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## FINDING MY FEET POLITICALLY

When I left the factory in 1947 the lads had returned from the war determined to make changes to wages and conditions. The older ones who had been militant or members of the Communist Party before the war greatly influenced the younger ones who returned from the war and wanted changes to be made. When I returned in 1949 it was easy to see that the Communist Party had made big strides into the John Barran's clothing factory. This was also true in the rest of the Leeds area. Right up to 1956, the year of the Hungarian Revolution, the Communist Party could muster 30 delegates, comprising members and supporters from the garment workers' union, to the Leeds Trades Union Council. Until about 1953-1954 I was considered to be a contact, so I was always on their list, though a contact who had to be handled with care, as I later came to understand. For instance Bert Ramelson, the Communist Party Yorkshire Area Organiser, held Friday night education classes at his home in Quarry Hill Flats. I was never invited. Another feature of the local political scene was Bert Ramelson's Friday lunchtime open-air meeting in front of Leeds Town Hall.

From 1949 into the early 1950s I was encouraged by members of the CP to join the factory library. You paid sixpence per week and then took it in turns to choose a book to add to the library. My first book was an exposure of the Ku Klux Klan: *I Rode with the Ku Klux Klan* by Stetson Kennedy. Another was *Peekskill: USA* by Howard Fast, the story of an attempted assassination of Paul

Robeson. During those early years I read a number of books by Upton Sinclair, John Steinbeck and Howard Fast, along with many other books that came to my notice. By 1952 I had become a regular reader of *Tribune*, the Bevanite paper. I was receiving every week a colour magazine called the *Soviet Union*, which was sent to its readers direct from Moscow. This was as far as it went regarding any attempts to recruit me. I was recognised as a Bevanite. Then the CP made their move. I was asked if I had ever thought of joining the Labour Party. I hadn't even given that a thought. I was encouraged to make this move. I was constantly told that people like me were needed in the Labour Party to help those fighting to defend Bevan from the attacks of the right wing. This must have been a strong argument, as I agreed to join.

After reading my *Tribune* every week I would pass it on to my Uncle Will. He had been greatly influenced by the Independent Labour Party, had supported the Russian Revolution of 1917 and was a great admirer of the Soviet Union. But his resolve was weakened by the zigzagging of the CP just before and just after the war had started. He was no union-jack waver and here was the CP wrapping itself up in it. I made one of my usual weekly visits with the *Tribune* to Uncle Will. After a few minutes he said that he had a book that he would like to give me, a book that he obviously valued very dearly. He went upstairs and came down with a book wrapped in brown paper. 'Read this', he said, 'it will do you more good than *Tribune*'. It was the unabridged version of John Reed's *Ten Days that Shook the World*, untouched by the hand of Stalinism. As my political understanding developed the more I valued that book. But I was to make a great error in judgement. About 1957-1958 a university student who was doing a thesis on the Russian Revolution asked me if I could lend him any literature that would help him. Thinking that he must be a serious student, I loaned him my *Ten Days* and a two-inch thick file on Stalinism from 1945 onwards. That was the last I saw of them. I now feel that loss very dearly.

I was greatly impressed by this book and like my uncle I saw a way forward and became a supporter and defender of the Soviet Union. My eyes shone with the vision of ploughs instead of guns,



*In the cutting room at John Barran's, 1952*

combine harvesters and tractors instead of tanks and weapons of destruction. I took my *Ten Days* to work and lent it to CP members for them to read. The response I got was the same from each one: take no notice of what it says about Trotsky, his role was to betray the revolution. That was the first time Trotsky's name had been mentioned to me. That meant that my first opinion of him was very negative.

I continued to be active in the Labour Party, doing the best I could to get militant resolutions passed at the Cross Gates Ward Labour Party meetings, attending my trade union branch meetings and going as a delegate to the Leeds Trades Council, where I felt more at home than I did at Labour Party meetings. To them I was just a willing grafter, and fodder for election work. At one council election I took a day off work to campaign for the return of our candidate, Councillor Jackson, only to discover that the candidate himself not only did not take a day off work but, to rub it in, had worked an hour's overtime. At the next ward meeting he rose to give thanks to the ward workers, going on to say that he was a socialist locally, nationally and internationally. At that I intervened saying 'but not on election day'. I said, 'Your internationalism goes

as far as the Leeds branch of the United Nations, the centre for international capitalism.’ With that I walked out of the meeting. I kept my membership but I did not do any more work.

Even then, at a time when I was most vulnerable, the CP did not make any move to recruit me. I was in somewhat of a political limbo, just getting my weekly dose of comfort from the *Tribune*. One Sunday afternoon when I was about to go out to meet my friends there was a knock at the front door. Only strangers come to the front door. So it was with ‘I wonder who this can be?’ going through my mind that I answered the door. I was confronted by a young man and woman. They asked if they could speak to Norman Harding. That’s me, I said. I asked them in and they introduced themselves as Paula and Ray Bradbury, members of the Cross Gates Ward Labour Party for the past few months. Ray had been elected as secretary. He told me that going through the ward minutes he had come across my name as the mover of resolutions that they both agreed with. Would I consider going back to the ward as an active member again to work with them and similar-minded people. This sounded much different to when the CP encouraged me to be active in the Labour Party and left me on my own. Here seemed to be a chance that I would be able to be with and work closely with others. I agreed to go back. But, I said, you might not like my politics, I am a firm supporter of Nye Bevan.

My life was never to be the same again. I was invited to their house after the next ward meeting for supper. They asked me what books I had read. I told them, but when I told them that I had read *Ten Days that Shook the World* they became very interested. I think they must have felt a bit disappointed when I followed this up by saying that Trotsky had betrayed the revolution and that he was in my eyes a traitor to the working class. But to their credit they must have recognised that I was ignorant of the politics of Trotskyism and Stalinism, that Trotsky was just a name that I had read in the book, and if he betrayed the revolution then he had to be opposed. This meant that I supported the revolution.

In the course of the next period I was introduced to Labour Party members who were also sympathetic to the politics of *Tribune*. Meetings were held on a regular basis to discuss such topics as the

1917 Bolshevik revolution, the rise of Stalin, the policy of peaceful coexistence, and its link to socialism in one country. The literature that I found myself reading were things like Lenin's *Last Will and Testament* and *The Revolution Betrayed* by Leon Trotsky, *Socialism on Trial* by Goldberg and *Negroes on the March* by Guérin.

The *Socialist Outlook* paper lost a libel case and had to pay heavy damages. This paper had a wide readership in the Labour Party. The driving force behind it were the members of the Trotskyist Group that had cells mainly in England and Scotland. The *Socialist Outlook* Readers' Group took in quite a wide periphery of contacts from the political left, with varying degrees of commitment. It did not take the Labour Party long to ban members from giving any support to the fight to save the paper or to have any connection with the paper.

At a meeting where the paper's supporters were discussing the campaign to save the *Socialist Outlook* the varying degrees of commitment soon came to the front. One notable leftwinger in Leeds was Councillor Douglas Gabb, Secretary of the East Leeds Constituency Labour Party (one of the most left-wing in the country). He suggested that there should be two layers of supporters: one openly campaigning and another one working quietly, kind of keeping their heads down. And he thought that he should be one of the latter. He became the expert at speaking with a forked tongue. He would support (in general) left-wing resolutions but took no action on them. He made sure that he was never in any danger from the Labour Party bureaucracy. He was always Denis Healey's agent at parliamentary elections.

It was during the latter end of the struggle around the *Socialist Outlook* when I had come into contact with the Trotskyists and one of the first things they asked me to do was to sell raffle tickets to raise money for the paper. Well, I was an innocent, diving in where angels fear to tread. I actually approached Communist Party members to buy raffle tickets to support a Trotskyist paper! At this particular time it had not become obvious that I was coming under any political influence from the Trotskyists, so on the basis of unity and defending the left wing in the Labour Party I did manage to sell about three pounds' worth. After all, I said to them, it was you

who encouraged me to join the Labour Party in the first place.

But of course the day had to come when I made my first move that alerted them to the fact that the CP cardholders in the Labour Party were not the ones that I was talking to. In fact those worthies had their heads down so low that no one could see them. The move I made was on the question of the Moscow Trials. I also took my copy of Lenin's *Last Will and Testament*. Right from the beginning it was not a private thing between the CP and myself; I made it very public. I forced the discussion at tea breaks and also in the canteen and at the various spots that they gathered at after dinner.

The Trotskyist Group decided that it was time to get me to work in the Labour Party. Ray Bradbury proposed at the ward meeting that I become one of the delegates to the East Leeds monthly meetings. These meetings could be quite lively. On occasion resolutions from the various wards were on the agenda dealing with proposed national policy. The next step was to be delegated to the Leeds City Labour Party. Like the Leeds Trades Council it was a very well attended meeting. The Leeds City Labour Party had delegates from Labour Party wards and constituencies, trade union branches and many more affiliated bodies, plus the Labour Party councillors and aldermen. The Trades Council was made up mainly of delegates from the trade unions. My union, the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers, had 30 delegates, and the vast majority were CP members or supporters.

I shall always remember the first time I moved a resolution. It was at my union branch, the Leeds No. 2 Branch of the NUTGW. Under the item 'correspondence' there was a letter from the General Secretary informing all members that the National Executive Committee was to enter into discussions with the Masters' Federation for a wage increase of sixpence an hour for both men and women. I will now go through the different stages of this wage demand, because it brought about my first big public split with the CP, and the Stalinists' policy of peaceful coexistence started to take on some reality for me, resulting in me being invited to join the Leeds Trotskyist Group. I moved that we welcome the claim for a wage increase and that we strongly endorse that the claim was for an equal increase for men and women workers in the industry. I

called on the NEC to stand firm on their demands. This was passed. I felt that by getting in before the CP had time to move anything would, in a way, be part of starting to get myself known to the branch members. This type of move and getting involved with the struggles inside the union proved to be very valuable in the years ahead when the CP attempted to brand me as a 'Trotskyist reactionary' or 'anti-communist'.

At the next branch meeting (meetings were monthly) we had the first report-back of the discussions with the Masters' Federation. It was simply to inform members that there had been an offer of twopence-halfpenny for men and two pence for women. We were told that the NEC had rejected this offer as an insult. I again moved support for the report and I remember stressing the word 'insult' as regards to the offer. The talk in the factory about the offer agreed that it was indeed an insult.

For the next branch meeting the union meeting hall in Circle House was full. Much interest had been generated around this wage demand. I asked the branch secretary not to give his report under the item of correspondence but to have it as the first item on the agenda. The firm cries of 'yes!' convinced our secretary that this would be a very good idea. The report told us that the firm stand of our NEC had resulted in a result. We had been offered threepence for men and twopence-halfpenny for women. As soon as the secretary had finished his report I raised my arm to speak. But at the same time so did Stan Hives, the leading CP member in the factory, the party Branch Secretary and a member of the Leeds and Yorkshire District Committees. Without any hesitation the chair called on Hives to speak. What followed was a shock to everyone in the room, except (of course) those who were in the know. Those attending the meeting could be put into categories:

- (a) Hardcore CP members
- (b) CP members
- (c) CP sympathisers
- (d) Interested union members
- (e) Those who supported the union leadership, right or wrong, and
- (f) One future member of the Trotskyist Group (myself).

The ones in the know were the CP hardcore and the union officials who were on the platform.

Hives started by saying, 'I move that this meeting of the No. 2 Branch accept the National Executive Committee's recommendation that the union say yes to the offer of the Masters' Federation of threepence for men and twopence-halfpenny for women.' He went on to say that it was obvious that the NEC had fought for our initial demand of sixpence all round and had taken the fight as far as they could, so we had to be realistic and accept the offer. The seconder made a similar mealy-mouthed speech. I immediately rose to move a second resolution rejecting the offer. The chair refused this and said that I would have to move an amendment to the resolution. We all know that this is an old trick. The trade union bureaucrats are well schooled in such tactics; they try to lose the amendment in a fog of confusion. I replied by saying that the resolution was impossible to amend and that it would be more democratic to have two opposing resolutions so that the members had a straightforward choice.

I asked for this to be put to the vote. It was and I won. Those against were the CP hardcore; the rest of the CP was split roughly down the middle, as were the interested members. Then of course there was the union right wing. I was allowed to move my resolution. I remember the points that I made but not necessarily in the right order. I reminded the meeting that Hives had supported the demand for a struggle to take place so that the membership could achieve their demand of sixpence all round. I demanded to know from Hives what had changed, for him to make such a sudden about-turn. Had he grown soft on the union right-wing leadership or had he decided to sell out? I went on to discuss the economics of the offer and showed how it had already been swallowed up by the latest food increases; I had many points of this nature prepared. It was Hives and his betrayal that had forced me to try and think on my feet. I made sure that everyone in the room recognised that he considered himself to be a communist and what he had done was an insult to the principles of communism. I used this issue of insult to bring in the point that at the previous meeting the union



leadership, the CP and the rest of the meeting had agreed that the offer of twopence-halfpenny for men and twopence for women was an insult. 'We are now in a position where according to the union leadership and a leading Communist Party member the difference between an insult and something acceptable is a halfpenny.' Their offer did not even include an equal rise for men and women. I ended by saying that the attitude of the union leadership and Hives was a much bigger insult to the membership.

During the discussion on the two resolutions it became very obvious that the hardcore was unashamedly giving its full support to the platform, meaning that Hives had not acted on his own; his move had been a decision taken by the Communist Party. However it had not been taken by all of the membership, and certainly there was opposition to the move. During the debate many of the interested members spoke and my comments regarding the insult had been taken to heart. The chair brought the debate to an end and suggested that movers of both resolutions should waive the right to reply as time was getting short. He won that one and took the vote. The Hives resolution took the majority of the votes. All the right wing voted for Hives.

Many of the Communist Party members voted out of loyalty. An indication of this was that after the meeting there were heated discussions between CP members in the Yorkshire Hussars in Eastgate. My resolution took the majority of the interested members who were in attendance, but most importantly six or so Communist Party members voted for my resolution. Later that night I discovered that the other two Leeds branches had also voted to support the offer. This meant the whole Leeds District, so I suppose you could say that the union had the support of the union branches in Yorkshire. The same story was repeated all over England where the CP members spearheaded the support for the union leadership. Their line was that the leadership had done its best, so let's be realistic and accept the offer. They even sank to the depths of congratulating our 'leaders' in their success.

But there were rumblings in the factories. There were 30,000 members in the three Leeds branches. The union leadership, and the CP, must have realised that to short-circuit the rank and file's

rumblings they would have to get the offer accepted at mass meetings of members, especially in Leeds, Manchester and London. About ten days after the call for acceptance mass meetings were held. The John Barran's factory committee was encouraged to call a members' meeting in the canteen a few days before the Leeds mass meeting.

In the meantime I had been discussing all my moves with my late comrade Jack Gale, and also other members of the Group. John Archer recommended that I see a contact of his (an ex-CP member and retired clothing worker). John had come across him at a meeting of the Leeds branch of the National Council of Labour Colleges. The most important bit of information that I got from him was that over the last few years the Communist Party had been trying to get the ban lifted that barred CP members from holding official posts in the union. Then everything dropped into place. They were trying to do a deal with the union at the expense of the union membership. Stalin's policies of 'peaceful coexistence' and 'socialism in one country' brought to bear right down to factory level.

At the factory meeting I moved to reject the offer saying very much the same as I had said at the union branch meeting, except that I introduced the issue of the CP trying to prove to the union what a bunch of responsible members they were. I said that if the Communist Party wanted to have a campaign to lift the ban on them holding office I was sure that they would get the support of thousands of union members throughout the country. I was sure that this was the principled way to fight the issue and not to use the union members' wages to buy their way in. I made my remarks directly to Hives. The presence of a large CP factory branch (and a larger still *Daily Worker* readership) made sure that between them and the right wing the vote went for acceptance. Even so I was sure that the vote did not represent the gut feeling of many.

The mass meeting went very much the same way as the factory meeting, except that the vote against accepting the offer was a larger percentage of the vote. The positive sides were that I was able to speak to about 1,000 members, calling on them to oppose the acceptance, using mainly the economic questions of the cost of living, and that a halfpenny was the difference between an insult

and a reasonable offer. I was also able to speak directly to practically the entire CP union membership in Leeds. I again raised the question of a principled fight to get the ban lifted, which would get huge support, instead of using the wage increase to buy their way in. I added, 'You have done the leadership's dirty work. The ban will have iron bars on it.' As they found out, nothing changed.

I was invited by Jack Gale to a meeting to discuss the experiences of the last few weeks. The members of the Leeds Trotskyist Group attended the meeting. Their names were John Archer, Mary Archer, Jack Gale, Celia Gale, John Walls, Lance Lake, Norman Atkinson, Ray Bradbury, Paula Bradbury and Bob Pennington. The main thing that came out of that meeting was a decision to have a public meeting in one of the rooms at the Trades Club in Upper Fountain Street. The subject of the meeting was to be 'Trotskyism and Stalinism' and the speaker Jack Gale. The big surprise of the night was that Hives and two or three other members of the CP turned up. Jack did a great job that night and the notes he prepared for the meeting were duplicated and handed out. Mine finished up as a well-thumbed document. The contributions by Hives were aimed at discouraging the uncommitted that were there. His points were that we were ultra-left, anti-Soviet. His parting shot was that the subject of Trotskyism versus Stalinism did not exist: there was no such thing as Stalinism, what was going on at the meeting was Trotskyism versus communism. This was 1953 or 1954.

Forty years later at a 'Hands off Iraq' demonstration I reminded Hives of this statement. There were others on the demonstration who had been members of the CP in the 1950s. A few of them had actually worked in my factory. I asked those who would talk to me what their opinion of Stalinism was now. Going over the questions that I was raising in the 1950s in the light of the current state of the Communist Party and the ex-Soviet Union was, I suppose, a very subjective thing to do. But I sarcastically told Hives to cheer up; the break-up of Stalinism was the best thing that had happened in the fight for communism since 1917. I had taken a lot of stick from them in the past and I just wanted them to know that I was still around, live and kicking.

One Sunday in early summer 1954 Ray and Paula Bradbury

and I were walking home from an 'ideal homes' exhibition in Roundhay Park. Paula walked in front with Ray's sister so that he could talk to me. He was very keen to discuss with me the lessons of the CP sell-out on the question of the wages struggle. He then told me that he been told by the Leeds Trotskyist Group to invite me to join them. He explained that it was not just a case of a few like-minded people coming together to discuss politics. The Group was part of an organisation that had branches all over the British Isles. Leeds met not only as a branch but took part in meetings attended by all the branches in the north of England. An annual conference was held where important decisions were taken, and a Central Committee elected. This was our national leadership which in turn elected the national secretary, the leader of the British section. We were also affiliated to the Fourth International.

I agreed to join and was very excited at the prospect of being able to work in an organised way against the Labour Party right wing and the Stalinists. I was invited to meet Jack Gale, the Leeds branch secretary, so that he could explain to me, among other things, the importance of security: no one was to know who the members were. They said I was being recruited because through the struggles in my factory I had started to understand the politics of Stalin's policies of 'peaceful coexistence' and 'socialism in one country'. I now believe that the reason should have been that in the process of *taking part* in the class struggle I had come into conflict with the Stalinists and the right wing, which meant I started to understand the importance of our opposition to the CP policies of peaceful coexistence and socialism in one country. But it was not enough to be anti-Stalinist, as I was to learn in a more profound sense in later years. The context was that the Russian Revolution took place in isolation from the rest of the world, and had created the conditions for the rise of Stalinism and its opponents, the Left Opposition. Stalinism betrayed working-class struggles all over the world, and hundreds of thousands of working-class fighters were executed either by bullets or in Stalin's labour camps. Yes, we were right to fight to understand this degeneration and to oppose it. But socialism is about building a future society, based on new social relations, not just about fighting degeneration. To be just anti-Stalinist is a million

times wrong. It is the same as saying that getting rid of religion will get rid of the problems of the world. This method will never get rid of anything. The reasons have to be understood and that means a Marxist understanding of the social relations in the context of the development of society.

It was a Saturday night and I was about to attend my very first branch meeting. I had no idea what to expect. The Leeds Group meetings were held at Jack and Celia's house just off Chapeltown Road. Ray and Paula took me there on public transport; no one had a car in those days. Celia let us in and invited us into the front room. Although this was 1954 I can still remember who was there: John Walls, John and Mary Archer, Lance Lake (Councillor), Norman Atkinson, and two dockers from Hull who arrived soon after, closely followed by three Nigerians: Jonas, Warri and John (Slim).

Jack was sat in a great big armchair that almost swallowed him up. He introduced me to the meeting and welcomed me as a member. The opening contribution was to be a report from the Central Committee that was held the previous weekend. This was to be given by John Archer. Everyone was seated except John, who reclined on the floor in front of us. He was supporting himself on his right arm with his pipe tobacco tin in front of him. He scraped the old tobacco out of the bowl of his pipe, knocked the residue out into the tin lid, refilled his pipe then laid his pipe down. Looking round at each of us, he closed his eyes momentarily and said, 'Comrades, I bring you greetings from the centre'. What happened after that has faded from my memory.

Two months or so after my first branch I attended my first national congress of the Group. It took place in a chapel hall in Frith Street, London. I was checked in at the door by Ted Knight (later leader of Lambeth council and known as 'Red Ted'). My credentials for attending had to be cleared by our Central Committee members before I was allowed into the hall. The content of the conference meant very little to me as I did not understand most of what was being discussed, although I do remember one statement that Gerry Healy made: 'Who knows? Maybe one day Catholics will denounce the Pope, and the Communist Party will denounce

Stalin.’

From then on I took every opportunity to discuss with the Communist Party members the history of the Russian Revolution. By now everybody knew that my differences with the Communist Party were not from an anti-Soviet position. On many occasions I had to reject the support of anti-communists; I constantly supported the Russian Revolution and the need to overthrow capitalism and not try to reform it.

My daily routine was to call in at Jack’s, who was now living close to me in Cross Gates (in the house previously owned by Ray and Paula who had moved to Hull) to discuss the events of the day and the discussions in the factory. At one point I was trying to get Hives and company to have a discussion in the canteen on the question of the changes that had taken place in society over the centuries. I remember the question coming up, that man is naturally greedy and you can’t change human nature. I used to really enjoy myself with this one. The can’t-change-human-nature brigade used to expound this theory as though it were some kind of advanced philosophy that I just could not get into my thick skull. One dinnertime I placed a salt pot in front of them and asked them why was it there for them to use free of charge. Why didn’t they put it into their pockets every day to take home, and why didn’t they go home every night and fill every utensil with water? This would happen if these commodities became scarce for one reason or another. Then presumably ‘human nature’ would change and they would become ‘greedy’. Conditions are the basis for human nature, and not something that you are born with.

Not long after the events in Poznan in 1956 Jack came to see me one Saturday afternoon. When I answered the door he was stood there with a deep grin on his face. We sat in the kitchen and he proceeded to tell me an incredible story. He had picked up his telephone and before he dialled he realised that there was a conversation taking place. He covered the mouthpiece and listened in to the conversation. It went some thing like this. Man’s voice: ‘Isn’t it terrible what is happening in Poznan?’ (The Russians were attacking workers in the streets in Poland.) ‘Yes’, said a girl’s voice, ‘it wasn’t like this when we went there. We will have to meet to

discuss this and decide if we should raise it in the party.' The young woman was apparently a bus conductress and they arranged to meet in Briggate when she had finished her shift.

At the allotted time Jack and I went to Leeds and waited in Briggate for a bus conductress to meet a boyfriend. Jack had already suggested that I should be the one to approach them. When boy did meet girl I approached them not knowing exactly what I was going to say. I excused myself for butting in and said I thought I had seen them at a Young Communist League meeting (I was once taken to a meeting by a friend) and were they in the YCL? (We did tell them at a later stage how we had come to meet them in Briggate.) Yes we are, was the answer. I then introduced them to Jack. They did not seem to recognise him, so we were OK. After a brief talk it was suggested that we went for a pint and a natter. I think they thought that they had made two contacts. The boy's name was Vince Lacey; he was about 18. The girl's name was Shirley Brady. Shirley was lodging at Cliff Slaughter's. We assumed that because Cliff was a prominent member of the CP his phone was tapped and we knew that Jack's phone was tapped. We thought that when Vince rang Shirley the two phones were connected by some tapping error. The fact that Jack picked up the phone at that exact moment must put the odds at millions to one.

It did not take long to get a discussion going. We told them that we were on the left in the Labour Party and active in the Young Socialists. One of the policy questions that we discussed was the abolition of conscription into the armed forces. We were pushing for this in the Labour Party YS, while the CP's policy in the YCL was to reduce conscription. Vince and Shirley agreed with us that it should be abolished. To our great surprise they were able to get the two of us invited to a YCL meeting where conscription was going to be discussed. On the night of the meeting Jack had to go to a meeting in Manchester. So I was to be on my own in the inner sanctum of the headquarters of the Leeds and Yorkshire CP, the Northern Star Hall, named after the Chartist paper *Northern Star*.

Charlie Labelski of the YCL led the discussion. Two points stood out from his contribution: one was that cutting conscription was more likely to be accepted by the government because they

could still get troops to trouble spots now that aeroplanes had taken over from ships. The second point was that the call for abolition was an ultra-left position which would not succeed and was put forward just to look more left than the Communist Party or as deliberate ploy so that conscription would remain in place. He held up an ashtray and then proceeded to show us what ultra-leftism really was. He placed his finger on top of the ashtray and moved his finger round to the left saying if you keep going you finish up on the right. I said his demonstration had more to do with the earth being round. I also asked him if it meant that if you kept going right, you would finish up in the YCL.

We did make inroads into the YCL nationwide and influenced many of their members well before the crisis of 1956, the Hungarian uprising. In fact we had a fair amount of support for abolition of conscription at the YCL annual conference. The CP was greatly worried. The first hint of this was when Hives told me that he had been talking to a friend of mine. 'Who is that?' I asked. 'Vince Lacey', he replied. 'Never heard of him', I said. We warned Vince and Shirley to be very careful who they talked to.

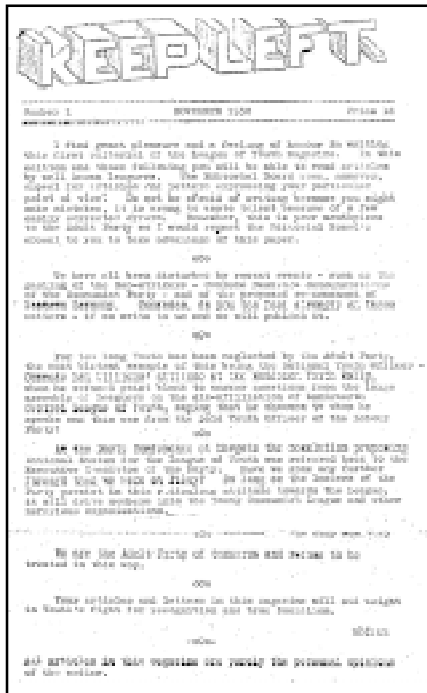
On the occasion of the 21st birthday of the YCL paper *Challenge*, a social was held in the Northern Star Hall. Jack, Celia and I were invited to attend by Vince and Shirley. The looks on the senior members' faces were as though the farmer had invited the fox into the henhouse. But they need not have worried; we had already decided not to do anything that would make things awkward for Vince and his supporters who were there. One of the girls, a leading member of the YCL, used to spit venom at us when we turned up on a Thursday night to sell *Keep Left*, our youth paper. She once waved Harry Pollitt's pamphlet *The five fingers of Trotskyism* which had a picture of a hand with a name for every finger and one of the fingers was fascism. In 1956 she left the YCL and joined the Co-operative Party.

When the dancing got under way I decided to do my bit for peace and bravely went where no Trotskyist had been before and asked her to dance. To my surprise she accepted. Nothing was said but at the end of the dance I said thank you and here's to the revolution. Charlie Labelski said that I had just taken a big step for



unity. We were having a drink of tea when Vince came up to us and told us that some leading YCLer thought that we getting too friendly with many of the members, and had sent for Bert Ramelson, the CP Yorkshire full-time organiser. He came in with his wife Marion, had a brief talk with someone and then came across and told us to leave.

Vince came over with a group of YCL members including two or three young miners. One of them was Arthur Scargill, who later became President of the National Union of Mineworkers. They said that if we were thrown out they would have to be thrown out with us. To avoid any further trouble we agreed to leave and said that we would be across the road in the pub. Within minutes Vince and his mates joined us for a discussion without any interference.



*First issue of our youth paper, Keep Left, which started in 1950 in a roneoed format*