

SOCIALIST HISTORY SOCIETY

Newsletter

June 2015

Issue 2 Vol 4 New Series

Reflections on the meaning of

Socialist', 'History' and 'Society'

Listening to the debate among Labour's front-runners I shudder and cringe. They seem comatose, entrapped in a collective coma or caught within self-imposed intellectual straight jackets, which has rendered them quite incapable of talking without recourse to vacuous slogans and buzz words that they all feel obliged to pay homage to. In current political discourse, if you can dignify it with that term, the key word is "aspirational". What does that mean? Very little, I suggest. It is merely adopting a shabby concept as an accommodation to austerity.

But the real tragedy unfolding is that this does not seem to be an effective strategy for recovering lost ground, either from the rise of the SNP in Scotland or within Labour's northern heartlands where many traditional Labour voters turned to UKIP, in deep despair as much as anything else. Will this obsessive recourse to the language of aspiration do the trick and win back the trust of these people? We probably know the answer. We can confidently predict that all this

**Opening remarks by
DAVID MORGAN
when making his
report to the
Society's AGM on
30 May**

aspirational chatter appears highly unlikely to inspire. One reason for this poor show - and it is indeed to all intents and purposes a show - is that Labour displays all sense that it has forgotten its history and heritage. Possi-

bly this can be attributed to the corrosive influence of the Thatcher and Blair decades.

The past is almost viewed as something of which to be totally ashamed; Labour's past and Labour's heritage must actively be repudiated, on the assumption that this is unattractive to modern voters. This is quite unforgivable especially given the fact that one Labour front bench spokesperson, Tristram Hunt is a historian, and biographer of Friedrich Engels no less.

And, ironically, the leading moderniser in the present leadership contest, has a first in history from Cambridge; this is Liz Kendall, whose every utterance appears to have been deliberately crafted by professionals working in advertising. The utter cynicism and emptiness of the

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whole debate is an affront to our sensibilities.

Even Andy Burnham, the candidate on whom the unions and the left have placed their bets, is uttering the same empty slogans and pitching his appeal to the right in a bid to attract corporate power. It really is as if they are all seeking to catch the eye of someone like Rupert Murdoch on the assumption that the media barons (non doms to a man) simply cannot be defied. Have we been reduced to this pitiful state of dependency on unelected power? If so, we can only look on and despair.

Meanwhile elsewhere, history very much remains a focus of contemporary politics. For example, Sarkozy's party in Paris is today changing its name to Republican, and thus provoking a great controversy by the audacity of the move as it seems that he is seeking to appropriate France's Republican tradition which of course should belong to everyone. At least in France politicians can still have an argument about their history; that's the impression from this side of the Channel.

Elsewhere, in Ukraine, a central part of the country's 20th century history, namely the years when it was part of the USSR, is to be erased from people's memory by an act of law that makes it a criminal offence to advocate Communism or even publicly display Communist emblems; it is grotesque that this law will criminalise the dead who fought the Nazis by making it a crime to have the hammer and sickle carved into the headstones on their graves. What a shocking desecration that will be. I simply mention this to stress the continued importance of history and the vital need never to forget the past.

All around us history is under assault. In Syria, ancient Palmyra, a treasure of human civilisation that should be cherished for all time, is now occupied by the murderous zealots of ISIS inspired by the Wahhabi brand of Islam. What a loss to the world and a crime against humanity the destruction of the tombs and temples of Palmyra will be. Its stunning ruins have already been turned into torture chambers and sites of mass executions. That's a modern tragedy and an indication of the grim reality and seriousness of the challenge we face when many people are fighting for their very survival.

To conclude, Eric Hobsbawm - the SHS's late honorary president - wrote about similar trends some 20 years ago, in his article "Barbarism: A User's Guide"; this is still topical. When we look around the world today it seems that we are living through a new age of barbarism where even human existence is under threat of extermination through climate change and environmental catastrophe, and where many regions of the world, in Europe and the Middle East, are in profound crisis provoked by civil wars and foreign interventions.

Now more than ever we need to hold on to our history, to remember the progressive history of struggles that embody the hope of humanity to change the world through collective action. Today the stark choice remains, "socialism or barbarism"; fortunately, I believe that we all know which side we are on.

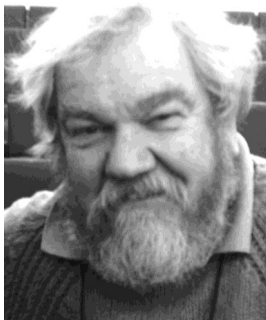
Finally, what's in a name? Eric Hobsbawm's headstone in Highgate reads simply, "Eric Hobsbawm: Historian". That is really all that needs to be said. We all know where he stood too.

Where do we go from here?

In 1960 I joined the Young Communist League. That was 55 years ago. I was told then and I am still being told now, 'we must win the Labour party to a left position.' The only difference now is that we are trying to win the Labour party not to a left position, but back to a position of right wing social democracy. In the meantime, those countries we referred to as socialist have collapsed and taken the path to capitalism; communist parties throughout the world, with few exceptions, are shadows of their former selves. Capitalism strides the globe and its ideology reigns supreme and here in our offshore island we, Marxists and Communists, are still discussing 'what should happen to the Labour party?'

I think that it is high time we threw our hat into the ring and gave some leadership over this issue. So here are the thoughts of one unrepentant, but not unreformed, communist.

A battle for the leadership of the Labour party is now underway. The organised Labour left does not appear to be able to muster enough support to field a candidate. Ian Lavery MP, chair of the trade union group of Labour MPs, turned down an approach. Andy Burnham, the shadow health secretary, now looks to be the candidate the left will get behind. He has already had discussions with Len McCluskey, the left leader of Unite. Burnham, once an advisor to Tony Blair, has moved to the left since then and now at least supports the idea of an NHS 'publicly provided'. This is a welcome move away from Alan Milburn's approach when he was health secretary of



Mike Squires
considers the future
for Labour

welcoming private sector involvement. Milburn is now a director of private equity company, Bridgeport, which has various interests in the health service.

Even if Burnham was to succeed and defeat the chief Blairite candidate, Yvette Cooper, Ed Ball's wife, would it make any real difference? Probably not in the long term. The Labour party has now moved so far away from its roots that it seems impossible that it can be won back. Burnham's election

may simply procrastinate the decision that has to be taken. Labour, the party that was formed by the trade unions to defend their rights, has singularly failed to do so over recent years. Given this acquiescence by the Labour leadership, the Tories have taken the initiative and are now set to effectively ban strike action in the public sector. For a strike to take place their proposed legislation would only make that possible if over 50% of all those eligible to vote do so. The present government was elected by 24% of the electorate. Will Labour speak out and oppose these new plans, or will they cower before the strident anti-union headlines of The Sun and The Daily Mail?

The election of a majority Tory government with an extreme right wing agenda has forced the Labour movement and progressive forces to contemplate the way ahead. Extra-parliamentary activity is top of the agenda, as it has always been, but what of the political struggle?

One redeeming feature of the election was the dramatic increase in the Green vote. One million votes for a party whose

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programme was well to the left of Labour's is heart-warming. And what of Scotland? Whatever one's views on the national question the fact remains that on all major policy questions from Trident to austerity, the SNP was more progressive than Labour. The SNP in Scotland won on a programme of 'Old Labour'. So North and South of the border those to the left of Labour made outstanding progress. This is something those pontificating on Labour's future might want to dwell upon.

So, to finish what I started; I think enough is enough. The Labour party is no longer fit for purpose. Its links with the trade unions are in serial decline, its representatives in Parliament are no longer drawn from a cross-section of society; its calls for reform are muted. Trade unions, and let's recall there are still six million trade unionists, need to look elsewhere for a party to represent and defend them. They may want to form a new organisation, or, they may decide to open discussion with the Greens which already has a substantial base, far more than Labour had when it first started out.

It will be a long and difficult journey with ideally the trade unions allying themselves with socialist groups, the peace movement, environmentalists, campaigners for more democracy, anti-racists and the like. This could forge a broad alliance that will mount a political challenge to the Tories and stand candidates on an anti-austerity platform to offer an alternative ideology to that on offer.

The forces are there for a new party of Labour that will attract other progressive elements in society around it. This may be a revamped Green Party or it may be a new party entirely -but we just cannot go on the way we have been. Labour as the party of the working class is dead, so let's start building something new.

Voices of struggle:

SHS poetry event, 26th March 2015, the Poetry Café, Covent Garden

This event was the second of its kind featuring the collaboration of London Voices Poetry Group and the Socialist History Society. Our first event focused on Revolutions, whereas on this night we looked at the various forms exile can take.

The impetus for the evening was the commemoration of historical events that happened between 1933 and 1944, when exiled writers poured into the city of Marseilles to leave Europe by boat. Nearby in Aix-en-Provence a new museum was

opened in 2013 in the old brick factory where in the years 1933 to 1945 writers, painters and poets were locked up before being sent back to Nazi Germany.



Chris Harrison

However, the meaning of exile can also take the form of internal or spiritual exile, exile from the country in which you live and where you were born, as well as exile from another aspect of oneself – such as age or gender. The exile of miners who spend most of their lives 'in exile' from daylight and the sun was touched upon in

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The Scottish Referendum and After

The campaign in the run-up to the referendum in Scotland was really exciting: a wonderful atmosphere and in many ways quite new to many of us who had been in politics for some years. It was common to hear people saying, "Things will never be the same again", and this

was echoed in the media coverage in Scotland. We couldn't explain this clearly at first; it was just a common feeling as each day passed that we were in the middle of a fight for real democracy and self-determination.

It took in the form of hundreds of public meetings (something abandoned some time by many of our politicians) in halls, pub lounges, coffee bars, etc, sometimes with official speakers from the 'Yes' or

by **John Kay**

John Kay was a leading Scottish CPGB member. The party's Scottish Industrial Organiser, he was also often its general election candidate in Govan. He is now a member of the Green Party.

'No' campaigns, sometimes with various organisations, political and non-political. This happened in all parts of the country.

Within the 'Yes' campaign there were movements like the Radical Alliance, comprising the Green Party, Scottish Socialist Party, and many Labour party members and supporters

and they had some of the biggest meetings with prominent artists, writers and actors taking part.

There was great media coverage, especially from the Scottish newspaper, *The Herald*, whose Sunday edition urged a 'Yes' vote. The Scottish editions of the right-wing press, while supporting the 'No' vote had difficulties in covering the campaign in terms of their Scottish readership.

The Herald has launched a new daily paper, *The Nationalist*, which is selling quite well — a bold step indeed. The 'No', 'Better Together' campaign was in comparison quite dull and as the campaign developed brought in more establishment voices like Cameron and Osborne. Big business organisations, like the CBI and the banks warned of the perils of going it alone and the problems there would be with the currency. Even foreign heads of state were roped in from Obama to Merkel.

The last desperate step was when it looked like success for the 'Yes' vote. A leading Treasury civil servant stated that

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Voices continued

songs.

We heard of travels to Australia, London homelessness (in exile from capitalism), immigration, a vignette of a man and lady with a dog, and heard about four German-Jewish poets who had to flee from the Nazis.

Chris Harrison sang his 'Carols from the coalfield' songs that are based on his great-great grandfather's poems of the time he was a miner.

It turned out to be a most enjoyable evening, we only wish more of our friends and poets had also been able to be there.

Greta Sykes

it would be impossible to share a currency. It turned out that he was supposed to be barred from making public statements of any kind. Then Gordon Brown was brought in to make an appeal for working class solidarity between the Scots and the rest of the UK.

There was a tremendous atmosphere of democracy unleashed, with 16-17 year olds voting, youth involvement rising, and an 84% turnout at the poll. All this activity gave rise to the view that things would never be the same again, as events are proving, even though the 'Yes' vote was narrowly lost. The 'No' vote campaign was one based on fear.

Then came Cameron's announcement in Downing Street after the result: 'English votes on English laws'. This issue had not been raised by the 'No' campaign and it cast doubt on the pre-referendum pledge of more powers for Scotland. Shrewd right-wing politicians pointed out that Cameron's pledge did imply some form of devolved English Parliament.

The Labour Party in Scotland seriously damaged itself by lining up with the Tories and the Liberal Democrats in the 'No' campaign. The SNP membership surge to 100,000 is truly remarkable. They now have 56 MPs. The Liberal Democrats in Scotland have been wiped out. The Greens, like the SNP, have also increased their membership both in Scotland and in England.

Things in Scotland are certainly not the same.

Soon after the referendum, Cameron, the fervent anti-nationalist, played the nationalist card in the general election. He tried to instil a fear factor in English people of a SNP/Labour alliance.

In the aftermath of the referendum and

the general election the problem of the Labour Party and labour movement in dealing with the national question and self-determination has been clearly demonstrated. It's one reason that the Scottish TUC and trade unions were hardly involved. The trade union section of the SNP has, not surprisingly, surged. As well as being anti-Tory the SNP has declared itself a social democratic party and against austerity and for welfare in a civilized society. There are contradictions of course. The party is against Trident, but a recent SNP conference declared in favour of NATO (albeit by only a 3 vote majority). They have also just flirted with the idea of a corporation tax reduction. But, to their credit the SNP has brought more women into politics.

Nicola Sturgeon has said that the SNP wants the people of England, Wales and Northern Ireland to have more democratic rights and involvement, not just the people of Scotland. She, and her party want self-determination and more devolved powers for all countries that make up the United Kingdom.

Despite the Tory victory at Westminster, I believe, as do many of us in Scotland, that more opportunities are opening up for more real democracy in Britain. That is federalism and more written constitutions for the UK's constituent parts. The idea of a constitution is certainly prominent on the agenda in Scotland. Labour could get out of its defeatist slump by understanding this. The Tories and the Establishment are certainly aware of the dangers that devolved rule could pose.

We should remember that the founding constitutions of the Independent Labour Party, the Labour Party and the Com-

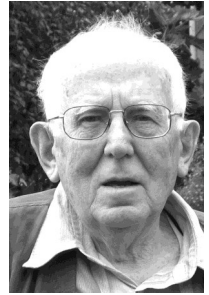
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John Manning writes from Berlin *Where now in Europe?*

The Ukraine and Germany

The Ukraine conflict contains a wider threat to peace in Europe. In Germany many now ask; what is really behind the Ukraine crisis? And do we (despite Angela Merkel's efforts) need to fear a full-scale war in Europe? Even Germany's populist 'Superillu' (March 2015) interviewed someone of the stature of Valentin Falin to put precisely that question. A month before (February 2015), no less than Henry Kissinger had written in the Swiss 'Weltwoche' of 'errors of the West' that were escalating the Ukraine crisis; he stressed the importance of not driving Russia into isolation. Earlier, in November 2014, he had used a German 'Spiegel' interview to warn of the risk of a slide into a new Cold War – or worse, and had pointed to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia that ended the Thirty Years War (in Europe perhaps the

From 1963 John taught at English summer courses in the German Democratic Republic. In 1973 he moved to the GDR and joined the British-American Institute at Humboldt University in East Berlin.



Subsequently he became the head of language teaching. He still works for a teaching magazine in Germany.

worst war of the lot); and to its lessons, that people must accept realities and work for stable relations.

In December 2014 sixty cultural and political personalities from Germany issued a declaration *War again in Europe? Not in our names!* Adding that they well understood Russia's fears when Georgia and the Ukraine were in 2008 invited to join NATO. People felt that the earlier confidence in a Europe free of war had been threatened by NATO trying to embed itself in the Black Sea region bordering Russia. Plus parallel plans to bring the Ukraine into EU economic structures, shutting out Russia.

At this point, it helps to review the sequence of inconsistencies that followed the 1945 Potsdam Conference decisions. While post-Nazi Austria became 'non-aligned' (1955), its capital Vienna doubling with Geneva in helping to settle international issues, post-Nazi Germany had already split, mainly due to hardliner US operations. The western Federal Republic, US

Referendum continued

munist Party all declared in favour of Home Rule for Scotland. Tom Nairn and other thinkers some years ago declared that the breakup of Britain was inevitable. It took many of us in the Communist Party and the Labour movement a long time to get our heads around this.

Scotland is governed yet again by a party its people did not vote for. This should spur us into more activity and of course there is much to do for all of us against austerity and cuts, low paid jobs, etc. We must build a pro-people alternative.

In Scotland things are certainly never going to be the same again.

investments boosting its economy, became the strongest state in western Europe, joined NATO and gained a new army. Its leader Adenauer rejected the second German state the GDR, and also the new Polish-German frontier. Yet we also saw support for the original 1945 Potsdam thinking. Britain, a west German occupation power, also developed discreet trade and cultural relations with the GDR. And after 1961, Kennedy's subtle line "Better a Wall than a War" prompted West German realists under Willy Brandt to accept the GDR and recognise the Polish-German frontier. Both pointed the way to the 1970s four-power agreement on Berlin, 'Helsinki'-style detente and the OSCE. European stability seemed assured.

Except that, with the 1980s Reagan presidency, new tensions threatened in Europe. NATO's "Able Archer" manoeuvres (1983) were interpreted by Soviet leaders as a possible cover for a US nuclear first strike. And yet, in a move recalling Britain's role in the 1950s vis-à-vis the GDR, Mrs Thatcher – in the name of Western Europe, as it were – got Gorbachev to pull Reagan back from the brink. An obvious gain, even if it left the West the ultimate 'winners' of the first Cold War. Following German reunification in 1990, level-headed western leaders went along with Gorbachev in keeping things calm. Which, for Europe, is how things mostly stayed for a decade and a half.

But Europe is now confronted by the repercussions of the US-led action of 2008. Some have remarked that this echoes events of mid-1961, when Jupiter missiles were installed in Turkey facing on to the Soviet Black Sea Fleet. The response, placing Soviet rockets in Cuba,

is popularly labelled the 'Cuba crisis', but the real question at that time was "who started it"? As is being asked again now. In Germany at least, quite a number argue that Russia last year had little choice but to absorb the Crimea.

So what is it all about? Alert circles recall Eisenhower in January 1961 warning the world about the US 'Military-Industrial Complex', and also the neocon 'Project for the New American Century' (1997) with its goal to "promote American global leadership". Indeed, already back in 1945, some in US occupation circles had rejected the concept, implicit in the thinking of the 'Big Three', of two 'superpowers' in Europe (the US in the West, Russia in the East) – a balance complementing the makeup of the new UN Security Council. For US conservatives, it seems to have been an issue of global hegemony. And is again now. With the first Cold War past, the fact that Western Europe and post-Soviet Russia have been re-establishing continent-wide stability, indeed in economic terms going beyond that, seems to be something that American conservatism cannot cope with. But not to overlook: despite loud talk in some quarters, US hardliners have actually only minimal support in Europe in this matter. People don't want to risk a war.

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S.H.S. PUBLIC MEETING

Saturday 18 July 2015

BERNARD CAPP (University of Warwick) speaks on
**Diggers, Ranters and Fifth Monarchy Men: An
Overview of the Revolutionary and Radical Sects in
the 1640-60 Era.** Time: 2.00 pm Venue Marx Memorial
Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green. London EC1



Call for papers

**Conference: Before '68:
The Left, activism & social
movements in the long 1960s**

13-14 February 2016 at School of
History, University of East Anglia, Nor-
wich, NR4 7TJ, UK. Organised and hosted
by UEA School of History in conjunction
with Socialist History and the Institute of
Working Class History, Chicago.

The events of 1968, particularly those in
France, have achieved a mythical sta-
tus in both the memory and the historiog-
raphy of the 1960s. For some, 1968 marked
the end-point of a realignment of the Euro-
pean 'New Left'. For others 1968 repre-
sented a student generation in revolt, and
many of the first accounts which sought to
explain the history and meaning of '68
were written by that generation.

More recently historians have tried to
demythologise '68, looking both at less
'glamorous' locales and at the deeper his-
tories of anti-colonial struggles and work-
ers' activism prior to the events of that
year. The aim of this conference is to ex-
plore the diverse histories of social activism
and left politics in Britain and elsewhere,
and how they prepared the ground for and
fed into '1968'. Themes might include, but

are not limited to:

- Anti-nuclear & peace movements
- Civil Rights struggles
- The Black Power movement
- Anti-colonial politics
- The activities of the Labour movement
and the 'traditional' Left
- The grassroots activism of the 'New Left'
- Far Left challenges: Trotskyism & Mao-
ism
- Campaigns around housing and the built
environment
- Campaigns around race and discrimina-
tion in the workplace and housing
- Solidarity movements with struggles
abroad (e.g. South Africa, Vietnam)
- Campaigns for Homosexual Equality
- Second Wave Feminism

We are seeking papers of 5,000 to 10,000
words on any aspects of left activism and
social movements in the period preceding
1968 to be presented at the conference.

Selected papers will be published in a
special issue of the journal *Socialist Histo-*
ry.

Attendance at the conference will be free
of charge, but we ask that anyone wishing
to attend registers in advance. Proposals for
papers and any enquiries should be submit-
ted to Ben Jones at UEA.

<http://goo.gl/IXcY0k>

Deadline for proposals for papers:
31 October 2015

CORRESPONDENCE

Moi, je ne suis PAS Charlie

— a reply to David Morgan and Greta Sykes

I have just returned from France where I found myself increasingly uncomfortable with "Je suis Charlie". Just because the right to free expression exists, does not mean it has to be used and the writer has a responsibility to consider the likely results of their actions. When Charlie Hebdo published an offensive cover to its five million print run, it not only humiliated hundreds of thousands of French Muslims, already the victims of a shockingly high level of anti-Arab racism, it gave aid and comfort to the growing French extreme right.

As the Front National rises in the polls and there is a distinct possibility that Marine Le Pen could reach the second round of the next Presidential election, the main threat to French democracy does not come from a few isolated Islamist nutters, but from an increasingly confident fascist movement using Islamophobia to divide and confuse its opponents.

I am prepared to give the editors of Charlie Hebdo the benefit of the doubt and assume that they are not *provocateurs* acting directly for the state or the extreme right, merely being stupid, greedy and childish, with no thought for the consequences of their actions and hoping to cash in on their new found notoriety. However, they might as well be fascist agents because the main gainers from their anti-Muslim crusade are the racists.

The hypocrisy of the "Defenders of Free Speech" is staggering. Well over 100 people have been arrested and imprisoned for

"glorifying" or "defending" terrorism. Of course saying that the writers of Charlie Hebdo "had it coming" or deny-

ing the Holocaust is offensive, but no more offensive than Charlie Hebdo itself, which has a record of sexism that I personally find completely unacceptable. To blame all Muslims for the actions of a small minority is no more justified than to blame the vicar of the church on the corner for the violent homophobia of the Church in Africa or to hold your Jewish neighbour responsible for the crimes of Binyamin Netanyahu.

With Jobbik getting over a million votes in Hungary and 20,000 Nazis marching through Dresden intent on stoking hatred and violence against Muslims, there is a whiff of the 1930s in the air. If we are to defend those democratic freedoms that are important to socialists, the priority is to unite Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Jewish and Atheist workers against Islamophobia, the anti-Semitism of the 21st century.

Steve Cushion

Branch Secretary
London Retired Members branch
University and Colleges Union

IT'S YOUR NEWSLETTER

Contributions, articles (no more than 800 words) etc always welcome.

Send to mikesquires70@hotmail.com

or by post to 50 Elmfield Road,
Balham, London SW17 8AL

János Jemnitz (1930-2014)

We were sorry to learn that János Jemnitz, a long-standing member of the SHS and its predecessor, the CP History group, died in Budapest on 20 July 2014. Born in 1930 into a prominent Hungarian social-democratic family,

János studied history in postwar Budapest, subsequently gaining research posts at the Institute of Party History and then the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Institute of History. His particular interests lay in the early history of the European labour movement and leading figures within it, on which he wrote numerous books, pamphlets and articles.

At a time when contacts between East and West European labour historians were not so easy to maintain, János was one of the few who was able to straddle the divide. The relatively liberal regime in socialist Hungary meant that he was able to research figures as diverse as Wilhelm Weitling, Louis-Auguste Blanqui, Keir Hardie, Jean Jaurès, Léon Blum, Aleksandra Kollontai and Karl Kautsky, travel to conferences in both Eastern and Western Europe, and maintain scientific and personal contacts with a wide range of colleagues.

He was particularly active in the annual Linz conferences of labour movement historians. From 1974 János edited the *International Labour Movement Yearbook*, which carried a wide range of articles and summaries, mainly translated

into Hungarian. He was assiduous in soliciting contributions from his many contacts, and if one agreed to write something once for him, more requests would follow, always on half a sheet of A4, typed on a manual typewriter.



At the opening ceremony of the Linz conference of labour movement historians (ITH), September 2006 with our own June Cohen.

It is a testimony to his resourcefulness, energy and charm that twenty-five years after the end of communist rule in Hungary, when the funds and attention previously lavished on labour history had largely dried up, János was still able to keep the yearbook appearing regularly.

Advancing years and his total loss of sight did not stop him. He retained his commitment to the socialist

idea, but with an undogmatic and inclusive openness to all its manifestations, all of which he wanted to see discussed in the yearbook. He also frequently reviewed, translated or summarised SHS publications, both in his yearbook and in other Hungarian historical journals, as well as providing critical feedback on anything with which he disagreed.

He was a remarkable individual, and his death is a great loss for the field of labour movement history, in Hungary and around the world. We extend our condolences to his colleagues and his daughter Katalin, who was a great help to him in his later years.

Francis King

The Chartists Were Right

One of the SHS's best meetings in recent memory took place on 25 April when David Goodway delivered a talk on the later career of Chartist leader, George Julian Harney.

The venue was full to capacity and a lively discussion was stimulated by Goodway's fascinating presentation which ranged widely over Harney's varying political interests as reflected in his journalism.

SHS honorary president Stan Newens, who chaired the meeting, began by describing the speaker as "half Marxist, half Anarchist".

Goodway's interest in Anarchism as a school of thought is reflected in his re-discovery of various writers who held such opinions namely Herbert Read, Alex Comfort and John Cowper Powys, about whom Goodway has produced books.

In his latest book, *The Chartists Were Right*, Goodway seeks to rediscover the late writings of Harney, a prolific and able journalist throughout his life. The research undertaken for this book formed the basis of the talk.

Goodway began by remarking how surprising it was that people knew so little about the history of Chartism. Harney himself is now little known, especially his late career, when he was no

longer the firebrand and advocate of "physical force" as he had been perceived during the late 1830s and the 1850s when

he was a friend of Marx.

Harney, Goodway reminded us, was to publish the first English translation of *The Communist Manifesto* by Helen MacFarlane, the one that notoriously begins with the "hobgoblin" haunting Europe.

Harney's finest period was during the 1843 to 1850 era, but he actually lived until 1897 and continued writing a regular column for the *Newcastle Weekly*.

Goodway suggested that we would all be shocked to realise that the once radical Harney later became a "Tory radical".

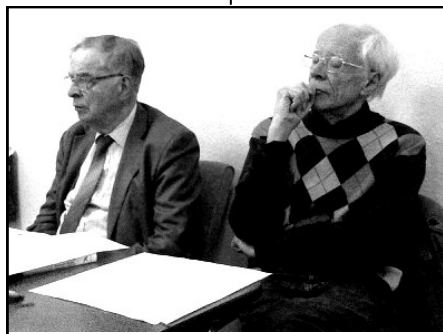
Harney was to become a staunch opponent of Gladstone from a Tory perspective and he opposed Irish Home Rule.

After having travelled far and wide in a lifelong career as Chartist and journalist, Harney spent his last years in Richmond where he was to be buried. His headstone reads, "the last of the Chartist leaders".

A paperback version of the book, *George Julian Harney: The Chartists Were Right*, is now available from publisher Merlin.

The SHS was pleased to recruit four new members at the meeting, such was the enthusiasm stimulated by an excellent and incisive talk.

David Morgan



Stan Newens (left) and David Goodway

James Keir Hardie

15 August 1856–26 September 1915



A One-Day Public Conference Saturday 26 September 2015

Conference Fee:
£20 waged
£7.50 unwaged

Saturday 26 September 2015 will mark the centenary of the death of James Keir Hardie at the comparatively young age of 59. But in those 59 years Hardie had changed the political landscape of Britain: as chairman of the Independent Labour Party (founded 1893) he headed an increasingly large group of ethical socialists who desired change based on human need and empathy rather than the mechanical Marxist economics of men such as Henry Mayers Hyndman and Friedrich Engels; he was instrumental in achieving the support of the Trade Union Congress for the foundation and financial support of the Labour Representation Committee (1900 and later the Labour Party in 1906); he had been a party to the divisive Gladstone-MacDonald pact which committed the Labour Party to avoiding a direct challenge to Liberal Party candidates in key seats; he had worked alongside Sylvia Pankhurst in the demand for the female vote. In his life he had been a miner, a journalist, the editor of a number of newspapers, the chairman of political groups and a Member of Parliament.

This conference aims to celebrate the impact Hardie had on British society and the legacy he left for those who followed. Public-facing proposals are invited for 20-minute papers on any area of Hardie's life and work. Papers might address (but are not limited to) the following areas:

- Hardie's labours (Hardie as miner, journalist, editor, politician)
- Hardie's philosophies (Hardie's attitude to trade unionism, mainstream politics, socialism, war, religion)
- Hardie's colleagues (Hardie's working relations with, for example, Sylvia Pankhurst, Margaret Harkness, Henry Hyde Champion, Ramsay MacDonald)
- Hardie's travels (his work around the British Isles, his internationalism, his overseas tours)
- Hardie as author (his short stories, his children's fiction)
- Hardie's legacy (the long-term effect of Hardie's work on British politics)

Please send abstracts of no more than 200 words to Dr Deborah Mutch, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK via email: dmutch@dmu.ac.uk

Deadline for abstracts: 1 June 2015

The early life of Margot Heinemann:

‘Change is their memorial who have changed the world’

Exactly why was a highly intelligent young woman from a very comfortable upper middle class background, attracted to Communism as a lifelong commitment? This question formed a substantial part of Jane Bernal’s talk to

the Society on 30 May when she examined the first 30 years in the life of her mother, the celebrated Communist, activist, writer, teacher and latterly academic,

Margot Heinemann.

Jane described Margot’s father as coming from a wealthy Jewish family in Frankfurt, but who arrived in London to make his career in the family banking business. Margot was to be brought up in a large suburban



Jane Bernal

house in Hampstead with servants and a nanny. Her parents sent her to the select Roedean girls’ school.

She won a scholarship to Cambridge in 1931 where she became involved in amateur drama and music, as well as editing and writing. She was later to experience the hunger march through Cambridge and was appalled at the hostile reception the unemployed workers from the “distressed North” received from the privileged right-wing students.

Margot was to attend a public meeting addressed by a Communist unemployed

worker at this time and was impressed by the powerful advocacy of his arguments. She became dedicated to supporting their cause.

Cambridge Communism has become something of a cliché, but Jane Bernal made the familiar story fresh with her new research and personal connection. She provided a very compelling and profoundly moving account of Margot’s awakening to the social injustices around her and the growing recognition of the need for political organisation to change things for the better.

Margot visited the South Wales mining communities and was struck by the resilience of the workers which deepened her understanding of the potential power of labour to effect social change. Her experiences in the coalfields were to be reflected in her study, *Britain’s Coal* and her novel, *The Adventurers*.

Jane Bernal remarked that this novel remains of immense value to any social historian who wants to grasp exactly what workers’ lives were like in the mining industry of the 30s and 40s. It is the only novel whose ending is a punch up at the TUC.

Her German Jewish background made her especially attuned to the threat posed by the rise of fascism in Europe and the urgent need to resist Mosley’s Blackshirts



led her to take the life changing decision to join the Communist Party in the 1930s. Famously, she was to be given her party card by John Cornford, who later became her partner up until his tragic early death fighting in Spain.

Poetry was one of the bonds between them and Margot was to be the subject of one of Cornford's most well-known poems. The title of Jane's talk, "Change is their memorial who have changed the world", comes from the lines of a poem written by Margot inspired by her relationship with John. That poem was written in the 1950s and read at Margot's funeral by actor Tilda Swinton, who had been one of her students.

Jane indicated that a shared interest in Elizabethan poetry and drama was one of the factors that had drawn Margot and John together. Her appreciation of the 17th century city dramas of Thomas Middleton and others led to one of her best books, *Puritanism and Theatre*, a late flowering of her latent academic talent, published in 1980 in the Past and Present series.



Margot's later relationship with the Marxist scientist JD Bernal, the father of Jane, did not really feature in the talk because that experience was to come later. The death of Cornford marked a natural conclusion for this period in Margot's life.

Contributors to the discussion variously remembered her as an inspiring teacher, a woman of great beauty, her attractive personality, wry sense of humour, unflinching dedication and absolute integrity.

One issue debated was how Margot

dealt with theory and practice. She was a great believer in how theory can have a

practical use as a guide to action rather than in mere abstract theorising.

The meeting was chaired by Professor Willie Thompson who had been the joint editor with Margot Heine-mann of a collection of essays by historian A L Morton.

Jane Bernal's book will most certainly be eagerly awaited.

David Morgan

Collection of Essays on Chartism by Dorothy Thompson

The Dignity of Chartism, edited by Stephen Roberts

The book contains sixteen essays and reviews written by Dorothy Thompson between 1952 and 2007 - amongst them a previously-unpublished collaboration with Edward Thompson on Chartism in Halifax. There is also a long introduction discussing Dorothy's scholarly and political activities - including her time in the YCL and the Communist Party. Published by Verso; Cost £15.99.

AGM Report

To briefly summarise the key decisions and announcements from the Annual General Meeting held on 30 May at Conway Hall:

The current committee of the SHS was re-elected with the addition of Steve Cushion, who volunteered to become involved. Steve, who is soon to publish a book on Latin American politics, should prove a valuable addition to the committee. The Society hopes soon to publish some research of his into the persecution of trade unionists in Cuba during the Cold War.

The SHS plans to continue to hold meetings on a broad range of topics with the aim of showing how an awareness of history can help illuminate current debates. Later this year we plan to hold talks on housing campaigns in Britain in

the 19th and 20th centuries and the legacy of the 1945 Labour government. Into 2016, we have plans to hold a seminar on free trade and globalisation in history and a meeting to mark the anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland.

Willie Thompson has agreed to deliver a presentation based on the themes in his ambitious new book, *Work, Sex and Power: The Forces That Shaped Our History*.

Other possible topics for talks include class and gentrification and the career of the half-forgotten 18th century radical Richard Price.

As for Occasional Publications, the First World War is planned to be the subject of one forthcoming volume, as well as the issue on Cuban trade unionists aforementioned.

I hope this will prove to be an exciting and worthwhile programme of activities and publications.

Should any member wish to get involved or inform the wider SHS membership of their own activities, please do get in touch. D.M.

The British Business of Slavery

A series of Tuesday evening talks starting on 6th October running to 8th December.

Presented by Conway Hall Ethical Society, the Socialist History Society and the Freethought History Research Group.

Speakers: Dr Wm. Pettigrew, Dr Perry Gauci, Prof Satvinder Juss, Dr Katie Donington, Mike Jay, Prof James Walvin, Prof Jordan Goodman

Discount for members: £3 per talk (as opposed to £5) and £21 when booking for the whole series rather than £30.

Curator: Debora Lavin 020 7504 5674

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