

THE LABOUR HISTORY ARCHIVE AND STUDY CENTRE – TEN YEARS ON

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It is now ten years since the Labour History Archive and Study Centre was established at the National Museum of Labour History in Princess Street. Its holdings at that time were a combination of the Labour Party archives and the various collections the museum brought with it from London. The Centre has now expanded beyond its capacity and is now facing a storage problem. Important collections have been deposited, such as the papers of Michael Foot, Judith Hart, Eric Heffer and Jo Richardson. The Centre has also received the archives of the Communist Party of Great Britain. With the archives of the two major political parties of the British working classes deposited there, it is now the centre for research into the political wing of the British Labour Movement. The Centre is now under the management of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester for an initial period of five years. This means that it is eligible for central government funding.

Michael Foot is a trustee of the National Museum of Labour History and the deposit of his papers at the Centre is an example of his characteristic loyalty. The collection starts with his school report in 1926 and ends in 1992, the year the papers were deposited. Obviously, the more recent time of his life as a belated member of the Wilson government in 1974 and as leader of the Party in 1980 is better represented than his earlier years. The papers also offer width as well as depth into his life, covering literary and historical, as well as the political aspects of his work.

Judith Hart's papers came as a donation from her family after her death in 1991. It is a very large collection, covering every aspect of her political life, as a campaigner for human rights, as a member of the Labour Party National Executive Committee and as a minister in Harold Wilson's governments as minister of social security and minister of overseas development. The collection will probably require a process of selective retention, to cut its size and make it more amenable for research.

Eric Heffer's papers, donated by his widow, Doris, cover his life from the time he stood as a Communist local candidate in Hertford in 1946 through his expulsion from the party to form the Socialist Workers' Federation. It then continues on to his joining

the Tenth Labour Party and then being selected as candidate for Liverpool Walton. Eric became a member and Chair of the National Executive Committee and briefly a member of Harold Wilson's government.

Jo Richardson's papers are extremely valuable. Although she was elected MP for Barking in 1970, she had led a very active political life before that. She had been since 1945 secretary to Ian Mikardo, the prominent left-wing MP and her papers contained the original minutes of the Tribune Group. She was also secretary of the Victory for Socialism Campaign, a broad left organisation in the late 1950s. The papers therefore cover a long period from the late 1940s to the 1980s. Their deposit qualifies as a rescue mission. She had agreed to deposit her papers with the museum in January 1994. She then died the following month. It was fortunate that Ian Mikardo's daughter, Judy Becker, lived in Heald Green and was able to tell me to contact Jo's sister-in-law, Pamela Richardson. I duly went up to London and collected the papers.

The archives of the Communist Party of Great Britain are the most valuable addition to the Centre's collections and have already been very extensively used. The Party archives themselves date from 1943, as the early material was deposited in Moscow in 1938. These contain executive committee, political committee, international, industrial and organisation papers. The archives also contained papers of prominent individuals, some of which pre-date 1943. These include the papers of Harry Pollitt, Willie Gallacher, Rajani Palme Dutt and J T Murphy. Further material is being deposited, mainly from regional parties.

The continued expansion of the Labour History Archive and Study Centre is reflected in our *Guide to the Labour Party Archive* (NMLH, 1998). However, extra funding will be urgently needed if the expansion will not be limited in the near future. The Archive and Study Centre, managed by John Rylands University of Manchester Library, is open to researchers Monday to Friday, 10.00 – 5.00, advance booking is advised. **Enquiries should be addressed to the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, National Museum of Labour History, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1 6DD; Tel: 0161 228 7212.**