1904. Biography of Donald.

² Bradford Observer, 27 April 1891.

³ *Ibid.*, 20 April 1891.

⁴ Bradford Observer Budget, 25 April 1891.

Temperance Hotel. At this meeting the Bradford and District Labour Union was formed. Its intentions were defined in the following terms:

“Its objects shall be to promote the interests of the working man in whatever way it may from time to time be thought advisable and to further the cause of direct Labour representation on Local Bodies and in Parliament. Its operations shall be carried on irrespective of the convenience of any political party. Persons holding official positions in connection with political organisations shall not be eligible for membership and members of the Labour Union accepting official positions in any political organisation shall thereby forfeit their membership.”¹

The formation of the Labour Union re-opened the split in the ranks of labour, which had been concealed during the heady days of the bitter industrial struggle. However much men like Shaftoe wanted to see working men on public bodies, they were unlikely to relinquish their life-long ties with the Liberal Party. Nor were they willing to challenge the parliamentary position of Alfred Illingworth. The Labour Union, in other words, offered a direct challenge to the continued existence of the LEA – a challenge which Shaftoe and other LEA members took to be presumptuous since it rested on the Union’s claim to appoint a labour candidate for the working classes when it was (in their view) totally unrepresentative of their views.

During the next eighteen months an atmosphere of uncertainty and confusion prevailed. Walter Sugden, a leading Lib-Lab, had spoken for direct labour representation in April 1891, and could be quoted against himself when he denied such views a year later.² Lionel Leader, President of the Boot and Shoe Makers’ Union, joined the Labour Union at its formation and then joined the LEA when he decided that it was attempting too much in promoting two labour candidates for Bradford (a proposal quickly developed after the initial meeting). Paul Bland left the LEA and joined the Labour Union for the opposite reason. Within the ranks of the trade unions themselves there is clear evidence of disagreement and confusion. James Bartley’s position in the Typographical Society was challenged on a number of occasions, on the grounds that he was not a regularly practising member of the trade. But the basis of the dispute appears to have been political and Bartley was saved by the political support he could muster in the Society. Meanwhile, though the Labour Union had established itself as a serious rival, Liberals and LEA members continued to control the

¹ Yorkshire Factory Times, 29 May 1891.

² Bradford Observer, 28 June 1892.

Trades Council. The Executive positions on the Council were still held by LEA members.

By the end of 1892 the position of the Trades Council had changed, and the Labour Union was in control. Clear distinctions had been established between the two political factions as much as anything as a result of the debate concerned with the methods of achieving effective labour representation. The debate was highlighted by three controversies – the future relationship with the Liberal Party, the importance of contesting local elections before entering a parliamentary contest, and the relationship between Home Rule and social reform.

V

THE TILLETT CAMPAIGN, 1892

The Labour Union, as we have seen, had been founded on a refusal to work within the Liberal Party. Before the Union was formed James Bartley said “that there was a large number of working men in the Eastern Divisions who had been chafing under the domination of political parties, and who were anxious to be offered an opportunity of striking out for themselves”.¹ It was a sentiment which promoted the candidature of Ben Tillett, first suggested for Bradford East. The shift to West was above all a blow struck deep into the heart of the Lib-Lab alliance, for here was the domain of Alfred Illingworth. Tillett’s refusal to accept the Liberal offer of a straightforward run in Bradford East in order to leave Illingworth’s alliance with the LEA intact was probably decisive in confirming the split between the two bodies. Walter Sugden, for instance, bitterly rejected Tillett’s candidature on the grounds that he was refusing a seat which could be assured to a working-class candidate for the sake of political factiousness.

Tactical differences complicated the divergence in policy, for while the LEA stressed the need for political victories at the local level, the Labour Union was determined to enter the parliamentary contest. In fact, for the first three months of 1892 the Labour Union was running two candidates for the expected general election.² Links were maintained with the national movement and the appearance of Katherine St John Conway, Enid Stacey, Sydney Webb, Bernard Shaw, Tom McCarthy and others on the Union platform helped to keep political controversy at fever pitch. Until Tillett’s defeat in July 1892 this remained the prime interest of the Labour Union. It participated (with no success) in the municipal elections of November 1891,

¹ *Ibid.*, 1 May 1891.

² Bradford Trades and Labour Council, *Yearbook 1899*, pp. 52-60.

collaborating with the LEA under the auspices of Trades Council organisation, but it was only after Tillett's defeat that it moved into local elections with genuine vigour.

Local issues sharpened the differences in politics and tactics. A very real issue in Bradford was the question of Home Rule and its relation to social reform. In 1891, approximately one-ninth of the population had Irish and Catholic connections. Thus the Irish vote was very important in Bradford; the Catholic Church pressure group was in alliance with the Anglicans for School Board elections and in alliance with the Liberals for municipal elections. The LEA stood on the Home Rule issue, and warned that the working-class vote would be divided if the Labour Union placed the demand for social reform before the legitimate demand of Home Rule for Ireland. Walter Sugden was particularly emphatic about the threat and called upon "the electors to act prudently at this juncture and not to throw away the chance of a satisfactory settlement of the Irish question by a multiplicity of candidates of the progressive type. [...] How would the Labour Party, which was the party of the future, appeal to the Irish democracy, if, by a persistent insistence on their just claims at this moment, they deferred the Irish nation in its terrible struggle for liberty."¹ The danger was real: the Irish clubs in Bradford made Home Rule the test question for their political sympathies. Since the Labour Union placed as much emphasis on the social reform question as on Home Rule, the Irish clubs firmly supported the Liberal Party. Indeed, when the Labour Union claimed that it had considerable Irish support William Kerwin, the Secretary of the Henry Grattan Club, disputed the assertion and reaffirmed his faith in the Liberal Party.²

The Tillett election campaign of 1892 was the essential ingredient in the new political mixture which the Labour Union brought to trade unionism. It completed the push of Bradford Liberalism to the right – a process begun with the Manningham Mills strike. It divided trade unions, and firmly and finally established the superiority of the Bradford Labour Union in the affairs of the Trades Council.

Matters came to a head in the Trades Council meeting in June, a month before the General Election. There had been a majority in favour of the policy of the Labour Union for some time – as the election of George Cowgill, of the ASE, as president had indicated. Nevertheless, the Tillett issue was bound to be divisive. The *Bradford Observer* of June 18, 1892, reported that

"The proceedings of Tuesday's meeting of the Trades Council

¹ Bradford Observer, 21 April 1892.

² Ibid., 4 August 1891.

were very lively. The Labour Union members were determined to get a general vote in favour of Tillet. [...] They have had a majority on the Trades Council for some time [...] they managed to get the vote but only after heated discussion.”

Cowgill introduced the subject.¹ He was supported by Palin of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants.² Punt argued that the question, being of a political nature, could not be introduced to the meeting without the approval of two-thirds of the delegates present. Cowgill sidestepped the procedural difficulty by declaring the matter non-political. In the vote which followed, 47 delegates voted for giving support and 33 voted against such action. It was a victory for the Labour Union, but, as Walter Sugden pointed out, not an overwhelming one. The voting revealed “that a very strong difference of opinion existed within the ranks of the Trades Council itself. Some bodies have even gone to the length of publicly expressing their disapprobation – such as the overlookers, the stuffpressers and the amalgamated boot and shoe makers.” Sugden continued: “May I assure Mr. Tillet that his candidature in West Bradford has driven a knife into every labour organisation in town, the realities of which will be felt dramatically in the year to come.”³ It proved an accurate prediction. The political balance within the Council was clearly altered – but the LEA had not been routed and continued to fight a rearguard action for more than a year.

In some cases, the decision stimulated internal dispute within the unions concerned. The Stuffpressers’ Society, which opposed Tillet in the Council reversed its decision at the next ordinary meeting. Even within the ranks of the Typographical Society – a union which had supported the Labour Union from its earliest days, which had just concluded the most serious and protracted strike in its history – a similar situation arose. Men like Donald, father of the *Daily Telegraph* chapel, and A. F. Paine, later to succeed Tetley Hustler as secretary, both life-long Liberals, were particularly unhappy at the intransigence which had forced a confrontation between the Labour Union and the LEA.

Several unions declared their outright opposition to the decision. The Overlookers’ Society threatened to withdraw from the Council, an action undertaken temporarily at a later date. The Boot and Shoe

¹ George Cowgill eventually replaced Shaftoe as secretary of the Trades Council, but ill-health forced him to retire from the position in 1895.

² J. H. Palin was a prominent member of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants and was on the National Executive at the time of the Taff Vale case.

³ Bradford Observer, 24 June 1892.

Makers passed a resolution on 13 June in a similar situation. It is difficult to specify, owing to lack of records, just where hostility to the Labour Union rested. Clearly, some unions remained obdurate in their determination to support Shaftoe and oppose the Tillett candidature. But already the Labour Union could rely upon about 60 per cent of the delegates. The dyers, engineers and the gasworkers dominated the Council. They were supported by unions like the General Railway Workers' Union. And despite some internal disagreement, the Typographical Society does not appear to have wavered in general from the determined position expressed in its resolution of 25 June 1892: "That this meeting desires to place on record its entire concurrence and approval of the action of the Bradford Trades and Labour Council in giving their moral support in favour of the candidature for the Western Division of Bradford of Alderman Tillett whom it regards as a faithful and earnest advocate and exponent of sound trade union principles."¹

The subsequent election campaign strengthened the position of the Labour Union. The unwillingness of the Bradford nonconformists to retain an open mind on Tillett's candidature was illustrated at a public meeting on 14 June 1892. Strong objection was taken at the attempt of Liberals to muster all nonconformists who had recently attended an International Congregational Council. Thus the middle-class Liberal bias of Bradford nonconformity alienated working-class opinion. Illingworth's platform also demonstrated the inability of Bradford Liberalism to face up to the problems of the working classes. No Liberal could have advocated an Eight Hour Bill at the Bradford Reform Club. Illingworth admitted that the employment of women and children in factories tended to reduce men's wages, but nevertheless maintained that their continued employment was essential to the family income. He was interested in the problem of old-age pensions, but felt that the right scheme for old-age pensions had not been hit upon.² He had little to say about the Newcastle Programme except on the question of Disestablishment, and above all pressed the point that nothing ought to be done to deflect Liberal efforts from a solution to the Irish problem.

In the event, Illingworth won a three-sided contest with a small majority: A. Illingworth (Liberal) 3,306; E. Flower (Conservative) 3,053; B. Tillett (Labour) 2,749 (majorities of 253 and 304). This victory was achieved with the support of the LEA, the Bradford and the Nonconformist Association, in addition to the full weight of Bradford middle-class liberalism. Tillett had, in fact, done remarkably

¹ Bradford Typographical Society, minutes, 25 June 1892.

² Bradford Observer, 15 June 1892.

well, for Illingworth was the Liberal party boss. Illingworth was fighting in a constituency where he was the largest single employer of labour, and in which his family had lived for a number of generations. With both LEA support and the Irish vote Tillet might well have been returned. The Bradford Labour Union (soon to become the Bradford ILP) had thus become a viable political entity and an instrument of political reform.

VI

THE REMOVAL OF SHAFTOE

The electoral defeat left the Independent Labour supporters in both a truculent and a euphoric state of mind. 1892 had, after all, been a year of dramatic development. The Bradford Labour Union had established its organ *The Labour Journal*; the Labour Church was formed, and the organisation of the Union was extended to the formation of Labour clubs. These increased its effectiveness enormously. Growth had been particularly rapid after the Tillet election. The East Ward Club was formed in January 1892 and the Lilycroft Club was opened in May 1892. Membership increased slowly until after Tillet's defeat. Between August and November there was a dramatic transformation, and by the end of 1892 at least sixteen clubs were formed in the Bradford region, another four or five being formed in the following year. Until 1895 most club members were also members of trade unions; 1300 of Bradford's 13,000 trade unionists had joined such clubs by the end of 1892. By November 1892, the Union had two municipal councillors. C. L. Robinson and Fred Jowett. Robinson had been returned unopposed in a municipal by-election in 1892, and Jowett was the first ILP representative to be returned after a contest, being elected for Manningham Ward in November 1892.¹

Meanwhile, the LEA was becoming isolated from the mainstream of trade-union activity. Shaftoe was its only representative in the higher echelons of Bradford trade unionism and its only municipal representative, having been elected for West Bowling in 1891. C. L. Robinson referred to the LEA as "fast becoming an extinct volcano".² George Cowgill was later to call it "a Liberal association for the defence of blacklegs",³ and its leaders were left in no doubt that they

¹ He was not, however, the first working man to be returned to the Town Council. Samuel Shaftoe, representing the Trades Council, had been returned for West Bowling in 1891, and Woods, a Conservative working man who later joined the ILP, was returned for Manningham Ward in November 1891.

² Bradford Observer, 11 July 1892.

³ Bradford Observer Budget, 2 November 1893.

were seen to have betrayed their class during the Tillett election. Shaftoe, as secretary of the Trades Council, was the obvious target for hostility. In the election of officials held in January 1893 he was opposed by George Cowgill, the former president, and defeated. Indeed, the Independents had decided to sweep the decks of the “old unionists” officials and, indeed, filled all executive positions, except that of treasurer, with their own men. Shaftoe was defeated by 48 votes to 38, all the votes against him being massed for Cowgill. The *Bradford Observer* referred indignantly to the “cliquism” which now dominated the affairs of the Trades Council, reporting that “no fewer than 17 delegates of the Dyers’ Society attended and voted as a man for Cowgill.”¹

For a short time the trade-union movement in Bradford was split wide open. Shaftoe’s supporters were not only preparing to secede but also to form a separate trades council. Lionel Leader of the Shoemakers and Ernest Green of the Assurance Agents circulated a request for the minority to meet at Firth’s Hotel to discuss the formation of the new body. The meeting was unsuccessful, though a number of secessions did take place, including those of the Amalgamated Railway Servants, the Stuff Pressers, Boot and Shoe Makers, and the Power-Loom Overlookers. Shaftoe himself, in an initial moment of bitterness, described his defeat as “the usual reward for a lifetime spent in the cause of Labour”, but eventually emerged with great credit from the upheaval, refusing to be party to secessions of any sort.² After a short period the seceded societies re-affiliated and remained to form within the Trades Council a considerable minority of about 40 per cent, which did not accept the implication either of “independence” or of “socialism”. The composition of the minority can be deduced from a list of those represented at a testimonial presentation to Shaftoe which took place in May 1893. It concluded the Warpdressers, Boot and Shoe Makers, Weaving Overlookers, Assurance Agents, Stuff Pressers, and Skip and Basket Makers. Prominent trade unionists – A. Hopkinson, Lionel Leader, Fred Punt, A. Pinder, Riley Bower and D. Rotheray – were present.

Shaftoe’s downfall and defeat for Lib-Labism were not simply due to the emergence of new unions with progressive ideas. Unions like the Gasworkers and Dyers had certainly played an important role; there were also personal antagonisms to take into account. But, most important, support for Liberalism had been eroded among the most effectively politically motivated members of some of the most powerful

¹ *Ibid.*, 6 January 1893.

² *Ibid.*, 5 January 1893.

craft unions. Shaftoe's fate was sealed by his opposition to Tillett's candidature. At the Trades Council elections in 1893 it was obvious that his personal magnetism had waned. He still had a role to play both on the Council and in local government, but he was never again the dominant figure he had been in the 1880's. There was no doubt at all that in the future the weight of the Bradford Trades Council would be thrown behind the ILP. Shaftoe had been ousted on the 4 January 1893, and within two weeks the Bradford ILP had strengthened its position. On 8 January the Labour Church and Institute was opened at Peckover Street, and the first National ILP Conference was held in Bradford on 13 and 14 January. The success of the Bradford ILP was complete. The new balance of power was clearly established. In 1896, J. Sewell was the only one of the nine members of the officials and executive who was not a member of the ILP. James Bartley, W. H. Drew and C. L. Robinson were all members of the executive; Fred Jowett was secretary of the Council; Burgoyne, a dyer, was the president, and Ralph Harvey, an engineer, was the vice-president.

VII

TRADE UNIONS AND THE ILP

Dr Henry Pelling suggested that the ILP renewed its interest in trade unionism after the disastrous electoral campaign of 1895 and that the real desire to obtain union backing came, in 1900, with the formation of the Labour Representation Committee.¹ Whilst Pelling's comments are undoubtedly a fair reflection for the nation as a whole, they by no means indicate the situation in Bradford, for, as this article has tried to show, trade unionism and the ILP were always closely aligned there. They were seen as two aspects of a single homogeneous Labour movement aimed at the emancipation of the working classes from poverty and exploitation. Indeed, interviewed in the *Bradford Labour Echo*, W. H. Drew, a prominent member of the ILP and a trade unionist, was emphatic:

"I do say without the slightest hesitation that, at the inception of the Bradford Labour Union (from which body, of course, sprang the present Bradford ILP), it was the avowed intention of the members of the union that it should be an essentially trade-union organisation."²

¹ H. Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (London, 1968).

² *Bradford Labour Echo*, 1 June 1895.

Most Bradford ILP clubs endorsed this statement. But this did not prevent the issue surfacing in the pages of the *Bradford Labour Echo* during the summer of 1895.

During the 1890's, twenty-one ILP clubs were formed in Bradford. One of the most important was the Central Labour Club, with Drew as its president. On its formation, in 1892, the Central Club introduced a rule allowing no member to hold office in the Club unless he was a trade unionist, thus enforcing the elemental connection with trade unionism. But in May 1895, the Central Club rescinded the rule, an action which prompted Drew to resign his position in the Club. The ensuing debate led the ILP to re-examine its attitude towards trade unionism. The controversy deeply divided the ILP. Drew was supported by Bartley and Robinson. Both maintained that a good ILP'er ought also to be a member of a trade union, and Bartley was vehement that "Socialism will never be won by the cowards who with one breath preach Socialism and with the next virtually proclaim themselves advocates of free labour."¹ Robinson considered that "trade unionists and ILP'ers ought to be synonymous terms", whilst Drew maintained that all members of the ILP, not only officials, ought to be trade unionists. "I have all along strongly advocated that insertion of a clause in the constitution of the ILP prohibiting non-unionists becoming members of the party."²

Opposition came from the two extremes, from ILP'ers who objected to the alliance with trade unionism and from trade unionists who disliked the connection with the ILP. The former group felt that the labour movement was wider than trade unionism, and one representative of this group declared that

"It [the ILP] is a movement which still seeks the support of all classes no matter how poor or degraded they may be. We are fighting the battle not merely of the comparatively well-to-do trade unionists, but also the battle of the down-trodden unorganised victims of the sweaters."³

To this select band of ILP'ers the hegemonious aspirations of the labour movement extended far beyond mere trade unionism. Trade unions represented only a small portion of the working class and, to them, the most reactionary and obdurate block to Socialism. The argument, however, was not really about these aspirations but about strategy: was it possible to be an effective member of the ILP without being a member of a trade union? It reflected also the discomforts of

¹ *Ibid.*, 22 June 1895.

² *Ibid.*, 1 June 1895.

³ *Ibid.*, 22 June 1895.

such a socially mixed political alliance as the independent labour movement had become. Many of those who opposed the “trade unionists” were members of the middle classes such as William Leach, a Bradford worsted manufacturer who became a prominent member of the ILP during the first half of the twentieth century, and Alfred Priestman, one of the three Priestman brothers who shared one of the largest family textile and dyeing businesses in Bradford. A few of this section of the ILP believed in the need for revolutionary tactics to obtain Socialism and married their membership of the ILP with that of more revolutionary societies such as the Social Democratic Federation. E. R. Hartley fell into this category. He was prominent in the Bradford labour movement as the president of the Bradford Labour Church, whose official organ was the *Bradford Labour Echo*. Hartley was never a trade unionist, although as a butcher he had a legitimate reason for not being so. Prominent in the ILP during the 1890’s, Hartley renewed his acquaintance with the revolutionary SDF during the early twentieth century. However, the SDF, as with all other revolutionary societies, never gained a strong foothold in Bradford and Yorkshire.

Trade-union opposition to the Socialism of Drew and Bartley came from Liberal and Conservative trade unionists who objected to ILP policies, but wished to play an active part in the economic and bargaining role of trade unionism. They therefore disliked the action of the Bradford Trades Council when it dropped its apolitical stance in 1895 by adopting the Dyers’ resolution, introduced by Joseph Hayhurst: “That no person be accepted by the Council as a candidate for an elective body who is not pledged to support the collective ownership of the instruments of production, distribution and exchange.”¹ Even the supporters of Drew and Bartley were doubtful of the wisdom of this action. Robinson regretted that the rule “practically excludes from the sympathies of the Council all who do not accept the principle of the ILP, committing as it does all candidates for office on public bodies to the principle of collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange accepted by the ILP. [...] It keeps good men, Liberals and Tories, from office who would still be able and willing to work on good trade union lines.”²

Indeed, this resolution tended to divide the Bradford labour movement, and it was only through the Workers’ Municipal Election Committee, which became the Workers’ Municipal Federation in 1902, that trade unions, the Trades Council and the ILP were united in their

¹ Referred to in an interview with C. L. Robinson in the *Bradford Labour Echo*, 22 June 1895. Also discussed in the Trades Council minutes, May and June 1895.

² *Bradford Labour Echo*, 22 June 1895.

local election campaigns and on Bradford City Council.¹ The dispute raged in the *Bradford Labour Echo* from June until August 1895. Ostensibly, it was a discussion of Drew's action in resigning from the Central Labour Club, but in fact it was clearly the spark for more combustible issues. Bartley and Robinson both made reference to the fact that ILP members had "acted black" in trade disputes.² Trade unionists were therefore being alienated from the ILP, a fact which aggrieved members of both organisations such as Bartley, Robinson, Jowett and Bland. Another issue which evidently worried a small minority was the fact that trade unionism was essentially orientated towards obtaining control of the nation through the existing democratic means and that it lacked revolutionary fervour. It was a fear which was strengthened by the failure of the ILP in Bradford parliamentary contests. The defeat of Ben Tillett in Bradford West in July 1895, followed by the defeat of James Keir Hardie in a by-election for Bradford East in November 1896, undermined the faith of some in parliamentary reform. However, the majority of Bradford trade unionists were less convinced by the alternative.

VIII

REVOLUTION OR REFORM

A recent article by B. Barker has emphasised that the majority of Yorkshire ILP and Labour Party leaders believed in reform rather than revolution, in parliamentary democracy rather than physical force.³ However, whilst Barker's argument is that the infusion of middle-class support and ex-Liberal groups into an existing base of trade-union support ensured that the labour movement moved towards parliamentary democracy during the early twentieth century, it is immediately obvious that the Bradford ILP's early association with trade unionism accounted for its reformism. The Bradford Labour Movement was dominated by trade unionists, the majority of whom were skilled workmen or craftsmen. The representatives of the engineers, printers, cabinet makers and dyers were committed to parliamentary democracy.

Barker has provided ample evidence of the way in which Fred Jowett and William Leach could be considered to be reformers. There is also plenty of evidence to suggest that most other Bradford ILP leaders were also reformers. Most prominent was James Bartley, of

¹ See p. 314, note 1.

² *Bradford Labour Echo*, 1 June and 22 June 1895.

³ B. Barker, "Anatomy of Reform: The Social and Political Ideas of the Labour Leadership in Yorkshire", in: *International Review of Social History*, XVIII (1973).

whom Walter Barber correctly wrote “that he laid the foundation of the present robust Labour Movement in Bradford”.¹ Surveying the career of Bartley, who was briefly secretary of the Trades Council in 1898, the *Bradford Labour Echo* stated: “It must be added that Mr. Bartley is a Socialist of the evolutionary type, that he was one of the founders of the ILP in Bradford, that last year he was General Secretary of the Bradford ILP, that this year he is a member of both the Executive and the General Council of the ILP.”² Other more militant and extreme members of the Bradford ILP held similar views.

During the 1890’s the most influential textile trade unionist in Bradford was Joseph Hayhurst, General Secretary of the Bradford and District Amalgamated Society of Dyers. From a position of weakness in 1893, Hayhurst had built the union into a large organisation of several thousand members. It was Hayhurst who had been responsible for introducing the “collective resolution” into Bradford Trades Council in 1895, and who eventually became the first Labour Lord Mayor of Bradford in 1918. On his election as Mayor he reviewed his twenty-five years with the City Council, stressing the way in which the vast number of reforms of the Council had set new sights for the millennium. Broaching the topic of education and social change, he stressed that

“It is education which produced the heart of civilisation. Revolution won’t thrive with an educated democracy. Education is the driving force of reform, and we must never be satisfied until we have given to every child, be it rich or poor, the opportunity of the highest human development of which it is capable.”³

The fact that many trade-union members of the ILP held such views is probably largely due to the fact that as trade unionists they had to represent members of mixed political persuasions. Also, craft unions had a vested financial interest in the continuance of the capitalist system, albeit reformed and modified by municipal action. In later years the belief that the British people would not countenance the “bloody” revolutions which occurred on the Continent was paramount. Indeed, in 1918 the ILP congratulated the German labour movement on the fact that the German revolution had been accomplished without much bloodshed.⁴ It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that the parliamentary and municipal election programmes during the 1890’s

¹ Mary Ashraf, *Bradford Trades Council 1872-1972* (Bradford, 1972), p. 42.

² *Bradford Labour Echo*, 5 March 1898.

³ *Bradford Pioneer*, 15 November 1918.

⁴ B. Barker, loc. cit.

could have been accepted by the progressive Liberals and were foreshadowed by the Liberal Newcastle Programme. In 1895, Tillett's manifesto for Bradford West included the demand for adult suffrage and equal voting power, the abolition of the House of Lords, Home Rule for Ireland, reform of the Poor Law, including the provision of old-age pensions, the payment of MPs and election expenses, a legal eight-hour day, and a new employers' liability bill with no contracting out. It was almost identical to the 1892 programme on which the Liberal Party had been willing to offer Tillett a straight run in Bradford. Apart from the obvious exception, it did not differ markedly from the programme of James Leslie Wanklyn, the Unionist candidate who won the Central Division of Bradford in 1895. It was a moderate policy of reform and collective action which formed the basis of the ILP appeal at the municipal elections.

IX

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS 1895 TO 1911

The years of organisation and advance between 1891 and 1895 were followed by years of decline during the rest of the decade. Tillett was once again defeated in Bradford West during the July general election of 1895. However, despite parliamentary failure, steady, if un-spectacular, progress was made in the local and municipal contests, which laid the foundation for the remarkable growth of Bradford Labour representation during the early twentieth century. The major improvement in organisation during this time was the formation of the "Labour Institute Ltd." on 8 January 1897. The old chapel in Peckover Street, which had been the home of the ILP since 1893, was purchased by the company which intended to raise £5,000 in £1 shares.¹ Many individuals became financially committed to the ILP, and the Bradford Labour Movement now had its own centre. It provided a focal point for the ILP, which helped to stimulate the membership campaigns of the local ILP clubs during 1898 and 1899, and which helped to co-ordinate activities. It was a significant and encouraging achievement in a period when the political fortunes of the ILP were low.

The local and municipal successes of the ILP and the Trades Council candidates diminished after the initial spurt between 1891 and 1893.²

¹ Yorkshire Observer, 14 January 1947. Article by W. Leach on the Bradford ILP.

² In that period prominent ILP'ers such as Jowett, G. Minty, C. L. Robinson and J. Hayhurst had been returned to the Bradford City Council. W. H. Drew had also been returned for the Bradford School Board towards the end of 1891.

In 1894 the party maintained its proportion of the total Bradford poll, although in common with the other two parties, its vote was much reduced. 1895 and 1896 saw further losses with the Labour vote diminishing whilst that of both the Conservatives and Liberals increased. But from 1897 onwards, with the exception of 1897 and 1903, the Labour Party continued to increase its proportion of the vote, the number of candidates it fielded and its number of successes. The corner was turned in 1904 and the Labour Party became a powerful force on Bradford City Council.

*The Performance of Labour in the Bradford Municipal Elections,
1891-1911*

Years	Labour Contests	Labour Wins	Labour Vote as %	Labour Vote
1891	2	—	5.3	1,310
1892	4	1	16.7	2,693
1893	9	3	22.4	5,569
1894	6	—	22.4	3,867
1895	6	1	11.8	3,089
1896	3	1	9.2	2,907
1897	5	1	14.8	4,521
1898	5	1	17.0	3,795
1899	8	—	12.8	4,483
1900	5	3	18.8	5,599
1901	6	4	16.7	6,825
1902	7	1	16.8	6,601
1903	4	2	8.8	3,894
1904	5	4	15.2	4,372
1905	9	2	22.0	8,184
1906	10	2	26.7	9,083
1907	9	5	30.5	9,356
1908	10	—	30.0	11,387
1909	9	—	30.8	10,647
1910	8	6	35.2	9,789
1911	11	6	31.0	12,845

Source: Bradford Trades and Labour Council, Yearbook 1912, pp. 47-51.

It is always difficult to explain the vagaries of voting at local elections. Clearly, the fortune of both the Liberal and Conservative parties had been low during the early 1890's, and Labour representatives had been able to secure some Liberal and, in some wards, even some Conservative votes. But the general election in 1895 appears to have been the signal for intensive campaigning at both the national and local election, especially over the educational controversy surrounding the continuance or demise of the school boards. Canvassing and interest in the outcome of municipal elections was

inevitably more intense between 1895, the year when the Conservative government came to office, and 1902, the year in which the Education Act was introduced to abolish the school boards and to transfer their powers to local authorities. At the same time, the ILP was losing support, involving its members in additional expenses in buying the Bradford Labour Institute, and was therefore becoming much more selective in contesting its wards. Some wards which ought to have been Labour wards proved very resistant to the Labour appeal. South Ward, referred to earlier in Hartley's harangue on the failure of working-class political support, was considered to be too backward and ignorant to understand the science of Socialism. The ILP contested the ward in 1892, 1893 and 1895, but without success. Labour did not contest it again until 1908, when a member of the Social Democratic Federation stood for election.

Part of the decline in the late nineteenth century was also due to the disparate nature of the Bradford labour movement. There was still a core of resistance to the ILP from trade-union members of the LEA, and the Lib-Lab alliance was still perpetuated in wards such as Allerton, West Bowling and South Ward by prominent figures such as Samuel Shaftoe and Walter Sugden.¹ In the late 1890's there were also disputes between the Trades Council, the ILP and individual trade unions over the selection of candidates and wards. The result was patchy and unorganised efforts by Labour candidates during municipal elections. The formation of the Workers' Municipal Federation during 1901 and 1902 altered this. It offered an outlet for that trade-union support which was reluctant to join the ILP, and yet provided a body through which they could negotiate with the ILP. C. F. Tumber, its secretary in 1912, wrote that "It may be stated, however, that since that date (1902) the two organisations have come nearer together and perfect harmony prevails between them. On the City Council the representatives are elected under one programme, and there is in evidence a Joint Committee, composed of representatives from each body which endeavour to prevent friction in the allocation of wards to be contested and the selection of candidates."² As compromise and moderation prevailed, the ILP and the labour movement in Bradford began to achieve improved municipal results. By 1914, the Labour Party, dominated by the ILP, had achieved equal status with the other political parties in the municipal elections. In the parliamentary sphere, the ILP had come of age with the return of Jowett for Bradford West at the end of 1905.

¹ Shaftoe contested and was returned for West Bowling, and W. Sugden made a number of unsuccessful attempts to capture South Ward for the Lib-Labs.

² Bradford Trades and Labour Council, Yearbook 1912, pp. 21-22.

X

CONCLUSION

Trade unions played a vital, if not decisive, role in the creation of an authentic working-class political party. Yet their early involvement in Bradford politics was the result of a number of fortuitous circumstances. The radical and Socialist societies, the intellectual godparents of the ILP, which had emerged during the incipient stages of the "Great Depression" had been unsuccessful in obtaining working-class support. The main reason for this was lack of political cohesion and awareness amongst the working classes, combined with the abstrusity of the early Socialist groups. The working-class vote had been largely absorbed by the Liberal party. But by the 1890's the situation had altered. The working classes were maturing to their political capacities, trade-union organisation was much more effective, and the McKinley Tariff had brought severe economic distress to the West Riding. Imposed upon this situation was a heroic vision of reform offered by Socialists, and particularly by the ILP. It found root amongst the Bradford trade unions during the 1890's, and in a climate of economic pessimism trade-union support was deflected from the Liberal Party to the ILP.

Much of this support for the ILP came from the small craft unions which dominated the Bradford Trades Council. Until the late 1880's the search for respectability and recognition had characterised the activities of these unions. The "new unionism" of the late 1880's, the Manningham Mills strike and the economic depression undermined the former emphasis upon individualism, and replaced it with a demand for collective and state action. Small craft unions, becoming vulnerable to economic depression and unemployment during the 1890's, were becoming more aware that their former security was being undermined. The typographers and the engineers, amongst the best paid of craft trade unionists, found themselves threatened by technological change and became increasingly pugnacious. Economically threatened, often by Bradford Liberal employers, powerful minorities in these, and other unions, gave their full support to the ILP. Trade unionism was therefore a vital component in the membership of the Bradford ILP. Yet, strong trade unionism was an essential corollary of effective political action, and it was not until the rapid advance in organisation during the late 1880's and early 1890's that a Labour party had a reasonable prospect of success. Equally, it was not until the economic depression of the early 1890's, with the attendant problems of strikes and disputes over trade-union wage rates, that Bradford craft unions turned towards

independent political action. The simultaneous timing of the two events brought success to the ILP.

The Bradford Labour Union, the forerunner of the ILP, was forged out of the conflict between Lib-Labs and Socialists on the Bradford Trades Council, which intensified after the Manningham Mills strike. It was this select band of trade unionists, which included Fred Jowett, W. H. Drew, C. L. Robinson, E. W. Roche, Edwin Halford, George Minty, J. Hayhurst, Paul Bland and, above all, James Bartley, which was responsible for requesting Ben Tillet to contest a Bradford seat, which in turn brought about division in the Trades Council and paved the way for the replacement of Samuel Shaftoe by George Cowgill, the Socialist engineer. Socialism in Bradford came through the trade-union movement, and its particular brand of reformist, as opposed to revolutionary, ideas was dictated by this heritage. Moderation accounted for much of the vote which the ILP garnered at municipal elections, and it is significant that revolutionary bodies such as the Social Democratic Federation were never very powerful in the Bradford district, or the Yorkshire textile district in general. Such views were held by intellectuals who had little faith in trade unionism alone. From the outset Bradford trade unionism and the Bradford ILP were seen as two aspects of a single homogeneous labour movement aimed at the emancipation of the working class from poverty and exploitation. W. H. Drew had stressed this,¹ and in our view it remained the most important source of the Bradford movement's strength.

¹ See above, p. 337