

THE LABOUR PARTY IN MANCHESTER AND SALFORD BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR: A CASE OF UNEQUAL DEVELOPMENT

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Although the stroke of a Norman baron's pen was said to have divorced Manchester and Salford in all but their devotions, the two cities have remained inextricably linked since medieval times. That link was solidified during the Industrial Revolution when the neighbouring settlements were cemented together by a sprawl of factories and workshops which came to dominate the local skyline. However, though their economic interests increasingly coalesced, their civic institutions continued apart; circumstances, according to W.H. Barker, which led 'to most unfortunate consequences, in the non-coordination of public services and in the unequal development of what has actually become a single human settlement standing astride the river.' The task of this study is to probe one aspect of that unequal development: the evolution of the Labour Party up to 1914.

According to Ross McKibbin, the pre-war Manchester and Salford Labour Representation Committee (LRC) was "probably the most effective central party" in the country. Supervising virtually all electioneering and coordinating activities throughout Manchester and Salford, in 1910 it boasted an affiliated membership of 17,959.² By 1914, the Manchester and Salford LRC had seen two local Labour MPs elected to parliament and could point to a combined total of sixteen Labour councillors in the two municipal chambers. Ostensibly then, Labour was making smooth progress in Manchester and Salford. Yet, closer analysis of the situation shows that party development was rather less sure, and certainly less uniform, than McKibbin suggests. While in Manchester, on the eve of war, Labour could boast two MPs and fifteen councillors, the position in neighbouring Salford was much less healthy, a solitary Labour councillor representing the party's only real electoral success. The aim of this paper is to explain why Labour's progress in Manchester was not mirrored by similar advancement in Salford.

Historians investigating local political differences have tended to focus their attention on the socio-economic or even ethno-religious composition of the locality under study, in order to uncover any clues as to varying party fortunes. Thus, explanations for Labour's failure to expand more quickly in Liverpool in the early part of the twentieth century have traditionally emphasised the importance of ethno-religious rivalry between the city's native Protestant working class and its large Catholic, Irish, immigrant community. Turning to the situation in Manchester and Salford then, where Labour's progress differed greatly between the cities, one might expect to account for the contrasting fortunes by reference to some important variations in the socio-economic or ethno-religious profiles of the cities.

Yet, such an account would fail to explain Labour's unequal development. Although Salford was not immune to the explosive mix of religion and politics which often undermined

Labour's appeal to the electorate in this period, Manchester politics were also marked by green and orange appeals. But despite operating in a similar ethnic context Labour achieved far greater electoral success in the latter area. Moreover, the population of both cities bore remarkably similar social and occupational characteristics; an explanation of Labour's differential development therefore, must come from some other quarter.

One possibility is that differing attitudes inside the Liberal Party in Manchester and Salford somehow distorted Labour's development. While many Manchester Liberals were sympathetic to progressive ideals and amenable to electoral cooperation with Labour, Salford Liberals systematically allied themselves with the Conservative Party *in opposition* to Labour. As a result, Labour's electoral march in Salford was rather more treacherous than that faced by the party in Manchester. Yet the extent to which differing attitudes inside the Liberal Party skewed Labour's progress across the two cities has to be counterbalanced by realising the limits of progressivism in Manchester. While it is true that a section of Manchester Liberals, generally in senior posts, desired to work with the fledgling Labour Party, many Liberals in the city, and indeed some entire Liberal Associations, steadfastly opposed cooperation with Labour. Thus, it is important not to exaggerate the extent to which the hostility of the Liberal Party in Salford hindered Labour's development. There was plenty of hostility shown to Labour by Liberals in Manchester.

Instead, Labour's uneven development owed more to the variable quality of its own party organisation. While Labour organisation in much of Manchester was by 1914 well established, in Salford, the party's political machinery was much weaker and at times non-existent. Thus, even if the hostile attitude of Salford Liberals presented Labour with a more difficult task in terms of electoral advancement, organisational weakness – especially in the immediate pre-war period – prevented the party from even testing that opposition; in municipal elections for three years between 1911-13 the Labour Party in Salford contested only one seat.

This disparity in the quality of Labour Party organisation in Manchester and Salford had its roots in historical differences in the development of independent labour politics in the two cities, differences hinted at in the decision of the local LRC to abandon joint organisation in 1920 on the grounds that Salford had "a distinct social and political life of its own, that could not find its natural expression merged in the Manchester movement..."³ While Manchester was influenced by the Independent Labour Party (ILP), Salford was home to an influential branch of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). These local differences proved crucial in colouring the type of Labour Party organisation which emerged following the formation of the national

LRC, an alliance of trade unions and socialist societies, in 1900.

While the ILP proved amenable to cooperation with politically less advanced groups, the influence of a powerful SDF organisation in Salford made a "Labour alliance" with non-socialist trade unions more difficult to maintain. Furthermore, as divisions emerged at the national level over the Labour Party's closeness to the Liberals in Parliament, the resulting political realignments undermined organisation in Salford far more severely than in Manchester. The formation of a British Socialist Party (BSP) in 1911 was the climax of these realignments and threatened serious upheavals in local Labour organisation. However, whilst in Manchester the BSP's creation had only a limited impact on the Labour Party, in Salford its formation was disastrous. Organisation was badly affected, with the result that by 1914, Labour representation on the council had disintegrated. Labour's unequal development owed more to problems created by internal politics, most notably the influence of the SDF in Salford, than to any variation in the socio-economic or ethnic composition of the two cities.

Political and Socio-economic Patterns

Before examining in more detail the reasons for Labour's distorted progress in Manchester and Salford, it is important to say something of the socio-economic and political character of the area at this time. In electoral terms Manchester was divided into six parliamentary constituencies and Salford into three. The six

enced during the Industrial Revolution.⁴ The importance of the industrial boom to this rise is confirmed by occupational statistics which show that between 1871-91, the proportion of those engaged in industrial occupations grew rapidly, until it represented the most common form of occupation in Salford. By 1900 the city boasted a large working class population, particularly in the West and South divisions, the latter described by the *Manchester Guardian* as having "a teeming industrial population."⁵ The opening of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894 increased this working class community, as new jobs were created in the West and South Divisions, especially in the docks around Salford Quays, and also in the many warehouses which sprang up in the surrounding areas. North Salford meanwhile, was more middle class in complexion, though the area was also notable for a substantial Irish community. Although the Liberals enjoyed support throughout Salford, by 1900 all three Parliamentary seats were in the hands of the Conservatives.

Probably because of its greater population – by 1901 it was home to 543,872 people – Manchester offered greater social variation. Manchester North, for instance, although a predominantly working class constituency, and home to a number of textile mills, also contained a substantial middle class vote. The North division also housed a large Irish community, especially in Ancoats, which in 1900 had a Catholic population (a good indicator of Irish presence) measured at 40%. Until the 1880s the Liberals had been strong in the area, but by the turn of the century the Conservatives had become the dominant political force.

The greatest concentration of workers in Manchester could be found in the heavily industrialised East, North-East, and Gorton constituencies. Employment in these areas was dominated by the metal and engineering plants in Gorton and Openshaw, the coal mines in Bradford, and the burgeoning transport industry which employed over 27,000 people, many located in Ardwick and Newton Heath. However, even these constituencies were not entirely working class, and parts of the Bradford and Newton Heath wards were considered quite affluent. Before the emergence of the Labour Party, both the East and North-East constituencies were dominated by the Conservatives – indeed, no Liberal was ever elected in Manchester North-East. Instead, Liberal strength was concentrated in the south of the city, where middle class residents congregated in Rusholme, Longsight and Moss Side. Liberal organisation was also strong in the South-West division, which contained a significant "artisan population" as well as a smaller population of unskilled workers. Nevertheless, the Conservatives won the seat three times after 1892.⁶

Indeed, by the turn of the century Manchester was increasingly viewed as a stronghold of Conservatism with powerful support among the working class. This working class Conservatism was characterised both by a "xenophobic Protestant Conservatism [with] powerful roots in a religious/ethnic/economic hostility to the Catholic Irish," and "an affinity with male working class social interests, particularly the right to pleasure."⁷ In such an environment a Liberal Party strongly identified with nonconformity and temperance reform struggled to gain working class support, and according to Jeffery Hill, by the early 1900s Liberal organisation in some working class districts of the city had almost ceased to exist.⁸ However, the Liberals continued to enjoy the support of one important section of the working community: skilled labourers.⁹

Yet, even among this group, loyalties were being weakened and a crisis in the craft trades in Manchester caused by increasing foreign competition and technological change prompted the

North	North-West	North-East	East	South
Collyhurst	Cheetham	Miles Platting	All Saints'	All Saints'
Harpurhey	Collegiate	New Cross	Ardwick	Longsight
Newton Heath	Exchange	Newton Heath	Beswick	Moss Side
St. Michael's	Oxford		Bradford	East&West
	St. Ann's		St. Luke's	Rusholme
	St. Clement's			St. Luke's
	St. John's			
South-West	Stretford	Prestwich	Gorton	
Levenshulme	Chorlton	Blackley	Gorton Nth	
Medlock St	Didsbury	Bradford	Gorton Sth	
St. George's	Withington	Crumpsall	Openshaw	
		Moston	St Mark's	

*NB – Some wards overlap between Parliamentary Divisions

North	South	West
Albert Park	Crescent	Hope
Charlestown	Islington	St. Paul's
Grosvenor	Ordsall	St. Thomas's
Kersall	Regent	Seedley
St. Mathias	Trafford	
	Trinity	
	Weaste	

Manchester constituencies were: Manchester North, North-West, North-East, East, South, and South-West. Although the electoral wards of these six constituencies provided the majority of representatives on Manchester City Council, wards within the boundaries of several constituencies outside the City of Manchester also elected councillors. These constituencies were: Stretford, Prestwich, and Gorton. Salford, with its own City Council, was divided into three: the North, South, and West constituencies (see tables below for breakdown of electoral wards). Between 1841 and 1901, Salford saw its population treble from 70,224 to 220,957, largely due to the economic growth experi-



H. Musgrave Reade

Trades Council, dominated by Liberal skilled workers, to lead growing calls for greater labour representation.¹⁰ Thus, as early as 1891, the Trades Council put pressure on the Manchester Liberal Union (MLU), with whom it had historic links, to advance the candidatures of working men at municipal and parliamentary elections. Crucially however, the MLU, dominated by a wealthy, middle class, social elite, remained unmoved by such appeals.¹¹

As a result of the Liberals' intransigence, emerging socialist groups such as the SDF and the ILP were able to exploit the situation. Emerging first, the SDF was a Marxist organisation formed in London in 1880 by H.M. Hyndman, an English businessman who had been profoundly influenced after reading Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* on a journey home from France.¹² Initially based in the capital, the SDF slowly spread into the rest of the country, and in 1883, in an effort to gain a foothold in Lancashire, contacted Herbert Musgrave Reade, a well known figure in left-wing political circles, asking him to organise a branch of the Federation in the area. As a member of the Salford branch of the International Working Men's Association (IWMA), a Marxist organisation originally formed after the Paris Commune in 1870, Reade was an obvious candidate to help organise the new group.

However, initially unsure about the precise political nature of the SDF, he delayed becoming involved until a personal visit from Hyndman convinced him that the SDF was indeed based on Marxist principles. Following Hyndman's assurance, Reade set about working to form a Salford branch of the new organisation and this came to fruition in 1884 with the formation of the South Salford SDF, which began meeting in the Crescent Inn next door to the Black Horse.¹³ With some 200 members the South Salford SDF was the biggest branch outside London and soon became involved in local politics. Early members, George Smart and Alf Settle, helped found a Working Mens' Sanitary Association, while Will Horrocks, who became the leading figure in the Salford SDF, fought a local election in working class Ordsall in 1889 on the issue of "free baths." As well as putting forward



W. K. Hall

increasing numbers of municipal candidates in these years, the SDF was also crucial in organising unskilled workers in the locality. Three members, Horrocks, Evans, and Tabron, were influential in forming the Salford branch of the Gas Stokers and General Labourers' Union. Thus, by the turn of the century, the SDF was a recognised element in Salford politics.¹⁴

Yet, although the group gradually aroused local interest it was not until 1892 that they were able to finance a candidate at a Parliamentary election; W.K. Hall stood in the South constituency and was comfortably beaten, polling under eight percent of the vote. Despite the result, the contest seemed to herald the emergence of a new political force. Frederick Engels, who had owned a mill in Salford and produced much work on the conditions of the working class, believed the election had given "a fair and unmistakable warning... that the Independent Working Man's Party was approaching, that it cast its shadow before it and that this was to be the last General Election carried on between the two parties only, the Inns and the Outs."¹⁵ Later the same year, an independent labour party emerged in Manchester following a notice in the locally-based socialist newspaper *The Clarion*, and was represented the following year at the Bradford Conference which established the national ILP. Although an avowedly socialist body, based on the principles of public ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, the ILP was more moderate in tone than the SDF which tended to employ more revolutionary rhetoric.

Moreover, in their respective spheres of influence the ILP and the SDF tended to be geographically distinct. Although the ILP had branches in North and West Salford, its greatest influence was in the Manchester area where the Social Democrats were largely absent. Although the SDF did enjoy a presence in Manchester – notably in Hulme – its branches were "ephemeral in character, coming and going as economic conditions fluctuated."¹⁶ The South Salford branch, however, was rather more enduring and it was from this constituency power-base that the SDF directed its activities.

Despite their differences, the two organisations initially enjoyed a close working relationship; at the inaugural conference of the Manchester and Salford ILP in May 1892, five Social Democrats were prominent on the platform.¹⁷ Indeed, during the 1890s it was not uncommon for members to be enrolled in more than one organisation. Far from being rivals the new groups were seen as complementary. Thus, when James Connolly, the Irish Republican Socialist and leader of the Easter Rising, visited Salford in 1901 to deliver a series of lectures, his expenses were jointly met by the South Salford SDF and the West Salford ILP.¹⁸ But such instances of SDF-ILP cooperation were to be short-lived as the formation of a national Labour Representation Committee in 1900 led to significant changes in the local political landscape.

Despite its professed socialism, the ILP had always been more amenable to cooperation with the trade union movement than the more dogmatic SDF, which feared such contact could pollute the purity of its Marxist ideology. The SDF's distrust of trade unionism was reflected in its educational work; among the programme for a series of lectures organised by the South Salford branch was one entitled "Socialism versus Trade Unionism".¹⁹ Consequently, when the ILP began in the 1890s to ally itself with the local trade union movement, particularly the Trades Council, the SDF distanced itself from proceedings. This proved to be a turning point in local political relations, as the ILP gradually drifted away from the SDF and focussed instead on permeating the trade union movement. Successfully converting the Trades Council from its previous demand for labour representation to the more radical demand for *independent* labour representation, the ILP helped to weaken the council's links with the Liberal Party, and in so doing created the opportunity for an independent political labour party to emerge in the area.²⁰ The success of its policy was illustrated in 1900, when representatives of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council participated in the inaugural meeting of the Labour Representation Committee, later the Labour Party. Following this, in 1902, the Trades Council called a meeting of trade unions, ILP, and SDF representatives, at which the Manchester and Salford LRC was formed.

The formation of a Manchester and Salford LRC coincided with a period of rejuvenation for labour politics in Manchester, which during the Boer War had been in decline. Old ILP branches which had folded were revived and new branches were formed in Miles Platting, Blackley and Moston, Ardwick, Longsight, New Cross, and Gorton.²¹ By 1906 the ILP totalled 13 branches with a combined membership of 810, while the SDF also reported an upturn in fortunes.²² This recovery was reflected by election results which saw 'Labour' candidates gaining seats on both the Salford and Manchester City Councils.²³ In 1906 the emerging Labour group could boast eleven representatives in Manchester and six in Salford.

But despite its electoral progress the fledgling labour movement was inherently fragile. Even within individual organisations diversity was a problem and in 1903 the secretary of the Central Manchester ILP branch raised the question of "greater cohesion" among the branches, as "some form of organisation would be needed if the ILP were to be become a force in Manchester politics."²⁴ In fact, moves were already underway to co-ordinate political activity in Manchester and Salford, but this was not to be under ILP auspices. Instead, reflecting the growing importance of the national LRC, the local branch of that body was given charge over the selection and placement of 'Labour' can-

didates at the forthcoming 1906 general election.

This was a necessary step given the secret electoral pact signed in 1903 by Ramsay MacDonald, secretary of the LRC, and Herbert Gladstone, Liberal Chief Whip. Under this agreement, which has since been labelled the progressive alliance, LRC candidates were given a free run against Conservatives in around fifty parliamentary seats, with the Liberals enjoying the same deal in the rest. The need for a Lib-Lab electoral pact was apparently greater in Manchester and Salford than in many other places, because of the strength of working class conservatism in the area. At the 1900 general election, for instance, the Conservatives had won eight out of the nine Manchester seats. In such circumstances a progressive alliance gave 'Labour' the best chance for gaining parliamentary representation, while for the Liberals it provided a potential means to break the Tory hegemony.

Thus, at the 1906 general election the Manchester and Salford LRC ran two candidates, in North East and South West Manchester, leaving the Liberals with a clear run in the remaining constituencies. Originally, the local LRC had hoped to run four candidates, but had been persuaded by MacDonald, who was concerned to protect his secret alliance, to reduce that number to two. MacDonald had also induced the secretary of the local LRC, John Harker, to switch his candidature from West Salford, where there was a Liberal, to the North East seat, where there was only a Conservative. Though Harker agreed, he informed MacDonald that the decision not to contest Salford "is a sore point with a great section of our members and has caused not a little friction."²⁵

In the event the progressive alliance held firm and had its desired effect. The national Liberal landslide was reflected in Manchester where the Conservatives were left with no seats, while Labour saw both its candidates elected. Following this success the Manchester and Salford LRC was placed on a permanent footing and given power to co-ordinate future municipal and parliamentary election campaigns. The events of 1906 generated widespread enthusiasm within the labour movement in and around Manchester, and later that year the South Salford SDF voted to affiliate to the Manchester and Salford LRC. However, differences within the Manchester and Salford labour movement were already emerging and the exhilaration and unity engendered by the election could obscure these only temporarily.

At municipal elections in 1907, candidates in two Salford wards, St. Thomas's and St. Paul's, listed themselves as 'Socialist Labour' indicating their belief, shared by others, that the Labour Party was not itself socialist. Furthermore, in another Salford contest, in Trafford ward, J. Thompson (who had been returned as a Socialist candidate three years earlier) was defeated by an 'Anti-Socialist candidate.' The appearance of anti-Socialist candidates in Salford was nothing new and had been seen two years earlier when A.A. Purcell, a well-known socialist, stood for Labour in St. Paul's ward. In fact, anti-Socialist candidates became an increasingly common feature in local elections in Salford and were usually an indication of Liberal-Conservative cooperation.

Such co-operation was not confined to Salford, but was also evident in local elections in Manchester. Following municipal elections in 1908, J. Nuttal, secretary of the Manchester and Salford LRC, informed Labour's National Organiser that Liberal-Conservative opposition had been in operation in a number of Manchester wards.²⁶ The most blatant of these cases were in Bradford



A. A. Purcell



Frederick Engels

and Openshaw where local Liberal and Conservative organisations worked hand-in-hand to run "Independent" candidates. The compact succeeded in Openshaw, where a Labour seat was lost (though Labour defeated a similar alliance the following year), but was thwarted in Bradford, where Labour's victory gave the party control over all three seats in that ward. It is interesting to note that Liberal-Conservative alliances generally occurred in those industrial areas where Labour had become the dominant force, or at least the main challengers to the Tories, well before 1914. Hence, the progressive alliance, at least in municipal politics, was not as harmonious in Manchester as those historians have claimed.²⁷

While Con-Lib alliances in Manchester assumed a straightforward 'anti-Labour' form, in Salford, the 'anti-Socialist' nature of these alliances reflected the different type of Labour candidates standing in the two cities. Although the ILP was influential in Manchester, and Labour candidates could often be heard advocating policies of municipalisation, in general such candidates were of a moderate nature, often employing the slogan "A Labour man for a Labour ward".²⁸ In Salford however, Labour candidates, especially if they hailed from an SDF background, delivered a more aggressive 'class-based' message, or were at least more blatant in their class appeals. In local elections in 1909, for instance, J. Gorman told voters in St. Thomas's ward that "he was out to defend the interests of the working class – his own class. His opponent was out, as he said, to look after the interests of all classes."²⁹ Moreover, as more socialist candidates took part in municipal elections in Salford, the contests grew more fierce and ideological. In 1910, the *Salford City Reporter* described contests in St. Paul's and St. Thomas's wards as "virtually a fight between socialism and anti-socialism."³⁰ Municipal elections in Manchester were rarely, if ever, described in those terms.

The existence of such fiercely contested elections in Salford resulted, as indicated earlier, from the preponderance of socialist candidates standing in the city. In 1908 six out of twelve con-

tested wards involved candidates listed as "Socialist" and in the period that followed most candidates representing the labour interest were members of the SDF-BSP, though many of these lacked official recognition from the LRC.³¹ In fact, the influence of the LRC over elections in Salford quickly diminished in the years prior to the war as splits in the national labour movement began to impact on politics at the local level.

A particular source of discontent at this time stemmed from the Parliamentary Labour Party's (PLP) refusal to pursue a more militant policy in the Commons. Rather than putting pressure on (after 1910) the minority Liberal Government to adopt more radical measures and hasten reform of industrial legislation, the Labour Party appeared to be in a state of paralysis. In part, Labour's weakness was blamed on the poor quality of its personnel in the Commons, many of whom were old trade unionists, ill-suited to parliamentary work. This was a point made by Philip Snowden, a Labour MP in this period, who recalled that "the bulk of the trade union members, when in attendance, spent their time in the smoke room or on the Terrace."³² However, even those Labour members trained in socialist organisations such as the ILP displayed a reluctance to depart from the moderate line of cooperation with the Liberals, claiming the party could not (financially if for no other reason) afford to turn the government out and fight another general election. Whatever the reasons for the PLP's moderation, the effect was to increase dissension in the party. No less a figure than Keir Hardie despaired that the Labour Party had "ceased to count."³³

In fact, many members outside the Commons felt that Labour was no longer an independent political party at all, but had become merely an adjunct to the Liberals. In Manchester, discontent with the PLP was illustrated in a parliamentary by-election in 1908 when Dan Irving, a well known SDF activist in Burnley, stood as the Social Democrats' candidate in North West Manchester. The local ILP, "although prohibited from affording him official recognition, generally rallied to his cause."³⁴ Irving was convincingly defeated, yet the actions of the ILP highlighted

SOCIALIST UNITY.

Conference of Socialist Bodies, Societies and Branches at Manchester.

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30th and OCTOBER 1st.

PRELIMINARY NOTICE

Mr. T. P. P. P.

Secretary National Union

Classical Cycling Clubs

212, MAIDEN LANE, STRAND,
LONDON, W.C.

July 31st, 1911.

DEAR COMRADE,

At the Annual Conference of the Social-Democratic Party held at Easter the following resolution was passed:—

"That this Conference affirms its desire for a United British Socialist Party, and in order to achieve this desire the Executive Council be instructed to invite the co-operation of other bodies, such as the Socialist Representation Committees, the South-Eastern Counties and Essex Socialist Federations, in the issuing of a circular of invitation to be despatched to every S.D.P. branch, I.L.P. branch, local Fabian Societies, who believe in industrial and political action. The circular shall ask each body whether they are in favour of a United Socialist Party; if so, whether they are willing to take part in a Conference, to be held at the earliest possible date, by which proper arrangements can be made with a view to formulating a common platform for the Socialist movement in this country; and to send in suggestions on the above-mentioned matters."

We have agreed to co-operate in the calling of such a Conference on Socialist Unity, to be held at the end of September.

Never has there been greater need for a thorough-going Socialist agitation and propaganda than at present; never has it been so necessary to make the people understand what Socialism really is. So much passes to-day for Socialism which is only social reform. All the more essential is it, therefore, that Socialists generally should hand themselves together in a United Party for common action upon all the pressing questions which demand public attention. United action will also encourage many who now stand outside to take active part in our work. From every point of view combination and consolidation must be of the utmost benefit to the Socialist movement in this country.

It has been said that the Labour Party forms a medium for common action among Socialists, and that affiliation to the Labour Party will bring about Socialist Unity. Without in any way wishing to discuss the present position occupied by the Labour Party, especially in Parliament, it must be obvious that affiliation with the Labour Party and Socialist Unity are quite two different questions. The union of the Socialist forces in the United Kingdom is one thing; the basis for common political action on the part of trade unionists and Socialists is quite another matter. Socialist Unity can only be brought about by Socialists, and not by those who are not Socialists.

But in any attempt to secure Socialist Unity, so long desired, certain definite principles must necessarily be laid down as the basis of a common agreement. We all recognise that the socialisation of the instruments of production, distribution and exchange can alone put a stop to the class struggle existing in our capitalist society of to-day, and that independent political action on Socialist lines is necessary as a means to that end.

We have therefore to put before you the following questions:—

(a) Are you in favour of a United Socialist Party?

(b) Are you willing to take part in a Conference on Socialist Unity with a view to formulating a common platform for the Socialist movement in this country?

We hope to receive a favourable reply from you to these questions, and that your members will also help us by sending in suggestions for the proposed Conference not later than August 31st.

In the sincere hope that the forthcoming Conference will be the success that its object deserves, and that it may result in strengthening and consolidating the Socialist movement in these islands.

We are, dear Comrade,

Yours fraternally,

ESSEX SOCIALIST FEDERATION,
F. C. KEALING, Chairman.
W. F. REAM, Hon. Gen. Sec.

SOUTH-EASTERN COUNTIES FEDERATION OF SOCIALIST SOCIETIES,
W. G. VRALES, Secretary.

NATIONAL CLARION CYCLING CLUB (Executive Committee),
Tom Groom, Secretary.

HYDE SOCIALIST CHURCH

FRANK BRADLEY, Hon. Sec.
Tom SHORROCK, Hon. Assist. Sec.
HARCE NORS, Trustee.
WILLIAM F. HOLLINS, Auditor.
GEORGE WINTERHEAD, Sunday School Sec.
Tom Fox, Hon. Treasurer.

MANCHESTER SOCIALIST REPRESENTATION COMMITTEE,
GEORGE SIMPSON, Hon. Sec.
GEORGE PEET, Hon. Treasurer.
ALFRED SUGAR, Chairman (pro tem.).

LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST REPRESENTATION COMMITTEE,
PERCY PARNHAM, Chairman.
H. A. CURRIE, Treasurer.
VINCENT LLOYD, Hon. Sec.

BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST REPRESENTATION COMMITTEE,
F. B. SHAYESMAN, Hon. Sec.

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JAMES TAYLOR, President.
A. B. HALL, Secretary.

DERBY SOCIALIST SOCIETY,
WILLIAM WHITE, President.
ALBERT JACKSON, Secretary.

ST. HELENS SOCIALIST SOCIETY,
J. GILMAN, President.
J. BURY, Gen. Sec.

WALTON SOCIALIST SOCIETY,
P. PARNHAM, Secretary.
MID-DEVON SOCIALIST LEAGUE,
H. COOK, Chairman.

E. H. DENNIS, Hon. Sec.
W. C. F. BEAVIS, Hon. Treasurer.

SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC PARTY (Executive Council),
H. W. LEE, Secretary.

All communications should be addressed to H. W. LEE (Sec. pro tem.), 212, Maiden Lane, Strand, London, W.C.

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An invitation to the B.S.P.'s Foundation Conference, 1911.

the discontent felt by many rank-and-file activists; discontent further demonstrated by the South Salford SDF which detached itself from the Manchester and Salford LRC later that year.³⁵

Divisions within the local labour movement grew even worse in November 1909 when a West Salford Parliamentary Division Socialist Representation Committee was formed primarily to promote the candidature of A.A. Purcell at a future general elec-

tion.³⁶ This move angered the West Salford ILP which had itself intended fighting the parliamentary contest, and for a time the prospect of two 'Labour' candidates standing in the same seat seemed a possibility.³⁷ That predicament was eventually avoided, though not without causing widespread antagonism. Purcell was not afforded LRC recognition and, although supported by many local Labour men, later complained of "certain Labourites" who had associated with the Liberal Party in opposition to him. Most seriously of all however, Purcell slammed the 'traitorous' actions of the Labour Party "instanced [by] the fact that the Liberal candidate used names like Keir Hardie, Henderson, and Shackleton in support of his candidature..."³⁸

Manchester, too, saw a candidate with pronounced socialist views complicate matters, though not to the extent of producing the squabbling witnessed in Salford. In place of the moderate G.D. Kelley, who was retiring, Labour had selected J.M. McLachlan to contest the South West seat. A well known socialist and member of the ILP's National Council, McLachlan quickly caused a stir by stating publicly, "I want to concentrate my attack on the Liberal Party."³⁹ Although this upset many Liberal activists, the reformed Manchester Liberal Federation (MLF) was initially relaxed about the situation, believing that a deal could be struck with Labour which would secure McLachlan's withdrawal. For in addition to the South West and North East seats which it already held, Labour aimed to contest East Manchester, where the sitting Liberal was retiring. East Manchester was the most industrial, working class district of the city, and although the local Liberal Association was hostile to Labour's advances, the Manchester Liberal Executive believed it was natural for Labour to run in such a constituency and offered to stand aside. In return however, it desired Labour to give up the South West seat, especially in view of the nature of its candidate there.

Yet, despite strong Liberal demands that McLachlan be withdrawn, Labour held firm, and for a time two three-corner contests were threatened in East and South West Manchester. Eventually, realising that Labour were unwilling to compromise and not wanting to split the progressive vote, the Liberals withdrew their candidate in East Manchester, allowing Labour a straight fight with the Conservatives. This was also the case in the North East Seat, and in these two constituencies Labour MPs were returned to Parliament. In the South West constituency, however, a split in the progressive alliance could not be prevented, and a three-corner contest took place. The split Lib-Lab vote gave victory to the Conservatives, prompting Liberal accusations that McLachlan, who came third, had cost them the seat.

Local Labour leaders had hoped the party's aggressive electoral strategy would placate discontented members, yet sections of the movement in Manchester remained disillusioned by the party's general demeanour, and soon after the election a Manchester District Socialist Representation Committee (SRC) was formed. Its objectives, according to one member, "were to promote Socialist Representation on public bodies, and to form a National Socialist Party, uniting all militant socialists."⁴⁰ Comprised of 280 members from seven affiliated socialist societies, the SRC undermined Labour's organisation as a number of members joined the new body.

Ironically, this coincided with a period of general progress for the party. Although organisational weakness had undermined Labour's challenge at the December 1910 general election, its two Manchester MPs, Jack Sutton and John Clynes, were both returned to Parliament. In local elections meanwhile, the party



Venue for formation of BSP. (Caxton Hall, Salford).

enjoyed something of a resurgence as Labour candidates were victorious in a number of contests. In Manchester, Labour men topped the poll in Blackley and Moston, Bradford, Gorton North and South, Harpurhey, New Cross, and Openshaw, while in Salford, Labour candidates triumphed in St. Paul's, Seedley, and St. Thomas's wards. However, although candidates in Salford were listed as 'Labour' they did not all have support from the LRC. In St. Paul's, for instance, A.A. Purcell pointed out in the aftermath of his victory that his success was won without Labour support, as the party had offered no assistance to his campaign.⁴¹

Although Purcell's remarks illustrate the continuing divisions within the Manchester and Salford movement, the problem should not be seen in merely local terms. Rather, political divisions at the national level were responsible for creating discord which affected localities throughout the country. These divisions worsened early in 1911 when four members of the ILP's National Council wrote to *The Clarion* protesting at the suppression of an article by the ILP newspaper, *Labour Leader*, in which Fred Jowett MP had called upon the Labour Party to adopt a more independent line in Parliament.⁴² Two signatories of that letter, J.M. McLachlan and Leonard Hall, were senior figures in Manchester Labour politics. As a result of their actions all four were forced off the ILP Council at the Party Conference in April 1911, a move which caused a split in the party. The row acted as a catalyst for a major realignment of labour politics and over the next few months calls were made for the formation of a unified, national, socialist party. Victor Grayson, who had won a famous by-election in Colne Valley in 1907, led these demands on the basis that "we no longer expect the quondam Socialists of the Labour Party to permeate their colleagues; rather are we resigned to the fact that their Radical colleagues have effectively and irrevocably absorbed the Socialists."⁴³

Thus, in October 1911, at a Socialist Unity Conference held in Caxton Hall, Salford, the British Socialist Party (BSP) was formed. It is interesting that the BSP should have been formed in Salford, as in this area, and indeed in neighbouring Manchester, Labour and Socialist candidates frequently faced combined Liberal-Conservative opposition in municipal elections, a situation which made the PLP's policy of supporting the Liberals in

the Commons especially hard to bear. The effect of this political realignment had significant consequences for the Labour Party in Manchester and Salford, which had already been damaged by the formation of an SRC; by 1911 membership of that body had increased to eighteen affiliated societies with approximately 1800 members.⁴⁴ Following the formation of the BSP, Labour's predicament worsened, as a number of ILP members left to join the new organisation, a trend that undermined the organisational capacity of the Labour Party in North East Manchester and also in West Salford.⁴⁵

Yet, despite problems, in Manchester the party escaped the upheavals of these years reasonably unscathed. Consistent performance in municipal elections from 1910 up to the war meant Labour never fell below fourteen representatives on the City Council, while at the same time action was taken to improve the party's organisation. The LRC set out to involve the rank-and-file more closely in party affairs, and so the Executive Committee (EC) sent small groups to visit local trade union branches to emphasise the growing importance of the political struggle. The EC also began attending monthly meetings with the Labour Group on the Council and called for greater cohesion among the various sections of the movement. Furthermore, in terms of constituency organisation, the LRC appointed full-time registration agents in East and North East Manchester, a move which cemented Labour as a permanent player in those divisions.

In Salford however, the party was rather more severely affected by earlier developments. Socialist defections seriously eroded Labour's organisation which had been weakening for some time anyway. With the formation of the BSP, Labour Party machinery seems to have more or less collapsed in the city. In municipal elections from 1911-13 Labour contested only one seat. Thus, by the time war broke out in 1914, the party had only one representative on the City Council. Socialist candidates fared little better however, and only one out of seven candidates was successful during the same period. The contrast between Manchester and Salford, as the tables below illustrate, could hardly have been sharper.

Number of Labour representatives on Manchester City Council 1903-14			
1903	6	1909	10
1904	9	1910	14
1905	12	1911	15
1906	11	1912	15
1907	11	1913	15
1908	8	1914	15

Number of Labour representatives on Salford City Council 1903-14			
1903	2	1909	2
1904	3	1910	3
1905	5	1911	2
1906	6	1912	1
1907	6	1913	1
1908	4	1914	1

Sources: Manchester Borough Labour Party *Annual Report* 1919 & Manchester Official Handbooks 1904-1914⁴⁶



Labour members, Manchester City Council.

Nevertheless, the LRC had not given up in Salford and in the years immediately before the First World War determined efforts were made to reorganise the party in the area. Hard work by the LRC Executive led to the formation of a Salford Divisional Council and by 1914 the LRC noted in its annual report that "The foundations of a sound organisation – the greatest need of the Salford Labour movement – have been laid."⁴⁷ During this period the Manchester and Salford LRC appeared to grow in confidence and in October 1912 the Executive Committee contacted the National Party stating the LRC's intention to contest five seats at the next general election. These were East, North East, North, and South West Manchester, and also West Salford.⁴⁸ Whether or not the national leadership would have sanctioned all five contests is debatable, but the LRC's claims nevertheless underline the Labour Party's determination to advance in the Manchester and Salford area.

Conclusion

By 1914 the Manchester and Salford Labour Party was considered one of the strongest in the country, yet while it had undoubtedly helped to forward Labour's march, electoral progress and organisational capacity was lop-sided between the two cities. While Manchester could boast two MPs throughout most of the pre-war period, and after 1910 claim at least fourteen representatives on the City Council, Salford could point to no such success. Left with only one Labour councillor at the outbreak of the war, the Labour Party in Salford was poorly organised and hampered by division. The principal reason for the discrepancy in Labour Party development is to be found in the historical developments in the formation of independent labour politics in the two localities.

The early development of the SDF in South Salford gave that organisation a power base which enabled it to exert an influence on labour politics which stretched beyond that constituency and

across the entire city. Formed some years later, the ILP was never able to dominate the labour movement in Salford to the extent that it could in Manchester. Moreover, when political realignments took place in 1909-11, the existence of a strong socialist tradition in Salford meant Labour organisation was more seriously undermined in that city, than in Manchester. This was most graphically illustrated after 1911 when the drastic shortage of Labour candidates in Salford's municipal elections must be largely explained by the formation of the BSP and the adverse effects it had on Labour Party organisation in the city.

Labour organisation in Manchester, meanwhile, did not have to contend with the same radical forces, and so internal divisions though evident, were less prevalent. Although the ILP was strong in the area, and tensions could at times rise, in general the greater harmony and more moderate nature of the labour movement in Manchester allowed the LRC to co-ordinate political affairs more easily. Thus, Labour's progress in Manchester was smoother and more advanced than in Salford. Nevertheless, for all the problems, the situation in Salford was showing signs of improvement. Towards the end of the period the LRC reorganised party machinery in the city, while the BSP's application to affiliate to the Labour Party in 1916 promised to heal some of the splits which had occurred in the preceding years. Hence, by the time war ended in 1918 Labour was at last in a strong position to move forward in Salford. In municipal elections during 1919 the local party – reflecting national developments – made sweeping gains, increasing its representation on the Council to twelve members. Nonetheless, local officials considered continuing progress would require a fundamental restructuring of party organisation in the twin cities. Consequently, in 1920 the Manchester and Salford LRC resolved to split, at last allowing the establishment of a separate body to co-ordinate Labour affairs in the city from an exclusively Salford perspective. It was, then, only after the war that Labour in Salford began to match the progress of its Manchester counterpart.

Notes

1. H. Clay & K. Brady, (eds.), *Manchester at Work*, (Manchester 1929), p.28.
2. R. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-24* (Oxford 1974), p.5.
3. Working Class Movement Library, Manchester Borough Labour Party, *Annual Report*, 1920.
4. Clay & Brady (eds.), *Manchester at Work*, p.31.
5. *Manchester Guardian*, 24 Nov. 1885.
6. In addition to A. Kidd, *Manchester*, (Keele 1993), this section draws largely from the *Manchester Guardian*, 14-24 Nov. 1885 and H. Pelling, *The Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910* (1967), pp.244-5 for information.
7. D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-18*, (Cambridge 1990), p.131.
8. J. Hill, 'Manchester and Salford politics and the early development of the Independent Labour Party', *International Review of Social History*, XXVI (1981), p.172.
9. L. Bather 'Manchester and Salford Trades Council from 1880', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 6 (1963), p.14.
10. Hill, 'Manchester and Salford', p.183.
11. *Ibid.*, p.185.
12. The SDF was originally named Democratic Federation (DF) but changed its title following a conference in 1884.
13. E. & R. Frow, *Radical Salford* (Salford 1984), p.18.
14. See E. Morrison, 'South Salford Branch of the Social Democratic Federation' (BA Dissertation, Manchester Polytechnic, 1978), p.43.
15. Engels, quoted by Frow, *Radical Salford*, p.19.
16. Kidd, *Manchester*, p.175.
17. Hill, 'Manchester and Salford', p.180.
18. Frow, *Radical Salford*, p.19.
19. Morrison, 'South Salford', p.40 & appendix.
20. *Ibid.*, pp.192-7.
21. G.C. Goldberg, 'The Socialist and Political Labour Movement in Manchester and Salford 1884-1914' (unpublished thesis, University of Manchester, 1975), p.106.
22. *Ibid.*, p.107.
23. Before the national LRC changed its title to "Labour Party" in 1906, the Manchester and Salford LRC acted at local elections as a kind of umbrella group, co-ordinating candidates who were often members of separate political organisations, such as the ILP and the SDF. However, while these candidates may have belonged to different groups, the fact that they ran under the direction of the LRC makes it possible to describe them as being part of a 'Labour' group.
24. Manchester Reference Library Archives (hereafter M.R.L.A.), ILP Minute Book, Manchester Central Branch, Quarterly Report, Jan.-March 1903.
25. National Museum of Labour History (hereafter N.M.L.H.), letter from J. Harker to Ramsay MacDonald, 9 Oct. 1905, LRC 11/296.
26. N.M.L.H., letter from J. Nuttal to Mr Peters, 5 Nov. 1908 (LP/EL/08/1/113).
27. See, for example, M. Bentley, *The Climax of Liberal Politics: British Liberalism in theory and practice 1868-1918* (1987), p.142; Tanner, *Political Change*, p.157.
28. See, for example, *Manchester Guardian*, 20 Oct. 1910.
29. *Salford City Reporter*, 30 Oct. 1909.
30. *Ibid.*, 5 Nov. 1910.
31. Goldberg, 'Socialist and Political', p.112.
32. P. Snowden, *An Autobiography*, Vol.1 (1934), p.216.
33. Quoted in *ibid.*, p.215.
34. N. Reid, 'Manchester and Salford ILP: A more controversial aspect of the pre-1914 era', *Bulletin of the North West Labour History Society* (5), 1978, p.28.
35. Goldberg, 'Socialist and Political', p.93.
36. Reid, 'Manchester and Salford ILP', p.29.
37. T. Bergin, D. Pearce, & S. Shaw (eds.), *Salford, A City and its Past* (Salford 1989), pp.98-9.
38. *Salford Reporter*, 22 Jan. 1910.
39. *Manchester Guardian*, 4 Jan. 1910.
40. Letter to *The Clarion*, 21 July 1911.
41. *Salford City Reporter*, 5 Nov. 1910.
42. *The Clarion*, 20 Jan. 1911.
43. *Ibid.*, 4 Aug. 1911.
44. Letter to *Ibid.*, 21 July 1911.
45. Frow, *Radical Salford*, p.23.
46. These figures relate to the number of council seats held by Labour immediately after local elections, which took place on an annual basis (though councillors served for a period of three years). They do not take account of by-elections, which periodically altered the composition of the councils. Note: The number of Labour councillors in Manchester from 1912-14 would be 16, but Councillor Phillips, elected as a Labour member in 1911, changed his title to Socialist in 1912.
47. M.R.L.A., Manchester and Salford LRC, *Annual Report*, 1914, p.12.
48. N.M.L.H., letter to NEC Elections Sub-Committee, 10 Oct. 1912.