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## WORK IN THE TENANTS' AND LABOUR MOVEMENT

In 1957 I became a member of the Cross Gates Tenants' and Householders' Association. One of the first things that I took on was to organise a Christmas party for the children on the estate and one for the pensioners. One of my union branch committee members was on the committee of the Cross Gates Working Men's Club. He arranged for us to have the use of the concert room for both events. For the children's party I was responsible for organising the games. There were the best part of 200 youngsters (am I glad that we did not have the worst part!). Jelly and buns all over the place. The noise was ... well what can you expect when all are enjoying themselves?

For the pensioners, the recycled teenagers, the meal was in the afternoon and we were to have a concert in the evening. Dad took on the task of getting artistes. To do this he went to the monthly audition night that the club turns have. A couple of his old pals from his club days were there and they helped him to get together enough volunteers for what turned out to be a very good show. Dad and I did the job of being the MC. Dad did three spots, one from his vaudeville repertoire; for the second he played and sang a couple of Fats Waller songs; and he finished with a couple of his Richard Tauber favourites, accompanied on the organ by one of his old mates who had worked with him in the past, song plugging in the music shops. It was soon obvious that he hadn't lost any of his old skills. The concert room was packed, with well over 300 people

there, including many of the club members who had come into the room to listen.

Some time after the show Dad had a series of heart attacks and had to curtail his activities; I was glad that I had been able to be there and hear him. I hadn't been able to spend much time at home and it was to be even less in the future, so it was nice that Mum, Dad and I were able to work on this activity together.

Around about this time Leeds City Council was determined to increase the rents. We were opposing this in the Labour Party and building up quite an opposition to the rise. The Labour Council was proposing the increase and the Leeds City Labour Party monthly delegate meeting rejected the proposal. The proposer of the resolution to reject it was an inconspicuous member of the Cross Gates Ward Labour Party, of which I was secretary. The whole plan had been worked out at a meeting of our delegates two evenings before. From the minutes and the housing committee report a question would be asked that would bring about a response that would in turn bring about an opening, allowing this new delegate, who was unknown to the chair, to speak. He was sat at the back; he was slightly built so he was just a shape to the chair, who maybe thought that he would be asking a nice friendly question. The chair pointed to the back of the room. The new delegate stood up, made a very short contribution and then moved the rejection of the proposed increase. One small speech by man, but a huge lecture for mankind. I formally seconded the resolution. There was a very lively debate, Council group versus the rest, much to our delight.

When the rent increase was rejected the housing committee chair, Alderman Hammond, screamed that this was a disgrace and suggested that she would be a laughing stock, made to look a fool. As we did not want any fools in the leadership of the Leeds City Council, Jack Gale moved that we would accept her resignation. As I remember there was no shortage of seconders. At the time it was in the constitution that the delegate body could overrule the Labour Council group. The *Yorkshire Evening Post* made a big issue of the fact that the trade union and Labour Party delegates had overruled the Leeds City Council.

At the June 1957 meeting of the Leeds City Labour Party, the

following resolution was passed and sent for inclusion on the agenda of the annual national Labour Party conference:

‘This Conference declares that the basic industries must be nationalised in order to secure the best use of raw materials and labour. It therefore instructs the NEC to include the confederation plan for engineering as part of the Party’s programme for the coming General Election and to give these measures of reorganisation of industry under public ownership high priority in the work of the next Labour Government.’

Four weeks later at the next delegate meeting it was the Labour Party’s turn to elect the Lord Mayor. Once again the Leeds trade unions and Labour Party delegates did not agree with the Council group choice, so a very well respected, retired member of the engineering union and Labour Party was nominated, Tom Jessop, the father of Marion Ramelson, a full-time Communist Party worker. Even though the right wing packed the meeting with new and recycled ‘delegates’, once again the right wing was defeated. This was too much for the conservative element in the party to stomach, especially those in the national leadership. There was a ‘send the gun boats’ attitude around. The following year the big guns moved in from London to find a way of changing the constitution. It also showed that they were very scared of the strong left-wing movement that was developing not only in Leeds but all over Britain.

To continue the struggle to fight for better housing and to keep up the pressure on the housing committee, I was able to organise a meeting in the main hall of the Leeds Town Hall through the Leeds Tenants’ Association, of which I was secretary. The purpose of the meeting was to unite the Leeds tenant associations behind a campaign for better housing conditions and for no more rent increases. Money to pay for this was to come from the nationalisation of the building industry and allied trades. I was to introduce the resolution as secretary of the federation. The secretary of the Middleton Association was the chair and the guest speaker was Jean Temple from the Northeast (Tyneside) Tenants’ Associations.

Opposition to the reference to nationalisation came once again from the Communist Party. They said the resolution would be defeated because many in the audience would be frightened off by any hint of left-wing politics. The CP moved that the resolution should be voted for section by section. I almost fell for this. It was the intervention of Jack Gale that saved my bacon. The resolution was discussed and then voted on in its entirety. The only votes against were the Communist Party members. It was quickly pointed out to them that they were the only ones to oppose the call for nationalisation. It was also agreed that the resolution would be presented to the full Leeds City Council at their next meeting in the Civic Hall. The delegation was to consist of the secretaries of each Leeds tenants' association and I was to make the statement to the Council on behalf of the federation. As expected, the only positive thing to come out of this was media coverage for our demands.

We had big meetings not only in Leeds but also in places like Bingley, Shipley, Castleford, Wakefield and many more. The one that gave me the greatest pleasure was the one organised by my own Cross Gates Tenants' and Householders' Association in the main hall of the Cross Gates School. All three Labour councillors had been invited to attend and defend or oppose the Labour Council's decision to increase rents. One turned up, Councillor Jackson. The hall was packed out, with people standing at the back and down the sides. Our association chair Mr Caldwell was in the chair; Councillor Jackson represented the Labour Council group and I was speaking as Cross Gates and Leeds federation secretary. Jackson spoke as though he was pleading for his life. In a way I suppose he was. He blamed everyone but the Labour Party. At one stage he tried to appear militant by blaming the 'money-grabbing bankers and the greed of the building industry'. When he finished, one of the tenants congratulated Jackson for putting his finger on the real culprits. Would he now call on the Labour Party to put those industries under public ownership for their wealth to be used for the benefit of everyone? Jackson spluttered some kind of an answer. He mentioned something about supporting Clause Four and that he had joined the Labour Party to be a socialist internationally, nationally and locally (I wish I had a pound for

every time I had heard him say that!). People like him disgusted me, as did Denis Healey MP, who once told me that if I behaved myself he would help me to make progress in the Labour Party. I told him to get lost. I said that I thought he was pathetic.

I think I must have let Jackson get to me because I remember going for the jugular. I finished my contribution by asking the audience to approve sending twelve delegates to the Young Socialists demonstration at the Labour Party conference in Blackpool at the expense of the association. This was passed. I think this must have been the last straw for Jackson. He excused himself from the meeting and left rather quickly. The meeting then elected the twelve delegates. It was also agreed that the meeting give its full support to the Leeds Tenants' Association deputation (that came out of the Town Hall meeting) when I was due to make a statement at a Leeds City Council meeting.

The Cross Gates twelve went to Blackpool for the demonstration with a banner we had made especially for the occasion. Apart from the Leeds leadership the only other person to come anywhere near us was Comrade Paul Jennings. He spoke to members of our delegation and took photographs. London knew of our success in getting such a deputation, the only one of its kind on the demonstration. I feel that Paul had more idea what work has to be done to get such a deputation. It just did not drop out of the sky. I did wonder at the time why Comrade Gerry Healy had not come to talk to the tenants. It was only a passing thought and was soon lost in the back of my mind or, as usual, rationalised away by saying that he was a very busy man and had more important things to do.

The other work that I was involved in was helping with the production of the Rank and File paper the *Miner*. The main miners involved around this paper were Jim Swan, Jimmy Allen, Joe Ryan, Joe Fitzgerald, Ron Morgan, Trevor Parsons, Curly Owen and Frank McCabe. Albert Field used his talents and enthusiasm in getting the *Miner* distributed in Yorkshire. The paper became extremely popular in the coal-mining communities and scared the living daylight out of the union leadership and the National Coal Board. There was a leadership developing in the coalmines of the same calibre as was developing on the docks. One was Jim Allen (who

later became a well-known playwright for television) and another whom I knew exceptionally well was Joe Fitzgerald.

We organised a meeting in Joe's area. When Joe came into the room he said: 'Where the hell have you lot been? I have been looking for you for years.' Joe told me of a pit-top meeting where safety improvements were being discussed. Joe thought this could be a good time to start the process so he stepped forward and emptied his water bottle on to the coal dust, indicating that he was not going down the pit. The others followed his example. From then on Joe Fitzgerald became the most respected miners' leader we have ever had in Yorkshire. He was unfortunately killed in a motor cycle accident going to his shift at the pit.

The Communist Party was prominent in the leadership of the NUM at the time that the *Miner* was being published. Will Paynter, a CP member, had taken over from Horner as General Secretary. He later joined a government-employer consultative committee.

The paper and the miners supporting it became quite an embarrassment to the union bureaucracy. Moral Re-Armament (MRA) decided to intervene and do as much damage as they could. MRA preached 'brotherly relations' between workers and employers and that goodwill and friendly negotiation can overcome difficulties between employees and employers. A very rich organisation with big donations coming from big business, MRA was able to impress and corrupt. Their main target appeared to be shop stewards and rank-and-file militants. Their leading figure was a Professor Buchman.

We were having a national meeting in London and our miner comrades were going to be there. While we were on our way to London representatives of MRA were visiting the wives and families of our NUM comrades, a good example of their tactics. When visiting one of our comrade's houses, after giving the wife the friendly soft talk, the MRA rep discovered that she had not been able to visit her mother for a number of years because she lived down south. He immediately arranged for a nice big, posh, chauffeur-driven car to take her to see her mother. She was understandably overjoyed at this and became quite taken up with this idea of peaceful collaboration. On the miner's return from

London, the MRA made sure he received a cold welcome and provided his wife with the means to put continuous pressure on him. Where the MRA had been able to get into a house it made things very difficult for our comrades.

While I was working at John Barran's clothing factory, the shop steward, Gilbert Taylor, did not turn up for work one Monday morning. No message was forthcoming explaining what was wrong. There was no Gilbert on Tuesday, Wednesday – he was away all week. Still no news all the second week. What was strange was that there had not been a sick note or any communication whatsoever. Even stranger, the management appeared not to be bothered by this disappearance. After two weeks, on the Monday morning, in pops Gilbert. Naturally he was greeted by: 'Where the hell have you been this last two weeks?' He replied by saying that because of a family problem he had been given permission to be absent for two weeks. Midway through the morning he was called upstairs to the office to see Biddle, a leading director of the board. We were still in dispute regarding the management's refusal to recognise the cutting-room committee. This had previously been custom and practice. As soon as Gilbert came down he called a cutting room meeting.

He said the management had agreed to recognise the cutting-room committee, with one proviso: that the meetings between the cutting-room committee and the management be called 'joint consultative' meetings. The meetings would only be there for consultation, and no pressure was to be tolerated in order to get demands met. This was to apply to both sides. It was quickly pointed out that the management had already put pressure on us by saying that we had to agree to their terms to get the committee recognised. Gilbert then put his position to the meeting. It went something like this. 'Listen chaps I think it is about time the workers and management stopped fighting each other. I am convinced that more can be achieved by good honest negotiation and good will than to be constantly at each other's throats.' Even the Communist Party members could not swallow this one, but they thought it was just a case of Gilbert being off caught off guard by the management. I knew immediately where he had been for the last two weeks. The

MRA had a large plush hotel in Switzerland where they entertained trade union militants, especially shop stewards. They had a fleet of aircraft to fly them there and limousines to pick them up at the airport and to take them on jaunts while they were there. These details had been made public just after our mining comrades had been targeted by MRA.

I took a deep breath and said that I had a question to ask. He said: 'Yes what is it?' I asked him if he had met Professor Buchman while in Switzerland over the last two weeks? He was obviously very



*Me in 1958*

shaken by this. I realised that I had hit the right button. I went on to explain that it was not a case that he had been caught off guard. The management had arranged for the MRA to contact Gilbert, and to work on him. The MRA would have convinced him of the correctness of their ideas and then invited him to go to the 'education centre' in Switzerland. They would have arranged for the management to give him the two weeks off. 'Am I right, Gilbert?' He said: 'Yes, and I think it is the right way.' Frank Stockdale, Geoff Emsley, Ronnie Jackson and other CP members supported my motion that we reject the management's proposal. Gilbert Taylor resigned and Frank Stockdale, the deputy, took over as steward. The fact that I had been able to say where he had been for the last two weeks did give me a little kudos. Gilbert said: 'You have been doing your homework, how did you know?' 'By what you said,' I replied.

There was a TV programme called *Who Goes Home?* (which has some kind of significance with the House of Commons: after a session the Speaker calls out, 'Who goes home?'). The programme was chaired by Bevins who, I think, was the editor of the *Daily*

*Herald* at the time. It was always clearly stated in the introduction to the programme that it was live and spontaneous. The idea was to have a Labour and a Tory MP from the same area. The audience was made up of representatives from organisations in their constituencies.

One of the series was to come from Leeds; the two MPs were Dennis Healey and Sir Keith Joseph. Just in case any reader does not know who is who, Joseph was the Tory and Healey was Labour, the Rt Hon MP for East Leeds. So obviously East Leeds Constituency Labour Party was invited and we were allocated ten tickets. Councillor Douglas Gabb was the secretary of the East Leeds Labour Party. In his infinite wisdom he distributed all ten tickets to known Trotskyites and supporters. Whether he would have done this if he had known that in the future it might jeopardise his chance to be 'his most worshipful' we will never know, but he did it. Ten Trots, asking questions to Dennis Healey, on a live TV programme! We did not have the heart to refuse the invitation.

When it became known in my factory that I was to appear on the television in *Who Goes Home?* Hives and company told everyone that this was my chance to prove that I was a socialist and supporter of the Soviet Union. To do this I had to ask Joseph and Healey if they were prepared to support the call for a summit conference in the name of world peace. I refused. This call for a world summit conference was all part of the Stalinist policies of 'peaceful coexistence' and 'socialism in one country' which worked something like this: to safeguard his position in the USSR (where 'socialism' was supposedly being built in one country) Stalin was prepared to maintain 'good relations' with the capitalist world (peaceful coexistence) by betraying workers' struggles in the rest of the world, using the various national Communist parties to bring this about. This was the 'Moscow Line'. So I told them I would support a summit conference if they would have it on the summit of Mount Everest in a snowstorm.

Along with the representatives of the other organisations we were transported from Leeds to the television studios in Manchester. On arrival we were directed into a room next to the broadcasting studio. There were drinks and eats laid out on a table and we were

told to tuck in. While we were doing this, Bevins was moving round explaining just what type of questions he would like. He wanted questions that would make it appear that the two MPs were really in opposition to one another. We knew exactly what he meant and we had prepared some questions that would do just that. We were expected to play the game of kidding the viewer. Bevins was really impressed with our suggested questions, which would make it easier for him to engineer a right old ding-dong. What Bevins did not know was that the questions we were going to ask were in our other pocket. When it came to planning to get certain results from a meeting we were a match for him. After a while we were asked to finish our food and to make our way into the studio. We all had to walk past the platform where the two would-be protagonists were already sitting. Healey looked at us and said: 'Lord save me from my friends'. I turned and looked him straight in the eyes and replied: 'Forgive them, father, for they know exactly what they're doing.' I really do enjoy moments like that. I have been told that I have a sense of humour and eye for the moment. I hope I never lose it.

The chair made his opening remarks and introduced Joseph and Healey. Then he asked for the first question. He pointed straight at Jack Kleinberg, who was an optician. He was supposed to be asking about the NHS and the question of free spectacles. The question they got was: 'What do the two MPs think about the demand to withdraw British troops from Cyprus?' No way was there going to be a ding-dong over this one, not even a ping pong could be expected. They both gave some kind of a parliamentary type of answer. Whether or not the chair thought there had been a misunderstanding, he selected another member of our group. The question he asked was on nuclear disarmament. 'Do you support the demand advocated by CND that Britain should stop manufacturing nuclear weapons, or do you support the policy advocated by the Communist Party that says Britain should keep the bomb so that we can keep our independence from the USA?' There had to be another Houdini escape by the platform to get out of that one. But not before the 'soviet' bureaucracy, the Communist Party, Healey and Joseph had all been tucked cosily in bed together.

We were only to get one more question in. This was based on

the concept of nationalisation and the continuing compensation being paid to the ex-owners of the coalmines and railways. There were six or seven questions that night and we managed to get in three. The rest were shared out between the Conservative Party and other organisations. When it was all over, there were further drinks and light refreshments. Bevins wasn't very pleased with our group. He said we had deceived him. Jack said that if we had done what he wanted us to do, we would be guilty of collaborating to deceive the viewers. 'You told the viewers that it was spontaneous and live and that's what we did.' Bevins was very angry but what could he do? He could not complain, as all he could achieve would be to make himself look foolish.

I have another Dennis Healey story. Later when I was in London working full-time in our print shop one of my jobs was to collect the Sunday papers as soon as they became available. In exceptional cases when I could not get round Fleet Street one place I used to get the papers was at a paper stall in Victoria Station. I had just put my hand on a copy of the *Times* when another hand tried to take the same paper. We looked at each other; it was Dennis Healey. 'Ah, Norman Harding, East Leeds Labour Party,' he said. I knew just what to do. I looked at him for about three or four seconds and then replied: 'Yes, but who are you?' The girl on the stall had been waiting to see who would be taking that copy of the *Times* and to get her money. I got the paper and said goodnight.

Every year the workforce at Barran's put on a pantomime the weekend before Christmas. Thursday night was for relatives, nurses from the local hospitals, pensioners and so on. Friday night was for the employees and the management. As near as I can date it, in 1958 the production was to be *Dick Whittington*. As usual, many of the chorus and townspeople were members of the Communist Party. At a point in the proceedings Baron Fitzwarren had a shipload of merchandise that had arrived at the docks. At this time there happened to be a much publicised dock strike in London. The producer Len Waite thought that it would be good idea to be up-to-date and introduce this into the panto. The Baron called all the townspeople together and announced that there was a strike at the docks and he would need volunteers to unload his ship. As soon as

the townspeople took a step forward to follow the Baron to the docks, I stood up and shouted from the audience 'Don't cross the dockers' picket line! They are your brothers! Don't be scabs!' Geoff Emsley and Les Dixon took up the cry from the stage: 'I will not cross the picket line.' The majority of the townspeople went off stage left instead of stage right. Loud applause from the audience, except from the two front rows that were occupied by the Barran family, board of directors and management. The curtain was closed to allow a clean start to the next scene.

There was always a do after the panto. The usual dancing along with a bit of Christmas cheer and youngsters hiring out their bike shed key, half a crown a time. There were always one or two humorous moments. Gilbert Taylor (who was still shop steward at the time) fell asleep on the train, missed Micklefield station and ended up in Hull. Frank Stockdale made a number of attempts to mount his bicycle and finally managed to get his feet on the right pedals and went off down Chorley Lane. He turned left on a short cut that took him into Victoria Square and had the misfortune to fall off his bike right outside the police station. He was late home. I shared a taxi with Dick Whittington's cat and Widow Twanky. I was obviously put off at the right place on the corner of Poole Road and Cross Gates Road, where Mr Atkin, the father of my friends John and Marion, spotted me attempting to count the stars in the sky. He escorted me round the corner to 93 Poole Crescent and saw me safely inside. Anyway that's the story I was told.

The founding of the Yorkshire Symphony Orchestra, the YSO, was a very positive development. With it came a determined drive to make the concerts available to as many citizens as possible. Once the orchestra had been welded together under the direction of Nikolai Malko we had in Yorkshire an extremely accomplished orchestra. A wonderful scheme was introduced to hold what would be called 'industrial concerts' in Leeds, Bradford, Huddersfield and Halifax on Thursday nights. Special programmes were printed for each concert. The contents gave details of the composers and pointed out which passages to listen for. It also explained the meaning of such words as coda for the benefit of those of us who were just starting to learn about such things. Each of the four had a

concert once a month, with all four Councils helping to fund the YSO. The factories were circulated and asked to send a request for tickets. The price was two shillings and sixpence irrespective of the position in the Town Hall. In our factory the personnel office sent a sheet round all the departments asking for all those who wanted to go to sign it before every concert. About twelve of us were regular attenders, mostly from the cutting room. Like other factories, we ended up having our own regular block of seats.

There was to be a special treat: Malcolm Sergeant was to conduct 'A night with Delius' at one of our concerts. The usual list came round and the regular names were put down. On this occasion I ordered two tickets as my father had said that he would like to go. The day before the concert we all received our tickets from the personnel office, only this time the personnel officer brought them herself, and not her secretary. We had not been allocated our usual seats, as there had been an overwhelming demand for tickets. She apologised and said that it had nothing to do with her. When we arrived we understood what she had meant. Down the two sides of the Victoria Hall there were a series of alcoves each with three or four seats facing inwards so that you were looking across at the rows of seats. You had to twist your neck, in our case to the right, to see the orchestra. Generally these seats were not used. To make matters worse, right across from us in our usual seats were the chairman of the board as well as a number of heads of departments. I was fuming because I was sure that some of them did not know the difference between a bassoon and a bass drum. It was a good night as far as the music went; the piece I remember best was *The walk to the paradise garden*. The closing notes just seemed to slip away from you; even when the vibrations had stopped you could still hear them in your head. The impression was that the applause was delayed as though the silence was part of the music.

The next morning on our arrival at work we had not cooled down one bit. It became clear to us that the management taking our seats represented the class divisions in society, and we should act accordingly. As a member of the cutting-room committee I was asked to approach the shop steward and ask for an immediate

meeting of the committee. The purpose of the meeting was to receive a complaint that we had been discriminated against. The management was sent a message telling them that the act of taking our seats for themselves and pushing us into the side seats was considered to be an act of snobbery of the worst kind, and if we didn't get an apology by noon a deputation would go to the media and tell them just what had happened. We would down tools until they got back, when the whole situation would be discussed. At 11.45 we received an official apology saying that it had been a mistake to act in this way. It would never happen again.

I became a great admirer (from afar) of June Mills, the principal oboist. A social was to be held in the Town Hall so that the public could meet the orchestra. I decided to attend to extend my interest in the oboe. As I entered the hall I was given a magazine that contained photographs and pen pictures of members of the orchestra. Turning the pages I saw that there was a bassoon player by the name of David Mills, whose wife played the oboe. I sure wasn't going to play second fiddle to a bassoon player so I turned my attention to the free drinks and food.

At the height of the popularity of the YSO there was a growing resentment from the so-called elite because the concerts were more and more being frequented by factory workers. In some cases 'overalls were seen to be stuffed into plastic bags', according to a letter in the *Yorkshire Evening Post*. At one of the invitation concerts held on Saturday nights, Eileen Joyce was to play Grieg's piano concerto. The first part of this had been made popular as the theme of a well-known film. When she had finished playing the well-known part, the majority of the audience started to applaud. The conductor turned, held his hand out to the soloist who stood and acknowledged the applause. She returned to her piano, the conductor faced the orchestra raised his baton and continued with the concerto. What more could the 'elite' want to prove that the concert hall was no longer their property? The expected letters were sent to the *Yorkshire Evening Post*: 'What will Eileen Joyce think of us?' 'Stop the subsidy from the Council; those who want to attend should pay a higher price for the tickets.' The letters must have been brought to the attention of Eileen Joyce because she sent a letter to the paper

disassociating herself from 'those terrible people'. One of the points she made was: 'When at a football match you don't only applaud when a goal is scored. Good approach work is also appreciated'. She added, 'Music is there to be enjoyed. I support what the YSO is doing to this end.'

The pressure continued and then the opportunity arose for the Tories to heighten the campaign against the industrial concerts and the subsidies. Tito Gobi was booked for one of the invitation concerts. He finished his programme. When the applause died down he announced that as long as we wanted to stay he would continue singing. It really was a night to remember. It went on so late that the transport department had to put special buses on to every part of Leeds. The Monday edition of the *Yorkshire Evening Post* had blazoned across its front page 'Overtime for busworkers to take home concertgoers'. From then on the Tories exploited the mistaken, snobby idea that classical music is for the upper class and 'if they want it let them pay for it. Why should we?' The end result was that all four Councils withdrew the subsidy. The industrial concerts finished and shortly after that the YSO was disbanded. The 'Glyndeborne set' had won. The pretentious, peacock-strutting, cultural parasites would rather destroy music than share it — music that has the power to take hold of your emotions and create in you sadness, joy, contentment and excitement. I suspect that many of the anti-YSO brigade did not understand this. The bitterness and hatred that I have of a society that creates such divisions is the reason why I became a communist.

In 1958 I was nominated for inclusion on the list of prospective candidates for the municipal elections. The Halton Labour Party ward invited me to stand as their candidate. This was a powerful Tory ward so I stood little chance of winning the seat. Not one member of that ward lifted a finger to help, saying it was more important to work in a marginal ward. My brother Keith and I were a two-man electioneering team. Keith and I attended the count and, as expected, the Tory was announced the winner. The candidate was immaculate; he looked as though he had come straight out of Austin Reed's window, while the two of us did not have time to wash and change. We had been dashing around on my motorbike

all day and must have looked very dishevelled. The returning officer called on the Tory to make his acceptance speech. Then I was called on to reply. I was taken completely by surprise. I was very tired and feeling very hostile towards my overbearing patronising opponent. I thanked the returning officer and the tellers. I then apologised to all the decent people of Halton for failing to get rid of the Tory candidate. I then vowed that I would not rest until every Tory had been kicked off the Leeds City Council. Apparently that wasn't a very nice thing to say. This fact was brought to my attention by the returning officer who was also a leading Labour Party councillor. I was hauled in front of the executive committee of the Leeds Labour Party and severely reprimanded. The Executive's disapproval of my conduct was recorded.

Over the next period I continued to campaign for socialist principles and sold the *Newsletter* wherever possible, including at the Labour Party conference in Scarborough. There was to be a CND demonstration on the Sunday with a contingent of Young Socialists made up from all our branches nationally. There was always a lot of activity on the Saturday before conference when the compositing of resolutions took place — always a good time to sell literature. It was decided that Doria Arram (Pilling) and I would go over on the Saturday morning to sell at the compositing. We took all the literature for the weekend activities with us. As expected we made a great impact and had a very good sale. One thing we were selling was a pamphlet called *The Future of The Labour Party* priced at twopence. My slogan was, 'Who will give me twopence for the future of the Labour Party?' We sold all day and kept up the pressure on the delegates constantly going in and out to fight for their points to be included in the composite resolutions.

As a bonus the usual pre-conference rally was held on the Saturday night. Doria and I had noticed that a number of our supporters and members had arrived on the Saturday evening so we organised a sales team. To our great joy and satisfaction by 21.00 hours we had sold every paper, every pamphlet, every magazine, and given out all our leaflets relating to the following day's demonstration. Then the reality of the situation hit me. We had nothing to sell or hand out on the demonstration the following

day. I telephoned Jack to round up as much literature as he could and to contact London and get the YS coach to bring supplies of literature with them and, if that failed, to see what the areas could do. I rang Jack back at 22.00 hours; he told me that London would be bringing fresh supplies and that the 'Centre' wasn't very pleased with me: I should have calculated the literature to cover both days. I would be spoken to when they arrived. Jack told me to ignore them; what we had done was correct.

Sunday's demonstration was a big success; television and the press interviewed members of the YS national leadership. Our literature stock had been replenished and a good sale was had by all. All that was said about selling everything on the Saturday night was something about paying more attention to detail. I can only remember saying that I thought I had done that by raising the alarm when we sold out.

The *Newsletter* called for a national industrial Rank-and-File conference on 16 November 1958 at the Holborn Hall, London. There was a tremendous campaign for this all over Britain, resulting in the attendance of 500 working-class militants. During the build-up to the conference Gerry Kitchen and I went to Sheffield for the weekend to work with the striking busworkers. We arrived early on the Saturday morning, enquired where the nearest bus garage was and promptly made our way there. Before leaving Leeds a two-sided A4 *Newsletter* 'Bulletin' had been duplicated. The front and half of the back outlined the need for solidarity for the busworkers from the labour movement, with a list of demands directed at all trade union branches with a strong emphasis on branches of the Transport and General Workers Union – the busworkers' union. The bottom half of the back was publicity for the National Industrial Rank-and-File Conference. The previous night, on our Gestetner duplicator (hi-tech stuff this) we produced 1,000 or more copies. We were to sell them at one penny each. By midday Gerry and I had covered every bus garage in Sheffield and had a fantastic reception at every one. We returned to the central garage where the strike committee held their meeting. Hoping to be able to get a statement from them for the next issue of the *Newsletter*, we hung around talking to the busworkers who were waiting for a progress

report. At long last the door of the committee room opened and one of the strike leaders came out and asked if those two who had been selling the *Newsletter* 'Bulletin' were in the garage. Gerry and I moved forward. He said, 'Will you come in here? The committee would like to have a word with you.' It all sounded very ominous.

The chair pointed to two seats that had been placed ready for us. We sat down and I for one thought that we were in for a roasting. The chair asked if we were the two responsible for producing the 'Bulletin'. We did not expect what followed. The secretary introduced himself and then said that he had a request to make on behalf of the committee. 'We want your permission to circulate every branch of the Transport and General Workers' Union in Britain with your "Bulletin". We will, with your permission, attach a covering letter explaining that the strike committee fully endorses the contents.' He added that they would not change anything and, naturally, the appeal for the Industrial Rank-and-File Conference would be included.

We looked at each other and conferred for all of a couple of seconds. I said that I could not see any problem with their suggestion. They thanked the two of us for giving our permission. With that we left the room along with the committee, to report to the strikers' meeting in the garage. We were allowed to stay at the meeting. The report included that permission had been given for the strike committee to circularise the *Newsletter* 'Bulletin' to every branch in Britain. Gerry and I decided that we would stay overnight and continue with our work.

A Central Committee meeting was taking place this same weekend so we decided that we would have to notify them of our progress. Jack Gale was brought out of the meeting to the telephone. I explained to him what had happened. He went back into the meeting and I later learned that he interrupted the proceedings to explain. An immediate decision was made to inform all our members that, wherever we had contacts in the Transport and General Workers' Union, they should make them aware that the circular was being sent to every branch. It was now somewhere between 13.00 and 14.00 hours and as we had been on the go since 05.00 hours that morning we took a break and had some lunch.

Back at the garage we discovered that the newspapers had been sniffing around. A reporter of the *Sheffield Evening Star* had a copy of the 'Bulletin' and wanted some comments on it. He was apparently keen to interview Gerry and me, but he and the photographer had been despatched kindly but firmly by the pickets who suggested we stay out of sight until it was confirmed that they had left the area. But it was too late; the damage had been done. The *Sheffield Evening Star* that night had a front-page article with a headline 'Trotskyists Infiltrate Bus Strike' with comments on the *Newsletter* 'Bulletin' and the decision of the strike committee to endorse the contents. We had met our first pickets at about 07.00 hours; ten or eleven hours later our work had led to this. As was to be expected, this had an effect on some of the more reluctant strikers, with the encouragement of a few Communist Party members who had suddenly appeared on the scene. (One of them was a leading AEU member and the father of a future leading Labour Party MP. There was also a CP member from Leeds who, I believe, reported for the *Daily Worker*.) They attempted to get the support for our 'Bulletin' rescinded by the committee. This did not happen, but the real danger was that the following day (Sunday) there was to be a meeting of the strikers in one of the main halls in Sheffield. If Saturday night was anything to go on, the CP and the right wing would be pulling out all the stops to prevent the endorsement and circulation of the *Newsletter* 'Bulletin'. As far as the union bureaucracy was concerned it had to be stopped at all costs. No way did they want any activity that could encourage nationwide support for the Sheffield busworkers.

On the Sunday afternoon Gerry Kitchen and I made our way to the meeting. We were on the steps leading up to entrance when the strike committee made its way into the hall. They assured us that they were not going to back down but were going to recommend that the original decision was to stand. I think it was the secretary who said to me, 'I can't see anything wrong with appealing for support from other garages, I don't understand why anyone can oppose it.' The strike committee won the vote by an overwhelming majority. After only a matter of days the union leadership decided that the strike had to be brought to an end. So a deal was struck

with the employers; no doubt the fear of national support scared both employer and the Transport and General Workers' Union. The resulting compromise was accepted by the strikers, but they lived to fight another day. On reflection it is obvious that they were not concerned with the political differences between the Stalinists, the right wing, and us. Working-class solidarity was at the heart of their support for the *Newsletter* 'Bulletin' and that support was our link with this section of workers. If we had approached them as the vanguard party of the working class telling them that the only way forward was to join us we would not have lasted five minutes. We approached the strike in a way that made it possible for the strikers to approach us. A bridge was built between the conscious leadership and the working class.

The highlight of the Leeds Labour Party social calendar was the annual dance at the Town Hall. All members of our group attended and this particular year we took as many Young Socialists as we could. Hugh Gaitskell, the leader of Her Majesty's parliamentary opposition, was there holding court. I asked him if he would be kind enough to meet a group of youths who were anxious to talk to him. He agreed, and the YS members immediately surrounded him. Dougie Thomas, a young miner from the Temple Newsam pit, asked him if he agreed that we should nationalise the coal distribution industry. He said no because at the moment there was a lot of opposition to nationalisation. He added that the reason for this was the high price of coal to the consumer. It was pointed out that the price of pit-top coal per ton was a lot less than what the housewife paid. It was the privately owned coal distribution that was responsible for the high price of coal. I can't remember how it came about, but Gaitskell raised the point that class society was disappearing. As proof of this he said that on the railways there was no longer first, second and third class – there was now only first and second. This man was hoping to be Prime Minister.

A few weeks after the Rank-and-File Conference I was summonsed to appear in front of the Leeds Labour Party executive. The list of prospective candidates for the municipal elections was to be discussed. As I was already on the list it was strange that I was to be interviewed. It became clear when Councillor Gabb

warned me of a move being made to throw me off the list. A few of the executive committee members said that they would help all they could. I was called into the room and offered a seat at the table. The first question was whether I attended the *Newsletter* industrial Rank-and-File Conference. 'Yes,' said I. 'Have you ever sold the *Newsletter* 'Bulletin' in public?' 'Yes.' 'You were also seen selling the *Newsletter* at the annual conference, is this true?' 'Well, spotted – yes.'

The chair was a leading Leeds solicitor, Councillor Waterman. He rose to his feet and asked, 'How did you get to know about this conference?' I replied that I had received my invitation through the post. 'Ah, how was it, Comrade Harding, that you received an invitation and I did not?' Councillor Waterman put this question to me in a tone that indicated that he had cracked the case. I explained to the executive that, like many people in the room, I read the *Tribune* every week. No doubt our chair had been known to read it. He said something like 'now and again'. I went on: 'A few weeks ago I spotted an advertisement asking anyone interested in attending the conference to write in with their name and address and the necessary documents would be sent to them. If you, Councillor Waterman, had answered that advertisement, or anyone else in this room had, then you would also have received an invitation.' 'Do you deny that the reason why you were invited was because you are a member of a secret organisation in the Labour Party?' Councillor Dennis Matthews took up the questioning at this point.

Councillor Dennis Matthews. When Jack London wrote 'the definition of a scab' he must have had Matthews in mind. He was a detestable unprincipled individual. He asked me if I was aware that if I ever became a member of the Council I would be bound by the decisions of the Labour group of councillors. He went on to say that as far as he was concerned I would have no loyalty to the Labour group. He then moved that I should leave the meeting so that the executive committee could discuss the issue. After about twenty minutes or so I was called back into the meeting where I was told that I had been removed from the list of prospective candidates, but if I wanted to be considered for the following year all I had to do was to have my name put forward and I would be

considered without malice. Or something like that. I was later informed that Matthews had concentrated on the question of loyalty to the Labour group. He had a long list of the resolutions and activities that I had been involved in to back up his theory. A few members of the committee accused Matthews of carrying out a witch-hunt against me. But the end result was victory for Matthews. He was the one who moved the resolution to strike me off the list.

A couple of months later Councillor Arthur Harrison, who worked with my father on the railway, told Dad he wanted me to go and see him to discuss something. I went that same evening. He told me that a struggle was taking place on the Council. The Tories were presenting a motion instructing the Council to make a large increase on the rents of Council houses. The Labour group had met and had decided to oppose the Tories' resolution and had instructed the Labour councillors on the Housing Committee to vote against the proposal. Now Arthur was a friendly sort of chap and had a dislike of careerists in the party. He was present at the executive meeting that moved me off the candidates' list and knew that the driving force had been Councillor Matthews making great play on the question of loyalty to Labour Council group decisions. Arthur told me that Matthews had ignored the Labour group's decision and had voted with the Tories on the Housing Committee to make a substantial increase in rents. It was suggested that I would be doing everyone a favour if I was to expose him at the next City Labour Party meeting. There was a ruling that stopped councillors from divulging the business of the Labour Council group. But once it had been raised at the City Party meeting there was nothing to stop delegates speaking on the issue and there were many councillors who were delegates from their union branches. If I had been a vindictive kind of bloke I would have gone for the proverbial jugular — and that was just what I was planning to do. It felt like being in a quiz and having the answers in front of you.

But first we had to make sure the opportunity to raise the issue would arise. Any mention of local elections or nominations for future candidates would suffice. If this did not happen then we arranged for someone to raise the question of when nominations for the candidates' list had to be in. We need not have worried; the

opportunity arose out of the minutes of the last meeting. I attracted the attention of the chair by standing up and asking if I might make an observation on the question of nominations for the list of prospective candidates. I informed the delegates that although I was already on the list I had been invited to appear before the executive committee. As a result of that meeting I had been removed from the list. I went on to tell the delegates that the reason was because Councillor Matthews had convinced the executive committee that I would not uphold the decisions of the Labour Council group and could not be trusted. I think at this point he realised what was coming because he looked very uncomfortable. If you think I was getting any pleasure out of uncovering Matthews you are dead right. I am reliving the moment as I type. I did not blurt out Matthews' disloyalty all at once. I deliberately stalled and let him stew for a few seconds.

After the pause I said: 'I have to inform this meeting that Councillor Matthews, the one who used the question of loyalty to the Labour Council group to get me taken from the candidates' list, that very same Councillor Matthews ignored the decision of the Council group and voted with the Tories on the housing committee.' There was an immediate response from the delegates, councillors, right-wing, left-wing and delegates without any wings at all, with cries of 'Shame!' 'Resign!'

The chair called for order. When he got it he asked me where I had got my information from. I told him that 'my loyalty to the Labour Council group would not let me divulge my source'. There was a wonderful response to that one.

At a Northern aggregate Peter Kerrigan, a leading Liverpool docker, had said that when you get the enemy by the throat and you know you have him, don't let go or he will turn on you. I wanted to throw Matthews to the wolves. I suggested that the chair should ask Matthews to make a statement to the meeting. He asked, but got a refusal. This started another round of heckling. I suspected that the hostility shown at this meeting would not continue in the future. But it was agreed that the executive committee should meet to discuss the issue. I am not clear what happened to him after that.

There were many Labour Party members and councillors in

those days who were on the right wing but had in their past been very devoted to the cause of socialism. One such leading member was George Murray (not the one of the same name who was Hugh Gaitskell's agent). He had been arrested and jailed many times for his activities in the 1930s. He, like many of the others, wanted socialism but differed with us on our approach to getting it. He always showed his admiration for anyone who fought for a principle. He never did the dirty on us. Jack Gale and I were coming through Leeds one Saturday night when we spotted George the worse for drink. We knew that if he was picked up the press and the Tories would have a field day. We bundled him into the car and took him home. His life-long partner opened the door; she had the same political history as George. We had a chat and a cup of tea. They thanked us and we went on our way.

But Matthews was of a different breed. There are still more of his kind around today. The Labour Party can't even be mistakenly referred to as a socialist party.