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JOHN WHEATLEY : A STUDY IN  
LABOUR HISTORY

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1973.

Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

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## S U M M A R Y

This is not a biography: the lack of any substantial collection of private papers relating to Wheatley would make a biography almost impossible. It is rather a study of the Labour Movement and of Wheatley's contribution to it.

There is a natural break in 1922 when Wheatley and many of his Clydeside colleagues were elected to Parliament. Before that date Wheatley was involved in local politics: after that date national politics predominate.

Chapter I sets the background by considering Glasgow at the turn of the century: it deals with social and economic conditions in the city and with the growth and weakness of the Glasgow Labour movement. Wheatley's own background is covered in Chapter II which deals briefly with his family background and with his rise from miner to director and virtual owner of a thriving publishing business. Chapter III traces his entry into local politics, the formation of the Catholic Socialist Society, the opposition to it from some sections



of the Roman Catholic Church, Wheatley's work on Lanarkshire County Council and on Glasgow City Council, and the growth and organisation of the Labour movement in Glasgow. In Chapter IV there are two main themes. Firstly, there is the myth and reality of Red Clydeside: the industrial and political unrest caused partly by the demands of war, and the efforts of the Government to clamp down on the unrest. Secondly, there is the work of the Labour Group on the City Council with its concentration on housing and its drive to increase Labour representation. Chapter V deals with the aftermath of war as it affected the Glasgow region and with the attempts of Wheatley and his colleagues to mitigate its consequences. It also sets the scene for the shift to Westminster by considering the important changes in the I.L.P.: the growth of the Labour Party was ultimately to prove disastrous for the I.L.P. but in the immediate post-war years the I.L.P. grew dramatically and came under the intellectual, middle class control of Clifford Allen.

Once the scene shifts to Westminster the thesis becomes a tale of hopes and of growing disappointment. Chapter VI considers the initial impact at Westminster

of the "wild men from the Clyde" who made abortive efforts to "ginger up" the Parliamentary Labour Party and to direct its attention to domestic rather than foreign affairs. Chapter VII deals with the 1924 Housing Act, while Chapter VIII considers the politics of 1924. During that year all the potential fissures within the Labour Party were observable and increasingly those on the left wing became disillusioned with the party's leaders. After 1924 while most labourists were giving their primary allegiance to the Labour Party which was gradually being absorbed into the parliamentary framework, those on the left wing continued to demand more radical solutions to the nation's problems. The failure of the Labour leaders to play an active role during the General Strike was important: it finally convinced many on the left wing that changes within the Labour movement were essential - but all attempts to effect those changes faltered. The position of the I.L.P. itself became increasingly precarious, especially once it had fallen under the control of the Clydeside M.Ps. It was increasingly at a discount, and the question of what, if anything, its role should be came increasingly to the fore. The failure of the second Labour Government to alleviate unemployment incensed the left wingers and drove them

into almost consistent opposition to the Government.

With this development the disaffiliation of the I.L.P. from the Labour Party became only a matter of time.

These developments, and Wheatley's role in them, are considered in Chapters IX and X. Chapter XI is an attempt to sum up Wheatley's career in both local and national politics.

## CHAPTER I

### GLASGOW

The initial cause of Glasgow's growth was commerce. It was the most rapidly growing city in Scotland before the Industrial Revolution as its "Tobacco Lords" grew rich on the American tobacco trade. The loss of this empire with the American Revolution led to a concentration on the textile industry: it came naturally to a city built on overseas trade to work up an imported raw material, raw cotton, into high quality fabrics for re-export. This was superseded in the 1830s by the rise of a new iron industry based on the great underground field of "blackband ironstone", discovered by David Mushet as early as 1801 but not usable at competitive prices until Neilson invented the "Hot-Blast" furnace in 1828. In the one dramatic decade of the 1830s the number of furnaces around Glasgow increased from 25 to 100, and the output of pig-iron increased from 40,000 to 400,000 tons per year. The decline of this industry in the face of competition from the Cleveland field in the 1870s was compensated for by the growth of shipbuilding which brought together the coal, the iron and steelworks, and heavy engineering. In the peak

years before 1914 one-third of all the world's steam-ships were launched on the Clyde: in 1913 370 ships were launched, their combined tonnage being 756,976.<sup>1</sup> This great inter-dependence of the heavy industries was potentially dangerous as more and more reliance was placed upon imported raw materials and upon export success: in such a position it was particularly susceptible to fluctuations in world trade. But this lack of industrial diversification did not become apparent until much later.<sup>2</sup>

This economic growth was accompanied by a tremendous increase in population. In 1707 Glasgow's population was an estimated 12,000. This rose to about 40,000 by 1780 and with industrialisation it increased even more rapidly - to 200,000 by 1830, 500,000 by 1880, and over 750,000 by 1901.<sup>3</sup> Natural increase, major incorporations of surrounding built-up areas in 1846 and 1891, and the influx of labour from the surrounding countryside accounted for the bulk of this increase, but migration from the Scottish Highlands and from Ireland was also important, if only because of the problems it caused.

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<sup>1</sup>J.Cunnison and J.B.S. Gilfillan, The City of Glasgow, Vol. V of The Third Statistical Account of Scotland (Glasgow: Collins, 1958,) p.840, table 43(b).

<sup>2</sup>R.H. Campbell, Scotland Since 1707: The Rise of an Industrial Society (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), p.248.

<sup>3</sup>Cunnison and Gilfillan, The City of Glasgow, p.58, table XI.

The Highland Clearances which began in the late eighteenth century continued throughout the nineteenth, causing a steady flow of migrants to the Clydeside and to the overseas dominions. As late as the 1880s Highland crofters rose in near revolt against evictions and clearances: in 1882 the Isle of Skye was aflame and in 1887 over 1000 crofters in the Lews took to arms, slaughtering 200 deer and attempting to drive the rest into the sea. But the clearances continued and between 1883 and 1908 the acreage under deer increased from 1,710,000 to 2,960,000.<sup>4</sup> The number of Glasgow's inhabitants who had been born in the crofting counties increased from 19,000 in 1881 to 25,000 in 1911,<sup>5</sup> but though these new proletarians carried bitter memories of eviction and were unused to their new industrial surroundings, it was not too difficult to assimilate them.

The influx from Ireland caused more serious problems. By 1840 the Irish comprised 25 per cent of the population of west and south-west Scotland and the tide of migration did not subside until 1856.<sup>6</sup> But this was only a temporary

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<sup>4</sup>Thomas Johnston, The History of the Working Classes in Scotland (Glasgow: Forward Publishing Co, 1922), p.207.

<sup>5</sup>Cunnison and Gilfillan, The City of Glasgow, p.67, table XVIII.

<sup>6</sup>W.H. Marwick, Economic Development in Victorian Scotland (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1936), p.132.

respite as another, bigger, wave came in the 1870s and 1880s. This invasion was not welcomed by the native population. The Irish immigrant, being extremely poor, undercut Scottish competition when bidding for jobs. Religion, too, was a serious factor. The Irish were mainly Roman Catholics and although Roman Catholicism had traditional strongholds in Scotland it was regarded as an alien institution and "in the eyes of most Scotsmen it is bound to remain the Church of the Irish in Scotland."<sup>7</sup> The fact that some of the immigrants were Protestants further aggravated the problem of assimilation, for it meant that the orange and green religious feud was continued in Scotland. The concentration of the Irish in Lanarkshire, Glasgow, Renfrewshire, intensified the problem, though this concentration had its advantages for the Irish at least as the close family relationships they maintained enabled them to reduce the practice of "moonlight flitting" to a fine art. Other Irish customs created problems: the practice of holding funeral "wakes", which developed into all-night drinking bouts, worried health officers as these convivial gatherings round the bodies of people who may have died of typhus or cholera increased the possibility of the

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<sup>7</sup> Sir R. Rait and G.S. Pryde, Scotland (2nd ed.; London: Benn, 1954; New York: Praeger, 1954), p.278.

disease spreading further afield.<sup>8</sup>

As in other cities population growth had far-reaching consequences, especially for housing and public health. Daniel Defoe, who visited Glasgow in the 1720s, described it as "one of the cleanest, most beautiful, and best-built cities in Great Britain,"<sup>9</sup> and McUre, a Glaswegian writing in 1736, pictured it as

surrounded with cornfields, kitchen and flower gardens, and beautiful orchards, abounding with fruit of all sorts, which by reason of the open and large streets send forth a pleasant and oderiferous smell.<sup>10</sup>

But by the early nineteenth century the city was no longer a salubrious country town. Despite rapid extension of the built-up area, most Glaswegians lived near the centre of the city. Terrace houses, the homes of the well-to-do but now being engulfed by the city's commercial and industrial expansion, were abandoned by their former owners and divided up to house many more families than they had been built for. The early four storey tenements built in the city centre in large rectangular blocks were ruined by the growth of "back lands" tenements that shut off the light and air from their rear

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<sup>8</sup> There was in fact a mild outbreak of bubonic plague in Glasgow in 1903, but it was not connected with the Irish.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in The Old Closes and Streets of Glasgow (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1900), p.21.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Ibid., p.21.



windows: and these "back lands" tenements were subdivided from the start. As the old black spots were demolished, their occupants overflowed into the next inner districts; into the houses squeezed in amongst the factories of Anderston to the West, into Bridgeton and Calton to the East, and into Gorbals to the South, creating a new zone of overcrowding and dilapidation encircling the business centre.

The Corporation did try to deal with the problems of the tenement slums. The City Improvement Trust, set up under a private Act of Parliament of 1866, bought land and demolished buildings; but it made little of its power to build new houses. Despite further Acts of 1897 and 1902 little headway was made, and by 1913 the Corporation had built a total of 2,199 houses: 592 houses of one apartment, 1,334 of two apartments, 257 of three apartments, and 16 of larger size.<sup>11</sup> It is little wonder that the Report of the Glasgow Municipal Commission on the Housing of the Poor expressed the view that the power to build houses "seems, indeed, to have been almost regarded by the Corporation as a permission which had found its way into the [1866] Act by mistake.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Municipal Glasgow: Its Evolution and Enterprise  
(Glasgow: Corporation of Glasgow, 1914), p.69.

<sup>12</sup> Report and Recommendations of the Glasgow Municipal Commission on the Housing of the Poor (Glasgow and Edinburgh: Wm. Hodge & Company, 1904) p.12.

Private builders erected much working-class housing in the late nineteenth century, but after 1904 their efforts in this sphere petered out: during the decade 1901-1911 the Dean of Guild Court approved plans for 2,901 one-apartment, 4,459 two-apartment and 5,516 three-apartment houses, but roughly a third of these were approved in 1902 alone.<sup>13</sup> The result of these meagre increases to the City's housing stock was, naturally, overcrowding.

In a pathetic attempt to stop overcrowding, the Corporation was reduced to "ticketing" the warren-like buildings: any house of not more than three apartments and with a cubic capacity of 2,000 feet or less could have on its door a metal ticket showing the number of adults allowed in the house, "a child under ten years being denoted by one-half."<sup>14</sup> Powers were secured to allow inspections or "night raids" and in 1901 55,292 inspections were made and 7,044 cases of overcrowding were found.<sup>15</sup> The 1904 Report gave details of the type of people who inhabited "ticketed"

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<sup>13</sup>Glasgow Corporation Archives, Minutes of the Municipal Commission on the Housing of the Poor, p.81.

<sup>14</sup>Report and Recommendations of the Glasgow Municipal Commission on the Housing of the Poor, p.2.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p.4. Alexander McCallum, the assistant sanitary inspector in the Eastern Police Division, reported that he had found people concealed in cupboards, under beds, and even on housetops. He had, on occasion, found two tiers of people in

houses: 3,970 such houses were specially visited by sanitary officers and it was estimated that of the tenants 64 per cent could be classed as "respectable", 24 per cent as "addicted to drink but not criminal", and 12 per cent as "vicious and criminal", but the "standard of respectability of the 64 per cent was not high, being defined as respectable in so far as they kept themselves and their family and pay their rents, but their conduct is not exemplary."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the reality for those in "ticketed" houses was "the lowest depths of wretchedness and poverty."<sup>17</sup>

In 1900, one in four Glaswegians lived in one-room houses, and one in seven of these houses had lodgers as well. The physical toll exacted by such living conditions is measurable in medical statistics. The death rate in Glasgow was 27.5 in 1861, 25.2 in 1881, and 21.2 in 1901.<sup>18</sup> The infant mortality rate in 1900 was 154, and it was not until the

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one bed. In the worst case of overcrowding found in the city he took seven people from an adjoining roof and eleven other adults from a house which contained only 880 cubic feet. Glasgow Corporation Archives, Minutes of the Municipal Commission on the Housing of the Poor, p.122

<sup>16</sup> Report and Recommendations of the Glasgow Municipal Commission on the Housing of the Poor, p.2.

<sup>17</sup> Glasgow Herald, 16th March, 1903.

<sup>18</sup> Cunnison and Gilfillan, The City of Glasgow, p.74, table XXVII.

1930s that it fell below 100.<sup>19</sup> Deaths from tuberculosis fell from six per thousand in 1860 to 2.82 per thousand in 1900<sup>20</sup>, still a high figure. These figures were higher than for any comparable British city, and broken down by district their significance becomes greater. In 1912 the infant mortality rate in residential Kelvinside was 43, while in the working-class areas it was much higher: in Cowcaddens it was 126, in Gorbals 130, in Kinning Park 138, in Townhead 145, in Mile-End 148, in Whitevale 151, in Calton 163, and in Blackfriars a staggering 178. Also in 1912, the death-rate in Kelvinside was 8, while in Dalmarnock it was 16, in Townhead 17, in Whitevale 18.4, in Cowcaddens 19, in Mile-End 19.3, in Calton 21, in Blackfriars 22, and in Broomielaw 22.4.<sup>21</sup> Emanuel Shinwell has recalled:

I can still see the typical Glasgow tenement child, happy and dirty as he played in the gutter or up and down the stairs of his building. His legs would be bandy or knock-kneed: those more fortunate jeered at them with opprobrious words to describe this freakish-ness. But nobody cared, for the physical abnormality was familiar to them all.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.885, table 89.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.895, table 97.

<sup>21</sup> John Wheatley, Eight-Pound Cottages for Glasgow Citizens (Glasgow: Glasgow Labour Party, 1913,) pp.2-3.

<sup>22</sup> Emanuel Shinwell, Conflict Without Malice (London: Odham's Press, 1955), p.33.

Despite all this, Glasgow was the most municipalised city in Britain. In America it was "praised as the best-managed 'municipal concern' on earth",<sup>23</sup> While The Times described it as "more responsible than any other city or town in the United Kingdom for the spread of those various forms of municipal progress which have been developed by the New Municipalism."<sup>24</sup> The Corporation took over the water supply in 1855, and the gas supply in 1869. Electric lighting was taken over in the 1890s, and that decade saw the building of sewage purification works. In 1894 the Corporation refused to renew the lease of the tramway track to Andrew Menzies' Glasgow Tramway and Omnibus Company, and went into business itself, providing bigger and cleaner cars and introducing electrified overhead cables in 1901. This was a great financial success and the Corporation built up the 50 million passengers a year it inherited in 1894 to over 500 million by the 1920s. Similarly in 1900 the Corporation inaugurated a municipal telephone system, though this venture ended in 1907 when they sold out to the Post Office.

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<sup>23</sup>J.H. Muir, Glasgow in 1901 (Glasgow and Edinburgh: W. Hodge & Co., 1901), p.38

<sup>24</sup>The Times, 6 October, 1902.

All this had important political consequences. Despite the appalling slums, the insanitary conditions and the high mortality rates, Glaswegians, unless old, ill or unemployed, were better off than ever before, and with the exception of housing the Independent - controlled Corporation was leading the nation in the field of municipal socialism. Despite the great miners' strike of 1894, when the Scottish miners held out for five months against wage cuts, almost the whole of Scotland was a Liberal stronghold, and Glasgow was no exception. Despite the cracks in the Liberal edifice which had appeared by the end of the nineteenth century,<sup>25</sup> the Labour movement had made very little impression in Glasgow. A branch of the S.D.F. was established in Glasgow in 1884 and the Fabians were also active. Keir Hardie's Scottish Labour Party managed to win four seats on Glasgow Corporation before it was submerged in the I.L.P. in 1893. During the 1890s the I.L.P.'s fortunes fluctuated. Its membership grew slowly, and the number of I.L.P.ers on local authorities grew gradually and painstakingly, but the summit of its achievement in Glasgow was to win 10 of the

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<sup>25</sup>See D.W. Crowley, "The 'Crofters' Party', 1885-1892", Scottish Historical Review, 35, 1956, pp. 110-26; D.C. Savage, "Scottish Politics, 1885-6," Scottish Historical Review, 40, 1961, pp. 118-35; and J.G. Kellas, "The Liberal Party and the Scottish Church Disestablishment Crisis," English Historical Review, LXXIX, pp. 31-46.

75 seats on the Corporation in 1898.

Numerically, the S.D.F. was insignificant, but its doctrinaire Marxism had some appeal and its close association with Blatchford and the Clarion gave it an unrivalled field of publicity. It competed fairly successfully with the I.L.P. until, under the influence of James Connolly and inspired by Daniel de Leon, the "impossibilists" broke away in 1903 to form the Socialist Labour Party. In Glasgow the S.L.P. remained a tiny group, but its "paucity of members was to some extent made up by fanatical quality,"<sup>26</sup> under the vigorous leadership of John Maclean. Its most prominent members were strategically placed in Glasgow's heavy industry - Neil Maclean, Arthur McManus, Tom Bell, William Paul, and, later, William Gallacher and David Kirkwood. They addressed workers at factory gates, distributed revolutionary literature, and held evening classes in Marxism run by John Maclean who was later assisted by James MacDougall. But before the 1914-18 war their influence was confined to Glasgow's shipyards, and even here S.L.P. extremism alienated as many as it attracted.

The more moderate I.L.P. was able to attract many who were disillusioned with the Liberals, but this seemed to apply only at the local level: like the S.D.F. it was singularly

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<sup>26</sup> Shinwell, Conflict Without Malice, p.36

unsuccessful at general elections and in 1895 all 25 I.L.P. candidates were defeated and even Hardie lost his seat at South West Ham. Indeed, such was the I.L.P.'s failure in Scotland that its most prominent members had to seek seats in England. Hardie never represented a Scottish constituency; neither did Bruce Glasier; and the only Scottish seat that Ramsay MacDonald ever held was the united Scottish Universities constituency following his humiliating defeat at Seaham in 1935 at the hands of Emanuel Shinwell. This shift of Scottish leaders to the south left a vacuum at the top in Scotland, and this was reflected in the general lack of professionalism in the party.

This can be seen in the Glasgow I.L.P., whose members either fitted in perfectly with the Independent-dominated Corporation or were young and relatively inexperienced enthusiasts unable to make any distinctive contribution until much later. James A. Allen was a millionaire socialist being owner of the Allen Line of Steamships but was unable to win a seat on the Corporation until 1907. His brother, Robert S. Allen, had been a member of the School Board since 1894: a moderate education reformer, he was backed by the United Free Church. Algernon Henderson, managing director of the Anchor Line, was likewise a moderate. When Dr. James Erskine won the election in the Anderston



ward in 1898, The Baillie, a very right-wing Glasgow magazine, commented, "if the 'municipalisers' must be represented, it is surely well that their representatives, as is the case in the present instance, should be gentlemen."<sup>27</sup>

John Battersby, an admired and respected member of the Corporation since 1891, and especially interested in housing was, again, "a Radical of the good old type - not a present-day fanatic."<sup>28</sup> More flamboyant but no more extreme was James Shaw Maxwell, a journalist who, after unsuccessful attempts to enter Parliament in 1885 and 1895, had fallen back on a Corporation seat in 1896. Into this group of moderates must also come men like Martin Haddow who pioneered school meals, Alexander Haddow (not related), George Scott who owned a haberdasher's shop, Robert Nichol a school teacher, James Taylor a civil servant, and Hugh Robertson who built up the famous Orpheus Choir. Much more radical, but no more successful, were men like John Cronin, a trade union leader and fiery advocate of "municipalising". The brothers Peter and John Stewart owned a brush factory, but the former especially was a robust, outspoken disrupter of Corporation meetings after his election in Hutchesontown

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<sup>27</sup>The Baillie, No. 1360, 9 November, 1898.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., No. 1646, 4 May, 1904.

in 1895. William Shaw an I.L.P. official and William Stewart the I.L.P. Secretary were also active in Glasgow, but their efforts at organising the fragmented Glasgow labour movement were unsuccessful. More important was George Carson, secretary of the powerful Glasgow Trades Council. This provided a forum of debate in which outsiders like Hardie and Smillie took part but its trade union members tended to concentrate on industrial problems to the exclusion of political ones.

It was not until the emergence of men like John Wheatley, Patrick Dollan, Thomas Johnston, James Maxton and Emanuel Shinwell that the Glasgow I.L.P. acquired a dedicated professional leadership, a sense of direction, and a fighting political programme. Perhaps the older leaders saw no need for leadership and organisation. After all, Glasgow was the most municipalised city in Britain and the City Chambers were untainted by class warfare: the Corporation was run by anti-Labour, but enterprising Independents allied with official Liberals and the only class-based hostility was displayed towards the S.D.F. and the S.L.P. The Citizen's Union was certainly anti-working class, but it fought almost solely against the provision of working-class housing and did not long survive its founding in 1898. Generally, the ruling Independents and Liberals could ignore the Labour men: they still held the bulk of the working class votes and saw

little need for concern over their political future. The secret MacDonald-Gladstone agreement of 1903 was to alter Labour's position at the national level, especially in England. Glasgow, for the time being was almost unaffected.

This was the Glasgow in which John Wheatley was to do most of his early political work. It was a cosmopolitan city, based on heavy industry, with a huge population living in overcrowded dilapidated tenements where disease and squalor were rife. It was a working-class city, a city where a strong socialist element would be expected but where it had failed to emerge because of its moderate fragmented leadership and lack of organisation and because of the enterprising policies of the ruling Independents and Liberals. Glasgow was far from Wheatley's birthplace in Southern Ireland, but close to Shettleston where he was to live most of his life and where he was to begin his political career.<sup>29</sup> Glasgow's influence and problems spread beyond her nominal boundaries and Glasgow around 1900 forms the essential background to Wheatley's life and his politics.

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<sup>29</sup> Shettleston was to be incorporated into Glasgow in 1912.

## CHAPTER II

### WHEATLEY'S EARLY LIFE AND BUSINESS BACKGROUND

John Wheatley was born on 24 May 1869 in the village of Bonmahon in County Waterford where his father, Thomas Wheatley, worked as a labourer. His ancestry is obscure, though it seems clear that Thomas Wheatley was English while his wife, Johanna Ryan, was Irish and that Thomas Wheatley probably migrated to Ireland from the Cornwall area to seek work in the mines of Southern Waterford.<sup>1</sup> But more often than not Thomas Wheatley was unemployed, and with the steady enlargement of the family the Wheatleys lived in grinding poverty. John Wheatley was the first-born, and in all he had two brothers and seven sisters, though not all of them were born by the time the family decided to join the flood of migrants to Scotland. Such was the rate of migration that it was possible to cross the Irish Sea for only a few shillings, and at times cut-throat competition among shipping companies reduced the cost to one shilling. It was on the one-shilling ferry to Greenock

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<sup>1</sup>Lord Wheatley, interviewed in Edinburgh, 12 February, 1969.

in 1876 that the Wheatleys sailed, herded below decks like cattle. From Greenock the family made its way to the mining village of Braehead, later known as Bargeddie, where Thomas Wheatley found regular work.

But though regular work meant that the family was better off than before, it was still surrounded by poverty and squalor. Braehead was tucked away in the rolling country between Shettleston and Baillieston. It was, in effect,

a row of back-to-back houses of the most primitive type. The majority were single-ends and were devoid of all ordinary amenities. The beds were 'holes in the wall'; the coal cellar was below the bed; water had to be carried a long distance from the one village pump; drainage was unknown.<sup>2</sup>

The Wheatley family plus two lodgers lived in "a single rough dark room less than eighteen feet square,"<sup>3</sup> and as John Wheatley later wrote:

The cooking, dining, mending, studying, sleeping, birth and death must all take place in this confined space. It is the coal cellar and wash-house as well.... it is the bath-room also. There is no private closet accommodation. The only sanitary convenience is out in the open, forty yards away. It is a dry closet, usually without a door, and frequently with a broken roof, and the approach to it is filthy. It is expected to serve the needs of several families, men and women, maiden and youth, and children of all ages.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Forward, 2 February, 1924.

<sup>3</sup>Lovat Frazer of the Sunday Pictorial, quoted in Forward, 5 July, 1924.

<sup>4</sup>Glasgow Eastern Standard, 29 May, 1926; Forward 29 May, 1926.

One of the presidents of the Scottish Miners' Federation forcefully expressed the general condemnation of the one-apartment, back-to-back house when he said that people were "housed like swine" under "positively brutal conditions."<sup>5</sup> It is not surprising that these surroundings left Wheatley with bitter memories and coloured much of his political activity in later years.

It is uncertain which school Wheatley attended,<sup>6</sup> but the most influential person during his boyhood days was clearly one Father Terken, a Dutch priest who took over the parish of Baillieston in 1879. He started his mission in converted stables and by dint of hard work, leadership and organisation became the most respected person in the community, admired by Catholic and Protestant alike.<sup>7</sup> After services, several youths led by Wheatley would discuss the sermon with Father Terken, who singled out Wheatley as a lad of promise and predicted that he would go far.<sup>8</sup>

But at the age of 12 or 13 Wheatley only got as far

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<sup>5</sup> Scottish Land Enquiry Committee, Scottish Land (London, 1914), p.409.

<sup>6</sup> The headmaster of St. Bridget's School, Baillieston, can find no reference to Wheatley in the school records, though Dollan states categorically that Wheatley was educated at that school. Sir Patrick Dollan, "Memories of 50 Years Ago," The Mercat Cross, Vol. 6, No. 4, October 1953, p.108.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, No. 2, October 1953, p.39.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, No. 4, October 1953, p.109.

as the mines,<sup>9</sup> although he attended evening classes at the Athenaeum in Glasgow despite the fact that this meant a five mile walk after work and another five mile walk to get home. Wages in the Lanarkshire mines were low. In May 1876 they had been driven down to 3/- per day,<sup>10</sup> and by the time Keir Hardie as Secretary of the Scottish Miners' National Federation gave his report in 1887 they ranged from 2/6 to 4/- per day, the average being about 3/3; but as work was unsteady weekly wages were unlikely to exceed 12/-.<sup>11</sup> Discipline was strict: the miner had to be prepared to work nine hours a day for six days a week when the owners so demanded, for if he refused he was dismissed, though it was more common for the largest possible labour force to be taken on for three or four days and the mine then closed till the following week in order to cut overheads.<sup>12</sup> The unions were too weak to affect this. Wheatley described the miner's working conditions:

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<sup>9</sup>Wheatley wrote that he became a miner at the age of twelve, Glasgow Observer, 3 August, 1907; but in his libel case in 1927 he stated that he went down the mines at the age of thirteen, Glasgow Herald, 6 July, 1927.

<sup>10</sup>R. Page Arnot, A History of the Scottish Miners (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955), pp. 58-9.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>12</sup>Shinwell, Conflict Without Malice, pp. 31-2.

Underground he works in an almost naked state. As a rule he is covered only by shirt, trousers, broken socks, and clumsy boots. Occasionally the shirt is discarded. The older men work laboriously at the coal face, often doubled into a seam as low as twenty-four inches. The younger men usually act as "drawers". They and the pit ponies largely constitute the transport service.

They meet at a terminus to which, by a haulage system, a train of little wagons or hutches is brought. There may be a dozen or so of these young men working to this terminus all day....As the young man arrives and has to wait on his next hutch, he stretches himself among the dust. The closet accommodation is any vacant space within a few yards of his resting place. The refuse is never removed, [it] lies there until it naturally decays. If the workings are wet, the flow of water carries some of it to a pool.

When meal time comes he opens a handkerchief in which he has brought some plain food and, having no facilities for cleaning his hands, except rubbing them on his dirty clothing, proceeds to eat.

There is no supply of drinking water except what he may bring in his flask from the surface. In the heated atmosphere this is usually consumed by mid-day and I have been men almost exhausted by fatigue and in a state of desperation with thirst, skim the scum from a stagnant filthy pool of water in order to cool their lips.<sup>13</sup>

Wheatley worked in the mines until the early 1890s.

His brother Patrick left the mines earlier to become an assistant in a grocer's shop, but his other brother, Thomas, who lost a leg at the coal-face, worked underground until the

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<sup>13</sup>Glasgow Eastern Standard, 29 May 1926; Forward 29 May, 1926. See also Wheatley's pamphlet, Miners, Mines and Misery (Glasgow: Reformer's Bookstall, 1908).



early 1900s.<sup>14</sup> By 1893, at the age of 24, John Wheatley was in charge of a public house in Braehead although at this time he was a total abstainer. In 1896 Patrick Wheatley started a grocery business of his own in Main Street, Shettleston, and, at his suggestion, John joined him as an assistant at a weekly wage of 35/-.<sup>15</sup> At this time he married Mary Meechan, daughter of an Irish railway gang foreman. The wedding was held in St. Bridget's, Baillieston, and the reception in MacInnes Hall took the form of a "pay wedding": the guests paid an entrance fee and the proceeds were used to cover expenses, with the balance going to the newly-weds.<sup>16</sup>

The grocery business expanded, and a branch shop was opened in Budhill Avenue, Shettleston. It was here that they first met young John McGovern whom they employed as a messenger boy: McGovern's elder brother, Tom, was a full-time assistant working 14 hours a day, and longer on Saturdays, for 7/- per week.<sup>17</sup> But at the turn of the

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<sup>14</sup> Lord Wheatley, interviewed 12 February, 1969.

<sup>15</sup> Glasgow Herald, 6 July, 1927.

<sup>16</sup> Dollan, "Memories of 50 Years Ago", The Mercat Cross, Vol. 6, No. 4, October 1953, p.109.

<sup>17</sup> John McGovern, Neither Fear Nor Favour (London: Blandford, 1960), p.23.

century the business ran into trouble, and it was later claimed that the Wheatleys paid their creditors 5/- in the £.<sup>18</sup> The cause of the trouble is unknown, but the business was finished, never to be restarted.

In 1901 Wheatley secured employment first as a reporter and then as an advertisement canvasser for the Glasgow Observer, the main Catholic weekly in the West of Scotland. It was in this connection that he first met "Mandy" McGettigan,<sup>19</sup> advertising manager of the Glasgow Examiner.<sup>20</sup> Wheatley and McGettigan tended to work together to secure advertisements, but their methods were not always scrupulous. An old friend of the Wheatley family has recalled how, in order to get an advertisement, they threatened to publish the details of a well-known Glasgow businessman's unfortunate

<sup>18</sup> Glasgow Herald, 9 and 12 July, 1927. The Wheatleys denied these allegations but two witnesses gave evidence against them. One of these, Alexander Findlay, a wholesale provision merchant of Main Street, Shettleston, stated that he had rejected the 5/- in the £ offer and held out for 10/- in the £, which he got, on a total bill of £29.

<sup>19</sup> McGettigan was a compulsive practical joker. For some of his exploits see Thomas Johnston, Memories (London: Collins, 1952), p.36.

<sup>20</sup> The Glasgow Examiner began publication in 1895 in the interests of the Irish Catholics in Scotland. In March 1903 the Home Government Branch of the United Irish League took it over and published it for five years as the Glasgow Star and Examiner. In 1908 the branch sold it to the proprietor of the Glasgow Observer who published it as a mid-week edition of his paper under the title of the Glasgow Star. It ceased publication in 1931.

affair with a young girl.<sup>21</sup> While employed by the Glasgow Observer Wheatley earned about £3. per week,<sup>22</sup> but his socialist beliefs were causing trouble with the paper's proprietors and in 1906 he and McGettigan started their own printing business under the name of Hoxton and Walsh.<sup>23</sup> They dealt mainly with shopkeepers' advertisement calendars, though at first they began by securing from the clergy the right to publish a New Year newsletter, which in addition to a few pages of parochial news was filled with the advertisements of local tradesmen. The business prospered and in 1911 it became a limited liability company with a nominal share capital of £200, with Wheatley and McGettigan as equal partners. During the war years the firm received considerable business from the Labour movement,<sup>24</sup> but in 1917 the partners

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<sup>21</sup> Mrs. Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, retired school-mistress and member of Wheatley's Catholic Socialist Society; interviewed in Glasgow, 15 September, 1968.

<sup>22</sup> Glasgow Herald, 6 July, 1927.

<sup>23</sup> The name of the firm is an indication of their nature as practical jokers. There was no Hoxton and no Walsh, and it was said that the name meant "Hoax the town and Welch on them." Mrs. Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, interviewed 15 September, 1968.

<sup>24</sup> For example, in May 1916 the Executive Committee of the Glasgow Trades Council decided to give Hoxton and Walsh the task of printing all their advertisements. Glasgow Trades Council, Minutes, 19 May, 1916.

quarrelled. In February 1917 Wheatley wanted to increase the capital of the company as assets showed a surplus over liabilities equal to 30/- per share, but McGettigan wanted to dissolve the company and retire.<sup>25</sup> In May 1918 McGettigan presented a petition to court to wind up the company on the grounds of deadlock, and Wheatley purchased the goodwill of the company from the liquidator for £100, forming his own company, Hoxton and Walsh, 1918 (Limited) to do similar business. Its nominal share capital was £5,000 in £1 shares.

Under Wheatley's control the business expanded rapidly: in 1919 its turnover was £8,000, in 1921 it was £71,000. Requiring more capital, Wheatley approached Rosslyn Mitchell, who contacted another Glasgow solicitor, Thomas White. White agreed to help on condition that Wheatley served the company for ten years, and in February 1921 the new shares were issued. On the day of issue, Wheatley paid £12,301 for 12,301 shares, thus acquiring one half of the shares and one share over, giving him a controlling interest. The company acquired various subsidiary interests throughout Britain and Ireland, and in 1923 launched its first weekly newspaper, the Glasgow Eastern Standard. This was followed by two others, the Glasgow South-Side Standard which was published for only a

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<sup>25</sup>Glasgow Herald, 6 July, 1927, on which the rest of this, and the first half of the next, paragraph is based.

few years, and the Glasgow Western Star which was allowed to die in 1940. The Glasgow Eastern Standard ceased publication in 1960, although the company continues to operate under the chairmanship of Wheatley's son.

After 1918 Wheatley was a comparatively wealthy man. John Paton wrote of him, "Although a man of very simple tastes, in his appearance of solid comfort he was a typical substantial bourgeois. As a self-made man he'd have been beloved of Samuel Smiles."<sup>26</sup> When he died in May 1930 he left a total of £16,795,<sup>27</sup> a substantial red-sandstone mansion overlooking Sandyhills Golf Course, and, of course, a controlling interest in Hoxton and Walsh. His financial independence enabled him not only to live in comfort, but to devote his time and energy to politics. He was often asked to justify his fitness, as a man in comfortable circumstances, to be a political representative of the working classes. On one such occasion he told of how at the age of twelve he had been sent to pawn his father's waistcoat for 1/6, and of how in 1914 his Savings Bank book showed weekly entries of 2/- which his wife saved so that they could send their son to Glasgow University

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<sup>26</sup> John Paton, Left Turn! (London: Martin Secker and Wartburg, 1936), p.148.

<sup>27</sup> Glasgow Herald, 16 August, 1930.

in 1915.<sup>28</sup> He ended his life in comfort, but it had been a long haul, made possible only by intelligence, hard work, and willingness to take a chance. And he never forgot the deprivations of his early years. Tom Johnston wrote:

He was always inordinately proud and bitter over his boyhood days in a Lanarkshire slum - proud that he had come from the working class, and had done something to inspire it with rebellion against the sordid poverty of his earliest days, and bitter against those in high places, ecclesiastical, legal, political, or financial, who sought to maintain the system of hunger and want, fear and servility, so rampant among the working-class.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 10 July, 1928.

<sup>29</sup>Forward, 17 May, 1930.

### CHAPTER III

#### WHEATLEY, THE CATHOLIC SOCIALIST SOCIETY, AND THE GLASGOW LABOUR MOVEMENT, 1906-14

The general election of January 1906 marked the opening of a new chapter in Labour's struggle for political influence as twenty-seven committed Labour candidates were elected in England and Wales. But in Scotland there was no comparable upsurge in the Labour vote and only Wilkie in Dundee and Barnes in the Blackfriars Division of Glasgow were victorious. Yet these two victories were significant. Firstly, when coupled with the victories in England, they injected more enthusiasm into the movement and showed that seats could be won, even in Scotland. Prior to this, success had come only at the local level in Scotland, and while in England Labour had won some significant by-elections in the 1901-5 period in Scotland they had been consistently unsuccessful: Smillie, the miners' leader, had lost in North-East Lanarkshire in 1901 because the miners had voted Liberal, and in the same constituency in 1904 the I.L.P. candidate had finished at the bottom of the poll. Secondly, the 1906 results brought to the fore the question of the Irish vote. Barnes was elected because the William O'Brien branch

of the United Irish League in Blackfriars deserted the Liberals and urged the Irish voters to support him,<sup>1</sup> a surprising move in view of the facts that the Church had advised Catholics to vote liberal, that Redmond, the Irish leader, had given Hardie only a heavily guarded promise to instruct the Irish to vote labour, and that although Barnes favoured Home Rule he was against the idea of a separate Parliament for Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

The U.I.L. was certainly the organisation for the Irish immigrants and their descendants and in the late nineteenth century it had expanded rapidly. Between 1883 and 1890 the number of branches in Britain rose from 52 to 630, the annual subscriptions from under £400 to almost £4,000, and the registered membership from 4,000 to over 40,000.<sup>3</sup> Despite a temporary split caused by the Parnell Divorce Case, the organisation continued to grow. Its main hope was, of course, Home Rule for Ireland, but below this ideal there was scope for variation in opinion, and in the opening years of the twentieth century more members were favouring wide-

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<sup>1</sup>The branch finally decided this only after much argument. See J.E. Handley, The Irish in Modern Scotland (Cork: University Press, 1947), p.290.

<sup>2</sup>Glasgow Herald, 6 January, 1906.

<sup>3</sup>Handley, The Irish in Modern Scotland, p.280.



spread radical social reform. But as long as Home Rule was denied, social change took second place for most members.

Thomas Wheatley had joined the League soon after settling in Bargeddie, and two of his sons, John and Patrick, followed suit, joining the Baillieston branch, then led by one Dennis Brogan a Glasgow tailor.<sup>4</sup> The whole organisation was given renewed vigour in 1898 by the reconciliation of Redmond and his followers with the rest of the Irish party, and by the commemoration of the 1798 centenary. In Scotland a huge recruiting drive took place. Edward Blake, T.P. O'Connor and John Dillon were enthusiastically received and Kierman, the League's organising secretary, toured the country reviving old branches and forming new ones. Seventeen were opened in the Glasgow area, including the Daniel O'Connell branch in Shettleston, the President of which was John Wheatley.<sup>5</sup>

Wheatley was originally a Liberal,<sup>6</sup> but by 1906 had become strongly sympathetic towards Labour, although he was not yet a member of any Labour organisation. In January 1906 he urged the Shettleston U.I.L. to vote for Joseph Sullivan,

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<sup>4</sup>Dollan, "Memories of 50 Years Ago," The Mercat Cross, Vol. 6, No. 1, July 1953, p.8.

<sup>5</sup>Handley, The Irish in Modern Scotland, p.287.

<sup>6</sup>The Baillie, No. 2568, 10 May, 1922.

the Labour candidate for North-West Lanarkshire,<sup>7</sup> and he acted as Sullivan's polling agent,<sup>8</sup> but he was well aware of the Roman Catholic Church's condemnation of Socialism. The Church's opposition was based on Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical of 1891 which was, in turn, based upon the late nineteenth century expositions of Socialism in Germany and France and upon the explicit anti-clericalism of Aveling, Kautsky, and Kropotkin. It expressed great concern about the condition of the working classes, but came out strongly against Socialism, stating that:

the main tenet of Socialism, community of goods, must be utterly rejected.... The first and most fundamental principal... if one would undertake to alleviate the condition of the masses, must be the inviolability of private property.

The Pope added the authority of Divine Law to the existence of private property and rejected the idea of a class war.<sup>9</sup> The failure to distinguish between the anti-clerical Continental Socialism and the more moderate British version and the belief that rigorous distinctions could be drawn

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<sup>7</sup>Glasgow Observer, 20 January, 1906.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 3 February, 1906.

<sup>9</sup>Major Henry Cannon Parkinson, ed., The Workers' Charter: A Translation of the Encyclical on the Condition of the Working Classes (n.p.: Catholic Socialist Guild, 1938), pp.19-20, pp. 16-17, p.21.

between Socialism and social reform<sup>10</sup> were anathema to Wheatley, but they were two issues which were to cause much confusion in the coming years. In February 1906 he raised these problems in a letter to the Glasgow Observer, using the pseudonym "Catholic Socialist". He admitted that the "revolutionary, confiscatory, anti-religious methods of the early, modern Continental Socialists" should be opposed, but argued that "the methods and aims of the legal evolutionary Socialism of Great Britain does [sic] not merit opposition." He stated that Glasgow's tramways, libraries, parks, gasworks and waterworks constituted Socialism, and asked:

Am I, as a Catholic, morally entitled to support the Corporation in providing me with water, and bound to oppose it should it propose to supply me with bread? Am I at liberty to approve of the State carrying my letters, but bound to oppose the State taking over the telephones, which are now private property? <sup>11</sup>

This sparked off an impassioned correspondence in the pages of the Glasgow Observer. Wheatley received some support but was bitterly opposed by many of the correspondents.

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<sup>10</sup> For example, one C.S. Devas, speaking under the auspices of the Catholic Truth Society in February 1906, "distinguished Socialism from Social Reform, [and] showed the impracticability of Socialist proposals, and the immorality of much of the Socialist teaching." Glasgow Observer, 24 February, 1906.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 24 February, 1906.

While they expounded the official Church line, Wheatley attacked the prevailing social and economic system:

"Individualism and free enterprise... [have] produced gambling, slums, vice, drunkenness, poverty, luxury and general inhumanity."<sup>12</sup> While they concentrated on the "immorality" of Socialism, Wheatley pleaded that they should "oppose it as citizens, but don't seek to drag in the Church as a weapon in the contest"<sup>13</sup> while cunningly arguing that "the necessity of the time is for Catholics to join the Socialist Movement in large numbers and permeate it with a Catholic spirit."<sup>14</sup> The debate proceeded with no interference from the clergy until mid-September when Hardie in a speech at Saltcoats said that the I.L.P. must necessarily be a Socialist party. The Glasgow Observer was immediately up in arms, ridiculing Hardie's "vision of a day when the only two parties in the state shall be the Socialists and the anti-Socialists" as "extremely remote".<sup>15</sup> Denunciations from the pulpit followed: Father Galton fiercely attacked Socialism, saying,

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 16 June, 1906.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 23 July, 1906.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 30 June, 1906.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 22 September, 1906.

"The Church opposes Socialism because Socialism is morally wrong."<sup>16</sup> But some priests disagreed, seeing through the problem of terminology and clearly distinguishing the British version from the earlier, more drastic, European Socialism. One such priest was a Father David who claimed that Catholics were quite free to join the I.L.P. and expressed his pleasure at the fact that there were Catholics among the recently elected Labour M.P.s.<sup>17</sup>

In April the idea of a Catholic Socialist League had been put forward,<sup>18</sup> but Wheatley had rejected it. By October he had changed his mind and was "prepared to join in convening a meeting of those willing to join such a body".<sup>19</sup> The result was that "four men, strangers to each other, met for the first time over a cup of black coffee in a Glasgow restaurant; and after much comparing of notes, it was resolved that a Catholic Socialist Society be formed."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 29 September, 1906.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 6 October, 1906.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 7 April, 1906.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 13 October, 1906.

<sup>20</sup>Forward, 27 February, 1909, quoting an article by William Regan which had appeared in Christian Socialist in Chicago.

In a letter to the Glasgow Observer Wheatley invited "all Catholics interested in the Socialist movement, for or against, to attend a meeting in the Albion Halls, in Glasgow, on Sunday 28 October."<sup>21</sup> Wheatley chaired this founding meeting, stressing that "In this organisation they would have Socialism preached in an atmosphere free from any irreligious taint."<sup>22</sup> At the next meeting the Society's constitution and rules were adopted, and its office bearers elected. With Wheatley as President, with six vice-Presidents, with Stephen Pullman as financial secretary, with William Regan as corresponding secretary, with Richard Malone as treasurer,<sup>23</sup> and with a programme of winter lectures, by opponents as well as supporters of socialism, and of summer rambles to outlying districts of Glasgow, the CSS set out to popularise Socialism among

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<sup>21</sup>Glasgow Observer, 27 October, 1906. I can find no evidence to support Mr. Middlemas's account of the C.S.S.: "In the summer of 1906 [Wheatley] placed an advertisement in the Glasgow papers and as a result four men met to found the Catholic Socialist Society - John and Patrick Wheatley, William Regan, and Stephen Pullman. With Regan as secretary, the society grew into a small nucleus of some fifteen members who met regularly in the Wheatley house in Shettleston." Robert Keith Middlemas, The Clydesiders: A Left Wing Struggle for Parliamentary Power (London: Hutchinson, 1965), pp. 36-7.

<sup>22</sup>Glasgow Observer, 3 November, 1906.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 10 November, 1906.

the Catholics of Glasgow.<sup>24</sup>

It was a tiny organisation of less than fifty members<sup>25</sup> and with the limited aim of weaning the Catholics away from Liberalism. This it hoped to do quietly and unobtrusively, in a manner not unlike the Fabian Society: indeed when introducing William Ward, the President of the Glasgow Fabian Society, at one of the C.S.S.'s early meetings Wheatley praised their policy of permeation as "one of the greatest effectiveness" and claimed that the C.S.S. "might be described as doing the same work among the Catholic community as the Fabians were accomplishing among the middle classes."<sup>26</sup> It refused to have any truck with agnostics or with the extreme Socialist views of the S.D.F. and S.L.P., and stuck rigidly to the more moderate views of the I.L.P.

Immediate opposition to the C.S.S. came from the Catholic Truth Society and from the Jesuit Father Ashton. Ashton's opposition was moderate and reasoned, though based on the anti-clericalism of the late nineteenth century

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<sup>24</sup>It should perhaps be stressed that at this time the terms "Irish" and "Catholic" were virtually synonymous in Glasgow.

<sup>25</sup>Glasgow Observer, 3 and 10 November, 1906. Sixteen people attended the founding meeting and another thirty joined the following week.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 22 December, 1906.

European Socialism. He further distinguished between Socialism and Social reform. Catholic Socialism, he claimed, was an unworkable hybrid; "de facto it is irreligious and, in particular, anti-Christian and anti-Catholic in its tendencies."<sup>27</sup> But he would not answer Wheatley's question - "what single item of the Socialist programme could a Catholic, with loyalty to the Church, not support?"<sup>28</sup> This was a question to which Wheatley continually returned, stating bluntly that "much as I believe in Socialism, did I consider it contrary to my religion or did the Church condemn it, I would abandon it."<sup>29</sup> Opposition of this type continued for several years, but it did not deflect the C.S.S. from its task. It plodded on doggedly although individual priests might still have a firm hold on their congregations and the Glasgow Observer could still dictate the actions of the bulk of the enfranchised Catholics. The C.S.S. saw itself as part of the cultural reawakening of Glasgow, exemplified by the Orpheus Choir, and to this end organised musical and literary evenings to supplement its propaganda

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 15 December, 1906.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 12 January, 1907.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 2 March, 1907.



work.

Its initial record of success was, however, uninspiring. The first annual gathering in Glasgow's Abbotsford Restaurant in March 1907 attracted only about 100 people, and this included the wives and children of members as well as people like Tom Johnston and Martin Haddow who were not closely associated with the C.S.S.<sup>30</sup> A branch was opened in Motherwell in October 1907<sup>31</sup>, and in March 1908 Wheatley announced that enquiries had been received from Catholics in Manchester and Liverpool, who were on the point of founding branches.<sup>32</sup> But in March 1908 an attempt to establish a branch at Hamilton came to grief,<sup>33</sup> and in September it was alleged that the Motherwell branch had only a handful of members while the paper membership of the Glasgow branch was only 94.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 9 March, 1907.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 28 September, 1907.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 4 April, 1908.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 28 March and 4 April, 1908.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 5 September, 1908. J. Harkin of Wishaw denied that the Motherwell branch had only a few members, claiming that it had fifty to sixty members, but no denial was ever made of the low membership of the Glasgow branch. Ibid., 12 September, 1908.

Wheatley's opportunity to reach a much wider audience seemed to come in the autumn of 1907 when he and a retired Jesuit, Father Puissant, joined in what promised to be a public debate on Socialism in the columns of the Glasgow Observer. This followed a particularly virulent personal attack on Wheatley by Puissant.<sup>35</sup> But though the debate ran from August until the end of November, it never really got off the ground. It made the Glasgow Observer one of the most widely read papers in the West of Scotland, and Forward and the Dundee Catholic Herald reprinted extracts of the debate; but there was no real debate. Puissant relied on Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical for the rejection of Catholic Socialism, and held forth on the sanctity of private property, but he was unable to reply to any of the points Wheatley raised because he had written his first four contributions before going off for a month's holiday in Belgium, and consequently they were lectures rather than contributions to debate.<sup>36</sup> Even when Puissant returned from holiday there was little real debate, and as late as 23 November Wheatley could complain that Puissant had "carefully refrained... from dealing with the case put forward for our society."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 13 July, 1907.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 7 November, 1907.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 23 November, 1907.

Talk of "a public debate on a high plane of dialectic"<sup>38</sup> is therefore an exaggeration. Despite Wheatley's attempts to narrow the field of discussion to practical, local matters, he could not draw his opponent who could not, and would not, tackle him on these grounds. Wheatley got considerable publicity from the debate, but his hopes of increasing his followers by demolishing arguments against Socialism were not realised.

The problem of terminology remained crucial. Had Wheatley called himself, and his society, anything other than "Socialist" much of the controversy would never have arisen. The failure to distinguish between the British and European models of Socialism caused the main problems. Indeed although the Catholic press took every opportunity to attack Socialism as it saw it, the C.S.S. was in fact attacked only because of its name. Behind this facade the Glasgow Observer, described by Puissant as "a Catholic organ of authoritative Catholic organisers of politics,"<sup>39</sup> actually agreed with most of the C.S.S.'s, and consequently the I.L.P.'s, policies. It has been said

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<sup>38</sup> Middlemas, The Clydesiders, p.38.

<sup>39</sup> Glasgow Observer, 13 July, 1907.

that in July 1907 Wheatley challenged his opponents "in the most blatant way possible",<sup>40</sup> by writing a letter to the Glasgow Observer requesting all Catholics to support the candidature of the I.L.P.er John Stewart at the forthcoming Blackfriars municipal election. In fact the Glasgow Observer's view of the election was spelled out in an editorial on the same day that Wheatley's letter appeared:

We think the Irish vote should go to Mr. Stewart.... The Irish electors of the [Blackfriars] Ward are, for much the greater part, wage-earning people. We have always held the view that in Municipal elections, where their devotion to the Catholic cause or the cause of Ireland leaves them a free hand - as in the present case - the Irish electors... ought to vote Labour.<sup>41</sup>

Again in October 1908, the paper urged Catholics to vote labour in the local elections, stating that, "As a general rule we have advised our people always to vote Labour".<sup>42</sup> It was therefore Ireland rather than I.L.P. policies which formed the stumbling block at Parliamentary elections. And despite its seeming hostility to the C.S.S.,

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<sup>40</sup>Middlemas, The Clydesiders, p.38.

<sup>41</sup>Glasgow Observer, 6 July, 1907.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 31 October, 1908.

the Glasgow Observer urged that it be tolerated. This was not an attitude which developed as the controversy raged from 1906 till 1909. It was, in fact, evident as early as December 1906, when the paper's editorial read:

Catholics can well afford either to join this Society or to extend to it a tolerant indulgence, for, apart from its unwarrantable name, it has excellent objects, and is capable of great good work.<sup>43</sup>

It denied, of course, that the Catholic Socialists were "Socialists": "there is no real Socialism among them in the sense which the Church reprehends."<sup>44</sup> But because of ignorance and prejudice the C.S.S. members were regarded as outcasts by most Catholics.

Wheatley brought matters to a head in December 1908 when he spelled out the aims of the C.S.S. and asked which of them could a Catholic oppose on religious grounds. Their guiding principle was the gradual substitution of public ownership for private in the production and distribution of goods, with compensation being paid when private property was taken over. If agreement could not be reached the public would set up in business and compete with the private firm. As a preliminary, of course, the workers would have to,

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 1 December, 1906.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 20 July, 1906.

democratically, gain control of Parliament.<sup>45</sup> The Glasgow Observer triumphantly announced that this proved "conclusively" their statement that the Catholic Socialists "are not Socialists at all, that they are only partly Socialists or Social Reformers." Of the C.S.S.'s aims it declared:

If that is Catholic Socialism, then to our mind, it is (at least) morally innocuous. And whatever may be said from the political and economic standpoint, such advocacy does not seem to us to be in itself immoral or un-Catholic.<sup>46</sup>

This marked one stage in the ending of the dispute. What eventually terminated it was the public debate between Wheatley and Hilaire Belloc, a debate which marked the climax of Wheatley's struggle to make the C.S.S. respectable in the eyes of the Catholic Church. The debate "Should Catholics Support Socialism?" was held in Glasgow's Pavilion Theatre on 21 November, 1909. Forward, however, considered it to be a debacle rather than a debate as Belloc made "a very poor show indeed".<sup>47</sup> Partly this was because Wheatley confined himself to the economics of socialism and to social problems rather than considering the moral and

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 12 December, 1908.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 12 December, 1908.

<sup>47</sup>Forward, 28 November, 1909.

religious points raised in the title of the debate. He drew a heartrending picture of the social conditions of the working-class:

inhabitants of cesspools, of poorhouses and slums, filthy in body, foul in speech and vile in spirit, but our own manufacture, for every member of this class was once an innocent child.<sup>48</sup>

Society must, he argued, either justify or abolish poverty. He denounced landlordism, claiming that the £100 million the landlords received each year would be sufficient to provide old age pensions of £3. per week. Belloc could hardly disagree with Wheatley's denunciation of existing social conditions, indeed he agreed that change was required, but he was unable to draw Wheatley or his jubilant supporters away from social problems and back to the question of Catholicism and Socialism. Forward for one regarded the episode as a triumph for Wheatley, and to have taken on such an experienced opponent and to have virtually dictated the proceedings was indeed something of a triumph.

This debate and the earlier publication, in May 1909, of Wheatley's pamphlet The Catholic Workingman ended the struggle for respectability. In this pamphlet he could quote

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<sup>48</sup>Glasgow Herald, 22 November, 1909.

Archbishop McGuire of Glasgow, "the workingmen will rule the world",<sup>49</sup> and Cardinal Manning on the demoralisation of poverty, "Society has made them what they are."<sup>50</sup> But this was a pamphlet aimed at purely political ends: it was an appeal to the Catholics to support the Labour Party.

Wheatley realised that the main obstacle was Irish Home Rule, and stated that only the Labour Party would give Ireland freedom.<sup>51</sup> He justified his own belief in socialism by quoting the Glasgow Observer's statement that Catholic Socialism was "morally innocuous" and its advocacy neither "immoral or un-Catholic",<sup>52</sup> but he claimed that the Church had made a fundamental error in claiming to control political and economic thought. Socialism would assist the Church by curing the poverty which bred vice and hopelessness, but the Church had to give socialism a free hand.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> John Wheatley, The Catholic Workingman (Glasgow: Catholic Socialist Society, 1909), p.1.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.27.



But although the struggle for respectability was effectively over prejudices were slow to die and local passions were still easily roused. In early 1911 there was an attempt by some Catholics to found a new and independent Co-operative Society in Shettleston because the existing one had spent members' money on printing bills and displaying them on its shops, supporting Wheatley in the 1910 Lanarkshire County Council election.<sup>54</sup> Much more dramatic and dangerous were the events of July 1912 when a mob marched on the Wheatley home in Shettleston.<sup>55</sup>

Father O'Brien, an aggressive, outspoken, implacable anti-Socialist, had the combined mission of St. Paul's, Shettleston, and St. Marks, Camtyne, and had, without naming him, been denouncing Wheatley from the pulpit as a "liar", "scoundrel", "traitor", "bribe-taker", "hypocrite", and "hired slanderer". Finally, on 29 June Wheatley defended himself in Forward: in a mild and conciliatory article he made no attempt to attack O'Brien, but merely showed that he was a sincere socialist who had made no profit

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<sup>54</sup>Forward., 18 February, 1911.

<sup>55</sup>Most accounts of this episode are unfortunately misleading, e.g. William Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde (London: Laurence & Wishart, 1936) pp. 22-3, McGovern, Neither Fear Nor Favour, p.40; Middlemas, The Clydesiders, pp.37-8, implies that it occurred in 1906 or early 1907. This account is based on Forward, 6 July, 1912.

from his pamphlets and lectures. This sparked off a weekend of violence in Shettleston. O'Brien openly paraded as the injured party while a number of girls physically attacked one Fleming, a socialist member of the local School Board, and tore down Forward posters. At St. Paul's on Sunday Father Morrissey, one of the curates, praised the girls' action and at an afternoon meeting it was decided that a deputation of twelve men and twelve women should speak out against Wheatley at an I.L.P. meeting at Shettleston Cross on the Monday evening. The I.L.P. meeting had actually been cancelled, but the mob paraded Shettleston's Main Street, broke up a small I.L.P. group, again attacked the unfortunate Fleming who happened to be there, breaking his nose, and then marched on Wheatley's house.

Wheatley and his wife returned from a country walk to find a howling mob in front of the house. Inside were the two Wheatley children and some friends, the McAleers, who had rushed there on hearing of the mob's plans.

Together Wheatley and McAleer faced the crowd from the doorstep for over an hour. Clearly the bulk of the crowd had been attracted by curiosity, but there was a group of thirty or forty girls who provided the excitement. They burned an effigy of Wheatley in his garden, while varying insults with the hymn, "Faith of our fathers, holy faith,

we will be true to thee till death." The following Sunday Wheatley was in his usual place in St. Paul's.

How effective was the C.S.S. in its avowed task of promoting socialism among the Catholics? Were The Catholic Workman and the short-lived quarterly which followed it, the Catholic Socialist, "a real force in the steady swing of the Irish vote from Liberal to Labour."<sup>56</sup> Indeed, was there such a swing? Wheatley certainly claimed success. He wrote that from the date of his debate with Belloc, "the clergy ceased to dispute our position publicly.... and the influence of our Society has steadily spread."<sup>57</sup> He also claimed that:

In several districts, particularly in mining centres, the majority of the numbers of the I.L.P. are Catholics who have joined the movement recently. Competent observers declare that in the West of Scotland at least Socialist views are gaining more adherents proportionately among Catholics than among any other section of the community.<sup>58</sup>

Unfortunately it is impossible to find conclusive evidence either for or against these claims. I.L.P. membership

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<sup>56</sup> Middlemas, The Clydesiders, p.39.

<sup>57</sup> John Wheatley, "The Catholic Socialist Movement in Britain," Socialist Review, vol. 9, No. 50, April 1912, p.143.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.144.

figures cannot be broken down by religion. All that is possible is to look at the Irish vote and consider how it was cast.

Of course, only some of the Irish had the vote.

At a time when only 59 per cent of the adult male population were enfranchised, and when the vote was still a privilege earned by a man's respectability and proven value to the community rather than a democratic right,<sup>59</sup> the Irish Catholics, being among the poorest people in the land, could not really expect to be politically significant. But though in Partick, South Lanark, and Govan the Irish vote was negligible, in places like Blackfriars, Mid-Lanark, North-East Lanark, and Bridgeton it was large enough to be important.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup>See Neal Blewett, "The Franchise in the United Kingdom, 1885-1918", Past and Present, December, 1965.

<sup>60</sup>The Irish vote in Glasgow and Lanarkshire constituencies in 1910 has been estimated as follows:-

Constituency	Number of Irish voters (to nearest hundred)	Irish vote as percentage of total
Blackfriars	1,100	12.97
Bridgeton	1,100	10.94
College	1,300	9.15
Tradeston	800	8.28
Camlachie	700	7.25
St. Rollox	1,400	7.05
Central	900	6.90
Mid-Lanark	2,000	11.23
North-East Lanark	2,000	11.00

In October 1909 at Barrow-in-Furness, Redmond and Michael Davitt urged the Irish to vote Labour at every opportunity,<sup>61</sup> but in January 1910 Dollan was writing furiously in Forward that the Irish Party had done "its very utmost to wreck the chances of the Labour Party... hosts of Irish and Catholic workers... actually [voted] against the Labour nominee in all cases except Blackfriars and Dundee."<sup>62</sup> In Dundee Wilkie was running with Churchill, and in Blackfriars Barnes was not opposed by the Liberals. As the Scotsman said of this general election:

Mr. Redmond, Mr. Dillon, and other Irish members have again and again proclaimed their love for and faith in the Labour Party. But in Scotland not a single member of that party who is opposing a Liberal is to receive the Irish vote! .... In Lanarkshire there has actually been some grumbling among the Irishmen because their leaders have preferred the Liberal to the Labour candidates, and in the North-West Division the local branch of the [United Irish] League has passed a resolution threatening that anyone who fails to obey instructions will be "expelled from the Irish movement."<sup>63</sup>

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<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Number of Irish voters (to nearest hundred)</u>	<u>Irish vote as percentage of total</u>
North-West Lanark	2,000	9.85
South Lanark	500	4.71
Govan	800	4.45
Partick	700	3.00

Scotsman 18 January, 1910, gives the number of Irish voters in each constituency; percentages are my calculations.

<sup>61</sup>Forward, 3 December, 1909.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 29 January, 1910.

<sup>63</sup>Scotsman, 18 January, 1910.

A real step towards a Labour-Irish alliance was made in Glasgow following the assistance given to an Irish publican, MacGuire, who was contesting the Calton Ward in the municipal elections of November 1911, by some Labour members of the Corporation.<sup>64</sup> This initiated a debate on the relations between the I.L.P. and the Irish publican,<sup>65</sup> and although the Glasgow I.L.P. Federation had to retreat from any such alliance<sup>66</sup> the Trades Council and the Glasgow Corporation Labour members did manage to reach agreement with the Home Government branch of the U.I.L.<sup>67</sup> This however did not prevent Wheatley being "bitterly opposed by the Official Irish Party"<sup>68</sup> when he was elected to Glasgow Corporation in November 1912.

Clearly, therefore, no conclusive case can be made for or against the claim that the Irish vote was steadily

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<sup>64</sup>Forward, 4 November, 1911.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 11 and 25 November, 16 December, 1911.

<sup>66</sup>The Glasgow I.L.P. Federation's Constitution prevented it from giving official electoral support to people who had not been I.L.P. members for at least twelve months prior to nomination. See Dollan's letter in Forward, 16 December, 1911.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 27 January and 10 February, 1912; Glasgow Observer, 3 February, 1912.

<sup>68</sup>Forward, 19 November, 1912.

swinging to the Labour Party. One can see with hindsight that the repressive reaction of the Asquith Government to the Easter Rising of 1916 was crucial in that it effectively released the Irish vote from the Liberals' grasp, but it is impossible to assess how far along the road to Socialism the Irish had in fact gone before that time. Clearly, at Parliamentary elections they voted Liberal, but at local elections they had much more freedom of choice. The fact that some form of Labour-Irish agreement was reached in early 1912 indicates that some swing was taking place at a local election, but one cannot really claim that it was very much. The C.S.S.'s role cannot be confidently assessed either. Many factors influence political opinion and the C.S.S. was but one propaganda group. But it was the first socialist organisation for Catholics and, unless it preached only to the converted, it must have had some effect.

The C.S.S. continued with its cultural and propaganda work, and Wheatley remained its leader until March 1917 when, because of the pressure of other political work, he handed over the reins to William Regan. Perhaps the most remarkable result of Wheatley's struggle with the Church was that he managed to remain a loyal Catholic - Dollan, for one, argued himself out of the Church and only returned to it

in the 1940s. Now Wheatley was recognised as a courageous advocate of labour's cause. He had faced up to the problems and had come through unscathed, convinced of the righteousness of his cause and dedicated to it.

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Wheatley joined the Shettleston branch of the I.L.P. in 1907, at the age of 38.<sup>69</sup> From that date he steadily became an active and influential figure in the West of Scotland, specialising in local government problems, especially housing and public health, although in his first electoral contest, in the Southern Division of Shettleston in 1907, he was heavily defeated by the Independent candidate, Walter J. Grant.

His brief association with the Camtyne Amateur Dramatic Club,<sup>70</sup> a Catholic organisation, led him to use the idea of drama for propaganda: he organised a travelling theatre of propagandists which toured the West of Scotland during the summer months and presented propaganda playlets.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Mr. Middlemas asserts that John and Patrick Wheatley and Dollan founded this branch: Middlemas, The Clydesiders, p.46. This is incorrect: it was founded in June 1905 by one Thomas Simpson. Glasgow Eastern Standard, 12 June, 1926.

<sup>70</sup>See Glasgow Observer, 25 August, 5 September, 6 and 20 October, 24 November, 1906, and 9 February, 1907.

<sup>71</sup>Lord Wheatley, interviewed 12 February, 1969.



He also tried his hand at pamphleteering, his first pamphlet, How the Miners were Robbed, being based on the courtroom scenes usually enacted by his travelling theatre and centred on the cross-examination of a Duke on trial for defrauding the simple miner "Dick McGonnagh."<sup>72</sup> More important, however, was his work in training other propagandists. At his Shettleston home, known as "Wheatley's training college", "he used to assemble potential agitators and coach them in collectivist policy and propaganda",<sup>73</sup> and in this way he turned out "at least a score of propagandists and let them loose in the Lanarkshire villages."<sup>74</sup> Dollan was singled out for special treatment and was persuaded by Wheatley to join the staff of Forward as a journalist.<sup>75</sup> Wheatley himself was not a particularly good speaker, especially in the open-air where he was "halting and awkward":

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<sup>72</sup> John Wheatley, How the Miners Were Robbed (Glasgow: Reformers' Bookstall, 1908).

<sup>73</sup> Dollan, "Memories of 50 Years Ago", The Mercat Cross Vol. 6, No. 6, December 1953, p.169.

<sup>74</sup> Forward, 24 May, 1930.

<sup>75</sup> Dollan, "Memories of 50 Years Ago", The Mercat Cross, Vol. 6, No. 6, December 1953, pp. 169-70.

He was intensely serious and lacking in humour when mounted on the orange box. He had physical defects - a thin voice and weak throat. More than once he had to give up, and when this occurred a member of the younger brigade deputised.<sup>76</sup>

He was particularly keen on the circulation of literature: little was sold, it was mostly given away with Wheatley and his friends bearing the cost. "His Saturday afternoons were spent organising literature brigades to go round the houses.... It was hefty but enjoyable work."<sup>77</sup>

Gradually he gathered round him a group of close colleagues. In 1908 or 1909 he met David Kirkwood for the first time,<sup>78</sup> and gradually under Wheatley's influence Kirkwood drifted away from the S.L.P. to become one of Wheatley's most respectful confidants - he finally joined the I.L.P. in 1914. The S.L.P. resented what Tom Bell later described as Wheatley's "policy of systematic poaching among the active men of the S.L.P.," and they were particularly annoyed at the defection of Kirkwood.<sup>79</sup> By 1910 James Maxton had become particularly close to

<sup>76</sup> Forward, 24 May, 1930.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 24 May, 1930.

<sup>78</sup> David Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt (London: Harrap, 1935,) p.83.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Bell, Pioneering Days (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1941), pp. 98-9.

Wheatley, and together they made a powerful if strange-looking combination. Wheatley was rotund, Pickwickian, with bottle-bottom spectacles; he looked eminently respectable. Maxton was almost emaciated, with satyrine features and that famous long black hair; he looked every inch a revolutionary. Everyone liked Maxton; even his bitterest political opponent liked him. But many were suspicious of Wheatley: with the exception of those close to him, he was respected rather than loved by his colleagues and feared rather than respected by his foes. Wheatley provided the ideas and the organising ability, while Maxton possessed the oratorical powers that were to make him one of the most popular speakers in Britain. As the old Glasgow adage puts it: "Wheatley made the cannon balls; Maxton fired them."

Also in the group which met regularly in Kate Granston's tea-rooms in Glasgow were Tom Johnston, William Gallacher, and Emanuel Shinwell. Johnston was the widely respected editor of Forward. He managed to combine a somewhat shy and retiring personality with an independent mind, and was milder and wittier in his outlook than the rest. Gallacher, a confirmed Marxist, remained on intimate terms with Wheatley, but never accepted his domination: he went his own way on every issue. Shinwell,

who had a particularly sharp political mind, worked with Wheatley but disliked him. He felt that Wheatley was too conservative,<sup>80</sup> and he jibbed at his hegemony, but he was unable to do anything about it. A trade union leader, an aggressive propagandist and debater, Shinwell added much to the colour of the group but little to its cohesion.

The Labour Party made no headway in the Glasgow area at the 1910 General Elections, but in the local elections of that year Labour had a net gain of fifty-three seats in Scotland, and one of these was in Shettleston where Wheatley captured the seat from Grant by the narrow margin of 760 votes to 758. Wheatley exploited a suggestion of corruption on the part of Grant<sup>81</sup> and, although some of the Catholic clergy worked behind the scenes for Grant,<sup>82</sup> managed to scrape in. For the next two years, before the incorporation of Shettleston in Glasgow, Wheatley devoted much time to the humdrum work of Lanarkshire County Council. He stood alone:

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<sup>80</sup> Later, in the 1920s, he was to criticise Wheatley for being too extreme.

<sup>81</sup> McGovern, Neither Fear Nor Favour, pp. 32-3; Forward, 17 December, 1910.

<sup>82</sup> McGovern, Neither Fear Nor Favour, p.33.

During my first few months on the County Council I found my colleagues suspicious, critical, and usually hostile to everything I proposed. I was a Socialist and they hated Socialism, or something which they believed Socialism to be.<sup>83</sup>

His concentration on public health won the respect of some of them. When on his suggestion the domestic water tanks in the Shettleston and Tollcross areas were inspected it was discovered that many were without covers, that some had not been cleaned for ten years, some not for twenty years, and in a number of tanks the decomposing remains of birds, mice and rats were found. His subsequent proposal for annual inspections met with no opposition.<sup>84</sup> He was one of the two County Council representatives at a London conference called by the National Association for the Prevention of Consumption in July 1911, and took the opportunity to condemn single apartment, back-to-back houses. But although this Conference adopted his proposals against such houses,<sup>85</sup> he was unable to persuade his County Council to declare them uninhabitable.<sup>86</sup> He received considerable sympathy

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<sup>83</sup>John Wheatley, My Work on the County Council (A cyclostyled booklet which was distributed during the Municipal elections of 1912), p.1.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., pp. 1-2.

<sup>85</sup>The Times, 22 July, 1911; Forward 29 July, 1911.

<sup>86</sup>Forward, 23 December, 1911.

from his Council opponents for his obviously genuine interest in public health, but he was still regarded by them as a shrewd and dangerous Socialist.

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The four years before the war were important for the Labour movement in Glasgow. They saw the development of a centralised Glasgow Labour Party with an aggressive municipal policy, instead of a loosely connected group of independent organisations. But the new central organisation did not appear overnight. It took almost two years of negotiations between the various organisations before it was founded, and it took another fifteen months before its programme was settled.

The first moves came in 1910 when on the initiative of the Workers' Election Committee a series of conferences was held "to consider [the] question of joint action [regarding] Labour Representation on all Local Public Authorities,"<sup>87</sup> and at the conference of 20 May 1910 a joint committee was formed to draw up a constitution and programme.<sup>88</sup> But the Workers' Election Committee had gone

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<sup>87</sup>Glasgow Trades Council, Minutes, 2 and 9 March, 1910.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 25 May, 1910. Conferences were held on 11 March, 18 and 22 April, 20 May, and 3 September, 1910.

too fast: it clearly hoped that any new organisation would be based on itself, and in this it reckoned without the obsession of other bodies with their own independence and importance. The Glasgow Trades Council, for one, was convinced that "nothing definite had resulted"<sup>89</sup> from these conferences and when the joint committee called on "all organisations sympathetic to Labour administration to affiliate to the Workers' Election Committee,"<sup>90</sup> the Trades Council instructed its representatives to vote against such a resolution.<sup>91</sup> Nothing came of these proposals, but when they broke down the I.L.P. took the lead in reviving a move to co-ordinate Labour's policies on Parliamentary representation in the Glasgow area. A conference of 250 delegates had taken place on 3 May, 1910, but no decision had been reached,<sup>92</sup> and it was not until January 1911 that any further move took place. Then the Glasgow I.L.P. asked the Trades Council to appoint three delegates to confer with three from the I.L.P. to "draft a provisional constitution

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 24 August, 1910.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 31 August, 1910.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 31 August, 1910.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 4 May, 1911.

for a Central Committee to control the Election policy of the workers of the City."<sup>93</sup> Soon the other organisations were involved - the Women's Labour League, the Fabian Society, the S.D.F., the Co-operative Defence Association, the Registration Committee, and the Govan, Partick, Hutchesontown, Central, and Camlachie Labour Representation Committees. On 18 May it was decided to form a Central Labour Party and a committee was formed to draw up a constitution.<sup>94</sup> The new Party's constitution was accepted by the constituent organisations in December 1911 - though the S.D.F. had withdrawn - with the important exception of finance.<sup>95</sup> Throughout the summer and autumn it had become apparent that few of the organisations could meet any more financial obligations, and it was eventually decided to accept the Trades Council proposal that the financial basis of the new Party be voluntary.<sup>96</sup> Finally, on 21 March, 1912, the Glasgow Central Labour Party was inaugurated at a Conference at the Reformers' Bookstall

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 25 January, 1911.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 18 and 24 May, 1911.

<sup>95</sup>Glasgow Central Labour Party, Minutes 21 December, 1911.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 23 February, 1912; Glasgow Trades Council, Minutes, 30 August, 1911.



in Bothwell Street.<sup>97</sup>

Still without a programme, the new party faced the 1912 municipal elections, the first after the 1912 reorganisation which added 226,335 to Glasgow's population.<sup>98</sup> But though these elections were the first to be fought on a Socialist versus Anti-Socialist basis, and although the Labour Group on the Corporation had been aggressive and outspoken in the months before the elections,<sup>99</sup> Labour was split on policies, especially housing. Wheatley managed to skirt round this problem during his campaign, claiming that as a Councillor he "would have to deal with things as he found them,"<sup>100</sup> and despite the opposition of the Glasgow Observer he comfortably topped the poll. Unfortunately the Labour Group on the new Council numbered only twelve.

The disagreement over policies was soon apparent. The Central Labour Party met on 12 December to formulate a programme for the Labour Group; and agreed to start

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<sup>97</sup> Glasgow Central Labour Party, Minutes, 21 March, 1912.

<sup>98</sup> Gunnison and Gilfillan, The City of Glasgow, p.44

<sup>99</sup> For example, there was a particularly disorderly Corporation meeting on 14 October, 1912. Glasgow Herald, 15 October, 1912.

<sup>100</sup> Forward, 26 October, 1912.

with housing. While James Stewart and Wheatley urged that the party oppose the Corporation's policy of buying up the back-lands tenements until adequate provision was made for those dispossessed by such a scheme George Hardie argued that the party be committed to buying up these properties, and the narrowness of the margin in favour of the Stewart-Wheatley approach, seven votes to four, revealed the split.<sup>101</sup> As Johnston wrote in Forward: "It is quite an open secret that all is not harmony and eye-to-eye agreement among the members of the Glasgow Town Council Labour Party."<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, the party managed to settle the other main points in its programme early in 1913. In February their policies on municipal income tax, liquor, rating and corporation works were agreed, in April their policies on municipal banking, laundries, milk, coal distribution and bread were settled,<sup>103</sup> and on 30 September they finally settled the vexed question of housing.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Glasgow Central Labour Party, Minutes, 12 December, 1912.

<sup>102</sup> Forward, 14 December, 1912.

<sup>103</sup> Glasgow Central Labour Party, Minutes, February-April, 1913.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 30 September, 1913.

The policy on which they finally settled was essentially that of James Stewart, who urged the construction of cottages instead of tenements. In April he had, at a six-hour meeting, urged the Corporation to build at Riddrie cottages to be rented at £15-15/- and £18 per year, but had been heavily defeated.<sup>105</sup> Wheatley adapted this policy and, having secured its acceptance by the Central Labour Party, explained it at length in his pamphlet, Eight Pound Cottages for Glasgow Citizens.<sup>106</sup> He argued that bad housing was an important factor in Glasgow's high infant mortality and death rates,<sup>107</sup> but went on:

The number of wounded in the battle for life amidst evil surroundings probably exceeds by far the number of killed. Many of these live long enough to retaliate severely on society as criminals and defectives, whose conduct intensifies and multiplies the problems of modern City life.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, 1912-13, No. 12, pp 1119-26. According to Forward, the result, sixty-three votes to twenty-seven, was "received with cheers by the minority", who had not expected so much support. Forward, 12 April, 1913.

<sup>106</sup> Wheatley openly admitted that the ideas he expressed were in large measure the work of Stewart. Forward, 8 November, 1913.

<sup>107</sup> See above, p.9.

<sup>108</sup> Wheatley, Eight Pound Cottages for Glasgow Citizens, p.4.

The root cause of the housing problem was poverty:

poverty alone is universally associated with bad housing. Mere tinkering with the contributory causes, while ignoring the main one, is idle futility. The brimming river which is bearing the people to destruction will continue to carry them on its deadly course even though here and there you may dam a rivulet.<sup>109</sup>

His proposals were fully worked out in terms of size of rooms, height of ceilings, dimensions of garden space, and, more important, in terms of cost.<sup>110</sup>

Because of its success the Glasgow Tramway Department would by 1915 have completely paid off its debts and, even allowing for service extensions or reduction of fares, would be in a position to contribute annually to the Corporation's Common Good Fund "a sum variously estimated at between two and three hundred thousand pounds".<sup>111</sup> This sum should, he argued, be used to build houses, the money being repaid in annual instalments, but without interest, to the Common Good Fund.<sup>112</sup> He estimated that "about 1000" of these houses could be built in the first year of operation,

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p.5.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., pp. 8-9.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p.6.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p.7.

and "an increasing number" annually thereafter.<sup>113</sup>  
 The annual rental was to be £8 per house, and in some cases £7 per house.<sup>114</sup> At a time when the average rental of a house in Glasgow was £14-5-3 per annum,<sup>115</sup> this represented a considerable reduction.

Although in October 1913 the Corporation rejected by only one vote a proposal from the City Improvement Committee to build seven two-storey blocks of three-apartment cottages, and decided to build tenements instead,<sup>116</sup> it was clear that the Wheatley proposals would meet considerable opposition. Accordingly, a strenuous campaign was set in motion to secure popular support for them. The Labour Group, the Central Labour Party, and the Trades Council came together "to carry on an agitation in connection with Rent Rates and Housing".<sup>117</sup> In the City Chambers, Labour councillors created difficulties and scenes: indeed on 23 December, policemen

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p.9

<sup>115</sup> Cunnison and Gilfillan, The City of Glasgow, p.471.

<sup>116</sup> Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, 1912-13, No. 27, pp. 2764-7.

<sup>117</sup> Glasgow Trades Council, Minutes, 3 December, 1913.

had to be called in before John Stewart and John S. Taylor would leave the Chamber after being suspended.<sup>118</sup> On 21 January, 1914, the Trades Council's support for the scheme was secured.<sup>119</sup> And, also in January, a conference of sixty delegates from Labour organizations met in the I.L.P. Hall at Bridgeton to consider ways and means of furthering the scheme, which Wheatley claimed was "the most original and revolutionary proposal" put forward since he joined the Labour movement; he supported it whole-heartedly as an "immediate instalment of Socialism."<sup>120</sup>

Gradually the movement gained impetus and the demand for speakers to explain the proposals became so great that Wheatley and Stewart had to appeal for more volunteers to carry their propaganda throughout the city.<sup>121</sup> In May 1914 Wheatley caught the headlines when, in what Dollan described as "the best debating speech I have heard in the Council",<sup>122</sup> he demolished the Progressives' proposals

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<sup>118</sup> Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, 1913-14, No. 6, pp. 463-74; Glasgow Herald, 24 December, 1913.

<sup>119</sup> Glasgow Trades Council, Minutes, 21 January, 1914.

<sup>120</sup> Forward, 10 January, 1914.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 28 March, 1914.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 23 May, 1914.

to build forty-eight single apartment tenements in Calton. Such was the brilliance and vehemence of his attack that the scheme was remitted back to the Corporation Committee.<sup>123</sup> Everything seemed to be going well. Converts were being made throughout the city, and Wheatley was ridiculing the Progressives' own proposals. Wheatley and Stewart had high hopes of seeing their proposals accepted on a tide of popular demand. But then came a series of misfortunes and delays.

In late May the College Labour Representation Committee selected one George Smith as candidate for the forthcoming by-election in Woodside Ward,<sup>124</sup> and Smith was opposed to the Wheatley-Stewart scheme. In June when the Central Labour Party considered Smith's candidature there was a furious argument, as Wheatley had urged that acceptance of the housing policy be the test for all candidatures: "the only reasonable alternative" he argued, "is that the party drop this policy from its programme".<sup>125</sup> But the party agreed

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<sup>123</sup>The Progressives' plan was, however, accepted by the Corporation when it reappeared for discussion on 2 July, 1914.

<sup>124</sup>Glasgow Central Labour Party, Minutes, 29 May, 1914.

<sup>125</sup>Forward, 27 June, 1914.

by twelve votes to six to accept Smith as candidate. Wheatley regretted the decision: the most he could promise in the circumstances was that he would do nothing either for or against Smith's candidature.<sup>126</sup> It was clear that Wheatley could not yet control the new Central Labour Party.

When the proposals finally came up for debate in the Chamber on 4 June, following six months' agitation, the Progressives "left the meeting in droves with a view to having the meeting counted out in the absence of a quorum", despite appeals from the Lord Provost to stay and discuss "this most-important motion". Only the action of a Progressive, Bailie Barrie, prevented the meeting from being counted out: he got discussion of the motion delayed until the following week. Then, on the Provost's request, it was further delayed until August.<sup>127</sup> But in August the whole matter was "postponed owing to the war at the request of the Lord Provost".<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Glasgow Central Labour Party, Minutes, 12 June, 1914.

<sup>127</sup> Forward, 13 June, 1914.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 15 August, 1914.



## CHAPTER IV

### CLYDESIDE IN WARTIME

The sudden threat of war in July 1914 took the Labour movement by surprise and it was several weeks before Labour's attitudes towards the war were finally clarified. The P.L.P. quickly condemned war, and a huge anti-war rally was held in Trafalgar Square, but within weeks the P.L.P. and the trades unions had, like their European counterparts, been submerged in a wave of patriotism and pledged their support to the Government. The hopes of those on the Left who believed that internationalism might have some effect were rudely shattered. Ramsay MacDonald condemned the war and resigned his chairmanship of the P.L.P., and he was supported by the I.L.P. But the I.L.P. M.Ps. on the Labour Party Executive, after much hesitation, decided to support the war.

In Glasgow all the Labour organisations joined forces as over 5000 people gathered on Glasgow Green on 9 August to demand the cessation of hostilities, but they were by no means united in their opposition.

The Trades Council was split over whether or not to participate in this demonstration: it decided to do so by 57 votes to 53 and, after this vote had been challenged and a second one taken, by 46 votes to 35.<sup>1</sup> It was some time before John MacLean on the one hand and Tom Bell and Arthur McManus on the other won over their followers in the B.S.P. and the S.L.P. to complete opposition to the war. Of the Labour Group on Glasgow Corporation only Wheatley and John S. Taylor opposed the war from the start: it was not until the introduction of conscription in early 1916 that all the Labour councillors opposed the war.<sup>2</sup> The Glasgow I.L.P., however, refused to support the war on pacifist grounds.

The U.D.C., founded in September 1914, provided a focus for opposition to the war, but in Scotland it was never the same force as it was in England, and in Glasgow it hardly got off the ground. Ramsay MacDonald, Wheatley, Kirkwood and Johnston were among those who attended a meeting in Glasgow's Grand Hotel

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<sup>1</sup>Glasgow Trades Council, Minutes, 5 August, 1914. The opposition to participation was, surprisingly, led by Shinwell.

<sup>2</sup>Harry McShane, interviewed in Glasgow, 14 December, 1968.

to form a branch,<sup>3</sup> but little was heard of its later activities. In fact the Clydeside anti-war movement had a different character from that in England. As Brockway noted, the leading Scottish I.L.P ers

were speaking a different language from the English I.L.P ers. Whilst we were exposing the duplicity of the foreign policy which had led to the war and advocating a peace of no conquests and no indemnities, they were denouncing rent increases and profiteering and the speed-up and long hours of munition workers. We concentrated on peace. They concentrated on the class struggle.<sup>4</sup>

And this was not by accident but by design. At the 9 August meeting, while some were denouncing militarism MacDougall and Bell were denouncing Capitalism, and Wheatley was advocating the "nationalization of the food supply as the only real safeguard" that the poor would not suffer too much.<sup>5</sup> Similarly in October, Maxton advised that, "As far as possible, the Socialist Movement should refuse to be swallowed up in a war or peace propaganda, but continue to conduct the business of Socialist manufacturing as usual."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, p.87

<sup>4</sup>A. Fenner Brockway, Inside the Left (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1942), p.53.

<sup>5</sup>Forward, 15 August, 1914.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 24 October, 1914.

For the Labour Group on the City Council it was, at first anyway, a case of business as usual, as urged on by the Trades Council,<sup>7</sup> they again proposed their housing scheme. This time, on 17 December after a six-hour sitting, the Council decided to remit the motion to a Committee on Cottages for the Working Classes for consideration and report, though a motion by Dollan that Wheatley be added to this committee was narrowly defeated.<sup>8</sup> Again a massive propaganda campaign was waged and in January 1915 a massive housing conference was held: 450 delegates representing 207 organizations considered and supported the £8 cottages scheme.<sup>9</sup> Wheatley, assisted by his able C.S.S. lieutenant, William Regan, embarked on a series of lectures at the Panopticon Theatre, and the third of these, "The City under Socialism", is especially interesting. It was not only a propaganda exercise to win support for the housing scheme, it was also an expression of Wheatley's hopes for the future, and it further demonstrated that

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 22 August, 1914. The Trades Council felt that a housing programme would relieve unemployment.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 26 December, 1914.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 9 January, 1915.

at this stage in his life Wheatley's political aims were firmly centred in George Square rather than in Westminster.

The basis of Wheatley's new Glasgow would be "better homes for the people". The Corporation would have an improvement committee whose aim would be "the beautification of the city, and ... under this committee slum clearances, smoke abatement, and green spaces would combine in producing beauty." The building of better and cheaper houses on the outskirts of the city would attract people from the slums which would then be demolished and replaced by parks and gardens. Most of the rebuilding of the city would be done by the Corporation, and one industry after another would come under the municipality. Glasgow would, in effect, be a city state, trading with other towns, cities, and nations - "preference being given to other Socialist cities" - and having its own ships "sailing the seas with the city flag waving proudly". It would be a society "free of poverty, ignorance, or human parasites".<sup>10</sup>

This utopia of Municipal Socialism was clearly for the distant future, but the first step, the basis of the new Glasgow, could be quickly begun - the £8 cottage

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 6 February, 1915.

scheme was due to re-emerge from the Corporation Committee on Thursday 18 February.

Hopes were high as it was known that the Committee had recommended acceptance of the scheme.<sup>11</sup> But then came the bombshell as the Town Clerk, John Lindsey, ruled that the proposal to borrow free of interest from the Common Good Fund was, in this instance, illegal. In the summer of 1914, in an attempt to clarify this very point, Battersby had asked the Town Clerk, "Is it legal to lend money from the Common Good to any department of the Corporation without interest?" and had received an affirmative reply with the qualification, "So long as the community are getting the beneficial use of the money."<sup>12</sup> Now in February 1915 Lindsey judged that

it obviously cannot be held to be for the benefit of the community, as a whole, that a limited number of individuals should have the use of houses at rents far below the market rates, and deliberately fixed at such amounts as will... yield no return.<sup>13</sup>

Lord Provost Dunlop had no alternative but to rule the proposal out of order. Stormy scenes followed, but there was nothing the Labour men could do. They were furious but impotent.

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<sup>11</sup> Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, 1914-15, No. 10, p.810.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1914-15, No. 10, p.811.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 1914-15, No. 10, p.812.

With its most important policy in shreds the Corporation Labour Group was in no position to react as an upsurge of industrial unrest hit Clydeside and thrust the initiative into the hands of the shop stewards. In July 1914 the District Committee of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers had decided to apply for a wage increase of 2d per hour, and formal application was made in December. Daily workgate meetings led by Gallacher at Albion, Kirkwood at Beardmore's Parkhead Forge, and John Smith and James Messer at Weir's, while MacDougall held two or three each day at various factories, increased the workers' militancy. The employers managed to delay negotiations until February 1915, but faced with the threat of a strike on 20 January, decided, on 19 January, to offer an increase of one-farthing, to be followed by another half-penny three months later. At York on 12 February they offered an immediate increase of three farthings, an offer which the A.S.E. Executive wanted to accept, and a ballot on the offer was arranged, to be completed by 9 March.<sup>14</sup> But at this point a new event intervened and altered everything: Weir's of Cathcart engaged, at higher wage rates, a number of Americans. On 16 February work

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<sup>14</sup>W.R. Scott and J. Cunnison, The Industries of the Clyde Valley during the War (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1924), p.140.

stopped at Weir's. Albion and Parkhead Forge quickly followed suit, and within days some 5000 men, the cream of Clydeside skilled labour, were on unofficial strike,<sup>15</sup> led not by their trades unions but by a specially formed body of shop stewards, the Central Withdrawal of Labour Committee, the direct precursor of the Clyde Workers' Committee.

Gallacher, the Chairman, was a member of the B.S.P. and Messer, the Secretary, was an I.L.P. er, but the core of the leadership was provided by S.L.P. ers like McManus and John Muir.<sup>16</sup> Neither press attacks<sup>17</sup> nor pressure from the A.S.E. Executive<sup>18</sup> swayed the strikers, and the ballot on the employers' offer showed a ten to one preference for continuing the strike.<sup>19</sup> In the face of local and

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p.140; Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde, pp. 38-9; Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, pp. 88-9.

<sup>16</sup>Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde, p.58.

<sup>17</sup>The Times, 10 March, 1915, quoted the German Vorwärts that "the whole working class is uneasy and dissatisfied, there is ferment all over the country."

<sup>18</sup>The Times, 2 March, 1915.

<sup>19</sup>Scott and Cunnison, The Industries of the Clyde Valley during the War, p.141.



national unpopularity the shop stewards kept the strike going for seventeen days. After returning to work in early March, the workers, on a ballot vote, accepted the Government offer of arbitration and were finally, on 23 March, awarded an increase of one penny per hour with ten per cent. on piece rates.<sup>20</sup> The Central Withdrawal of Labour Committee then went out of existence, but things could never be the same again. The failure of the union officials to support the strikers gave impetus to the movement towards independent organisation on the workshop floor, and when industrial disputes arose in the future the men looked for leadership not to the unions but to the shop stewards.

The considerable local unpopularity incurred by the strikers, an unpopularity that affected all the Labour organisations in Glasgow, was, however, dissipated in the summer and autumn of 1915 by the great Glasgow rent strikes. The influx of thousands of new workers into the munitions factories had increased the pressure on housing and this gave the landlords an opportunity to increase rents. As early as September 1914 the Trades Council had protested against landlords' agents trying to "force" soldiers'

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.141.

wives into smaller houses,<sup>21</sup> and in March 1915 Wheatley tried to persuade the Corporation to petition Parliament to take steps to prevent the increase of working class rents during wartime. The Corporation would not go this far, but did agree to petition Parliament to make enquiry and take protective measures in the interests of tenants if unwarranted rent increases were discovered.<sup>22</sup> Andrew McBride, a close friend of Wheatley, organised a meeting of the Women's Housing Association in May 1915, and it was decided to call a rent strike. Trades Council support was secured,<sup>23</sup> and McBride, John MacLean and MacDougall began another campaign of workgate meetings. The Glasgow Labour Party Housing Committee organised a mass demonstration on Glasgow Green on Sunday 6th June, where Wheatley, Dollan, Taylor and Hamilton Brown, demanded Government intervention and threatened that if it were not forthcoming "self-protective measures" would have to be taken.<sup>24</sup> But initially it was mainly a women's

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<sup>21</sup>Glasgow Trades Council, Minutes, 16 September, 1914.

<sup>22</sup>Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow 1914-15, No. 11, p.940.

<sup>23</sup>Glasgow Trades Council, Minutes, 12 May, 1915.

<sup>24</sup>Glasgow Herald, 7 June, 1915.

revolt, and, led by Helen Crawford, Agnes Dollan, and a Mrs. Barber of Govan, women physically fought off the factors and rent collectors.

One example of the public feeling aroused by rent increases and the subsequent threatened evictions came in Shettleston where on Tuesday 8 June an eviction order was granted against the McHugh family in William Street.<sup>25</sup> Mr. McHugh was in the Irish Guards but lay wounded in Rouen Hospital; one son was home on leave recuperating from a wound; another son was in training at Gailles; there were five young children, two of whom were suffering from pneumonia; and rent arrears amounted to 18/9. On Wednesday 9 June in William Street, Wheatley addressed a crowd estimated at about 500 strong by the Glasgow Herald, but at between three and four thousand strong by Forward. The women in particular were "greatly and indignantly incensed", and Wheatley said that it was "pre-eminently a fight for poor women" and that "poor women should undertake it".<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, guards were placed on the house to ensure that no eviction could take place. The following

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<sup>25</sup> This paragraph is based on Forward, 12 and 19 June, 1915, and Glasgow Herald, 11 and 12 June, 1915.

<sup>26</sup> Forward, 19 June, 1915.

afternoon about 1000 people, mainly women and children, gathered outside the McHugh house, where a large Union Jack had been nailed over the tenement entrance, and set off to demonstrate outside the factor's house in Springboig. But in the evening another demonstration was not so well-mannered, as the crowd burned the factor's effigy outside his house and smashed his windows before enough police reinforcements arrived to herd the demonstrators back to Shettleston. Wheatley condemned the "misguided enthusiasm"<sup>27</sup> which had erupted while he had been in the City Chambers trying, in vain, to have all evictions of soldiers' dependents declared illegal.<sup>28</sup> The sole object of the agitation, he told an open-air meeting on Friday 11 June, was to prevent evictions not to wreck homes elsewhere. He had even sent a telegram to Lord Kitchener stating:

Numerous cases of absent soldiers' dependents here threatened with eviction for non-payment of rent; appeal for and await your suggestion of protective measures.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Glasgow Herald, 12 June, 1915.

<sup>28</sup>Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, 1914-15, No. 18, p.711.

<sup>29</sup>Glasgow Herald, 12 June, 1915; Forward 19 June, 1915.

This Shettleston case was but one of many throughout the city, and as the summer wore on the popular protest against evictions and increased rents intensified and spread.

A huge procession of 2000 women and children to the City Chambers on 7 October attracted massive publicity, and on 11 October representatives of the rent strikers met McKinnon Wood, the Secretary of State for Scotland, and explained their demands.<sup>30</sup> Eventually the Government set up a Commission of Enquiry to look into rent increases in the industrial areas of Scotland, but immediately the factors, by announcing further increases, made matters worse. The Glasgow Herald announced on 22 October that over 400 tenants in the Kinning Park area were on rent-strike, the number of rent-strikers in Patrick had increased, 1500 tenants in Rutherglen had signed a pledge not to pay increases or move home, and four Labour Councillors, Denny, Taylor, Kerr, and Smith, had also gone on rent-strike. By the end of October, Dollan estimated that 15,000 Glasgow tenants were on strike,<sup>31</sup> and by

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Kirkwood was probably referring to this telegram when he recalled that "John Wheatley and I sent a telegram to Lloyd George that unless the Government intervened to keep rents at pre-War level, the most important department in Parkhead would stop work" (i.e. the M-shop which made howitzers). Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, p.123.

<sup>30</sup> Labour Leader, 14 October, 1915.

<sup>31</sup> Forward, 30 October, 1915.

mid-November his estimate had increased to 20,000, by which time the rent-strike movement had spread not only to nearby Paisley but also to Aberdeen and Dundee.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, on 17 November, eighteen munitions workers were summoned for non-payment of rent. Immediately, work stopped at Fairfield's and Harland and Wolff's shipyards as some 10,000 workers marched in procession to the Small Debt Court. Faced with the threat of widespread strikes the cases were dropped,<sup>33</sup> and, within weeks, the Rent Restriction Act was passed, tying rents at pre-War levels. To the Glasgow strikers it seemed that this had been achieved by direct action, and no real move was made to dispel this impression.

For Wheatley the strike was important in another way, as it brought the non-militants into the fray. The real leaders of "Red Clydeside" were the men actually at work on the shop floor, men like Kirkwood, Gallacher, McManus, Messer, and Muir, backed by revolutionaries like John Maclean and James MacDougall. With the rent strike men like Wheatley, Maxton, the

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<sup>32</sup>Labour Leader, 11 November, 1915.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 25 November, 1915.

extremely moderate James Stewart, and even the elegant ex-liberal lawyer, Rosslyn Mitchell, were inextricably drawn into the broader struggle. They were never involved in the industrial unrest as the others were, but the anti-Government front gained a more moderate and respectable wing. Wheatley, Stewart, and Mitchell fought the property owners' policy in the City Chambers and offered to defend so many cases that at times the courts were completely blocked. Wheatley in particular was singled out as a popular leader, as is seen in the lines of a jingle which swept the city in 1915:

The landlords' rents we will not pay,  
No! We'll support John Wheatley!<sup>34</sup>

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By mid-1915 it was clear that the war would not be over quickly, and the pressures of war inexorably pushed the Government towards conscription and intervention in industry. In March 1915 the unions accepted the need for dilution. Arthur Henderson agreed to advise the Government on labour problems, and joined the Cabinet in

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<sup>34</sup> Lord Brockway, interviewed at the House of Lords, 14 April, 1970.

May. And in early July the Munitions of War Act was passed - with its leaving certificates, provision for dilution, and the total abolition of strikes.

Despite an immediate setback in the form of a successful, if illegal, strike by 20,000 Welsh miners, the authorities used their new powers. In July, a shop steward at Parkhead Forge, Marshall, was sentenced to three months' imprisonment for "slacking and causing others to slack"; but when the Beardmore workers threatened to strike he was released.<sup>35</sup> Immediately a shop stewards meeting was held and the Clyde Workers' Committee was formed with Gallacher as President, Messer as Secretary and Tom Clark as Treasurer, though Clark was soon succeeded by Kirkwood who acted as a channel of communication with Wheatley. The C.W.C., in its first manifesto, described the support given to the Munitions Act by union officials as "an act of treachery to the working classes",<sup>36</sup> but thought its avowed ultimate aim was industrial unionism its immediate aim was the limited and more practical one

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<sup>35</sup>Vanguard, November 1915; Gallacher, Revolt on The Clyde, p.67.

<sup>36</sup>G.D.H. Cole, Workshop Organisation (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1923), p.146.



of dealing with the infringement of traditional rights felt to be involved in the Government's measures.<sup>37</sup>

Yet when seventeen workers at Fairfield Shipyard were first fined £10 each for striking and then jailed for refusing to pay, the C.W.C. issued no call for sympathetic action. Possibly the personal antagonism between Gallacher and Kirkwood on the one hand and Maclean on the other influenced matters,<sup>38</sup> as it was Maclean who tried to raise Clydeside on this occasion; but whatever the reason, this was a surprising failure to react on the part of the C.W.C.<sup>39</sup>

Passions had been running high throughout 1915, maintained by the rent strikes and the sporadic industrial unrest, and these feelings were intensified as the need for some form of conscription became obvious

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<sup>37</sup>Worker, 29 January, 1916.

<sup>38</sup>Kirkwood reserved some harsh words for Maclean, his close colleague MacDougall, and their Russian friend, Peter Petroff. Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, pp. 114, 125.

<sup>39</sup>The Government was certainly worried about the threat of a general strike on Clydeside. A meeting of officials at the Scottish Office late on the evening of 15 November, 1915, sought some way out of the problem. They considered releasing the three men on indefinite bail so that they should not return to prison, but eventually decided to try to get the men's union to pay the fines. Ministry of Munitions, MUN 5/79/341/14 Papers on Strikes in Clyde Industries.

and the anti-Conscription movement arose. One by one Glasgow's indoor halls were closed to the Socialists. A meeting in the City Hall to be addressed by John Maclean, George Lansbury, and Sylvia Pankhurst was cancelled. The I.L.P. were refused the Metropole, the S.L.P. the Lyric, and the B.S.P. the Panopticon. A mass demonstration of 4000 outside the City Chambers against this policy was led by the I.L.P., the Labour Party and the Trades Council.<sup>40</sup> And on 22 December the Labour Group on the Council staged a demonstration of their own. They disregarded the ruling that they could not discuss a minute of the Sub-Committee on Halls refusing to let St. Andrew's Hall for an anti-conscription meeting to be addressed by Ramsay MacDonald and John Dillon,<sup>41</sup> and "One after another the Labour members rose and endeavoured to criticise the minute, and as each refused to desist when asked by the chairman, his suspension was moved."<sup>42</sup> In all, eleven Labour

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<sup>40</sup>Glasgow Herald, 13 December, 1915.

<sup>41</sup>Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, 1915-16, No. 5, p.402.

<sup>42</sup>Glasgow Herald, 24 December, 1915. According to Forward, 1 January, 1916, this scene was not planned beforehand, but this seems unlikely.

members were suspended in a one and a half hour's scene which almost became violent when Izett slapped Baillie Scott with his copy of the minutes and refused for some time to leave the Chamber.<sup>43</sup>

It was against this background of demonstrations, strikes, and threats of strikes that Lloyd George himself came to Clydeside in December 1915 to convince the workers of the need for dilution.<sup>44</sup> His tour of the workshops was of little value as Gallacher and Muir, in an attempt to force direct negotiations between Lloyd George and the C.W.C., had urged the workers not to meet him. At Weir's the shop stewards refused to speak with him and he did not bother visiting the Albion where Gallacher was entrenched. But he did go to Parkhead Forge where a stormy meeting was held. It started badly in an atmosphere of tension and ill-feeling as Kirkwood and his colleagues had been kept waiting for three quarters of an hour, and Kirkwood, in the chair, introduced Lloyd George

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<sup>43</sup>Forward, 1 January, 1916.

<sup>44</sup>Lloyd George had been warned that relations between shop stewards and employers were so bad that "the chances of any movement might be likened to an effort to advance, and sustain an advance, against a solid wall of poisonous gas". Ministry of Munitions, MUN 5/73/324/15/2 Material Supplied to Mr. Lloyd George before his visit to the Clyde and Tyne.

with words which became famous:

I can assure you that every word you say will be carefully weighed. We regard you with suspicion, because the Munitions Act with which your name is associated has the taint of slavery about it.<sup>45</sup>

But despite the turbulence of the meeting Kirkwood did explain his, and the C.W.C's, attitude towards dilution: they were not opposed to dilution but it "must be carried out under the control of the workers".<sup>46</sup> Muir did not go quite as far when outlining the official C.W.C. attitude in the Worker: he demanded "a direct share in the management down through all the departments".<sup>47</sup> Dilution was therefore acceptable but only on the C.W.C's terms, a point which was reiterated on 24 December when Lloyd George reluctantly met the C.W.C. in Glasgow's Central Hotel to arrange an agenda for the big meeting planned for Christmas Day.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, p.108.

<sup>46</sup>Labour Party, Report of the Labour Party Special Committee to Investigate the Clyde Deportations, p.17.

<sup>47</sup>Worker, 3 January, 1916.

<sup>48</sup>The Trades Council had been offended by being ignored. Some members wanted to ignore the visit; others, led by Shinwell, urged that it be ridiculed. Glasgow Trades Council, Minutes, 22 December, 1915.

Muir warned of their determination "to force the matter to an issue",<sup>49</sup> but got no response from Lloyd George, and all attempts to agree arrangements for the meeting failed.

The great meeting in St. Andrews' Hall on Christmas Day was a shambles. Over 3000 workers packed the hall and hundreds gathered outside. Girl workers dressed in khaki sat on the platform, which was barricaded and protected by police, and a choir sang "See the Conquering Hero Comes" as Lloyd George appeared. The crowd was incensed and greeted him with "loud and continued booing and hissing... two verses of the Red Flag were sung before the Minister could utter a word".<sup>50</sup> He could hardly make himself heard above the constant shouts and interruptions, though the C.W.C. later disowned responsibility for the disturbance claiming that "during the meeting our members were actively engaged in maintaining order".<sup>51</sup> Kirkwood's appeals that Lloyd George be given a hearing had but a temporary effect as "He evaded the hard practical points

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<sup>49</sup>Worker, 15 January, 1916.

<sup>50</sup>Forward, 1 January, 1916.

<sup>51</sup>Worker, 8 January, 1916.

about labour dilution, wages and the cost of living",<sup>52</sup> and the disturbances started again. The meeting ended in disorder with Muir on his feet demanding an opportunity to state the C.W.C. case,<sup>53</sup> and outside a procession was formed which marched to Glasgow Green where speeches were made by Harry Hopkins, Tom Clark, John Maclean, McManus, Muir and Wheatley.<sup>54</sup>

Lloyd George's visit had been a resounding failure,<sup>55</sup> and it was clear that if dilution was to be effective on Clydeside, other methods were required. In 1915 Lord Balfour and Lynden MacAssey in their report on Clydeside unrest had argued that many of the problems that had arisen were "not so illustrative of disputes on definite matters of principle" as they were "indicative of local friction surrounding the relationship of particular employers and employed",<sup>56</sup> and indeed they would not have been serious

<sup>52</sup>Shinwell, Conflict Without Malice, p.55.

<sup>53</sup>Forward, 1 January, 1916.

<sup>54</sup>Thomas Bell, John Maclean: A Fighter for Freedom (Glasgow: Communist Party, Scottish Committee, 1944), pp. 56-7.

<sup>55</sup>The country did not see it in this light as only the official account of his speech appeared in the national press.

<sup>56</sup>Ministry of Munitions, Clyde Munition Workers, Report, 1915, Cd. 8136, para. 2.

"had they been promptly dealt with in their embryo stage".<sup>57</sup> But by December 1915 MaCassey was offering a different explanation for Clydeside's troubles. "Two or three local trade union officials deliberately and for their own purposes, circulated, only too effectively, untrue statements as to the origin of the [ Munitions ] Act, and garbled and misleading versions of its effect." More pushing men had then come forward as champions of trade unionism spreading the belief that trade union officials "under nefarious inducements" had accepted a Munitions Act which furnished the employers with "a machine that would shatter to its foundations the whole fabric of trade union liberties and customs". His solution was to appoint "two or three local trade union officials" to some official post far from Clydeside, and he warned that, "It would be impossible to obtain sufficient evidence to dispose of them under the Defence of the Realm Act" and even if it were possible their prosecution "would produce an industrial revolution on the Clyde."<sup>58</sup>

The first taste of Governmental repression came on 1 January, 1916, when Forward was suppressed for publishing

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., para. 17.

<sup>58</sup> Ministry of Munitions, MUN 5/73/324/15/1. L. MaCassey Memorandum on Certain Causes of Unrest among Munition Workers on Clyde and Tyne-side which are Peculiar to those Districts, paras. 5, 6 and 7.

Tom Hutchinson's account of Lloyd George's meeting at St. Andrew's Hall.<sup>59</sup> The Forward offices were occupied by police and by the military authorities, and an attempt was even made to trace and confiscate sold copies. This was no petty reaction on the part of Lloyd George to the highly critical account of the meeting: despite what Lloyd George said in Parliament about Forward having been under surveillance for some time and how action would have been taken against it anyway,<sup>60</sup> it is clear that the Government decided to suppress the paper and then sought justification for its action. The view of the officials at the Ministry of Munitions was that as far as Forward's previous behaviour was concerned, there was "practically nothing that can be described as deliberately seditious".<sup>61</sup> But on the Clydeside there was "a relatively small but vigorous body organising revolt both against the Munitions of War Act and against official trade union leaders, and... this has

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<sup>59</sup>Curiously, Forward had not received the Press Bureau Notice, Serial D.335, requesting that only the authorised version of Lloyd George's speech be published and requesting the Press to refrain from reporting "any disturbance" which might take place "at or in the neighbourhood of the meeting". Ministry of Munitions, MUN 5/70/324/18.

<sup>60</sup>See 77 H.C. Deb., 5s, 1402-3.

<sup>61</sup>Ministry of Munitions, MUN 5/70/324/18 Notes on the Suppression of the 'Forward', p.4.



been gathering strength with time."<sup>62</sup> It was the existence of this discontent which accentuated the harmfulness "in fact if not in intention" of the Forward article.<sup>63</sup> The fact that there was a small strike at Beardmore's Munitions Department on the 28th, 29th and 30th December, gave them the opportunity to associate the paper with this strike and consequently with the general anti-Government and anti-union attitude in the area.<sup>64</sup> The attempt by the C.W.C. to fill the gap left by this suppression by bringing out the Worker, edited by Muir and printed by the S.L.P. Press, was shortlived. The fourth issue carried an unsigned article entitled "Should the Workers Arm?"<sup>65</sup> and on 8 February the authorities arrested Gallacher, Muir and Walter Bell, the manager of the S.L.P. Press. MacCassey welcomed these arrests. On 9 February he wrote:

I have been convinced for some days that the only effective way of handling the situation is to stike a sharp line of cleavage between the loyal workmen... and the disloyal Socialist minority.... The means of effecting this was wanting until yesterday.... [The means are now] provided by the arrests ... of ...

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p.6.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p.7.

<sup>64</sup>Ministry of Munitions, MUN 5/70/324/18. Memorandum by the Solicitor-General of Scotland, The Suppression of the 'Forward'.

<sup>65</sup>Worker, 29 January, 1916.

Bell, Gallacher and Muir....

If these arrests are now followed up by definite and consistently firm action, I am satisfied the [ Clyde Workers' ] Committee can be deprived of its influence and its propaganda effectively counteracted.<sup>66</sup>

As a further step, Maclean was also arrested.

It was at this point that the apparently united front of unofficial opposition collapsed. On 22 January the Government had appointed the Clyde Dilution Commission, its aim being to get each major establishment in the district to accept a dilution scheme separately. But the C.W.C. had responded by insisting on a general dilution agreement for the whole area and instructing all its supporters to refuse to meet the Commissioners and to refer them to the Committee. It also repeated its demand that the Government "give the workers... a direct and equal share in the management" of all industries.<sup>67</sup> The Commission's first success came at Parkhead Forge where Kirkwood met them. When they offered to discuss terms for dilution if he could produce some, he went straight to Wheatley:

We collected shop stewards from other works. Together we thrashed out the problem, and John Wheatley began to write.... It was a

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<sup>66</sup>Ministry of Munitions, MUN 5/73/324/15/7. Memorandum by Lynden MacCassey, The Industrial Situation on the Clyde (Incomplete).

<sup>67</sup>Worker, 29 January, 1916.

perfect piece of work.<sup>68</sup>

From the C.W.C.'s viewpoint it was nothing of the sort, as it stipulated that "a Committee appointed by the skilled workers be accepted by the Employers, with power to see that this agreement is loyally carried out;"<sup>69</sup> this ran counter to the C.W.C. policy of bringing together all grades of workers.<sup>70</sup> The C.W.C. made eight amendments to the Parkhead Forge agreement, the most important being that in each shop a committee "representative of all grades" should be set up and "consulted on all questions of the transfer of labour", and that "everyone who enters the shop as a result of dilution must be organised in some union",<sup>71</sup> but the Clyde Dilution Commission refused to meet them to discuss the matter.<sup>72</sup> One by one the industrial plants on Clydeside quickly accepted the Kirkwood-Wheatley scheme as a basis for their own, and the C.W.C. demand for a "direct and equal" share in management was quietly dropped. Kirkwood stated in his autobiography that he and the Parkhead shop stewards acted

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<sup>68</sup>Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, pp. 117-8.

<sup>69</sup>Forward, 12 January, 1916.

<sup>70</sup>Gallacher wrote of his great disappointment at this agreement. Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde, p.104.

<sup>71</sup>Herald, 12 February, 1916.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 12 February, 1916.

under the impact of bad news from the front and the campaign against the shortage of munitions,<sup>73</sup> but it is more likely that they recognised the Government's new strong line against the C.W.C. and accepted that the majority of workers would not support them in a direct clash with the Government.

In March the Government was able to drive home its advantage. At Parkhead Forge Kirkwood wanted to move freely throughout the works, to check on the conditions under which the dilutees were employed, "at all times and under all circumstances". On 14 March Sir William Beardmore withdrew this right. He made counter-proposals and even offered to have the matter decided by arbitration,<sup>74</sup> but a workers' deputation would not accept this and on 17 March Parkhead went on strike, supported by workers at Beardmore's of Dalmuir, Weir's of Cathcart, and the North British Diesel Company at Whiteinch.<sup>75</sup> It was, or so an official Labour Party inquiry concluded, "a spontaneous outbreak",<sup>76</sup> but the Government was quick to

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<sup>73</sup>Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, p.115.

<sup>74</sup>As provided by Clause 2 of the dilution agreement made at Parkhead.

<sup>75</sup>Ministry of Munitions, MUN 5/79/341/14 Papers on Strikes in Clyde Industries, Summary of the Position on the Clyde.

<sup>76</sup>Quoted in Cole, Workshop Organisation, p.149.

conclude its offensive on the Clyde by arresting the chief industrial trouble-makers. Kirkwood was arrested at three o'clock in the morning of 25 March, and he was joined in the cells by Messer, McManus, S. Shields, R. Wainwright, Thomas Clark, Robert Bridges, James Kennedy, Harry Glass, and James Haggerty.<sup>77</sup>

The following day Maxton and MacDougall were arrested following a meeting to protest against the arrests.<sup>78</sup> They joined Gallacher, Muir, Bell and Maclean, in Edinburgh to await their trial, while Kirkwood and the others were deported to Edinburgh.<sup>79</sup> Maclean was sentenced to three years' imprisonment, Gallacher, Muir, Maxton and MacDougall to one year's imprisonment, and Bell to three months' imprisonment. By mid-May 1916 the Clydeside "revolt" was over, and industrial peace returned.

Only Kirkwood was to remain a thorn in the side of officialdom, and in this he was aided by Wheatley who had become Treasurer of the Clyde Workers' Defence Fund.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Ministry of Munitions, MUN 5/54/300/105. Notes on the Shop Stewards Movement.

<sup>78</sup>John McNair, James Maxton: The Beloved Rebel (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955), pp. 60-1.

<sup>79</sup>They had a choice of Edinburgh or Hawick. Forward, 1 April, 1916.

<sup>80</sup>Labour Leader, 20 April, 1916.

The deportees were not permitted to work in Edinburgh though they could work elsewhere, as long as it was not nearer Glasgow. But while the others left to work in England, mainly in Liverpool, Kirkwood remained in Edinburgh, in "solitary grandeur".<sup>81</sup> With the fund behind him, Wheatley was able to build up Kirkwood as the deportee, as the honest workman who had been hard done-to. "Whoever went from Glasgow... to Edinburgh," wrote Gallacher, "Wheatley saw to it that he or she visited Kirkwood. Not only so, but he kept up a continuous series of visits at the weekends."<sup>82</sup> It is not surprising that those on the far left saw Wheatley as an arch-conspirator.<sup>83</sup> Though a popular figure, he had remained on the wings during the industrial troubles and was now establishing Kirkwood as a national figure at the expense of the other deportees and of those languishing in Calton Jail.

It was not until the Labour Party Conference at Manchester in January 1917 that Kirkwood could state his case. Primed by Wheatley, he made an angry, emotional

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<sup>81</sup>Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde, p.127

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p.128.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., pp. 127-8; Bell, Pioneering Days, p.118.

speech, exclaiming:

I have had no charge and no trial.... I am no criminal.... Today for the first time I have the opportunity to place my case before the representatives of British Labour. I place it on your shoulders with all its responsibilities. I go home to Glasgow or I go to prison.<sup>84</sup>

He received a standing ovation, but after only four days he was arrested and imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle, only to be released after a fortnight, still a deportee.

Gradually, however, surveillance of his activities was relaxed and on 30 May, 1917, the deportation conditions were annulled. Soon he was back in Beardmore's Parkhead Forge.

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With some form of industrial peace prevailing on Clydeside and with the "revolutionaries" out of the way, Wheatley and his colleagues on the City Council were able to get back to their main tasks of organising Labour to win elections and trying to make some headway with the housing problems. The ferocity and militancy of the industrial struggles had temporarily given the lead to the militants and the "revolutionaries" and had veiled the fact

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<sup>84</sup> Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, p.143; Labour Leader, 25 January, 1917.

that in Glasgow, as in the rest of Scotland, the I.L.P. was the main Socialist body,<sup>85</sup> and in Glasgow the links between other groups and the I.L.P. were strong if haphazard.

The Labour Group's obsession with housing is understandable, especially in view of the report of the Royal Commission on Scottish housing, which appeared in 1917. It spelled out what Wheatley had been saying: working-class housing in Scotland was deplorable and intolerable, standards were lower than in England, and a special building programme was urgently required. It did not mince its words:

These are the broad results of our survey: unsatisfactory sites of houses and villages, insufficient supplies of water, unsatisfactory provision for drainage, grossly inadequate provision for the removal of refuse, widespread absence of decent sanitary conveniences, the persistence of unspeakably filthy privy-midden in many of the mining areas, badly constructed, incurably damp labourers' cottages on farms, whole townships unfit for human occupation in the crofting counties and islands, primitive and casual provision for many of the seasonal workers, gross overcrowding and huddling of the sexes together in the congested industrial villages and towns, occupation of one-room houses

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<sup>85</sup> Using his old Forward pseudonym, "Myner Collier", Dollan wrote in January 1917 that "The I.L.P. in Scotland is the 'life force' of the Labour movement." Labour Leader, 11 January, 1917.



by large families, groups of lightless and unventilated houses in the older burghs, clotted masses of slums in the great cities.<sup>86</sup>

About 126,000 new houses were required immediately, half to replace houses totally unfit for human occupation and half to abolish overcrowding; and to raise standards to any reasonable level another 110,000 houses were needed to replace at least half the one-roomed houses and fifteen per cent of the two-roomed houses. Private enterprise could not do the job - "most of the troubles we have been investigating are due to the failure of private enterprise to provide and maintain the necessary houses sufficient in quantity and quality" - and the state should place the responsibility on the local authorities.<sup>87</sup>

This followed hard on the heels of the report of the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest which asserted that Scottish housing was "a serious cause of unrest, as well as a danger to public health", and that the Government must take steps "to grapple with a problem which appears to have grown too great for private enterprise now

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<sup>86</sup> Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland, Urban and Rural, 1917. Cd. 8731, p.346.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., pp. 292-3.

to meet."<sup>88</sup>

Even while Glasgow was preoccupied with dilution, while papers were being suppressed, and while workers were deported and imprisoned, Wheatley was hammering away about housing and how the problem could be solved. Meetings held in the S.C.W.S. Hall and in St. Mungo's Hall on 3 and 4 January, 1916, under the auspices of the Glasgow Labour Party Housing Committee and attended by 786 delegates representing 362 bodies, led to the formation of a Scottish National Housing Association, whose aim was "to provide houses from grants made by the State, these houses to be let free from all interest charges".<sup>89</sup> These grants, Wheatley argued, should be of £2.5 millions per year for 61 years. If it was worth £5 millions a day to protect the people from enemies abroad, then, he said, it was worth £2.5 millions a year to protect them from the enemies at home.<sup>90</sup> The idea of using Glasgow Tramway's surplus was not forgotten; in

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<sup>88</sup> Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest, No. 8 Division, Report of the Commissioners for Scotland, 1917. Cd. 8669, para. 8.

<sup>89</sup> Glasgow Herald, 4 and 5 January, 1916.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 4 January, 1916.

Glasgow this would supplement the Government grant,<sup>91</sup> which should be raised by imposing a special taxation for housing purposes on incomes exceeding £5000 per year.<sup>92</sup>

But Wheatley and his colleagues could not even get Labour Party support for their plans. At the ILP Conference in April 1916, Regan's motion for "a scheme of housing based on Government grants or loans, free of interest" was defeated.<sup>93</sup> In January 1917 Wheatley, James Stewart, and Andrew McBride met Labour M.Ps. at the Manchester Conference and it was agreed to send a deputation to Westminster to meet the other M.Ps. with a view to a national Labour conference on the housing problem.<sup>94</sup> But it was not until June that the meeting took place and even then it was highly unsatisfactory for the Glasgow men. Wheatley and James Stewart, together with Armour and Shaw of the Trades Council met the War Emergency Committee of the Labour Party, but that Committee "did not approve of non-interest bearing Capital being

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 3 July, 1916.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 4 January, 1917.

<sup>93</sup>I.L.P., Report, 1916, p.92.

<sup>94</sup>Glasgow Herald, 31 January, 1917; Labour Leader, 8 February, 1917.

granted to Local Authorities"; indeed, "they treated the problem of Housing as if it were a war problem and not one that had existed prior to the war".<sup>95</sup>

Indeed, more satisfaction was got from the Liberal - Progressive - Independent group on Glasgow City Council. They at least realised the need for some action and in January 1917 sought financial assistance from the Local Government Board for a small development of tenements at Cowcaddens and Garngad,<sup>96</sup> a move which met but little opposition from the Labour Group who naturally preferred cottages to tenements.<sup>97</sup> But this semblance of good-will between the Labour Group and their opponents vanished during March and April, when scenes occurred which were to embitter relations between the two sides and prevent co-operation for several years.

On 15 March the Council refused to meet a deputation of women to hear their views on the potato shortage and food distribution, and when the Lord Provost said he thought the women's duty was to go home and care for their children,

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<sup>95</sup>Glasgow Trades Council, Minutes, 27 June, 1917.

<sup>96</sup>Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, 1916-17, No. 7, pp. 528-9.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 1916-17, No. 8, pp. 536-7.

chaos ensued as Shinwell,<sup>98</sup> Dollan, Charlton and Denny were suspended for disregarding the authority of the chair.<sup>99</sup> At the next meeting, on 29 March, the deputation was again refused a hearing and Wheatley's motion for a Committee of Enquiry to report on the extent of food scarcity in the city was ruled incompetent by the Town Clerk. Wheatley described the subsequent scene in

Forward:

we resolved to meet [ this refusal ] with new tactics. 'If the feeling of the people is not worth discussing, what is?' Our reply was 'Nothing!'

And we proceeded, with the strictest regard for the rules, to obstruct the passage of the minutes. The result was a complete rout of our opponents.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Mr. Middlemas has suggested that Shinwell's arrival on the Council, as co-opted member for the Fairfield Ward of Govan, caused a realignment of forces within the Labour Group, as Shinwell's "cutting tongue and vigorous jockeying" antagonised the factions led by Wheatley and James Stewart to such an extent that the two factions drew together under Wheatley's leadership. Middlemas, The Clydesiders, pp. 70-1. This exaggerates any personal antagonism between Wheatley and Stewart. They had been working together for years, trying to get the Council to accept the £8 cottages scheme, opposing rent increases, and establishing the Scottish National Housing Association, of which Stewart was the first chairman. This is hardly a picture of antagonism between the leaders of opposing factors in the Labour Group.

<sup>99</sup>Forward, 7 April, 1917; Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, 1916-17, No. 11, pp. 772-3.

<sup>100</sup>Forward, 7 April, 1917.

Bailie Douglas Graham, the chairman, bluntly denounced this as "wilful and deliberate obstruction of business",<sup>101</sup> and Wheatley admitted that "such tactics are deplorable, but in the Council at the moment they are our sole protection".<sup>102</sup> The next meeting, on 12 April, saw even more obstruction as during a six-hour sitting the Labour Group exhausted three chairmen. They seized every opportunity to ask questions and object to paragraphs in the minutes and took up the full time allowed for speaking on each subject, while at the same time disclaiming any desire to waste time.<sup>103</sup> The maximum number of votes any amendment received was nine and on one occasion an amendment by Wheatley actually received no votes.<sup>104</sup> When the meeting finally adjourned at 7 p.m. the Council had only managed to dispose of the Committee Minutes which should have been dealt with on 29 March. The Committee Minutes arising during the fortnight from 29 March to

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<sup>101</sup> Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, 1916-17, No. 12, p.854.

<sup>102</sup> Forward, 7 April, 1917.

<sup>103</sup> Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, 1916-17, No. 13, pp. 911-9.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 1916-17, No. 13, p.915.

12 April were untouched and would therefore appear first on the agenda at the next meeting, when they would be immediately followed by another set of Minutes.

But the Labour Group was outmanoeuvred at the meeting on 26 April. The Council agreed to hear the deputation they had previously refused to receive, and quickly got down to the task of clearing the backlog of minutes. Only later did Wheatley realise what was happening:

About 4 o'clock I realised that there was a strong desire to have the minute conferring the Freedom of the City on the Premier through. The Lord Provost had arranged to go to London at night, and desired to present the invitation personally, and he realised that without a surrender on the deputation question, the passage of the minute that day was impossible.<sup>105</sup>

Three hours of Labour obstruction followed but the minute eventually surfaced for discussion, and despite a spirited opposition by Wheatley and Shinwell it was passed by the Council.<sup>106</sup> But the animosity and distrust caused by the scenes of March and April 1917 were such that it was to be over two years before the Labour Group and their

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<sup>105</sup>Forward, 5 May, 1917.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 5 May, 1917; Glasgow Herald, 27 April, 1917; Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, 1916-17, No. 14, pp. 981-94.

opponents showed any signs of co-operation in the Council's work; and other events intruded to make co-operation less likely.

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When Marton, Gallacher, MacDougall, and Muir were released from prison in February 1917, they found themselves in an atmosphere of growing hostility to the war and the sacrifices it demanded. The Russian Revolution of March 1917 brought hope to many on the British Left that the war would soon end without a clear-out military decision, and to many the fall of Tsarism was a blessing on its own. The May-Day demonstrations in Glasgow were bigger than ever before as some 70,000 people took part.<sup>107</sup> Russian sailors marched with the Clydeside workers and attended a Labour demonstration later in the month.<sup>108</sup> Swept along by a national upsurge of unrest, the I.L.P. and the B.S.P. combined in June to organise a convention in the Leeds Coliseum. Twelve hundred delegates filled the hall to rejoice in the Russian Revolution, and even convinced

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<sup>107</sup> Labour Leader, 10 May, 1917.

<sup>108</sup> Glasgow Herald, 28 May, 1917.



Parliamentarians like Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden seemed to be carried away in the excitement of what the I.L.P. later described as "a surprising manifestation of revolutionary fervour".<sup>109</sup> A similar convention was called in Glasgow for 11 August, but when, at the last minute, the booking of St. Mungo's Hall was cancelled, it was transformed into a demonstration outside the hall. Shinwell made a violent speech denouncing warmongers, while Fairchild of the B.S.P., MacDonald, Wheatley and others all welcomed the "new democracy" of "Free Russia".<sup>110</sup> This seems to have been the only meeting which aimed at the establishment of a Soldiers' and Workers' Council on Russian lines. On 5 October the Executive Council of the Glasgow I.L.P. Federation decided to vote for Kirkwood and McManus as representatives to a National Provisional Committee,<sup>111</sup> but thereafter nothing is heard of the movement which seemed to simply peter out. Professor Marwick's comment on the working class of Clydeside seems to be just as valid when applied to the whole Labour movement: "in the final analysis [ it was ] touched by a near and real

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<sup>109</sup> I.L.P., Report, 1918, p.31.

<sup>110</sup> Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde, pp. 158-63.

<sup>111</sup> I.L.P., Glasgow Federation, Executive Council Minutes, 5 October, 1917.

issue rather than any hypothesis about the final collapse of capitalism."<sup>112</sup> The euphoria of June was but a temporary phenomenon.

Soon after his release from prison, Gallachier tried to revive the C.W.C., but without the deported shop stewards he found the task impossible.<sup>113</sup> The man he regarded as "in many respects our ablest and most valuable comrade",<sup>114</sup> Muir, had been almost broken by the rigours of Carlton Jail, and Wheatley gradually drew him into the I.L.P. The failure of Clydeside to play any part in the great strike which swept Britain in May 1917 highlights the decay which permeated industrial organisation on the Clyde. Widespread industrial discontent and a national Shop Stewards' movement forced the Government to establish Commissions of Industrial Unrest in the autumn of 1917, and on Clydeside the C.W.C. was eventually re-established in September. But the C.W.C. was weak and played no part in the successful Scottish moulders' strike of that month

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<sup>112</sup> Arthur J.B. Marwick, The Deluge: British Society and the First World War (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), p.75.

<sup>113</sup> Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde, pp. 139-40.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., pp. 141-2.

which won them an increase of twelve and a half per cent. Glasgow's only industrial threat during the winter of 1917-18 came over the proposed Manpower Bill, which would conscript eighteen year olds, but despite resolutions threatening strike action, nothing happened.<sup>115</sup> Instead the Clyde munitions workers continued to produce munitions, and Kirkwood boasted that at Beardmore's Mile-End shell factory:

we organised a bonus system in which everyone benefited by high production.... The factory built for a 12,000 output produced 24,000. In six weeks we held the record for output in Great Britain and we never lost our premier position.<sup>116</sup>

The man who stood out from all other agitators was John Maclean. He had been released from prison in June 1917 with only half of his three years' sentence served, and without a break he had plunged into agitation against the war and against capitalism. On 1 February, 1918, he was appointed Soviet Consul for Scotland, but more important was the re-opening of his economics classes in the autumn of 1917. By October 1917 over 2000 students attended the various lectures in the

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., pp. 179-84.

<sup>116</sup> Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, p.168.

area each week.<sup>117</sup> He was a dedicated revolutionary. "His educational work would have been sufficient for half a dozen ordinary men, but on top of this he was carrying on a truly terrific propaganda and agitational campaign."<sup>118</sup> His arrest on 13 April, 1918, followed by his sentence of five years' imprisonment, eliminated the most dangerous figure in Clydeside. Only he might have been capable of turning popular discontent into open insurrection.

It is hardly surprising that he and Wheatley never saw eye to eye. While Maclean was immersed in the industrial struggles, Wheatley stayed on the fringes avoiding the reputation of industrial agitator while maintaining contact with whatever group was involved in each dispute. Both Gallacher and Maclean saw him as an arch-conspirator, intriguing whenever possible to suit his own ends.<sup>119</sup> But though favouring direct industrial action on many occasions, Wheatley was a convinced Parliamentarian. He wanted to change the system of government, but despite his connections with the revolutionaries he accepted that the change would have

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<sup>117</sup>Glasgow Herald, 9 October, 1917.

<sup>118</sup>Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde, p.171.

<sup>119</sup>Gallacher wrote, "Wheatley could see progress only through a series of compromises and intrigues." Ibid., p.23.

to come from within and that the new Jerusalem would not come overnight. He was essentially practical, prepared to accept instalments of Socialism while on the long trek to the promised land. To this end his eyes shifted from George Square to Westminster.

The sudden death of James Alston on 15 November, 1915, enabled Wheatley to become prospective Parliamentary candidate for Camlachie in June 1916,<sup>120</sup> but when it became known that Shettleston was to become a constituency he transferred his candidature in January 1918.

Unfortunately the process of transfer caused a minor uproar in the Glasgow I.L.P. as irregularities in procedure were discovered: Wheatley's candidature was approved by Shettleston before he had been released by Camlachie, the nomination date had been fixed in deference to his wishes, and he had personally communicated with the selection committee regarding his candidature.<sup>121</sup>

The reason for the transfer is obvious. Wheatley knew that he had a personal following in Shettleston and would stand a better chance of victory there. And the

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<sup>120</sup> Glasgow Central Labour Party, Minutes, 15 June, 1916.

<sup>121</sup> I.L.P., Glasgow Federation, Executive Council Minutes, 8 February, 1918.

Glasgow I.L.P. agreed with him: when a special committee recommended, in order, the seats that should be contested at the next General Election, Shettleston came first in the list.<sup>122</sup>

Attempts had been made since November 1916 to link more closely the political and industrial wings of the Glasgow Labour Movement. For example, members of the Labour Group on the City Council began reporting on their activities to the Trades Council.<sup>123</sup> But although soundings were made about the formation of a Trades and Labour Council,<sup>124</sup> it was not until 20 April, 1918, just three months before the publication of the new Labour Party Constitution which abolished the political power of Trades Councils, that such a body was formed.<sup>125</sup>

It consisted of delegates from 93 trade union branches, 11 I.L.P. branches, two L.R.O.s., two Co-operative Societies, the Fabian Society, and the B.S.P., with Shinwell as Chairman.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> I.L.P., Glasgow Federation, Minutes of Bi-Monthly and Special Aggregate Meetings, 30 November, 1917.

<sup>123</sup> Glasgow Trades Council, Minutes, 28 February, 28 March, 23 May, 1917.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 18 April, 2 and 22 May, 1917.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 22 May, 1918.

<sup>126</sup> Glasgow Trades and Labour Council, Minutes, 19 June, 1918.

But more important, in view of the impending election, was to have an agreed programme to place before the electors; and to this end nine meetings were held with I.L.P. candidates and the I.L.P. Election Committee.

On 8 September it was agreed to include in their election programme the Glasgow Labour Party's housing proposals,<sup>127</sup> pledges not to tax "Co-op Dividends", or incomes of £300 per annum or less, pledges to abolish "all indirect Taxation on Food Essentials", proposals for separation allowances to soldiers' and sailors' dependents, old-age pensions of £1 per week at the age of sixty, a levy on wealth "to meet the National War Debt", and universal suffrage. On 15 September agreement was reached that peace by negotiation be advocated and that the drink trade be nationalised with a view to prohibition. On 22 September it was agreed that land and mines be nationalised. On 12 October proposals were accepted for equal pay for women and "Sufficient Wage for Maintenance during the period of Unemployment following the conclusion of the War."

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<sup>127</sup>The 1918 I.L.P. Conference had unanimously accepted the interest-free housing scheme, and agreed to put it "in the forefront of the Party's programme of propaganda". I.L.P., Report, 1918, p.83.

And on 29 October it was agreed to advocate universal disarmament and the abolition of conscription through international agreements, to nationalise food production, and to give Home Rule to Ireland.<sup>128</sup> The task of preparing the final election address was given to Wheatley, George Hardie, and H.B. Guthrie.<sup>129</sup>

When the election came in December, Wheatley was thought to have a good chance of winning. Forward declared, "He is a sure winner", and that his Conservative opponent, Rear-Admiral Adair, "is not taken seriously by the electors".<sup>130</sup> But Wheatley lost by 74 votes. It was, wrote Dollan, "our one disappointment".<sup>131</sup> But the other Scottish results were no better for Labour and the I.L.P. In Edinburgh Central William Graham won by nearly 400 votes and in Govan Neil Maclean scraped in on a split anti-Labour vote: but these were the only two victories. In Glasgow, Maxton polled 7860 votes in Bridgeton,

<sup>128</sup> I.L.P., Glasgow Federation, Election Committee Minutes, 8, 15 and 22 September, 12 and 29 October, 1918.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 10 November, 1918.

<sup>130</sup> Forward, 7 December, 1918.

<sup>131</sup> Labour Leader, 2 January, 1919.



Guthrie 7192 in Camlachie, James Stewart 6147 in St. Rollox, Muir 5531 in Maryhill, George Hardie 7996 in Springburn, and in the bizarre contest in Gorbals, John Maclean polled 7436 votes against the ex-Labour Cabinet Minister, Barnes.<sup>132</sup> Elsewhere, Kirkwood lost Dumbarton Burghs by just over 1000 votes, Tom Johnston came second in Stirlingshire West as did W.H. Martin in Dunbartonshire, James Welsh lost heavily in Lanark as did Regan in Rutherglen, the Rev. Campbell Stephen in Ayr Burghs and Shinwell in Linlithgowshire. Meanwhile in England, Snowden came a poor third in Blackburn while MacDonald was routed in Leicester West.

Wheatley took his own defeat philosophically.<sup>133</sup> Of course he was disappointed, but had he been elected he would have joined an extremely weak, trade-union dominated, P.L.P. led first by the uninspiring Clynes and then by the insipid Adamson. The vision of a large "political" group led by the much more attractive and dynamic MacDonald was not to be. Certainly Wheatley was distrustful of MacDonald, but he considered him to be by

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<sup>132</sup> This was bizarre in that Maclean was in prison: Gallacher canvassed on his behalf.

<sup>133</sup> Lord Wheatley, interviewed 19 February, 1969.

far the best leader available.<sup>134</sup> There was, however, no time to think of what might have been, for the advent of peace immediately led to an industrial slump and an astonishing outburst of working-class feeling in Glasgow.

The most powerful force behind the resistance to war-time changes in trade union conditions had been the fear of post-war unemployment, and by January 1919, despite the fact that neither heavy demobilisation nor any vast cessation of existing war equipment orders had taken place, unemployment had already begun to increase.<sup>135</sup> In April 1918 the Scottish T.U.C. had declared for a thirty-hour week<sup>136</sup> and in August 1918 the Scottish Advisory Committee of the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. had come out in favour of a forty-hour week, a demand endorsed by the Glasgow district committee of the A.S.E.<sup>137</sup> But national trade union leaders

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<sup>134</sup> Lord Wheatley, interviewed 19 February, 1969. Kirkwood is certainly inaccurate when, writing of the formation of the Glasgow branch of the U.D.C. in 1914, he asserted, "that night John Wheatley and I became MacDonald's men." Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, p.87.

<sup>135</sup> Shinwell has written of an estimated 100,000 dismissals in Scotland. Shinwell, Conflict Without Malice, p.60.

<sup>136</sup> Glasgow Trades Council, 100 Years of Progress (Glasgow: Glasgow Trades Council, 1958,) p.31.

<sup>137</sup> Strike Bulletin, 3 February, 1919; Scott and Cunnison, The Industries of the Clyde Valley during the War, p.159.

had only secured a forty-seven hour week, and even this reduction had led to difficulties over mealbreaks and to "a stiffening of discipline on the part of employers".<sup>138</sup> Agitation for further reduction grew. The Scottish I.L.P. Conference at Edinburgh called for a thirty-hour week,<sup>139</sup> but the 800 delegates at a shop stewards' conference on 18 January, 1919, were split over demands for the thirty and forty-hour week. The outcome was a vote to strike within seven days and to remit the choice of demands to a specially elected strike committee, chaired by Shinwell. The committee decided on the forty-hour week and declared for a general strike on Monday, 27 January.<sup>140</sup>

The response to the strike call was amazing;<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Scott and Cunnison, The Industries of the Clyde Valley during the War, p.160.

<sup>139</sup> Glasgow Herald, 6 January, 1919.

<sup>140</sup> David Morton, The Forty-Hour Strike (Clydebank: Socialist Labour Party, 1919) gives the most detailed account of the strike.

<sup>141</sup> On 17 January the Glasgow I.L.P. considered the question of affiliation to a proposed West of Scotland Soviet, but decided to delay any decision for a month to allow a committee to consult with the Soviet promoters. Probably because of the events of the next few weeks nothing more was heard of this committee, which included Wheatley and Dollan, or of the proposed Soviet. I.L.P., Glasgow Federation, Minutes of Bi-Monthly and Special Aggregate Meetings, 17 January, 1919.

estimates of the number of strikers ranged from 40,000,<sup>142</sup> via 75,000,<sup>143</sup> to 100,000.<sup>144</sup> On the day the strike began a huge meeting in St. Andrews Hall declared that no resumption of work would take place until the forty hour demand had been conceded and that no rent or income tax would be paid until a satisfactory settlement had been reached. They then marched to George Square where a red flag was run up to the top of the flag post facing the City Chambers.<sup>145</sup> Massive forces of pickets began touring the factories and by the afternoon of Wednesday 29 January they had induced all the men in the electricity generating stations to join the strike.<sup>146</sup> That day a mass demonstration assembled in George Square and a deputation of eleven, including Shinwell, Kirkwood, and Neil Maclean, met the Lord Provost. According to the Strike Bulletin, the deputation was courteously received and "the Lord Provost, on his initiative, offered to make representations to the

<sup>142</sup>Glasgow Herald, 28 January, 1919.

<sup>143</sup>Glasgow Evening News, 29 January, 1919.

<sup>144</sup>Strike Bulletin, 30 January, 1919.

<sup>145</sup>Glasgow Herald, 28 January, 1919.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., 31 January, 1919.

Prime Minister and Sir Robert Horne for the purpose of ascertaining their views on the 40 hours' demand". The deputation agreed to call at the City Chambers on Friday 31 January at 12.30 p.m. to hear the reply which would be communicated to a demonstration in George Square.<sup>147</sup> This account is, however, contradicted by the contents of the telegram sent to the Prime Minister by the Lord Provost. He outlined the deputation's request for Government intervention to secure their demand. Then, he went on:

It was further stated that they had hitherto adopted constitutional methods in urging their demand, but that, failing consideration being given to their request by the Government, they would adopt any other methods which they might consider to advance their cause. They have, however, agreed to delay taking any such action until Friday in order that I may be able to communicate your reply.<sup>148</sup>

On Friday 31 January the Glasgow Herald published a Press Association statement that "while the Government desires to refrain from any provocative action, the necessary steps have been taken to preserve order and safeguard public interests". Nevertheless, a crowd, estimated by Wheatley to be 20,000 strong, assembled in

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<sup>147</sup>Strike Bulletin, 30 January, 1919.

<sup>148</sup>Glasgow Herald, 31 January, 1919.

George Square, overflowing into the surrounding streets.<sup>149</sup>

A deputation, including Shinwell, Kirkwood, Neil Maclean, and Harry Hopkins, entered the City Chambers to receive the Lord Provost's reply, but were kept waiting for twenty minutes as he met an employers' deputation.<sup>150</sup>

Meanwhile the crowd grew restless and while Gallacher was addressing them an incident in the South-East corner of the Square provided the excuse for a general police assault:

A strong force of police converged from the south-east corner of the square and, advancing in extended order, swept the crowd in front of them raining a hurricane of blows which fell indiscriminately.... The square soon assumed the appearance of a miniature battlefield. Figures prone and sitting strewed the ground... the scenes were piteous.<sup>151</sup>

Hearing the battle, Kirkwood and Shinwell rushed outside: Kirkwood was batoned from behind while Shinwell managed to escape. Gallacher, who attacked the Chief Constable, disappeared under a swarm of policemen. The injured were carried into the City Chambers while the battle raged outside.

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<sup>149</sup>Ibid., 7 February, 1919.

<sup>150</sup>Strike Bulletin, 1 February, 1919.

<sup>151</sup>Glasgow Herald, 1 February, 1919.

Wheatley and John Stewart were in the magistrates' room when the trouble started; and "Right at the outset of the proceedings the Sheriff walked into the Magistrates' room" and proposed, "without consultation or ... approval of the magistrates," that the military be brought in.<sup>152</sup> Wheatley and Stewart hurried downstairs where they found Gallacher and Kirkwood lying on the corridor floor.<sup>153</sup> They then rushed outside to try to get the crowd to disperse, telling them "to get away as they were threatened with the military".<sup>154</sup> They then moved towards North Frederick Street where a strong group of strikers had commandeered a lorry-load of lemonade bottles and used them as missiles. But Wheatley and Stewart were unable to make themselves heard and, realising the hopelessness of the situation, returned in anger and sorrow to the City Chambers.<sup>155</sup>

The strikers refused to leave the Square until Kirkwood and Gallacher, his head wrapped in a blood-stained

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<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 7 February, 1919.

<sup>153</sup>Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde, p.233

<sup>154</sup>Glasgow Herald, 14 April, 1919.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., 14 April, 1919.

bandage, appeared on a balcony and urged them to do so.<sup>156</sup> They made their way in a disorderly manner to Glasgow Green. En route they broke shop windows and fought running battles with the police. Tramcars were stoned and had their cables cut. Crowds continued to roam the city streets until late at night, and some shops were looted. In the early evening electricity supplies were interrupted and several streets were in darkness until about 8 p.m.: it was rumoured that saboteurs were at work.<sup>157</sup>

After the Square had been cleared, Gallacher, Kirkwood and the other leaders were taken straight to jail. In the evening police raided the offices of the Trades and Labour Council.<sup>158</sup> Shinwell managed to print a manifesto, "A Call to British Labour - Dastardly Attempt to smash Trade Unionism," before he was arrested.

During the evening trainloads of fully-armed soldiers arrived in the city. A large body of troops were quartered in the City Chambers, which was surrounded by barbed wire.

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid., 1 February, 1919; Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde, pp. 231-2.

<sup>157</sup>Glasgow Herald, 1 February, 1919.

<sup>158</sup>Strike Bulletin, 2 February, 1919.



Sentries with fixed bayonets guarded the building. Troops were sent to possible trouble-spots while men with fixed bayonets were posted at the electricity stations, railway stations and bridges, tramway depots and gas works.<sup>159</sup>

A squadron of six tanks lay waiting in the meat market. On the Saturday morning, the city awoke to find itself under armed occupation. "For the first time since 1820 the city was fortified against its rebellious inhabitants."<sup>160</sup>

The reasons for the occupation, which could not have been undertaken so swiftly without prior planning, seem clear. The Russian Revolution had begun with strikes in main cities, and in January 1919 the Spartacus rising had taken place in Berlin. It was always a mistake to believe that Glasgow followed any European lead - it was too parochial for that - but the authorities seemed to think it might, and the wartime troubles probably gave weight to this assumption. It is clear that they believed that the trouble might be really serious: the troops received orders that "fire" should be "effectual" and that it was "undesirable that firing should take place over the heads

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<sup>159</sup> Glasgow Herald, 3 February, 1919.

<sup>160</sup> Middlemas, The Clydesiders, p.94.

of rioters or that blank cartridges should be used."<sup>161</sup>

The strike did not immediately end. If anything the events of Friday 31 January stiffened the strikers' resolve. The Strike Bulletin reported imminent action from London, Birmingham, Sheffield, Barrow, and elsewhere, but nothing happened. Shaw and Allen, the only strike leaders still at liberty, travelled to London on 3 February to see Sir Robert Horne and demand intervention - but in vain. On 5 February the Electrical Trades Union threatened to cut off London's electricity supplies unless the Government intervened,<sup>162</sup> but the Government used emergency powers to declare the strike illegal and faced with the threat of fines and imprisonment the Electrical Trades Union backed down. The A.S.E. Executive suspended its whole Glasgow District Committee for two years, and finally, on 10 February, the strike was called off.

At the trial of the strike leaders in Edinburgh in April, Kirkwood was fortunate in having photographic evidence that he was batoned down from behind while rushing forward with his arms outstretched to appeal for peace, and he was acquitted. Shinwell, Gallacher, John Murray and William McCartney were found guilty: Shinwell was sentenced to five

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<sup>161</sup> Strike Bulletin, 10 February, 1919.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 5 February, 1919.

months' imprisonment, the others to three.<sup>163</sup>

The strike had been an abysmal failure. It showed clearly that there was in fact little revolutionary feeling on Clydeside. With the exception of John Maclean and a few others, the Clydeside leaders were much more concerned with parochial trade union matters. Clydeside had certainly been the most politically "advanced" area during the war, and because of this it acquired a mythical reputation for political extremism.

But though the strike was a failure, it had important consequences for Clydeside. The militant industrial wing was finally broken. Its leaders did not have another chance. They found themselves barred from the factories; Gallacher wrote that "when I came out of prison in July 1919... I was blacklisted".<sup>164</sup> The rapid increase in unemployment destroyed the power of the shop steward movement which had depended for its strength on labour shortage, and its leadership passed into the hands of doctrinaire Marxists who were to be prominent in the Communist Party of Great Britain when it was founded in 1921. The shop stewards' leaders had eschewed the opportunity of gaining positions in the Glasgow Trades

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<sup>163</sup> Wheatley accompanied Gallacher's wife in the court, and when the sentences were announced Gallacher turned towards them saying, "I could do it on my head." Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde, p.242.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., pp. 248-9

and Labour Council or in the I.L.P., and with the basis of their power gone they were impotent.

Leadership in Glasgow returned to the politicians. Shinwell's future career was considerably affected: he turned finally from industrial to political activity. Wheatley's future career received a considerable boost. The industrial unrest and the upsurge of revolutionary extremism had pushed into the background the activities of the Corporation Labour Group. But with the revolutionary bubble burst, with the industrial leaders temporarily out of the way and with the slump becoming a depression, Wheatley had the opportunity to press for concrete economic measures. For the last time, the initiative returned to the Labour Group on the City Council.

## CHAPTER V

### FROM GLASGOW TO WESTMINSTER

Two major developments of the post-war years were the advent of mass unemployment and the upsurge of support for the Labour movement. Wheatley and his colleagues were intimately concerned, mainly at the local level, with the first of these. As far as the second was concerned, their attitudes differed somewhat from those of the national leaders.

The return of peace meant the return of economic freedom as wartime controls were rapidly abandoned. But the immediate post-war boom, based on a universal desire to replenish stocks, led to soaring prices and wages, and, taking fright, the Government raised Bank Rate to six per cent in November 1919 and to seven per cent in April 1920. This combined with serious labour disputes cut short the boom and it became a slump for which the Government prescribed the "Geddes Axe": government expenditure was slashed to just over £1,000 million in 1920-1, while taxation rose to £1,426 million. As unemployment rose, the Economist described 1921 as "one of the worst

years of depression since the industrial revolution".<sup>1</sup>

The depression hit Glasgow earlier than other parts of the country, mainly because of its dependence on heavy industry. By 1920 unemployment was already sixteen per cent. But Glasgow had foreseen this problem and in March 1919 had started to try to deal with it. On 20 March 1919 Wheatley persuaded the City Council to set up a Special Committee on Works (other than Housing) in Hand, or Proposed to be Undertaken, to consider how much work, which had been postponed during the war, could now be undertaken. It was a large committee of twenty-seven, with Wheatley as convener, and it was empowered to seek financial assistance from the Government.<sup>2</sup> By mid-April its first report was ready, listing those items of work which might be undertaken. The total estimated cost was £6,539,000, of which £563,000 referred to work delayed because of the war, including £200,000 for completing the extension of the Municipal Buildings. The largest sums in the list of works in prospect were £1m. for a high level bridge, and approaches, over the Clyde at Finnieston Street,

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in A.J.P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945 (Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1965), p.145

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, 1918-19,  
No. 11, pp. 843-4.

£800,000 for reconstruction of the gas works, £700,000 for an eighty-foot wide road from Paisley Road to the city boundary, £600,000 for tramway extensions, £594,000 for Glenfinlas Water Works, and £500,000 for another bridge over the Clyde at Oswald Street.<sup>3</sup>

Copies were sent to the Secretary of the Employment Department of the Ministry of Labour in Edinburgh, with a plea for government assistance, pointing out that large sums were being paid in "unemployment donations", a large part of which "could be better used in enabling Local Authorities to proceed with useful work, with the result that many of those who are going idle might be employed in productive work."<sup>4</sup> The reply was encouraging: the points raised were being forwarded to the Ministry of Labour in London, "with a strong recommendation ... that pressure be brought to bear on the Treasury" to grant financial assistance.<sup>5</sup> When the Ministry of Labour wrote asking the Corporation's views on how financial assistance might be given, it was decided to arrange a conference of the principal local

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 1918-19, No. 13, pp. 1051-60.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 1918-19, No. 13, p.1054.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 1918-19, No. 13, p.1055

authorities in Scotland to consider joint action in approaching the Government.<sup>6</sup> The conference, held in Glasgow City Chambers on 16 May with Wheatley in the chair, appointed a fifteen-strong executive committee which, on the same day, decided that a deputation should see the Secretary of State for Scotland and representatives of other Government departments involved.<sup>7</sup>

Before the meeting at the Scottish Office in Whitehall on 20 June, the deputation met to finalise its suggestions. It would propose that grants should not be conditional upon any preliminary submission of plans and approval of details, as this would cause delays. Grants should be on such conditions that local authorities would feel assured that if they undertook work of the classes specified, and completed it within the time specified, then the grant would be forthcoming. Grants should be made in respect of work in the following classes: public health, roads and bridges, police and fire brigades, waterworks, gas and electricity works, tramways, markets, parks, libraries, public halls and council chambers. A date should be set for the start of each scheme and if the contract was placed within two months of that date then the grant should be of fifty per cent; if placed within three months, forty per cent; and so on down to a

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 1918-19, No. 18, p.1599.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 1918-19, No. 18, pp. 1601-2.



five per cent grant for a contract placed within eight months. It was a beautifully simple set of proposals. Those local authorities who had most to do and who appreciated the urgency of the problem would receive most assistance. The deputation put these proposals to the Secretary of State for Scotland who promised that they would be carefully considered and laid before the Cabinet.<sup>8</sup> But in October the Committee was informed that "under existing circumstances" no assistance could be granted.<sup>9</sup>

It was a bitter blow, especially as it was clear that unemployment was rising instead of falling. The Corporation agreed to press on as far as possible with the work recommended by Wheatley's Committee,<sup>10</sup> which remained in existence but found itself thwarted at every turn by lack of finance. All the Committee could do was urge that the various departments of the Corporation do as much as possible, while it acted as a channel for information and proposals. For example, in October 1920, it received the representations of a deputation of the unemployed. A proposal that arrangements be made for

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1918-19, No. 18, pp. 1602-5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1918-19, No. 25, p. 2232.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1919-20, No. 7, pp. 628-9.

feeding the unemployed and their dependents was redirected to the Education Authority and the Committee on National Kitchens, which had some powers in this direction. A proposal that the Corporation should "establish farm colonies on waste land within a radius of fifteen miles from Glasgow" and that houses be built there for the workers, was passed on to the Burgh Distress Committee. But the Committee took no action on the proposal that "free passages to Russia be provided for those who cannot obtain suitable employment".<sup>11</sup>

In November 1920 Wheatley secured the Committee's support for a new set of proposals. Parliamentary powers should be secured to levy a special rate on the value of land while the Government should pay to those employed in special employment schemes the sums they would receive if unemployed. With this financial assistance the Corporation could embark on a smaller, more domestic, programme than that envisaged in April 1919. The Health Committee should provide food and milk for necessitous children under five years of age, should establish a poultry farm at Robroyston, and institute experimentally a scheme of municipal domestic service. The Distress Committee should promote market gardening. The Housing Committee should make their own bricks and concrete blocks

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 1919-20, No. 8, pp. 2642-3.

and proceed with road and street making in all the housing scheme areas. The Baths and Warehouses Committee should consider the advisability of undertaking laundry work at prices to cover costs and the Tramways Committee the advisability of acquiring quarries to supply materials for extension schemes. The Parks Committee should improve and equip Hogganfield Loch for boating. And the Statute Labour Committee should proceed with roadmaking and should report on the advisability of beginning immediately with the construction of the Western, Govan, and Renfrew Boulevards.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly the search for employment schemes had become more frantic and more despairing as unemployment mounted. These proposals, which were quickly accepted by the Corporation,<sup>13</sup> would help only about one tenth of Glasgow's registered unemployed.<sup>14</sup> Again, requests for Government assistance were made and, again, Wheatley was appointed convener of a committee to impress on the Government the advisability of providing assistance, but, again, no assistance

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 1920-21, No. 3, p.202.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 1920-21, No. 4, p.213.

<sup>14</sup>Glasgow Herald, 29 December, 1920.

was forthcoming. It was the futility and frustration of seeing schemes founder because of lack of resources that formed the background to the Labour Group's decision to withdraw from the Committee. The issue over which they withdrew was the refusal of the Corporation, on 3 February 1921, to grant a further £10,000 towards the relief of distress in the City.<sup>15</sup> It was an understandable move, born of disappointment and dismay. Inside the Committee the Labour Group had been at its most constructive and Wheatley had managed to carry the whole Council with him, dominated though it was by an anti-Labour majority. The schemes he initiated were simple, but impressively realistic, and the blame for the lack of progress lay with the Government's policies. The dominant feature of the interwar years had arrived. Unemployment more than doubled between December 1920 and March 1921 and in June 1921 it passed the two million mark. Between the wars it never fell below one million. Outside the Committee the Labour men could do nothing but agitate, and they were finally reduced to sending the following telegram to Lloyd George:

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<sup>15</sup>Glasgow Trades and Labour Council, Minutes, 4 February, 1921.

Thousands in Glasgow faced with famine.  
 43 Labour Magistrates and Councillors demand  
 immediate meeting of Parliament to provide  
 work on adequate incomes for unemployed.<sup>16</sup>

The one area in which the Government did give financial assistance was housing. Under the Addison Acts each local authority's liability was limited to the produce of a rate of four-fifths of a penny in the pound, and the Exchequer met all the remaining annual deficits on the houses built. The scheme effectively removed the financial responsibility from the local authorities while giving them administrative responsibility. It was an understandable arrangement: house-building on a large scale was a new, untried field for most local authorities and they probably required assurances of the limit of their liability before they would embark on it. But the scheme did not work very well, mainly because of the failure to control the use of scarce building resources in a way which the type of subsidy made particularly necessary. Some 214,000 houses were built before the Geddes Axe fell, but prices had been rising at an alarming rate: houses which would have cost £300 each in 1914 were, by 1921, costing £1000. Faced with widespread shortages of materials and trained labour the building industry was called upon to undertake a quite

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<sup>16</sup>  
Glasgow Herald, 9 September, 1921.

unprecedented volume of housebuilding and the resulting overloading of the industry made it difficult to obtain tenders; so prices went up. Further, the availability of the subsidy was originally limited to three years, so that local authorities naturally rushed to plan their schemes and place their contracts, so intensifying the demand.<sup>17</sup>

Glasgow was quickly off the mark with its plans. In March 1919 the Council approved plans for developments at Coplawhill, Kennyhill, Riddrie and Blackhill,<sup>18</sup> and in May approval was given to another development at Mossbank.<sup>19</sup> But by October only the Coplawhill scheme had come before the Dean of Guild Court,<sup>20</sup> and faced with 47,000 Glaswegians living in what Wheatley described as "little better than lethal chambers",<sup>21</sup> the City Council took up the idea of

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<sup>17</sup>Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the High Cost of Building Working Class Dwellings in Scotland, 1921, Cmd 1411, passim.

<sup>18</sup>Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, 1918-19, No. 10, p.762. Glasgow's Garngad housing scheme was started before the Government's measures were passed and consequently did not qualify for aid, but the Corporation continued with it. Ibid., 1918-19, No. 6, p.1398.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 1918-19, No. 16, p.1398.

<sup>20</sup>Glasgow Herald, 3 October, 1919.

<sup>21</sup>The Times, 8 September, 1919.

building "temporary dwellings". The decision to build "temporary dwellings" was taken on 23 October 1919 and 500 of these huts were envisaged.<sup>22</sup> But housing progress was severely hampered by the national scarcity of materials. By August 1920 the Director of Housing was reporting that because of the shortage of bricks there was no work for the builders engaged at the Coplawhill, Kennyhill and Riddrie sites. An appeal to the Director of Building Material Supply in Edinburgh was futile: it seemed that Glasgow alone could absorb the whole available output of Scottish brickyards at that time.<sup>23</sup> The situation was so bad that by mid-September 1921 the numbers of newly-built occupied houses were: 92 at Garngad, 108 out of a total scheme of 126 at Coplawhill, 46 out of 143 at Gilshochill, and 334 temporary dwellings.<sup>24</sup> Not a single house had been completed at Riddrie or Mosspark! It was not surprising that Labour tempers were frayed when housing was being discussed.

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<sup>22</sup> Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, 1918-19, No. 27, p.2358. By December 1919 over 900 applications had been received for the tenancy of 60 huts built at Craigton. Glasgow Herald, 12 December, 1919.

<sup>23</sup> Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow, 1919-20, No. 21, pp. 2077-8.

<sup>24</sup> Glasgow Herald, 7 October, 1921.

Disorder broke out intermittently at Council meetings, the most dramatic scene coming on 25 March 1920 when Shinwell was suspended for disobeying the chair and a furious Kirkwood rounded on the anti-Labour councillors with language which was even more intemperate than usual:

This is the beginning of the end, and you can put us all out. The working classes in Germany are today up in arms; the working classes of Glasgow will soon be up in arms, too, and then woe betide you! you wolves, you tigers, who live on the flesh and blood of my class.<sup>25</sup>

But more serious problems arose following the Salisbury Committee's recommendation that rents be increased by eight shillings in the pound. A special Scottish Labour Housing Association Conference in Glasgow voted, by the overwhelming majority of 940 votes to eight, against the Salisbury recommendation and decided to instigate a rent strike if Parliament sanctioned the increases. The Association's Executive, led by Wheatley, Kirkwood, and Joseph Sullivan, would decide when the rent strike would start, and, in preparation, a Solemn Pledge and Covenant was to be distributed throughout Scotland for signatures.<sup>26</sup> In June the Executive issued an appeal for funds,<sup>27</sup> and in

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<sup>25</sup>Forward, 3 April, 1920.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 29 May, 1920.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 5 June, 1920.



August the rent strike began. Wheatley brought out a pamphlet, The New Rent Act - A Reply to the Rent Raisers, urging non-payment of rent, while Kirkwood and Rosslyn Mitchell clogged up the courts by fighting every eviction case.<sup>28</sup> But the source of the problem lay at Westminster and local action was not sufficient. Gradually the movement died down.

Virtually no progress was made in the housing field in the immediate post-war years. The Addison scheme had raised hopes dramatically, and then dashed them down to the ground. The flurry of housing problems in Glasgow could scarcely be got under way, and gradually bitterness replaced hope. In January 1922 Wheatley pointed out some stark facts. Although some 4000 houses were being built, when materials were available, the Corporation's housing list contained 70,000 names: 8,000 of the applicants were homeless and over 10,000 were ex-service men. Over 13,000 houses in the city were condemned as unfit for human habitation.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Wheatley had impeccable credentials for speaking for those with housing problems as he himself had been evicted in the summer of 1919. Because of the housing shortage he was forced to live in furnished lodgings in Helensburgh. Eventually he bought the house overlooking Sandyhills Golf Course. Lord Wheatley, interviewed 12 February, 1969.

<sup>29</sup>The Times, 3 January, 1922.

With high unemployment, increased rents, and a chronic housing shortage, it is not surprising that the Labour Group in the Council Chambers started to grow. Talk of splits within the Group<sup>30</sup> did not detract from labour's electoral appeal. In August 1920 the Glasgow Labour movement was quick to support the threat of a general strike if Britain intervened against Russia in Poland.<sup>31</sup> In September Maxton saw the Scottish Advisory Council of the Labour Party unanimously approve his resolution that in using British military resources to assist the reactionary elements in Europe to make war against Russia without the consent of Parliament or the people Churchill had grossly violated the British Constitution and should be immediately arrested and impeached.<sup>32</sup> The Glasgow Labour men enthusiastically greeted the I.L.P. N.A.C.'s proposed new programme which, among other things, stated that "it may be necessary on specific issues for the organised workers to use extra-political means, such as direct action."<sup>33</sup> But the desire for direct action

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<sup>30</sup> See the report of Shinwell's views in Forward, 4 October, 1919.

<sup>31</sup> Glasgow Herald, 11 August, 1920.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 27 September, 1920.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 3 November, 1920.

vanished quickly when the results of the 1920 Municipal elections in Glasgow were announced.

Interest in the election was heightened by the reorganisation of wards and the consequent retiral of all 111 Council members. Only four of the 37 wards were uncontested and only 12 candidates were returned unopposed.<sup>34</sup> Labour ran 87 candidates, polled over 321,000 votes and won 44 seats. In Shettleston Wheatley easily topped the poll and all three seats were won by Labour. According to the Glasgow Herald the percentage turnout throughout the city reached "the phenomenal figure of 78.57".<sup>35</sup> In 1912 Labour held twelve seats, in 1916 eighteen seats, in 1919 twenty-four seats, now, in 1920, forty-four seats. It seemed they were well on the way to securing a majority on the Council.<sup>36</sup>

At the Labour Group's first meeting after the elections, Wheatley was appointed Chairman:<sup>37</sup> he had been unofficial leader for several years but only now was his position

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<sup>34</sup>Three Labour candidates and nine "Moderates" were unopposed.

<sup>35</sup>Glasgow Herald, 3 November, 1920.

<sup>36</sup>It was not until the 1930s that a majority was actually won.

<sup>37</sup>Glasgow Trades and Labour Council, Minutes, 3 November, 1920.

formalised. Immediately, he entered into negotiations with the Trades and Labour Council and secured the establishment of a Joint Executive Committee to coordinate work and, by meeting regularly on Tuesdays, decide the policies to be pursued at City Council meetings.<sup>38</sup> The new arrangement soon got a chance to prove itself when the mining crisis blew up on 1 April 1921 when the mineowners refused the miners' demand for a "national pool" to equalize wages and began a lockout.<sup>39</sup> The triple alliance was called on and the threat of a general strike was revived.

Wheatley and William Shaw, the Secretary of the Trades and Labour Council, called a meeting of the Joint Executive Committee for Sunday 10 April, and this meeting appointed a Temporary Committee of representatives of the Co-operative Societies, the Labour Magistrates, the Labour Party Executive, the Trades and Labour Council, and the Glasgow I.L.P. Federation. The following day

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 9 and 10 November, 1920, 26 January, 4 February, and 10 March, 1921.

<sup>39</sup>The mines were returned to their former owners on 31 March, but the owners' only solution to the mining problems was to try to cut wages and return to the old system of district rates.

when this Committee met, Wheatley

referred to the preparations being made that day at the City Chambers by the authorities. Representatives of the Admiralty, Army and the Magistrates were giving effect to the organisation that would be used against Labour. He urged that all the resources of Labour should be organised to cope with the situation that would arise in the event of a general stoppage of work.<sup>40</sup>

Clearly the memory of the events of 31 January 1919 loomed large. This time Wheatley was determined that there would be no battle in George Square, and the Temporary Committee sanctioned a manifesto which appeared that day in the Glasgow papers over the names of Wheatley and Shaw.

The manifesto urged the working class to "rally to the support of our fighting comrades", but insisted that support must be "intelligent", because "Efforts may be made... to goad the workers into conflicts with the authorities in order to discredit the movement and defeat the workers by a smashing demonstration of force". It was pointed out that the Education Authority and the Corporation Health Committee had powers to feed and clothe children so that a general strike could be supported without the children suffering. But the manifesto also had a constructive side. Wheatley and Shaw blamed the economic depression on "the unsettled

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<sup>40</sup> Glasgow Trades and Labour Council, Minutes, 15 April, 1921.

and impoverished state of Europe" and, unlike the national Labour and trade union leaders, agreed that a reduction in production costs was "essential". But this reduction should be a general one, including rents and profits. This would receive working class support if the workers were assured of "a reasonable and as far as possible clearly defined minimum standard of living, expressed in goods and not merely in wages", and if "the present standard of living for the workers be not reduced until all other means of lowering costs have been exhausted". A Commission to ascertain the national resources would implement this early form of incomes policy.<sup>41</sup>

But this made no impact on the national trade union figures. The miners rejected the offer of a wage freeze while negotiations for a "national pool" took place, and the railway and transport unions backed down only hours before the strike was due to begin - on "Black Friday", 15 April. The miners held out until 1 July, but ended up getting worse terms than could have been got by negotiating at the beginning. This set the pattern, and during 1921 wages fell heavily in many

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<sup>41</sup>Glasgow Herald, 11 April, 1921.

industries. Lloyd George and his Government were henceforth seen as the enemies of the working class.

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The very important changes in the I.L.P. between 1918 and 1922 aroused but little interest on Clydeside. The considerable upsurge of support for Labour was naturally gratifying, but Wheatley and his colleagues were more concerned with the weaknesses of the P.L.P. than with changes within the I.L.P.

That the Labour Party was now open to individual membership and that it began to systematically create a network of local Labour Parties caused no immediate problems for the I.L.P., though the long-term effects were serious. "The first eighteen months after the armistice were something of a time of postwar inebriation for the I.L.P."<sup>42</sup> Between April 1918 and April 1920 membership rose from 30,000 to 45,000,<sup>43</sup> many of the new recruits coming from the ranks of middle-class Liberals who were disillusioned by the

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<sup>42</sup> Arthur Marwick, The Independent Labour Party, 1918-32 (Unpublished B.Litt. thesis, Oxford: 1960), p.95.

<sup>43</sup> I.L.P., Report, 1918, p.26; Ibid., 1920, p.18.

inconsistent, immoral, and undignified postures they felt their party had assumed. It seemed that few of this group joined because of their belief in Socialism.<sup>44</sup>

In Glasgow where there was more of a Labour versus anti-Labour attitude there was little ex-Liberal infiltration, but the party continued to grow: in March 1920 it had twenty-seven branches, 2641 members, and an income of almost £2,000.<sup>45</sup>

The I.L.P. changed its leadership during these years of growth. Gradually control was won by a group of young London-based men led by the intellectual, wealthy, middle-class, ex-chairman of the No-Conscription Fellowship, Clifford Allen. They aimed to give the party a clear philosophical basis, distinct from communism on the one hand and the growing Labour Party on the other.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>For a derogatory view of the influx of Liberals see Egon Wertheimer, Portrait of the Labour Party (London & New York: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1922), p.14 and pp. 128-9.

<sup>45</sup>I.L.P., Glasgow Federation, Minutes of Bi-Monthly and Special Aggregate Meetings, 26 March, 1920. See also, The I.L.P. in Scotland: Its Rise and Progress (Glasgow: Reformer's Bookstall, no date, but probably 1920), p.43, where it is claimed that because of winter recruitment actual membership was nearly 4,000.

<sup>46</sup>I.L.P., Report, 1920, p.46.



"The fight for the I.L.P. was finally won at the 1922 Conference when Allen became treasurer of the Party",<sup>47</sup> but he faced three major problems: a decline in party membership following the immediate post-war boom, a decline in the Labour Leader's circulation, and a shortage of funds.<sup>48</sup> The solution to the paper's problems was to close it down and replace it with the New Leader under the brilliant editorship of H.N. Brailsford.<sup>49</sup> It was a brilliant success. It was a literary as well as a political paper and "circulation and advertising revenue steadily rose, till with an average weekly sale of 47,000 it eclipsed all other similar weeklies, including the Nation, the New Statesman, and the Spectator".<sup>50</sup> A partial cure for the Party's empty coffers lay in Allen's ability to tap the financial resources of wealthy sympathisers: it was not for nothing that a Scotsman said "yon felly could woo a bird aff a tree".<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Arthur Marwick, Clifford Allen: The Open Conspirator (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), p.196.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.76.

<sup>49</sup> MacDonald, who worked closely with Allen at this time, opposed both the new name and the new editor. See his letters to Allen in Martin Gilbert, Flough My Own Furrow (London: Longmans, 1965), pp. 170-1.

<sup>50</sup> Marwick, Clifford Allen, p.79.

<sup>51</sup> Paton, Left Turn! p.54.

The national storm over the question of the Internationals caused problems. Both the Labour Party and the I.L.P. were convinced at the war's end of the need to resurrect the International, but the Russian Revolution made this difficult. Labour, rejecting all overtures from the Third International, was instrumental in reviving the old Second, or what remained of it, but the I.L.P. was less willing to acknowledge an irreparable fissure in working-class solidarity. In January 1920 the Scottish I.L.P. voted, by 158 to 28, to affiliate to the Third International,<sup>52</sup> but in January 1921 reversed this decision by 93 votes to 47.<sup>53</sup> Eventually the I.L.P. affiliated to the Vienna Union, the "Two-and-a-Half", as a hopeful means of reforging unity. But by 1923 the effort was abandoned as hopeless, the Union collapsed, and the I.L.P. and the Labour Party were joined together, however briefly, as common members in the new Labour and Socialist International.

Although the Scottish socialists had been involved in the question of the Internationals, they played no part in the changes in the national I.L.P. Maxton was on

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<sup>52</sup>Glasgow Herald, 5 January, 1920. Forward, 10 January, 1920.

<sup>53</sup>Labour Leader, 13 January, 1921.

the National Administrative Council from 1918 till 1920 when his place was taken by Kirkwood, but as far as new programmes were concerned Dollan tried, in 1921 and again in 1922, to get the whole business shelved,<sup>54</sup> while Shinwell remarked at the 1922 I.L.P. Conference that "enthusiasm was somewhat subdued".<sup>55</sup> What the Scots were concerned with was the uninspiring performance of the trade union dominated P.L.P. Resolutions that the I.L.P. disaffiliate from the Labour Party were defeated, but not by overwhelming majorities: in August 1919 the Glasgow Federation rejected such a resolution by only 70 votes to 51,<sup>56</sup> and in January 1920 following a plea for unity from Wheatley the Scottish Divisional Council rejected a similar motion by 147 votes to 53.<sup>57</sup> In criticising what Dollan called "the present ineffectiveness of the Labour Party in the House of Commons",<sup>58</sup> the Glasgow men had the allegiance of MacDonald and Snowden who led the barrage of attacks. In the Labour Leader

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<sup>54</sup>I.L.P. Report, 1921, p.138; Ibid., 1922, p.64.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 1922, p.64.

<sup>56</sup>I.L.P., Glasgow Federation, Minutes of Bi-Monthly and Special Aggregate Meetings, 29 August, 1919.

<sup>57</sup>Forward, 10th January, 1920.

<sup>58</sup>I.L.P., Glasgow Federation, Minutes of Bi-Monthly and Special Aggregate Meetings, 29 August, 1919.

Adamson's leadership was described as "simply third rate",<sup>59</sup> while in Forward MacDonald classed Clynes as "the Hobbes of representative government... more servile to authority than the Whigs".<sup>60</sup> Everything that went wrong was blamed on the failure of the P.L.P. to function as an effective parliamentary opposition. The demand was not so much for a change of policy as a change of leadership. If trade union leadership could not ring the changes then it seemed that only I.L.P. leadership would ensure success. The only person with sufficient authority was MacDonald and he had the additional advantage of being untainted by the war.

It is easy to be cynical about MacDonald's attitude towards the I.L.P.: of course he saw it as a stepping stone to the House of Commons and to the leadership of the P.L.P. But at this time he had a genuine attachment to the party and was firmly convinced of the need for the I.L.P.<sup>61</sup> As far as Wheatley and his friends were concerned, MacDonald was easily the best man for the job, and he always responded

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<sup>59</sup>Labour Leader, 26 February, 1920.

<sup>60</sup>Forward, 5 July, 1919.

<sup>61</sup>See his letter in Margaret Bondfield, A Life's Work (London: Hutchinson, 1949), p.247.

well to their support. He spoke freely, and often, in Glasgow during the war and was regarded by some as "a strong man fighting against adversity, a revolutionary Socialist held in bonds by reactionary Trade Union leaders like Clynes, Thomas, Henderson".<sup>62</sup> This picture does not reflect reality, but in many cases it is the image that counts.

The Glasgow Labour men were confident of doing well at the next Parliamentary election. Dollan confidently remarked in March 1922 that "It was within the power of the [ I.L.P. ] to win a majority of the Glasgow seats whenever an election came".<sup>63</sup> The candidates, too, were confident and well prepared. Kirkwood described their preparation:

For months [ before the election ] eleven of us... met very Saturday evening to discuss a plan of campaign.... Each evening we discussed a different subject, always from the point of view that we were to be the next Government.

And the result was that "any one of us could go on to the platform of any other and speak without the risk of uttering conflicting views."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> John Scanlon, Decline and Fall of the Labour Party (London: Peter Davies, 1932), p.27.

<sup>63</sup> Glasgow Herald, 1 April, 1922.

<sup>64</sup> Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, pp. 188-9.

The Coalition Government broke up dramatically when the leading Conservatives agreed at the Carlton Club Meeting of 19 October 1922 to fight the election as an independent party. The collapse was not altogether unexpected though its suddenness was. Lloyd George's leadership had come under heavy fire and no criticism was more accurate than that from Keynes, who wrote:

Our affairs have been conducted since the Armistice with insincerity and incompetence. For four years no question has been settled on its real merits. In spite of his great gifts, master of conciliation and persuasion, yet because he appeals to all that is shortest in view, backwards in memory and forwards in precision, Lloyd George has proved himself the least capable of enduring and constructive statesmanship of any man who has held long power in England. Perhaps we lose our time in devising paper schemes... and ought to concentrate energy on the political strife which alone can free us from the methods and the persons who have led us where we are.<sup>65</sup>

As far as the I.L.P. was concerned, the election was very much of a local affair: the I.L.P. N.A.C. actually mentioned approvingly "the manner in which the branches of the Party and local organisations rallied to the financial support of their candidates."<sup>66</sup> In Glasgow, and in the West of Scotland generally, the man behind Labour's electoral

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<sup>65</sup> Manchester Guardian Reconstruction Supplement 8, quoted in New Leader, 13 October, 1922.

<sup>66</sup> I.L.P. Report, 1923, p.28.

success was John Wheatley.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, according to Scanlon, in Glasgow "the official programme issued by the Labour Party was largely ignored and the election fought on a series of leaflets and manifestos drafted mainly by Wheatley."<sup>68</sup> On the evening of Saturday 28 October Wheatley chaired a meeting of twenty-one prospective Labour candidates and summed up Labour's case against the Liberal and Conservative Parties. As his reported speech contains most points made by the West of Scotland Labour candidates during the campaign, it is worth considering it in some detail.

The Liberals and Conservatives together had brought the country to its knees, created a million and a half unemployed, and brought wages to the hunger level. "The people were beaten to their knees. They were stripped of everything but their votes. Capitalism stood triumphant." Yet in the midst of these deplorable conditions the nation was invited to forget its troubles and concentrate on the

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<sup>67</sup>Wheatley was later described as the "organiser of victory", McNair, James Maxton, p.96, and as "the field marshall of the fight," Gilbert McAllister, James Maxton: The Portrait of a Rebel (London: John Murray, 1935), p.97.

<sup>68</sup>Scanlon, Decline and Fall of the Labour Party, p.29.

"personal squabbles and mean ambitions of party politicians."

The break-up of the Coalition raised visions of a serious struggle between parties of opposing principles. But:

There was no fundamental difference. The rival parties were not enemies. The fight was a farce. It resembled a frame-up contest between professional pugilists, where the blows fell softly on smiling faces and the proceeds are afterwards amicably divided.

The Liberal and Conservative approach to economic problems was fundamentally wrong. Wealth existed in abundance: it was not the production but the distribution of goods which was wrong.<sup>69</sup>

In their search for a market for great stores of goods the capitalists screamed about the necessity of putting Germany on its feet, Austria on its feet, Russia on its feet, and talked about granting credits which would enable those countries to purchase from us, so clearing our markets and setting our industries going. But why not set Glasgow on its feet, Dundee on its feet, Lanarkshire on its feet? Couldn't the people in these places use more goods if they had the power to purchase them?

Labour would change this system and tackle the distribution problem. It would also give the land to the people, nationalise the banking system, establish national factories for the production of building materials and realise the

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<sup>69</sup>This was one of Wheatley's first speeches expounding the under-consumption theory. See also his article in Forward, 28 October, 1922, where he wrote: "I want to repudiate emphatically the idea that the country is poor, as a matter of fact the poverty of the workers is due to the embarrassing wealth of the country."



dream of homes for heroes. It would eliminate poverty and unemployment. It would "introduce honesty into politics and brotherhood into life."<sup>70</sup>

But at least one Glaswegian was soon to dispute the "honesty" claim. In a letter to the Glasgow Herald signed "Disgusted" he characterised the conduct and attitude of the Labour candidates as "contemptible, despicable, and dishonourable". The basis of his disgust was a circular, bearing the names of Wheatley and Kirkwood, which was issued to the female electors in each of the twelve Glasgow constituencies fought by Labour. It claimed that tenants were entitled to receive approximately one year's rent which had been wrongfully taken in illegal increases, and that property owners were trying to secure the election of anti-Labour M.P.s. who would pass an act allowing the factors to retain this money.<sup>71</sup>

The Glasgow Labour movement were overjoyed at the election results. In Glasgow they won ten seats. Wheatley romped home in Shettleston with a majority of 4,991, with the Communist candidate, Guy Aldred, receiving a meagre 470 votes. In Bridgeton, Maxton established a new low in

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<sup>70</sup> Glasgow Herald, 30 October, 1922.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 20 November, 1922.

cash-votes ratios with a total election budget of £174, implying an average cost per vote of two-and-a-half pence. George Buchanan was victorious in Gorbals, Campbell Stephen in Camlachie, Neil Maclean in Govan, James Stewart in St. Rollox, George Hardie in Springburn, John Muir in Maryhill, Thomas Henderson in Tradeston, and, on a split anti-Labour vote, Captain John Hay won in Cathcart.<sup>72</sup> Outside Glasgow the results were almost as good. Kirkwood won Dumbarton, Shinwell won Linlithgow, the colourful MacNeil Weir won Clackmannan, Tom Johnston won West Stirlingshire, Robert Murray, a journalist, won West Renfrewshire, the ex-miner William Wright won Rutherglen, Robert Nichol won East Renfrewshire, and the fiery miner John Robertson won Bothwell.

According to Dollan the chief issues in the Glasgow elections were rents, unemployment, the proposal for a capital levy, and anti-reaction.<sup>73</sup> But in Shettleston Wheatley left little to chance. Local issues were dominant as he pressed "the claims of the Far East of

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<sup>72</sup> Rosslyn Mitchell almost caused a sensation in Bonar Law's constituency of Glasgow Central. The decision to fight Central was taken at the last minute: Wheatley and Kirkwood persuaded Mitchell to stand though there was no organisation and no money, Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, pp. 189-90. Bonar Law, ever pessimistic, was certainly worried by the late challenge: see Lord Beaverbrook, The Decline & Fall of Lloyd George (London: Collins, 1963), pp. 219-20.

<sup>73</sup> Forward, 25 November, 1922.

Glasgow rather than those of the New-East of Europe."

He had the advantage of good organisation: it "came as near perfection as we are ever likely to have it."

His supporters found out exactly where his voters lived and concentrated on getting them to the polling stations: "Half an hour before the booths closed we had less than 50 supporters unpollled, and they were being sought out."<sup>74</sup>

On Sunday 19 November, the day the victors were to leave Glasgow for Westminster, three gigantic meetings were held.<sup>75</sup> The main I.L.P. meeting was held in the Metropole Theatre where Dollan presided over a packed audience while thousands were addressed outside by some of the new M.Ps. The Trades and Labour Council organised the other two in the City Hall and in St. Andrew's Hall, where Mitchell and Herbert Heighon presided. These last two were the more historic as over 8,000 people heard their new M.Ps. pledge themselves to the following declaration:<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 25 November, 1922.

<sup>75</sup>Except where noted, the remainder of this chapter is based on Glasgow Herald, 20 November, 1922, and Forward, 25 November, 1922.

<sup>76</sup>The author of the declaration was Mitchell, McAllister, James Maxton, p.101.

The Labour Party members of Parliament for the City of Glasgow, inspired by zeal for the welfare of humanity and the prosperity of all peoples, and strengthened by the trust reposed in them by their fellow-citizens, have resolved to dedicate themselves to the reconciliation and unity of the nations of the world and the development and happiness of the people of this island.

They record their infinite gratitude to the pioneer minds of past generations who, by their services and sacrifices, have opened up the path for the freedom of the people.

They send to all peoples a message of goodwill, reconciliation and friendship.

To the sister nations of the British Commonwealth they send fraternal greetings, and offer all encouragement in the difficult task of self-realisation and self-government.

To the men who bore the burden of war they offer their grateful thanks, and promise that those who have suffered shall be generously treated, and that the widows and orphans of those who fell shall be cherished by the nation.

They promise that they will urge without ceasing the need for providing houses for the people, suitable to enshrine the spirit of Home, that men and women may live in healthy surroundings and that little children may bloom and flourish. They will bear in their hearts the sorrows of the aged, the widowed mother and the poor, that their lives shall not be without comfort.

They will endeavour to purge industry of the curse of unhealthy workshops, to restore wages to the level of adequate maintenance and to eradicate the corrupting effects of monopoly and avarice.

For those who are without work, they will press for the provision of useful employment or reasonable maintenance.

They will have regard to the weak and those stricken by disease, that medical science and skill shall not be wanting to restore them to health and to eradicate preventable disease from our land.

For those who have fallen in the struggle of life, and are in prison, they will labour that their lot may be lightened, and that they may be strengthened to face the temptations of the world on their release.

To this end they will endeavour so to adjust the finances of their nation that the burden of public debt may be relieved and the responsibility for the maintenance of national administration be borne by those who, by the possession of the land of the nation, or the wealth created by the citizens of the nation, are best able to bear.

In all things they will abjure vanity and self-aggrandisement, recognising that they are the honoured servants of the people, and that their only righteous purpose is to promote the welfare of their fellow-citizens and the well-being of mankind.<sup>77</sup>

It was a religious rather than a political declaration, and the religious atmosphere of the meetings was heightened by the singing of the twenty-third and 124th Psalms.

That evening the new M.Ps. were dinner-guests of the I.L.P. at Glasgow's Kenilworth Hotel, about half a mile from St. Enoch Station. Though aware of the crowds thronging the centre of the city, they must have been overwhelmed by the scenes that awaited them at the Station. An estimated fifty or sixty thousand people crammed into St. Enoch Square and the surrounding streets in an attempt to see them off. All traffic in Argyll Street and Buchanan

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<sup>77</sup>A shortened version of this declaration is in Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, pp. 192-3.

Street came to a halt as processions surged towards the station. The crowd had begun to gather in the late afternoon, and when darkness fell the street lights streamed down on a seething mass of men and women drawn from every part of the city. On the steps leading to the station was the William Morris Choir leading the singing, and above them two red flags blazed in the gleam of the arc lamps. The new M.P.s. forced their way through with great difficulty, as the massed voice of thousands roared in welcome, and Maclean and Maxton climbed on the parapet of the station carriage way to address them. The 10.45 train pulled out of the station to the strains of the "Internationale", and at Kilmarnock Station another choir waited to sing them on their way.

"We were going to do big things." wrote Kirkwood: "We were the stuff of which reform is made."<sup>78</sup> And Shinwell wrote, "We had been elected because it was believed we could perform miracles."<sup>79</sup> They did not sleep that night. Excited and tense they crammed together and spent the journey discussing their plans. In the morning they arrived into a different world. But their

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., pp. 191-2.

<sup>79</sup> Shinwell, Conflict Without Malice, p.77.

ardour was not dimmed. Kirkwood, "sitting on the dickey of a horse-drawn charabanc, announced their arrival by lustily singing 'Scots wa hae' as they drove from the station."<sup>80</sup> The "wild men from the Clyde" had arrived.

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<sup>80</sup> Scanlon, Decline and Fall of the Labour Party, pp. 29-30.

## CHAPTER VI

### FROM OPPOSITION TO OFFICE

In London, Wheatley's comparative wealth set him a little apart from his Clydeside colleagues. He could afford to live in hotels, his usual residence being either the Bedford in Bloomsbury or, more commonly, the Cosmo in Southampton Row. Maxton and Stephen initially lodged in Pimlico: later, joined by Buchanan, they moved to a small fourth floor flat in Battersea where they remained for several years. After a few weeks in Clapham, Kirkwood moved into lodgings with Johnston in Maida Vale. Shinwell, however, was soon joined by his wife and children and moved to Essex.<sup>1</sup> The rest of the Clydeside M.Ps. faced a lonely existence in the strange and soulless heart of British capitalism.

Wheatley had no financial problems, but many of the others had. Shinwell has recalled that on arrival in London he had little more than £5, and he had a wife and family to support. He wrote:

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<sup>1</sup>Middlemas, The Clydesiders, pp. 113 and 121; McNair, James Maxton, The Beloved Rebel, p.142.



Making ends meet was a problem with which we were all familiar, but doing so in those first few months in London was difficult indeed. Meals in the House were quite beyond the means of most of the Scottish Labour members, and we used to walk miles to discover cheap and clean food.<sup>2</sup>

Johnston later wrote of "the boredom and weariness of the week-ends we Scots M.Ps. from the Clydeside had to spend in London."<sup>3</sup> And Gallacher, writing about the events of 1924, mentioned that

Wheatley never took to the life in London, nor to the sham and hypocrisy of official receptions and gatherings of that sort. I recall how one evening, when he had accompanied me to an open-air meeting in Finsbury Park, we got a bus back to the Angel and went into a Lyons Cafe for tea and buns. John was pleased with the meeting; it had been like a breath of fresh air after all he had to go through with those abortive Cabinet meetings. "You know, Willie," he said, "it made me feel that I was back home in Glasgow."<sup>4</sup>

But on arrival in London there was little time to feel homesick. Wheatley and his colleagues were immediately plunged into the debate about the leadership of the P.L.P. Thirty-one I.L.P. M.Ps. met at the I.L.P. headquarters on 20 November primarily to decide whether to put forward a nomination for the P.L.P. leadership at a meeting the

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<sup>2</sup>Shinwell, Conflict Without Malice, p.82.

<sup>3</sup>Johnston, Memories, p.47.

<sup>4</sup>William Gallacher, Last Memoirs (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1966), p.200.

following day. It was obvious that the Clydeside M.Ps. would support MacDonald, and that most I.L.P. ers would also be behind him. MacDonald's anti-war stand had strengthened his position in the I.L.P., and Clynes, who had served the wartime governments, had virtually no hope of I.L.P. backing. There was no question of the Clyde group regarding MacDonald as a revolutionary: despite much of what they said and wrote, none of them was a revolutionary either.<sup>5</sup> Maxton never really trusted MacDonald, although he would never dream of supporting Clynes: he preferred Wheatley as leader, but, at this time, such an idea was impossible.<sup>6</sup> Shinwell has stated that Maxton opposed Shinwell's nomination of MacDonald "with all the vehemence at his command",<sup>7</sup> while Kirkwood has given the impression that all the Clydeside M.Ps. were solidly behind MacDonald.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps surprisingly there was some opposition to MacDonald at this meeting, although when the matter was put to the vote MacDonald won comfortably. But the Clyde group was

<sup>5</sup>It was not a case of "confusing pacifism with revolutionary fervour". Roy Jenkins, Mr. Attlee (London: Heineman, 1948) p.102.

<sup>6</sup>Shinwell, Conflict Without Malice, p.83.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p.83.

<sup>8</sup>Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, pp.195-7.

surprised by the "cloud of suspicion and distrust" in which MacDonald seemed to move, and Kirkwood wrote:

So all-pervading was this feeling that even John Wheatley... began to grow uneasy as to what was behind all the headshaking and shoulder-shrugging. 'What does it mean?' he asked. 'Is it jealousy? .... The man seems to have no friends.'<sup>9</sup>

The meeting of 118 Labour and I.L.P. M.Ps. in the Grand Committee Room at Westminster on 21 November was much more evenly divided. The prominent Labour M.Ps., especially Thomas and Snowden, spoke in favour of Clynes,<sup>10</sup> who also had the support of a majority, but by no means all, of the trade union M.Ps., some of whom were absent. MacDonald's support came mainly from the newly elected M.Ps., and this was just sufficient. The Daily Herald said that MacDonald won by 61 votes to 57; The Times gave it 61 to 56.<sup>11</sup> MacDonald's election was then put as a substantive motion and carried without dissent.<sup>12</sup> On the urging of MacDonald, Clynes was unanimously elected Deputy Leader.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 195-6.

<sup>10</sup> J.H. Thomas, My Story (London: Hutchinson, 1937), p.249; Philip, Viscount Snowden, An Autobiography (London, Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934), pp. 573-4.

<sup>11</sup> Daily Herald, 22 November, 1922; The Times, 22nd November, 1922.

<sup>12</sup> L. MacNeil Weir, The Tragedy of Ramsay MacDonald (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938), p.108.

Clynes stated later that day that he was not disturbed by the result, "although I dislike the procedure reported in the press whereby a large number of new members decided for a change in the chairmanship before the party meeting was held."<sup>13</sup> Several of the Clyde group believed that they alone had been responsible for MacDonald's election. For example, Kirkwood wrote, "It was the Clyde Group of Labour Members who made Ramsay MacDonald leader of the Party."<sup>14</sup> Snowden also believed that MacDonald "owed his election" to the Clydeside M.Ps.<sup>15</sup> This is true only in the very narrow sense that had they not voted for MacDonald he would not have been elected leader. In fact, MacDonald had considerable minority support amongst the trade union M.Ps. But at the time it was the impression that mattered, and it seemed that the Clydeside M.Ps. had descended on London and engineered MacDonald's election. The public were soon to forget this myth, Kirkwood and a few others did not.

At this same meeting Wheatley, Johnston and Shinwell were voted onto the P.L.P. Executive, while Neil Maclean

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<sup>13</sup>Glasgow Herald, 22 November, 1922.

<sup>14</sup>Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, p.195. See also pp. 197 and 217.

<sup>15</sup>Snowden, An Autobiography, p.574.

became one of the Whips.<sup>16</sup> When the Executive Committee of the I.L.P. N.A.C. was replaced by a Consultative Committee, Wheatley was a member.<sup>17</sup> And in April 1923, Wheatley was elected one of the four national members of the N.A.C.<sup>18</sup> But though Wheatley and his colleagues made these inroads into the I.L.P. organisation, they made little immediate impact in the House of Commons.

After a conducted tour of the Palace of Westminster by Neil Maclean, the Clyde M.Ps. squeezed into the side galleries of the House of Lords to hear the King's Speech. Later as they prepared to leave the Chamber Kirkwood, according to the Glasgow Herald shouted, "We will soon smash all this. We will give them tranquility."<sup>19</sup> According to The Times correspondent he said, "Did you go yonder?" - waving his hand in the direction of the House of Lords - "Isn't it a horrible scandal?"<sup>20</sup> And Kirkwood himself, who had seen in the Lords everything that he despised, states that he turned to Wheatley and

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<sup>16</sup> I.L.P. Report, 1923, pp. 48-9.

<sup>17</sup> I.L.P. N.A.C., Minutes, 8 and 9 February 1923; I.L.P. Report, 1923, p.35.

<sup>18</sup> I.L.P. Report, 1923, p.132.

<sup>19</sup> Glasgow Herald, 21 November, 1922.

<sup>20</sup> The Times, 24 November, 1922.

said aloud, "John, we'll soon change all this."<sup>21</sup> But whatever he said, it had no effect on the M.Ps. surrounding them. The wild Clydesiders could preach revolution if they wished, but street-corner tirades would make little impression on the House.

This was also apparent when several of the new M.Ps. delivered their maiden speeches in the Debate on the Address. While MacDonald's speech was a reasoned attack on the Government, the maiden speakers were more intemperate. Shinwell has described the occasion:

In pre-election days they would have aroused cheers from the electors. In the House they fell flat. No one... could doubt the sincerity which impelled my friends to demand immediate social improvements, to bring about the instant end of capitalism, and to eradicate the evils of unemployment then and there. Yet they failed because of<sup>22</sup> their appeal to emotions instead of the mind.

One of the few maiden speeches to attract praise was Wheatley's.<sup>23</sup> He made a scathing attack on capitalism. It was he claimed the system rather than the personnel that caused all the problems: "if those [Government] Benches were occupied by Angels from Heaven

<sup>21</sup>Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, p.201.

<sup>22</sup>Shinwell, Conflict Without Malice, p.85.

<sup>23</sup>Snowden, An Autobiography, pp. 576-8.

and they defended the capitalist system of society, you would still have the present deplorable conditions."<sup>24</sup> As the speeches went on, the House emptied, and on the Government front-benches only Bonar Law sat through the whole proceedings.

It was to be some time before the subduing influence of the House of Commons had any real effect on the hard core of the Clydeside M.P.s.: it certainly had little effect on their activities in their first few years in Parliament. But Kirkwood at least was conscious of its existence. Before 1922 he knew little of "the Great Ones, the Powerful Ones, the Lordly Ones" but felt that "they and the world they represented were crushing my fellows down into poverty, misery, despair and death."<sup>25</sup> But once in Parliament, "I had to shake myself occasionally as I found myself moving about and talking with men whose names were household words. More strange was it to find them all so simple and unaffected and friendly." Violently attacked over unemployment, Bonar Law "showed no resentment"; denounced as a "Uriah Heep", Baldwin

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<sup>24</sup>159 H.C. Deb., 5s, 98.

<sup>25</sup>Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, p.200.

was gently reproachful;<sup>26</sup> and a Conservative M.P., having heard Kirkwood make a "flaming speech" about the poverty of Hebridean crofters, told him, "I could not vote for you, but I should like to help those men if I may," and gave him a five-pound note.<sup>27</sup>

Some of the new Labour M.Ps. were soon caught up in London's social life. They were now personalities, loved by journalists and sought after as curiosity-pieces by hostesses. Wheatley, Maxton, and Johnston took alarm and launched a declaration against "social fraternising" with political opponents. Wheatley managed to force on to the 1923 I.L.P. Conference agenda a resolution "That this Conference recommends that Labour M.Ps. should not accept [the] hospitality of political opponents at public dinners and society functions."<sup>28</sup> Such an attitude to Parliament may be simply impractical within the framework of parliamentary government, but it is symptomatic of the difficulties the Clydesiders faced in adjusting to the new conditions in which they now operated.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p.202.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p.206

<sup>28</sup>I.L.P. Report, 1923, p.143.



What they wanted was action, not words, and, as Wheatley admitted, their thoughts were "governed" by the "conditions of the people at home".<sup>29</sup> This parochialism was not altogether undesirable, but its effect was to engender a feeling of impatience: they felt that the House was "being treated to intellectual fencing while social conditions were waiting to be solved".<sup>30</sup>

This frustration was highlighted by their dismay at the Labour movement's preoccupation with foreign affairs. Snowden and MacDonald were convinced that reparations and the consequent fall in trade were the basic causes of the high unemployment, and this view was supported by the ex-Liberals and most of the U.D.C. group - the group which, led by Allen, now controlled the I.L.P. In April 1921 Wheatley had agreed with this thesis;<sup>31</sup> by the autumn of 1922 he had changed his mind.<sup>32</sup> J.A. Hobson had put forward his under-consumption explanation of unemployment as early as 1889, and when he used this as the basis of his Economics of Unemployment, which appeared in 1922, Wheatley accepted it uncritically.

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<sup>29</sup>Glasgow Herald, 16 December, 1922.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 16 December, 1922.

<sup>31</sup>See above, pp. 146-7.

<sup>32</sup>See above, p.157.

In January 1923 Wheatley's short pamphlet, Starving in the Midst of Plenty, applied Hobson's ideas to the country's problems. The country, he argued, was not poor. There were plentiful stocks of goods. But the home market had been destroyed and this had led to reduced output and a decline in wages. The remedy was to raise purchasing power.

I do not agree with those who believe that the key is to be found in greater trade with Russia and other countries. The key lies in greater trade with our own population.... what we require today is greater consumption of goods, not more production.<sup>33</sup>

And in March, he went so far as to attack free trade, a tenet of faith for many I.L.P.ers: impediments to international trade did not matter, underconsumption did.<sup>34</sup> Armed with this theory, and exasperated by the obsession with foreign affairs,<sup>35</sup> Wheatley and his colleagues swung into action.

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<sup>33</sup> John Wheatley, Starving in the Midst of Plenty (London: I.L.P., 1923), p.4.

<sup>34</sup> New Leader, 30 March, 1923.

<sup>35</sup> Kirkwood's outburst in March 1923 is typical of their attitude: "I sincerely regret that many members of the Labour Party should be eternally giving prominence to the Ruhr, or Martenegro, or Timbuctoo, when their prime duty is to emancipate the British working class. I know that all this interest in foreign affairs is a heritage from Liberalism." New Leader, 30 March, 1923.

The French occupation of the Ruhr in January 1923 was denounced in an emergency resolution at the Scottish I.L.P. Conference in Glasgow as a "militarist and capitalist aggression on a defenceless people, and a knavish blow at international peace and the reconstruction of Europe."<sup>36</sup> The N.A.C. immediately sent a letter to the Socialist and Labour Parties of Germany, France and Belgium, declaring that since the Armistice the policy of the victorious powers had "plunged the workers of Central Europe in a poverty which imperils civilisation itself" and that "the ruin of Europe explains the unemployment from which we [in Britain] suffer".<sup>37</sup> One of the new ex-Liberal M.Ps., Roden Buxton, a close friend of Allen's, was sent to the Ruhr on behalf of the N.A.C., to investigate and "convey sympathy to the German workers".<sup>38</sup> His report, sent to the New Leader, was full of righteous indignation:

Never have I seen a highly-skilled and well-educated working class so insolently flouted as it is today in the Ruhr. Never have I been so vividly impressed with the dignity of the plain civilian in his dirty coat and threadbare trousers, facing the swaggering

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<sup>36</sup> The Times, 22 January, 1923.

<sup>37</sup> I.L.P. Report, 1923, p.46.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 1923, p.25.

officer in his spick-and-span uniform, with his tanks and aeroplanes and armoured cars.<sup>39</sup>

The full N.A.C. Manifesto, issued a month after the beginning of the crisis, showed the effect of Allen's belief in the need for a "constructive alternative" in addition to condemnatory phrase-making. After characterising the French action as "a breach of international law", it advanced a "comprehensive plan" calling for a reduction of reparations to a sum sufficient for the reconstruction of the devastated areas with an international loan to France of that amount, complete recognition of Russia, full rights of commerce to Germany, and action through a reconstructed League of Nations.<sup>40</sup>

Wheatley, Maxton, Kirkwood, and Stephen, however, decided upon a three-day visit to the Ruhr on their own account. During their visit they discussed the problem with the Belgian Socialist leader de Brouchere, the staff of the British Headquarters at Cologne, the British Consul-General for the Rhineland, the British Vice-Consul at Essen, Von Bulow of Krupps, and the Executive Committee of the Ruhr Miners' Union. One of their two main conclusions

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<sup>39</sup>New Leader, 2 February, 1923.

<sup>40</sup>I.L.P. Report, 1923, pp. 44-5.

was that the Ruhr workers, rather ludicrously described by the N.A.C. as "serfs of a foreign taskmaster",<sup>41</sup> still enjoyed better conditions than the workers in the West of Scotland:

we did not find dwelling-houses falling about the ears of the people, as they are in our district in the West of Scotland. We saw no queues of unemployed men at unemployment exchanges, nor did raggedness and outward signs of poverty obtrude themselves to our notice.

The other was that the ore-bearing Loraine and the coal-bearing Ruhr formed one economic unit, so that "The only way out of the difficulty is for France, Germany, Britain, Belgium, and Italy to internationalise the Ruhr coalfield." The coalfield should be administered by an international board of directors who would sell the coal on the open market and "the dividends earned would be distributed proportionately as reparations."<sup>42</sup> It was not a particularly far-fetched scheme, and it was at least more perceptive than the simple anti-French attitude which permeated many in the I.L.P.

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 1923, p.46.

<sup>42</sup>The full text of their report is in Forward, 3 March, 1923. On 6 March Wheatley outlined the group's views in the House of Commons; see 161 H.C. Deb. 5s, 340-7.

The differing I.L.P. attitudes towards the Ruhr problem came into the open at the I.L.P. Conference in London in April. A Norwich addendum to the N.A.C. line sought to secure the immediate withdrawal of British troops, a proposal which the N.A.C. opposed as an emotional reaction rather than part of an international policy. Here Wheatley differed with Allen and the N.A.C. He read into their attitude a willingness to put pressure on the French to the extent of going to war to decide whether French or German capitalists should control the Ruhr. "When they had lectured France and denounced the immorality of her policy and action, if France still refused to leave the Ruhr, were they prepared to abandon neutrality and use force?" British capitalists would be pleased if Germany retained the Ruhr as they feared the competition of a united Alsace and Ruhr economic bloc, while German capitalists were interested only in the profits from the Ruhr. Why should a socialist party be prepared to go to war on the issue? He further disagreed with the whole N.A.C. line that "the ruin of Europe was responsible for the unemployment and misery in Great Britain". Where was the evidence for such a belief?

Could they tell him of a single article for which they were dependent in Europe and of which there was any shortage? Was it not the case that all the repositories were bulging with goods? Was it

not the case that the British workers were starving for these goods and the reason was the shortage of purchasing power in the pockets of the workers?<sup>43</sup>

Allen rebuked him for oversimplifying the issue and objected to the selfish, national view of Socialism which Wheatley seemed to be advocating. "They stood for certain great moral ideas. They did not believe in geographical boundaries."<sup>44</sup> And the original resolution and the Norwich addendum were carried overwhelmingly. There were therefore three attitudes within the I.L.P. The mass of the party was overwhelmingly pacifist and wanted nothing to do with militarism. Allen and the N.A.C. had a more sophisticated attitude: military resources should be fitted into a pattern of moral international action. And Wheatley and his friends wanted to turn their backs on Europe and concentrate on domestic affairs.

But although Wheatley failed to divert the I.L.P. from its internationalist outlook, his constant advocacy of the underconsumption explanation of unemployment did bear fruits. When the N.A.C. Manifesto on Unemployment appeared in October it included, as well as a brief

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<sup>43</sup>I.L.P. Report, 1923, p.89.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 1923, p.91.

paragraph on trade with Russia and revision of the Versailles Treaty, a statement that with the country "glutted with wealth" production and distribution should be harmonised so that "no man shall lack work or wages".<sup>45</sup>

And the New Leader spelled this out:

The home market has collapsed because of the loss of purchasing power represented by a reduction of wages to the extent of £6,000,000,000 per annum. Scientific and necessary production must be stimulated by improving the wages of the workers. The nation is menaced by a plague of under-consumption.<sup>46</sup>

It would be wrong to picture Wheatley as an economic thinker. He was a publicist and propagandist. His ideas on under-consumption came straight from Hobson, who in many respects anticipated the Keynesian views in the 1930s. But though not the author of the theory, Wheatley spent the rest of his life explaining it.

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After MacDonald replaced Clynes as leader in 1922 the attacks on the weaknesses of the P.L.P. as an opposition did not cease: they came from another direction - from Wheatley and his little group. They attacked the leadership on the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1924, pp. 61-3.

<sup>46</sup> New Leader, 26 October, 1923.



grounds that it lacked ferocity and bite, and to rectify the situation they determined to ginger the P.L.P. into a less "responsible" opposition. Their most dramatic attempt to do this came on 27 June 1923 when the House was in Committee debating the Scottish Health Estimates which had been considerably reduced from the previous year's level.

Maxton had clearly lost his temper when he called Sir Frederick Banbury a murderer for supporting the Government's financial stringency. His charge that the Government's policy would lead to the deaths of "thousands of children" and that this was "a cold callous deliberate crime in order to save money"<sup>47</sup> immediately "electrified the atmosphere" in the House.<sup>48</sup> And by the time Wheatley repeated the charge the near empty Chamber had begun to fill with excited members, while journalists abandoned the Lords debate and raced back to the Commons. Joynson-Hicks the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, appeared on the scene with a full bench of junior ministers. The disturbance lasted for an hour and a quarter and only gradually subsided once Maxton, Wheatley, Stephen, and Buchanan

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<sup>47</sup>165 H.C. Deb. 5s, 3279 et seq.

<sup>48</sup>Glasgow Herald, 28 June, 1923.

had been suspended. Wheatley and Maxton had sat together on the bench behind the Opposition Front Bench, and, according to The Times correspondent, MacDonald, "very pale, turned and spoke angry words to his back-benchers but they were beyond his authority."<sup>49</sup> Indeed, according to Paton, MacDonald laid "his noble head on his hands as he writhed uneasily on his bench and audibly lamented with a groan of despair - 'This is the end of the Labour Party.'" <sup>50</sup> The Labour Front Bench was furious and dismayed at the scene and, when the votes of suspension were taken, refused to go into the Division Lobbies.

It was later rumoured that Maxton had been prepared to withdraw the offensive epithet, but that his attitude had been stiffened by Wheatley. MacNeil Weir refutes this, claiming that Maxton was emotionally and physically exhausted and as he sat down he said to Wheatley, "You take my place, John. I refuse to withdraw. I cannot apologise."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>The Times, 28 June, 1923.

<sup>50</sup>Paton, Left Turn! p.163. For MacDonald's dislike of incidents and scenes see Lord Elton, The Life of Ramsay MacDonald (London: Collins & Co, 1939), p.150., where he considers MacDonald's reactions to the scenes engineered by Victor Grayson in 1908-9.

<sup>51</sup>Forward, 6 July, 1923. According to Professor Marwick, on 28 June Maxton sent a strongly worded private letter to the Secretary of the Bridgeton Labour Party demanding total support

Several people thought that Maxton and his colleagues had simply lost their tempers.<sup>52</sup> But the scene was clearly premeditated in the sense that the group was looking for an opportunity to create a scene and an issue upon which to stump the country. This is clear from an article written by Wheatley before 27 June and published in the New Leader on 29 June:

What are called "scenes" in Parliament shock only those who are out of touch with the realities of working class life, and who forget the scenes in the homes of the workers.... The workers owe nothing to a Capitalist Parliament, and wish to pay it exactly what they owe.

It is true, I believe, that the more aggressive parliamentary policy for which many Labour members crave might prevent a number of timid Liberals from joining us. I, for one, don't want Liberals to come into the Labour Party unless they are ready to leave their Liberalism outside. I have no patience with the sham respectability that is more shocked by an outburst by David Kirkwood than by the starvation of a child.<sup>53</sup>

It is possible that the scene grew out of a genuinely unpremeditated attack from Maxton, but it is certain

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for his action. This seems to show that Maxton may not really have had the "soft centre" normally attributed to him. Arthur Marwick, "James Maxton: his place in Scottish Labour History", The Scottish Historical Review, April 1964, XLII, p.32.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, New Statesman, 4 August, 1923.

<sup>53</sup> New Leader, 29 June, 1923.

that some scene would have been forthcoming anyway.<sup>54</sup>

Wheatley and his colleagues explained their actions to their constituents in the columns of Forward and of Wheatley's newly founded Glasgow Eastern Standard, but they were completely unrepentant. Speaking at Shettleston Wheatley said that:

He did not violate the rules of Parliament in a fit of temper. Had he done so he would have been ashamed and would have apologised. He acted with calm deliberation and so to have apologised would have been cowardly and dishonest.<sup>55</sup>

The press had a field day and the "rebels" emerged as proletarian heroes. One leading Communist suggested that Wheatley had "more political acumen in his little finger than is contained in the combined heads and bodies of Snowden and MacDonald".<sup>56</sup> Brailsford, however, strongly criticised their policy. He accepted that the workers, who knew little of what actually went on in Parliament, could understand scenes - "drama can reach them" - and their support for an aggressive socialist party was

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<sup>54</sup> Sir Patrick Hastings mentions that prior to the incident he was approached by members of the group who asked if salaries were suspended when M.P.s. were suspended. Sir Patrick Hastings, Autobiography (London: Heineman, 1948), p.228.

<sup>55</sup> Glasgow Eastern Standard, 4 August, 1923.

<sup>56</sup> Communist Review, August 1923, pp. 154-5, quoted in Stephen Richards Graubard, British Labour and the Russian Revolution 1917-1924 (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p.252.

essential: but scenes discredited Parliament, weakened MacDonald's prestige, and their effect would fade with frequency so that to maintain the stimulus larger scenes would be necessary and this could eventually lead to violence.<sup>57</sup>

The Labour leadership decided that some action had to be taken against the suspended M.P.s., and eventually it was decided to leave the matter in the hands of the P.L.P. Executive. If the "rebels" apologised when summoned before that body on 3 July the whole matter would be dropped. But this they refused to do. The Executive censured them and agreed that any apology made to the Speaker would suffice.<sup>58</sup> But this they also refused to do. Wheatley and his colleagues had made the headlines and were now free to stump the country attacking the Government's social policies and, by implication, attacking the P.L.P. leadership for its ineffectiveness.<sup>59</sup>

Despite initial publicity, however, it seems that their newsworthiness was diminishing towards the end of July. Accordingly, Wheatley summoned Gallacher to his

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<sup>57</sup> New Leader, 6 July, 1923.

<sup>58</sup> Forward, 7 July, 1923.

<sup>59</sup> Glasgow Herald, 9 July, 1923.

room in the Cosmo Hotel and asked him to go to the House of Commons and try to persuade the other Scottish Labour members to fight to get the suspension lifted, and if this were refused, to get themselves suspended. The Scottish M.Ps. refused, but Neil Maclean, the Scottish Whip, told Gallacher that Baldwin was presenting a motion for the lifting of the suspension on the following Tuesday, 31 July.<sup>60</sup> There was political capital to be made out of this situation and Wheatley, Maxton, and Gallacher quickly decided to issue a statement to the press in the form of a letter to the Speaker, stating that the four suspended M.Ps. intended to go to the House on Monday at 4 p.m. to take their seats.<sup>61</sup> This scheme had the virtue that if it was decided not to proceed with the motion for lifting the suspension then the publicity would help Wheatley and his colleagues; and if the motion went through it would appear that the Government's hand

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<sup>60</sup> Gallacher, Last Memoirs, p.190; William Gallacher, The Rolling of the Thunder (London: Laurence & Wishart, 1947), p.41.

<sup>61</sup> The statement is reproduced in full in Gallacher, The Rolling of the Thunder, pp. 42-3. They argued that it was intolerable that their constituents should be disfranchised for so long and quoted the 1913 case of Moore, the Unionist M.P. for North Armagh: the lifting of Moore's suspension had been urged by the Chairman of Ways and Means - the present Speaker.

had been forced. At 4.20 p.m. on the Monday, Wheatley, Maxton, and Stephen arrived at Westminster by taxi - Buchanan did not put in an appearance. Standing in the rain, they argued "mildly" with policemen who denied them admittance. Then, having posed for the large group of photographers, they departed.<sup>62</sup> The following day the performance was repeated - except that Buchanan was present this time. And just as they were arguing with the police, word came that the suspensions had been lifted.<sup>63</sup> Elated with the success of their plan they adjourned for tea in a Tothill Street Cafe.<sup>64</sup>

They had got the publicity they desired. Their views were now known by all. And they had thoroughly embarrassed MacDonald.<sup>65</sup> They were the champions of the poor and they received solid support in Glasgow. But the New Leader was not impressed:

These tactics of sensation have not served the cause which the Glasgow Members had at

<sup>62</sup>The Times, 31 July, 1923.

<sup>63</sup>The suspension was lifted, without a division shortly before 5 p.m. 167 H.C. Deb. 5s, 1305-18.

<sup>64</sup>Gallacher, Last Memoirs, p.192.

<sup>65</sup>The incident was passed over as quickly as possible in the I.L.F. Report, 1924, p.42.

heart. They have generated much heat. They have provoked much personal comment and criticism. They have centred discussion on the doings of individuals. But we doubt whether they have really roused the conscience of the country over the plight of the Scottish children. That remained for the broad mass of the public a secondary issue, obscured entirely by the hot debate over manners and language.<sup>66</sup>

In fact, it was the New Leader which was wrong. The aim was to put some spark into the P.L.P. and arouse the public anger. In this they succeeded - but not to the extent that they clearly desired.

This onslaught against the "respectability" of the P.L.P. did not seriously imperil Wheatley's position as Labour's main spokesman on housing, and on this subject his pronouncements were constructive. Admittedly, when there were several evictions in the Parkhead area of Glasgow in January 1923 he urged the local residents to take "such steps as were necessary to see that their neighbours were not put out of their houses,"<sup>67</sup> and in April he led some 8000 Glaswegians in a protest demonstration against the Rent Restrictions Bill;<sup>68</sup> but it was in the House of Commons that he made his mark when on 24 April he moved the Opposition rejection of Neville

<sup>66</sup> New Leader, 3 August, 1923.

<sup>67</sup> The Times, 25 January, 1923.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 8 April, 1923.



## Chamberlain's Housing Bill.

He attacked Chamberlain for his lack of understanding: "he does not understand the extent of the housing problem,... he does not understand the cause of the housing shortage, and... he does not understand the people and has no sympathy with the people for whom he is endeavouring to provide in this measure."<sup>69</sup> He quoted some Glasgow statistics: 20,000 names on the Corporation housing list; 13,195 houses, occupied by 58,000 people, were "certified... as not reasonably fit for human habitation;" sixty-six per cent of houses having not more than two apartments and most of them without bathroom or closet accommodation.<sup>70</sup> He quietly added his own experience:

I was one of 11 persons who lived, not merely for a month but for years in a single apartment dwelling in Lanarkshire.... not merely do you not understand the housing problem, but you do not understand the intense and imperishable hatred of your social order that is bred in the breasts of the victims of these housing conditions.<sup>71</sup>

Chamberlain had blamed the war and Lloyd George's 1909 Finance Act for the housing shortage. Wheatley disagreed: the slum problem had existed long before these came along, and the scarcity of houses since about 1910

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<sup>69</sup>163 H.C. Deb. 5s, 322.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 323-4.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 325.

could more rightly be blamed on the formation of rings and combines in the building industry and on the Rent Restrictions Act of 1915.<sup>72</sup> The slump in building had never been broken despite the Addison subsidies.

Wheatley's answer to the problem was to cure the ills of the industry itself, which was chronically short of labour. Those engaged in the building industry should be given some prospects of a successful future: "You will have to convince the fathers and mothers of this country that in putting their children into the building industry and housing they are likely to have some security for sufficiency in years to come." In this context he criticised the two years' limit of the Bill as "ridiculously inadequate".<sup>73</sup> Chamberlain's proposed subsidy of £6 per house per year simply would not provide enough houses. Even with the subsidy the houses built would cost £40 per annum in rents and this was outwith the reach of most of the working class.

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 326. It is interesting that he should place some blame on the 1915 Act as he, and others, believed that Clydeside had played a major part in getting that Act passed by a reluctant Government. See above, p.p. 83-4.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 332.

Anyway these houses would be for sale, not for letting, and the working class had no hope of buying them.<sup>74</sup>

He concluded with a bitter attack on the size of the proposed houses. The parlours were to be 10 feet 6 inches by 9 feet 3 inches:

I wonder what were the dimensions of the table on which the right hon. Gentleman was writing his figures. These houses will never be homes. They will very soon be slums.... whatever be the vicissitudes of party politics in this country, he is stereotyping poverty in housing for half a century to come, and he is giving Parliamentary acceptance to the permanency of class distinctions in this country.<sup>75</sup>

The 1923 Housing Bill was Chamberlain's first political success. He "was sure no one would contradict him because he 'h[e]ld the key position' and knew best what was politically possible,"<sup>76</sup> and he thought his Bill had "knocked the stuffing" out of the Opposition.<sup>77</sup> But this view was not held by everyone. Some might regard the Clydeside M.P.s. as Parliamentary bores, and indeed some of them were, but Wheatley, with a calm and reasonable

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 333.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 335.

<sup>76</sup>Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Labour, 1920-1924 (Cambridge University Press, 1971), p.296.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p.426.

speech, had put on an impressive Parliamentary performance which immediately established his position on the Labour Front Bench. His antics in June and July certainly annoyed MacDonald, but in the eyes of the P.L.P. rank and file he had already firmly established himself as Labour's housing expert.

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The Clydeside M.P.s' suspicions about the real inclinations of the Labour leaders were revived by the results of the 1923 General Election. Baldwin's decision to call an election in December took most politicians by surprise. The main consideration was probably his desire to secure release from Bonar Law's pledge that no change would be made in the fiscal system until after the nation had been consulted. In Baldwin's view the unemployment problem could only be solved by a protective tariff and for that an electoral dispensation was required. The Labour Party were caught unprepared. The only new item in its programme was the proposal for a capital levy, and it relied heavily on simple opposition to protection. For the first time the I.L.P. N.A.C. issued a unified election call to members. Its main points were that this was not a contest between protection and free

trade but between capitalism and socialism, and that the Peace Treaties must be replaced by a "charter of co-operation".<sup>78</sup> This was expanded into a full-scale election booklet, The Socialist Programme.<sup>79</sup>

According to Dollan, the I.L.P. in Scotland were ready for an election. "The prospects are encouraging", he wrote. "In the past year there has been an I.L.P. revival all over Scotland, which has been stimulated by the tremendous amount of propaganda undertaken by the M.Ps."<sup>80</sup> But, as before, Wheatley and his Clydeside colleagues largely ignored the official Labour and I.L.P. campaign proposals. Wheatley concentrated on expounding the underconsumption explanation of unemployment, on slating the Conservatives, and on calling for the nationalisation of land, railways, coal-mines, and banking.<sup>81</sup> The Clydeside I.L.P. ers were riding a wave of popularity, and, with the exception of Hay who lost Cathcart, they were returned with increased

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<sup>78</sup> I.L.P. Report, 1923, pp. 64-5.

<sup>79</sup> I.L.P. The Socialist Programme (1923)

<sup>80</sup> New Leader, 16 November, 1923.

<sup>81</sup> Glasgow Herald, 4 December, 1923.

majorities.

The Conservatives held only 258 seats. The Liberals won 158. And Labour won 191. It was an intriguing result and the air was soon thick with rumours of a Liberal-Labour arrangement. Such a prospect filled the Clydeside Socialists with alarm. An I.L.P. meeting in City Hall, Glasgow, decided to send a telegram to MacDonald:

Glasgow solid behind you and Labour Party for a Labour Government. No coalition under any circumstances. Labour alone is competent and willing to govern.<sup>82</sup>

Wheatley stated bluntly that "If the Labour Movement... were to compromise its principles by allying itself with Liberalism it would be the greatest betrayal in political history."<sup>83</sup> He reiterated this view at greater length in a Forward article entitled "No Coalition - No Compromise", and asserted that a "colourless, diluted policy would be rejected with contempt." In the same issue, Maxton called for an immediate general election, failing which "I hope Liberals and Tories will frankly combine to form a

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 10 December, 1923.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 10 December, 1923.

Government to protect private enterprise against the Socialists."<sup>84</sup> According to The Times, the Clydeside M.P.s. were so against a coalition that "in the event of Mr. MacDonald making any such arrangement with Mr. Asquith they would form themselves into a separate group and maintain a position of critical neutrality, preserving an open mind on every subject that emerged."<sup>85</sup>

The Labour leaders were genuinely surprised by the result of the election: "the possibility of the Labour Party being called upon to take office, as a result of the election of 1923, never occurred to any of us before the day after the poll" wrote Sydney Webb.<sup>86</sup> It was at a meeting of MacDonald, Snowden, Henderson, Clynes, Thomas, and Webb at Webb's house on 10 December that it was unanimously agreed that Labour had to accept office if invited.<sup>87</sup> As MacDonald

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<sup>84</sup> Forward, 15 December, 1923.

<sup>85</sup> The Times, 10 December, 1923.

<sup>86</sup> Sydney Webb, "The First Labour Government", Political Quarterly, vol. ~~XXXI~~ 11, 1961, p.6.

<sup>87</sup> Snowden, An Autobiography, pp. 594-6.

1 ter told a massed audience at a victory rally in the Albert Hall on 8 January 1924, they had no alternative: "If we shirk our responsibilities now we should inflict upon ourselves the defeat that our enemies could not impose on us. So we accept our responsibilities."<sup>88</sup>

It was also decided at Webb's house that in office they would not "live dangerously" as urged by Brailsford<sup>89</sup> and Allen,<sup>90</sup> but, as Snowden puts it, "confine our legislative proposals to measures that we are likely to be able to carry."<sup>91</sup>

That Labour would in fact form a Government was not finally settled until the House of Commons met in January, as Baldwin had decided to carry on until defeated so that the responsibility for putting Labour into office would fall on the Liberals. But Asquith, Baldwin, and the King were in no doubt that Labour would form a Government. Meanwhile MacDonald retired to Leamington where he busied himself trying to draw up a list of Cabinet members. According to Snowden, he did not find the task an easy one: at the meeting at Webb's

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<sup>88</sup>The Times, 9 January, 1924.

<sup>89</sup>New Leader, 16 December, 1923.

<sup>90</sup>Gilbert, Plough My Own Furrow, p.175.

<sup>91</sup>Snowden, An Autobiography, p.596.



house. He told us that he had been looking through the list of Labour M.P.s. and was appalled at the poorness of the material."<sup>92</sup> Cabinet-making continued while the Debate on the Address ran its course, but when MacDonald finally kissed hands on 22 January one post was still to be filled - that of Minister of Health. On 17 December MacDonald had written to Wheatley:

I am making up a list of members from which a Labour administration might be manned if the occasion arose. I should be glad to hear from you... if you would be disposed to consider coming into the team. I have thought little of offices to which to assign them, and there I shall find much difficulty as, so far as a casual look at appointments to be filled goes, I can see that some men who have struck me as being of great promise, may have to wait further opportunities.<sup>93</sup>

Perhaps the events of June and July had coloured MacDonald's view, and on 22 January he offered Wheatley only the Under-Secretaryship at the Ministry of Health with responsibility for housing.<sup>94</sup> The Minister would probably be the younger Arthur Greenwood.

Wheatley had expected to be offered the Ministry,<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., pp. 594-5.

<sup>93</sup>MacDonald to Wheatley, 17 December, 1923.

<sup>94</sup>MacDonald to Wheatley, 22 January, 1924.

<sup>95</sup>See Glasgow Eastern Standard, 19 January, 1924, where it was stated that "Mr. Wheatley is quite likely to become Minister of Health."

and, discussing MacDonald's offer with his Clydeside colleagues, he agreed with Campbell Stephen that "there was no point in his being simply the parliamentary mouthpiece of the Ministry unless he could have some influence in shaping government policy."<sup>96</sup> Accordingly, Wheatley rejected the offer. That same evening MacDonald sent a card to him at the Cosmo Hotel saying that the post of Minister of Health had "not been decided definitely."<sup>97</sup> No record exists of the events of the next few hours, but Wheatley got the job he wanted. Kirkwood was later to write of Wheatley's acceptance of office: "He was a magnificent success as Minister of Health, but we felt that he had left us."<sup>98</sup> It is highly unlikely that Kirkwood and his friends felt this in January 1924: they were more probably overjoyed that there was at least one left-winger in the Cabinet.

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<sup>96</sup> McNair, James Maxton, The Beloved Rebel, p.131.

<sup>97</sup> MacDonald to Wheatley, 22 January, 1924.

<sup>98</sup> Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, p.220.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE 1924 HOUSING ACT

Housing had always been the dominating interest in Wheatley's political life. Now, in the Cabinet and in the office he had always wanted, he had a brief opportunity to put his ideas into practice. He seized that opportunity and pursued his plans with more administrative ability than most people thought he possessed. Mr. Middlemas surely goes too far in asserting that "if any other minister, with the exception of MacDonald at the Foreign Office, had shown a tenth of his talent, the 1924 Government might have been remembered for more than its ineffective minority;"<sup>1</sup> but Wheatley's success in the housing field was one of the few notable achievements of 1924.

He got off to a good start at the Ministry of Health where he "startled and, on the whole, pleased his several Heads of Departments by requiring each of them to give him a lecture describing the work of his special department, which was taken down verbatim and afterwards carefully

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<sup>1</sup>Middlemas, The Clydesiders, p.145.

studied by the Minister and further questions asked."<sup>2</sup>

This was in complete contrast with the antics of Thomas whose first words to the staff at the Colonial Office are reported to have been: "I've been sent here to see that there's no mucking about with the British Empire."<sup>3</sup>

And by March "Wheatley was growing in [his officials'] favour day by day. Their ideal Minister had hitherto been Neville Chamberlain, but they were now beginning to regard Wheatley as even an improvement on him."<sup>4</sup>

Some of his Cabinet colleagues thought, however, that Wheatley might need some assistance, or possibly some watching. Sidney Webb proposed that specialised committees "might be useful to 'weak' Ministers",<sup>5</sup>

and the Cabinet decided on 23 January to establish a Committee on Unemployment and Housing.<sup>6</sup> Webb was to chair this committee which, in addition to Shaw and Wheatley the two Ministers concerned, contained the

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<sup>2</sup>Margaret Cole, ed., Beatrice Webb's Diaries (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1956), vol. II, 1924-1932, p.4.

<sup>3</sup>Gregory Blaxland, J.H. Thomas: A Life for Unity (London: Muller, 1964), p.170.

<sup>4</sup>Keith Middlemas, ed. Thomas Jones: Whitehall Diary (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), Volume I, 1916-1925, p.274.

<sup>5</sup>Sidney Webb, "The First Labour Government", Political Quarterly, vol. XXXII, 1961, p.21.

<sup>6</sup>CAB 23/47 7(24) 3(a)

Under-Secretaries for Scotland, the Treasury, and Health,<sup>7</sup> but it quickly split into two sub-committees, one under Shaw, the other under Wheatley, and although the Unemployment sub-committee met fairly regularly Wheatley's sub-committee on housing soon ceased to meet and he built up his own programme.<sup>8</sup>

Wheatley quickly got down to work. The Cabinet's intention was to tackle housing and unemployment together, and to this end Wheatley and Shaw arranged to meet representatives of the Building Trades Employers' Federation and of the trades unions on the morning of 6 February: on Cabinet instructions they were to ask the representatives what steps they could take to provide the necessary increase in labour on alternative assumptions such as the building of 100,000, 150,000 or 200,000 houses per year.<sup>9</sup> This was crucial as the unemployment sub-committee calculated that a house-building programme of 100,000 houses per year would necessitate the employing of an extra 69,000 men,

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<sup>7</sup>Webb, "The First Labour Government", p.21.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-2. Webb does claim that "we steered Wheatley off some impossible schemes for financing the Bill he was preparing".

<sup>9</sup>CAB 23/47 9(24) 4(c).

while one of 200,000 would give employment to an extra 171,400 men.<sup>10</sup> Fortunately dilution was no longer the great problem it had been in 1916 on Clydeside and it was clear that it would be required.<sup>11</sup> But though the Committee on Unemployment and Housing recommended to the Cabinet that the implementation of a large housing programme "would materially contribute towards relieving unemployment",<sup>12</sup> Snowden at the Treasury had other ideas. In a six-page memorandum Snowden outlined the dire effects, as he saw them, that large scale loan expenditure on housing would have on the economy, and the danger of adopting Wheatley's plans. He wrote: "If it is desired to mobilise the national credit, the first necessity is to make certain that you do not destroy it." There were competing claims on the national wealth, and grave dangers of inflation. Anyway, argued Snowden, a housing programme of any magnitude would have an adverse effect on employment as by increasing the amount of capital in the building industry

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<sup>10</sup> CAB/24/164 C.P. 83 (24)

<sup>11</sup> See the report of Muir's speech at Glasgow arguing the necessity of dilution. The Times, 6 February, 1924.

<sup>12</sup> CAB/24/164 C.P. 83(24).

the Government would be reducing the capital going into overseas trade; and "the fundamental cure for unemployment lies in an increase in our overseas trade".<sup>13</sup> On 8 February the Cabinet decided to approve the general lines of the scheme proposed by the Committee on Unemployment and Housing, subject to several variations which showed the influence of Snowden's financial orthodoxy. Firstly, the figure to cover rent and rates for new houses was set at nine shillings a week; this was twelve and a half per cent higher than the Committee suggested. Secondly, the State's share of the proposed subsidy to the local authorities was not to exceed an average figure of £9 per house per year. And thirdly, in his negotiations with local authorities Wheatley was to try to secure a time-limit for the subsidy of 20 years: if he could not get agreement on this point he "should make the best bargain he can, but in no event should he agree to the payment of the subsidy for more than 40 years."<sup>14</sup> Wheatley on the one hand wanted to spend as much as possible on housing, while Snowden on the other hand was urging economy; and at this stage Snowden's warnings carried more weight in the Cabinet.

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<sup>13</sup>CAB/24/164 C.P.85(24)

<sup>14</sup>CAB/24/164 C.P. 98(24)

The meeting which Wheatley, Greenwood and Shaw held with the employers and employees of the building trade on 6 February had one very important outcome. It led to the creation of a committee, its chairman drawn from the nineteen employers' members and its vice-chairman drawn from the fifteen employees' members, which was to report on the "Present position of the Building Industry, with regard to the carrying out of a full Housing Programme, having particular reference to the means of providing an adequate supply of labour and materials."<sup>15</sup> The Secretary, B.H. Rogers, was provided by the Ministry of Labour: otherwise the Government was quite unrepresented.

Many on the left wing of the Labour movement must have been uneasy at the setting up of such a committee, especially as the employers were in a majority. It was, therefore, partly to explain his action to his own party that Wheatley stated in the House on 26 March, "The Labour Party's programme on housing is not a Socialist programme at all. I wish it were."<sup>16</sup> He had accepted office to try to alleviate the housing problem, and given that the country was not ready for Socialism

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<sup>15</sup>Cmd. 2104. Quotation is full title of Report.

<sup>16</sup><sub>171</sub> H.C. Deb. 5s, 1466.



he had to work within the existing framework. Consequently:

I brought the industry together. I brought the employers and workers together and put the situation before them. I did not go to teach them or to threaten them, but to speak with them as men having an interest in their fellowmen and in the future of the country of which they are citizens. I asked them to co-operate with me in finding a way to provide the necessary houses to meet the pressing wants of our people.<sup>17</sup>

The committee's report appeared on 10 April. It was brief and it was essentially the reports of the four sub-committees into which the committee had split: on General Purposes, Labour, Materials, and Scotland. It recommended a Government guarantee for a fifteen year house-building programme totalling two and a half million houses. In the first year only 50,000 houses could be built, but this would increase to 225,000 houses a year and this rate would be maintained until the end of the programme.<sup>18</sup> The most important difficulty would be the relative shortage of skilled labour: in January 1924 there were 11,750 fewer bricklayers than in December 1913, 16,000 fewer masons, and 4,110 fewer plasterers, and as soon as industries like shipbuilding became active again there would also be a serious shortage of carpenters and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 1469.

<sup>18</sup> Cmd. 2104, p.9.

plumbers.<sup>19</sup> The shortages were caused by the casual nature of employment in the building industry, the shift of building workers into other industries, the prolonged depression in housebuilding from about 1905-6 to 1914, and the loss of labour due to the war, the post-war conditions and emigration.<sup>20</sup> A fifteen year programme backed by Government guarantee would give confidence to the industries and by spreading the housing contracts over the largest possible number of employers the best use could be made of the existing labour force while the incoming apprentices were being trained.<sup>21</sup> But extra labour would be required, and so it was recommended that the age limit for taking apprenticeship be raised from sixteen to twenty, that the apprenticeship period be reduced from five years to four, and in exceptional circumstances to three,<sup>22</sup> and that the ratio of apprentices to craftsmen, which normally varied between one in four to one in seven,

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p.12.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 8-9.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p.11.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p.16.

be changed to one in three.<sup>23</sup>

The Government accepted all these recommendations. But the Committee's recommendation that a National House Building Committee be set up ran into trouble in the Commons and was dropped. This Committee's functions would have been to arrange and co-ordinate, to obtain information, and to oversee construction, tendering, and the placing of contracts.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps more than anything this proposal showed how seriously the committee had taken its task.

Wheatley described the Report as "extraordinarily valuable" when he informed the House of the progress of his housing plans. He announced that the Government was prepared to accept the principle of a long programme and that the houses built would be for letting, not for sale, at rents "such as the worker - let us say the man building the house - is able to pay".<sup>25</sup>

Throughout May Wheatley was deep in negotiations with the local authorities and the building firms. On 8 May he met a deputation from the local authorities:

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> 172 H.C. Deb. 5s, 1367-9.

it was rather ironical that it was led by Colonel Levita who had been Kirkwood's jailor in Edinburgh Castle, and by Bailie Morton who was one of Wheatley's old colleagues on Glasgow City Council. Anxious lest they incur any serious losses they demanded that their liability be limited to two thirds of any capital losses incurred under the scheme, and they pressed for the retention of the existing scale of rents. Wheatley was conciliatory. There were, he stressed, only minor difficulties and he wanted them cleared up: "I recognised at the outset unless I could carry the local authorities with me there was very little use in proceeding with the housing problem."<sup>26</sup> He was disarming about his approach to the housing problem:

I do not want to protest too much but I have not looked at it from the political point of view at all. I have accepted a competitive system. I may not agree with it but I take things as I find them and I want to contribute to finding a way out of our present problems.<sup>27</sup>

But he was insistent that there must be a new and lower scale of rents. As for the guarantee, he was conspiratorial,

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<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Housing and Local Government. H.L.G. 29/130 Vol. 121. Minutes of Meeting with Deputation from Representatives of Local Authorities in Great Britain, p.15.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.18.

suggesting that it was the builders who would have to watch their step:

I do not want this to be stated publicly; but I have told [the building industry employers] from the outset that any guarantee that I shall ask Parliament to give to them would require to be a conditional guarantee; in other words, my guarantee goes on automatically from period to period, conditioned [sic] that in each period I am given a number of houses. If the industry does not give the houses, Parliament ceases to give the guarantee.<sup>28</sup>

Five days later in a Committee Room at Westminster he chaired a meeting of the Housebuilding Committee and M.Ps. from all parties. But although he claimed that the meeting "has been a complete success", he had run into considerable opposition to the proposal for a statutory National House Building Committee and its death was virtually assured.<sup>29</sup> On 20 May in the Conference Room at the Ministry of Health, he had a remarkable exchange with some members of a deputation from the National Federation of House-Builders. The Federation's President, H.R. Selly, stressed the lack of confidence in the industry following the upheavals of the post-war years; as things stand, he said,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Housing and Local Government. H.L.G. 29/130. vol. 121. Minutes of Meeting of Housebuilding Committee and Members of Parliament, passim, and p.29.

"not a man here will take a contract with local authorities".

Wheatley appreciated their difficulties and stressed the need for confidence: without the co-operation of the Federation his housing programme would not get off the ground, and it was in the Federation's own interests that the programme be put into operation and that the industry thrive. The deputation naturally wanted a thriving industry. But how could they build houses when there were no bricks? It was at this point that their frustration showed itself. J. Squires of Nottingham urged that the Government take the power to make the brickyard owners start production straight away, a remark which prompted Wheatley to reply, "You are more revolutionary than I was in my wildest days".<sup>30</sup> It was a tough session and it was only by shrewd cajoling and encouragement that Wheatley managed to win over the deputation to the idea that his housing plans would work.

Wheatley was much firmer when dealing with the smaller local authorities, who were worried about the terms of financial assistance under the housing scheme: Wheatley's proposals would mean that while the Exchequer

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<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Housing and Local Government.  
H.L.G. 29/130 vol. 121. Minutes of Meeting with Deputation from National Federation of Housebuilders, passim, esp. pp. 14-15.

paid £9 per year for each house built, £12-10/- in agricultural parishes, the local authorities would have to contribute £4-10/- per house per year. But though united in their financial worry, the smaller authorities were split over what could be done to ease their anxiety. Provost Baxter of Greenock advocated an additional grant of £2 per house per year for those local authorities whose rateable value did not exceed £50,000 and which, to meet this additional imposition, would have to raise their rates by more than two pence in the pound. Colonel Seymour Williams agreed that this would not be sufficient to substantially assist the English urban district councils. Some members of the Association of Municipal Corporations felt that general pleas for more financial assistance would not be advisable: they preferred an advisory tribunal so that each local authority's case could be decided on its merits. Given this divergence of opinion, Wheatley had a much easier time than with the Federation of House-Builders. It was, he said, "difficult for him to meet these hard cases because of (1) Treasury objections (2) the nature of things". He dismissed the idea of a tribunal because "everyone except the most prosperous local authorities would be appealing to it" and progress

would be hindered. And he was "as a matter of general policy... against special grants to particular areas". Most important, he stated bluntly that the deputation's desire for a bigger subsidy could not be met:

He had tried to find alternative methods of achieving the objects the deputation wanted but without success. He was obliged to say that he could hold out no hope of being able to go beyond the £9 subsidy... with a review at the end of three years.<sup>31</sup>

By the time all these negotiations were over Wheatley had either won over, or quashed the objections of, all the interested parties, and was able to bring to the House of Commons proposals which had the approval of both the building industry and the local authorities. For a junior, and at first suspect, member of the Cabinet he had had a surprisingly free hand. The leader of the "wild men from the Clyde" had conducted his negotiations more skilfully than expected. He had cajoled, wooed, exhorted, been abrasive and when necessary obstinate. Professor Lyman's opinion of Wheatley's Bill is perhaps more appropriately applied to the way Wheatley had worked:

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<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Housing and Local Government  
H.L.G. 29/130 vol. 121. Minutes of Meeting with  
Representatives of Smaller Local Authorities, passim.



"if it was not exactly socialism, it was certainly statesmanship."<sup>32</sup>

The house-building targets finally decided upon were 190,000 houses per year by 1925-6, 255,000 per year by 1928-9, 360,000 per year by 1931-2, and a staggering 450,000 per year from 1934-5 to 1938-9.<sup>33</sup> These superseded those set out in a White Paper<sup>34</sup> which is, however, correct for the other details of the scheme. The £9 per house per year subsidy, £12-10/- in agricultural parishes, would operate for thirty years, but would only be paid for rented houses which met certain specifications concerning dimensions. Rents were to be based on the rents of pre-1914 working class houses in the same area, a proposal which meant that not only would the tenant get a brand new house, he would get it for less than someone in a similar house. And rents could only be raised if the Exchequer subsidy, the local authority subsidy, and the prescribed rent could not cover the cost of construction. Every three years the programme would be reviewed and if less than two-thirds of the predicted output had been

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<sup>32</sup> Richard W. Lyman, The First Labour Government 1924 (London: Chapman & Hall, 1957), p.115.

<sup>33</sup> CAB/24/167 C.P. 308(B) (24).

<sup>34</sup> Housing (Financial Provisions), Memorandum, Cmd.2151, 1924.

produced then the programme would be ended. Unreasonable cost could also end it. The total cost of the subsidies seemed enormous. In 1924-5 the Exchequer would provide £278,000 and the local authorities £135,000; but by 1940-1 these figures would have risen to £23,156,000 and £11,250,000 respectively and would remain at those levels until 1963-4 when they would begin to decline, and in 1979-80 would finally cease with an Exchequer payment of £645,000 and a local authority payment of £314,000. Wheatley was certainly willing to let future generations pick up the bill for his housing programme.

Parliamentary opposition to the Bill was half-hearted. The Conservatives formally opposed it, but determined opposition was difficult in view of the similarity between the Wheatley and Chamberlain schemes: to attack the principle of state subsidies would have involved disowning their own legislation of only a year before, and they could not really attack the size of the houses which, though small, would be bigger than the Chamberlain houses. The Liberals too were hindered in their opposition. Many of them genuinely wanted to give the scheme a chance, and, more important, they all knew that defeat for the Government on such a major issue would mean a general election, something for which the

Liberals were totally unprepared. Even the Labour left wing was comparatively silent: perhaps they too realised the merits of the scheme and perhaps they recognised Wheatley's own reputation as a left-winger. As it was, only George Hardie spoke out against the principles behind the Bill: he wanted a "Bill that would wipe out once and for all the anomalies of this system of blood-sucking of the life of the nation by the landlords".<sup>35</sup> Consequently, most opposition was in the form of minor amendments, some aimed at reducing the scope of the Bill, some at enlarging it; and in view of this rejection of the Bill was highly unlikely.

The legislation went fairly smoothly. Throughout the Bill's passage Wheatley was moderate and practical,<sup>36</sup> and Neville Chamberlain summed up the character of the legislative process:

our proceedings have been conducted with complete good humour, with an anxious desire thoroughly to understand the proposals that have been put before us, and with an earnest wish, if possible, to see that they shall be effective in operation.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>176 H.C. Deb. 5s, 1674.

<sup>36</sup>Lord Eustace Percy, who delivered the main Conservative speech on the Second Reading, described Wheatley's speech as being "of a conciliatory nature". 175 H.C. Deb. 5s, 106.

<sup>37</sup>174 H.C. Deb. 5s, 1291-2.

There were, in fact, only three major attempts to alter the Bill, and these came over the size of the houses to be built, the definition of "agricultural parishes", and the proposed rents. On the first of these Wheatley was clearly in difficulties; he had after all persistently attacked the Chamberlain proposals on this very point. In 1923 he had accused Chamberlain of building the slums of the future; in 1924 he adopted Chamberlain's view that if the houses were enlarged they might be occupied by the middle classes instead of by the working classes. Clearly he was embarrassed by the whole affair and was glad to be rescued by the fact that to change the size of the houses would require a new Money Resolution, and this he refused to introduce.<sup>38</sup>

He did give way over the definition of "agricultural parishes". According to the Bill, such a parish must have a population not exceeding thirty-five per 100 acres, and the proportion of the value of agricultural land to the value of the total land in the parish must be at least 33.3 per cent. But what, asked Ernest Brown, if Government institutions like railways, workhouses,

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 1333-4.

residential schools or mental hospitals pushed a parish's population above the prescribed limit or altered the ratio of land values? A hastily completed survey by officials at the Ministry of Health showed that most of these institutions would have a negligible effect, but that railway property was important. "Undoubtedly the number of parishes which are taken out of the 'agricultural' category by the presence in them of lines of large rateable value is considerable." The Ministry officials still thought that the existing formula was fair,<sup>39</sup> but Wheatley decided to raise the population criterion to fifty per 100 acres and to lower the ratio of land values to twenty-five per cent.

The third problem, that of rents, showed the weaknesses of the Liberals. E.D. Simon proposed that the rents of the Wheatley houses be equated with those of existing houses in the same area and "of similar size, type, and amenity".<sup>40</sup> Wheatley violently attacked this proposal: it would lead to an increase in rent and thereby a siphoning off of the houses to the middle classes, or it

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<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Housing and Local Government.  
H.L.G. 48/700. File number 92038/1/234.

<sup>40</sup> 176 H.C. Deb. 5s, 676.

would lead to a reduction in construction standards to keep rents down. Fortunately for Wheatley, this amendment, which was backed by many Conservatives, was eventually deserted by most of the Liberals who changed sides and joined with the Government to defeat their own proposal.

Many minor amendments were accepted: indeed of seventy-six amendments tabled Wheatley accepted no fewer than sixty-six in the course of the Committee Stage.

The Lords, however, carried two important amendments. One was to reduce the period between reviews of progress from three years to two. The other was to provide that "the rents charged should be not higher than would be payable if the houses were let at the appropriate normal rents charged in respect of pre-war working-class houses of similar size, type and amenity" - in other words the same amendment that the Liberals had proposed and abandoned in the Commons. The Cabinet decided that these "must be resisted",<sup>41</sup> but Wheatley eventually had to give way on the first one.

On 7 August 1924 the Bill received the Royal Assent, and under the Conservative Government which came into office

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<sup>41</sup>CAB 23/48 47(24)19.

in November it operated with some success. But the measure can be criticised on two grounds. Firstly, it completely failed to make any special provision for slum clearance, which had to await the attention of Greenwood in the next Labour administration. The Government recognised this failing in 1924, but argued that local authorities already had "ample powers" for dealing with this problem "provided that alternative accommodation... is available" - and the 1924 Act was designed to provide that alternative accommodation.<sup>42</sup>

Secondly, the idea of annual subsidies to local authorities was economically clumsy. Before building could start the local authority had to borrow the capital cost, which meant that a large part of the subsidy had necessarily to go on servicing the interest on the loan. It was partly because of ~~this~~ that in 1920 the Labour Party had adopted the idea of low-interest loans from the Government,<sup>43</sup> a policy which was only one step away from Wheatley's idea of interest-free loans which he had advocated so vigorously. In his Act, Wheatley explicitly rejected not only his own party's ideas on

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<sup>42</sup>CAB 23/48 34(24)2(h).

<sup>43</sup>Labour Party, Report, 1920, p.181.

housing but also his own ideas. When Labour swept into power in 1945 they rejected the policy of subsidies in favour of a return to the 1920 idea of low-interest loans.<sup>44</sup>

Despite these criticisms the Wheatley Act did do valuable work. In 1923-4 only 86,210 houses were built, but in 1927-8 the figure was 238,914, and had the subsidy not been reduced in 1927 and finally abolished in 1933 the anticipated two and a half million houses could possibly have been built. The special subsidy for "agricultural parishes" did not work so well: by March 1928 only 10,195 houses had been built with this extra assistance.<sup>45</sup> It is however clear that the new houses tended to be occupied by the better-off members of the working and lower-middle classes: at best the very poor were able to move into the houses vacated by the new Wheatley tenants.<sup>46</sup> But even if, as Bowley argues, "between 1921 and 1931, housing policy... did not provide adequately for the varying requirements for

<sup>44</sup> Labour Party, Housing and Planning after the War, p.8.

<sup>45</sup> Ministry of Health, Ninth Annual Report, Cmd. 3185, 1928, pp. 71-2.

<sup>46</sup> The Annual Report of the Department of Health for Scotland, 1929, pp. 6 and 10, admitted that the 1924 Act had provided houses for the "better-off class of worker".



additional working-class houses in the different parts of the country"<sup>47</sup> the efforts of Chamberlain in 1923 and Wheatley in 1924 should not be underestimated. They did make some provision for house building, and but for the reduction and eventual abolition of the Wheatley subsidy his contribution in terms of houses built would have been immeasurably greater. As it was he brought about a change of attitude in the building industry: as W.H. Nicholls, chairman of the House-Building Committee set up by Wheatley before he left office, told Chamberlain in November 1924: before 1924 "the industry... was suspicious and apprehensive", now "unanimity [between the branches of the industry] was becoming more rather than less pronounced". And Chamberlain agreed with him, stating that "he did not contemplate any violent change in policy."<sup>48</sup>

One aspect of Wheatley's housing work did, however, cause problems, and this was the decision to restrict the making of unreasonably high profits in building materials. At first it was thought that such a measure

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<sup>47</sup>Marion Bowley, Housing and the State, 1919-1944 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1945), p.70.

<sup>48</sup>Ministry of Housing and Local Government. H.L.G. 52/895 File number 92053/13/1, Minutes of Meeting of the "House-Building" Committee with N. Chamberlain, pp. 1 and 2.

could be part and parcel of the Housing Bill, but it was soon very clear that such a position would be too controversial and on 27 May the Cabinet decided that a separate Bill should be introduced. It further decided that this Bill had to be printed and circulated to M.Ps. before the Second Reading of the Housing Bill; it therefore had to be before the Cabinet on 30 May.<sup>49</sup>

The Bill Wheatley hastily produced was clearly a controversial one. It would give him power to inform the Board of Trade of excessive prices of any articles in common use in the building industry. If, on investigating, the Board of Trade considered prices to be unreasonably high or conditions of supply to be unreasonable, then it had the power by order:

- (a) to fix or regulate prices and to vary prices so fixed or regulated, and
- (b) to prohibit or restrict the imposition of conditions of supply or the charging or seeking to charge prices in excess of maximum prices fixed by the order.<sup>50</sup>

And where the production or supply of any article was being unreasonably prevented the Minister could be empowered:

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<sup>49</sup>CAB 23/48 34(24)2(g)(h).

<sup>50</sup>CAB/24/167 C.P. 318(24) Clause 1, Subsection 2, paragraphs (a) and (b).

- (a) to require that person to place the whole or part of his stocks of the article at the disposal of the Minister, or to deliver to the Minister the stocks or output in such quantities and at such time and places and during such periods as may be specified by the Minister.
- (b) [ to ] take over the buildings and land and machinery and to carry on the business or to make provision for the business being carried on under the direction of the Minister.<sup>51</sup>

It was clearly not a Bill that could expect either Liberal or Conservative support. It was exceptional in the context of Wheatley's statesmanlike Housing Bill which was remarkably free of controls. It is difficult to know why it was introduced: its chances of passing through the Commons were extremely poor, and Wheatley's claim that he had the agreement of the brick manufacturers<sup>52</sup> would not help him. He introduced the Bill on 5 June 1924. It failed to surface for a Second Reading before the Government fell, and it was probably just as well. As a deputation of representatives of the manufacturers and suppliers told him on 2 October, the Bill went too far, and in particular they could not accept the provision for the taking over of works.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Clause 3, Subsection 1, paragraphs (a) and (b).

<sup>52</sup> New Leader, 4 July, 1924.

<sup>53</sup> The Times, 3 October, 1924.

But failure with this Bill detracted little from Wheatley's resounding personal triumph with the Housing Act. Of course, he received some criticism as well as praise. Lloyd George, for example, while electioneering at Carnarvon on 18 October, singled him out for ridicule:

Although he will probably cease to be a Minister in a very few weeks he has already won for himself a secure niche in history. Of a Government which has failed more conspicuously than any Government that ever existed to realise the hope of its friends he has been the most portentous failure of the lot.... He will never be forgotten, nor his schemes.<sup>54</sup>

The plaudits, however, far outweighed the criticisms.

Masterman described him as "the one really popular figure on the Labour Front Bench".<sup>55</sup>

Wheatley himself was characteristically modest. He ended his speech on the Third Reading of his Bill by saying:

I have... made an honest effort to contribute to finding a solution for his vast [housing] problem, and, if I be so fortunate as to be successful in wiping out... one of the greatest blots on our civilisation, then I shall be regarded for all the labours of the past six months.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Glasgow Herald, 20 October, 1924.

<sup>55</sup>Lucy Masterman, S.F.G. Masterman - A Biography (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1939), p.348.

<sup>56</sup>176 H.C. Deb. 5s, 1726.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE POLITICS OF 1924

To govern while in a Parliamentary minority is difficult: to do so with an almost totally inexperienced Cabinet<sup>1</sup> is even harder. The task of Cabinet making had been left entirely to MacDonald and he made some notable omissions and some strange appointments. He was certainly tactless in dealing with Henderson: first he proposed to omit him altogether, then he offered him the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ways and Means, then the post of War Minister, and it was only after Henderson had shown "indignant resistance"<sup>2</sup> that he was finally offered the post of Home Secretary. Morel seemed a strong favourite for the Foreign Office but was omitted from the Government because of "his strong anti-French bias",<sup>3</sup> and MacDonald gave himself the Herculean task of being both Prime

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<sup>1</sup>Of all the Cabinet members, only Henderson and Haldane had previously held high office.

<sup>2</sup>Archibald Fenner Brockway, Socialism over Sixty Years: The Life of Jowett of Bradford (1864-1944) (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1946), p.208.

<sup>3</sup>Marwick, Clifford Allen, p.86.

Minister and Foreign Secretary. Another glaring omission, so many thought, was George Lansbury whom MacDonald refused to have in his Cabinet because "he was always speaking so wildly and indiscreetly at meetings that he would injure the Government" and because MacDonald "felt he could not trust him with any big administrative office."<sup>4</sup> It would probably have been better for MacDonald's position within the P.L.P. if he had been able to bring in another left-winger to join Wheatley and Jowett, but he would not have Lansbury in the Cabinet and Lansbury would not consider a non-Cabinet post. It was in the allocation of minor offices that some anomalies appeared. Shinwell had for years been a trade union official dealing with ships and shipping but was appointed Parliamentary Secretary at the Mines Department, while Frank Hodges who had mining in his veins was appointed Civil Lord at the Admiralty. William Leach, the new Under-Secretary for Air, and C.G. Ammon, the new Parliamentary and Financial Secretary at the Admiralty, were both avowed pacifists, and at this stage in his life Attlee, who was appointed Under-Secretary at the War Office, was almost one too.

MacDonald's Cabinet was quite well balanced, and

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<sup>4</sup>Webb, "The First Labour Government", p.13.

only Wheatley represented the extreme left wing, but the very prospect of a Labour Government filled many people with alarm. Snowden was, he claims, telephoned by a countess who asked "if it were true that the first thing the Labour Party would do would be to cut the throats of every aristocrat and steal all their property".<sup>5</sup>

Hostesses were also worried about the comparative obscurity of the new Ministers: a "leading hostess" asked MacDonald's Private Secretary, Ronald Waterhouse, "what Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's table manners were like? 'I mean,' said she, 'does he use a knife and fork properly?'"<sup>6</sup> Attempts to show just how respectable and civilised the new Government actually was, by ensuring that the ceremony of receiving the seals of office was thoroughly rehearsed beforehand,<sup>7</sup> by the formation of the "Half Circle Club", formed, according to Johnston "to see that Labour people were properly trained and taught to avoid eating with their knives and

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<sup>5</sup>Snowden, An Autobiography, pp. 607-8.

<sup>6</sup>Nourah Waterhouse, Private and Official (London: Jonathan Cape, 1942), p.305.

<sup>7</sup>Snowden, An Autobiography, p.606. John Paton reflected the indignation felt in Labour circles: the Ministers were "being put through their paces by the professional ringmaster [Sir Maurice Hankey, the Secretary to the Cabinet and the Clerk to the Privy Council] like ponies in a circus." Paton, Left Turn! pp. 169-70.

spitting on the carpet,"<sup>8</sup> and by the wearing of Court dress for the receiving of seals, merely caused dismay in the ranks of the Labour Party and its supporters. The refusal of Wheatley and Shaw to wear Court dress - they turned up at Buckingham Palace in lounge suits, and, in Wheatley's case a bowler hat - caused a few eyebrows to be raised, but the willingness of the other Ministers to respect tradition set the seal on the popular view of the Government: a Scottish shipyard worker echoed the feelings of many when he shouted, "A workers' government, ye ca' it! It's a bloody lum hat Government like a' the rest."<sup>9</sup>

Most Ministers regarded the Court dress incident as being of little importance, but they did see the irony of the situation: at Webb's house after the ceremony the guests "were all laughing over Wheatley - the revolutionary - going down on both knees and actually kissing the King's hand".<sup>10</sup> But MacDonald was annoyed by the actions of Wheatley and Shaw, and the whole matter was raised in Cabinet. On 6 February

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<sup>8</sup>Scanlon, Decline and Fall of the Labour Party, p.62.

<sup>9</sup>Paton, Left Turn! p.168.

<sup>10</sup>Cole, Beatrice Webb's Diaries, vol. II, p.2.



it was finally agreed that MacDonald should try to arrange that Ministers attending levees should be allowed to wear black evening dress and knee breeches; that a panel of Ministers, who either had or were prepared to get this outfit, should be formed and Ministers attending Court functions should be drawn from this panel; and that Ministers who did not own a Court uniform should be excused by the King from attending functions at which it was obligatory.<sup>11</sup>

Fear that the Government was not respectable enough was, however, quickly replaced by fear that it might not survive, for Wheatley's first administrative act, taken before he met Parliament, was to rescind the Poplar Order of 1922, and this immediately raised the possibility of a Parliamentary vote of censure. The Poplar issue had been in the air since 1921 when Lansbury, then Mayor of Poplar, and several Poplar councillors were jailed for contempt of court for refusing "to levy the precepts of the London County Council and the Metropolitan Asylums Board".<sup>12</sup> In 1922 H.J. Cooper, clerk to the Bolton Guardians, reported on the expenditure

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<sup>11</sup>CAB 23/47 10(24)10.

<sup>12</sup>Cole, Beatrice Webb's Diaries, vol. II, pp. 9-10.

of the Poplar Guardians and accused them of extravagance, stating that £100,000 could be saved each year by reducing outdoor and indoor relief to the prescribed scales and by ceasing to pay wages in excess of trade union rates.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, Sir Alfred Mond, the Minister of Health, issued a Special Order regulating the relief of the unemployed in Poplar. But by an Act of 1923 the scale prescribed by a 1921 Act was replaced by a statutory flat rate, and consequently the Mond Order had become obsolete. It was therefore as an act of administrative convenience that Wheatley rescinded the Order.<sup>14</sup>

Wheatley gave the Cabinet a full account of the circumstances surrounding his decision. But aware of "the great public interest and the anxiety in financial circles which, in ignorance of the facts, had been aroused by this decision", the Cabinet decided that an explanatory press statement be issued in the hope that this would dispel alarm.<sup>15</sup> The press statement

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<sup>13</sup>The Times, 6 February, 1924.

<sup>14</sup>CAB 23/47 11(24) Appendix II. It was, however, not quite as simple as this: see below, pp. 233-4.

<sup>15</sup>At this meeting MacDonald urged Ministers not to make public announcements or take administrative action on potentially controversial matters without consulting him. CAB 23/47 11(24) 6, 7.

was simple and straightforward, stressing that:

The action taken does not involve or imply any alteration in general Poor Law policy. The Poplar Board of Guardians will remain in exactly the same position as every other Board of Guardians in the country, and will be subject to precisely the same limitations and restrictions.<sup>16</sup>

This, however, did not placate the Liberal leaders, nor did MacDonald's plea for sanity in the Commons.<sup>17</sup> On 13 February, Asquith said:

I wish to say in the plainest and most unequivocal terms, that unless the Government can see their way... to reconsider the action taken... I do not think there is the least chance of that administrative act receiving the countenance or approval of the House of Commons.<sup>18</sup>

It seemed that Wheatley's Ministerial career might end before it had properly started.

That night the Cabinet met in MacDonald's room at the House of Commons, where it was decided that Wheatley should prepare a full explanatory memorandum on Poplar.<sup>19</sup> When it next met, it had before it Wheatley's memorandum in which he defended his action, pointing out that the Order had never been operative and that his predecessors

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<sup>16</sup>CAB 23/47 11(24) Appendix II.

<sup>17</sup>169 H.C. Deb. 5s, 751.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 864.

<sup>19</sup>CAB 23/47 13(24) 12(b).

had known all about this.<sup>20</sup> It was on this basis that it was decided that, if possible, the Government's aim should be to secure the withdrawal of the Liberal motion without a division.<sup>21</sup>

And so on Tuesday 26 February, shortly before 5 o'clock, Wheatley rose to make his first speech from the Front Bench, in the full knowledge that unless he did well it could easily be his last. He argued that he had no choice but to rescind the Order, and that his three Conservative predecessors had known that the Poplar Guardians were ignoring it: "It was known to the Ministry of Health, known by the evidence provided by Poplar itself that Poplar was breaking the law to the extent of £2,000 a week", and yet "no attempt whatever was made by the Ministry of Health to enforce the law".<sup>22</sup> The only action taken by the Conservatives in 1923 was to drop the 1921 scale: they had laid down that

the maximum amount which any board of guardians should take from the Central Fund was 9d. per head per day of the persons relieved. But they also

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<sup>20</sup>CAB/24/165 C.P. 114(24).

<sup>21</sup>CAB 23/47 14(24)1(a).

<sup>22</sup>171 H.C. Deb. 5s, 340.

made it perfectly clear that boards of guardians - Poplar excluded - were free to give relief in excess of that scale out of their local rates.

The result was "that the payments that might have been illegal in Poplar might be perfectly legal in Bermondsey".<sup>23</sup>

Had the Conservatives had the Poplar audit completed this would have revealed the illegality of the £2,000 per week and forced them to act. Instead they had actually loaned Poplar £506,000 so that it could continue to break the law.<sup>24</sup> He drove home his advantage:

Since 1921 I find that Poplar has appealed to the Ministry of Health against decisions of auditors to surcharge them on five occasions, and on four occasions the surcharges were remitted.... and the solitary exception was a remarkable one for a small sum of £10 paid by the Poplar Board to a school band for playing outside the prison in which the Poplar Town Councillors were confined.<sup>25</sup>

What choice did he have? All he had done was remove Poplar's grievance that it was not being treated the same way as other Boards of Guardians. "I have not surrendered to Poplar," he concluded, "I do not intend to surrender to Poplar. I have rescued my Department from a state of degradation."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 341.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 344.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 345.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 349.

It was a brilliant debating speech, praised by friend and foe alike. Beatrice Webb called him "a new star in House of Commons dialectics, logical and humorous, with first-rate delivery.... he has scored as a Parliamentary artist, and he takes his place as a front-runner in the game, a rival to Thomas for the leadership if J.R.M. breaks down."<sup>27</sup> Joynson-Hicks described his speech as "excellent",<sup>28</sup> and Asquith classed it as "a most adroit debating performance", adding "Those who heard the right hon. Gentleman welcome most heartily the accession of such a formidable combatant to our ranks".<sup>29</sup>

On getting a guarantee from MacDonald that Poplar's activities were not condoned and that a Joint or Select Committee would be set up to investigate the whole matter, Asquith and his followers did not call a division. The Conservatives did, but were easily defeated.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Cole, Beatrice Webb's Diaries, vol. II, p.11.

<sup>28</sup>171 H.C. Deb. 5s, 350.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 388.

<sup>30</sup>Middlemas, The Clydesiders, p.143, writes that Wheatley sent Veale, his private secretary, to tell the Conservative spokesman, Lord Eustace Percy, that unless they withdrew support for the Liberal motion he would, in his speech, use the fact that the Conservatives had loaned

In the hope of securing "an agreed scheme of reform" of the Poor Laws, Wheatley sought, and secured, Cabinet permission to invite Liberal and Conservative participation in a conference to discuss the main principles of any reform.<sup>31</sup> But his attempt to bring all the parties together was fruitless and he had to make his own recommendations to the Cabinet. He had originally believed that the special case of London should be dealt with first, but by August had concluded that any proposed legislation should cover the whole of England and Wales, an approach which he thought would find favour with the other two parties.<sup>32</sup> His Department produced a long paper on this question and on 6 August a Cabinet Committee, headed by Wheatley, was appointed to consider it in depth.<sup>33</sup> It seemed that as with housing Wheatley was about to embark on another major

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over £500,000 to Poplar. Lord Eustace Percy saw Asquith and persuaded him to meet MacDonald and a compromise was reached, namely that Asquith would ask MacDonald "a carefully phrased set of questions" to which MacDonald "would concede the (agreed) demands." Wheatley agreed reluctantly and felt he had been badly let down by his leader. I feel Mr. Middlemas makes too much of this. The "demands" were very modest and Wheatley would certainly have agreed to them, if only to save the Government. To date the strained relationship between Wheatley and MacDonald from February, 1924, is, I feel, a few months premature.

<sup>31</sup>CAB/24/165 C.P. 173(24)

<sup>32</sup>CAB/24/168 C.P. 429(24)

<sup>33</sup>CAB 23/48 48(24) 11.

piece of legislation. Indeed, he had started in exactly the same undogmatic way, by trying to bring the other parties round the table and get an uncontroversial solution to the problem. This time, however, he was doubly unfortunate: the other two parties refused to co-operate, and, more important, the Government fell before the project could get really under way, and it was left to Chamberlain to tackle the matter.

Another problem which he bequeathed to his successor was that of birth control. The difference was that whereas Wheatley was prepared to initiate legislation on Poor Law reform, he resolutely refused to take any action at all over birth control. Once the Malthusian League had in 1917 adopted a policy of trying to persuade the Government to allow Maternal and Child Welfare Centres to give contraceptive advice it was clear that the birth control issue would soon come to the fore. What finally brought it into the public eye were the printing and publishing by Rose Witcop and Guy Aldred in 1923 of Margaret Sanger's pamphlet, Family Limitation - Handbook for Working Mothers, the subsequent seizure and suppression of this work as "indecent", and Witcop's reissue of a modified pamphlet in early 1924.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup>H.B. Lees-Smith, ed., The Encyclopaedia of the Labour Movement (London: Caxton, n.d.) vol. I, p.60.



On 9 May Wheatley received a very eloquent deputation which included H.G. Wells, Mrs. Bertrand Russell, Dr. Frances Huxley, and Mrs. Jenny Baker. They urged that the ban on the giving of contraceptive advice be lifted and requested Wheatley to make it quite clear that doctors were free to give such advice when they considered it medically advisable.<sup>35</sup> Also in May, the National Conference of Labour Women demanded by 1000 votes to eight that Health Authorities be permitted to give information.<sup>36</sup> But Wheatley refused to be drawn. As he saw it, under existing conditions Maternity Centres could only direct people to where advice could be obtained, and to change this arrangement would require Parliamentary sanction.<sup>37</sup> On 30 July and 6 August questions were asked in the House, especially by Ernest Thurtle, a Labour M.P. sympathetic to the birth control advocates. Wheatley stated bluntly that Parliament had to change his instructions to permit contraceptive advice to be given, but on 6 August

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<sup>35</sup> The Times, 10 May, 1924.

<sup>36</sup> Lees-Smith, ed., The Encyclopaedia of the Labour Movement, vol. 1, p.61.

<sup>37</sup> The Times, 10 May, 1924.

Thurtle managed to extract from Wheatley an admission that it was by no means certain that new legislation would be required, and the statement that even if he had executive powers to authorise the giving of birth control advice, "I would not introduce such a revolutionary change".<sup>38</sup>

As a staunch Roman Catholic Wheatley was bound to have difficulties with this issue. He tried hard to hide behind the shield that new legislation would be needed. When it was clear that this might shield him no longer he openly stated his position. Several Labour M.Ps. were in a similar dilemma and had obviously fought shy of such a topic which could be electorally damaging. Indeed the care which Labour took in the London and Glasgow areas to avoid controversy or confrontation on this issue, is a measure of the extent to which they relied upon the support of Catholics. Wheatley was certainly unhappy at having to take decisions on this subject, the only occasion in his political life when his religious beliefs clearly influenced his political activities.

What The Times classed as the most serious of the

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<sup>38</sup> 176 H.C. Deb. 5s, 2050 and 2908-9.

Government's defeats in the Commons,<sup>39</sup> came over the problem of evictions, and one of the prominent characters in this defeat was Wheatley. The extent of evictions has often been exaggerated, but in England and Wales during the period from 1 August 1923 to 31 March 1924 there were 35,001 actions for possession which resulted in 21,326 orders for possession and 3,835 actual warrants. In Scotland the greatest concentration of evictions occurred in the Glasgow area and in particular in Clydebank, the core of Kirkwood's constituency. Between 1 January 1923 and 31 March 1924 the Glasgow area witnessed 24,116 actions for possession, 4,936 eviction orders were granted and 1,009 were carried out. As Adamson, the Secretary of State for Scotland, pointed out, these figures underestimated the problem as many tenants moved out as soon as any action was brought against them.<sup>40</sup> The problem was serious, and Wheatley's closeness to the other Clydeside M.Ps. made his position a delicate one.

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<sup>39</sup> The Times, 9 August, 1924.

<sup>40</sup> 172 H.C. Deb. 5s, 620, 911-2. See also Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt, Ch. XIV, and Patrick Dollan, The Clyde Rent War! (Glasgow: I.L.P. Scottish Council, 1925).

Government consideration of the problem began on 13 February when it was agreed that Wheatley and Jowett should consider whether legislation was necessary.<sup>41</sup> On 22 February Benjamin Gardner, a Labour M.P., was due to introduce a Private Member's Bill which openly favoured the tenants: it was an extreme measure which would make the sole excuse for granting an eviction order the owner's desire to occupy the property himself, and even then he would have to provide alternative accommodation for the tenant. On 19 February Wheatley and Jowett suggested to the Cabinet that Wheatley should be authorised to state that the Government favoured Gardner's Bill and, if it obtained a Second Reading, would assume responsibility for its later stages.<sup>42</sup> But two days later the Cabinet decided that Wheatley should "limit himself to stating that the Government are generally in favour of the proposals of the Bill."<sup>43</sup>

Gardner's Bill went upstairs into Committee where the Government hoped to amend it: the task of drafting

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<sup>41</sup>CAB 23/47 13(24)4.

<sup>42</sup>CAB/24/165 C.P. 125(24).

<sup>43</sup>CAB 23/47 16(24)8.

the amendments was Wheatley's and the two men who were to be closely associated with him in this matter were Adamson and MacDonald, whose involvement from the very beginning has been underestimated.<sup>44</sup> But the Conservatives who had wholeheartedly attacked this Bill carried the fight upstairs, and although the Committee met fourteen times no progress was made.<sup>45</sup> The Labour left wing was growing impatient, though Kirkwood was still unexcited when he begged MacDonald to "make some announcement that would stop evictions now; not wait until a Bill or anything is passed, but now."<sup>46</sup> Eventually, as evictions increased and Gardner's Bill languished in Committee, the Government decided to introduce a Bill of its own.

The Bill which Wheatley drafted had two main points. Courts were to refuse to grant eviction orders in cases of arrears of rent due to unemployment, provided that such a refusal did not create greater

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<sup>44</sup>CAB 23/47 17(24)17.

<sup>45</sup>Ministry of Housing and Local Government. H.L.G. 29/130, Vol. 121, Prevention of Eviction Bill - Memorandum, dated 14/5/24.

<sup>46</sup>171 H.C. Deb. 5s, 25.

hardship for the owner than eviction would create for the tenant; and landlords repossessing property would have to provide alternative accommodation for the tenant, again with the hardship exemption. The second of these points was controversial enough, but the glaring weakness of the Bill was the unemployment clause, a clause which, according to Beatrice Webb, "the Clyde men had insisted should be put in the Bill,"<sup>47</sup> yet a clause which Wheatley had told the Cabinet "would almost certainly be contested",<sup>48</sup> and a clause which the Cabinet had considered and accepted.<sup>49</sup>

The Conservatives and Liberals immediately attacked this clause. Why should one particular section of society have to subsidise another? Why should landlords with unemployed tenants be the ones to suffer? Surely, urged both Chamberlain and Asquith, the community as a whole should do the subsidising. They urged that rents be considered when poor relief was being given. Having listened to these arguments, Clynes thought it clear

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<sup>47</sup> Cole, Beatrice Webb's Diaries, Vol. II, p.19.

<sup>48</sup> CAB/24/166 C.P. 212(24).

<sup>49</sup> CAB 23/47 22(24)7.

that the Bill was going to be defeated unless some concession was made to the Chamberlain-Asquith line. He hastily summoned a meeting of those Ministerial colleagues who were around - Wheatley, Adamson, Thomas, and the Chief Whip, Ben Spoor - and they reached the "unanimous conclusion" that Clynes should assure the House that they were willing to replace the obnoxious Clause One with one "which would throw the burden upon the community, or if this were not possible we would take other steps to secure this end."<sup>50</sup> But the Speaker ruled that this would necessitate a Money Resolution, and would probably have to be a completely separate Bill. The Opposition immediately rounded on Clynes: would he say that Clause One had now been officially dropped? Under severe pressure, Clynes fumbled and squirmed but managed to avoid giving a definite statement. It was to his great relief that the debate was talked out.

The following day, 3 April, Clynes stated that an announcement would be made on the 4th, but when pressed, on the Adjournment Debate, to give an assurance

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<sup>50</sup> CAB/24/166 C.P. 245(24) Rent and Mortgage Interest Restriction Bill: Outline of Parliamentary Position, circulated by Clynes.

that the Treasury would assist the Scottish Parish Councils to help those in danger of eviction for non-payment of rent, Clynes refused to be drawn. At this Kirkwood threw caution to the winds and angrily shouted:

The time has come for the Labour Party in office to prove... [ of ] some use to the people who fear evictions.... If the Government do not stop evictions, then I will.... I will defy the law, and if I am imprisoned I will be a greater menace than David Kirkwood on the Floor of the House.... I am not going to be a party, even supposing it destroys all the Labour Governments that ever were in office, to seeing the children of the unemployed starve in order that the landlord's rent may be paid.<sup>51</sup>

On the evening of Sunday 6 April, MacDonald met with Clynes, Snowden, Thomas, Adamson, and Wheatley, and it was decided to amend Clause One to provide that eviction notices would only be granted if a Court "is satisfied that the tenant has had a reasonable opportunity of applying to the local Poor Law Authority for relief, and the Authority has had an opportunity of considering any such application." Remarkably they then decided that Wheatley and Adamson should find out whether it was practical "by administrative action to secure that the Poor Law Authorities shall... give such relief as may be necessary to protect the tenant

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<sup>51</sup> 171 H.C. Deb. 5s, 2718-9.



from eviction on the ground of non-payment of rent." They further decided that they would "resist all idea of a state grant to local authorities".<sup>52</sup> The following morning the Cabinet accepted these decisions and further concluded that the division on the Bill would not be regarded as a question of confidence.<sup>53</sup>

The debate was a debacle. MacDonald, Wheatley and Thomas all tried to defend the Bill, but none of them could explain why an Exchequer grant was unnecessary and undesirable. Not surprisingly the House was not satisfied and the Bill was defeated by 221 votes to 212. The narrowness of the defeat is explained by the fact that only twenty-five Liberals voted with the Conservatives: forty voted for the Bill, but the rest abstained.

With its own Bill defeated, the Government adopted E.D. Simón's Prevention of Evictions Bill with the intention of amending it in Committee. By mid-May it had been so amended as to be "practically identical with the Government's own Bill, with the exception that the controversial Clause

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<sup>52</sup>CAB 23/47 Notes on a Meeting held at 10 Downing Street ... on Sunday, April 6, 1924 at 7 p.m. Annexed to CAB 24/47 25(24).

<sup>53</sup>CAB 24/47 25(24)4.

1... has been omitted."<sup>54</sup> This was the only measure concerning evictions to become law under the Labour Government, and by no stretch of the imagination can it be said to be a serious attempt to solve the problem. Ironically, the only really radical suggestion had come from the Conservatives and Liberals. But Labour refused to intervene directly to subsidise the unemployed tenant. Instead, the Government's policy was weak and inconsistent.

The problem of course did not disappear with the passing of this inadequate Act. It continued to summon the Clydeside M.Ps. to action right until October; and Clynes continued to be the man in the line of fire. As late as 2 October, Clynes was announcing that "The whole question of rent restriction is receiving the consideration of the Government as an urgent matter,"<sup>55</sup> but by then it was too late for any real action to be taken.

The eviction problem was badly and inadequately handled, although the Cabinet as a whole was kept fully

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<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Housing and Local Government. H.L.G. 29/130 Vol. 121. Prevention of Eviction Bill - Memorandum, dated 14/5/24.

<sup>55</sup> 177 H.C. Deb. 5s, 318.

informed and MacDonald himself was actively involved in this issue.<sup>56</sup> Clynes came out of the struggle badly beaten. He had faced an uphill struggle and had stumbled badly on the way. The press was harsh on him, and Beatrice Webb, at her most poetic, poured on the vitriol: "He droops, like a snowdrop in an icy wind, beneath the rank grass of the Labour benches."<sup>57</sup> Clynes was certainly never an impressive figure, but he had his instructions from the Cabinet and when these were inadequate he tried to cope with a confused situation. The fact that he received little support from either MacDonald or Wheatley is a criticism of them rather than an excuse for Clynes. The eviction problem was one close to Wheatley's heart - after all he had once been evicted himself - and his Clydeside colleagues continually pressed for action. Wheatley had been prepared to take extreme action, but had been overruled by the Cabinet. Beatrice Webb might write

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<sup>56</sup> MacDonald told Chamberlain that "when he saw the [ Government ] bill, he was filled with consternation and told his Cabinet it would be suicide to go with it". Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: MacMillan, 1946), p.113. If this is true then at best it means that MacDonald was ignorant of what was discussed at Cabinet meetings that he chaired; at worst it means that he was trying to dissociate himself from the bill as much as possible.

<sup>57</sup> Cole, Beatrice Webb's Diaries, Vol. II, p. 23.

that the debacle of the Second Reading of the Government's Bill was "Another example of Wheatley getting the Government into a deep hole, climbing out of it himself in a brilliantly successful speech, leaving the Government still deeper down in the hole which he had made",<sup>58</sup> but is she right? The clue to the real culprit lies in the record of the Cabinet meeting held on 7 April when it was finally decided not to assist local authorities by means of a State grant. It was to be made clear in the Commons that Government proposals in regard to unemployment insurance, which included a twenty per cent increase of benefits and the abolition of gaps, would result in an extra £10 millions for the unemployed. This sum, it was argued, would reduce the expenditure of Boards of Guardians and Parish Councillors by more than the Government proposal to make local authorities include rent relief in grants made to the unemployed would raise expenditure.<sup>59</sup> Clearly it had been decided that enough was being spent on the unemployed, and the man in whose province this decision primarily lay was Snowden. Snowden, more than anyone, restricted the Government's

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p.19.

<sup>59</sup>See above, pp. 245-6.

freedom of manoeuvre and prevented it from adopting the radical solution. Further, his financial stringency made Clynes look foolish and took away some of the glitter from Wheatley's performance over housing.

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When MacDonald accepted the Premiership he was fully aware of the difficulties, but argued that Labour could not shirk its responsibilities. He determined to prove that, contrary to Churchill's jibe, Labour was fit to govern, and to govern within the existing political and constitutional framework. The formation of the first Labour Government was "a great adventure", even "an insane miracle", as MacDonald is said to have exclaimed.<sup>60</sup> But although Labour did prove its fitness to govern, the nine months of office brought into focus all the potential fissures within the party. By early April Haldane was writing that "our experience shows that there is a pretty strong tail which is trying

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<sup>60</sup> Reginald Bassett, *Nineteen Thirty-One: Political Crisis* (London: MacMillan, 1958), p.17.

to wag the dog, and the real problem of the Government is to educate a large section of its supporters in the problems of government,"<sup>61</sup> while, on 1 March Masterman argued that the Government was so weak that "The question is, not how we can knock 'em down, but how in God's name, we can keep them alive".<sup>62</sup> The Cabinet itself was certainly cohesive and businesslike: "the most businesslike Cabinet I have sat in" wrote Haldane,<sup>63</sup> while Webb has recorded, "we were nearly always remarkably unanimous in the 'general cause of the meeting'; sometimes with individual dissentients (such as Wheatley, Wedgwood, Tom Shaw, Trevelyan, and sometimes Snowden), who gave way to the evident majority."<sup>64</sup> The problem lay partly with the militant socialist backbenchers and partly with the party outside Parliament; elements which at times seemed unwilling to accept, if indeed they grasped, the

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<sup>61</sup>Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, The Life of Viscount Haldane of Cloan (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), Vol. 2, p.153.

<sup>62</sup>Masterman, C.F.G. Masterman, p.340.

<sup>63</sup>Maurice, The Life of Viscount Haldane of Cloan, Vol. 2, p.160.

<sup>64</sup>Webb, "The First Labour Government", p.20.

conditions of Parliamentary government, still less those of a minority government. It was from the ranks of these that opposition came to both foreign and domestic policies.

The Government's foreign policy ran into increasing criticism, especially from the I.L.P. The I.L.P. pacifists were disappointed when instead of disavowing the Government actually contemplated building a naval base at Singapore,<sup>65</sup> and fifteen of them voted for R.H. Ayles's amendment to the Defence Estimates in March.<sup>66</sup> Forty-five Labour and I.L.P. Members voted against the Government's Trade Facilities Bill which guaranteed the capital of the Sudan Plantation Syndicate.<sup>67</sup> and by July many were clearly dissatisfied with a foreign policy which seemed very much like that of the previous administration. Drailsford articulated this feeling:

The Indian crisis does not grow less acute under our handling. In the Mosul Case the Colonial Office has taken over Lord Curzon's untenable case for the acquisition of its oil-bearing lands by our protege, the Kingdom of Iraq. A conventional negative answer has been sent to a petition from the Greek majority

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<sup>65</sup> Forward, 14 March, 1924.

<sup>66</sup> 171 H.C. Deb. 5s, 83-194.

<sup>67</sup> 170 H.C. Deb. 5s, 1437-1507.

in Cyprus which claimed the right once more to join the Greek Motherland.<sup>68</sup>

When the terms of the Dawes Plan became known, not confining reparations to the devastated areas, the I.L.P. Parliamentary Group, which was steadily becoming dominated by the left-wingers within it, immediately sent a deputation to MacDonald to explain their views,<sup>69</sup> and when the Plan was debated in Parliament men as diverse as Tom Johnston and E.D. Morel joined forces against it.

Dissatisfaction with domestic affairs was, however, much more acute. The problem of the intractable million unemployed did not disappear under Labour. But at least until the 1924 Conference the I.L.P. Parliamentary Group as a whole did nothing to embarrass the Government: its attitude was

The members of the I.L.P. in the House of Commons have always in mind the circumstances under which the Government was formed and that fundamental changes can only come when the Government has a working majority both inside and outside the House of Commons.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> New Leader, 4 July, 1924.

<sup>69</sup> Brockway to Allen, 24 July, 1924; copy of letter in I.L.P. Parliamentary Group Minutes.

<sup>70</sup> I.L.P., Report, 1924, p.45.



Nevertheless, on 17 May the I.L.P. N.A.C. decided to ask MacDonald "to bring to the notice of the government the immediate improvement that would accrue by the establishment of a 48-hour week... for all workers, and an all round increase in wages to employed workers and unemployed workers".<sup>71</sup> Public works schemes were advocated, and in June emergency conferences and demonstrations were held to add weight to their ideas.<sup>72</sup> But by August the extra-Parliamentary I.L.P. was expressing its dismay over the extent of unemployment: "There is no disguising the fact that the Labour Movement is disappointed with the Government's record on unemployment," and, again, "To manufacture a boom may be dangerous and unwholesome, even if it cures unemployment; to manufacture a slump is sheer lunacy."<sup>73</sup>

Given the dimensions of the unemployment problem and given that its relief was a matter close to the hearts of all I.L.P. ers, I.L.P. criticism was, on the whole, remarkably muted. This was not just because some actually realized the problems facing a minority

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<sup>71</sup>I.L.P., N.A.C., Minutes, 17 May, 1924.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 27, 28, 29 June, 1924.

<sup>73</sup>New Leader, 8 August, 1924.

government, but also because the I.L.P. itself was confused.

It envisaged an uninterrupted advance towards the creation of a socialist society, and the arrival of a minority Labour Government in an overwhelmingly capitalist society disrupted that advance and presented a problem with which the I.L.P. was philosophically unequipped to deal.

This dilemma, as much as anything else, induced divisions within the I.L.P., and with the electoral successes of 1922 and 1923 these divisions were inevitably reflected in Parliament. Some felt that their first allegiance was to the Government, others felt it was to their political philosophy. And so, although there were in Parliament men as strongly leftist as any rank-and-file militant, and although in 1924 the I.L.P. Parliamentary Group was becoming dominated by left-wingers, I.L.P. criticism was not united.

One group which was united was the hard core of the Clydeside M.Ps., Maxton, Kirkwood, Stephen and Buchanan. On 27 January, speaking at a demonstration in Glasgow's City Hall to celebrate the advent of a Labour Government, Maxton defined their attitude to the new administration and gave an unveiled warning that MacDonald had to deliver the goods or at least be seen to by trying to deliver them in the face of

capitalist opposition:

The Labour Government would have nothing but the most loyal and faithful support from the men from the Clyde as long as the Labour Government remained true to the great principles of the Labour and Socialist movement. They would not harass the Government about the slowness of their going forward as long as they were going forward ... but if for one minute the Labour Government turned its back upon its great principles, or on the millions of men and women who toiled to put them there, and had placed all their hopes for the future in them, then he hoped that the men from the Clyde would rise up and protest, and demand that no consideration of expediency or office, of personal vanities or personal dignities, should be allowed to divert the great Labour movement from the path it had been destined to lead.<sup>74</sup>

By the summer of 1924 they had decided that they had been betrayed by their leaders. They were incensed by the level of unemployment. They were outraged by the Government's feeble efforts to stem the tide of evictions. They saw little need for constitutional propriety when people were hungry and homeless, and, as before, their radical fervour spilled over into outrageous remarks like Kirkwood's over evictions.<sup>75</sup> In July, Beatrice Webb had a long talk with Wheatley who explained their attitude:

The Clyde think J.R.M. has betrayed them. They believed he... was a revolutionary, willing to run risks for principles.... 'Mac' made them

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<sup>74</sup>Glasgow Herald, 23 January, 1924.

<sup>75</sup>See above, p.245.

feel he had vision and fervour, and that once he was leader they would be in sight of the promised land. Today, Marton declares that it is the capitalists who have put him in power, and that they are quite right, because such a Labour Government in office means Socialism thwarted and capitalism kept in being, with the consent of the workers.<sup>76</sup>

When criticism was voiced in the Commons MacDonald, so Shinwell records, "took it as a personal affront", and regarded "sniping" from the back benches, and especially from the Clydeside group, as "treachery".<sup>77</sup> And in September he really let himself go in a letter to Allen complaining strongly about I.L.P. criticism:

Were I to say that from the moment I took office to now I have not had a particle of support from the I.L.P. I should be unfair, but it would only be an exaggeration and not an invention.... For God's sake, let yourselves go on big issues, leave details of programmes to men who are at the face of the cuttings, cheer sometimes, and have less damned critical wisdom upon things about which you are really not fully informed.<sup>78</sup>

Wheatley, however, was "fully informed" and was, by the summer of 1924, beginning to view the continuation of the Government with distaste. Scanlon claims that in August Wheatley told him that he would resign from the

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<sup>76</sup>Cole, Beatrice Webb's Diaries, Vol. II, p.39.

<sup>77</sup>Shinwell, Conflict Without Malice, p.94.

<sup>78</sup>Gilbert, Plough My Own Furrow, pp. 180-1.

Government once the Housing Bill was passed, and gave as his reason that "He had seen the futility of trying to do anything of permanent value to remedy the defects of Capitalism in a Government composed of men who did not believe in Socialism."<sup>79</sup> He was certainly at one with his Clydeside colleagues in their dislike of the failure to ease the unemployment problem, and here he saw the chief problem as being Snowden's obsession with the doctrine of free trade, while his own views on that subject were changing: he told the Committee of Manufacturers of Building Materials, "I do not know that I am strictly orthodox in my views of Free Trade and Protection".<sup>80</sup> Apart from his Housing Act, he found little to please him in the Government's record. And speeches such as MacDonald's at Dundee in September seemed designed to dispel his hopes for the future: MacDonald stated that the time was not ripe for Socialism - even if he were Premier for fifty years "the pledges I have given you from my heart would still be unfulfilled - not because I fainted or failed but

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<sup>79</sup>Scanlon, Decline and Fall of the Labour Party, pp. 72-3.

<sup>80</sup>Ministry of Housing and Local Government. H.L.G. 29/130 Vol. 121. Meeting with Committee of Manufacturers of Building Materials, 2 October, 1924.

because the corn was still green".<sup>81</sup> Wheatley was steadily coming to the view that a Labour Government could not, and should not attempt to, run a capitalist system. He had spent years advocating that the capitalist system be replaced: why then should socialist theory be trimmed to suit capitalism? It is possible that Scanlon is right. The fact that Wheatley did not resign in August or September does not necessarily mean that he did not intend to. He may simply have been waiting for a suitable opportunity and was overtaken by events.

In the end the Labour Government fell over a comparatively trivial issue of confidence. It was clear that the fate of the Russian Treaty had been sealed and that the Government would be defeated. But why resign over a silly episode such as the Campbell Case? The obvious answer is that the administration was tired of nine months of office without power, and that MacDonald was mentally and physically exhausted by occupying two very senior Government posts.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Joseph Clayton, The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain, 1884-1924 (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1926), p.213.

<sup>82</sup> On three occasions during MacDonald's first fortnight in office, his Private Secretary found him still at work between 2 and 4 a.m. Waterhouse, Private and Official, p.305.

The Government, obsessed with proving its fitness to govern, had been scrupulous in demonstrating that it was not influenced by Communists. Indeed, in April a Cabinet Committee had been set up to "enquire into the facts in regard to recent strikes, with a view to ascertaining whether any appreciable percentage of the unfortunate aspects of these strikes was due to Communist activity".<sup>83</sup> Perhaps it was this fixation that the Government must not be thought to be tainted with Communism that sparked off the death-wish in October, and prevented MacDonald from considering Asquith's proposed compromise of setting up a Select Committee to investigate the Campbell Case.<sup>84</sup>

The Clydeside M.P.s. had a hand in the downfall of the Government. Scanlon, the political secretary of Hastings, the Attorney General, told Maxton of the intention to prosecute Campbell, as he feared this would endanger the Government, and asked Maxton to try to persuade Hastings not to proceed with the case. The fact that Maxton refused at this juncture, asking "sarcastically... if wrecking the Government would be a tragedy" and stating "quite definitely that the sooner

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<sup>83</sup>CAB 23/48 28(24) 8(b).

<sup>84</sup>CAB 23/48 52(24) 1(b).

they were out the better, as every day they were in led us further from Socialism,"<sup>85</sup> and later led the back-bench pressure for the prosecution to be dropped, clearly implies that his intention was either to seriously embarrass MacDonald or even bring down the Government. When it was rumoured that Hastings might be induced to resign in order to preserve the Government, Wheatley, so Scanlon writes, threatened to resign saying "I strongly object to Hastings being sacrificed to save MacDonald's face."<sup>86</sup>

The defeat of the Government was a formality, and the succeeding election would probably have been a formality as well in that the Conservatives were almost certain to win. The shock of the Zinoviev Letter, it seems, merely demonstrated MacDonald's state of mental fatigue and brought to the surface the tremendous ill-feeling between MacDonald and Snowden.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Scanlon, Decline and Fall of the Labour Party, p.76.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.82.

<sup>87</sup> Snowden, in a letter to Shinwell, mentioned "the most incompetent political leadership which has ever brought a Government to disaster", Shinwell, Conflict Without Malice, p.99, and he wrote to Jowett in the same vein, Brockway, Socialism over Sixty Years, pp. 222-3.



In Glasgow the political fighting was dirty. Wheatley and his friends made much of the Housing Act. But Wheatley lied that Snowden in his next budget would have reduced the pension age to sixty-five, and "in all probability" would have substantially increased the pension.<sup>88</sup> He stated that he would have extended the Rent Restriction Act for another fifteen years had he still been in office, and he would have reduced rents.<sup>89</sup>

Further, the correspondent of The Times wrote:

Clyde Socialists are spreading a story that the guaranteeing of a loan to the Russian Soviet Government would mean orders and work for the district. Mr. Kirkwood has declared that he had an assurance from what he regards as a reliable source that this loan would mean a big order for the sewing machine works<sup>90</sup> in which many of his supporters find employment.<sup>91</sup>

But the tactics of Wheatley's Conservative opponent, John Reid Miller, were even more unsavoury. He embarked on a straight anti-Wheatley campaign, and by an appeal to religious bigotry and an attempt to implicate Wheatley with the licensing trade,<sup>92</sup> managed to slash his majority to 641.

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<sup>88</sup>The Times, 22 October, 1924.

<sup>89</sup>Wheatley's Election Address, October, 1924. University of Glasgow, Broadly Collection, Box B2.

<sup>90</sup>i.e. the Singer factory at Clydebank.

<sup>91</sup>The Times, 24 October, 1924.

<sup>92</sup>This is treated in more detail on pp. 316-7.

Labour's electoral defeat was greeted with relief by Wheatley who stated bluntly:

Labour is freed from a difficult position. We can now return to a fighting policy. It is clear that a timid statesman-like attitude makes no appeal to a people struggling to emancipate themselves from poverty. The points of attack should be mainly domestic.<sup>93</sup>

The New Leader put it less menacingly, "We have lost office. We have gained the right to be ourselves."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Glasgow Eastern Standard, 8 November, 1924.

<sup>94</sup>New Leader, 31 October, 1924.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MOVE TO THE LEFT

In the eyes of Wheatley and those on the left wing of the Labour movement MacDonald's leadership had not lived up to expectations, and criticism of MacDonald continued well after the Red Letter election. Rumours were rife that he would be replaced. Thomas was "widely tipped as Labour's next Prime Minister".<sup>1</sup> Beatrice Webb believed that Wheatley was "runner up" behind MacDonald, but felt that MacDonald was not seriously threatened.<sup>2</sup> The press was full of reports of moves to depose MacDonald and to replace him with Snowden, Clynes, Thomas, Henderson or Wheatley. But the nearest MacDonald came to being dislodged was in November when several people, including Wheatley, Snowden and Ernest Bevin asked Henderson to stand against him. Henderson's loyalty prevented him, and anyway he, as Party Secretary, knew better than anyone the mesmeric hold MacDonald had

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<sup>1</sup>Blaxland, J.H. Thomas: A Life for Unity, p.179.

<sup>2</sup>Cole, Beatrice Webb's Diaries, Vol. II, p.51.

on the rank and file. Instead of challenging MacDonald he took the chair at a dinner given for MacDonald by the T.U.C. General Council and the Labour Party Executive in order to disprove rumours that he was about to supercede him.<sup>3</sup> But the rumours and the criticism continued.

Some of the criticism called for a less moderate approach to politics: as Wheatley stated at a Plebs League Executive Dinner in December 1924, "The Labour Party had nothing to gain by saying they were moderate people".<sup>4</sup> MacDonald was not insensitive to this type of criticism, but he was convinced that his approach was correct and that some of his critics did not understand the nature and significance of Parliamentary action. He wrote:

There is a so-called left-wing which... is trying to commit the Party to a simple policy of Socialist propaganda and the neglect of Parliamentary detail. It will not succeed in that, but it may make public confidence difficult and in that event we shall be back to where we were in 1922 or even a little further back. Everything I can do will be done in exactly the opposite direction.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Scanlon, Decline and Fall of the Labour Party, p.85; Mary Agnes Hamilton, Arthur Henderson (London: Heinemann, 1938), pp. 256-7. Ernest Thurtle, Time's Winged Chariot - Memories and Comments (London: Chaterson, 1945), p.85; Alan Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin (London: Heineman, 1960), Vol. 1, p.258; The Times, 7 November, 1924.

<sup>4</sup>The Times, 8 December, 1924.

<sup>5</sup>MacDonald to Oswald Garrison Villard, quoted in

Criticism calling for less moderation was a natural reaction to nine months of office without power. But there was another type of criticism - personal criticism - and by February 1925 it had reached such lengths that Forward was able to write about a "personal vendetta" against MacDonald.<sup>6</sup>

Such was the volume of criticism and rumours of dissention within the Labour ranks that the leaders were fully engaged denying that any serious split existed. At Walsall on 26 February MacDonald explained that Labour was "not a machine-run party";<sup>7</sup> in March Snowden declared that "Iron discipline would break the Labour Party.... The difference is not so much a difference of opinions as a difference of expression;"<sup>8</sup> but Henderson denied that there was any split at all.<sup>9</sup> Despite these efforts, the split did exist, and at

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M.S. Venkataramani, "Ramsay MacDonald and Britain's Domestic Politics and Foreign Relations, 1919-1931: A Study Based on MacDonald's Letters to an American Friend", Political Studies, vol. 8, 1960, p.240.

<sup>6</sup>Forward, 28 February, 1925.

<sup>7</sup>Glasgow Herald, 27 February, 1925.

<sup>8</sup>Forward, 7 March, 1925.

<sup>9</sup>Glasgow Herald, 27 February, 1925.

the I.L.P. Conference at Gloucester in April the differences of opinion could not easily be blurred.

The N.A.C. Report to the Conference was glowing as far as the Labour Government's foreign policy was concerned,<sup>10</sup> but the Parliamentary Group's Report revealed the widespread disillusionment with MacDonald's Government: "One lesson to be drawn from last year's experience of office is that Labour had everything to gain and nothing to lose by vigorously using its power to advance a constructive Socialist policy."<sup>11</sup> Indeed Campbell Stephen bluntly declared that "There was nothing which differentiated the Labour Government from the Tory Government of to-day."<sup>12</sup> Much more serious, however, was Wheatley's contribution. Seconding Kirkwood's emergency resolution on "The Failure of Capitalism", he stated that, "A great deal of the criticism that had been levelled at the Labour Government arose from the fact that during its period of

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<sup>10</sup> I.L.P., Report, 1925, p.12; but many I.L.P. ers. had been displeased by the Government's record in this field, see above pp. 252-3.

<sup>11</sup> I.L.P. Report, 1925, p.46.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.125.

office it had been called on to administer a capitalist order of society", and urged that

Labour should not again accept office as a minority. If Labour went back as a minority Government, it went back to administer a capitalist order of society, and that would only bring discredit on the Party.<sup>13</sup>

This was a principle which MacDonald refused to accept.

He argued that circumstances must determine whether such a decision was taken: "He was not going to put a rope round his neck."<sup>14</sup>

Wheatley's speech reflected the frustrations of office, and it is not surprising that after October 1924 his speeches became less temperate and less circumspect. He realised this himself. On 6 December 1924 he argued that "One of the results of the General Election was more and more to drive those who were working for economic emancipation to the left-wing of politics."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 132-3.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p.125. At the Labour Party Conference at Liverpool in September, 1925, Bevin's motion that Labour should never again accept office while in a Parliamentary minority was overwhelmingly defeated. Labour Party, Report, 1925, p. 244. The greater time lapse probably explains why, while Wheatley's argument was cheered, Bevin faced a hostile audience.

<sup>15</sup>Glasgow Herald, 8 December, 1924.

In November he said that "He was not sure that he was not more revolutionary today than three years ago."<sup>16</sup>

Two examples of the extremism which crept back into Wheatley's speeches will suffice. On 21 December at an I.L.P. demonstration in the City Hall, Glasgow, he made a dramatic declaration of goodwill towards Russia:

However unpopular it may be, however much vituperation it may get for me in the press, I make the public statement that if any attempt is made by the Government of Britain to launch us into war with Russia I for one am prepared to spend not only my time but my life appealing to the working class of this country not merely to refuse to join in the attack on Russia but to utilize the opportunity of a war with Russia for an attack on British capitalism with a view to securing its overthrow in this country.<sup>17</sup>

And on 3 March 1925 he caused shouts of "Oh, Oh!" in the House of Commons by stating that "if I felt tomorrow that by exercising a little violence... I could emancipate the millions of my fellow-countrymen from perpetual poverty, I should feel... I was more justified

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted by Geoffrey Peto, Conservative M.P. for the Frome Division of Somerset, in the House of Commons on 3 March, 1925, 181 H.C. Deb. 5s, 355.

<sup>17</sup> Glasgow Herald, 22 December, 1924.



than you were in the cause you took in 1914."<sup>18</sup>

Further, every speech contains implicit criticism of MacDonald and the type of party he seemed to want. It is, however, very doubtful if Wheatley had serious hopes of replacing MacDonald; he knew that he lacked the necessary charisma, the personal magnetism, which MacDonald had in abundance. But he felt that many of the prevailing ideas within the party were wrong and he was prepared to state the case against them. He had experienced the financial orthodoxy of Snowden and felt it to be incompatible with his own advocacy of the underconsumption explanation of unemployment. At the same time he instinctively distrusted the middle-class dominance of the I.L.P. by Allen and his colleagues, though he did openly acknowledge his debt to Hobson.

He felt that foreign trade should, like the national economy, be subject to State regulation, and, like several other Labour M.Ps., he was beginning to think that British industry required protection against unfair competition.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, in a series

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<sup>18</sup>181 H.C. Deb. 5s, 385.

<sup>19</sup>On 16 February, 1925, only one Labour M.P., Dr. Haden Guest, voted for the Government's Safeguarding

of five articles which appeared simultaneously in Forward and in his own Glasgow Eastern Standard in February and March 1925, he broke openly with free trade, "the official policy of the [Labour] Party."<sup>20</sup> He wrote:

I cannot, as a Socialist, support what is called Free Trade, any more than I can Tory policy. Free Trade is outrageously anti-Socialist. It is anarchy in trade. It denies the right of the people to control the individual. The idea is a survival of a primitive commercial age. Its historic and fundamental claim is to buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest. Trade unionism wisely violates the principles of Free Trade.

He blamed the Liberals for training the country to think of trade as being in two classes - national and international - whereas "National frontiers make no difference in the nature of trade".<sup>21</sup> The problem with Liberalism was that it seemed "unable to think of things collectively, even to the extent of one trade", and believed that "any attempt by the community

of Industries proposals, but it was no secret that many disliked "unfair competition" and felt that some protection was necessary. According to The Times, Wheatley "may be regarded as the leader of this movement". The Times, 21 February, 1925.

<sup>20</sup> Glasgow Eastern Standard, 21 February, 1925; Forward, 21 February, 1925.

<sup>21</sup> Glasgow Eastern Standard, 21 February, 1925; Forward, 21 February, 1925.

to regulate or control... individual employers or traders is... contrary to the national interest." Wheatley believed that "we have now reached a stage when, even under private capitalism, it is essential, if we are to survive in competition with the people of other nations for the ever shrinking markets of the world, that we have national organisation of trade."<sup>22</sup>

Not only was organisation of trade essential for capitalism, it would be vital to provide protection from free trade when it came to the establishment of socialism:

A small number [of Socialists] believe that a class-conscious, fearless minority of workers will succeed during a favourable opportunity in seizing power by force. A still smaller minority, who are anti-revolutionary, think we will cling to a capitalist system that is choking production because it cannot distribute the goods, until revolution becomes inevitable in a country where hardly anyone wants it. But the great majority believe [Socialism] can come by the gradual socialisation of industry and that each nation can and must work out its own economic salvation. I submit that free trade makes this impossible.

The employer of cheap labour in India could always undercut British producers, and until the Indian standard of living and hence costs of production rose

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<sup>22</sup>Glasgow Eastern Standard, 28 February, 1925; Forward, 28 February, 1925.

to the British level, the British industry "must go down" and would require a "national subsidy" to stay in operation: "If Socialism is to be established piece-meal the structure must be protected from capitalism as it is erected."<sup>23</sup>

The Conservative proposals would not help. Employers of sweated labour would still be able to compete unfairly while America, where working conditions were better than in Britain, would be penalised - "America must suffer for the sins of China."<sup>24</sup> Unfair competition would reduce Britain to the level of her competitors, and tariffs would not prevent this. This meant that either British wages had to be cut, or industrial reorganisation had to take place. Wheatley naturally favoured the latter:

Nothing short of a complete scheme of national industrial reconstruction, having as its goal the pooling of our resources in labour power, raw materials, and knowledge, can save us from the abyss. There is no use thinking that the pooling of our resources in coal-mining or any single industry would now save us. What would have sufficed ten years ago will not avail us now, and if we

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<sup>23</sup>Glasgow Eastern Standard, 21 February, 1925;  
Forward 21 February, 1925.

<sup>24</sup>Glasgow Eastern Standard, 7 March, 1925;  
Forward, 7 March, 1925.

drifted for ten years more, nothing can save us. Coal-mining, agriculture, banking, cotton-making, and other great industries must be amalgamated. Foreign trade must be under State regulations. This new structure must be erected in sections and sheltered from commercial or industrial savages during the process.<sup>25</sup>

These ideas in large part anticipated and went beyond the Socialism in Our Time proposals which Brailsford, Creech Jones, Wise and Hobson were to produce in 1926.<sup>26</sup> While the Socialism in Our Time proposals directed attention to the task of increasing purchasing power as the way out of depression, with nationalisation and other controls relegated to subsidiary roles, Wheatley, while still urging that consumption must be increased, felt that state control was necessary and ought to be in the forefront of any set of proposals. But as with many other things, Wheatley did not promote his own case far enough. Perhaps he was simply trying to influence the study group working on Socialism in Our Time: in which case why produce his ideas in the Glasgow Eastern Standard

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<sup>25</sup> Glasgow Eastern Standard, 14 March, 1925; Forward, 14 March, 1925.

<sup>26</sup> This is discussed on pp. 298-9.

and Forward instead of in the New Leader? If he wanted support for his views why confine himself to Glasgow? Admittedly he regarded Glasgow as a base - indeed in 1928 Glasgow was chosen as the inaugural point for the Cook-Maxton campaign<sup>27</sup> - and he may have wanted to sound out opinion on his ideas. In any case, it is highly doubtful if he intended these ideas to form an alternative programme to Socialism in Our Time: his praise for Socialism in Our Time was far too great for that to be the case.

In fact, Wheatley was no great economic thinker. His ideas may have differed from those of the leaders of the Labour Party, but they were entirely in tune with those on Labour's left wing. Those on the left were becoming restless about unfair competition, they were in favour of nationalisation and state controls. Wheatley simply articulated their feelings. His seemingly ruthless logic depended more on his manner of presenting an argument than on any thought process, and the contrast between the cool, level-headed Wheatley and the excitable Maxton was such that Wheatley appeared

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<sup>27</sup>This is discussed on pp. 327-37.

even more logical than he really was. The weaknesses in his logic and in his grasp of economics were clearly revealed in these articles. For example, he scolded Snowden for arguing that if the steel industry was protected the price of steel would rise and, because of the importance of steel, other prices would rise as well so that the whole population would suffer for the benefit of the steel workers. Wheatley's argument was that if the steel makers were underpaid that was the fault of British consumers who were not prepared to pay a fair enough, that is a high enough, price for steel.<sup>28</sup> How this could be reconciled with his advocacy of the underconsumption theory, namely that consumers through lack of purchasing power could not afford to buy at a time when plenty was available, seems to have escaped his notice. Wheatley's role was not that of an economic theorist but that of an articulator of left-wing opinion: he was a propagandist rather than a creative thinker.

Some of his ideas were original, but many of them were completely impractical as well. For example, in June 1925 most of the Clydeside M.Ps. voted for the

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<sup>28</sup> Glasgow Eastern Standard, 28 February, 1925; Forward, 28 February, 1925.

Imperial Preference proposals in Churchill's budget, and Wheatley explained their action in his Glasgow Eastern Standard. The Empire existed. It was not all that could be desired, but it was there, and did provide a "nucleus of unity" of peoples. Any action which would break up the Empire would be divisive and the antithesis of international and unifying Socialism. Five Labour administrations existed in the Empire:

A bold and courageous Labour government in this country would utilise these Labour governments in the Dominions to form the basis of a block against world capitalism. We would try and induce Soviet Russia to join this grouping. We could oppose such a Pact, based upon mutual working-class assistance, to the military Pact of the capitalist states.<sup>29</sup>

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In August 1924 Beatrice Webb wrote that "the I.L.P. ... has been skilfully regimented by Allen who is acting as J.R.M.'s hidden hand in keeping the Left loyal to their former idol.... Maxton and the Clyde brethren are restive."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Glasgow Eastern Standard, 27 June, 1925.

<sup>30</sup>Cole, Beatrice Webb's Diaries, Vol. II, p.42.



By the end of 1925 they were even more restive and made another attempt to "ginger up" the P.L.P. into a more vigorous opposition.

At a Labour Party meeting in December 1925 Lansbury, Maxton, Wedgwood, and Wheatley proposed that Baldwin's Government should be opposed by the use of Parnellite obstructionism. All arrangements with Government whips should stop; the Government should be opposed all along the line "save where the Government does something useful for the unemployed", and to do this the Labour Party should be organised for obstruction "in relays of thirty Members, each ready for day and night work".<sup>31</sup> The discussion was adjourned for a week, but the four malcontents resolved to implement their obstructive tactics no matter what the Party decided, and they also stated their decision not to stand for election to the P.L.P. Executive Committee. The Times believed that MacDonald regarded this as a deliberate challenge to the

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<sup>31</sup>New Leader, 11 December, 1925. In November Wedgwood had forcefully expressed the aims of the discontented M.P.s.: Lansbury, Scurr and I and others are determined to fight whatever the front bench may arrange.... We want no 'arrangement' with the Tory Whips. We want to say "take our policy on unemployment - or we will hold you up." Wedgwood to Brockway, 22 November, 1925; letter in I.L.P. Parliamentary Group Minutes, 25 November, 1925.

accepted policy of the party,<sup>32</sup> but the adjourned meeting was "remarkably harmonious". The malcontents were supported in their desire for a more militant attitude in the House, but few liked the prospect of systematic obstruction and few liked "the prospect of an Executive on which the advanced sector would have no representation". In the end the meeting managed to produce a resolution which satisfied everyone: it instructed the Executive to prepare plans which would utilize the services of all Party members for the purpose of "fighting the capitalistic policy of the Government and compelling it to produce constructive measures for coping with the problem of unemployment".<sup>33</sup> In return, Lansbury, Wedgwood and Wheatley agreed to stand for the Executive - only Maxton remained aloof. The result was a major defeat for the Left-wingers. Lansbury, who had headed the poll the previous year, came tenth, while both Wheatley and Wedgwood failed to secure re-election. The resultant Executive was "decidedly 'Right Wing'"<sup>34</sup> and, wrote Beatrice Webb, "the saner members

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<sup>32</sup>The Times, 5 December, 1925.

<sup>33</sup>New Leader, 18 December, 1925.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 1 January, 1926.

of the front bench - Henderson, Clynes, Graham - are distinctly in the ascendant".<sup>35</sup>

Attempts were made to put obstruction into practice, but only limited support could be found. Perhaps the only notable incident came in the early hours of Thursday 15 April 1926 when the House was debating Neville Chamberlain's Economy Bill. Some Labour Members managed to keep the House up all night, dividing whenever possible, and in the early morning began to go slow in the Division Lobbies. Eventually, at 5.30 a.m. thirteen Members led by Wheatley and Lansbury passed the clerks and then sat down on the floor, refusing to pass the tellers. They sat tight for three-quarters of an hour, talking and singing, despite the urgings of Thomas "not to be such bloody fools".<sup>36</sup> After the Speaker had been called from his bed it was moved that the thirteen be suspended. Other Labour Members tried to copy them by sitting in the "Noes" Lobby, but eventually the Speaker ruled that a reasonable time had elapsed and the thirteen were suspended. The whole episode lasted

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<sup>35</sup> Cole, Beatrice Webb's Diaries, vol. II, p.81.

<sup>36</sup> Hugh Dalton, Call Back Yesterday: Memoirs 1887-1931 (London: Frederick Muller, 1953), p.160.

an hour and a half.<sup>37</sup> But that was all. There were no plaudits from the Left Wing press, there was little publicity, and virtually nothing was achieved. The attempt to nudge the P.L.P. into a less responsible position had less success than the 1923 attempt. MacDonald was still the indispensable leader and the left-wing theory of unlimited opposition was anathema to his essentially practical and biological approach to politics.

The hard core of Clydeside M.Ps. had been closely involved in this futile episode. They had much more success in quietly seizing control of the I.L.P., a process which began in an unpremeditated way in the spring of 1925 and which was completed in April 1926.

During the years of Allen's chairmanship the I.L.P. was "a vigorously Socialist, but eminently respectable party".<sup>38</sup> Great advances were made in membership, finance, and organisation, and yet in 1924 the I.L.P. had failed to capture the Labour Government or even to win the active sympathy of the

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 160-1; New Leader, 23 April, 1926; 194 H.C. Deb. 5s, 426-31.

<sup>38</sup>Marwick, The I.L.P., 1918-32, p.IV.

Government's Front Bench. After the Red Letter election the P.L.P. was theoretically dominated by I.L.P. ers,<sup>39</sup> but in practice most gave their first allegiance to the Labour Party. The I.L.P. Parliamentary Group meetings were never attended by more than 50 of the possible 106 Members. The Parliamentary Group's report to the 1926 Conference stated that "All were invited to attend the meeting of the I.L.P. parliamentary group regularly every week, and in the early part of the session the attendance was good. Towards the end of the year, however, the attendance fell off seriously."<sup>40</sup> In fact the problem of poor attendance was raised as early as April 1925.<sup>41</sup>

By March 1925 a Parliamentary Committee was established, consisting of the members of the Group elected to serve as representatives to the N.A.C. along with those members of the N.A.C. who were also M.Ps., plus the Chairman and Secretary of the Party. It

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<sup>39</sup>Of the 151 M.Ps. in the P.L.P., 106 were members of the I.L.P. and 27 were I.L.P. sponsored and financed. I.L.P., Report, 1925, p.44.

<sup>40</sup>Report of Parliamentary I.L.P., attached to I.L.P. Report, 1926.

<sup>41</sup>I.L.P. Parliamentary Group, Minutes, 7 April, 1925.

consisted of Wheatley, Maxton, Buchanan, Stephen, Ben Riley, R.C. Wallhead, J. Scurr, C.P. Trevelyan, C.R. Attlee, Clifford Allen, and Fenner Brockway.<sup>42</sup>

While by no means solidly left-wing, this Committee was symptomatic of the growing importance of the Scottish and left-wing elements within the Party.

It met on Thursdays, immediately after the following week's business had been announced in the Commons, and immediately before the meeting of the P.L.P.

Executive.

The I.L.P. Parliamentary Committee considers the business for the following week and suggests action through its members on the Parliamentary Party Executive or in the Parliamentary Party meeting. The intention is also to develop corporate and constructive action by the I.L.P. Group, by means of tabling motions and amendments, suggesting Bills and finding opportunities for the statement of the Socialist case in the Debates.

Motions were drafted on evictions, pensions, over-capitalisation of industry, tubercular milk, disarmament, and a basic living wage, and some were circulated with a view to being tabled if any member were lucky in the ballot for Private Members' Bills. The P.L.P. Executive was asked to prepare bills on electrification, food control, banking, land, and agriculture, while support was promised

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<sup>42</sup>Report of I.L.P. Parliamentary Group, I.L.P. Report, 1925, p.47.

for H.C. Wilson's Secret Party Funds Bill, Dr. Salter's Minimum Wage Bill, and Campbell Stephen's Excessive Rents Bill.<sup>43</sup>

But while the Committee was busy the I.L.P. Group itself was in seeming hibernation. In the weeks before the summer recess attendances slumped. Only seven members attended the weekly meeting on 2 July, only ten attended on 9 July, only six attended on 23 July, and only seven attended on 30 July.<sup>44</sup> There must have seemed little point in attending when matters were being decided by the Parliamentary Committee.

Gradually, the I.L.P. began to lose its middle class element - Attlee, Trevelyan and Buxton, for example, transferred their candidatures from the I.L.P. to their Divisional Labour Parties<sup>45</sup> - and eventually the tension between the respectable, middle-class leadership of Allen and the more robust, working-class idealism of the Clyde group came to a head in

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<sup>43</sup>I.L.P. Parliamentary Group Report for N.A.C., reported to I.L.P. Group on 10 March 1925. I.L.P. Parliamentary Group, Minutes, 10 March, 1925.

<sup>44</sup>I.L.P. Parliamentary Group, Minutes, 2, 9, 23 and 30 July, 1925.

<sup>45</sup>I.L.P., Report, 1926, p.28.

October 1925 with the resignation of Allen. Allen was still seen by many as one of MacDonald's principal lieutenants, but the clash between him and Maxton was one of personality as well as of principle. Allen's calm intellectual approach and his willingness to negotiate and compromise contrasted with Maxton's dramatic oratory and refusal to compromise. The tension between the two had been growing steadily and the events of October 1925 were the occasion rather than the cause of the withdrawal of Allen.

The 1925 Labour Party Conference was held at Liverpool, and during the conference the I.L.P. N.A.C. met, with Allen as chairman. The 1924 I.L.P. Conference held at York had, under Allen's influence, accepted a resolution that land nationalization should be achieved by compensation, not by confiscation,<sup>46</sup> and in April 1925 an I.L.P. Commission on Confiscation reiterated this approach.<sup>47</sup> At Liverpool Maxton, whom Allen regarded as a "future Chairman of the party", "considered himself entitled to pledge the party to a policy of Land Nationalization without compensation in flagrant

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 1924, p.138.

<sup>47</sup>Forward, 11 April, 1925.



defiance of the recorded decision of the Annual Conference at York." Allen stated his case bluntly: "I can't work with that kind of political irresponsibility."<sup>48</sup> Hard on the heels of this dispute came the N.A.C. refusal to allow MacDonald to become editor of the Socialist Review, a decision which reinforced Allen's determination to resign.

Jowett was installed as interim Chairman of the I.L.P. until the 1926 Conference when Maxton was elected chairman with a majority of 508 over his nearest rival.<sup>49</sup>

MacDonald's sympathies were clearly with Allen, and he was worried about where the I.L.P. was going. On 7 October he wrote to Allen: "I am very sorry to hear about the N.A.C. meeting in Liverpool. I am afraid that some of our people are losing both their heads and their moral consciences."<sup>50</sup> And by November he was even more scathing:

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<sup>48</sup> Allen to Maxton, 21 October, 1925, quoted in Gilbert, Plough My Own Furrow, pp. 194-5.

<sup>49</sup> I.L.P., Report, 1926, p.29.

<sup>50</sup> MacDonald to Allen, 7 October, 1925, quoted in Gilbert, Plough My Own Furrow, p.192.

Somehow or other there has grown up inside the I.L.P., especially amongst those who are in most prominent positions, a petty small-mindedness on personal matters and a cheap melodramatic appetite in propaganda.... If the I.L.P. would preach the positive doctrines of Socialism and give out positive views on social service, then it would be of the utmost value. But if it is only going to run on the Wheatley and Maxton line of pose and drama, thinking of effect and not of truth, of heroism and not of wisdom, it has no useful purpose to serve.... the leadership that is now being offered to the I.L.P. is one of the greatest calamities that can overtake us.<sup>51</sup>

The gulf between Wheatley and his friends and the leaders of the Labour Party was growing steadily wider.

A further reorganisation of the I.L.P. in late 1925 and early 1926 served only to emphasise the Clydeside dominance in the party. Brockway's recommendations, that the full I.L.P. Group should meet only occasionally while a small committee of the N.A.C. M.Ps., Maxton, Kirkwood, Stamford, Scurr, and Wallhead, and two others (Stephen and Trevelyan were elected) should meet regularly, were accepted,<sup>52</sup> and from March 1926 these seven directed the effective I.L.P. representation in

<sup>51</sup>MacDonald to Allen, 3 November, 1925, quoted in Gilbert, Plough My Own Furrow, pp. 195-6.

<sup>52</sup>Minutes of Special Committee to consider the future of the Parliamentary Group, 15 December, 1925; Minutes of Joint Meeting of Consultative Committee and Special Committee, 12 February, 1926; I.L.P. Parliamentary Group, Minutes, 3 March, 1926.

the Commons. This Parliamentary Group Committee, or Parliamentary Group Executive as it, significantly, came to be called,<sup>53</sup> was closely linked to the N.A.C. and it was clearly dominated by the Clydeside M.Ps. Though not a member of the Committee, Wheatley's influence was never far from the surface. The gradual emergence of Maxton as the leading figure in the I.L.P. could not conceal the fact that Maxton continued to regard Wheatley as his mentor.

The full I.L.P. Group, though theoretically able to take decisions, which it later did, was for most purposes simply a body which met infrequently to be lectured on, for example, Public Ownership in the Woollen Industry or on India; and even these meetings were poorly attended.<sup>54</sup>

The virtual demise of the Group coupled with the emergence of the Group Committee or Executive and the new cohesion and co-operation between the Committee and the N.A.C., both of which were now dominated by the

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<sup>53</sup>I.L.P. Parliamentary Group Executive, Minutes, 14, 21 June, 1927.

<sup>54</sup>I.L.P. Parliamentary Group, Minutes, 7 July and 24 November, 1927.

hard core of the Clydeside M.P.s., Marton, Wheatley, Stephen, Buchanan, and Kirkwood, explains the process whereby "the I.L.P. and 'the Clydesiders' were already coming to be used as to some extent interchangeable terms".<sup>55</sup>

Gaining control of a party machine is one thing: being able to use that machine to do something is quite a different problem. Despite the background and idealism of the Clydesiders, the I.L.P. was completely unable to influence events when the coal crisis finally broke in 1926.

Wheatley was one of the few to see that the Government's decision of August 1925, to give a temporary subsidy to the coal industry, provided only a breathing space. He rejoiced in "The Triumph of Cook", but felt that:

We are on the threshold of an industrial and social revolution, and whether it is to take place peaceably or not depends on our intelligence. I see no serious effort being made to take the essential steps to reconstruct society while there is still time to do so in an orderly manner.

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<sup>55</sup>G.D.H. Cole, A History of the Labour Party from 1914 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1948), p.220.

The nine months' "truce" must not be wasted, he argued, "the workers must prepare on a new scale and on new lines for the greatest struggle in their history".<sup>56</sup>

Much of his time was spent urging the working classes to prepare and arguing that the principle of a subsidy was not unsound. He felt it stupid to "sacrifice the nation to preserve a musty, academic, economic theory". He argued:

It is not only good Socialism but good sense for a nation in industrial difficulties to pool its economic resources and where necessary maintain out of the surplus of one department other essential departments which have no surplus but need assistance. The coal department is poor. The beer department is rich. Agriculture is starving. Pleasure cars are booming. The number of super-tax payers is increasing. Engineers cannot get a living wage. If coal, and steel, and shipbuilding, and cotton are allowed to go to the wall the nation will not be saved by its brewers, its pleasure-seekers, and its super-tax payers.

The only way to prevent defeat when the subsidy expired was to organise - if possible by creating a labour army of ten million people. Only that would secure industrial peace.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Glasgow Eastern Standard, 8 August, 1925;  
Forward, 8 August, 1925.

<sup>57</sup> Glasgow Eastern Standard, 15 August, 1925;  
Forward, 15 August, 1925.

The workers' defence corps must not be merely an alliance of leaders. It must be a hearty union of the rank and file. Every Labour organisation in Britain should proceed immediately to obtain pledges from millions of workers that in this hour of destiny they will not desert their class.<sup>58</sup>

Allied to this, the unions had in the immediate future to decide what they wanted, how to organise properly, and what action they would take:

The great danger to be avoided at the moment is slumber. It is so easy to be peaceful and to believe that the danger has passed. The masters will use every effort to lull the workers into sleep while the attack is being prepared. To prepare calmly and coolly for a war that is not yet declared but is inevitable must always be difficult. But it must be done.<sup>59</sup>

To be successful the strikes of the future would have to be class strikes.<sup>60</sup>

The response from the trade unions and from the Labour Party dismayed him. The Labour leaders were essentially moderate men and distrusted the almost revolutionary ideas of the left wing. But even among the left wing, Wheatley's urgings provoked little response.

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<sup>58</sup> Glasgow Eastern Standard, 22 August, 1925; Forward, 22 August, 1925.

<sup>59</sup> Glasgow Eastern Standard, 29 August, 1925; Forward, 29 August, 1925.

<sup>60</sup> Glasgow Eastern Standard, 12 September, 1925.

In the autumn of 1925 while Wheatley was exhorting the workers to organise, Maxton, Kirkwood, and Stephen went on a propaganda tour of Caithness and the Western Isles, and Maxton's illness took him out of politics for much of 1926. The union leaders, with the exception of extremists like Cook, disliked and distrusted the left wingers. Bevin was especially distrustful: "His views on the I.L.P. with its doctrinaire, sectarian socialism, had always been caustic and he did not revise them when the I.L.P. moved to the left and began to proclaim revolutionary socialism in increasingly shrill tones."<sup>61</sup>

Not only were Wheatley's urgings largely ignored; when the General Strike finally came about the whole I.L.P. was largely ignored. Maxton summed up the attitude of I.L.P. ers. when he wrote: "The duties of the Labour Movement begin when the miners have made their own decision. It is unnecessary to say that the I.L.P. will play its full part."<sup>62</sup> The I.L.P. placed its propaganda machinery at the disposal of the T.U.C., but the offer was never taken up. The T.U.C. was determined

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<sup>61</sup> Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, vol. 1, p.260.

<sup>62</sup> New Leader, 30 April, 1926.

that this was an industrial matter, and the I.L.P. and the P.L.P. had to watch from the wings.

During the miners' lock out the I.L.P. did have some part to play: at national level its offer of assistance was accepted, but its most useful work was done at local levels.<sup>63</sup> In Glasgow the I.L.P. held demonstrations and collections for the miners, and opened soup kitchens throughout the city.<sup>64</sup> During the crisis the Glasgow I.L.P. collected £3,406. 12. 4. for and spent £3,424. 11. 6½. on the miners.<sup>65</sup> Wheatley launched an even more local relief scheme in his Glasgow Eastern Standard and Glasgow South Side Standard. His Miners Distress Fund was opened at the end of May and when it closed in December 1926 £729. 12. 6. had been raised. Most of it went to local funds in Glasgow's East End and South Side, though over £350 was sent to Hamilton for distribution throughout the Lanarkshire coalfield.<sup>66</sup> Wheatley's own

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<sup>63</sup>Cook wrote, "We shall never forget the generosity of the I.L.P. in this titanic struggle." New Leader, 12 November, 1926.

<sup>64</sup>I.L.P. Glasgow Federation, Executive Council, Minutes, 7 and 21 May, 4 June, and 2 July, 1926.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 8 April, 1927.

<sup>66</sup>Glasgow Eastern Standard, 11 December, 1926.



financial contribution was considerable. The Fund opened with a £50 contribution from the papers' proprietors and a £32 contribution from Wheatley himself.<sup>67</sup> Wheatley followed this with a weekly sum of £8, that is his whole Parliamentary salary; so that by December he had contributed some £270.

As far as Wheatley was concerned the Labour leaders had finally disgraced themselves. Snowden pled ill-health and kept silent during the nine days of the General Strike - "He considered the T.U.C. leaders to be hopelessly misguided" in pursuing strike action.<sup>68</sup>

MacDonald surveyed the strike in an article in Forward:

It was an industrial move, made for an industrial purpose. Political and constitutional issues were as far removed from it as the moon. It was inspired by none of those ideas which in the days of syndicalism before the war were associated with the general strike. It was merely our old friend the sympathetic strike on a large-scale. The Government strove hard to make it political and revolutionary, but was baffled by the sanity of Ecclestone Square.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 29 May, 1926.

<sup>68</sup>Colin Cross, Philip Snowden (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1966), p. 221.

<sup>69</sup>Forward, 22 May, 1926.

Wheatley viewed the matter in a completely different way.

It was, he believed, "the greatest and most bungled strike in history". Reviewing the collapse of the strike he hit out at the Labour leaders:

Some days must elapse before we learn accurately all the causes of the dreadful debacle. But I have no doubt that when everything is straightened out cowardice will occupy a prominent place. The qualities which distinguish men in a drawing room, a palace, or a debating society are of little use in a vital struggle. Smart quips and polished manners play little part amidst grim realities. From the first moment of the struggle, and indeed before it, prominent Labour leaders were whining and grovelling. The day before the general strike was declared we were told by one of the men who were going out to lead us, that defeat was certain. Others, of great influence,... spent their time damping the ardour of the courageous by wringing their hands and talking about the "tragedy". The real tragedy was that in its hour of trial the Labour movement was deserted by those in whom it had placed its greatest trust.<sup>70</sup>

In October Wheatley buried the memory of the General Strike in a long article in Forward and in the Glasgow Eastern Standard. He argued that leaders were only human and "You cannot plunge on the General Strike with any certainty that the most promising leader in peace-time will not develop heart failure at the height of an industrial war." But more important he now declared: "Reviewing the matter calmly... I cannot see how a General

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 22 May, 1926.

Strike, constitutionally conducted, can attain its object. To be successful it would require to be swift and complete and backed by unconstitutional action."<sup>71</sup> He was not prepared to advocate "unconstitutional action", but this does not mean that MacDonald and the other Labour leaders were raised in his estimation!

Although many on the left wing of the Labour movement were very disappointed with the Labour leadership, it is impossible to show that the General Strike pushed the I.L.P. further to the left. Those like Wheatley who were moving to the left were clearly doing so before the crisis: the crisis only reinforced their shift. Nor did the strike lead to any great upsurge of support for the I.L.P. - partly, no doubt, because the I.L.P.'s role had been so peripheral. The Communist Party saw a rapid, but temporary, increase in membership from 6,000 in April 1926 to 10,730 in October 1926; but twelve months later membership had fallen to 7,377 and by January 1929 was down to 3,500.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 30 October, 1926; Glasgow Eastern Standard, 30 October, 1926.

<sup>72</sup>Henry Pelling, The British Communist Party (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1958), Appendix 'A', p.192.

Dr. Dowse has pinpointed three ways in which the strike was to be important for the I.L.P., and he is certainly correct in his assertions. Firstly, relations between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party were further strained by the I.L.P. denouncing the Labour Party Conference for refusing to levy itself on behalf of the miners and for failing to demand the Government's resignation.<sup>73</sup> Secondly, I.L.P. leaders were brought into close contact with the miners' leaders and with Arthur Cook in particular. "It may be," writes Dowse "that the origins of the Cook-Maxton Manifesto have to be seen in this association," and indeed one of Wheatley's observations in May 1926 was "Now that trade unionism has been mortgaged to its enemies a new form of organisation may be necessary."<sup>74</sup> Thirdly, "Occurring when it did, the strike caused a diversion of party activity away from its campaign to the public and the Labour Party in favour of the Living Wage proposals. Thus the party lost much impetus in its propaganda."<sup>75</sup> The Living Wage or Socialism in Our Time proposals were the most

<sup>73</sup>New Leader, 15 October, 1926.

<sup>74</sup>Forward, 22 May, 1926; Glasgow Eastern Standard, 22 May, 1926.

<sup>75</sup>Robert E. Dowse, Left in the Centre: The Independent Labour Party, 1893-1940 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1966), p.129.

coherent and concrete ideas to be produced by the political left wing between the wars: but they had to be sold to the public and to the Labour Party.

The proposals were developed by an I.L.P. study group set up by Allen in 1924 and chaired by J.A. Hobson. Its members were H.N. Brailsford, E.F. Wise an ex-civil servant, and Arthur Creech Jones a research officer of the Transport and General Workers' Union who was included to bring the policy into closer contact with the unions. Its task was to frame a "Plan for the speedy Abolition of Poverty and the Realisation of Socialism", and although not finally elaborated until March 1926 when The Living Wage was published, its details had been well-known and well-argued long before.<sup>76</sup>

The proposals have been described as "none other than our old friend the belief that capitalism could be made to burst of itself, if wage demands were pushed high enough."<sup>77</sup> Nothing could be further from the truth. The influence of Hobson predominated, and the proposals echoed his underconsumption explanation of the

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<sup>76</sup>For how details were gradually released and modified see Ibid., pp. 130-2.

<sup>77</sup>A.J.P. Taylor, "Confusion on the Left," in John Raymond, ed., The Baldwin Age (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1960), p.71.

unemployment problem by calling for the redistribution of wealth and the establishment of a legal minimum wage, supplemented by family allowances. Nationalisation was relegated to a supporting role, being reserved for key industries and those which refused to increase wages. Credit control would be secured by nationalising the Bank of England.

The I.L.P. formally adopted the policy by an overwhelming majority at its Annual Conference in April 1926. Its acceptance was moved by Brailsford, and Wheatley hailed it as "the wisest and most practical policy which had ever been presented to their people".<sup>78</sup> But it was much more difficult to get it accepted either by the trade unions or by the Labour Party.

The T.U.C. objected strongly to the proposed family allowances. Their objections were summed up by Rhys Davies, a Trade Union M.P., who wrote: "Family allowances, as a system, is a confession that industry cannot afford to pay a decent wage to the workmen. It is also a confession that trade unionism is played out."<sup>79</sup> All attempts to draw Bevin into the campaign failed; he

<sup>78</sup> I.L.P., Report, 1926, p.22.

<sup>79</sup> New Leader, 2 November, 1926.

felt that wages were a problem for unions not for the I.L.P. and wrote to Brockway, "You will discover you cannot handle wages by attaching them to the tail of a particular slogan."<sup>80</sup>

The proposals immediately increased the already growing antagonism between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party leaders. Snowden lost no time in condemning them, declaring that "Socialism in our time means Socialism in no time", and that "If the Labour Government established a minimum wage of £4 a week, the week after there would be no wages for anybody".<sup>81</sup> MacDonald was even more scathing in his condemnation. He rejected "schemes and proposals... [ which committees ] hand... over to a body of unfortunate Members of Parliament, and especially ministers, like orders issued to subordinates by military commanders." And he objected to the "sanctification of phrases of no definite meaning... like 'Socialism in our time'," calling such proposals

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<sup>80</sup> Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, vol. 1, p.389.

<sup>81</sup> Cross, Philip Snowden, p.224. Snowden's reasoning was that the only source of money to finance the minimum wage was unsound finance, which would bring British credit, and hence Britain, to its knees. He had clearly not studied The Living Wage, which advocated taxation, not borrowing. The Living Wage, p.23.

"millstones for mere show round the neck of the Movement".<sup>82</sup>

MacDonald clearly had not read the proposals. He described his first knowledge of them as coming when he read the headlines of passengers' newspapers while strap-hanging in a London tube.<sup>83</sup> But more ludicrous was his attack on them which ended with the suggestions that the I.L.P. should start thinking along the lines of Hobson - the chief architect of the proposals - and consider Mosley's ideas on credit control - which were in fact largely embodied in the programme.<sup>84</sup>

The Living Wage was debated at the Labour Party Conference at Margate in October 1926 and was effectively killed by the simple expedient of referring it to the executive. Wheatley had wanted to speak in the debate but was prevented by the imposed timelimits and by the action of the chairman Bob Williams who, after seeing a

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<sup>82</sup>Socialist Review, March, 1926.

<sup>83</sup>Forward, 17 April, 1926.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 27 March, 1926. Mosley's Revolution by Reason, published in 1925, focussed more attention on monetary than on fiscal policy, but Mosley agreed that his credit techniques were largely embodied in the Living Wage proposals; see Birmingham Town Crier, 16 April, 1926.



motion for the suppression of standing orders to enable Wheatley to speak being carried on a show of hands, called for a card vote on which the unions' block votes defeated the motion. Reporting this incident Brockway wrote of his sorrow because of the "exceptional trouble" Wheatley had taken to prepare for the debate: "when listening to Wheatley, one imagines he speaks extempore. I found that he had planned almost every sentence, and that he had foregone lunch to walk along the sea-shore to clear his mind for the occasion".<sup>85</sup>

Disappointed but not too dismayed, Wheatley set out to popularise the Living Wage proposals in a series of articles in Forward, The Glasgow Eastern Standard and The New Leader. Mr. Middlemas has called this "Wheatley's last manifesto" and a programme which "could have begun the last piece of major rethinking within the I.L.P.;"<sup>86</sup> but Mr. Middlemas is wrong. Wheatley's articles were merely a popularisation and, in some instances, an elaboration of The Living Wage. To state that "The significance of his thoughts belongs to the history of

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<sup>85</sup> New Leader, 22 October, 1926.

<sup>86</sup> Middlemas, The Clydesiders, pp. 207, 208.

ideas rather than that of politics"<sup>87</sup> is to put it the wrong way round. His writings were typical pieces of Wheatleyite propaganda.

Basically he was calling for State control of both prices and incomes. The Living Wage advocated exactly the same with its statutory minimum wage,<sup>88</sup> nationalization of industries which refused to raise wages, and bulk government purchase of raw materials, especially foodstuffs, to build up reserve stocks whenever employers tried to counter higher wages with higher prices.<sup>89</sup> Wheatley described it as socialising the product of labour and raising the purchasing power of the workers before embarking on the nationalizing of the means of production. He pointed out that nationalization would be a very slow process, and, having illustrated the difficulties land nationalization would face, asked "Does anyone believe that this land nationalization can be carried through in less than ten years?" and "Is it a wild estimate that forty years would be required for the complete socialisation of key industries?"

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.208.

<sup>88</sup> The Living Wage, pp. 15-16, 34.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., pp. 19, 38, 42-3.

Something should be done now: the power to fix prices and wages should be "taken from private enterprise in the first session of the next Labour Government".

This would lead to an immediate increase in purchasing power, which "would automatically provide a market for our super-abundant goods". He ended his first article:

Socialisation of the means of production would then proceed smoothly as a means of improving production, which is its real function. The problem of to-day is one of distribution of the national income and it would not be solved by an improvement in production.... Instead of our people marching through starvation to Socialism they would... enter it through an era of prosperity.<sup>90</sup>

This was surely the Hobsonian solution being popularised and being made to look even more attractive. Naturally, Wheatley took the opportunity to chide MacDonald and his supporters for not realising how much had changed since 1924: "The stereotyped Socialist of 1924 might still be labelled Socialist, but in reality be the Conservative of 1927."<sup>91</sup>

In January 1927 he sought to explain his ideas more fully in a series of three articles entitled "A New Socialist Policy Explained." The first was a straight-

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<sup>90</sup> Forward, 30 October, 1926; Glasgow Eastern Standard, 30 October, 1926.

<sup>91</sup> Forward, 30 October, 1926; Glasgow Eastern Standard, 30 October, 1926.

forward description of "Why Capitalism is Failing", based on the underconsumption theory.<sup>92</sup> The second - "Treat Britain as one National Workshop" - is more important. Given the thesis that "The purchasing power of our own people is the determining factor in our home and foreign trade," the problem is how to cope with the difficulties of distribution this creates. The normal solution was "to continue competing amongst ourselves, and as traders in the markets of the world," by reducing "our workshops and transport costs". But this would not work as each cost-reducing step could be matched, either immediately or later, by competitors. The only solution was to "make the market larger and larger by enabling workers to buy more and more". The competitive system of fixing wages and prices must be immediately ended; both wages and prices must be dealt with simultaneously; and an increase in wages must be a real increase, enabling the worker to buy more goods. The "old idea of dealing with each industry or group of people separately" must be abandoned - "All the bishops and Baldwins in the world could not, out of coal alone, in a competitive system, obtain a decent standard of living for the miners." This meant that Britain

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<sup>92</sup> Forward, 8 January, 1927; Glasgow Eastern Standard, 8 January, 1927.

should be treated as a national workshop, in which "no industry should be regarded as self-contained", but in which "every industry must be looked upon and treated as a department of one workshop". "We must stifle the parrot cry that each industry must 'face its economic facts', even to the extent of suicide." Every large business has at least one essential but unprofitable department which is not abolished. The national economy should be run in the same way.<sup>93</sup>

His third article explained how the new system would work. Wages and prices would be fixed by a state department, which would naturally "have a big say in deciding what is work of national importance", scrapping those industries "which add nothing in substance to the national wealth" - and releasing those engaged in them "for additional useful production". There would be state regulation of imports and exports, and, if necessary, assistance to exports by "lowering the selling prices of certain commodities abroad to compete with cheap labour in other parts of the world". National control of credit would quickly take place so that financial power lay not with "a few financial magnates" but with the nation.

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<sup>93</sup> Forward, 15 January, 1927; Glasgow Eastern Standard, 15 January, 1927.

"Under this policy nationalization will take its proper place. After all, its real objective is improved production. Our problem today is not one of production. The improved production will become necessary and possible when we have removed the barrier of poverty which obstructs it now, and the value of nationalization will then become obvious". No nationalize before ending the competitive system would not work - it would take too long and could even lead to a reduction in purchasing power. He ended with a sideswipe at the Labour leaders: the Labour party's "millions of supporters expect it to abolish poverty now, and not when they are dead."<sup>94</sup>

Clearly this was no unauthorised programme of Wheatley's. His views had always been those of the left wing of the Labour movement. He had uncritically accepted the Hobsonian solution to the unemployment problem and he had immediately accepted the Living Wage proposals. In these articles he was simply popularising them. State controls, export subsidies, credit controls, a prices and incomes policy - all these were written into the Living Wage. Wheatley had nothing new to add; he simply said the same things in a clearer, more popular way.

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<sup>94</sup> Forward, 29 January, 1927; Glasgow Evening Standard, 29 January, 1927.

Wheatley was a politician, not an economist, and as a politician he was steadily emerging as MacDonald's chief critic within the Labour movement. But there was more to Wheatley's opposition to MacDonald than the latter's misguided, as Wheatley thought, economic beliefs. Wheatley was inexorably coming to the view that the flesh was weak. MacDonald's leadership at the time of the General Strike was the major factor here. He had convinced Wheatley that he did not really have the interests of the working class at heart.

Wheatley had behind him the experience and praise of 1924; he was seldom out of the news because of his propaganda and criticism of the Labour leaders; and he effectively had behind him the I.L.P. organisation. There seemed every likelihood of a Wheatley-led left wing revolt, and it seemed very likely to come in early 1927.

## CHAPTER X

### FURTHER TO THE LEFT

In 1927 MacDonald was convinced of his own personal indispensability. On 1 March he wrote:

We have still a small section of people who deal in absolutes, and who would very soon bring us crashing to ruin. Ninety-nine per cent of the Party, however, is sound and sane, and don't you make any mistake about it!... If one or two of us were to leave the Party, or to come out in disagreement with it, it would cease to be a power in our politics.<sup>1</sup>

This conviction was accepted by Clifford Allen who wrote in May that MacDonald "is head and shoulders above us all, and his Socialist influence within the Labour Party is of supreme importance,"<sup>2</sup> but it was rejected by some on the left wing. In January the Scottish I.L.P. Conference rejected by only the narrow majority of sixty-one votes to fifty-seven a resolution disapproving of MacDonald's "recent utterances on the political and industrial situation" and calling for "a change in

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<sup>1</sup> MacDonald to Villard, quoted in Venkataramani, "Ramsay MacDonald and Britain's Domestic Politics and Foreign Relations, 1919-1931," p.240.  
<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Gilbert, Plough My Own Furrow, p.209.



the Leadership of the Parliamentary Labour Party."<sup>3</sup>  
 And Wheatley acquired a new stick with which to beat MacDonald as the general left wing complaint about the slowness of change implicit in MacDonald's biological gradualism developed into an outright attack on that political philosophy.

Criticism of this type was nothing new: it was implicit in every left wing criticism of MacDonald since 1922. By early 1927 the rumblings of discontent had simply become more explicit and coherent, and the articulation of this by Wheatley is yet another example of his ability to reflect in a seemingly calm and sane way the mood of the left wing. Admittedly, at this time Wheatley was criticising MacDonald over every issue that arose, from his views on China<sup>4</sup> to his views on the British economy,<sup>5</sup> but through every criticism shines his attack on gradualism. In February he wrote:

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<sup>3</sup>Forward, 15 January, 1927.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 12 February, 1927.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 20 February, 1927.

Those who look to Labour Gradualists to emancipate the workers and save British industry have no more solid foundation for their hopes than those who rely on Tory Imperialism. The policy of either might succeed if social and industrial conditions, however bad, could be stabilised. But the changing forces in industry to-day are more revolutionary than gradualist.

And in the following month he went even further, arguing that the Labour Party was steadily becoming more and more like the Conservative and Liberal Parties. He sketched the similarities. Labour did not favour enlarging the Empire but was not prepared to see it shrink: self-government would be promoted but attempts to secede would, in the last analysis, be resisted by force. Labour felt that "a slightly smaller [military] force" would be sufficient to maintain Britain's power and position in the world, but the party "would never dream of proposing abolition". National finance threw up the same sort of problem: Labour would criticise Conservative proposals to raise money, but "if we have to run the nation on similar lines the money must be found". Just like the Conservatives, Labour had

no desire to repudiate the National Debt or to depart by one per cent. from our obligations to holders of War Loan Stock. We would reduce the taxes on food and transfer this part of the

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 26 February, 1927.

burden to the shoulders of the rich, but we would secretly fear that somehow or other the rich would get their own back. We would abolish import duties and obtain this part of our revenue from direct taxation, and go a step further than the Tories with regard to pensions. But, in every move, we would require to be assured that we had the approval of "the City" and were not disturbing the extremely delicate machinery of finance.

In other words, Labour seemed concerned to "run the machinery of Capitalism better than the Capitalists" and was forgetting that Labour supporters were "rebels against existing social conditions". The Labour Party's task was to "free the toilers from industrial oppression, social insecurity, and the circumscribed life of to-day." The Labour Movement, he argued, was a "class movement", not a national movement as MacDonald and his followers thought.<sup>7</sup>

Such an unequivocal rejection of consensus politics, the establishment of which was perhaps MacDonald's greatest achievement, coupled with a scarcely-veiled personal attack on MacDonald, was clearly irreconcilable with remaining on the Front-Bench, and on 29 March Wheatley flamboyantly retired to the back-benches. It was the final split with

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 12 March, 1927; Glasgow Eastern Standard 12 March, 1927.

MacDonald. Austen Chamberlain said in the House of Commons: "There are two parties on the benches opposite, one which is represented by [MacDonald] ... and one which is represented by [Wheatley] ".<sup>8</sup> In this judgment he was premature: Wheatley had made the break and was clearly the leader of the Parliamentary left wing, but he had not yet made any real effort to organise a revolt. He could count on the I.L.P.,<sup>9</sup> now controlled by his Clydeside colleagues, but at a time when many I.L.P. members were only nominal supporters whose primary allegiance was increasingly going to the Labour Party, Wheatley's chances of either deposing MacDonald or tugging the Labour Party to the left depended on his views gaining wider currency. If he failed the likelihood was that he would be the effective joint-leader of what would become a mere splinter-group outside the mainstream of the Labour Party.

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<sup>8</sup> 204 H.C. Deb. 5s, 2140.

<sup>9</sup> Yet another illustration of the extent to which the Scots had taken hold of the I.L.P. can be seen in the list of nominations of prospective parliamentary candidates endorsed by the W.A.C. by April, 1927. Scotland topped the list with twenty-five, Lancashire came second with six. I.L.P., Report, 1927, p.12.

He tried to drum up support for his views, demonstrating how moderate they actually were:

I think it is not an unreasonable thing to ask that the people who are living in Britain to-day should have something done for them to-day, and if that something can only be done by the adoption of Socialism then we ought to have Socialism to-day.

He was not calling for a revolution, he explained. "We want to get the fruits of revolution without a revolution."<sup>10</sup> But the gradualist was hopelessly out of date - "He belongs to the mail coach age, or at best to the days of Queen Victoria"<sup>11</sup> - and the Labour Party had become "a national party, cautious, responsible and respectable, one that the most timid maiden lady could trust".<sup>12</sup>

He was able to take a lead in condemning the Blanesburgh Report for its recommended reductions in unemployment benefit, and he chastised the National Joint Council of the T.U.C. and the Labour Party for stating that the report contained some good features. At the April Conference at Leicester, Campbell Stephen moved that the Conference "declares its entire disapproval" of the Report, and by a large majority the Conference

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<sup>10</sup>Glasgow Herald, 18 April, 1927.

<sup>11</sup>Forward, 7 May, 1927.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 2 July, 1927.

accepted an amendment to insert at the end of the motion "and therefore strongly condemns the action of the Labour representatives in signing the Blanesburgh Report."<sup>13</sup>

Left wing support for the Wheatley revolt was clearly secure, the question was whether by an all-out summer campaign he could convert the waverers.

This was perhaps one of the better opportunities in the 1920s to depose MacDonald. The discontent was there. The issues were there. Wheatley had the reputation and ability to lead a successful revolt, But suddenly in the summer of 1927 personal disaster destroyed his chances and almost ended his political career.

He had been temporarily embarrassed in December 1926 and January 1927 by a strike at the offices of the Glasgow Eastern Standard and the Glasgow South Side Standard.<sup>14</sup> Local embarrassment was avoided by the simple expedient of allowing his manager, William Regan, to write an article setting forth the wages and conditions of work in "Mr. Wheatley's

<sup>13</sup>I.L.P. Report, 1927, p.73.

<sup>14</sup>Glasgow Eastern Standard, 25 December, 1926, 1 January, 1927; Forward, 25 December, 1926, 1 January, 1927.

Workshop".<sup>15</sup> But at national level the fact that the National Union of Journalists recognised the strike as official,<sup>16</sup> despite the fact that Wheatley's firm paid more than trade union wages, undoubtedly caused some embarrassment. Much more serious, however, was the personal vilification of Wheatley which had started during the 1924 election.

The election in Shettleston had been dirty. Wheatley's Conservative opponent, John Reid Miller, a young and ambitious man who had lost a leg while on active service during the war, had gone beyond the bounds of respectable electioneering and had openly and unashamedly appealed to religious bigotry. A leaflet circulated in the constituency bore the heading "The Church, The Bible - Religion in Danger!" and called on Protestants to "Arise!" and "Protest!", arguing that Wheatley's Catholicism was a danger to them all.<sup>17</sup> Personal rumours also began, chiefly that Wheatley was a money-lender with connections with the brewing

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<sup>15</sup>Glasgow Eastern Standard, 8 January, 1927; Forward, 15 January, 1927.

<sup>16</sup>Forward, 14 May, 1927: letter to the editor from the National Organiser of the National Union of Journalists.

<sup>17</sup>Glasgow Observer, 1 November, 1924.

industry - indeed it became commonplace to hear of people entering a pub and ordering a "glass of Wheatley's beer".<sup>18</sup> Both factors combined to slash Wheatley's majority to 641.

The rumours continued and finally in September 1925, with Wheatley's approval, an article in the Eastern Standard offered a £1000 reward to anyone who could prove the truth of any or all of the "objectionable charges" that Wheatley was a "professional moneylender" who "puts people in court in hundreds to extort from them exorbitant interest", that he was a shareholder in a brewery business or financed license-holders, that he was "interested in a Riddrie contracting business" which employed "sweated labour", and that he was "the hidden hand behind a flourishing bookmaking business".<sup>19</sup> A week later the firm received a letter from Miller describing Wheatley in precisely these terms, adding that he was "an unscrupulous political charlatan, a man with no regard for the sanctity of an oath". Wheatley's firm refused to publish the letter on the grounds that it was "clearly libellous and had we published it a court might have held that Mr. Wheatley

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<sup>18</sup> Glasgow Herald, 6 July, 1927.

<sup>19</sup> Glasgow Eastern Standard, 19 September, 1925.



had contributed to his own defamation".<sup>20</sup> Miller, however, secured its publication in the Eastern Argus and Glasgow East End Advertiser,<sup>21</sup> and on 10 October 1925 the Glasgow Eastern Standard announced that Wheatley had instructed his solicitors to proceed against both Miller and Alexander Anderson, the publisher of the Argus.<sup>22</sup> he sued them for defamation of character and claimed damages of £3000 against each. Legal complications delayed the case, and it was not until July 1927 that the case came before a jury in Edinburgh.

The trial lasted a week, during which time much was made of whether or not Patrick Wheatley's grocery business had gone bankrupt, whether Wheatley had refused to toast the King at an inspection of a Glasgow Corporation farm in August 1919, and whether in his political speeches of 1924 and 1925 Wheatley had been calling for a revolution.<sup>23</sup> Miller and Anderson based their defence on the claim that their article was

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 10 October, 1925.

<sup>21</sup>Eastern Argus and Glasgow East End Advertiser, 25 September and 2 October, 1925: the letter appeared in both issues.

<sup>22</sup>Glasgow Eastern Standard, 10 October, 1925.

<sup>23</sup>Glasgow Herald, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12 and 13 July, 1927.

a fair reply to a challenge, and in this they had the active support of Lord Murray who in his summing up on 12 July stressed that the jury "must read the reply in the light of the challenge to this extent - that, being a public challenge aimed at his opponents, if a reply was given considerable latitude should be given to a person who, being aimed at, takes up the cudgels and replies". The challenge had been hard hitting, he went on; a hard-hitting reply should have been expected and the challenger "should not be thin-skinned". The reply, he stated, "was dictated by... hard hitting but fair play, and not hitting below the belt".<sup>24</sup> Given this summing up it is surprising that the jury deliberated for over two and a quarter hours before declaring for the defendants on the two issues by nine votes to three and by twelve votes to nil.<sup>25</sup>

Wheatley was shocked. He had been represented by two of the best lawyers in Scotland, Graham Robertson

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 13 July, 1927.

<sup>25</sup>The first issue was that Wheatley had been represented as a man of dishonourable, crooked and mean character; the second was that he had been represented as a man with no regard for the sanctity of an oath.

and Craigie Aitchison, and he had been completely confident of winning - indeed the only reason he had not taken legal action earlier was that he had waited "to obtain evidence [which was] sufficiently accurate".<sup>26</sup> Wheatley had not brought the action because he was thin-skinned. He was too old a campaigner for that. He took legal action because he was sure he would win and could nail the politically damaging rumours. In this he was misguided. The rewards of successful actions are, for politicians, seldom great; the cost of unsuccessful ones can be considerable, not in financial but in personal and political terms. Whether he liked it or not it was, as Anderson's counsel said, "political controversy... and nothing else. It was seething with politics."<sup>27</sup>

In July, on counsel's advice, he asked for a new trial on the ground that the verdict was contrary to evidence,<sup>28</sup> and he would probably have got one. But in November he decided to let sleeping dogs lie and withdrew his notice.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Glasgow Eastern Standard, 10 October, 1925.

<sup>27</sup> Glasgow Herald, 13 July, 1927.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 21 July, 1927.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 21 November, 1927.

Losing the case was politically a severe blow, and Wheatley's thoughts turned to the prospect of resigning his Parliamentary seat. MacDonald, who had had his full share of troubles and vilification during and immediately after the war, was full of sympathy. The day following the verdict he wrote to Wheatley:

Although you must be very sick about the result of your libel complaint you must not take it too seriously. Time hides up or obscures all small matters and their importance at the moment of happening does not persist. One is apt to feel them out of all proportion. A perfectly candid explanation followed by consistent attitudes will be accepted by the ordinary man who is in the bulk both fair and reasonable. I have seen none of your Glasgow papers so do not know what they are saying. It will be to their interest to keep the matter alive and you should adopt your policy accordingly. If I can help, please let me know.<sup>30</sup>

Wheatley told him of his inclination either to retire completely or to resign his seat and make a come-back later, and MacDonald replied realistically:

I hope you will go thoroughly into the whole situation before coming to any conclusion, for though I understand your feelings, there is another serious side to be taken into account. If you resign your seat now, that completes the victory for your enemies; if you propose to do it temporarily, you may find it difficult to get back, or at any rate to get a good opening. Then the interests of the movement ought to be studied. Would a by-election in Shettleston be

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<sup>30</sup> MacDonald to Wheatley, 13 July, 1927.

a good thing at present? Both Tories and Liberals would certainly confuse the issues and it looks as though the dice would be pretty badly loaded against us. Of course I do not know all the facts, but from this end it certainly looks as though an election arising out of your case ought not to be undertaken. I think you will see, when you come back from a holiday, that a public meeting in your constituency will go all right and remove any unhappy feelings that the case may have stirred amongst your friends.<sup>31</sup>

But the whole episode had taken a severe toll on Wheatley's health. His period in office had brought on high blood pressure, and indeed at the time of the 1924 election his condition was such that he was ordered to refrain from all political meetings.<sup>32</sup> Now his health broke down again, and after a month-long rest he decided to place his resignation in the hands of the I.L.P. branches in his constituency.<sup>33</sup> He was urged by the branches to reconsider his decision and agreed to do so, though he stressed that he would not promise to alter his decision.<sup>34</sup> It was not until 22 April 1928 that he finally decided to contest the seat at the next election.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>MacDonald to Wheatley, 19 July, 1927.

<sup>32</sup>Glasgow Herald, 27 September, 1927.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 26 September, 1927; The Times, 27 September, 1927; Forward, 1 October, 1927.

<sup>34</sup>Glasgow Herald, 27 September, 1927.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 23 April, 1928.

The revolt which Wheatley had hoped to lead in the summer of 1927 had been completely ruined. Instead of being in the limelight for his political activities, Wheatley "disappeared" until October when in a half-hearted way he resumed his criticism of MacDonald's Labour Party.<sup>36</sup>

During Wheatley's absence the I.L.P. machine at Westminster almost ground to a standstill, and under Maxton's leadership even the Parliamentary Group Executive seemed moribund.<sup>37</sup> In the summer and autumn of 1927 Maxton's only noteworthy activity was to get himself suspended from the House of Commons, once in July and again in November: on the latter occasion he was joined by Buchanan, Neil Maclean, and Wallhead, in a scene that lasted for an hour and a half, but significantly Wheatley did not follow his example.<sup>38</sup> It was probably the antics of the I.L.P. leadership that prompted Snowden, who had virtually severed his

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 17 October, 1927; Glasgow Eastern Standard, 22 October, 1927.

<sup>37</sup>At no meeting of the Executive between June and November were there more than three members present. I.L.P. Parliamentary Group, Minutes, June-November, 1927.

<sup>38</sup>210 H.C. Deb. 5s, 1926-54.

association with the I.L.P. after 1922, to finally formally resign his membership in December;<sup>39</sup> but his letter of resignation is important as it raised the question "What, if anything, is the role of the I.L.P.?" As far as Snowden was concerned the I.L.P. "as a separate body, has served its purpose, and... its continued existence is neither necessary nor useful." The Labour Party, he argued, now fulfilled all the I.L.P.'s functions and the latter body "might well be content now to merge itself in the larger life".<sup>40</sup> Dollan and Maxton certainly did not agree with this and spoke out strongly against Snowden at the Scottish I.L.P. Conference in January 1928.<sup>41</sup>

MacDonald also had strong ideas about the role of the I.L.P. In a long and elegant article in Forward he argued that it should be a propaganda organisation and should leave plans and politics to the Labour Party. The weakness of the I.L.P. under Maxton's leadership, he wrote, was that it was "only a Labour political Party...."

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<sup>39</sup>This is certainly Brockway's view. Brockway, Socialism over Sixty Years, p.252.

<sup>40</sup>I.L.P. Report, 1928, p.41.

<sup>41</sup>Forward, 14 January, 1928; The Times, 9 January, 1928.

If the I.L.P. settles down to being merely a Left Wing of the Labour Party, there is no place for it." What was needed was "a body of Socialist propagandists who are enlisted to teach and preach Socialism, vigilant in repelling attacks upon it, and in carrying its offensive into the enemy's lines, keeping itself abreast of the best Socialist thought of the day and accustoming people to cast their minds in Socialist moulds".<sup>42</sup>

This was a distinction made at some stage by almost every important figure on the left between the wars - with the notable exceptions of Wheatley and Maxton. Socialism to them was, as Maxton said, "a practical thing"; they "did not accept [MacDonald's] view," but felt that the working class "must be urged to demand big social changes," and in the Socialism in Our Time proposals lay a firm basis for change.<sup>43</sup>

The situation on the left wing had become extremely confused. Clearly many I.L.P. ers gave their first allegiance to the Labour Party, and as that party steadily became a part of the Parliamentary framework there was less room for criticism of policy within the Labour Party. The I.L.P. was steadily being sandwiched

<sup>42</sup>Forward, 28 January, 1928.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 20 October, 1928.



between the growing Labour Party and the small but noisy Communist Party. Refusal to accept a propaganda role meant that the I.L.P. had, in some way, to distinguish itself from the Labour Party. The Socialism in Our Time proposals were distinctive - the Labour Party had nothing to compare with them - but the I.L.P. had great difficulties in popularising this programme. The problem of distinctiveness became almost an obsession with the I.L.P. leadership. For example, in June 1928 Jowett urged that the I.L.P. "boldly stress its immediate proposals like the Living Wage and Children's Allowances, which were things which mark it out as distinct from the Labour Party", and Paton wanted the party to stress the Living Wage in order "to make clear the real distinction between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party,"<sup>44</sup> and in December 1928 Maxton urged that the I.L.P. must be a "distinctive body".<sup>45</sup> But given its Parliamentary membership this was not easily achieved. Some sided with Maxton and Wheatley, some with MacDonald. Some believed in Socialism in Our Time, others did not; many were gradually moving closer to the Labour Party, others were

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<sup>44</sup>I.L.P. N.A.C., Minutes, 10 June, 1928.

<sup>45</sup>I.L.P. Parliamentary Group. Minutes, 6 December, 1928.

moving away from it. And nothing highlighted this confusion so vividly as did the Cook - Maxton Manifesto of June 1928 and the subsequent Cook - Maxton Campaign.

The Manifesto and the Campaign were themselves extremely curious. It is not certain whose idea they were or what their real purpose was. Middlemas traces the Manifesto's origin to the attitudes of Maxton and Wheatley to the Mond - Turner talks,<sup>46</sup> to the move to expel Cook from the T.U.C. General Council, and to the need to defend Cook who was their only link with the T.U.C.; it was out of a meeting at the House of Commons to discuss Cook's possible expulsion that the idea of the Manifesto and Campaign grew.<sup>47</sup> This may be correct, but there are other possible explanations. The idea might have been to try to tug the Labour movement to the left and halt its tendency towards reformism, a view expressed by the Glasgow Herald which argued that Maxton was worried by the moderation in the Labour Party's

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<sup>46</sup>This joint committee of employers and the T.U.C. explored means of improving industrial efficiency and promoting industrial peace. Little came from the discussions at the time, but they were a portent for the future and Bevin, especially, was influenced by them. Their very existence, however, clearly undermined the class angle in Wheatley's approach to politics.

<sup>47</sup>Middlemas, The Clydesiders, p.215.

Labour and the Nation, which was then before the branches for consideration, and was trying to stir up the rank and file to press for more drastic proposals.<sup>48</sup>

Alternatively, the whole episode may have been a front for the founding of a new left wing party.

Scanlon has written that Cook was invited by Maxton, on behalf of a committee, to co-operate in drawing up a Manifesto.<sup>49</sup> McNair has credited the idea jointly to Maxton and Wheatley.<sup>50</sup> Gallacher has written that he was asked by Wheatley to organise the meeting at the House of Commons.<sup>51</sup> Paton implies that the idea of the Manifesto grew out of the meeting.<sup>52</sup> It seems clear that Gallacher wrote the Manifesto, though it was signed by Maxton and Cook;<sup>53</sup> but it also seems clear that Wheatley was never

<sup>48</sup>Glasgow Herald, 22 June, 1928.

<sup>49</sup>Scanlon, The Decline and Fall of the Labour Party, pp. 107-14.

<sup>50</sup>McNair, James Maxton: The Beloved Rebel, p.171.

<sup>51</sup>Gallacher, Last Memoirs, pp. 222-3.

<sup>52</sup>Paton, Left Turn!, pp. 294-300.

<sup>53</sup>McAllister, James Maxton: Portrait of a Rebel, p.193; Gallacher, Last Memoirs, p.223; in his earlier autobiography Gallacher claimed only joint authorship, Gallacher, The Rolling of the Thunder, p.98.

far in the background.<sup>54</sup> Both Maxton and Wheatley denied that there was any intention of splitting the Labour Party. Maxton hoped "to keep the party on the road where Keir Hardie set its feet",<sup>55</sup> while Wheatley hoped that the Manifesto and Campaign would help to change the Labour Party.<sup>56</sup> The sentiment behind these statements is supported by Scanlon, McAllister and Tom Johnston, who all felt that the aim was to ginger up the Labour movement.<sup>57</sup> But both Brockway and Paton have argued that Wheatley was willing to organise a new party and that the Manifesto and Campaign were merely devices for sounding out opinion.<sup>58</sup> The fact that those attending Campaign meetings were given pledge cards to sign, stating "I pledge myself to support the efforts of Messrs. Maxton and Cook towards

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<sup>54</sup> Brockway, Paton, and Gallacher clearly regarded Wheatley as the real figure behind the Manifesto. Brockway, Inside the Left, p.194; Paton, Left Turn! p.300; Gallacher, Last Memoirs, p.223. The Manifesto is reproduced in Appendix I.

<sup>55</sup> Forward, 30 June, 1928.

<sup>56</sup> Glasgow Eastern Standard, 30 June, 1928.

<sup>57</sup> Scanlon, Decline and Fall of the Labour Party, pp. 107-14; McAllister, James Maxton: Portrait of a Rebel, p.184; Johnston in Forward, 7 July, 1928.

<sup>58</sup> Brockway, Inside the Left, p.194; Paton, Left Turn! p.300.

establishing the New Order with all possible speed," seems to reinforce the latter view; and Maxton's statement at the N.A.C. meeting on 30 June that the idea behind the pledge cards was to provide a "register of people who believed in the project, to have a nucleus of people in support if need be,"<sup>59</sup> adds even more weight to it.

The special N.A.C. meeting to consider the Manifesto revealed the confusion within the I.L.P. By only eight votes to five did the Council reject Dollan's resolution virtually repudiating the whole affair; and by only seven votes to six did it adopt E.F. Wise's resolution expressing agreement with the "spirit and intention of the Manifesto" and urging I.L.P. "branches and members to co-operate in this attempt to secure a strong Socialist programme". At the same time the N.A.C. decided to press on with "its campaign for the incorporation in the Labour Party programme of the Socialism in Our Time proposals".<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup>I.L.P. N.A.C. Minutes, 30 June, 1928.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 30 June, 1928. Dollan "regarded the calling of unofficial conferences as a most serious interference with I.L.P. organisation and status", New Leader, 6 July, 1928. See also, I.L.P. Report, 1929, p.13 and pp. 36-7, for how the I.L.P. tried to quietly bury the memory of the Manifesto.

But the Scottish I.L.P. was less accommodating. On the prompting of Dollan it refused to take any official part in the Campaign: it expressed agreement with the "spirit and purpose" of the Manifesto and called for the promotion of the Socialism in Our Time proposals, but "believes this object can best be accomplished by working through the I.L.P. and affiliated organisation".<sup>61</sup>

Wheatley publicly announced his "unqualified" support for the Manifesto at an open-air meeting in Shettleston, stating that Maxton and Cook wanted Socialism in Our Time, "that was all".<sup>62</sup> But in October Maxton and Cook produced a series of proposals, Our Case for a Socialist Revival, outlining "our point of view as to what is wrong with the Labour Movement and what our alternative policy is". This alternative policy bore precious little resemblance to Socialism in Our Time. They called for complete taxation of all wealth over £5,000 at death, nationalization without compensation, a doubling of the housing subsidy, and the

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<sup>61</sup> Forward, 14 July, 1928; Glasgow Herald, 9 July, 1928; New Leader, 13 July, 1928.

<sup>62</sup> Glasgow Herald, 26 June, 1928. See also, Glasgow Eastern Standard, 30 June, 1928; The Times, 26 June, 1928.

abolition of the monarchy. They also roundly condemned the Labour and the Nation proposals, which completed "the swing of the Labour leadership to the right and must be regarded not as a Socialist programme, but as an enlightened Liberal Programme".<sup>63</sup>

The situation was hopelessly confused. Clearly Maxton wanted a comprehensive working class campaign and for this reason had gone, quite deliberately, behind the back of the I.L.P. to appeal directly to the working class. But was he, like Wheatley may be thought to be, really hoping to use this as a sounding board for some new organisation? The fact that as the Campaign ran into 1929 he tried to ensure that the Labour Party's electoral prospects were in no way damaged would seem to suggest that he was not. But how can this be reconciled with his open attacks on MacDonald in Our Case for a Socialist Revival, or with his statement to the N.A.C. about pledge cards? Could it be that by 1929 he was convinced of the futility of the whole affair?

The Times noted that, "Lacking even the semblance of an organisation, without preliminary warning, and with

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<sup>63</sup> These proposals were clearly inspired by Wheatley's House of Commons speech of 24 July, 1928, see below pp. 336-7.

no evident preparation, [Maxton and Cook] have taken the first steps to the formation of a new party in rivalry with, and in opposition to, the Labour Party".<sup>64</sup> It is impossible to be sure if there was any intention to form a new party, but it is certainly clear that the whole idea was virtually unplanned and virtually doomed to failure. The great inaugural meeting in St. Andrew's Hall in Glasgow was a damp squib. An estimated 4,000 people packed the Hall and an overflow meeting was held in Berkley Hall. From the reports, Cook did rather well and George Hicks made a good job of apologising for his earlier association with the Mond-Turner talks. But Maxton, who "looked rather tired" following a lengthy speech at the overflow meeting, was disappointing.<sup>65</sup> Gallacher makes much of Maxton's performance, characterising it as "cruel, pathetic, an utter let-down". Wheatley, he claims, was furious and blamed Maxton for the debacle.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>The Times, 23 June, 1928.

<sup>65</sup>Forward, 14 July, 1928; See also, Glasgow Herald, 9 July, 1928; The Times, 9 July, 1928.

<sup>66</sup>Gallacher, Last Memoirs, p.225.



Scanlon believes that Wheatley felt that the campaign was "finished, and indeed, later that night Wheatley, who had written a hefty cheque to pay the expense of the campaign... tore it in pieces and scattered it to the four winds."<sup>67</sup> Wheatley decided to force the Labour leaders "to take notice of the campaign", and two days later openly denounced MacDonald and Thomas as "deliberately betraying the Labour Movement";<sup>68</sup> a move which got him, and Maxton, summoned before the Parliamentary Labour Party.

MacDonald chaired the meeting on the evening of Thursday 19 July. It lasted three hours and there was a good deal of "straight talk"<sup>69</sup> from Thomas and Henderson, while Clynes is thought to have "suggested bluntly that [Wheatley and Maxton] leave the party".<sup>70</sup> A severe vote of censure was proposed at one stage,

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<sup>67</sup> Scanlon, Decline and Fall of the Labour Party, p.112. Wheatley did, however, play a part in financing the campaign; see, for example, Receipt No. 1 for £50 donated by Wheatley, in the Maxton Papers.

<sup>68</sup> Scanlon, Decline and Fall of the Labour Party, p.113.

<sup>69</sup> Glasgow Herald, 20 July, 1928.

<sup>70</sup> Middlemas, The Clydesiders, p.220.

but was withdrawn in favour of a mild rebuke stating that the party provided internal opportunities for discussion about policies and people and therefore hoped that "in future any criticism or difference will be brought forward in a constitutional way, which will enable the party as a whole to move forward, in a spirit of unity and confidence, to the accomplishment of its task."<sup>71</sup> The mood of the meeting was very much against Wheatley and Maxton, but they remained singularly unrepentant.

The Cook - Maxton Campaign went on, though no attempt was made to form any new political organisation, and it was not a complete fiasco. A large number of meetings were held throughout Britain, in some cases assisted by the local I.L.P., in others in face of its opposition.<sup>72</sup> But nothing positive was achieved as the Campaign continued under its own steam until the 1929 election directed attention elsewhere. Perhaps the most

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<sup>71</sup>The Times, 20 July, 1928.

<sup>72</sup>For example, the Nottingham I.L.P. refused to help and the meeting was organised by a sympathiser, one Alfred Marshall: see the letters from the Nottingham Branch Secretary to Kirkwood, who acted as Secretary and Treasurer to the Campaign, dated 28 July, 1928, and from Alfred Marshall to Kirkwood, dated 10 January, 1929, in the Maxton Papers. This collection of letters and documents also contains the Campaign balance sheets and show that it was financially fairly successful.

noteworthy episode occurred as early as 24 July 1928 when Wheatley shocked the House of Commons with a speech which anticipated and actually went beyond Our Case. He outlined his proposals for reducing unemployment. He called for full workshop wages for the unemployed, pensions at the age of sixty - equal to full workshop wages - generous maintenance grants to parents whose children remained at school: all of these would increase purchasing power and stimulate industry. He then raised the question of how this could be done in the face of sweated goods, and shocked the House with his answer: "I would use my navy, were I in power, to sink the ship that brought from abroad the product of sweated labour to reduce the standard of life here." Where would the money come from to finance his schemes? "I would tax earned incomes over £2,000 at the rate of 20s. in the £ temporarily, until I had set industries going. I would tax unearned incomes of over £1,000 at 20s. in the £, until I had set industries going." He would also "double the housing subsidy and halve the rents of working class houses". The problem was that the Labour Party would not go to the country with such an appeal, though he claimed:

if we did that, we would make a successful appeal, and we would, through our efforts in this House, make ourselves helpful to the people, instead of making ourselves, as we are to-day, to all who listen to us, a useless institution in dealing with the problem which confronts us.<sup>73</sup>

This was clearly an attempt to rouse the support of the working classes and help to get the Campaign under way.

It certainly had no positive influence on the Labour leaders. As an attempt to sound out potential support for a new party, the Manifesto and Campaign failed; as an attempt to tug the Labour Party to the left, away from reformism and towards a radical, socialist policy, they also failed. As the Observer noted, "Labour talks with many voices, but generally votes as one".<sup>74</sup> The only real effects were to further strain relations between the Labour Party and the I.L.P. and to accentuate the growing antagonisms between the various sections within the I.L.P.

The gulf between the Labour Party and the I.L.P. leadership was clearly seen at the 1928 Labour Party Conference where Wheatley continued his struggle to make the Labour Party more radical. He tried to use

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<sup>73</sup>220 H.C. Deb. 5s, 1175-80.

<sup>74</sup>Observer, 24 June, 1928.

the Party Constitution to make the P.L.P. subservient to the Party Conference. Arguing that the Conference should give firm instructions to the Labour M.Ps. he hoped to secure the rejection of the moderate Labour and the Nation programme and its replacement by an uncompromisingly Socialist one which the P.L.P. would be bound to support. It seems that in Wheatley's approach Socialism and democracy were drifting further apart and that he favoured the former, even at the expense of the latter. After all, his proposal would mean that party activists would form the real government of the country, and in the British parliamentary system government by party conference would be quite intolerable. In this sense it was fortunate that his attempt failed. Labour and the Nation could not be debated as a whole, only specific amendments could be proposed,<sup>75</sup> and so Wheatley and Maxton "were expertly stage-managed... out of any chance to test the Conference on the general question of control of policy."<sup>76</sup>

Thus not only were the strained relations between the Labour Party and the I.L.P. given another twist, but

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<sup>75</sup>Labour Party, Report, 1928, pp. 164-219.

<sup>76</sup>Middlemas, The Clydesiders, p.227.

the I.L.P., and Maxton and Wheatley in particular, had received a severe rebuff. But this was not the end to their problems for their antics had been steadily causing unrest within the I.L.P.; so much so that in December 1928 a minor crisis blew up.

Criticism of the I.L.P. leadership had been on the increase since the appearance of the Cook - Maxton Manifesto, and the most devastating condemnation had come from MacDonald, who wrote in July:

Under the incompetent lead which the I.L.P. has had for some years, sound demands like the living wage have been turned into pegs upon which to hang trappings which I have accurately described as "flashy futilities"; the fine hearty spirit of the I.L.P. has become unhappy and mean; Socialism is suffering, the movement is suffering, the men bearing the burdens of the heat of the day and who have the task of keeping the tide flowing deep and strong have had their hands weakened and their time wasted. The very last men who can reform anything or guide anything are those who have been making a mess of the affairs of the I.L.P.

And he ended his attack with the words, "The more clearly one feels the need of Socialist propaganda and believes that the I.L.P. could provide it, the more emphatic becomes the censure one would pass on the group who are its present leaders".<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Forward, 21 July, 1928.

No one on the left could match the elegance of MacDonald's words, but some were thinking along the same lines. In July George Lansbury refused to assist in the Cook - Maxton Campaign.<sup>78</sup> In November John Scurr resigned from the N.A.C. and from the I.L.P. because of the Manifesto.<sup>79</sup> In December a conference of I.L.P. organisers bemoaned the poor condition of the party. They complained of the decline in membership throughout the country and agreed that it was due not only to the industrial depression, apathy among the workers, and competition from the Labour Party, but also to the growing feeling that the I.L.P. as a separate party was no longer necessary and to the disturbing effect on the party of the Cook - Maxton Manifesto.<sup>80</sup>

Dissatisfaction with Maxton's leadership was voiced at an unofficial meeting of some twenty I.L.P. M.Ps. called on the initiative of, among others, Dr. Alfred Salter. Brockway drew the attention of

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<sup>78</sup>Lansbury to Maxton, 26 July, 1928. Maxton Papers.

<sup>79</sup>Scurr's letter of resignation is in I.L.P., Report, 1929, p.38.

<sup>80</sup>I.L.P. Glasgow Federation, Management Committee, Minutes, 18 January, 1929.

the N.A.C. to this meeting which had been attended by Shinwell and Stamford.<sup>81</sup> After some wrangling which was concluded by Maxton's declaration that it would be best to allow "the maximum of tolerance in the expression of opinion", it was agreed that a full Parliamentary Group meeting should be held as soon as possible.<sup>82</sup>

Two meetings were in fact held, on the 6th and 12th of December, and minutes exist only in the form of pencil notes by Campbell Stephen. The first meeting was attended by 74 members and the second by 87,<sup>83</sup> figures which show how many M.Ps., at a time of crisis, were interested in the fate of the I.L.P. - many of those present had not attended an I.L.P. Group meeting in years. Shinwell opened the proceedings with a fiery speech, centred on the future role of the I.L.P. He wanted the I.L.P. to continue in being but argued that, in view of the approaching general election and the possible advent of a Labour Government, the I.L.P. should be loyal to the Labour Party programme, putting the wider viewpoint of the Labour movement ahead of its own. The I.L.P. should, he maintained, conduct Socialist

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<sup>81</sup>I.L.P. N.A.C., Minutes, 24 November, 1928.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>I.L.P. Parliamentary Group, Minutes, 6 and 12 December, 1928.



propaganda outside the Commons and the New Leader, then edited by Brockway, should show some restraint as at present it was only the mouthpiece of a small clique and as such the I.L.P. would be better off without it. He was followed by John Potts, who spoke out strongly for MacDonald and against Maxton; he felt that squabbles should stop and advised Maxton to stand aside if he felt differently. Viant called for more team spirit in the House of Commons and argued that the I.L.P. should be a propaganda body.

Maxton made an important speech defending his own actions. He maintained that the party was not just a propaganda organisation: it had a practical set of proposals and its task was to "carry into the Labour Party speed in approach to Socialism adopted [ Sic ] " He and his colleagues tried to get these views adopted with a minimum of friction. He referred to his association with Cook, claiming that he had not asked the I.L.P. to support his activities in this sphere: the special N.A.C. meeting had, he argued, been summoned by his critics but had decided to support the spirit of the Manifesto. He concluded: "As Chairman of the Party I will not accept from anything but [ the ] I.L.P. Conference that the I.L.P. is to subserve the L [ about ] P [ arty ] ".

Kirkwood vigorously supported him, and rounded on many I.L.P.ers. asserting that they had lost any class feeling they ever had, but it was the old, respected figure of Bob Smillie, one-time leader of the I.L.P., who ended the first meeting with a call for unity and a declaration of his belief that the I.L.P. should concentrate on becoming the propaganda wing of the Labour Party.<sup>84</sup>

Dr. Salter opened the second meeting with an attack on Maxton. He was unhappy with the way the I.L.P. in Parliament was being run, claiming that the whips in particular were resentful about the way Maxton and Wheatley called for divisions; and he deprecated what he called "malignant attacks" on MacDonald. Wheatley rose to defend both Maxton and himself. He pointed out that if one were talking about secession then Snowden's resignation had preceded the Cook - Maxton Manifesto. The great need, he argued, was for change in the Labour Party. At this point William Lunn pointed out that Wheatley's views differed from those of many I.L.P. M.Ps. and, furthermore, Wheatley was not popular with the whole of the party

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 6 December, 1928.

and indeed seemed to lack team spirit. Wheatley tried to defend himself but had to concede that "many people believe he went round intriguing." The fatal flaw in Wheatley's make-up was clearly exposed. He was liked, even loved, by those who knew him well, but he was simply mistrusted by many of his own, nominal colleagues. Thus an utterly inconclusive discussion ended: the meeting was adjourned sine die.<sup>85</sup> Nothing had been achieved but the widening of the splits within the I.L.P.

The I.L.P. was run as before, by the Marton - Wheatley clique.<sup>86</sup> Early in 1929 MacDonald wrote to Shinwell, urging him to stand for the Chairmanship of the I.L.P.:

I hope that you will stand and that there will be a concentration upon you. If you think it is too risky, you ought to take care that you are on the W.A.C. whatever happens. But I think that by organisation you could be elected chairman.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 12 December, 1928.

<sup>86</sup>See, for example, I.L.P. Parliamentary Group, Minutes, 21 February, 1929; only Marton, Kirkwood and Stephen attended and decided what the Party's tactics should be.

<sup>87</sup>Quoted in Shinwell, Conflict without Malice, p.103.

In the event both Shinwell and Dollan contested the Chairmanship with Maxton at the Easter Conference in 1929, but Maxton romped home with 284 votes to Shinwell's thirty-nine and Dollan's thirty-eight. Despite considerable opposition within the I.L.P., Maxton and Wheatley, together with their few close associates, still controlled the Party.

The General Election of May 1929 returned another minority Labour Government, though this time Labour was the largest single party, winning 288 seats to the Conservatives' 261 and the still split Liberals' fifty-one. MacDonald unhesitatingly decided to take office again, but the previous five years had seen a widening of the gulf between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party, and unless the left wing critics stopped their attacks on the Labour leadership the question of the I.L.P. remaining within the Labour Party was bound to become a serious problem.

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The Glasgow contests were uneventful, save for the

appearance on Wheatley's platform of the young Jennie Lee, and for Maxton's election expenses which totalled only £75. 1. 6, that is a cost per vote of three-farthings.<sup>88</sup> Wheatley's share of the vote in Shettleston increased by 9.1 per cent, the biggest increase in Glasgow, but this was undoubtedly a reaction, in part at least, to his rather poor performance in 1924.<sup>89</sup> Brockway relates that during the campaign MacDonald visited Bradford and while in conversation with W. Hirst, the Labour candidate for South Bradford, he "referred contemptuously to the Glasgow 'rebel' group of M.Ps. and particularly to John Wheatley. He apparently anticipated their defeat and made it clear that he would not be sorry if they were defeated."<sup>90</sup> If this is true then MacDonald was disappointed and he must have been further disappointed when, at the I.L.P. victory rally in Glasgow's St. Andrew's Hall, Wheatley went out of his way to stress that while Labour "had not got a mandate for Socialism from the election", it had

<sup>88</sup> Wheatley spent £343. 16. 8., that is a cost per vote of fourpence farthing. I.L.P. Report, 1930, p.40.

<sup>89</sup> According to Wheatley his canvassers predicted that he would receive 19,343 votes and his Conservative opponent, Captain H.J. Moss, 11,652. The result was 19,594 against 12,870. Glasgow Eastern Standard, 8 June, 1929.

<sup>90</sup> Brockway, Socialism over Sixty Years, p.257.

got a mandate for the removal of poverty. He would insist on £2- 10/- per week for an unemployed man with a wife and four children, and he would insist that this level of assistance be given within six months of taking office. Within this period, too, all widows would get pensions, and within a year old-age pensions would be increased to £1 per week. He was, he maintained, "the very essence of reasonableness, but he was going to Westminster to keep his pledges."<sup>91</sup>

The strongest case against Labour's acceptance of office while in a minority also came from Wheatley. At the first post-election meeting of the F.L.P. at the House of Commons Wheatley argued that if Labour tried to solve the country's economic problems simply by using the old solutions, that is if Labour administered Capitalism, then a reduction in the standard of living was inevitable. Wages would fall, social services would be restricted, and Labour would be responsible. The Conservatives and Liberals believed in Capitalism: let them run it. Labour should wait until it had a majority in Parliament and should then fundamentally change the system. But Wheatley's was a lone voice. Shinwell stated that Wheatley's speech was of academic interest only as

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<sup>91</sup>The Times, 3 June, 1929.

the Government had already been formed, while MacDonald regarded Wheatley's belief that the Party should refuse to accept the responsibilities of government as "cowardly",<sup>92</sup> and the majority of the rank-and-file I.L.P.ers. were "content with Brockway's plea for a bold attack on unemployment."<sup>93</sup>

The exclusion of Wheatley from the Cabinet was no surprise. Henderson and Snowden felt it would be wiser to have him inside than outside,<sup>94</sup> but, wrote Snowden:

MacDonald was strongly opposed to offering him a post in the new Government. Wheatley had deserted us and insulted us, and MacDonald thought the country would be shocked if he were included in the Cabinet, and it would be taken as evidence of rebel influence.<sup>95</sup>

Accordingly, MacDonald wrote to Wheatley:

At the beginning of the new Government, I must thank my old colleagues who were with me in the last. I always regretted that you did not see your way to continue with us. It would have been a great pleasure to me had you done so, but I hope that the work to which we are to put our hands will receive the support of all our members. Our position will be tight and strenuous.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Brockway, Inside the Left, pp. 197-9; see also McNair, James Maxton: The Beloved Rebel, p.187.

<sup>93</sup>Dowse, Left in the Centre, p.152.

<sup>94</sup>Mary Agnes Hamilton, Arthur Henderson, p.367; Snowden, An Autobiography, p.759.

<sup>95</sup>Snowden, An Autobiography, pp. 759-60.

<sup>96</sup>MacDonald to Wheatley, no date.

But his appeal for unity was brushed aside. Wheatley would refrain from being divisive only on his own terms. He believed that only "courageous" measures would help the working classes, while "a policy of futile moderation... would ultimately discredit Labour and break the hearts of millions of optimistic electors." Consequently, support would be conditional:

If the Labour Government show signs of a willingness to "deliver the goods" they will have no warmer backers than the Clyde men. If, however, the forward march degenerates into a laggard crawl the country can count on Wheatley, Maxton, and their friends dutifully doing their best to speed things up for the credit of the Labour Movement.<sup>97</sup>

But while the Glasgow Eastern Standard was threatening, Forward, which had since 1924 steadily moved towards MacDonald and away from Wheatley and Maxton, was calling for "a square deal" for the Labour Government: "It will have quite sufficient enemies seeking to trip it up, and to pull the feet from it, without any of its

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<sup>97</sup>Glasgow Eastern Standard, 15 June, 1929. Kirkwood, as usual, was more forthright: at the Grand Theatre in Glasgow he stated bluntly that "Unless the Government was prepared to deliver the goods it was [the Clydesiders'] business to roast them until they did." Ibid., 29 June, 1929.



friends and colleagues requiring to so engage themselves."<sup>98</sup>

Nothing happened during the early months of the new Government to moderate the Clydesiders. Right from the start, they were disappointed by the Government's refusal to take courageous actions or to come to grips with the economic problem.<sup>99</sup> Both Maxton and Kirkwood refused nomination to the P.L.P. Consultative Committee which was to be a link between the Government and the rank and file,<sup>100</sup> and Maxton went out of his way to express his "complete dissatisfaction with the King's Speech".<sup>101</sup> In August at the I.L.P. summer school Maxton continued with his criticism:

Has any human being benefitted by the fact that there has been a Labour Government in office during the past two months? I can think of nobody except two murderers, who were reprieved.<sup>102</sup>

Wheatley backed him up. In the House of Commons he said:

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<sup>98</sup> Forward, 8 June, 1929.

<sup>99</sup> Cross puts Snowden's views very well. He "regarded the depression as being as much an uncontrollable force as an earthquake. The best thing to do was just to sit it out, avoiding such quack remedies as would interfere with correct finance and thereby delay ultimate recovery". Cross, Philip Snowden, p.252.

<sup>100</sup> Glasgow Herald, 12 July, 1929.

<sup>101</sup> 229 H.C. Deb. 5s, 164.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted by Dollan in Forward, 10 August, 1929.

This is the day of the Government's power. To-day the Government could do anything. To-day the Government are not showing the courage that their supporters on these benches expect. If they displayed that courage and went on with their own policy, the parties opposite would not dare to wound them, however willing they might be to strike; but after the Government have disappointed their friends by 12 months of this halting, half-way legislation... and have been discredited in the country, then, 12 months from now, there will be no party in this House poor enough to do them honour.<sup>103</sup>

He was especially critical of Thomas and his vain efforts to alleviate unemployment. Macdon wrote that Wheatley "used to provide the nation with amusement once weekly by baiting Mr. Thomas,"<sup>104</sup> but he exaggerated. Wheatley distrusted and disliked Thomas, and he did make him look foolish at most on time, but such occasions were not as numerous as some imagine.<sup>105</sup>

The Wheatley - Maxton group antagonised the Labour leadership by openly refusing to assist the Labour candidate at the Kilmarnock by-election in November 1929.<sup>106</sup> Announcing this, Kirkwood expressed their frustrations

<sup>103</sup> 230 H.C. Deb. 3s, 98.

<sup>104</sup> Macdon, Decline and Fall of the Labour Party, p.172.

<sup>105</sup> Perhaps the best example of Wheatley making Thomas contradict himself several times came on 12 November, 1929. See 231 H.C. Deb. 3s, 1698-1700, 1701.

<sup>106</sup> The Labour candidate was Craigie Aitchison, who had been Wheatley's counsel in his libel case.

at the Government's weakness:

Jimmy Thomas and others cannot make capitalism work. MacDonald has done nothing to ease the situation, Snowden has done nothing, and Henderson has done nothing, while Jimmy Thomas's bluff has gone. He has taken on a job he cannot do, and no other man can do, and the sooner we make them realise that the better.... MacDonald is no more use to me than Baldwin, unless he delivers the goods. I don't care if I risk my seat in Parliament. I will do what I can to break a Government that does not keep its pledges to the working-classes.<sup>107</sup>

Immediate speculation about disciplinary action against the Clydesiders met with rebukes and warnings from them, and the strongest came from Maxton: "There would be something humorous in the idea of John Wheatley, James Maxton, David Kirkwood, Campbell Stephen and George Buchanan being expelled from the Labour Party by the votes of Lord Parmoor and Commander Kenworthy." Not only did he expect all talk of disciplinary action to cease, but he would see that "a public apology was offered to the group".<sup>108</sup>

The most bitter conflict with the Government came over Margaret Bondfield's National Insurance Bill.

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<sup>107</sup>Quoted by Geoffrey Locker-Lampson, Conservative M.P. for Wood Green, Middlesex, in the House of Commons on 21 November, 1929. 232 H.C. Dec. 5s, 844.

<sup>108</sup>The Times, 2 December, 1929.

Her proposals were discussed in a moderate and sensible way at meetings of I.L.P. M.Ps. on 11 and 21 October.

The only extreme outburst came from Campbell Stephen, "who did not intend to be bound by the decisions of the Parliamentary Party but by Conference decisions".<sup>109</sup>

The latter meeting set up a nine-man sub-committee which prepared the I.L.P. Minimum Demands, a document submitted to a further I.L.P. Parliamentary Group meeting on 28 October: it demanded the "Blanesburgh" figures, the abolition of the obnoxious "Not Genuinely Seeking Work" clause in the Bill, and provision that disallowance of benefit ought to be deferred until the insured man had lost a final appeal.<sup>110</sup> The Minimum Demands were accepted without opposition being recorded and it was agreed to urge their implementation at the P.L.P. meeting the following day, with the provision that if they were not accepted there a further I.L.P. Group meeting would be held.<sup>111</sup> A subsequent meeting

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<sup>109</sup> I.L.P. Parliamentary Group, Minutes, 21 October, 1929.

<sup>110</sup> I.L.P. Minimum Demands, printed in I.L.P., Report, 1930, p.65.

<sup>111</sup> I.L.P. Parliamentary Group, Minutes, 28 October, 1929.

reaffirmed the previous decisions,<sup>112</sup> but as news of this opposition to the Government's Bill circulated, so the position changed.

On the morning of 19 November a P.L.P. meeting recorded its overwhelming approval of the Bill, and decided that amendments not sanctioned by the P.L.P. Consultative Committee would not be allowed. Maxton told them that the I.L.P. "must retain liberty to put down amendments on the Order Paper".<sup>113</sup> That evening the I.L.P. Group met. Sixty-eight M.Ps. attended - many of them had not been at an I.L.P. Group meeting in years - and by 41 votes to 14, with 13 abstentions, the meeting accepted Shinwell's resolution to support the Government on the Second Reading of the Bill. By 37 votes to 3, it also resolved that all amendments should first be submitted to the P.L.P. Consultative Committee. Maxton was furious, and announced that in any event he intended to table the Minimum Demands as a reasoned amendment, and would approach every I.L.P. M.P. to support it in the lobby.<sup>114</sup> Within a week, William Leach and Cecil

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<sup>112</sup>Reported in I.L.P. N.A.C. Minutes, 7 and 8 December, 1929.

<sup>113</sup>Birmingham Town Crier, 29 November, 1929.

<sup>114</sup>I.L.P. N.A.C. Minutes, 7 December, 1929.

Wilson had circulated I.L.P. back-benchers and had got sixty-seven signatures for a memorandum declaring that "we... desire to make clear that recent pronouncements hostile to, or critical of, the Government, and purporting to be in the name of the I.L.P. Members of Parliament do not represent our views."<sup>115</sup> The problem that had finally surfaced was: Who really spoke for the I.L.P.? The Wheatley - Maxton group or the nominal I.L.P. M.Ps. who were long-time members of the I.L.P. but who had given their first allegiance to the Labour Party? Maxton could claim that he was the democratically elected leader of the I.L.P., but if the bulk of the party members were against him, was he acting democratically?

The party had tried to grapple with this problem earlier in the year. In February the N.A.C. had decided upon new regulations for I.L.P. candidates,<sup>116</sup> the most important being to limit membership of the I.L.P. Parliamentary Group to "I.L.P. nominees and to other I.L.P. members who declare their support of general I.L.P. policy" and to give the N.A.C. the right of

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<sup>115</sup>New Leader, 22 November, 1929.

<sup>116</sup>I.L.P. N.A.C. Minutes, 9 February, 1929.

expulsion from the Group.<sup>117</sup> But this had been rejected by the April Conference which instead adopted resolutions referring only to I.L.P. candidates and not to the Group.<sup>118</sup> On circularising all Labour M.Ps. to determine who were I.L.P. members and who desired to be invited to Group meetings,<sup>119</sup> the N.A.C. discovered that it had a Parliamentary Group of 142.<sup>120</sup> Clearly Maxton and Wheatley did not speak for the vast majority of these.

During the prolonged Committee Stage of the Unemployment Insurance Bill the wrath of the Clydesiders was unleashed. When Margaret Bondfield moved the closure on the first clause, Wheatley had just risen to speak. Shouts of "Gag" from his Clydeside colleagues and from a few Conservatives demonstrated their feelings while "the face of the member for Shettleston was a study in the physiognomy of suppressed resentment."<sup>121</sup> In the subsequent division the Government's majority was only thirteen, its lowest so far. Later that day when Bondfield opposed Brockway's amendment to help the unemployed

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<sup>117</sup>I.L.P. Report, 1929, p.66.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>I.L.P. N.A.C. Minutes, 8 June, 1929.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 10 and 11 August, 1929.

<sup>121</sup>Daily Herald, 3 December, 1929.

during the winter instead of waiting till the following summer, Wheatley rounded on the Government:

I shall go into the Lobby in support of [ this amendment ] against the Government; and I am going to do more. I am going into the country to tell the working class that my colleagues on these benches should have followed me into that Division Lobby. I am going to plead for something like honesty in politics, and I am going to ask the working class to believe that when they put their trust in politicians there are at least a group of Members in this House who will be true to their promises and their pledges.<sup>122</sup>

But repeated divisions showed how small that group actually was. Labour votes against the Bill varied from twenty-two to thirty-two, including tellers, and contained a hard core of only seventeen I.L.P. M.Ps. Other I.L.P. M.Ps. voted for some amendments and against others.<sup>123</sup> The group's only success was to secure amendment of the "Not Genuinely Seeking Work" clause, and here they had the important backing of many trade union M.Ps.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> 232 H.C. Deb. 5s, 2007.

<sup>123</sup> 232 H.C. Deb. 5s, 1995-2018 (Division No. 64), 2074-94 (Division No. 68), 2218-43 (Division No. 73), 2243-67 (Division No. 74); 233 H.C. Deb. 5s, 411-5 (Division No. 88).

<sup>124</sup> 232 H.C. Deb. 5s, 2599-722; 233 H.C. Deb. 5s, 723-803.



Reviewing the Parliamentary Session at the end of December, the Observer analysed Wheatley's position:

Behind the Government sit the Mountain.  
A formidable and menacing body led by  
Mr. Wheatley with Mr. Maxton as second-  
in-command. This combination alone would  
be sufficient to command the respect of  
the House and inspire a good deal of fear  
on the Treasury Bench. The day will probably  
come when the Prime Minister will bitterly  
regret his decision to exclude Mr. Wheatley  
from his administration. The Clydeside  
leader is not a popular figure; but he  
commands the support of one who is - Mr.  
Maxton - and the loyalty of a group which  
holds the key to the present Parliamentary  
situation.

It is no exaggeration to say that the fate  
of the Government depends more upon Mr. Wheatley  
than upon Mr. Lloyd George. When the final  
crisis arises his will be the hand which will  
strike Mr. MacDonald and his colleagues from  
power. It is not a hand that will flinch from  
that task.<sup>125</sup>

Throughout the early part of 1930 Wheatley spoke  
and voted against MacDonald's Government.<sup>126</sup> Every  
issue was regarded on its merits, as he answered his  
own question: "Are we to go to the House of Commons and  
accept every policy merely because it is made for the  
time being by a Labour Government."<sup>127</sup> But within the

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<sup>125</sup>Observer, 29 December, 1929; See also Forward,  
4 January, 1930.

<sup>126</sup>See, for example, 235 H.C. Deb. 5s, 309-12,  
2483-4; 236 H.C. Deb. 5s, 975-6; 237 H.C. Deb. 5s, 1243-6,  
2015.

<sup>127</sup>Glasgow Herald, 16 December, 1929.

I.L.P. counter-attacks were being mounted, primarily by Shinwell and Dollan who believed that the I.L.P.'s first duty was to support the Government. At the N.A.C. meeting on 7 December 1929 Dollan called for a special conference to decide whether the I.L.P. Group should offer amendments to Government bills, but he was defeated by ten votes to three. Wheatley proposed what amounted to a vote of confidence in the Group and this was carried by the same margin,<sup>128</sup>

But although the N.A.C. supported them, the "rebels" faced considerable difficulties at the Divisional Conferences in early 1930. The most exciting debate took place at the Scottish Conference in January, and an indication of the unrest prevailing in Scotland had been seen a month earlier at an Executive Council Meeting of the Glasgow Federation of the I.L.P. It was only after a very acrimonious discussion that it was finally decided by nineteen votes to nine that the Glasgow Federation's delegates to the Scottish Conference should endorse the actions of the "rebel" group.<sup>129</sup> The Scottish

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<sup>128</sup> I.L.P. N.A.C. Minutes, 7 December, 1929.

<sup>129</sup> I.L.P. Glasgow Federation, Executive Council, Minutes, 27 December, 1929. The Council further decided, by twenty votes to three, not to send this decision to the press.

Conference, held in Glasgow, had a record attendance of over 200 delegates, and the main debate was on the N.A.C.'s endorsement of the I.L.P. "rebels". Gilbert MacAllister challenged Maxton's right to speak for the I.L.P. and earned himself a rebuke from Maxton who declared that he had been elected leader in four successive years and that the N.A.C. and the I.L.P. Group had given him a specific mandate to fight the Unemployment Insurance Bill. He wanted a decision from the Conference so that he knew where he stood, but added, "even if you don't give me [ a majority ] I shall do it again all the same."<sup>130</sup> Wheatley's speech was described by the New Leader as "formidable" and "one of the best he has ever delivered at a Labour Conference".<sup>131</sup> He attacked the Government for its inability to cope with the economic problem. He denied that the Government's critics were limited to the Clydeside M.P.s; discontent was much more widespread. He argued that at P.L.P. meetings there had been overwhelming opposition to the

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<sup>130</sup> New Leader, 17 January, 1930.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

Insurance Bill,<sup>132</sup> and that as a result Margaret Bondfield had been compelled to drop parts of the Bill. The "rebels" did not want to defeat the Government, they wanted to activate it: "If the rebel M.Ps. had wanted to turn out the Government they could have done it on [ the Second Reading of ] the Coal Bill. But they had voted with the Government, and saved the Government by their loyalty."<sup>133</sup> But his moving peroration appealing for support for Maxton was immediately followed by Shinwell's vigorous attack on both of them, and then by Dollan who left the chair to explain that in his view the whole matter was simply "a question of whether Maxton, like every other Member, would have to conform to I.L.P. policy and discipline."<sup>134</sup> By 103 votes to 94 the Conference refused to give its approval to the N.A.C.'s endorsement of the "rebels", illustrating the extent to which Dollan

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<sup>132</sup> Shinwell rightly challenged this statement, pointing out that at the P.L.P. meeting Wheatley and Maxton had been defeated by about 250 votes to 9 and at the subsequent I.L.P. meeting by 41 votes to 14, "and then refused to accept the decision". Forward, 18 January, 1930.

<sup>133</sup> Forward, 18 January, 1930.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

controlled or influenced the I.L.P. in most of Scotland. A recount was demanded but was refused. Scotland, as so often before, had rejected its own left wing leaders;<sup>135</sup> but it stood alone as the Conferences in Wales, Yorkshire, Lancashire, the Midlands, London, and East Anglia endorsed the Group's actions.<sup>136</sup>

The growing gulf between the I.L.P. leadership and its nominal supporters in the House of Commons came to a climax at the April Conference at Birmingham, but between 27 November 1929 and 20 March 1930 the whole I.L.P. Parliamentary Group was never called together, and on the latter date it was told by Maxton that "he knew that there was a definite majority against him in the I.L.P. Group, and he had no desire to be humiliated and turned down more often than was necessary by Group meetings".<sup>137</sup> At the Birmingham

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<sup>135</sup> As Wheatley pointed out in his Conference speech, Alexander MacDonald, Keir Hardie, Ramsey MacDonald, and Bob Smillie had all had to go to England to find Parliamentary seats.

<sup>136</sup> I.L.P. N.A.C. Minutes, 31 January, 1930; New Leader, 31 January, 1930.

<sup>137</sup> Forward, 5 April, 1930.

Conference a resolution put forward by the London Central Branch and carried by an overwhelming majority embodied the demands regarding the Parliamentary Group which the N.A.C. had failed to carry the previous year:

This Conference instructs the N.A.C. to reconstruct the I.L.P. Parliamentary Group on the basis of acceptance of the policy of the I.L.P. as laid down by the decisions of the Annual Conference and as interpreted by the N.A.C. and to limit endorsements of future I.L.P. candidates to nominees who accept this basis.<sup>138</sup>

As a result, Paton circularised existing I.L.P. M.Ps. asking them if they wanted to join a reconstituted Group and setting forth the basis of membership, the vital clause being that "Proposed candidates should give an undertaking that they accept in general the policy of the Party as determined by the Annual Conference and, if elected, will be prepared to give full effect to it in the House of Commons".<sup>139</sup> This was held to mean that I.L.P. M.Ps. accept the "Socialism in Our Time" and "Internationalism in Our Time" programmes and that "the application of I.L.P. policy in Parliament should be left to the I.L.P. Parliamentary Group," though freedom of conscience

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<sup>138</sup> I.L.P. Report, 1930, pp. 76-7.

<sup>139</sup> I.L.P. N.A.C. Minutes, 23 April, 1930.

would be allowed on particular issues "so long as the general policy of the I.L.P. is wholeheartedly accepted."<sup>140</sup>

Only nineteen I.L.P. M.Ps. accepted these conditions: Wheatley, Marton, Kirkwood, Stephen, Buchanan, Jennie Lee, Jowett, Wallhead, Sandham, Wise, Brockway, Lees, Dr. Forgan, Beckett, Brown, Strachey, Hirst, Horrabin, and Kinley.<sup>141</sup> This reconstruction was a logical consequence of the desire of the I.L.P. to be "distinct" from the Labour Party, but it was also a vital stage in the growing confrontation with the Labour Party. From being an internal I.L.P. one, the struggle quickly became an I.L.P.- Labour Party one. Instead of being faced with a group of most of whom were prepared in the last analysis to support it, the Labour Government was now faced with an organised group backed in the constituencies with a rank and file opinion and organisation, a group whose opposition was not only continuous but was concerned, not with details of policy, but with the philosophy behind policy. It was, of course, not inevitable that the disaffiliation of the I.L.P. from

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<sup>140</sup> I.L.P. Report, 1931, pp. 41-2.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.13.

the Labour Party would come about, but it was, after Easter 1930, a very strong probability. As long as the I.L.P. attacked the Labour Government and refused to be bound by Labour Party Standing Orders, and the reconstruction of 1930 made this almost certain, then disaffiliation was on the cards.

The death of John Wheatley in May 1930 made no difference. There is no evidence for the assertion that "Had Wheatley lived it is reasonable to think that he would have preserved the I.L.P. from the drift in which it committed political suicide."<sup>142</sup> Such a view rests on the argument that "Wheatley and Maxton were shrewd enough tacticians to realise that... a policy of exclusion could only end in cutting off the lukewarm, shadowy but considerable support from I.L.P. ers. within the Labour Party on which their real influence rested."<sup>143</sup> In fact Wheatley's record as a tactician had, since 1927, been very poor. He failed to tug the Labour Party to the left, he failed to organise a new party in 1928 - if indeed that was his aim - he failed to

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<sup>142</sup> Middleman, The Clydesiders, p.243.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p.241.



arouse sufficient opposition to seriously affect the policies of the second Labour Government save where the trade union M.Ps. felt strongly enough to join with his little group. Indeed, his death brought no noticeable change in the behaviour of the I.L.P. in Parliament. It is true that "Maxton with Wheatley to advise him and Maxton without Wheatley were two very different propositions",<sup>144</sup> but Maxton's failure to lead was not really the vital factor in the drift towards disaffiliation. The crucial factors were the absorption of the Labour Party into the Parliamentary framework and the unwillingness of those on the left wing to be similarly absorbed. The fact that the Labour Party, in office for only the second time, had no practical socialist economic policy and no theory of how to use Parliament for furthering socialist aims meant that it was reduced to running a capitalist system in which it disbelieved. The refusal of those on the left wing to accept this simply made I.L.P. - Labour Party relations much worse. The death of Wheatley did not alter that. Disaffiliation was the logical conclusion of Wheatley's opposition to MacDonald

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<sup>144</sup> Cole, History of the Labour Party since 1914, p.229.

and his Labour Party. Mrs. Elizabeth Fitzpatrick is almost certainly correct in her assertion that "Had Wheatley been alive in 1932, he would have strongly supported disaffiliation".<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Mrs. Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, interviewed,  
15 September 1968.

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCLUSION

Wheatley became ill at his hotel during the Birmingham Conference. He made a partial recovery, but later suffered a relapse and was taken home to Shettleston. On Saturday 10 May he had a cerebral haemorrhage and became unconscious: he died at 11.20 on the night of Monday 12 May.<sup>1</sup>

A memorial meeting in Glasgow's City Hall brought tributes from his Clydeside colleagues, and Maxton in particular "showed signs of emotional distress".<sup>2</sup> The funeral on 15 May provided a spectacular demonstration of respect from his constituents as thousands lined the streets in drizzling rain to watch the procession. "That day," said Wheatley's nephew, "Maxton was a broken man."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Glasgow Herald, 13 May, 1930.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 26 May, 1930.

<sup>3</sup>Lord Wheatley, interviewed, 12 February, 1969.

If one excludes the nine months Wheatley spent in office, it is fair to regard him as a political failure in national politics. He was a "fundamentalist", and in the Labour movement of Ramsay MacDonald that implied great expectations on the way up the political ladder and frustration leading to opposition once at the top. Wheatley, like the others on the left wing expected great things from a Labour government and expected a Labour opposition to continually harass a Conservative government and force it to change its policies. When it was clear that neither of these was forthcoming, Wheatley made strenuous efforts to alter the Labour Party's course.

The steady integration of the Labour Party into the parliamentary framework was crucial. To people like MacDonald the Labour Party had to be acceptable and respectable: to people like Wheatley it had to be a vehicle for the alleviation of the conditions of the working class. One can argue that MacDonald's greatest achievements were to facilitate the parliamentary absorption of the Labour Party and to establish consensus politics at a time when inter-class tensions were still great. But Wheatley, and those who thought like him, could never accept such developments as they would

inevitably mean conciliation, moderation, and a trimming of socialist theory.

The steady movement of I.L.P. ers. into the Labour Party was a clear indication of the growing predicament of the I.L.P. And as more and more of the nominal I.L.Pers. gave their first allegiance to the Labour Party the I.L.P. was inexorably sandwiched between the growing Labour Party and the small but vociferous Communist Party. That the leading I.L.P. ers. realised this is clearly seen by their increasing obsession with the "distinctiveness" of the I.L.P. If the I.L.P. was to survive as a viable Political entity, neither Wheatley nor Maxton was the man to save it. They did not directly kill the I.L.P., but under their leadership its survival became increasingly doubtful.

Given these developments it is not surprising that every attempt Wheatley made to tug the Labour Party away from reformism and towards a more radical socialist policy came to nought. The attempt to inject a less responsible attitude in 1923 merely antagonised the moderates. The Cook-Maxton Campaign was poorly organised and failed to gain any real momentum. The best opportunity to divert the Labour Party came in 1927 when disillusionment with MacDonald and Snowden had increased because of their

attitude towards the General Strike and when Wheatley had emerged as the real leader on the left wing: but this was when Wheatley's libel case intervened and almost ended his political career.

Opposition to the second Labour Government achieved little. The Clydeside group could successfully oppose only when it had powerful allies, such as the trade union M.Ps. over the Unemployment Bill. It was only to be expected that Labour M.Ps. would prefer a struggling Labour Government to any Conservative one, and the fact that Labour was again in a minority merely added to the pressure that M.Ps. should not rock the boat. What opposition did show was how small the Wheatley-Maxton group actually was. Wheatley had by this time decided that it was impossible to make capitalism work and that the Labour Party should not try to do so. But his "fundamentalism" demanded fundamental changes - changes that neither the electorate nor the P.L.P. was prepared to face.

But if Wheatley was a comparative failure at national level, he had considerable success at local level. His political apprenticeship was served in the most solidly working class city in Britain, and his propaganda and organisation work did much to bring both support and

coherence to the Glasgow Labour movement. During the 1914-18 war he occupied a special position. He stayed on the wings during the industrial troubles but gave assistance and advice to all groups involved; and when the spotlight returned to the City Chambers he was in the limelight with his housing proposals. Between the end of the war and the 1922 General election his work was totally constructive, both on the Council where he had, at times, the support of the anti-Labour majority and behind the scenes where he organised the Labour election victories of 1922. Of course he had the assistance of many, but he was undoubtedly the leader. One can readily agree with Tom Johnston that Wheatley's best work was done in this period,<sup>4</sup> but it is perhaps ironical that one aspect of this work led to the removal of almost all the best political figures from Clydeside to Westminster. After 1922 the only really able Labour figure in Glasgow was Patrick Dollan.

Wheatley and his colleagues took not only enthusiasm and socialist beliefs to Westminster - they also took colour. Steeped in the grimness of Glasgow, they formed

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<sup>4</sup>Forward, 30 May, 1930.

one of the most colourful groups seen this century,  
and by far the most colourful member was Maxton.  
The Wheatley - Maxton combination was as interesting  
as it was strange-looking. But while, by 1930,  
Maxton had still to reach his peak, Wheatley had  
passed his. And while Maxton was to go on to become  
the conscience of the British nation,<sup>5</sup> Wheatley was  
to become one of the forgotten men of British politics.

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<sup>5</sup>MacAllister, James Maxton, Portrait of a Rebel,  
p.260.



APPENDIX

## THE COOK-MAXTON MANIFESTO OF 21 JUNE 1928

## TO THE WORKERS OF BRITAIN

For some time a number of us have been seriously disturbed as to where the British Labour Movement is being led.

We believe that its basic principles are:

- (i) An unceasing war against poverty and working class servitude. This means an unceasing war against Capitalism.
- (ii) That only by their own efforts can the workers obtain the fullest product of their labour.

These basic principles provided the inspiration and organisation on which the party was built. They were the principles of Hardie and the other pioneers who made the party. But in recent times there has been a serious departure from the principles and policy which animated the founders. We are now being asked to believe that the party is no longer a working class party, but a party representing all sections of the community. As Socialists we feel we cannot represent the views of Capitalism. Capitalism and Socialism have nothing in common.

As a result of the new conception that Socialism and Capitalism should sink their differences, much of the energy which should be expended in fighting Capitalism is now expended in crushing everybody who dares to remain true to the ideals of the Movement. We are convinced that this change is responsible for destroying the fighting spirit of the party, and we now come out openly to challenge it. We can no longer stand by and see 30 years of devoted work destroyed in making peace with Capitalism and compromises with the political philosophy of our Capitalist opponents.

In furtherance of our effort, we propose to combine in carrying through a series of conferences and meetings in various parts of the country. At these conferences the rank and file will be given the opportunity to state whether they accept the new outlook, or whether they wish to remain true to the spirit and ideals which animated the early pioneers.

Conditions have not changed. Wealth and luxury still flaunt themselves in the face of poverty-stricken workers who produce them. We ask you to join in the fight against the system which makes these conditions possible.

Yours fraternally

A. J. COOK  
JAMES MAXTON

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