

The Origins and Development of the Labour Movement in
West London 1918-1970

A thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of History

Barbara Humphries

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Abstract

This PhD will look at the origins and development of the labour movement in Ealing and Hillingdon from 1918 to 1970, with a focus on the Labour Party, trades unions, co-operative movement, Independent Labour Party and Communist Party. Written as a 'history from below' and based on extensive archival resources, it will assess the role played by different sections of the working class, including ethnic groups (Welsh, Irish and Asians from the Indian Punjab) and women, in forging and sustaining Labour's presence in west London. In particular, it examines how population change altered the political landscape via large-scale industrialisation in the 1920s and 1930s and the building of new housing estates. Suburbia is considered as a mixed area of working-class communities and middle-class commuter land, feeding into analysis of Labour's electoral fortunes at the general and local level. Ultimately, the thesis concludes that population change was not responsible alone for the political changes that took place over the century. As important was the building of political organisation at a 'grassroots level', thereby necessitating an emphasis on industrial and community organisation. Finally, the thesis evaluates the relationship between national political developments and local politics, feeding into a multi-faceted thesis that contributes to wider debate as to the fluctuating fortunes of Labour in and out of government.

‘Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.’

Barbara Humphries

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Abbreviations

AATVW Amalgamated Association of Tram and Vehicle Workers

AEU Amalgamated Engineering Union

ASLEF Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen

ASRS Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants

CLP Constituency Labour Party

CPGB Communist Party of Great Britain

DLP District Labour Party

ILP Independent Labour Party

IWA Indian Workers' Association

LAI League Against Imperialism

LCC London County Council

LCS London Co-operative Society

LPU London and Provincial Union of Licensed Vehicle Builders

LPWS Labour Party Women's Sections

LRC Labour Representation Committee

MCC Middlesex County Council

NC National Committee

NFWW National Federation of Women Workers

NMM National Minority Movement

NUDAW National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers

NUR National Union of Railwaymen

NUWU National Unemployed Workers' Union

RCA Railway Clerk's Association

SJC Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Organisations

TGWU Transport and General Workers Union

TUC Trades Union Congress

UDC Urban District Council

WCG Women's Co-operative Guild

WLICS West London Industrial Co-operative Society

WLL Women's Labour League

WMDCP West Middlesex District Communist Party

WPSU Women's Social and Political Union

WRG Women's Railway Guild

Origins and Development of the Labour Movement in West London 1918-1970

Introduction

The basis, the roots of our movement, is in the localities, in the towns and villages. Without local movements a national movement is inconceivable. We cannot have a national trades union without it possesses branches in towns and districts spread over the country; nor can we have a truly national Labour Party without local Labour parties in every town and hamlet throughout the kingdom. The national movement arises from the combination of the local movements.

Address to York Trades Council 13 December, 1930 by A.A.Purcell of Manchester and Salford Trades Council.¹

This thesis will look at the origins and development of the labour movement in west London, focusing on two boroughs, Ealing and Hillingdon.² It will show how economic and social change in the first half of the 20th century in this area provided the background for a working class political movement. This will include the growth of industries in the interwar years, and the expansion of house-building. It will look at migration into west London and how the population changed, leading to the creation of working-class communities in what had been a rural and suburban area, not officially part of London, but the county of Middlesex. It will consider how this brought about the potential for political change and will look at how the labour movement was built in a politically contested area of suburban London. It will consider the question of whether industrialisation alone caused the change in political landscape, or whether it was the importance of political organisation, both at a local and national level. This will include estimating the impact at different times of the three wings of the labour movement, the trades unions, Labour Party and the Co-operative Movement, and assess how they took root in west London. It will acknowledge the importance of human agency in creating history, with reference to the individuals who built the labour movement. It will also take into account the role of national political events, and their capacity to override local economic and social change. The time scale for this thesis is from 1918, when

¹ A.A.Purcell, *The Trades Councils and Local Working Class Movement* (Manchester, 1930) (LSE Pamphlet) p.5

² The labour movement includes the Labour Party, trades unions, the Co-operative movement, and also the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Communist Party. Some of the major industrial developments to affect this area took place in Park Royal and the Great West Road, partly in the neighbouring boroughs of Brent and Hounslow. For maps of the area covered see Appendix 1.

the Labour Party first ran candidates in west London, up until 1970, although it is written thematically, rather than chronologically.

This thesis begins in 1918. There had been a labour movement presence in west London before this date, but this was the first time that the Labour Party had stood candidates in any of these parliamentary divisions. The chapters are concentrated on the years between 1918 and 1945 because it was over this time that the substantive changes to the political landscape of west London took place. However post 1945 it was necessary to illustrate why this part of London never became a Labour heartland, and how it remained an area to be contested by the two main political parties. It was also necessary to extend the chronology of the thesis up to 1970 to allow a comparison to be made of the role of ethnic groups in west London politics, including Indians from the Punjab who began arriving in Southall in the 1950s and 1960s.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Middlesex had been a largely rural area, devoted to market gardening and the production of bricks for London. Parts of it were commuter land, such as Ealing, the ‘Queen of Suburbs’, home to City workers and retired colonial officials.³ The local laundries, in Acton and Ealing, employing women, supplied a service to middle-class households. In the interwar years, parts of Hillingdon, such as Ruislip became part of suburbia’s ‘Metro-land’ and therefore not promising electoral territory for the Labour Party.⁴ However, as West Middlesex sprawled in the interwar years, it was gathering in its path, industrial towns which were to change the area for ever. It is important to bear in mind that industrialisation had come relatively late to this part of Britain, and it was based on new industries such as electrical engineering and food-processing, which were engaged in production for the home market, not export. This happened at a time when the labour movement had long established a base in the country’s old industrial heartlands, and had made an impact on the national political scene.⁵

³ There have been a number of local histories written about the boroughs of Ealing and Hillingdon, which will be referred to in more detail in Chapter 1. These include for example: J.Oates, *Southall and Hanwell* (Chiswick, 2003) and P.Hounsell in *Ealing and Hanwell Past: a Visual History of Ealing and Hanwell* (London, 1991). In his introduction Hounsell said that Ealing is often referred to as the *Queen of Suburbs*, an epithet believed to have been bestowed at the end of the 19th century by Charles Jones, Ealing’s first surveyor, architect and engineer on a town of ‘handsome villas and established trees’.

⁴ Metro-land was a term coined by the Metropolitan Railway to promote areas like Ruislip. It was described by Sir John Betjeman as the land of ‘cricket pitches, golf clubs, Women’s Institutes and verdant farmland: new life for Britons at arm’s length from the bustle of London.’ See H.Muir, ‘Black Flight:How England’s Suburbs Changed Colour’, *Guardian*, 8 July 2016.

⁵ There are a number of works which include an account of the industrialisation of suburban London in the interwar years. These include: N.Barratt, *Greater London and the Story of the Suburbs* (London, 2012), G.Weightman and S.Humphries, *The Making of Modern London 1914-1939* (London, 1984) as well as national economic and social histories such as N.Branson and M.Heinemann, *Britain in the 1930s* (London, 1975) .

West London, in its turn, was however to make a significant contribution to political change at a national level. In the 1945 General Election it was one of the parts of the country noted by contemporary historians such as G.D.H. Cole in *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (1948). He said that in Greater London 29 more seats had been won for Labour in 1945 than in 1935, and 23 more than in 1929. Together with Lancashire, the West Midlands and the Eastern counties, the results in Greater London had played a key role in the political change which had brought about Labour's landslide victory. In contrast Scotland, Wales and most of northern England had contributed few more Labour seats than in 1929. There were also 13 new parliamentary divisions in Greater London.⁶ An editorial in the *Middlesex County Times* on the election result of July 5 1945 commented that local results had reflected the leftward swing of the country and also the social changes which had followed the industrialisation of Greater London – a factor which was not noticeable at the time of the last election (1935). It added: 'Middlesex is quite an industrial county and it is not surprising that it should return a majority for Labour.'⁷

This view of the changing industrial nature of west London had earlier featured in the election campaigns of both Labour and Conservative politicians in the 1930s. In the 1929 General Election for instance, when Joe Shillaker was to become the first Labour MP for Acton, his Conservative opponent and sitting MP, Harry Brittain, commented that Acton was an important industrial division of the South which the socialists would give everything to win. Joe Shillaker said that the Tories no longer challenged the industrial areas of Wales and Scotland, because 'they were permanently lost to Labour.'⁸ So was this outcome inevitable in west London? If it was not inevitable then what other factors were involved? This thesis will look at how support for the labour movement was built in communities as well as in the workplace. However it will also take into account the impact of national politics on a local area. General election results in west London in 1929 and 1945 would have indicated that industrialisation was having an impact on west London, with a growth in the Labour vote. The election results of 1931 and 1959 would tell a different story. As Mike Savage explained, there is a dialectical relationship between local and national politics.⁹ There has been much debate about the 1945 election. Were the results across west London and other suburbs the result of industrialisation and population change in the interwar years, or was this just part of

⁶ G.D.H.Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London, 1948) p.434.

⁷ *Middlesex County Times* (Ealing edition), 28 July 1945.

⁸ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 25 April 1929.

⁹ See M.Savage, 'The Labour Party in Local Perspective', *Journal of Regional and Local Studies* 10(1) (1991), pp.1-15.

the change in political opinion across the UK as a whole during the 1930s and World War 2?¹⁰

Industrialisation and Population Change

Chapter 1 of this thesis will examine the growth of industries in the early 20th century in west London, in areas such as Hayes and Southall, Greenford, and Acton. It will also look at the growth in population, housing, the building of new working-class communities and the migration of a working-class population from across London, and from other parts of the country, such as South Wales. But it will also consider how as part of suburbia, parts of Ealing and Ruislip attracted middle class commuters at the same time. Some of the newcomers to the area were not attracted into the area to work, but to find suburban homes from which to commute into the City of London. The extent to which the population of west London commuted, they did not live close to their place of work, will also be considered in detail in this chapter, because this partly explains why, in an area with so many factories, there remained in the interwar years and beyond the basis for support for the Conservative Party.

Paul Addison in *The Road to 1945* (1975), estimated that one third of the working class in Britain voted Conservative in the interwar years. He said that ‘the Labour Party had a rock-like foundation in the heartlands of basic industry, but found it hard to expand into agricultural areas, or the prosperous Midlands and the south-east of England.’¹¹ A different picture however is portrayed by Ellen Wilkinson MP who claimed that 30% of her Jarrow constituency voted Conservative in the 1930s, one of the towns worst affected by the great depression¹² In the General Election of 1931 the Labour Party lost seats in its industrial heartlands, in the North-East of England, including Jarrow. She also said that towns like Middlesbrough had not broken with Lib-Lab traditions by the 1930s.¹³

¹⁰ When and why this change took place attracts different opinions. In the opinion of Paul Addison, Richard Sibley and Andrew Thorpe this occurred during the War and not before. See P. Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London, 1975), R.Sibley, ‘The Swing to Labour During the Second World War: When and Why’, *Labour History Review*, 55 (1) (1991), p.23, and A.Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, (4th ed.) (Basingstoke, 2015), pp.103-118. This debate will be discussed further in Chapter 2 of this thesis on Labour and the Electorate.

¹¹ P.Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London, 1975), pp.24-27. This view is also held by Nina Fishman. See N.Fishman and J.McIllroy (eds.), *The Post War Compromise: British Trades Unions and Industrial Politics 1945-64* (Monmouth, 2007), p.99.

¹² P.Addison, *The Road to 1945*, p.24.

¹³ M.Perry, *‘Red Ellen’ Wilkinson: her Ideas, Movements and World* (Manchester, 2014), p.218.

Those who moved into London and the south-east in search of work in the interwar years tended to be the young generation. What would be the political impact of this migration? Workers from parts of the UK with strong labour movement traditions helped to build the labour movement in west London and other new industrial areas, such as the West Midlands and Oxford in the 1920s and 1930s. This included a significant number of Welsh migrants. How significant was the contribution to the labour movement in new industrial areas from those who had migrated from the depressed areas? Did leaving their roots affect their outlook? On the one hand they were taken away from areas where trades unions were strong and they were to be working in factories where employers were hostile to the unions. On the other they would have been less affected by older working class alliances to the Liberals and Conservatives, imparted by institutions such as churches and clubs. It has been argued that many of the young employed from Wales who came to London had never been miners and they had never been members of a trades union.¹⁴ They had left South Wales after the defeat of the 1926 general strike after which the membership of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain fell dramatically. It would be wrong to assume however that their upbringing had not affected their political views. Moving to a new area would not automatically change the way they thought, especially as in their new location they faced an uphill struggle to get a job and a home.¹⁵

It could be argued that the young rather than the old were more inclined, when they migrated, to lose the traditional links that some sections of the working class had earlier, for instance with the Liberals in South Wales and the North East, or the Conservatives in Lancashire and the Midlands. Martin Pugh estimates that even by 1935, new voter registration in areas of high population growth went hand in hand with electoral gains for Labour. In the 1935 General Election for instance, Labour's share of the vote overall was 38%, but 45% of new voters. This, he said was a foretaste of the 1945 result, and it was 'an early symptom of the reaction of younger voters who felt the brunt of unemployment and a

¹⁴ See D.Lyddon, 'Trades union traditions: the Oxford Welsh and 1934 Pressed Steel Strike', *Llafur* 6 (2) (1993), pp.106-114.

¹⁵ J.Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain 1918-1979* (London, 1984). He showed how the Welsh did fit into existing working class communities in London and the Midlands. See also D.Weinbren, 'Building Communities, Constructing Identities: the Rise of the Labour Party in London', *London Journal*, 23(1) (1998), pp 41-60. For more on Welsh workers in the Oxford car factories see: P.John, 'The Oxford Welsh in the 1930s' *Llafur*, 5 (4) (1991), pp.99-106, J.Zeitlin, 'Emergence of shop stewards and job control in the British car industry', *History Workshop journal*, (1980) , pp.119-137, a pamphlet by Dudley Edwards who worked at Pressed Steel, entitled *How Trades Unionism came to Pressed Steel* (Oxford, 1979) and R.C. Whiting, *The View from Cowley: the Impact of Industrialization upon Oxford, 1918-1939* (Oxford, 1983), pp.61-73.

herald of their politicisation during World War 2.¹⁶ The later 1930s saw by-election gains for Labour across London, including Peckham and Islington. In the 1945 General Election, when Labour's share of the national vote was 47.8%, it won seats in London with a 17% swing from 1935. The national average swing was 12%. Parliamentary seats were won in the London suburbs, not just in the west of London, but on the fringes of Essex, Hertfordshire and Kent.¹⁷ In the 1945 General Election 21% of the electorate were first time voters.¹⁸

The workforce in west London was very different from that of Britain's older industrial areas, where employment was in heavy industry, such as mining or shipbuilding. The local paper saw economic growth in west London as a 'Second Industrial Revolution', spreading from Park Royal to the Great West Road.¹⁹ The workforce was employed in modern factories engaged in electrical engineering and food processing. An increasing proportion of the workforce was female. An article from *Labour Organiser* in April 1934 on the need for new socialist songs said that it was ridiculous to sing 'seamstress of the hovel, woman of the mill', when 'the seamstress of 1934 minds a machine in a modern factory using the Bedaux system, and the mill workers' traditional clogs have given place to silk stockings and natty shoes. As for the shawl, she would be horrified it would ruin the set of those trim curls for which she is paying nine pence a week in the perm club.' But, it said that the slavery was still there. The soulless slavery of the Bedaux system meant 'speed ups' and the conveyor belt.²⁰

To look at population change alone however would be a vast over-simplification. Important though industrialisation was to the changing face of west London, and with it the growth of the working-class population, this would understate the part played by political organisations, both at a local and national level. The thesis will look at the growth of the Labour Party, the trades unions, the Co-operative Movement and other left political parties. It will also look at the role played by distinct ethnic groups such as the Welsh, Irish and Asian communities and that of women in the Labour Party Women's Sections and the Women's Co-operative Guild. Although the changing political face of west London helped to change British politics at a national level, national political developments also had an impact on west London in many ways. For instance the creation of divisional Labour parties with an individual membership after 1918, allowed for effective electoral organisation in areas like

¹⁶ M.Pugh, *Speak for Britain: a New History of the Labour Party* (London, 2010), pp.140-141.

¹⁷ M.Pugh, *Speak for Britain*, p.285.

¹⁸ P.Addison, *The Road to 1945*, p.259.

¹⁹ *West Middlesex Gazette* (Southall edition), 25 August 1934.

²⁰ *Labour Organiser*, April 1934.

west London, where the trades union movement was still very weak. Nationally established organisations like the Women's Co-operative Guild and the Labour Party Women's Sections took root in new housing estates in the area.²¹

National events also illustrate the limits of local history in defining political developments, as explained by Mike Savage.²² The Representation of the People Act of 1918 increased the electorate from 7.7 million in 1915 to 21.4 million in 1918. The Labour vote increased from 370,802 in the 1910 election to 2,244,945 in the Coupon Election of 1918, the first time the Party had fielded candidates in many parts of the country including west London.²³

However, the 1931 General Election saw the apparent 'forward march of Labour' across west London halted for a number of years. Parliamentary gains in Acton and a close result in the Uxbridge parliamentary division were completely wiped out by Conservative candidates fielded by the National Government.²⁴ These developments will be considered in more detail in Chapter 2, which is on Labour and the electorate in west London

The belief that industrialisation alone changed the area politically can be challenged by the fact that it was not initially strong trades unions in the workplace which led to Labour election gains. Chapter 4, which is on trades unions, will show that, apart from the railways and London transport, trades union organisation in the area was very weak during most of the

²¹ Chapters 6 and 7 will look at women in the Labour Party Women's Sections and the Women's Co-operative Guild. See for instance P.Graves, *Labour Women: Women in Working Class Politics 1918-1939* (Cambridge, 1994), J.Gaffin, *Caring and Sharing: the Centenary History of the Co-operative Women's Guild* (Manchester, 1983) and N.Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement and Communities in Britain 1914-1960* (Farnham, 2010). See also: J.Mckibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998).

²² M.Savage, *The Dynamics of Working Class Politics the Labour Movement in Preston 1880-1940* (Cambridge, 1987), p.188 and 'The rise of the Labour Party in local perspective', *Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 10(1) (1990).

²³ A.Haworth and D.Hayter, (eds.) *Men Who Made Labour: the PLP of 1906-the Personalities and the Politics* (Oxford, 2006), p.256. See also *The Longman Companion to the Labour Party 1900-1918* (London, 1999) pp. 30-31. There has however been a significant debate on the impact of the 1918 Representation of the People Act on the progress of the Labour Party in the 1920s. Duncan Tanner for instance believes that the expansion of the electorate has been overstated, and that political change before 1914 was already leading to the post 1918 rise of Labour and decline of the Liberals. There are a number of books which cover this debate, for instance: D.Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918* (Cambridge 1989), R.Mckibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924* (Oxford 1974), and K.Laybourn, *The Rise of Labour: the British Labour Party 1890-1979* (London, 1988). The debate is summed up by K. Laybourn, 'The Rise of Labour and Decline of Liberalism: State of the Debate', *History*, 80 (259) (1995), pp.207-226. The extent of the franchise before 1918 was subject to local variation. T.Woodhouse for example says that the 1867 Act increased electoral representation in Leeds from 8,480 to 38,000. See T.Woodhouse, *Nourishing the Liberty Tree: Labour Politics in Leeds, 1880-1914* (Keele, 1996), p.14.

²⁴ There are many accounts of the 1931 General Election and its consequences for the Labour Party. Whilst seats were retained in the north-east of England, and South Wales, it was losses in the south-east of England which contributed to the Party losing all but 52 MPs. See the following books for instance: R.Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour* (London, 1973), N. Riddell, *Labour in Crisis: the Second Labour Government 1929-1931* (London, 1999) and M.Worley, *Labour inside the Gate: a History of the British Labour Part Between the Wars* (London, 2005).

interwar years. After the defeat of the 1926 General Strike, both trades union membership and militancy declined.²⁵ Although railway workers and their wives played a key role in building local Labour parties, they would have accounted for a small fraction of the Labour vote. So we have to look to the building of working-class communities for an explanation. This is a pattern which came to light from a number of local studies across the country, illustrated in particular by Mike Savage in his work: *The Dynamics of Working Class Politics* (1987). He describes how over a decade in Preston, the local Labour Party changed from being work-place focussed to being rooted in local housing estates and communities, winning support with policies on housing, welfare and public health.²⁶ Nationally the Labour vote had grown in the 1920s, whilst the membership of trades unions was declining. By the time of the 1929 General Election for instance there were twice as many Labour voters as trades union members.²⁷

By the time of the 1945 General Election, however, the trades union movement had become more powerful across west London, especially in aircraft engineering factories. This continued to be the case with full employment in the post-war years. The area was not to be affected by de-industrialisation until the 1970s. However by the late 1950s the Conservatives had started to win back parliamentary seats, which had been won by Labour in 1945. Extending the timescale for this thesis to 1970 illustrates how west London did not become a Labour heartland, but marginal swing territory. Whilst in London boroughs such as Bermondsey, the Conservatives and Liberals closed their party HQs in the 1930s as the Labour Party won 100% control of the council, this was not to be the case in west London.²⁸ Sue Goss described Bermondsey as a long standing industrial area, based on the docks, food processing and the leather trade. 91.2% of its population was working class.²⁹ However, it was not only the case that parts of Ealing, Acton and Hillingdon were commuter land, but also that sections of the working class in the 1950s could be more inclined to vote Conservative than in South Wales or parts of the north-east of England. Consider this report

²⁵ See N.Branson, *Britain in the 1920s* (London, 1975), p.249. The number of TUC affiliated members fell from 6.5 million in 1920 to 3.7 million by the end of 1929.

²⁶ M.Savage, *The Dynamics of Working Class Politics: the Labour Movement in Preston 1880-1940* (Cambridge, 1987).

²⁷ In 1922 there were 5.63 million trades union members, 4.2 million Labour voters; At the 1929 election there were 4.86 trades million union members and 8.4 Labour voters. See J.Marriott, *The Culture of Labourism in the East End Between the Wars* (Edinburgh, 1991), p.69.

²⁸ G.Taylor, *Ada Salter: Pioneer of Ethical Socialism* (London, 2016), Reviewed by Barbara Humphries in the *Labour Heritage Bulletin* (Summer 2017).

²⁹ S.Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government: a Study of Changing Interests, Politics and Policy in Southwark from 1919 to 1987* (Edinburgh, 1988).

from the West Middlesex District of the Communist Party in 1956. In an area where the trades unions were now relatively powerful, and workers very militant on economic issues, it acknowledged that the Tories still had ‘a considerable grip on the District.’ It read:

We recognise as a paradox the fact in an industrial district 283,000 voted Tory as against 247,000 Labour in the May 1955 election. Most of the Tory votes were cast by working people and many by industrial workers.³⁰

One explanation it gave was that the District had been spared the worst effects of pre-war depression and unemployment. A young generation had not seen poverty in the 1930s and were living in a sense of false security. The chapter on Labour’s progress in elections both national and local, in west London, will look how the local Conservatives and Liberals responded and organised to win back support, particularly after 1945.³¹

This thesis then is a local history study, but one which also seeks to put local history into a national context, and also puts the development of political organisations into the context of the local economy social conditions and population. It is written primarily from the ‘history from below’ perspective, which was developed in the 1960s by E.P.Thompson and others.

History from Below

From E.P.Thompson: *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963)

There is the orthodoxy of the empirical economic historians, in which working people are seen as a labour force, as migrants or the data for statistical series. There is also the Fabian orthodoxy in which the great majority of working people are seen as passive victims of laissez-faire. My quarrel with [these] is that they tend to obscure the agency of working people, the degree to which they contributed by conscious efforts to the making of history’.³²

Political change in west London was not brought about by purely economic development. In retrospect it could be argued that those who built the labour movement in west London were right in their belief that ‘history was on their side’. So they were not like ‘the poor stockinger,

³⁰ West Middlesex District Communist Party, Report to the Executive Committee October 1855- September 1956, p.10 (Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester), CP/INT/ORG/10/07-10.

³¹ The impact of post-war affluence on the working class is described in Coventry which saw the growth of aircraft engineering and inward migration in the 1930s and became a Labour city in 1945. By the 1950s Labour support was in decline. See N.Tiratsoo, *Reconstruction, Affluence and Labour Politics in Coventry 1945-60*, (London, 1990). See also J.Goldthorpe, D.Lockwood and F.Bechhofer, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (Cambridge, 1969), p.45.

³² E.P. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963) pp.12-13.

the Luddite cropper, the obsolete handloom weaver, the utopian artisan and even the deluded followers of Joanna Southcott' whom Thompson had to rescue from the 'enormous condescension of posterity.'³³

They did bring about political change in 1945 because of what they believed the 1930s had meant for those in what became known as 'the distressed areas'. It has become fashionable to rewrite the 1930s not as a decade of the hunger march and the dole queue, but as a time when, for many, living standards were improving.³⁴ In parts of the country like west London, there were new factories and new industries. Compared to the 19th century many had better housing conditions, with electricity and running water. Chapter 7 on the Co-operative Movement will show how this wing of the labour movement accommodated to growing working-class consumerism in the south-east of England, where for some there was money for homes, gardens and annual outings. This thesis will look at and assess how this so-called north-south divide affected the population of London's suburbia, and how workers in London supported those in the 'distressed areas' of Britain, collecting food and clothes for the families of miners in South Wales, and welcoming the hunger marchers, when they arrived in London. It will also look at the insecurity of employment in some of the factories in the west London area.

The legacy of the 1930s lived on into the post-war period. Consider the election rally addressed by Joe Sparks, Labour candidate for Acton in the 1950 general election. In front of a picture of the Jarrow marchers with the caption 'no return to the 1930s' he said:

we don't want to go back to the old scrag of mutton breast and bones, the skimmed milk, the 10 or 12 hour day, nor to their wars, we are not going back to that are we?' No! replied the audience.³⁵

'History from below' was not entirely new in the 1960s and had been anticipated by social historians such as the Hammonds, Webbs and G.D.H. Cole, who wrote about the working

³³ E.P. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class* p.13.

³⁴ See accounts of the 1930s written by Cook and Stevenson, *The Slump: Britain in the Depression*. (Basingstoke, 2007), A.Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1992), M.Pugh, *We Danced all Night :a Social History of Britain between the Wars* (London, 2008) , and J.Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London, 2014). The legacy of the 1930s continues to attract contemporary journalism, and remains a 'toxic decade' for the Conservatives. See for example J.Freedland 'Osborne May Live to Regret His Rush Towards Wigan Pier', *The Guardian*, 6 December, 2014, p.39.

³⁵ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 24 February, 1950.

class, as opposed to institutional history of labour movement organisations.³⁶ However, it gained impetus with the establishment of the Society for the Study of Labour History, and the pre-eminence of historians such as Eric Hobsbawm and Asa Briggs as well as E.P. Thompson. Rowan McWilliam drew the link between increased political activism in the 1960s and the resurgence of labour history in those years. He described E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm as role models who combined research with political commitment in ways that many sought to emulate, when he wrote:

Both analysed issues about working class agency and the possibilities and limitations of popular politics. Both showed how the world, examined through plebeian eyes looked very different from the perspective of the middle class, this was the essence of what became 'history from below'.³⁷

Workplace and Community

Later developments in the study of labour history since the 1980s have seen the focus on the workplace shift to the community. This has coincided with trends towards deindustrialisation, decline in the trades union movement and industrial militancy. It is outlined by Savage and Miles in their *Remaking of the English Working Class* (1994).³⁸ In his introduction to a recent article on Red Clydeside, Ewan Gibbs wrote:

Contemporary labour history scholarship has seen a shift of focus from the traditionally limited concerns of 'labour history' to a more comprehensive view of working class history. Labour history at least in Britain has tended to focus on industrial movements and disputes, whereas working class history can illuminate an understanding based on community and industrial struggles united in material interests and consciousness.

He cited the examples of the 1915 rent strikes on Clydeside and the more recent Anti-Poll Tax campaign to show how perceptions of class can transcend the workplace and the impact of de-industrialisation.³⁹

³⁶ See J. Milroy, 'Asa Briggs and the Emergence of Labour History in Post-War Britain', *Labour History Review*, 77 (2) (2012), 211-242, D. Guernsey, 'History and Commitment: E.P. Thompson's Legacy', *Labour History Review*, 78 (3) (2013), pp. 331-349.

³⁷ R. McWilliam, 'Back to the Future: E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm and the Remaking of Nineteenth Century British History', *Social History*, 39(2) (2014) p.149-159.

³⁸ M. Savage and A. Miles, *Remaking of the British Working Class* (London, 1994).

³⁹ E. Gibbs, 'Historical Tradition and Community Mobilisation: Narratives of Red Clydeside in Memories of the Anti-Poll Tax Movement in Scotland 1988-1990', *Labour History*, 57(4) (2016) pp.439-462. See also E. Gibbs,

More recent accounts of industrial disputes have pointed to the role played by local communities in support for strikers. This was the case with the strike of the match women at Bryant and May in 1888 and in more recent years the strike for equal pay at Trico in 1976. It was also the case for the strikers at Woolf's, Southall in 1964.⁴⁰

The creation of working-class communities is described by Savage and Miles in their chapter on working class formation and the city. They describe how the suburbanisation of London took place between 1890 and 1914, as part of a trend for the middle class to abandon inner city areas. This was to lead to the creation of working-class districts in inner cities, which were no longer under the political influence of the middle class. This was happening in conurbations such as Manchester, Merseyside, and the West Midlands as well as London. There were still industrial towns such as Barrow, Middlesbrough, and Doncaster, but increasingly working-class communities were being built within cities. Rent controls at the beginning of the 20th century and the beginning of public housing were to support the creation of working-class communities which were to be the basis of working-class politics. In the suburbs however, middle-class areas were being created which formed an increasing bedrock of Tory support.⁴¹

We will see though that these working-class communities were also built in suburban areas, in London for instance, in West Ham, Battersea and Woolwich. These were to become strongholds for the labour movement, where the population was growing. Factories relocated to the suburbs taking their workforce with them. So it was not just a middle class exodus to the suburbs. In the case of west London, industrial towns like Southall were being woven into the economic and political development of the area, laying the basis for organisations like the Co-operative Movement, and the Labour Party Women's Section. Labour councils in the 1930s gained their support on the basis of providing urban public services, playing a key role in housing, education and public health.⁴²

De-industrialisation and Industrial Communities: the Lanarkshire Coalfields 1947-1983 (PhD, University of Glasgow, 2016).

⁴⁰ See L.Raw, *Striking a Light: the Bryant and May Match-Women and their Place in History* (London, 2011), S.Groves, *Trico: a Victory to Remember* (London, 2018), p.176 and P.Marsh, *The Anatomy of a Strike – Unions, Employers and Punjabi Workers in a Southall Factory* (London, 1967).

⁴¹ M. Savage and A. Miles, *Remaking of the British Working Class*, in particular, Chapter 4, Working Class Formation and the City, pp.57-72.

⁴² See D.Weinbren, 'Building Communities, Constructing Identities: the Rise of the Labour Party in London'.

Migrant Groups and Women

Since the 1970s race, ethnicity and gender have had an impact on the study of labour history. This thesis has chapters on different ethnic groups and women.⁴³ In it ethnicity, race and gender are considered in relation to the history of the local labour movement, and have not replaced class but enhanced it, deepening our understanding of its dynamics.

Chapter 5 will look at three different groups of migrants and their relationship to the labour movement in west London, from their viewpoint of how they related to the working class as a whole. There have been numerous accounts of the experience of the ‘black working class’ and some on Irish workers in Britain.⁴⁴ The three groups who migrated to west London in search of employment were the Welsh from the South Wales mining valleys who arrived in the interwar years, the Irish who came from the Republic of Ireland after 1945, and Indians from the Punjab who came in the 1950s and 1960s.

Chapter 6 will look at women in the workforce, trades unions and the Labour Party.⁴⁵ Falling between the Women’s Suffrage Movement and the Women’s Liberation Movement, the working class housewives who were the members of the Women’s Co-operative Guild and the Labour Party Women’s Sections, do not fit into the narrative of either, and their importance has therefore been underestimated.⁴⁶ In common with other parts of the country, the Labour Party Women’s Sections and the Women’s Co-operative Guild had a thriving membership in the interwar years. The Women’s Co-operative Guild will be covered in Chapter 7 on the Co-operative Movement.⁴⁷

⁴³ See N.Kirk, ‘Challenge, Crisis and Renewal: Themes in the Labour History of Britain, 1960-2010’, *Labour History Review*, 75 (2) (2010), pp.162-180.

⁴⁴ Books on race relations and class in Britain include for instance: D.Hiro, *Black British, White British* (London, 1971) and R.Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain*, (Aldershot, 1987). Books on the Irish in Britain include: S.Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity* and *Irish Catholics in England 1880-1939* (Buckingham, 1993).

⁴⁵ For background reading on the history of women and the labour movement up to 1918 see: J.Liddington and J.Norris, *One hand tied behind us* (London, Virago, 1978), C.Collette, *The Women’s Labour League: for Women and for Labour*, (Manchester, 1989) and *The Newer Eve* (Basingstoke 2009).

⁴⁶ See P.Graves, *Labour Women: Women in British Working Class Politics 1918-1939* (Cambridge, 1994), S.Boston, *Women Workers and the Trades Unions* (Cambridge, 2015), M.Glucksmann, *Women Assembled: Women Workers and the New Industries in Inter-War Britain* (London, 1990), as well as chapters in collected works, such as P.Thane, ‘The Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism 1906-1945’ in H.Smith (ed.), *British Feminism in the 20th Century* (Aldershot, 1990). For a more recent article see: G.Stevenson, ‘The Forgotten Strike: Equality, Gender and Class in the Trico Equal Pay Strike’, *Labour History Review*, 81(2) (2016), pp.141-168.

⁴⁷ See for instance: L.Middleton (ed.), *Women in the Labour Movement: the British Experience* (London, 1977) and J.Gaffin, *Caring and Sharing: a Centenary History of the Women’s Co-operative Guild* (Manchester, 1983),

Oral History

‘History from below’ continued with History Workshop and the growth of oral history.⁴⁸ It is now acceptable for academics to write their books based around oral history interviews. One such example is *Labour Women* (1994) written by Pamela Graves, who conducted fifty oral history interviews with women members of the Labour Party. It is doubtful whether any of the evidence she used would have been obtainable from minutes or archives.⁴⁹ Miriam Glucksmann based her account on interviews with women workers in five west London factories.⁵⁰ Where sections of the population are ‘hidden from history’ the use of the oral history interview fills gaps and enhances written evidence.

Activists have been encouraged to record their own history. Labour Heritage has been in existence since 1982. In 1994 Dan Weinbren, co-ordinated a Labour Oral History Project, in which he organised the training of volunteers to interview labour movement activists across the country. In total over 200 tapes were made and they are held at the British Library Sound Archive.⁵¹ In 1997 a summary of these recordings was published in the form of a book entitled *Generating Socialism*.⁵² Linking the past to the present, young activists were teamed up with older ones, and its conclusion was used as a political statement by the late Tony Benn who wrote in the preface: ‘It completely disposes of the idea that New Labour with its spin doctors, gimmicks and sound-bites could ever supplant or destroy the real Labour Party.’ He added: ‘It reminds us that history is made by the people, not by the leaders.’

Oral history interviews have enhanced, not replaced printed sources in this thesis. They complement rather than contradict conclusions. Oral history can be described as ‘unwritten history’, but interviews conducted for the Labour Oral History Project relied on memory which is always selective. Dan Weinbren in *Labour’s Roots and Branches* wrote of the Project that its interviewees were untrained (although some of us did take up the offer of training). He also said that the interviewees were ‘self-selecting’ and often known to the interviewer. This was true. There was no scientific method in the selection of interviewees. In most cases as political activists, like their interviewers, they had shared assumptions which critics could say affected the outcome of the interview and even prevented some basic

⁴⁸ See: I.Gwinn, ‘History Should Become Common Property: Raphael Samuel, History Workshop and the Practice of Socialist History’, *Socialist History*, 51 (2017) (Left Intellectuals After 1956) pp.96-117.

⁴⁹ P.Graves, *Labour Women*, pp.3-4.

⁵⁰ M.Glucksmann, *Women Assemble*.

⁵¹ Labour Oral History Project (British Library Sound and Moving Image Catalogue C609).

<https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/oral-histories-of-politics-and-government>

⁵² D.Weinbren, *Generating Socialism :Recollections of Life in the Labour Party* (Sutton, 1997) p.iv

questions from being asked at all. Dan Weinbren illustrated the advantages and pitfalls of oral history for labour historians, in an article written in 1996.⁵³

I interviewed nine people from west London for the Labour Oral History Project, and the interviews have been used in this thesis.⁵⁴ With the advent of oral history, history from below has benefitted from the technological advances of sound recording. This was anticipated by John Saville as early as 1972 when he said that the tape for the labour historian would be ‘particularly important not for the top boys but for the middle range of personalities and middle range events.’ Much of what is recorded on tape has never been written down.⁵⁵ This thesis is mainly written from printed sources, but oral history interviews form an additional complementary source, particularly in relation to women and ethnic groups, such as Welsh and Irish migrants.

Local Labour History

The local approach to labour history illustrates how the movement was built at a grassroots level, based on a local population, with local characteristics. This can illustrate similarities as well as differences between different parts of the country, as well as offering a local explanation for national political developments.

Much history written by labour movement activists is local history. Some of it is anecdotal and biographical, and has not been widely circulated. In 2000 Labour Party archivist Stephen Bird drew up a list of local party histories in commemoration of the Party’s centenary. He came up with over twenty titles, from all parts of the country including Derby, Woolwich, Battersea, Norwich, Ipswich and even Windsor. This was not of course a comprehensive list, and more were to be written.⁵⁶ The Socialist History Society’s recent publication *The Labour*

⁵³ D.Weinbren, ‘Labour’s Roots and Branches’, *Oral History* (Spring 1996 Political Lives), pp. 28-36.

⁵⁴ They were also used as the basis for a pamphlet. B.Humphries, *The Roots of Labour in a West London Suburb: Ealing in the 1930* (2002), unpublished but available on the Labour Heritage Website. www.labour-heritage.com.

⁵⁵ J.Saville, ‘Interviews in Labour History’, *Oral History*, 1(4) (1972) pp. 93-106.

⁵⁶ This list was published in the *Labour Heritage Bulletin*, (Winter 2003). It included titles such as J.Beadle, *A Glorious Century, One Hundred Years of the Derby Labour Party* (Derby, 2000), R.B.Stucke (ed.), *Fifty Years of the Woolwich Labour Party 1903-1953* (Woolwich, 1953), S.Cherry, *Doing Different: Politics and the Labour Movement in Norwich 1880-1914* (Norwich, 1989), and S.Creighton, *Not for Me, Not for You but For Us; Eighty Years of the Battersea Labour Party* (Battersea, 1986). More commemoration local histories were written. These included: S.Newens, *A Brief History of the Labour Party in the Eastern Region* (Harlow, 2000), L.Snow, *A Short History of the Labour Party in Brent 1900-2000 (n.d.)*, *Labour in the East: Essays in Labour History in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex* (London, 2009), as well as more substantial works such as R.Johnson and A.Walsh, *Camaraderie: 100 Years of the Cambridge Labour Party 1912-2013* (Cambridge, 2012), and B.Evans, K.Laybourn, J.Lancaster and B.Haigh, *Sons and Daughters of Labour: a History and Recollection of the Labour Party within the Historic Boundaries of the West Riding of Yorkshire* (Huddersfield, 2007).

Party in Historical Perspective edited by D.Morgan contains essays on Liverpool, Oxford and the West Riding of Yorkshire.⁵⁷

In his essay ‘Homage to Tom Maguire’, (Essays in Labour History 1960) E.P.Thompson stated that local labour history had become more professionalised. He said for many historians previously:

The dubiousness reminiscences of local worthies can be disregarded (unless required for ‘colour’), the regional skirmishes can be dismissed with an irritable footnote, and the historian can get down in earnest to national minute books, congress proceedings, intrigues among the leadership and underhand political agreements.

Even though the study of labour history faced tough times in the political climate of the 1980s and 1990s, the achievements of its 1960s and 1970s heydays had not been lost. When E.P. Thompson wrote an article on ‘history from below’ in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1966, he described labour history as being ghettoised in a country with an establishment which did not consider it to be ‘proper history.’ At that time he said there was no library or archive devoted to its study. Thankfully that has changed.⁵⁸ John Saville, added that before the launch of the *Bulletin for the Study of Labour History* in 1960, labour history had few practitioners and ‘was not quite respectable in academic circles.’⁵⁹

Thompson said that labour historians tend to fall into a double vision – mass movements which grow blindly and spontaneously under social and economic pressure versus leaders and manipulators. There is no space for local leaders and this superficial national approach is beginning to give way to a more mature school of local history employing sociological techniques, but we rarely find national and local pictures put together. In his study of Tom Maguire, Thompson illustrates how the Independent Labour Party (ILP) was built from the west Yorkshire community. It was not the work of one local leader who created a movement of thousands. Nor was the ILP the result of the Manningham Mills strike alone. Such a belief he says ‘implies an appalling attitude of condescension towards those provincial folk,

⁵⁷ D.Morgan (ed.), *The Labour Party in Historical Perspective* (London, 2018).

⁵⁸ E.P. Thompson, ‘History from Below’, *Times Literary Supplement* 7(4) (1966).

⁵⁹ J.Saville, ‘Oral History and Labour Historians’, *Oral History*, 1(3) (1972), pp.60-62. Two exceptions were Henry Pelling and GDH Cole in the interwar years. Labour history was assisted in the 1960s by the growth of higher education in Britain, and funding from the Social Science Research Council.

who are credited with every virtue except the human capital virtue of conscious action in a conscious historical role.’⁶⁰

Local histories of the labour movement were not a new concept, they had been written by activists for years. After 1960 however the writing of labour history from this standpoint became academically acceptable. Local studies could reach out to fields of investigation which national and institutional accounts could not. They could set the movement into an economic and social setting with the local population, and explore links at a grassroots level between the different wings of the labour movement, trades unions, Labour Party and the Co-operative Movement, as well as different sections of the population such as women and ethnic minorities. The value of writing of labour history with a view to resolving nationally based controversies is explained by Andrew Thorpe in his article on Jimmy Thomas and the rise of Labour in Derby.⁶¹

One of the problems of writing local labour history is that of finding primary sources, many of which are not deposited in archives and are incomplete. Other resources which are more reliable are local papers, with good political reporting. The other option is to sift through national journals and reports to dig out local information. Activists are not always inclined to have arranged for their papers and minutes to be deposited.⁶²

There have continued to be local grassroots studies. Histories of the Labour Party and the trades union movement at a national and institutional level deal with policies, the formation of governments and the role played by national leaders, but it is studies of labour at a grassroots level which can explain the economic and social roots of political change, as for example Matthew Worley’s *Labour Inside the Gate*. (2008).⁶³ Collected works such as *Labour’s Grassroots* (2005)⁶⁴ and *Foundations of the British Labour Party* (2009)⁶⁵ covering all three wings of the labour movement in different geographical locations are a selection of local studies to which the development of the labour movement in west London can be compared. What was the industrial background, was there one industry or several, was

⁶⁰ E.P. Thompson, ‘Homage to Tom Maguire’ in A.Briggs and J.Saville (eds), *Essays in Labour History* (London, 1960).

⁶¹ A.Thorpe, ‘J.H.Thomas and the Rise of Labour in Derby, 1880-1945’, *Midland History*, 1990, 51(1) (1990), pp. 111-128.

⁶² G.W.Jones, *Borough Politics: A Study of the Wolverhampton Town Council, 1888-1964* (London, 1969).

⁶³ M.Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate: a History of the British Labour Party Between the Wars* (London, 2005).

⁶⁴ M.Worley (ed.), *Labour’s Grassroots: Essays on the Activities of Local Parties and Members 1918-45* (Aldershot, 2005).

⁶⁵ M.Worley (ed.), *Foundations of the British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives 1900-1939* (Farnham, 2009).

one union dominant, were there cultural roots into which the Labour Party was able to tap? Were there existing strong working class links with the other main political parties, for instance with the Liberals or Tories? Did the Independent Labour Party have a large organisation before 1918 and how was this to affect the organisation of the Labour Party? It is with these questions in mind that we can consider the history of the labour movement in west London.

Other local studies have been focussed on selected parts of the country such as Labour's industrial heartlands in the north of England. These include Laybourn's *Labour Heartlands* (1987)⁶⁶ and David Clark's *We Do Not Want the Earth* (1992),⁶⁷ which are studies of the labour movement, in Yorkshire and the North-East. Salveson's more recent *Socialism with a Northern Accent* (2012), is focussed on the north of England, both Lancashire and Yorkshire.⁶⁸

As a study of the labour movement from a local grassroots perspective this thesis will illustrate how it was built in an area with diverse workplaces and a mixed population. It differed from Labour's heartlands, many of which were based on one industry such as mining or textiles.⁶⁹ It has similarities with other parts of Greater London, which also experienced industrial growth during the interwar years, and Midlands towns such as Nottingham and Birmingham.

So which studies have been particularly useful for comparison with the area covered in this thesis? Chris Wrigley, in his article 'Labour's Constituency Activists' cites local studies, including rural areas where the development of the railways and their workers provided the background to the development of the labour movement.⁷⁰ This in many ways was true of West London in its early days, industry was located along the Great Western and South Western railways, before the building of roads, and there are examples of how local

⁶⁶ K.Laybourn, *Labour Heartland: History of the Labour Party in West Yorkshire in the Interwar Years, 1918-1939* (Bradford, 1987).

⁶⁷ D.Clark , *We do not want the Earth: the History of South Shields Labour Party* (Whitley Bay, 1992).

⁶⁸ P.Salveson, *Socialism with a Northern Accent: Radical Traditions for Modern Times* (London, 2012).

⁶⁹ See E.Hobsbawm, 'Labour in the Great City', *New Left Review*, 166 (1987), p.39. He shows that the first Labour MPs were from small communities based on one industry rather than large cities such as London or Liverpool. See also A.Haworth and D.Hayter (eds.), *Men Who Made Labour*. Of the 29 Labour MPs elected in 1906, 17 were from small industrial towns such as Merthyr Tydfil and Sunderland. From the large cities – Manchester (2), Leeds (1), Glasgow (1), Leicester (1), Bradford (1) and none from Liverpool. The three Labour MPs elected in London represented Deptford, Woolwich and West Ham, industrial suburbs with docks and related industries and the Woolwich Arsenal.

⁷⁰ C.Wrigley, 'Labour's Constituency Activists', *Labour History Review*, 56 (1) 1991, pp. 58-61.

railwaymen became trades union and Labour Party activists. Evidence for this is contained in the minutes of the Southall Labour Party, and reports by the local press in Ealing.

There are many parts of the country where railway workers have played a pivotal role in the labour movement. Perhaps nowhere more so than in Derby, where two Labour MPs, associated with the railway unions were elected at an early stage. Richard Bell was one of the two Labour MPs elected in 1900.⁷¹ He was to be followed by Jimmy Thomas. Railway workers, important to the labour movement in west London, were mobile, and did not in most cases have the same community life as miners, who tended to live near their workplace. They were important in spreading their political allegiances into new areas, but rarely sustained support alone for a political party or candidate. Even in Derby, Labour candidates were dependent on other sections of the working class.⁷²

Over past decades there have been grassroots studies of labour in cities such as Nottingham, Liverpool, Coventry, Manchester and Glasgow.⁷³ Studies of industrial communities in the west Midlands have some similarities with west London. Coventry for instance was to become a centre of the aircraft engineering industry and attracted large numbers of migrant workers, particularly from South Wales. In the cases of Coventry, Birmingham and the Black Country however, there had been an industrial base since the 19th century.⁷⁴ Oxford, like west London attracted workers from South Wales to work in its new car factories in the 1930s, although this did not have an impact on politics in the city until the late 1930s.⁷⁵ We also have to look at city politics, and the extended influence of Liberal and Conservative politicians such as the Chamberlains in the west Midlands. In Oxford the university had a political influence on the city. In northern cities such as Manchester and Liverpool there is a

⁷¹ See A.Beadle, *A Glorious Century*, and A.Thorpe, 'J.H.Thomas and the Rise of Labour in Derby'.

⁷² Trades union histories of the NUR at a national level describe the importance of the NUR to Labour politics, for instance: D.Howell, *Respectable Radicals, Studies in the Politics of Railway Trades Unionism* (Aldershot, 1999). And P.Bagwell, *The Railwaymen: the History of the NUR* (London, 1963),

⁷³ For example: P.Wyncol, *The Nottingham Labour Movement 1880-1935* (London, 1985). Wyncol described how a mixed population of miners, lace workers, and workers in new industries as well as a middle class affected different political allegiances in different parts of the city. Other local studies include: S.Davies, *Liverpool Labour: Social and Political Influences on the Development of the Labour Party in Liverpool 1900-1939* (Keele, 1996), B.Lancaster and T.Mason (eds.), *Life and Labour in a 20th Century City: the Experience of Coventry* (Warwick, 1986), J.Smyth, *Labour and Glasgow 1896-1936: Socialism, Suffrage, Sectarianism* (East Linton, 2000) and G.J.Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country 1850-1939* (Wolverhampton, 1998), F.W. Carr, *Engineering Workers and the Rise of Labour in Coventry*, (PhD thesis University of Warwick, 1978 (<http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap/34740>), D.McHugh, *Labour in the City: the Development of the Labour Party in Manchester, 1918-31* (Manchester, 2006), and B.Lancaster, *Radicalism, Co-operation and Socialism in Leicester: Working Class Politics 1860-1986* (Leicester, 1987).

⁷⁴ See R.P. Hastings, 'The Birmingham Labour Movement, 1918-1945', *Midland History* 5 (1979-80).

⁷⁵ See R.C.Whiting, *The View from Cowley: the Impact of Industrialisation upon Oxford, 1918-1939* (Oxford, 1983). P.152.

complex relationship between different sections of the working class and politicians, and immigration produced sectarian divisions, such as between Catholics and Protestants.⁷⁶

It is particularly important however to look at other accounts of the history of the labour movement in London. Most of these look at local labour history, distinct from London as a whole. Comparisons can be seen between west London and other suburban areas.⁷⁷

Labour in London

The study of the labour movement in west London needs to be put into a London wide perspective. London had been regarded as a backward area for the labour movement, which did not change until the industrialisation of the 20th century. The main advances for the trades unions and the Labour Party occurred in its outer suburbs.⁷⁸

Raphael Samuel writing in the *Bulletin for the Study of Labour History* in 1978 sums up the comparative weakness of the London labour movement at the end of the 19th century. The strong trades unions of the days of the London Corresponding Society had been lost. There had been defeats for traditional sectors like shipbuilders and tailors, and industrial areas like the East End had become afflicted with casualisation, patronage and poverty. London attracted a 'reserve army of labour' both from its rural hinterland and overseas. It was also facing de-industrialisation, as new factories were built in the suburbs. These were difficult to organise. Samuel for instance claims that it was initially illegal for engineering workers at armaments factory in Enfield to join a trades union. A renaissance of London trades unionism was not to take place until the interwar years. This was initially amongst transport workers. He concludes: 'The historian of the London labour movement must always be struck by the capacity of the metropolitan working class for self-renewal.'⁷⁹

Paul Thompson in *Socialists, Liberals and Labour: the Struggle for London 1885-1914* (1967) regarded London as untypical of the rest of the UK because there was no heavy industry such as the mines or textile factories to form the basis for a strong trades union

⁷⁶ See B.Marren, *We Shall Not be Moved: How Liverpool's Working Class Fought Redundancies, Closures and Cuts in the Age of Thatcher* (Manchester, 2016). Chapter 1 has a description of Liverpool 'exceptionalism' with its diversity and casual employment, pp.8-31.

⁷⁷ For some more on 'London exceptionalism' see reports of Labour Heritage AGMs in *Labour Heritage Bulletins* (Autumn 2010, Autumn 2012) . www.labour-heritage.com .

⁷⁸ See for instance P.Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour: the struggle for London 1885-1914* (London, 1967).

⁷⁹ R.Samuel, 'The London Labour Movement,' *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 36 (Spring 1978), pp.13-14.

movement.⁸⁰ In London traditional employment was casual as in the docks, or based on small sweatshops in areas such as Stepney. The Conservative Party had a strong influence over sections of the working class and until 1918 enfranchisement amongst the London working class was lower than the national average.

Duncan Tanner in *Political change and the Labour Party 1900-1918* (1990) also identifies London as a basis for working class Conservatism. Problems for the Liberal Party occurred in East London, and what he describes as “the sinkholes of poverty” which littered west London.⁸¹ Liberals had however gained support from Jewish and Irish communities in East London, the Irish because of Liberal support for Irish Home Rule, and the Jews due to Conservative support for restricting immigration by the 1905 Aliens Act. In some parts of London there was no Liberal tradition, and Labour was able to challenge the Conservatives without deals or alliances. This was the case in Woolwich. Woolwich was also an example of a town in London which was based on one industry, the Arsenal which had a high percentage of trades union members.⁸²

Paul Thompson’s account finishes in 1914, when he indicated that there was little significant development of the labour movement in west London. In 1914 he describes Ealing as being at the western edge of the London built-up area. It was a wealthy suburb but with considerable independent Labour activity. There was an early branch of the Independent Labour Party. Chiswick, also just within the boundaries of London, had little working-class activity, two Labour councillors being elected in 1906. But there is no mention of Southall or Hayes which by 1914 had trades unions and Labour councillors. Maybe it was because they were not ‘in London’ at the time.

But Thompson also, rightly describes London as a ‘conurbation’, before, he said, the word had been invented, rather than a city, even before 1914.⁸³ This definition of London as a conurbation, a collection of towns and villages, rather than one city, is perhaps the key to approaching labour history in London. By the 20th century the industrial development of London and its working-class communities was already taking place in suburbs, such as West Ham. West Ham was on the fringes of London, still regarded as part of the county of Essex.

⁸⁰ P.Thompson,,*Socialists, Liberals and Labour*.

⁸¹ D.Tanner,*Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918* (Cambridge, 1990).

⁸² See P.Tyler, *Labour’s Lost Leader: the Life and Politics of Will Crook* (London, 2007).

⁸³ P.Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour*, p.5.

Although not a northern 'Labour heartland', it had elected the first Labour MP, Keir Hardie in 1893, and the country's first Labour council.⁸⁴

West Ham is the subject of Marriott's book *The Culture of Labourism in the East End between the Wars* (1991). It is an interesting comparison with what happened in west London in the interwar years. Its main population growth occurred at the end of the 19th century.⁸⁵ It was an industrial town, based on the Stratford Railway depot, docks and related industries and the Beckton Gasworks. It had been home to the growth of New Unionism in the 1880s, whereby unskilled workers on the docks and in the gasworks joined a trades union. By the mid-1920s the strongest trades unions were the National Union of Railway Workers, National Union of General Workers and the Transport and General Workers Union. Industrial decline however had already started to affect this part of London, and at 19% in 1927, unemployment was far higher than the London average of 6.5%.⁸⁶ Although West Ham had some affluent middle-class areas such as Forest Gate, it returned 4 Labour MPs in the 1929 General Election, with 78,454 votes, higher than the Conservative and Liberal votes combined.⁸⁷ Marriott describes the importance of unemployment and struggles against the Poor Laws as being crucial to the politics of West Ham in the interwar years, when trades unionism had fallen from its peak membership in 1918. Nevertheless activism in the local Labour parties tended to be trades union members. As well as the trades unions, the Co-operative Society based at Stratford, and the organisation of women in the movement became increasingly important.⁸⁸

In the early days workplaces were key to building the labour movement in London. In *Behind the Lines* (1984) Julia Bush described how Labour, in London's East End became a major political force after 1918. She regards workplaces as being important to the creation of labour as a political force in London, particularly during World War 1.⁸⁹ This is in contrast to articles written by Dan Weinbren who puts the emphasis on the building of communities

⁸⁴ W.Raymond Powell, *Keir Hardie in West Ham: a Constituency with a Past*. (Socialist History Society Occasional Paper no.19) (London, 2004).

⁸⁵ West Ham population 1851-1931: 18,817-294,278. See J.Marriott, *The Culture of Labourism: West Ham between the Wars* (Edinburgh, 1991), p.13.

⁸⁶ J.Marriott, *The Culture of Labourism* pp.85-123.

⁸⁷ J. Marriott, *The Culture of Labourism*, p.59.

⁸⁸ See J. Marriott, *The Culture of Labourism*, pp. 39, 50, 192.

⁸⁹ J.Bush, *Behind the Lines: East London Labour 1914-1918* (London, 1984).

aided by the Labour Party's control of local government.⁹⁰ The role of both workplaces and the building of communities will be considered in this study of west London.

Chris Wrigley writing of Battersea, another Labour stronghold in London after 1918, that although it had an industrial base in the railways and a munitions plant during World War 1, municipal socialism was to play a more decisive role. During the War the local Food Control Committee had involved working-class women in the struggle against inflation. In 1918 Labour ran a women candidate, Charlotte Despard, and an alliance of socialists and trades unionists were able to bring about the demise of the one-time Progressive Alliance.⁹¹

Marriott also describes one of the other features of the London working class, that of commuting, many from West Ham worked at the Woolwich Arsenal. The Arsenal was seen as the basis for both the Co-operative Society and strength of the Woolwich Labour Party.⁹²

Thompson describes London working-class communities as being unstable, liable to internal migration and migration from outside of the City. According to Thompson this was another weakness in the London labour movement – the lack of community because workers did not live and work in the same area, but often had to travel five or more miles to work. In the factories in Hayes after 1919 local councillors claimed that workers had to travel up to twenty miles to work, and tried to take action to get public housing built.

Thompson notes the beginning of large scale industry in outer London in the 1920s, which was set to change the city's political landscape. The patterns of migration were to change also. He says that major migration into London before 1914 was from the south (the agricultural areas of Kent and Sussex) which he thought had contributed to London's political conservatism. However in the 1920s and 1930s, migration was from the industrial north, Wales and Scotland, areas with a radical labour movement tradition.

Herbert Morrison, writing an article in *Labour Organiser* entitled 'Good old London' described "the wonderful progress of the London labour movement."⁹³ In 1929 *Labour*

⁹⁰ D.Weinbren, 'Building Communities, Constructing Identities: the Rise of the Labour Party in London', pp.41-59.

⁹¹ C.Wrigley, *Changes in the Battersea Labour Movement, 1914-1919* (Loughborough, 1977).

⁹² R.B.Stucke (ed), *Woolwich Labour Party: 50 Years 1903-1953* (Woolwich, 1953).

⁹³ 1918: 148,000 votes, 2 MPs, 1922: 334,000 , 9 MPs, 1923 425,000, 22 MPs (*Labour Organiser*, December 1924).

Organiser listed 12 of the 39 constituency parties with over 1,000 members as being in London, the largest being Woolwich with 4971 members.⁹⁴

By the 1920s this late development of the labour movement in London was starting to look like a relic of the past and so-called ‘London exceptionalism’ for the labour movement came to an end. Julia Bush said that it had been ended by ‘the development of forms of class organisation common to the rest of the working class.’ This however is disputed by J.Gillespie, saying that it was in strongholds like Poplar that Labour was most successful post 1918, not in new industrial areas of outer London. As a result of this he concludes that it was an error to conclude that a unionised workforce was a condition for the existence of support for Labour politics.⁹⁵

The labour movement in London was built in the local areas, towns and suburbs. Like other major cities, its population was divided by class and by geographical location, and by the 20th century these trends were fairly clear. However the city was in a state of constant change, parts of it were already facing de-industrialisation, as others were gaining new factories and industries. No one area was typical. Although towns in west London, such as Hayes, Acton and Southall attracted a growing working-class population, as had West Ham, Woolwich and Battersea earlier. The advent of the railways and some industrialisation, and the building of a council estate led to the growth of the labour movement in another London suburb, Wimbledon before 1945.⁹⁶ However suburbs such as Croydon went through a reverse process. Author of *Labour Politics in Croydon 1880-1914*, (2015) Michael Tichelar described how its middle- class residential development overtook working class communities based on railways, building and light engineering. This weakened support for the labour movement and hastened support for the Conservatives. The high point for the Labour Representation Committee came in the 1906 election when it won 4,007 votes in a three-cornered contest.⁹⁷ This was evidence that the London suburbs were contested territory, and that population trends were not irreversible.

⁹⁴ *Labour Organiser*, (October 1929).

⁹⁵ J.Gillespie, ‘Poplarism and Proletarianism: Unemployment and Labour Politics in London, 1918-1934,’ in D.Feldman and G.Jones (eds.), *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations since 1800* (London, 1989).

⁹⁶ H.Topman, *Eighty Years of the Wimbledon Labour Hall, 1921-2001*(Tooting, 2004).

⁹⁷ M.Tichelar, *Labour Politics in Croydon 1880-1914*, (Croydon Radical History Monograph no.1), (Croydon, March 2015).

Identity of West London

What can be said about the identity of west London? It is part of suburban London, although in 1918, it did not even consider itself to be part of London at all. It had several councils, parliamentary constituencies, trades councils and divisional Labour parties. The deeper one digs down into local labour history, the more one is confronted with a rich historical diversity. Just as London is not one place, but a collection of towns, within west London, Ealing, Hayes, Acton and Southall have very different histories. There are however similar trends of development within London and the boroughs of Ealing and Hillingdon, with their complex collection of towns and villages as well as diverse workplaces, have a lot in common with other outer London suburbs, on the east and north side of London, all of which witnessed large scale industrial development and population growth in the 1920s and 1930s.

Scope of this thesis

Within its geographical and chronological limitations this thesis will look at the development of the labour movement in west London on a thematic basis. The following themes will be its chapters.

1. The economic and industrial background, and how it changed during the course of the 20th century. Who built the labour movement in west London? Chapter 1 will look at the growth of industry in west London, and how it attracted a workforce from outside of the area. It will look at the diversity of workplaces, commuting and migration. It will also chart the growth of working class communities, with house-building programmes, both in the private and public sector in the interwar years and post 1945. It will look at the limits to population expansion after 1945, and how parts of the area still conformed to the middle-class image of suburbia, interspersed with industrial towns.

2. Labour and the electorate. Chapter 2 will chart the progress of the Labour Party in general elections, and in local government, both before and after 1945. It will look at the experience of west London in relation to national developments, such as Labour in government and the defeat of 1931. How did the Conservatives and Liberals adjust their strategies to attract a growing working-class population and a challenge from Labour?

3. Labour Party organisation and membership. Chapter 3 will look at the Labour Party and class in west London, illustrating how the Party campaigned in an area with a diverse population. It will examine how the organisational changes set out by Labour's 1918

constitution were applied to the structure of local parties in different parts of west London. It will consider the importance of trades union members in forming local Labour party branches. It will look at the growth in the membership of the Party in the 1930s, and illustrate how campaigning methods such as door-to-door canvassing were important in an area where the trades union movement was weak, and on new housing estates, where 'life in the Party' was part of the building of working-class communities.

4. The trades unions and political change. Chapter 4 will look at the main trades unions in west London and the Trades Councils. It will look at strike action by transport workers during the 1926 General Strike. After 1926 the influence of the trades unions declined and they faced an uphill struggle to gain recognition in the new factories which were being built across the west London. As an area where there were diverse workplaces, there were many different trades unions. We will look at three of the most important unions, the National Union of Railwaymen, Transport and General Workers' Union and the Amalgamated Engineering Union, and their strength in this area. We will consider the role played by the trades unions in the development of the local Labour parties, and in bringing about political change in west London.

5. Migrants and ethnic identity in the west London labour movement. Chapter 5 will look at the role of migrants who moved to west London to find employment. Continuing the theme of workplace and community, it will look at three distinct ethnic groups, the Welsh, Irish, and Asians, who were Sikhs and Hindus from the Indian Punjab. West London was built on migration, but how far did these ethnic groups build separate communities and have a distinct impact on the growth and development of the labour movement in the area? Did they change the political landscape, or adapt to the existing one? Did their presence actually change the priorities and direction of the local trades unions and Labour parties and local politics? How far did the labour movement assist them into their integration into local politics and help with social cohesion?

6. Women in employment, the trades unions and the Labour Party. Chapter 6 will look at women as workers, voters and political activists. Women workers organised themselves into the labour movement, with organisations such as the Women's Trade Union League, Women's Labour League, and the Women's Co-operative Guild. Employment opportunities were also changing for women, as they were able to get work in new factories and offices. During two world wars they had worked on public transport and in local munitions factories,

which would replace the traditional areas of employment such as domestic service or laundry work. Apart from the transport unions however, trades unions were slow to recruit women members. Women's role in politics was to become more important, due to enfranchisement, and by 1929 all women over 21 had the vote. The Labour Party Women's Sections (LPWS) replaced the Women's Labour League, recruiting thousands of members, who were to become the backbone of many local Labour parties. This chapter will look at the success of the LPWS in west London, in building support on new housing estates and appealing to women on the issues of public health, housing and education. It was an example of how a national political organisation was built in a local area.

7. The Co-operative Movement and its impact on west London. Chapter 7 will look at how the Co-operative Movement was built in west London. The West London Co-operative Society which had been founded by railway workers joined up with the London Co-operative Society in 1921. Although it had its roots in the north of England, the Co-operative Movement made gains in London and the south east in the interwar years. Adjusting to a new working class, particularly women, it gained roots in west London, with Co-op Shops, and consumer services, but it also made a political impact with the success of its guilds, particularly the Women's Co-operative Guild. It provided finance and resources for local Labour parties, as significant as the local trades unions. Its importance as the third wing of the labour movement is fully illustrated by a local study, where there has been very little research of any kind.

8. Labour and other left political parties. Chapter 8 will look at the influence in west London of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). They both played a very different political role. The ILP had a relatively small presence across west London prior to 1918, and it continued to provide active members for local Labour parties and a role model for local party organisation. The Communist Party had a lot of influence in the trades unions, particularly in the Amalgamated Engineering Union during World War 2. It did not usually stand candidates against Labour, but affiliation to the Party had been rejected. However there is evidence that it had an influence over the local Labour League of Youth and attracted Labour Party activists on issues such as unemployment and medical aid for Spain. During World War 2 it gained much support in some of the factories in west London such as Napiers and EMI, and retained a base in the AEU and local trades councils. However at an electoral level its success was to be more limited as it deferred to the Labour Party in general and local elections.

Sources

There has never before been any substantial account of how the labour movement was built in west London. Therefore much of the research for this thesis was carried out from primary sources. These included local newspapers and local histories. It also involved trawling through national archives for local material. These included reports, newspapers and pamphlets published by trades unions, the Labour Party, Co-operative Party, Labour Party Women's Sections, the ILP and the Communist Party. There are some local archives, notably those of the Southall and Ealing North Labour parties, held at the London Metropolitan Archives, those of the Southall District of the AEU held at the Modern Records Centre at Warwick, and the West Middlesex District Communist Party, held at the Labour Archives in Manchester. I have used recordings that I made for the Labour Oral History Project 1994/95, and have conducted a few more interviews which have assisted in supplementing printed resources. Finally I have also referred to articles from the *Hayes Peoples History* blog and from the *Labour Heritage bulletin*.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Hayes Peoples History <http://ourhistory-hayes.blogspot.co.uk/>, www.labour-heritage.com

Chapter 1: The Economic and Social Background 1918-1970 and How it Changed : Who Built the Labour Movement in West London?

Introduction

This chapter will look at the population of west London and how it changed over the course of the 20th century. It will use local histories to obtain an outline of the industrial development of the area in the interwar years, illustrating the reasons why workers from across London and other parts of the country moved into the area. It will show how west London remained a major industrial area and was part of the country which experienced full employment post 1945. It will consider the development of housing, both in the public and private sector to accommodate some of those who moved to work in the area and also the limits to house building due to the shortage of land post 1945 due to problems faced by local councils who were committed to meet local housing demand. Finally it will describe the social background to the area as a whole and how parts of it remained middle-class suburbia, whilst other parts were to become thriving working-class communities. This was the backdrop to the origins and development of the labour movement in west London, and the people who built it.

1.1 Where they Worked: the Industries of West London

Until the 20th century most of the working population of this area had been engaged in agriculture, market gardening and brickworks. In addition, Acton was the centre of laundries which employed women, the wives of bricklayers and poor labourers. This was in Bollo Bridge Lane, South Acton, known as ‘Soapsud Island’. The opening of the Great Western Railway (GWR) in the mid-19th century had provided employment, temporarily, for the navvies who built it, but was later to provide long-term employment on the railways and factories which were built along its route.¹ Southall had become a railway town by the beginning of the 20th century. Its workforce provided support for the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and the Labour Party. There were also railway workers living in South Ealing and Acton. Many of the founders of the Labour Party in west London were railway workers including Joe Sparks, an Acton councillor in the 1930s and elected MP for the Acton

¹ A number of local histories have provided background information on the economic and social development of west London suburbs. These include several books by Ealing local historian Jonathan Oates on Southall, Hanwell, Ealing and Acton, and Peter Hounsell on Greenford, Perivale and Northolt. For instance: J.Oates, *Southall and Hanwell* (Stroud, 2003). Local histories of Hillingdon include: C.Kelter, *Hayes Past* (London, 1996) and C.Bowl, *Ruislip Past* (London, 1994). Local newspapers like the *Middlesex County Times* have also been an invaluable source of information.

constituency in 1945. Employees on the GWR were often relocated by their employer. Joe Sparks had been born in Devon but moved to work in Paddington, when he came to live in Acton in 1931.² Employment on the railways was seen as a secure job, but it was still dangerous with regular fatalities at work. The NUR had a fund for widows and orphans, some of who lived in Southall. A.H.Chilton, Labour councillor and prospective parliamentary candidate for Ealing in the 1920s was killed in an accident at work in 1930. Councillor Downey of the Southall Urban District Council had been killed at work in 1921. He was chairman of Southall Labour Party and secretary of the ILP. Thousands attended his funeral including members of the unions, the Women's Co-operative Guild and children from the Socialist Sunday School. His coffin covered with red flag was carried through the streets of Southall by members of the NUR and the ILP.³

The presence of the railway was to lead to the development of industrial estates in Southall with Otto Monsted's margarine factory, known as the Maypole Margarine Factory, the largest of its kind in Europe.⁴ In Hayes, in 1899, the Hayes Development Company bought land near the railway in Botwell, on which dozens of factories were to be built.⁵

West London in the 1920s and 1930s was a new industrial area. Many of the firms which opened factories at the beginning of the 20th century had relocated from other parts of London. They were attracted by the availability of cheap land. Death duties raised during World War 1 led to the demise of landed estates in west London, with the sale of land post 1918 on a large scale. London's population provided a skilled workforce which could be easily transferred. Napiers moved from Vauxhall to Acton Vale. AEC (Associated Equipment Company) to Southall. AEC which made London buses was to become the largest factory in Southall, employing up to 5000 workers.⁶ It was a basis for the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), providing secure employment for skilled engineers who were to play an active role in the Southall Labour Party as well as the union. These included Tommy Steele, a Labour mayor in 1959. He had been born in Poplar and moved to Southall in 1927. He had worked for AEC for over 20 years and had been President of the Southall District of

² Joe Sparks was born in Tiverton, Devon in 1901. He got a job with the GWR in Torquay and was active in the NUR at the age of 15. He went to work at Paddington in 1931. He had been a parliamentary candidate for Taunton in 1929. *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 10 February 1950.

³ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 26 November 1920.

⁴ When the Maypole Margarine Factory closed it was taken over by Quaker Oats. J.Oates, *Southall and Hanwell*, p.80.

⁵ See C.Kelter, *Hayes Past* (London, 1996), pp. 75-79. By 1957 Kelter said that there were a total of 170 factories operating in Hayes, not just alongside the railway line in Botwell, but in other parts of the town, p.136

⁶ See J.Oates, *Southall and Hanwell*, pp.102-107.

the AEU.⁷ George Pargiter, MP for Southall 1950-1964 had also been a convenor of shop stewards at AEC. The British Electric Transformer Company moved from Paddington to Hayes. It was joined in 1906 by the Gramophone and Typewriter company, later to become EMI (Electric and Music Industries), locally known as 'The Gram'. EMI had been founded as the Gramophone and Typewriter Company in Maidan Lane, the Strand in 1898.⁸ Some of these factories were to employ thousands of workers who travelled into the factories from Southall, Ealing, Slough, and further afield. West of Hayes there were smaller industrial estates built in the rural district of Uxbridge, supporting factories such as Sanderson's Wallpaper, and food processing, based on market gardening.⁹

Acton Vale and North Acton became centres of industry with the location of several hundred factories including Landis and Gyr, Eversheds and Vignoles, Wilkinson Swords, Heinz, and Walls. Many of them however were relatively small employers, in contrast to Napiers which was to employ thousands of workers during World War 2 after it had switched from motors to the production of aero-engines.¹⁰

World War 1 gave a further boost to the industrial development of west London. As the government ordered that munitions factories be built, a national filling factory was opened by the railway in Hayes, employing thousands of workers, mainly women. After the War, this was taken over by the Hayes Cocoa Company which merged with Nestles. It had been built on land which had previously been covered by orchards.¹¹

A munitions factory also opened on the site of a royal agricultural park on the borders of Acton and Brent and became known as Park Royal. This was the start of an intensive industrial development which between 1919 and 1939 grew from 38 to 250 factories, the fastest growing industrial area in Europe at the time. Some new industries, such as motor manufacturing were located there, but also some traditional London trades such as food processing, brewing and printing. In peacetime the Guinness brewery was the largest factory on Park Royal. Many factories which opened in Park Royal had relocated from other parts of London and they brought some of their skilled workforce with them. The catchment areas for

⁷ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 23 May 1959.

⁸ *Middlesex County Times* (Ealing edition), 2 August 1950.

⁹ C. Hearman, *Uxbridge: a Concise History* (Hillingdon, 1982), p.175.

¹⁰ C.W. Isa and W. Reader, *Men and Machines: a History of D. Napiers and Son, Engineers Ltd, 1808-1958* (London, 1958), pp. 102-117.

¹¹ M.S. Briggs in *Middlesex Old and New* (London, 1934), pp.220-233.

employment in the area was therefore widespread, from the boroughs of Acton and Brent, but also from across London.¹²

There was a new wave of industrialisation in the late 1920s and 1930s along the Great West Road, bordering Acton, Ealing and Hounslow and the Western Avenue (A40) through Acton and Ealing.¹³ This was encouraged by the availability of electricity as a new source of energy. The government had promoted road building and introduced some limited import tariffs on manufactured goods.¹⁴ American companies such as Firestones and Gillette's on the Great West Road, manufacturing car parts and electrical consumer goods benefitted from the proximity of the London consumer market and a skilled workforce. Hoovers was built on the Western Avenue in Perivale. North of the Western Avenue an industrial estate was built in Greenford alongside the canal and railway line, where thousands were employed at firms such as Rockware Glass, Lyons and Sanderson's Wallpaper.¹⁵ These new factories employed semi-skilled labour, including growing numbers of women, many of whom were to be recruited from outside of London, as economic decline hit traditional parts of the UK economy such as mining and shipbuilding.¹⁶ They were large factories but they were not easy for the trades unions to organise. Their managements were hostile to trades unionism and adopted a paternalistic style. Some employers tried to create a workplace community with canteens, social clubs and firms' outings. This was with the aim of getting a happier workforce, and overcoming the isolation that faced workers who had been uprooted from their communities. The Maypole Margarine factory in Southall had already adopted this mode of operation, declaring that a healthy and contented workman was a firm's finest insurance against labour troubles and a great factor in its success. A works committee had been set up to reduce accidents, annual parties were held and presents given to long-standing

¹² See J.Armstrong, 'The Development of the Park Royal Industrial Estate in the Interwar Period: a Re-examination of the Aldcroft/Richardson Thesis', *London Journal*, 21(1) (1996), pp.64-79. See also the account in J.White, *London in the 20th Century* (London, 2008), p.189 and W.Podmore, *Reg Birch: Engineer, Trades Unionist, Communist* (London, 2004), p.6.

¹³ See J.Marshall, *History of the Great West Road* (London, 1995), p.21.

¹⁴ Stanley Baldwin's government in the 1920s had abandoned free trade in favour of limited import tariffs on manufactured goods. The policy known as 'safeguarding' is explained in *Politicians and the Slump: the Labour Government of 1929-1931* by R.Skidelsky (London, 1967). This meant the US companies such as Firestones and Hoovers had to open factories in Britain to gain access to the UK market.

¹⁵ See F.Hounsell, *Greenford, Northolt, Perivale Past* (London, 1999), p.102.

¹⁶ See M.Gluckmann, *Women Assemble* (London, 1990), pp.1-9.

workers.¹⁷ Some employers, such as Hoovers, provided company housing for workers, buying up streets of houses, which had been built by speculative builders.¹⁸

Economic growth in west London, as in other parts of outer London and the south east of England in the interwar years, was in sharp contrast to the older industrial areas of the north of England and South Wales. According to Nick Barratt three quarters of all new factories in London 1920-1939 were built in the suburbs. Apart from west London, other locations were Hendon, Woolwich, Erith, Wembley, and Dagenham, which saw its population rise from 39,000-184,000 1911-1939. The Fords Motor Corporation opened in Dagenham in the late 1920s.¹⁹ In a recent article in the *Financial Times* on the North-South divide, reference is made to the Barlow Commission, which reported in 1939 that 80% of factory openings between 1932 and 1937 were in London.²⁰ The diversity of industrial employment in London was to protect it from much of the impact of the 1930s depression which had affected other parts of the country.²¹

Public transport continued to grow as a source of employment, across London. Tube lines were extended and a depot was opened at Acton Town on the Piccadilly Line. The tramways, and later bus routes were to employ many people. This was seen as secure and well paid work, like employment on the railways. Joan Parr's father was a bus driver in Acton. She said that wages and conditions were very good. Bus drivers were paid more than any other industry and they were respected. They got to know all their customers.²² As the west London area was built up there was a need for more infrastructure in terms of transport, shops and offices. This provided work for building workers, some recruited from the 'distressed areas'. Pay and conditions for building workers were ongoing concerns for Labour councillors in Hayes and Southall who wanted direct labour employed in the construction of council buildings, rather than private contractors. Wal Hannington, founder of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM) expressed worries that workers from 'distressed

¹⁷ See report in the *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 14 January 1921.

¹⁸ Interview with Doris Ashby for the Labour Oral History Project.

¹⁹ See N.Barratt, *Greater London: the Story of the Suburbs* (London, 2012) pp. 368-377.

²⁰ *Financial Times*, 9 January 2015.

²¹ There are many accounts of the 1920s and 1930s which give a useful and informative background to the development of west London. They include: - N.Branson, *Britain in the 1920s*, N.Branson and M.Heinemann, *Britain in the 1930s*, C.Cook and J. Stevenson, *The Slump :Britain in the Depression*, A.Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930 s*, and J.Gardiner, *The Thirties :an Intimate History*.

²² Interview with Joan Parr for the Labour Oral History Project.

areas' were undercutting local trades union rates.²³ Building work was often insecure as testified by Marianne Elliott whose father had moved from Lanarkshire to work on sets for an exhibition in Wembley but who often faced redundancy.²⁴ Members of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers (ASW) played an active part in Acton and Southall Labour parties. E.W.Paine, for instance, was inaugurated as Labour Mayor in Acton in 1955. He had been a member of the ASW since 1929 and had organised the building of a new Labour Hall in Horn Lane at the end of World War 2, after the former HQ had been destroyed by enemy action.²⁵ Syd Bidwell's father was also in the building trade and had taken part in the building of the Labour Hall in Southall in the 1920s.²⁶

Local office work was available at the new factories, which needed clerks and secretaries in their accounts and personnel departments. National and local government were expanding, and in Acton Vale, the Ministry of Pensions was opened employing around 2,000 workers in 1921, more than some of the local factories. White collar work was on the rise across London. It was a growing area of employment and one new development for women as well as semi-skilled jobs in the local factories.²⁷ Domestic service and laundries however remained significant areas for the employment of women in Acton and Ealing. Hospitals provided employment. Hanwell for instance had a tram depot but also was famous for its mental asylum (Middlesex County Asylum), which had opened in the 19th century, pioneering new methods of mental health care, under the jurisdiction of Dr Connolly. Its employees had been addressed in 1914 by Fred Knee of the London Trades Council on the benefits of trades union organisation.²⁸

West London was to become a major centre for the UK aircraft engineering industry particularly with rearmament after 1938. Napiers on Acton Vale became one of the major factories during World War 2, producing aero-engines. Malcolm Mitchell who was interviewed for the Labour Oral History project described its working conditions as fairly

²³ 'Distressed Areas' were designated by the government as parts of the UK affected by high unemployment in the interwar years. They were sometimes called 'the depressed areas.' See W.Hannington, *Problem of the Distressed Areas (London, 1937)*, Chapter 8 Industrial Transference.

²⁴ Interview with Marianne Elliott for the Labour Oral History Project.

²⁵ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 27 May 1955.

²⁶ Interview with Syd Bidwell for the Labour Oral History Project.

²⁷ The number of secretaries had already increased from 33,000-102,000 1911-1921. (N.Barratt, *Greater London*, p.360). See also N.Robertson, 'Women at Work: Activism, Feminism and the Rise of the Office Worker during the First World War and its Immediate Aftermath' in K.Laybourn and J.Shepherd (eds.), *Labour and Working Class Lives: Essays to Celebrate the Life and Work of Chris Wrigley* (Manchester, 2017), Chapter 9.

²⁸ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 6 April 1914.

primitive.²⁹ By the end of the War, Napiers was employing over 20,000 and it was to become a trades union stronghold. The threat of redundancies as the War came to an end provoked a mass lobby of Acton Council and the House of Commons by 9,000 of its workers who called for a plan for peace time employment.³⁰ In 1945 Acton Labour Party and Trades Council called on the local council to set up a full employment conference. But Acton was not an economic entity and therefore a plan as set out, for example for the Medway towns was not appropriate.³¹ Acton was still attracting workers from outside the borough on a large scale, but was the local council responsible for them all?

1.2 *The West London Economy after 1945*

After 1945 West London remained a major industrial area in the UK, although compared to the interwar years there was no influx of new factories. London wide planning and government policy nationally was to encourage industry to move away from towns like Acton to new towns and other parts of the UK. This had been envisaged in the Abercrombie Plan for London in 1943, and in the government's 1947 Town and Country Planning Act.³² Some west London employers were opening new factories out of the area, engineering firm Rotax for instance in Hemel Hempstead, and Hoovers in Methyr Tydfil.³³

One new important employer opened in 1946 with initially 1,000 employees. This was Heathrow, London's first airport, on the borders of Hillingdon and Hounslow. By 1958 it was employing 26,000 workers. Its employment opportunities were diverse, providing office work as well as skilled manual work, as headquarters of airlines, such as the British Airways Overseas Corporation moved their headquarters to the area. It continued to be an important employer in west London as other factories closed or relocated, but it never provided a cohesive workforce with a single industrial identity. Many trades unions came to be represented at the airport. Demands on land also were to mean that Heathrow became a 'mixed blessing' for the area. Concern was expressed by local MP George Pargiter and local

²⁹ Interview with Malcolm Mitchell for the Labour Oral History Project. He was a member of the Communist Party and stood for Acton's North-East ward as a prospective councillor up until the 1960s but was never to be elected. He left engineering and trained as a teacher.

³⁰ Report from the *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 25 May 1945. See also W.Podmore, *Reg Birch*, p.26.

³¹ Reports from the *Acton Gazette and West London Post* in 1945.

³² Sir Patrick Abercrombie in his 'Greater London plan' envisaged that there should be no further industrial expansion in west London and that factories should relocate. Some long standing factories in Hayes moved-Smith Crisps to Corby, Fairey Aviation was taken over by Westland Helicopters and moved to Yeovil, and the East Acton brickworks closed. (C.Kelter, *Hayes a Concise History*).

³³ Government policy gave Incentives for companies to relocate after 1945. This is described by J.Marshall in his *History of the Great West Road*. pp.93-96.

councils that Harlington village could be wiped out with the loss of jobs in market gardening, houses, churches, shops and schools and a historical village.³⁴ Furthermore airport workers were to have some priority for newly built council homes provided by Ealing, Southall and Hayes councils.³⁵

Like most of London and the south-east, west London enjoyed full employment in the years following World War 2. The local papers were full of adverts for jobs of all types. Wall's in Acton took out half page adverts appealing for women workers, on the basis that the work was clean, coffee and tea was freely available, and that the company provided sports, social and medical facilities. The Acton Labour Exchange frequently reported that the number of vacancies exceeded numbers looking for work. In the 1960s unemployment in London and the south-east was reported as being 1.3% compared to a national average of 2.4%.³⁶ Large scale factory closures were not to take place in west London until the 1980s, but there were exceptions. In August 1962 the *Acton Gazette* reported the 'Death of a Giant' – Napiers, a landmark of Acton Vale since 1904 was to close. Napiers had been taken over by English Electric, and Rolls Royce had bought a controlling interest in the company. The company's 2,500 workers were left with nine months to find other work. Many were engineers with specialist skills, workers who might have difficulty in finding similar work if they were in their 40s or 50s. Some engineers were offered jobs with Rolls Royce in Derby, and the Canadian High Commission stepped in to encourage them to offer their skills to the Canadian economy.³⁷ Acton would lose the several hundred apprenticeships provided by the company, and local businesses dependent on Napiers would lose trade. The announcement coincided with the news of a 100% increase in unemployment in Acton between 1961 and 1962.³⁸ Napier's shop stewards, local councillors and then Conservative MP, Philip Holland approached the Minister of Aviation and Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to provide assistance to keep Napiers open, but to no avail.³⁹ The Napiers site was sold to a property development company for £1.25 million and it finally closed in the summer of 1963. There were 2,500 redundancies, with only a month's pay on offer. Some further concessions were

³⁴ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 5 January 1946.

³⁵ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 19 February 1949.

³⁶ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 3 December 1966.

³⁷ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 13 September 1962.

³⁸ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 20 September 1962.

³⁹ Following the defeat of Joe Sparks after 14 years as Labour MP in 1959, Philip Holland (Conservative) was elected. Labour was to regain the Acton constituency in 1964 with the election of Bernard Floud, who had condemned the closure of Napiers, describing it as a tragedy. *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 20 September 1962.

forced by the trades unions. Other factories on Park Royal and in North Acton had been experiencing industrial action over redundancies for several years. Shop stewards from factories at Park Royal had even called for the Trades Union Congress to consider a one day strike in protest at growing unemployment.⁴⁰ However, unemployment in Acton was still negligible compared to the 1930s when it had during the worst years risen to several thousand.⁴¹

Employment prospects were also good in Southall, giving the local workforce a sense of security not known in the interwar years. Woolf's Rubber Company on the Southall-Hayes border had to look overseas to the Punjab to recruit labour. George Pargiter, MP for Southall at an AEU dinner in October 1959 commented that for the youth, motor cycles are more important than trades union or politics. He said: "Youth have grown up in a different world of full employment, no worries about being on the breadline or facing the sack."⁴² But he went on to say that youth had to be educated as he did not think that this prosperity would last forever. It would last maybe another four or five years?

This prosperity was noted in the *Daily Herald Advertiser Weekly*, when it said: "There is a new class of spender in this country. In the last five years or so the skilled and semi-skilled manual workers have emerged as the biggest spenders on a whole range of goods traditionally regarded as middle class products."⁴³

The Woolf's Rubber Company however was to close in 1967, making its 600, mainly Asian workforce, redundant. The Transport and General Workers' Union accepted the redundancies, as workers were offered alternative employment, even though it was a long way from Southall. There were other factory closures in Southall in 1967, including Cramic Engineering, which relocated to Port Talbot. By September of that year unemployment in Southall rose to over 500 for the first time in decades.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Reports from the *Acton Gazette and West London Post* reported industrial action at a number of factories across Park Royal and North Acton. British Light Steel Pressings for instance had experienced four strikes in a year mainly over bonuses.

⁴¹ Reports from the *Acton Gazette and Express* for 1938 give unemployment figures as 1,281 for men and 393 for women. This figure was falling due to jobs linked to rearmament.

⁴² *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 31 October 1959.

⁴³ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 12 September 1959. This was the basis for Harold Macmillan's 'Never had it so good' election campaign in 1959.

⁴⁴ Reports from the *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 20 January 1967, 22 June 1967, 4 August 1967 and 22 September 1967.

The industrial expansion enjoyed by west London in the interwar years was coming to an end. This was to have an impact on the local politics of the area and the local labour movement. We will see in Chapter 4 that there were more strikes in local factories. The election victories seen by the Conservative Party, reversing Labour gains from 1945, were also to be temporary.

1.3 Commuting: Where the Workforce Lived and Worked

Industrial diversity was the primary feature of the workforce in west London. The second distinguishing feature was the fact that many people did not live in the place where they worked. This was particularly the case as factories were opened before new housing was built. Southall and Acton had established working-class communities in 1918, plus parts of Ealing and Hanwell. In Acton this was mainly in South Acton whose terraced streets were built in the 19th century for labourers and women laundry workers, but the industrial growth in Acton in the 20th century was not automatically reflected in a major growth in local working class population. Hayes, Greenford and Northolt had not yet been built up as residential areas.

Commuting to work in London went back beyond the 20th century. By 1900 200,000 people travelled from the suburbs to the centre each day,⁴⁵ but this movement of City employees was only part of the picture. Industrial workers also travelled to work. Tom Mann in his memoirs describes how he was made redundant from Thorneycroft in Chiswick, where he had an active political life in the Hammersmith branch of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and the Shakespeare Mutual Improvement Society.⁴⁶ He was hard pressed to maintain these activities when his next job was in the Tilbury docks! He ended up as a lodger in the Grays area in Essex, where there was little or no housing for working people. This pattern of commuting was to affect the first workers in the new factories in Hayes, Park Royal and the Great West Road as they travelled from inner London and beyond. Paul Thompson describes London's working-class communities as being unstable, liable to internal migration and migration from outside of the City. This, he said was a cause of the weakness in the London labour movement – the lack of community because workers did not live and work in the same area, but often had to travel five or more miles on a daily basis.⁴⁷ As the location of industry moved to the suburbs at the beginning of the 20th century, commuting became more widespread.⁴⁸ However improved transport communications for working people, including the workman's trains and trams, had

⁴⁵ N.Barratt, *Greater London*, p.12.

⁴⁶ *Tom Mann's Memoirs*; introduced by K.Coates (Nottingham, 2008).First published in 1923.

⁴⁷ P.Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour*, p 282.

⁴⁸ The censuses of 1921 and 1951 collected information on 'where you work and where you live.'

helped to bring the communities of London together. Peoples' lives were not constrained to their own locality.

In the 19th century the suburbs had been seen as dormitory towns for London's middle class who travelled in to work in the City. This did not sit easily with expanding industry in the suburbs and there was no rush to accommodate an expanding workforce. Improved means of transport – workman's trains, trams and buses, meant that workers could take longer journeys to work. In Hayes thousands travelled to work in the factories in Botwell. Kelter in *Hayes Past* (1996) describes vividly how the workforce of Hayes exceeded its residents. 7,000 travelled on special trains everyday into Botwell –two thirds of the workforce. There were no facilities even for meals and many brought their own lunches initially. In later years roadside shacks sold drinks and snacks. The road from the station was a stream of workers who packed this hamlet day and night. In the factories in Hayes after 1919 local councillors claimed that workers had to travel up to twenty miles to work, and pressed for public housing to be built.⁴⁹

In Acton although the working population was rising most of the workers who were drawn to the growing number of factories did not live in Acton. Many travelled from other parts of London. In spite of the growing availability of land, this was not to be put to use for housing, but for the growing demands of industrial development. The local council also bought land for parks and were accused of giving this higher priority than housing. The 1921 census revealed that many people who lived in Acton did not work there and vice versa. The *Acton Gazette* in 1923 reported that Acton had become a growing workplace for London, as 14,575 worked in Acton but lived elsewhere in Hammersmith and Ealing for instance. However 13,346 Acton residents worked outside the borough – 9,000 travelled into London, 3,400 into the City and Westminster. The town provided accommodation for City workers. This was to have political implications as many of the residents of Acton could be regarded as 'middle class' with different interests to the local workforce, and may have explained why Acton, as an industrial area, did not get a Labour council until after 1945, and a Labour MP, Joe Shillaker for only two years, (1929-1931) in the interwar years.⁵⁰

Other parts of west London such as Greenford, which had an industrial estate by the 1920s, also attracted workers from across London and even from Kent and Essex. Its population in

⁴⁹ C.Kelter, *Hayes Past* (London, 1996), pp.87-97.

⁵⁰ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 21 September 1923.

1921 was only 1,461 but 900 workers travelled in to work every day. Like Hayes, the only local accommodation available at the time consisted of ‘rural hovels’.⁵¹

Many workers of west London were completely dependent on public transport to get to work. There were workmen’s trains run by the Great Western Railway (GWR). There were also the tramways. By 1901 the London United Tramways provided a service from Shepherds Bush to Southall and then to Uxbridge. In 1907 one could stand in Hanwell high street and look west and it seemed like this was the edge of London. The tramline however indicated that this was not the case.⁵² By 1908 motor buses were to replace horse drawn buses and they would eventually replace trams in London.

In 1909 the London County Council took over the tramways, and in 1912 the London Omnibus Company was set up. Between 1922 and 1937 travel on London Transport doubled to 2.2 billion passengers a year.⁵³ Tube lines were extended – the Central Line to Ealing Broadway by 1920, and to Greenford by 1947. In the 1930s as more factories opened in the London suburbs and housing did not always follow, Londoners expected to pay out an estimated 8% of their income on transport.⁵⁴ Dependence on London transport continued to expand. When Mr Lyon, a member of the London Transport Passenger Board came to the Rotary Club in Southall in 1949 he said that the average London passenger’s miles per annum had increased from 800 to 1300 over ten years from 1939. Relocation of industry and housing had contributed to this with London Transport now carrying 12 million people a day. New housing developments in the north of Southall, Hayes, and Northolt brought about demand for more bus routes.⁵⁵

In spite of house building programmes by both private builders and local councils in the interwar years and beyond, commuting was to remain a feature of London working life. In 1957 still nearly three times as many employees in Acton lived outside the borough as inside, with a 2,000 increase in population during the day.⁵⁶ In Southall by contrast in 1945 50% of the population worked in local factories.⁵⁷ The London Labour Party publication *London News* reported in July 1956 on the results of the 1951 census, which showed an increase in

⁵¹ F.Hounsell, *Greenford, Northolt and Perivale Past* (London, 1999), pp.109-111.

⁵² J.White, *London in the 20th Century*. He described how Clarence Rook wondered why the tramcars went west, when Hanwell seemed like the edge of London, p.25.

⁵³ J.White, *London in the 20th Century*, p.32.

⁵⁴ N.Branson and M.Heinemann, *Britain in the 1930s*, Chapter 5, The Growing Communities.

⁵⁵ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 5 September 1949.

⁵⁶ J.Oates, *Acton: a History* (Chichester, 2003).

⁵⁷ J.Oates, *Southall and Hanwell*, p.92.

commuting in London from 1921. In 1921 a third of workers had lived close to their place of work, by 1951 this was down to a quarter.⁵⁸

There had been a shift to the suburbs. Over half a million workers in central London now lived outside of the London County Council area. Nick Barratt in *Greater London: the Story of the Suburbs* (2012) pointed out that by 1939 more Londoners were already living in the suburbs than inner London.⁵⁹ In the years 1921-1935 the population of inner London (the London county area) fell by 339,000, but outer London grew by 1,278,000.⁶⁰ Of those who left inner London in these years, the majority moved to the greater London area of the outer suburbs.⁶¹ This trend was to continue and it was augmented during World War 2 when inner London areas lost a lot of its population due to bombing and evacuation policies.⁶²

At the end of the war all parts of London were to face an exodus through the building of new towns. This included west London, and other growth areas of the interwar years. The Abercrombie Plan was to place restrictions on building houses as well as factories, with the aim of preserving the Green Belt. Planning permission was often refused by the Government, and local councils jointly approach the Ministry for Town and Country Planning to ask for help. Suggested locations for new towns for the excess population of the west London area were White Waltham and Bracknell in Berkshire.⁶³

West London, then, experienced population change throughout the 20th century. Divergence in location of work and home, made the building of stable communities difficult and this had an impact on the structure of the labour movement. Trades union branches for instance were organised on geographical rather than workplace location. This could hamper building community support for industrial disputes in the workplace if the workforce was dispersed across the area.

⁵⁸ *London News*, July 1956.

⁵⁹ N.Barratt, *Greater London*, p.398. Figures given by Barratt for the population of London (in millions): 1931 8.1, 1951 8.2, 1981 6.8. The population of inner London fell from 4.9 million in 1931 to 2.5 million in 1981. See N.Barratt, *Greater London*, p.398.

⁶⁰ P.Scott, 'The State, Internal Migration and the Growth of New Industrial Communities in Interwar Britain', *English Historical Review*, cxv, 461 (April 2000), pp. 329-353.

⁶¹ A.D.K.Owen, 'The social consequences of industrial transference', *Sociological Review*, xxix, 4(October 1937), pp.331-354.

⁶² The population of Bethnal Green fell from 108,000 to 90,130 (1931-1939). After air raids it fell to 47,330 in 1941, recovering to 60,580 by 1948. See M. Young and P.Wilmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (Harmondsworth, 1962), p. 123.

⁶³ Both of these locations were controversial with local farmers and the White Waltham option never got off the ground at all. Reports from the *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 1946-1948).

1.4 Migration into west London from the 'Distressed Areas'

Initially workers for the factories of west London came from other parts of London or its outskirts. Some employers brought their workforce with them. But by the 1920s and 1930s workers were to come from further afield. This was based on the growing labour market in London, and the state of Britain's 'distressed' areas such as the North of England, South Wales and Scotland. Staple industries such as coal mining, textiles and shipbuilding faced decline from the early 1920s. D.H. Aldcroft illustrates that the depression which faced British industry in the 1920s was deeper than that of the 1930s. By 1921 unemployment rose to 2.4 million, 22% of the workforce. There was a regional imbalance. Industrial areas which now faced the highest levels of unemployment had had the lowest levels of unemployment pre 1914. In Wales for instance in 1912/13 unemployment had been 3.1%, its average 1919-1936 was 30.1%, and its highest, in 1932, was 38.1%. In comparison London's rate of unemployment remained at an average of 8.8% from 1912-13 to 1929-1936, peaking at 13.1% in 1932. In 1932 areas which were dependent on the old staple industries such as coal, iron and steel, and textiles faced unemployment rates of 30-40%, and ship building faced 60% unemployment. By the time of the 1936 economic recovery two thirds of the unemployed were in the North, Scotland and Wales. London with its diverse industrial spectrum and its industries such as food, electrical engineering and vehicles dependent on an increasing domestic consumer market, not exports, was able to escape the worse of the depression.⁶⁴

The Government designated South East Wales, West Central Scotland, Cumberland and Tyneside with a total of four million inhabitants, as 'distressed areas.' In 1934 it passed the Depressed Areas Act, but there had been little encouragement for factories to move to these areas.⁶⁵ Government policy had been to encourage workers from the distressed areas to move to new industrial areas and between 1928 and 1938 the Ministry of Labour had assisted 280,000 workers to move with the Industrial Transference Scheme.⁶⁶ However it was acknowledged that not all workers could relocate. Those over thirty years of age with families would not be able to move. In many cases skills associated with the staple industries such as coal mining were not transferable. Indeed many young workers who did migrate south were offered semi-skilled jobs in factories, when they may have been formerly

⁶⁴ This is described in D.H.Aldcroft, *The British Economy vol.1: the Rise of Years of Turmoil 1920-1951* (Brighton, 1986).

⁶⁵ M.Pugh, *Making of Modern British Politics: 1867-1939 2nd ed.* (Oxford, 1993), p.98.

⁶⁶ Industrial Transference Board (1928) Report [Cmnd. 3156], London, HMSO.

employed as skilled miners, engineers or shipbuilders. Some employers were dubious about taking on those with a trades union or political background. Also, although jobs were available in London and the south-east of England, housing was in short supply. Single people could find lodgings, but not families. So for many unemployed, relocation was not attractive. In their home towns they had the support of their families and communities and some who did make a move were to later return.⁶⁷ If migration was a problem for the unemployed it was also a problem for local government in the reception areas.⁶⁸ The infrastructure in new industrial areas did not exist to provide communities to replace those in the distressed areas.

In 1934 the Ministry of Labour published reports of investigations into the industrial conditions in certain 'distressed areas' and argued that industrial transference continued to be the simplest and most immediately practical remedy. The fact that between 1921 and 1931 148,000 persons had left Tyneside for instance showed that there was no lack of willingness to find work.

However it went on to say:

The Government found it necessary in 1932 to curtail their activities in this direction, on the grounds that unemployment had so much increased throughout the country that any attempt to distinguish between the various centres of recruitment would meet with opposition and although matters have improved in this respect and it appears that opportunities for transference, particularly of juveniles, now exist, the limiting factor must continue to be the capacity of the more fortunate districts to absorb workers from the 'distressed areas' without arousing local hostility.⁶⁹

It acknowledged that probably the best and most easily transferable had already moved. Government training centres were placed in the new industrial areas, and financial help was

⁶⁷ See N.Branson and M. Heinemann, *Britain the 1930s*. pp.58-78. Wal Hannington also confirms that many returned. He said that between 1921 and 1935 608,000 persons had migrated in search of work, but after 1933-1935 the numbers from South Wales increased by 250%. There were 60,000 new entrants into the building trade in London, many of whom were undercutting wages. See W.Hannington, *The Problem of the Distressed Areas*, Chapter 8 on Industrial Transference.

⁶⁸ *London News* (March 1932) cited an article from *the Times* saying that workers and industry could migrate but social capital could not. 'It may be true to say that every extra man brought to work at Slough or Southall or Dagenham is a man taken from Tyneside, South Wales or some other derelict area where his needs in transport, drains, public libraries and so forth have already been provided for!' A falling birth rate in the 1930s aggravated this problem in the distressed areas. In the more prosperous areas there were problems with overcrowding and lack of social amenities.

⁶⁹ Ministry of Labour Reports of Investigations into the Industrial Conditions in Certain Deprived Areas (1934) [Cmnd 4728] London, HMSO.

given for temporary accommodation, removal and fares. Young women and girls had been successfully transferred to jobs in domestic service, where over 9,800 had been trained at Domestic Training Centres. Some Durham mining villages had lost nearly all their girls in this way.⁷⁰ The peak years for industrial transference were 1929 and 1936 when over 43,000 workers were assisted by the scheme. In 1932 as the UK economy as a whole contracted it fell to 14,140. For the first time in history the British government had provided assistance with employee mobility, with help with fares, housing, training, even in some cases topping up wages. Government Training Centres were set up in growing industrial areas such as Park Royal where a GTC had trained over 12,000 men by 1938. Labour Exchanges were also to play a vital role, recruiting directly from the depressed areas for factories in the south-east of England and the West Midlands.

However much migration was from undirected transference. Peter Scott indicates that 1935-1936 105,050 migrated, 75% of their own accord.⁷¹ Sometimes connections with family and friends who had already migrated were to prove more of an incentive than government assistance. In that way the migrant worker was able to get support, particularly as was often the case that he or she faced hostility from the local population. The Welsh for instance were blamed for undercutting wages. Abandoned communities could be rebuilt in new surroundings. A.D.K. Owen for instance writes about how the Welsh settled down in their new surroundings, taking part in the social and recreational associations in their new homes. Their familiar physical and social content of life had gone in depersonalised suburban areas, and often transferees were unhappy. Transferring whole families and indeed communities was, Owen thought, more successful than transferring individuals.⁷²

In spite of the problems with industrial relocation, many did move to London, the south-east and the Midlands in the 1920s and 1930s. According to Branson and Heinemann over one million people between the ages of 15-45 migrated to the south-east of England between 1923-38, and between 1932-37 the insured working population of London rose by half a million or by 14%. Barratt cites the growth of population in the county of Middlesex between 1921-1931 as five times the average for England and Wales for the same time.⁷³

⁷⁰ [Cmnd 4728].

⁷¹ P.Scott, 'The State, Internal Migration and the Growth of Industrial Communities in Interwar Britain', *English Historical Review*, cvx, 461, (April 2000), pp.329-353.

⁷² A.D.K Owen, 'The social consequences of industrial transference', *Sociological Review*, xxix, 4 (October 1937), pp.331-354.

⁷³ N.Barratt, *Greater London* p.343.

Lack of statistics on the origins of migrants into an area and the fact that there was no 1941 census, meant that it was difficult to quantify and locate the influx of labour from the distressed areas into London and the South-East. Thomas bases his estimates on Ministry of Labour unemployment books, which had to be registered at the local labour exchanges when a worker arrived in a new area. From these he notes that of 219,000 workers registering in London and the South East in 1936, 27% were from the north-east of England, 19% from Wales, 15% from the north-west of England, and 10% from Scotland. There were 10 Welshmen in London for every 100 in Wales.⁷⁴

This was particularly significant for west London, as he estimates that in 1936 the registration of non-native workers were as follows: Acton (10.1%), Southall (15.1%) and Hayes (17.1%). He says that outer west London attracted more migrant workers than the Lea Valley or Edgware in North London (4.8%) due to the nature of its industry which consisted of light engineering and consumer products. Furthermore of the total of 15,871 settling in the area in 1936 28% were Welsh, 26% were from the north-east of England, 14% from the north-west, and 8% from Scotland.⁷⁵

As London doubled its size between 1919 and 1939, much of the growth came in the suburbs. White in *London in the 20th century* (2008) indicates that from 1921 to 1939 west and north-west London gained an additional 800,000 people and that Hayes and Harlington and Harrow grew by 150% in the 1920s.⁷⁶ By 1939 Harrow, one of the fastest growing parliamentary constituencies in the UK had a population the size of Salford. Some of this was a growing working-class population, in Greenford, Northolt and Hayes.

1.5 Unemployment in the Interwar Years and the North-South Divide

Unemployment affected the capital unevenly – in 1927 it was 6.5% for London as a whole, but 13.2% in Poplar and 19% in West Ham.⁷⁷ For those in work real wages were rising due to falling prices particularly for food and housing but there was still fear of unemployment. This was reflected in demonstrations on behalf of the unemployed, particularly in the depressions of 1920-1921 and 1931-33. Workers marched on town halls and the local Poor Law Guardians calling for the provision of public works. In Acton unemployed workers

⁷⁴ E.J.Jones, *The Welsh in London 1500-2000* (Cardiff, 2001), p.129.

⁷⁵ B.Thomas, 'The Influx of Labour into London and the South-East 1920-1936', *Economica* (1937), pp.323-336.

⁷⁶ J.White, *London in the 20th century*. p.32.

⁷⁷ J.Marriott, *Beyond the Tower* (New York, 2011). He also noted that 250,000 moved out of the East End in the interwar years to areas such as Dagenham, p.223

demonstrated outside Napier's asking for work. Local councils and mayors set up distress funds. They were also asked to provide public works.⁷⁸ The Ministry of Transport provided money for road building but road-building often recruited short term labour via private contractors rather than the local Labour Exchange. For instance, only handful of local men were employed on building the Western Avenue and the Great West Road.⁷⁹ In February 1933 Acton Council, still controlled by the Conservatives, introduced a Social Fund for the unemployed, which raised £6,000. This was condemned as inadequate by Joe Sparks, a Labour councillor who was later to become Labour MP for Acton. He said that a complete change in the system was needed. In Ealing the council set up workshops for the unemployed and middle class residents were implored to bring forward home improvements to provide jobs with a call to 'spend that idle money to help the idle many.'⁸⁰ It is not clear how much these philanthropic efforts had on the unemployment situation either locally or nationally, but they did indicate that prosperous members of the middle-class had a conscience, which extended beyond their own relatively comfortable circumstances, part of the political impact of the 1930s.

At the time of the council elections in 1935 unemployment was at the top of the list of priorities for the Southall Labour councillors. They wanted housing, schools, pools, libraries, road repairs – anything that could provide work. But they also wanted local labour given priority. This was later specified as having lived in the area for six months. So in spite of being a growing and prosperous industrial area, to which workers from the 'distressed areas' could be relocated, west London had its own unemployment problem. Syd Bidwell in his interview for the Labour Oral History project described the plight of the unemployed in Southall, who he said were visible and hanging around on street corners. He recalls workers who had been dismissed from the ETC factory in Hayes on a Friday afternoon, going home afraid to face their families.⁸¹ The 1930s is a contested decade which has led to debates amongst historians. Poverty and insecurity were still major facts of life, including in parts of the UK with a growing industrial base. Some factory work was still seasonal, being dependent on consumer demand. In the motor industry in Oxford for instance, some workers returned to agriculture during the harvest season. At EMI in Hayes conditions are described by former employee Doug Witt:

⁷⁸ See J.Marshall,*History of the Great West Road*, pp.24-26.

⁷⁹ J.Marshall,*History of the Great West Road*, pp.21-29.

⁸⁰ *Middlesex County Times* (Ealing edition),4 March 1933.

⁸¹ J.Oates also described unemployment in 1930s Southall in *Southall and Hanwell*, p.92.

Employment at EMI was always insecure. There was short time working and you could be laid off with no warning in the middle of the day or at the end of the week and told to come back the following day, week or not at all.

When Doug Witt was taken on as a clerk in 1935 he was told to look out of the window and count the number of people waiting to take his job if he did not do it properly. The radio season coincided with the agricultural season, both reaching a peak in the summer and a trough in the winter and this meant that local unemployment was particularly severe from November to March. He added that the only secure employment seemed to be on the railways.⁸²

These insights show that the population of growing industrial areas in London and the south-east were not immune from the fear of unemployment. They showed solidarity with workers from the north, in their support for the hunger marchers. Although there was a north-south divide, it did not affect the political outlook of these different parts of the country. This was particularly the case as growing numbers of workers in west London came from the 'distressed areas'. Working-class communities in London were not immune from the fear of unemployment.

1.6 Housing: the Role of Government and Local Councils

Many of the new workers in west London could not find accommodation in the area. Nevertheless the interwar years saw a large house building programme. Some of this was carried out by local authorities. In November 1918 the Housing Committee of the Middlesex County Council called a conference and asked all its local authorities to assess their housing needs. It noted that many of these were now dormitory towns for London.⁸³ Their role as dormitory towns was considered to merit their entitlement to government assistance. But the growing industrialisation of Middlesex had not been taken into account. In fact this was to make the area's housing needs more urgent. Government subsidies provided by the Housing and Town Planning (Addison) Act of 1919 and the Wheatley (Housing Financial Provisions) Act of 1924 prompted some council house building. 200,000 council houses were built nationally with these subsidies.⁸⁴

⁸² Interview with Doug Witt in M. Glucksmann, *Women Assemble* (London, 1990) pp. 111-117.

⁸³ *Middlesex and Buckinghamshire Advertiser and Uxbridge Gazette*, 29 November 1918.

⁸⁴ See: A. Cox, *Public Housing* (London, 1993). The 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act had allowed councils to provide housing. A further law of 1900 allowed local authorities to build outside their own area, a

How far these provisions were enacted upon depended on which political party controlled the local council, and also on the availability of land and finance. In west London Labour ran Southall and Hayes for most of the interwar years, and Conservative backed candidates, such as 'Ratepayers', ran Acton and Ealing. In Acton Joe Sparks was vocal in condemning the Acton Conservatives for not building houses, allowing land to be used for other purposes such as factories and parks, and encouraging private builders. People wanted a house to rent. He said that Conservative councils had not exercised their powers. Before the War, he said:

People had to buy a house at an inflated price. Many cases have been brought to my notice in which families have been persuaded to hang around their necks a burden of debt for 20 years buying houses incurring heavy mortgage costs and denying themselves food, clothing and a decent standard of life in order to provide the mortgage charges on the houses which they were supposed to own.⁸⁵

He claimed that Acton Council had built a total of 500 dwellings between 1919 and 1939 due to pressure by a small Labour group.⁸⁶ When Labour had controlled Acton for a short period of time in 1919 some advances had been made to begin building council housing in East Acton.⁸⁷ This was completed after the Conservatives won control of the council but they had also sold off some land and houses. Obstacles to house building in the interwar years were finance, obtaining land and the use of private builders whose costs would result in rents which tenants would be unable to pay.⁸⁸ In 1932, due to government cuts in spending, all subsidies for public housing throughout the UK were ended, except for slum clearance.⁸⁹ In parts of Acton in the interwar years overcrowding and subletting were rife.

When Labour ran Acton Council after 1945, priority was given to build more council housing. Land had been acquired in Acton Vale for 300 flats as early as 1937. World War 2 bomb damage brought about more shortages, and after 1945 the housing waiting list in Acton rose to 2,365 and continued to rise to over 4,000, before it started to fall. As in other parts of London there was an active squatting movement and the Council stepped in to take over empty properties. As an emergency measure 900 private houses were requisitioned and

request which had been made by the London County Council. The 1946 Housing, Financial and Miscellaneous Provisions Act allowed a £16.10 subsidy from the government per house for local authorities.

⁸⁵ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 26 April 1946.

⁸⁶ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 24 October 1947.

⁸⁷ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 15 January 1926. It reported 173 dwellings having been built in East Acton.

⁸⁸ *London News*, September 1932. It reported that private builders in Acton would not adhere to Ministry of Health guidelines in relations to costs and density.

⁸⁹ See A.Cox, *Public Housing*, p.10, M.Pugh, *We Danced All Night*, p.62.

250 temporary houses (prefabs) were put up.⁹⁰ 400 more houses were planned for bombed-out sites. In total there would be four times as many houses to let as to buy. But the lack of availability of land meant that more homes had to be provided outside of the borough for Acton families, on the borders of Ruislip and Northolt in west London or in the new town of Hemel Hempstead where 1,000 new houses were to be built. Land in Yeading Green (on the borders of Northolt and Hayes) was bought jointly by Acton, Ealing, Southall and Willesden councils.⁹¹

Between 1946 and 1965 Acton council was to build 2,197 more houses than the council in the interwar years. But by 1951 it was estimated that only 43% of households in Acton had basic amenities such as inside bathrooms. Acton council was facing problems with purchasing land inside the borough.⁹² The solution to be pursued was the complete re-development of South Acton.⁹³

By the 1960s the whole of South Acton was being redeveloped with compulsory purchase of existing terraced housing. Re-housing these families was to bring additional pressure on the housing waiting list, as they claimed priority. Many elderly people who had lived in the area for years were reluctant to leave, as they found themselves in empty streets, denuded of neighbours and affected by vandalism. But when the families moved in to the new flats they had for the first time inside amenities and central heating. Tower blocks were built, and plans were made for facilities such as a children's playground, nursery and shops, as well as some new industrial development.⁹⁴

Housing remained a party political issue in Acton, with the election of a Conservative government in 1951. Subsidies for council housing were cut back under the government's Housing Repairs and Rents Act of 1955.⁹⁵ This led to the council having to raise rents, and put the future of plans for South Acton in jeopardy. Private tenants were to be affected by the Rents Act of 1957 which de-controlled rents, led to evictions and Acton's own Rachmanism.

⁹⁰ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 22 June 1945.

⁹¹ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 3 March 1952.

⁹² J.Oates, *Acton: A History*, pp114-116.

⁹³ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 4 July 1952, 23 January 1953.

⁹⁴ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 2 February 1958.

⁹⁵ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 21 October 1955.

There were regular reports in the *Acton Gazette* of tenants being physically attacked by landlords over tenancy issues.⁹⁶

For Hayes and Southall in the interwar years, housing also was a key issue, but the Labour controlled councils struggled with lack of funding and land. Nevertheless an impressive amount of public housing was provided in Botwell, substantially increasing the population of Hayes. In 1920 the *Southall and Norwood Gazette* reported that Hayes Urban District Council planned 2,000 new houses in Botwell, with government subsidies, together with a swimming pool and public library. The Townfield Housing Estate will be “A new city” declared the local MP Colonel Peel for the Uxbridge Division, which would help those who travel over 20 miles to work and ease overcrowding in Hayes.⁹⁷ By the time it had been built in the 1930s, M.S. Briggs described it as one of the best housing schemes designed in London.⁹⁸ Together with the 534 houses built on the Great Western Railway estate, and another 1,080 by the Allied Building Corporation, by 1929 6,500 new houses had been completed or started in Hayes. The population of Botwell had increased from 2,651 in 1901 to 10,000 in 1931 which was now regarded as the centre of Hayes.⁹⁹

However, rents were too high for some council house tenants, at eight shillings per week, compared to three shillings for the hovels that some had been renting. Councillors in Hayes were in dispute with the Ministry of Health regarding the level of rents. Tenants could not afford them and this could lead to a rent strike. The Ministry however said that rents were supposed to cover the costs of building the houses. After 1945 Hayes council continued its house-building programme, planning 1,000 more houses in an area of predominantly working class housing. By 1946 the population of Hayes had reached 66,000 and in 1955 it was predicted to reach 70,590 by the 1970s. Post 1945 Hayes Council, controlled by Labour faced a housing waiting list of 3,000 which was growing. New housing was built by the council but like other councils in west London it was running out of land.¹⁰⁰

Uxbridge UDC built some council housing between 1919 and 1939, and the Ruislip-Northwood UDC built 445 houses for working class families. Neither of these councils was

⁹⁶ Cllr Gerry Reynolds, Acton councillor and MP for Islington North complains of Rachmanism in Acton in the *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, August 1963. Rachmanism was associated with a notorious landlord in Nottinghill Gate called Peter Rachman.

⁹⁷ *Southall-Norwood Gazette*, 27 February 1920.

⁹⁸ M.S. Briggs, *Middlesex Old and New*, p.222.

⁹⁹ C.Kelter, *Hayes Past*, pp. 87-97.

¹⁰⁰ Reports from the *Hayes Gazette* (*West Middlesex Advertiser and County Gazette*, Hayes and Harlington edition), for 1946, 1950, 1955 and 1959.

Labour controlled, but they had better opportunities to purchase land than other councils in the area.¹⁰¹

Southall UDC was also concerned with housing and councillors expressed fears that not enough was being done. Subsidising rents was completely opposed by the opposition Ratepayers Party in Southall. But Southall Council had, by 1939, built 1,119 new houses.¹⁰² Southall council like Acton found difficulties in finding land, and most of the population remained in private rented or owned accommodation. The problem of land shortage continued after the end of World War 2. In April 1946 Walter Ayles MP said that building materials and labour were available, but the problem was land. He said: "We have none or have overbuilt." More housing was to be built in Dormers Wells in the North of the town and by the canal in the South, but these amounted to hundreds of dwellings when there were 3,000 on the housing waiting list. Planning permission was in some cases refused as it would have led to building on Green Belt land. One such case was a proposed development of Osterley Park. Increasingly Southall council was looking to build outside the borough in Heston or Northolt. By 1947 more housing was being built outside the borough than inside. The council's record was challenged by its Conservative opposition in 1948 who claimed that they had found land for 500 new houses. Alderman Hopkins, leader of Southall Council told them that:

We could panic and put up houses on every open space in town. But that would not solve our problem. In a few years the people whom we had put into houses would be crying out because there were no open spaces for their children to play in.¹⁰³

The building of a new large council estate with tower blocks like South Acton, was not to occur until the 1960s, on the Golf Links estate, where land had been used for temporary housing after 1945.

Hanwell council which existed until 1926 when it was amalgamated with Ealing, also built 122 houses under the Addison Act, in Townholm Crescent.¹⁰⁴ The largest estate to be built in the borough of Ealing in the interwar years was built in the late 1930s on the site of the

¹⁰¹ E.M.Boult, *Ruislip Past: a Visual History of Ruislip, Eastcote and Northwood* (London, 1994), pp.101-102.

¹⁰² J.Oates, *Southall and Hanwell*, pp.90-91.

¹⁰³ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 3 July 1948.

¹⁰⁴ J.Oates, *Southall and Hanwell*, pp.90-91.

Cuckoo Farm in North Hanwell.¹⁰⁵ The Cuckoo Estate was one of a number of estates built by the Labour-controlled London County Council, the largest being at Becontree in Dagenham, as part of a programme of slum clearance in London. Those who moved to these new estates largely came from poorer overcrowded parts of London. Often they had to travel back to their jobs in inner London, and sometimes often they could not afford the rents charged or their fares and missed their local communities. Originally those who benefitted from council housing were skilled workers or clerks, not the very poor. Building council estates in leafy areas was not always popular with the local residents.¹⁰⁶ In 1937 the Labour parliamentary candidate for Harrow told residents on the Cuckoo Estate that the local Conservatives had not wanted them in the borough of Ealing because he said “you are disturbing the sedate roots of Tory respectability that have so far inhabited this part of the world”.¹⁰⁷ In South Ruislip in the 1950s there were complaints about new council tenants from Acton, whose children were described as dirty and lowering the tone of the neighbourhood.¹⁰⁸

More council estates were built by the London Borough of Ealing after 1945, for instance the Racecourse estate in Northolt.¹⁰⁹ This land had been purchased before 1939 but its development had been delayed due to the War. Ealing had a large housing waiting list of 10,000. However by 1959 Ealing had built 3,670 houses, the highest total in Middlesex according to the *Middlesex County Times*.¹¹⁰ It also reported that 1,822 houses had been built in the private sector in the borough. Families were moved out of overcrowded conditions in South Ealing to houses in Northolt. This was to affect local politics as Northolt was to become more solidly Labour, but votes were lost in its traditional base of Lammas Ward, South Ealing.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ The Cuckoo Farm was part of the Central London District School built to educate the families of those who were born in workhouses. One of these was film star Charlie Chaplin. The School and Farm were transferred to the London County Council (LCC) in 1932 and most of it was demolished in 1933. The main block remains and is now Hanwell Community Centre. The LCC used the land to build a housing estate called the Cuckoo Estate. This is described in *Ealing and Hanwell Past* by P.Hounsell, p.136.

¹⁰⁶ N.Barratt, *Greater London*, pp.358-368 and J.White, *London in the 20th Century*, p.35.

¹⁰⁷ *Middlesex County Times* (Ealing edition), 12 June 1937. Labour councillor Chilton said that Ealing Council had tried to stop the estate from being built, and that the local Conservatives looked down on other parts of Ealing, like Northfields, where he lived. They nevertheless organised a tea party to welcome ‘the mothers of Hanwell.’

¹⁰⁸ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 12 October 1951.

¹⁰⁹ *Middlesex County Times* (Ealing edition), 27 October 1945. It reported that 1000 houses were planned for the former Northolt Race Course.

¹¹⁰ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 7 February 1959.

¹¹¹ This was commented on by Councillor Tom Allsop in his interview for the Labour Oral History Project.

1.7 Home Ownership

Housing statistics for London were published in *London News*. Between 1919 and 1937 684,000 new houses had been built in London, Of the 137,420 built by local authorities 68,720 had been built by the London County Council.¹¹² The rest would have been built by private builders. But Branson and Heinemann stated that in 1931 less than one fifth of houses were owner occupied.¹¹³ For those who did buy their own home, living conditions were vastly improved with electricity, indoor running water and gardens.

The majority of housing built in the interwar years in London was in the private sector. This was helped by the availability of cheap land in the suburbs. In Acton and Ealing these could only be afforded by the more affluent middle-class. The *Acton Gazette* carried an advert for ‘new wonder houses for the city worker’, three or four bedrooms at a cost of £800-£1000 in areas such as Ealing Common, or Gunnersbury Park, part of Acton, but far removed from the overcrowded houses of South Acton.¹¹⁴ Housing legislation in 1923 enabled councils to lend to buyers, and to give subsidies to private contractors to develop housing. However, parts of west London were to see the beginning of working class owner occupation, as the cost of housing and borrowing fell. A house which could be bought for as little as £300 was within the reach of skilled workers. Private housing estates were built alongside the main roads such as the Western Avenue, in Perivale, Greenford and Northolt. In Ruislip Manor 2,322 affordable houses selling for £450 were to be built by Manor Houses, on 186 acres south of the railway line. It was expected that they would be bought by working men.¹¹⁵

House building grew in the 1930s, almost 300,000 built in 1934/35, and some well paid workers were able to buy their own homes. This was described by some of those interviewed for the Labour Oral History Project, such as Doris Ashby. Her parents saved for a mortgage with their ‘Co-op Divi’, and bought a house in Perivale, which in the 1930s was surrounded by fields. Doris remembers flowers growing at the bottom of her road. Jean Humphries whose father bought a house just off the A40, when his firm relocated from Grays Inn to Park Royal in the 1920s remembered the pleasure for the first time of having a room of her own.¹¹⁶ In both cases they had been living in rooms in parts of inner London, Islington and Kensington. Alan Rogers said that Wimpey Houses in Greenford cost £250. His parents only

¹¹² *London News*, September 1937.

¹¹³ N.Branson and M. Heinemann, *Britain in the 1930s*, Chapter 5: The Growing Communities.

¹¹⁴ *Acton Gazette and West London Express*, 8 April 1927.

¹¹⁵ E.M.Boult, *Ruislip Past*, pp.101-102.

¹¹⁶ Interviews with Jean Humphries and Doris Ashby for the Labour Oral History Project.

managed to raise the £20 deposit by borrowing from his grandfather. His father was a postal worker in Paddington.¹¹⁷ Those who moved to new housing estates on the outskirts of London experienced less crowded conditions, and enjoyed the strong air of the suburbs, but there was also a sense of isolation.¹¹⁸ Was life better in North Greenford or in a central London borough? This was a debate held at the All Hallows Men's Discussion Group, Greenford in 1946. Greenford was a neighbourhood of new, up to date and clean houses, with gardens a source of beauty in the summer. But Westminster had a full social life, churches, youth clubs, the theatre and open spaces. One's neighbours were more friendly than in the suburbs where standoffishness spoiled things considerably.¹¹⁹

Some workers were housed by their employer. The Great Western Railway had built small estates in Hayes and Acton for its workers. Large employers such as Hoovers purchased houses in Perivale for its workers.

The majority of the working class in west London, pre 1945 did not live in council housing, nor were they owner occupiers. Many in Southall, Hanwell, South Acton and South Ealing continued to live in 19th century terraces, privately rented and often in multi-occupied overcrowded accommodation. These were long standing working class communities. Many newcomers from the 'distressed areas' tended to be young and single, would not qualify for council housing and lived in rented lodgings.

1.8 Class, Building Communities and Politics in Suburbia

From the outset the industrialisation of west London had met with some disapproval. In 1839 when the railway opened in Southall, one contemporary who had seen Southall as a rural retreat described it as being 'a remarkable change for the worse'. 'The railway spread dissatisfaction and immorality among the poor, the place being inundated with worthless and overpaid navigators, the very appearance of the country was altered, some families left and the rusticity of the village gave place to a London out of town character.'¹²⁰

Rupa Huq in *On the Edge: the Contested Cultures of English suburbia (2013)* described how:

¹¹⁷ Interview with Alan and Ann Rogers, 10 September 2015.

¹¹⁸ The *Middlesex County Times* reported on interviews with women living on the Cuckoo Estate in Hanwell. Mostly they were happy with their improved housing conditions and praised the LCC as a landlord. They valued their new found privacy. A few had commented that the local air was too strong for them, *Middlesex County Times* (Ealing edition), 23 February, 1937.

¹¹⁹ Debate between Mr Hurford and Mr Walker in the *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 14 June 1946.

¹²⁰ Quote from the Reverend B.J. Armstrong in N.Barratt, *Greater London*, p 196.

The first expansion of suburbia was largely undertaken to accommodate the middle class, which grew in Victorian and Edwardian times because of the increase in non-manual work. The middle class sought improved physical surroundings away from their initial habitat, the city, and its districts of exclusivity that marked out their distinction from those in manual work. There was a sense that moving out to suburbia meant moving up the social scale. For those original dwellers the suburb was the dormitory town.¹²¹

This migration of the middle class continued into the 20th century with the building of the Metropolitan Railway out to Harrow, Ruislip and Hillingdon, which were seen as rural paradises. Their population was to treble in the first decades of the century. Encouraged by the advertising caption ‘Live in Ruislip-the air is like wine, it is less than half an hour on the Piccadilly line.’ between 1930 and 1939 Ruislip’s population grew from 16,000 to 47,000.¹²² Detached houses on the Deane Estate were described as having ‘wonderful views’, but only 26 minutes from the centre of London. They were equipped with bathrooms, and tiled kitchens with gas cookers.¹²³

By 1914 Southall was an industrial town, which had a community – schools, churches, pubs, and a Chamber of Commerce. There were several working men’s clubs and places of worship, such as the Southall Brotherhood, whose Reverend Broadbelt was to offer the use of its Kings Hall to railway strikers in 1919.¹²⁴ The Southall Brotherhood was a nonconformist church.

In other parts of west London the growth of industry sat uneasily with a middle class population. This was the case with Acton, Hanwell and Ealing, where most of the residents did not work in the area, although there were industries in Acton and Hanwell, as we have seen. Ealing was determined to stay as a middle class area. Nick Barrett writes that Ealing fought hard to maintain itself as a fashionable London suburb, where trams and workmen’s trains had been discouraged in the mid-19th century.¹²⁵ Acton also had its fashionable districts such as Bedford Park on the borders of Chiswick, England’s first garden suburb. Hanwell was a mixed area with residential accommodation, but also provider of employment for transport workers and some small factories.

¹²¹ R.Huq, *On the Edge: the Contested Cultures of English Suburbia* (London, 2013), p.21.

¹²² This was an advert for Ruislip from the London Metropolitan Railway. M. Pugh, *Making of Modern British Politics*, p.62.

¹²³ E.Bowl, *Ruislip Past*, p.107.

¹²⁴ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 10 October 1919.

¹²⁵ N.Barratt, *Greater London* p. 487

In other parts of the west London new communities had to be built. They faced problems as they were not established towns and the new housing estates did not match the old village centres. Hayes for instance was not one place but five villages. Hayes Urban District Council was faced with the task of building an infrastructure for a growing population which needed schools, shops and places of entertainment as well as houses. Greenford and Northolt were villages at the turn of the 20th century. They were to come under the jurisdiction of Ealing council, for whom its residents were not always a welcome addition. They were separated from Ealing town centre in the 1930s by fields and arterial roads such as the Western Avenue. But by 1938, with Hanwell, they comprised 45% of the population of the borough of Ealing. As the population of London doubled in the interwar years, mostly in the suburbs, industrial towns and villages were to become an integral part of suburbia, swept into its growth. This process not only took place in west London but on the outer fringes to the east, north and south as well.¹²⁶

M.S.Briggs gives us an overview of the county of Middlesex in the 1930s and says that Southall, Hayes, Acton, Willesden and the Lea Valley shared the distinction of being prominent industrial districts in a changing county. He writes:

But this sudden industrial expansion in West Middlesex, spreading a huge population of immigrants over a district hitherto engrossed in market gardening and occasional brick-making has found the authorities in some cases unprepared and has certainly proved the need for attention to the various problems which are now generally described as “town planning.”¹²⁷

This is why the Abercrombie Plan was welcomed by many in west London. The area was in danger of becoming a sprawl without concern for lives of its inhabitants. Industry and housing had continued apace without any concept of planning. New housing estates were often without basic facilities or adequate public transport. Open spaces were disappearing so the Green Belt was to be an area of land around London which could not be used for development. This was to come into conflict with an acute housing need which persisted after 1945.

¹²⁶ An article in *Labour Organiser* in January 1964 described Tolworth in the London borough of Kingston as a stony area for Labour in the 1920s until engineering factories were built along the Kingston by-pass and Tolworth South became a Labour ward. Its supporters comprised Taafies, Geordies and Cocknies.

¹²⁷ M.Briggs, *Middlesex Old and New* p.233.

Even the pace of growth differed between the different towns. Acton's greatest growth had been between 1901 and 1911, (37,744 to 57,497). When it reached 70,523 in 1931 it could grow no more in terms of space. Ealing with a population of 130,000 in 1931 had four times the land space of Acton, and except for Hanwell and Greenford area had no industrial base. Hayes on the other hand had grown by 144% in the 1920s from 9,705 in 1921 to 23,649 in 1931.¹²⁸ It was to continue to grow after 1945.

Much of the building of communities in west London fell to local councils. They were responsible for providing not just houses, but facilities such as schools, parks, swimming pools and libraries. Some of this had to be done when local government was short of finance in the interwar years. But it was people also who built communities. The labour movement was to play a role in building these communities. Take for instance this paragraph from Owen's article on the social consequences of Industrial Transference. He wrote:

It appears that some transferees from South Wales are already enlivening the fellowship of some London political associations and that the tradition of trades unions respected by transferees from Wales and the North is now being appealed to with some prospect of effective results as a starting point for organising the workers in many of the new industries in which trades unionism has so far obtained no footing.¹²⁹

Working-class areas within the suburbs of London often retained their own identities and some met with hostility from other, mainly middle class residents. J.White in *London in the 20th century* (2008) writes that in many ways the council estate was seen as an intrusion in the suburbs, and its tenants were made to feel it.¹³⁰ Mike Elliott, member of the Labour Party in Greenford, said that the Conservatives on Ealing Council, described Greenford and Northolt, in disparaging terms as 'the additional areas'.¹³¹ Council estates were often built away from middle-class areas, as with Becontree in Dagenham. That these people were not always welcomed meant that they formed their own allegiances and political traditions, based on the areas from which they had come. So the potential Labour vote in terms of working class voters was not changed by migration, but geographically redistributed. The fact that

¹²⁸ M.S.Briggs, *Middlesex Old and New* pp. 220-233.

¹²⁹ A.D.K. Owen, 'The Social Consequences of Industrial Transference'.

¹³⁰ J.White said that 'Interwar suburbia was above all a middle class phenomenon. The suburbs spoke for the middle class values of privacy, status, pride in ownership and a fear of being left behind by the tide of fashion.' (J.White, *London in the 20th Century*, p. 32).

¹³¹ Barbara Humphries interview with Mike Elliott, November 2015. One former councillor had said that the Conservatives had objected to the opening of a clinic in Greenford, because 'the local women would not know how to use it', and described the provision of free school meals as 'socialism run mad.'

people in Acton, Hayes and Southall gave support to the miners in the 1926 strike and to the unemployed hunger marchers showed that moving to a different area did not change political allegiances but re-enforced them. Miner's leader A.J. Cook was to speak in Acton twice during the General Strike and was enthusiastically received. Joe Sherman, founder member of the Labour Party in Ealing described how miners from South Wales came to Ealing during the General Strike to raise funds. He arranged accommodation for some of them to stay on for over nine months. Members of Southall Labour Party regularly collected food and clothes for the children of miners. There was a lot of support for the hunger marchers when they arrived in Acton, Hayes and Southall.¹³² In Hayes onlookers are reported to have wept as they arrived.¹³³ In Acton they were accommodated in a local school, looked after by members of the Acton Trades Council and Labour Party. The National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) was actually founded in London by London engineering worker Wal Hannington. Raids on factories where excessive overtime was being worked are described in R.Croucher's *We Refuse to Starve in Silence: a History of the NUWM* (1987). One of the factories to be raided was the AEC factory in Southall.¹³⁴

Conclusion

This economic and social background is critical to the understanding of the development of the labour movement in west London. The labour movement was created in the 20th century from a workforce which had largely migrated into the area. This was a diverse workforce in mainly new industries which was to consist of semi-skilled workers in factories, and increasing numbers of office workers. Skilled engineers were a minority of the workforce.

The background to the labour movement in west London, as in other parts of suburban London was not one industry, or community.¹³⁵ Places of employment were diverse and included transport, small and large factories and offices. Most industrialisation took place in the first half of the 20th century. Working-class communities were not built around workplaces, and in many cases, as in Acton, for instance, workers did not live in the same areas in which they worked. A large proportion of the population had not been born in west London, but had migrated for work and some later to live.

¹³² Joe Sherman (1901-83): *a Tribute in his Own Words: Recorded Reminiscences with Alan Rogers and Stephen Bird, on September 4 1983*. A transcript of this interview was edited by Stephen Bird. Joe Sherman was agent and secretary of the Ealing Labour Party in 1919.

¹³³ C.Kelter, *Hayes Past*, p.99.

¹³⁴ R.Croucher, *We Refuse to Starve in Silence: a History of the NUWM* (London, 1987).

¹³⁵ For comparisons with the building of the labour movement in other parts of London see D.Weinbren, 'Building Communities, Constructing Identities: the Rise of the Labour Party in London'.

Communities were mixed, some being based on middle-class commuters rather than industrial workers, but the latter was to increase during the interwar years. The building of new housing estates and communities showed that the west London working class was not just defined by the world of work, and in many cases did not live near its place of work.

Even older industrial towns such as Southall did not have a political identity initially but were part of Middlesex parliamentary constituencies such as Uxbridge. This was different to the working-class communities based on one industry such as coal mining in the Rhondda Valley, or even in some parts of London where one large employer, such as the Woolwich Arsenal, the London docks or the Royal Small Arms Factory in Enfield, provided the basis of support for the labour movement.¹³⁶

The area's relationship with the rest of London also has to be considered. This area did not become part of London officially until the creation of the Greater London Council in 1965. In 1918 it was a collection of industrial or semi-industrial towns and villages in West Middlesex. Southall and Hayes were working-class towns, where the labour movement had a lot of influence, even in the interwar years, but in Ealing, Uxbridge and Acton it faced established opposition from other political organisations.

¹³⁶ T.Putnam and D.Weinbren, 'Royal Small Arms Factory and Industrial Enfield 1855-1914', *London Journal*, 21, (1) (1996), pp.164-180.

Chapter 2: Labour and the Electorate 1918-1970

Introduction

We have seen how the population of west London changed in the interwar years, bringing workers from different parts of the country to work in its factories, and we have also seen how housing was built to accommodate this growing section of the population. This chapter will look at election results in west London parliamentary divisions 1918-1970, and consider how far they were influenced by a changing population, and how far by national political developments.

Duncan Tanner who took the local approach politics believed that labour organisation up to 1918 was an important as the electoral changes resulting from the 1918 Representation of the People Act and that this varied within a national perspective. He said that the growth of class consciousness did not automatically lead to support for the Labour Party. This could be seen in west London, because the Party did not have the same historical roots as in other parts of London or the country as a whole. It was still a 'new party', untried and tested. Initially though the absence of Liberals in west London allowed relatively favourable results for Labour in the 1918 general election. The Uxbridge division was one of the 68 three cornered seats where the Labour vote was higher than the Liberals.¹

We have seen that industrialisation did not automatically change the population, until housing was built to accommodate the growing workforce. Many of the new factories in west London did not become trades union strongholds so although members of the NUR and the AEU contributed to the active membership of local Labour Party organisations, they were not the majority of the working class population. There were therefore other factors in the growth of support for the Labour Party in this area. Labour's only parliamentary success in the interwar years in this part of west London was in Acton in 1929. The electoral success of the Labour Party was more accurately reflected in its control of councils in working-class communities such as Southall and Hayes in the interwar years. In parliamentary elections these communities were marginalised in large electoral divisions, which included rural districts and commuter land.

National factors included the extension of the franchise by the 1918 Representation of the People Act, the establishment of Labour as the second major party in British politics, and the

¹ .D.Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918*, p.420.

growth of its role in national and local government. They also included the fall of the 1929/31 Labour Government, and subsequent failure of the Party to win another General Election until 1945, when there was a sea-change in British political opinion. In the 1950s the affluent society and a resurgence of the Conservatives were to have an effect in west London constituencies until the 1960s.²

2.1 *The General Election of 1918*

The post-war election in December 1918 took place with a vastly increased electorate. Extending the franchise to all men over 21 and women over 30 with property qualifications, the electorate nationally was extended from 7,709,981 to 21,392,322.³ The Labour Party pulled out of the wartime coalition government and fought an independent campaign.⁴ It had a national programme and manifesto to which all its candidates were committed to campaign.⁵

In west London Robert Dunsmore, ‘the man for Acton and the man for action’, was the Labour candidate for Acton in 1918. Born in Kilmarnock, Lanarkshire, Dunsmore had been a councillor for the Acton’s South West ward for thirteen years. He set up committee rooms in Acton High Street and appealed to workers for funds. His agent was a Mr Connolly, trades unionist born in Dublin and convert from Liberalism. Mr Mawby of the NUR chaired the selection meeting. Dunsmore said that war was the wrong way to settle disputes. He called for war widows and orphans to be properly looked after. He wanted more public works, no hoarding of capital and for government controls to continue. He called a special meeting for women, just enfranchised. In his election address he said that liberty was not compatible with the private ownership of the means of life. Land and capital must be owned by the people, wealth created enjoyed by the people. He supported the League of Nations, Home rule for

² For election results in west London parliamentary constituencies 1918-1970 see Election Table, Appendices 2 and 3.

³ *The Longman Companion to the Labour Party 1900-1918* (London 1999), pp. 30-31.

⁴ *Why Labour Left the Coalition* was published by the Labour Party in 1918. It called for a people’s peace, disarmament, no economic war, no secret diplomacy, no capitalist intervention, freedom for Ireland and India, a commonwealth of nations, a levy on wealth, no indirect taxation, public ownership of capital, a million new houses, free education for all, abolition of unemployment, right to maintenance, and policies for the land and peace. It stressed that Labour was for the workers by hand or by brain, and was a force for revolutionary change. Referring to the split in the Party during World War 1 it said that there may have been two opinions on the conduct of the war, but there could not be two opinions on post-war reconstruction.

⁵ See J.Grigg, ‘Coupon Election in West London’, *Labour Heritage Bulletin*, (Spring 2017).

Ireland, war pensions, more power for local government, trades union freedom, housing, education and equality for women.⁶

Public meetings were held on Saturday evenings at the market place in Acton. This came to be known as Dunsmore's Corner. Meetings could last for four hours or more. Dunsmore appealed to the middle class, saying that those timorous people who regarded him as a Bolshevik should take the trouble to attend his meetings. Labour's capital levy, a tax on wealth to pay for the War, would not hit the middle class, only those with over £1000.⁷

The outcome of the election was uncertain as only 25% of the electorate had voted before 1918. Sir Harry Brittan was the Conservative candidate and he went out of his way to speak to railway workers in the division, and newly enfranchised women, with the aid of his wife who had worked for the Red Cross during the War. He appealed to them on the basis of patriotism and national unity. He complained that Labour supporters had disrupted his meetings by singing the 'Red Flag'.⁸

The Labour Party established a modest presence in Acton and Ealing. It had hoped to win the Uxbridge division and ran a high profile candidate, Harry Gosling.⁹ In all cases the turn-out was fairly low, with not much variation on the national average of 57.2%. This was in contrast to pre-war levels of over 80% nationally. There was no local comparison as in 1910 these west London seats were previously uncontested. The Conservative candidates accused Labour of breaking up the wartime coalition government, and disturbing the existing political order. This was particularly the case in the Ealing constituency where Sir Herbert Nield had held the seat from 1910. He described Labour as the 'socialist menace'.¹⁰

2.2 Labour's Electoral Advance in the 1920s

By the 1922 General Election Labour established itself as the second largest party in the House of Commons, fielding 414 candidates and winning 142 seats. In these west London parliamentary divisions however there was little significant political change.

⁶ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 6 December 1918.

⁷ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 6 December 1918.

⁸ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 13 December 1918.

⁹ For biographical details of Harry Gosling see article by J.Lovell in J.M.Bellamy and J.Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography* vol.4 (London, 1977), pp.83-89.

¹⁰ This was a charge used against the Labour Party by both Lloyd George and Winston Churchill. See ILP leaflet *Bunkum versus Fact*, ILP Archives (LSE) ILP/5/1922/9.

In 1922 in Acton there was a fall in the Conservative vote compared to 1918, and a rise in the Labour vote, but a considerable vote for the Liberals and it is not clear if these were votes taken from Labour or the Conservatives. The Labour candidate was Miss Mary Richardson, a former suffragette. She defended the capital levy, saying that it would only affect the 250,000 super-rich to prevent unemployment and starvation for 1,300,000 and their families. Her Conservative opponent, Harry Brittan took out adverts in the *Acton Gazette*, assuring voters that he will not take their savings and favours fair play for private enterprise.¹¹

Harry Gosling did not contest another election in Uxbridge after 1918. He went on to win Whitechapel in a by-election in 1923.¹² By the end of 1919 a new Labour candidate had been adopted, Captain Goldstone. He spoke on Labour policy in Hayes to packed meetings, calling for a capital levy to solve the national debt crisis, and self-government for Ireland and an end to British military intervention in Russia. Like Gosling, Goldstone was a high profile candidate, having been an MP for Sunderland 1910-18 and Labour chief whip. But he later stepped down as candidate as the effects of poison gas during the War had affected his throat and he could not continue public speaking.¹³ He was replaced by W.J.Brown, secretary of the Clerical Officers Association, who had entered the civil service at the age of fifteen and had set up the Boy Clerks Association, part of the Civil Service Clerks Association. He was a prominent speaker for the Labour Party on the machinery of government. His speech at a public meeting in Uxbridge was on the necessity of nationalisation. He attacked the Treaty of Versailles believing that an opportunity to end war for ever had been missed. Brown was the son of a plumber and one of seven children and he had known poverty. As a promising Labour politician, he had had the option of a safe seat but chose Uxbridge which he believed was winnable for Labour.¹⁴

The Conservative candidate Colonel Peel had also had to stand down in Uxbridge due to ill health before the 1922 election. He was replaced by Colonel Burney, a man with a distinguished military career. He was to win Uxbridge with a larger majority than in 1918, which may have been partly due to efforts to rebuild the Conservative Party in the division, on the basis of appealing to working people on issues such as housing and unemployment. He celebrated his election victory at the Southall Conservative Club with 160 present, and he

¹¹ *Acton Gazette and West London Express*, reports from November 1922.

¹² In 1926 the Conservative selected to oppose him was the former suffragette leader, Emmeline Pankhurst. See D.Rosenberg, *Rebel Footprints: a Guide to Uncovering London's Radical History* (London, 2015), p. 182.

¹³ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 5 December 1919.

¹⁴ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 8 October 1920.

expressed confidence ‘that the western parts of the division need never trouble themselves one iota with the fear that Southall was the bedrock of Labour and socialism in the division.’ He would never allow the balance of the vote to be given in favour of Labour. However he conceded that Southall which held the majority of voters in the division was a ‘dark spot’ for the Conservatives. He condemned Labour’s supporters for their actions in burning an effigy of himself.¹⁵

In Uxbridge Labour could have been deprived of a victory by a Colonel F.S. Evans, a National Liberal who had decided to stand at the last moment. He fought a high profile campaign aggressively anti-Labour, particularly on the issue of the capital levy which he said would mean starvation, and ruin for the working man. He presented himself as a friend of the working man who would solve unemployment. He favoured better housing conditions and equality but opposed nationalisation and did not believe in “violent changes in the economic system”. He also appealed to women voters who should vote for him as a self- made man who believed in equality of the sexes.¹⁶

In the General Election in December 1923 Labour won 191 seats, and with a Liberal revival the Conservatives lost their overall majority. They were the largest party in the House of Commons, but their King’s Speech in January 1924 was voted down by Labour and Liberal MPs on the issue of free trade and tariff reform. This was to lead to the first minority Labour Government, which lasted until October 1924.¹⁷

In west London however, the Liberals had pushed Labour into third place in Ealing and Uxbridge, with both the Conservative and Labour votes falling. This was surprising. In parts of Britain there had been long standing working class support for the Liberals, for instance in mining areas such as South Wales and this had survived into the 20th century. However this was not the case in west London and support for the Liberals was to be only temporary.

The general election of 1929 was to be the high point of Labour’s electoral success in the interwar years. Nationally it won 287 seats and 37.1% of the vote, becoming the largest party in Parliament but with no overall majority. The electorate had increased again as women over 21 now had the vote. The total electorate was now stood at 28,854,748 compared to

¹⁵ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 22 December 1923.

¹⁶ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 18 November 1922.

¹⁷ For accounts of the Labour Party in government in the interwar years see for instance M.Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate* and R.Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism*.

21,730,988 in 1924.¹⁸ In the west London constituencies an increasing population meant even larger increases in the electorate, especially in the Harrow constituency where it had almost doubled since 1924. In all the constituencies women now outnumbered men.

In Uxbridge Labour won 38% of the vote, doubling its vote since 1924. But it did not win the seat and Major Llewellyn the Conservative MP expressed his pleasure that ‘this old Conservative constituency had remained true to its colours.’ Labour candidate, Reginald Bridgeman expressed his confidence that Labour ‘would win Uxbridge next time.’ A growing working class population in Hayes was helping to increase the Labour vote.¹⁹ Support for Labour in Harrow and Ealing was 29% and 24% respectively, still with significant increases in the vote. This would indicate that the class composition of these constituencies had not changed very much by 1929. The growing population of Harrow was partly accounted for by middle class commuters moving to Metro-land, as it was called.²⁰

Labour’s success was greatest in Acton where it won the seat, taking 41% of the vote, having more than doubled its vote since 1924, an indication of how the political landscape was changing. Joe Shillaker, a researcher and son of a policeman, had been selected as parliamentary candidate. Labour held regular public meetings, campaigning against the Conservative’s record on unemployment and their local record on housing. Land had been sold to speculative builders who built houses that workers could not afford. This was leading to chronic overcrowding in South Acton. He had seen coffins of dead children laid out on beds slept in by other children who were still alive. He spoke about pensions and school leaving age, and unemployment from which no worker was safe.²¹ Joe Shillaker was supported by national Labour Party figures such as Susan Lawrence and Arthur Greenwood. He gained support from MPs in neighbouring constituencies, such as J.P Gardener of Hammersmith North who observed that it had once been said that Acton could never be won for Labour, but it that now it was changing industrially and it was essentially a Labour constituency. Regular adverts were taken out in the *Acton Gazette*. A pre-election rally was

¹⁸ *Longman Companion to the Labour Party 1900-1918*, pp.32-33.

¹⁹ *Middlesex and Buckinghamshire Advertiser and the Uxbridge Gazette*, 7 June 1929.

²⁰ *Labour Organiser*, January 1937 reported that Harrow was one of the fastest growing constituencies in the country. But it was full of housing estates inhabited by the clerical and professional types, not the most responsive part of the electorate for the Labour Party.

²¹ Reports from the *Acton Gazette and Express*, April-June 1929.

held in the Globe Cinema, which attracted over 3,000 people. Confident of the result Shillaker, was introduced as the first Labour MP for Acton. He won by 467 votes.²²

Labour's potential success attracted the concern of Conservative MP Sir Harry Brittan. He addressed working class voters who he described as enthusiastic audiences who were glad of the government's defeat of the General Strike. He said that 'safeguarding' had saved Acton factories, and fourteen more were planned.²³ This policy, he said, had been opposed by 'free traders' in the Labour Party and the Liberals.

After Shillaker's election success in June a west London Labour victory demonstration was held. The speakers included Joe Shillaker and the Labour MPs for Hammersmith, North Kensington and West Willesden.²⁴ Labour was slowly consolidating its hold on west London, or so it seemed. But after two years of a minority Labour government, events nationally and internationally were to halt this advance.

2.3 Labour's Defeat of 1931 and its Impact on West London

The election of 1931 is an example of how national politics cut across political changes brought about by changing local economic and social conditions. It illustrated the limitations of local grassroots studies in providing a full historical explanation of political developments, indicating the dialectical relationship between national and local developments as explained by Mike Savage.²⁵

In the 1931 General Election the Labour Party had to defend itself against the accusation, not only of the Conservatives and Liberals, but its own former leaders, that it would put savings accounts at risk and wreck the economy.²⁶ In a pamphlet entitled '*The People's Savings*' published in 1932 it said: 'Their anxiety to smash the Labour Party led the

²² *Acton Gazette and Express*, 31 May 1929. A report of the rally described how queues formed at 7pm for an 8pm start. It was addressed by Cannon Lewis Donaldson and was described as a 'spectacular' with lighting effects and a euphoric atmosphere. A post-election rally attracted 2,000 people.

²³ 'Safeguarding' was a policy of Conservative governments in the 1920s which gave limited protection to new industries such as chemicals and electrical engineering. See M.Pugh, *The Making of British Politics 1867-1939*, p. 220.

²⁴ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 21 June 1929.

²⁵ See M.Savage, 'The rise of the Labour Party in Local Perspective'.

²⁶ Coverage of the 1929-1931 Labour Government and the split which led to the formation of a National Government has been extensive. Books include: R. Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump: the Labour Government of 1929-1931* (London, 1967), R.Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism*, J.Shepherd, J.Davies and C.Wrigley (eds.), *Britain's Second Labour Government* (Manchester, 2011), M. Pugh, *Making of British Politics 1867-1939* and M.Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, which describes the impact on the Party at a grassroots level. The Labour Party published its own account entitled *The Peoples' Savings* (London, 1932), (LSE Pamphlet).

National Government leaders to employ some of the most despicable and dishonest electioneering propaganda of the post-war period.’ ‘At no time in the modern history of British politics has any single party had to defend itself against such a terrific onslaught. The resources at the disposal of the National Government were unique in the history of British general elections. All newspapers, radio, fleets of motor cars, even aeroplanes were at the disposal of the National Government.’²⁷

The National Government won 67% of the vote, 55% of which went to the Conservatives, with 470 seats. Labour stood at 30.9%, losing over 1.5 million votes since 1929, but down to 52 MPs. It only retained parliamentary seats in its heartlands in the North of England, South Wales and parts of Scotland, many of them mining constituencies. Very few Labour MPs joined the National Government.²⁸ Most of the Liberals did so, and the National Government owed 100 of its seats to the fact that they were not contested by the Liberals. It was also the case that the turnout fell by 1 million from 1929, suggesting political disillusionment as much as enthusiasm for the message offered by the National Government.

In west London Labour suffered a set-back as in many other parts of the country. The Acton seat was lost, and the Conservatives retained Ealing, Uxbridge and Harrow with larger majorities. In Acton and Harrow the decline in the Labour vote was not as significant as the rise in the Conservative vote, which doubled in both cases. There were no Liberal candidates in Acton, Uxbridge or Ealing, and in Harrow the Liberal vote more than halved. This was in line with many of the national results. Across London the number of Labour MPs fell from 35 in 1929 to 5 in 1931. All six Labour-held seats were lost in Middlesex.

In 1929 Labour had been posed to break through in west London, winning Acton and coming close to winning Uxbridge. In 1935 this looked like a long way off. Matthew Worley made the point that Labour’s recovery based on its trades union affiliation and old industrial heartlands, was more problematic for less industrial and rural parts of the country, and not yet a plausible identity for the new industrial areas.²⁹ West London was not a Labour heartland. It had a mixed population, substantial numbers of middle-class voters who would have been frightened into voting Conservative by an economic crisis and appeals for national unity. What about the working class vote? Clearly not all working class voters voted Labour

²⁷ *The Peoples’ Savings* (London, 1932),

²⁸ In the vote of confidence in September 1931 out of 280 Labour MPs, 12 voted with the National Government and 5 abstained. (*Labour Heritage Bulletin*, Autumn 2009).

²⁹ M. Worley, *Inside the Gate*, p. 169.

in an area where the Party was still putting down roots. It was also the case however that there were sections of the working class who still voted Conservative even in Labour heartlands.³⁰ In any case the political impact of the growing industrialisation of west London was not to become apparent again until 1945.

By the mid-1930s the strategy which the National Government had used to gain power was starting to backfire. Labour claimed that the appeals to fear and prejudice which gave the National Government an overwhelming victory had meant that the government's foundations were not secure or stable.³¹ Its unpopularity was soon to be seen with the introduction of the Means Test, by which the long term unemployed lost their benefits after six months and became dependent upon the Poor Law. This often meant dependency on family members for their survival, and the loss of their savings.³² Public outrage at cuts in unemployment benefit implemented in 1931 led to the reversal of these cuts in 1934.³³

In the 1935 General Election the west London constituencies Labour faced National Government candidates as the sole opposition. Only in Uxbridge was there an independent Liberal standing. In all cases there was a growing electorate, especially in Harrow and Uxbridge. In Acton and Ealing the Labour vote was back up to 1929 levels, and in Harrow and Uxbridge the Labour vote roughly doubled from 1931. But in no case was it enough to win the seat, and in the case of Harrow the Conservative vote actually increased. In this election peace and international security had become key issues.³⁴

There would not be another general election until 1945, due to World War 2. This gives the impression of a lost decade for Labour, helpless in the face of defeat, mass unemployment, fascism in Europe and the threat of war. The economic and political volatility of the 1930s however made election results unpredictable.³⁵ There were remarkable by-election victories for Labour in the 1930s, notably in Fulham East in 1933 where a swing of 29.1% overturned a 14,960 Conservative majority.³⁶ This was not however to be repeated in the 1935 election, when Labour's national share of the vote nationally rose to 38% (higher than in 1929), but it only won 154 seats, compared to the 387 for the Conservative led National Government. In

³⁰ See P. Addison, *The Road to 1945*, p.24.

³¹ Labour Party, *Smashing the Unemployed: the Meanness of the Means Test* (London, 1932). (LSE Pamphlet).

³² Labour Party, *Smashing the Unemployed*.

³³ See Martin Pugh, *The Making of British Politics*, p. 284.

³⁴ These issues had led to replacement of George Lansbury by Clement Attlee as Labour leader before the 1935 General Election. See M. Worley, *Inside the Gate*, Chapter 4.

³⁵ B. Humphries, *Was there a Forward March of Labour in the 1930s?* (MA thesis, University of London, 1988).

³⁶ M. Pugh, *Making of Modern British Politics*, Chapter 3.

the 1935 General Election Labour won 22 seats in London, two in Middlesex.³⁷ By 1938 Labour was again overturning Conservative majorities in North Islington, West Fulham and Dartford. Norman Howard said that there had been 219 by-elections between 1935 and 1945 (they were mainly uncontested due to the wartime electoral truce), but the 30 which had been contested, had all been won by Labour from the Conservatives.³⁸ However Fielding in *England Arise* thought that there was little reason to believe that Labour was on the verge of a breakthrough in 1939, and that the main political change came during World War 2.³⁹

2.4 The Road to 1945

During the War, in spite of the electoral truce, political parties had continued to maintain their organisation.⁴⁰ In Ealing both Labour and the Conservatives had retained a presence. There were thriving Labour League of Youth branches, notably in Southall.⁴¹ *Labour Organiser* encouraged local Labour parties to continue to organise with a recruitment campaign in 1942. It produced pamphlets on freedom for India and post-war reconstruction. It claimed that the ‘trend to the left is ours’. It will be catered for by every party at the general election. Tories talk terribly left but ‘the rich man will do anything for the poor man except ‘get off his back’, sacrifices had been made by workers during the war and rewards needed. On issues such as housing, the welfare state and nationalisation Labour had captured the political mood. Its commitment to these policies had been there since the 1930s. But it warned that Labour could be faced with jingoism, as in 1918.⁴²

In Acton there had been a by-election in 1943. Walter Padley, a shop steward at Napiers and member of the Independent Labour Party, decided to contest the seat. He lost to the Conservative in a very low turn-out, but he won almost half as many votes as their candidate, Captain Longhurst. He was selected by the ILP to stand again in July 1945 but withdrew before the election.⁴³

³⁷ *Longman Companion to the Labour Party* p. 34.

³⁸ N.Howard, *New Dawn: the General Election of 1945* (London, 2005), p.28.

³⁹ S.Fielding, *England Arise*, p.14

⁴⁰ For an account of Britain’s political parties during World War 2 see A.Thorpe, *Parties at War: Political Organisation in Second World War Britain* (Oxford, 2009). *Labour Organiser* reported on the successes of Labour’s wartime political organisation. In Southall where there was a flourishing Labour League of Youth, and Harrow Labour Party managed to issue a regular news-sheet in 1943, and collect funds for a library.

⁴¹ *Labour Organiser*, (254), February 1943.

⁴² *Labour Organiser* (266), February 1944.

⁴³ See article by Bill Bolland in *Labour Heritage Bulletin* (Spring 2004) and *Acton Gazette and West London Post* 14 December 1943.

1943 Acton By-Election (figures from DODS Parliamentary Companion) 1944

1943 Acton bye-election Longhurst (Conservative) 5,014; Padley (ILP) 2,336; Miss Crisp (Independent) 707; Godley (Independent) 258 (48,260 electors, 25,918 women, 22,343 men)

Paul Addison in *The Road to 1945* described how a new political consensus was forged during the War, around issues such as full employment, planning and housing and a welfare state. He draws on evidence from opinion polls to indicate that this sea-change occurred around 1942, with opinion polls giving Labour a commanding lead from 1943 onwards. He said that the root explanation of the eclipse of Conservatism in the war years was the obsolescence of its outlook. This was particularly the case with younger voters, 61% of whom were estimated to have voted Labour in 1945.⁴⁴ Addison amongst others notes the role of some of the press in helping to change this consensus, particularly the *Daily Mirror*, which became a Labour supporting newspaper, doubling its readership between 1939 and 1946.⁴⁵ The Beveridge Report and Labour's election manifesto were widely read, and discussed in the armed forces, and the workplace, as we will see in Chapter 4.

By the 1945 election 25 new parliamentary divisions had been created by the Boundary Commission, many of which were in Greater London.⁴⁶ These included Ealing East, Ealing West and Southall. Ealing East retained much of the old Ealing division, with a small working-class population. Ealing West included the working-class areas of Greenford, Northolt and Hanwell. Southall was to include Hayes and Harlington.⁴⁷ The Acton constituency remained the same as before. Uxbridge included Ruislip and Northwood, with some parts of the former division such as West Drayton going in to the newly created division of Spelthorne. Harrow was also to be divided into two constituencies. This was significant for the 1945 General Election in west London. There were now effectively eight parliamentary divisions, instead of four, reflecting the growing population of the interwar years. Two of them, Southall and Ealing West contained a majority working class population, which was no longer subsumed in the large pre-war parliamentary divisions of Uxbridge and Harrow.

⁴⁴ P.Addison,*The Road to 1945*, p 229.

⁴⁵ P.Addison,*The Road to 1945*, p.151. See also L.Beers,*Your Britain*, p.20.

⁴⁶ N.Howard,*New Dawn*, p.155.

⁴⁷ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition),5 June 1945.7,500 of the voters were from the Services (10%). The population breakdown was roughly split 50/50 between Hayes and Southall, illustrating the population growth which had occurred in Hayes.

Joe Sparks, a councillor for its South West ward, was the successful Labour candidate for Acton. The *Acton Gazette* believed that the Conservatives could hold the seat as they had a better organisation but Joe Sparks disagreed, saying that Acton was now a working-class area with trade union support.⁴⁸ Thousands attended election meetings. In what was to be a rowdy election campaign at times, the Conservative candidate, Captain Longhurst was booed and heckled at a ‘Soapsud Island’ public meeting in South Acton. When he asked “Is this election necessary?” he was told “yes” by the audience. “The Labour Party wanted to nationalise the Bank of England” he said. “Why not?” they replied. “What have we to lose from a Labour victory?” they asked. “Your freedom!” He replied. He appealed to the Conservatives to “vote for Longhurst and make Sparks fly”.⁴⁹

The Labour candidate for Ealing West was James Hudson, a school teacher who had previously been an MP for Huddersfield.⁵⁰ In Southall and Hayes Labour was predictably victorious although the Conservatives had claimed that they had a 50 /50 chance of winning the seat.⁵¹ Walter Ayles was born in Lambeth in 1879, where he had gained an engineering apprenticeship. He had been an MP for Bristol North for the years 1923-1929, and former PPC for Uxbridge in 1936.⁵² His Conservative opponent, Colonel Baker was heckled at public meetings, and some of the audience started to sing the Internationale at one of them. On election day there was a heavy poll with 400-500 voters per hour at some polling stations. Labour won Southall with a 24,000 majority.⁵³ Cllr H.J.Andrews, chairman of Ealing Borough Labour Party claimed that Labour’s ascendancy in West Middlesex made the minority Tory representation in Ealing East look like ‘a weed in a beautiful garden.’⁵⁴

Labour’s victory in Uxbridge was less expected. Labour selected Flight Lieutenant Beswick to challenge Major Llewellyn, the existing Conservative MP since 1929 and Minister for Food in the wartime coalition government. He campaigned in Ruislip which he thought would be won and Uxbridge which he claimed would be a hard nut to crack, “but like all nuts

⁴⁸ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 25 May 1945.

⁴⁹ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 29 June 1945.

⁵⁰ A funeral card for Nancy Hudson, wife of James Hudson contains biographical details for her husband. He had been a conscientious objector who had spent years in prison during World War 1. Ealing North Labour Party Records LMA/4023/01/33.

⁵¹ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 5 June 1945.

⁵² Reports from the *AEU Journal*, February, May, June 1945 and October 1952. See also B.Humphries, ‘Walter Ayles: the First Labour MP for Southall and Hayes’, *Labour Heritage Bulletin* (Autumn 2017). For a full biography see article by J.Saville and B.Whitheld in J.M.Bellamy and J.Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography* vol.5 (London, 1979), pp.10-13.

⁵³ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 28 July 1945.

⁵⁴ *Middlesex County Times* (Ealing edition), 4 August 1945.

it could and would be cracked.”⁵⁵ He said that more and more of the professions were realising that they were workers and joining the Labour Party. Both workers and administrators were needed for industry, ‘but remove the capitalist element and industry would still function.’⁵⁶ There were some stormy scenes in Uxbridge when Winston Churchill visited. The *West Middlesex Advertiser* reported that crowds ten deep filled the streets to see him. Churchill had tried to turn the meeting into a non-political event, by saying “God bless you all whatever party you are from.” But this had not worked and, as he left and the Conservative candidate got up to speak, posters of the Labour candidate were held up in front of his car, some of which were torn up by Churchill supporters. The Labour candidate had called on his supporters to stop disrupting Conservative meetings, urging them that their candidate had the right to be heard.⁵⁷

The result of the election held on 5 July was not known until the end of the month as the forces’ vote had to be counted. It came as a shock to the Conservatives, particularly in areas such as west London where there had been such a political change.⁵⁸

2.5 The 1950s: Conservatives Fight Back

The election of 1945 had changed the political landscape in west London, but by the 1950s this Labour success was beginning to ebb away. The population growth which had occurred in the interwar years, which lay behind political change slowed down or came to an end.⁵⁹ There was no major new industry in the area. There were new housing estates mainly built by councils, but these were to redistribute the population within boroughs rather than attract newcomers to the area. Council housing outnumbered privately built housing in some boroughs such as Hayes and Acton fourfold. After 1945 the building of more council estates in Northolt, Hayes and Greenford led to the consolidation of Labour electoral strongholds in these parts of west London. The electoral importance for the Labour Party of Northolt was paramount and its members were constantly reminded that although it had overwhelming

⁵⁵ *West Middlesex Advertiser and County Gazette*, 15 June 1945.

⁵⁶ *West Middlesex Advertiser and County Gazette*, 15 June 1945.

⁵⁷ *West Middlesex Advertiser and County Gazette*, 29 June 1945.

⁵⁸ An account of the national campaign in 1945 is written by Derek Wheatley in *Labour Heritage Bulletin*, (Spring 2015). See also N.Howard, *New Dawn* and P.Addison, *The Road to 1945*. Addison emphasized changes in political opinion pre 1945, saying that there was a ‘swing to the left.’ By 1942 2 out of 5 of the population had changed their political views. p.127.

⁵⁹ Although the population of Hayes was still growing (from 40,000 to 66,000 1939-1946) *Hayes Gazette: West Middlesex Organiser and County Gazette* (Hayes and Harlington edition), 4 October 1946.

local electoral support, in the Ealing North constituency as a whole it could be outvoted by the residents of the affluent Hanger Hill area.⁶⁰

The speculative housing boom of the interwar years would not be repeated owing to the shortage of land. With housing waiting lists of thousands throughout Middlesex, newcomers to the area would not get housed easily. In fact an exodus of population was encouraged by government policy and by local councils. Any change in the political landscape after 1945 would have been influenced by changing political views, not a changing population. There would however be no return to the politics of the inter-war years. The Labour Party retained its position and influence, but its election victories were less decisive and results more marginal.

Parts of Ealing and Hillingdon remained prosperous middle-class areas. The trend, started in the 1930s of a growth in the white collar and service sector continued, increasingly with the children of manual workers, and women employed in offices. Part of this was accounted for by government and local government where employment was expanding. By the 1955 General Election Labour was losing some of the electoral gains which had been made in 1945. Many constituencies became 'marginal' rather than Labour strongholds. Ealing was still a dormitory suburb for thousands of office workers who worked in the City.

By the 1950 election, the boundaries in this part of west London had changed again. Hayes and Harlington became a constituency in its own right. Hanwell left Ealing West and became part of the Southall constituency. Both of these were expected to stay Labour. Ealing West and Ealing East become Ealing South, a safe Conservative seat, and Ealing North, which retained Greenford and Northolt, becoming a Labour 'marginal'. The Conservatives did not give up on west London, as they had on the country's Labour heartlands. This became apparent to Labour Party head office. Mr Ede the home secretary, speaking in Uxbridge in 1950 declared that the election was likely to be decided in the Home Counties.⁶¹ Already the Conservatives were beginning to close the gap in Acton, Ealing North and Uxbridge, with Labour only winning decisively in Southall and Hayes and Harlington. In 1955 Labour held Acton with a majority of 525, in Ealing North it lost to the Conservative by 246 votes, and the Conservatives held Ealing South. Labour held Southall with a majority of 6,335, and Hayes and Harlington with a majority of 6,148 votes over the Conservatives. Labour narrowly held Uxbridge

⁶⁰ Report of Northolt Labour Party AGM 1959 LMA ACC/4023/02/06. Hanger Hill was the most affluent part of the Ealing North constituency.

⁶¹ *Hayes Gazette*, 10 February 1950.

with a 876 majority. Labour did not win Ealing North again until 1964. Labour lost Acton and Uxbridge in 1959.⁶²

The loss of three general elections in the 1950s by the Labour has been explained by the growth of affluence and the ‘never had it so good factor.’⁶³ Labour’s share of the vote fell from 49% in 1951 to 44% in 1959. Between 1951 and 1958 real earnings had risen by 20%. Home ownership had risen to 35%, and in the consumer economy 85% owned a television.⁶⁴

However because it was in parts of suburban London that Labour was losing elections, it is important to look not just at the failures of the Labour Party, but at how the Conservatives were able to make a comeback. Unlike London’s East End, they did not give up on suburban London, and in all west London constituencies after 1945 they attempted to build their organisation and electoral support.⁶⁵

Although Conservative candidates in every election since 1918 had to address the working class voter, their main priority was to appeal to what they saw as a growing middle class in suburban London.⁶⁶ There were new private housing estates built in Ealing, for instance at Sudbury Hill, in the north of the borough. The *Middlesex County Times* observed in 1950 that the Conservatives were ‘wooing the petit-bourgeoisie’. It said:

...the middle class elector who lives at North Greenford is influenced by popular Conservative newspapers. Unlike the industrial worker he does not feel better off than before the war, and unlike some members of the upper middle class, and their families, not consoled by well paid jobs in public services.⁶⁷

Cronin estimated that in the 1951 General Election, Labour suffered losses amongst middle class voters, but retained two thirds of the working-class vote and that working-class voters had accepted difficult measures such as the pay freeze, maintained by the Attlee

⁶² See Election Table.

⁶³ See A.Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, pp. 149-152 and Morgan Phillips’ *Memoirs*, (Nottingham, 2017), pp. 62-63. Other possible factors in Labour’s election defeats were divisions within the Party, poor organisation and lack of socialist vision. The political impact of the end of rationing and post-war prosperity in suburban London is described by D.Wheatley, ‘Swinging in Heston and Isleworth’, *Labour Heritage Bulletin*, (Summer 2017).

⁶⁴ Goldthorpe, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, pp.21-22.

⁶⁵ This was also reported in the Coventry by N.Tiratsoo, in *Reconstruction, Affluence and Labour Politics in Coventry, 1945-1960*.

⁶⁶ B.Campbell in *The Iron Ladies: Why do Women Vote Tory* (London, 1987). She described the Primrose League. It was launched in 1883 and undertook to appeal to the lower orders on a ‘sentimental basis’ with entertainments. It had a children’s section called ‘The Buds’ p 5.

⁶⁷ *Middlesex County Times* (Ealing edition), 14 February 1950.

government.⁶⁸ Campbell, however, described the appeal made by the Conservatives to middle-class women on the issues of rationing and queuing. The British Housewives League, although independent of party politics, had 100,000 members and launched an Anti-Queue Campaign.⁶⁹

The Conservatives made strides post 1945 to build a youth organisation, the Young Conservatives (YCs). According to C.Ellis, they feared that the welfare state had induced in young people values, which made them open to socialism. However, Black describes the YCs as more a marriage bureau than a moral crusade. It had its heyday in the 1950s, with 160,000 members. It appealed to young middle-class voters, and indeed the Conservatives achieved their peak vote with the under thirties in 1955, winning over at least half of them.⁷⁰ By the 1960s membership of the YCs was on the decline.

In west London the Conservatives built up their organisation in the 1940s and 1950s. In Hayes, in 1950, prospective Conservative candidate, Mr Vinsom, said that “We do not feel that our fight in this heavily industrialised district is useless.” He attacked the record of the Labour Government and council on housing, saying that they had failed on housing and that the private sector should be let in. The Hayes Conservatives claimed 2,000 members.⁷¹ In the election campaign they held regular public meetings, but failed to get the 17,000 votes needed to win the seat. They won less than 12,000 votes and Walter Ayles had a two to one majority. By the 1959 election however, this gap had narrowed, with the Conservative candidate winning over 14,000 votes, to 18,000 for the Labour candidate Arthur Skeffington. It was notable however, that the Conservatives, having been in office since 1951, had not made any significant attempt to reverse what had been achieved by the 1945 Labour government. There was no denationalisation. Targets for public house-building were maintained, although with less planning safeguards, and most significantly they were committed to full employment policies. For instance, one local Conservative candidate said to the Hayes Young Conservatives:

⁶⁸ J.Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain 1918-1979* (London, 1984), pp.132-146.

⁶⁹ B.Campbell, *The Iron Ladies: Why do Women Vote Tory*, p.72.

⁷⁰ C.Ellis, ‘No Hammock for the Idle: the Conservative Party, Youth and the Welfare State in the 1960s’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 16(4) (2005), pp. 441-470, and L.Black, *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consensus and Participation 1954-70* (Basingstoke, 2010), p.76.

⁷¹ *Hayes Gazette*, 10 February 1950 and 28th April 1950. Mr Vinsom was a managing director of the local firm Fairey Aviation.

You are too young to remember the days before the war when unemployment was at its height, but the government is determined never to let those days return.⁷²

In other parts of west London, the Conservatives formed a branch for the first time, in Northolt, with 100 members, and a junior section. Branches were also formed in Greenford and Perivale, including a women's section, which claimed 500 members. They campaigned on behalf of the small shopkeeper. In Southall, the local Conservatives re-launched themselves with a 'Conservative Week' in 1948, including public meetings and vans. In 1955 Lord Fairfax claimed at the local Primrose League event in the Bridge Hotel, Greenford, that the Tories were the most progressive of the political parties, and "would never be vanquished by our enemies." The Local Conservative Association had trained an army of troops in Conservative thought to challenge Labour.⁷³

Many Conservative MPs descended on Southall, with the message that they would not denationalise but accused the socialists of 'incompetence', and even predicted that 'a Conservative storm would sweep away socialism.' Before the 1950 General Election, the local paper asked if Labour could still hold Southall 'in the face of the challenge of a stronger and more efficiently geared Conservative organisation than existed in 1945'.⁷⁴ A branch of the Young Conservatives was formed in Southall in 1949. It was reported however to be more interested in 'jitterbugging' (a dance of the 1950s) than politics.⁷⁵

At the 1964 General Election, Labour was to retake Acton and Ealing North narrowly. Acton had been held since 1959 by the Conservative candidate Philip Holland. There were local issues in this election, which can be considered alongside the Labour resurgence, which gave it a very small parliamentary majority.⁷⁶ Indeed the Ealing North and Acton MPs were part of that small majority. Acton had seen the closure of Napiers, a major employer, and many had suffered from the Conservatives deregulation of rents for private landlords, and differential rents for council tenants. Bernard Floud, the Labour candidate for Acton had campaigned to keep Napiers open. In 1966, both Floud, and Ealing North Labour candidate William Molloy increased their majorities, and Uxbridge was narrowly won again for Labour by John Ryan. Ealing South remained Conservative throughout both elections, Hayes and Southall remained Labour, although the Southall result and the impact of the immigration issue, will be

⁷² *Hayes Gazette*, 5 February 1959.

⁷³ Dai Cousins in the Ealing North Labour Party Annual Report 1955 LMA ACC/2417/E8/4.

⁷⁴ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 14 January 1950.

⁷⁵ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 21 January 1950.

⁷⁶ See Morgan Phillips' memoirs on Labour in the 1960s, pp. 74-77.

considered in more detail in Chapter 5. By 1968, however, national politics overshadowed local politics, and the unpopularity of the Labour government's pay freeze was to take its toll.⁷⁷ In local elections in 1968 Labour suffered heavy losses, and there was also a by-election in Acton, due to the untimely death of Bernard Floud MP. Kenneth Baker won Acton for the Conservatives.⁷⁸

In the 1970 General Election, in line with the extreme marginality of west London, Labour narrowly retook Acton, held Ealing North, and lost Uxbridge. Hayes and Southall remained the only safe Labour seats in this part of London.

2.6 Labour in Local Government

Gains made by the Labour Party in local government in the interwar years were to be an important part of its growth in influence. Local councils had powers for housing and public health. Poor Law Guardians were also elected locally to provide relief for the unemployed. This helped to cement the Labour vote in many areas. In London, Poplar Councillors, led by George Lansbury, had campaigned for the equalisation of the rates, galvanising behind them a pool of local support.⁷⁹ The main issue for Labour local councils was housing during the interwar years and beyond. Governments had made money available to local councils, through the Addison Act, 1919 and the more generous Wheatley Act in 1924.⁸⁰ These subsidies ensured that council house building was to be carried out by councils of all political persuasions, not just those controlled by Labour.

Council elections were held annually and turn outs in local elections were often traditionally low. Julia Bush reports that turnouts in parts of the East End could be as low as 10%. Quoting from a Labour canvasser in Stepney (Annie Barnes) in 1919, she says that people just did not know what an election was, and it had to be explained that Labour was a new party, which was for the people. It was hoped that this would overcome some of the political apathy.⁸¹ In *Labour inside the Gate* (2008), Matthew Worley described the growth in Labour's municipal

⁷⁷ Mike Elliott said that Labour losses in local elections in 1968 were caused by the Government's pay freeze which was seen as unfair. It could be avoided by those changing jobs (or job titles). (Interview with Mike Elliott, 10 November 2015).

⁷⁸ Bernard Floud committed suicide, having been accused of being a Soviet spy. See D.Jobbins, 'Persecuted: the Tale of Would-be Labour Minister Bernard Floud', *Country Standard*, Summer 1917. The result of the by-election was Kenneth Baker (Conservative) 12,242, Walter Johnson (Labour) 8,522.

⁷⁹ N.Branson, *Poplarism, 1919-1921: George Lansbury and the Councillor's Revolt* (London, 1979), J.Booth, *Guilty and Proud of it: Poplar's Rebel Councillors and Guardians 1919-1925* (Pontypool, 2009).

⁸⁰ Labour Party, *Labour Solves the Housing Problem: an Exposition of the Wheatley Scheme* (London, 1924). Its projections for house-building went up to 1980. These provisions were to be cut back by successive Conservative governments, including the National Government in 1932.

⁸¹ J.Bush, *Behind the Lines*, p. 210.

vote across the country in 1919, which was to be consolidated by the 1922 and 1923 general election results.⁸²

One contemporary writer, H.S.Phillpott carried out a survey of Labour-held councils in 1934 in his book *Where Labour Rules* (1934). His list included industrial strongholds such as Sheffield, Merthyr, Durham and Wigan, but also the suburb of Walthamstow, which like the boroughs of west London had some industries but 80% of its population worked in central London, outside of the borough, and which Labour had held since 1921. Phillpott described these diverse boroughs as being showcases for Labour policy in government, not just in the provision of housing but also sound financial management with the successful collection of rates.⁸³ Other cities in Britain were experiencing economic and political change, leading to the election of Labour councils in the 1930s. Coventry for instance elected a Labour council in 1937. This was a city with a strong trade union presence in the motor industry, but where municipal socialism was later to take root.⁸⁴ The role of the local council was important even in areas where there was a strong trades union backing for the Labour Party, such as the Rhondda Valley.⁸⁵ In London's East End, the role of councillors was particularly important. According to Dan Weinbren, in much of London, Labour could not rely on strong trade unions, local traditions of communal solidarity or the prerequisites for participation in local civil society.⁸⁶

Herbert Morrison, secretary of the London Labour Party had set out a socialist housing policy, which he urged Labour councils to take up. In 1923 he argued that too many working class families were living in overcrowded conditions. This was more prevalent in London than anywhere else. The working-class and middle-class could not be provided for without public subsidies. When Labour won control of the London County Council in 1934, it adopted a policy of slum clearance and the provision of public housing across London.⁸⁷

⁸² M. Worley, *Inside the Gate* p.30.

⁸³ H.S.Phillpott, *Where Labour rules: a Tour through Towns and Counties* (London, 1934).

⁸⁴ F.Carr, 'Municipal Socialism: Labour's Rise to Power' in B.Lancaster and T.Mason (eds.), *Life and Labour in a Twentieth Century City; the Experience of Coventry* (Warwick, 1986).

⁸⁵ E.May, 'The Mosaic of Labour Politics 1900-1918' in D.Tanner, C.Williams and D.Hopkins (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2000).

⁸⁶ D.Weinbren, 'Sociable Capital: London's Labour Parties, 1918-45'. In M.Worley (ed). *Labour's Grassroots*.

⁸⁷ H.Morrison, *A Housing Policy for London and an Exposure of the Tory Wreckers* (London, 1923). (LSE Pamphlet).

2.7 Councils in West London

Many of the local councils in west London in the 1920s and 1930s were Urban District Councils, with a dozen councillors or less. This was the case in Hayes and Uxbridge. Ealing was already a metropolitan borough in 1918, Acton was to become one in 1921, and Southall in 1936.⁸⁸ This increased the size of the council, allowing for the election of a mayor and the creation of aldermen by the majority party. The aldermanic system made political changes in local government difficult, used against Labour in the interwar years. Local elections were annual, with a proportion of councillors coming up for election in any one year. There were also still property qualifications for the local franchise and fewer people were entitled to vote than in a general election. According to Dan Weinbren, London's local government electorate grew from about 15% to 50% of the population following legislation in 1918 but in London those in furnished rooms and lodging houses, transient people and servants were still barred from the municipal suffrage. It was not until 1948 that these anomalies disappeared.⁸⁹ Election results in west London council elections illustrated the extent of local support for Labour within the parliamentary divisions. This was in contrast to cities which elected councils from a diverse population. In Coventry for instance Labour had been opposed by an alliance between the Conservatives and Liberals.⁹⁰ In Liverpool where Labour did not win control of the council until 1955, Sam Davies argues that the splitting of the working class vote between ward boundaries was an important factor in Labour's lack of success, alongside the legacy of sectarianism and insecure employment in the city.⁹¹ In some of the urban council districts of west London, the working class were in the majority and therefore in a position to win control of councils such as Southall and Hayes. This was in contrast to cities where the middle class exercised its influence and it had therefore been difficult for the working class to establish a political identity.⁹²

In Acton Labour support was based in the long standing working class community of South Acton. There were four wards which elected councillors to the Acton Urban District Council – North-West, North-East, South-West and South-East. Labour support was in the South West ward. In April 1919 Labour fielded fifteen candidates, twelve of whom were successful. It won 50% of the council, a result which was favourable compared to the 1918 General

⁸⁸ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 7 October 1921. J.Oates, *Southall and Hanwell* p.88.

⁸⁹ D.Weinbren , 'Sociable capital' pp.197-198.

⁹⁰ F.Carr, *Municipal Socialism*.

⁹¹ S.Davies, *Liverpool Labour: Social and Political Influences on the Development of the Labour Party in Liverpool*. This was his contribution to the debate about 'Liverpool exceptionalism.'

⁹² M.Savage and A.Miles, *Remaking of the British Working Class 1840-1940*, p.57.

Election result in Acton, and the best result for Labour on Acton Council in the interwar years. In these elections less than one sixth of the electorate voted. Labour was the only party to identify its political colours. The Conservatives did not stand openly but supported the Anti-Waste Party.⁹³

By the time Acton had been incorporated as a municipal borough in 1921 Labour faced tougher opposition from the Anti-Waste Party and did not do nearly as well as in 1919. The electorate were perhaps fatigued by the frequency of elections, which the local Conservatives condemned as a 'waste of money'. The *Acton Gazette* reported that 'elections are threatened in all wards.'⁹⁴ Forty four candidates competed for twenty four council seats, and Labour only retained its councillors in the South West ward. The Anti-Waste Party had become better organised in getting its vote out. It had access to motor cars to get voters to the polls, whilst the Labour Party was dependent on a donkey and a cart. In November 1924 Labour even lost votes in South West ward, results which paralleled its poor performance in the autumn general election.⁹⁵

After a council estate was built in East Acton, Labour was able to win a council seat in the North-East ward in 1929 by 277 votes. 'Acton needs eight and cannot wait' – this was Acton Labour's campaign for the council elections in November 1930. It campaigned for more housing for the working class, abolition of slums, direct labour on municipal contracts, and land for homes not factories. However it was only to win three of these council seats and as a result claimed only nine out of twenty three seats on the council. The local Conservatives, now openly contesting the council, claimed that a Labour victory would mean higher rates.⁹⁶ Throughout the 1930s Labour gained votes in Acton, but these were not transferred into council seats.⁹⁷ In spite of failing to win the council Acton's Labour councillors were able to pressurise the Conservative majority into acquiring more land for council housing, on Acton Vale for instance.

Due to the wartime truce there were not to be any council elections in Acton between 1938 and 1945. But the Labour Group continued to play a role in the council with Joe Sparks

⁹³ Reports from the *Acton Gazette and Express*, April 1919.

⁹⁴ *Acton Gazette and Express*, October 1921.

⁹⁵ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, January 1959. An obituary of former Councillor and Acton Mayor C.O'Day in the *Acton Gazette* said that in 1925 he was the only Labour man on Acton council for South West ward. He had been born in Barrow in 1883 and had as an engineering apprentice joined the United Machine Workers Union.

⁹⁶ *Acton Gazette and Express* 26 September 1930.

⁹⁷ Between 1931 and 1933 the Labour vote increased from 6,572 to 10,066. *Acton Gazette and Express*, 1 March 1934.

becoming chairman of the Public Health Committee during World War 2 with special responsibility for housing. He used this position to push for the Acton Vale housing development to go ahead after 1945.⁹⁸ In 1945 Labour gained control of Acton Council with a twenty seven to five majority. In its stronghold the South-West ward, it was challenged only by Communist Party candidates, who polled just few hundred less votes than Labour.⁹⁹ Labour was to retain control of Acton council up until 1965 when it amalgamated with Ealing and Southall to form the London Borough of Ealing. The housing waiting list was its most overwhelming political concern. The Conservative Government in the 1950s introduced housing repairs and rents legislation, leading to cuts in the housing programme and rent increases. This put pressure on Acton council to raise rents, but also increased support for Labour in the 1954 council elections.¹⁰⁰

Urban District Councils within the Uxbridge division included Southall, Hayes, Uxbridge, West Drayton, Yiewsley and Harefield. The Labour Party had councillors on all these councils after the 1919 elections, but it was in control only in Southall and Hayes.

In April 1919 representatives of the Uxbridge Divisional Labour Party (which included Hayes) met at the Assembly Hall, Yiewsley, to celebrate recent Labour election successes. While it had been a shock to the local Labour Party, that they had not won the Parliamentary seat in 1918, they had built up an effective electoral machine for the Middlesex County Council and Urban District Council elections of 1919. Percy Langton, Labour Party Divisional Secretary stated:” If they made progress at the present rate the Labour Party would soon be in control of every municipal body within the area.”¹⁰¹

Labour ran Southall council for most of the interwar years, losing briefly to the Conservative backed Ratepayers’ Alliance, in 1931. The Ratepayers’ campaigned against Labour’s ‘extravagance’. Labour campaigned on welfare, housing and unemployment. In 1936 Southall Council was incorporated and became a metropolitan borough with six wards, instead of two. Labour won four of these – Hambrough, Glebe, Northcote and Waxlow, the Ratepayers won Dormers Wells and Norwood. George Pargiter, the future MP for Southall was leader of the Labour Group on the new council.

⁹⁸ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 16 September 1943.

⁹⁹ *Acton Gazette and West London Post* 2 November 1945.

¹⁰⁰ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 21 May 1954.

¹⁰¹ ‘West Middlesex Elections 1919’, *Hayes Peoples History*, 16 January 2007.

In 1945 Labour increased its majority on Southall council, winning ten out of fourteen contested seats. It was opposed by the Ratepayers Association. The council found more land to build houses in Conservative strongholds such as Dormers Wells. But the Ratepayers (soon to be replaced openly by the Conservatives) continued to hold this ward and Norwood Green.

Housing continued to be the key issue for the council. In 1947 it also planned a £66,000 swimming pool, £180,000 town hall, a three year plan for housing, a public library, road works, community centres, parks and allotments. In the November elections Labour lost seats to the Conservatives, even in wards which it held since 1936.¹⁰² These seats were regained in 1951, but in council elections where the local paper estimated that Labour had won a minority of votes throughout the Southall constituency.¹⁰³

In 1919 Labour had seven out of nine councillors on the Hayes UDC, which was run by Labour for most of the interwar years.¹⁰⁴ As we saw in Chapter 1, housing and the building of new communities was its main priority. In June 1928 the *Railway Review* in a series *Can Labour Rule* published a feature on Hayes UDC, which had been run by Labour from 1918-1928 except in 1924 'when it was controlled by the enemy'. In these years Hayes UDC had built 1,200 homes, and owned a third of homes in the area, way above the national urban average of 10%. Efficient collection of rates had contributed to a healthier population, as Hayes also had lower death rates than the national average.

Hayes council was lost to the Ratepayers in the late 1930s but was regained by Labour in 1946, and Labour was to win 100% control of Hayes council by 1950. With a working class population on its council estates, Hayes was to resemble the Labour strongholds, more typical of London's East End, described by Dan Weinbren, than other parts of west London.¹⁰⁵

Labour in Hayes was therefore less vulnerable to the post-war challenge from the Conservatives than Southall.

¹⁰² *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 8 November 1947.

¹⁰³ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 12 May 1951.

¹⁰⁴ 'The Establishment of Hayes Labour Association', *Hayes Peoples History*, 5 March 2006. Labour councillors had run Hayes before 1914. In 1911 George Moses, Henry Palmer and William Rawlins issued an election manifesto calling for municipal housing, town planning for Hayes, the preservation of open public spaces and an additional polling station at Botwell.

¹⁰⁵ D.Weinbren, 'Building Communities, Constructing Identities' p.45. A.Cox in *Public Housing* however indicates that many LCC tenants would have preferred to stay in inner London if that had been possible. See A.Cox, *Public Housing*, p. 10.

In the old borough of Ealing Labour held very few seats on the council in the before 1945, when it had nine councillors on Ealing council, out of a total of thirty six.¹⁰⁶ This was to change when Greenford and Northolt were to elect councillors to Ealing council. Greenford was part of the Harrow Division which Doris Ashby described as ‘a dead loss for Labour.’ As Joe Sherman said:

When Greenford developed, we built up our Labour vote. I can remember when the population of Greenford was around 1,000. In the 1930s Ealing was developed. A lot of people came from South Wales...it was very solid Labour. Most of our councillors came from there.¹⁰⁷

Hanwell, which was also part of the Harrow parliamentary division, but which elected councillors to Ealing council helped to change the political representation in Ealing, particularly after the building of a new London County Council estate in North Hanwell.¹⁰⁸

Labour’s electoral success in Ealing West in 1945 added to its determination to win Ealing council. However, the Ealing Borough Electors Association stepped up its campaign to stop Labour from winning the Town Hall. It would either stand or back anti-Labour candidates.¹⁰⁹ In November 1946 Labour was to win a majority of councillors in Ealing (25 to 20). This did not give it full political control of the council as the Conservatives had enough aldermen to maintain control. Labour however was able to gain parity on key council committees such as Housing and Education, allowing it to effectively plan housing for the borough in the post-war years and the re-organisation of its schools. By 1949 Labour had lost seats on Ealing council, retaining council seats only in Greenford, Northolt, and Hanwell – the working class areas. It now held no seats in the old part of the borough. Lammas in South Ealing had turned Conservative, apparently as many of its inhabitants had been re-housed on council estates in Northolt.¹¹⁰ Labour was not to gain a majority on Ealing council until 1958.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Ealing Council Labour Group Minutes October 1942-February 1946 LMA ACC/1972/006.

¹⁰⁷ *Joe Sherman :Tribute in his Own Words.*

¹⁰⁸ Councillor Chilton told tenants that the Conservative Council had fought tooth and nail to prevent the estate from being built because it objected to the residents, and M.Davidson Labour PPC for Harrow told them that they were ‘disturbing the sedate pools of Tory respectability that have so far inhabited this part of the world. (*West Middlesex Gazette*,12 June 1937).

¹⁰⁹ *Middlesex County Times* (Ealing edition), 6 October 1945.

¹¹⁰ Tom Allsop interview for the Labour Oral History Project. *Middlesex County Times*, 13 May 1950 reported that 700 new votes were recorded in Northolt due to the council estate

¹¹¹ Ealing Labour Group Minutes May 1952-December 1958 LMA ACC/1972/008.

Until 1965 however, there were annual council elections which reflected fluctuations in national electoral politics. In 1954 and 1955 for instance, annual reports of the Ealing North CLP were very gloomy, reporting the worst local election results since 1945. Blame for this was put on the increase in home ownership in Greenford and Perivale. These homeowners were no longer voting Labour. However in 1956 Labour candidates won all contested seats in the local elections, with the exception of the very Conservative Hangar Hill ward. There was a significant increase in the Labour vote in Northolt.¹¹² This could have been a backlash against the Conservative government's disastrous Suez policy.

Southall, Ealing and Acton councils were amalgamated into the London borough of Ealing in 1965, which was first elected with a Labour majority. On the newly created Hillingdon Council the Labour Party also had a majority.¹¹³ Elections for London boroughs now took place every three years when the whole council was elected. In boroughs such as Ealing the council was to change hands on a regular basis.

In the elections of 1968 Labour lost all but five seats on Ealing council. There were local issues, such as housing, education and immigration,¹¹⁴ but there was also the unpopularity of the Wilson government, particularly over its wage freeze.¹¹⁵ On Ealing council Labour had the same level of representation as on the Ealing council of the 1930s. This serves to indicate two points about the growth of Labour in this west London suburb. Firstly that national political issues could again override long standing population changes, which had seemed to have permanently changed the political landscape. Secondly, however the Labour Party now had the roots in the area to recover from this defeat more quickly than it had in the 1930s. By 1971 it had won back control of Ealing council.

Labour also won control of the Middlesex County Council (MCC) for a few years in 1946, and again in 1959. Seats were won in working class areas, but the Council was still very much a contested area. George Pargiter was the leader of the Labour group on the council. He believed that it had been lost in 1949 because of Middlesex being a mixed area with large factories but also large numbers of black-coated workers.¹¹⁶ The MCC had no house building

¹¹² Northolt Council elections results – 1951 Labour 2,829, Conservative 2,509, 1956 Labour 4,119, Conservative 1,312. Ealing North Labour Party annual reports, 1954-1956, LMA ACC/2417/E8/4.

¹¹³ Out of 60 seats Labour won 36 to the Conservative's 24. All council seats in Hayes and West Drayton went to Labour, Ruislip-Northwood was Conservative by 5-1, and Uxbridge was split on a 50-50 basis. (*Hayes Gazette* reports from May 1964).

¹¹⁴ This will be considered in Chapter 5 which is on immigration and ethnic identity.

¹¹⁵ The 1964-70 Wilson government antagonised Labour supporters because of its wage freeze.

¹¹⁶ *London News*, March 1951.

powers, although it had to deal with the homeless. Until 1965 it ran education throughout the county. In 1965 this was to be taken on by local councils such as Ealing, and in inner London by the Inner London Education Authority.

Conclusion

The reasons for the growth of the Labour vote in west London, culminating in its spectacular victories in 1945, were both due to an increasing working-class population, but also the strength in the organisation of the labour movement and national political factors. It was not however an even process. The Labour vote remained strongest in Hayes, Southall and parts of Acton and Ealing, strongholds which led to Labour councils in Hayes and Southall throughout the interwar years and beyond. In parliamentary divisions and councils, where industrial development had co-existed with middle class commuter land voting patterns were more uneven. Changes in parliamentary boundaries played their part in this. In the 1951 General Election, the Labour vote was higher than in 1945, at 48.8%. But it only gained 295 seats, losing to the Conservatives by 7 seats.¹¹⁷ This did not have an immediate effect on west London constituencies. Both Hayes and Harlington and Southall constituencies, newly created in 1950, and redrawn in 1951 continued to return Labour MPs. It was not until 1955 that Labour lost Ealing North, and 1959 when it also lost Acton and Uxbridge. In the late 1950s the Conservatives were making gains in all west London constituencies. These were to be reversed in the 1960s, showing maybe that in spite of the electoral ebbs and flows, due to national political events, population change had decisively changed west London. This was achieved however, by the impact of political organisation on the part of all three wings of the labour movement, which will be described in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

¹¹⁷ *Longman Companion Guide to the Labour Party*, pp. 34-35.

Chapter 3: Labour Party: Class, Organisation, Structure and Membership

Introduction

This chapter will look in detail at how the Labour Party was built, its organisation and structure and membership. It will also describe life in the Party in the interwar years and beyond, and why this was important in suburban London, which had a diverse population, a variety of workplaces and new housing estates.

Matthew Worley's *Labour inside the Gate* is a history of the Labour Party with an emphasis on the grassroots rather than parliament, not based on themes but local studies. He described 'hundreds of Labour parties, all with similarities but all distinctive within a geographical context'. He commented that development of parties in suburban areas meant that electoral progress was made by the 1930s.¹

Although the emphasis of this chapter is on the years 1918-1945 when the Labour Party was founded in west London parliamentary divisions, it will also look at the problems of declining membership and activism by the late 1950s, which mirrored the Party's declining electoral success in the area.

Campaigning for support in areas like the London suburbs was considered to be important to prove that the Labour Party could appeal to all classes after 1918. West London, as we have seen, was an area which contained middle-class commuter land, and a growing number of working-class communities. How was class regarded by the Labour Party both nationally and locally in 1918 and how was it to campaign.

3.1 Labour and Class in West London

Working-class support was the most important for the Labour Party. The main working-class communities in west London at this time were Southall, and to a lesser extent Hayes which had a smaller, but growing population. The working-class population in Hayes was to grow as more council housing was built for those who had come to work in its factories. There was a working-class community in South Acton and Acton's growing industrialisation was to lead to more support for the Labour Party. Even in Ealing in 1924 Joe Sherman said in his annual

¹ M.Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, p.219.

report to the Ealing Labour Party that there was a majority of the working classes in the borough so Ealing should be Labour.²

The *Acton Gazette* reported a rally in Acton in July 1924, addressed by Marion Phillips, Labour Party Women's organiser. She said: "Acton people though mainly workers had not realised that it was the workers' responsibility and duty to be represented by workers - how long would they continue to allow their politics to be a matter of tradition rather than common sense?" They sent to Parliament a Tory who could not know what working people required."³

It was recognised however that suburbia was to be a challenge for Labour and many of its residents were not seen as potential Labour voters. This was reflected in the public speeches of both local and national representatives of the Party. In the October 1924 General Election campaign, Mr Chilton, the Labour candidate for Ealing when he came to speak for Mr Baldwin, the candidate in Acton said that:

He came from an eminently respectable place where people polished their brass door knobs in the dead of night and were ashamed to let it be known that they earned their own living. At first Ealing was painfully surprised that Labour should put forward a candidate of its own, especially a working man, but even in Ealing, Labour had justified its right to contest the seat.⁴

This was also recognised by national leaders of the Labour Party. In areas like west London however Labour stressed it would not just govern for the working class. Labour candidates like W.J.Brown in Uxbridge in 1922 stressed that Labour could govern for all classes. It was important to be seen to be for the workers 'by hand or by brain'.⁵ W.J.Brown was a black-coated worker and a trades unionist.

² *West Middlesex Gazette*, 26 January 1924, *Joe Sherman: a Tribute in his Own Words*. Joe expressed his political frustration with working-class voters when he said: "The average English worker has no political sense at all. How can they vote Tory?" p.3.

³ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 25 July 1924.

⁴ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 23 October 1924.

⁵ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 8 October 1920. W.J.Brown was the General Secretary of the Civil Service Clerical Association. He wrote an introduction to F.D. Klingender, *The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain* (London, 1935).

One of the Labour leaders J.Clynes (chairman of the Labour Party) speaking at a rally in Acton in 1921 said that “great as is the working class, no class can in the narrow sense of the term be a governing party in this country for long.”⁶

This did not however mean any diversion from political aims, only the recognition that the Party had to appeal to a diverse working population. *Labour Organiser* published an article by Herbert Morrison, secretary of the London Labour Party on the progress of Labour in London. He recognised the challenges of building the Party in an area with a diverse population, but thought that tactics rather than principles were at stake. He wrote:

The problem of the middle classes is principally the question of specialised propaganda and is nothing to do with any variation of Party principles. We have to explain our principles to the middle classes in their language rather than ours, and from the point of view of their particular social and economic circumstances.⁷

Who were the workers ‘by hand or by brain?’ In the early years of the 20th century there was already a growth in the middle class nationally, as more workers were to be employed in banks, commerce and government. Noreen Branson said that in the decades 1911-1931 the number of manual workers was falling, but that the middle class was rising. The rise in this class however was at the lower end of the social scale where the numbers of humble clerks and insurance agents had risen by 69%, the professional classes by only 30%. These clerical workers were for the most part recruited from the families of manual workers.⁸ As the middle class had grown, its security and identity were being diminished. At the height of the interwar depression for instance, as many as 300,000 black-coated workers were unemployed.⁹ Clerks and secretaries did not have the same status and income as city bankers or doctors, but they still regarded themselves as middle class. Labour’s political opponents

⁶ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 30 December 1921. In Manchester Clynes was faced with cries of ‘shame’ said that Labour would look after the interests of the middle class. He replied that it was not a shame but that the class that needed most relief was the working class. See D.McHugh, *Labour in the City: the Development of the Labour Party in Manchester 1918-31*, (Manchester 2006), p.62.

⁷ *Labour Organiser*, December 1924. See also T.Jeffery, ‘The Suburban Nation: Politics and Class in Lewisham’ in D.Feldman and G.S. Jones, *Metropolis London*. The LCC led by Herbert Morrison was responsible for new housing estates in the suburbs of London which were to become strongholds for the Labour Party in constituencies previously held by the Conservatives. These included St Helier in Wimbledon, Becontree in Dagenham and the Cuckoo Estate in Hanwell.

⁸ N.Branson, *Britain in the Nineteen Twenties*, pp. 93-94. See also F.D.Klingender, *The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain*, p xiv. He showed from the 1921 census that 70% of the workforce were manual workers, 16.5% were professionals and clerical workers.

⁹ A.Calder, *The People’s War*, p.31.

were equally determined to organise and motivate the middle class vote with organisations such as the Middle Class Union and the Ratepayers Association.¹⁰

On the other hand many trades unionists were uneasy about appeals to the ‘middle class’. An article in the *Railway Review* of 1921, written under the pseudonym ‘Vedette’ deplored the Middle Class Union, the new enemy who organised blacklegs in the railway strike and it suggested that the Labour Party’s priority was to motivate working-class people to vote. The article read:

In the London suburb where I live we had the Labour Party on the council until the last election, when the Middle Class Union threw all its weight into the scales against them. So while the wage earners were busy in their allotments, or helping the wife with her shopping, or possibly watching a football match, the salaried gentlemen of the middle classes and their wives swept the polls and the Labour members were bundled out neck and crop. They had taken the precaution to register their votes. The result was now the end of employing direct labour – all public work was given to private contractors.

It added: “only those who really mix with these middle class people can form any idea of their enormous hatred of the working classes of today”.¹¹

Strikes were to highlight class tensions in the suburbs. During the 1919 railway strike and the 1926 General Strike for instance, middle-class people had been prepared to break strikes by driving trains and buses. This had led to bitterness between the working class and the middle class in suburbs such as Ealing. There was little public disorder, but sometimes buses driven by ‘blacklegs’ had been attacked. Joe Sherman and Jonathan Oates describe this in their different accounts of the General Strike in Ealing.¹² The Labour Party at a local level was not only on the side of the strikers, but an integral part of the organisation of the General Strike. The Ealing Trades Council and Labour Party was one and the same body and organised the General Strike in Ealing. Strikers at Hanwell bus garage were addressed by members of the local Labour Party at strike meetings. Although it had been an industrial defeat, the General Strike was seen as having been beneficial for the Labour Party electorally. Following the end of the strike, for instance, *Labour Organiser* reported that the strike had

¹⁰ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 3 September 1921.

¹¹ *Railway Review*, 7 January 1921.

¹² *Joe Sherman: Tribute in his Own Words*. A transcript of a shortened version of a talk given by Dr Jonathan Oates on the General Strike in Ealing was published as an article in *Labour Heritage Bulletin*, Spring 2006. (www.labour-heritage.com). Interviews with Syd Bidwell and Joan Parr for the Labour Oral History Project relate how buses driven by blacklegs were attacked.

had an invigorating effect on the Party. Thousands had seen the error of their ways and voted Labour in local elections, and would do so in the 1929 General Election.¹³ Laybourn argued that the impact of the defeat of the General Strike and the 1927 Trades Union Act, which lost the Labour Party one million trades union affiliations, nevertheless strengthened trades union links with the Party, as the ballot box rather than industrial action was seen as the way forward.¹⁴ Cole and Postgate on the other hand flagged up the issue of unemployment under the Conservative government which lay behind Labour's electoral success in 1929.¹⁵ Noreen Branson noted the addition of two million younger women voters on to the electoral roll ahead of the 1929 General Election, as all women over 21 won the right to vote.¹⁶

Labour's concern with winning the black-coated worker continued throughout the interwar years with an article in *London News* jovially entitled 'Socialism for Mr Blackcoat'. It argued that the black-coated worker faced the same problems of being subject to hiring and firing, but also had to keep up appearances on a modest income.¹⁷ Recognising that the lower end of the middle classes could offer political support, an article in *Labour Organiser* in 1937 pointed out that it was not all jam in the middle, as the middle-class was divided into upper and lower. The latter had the same economic conditions of the working class but was offended if they were called as such. It added: 'Ours is a people's party to represent the workforce by hand or by brain. When a man or woman enters the Labour Party class should be left behind.'¹⁸

Steve Fielding explained that Labour defined the people economically, as that nine-tenths of the population forced to work for a living, including those running small businesses. They included those in the retail trade threatened by the monopolies, useful people in the offices and fields as well as the factories. They were against the big landowners, financial magnates and captains of industry, who represented the Conservative Party. He argued that this was more than an attempt to win over suburban voters, but a clear message that Labour's appeal was not limited to the industrial working class.¹⁹

Laura Beers, reviewing changes in Labour's election publicity since the 1930s, described a 1945 election poster, which appealed to the professional classes. It read: 'He's got brains and

¹³ *Labour Organiser*, June 1926.

¹⁴ K.Laybourn, *The Rise of Labour: the British Labour Party 1890-1979* (London, 1988), p. 62.

¹⁵ GDH Cole and R.Postgate, *The Common People 1746-1946* (London, 1946), p.587.

¹⁶ N.Branson, *The Nineteen Twenties*, p.203.

¹⁷ *London News*, November 1933.

¹⁸ *Labour Organiser*, July 1937.

¹⁹ S.Fielding, 'Labourism in the 1940s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 3 (2) (1992), pp. 138-153.

doesn't want them wasted', claiming that national control of industry would mean more prosperity due to a greater scope for managers, technicians and administrators.²⁰

In 1945 Labour had to win parliamentary seats in suburban areas, such as those in west London, in order to form a majority government. G.D.H. Cole on the 1945 election result commented that geographically the political change came in Greater London, the West Midlands, Lancashire and Cheshire and the Eastern counties. There had been little change in the voting patterns of 'Labour heartlands' since 1929. In class terms he believed that the big turnover had been amongst the poor, and 'groups in social estimation just above the working class level.' The fault lines were between 'working class cum black-coat areas' and 'middle class areas'. The wealthy and well to-do had voted against Labour. This demarcation in suburbia was marked in Ealing and was reflected in the division between Ealing West which went Labour, and Ealing East which stayed Conservative.²¹

In the post war years however the problems of winning parliamentary seats in mixed dormitory towns attracted the attention of *Labour Organiser*, when faced with an uncertain result in the 1950 general election. Frank Shepherd, Southern Regional Secretary of the Labour Party reflected how in 1945, towns such as Chislehurst, Brentford and Chiswick, Harrow East, Hendon North, Wembley North, Wimbledon, and Mitcham sent Labour members to the House of Commons. But now Tory gains were expected.²²

An article in *Labour Organiser* in March 1950 said that:

Labour had won over agricultural workers but the problem may be more difficult in the non-community conscious dormitory areas and susceptible suburbia where the aspiring black-coated workers feel wrongly that they have moved away from the working class and have suffered nothing but ill from Labour. The man who goes to work at 9 in the morning instead of at 8, must be reached and persuaded that this extra hour in no way separates him from the millions who again have voted solidly Labour. He has just as much to lose from a Tory government as the industrial worker and the farmer.²³

²⁰ L.Beers, *Your Britain: Media and the Making of the Labour Party* (Cambridge, Mass, 2010) p. 182.

²¹ G.D.H Cole, *History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London, 1948), p. 434.

²² F.Shepherd, 'Problems facing us in Suburbia', *Labour Organiser*, May 1949, pp. 10-11. In the October 1949 issue of *Labour Organiser*, he describes Middlesex, once a pastoral county, as the cockpit of our national politics. In 1935 four of its parliamentary seats were held by Labour, by 1945 this had increased to 17.

²³ *Labour Organiser*, March 1950.

In the post-war years it was the inner cities with their overwhelming majority of manual workers which remained Labour strongholds. In Bermondsey for instance, home to dockworkers, over 90% of the population were manual workers, according to Sue Goss in *Local Labour and Local Government* (1988).²⁴ Turner in *Labour's Doorstep Politics* (1978) shows how constituency organisation varied between safe inner city and marginal Labour seats.²⁵ Suburban constituencies, including those in west London again became marginal in the post-war years.

So questions remain as to whether Labour's electoral success in 1945 was dependent on winning sections of the middle-class vote, which it was to lose in 1950s to the Conservatives. It has been noted in the introduction to this thesis that in the 1920s and 1930s, Labour did not always gain the support of large sections of the industrial working class in northern towns. On the other hand, what it meant to be working class was changing in the interwar years in the London suburbs and other parts of the country and this continued after 1945.²⁶ James Cronin in *Labour and Society in Britain 1918-1974* (1984) described how the destruction of community in the 1950s served to marginalise the working class.²⁷

3.2 Labour Party Structure and Organisation

In February 1918 a new constitution was drawn up by Arthur Henderson, Labour Party secretary. This was to replace the federal structure of trades unions and socialist societies that had previously existed, and to open the Party up to individual membership. It was not however designed to end the close link between the trades unions and the Party. At a local and national level, trades unions affiliated to the Party, and retained direct representation on national and local committees. Most significantly they provided a large proportion of the Party's finance, and in some cases, much of its active membership.²⁸ In west London for instance, finance and members for local Labour parties came significantly from the National

²⁴ S.Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government: a Study of Changing Interests, Politics and Policy in Southwark from 1919-1982* (Edinburgh, 1988).

²⁵ J.E. Turner, *Labour's Doorstep Politics* (London, 1978).

²⁶ See N.Tiratsoo, *Reconstruction, Affluence and Labour Politics in Coventry, 1945-1960*, and S.Fielding, 'Activists against Affluence', *Labour Party Culture during the Golden Age, circa 1950-1970*, *Journal of British Studies*, 40(2) (2001), pp. 241-267.

²⁷ J.Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain*, p. 5. He points out that Labour's losses in 1951 were due to the loss of the middle class vote. It retained its working class supporters. However the number of manual workers had declined, from 64.2% to 58.3% from 1950-1966, pp. 145-146.

²⁸ Chapter 4 will look at the links between the trades unions and the Labour Party in west London.

Union of Railwaymen and the Amalgamated Engineering Union.²⁹ However the geographical differences in the location of industry and strength of trades union organisation in Britain meant that in practice there could be no uniform national model for the organisation of the Labour Party at a local level.³⁰ In some areas the Party would be dominated by one union, for instance the Durham Miners' Federation.³¹ In most parts of the country where there was no one dominant industry this was not the case, but nevertheless local committees were likely to have significant trades union representation.³² In many areas also the local Labour Party and Trades Council were still one and the same organisation. This was the case in Ealing, Acton, Southall, Hayes and Uxbridge in 1918. These bodies affiliated to the local Divisional Party, a practice which was discontinued when trades councils were re-launched as purely industrial organisations in the 1930s.

The new constitution provided for the setting up of divisional parties which coincided with parliamentary divisions. This was to establish the Labour Party foremost as an electoral machine. In new divisions as in west London, this was important in overcoming organisational weaknesses, which existed as a result of a diverse working class population. The Party could now recruit individual members across the population and area, and campaign in all parliamentary divisions. As Matthew Worley in *Labour inside the Gate* (2005) writes, the Party's focus on divisional apparatus helped facilitate Labour's gradual extension into non-union, less industrial areas in the South-East.³³ Parliamentary divisions however did not always fit in with city and borough boundaries.³⁴ In Leeds, for instance divisional Labour parties affiliated to the Leeds City Labour Party. In west London parliamentary divisions roughly matched borough boundaries in Acton and Ealing in 1918, although Greenford and Hanwell were in the Harrow Division, and Northolt was in Uxbridge Division, as we have seen. The Uxbridge Division contained a number of local urban district

²⁹ In 1924 in Southall £26 was raised from 4 NUR branches, as well as donations from the AEU and ASLEF. In 1964 the AEU donated £60 to the election fund, half the cost of employing a full time agent. The PPC George Pargiter was a member of the AEU. See: Southall Labour Party Records, London Metropolitan Archives LMA ACC/1267/2 and ACC/1267/58.

³⁰ Matthew Worley's study of Labour activism in different parts of Britain including Durham and Plymouth illustrates these differences. See M.Worley, 'Building the Party: Labour Party Activism in five British Counties between the Wars', *Labour History Review* 70(1) (2005), pp.73-95.

³¹ M.Worley, *Inside the Gate* p.49.

³² In industrial areas such as Southall numbers of affiliated members were far higher than the individual membership. In 1948 the Southall Labour Party AGM reported that 10,112 out of 11,355 were affiliated members, *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 13 March 1948.

³³ M.Worley, *Inside the Gate* p.161. See also: 'The Fruits on the Trees: Labour's Constituency Parties between the Wars' in M.Worley (ed.) *Foundations of the British Labour Party* (Farnham, 2009), Chapter 11.

³⁴ M.Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate* p.48.

councils, and local Labour parties were built around these. They affiliated to the Uxbridge Divisional Labour Party.³⁵

In 1918 according to Labour Party annual reports, there were two affiliated organisations in west London - the Ealing, Acton and Chiswick Trades and Labour Council and the Hayes Labour Association.³⁶ By 1919 there were three affiliations – Ealing Labour Party and Trades Council, Acton Divisional Labour Party and Uxbridge Divisional Labour Party. The Harrow Divisional Labour Party affiliated in 1922. This illustrated the progress that the Party had made in terms of its organisation in west London post 1918, and the extent and limits to which it was operating within the new constitution.

In March 1918 the *Acton Gazette* reported that the Acton Labour Party had been founded under the terms of the new Labour Party constitution. Its chairman comments: “Acton is now a great industrial area and Labour must keep pace with the times.” Officers were elected and an Annual General Meeting was planned. Elections would now be contested in the name of the Acton Divisional Labour Party, from which all parliamentary and council candidates had to have approval.³⁷

In the borough and parliamentary division of Ealing the Labour Party was organised under the name of the Ealing Labour Party and Trades Council. Hanwell also had a Labour Party branch and trades council in the early 1920s.³⁸ Branches of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) had existed in Ealing, Acton and Southall and they continued to exist alongside the divisional Labour parties.³⁹ Members held office in both organisations. In some parts of the borough there had been no previous socialist or trades union organisation and branches of the Labour Party were built from scratch. Branches of the Labour Party were formed in Greenford in January 1927, and by 1932 its support was sufficient to divide into two branches, north and south. Northolt Labour Party was founded in 1932.⁴⁰ By 1940 this had

³⁵ By 1924 most parliamentary divisions had local divisional parties but often Trades Councils and Labour Parties continued to exist. Individual membership did not grow massively after 1918 except in the Labour Party Women’s Sections, and the ILP continued to recruit. See R.McKibbin,*The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924* (Oxford, 1974), p 138. In London by 1935 all 62 parliamentary divisions had a divisional party, and 19 out of 28 London boroughs had a central party, which cut across divisional boundaries. See also D.McHenry, *The Labour Party in Transition 1931-1938* (London, 1938), p 105.

³⁶ *Labour Party Annual Reports 1919-1922*.

³⁷ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 8 March 1918.

³⁸ Hanwell Urban District Council was amalgamated with the London Borough of Ealing in 1926. J.Oates,*Southall and Hanwell*, p.86.

³⁹ There will be more on local branches of the ILP in Chapter 8.

⁴⁰ A short resume of the population growth of Northolt from 904 in 1921 to three times that number in 1931 can be seen on Ealing Council’s history web site www.ealing.gov.uk

also divided into two branches. Although branches of the Uxbridge and Harrow divisional Labour parties they elected councillors to Ealing council and this led to the setting up of an Ealing Borough Labour Party.⁴¹ This problem of geographical identity was only to be resolved in 1945, when all of Greenford, Northolt and Hanwell became part of the Ealing West parliamentary division.⁴²

The establishment of an Uxbridge Divisional Labour Party in 1918 along the lines of the new Labour Party constitution allowed the Party to establish an identity and to recruit and contest elections across an area where its support was patchy and concentrated in particular parts of the division such as Southall. At a grassroots level however the federal structure of the Party survived with trades unions having a major influence in its organisation.

The Uxbridge Divisional Labour Party had delegates from Southall, Hayes, Uxbridge, Ruislip, West Drayton, Hillingdon, Ickenham and Yiewsley. It held quarterly and annual conferences, and an Executive Committee elected by its affiliated organisations. In 1919 the *Southall and Norwood Gazette* reported that the Uxbridge Labour Party meeting had consisted of eight representatives from Hayes, thirteen from Southall, five from Uxbridge, and two from West Drayton/Yiewsley. It was chaired by Councillor Hudson of Uxbridge.⁴³ In 1929 its divisional meeting was attended by 65 delegates, and its main discussion was the forthcoming election campaign.⁴⁴ The location of conferences rotated between the Southall and Hayes Labour Halls, and public houses in other parts of the division. Although membership was spread across the division, the largest number of delegates came from Southall and Hayes, which were the most industrial and had the largest working-class population. In May 1936 seventeen attended the Executive Committee. They were four trades union representatives, three from women's sections, seven from Southall, five from Hayes, three from Hillingdon, two from Eastcote, one from Ruislip, one from Northolt, one from Uxbridge, and one from the Labour League of Youth.⁴⁵

Labour Party organisation within the Uxbridge division was based on the local Urban District Councils. These were combined organisations with the trades councils, for instance the

⁴¹ The proposal to set up a borough of Ealing Labour Party to cut across parliamentary divisions was initially proposed by the Greenford Labour Party and discussed at the AGM of the Northolt Labour Party in 1936. Ealing North Labour Party LMA ACC/ 4023/02/01.

⁴² Ealing East and Ealing West were created by the 1945 Boundary Commission in 1945. Ealing South and Ealing North were created in 1948 in time for the 1950 General Election.

⁴³ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 27 June 1919.

⁴⁴ Uxbridge DLP Minutes 1928-1929, LMA ACC/1267/1/1.

⁴⁵ Uxbridge DLP attendance register: EC attendance 1936-1949, LMA ACC/1267/1/2.

Uxbridge Labour Party and Trades Council and the Southall Labour Party and Trades Council.⁴⁶

The Southall Labour Party and Trades Council in 1924 had an Executive Committee which consisted of twelve trades union representatives, one each from the Labour Party Men's and Women's sections, one from the Socialist Societies, one from the Railway Women's Guild and one from the Labour League of Youth.⁴⁷ This illustrated the predominance of trades union representatives in the organisation. It is also notable that the Southall Labour Party was divided into Men's and Women's sections, a legacy of the separate organisation which had existed to recruit women before 1918.⁴⁸ By 1932 it was divided into an Individual Members Section, and an Industrial Section, both of which elected delegates to a Political Council, whose attendances varied from 20-30.⁴⁹ There was also an Executive Committee which met monthly, attended by 12 representatives.

Following the birth of a Southall constituency (which included Hayes), the Southall Labour Party was launched in May 1945. The majority of its sixteen strong general committee delegates were from the Southall end of the constituency and included six women. Trades union delegates were in the majority – there were six from the NUR, (including Syd Bidwell), nineteen delegates from five branches of the AEU, many of whom lived in Hayes, and also delegates from Women's Section and the Women's Co-operative Guild. The Executive Committee elected at a conference in 1947 included five from Southall, three from Hayes, plus five trades union delegates and delegates from the Women's Section. The constituency was to be re-organised in 1948 to include Hanwell, and Hayes and Harlington became a constituency in its own right.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 7 January 1921.

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Southall Trades Council and Labour Party October 1923-October 1925, LMA ACC/1267/2-3.

⁴⁸ This was the Women's Labour League. It was replaced after 1918 by the Labour Party Women's Sections. However it was unusual for a Party to have a separate Men's section. It seems that in Southall this would be replaced by an Individual Member's Section, plus a Women's Section. Chapter 6 will deal in more detail with the Labour Party Women's Sections in west London.

⁴⁹ The division of Labour and Trades Councils into Industrial and Individual members sections was, according to Mike Savage due to the 1927 Trades Disputes Act which outlawed the funding of political parties by trades unions. Industrial Trades Councils could continue to receive trades union funding. See M.Savage, *The Dynamics of Working Class Politics*, p 176.

⁵⁰ Southall Divisional Constituency Labour Party minutes, LMA ACC/1267/5. After 1948 there are no minutes for the other divisional parties, which had formed part of the Uxbridge Parliamentary Division up until 1945. These were Hayes and Harlington, Uxbridge and Ruislip-Northwood.

3.3 Membership

Dean McHenry said that, ‘above all other factors, the real source of strength of the Labour Party is the day to day work of its convinced partisans who sacrifice their time and money for the cause’.⁵¹ The dependence of the Party on volunteers was recognised by those in office, and envied by Conservative and Liberal opponents. At elections Labour candidates relied on its membership to canvass.⁵²

Those who built the labour movement in west London could be railwaymen, engineers, builders or semi-skilled factory workers. They could also be office workers or housewives. They were a mobile section of the working class – often young, uprooted and living in different conditions to their parents. Working conditions were very different in the new factories, which opened in the interwar years to those of the coal mines or mills of the industrial north. Life on new housing estates in the London suburbs was also very different from the crowded tenements from which they had come.⁵³

In many cases, working-class people, having been relocated brought their values with them, and created political organisations in their new locations. This is described by Doris Ashby who had moved to Perivale from North Kensington in 1933. Her parents had been active in North Kensington Labour Party. She said that the majority of people in her street were committed to the Labour Party and that: ‘The people in Perivale were newcomers, they had seen poverty but as they were the more intelligent section of the working class, they had taken action to help themselves. At least one third of the people who came to Perivale moved to work at the Hoover Factory on the A40. In the main, the newcomers came from other parts of London, Paddington, Kensington and Shepherds Bush, but there were also a lot of Welsh people. They were very keen on the Labour Party because of the poverty they had left behind in mining villages.’⁵⁴ Many who had migrated from mining areas had faced blacklisting after the defeat of the 1926 General Strike and had to move to find work. This was the case with Dai Cousins, who was to be first Labour mayor of Ealing in 1965.⁵⁵

Some newcomers brought their labour movement traditions with them. Others would have had Liberal or Conservative backgrounds, which, as members of the young generation, they

⁵¹ D. McHenry, *The Labour Party in Transition 1931-1938*, p 99.

⁵² R. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924*, pp. 145-146.

⁵³ See J. Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain, 1918-1979*, p 81-182. Cronin described how newcomers to the South and Midlands settled in and created new communities.

⁵⁴ Doris Ashby interview for the Labour Oral History Project.

⁵⁵ See biography of Dai Cousins in *Labour Organiser*, July 1966.

left behind.⁵⁶ One of these was Cyril Grant, one of the founders of the Greenford Labour Party in 1928. He was born in Tufnell Park, North London, and like his father had been a Liberal. By 1920 however he had joined Islington Labour Party. In 1929 he was elected to Ealing Council. He set up an organisation for the unemployed in Greenford, providing footwear for them and Christmas presents for children. He also gave advice on getting mortgages, an indication of growing working class owner occupation in the area.⁵⁷

As in other parts of the country, a significant number of Labour Party activists were trades unionists. They were members of trades unions which were predominant in their area.⁵⁸ Reports of council election results in the local papers gave the trades union affiliations of Labour candidates. In the 1919 elections in Acton for instance, candidates were members of the NUR, metal workers, tool makers and engineers. There were two women candidates from the Railway Women's Guild. In 1930 candidates included a railway clerk, bookbinder and a transport worker who was a member of the National Union of Vehicle Builders.⁵⁹ In 1946 the leader of the Labour Group in Ealing Councillor Chilton was a railway clerk.⁶⁰ Two MPs for the area were from the NUR, Joe Sparks and Syd Bidwell, and George Pargiter was from the AEU. This indicates the predominance of manual workers amongst Labour Party activists in its early years, and in west London the importance of two particular trades unions, the NUR and the AEU. Walter Ayles Labour MP for Southall in 1945 and Hayes and Harlington in 1950 was a member of the AEU.⁶¹ Women activists were often wives of railwaymen or engineers.⁶² Margaret Abbott, Labour candidate for the Middlesex County Council in 1955, was the wife of a railwayman. She had employment of her own, as a legal secretary for the Co-op and Hayes Legal Advisory Services.⁶³ Chapter 6 will look in more detail at the participation of women in the labour movement.

⁵⁶ In other parts of the country Lib-Lab-ism lingered on through the interwar years. S.Pollard, for instance in his history of labour in Sheffield says that the Lib-Labs did not disappear until the 1930s. See S.Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield* (Liverpool, 1959), pp.265-266.

⁵⁷ Ealing North Labour Party LMA ACC /4023/01/34.

⁵⁸ J.Marriott describes how members of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), representing the dockers and members of the National Union of General Workers (NUGW) representing the gas-workers, were to play a key role in the organisation of West Ham Labour Party. In 1923 12 out of 47 West Ham councillors came from the NUGW. See J.Marriott, *The Culture of Labourism: the East End between the Wars*, p.92.

⁵⁹ Reports from the *Acton Gazette and Express* from April 1919 and 26th September 1930.

⁶⁰ *Middlesex County Times* (Ealing edition), 22 September 1945.

⁶¹ *Hayes Gazette*, 18 May 1945.

⁶² Dora Sparks for instance, secretary of the Acton Labour Party in 1939 was the wife of Joe Sparks. By 1956 she worked as a clerk for the Shop Assistants' Union, *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 6 January 1956.

⁶³ *Hayes Gazette*, 21 January 1955

Increasingly parliamentary candidates were more likely to be professional people. The first Labour MP for Ealing West in 1945 was James Hudson, a school teacher. The candidate for the more middle class division of Ealing East was reported as saying that: “Labour was no longer a working-class gang in a back-alley but attracting the best brains in the community.”⁶⁴ Labour Council candidates for Ealing elected in 1945 included a production manager, school teacher and chemist, as well as two railwaymen. After the departure of Joe Sparks, Bernard Floud was selected as the PPC for Acton. He was a history graduate from Oxford, who worked for the Civil Service and television.⁶⁵ Bill Molloy elected as MP for Ealing North in 1964, was from Swansea. He had studied politics at the University of Wales Extra-Mural Department and had a career in the civil service, where he had a record of trade union activity.⁶⁶

These were however people who had been born into working class families but increasingly had enjoyed the benefits of higher education and become professionals. In its early days parliamentary candidates who were well off, could obtain safe Labour seats, being able to provide their own expenses. Two of these had connections with west London. Oswald Mosley had been a Conservative MP for the Harrow Parliamentary Division, but when he joined the Independent Labour Party (ILP) he moved to a winnable Labour seat in Smethwick where he was in a position to finance the local party newspaper.⁶⁷ Another example of what the Society of Labour Candidates called ‘loosely attached bourgeois candidates’ was Oliver Baldwin, son of Conservative Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin. He was selected to fight the Acton parliamentary division for the Labour Party in 1923, replacing Mary Richardson. He did not win the seat, but went on to win the Dudley parliamentary division for Labour in 1929.⁶⁸

The diverse membership of Labour parties in suburban constituencies was championed by Frank Shepherd. He wrote:

⁶⁴ *Middlesex County Times* (Ealing edition), 30 June 1945.

⁶⁵ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 1 February 1962.

⁶⁶ Ealing North Labour Party, LMA 4023/01/26. Other contenders for the PPC were a statistician, educational advisor and a civil engineer. Syd Bidwell, member of the NUR was by then a tutor for the National Council of Labour Colleges.

⁶⁷ K.Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left: Part 1: Labour Legends and Russian Gold* (London, 2006), pp. 165-167.

⁶⁸ K.Morgan, *Labour Legends and Russian Gold*, pp.168-170. For a biography of Oliver Baldwin see article in K.Gildart and D.Howell (eds.) *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol. 12 (Basingstoke, 2005), pp.7-13.

Labour organisation in the dormitory areas should, by virtue of the rich variety of its membership, produce the most efficient political organisation in Britain. One local Labour Party has the son of a Peer and country club proprietor for its chairman, the vice chairman is the branch manager of a Joint Stock Bank, and the secretary is a gardener. But in many marginal constituencies Labour has to master the technique of blending the tenacity of the old stalwarts with the administrative capacity of more recent recruits.The trades union delegates in dormitory constituencies who absent themselves from meetings of the General Management Committees because so-called middle classes predominate, are doing a disservice to themselves, the trade union movement and the Labour Party.⁶⁹

Labour Party membership statistics for the 1920s were patchy for the divisions in west London. Membership fluctuated and there were resignations and splits. 1929 was the first year that individual membership figures are recorded for all four divisions in this part of west London.⁷⁰ The figures for these west London parties were:

Ealing (401)	Acton (250)	Uxbridge (305)	Harrow (685).
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After the election defeat of 1931 the Labour Party launched a membership campaign with a target of one million individual members. A ‘Socialist Crusade Week’ across the country was organised in 1936. Some local parties had experienced a loss of membership due to the 1931 split.⁷¹ Alan Rogers said that his father had cycled from Greenford to East Acton to tell Alan’s grandfather that Ramsay MacDonald had gone and joined the Tories! After reading this in the *Daily Herald*, he resigned from the Party immediately.⁷² More significant membership losses came however as a result of the disaffiliation of the ILP in 1932.⁷³ In Ealing there were losses in the old part of the borough. In Lammas and Grosvenor Wards, in South Ealing for example, the membership was depleted. However as in other parts of the country, the membership was rebuilt within a few years, as one hundred new members were recruited during a campaigning ‘socialist week’. The new areas, like Greenford and Northolt,

⁶⁹ F.Shepherd, ‘Problems Facing Us in Suburbia’, *Labour Organiser*, May 1949.

⁷⁰ *Labour Party Annual Reports 1919-1929*. Before a national membership database was set up in 1991, subscriptions were collected locally. This made accurate membership reporting difficult, as described in an article by J.Grigg, entitled ‘Labour’s Lost Membership Records’, *Labour Heritage Bulletin*, (Summer 2015).

⁷¹ See M.Worley, *Inside the Gate*, p.135-137.

⁷² Interview with Alan and Ann Rogers, 10 September 2015.

⁷³ This will be covered in more detail in Chapter 8.

were not significantly affected by the ILP split.⁷⁴ Between 1929 and 1935 the individual membership of the Party nationally had doubled to 419,311 members.⁷⁵

In areas where there was a growing population, like the Harrow parliamentary division, which contained Greenford and Northolt, Labour Party organisation based on individual membership was proving to be the more successful than in its old industrial heartlands. In 1930 there was an article in *Labour Organiser* on constituency organisation. It noted that although one in six Labour votes came from the mining constituencies, they had the poorest organisations, often with no individual membership. Whilst industrial organisation was sufficient for electoral success, it was no good for campaigning or political education purposes, as not all the population were miners. Women for instance were being excluded.⁷⁶ The observation that it was in mixed population areas that the strongest local parties were built was made by Dan Weinbren in 'Building Communities, Constructing Identities.'⁷⁷

In London the Party was particularly successful in recruiting. The following London divisions had over 1,000 members in 1929 - Bermondsey, Camberwell, Greenwich, Lewisham, Poplar and the largest, Woolwich had 4335 members.⁷⁸ By 1931 other outer London divisions in industrial areas had a growing membership, for instance Enfield had 1,493 members and Edmonton had 1,051.⁷⁹ In 1937 *Labour Organiser* published a roll of honour – a list of Labour parties with over 2,000 members. Half of these were in London where recruitment activities were focussed on door to door canvassing.⁸⁰

These are a selection of membership figures for the parliamentary divisions included in this thesis, taken from Labour Party annual reports.

Division	1929	1931	1933	1935	1938
Ealing	288	421	287	373	851
Acton	250	443	370	448	375
Uxbridge	300	948	1270	1833	2594
Harrow	1260	1238	1435	2590	3545

⁷⁴ Ealing Trades Council and Labour Party minutes 1930-1935 LMA ACC/1972.

⁷⁵ M. Worley, *Inside the Gate*, p.60.

⁷⁶ *Labour Organiser*, September 1930.

⁷⁷ D.Weinbren, 'Building Communities, Constructing Identities'.

⁷⁸ *Labour Organiser*, October 1929.

⁷⁹ Labour Party Annual Report 1932.

⁸⁰ *Labour Organiser*, May 1937.

Membership of the Uxbridge and Harrow divisional parties were amongst the fastest growing during the 1930s. In 1935 *Labour Organiser* was to carry an article by the secretary of the Harrow Division, describing how the membership of his constituency had doubled in six months.⁸¹

The membership figures for divisional Labour parties in socially mixed areas partially obscures the concentration of members in new working class localities. Take for example the cases of Greenford and Northolt. By 1937 Northolt Labour Party had 150 members, 88 men and 62 women.⁸² They were reporting attendances of fifty or more at meetings in the 1930s. Social activities such as dances attracted several hundred. Doris Ashby recalls how her mother in Perivale (part of Greenford) collected subs from almost every house in the street where they lived.⁸³

During World War 2 the membership of the Labour Party fell due to conscription and evacuation of civilians. Even Harrow Labour Party was to report a fall in membership, although it acquired a building fund and library during these years. By 1941 nationally the Party's membership had fallen from 400,000 to 300,000, back to 1931 levels.⁸⁴ Nevertheless members were encouraged to keep their organisations going as much as they could and by 1944 membership was starting to grow again.⁸⁵

In the final year before the re-organisation of the divisions in west London these were the membership figures. (1944). According to the *Middlesex County Times* the Southall Labour Party had seen a 94% increase in membership over the year.⁸⁶

Ealing 299; Acton 240; Harrow 1289; Uxbridge 1532

These were the membership figures for the new parliamentary divisions in 1945.⁸⁷

1945 - Ealing East 1416 ; Ealing West 883; Acton 429; Southall 1387; Uxbridge 1243
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1946 - Ealing East 1583; Ealing West 2903; Acton 401; Southall 1437;Uxbridge 1239

⁸¹ *Labour Organiser*, May 1935.

⁸² Northolt Labour Party Minutes 1937-1940, LMA ACC/4023/02/03.

⁸³ .D.Weinbren,*Generating Socialism: Recollections of Life in the Labour Party*, p.20.

⁸⁴ *Labour Organiser*, issues 1941 -1942.

⁸⁵ See A.Thorpe, *Parties at War: Political Organisation in the Second World War* (Oxford, 2009).

⁸⁶ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition),3 March 1945.

⁸⁷ *Labour Party Annual Report* 1946.

Labour Organiser reported in 1946 that Ealing West which had just elected a Labour MP, had more Labour Party members than towns the size of Doncaster and Swindon. It can be seen though that the Ealing East constituency which returned a Conservative MP had a high membership of over 1,000, alongside Southall and Uxbridge.⁸⁸ There is no explanation as to why the individual membership figures for Acton are so low, in spite of electoral successes.

In 1949 there was further constituency re-organisation and these were the constituency memberships.⁸⁹

Acton 1840; Ealing North 2764; Ealing South 1566; Southall 1416;
Hayes and Harlington 1027; Uxbridge 1027

By the 1950s although the Labour Party lost votes in these parliamentary divisions, its organisation was to remain strong, with frequent recruitment campaigns. All constituency parties held regular annual recruitment campaigns. In 1950 it was reported that Hayes Labour Party had recruited over 350 members in one year, and the membership of Uxbridge Labour Party had risen to 1,573.⁹⁰ Acton reported an increase of 933 members in 1953, with a total membership of 2,453. The largest membership was in the South-East ward with 523 members. Problems were reported however with the collection of subscriptions.⁹¹

Labour Organiser reported that membership continued to be high in London and the Home Counties.⁹² These were examples of the marginal seats described by J.E.Turner in *Labour's Doorstop Politics in London* (1978). He looked at constituency organisation in three areas in London, Bermondsey, Fulham and South Kensington. He describes a marginal seat as having some industry, maybe a dormitory town, a mixture of classes interspersed with manual workers, a population with high geographical mobility, and variety of living standards. In these areas Labour Party members would see elections as all important, there would be more competition for council seats, but also activists would tend to be interested in local and national politics. In Labour's unwinnable seats members would be held together by political commitment and social activities.⁹³

⁸⁸ *Labour Organiser*, April 1946.

⁸⁹ Labour Party Annual Report 1950.

⁹⁰ *Hayes Gazette*, 3 March 1950.

⁹¹ Acton Labour Party Annual Report 1953 LMA ACC/2417/E8/1.

⁹² *Labour Organiser*, February 1947.

⁹³ J.E.Turner, *Labour's Doorstop Politics*.

However by the end of the 1950s there was evidence that all the constituency parties were facing problems in recruiting and retaining members. This reflected Labour's falling electoral support, but it was also argued that cultural changes such as the ownership of televisions, was leading to lower political participation and even support for social events.⁹⁴ Dai Cousins, who wrote the annual report for Ealing North Labour Party in 1955 claimed that attendances at meetings had become poor as members felt compelled to work overtime to keep up with rising prices. Recruitment campaigns had not been successful, and members were not replacing those who had left the area.⁹⁵

Membership losses were also reported in the Northolt and Greenford branches of the Ealing North division, which had been so successful in their early years. In 1953 however it was reported that Northolt Labour Party still had a total of 750 members, 82 recruited over the previous year, but that 200 had not paid their subs.⁹⁶ In 1956 Ealing North reported an increased membership, the largest being in the working class areas of Northolt (766) and South Greenford (546).⁹⁷

Few were active members. Attendances at branch meetings were around 20 and falling, and not enough subs collectors could be found.⁹⁸ Often officers had to double up, for instance Councillor Acock being both propaganda and membership secretary. However recruitment campaigns still went ahead on the new council housing estates such as the Racecourse Estate in Northolt.⁹⁹ Into the 1960s attendances at meetings were to fall to ten or less, and there was talk of a membership campaign to increase the membership to 400.¹⁰⁰ In the neighbouring branch of Greenford attendances were down to four. However membership in 1968 was reported as being 350.¹⁰¹ In both Northolt and Greenford efforts continued to be made to increase attendances by recruitment campaigns and a range of speakers at meetings on issues such as Suez, Cyprus, the Common Market, automation and old age.¹⁰²

⁹⁴ This reflected the national situation. Andrew Thorpe reports that membership of the Labour Party fell 1952-1961 from 1,014,524 to 750,000. See A.Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, p 149, and S.Fielding, 'Activists against Affluence'. Fielding's article records that by the 1960s, the membership was mainly elderly, with a smaller proportion of women and trades unionists.

⁹⁵ Ealing North Labour Party Annual Report 1955 LMA ACC/2417/E8/4.

⁹⁶ Acton Labour Party Annual Report 1953 LMA ACC/2417/E8/1.

⁹⁷ Ealing North Labour Party Annual Report 1956 LMA ACC/2417/E8/4.

⁹⁸ Northolt Labour Party minutes 1953-1955 LMA ACC/4023/02/05

⁹⁹ Northolt Labour Party minutes 1955-1959 LMA ACC/4023/02/06.

¹⁰⁰ Northolt Labour Party minutes 1960 LMA ACC/4023/02/08.

¹⁰¹ Minutes of the Greenford Central Labour Party LMA AAC/4023/02/10 and Ravenor Ward LMA ACC/4023/02/11.

¹⁰² Northolt Labour Party minutes LMA ACC/4023/02/06-08.

At the founding conference of the newly constituted Southall Labour Party in 1948 it had claimed 3,000 members.¹⁰³ By 1952 however this was down to 2,350, and a membership campaign was launched with a target of 3,050 members. At the 1957 AGM a membership of 964 in Southall and 1004 in Hanwell was reported. Further membership campaigns were organised throughout the 1960s, with each member being given a ‘personal approach book’. Canvassing squads had a reasonable amount of success, recruiting 64 new members in one ward, Hambrough alone in 1961. These were the membership figures in Southall in 1965 when new wards were created for the new London Borough of Ealing.¹⁰⁴

Glebe-251	Northcote-322	Brent-270	Waxlow-182	Elthorne-340	Dormers Wells-240
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But by 1968 membership was reported as having fallen to just over 1,000. This was acknowledged by the MP Syd Bidwell, as being unsatisfactory. Concerns over the state of Labour Party organisation and membership in the 1960s were not confined to west London. They were to be addressed by General Secretary, Morgan Phillips.¹⁰⁵

3.4 Labour League of Youth and Young Socialists

One measure taken by Labour Party staff in the 1950s was to try to revive its youth section, formerly called the Labour League of Youth (LLY). Morgan Phillips, General Secretary in 1959, was asked to ask to prepare a report on the way forward after the Party’s third election defeat. He said in his memoirs that one of his first priorities was to build a Young Socialist movement. He said:

In speeches all over the country I urged local parties to allow and indeed encourage teenagers to play an active part in politics. It was unreasonable to expect young people always to toe the party line and never enjoy any apolitical activities, and it was criminal to give them all the donkey work and no responsibility.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Note that this membership figure reported at the AGM does not tally with that of the Labour Party annual report for the year.

¹⁰⁴ Southall Labour Party Records LMA ACC/1267/16-17. These membership figures are taken from the minutes of meetings of the Southall Labour Party. The membership figure of 3000 in 1948 is substantially higher than the figure given in the Labour Party annual report for 1949.

¹⁰⁵ Morgan Phillips, *Memoirs*. See also: L.Black, ‘Still at the Penny-Farthing Stage in a Jet-Propelled Era: Branch Life in 1950s Socialism’, *Labour History Review*, 65 (2), (2016), pp.202-226.

¹⁰⁶ *Morgan Phillips: Memoirs*.

Morgan hoped to see delegates under the age of 26 form one third of the Party's annual conference by 1964. Morgan had a stroke and did not live to see 1964, and was too ill to attend the 1960 annual conference, where his report *Signposts for the Sixties* was discussed. However the Conference heard the news that over the previous year, the number of Young Socialist branches had jumped from 262 to 608.¹⁰⁷

Labour's first youth section, the Labour League of Youth, had been set up initially in the 1920s. Joe Sherman Labour Party agent and secretary in the 1920s, was also chairman of the local Labour League of Youth.¹⁰⁸ Syd Bidwell was involved in the Southall Labour League of Youth, which campaigned against fascism and collected door to door for Aid for Spain. It held an anti-war public meeting in Southall Park. Ealing Labour League of Youth held debates, rambles and a recruitment drive throughout 1938.¹⁰⁹

Labour's youth organisation was re-created in the 1940s. There have been a limited number of publications on the attempts of the Labour Party to create a successful youth section. The lives of different versions of the Labour League of Youth were short lived, due to political disagreements and factionalism.¹¹⁰

There had been youth sections in west London in the interwar years, in Southall, Ealing, Greenford and Northolt. In Southall the branch of the Labour League of Youth (LLY) was reformed in 1936, with around 40 members. It was chaired by Syd Bidwell and held political meetings on subjects such as Indian independence. It held debates with the Young Communist League and organised regular social events.¹¹¹ It survived the wartime years, and by 1946 was reporting weekly meetings of 14-25, plus social activities such as cycling, hiking and a games night.¹¹²

In Ealing North, Alan Rogers reported that after 1945, he became involved with the LLY. It had camping holidays, as well as high level political discussions, with speakers, for example,

¹⁰⁷ *TGWU Record, Labour Party Conference 1960*, October 1960.

¹⁰⁸ *Joe Sherman: a Tribute in his own Words*.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Syd Bidwell for the Labour Oral History Project, *Middlesex County Times* (Ealing edition), 9 February 1938.

¹¹⁰ See M. Webb, *The Labour League of Youth : an Account of the Failure of the Labour Party to Sustain a Successful Youth Organisation* (Lewiston, NY, 2010) and Z. Layton-Henry, 'Labour's Lost Youth', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11 (1976), pp. 275-308. Labour Heritage has carried some anecdotal accounts from some of its members, for instance : A.Potts, 'Joining Up: the Sunderland Labour League of Youth', *Labour Heritage Bulletin*, Autumn 2014, and P.Kingsford, 'The Witham Labour League of Youth 1948-1956', *Labour Heritage Bulletin*, Spring 2008 .

¹¹¹ See reports from the *West Middlesex Gazette* and Southall Labour Party Records, LMA ACC/1267/2.

¹¹² *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 16 February 1946, and 14 June 1947.

from the Workers Educational Association. Initially an officer from the local CLP came along ‘to keep an eye’, but after a while that was considered as no longer necessary. An insight into the transient role of the LLY is given, as when Alan left to do his National Service in the army, the local branch collapsed. It had played a social role however, as many of the members were to marry each other. Alan also reported a Young Socialist branch in Ealing South, set up by Phil and Betty Ridley, outside of the Party structure. It had a political education programme, went on camping holidays and helped in elections. Alan himself organised a Greenford Young Socialist branch, which came to an end when its members emigrated to Australia.¹¹³ In the early 1950s branches of the LLY were reported across west London, in Ealing, Hayes, West Drayton Uxbridge and Ruislip. In Ealing North there were branches in Perivale and Greenford, which met on a weekly basis.¹¹⁴

A branch of the Young Socialists was set up in Southall in 1960, but with differing views to the local party on the immigration question and alleged unconstitutional activity, it was closed with suspensions, and reformed with 15 members in 1965.¹¹⁵ The branch had called for an end to immigration controls and for the nationalisation of Woolfs, which was facing closure. It wanted to organise a public meeting in Southall In Acton the Young Socialist branch, critical of the Wilson Government’s policy on pay restraint had to be reconstituted.¹¹⁶

3.5 *Life in the Party*

If Arthur Henderson was the architect of the new constitution of the Labour Party in 1918, then Herbert Morrison, secretary of the London Labour Party was the most influential in shaping the organisation of the Party in London in the interwar years. He drew inspiration from the organisation of the German Social Democratic Party. The model party was not just to be an electoral machine, but a lively political and social entity, giving its members a way of life and ensuring their commitment.¹¹⁷ The London Labour Party by the mid-1920s had a choral union with fifteen choirs, a symphony orchestra and a sports federation. There was an annual London Labour Party fair. However this was all part of party building, and winning

¹¹³ Interview with Alan and Ann Rogers September, 2015. Marianne Elliott also spoke about camping holidays, in her interview for the Labour Oral History Project.

¹¹⁴ London Labour Party Archives LMA ACC/2417/E7.

¹¹⁵ Southall Labour Party Archives, Dissident YS section, LMA ACC/1267/72 1960-1965.

¹¹⁶ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 3rd December 1964. In one incident some of its members were barred from Labour Party premises and the police were called.

¹¹⁷ See D.Geary, ‘Working Class Culture in Britain and Germany 1870-1917: a Comparison’ in K.Laybourn and J.Shepherd (eds.), *Labour and Working Class Lives: Essays to Celebrate the Life and Work of Chris Wrigley*, (Manchester, 2017), Chapter 8, pp. 160-168

elections which would be done by door to door canvassing, a process devised by Labour to overcome its disadvantage in terms of national newspaper coverage.¹¹⁸

The extent of Labour's grassroots organisation is described in the chapter on 'Elections, Leaflets, and Whist Drives' in *Labour's Grassroots* (2005), which looks at party organisation in five very different parts of the country. Comparisons are made with other political parties and it draws on information from local party political archives.¹¹⁹ However, in *Labour in the City* (2006) Declan McHugh in his study of Manchester argues that the British Labour Party was never able to achieve the scale of organisation of the German SPD, because the working class had alternative pastimes, some provided commercially. In cities like Manchester there were already organisations like working men's clubs. So the Labour Party was never able to exercise the same social influence over sections of the working class as did its German counterpart. Its membership therefore was inevitably going to be restricted to a minority of the working class, and often a small group of people.¹²⁰ It is true that towns and cities throughout Britain had their own cultural traditions and pastimes, but what about the new industrial areas? *Labour Organiser* in 1937 carried an article on the potential for recruitment to the Labour Party on new housing estates, which included the following paragraph:

Has it ever struck you that the new housing estates are full of lonely people. That to feel a stranger in a strange land is the lot of lots who inhabit the new estates the newer the more so. After all the people in all these places have mostly torn up their roots from areas where social life has been developed from one, two, three or more generations. In the areas they came from were chapels, halls and social circulars competing for their interest. All this is changed in the new housing estates. Houses are further apart. Halls and centres are few or non-existent.

¹¹⁸ See: H.Morrison, *An Autobiography* (London, 1960), B.W. Donoghue and G.W.Jones, *Herbert Morrison; Portrait of a Politician* (London, 1973), S.Berger, *The British Labour Party and the German Social Democratic Party 1900-1931* (Oxford, 1994), S.Berger 'Herbert Morrison's London Labour Party in the Interwar Years and the SPD,' *European History Review* 2 (12) (2005), pp. 291-306, and his 'Formation of Party Milieux in the British Labour Party and the German SPD in the Interwar Period' in M.Worley (ed.), *Labour's Grassroots, Chapter 12*. See also M.Pugh, 'The Daily Mirror and the Revival of Labour', *Twentieth Century British History*, 9(3) (1998), pp. 420-438.

¹¹⁹ M.Worley (ed.), *Labour's Grassroots*, Chapter 2. See also M.Worley, 'Building the Party: Labour Party Activism in Five British Counties Between the Wars', p.73.

¹²⁰ D.McHugh, *Labour in the City*, p.82.

Anyway in lots of these places there is yearning for understanding, compassion and comradeship. Which of our readers will canvass intelligently and understandingly the nearest estates to your home and lead the lonely ones into the light and enjoyment of a live Party! ¹²¹

The life of the Labour Party in Ealing is referred to by Dan Weinbren in his chapter on 'Sociable Capital,' in *Labour's Grassroots*. It organised dances, whist drives, football, cricket, a choir and amateur dramatics. ¹²² The divisional parties in west London were based on a growing population, many living on new housing estates, having relocated from other parts of London and the UK. It would be expected therefore that the Party would help to provide them not only with an electoral challenge, but also with companionship and a way of life. Fluctuating attendances at meetings, resignations of officers and councillors, for political or personal reasons, at this early stage made local grass-roots organisations vulnerable. High hopes for success were often dashed by disappointing election results. In the newly formed Southall Labour Party in the 1920s, it was requested by one member that the welfare of members be put on the agenda. ¹²³ Some individuals such as Joe Sherman were to give the Party continuity and stability, but others, like council candidate for Northolt, Mr Taylor did not stay for long. ¹²⁴ In Southall volunteers were asked to visit new members to encourage them to get more involved. ¹²⁵

Much of Labour's activity was around elections and included regular public open air meetings. Labour had introduced political campaigning into these west London parliamentary divisions in a very visible way. Open air meetings were held on a regular basis and candidates campaigned on different aspects of Labour Party policy. These were not just held at election times, they were also organised to gain members and political support. Joe Sherman for instance, described how he addressed meetings on Ealing Common for hours every Sunday evening. If it rained, he said then we moved under the trees. ¹²⁶ Greenford

¹²¹ *Labour Organiser*, January 1937.

¹²² D. Weinbren, 'Sociable Capital'. The reference to Ealing is from B. Humphries, *The Roots of Labour in a West London Suburb: Ealing in the 1930s* (1993). Unpublished history of the Ealing Labour Party, available on the Labour Heritage web site www.labourheritage.co.uk

¹²³ Southall Labour Party Records LMA ACC/1267 Minute book 1923-25 LMA ACC/1267/2.

¹²⁴ At the 1937 AGM of Northolt Labour Party Mr Taylor resigned as chairman because he does not agree with dividing the branch into north and south. He was also unsuccessful as a council candidate in 1936. Northolt Labour Party Minutes 1937-1940 LMA 4023/02/03.

¹²⁵ Southall Labour Party Records LMA ACC/1267, Southall Labour Party Minute book 1932-35. LMA/ACC/1267/3, Ealing North Labour Party LMA/4023/02/1, Ealing Labour Party and Trades Council minutes 1930-1935 LMA/ACC/1972/002.

¹²⁶ *Joe Sherman: a Tribute in his Own Words*.

Labour Party held open air meetings at the War Memorial every Sunday.¹²⁷ Meetings were addressed by both local speakers and national labour movement figures.

There was a change in emphasis in Labour's campaigning by the mid-1930s. Socialism was less visionary and more practical in its appeal. One example was its pamphlet *Your Britain* (1935). Illustrated with pictures of houses built by Labour controlled councils, with gardens, healthy mothers and children, it called for work, fair wages, food at fair prices, a decent home at a fair rent, and in recognition of changing aspirations – leisure time and holidays with pay. It was aimed at all types of worker, including those on farms, in offices and housewives. Socialism was just common-sense. Finally it called for public ownership of services like electricity and water. It said: "You pay for them, you should own them!" Over one million copies of this pamphlet were published, which were to be sold in a Socialist Crusade Week in 1936.¹²⁸

The Labour Party also held workplace election meetings, at railway depots such as Old Oak Common in Acton. This tradition of factory gate meetings was still continued into the 1950s and 1960s outside the main factories across west London.¹²⁹

There was a thirst for political education in the early years. Local parties were encouraged to appoint literature secretaries and to set up Propaganda Committees. In Ealing there were meetings on economics, industrial relations, India and China. In Northolt study circles were established, in addition to monthly Party meetings. They were to discuss subjects including economics, and how to get socialism. Greenford Labour Party held fortnightly political meetings on women, malnutrition and Spain, how to organise the unemployed and put socialism into practice. International issues were starting to loom large, alongside the domestic issue of unemployment. Southall Labour Party discussed the Nazi seizure of power and the need to support German Social Democrats in 1933. It called for a boycott of trade with Germany. Perivale branch (Greenford) debated whether domestic servants could be organised into trades unions. In Ealing there were speakers from the English League for the Taxation of Land Values.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Greenford Labour Party Branch minutes 1927-1930 LMA ACC/1927/ 009.

¹²⁸ Labour Party, *Your Britain* (London, 1935). This change in emphasis in Labour Party campaigning is also described in M.Worley, *Inside the Gate* Chapter 4. L.Beers in *Your Britain* says that by the 1930s the Labour Party was making use of photography in its electioneering, with a certain amount of success. p.159.

¹²⁹ Interview with Marianne Elliott for the Labour Oral History Project.

¹³⁰ Ealing Trades Council and Labour Party Minutes 1930-1935 LMA ACC/1972/002, Greenford Labour Party Branch Minutes 1927-1930 LMA ACC/1927/09 , Northolt Labour Party Minutes LMA ACC/4023/02/01-03.

Parties in west London campaigned on local issues. The newly formed Northolt Labour Party for instance called for a local fried fish shop to be opened in the area. In Southall and Hayes, issues of housing, rents and employment by the council were regularly widely discussed.

In 1921 *Labour Organiser* published a directory of Labour newspapers. There were over thirty, nine of which were from London, including the *Woolwich Pioneer* and *Hammersmith Pioneer*. In west London attempts were made to launch local Labour newspapers. In 1927 for instance *Acton News and Views* was launched and in Ealing a paper called the *Citizen* published by the London Co-operative Society in the 1930s with a distribution of 10,000 but it soon faced financial difficulties. The Greenford Party aimed to set up a monthly journal entitled the *Greenford Monthly Review*. It started with 4,000 copies. It also produced its own leaflets, entitled *Commonsense*.¹³¹

Local parties were encouraged to obtain propaganda material published by the Labour Party nationally. In the 1920s and 1930s the Party published dozens of pamphlets. Amongst the most widely purchased were *Your Britain*, published in 1935, and later the 1945 election manifesto, *Let us Face the Future*, of which over one million copies were sold.

Was there any serious dissent in the Party? In Acton in the 1924 General Election the former Labour candidate Mary Richardson stood against the official Labour candidate Oliver Baldwin as a representative of the Acton Democratic Labour Party. During the course of 1924 her supporters were engaged in an increasingly bitter and public row with other members of Acton Labour Party. She was shouted down at a Party meeting, which broke up amidst quarrels and punches. She launched the Acton Democratic Labour Party with fifty one members. Mary Richardson and her supporters claimed that the candidate Oliver Baldwin was imposed by Labour Party head-quarters. He denied this and claimed that he had won a majority of the votes in a selection contest. The election result in October showed that she was attracting some support amongst Labour voters.¹³² There was however little indication of clear political differences (if any), although she blamed the local ILP for ‘burrowing like rabbits against her.’¹³³

¹³¹ Greenford Labour Party Branch Minutes 1927-1930, LMA ACC/1927/09.

¹³² Reports from the *Acton Gazette and Express*, 7 March 1924, 18th April 1924 and 31 October 1924. Mary Richardson is also described in ‘Labour candidates 1922 and 1923 in West London’, *Hayes Peoples History*, Sunday February 22, 2009, (ourhistory-hayes.blogspot.com/). In the 1930s Mary Richardson joined Oswald Mosley’s New Party, See D.Rosenberg, *Rebel Footprints*, p. 260 .

¹³³ Chapter 8 will look at ILP influence in west London. See election table for the 1924 election results.

There was criticism of the 1929-1931 Labour Government both in the Greenford branch and the Uxbridge DLP. In the election of October 1931 the Labour vote was dented in Uxbridge by Reginald Bridgeman, the former Labour candidate who stood as an independent candidate. Bridgeman had not been endorsed by the Labour Party National Committee due to his support for the Communist backed League Against Imperialism.¹³⁴ He had been a popular candidate who had campaigned for wage and pension rises, paid holidays, raising of the school leaving to 15, taxation of land values and withdrawing British troops from overseas. He was admired for his support for local people and willingness to take on any menial task.¹³⁵ However, the Uxbridge DLP would have faced disaffiliation if it continued to support him.¹³⁶ In February 1932 at a smaller than usual divisional conference Mr L.M.Worsnop was adopted as the parliamentary candidate for the Uxbridge Division.¹³⁷ Uxbridge DLP nevertheless adopted a resolution as its verdict on the record of the 1929-1931 Labour government, claiming that gradualism was inadequate in the face of the breakdown of capitalism, and that there was a need for a socialist policy to include government ownership and control of banking, control of foreign trade, rents, socialisation of industries and building links with other socialist parties overseas. This would necessitate the speeding up of parliamentary procedures.¹³⁸ In the 1930s the local Parties as in the rest of the country were focussed on building their memberships, but there were problems caused by the disaffiliation of the ILP, but not to the extent as in other parts of the UK, such as Clydeside. There was some support for Stafford Cripps, the Socialist League and the Popular Front campaign.¹³⁹

Local Labour parties held a wide range of social events. After Oliver Baldwin, Acton parliamentary candidate in 1924, had called for the Labour Party to become ‘the singing party’, the Acton Socialist Choir took its place at many Party meetings, singing *England Arise*. There were many dances, parties for children, and of course whist drives. The organisation of these events took up a lot of the time of committee meetings. The prices for refreshments were debated, the hiring of bands and booking of entertainment such as conjurors. In Ealing the Party managed to sustain a cricket club, a choral society, a socialist

¹³⁴ This was described in J.Green, *Britain's Communists: the Untold Story* (London, 2014, pp. 162-167.

¹³⁵ J.Saville and J.Bellamy (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography* vol. 7 (London, 1984), pp.26-50.

¹³⁶ Other DLPs in London had faced disaffiliation due to refusal to exclude Communists. This meant the complete closure of the DLP and reconstruction by individual invitation. See Chapter 8 for a more detailed account of Reginald Bridgeman.

¹³⁷ The Uxbridge DLP had discussed Bridgeman's candidature at its conference on 18th January 1930 and again on 10th May 1930. The February 1932 Divisional Conference which adopted Worsnop saw a drop in attendance from 1930 down from 85- 36 delegates, Uxbridge DLP , LMA/ACC/1267/1/1.

¹³⁸ Uxbridge DLP Minutes, 20/2/1932, LMA/ACC/1267/1/1.

¹³⁹ There will be more discussion on the role of the ILP and the Communist Party of Great Britain in Chapter 8.

cycling club, weekly dances and an amateur dramatic society. According to Doris Ashby this was before the days of television, when people made their own entertainment. The commercialisation of leisure, which McHugh refers to, had not really taken off in the 1930s at least.¹⁴⁰ Visits to pantomines and circuses for children were very popular, attracting hundreds of children. In Acton in 1931, a fancy dress party attracted 200 children. As part of the progress which was described by one member as ‘astonishing for a reactionary area’, in Ealing the Socialist Sunday School attracted 700 children for naming ceremonies and harvest festivals. Socialist Sunday Schools illustrated the impact of religious belief on the labour movement in Britain, although these Sunday Schools were widely seen as a secular and political alternative to religious Sunday Schools.¹⁴¹ Greenford and Northolt Labour parties organised regular social events which were very well supported.¹⁴²

These social activities continued after 1945, although they reflected changing social habits. Branches of Ealing North Labour Party held coffee evenings and cheese and wine parties to attract new members. In the 1950s the Southall Labour Party set up a Supporters Association. You could join this for the cost of at least one shilling per year. Its membership was difficult to estimate as members paid throughout the year, but is likely that it was never much less than one thousand at any one time. For this price you were entitled to social events, and the opportunity to win prizes in the many lucky draws. By 1958 its turnover was over a thousand pounds per annum. It organised parties and outings for children. An outing to a pantomime in 1959 attracted 350 children, accompanied by 32 adults. Six buses were hired from London Transport.¹⁴³

Social events however were not just to entertain members and their children. Much of the social life of Labour parties in west London was devoted to fund raising. Not all the new parties could attract trades union financial support. Northolt for instance received donations from the Railway Clerks Association, and the NUR branch at West Brompton, but unless there were obvious gains for a trades union, like being able to get your members selected as parliamentary or council candidates, there was not much attraction. Uxbridge DLP was frequently in financial trouble, struggling to finance elections. Whist drives which took place

¹⁴⁰ D.McHugh, *Labour in the City* p.82

¹⁴¹ See also J.Turner, *The Labour Church: Religion and Politics in Britain 1890-1914* (Basingstoke, 2018) and N.Johnson, *The Labour Church: its Movement and its Message* (London, 2017).

¹⁴² Reports from the *Acton Gazette and Express*, *Middlesex County Times* (Ealing edition), Greenford Labour Party Branch minutes LMA/ACC/1972/009/10, and Northolt Branch Minutes, LMA ACC/4023/02/001.

¹⁴³ Southall Labour Party Records, Supporters Association 1954-1963 LMA ACC/1267/18-19A.

weekly were very successful in raising funds for the new Northolt Party, but concerts and dances less so, according to its minutes.¹⁴⁴

In spite of the need to raise funds for elections, Labour Party members also raised funds for causes such as the hunger marchers in 1936, the textile workers in 1932, and for the victims of the Spanish Civil War. Food was collected for Spanish children, and women members took to knitting clothes, and collecting blankets.¹⁴⁵

Local parties were encouraged to build Labour Halls. These involved extensive fund raising efforts, as well as the expertise of members who were building workers. Joe Sherman and Syd Bidwell describe how funding was raised for halls in Ealing and Southall. In Southall in 1920 a fund for Labour hall was launched, in which 262 applications for shares from 17 affiliated organisations raised £500 initially.¹⁴⁶ Acton Labour Party launched its appeal for new premises during World War 2, and collections were held in local factories. Its original premises in Horn Lane had been destroyed. In Ealing the Labour Hall was in Dorset Road, South Ealing, a modest building, later to be renamed the Sherman Hall.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has looked at how Labour Party organisation and membership was built in a new industrial area like west London. The 1918 constitution laid the basis for building this organisation. It moved beyond being a party for the trades union to becoming a party for the working class as a whole, including all 'the workers by hand and by brain'. It introduced an individual membership for the first time. It was a model which contributed to the growth of the labour movement in suburban London. Door to door canvassing, regular meetings and social events drew in an expanding working class population.

However the 1918 constitution could not be applied completely to accommodate a growing local population and membership. Much of the building of the Party was done at a grassroots level. The model of the divisional party allowed for effective electoral organisations to be created whilst still accommodating a role for the local trades unions. In west London railway workers and their families were often the cornerstone of local party organisation. The membership reflected the diverse working class population of the area, including the many migrants from other parts of London and the UK. In an area with few socialist traditions pre

¹⁴⁴ Northolt Labour Party 1932-1936 LMA/ACC/4023/02/001.

¹⁴⁵ Southall Labour Party Records Minute book 1932-1935 LMA/ACC/1267/3.

¹⁴⁶ Southall Labour Party Records Minute book 1923-1925 LMA/ ACC/1267/2.

1918, the labour movement was able to effectively use its national strength to sink roots in what was a new industrial area, with a certain amount of success in the interwar years, laying the basis for the political change which occurred after 1945.

Chapter 4: The Trades Unions and Political Change

Introduction

In Chapter 1 we looked at the economic and social changes which occurred across west London in the first half of the 20th century, and how growing industrialisation was to lead to a growth and change in the population. However, industrialisation did not lead immediately to the growth of a strong trades union movement in the new industries of west London. Branson and Heinemann describe the hostility of employers towards trades unions in the interwar years, when the trades union movement in the UK was in retreat, due to defeats and unemployment. They said that ‘in the newer industries, many employers developed their factories, especially in the Midlands and South of England on a strictly non-union basis’. This included the threat of the sack, use of factory spies, and control over meetings. Trades unionists who leafleted these factories could face police harassment.¹ The decline of the trades unions, across the whole country as well as west London, was not to be reversed until the late 1930s, with rearmament and the growth of the aircraft industry.²

In Chapters 2 and 3 we looked at the electoral and organisational progress of the Labour Party across this part of west London. We considered the role of local trades union branches in supporting Labour, both in terms of finance and activists who ran the local divisional parties, and some who became councillors and parliamentary candidates.

In Chapter 4 we will look at the role of the trades unions themselves. How strong were the trades unions in west London? Which trades unions were important? Was a high trades union membership linked to political change across the area? We will look at the trades councils which were local committees of the trades union movement, and which in the 1920s effectively worked as industrial and political committees of the local labour movement. Affiliations to these trades councils illustrate the numerical strength of the trades union movement, and the diversity of the trades unions involved. We will also look at the role of three of the key trades unions in west London – the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) and the Transport and General Workers’ Union (TGWU).

¹ N.Branson and M.Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties*, p. 121.

² In *Labour Inside the Gate*, Matt Worley described how the growing strength of trades unions in the late 1930s due to rearmament, led to a ‘more homogeneous city labour movement in Birmingham’, p. 55.

We will look at the ebbs and flows in the fortunes of the trades union movement in west London, including the militancy which led to a railway strike in 1919 and the General Strike in 1926. The impact of the recession across the UK and victimisation of trades unionists, led to a decline in membership until the late 1930s. We will consider the growth in the membership of these unions during World War 2 and their contribution to Labour's local election victories in 1945. We will also look at the post-war years, when trades union density remained high but in west London, electoral support for Labour was to decline.³ The membership of the trades unions grew during World War 2, but there were few strikes, as under Order 1305, all industrial disputes had to be resolved by compulsory arbitration.⁴ The number of strikes was not to increase again until the late 1950s with strikes across the engineering and ship building industry in 1957, and with the London busman's strike of 1958.⁵

4.1 The Role of the Trades Councils

Trades Councils co-ordinated trades union membership across the area. Local union branches affiliated to the local Trades Council.⁶ In the early years, these councils were joint organisations with the local Labour Party, having both an industrial and a political section. They had existed in Acton, Ealing, Southall-Norwood, and Uxbridge until the mid-1930s when they were re-formed to become purely industrial organisations. As Trades Councils, they were required to send annual returns on their membership to the General Secretary of the TUC. From these returns, where they exist, we can see the extent of trades union membership across Ealing and Hillingdon in the 1920s.⁷

³ Trades union density across the UK was as follows: 1938 30.5%, 1945 38%, 1948 45%. See A.Campbell, N.Fishman, and J.McIlroy (eds.), *The Post-war Compromise: British Trades Unions and Industrial Politics, 1945-64* (Monmouth, 2007), p. 81. By the 1930's membership of the trades unions had slumped to 3.4 million p.99.

⁴ The Conditions of Employment and National Arbitration Order, known as Order 1305 had been implemented during World War 2. It set out compulsory arbitration as a way of settling industrial disputes.

⁵ For full accounts of the strikes in engineering in 1957 and on the London buses in 1958 see chapters 9 and 10 of Campbell, Fishman and McIlroy, (eds.), *The Post-war Compromise*, and G. Goodman, *The Awkward Warrior: Frank Cousins: His Life and Times* (London, 1979) chapters 12 and 13.

⁶ There are very few books on the history of Trades Councils. Emile Burns wrote a book about the Trades Councils during the 1926 General Strike. See E.Burns, *The General Strike May 1926: Trades Councils in Action* (London, 1975). In 1926 there were 52 trades councils in London (the largest of any region in the country), plus 6 in Middlesex, p 76. There are a number of local histories, for instance: A.Kirkby, *In the Cause of Liberty: Exeter Trades Council 1890-1990* (Exeter, 1990), *Sheffield Trades and Labour Council 1858-1958* (Sheffield, 1958) (LSE Pamphlet) and *London Trades Council 1860-1960: 100 Years of Protest and Progress* (London, 1960) (LSE Pamphlet). These were published by the Trades Councils as centenary editions.

⁷ The Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick holds reports for the Acton (1925-1955), Southall-Norwood (1921-1949), Hayes (1927-1951), Uxbridge and Ruislip and Uxbridge (1952-1960).

In 1928 for instance the Acton Trades Council and Labour Party reported 25 affiliated trades unions, only 12 of whom were fully paid up, with 2,000 affiliated members. By 1934 this had fallen to 10 trades unions with 853 members. In 1936 it was re-launched as a separate trades council. By 1943 it had the affiliation of 22 trades unions, including 12 branches of the AEU, two branches of the TGWU, one branch each of the Amalgamated Union of Woodworkers (ASW), Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the National Union of General and Municipal Workers (NUMGW).⁸

The Southall-Norwood Trades Council and Labour Party was established in 1921. In 1925 it reported the affiliation of 21 trades union branches and 2,192 affiliated members. By 1927 however this had fallen to 15 branches, with 1,455 members, and by 1930 14 branches with 1,250 members, and by 1936 it had ceased to exist, and had to be reconstituted as a purely industrial body. In 1927 its secretary Mr F. Coleman, described Hayes and Southall, as 'purely industrial, teeming with factories'. However, he said, that almost all the unskilled labour was unorganised. 'Female labour which forms quite a large proportion of the unskilled is not catered for. No trades union has made any effort to enrol these workers, and as a result wages and conditions leave much to be desired.' Trades union affiliations indicated that a large percentage of the unionised workforce was on the railways, organised in the NUR and ASLEF. There were however affiliations from the ASW, NUGMW and, in 1929 the National Asylum Workers Union.⁹

Emile Burns in his account of Trades Councils during the 1926 General Strike, reported that Southall Trades Council set up a council of action during the strike, which comprised the Industrial Section of its Executive Committee, plus the secretary and chairman of every trades union branch in the District. It held daily meetings, and showed no sign of weakening at the end of the strike.¹⁰

These reports from Acton and Southall indicate that trades union membership was concentrated in transport, with some employed in the building trade and local councils. The AEU retained the membership of skilled engineers, many of whom had relocated when their employers moved to west London. There were also signs that trades unions were beginning to take root in hospitals, like St Bernards, Hanwell, and amongst shop workers, clerks and

⁸ Acton Trades Council and Labour Party, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick MRC MSS.292/79/A/6.

⁹ Southall-Norwood Trades Council and Labour Party, MRC MSS/292/79S/39.

¹⁰ E. Burns, *The General Strike May 1926*, p. 176.

insurance workers, as the numbers of these workers increased.¹¹ However, unskilled workers in the many factories remained largely unorganised. At EMI, the Gramophone factory, out of 12,000 workers only a small proportion of tool-makers and electricians had been members of a union. This did not begin to change until a 'Stay in Strike' in 1935.¹²

Ealing was not an industrial area, but an Ealing Trades Council and Labour Party had existed from 1918. Hanwell, which had a tram depot, and hospital, had its own Trades Council, but this was amalgamated with Ealing in 1930. Even in Ealing, the Trades Council was to become very powerful during the 1926 General Strike. Joe Sherman was secretary of the Trades Council at the time. He said:

Believe it or not Ealing was dead. Everything stopped...I had a letter from the borough surveyor Hicks, asking whether the strike committee would give permission to deliver two tons of coal to the Ealing Memorial Hospital. It showed how strong we were.¹³

The Hayes Trades Council and Labour Party reported the affiliation of 8 trades union branches with 1,050 members. The main unions were the AEU, NUR and NUGMW. There were also some musical equipment workers.¹⁴ In 1928 the Trades Council reported 11 unions with 792 members, and having undergone several re-organisations reached its nadir with 300 members in 1933. By 1934 this had increased to 10 unions with 680 members.¹⁵

The western and northern parts of what is today the London Borough of Hillingdon did not experience the extent of industrialisation as Hayes, and this was reflected in the membership of the Uxbridge Trades Council and Labour Party. In 1928 it had the affiliation of 4 trades union branches only, although there existed nine others which were reported as eligible for affiliation. These 250 union members belonged to the NUR, the ASW, the National Union of Brassworkers and the Typographical Association. Parts of the Uxbridge district were still largely rural, including the village of Harefield, which nevertheless had some small factories, including the Bells Asbestos Factory, with a branch of the TGWU. By 1929 the Uxbridge Trades Council and Labour Party had 13 affiliated trades unions with 578 members, but by 1936 this had fallen to 6 unions with an affiliated membership of 211.

¹¹ In April 1914 the Hanwell Asylum Workers Union had been addressed by Fred Knee of the London Trades Council (*Southall-Norwood Gazette*, 6 April 1914).

¹² 'HMV 'Stay-in Strike 'August 1935', *Hayes People's History*, 14 June, 2015.

¹³ Joe Sherman, *A Tribute in His Own Words* p.5.

¹⁴ In 1914 there had been a strike by the Organ Builders Society at the Orchestrelle factory in Hayes. This had been a factory which had relocated to Hayes from London and was 80% organised. *Southall-Norwood Gazette*, 6 February 1914.

¹⁵ Hayes Trades Council and Labour Party, MRC MSS/292/79H/25.

In Ruislip it was reported by the Ruislip-Eastcote branch of the Labour Party that no industrial section was possible as there was only one trades union branch in the area. It wanted to affiliate to the Uxbridge Trades Council and Labour Party. This was problematic however as it was already affiliated to the Uxbridge Divisional Labour Party.¹⁶

After the Uxbridge Trades Council had been re-launched as a separate industrial organisation in 1944, increases in trades union membership during World War 2 had improved its fortunes. At its AGM in February 1945 it had the affiliation of 17 trades union branches, with 1,695 members in the AEU, TGWU, Electricians Trades Union (ETU) and Fire Brigades Union (FBU). In 1950 a branches of Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE) from Harefield and Hillingdon hospitals affiliated.¹⁷

Post 1945, trades councils across west London continued to grow in strength and diversity. They were subject to many re-organisations, sometimes for geographical reasons – to match the re-organisation of the London boroughs in 1965. This would lead to the creation, with some resistance, of Ealing and Hillingdon Trades Councils. In the shadow of the Cold War, some trades councils were closed down and reformed with the aim of excluding members of the Communist Party.¹⁸ For instance, in 1952 a new Trades Council for Uxbridge and Ruislip was formed, which was to gain the support of 26 trades unions across the area. Calling for the need for an employment exchange in Ruislip, Mr McCormick said that Ruislip was becoming highly industrialised and thickly populated.¹⁹ The Trades Councils were increasingly receiving affiliations from unions representing white collar workers, those in distributive trades and in the public services, such as the Union of Post Office Workers, (UPOW), the Post Office Engineering Union (POEU) and Union of Shop and Distribution Allied Workers (USDAW). A new Trades Council established in Yiewsley and West Drayton included workers in cinema and the theatre. Ealing Trades Council launched a recruitment drive for shop and cinema workers in 1954. It had the affiliation of over 20 trades branches in the 1950s, with meetings of 30 delegates. It organised support for strikes, such as the London busmen's strike of 1958.²⁰

¹⁶ Uxbridge Trades Council and Labour Party, MRC MSS/292/794/3.

¹⁷ The two delegates with Welsh names were D.J. Evans and S.J. Davies. Like Cyril Grant in Ealing who worked at Perivale maternity hospital their trades union backgrounds in the South Wales coalfields may have helped them to build unions within the health service.

¹⁸ The influence of the Communist Party of Great Britain on trades union politics in west London will be dealt with in Chapter 8.

¹⁹ Uxbridge Trades Council and Labour Party MRC MSS/292/794/3.

²⁰ Ealing Trades Council minutes 1954-1963, LMA ACC/1972/003-004.

As trades union membership grew across west London, the unions represented became more diverse and reflective of the workforce, compared to the early years when members were concentrated in transport and the engineering industry. However, this chapter will look in more detail at three of these unions which were to play the major part in the construction of the labour movement in this area – the NUR, AEU and the TGWU. Alongside the growth of other trades unions they continued to play an important part in all the trades councils across west London.

The trades union movement in west London was built on a diverse and changing workforce. We have also noted that workers did not live near their workplaces, and working-class communities were not mainly built around workplaces. This affected the development of the labour movement in the area. We will see in the cases of the three main unions that their organisation reflected this, and branches were based on geographical area not the workplace. The AEU was successful in building a shop stewards movement, originating during World War 1. In the late 1930s this was to be revived with the Aircraft Shop Stewards National Council and later the Engineering and Allied Trades Shop Stewards Council.²¹ The Southall District of the AEU built a substantial shop stewards movement across its area. However, there was no provision for shop stewards committees to affiliate directly to local Trades Councils.

4.2 *The National Union of Railwaymen (NUR)*

The National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) had been founded in 1913, from an amalgamation of five separate unions, the largest of which was the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. Its membership was 250,000.²² By 1920 this had risen to 500,000. There were four major rail companies, and in west London railway workers were employed by the Great Western Railway (GWR). They were based at depots in Southall and Old Oak Common, Acton as well as Paddington itself. The GWR connected the west of England and Wales with London, with its employees working throughout the area. They were a mobile workforce. We have seen that GWR employees like Joe Sparks had worked in Taunton and Barry before moving to London. Edward Hartley started work in Swindon aged 13. In 1924 he moved to Southall where he became a member of the local NUR branch committee.²³ *The Railway*

²¹ See N.Fishman, *The British Communist Party and the Trades Unions*, p.294 and R.Croucher, *Engineers at War* (London, 1982), pp.112-113.

²² See P.Bagwell, *The Railwaymen: the History of the NUR: Vol.1* (London, 1963), p.309.

²³ *Railway Review*, 4 August 1932.

Review reported branches across west London in Southall, Acton, Ealing, Uxbridge, West Drayton, as well as Hounslow and Brentford. There were two branches in Southall, which met weekly at the local Co-op Hall. There were also two branches in West Ealing, the secretary of one of these was A.J.Chilton who lived in Ealing, the other secretary L.Akehurst lived in Shepherds Bush, Hammersmith. This shows that railway workers did not always live close to their workplace.²⁴

In 1918, before the end of World War 1, there had been a local dispute over pay on the GWR. The local paper reported that munitions workers at Hayes had been stranded by the dispute and had to walk home along the railway tracks after their night shift, ‘singing patriotic songs.’ The strike had been condemned by trades union leader Ben Tillett, as undermining the war effort, but it was defended by the local NUR secretary at Paddington.²⁵

In October 1919 the NUR was involved in a national dispute over pay. Bagwell describes how the government sent in troop units to protect railway stations, bridges and signal boxes and to act as strike breakers. However the strike ended in victory for the NUR after over a week and pay cuts were avoided at the time.²⁶ *The Railway Review* was able to report a ‘roll of honour’ for the 1919 strike in Ealing and Uxbridge where all GWR employees stopped work. A march and rally on Ealing Common of local railwaymen and their supporters attracted 10,000.²⁷ The *Southall and Norwood Gazette* reported that in Hayes and Southall there was complete support for the strike. At Hayes station the manager had no choice but to run the service on his own. The GWR reported that some volunteers were recruited to transport supplies of coal and milk. The first day of the strike was a Saturday, which was a part holiday. On the Monday, members of the public were looking at alternative transport methods to get to work, such as private cars and lorries. There was a military presence but no hostility between strikers and soldiers. At West Drayton a group of soldiers even posed for photographs taken by NUR members. Public meetings in support of the railway workers were held in Uxbridge, West Drayton and Southall. They were addressed by trades union leaders and local Labour councillors. In Southall, NUR general secretary, Jimmy Thomas addressed 1,000 strikers and their supporters, one third of who were women. Women were urged to support the strikers as their families needed the wages.²⁸ Support was forthcoming from the

²⁴ *Railway Review*, 3 January 1919, and 7 February 1919.

²⁵ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 26 September 1918.

²⁶ P.Bagwell, *The Railwaymen*, pp. 375-403

²⁷ *Railway Review*, October 1919.

²⁸ Chapter 6 will consider the role of women in the labour movement in west London.

Southall Brotherhood, (a non-conformist church) whose Reverend Broadbelt let the NUR hire its Kings Hall in Southall for free.²⁹

1919 was the peak in membership for the NUR, and by 1922 it had fallen to 337,000 as recession hit the British economy, seeing falls in production levels in coal and other commodities which were moved by train. This was to hit the funds as well as the membership of the union.³⁰ Much of the welfare work of the union was conducted by the Railway Women's Guild (RWG). Founded by wives and daughters of railway workers in 1900, it had rapidly grown. Much of its work was to raise funds to support the widows and children of those who had been killed at work on the railways.³¹ Some of those killed had been in the west London area, such as Charles Downey, who was knocked down by a train whilst walking along the railway track to a signal box. He had worked for the GWR for 16 years, and was 34 years old with three children under the age of six. The only financial support for his widow and children would have come from the NUR, which organised a benefit for them.³² By 1920 it was reported that 4,857 were being supported by the NUR's Orphan Fund, 12 of whom were in Southall.³³ Branches of the RWG in Southall organised tea parties for the children of orphans, as well as holding fund raising events such as flower days, jumble sales and whist drives.³⁴ The Hayes RWG held weekly meetings, and there were also branches in Uxbridge and Acton.

In 1926 railwaymen were to be called out on strike again in support of the Miners Federation of Great Britain, in their fight against pay cuts and longer working hours. This was the nine day General Strike in May 1926, which attracted the overwhelming support of transport workers. Bagwell reports that workers on the GWR were solidly in support of the strike. Bagwell's statistics show that very few of the normal drivers and signalmen reported for work, and although there were thousands of volunteers, the company was unable to give them the training required.³⁵ According to David Howell in *Respectable Radicals* (1999),

²⁹ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 10 October 1919.

³⁰ P.Bagwell, *The Railwaymen*, p.423.

³¹ Between 1875 and 1899 12,815 railway workers had been killed and 68,575 injured at work. For some grades like shunters and goods guards, over 20 had lost their lives in 1906 alone, a higher death rate than in the mining industry. See P.Bagwell, *The Railwaymen*, p.94.

³² Reports from the *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 26 November and 24 December 1920.

³³ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 10 September 1919.

³⁴ *Railway Review*, 2 April 1926.

³⁵ Ministry of Transport figures for the GWR show that of 6206 train drivers, 79 reported for work on May 5, and 104 on May 12, of 4843 signalmen, 384 reported for work on May 5, 584 on May 12. See P.Bagwell, *The Railwaymen*, pp.473-479.

nationally 94% of signalmen, 98% of shunters and 98% of train drivers were on strike.³⁶ After the strike was called off however, railway workers were to face large scale victimisation. In October 1926 it was reported that 45,000 of them were unemployed and 200,000 were on short time working. The guaranteed working week was not to be restored until April 1927. Increasingly the railways were facing competition from road transport, where the workforce was poorly organised. In west London, branches of the NUR were maintained, but there was evidence that for many, trades union membership lapsed. The NUR judged the GWR to have been the most vindictive of the rail companies after the general strike. Some railway workers had even ended up in gaol.³⁷ In Acton, workers at the GWR were asked by management to sign a 'document' before being re-admitted into employment. This would have treated them as new employees of the company. Six workers signed but after an intervention from the local strike committee, this requirement was dropped.³⁸ Local historian Jonathan Oates described the victimisation of strikers. For example, Mr Creeseey, secretary of the West Ealing branch of the NUR was barred from working for the GWR.³⁹

By 1928 NUR branches in west London began to recover their membership.⁴⁰ The Southall branch announced 'a steady increase in members returning to the fold.' Help was being given to those in arrears of subs.⁴¹ Acton and Ealing branches reported an influx of new or re-joined members and good attendances at meetings. Members were urged to wear the trades union badge at work in order to discourage 'nons' (non-union members), a problem which they hoped would disappear.⁴² The Hayes branch claimed success with its recruitment of 'nons'. It organised fortnightly lectures on subjects such as psychology and economic geography as well as its weekly branch meetings and it had a branch library. In December 1929, it organised an annual dinner for members and wives, and continued to raise funds for the Orphans Fund.⁴³ The *Railway Review* continued to play a part in the education of members and recruitment of new members. It carried an article in August 1929 outlining the benefits of membership including the ten hour day, lifting workers out of poverty, welfare benefits and loans for those thrifty members who wanted to buy their own home.⁴⁴

³⁶ D.Howell, *Respectable Radicals, Studies in the Politics of Railway Trades Unionism* (Aldershot, 1999).

³⁷ NUR AGM Verbatim on the General Strike, 6 July 1926 (LSE Library).

³⁸ Item on the General Strike in Acton MRC 292/252/62/10/3.

³⁹ J.Oates, 'Ealing and the General Strike,' *Labour Heritage Bulletin* (Spring 2006).

⁴⁰ *General Secretary's Report to the NUR AGM 1928* reported 27,000 new applications to join the NUR.

⁴¹ *Railway Review*, 8 August 1928.

⁴² *Railway Review*, 26 October 1928.

⁴³ *Railway Review*, 7 and 14 December 1928, and 20 December 1929.

⁴⁴ *Railway Review*, 16 August 1929.

In May 1930 the NUR organised a ‘NUR propaganda week’, and there were reports of new members in Ealing, Acton and Hayes.⁴⁵ Open meetings were organised for non-members. Good attendances continued to be reported into the 1930s. By 1938 Acton and Ealing branches were reporting ‘splendid meetings’ as lapsed members returned. A mass meeting was held in support of a minimum wage, with representatives from branches in Hayes, Uxbridge, West Ealing, West Drayton and Southall.⁴⁶

Recruitment continued through World War 2 and into the 1940s. The war economy, which included petrol rationing meant that the railways regained their importance for the national economy. The London Underground also became an area for trades union recruitment. Tube lines such as the Piccadilly Line had been expanded in the 1930s, and a thriving branch was built at Rayners’ Lane, in Hillingdon.⁴⁷ Recruitment also went ahead at the Ealing Common Depot on the London Underground.

4.3 The Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU)

The second major trades union in west London was the AEU. This was a craft union of skilled engineering workers. Founded in 1919, it had formerly been known as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE). The years after 1919 had seen the pinnacle of its strength, with campaigns for the eight hour day, based on the position of strength that it had built up in the munitions industry in World War 1. This had involved the building of a substantial shop stewards movement, in munitions factories including those in Park Royal, west London. Its membership nationally rose to 410,988. In October 1919 a strike took place at the Fellow Magnet Company on Park Royal over proposed reduced rates of pay.⁴⁸ There were local strikes to defend the 40 hour week.

In 1922 however the union faced a devastating defeat in an employers’ lockout, and with pay cuts and unemployment in the engineering trade it lost 25% of its membership. By 1933 it was still down to 191,539 members. Its membership was not to recover until the late 1930s, with the growth of the aircraft engineering industry. By 1939 this had risen to 413,094.

⁴⁵ *Railway Review*, 2 May 1930.

⁴⁶ *Railway Review*, 16 September 1938.

⁴⁷ *Railway Review*, 22 October 1943.

⁴⁸ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 24 October 1919. 400 members of the AEU and the Workers Union took strike action over reduced rates of pay. A mass meeting was held at Central Hall, Acton. The company complained of the ‘red element’ which had gained supremacy in his shop. They were Bolsheviks who only wanted to work 2 out of 8 hours. Hours had been set by the government during the War, but a return to normal was now necessary.

During World War 2 its fortunes improved and by 1944 membership had risen to 898,508. The AEU launched a campaign for one million members in 1945.⁴⁹

In west London, Acton and Hayes were the main centres of the engineering industry. The largest factory in Acton was Napiers. During the 1922 lock-out engineers in Acton from Napiers and CAVs (also on Acton Vale) demonstrated on Acton Vale in protest. Many were later to face unemployment.⁵⁰

The main factories in Hayes and Southall included AEC, which made London's buses, and EMI, which made gramophone records. The AEU did not recruit all the workers in these factories, as they were semi-skilled and it was still very much a craft union.⁵¹ Many of the workers at AEC had relocated and retained their union membership. Tommy Steele, who was to become convenor, commuted initially from Bow in East London. Branch organisation was on an area basis. In 1919 the *AEU Journal* reported four branches in west London, two in Acton with a total of 603 members, one in Hayes with 250 members and one in Southall with 325 members. By 1920 there was a total of 1,275 members across the area.⁵² In 1922 a branch of the AEU was reported in Ealing.

The Southall District of the AEU had been set up in 1916, with 393 members in Southall, Brentford and Hayes. It was re-established, after a lapse in 1923.⁵³ Its branches covered swathes of west London, Southall, Hayes, Uxbridge, Brent, Greenford, Hounslow, and Slough, to the west of London. In local factories it built a shop stewards movement, which held meetings every four months.⁵⁴ It recruited at AEC, Fairey Aviation, Crown Cork and EMI. At first it met obstacles to recruitment and recognition from managements, especially in the wake of the 1922 defeat. In 1928 it was reported for instance, that the AEC was only 50% organised. By 1931 however this had risen to 90%.⁵⁵ At Fairey Aviation in Hayes, dinner time meetings were organised and by 1935 100% organisation had been achieved.⁵⁶ As the economy improved in the mid-1930s, the trades unions enjoyed improved recruitment

⁴⁹ See N.Fishman, *The British Communist Party and the Trades Unions 1933-1945*, especially membership figures in appendix 3, p.356. See also W.Podmore, *Reg Birch: Engineer, Trades Unionist, Communist* (London, 2004).

⁵⁰ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 17 March 1922.

⁵¹ R.Croucher, *Engineers at War*, p.61.

⁵² *AEU Journal* reports from May 1919 and January 1921.

⁵³ *AEU Journal* February 1923.

⁵⁴ AEU Southall District Committee minutes, 23 April 1931.

⁵⁵ *AEU Journal*, February 1928.

⁵⁶ Reports from *AEU Journal*, October 1935 and AEU Southall District Committee Minute Book MRC MSS/259/AEU/6/3/SL/1-2.

opportunities in parts of the country like west London, and good progress for the AEU continued to be reported for Hayes and Southall. Hayes and Southall had the highest recruitment figures nationally throughout 1935. In January the quarterly shop stewards meeting had an attendance of 18, with representatives from AEC, Fairy Aviation, EMIs and Crown Cork. A new branch was established in Hayes End with 50 members. In the vote for the new district secretary, members took part from branches in Wembley, Hayes, Harrow, Hayes End, Brentford, Southall and Slough. In 1936 shop stewards organisations were reported at Hoovers, Perivale and at Rockware Glass in Greenford.⁵⁷

In 1937 the Hayes AEU branch called for the union to begin a campaign to organise the aircraft engineering industry. Fairey Aviation in Hayes alone employed 1,500 workers, and the membership of the Southall district of the AEU had risen to 3,000. This increased membership gave the union the industrial muscle to campaign for better wages and conditions, including holidays with pay. By 1938 the Southall District was recruiting at the rate of 1,000 new members per month.⁵⁸

Much growth in the membership of the AEU was due to the expansion of the aircraft engineering industry as the British government began a programme of rearmament. In 1933 52,741 apprentices had been recruited nationally. According to Nina Fishman employment in aircraft engineering in the UK increased tenfold between 1935 and 1939, from 35,000 to over 350,000. By 1944 there were 1,678,000 engineering workers, working for the Ministry of Aircraft Production, one third of all workers across UK manufacturing.⁵⁹

During World War 2, membership of the AEU, including the Southall District rose dramatically. By September 1940 it stood at 6,205 and rising.⁶⁰ In Hayes there were three branches with a total of 1,758 members, and two in Southall with a total of 656.⁶¹ Youth committees were established, and new shop stewards were recruited by the month, some with only a few months membership in the union. By 1942 AEU membership in the district had risen to over 10,000, with members reported at factories such as Alladin (Greenford), Philo Radio, Pyrene and Bell Punch. By April 1943 the Southall District had 12,500 members, organised into 31 branches, with 540 shop stewards. Yet by June this had risen again to

⁵⁷ AEU Southall District Committee minutes, 25 June 1936.

⁵⁸ AEU District Committee minutes, 1936-1938.

⁵⁹ W.Podmore, *Reg Birch*. See also: K.Whitston, 'The Politics of Production in the Engineering Industry', *Labour History Review*, 81 (1), (2016), pp. 1-24.

⁶⁰ From 1938-1943 the membership of trades unions increased by one third to over 8 million. See A.Calder, *The People's War*, p.455.

⁶¹ Southall District Committee Minutes MRC MSS/259/AEU/6/3/SL/1/3-4.

15,000 in 33 branches and 675 stewards, up by 135 from the previous quarter. The number of women shop stewards had increased over the same time from 10 to 37. In all the factories across west London the union campaigned for 100% membership. This favourable recruitment situation was fostered by full employment, and trades union participation in government. Former General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, Ernest Bevin was Minister for Labour in the wartime coalition and had invited the trades unions into government.⁶²

Membership of the Southall District continued to rise after the end of World War 2, with 14,425 members reported in May 1947. In October 1947 the quarterly shop stewards meeting was attended by 112, out of a total of 427 across the district.

Acton's factories were represented by the North London District of the AEU. In Acton trades union membership increased during World War 2, in the factories on Acton Vale and the Park Royal Estate. Reg Birch was president of North London AEU District and was convenor at Landis and Gyr on Park Royal, which employed 700 workers.⁶³ His dismissal as convenor by his employers was to lead to a walk out by 15-20,000 workers and the Ministry had to intervene to get him reinstated. From having a low level of trades union organisation in its factories, the area got the reputation as 'Red Park Royal.'⁶⁴ A second Napier factory had been opened on Park Royal. The unions campaigned for Joint Production Committees (JPCs) to undermine profiteering by companies and to increase productivity. Malcolm Mitchell a youth representative on the local shop stewards committee from the Ultra-Electric Company in Acton, describes how the JPCs worked at a local level. A shop steward at the factory reported the manager to the Ministry of Labour for spinning out work in order to increase its profits. Ultra- Electric management angrily dismissed the shop steward in question, but in the face of protest from the workforce, was ordered to re-instate him by an industrial tribunal.⁶⁵ Union power was used to prevent a repetition of the defeats which occurred in the aftermath of

⁶² G.Goodman,*The Awkward Warrior: Frank Cousins: his Life and Times* (London, 1979), pp. 54-55.

⁶³ See article by J.Mcillroy in K.Gildart and D.Howell (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol.15 (Basingstoke, 2010), p.132.

⁶⁴ W.Podmore, *Reg Birch*. It did however have an earlier tradition of militancy during World War 1 as the centre of the West London Shop Stewards Movement. Some of the older activists had remained to lead the struggle again, both on Park Royal and Napiers on Acton Vale. See N.Fishman, *British Communist Party and the Trades Unions*.

⁶⁵ Interview with Malcolm Mitchell for the Labour Oral History Project.

World War 1. Mass meetings were called in the summer of 1945 and 9,000 workers demonstrated outside Acton Town Hall to protest against redundancies at Napiers.⁶⁶

The failure of the AEU to recruit semi-skilled workers had led to the Workers Union and later the TGWU taking on this role. At Hoovers in Perivale for instance, the machine shop employing skilled engineers was the only part of the factory to be 100% organised in the AEU in the 1930s.⁶⁷ Fishman reports that at Fairey Aviation in Hayes, it was the TGWU not the AEU which recruited 'the girls'.⁶⁸ However, increasing numbers of AEU recruits were women workers, showing that the union had been able to expand into the ranks of the semi-skilled factory workers. In some factories such as Napiers, the AEU was allowed to recruit a semi-skilled workforce, succeeded in breaking down the divisions between craftsmen and the semi-skilled. Shop steward Fred Arter in the grinding shop for instance did not hold a union 'Green Card'.⁶⁹ At AEC, Southall also the AEU attempted to recruit semi-skilled workers.⁷⁰ The Southall District had a better record than others for allowing its branches to recruit semi-skilled workers to their ranks.⁷¹

After 1945 engineering remained a key part of the west London economy up until the 1970s. Strike levels were fairly low for the most part. In 1946 the AEU won the 44 hour week. A wage claim on behalf of the AEU in 1948 went to arbitration.⁷² AEC, which employed 4,000 workers continued to build buses for the world. In 1964 there was a strike over working hours which affected 17,000 engineering workers in the Southall District, as the Engineering Employers Federation took on the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions.⁷³ In 1968 there was a one day strike of 13,000 out of 16,000 AEU members across the District.⁷⁴

In Acton in the 1960s there were a growing number of strikes affecting the AEU, over pay, hours and victimisation at Napiers, CAVs and British Light Steel Pressings.⁷⁵ Bill Taylor, elected to the North London District of the AEU in the 1960s, said that it had 50,000 members, across London, from Chelsea to Plaistow. It had representation in hundreds of

⁶⁶ N.Fishman, *British Communist Party and the Trades Unions*, p. 337.

⁶⁷ Interview with Edith Boyd in M.Glucksmann, *Women Assemble*, p. 140. The TGWU was also responsible for trades union organisation at Pressed Steel in Oxford, and at the Lucas motor factory in Birmingham, where trades union application forms were handed in to the TGWU after the AEU had refused to take them. p.191.

⁶⁸ N.Fishman, *British Communist Party and the Trades Unions*, p.141.

⁶⁹ N.Fishman, p.212. A Green Card was held by the most highly skilled engineers.

⁷⁰ See: R.Croucher, *Engineers at War 1939-1945*, (London, 1982).

⁷¹ See K. Whitston, 'The Politics of Production in the Engineering Industry', *Labour History Review*, 2016, 81(1) (2016), pp. 1-24.

⁷² *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 5 February 1949.

⁷³ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 6 June 1964.

⁷⁴ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 2 May 1968.

⁷⁵ See reports from the *Acton Gazette and West London Post*.

factories. Acton had more branches of the AEU than any other borough in the UK he estimated 10-15 branches. Up to 20 factories would be represented in one branch. He said ‘where there was a wheel there was a branch of the AEU.’ AEU branches often played the role of ‘labour exchanges’, as members could provide information on where there were vacancies in factories which were organised by the union.⁷⁶

The AEU remained one of the main trades unions affiliated to the local Trades Councils. It was also one of the unions to recruit BOAC and BEA workers at Heathrow Airport.

4.4 Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU)

The TGWU had been founded in 1922 from an amalgamation of transport unions including the dockers, National Union of General Workers, and the National Amalgamated Labourers’ Union. It was later joined by unions representing road haulage, such as the National Union of Vehicle Workers.⁷⁷ It gained representation for tram and bus workers in London, who had previously been organised in the Amalgamated Association of Tramways and Vehicle Workers union (AATVW) and the London and Provincial Licensed Vehicle Workers Union (LPU), which had organised bus workers.⁷⁸ When joined by the Workers’ Union in 1929 it had a base for recruitment in engineering and car factories in its Metal, Engineering and Chemical Trade Group.⁷⁹ It was set up initially with 250,000 members. By June 1922 following more amalgamations the *TGWU Record* reported 500,000 members.⁸⁰ By 1951 it had 1,337,000 members, the largest union in the UK. It was never to recruit all transport workers however. Workers on the railways and the London Underground continued to be represented by the rail unions, the NUR, ASLEF and the Railway Clerks Association (RCA). They did not affiliate to the TGWU.

The main arterial road through the London boroughs of Ealing and Hillingdon was (and still is) the Uxbridge Road. Public transport along this route at the beginning of the 20th century was provided by the London United Tramways Company, which ran trams from Hammersmith through to Uxbridge. It employed 1,200 drivers. One of the main tram depots in west London was at Hanwell, but there were also bus and tram depots at Acton, Southall and Uxbridge. Tram workers were organised in the AATVW. In 1909 there had been a strike

⁷⁶ Interview with Bill Taylor, 3 May 2016.

⁷⁷ A. Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin*, vol.1 *Trades Union Leader 1861-1940* (London, 1960), pp.153-156.

⁷⁸ M. Eady, *Hold on Tight: London Transport and the Trades Unions* (London, 2016).

⁷⁹ A. Murray, *The T & G Story: a History of the Transport and General Workers Union* (London, 2008), p 66.

⁸⁰ *TGWU Record*, June 1922.

at the Fulwell garage (Twickenham), when the west London branch of the AATVW had tried to get trades union recognition and a six day working week. This strike had been defeated as tram drivers at Hanwell had not been approached to support the strike, and had been bribed by the company to drive the trams of strikers at Fulwell.⁸¹

Tram workers were paid less than bus workers in London, who were organised in the LPU. The LPU, having succeeded in recruiting London bus workers, tried to take over the AATVW. In 1918 it had 20,000 members in 40 garages across London, 90% of all bus workers.⁸² (On that basis we are looking at 500 members per garage). Changes to bus driving from horse to motor had changed the trades union awareness of London bus workers, according to Herbert Morrison. He said: "From what I learn in my youth I would say that the bulk of horse bus drivers voted Tory". This was because they chatted with the City stockbrokers and clerks whom they were carrying. Motorised buses were to separate them from their passengers.⁸³ By the time of the London tram strike of 1924 there were 23,000 bus workers, and 16,000 tram workers across London, by now organised in the TGWU. Trams were being replaced by buses in London. By 1952 they had been phased out completely.⁸⁴ By 1939, Hanwell originally a tram depot had gone over to trolley buses. In November 1939 the Hanwell Trolley Bus Branch (TGWU 1/636) issued a leaflet explaining to passengers why their members were taking strike action during wartime over their working schedules.⁸⁵

In Acton bus workers in the Acton branch of the LPU had called for an equitable distribution of food during World War 1. Together with the Acton Trades Council and Labour Party, Women Workers' Federation and local branches of the AEU and NUR, it had set up the local Acton Food Vigilance Committee.⁸⁶ In August 1918 tram and bus workers in west London took action to get women 'conductorettes' the same 'war bonus' as was being paid to men in the service. The *Acton Gazette* reported that the strike had involved 200 tram-workers from Hanwell, and 100 each from Acton and Turnham Green (on the borders of Acton). In addition 200 bus workers at Acton were called out on strike. The White Hart pub in Acton was the headquarters of the strike and the union made banners calling for 'Justice for the Workers.' The strike was effective as local munitions workers had to walk to work, but the

⁸¹ A full report of this strike was written by J.Grigg in *Labour Heritage Bulletin* Autumn 2004, and reprinted in M.Eady's *Hold on Tight*, p.35.

⁸² M.Eady, *Hold on Tight*, p.55.

⁸³ H.Morrison, *Autobiography*, p.139

⁸⁴ M.Eady, *Hold on Tight*, pp.55-65.

⁸⁵ Transport and You, Hanwell Trolleybus Branch of the TGWU, MRC MSS/62/5/1/27.

⁸⁶ *Acton Gazette and Express*, January 1918.

local paper claimed that other women workers were not sympathetic to the strike, which was successful.⁸⁷ It spread to NUR members on the London Underground.⁸⁸ Discontent amongst local transport workers was to continue after the end of World War 1. In February 1919, 200 workers at the Acton transport depot took action in support of the eight hour day. The local paper reported that as a result “other hands” had to walk to work, one from Elephant and Castle to get to Napiers.⁸⁹

Bus and tram workers were to take industrial action in 1924 in a dispute which started on the London Tramways and attracted the support of the bus workers employed the London General Omnibus Company. The strike lasted 10 days and was to lead to friction between Ernest Bevin General Secretary of the TGWU, and the first Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald.⁹⁰ Transport workers in west London also solidly supported the General Strike in 1926. Hanwell and Acton tram and bus depots were on strike. The *Acton Gazette* published a General Strike edition, and Acton council set up an emergency committee, backed by the National Citizen’s Union, which provided some private cars and ‘pirate buses’ to transport passengers. Many factories however could not operate as their workers were either on strike or unable to get to work. Their goods could not be moved at all. There were reported instances of accidents in the Uxbridge Road, involving volunteer drivers, some had had their windows smashed.⁹¹ At the end of the strike there was the longest procession ever held on Ealing Common, supported by the NUR, unions representing local busmen and building workers, and the local Labour Party and its Women’s Section. Acton tram workers were not to return to work immediately. In Hanwell tram workers marched back to their depot, addressed at a rally by members of the local Labour Party.⁹²

Although the strike had ended, support for the miners continued. Miners’ leader A.J.Cook had come to speak in Acton twice in the earlier part of 1926. He called for support for the one million miners in Britain. In 1927 the *TGWU Record* reported that Hanwell tram depot was a ‘pretty lively body’, which had raised £150 for miners’ relief and sold over 100 copies of the

⁸⁷ Reports from the *Acton Gazette and Express*, August 1918.

⁸⁸ M.Eady, *Hold on Tight*, p.41

⁸⁹ *Acton Express and Gazette* 7 February 1919.

⁹⁰ TGWU *Record*, April 1924. See also report of the strike in A.Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin*, p. 238.

⁹¹ Attacks on buses driven by scab drivers were reported by Syd Bidwell and Joan Parr in their interviews for the Labour Oral History Project, and by J.Oates in ‘Ealing and the General Strike.’

⁹² *Acton Gazette and Express*, 14 May 1926. See also interviews for the *Labour Oral History Project* with Syd Bidwell and Joan Parr, *Joe Sherman: Tribute in his own Words*, and transcript of J.Oates on the ‘General Strike in Ealing’ in *Labour Heritage Bulletin* (Spring 2006).

British Worker during the General Strike. This, it said showed that ‘Hanwell tram-workers have no room for Baldwin’s government and by their activities they show it.’⁹³

Transport workers were the first to build the labour movement in west London. They had close links to the miners as their unions had been part of a Triple Alliance of transport workers.⁹⁴ Solidarity had been an extension of their trades union activity, but the scale of the government’s attack on the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain after 1919 played its part in the political transformation of these workers, and the communities within which they lived. In 1920 for instance, Southall Labour Party organised a public meeting at which a local councillor and railway worker, James Culley, said that he had already taken part in three railway strikes and was not particularly anxious to take part in another. He would support the miners because if the railwaymen came out for the miners the strike would be shortened and there would be less hardship for local people. The mine owners had made massive profits. Many letters in support of the miners appeared in the local paper, the *Southall and Norwood Gazette*.⁹⁵ The railwaymen did not strike with the miners in 1921, but they made their support for the miners very public. They organised a procession through Southall, which was supported by the ILP, ASLEF, RWG, WCG and Hayes Trades Council and Labour Party. Its banners read ‘Kindly support the miners’ children.’ Collections were taken. There was a church service and tea was served at the Co-op Hall in King Street, Southall. Any food left over was given to distressed families in the town. Over £31 was raised, including gifts from the management of the Maypole Margarine Factory.⁹⁶

By the mid-1930s the TGWU was regaining strength and confidence, and in the 1937 London busmen’s strike for the eight hour day, Hanwell, now a bus garage, was reported as being 100% solid. The local paper reported that during the strike bus workers played football and other games. Two hundred of them met on Ealing Common. Being a bus driver was considered to be relatively well paid, but very stressful. The average age in the industry was 34, and many had left due to ill health. The strike attracted support from the local

⁹³ *TGWU Record*, July 1927. The *British Worker* was published by the TUC during the General Strike. Stanley Baldwin was Conservative Prime Minister.

⁹⁴ See P.S.Bagwell, ‘The Triple Industrial Alliance, 1913-1922’ in A.Briggs and J.Saville (eds.), *Essays in British Labour History 1886-1923* (London, 1971).

⁹⁵ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 1 October 1920.

⁹⁶ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 20 May 1921.

community , including the church, pub landlord and the local cafe in Hanwell, which provided food parcels , as bus drivers demanded the right to ‘live a little longer.’⁹⁷

There was not to be another all- out bus strike until 1958. This was over pay and lasted for seven weeks.⁹⁸ In Ealing it received the full support of the local Trades Council and a supportive march was organised through the borough.⁹⁹ There were to be short unofficial strikes at Hanwell and Southall garages in the 1960s.¹⁰⁰

The first members of the TGWU in west London were employed by London Transport, but the union recruited in some local factories as well.¹⁰¹ Much of this was from a merger with the Workers Union. The Acton TGWU 1/156 branch was founded in 1922, and met monthly with an attendance of 18 and membership of 25. It gained recruits in local factories such as the Walls (Sausage and Ice Cream Factory) in North Acton, in 1930, when it took over from the Workers Union. It reported that most men had joined the union, but there was concern over the low membership amongst women. The membership of the branch was estimated to be over 200. By 1939 it had 584 members, including general workers (325), road transport (96), builders (60) and engineers (83). Geographically it spread out beyond Acton, to Paddington, Shepherds Bush and Hanwell.¹⁰² Engineering workers were recruited in Greenford and Southall. It organised women workers at Fairey Aviation together with the AEU during World War 2.¹⁰³ At Rockware Glass in Greenford, the *TGWU Record* reported 30 shop stewards including women. In 1961 there was a strike by the TGWU branch 1/453 at Napiers, Park Royal over the sacking of shop steward.¹⁰⁴

The TGWU also recruited extensively at Heathrow Airport amongst employees of BOAC and BEA.¹⁰⁵ In 1961 15,000 members were organised at Heathrow, where a pay dispute was

⁹⁷ *West Middlesex Gazette*, July 1937. The London Busmen’s Rank and File Committee published pamphlets entitled *The London Busmen’s Case* (1930), *The Public, the Busmen and the Transport Board* (1935), *The Story of the London Busmen’s Rank and File Movement* (1932) and *London Busmen Demand the Right to Live a Little Longer*. (n.d). For an account of the strike see *Daily Worker online*, 3 March 1937, 19 May 1937, 22 May 1937. B.Humphries, *The Roots of Labour in a West London Suburb*, p.9.

⁹⁸ For more information on this industrial dispute see chapters in Campbell, Fishman and McIlroy (eds.), *The Postwar Compromise* and G.Goodman, *The Awkward Warrior*.

⁹⁹ Ealing Trades Council Minutes 1954-1963 LMA ACC/1972/003-004 and Annual Report for 1958 (TUC Library).

¹⁰⁰ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 30 May 1964, 1 January 1965 and 11 March 1966.

¹⁰¹ By 1942 membership of the Metal, Engineering and Chemical Group accounted for one third of the TGWU membership. See Bullock, *Life and Times of Ernest Bevin*, p.525.

¹⁰² Acton TGWU 1/156 branch minutes, 1922-1931, MRC MSS/126/Z/142, MSS.126/Z/97-103 ,

¹⁰³ TGWU Aircraft Workers 1941-1960 MRC MSS/126/TG/RES/GW/6/2.

¹⁰⁴ *TGWU Record*, May 1961 and April 1963.

¹⁰⁵ *TGWU Record* June 1968. The TGWU negotiated training rights for its members in the Civil Air Transport Industry.

won.¹⁰⁶ Branches of the TGWU in west London continued into the 1950s and 1960s to be the largest number of affiliates to local trades councils, overtaking the NUR and the AEU.¹⁰⁷

4.5 Trades Unions and the Labour Party

Trades unions and trades councils campaigned on political issues, as well as industrial issues. They did this through discussions at their meetings and their journals which were distributed to the membership. Some trades union branches had their own library. Even after trades councils had become purely industrial organisations, they retained their interest in political issues. This included local matters such as house-building, road safety and local flooding, and national policies such as the decontrolling of rents in the 1950s. It also included foreign policy, such as the Spanish Civil War and the rise of European fascism in the 1930s, and the Suez Crisis in the 1950s.¹⁰⁸

All the three main unions in west London were affiliated to the Labour Party. Their members were local party activists and councillors and MPs. The NUR in particular had a strategy of getting its members elected as Labour MPs and councillors. Its general secretary, Jimmy Thomas was elected as Labour MP for Derby in 1918, and by 1929 there were eight NUR sponsored MPs.¹⁰⁹ However they all lost their seats in the October 1931 election, when Jimmy Thomas resigned as general secretary of the NUR, having joined MacDonald in the National Government.¹¹⁰

The NUR had an active presence across this part of west London, with a number of branches. When assessing the political impact of the NUR however, we need to take into account the fact that these comprised only a minority of the workforce. In 1919 and 1926 the industrial muscle of the NUR in west London was overwhelming, but they did not form the majority of the unionised workforce across the area, let alone the thousands of unorganised workers in the growing number of new factories in west London.¹¹¹ We are talking about hundreds, rather than thousands of workers, even with their wives who were organised in the

¹⁰⁶ A.Murray, *The T & G Story: a History of the Transport and General Workers Union* (London, 2008), p.120.

¹⁰⁷ See Annual Reports for Ealing Trades Council 1956-1962 (TUC Library).

¹⁰⁸ See reports of the Ealing Trades Council 1956-1962. In 1956 it called a protest meeting over the Suez Crisis on Ealing Green and called for the Conservative government to resign.

¹⁰⁹ See D.Howell, *Respectable Radicals: Studies in the Politics of Railway Trades Unionism* (Aldershot, 1999). See also G.Crompton 'Lines of Division: Railway Unions and Labour 1900-1939' in M.Worley (ed.), *Foundations of the British Labour Party*.

¹¹⁰ *NUR General Secretary's Report to the AGM 1932*.

¹¹¹ Jonathan Oates said that there were 8,000 transport workers in Ealing in 1926, but that is probably an overestimate. See J.Oates, 'Ealing and the General Strike'. Daily gatherings of up to 10,000 on Ealing Common included transport workers from across west London.

RWG. Although NUR members played an important role in local Labour Party branches, they would not be able to make a decisive electoral impact. Chris Wrigley explains that members of the NUR were to play an important political role, but they could not on their own change the political landscape. In rural areas like Hatfield, Windsor and Chichester railway workers were the foundation of the labour movement, but they were a minority of the workforce, where the majority worked on the land or in the building trade. There were not railway constituencies, as there were mining constituencies. The only possible exception to this was the election of Jimmy Thomas as MP for the railway town of Derby.¹¹² Active branches of the NUR existed in areas like Tunbridge Wells, Kent and in Cornwall but they were minorities with their own culture and politics. In Cornwall for instance, there two GWR housing estates in Truro and Penzance whose residents were Labour voters in a Conservative and Liberal community. They were known locally as ‘little Moscows.’¹¹³ It was estimated that over 50% of Labour parties in rural areas were dependent on members of the NUR.¹¹⁴ In west London however, trades unionism amongst transport workers was later to be accompanied by a growing industrial work force and trades union organisation in the local factories.

In Acton in 1919 the local branch of the NUR, with 300 members attempted to get railwayman, Brother Holmes adopted as the Labour parliamentary candidate. They were not successful, as Robert Dunsmore was selected, and it was not until 1945 that Joe Sparks, an NUR candidate was to become the MP for Acton, having been a councillor throughout the 1930s. Holmes was to be a councillor for Lammas Ward in Ealing also in the 1930s.¹¹⁵ Other early NUR successes across west London included Brother Turrell who won a seat on the Uxbridge UDC in 1919.¹¹⁶ In 1931, of the ten Labour councillors on Hayes UDC, four were NUR members.¹¹⁷ This included the future chairman of the council, Edward Hartley. Hartley had joined the Labour Party in Swindon at the age of 15. At the age of 21 he was on the executive committee of the Uxbridge DLP, became a councillor for East Ward (Hayes), in 1932. At the age of twenty nine, he was the youngest chairman of a UDC in the country.¹¹⁸

¹¹² D.Howell,*Respectable Radicals*, p.401. See also A.Thorpe, ‘J.H.Thomas and the Rise of Labour in Derby’, and A.Beadle, *A Glorious Century*.

¹¹³ C.Wrigley, ‘Labour’s Constituency Activists’. See also V. Kelley, ‘Little Moscow and Moscow Row’, *Labour Heritage Bulletin* (Autumn 2008).

¹¹⁴ C.Griffiths, *Labour in the Countryside: the Politics of Rural Britain 1918-1939* (Oxford, 2007), p 153.

¹¹⁵ *Railway Review*, 25 April 1919 and 7 November 1930.

¹¹⁶ *Railway Review*, 9 May 1919.

¹¹⁷ *Railway Review*, 25 December 1931.

¹¹⁸ *Railway Review*, 4 August 1933.

The *Railway Review* called on its members to support Labour candidates across London throughout the 1930s. Its branches discussed reports from Labour Party conferences. E.Hamblin from the Southall NUR branch was one its delegation to the Labour Party conference in 1928.¹¹⁹ After the defeat of the General Strike, the Conservative Government passed the Trades Disputes Act of 1927, which was aimed at breaking the links between the trades unions and the Labour Party. This led to a fall in the number of trades unionists affiliated to the Labour Party, from 3,352,347 in 1926 to 2,025,139 in 1928. A campaign against the Act was launched to encourage trades unionists to ‘contract in’ to pay the political levy.¹²⁰ In the NUR the General Secretary reported that although the union’s membership was falling, 235,993 out of 301,865, were paying the political levy.¹²¹ Local branches of the NUR discussed Labour’s policies for post-war reconstruction in 1944, and purchased bulk orders of pamphlets written by Arthur Greenwood and Herbert Morrison. The NUR and its predecessor the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants had long been committed to rail nationalisation, which was implemented in 1948.¹²² Local Labour activists such as Joe Sparks and Syd Bidwell wrote regularly for the *Railway Review*. However, when Bidwell was selected as the PPC for Southall in 1965 it was not with NUR support.¹²³

The TGWU did not have the same concentration of members as the NUR, but it did have a basis of support across west London, and links with the Labour Party. Harry Gosling, leader of the Transport Workers Federation and former docker, had been the Parliamentary Candidate for Uxbridge in 1918. The Uxbridge DLP selected L.M. Worsnop, member of the TGWU for its candidate ahead of the 1935 General Election. There was also a smattering of Labour councillors from the transport unions, for example, Ben Smith of the National Union of Vehicle Workers who lived in Acton, was elected to the Hayes UDC from Botwell in 1919.¹²⁴ In 1922, Mr Page vice-chairman of Hayes Labour Party was also secretary of the

¹¹⁹ *NUR General Secretary’s Report to the AGM*, 1928.

¹²⁰ M.Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, p 113.

¹²¹ *NUR General Secretary’s Report to the AGM*, 1928.

¹²² The bitter disputes between railway employers and the unions which had taken place in the early 20th century, shaped the NUR’s policy of rail nationalisation, and its support for the Labour Party. In his pamphlet *Killing no Murder*, Keir Hardie said that troops were used against strikers in 1911, paid for at public expense. Ahead of the 1945 Labour election victory, the *Railway Review* carried an article on trades unions and politics, in which it heralded the role played by the ASRS in the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900. See *Railway Review*, 29 June 1945.

¹²³ *Railway Review*, 25 February 1965. In 1947 the *Railway Review* had carried articles by Joe Sparks on the housing crisis in Acton (28 November) and by Syd Bidwell on nationalisation and workers’ control. (21 November).

¹²⁴ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 14 March 1919. The TGWU reported that its members were council candidates in the neighbouring borough of Hounslow and the PPC for Twickenham, Brother Thomas Jackson Mason. Joint dances were organised by the Hounslow bus and tram branch and the local Labour Party.

local Workers' Union, which was to later amalgamate with the TGWU. The Hanwell Tram branch of the TGWU was described as 'well represented in the local Labour Party', with one local councillor, and member of a Labour Club committee. The club apparently had 300 members locally.¹²⁵ When the Hanwell 1/467 branch organised a concert in aid of an employee who had sustained injury whilst working for Ealing council, it was attended by Harry Gosling.¹²⁶

We have seen that by the late 1930s the AEU was the fastest growing union in the west London area, but that it had an early basis amongst skilled engineering workers who had relocated to work in the new factories of west London. It had supported the local Labour Party, but arguably not to the same extent as the NUR. Its forerunner, the ASE had affiliated to the Labour Party in 1913.¹²⁷ Locally it held a garden party to raise funds for the Southall Labour Club.¹²⁸ William Carpenter, Labour candidate for the Southall UDC in 1922, was a member of the AEU.

Much political organisation in some of the local factories could be attributed to the Communist Party of Great Britain, which ahead of the 1945 general election, was calling for a 'Labour and Progressive majority' to achieve a socialist commonwealth.¹²⁹ The Southall AEU District discussed political issues during World War 2. At a shop stewards' meeting in September 1943 a resolution calling for a second front in the War was passed, and an end to the 'reactionary elements' in the British government. In March 1943 shop stewards listened to a speech by Brother Borridge, in which he said that there was a need to prepare for a general election after the war. He believed that the employers would be weakened by the defeat of fascism and that the growth of a revolutionary movement worldwide would probably mean that they would offer a 'modified Beveridge plan' with major advances in health and education. They also campaigned for the political levy, which had been much lower in the AEU than other unions. It was reported that in the Southall District numbers paying the political levy had doubled from 1942 to 1943, (1657 to 3,656) but this was considered to be far from satisfactory.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ *TGWU Record*, July 1927.

¹²⁶ *TGWU Record*, March 1928.

¹²⁷ This was carried by 20,586 votes to 12,740. See D.Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*.

¹²⁸ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 23 July 1920.

¹²⁹ *AEU Journal*, February 1945. The extent of support for the CPGB in west London factories will be explored in Chapter 8.

¹³⁰ The percentage paying the political levy in the Miners Federation of Great Britain was 80%. In 1946 in the AEU it was less than 30%, compared to 60% in the NUR, and 50% in the TGWU. Out of 94 trades union

Did this unprecedented increase in trades union membership across west London have an impact on the changing political landscape in 1945? We have seen how factories previously with a low level of industrial organisation in the 1930s became strongholds for the trades unions. George Pargiter, convenor at AEC and future Labour MP for Spelthorne in 1945, and later for Southall in 1950, believed this to be the case when he said: “Engineers in Southall could win the seat for Labour.”¹³¹

Ahead of the 1945 election campaign, the union held political meetings both outside factory gates and inside its factories, putting its full weight behind Labour’s electoral campaign. The June 1945 issue of the *AEU Journal* had the headline ‘All Out to Defeat the Tory Menace.’ The Southall AEU held six public meetings and 40 factory gate meetings over the summer of 1945. Two local Labour candidates were members of the AEU – Walter Ayles for the newly created Southall parliamentary division, and George Pargiter for the neighbouring division of Spelthorne. Both were elected, and when parliamentary divisions were re-organised in 1950, Ayles was elected for Hayes and Harlington, and Pargiter for Southall. Pargiter had been convenor at AEC and on the General Strike local committee in Southall in 1926.

During the summer of 1945 the Southall District of the AEU invited Labour PPCs and councillors to trades union meetings, and purchased in bulk the Party’s policy pamphlets. At a political conference in June, 70 attended and were told that the coming general election was the ‘best chance in ten years.’ Brother Athorn, the district secretary believed that the campaign would be won or lost in the local factories it would be a dirty campaign with lies from the press which would have to be countered. In response to Churchill’s ‘Gestapo jibe’, he said that engineers knew better, they had been the victims of blacklisting by their employers for years. The District resolved to set up election campaign committees in factories, to canvass every section, and to hold regular collections. On election day itself union members would be called upon to stop work at noon and to go out electioneering. Teams from local factories were to report to the local Labour Party election agent. Within the factories regular canteen meetings were to be held. In addition factory gate meetings would be held. This was all necessary to ‘keep out the old Tory gang.’¹³²

sponsored MPs in 1946 – the break down was NUM-34, TGWU-17, NUR-12 and AEU-4. These figures are from Campbell, McIlroy and Fishman, *The Post-War Compromise*, pp.119-123.

¹³¹ Conference Report June 1945, Southall AEU District Committee Minutes MRC MSS259/AEU/6/3/SL/1/8.

¹³² MRC Southall AEU District Committee minutes MRC MSS/259/AEU/6/3/SL/1/8.

Factories like Napiers in Acton had also become centres of political activity with a thriving shop stewards movement. Its workers had established a Left Book Club and been involved in raising funds for republican victims of the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s. Many of its shop stewards were members of the Communist Party, which had supported the wartime electoral truce. Earlier in 1943 the local Labour Party had called a conference on housing, chaired by Councillor Joe Sparks, who ran the Acton Public Health Committee. In January 1945 he supported a local labour movement conference condemning the coalition government's policy in Greece. The use of force by British troops was condemned and support given to the Greek resistance movement. This conference had the backing of local trades unions. As the war drew to an end, workers at Napiers fearing 2,000 redundancies, support a conference to work for full employment in Acton, supported by Acton Labour Party and local trades unions.¹³³

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the relative strength and growth of three of the main trades unions in west London and their support for Labour Party politics. These three were not the only trades unions which organised in the area. The Post Office Workers Union for instance held a rally in Uxbridge in 1920, and there were local branches of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers in Southall.¹³⁴ In *Labour Inside the Gate* (2008) Matthew Worley outlines the importance of the growth of trades unions in the service sector, like the National Union of Distributive and Allied Trades (NUDAW) in comparison with the decline of the MFGB in the 1930s. Trades unionism was becoming more widespread amongst growing sections of the working population, many of whom were located in London and the south east of England.¹³⁵

As the growing working class population was to change the political landscape in west London, what role did the trades unions play? In 1918 there were established working class communities based on the transport industry. These were however a minority of the workforce. Transport workers were almost 100% unionised and this was not set to change, apart from the setbacks incurred from the 1926 defeat. Railway workers formed the backbone of support as activists in the local Labour Party, but there were not enough of them to deliver

¹³³ See N.Fishman, *British Communist Party and the Trades Unions*, pp.212-225, and reports from the *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 16 September 1943, 26 January 1945, 20 April 1945, and 25 May 1945.

¹³⁴ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 24 September 1920 and 8 October 1921.

¹³⁵ M.Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, p. 183. NUDAW affiliated to the Labour Party with 93,712 members in 1927, 150,000 in 1938. The Trades Disputes Act was not repealed until after 1945.

the electoral support that it received for parliamentary and council candidates. The narrative of a unionised workforce, such as mineworkers, delivering electoral support for Labour did not apply in this part of west London. By the 1929 election, over half the voters were women, a poorly organised section of the workforce, if they were in employment at all. The NUR had worked to overcome this, in establishing the RWG with the support of wives and daughters of railway workers. It is also noteworthy that although electoral support for Labour had grown across west London in the 1920s, it was against a background of industrial defeat and declining trades union membership at a national level.

Labour narrowly won Acton in 1929, and did significantly well in the Uxbridge division but much of this was lost in the October 1931 General Election, when votes for Labour held up amongst organised workers, in mining constituencies, but not in new industrial areas such as west London, although it maintained control of local UDCs, such as Southall and Hayes throughout most of the 1930s. Ernest Bevin had appealed to his members in the TGWU to turn out and vote Labour in October 1931 but there were not enough members of his union, in this area to make a difference.¹³⁶ West London was a new industrial area and most of its factories were not yet strongholds of the trades union movement. Nina Fishman explains Labour's electoral failure in the 1930s on the growth of the working class population in areas where trades union membership was low. She wrote:

The shift in the centre of Britain's industrial gravity during the interwar years from the North of England, Scotland, and South Wales towards the newer industries of the Midlands and the South East posed a major problem for class rassemblement and for the mobilisation of support for the party, it was the party of old and decaying places rather than the new and dynamic ones.¹³⁷

It would follow from this that Labour's landslide victory in 1945 was based, at least partly, on growing trades union strength, up from 30.5% of the workforce in 1938 to 38% in 1945, and 45% in 1948.¹³⁸ This is a view also expressed by Minkin who describes the 1945 election result as 'an experience of growing industrial strength and mass radical support.'¹³⁹ Croucher also describes the importance of an industrial machine in the factories of the West Midlands

¹³⁶ *TGWU Record*, October 1931. A large number of the 52 Labour MPs elected in October 1931 were sponsored by the MFGB.

¹³⁷ N.Fishman, *The Post War Consensus* p. 99.

¹³⁸ N.Fishman, *The Post War Consensus* p. 81.

¹³⁹ L.Minkin, *The Contentious Alliance: Trades Unions and the Labour Party* (Edinburgh, 1991). Trades union membership rose from 4,460,167 in 1938 to 6,642,367 in 1944, pp. 54-63.

in 1945 in laying the basis for the defeat of the local Conservative and Unionist electoral machine. He argues that this industrial strength was at least as significant in determining the 1945 election result as the often cited 'forces vote'.¹⁴⁰

In west London we have seen that the most spectacular increase in trades union membership was achieved by the AEU in later 1930s and 1940s. This was followed in many areas by the TGWU. The AEU changed from a union of skilled engineering workers, several hundred in the Southall District when it was founded in 1916, to over 16,000 in the 1940s.

Trades union membership was to remain high in the post-war years, with full employment and gains in real wages. This included west London where most of the main factories were 100% organised. This did not however go hand in hand with increased electoral support for the Labour Party, as we have seen in Chapter 3 that parliamentary seats in west London such as Ealing North and Acton were lost to the Conservatives in the 1950s. On the other hand, trades union opposition to the Conservative policy of decontrolling rents in 1957, with a campaign launched by the Trades Council, led to the election in 1958 of a Labour council in the old borough of Ealing. Parliamentary seats were regained in 1964 and 1966, after growing trades union membership and strike action. The TGWU for instance gained 62,047 members in 1959.¹⁴¹

In the 1968 local elections however there were very heavy electoral losses for Labour across the country, including in Ealing and Hillingdon. Conflict between the trades unions and a Labour government, had been experienced as early as 1924 when London tram and bus workers took strike action and the Government declared a state of emergency.¹⁴² In the 1960s the government of Harold Wilson became unpopular with the unions on the issue of *In Place of Strife*, seen as an attack on trades union rights, and more widely on a deeply unpopular wages freeze.¹⁴³ Did trades unions change the political landscape in west London? They did play a significant role, but they were not the sole factor in determining the politics of what was to remain a contested area. In the interwar years Labour's success on local councils for instance, was supported by working people who for various reasons were not members of trades unions. Trades union density had remained high in west London factories, due to full employment and gains made by the unions post 1945. This continued to be reflected in the

¹⁴⁰ R.Croucher, *Engineers at War*, pp 346-352.

¹⁴¹ G.Goodman, *The Awkward Warrior* p.287.

¹⁴² See A. Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin*, vol.1 p. 238.

¹⁴³ Interview with Mike Elliott, November 2015.

strong links between the trades unions in local factories and the local Labour Party organisation. At election times local Labour MPs could speak at factory gate meetings, as for instance William Molloy at Hoovers on the Western Avenue in Perivale.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ In an interview with Marianne Elliott for the Labour Oral History Project, she recalls visiting local factories with the MP for Ealing North.

Chapter 5: Immigrants and Ethnic Identity in the Formation of the West London Labour Movement.

Introduction

The majority of the population of west London were migrants, attracted by the promise of employment to move to the area throughout the 20th century. Many of those who built the labour movement had moved from other parts of London. But others came from further afield, from Britain's 'distressed areas' in the 1930s, as we have seen in Chapter 1. This chapter will look at three different ethnic groups who were to move into this part of London during the 20th century and to see how they played a role, collectively, or as individuals, in the growth and support for the trades unions and the Labour Party. Were they instrumental in changing the political landscape, and how far did they fit in with existing political organisations? Did they simply merge with the existing working class movement or did they play a role as distinctive ethnic groups? When they faced hostility from the local working class, was this perpetuated by the actions of political organisations?

This thesis covers the period 1918 to 1970 and during this time three migrant groups played a significant part in the development of the labour movement in west London were the Welsh, Irish and Indians from the Punjab. Migration into the area took place at different times. Welsh migrants from the mining valleys of South Wales came in the 1930s. The Irish, mainly from the Republic of Ireland came in the 1940s. Asians, who were Sikhs and Hindus from the Indian Punjab arrived in the 1950s and 1960s.¹ They will be referred to in this chapter as Welsh, Irish and Asian. Terms such as Indians, Asians or even blacks have been used to describe the population of Southall. The majority of the population of Southall originated from the Indian Punjab. The IWA (Southall) was open to those born in the India or whose parents were born there.² In his book however the term Asians is used generically to cover all those born in the Indian sub-continent, or elsewhere, a political statement to emphasize unity between all Asians and black British.³ In *Southall: Birth of a Black Community* comparisons are drawn between all Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME)

¹ They will be referred to as the Asian Community in this chapter.

² B. Purewal, *Indian Workers' Association (Southall): 60 Years of Struggles and Achievements 1956-2016* (Southall, 2018), p.118.

³ B. Purewal, *Indian Workers' Association (Southall)*, pp.145-146.

communities in Britain, including East African Asians (Kenya and Uganda), Pakistanis, West Indians, as well as Sikhs and Hindus from the Punjab.⁴

Sections of the chapter on the Welsh and Irish are much shorter than the section on the Asians, reflecting the fact that these communities were more longstanding, less distinct and there is less written evidence about them. Some of these gaps have been expanded with the help of oral history interviews. The section on the Asian community in Southall, will be a more detailed study of how an ethnic group can change the political landscape, in conjunction with the existing organisations of the labour movement.

5.1 Welsh Migrants in the Interwar Years

Welsh migrants were to play a significant part in the building of the west London labour movement. There is much anecdotal evidence for this from some of those who took part in the Labour Oral History Project. Both Syd Bidwell and Doris Ashby recall the large numbers of Welsh people moving into Southall and Perivale to find work at factories such as Woolf's and Hoovers.⁵ Tom Allsop, for instance, a Labour councillor in Ealing had moved to London from South Wales in the 1930s. Tom's father was a coal miner who took part in the coal strike in 1926. His uncle was a local mayor and along with other relatives he helped to run soup kitchens during the strike.⁶ Tom Parker from Wales was the first Labour mayor for Uxbridge, 1960-1961, having been leader of the Uxbridge Labour Group 1949-1964.⁷ The *Hayes Peoples History* blog contains stories about Welsh migrants to Hayes and Southall. Mrs Barbara Chard, for instance came to Southall in 1898 with her husband Albert, who was a railway guard. She helped to form local branches of Women's Co-Operative Guild and the Railway Women's Guild. She assisted local munitions workers find accommodation during World War 1, and became a Labour councillor in 1919, and chairman of the Southall Urban District Council in 1926. The Chards came from Cardigan. Working for the Great Western Railway (GWR) brought them to Southall.⁸ The extent of the Welsh community was evident from their surnames throughout the years. For instance in the 1960s, Eric (Ginger) Evans was a leading member of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) at EMI, Hayes.

⁴*Southall: the Birth of a Black Community*, published by the Institute of Race Relations and Southall Rights, (Southall, 1981). p.5.

⁵ Interviews with Doris Ashby and Syd Bidwell for the Labour Oral History Project.

⁶ Interview with Tom Allsop for the Labour Oral History Project.

⁷ 'Tom Parker :National Union of the Blind Trade General Secretary', *Hayes Peoples History*, February 12 2007. Tom was born in the Rhondda Valley. He had been blinded since the age of 16 and had been a basket maker by trade. He led the Uxbridge marchers on the CND Aldermaston march in the 1950s.

⁸ 'Mrs B.A.Chard', *Hayes Peoples History*, 4 December 2012.

He was also a Labour Party activist.⁹ Dai Cousins, who came from the Rhondda Valley in the interwar years was to become the first Labour Mayor of Ealing in 1965.¹⁰ In October 1965 the *Middlesex County Times* reported on another Mr Evans who had been a Rhondda miner who had come to Southall. A trades unionist since he left school at 14, he became a delegate to Southall Labour Party Industrial Section. He was a delegate to the Southall Trades Council from the Building Operatives Union and worked as a plumber at St Bernard's Hospital. He was elected as President of Southall Trades Council when it played a key role in the establishment of the Southall International Friendship Council in the 1960s, which was to build support for community relations in the town.¹¹

The largest number of Welsh migrants came to west London in the 1920s and 1930s to escape unemployment in South Wales mining communities such as the Rhondda Valley. 430,000 Welsh people moved to London between 1921 and 1941.¹² Between 1921 and 1951 the population of the Rhondda Valley fell by 36.1%. These were overwhelmingly the young generation. An estimated one third of those aged 15-29 left the area between 1921 and 1931.¹³

In Chapter 1 we looked at the extent of this migration and the role of the government's Industrial Transference Scheme. The railway link between west London and South Wales has been suggested as the reason for the numbers of Welsh people who moved to Hayes and Southall.¹⁴ However, very few Welsh migrants were railway workers. Mainly their employment had been in the coal mines and they were to find semi-skilled employment in the new factories and in the building trade. Women found work as secretaries, in domestic service or hairdressing.¹⁵ They were not always welcomed by the local population. Syd Bidwell recalls 'Welsh go home' being painted on a railway bridge in Southall, at the same point where 'blacks go home' was to be painted 30 years on!¹⁶ Hugh Lowe even recalled

⁹ 'Eric (Ginger) Evans,' *Hayes Peoples History*, 18 June, 2011. A report in the *Hayes Gazette*, 7 May 1959 describes how he had disagreements with the Labour Party on its local rents policy and German re-armament.

¹⁰ A biography of Dai Cousins in *Labour Organiser* in July 1966 shows that he did indeed keep his socialist politics which he had held since the age of 8! He had worked in the mines since the age of 14 and held a position in the local miners' lodge. After 9 years of unemployment he moved to Greenford where he worked in a local hospital.

¹¹ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 22 October 1965.

¹² E. Jones, *The Welsh in London 1500-2000*, (Cardiff, 2001). In 1991 the boroughs of Ealing and Hillingdon contained 1 in 10 of London's Welsh born immigrants.

¹³ C. Williams, *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society 1885-1951* (Cardiff, 1996), p.26.

¹⁴ 'For many from South Wales Hayes and Southall were the first stops on the line, offering jobs to all in their native South Wales.' See 'Yiewsley and West Drayton Welsh Choir,' *Hayes Peoples History*, 8 February 2007.

¹⁵ South Wales and Monmouthshire Council of Social Service, Committee on Transference. Preliminary Report on Social Provision at the Reception End for workers transferred from South Wales LMA ACC/2720/01/07/01.

¹⁶ Interview with Syd Bidwell for the Labour Oral History Project

‘riots against the Welsh’, which he witnessed whilst attending night school in Southall in 1938.¹⁷

As late as 1968 in a heated debate in the local paper over Asian immigration into Southall, a letter was sent in reply to the Ealing Community Relations Officer, Martyn Grubb.¹⁸ It had been written by a resident who had lived in Southall for 33 years. He said that Southall had been an interesting place to live before the Irish, Welsh and even people from the North arrived. He added: They wanted what we had – fine schools, libraries, parks – a fine town was murdered. A population explosion from 1928 to 1938 caused overcrowding and Southall lost its character.¹⁹

In *Women Assemble* (1990), Glucksmann states that:

The same epithets and criticisms already used against Irish migrants to Britain in the nineteenth century, and later to be endured by Asian and Caribbean settlers from the 1950s, were also applied to those from the ‘distressed areas’ in the 1930s, and particularly those from Wales. They were described as dirty, breeding like rabbits, overcrowded, taking people’s jobs and houses, undercutting pay rates and so on. During the interwar years the ethnic and geographical differences were all contained within Britain, with the South East and Midlands as the metropolis, and the North and Celtic fringe as the periphery. In the post-war period, similar factors encouraged migrants from the British colonies, impoverished as a result of imperialism to leave their own countries in search of work, and they too entered the bottom rung of a segmented labour market.²⁰

There were fears that the Welsh would undercut local wages in factories which had been resistant to trades union organisation and on building sites, where there was little regulation of pay and conditions. Suzanne Burge described how her Welsh father had been unable to find permanent work in his home town and at the age of 20 ‘he took a football special’ train ticket to London. At building sites he would sometimes be met with ‘no bloody taffs here’, or

¹⁷ Martin Eady interview with Hugh Lowe, *Labour Heritage Bulletin* (Spring 2013).

¹⁸ Martyn Grubb had been a shop steward at AEC Southall and worker priest. Together with Jaqueline Macdonald of Southall Trades Council he had founded the Southall International Friendship Council, with the help of Fenner Brockway MP. They had challenged racial prejudice amongst trades unionists at AEC, including the convenor and Labour councillor Tommy Steele. They also challenged the ‘colour bar’ at the Southall Labour Club, and its policy of refusing women members. See interviews with Richard Hawkins in *Labour Heritage Bulletins* (Spring 2013 and Spring 2015). Martyn’s wife Anne Grubb also regularly wrote to the local paper saying that there should be no ‘colour bars,’ and that ‘all men were equal and the object of God’s love.’ See *Middlesex County Times*, (Southall edition), 16 May, 1964.

¹⁹ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 8 March 1968.

²⁰ M.Glucksmann, *Women Assemble: Women Workers*, pp. 301-302.

worse, as soon as he opened his mouth. Only if there was a Welsh foreman was he in with a chance.²¹

The National Council of Social Service (NCSS) published a report on the migration of Welsh workers into London and the south-east of England in the 1930s. It reported that in West Middlesex, the Welsh population was dispersed, and the only communities which existed seemed to be around places of employment. New housing estates had scattered the Welsh community and this was one of the most depressing parts of the country for them.²² As in Dagenham, council housing was prioritised for local or London workers. An article from the *Listener* described how Welsh people from mining valleys suffered from loss of community when they moved to London. One of the problems was that work was often not local, and there was a lack of neighbourliness. The NCSS tried to assist in the formation of Welsh choirs and dramatic societies but to get to these meant travelling across London.²³ People had less leisure time and were fatigued by the journey to work.

Suzanne Burge described how her father moved all over London to find employment and lodgings. He met up with other Welsh people on a Sunday night at Hyde Park Corner, where they would hear speeches and sing. He heard news from his home town, and exchanged information with other Welsh people on finding work and cheap lodgings.²⁴

However there is evidence from the NCSS report that as well as joining Welsh societies, Welsh people had much in common with the indigenous population and joined diverse organisations such as sports clubs, the British Legion, YMCA, and the Labour League of Youth.²⁵ James Cronin said that although migrants from South Wales and other depressed areas felt a loss of community when they moved, they appeared to have fitted in without difficulty into the working-class neighbourhoods of London, Coventry and Birmingham.²⁶ He assessed the contribution of Welsh workers to the organisation of factories in other parts of the UK. Car factories in Oxford, Coventry and Dagenham in East London were dependent upon Welsh workers, and in 1929 a dispute in Fords Dagenham, including an occupation was led by a Welshman called Boven. Fords at Dagenham was not organised until 1943. It was at Pressed Steel in Oxford where Welsh workers made most impact and achieved trades union

²¹ Barbara Humphries Interview with Suzanne Burge, 23 October, 2015.

²² [Report] LMA ACC/2720/01/07/01.

²³ Article from the *Listener*, 20 April 1938 [Report] LMA ACC/2720/01/07/01.

²⁴ Interview with Suzanne Burge.

²⁵ [Report] LMA ACC/2720/01/07/01.

²⁶ J.Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain, 1918-1979*, p. 82.

recognition.²⁷ Cronin suggests that this was because at the Oxford factories a larger proportion of the workforce was recruited from South Wales, which had strong links with a Welsh community in the town, with Welsh choirs, sports clubs and a working man's club. In Coventry in contrast most of the workforce in the car factories had been recruited locally.²⁸ Oxford had a small number of factories, mainly motor manufacturing, in contrast to west London, with its hundreds of factories. Hence it was likely that Welsh workers although playing a role in the unionisation of factories such as EMI in Hayes, would not have the same impact, as a community, as in Oxford. Dan Weinbren however, stressed that many Welsh people who worked at EMI did live on a local housing estate.²⁹

In west London they also did not face the same hostility as Welsh workers in the smaller town of Slough, to the west of London, where by the 1930s out of a population of 50,000, 11,000 were from South Wales. This was because they were dispersed throughout a larger area.³⁰

Welsh migrants to London played a role in non-conformist religious movements, like the Wesleyan Brotherhods and Sisterhoods in Southall and Hayes. The Yiewsley and West Drayton Choir was established by Mr S.Catley and made its first appearance at the Central Hall, Yiewsley in 1936.³¹

How significant was the contribution to the labour movement in new industrial areas from those who had migrated from the 'distressed areas'? Many, like those from South Wales, came from parts of the country which had become Labour heartlands.³² They were the young generation. Did leaving their roots affect their outlook? On the one hand they were taken away from areas where trades unions were strong and they were to be working in factories where the management was hostile to the unions. On the other they would have been less affected by older working-class alliances to the Liberals and Conservatives, imparted by institutions such as churches and clubs. Liberalism for instance had been very influential within the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF), which had not affiliated to the Labour Party until 1909. This had been based on the religious non-conformism of the Welsh

²⁷ See D.Edwards, *How Trades Unionism Came to Pressed Steel*.

²⁸ J.Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain, 1918-1979*, p. 105.

²⁹ D.Weinbren, 'Building Communities, Constructing Identities', p. 43.

³⁰ [Report] LMA ACC/2720/01/07/01.

³¹ See 'Yiewsley and West Drayton Welsh Choir,' *Hayes Peoples History*, 8 February 2007.

³² The history of the Labour Party in Wales is well documented in D.Tanner, C.Williams, and D.Hopkin (eds), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2000).

chapels.³³ However by 1922 the Rhondda Valley had become a ‘Labour heartland’, with the Party running all the Urban District Councils as well as parliamentary representatives.³⁴ The main challenge to Labour was to come in 1945, when Harry Pollitt of the Communist Party of Great Britain won 45.5% of the vote. The Labour candidate, W.H. Mainwaring won with 48.4%.³⁵

Many of the young employed from Wales who came to London had never been miners and they had never been members of a trades union. They had left South Wales after the defeat of the 1926 General Strike after which the membership of the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain fell dramatically. It would be wrong to assume however that their upbringing had not affected their political views. Moving to a new area would not automatically change the way they thought, especially as in their new location they faced an uphill struggle to get a job and a home. So Welsh immigrants undoubtedly played a role in establishing labour organisations in the areas into which they moved. But this does not mean that they organised as an ethnic group. The organisations and traditions which they represented were present in the rest of the UK.³⁶ However the structure of the labour movement in west London was to be different from that of South Wales, where labour politics was based on the SWMF. In west London the Welsh faced a situation where the unions were weak and where there was a diverse workforce.³⁷

As an industrial town, Southall had received waves of immigrants. However it would be wrong to say that they changed the political landscape. Although they were migrants from a Labour heartland, Southall was already a Labour town in the 1930s.³⁸ As individuals the Welsh played a role both in the Labour Party and in the trades unions. The same was true of Hayes. In 1959 the *Hayes Gazette* described Hayes as a district where in ten years, from 1930 the population increased by 37,000 as unemployed immigrants poured into Hayes from

³³ D.Tanner, C.Williams, and D.Hopkin, (eds.) *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, p.45.

³⁴ C.Williams, *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society 1885-1951* (Cardiff, 1996), p.3.

³⁵ C.Williams, *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society 1885-1951*, p.161.

³⁶ For the role of Welsh workers in the Oxford car factories see articles from *Llafur* – P.John, ‘The Oxford Welsh in the 1930s’, *Llafur*,(5,) 4, (1991), D.Lyddon, ‘Trades Union Traditions: the Oxford Welsh and 1934 Pressed Steel Strike’, *Llafur* (6), 2 (1993), also J.Zeitlin, ‘Emergence of Shop Stewards and Job Control in the British Car Industry’, *History Workshop journal*, 1980, and the pamphlet by D.Edwards, *How Trades Unionism came to Pressed Steel*.

³⁷ D.Tanner, C.Williams and D.Hopkin (eds.)*The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, pp.113-139.

³⁸ This was stated by Syd Bidwell when he said that Southall was a ‘working class fraternity’ in the 1920s. Interview with Syd Bidwell for the Labour Oral History Project. See also reports from the *Southall and Norwood Gazette* on Labour local election successes in Southall in 1914. (6 April 1914).

‘distressed areas’ – thus its Labour preponderance.³⁹ But Labour politicians had run Hayes council before 1914. The migrants were moving into a working class area which already had its own political traditions.⁴⁰

In 1945 the newly created parliamentary division of Southall and Hayes elected a Labour MP, a member of a majority Labour government. How did this help to change national policy towards Wales? The policy of Industrial Transference in the interwar years had not been popular. Nye Bevan at a conference organised by the South Wales and Monmouthshire Council of Social Service in 1936 said that it should not be encouraged, although he acknowledged that it could not be stopped.⁴¹ Encouraging the opening of factories in South Wales, providing alternative employment had begun during World War 2 and became part of government industrial policy post 1945.⁴² However in 1957 it was still the case that 55% of male employment in the Rhondda Valley was in the coal industry.⁴³ It was acknowledged that Wales was dependent on the rest of the UK and there were few calls for its independence. Although the Welsh in London had their own cultural organisations, they did not raise Welsh political issues, such as Home Rule for Wales.⁴⁴

5.2 Irish in West London

Since the 1950s London had been the main destination for migrants from Ireland. Until as recently as 2001 they formed the largest immigrant group in the capital. Previously the main destinations had been the north-west of England and the west of Scotland, where, since the 19th century there had been long standing Irish communities.⁴⁵ In London the earliest Irish communities had been in the East End. Irish migration to west London therefore, was relatively recent. Following a trough in the Irish economy, workers from the Republic of Ireland had migrated to west London to find employment in the 1940s and 1950s. Initially this was to inner London boroughs such as Fulham and Hammersmith, but later to outer London boroughs, with the highest proportion in Brent, Harrow and Ealing.⁴⁶

³⁹ *Hayes Gazette*, 7 May 1959.

⁴⁰ ‘The Establishment of Hayes Labour Association (1910)’, *Hayes Peoples History*, 5 March 2006.

⁴¹ [Report] LMA ACC/2720/01/07/01.

⁴² M.J.Crowley, ‘Produce More coal’ = ‘Produce More Silcosis’?Retraining,Re-employment and Respiratory Illness in the South Wales Coalfield 1938-1945’, *Labour History Review* 82(3) (2017), pp.215-250.

⁴³ C.Williams, *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society 1885-195*, pp.27-28.

⁴⁴ See D.Tanner, C.Williams, and D.Hopkins (eds), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*.

⁴⁵ P.Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity and Racism in Britain, 1815-1945* (Manchester, 1994), pp. 53,94,120.

⁴⁶ B. Walters, ‘Migrants and Descendents:Multi-generations of the Irish in London in the 21st Century’ in A.Kershen, *London :The Promised Land Revisited* (Farnham, 2015), pp. 127-146.

Like the Welsh in west London the Irish were dispersed throughout the area.⁴⁷ In 1989 Ealing Council published a pamphlet entitled *The Irish in Ealing: an Invisible Community*. It estimated that people from Irish backgrounds formed 10% of the borough's population, up from 7% at the time of the 1981 census. The biggest wave of Irish immigration into Ealing had come in the 1940s and 1950s into Acton in particular.⁴⁸ Bronwen Walter describes Irish women in Ealing as being 'invisible'. However, in parts of Acton, and Hanwell, the Irish formed 12% of the population (1981 census), twice the London average.⁴⁹

In the 19th century Irish navvies had been employed building the Wharncliffe Viaduct in Hanwell, part of the Great Western Railway, and were to play a part in the road building programmes of the 1920s. Although these were one-off projects, there is little doubt that there has remained an Irish community in Hanwell, with Irish pubs and a catholic church.⁵⁰ The Irish maintained some cultural heritage, but politically, as a group, they did not form a distinctive entity. Although a catholic council candidate in Hanwell challenged the Labour Party on the issue of birth control, there is little evidence that the Irish played the sort of role played by the Irish community in Labour politics in Liverpool, Glasgow, or parts of East London.⁵¹ In London's East End Irish migrants escaping famine in Ireland in the 1840s had formed a more distinct and compact community.⁵² But they played a role as individuals in the west London labour movement. As with the Welsh, Irish names reveal the ethnic origins of many activists.

Like the Welsh, the Irish migrated to find work in the building trade and manufacturing industry. As building workers they played a part in the post-war reconstruction of Britain. Women found work in nursing, catering and domestic service. Employment in the building

⁴⁷ The dispersed nature of the Irish across generations in Britain is described in L.Marley (ed.), *The British Labour Party and 20th Century Ireland* (Manchester, 2016). See Chapter 1, G.O.Tuathaigh, 'A Tangled Legacy: the Irish Inheritance of British Labour', pp.17-34.

⁴⁸ M.Maguire, *The Irish in Ealing: an Invisible Community* (Willesden, 1989).

⁴⁹ B. Walters., *Irish Women in London: the Ealing Dimension* (Ealing Women's Unit, 1989).

⁵⁰ J.Oates, *Hanwell and Southall*. p.51.

⁵¹ The role of Irish organisations in the Labour Party in Glasgow is described in P.Smyth, *Labour in Glasgow 1896-1936: Socialism, Suffrage and Sectarianism* (East Lothian, 2000), and in Liverpool in an article by I. Baxter, 'Working class and Labour politics', *Political Studies*, (20) 1 (1990). Smyth believed that it was class politics rather than Irish nationalist politics which lay behind the support given by the Irish community in Glasgow to the Labour Party. Baxter describes how the Irish in Liverpool organised initially over the issue of Irish nationalism and Irish Home Rule, and then turned to the Catholic Church before dissolving into factions within the Liverpool Labour Party. See also J.Belchem, 'Liverpool Labour' in D.Morgan (ed), *The Labour Party in Historical Perspective*, pp.42-50.

⁵² See D. Renshaw and G. Dhulchaintigh, 'Irish Communities in East London and their Processions, 1900' *Socialist History* (45) Class, Immigration and Identity (2014), pp. 45-58. See also D.Renshaw, *Socialism and the Diasporic 'Other': a Comparative Study of Irish Catholic and Jewish Radical and Communal Politics in East London, 1889-1912* (Liverpool, 2018).

trade was insecure, which as Maguire said: ‘has brought about the inevitability of some Irish workers remaining on the periphery of the British trades union and labour movement.’⁵³ The trades unions were weak in the building trade. However some did join trades unions and she cites as evidence their involvement with the West London Trades Union Club, which was opened in 1980.⁵⁴ Between 1900-1940 trades union density was only 24.8% amongst unskilled workers, and Irish workers were at this time, predominantly unskilled.⁵⁵ But after 1945 most factories in west London gained trades union recognition. The number of unskilled workers to be recognised by trades unions rose during the 1940s. Bill Taylor was born in Dublin and moved to London in the 1950s. He had served his engineering apprenticeship in Dublin, so was able to find work in Park Royal, at a firm which made equipment for the dairy industry. When he was made redundant he got a job at Acton Works, one of 1,500 workers employed by London Transport. He was elected as shop steward, then convenor for the workplace. In an interview he said that workers from Irish backgrounds often became trades union activists. For instance, three out of four AEU branches on Park Royal had branch secretaries who were of Irish descent. Charlie Cunningham also moved to London from Dublin in the 1950s to work in engineering. He became active in the Sheet Metal Workers Union, taking office as a shop steward, then as a member of its London District Committee.⁵⁶ In the building trade there was even greater Irish representation.⁵⁷ There was a drive by the union UCATT in the 1960s and 1970s to eliminate the ‘lump’.⁵⁸ Irish trades unionists such as John Hourigan, a founder of the West London Trades Union Club, had been involved in this.

The Irish came to west London at a time of full employment so there was none of the backlash over unemployment that Irish migrants to cities in the North of England and Coventry had faced in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵⁹ However Irish migrants in North Acton, writing to the *Irish Times* claimed that the area was festooned with NINA (No Irish Need Apply) signs in windows, making it very difficult to find accommodation. (This only

⁵³ M.Maguire, *Irish in Ealing*, p. 22.

⁵⁴ M.Maguire, *Irish in Ealing*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ S.Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity; Irish Catholics in England 1880-1939* (Buckingham, 1993).

⁵⁶ Barbara Humphries Interview with Charlie Cunningham, 2 December 2015.

⁵⁷ Barbara Humphries Interview with Bill Taylor, 3 May 2016.

⁵⁸ The ‘lump’ was a form of self-employment on building sites in the UK, opposed by the trades union, UCATT.

⁵⁹ M.Moulton, *Ireland and the Irish in Interwar England* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 301-303. She described resistance to Irish immigration in Liverpool, where there were calls for quotas from the Transport and General Workers Union to protect members’ standard of living. They also faced accusations of migrating to claim benefits rather than to work, but this was unsubstantiated.

subsided when racism was transferred to the growing black population in the area).⁶⁰ As migrants, Irish families faced difficulties with getting rented accommodation from private landlords, or the local councils, who operated residential qualifications to get on to the council house waiting list. Bill Taylor described his difficulty in finding accommodation in London, because most landladies wanted a deposit which he did not have. He first shared a house with 18 men from the west of Ireland. Sleeping on a settee, he was always awakened at 6.30 in the morning as all the others got up to be collected by vans which would take them to building sites across London. Many of them sent money back home and they saved in the hope of buying land in Ireland.⁶¹

With the help of family members some were able to buy their own homes. Bill Taylor said that he lacked the residential qualification to get on the council housing waiting list in Willesden. So, in 1959, saving every penny he had, he put a £250 deposit down on a house in Wembley. He later moved to Greenford. By the 1980s 55% of the Irish in Ealing were owner occupiers, and 26% were council tenants, with respective percentages for the borough's population as a whole being 58% and 22%.⁶²

Unlike the Welsh, Irish workers, mainly from the South of Ireland, had not come from an area with strong labour movement traditions. Ireland had been part of the UK until 1922, but its main industrial city had been Belfast, which was to remain part of the UK after partition. The Republic of Ireland, except for Dublin, was largely still an agricultural country. Bill Taylor explained how, as a Dublin man, he had found it easy to settle in London. However many Irish people had come from rural backgrounds, and had never seen a factory before, let alone worked in one. He had found some anti-Irish prejudice, and that people in London knew very little about the Irish trades union movement. Bill got his politics from his parents – his mother's side of the family were trades unionists, his father was an Irish Republican. In London, Bill joined the Young Communist League (YCL) and later the Labour Party.⁶³

Nationalism had marginalised support for the Irish Labour Party, which had been given recruiting rights across the whole of Ireland by the Labour Party in the UK. The Irish labour movement had suffered defeats in the Dublin lockout of 1913, and the Easter Rising of 1916. In 1918 it did not contest the elections which it ceded to Sinn Fein, accepting that 'Labour

⁶⁰ D.M. MacRaill, 'No Irish Need Apply: the Origins and Persistence of a Prejudice', *Labour History Review*, 78, (3), (December 2013), pp. 269 -299.

⁶¹ Interview with Bill Taylor.

⁶² M.Maguire, *The Irish in Ealing*, p 13 (Figures are from the 1981 census).

⁶³ Interview with Bill Taylor.

must wait.⁶⁴ However it was estimated that most Irish workers in Britain supported the UK Labour Party. Until 1922 Irish politics had been an issue in British politics, with both the Liberal and Labour parties supporting Home Rule for Ireland. Irish politics however did not play a major part in British politics after 1922, although Labour continued to oppose the partition of Ireland.⁶⁵

It can therefore be argued that Irish workers were part of the British working class, which formed the basis for their support for Labour. This has been discussed in relation to cities such as Glasgow and Liverpool, which had larger concentrations of Irish workers. In these areas the Catholic Church claimed cultural representation of the Irish in Britain, and in cities like Liverpool had an influence over Labour Party politics.⁶⁶ Fielding however described how Irish Catholics joined the Labour Party for ethnic rather than class allegiances.⁶⁷ Moulton although saying that the extent of Irish Catholic support in cities like Liverpool had effected Labour Party policy on the Spanish Civil War, for instance, it had stood firm in resisting an application for affiliation from a Catholic trades union.⁶⁸ Support for educational establishments to be secular had continued to cause friction between socialists and minority ethnic groups.⁶⁹

Other forms of Irish organisation included Irish clubs, music, schools and sport.⁷⁰ In Ealing, Maguire wrote of the existence of cultural societies such as the West London Irish Society, London Irish Athletic Club, the Innisfree Dance Hall and the Spinning Wheel Club.⁷¹ Bill Taylor met his wife at an Irish dance hall in Cricklewood. For many Irish women in

⁶⁴ Ivan Gibbons gave a talk to the West London Labour History Day in 2012 on the events of 1912-1922 and their impact on the Irish labour movement. The report of his talk is contained in *Labour Heritage Bulletin*, Spring 2013. He argued that with the links with the British labour movement severed, Irish labour was to be 'drowned in a sea of Catholic reaction.' The policy of allowing the Irish Labour Party sole recruiting rights across the whole of Ireland was opposed in Belfast.

⁶⁵ See I.Gibbons, 'The Irish Policy of the first Labour Government', *Labour History Review*, 72(2) (August 2007), pp. 169-184, and I.Gibbons, *The British Labour Party and the Establishment of the Irish Free State, 1918-1924* (New York, 2015).

⁶⁶ See M.Hickman, *Religion, Class and Identity: the State, the Catholic Church and the Education of the Irish in Britain* (Aldershot, 1995). She explained how the Bishop of Liverpool in 1920s and 1930s called for immigration controls saying that there were 250,000 Irish in Liverpool. And he claimed that the control of the Liverpool Labour Party by the Irish would lead to Catholic control of the council, (Chapter 6).

⁶⁷ S.Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity*, p.108.

⁶⁸ M.Moulton, *Ireland and the Irish in Interwar England*, pp. 264-266.

⁶⁹ This is described by D.Renshaw in relation to both Irish and Jewish communities in East London in the late 19th century. See D.Renshaw, *Socialism and the Diasporic 'Other'*, pp.160-180.

⁷⁰ J.Jackson, *The Irish in Britain* (London, 1963).

⁷¹ M.Maguire, *The Irish in Ealing*, p. 9.

particular, who did not have the social life of the pub or the football match, the Catholic Church could be the centre of their life.⁷²

Organisations such as the Irish Self Determination League (ISDL) and the Connolly Association attracted a minority of Irish migrants, although, according to Moulton the Irish Self Determination League had as many as 26,000 members in 1920.⁷³ The Anti-Partition League sent speakers to trades union meetings in Hayes and Hammersmith. By the time of a second wave of Irish immigration occurred in the 1930s the ISDL was arguing for Irish integration into British society.⁷⁴ This meant class replacing ethnicity as political identity.

In the 1960s however Irish politics came to the fore again in Britain with the Civil Rights Movement in the North of Ireland. In an interview John Boyd referred to the Irish communities in Hanwell and Acton. He was a member of the West London branch of the Connolly Association, which had been founded in the 1920s, but which came to life in the 1960s over the Civil Rights Movement. The local branch, with 20 members, organised political meetings and fund raising events at Acton Town Hall and in Hanwell Library. One of its activities was selling its newspaper the *Irish Democrat*, in pubs in Hanwell, such as the Viaduct. John said that they always got a good response.⁷⁵ The Connolly Association leafleted catholic churches like Ealing Abbey, even though most of the congregation were not Irish. Charlie Cunningham also became involved in Irish politics via the Connolly Association in the 1960s. He described it as a seven night a week commitment, attending meetings and selling the *Irish Democrat*.⁷⁶ The Connolly Association campaigned for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, and support for the Civil Rights Movement. This campaign attracted support from labour movement activists in London, including the Acton MP, Bernard Floud, elected in 1964.

5.3 The Asian Community in Southall

Both Irish and Welsh migrants had political links to British labour movement organisations before they moved to London. Trades union and Labour Party membership was nationwide, and up to 1922 Ireland had been part of the UK. The biggest change in the population of the UK in the 20th century was immigration from the New Commonwealth. The most significant

⁷²Interview with Bill Taylor.

⁷³ M.Moulton, *Ireland and the Irish in Interwar England*, p.103. There was an actual branch of the Irish Labour Party in South Shields in 1919 but this did not last long.

⁷⁴ M.Moulton, *Ireland and the Irish in Interwar England*, pp. 241-245.

⁷⁵ Interview with John Boyd, 20 November 2015.

⁷⁶ Interview with Charlie Cunningham,

group in west London was the Asian community in Southall. This was to have a defining impact on the local labour movement, particularly with regard to its relationship with organisations such as the Indian Workers Association (IWA). Nationally it posed the largest challenge to the labour movement since the large scale immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe at the end of the 19th century, who came from a different culture and politics, and for whom English was not their first language.⁷⁷

Asian immigrants from the Punjab started arriving in Southall in the 1950s. Census figures show that the numbers of immigrants from the Indian sub-continent in Southall increased from 1,678 in 1961 to 14,630 in 1971. By 1991 this had risen to 35,214, and in some parts of the town they formed over 50% of the population.⁷⁸ In perspective, although the population of Southall had risen by 43.9% between 1931 and 1951, it had fallen by 5.3% from 1951-1961.⁷⁹ Southall changed very visibly. A cutting from the *Daily Mirror* in 1963 described it as a mini Calcutta, the Kybher Pass in Middlesex.⁸⁰ By the mid-1960s the 9,000 Indians formed one in six of the population, occupying half a square mile with 500 houses, six shops, and a temple. Unlike the Welsh and Irish migrants, Asian migrants from the Punjab were not dispersed, they formed a very compact and distinct community in Southall, with its own shops, restaurants, temples, and cinemas.

However, in common with the earlier migrants from Wales and Ireland, it was employment opportunities which had attracted them to west London. If Paddington station had been the gateway for the Welsh, Heathrow was the gateway for the Asians from the Punjab.⁸¹ But initially many of them worked at a local factory, Woolf's Rubber, which had experienced problems in recruiting a local workforce. It was a factory with a history of poor working conditions and hostility to trades union organisation. In the 1930s it had employed migrants from South Wales. Like migrants from Wales and Ireland, Asian workers faced discrimination when trying to find employment. A Southall Employment Exchange manager

⁷⁷ See D.Renshaw, *Socialism and the Diasporic 'Other'*, particularly chapter 2 on 'Socialist Ideology, Organisation and Internationalism with Diaspora and Ethnicity', pp.36-94. Biographies of Eleanor Marx also illustrate how Jewish workers aligned to the local labour movement in east London. See R.Holmes, *Eleanor Marx: a Life* (London, 2015) and Y.Kapp, *Eleanor Marx, vol.2 The Crowded Years* (London, 1979).

⁷⁸ J.Oates, *Southall and Hanwell*, (2003), p.104. See also *Southall: the Birth of a Black Community*.

⁷⁹ D.Woolcott 'Case Study on Southall' in N.Deakin (ed.), *Colour and the British Electorate 1964: Six Case Studies* (London, 1965), p.50

⁸⁰ Newspaper cutting in Southall Labour Party Records, File of Correspondence, News Cuttings and Reports Concerning Coloured Immigrants, LMA ACC/1267/73 1963.

⁸¹ Many immigrants from the Punjab were employed at Heathrow Airport. For instance, Onkar Sahota, Labour GLA Member for Ealing and Hillingdon said that his father was a maintenance worker at the airport before setting up his own grocery business. (*Ealing Gazette*, 15 April 2014). Onkar went on to train as a doctor.

reported that coloured people came here with a good deal of affection for the British way of life but ‘they are soon embittered when they are turned away from jobs because of a colour bar.’⁸² Even some trades unionists at AEC wanted a bar on recruiting “coloured apprentices”.⁸³ Like the Welsh, the Asians were recruited to unskilled factory work, for which many were over-qualified.⁸⁴ The Welsh had been skilled workers in the communities from which they had moved, but workers from the Punjab had been professional people, teachers, doctors or civil servants, or they had been farmers. They came to Britain as the Punjab had been partitioned after Indian independence, leading to pressures on land, and a shortage of jobs.⁸⁵

Asians who could speak English got jobs with London Transport, a field of employment with strong trades union representation, but sometimes they faced discrimination from the white workforce. Sikhs working at Hanwell Bus Garage were granted the right to wear turbans at work, on the same religious grounds as Sikhs in the British army. This provoked a protest by bus crew, who reported for work wearing various forms of head dress instead of their uniform hats. Their shop steward even threatened to call a strike if they were sent home by the management for their non-uniform headgear. This action was robustly condemned by the Chairman of the London Bus Workers’ Committee of the Transport and General Workers Union, who described those wearing silly hats as ‘looking mentally retarded.’⁸⁶

At first workers at Woolf’s travelled to Southall from other parts of London but they gradually moved into the area, initially renting and later buying houses.⁸⁷ Housing was inadequate and this led to overcrowding. There was no help from the council, and hostility from some local councillors who protested at overcrowding, but at the same time wanted to retain stringent residential qualifications to gain a place on the council housing waiting list. So the Asians had no choice but to buy, often collectively, houses which were being vacated

⁸² *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 16 July 1960.

⁸³ Syd Bidwell interview for the Labour Oral History Project.

⁸⁴ A CARD survey in Southall in 1965 found that of 1,000 university graduates of Indian and Pakistani origin, 84% were engaged in manual jobs. See D.Hiro, *Black British, White British: a History of Race Relations in Britain* (London, 1991), p. 130.

⁸⁵ This is described in K.Lunn (ed.), *Race and Labour in 20th Century Britain* (London, 1985), pp.152-157, and in B.Purewal, *Indian Workers’ Association (Southall)*, pp.12-14.

⁸⁶ S.Bidwell, *Red, White and Black: Race Relations in Britain* (London, 1976), pp. 6-7. In Wolverhampton the local council, in spite of earlier opposition from a branch of the TGWU, finally allowed bus workers to wear turbans in 1968. See C.Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Post-Colonial Britain* (Cambridge, 2013), pp.216-217.

⁸⁷ B.Purewal, *Indian Workers’ Association*, p.16.

by the white working-class population.⁸⁸ The Southall Resident's Association (SRA) in cahoots with local House Agents tried to restrict the sales of houses to Asian buyers to streets in the old centre of Southall – Hambrough and Glebe wards.⁸⁹ This was to accentuate the concentration of the Asian population into a very restricted area. Unlike the Welsh and Irish migrants who had been dispersed throughout west London, Asians formed a compact community bound not only by cultural traditions but by racist actions by some of the white population. Some saw the makings of a ghetto in Southall. The old centre of Southall was to become home to a mainly Asian population.

5.4 Joining Trades Unions

In *Black Militancy and Class Conflict* (1979) J.Rex argued that was no way into British society for black and Asian immigrants except through its class system. The majority of immigrants would join the working class where the benefits of welfare and social mobility would be via the trades unions and the Labour Party.⁹⁰ Because of the vast cultural differences between the Asian migrants and the native working class, their integration into British society, as members of the working class via the labour movement was crucial for both them and the indigenous working class. Trades unions had a duty to ensure that local wages and living standards were not being undercut. However it was often the case that Asian workers were recruited to working in sections of British industry which were poorly represented by trades unions.⁹¹

In 1958 the TUC General Council had come out with a statement strongly opposed to discrimination on the basis of colour. In 1963 it gave evidence to the Immigrants Advisory Council, claiming that immigrant workers faced the same issues as native workers in terms of finding jobs and homes. But they faced additional problems such as a language barrier and lack of qualifications, such as apprenticeships to gain entry to a number of trades. Some were being treated as cheap labour by small firms who were undercutting wages. It recognised that the TUC was not providing any special assistance to immigrant workers, and that there was a

⁸⁸ Alan Rogers moved to Oakwood Avenue, Southall in 1968. He said that houses became available because members of the white working class, who worked at AEC, started moving out, 'once the first Asian face appeared in the street.' Interview with Alan and Ann Rogers 10 September 2015.

⁸⁹ House agents were accused of racial discrimination by Piara Khabra, *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 4 July 1964. See also B.Purewal, *Indian Workers' Association (Southall)*, pp.40-41.

⁹⁰ J.Rex, 'Black Militancy and Class Conflict', in R.Miles and A.Phizacklea (eds.), *Racism and Political Action in Britain* (London, 1979).

⁹¹ See account of foundry workers in the West Midlands, 'Rationalisation and the Politics of Segregation: Indian Workers in Britain's Foundry Industry, 1945-62' in Lunn, K. (ed.) *Race and Labour in 20th Century Britain*, pp.143-151.

certain amount of prejudice over what it called ‘differing social standards’.⁹² Asian and West Indian workers tended to be disproportionately concentrated in low paid, poorly organised workplaces. In spite of the TUC anti-discrimination policies, some local trades union branches in the 1960s were calling for quotas for immigrant workers, citing fears of job shortages. In some cases these policies were pushed by activists in the branch who were members of racist organisations. Branches of the AEU and the TGWU in Southall and Greenford, for instance contained members of the British National Party (BNP).⁹³ However resolutions calling for a stop to (coloured) immigration was to be rejected by the Ealing Trades Council in 1967, being opposed by two of its affiliated branches of the TGWU and the AEU.⁹⁴

5.5 Strike at Woolf’s

There was a strike for trade union recognition at Woolf’s in 1962 where Asians formed 90% of the workforce. This was an example of how Asian workers organised themselves into the labour movement.⁹⁵ They were assisted in this by the Indian Workers Association (IWA), which encouraged Asian workers to join trades unions. Some of the most educated became leaders in the work place. Piara Khabra, later to become Labour MP for Southall was a shop steward at Woolf’s. Many had been political activists in the Punjab.⁹⁶

After they had walked out on strike, over 400 workers at Woolf’s joined the TGWU and in 1964 the union was recognised. In December 1965 however, they were to walk out again in defence of a victimised shop steward, Mr Muktar Singh. The strike lasted six weeks. It received official support from the TGWU, but due to members being in arrears in subs, they had problems in obtaining strike pay. The firm lost contracts and a deal was negotiated via the Joint Industrial Council for the Rubber Industry, but 100 strikers did not get their old jobs back. The factory closed in 1967.

⁹² See Commonwealth Immigrants Advisory Council (Cmnd 2119), HMSO, 1963 and *London News*, October 1963.

⁹³ This was a far right party 1960-1967 led by John Bean. It then joined other organisations to form the National Front. John Bean’s autobiography *Many Shades of Black* (London, 1999) was published in 1999. He claimed success in Southall, in winning 9.2% of the vote in the 1964 General Election, and forcing the existing Labour MP, George Pargiter to defy the policies of his own party by calling for a complete ban on further immigration into Southall.

⁹⁴ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 20 January 1967.

⁹⁵ N.Deakin, B.Cohen and McNeal, *Colour, Citizenship and British Society* (based on the Institute of Race Relations Report, London, 1969), p.301.

⁹⁶ ‘Breaking the Glass Barriers: from IWA to Mainstream Politics’, written by Cllr. Ranjit Dheer in B.Purewal, *Indian Workers’ Association (Southall)* p. 144.

The strike illustrated some of the issues in the relationship between Asian workers and the trades unions. The workers had walked out spontaneously, but this was not, as the local press implied, due to their lack of integration into British society. Many strikes in British industry in the 1960s were 'non-official', and began with such spontaneous walk-outs. It also brought to the fore the way management divided the workforce. For instance, it was mainly Asian workers who worked on the night shifts. The better jobs were still reserved for white workers. Management also sought to sow divisions within the Asian workforce, by trying to bring in replacement workers of Pakistani origin from Bradford, to take the place of local Sikhs and Hindus. The local IWA played an important part in resisting these divisions. Together with the TGWU it also had to combat the system of bribery, whereby a middleman with knowledge of English recruited for the local foreman, taking bribes from potential employees. Bribes were given for overtime and better shifts. These practices had been used to undermine trades union organisation. The local community played a role in this strike by raising funds and providing food for strikers. It also gave access for union officials to visit workers in their homes to build up opposition to the system of bribery.⁹⁷ Having support from the local close knit community and the strength of the trades union movement in west London was crucial to the strikers at Woolf's.⁹⁸

West London post 1945 still had full employment and a high level of trades union organisation. Factories like Woolf's had poor trades union organisation, but they could call upon the support of the local trades union movement. This was unlike the situation that had faced Welsh workers in the 1930s and Irish workers in the poorly organised building trade in the 1950s. There were other strikes by Asian workers in the west London area in the 1960s. These included a strike at Rockware Glass, Greenford in 1962. It was led by Vishnu Dutt Sharma, who was later to become a President of the Southall IWA.⁹⁹

5.6 *The Asian Community and Southall Labour Party*

In *Labour Organiser* (June 1965) there was a report on the retirement of Bob Wyatt Labour Party agent for Southall. He had moved to Southall in 1958 and soon found himself faced with one of the most difficult problems facing a political organiser, namely racial prejudice.

⁹⁷ See article by B.Humphries, 'The Strike at Woolfs 1965', *Labour Heritage Bulletin* (Autumn 2004) and *Southall: Birth of a Black Community*, (Southall Rights and Institute of Race Relations, 1991). See also B.Purewal, *Indian Workers' Association (Southall)*, pp.74-75.

⁹⁸ See B. Walters, 'England People Very Nice': Multi-Generational Irish Identities in the Multi-Cultural East End', *Socialist History* (45), pp. 86-88.

⁹⁹ B.Purwal, *Indian Workers' Association (Southall)*, p.70.

He would not claim that he had solved this question at Southall, but he was able to show that, ‘notwithstanding the erosion of votes and enthusiasm, which this evil produces, the Labour Party in Southall had lost no seats of any kind’.¹⁰⁰

In 1948 the Labour Government had passed the British Nationality Act, opening the door for all Commonwealth citizens to come and work in the UK. The Conservative Governments of the 1950s had not reversed this policy until the introduction of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962, which was to limit immigration by introducing quotas and vouchers. This Act was opposed by the Labour Party in opposition but not repealed when in government after 1964.¹⁰¹ A debate had begun in the Labour Party on the issue of race discrimination. Fenner Brockway MP had campaigned for legislation against discrimination. The London Labour Party had set up a sub-committee on immigration in 1955 which recommended that racial discrimination should be challenged whenever it occurred and that there should be no ban on immigration. Instead, government help was needed to assist integration.¹⁰² However there was little government help for areas with high numbers of immigrants.¹⁰³ Most of these were in working class areas with Labour councils, such as Southall.

George Pargiter, the MP for Southall was to abstain when the Commonwealth Immigrants Act came up for renewal in 1963. In his statement he stressed his support for Labour’s stand against immigration controls but he did not want to be misrepresented in Southall. He said that Southall was a special case. There had been an influx into already overcrowded town. Property values had fallen, with a loss of life savings for many people. However, he said that “Common humanity demands that we work to promote the integration of the immigrants into the life of Southall” and that there should be no colour discrimination of any kind. He had told Asian people that they must “conform to our ways if they want to be treated as part of the community” and he had asked them to encourage their friends not to come to Southall to live.¹⁰⁴ He had even suggested that if they had farming experience then could they be offered work on farms elsewhere!¹⁰⁵ George Pargiter was not untypical of MPs from areas of high

¹⁰⁰ *Labour Organiser*, June 1965.

¹⁰¹ The immigration and race relations policies of both Labour and the Conservative parties is described in Z.Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Race in Britain* (London, 1984), pp.170-176.

¹⁰² *London News*, October 1955.

¹⁰³ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 28 December 1968.

¹⁰⁴ Reply to Mrs A.Ayres and her husband who had been delegates to the Southall GMC and Trades Council. He expressed surprise that they had ever been members of the Party. Southall Labour Party Archives LMA ACC/1267/73).

¹⁰⁵ Southall Labour Party Archives, File on Coloured Immigrants in Southall 1963, LMA ACC/1267/73.

immigration. Many of his sentiments were echoed by the MPs for Hammersmith and Kensington North which contained Notting Hill where there were large numbers of migrants from the Caribbean.¹⁰⁶

Maintaining support for national Labour Party policy, the Southall CLP had to cope with a backlash amongst some white working class voters against the Asian immigrants. Two long standing problems in the town had been over-crowding in housing and schools. The long established Southall Labour Club and Institute introduced a 'colour bar,' as did the local Conservative Club, and some local pubs, such as the Northcote Arms.¹⁰⁷ These practices continued even after the race relations legislation introduced by the government of Harold Wilson in 1965 and 1968. He condemned Labour Clubs which operated a 'colour bar.'¹⁰⁸ The Labour Club's continued practice of a colour bar, led to the Southall Labour Party finally having to sever its links with the Club and move to another premises.¹⁰⁹ The operation of a 'colour bar' in Labour Clubs in areas with a growing immigrant population was not unique to Southall. It also for instance happened in Smethwick.¹¹⁰

Southall Labour Party had discussions for members on 'the coloured question', sometimes with officers from Labour Party HQ. The 1963 AGM of the Party attended by 52 delegates discussed the issue of immigration. National Agent Reg Underhill attended. His concern was about how Asians would vote. He said that 'quite a lot of work is needed to organise these people into our way of political thought.' But he was opposed by two local councillors, one of them, Tommy Steele, leader of Southall Council, who claimed that 4,500 votes had been lost to Labour, due to the 'coloured question.' In June the General Management Committee (GMC) discussed a resolution from Hambrough ward in central Southall, urging the council to use its public health powers to deal with overcrowding.¹¹¹ They also wanted a ban on future immigration into Southall but were told that this was not national Labour Party policy. Some in the local Labour Party wanted a more concerted anti-racist approach. The Young Socialists for instance wanted an open meeting in Southall to oppose the Government's Immigration Bill. This was rejected by the EC of Southall CLP because it

¹⁰⁶ George Roberts (Kensington North) and Frank Tomney (Hammersmith North). D.Hiro, *Black British, White British*, p. 207.

¹⁰⁷ Interviews with Richard Hawkins, *Labour Heritage Bulletins* (Spring 2013 and Spring 2015).

¹⁰⁸ See Z.Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Race in Britain*, p.55.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Alan and Ann Rogers.

¹¹⁰ See article by S.Jeffries, *Guardian*, 6 October 2014.

¹¹¹ Southall Labour Party Records, Minutes of Executive and General Management Committee Meetings LMA ACC/1267/6.

could have given a platform to fascists. No public meeting on racial discrimination was to be allowed in Southall.¹¹²

It could be argued that in the early 1960s the Southall Labour Party was performing a balancing act between its traditional working-class votes and potential new voters amongst the Asian community. There had been two positive developments in 1963. The Southall Trades Council had set up an Inter-racial Friendship Committee to which the Labour Party was sending five delegates. There were also plans to canvass the Asian voters together with the IWA. In June 1964 the EC of Southall CLP set up a study group on Commonwealth immigrants.¹¹³

5.7 General Election of 1964

Immigration was to be a local issue in the 1964 general election. In Smethwick in the West Midlands, Labour candidate Patrick Gordon Walker lost his seat, against the national swing, to the Conservative candidate Peter Griffiths, who campaigned on an openly racist platform, with links to the Birmingham Immigration Control Association.¹¹⁴ In Slough Fenner Brockway, a high profile campaigner for racial equality was also defeated. Paul Foot saw in this a deeper significance. He wrote that

The Smethwick campaign was used by the Conservatives to split the working class – this was an issue because they could find no other way of removing their stumbling block of the loyalty of the industrial working class to Labour.¹¹⁵

Parts of the country such as the West Midlands and west London had swung to Labour in 1945, but had not been abandoned by the Conservatives. Even in Southall council seats had been lost to the Conservatives in 1947. In 1959 George Pargiter's majority had already fallen to 2,319 and Southall could no longer be considered as a safe Labour seat.¹¹⁶ Woolcott's case

¹¹² Southall Labour Party Records LMA ACC/1267/6.

¹¹³ Southall Labour Party Records LMA ACC/1267/6.

¹¹⁴ See P.Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics* (Harmondsworth, 1965).

¹¹⁵ P.Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, p. 77. This point is also made by Stuart Jeffries in an article on Smethwick in the *Guardian*, 16 October 2014. He wrote that the Conservatives had declined to condemn the open racism of Patrick Griffiths because 'he had found the Conservatives' Holy Grail, undermining industrial working class support for Labour'. He also pointed out that the local Labour Club was part of the problem as it operated a 'colour bar.'

¹¹⁶ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 8 November 1947 and 10 October 1959.

study of Southall notes the fall in the Labour vote from 84% in 1951 to 52.8% in 1959. It was to fall to 48% in 1964, with the Conservatives on 42.9%.¹¹⁷

Welsh and Irish migrants to west London had faced prejudice, based mainly on fears about unemployment, wages and housing shortages. Asian migrants faced additionally, organised political hostility from parties with an overtly racist agenda. In the early 1960s in Southall this came from the British National Party (BNP).¹¹⁸

In a council bye-election in Hambrough ward in 1960 Labour had held the seat by only 54 votes.¹¹⁹ In 1963 the BNP had stood council candidates in Glebe and Hambrough wards. It called for homes for 'our people first', for 'backward coloured children' to be educated in separate schools, and for public health regulations regarding over-crowding to be enforced by the local council. It claimed that seven out of ten voters opposed immigration, and advised voters that 'Remember your vote is secret.' It said that Labour and the Liberals were in favour of uncontrolled immigration and that the Conservatives were a wasted vote in Southall. George Pargiter claimed that this anti-black strategy would get no support, but one of the BNP candidates won 27.5% of the vote in Hambrough, 1 in 3 voters, coming in second place to Labour.¹²⁰

In the 1964 General Election the SRA had invited all parliamentary candidates to attend a pre-election meeting. This had been rejected by George Pargiter, because the candidate from the BNP was in attendance.¹²¹ The BNP made the formally apolitical SRA its front organisation. At a meeting earlier in the year its members had jeered George Pargiter's efforts in defending Labour policy, and amidst calls to 'send them home' claimed that immigrants lived in garden sheds, urinated in the streets, entertained prostitutes and had used a house as a Sikh temple.¹²² Members of the SRA claimed that the council had failed to prosecute those guilty of public health offences. It described Southall as a 'black slum.'¹²³ It was a stormy

¹¹⁷ D. Woolcott 'Case Study on Southall' in N. Deakin (ed.), *Colour and the British Electorate 1964: Six Case Studies* (London, 1965), p.50

¹¹⁸ The British National Party was a far right political party in Britain 1960-1967. It was led by John Bean. It later amalgamated with other political groups to form the National Front.

¹¹⁹ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 22 October 1960.

¹²⁰ Southall Labour Party Records, File of Correspondence Concerning Southall and Ealing Municipal Elections 1960, 1963 LMA ACC/1267/77-78.

¹²¹ Southall Labour Party Records LMA ACC/1267/6.

¹²² *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 11 January 1964.

¹²³ 760 cases had been reported, with only 50 prosecutions. *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 2 May 1964, and 4 July 1964.

election campaign with both George Pargiter and BNP candidate John Bean being shouted down at public meetings.¹²⁴

Southall was retained by George Pargiter for Labour but the combined votes of the Conservative and BNP candidates campaigning against immigration attracted between them a higher number of votes. There was also a significantly lower turn out in Southall than neighbouring constituencies, and compared to earlier election results. The percentage voting had fallen from 76.4% in 1959 to 70.2% in 1964. There was a local swing against the Labour candidate of 0.2%, compared to a pro-Labour swing across Middlesex of 4.2%. Woolcott thought that John Bean of the British National Party had taken votes from both Labour and the Conservatives in equal numbers. Asians voting for the first time would have mainly voted Labour.¹²⁵ (See election table appendix 2). George Pargiter said that it had been a difficult time in Southall, but “we had acted well and in the right way”. He had pressed home the facts about immigration in the House of Commons - housing, welfare, and the need for reception classes for immigrants. The fascists and Conservatives had made immigration an election issue in Southall and canvassing had been difficult.¹²⁶ The Conservative candidate for Southall, Barbara Maddin, said that immigration control had been regretful but defended the voucher system which had been put in place by the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act.

5.8 Labour and the Indian Workers Association (Southall)

The Southall IWA was founded in 1956, with 120 members. By 1971 this had risen to 9,600. It took on the role of a welfare and advice bureau, and possessed a considerable amount of property including a cinema, which showed Indian films. It was open to any Indian which it defined as ‘a person born in India or of parents and grandparents of Indian origin’, aged 18 and over.¹²⁷ The first IWA had been set up in Coventry in 1938, and IWAs were revived in West Midland towns, with growing Asian populations in the 1950s, including celebrations for Indian Independence Day.¹²⁸ The largest was in Birmingham. When President Nehru of India visited Britain in 1958 he had called for the centralisation of the IWAs, but the Southall IWA only temporarily became part of the IWA (GB).¹²⁹ Over time the Southall IWA became

¹²⁴ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 10 October 1964.

¹²⁵ D. Woolcott (Southall case study) in N. Deakin, *Colour and the British Electorate*, p.50.

¹²⁶ Southall Labour Party Records LMA ACC/1267/6.

¹²⁷ B. Purewal, *Indian Workers' Association (Southall)*, pp. 82-94, 118-119.

¹²⁸ G. Singh and D.S. Tatu, *Sikhs in Britain: the Making of a Community* (London, 2006), pp.51-97.

¹²⁹ It is disputed whether the Southall IWA was ever affiliated to the national IWA. For background information see S. Josephides, *Towards a History of the IWA*, Research Paper in Ethnic Relations (18), University of Warwick.

less of a workers' organisation, and attracted local businessmen. It had a different political orientation than the IWA (GB), making integration, rather than challenging racism as its priority. It was itself to become divided into different factions. The IWA (GB) tried to start its own branches in Southall, but this faltered as its own allegiances were divided between different factions of the Indian Communist Party.¹³⁰ Campaign against Racial Discrimination (CARD) formed in 1964 was to gain the support of the Southall IWA. The IWA (GB) did not affiliate as it was already affiliated to the Birmingham based Co ordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination. This further deepened the differences in strategy between the IWA (GB) and the Southall IWA, as the latter pursued closer links with the Labour Party.¹³¹

However, the Southall IWA was not impressed with the local Labour Party's record in combating racism in the borough. In 1964 its secretary Piara Khabra had expressed his disappointment with George Pargiter.¹³² In February it organised a meeting for 2,000 Asian residents in Southall who were registered to vote. Candidates from all political parties were invited (including the BNP and the Communist Party). It claimed that 80% of its members would respect its advice.¹³³ In March there was another meeting between the EC of Southall Labour Party and the IWA, when the Southall Party was urged to take a tougher stand against the BNP, and to respect Labour's national policy on race and immigration.¹³⁴ In April 1964 the IWA announced that it was advising its members to vote Labour for three reasons – it was the party of the working class, it was in favour of the Commonwealth and it supported its policies on housing. It made it clear that this was advice not instruction. The IWA's advice was questioned by some of its own members.

The view of the *Middlesex County Times* was that this advice could be embarrassing for the local Labour Party, saying that the 'the announcement is quite likely to cause quite a lot of votes to be lost among their own supporters.'¹³⁵ However Labour's 'own supporters' were changing. Election results in the council elections and general election of 1964 illustrated that Labour was becoming dependent on the Asian vote in Southall, although they were still

¹³⁰ A description of the structure and organisation of the IWA, and an explanation of the split between the IWA (GB) and the IWA (Southall) is most clearly outlined in the introduction to the IWA archives at the Library of Birmingham (MS 2141 – Papers of the Indian Workers Association).

<http://calmview.birmingham.gov.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=MS+2141>

¹³¹ R.Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (Aldershot, 1987), pp.367-400.

¹³² *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 18 January 1964.

¹³³ The invitation to the BNP was later rescinded but all the other political parties sent representatives. *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 7 March 1964. Only 30 attended this meeting. 600 Asian workers attended a meeting on joining a trades union which took place on the same day.

¹³⁴ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 14 March 1964.

¹³⁵ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 11 April 1964.

a minority – 2,000 out of 53,000 voters in the 1964 general election in the Southall constituency as a whole.¹³⁶ By the late 1960s, the growth of the Asian community would lead to Labour being able to win previously Conservative held wards such as Dormers Wells in council elections.¹³⁷ Syd Bidwell MP wrote in his book *Red, White and Black* (1976): ‘I estimate that half the Labour vote for me comes from coloured people. The ratio is bound to grow.’¹³⁸

Before the 1966 general election George Pargiter retired and Syd Bidwell himself a former railwayman and lecturer for the National Council of Labour Colleges, was selected as Labour candidate for Southall.¹³⁹ He was determined to “offer the hand of friendship” to the Asian community.¹⁴⁰ This was to prove not only good ethically but also electorally for Labour, as the centre of Southall was becoming mainly an Asian community. Syd and his family were to face a number of racially motivated attacks. On the 20 July he reported that his windows had been broken, but with the aid of his dog the attacker had been caught. The attacker had left a leaflet published by the Great Britain Movement with the message – ‘Blacks not wanted here’. His attacker was one of the first to be prosecuted under the 1965 Race Relations Act. Bidwell’s election as MP for Southall in 1966 was to improve relations between Labour and the IWA. In August 1966 he attended the IWA’s Indian Independence Day celebrations and was introduced as ‘a man dedicated to the working class movement of this country’. He called on Indians to join the trades unions and the Labour Party and to take up positions as councillors.¹⁴¹

Not all factions of the IWA were supportive of Labour. The IWA (GB) maintained its links with the Communist Party, and one prominent activist in the Southall IWA, Vishnu Sharma was on the District Committee of the West Middlesex Communist Party.¹⁴² On one occasion he stood as a Communist candidate for the council against Labour. A significant Asian vote

¹³⁶ In May 1964 there were elections for the newly created London Borough of Ealing. Labour won 34 out of 60 seats, including most of the Southall seats. In Glebe ward for instance the results were – Labour 1,598, Conservative 921, British National Party 459, Communist Party 129 (*Middlesex County Times*, (Southall edition), 9 May 1964).

¹³⁷ Interview with Alan and Ann Rogers.

¹³⁸ Syd Bidwell, *Red, White and Black*, p 1. There had been a significant exodus of white residents from Southall. Councillor Charles Pollard for instance who worked at AEC moved out to Langley. *Middlesex County Times*, (Southall edition), 27 August 1960. Many more moved to more spacious housing in neighbouring towns.

¹³⁹ This was an unexpected result. Syd Bidwell, a left-wing candidate had been selected on the third ballot and his endorsement as PPC for Southall was opposed by some delegates to the selection meeting which had taken place in February 1966 (Southall Labour Party Records LMA ACC/1267/6).

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Syd Bidwell for the Labour Oral History Project.

¹⁴¹ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 26 August 1966.

¹⁴² *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 2 December 1966.

for the Communist Party could have changed Labour's fortunes in Southall and divided the working class vote. But this did not happen. The Southall IWA was not usually tempted to stand its own candidates, as Asian organisations were to do in Bradford, where the first Asian candidates stood for the council in 1963 as independents. But by the 1970s the Labour Party was standing Asian councillors in Bradford.¹⁴³

Whilst the Southall Labour Party grappled with the issue of immigration, and the necessity of attracting Asian voters, it was less successful in attracting Asian members at this stage. Membership figures continued to hold up throughout the Southall constituency.¹⁴⁴ That there may have been resistance to the recruitment of Asians to the Party is only hinted at in the minutes of the GMC of 16 March 1960 when there was a discussion on the application of Mr Jowell, Asian resident of Hambrough ward. It was agreed that he should join, but why the need for a discussion?¹⁴⁵ An interview with the ward secretary for Dormers Wells indicated that there was resistance to Asians joining the Party by some white members with racist views.¹⁴⁶ 'Life in the Party', which included a mystery coach trip, a cheese and wine party and a Xmas bazaar may not have appealed to potential Asian members.¹⁴⁷

5.9 Ealing Council

In 1965 Southall Council was abolished and became part of the London Borough of Ealing. A number of Labour councillors, including Tommy Steele defied Labour Party policy by voting to extend the residential qualification for Asian immigrants to fifteen years for the housing waiting list, a measure proposed by the Conservative opposition. For all other residents it was five years. This clearly racist motivated action was to lead to the suspension of Steele

¹⁴³ See: M.Le Lohe, 'The Effects of the Presence of Immigrants upon the Local Political System: Bradford, 1945-1977' in R.Miles and A.Phizacklea, (eds), *Racism and Political Action in Britain* (London, 1979).

¹⁴⁴ In 1964 both Hambrough and Glebe wards reported over 200 members. In 1965 a constituency wide membership of 1600 was reported. *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 5 February 1965.

¹⁴⁵ Southall Labour Party Records LMA ACC 1267/6. Glynn described how Bengalis had problems in joining the Labour Party, being told that there was a waiting list. However as with the Southall IWA, community leaders could deliver votes for Labour. Often support was personalised, for example for MPs such as Peter Shore in Bethnal Green. Left-wingers in the local party assisted Bengalis in joining but there were later to be complaints about 150 applications to join written in the same handwriting. See S.Glynn 'East End Bengalis and the Labour Party: the End of a Long Relationship.' in C.Dwyer and C.Bressey, *New Geographies of Race and Racism* (Aldershot, 2008).

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Alan and Ann Rogers. Ann Rogers said that she had to push through the application form for Virendra Sharma, currently Labour MP for Ealing Southall as she thought that along with others, it was being blocked. However once some Asians had joined, it would become easier for others to do so.

¹⁴⁷ Paul Nischal of the Anglo-Asian Conservative Association in an interview in the *Guardian Weekend*, 22 August 2015, said: 'When I arrived in 1965 I thought the Labour Party was for labourers. I went along to a meeting (this was in Southall) - they were drinking like fish, smoking like chimneys and talking a lot about unions.' He joined the Conservative Party expecting it to be business-friendly, but as he was not 'a barrister, solicitor or chartered accountant' he was not able to get a safe Conservative parliamentary seat.

and other councillors from the Labour Group on Ealing council. They later applied to rejoin Labour but only 'if they could vote according to their consciences on immigration and housing.' This was rejected.¹⁴⁸

Ealing council continued with a controversial policy of 'bussing' children from Southall into Ealing schools. This policy, initiated at government level by the Conservative Minister for Education, Edward Boyle in 1964 was to ensure that Southall schools had no more than 30% of children from immigrant families.¹⁴⁹ However the 'bussing was one-way only'. No children from Ealing were bussed into Southall and it caused distress to Southall families whose children were taken out of the town by bus every morning. The policy of 'bussing' was declared illegal in 1976.¹⁵⁰

In 1967 the IWA (Southall) approached the local Labour Party to discuss candidates for the forthcoming council elections. In a cordial meeting Labour's selection procedures were explained to the IWA, and it stated that it could not endorse unsuitable candidates, nor did it want to interfere in the internal affairs of the IWA. The Party agreed to buy 18 pamphlets on race relations and to organise four public meetings. In 1968 Mr Sardul Singh Gill was elected as delegate from Southall CLP to the Labour Party annual conference. He was also to be the first Asian councillor in the London Borough of Ealing.¹⁵¹ Canvassing for Labour in Southall amongst the Asian community was carried out by the IWA which could issue leaflets in Asian languages. This could provide problems in that local Labour Party members did not know what they were saying. In the 1968 council elections they received a complaint from the local Conservatives (who had also published leaflets in Punjabi) about the strident nature of a Labour Party leaflet which had accused the Conservatives of race hatred, harbouring politicians such as Enoch Powell, and having enslaved India. Winston Churchill, it said, would never have given India her independence, and the Conservatives were hindering the Race Relations Board and were anti-working class.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Southall Labour Party Records LMA ACC/1267/6 Tommy Steele, born in Poplar had lived in Southall for 40 years and worked at AEC for 20 of these. He had been president of the Southall District of the AEU until 1949 when he had been elected to the council. *Middlesex County Times*, (Southall edition) 23 May 1959.

¹⁴⁹ *Middlesex County Times*, (Southall edition), 11 January 1964.

¹⁵⁰ B. Purewal, *Indian Workers' Association (Southall)*, pp. 78-80.

¹⁵¹ Southall Labour Party Records LMA ACC/1267/6.

¹⁵² *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 10 May 1968.

Labour lost many seats in the council elections of 1968.¹⁵³ It was the year in which Conservative MP Enoch Powell put the issue of immigration on the political agenda again, with his ‘rivers of blood’ speech. In Southall a public meeting in support of Powell was held in the White Hart pub, which attracted workers from EMI, AEC and Heathrow. Some workers from AEC marched in support of Powell.¹⁵⁴ In the council elections however both Labour and the Conservatives stood an Asian candidate each in the newly formed Northcote ward. The IWA stood 3 independent candidates, one of whom withdrew at the last moment. Two rebel Labour councillors, Steele and Lamb won seats under the auspices of the SRA in central Southall. Of the Asian candidates, the independents were defeated with a very low vote, the one Labour candidate (Sardul Gill) was elected but the Conservative Asian candidate (Dr Rangat) was defeated. Overall Labour lost seats across the London Borough of Ealing, with the Conservatives winning 53 out of 60 seats. Dr Rangat was made an Alderman by the Conservatives, but he soon fell out with the Conservative Party over his dislike for Enoch Powell. He was rebuffed by Ealing Conservatives who told him that multiculturalism was not wanted in Britain.¹⁵⁵

In October 1969 100 members of the National Front marched through Southall town centre. As unemployment rose, including in Southall, this was a harbinger of what was to happen in the 1970s.¹⁵⁶ In 1967 fifteen factories in Southall were closed and there were redundancies at Quaker Oats. By the end of the year unemployment in Southall had risen to 500.¹⁵⁷

This section of the chapter on Asians has exclusively been related to Southall which indicates how tightly the Asian community in west London was originally concentrated there. Was there any impact across the rest of this part of west London? The Hayes and Southall Trades Council began to discuss the recruitment of Asian workers.¹⁵⁸ Organisations in Southall had their parallels elsewhere. The Hayes Residents’ Association, following in the footsteps of the SRA complained about residents from poor countries ruining property prices and said ‘we do not want Hayes to become another Southall’. Residents’ Associations in Ealing also tended to take their cue from the SRA. On the other hand a Hayes International Friendship Committee

¹⁵³ This was due to the difficulties faced by the 1964-1970 Labour Government, which inherited a balance of payments crisis and as a result implemented a wage freeze.

¹⁵⁴ For an analysis of working class support for Enoch Powell see C.Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Post-Colonial Britain*, pp.207-211.

¹⁵⁵ Reports from the *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 24 May 1968, and 29 November 1968.

¹⁵⁶ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 17 October 1969.

¹⁵⁷ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 22 September 1967.

¹⁵⁸ *Hayes Gazette*, 29 January 1959.

was set up.¹⁵⁹ In 1964 it had expressed fears that Southall could become ‘another Smethwick’. The issue of immigration in the London Borough of Ealing received an occasional mention at branches of the Labour Party in Ealing North, with the view that this was an issue to be dealt with by Ealing Council. At this stage it was overwhelmingly an issue for Southall.

Conclusion

In conclusion Welsh, Irish and Asian migrants came to west London to find employment. They all faced problems with finding housing and faced prejudices from the indigenous population. The arrival of the Welsh and Irish raised fears over unemployment, wages, housing and overcrowded schools. The Asians additionally faced a racist attack from political parties such as the BNP. The Conservatives used the immigration issue to gain votes from the white working class. Layton-Henry said that most Conservatives had assumed that Asian and black voters were concentrated in inner city and working class suburbs like Southall ‘ which would have returned Labour MPs with or without black voters.’¹⁶⁰ The Welsh and Irish were dispersed throughout the area, whilst the Asians formed a compact and distinct community. Welsh and Irish migrants joined the labour movement mainly as individuals rather than an ethnic group. This was different to the Asian workers who organised themselves into the ranks of the trades union movement and provided electoral support for the Labour Party via their own organisations such as the Southall IWA. In the case of all three ethnic groups, they were to become part of an existing working class community, with its established labour movement organisations. This was in contrast to the Irish and Jewish communities in the 19th century in London’s East End, who were to form the basis for the growth of the labour movement in that area. In the late 19th century, Stepney in east London was represented by a Conservative MP, Major William Evans-Gordon, who founded an anti-immigrant organisation called the British Brothers’ League. It grew to 45,000 members.¹⁶¹ The TUC had initially supported calls to limit immigration, although this had been dropped by the time that the Aliens Act was passed in 1905.¹⁶² As Renshaw said, ‘it was by no means clear that socialism, and in particular, the

¹⁵⁹ *Hayes Gazette*, 18 and 25 September 1959.

¹⁶⁰ Z.Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Race in Britain* (London, 1984), p.147. He later noted that by the 1970s when numbers of black voters were growing in marginal seats, the Conservatives set up their own Anglo-Asian Conservative Society and an Ethnic Minorities Unit.

¹⁶¹ P.Panayi, *Immigration Ethnicity and Racism in Britain*, pp.120-121.

¹⁶² The Aliens Act was passed by the Conservative Government in 1905 to restrict immigration. It was aimed at stopping Jews who were fleeing persecution in Czarist Russia from entering the UK. .

Labour Party would become the ‘natural’ party of migrants and their descendents in urban areas.’¹⁶³

Labour had to campaign for Asian votes. There were no automatic links with Labour, as with the Welsh newcomers in the 1930s. The Asian community had a history in the Punjab of trade union organisation, but the main political parties to which they had allegiances had been the Congress Party or the Communist Party.¹⁶⁴ There was no equivalent of the Labour Party in the Punjab, so Labour had to make links politically with the Asian community when it set up its own organisations such as the IWA. On the other hand, as Ranjit Dheer said, the fact that the founders of the IWA had been trades union and socialist activists, and independence campaigners in India, and their early struggles against exploitation in Britain, was an important factor in the ‘special historical relationship’ between the IWA and the Labour Party. In 1992, president of the IWA, Piara Khabra was elected as first Asian MP for Southall.¹⁶⁵

There were precedents here in the way in which Labour had worked with Irish organisations in Liverpool, Glasgow and the North East, and the Jewish organisations in East London. In doing so the local identity of the Party itself was to change, as it adjusted to the ways in which these migrant organisations worked and to their political priorities.¹⁶⁶ The Irish vote for instance had questioned Labour support for issues such as the Spanish Republic, and birth control in the 1930s. Immigrant communities have been natural allies of the Labour Party, in its commitment to equality, tolerance and criticism of Britain’s colonial past. Labour had campaigned in the 1930s for independence for India with the publication of several pamphlets, and India had gained her independence under a Labour government in 1947.

As with the Irish and Jewish communities it was arguably matters of class as much as ethnic identity which affected political allegiances. However in the East End of London Sarah Glynn argued that support for Labour was not class-based, but ‘often the best way to achieve power within the political establishment.’ As the dominant political party in Tower Hamlets Labour was ‘the most natural recipient of most Bengali votes and the natural forum for most mainstream Bengali political activity.’ The relationship was pragmatic rather than idealistic.

¹⁶³ D.Renshaw, *Socialism and the Diasporic ‘Other’*, p.248.

¹⁶⁴ The Communist Party of Great Britain had assisted workers in India to set up trades unions. This is described in J.Green, *Britain’s Communists the Untold Story*, pp.159-162.

¹⁶⁵ Ranjit Dheer on ‘Breaking the Glass Barriers’ in B.Purewal, *Indian Workers’ Association (Southall)*, pp.144-146.

¹⁶⁶ For instance see I. Baxter, ‘Working Class and Labour Politics’.

Some of the Bengalis were small landowners in their own country.¹⁶⁷ In Southall also local politics had been described as those of an Indian village, where loyalties were often on a personal rather than a political basis.¹⁶⁸ Purewal said of the IWA in Southall that recruitment into factions was based on ‘village and family relationships’, and that when executive committee elections were due, potential leadership contenders would pay the membership fees of their supporters.¹⁶⁹

Not all Asians regarded themselves as working class. As businessmen they could have been attracted to the Conservative Party, but were rebuffed by its racialism. In Southall many Asians became factory workers, but others set up businesses, becoming for instance, estate agents or restaurant owners. They nevertheless continued to support the Labour Party. The Conservative Party in Southall tried to win votes from the white working class because they indicated that they who would stop further Asian immigration into the town.¹⁷⁰

When considering the impact of political change of immigration on Southall and other parts of west London, in later years we are looking not at changes in political allegiances. Southall continued to be a Labour town as it is today, never losing the seat to the Conservatives, but the political and cultural change was to be seen within the Labour Party itself. This was because increasingly its electoral support was organised by local organisations like the Southall IWA. We have seen that since 1918 in west London constituencies, Labour Party organisation had been the main agent for getting out the vote at elections, unlike for instance, the trades unions in mining areas, or organisations representing ethnic groups like the Irish in northern cities and London’s East End. The extent of the Asian community in Southall led to a similar pattern in this west London constituency.

¹⁶⁷ S.Glynn, ‘East End Bengalis and the Labour Party: the End of a Long Relationship’, p.67.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Alan and Ann Rogers. This was the view of IWA activist Vishnu Sharma. Although initially employed as factory workers, many Asians aspired to become shop keepers, and to send their children to higher education and train for professional jobs. There was evidence of more social mobility than with the Welsh and Irish communities.

¹⁶⁹ B.Purewal, *Indian Workers’ Association (Southall)* p.118-119.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Alan and Ann Rogers.

Chapter 6: Women in the West London Labour Movement

Introduction

Previous chapters have looked at how the working class population of parts of west London increased during the 1920s and 1930s, laying the basis for political change. Women formed a large part of this population, who moved to the area, either as wives of male workers, or, as we have seen in the previous chapter, workers who left behind their families in Wales or Ireland, to work in domestic service, nursing, catering and local engineering factories.

This chapter will start from the premise that working class women were not just half of the population, but were a distinctive section with their own involvement in politics, based on an economic and social sphere which differed from their male counterparts. In the interwar years most women were not in paid employment. Where they did work it was mainly in different occupations and workplaces to men. On the one hand they were the wives and daughters of working class males, supporting their fathers and husbands, but they also formed their own organisations which linked them to the labour movement.¹

There is a paucity of secondary resources on the history of women's participation in the labour movement. Institutional histories which are focussed on Labour MPs and trades union leaders, inevitably overlook the role that women members played at a grassroots level.² This has only partly been rectified by works by committed women labour activists themselves.³ Secondly, organisations such as the Labour Party Women's Sections and the Women's Co-operative Guild involved mainly working class housewives, and their narrative has been eclipsed by the high profile struggle of the Women's Suffrage Movement in the early 20th century, and the rebirth of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴ The Women's Suffrage Movement constituted a broad mix of groups and societies whose primary aim was the franchise but whose constitutional and political affiliations varied. Sylvia Pankhurst for

¹ Examples include P.Graves, *Labour Women: Women in Working Class Politics 1918-1939* (Cambridge, 1994) and G.Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Class Women* (London, 1998).

² There have been recent biographies of women Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson, for instance, L.Beers, *Red Ellen: the Life of Ellen Wilkinson: Socialist, Feminist and Internationalist* (Cambridge, Mass., 2016). See also: A.Perkins, *Red Queen* (London, 2004), which is the authorised biography of Barbara Castle.

³ For instance see two books by Christine Collette, *For Women and For Labour: the Women's Labour League 1906-1918*, (Manchester, 1989) and *The Newer Eve: Women, Feminists and the Labour Party* (Basingstoke, 2009), and Lucy Middleton (ed.), *Women in the Labour Movement: the British Experience* (London, 1977).

⁴ For working class women and the campaign for women's suffrage see Jill Liddington and Jill Morris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: the Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London, 1978), and biographies of Sylvia Pankhurst, for example, K. Connelly, *Sylvia Pankhurst: Suffragette, Socialist and Scourge of Empire*, (London, 2013). Books on women's history published in the 1970s include: Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden From History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Struggle Against it*, (London, 1973).

instance founded the East London Federation of Suffragettes which had a mainly working class membership in London's East End and which was a fundamentally socialist organisation concerned with poverty.

The period of history covered in this thesis shows that women's involvement in labour movement politics developed through organisations like the Labour Party Women's Sections and the Women's Co-operative Guild which campaigned on gendered political issues such as housing, infant and maternal welfare and public health. This was 'new feminism' or practical feminism for those thousands of women who played their part in these organisations.

There are two aspects of the history of working class women in west London, which need to be considered. One was the field of employment. Women had been employed during World War 1 in transport and in local munitions factories. Many faced dismissal in the immediate post war years, but increasingly the new factories in London area were to employ women workers on a large scale. This was to present a challenge to the trades union movement. Organisations like the Railway Women's Guild had organised the wives and daughters of railway workers in support of their husbands. The unions now had to look to organising women workers.⁵

Secondly, women as new voters assumed an importance for all political parties. In 1918 some women over 30 had gained the vote for the first time, and by the 1929 election this had been extended to all women over 21. Between 1918 and 1929 the percentage of women as part of the electorate had risen from 40% to 52%, so in the 1929 General Election, 67% of candidates attempted to win women's votes.⁶ In most parliamentary divisions, women were to form the majority of the electorate. By the mid-1890s women in the UK could vote for and be elected to School Boards, Poor Law Guardians, Parish Councils and Urban District Councils, more than in any other state in Europe or the United States.⁷ Hundreds of women were councillors in 1918.⁸ Now they could also stand for Parliament. In order to appeal to women voters, the Labour Party set up its Women's Sections in 1918. Replacing the earlier Women's Labour League (WLL), Women's Sections were encouraged in all parliamentary divisions, some even at local branch level. By 1923 twelve women's sections had over 200

⁵ See Sarah Boston, *Women and the Trades Unions* and M. Glucksmann, *Women Assemble*.

⁶ See M. Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1939*, pp. 249-250.

⁷ J. Martin, 'Engendering City Politics and Educational Thought', *Paedagogica Historica*, 44(4) (2008), p. 398.

⁸ See Pamela Graves, *Labour Women*, pp. 168-176.

members and in Woolwich there were over a thousand. Nationally thousands of women were involved.⁹

This chapter will look at the role of the trades unions in organising women in west London, and the growth of the Labour Party Women's Sections. The Women's Co-operative Guild, which also organised women into political activity, will be considered in Chapter 7, which is on the Co-operative Movement. It will show how it was not just a changing population, but political organisations which were able to build the support of women, with a significant impact on the changing political landscape across west London.

6.1 Employment

During World War 1 women had been recruited to work in the munitions factories in Hayes and food processing factories in Southall, such as Maypole Margarine, which employed over 2000. This continued into 1919 with the *Southall and Norwood Gazette* containing adverts for jobs with good wages for women and girls, washing jars and peeling fruit.¹⁰

Southall was a railway town and women had been employed as porters, cleaners, ticket collectors and signal workers during the War. Nationally 56,000 women were working on the railways by 1918.¹¹ Women were also employed on London Transport.¹² Martin Eady describes how following conscription, women were recruited to become conductors on trams and buses. By 1920 however he says that most of them had been dismissed.¹³ As unemployment rose it was expected that married women would leave the workforce. Following demobilisation, 600,000 women across the UK lost their jobs. In 1918 the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act laid the basis for jobs to go to men discharged from the armed forces. Between November 1918 and April 1919 the percentage of women in the workforce fell from 36.1% to 28.8%. By 1919 official unemployment amongst women rose to 1.5 million, but this was an underestimate as many married women were not entitled to 'sign on', when they became unemployed. Many were angry and prepared to demonstrate

⁹ See Pamela Graves, *Labour Women* and Lucy Middleton, (ed.) *Women in the Labour Movement*. See also R.McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-192* (Oxford, 1924) p. 141.

¹⁰ J.Oates *Southall and Hanwell*, p.83, *Southall and Norwood Gazette* (issues from 1919).

¹¹ G.Crompton, 'Lines of Division: Railway Unions and Labour 1900-1939', in M.Worley, (ed), *Foundations of the British Labour Party*.

¹² See 'London Women Tram Workers- Equal Pay Strike', *Hayes People's History*, 13 February 2007.

¹³ M.Eady, *Hold on Tight*, p.41 and p.57.

against high levels of unemployment, especially as thousands had lost their breadwinner during World War 1, and had few prospects of finding another.¹⁴

Domestic service and laundries were large employers in Ealing and Acton. Ealing, with its middle class households, offered employment in domestic service.¹⁵ Acton was a centre for the laundry industry. In 1911 there had been over 200 laundries employing 3,000 women. By the time of the 1921 census 1,892 women worked in laundries, with an additional 1,754 in domestic service and 1,437 clerks.¹⁶ These were not always young single women. They were described by Jonathan Oates as ‘the wives of poor labourers’, who served the demands of a middle class population. In one ward in Acton one third of married women worked in laundries. When Acton Public Health Committee opened a day nursery in 1908 it had minded and fed 2,690 babies of laundry workers within six months. Dependent upon charity it was forced to close when it ran out of funds, with the result that female laundry workers resorted to depositing their children with neighbours, or leaving them in luggage racks at the entrance to the laundry.¹⁷ There was a high infant mortality rate in the south west ward in Acton, but the women had to continue working as their husbands were frequently out of work themselves, for instance if they were in the building trade.¹⁸ Laundry work in Acton (and Ealing) was to decline throughout the 20th century, as households became equipped with their own washing facilities.

With the growth of new industries in the late 1920s and 1930s, however there was a drive to recruit women into these factories. Many factories which employed women in light engineering and food processing were located in London and the south-east of England. It was on this basis that a second industrial revolution took place in parts of west London as we have seen in Chapter 1. By the 1930s the rate of female employment London was higher than in many other parts of the country where heavy industry such as the mines, steel making and shipyards employed a mainly male workforce. A pamphlet published in 1935 by the Labour Party’s Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Organisations (SJC) claimed that between 1923 and 1934 employment in the UK increased for males by 6.3% and for females by 18%.

¹⁴ See S.Boston, *Women Workers and the Trades Unions*, Chapter 5 ‘Women Must Go’ 1918-1923, pp.132-152.

¹⁵ See P.Hounsell, *Ealing and Hanwell Past*, p 111. He quoted the 1911 census figures which show that Ealing had the highest proportion of domestic and laundry workers per household in London. (68 per 100 households, the London average being 25 per household). This explains why Ealing had a very high proportion of females in 1911 (29,771 women, 19,812 men).

¹⁶ J.Oates, *Acton: a History*, p.90.

¹⁷ *Chiswick Gazette*, 29 October 1909 and 31 March 1911 (research by John Grigg of Labour Heritage).

¹⁸ Reports from the *Chiswick Gazette*, 13 November 1908, 24 September 1911 (research by John Grigg of Labour Heritage).

In textiles, the distributive trades, food processing and light engineering more women than men were recruited during those years.¹⁹

In 1936, the SJC published *Women in Offices* describing a growth in the employment of women, in the Civil Service, the Post Office, local authorities, banks and the insurance industry.²⁰ One such employer was the Pensions Office in Acton. These industries were still largely affected by a 'marriage bar' whereby women had to give up work when they married.²¹ The Labour Party supported the right of women to work, including married women. In 1930 its Women's Conference supported the principle of equal pay for equal work. This was controversial for some male workers but many feared the threat of wage rates being undercut by women workers.²² In 1934 *Labour Woman*, journal of the Labour Party Women's Sections, carried an article entitled *Should Married Women Work?*, and in its essay competition three out of four participants said that they should be able to do so. It was accepted however that the majority of married women were primarily housewives.²³

Miriam Glucksmann in *Women Assemble* described the increased employment of women in 1930s. She cites census statistics to show that nationally by 1931 one third of the employed work force were women. Between 1923 and 1930, the percentage of women employees across the country rose from 36% to 44%. In electrical engineering the number of women employed rose from 69,000 in 1931 to 204,000 in 1951.²⁴ The growth of electrical goods and the supply of electricity to households during the interwar years had an impact both on the home and working lives of women. By 1938 two thirds of households in the UK had electricity.²⁵

¹⁹ Labour Party (Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Organisations) (SJC), *Women in Industry* (London, 1935) (LSE Pamphlet). The SJC comprised women's trades union organisations, as well as the Labour Party Women's Sections and the Women's Co-operative Guild. See P.Graves, *Labour Women*, p.9.

²⁰ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 16 March 1923.

²¹ Labour Party (SJC) *Women in Offices* (London 1936) (LSE Pamphlet). See also N. Robertson, 'Women at Work: Activism, Feminism and the Rise of the Female Office Worker During the First World War and its aftermath', in K.Laybourn and J.Shepherd, (eds), *Labour and Working Class Lives :Essays to Celebrate the Life and Work of Chris Wrigley* (Manchester, 2017), and F.D.Klingender, *The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain* (London, 1935). The preface was written by W.J.Brown, General Secretary of the Civil Service Clerical Association, and one time Labour PPC for Uxbridge. By the 1921 census clerks and professionals formed 16.5% of the workforce, (p.xiv) 45% of these were women and almost half were from working class backgrounds. See also J.Cronin *Labour and Society in Britain*, p. 55.

²² Labour Party conference passed a resolution calling for equal pay for women in 1947.

²³ P.Thane, 'The Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism 1906-1945' in H.Smith. (ed). *British Feminism in the 20th Century*, p.128.

²⁴ M.Glucksmann, *Women Assemble*, p.44.

²⁵ M.Glucksmann, 'In a Class of their Own', *Feminist Review* 24 (2013), pp.7-37.

However that fact that 69% of working women were under 35, and that 77% of working women were single indicate a smaller participation in the workforce by married women.²⁶ The majority of married women did not work.

Population change in west London, as a centre of new industries in the interwar years, was augmented by the movement of women as well as male workers. Many of these women, like their male counterparts either commuted into the area by train or bike or they relocated from the depressed areas like South Wales or Tyneside.²⁷ Initially they took up employment in domestic service but later went to local factories. Overwhelmingly these women were young and single. However working in a factory gave them financial independence, and interaction with fellow workers on a scale not experienced when they were in domestic service. This was a large social change which began in the interwar years, and it was geographically located in parts of the country like Greater London.²⁸

Glucksmann carried out interviews with women who worked in factories in west London. She illustrated from her interviews women who were employed in local factories such as Hoovers and EMI. These were single women, like Edith Boyd who came from South Shields, to work in domestic service in London. When she moved in with her brother in Greenford, she took a job in Hoovers. This was overwhelmingly more attractive to working women than domestic service. Doris Edwards and Eileen Jones came from South Wales to work in EMI in Hayes. Work at this factory was often seasonal and the management favoured women who were cheaper to employ. On the production line at EMI, according Glucksmann, women outnumbered men by ten to one. They had little training and there was no seniority. They were hourly paid. Due to piece work, accidents were rife in the factory and workers regularly lost fingers in machines. There was no marriage bar in the factory, and women needing the money could work until their child birth confinement. A similar situation existed at Hoovers, where 'mature women' were preferred. However there was strict demarcation between men and women, with men being allocated the skilled jobs. In many food processing factories, like Lyons in Greenford, women formed over 50% of the workforce.²⁹ Dominance of women however was confined to industries such as food processing. In industries such as engineering

²⁶ M.Glucksmann, *Women Assemble*, pp.40-43. See also M.Pugh, *We Danced All Night*, p. 100.

²⁷ According to Glucksmann 75% of women in domestic service in London had not been born in London. Some had relocated via the Industrial Transference Scheme p.245.

²⁸ A.Calder, *The People's War*, p.382. By 1935 one in three workers employed in electrical engineering were women. These would have been in new industrial areas.

²⁹ See M.Glucksmann, *Women Assemble*. Five case studies included EMI, Lyons, and Hoovers, pp.93-143.

and vehicle building, women remained a very small proportion of the workforce, less than 10%.³⁰

During World War 2 women were again called upon to join the workforce in large numbers both in public transport and in the engineering factories in west London. This would have a huge impact on their lives, as family life was replaced by workplace canteens and council run nurseries. In contrast to the dismissals after World War 1, with full employment after 1945, the employment of women continued after the end of the War. The *Middlesex County Times* reported in its 'Women in the News' column that women workers in Southall had problems of finding part-time work and combining childcare. Wartime nurseries had closed. One catering firm had failed to recruit women and took on twenty disabled men. In Hayes there was 'an unsatisfied demand for all kinds of unskilled labour.' Hayes Employment Exchange reported that one large factory would offer part-time work.³¹ Increasingly local employers had to offer part time work to attract married women. They also advertised their canteen and social facilities. In Acton women were still employed in laundries, although in less numbers as mechanisation went ahead.³² New jobs were available in factories such as Walls and Lyons, and in public services such as the NHS.

6.2 Women in Trades Unions

It was in the interest of the trades unions to recruit women who worked in transport and local factories, but many trades unions historically had only catered for male workers. Women had organised themselves into the trades union movement via organisations such as the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) in the 19th century, and the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW), which was formed in 1906. It organised laundry workers, domestic workers and cleaners. The NFWW had 70,000 members at its peak in 1920, when it merged with the National Union of General and Municipal Workers.³³ The Workers' Union also organised women workers, and it had a branch in Hayes. It had a local woman's organiser, Miss Saward, who was also involved in the local Labour Party.³⁴

³⁰ P.Scott, 'Women, Other Fresh Workers and the New Manufacturing Workforce of Interwar Britain', *International Review of Social History*, 45 (2000), pp 449-479.

³¹ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 8 March 1947.

³² *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 24 August 1945.

³³ L.Middleton, (ed), *Women in the Labour Movement* Chapter 5 , Early Days in the Trades Unions by Dame Anne Godwin. See also S.Boston, *Women Workers and Trades Unions*, p.148.

³⁴ 'Labour Candidates 1922 and 1923 –West London', *Hayes Peoples History*, 22 February 2009.

The conditions of women laundry workers in Acton had caught the attention of the WTUL. Hours were long, with the mainly married female workforce being made to work shifts of ten hours at a time. Health and safety was also a problem in the laundries with workers losing fingers in machinery, and diseases like tuberculosis were rife. In October 1911 the WTUL attempted to set up a branch of laundry workers in Acton and called a public meeting addressed by Marion Phillips, a union organiser for the WTUL. Large numbers were reportedly enrolled.³⁵ However they feared loss of pay and victimisation at work. In 1911 when Lloyd George's National Insurance Bill was being discussed in Parliament, the local Conservative MP for Ealing, Herbert Nield, tried to get laundry workers exempted from the legislation, on the grounds that they were 'outworkers'. This was successfully challenged by Labour MP Ramsay MacDonald. Local Labour councillors, Robert Dunsmore and Joe Shillaker also took up the cause of the laundry workers and their rights under the new National Insurance Act. Joe Shillaker called for a Trade Board to set the wages of laundry workers on the grounds that it was a 'sweated' industry. Acton ILP and the Ealing, Acton and Chiswick Labour Representation Committee took up the campaign, organising public meetings. In 1913 Acton Council set up a special committee to look into the wages and conditions of workers in the Acton laundries. Evidence was given by a Mrs Ratcliffe, who was later to become a councillor for the town.³⁶ Laundry workers however were often seen as 'too down-trodden' to be successfully organised into trades unions.³⁷

Transport unions had successfully organised women workers. The NUR and the Railway Clerks Association (RCA) were able to recruit women during World War 1 and were particularly concerned with ensuring that they should not be undercutting male rates for the job.³⁸ Women who worked on the London United Tramway Company, on the Shepherds Bush to Uxbridge line, took strike action in August 1918 in a dispute over equal pay with men. This was opposed by some men on the grounds that these women were in receipt of separation allowances from their husbands as well as their wages, but they had been employed on the basis that they would receive equal pay to the men.³⁹ After the War

³⁵ *Chiswick Times* 6 October 1911. (Unpublished research on laundry workers in Acton was carried out by John Grigg, from local newspapers such as the *Chiswick Times* and *Acton Gazette*).

³⁶ Reports from the *Chiswick Gazette*, 6 October 1911, 22 December 1911, 13 June 1913, and 25 July 1913, and the *Acton Gazette and Express*, 1 August, 1913.

³⁷ See L. Beers, *Red Ellen: the Life of Ellen Wilkinson: Socialist, Feminist and Internationalist*, p.71. Ellen Wilkinson was an organiser for NUDAW in Manchester in 1923.

³⁸ G. Crompton, 'Lines of Division: Railway Unions and Labour 1900-1939', in M. Worley, (ed), *Foundations of the British Labour Party*.

³⁹ 'London Women Tram Workers – Equal Pay Strike 1918', *Hayes Peoples History*, 13 February 2007.

however, even the unions called on women to leave the workforce in an age of unemployment. The tram workers union, the AATVW called on women to go. The Acton branch of the NUR called on women without dependents to make way for the unemployed.⁴⁰ The union campaigned for pensions for those women who had lost their breadwinner.

There had been successful attempts at an early stage to organise clerks and shop workers. These were aided by the participation of high profile Labour women activists such as Ellen Wilkinson and Margaret Bondfield in the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers (NUDAW).⁴¹ There were even attempts to organise domestic workers, when a Domestic Workers Union was set by the TUC in 1927. In an indication of the extent of domestic service as an area of employment, the May 1929 issue of *Labour Organiser* appealed to the women voter, including domestic servants, saying that ‘the kitchen should be as ‘Labour’ as the pit or the factory.’⁴² In Ealing many domestic servants had migrated from parts of the UK which had strong labour movement traditions, such as South Wales, but it would be difficult to find evidence that they had joined a trades union in this paternalistic environment.⁴³

Where men were the majority of the workforce, as on the railways, organisations such as the Railway Women’s Guild (RWG) organised the wives and daughters of railway workers to support their men, particularly at times when there was industrial action. The RWG played a large role in the support of widows and orphans of railway workers, organising bazaars and ‘flower days’ to support them. Parties were organised for the children, at which they would be given fruit and money. This was widespread in west London where there were large numbers of railwaymen.⁴⁴

The bitter dispute between the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain and the government in 1926 had its repercussions in west London.⁴⁵ When the miners fought on alone, women across the country, including west London, raised support for the miners and their families, in an act of solidarity. Much of this was organised through the Labour Party Women’s Sections.

⁴⁰ *Railway Review*, 27 June 1919.

⁴¹ K.Hunt, ‘Making Politics in Local Communities: Labour Women in Interwar Manchester’ in M.Worley, (ed.), *Labour’s Grassroots*.

⁴² *Labour Organiser*, May 1929.

⁴³ The situation for domestic servants would have been as vulnerable as the farm workers described by Clare Griffiths in *Labour in the Countryside*.

⁴⁴ Reports from the *Railway Review*: for instance, 1 April and 4 November 1927.

⁴⁵ Ealing during the General Strike was described by Joe Sherman, in *A Tribute in his Own Words*. See also E.Burns, *The General Strike, May 1926*, and M. Morris, *The General Strike (London, 1976)*. A table drawn up by the Plebs League indicates that the General Strike received 90% support in the industrial parts of west London, including Acton, Hayes, Uxbridge, West Drayton and Southall, p.41.

Marion Phillips, Chief Women's Officer described how Labour women used their organisation to carry out the work of 'an industrial Red Cross'. Every area outside of the coalfields was to appoint a distress committee, organise house to house and workplace collections, and fund raising events such as garden parties. She reported that £313,000 had been collected and that 5,000 women had been involved. Welsh miners choirs were invited to London and 400 miners' children were placed with foster parents.⁴⁶ Its political significance was to challenge the so-called North-South divide which existed in the interwar years, and to instil into a younger generation of working men and women, even in the new industrial areas of London and the southeast a sense that poverty and starvation could not be tolerated. In an example of how the 1926 strike touched west London, Phyllis Hawtree, aged 14, of Ealing won the *Labour Woman's* children's essay prize. The essay was entitled *What May Day Should Mean*. She wrote that "May Day this year (1926) meant that the workers made a great decision on whether they should see their comrades, the miners accept starvation wages and conditions and whether they should unite and stand by them in their hour of trial. To their everlasting credit they have decided to stand by them and they have made history during the past week."⁴⁷

In the post-war years the growth of white-collar employment led to some trades union success in recruiting women in that field of work. In 1947 a public meeting was organised for shop assistants in Southall, attracting over 400 people. It was addressed by Southall MP, Walter Ayles.⁴⁸

Women were increasingly reported as taking on the role of shop stewards in factories in west London, as at Rockware Glass in Greenford.⁴⁹ The *AEU Journal* reported the case of Sister Higgins from the Ealing no.3 Branch. She had worked at Landis and Gyr in Acton in 1935 but left when she got married. She returned to the factory in 1953 and was elected as shop steward in 1960, in a shop with 100% trades union membership. She was described as one of the ablest shop stewards and was also on the works canteen committee and Ladies Darts Team.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ M. Phillips, *Women in the Miners' Lockout: the Story of the Women's Committee for the Relief of the Women's Committee for the Relief of the Miners' Wives and Children* (London, 1927).

⁴⁷ *Labour Woman: a Monthly Paper for Working Women*, June 1926.

⁴⁸ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 18 January 1947.

⁴⁹ *TGWU Record*, June 1963.

⁵⁰ *AEU Monthly Journal*, November 1969.

Nevertheless women's membership of the trades unions remained relatively low, even in the post-war years. Trades unionists were a minority of the workforce in west London before World War 2, as we have seen in Chapter 4. Women workers were a smaller percentage than that. This changed during the war years, when many worked in aircraft engineering factories.⁵¹ Numbers grew in the post-war years in 1958, with over seven million women in the workforce, 23.79% of who were in trades unions. By 1973 this had risen to 33.9%, lower than for men, at 59.35%.⁵² Locally Ealing Trades Council supported campaigns by the shop workers' union, USDAW to recruit, mainly women workers in supermarkets. This included leafleting outside Sainsbury's in June 1962.⁵³

Although there was a growing involvement of women in the workforce in west London, many women were attracted to the labour movement and its politics not so much from the trades unions as from organisations such as the Labour Party Women's Sections and the Women's Co-operative Guild. The focus of this political involvement was community, rather than work place based.

6.3 *The Women's Vote*

In 1918 some women over 30 were enfranchised by the Representation of the People Act. Many working-class men were also given the right to vote for the first time. Younger women who had worked in munitions factories and transport during World War 1 did not receive the vote. All political parties aimed to win the women's vote in the General Election of 1918. In Southall a local councillor was reported as offering to look after children to allow women to get to the polls.⁵⁴ By the 1929 General Election, however all women over 21 had the right to vote in national elections. An additional seven million voters had been added since the 1924 General Election, the majority of whom would have been women.⁵⁵ The full enfranchisement of women had been supported by the WLL in the early years and later by the Labour Party Women's Sections. In 1924 it published *Give the Young Women the Vote* and *Why Women Should Vote Labour*.⁵⁶ Chief Women's Officer, Marion Phillips, said that the

⁵¹ Women numbers in trades unions 1914 - 437,000, 1933 - 737,000 (SJC, *Women in Industry*, p.11.)

⁵² M.McCarthy, *Women in Trades Unions Today*, in L.Middleton, (ed), *Women in the Labour Movement*, p.162. Numbers of women trades unionists had fallen in the interwar years from 1,343,000 in 1920 to 731,000 in 1933, but rose again in 1944 to 1,668,000.

⁵³ Ealing Trades Council Minutes 1954-1960, LMA ACC/1972/0003/4.

⁵⁴ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 19 December 1918. This was Labour councillor Hudson, who was a babysitter for five children, with a warning from their mother that he was not to drop any of them.

⁵⁵ Number of voters 1910 7,709,981, 1918 21,392,322, 1929 28,854,748, (*DODs Parliamentary Companion*.) Just under 14 million voters received the franchise for the first time IN 1918.

⁵⁶ Labour Party, *Fifty Years of Service: Labour Women's Jubilee* (London, 1956). (Women's Library @LSE).

woman voter could be ‘deciding factor for Labour’. The woman voter was a free individual and it would be an error to treat the wife as automatically voting the same way as her husband. A way had to be found to speak to the woman voter who was often tied to the home and could not come out to meetings. She called for mass canvassing to get women to meetings in their street, and to talk about issues of concern to them.⁵⁷ In the 1923 General Election, seeing women hand in hand with their children walking to the polling booths, the Conservatives blamed these working class women for their own electoral defeat.⁵⁸

Margaret Bondfield, elected as MP for Northampton in 1923 praised the role of women in her campaign. She said that their work had been more important than that of the candidate.⁵⁹ Averil D.Sanderson Furniss wrote that women had become ‘the deciding factor at the polls.’ They were the most successful in making new recruits and raising funds, but also they did most of the election work, such as canvassing and addressing envelopes, when men were tied up at work during the day.⁶⁰

There were very few women Labour MPs in the interwar years, only three in 1923, but women played a larger role in local government, local councils and Boards of Poor Law Guardians. In spite of not having a vote, women had been eligible to be elected to a local council in Britain since 1907. In 1919 there were 100 Labour women councillors.⁶¹ In London by 1934 150 out of 729 Labour councillors were women.⁶² Council meetings were held during the day, which meant that it was difficult for working men to attend them. Women who did not work could find it easier to play this role in local government. Working women however had the same problem as their male counterparts. Alice Arnold for instance, a Coventry councillor for 36 years, had to take time off to go to meetings. Fortunately she had a sympathetic employer, the local Co-op Shop. She was however effectively excluded from playing a part in her local Labour Women’s Section which met in the afternoon.⁶³

⁵⁷ *Labour Woman*, October 1922.

⁵⁸ M.Roberts, *A Woman of Vision:the Life of Marion Phillips MP*, (Wrexham, 2000), p.93. (Women’s Library @LSE).

⁵⁹ M.A.Hamilton , *Margaret Bondfield* (London, 1924).

⁶⁰ A.D. Sanderson Furniss, ‘*The Citizenship of Women*’ in H.Tracey, (ed.), *Book of the Labour Party: its History, Growth, Policy and Leaders* (vol.2) (London, 1925). The *Liverpool Echo* in March 1923 referred to ‘the army of Labour women canvassers.’ R.McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, p 146. P. Graves describes how in Edmonton, nine-tenth of canvassing was done by women, *Labour Women*, p. 111.

⁶¹ P.Graves,*Labour Women*, p.17.

⁶² P.Thane, *The Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism, 1906-1945*. In Liverpool the number was much lower (6 out of 73) according to S.Davies in *Liverpool Labour*.

⁶³ C.Hunt, ‘Everyone’s Poor Relation: the Poverty and Isolation of a Working Class Woman Politician of Interwar Britain’, *Women’s History Review*, 16, (3) (2007), p.421.

In Acton, with its large number of laundry workers, the Labour candidate in 1918 made a special appeal to women voters. This was in light of the large number of women workers in his area. Robert Dunsmore called a meeting for women voters. He supported equal pay for equal work and pensions for war widows and their orphans.⁶⁴ In the 1919 council elections in Acton two women Labour candidates were successful, Mrs Ratcliffe in South West ward and Mrs Lavinia Salmon in the North East ward. The latter was the wife of a railway worker and member of the RWG. This was an example of how the wives of skilled industrial workers were able to play an active part in politics. The long shifts worked by laundry workers would have been a deterrent to political activity. Their votes were nevertheless important to Labour candidates, such as Robert Dunsmore and Mary Richardson.⁶⁵

In the 1922 General Election, Mary Richardson was Acton's Labour candidate. She had been an active suffragette who had slashed a painting in the National Gallery during her campaign for votes for women.⁶⁶ However it had been mainly middle and upper class women who had joined the Women's Social and Political Union (WPSU) in west London. Like Mary Richardson they had embarked on acts of violence against property, such as the burning down of a tea room in Kew Gardens. Women in the working-class towns of Brentford and Acton had not joined the WPSU. There were reported branches of the Women's Freedom League, a rival organisation, which disapproved of militant tactics in Acton and Southall. The concerns of laundry workers in Acton and Ealing were mostly about their pay and working conditions, not the vote.⁶⁷

By 1929 women formed the majority of the electorate in all the parliamentary divisions covered in this thesis. (Acton 53%, Harrow 52%, Uxbridge 51% and Ealing 57%). The increase in the electorate from 1923 however could not be accounted for only by the addition of women voters, for example – Acton 34%, Harrow 94%, Uxbridge 74% and Ealing 52%. Uxbridge and Harrow were areas of population growth.⁶⁸ In these areas the Labour Party Women's Sections and Women's Co-operative Guild were decisive in campaigning for the votes of women.

⁶⁴ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 6 December 1918.

⁶⁵ Reports from the *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 6 December 1918, 18 May 1923, and 25 July 1924.

⁶⁶ 'Labour Candidates 1922 and 1923 West London', *Hayes Peoples' History*, 22 February 2009. She spent 6 months in Holloway Prison for this. She joined the Labour Party in 1919.

⁶⁷ J. Grigg, 'The WPSU in West London', *Labour Heritage Bulletin*, (Spring 2014).

⁶⁸ Statistics from *DODS Parliamentary Companion* for 1923 and 1929.

6.4 The Labour Party Women's Sections: Aims and Objectives

As it was based on a mainly male-dominated trades union movement, the Labour Party was not best placed to recruit women in its early years. There was no individual membership (except for the ILP), so one could only be a member through an affiliated trades union. The Women's Labour League (WLL) was founded in 1906 to address this problem. Its president was Margaret MacDonald (wife of Ramsay MacDonald). She stressed that the WLL would make a special effort to enrol the wives and daughters of trades unionists and socialists, since it recognised the dangers of wives not being in sympathy with their husbands' Labour politics. Women had the right to know what their husbands were fighting for. Nevertheless the WLL campaigned on issues of importance to women, such as infant and maternal health care and pit head baths for miners. Working-class women were to be given the opportunity to play a part in their community. Professional women were attracted to the WLL, because in their working capacity as teachers and doctors they had seen poverty at first hand, and therefore understood the need for social reform.⁶⁹

In 1918 the WLL had an estimated 4,000 members. It had assisted women to get involved in local government, including Urban District Councils, Poor Law Guardians, as well as Child Welfare Committees, established by the 1918 Maternity and Child Welfare Act. They had also participated in Food Control Committees, which were set up during World War 1. In Southall local women were supported by male trades unionists on the railways who threatened to 'do the shopping on Saturday morning' rather than see their wives having to queue all day for basic provisions. This would have constituted a form of industrial action.⁷⁰

In 1918 the WLL became the Women's Sections of the Labour Party with a membership which was to grow to hundreds of thousands.⁷¹ Unlike socialist parties in continental Europe women members were to represent almost half the membership of the party, the majority in some areas. There had however been a tradition of women's involvement in politics in Britain, including the Women's Suffrage Movement.⁷²

⁶⁹ L.Middleton, (ed.), *Women and the Labour Movement*, p.28. For a full account of the Women's Labour League see C.Collette, *For Labour and for Women: the Women's Labour League 1906-1918*.

⁷⁰ See B.Humphries, 'Do We Want to Starve? Southall Labour and the Southall-Norwood Food Control Committee', *Labour Heritage Bulletin* (Summer 2014).

⁷¹ See P.Graves, *Labour Women*, pp.23-40.

⁷² The involvement of women in politics was more widespread in Britain than in other European countries, where in some cases it had been banned. There had also been a high profile campaign for the right to vote the Suffragettes for instance. Women gained the vote in 1918 in Germany and in 1944 in France. The Conservative

The Women's Sections were set up under the 1918 new constitution of the Labour Party. We have already seen that the recruitment of individual members was important in new industrial areas such as west London, with a diverse population and weak trades union movement. Before looking at how widespread Women's Sections were in the area covered by this thesis, it is important to look at their success nationally. How did they organise at a grassroots level and involve women in politics?

In 1918 branches of the WLL were invited to become the basis for the new women's sections of the Labour Party. They would have representatives on local Party General Committees.⁷³ It was expected that meetings would be held weekly or fortnightly, with outside speakers and open to non-members. More informal social gatherings in peoples' homes were envisaged, such as 'sewing parties', to help integrate new members and to 'chat over the affairs of the Party.' More formal social events such as tea parties and drama were also encouraged. Members would be prepared for election work, and to organise links with trades unions organising women workers.⁷⁴ Like the WLL, the Women's Sections attracted single professional women, but the main basis for its membership were working-class married women, for many of whom there had been no other outlet for public involvement outside of the home. For Marion Phillips this organisation of 250,000 women became an achievement in itself, a crusade to free wives and mothers from a life of domestic drudgery.⁷⁵

To involve women in a plan for their future, they were invited by the Labour Party Women's Advisory Committee to become involved in a discussion on planning for their homes, in a considerable amount of detail. The results were published in a pamphlet written by Marion Phillips and Averill Sanderson-Furniss, entitled *The Working Woman's House*.⁷⁶

A questionnaire was sent out to women in the WLL in 1918 on the working woman and her home. Some had replied then that yes they would like a fitted bath but would never get it, but others feared that more baths would lead to people getting colds.⁷⁷ This is significant as housing policy for Labour was not just a 'woman's issue', but a core part of its policy both in

and Liberal Parties had women's sections with thousands of members. See B.Campbell, *The Iron Ladies: Why do Women vote Tory* (London, 1987).

⁷³ L.Middleton, *Women and the Labour Movement*, p.55.

⁷⁴ Labour Party, *Organisation of Women within the Labour Party: the Work of the Women's Sections* (London, 1918) (LSE Pamphlet).

⁷⁵ G.Roberts, *A Woman of Vision: the life of Marion Phillips*. See also P.Thane, 'The Women of the Labour Party and Feminism'.

⁷⁶ A.Sanderson Furniss and M.Phillips, *The Working Woman's House* (London, 1920) (LSE Pamphlet).

⁷⁷ *Labour Woman*, October 1953.

national and local politics. Funding made available by John Wheatley's Housing Act of 1924 underpinned much of the public house building, carried out by the local councils which Labour controlled and (some which it did not) in the 1920s. However women took the brunt of bad housing and the ill health which it went with it. This remained a key issue into the 1930s, and up to the 1945 general election. Pamphlets published by the Labour Party in the 1930s such as *Your Britain* featured photographs of healthy children in houses with gardens, and in 1943 the Party published another pamphlet entitled *Your Home Planned by Labour*, which was to be a model for many of the new council estates to be built after 1945.⁷⁸ The Party also campaigned on pensions for widows, free education, lower food prices, child and maternal welfare and, after 1918, extending the franchise to all women over 21.⁷⁹

The newspaper *Labour Woman* supported the work of the Women's Sections. It combined politics with recipes and knitting patterns. It also had sections for children including essay and drawing competitions, indicating that the lives of its readers evolved around their homes and their families. In June 1928 it published as an article the prize winning essay on why the new woman voter should vote Labour. It saw women as workers, although for most them, their working sphere was the home. The woman had the profession with the highest mortality rate that of childbirth and her craft was motherhood. What were her needs? An end to slum housing, decent homes, a living income, good health care for her and her children, free secondary education for all and free access to university education. She also needed peace to protect her children from death and injury in war.⁸⁰

Women formed a link between the labour movement and local communities, at a time when men worked long hours. They campaigned on local issues such as public baths and clinics for mothers and children. They also held together the social life of the labour movement, organising dances, children's parties and bazaars. These social events also provided a link to the local community. John Grigg, whose mother was in the Heston Labour Women's Section said that he doubted if there were better children's events in Heston. There was always an excellent tea, film shows, entertainment, games and gifts for all the children. 150 children attended the tea party.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Labour Party, *Your Home Planned by Labour*, London, 1943 (LSE Pamphlet).

⁷⁹ Phillips, M. (ed.) *Women and the Labour Party*, London, (London, 1918).

⁸⁰ *Labour Woman*, June 1928.

⁸¹ John Grigg has edited notes from the minutes of the Heston Women's Section Executive Committee, 17th December 1930-24th August 1936.

Labour women also discussed political issues which they considered of key importance and some of which were controversial with men.⁸² One of these was the issue of birth control, which had the overwhelming support of the Women's Conference but received opposition from men who said that the working class could not be constrained by 'Malthusianism'.⁸³ There was also strong opposition from Irish Catholics in the Party, in areas like Liverpool and Glasgow.⁸⁴ The other controversial issue was family allowances, which were seen as likely to cause wage rates to be depressed.⁸⁵ Dr Ethel Betham spoke on Family Allowances at a meeting of the Acton Women's Section.⁸⁶

By the 1950s it was time to reflect on what had been achieved in terms of falling infant mortality, now down to 29.8 per 1,000 births, and the success of the government's housing programme. Leah Manning, MP for Epping called for women to get involved in discussing practical issues such as day nurseries, free school milk and whether births should take place in the home or in hospital. She acknowledged that for most women life still centred round the home and that the LPWS should aim to involve these women in political discussions. This was reflected in the growth in Party membership to over one million, whilst in government.⁸⁷

However, more women were now working, and alongside recipes and knitting patterns there was a regular series in *Labour Woman* entitled *I Like My Job*, featuring teachers, librarians, home helps amongst others. But this new development may have lay behind the decline of the Women's Sections. By the 1950s and 1960s women being in paid employment was the norm rather than the exception. They could no longer attend afternoon meetings. The consumer society was also taking its toll, although rising rents and prices were to become issues in the 1950s as wartime controls were relaxed. By the late 1950s the Women's Sections were scaling down their activities but not abandoning them altogether. In the 1964 General

⁸² K.Hunt, 'Making Politics in Local Communities: Labour Women in Interwar Manchester' in M.Worley, (ed.), *Labour's Grassroots*. She also argues that women's issues such as safe motherhood remained important in the Manchester Labour Party in the 1930s.

⁸³ This is described in G.Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women*, Chapter 6. Labour's Chief Women's Officer Marion Phillips said that 'sex should not be dragged into politics', whilst John Wheatley MP advised that birth control was a matter for a husband and wife, p.160. A debate on birth control was considered not suitable for Labour Party conferences. See also L.Beers, *Red Ellen*, pp.123-124.

⁸⁴ In March 1926 Labour MP for Shoreditch, Mr Thurtle introduced a ten minute bill to allow doctors employed by local authorities to give birth control advice to married women. It was opposed by Rev. Mr Barr of Glasgow. The Bill was defeated by 167 votes to 81. The Labour vote was 28 in favour, 46 against. *Labour Woman*, March 1926, p.38.

⁸⁵ For a full account of these different opinions on family allowances see P.Graves, *Labour Women*, Chapter 3 and L.Beers, *Red Ellen*, pp.123-124.

⁸⁶ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 22 July 1927.

⁸⁷ L.Manning, *Growing Up: Labour's Plan for Women and Children* (London, 1948). See also: J.Bellamy and J.Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography* vol.7 (London, 1984), pp.166-173.

Election Labour targeted women voters with a leaflet which asked ‘Why doesn’t my money buy as much as it used to,’ appealing to women in their role as housewives.⁸⁸ Beatrice Campbell, like many others argued that the Conservatives were able to appeal to women voters in the 1950s, as consumers who wanted to see the end of rationing by the Labour Government.⁸⁹ However when price controls were relaxed by the Conservatives, food prices rose significantly, and became the focus of Labour’s 1955 election campaign.⁹⁰ Andrew Thorpe agreed that Labour lost more votes proportionately from men than from women voters in the 1950s.⁹¹

In 1965 *Labour Organiser* ran a debate on the future of the Women’s Sections. Some argued that it had attracted women into the Party and to play a role in local government. Others were dismissive, saying that it had confined women to mundane tasks such as tea making and envelope stuffing. Some wanted it to be given a higher profile, whilst others wanted it to be abolished completely, saying that women could just play a role like men in the Party, and no longer faced discrimination. There were however still fears about the woman’s vote in a divided household.⁹²

6.5 Labour Party Women’s Sections: Extent of Local Organisation in West London

The National Conference of Labour Women reported at its 8th Conference held in Huddersfield in 1927 that 1,782 women’s sections existed, with an estimated 300,000 members. 258 of these were in ward rather than divisional parties. By 1932 there had been a fall to 1,704, but that started to rise again in the 1930s.⁹³ Only a minority of activists became MPs or councillors in the area.

Women’s Sections were reported from an early stage in parliamentary divisions covered in this thesis. Branches were reported in Southall, Ealing, Hayes, Uxbridge and Acton.⁹⁴ In Southall the Women’s section had been active in the local Food Control Committee. Together with the National Federation of Women Workers, the Southall Women’s Section organised a victory dance after the election of James Culley to the Middlesex County Council

⁸⁸ Glebe Women’s Section Minutes LMA ACC/1267/14.

⁸⁹ Beatrice Campbell, *The Iron Ladies: Why do Women Vote Tory?* p.72.

⁹⁰ *Hayes Gazette*, 6 May 1955. Food subsidies were abolished in 1952. This was soon to be followed by ending rent controls.

⁹¹ A.Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, (4th edition), pp. 136-137 1945 Men (55%), Women (47%), 1950 Men (47%), Women (43%). More significant electoral losses were from non-manual and young voters.

⁹² *Labour Organiser*, issues from 1965.

⁹³ Report of the 8th National Conference of Labour Women, Huddersfield, 1927.

⁹⁴ Reports from *Labour Woman*, December 1918, August 1920, and October 1922.

in May 1919. At the second anniversary of the Southall Labour Party it was reported that the Southall Women's Section was the most 'live' in Middlesex. It was paralleled by an individual Men's Section, which later became the Individual Members' Section. Both the Women's and the Men's Section had one representative on the Executive Committee of the Southall Trades Council and Labour Party. There was also a representative from the Railway Women's Guild.⁹⁵ In 1919 Southall Women's Section organised a Socialist Sunday School whose tea party was attended by 64 children. It had organised tea for the 160 inmates of Hillingdon Infirmary, one of its practical welfare activities. Two local women were elected as Labour councillors in the council elections of 1919. One of them, Mrs Chard was married to a railway worker from Cardiff. During World War 1 she had assisted women munitions workers find accommodation in the area, and in 1920 she was also elected to the local Maternity and Child Welfare Committee.⁹⁶ She campaigned for the first public bath house in Southall, and in 1926 was elected chairman of the Southall Urban District Council.

The work of Labour councillors appealed to women voters. In Ealing, post 1945, Labour's control of the borough housing committee allowed 5,000 new homes to be planned across the borough. Other achievements included free school meals, slipper baths and a children's playground.⁹⁷ The provision of free school meals was described by the local Conservatives as 'socialism run mad'. They had also opposed the opening of a clinic in Greenford in the 1930s, saying that Greenford women would not know how to use it.⁹⁸

On the Executive Committee of the Uxbridge DLP four out of eleven members were women in 1929. There was a new affiliation from the Hillingdon East Women's Section.⁹⁹ In 1930 there was a conference to select a new Parliamentary candidate, Mr Worsnop was selected with 45 votes, but his runner up was a Mrs Moore with 16 votes.¹⁰⁰

In Acton there was a Woman's Section from 1918.¹⁰¹ Women in Acton had played a role in the wartime Food Vigilance Committee during World War 1.¹⁰² Nationally known women activists such as Marion Phillips and Dr Ethel Betham were invited to speak at its public

⁹⁵ Southall Labour Party and Trades Council 1923-1925 LMA ACC/1267/2.

⁹⁶ *Labour Woman*, May 1919 and March 1920. See also 'Mrs B.A.Chard' *Hayes Peoples History*. Monday 9 July 2007.

⁹⁷ Ealing Labour Group Minutes 1942-1946 LMA ACC/1972/006.

⁹⁸ Interview with Mike Elliott. This was related to Mike by a Greenford councillor, Fred Tomlinson in the 1940s.

⁹⁹ *Uxbridge District Labour Party Minutes 1928-1939*, LMA ACC/1267/1/1-2.

¹⁰⁰ *Uxbridge District Labour Party Minutes 1928-1939* LMA ACC/1267/1/1-2.

¹⁰¹ *Labour Woman*, October 1918.

¹⁰² *Acton Gazette and Express*, January 1918.

meetings. It had supported two local council candidates in 1919, Mrs Ratcliffe and Mrs Salmon.¹⁰³ By the 1930s it was meeting weekly, and organised a public meeting for laundry workers. In 1945 Mrs Simpson, the wife of a train driver and secretary of the West London Co-operative Guild, stood as a council candidate. Dora Sparks, the wife of Joe Sparks MP, who was a clerk for the Shop Assistant's Union, served as secretary to the Acton Labour Party until 1939.¹⁰⁴ The Acton LPWS supported workers at Napier's who were resisting redundancies at the end of World War 2.¹⁰⁵

In Ealing there was a functioning Women's Section in 1918, which held monthly meetings with speakers, as well as social events. Subjects included co-operation, India, work on the local county council and internationalism. These sections often held joint public meetings. In line with national organisational guidelines a West Middlesex Women's Advisory Council (WMWAC) was set up. Its first secretary was a Mrs King of Deans Road, Hanwell, who set out to organise a conference.¹⁰⁶ This was to be the first of many conferences across west London. In 1929 Marion Phillips addressed 100 delegates and visitors on the need for a state medical service. It was reported that every Parliamentary division except Acton was represented.¹⁰⁷ Maternal health remained an important topic for the Women's Sections.¹⁰⁸

Into the 1930s west London was one of the areas of membership growth for the Labour Party and this was also reflected in its Women's Sections. *Labour Woman* reported a rapidly growing population as being responsible for good attendances and new sections. A new women's federation was created in Southall suggesting that women's sections were founded on a ward basis.¹⁰⁹ In May 1936 a conference called by the WMWAC in Hanwell was attended by representatives from 21 sections.¹¹⁰ In June 1937 *Labour Woman* reported that the number of sections in West Middlesex was increasingly so rapidly that its conferences looked like a mass meeting.¹¹¹

¹⁰³ *Acton Gazette and Express*, April 1919.

¹⁰⁴ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 8 June 1945 and 6 January 1956.

¹⁰⁵ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 1 June 1945.

¹⁰⁶ *Labour Woman*, April 1925.

¹⁰⁷ *Labour Woman*, May 1929.

¹⁰⁸ In National Baby Week in July 1936 it was reported that there were still 3,000 maternal deaths per annum. Infant mortality had fallen to 57 in 1000, down from 150 per 1000 in 1930. Local Authority provision was considered to be responsible for this improvement, *Labour Woman*, July 1936.

¹⁰⁹ *Labour Woman*, May 1935.

¹¹⁰ *Labour Woman*, May 1936.

¹¹¹ *Labour Woman*, June 1937.

A newly formed branch in Greenford was part of the Harrow Parliamentary Division. One of its members, Mrs Mercer chaired the Harrow Women's Divisional Committee. *Labour Woman* reported that the section in Greenford was 'in one of the entirely newly built areas and the officers and members are to be sincerely congratulated on the excellent work done and progress made in their first three years.'¹¹² A local paper reported that the Greenford LPWS had organised a Xmas Party for 70 adults and 200 children. There had been a collection of presents for the children of miners.¹¹³ Northolt Labour Party founded in 1932 was part of the Uxbridge division. By 1938 just under half of its membership were women.¹¹⁴ A women's section was duly set up in 1937. Members held meetings, whist drives and children's parties and there were visits to local factories such as Lyons, to look at working conditions. New ward sections were reported across the area, Waxlow Ward in Southall and Grosvenor Ward in Ealing were amongst them. The Women's Sections had taken on an international campaign raising money for the children caught up in the Civil War in Spain.¹¹⁵

When war broke out in 1939 however there was some initial disruption to the work of the Women's Sections, as with all other sections of the Labour Party. Attendances at meetings were smaller. However meetings were continued, as issues such as evacuation, rationing and air-raid shelters were discussed. In June 1941 the WMWAC held its annual conference with 60 delegates, and 'many cheerful reports.' In fact in many areas, women were holding the Party together. In 1942 17 sections were represented at a conference in Southall. As more women were pulled into the workforce meetings were held at different times and some were more informal. John Grigg reported that his mother had to give up her role as treasurer in the Heston Women's Section, when she took a job in a local factory as she could no longer make afternoon meetings.¹¹⁶ By 1943 there was emphasis on discussing post war reconstruction, in particular the Beveridge Report.

After 1945 and the election of a Labour Government, the number of women's sections increased along with the membership as a whole. At the Southall AGM in 1947 there were two representatives from the Women's Sections, and three out of twelve on the Executive

¹¹² *Labour Woman*, August 1927.

¹¹³ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 4 January 1929.

¹¹⁴ Northolt Labour Party Minutes LMA ACC/4023/02/03 1937-1940.

¹¹⁵ An article by Gwendoline Adams de Puertes reported that 20,000 school children in Barcelona were receiving free milk due to the efforts of the British Labour Party and Co-operative Movement. *Labour Women*, August 1938.

¹¹⁶ John Grigg on the Heston Women's Section, (1 October 2004) .

Committee were women.¹¹⁷ Waxlow Women's section celebrated its seventh birthday with a cake, singing and dancing. It held weekly whist drives.¹¹⁸ New sections were formed, in Ruislip for example. In Southall there were new ward women's sections in South Hanwell and Glebe. The Glebe women's section met monthly. Minutes from 1958 indicate that meetings were held to hear reports of the Labour Women's Conference, they had discussions on the Party's *Signpost for the Sixties* document and 'on the younger generation.' Social activities included tea parties, bingo and the annual bazaar preparations which included making handicraft dolls for sale.¹¹⁹

Women were still a minority of parliamentary candidates. In the newly created Ruislip-Northwood constituency a female parliamentary candidate, Alma Birk, was selected in 1950. This was the first Labour woman parliamentary candidate in west London since Mary Richardson in Acton in 1922. She wrote a regular column in *Labour Woman*. However, her constituency was not considered to be a winnable seat for Labour.¹²⁰ Two women candidates were selected for the Middlesex County Council for Ealing in the 1950s, both were members of Hayes Labour Party. Margaret Abbott was the wife of a railway worker and legal secretary at the local Co-op.¹²¹ There was only a minority of women Labour councillors. When Labour won control of Ealing council in 1958, only two of twenty five of its councillors were women, and three out of nine aldermen.¹²²

In the main women did not form the majority of the Labour Party membership in any of the parliamentary divisions covered in this thesis, with the exception of Ealing. In 1933 for instance Ealing Labour Party reported 287 members, which included 129 men and 158 women. By 1934, after an overall increase in membership to 490, this comprised 279 men and 211 women. In the other parties the percentage of women's membership was much lower. In Uxbridge and Acton for most of the 1930s there were almost twice as many men as women in membership. In Harrow (which included Greenford), by 1938 the proportion of women was higher, 2518 men to 1927 women. During the war years of the 1940s the proportion of women members in Ealing rose again to over 50%, and in 1945 the membership of the Ealing East Party comprised 789 women, and 627 men.¹²³ This might be

¹¹⁷ Southall Labour Party Records LMA ACC/1267/5.

¹¹⁸ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 2 February 1946.

¹¹⁹ Glebe Woman's Section Minutes LMA ACC/1267/14 1958-63.

¹²⁰ The results in the 1950 General Election were Crowder (Conservative) 23,077, Birk (Labour) 13,568.

¹²¹ *Hayes Gazette*, 21 January 1921.

¹²² Ealing Labour Group Minutes LMA ACC/1972/006.

¹²³ Figures are from Labour Party Annual Reports.

surprising as in many areas women held the Party together during World War 2. However it must be remembered that Acton and Hayes were centres for the aircraft engineering industry and the railways so many male workers were in ‘reserved occupations.’ In the annual reports for the 1960s Southall Labour Party reported two women’s sections, and a total membership of 2,666, only 556 of whom were women.¹²⁴

However women were playing a role in the Party, without necessarily being members of the Women’s Sections. There were long standing socialist couples who ran Ealing North CLP, like the Elliots, Wheatleys and the Glovers.¹²⁵ By the 1960s attendance at meetings was falling and this was reflected in the participation of women as well. The Greenford Branch for instance, once so vibrant in the 1930s reported low attendances including that of women.¹²⁶

Interviews with members of the local parties for the Labour Oral History Project reveal some information about the participation of women. Syd Bidwell for instance says that his mother was not involved at all. This was because: ‘Politics was not for the likes of her’. She had, he said, ‘kids and curtains mentality’. He did though acknowledge that women were more likely to be involved in the Women’s Co-operative Guild. Some of the women interviewed gave a different picture. Both Doris Ashby and Marianne Elliott said that it was their mothers who were involved in the Labour Party. In both cases they were very committed subscribers in the new industrial area of Perivale and Greenford. They both said that their fathers were not actually Party members, but they were trades unionists with left wing political sympathies, and probably regarded themselves as ‘affiliated members’. This could indicate that for their fathers being a member of an affiliated trades union was seen as their political commitment to the labour movement. Both Marianne and Doris followed their mothers’ footsteps into Labour Party politics, Marianne at the young age of 18 when she became a branch secretary, but Doris not until she retired from nursing. Both of their mothers were additionally active in the Women’s Co-operative Guild which they said had given them training in running meetings and public speaking. This indicates that there was considerable overlap between membership of the Labour Party and the Women’s Co-operative Guild. Miriam Crook said that she joined the Labour Party in 1937 after she met her husband, who worked for London Transport. She remembers the Women’s Section as being very active in

¹²⁴ Southall Labour Party Annual Reports 1961-1965 LMA/ACC/1267/58.

¹²⁵ Mrs Elliott and Mrs Glover wrote letters to the *Middlesex County Times*.

¹²⁶ Ealing North Labour Party, Ravenor Ward Minutes LMA ACC/4023/02/11.

Acton. Joan Parr's husband also worked for London Transport, as a driver at Southall bus garage. During the 1926 General Strike she and her mother had booed at scab drivers who had taken buses out along Acton High Street. Her father was disappointed when the strike was called off, but her mother was glad to see money coming into the household. Both her parents continued to collect food and money for the miners as they stayed out on strike. Her mother was active in the Women's Co-operative Guild.¹²⁷

Conclusion

The extent of women's involvement in labour movement politics and its impact has been underestimated by historians. Much labour history has been centred on national rather than grassroots politics and there were very few women Labour MPs in the interwar years. Also until the 1970s women had been under-represented in the trades union movement. Their participation in the workforce has been regarded as marginal and temporary, playing a part on a large scale during two world wars in the 20th century. In some industries however women formed the majority of the workforce, in the textile mills of the north of England, but also in the laundries of west London. In the interwar years the trend of women working in the new factories in London, but also in offices, shops and public services had already begun. Their main contribution to politics at this stage however was in their local communities, and it was via organisations such as the Labour Party Women's Sections and the Women's Co-operative Guild. Pamela Graves and Pat Thane have written about the contribution of Labour women to the organisation of the Party and also to its priorities in policies for housing, welfare and education.¹²⁸

How did this apply to west London? Mike Savage in his local study of labour movement politics in Preston, described how the emphasis changed from work place politics to community politics, with the women's sections and their political priorities coming to define Labour's political support. He also notes that women who were active trades unions changed their focus in the late 1920s to community politics.¹²⁹ The growth of Labour Party women's sections and branches of the Women's Co-operative Guild across the area, mobilised political support amongst working-class women voters. The issues on which they campaigned such as housing were not marginal 'women's issues' but major political issues for the working class

¹²⁷ Interviews with Syd Bidwell, Doris Ashby, Joan Parr and Miriam Crook for the Labour Oral History Project. Syd Bidwell's interview was also recorded in D.Weinbren's *Generating Socialism*, p.23.

¹²⁸ P.Graves, *Labour Women*, P.Thane, 'Labour and Welfare' (Chapter 3) and M.Francis, 'Labour and Gender' (chapter 6) in D.Tanner, P.Thane and N.Tiratsoo (eds), *Labour's First Century* (Cambridge, 2000),

¹²⁹ M.Savage, *The Dynamics of Working Class Politics: the Labour Movement in Preston*.

as a whole. The building of working-class communities providing not only housing, but schools and public health facilities were crucial in building political support for the labour movement across west London and changing the political landscape. This applied to the new working-class areas of Hayes, Greenford and Northolt, as well as existing working class communities in Southall and Acton.

This thesis has looked at how population change in west London underpinned the changing political landscape, but this chapter on the organisation of women shows that it was not automatic but directed by a nationally co-ordinated strategy. Hence there was a two way relationship between local population and national political organisation. It can be said that in new industrial areas, such as west London in the interwar years, the success of this organisation was of key importance in bringing about political change. Women organised themselves into the local labour movement. They were influential in supporting industrial action locally and nationally in organisations such as the Railway Women's Guild. Enfranchised for the first time, many women joined the LPWS and Women's Co-operative Guild, which played an important role in their political education and in mobilising the votes of working class women for the Labour Party.

Chapter 7: The Co-operative Movement and its Impact on West London

Introduction

This chapter will look at the role of the Co-operative Movement in the development of the labour movement in west London. It will consider the history of the Co-operative Movement nationally, its influence in local working class communities, and services that it provided to them as consumers. It will also examine its educational and political roles, and its organisations, the Co-operative Party, and the Guilds, particularly the Women's Co-operative Guild, which recruited thousands of working-class women nationally.¹ It will then examine how this movement took root in west London. The growth of the Co-operative Movement took place in the interwar years and its peak was in the 1950s. After this the Co-op was in decline.

The political impact of the Co-operative Movement has to be evaluated in terms of its alliance with the Labour Party. How many co-operators, formerly non-political or Liberal or Conservative voters, would have been motivated by their membership of the Co-operative Movement to become Labour voters? Nicole Robertson quotes from McKibbin's *The Evolution of the Labour Party* (1975) his view that it was unlikely to have gained votes from Co-operative Party affiliation that it would not otherwise have won.² This is questionable as the role of the Co-operative Movement was to represent the working class as consumers, not producers, thus potentially motivating women voters. This was at a time when the majority of women did not participate in the workforce after marrying and having a family. Thomas Carberry said that the 1918 Co-operative Congress hailed the enfranchisement of women voters. Its annual report said that the new representation would gain from 'the accession of the mass of organised and trained Co-operative women.' It was envisaged that the Co-operative Movement would play an important role in motivating women voters. Alfred Barnes of the London Co-operative Society (LCS), described the creation of the Co-operative Party and the enfranchisement of women as being 'synchronous events.'³

¹ There are a limited number of books which have been written about the Women's Co-operative Guild. They include the following – C.Webb, *The Woman with the Basket: the History of the Women's Co-operative Guild 1883-1927* (Manchester, 1927), G.Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women* (London, 1998) and J.Gaffin and D.Thomas, *Caring and Sharing: the Centenary History of the Co-operative Women's Guild* (Manchester, 1983).

² N.Robertson, 'A Union of Forces Marching in the Same Direction:the Relationship between the Co-op and Labour Parties 1918-39' in W.Worley (ed.), *Foundations of the British Labour Party*, p.229.

³ T.F. Carberry, *Consumers in Politics: a History and General Review of the Co-operative Party* (Manchester, 1969), p. 24 and p.61.

Membership of the Co-operative Movement in the interwar years was higher than that of trades unions. G.D.H. Cole reports that in 1945 there were 9 to 10 million Co-op members, and 6.5 million trades union members. The Co-operative Movement had grown during the 1920s and 1930s, especially in new industrial areas, and trades union membership had fallen.⁴ But if this was not significant, then it can be argued the Co-operative Movement offered considerable support, both financial and practical in providing meeting halls, for local Labour parties, particularly in areas where the trades union movement was not very strong.

This leads us on to the question for this thesis. How strong was the Co-operative Movement in west London and how great was its political impact? Nicole Robertson in her book *The Co-operative Movement and Communities in Britain 1914-1960* (2010) provides a model for considering the role of local co-operative movements in different parts of the country, including the Midlands, South Wales, Scotland and London.⁵ Mike Savage illustrates the role of the Co-op in different neighbourhoods in Preston.⁶ The structure of the Co-operative Movement has always been federal, a union of co-operative societies, which although having national aims and objectives, constitutional rules and guidelines, also was bound to reflect the working-class communities in which it was based. Having looked at the progress and aims of the Co-operative Movement nationally, this chapter will then consider the development of co-operative societies in London as a whole, and then in the working-class communities of west London.⁷ It will try to reach a conclusion on how much influence the Co-operative Movement had on political change across west London, in comparison with the rest of the labour movement, the trades unions, and the Labour Party.

7.1 Growth and Development of the Co-operative Movement?

Co-operative societies had a history going back to Rochdale Pioneers in 1844, although there had been some existing producer co-operatives before that. They aimed to cut out ‘the middle man’, were owned by their members, and therefore did away with profiteering. There were no shareholders or profits. Any surplus was paid to Co-operative Society members as a dividend (the divi) which was paid out on an annual or semi-annual basis. By the end of the 19th century the core business of the Co-op was its grocery stores, operating on a ‘not for

⁴ G.D.H Cole, *The Co-ops and Labour* (London, 1945) (LSE Pamphlet).

⁵ N.Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement and Communities in Britain 1914-1960*, (Farnham, 2010).

⁶ M.Preston, *The Dynamics of Working Class Politics*, pp.127-129.

⁷ There are several short histories of the Co-operative Movement in London, for instance by S.Newens, *History of Co-operative Politics in London*, (London, 1982), (Bishopsgate Institute Co-operative Movement Collection A/2E/1) and *Working Together: a Short History of the London Co-operative Society Political Committee* (Wembley, 1988), and W.Henry Brown, *A Century of London Co-operation* (London, 1928).

profit' basis, dealing directly with producers and guaranteeing good quality food for the shopper.⁸

Co-operative societies were self-governing, rooted in towns, cities and neighbourhoods. They affiliated to the Co-operative Union.⁹ Early co-operative societies were based on groups of workers such as the Birmingham Industrial Co-operation Society formed in 1881 by twenty five railway workers who worked for the Midlands Railway. In South Wales miners formed the basis of co-operative societies and in Liverpool they were initially based on transport workers.¹⁰ Workers at the Woolwich and Plymouth Royal Arsenals also set up co-operative societies.¹¹ These were typical examples of groups of skilled workers, who formed the basis of support for the Co-operative Movement. The component parts of the London Co-operative Society (LCS) were the Stratford Society formed by railwaymen in 1860, Edmonton Society formed by tramway men in 1895 and the West London Co-operative Society, formed by railwaymen also in 1895.¹²

The Co-operative Movement was to move towards a neighbourhood focus, based in working-class communities, rather than the workplace. In the 20th century membership and sales grew significantly. By 1920 there were 4.5 million members, spending an average of £56 per annum. It was the largest trading organisation in the world. Based in working-class neighbourhoods its shops were seen more as a threat to the small independent grocer, than the department stores, which were largely situated in town centres.¹³ By 1939 there were 8.5 million members nationally, accounting for 20% of all grocery sales. The membership was working class, and skilled workers in particular. It had less support amongst the poorest section of the working class, who could not afford the prices of its produce.¹⁴ It was estimated that 60% of all skilled workers in London belonged to the Co-op.¹⁵

The geographical location of the Co-operative Movement was changing. Born in Rochdale the Co-op was initially an institution of the North of England. At the beginning of the 20th

⁸ For a full account see G.D.H. Cole, *A Century of Co-operation* (Manchester, 1944).

⁹ C. Webb, *The Woman with the Basket*, p.205.

¹⁰ J.De Forges, 'We Make Millions of Pairs of Boots, but not one Pair of Millionaires': Co-operation and the Working Class in Liverpool and the Rhondda', *North West Labour History*, 19 (1994/95), pp. 48-64.

¹¹ See R.Rhodes, *An Arsenal for Labour: The Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society and Politics 1896-1996* (Manchester, 1998), and M.Hilson, 'Consumers and Politics', *Labour History Review*, 67 (1) (2002), pp.7-27.

¹² N.Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement and Communities in Britain 1914-1960*, pp.15-16.

¹³ B.Lancaster, *The Department Store: a Social History*, (Leicester, 1995), p.88. See also N.Killingback, *Limits to Mutuality: Economic and Political Attacks on Co-operation during the 1920s and 1930s* in S.Yeo (ed). *New Views of Co-operation* (London, 1988).

¹⁴ See C.Webb, *The Woman with the Basket*, p.88, and J.Gaffin, *Caring and Sharing*.

¹⁵ J.Benson, *Affluence and Authority: a Social History of 20th Century Britain* (London, 2005), p.53.

century there were 100 co-operators per 1,000 population in the north of England, but only 7.5 per 1,000 in London.¹⁶ Peter Gurney quotes Leonard Wolf's condescending comment: 'the dingy grocery store in some main sodden street in a hideous grimy northern industrial town.'¹⁷ It had been confined to the industrial areas of Lancashire, Yorkshire, Tyneside and the West Midlands.

Between 1914 and 1938 membership of the Co-operative Movement doubled. It had expanded well beyond its heartland in the North of England, and into the South and Midlands, amongst an increasingly affluent working-class population. During this time retail trade as a whole only increased by 2.5%. Gurney wrote that the social geography of co-operation was transformed in the interwar period, as the movement began to take root in what had previously been described as 'co-operative deserts', particularly in London and the South-East.¹⁸ This coincided with a relative decline in Lancashire, which Turnball and Southern ascribe to the decline of staple industries such as coal and textiles and falling disposable incomes. In contrast the south of England was beginning to see working-class affluence.¹⁹ For instance the *LCS Spring Bulletin* of 1932 advertised furniture, raincoats, shoes and garden equipment, with the caption 'let us help you make your garden beautiful'.²⁰

Its range of activities was expanding beyond that of the local grocer's shop, and was to include department stores selling clothes and furniture, as well as offering financial and travel advice. In moving with changing patterns of consumption in the 1930s Co-op shops began to sell convenience foods such as tinned fruit and vegetables. A Co-operative Permanent Building Society was set up to offer help to working class house buyers. This was catering to a changing working class population, who had benefitted from falling food prices in the 1930s. By 1938 two-thirds of homes in the UK had electricity, radios, electric fires, vacuum cleaners and irons.²¹ It was the success of the Co-op which was to attract attacks from its competitors such as the National Trades Defence League and the Grocers' Federation. They

¹⁶ M.Purvis, 'Development of Co-operative Retailing', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 16(3) (1990), pp.314-331. Purvis attributes low membership in the metropolis and other large cities to a diverse workforce and hostile competition.

¹⁷ P.Gurney, 'Heads, Hands and the Co-operative Utopia: a Essay in Historiography', *North-West Labour History*, 19, (1994/95), p.3-23.

¹⁸ P. Gurney, 'The Battle of the Consumer in Post-War Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, 77 (4) (2005), p.956-987.

¹⁹ J.Turnball and J.Southern, *More than Just a Shop: the History of the Co-op in Lancashire* (Preston, 1995).

²⁰ *LCS Spring Bulletin* 1932 published by the London Co-operative Society. (Bishopsgate Institute Co-operative Movement Collection).

²¹ G.Scott, *Feminism, and the Politics of Working Women*, p.256.

lobbied the Government for the Co-op's 'divi' to be taxed as unearned income, a measure which they hoped would bankrupt the Co-op.²²

This geographical relocation could have been overstated, as it was undoubtedly linked to population growth in London and the South-east of England in the interwar years. We have seen in Chapter 1 of this thesis, how and why the population of west London suburbs grew at this time, with an increased working-class population. This contributed to the changing geographical location for the Co-operative Movement, away from its heartland in the North-West of England, and towards London and the south-east. This was because areas like west London had a growing population, many living on new housing estates, who had more disposable income in the interwar years. The enrolment percentage of Co-operative membership in the interwar years was still higher in the north-west England than the south, with West Cumberland having the highest percentage of 29%. Jayne Southen's article on co-operation in the north-west of England looks at co-operative statistics and indicates that membership figures for the North-West and South in 1924 were 1,036,360 and 726,505 respectively. By 1939 they were 1,586,544 and 2,412,535. Sales statistics were even more dramatic with sales in the North-West having halved, and those in the South increasing threefold between 1924 and 1939. This she believed had adverse consequences for the Co-operative Movement as 'many of its new members were not interested in or unaware of highest ideals of the Co-operative Commonwealth.'²³

7.2 The London Co-operative Society (LCS)

W.Henry Brown wrote his book *A Century of London Co-operation* in 1928. He said:

The Co-operative Conquest of London since the War has been the most significant victory of the Peace. Ideals which seemed the phantoms of enthusiastic visionaries have become materialised in shops, factories, rolling stock and dividends. They are the tangible evidences of security and success, according to the accepted canons of orthodox economists and the authorised exponents of the commercial creed. To have attained such a vast result in so short a time seems suggestive of the miraculous.²⁴

²² See N.Killingback, *Limits to Mutuality*.

²³ J.Southen, 'Co-operation in the North West of England 1919-1939'. *North-West Labour History*, 19 (1994/95), pp.97-114.

²⁴ W.Henry Brown, *A Century of London Co-operation*.

His history shows that despite lagging behind co-operative heartlands such as Lancashire, London had not been a complete desert for the movement in the 19th century. Its first co-operative society had in fact been founded in 1821. The first co-op shop had been opened in Stratford in 1861. The LCS was founded in 1920, the result of an amalgamation of existing societies in Stratford and Edmonton. It was joined by the West London Co-operative Society in 1921, and by the Yiewsley Society in 1931. Stratford was the largest of these societies with 40,278 members before amalgamation, followed by Edmonton with 26,035 and West London with 10,701. The LCS represented the Co-operative Movement north of the Thames. In south London there was the South Suburban Co-operative Society and the Woolwich Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (WRACS).

The LCS immediately began vigorous recruitment – with the following annual increases in membership: 1924 (5,097), 1925 (38,108), 1926 (36,203) and 1927 (44,989). In January 1934 the LCS journal the *Wheatsheaf* reported that 20,000 new members had been recruited in one month simply by members approaching friends, workmates and neighbours. In March it was reported that an additional 50,000 members had joined since the beginning of the year. One of the star recruiters had been a dairy worker in Hillingdon, who had signed up over 218 members by recruiting door to door and this had included eight guests at a wedding party.²⁵ It continued to grow: 1935 (574,921), 1945 (862,049), reaching its peak in 1957 with 1,214,035 members.²⁶ Its geographical area expanded beyond its base in inner London. It extended through Essex to Southend on the east coast, to Harefield on the western outskirts of London.

By 1922 the LCS owned 99 groceries, 31 bread shops, 26 butchers, 8 bakeries, 16 dairies, one laundry in Ealing and a farm in Essex.²⁷ This was achieved in the face of difficulties posed by the economic recession across the UK economy in the early 1920s. In 1922 no dividend could be paid but 90% of the membership remained loyal members. In January 1936 it reported that all records had been broken. Total share capital had risen to £8 million. New outlets included a dairy in South Ealing, with a capacity of 30,000 gallons of milk.

The LCS was also an important employer in London. By 1936 there were now 14,000 employees, an increase of one and a half thousand in one year. It employed a diverse workforce with fifty or more trades, including clerks, bakers and laundry workers, delivery drivers and shop assistants. Co-operative Society workers enjoyed sick pay and holidays with

²⁵ *Wheatsheaf* (London Co-operative Society), January 1934, January and , March 1936.

²⁶ N.Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement Communities in Britain*, p.16.

²⁷ S.Newens, *History of Co-operative Politics in London*.

pay, even in the interwar years. Typically 1,000 new employees were taken on every year, but applications could exceed 1,500 per week.²⁸

The LCS was to become the largest co-operative society in the UK.²⁹ Its main growth took place between 1920-1940, years which coincided with an expanding population in parts of the capital and the south-east of England. In 1952 a LCS pamphlet reported that the LCS had 403 grocers, of which 120 were self-service, 228 butchers, 114 fruit and vegetable shops and 26 department stores, which sold a whole range of furnishings and TVs and radios.³⁰ The Co-op had developed beyond the corner shop selling food produce, and was diversifying its range of products in new industrial areas.

Quarterly members' meetings of the LCS were held in all localities. It also organised public meetings with speakers, social events, choirs and dramatic societies. It was however only a minority of the membership as elsewhere who participated in these activities. The Co-operative Party had only ever comprised a minority of the membership of the Co-operative Movement itself. In 1953 membership of the LCS across London was 1,100,000, but only 3,251 were members of the Co-operative Party. Stan Newens said that by the 1940s the LCS had become dominant in its trading areas, with 40% of households having a member, 'though the number of activists was only a tiny minority of the membership, the Movement was widely recognised as an important force in the Metropolitan area.'³¹ In the 1930s 250,000 copies of the Co-op paper, the *Citizen* were distributed across 25 constituencies in London every month.³² He adds that the LCS was 'an important factor in winning London to the Labour cause.'³³

The LCS reported challenging times during the 1939-45 war but retained loyal support, with members registering their ration cards with Co-op shops. In 1942 the first ever self-service store in the capital was a co-op shop which opened in Romford in 1942. After 1945 the Co-operative Movement continued to thrive and adapt. In the 1950s for instance, the Co-op ran 60% of self-service outlets.³⁴

²⁸ LCS, *20 Years After: a Commentary on the Growth of the LCS Ltd, 1920-1940* (Bishopsgate Institute Co-operative Movement Collection).

²⁹ G.D.H.Cole, *A Century of Co-operation*, p.380.

³⁰ LCS, *Always a Step Ahead – a Guide to Your Membership* (London, 1952) (Bishopsgate Institute Co-operative Movement Collection).

³¹ S.Newens, *Working Together*, p 24.

³² S.Newens, *Working Together*, p 11.

³³ S.Newens, *Working Together*, p 51.

³⁴ See P.Gurney, 'The Battle of the Consumer in Post-War Britain', pp.956-987.

After 1950 the Co-operative Party had also lost members. By the late 1950s falling membership of the LCS attracted criticism of its entrenched political leadership, the London Co-op Members Organisation (LCMO).³⁵ In London its membership had peaked at 4,161 in 1951. By 1962 it had only 2,490 members. Between 1950 and 1960 the membership figures dipped across London. West 1038-630, East 1704-1242, North 1485-1185. The decline in the late 1950s, Stan Newens believes, was down to a falling population in London, as its inhabitants moved out to New Towns and the suburbs. Increasing affluence in the 1950s had favoured private traders, which took trade away from the Co-op stores.³⁶

18,000 new members had joined the LCS in 1953, but that had compared with 46,000 new members in 1950. Its increase in sales in 1954 had been the lowest since 1945. In 1968 the *LCS Quarterly Review* reported that in what it called 'The London Desert, the Co-op represented only 3% of grocery stores in inner London. It was still 20% in west London, and 25% in the rest of the country.'³⁷ Blame was attached to the LCMO which still held 14 out of 15 seats on the LCS Management Committee. Furthermore meetings were often inquorate and it was proposed in 1961 to hold meetings twice per annum instead of quarterly.³⁸ Membership of the guilds also declined.

7.3 Extent of Co-operation in West London

We will now focus on the growth of co-operative societies in the two west London boroughs of Ealing and Hillingdon. This will show that it was new working-class areas which were the location of most new Co-op shops in the interwar years.

The West London Industrial Co-operative Society amalgamated with the LCS in 1921, after a series of local amalgamation meetings. It had been set up in 1893 with 253 members. In 1904 stores had opened at Acton Green and Southall. In 1909 a South Ealing branch was opened and in 1911 land had been purchased for a bakery in Southall.³⁹ After amalgamation a committee of 32 was established, comprising 12 from Stratford, 10 from Edmonton and 8 from West London. The Committee was to meet once a month and to report to two general

³⁵ The LCMO had run the LCS unchallenged since its early days. Initially it was progressive, ending the Co-op's previous non-political stance. See S.Newens, *History of Co-operative Politics in London*.

³⁶ S.Newen, *History of Co-operative Politics in London, and Working Together*, p 57. See also A.Barnes, *The Coming of the LCS* (London, 1940) and *The LCS Story* (London, 1963).

³⁷ *LCS Quarterly Review*, vols.1-6, (1953-1958).

³⁸ *LCS Quarterly Review*, 9(3),(1961).

³⁹ *Wheatsheaf*, November 1935.

meetings of the membership per year.⁴⁰ By this time there was a thriving co-operative movement with local shops in Ealing, West Ealing, Acton and Hanwell. These were suburban town centres, and as we have seen there were communities of railway workers. There was also a branch in Pitshanger Lane, Ealing. This was still largely a rural area before housing estates were built in the late 1920s. There was a nearby co-operative housing estate called Brentham Garden Suburb, which had had been built in 1901.⁴¹ It was the home of Sam Perry, the first secretary of the Co-operative Party.⁴²

Southall, the main railway town in west London, had a co-op shop and a bakery, which delivered bread to all the shops in the area. In 1917 this was delivered by horse driven vans. The minutes of the Society dwelt at length on the problems of lame horses, resulting in late deliveries and left-over bread. In 1919 there were negotiations with the Bakers Union which was asking for more pay and fewer hours for its members.⁴³ Many parts of west London were at this time not more than villages. In 1920 it was reported for instance that ‘Greenford was not ripe for a branch (of the Co-op).’⁴⁴

The LCS minutes for 1927 showed that in terms of grocery sales, none of the west London shops were ‘in the first league’, like those in East Ham or Walthamstow. However, the Southall Co-op shop, made it into the ‘second league.’⁴⁵ The Co-operative Movement was progressing in the area. In January 1930 the *Wheatshaf* reported on a meeting *Ealing Enlightened*, when Mr Perry, MP for Kettering, addressed a concert meeting in the Victoria Hall, Ealing Town Hall. He welcomed a ‘large attendance of residents’ and said that London was no longer a ‘Co-op desert’. West London once struggling in its early days was now making great strides.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ *LCS Suggested Amalgamation with the West London Industrial Co-operative Society*, (Bishopsgate Institute Co-operative Movement Collection).

⁴¹ <https://brentham-com/brentham-garden-suburb/history/>

⁴² See G.Rosen, *Serving the People: Co-op Party History from Fred Perry to Gordon Brown* (London, 2007), p 1. Sam Perry was the father of tennis champion Fred Perry. The Brentham Institute had tennis courts for local tenants, which allowed Fred Perry to become a nationally renowned tennis player.

⁴³ West London Industrial Co-operative Society (WLICS) Minute Books 1917-1921 (Bishopsgate Institute Co-operative Movement Collection), LCS/D/64A/11-13.

⁴⁴ WLICS Minute Books 1917-1920.

⁴⁵ LCS Sub Committee Minute Book 21st September 1925-23rd July 1928, (Bishopsgate Institute Co-operative Movement Collection) LCS/A/4C/3.

⁴⁶ *Wheatshaf*, January 1930. Sam Perry was elected MP for Kettering in 1923 and 1929. His family home was in Ealing where he supported his tennis playing son, Fred Perry. He was to decline offers to stand as a PPC in Ealing when he lost Kettering, as his priority was the Co-operative Movement. (K.Gildart and D.Howell eds., *Dictionary of Labour Biography* vol.12 (Basingtoke, 2005), pp.226-233

In 1931 the Yiewsley Co-operative Society joined the LCS. This represented an industrial area in the current borough of Hillingdon. It had begun in 1893 with a bakery and opened its first branch in Uxbridge in 1908. Branches of the Co-op were to follow in Hayes in 1919, West Drayton and Harefield in 1920.⁴⁷

By 1940 the LCS could report department stores and groceries on the Western Avenue in Acton, which was close to the new East Acton Estate built by Acton Council, Coldharbour Lane in Hayes, a centre of new council housing in the interwar years, as well as the more long established working-class communities in King Street, Southall and West Ealing. Co-op shops sold groceries, fresh fruit and vegetables and increasingly clothing and footwear. In total there were four Co-op grocers in Acton, four in Ealing, two in Greenford, two in Hanwell, two in Hayes, one in Northolt, one in Perivale, two in Ruislip, three in Southall, one in Uxbridge, one in West Drayton and one in Yiewsley. Some of these also sold meat and fresh fruit and vegetables. There were coal depots at Acton, Greenford, Hayes, Ruislip, Southall, West Drayton, and Ealing, milk depots in Acton Green, Hayes End, Southall and South Ealing. Other services included tailoring, footwear, opticians, pharmacy, estate agents, travel agents and savings banks. This showed that the Co-op had set down roots in the new industrial areas of west London. It also illustrated that it had grown beyond its core business of selling groceries.⁴⁸

Why did Co-op shops attract the working class in new industrial areas? McKibbin in *Classes and Cultures* (1998) described how, between 1919 and 1939 90% of local authority houses were built on suburban estates, away from traditional working class communities. This was the case in west London. These estates were often cultural deserts and their shopping facilities were poor. The Co-op was able to fill a gap in these areas.⁴⁹ In 1935 a new food store was opened in Bilton Road, Perivale, on a housing estate close to the Hoover factory on the A40. This is where Doris Ashby had moved with her parents in the 1930s.⁵⁰ The *Wheatsheaf* reported:

⁴⁷ *Wheatsheaf*, September 1935.

⁴⁸ LCS, *Co-operation All About it*, (London, 1940) (LSE Pamphlet).

⁴⁹ R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.188.

⁵⁰ Interview with Doris Ashby for the Labour Oral History Project.

Until the builders convened to erect factories and houses in Perivale the district was unknown to most Londoners. Yet today there are many hundreds of LCS members living in the district...who appreciate the new Co-operative Service.⁵¹

New activities on behalf of the co-operative societies illustrate how life was changing for the working class in parts of the country. It was now possible to save and have a bank account, to take out a loan for a mortgage and to budget for a day out at the seaside, if not a summer holiday. The LCS advertised a travel department and a mortgage service with 5% interest. Its journal, the *Wheatsheaf* advertised houses which were for sale. When the Co-operative Bank had been founded in 1919, most Co-op members did not save, having only money for basic necessities. By 1934 the bank held 66,058 deposits. This was nevertheless a minority of the 7 million co-op membership.⁵²

What about the cultural and political side of the Co-operative movement? Was it 'just a shop', with quality good food and an annual 'divi' or were its traditional beliefs also being carried into new industrial areas? The value of the 'divi' varied from one part of the country to another, depending upon the rate of unemployment and disposable income. For some it helped them out of dire hardship, whilst for others it enabled a small treat or luxury, or even savings for a mortgage for instance.⁵³ Doris Ashby reported that the co-op 'divi' had helped her parents save up to buy a house in Perivale.⁵⁴

7.4 More Than Just A Shop: the Political and Social Life of the Co-operative Movement

Prams and Politics – meet Mr and Mrs Wise (a recruitment leaflet for the LCS in 1955)

But the co-op is more than just a shop. Mrs Wise knows this too. Her husband is a trades unionist and understands why workers must stand together to protect themselves. Unity is strength. In a sense the Co-op is the housewife's trades union. It protects the consumer from exploitation from shoddy goods and excessive prices.' It does this because it belongs to Mr and Mrs Wise and the rest of the Co-op's customers. They own the store. Between them they get the profits when the 'divi' is paid out. They elected the directors and its members decide policy.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Wheatsheaf*, May 1935.

⁵² *Wheatsheaf*, April 1934, September 1934 and March 1935

⁵³ N.Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement and Communities*, p.51.

⁵⁴ Interview with Doris Ashby for the Labour Oral History Project.

⁵⁵ Recruitment leaflet for the LCS, July 1955. (Bishopsgate Institute Co-operative Movement Collection).

The Co-operative Movement was more than just a shop. It stressed the value of educating its membership in the ideals of co-operation, and the superiority of socialism over capitalism. These ideals could be put into practice in its shops where members benefitted from owning the business. However its educational activities were designed to impart its social and political values to its membership and beyond. The adaptation to consumerism in the South of England was seen by some to be undermining the ethical basis of co-operation, but the LCS attempted to organise its membership socially and politically. An LCS recruitment leaflet advertised the Women's Co-operative Guild where women members could discuss social issues. It called on both wives and husbands to join the LCS, so that they could take part in joint social activities.⁵⁶ The Co-operative Union published handbooks which encouraged social activities such as whist drives and tea parties, to engage the local working class at a time when leisure was becoming more commercialised. Local societies were encouraged to set up Educational Committees, in order to prepare its members for a new society. Nicole Robertson assesses that only 50% did this, and it declined in importance after 1945, when the state provided free education up to secondary level.⁵⁷ Local societies also organised welfare work and raised funds for charities.⁵⁸ There was a west London 'slate club' which helped women in the Co-op, on the payment of four pence per week.⁵⁹ On joining the LCS, all members received death and convalescent benefits. There was a nursing section which loaned medical equipment.⁶⁰ This was before the foundation of the NHS.

Branches of the LCS organised 'concert meetings' with speakers. This comprised both politics and entertainment. A concert meeting was held in Ealing in 1930. The speaker, Mr Messer MP told the *Wheatshaf*, 'it may be of interest to you at HQ that even in a backward area like Ealing our concerts are being well-attended.'⁶¹ His speech was on Co-operation and Labour.

The *Wheatshaf* reported Co-op tea parties for children in Brentham and Hanwell. In Southall 200 attended a performance of the Southall Junior Co-operative Choir in December 1929. In June 1930 the West London Co-operative Choir held its first concert at the Co-op Hall on the

⁵⁶ LCS, *Just to Introduce Ourselves*, 1943 (Bishopsgate Institute Co-operative Movement Collection).

⁵⁷ N.Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement and Communities in Britain*, p.101.

⁵⁸ Evidence of these events in other parts of the country includes Mike Savage's account of Preston, *Dynamics of Working Class Politics*, where he describes the summer fete. (p.129) Interviewee for the Labour Oral History Project, Isa Paton of Glasgow, describes how the local co-operative society ran a nursing home, convalescent home, and provided bed pans and crutches when needed. See D.Weinbren, *Generating Socialism*, p.51.

⁵⁹ *Wheatshaf*, January 1934.

⁶⁰ LCS, *Just to Introduce Ourselves*.

⁶¹ *Wheatshaf*, March 1930.

Western Avenue. The Western Area of the LCS held its annual children's outing in July. 1,000 children were taken to Sheerness for the day. A total of twenty six coaches collected members from nine pick-up points including Ealing and Hanwell. After a day of boating and bathing, tea was provided by Co-op members in Sheerness.⁶²

Members' quarterly meetings continued to be held across west London. In December 1929 meetings attracted 47 in Southall and 90 in Acton.⁶³ End of year concert meetings were held in Hillingdon, Southall, Greenford and Yiewsley. A conference was held in the Co-op Hall, Acton to discuss workers and education in the United States.⁶⁴

The January 1934 issue of the *Wheatsheaf* issued an appeal to all members of the LCS to loyally support the services of the Co-op, as this would 'bring a greater measure of happiness to the consumer and assurance of further progressive steps towards the permanent solution of present day economic chaos.' Planned January events included ten concert meetings across west London, including Uxbridge, film displays, and a performance by the Acton Co-operative Dramatic Society.⁶⁵

As in other parts of the country, the annual event was the summer fete, held on International Co-operators Day (2 July). This attracted thousands of local people. These fetes were to showcase the values and politics of the Co-op, with an emphasis on internationalism, peace and mutuality.⁶⁶ In July 1930 the LCS ran seven fetes to commemorate International Co-operators Day. The fete in Acton attracted 25,000 people. Its events included a 'beautiful baby contest', choirs, a foreign fancy dress pageant by 400 ladies, and sports. Opened by the Mayor of Acton, it ended with a firework display and dancing. It was described by the *Wheatsheaf* as 'one of the most eventful days in the history of Acton.'⁶⁷ This was to be repeated on an annual basis. Wood End playing fields in Hayes were to be a second west London location for an International Co-operators Day fete.⁶⁸ In July 1935 the co-op fete in Hayes was attended by hundreds of members. It included sports events, a pageant and a firework display and 'a continuous programme of events such as can rarely be equalled in

⁶² *Wheatsheaf*, July 1930.

⁶³ *Wheatsheaf*, December 1930.

⁶⁴ *Wheatsheaf*, January 1931.

⁶⁵ *Wheatsheaf*, January 1934.

⁶⁶ N. Robertson described Kettering's annual co-op fete in *The Co-operative Movement and Communities in Britain*, p. 82.

⁶⁷ *Wheatsheaf*, June, July and August 1930.

⁶⁸ *Wheatsheaf*, May 1932.

Hayes.’⁶⁹ The evening meeting was addressed by former LCS president Caroline Ganley on world peace. The following year the Hayes fete was addressed by a Hayes councillor who described the National Government as the ‘National Nuisance’, which had no money for economic development, but plenty for re-armament. It had been put into power by the apathy of the people. This political speech was followed by eight hours of ‘fun and frolic with never a dull moment’. This included sports, a pageant, a baby competition, folk dancing and a ‘monster firework display’.⁷⁰ These events showed how the Co-op successfully combined its political message with providing entertainment for the local community. These were indications that although only a minority of its members attended its meetings, the LCS and the Co-operative Movement were rooted in local communities.

In 1936, in a venture of international solidarity, the LCS was urging its members to buy milk for Spanish children, caught up in the Spanish Civil War. Milk for Spain coupons could be bought at every Co-op store. It was the largest international aid effort that the Co-op had ever embarked upon.⁷¹ Recruitment however was still seen as difficult in commuter areas of west London such as Ealing and Ruislip. Ruislip was congratulated on its progress ‘in spite of the peculiar difficulties with which they were faced, owing to the district being one of London’s dormitory suburbs.’⁷²

The activities of the Co-operative Movement were curtailed during wartime in London as in the rest of the country. Its last International Co-operators Day before the War, was held in Wembley Stadium and attracted 65,000. Its pageant showcased the history of England, from Merrie England, to Industrial Revolution, the Luddites, Robert Owen and the Rochdale Pioneers, and the 1914-1918 War.⁷³ Members of the Co-operative Movement in west London took part in elections for the LCS committees. In 1935 Mr R.Barker of the TGWU in Greenford stood for the Political Committee. In 1951 Mr Neal, a butcher, also from Greenford, stood for the Management Committee.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ *Wheatsheaf*, August 1935.

⁷⁰ *Wheatsheaf*, August 1936.

⁷¹ See E.Mason, ‘The Co-operative Commonwealth is the only Answer to the Fascist Empire: Support for Republican Spain within the British Co-operative Movement’, *Labour History Review*, 82(3) (2017), pp. 189-213.

⁷² *Wheatsheaf*, March 1938.

⁷³ *Wheatsheaf*, August 1938. This could have been the inspiration for the London Olympics ceremony!

⁷⁴ *LCS Internal Election Handbills 1922-1969* (Bishopsgate Institute Co-operative Movement Collection) LCS/B/14A/18.

The Co-operative Movement had a life beyond the shop across the localities of west London. Much of its life was conducted by its affiliated guilds, the most important and significant of which was the Women's Co-operative Guild.

7.5 Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG)

The Women's Co-operative Guild was founded in 1883 in Hebden Bridge, with 40 members. Originally it had been called the Women's League for the Spread of Co-operation. It was part of the Co-operative Movement. Its membership mainly consisted of working class married women, who had been excluded from all aspects of public life.⁷⁵ It appealed to women as consumers rather than producers, but did include some working women, such as teachers, and textile workers. Catherine Webb's book *The Woman with the Basket* was published in 1927. In her introduction to the book, the former WCG general secretary of 32 years, Margaret Llewelyn Davies, said that her friends had included mill workers in Lancashire and Yorkshire, teachers and wives of engineers, miners and railwaymen, store employees, agricultural and general labourers. They were determined that their children would have better life chances than themselves. She described the 1916 Congress of the WCG where working women addressed other working women about questions which interested them. The WCG had led to the emergence of the married working woman from national obscurity into a position of national importance. Furthermore the Co-op had done for the housewife what trades unions had done for working men.⁷⁶ She said that the Co-op organised women as consumers, in the same way that trades unions had organised men as workers.

The WCG was to grow rapidly. By the end of the 19th century it had 6,400 members. It suffered a small set back during World War 1, but from 1918-1919 it recruited 5,000 new members in a record of 100 new branches.⁷⁷ The main period of growth however was in the interwar years, from 44,539 to 87,246 members between 1920 and 1939. This was to be the peak year for membership of the WCG. By 1953 it had fallen to 58,785 members in 1,692 branches.⁷⁸ Like the Co-operative Movement itself, the WCG began life in a northern town.

⁷⁵ See J.Gaffin,J.and D.Thomas, *Caring and Sharing*, p.20.

⁷⁶ C.Webb, *The Woman with the Basket*, pp. 9-14, Margaret Llewellyn Davis was WCG General Secretary from 1889 to 1921.

⁷⁷ C.Webb,*The Woman with the Basket*, p.23.

⁷⁸ J.Gaffin,*Caring and Sharing*, p.90. There was a rise in membership by 1961 to 61,037, but 40% of the membership were over 60. By 1981 it had fallen to 13,709 members in 578 branches.

Its membership card depicted a woman in a shawl over her shoulders, wearing clogs, basket in hand. She is looking beyond the mill town in front of her.⁷⁹

Much of the growth of the WCG in the interwar years however, was not to come from its northern heartlands, but like the Co-operative Movement itself, the south of England. Webb gives the membership figures for the WCG in 1927 as follows: London (LCS) 3,273 in 88 branches, south of the river the WRACS had 2,069 members in 36 branches and the South Suburban Society had 712 members in 29 branches. In 1940 there were 6,000 members in 173 branches across the area covered by the LCS. In contrast the city of Leeds had 1,368 members in total.⁸⁰ As with the Co-operative Movement as a whole these figures reflected a rapidly growing population in London and the South and membership density in the North and Midlands was higher.⁸¹ Jean Gaffin says that the main increases in membership in the interwar years were in the south-east where there were lower rates of unemployment. Growing disposable incomes made the quality produce of the Co-op shops attractive. There was also an emphasis on social activities, such as whist drives, drama and concerts which its new members could afford. However, attendance at WCG branch meetings averaged around fifty. Therefore there is little evidence that the WCG lost its core values of support for women as mothers and housewives, its political campaigning for peace or its support for families in the depressed areas of the UK, for instance during the miners' lockout of 1926.

There were active branches of the WCG across west London. By 1930 there were three branches in the older working class areas of Acton and Southall, which met weekly. In Southall the branch had been in existence since the beginning of the 20th century. It celebrated its 33rd birthday with 45 members enjoying a tea, games and a sketch. To accommodate women with children, branches generally met in the afternoon. They had speakers on topics such as 'women and health', and 'women and politics'. These meetings were interspersed with social events such as whist drives. Branches existed in Ealing, Hanwell, and Northfields. There was a branch on the Brentham Estate, and already in the

⁷⁹ This image was painted by a local painter, Mr Muirhead Bone, whose woman is looking over the factories for a new dawn and social order. C.Webb, *The Woman with the Basket*, p.40.

⁸⁰ C.Webb, *The Woman with the Basket*, p. 199. See also LCS, *Co-operation: All About it*.

⁸¹ G.D.H. Cole gives Co-op membership density in 1942 as 15% in the LCS area, 58% in Derby and 59% in Walsall, G.D.H. Cole, *Century of Co-operation*, p.380.

new working class area of Greenford.⁸² The Sudbury Hill branch, north Greenford held an annual hyacinth show.⁸³

In Hillingdon there were branches reported in Hayes, Uxbridge, Yiewsley, and Woodend.⁸⁴ Subjects for meetings included the role of social services, of practical interest to working class housewives, but there were also speakers on the broader political issues of peace and disarmament. In 1931 the Hayes WCG discussed attacks by local business on the Co-op and the role of women in international life. Hanwell WCG also had an impressive attendance, attracting 100 to a tea party in Hanwell library. It organised an annual outing to the coast, such as Clacton. Branches campaigned on local issues. Hayes for instance campaigned for the Middlesex County Council to provide free school milk.⁸⁵ In 1934 the Southall branch held a corset exhibition and visit to a local factory. By 1936 the Greenford branch was celebrating its 7th birthday, with a tea, attended by 70 people. In the evening 250 attended a dance in the evening, one illustration of how deeply the WCG had sunk roots in the area. An additional three more branches are reported in the Hillingdon area, North Hillingdon, Ruislip and Ickenham, areas in the heart of Metro-land. Ruislip is reported as having discussions on life in the Soviet Union and whether women should have equal rights.⁸⁶

A glimpse of life in the WCG is recorded by a reporter from the *Middlesex County Times* from July 1936. Under the title: *Women's Co-operative Guild at Work: How they do it in Perivale*, he observed:

My first glimpse was a row of perambulators each with its full weight of sleeping infant, neatly parked in the drive and thought at first that it would be a glorified mothers meeting. But no. These two hours every Tuesday afternoon were like a company AGM. It was all very businesslike. A bell rang to commence business. The women had come from giving their husband their midday meal, and would return to household chores. The discussion was short and to the point, led by Mrs Davies of Ealing Council. Subjects discussed were not just 'parish pump' but issues such as whether there should be sterilisation of the unfit. Local maternity provision was very important. They discussed a campaign for a Perivale maternity hospital. There were reports and resolutions. After a strict ten minute tea break, a bell would be rung to commence business. Recruitment to the Perivale WCG was by

⁸² *Wheatsheaf*, January 1930, May 1932.

⁸³ *Wheatsheaf*, May 1935.

⁸⁴ *Wheatsheaf*, May 1934.

⁸⁵ *Wheatsheaf*, May 1932.

⁸⁶ *Wheatsheaf*, issues from 1936

members bringing friends to the meeting. Once they had attended three meetings they would be approached by the branch to join the WCG. The sixty women then go home.⁸⁷

Mrs Olive Davies, a local Labour councillor was described by Doris Ashby in her interview for the Labour Oral History Project, as a forceful woman who was very keen to train other women, to take on positions of authority within the WCG.⁸⁸

One of the major campaigning issues for the WCG was international peace. It had invented the 'white poppy' as a symbol of peace, which replaced the traditional red poppy on Armistice Day. In November 1936 Acton WCG, together with the Labour Party Women's Section and the Palmerton Road Sisterhood laid a wreath of white poppies at the Acton Cenotaph. 150 women attended a church service at St Mary's Church with Reverend Gough, and then marched to St Albans Hall for a peace play. This was followed by a short meeting, at which a resolution on disarmament, an end to the causes of war, and the need to work for a new world order, was passed unanimously.⁸⁹ The Yiewsley and Greenford branches had also held peace days, and the Greenford branch had called for peace training to take place in schools.⁹⁰

The WCG kept going during World War 2 in spite of difficulties. Women worked in local factories so were no longer able to attend afternoon meetings. In place of face to face education, the Co-op offered correspondence courses. The Co-op advertised its laundry services for working women – under the heading 'Do you dread Mondays?' One of its original aims had been to free women from the drudgery of housework. This was controversial as many WCG members saw household management as their professional skill.⁹¹ The Co-operative Wholesale Society Horticultural Department issued advice on how to grow your own vegetables in wartime. *The Wheatsheaf* printed recipes for meals at a time of rationing. Where members could meet, there was still plenty to discuss peace aims, wartime taxation, the Beveridge Report and home rule for India.⁹² Branches such as Sudbury Hill held sewing and cookery classes.⁹³

⁸⁷ *Wheatsheaf*, September 1936, originally published in the *Middlesex County Times*, 11 July 1936.

⁸⁸ D. Weinbren, *Generating Socialism*, p. 5.

⁸⁹ *Wheatsheaf*, January 1937.

⁹⁰ *Wheatsheaf*, May 1935.

⁹¹ See A. Thomson, 'Domestic Drudgery will be a Thing of the Past: Co-operative Women and the Reform of Housework' in S. Yeo (ed.), *New Views of Co-operation* pp.108-127.

⁹² *Wheatsheaf*, February, April 1940, January, March, June, 1941.

⁹³ *Wheatsheaf*, January 1942.

Although the WCG was by far the largest of the guilds, the Co-operative Movement also organised Men's and Mixed Guilds, and Children's Circles. In the LCS area, by 1939 there were 169 women's guilds, 14 Men's Guilds, and 16 Mixed Guilds. There were 24 guilds for youth aged 15 to 25, and 171 guilds for children. The WCG was the most successful guild, but the organisation of children of co-operators was also very significant. The membership of the Youth Guilds peaked at 40,000 in 1945, falling to 22,000 by 1955. There were 180 Children's Circles across London.⁹⁴

As these numbers suggest, Men's and Mixed Guilds across west London were few and far between, but there were reports of Men's Guilds in Acton and Ealing, and a Mixed Guild in Hayes.⁹⁵ There were more reports of the youth guilds. In 1930 for instance the Southall Junior Co-operative Choir held a concert in the Sisterhood Hall in Southall, attended by 200 people.⁹⁶ In October of the same year Greenford Children's Circle held its annual camp in Iver, Buckinghamshire.⁹⁷ In 1932 the Ealing Children's Circle held a tea for 70 children.⁹⁸ In 1935 junior circles were reported in Southall, Acton, Hanwell, Greenford and Ealing. There was an emphasis on social events and entertainment.⁹⁹ Children's Circles played a role for a generation of children in educating them in the values of the Co-operative Movement, and preparing them for an active life in politics, as an active citizen. This is described by Doris Ashby who related how she learned how to chair meetings, at the local Co-operative Youth circle.¹⁰⁰

The extent of the co-operative guilds across west London showed how the co-operative movement had laid down roots, with popular support in this area. How much impact was it to have on local politics?

⁹⁴ LCS, *20 Years On* p.24, P. Gurney, 'The Battle of the Consumer in Post-War Britain', pp. 956-987. See also LCS, *Co-operation All About it.*, and S.Todd, 'Pleasure and Co-operative Youth: the Interwar Co-operative Circles', *Journal of Co-operative Studies*, 32, (2) (1999), pp. 129-145.

⁹⁵ *Wheatsheaf*, January, May 1931.

⁹⁶ *Wheatsheaf*, February 1930.

⁹⁷ *Wheatsheaf*, October 1930.

⁹⁸ *Wheatsheaf*, January 1932.

⁹⁹ *Wheatsheaf*, March 1935.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Doris Ashby for the Labour Oral History Project.

7.6 *The Co-operative Movement and Politics*

Meet Mr and Mrs Wise again

‘The Co-ops are in politics to protect Mr and Mrs Wise as they go shopping. At every turn politics affects them.’¹⁰¹

In 1917 the Co-operative Movement ended its political neutrality and the Co-operative Party was formed. This was in response to the wartime government’s imposition of an Excess Profits Tax on its members. It was seen as unfair as the Co-op did not make a profit. Any surplus went to the membership. The Co-op had also been involved in campaigning against wartime profiteering in the food industry and had urged its members to take an active part in local Food Control Committees.¹⁰²

An LCS pamphlet entitled *Co-operators and Political Action*, published in 1923, saw the politicisation of the Co-op in broader terms. It read:

The entrance of the Co-operative movement into the political field was both a necessity and a natural outcome of its progress. The movement has striven and worked towards an ideal, the displacement of capitalist enterprise by co-operative enterprise, the public ownership of the means of wealth production by the workers, and control by them, through democratic machinery, as opposed to private ownership and the exclusion from control of the producing, consuming and distributive workers.¹⁰³

In other words the Co-op needed political protection, as had the trades union movement. When the Co-operative Party was founded, all members of co-operative societies became affiliated members. There was no option to ‘opt out’ (unlike trades union members who could opt out of affiliation to the Labour Party). In 1962 Thomas Carberry reported that there were 11,392,546 affiliated members of the Co-operative Party, from 555 societies. He suggested that most of them did not even know that they were members, and that the active individual membership of the Co-operative Party was more like 25,000.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ LCS recruitment leaflet (1955).

¹⁰² See article by J.Grigg in *Labour Heritage Bulletin*, (Autumn 2016), and article by Gareth Thomas on *Labour List*, <http://labourlist.org/2016/10/gareth-thomas-from-tax-justice-to-workers-on-boards-the-co-op-party-is-as-vital-as-ever-as-it-marks-its-99th-birthday>.

¹⁰³ London Co-operative Society, *Co-operation and Political Action* (London), 1923 (LSE Pamphlet).

¹⁰⁴ T.Carberry, *Consumers in Politics*, p 60.

The Co-op had not taken part in the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900. Many of its members were deemed to be supporters of the Liberal and Conservative parties, and so party politics was to be avoided.¹⁰⁵ However, the adoption by the Labour Party of a new constitution in 1918, which included a clause endorsing common ownership, plus the overwhelming working class membership of both parties, meant that they could work together. The Co-op stood for the nationalisation of land, railways, and waterways. In local politics it stood for municipalisation of lighting, electricity and water, tram and bus services, baths and laundries. It favoured direct works for house-building. Nationally it opposed indirect taxation, such as Purchase Tax.¹⁰⁶

This alliance was not formally recognised however until the Cheltenham Agreement of 1927, narrowly supported by the Co-operative Party. Up until that time the Co-operative Party had stood its own candidates in some elections. In 1918 there had been 10 Co-operative Party candidates, one of whom, A.E. Watson, was elected in Kettering. He was also the leader of the Labour Group on Derby Council. After the Cheltenham Agreement, local agreements led to joint Co-operative and Labour candidates and local Co-operative Parties could affiliate to their local Labour Party.¹⁰⁷ However, by then 447 local Co-operative Societies, including Woolwich, were already affiliated.¹⁰⁸ Labour's commitment to the Co-operative Movement, was upheld by Ramsay MacDonald prior to the 1929 General Election, when he guaranteed that there would be no taxation of the Co-op whilst he was prime minister.¹⁰⁹ In 1935 there were nine Co-op sponsored candidates, five of whom were in London. There were 23 Co-op candidates in 1945.¹¹⁰ In 1955 19 out of 38 Co-op sponsored candidates were elected. Four of these were women.¹¹¹ In 1946 there was a new agreement between the Co-operative Party and the Labour Party, leading to joint committees at national level.¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ See T.Carberry, *Consumers in Politics*, p 11.

¹⁰⁶ S.Newens, *Working Together*, p 11.

¹⁰⁷ See the wording of Clause 4, Part 4 of the Labour Party constitution. 'To secure for the workers by hand and brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.' See also D.Weinbren, *Generating Socialism*, p.50.

¹⁰⁸ See K.Manton, 'The Labour Party and the Co-op', *Historical Research*, 82 (218) (2009), pp. 756-778.

Manton illustrates how its business interests sometimes led to a divergence of interest between the Co-op and Labour Governments, after 1945. There was a difference of opinion on the form of public ownership between nationalisation, municipalisation and co-operative enterprise.

¹⁰⁹ See N.Killingback, *Limits to Mutuality*, p.218.

¹¹⁰ T.Carberry, *Consumers in Politics*, p.24.

¹¹¹ T.Carberry, *Consumers in Politics*, p 128.

¹¹² J.Bailey, 'The Consumer in Politics', in I.Barou (ed.), *The Co-operative Movement in Labour Britain* (London, 1948), pp.107-108.

The WCG had a broader political vision before 1917. Catherine Webb described the support of its members for free education, widows' pensions, sickness benefit and the right of women to vote. In 1908 it came out in favour of equal pay for women, in 1909 it supported women's suffrage (although eschewing the activities of the militant suffragettes), and it supported the 1911 National Insurance Act. The WCG encouraged women to join trades unions, and in 1922 it became part of the Standing Joint Committee (SJC), which comprised the Women's Trades Union League and the Labour Party Women's Sections.

After the enfranchisement of some women in 1918 the WCG stepped up its efforts to recruit women and to offer them political training. It organised 40-50 day schools attended by over 1,000 women. Catherine Webb comments that although traditionally the Co-operative Movement had seen party politics as being divisive, she said that 'a party which approached the problems of everyday life from a point of view and in the language most familiar to their (women's) homely experience should make a great appeal to them.'¹¹³ Since 1912 the WCG had favoured an alliance with 'other Labour forces', and in 1920 its congress wholeheartedly supported an alliance with the Labour Party. Margaret Llewelyn Davis, WCG General Secretary 1889-1921 said that 'it was through Co-operation that the married woman living at home finds her work and place in the Labour world.'¹¹⁴ Over 100 branches affiliated directly to the Labour Party, and in 1919 four Guildswomen stood as parliamentary candidates. In 1925 Congress passed a resolution stressing the importance of women co-operators in using their voting power as well as their spending power to overthrow capitalism.¹¹⁵

In 1927 the Cheltenham Agreement had only narrowly been carried, as many co-operators were still supporters of the Liberal or Conservative parties. Jean Gaffin relates how a delegate at the WCG congress in the 1920s, who described herself as a co-operator and a Conservative was jeered by other delegates, who called her a 'rotter'! The delegate was asked by the Chairman to step down before having finished her speech.¹¹⁶ The WCG took a more audacious stand than the LPWS on divorce, family planning and even abortion. Political affiliation could therefore be seen by some members to undermine feminism, and subject the WCG it to the priorities of working-class politics.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ C.Webb,*The Woman with the Basket*, p.160.

¹¹⁴ G.Scott,*Feminism and the Politics of Working Women*, p.13.

¹¹⁵ C.Webb,*The Woman with the Basket*, pp 160-164.

¹¹⁶ J.Gaffin, *Caring and Sharing*, p.86

¹¹⁷ This is described in G.Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women*.

The WCG encouraged its members to become councillors. In 1919 the Women's Local Government Society issued a leaflet which read:

An Urban District Council can do much for the life of the people, from infancy to old age. No children can have a chance in life if they are brought up in bad surroundings. Women as citizens can do something to change bad surroundings – they can question the council's power in the fields of maternity and infant welfare, housing, clean milk, baths, water supply, wash houses, prevention of infectious diseases, health and the education of school children, clean streets and playgrounds.¹¹⁸

The WCG encouraged its members to take part in Food Control Committees and Maternity and Child Welfare Committees. By 1918 230 of its members were elected to Food Control Committees.¹¹⁹ By 1926 Guildswomen could claim to have one mayor, 69 councillors, 69 on municipal welfare committees, 77 on Urban District Councils, 186 on Boards of Guardians, 63 on local housing committees, and 66 on Local Education Committees.¹²⁰

Nicole Robertson describes how the relationship between the local Co-operative and Labour parties varied from one area to another. In mining areas such as South Wales, where the Miners Federation of Great Britain sponsored the Labour candidate, there was less likely to be political involvement from the Co-operative Party. Ties were closest in London and Birmingham.¹²¹ Co-operative Party candidates would pursue the priorities of the Co-op, such as the interests of the consumer, as well as health, housing and education, within the Labour Party.¹²²

In the early days of the West London Industrial Co-operative Society, political affiliations were not allowed, and notices of meetings, or newspapers could not be displayed in shop windows. A request by Southall Labour Party for a donation to help fund the building of its own hall was rejected.¹²³ However throughout 1918 and 1919 the Co-op Hall in Southall was

¹¹⁸ Women's Local Government Society, *UDC's call for Women Councillors* (London, 1919) (LSE Pamphlet).

¹¹⁹ C. Webb, *The Woman with the Basket*, pp. 51-56, 98, 135.

¹²⁰ C. Webb, *The Woman with the Basket*, p.194.

¹²¹ N. Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement and Communities in Britain*, p.162. There was a joint Labour and Co-operative Candidate in Kettering in 1918.

¹²² See also N. Robertson, 'A Union of Forces Marching in the Same Direction: The Relationship between the Co-operative and Labour Parties 1918-1939', in M. Worley (ed.), *Foundations of the British Labour Party* p.213, and *The Political Dividend: Co-op Parties in the Midlands 1918-1939*, in M. Worley (ed.), *Labour's Grassroots*.

¹²³ WLICS minute books 1918-1920 LCS/D/64A/11-13.

hired out to Southall Labour Party and the local ILP, as well as to trades unions such as ASLEF and the NUR.¹²⁴

When the WLICS amalgamated with the LCS however this was set to change. In 1917 the LCS elected Alf Barnes, an ILP member as its president. Following the launch of the Co-operative Party in 1917, a policy of working closely with local Labour parties and trades councils was followed, although in the face of Liberal opposition. By the 1929 general election there were 20 parliamentary candidates sponsored by the LCS, including Alf Barnes, the candidate for East Ham South. The Woolwich Royal Arsenal Society had even closer links with the Labour Party.¹²⁵

Political Councils were set up across the LCS district, with 73 by the time of the fifth conference of the London Co-operative Party in 1932.¹²⁶ By 1931 there were Political Councils in Acton, Ealing, Hanwell, Hayes and Southall. By 1934 there was also one in Uxbridge. They met weekly or twice a month.¹²⁷ The Political Councils met on a regular basis. In March 1936 the Acton Political Council attracted 250 members to its annual social. Ruislip Political Council met with 40 members, and affiliated directly to the Uxbridge DLP. By 1939 the Political Councils had become local branches of the Co-operative Party. There were branches in Acton, Brentham, Ealing, Greenford, Hanwell, Hayes, Ruislip, Southall, Uxbridge, Yiewsley and West Drayton.¹²⁸ They maintained themselves during World War 2, although with a loss of members and activities.

The main political impact of the Co-operative parties, as in other parts of the country, was in their support and funding for Labour and Co-operative candidates. This was not a one-way process. There was considerable overlap in membership between the Co-operative Party and the Labour Party. Some members saw the Co-operative Party which could affiliate to any local CLP where it had members, as a way of getting more delegates elected to the local Labour General Management Committee.¹²⁹ Did the Co-op have an input into Labour Party

¹²⁴ WLICS minute books 1918-1920 LCS/D/64A/11-13.

¹²⁵ See R.Rhodes, *An Arsenal for Labour*. WRACS affiliated to the Labour Party nationally and to seven local parties.

¹²⁶ S.Newens, *History of Co-operative Politics in London*. Although there were local affiliations, the LCS did not affiliate nationally to the Labour Party until 1979.

¹²⁷ *Wheatsheaf*, January 1931, January 1934.

¹²⁸ *Wheatsheaf*, January 1939.

¹²⁹ See LCS Political Committee, *Rules for the Co-operative Party Branches and Agreement between the Labour Party and the Co-operative Union*, (Bishopsgate Institute Co-operative Movement Collection).

policy? Jean Gaffin believes that the WCG made some impact on women's issues, although its key concerns were shops and prices.¹³⁰

In 1935 there were two Co-operative Party sponsored candidates elected in London, for Edmonton and Tottenham. 1945 was the high tide for LCS sponsored MPs, with eleven elected across London. These included two west London MPs, James Hudson in Ealing West and Frank Beswick in Uxbridge. Both of these were new parliamentary constituencies in 1945, and did not have particularly close links with long standing trades unions. In contrast the NUR and the AEU had consistently provided financial support for the Southall and Acton Labour parties in the 1920s and 1930s. Ealing and Uxbridge would therefore have been opportunities for the local Co-operative Party to sponsor Labour MPs and field joint candidates.

Frank Beswick, MP for Uxbridge between 1945 and 1959, was chair of the Co-operative Party Parliamentary Group in Parliament. In the 1945 government, he was head of the Air Ministry and delegate to the United Nations. He regularly spoke at meetings in Uxbridge, together with Jack Bailey, secretary of the Uxbridge Co-operative Party. Local Co-operative Parties which sponsored MPs tended to have some of the highest memberships in London. Uxbridge had 70 members, making it the seventh largest in 1957. Both Jack Bailey and Frank Beswick wrote a number of pamphlets for the London Co-operative Party. Following the political priorities of the Party, Beswick's pamphlets were on peace and nuclear disarmament and industrial democracy. Frank Beswick was to replace Alf Lomas as chair of the LCS.¹³¹

Election funding by the Co-op was also appreciated by local Labour parties. Links between the Co-operative Party and the Ealing North Labour Party (when Ealing North replaced the Ealing West Division after 1950) continued when James Hudson was replaced by Bill Hilton in 1955 as parliamentary candidate. By 1959 both Frank Beswick and Bill Hilton were defeated and the LCS was down to five sponsored MPs in London. Mike Elliott described the importance of funding from the Co-op for the Ealing North constituency, of which he was treasurer. He said that the local Party never had to worry about fund raising when an election came along.¹³² For instance in the 1950 general election in Ealing North it was reported that

¹³⁰ J.Gaffin, *Caring and Sharing*, p.80.

¹³¹ Pamphlets written by Frank Beswick include : *When We Renounce Nuclear Weapons* (1960), *Plan for the Aircraft Industry* (1955), *Heads Together* (1949), *The Hydrogen Bomb What Shall We Do?* (1951). See also: *The Pioneer: Magazine of the London Co-operative Party*, January 1953, May, June 1956, March 1957.

¹³² Interview with Mike Elliott. See also S.Newens, *History of Co-operative Politics in London*.

the Co-op donated £545 out of £806 to local Labour Party funds. In 1955 this was £607, the local Labour Party itself providing just £161, and a local trades union, (TGWU) £52.¹³³

Local Labour Parties were able to use Co-op Halls for meetings. Halls for hire were available in King Street, Southall and on the Western Avenue, East Acton.¹³⁴ They were above the Co-op shops. In Greenford and Northolt however the local Labour Party never owned its own premises at all. The Ealing North Labour Party was completely dependent upon the Co-op Hall in the Greenford Road, which functioned as its own premises. In return for this, local Labour Party branches invited speakers from the Co-op and distributed copies of the *Co-operative Enterprise*.¹³⁵ When the Co-op shop was sold in the 1980s, Ealing North Labour Party lost its premises.¹³⁶ The Uxbridge DLP also made use of local Co-op Halls in Yiewsley in the 1930s.¹³⁷

The LCS sponsored councillors as well as MPs. Mrs Chard, a local founder of the WCG was a councillor in Southall, and chaired the Southall Urban District Council in 1926.¹³⁸ Leader of Southall Council in 1946 was William Henry Hopkins, a member of the London Co-operative Political Committee. In 1954 Dai Cousins, who won South Greenford by 700 votes to become a councillor, was also a member of the London Co-operative Committee.¹³⁹ In Fulham William Molloy was leader of the council and press officer for the Fulham Co-operative Party. In 1964 he was selected as the parliamentary candidate for the Ealing North constituency.¹⁴⁰

In 1953 the London Co-operative Party sponsored 115 council candidates in London local elections, of whom 62 were elected. In 1957 it sponsored 202.¹⁴¹ It also sponsored 14 members of the Middlesex County Council. Councillors had the power to grant planning permission for Co-op shops. Conservative controlled Ruislip-Northwood Council blocked a Co-op shop in West End Road, Ruislip in the face of opposition from the local residents association. It claimed that there were too many shops in the road already.¹⁴² However

¹³³ Northolt Labour Party minutes LMA ACC/4023/02/03.

¹³⁴ *Wheatsheaf*, July 1930.

¹³⁵ Northolt Labour Party minutes LMA ACC/4023/02/03.

¹³⁶ Interview with Jean Humphries for the Labour Oral History Project.

¹³⁷ Uxbridge DLP Minutes LMA ACC/1267/1/1.

¹³⁸ 'Mrs Chard', *Hayes Peoples History*, 29th February 2009.

¹³⁹ *The Pioneer*, August 1953, June 1954.

¹⁴⁰ *The Pioneer*, April 1956.

¹⁴¹ *The Pioneer*, June 1953, *LCS Quarterly Review a Critical Approach to the LCS*, 11 (4), (1957) (Bishopsgate Institute Co-operative Movement Collection).

¹⁴² *The Pioneer*, November 1953.

Labour councillors did not always favour the Co-op, as much as expected. A critical publication entitled *LCS Quarterly Review* complained that Labour councillors in Hillingdon had seen the Co-op as an easy source of money towards their election expenses, but once in charge of the newly created Hillingdon Council, they went ahead with a redevelopment of Uxbridge town centre, which would involve the loss of the Co-op shop. The Co-op would be offered a 'lower value site'.¹⁴³

In 1962 Jack Bailey wrote a pamphlet restating the case for the Co-operative Movement. He said that the aims of the Co-op were to represent and promote consumers' interests and to ensure that the principles of co-operation were widely used in the building of the new society. There were 13 million co-operators nationally and it was important that they understood their role in challenging private profit. He defended the Co-op's links with the Labour Party, saying that the Co-op had to be attached to a political party which 'accepts socialism', while the Conservatives defended private enterprise.¹⁴⁴

The *LCS Quarterly Review* carried an article by Louis Bondy in 1967 under the title *Widening the Scope of Co-operative Work*, which included the following paragraph:

The average citizen thinks of the Co-op chiefly in terms of his local shop, and judges the importance of the movement by the efficiency or inefficiency of that trading unit. As a first step towards greater national influence, the Co-operative Party must make people aware of the basic and vital differences between capitalist and co-operative trading.

He added that there should be an 'extension of activities into housing, making a difference to people's lives, social and cultural functions, otherwise it will never be more than a chain of shops and a comparatively powerless appendage to the official Labour Party.'¹⁴⁵

Conclusion

The importance of the Co-operative Movement has been underestimated in UK politics.¹⁴⁶ With its multi-million membership across the country, it potentially had mass support for a political alternative to capitalism, and one that could be demonstrated in practical terms. The research for this thesis has also shown that the Co-operative Movement was not only a

¹⁴³ *LCS Quarterly Review*, 51(2) 1967

¹⁴⁴ J.Bailey, *Co-operative Politics: the Case Restated* (Manchester, 1962), (LSE Pamphlet).

¹⁴⁵ *LCS Quarterly Review*: 15(1), January 1967.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Carberry claims that he wrote the first history of the Co-operative Party, based on his PhD thesis. This was published as *Consumers in Politics*, (Manchester, 1969).

movement of its industrial heartland in the north of England and that it adapted to the new working class in the south of England, without abandoning its political principles. This was seen to be the case in west London, as alongside shops, there were well supported events – such as meetings and fetes, where the message of the Co-operative Movement could be heard, alongside popular entertainment. In the specific conditions of west London it found its roots firstly in the industrial heartlands of Southall and Acton, even to a smaller extent in parts of Ealing, but found very fertile ground in the growing working-class communities of Hayes, Perivale and Greenford. As a national movement it therefore helped change the political landscape of west London, as part of the labour movement.

How far did the Co-operative Movement affect political change in west London?

Membership of the local co-operative society, the LCS was high, but its political organisation was not so well supported. The LCS as we have seen had one and quarter million members, but the Co-operative Party with its 80 branches across London only reached just over 4,000 at its height. Even the WCG only reached 6,000 members in total in London. Nationally its membership peaked at 87,000, somewhat lower than the Labour Party Women's Sections at 250,000. In west London therefore the political influence of the Co-operative Movement was through the local Labour parties, to which branches of the Co-operative Party and the WCG affiliated. Many members held dual membership, and the local co-operative movement provided funds and active support for Labour parliamentary candidates.

However membership of the Co-operative Movement was significant in changing public opinion. Those who shopped at the Co-op could see how its principles could work in practice for them. It could be said to have won 'hearts and minds.' It had a particular appeal to women voters in the interwar years, as consumers, but also on wider social and political issues. The WCG had worked more closely with the Labour Party than the Co-operative Movement as a whole, as the issues of housing, maternity and infant care, health and education.¹⁴⁷ Two west London constituencies won by Labour in 1945, Uxbridge and Ealing North were supported by the Co-operative Party. The Conservatives won Ealing North in 1955 and Uxbridge in 1959. If the Conservatives regained control in the 1950s by their appeal to women voters as consumers. It is possible that the decline of the Co-operative Movement in the late 1950s played a part in weakening Labour's appeal to women voters, as it had been the Co-operative Movement which had represented them as consumers in the

¹⁴⁷ See J.Gaffin, *Caring and Sharing*, and G.Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women*.

early years.¹⁴⁸ The Co-operative Movement and the WCG had a special appeal to women, whose main concern was feeding the family and did not regard themselves primarily as wage-earners.

¹⁴⁸ M.Francis, 'Labour and Gender' in D.Tanner, P.Thane, and N.Tiratsoo (eds.), *Labour's First Century*. Labour was estimated as being 13% behind the Conservatives amongst women voters in 1955. p.206.

Chapter 8: Labour and Other Left Political Parties

Introduction

In the introduction to this thesis, the labour movement was defined as consisting of the Labour Party, the trades unions and the Co-operative Movement. It also included left political parties such as the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). This chapter will focus on these two parties on the left.¹ It will look at their roles as separate minority political parties and their relationship to the labour movement. In some cases their membership overlapped with that of the Labour Party, and more often their policies were similar. No section of the labour movement exists in isolation, and members of the ILP and the CPGB had influence within the trades union movement, the Co-operative Movement and the Labour Party.

In 1918 the party of the left in west London was the ILP. After its split from the Labour Party in 1932 the evidence is that it went into decline in this area, only having a revival in 1943 when Walter Padley stood in the Acton by-election. Its main influence had been within the Labour Party. On the other hand the Communist Party reached its heyday in 1945 but it retained a strong trades union base right up until 1970.

This thesis is designed to consider the impact of national on local politics and vice versa. So this chapter will look at the development of the ILP and the CPGB at a national level, and then look at how significant they were across west London. This will include their ability to build and influence the labour movement.

8.1 *The Independent Labour Party (ILP)*

The ILP predated the Labour Party. It was formed in 1893, and in 1900 it took part in the formation of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), which became the Labour Party in 1906. It was the socialist component of an electoral alliance to secure independent trades

¹ For an account of the activities of the Commonwealth Party in Osterley Park see H.Purcell, *The Last Revolutionary: Tom Wintringham 1898-1949* (Stroud, 2004). See also the obituary of Syd Bidwell by John McIllroy, 'Adrift in the Rapids of Racism : Syd Bidwell (1917-1997)' in *Revolutionary History*, 7,(1) 1998. He described his sales of *Socialist Appeal* to NUR members on the GWR during World War 2 in his interview for the Labour Oral History Project.

union representation. It had a separate organisation and membership and was affiliated to the LRC.²

As we have seen in Chapter 3, in 1918 the Labour Party adopted a new constitution, which allowed for individual membership. Previously it had only been possible to be a member from an affiliated organisation, such as a trades union, or a socialist party such as the ILP. The ILP immediately discussed its future role within a newly constituted Labour Party.³

The ILP's position had weakened since 1914. Many of its MPs were out of Parliament, having opposed World War 1. Around 6,000 of its members had faced imprisonment.⁴ This included leaders such as Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden. Some of its members were still in prison in 1918, having been conscientious objectors during the War. These included two members of its National Administrative Committee (NAC) who were to become Labour MPs for west London constituencies after 1945, Walter Ayles and James Hudson. Ayles was based in Bristol, and Hudson in Huddersfield, Yorkshire.⁵ They would both later become ILP sponsored MPs in their local areas.

After 1918, however, the ILP experienced a significant increase in membership nationally. Between 1918 and 1919 11,000 new members were reported, in 139 new branches.⁶ At its annual conference in Stockport in 1921, the following membership figures were reported – 1909 28,640, 1914 29,793 and 1920 37,150. 53% of this growth was in Scotland.⁷ In February 1918 out of a total membership of 35,717, no less than 8,539 were in Scotland, compared to 3,661 in London for instance.⁸ The west of Scotland, known as 'Red Clydeside' became the power base of the ILP. Rent strikes and trades union action across the area after and during World War 1, gave an impetus to its growth.⁹

At its 28th Conference in Glasgow, in 1920, the ILP debated whether to remain part of the Labour Party or not. In favour it was argued that the Labour Party was a larger organisation,

² See for instance: F.Brockway, *Inside the Left: 30 Years of Platform, Press, Prison and Parliament* (London, 1942), R.Dowse, *Left in the Centre: ILP 1893-1940* (London, 1966), D.Howell, *British Workers and the ILP: 1888-1906* (Manchester, 1986) and F.Brockway, *Socialism over 60 Years: the Life of Jowett of Bradford 1864-1844* (London, 1946).

³ See G.Cohen, 'Myth, History and the ILP' in M.Worley (ed.), *Foundations of the British Labour Party*, p.95.

⁴ F.Brockway, *Socialism at the Crossroads: why the ILP left the Labour Party* (London, 1932), p.2.

⁵ ILP 27th Report to Conference, Huddersfield, 1919.

⁶ ILP 27th Report to Conference, Huddersfield, 1919.

⁷ ILP 29th Report to Conference, Stockport 1921.

⁸ ILP Archives (LSE) ILP/3/59.

⁹ For an account of Clydeside rent strikes see for instance J.Hannan, *The Life of John Wheatley* (Nottingham, 1988), I.McClean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside* (Edinburgh, 1983) and W.Kenefick and.McIvor (eds), *Roots of Red Clydeside 1910-1914* (Edinburgh, 1996).

and that its political stance could not be defined by the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) alone. In opposition to this, it was argued that the Labour Party was not socialist, and that it contained ‘persons of every cult.’ It voted to stay within the Labour Party, and in its report to the annual conference of 1921 in Stockport the ILP NAC clarified its position, as follows. It recommended that ILP members should remain in the Labour Party, and devote their energies to building it. It noted that, with an individual membership, new members would now be likely to join the Labour Party rather than the ILP, as it was now the main opposition in Parliament, and its subs were lower than that of the ILP.¹⁰

After 1918 where a local Labour Party was formed in a district there was an ILP, it was largely run by active members of the ILP who transferred their interests and energy to the Labour Party. This, it noted, could lead to a suspension of ILP activities, except in Scotland and parts of the North of England, where the ILP dominated. Would local Labour parties take on the campaigning and political education roles of the ILP, or would they exist mainly as an electoral machine? In the case of the former, ILP members should assist and promote socialist policies. In a letter to ILP branches it said that ‘the function of the ILP is to be the organised nucleus of definite socialist opinion’. It advocated that the first loyalty of members was to the ILP, and that it should seek to recruit from new Labour Party members.¹¹ This view was echoed by leading member and NAC member Fenner Brockway, when he said that the ILP should retain an educational role within the Labour Party.¹²

In 1932 a dispute over standing orders led the ILP to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. This was after a bitterly contested debate at its 1932 conference. These standing orders introduced by Ramsay MacDonald would prevent ILP MPs from voting against the government, even if there had been no prior debate within the PLP.¹³ Most opposition to disaffiliation came from Scottish delegates. Delegate Patrick Govan from Glasgow Govan mocked branches in ‘revolutionary centres such as Truro and Winchester’, as being out of touch with the working-class movement.¹⁴ In Scotland, unlike in other parts of the country, the ILP was effectively the Labour Party organisation at a grassroots level.¹⁵ Cohen argues that after

¹⁰ ILP 29th Report to Conference, Stockport, 1921.

¹¹ ILP 29th Report to Conference Stockport, 1921.

¹² F.Brockway, *Inside the Left*, p.139.

¹³ J.Maxton, *Where the ILP Stands* (London, 1930) (LSE Pamphlet).

¹⁴ ILP Report to Conference, 1932 p.35.

¹⁵ See A.Mckinlay and R.J.Morris, *The ILP on Clydeside 1893-1932: from Foundation to Disintegration and End* (Manchester, 1991), and G.Cohen, ‘Happy Hunting Ground of the Crank: ILP and Local Labour Parties in Glasgow and Norwich, 1932-45’ in M.Worley, (ed.), *Labour’s Grassroots*.

disaffiliation the ILP became a 'shadow of itself'. Wilderness reduced it to a shambles. Two thirds of its membership had voted to disaffiliate. McIlroy and Campbell estimated that its membership fell from 16,773 in 1932 to 2,441 by the end of the decade.¹⁶ However in Cohen's book *The Failure of a Dream*, he suggests that the greatest falls in membership occurred in 1933-1935, and were therefore the result of factional struggles, rather than simply disaffiliation. This was particularly the case in London and the South, where the Communist inspired Revolutionary Policy Committee and a Trotskyist group had most influence.¹⁷

In the rest of the country the impact of ILP disaffiliation was not critical, as most ILP members switched their allegiance to the Labour Party. For councillors and MPs there was a strong incentive to do so. In London the number of ILP branches fell by a third, from 88 to 56 between 1932 and 1935.¹⁸ However in areas where it had a base in the trades union movement, the ILP maintained much influence. In Derby for instance, the ILP faced only a 'slow death' not a 'rapid demise' after 1932, assisted by its strength on the local trades council. ILP delegates, unlike those from the Communist Party, were not banned from being delegates to the local Labour Party. After 1932 it initially gained members, partly no doubt reflecting the dismay in the local labour movement that the town's MP, Jimmy Thomas, had joined MacDonald and Snowden in the National Government. Richard Stevens said that some ILP councillors were not challenged by official Labour candidates. The decline in the ILP did not become apparent until 1935, after Labour reasserted its electoral strength. It was also being eclipsed on the left by then by the Communist Party.¹⁹

After the disaffiliation of the ILP the role of a left opposition within the Labour Party was to be taken up by the Socialist League, led by, Stafford Cripps MP. Founded in 1932, its membership which numbered 3,000 was never as large as the ILP, and its main base was in London.²⁰ Unlike the ILP it did not sponsor MPs and it had few direct links with the trades union movement. It included at one time in its membership Clement Attlee and Ellen Wilkinson, as well as academics such as GDH Cole and Harold Laski. It called for immediate

¹⁶ These figures are included in Table 1 in J.McIlroy and A.Campbell, 'The Last Chance Saloon? : the Independent Labour Party and Miners' Militancy in the Second World War Revisited', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46, 2011, pp.871-896.

¹⁷ G.Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream: the ILP From Disaffiliation to World War 2* (London, 2007), pp .200-211.

¹⁸ G.Cohen,*The Failure of a Dream*, pp. 32-33.

¹⁹ R.Stevens, 'Rapid Demise or Slow Death: the ILP in Derby', *Midland History*, 27 (1), (1997) pp.113-130.

²⁰ M.Bor, *The Socialist League in the 1930s* (London, 2005). In this book on the Socialist League, Bor describes the activities of a branch in Gateshead, with 113 members mainly former ILPers, the League's participation in the successful campaign against the 1934 Unemployment Act, which defeated cuts to benefits, trades union and unemployed workers' organisations. This is a different perspective to the view that the Socialist League was only a London based propaganda group. When it was wound up, some its members went to the Left Book Club

nationalisation of the banks, land, mines, transport, iron and steel and government control of foreign trade.²¹ Its members supported a United Front with the Communist Party. This caused it to be considered for the Labour Party's 'proscribed list'. Beforehand the Socialist League was dissolved in 1937. However in 1939 some of its leading members such as Stafford Cripps and Nye Bevan were expelled from the Labour Party for advocating a Popular Front with Communists and Liberals.²²

By the end of the 1930s the ILP was again considering re-affiliation to the Labour Party, but this was cut across by the outbreak of World War 2, when Labour entered a coalition government and agreed an electoral truce. This was opposed by the ILP, which gave it a new lease of life. It contested by-elections during the War, where there was no Labour candidate. It was also active in campaigning for workers' rights during the War.²³ It was therefore able to criticise its rival on the left, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), which it said, was advocating sacrifices on behalf of British workers to secure advantages for the Red Army and uncritically supporting the electoral truce. It also criticised another party of the Left, which was standing candidates in elections – the newly created Common Wealth Party, dubbing it 'the petit bourgeois pro-war Common Wealth Party'.²⁴ However its lack of influence within the trades unions meant that the ILP could not use its support for workers rights effectively.²⁵ At the end of the War, it reviewed its policy on fighting by-elections, and with the end of the war-time electoral truce, the Labour Party was able to re-establish itself with working class voters.

8.2 The ILP in West London

Although Scotland and the North of England are widely regarded as the heartland of the ILP, its membership in London was not insignificant. It had got off to a slow start in the 19th century, which David Howell attributed to the weakness of working class communities in the capital, the only exceptions being the industrial suburbs of West Ham and Woolwich.²⁶ However, ILP membership in London and the South-East in 1911-1912 was 3,321, out of a total of 20,009. At that time only Lancashire and Yorkshire had a higher membership. In

²¹ R.Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism*, p.196.

²² A.McKinley and R.J.Morris (eds), *The ILP on Clydeside*, p. 219. The United Front and Popular Front campaigns will be discussed in more detail in relation to the Communist Party of Great Britain.

²³ See J.McIlroy and A.Campbell, 'The Last Chance Saloon'

²⁴ ILP report to 1944 Conference .

²⁵ J.McIlroy and A.Campbell, 'The Last Chance Saloon'

²⁶ D.Howell, *British Workers and the ILP: 1888-1906*, pp.255-262.

1916 80 branches in London and the South East were reported, surpassed only by Scotland (89) and Lancashire (91).²⁷

A local West London Federation of ILP branches had existed since at least 1907. Eleven new branches were created during that year, taking it up to a total of eighteen branches, .300 new members were reported. There was a full-time organiser, James Mylles, who, during the course of a year, had addressed 232 propaganda meetings, 50 trades union branches, and dinnertime meetings outside factories in Acton and Chiswick. The Ealing branch published its syllabus of public meetings, held fortnightly at Ealing Town Hall. Topics included remedies for unemployment, cures for poverty, free trade and protection, the woman question, socialism and the drink question and internationalism. Nationally known speakers such as Margaret Bondfield were invited. The branch organised open air meetings on Ealing Common every Sunday evening.²⁸

In 1917 the West London Federation was reported as having fourteen branches, from inner London suburbs such as Fulham to rural districts such as Chesham. In the part of west London covered by this thesis there were reported branches in Acton, Ealing, Hanwell, Southall and Brentham. No membership figures are given, but the highest affiliation fee was reported from the Ealing branch.²⁹ The ILP had established itself in west London before 1918. Addresses of local branch officers suggest that the Ealing branch membership was concentrated in South Ealing, a community of railway workers.³⁰

Many of the founder members of the labour movement in west London had been members of the ILP. In December 1960 the *Middlesex County Times* carried an obituary of Alderman Ernest Gardiner of Southall. Known as 'Mr Southall Labour Party' he had been born in Hampshire and moved to Southall in 1913. He had been a member of the ILP since 1900 and joined the Labour Party in 1920. He became secretary of the Uxbridge Division and was elected to Southall council in 1934.³¹ Oscar Charles Downey who died in an industrial accident in 1920 had been both chairman of Southall Labour Party and secretary of the local ILP. As encouraged by the ILP NAC members of the ILP tried to get political discussion at

²⁷ ILP Archives (LSE) ILP/3/59.

²⁸ ILP Archives (LSE) ILP/5/1907/61 and ILP/5/1908.

²⁹ ILP Archives (LSE) ILP/3/59. Note that the Brentham branch would have been based on the Brentham Estate described in Chapter 6 on the Co-operative Movement.

³⁰ For instance both the secretary of the Ealing branch and the West London Federation lived in Northcroft Road, now in Ealing, W.13.

³¹ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 2 December 1960.

meetings of the Southall Trades Council and Labour Party, on for instance the military occupation of the Ruhr Valley in 1923.³²

In 1920 the Ealing and Acton branches sent delegates to the ILP annual conference in Glasgow. Southall branch of the ILP held regular public meetings.³³ The West London Federation continued to grow across the district in the 1920s. ILP branches established before 1918 continued to thrive. There were also new branches set up in Hayes, Uxbridge and Hanwell. The ILP was continuing to play a role within the labour movement. Ealing, Acton and Hanwell regularly sent delegates to the annual conference. Acton ILP maintained its separate existence organising a public meeting in 1924 with a fairly good attendance. The speaker was a Mr J.Mills MP for Dartford but who had connections with Acton. He had joined the ILP in Acton in 1905, recruited by Joe Shillaker, future MP for Acton and had been a trades unionist for 22 years. He told his audience not to be downhearted at not having won Acton for Labour yet. Commenting on the first Labour Government he said that the old parties had thought it a “pleasant joke to put Labour into power...to prove its incapacity.” Labour was still finding out how the civil service worked and the budget would be a disappointment. Defending the ILP’s man in government, he said how ‘Tories went on about the Clyde gang’, but one of them, John Wheatley was a government minister.³⁴

In 1926 the year of the General Strike, which took up a lot of ILP campaigning activity, 22 new branches were established across London, this included new branches in Yiewsley and Ruislip in west London.³⁵ The NAC annual report to the ILP conference stressed the importance of the 1926 strike:

During the difficult days from May 1 to the end of the year, the District Council, its federations, branches and members did all that an organisation could do to support its gallant comrades in the mining areas by propaganda and organisation, by collections and flag days, concerts and social gatherings, by the collection of clothes and in many other ways.

At the end of the year it was reported that there were 136 branches across London and the South East, in seven federations.³⁶ Miners’ leader A.J. Cook addressed a public meeting of

³² Southall Trades Council and Labour Party, Minutes 1923-1925 LMA ACC/1267/2.

³³ *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 12 November 1920.

³⁴ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 4 April 1924.

³⁵ ILP Conference reports 1921-1926.

³⁶ ILP Archives (LSE) ILP/5/1927/20.

Ealing ILP in the Victoria Hall in February 1927. The meeting was reported as full to overflowing, as scenes from the Welsh coalfields were brought home to Ealing.³⁷

In Southall, Ealing and Acton ILP members played an active part in both the ILP and the local Labour Party. There were many cases of dual membership. One of the founder members of Ealing Labour Party, Joe Sherman was strongly of the belief that the ILP should maintain its independent existence. In Ealing, as in other parts of the country, the ILP was critical of the 1929-1931 Labour Government, and the National Government which followed. It organised a protest rally on Ealing Common in September 1931.³⁸

The disaffiliation of the ILP in 1932 did not have a major impact on Southall Labour Party. The Southall branch of the ILP disaffiliated from the local Labour Party. This was noted with regret by the Political Committee but in fact only led to one resignation from the Southall Party, that of a Mr Hall, treasurer of the local branch and the Uxbridge DLP to which he had been a delegate. The local branch decided to send delegates to a conference to hear the ILP's viewpoint.³⁹ The largest loss of Labour Party members in the borough seems to have been from the Lammas and Grosvenor branches in South Ealing, an indication of the influence of the Ealing ILP branch.⁴⁰

This was not to be the case however with new branches of the Labour Party which were established in areas such as Greenford and Northolt. There had not been any branches of the ILP in these areas, although members may have had connections with the ILP in the past. Branches of the Socialist League were formed in both Greenford and Northolt after 1932 and its policies were discussed at branch meetings. The Northolt branch deplored the expulsion of Stafford Cripps in 1939.⁴¹ By the end of the 1930s the ILP had disappeared, as a separate organisation from west London, as its members overwhelmingly transferred their allegiance to the local Labour Party, or perhaps some may have joined the Communist Party. This applied to the older working class communities, in Southall and South Ealing and to new areas such as Greenford and Northolt.

Acton was one of the constituencies where the ILP fought a by-election in 1943, fielding Walter Padley. In a town with a large number of engineering factories, Padley achieved a

³⁷ *West Middlesex Gazette* (Ealing edition), February 1927.

³⁸ B.Humphries, *The Roots of Labour in a West London Suburb*, p.12.

³⁹ Southall Trades Council and Labour Party Minutes 1932-1935, LMA ACC/1267/3.

⁴⁰ B.Humphries, *The Roots of Labour in a West London Suburb*, p.12.

⁴¹ Northolt Labour Party LMA ACC/4023/02/001.

respectable result: Captain Longhurst (Conservative) 5,014; Padley (ILP) 2,336; Miss Crisp (Independent) 707; Godley (Independent) 258. However this 42% was on a very low turn-out, as there were 48,260 electors in the division.⁴² In 1945 Padley withdrew his candidature and supported Acton's Labour candidate, Joe Sparks. This was really the final act for the ILP in west London.

8.3 *The Communist Party of Great Britain*

The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was formed in 1920, the result of an amalgamation of pre-existing socialist organisations, such as the British Socialist Party (BSP).⁴³ The BSP was the successor to the Social Democratic Federation, founded in the 1880s. It had a sectarian past, both in relation to the trades unions and the Labour Representation Committee in 1900. However in 1914 the BSP had affiliated to the Labour Party. By 1921 the post-war revolutionary surge which had swept Europe and had an impact even in Britain, was in retreat.⁴⁴

Willie Thompson said of the CPGB that: 'It did succeed in establishing itself as a permanent part of the British labour movement and wider political reality but was never more than a marginal fragment.'⁴⁵ However it was more influential beyond its numbers, particularly in the anti-fascist struggles of the 1930s, and, for a longer period of time, in the trades unions. It failed to become a mass party. Anti-fascist struggles in the 1930s took its membership up from 6,500 in 1935 to 17,750 in 1939.⁴⁶ In electoral terms it came nowhere challenging the Labour Party, even at times when it might have gained popularity, such as after the fall of the 1929-1931 Labour Government. At the peak of its membership and strength within the trades union movement, such as the 1945 General Election, it only succeeded in getting two MPs elected, in Stepney and Fife.⁴⁷

However the CPGB has to be evaluated not just in terms of its membership, and numbers of MPs and councillors, but also by its influence on the broader labour movement. In 1921 its application to affiliate to the Labour Party was rejected, on the grounds that it was for the

⁴² *Dods Parliamentary Companion*, 1944.

⁴³ See J.Klugman, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Vol.1: Formation and Early Years, 1919-1924* (London, 1968).

⁴⁴ In June 1917 a labour movement conference in Leeds had called for workers and soldiers councils to be set up in Britain, and in 1920 London dockers refused to load ammunition on to a boat called the Jolly George to aid the Polish anti-Bolshevik army. See R.Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism*, p.54-55, p.77.

⁴⁵ W.Thompson, *The Good Old Cause* (London, 1992), pp.8-9.

⁴⁶ N.Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1941* (London, 1985), p.188.

⁴⁷ W.Thompson, *The Good Old Cause*, p.74.

‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, and did not respect constitutional democracy.⁴⁸ This was the first of several attempts to affiliate.

After 1921, members of the CPGB however continued to be members of the Labour Party, and could even become Labour MPs and councillors. In Battersea for instance the MP Sharpurji Saklatvala, Britain’s first Asian MP was elected on both a Communist and Labour ticket.⁴⁹ The 1924 Labour Party conference banned Communists from standing for office.⁵⁰ However many remained as individual members. Noreen Branson estimates that as late as 1926 out of a total of 7,900 Communist Party members, as many as 1,544 were still members of the Labour Party. They campaigned within local parties under the banner of the National Left Wing Movement. Their aim was to convert Labour to militant socialist policies, and they supported a newspaper called the *Sunday Worker*, with a circulation of 100,000. The National Left Wing Movement was strong in some London boroughs, such as Battersea, Bethnal Green and Lewisham, as well as the west of Scotland and the Rhondda Valley. After 1926 local Labour parties supporting the National Left Wing Movement and refusing to expel Communists, were themselves disaffiliated from the Labour Party nationally. Twenty seven DLPs were closed down between 1926 and 1929, plus countless local branches. Twelve of these were in London, as Herbert Morrison enthusiastically disaffiliated local Labour parties.⁵¹ Nevertheless the National Left Wing Movement could call a conference in 1927, at which 120 organisations were represented, including no less than 54 DLPs.⁵² The claims of the CPGB to affiliate to the Labour Party were supported by high profile Labour politicians such as Fenner Brockway of the ILP and Ellen Wilkinson, MP for Jarrow, herself a one-time Communist Party member.⁵³

⁴⁸ All the correspondence relating to the CPGB’s application to affiliate to the Labour Party was published in a pamphlet held in the LSE Library. (CPGB) *The Communist Party and the Labour Party: all the Facts and Correspondence*, 1921 (LSE Pamphlet).

⁴⁹ N.Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1946* (London, 1985, p.5. See also S.Saklatvala, *The Fifth Commandment : a Biography of Sharpurji Saklatvala by his Daughter* (Manchester, 1991). See also article in J.Bellamy and J.Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol.6 (London, 1982), pp.236-241.

⁵⁰ See A.Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920-43* (Manchester, 2000), pp.78-79. The 1924 Labour Party conference rejected CPGB affiliation by 3,185,000 to 193,000. A resolution banning CPGB members from Labour Party membership was passed more narrowly by 1,804,000 to 1,540,000 votes.

⁵¹ G.Taylor, *Ada Salter: Pioneer of Ethical Socialism* (London, 2016), p.238.

⁵² N.Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, pp.5-9.

⁵³ A.Llacuna, ‘The Labour Galaxy and the Communist Solar System’ *Socialist History* 44, 2014, (Anti-Communism on the Left), pp.30-31.

The 'Class against Class' policy was to be reversed after 1935, with the CPGB again looking for a united front with Labour Party members.⁵⁴ Some also came to join the Labour Party as individual members. Thompson relates how in 1939, at the outbreak of war : 'The Communist Party at this juncture had a fair number of concealed members within the Labour Party who had joined since 1935 and been told to remain inside, so as to strengthen the Communist Party's hand in seeking affiliation.' In Oxford covert membership was claimed to be 'so general and ill-concealed as scarcely to be under cover at all.'⁵⁵ However at the outbreak of World War 2, the initial policy of the CPGB in line with that of the Communist International, was to denounce the War as imperialist on both sides. The CPGB called on its members in the Labour Party to reveal themselves, taking in some cases whole local Labour organisations with them.⁵⁶ Nationally Labour's youth organisation, the Labour League of Youth (LLY) was suspended as its entire national committee, including chairman, Ted Willis, were found to be members of the Young Communist League (YCL).⁵⁷

The CPGB could appeal to and work with members of the Labour Party on a number of causes and campaigns. Their members organised the unemployed in the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM), in the Hunger Marches of the 1920s and 1930s. The League Against Imperialism (LAI) was described as a CPGB front organisation, but its chairman was James Maxton of the ILP. As a result of this the Labour Party conference set out a list of proscribed organisations, which included the LAI and the NUWM. Activists in these organisations could face expulsion from the Labour Party. The CPGB picked up support in the 1930s in its fight against the growing threat of fascism. The most famous of these was the battle of Cable Street, when the mobilisation against Oswald Mosley undoubtedly attracted the support of Labour Party members, even though they had been advised by their leaders to stay away.⁵⁸ It inspired the campaigns for victims of the Spanish Civil War, at a time when Labour's official policy was to support Non-Intervention. Support for these organisations went far beyond the membership of the CPGB. For instance, the

⁵⁴ For an explanation of the 'Class Against Class' policy see: M.Worley, *Class Against Class :the Communist Party in Britain Between the Wars* (London, 2002), M.Woodhouse, B.Pearce, *Essays on the History of Communism in Britain* (London, 1975) and N.Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*.

⁵⁵ See also D.Bowie, 'Labour and Communist Politics in the City of Oxford between the Wars' in D.Morgan (ed.), *The Labour Party in Historical Perspective* pp.52-73.

⁵⁶ W.Thompson, *The Good Old Cause*, p.69.

⁵⁷ W.Thompson, *The Good Old Cause*, p.57. See also K.Morgan, G.Cohen and A.Flinn, *Communists and British Society 1920-1991* (London, 2007), p.44.

⁵⁸ N.Branson, *History of the CPGB*, p.155. This demonstration was also supported by the ILP which issued its own pamphlet entitled *They did not Pass: 300,000 Workers Say No to Mosley*, 1936. A mural in Cable Street notably portrays an ILP banner showing that it was prominent on the 1936 demonstration.

NUWM which organised Hunger Marches in the 1930s had a membership of 50,000 in 1931, when the membership of the CPGB was less than three thousand. Many more attended rallies in Hyde Park to support the marchers and provided them with food and accommodation en route.⁵⁹ Local Aid for Spain committees attracted thousands.⁶⁰

The most substantial support gained by the CPGB however was within the trades union movement. The majority of its members were industrial workers.⁶¹ It founded the National Minority Movement (NMM) in 1924. This gained substantial support during the 1926 General Strike, particularly in the MFGB. Many of these members were lost in the coming years, as industrial defeat led to victimisation and unemployment amongst mineworkers. The 1926 TUC congress ruled that trades unions could not affiliate to the NMM. Building the trades union movement is described by Nina Fishman:

Historians of all kinds remained stubbornly incurious about what Communists did in the troughs and lulls. The historiographical problem with investigating only the peaks of industrial conflict is that occurrences of militant economic struggle were comparatively few. Yet Communists were continuously active inside the trades unions and factories throughout the period. They routinely performed copious amounts of bureaucratic labour inside union lay institutions and in workplace collective bargaining committees during long stretches of calm.⁶²

It should be added to this that building the trades union movement in times of hostility by government and employers, takes a considerable amount of dedication and self-sacrifice, and political support. This is what the trades union movement faced after the defeat of the 1926 General Strike in Britain. The 1927 Trades Dispute Act had undermined solidarity action and curtailed the rights of trades unions to fund a political party. We have seen also in Chapter 4 how employers in the new industrial areas were hostile to trades union organisation and recognition. Many of the trades unionists who came forward to lead struggles for trades union rights were Communists such as Abe Lazarus, who worked at Firestones on the Great West Road, Brentford and Pressed Steel in Oxford.⁶³ Some came from the industrial areas of

⁵⁹ N.Branson, *History of the CPGB*, p.74, pp.80-81.

⁶⁰ N.Branson, *History of the CPGB*, pp.223-234.

⁶¹ See A.Thorpe, 'The Membership of the CPGB 1920-1945', *Historical Journal*, 2000, 43(3) (2000), pp.777-800.

⁶² N.Fishman, 'No Home but the Trades Union Movement: Communist Activists and 'Reformist' Leaders 1926-1956' in G.Andrews, N.Fishman and K.Morgan (eds.), *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of British Communism* (London, 1995).

⁶³ D.Edwards, *How Trades Unionism Came to Pressed Steel*.

Britain with high unemployment. Worley said that ‘Gradually as the depression continued, there was a drift to places like Slough, Coventry, Birmingham and Hayes where the newer industries were being developed.’⁶⁴ These militant workers who migrated were to play a role in rebuilding the trades union movement, as the economy was rebuilt in new industrial areas in the 1930s.

In 1939 the CPGB had campaigned against the War, concentrating on demanding civilian protection such as the provision of air-raid shelters.⁶⁵ When the Soviet Union entered the War in 1941, and was under threat from the Nazis, it changed its line to calling for a ‘Second Front’ and full support for the war effort in Britain. It was called ‘HM’s Communist Party’ by members of the ILP.⁶⁶

The 1940s saw the CPGB at the peak of its support in industry, with 56,000 members.⁶⁷ After 1945, during the Cold War, its membership began to decline, and within the labour movement in Britain it faced more bans and proscriptions. In 1948 the TUC sent out a circular which set out to deregister trades councils which would not observe its ban on communists and fascists.⁶⁸ Nevertheless it maintained a significant amount of support within the trades union movement in parts of the country like west London, with the foundation of the West Middlesex District of the Communist Party in 1950. It continued to attempt to influence the Labour Party via the trades union movement, and appealed to its activists on issues such as peace and nuclear disarmament, and domestic concerns such as rents and racism.⁶⁹ However the Communist Party as an organisation, no longer had the desire or manpower to infiltrate the Labour Party.⁷⁰ Its continued support in the trades union movement will be considered in a case study of west London.

⁶⁴ M.Worley *Class Against Class*, p.50.

⁶⁵ N.Branson,*History of the CPGB*, pp.275-276.

⁶⁶ N.Fishman,*No Home but the Trades Union Movement*, pp.106-116. R.Croucher, *Engineers at War*, p.176.

⁶⁷ R.Croucher, *Engineers at War*, p.320.

⁶⁸ K.Fuller,*Radical Aristocrats*, p.195. The CPGB still had a strong base in the North West London and other bus garages until the 1950s. It established garage branches.

⁶⁹ See J.Schneer, *Labour’s Conscience: the Labour Left 1945-51* (Boston ,Mass,1988),.

⁷⁰ C.Beckett,and F.Beckett, *Bevan* (London, 2004), p.112. When Hugh Gaitskell’s supporters lost their majority on the Party’s NEC to the Bevanites in 1952, he claimed that ‘one sixth of the constituency party delegates appeared to be Communist or Communist-inspired.’ This is rejected by Beckett.

8.4 Roots of the Communist Party in West London

The British Socialist Party (BSP) had members in west London. They included for instance, Robert Dunsmore, Acton's Labour candidate in 1918.⁷¹ There had been other branches of the BSP in west London. One of the candidates for the Southall Urban District Council in 1914 had been a Peter Green, a member of the Southall branch of the BSP.⁷²

The charge of 'Bolshevism' was linked to the militancy of the trades unions. In 1919 there were strikes at engineering factories in Acton for a 40 hour week. At Fairey Aviation in Hayes trades unionists took action against redundancies.⁷³ In October 400 workers at Fellow Magnet, members of the AEU and General Workers Union, struck against pay cuts. A mass meeting was held at Central Hall, Acton. The Company complained of the 'red element which had gained supremacy in the shop', saying that 'they were Bolsheviks who only wanted to work for two out of their eight hours.' The Company complained that hours had been set by the Government during the war, now they wanted to return to normal. Most workers had returned but a mob of 200 was outside his gate.⁷⁴ During the lockout of engineering workers in 1922, The *Acton Gazette* reported that demonstrations on Acton Vale were organised by 'communists'.⁷⁵

In February 1924 a meeting of the Acton Group of the West London Communist Party was held, hosted by the Ealing Trades and Labour Council. It was well attended 'with Labour men and women.' Joe Sherman however did not chair the meeting. He was replaced by the treasurer who said that Joe had "in a weak-kneed manner gone off in search of employment". There were only two members of the Communist Party in Acton, but it was hoped to increase this to twenty. The speaker said he had no faith in constitutional action, armed force would have to be used if necessary and even a Labour government did not represent the working class. The Communist Party's London organiser said that workers needed to hit back at capitalism. Commenting on the 1924 Labour government, he said that it had been affected by Liberalism, but he would not attack Labour when it advanced the workers' cause.⁷⁶

⁷¹ See article by J. Grigg on the '1918 'Coupon' election in West London', *Labour Heritage Bulletin* (Spring 2017).

⁷² *Southall and Norwood Gazette*, 6 April 1914.

⁷³ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 7 February 1919.

⁷⁴ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 24 October 1919.

⁷⁵ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 17 March 1922.

⁷⁶ *Acton Gazette and Express*, 15 February 1924.

There was not however much evidence of any significant Communist Party support in this part of west London until the 1930s. Communists were simply part of local trades councils and Labour parties. Morgan, Cohen and Flinn, writing on the sociological location of CPGB branches, said that in the interwar years they tended to be in older industrial areas, like South Wales and Tyneside, where they were an attractive alternative to Labour, or in east London boroughs with large Jewish and Irish populations.⁷⁷ Andrew Thorpe said that in 1931, London had 31.4% of the membership of the CPGB, the highest of any region in the country. However, in the new industrial areas there were few branches until after 1945, and individual members would have simply joined the local Labour Party.⁷⁸ As west London was a relatively new area for the labour movement, they would have been less likely to attract the attention of Labour Party HQ. This situation however was set to change when the Uxbridge DLP tried to re-select its parliamentary candidate in 1930.

8.5 Reginald Bridgeman and the ‘Communist Solar System’

In 1932 the Labour Party published a pamphlet entitled *The Communist Solar System*. It was an exposure of the CPGB’s tactic of creating ‘sympathising organisations’ in order to avoid expulsions. It contained this quote from the Communist International:

We must create a whole solar system of organisations and smaller committees around the Communist Party ...smaller organisations working actually under the influence of our Party.

These, Labour claimed, were independent, but sympathetic to the Communist Party, and hostile to Labour and other socialist parties across Europe. In Germany the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands had made common cause with the Nazis in elections, against what they called the ‘Social Fascists’, in the German Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands.⁷⁹

At least thirteen organisations were identified as part of this solar system, including the Minority Movement, the League Against Imperialism and several of its sister organisations, such as the Meerut Prisoners Release Committee and the Negro Welfare Association. Often these organisations operated out of the same address and there was much overlap between their officers. Reginald Bridgeman for instance, who had connections with west London, had been a founder member of the League Against Imperialism in 1927. A former British Foreign

⁷⁷ A.Thorpe, ‘The Membership of the CPGB 1920-1945’, p. 791. Scotland was the second highest with 24%.

⁷⁸ K.Morgan, G.Cohen and A.Flinn, *Communists and British Society, 1920-1991*, p. 31.

⁷⁹ Labour Party, *The Communist Solar System* (London, 1933) (LSE Pamphlet), pp.1-3.

Office Official, he was the grandson of an Earl who had decided to take a stance against British colonial rule.⁸⁰ He was also secretary of Workers International Relief, and chairman of the Negro Welfare Association. The CPGB welcomed non-communists taking part in these organisations. James Maxton, leader of the ILP, for instance, had for a time been chairman of the League Against Imperialism, but he had been expelled from it in 1930, after having been denounced by Bridgeman and Saklatvala for ‘supporting the imperialist policies of the Labour Party in Britain.’⁸¹

Bridgeman was active in west London in support of the Meerut prisoners in India. Throughout 1930 he spoke at public meetings in Southall, Hayes and Ealing Common in support of the Meerut prisoners. In December 1930 both Bridgeman and Frank Hall, chairman of the Uxbridge DLP addressed a meeting at the Gram (EMIs). In 1934 he addressed anti-fascist councils in Hayes and Uxbridge, explaining the class nature of fascism.⁸²

Bridgeman had been the Labour candidate for Uxbridge in 1929, and although he did not win the seat, he achieved a respectable number of votes, 16,422 to the Conservative’s 17,770. This was the highest vote that Labour had ever achieved in this parliamentary division. This was the last time however that he was to contest the seat on behalf of the Labour Party. In December 1929 the Executive Committee (EC) of Uxbridge DLP received a letter from the Party HQ, stating that the League Against Imperialism was not eligible for affiliation to the Labour Party and therefore Bridgeman, who was its secretary, could no longer be its parliamentary candidate. There was still a lot of support for Bridgeman in Uxbridge. At a meeting of 85 delegates in January 1930, the EC report was referred back, with the request that no action be taken until Labour Party annual conference, where it was hoped, policy on the League Against Imperialism could be overturned. A local conference was held in Uxbridge in March 1930, attended by a member of Labour’s National Committee (NC), who appealed for loyalty. The implication was that the Uxbridge DLP could face disaffiliation if it continued with Bridgeman as its parliamentary candidate. In May 1930 the annual conference of Uxbridge Labour Party voted by 39 to 29 votes to support the National Committee. Strong support for this position had come from the NUR, which was influential and provided

⁸⁰ See J.Ellison, *The League Against Imperialism: the Hidden History of its British Section* (rev.ed) (London, 2017), (Our History 14, new series vol.2), pp.5-6.

⁸¹ *The Communist Solar System*, p.8. See also J.Bellamy and J.Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol.7 (London, 1984), pp.26-50.

⁸² *Daily Worker online* mstar.link/DWMSarchive 19 March 1930, 21 March 1930, 31 December 1930, 25 June 1934.

substantial amounts of finance to the local party. However the Uxbridge delegates were divided. Some wanted Bridgeman adopted at all costs, others wanted him to comply with the Labour Party constitution. Members of the ILP called for rejection of the NC's position. The DLP narrowly rejected a resolution to try to change Labour Party policy on the League Against Imperialism.(27-29). In September delegates passed a resolution which was very critical of the Labour Government. However, in November they elected a new candidate to replace Bridgeman, Mr Worsnop, who was to be heavily defeated in the October 1931 election.⁸³

Bridgeman stood as a Workers Candidate in Uxbridge in the 1931 General Election, sponsored by the Southall branch of League Against Imperialism. In an election in which National Government candidates won overwhelmingly, Bridgeman polled 2,358 votes, Labour candidate Worsnop polled 11,609 votes, and the Conservative 35,836. Bridgeman was to rejoin the Labour Party in 1937 when the League Against Imperialism had been wound up, and he became Labour's parliamentary candidate for Hendon. He was however expelled from Labour (for the final time) after supporting the Communist inspired Peoples' Convention in 1941.⁸⁴ According to John Callaghan, Bridgeman was never an open member of the CPGB, but he always followed the line of the Communist International.⁸⁵

Uxbridge DLP backed down on selecting Bridgeman as its parliamentary candidate, but this did not stop the local party from supporting the activities of the League Against Imperialism and other organisations, which were linked to the Communist Party. In 1930 Southall and Uxbridge members supported a reception committee for the hunger marchers, although in many cases correspondence from the NUWM could not be discussed at Labour Party meetings.⁸⁶

By 1931 there was a Communist Party local (branch) in Southall, and groups of supporters in Hayes and Uxbridge.⁸⁷ There continued to be local support for CPGB affiliation to the Labour Party, from the newly founded Labour Party branch in Northolt, where there was also support for Stafford Cripps, the Socialist League and the Unity Campaign. There was also support for affiliation from the Southall Trades Council and Labour Party, the Southall Co-op

⁸³ Uxbridge DLP, LMA ACC/1267/1-2.

⁸⁴ Personal papers of Reginald Francis Orlando Bridgeman (1884-1968) , (Historical background to the papers. Hull University Archives). See also footnote 62, p.330 in J.Green, *Britain's Communists: the Untold Story*.

⁸⁵ J.Callagan, *British Communism: a Documentary History* (Manchester, 2011), p.88.

⁸⁶ Southall Trades Council and Labour Party 1932-1935, LMA ACC/1267 /3.

⁸⁷ *Daily Worker online*, 18 March 1931 and 4 February 1932.

Political Council and several local trades union branches, including ASLEF and the Southall Brass and Metal Mechanics Union. When the National Committee of the AEU adopted a resolution calling for the unity of working class organisations, to go to Labour Party conference in 1936, it was moved by a Mr. Stokes from Coventry and seconded by George Pargiter of the Southall branch.⁸⁸ The Southall LLY had close links with the YCL, particularly on the issues of fighting fascism and aid for Spain. In Ealing a branch of the Left Book Club was launched. In September 1939 the *Daily Worker* reported Communist branches in Acton, Hayes, Greenford, Ealing, Southall and Harrow.⁸⁹

8.6 Communists and the Trade Unions in West London

In Chapter 1 we looked at the growth of industry across west London in the interwar years, with new factories attracting workers from across London and the country at large. In Chapter 4 we looked at the problems facing trades union organisation. Members of the Communist Party played an important part in building the trades union movement in difficult circumstances.

The *Daily Worker* reported the extent of trades union struggles in factories in west London. In many cases its members were involved in organising inside these factories and obtaining solidarity support. Abe Lazarus, for instance tried to organise workers at the Firestone Factory in Brentford. He was born in Chiswick in 1911 and joined the Communist Party in Hammersmith in 1930s. When he moved to Oxford he achieved 100% membership for the TGWU at Pressed Steel. He was to return to west London, when he became District Secretary of the West Middlesex Communist Party in 1950.⁹⁰

The Communist Party in west London organised factory gate meetings to promote trades union organisation. At Vaudevilles (CAV) in Acton, the *Daily Worker* reported a factory gate meeting attended by over 200 in 1930. It campaigned on the working conditions faced by workers. Employees at the factory were working long hours. One girl had been sacked for eating at her machine, due to inadequate provision for meals at work. Many like her faced long journeys to work, getting up at five in the morning to get to Acton Vale from Brixton.⁹¹

⁸⁸ *Daily Worker online*, 6 June 1936 and 9 July 1936.

⁸⁹ *Daily Worker online*, 29 September 1939.

⁹⁰ 'West Middlesex District Communist Party', *Hayes Peoples History*, 15 January 2008.

⁹¹ *Daily Worker online*, 14 February 1930, 17 February 1930

By the mid- 1930s the trades union movement was again growing in strength. The Communist Party published a pamphlet in 1936 entitled *For Unity and Peace*, in which it said that hundreds of thousands were moving into the trades union movement. It championed workers unity, calling for a Labour Government to repeal all anti-working class legislation. It issued four demands : Down with the National Government, 40 hour week, higher wages and abolition of the Means Test, taxation of the wealthy not the working class, and for workers unity and peace.⁹² Fishman argues that trades union leaders relied on Communist Party members to recruit and obtain recognition. That was why leaders such as Ernest Bevin were ‘lukewarm’ about the Black Circulars which came out from TUC HQ curtailing the holding of trades union positions by communists.⁹³

Members of the Communist Party had built rank and file movements amongst London bus-workers, which were to play a significant role in strike in 1932 and 1937. On the London buses a rank and file movement published the *Busman’s Punch*. It was led by Bert Papworth based at Cricklewood Garage, and its members successfully fought wage cuts on the buses.⁹⁴ Support for these disputes was overwhelming in the Hanwell and Acton bus depots. Bus workers fought against schedules which committed them to longer working hours. In 1934 the *Daily Worker* reported strikes at Acton and Hanwell against the posting of new schedules by the London Passenger Transport Board. This unofficial action secured changes to schedules at Hanwell. Following this successful strike, Hanwell drivers considered sending delegates to a National Conference of Friendship with the Soviet Union at Bermondsey Town Hall.⁹⁵

The growth of the AEU in the late 1930s, in the newly developing aircraft engineering industry was to be particularly significant for the Communist Party in west London. In 1936 for instance there was a strike at Fairey Aviation in Hayes. Solidarity action was organised to ensure that work from this company was not passed on to other factories in the area such as Napiers or EMI.⁹⁶ One of the Communist Party members at Fairey Aviation was John Mansfield. He had moved to Hayes from Camden in 1932, at the age of 12 with his family. When he left school he started work as a toolmaker at Fairey Aviation. He was joined by

⁹² Communist Party, *For Unity and Peace: Manifesto of the CPGB*, (London, 1936) (LSE Pamphlet)

⁹³ The TUC issued a statement in 1933 entitled *Democracy and Dictatorship* curtailing the activities of Communist Party members in the trades unions.

⁹⁴ N.Branson, *History of the CPGB*, pp.93-94 .K.Fuller noted that there were 98 CPGB members in 29 bus garages. See K.Fuller, *Radical Aristocrats*, p.156.

⁹⁵ *Daily Worker online*, 10 May 1934 and 16 June 1934.

⁹⁶ *Daily Worker online*, 11 March 1936.

Frank Foster, also a Communist Party member who became factory Convenor at Fairey Aviation.⁹⁷ During World War 2 he campaigned for a Joint Production Committee in the factory. He was to become branch chairman of the Hayes Communist Party. The other key figure in the branch was Robert Good of the Brass and Mechanics Union, convenor at EMI.⁹⁸

Napiers in Acton became a stronghold for the Communist Party in west London. Nina Fishman describes how shop stewards from the West London Shop Stewards Movement during World War 1 went on to become activists in the Aircraft Shop Stewards National Committee (ASSNC) in 1935. These included Napiers shop stewards such as Ralph Fuller and Fred Archer. It launched a newspaper entitled *The New Propeller*. A branch of the Left Book Club was launched in Napiers, and a group of Voluntary Industrial Action for Spain. These organisations encouraged participation from those not Communist Party members.⁹⁹ Napiers became known as the 'Red Putilov' with a reported 200 Communist Party members and six factory groups by 1945. Support was extended to its sister factory on Park Royal, once described as a trades union black-spot. Much of its work during World War 2 was the promotion of Joint Production Committees.¹⁰⁰

By 1945 trades union organisation was firmly entrenched in the major factories in west London, laying the basis for its strength in post-war Britain. This was a complete change from the situation in the early 1930s when workers had faced victimisation and insecurity. Organising these factories in west London and other parts of the country had been an uphill feat, and members of the local Communist Party played leading role in this.¹⁰¹

8.7 The Communist Party and Labour in 1945

The CPGB achieved its highest membership ever during the 1940s. In 1942 it reported that from March to June 1942 its membership went up from 46,751 to 59,319. London, with the highest membership in the country, it rose from 15,500 to 20,000. Membership in the Midlands, another centre of the engineering industry was also high.¹⁰² Its organisation in factory groups served war time purposes well. Lunch time and factory gate meetings helped to politicise large sections of the working class. This was at a time when the political

⁹⁷ N.Fishman, *The British Communist Party and the Trades Unions*, p.294.

⁹⁸ 'John Mansfield: Mr Hayes', *Hayes People's History*, 20 October 2009.

⁹⁹ N.Fishman, *British Communist Party and the Trades Unions, 1933-1945*, pp.212-214.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Malcolm Mitchell for the Labour Oral History Project.

¹⁰¹ For a biography of the life of a Communist Party trades union activist in west London see W.Podmore, *Reg Birch*.

¹⁰² Communist Party, *Mobilising the Party for the Second Front* (London, 1942) (LSE Pamphlet)

machinery of the Labour Party had been hampered by the War. There were difficulties in maintaining regular meetings due to long working hours and evening curfews. Members had been dispersed to different parts of the country. Yet the Labour Party never took up the initiative of organising workplace branches with the sort of success achieved by the Communist Party.

In west London, Ealing Labour Party supported affiliation of the CPGB, as did Southall Labour Party, by 24 votes to 18.¹⁰³ In April 1943 Southall Labour Party invited the local Communist Party branch to take part in its May Day celebrations.¹⁰⁴ However it was rejected by Labour's annual conference. In terms of individual membership the Communist Party stood at 25% of that of the Labour Party.¹⁰⁵ It did not however have the affiliation of millions of trades unionists. In fact Communists in the AEU encouraged trades unionists to affiliate to the Labour Party and pay the political levy.¹⁰⁶ In June 1945 it called for a Labour and Communist majority in the forthcoming election, to ensure that there would be no return to the 1930s. It added that Britain's rich men would have lost the War. It announced that it would stand 22 candidates. Where there was no Communist candidate it called for its supporters to vote Labour.¹⁰⁷ It hoped that it might be possible to get the Labour candidate withdrawn in areas with high Communist support. One of these parliamentary divisions was Acton.

Ted Bramley, London Communist Party secretary, had been selected as the CPGB Parliamentary candidate for Acton. In June he presented a 10,000 strong petition to Acton Labour Party calling for a unified selection conference to select a Labour or Communist Party candidate. The reply was that Joe Sparks had already been selected as the Labour and Co-operative Party candidate, with the support of the NUR. Ted Bramley withdrew but said that it would be a 'great sacrifice'. However it would be accepted as the NUR had supported CPGB affiliation at the Labour Party conference.¹⁰⁸ Ted Bramley announced to his 700 supporters in the Napiers Shop Stewards Co-ordinating Committee that he was stepping down and called on Labour Party HQ for 'election unity' in other parts of the country. He

¹⁰³ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 22 September 1945.

¹⁰⁴ *Daily Worker online*, 29 April 1943 and 11 June 1943.

¹⁰⁵ J. McIllroy and A. Campbell. 'Last Chance Saloon?' Table 1, p.878 lists party membership as follows: 1942 Labour Party - 218,783, Communist Party- 56,000, ILP- 2066; 1947 Labour Party- 608,487, Communist Party- 38,579, ILP- 2008.

¹⁰⁶ R. Croucher, *Engineers at War*, p.353.

¹⁰⁷ *Communist Party Election Policy 1945* (London, 1945) (LSE Pamphlet)

¹⁰⁸ *Daily Worker online*, 14 June 1945.

would help now to mobilise Napier's workers for a Labour victory in Acton. Mass rallies had been held in Acton Park of Napier's workers who faced redundancy after the War. The AEU district organiser said that unless workers planned industry, there would be mass unemployment again, like in the 1930s.¹⁰⁹

Across west London members of the Communist Party, where it had an industrial base, such as EMI in Hayes, were encouraged to actively support Labour candidates. Hayes Communist Party said that its members continued to give magnificent service in helping to maintain the morale and efficiency of our town in furtherance of the war effort. It had campaigned for JPCs, supported better wages and conditions, and solidarity with the armed forces. It had volunteered blood donors and air raid wardens. It called for full employment after the war, a Hayes Plan to include street lighting in Hayes, and it opposed British intervention in Greece.¹¹⁰ It called for a united front with Labour.¹¹¹ In November 1945 a joint victory social for Ayles was held by the local Labour and Communist parties.¹¹²

However the Communist Party did not give up on standing its own candidates. In October 1945 Ted Bramley again approached Acton Labour Party for a joint campaign in the local elections, for which 18 seats were to be contested. He had hopes of standing in the South-West ward, a long standing Labour stronghold. This joint approach was again rejected by Acton Labour Party, but this time, by just one vote.¹¹³ The Communist Party stood council candidates in the ward, Ted Bramley and Mr G.Poole of the Park Royal Shop Stewards committee. They come second as the seats were not contested by the Conservatives. Labour won a 27-5 majority on Acton council.¹¹⁴

The Communist Party maintained its promise to add 'life and drive' into a Labour majority by campaigning on housing shortages. In Ealing, Acton and Hayes it called for empty homes to be taken over and supported rent strikes. The Communist Party continued to stand candidates at local elections during the 1940s, but without a good deal of success. In Southall in 1945 the Communist Party fielded some council candidates, Gwythm Evans and Frank

¹⁰⁹ *Daily Worker online*, 10 May 1945 and 18 June 1945.

¹¹⁰ R.Croucher described trades union opposition to British military intervention in Greece, in *Engineers at War*, p.323-5. For an account of opposition to this policy in the Labour Party see A.Thorpe, 'In a Rather Emotional State' *The Labour Party and British Military Intervention in Greece, 1944-1945*, *English Historical Review*, 121 (493), (2006) pp.455-481.

¹¹¹ *Hayes Gazette*, 16 March 1945.

¹¹² *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 3 November 1945.

¹¹³ *Daily Worker online*, 16 October 1945.

¹¹⁴ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 28 September 1945, 2 November 1945.

Day, both former Labour councillors. They won around 500 votes.¹¹⁵ A request for the Labour Party to withdraw candidates in Southall was refused. Even in the Ealing borough the local Communist Party decided to contest Lammas and Hanwell North wards in the 1945 council elections.¹¹⁶

In March 1946 a request for Labour to withdraw council candidates in the Hayes local elections was also refused. EMI shop steward backed two Communist Party candidates, Frank Foster and Fred Neale.¹¹⁷ Foster, a convenor at Fairey Aviation achieved a respectable vote, 1,344 to 1,569 for the Labour candidate, A.H. Smith.¹¹⁸ There was no Conservative candidate for this Harlington ward, so the Communist candidates did not consider that they were jeopardising Labour's chances. Labour regained control of Hayes council at the election.¹¹⁹

8.8 West Middlesex District Communist Party

The West Middlesex District Communist Party (WMDCP) was founded in March 1950, attended by 148 delegates. It met in the Co-operative Hall in East Acton. Its founding conference elected a district committee of 28, which comprised 15 industrial workers in major local enterprises. It covered 15 boroughs, with 50 branches which included 8 factory branches. Its total membership was 1,650, though only 1,281 were paying subs. Across the district, its largest membership was in Acton (366), which also contained the majority of the factory branches, followed by Ealing and Greenford (210) Hayes and Harlington (160) and Southall (110). Membership of its youth section, the Young Communist League (YCL), however, stood at only 80 and falling. This suggests a failure to connect with the young generation. It was retaining the loyalty of an older generation of industrial workers, who had lived through the 1930s.¹²⁰

The main strength of the WMDCP was its factory branches. It increased its number of factory branches from 8 to 34 1950-1951, with 700 members in 230 factories. The number of

¹¹⁵ *Middlesex County Time* (Southall edition), 29 September 1945. Evans had been a member of the Communist Party since 1925.

¹¹⁶ *Middlesex County Times* (Ealing edition), 9 June 1945.

¹¹⁷ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition) 2 March 1946.

¹¹⁸ Frank Foster became industrial organiser for the Communist Party in West Middlesex, taking over from Phil Piratin in 1954. See: K. Marsh and R. Griffiths, *Granite and Honey: the Story of Phil Piratin Communist MP* (Croydon, 2012), pp. 169-171.

¹¹⁹ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 6 April 1946. See also *Hayes Gazette*, 1 March 1946.

¹²⁰ West Middlesex District Communist Party files (Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester, CP/INT/ORG/10/07-10. Report to Organisation Committee 1950. See also 'West Middlesex District Communist Party', Hayes Peoples' History, 15 January 2008.

industrial disputes in the district was low, in spite of high levels of trades union organisation. It was reported that strikes at the Old Oak Common rail depot in Acton had been led by Communist Party members. Most disputes were around pay, limited to sections of factories such as EMI and AEC, and usually they achieved success quickly.¹²¹

Trades union membership itself continued to grow across the District. Trades union recognition was achieved at Lyons in Greenford. Trades unions were established at Heathrow Airport, where the Communist Party set up a factory branch of 60 members.¹²² Its secretary was Stan Davison, who had joined the Party in West Hendon in 1947. Interviewed for the Communist Party of Great Britain Biographical Project, Stan said that there were 5,000 employees at the Airport and it was 100% unionised in the 1950s. Of the Communist Party branch he said, that it stayed at around 100 members, and it had a very high influence in trades union structures because of its sense of discipline and direction. Its activities were very open, and it was tolerated in spite of the active presence in the Airport of both Catholic Action and Moral Re-armament. Its activities extended into local election and community work, and literature sales.¹²³

By 1961 the changing economic situation affecting west London, with growing job insecurity, had led to a number of industrial disputes, EMI, Hoovers and Fairey Aviation. At Hoovers workers took five days of strike action against redundancies. Facing redundancy, workers could usually find another job, but with less money and involving more travelling.¹²⁴

The Communist Party continued to stand candidates against Labour at both general and local elections. In the 1950 General Election, Hayes Communist Party stood Frank Foster as its parliamentary candidate. He was critical of Labour's record on housing, and called for the building industry to be nationalised. He condemned the compensation paid to the former owners of the mines and the railways, whilst railway porters could not get a pay rise. Nevertheless he said that to vote Tory would be 'to jump from the frying pan into the fire.'¹²⁵

In 1950 Communist Party candidate, Arthur Roy Mellor of the Brass and Metal Mechanics Union stood for Southall South East in a Middlesex County Council (MCC) by-election. He had lived in Southall for 20 years and had once been assistant secretary of Dormers Wells

¹²¹ West Middlesex District Communist Party Review February- November 1951.

¹²² West Middlesex District Communist Party report to the EC July 1954-August 1955.

¹²³ Richard Stevens, Interview with Stan Davison, Communist Party of Great Britain Biographical Project, British Library Sound Archive, C1049/38/01-02 (transcript).

¹²⁴ See Chapter 1.

¹²⁵ *Hayes Gazette*, 2 February 1950.

Labour Party branch.¹²⁶ This was an indication that a significant number of Communist Party members had been previously members of the Labour Party, even in the 1930s as members of both parties. The Conservatives regained the MCC seat by 3,296 votes to 2,789, the Communist Party winning 167 votes.¹²⁷ In Acton, former Napiers worker, Malcolm Mitchell, was one of three Communist candidates in the 1953 council elections.¹²⁸ In the local elections of 1953 the local Communist Party had stood candidates in 10 wards across the District gaining a total of 1,758 votes. Standing candidates at election gave the Party a chance to hold meetings, distribute leaflets and sell copies of the *Daily Worker*. Factory gate meetings and sales continued to take place at factories like EMI.¹²⁹

Communist Party election candidates had trades union connections. Frank Stanley, who stood for the Middlesex County Council for Hayes North in 1954, was a convenor at EMI.¹³⁰ In the local elections in Southall in 1964, its candidate for Glebe Ward was Lionel Miller, President of the Southall District of the AEU.¹³¹ In 1954 Frank Foster, a convenor at EMI was adopted as the Communist prospective parliamentary candidate for Hayes and Harlington and in 1955 stood against Labour's Arthur Skeffington.¹³² He held factory gate meetings at Fairey Aviation and EMI and invited Harry Pollitt to address local workers at the Hayes Civil Restaurant, at a meeting attended by 150.¹³³

However support within the trades union movement however did not translate into electoral support and the Communist Party simultaneously tried to influence members of the Labour Party. In its review of 1951 for instance, it reported better relations with non-Party (CP) trades union and Labour Party members than ever before. It organised 14 public meetings attended by 860 people.¹³⁴ It said:

Our party members played an active and sometimes outstanding part in the local Labour Party organisations. There was some measure of united activity in every borough. The

¹²⁶ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 21 January 1950.

¹²⁷ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 14 February 1950.

¹²⁸ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 7 May 1953. See also Interview with Malcolm Mitchell for the Labour Oral History Project.

¹²⁹ West Middlesex District Communist Party Report to Congress March 1955, Report to the EC July 1954-August 1955. See also 'Frank Stanley', *Hayes Peoples History*, 27 October 2013. Frank Stanley had joined the Communist Party and YCL in Acton in 1937. From 1959 he was the Convenor for the AEU at EMI.

¹³⁰ West Middlesex District Communist Party Report to Congress March 1955, Report to the EC July 1954-August 1955.

¹³¹ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 18 April 1964.

¹³² Following the death of Walter Ayles in 1953, Arthur Skeffington was elected as Labour MP for Hayes and Harlington.

¹³³ *Hayes Gazette*, 22 April 1955. Foster accused Labour of adopting Tory policies.

¹³⁴ West Middlesex District Communist Party Review February-November 1951, p.8.

Party (CP) members certainly changed the character of the campaign by bringing in to it a confident spirit and the live political issues of peace and standards of living. This political influence, notably on the question of peace, had an effect on the rank and file, several of the candidates and of course on the electorate. The independent campaign of the Party (CP) while weaker in so far as the members participating, relative to those active in the Labour Party, was more effective than any other public campaigning in the District.

In its District Review for 1953/54 the Communist Party reported that it was finding little hostility from Labour Party members. It claimed that it had swayed the minds of local MPs, like Frank Beswick in Uxbridge on the issue of peace, and opposition to German re-armament. In 1954 it reported an increase in the number of ‘progressive’ resolutions from CLPs in the West Middlesex District to Labour Party conference. However it noted that Labour Party members were prepared to work with Communist Party members as individuals, not with the Party as a whole.¹³⁵

The Communist Party campaigned on housing policy. It recognised that ‘there was no grinding poverty’ in the District, but there was hidden hardship. For instance, a housing census had shown that out of 700,000 households in the District, 207,000 were living in shared dwellings. 241,000 were without or sharing a bath. It opposed the rents legislation introduced by the Conservative Government, which was benefitting the landlords. Council tenants were also subject to a ‘lodger’s tax. Where these were being implemented by local Conservative councils there had been scope for joint campaigns with the local Labour Party. This was the case in Ealing where there had been a ‘spectacular campaign’ against differential rents amongst council tenants in Northolt. The local Communist Party had produced a leaflet which it distributed door to door. The local Communist Party campaigned for recreational facilities on a new council estate, Waxlow Manor, on the borders of Southall and Greenford. It said that 10,000 tenants had been ‘dumped’ without any regard to educational or cultural needs.¹³⁶

However some Labour councils were implementing these rents policies.¹³⁷ In Hayes for instance, the housing crisis continued with 10,000 on the waiting list. The Communist Party

¹³⁵ *West Middlesex District Communist Party Review 1953-1954.*

¹³⁶ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 19 March 1949.

¹³⁷ Rents legislation introduced by the Conservatives in 1954/5 included giving local councils the right to charge differential rents to council tenants, according to their income. Council tenants were also to be charged for lodgers, including adult family members. *West Middlesex Communist Party District Review 1953/54, Report to the EC July 1954-August 1955, October 1955-September 1956.*

campaigned against the housing policy of the Labour Council as it was implementing the rents policy of the Conservative Government. Eric Evans leader of the Hayes Council Tenants' Association gained the support of Labour members in Hayes leading to a number of resignations and expulsions from the local Labour Party.¹³⁸ The West Middlesex District Communist Party tried to assess the political situation in the District in 1956:

The Tories still had a considerable grip on the District, and the policy of the right-wing (Labour) leaders was enabling them to consolidate this grip. Yet at the same time the workers showed themselves very militant on the economic issues.

It acknowledged that 'surface prosperity' was sufficient to clamp down on deep class feeling. However it was also critical of the Communist Party's own role in putting too much emphasis on attacking the right wing of the Labour Party instead of the Tories. It also said that it had not carried out enough political campaigning in the factories on anything other than the economic issues.¹³⁹

In 1951 it was reported that membership of the West Middlesex District Communist Party had fallen to 1,425. Nevertheless for a 'fringe' left political party, this was a significant membership and no other group on the left was ever to achieve this level of membership again. Its impact was greater than its size, and it contained a higher percentage of activists, than for example, the local Labour Party branches. It reported nine weekly factory sales of the *Daily Worker* per week in Acton, and two sales in shopping centres. There were also factory sales in Hayes, Southall, Uxbridge and Yiewsley.¹⁴⁰

By January 1955 total membership of the district stood at 1,315 and membership of the YCL had fallen to 51. The Party acknowledged its problems in its annual reports. Its peace campaign was not popular in a district where employment had been dependent on the arms industry.

Foreign policy issues were to be problematic for the Communist Party post 1945, due to the Cold War. Its favourable position in the forefront of fighting European fascism was replaced by hostility to the Soviet Union, and a growing arms race. Its main activity in the 1950 elections was campaigning on the issue of world peace, and 10,000 copies of the leaflet *Never Again* (against war) were distributed across the district. It held six factory gate

¹³⁸ *Hayes Gazette*, 15 April 1955, 12 March 1959, 7 May 1959 and 21 May 1959.

¹³⁹ West Middlesex District Communist Party Report to the EC October 1955-September 1956.

¹⁴⁰ West Middlesex District Communist Party Review February- November 1951.

meetings per week. It had contested local elections in ten boroughs, but the number of votes received was very small.¹⁴¹ It also lost thousands of members over the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956.¹⁴² In the face of this it was faced with bans and proscriptions within the labour movement and trades councils were ordered by the TUC not to allow members of Communist and Fascist organisations to stand for office. Some trades councils such as Southall for instance, refused to comply with this regulation, as did the Ruislip-Northwood Trades Council.¹⁴³ It also met with opposition from Acton Trades Council.¹⁴⁴ If they refused to comply with this, these organisations were faced with disaffiliation from the TUC.¹⁴⁵

In the professions, Communist Party members faced bans. For instance no member of the Communist Party could become a head teacher with the Conservative controlled Middlesex County Council.¹⁴⁶ This ban was opposed by Labour members of the MCC.¹⁴⁷ It was also opposed by the National Union of Teachers, the (Conservative) Minister for Education and the Conservative Teachers' Association.¹⁴⁸

The rise of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the 1960s however, was to help revive the fortunes of the Communist Party. In its report for 1960-1961 the West Middlesex District Communist Party gave support to the peace campaign around the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Its members were involved in the Middlesex Co-ordinating Committee for CND. It reported a delegate meeting in Ealing with 81 delegates, including 53 from Labour Party and trades union branches. In 1961 for the first time in decades the District reported an increase in membership to 1,110 (from 957 in January 1960). It had held two rallies at Acton Town Hall, attracting over 500. It held door to door sales of the *Daily Worker* in 29 local wards, and outside 25 factories, with average weekly sales of 450 and 583. It distributed 23,000 leaflets *So No to Polaris*. The CPGB campaigned on a number of international issues in the 1960s – ending the sale of arms to apartheid South Africa, ending

¹⁴¹ West Middlesex District Communist Party Report to Organisation Committee 1950.

¹⁴² By 1958 the CPGB had a membership of 24,670, less than half that of 1943. However by 1964 it had grown to 34,281. See E. Smith, 'Too little too late the Communist Party and Race Relations in the late 1960s', *Critique* 36 (3) (2008), p.363-384.

¹⁴³ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 5 February 1949, 25 February 1955. The TUC document on the Communist Party was rejected by the Southall Trades Council by 34 to 6 votes. The Trades Council was disaffiliated and replaced with a Hayes and Southall Trades Council.

¹⁴⁴ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 31 March 1955. The document was noted, but one delegate asked - how could you infiltrate when you are already part of the movement? See also: J. McIlroy, 'Reds at Work: Communist Factory Organisation in the Cold War 1947-56', *Labour History Review*, 65 (2) (2000), pp.181-201.

¹⁴⁵ Southall and Hayes Trades Councils were disaffiliated. A new Hayes and Southall Trades Council was set up which re-admitted Communists (and fascists) in 1964. *Hayes Gazette*, 14th February 1964.

¹⁴⁶ *Middlesex County Times* (Southall edition), 3 November 1950

¹⁴⁷ *Hayes Gazette*, 3 November 1950, 18 March 1955.

¹⁴⁸ *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 10 April 1954.

the US War in Vietnam and against the Colonels' regime in Greece. This gained it respect amongst young political activists and the broader labour movement.

In West Middlesex the issue of racism and support for Indian workers was to gain its attention. It supported the newly formed Community Relations Councils, and launched an anti-racist campaign in 1969. The West Middlesex District alone produced 10,000 leaflets. An Indian worker, Vishnu Sharma was a member of the West Middlesex Communist Party District Committee, who regularly stood for the local council but did not elected. This was in spite of the fact that a Labour Government had introduced tougher immigration controls in 1968 which he had described as 'The White Passport Act.'¹⁴⁹

The Communist Party, unlike Labour councillors came out against the policy of 'bussing' school children from Southall into Ealing schools.¹⁵⁰ It published a pamphlet which was critical of the policy which had led to 3,000 children being 'bussed'. It said that the policy had cost £100,000 per annum, which could have been spent on new schools in Southall. Most primary schools in Southall had been built before 1920.¹⁵¹ The success of this campaign was to lead to an end to 'bussing' in the London Borough of Ealing. It had been deeply unpopular in Southall as it had treated immigrant (coloured) children as the problem.¹⁵² The CPGB had built a base in an area with a large Jewish population in East London and its candidate Phil Piratin had been elected MP for Stepney in 1945. However the West Middlesex District of the Communist Party was not set to make the same breakthrough with the Asian population of Southall.¹⁵³

Evan Smith blamed the failure of the CPGB nationally to recruit significantly amongst black and Asian workers on its priority for 'militant labourism' and class unity. This was in the late 1960s in the face of attacks on black and Asian workers from Enoch Powell, and the newly created fascist party, the National Front. Its call for 'One Race the Human Race' was

¹⁴⁹ E. Smith, 'Too Little Too Late?' When Vishnu Sharma stood in the Ealing Council elections in 1974 in Southall he lost to the Labour candidate by just three votes. (interview with John Boyd, 20 November 2015).

¹⁵⁰ 'Bussing' was a dispersal policy arising from the ruling of Conservative Minister for Education Edward Boyle, that no school should have more than one third coloured children. (*Middlesex County Times*, Southall edition), 11 January 1964. This policy was continued by Labour controlled Ealing council after 1965, but was to be phased out after 1974. It was controversial in the UK. Not all councils implemented it. In the US however, 'bussing' was welcomed by progressive politicians in the name of integration.

¹⁵¹ The pamphlet was reviewed by John Boyd, member of the West Middlesex Communist Party District Committee (interview with John Boyd).

¹⁵² West Middlesex District Communist Party [documents 1968-1974]. Olivier Esteve (University of Lille) is writing a book on 'bussing' in the UK and the US. He sent me copies of his draft chapters and introduction and gave a talk at Ealing Central Library in November 2016.

¹⁵³ See Chapter 5.

supported by trades unions, local Labour parties, community organisations, churches and Hindu and Sikh temples, did find resonance in Southall, when the community was under attack in the 1970s. The fact that the IWA gave its electoral support to the Labour Party in this town was more due to the fact that this was the dominant party of the working class, not because the local Communist Party had rejected black separatism.¹⁵⁴

Conclusion

Parties to the left of Labour gained relatively small memberships and not much electoral success in this part of London. However their significance was their political and organisational impact on the labour movement, both the trades unions and the Labour Party. The ILP had branches in the area before 1918, which provided the political inspiration and basis for socialism. It also provided many of the activists for newly established divisional Labour parties after 1918. Although it split from Labour in 1932, its members carried its political legacy into the Party as a whole, without causing the sort of damaging divisions seen in other parts of the UK such as Scotland. In an area where the trades union movement was weak, the role of these activists was crucial to the building of the labour movement in west London.

The main contribution of the CPGB in west London was building the trades union movement in an area where the unions had traditionally been weak, except on public transport. This base was mobilised to help to deliver political change across the area in 1945, with victories for the first time for Labour MPs. In the post war years, the Communist Party, although in decline, retained a formidable presence in the local trades union movement, with support for left wing policies in the labour movement as a whole.

Both the ILP and the CPGB, although small in membership, historically played a critical role in changing the political landscape. The legacy of 1945 was to survive into the second part of the 20th century. The trades union movement in west London remained strong. Electoral losses for the Labour Party in the 1950s, were to be reversed in the 1960s. This was based on a changing population, but also on the success of political organisation.

¹⁵⁴ See E.Smith. 'Class before Race: British Communism and the Place of Empire in Post-War Race Relations', *Science and Society*, 2008, 72(4) (2008) pp .455-481, and 'Too Little Too Late?' pp.363-384. In June 1976 a Unity March was organised in Southall in protest against the murder of an Asian student by a white racist, under the banner of One Race the Human Race. <http://l-r-c.org.uk/news/story/march-for-unity-1976-and-2016/>

Conclusion

This thesis has been a study of the labour movement in west London. The local history approach tells us that this is a social movement rooted in a local population. Looking at local history challenges some of the stereotypes about the history of the labour movement. It had roots in parts of suburbia like west London, as well as in the industrial heartlands of the north of England, Scotland and Wales. It is based mainly on primary sources, but calling on secondary sources for comparison, and national context. Primary sources included local newspapers, pamphlets and labour movement journals. They also included some oral history interviews, which complimented printed resources.

What does it tell us? We have to consider firstly what it tells us about the labour movement in west London. Secondly what does it illustrate about the development of the labour movement generally? Thirdly what can we learn about politics as a whole from this study?

As I explained in my introduction, west London was a very difficult geographical area to define. For the purposes of this thesis, I chose to define it as the current boroughs of Ealing and Hillingdon, which are only part of west London. I chose them because their histories are interlinked, with parts of Ealing, included in the Uxbridge parliamentary division until 1945. Nevertheless these boroughs do not have a common identity, either in 1918, or today. Central Ealing and Acton are still leafy suburbia, as is affluent Ruislip and Northwood. Both boroughs however had working class communities, in Acton, Hayes, Hanwell, Southall, Greenford and Northolt, as they do today. This diverse character makes these boroughs comparable to other boroughs in outer London, neighbouring Brent, Harrow and Hounslow, as well as others on the north, south and east side of London, such as Edmonton, Walthamstow and Wimbledon.

As suburbs of London, they do not have the shared history and character of towns and cities. This has made the history of the local labour movement more problematic. They are not defined by one industry, like coal mining in South Wales or the textile industries defining Yorkshire and Lancashire. They do not have a city political identity like Liverpool or Coventry, or town identity like Reading. This may explain why the history of London suburbs, including the history of the local labour movement, has not received much attention. London suburbs are at least partly defined by their proximity to London itself. This had led to a constantly mobile and changing population, as we have seen. Population movement and change has been a key feature of the suburbs, one which underpins their political importance,

as ‘bell-weather’ constituencies, in which general elections have been won or lost by the major political parties. We have seen how the constituencies of west London never became ‘Labour heartlands’ in spite of its industrial growth, and that the Conservatives were able to make electoral gains in the 1950s. We considered the impact of a growing working class population in west London, but this was always modified by the growth of parts of the area as suburban Metro-land, with middle class commuters.

However the main change that took place in west London in the early 20th century was its late industrial growth, based on new industries in electrical engineering and consumer goods. So the labour movement in west London was built by a population that moved into the area from other parts of the UK, mainly with the objective of finding work in its many factories. Some of the first had been employed on the railways, as drivers, signalmen and guards on the Great Western Railway. These were largely a young generation, and in many cases they brought with them, labour movement allegiances from the areas from which they re-located. The 1920s saw industrial militancy on behalf of transport workers, as in other parts of the country, including the nine day General Strike in 1926. However as membership of the trades unions fell due to unemployment and victimisation, trades unions had a lot of difficulty in getting a foothold in west London’s many factories. The working population was diverse and dispersed. Many were not living in the area where they worked. As a result of this we saw that trades unions, although providing a backbone for the labour movement, they were not the sole bedrock on which it was built.

Instead we have to look to Labour Party organisation at a grassroots level to explain its electoral gains up until 1931, and its survival in the 1930s. This included the recruitment of women into the Labour Party Women’s Sections. In working-class communities such as Southall and Hayes, control of local councils gave the party the opportunity to connect with the electorate on issues such as public housing, public health and education. Even where it failed to win Acton council, a group of Labour councillors were able to make a difference in pressurising councillors to buy land for housing. We also have to look to the third wing of the labour movement, the Co-operative Movement for the strength of its organisation in west London, its basis in local communities, and its ability to organise and motivate newly enfranchised women voters.

The history of the labour movement in west London was to throw up twists and turns to this early narrative. In the late 1930s and during World War 2, trades unions such as the AEU and

TGWU recruited in local factories and the area became a stronghold for these trades unions. During the 1945 General Election campaign, trades unionists in the workplace, were mobilised behind Labour candidates across west London, in new constituencies, which changed the political landscape. Political organisation in factories like Napiers in Acton and EMI in Hayes was often led by members of the Communist Party who had been at the forefront in recruiting to the trades unions, but the Communist Party was never in a position to challenge Labour candidates in national or local elections. This was due to the electoral machine that had been built up by the Labour Party in the interwar years.

After 1945, the trades unions remained strong across west London, as we have seen in Chapter 4. There were few strikes until the 1960s, and post-war prosperity benefitted the local workforce, or so it seemed. The first shock was to come with the closure of Napiers on Acton Vale in 1962, with thousands of redundancies. During the 1950s, in spite of a strong trades union movement, electoral support for the Labour Party was falling, not dramatically, but gradually, parliamentary seats like Ealing North, Uxbridge and even Acton were lost to the Conservatives. This went alongside the decline of active Labour Party membership in every constituency. The low point for Labour was, as in the rest of the country, in 1959, when its defeat was blamed on having lost the young generation, who had no recollection of the 1930s. By the 1960s, however, these electoral losses were reversed, showing that the impact of the long term demographic trend of the interwar years remained. The only negative result for the Labour Party in 1964 was when it came close to losing Southall over the immigration issue. This was examined in detail in Chapter 5. As the Asian community in Southall grew however, its support for Labour was cemented, in alliances with local organisations such as the IWA.

This takes us to another factor in the growth of the labour movement in west London, which we have considered, that of the role of immigration and ethnic groups. Unlike the London's East End, the area was never dominated by one or more ethnic groups. The Welsh and Irish moved from other parts of the UK or the Republic of Ireland, and although they had their own cultural ties, they integrated with the existing population, and played a significant role, as individuals in building the trades unions and the Labour Party. Rather than being concentrated in one area, they were dispersed across London. It was a different picture with Indians from the Punjab who arrived in Southall in the 1950s. They formed a distinct community with their own organisations, such as the IWA, as we saw in Chapter 5. It was via

their own organisations that they connected to the local labour movement, both the trades unions and the Labour Party.

So moving on to the second question, what can west London tell us about the origins and development of the labour movement in general? Firstly it illustrates the importance of a local approach, in explaining how this social movement was built. Local economic and social background were overwhelmingly important. Secondly it shows the enormous complexity in the relative strengths of the three wings of the movement at any one time, the trades unions, the Co-operative Movement and the Labour Party. Thirdly it challenges some stereotypes about the local roots of the labour movement. That there were branches of the ILP at an early stage in suburban London, that socialists had control of Urban District Councils like Hayes in 1919 and that the Co-operative Movement grew in the 1930s in new industrial areas in London and the south-east, have been largely ignored. It also challenges the belief that the labour movement had to be based on strong trades unions, as it shows that organisation in the community was just as important. Fourthly it shows that for a political party to be successful, it needs to rest on a strong grassroots organisation.

However this thesis has also shown that the rise of the local labour movement was based on national political organisations which sank roots in the local area. Organisations which had their birth in the Labour heartlands were able to build support and gain a membership in a new industrial area. It was also affected by national political events such as the extension of the franchise in 1918, and the fall of the Labour Government in 1931.

The third question is what the history of the labour movement in west London can tell us about politics in general. Whilst researching for this thesis it became clear that many of the political issues in 1918 were the same as today. These include housing shortage, employment and unemployment, free trade versus protection, and regional disparities in the UK, including the North-South divide, which so afflicted the 1930s.

The interwar years brought about unprecedented political changes in terms of extension of the franchise, also saw the Labour Party replace the Liberal Party as a main party of opposition and government. This has remained the case in British politics to this present day, with Labour and the Conservatives as the two main parties. There have been recent attempts to change this two-party system, for instance by the SDP-Liberal Alliance, and UKIP. Some say that they failed because of the 'first past the post' electoral system. However, the success of the Labour Party after 1918, where these others have since failed, is that it was focussed

above all on winning the votes of a key section of the population, that of the working class. This definition of working class was broadened, as we have seen to include ‘the black-coated worker’, and this was critical in the London suburbs. Having a core electorate, and support in heartlands, which were retained, even after the 1931 defeat, remained the basis on which to rebuild and expand into rural, suburban and new industrial areas. Supporting this was the building of a grassroots movement, local party organisation, trades unions and the co-operative movement, rooted in local communities. Class underpins the electoral system in Britain. This was apparent also to the Conservatives and Liberals, who tried to win the working class vote, or to marginalise it, as in the 1950s, when everyone was to be persuaded that they were ‘middle-class’ because of increased affluence. If class was the main factor in British politics, this thesis has also considered the impact on support for political parties by age, gender and ethnic groups, at different times. For instance the youth vote was considered to have benefitted Labour in 1945, but more the Conservatives in the 1950s. The impact of women voters has also been considered, and whether it too divided on class lines.

Population change can be critical in changing the political landscape. We have seen how the industrialisation of west London, led to political change. In parts of the country, de-industrialisation has had an impact. Ex mining areas revert to their former rural identities, as in Cumbria. A falling population makes industrial constituencies candidates for election boundary changes, which change the nature of the area. Large cities, especially London, have seen rapid changes, with parts of the capital, with a working class identity such as Battersea and Fulham, becoming gentrified. Hence Red Battersea became Blue Wandsworth. The growth of multi-ethnic communities have had an impact on boroughs like Ealing and Harrow, but much less so in the neighbouring borough of Hillingdon.

Finally what determines the outcomes of elections? We have considered long term changes in political mood as in 1945 and 1959. Both could be considered in their different ways as a response to the 1930s, seen as a decade of poverty and unemployment. They were summed up by the slogans ‘never again’ in 1945, and ‘never had it so good’ in 1959. We also have to take into account short term political shocks, such as the fall of the Labour Government in 1931, and the Suez Crisis of 1956 which discredited the Conservatives. Elections can often reflect a snap-shot of political opinion rather than a long term trend. Local elections, held annually in west London until 1965, and by-elections can illustrate changes in political mood. There were by-elections of the 1930s for instance, where Labour did exceptionally well in London, but went on to lose the 1935 General Election. In the local elections of 1968, due to

government unpopularity, it did exceptionally badly, but was to recover after 1970. Boundary changes can make a difference to an election result. We saw for instance that new parliamentary constituencies were created in outer London ahead of the 1945 General Election. In west London this ensured that working class towns such as Hayes and Southall were more accurately politically represented, than when they had been part of the Uxbridge and Harrow parliamentary divisions.

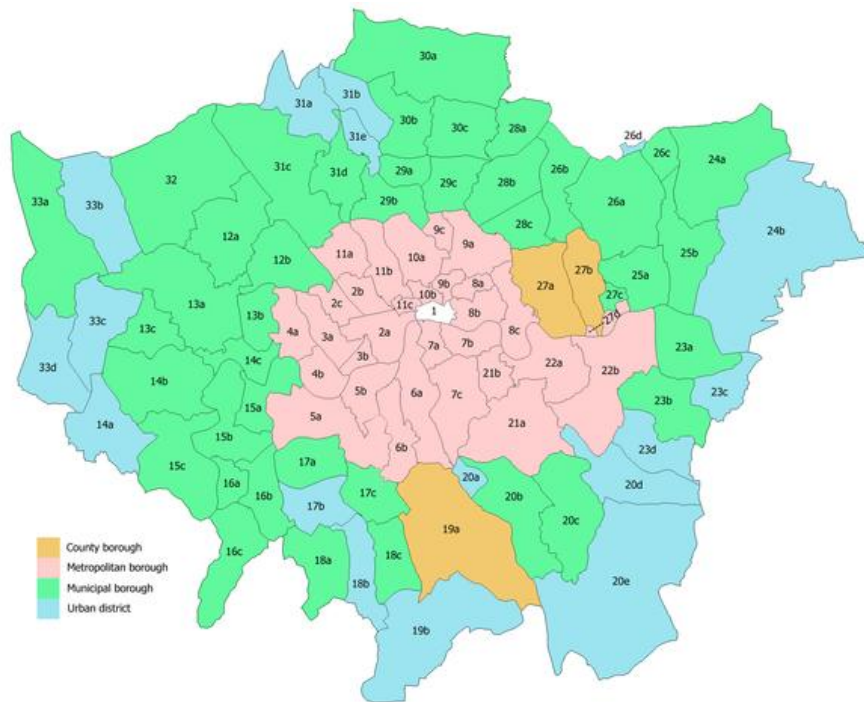
Although this is a local study this thesis has explored the links between local and national politics, in the origins and development of the labour movement in west London, and has shown how one has influenced the other. As a 'history from below' it has shown how political change takes place in local communities, but also how these are affected by national political events.

Appendix 1 – Maps of West London



Current London Borough boundaries 33 Hillingdon 13 Ealing

Source: [Numbered map of the boroughs of London](#) by Notscott via Wikimedia Commons, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)



Pre 1965 boundaries - 13a Ealing, 13b Acton, 13c Southall 33a Uxbridge, 33b Ruislip Northwood, 33c Hayes and Harlington, 33d Yiewsley and West Drayton

Middlesex Parliamentary boundaries 1918-1945

Source: [Greater London composite parts](#) by MRSC via Wikimedia Commons, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)



Source: [Acton constituency within Middlesex](#), as it existed from 1918 to 1945, by Sam Blacketer via Wikimedia Commons, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

Appendix 2 General Election results in West London (figures from DODs Parliamentary Guide) 1910-1970

1910

Ealing Nield (Conservative) unopposed (25,073 electors)
Harrow Mallaby-Deeley (Conservative) unopposed (35,379 electors)
Uxbridge Mills (Conservative) 9,005 ; Mallik (Liberal) 4,286 (17,634 electors)

1918

Acton Brittan (Conservative) 11,671; Dunsmore (Labour) 4,241 (29,542 electors)
Harrow Mosley (Conservative) 13,959 ; Chamberlyne (Independent) 3,159 (33,308 electors)
Uxbridge Peel (Conservative) 9,814; Gosling (Labour) 6,251; Snowball (Liberal) 545 (29,442 electors)
Ealing Nield (Conservative) 13,710 ; Chilton (Labour) 3,610 (28,687 electors)

1922

Acton Brittan (Conservative) 10,208; Richardson (Labour) 5,342; Dixey (Liberal) 4,877 (30,425 electors)
Harrow Mosley (Independent) 15,290; Ward-Johnson (Conservative) 7,868 (35,592 electors)
Uxbridge Burney (Conservative) 12,391; Brown (Labour) 9,411; Evans (National Liberal) 3,844 (32,229 electors)
Ealing Nield (Conservative) 14,405; Chilton (Labour) 6,128; Lital (Independent) 719 (32,457 electors)

1923

Acton Brittan (Conservative) 8,943; Baldwin (Labour) 6,069; Levinton (Liberal) 4,909 (31,394 electors)
Harrow Mosley (Independent) 14,079; Morris (Independent) 9,433 (36,475 electors)
Uxbridge Burney (Conservative) 9,254; Small (Labour) 6,146; Hutchison (Liberal) 7,423 (34,250 electors)
Ealing Nield (Conservative) 12,349; Bradford (Liberal) 6,410; Chilton (Labour) 4,495 (33,699 electors)

1924

Acton Brittain (Conservative) 12,799; Baldwin (Labour) 5,583; Levinton (Liberal) 3,074; Richardson (Independent Labour) 1,775 (31,999 electors)
Harrow Salmon (Conservative) 16,526; Lindsay (Labour) 9,507; Blair (Liberal) 4,230 (38,644 electors)
Uxbridge Burney (Conservative) 13,525; Small (Labour) 8,459; Griffiths-Jones (Liberal) 7,158 (49,196 electors)
Ealing Nield (Conservative) 18,572; Chilton (Labour) 6,765 (34,623 electors)

1929

Acton Shillaker (Labour) 13,206 ;Brittain (Conservative) 12,739; Medlicott (Liberal) 5,981 (42,276 electors 22,484 women, 19,792 men)
Harrow Salmon (Conservative) 22,466; Beanmont (Labour) 15,684; Taylor (Liberal) 12,554; Sholl (Independent Conservative) 1,965 (70,849 electors, 37,228 women, 33,621 men)
Uxbridge Llewellyn (Conservative) 17,770; Bridgeman (Labour) 16,422, Binney (Liberal) 8,847 (59,603 electors, 30,743 women, 28,860 men)
Ealing Nield (Conservative) 20,503; Maycock (Labour) 9,093; Grundy (Liberal) 8,042 (51,253 electors, 29,548 women, 21,705 men)

1931

Acton Duggan (Conservative) 24,196; Shillaker (Labour) 11,924; (47,865 electors, 25,783 women, 22,082 men)
Harrow Salmon (Conservative) 48,068; Sandilands (Labour) 14,241; Banting (Liberal) 5,444 (94,002 electors, 49,702 women, 44,300 men)
Uxbridge Llewellyn (Conservative) 35,836; Worsnop (Labour) 11,609; Bridgeman (Independent) 2,358 (72,866 electors, 37,503 women, 35,363 men)
Ealing Sanderson (Conservative) 32,792; Maycock (Labour) 6,857 (52,298 electors, 30,120 women, 22,169 men)

1935

Acton Duggan (Conservative) 19,137; Mclaine (Labour) 13,559 (48,260 electors, 25,918 women, 22,342 men)
Harrow Salmon (Conservative) 52,729; Mrs Bentwich (Labour) 31,422 (130,710 electors, 68,870 women, 61,846 men)
Uxbridge Llewellyn (Conservative) 34,727; Worsnop (Labour) 24,000; Ridgeway (Liberal) 5,514 (98,533 electors, 50,965 women, 47,568 men)
Ealing Sanderson (Conservative) 28,472; Auliff (Labour) 9,972 (55,657 electors, 32,083 women, 23,472 men)

1943 Acton by-election Longhurst (Conservative) 5,014; Padley (ILP) 2,336; Miss Crisp (Independent) 707; Godley (Independent) 258 (48,260 electors, 25,918 women, 22,343 men)
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1945

Acton Sparks (Labour) 19,590; Longhurst (Conservative) 12,134; Halpin (Liberal) 3,172 (44,861 electors)
Southall Ayles (Labour) 37,404; Baker (Conservative) 13,347; Wakefield (Liberal) 7,598 (78,649 electors)
Uxbridge Beswick (Labour) 25,190; Llewellyn (Conservative) 24,106; Aylett (Liberal) 8,300 (77,904 electors)
Ealing East Sanderson (Conservative) 22,916; Johnston (Labour) 18,619; Foster (Liberal) 6,377 (65,485 electors)
Ealing West Hudson (Labour) 29,115; Sunley (Conservative) 12,880; Lewis (Liberal) 6,258 (64,866 electors)

1950

Acton Sparks (Labour) 21,751; Willment (Conservative) 19,116 Furniss (Liberal) 2,781 ; Papworth (Communist) 663 (50,434 electors)
Ealing North Hudson (Labour and Co-op) 24,157 ; Olsen (Conservative) 21,753; Holloway 4,855 (57,671 electors)
Ealing South Maude (Conservative) 28,299; Neary (Labour) 17,097; Corn (Liberal) 4,555 (58,944 electors)
Hayes and Harlington Ayles (Labour) 22,490 ; Vinson (Conservative) 11,218 ; Lett (Liberal) 3,093; F.Foster (Communist) 593 (43,893 electors)
Southall Pargiter (Labour) 27,101 ; Cole (Conservative) 18,392; Andrews (Liberal) 3,917; Purton (Communist) 839 (60,752 electors)
Uxbridge Beswick (Labour and Co-op) 20,139; Thorne (Conservative) 17,741 ; Aylett (Liberal) 3,933 (49,446 electors)

1951

Acton Sparks (Labour) 23,287; Ramseyer (Conservative) 21,296 (51,292 electors)
Ealing North Hudson (Labour and Co-op) 25,698 ; Neave (Conservative) 25,578; (51,576 electors)
Ealing South Maude (Conservative) 30,261; Allen (Labour) 18,204 (58,952 electors)
Hayes and Harlington Ayles (Labour) 23,823 ; Rantzer (Conservative) 12,949 (44,7373 electors)
Southall Pargiter (Labour) 29,123; Berkeley (Conservative) 21,169 (59,885 electors)
Uxbridge Beswick (Labour and Co-op) 21,249; Curran (Conservative) 19,701; Fior (Liberal) 2,289

1955

Acton Sparks (Labour) 20,645; Bott (Conservative) 20,120 (49,373 electors)
Ealing North Barter (Conservative) 23,040; Hudson (Labour) 22,794; Bender (Liberal) 3,770 (58,245 electors)
Ealing South Maude (Conservative) 25,992 ; Allen (Labour) 13,462; Evans (Liberal) 4,182 (56,046 electors)
Hayes and Harlington Skeffington (Labour) 19,558; Courtney (Conservative) 13,440 ; Foster (Communist) 886 (44,259 electors)
Southall Pargiter (Labour) 25,207 ; Tickler (Conservative) 18,872 (57,633 electors)
Uxbridge Beswick (Labour and Co-op) 22,244 ; Curran (Conservative) 21,368 (53,372 electors)

1959

Acton Holland (Conservative) 19,358 ; Sparks (Labour) 18,438 (46,835 electors)
Ealing North Barter (Conservative) 27,312 ; Hilton (Labour) 23,036 (59,768 electors)
Ealing South Batsford (Conservative) 24,761; Garside (Labour) 12,039; Mostyn Liberal 4,842 (53,296 electors)
Hayes and Harlington Skeffington (Labour) 18,301 ;Grant (Conservative) 14,149 ; Gay (Liberal) 4,235; Foster (Communist) 527, (37,212 electors)
Southall Pargiter (Labour) 22,285; Underhill (Conservative) 19,966 (55,290 electors)
Uxbridge ; Curran (Conservative) 22,360; Beswick (Labour and Co-op) 20,970; Goddall (Liberal) 4,746 (46,244 electors)

1964

Acton Floud (Labour) 17,022 ; Holland (Conservative) 14,423; Martin-Kaye (Liberal) 3,049
Ealing North Molloy (Labour) 20,809 ; Barter (Conservative) 20,789; Wood (Liberal) 6,532
Ealing South Batsford (Conservative) 22,121 ; Jaffe (Labour) 18,104
Hayes and Harlington Skeffington (Labour) 20,018 ;Smith (Conservative) 13,158; Stanley (Communist) 873
Southall Pargiter (Labour) 18,041 ; Maddin (Conservative) 16,144; Bean (BNP) 3,410
Uxbridge Curran (Conservative) 20,519 ; Parker (Labour) 19,866; Goddall (Liberal) 6,644

1966

Acton Floud (Labour) 18,541 ; Baker (Conservative) 13,600 (43,464 electors)
Ealing North Molloy (Labour) 23,730, Barter (Conservative) 21,153, Elsom (Liberal) 3,858 (59,315 electors)
Ealing South Batsford (Conservative) 18,968 ; MacFaquhar (Labour) 13,885; Martin-Kaye, 4,473 (51,283 electors)
Hayes and Harlington Skeffington (Labour) 20,707 ; Smith (Conservative) 11,883; Stanley (Communist) 698 (45,797 electors)
Southall Bidwell (Labour) 19,989; Maddin (Conservative) 14,642; Bean (BNP) 2,768 (52,811 electors)
Uxbridge Ryan (Labour and Co-op) 21,793; Curran (Conservative) 20,903; Goddall (Liberal) 5,241 (58,070 electors)

1970

Acton Spearing (Labour) 13,960 ; Baker 13,300; Scherer (Liberal) 1,538; Costin (Communist) 258 (43,861 electors)
Ealing North Molloy (Labour) 23,459 ; Barter (Conservative) 23,139 (64,539 electors)
Ealing South Batsford (Conservative) 19,326 ; Rofe (Labour) 12,042; Smith (Liberal) 3,784 (53,997 electors)
Hayes and Harlington Skeffington (Labour) 19,192 ; Potier (Conservative) 13,728; Pink (Communist) 372 (49,886 electors)
Southall Bidwell (Labour) 18,389; Reeves (Conservative) 15,166 ; Shaw (National Front) 1,572 (56,289 electors).
Uxbridge Curran (Conservative) 23,414 ; Ryan (Labour) 19,768; Goddall (Liberal) 4,265 (63,710 electors)

Acton by-election 1968 – death of Bernard Floud. Kenneth Barker won 12,242 to the Labour candidate Walter Johnson 8,522. 25,151 voters

**Appendix 3 Summary of General Election results by Parliamentary
Division or Constituency 1918-1970 and by Political Party of Elected MP**

Acton
1918 Conservative
1922 Conservative
1923 Conservative
1924 Conservative
1929 Labour
1931 Conservative
1935 Conservative
1943 Conservative
1945 Labour
1950 Labour
1951 Labour
1955 Labour
1959 Conservative
1964 Labour
1966 Labour
1970 Labour

Ealing
1918 Conservative
1922 Conservative
1923 Conservative
1924 Conservative
1929 Conservative
1931 Conservative
1935 Conservative

Ealing East	Ealing West
1945 Conservative	Labour

Ealing North	Ealing South
1950 Labour	Conservative
1951 Labour	Conservative
1955 Conservative	Conservative
1959 Conservative	Conservative
1964 Labour	Conservative
1966 Labour	Conservative
1970 Labour	Conservative

Uxbridge
1918 Conservative
1922 Conservative
1923 Conservative
1924 Conservative
1929 Conservative
1931 Conservative
1935 Conservative
1945 Labour
1950 Labour
1951 Labour
1955 Labour
1959 Conservative
1964 Conservative
1966 Labour
1970 Conservative

Southall	Hayes and Harlington
1945 Labour	Labour
1951 Labour	Labour
1955 Labour	Labour
1959 Labour	Labour
1964 Labour	Labour
1966 Labour	Labour
1970 Labour	Labour

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