

TRIBUTE TO SID EASTON

"The Life and Times of Sid Easton" is a collection of items associated with a well known trades unionist.

Sometime streetfighter, sportsman, cabbie, bodyguard and chauffeur, family man, trade union leader, Sid Easton was an unrepentant life-long communist.

His close friend, former General Secretary of TGWU, Ron Todd performed the oration at Sid's funeral in 1991 and the text is enclosed.

The basis of the book is Sid Easton's edited conversations with Graham Stevenson, who is also the author of an accompanying paper on the Bans and Proscriptions on Communists in the TGWU 1949-68; Graham Stevenson is National Secretary of the TGWU's Passenger Services Group.

Peter Hagger, TGWU General Executive Council member and cab drivers leader in London provides an obituary and Jane Rosen a personal and moving poem about Sid Easton.

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IN ACTION: As chair of the TGWU Cab branch Sid (above) addresses drivers at Speakers' Corner in March 1973 before a march and lobby of parliament against VAT and illegal plying for trade.

THE LIFE & TIMES of SID EASTON (1911-1991)

"Why is Life Like That?"

Sid's own reminiscences

Edited by

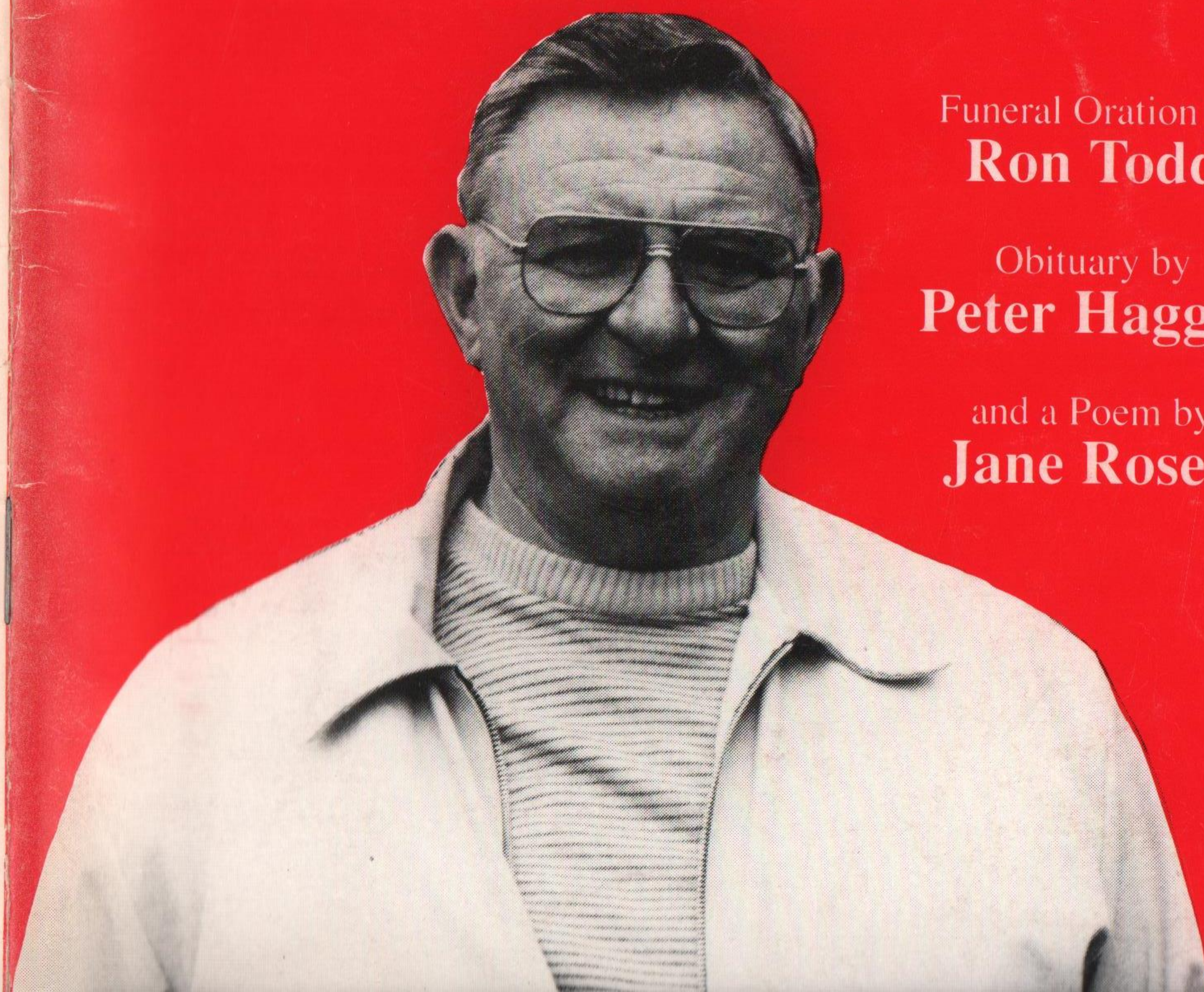
Graham Stevenson

with an accompanying chapter by him on
"Anti-Communist Bans in the TGWU 1949-68"

Funeral Oration by
Ron Todd

Obituary by
Peter Hagger

and a Poem by
Jane Rosen



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**“Those who do not remember the past,
are condemned to relive it.”**

*George Santayana
(A 19th century philosopher)*



Ron Todd and Gladys Easton, unveiling a plaque in the Gower Street office of the TGWU, which amongst other groups caters for the Cab Section. Ron Todd described Sid as the champion of the underdog, “a tireless worker against unemployment, poverty, in all trade union struggles, as well as his service to the cab trade.”

“This plaque will be a visual reminder, not only to us who knew him, of a good comrade whose heart was as big as his body,” Ron Todd declared.

Also at the unveiling of the plaque were son Gordon, retired TGWU general secretary Jack Jones, general secretary of industry and services union MSF Ken Gill, former Labour Party general secretary Jim Mortimer, together with a large number of Sid's former colleagues and comrades.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

I shared a journey with Sid Easton on the train back from the TUC in Blackpool in 1989. It was by no means the first time I had spoken at length with Sid, but it was the first time I had chatted about his long involvement in the movement. I told him of a paper I had written to clarify my own thoughts on the bans on Communist Party members holding office in the TGWU. Sid made many suggestions as to the direction such a paper could go in, whilst I pressed him on why he had never put his own thoughts and experiences on paper.

He was characteristically modest about his own contribution and similarly characteristically scathing about others who had produced their own version of the past. He abhorred tendencies on the part of the great and the good to overstate personal importance or to ignore those who aided their elevation. Moreover, Sid was not a bookish or literary man and felt disinclined to put pen to paper. I suggested he consider taping his reminiscences in conversation with someone sympathetic to his essential ethics and found myself volunteered for the job.

So it was that, during the course of 1990, Sid and I sat for hours in several sessions by a tape recorder. He began, as they say, at the beginning and had general ideas about what he wanted to say. But I took the liberty of prompting and directing him in the interests of extracting the maximum from him. In transcribing the conversations I have, in the interests of clarity, not included these interjections, which were necessarily two-way. We also had great fun at times, reflecting on the absurdities of our movement. These asides were of a personal character and hence do not form part of the text reproduced here.

In any case, it was agreed that I would edit and adjust the conversations into the first person, altering only for grammatical clarity. Necessarily, sequences would have to be adjusted for chronological or even political clarity. Professional historians may be aghast at such interference with actuality, but Sid wanted ordinary people to read his thoughts and experiences so they would understand and possibly learn from them. So much for the methodology, what of the context?

I presented Sid with a complete rough text in late 1990, which he gave general approval to. I outlined a series of questions and suggestions for further development and he indicated that, with the back of the task broken, he felt able to contemplate fleshing out the story. Specifically, he wanted to mention a series of people dear to him, or important to his life. I pointed out that he had said very little in our conversations about the campaign to lift the bans on Communist Party members holding office in the TGWU. This being arguably the single most important contribution Sid had made to the British Labour Movement's future development from 1968 and its impact beyond 1990. In our conversations it was as if he took the view that I was well acquainted with these matters and it was, in any case, all too embarrassing to claim very much. It had been a collective effort.

As if completing unfinished business, Sid visited relatives in the USA at this point. Unfortunately, on his return he suffered a period of illness. In September 1992, he died. Sadly, the missing gaps in his account were never filled. His good friends, who he wanted to mention, will understand.

In preparing this text for publication, I have made explanatory notes, assuming certain levels of knowledge. If I offend anyone by being too painstaking or too presumptuous, then apologies; but, of necessity, these things are always a difficult balance to resolve.

Given that you cannot really understand the TGWU in the Seventies and Eighties if you do not have some clarity on how it was moulded in the Forties and Fifties, and given that Sid Easton's considerable reputation inside the TGWU rested upon the campaign to lift the bans and create a progressive impetus for the future, one cannot understand Sid Easton without understanding the bans. Sid's general approval of my paper on the bans is good enough for me and, I suspect, many others. Historians will argue about the nuances in other quarters, but, in memory of Sid, the paper on the bans is included herein with no apologies.

GRAHAM STEVENSON



As chair of the TGWU Cab branch, Sid at Speakers' Corner in March 1973 before a march and lobby of parliament against VAT and illegal plying for hire. Having a quick consultation with Alfie Ross, then the vice-Chair of the committee.

'SID EASTON - HIS HEART WAS AT BIG AS HIS FAME'

Funeral Tribute by Ron Todd, General Secretary TGWU

Monday 7th October 1991, Golders Green Crematorium

Sisters, Brothers, Friends and Comrades, your presence here is a demonstration of the high regard in which you held the man we honour – many more were unable to be with us and I received a special message from Bert Ramelson who unfortunately is not well and sends his regrets.

All of us here today are gathered to pay our respects and our tribute to the memory of Sid Easton who died at the age of 80 years on Friday 27th September 1991, after a lifetime of commitment and dedication to the aims and aspirations of working people – and it is to the memory of that campaigner and fighter that we join with Sid's family to remember the man, to mourn his passing and to express our love and our sympathy to Gladys, his wife, and to all of his family on this sad occasion.

To his son Gordon, his grandsons Lee, Tony and Darren, to his great grand-daughter Emma and his great-grandson Joshua.

To his brother Stan and his sisters Lily and Rosie.

To all of them – we want you to know that we share your loss.

There are, I am sure, many comrades here who will have their own personal memories of their association with Sid over the years.

A contact either through his activeness with his own Union, the TGWU, or in the wider political activities of the Trade Union and Labour Movement.

Whatever your recollections are, I am confident that there will be no dissent when I say that whoever Sid met – whatever position they held – you knew exactly where you stood in Sid's estimation.

On any issue – he never minced words – he was forthright in all of his opinions and he expressed them in the language of a Cockney – you were left in no doubt at all as to whether he considered you to be right or wrong on that issue. He gave it to you straight, but he never uttered a word of criticism about anyone that he was not prepared to say in their presence.

I first met Sid 35 years ago when I was a Shop Steward at Ford Motor Company during the early Union struggles. Our friendship grew over those years as I moved from Local Officer to Regional Secretary and to my present position. They were years during which we had many differences between us, but they were differences expressed between friends and my regard and respect for him was never in question.

Sid's life began in the East End, Bethnell Green area of London on 23rd June 1911.

His maternal grandparents had left Russia to settle in England. His mother had married an English Jew and when Sid was born they took him to a new life in America.

But when the First World War clouds gathered, Sid's father brought him back to England and when his father joined the Army, Sid lived with his grandmother's family until his mother returned.

During his life he was to return to America again when he was 15, but only stayed for three years and when he came home again he began his working life as a London Cab Driver, involved in Union activities within the 1/504 and 1/230 branches and as Chairman of the Cab Trade Committee and he began his political life as an active member of the British Communist Party.

Sid worked, at one time, as driver and bodyguard to Harry Pollitt, General Secretary of the Communist Party.

Whilst within the TGWU, Sid fought against Deakinism and in particular the bans and proscriptions which had been imposed against Communists holding office.

Throughout that period Sid refused to sign any declaration – he refused to leave his Party and only when the ban was lifted was Sid able to serve as a member of the GEC of his Union, which he did as Territorial Representative of Region One during the 1970s.

During the Second World War, Sid served in the Army – which he used to recall with humour. On one occasion, when he was having his teeth examined, the Army dentist looked surprised and Sid asked if anything was wrong with his teeth – the Dentist assured him his teeth were sound – but he said "On your Army pay book you are stamped as Jewish and yet you have blue eyes?"

Sid's humour came to the fore, he said "Maybe that's because the Cossacks could run faster than my grandmother! Although I am a Jew, I follow no religion at all."

In truth, colleagues, Sid's religion was to work in the interests of all people, regardless of their race, colour, or creed.

During the last decade, Sid found it difficult to hold back the anger and frustration that he felt at the plight of working people – the unemployment – the homelessness – the dismantling of the welfare state – and the anti-Union attacks – but his solutions to these problems were never motivated by revenge nor malice.

They were based on his belief that people require a system of care in the community – for the elderly, the sick and disabled – help from those who have to those who need, young or old.

Sid died before the 1991 Labour Party Conference – and I know there were issues on which he would have fundamentally disagreed.

But there was a commitment given there, in words that would have been dear to Sid's heart. Those words were:

"That in a civilised society the best off minority must pay their fair share to meet the needs of the majority. That is not the politics of envy it is the ethics of a community".

Sid would agree.

In the preparation for the official "History of the TGWU", the authors spoke to Sid whose family knowledge of the London Cab trade, including his fathers' experiences, reached back to Edwardian times.

Sid recalled his days as a Cabby – that was for Volume One and Sid is quoted in that book. On Cab life, Sid said except for the occasional wedding or Christmas time, the only people who could afford to ride in Cabs were the rich folks.

You then came into contact with the worst elements of capitalism, directly.

If you work in a factory – you are one of many – you know there is an employer – but it's a unit – a company.

But when you get a man or a woman who has no thought about cost, merely about your behaviour towards them, it changes your regard for them – whether your forelock is long enough for you to pull or not.

And I believe that was the reason why we had something in excess of 120 members of the London Cab Section who were members of the C.P., which was a high figure by ratio than in almost any other industry.

Had Sid remained with us there was so much that he lived through in our Union and the Movement, that he could have contributed to the work of Volume II, from the Amalgamation to the Deakin era, and Volume III to the present time.

I cannot remember a protest or any Trade Union lobby or demonstration that took place where Sid was not there in support of others, be it Ban the Bomb, March for Jobs Grunwick, 1971 Industrial Relations Bill, Wapping, Miners Strike.

I can remember that I took my son of ten on a march with Sid and when my son was 35 he too marched with Sid in support of unilateral nuclear disarmament. The movement can ill afford to lose his like.

I shall miss him, as others will, but I have some fond memories of him to recall in future years.

The time with him when I was a Steward, with much to learn about the Union. My time as Regional Secretary when Sid received the Union's highest award at Woodberry, the TGWU Gold Medal. When the Metropolitan Police sent a Representative to honour him,

the time when my mother played the piano for Sid and we recorded him singing my Yiddisha Mama.

His 1/161 Branch Meetings – Secretary until the end – and sadly the last day of his life when I was with him in the morning and we spoke of many things.

I think the words of the song played as we entered this Chapel (*Sinatra's "I did it my way"*) are as applicable to Sid Easton as to any other man, because throughout his life he DID do it his way.

Sid and I both shared the same view regarding burials and, for another comrade, many years ago I wrote a verse that Sid liked and I would like to close with those words to the memory of a great comrade, a great Socialist and Trade Unionist.

**No grief, no shallow tears to mark my fall
Neither to Priest nor solomn sermon do I aspire
No grave to conscience prick nor duty call
Just one small corner of a comrades heart
Is all that I desire.**

Well, colleagues – Sid Easton will always have that corner in our hearts and we will cherish the memories that are left with us of Sid and many others in our Movement.

On behalf of Gladys and family, I thank each and everyone of you for your being here today, for paying your tribute by your presence, to the memory of a good comrade.

Would you now please stand to pay your last respects and farewell.

Sid Easton, a fighter whose heart was as big as his fame.

SID EASTON 1911-1991



"THE BALLAD OF JOE HILL"

I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night
Alive as you and me
Says I "but Joe you're ten years dead"
"I never died", says he.

"In Salt Lake City, Joe" said I
Him standing by my bed,
"They framed you on a murder charge"
Says Joe "but I ain't dead".

"The copper bosses killed you, Joe,
They shot you, Joe", says I
"Takes more than guns to kill a man"
Says Joe "I didn't die".

And standing there as big as life
And smiling with his eyes
Says Joe "What they can never kill
Went on to organise."

"From San Diego up to Maine
In every mine and mill
Where workers strike and organise
It's there you'll find Joe Hill"

I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night
Alive as you and me
Says I "but Joe you're ten years dead"
"I never died", says he.



Sid Easton shaking hands with The Prince of Wales at Buckingham Palace in June 1977. Sid was part of the London Cab Trade Delegation in the year of the Queens Silver Jubilee.

"WHY IS LIFE LIKE THAT ..." an Oral history by Sid Easton

I suppose you could call me a Londoner, through and through. I was born on November 23rd 1911 in Shoreditch and then lived in Bethnell Green and then Walworth. I went to Honeywell Road school in Battersea. My mum and dad ran a grocery shop for a while, but it didn't do too well. So in 1913 we left for the USA.

Mum was pregnant when war broke out in 1914 and gave birth to her third child in December. Dad and myself eventually left America, him holding my hand, in 1915 as he returned to join the British army. Mum travelled back with the younger children later. So my first years were eventful and only seemed to settle down when Dad was discharged from the army and came for us in Weymouth, where we were staying at the time.

Both parents had, as with any child, different influences. My mother was long lived, she died aged 86. But my father died shortly after he was 57. Oddly, both were died-in-the-wool Tories. I suppose Dad's membership of the army conditioned much of his thinking at the time.

One of my earliest memories is illustrative of how I had already developed a strong sense of indignation at injustice. In 1919 or 1920, when my father came out of the army and I was eight or nine years of age, I was playing one Sunday morning in Fieldgate Street outside a public house, with a group of kids including two little girls. A man came along, he had only one leg and one eye. He was on crutches and had other serious injuries received in the war. I was very struck by a big piece of cardboard he had which indicated that he was prepared to take any job offered to him. It struck me more than I realised. At Sunday dinner - it was roast beef, available to us only because Dad worked regularly as a taxi driver before the army and after - my father stood carving the meat. He had a fetish about carving it thinly. This Sunday morning I sat in his chair and asked him to tell me why the Prince of Wales did nothing - except perhaps be born - whilst I'd seen a man that very morning begging for half pennies and pennies. "Why is life like that?" I demanded. Knives and forks clattered!! For my father considered my doubts and questions disloyal. Nonetheless, before he died I had him converted to being a supporter of progressive causes. Not my mother though. Never could shift her!

That Sunday lesson was the first political thought I had and I still go though life asking, "why is life like that?" Such a critical, doubting outlook is important, but the other characteristic which shaped my life was a certain toughness. I was a street kid. Looking back now, I have lived in two major cities, the experience of which has influenced me enormously. London, where I was born, and on two separate occasions I lived in New York. Once for two years as a child and again as a teenager for three years, from when I was 16. This second time I lived in the fruit market area in Harlem, where I became well acquainted with many a street gang. In London, I was involved with people like Jack Spot and Morrie Goldstein, whose nickname was "Blue Ball" - because he didn't know what end of the snooker cue to hold and tore the green baize! He was a tough character. All these experiences and people helped toughen me up.

There was one fellow called "Solly the Turk" who was really the hardest person I've ever come across, both before and after he lost a leg. Then there was Sammy Joseph, who eventually got arrested for the London Airport gold bullion robbery. He was a real hard nut. Hell of a nice guy though. The one thing that separated me from them was that they expressed their lives in trying to make themselves rich. For me it has always been clear that our aim ought to be to make things easier for the next generation. In a way all this experience was my apprenticeship.

Being a bit of a hard nut, I wasn't worried about what might happen to me, although I did start out in a trade. The first job I had was when I started as an apprentice to a cabinet maker in 1925. I worked the week from eight o'clock on the Monday morning until about half past four on the Friday. All other evenings I didn't finish until half past seven. When the boss gave me my wages, they were in an envelope. There was nothing written on the outside except my name. When I peered into it, there was three shillings and sixpence in the envelope.

All week I had been making glue and gluing joints and carting barrowloads of timber backwards and forwards to the sawmills where the legs were shaped. When I counted out how little there was in the envelope, I said to the governor, "You'd have to pay this much to a man for at least one day's carrying timber." He was belligerent, "If you don't bloody well like it then you know what you can do." "Governor," I said, "I don't particularly like it, but I tell you what I can do." "What's that?" he asked. So I showed him. I slung a right hander on him! I then walked off, leaving the three and sixpence in the open envelope.

It was not easy at that time to find jobs. But I worked in a cab garage, cleaning the vehicles and greasing. The garage was situated under some railway arches, just before the junction of Cable Street and Dock Street, and had entrances either side of the arches. There was a bridge across the road, as you came down Gardner's Corner. Shortly before the bridge on the right was an open space, which led to the entrance to two or three arches. This side was closed to the public. Well, I worked there until the boss was discovered operating a business on the closed side receiving stolen cars, altering and then selling them. Why he bothered, I don't know, because it was then possible to buy second hand cars for buttons!

The next job I had after that was in a cardboard box-making factory, this would be towards the end of 1925, and that was when I first joined the TGWU. I was there until we went on strike in 1926 during the General Strike. I had been very influenced by George Lansbury, a councillor and MP for the area. Lansbury use to tour his constituency regularly and was very well-known in the community. He lived on Bow Road and I used to work near Bow Church, so was acquainted with him.

[Editor's note: George Lansbury (1859-1940) Poplar councillor 1903-40, MP for Bow and Bromley 1910, 1922-40. Lansbury's biographer notes that "the seat was his whatever he did. He still patrolled the constituency at national and local elections, in a procession headed by a large stuffed black cat with a red neck-ribbon, and escorted by a flying corps of children chanting:

"Vote, vote, vote for Mister Lansbury poke old Someone in the eye" The someone being the name of the Tory candidate. But this was only because electors must be treated with courtesy, and because he enjoyed it immensely; he could have won the seat henceforth (i.e. from 1922) without stepping out of his house at 39 Bow Rd." Raymond Postgate *"The Life of Lansbury"* (1951) p220.]

When I went back to work after the strike, they wouldn't take me back. Not that I was the only one, there were others on strike as well, but not very many.

I then discovered that it was almost impossible to get a job. In the end I did manage to get one in the markets, but that didn't last. I had odd jobs all over the place and in early 1927 decided to apply for an immigrant's visa to enter the United States for the second time. The first time I'd been a baby of course and had travelled on my parent's passports. This time I went on my own.

I got a job working for an uncle in a hosiery dye works producing men's socks. I worked there from the Monday after I arrived and didn't finish until the mid-day on the Friday that the boat for England left New York harbour - at eight o'clock in the evening in fact. I left America not because I had employment problems. Actually, my mother came over to get me because she had received all sorts of mis-information about what I'd been up to! My knack of finding all the hard nuts gave some of my relatives over there the impression that I was going to finish up as a gangster. But whilst they were tough guys they were still hell-of-a-nice blokes!

Funnily enough, whilst I was in the States, I used to play semi-pro soccer football for the "Bronx Workers". I'm sure they had some link with the progressive movement, but I never discovered it. One day we were playing football in Central Park and a man and a woman came along on horseback. Well, they looked pretty well-heeled and they stood and watched us. She said in a derisory tone, "What the hell-kind-of-a game is this they're playing?" I turned to her and said, "I don't expect you to know, but it's some sort of foreign game that those crazy English learned how to play and are now teaching the world. I hope that helps you know better about the game. . . . Goodbye." Then I quickly turned my back and got on with the game..

Strangely, this football experience in the States surfaced again with odd connections in later life. I met a man called Rio in 1950 in Brest, France, he had been in the States when I was there. I knew his son who was a reporter for the progressive newspaper "Ouest Matin" and he invited me over to France for a holiday with his parents. I got on extremely well with the old man and when I came back from this holiday it was to work with Pollitt.

Another sporting connection surfaced when I was Secretary to the Transport Advisory Committee of the CPGB [Communist Party of Great Britain], after Pollitt retired [General Secretary of the CPGB 1929-39 and 1941-56] when in that capacity, I met Hughie Reed, a docks officer in Belfast, only to discover that we had both played football for different teams at the same time in the States. Hughie was a hard nut, a big guy. If he had trouble with dockers, it was not unknown for him to grab them by the scruff of their necks and bang their heads together.

My experiences in the United States really helped me reach a considered political choice. An example of this was what happened to a lad who used to live in the same little alleyway as myself in London before he emigrated to the USA. He was the original pal of Jack Spott - although he was not a terribly good fighter - and his name was Conan. Well, he contacted me and asked if I could get him a job- which I did. Now this was just after the first Wall Street crash, but before the second one. Things had picked up and seemed to be going really well right up to the second crash. By that stage, I'd left New York and was back in London, when I heard that the people I'd worked with had lost everything, down to homes and furniture and families as well as jobs.

One of the departmental managers with whom I'd been quite friendly fell badly. He used to go away every summer. He had a reasonably good job, with a home and a car - so he used to stay in Far Rockaway (Long Island), a seaside resort outside New York, the whole summer, commuting backwards and forwards whilst his wife and family stayed at the seaside. They once invited me down for two weeks. When the second crash came, he lost the lot. The extent to which ordinary people, who hadn't really the wherewithal to be involved in stocks and shares, lost out due to the crash caused as much suffering as anything else. I observe with regret that this is something which is now happening, to a greater or lesser extent in Britain. Back then, the crash and its impact was one of the main reasons why I came back to Britain. We didn't think things could stay as they were and I wasn't really certain whether I would be staying for good when I got back. In 1930, I could have re-entered the States on my old visa, if I returned within a certain period. But when the second crash came, it decided me against returning.

I now heard that Conan had got put out of work. Now he had a good voice and so decided to scrounge his way across America to Hollywood to try to get into films. He actually ended up walking most of the way back to New York - that's three thousand miles. He came in with no soles to his shoes, no shirt and a pair of ragged trousers. The last I heard of him, he became a merchant seaman in the war and then captain of a ship.

In 1934 I went on the Knowledge and by early 1935 I got my licence. I had the example of being a taxi driver from my father who started driving a cab in 1907, although I didn't take it up until I was desperate for work. I joined the Communist Party in this period, in fact very soon after I got my licence. My father's brother had a friend called Jim Borders who was a Party member and a London taxi driver. His wife was called the "modern Portia" in a role she played in a campaign over a housing site. He eventually became a barrister, after having been a cab driver - I met him in later life after he had qualified. After I began to listen to the arguments he put forward, Jim invited me to a meeting in mid-1935 addressed by Harry Pollitt. It was held in a hall in Farringdon Street and was chaired by Jim. As I listened to Pollitt, I thought "This is what I've been waiting for." So I joined the Communist Party. I was of course also a member of the Cab Section of the TGWU by this time and was, from then on, a working cab driver up until the time I joined the army.

There was a certain point at which everyone of a certain age or with a certain initial was called up, firstly to register, then to have a medical and finally to be called into the army.

I registered at the appropriate time and place and similarly had my medical. As I was coming out of my medical someone said, "What's the name of your employer?" "My wife," I said, half humorously. Now strictly speaking, I wasn't an employee of anyone, since I received no earnings as such, only commission. So I "blinded them with science", using the term "bailee" [*Editor's note: French for "carrier"*] By mid 1941 I still hadn't been called up, as they were still trying to work out whether I was an employee or not.

At this time I had an unpleasant tangle with the law, it was an event heavily tinged with anti-Semitism. I had a job carting finished dresses in my cab. I waited whilst they loaded up and then I took them where I was directed. I carried string and I used to put it in one side through an open window and take it out through the other side and tie it to the roof. Then they would pile dresses on hangers from the string inside the cab. So much so that the guy who sat in the back of the cab was completely invisible to anyone who didn't know he was in there.

On this job one day, I was going down Dalston Lane, a viciously anti-semitic area. Nowadays it is viciously racist against Bangla Deshis. The traffic lights were just turning red as I got to them, so I pulled up. I wasn't conscious of cutting anyone up. I was in such a good mood, once I'd finished this job I was going home to have an early finish. All of a sudden, I got the feeling that someone was trying to come over to my nearside, but couldn't do so as the kerb was in the way. I looked to see what was happening, when someone came over.

"I've a good mind to punch you in the fucking jaw for cutting me up," he told me. I looked at him, "Look, mate," I replied. "I wasn't aware that I cut anybody up. If I did, I'm sorry. But be careful how you go, don't threaten me, because I've got a weak heart," I cheeked him. "I'll give you a weak heart," he said and swung a punch at me. I opened the big half door of the cab and swung it out as he shaped up. He was forced to step back and so didn't get anywhere near me. I thought I'd let him see how big I was, because I've a tendency when I'm driving to slump down a bit! So, I got out of the cab and said, "Now look, you've had two goes. Why don't you get back into your cab.." (he was actually driving a lorry) "...and when the lights change we'll go. I've told you, I didn't intend to cut you up. Whatever I did was done quite unconsciously. I'm sorry, but what else do you want? Blood?"

"You fucking Jew bastard," he growled and slung one at me. He was a mug, because I could see it coming a million miles away. So I just stopped it and hit him myself. He hit the deck - he fell flat on his face. There he laid. It was unfortunate for me, because immediately I hit him, my arms were grabbed by two men. They turned out to be plain clothed policemen. They stood waiting for the lorry driver to get up, but I'd done too good a job on him and he remained unconscious. Leaving him on the floor they took me to the police station, riding the few yards on the side runners of the cab. My passenger was still in the back and all this time was hidden by the hanging dresses. Well, I didn't say anything about him!

These policemen knew what they were about alright, they didn't care that I was defending myself... it was Jew versus Gentile. In the charge room they prepared to do me

for grievous bodily harm. One of them says, "It's a good job this wasn't at night, because we'd have done you." Meaning of course that they would have beat me up under cover of darkness. "Look, I'll tell you something," I replied. "If this had been at night the pair of you would have been on the floor and out. But I'll let you away with it. If you feel like it, I'll prove it to you."

By this time a superior officer arrived and began questioning me. He sent the two policemen who had arrested me out for the body. The knocked out lorry driver had come round before the police could get back to the scene of the crime, although they did have a note of the number of the lorry. The driver nonetheless had pushed off without knowing what had happened. Whilst the passenger in my cab emerged from his hiding place and arrived at the station to confirm that I had been a victim not an assailant.

So they were unable to make the GBH charge stick and resorted to charging me only with assault.

As I was leaving the station, the two policemen who had arrested me started whistling "Deutschland Uber Alles" - remember this was 1941! I asked the policeman in charge if he knew what they were whistling and told him that they also had reckoned they would have beaten me up in the backyard if it had been night-time. I told him that they could do that as far as I was concerned, and lock the door, for there was only going to be one person knocking on the door, the other two would only be fit for burying. He said, "You're loosing your temper."

I replied, "What do you mean, 'loosing my temper' - there's a war on, didn't you know! They're whistling the enemy's song and you're talking to me about loosing my temper. I thought this was something you could be in prison for." Eventually I had to leave the station, my customer was still anxious to deliver his dresses!

In court, both me and the lorry driver were bound over to keep the peace and had to pay a two shillings fine. The policeman who took the money off us said that we had both acted stupidly and that we ought to shake hands, but the other guy refused although I told the policeman that I didn't want to fight in the first place. So the copper said, "If I turned round the other way, do you want to give him another one!" That was funny, but I said it was too easy and in any case it was no use banging somebody you didn't really have to be afraid of.

After appearing in court, I was called up to the Public Carriage Office, which was rather enlightening! I could have lost my licence of course. I had to go to Lambeth Road, where the PCO then was. Waiting to be called for some considerable time, I complained that I'd been asked to come at a particular time. I told them that if I wasn't called within ten minutes I was leaving and another appointment would have to be made. Even then, if I was treated shabbily again, I would walk out again.

When I got to see the PCO official I was full of the joys of Spring. "Good morning," I said very chirpily. "What are you so happy about?" he demanded. "Because it's a nice day ... and I feel happy." I told him. "Do I have to apologise for that?" "Have you got

any reason to be happy?" he asked sternly. "Eh?" I acted daft. "You've got no reason to be happy," he said. "Why not?" I countered.

"Now, why shouldn't I be happy? What am I supposed to be unhappy about?" "Don't you know?" he repeated. "Look, Governor. Before you got the goodness to play silly games, I haven't the time. You can either ask me to leave my licence here or if you don't do that, I'm going to push off. Unless you're going to tell me what I'm here for, otherwise I'll come back when you will. In the meantime, I don't want any more stupid questions."

Of course he was fuming, but I started to walk out. He called me back, "You want any advice?" he said. Annoyed, I told him swiftly, "Don't start that all over again."

"Put your licence on the table," he said. "Here's my licence...if that's all you've got to say, I'm going straight over to the gas works." The nearest gas works to Lambeth Bridge was the House of Commons, and he knew what I meant alright. "I'm going to see my MP. If you think you can push me around, you've as much chance as a snowball in hell." "Who do you think you are talking to," he asked. "You, as far as I'm concerned," I spoke as directly as he did. "You ought to be doing your fighting in the army. Have you got TB?" he asked me. "Of course not," I told him. "But if you think it's so important why don't you volunteer, because there are facilities for that. I was asked to register - I registered. I was asked to go for a medical - I went for a medical. I don't intend to listen to you saying there's some special reason for me to go and not you. When they send for me to be called up, I'll go."

After that he backed down "You'll have to promise me you won't do it again," he said So I told him, "Look, the only thing I can promise you, is that if anyone does or says the same thing to me again as that lorry driver, as long as I'm able...and that's a promise ..they'll get the same. if that's not good enough for you -good day to you." Eventually, he simply told me not to do it again and let me out!! But within two weeks I was in the army.

The decision to impose a ban on Communists holding office in the TGWU took place at the BDC in 1949. It was also then decided to hold a Rules Conference in 1950 and thereafter every six years, taking the power away from the BDC, which had carried out that function hitherto.

When the bans were imposed, a lobby of the September 1949 General Executive Council was held. Papworth and Bill Jones were on the GEC - Papworth was also on the General Council of the TUC and Jones on the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the GEC. They held a meeting on the steps of the church outside the union's Central Office in Smith Square as a demonstration and I attended this as an ordinary active member.

I was furious at what was happening and found myself getting more and more angry. We all decided to go into the building and try to see Arthur Deakin, then the General Secretary. We made a hell of a lot of noise and went into Transport House by the side entrance. At that time the bank was on the first floor and there was a bigger entrance than

there now is to Transport Hall. A crowd of us poured in shouting and calling Deakin names. Like the rest of them I was angry and bitter with him. I didn't have any position in the union then, so I didn't personally have anything at stake. But the principle concerned me. It wasn't right for them to ban me or anyone else. Deakin called us scum, so I dived over and grabbed him by his throat. There was a policeman there at this stage and he intervened. I said a few well chosen words, I told him to take his hands off me. "I pay rent for this place. I never invited you, so fuck off. If you don't go, I'll throw you out." I think he decided that I could do it because he went saying that I was a naughty boy, or words to that effect!

I used to go regularly to the union branch - the 1/504 . . . it's no longer in existence, as a Cab branch anyway. There were then eight branches in the Cab Section, which had its own delegate conference and there were five delegates to the BDC.

At the end of May there was an increase in cab fares from 9d to a shilling. The fare was 9d for the first two-thirds of a mile and 3d for every third after that. Or to put it another way, that's 1/- a mile except for the first mile when it was 9d. There was no facility to easily change meters, so advisory stickers had to be placed on the cabs. Unfortunately passengers rarely paid much attention to them and they were never the best method of advertising fare changes.

Now it was quite common for people to take a taxi for a short journey, so you often got a 3d tip if someone had a 9d trip. Once the increase took place however, you didn't get a tip on a mile long trip, because the fare was a shilling and there was no change. This so enraged cab drivers that motions went through the branches and there was a mass meeting called at the Holborn Hall, at the corner of Gray's Inn Road.

The hall was completely full, it was supposed to take six hundred people, but on this occasion there were between two and three thousand people at least. People were on the window ledges and the rafters. The stairs were full. A room behind the stage was full. Every inch of space was crowded. The whole area around was completely occupied with empty cabs, their drivers being in the hall. Sam Henderson had been the National Secretary of the Passenger Services Group. He had been the first to be appointed directly from a lay member position to becoming a senior officer. Twice he had that happen to him! For after he lost his job for being in the Communist Party, he was able to return after he had left the Party over Hungary. Originally he had been a Glasgow tram driver. Because of the bans, Sam was going to lose his job. He had a contract which didn't expire until the end of May, so from the beginning of June, Frank Coyle took over as National Secretary and thus had the job of handling this meeting.

A discussion took place, members put their views. Jim Francis, the Cab Section Officer, put the case of the leadership very ably. A vote was taken and despite Francis it was overwhelming for strike action. Coyle then decided to intervene and did so very pompously. He introduces himself as the new National Secretary and tells us that he has plenary powers in his pocket. That's to say that the executive of the union had authorised, through the General Secretary, official sanction to strike if events proved it necessary.

Having listened to all the arguments, he told us, he had decided against giving up the plenary powers.

Well, can you imagine the pandemonium which erupted. Eventually one old fellow, he was a tough little sod, with progressive views (his son is still active in the Cab Section), caught the temporary abatement of the outcry at just the right moment. "Brothers! Brothers! I have a point to make," he spoke up. The crowd couldn't see who said this, but there was an extended lull followed by general calls for him to make his point. "Above all we are democrats and we are all entitled to our opinions," he began. "If Brother Coyle has the opinion that he's taken here today, then he's got every right to have that opinion." Of course, rumblings began at this. "But you let the silly sod try and get out of here!!!"

You never saw anything like it. I swear Coyle blanched. I don't know any other word for it, he went so white. He was flabbergasted. There was no way he was going to get out. Every possible exit was smothered with people. It took only a very little time for him to decide that discretion was the better part of valour and grant plenary powers.

So we had a strike, which was to some degree successful, but it could have been even more successful. We had decided that we would let anyone work if we could, where particular garages signed an agreement to pay the 40% we were asking for instead of the 33½%. We had 5,000 or so members at the time, 70-80% of the available drivers then. A number of firms did agree to do what we were asking, but pressure was put on Francis to settle the strike and we were manoeuvred into accepting 37½% as a compromise. [Editor's note: TGWU GEC Minutes record that plenary powers were granted to the General Secretary to call a strike over a 33½ to 40% commission claim, "in view of the fact that cab drivers were not legally recognised as workmen, but are bailees, the principles and procedures laid down under the conditions of Employment and National Arbitration Order No 1305 did not apply" (May 15th 1950). In June the GEC recorded that 2,600 members were involved, with 600 joining "subsequent to the decision to discontinue plying for hire" (June 7th 1950). Whilst the Finance and General Purposes Committee noted the 37½% rate along with recognition of union garage committees as the basis for the settlement (June 29th 1950).] There were then far more directly employed drivers and fewer self-employed owner drivers. A combination of Francis's antics and those of Jim Bradley, the section's organiser, who was far less capable than Francis, along with the competition between a variety of organisations for the allegiance of drivers has led to the horrible position we have today, with vastly reduced membership of the TGWU amongst London cab drivers. This despite there being two or three times the number of cabbies plying for hire now. At the last garage I was at, I negotiated 45% of the meter fee for day-time workers and 50% for night-time (that is to say pm) workers.

I still hold my cab licence of course, but the last time I drove a cab was when the Prince of Wales married Diana. I went to work on a cab to keep myself occupied and out of the way of the TV that day. I couldn't imagine myself watching the church service, but I took pretty good takings that day.

At the time of the big strike, I worked for a firm called Coupe Motors that had an office in Sloane Square and a garage off Holden Place. A fortnight before the strike I went to the firm to try to boost the 15 or 17 in the the union. They had never had anything to do with Communists. A man called Bayard, who was in charge of the repair section of the garage, became manager. Eventually he was sacked for fiddling.

I went on holiday to France after the strike, where as I've said I met my old footballing chum, and pretty soon after started the job with Pollitt, as his driver-cum-bodyguard. To take this up, I had to resign from Coupe Motors of course. So I called a meeting of members to elect a replacement shop steward. The company tried to get the bloke who was elected in my place to agree to blacklisting me for future employment, but to his credit he refused.

Getting the job of Harry Pollitt's bodyguard was, as you might expect, anything but straightforward. I used to live in Chiswick and possessed a big black labrador, a beautiful animal - but he would fight anything on four legs. I had a lot of trouble keeping him off other animals - he was a democrat, you see. he didn't care what size they were. I don't know whether he took after me or not! No matter what time I arrived home, I had to take this dog for a six or seven mile walk.

Well, one day, I was walking him along the pathway which runs by the Gaddesby Road railway station, off the High Road at Chiswick when I met an old friend from the days when we were kids in the streets, Lou Kenton who had been in the International Brigade. Now I had been building a bit of a reputation in the Party speaking publicly. So it was Lou who broached the subject of working for Harry. *[Editor's note: In 1949, the Chinese Peoples' Liberation Army was achieving decisive victory in China and Chiang Kai-shek's forces were on the run, when an accidental encounter with British forces was inflamed into a serious clash. The CPLA crossed the Yang Tze river and began a rapid advance into the south and west of China. As they crossed the river near Nanking, their supporting artillery became involved in a clash with the British sloop "Amethyst", then on her way to Nanking. Other British ships which came up the river to assist the crippled vessel were fired on and driven back with some loss. It was believed that the British were assisting the fleeing Kuomintang forces to repel the crossing. Naturally the British government made much of the incident and a mood of jingoism was fanned into hysteria by the popular press in Britain.]*

In 1949, during the Amethyst situation, I was with three other Party lads - all ex-servicemen - on the green outside Chiswick, holding a meeting. The crowd started shouting "String him up! String him up!" at the speaker. The second speaker who got up, a teacher, was much more mild than the previous speaker and one of the hecklers went for him. I was the chairman, so I grabbed the speaker off the platform and told the heckler straight, "If there's going to be a punch-up, it's going to be between you and me. If that's what you want, just say so and we'll arrange it. It won't take long."

No doubt the reputation such events generated played a part in my being chosen to guard Harry. Presumably my political steadfastness was a factor also.

Lou Kenton lived in a big house, converted into flats, opposite Chiswick station. When I met him that day, he was just parking his car in the station forecourt. He said that he wanted a word with me..."How would you like to be Harry Pollitt's chauffeur and bodyguard?" he asked. I said that I didn't mind the idea. "You know that you'd have to travel a lot with him?" Lou warned me. But I said that I could think of a lot worse people to travel with than Harry Pollitt! Lou pressed me, "Would you like the job?" I told him that if the Party wanted me, I was ready. I went to work as usual the next day to be informed that a Mr Kerrigan had phoned for me. Kerrigan, of course, was the Party's National Organiser at the time and Lou Kenton had obviously acted quickly.

Kerrigan was a great guy, but he was one of those people for whom life was very easy and simple. This is what he wanted to do and this is what he did - that was his way of going about things. He didn't see the finer niceties or difficulties of life. It was just a case of "this is what you have to do and all you have to do is to remind yourself" He was asked to go to Spain twice with the International Brigades. His role in saving Harry Pollitt, when he got kicked by a belligerent crowd over the "Amethyst" affair testifies to his single-mindedness and resourcefulness. In fact it was as a result of that experience that I got taken on, it being decided that Harry needed special protection.

So, when I got home from work on the Monday, after I had met Lou, I had a message to phone Mr Kerrigan. I actually got through to Reuben Falber, in Kerrigan's Organisation Department at the Party's central office in King Street. He made an appointment for me to see Kerrigan at two o'clock the next day. Shortly before then on the following day, I stopped in Bedford Street, adjacent to King Street, with my cab and had a cup of tea and a roll. I had to explain to Kerrigan, when I got to see him, my background. I responded to a number of queries he put to me concerning consequences for the Party's organisation if I took the job.

The elected secretary of the Chiswick Borough party organisation was a school teacher named Len Morris who had come back out of the army to find that his wife, who was a rather pretty woman, had gone off with somebody and he was completely devastated with it. So I was asked by the comrades, particularly G.C.T. Giles *[Editor's note: a prominent educationalist]* and his wife, if I'd keep the organisation going. So I had become Acting Secretary and this position needed dealing with.

Then Kerrigan said, "We can pay you six pounds or six pounds and five shillings a week. Which is it to be?" The absurdity of it amused me, so I burst out laughing. He asked me why I was laughing, so I told him. "I've been to work today in my cab. The highest figure you're offering me is six pounds five. I've just earned considerably more than that today. I'll leave it to you to make the momentous decision as to whether it's six pounds or six pounds and five." The money didn't worry me, but the job did!

One of the demands that I made was that I wasn't going to be a nursemaid to a car. Kerrigan warned me of the dangers involved...that I would have to put myself between a gun and Comrade Pollitt if an assassination was attempted. "I've never actually been a gangster," I told him, "but I know the workings of a gangster and I understand what it

means much more clearly than you have any idea - please believe me. I know what I'm taking on, but I can't think of anyone I'd rather do it more for than Harry Pollitt."

So that was it - they gave me six pounds five!! I started work on the Wednesday and I had to go to meet Pollitt at Euston railway station. The car was a 29 horse power Wolsey, registration BMJ6 and it had belonged to the Chief Constable of Bedfordshire. George Matthews's father, who ran a farm there, had bought it. Only a couple of days before I had been a taxi driver, reasonably well known in the Cab Section, so I attracted some attention with this private car - with cabbies looking at me wondering what I was up to.

Pollitt didn't know me at all then. But of course he was well known to me. So I grabbed him off the train and steered him, despite his initial uncertainty, into the car. Once he saw the car he seemed more at ease. From then on we developed a very good relationship and I was very pleased and happy to do the job. In fact, working at Party Headquarters was important to me in so many ways. It was where I met my life-long partner, and comrade, Gladys, and as a result I have a son, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren who are all dear to me.

The issuing of the British Road to Socialism, the Party's new strategic programme, in 1951 stands out in my recollection. A quarter of a million copies of the BRS were sold. Willie Gallagher [*Editor's note: the Party's MP for West Fife*] and Harry Pollitt spoke at every major town and city in Britain and I had the good fortune to go with them on their grand tour - something not taken up with later editions of the BRS.

I never agreed with those who always differed with the programme and certainly, listening so much to Pollitt, I was clearer about the fact that there were other ways to revolution. Some people would pick out isolated words and say that we meant other than what we said. Pollitt would handle this well. He'd point to the fact that the warring factions of World War One united in an attempt to overthrow the Russian Revolution. It would be so here. As long as the right to vote for something and get what you voted for applies, we should accept that. But if a reaction against a progressive government took place, we would forcibly defend the people's choice.

Before the war we had a number of Jewish people supporting and joining the Party, arising from the magnificent work of people like Phil Piratin, who was elected as a Communist MP in the East End, joining Willie Gallagher in Parliament. [*Editor's note: Piratin was MP for Mile End from 1945-50.*] After the war, the Jewish people were alright, until they started to fight for the establishment of Israel. Once the Labour Party agreed to it, they forgot the number of times that British troops had been instructed to shoot them down as they were coming off the boats. The fact is that Britain took upon itself to give away a country which wasn't theirs to give.

During the aftermath of the events in Hungary in 1956, I had to act as bodyguard to John Gollan, who subsequently succeeded Pollitt as CPGB General Secretary. He had an appointment to hold a meeting at Cowes, in the Isle of Wight. We took the car to Southampton and then the boat to Cowes, where we were met by some local comrades, who took us to their house, where we freshened up after the journey.

Suddenly the lights went out - somebody had cut the main cable to the island and it was in darkness, with there being no electricity whatsoever. We got to the meeting place in a little school hall. There was a deathly hush all around as a hostile crowd greeted us. Like so many schools, there were very high barriers of wire mesh to stop balls from travelling outside. The steel bars at the top, from which the mesh hung were crowded with people. An argument ensued with the local comrades about what to do. In particular with the secretary of the branch, a little Scots fellow. I told him that I was responsible for Gollan's safety and would decide on our course of action, once I'd seen inside.

I was the proud possessor of a dark brown, fairly new Crombie overcoat, which I'd bought at Moss Brothers, opposite the Party's King Street headquarters, in a sale for £20 - a bargain. The then telephone operator at Party centre loaned me the money! I suppose it lent me a certain air. I marched into the hall and saw that a crowd was inside, complete with Hungarian banners. I swept through the lot of them out into the back school yard. The whole place was swarming with hostile people. Before anyone knew what was happening, I'd brushed past them all, reversed my steps and was out. Gollan was on the verge of coming in, so I grabbed him and wheeled him around. The branch secretary then became concerned about all the Labour Party contacts he had sitting in the hall waiting for the meeting. I told him to get them out and take Gollan with him, whilst I stayed. There was a lad there - a docker - who offered to stay with me.

We afterwards discovered that the people who had taken control of this school hall were Moseley's and were led by an ex-police sergeant. Eventually, after some delay, Gollan and the others got away, but this docker and myself were caught. The crowd didn't touch me, but the docker fell down - so they kicked him . . . until I stopped them. The crowd then demanded all the entrance money off me, which had been collected for the Party. I told them I hadn't got any, but actually the docker had got some. They demanded the money, but I said we would only turn it over to the police and obtain a receipt until it could be ascertained we were in our rights to keep the money.

So they started to march us to the police station. One of the mob kept diving in between myself and the docker, trying to separate us. He did it two or three times, until I got fed up with it and stuck up my hand to grab him by the throat and pushed his head back. I said to him, "If you don't promise me that you aren't going to do that anymore, I'm going to break your neck . . . and that way you'll be dead. I might get into trouble, I might not, but you'll be dead. So what do you want to do?" He promised me that he wouldn't do it again, so I let him down and we all marched to the police station, where we got a receipt for the disputed money. The ex-policeman who had led the mob was smiling all over his face.

The police then took us to an area where our people had gone. We just asked to be dropped in the general vicinity. We didn't ask them to go to the house of course. But we eventually found the others. I hadn't smoked for several months, but I needed one then alright! I suppose it was a reaction to the tension.

We went back for a daytime meeting some time later. I made sure we got to the meeting long before anyone else got in. I thought I had every place closed, but one skylight was

not completely locked and that led to a fracas. The local comrades and I agreed that I was to stand on the door checking people as they came in and tell them whether they could or could not enter. The ex-police sergeant appeared with a lot of people. I said to him and to one other, "You can come in and you can come in with him, the rest of you - sod off!" "You can't do that," he complained. "I've just done it," I told him. "You can either come in and sit down or get out of the way and let the people who we're letting in come on in. Now please yourself. Unless you really want to start trouble, and I'll have that with you, I owe you something." So he came in and sat down. Shortly after, the meeting started and Gollan began to speak. I was sitting in the hall, keeping an eye on the ex-police sergeant, waiting for him to stand up and start something. Now it appears that what happened was that they put a kid through the skylight, who then unlocked the door to admit the crowd. Fortunately, there was a narrow staircase and I saw the heads of them just as the mob was coming to platform level. Gollan was speaking and I didn't know anything about what was happening behind him, but I could see it. I jumped up on the platform, grabbed the first intruder by the arm and began to push him and the others down the stairs. One of them said, "You're hurting my arm." "If you open your mouth again, I'm going to pull your arm off and slap you in the face with it. Now get down them stairs," I told him roughly. "And as you go down, push everybody in front of you out of the door." I succeeded! They let me do it! I got them out. The lot! They crowded outside for a while, but eventually, realising that they weren't going to get in, they cleared off. Even so, it had been so well organised.

Of course we locked the window up, put a nail in it and carried on with the meeting. At the end, I said to the ex-sergeant, "So, you didn't succeed this time. I hope you take it as well as I did. Next time I come here, you can look for me. Because I'll look for you."

I didn't mind helping Gollan out, as on these occasions, but it was Harry who held my special affection. In my time with Harry, I met and saw a lot of real characters and stalwart comrades. Harry and I went to see Bert Neville at University College Hospital, when he was on the point of dying. Neville was a London taxi driver and in the First World War he had been a King and Country volunteer for the army, although at that stage he had no real politics. In 1917 he had volunteered to go to Russia as part of the British Interventionist forces. While he was there he met ordinary people, who explained to him what it was all about. This enlightenment helped to clarify his mind to such a degree that when he came back he joined the newly formed Communist Party. At the age of 37, he was one of the oldest members of the International Brigade in Spain. Kerrigan, who himself had been a soldier in the war, once told Neville out in Spain that he had a job for him, but not on active service - it was behind the lines. Bert retorted, "You'll do nothing of the kind. I came here to fight, even if I have to start with you." In the Second World War, he was shot down as a RAF pilot. Tragedy was - his family had given up on him, because of his militant Communism. So we went to give him company on his death bed. Harry's thoughtfulness in Neville's last hours was typical of the man. Pollitt was in every way a giant. Right from the very inception of the Russian Revolution he was there. He'd been a member of the BSP [*Editor's note: British Socialist Party, one of the main groups which formed the CPGB*] and had actually stopped a shipload of armaments on the "Jolly

George", bound for the Whites fighting against the Revolution. He wasn't the only one, but he played the major role. Harry was a delegate from the Boilermakers to the Labour Party conference through much of the 1920's and was present at the 1927 Conference, which was the last to allow Communists to be delegates to the Conference, representing affiliated organisations.

Without having all the facilities and abilities that Harry had, I've come to a conclusion about the situation in the Soviet Union. One could make an extremely good case that what Khrushchev said, in the particular manner in which he exposed the faults and crimes of Joe Stalin, did more to harm the International [Communist] Movement than to improve the position. We seem now further from unity and even the point at which we all agree is increasingly distant. Even the importance of the role of the Revolution in Russia is doubted by some.

If you take Mao Tse Tung, whatever you say about Maoism and the Gang of Four, that man was on the Long March for a thousand miles. [*Editor's note: The Long March was an epic migration of Chinese Communists. A Chinese Soviet Republic had been established in 1931 in Kiangsi Province. After three years of military combat with the Kuomintang forces, a march of 8,000 miles was undertaken to the far north-west of China, where a more strongly defended position was possible. The march was through very difficult terrain, thousands perished. The march was by no means simply the retreat of an army, but in a sense also a population move. Once settled in Yen-an, resistance to the Kuomintang was successful until 1937, when a truce to allow joint combat of the invading Japanese was agreed.*]

I was fortunate, on one occasion, to meet a woman who had slept with a rifle through the Long March. A more timid lass you could not have hoped to meet. Of course Mao saw himself as the successor to Stalin, as the leader of the Communist world. Yet what remained was the simple fact that the Soviet Revolution first established the workers' state, in the absence of any precedent to follow other than trial and error.

Of all the "Isms" that had ever existed, none had shown the way. Whilst Joe Stalin was responsible for a lot of things he should not have done, and rightly needs to be severely reprimanded by history for so doing, the fact remains that his leadership was decisive in the Second World War. In the words of Winston Churchill, the Soviets "tore the guts" out of the German Army. The battle of Stalingrad was the turning point of the war. That battle was fought on bodies, by bodies, on top of dead bodies . . . A human sacrifice to democracy. To deny the simple fact of Stalingrad is to deny the truth. Once the Soviets won, they went right through Europe and had they not reached an accommodation with their other allies, they could very easily have reached the Channel ports and nothing could have stopped them. Changing the name to Volgograd, it seems to me, denies the sacrifice and implies an imbalanced view of history. Harry's reaction to Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin was marked by the difficulty of accepting it, because of what he had believed all his life. I was with Harry outside Claridge's Hotel, when Khrushchev was staying in London and he walked past Harry as though he didn't exist. I can understand that didn't endear him to Harry, who of course was reasonably well-

acquainted with Khrushchev. It's too late for anyone to ask Harry his feelings, but I was with him and I've my ideas!

I was with Pollitt up until 1957, when he resigned as General Secretary. He hadn't been well and had been staying on a farm in Derbyshire which belonged to a nephew of his - his sister's son. Ella Swift was her name. She lived in a council house in Manchester and her husband had been ill for a long time with Parkinson's disease, so she had to do everything for him. Harry's brother, Jack was useless, but Ella was a wonderful person. I'd been taken by John Gollan to the farm to see Harry, who had a problem with a tumour at that stage. I'd gone up to Scotland with Gollan and his brother, on the A1 route to Edinburgh, and then taken him to see the miner's leader, Abe Moffat and other comrades across Scotland.

Gollan had a private discussion with Pollitt at the farm. It was getting dark by the time they finished their discussions. Gollan and I got into the car and left the farm. Whichever way you turned out of the farm, you were going up a hill. I turned to the right and the road was only lit by the headlights of the car. All of a sudden, Gollan spoke in a normal manner, "Comrade Pollitt and I have had a discussion and we've decided that you are going to be the first to know . . . he's going to resign and retire and I'm going to be the next General Secretary." I slammed on the brakes so forcibly that Gollan nearly went through the window! In my usual diplomatic manner, I responded appropriately! I was shocked, I can tell you.

On the night before Pollitt went to Australia, he, my wife Gladys and I went out together with Olive Parsons. *[Editor's note: Pollitt accepted an invitation from the CPs of Australia and New Zealand to tour in April 1960]* Olive had her own car and she gave us a lift and we stopped off at a pub in Hendon Way, just before Hendon Central. It belonged to a former light-heavyweight champion boxer, who I had known for some years. For that reason Harry and I used to stop off there occasionally. Harry didn't take care of himself, he did a lot more than he should have done. In fact, Gladys said to him that night, "You don't think you're coming back do you?" She always spoke directly to him. All he did was to laugh.

My view is that the period after this saw the laying of the basis for the demise and the splitting of the British Communist movement. The leadership became unconcerned about prioritising the role of the trade union and labour movement. Looking back to the 1950s, the CPGB had full-time workers in most sizeable towns and had a significant base in most industries. There were full-time industrial organisers at local levels as well. The only full-timers today are in the cities of the main regional centres - and there are very few if any of these. Whilst in no place are there any industrial organisers, including at national level. An abandonment of an effective strategy for how the Party ought to be organised had, in my view led to this. When in 1957 a Recall Congress of the Party took place, Harry retired and Gollan took over the General Secretaryship. Gollan didn't want a permanent driver and bodyguard, but whenever he wanted to travel anywhere, he asked me to go with him. So after 1957 I went back onto work on the cabs, until 1961. Then the Party decided that I should work for the 1962 Rules Conference to get rid of the Bans in the TGWU.

Of course that particular campaign was not at that time successful. Towards the end of that period a comrade called Ralph Simons, the Party District Secretary in West Middlesex met me and asked if I would be prepared to become the Industrial Organiser of the Party in his district.

It was a remarkable district, an example to the whole of the Party. Not that the example was taken, Gollan was not particularly enamoured of trade union work and that was a special feature of West Middlesex. There were less than 1,200 members in the district, yet it succeeded in keeping four full-time workers and didn't have any debts to anyone. *[Editor's note: There is no evidence that the recent revelations concerning funding from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the CPGB, accepted by Gollan and administered by Reuben Falber, CPGB National Organiser, under Gollan's instructions, was syphoned to the Districts of the Party. Throughout the period CPGB branches and Districts were involved in herculean fund-raising activities, believing no Moscow funds were involved at all. There seems therefore no mileage in posterity viewing Sid's pride in West Middlesex's sterling endeavours as in any way jaundiced by events after his death.]*

West Middlesex District of the Party owned its own premises and was a model in all organisational respects. Very many Party districts were unable to regularly pay their full-time workers - some were often owed large sums of unpaid wages. There was only one weekend when I hadn't been paid my wages and that was because the District Treasurer got so involved in doing other jobs, she forgot to go to the bank for the money that Friday. But we got our wages on the Monday! Eventually, when we sold the premises, it became a very rich District.

When I eventually went back to driving a taxi in 1968, I had a battle to get my licence back because I'd worked for the Communist Party. Just before this, I had gone onto the task of co-ordinating the struggle to lift the bans on Communists holding office. A lot of people, Communist or not, all over the country played a magnificent role in that campaign, but that's another story. After the campaign was concluded by the successful resolve of the Rules Conference, I finished full time work for the party. Although I had been taken onto Party work to campaign on the bans, I never quite forgave Gollan for simply dropping me off full time work after 1968.

Bayard, who I mentioned earlier, was now the manager of a Stewart's garage in Fulham. The shop steward was a member of my T&G branch, called Charlie Wade - "Mickey the Mouse" Wade. I told him that all the big garages were refusing me work and asked him for help. Wade saw Bayard and told him that I was coming to work. Bayard said, "He ain't coming here." Charlie said "I'm really a democrat. You don't want him here, that's up to you. But I have to warn you that if he comes here and you don't let him work . . . no-one else is going to go out." "You won't do that," Bayard blurted out. "You try me, Mr Bayard, you see," Charlie told him. So I got a job . . . and they still hold my licence!

Once the bans were lifted, I was able to hold office in the union and I suppose I was deeply involved in the late Sixties and early seventies in the union's development. *[Editor's note: Sid was a territorial representative for Region One on the General*

Executive Council and a member of the Passenger Services Group National Committee representing taxi drivers in the 1970's]

I have known all General Secretaries of the TGWU to some degree. Bevin was a distant figure to me, but as a member of the Passenger Services Group, I was conscious of his battle in the 1930's to dominate the London Bus membership.

Deakin was a small man in terms of personal stature. He was a bigot and held deep personal grudges. Tiffin was in his shadow and in any case was here and gone with no obvious effect on the union. Frank Cousins was like a breath of fresh air. His commitment to unilateralism was a milestone in breaching the backward thinking which dominated the movement. I recall that it was Tom Fitzpatrick of the London Bus Section - he's a lollipop man now! - who moved the famous resolution on unilateralism at the 1959 Isle of Man Biennial Delegate Conference of the union. Jack Jones and I were contemporaries in the sense that I was elected to the GEC when he was General Secretary. Moss Evans came in just as I was moving out, but I knew and worked with him well, as I have done with Ron Todd. Like many progressives, I worked for Bill Morris and welcome his election. As I say, Cousins dramatically changed the TGWU. We were however always a target for the right, George Brown [*Labour MP and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party in the Sixties*] interfered for years to direct the TGWU rightwards, if he could. He had been a district officer of the union before becoming an MP. He and I obviously clashed frequently. Once George Brown was the main speaker at a Labour Party meeting in London. Now for a very good reason, Bill Jones, myself and Harry Soles put a picket on the cinema to try to communicate to Labour activists the need for progressive unity. We had to do that as George wouldn't let anyone in!

What had happened was that there was a right-wing Labour agent in the Putney council by-election and my wife, Gladys, stood as a Communist Party candidate. But the Labour agent had forgotten to get the nomination papers in on time. They asked voters to abstain, which would in effect let the Tories in. The agent came out to try to move us away, but we managed to convey the gist of our concern to many people and I can assure you George didn't have a successful meeting!!

I have never seen things in personal terms though, all the General Secretaries of the TGWU have magnified their strengths and weaknesses according to the people they had around them. Being strongly identified with the progressive direction the union took after Cousins, of course I supported Moss Evans and Ron Todd as following in the same spirit. Throughout the Seventies there was always an undercurrent that Larry Smith was being groomed by some to become the General Secretary, something I differed with. There was also the notion that John Freeman, from our Irish Region, would become Deputy General Secretary and follow Larry. As it turned out, I'm satisfied that the union's future is in good hands. It will clearly not simply drift in a right-wards direction as some would have liked.

You know when one looks at the plaque at the side entrance to Transport House, which commemorates the role of Ramsey MacDonald, later to become prize traitor of the

Labour Movement by smashing the 1929-31 Labour Government, forming a National Government and putting back the cause of socialism by decades, when I look at that plaque commemorating his opening of our building, I wish I could put some other wording in place of that, which would be more in keeping with the role this union and its thousands of ordinary stalwart activists have played and I know will continue to play over the years. I haven't been able to recall everything with the clarity I'd like, some of these events were a week or two ago!! Whilst I feel chary of claiming too much for myself, unlike some folk(!), I'd like to think anyone reading my recollections will at least grudgingly concede that I did my bit.



Presentation of TGWU Gold Badge of Merit to Sid Easton in 1976 by Jack Jones (the then General Secretary) and Ron Todd (the then Regional Secretary of Region 1)

ANTI-COMMUNIST BANS IN THE TGWU 1949-68

- a review by Graham Stevenson

The McCarthyite nightmare of obsessive anti-communism has rightly become a by-word for the elimination of civil liberties. A gross travesty of the very thing it purported to defend. Yet it is often forgotten that there were other Western variants of cold war phobia. British "McCarthyism" took its brief from the 1947-8 period, when the CPGB opposed Marshall Aid, the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation and wage restraint as contained in the proposals of the Labour Government's 1948 White Paper.

Central to the Marshall Plan was re-armament and the dollar-financed revival of German and Japanese industry. British support for the plan effectively resulted in US demands for cuts in British housing and social service expenditure to finance its share of the burden. Communist Party opposition fuelled internal dissension in the Labour Party and in the trade union movement. In a state of righteous fury, Labour leaders launched an anti-communist campaign, the essence of which was that the Soviet Union was out to sabotage economic recovery of countries which accepted the Marshall Plan. An example of the ruthlessness, with which internal dissent was dealt with, is the expulsion of John Platt Mills, the left Labour MP for Finsbury for the "crime" of sending a telegram signed by 21 Labour MPs, wishing success to the Italian Socialist Party, who were contesting a general election in alliance with the Communist Party of Italy.

It was but a short step from silencing dissent in Parliament, to silencing dissent by act of Government. In 1948, the Cabinet approved proposals worked up over the previous year for anti-communist propaganda operations and Attlee introduced positive vetting of the civil service in March, thus effectively removing CPGB members from employment by the State. Communists were by definition removed from duties "vital to the Secretary of State".

Bans in Parliament, bans in Government . . . why then not bans in the trade unions? Setting the pace was the Australian Workers Union, which decided to ban Communists from holding office - the first union to do so after the suggestion of the Australian Prime Minister that "the workers should maintain or regain control of their union."

One early British example of anti-communist intolerance was when Arthur Horner, the General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers was formally rebuked by his union's President, Will Lawther, for a speech in Paris in October 1948 which encouraged and supported French miners in the CGT national strike against redundancies in their coal industry. From hereon Horner was barred from making political pronouncements.

Underlying all this was the assumption that war with the Soviet Union was inevitable, that the CPGB was a direct instrument of Soviet policy and **nothing more** and that because of this it constituted a danger to national security, which excused anything.

That there was British security service penetration of the CPGB is without question. The only issue at stake is how far into the organisation the interference went and how

effective or even necessary it was. It is now well established that one Betty Gordon was a MI5 plant for ten years in the Party, "Soviet Weekly" - a British based friendship journal - and the British Society for Friendship with the Soviet Union (BSFS) in the Fifties. Whilst the F1 Division of MI5, at the time under the control of Roger Hollis (of erstwhile fame!) practically did nothing else but spy on the Party and its allies. The F4 Division, under John Bingham had deep cover penetration agents ran from a flat in Exhibition Road, South Kensington.

Given such an obsession by the State, with a Labour Government in office, it proved possible to steer the trade union movement in an anti-communist direction. The TUC proved to be a willing partner in this crusade, particularly as the major trade unions and the TGWU in particular, with its huge block vote at Labour Party and TUC conferences, were paranoid about Communist infiltration.

As early as 1947 TGWU GEC noted that the labour party had proscribed the BSFS. By August 1947, Deakin acted against London Bus branches being invited to affiliate to the BSFS, well before the contrived walk out in January 1949 of Western unions from the executive of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), a body actually founded in London in 1945 and which united unions East and West, thus beginning forty years of division. Deakin had become President of WFTU, being nominated by the British TUC, in 1946. After he had led the departure of unions, preparations were made from June towards the formation of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in December. Clearly, during the course of 1948, Deakin became hell-bent on ridding British trades unionism of any Communist connections.

The TUC issued a statement on "Trade Unions and Communism" at the end of 1948 and a pamphlet entitled "Defend Democracy", which centred upon a supposed Communist conspiracy to disrupt the economy of the West. Affiliated unions were asked to investigate the extent of Communist activity internally and to consider specifically whether Party members ought to hold office. The position regarding Trades Councils was immediately looked into by the TUC and a circular (which many Trades Councils ignored) recommending the barring of Communists as delegates was issued. The results of these preliminary considerations of the TUC were announced in March 1949, when the TUC roundly condemned the Communists, stimulating a general warning from the Prime Minister the following month about the evils of Communism.

Deakin's special report to that year's TUC on the British withdrawal from WFTU was a mastery of McCarthyism, or should we say Deakinism? According to Deakin, "despite Communist half-truths the WFTU has been dominated by the numerical strength of the Communists." The TGWU journal, the Record, in October 1949 proudly, if sycophantically, recorded that Deakin "impressed everyone with scathing words about the interference of Communist agitators." This was especially strong, claimed Deakin, in the docks, where the Communists' "avowed intention" (to avow is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "to admit or confess" . . . was this really the declared aim of the CPGB???) was to do all possible to retard the nation's recovery." According to Deakin, the "strike weapon was obsolete".

In January 1949, Deakin had claimed to have knowledge of a CPGB plan to disrupt industry during the month of August. Despite this "foreknowledge", the total number of days work lost through strikes in that year as a whole compared very favourably with previous years. There was only a small dispute by train drivers in ASLEF on east coast routes and a four day strike in the Yorkshire coalfield of 500 winding enginemen of any note at all. August was a very quiet month.

Deakin became obsessed by the "Communist spectre" beyond reason and almost above all else. He viewed the CPGB as responsible for nearly all serious instability in industrial relations. Perhaps the fact that an increasing number of Communists and Lefts were elected to leading positions in the TGWU, in the aftermath of the radicalising effect of the war and the election of a Labour Government, unsettled Deakin. Bevin had been absent from the leadership from 1940, but Deakin had never been really in control. Although nominally in charge whilst Bevin was at the Ministry of Labour, Deakin was very much under Bevin's shadow. It was only in late 1945 that Deakin took over finally as General Secretary. Given his personality, views and style, friction between himself and the self-confident left was to be expected, however Deakin did not have Bevin's folksy charisma, so inevitably the conflict took an administrative and sneaky turn.

It was thus that the decision of the TGWU Biennial Delegate Conference (BDC) in July 1949 to bar Communists from holding office, by a vote of 426 to 208, was by no means an accident or a sudden reaction to some single event, it was the culmination of a clear political project initiated almost single-handedly perhaps by Deakin himself. Although Bevin, as Foreign Secretary, now assumed his role as defender of the British Empire in a global game of power, in which the interests of the Soviet Union and Britain collided over a legion of small nations and this would have had some influence.

The BDC had been swung to a majority on an ill-defined understanding that the bar would apply in the future, so that no individual currently enjoying office or employment in the union would be penalised. But in the event, Deakin and his supporters were merciless. Nine full-time officials, including the Passenger Services National Secretary, Sam Henderson, lost their jobs and Jones and Papworth were removed from the GEC when they all refused to sign a renunciary document, the Declaration of non-membership of the Party.

Some members of the Communist Party resigned their membership and thus saved their jobs, but this was to the opprobrium not just of CPGB members, but often of ordinary activists. One Labour MP revealed to me how as a young boy he learnt of such an action on the part of an Edinburgh TGWU officer, through the wry and bitter comments of his mother. Sid Easton was characteristically more unforgiving. Harry Pollitt's biographer, John Mahon, reveals how Sid was told, when he was obliged to deal with TGWU officials who had left the Party, by Harry, "It's better to speak even if you call each other names, than not to speak at all." [p433 *"Harry Pollitt- a biography"*, Lawrence and Wishart 1976]

November 30th 1949 had been fixed as the closing date for receipt of the declaration. Three officers failed to return the form, but this was due to absence from illness. The nine dissidents returned their forms, but did not sign the declaration. They were:

S. Henderson	National Secretary	Passenger Group
C.H. Player	East Anglia Composite Officer	Area 1
W.J. Warren	General Workers Trade Group Organiser	Area 1
C.A. Jordan	Metal Engineering & Chemical Organiser	Area 1
D.J. Lewis	Building Trade Group Organiser	Area 1
E. Scarr	General Trades Organiser, Wolverhampton and District	Area 5
H. Fraser	Grangemouth Permanent Docks Delegate	Area 7
G. McKay	Temporary Building Trades Organiser	Area 7
H. Windle	Huddersfield and District General Trades Organiser	Area 9

But of course it was not just the full-time officers who suffered debarment, very many lay office-holders were affected. Delegates to the 13th BDC which had taken the decision were debarred, as delegates hold office in between BDC's in case the need for an emergency or recall BDC occurs. Six delegates returned the form unsigned, although 128 refused to respond at all - possibly some were due to apathy, but it is equally likely that many were expressing a gesture of dissidence or disgust with the very concept of politically vetting delegates.

This removal of leading Communists was carried out with ruthlessness and even vindictiveness. When Deakin proposed to advertise the jobs of those dismissed, thus replacing them even before their appeals were heard, he declined a request to delay this pending the appeals and won the GEC to his position.

Protests that the BDC had not meant that existing officers would lose their jobs were brushed aside. Since the resolve of the BDC was phrased ambiguously, Deakin could construct a sort of an argument that the union was opposed to victimisation, even opposed to Communists loosing their jobs because of Party membership. But, he now clarified, this was in industry!! Employers should not be allowed to get away with holding a person's politics against them, but the union's ban was about holding office. This sophistry was Deakin's answer to the plea that the BDC was told that the ban would not apply to full-time officers.

Deakin set his face against appeals that this was just not so. The protests of a Passenger Group National Committee remit to the GEC, challenging its interpretation of the BDC's resolve was ruled out of order. It was not even allowed that a vote be taken to commit the union to Deakin's implied interpretation - that if members (not officers) lost their jobs due to the ban they would be given union protection.

The protests of no less than one hundred and four branches, the Passenger and the Chemical and Allied Trades National Committees, Area 7 (Scotland) Area Committee and (naturally!!) the Cab Trade Section in Area 1 were simply met by what Deakin presumably assumed was a clever "outmanoeuvring" of the "reds", but what was patently dishonest trickery. Would the BDC have voted to accept debarment if it were clear that sackings would occur? We shall never know for sure of course, but the left of the day certainly thought not. The Chemical National Committee demanded the GEC recall the BDC to resolve the doubt. Perhaps the failure to answer this not unreasonable call testifies to the intellectual weakness of Deakin's case. The BDC has a fine tradition of oft-experienced determination to trounce the leadership at least once or twice on matters of principle and a fondness for emotional appeals to fair-mindedness. Few who know of this could genuinely doubt that a capable speaker, armed with the fact of the dismissal of a popular figure like Henderson, arising from the passing of an unambiguous motion to that effect, could have at the very least dramatically reduced the majority of 218, perhaps it could have even been overturned.

Such a bar to office was completely against the spirit of the TGWU's constitution. The 1922 Rule Book, the first, had provided the criteria for eligibility for holding official positions in the union . . . 1) two consecutive years "financial membership" . . . 2) a candidate must be employed (or have connection with) the trade group he or she would represent at the time of nomination . . . 3) the candidate would be "in full benefit" at all times on forfeit of the position. That was all.

Arising out of Bevin's struggle with the London busworkers, control mechanisms were later added. The 1937 edition of the Rules introduced the requirement to produce a card as evidence of such a condition. While the holder of any official position was to conduct all union business within official union bodies only. A ban therefore on rank and file bodies, although these simply assumed organisational forms which evaded the ban. In these rules the GEC was given the power to proscribe any body which dealt with questions of wages and conditions (or any matter affecting the union). However, such organisations would have to be detrimental to the policy and purpose of the union and the GEC would be expected to impose penalties considered appropriate and just, where necessary.

Aside from the clumsy trickery which Deakin indulged in after the BDC, he allowed himself and the union an unduly imbalanced sense of discipline, whereby dissident views from the right were treated with a tender touch. It should be noted that the TGWU's ban on Communists did nothing, as with most other cases in the trade union movement, to restrain the activities of members of the Conservative or Liberal Parties, who continued to enjoy the privilege of holding office. Any pretence that the ban applied equally to Fascists was a subterfuge, for the far right had never established a base in trades unionism of consequence and no fascist was ever brought to book under the TGWU Rules.

One example of the indulgence granted to the right was the case of one A. Tegerdine, from the North-East. His expulsion had been recommended by the area in 1952 for his

activities in fostering support for the incoming Tory Government's proposals to denationalise the bus industry. Tegerdine was the founder of the "Bus Workers Anti-Nationalisation Society", surely an organisation detrimental to the policy of the union under the 1937 Rule amendment? Perhaps his chairmanship of the Tynemouth Council of Conservative Trades Unionists was sufficient to advise caution? But no even-handedness here! The GEC found insufficient evidence to justify expulsion and no more was heard of the matter.

Compare this kid-glove treatment with another case from the same period. A London bus activist, E.C. Sheehan of the 1/325 Catford branch, had left the Communist Party and despite his Regional Committee's support for his personal ban to be lifted after he signed the Declaration in November 1951, the leadership declined to accept the position. They would only reconsider their position if the individual could prove non-membership of the Party. He had to deny his membership and make contact with the Party as difficult as possible. Something more than declaration was now being sought, perhaps far beyond mere renunciation.

The view was expressed that considerable time ought elapse from having left the Party to being accepted for eligibility as a candidate for office. Even though the said Sheehan had been out of the CPGB for at least eight months, his case was turned down, it being suggested he try again in another years time. Where the justification for this was to be found in Rule or in BDC resolve was not explained, but it was the harbinger of a distasteful toying with lapsed Communists for some years to come.

For all Bevin's sternness in the battle of superiority within the union he conducted with the rank and file, formal bars had never been necessary and although debate was often stifled, manufactured and set up, at least controversy existed inside the union. Indeed in 1934 Bevin refused to introduce a ban on communists holding office as asked for by the TUC. A new climate of totalitarianism, or Deakinism, created a hysterical over-reaction to the expression of dissent, especially if that dissent was tinged with radicalism. Criticisms of the ineffectual performance of the Labour Government in 1949 were seen as Communist inspired. despite the deep and obvious mass unpopularity of the Government at that stage.

The introduction of the bans was therefore not taken silently, particularly in the Docks and the Passenger Services Groups. Perhaps the severity with which the bans were imposed in the TGWU had something to do with the severity of the response. The union was not isolated in its adoption of McCarthyism, but it adhered to the practice more ruthlessly than any other union, until the ETU and the EEPTU in the Sixties and Seventies.

Unions with about 40% of the total trade union membership banned Communists in one way or another. Following the TGWU ban, a veritable cascade of anti-communist bans were imposed. The National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives introduced a requirement on candidates to sign a declaration of office that they were "not a member of the Communist Party or any subsidiary bodies connected with the Communist Party. I am

opposed to the principles of Communism and agree that my appointment is made on that understanding." Interestingly, in NUBSO's case, the usual passing pretence of imposing "even-handed" bans on Fascists was not even bothered with, perhaps given such an obvious ideological requirement it was not needed. The National Union of Seamen barred Communists from holding office, whilst the Clerical and Administrative Workers' Union required members of "proscribed organisations" to declare their membership when standing for election and debarred them from representing the union on any outside body.

Around one hundred trades councils adopted the TUC's ban on Communists becoming delegates and the TUC itself imposed a ban on membership of the Trades Councils Joint Consultative Committee.

The Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers had a ban on Communists voting or discussing any political issue even if individuals personally paid the political levy to the union.

The National Union of General and Municipal Workers' had no official ban as such, but in practice no Communist could become a full-time official. The National Union of Railwaymen effectively banned Communists from the leading positions of General Secretary and President, by the clever device of inserting in the rules that these individuals must be delegates to the national Labour Party conference.

But it was the TGWU which was most associated with anti-communist bans and it was the TGWU which saw the longest and most persistent struggle to abolish them. At the heart of this, almost as a cause celebre, was sympathy for Sam Henderson. He gave his last report as National Secretary to the GEC in December 1949. It promptly passed a motion of thanks for his services!! Henderson made a dignified personal statement and left, carrying the high moral ground with him.

After having been National Secretary for three and a half years before being sacked, Sam Henderson was well-known and supremely popular in the Passenger Group. In Area 6, the North-West, hostility to his removal was so strong that a break-away union was mooted, but the impact of this was very limited indeed, the more so because Henderson, indeed the Party, vigorously opposed the notion. Opposition to Henderson's removal was strongest in London Bus branches where the Party was well established, with large branches or groups of members in up to a dozen garages and with individual members scattered here and there throughout the fleet. A series of protest meetings were held right up to the time of Henderson's dismissal.

The 1/498 Dalston bus branch, power base of Bill Jones, provided their branch secretary, J. Harding, as secretary of a Committee For Trade Union Democracy. Deakin instructed branches to have nothing to do with the Committee, but many pointedly ignored this edict. A demonstration of 70 protested in Transport House and a meeting of 300 was held outside. The GEC refused to see the deputation, but a further national deputation was organised for the December 1949 GEC meeting. After a deputation from the Committee had eventually been met, it was eventually wound up.

But of course Deakin simply set his face against these campaigns and ensured replacements were made for the sacked officers. Frank Coyle took over as National Secretary for the Passenger Group in February 1950, despite the National Committee's attempt to query the contradiction between the BDC's resolve, (according to the GEC's interpretation), to give support to members on loss of employment due to political victimisation, but not to provide the same protection to officers of the union. Touchingly, Henderson asked and received from the GEC removal expenses back to Glasgow, to return to his former employment, since he had not sought or received assistance when he took up the National Secretaryship. Henderson worked for the Communist Party for a short while after his dismissal, before obtaining a job as a bus conductor at Southall garage.

Those who had backed him found themselves under attack. T. Slavin, the GEC member for the Passenger Services Group was pulled up for being quoted in the Daily Worker about the whole affair. Whilst the Dalston bus branch suffered a thorough-going disciplinary intervention after unofficial industrial action. From here on the leadership found it increasingly impossible to separate out in its collective mind a distinction between Communist Party influence and mass, popular unofficial industrial action. Four Dalston members suffered removal from office for at least an entire electoral period of two years, with the rider that the GEC and the Regional Committee would want assurances for the future at the end of the ban.

The GEC convened a committee of enquiry into Bill Jones's activities, in particular the fund-raising activities for the nine sacked officials. His branch organised a strike and a protest outside Transport House, but it would be nearly two decades before some could contemplate a legitimate leadership role, unless they resigned their Party membership and recanted. Even then some found rehabilitation to be grudgingly given, dependent upon having a "good attitude". Pure membership of the Party increasingly became only a technical matter in a war against rank and file militancy.

The witch hunt was relentless, if not widespread. Rather, it sought to intimidate by example. Action against shop stewards' movements in the Docks and Passenger Groups increasingly became the real objective, with Party membership the formal excuse. In mid 1950, Bill Jones was given a final warning, with his union membership in doubt, over his association with the broad rank and file journal "Platform", founded in 1949.

On Sunday August 31st 1952, Dalston held an open mass meeting at Shoreditch Town Hall, contrary to an instruction given by the London District Secretary. This instruction had been endorsed by the London Bus Committee, the delegate conference and the Regional Secretary as such a meeting would be an "unconstitutional act", contrary to a GEC minute of May 1946, which made it "not permissible for a Branch Secretary to summon a meeting of members of any other Branch than his own."

All Dalston's branch officers and the entire branch committee were suspended by the Regional Secretary from holding office, contrary to the rule book. After the lifting of the suspensions to accord with the constitution, the Regional Committee debarred all concerned from office until the end of 1953.

The Peckham 1/1401 branch also held an open mass meeting at Catford Town Hall, Lewisham, in September 1952, again contrary to instructions. In fact both meetings were concerned with the reference of the annual wages claim to an Industrial Court. The GEC held an enquiry in October to look into the whole affair. Dalston's defence was that the branch had only invited others to attend, they had never summonsed them, whilst their concern was honourable. They only wanted action to stop the "policy of delay", as their handbill put it, in concluding the wage increase.

Dalston had a large Communist Party branch of 40 members and of course Jones' past position as GEC member, Chair of the Region 1 Passenger Group Committee and the London Bus Committee was decisive. His long experience enabled him to point to a similar experience in 1945, which led to the ruling quoted in the enquiry. There was also some difference over whether the GEC ruling was properly conveyed to the branch. Peckham was a newish branch and justifiably argued that it was not sure of the precise terms of the GEC ruling. Jones was no newcomer however and the enquiry took the view that the argument over interpretation was "a subterfuge used to justify the unconstitutional action".

Dalston took the matter to the Appeals Committee which unanimously disallowed the appeal. Their branch officers (not Communists of course) remained barred on a technicality.

Gradually, some people left the Party and were rehabilitated by Deakin. E.C. Sheehan eventually got a job as a bus inspector, changed branches and trade groups, and along with three others, G. Clack (Chalk Farm), W.E. Saint (London Country-Amersham), and M. Cravitz (Leyton) had their disqualifications from office withdrawn in 1953. M. Gray (11/30 Belfast Shipyard Workers Branch), who had declined to sign the declaration since the 13th BDC, did not satisfy the GEC with his recantation and continued to be banned. His letter written on September 1st 1952 simply said that he was not a member of any political party - that was not good enough.

Such vindictiveness, in the absence of complete capitulation was consistent with Deakin's outlook. The Regional Committee in Region 1 recommended that the ban on Dalston's branch officers, J. Harding and F.J. Lock be lifted to enable them to partake in the elections for the 1954/55 Electoral Period. They had written accepting that they were wrong not to carry out the advice and instructions given to them over the mass meetings they had called which had given rise to their debarment. Yet the GEC did not accept the Regional Committee recommendation, reasoning that these two had been distinguished from other branch committee members by being barred until they could convince the GEC that they were fit to hold office. A sort of union version of being detained at the General Secretary's pleasure perhaps?!

In June of the following year, the GEC considered a request from the Region 11 Committee to reconsider the ban on M. Gray. The suggestion that if he did not like it, he would go to the Appeals Committee was curtly rebuffed. Quite extraordinarily, it being

ruled that there was no question of GEC decisions on this subject falling within the competence of the Appeals Committee.

F.S. Hoyle of the 3/102 Bristol Docks Branch had been banned because of his association with the unofficial docks movement. He had instantly dropped any links with the "Port Workers News", either writing for it or selling it. Despite his branch, his district and his region recommending full re-instatement, the GEC sternly agreed to restitution only on the condition that the Regional Secretary ensure Hoyle conducted himself according to rules.

In 1955, a J. Byrne was elected to the Branch Committee of the 12/3 Liverpool Dock Branch. It was decided that no conclusive evidence existed that he had actually ended his association, as distinct from membership, with the CPGB and he was banned on the evidence that he had once refused to sign the declaration.

Another Liverpool docks branch committee member J. Evans Jnr (12/5) was the subject of a regional inquiry when the Branch Committee complained of his activities. He had spoken from a platform outside the D10 Dock Labour control in support of an unofficial one day stoppage called by the NASD, the Blue Union. Evans lost the right to hold office for the duration of the electoral period.

Poor old M. Gray reappeared in 1955. Again the Regional Committee asked for him to be allowed to hold office. Again the GEC considered the circumstances did not warrant it. Similarly, Harding of the Dalston branch reappeared. Again the Regional Committee asked for the ban to be lifted. Again the GEC declined even though he had given a written undertaking to abide by the constitution and carry out union policy.

T.W. Cook of Bournemouth was brought to task for circulating shop stewards outside of the official machinery. The "Busmen's Clarion" was proscribed, Jack Askins and B. Cowan of the Manchester Corporation bus branch (6/5) being reprimanded for having dealings with "unofficial bodies". Askins complained that no such rule existed to debar from office, so the GEC declined to accept the recommendation of leniency from the Region. Askins' complaint was not properly lodged under union rules, went the argument.

M. Gray of Belfast!! Extraordinarily he returns to consideration when the Region 11 Committee points out that Gray has ceased his membership of the Communist Party and severed all associations. Why does the GEC refuse to allow him his rights? The GEC politely, but coldly says it does not have to explain its actions. The voice of Deakin. Unreason asunder!

Hungary changes much. Deakin's death in May 1955 changes everything, although it is arguable that as he was due to retire in any case at the end of the year, a new regime might have come about anyway. One third of the membership of the British Communist Party left after Soviet troops intervened in November 1956. The new leader of the Hungarian Communists was shot as a traitor, only to be rehabilitated three decades on, even before the Centre Right parties win a general election. But Deakin will never be

rehabilitated. It is too tempting an analogy to refrain from pointing out the supreme irony that he and his like were the mirror image of Stalin, fortunately unlike Stalin they did not have state power.

Bill Jones and E A. David of Battersea 1/319 were relieved from the bans after leaving the Party and obtaining mass support in the union for that. Some reservoir of reluctance surfaced when Sam Henderson (now of Southall 1/686 branch) reapplied for the right to hold office. His branch, regional trade group and regional committee endorsed that right. The GEC?? It referred it back for an assurance that he had completely severed his connections with the Party.

Henderson was an upright man of firm, moral rectitude. The notion that he was saying something different to what he was doing was alien. Nonetheless, assurances were given to the Regional Committee which reaffirmed their support. Subsequently, having left the Party, he was reappointed National Secretary. It was a rare case of sweet retribution, of a kind at least. On 28th April 1958 Henderson resumed duties as a National Officer. Coincidentally, the famous London Bus Strike began on 5th May, ending on 20th June. Not that Henderson was by any means the cause of this, he was still overshadowed by a superior and, in any case Cousins was now General Secretary. Coyle had retired early in 1958 on ill-health grounds and A.J. Townsend, the National Officer had taken over from him as National Secretary. So a vacancy was created for Henderson to step into, very soon after he had his ban on office lifted. Nonetheless, when Townsend left, Henderson took over as National Secretary – fourteen years after being sacked. Sadly, he did not live long enough to really enjoy full restitution, dying at the age of 61 years. In 1963, he had a bout of ill-health for many months. In May 1965 he was admitted to hospital and in November died. A testimonial fund for his widow raised £378:18s:10d – the equivalent of several thousands of pounds in today's prices – eloquent testimony to the high regard he was held in.

In 1958 one might have been forgiven for believing that some relaxation was about to take place, when J. Marsh of Sheffield 9/10 was allowed to hold office after an eight year ban when he "severed all Communist associations". But shortly after this G. Evans, an activist in 1/656, a Southall building branch applied for restitution having, resigned from the Party, but even though ten months had elapsed, the GEC considered this a limited period and declined to accept this as sufficient to allow him to hold office as it did not imply complete severance from the Party" Since simple membership or not was by no means the decisive test, it seems that judgments about the views and outlook of individuals were being made. The only way for activists, without the sort of clout Jones and Henderson had, to avoid being accused of fellow-travelling, was to adopt a fierce, vitriolic anti-communism.

The Docks Group National Committee raised the problem with the GEC, proposing that a two year probationary period be introduced, additional to the initial two year membership qualification required under rule, specifically for those who had previously refused to sign the declaration. To no avail however, for the GEC stuck to the line of examining each case individually where a recommendation of a Regional Committee was made. As

if to prove that this was a valid system, by the end of the year, Region 9 successfully obtained sanction to hold office for a second candidate, one C. Frith of Bingley 9/15 and the following year Region 7 similarly won rights for a P. Gillan.

Even so, unofficial bodies in the docks group, were now under continuous examination, whilst the bans lingered and this approach survived Deakin's death. Whilst, the issue featured in any future leadership ambitions The ballot for Deakin's successor had already commenced before his death and the GEC had appointed Jock Tiffin as Acting General Secretary upon his death, so the result was a foregone conclusion. Tiffin's main rival, was Charles Brandon, Region One Secretary. Geoffrey Goodman, the biographer of Frank Cousins, who eventually succeeded Tiffin, suggests that Communist Party members had promised support for Brandon if he fought for a removal of the ban. He took the position that he would not oppose the removal, but would not personally work for it. A difference existed between Brandon and Frank Cousins, who at this stage was National Secretary of the Road Transport - Commercial Group, as to who could garner most support from the left. In the event they both stood. Cousin's unexpectedly good showing as an outsider - he came third- put him in a good position for the appointment due by the GEC for an Assistant General Secretary. His capability put him far ahead of rivals, but also there was a general view now developing in the union that the Deakin regime had brought the union close to disintegration, that the absurd anti-communism had been taken to ridiculous levels and in the process damaged the union. Perhaps reflecting all these factors, the GEC overwhelmingly endorsed Cousins as Tiffin's deputy.

Tiffin was only able to express pleasure at Cousins' appointment and to ensure that a measure of free debate and flexibility was injected into that years BDC, before he fell ill during the September GEC. By December he was dead from cancer. By the following May, Cousins had been elected General Secretary in a landslide victory against a single candidate, nine others having withdrawn in the interests of unity.

His election was to create an entirely new mood in the union and to a large extent amongst the wider Labour and Trade Union Movement. Vindictiveness against Communists was replaced by tolerance, but removing the ban was more difficult than imposing it. As a change in rule was required, the only opportunity to challenge the ban would be at the Rules Conference - held every six years! it was perhaps too soon when an attempt to change the rules in July 1956 was defeated.

At the 1950 Rules Conference, the first when rules were debated at such a smaller and possibly safer conference and not at the more emotive BDC, eight motions had been debated in principle, taking two concepts, the deletion of Clause 2 which banned members of Communist and Fascist Parties, or simply deleting the ban on Communists alone. The latter point was eventually moved and rejected by 78 votes to 24.

In 1956 an altogether more insistent campaign was launched. A model motion won no less than 39 Region 1 branches, one each from Region's 2 and 3, two from Region 4 and five from Region 5. Region 6 produced three, Region 7 had ten, Region 8 - two, Region 9 had one, Region 10 had two, 11 had one and 12 had four. A grand total of 71 motions!

As if this was not enough, these motions were classified as being in the same terms as eighteen motions standing in the names of sixteen Region 1 branches, two from 2, two from 4, five from 5, seven from 6, four from 7 and one from 12. All essentially said - delete the clause. Despite the debate being infinitely less tense than it might, the result was only marginally better than six years earlier. A motion to delete the entire banning Clause was rejected by 69 votes to 27.

July 1962 saw the Third Rules conference debate a motion standing in the names of 35 Region 1 branches, four from Region 2, one each from 3 and 4, ten from Region 5, six from Region 6, sixteen from Region 7, two each from Regions 8 and 9, one from Region 11 and ten from Region 12. Region 1 Passenger Group Committee, Region 7's Regional Committee and Region 12's Building Trades Committee joined five region 1 branches, two from 7, one from 10 and Birkenhead Power Workers Group who had a composited motion deleting the whole clause. The minutes do not record the vote but once again it was lost.

At the 1963 BDC a motion calling for the "removal of all bans and proscriptions within the labour and progressive movement in view of the immediate need for working class unity to remove the Government" was moved by the 12/27 and 12/33 branches. There was a Tory Government at the time and a General Election was pending. The next BDC in 1965 saw another motion, this time to remove "the bans and proscriptions within the labour movement in view of the immediate need for working class unity to help the present Government", moved by 1/690, 12/27 and 12/33. There was now a Labour Government of course. These both failed, for self-evidently, how could the union adopt a position about the wider movement at variance with its own rules? How could the union speak for other trade unions? How could the BDC over-rule the Rules Conference?

But there was a method to the madness, for a political campaign was needed to create the necessary understanding and so, BDC after BDC, there were these repeated endeavours to raise the issue. In the end, arguably it would be mass action that laid the basis for the removal of the bans. As so often in history, it would be discontent at the actions of a Labour Government which formed the backdrop to much of the drama. But the easing of tension between east and west increasingly made it difficult to cast the staunch defence of working people in struggle, in which many Communists distinguished themselves, as instances of unpatriotic mischiefmaking as it had been in the late Forties and early Fifties. A new generation of TGWU leaders at all levels of the organisation understood these basic principles.

For example, the 1967 dock strike in response to the decasualisation scheme was fuelled by fears for future job security. In such a situation labelling them as Communists did little to dampen support for rank and file leaders. London dockers assembled in January 1968 for mass meetings to elect a shop stewards committee for each firm. As they were joint meetings of the National Amalgamated Stevedore's and Dockers' Union (the blue union) and the TGWU (the white union), the men demanded that no political bars be adopted, for the NASD had no such ban. Representatives were elected with 1,950 men at the

meeting. The top two successful candidates being Jack Dash and Vic Turner, both members of the Communist Party. The results were:

Ernie Rice	TGWU	
Mick Fenn	NASD	Thames 65 Co.
Vic Turner	TGWU	
Dave Timothy	NASD	Scrutton and Maltby
Buck Baker	TGWU	
Jack Dash	TGWU	
Ted Kirkby	TGWU	Southern Stevedores
Danny Lyons	TGWU	Port of London Authority

The Docks Group in London refused to accept the accreditation of Dash and Turner, whereupon all of the TGWU non-communist stewards refused to sign the declaration. The result was that the TGWU had no credentialed shop stewards, but the NASD had. The Regional Officer and the Docks Officer met the elected shop stewards and stressed the need to adhere to the constitution. On Merseyside however, credentials had been issued to Communist docks activists and in a number of trade groups the ban began to break down. Some argued that since a shop steward had no place in the rule book (at this stage) the ban did not formally extend to workplace representation. The example of the London dock workers proved that the ban was in effect unenforceable in workplace situations and that the union faced serious competition with rival unions if it did not modernise its practices. This sort of thing was the writing on the wall for the bans, but why did Cousins leave the bans in place for such a long period after his elevation and creation of a new enlightened leadership? Goodman in his biography argues that Cousins saw the removal of the ban as a last act of clearing up obstacles to his successor's smooth inheritance and subsequent leadership. The ban was an issue Cousins had "ducked long enough, not because he had any sympathy with the ban but because he had always found reasons to avoid a frontal challenge on the question. [p561] Moreover, that he was "too unsure of his support from the rank and file as well as senior officials of the union to take the risk." [p562]. Considering the upheavals he had caused in the union, he could have been exposed to accusations of crypto-communism. He also saw the issue as of minor importance compared with, say the H-bomb controversy.

Another factor was the re-emergence in national leadership of people like Bill Jones and Henderson. Bill Jones, amongst others, felt that Cousins' prevarication on the issue of the bans was his main weakness. There is considerable likelihood that Jack Jones pressed Cousins on the issue. Jones had been appointed Assistant Executive Secretary in 1963, then Acting Assistant General Secretary in 1964, in 1968 he was elected as 'Cousins' successor and was to take over on the latter's retirement in September 1969. Certainly, Jack Jones' understanding of the difficult situation on the docks would lead him to want a

constitutional settlement to be made before he assumed the mantle. It would be better for the outgoing General Secretary to face the membership on such a potentially explosive issue, and there was also the factor of several key, senior officers jostling for position, who might use the issue negatively.

Also, the Communist Party Industrial Department was by no means inactive. Something of a campaign was building up which could either embarrass Cousins' departure or create awkwardness for Jones arrival. It was patently clear that the 1968 Rules Conference would be a field of battle on a number of issues. Jones was eager to restructure the Byzantine obscurity of the TGWU's ramshackle structure. In this new situation, Communists and lefts in the union, none more so than Sid Easton, allocated to the campaign full-time, badgered and pressured activists and officers throughout the trade groups and the regions to come clean on the issue and provide the leadership with a backing for change.

In his autobiography, Jack Jones notes that this Rules Conference was the first since he had assumed executive office, in preparation he drafted a series of proposals for the GEC to consider. "One change I considered necessary related to the discriminatory practices which precluded members of the Communist and Fascist parties from holding office. It was a form of discrimination and I felt it to be contrary to good trade union principles. Such discrimination was brought to an end by my proposals, which ensured that members were to be treated on an equal footing but with continued safeguards against disruptive action from any quarter." [p200]

On February 27th 1968, the GEC of the TGWU decided by 32 votes to 2 to recommend support for the removal of the bans at the Rules Conference [Jack Dash records the vote in his autobiography on pp170-1]. Whilst the March GEC received resolutions from Regions 2 and 8 regarding Schedule I Clause 2, asking for clarification on the operation of rule to the position of shop stewards who were Communist Party members. The GEC noted that there had been a wide variation in approach in applying the rule in this particular respect, depending on whether or not the matter had been raised formally.

Some regions were not applying the need for the Declaration rigidly and this had been more than clear in the Docks Group. In an obvious reference to the problem of the NASD, it was noted that there were difficulties where shop stewards were elected by members of more than one union. Increasingly, in this situation the GEC thought it impractical to operate the rule as far as shop stewards were concerned. Membership of official union committees was another matter. The Rule Book had to be altered to deal with this.

On June 11th, the GEC convened in special session to instruct its representatives on its policy positions on amendments to rule. At long last the Rules Revision Conference met in Belfast in July 1968 and removed the ban. Some delegates opposed the recommendation, but the death of the ban was a certainty.

The deletion of the entire offending Clause 2 in Schedule 1 and the insertion of a new clause 7, which gave authority to the GEC to use its discretion in declaring ineligible any particular organisation was agreed.

This is presently Clause 2 of Schedule I in the TGWU Rules, "Membership of an organisation which in the opinion of the General Executive Council is contrary, detrimental, inconsistent or injurious to the policy and purpose of the Union will render the member liable to be declared ineligible to hold any office within the Union either as a lay member or as a permanent or full-time officer, or other such penalties as in the opinion of the General Executive Council shall seem just."

The GEC motion was by no means the only one. Once again there was a motion simply deleting the clause. Twenty two Region 1 branches were joined by three from Region 2, one from Region 3, seven from Region 5, ten from 7, three from 8, two from 9, three from 10, three from 11, seven from 12. Region 7's Committee and Region 1's Engineering Group and Passenger Group, along with the Central Bus Committee and the Cab Trade Committee backed the motion.

Fourteen branches proposed that the ban remain only for Fascists, and four branches argued that political views or affiliations should not be a factor in the holding of office. Only one branch wanted to clarify the dilemma about shop stewards by specifying in rule their ban. 85 motions for lifting the ban, one against.

Two decades of intolerance, vindictiveness and resort to administrative method to control internal dissent, in a union not geared for thought control had ended. The union would never be the same again. Alliances which had grown in the resistance to the ban and in the support for rank and file initiative were continued into the 1970's and provided a fertile basis for the development of a progressive trend which continued to hold intellectual and moral hegemony within the union for most of the time thereafter.

SOURCES

Sid Easton's taped reminiscences 1990

GEC Minutes 1949-60

TGWU BDC and Rules Conference Minutes

Ken Fuller – "Radical Aristocrats"

Jack Dash – "Good Morning Brothers"

Geoffrey Goodman – "Awkward Warrior"

Jack Jones – "A Union Man"

John Mahon – "Harry Pollitt"

Raymond Postgate – "The Life of Lansbury"

TRIBUTE TO SID EASTON

by Peter Hagger

(reprinted from Cab Trade News - November 1991)

On Monday 7th October, family and friends gathered at Golders Green crematorium to show respect and pay honour to Sid Easton. The oration was made by Ron Todd, TGWU General Secretary, and a close friend.

Sid was born in 1911, and spent his life fighting for equality and justice for his fellow human beings. Renowned for his determination and honesty, he became a nationally known figure in the British trade union and labour movement, and was a committed internationalist.

Sid will probably be most remembered for the leading role he played in making the Transport and General Workers Union a more free and open union by lifting the bans on communists being elected to hold office in the union.

The members, free to express themselves, showed their feelings for Sid by electing him to represent them. His fellow cabdrivers elected him to the TGWU Cab Trade Committee, who in turn elected him the chairperson, and their representative on the union's National Passenger Trade Group Committee. He was also elected to the highest committee in the Union, the General Executive Council, by the members in London across all industries.

I first met Sid when I became a cab driver 21 years ago. He became one of the most supportive people in my life. He shared his immense knowledge, and never flinched from giving encouragement or from telling you if he thought you were wrong. I and a number of others will especially miss Sid because we owe him so much. We can only repay him by continuing to advocate the principles of honesty and fairness for which he stood.

Sid was involved in many campaigns in the cab trade. In the battles on limitation, increasing the commission rate, the cabman's charter, VAT zero rating, buslanes and minicabs, including the removal of lights and signs, he was in the forefront.

During his cab driving career he took a break from driving to concentrate full time on political work. On returning to the cab trade he was required by the Public Carriage Office to do a refresher course, Sid told the story of the examiner asking him what he considered to be unreasonable questions. On being asked to do a run from Whitestone Pond, Hampstead, to Peckham Rye, he told the examiner it was over six miles, and he didn't wish to go! He then demanded to see the chief examiner, and soon got his badge and bill back.

Ron Todd said at the funeral: "Sid never minced his words. You were left in no doubt about his view, and he never said anything of a person behind their back that he had not said to their face."

Those words are so right.

Jane Rosen is a young woman who experienced the warmth, guidance, and comfort of Sid and his wife Gladys. Jane wrote the following poem, which describes Sid and how many of us feel about him.

ABOUT SID by Jane Rosen

I have known all of my life
A great and kind strength
That has followed me
All my way
Never asking or demanding
Just there
If I need it and when
I do
The strength expands
And pushes me to do
What I must

I have known all of my life
A man
Who stands out from most men
And leaves them behind
A man whose kindness
To me
Makes me feel safer
And more sure
In this world of uncertainty
And pain
Showing me the path of truth
Like a flame
For this man that I have known
All of my life
Has no conception of untruth
Cannot deal
In misconceptions
And lies
And hates deceit

Show him a traitor and
You will see
An anger and a violence
Burning bright
For you see this man that I have loved
All of my life
Has a great and encompassing
love himself,
For humanity
A great desire to see the world
Reach justice
Where there is no poverty
Or pain
And where all can live in joy

Show him injustice and
You will see
A man whose anger does not recede
Look at his life and
You will see
A man who cannot retreat
Who stands
And holds the road to a
Better, brighter day
Against those unctuous ones
Who claim to know
A better way

I have known and loved this man
Who never flinches
All of my life



TRIBUTE TO JANE ROSCOE

by Peter Hagger

I have known all of my life
A great and kind strength
You will see
On Monday 7th October his friends gathered at Golden Square to show respect and pay honour to a man who had been a great friend to the TGWU.
For you see the man that I have known
All of my life
Sid was born in 1911 and grew up in a family of human beings. He was a man of great strength and honesty, a man who was known in the British and international labour movement and was a great desire to see the world.
Sid will probably be most remembered for the leading role he played in the Transport and General Workers' Union. He was a man of great strength and honesty, a man who was known in the British and international labour movement and was a great desire to see the world.
The members, first to express themselves, showed that they were most keen to represent them. He was a man of great strength and honesty, a man who was known in the British and international labour movement and was a great desire to see the world.
A man who was known in the British and international labour movement and was a great desire to see the world.
You will see
And more sure

A man who cannot rest
In this world of uncertainty
Who stands
And man
Showing me the path of truth
I like a flame
For this man that I have known
All of my life
Sid was involved in many ways in the cabman's charter, increasing the commission rate, the cabman's charter, VAT zero and minicab regulations. He was a man of great strength and honesty, a man who was known in the British and international labour movement and was a great desire to see the world.

Who never flinches
All of my life
During his cab driving career, he took a break from driving to concentrate full time on political work. He was a man of great strength and honesty, a man who was known in the British and international labour movement and was a great desire to see the world.



Jane Roscoe is a young woman who has been a great friend to the TGWU.