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**THE THEATRE OF THE ORGANISED WORKING CLASS 1830-1930**

Ros Merkin

Ph.d. University of Warwick  
Joint School of Theatre Studies

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## INTRODUCTION

This study of the theatre of the British Labour Movement had its roots in 1985 when History Workshop published a collection of documents relating to the Workers' Theatre Movements in Britain and America between 1880 and 1935. In his introductory essay in Theatres of the Left, Raphael Samuel concludes that there are no traditions in British Labour Theatre except those which have been broken or lost, that

There is no continuous history of socialist or alternative history to be discovered, rather a succession of moments separated from one another by a rupture (1).

Since this conclusion was reached, others have repeated Samuel's assertion in varying forms. So, Andrew Davies talks of "scanty Chartist theatrical activity" and of the mainstream labour movement in the 1920s remaining "uninterested in cultural matters" and Ian Saviile asserts that

the conception of a partisan, organised theatre devoted to spreading the socialist message throughout the working classes only began to take shape in Britain in the mid-1920s (2).

Yet a cursory glance at the theatre which preceded the Workers' Theatre Movement, a glance which Raphael Samuel provides in his introductory essay on theatre and socialism in Britain, reveals a plethora of activity in the labour movement. From the Chartists and the Owenites in the

nineteenth century, through the Socialist Sunday Schools and the Socialist League to the Clarion movement, the Independent Labour Party and the Labour Party, the theatrical activity pointed to by Samuel is startling in comparison to anything we can see today. What follows is an attempt to look at some of those moments, to look at the plays they produced and at both how and why working class political organisations looked to the theatre, to try to ascertain if they were indeed no more than broken threads and if so to try to account for why this may be the case. It is also an attempt to re-examine some of our notions of what is political theatre, for since the discovery of the work of the Workers' Theatre Movement and subsequently of the Actresses Franchise League much has been made of these as the starting point of political theatre in Britain. Yet, for a country with one of the longest traditions of organised working class movements, such assertions seem at best strange, at worst dishonest.

One clue as to the reason for such claims can be found in the characterisation of the theatre of the organised working class prior to the Workers' Theatre Movement which has become common currency. It was, in the words of Colin Chambers, primarily "ethical and anti-militarist rather than directly political", or in the words of Raphael Samuel:

First, the belief that it is their mission to bring the working class into contact with "great" art (ie capitalist art) and second, the tendency to produce plays which may deal with the misery of the workers, may even deal with the class struggle, but which show no way out, and which therefore spread a feeling of defeat and despair (3).

Such definitions of what is (or rather what is not) political theatre rest very heavily on a notion that political is most importantly propaganda. If the theatre that existed in connection with political organisations prior to 1926 was not propagandist then it follows for some that it was not political. What follows is therefore also an attempt to uncover a different approach, by looking at the groups own justifications for their involvement in theatrical ventures as part of the struggle for socialism.

## THE CHARTISTS: BEYOND HARMLESS RECREATION.

The reform agitation of the early 1830's produced not only a great political awakening across all classes in England but also introduced a new dimension to politics: crowds demonstrating for a political principle rather than for particular candidates. More importantly, the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832 (which extended the franchise to £10 households) raised expectations high:

A combination of mass pressure and threats of violence as well as reasonable argument and constitutional petition had apparently achieved the impossible. Faced with popular pressure, a corrupt Parliament, based on patronage and interest, had voluntarily extended its privileges to sections of the unenfranchised. The lessons seemed clear. The unenfranchised could make themselves heard. The demonstrations which had shaken the country had bought about a peaceful revolution.... (1).

Yet the belief that the Reform Act of 1832 would herald in a "new age of enlightenment" was dashed almost immediately. Hopes that the newly reformed Parliament would concern itself with issues that affected working people were met instead with further attacks. Parliament resisted the introduction of the Ten Hour working day and introduced stamp duty on newspapers (thereby pricing them out of the reach of working people). Workers engaged in organising trade unions were convicted and transported. Most controversially Parliament introduced in 1834 the Poor Law Amendment Act which aimed to reduce the possibility of survival without working, forcing people to work at any wage rather than starve. The spell was broken; in

the words of Bronterre O'Brien:

In one respect the New Poor Law has done good. It has helped to open the people's eyes as to who are the real enemies of the working classes. Previously to the passing of the Reform Bill, the middle orders were supposed to have some community of feeling with the labourers. That delusion has passed away. It barely survived the Irish Coercion Bill. It vanished completely with the enactment of the Starvation Law (2).

Agitation against the Poor Law, the war of the unstamped press, resistance to the persecution of trade unions, but centrally the disillusionment with the "shopocracy" (the middle classes with whom they had fought for reform) and with "the basis of the new Constitution", led to the emergence of a variety of radical working class organisations - the London Working Men's Association, the Birmingham Political Union and the foundation of the Northern Star. Most importantly it led to the publication in May 1838 of The Charter, which focused all the disillusionment and hopes on once again reforming Parliament, and led to the establishment of what was to be the first organised expression of the working class to be sustained on a nationwide basis for a number of years (3).

The year 1839 saw riots, "monster" demonstrations and uprisings across the country, from the Bull Ring in Birmingham to Stockport, from Ashton-under-Lyne to Newport in South Wales. The first Chartist Convention, held in London on the 4th February 1839, took place against a background of turmoil:

Demonstrations, marches, arming and drilling, all taking place on an unprecedented scale, constituted a threat to the established order (4).

The first Petition was presented to Parliament on 25 May 1839



amidst great enthusiasm, and a "sacred month", a month of strike action across the country, was planned for July. Yet by that month, the situation was reversed:

Despite its long deliberations, the Convention had little or nothing to show for its efforts. Its biggest demonstration had been its own failure; its failure to persuade Parliament to grant The Charter peacefully; its failure to organise a national uprising; and finally its failure to arrange a general strike (5).

Spontaneity had not been enough. It would take a longer and more organised fight to make Parliament concede to their demands. Amongst Chartists a sense of disillusionment once again prevailed: this time with the Convention and existing organisational arrangements. In response, both to this disillusionment and to the realisation that they were in for a long battle, the Chartist leadership reorganised, creating the National Charter Association with clearly defined rules and membership - the first working-class political "party".

But this was not to be simply a political organisation; at the same time Chartists gave increased expression to the cultural side of their radical commitment. In the words of Dorothy Thompson,

..the actual collection of signatures to the petition does not seem to have been a major preoccupation of the new groups...It is...noticeable that none of the recollections of ex-Chartists mentions the collections of signatures as a remembered form of activity. Meetings, lectures, tea parties and the regularly shared reading of radical newspapers, above all the Star, are what Chartists remembered (6).

James Epstein is more specific:

Throughout the country they formed Chartist schools

and democratic chapels, co-operative stores, burial clubs, temperance societies. A constellation of leisure activities was provided locally: regular lectures, debates, newspaper readings, soirees and tea-parties, annual dinners to celebrate the birthdays of such radical luminaries as Paine and Hunt (7).

A "movement culture" was being created in which Chartists could spend all their time. In Merthyr, an increasing range of "respectable" activities engaged the minds of the Chartists - sports, temperance and friendly societies, and education, and any study of Chartist papers shows a plethora of cultural and social activity. In Nottingham, the Democratic Chapel became the centre of activity; on Sundays it was open for religious services, on Mondays the Charter Association transacted its business, the Chartist Total Abstinence Society met on Tuesday, Wednesday was for singing practice, and on Saturdays the Chartists met for "mutual instruction" and the reading of Chartist newspapers. A tract society was formed to spread political information, and a library operated from the chapel. Education played an important role, and schools were established where children could learn to put a "proper value on men and things", but informal education (the reading of papers followed by an open discussion) was equally important. Chartism.

did not merely foster and encourage expression by the workers as a class, it also nurtured the talents of countless individuals, making them capable of attainments they otherwise would not even have dreamed of.

Public meetings and lectures also featured prominently in the Chartist world, many of the regular lecturers being self-educated working class men. Meeting rooms, often in public

houses, were decorated with portraits, posters, banners, caps of liberty and tricolour lanterns (8).

In the summer, activity moved out of doors; newspapers were read in the market place (in Nottingham, this attracted between 200-500 Chartists), lectures held on street corners, and camp meetings, "half political, half religious in tone", were held in large open spaces near to the towns. On summer Sundays in Nottingham, Chartists preached in the Forest, and in Loughborough parties came from ten to twelve miles around to attend Sunday meetings which would last up to eight hours. Camp meetings would open with a hymn and prayer, followed by an address and a reading. After a break for tea, there would be another sermon and the day would conclude with more hymns and prayers - and then the long walk home. Following one occasion in Nottingham in 1842, when McDouall had addressed a gathering, several thousand marched through the streets of the city singing Chartist hymns and songs. Thomas Cooper, the Leicester Chartist, also recounts singing in the streets:

...generally, on the fine evenings, we used to form a procession of four or five in a rank, and troop through the streets, singing the following triplet to the air of the chorus "Rule Britannia":

Spread - spread the Charter -

Spread the Charter through the Land!

Let Britons bold and brave join heart and hand!

...Our singing through the streets...often accompanied with shouts for the Charter, had no harm in it, although many of the shop-keepers would shut up their shops in real, or affected terror. This only caused our men to laugh, since there was no thought of injuring anybody (9).

Singing (at concerts, meetings, free and easys and on the streets) was an integral part of Chartist activities and

formed a continuation with the past. The skilled artisans and tradesmen of the London Corresponding Society had produced and printed their own music for special occasions and a plethora of workers' folk songs exists from the early nineteenth century, dealing with a variety of political issues including the importance of trade unions (10). The Leicester Chartists included songs in their meetings; in December 1842 they chose "The Lion of Freedom" (about Feargus O'Connor), "When Britain First By Heaven's Command" and "Spread the Charter", and followed the meeting with a social at Thomas Cooper's coffee rooms, where the songs included the less political "O'Brannigan", a comic Irish melody and "The Holy Clerk of Copmanhurst" from Ivanhoe. Singing was such an integral part of Leicester Chartist life that Thomas Cooper proposed to two of the members, John Bramwich (a stocking weaver) and William Jones (a glove-hand) that they should compose hymns for their Sunday meetings. The hymns, originally published in Cooper's paper, Extinguisher, were collected together and published as the Shakespearean Chartist Hymn Book (11).

Alongside music, soirees, balls and concerts appear as regular activities. In Glasgow, Kilmarnock and Cumnock, social meetings and concerts were held weekly or monthly, and the Saturday evening concerts at the Glasgow Lyceum were "a treat of no ordinary description". In 1842, in the wake of the failed uprisings, the Chartists in London held a Grand Concert and Lottery on October 27th, followed by a tea party on November 7th. In December, Birmingham Chartists organised a "splendid" concert in the Philosophical Hall to raise money for expenses at the National Conference:

The Cornetta and Quadrille Bands, and the young gentlemen of the glee club generously offered their services on the occasion. The orchestra consisted of about thirty performers, the music was of first class description and elicited the highest applause.

Over a period of two weeks at the end of December 1842, the numerous social events being held up and down the country, listed in the Northern Star, attests to the popularity of such functions. Tea parties were being organised at Hollinwood, Radcliffe Bridge and Kirkheaton and were combined with balls or concerts at Ashton, Sunderland, Hebden Bridge (where over two hundred attended at the Democratic Chapel) and Dukenfield (where it was followed on the Saturday by a "Grand Concert and Ball"). Halifax Chartists were holding a ball, as were those at Kidderminster and at Stroud. At Sutton in Ashfield, two concerts were held in the space of two days (one at the rooms of Mr Edward Parks and one at those of Mr G Marriott), both of which were "crammed to suffocation" and in Walsall a public dinner was being held for Mr John Mason (12).

Such social events generally offered a variety of entertainment and often combined songs and dancing with political addresses. The 1300 people who paid 6d each to attend a concert at the Chartist Church in Glasgow in February 1841 were entertained by a speaker in the interval, who explained why he had no faith in looking to the middle class for assistance in their struggle. At times, recitations would complement speeches, as the poems published in the Northern Star complemented the political articles; a grand concert in Stockport offered a full band and professional singers performing comic songs and recitations as well as patriotic

addresses, and at Lawhead, a soiree combined pies and speeches, interspersed with recitations. On their own, recitations occasionally formed the basis for a social gathering, as at Ashton one Saturday evening in February 1841, where local Chartists were entertained with such topical pieces as "John Frost and His Gaoler" and "The Chartist Prisoner's Wife and Daughter" (13).

Social events covered everything from the spontaneity of "free and easies" to well organised gatherings on a much larger scale which took place with less regularity. Anniversary dinners were grand occasions which included much toasting and speech-making. The dinner held in Nottingham in 1844 for that "Immortal Patriot" Tom Paine, after "justice had been done to the good things in life", included songs, toasts to Frost, Williams, Jones and all suffering patriots, to Feargus O'Connor and the bright Northern Star, and to T.S. Duncombe, the People's Representative in Parliament (amongst others), and a good number of speeches responding to sentiments such as "The Immortal Memory of Tom Paine", "The People, the Source of all Wealth" and "The People's Charter". The evening was rounded off with a "great variety of songs, glees and recitations". Dinners, often held as receptions for better known Chartists and their supporters, provided the occasion for a great deal of pomp and merriment. A Grand Festival at Stockport, in honour of Duncombe and Feargus O'Connor, attracted over a thousand people, who were entertained until late by an orchestra and glee singers in a room decorated with festoons of evergreens and artificial flowers. Outdoor demonstrations were often popular festivals, requiring much

local preparation, expense and, sometimes, regional co-ordination. Processions were tightly organised, bands had to be prepared or hired and banners and flags had to be made or borrowed. James Epstein describes the welcome organised for Feargus O'Connor in Nottingham in July 1842:

Tens of thousands met him in the town's market-place with bands and banners. After a short speech, O'Connor set out, accompanied by a grand procession, on a two-day tour of liberation through Nottinghamshire. From Nottingham they marched six miles north to the "tory-ridden village of Calverton, met on the way by Chartists from the villages of Bulwell, Carrington, Arnold, Basford and Humanely. A mile outside Calverton, O'Connor was welcomed by members of the Calverton Chartist Association, the Sutton-in-Ashfield band, more banners, flags and garlands with fresh flowers. At Calverton the Revd Harrison had arranged a great outdoor Chartist tea. A tent, marquee and stalls had been set up in a large pasture. At one time...there were as many as 5000 people at this moral fete in honour of O'Connor. Nearly 1000 "sons and daughters of toil" took tea, plum and plain cake, bread and butter. There were "all sorts of innocent amusements" - kiss in the ring, country dances...[and] a Nigger, a real Nigger accompanied by two fiddlers dancing Jim along Josey in real Nigger style (14).

At seven O'Connor made a speech from a waggon in the field and the events concluded with recitations and Chartist songs composed by John Hardy. The previous year, O'Connor's release from prison had been celebrated in Nottingham with the firing of small arms from the window of "King George on Horseback", followed by dancing and other "mirthful sports" in the forest and a Free and Easy in the evening.

Demonstrations and processions provided the opportunity for Chartists not only to make banners, but sometimes to decorate entire streets and villages. The procession of 2,500 which greeted O'Connor outside Mansfield in 1842 carried numerous

and many-coloured flags and banners bearing inscriptions such as "Unity is Strength", "Peace, Plenty and Happiness" and "The Judgement of Heaven is Labour and Food, but the Judgement of Kings is Toil and Starvation". Each man wore a green rosette or ribbon, the leaders of the procession carried wands of office, and the boys had different coloured paper round their hat bearing, like the flags, inscriptions. On its arrival in Sutton, the march was greeted by a grand Chartist spectacle:

O! heavens, what a sight! Doors, windows, and walls presented hundreds of Chartist mottos, Star portraits, flags, garlands, oakboughs, and evergreens, and roofs, windows, and walls were crammed with human beings...In our passage down the highlin [sic], we passed under several triumphal arches, which were suspended across the street from house to house (15).

Whilst the symbolic gesture of taking over villages and towns in a kind of prefigurement of Chartist victory (O'Connor, in his speech, renamed the main road "Charter-street") was a relatively rare occurrence, Chartist fairs and festivals were often annual events. In Nottingham, the anniversary celebrations of the "Battle of Mapperley Hills" took on the character of a Chartist Fair. The "battle" had been the culmination of the 1842 strike, when a peaceful gathering of 5000 working people had been dispersed by the military, who took over four hundred prisoners. The anniversary celebrations were held as a reminder of the events, to show the working people's "detestation of their tyranny, in every shape, and their determination to enfranchise themselves" and attracted between two and three thousand men, woman and children:

The plains were studded with camps, marquees, and stalls; several bands of music were in attendance, and the parties amused themselves with dancing and



various rural sports, and appeared to enjoy the fun amazingly (16).

The theatricality of such demonstrations and festivals is unquestionable, but the Chartists also devoted some time and energy to more formalised theatrical activity. Indeed, at least two Chartist leaders, Feargus O'Connor and Ernest Jones, attempted to make careers as dramatic writers.

#### Chartists as Dramatists.

Of the two, O'Connor was the least successful, attempting a literary career when he arrived in London, having left Ireland after he was threatened with implication in the White Boy insurrection. He wrote two tragedies entitled Constantina and Cardenia and Spanish Princess, a comedy of Irish life and manners called Bull or O'Bull, and a farce entitled Mock Emancipation. They were shown to Adderley, who held an appointment in the Exchequer Seal Office and who was amused by the farce but did not encourage O'Connor to show any of his pieces to a London manager. According to Thomas Frost, O'Connor was

as destitute of literary ability as any man of ordinary intelligence and education can be, his style being discursive, and his poverty of language, to say nothing of imagination, extreme (17).

Unfortunately, none of the plays were published, so we have nothing against which to judge Frost's comments.

Ernest Jones was no more successful than O'Connor, but he was more prolific. Originally from a wealthy family, Jones went to London in 1838, and spent some of his time visiting the theatre and getting to know Macready, Kemble, Matthews and Rouse amongst other actors of the day. He also experienced a period of "refusals and misses" in writing for the theatre; author of Follingar, Lavangra, Love and the Monkey, Montbessian and St John's Eve, (along with the libretto to an opera, The Wood Nymph), he had the peculiar honour of having every single one rejected by major London theatres (18). Jones became a Chartist in 1845 following his bankruptcy and, although he did not write any plays after that date, he certainly continued to show a lively interest in literature and to write poetry after he became a Chartist. He also thought kindly enough about his last play, St John's Eve (written in 1843-1844) to begin to serialise it in one of his numerous newspapers. He presumably intended to publish the entire play but unfortunately the first act was published in what was to be the final issue of The Labourer (19).

The first act gives us a tantalising glimpse of a romantic drama, tinged with elements of the gothic, in which Gemma is on the point of being married to Rupert, a man she has not seen since she was a child and who is returning from the Indies where he has made his fortune. She loves Rudolph, a poor huntsman and playmate in her "childish days", who her father, Rupert, will not allow her to marry. Although for Gemma the rank and wealth of a man are in his soul, her father, who has raised himself from a humble state by "dint of talent and energy", sees the matter rather differently,

telling her to banish thoughts of Rudolph for he will never become wealthy:

He's far too proud girl! ever to grow rich  
Who would grow rich, must stoop to pick the gold,  
The proud man scorns to lift from the low mire.

Love is not reason enough to marry and not loving someone is not enough to prevent a wedding; "You love him not", Rupert explodes, as his daughter tries to persuade him not to force her to marry against her will:

Ha! ha! and do you think  
That is an argument to urge in me?  
You think to cover every childish whim  
With those unmeaning words - I love him not! (20).

Yet his wealth and treatment of his daughter earn Rupert no respect from the Caitiffs, the villagers of the play. Rather they pour scorn and insults on him; he is an "upstart villain", a "tyrannous old croaking monster", a

miser, who has coined orphans and widows tears, and keeps them locked up in chests to be the curse of whoever inherits them (21).

Dark elements of the supernatural run through the first act, alongside Jones' social comment. He introduces the mysterious character of the stranger, whose face is "pale as that of one long buried" and who has enemies at the convent who seek with mass and bell to drive him out. He comes to tempt Rudolph with ideas of killing Rupert, and persuades him, as it is St John's Eve, to

Repair at midnight to the village church,  
But enter not: - rest thee upon a tomb,  
With grave earth on thy breast, and as the clock  
Strikes twelve, thou'llt mark a gleam illumine the  
aisles,  
And phantom funeral service peal within.  
Then through the gate, that to the hamlet leads,

Will enter one by one the shrouded ghosts  
Of those who in the year shall slumber there! (22).

The St John's Eve procession is preceded by a churchyard scene in which the stranger calls upon spirits who groan and shriek under the earth, until the graves open, sheets of fire flash upward through them and the ghost of a murderer appears. The stranger, who also loved Gemma, has come seeking revenge and release from a pact he has made with the spirits. As the scene quietens, Rupert appears and witnesses the procession, the act ending as the final figure in the march is revealed as Gemma. The character of Rudolph adds to the tension and undercurrent of evil that pervades the first act. Though poor, he is not a melodrama hero; in his youth he has entered a church and broken the sculptured cherubim and borne a young maid from her father's house against her will. Though he repents of the past (the girl was restored "pure" to her father's arms), he is tempted at the thought of killing Rupert and, as the stranger, points out at the conclusion of the act

The fiend ne'er comes  
Until man's heart has whispered prayers for him  
Trust me, no fiend can injure man so much  
As by fulfilment of his own desires (23).

The act ends on this note of foreboding, promising a play that will end in tragedy.

Chartist leaders were by no means alone in showing an interest in working in the theatre. In fact, whilst both Jones and O'Connor abandoned their unsuccessful attempts on becoming Chartists, individual members did involve themselves in theatrical performances. Worthy of note, as just one example,

is Abram Hanson of Elland, described by his biographer as "shoemaker, politician, dramatist and medical practitioner". Almost entirely self-taught, Hanson was respected both for his knowledge of many subjects and as a popular actor:

When the players came to the district, he would leave his shoemaking, and take part in the production. He was particularly famous for the part of a shoemaker in the travelling players' version of Ali Baba, when he would be billed as "Abram Hanson of Elland, the political cobbler". And to the credit of Abram, it must be mentioned, that the manager was sure of a full house on those occasions (24).

More important than either the unsuccessful careers of Chartist leaders as dramatists or the theatrical involvement of individuals, are theatrical performances by local groups of Chartists. Whilst by no means central to the social life of Chartism, these did emerge in the early 1840s (following the first great wave of Chartist activity) and emerged in diverse forms. On occasions, they took the form of dramatic readings which were part of a wider programme of entertainment; for example, at the Grand Carnival held to raise money to buy a printing press for Bronterre O'Brien, Mr Grainger offered his dramatic services gratuitously (25). But in general, dramatic performances were organised on a larger and more independent scale.

In Leicester, the Chartist group led by Cooper and known as the Shakespearean Brigade (after their meeting room), not only ran a dramatic society, but also chose to perform Hamlet to raise money both for Cooper's impending trial and to support his wife whilst he was in prison. In order to raise the money necessary to perform Hamlet, the dramatic section "attempted"

John Home's Douglas and also performed two plays by unknown authors to a crowded audience: The Wizard of the Moor and The Queer Subject. At first glance Douglas seems a strange choice. Written by a one time Royalist, the play is a pathetic tragedy which sets out to inspire pity for the long suffering Lady Randolph and for the wasted youth of Douglas, an idealist in the mould of heroic tragedy. The Chartist Circular was critical of Home's political bias in the play, condemning, in particular his treatment of the character of Douglas. Having been lost when very young, the aristocratic Douglas is found by Norval, a shepherd, and brought up as his own son. Later in life, and on his way to join the army in Carron, Douglas saves the life of his mother's second husband, Lord Randolph, and the secret of his birth is discovered. In a moment, he:

is noble Douglas, although he has only the education of a shepherd. Yes, he is great, generous, brave, honourable, speaking bold and lofty language, a companion for heroes, knights, ladies and barons - a noble Douglas in word and deed, in one moment by the simple discovery of his birth (26).

The writer of this literary sketch of Home disliked the idea of "innate greatness and nobility of aristocratic birth" which surfaced in a moment, despite Douglas' "serfish education". To this could be added another criticism which seems to contradict the ideas of Chartism, for the play also stresses Fate; Lady Randolph is encircled by:

...a destiny in this strange world,  
Which oft decrees an undeserved doom (27),

a concept which would seem very distant to the Chartist desire for men to change the world themselves. The article in the Chartist Circular finished with a warning:

If this book, like the Gentle Shepherd, falls into the hands of young Chartists, let its political bias be honestly explained to them by their Chartist leaders (28).

In Leicester, the play did not fall into the hands of the Chartists, but was thrust there by Cooper and his dramatic friends, and we do not know if they chose to follow the warnings of their own press.

Whilst it was a strange choice of play, there are some reasons which may have recommended it. Over the years, the Chartists developed a coherent literary theory, part of which stressed the need and value of a literary education which included looking to the literature of the past:

Let the people bathe deep in the light of the accumulated genius of many ages and armed at all points "with heaven born knowledge" - let them enter boldly on the conflict between light and darkness, and tyrants alone have cause to fear the issue of the contest (29).

So wrote William Thomson, editor of the Glasgow Chartist Circular, a point also emphasised by a Barnsley Chartist in his introductory remarks to an evening school club rules:

An extensive Literary Education, may be classified amongst the highest of all earthly enjoyments; not only, in its beneficial effects on the Individual who possesses it, but in its application conducive to the welfare of society at large (30).

Despite this, and although it could be tentatively argued performing Douglas could be seen as learning from the past, it should still be emphasised that Douglas is in many ways an oddity amongst the Chartists' choice of literature. Cooper's Sunday lectures on Milton and Shakespeare and Burns (at which

he repeated portions of Paradise Lost, Hamlet and Tam O'Shanter) are far more representative, for the Chartists were essentially interested in those writers who had raised their voices "and cried 'Liberty'!" (31). Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Milton appear most frequently in the pages of the Chartist press, for in essence the Chartists looked back for writers who could not only uplift the souls of readers and inspire them, but also educate people about the world they lived in and offer visions of what life could be like. A more likely recommendation for the performance of this play may have been its form for, despite its evocation of woods and wilds, rocky cliffs and heroic adventure, the play is a static piece based on a series of interviews, which made it relatively simple to stage - not an unimportant consideration when its performance was to raise money for Hamlet.

The subsequent performance of Hamlet itself was not, however, quite the success Cooper had hoped it would be:

...we hired the Amphitheatre, and I took the part of Hamlet - as I knew the whole play by heart. We performed the play twice; but I found it useless to proceed further in that direction: the amphitheatre, which...held 3000 people, was crowded to excess each night; but the people who went on the stage as actors and actresses, all demanded payment, both for the cost of their dresses and their time, so the income hardly covered expenses (32).

Despite its lack of financial success, Hamlet clearly drew a large audience - it was a sign of the times that this could seem a promising enterprise to attract a large working class audience. A performance of Addison's Cato was promised to



follow in the Northern Star, but does not seem to have materialised (33).

Leicester Chartists were not alone in performing Shakespeare; the Shakespearean Society of amateurs that met in the Rancliffe area paid £1 10s 6d into the local defence fund - the proceeds of a performance. Nor should we be surprised at finding Chartists performing Shakespeare. In 1845, The Northern Star was praising him for speaking the language of justice and humanity that would continue to elevate and instruct future generations. A poem by Charles Mosley Kenworthy, entitled simply Shakespeare, and published in the same paper, speaks of his "god-like" genius which soared "on wings sublime", his grace and his matchless skill; all of these lay not simply in his poetry but in the fact that he portrayed men "of all climes" from every age and every sphere of life, explaining also why people acted as they did (34).

In Scotland, the Chartists chose not to perform plays themselves - maybe they did not have Cooper's memory or the confidence to perform Hamlet with no previous stage experience - but to hire a theatre company to perform plays for them. The committee appointed by the Glasgow Chartist Association to liquidate the debt due to George Ross, the previous treasurer of the Association, decided to

engage a talented company now in Glasgow to visit the most populous and patriotic districts throughout the country and give a correct representation of the trial of that distinguished gentleman, Robert Emmett, Esq on a charge of high treason, at Dublin in the year 1803 (35).

It was resolved to perform the play in some of the largest buildings at a moderate charge of admission, and the first performance, at Cook's Circus in Glasgow which held 2000, was "crowded to suffocation".

Yet, like Thomas Cooper in Leicester, the Scottish Chartists were to discover that organising theatrical entertainment could create problems. A letter to the Northern Star, signed by Thomas Ancott and William Brown (the Chairman and Secretary of the Glasgow Representation Committee) complained of a "knot of four or five individuals" who had taken advantage of the idea of a travelling performance to "fill their own coffers" by performing their own version of the play. They were representing themselves sometimes as the Greenock Chartist Committee, and sometimes as an emigration committee, and despite the fact that they had succeeded in performing in several places, and at Paisley had received £11, the Chartists had received not one farthing of the money. The problem for the Committee was not simply the fact that they were not receiving the money from the imposters' efforts; the fraudulent actors were also preventing the legitimate company from performing, for,

the attempt to sustain any town they come to is completely destroyed for a repetition by others...; the people being once jewed (sic) out of their money become disgusted, and, as a matter of course, will measure the future by the past.

The letter concludes by stating that this group can only succeed with the support of Chartists in the localities, and asks them to assist the real company (36).

While Scotland preferred a professional company, the majority of local groups chose to perform plays themselves, and several chose the same theme as Scotland: the trial of Robert Emmett. Emmett, a United Irishman, had led an isolated uprising in Dublin in July 1803 in which he planned to seize the castle, Pigeon House Fort, and to hold the viceroy as a hostage. The plot failed, although Lord Kilwarden and Colonel Brown were assassinated; Emmett was caught, charged with being an emissary of France conspiring to overthrow the British government in Ireland and hanged on 20th September 1803. The pages of the Northern Star regularly advertised the Celebrated Speech Delivered by the Lamented Patriot at the Close of his Trial, at the price of a penny, (a speech described by Raymond Postgate as one of "the most remarkable pieces of English oratory of its kind that survives") along with The Life, Conversations and Trial of Robert Emmett (at 1s a copy). Doubtless this formed the basis for the performances devised by the Chartists - such as the one at Ashton-under-Lyne, where the trial was performed by the juvenile members of the National Charter Association at their meeting room in Charlestown:

The judges entered the room about eight o'clock, when the grand jury was sworn. The Attorney General opened the proceedings in the regular court style. Robert Emmett was brought forward in chains, attended by an officer, and six soldiers. the judges and councillors were dressed in the regular court uniform and everyone acquitted himself so well, that the hearers could not but be struck with the reflections of reality - indeed while the character of Emmett was being performed tears were seen trickling down many cheeks. The rattling of the chains and the solemn toll of the bell whilst the judge was passing sentence, produced a striking effect upon the audience. (37)

The striking impact of the play on its audience, described by a local Chartist in the Northern Star, provides a partial understanding of the role such theatrical performances could play in the eyes of the movement. Whilst on a prosaic level such entertainment was important for raising money and for drawing the "dupes from the public house" (38), drama and poetry could also influence the minds of the audience. John Watkins, the author of John Frost; a Chartist Play (see below), dedicated the play to the "Frost, Williams and Jones Restoration Committee" (a "humble effort in aid of their friendly exertions") to show them that whilst he refused to become an honorary member of their body it was not from indifference to their cause

but from a conviction of the uselessness as well as mean-spiritedness of petitioning those who had banished him. What I would not stoop to do for myself, I would not do for him (39).

For Watkins, the impact of the play would be of more use than petitioning:

The pen, the press is more wanted, and must be more used - had in greater requisition. It must be applied in every variety of form and manner with novelty. If one shaft fail we must use another with more "advised aim". it is not in "much speaking" - it is more in writing to benefit the cause (40).

Watkins went on to argue that while speeches had a role to play (for those who could not read and for the electrifying effect they could have on rousing sympathetic action), words were "but wind" and if they were given "paper wings" they became birds of the air which travelled further and lasted longer. The way in which literature could influence people was explained in an article in the Chartist Circular:

Poets and their poetry have, and will continue to exert extensive influence on the destinies of mankind...From the hidden cell "Thoughts that breathe and words that burn" have passed, and startled mankind from their sleep of indifference, roused them into action, shaken the long established foundation of things, revolutionised the feeble mind, and raised man, as a moral and intellectual being, to a loftier elevation (41).

The same was true of the drama, as The Charter pointed out:

We entertain a devoted attachment to the drama, not alone as a delightful and harmless recreation, a refuge from the thorns and briars of which "this working-day world" is so full; but more especially because we regard it as one of the most humanising of all the moral engines of civilisation; as a medium at once exhilarating and sedative; one which can indeed, if anything merely human has that power, ...ministers to a mind diseas'd  
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,  
Kick out the written troubles of the brain -  
And "like" some sweet oblivious antidote,  
Cleansse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff  
Which weighs upon the heart (42).

The theme of John Frost was certainly not intended simply as a "delightful and harmless recreation", but a play of that name was performed several times by the Chartists of Nottingham (43).

Its author, John Watkins, did choose a subject that was phenomenally popular with the Chartists - the Newport Uprising of 1839 and the subsequent trial and transportation of John Frost, one of the leaders. At the time of the event, numerous defence committees were organised up and down the country, petitions were sent and meetings were organised. The Charter had even proposed that the day of the Queen's wedding, in February 1840, should be turned into a day of demonstrations

for the pardon of Frost, with all London Chartists meeting in St James Park to call to the Queen as she went to Westminster: "Pardon for Frost" (44). Subsequently, the return of the three leaders from exile became a central demand for as long as the Chartist movement continued in existence, and the leaders and events in Newport were eulogised in the pages of the press:

Each post brought to the editors of the Chartist newspapers whole piles of letters, acrostics, sonnets, epitaphs and odes devoted to the participants and the leaders in the Newport revolt. Many of them never saw the light, but even those which were printed were numerous enough to fill a separate volume (45).

Despite the popularity of his subject matter, and despite the fact that he was himself a Chartist (prepared to sacrifice all to the cause), John Watkins relationship with many Chartists was far from smooth. Described by Goodway as "argumentative and, it would appear, unbalanced", he had arrived in London from the North Riding in the winter of 1840-41 and at first supported O'Connor and the Northern Star - even going so far as to recommend the assassination of Lovett and the New Movers. But he had a violent change of heart in 1843, and attempted to form an opposition to O'Connor, touring the city denouncing him. Not surprisingly, given the fact that London was overwhelmingly O'Connorite, Watkins found few friends, but even earlier he had found little support amongst the London Chartists when it came to the question of the publication and distribution of his play. After having been bandied between publishers like a shuttlecock and finding that the chief Chartist publisher shrank "from the responsibility" of producing the play, Watkins eventually, in 1841, put his own name on the title page "for none other dared let his stand

there" (and apologised to readers of the Northern Star for the "awkward manner" in which the work was published). Such was his anger at the London Chartists, that he wrote an article for the Northern Star denouncing them as "a mongrel breed" and "snakes in the grass"; but his problems did not end with publication. Watkins discovered that one Chartist bookseller, having asked for some copies to sell, had shelved them out of sight, and such behaviour led him to establish his own Chartist depot to distribute Chartist books "independently of such insults" (46). It is hard to ascertain whether the London Chartists had shunned the play because they did not want to publish drama, because of the play itself or because of Watkins as an individual, but it is clear that the Chartists in Nottingham had no such reservations and found much in it to recommend several performances.

According to Dorothy Thompson, Watkins' play was "more to be praised for its intentions than either its dramatic power or its historical accuracy", but John Watkins himself made no claim for the piece as a truthful chronicle of the Uprising:

This drama is not so much intended to illustrate the characters of the dramatis persona in it, nor the insurrection at Newport, on which the plot turns, as it is an attempt to illustrate Chartism itself. Nevertheless the writer has selected the chief Chartist victim to be the hero, and so far as one not personally known to him could know him, he has endeavoured to make a true portrait of him, likewise of Shell. The character of Albion was originally meant to be a sketch of Vincent. Melbourne, Russell and Normanby are caricatured; but a Socialist, a teetotaller, a Corn Law repealer, a parson, a magistrate, a policeman and others are all brought in as representatives of their peculiar classes...In short, the whole piece is a **composition**, in the artistic meaning of the word, made up of characters, incidents and events taken separately from the whole history of the Chartist movement, and dovetailed together (47).

It is indeed such a breadth of vision which is one of the saving graces of a play which is, in many ways, bombastic and undramatic. Alongside his portrayal of ruthless rulers, Watkins includes arguments for rational reform from the mouth of Middleman; debates about the need to reform ourselves through love and morally renew the new world are heard from Utopian (a socialist), and Aquarius, a teetotaler, blames poverty on drink. The church too enters the debate in the shape of Parson Coal who argues that the power of the rulers is proof that they are ordained by God, for where else could their power have come from, and in challenging them Frost is no more than an atheist and rebel, for both crimes go together. All these arguments (and more - Watkins does not shrink from dealing with lawyers, charity and Frost's own personal dilemma of having to choose between his family and the people) are answered with Chartist arguments.

The play sets out to show the justice of the Chartist cause, and therefore central to it is a portrayal of the rottenness and ruthlessness of the present rulers, of a world where "vice reigns" and "virtue is her victim", nowhere expressed more clearly in the play than in Frost's speech from his prison cell:

I sought for mercy for the suff'ring poor,  
And am condemn'd for 't - aye, for that,  
I'm sentenc'd to be hang'd, and drawn and quarter'd,  
My sever'd limbs dispos'd of by the Queen.  
What will she do with them when sent to her?  
Will she, like Ale, make a feast of them? (48).

The harsh reality of justice is described even more graphically by Frost when, having heard from his gaoler that





And made to bear burdens that beasts should not  
bear.  
No more be it said of the British so brave  
They're the best in the world to dupe and enslave  
(50).

Apart from the easy targets of rulers and injustice, Watkins does not shirk from dramatising the problems and arguments within the Chartist movement itself, posing as central an argument between physical force and moral force. From the mouths of Shell and Albion, both "leaders of the people", we hear of the uselessness of petitions which the "House of Thieves" scoff and spurn, and the need therefore to exchange "begging papers" for pikes and to meet force with force. These arguments are put to a meeting of working men, arguments which Frost tries to counter by warning of the dangers of using violence and urging moral superiority:

Oh do consider how beset with snares  
You are - how Government lurks like a tiger,  
Waiting and watching for the least excuse  
To pounce upon you with exulting fury!  
We are no match for it in force and fraud -  
Only by moral means can we hope conquest.  
Our wavering friends will turn to foes with fear.  
Obey the law or arm the tyrants with't (51).

However, on Albion's arrest for treason, it is Shell's arguments which win the day, and the men go off to "have at the brutes who broke our bones" and Frost is compelled, despite being "horror struck by war" and with his "damp hair" rising up, to go with them. The Chartists are beaten, many (including Shell) are killed and the rest dispersed to the hills. In the end, Frost is arrested and sentenced to transportation, a broken man. Although Watkins does pose the argument, he appears unable to decide if either way can win,

for the petition had very clearly been rejected and the Newport Uprising was defeated. What he was certain about was why he had written about the event. In John Frost he hoped to strengthen the spirit of the movement, to rouse the sadly lacking passions of the people:

The sympathies of the people for themselves are not sufficiently roused; they don't rise for their rights - they lie supine under the feet of tyranny. They require to be incessantly appealed to - their feelings and understandings are incessantly appealed to, and what do they answer? It is not yet time. When, British slaves! - when will the last point of endurance be reached?...You all do know that the Charter is just, is your due; you are fully convinced of that - instruction has done its office; what do you want further? You want sentiment, passions, action, or you would never see your benefactors taken to prison, by your tyrants, before your eyes (52).

Whilst Watkins hoped that in putting Frost onto the stage he could rouse those passions, and dispel what he saw as the three great foes of Chartism (ignorance, prejudice and apathy), his choice of a Chartist hero and of political events was by no means isolated in terms of Chartist attitudes towards literature. The Chartists were aware on a broader level of the political role of writers. "Most modern poets...are class poets, the same as we have class-legislators," wrote Ernest Jones. "All genuine poets are fervid politicians" added Ebenezer Elliot in the preface to one of his poems. Literature and its authors did not stand outside of life, but reflected both the world in which it was written and the politics of the writers:

The gentlemen critics complain that the union of poetry with politics is always hurtful to the politics and fatal to the poetry. But these great connoisseurs must be wrong, if Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Cowper and Burns were poets.

Why should the sensitive bard take less interest than other men in these things which most nearly concern man. The contrary ought to be and is true. What is poetry but impassioned truth - philosophy in its essence - the spirit of that bright consummate flower whose root is in our bosom? Are there no politics in Hamlet? Is not Macbeth, - is not the drama of Wallenstein and a hundred other works of great authors, sublime political treatises (53).

In their choice of topic most poets seized on those which were of interest only to the privileged few or which vindicated their rule. In its place, the Chartists demanded a literature of their own which reflected their interests. Jones made an impassioned plea for the Bulwer of Chartism and the Knowles of Democracy, and in the same article he chastised those writers (Browning, Tennyson and Horne amongst others) from whom they had expected more:

Can Knowles but stalk upon his stilts of Arragon, go hunting with his feudal falconers, or make a princess condescend to love a serf? (54).

In ignoring "the great cause of the age" these writers not only did not serve the people, they ran the risk of being forgotten tomorrow, for they were behind the times. In posing this problem, Jones also pointed to the answer (in his eyes) and joined in an argument about the theatre which found many voices during the nineteenth century; the drama was expiring

because it has been dedicated to an expiring cause - because it has been the pander to wealth and fashion, instead of the vindicator of manhood and industry. Whenever, indeed, it has ridiculed or chastised an aristocratic vice, it has done so playfully, and kindly, shewing it in a sportive light, and, at any rate, depicting how it made an equal suffer, not how it crushed a "subordinate". We have had the misfortunes of younger sons, the mishaps of injured daughters of noble houses, but when has the Bastille victim, when has the lost child of labour, when has the hapless operative,

(the martyrs of the nineteenth century,) when have these been brought before the public eye in the drama, or when will they? (55).

Nor was it sufficient simply to put the working class on the stage; criticism was made of the way in which the working class was portrayed when it was written about. Most literature was written to "decorate the nobility" and if "lowly beings sometimes mingle in a romantic story they appear base and ignoble". Douglas was criticised not simply for its portrayal of the hero, but for that portrayal in comparison to the other shepherds:

...the minor machinery - the serfs and vassals of the tragedy - although educated as shepherds like [Douglas], are little better than brutes in their language and actions (56).

Such works should be left to moulder on the shelves uncut and unread. In its place, a radical Literary Reform should create a literature which sought out the virtue of the masses and exposed and condemned the iniquities of the titled. Here was "the business of life" in which all true and lasting poetry had to be rooted, and Ernest Jones extended a fraternal hand:

to the great minds of the day, come among the people, write for the people, and your fame will live forever. The people's instinct will give life to your philosophy...(57).

It is worth noting that in arguing both that the theatre was dying because it looked to an expiring cause, and also that the working class should be put on the stage, the Chartists were reflecting developments in the theatre that were being argued for by far less radical voices. In 1833, Bulwer Lytton had made a plea for tales of a "household nature that find

their echo in the hearts of the people" if the theatre was not to deteriorate further (although he did want tragedy to limit itself to the woes and passions of people to be found in the "different grades of an educated and highly civilised people"). Ten years later Richard Heigest Horne, although he believed drama should be an ideal art with no relationship to contemporary society, was forced to admit that the most legitimate drama, the drama which was the genuine offspring of the age was that which "catches the manners as they rise and embodies the characteristics of the time" (58). In the ten years between Bulwer Lytton's plea and Horne's reluctant description, the theatre had followed Dickens' admonition to the writer to hold their mirror up to Mr Whelks of the New Cut in Lambeth and the working class had arrived on the stage - principally in the shape of the melodramas which were to dominate the theatre of the East End for the best part of the century (59).

It would be easy to overestimate the political character of melodrama (there were certainly many, if not a majority, which favoured patriotism and flag-waving), but it is also true, to use the words of Michael Booth, that a proletarian impulse lay at the heart of melodrama, and that it was the chief social protest drama of the century:

The authors who wrote for Mr Whelks were well aware of his station in life and the class sympathies he was likely to have. Melodrama clearly reflects class hatreds (60).

Some (from The Mutiny at the Nore, through The Factory Lad, The Factory Girl, The Barn Burners, and The Factory Strike)

did deal with the fundamental questions of profit-making, working conditions, automation, and industrial discontent. Alongside these a handful dealt more directly with political issues, although these focused essentially on the reform movement: Moncrieff's Reform, or John Bull Triumphant (performed at the Coburg in March 1831), the anonymous play performed at Sadlers Wells in the same year More Reform! or, The Bill! The Whole Bill! And Nothing But the Bill!!!, and the Surrey Christmas pantomime of 1831, Harlequin Reformer. And to this can be added the developing pantomimes which also represented a highly topical form of dramatic art offering audiences immediate and specific comment on issues of the day from religion to poverty and justice, an unofficial and informal chronicle of the age dramatising everything from everyday trivia and attitudes to technical achievements to the major political and social crises of the time (61).

In this context, the voices of the Chartists were not so isolated, nor were they alone in their small attempt to create a non-commercial political theatre, for they had a predecessor in the shape of William Cobbett - a predecessor who unlike the bombastic verse of Watkins favoured satire and melodrama in his plays.

#### A Kick for a Bite: The Plays of William Cobbett.

The player people have driven out those legitimate buffoons of the country as the Hanover-Rats drove out black English-Rats which were poor harmless creatures that very seldom plundered either the mow or the dairy...Oh let us have the out-a-doors

vagrants back again! Let us have the Mountebanks and the Jack-puddings...(62).

Thus wrote Cobbett in April 1821, four years before the appearance of his first fully fledged play, Big O and Sir Glory: or the Leisure to Laugh. It was published in The Political Register of 24th September 1825, and described as:

not the first, or the last, or the least tedious of Cobbett's several ponderous efforts in comic dramatic dialogue (63).

Big O dealt with Ireland and the emancipation Bill, an issue over which Cobbett and Daniel O'Connell (who was supported by Sir Francis Burdett) had disagreed vehemently. The subtitle was taken from O'Connell's response to various charges made by Cobbett against him: "What a strange creature it is! If I had leisure, I think I would laugh a little at him by way of reply" (64).

It was Cobbett who found the leisure to laugh and not only at O'Connell, characterised as Big O and attacked for his "intense vanity, his cormorant appetite for huzzas, his intense haste for precedence" and his love of everlasting talk, but at

the "entire" jack asses who had the "intense" impudence to call me an "old fellow", "an under-growing fool" and a "comical miscreant" (64).

Sir Francis Burdett, once called "Westminster's pride and England's Glory" by an exuberant supporter, was pilloried for his stinginess, indolence and early relations with Lady Oxford. The piece also lambasted Francis Place, in the



character of Peter Thimble, and The Times, the "broadest sheet in the whole world", personified on stage by the character of Anna Brodie. The hero, a "very mild and placid, patiently enduring Old Fellow" who appears in the third act, is Cobbett himself. He takes the opportunity to deal with some of the accusations thrown at him by John Bric, one of O'Connell's henchmen, who is referred to as the "foul discharge from the flatulent bowels of cormorant vanity" (65).

Cobbett was not entirely satisfied with his first theatrical venture. A few days after its publication, The Political Register carried an apology for the untidy manner in which it had been presented and expressed Cobbett's deep mortification when forced to "contemplate the disfigured features of the first-born of my dramatic muse". Time had forced him to leave out several very interesting incidents and several characters amongst which was "an awfully interesting ghost" (66). Notwithstanding Cobbett's feelings, the play had an immense public. Three days after it appeared in London, the first act was reprinted in The Dublin Morning Post where it was in such demand that vendors were able to ask between one and five shillings for each paper they had remaining (67). Cobbett later reissued it in pamphlet form and gave free permission to anyone to stage it without acting rights, as it was the "stuff" that people want:

They are too busy thinking about politics to be amused with the soft and loyal rubbish of the Colmans and the Cumberlands, and the like...The golden times are gone, when Dibdin got a pension for the **Tight Little Island** and the **Sweet Little Cherub** and NEPTUNE saying **Great George shall rule for me**. O, no! Big O and Sir Glory is the thing for these days (68).

Despite this, and despite the fact it was not a

difficult piece by any means. The scenery is very plain; the principal characters, Big O, Sir Glory, Sancho, Brick, Bott, Smith and Anna Brodie all easily personated; any stout, tall irish Footman, with good lungs, plenty of brass, a white eye and a swinging body will do for Big O (69),

it was an offer which does not appear to have been taken up.

Cobbett's second three act play, Mexico or the Patriot Bondholders, was published in the Political Register in 1830 and was more unsuitable for stage presentation, including one scene in which 26 place names are solemnly pointed out on a map. Described as a melodrama, the play deals with the alarm felt by British investors in Mexican silver mines at the internal anarchy in the country. They were concerned at Spain's attempts to quell the unrest, fearing they would lose the "expected fruits of their gambling" and consequently opposed the Spanish expeditions sent from Cuba. Cobbett shows their false concern for justice and humanity in Mexico as being nothing more than a cover for their real concern - getting money out of the Mexicans (70).

It was not until his third play, Surplus Population, that Cobbett found himself on the stage (71). This time he centres his attack on the Malthusians who were gaining credence at the time and focusing much of their energy on tightening up the Poor Law. Francis Place appears once again as Peter Thimble "the ugliest devil I ever saw" and is lampooned for his Malthusian beliefs, his arrogance in calling himself esquire and his sycophantic adherence to Burdett. Burdett is ridiculed as Sir Gripe Grindum, a lecherous and insincere

landowning MP, a "political weathercock" who professes Malthusian principles but practices seduction. An extract from the play, a discussion between Thimble and the girl Grindum wants to seduce, shows both the style and theme of the play:

Thimble: So, young woman, you are going to be married, I understand?  
Betsy: Yes, sir.  
Thimble: How old are you?  
Betsy: I'm nineteen, sir, come next Valentine's Eve.  
Thimble: That is to say, that you are eighteen!  
(Aside) No wonder this country is ruined!  
And your mother, now, how old is she?  
Betsy: I can't justly say, sir; but I heard her say she was forty some time back.  
Thimble: And how many of you has she brought into the world?  
Betsy: Only seventeen, sir.  
Thimble: Seventeen! Only seventeen!  
Betsy: Seventeen now alive, sir; she lost two and two still-born, and ...  
Thimble: Hold your tongue! Hold your tongue!  
(Aside) It is quite monstrous! Nothing can save the country but plague, pestilence, famine and sudden death. Government ought to import a ship-load of arsenic. (To her) But, young woman, cannot you impose on yourself "moral restraint" for ten or a dozen years?  
Betsy: Pray what is that sir?  
Thimble: Cannot you keep single till you are about thirty years old?  
Betsy: Thirty years old, sir! (Stifling a laugh).  
(72).

Whilst Thimble tries desperately to stop "the coupling together of these poor creatures" who want "to fill the country with beggars and thieves", Sir Gripe Grindum plans his seduction of Betsy. At first he tries to bribe Dick, Betsy's fiancée, with an offer of a job in the Guards in London and to blackmail her mother by demanding the year's rent or threatening to throw her out of her house. Failing in both of these, he decides to abduct the young girl who he sees as his property, for "am I not her lord?". However, his plans are

foiled, and at the end retribution falls on both Peter Thimble and the MP, the latter being dragged by a mob of three to four hundred villagers through his own pond.

The play is in essence a melodrama; the wicked property owner using his power and wealth to try and seduce the innocent girl and wreck the lives of the poor but happy couple. Suspense is maintained throughout as the audience waits to see if he will succeed. Yet it also includes much political discussion; a whole scene is devoted to an attack on Malthusian principles, in which Last, the shoemaker, acts as Cobbett's mouth piece showing how Thimble is anxious only to "put a stop to the breeding of those who do the work". He shows up the stupidity of such ideas and expresses ideas Cobbett later printed in The Political Register himself; of those who

create **useful things** by their labour, either of hands or head, there never can be too many in any country, because they will create subsistence in proportion to their numbers..but that, of those **who create nothing useful** there may be, as there is now in this country, a great surplus population (73).

In practice, Cobbett tries to undercut Malthus's ideas by showing the country people to be poor but happy families. There are hordes of children in the village, all the fruits of happy marriages; Widow Birch may be in arrears with her rent and in dire poverty, but her 21 children (of which 17 have survived) are her pride and joy and at the end of the play, Dick and Betsy sing of the fulfilment of parenthood:

Dick: Of children full that I my quiver  
Might have, you heard the parson pray;  
Call you then where God's the giver,  
Behold the gift and turn away?

Betsy: Di'n't he pray for God to bless me,  
And make me fruitful as the vine;

And charge my Richard to caress me,  
And sick or well not to repine (74).

In this picture of rural bliss (all the villagers have pastoral surnames such as Birch and Hazel), Cobbett probably comes closest to creating "the rustic comedy of the Merry England of yore" to which he longed to return (albeit with a sharp political twist), although Cobbett's insistence on such happiness should be tempered by his own belief (influenced by Catholicism) that, birth control was "legalised murder" (75).

As well as taking on the ideas of Malthus, there are many attacks on the ills and hypocrisies of the ruling class. Apart from his lechery, Sir Gripe Grindum is stingy. He half starves his servants and the best room in Gripe Hall has cobwebs on the ceiling, torn paper on the walls, no curtains on the windows and no fire in the grate - a room appropriately described as more fitting to a "robber's den" than a "gentleman's house". He feels safe to do what ever he wants to, for,

Did you ever know the world find wrong anything done  
by a man with forty thousand a year in land! (76).

Yet pressures are also afoot to change things. There are references to Swing and the pressure for reform is so great that Grindum finds he is its slave:

I know that this Reform of Parliament will strip me  
of my power; I detest it accordingly, and yet I'm  
compelled to work for it (77).

Given the subject matter it is hardly surprising that a proposed production, which Cobbett was to have attended, in Tonbridge, Kent in 1835 was prohibited by the local authorities. According to Cobbett,

Some very decent and respectable players in London wished to act it; and I recommended them to take a tour in Sussex and West Kent and to begin at Tonbridge on their way to Lewes. The manager proceeded to Tonbridge, and engaged a place for acting at The Angel Inn. The aristocracy (by which I mean lords, baronets, squires; the parsons, the money-mongers) took the alarm; the landlord was frightened out of his bargain with the players who were thus obliged to give up their intention. (78).

The conduct and motives of the aristocracy were like those

of the King in Hamlet, when he, being at the play, rises hastily and cries "Lights! Lights! Away! Away!" Well may they exclaim, with Macbeth I think it is: "How is it with me, O God! When every little noise alarms me"! How is it with them indeed! How is it with them, when even the stirrings of a mouse excites their fears! There are no combinations against them; there are no menaces; there is no appearance of any outward array; there is no appearance of resistance being offered to them...Only think of them being alarmed at a mere piece of ridicule on the damnable Malthusian doctrine! Only think of their taking fright even at that!...And the folly surpasses even the baseness of their conduct. Do the nasty greedy fools imagine that they can keep the contents of Surplus Population from being known to the working-people? Are they asses enough to believe this? Why the very circumstances of their having thwarted the players at Tonbridge will cause thousands and thousands of the Comedy to be sold in print! And do they think that this is the way to diminish the number of Cobbettites in this country! It will greatly augment them because the general conclusion will be that there was something which the aristocracy, parsons and money-mongers wished that the people should not hear (79).

Surplus Population was performed in the neighbourhood of Normandy Farm at Ash in West Surrey where Cobbett lived

sometimes from 1832, on March 27 1835. According to Cobbett, the play was taken on a tour of villages of Hampshire, Sussex and Kent and Dorothy Thompson notes that the players in Elland, near Huddersfield, were persuaded to perform the play, the part of Last being played by Abram Hanson (80).

Despite believing that the ban on his play in Tonbridge would backfire on the aristocracy, Cobbett did not let matters rest there. A fourth play was promised, to be called Bastards in High Life which would attack those who had inflicted this wrong on him:

to pull out the whole bastardised litter by the ears and toss them out sprawling before the public, as boys do litters of young rabbits by poking in and twisting of a bramble amongst them (81).

Although he felt it was his right and duty to inflict vengeance on the wrong-doers, the play was never written, Cobbett dying in June 1835.

Much can be made of Cobbett's contribution to political theatre; Big O and Sir Glory and Surplus Population were written before any of the handful of topical plays (such as Reform or John Bull or The Factory Lad) mentioned above and the performance of the latter outside a conventional theatre can be seen as one of the earliest attempts to create a non-commercial political theatre (certainly in the nineteenth century). All three plays, represent the first attempts to satirise on stage contemporary political figures, and their publication in the popular Political Register makes Cobbett certainly amongst the first to try to take political and social drama to the heart of the rural and industrial workers

in England. All these elements lead Kenneth Chandor to conclude both that Cobbett gave to the theatre "an original concept" of what political theatre ought to be, a concept of "provocative debate in dramatic form" and to claim he was the first person to introduce drama as "an important part of the scheme of radicals to involve the working class politically". He goes further in arguing Cobbett led the way in voicing the "rebellious spirit of reform" struggling beneath the surface of conformity and convention, allowing others to follow (82).

However, despite Cobbett's undoubted contribution (not least in the form of political melodrama) some caution should be used in claiming too much for his work. There is undoubtedly an element of cynicism in the timing of Cobbett's publication of his works which could lead us to question how far his commitment was to political theatre and how far to his own political self-advancement. Big O and Sir Glory appeared both at a time when the Political Register was suffering from falling sales and just prior to an election, and can be seen as a political manoeuvre on Cobbett's part to gain support from Catholics in England and enhance his chances of securing a seat in Parliament. The same is true for both publications of Surplus Population; its original appearance in the Political Register and the subsequent pamphlet (published in 1834) both concur with election campaigns with which Cobbett was heavily involved, and in the case of its first publication, Cobbett stated (unlike Big O) that players had to obtain special permission to perform the piece, leading Chandor to conclude that this was to enable Cobbett to "use it for political advantage in his election campaign" (83).



Whatever, Cobbett's reasons for publishing these plays (and they were all published late in his life) he clearly did touch a nerve of the people, and was shrewd enough to see that popularity could be attained through political drama. But more importantly, we should question the idea of Cobbett as a lone voice both in writing topical plays and in breaking through the theatrical censorship of the time. The Chartists, as has been seen above, made a contribution in the former sphere (and certainly a greater contribution in terms of performance), and they also played a not insignificant role in taking on both the theatrical monopoly and the abuses of professional theatre.

#### Professional Abuses and the Monopoly

Whilst The Operative felt it had far nobler objects in view than encouraging in their readers a "taste for theatrical entertainment", much of the Chartist press regularly reviewed theatrical performances and events and carried advertisements for published play texts (84). The papers devoted weekly columns to the performances at the major houses and The Champion went so far as to introduce a column entitled "Theatrical and Musical Chit-Chat" - an early gossip column about theatrical goings-on. The reviews were by no means all favourable; indeed both patent houses (in particular) endured much criticism as the Chartists joined others in blaming them for the "victated and vulgar" feeling which had overtaken theatrical taste and attacking their performances for being no more than "gegaw and nonsense, pun and pantomime" (85). In the eyes of the Northern Star (which introduced sporadic

theatre criticism when it moved from Leeds to London), the two great national theatres had been appropriated to purposes foreign to those for which they were originally intended. Shakespeare had been banished from Drury Lane and replaced by spectacles "unfitted even for the pastime of holiday fools". It had even been made an arena for wild beasts, and on one occasion the novelty at the house was

the feeding of the beasts in the presence of the audience! To what depths of depravity will this "Grand National Theatre" descend at last or can it suffer further declension? (86).

Much space was allotted to uncovering not simply the horrors of what appeared on the stage but also the errors and abuses associated with the theatre as an industry. The Charter, for example, printed a damning indictment of critics, blaming them for the "present unsatisfactory condition of the stage" and attacking their acceptance of free tickets from the management as bribes. The Champion concentrated its attention on the over-crowding of theatres and the "abominable" practice of selling tickets when the theatre was already full, but the greatest space was reserved for the treatment of actors. They were quick to criticise bad practice on the part of performers; drunkenness during performances, a problem which occurred not infrequently, was condemned particularly in the case of Mr Reeves, who made a habit of appearing on stage when he was tipsy and who was impudent enough to "make a habit of insulting his patrons". But on the whole, the Chartists spent more time defending actors against charges of immorality and

on the question of actors' wages. Dr Wade, a Warwick clergyman, Chartist and a strong supporter of trade unionism, was not a lone voice as <sup>he</sup> leapt to the defence of actors when

...the law called them vagabonds and vagrants. What right has the law to give them this appellation? If it were just, then were the Judges who went on circuits vagrants - and the Bishops, when they went their visitations (sic), were vagrants (87).

Chartists reserved much venom for the "fulsome truckling to management" which the theatrical practice of benefits entailed. In acting gratuitously, the performers were being "robbed of a night's labour" and the paper reserved harsher words for those actors at Drury Lane who signed a letter praising Mr Bunn and his management and agreeing to perform free for his benefit:

Really those actors are beneath contempt who could truckle to a manager who has done so much to degrade and depress their art and their prospects, as to sign a testimonial...(88).

The actor's loss of wages was also a central argument in one of the main crusades run by the Chartists against the closure of theatres on certain days. In February 1839, The Charter was discussing the "monstrous farce" of closing certain theatres on the anniversary of Charles I's execution:

It seems odd that no mode should be hit upon of commemorating the cutting off of a king's head, but that of cutting off one sixth of an actor's weekly salary. It would appear as though the catastrophe was brought about by the stage players instead of the puritans, and that it was determined to visit it upon their generations to the end of time (89).

But it was the "laughable farce", "a farce to all but the actors", of the closure of those theatres under the surveillance of the Lord Chamberlain on the Wednesdays and Fridays of Lent which became the focus for Chartist discontent and agitation (90).

The issue had been raised in 1831 by Kemble as manager of Covent Garden, by both patent theatres in 1833 and in 1837 Thomas Duncombe MP had presented a petition in Parliament in support of Bunn, then the licensee of Drury Lane. But it was 1839 when the issue really exploded. In February, The Charter was bemoaning the fact that the

season has now arrived, when, as we believe, without the authority of any law of the land, it pleases the government, or Lord Chamberlain, to order the closing of five out of the dozen metropolitan Theatres, on two nights in the week, for six weeks, and for the whole of the seventh, thus depriving hundreds of persons of eighteen days income, for no other purpose than the pleasure of asserting a supposed right, the gratitude of a diseased appetite for exercising arbitrary power (91).

The paper would have liked the theatres to open their doors in defiance of the Lord Chamberlain, asking what he could do if they all took such action, but the campaign to amend this abuse was instead fought (and won) in Parliament, spearheaded by the "only decidedly Chartist member of the House of Commons", the radical MP for Finsbury, Thomas Duncombe (92).

During the course of the debate on Lent closures in Parliament, Lord John Russell had raised the question of the legality of those theatres outside the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain, which were acting without any sanction of

the law. In this, he touched on the other issue which was to concern the Chartists until its repeal in 1843, the theatrical monopoly. Whilst they had supported the fight to open the theatres during Lent which had (in theatrical circles) been led by the patent theatres, the Chartists had no love for monopoly. Their opposition to such inequality was, not surprisingly, vociferous. No opportunity was missed in the papers to point out the "degrading influence of an abominable monopoly". It was not simply the case that the two major theatres which were extended privileges by their patents rendering them guardians of the national drama, ignored the public trust and did nothing to further the case of the drama, or that the government

affected to protect the patentees, while the purposes for which the patents were expressly granted (the encouragement and protection of the drama) have been set altogether at nought (93).

The monopoly was seen to be responsible for the degraded state of the drama in England. Ernest Jones noted that whilst critics objected that English dramatic authors were destitute of inventive powers, they missed the real cause of dramatic degradation, for as long as the dramatist was

restricted to the advocacy of monopolies, in defence of which nothing can be said, so long may he tax his ingenuity in vain, to produce that free flow of language, incident and moral, which an honest, and fertile theme alone affords the author (94).

The Charter went further than Jones arguing in no uncertain terms that

The fruitful sources of dramatic degradation is to be found in the existing monopoly. It is alike injurious to the author, the actor and the public...It frequently throws the great theatres into the hands of unthrifty speculators, without

either taste or principle. It reduces the most talented performers to a state of degrading dependence on individual caprice. It exalts the paltriest trickster of a play-wright above the most unquestionable dramatic genius. It ministers to a public love of excitement on principles false and gross, corrupting where it should refine (95).

The article ended with a plea to all who regarded the glory of "our country's drama" as a matter of high importance, to "combine for the destruction of this pernicious monopoly".

In championing the repeal of the monopoly, the Chartists were putting themselves at the front of a movement already in full flood, a movement led by the middle class reformers, but it was in their defence of unlicensed theatres and their commitment to legalising cheap entertainment that they broke in a more class based direction (96).

1839 was the year of the first Metropolitan Police Act. Amongst the long list of offences, (which included riding or driving "furiously", selling wine, beer or spirits on a Sunday morning, flying kites or shaking doormats in the street after eight o'clock in the morning), power was given to Police Commissioners to order, in writing, entry

into any house or room kept or used within the said district for stage plays or dramatic entertainments into which admission is obtained by payment of money, and which is not a licensed theatre, at any time when the same shall be open for the reception of persons resorting thereto, and to take into custody all persons who shall be found therein without lawful excuse (97).

That the Chartists took up the issue is not surprising. The Bill as a whole had, according to Thomas Wakley (one of the

radical MPs for Finsbury) "excited great alarm in the city" for it attacked the "privileges of the citizens which had existed since the time of Alfred", creating crimes where none previously existed (98). It was passed at a time when the political situation was explosive; the Chartists' petition had been rejected by the House of Commons, and their discussion was centred on "ulterior motives", the sacred month, arming, drilling and fighting. The movement was, in the words of Dorothy Thompson, at "the frontiers of legality" and meetings were being broken up, most relevantly maybe for understanding why the Chartists felt that they had something to fear from the Metropolitan police, at the Bull Ring in Birmingham where a posse of Metropolitan police had been used to attack the regular gatherings of Chartists (99). At a time like that, the introduction of a Bill aimed at clearing up the streets of London, which included a clause making it an offence to

sell or distribute or offer for sale or distribution or exhibit to public view any profane, indecent or obscene book, paper, print, drawing, painting or representation or sing any profane, indecent or obscene song or ballad or write or draw any indecent or obscene figure or representation or use any profane, indecent or obscene language to the annoyance of the inhabitants or passengers,

and which allowed the police "despotic powers to enter houses" was something to be challenged (100).

Yet understanding in general why the Chartists opposed the Bill as a whole, does not explain why they took on in particular the question of unlicensed theatres. The specific target of this section of the Act was the penny theatres which, in the late 1820's and 1830's had sprung up all over

London, although in particular in the poverty stricken and densely populated East End. Estimates are difficult to come by, not least because the gaffs (as they became known) were set up quickly in shops and warehouses, but Paul Sheridan suggests there were at one time over 80 in the East End alone and James Grant in his Sketches in London written in 1838 guesses at between 80 to 100 in the whole of London "wishing to be under rather than above the mark", although he had

lately been assured by the proprietors of two of these establishments, they are likely to go on increasing to an extent of which no one at present has any conception. (101).

These figures are almost certainly well below the true number of theatres; Davidge's concern at the 1832 Select Committee of theatres springing up on every street more truthfully reflects the real picture than any figures I have been able to find. These "juvenile thief manufactories" or "unlawful hot-bed[s] of guilt" (to use the words of The Morning Chronicle which reflected general opinion) offered two twenty minute plays (generally of the "blood and thunder" variety with the occasional twenty minute "Shakespeare") divided by a song and dance, and performances could take place up to five or six times a night. On average they could hold an audience of 200, although an unnamed newspaper article which lists over 24 penny theatres also includes two (one near the Yorkshire Stingo and the other in Portman Market) which could hold between five to six hundred. Despite the frequency of performances and the size of the "theatres", they were generally filled to bursting, the audience in their rush for



places making "the canvas partition bulge in and out" for the performance started as soon as the first was seated (102).

Alongside the gaffs, which formed the bottom of the theatrical ladder, came the more respectable but equally unlicensed (for dramatic performances) penny or saloon theatres. The Royal Union Saloon in Shoreditch was described as "a very attractive place of amusement...exceedingly well conducted" which seated over 900. The Royal Victoria Saloon, which seated 600, had scenery and decorations which were "got up in a very expensive style" and employed Ellar, the once celebrated harlequin of Drury Lane and Covent Garden. Ellar also appeared at the Bower Saloon, in Stangate Street, where in the "superior accommodation", pieces were presented of "the highest order". In Marylebone, the Yorkshire Stingo (despite its name) boasted an orchestra "embellished with illuminated crystal columns" and a balcony which overlooked the "grand concert room". These are a very different proposition to the gaff in Harrow Street, Southwark where the floor boards were so rotten the audience were in danger of being "precipitated into the cellar underneath" or the theatre in Short's Gardens where the only musical instrument was a cracked drum (103).

The fact that both Chartists and other radicals did involve themselves in the defence of these theatres can be seen by the numerous reports of prosecutions which appeared on the pages of their press. So, for example, less than a month after the introduction of the bill, The Examiner was writing that they could not understand the "fury of the law against penny theatres". Quoting a report from the Chronicle about the

"Extraordinary Seizure of 14 Performers and Forty of the Audience, at that den of infamy, the twopenny theatre in Parker Street, Drury Lane", The Examiner

looked in vain for the circumstances of 'infamy' alleged, or for any sort of atrocity; the only crime proved being indeed the heinous one of payment of twopence at the door (104).

The "vigour of justice on a worthy occasion" had indeed been shown when a whole division of police had been used in "bringing up the theatrical delinquents", and the paper was surprised that

a Penny Tournament, with Penny Tilts to the sound of Penny Trumpets is not started in Drury Lane (105).

One of the best documented examples of Chartist intervention in the fate of an unlicensed theatre can be found in A.L.Crauford's semi-biographical novel Sam and Sallie, an account of the Royal Union Saloon and the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton, under the management of Sam Lane - an event also reported and followed with much interest in the pages of the radical press (106).

Whilst popular feeling was undoubtedly aroused by the attacks on penny theatres (the Christmas Harlequinade at Covent Garden included several "good hits" illustrating the absurdities of the Bill), it did not lead to the "Penny Tournaments" predicted by The Examiner. The Weekly True Sun, which was convinced that the "wanton use of power" allowed for by the Bill would soon get up "political steam", was puzzled that the audience allowed the arrests at the Royal Union Saloon to happen in the first place:

We wonder that 900 persons permitted such a flagrant injustice - though law it may be - to be perpetrated as the apprehension of so many (107).

The audience clearly either did not feel so strongly or so confident as the radical press over opposing such "wanton power". This was true not simply for the attacks on unlicensed theatres but for the Bill as a whole; despite frequent collisions with the police, Londoners physically accepted it with comparative docility despite the fact that it "affected the minutiae" of their lives as much as, if not more than, the crises. An incredulous Frenchman, writing in 1845, of his experience at the Princess's Theatre, shows how far the actions of the police became accepted. He describes the arrival of the stout half-price invaders, who, encouraged by the police, threatened to overturn the audience and left ladies "screaming on their seats" at the "alarming impending danger" of being crushed by the fall. Despite the fact that the theatre was filled with a "thick mass, which it was quite impossible to penetrate",

the free public...did not offer any other resistance than that of the inert mass - they did not venture to make any complaint - they allowed the police to do with them what they pleased...I called a policeman who took the most prominent part in the affray...to cease such a scandal. No attention was paid to the voice of A SLAVE CITIZEN OF FRANCE (108).

One important reason for Chartist involvement in the defence of unlicensed theatres can be found in the links they drew between the attacks on the penny theatres and political repression. Commenting on the Union case, The Weekly True Sun drew the parallels:

for being present at a "performance of dramatic tendency", if they meet to discuss political grievances and to petition for redress, they are subject to like penalties because the speeches "have a seditious tendency". What then are the poor to do? Their taskmasters will reply: work, work, work (109).

Threats to penny theatres were also threats to the political and social meetings of the Chartists, (and to other groups of radicals, for beershops had become popular places for meetings and to read newspapers) often held in the same kind of beershops as those at which the theatres were set up. On the 8th September 1839, the same day the first reports of prosecutions of penny theatres under the new bill were appearing, The Charter was reporting the prosecution of publicans and the taking away of their licences for holding illegal meetings and clubs (110). But the Chartists were not simply motivated by self interest or in protecting their own meetings and "free and easies". Whilst at the beginning of 1839 they had joined in the condemnation of these "nuisances", for no-one

can deny that Penny Theatres are liable to great objections, upon account of certain classes of persons who frequent them,

they were at the same time committed to cheap amusements (whether newspapers or theatres) for the poor. They were keen to see all theatres permitted by the law and placed under the inspection of the authorities for then the.

case would be different, and the well-disposed poor could enjoy their theatrical amusements as well as the rich. Places for public amusement ought not to be suppressed merely because they afford it at a cheap rate (111).

But such was the case under the Police Bill. The Chartist's hand was strengthened as the prosecutions began to reveal that most of the "nuisances" were not the dens of vice and infamy pictured in the hysterical propaganda. Many were poor but respectable theatres, such as Hector Simpson's gaff in Tooley Street where, according to James Grant, the acting would have been applauded at some of the metropolis' respectable larger theatres (112). Nor were the plays simply blood and thunder or the performances lewd and suggestive; while one gaff did advertise Hothello, the Moor of Wenus, others offered the opening soliloquy from Richard III and pieces which reflected the everyday realities of working class life in London:

"Mr S reproaches Mrs S with the possession of a private bottle of gin" records the journalist Augustus Sala of one entertainment, "Mrs S inveighs against the hideous turpitude of Mr S for pawning three pillow cases to purchase beer. The audience are in ecstasies. It is so real" (113).

Many of the actors were not prostitutes or thieves. Emma George, prosecuted as a member of the Sanspareil company, was the daughter of a man who some years before had held a position at Covent Garden and was killed in an accident. An early prosecution in January 1839 found a fully employed chair-maker, and an out of work cork cutter, coach painter, stay-stitcher and shoe-binder. In August 1839, the Charter carried an obituary for Abraham Saunders, a celebrated showman (who had "adopted" Edmund Kean and had trained, amongst others, Ducrow); falling on hard times towards the end of his life, Saunders had been reduced to obtaining a precarious subsistence at the penny gaffs until he was compelled to give this up due to police prosecution (114). All these elements,

coupled with the discovery of the more prestigious but equally illegal saloon theatres, led to a considerable reluctance on the part of magistrates to convict offenders, or where they did, to choose not to punish them with the full severity of the law.

One other reason for Chartist involvement in the issue can be found in the nature of the audience. James Grant depicts the audience at the lowest gaffs as overwhelmingly juvenile, but Mayhew, in London Labour and the London Poor, chooses the section on the costermongers to discuss a visit to a penny gaff in Smithfield - choosing to visit it himself as he did not wish to believe the description which some of the "more intelligent" costermongers had given of these places. The costers did not confine their visits to the gaffs:

The other amusements (apart from the pub and dances) of this class of the community are the theatre and the penny concert, and their visits are almost entirely confined to the galleries of the theatres on the Surrey-side - the Surrey, the Victoria, the Bower Saloon, and (but less frequently) Astley's...Three times a week is the average attendance at theatres and dances by the more prosperous costermongers. "Love and murder, suits us best sir" (says an informant) "but within these few years I think there's a great deal more liking for deep tragedies amongst us. They set men a thinking; but then we all consider they go on too long" (117).

After a description of the Victoria Gallery, Mayhew goes on to discuss the politics of the costers:

The politics of these people are detailed in a few words - they are nearly all Chartists. "You might say, sir", remarked one of my informants, "that they all were Chartists, but as it's better that you should rather be under than over the mark, say nearly all" (116).

Mayhew is assured that in every district where the costermongers lived one or two of the body have great influence over the others and these leading men are all Chartists:

The costermongers frequently attend political meetings, going there in bodies of from six to twelve. Some of them...could not understand why Chartist leaders exhorted them to peace and quietness, when they might as well fight it out with the police at once (117).

Alongside the costers in the Vic gallery could be found a smaller number of "black faced sweeps" and a letter written to Elliston, manager of the Surrey, in 1827 complained of sweeps attending the theatre in "the very dress" of their occupation, suggesting they did not confine their visits to the gallery of the Vic (118). The sweeps were also "to a man" Chartists,

understanding it too, and approving of it, not because it would be calculated to establish a new order of things, but in the hopes that in the transition from one system to the other, there might be plenty of noise and riot, and in the vague idea, that in some indefinable manner, some good must necessarily accrue to themselves from any change that might take place (119).

The areas of London inhabited both by the costers and sweeps and by the penny gaffs coincide. All are to be found essentially in the East End and City of London, as were the strongholds of Chartism. Goodway lists (in order of size) Tower Hamlets, Finsbury, Westminster and the City as having the largest number of Chartist localities and The Northern Star cites Marylebone and Paddington as two "glorious hot-beds of Chartism" in 1841. This would suggest that Chartists as members of theatre audiences in these areas were not confined only to costers and sweeps and while Mayhew was writing at the

end of the 1840s, Goodway points to 1841-2 as the time when once "apathetic" London took its place among the most militant Chartist areas in the country (120).

Assessing the real impact of Chartist involvement in theatre reform is a difficult task. 1843 certainly saw a number of saloons achieving full theatrical status, including the Albert, the Bower, the Effingham and the Grecian. Penny gaffs, whilst remaining strictly illegal, continued to flourish, although prosecutions all but stopped. But it would be overstating the case to say that this was a result purely of Chartist pressure. Other factors were also at work. The impact of the 1832 Select Committee on the licensing of saloons is debatable, for while it had recommended all theatres that held either a musical or dramatic licence should be eligible to play legitimate drama, there is certainly some confusion over whether they intended this to cover saloons as well as minor theatres such as the Surrey and the Royal Victoria. In any case, little had been done by them in the light of the Police Bill to ensure the survival of the saloons until the passing of the Bill in 1843.

If the Committee did not recommend the licensing of saloons, other middle class reformers were concerned about amusements for the poor, as they had been about newspapers in the past. Dickens, writing about saloon theatres in 1850, broke his narrative to comment:

We will add that we believe these people have a right to be amused. A great deal that we consider to be unreasonable, is written and talked about not licensing these places of entertainment. We have already intimated that we believe a love of dramatic representations to be an inherent principle in human



nature. In most conditions of human life of which we have any knowledge, from the Greeks to the Bosjesmen, some form of dramatic representation has always obtained. We have a vast respect for county magistrates and for the lord chamberlain; but we render greater deference to such extensive and immutable experience, and think it will outlive the whole existing court and commission. We would assuredly not bear harder on the fourpenny theatre than on the four shilling theatre, or the four guinea theatre...(121)

Such views can also be found reflected in the words Mayhew who talks about "wholesome amusement" at a cheap price, in the actions of the magistrates who did not prosecute the Tottenham Street Theatre and in the pronouncements of Lane's advocate, John Adolphus when he expressed the fervent hope that

he might never see the day when it would be held legal for poor people to be dragged off like felons to the station house for meeting to enjoy such innocent amusements (121).

The Chartists opposition to the injustice of the theatrical monopoly and to the prosecution of the amusements of the poor played a not insignificant role alongside these other voices in helping to ensure the saloons were licensed.

## OWENITES, TRADE UNIONS AND THE ROTUNDA.

The Chartists were not alone amongst radical groups in creating a social and cultural world. The closest parallels can probably be found with the Owenites - not least as both groups often shared the same halls for their activities, although for all the parallels that can be drawn in the sphere of leisure activities, the political differences and aims were immense. Whilst the Chartists, on the whole, spoke openly in terms of class conflict, Robert Owen argued such "irrational and useless contest must cease". In its place, he established the Association of All Classes of All Nations, dedicated one part of his book A New View of Society to the Prince Regent and attempted to persuade the aristocracy and church (without intending "personal offence") to liquidate themselves. Such political differences also had an impact on the nature of the leisure activities organised by the two groups (1).

The Owenite philosophy, which attacked competition on both economic and moral grounds, attempted to create a new life in the midst of the old, to

form a family compact to shield and protect their members from the inroads of the irrational system of competition (2).

They therefore attempted to bring as many activities as possible within the orbit of Owenite control. Most far reaching were the communities, such as New Lanark, established by Robert Owen but the impulse can also be seen in the Labour Exchanges and the stores, which became new socialising

centres. It was the arena of leisure activities where control was easiest to establish, and they set up a thriving "social world in which their members could move during leisure hours" (3). Activities encompassed a weekly, annual and lifetime cycle and included choirs, concerts, tea parties, congregational singing, and an annual series of festivals based on an inverted Christian year and all of which aimed to prepare people in the widest possible way for a new community life. Most spectacular were the Social Festivals of the 1830s held every two weeks at the London Labour Exchange and attracting up to 2000 people:

A splendid platform was raised, on which was placed a superb and majestic organ...On festival nights ...the avenues were brilliantly illuminated with...costly Grecian lamps. Ten or a dozen musical instruments were employed; and ladies and gentlemen sung to the sweetest airs...

The festivals were opened with a short lecture, on the subjects of social love, universal charity, and the advantages of cooperation...The lecture was followed by a concert, and the concert by a ball...(4).

Within all this, Robert Owen was the "kindly Papa of Socialism". He was the Philanthropist who wanted to "remoralise the Lower Orders", and the creation of a new moral world was high on the Owenite agenda. Social festivals were to be pleasant classrooms for the practice of the sedate disciplines of friendliness, politeness and consideration; in December 1839, the Stockport branch was able to boast that whilst people had once attended the Saturday amusement class in greasy jackets and working gowns, "a spirit of neat cleanliness and order" was now on the increase (5). The Festivals aimed to combine instruction and rational amusement,

to diffuse the "most Useful Knowledge" and to create "general good Feeling amongst all Parties":

Let us hope, that they [the Festivals] may serve as a corrective to the thoughtless spirit of ridicule, with which the amusements of the Industrious Classes are frequently treated by the higher (6).

Theatre, associated with immorality, did not serve such puritanical ends and references to theatrical performances are scarce, although at least one of the communities (at Orbiston) had a theatre on the upper floor of one of the buildings which could seat three hundred people. Andrew Davies mentions "occasional theatrical performances" (which we could compare to the frequent Sunday School recitations mentioned by Eileen Yeo), but the only specific reference can be found in The Poor Man's Guardian for September 1832, when Mr Dobbs, formerly of Drury Lane and Haymarket theatres was

engaged to assist Mr Owen at the bazaar in Gray's Inn Road, by interspersing between parts of Mr Owen's lectures, new comic songs, and an entertainment which he has been giving in the provinces with great success, called Political Comicalities (7).

One note of caution needs to be sounded; a gap opened up between Owen and followers of Owenism in the twenties, the imprecision of his theories making them adaptable to different groups of working people and allowing them to select those parts most closely connected to their own needs. London remained probably the most closely connected to Owen the man (as can be seen by the Festivals), although a closer search of Owenite followers could be more productive in terms of theatrical activity.

Trade Unions and trade societies prove more fruitful ground in the search for theatrical activity. The Unions had a long tradition, rooted in Friendly and Benefit Societies, of collectivist consciousness and values. These were propagated not simply in moral rhetoric and political theory but also in cultural forms such as trade union ceremonies and festivals, "convivial club nights and annual 'outings' or feasts". The woolcombers feast of Bishop Blaize can serve as one example. Held in Bradford in 1825 on the eve of the great strike, it was celebrated with extraordinary splendour:

Herald, bearing a flag.  
Twenty-four Woolstaplers on horseback, each horse  
caparisoned with a fleece.  
Thirty-eight Worsted-Spinners and Manufacturers on  
horseback, in white stuff waistcoats, with each a  
sliver of wool over his shoulder and a white stuff  
sash: the horses' neck covered with nets made of  
thick yarn.

And so on until we reach:

BISHOP BLAIZE  
Shepherd and Shepherdess.  
Shepherd Swains.  
One hundred and sixty Woolsorters on horseback,  
with  
ornamented caps and various coloured silvers.  
Thirty Combmakers.  
Charcoal Burners.  
Combers Colours.

Band.

Four Hundred and seventy Wool-combers with wool wigs  
and co.

Band.

Forty Dyers, with red cockades, blue aprons, and  
crossed  
slivers of red and blue (8).

At times of disputes, such collectivist consciousness and cultural activity could be turned to good use in raising

money. The Chartist papers were not very tolerant of the common theatrical practice of benefits being held by theatres for various actors, actresses and managers (see below), yet the labour movement itself had a long tradition of raising money for its members who had fallen on hard times either because of sickness or persecution by the state. So deeply embedded was this mutual aid that every

kind of witness in the first half of the nineteenth century - clergymen, factory inspectors, radical publicists - remarked upon the extent of mutual aid in the poorest districts. In times of emergency, unemployment, strikes, sickness, childbirth, then it was the poor who "helped every one his neighbour" (9).

At times money was simply collected at meetings to help individuals, such as the Chartist in Leicester who had been forced to retire to his bed through sickness arising from a long experience of starvation (10). At other times, events were organised to raise money. Mr Railton of Manchester benefited from an harmonic meeting at the Golden Lion in July 1843 and another harmonic meeting in London divided its proceeds equally between Mrs Ellis (to establish her business) and Robert Peddie, who had just been released from Beverley prison (11).

It was not just individuals who benefited from the financial help. Local and national events demanded fund raising for victims of political persecution on a far larger scale. In 1842 numerous entertainments were taking place throughout the country for the benefit of the "political victims". In London, concerts, balls and raffles were "constantly taking place" and the Pavilion Theatre had also been engaged by the Chartists of

Tower Hamlets for the same "patriotic purpose". In Somers Town, a harmonic meeting was arranged, in Birmingham, a portrait of Feargus O'Connor was raffled and in Nottingham, a ball at the Union Coffee House was organised to raise proceeds for the "victims of magisterial oppression" (12).

Trade unions and those with political sympathies also used social events to raise money at the time of disputes and political upheaval. One of the earliest examples is a tantalising but frustratingly elusive reference to "theatrical shows organised by the Corresponding Societies" in the 1790s. Slightly later, in Leicester, a benefit under the patronage of the Duke of Rutland was held at the theatre for striking hosiers, but equally no details have emerged (13). A later benefit at the Coburg was organised for Spanish refugees who had fled from the Carlist disturbances in their own country. The bill included a popular Spanish play Martinez de la Rosa's five act tragedy, La Viuda de Padilla with Madame St Leon Cortes of the Theatre Francais in the title role. Despite her contribution, contemporary reviews show the performance was not very professional; a child who should have been discovered sleeping on a bank walked on by itself and then

rolled about ad lib, till a don entered with the utmost coolness, and pommelled, nay, almost kneaded, the naughty child into the desired position. The heroine having duly died outside the curtain, curled herself up, on its descent, like a touched caterpillar, and then quietly walked off stage. a gentleman then came on to deliver a recitation, which ended by him stabbing himself and dying, as per example, out of bounds. On seeing the descending baize, he scampered up and rushed off with a terror truly ludicrous. his consternation, however was nought to that of the whole corps, when having first quietly suffered a large flag to hang against the gas-lights at the wing till it was in flames, they gave themselves up to the very extravagance of fear,

and gesticulated with a despair that was particularly amusing to the Coburg audience (14).

Whether the Society for the Protection of Booksellers 1836 performance managed to reach more professional standards is hard to ascertain as there are no surviving account of it but what is clear is the more directly political nature of their performance. They chose Southey's Wat Tyler to help them raise funds, a play which The Charter thought every young man should read and which The New Moral World thought would flourish as long as radicalism flourished (15). Written in 1794 when the author was an "Ultra-Jacobin", the play was published in 1817 without Southey's permission (he was by then Poet Laureate) and much to his embarrassment. Its publication caused a stir, and Southey was attacked in the Houses of Parliament by William Smith, MP for Norwich, who thought it to be

the most seditious book that was ever written; its author did not stop short of exhorting to general anarchy; he vilified kings, priests, and nobles, and was for universal suffrage and perfect equality (16).

Sentiments which The Black Dwarf quoted approvingly; it was "not reform, but revolution" that Southey advocated (17). The play, which tells the story of the 1381 Peasants Revolt, does contain radical sentiments. The wrongs of the world are unfolded in speech after speech from Wat Tyler and John Ball. Richard the Second is ridiculed as King of England, Ireland, France and Scotland, and "of the town of Berwick-upon-Tweed" and the very need for Kings and titles is questioned:

Why are not all these empty ranks abolish'd -  
King, Slave and Lord, "ennobled into Man"?  
Are we not all equal?





entertainment included the highly successful melodrama Mary Le More; or the Irish Maniac, the popular farce The Englishman in France and the grand historical drama Wallace, The Hero of Scotland. These were interspersed by a chinese extravaganza, a highland fling and a pas de deux. An address written and spoken by Mr Carr of the Carpenters Society elicited applause from the audience who were "crowded to the ceiling" (19).

In July, the journeymen bookbinders, who were involved in a long dispute with their masters, ostensibly over the question of apprentices (but more centrally over the issue of a trade society) organised a grand gala fete at the Eagle Tavern, "that favourite place of amusement", in City Road. The evening promised fireworks, vaudeville, a ballet, a concert and "beautiful cosmoramas", including

The Queen's visit to the City, View of Windsor, Spanish Bullfight, The Blacksmith's Shop, Robinson Crusoe and Friday, The Hermit (20).

These attractions ensured the event was an unprecedented success, the number exceeding by several hundreds that of any previous benefit at the same place. The very crowded state of the grounds forced the organisers to run extra and simultaneous amusements, and the ball, which took place in the large assembly room, carried on until a late hour. The whole event raised over one hundred guineas for the bookbinders. But it was not simply the attractions which ensured such a large audience; sympathy and support for the cause played an important role. The Committee, in thanking people for their support, were moved to conclude that the crowds provided ample proof

of the growing sympathy of the Working Classes with each other, and of the nearer approach of the time  
"When man to man the world over  
Shall brothers be" (21).

A second benefit was organised at the Eagle Tavern on August 14th 1839, at which the singing, dancing and fireworks were accompanied by a performance of The Fratricide. The highlight of the evening was a poetical address "allusive to the strike" delivered by Mr Adams, during which "from the very feeling manner in which it was spoken" he was repeatedly cheered (22).

The pattern of performance at this benefit seems to have been repeated at others organised by trade societies in London. The benefit for the philanthropic Society of Coopers held at the Eagle Tavern in 1838 included a concert in the Royal Sussex Harmonic Temple, a vaudeville in the Saloon, a promenade band and cosmoramas complete with a dripping rock and fountains. The Zinc Trade's Society "well-selected concert" in the gardens of the Royal Albert Saloon, in Shepherdess Walk, during 1840, offered Henry Howell, a popular saloon comedian, singing "Commonsense" and Kitty Tunstall singing "Banners of Blue". There were also "Feats Gymnasium" by the Incredible Brothers, and a comic ballet with Paul Herring (a well-known clown), and the performance was rounded off with two historical dramas: Robert the Bruce and Gilderoy (23).

The previous year plays were also being performed as part of the celebrations organised for the return of the Dorchester Labourers. A farewell performance was held at the newly re-opened Victoria Theatre (the proprietor of the Eagle Tavern

having refused to let his grounds to the committee on this occasion) on October 8th 1839. It was attended by over 1,500 people, and the Dorchester Labourers Committee, set up five years previously to raise money to buy farm land for the Tolpuddle Martyrs, organised a prodigious variety of events. Top of the bill was King Harold: or the Battle of Hastings, an historical drama which had first appeared on the night of the theatre's re-opening, to be followed by the popular interlude Family Feuds and concluding with the operatic drama Lass of Gowrie - all to be performed by the theatre's company. The evening also included dancing, but the promise of songs from members of the English Opera did not materialise. The highlight of the evening was undoubtedly the appearance of the labourers themselves

who stood in a row in the centre of the stage, and who were greeted with one of the most enthusiastic bursts of approbation ever heard within these walls, since the memorable appearance of Macready as Virginus on the occasion of his friend Sheridan Knowle's farewell benefit. The majority of the audience rose, whilst the pitties hurled gilded wreaths of evergreen (one for each labourer) upon the stage.

George Loveless, thin and pale and "evidently not recovered from the base and brutal treatment to which the Whigs subjected him", was overcome by the reception and "his voice all but left him":

The situation of this generous souled man was heart-stirring and excited the sympathy of all. Would to God - his base persecutors had been present - it would have "Reformed them altogether", they must have been moved at witnessing such a scene.

Recovering enough only to thank the audience for their

support, Loveless retired giving vent to his feelings "in a flood of tears" and was replaced by Stanfield, whose words created the political controversy of the evening. Thanking the public for their support since he had fallen into the "claws of the oppressor" and expressing the conviction that whenever there was any great object to be obtained the people needed nothing more than a determined union to gain it, he was greeted with great applause by the audience. The theatre management were less impressed:

During this address, it was curious to observe the uneasiness of various persons behind the scenes. What could be the matter? Those at either wing were beckoning Stanfield off; this drew the attention of Mr Loveless to him, who tapped his brave companion on the shoulder, as much as to say, "don't say any more". This done, the individual who opened the proceedings, (Tomey) next whispered Stanfield in the ear, who appeared not to know what they were all about, and retreated back a few steps only just in time to save himself from being crushed with the heavy curtain, which descended with great velocity, to the astonishment and indignation of all present.

The Charter was up in arms. The theatre had been hired for the night by the Dorchester Committee, and they alone should have regulated the proceedings. The paper did concede that the fear of the management had been created by the "liberal government" who had

so far succeeded in terrifying all whose avocations depend upon a licence, with the idea of chartism or sedition - the terms being now deemed synonymous - that whether at a theatre or a public house, this sort of treatment has become common (24).

Whilst the benefits of 1839 had relied on popular entertainment with the political sentiments being added in the form of speeches (the exception being the repeat benefit for

the bookbinders where the speech was replaced by a poem), the stone masons in 1841 took a slightly more political approach - an approach which even went beyond the performance of more political plays. The strike, which started with the masons working on the new Houses of Parliament and soon spread to other masons working on Trafalgar Square and in Woolwich, was

the most intellectual strike which had ever taken place in the trade, the question not being one of wages, but of human rights and freedom (25).

Allen, the foreman at Parliament was accused of exercising tyranny over the workers, refusing them time off to pay the last rites to deceased relatives, and forcing them to use favoured public houses. When the workers had laid their complaints in front of Mr Grissell and Mr Peto, the contractors, they were told they would not "degrade themselves by inquiring into them" and a long and bitter strike ensued. The union, in addition to appeals to other unions for financial and moral support, also took the step of hiring the Victoria Theatre for a night. Partly an attempt to raise funds, the performance was, more importantly, also aimed at putting the masons' case before the public, for "a great misunderstanding exists among the trades of Britain" as to their reason for withdrawing their employment - a misunderstanding caused by the "grossest falsehoods" of the press. Accordingly, as a part of the performance to a house which was "crowded from the pit to the roof"(a performance which also included William Tell, Nature and Art and The Two London Locksmiths), one of the strikers, Robert Anderson, "performed" a long poetic address. The main thrust of the poem was not, however, an attempt to put the facts of the strike to

the audience, but was an appeal to wider loyalties. Drawing comparisons with the Israelite slaves in Egypt and with William Tell, (the hero of one of the plays just seen by the audience), it discusses tyranny and injustice, but most of all stresses the need (and the right) of "wronged labour" to rise against oppressors and of the common cause in so doing both historically and in the present day:

When Israel toll'd in bondage, Egypt vow'd,  
To break the spirit which the yoke had bow'd;  
For fearful tyrants cannot rest content,  
Unless the mind be with the body bent  
Gall'd by their chains the burthened Hebrew groan  
And cry to Pharaoh - but his heart was stone.  
"Begone, ye idlers! Why do you complain?"  
So said the despot, and increased their pain.  
They struck at last, and God in freedom served,  
While Pharaoh met the fate his crimes deserved.  
The piled up pyramids, by Israel built,  
Still point to heaven! - against proud Pharaoh's  
guilt.

But point in vain! - Tyrant's no warning take, -  
Their hardened hearts no judgements can awake, -  
Save when wronged labour rises in its might,  
And hurts oppression from its harmful height.  
Thus did bold Tell! - by cruel insults fired,  
His patriot heart, his strong right arm inspired,  
And first the apple, with an unmatched dart  
He hit - not missed the mark at Gesler's heart!  
Nature in tell was dared to that great deed  
he freed himself - his country too he freed!  
Sarnem a slave was Gesler's chosen tool,  
To keep his dignity by barb'rous rule.  
What dignity forsooth! Can masters see  
In using servants with indignity?  
The thankful masons who you aid tonight  
Show'd more greatness when they struck for right,  
And taught the petty tyrant to be civil,  
Who now assumes the saint instead of devil.  
Ye trades! who wide unite to shield each other  
And will not see oppressors starve a brother,  
Ye heard and answered the free mason's cry -  
Famine they fear not - for your help is nigh!  
We struck for labour's rights, 'gainst labour's  
wrongs -  
Our cause is yours - to you our case belongs:  
They would have made us slaves, nay worse; but then  
We struck to show them we still were men.  
And all who value worth and manliness  
Have sympathised with us, except the Press -  
The Press! that engine to enlarge the slave,  
Can it refuse when truth and justice crave?  
Alas! Oppression sways the venal pen -

Corruption backs the masters - not the men!  
But time will come when things will not be -  
When heaven will give success to honesty.  
And those who worked at Nelson's Monument,  
And Woolwich too - by slavery unbent,  
Shall with their brethren raise a noble name  
That tyranny shall daunt and treachery shame.  
Oh, may the members of the Houses be,  
As were the builders, foes to tyranny.  
Then will the day, so long desir'd, come round,  
When labour shall with capital be crown'd,  
And Union, Peace and Plenteousness abound! (26)

The benefit raised over £50, but perhaps more importantly, the masons began to receive increasing public support for their stand against Grissell and Peto. Copies of the address were printed and sold for a penny and Fortnightly Return, the union paper of the stonemasons, encouraged its members to circulate it as "evidence of the growing intelligence of the labouring community" (27).

For some trade unionists and workers in the 1830s and 1840s, drama did not simply mean one-off events connected to disputes. The Operative, in November 1838, was reporting on a "number of intelligent Operatives" who about three years ago established a society called the Tyro Thespians for the purpose of devoting the profits of amateur dramatic performances to the relief of widows and the afflicted. A performance at the Pantheon Theatre in London's Catherine Street was held, during that month for the benefit of Mrs Bell, a widow:

An address for the occasion, from the pen of a veteran operative, full of point and pathos was spoken by Mr Hind, and the whole of the performance, all things considered was respectable. A little more attention to the minutiae of the histrionic art would render this amateur dramatic corps equal to the best company at any of our minor theatres (28).



That the Tyro-Thespians were not alone amongst operatives with a theatrical interest, can be seen from a review in The Operative for Hind's English Stage. Praised as a "neat, cheap and correct" edition of the principal plays acted in London theatres, the book would be of interest

to such of our operative brethren as are fond of dramatic reading - of whom, we know, there are a goodly number - we can safely recommend this work...(29).

It is worth pointing out here that the use of the theatre by trade unions was not confined to the early nineteenth century. In 1888, a benefit for the building fund of Women's Matchmakers Union (who were intending to build a hall in East End for girls to meet in) was held on five nights at the Royal Princess's Theatre in Oxford Street. On this occasion, the play was Still Alarm, which included a scene which showed a "realistic fire-engine incident with the two trained Arabian horses" - not maybe a play which had any great message to convey, but one which would have drawn the crowds and therefore raised the money. And in November of the same year, the Pavilion Theatre held a benefit for the anarchist Berner Street Club in East End. This was followed in 1911 by Jim Larkin's development of Liberty Hall in Dublin, complete with Delia Larkin's Irish Workers Dramatic Company. Even these three random examples should be sufficient to suggest a deeper study of trade union involvement in theatrical events would prove fruitful (30).

One further example can be cited as evidence of a general cultural commitment and interest in theatrical performance of

radicals in the early nineteenth century, and that is the case of the Rotunda in Blackfriars Road. In the 1830s, the Rotunda became the home of the radical movement in London and the "rather noisy" Rotundists

inspired partly by the Socialist doctrine of labour as the only source of wealth and Owen's teaching of the imminent advent of a new order of society, partly by the hope of political reform, became an object of terror alike to the more constitutional Radicals and to the Conservative and respectable classes generally (31).

In the eyes of the Duke of Wellington a contest was soon to be fought out between the Establishment and the Rotunda, which he compared to two armies "en presence". Francis Place regarded the Rotundists as "loud and long talkers, vehement, resolute, reckless rascals" and the Home Office detailed agents to watch the Rotunda (32).

The building, which had previously been a museum of natural history and a place of general public entertainment, was taken over by Richard Carlile, the "Showman of Free Thought", in 1830. He turned it into a centre for political debate and discussion, making full use of political dialogues and burlesque trials to attract his audience. Newly refurbished, The Rotunda contained a small circular theatre complete with gallery (originally built for equestrian performances) and its greatest attraction undoubtedly became the Reverend Robert Taylor, an apostate Anglican and former chaplain to the King, who several times weekly preached atheistic and dramatic sermons. Dressed, according to one informer's report, in bishop's robes with a tricolour ribbon draped across his shoulders and making prominent use of decorative eyeglasses,

Taylor staged elaborate theatrical performances to packed audiences (33). The Prompter in December 1830 promised "The Raising of the Devil" for the following Sunday, in which the Reverend Preacher

will display upon the celestial globe, the astronomical character of the Devil. He will also display the reality of that principle which has frightened so many weak people. The Preacher will raise him and put him down again, with a pledge of safety to his audience (34).

Later followed by "The Raising of Christ", "Sons of Thunder" and other "physico-astronomical" demonstrations, these dramas from the "Devil's Pulpit" (as his podium at the Rotunda became popularly known) made full use of props - a communion table, orreries (clockwork models of the planetary system), a six foot crucifix - although the rumour that live animals were impaled was vigorously denied by Carlile. Whilst funds did not allow him to gratify his thespian proclivities fully, these infidel dramas, which attempted to infuse anti-christian propaganda with entertainment value in order to draw the crowds, reflect the revival of messianic movements during the Reform Bill agitation. Taylor attested to the central place of sun worship and ancient astronomy in the history of religion:

The whole story of the Creation of the world, and the allegorical life, character, death, and resurrection of Christ was acted as a play, or holy pantomime, in the ancient mysteries of Mithra and of Bacchus, from which every doctrine which we now call Christian is entirely derived (35).

Taylor was not alone in such pronouncements; millennial instability and atheism revived during the excitement of the Reform agitation and its aftermath. Individuals such as "Zion"

Ward, a crippled shoemaker who was convinced he was Christ come to save the world and "Sir William Courtney", who, dressed in eastern costume, rode round the country at the head of fifty or a hundred armed labourers carrying a loaf of bread on a pole, gained an enormous following. This revival took on a radical tone when related to the more general movement for reform and the rise of Chartism (36).

Some of Taylor's histrionic performances were more overtly political. His most popular and lasting piece was the "politico-monological tragedy" entitled Swing! or Who Were the Incendiaries (which was published by Carlile as a threepenny tract in 1831 under the title of The Life and History of Swing, the Kent Rick Burner). It dramatised "without fear or disguise, the whole question of popular grievance and desired reform", telling the story of the riots by agricultural workers in several southern counties. According to Carlile

the denouement of the plot beats that of any other popular tragedy; for here an injured people finally triumphs; hitherto all dramatic efforts to exhibit a resistance to tyranny have represented that resistance as unsuccessful. The tragedy admirably displays the three degrees of religious hypocrisy and wickedness in the fanatic rabble, in the priest and mitred archbishop. It is a picture of the life of the three degrees of religious villainy...The family of Swing is made to picture the past, the present and the future character and condition of the agricultural labourers...This piece itself is sufficient to produce all the desired reforms (37).

The numerous characters involved in the tragedy, which included The Archbishop of Cant-, D.D.Ebenezer Sanctity, Robert the Devil and the entire Swing family (complete with female members), were all portrayed by Taylor and he was not content with simply prophesying the future victory of the

agricultural workers or attacking religious hypocrisy. The prologue also addressed the contemporary issue of stage censorship:

The ancient tragedy was first designed,  
From slavish bonds to free th' insulted mind:  
To speak the people's voice with magic art,  
And launch keen satire to the tyrant's heart:  
It was **the People's Tragedy**; the stage,  
The **People's House of Commons** was, till th' age  
When a usurping censorship arose,  
And sold the people to their deadliest foes.  
From that sad day the Muse no more appears,  
And Genius quenched his torch in Virtue's tears.  
Restore her now, - she bids you now restore,  
And let a censor **think** for you no more.  
Dare to be wise yourselves and SWING shall be,  
if you approve, **THE PEOPLE'S TRAGEDY** (38).

The inspiration of two days work, the monologue was soon being performed twice weekly at the Rotunda and Swing, as the hero who accelerated reform in the country by cleansing it with fire, was even canonised by Taylor. Owing to its popularity, the "Reverend author and actor" promised, at the end of February 1831, a second tragedy of "still higher interest". Although it was to be set in a remoter time and place, the characters (chiefly Balak, Balaam and the Donkey - with the "Lord Mare" as the principal Donkey) would be found to have a living likeness, as "principles of kingcraft, priestcraft and donkeyism" had been the same through all times and places. Unfortunately, the Reverend Robert Taylor was indicted for blasphemy at the beginning of April and the new tragedy was never performed - although his committal to prison for two years gave the Rotundists new material for their theatrical activities and a mock trial as well as Blasphemy: A Drama in Five Acts (Act the Fifth; Scene the First) were both performed in July 1831 (39).

The dramatic history of the Rotunda did not, however, end with the imprisonment of Taylor. In September 1833, Davidge (who until earlier in the year had been the manager of the Coburg) opened the Rotunda as the Globe Theatre, bringing with him "the conglomeration of thievery in the shape of the audience". Performances continued, according to Harold Scott, under the conditions of a penny gaff, but it was not until ten years later (when the Rotunda had passed into the management of John Blewitt, the composer) that the political and theatrical merged once again. In August 1843, The Weekly Chronicle carried a description of the strange scene that had occurred at the Rotunda one Monday evening, following the announcement of a performance of Hamlet. The performers listed to appear had included, as queen, Mary Ann Walker, a "chartist celebrity", and the theatre was crowded with people "desirous of seeing the fair champion of the people's rights" in another character. Her non-appearance led to uproar (40).

Whether Mary Ann Walker ever appeared on a stage at all is not known, but the story provides two interesting pointers. Firstly, we can see once again the link between the oratory of the Chartists and theatrical performance. Mary Ann Walker was well-known as a speaker at meetings of the City Female Chartists, her oratorical powers being described by the Annual Register as sufficient to

serve the purpose of confirming the Chartist faith in those who make the six points their creed, but it is by no means calculated to make new converts from the thinking and the intelligent (41).

Secondly, the Rotunda points towards an area which could be more fruitfully explored in greater detail - a relationship between buildings used by radicals for meetings and for unlicensed theatrical and musical performances. The link with the Rotunda is clear, and not only at the time of Carlile.

In this, the Rotunda was not alone. The White Conduit House in Pentonville, well-known for variety entertainment including Chabert, the poison and fire resister, and a host of "tavern singers" (notably Charles Sloman, Leffler, Henry Howell and Joseph Plumpton), also boasted a large concert room which

was the scene of a number of mass political meetings and became a vortex of the excitement provoked by the Reform Bill (42).

## A COLLECTION OF ODDITIES.

My sorrowful impressions were confirmed. In our old Chartist time, it is true, Lancashire working men were in rags by the thousands; and many of them often lacked food. But their intelligence was demonstrated wherever you went. You would see them in groups discussing the great doctrine of political justice...Now you will see no such groups in Lancashire. But you will hear well-dressed working men talking, as they walk with their hands in their pockets, of "co-ops" and their shares in them, or in building societies. And you will see others, like idiots, leading small greyhound dogs (1).

So wrote Thomas Cooper in 1870, summing up the situation in the working class following the decline of Chartism in 1850. The period between 1850 and 1884 marks a break in working class organisation and therefore in the theatre of the organised working class. It was a time (until the "great depression" of 1873) of prosperity and growth during which the British ruling class capitalised on its position as the first industrialised nation in the world. Real wages rose and affluence, or "what men used to starvation regarded as comfort" extinguished "the fires in hungry bellies". Many old Chartists joined the Liberals or the co-operative movement; other working men became involved in the slowly developing trade union movement centred on the skilled workers and around slogans such as "A Fair Day's Work for a Fair Day's Pay". In the theatre, it was a time which marked the return of the middle classes and a drive for respectability; Samuel Phelps transformed Sadlers Wells from an "unruly melodrama house" into a home for Shakespeare and the legitimate drama, Kean continued the process at the Princess's Theatre and later the



Bancrofts transformed the run down Queen's Theatre by replacing the pit with stalls and introducing white lace anti-macassars (2).

Most studies of working class organisation and working class cultural involvement have tended to ignore this period, or pass over it in sketchy detail, yet it is not necessarily completely barren. Jack Mitchell describes how the "Middle Ages" produced a handful of individuals who continued the tradition of working class literature developed under Chartism, poets such as Robert Brough and James Thompson and novelists such as James Greenwood and Mrs Lynn Linton. Alongside these, the mid-nineteenth century produced the educated (generally self-educated) skilled trade unionist, and this, coupled with the persistence of communal organisation, especially outside London, through friendly and benefit societies as well as trade unions, provides an indication that this area could fruitfully be studied in more detail. Such a study could produce, not a large scale, organised working class theatre movement, but some useful links from Chartism to the socialists of the 1880s, for it is then that socialist organisation re-emerged (3).

#### Hyndman and the Social Democratic Federation

The first sizable socialist organisation in Britain appeared in 1883, the product of both the effects of Britain losing dominance in the world market and the imperialist wars. The Social Democratic Federation (SDF), shortly to be followed by the Socialist League, did not represent a movement on the

scale of Chartism (a mass movement, in a different guise, was to re-emerge at the end of the 1880s in the form of New Unionism). At its peak, the SDF claimed a membership of 10,000 (and this may be a generous figure - Henry Pelling suggests it is unlikely the SDF ever numbered more than 1000), yet when William Morris joined in 1883 he was one of perhaps 200 men and women

who took the same step in 1882 and 1883. They represented a small eddy of ideas, part old, part new, rather than a movement of the masses (4).

Later in his life, Morris recalled the early pioneering years, when the great body of working men, especially those belonging to the most organised industries, regarded themselves as being hostile to Socialism. Thus Engels was to describe the movement in 1883 as coming in essence from "among the 'educated elements' sprung from the bourgeoisie" (although it did include a handful of working men, such as Tom Mann, John Burns, Tom Maguire and Harry Quelch - who were to play a leading role in the propaganda of socialist ideas and organisation) and three years later, writing to Sorge, he proclaimed the "whole movement here is only a phantom" (5).

The small size of the SDF was without doubt a consequence of its extremely sectarian attitude to the Labour Movement as a whole. Led by the ex-Tory H.M. Hyndman (an amateur cricketer who became a Marxist after reading Capital in French during an American cruise), its politics were dominated in part by a belief that socialism could be achieved by the existing state, but more centrally by a complete rejection of trade unions and strikes. So, Hyndman wrote in his autobiography that

even the most successful strikes under the existing conditions do but serve to rivet the chains of economic slavery, possibly a trifle gilded, more firmly on their limbs (6).

And describing his work in the early days of the movement, T.A.Jackson recalled that the SDF members

thought their duty done when they had told the workers with reiterated emphasis that they had been and were being robbed systematically, and giving them an exposition of how the trick had been worked. From this the workers were to draw a moral conclusion that the robbers ought to be stopped, and to reach a practical decision to wage a class war on the robbers (7).

When the audience did not reach this decision, the party's members were wont to conclude that "the bastards aren't worth saving" and to move on to other fields of the labour movement. In artistic terms such disdain can be seen in the disparaging way some writers in Justice (the SDF's paper) dismissed the leisure activities of the working class. Writing in May 1895, H.W.Hobart (an active member of the SDF in Salford who wrote extensively for the paper on leisure) claimed that the average worker in a week spent 56 hours in bed, 60 hours at work and much of the rest of the time either travelling to and from work or eating. The few remaining hours were spent either in the pub, or a club or perhaps a music hall. He ends by asking,

What do they [the workers] do in the direction of rationally enjoying life? Or what do they do towards improving or amending society?...In the great majority of cases the British workman makes very bad use of his leisure (8).

It was a view to be repeated time and again by members of the party, although at times the blame was put not on the individual but on capitalism, as Belfort Bax (to use just one

example) noted in his article "Socialism and the Sunday Question":

A well-conducted English workman, "thrifty and industrious", is no doubt kept in a state of dogged contentment by never knowing what leisure intelligently occupied means, by his tastes being carefully kept under, and by his weekly holiday being "empty, swept and garnished" (9).

Such attitudes might lead us to expect that the SDF produced either some stark "class war" theatre or attempted to "rationally" educate the artistic tastes of the workers, but two other points need to be taken into consideration. Firstly, to expect from such a small party, the production of a fully organised theatrical movement would be little short of foolish optimism. Secondly, the austere characterisation of the SDF from all who wrote about it, from Engels' description of it as a sect that had "ossified Marxism into a dogma" to Stuart Macintyre's assessment of the SDF as being grounded in "an extremely mechanical version of the materialist conception of history" which they interpreted as meaning the "whole of human activity was controlled by economic forces independently of human volition", would suggest they paid little attention to matters artistic. Yet, they were involved both in some theatrical activity of note, and in making a few (if tentative) moves towards developing a theory of leisure and its possible uses for socialism (10).

The scope of that dramatic activity was however sporadic. In general the few performances to be found on the pages of Justice took the form of dramatic recitals rather than full performances, such as Mrs Louise Jewell Manning-Hicks' recital

of Shaw's Candida at Holborn Town Hall (given in aid of the new premises fund of the SDF) or Mr Dymond Stuckely's dramatic recital of The Ancient Mariner. Where full performances were given, they were generally by groups outside of the SDF. So at the Grand Social and Dance organised by the London Committee in 1908, it was the Clarion Dramatic Society who offered the dramatic entertainment in the shape of a short play entitled A Kiss in the Dark, and in 1911, it was the South London Clarion Players who performed for the SDF (11). The lack of dramatic entertainment was certainly in keeping with the general lack of social activity within the party, certainly in the early years of its existence.

There are however a few exceptions which are worth noting. One performance stands out in particular, not least because of its isolation. In 1884 a fund-raising entertainment was organised by Edward Aveling, at which he and Eleanor Marx performed in Sidney Grundy's In Honour Bound, a performance which was executed with "great spirit" and received with "much applause". The first half of the programme was composed of Shaw and Kathleen Ina performing a Mendelssohn piano duet, Aveling reciting some Shelley, and Morris delivering his own "The Passing of Brynhild". Other performers included Mrs Theodore Wright reading from Adam Bede and Bax playing Schumann's "Carnival" (12).

The other examples centre on the work of two individuals, both of whom worked in the theatre professionally and were also members of the SDF. Agnes Bain wrote a sporadic theatre column for Justice, reviewing plays as diverse as George Calderon's

The Little Stone House (performed by the Stage Society) and the huge commercial success The Chocolate Soldier, a musical based on Shaw's Arms and the Man which she recommended to those "sturdy Social Democrats" who found themselves in need of recreation "for the perturbed soul" (13). She also turned her own hand to writing plays, and performed in her own sketch Blind Iris at Walthamstow's first dramatic and musical evening. The rest of the entertainment on that occasion was provided by a recitation of Kipling's "Delilah" and a performance by another member of Miss Bain's company, Mr Hawk, of the court scene from The Bells. The "socialist" actor, Harry Starr also turned his hand to writing sketches which were performed at SDF socials, and as part of a Blackpool branch Tea Party and Social, he organised and performed in two of his own sketches. If Dreams Were True was a Socialist sketch in three episodes (Reality, Dream, and Awakening) in which a miner who is out of work because of a strike is seen first (amidst his starving family) discussing socialism with a friend, then dreaming of a society in which the socialist ideal has been reached. The sketch ended with his return to the present, wishing "dreams were true". The second sketch, A Broken Toy dealt with prostitution; Olive Drayton, a woman of the streets, (played by Mrs Starr) is visited first by a Suffragette seeking support for a Votes for Women candidate but she leaves very quickly when she discovers Olive is a prostitute. She is followed by Sir Sidney Self-rise and his daughter, both of whom are "slumming it", and a painful scene follows when he discovers he has caused her downfall and Olive refuses the financial help he offers. The play ends on a sombre note as Olive, finding a broken doll (one of her dead

child's toys) resolves no longer to be a "broken toy" and commits suicide. Both sketches deal with issues which were to become common in the labour movement theatre, the portrayal of a harsh world and the vision of a brighter and better future, and are exceptional only for being amongst the earliest of their kind (14).

However, to simply see the artistic and theatrical activity of the SDF as being confined to the work of one or two individuals would be to give a distorted picture. Whilst it is true that in practice little work was done, running throughout the history of the party was an attempt (at least in theory) to begin to argue for social activity as a means to fight for socialism. Thus as early as July 1893, Justice carried two articles which attempted to do precisely this. At the beginning of the month, a piece appeared entitled "Propaganda and Pleasure"; in this the author described a day spent with the Glasgow Socialist Rambling Club, during which songs were sung, a banner paraded, stickers stuck up and literature distributed, all concluded by an open-air meeting. He ended with a plea for rambling clubs to be formed in every branch (or group of branches) as a means both of "cheap pleasure" and of doubling paper sales (15). A few weeks later, a second piece appeared, this time about the SDF "Beano", an event then being held on an annual basis. This the author saw as a healthy development, for

while being far from desirous of seeing the most militant Socialist organisation degenerate into a mere picnicing pleasure party, I certainly think we might, on many more occasions than now, show the world our ability to enjoy ourselves and so give it an earnest of our intention to do so to the utmost when the workers come by their own (16).

In subsequent years, the pages of the paper found room for more, if sporadic, pleas for increased social activity. In 1907, Hyndman was writing a description of a "festive evening" in Burnley, on which he commented,

Socialists have learnt more and more of late years that there is no better way of attracting young people of both sexes in their organisation and keeping them when attracted, than good entertainments of all sorts. So far from the propaganda of Socialism being headed back by such well-managed pleasure gatherings, it is found by experience everyone is the gainer (17).

He appealed for the formation of socialist choirs, for "diversified concerts", for dances and balls. Indeed, far from emphasising any artistic activity for its "propaganda" value, Hyndman stresses the nature of the event itself as paramount, describing a recent Labour Representation Committee concert not for what was performed, but for the "pretty faces", "pretty dresses" and beautifully managed lights. Later the same month, the readers of the paper were confronted by an article asking "Are Socialists Sociable?", in which the writer (describing a joint social organised by two branches of the SDF at Chandos Hall) reflected much the same outlook as Hyndman. Starting from the point that one of the main problems facing English socialists was their "aversion to sociability" (ascribed to the "reign of puritanical institutions"), the writer urges his readers to break with convention and to replace such "unsociability" with a healthy spirit of comradeship

that can only be developed by a more frequent and freer intercourse of the children, women and men who make up the ranks of Social Democracy (18).



The members who organised the event seemed to have been as little concerned with the content of what was performed, for the audience were entertained with humorous recitations from Mrs Hicks, a string quartette playing Haydn and exhibition by Miss Heaney and Mrs Tierce of "what they can do with a skipping rope".

Whilst none of the above had any immediate impact on dramatic activity in the SDF itself, it is important for the way such ideas were later picked up and developed in relation to theatrical practice by other groups. We can but speculate on whether or not dramatic activity would have increased within the SDF itself, for four years after the Chandos Hall Social, the party (having much earlier rejected a fusion with the Independent Labour Party), became part of a coalition with non-Marxist sections of the Independent Labour Party, the Clarion movement and various local socialist societies. Within a short space of time, the coalition had fragmented spawning a number of different political organisations (including the British Socialist Party and Socialist Labour Party), leaving the SDF to disappear and re-emerge in the wake of the First World War, no longer a Marxist organisation, but rather a grotesque parody of one which

carried patriotism and hatred of Communism to such lengths that its vestigial Marxism was buried under a mountain of vituperation against any kind of working class militancy (19).

As such, it is no surprise that any attempt to continue to develop a socialist perspective on theatre disappeared.

## THE SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

In December 1884 William Morris, Eleanor Marx, Edward Aveling and E.Belfort Bax (amongst others) broke from Hyndman's SDF on the basis of his arbitrary and sometimes dictatorial rule, his political opportunism and his jingoism. They immediately established a new party, the Socialist League which set out to build a party of "cadres" with a high level of theoretical understanding which could educate the people in the principles of socialism. In the words of Morris,

I want an educated movement. Discontent is not enough, though it is natural and inevitable. The discontented must know what they are aiming at...My belief is that the old order can only be overthrown by force; and for that reason it is all the more necessary that the revolution...should be, not an ignorant, but an intelligent revolution (20).

The members of the League looked on the revolutionary movement from two aspects;

a small educated propaganda on the one hand, a spontaneous rising provoked by misery on the other: in the final event "the crisis" arises - one sharply defined revolutionary moment (like the Commune) - when the Socialist cadres will master the spontaneous mass movement and steer it through to Socialism (21).

How far E.P.Thompson's analysis of the League can be accepted as true may be debatable. But it is certainly true that one of the main tasks the new party saw before them was "to make Socialists", and there art and entertainment had a role to play, (alongside selling the paper, street corner meetings and general propaganda) as Morris wrote in "Socialists at Play", a poem written for a League entertainment in June 1885:

So through our play, as in our work we see  
The strife that is, the Peace that is to be (22).

From joining the Socialist movement, Morris had become the "laureate of sweating men", writing numerous propaganda poems to fit the day to day needs of the movement - for the funeral of Linnell (killed at a riot in Trafalgar Square) or Hyndman's debate with Bradlaugh over the war or for the coming socialist future. In his early days as an active socialist in the SDF, Morris had seen as one of the first duties of socialists the expression of "their discontent and hope when and where they can", and had discussed the "Cause" as worthy of the sacrifice of leisure, pleasure and money. Although sporadic, the entertainments of the Socialist League were not mere entertainment, as "Socialists at Play" stressed:

So be we gay; but yet amidst our mirth,  
Remember how the sorrow of the earth  
Has called upon us till we hear and know,  
And saved as dastards never back may go!  
Why then, should we forget? Let the clause cling  
About the book we read, the song we sing,  
Cleave to our cup and hover o'er our plate  
And by our bed at morn and even wait.  
Let the sun shine upon it; let the night  
Weave happy tales of our fulfilled delight!  
The child we cherish and the love we love,  
Let these our hearts to deeper daring move (23).

Apart from the words of Morris, the seriousness with which the members viewed their entertainments can also be seen in a letter written by Eleanor Marx to the Secretary of the Socialist League, deploring certain degenerations in the entertainments organised by the League. She objected in particular to Charles Theodor (or Theodor Reuss), an executive member and musician whose comic songs she thought "a dull piece of vulgarity":

I like fun - any fun no matter how rough as it be wholesome - as well as any, but I fail to see fun in pure (and impure) and simple vulgarity. Brainless middle-class cads may like this sort of thing: I don't believe working-men who have a real sense of humour do (24).

Eleanor Marx was convinced that Reuss would never dream of having such songs sung at one of his own concerts. Nor was it a matter of personal taste, even if some members of the audience did not share her criticisms:

I don't think we, who want our lectures, our paper, all our work to educate people (and surely education to a Socialist means also Art Education) should tolerate them...I know, alas! that we can't pretend to give grand concerts: but let what we do give at least be of such a kind that we need not be ashamed of it, and do not let us say "anything will do for us" for our audience because it is a poor and working class one (25).

Eleanor Marx differs from Morris in her view of art; whilst he yearns for socialists to cry "aloud the certain tale of fate", Eleanor discusses "Art Education" and giving entertainment of which the League need not be ashamed. There is little evidence to be found on the pages of Commonweal of the programmes of the Socialist League entertainments; a sprinkling of events are mentioned (including Christmas trees for the children, Saturday "sociables" and concerts following lecture series), but apart from mentioning the fact that they included recitations, songs and musical pieces the paper gives us few details. One interesting venture was a series of free evening concerts "for the people" organised at Farringdon Hall in 1885; for the first, the room was "quite full of working men, women and children" who were entertained by pianoforte selections (performed by Ann Taylor and W.B.Adams),

women and children" who were entertained by pianoforte selections (performed by Ann Taylor and W.B.Adams), recitations (from, amongst others Edward Aveling, Eleanor Marx and H.H.Sparling) and songs (sung by May Morris, Andreas Scheu, E.Pops, W.Wade and Frau Walther). The evening was closed "in customary fashion" with the singing of the Marseillaise. Future evenings included dramatic entertainment, and on one occasion, the performers included G.B.Shaw. But without further details it is impossible to ascertain whether such evenings constituted an attempt at "Art education" for the working class or socialist propaganda (26).

Commonweal is a little more forthcoming in its details of dramatic entertainment, although at times it notes simply dramatic performances or entertainments; so, the Clerkenwell Branch was entertained one Sunday evening by "two laughable farces, singing and instrumental music" and on one occasion a dramatic sketch written by Darwood and Jeffries, two members of the League, was performed (27). Such indifference to even giving details of the piece to be performed would seem to suggested that Yvonne Kapp was right to note that these "little amateur theatricals" were of no great importance to Eleanor Marx, or to anyone else in the League (28), yet their frequency coupled with the fact that other plays were mentioned in more detail and many were written by members of the League, would seem to suggest otherwise. Even where performances are not named or reviewed, their frequency, would suggest a level of commitment to drama, by virtue of the time that would have been spent in rehearsing. The theatrical

pleasure to think you are causing them trouble and annoyance. There is a call for 11am tomorrow (Thursday) as perhaps you know. I shall be much surprised if you turn up. Yours in anger, May Morris (29).

And while the "theatrical company" for Shaw's performance was somewhat ad hoc, the League in Norwich set up not only a branch band and choir, but also a weekly dramatic class (30).

Unfortunately, the first performance mentioned by the paper, Alone by Palgrave Simpson and Hermann Merivale, would not appear to be a prodigious choice either in terms of propaganda or as a piece of much theatrical merit. Described by Shaw (one of the performers) as a "third rate comedy", it was performed at Ladbroke Hall, in Notting Hill, making up the second part of the programme, the whole ending with a rendition of Morris' "The March of the Workers" (sung to the tune of John Brown), in which the audience were invited to join (31). However, it was followed, ten days later, by a dramatic entertainment of two one act plays under the direction of Edward Aveling. The first of the two pieces, To Oblige Benson, by Tom Taylor, was as inauspicious a choice as Alone, but the second, The Test, marked the first performance of a piece co-written by Edward Aveling. Written in collaboration with the blind poet Philip Bourke Marston, The Test was, according to the Dramatic Review, crudely constructed and its unhappy end was "painful without being really dramatic", and according to May Morris (writing to Shaw to invite him to the performance) it was "a dismal little play but clever". The cast included May Morris (who performed alongside Edward Aveling) and Eleanor Marx (who played the roles of a country doctor and his wife), and the

piece was not to be the last of Aveling's dramatic contributions to the entertainment of the socialist movement (32).

Nor was Aveling alone as a member of the League in writing theatrical pieces. The next performance noted in any detail by Commonweal was an extravaganza in six scenes, The Lamp, written by the secretary of the League, H.A.Barker. Its "lively music and good scenery" (designed by C.Barker) proved popular and the piece was performed several times, including a fund raising event held at the new Farringdon Road Hall of the League to help in the formation of an East End Socialist Club. Barker's playwrighting efforts were followed by a series of entertainments organised to raise money for the Strike Fund, at the fourth of which two dramatic pieces were performed - The Appointment by Miss Radford and A False Start by Julian Sturgis (33). But undoubtedly the most significant dramatic work performed by the League was Morris' play The Tables Turned or Nupkins Awakened which received the first of numerous performances on October 15th 1887 at the Farringdon Hall, as part of a concert in aid of the Commonweal Printing Fund (34).

"A - what? - an Interlude, let's call it".

Describing the first night of Morris' "topical extravaganza" The Tables Turned or Nupkins Awakened, Shaw remembered the wild laughter of the audience, "a motley sea of rolling, wallowing, guffawing Socialists". May Morris preferred to recall a rather more sedate and "harmless gathering of

mischievous revolutionaries" and the reviewer from the Pall Mall Gazette reported that the audience was mainly composed of working class socialists with a sprinkling of artistic utopians (including Walter Crane and the "pillars of the Grosvenor Gallery"). Whichever is the truer picture of the scene which greeted Morris' only play (performed in the inauspicious surroundings of a long narrow garret decorated with a few red flags which looked as if they had "braved a thousand years of bobbies and the breeze), it was certainly a huge success (Shaw went on to describe it as the most successful first night in living memory) and Commonweal reported not only that it was much applauded, but also that so many people wanted to obtain admittance that it was decided to repeat the performance. In the end, the play went on to be performed not just once more, but on numerous occasions around London, where it was used both to raise money and as socialist propaganda - for the League discovered that it attracted "many people not often seen at a Socialistic meeting" (35).

The text, printed by Commonweal (a sign of its popularity), falls into two distinct but related parts. The first is set in a courtroom where Mr Justice Nupkins presides over a court in which there is very clearly one law for the rich and one for the poor. Mr La-di-da, a respectable "gentleman" found guilty of obtaining money through fraud, finds himself imprisoned as a "first-class misdemeanant" for one month (with a week prior to its commencement to get his affairs in order, as Nupkins does not wish to make the sentence any "heavier by forcing a hard construction" on him). On the other hand, Mary Pinch, a labourer's wife, is accused of stealing three loaves



of bread to feed her children, and faces not only three policemen who very clearly cannot get their story straight but is also accused by Nupkins of committing a "revolutionary theft"

based on the claim on the part of those who happen unfortunately to be starving, to help themselves at the expense of their more fortunate, and probably - I may say certainly - more meritorious countrymen (36).

Having convinced the jury that she is a dangerous threat to society, he asks them to dismiss such "non-essentials" from their mind and to show the "mistaken" woman the "true majesty of the English Law", which they do by finding her guilty (without leaving the courtroom), whereupon Nupkins sentences her to eighteen months hard labour. Throughout, the proceedings are interrupted by heckling in the court, and, finally John Freeman, the Socialist and the central case of the act, is brought on. He is accused, in the words of Mr Hungary Q.C for the prosecution

with sedition and incitement to riot and murder, and also with obstructing the Queen's Highway. I shall bring forward overwhelming evidence to prove the latter offence - which is, indeed, the easiest of all offences to be proved since the wisdom of the law has ordained it can be committed without obstructing anything or anybody (37).

Freeman's case takes up the remainder of the first part of the play, during which he calls a number of witnesses (including the Archbishop and Lord Tennyson) to prove that he is not a "criminal fool".

In his depiction of the court, and in particular the discussion of "free speech", lies the true topicality of the

interlude. It was only two years since the Socialists of all denominations had found their street meetings harassed and hounded by the police, the situation developing (especially in the aftermath of the unemployed riots of Trafalgar Square in 1886) to one where "arrests were almost a weekly occurrence". The memory was clearly sharp in the minds of those socialists present at the performance, as May Morris remembered:

Our public fresh from encounters with police and magistrates, delighted in the travesty of a court, in the solemn-silly policemen - scarcely a burlesque of the real thing - in the ludicrous summing-up of Nupkins and his final downfall (38).

The events were indeed very close; not only was there a cartoon commemorating Dod Street on the wall of the hall, but during the interval (alongside Brocher singing a song of his composition and Beaver chanting "The March of the Workers"), a vote of sympathy was taken for Comrade Charles Mowbray who was sentenced to nine months by another "Mr Justice Nupkins, whose disgraceful name I forget". The ensuing trial of Freeman also bears an uncanny resemblance to the scene in the Thames Police Court in September 1885 when those arrested for organising to defend their right to hold meetings at Dod Street in Limehouse appeared charged with obstruction and resisting the police, and where Morris himself was arrested following a scuffle in the court. In the real court case, Lewis Lyons, a tailoring worker, was sentenced to two months hard labour (a sentence which provoked the ensuing furore); in the play, Freeman receives a sentence of six years penal servitude and a fine of £100, but is saved from having to pay anything by a hammering on the doors and the singing of the

"Marseillaise". The "tables have turned", as the Socialist Ensign who bursts into the court with a red flag explains:

The Revolution we were all looking forward to had been going on all along, and now the last act has begun. The reactionists are fighting, and pretty badly too, for the soldiers are beginning to remember that they too belong to the "lower classes" - the lower classes - hurrah! (39).

Part Two opens with the revolution complete and victorious, and Judge Nupkins a fugitive in a field. Here we are in a utopia of rural bliss, of no more masters, of

hot late summer mornings, when the first pears are ripening, and the wheat is nearly ready for cutting, and the river is low and weedy...it's like living the best of the early days over again now we are so happy, and the children like to grow up straight and comely, and not having their poor little faces all creased into anxious lines...it's all like a pretty picture of the past days (40).

And it is here that Justice Nupkins is "awakened" as he is treated to his first taste of revolutionary justice - a very different justice to the corrupt class bias of the old courts. He is "tried" by the village council (many of whom, including Mary Pinch, have had a taste of Nupkins' justice), and whilst some are in favour of shooting him (because "once a thief, always a thief"), Freeman wins the day. He persuades them both that they cannot imprison him (for "who would be the jailer?") and that it is possible for Nupkins to learn to behave decently by doing an honest days work - digging potatoes. Having reached their decision, the villagers come together to sing and dance "to the tune that sprang up at the dawn of freedom in the days of our great grand-fathers". The last word is left to Freeman who, breaking free of the dance with

Nupkins (now known as "citizen"), tells him he must learn to bear a world in which everyone is happy:

I can't be very sorry that you feel it so keenly. When scoundrels lament that they can no longer be scoundrels for lack of opportunity, it is certain that THE TABLES ARE TURNED (41).

Commonweal was full of praise for the staging of the play, singling out in particular Mr Campfield's "pretty Landscape, with its tree for the open air communal council and its dwelling in the distance", which contrasted effectively with the realistic court scene constructed by C. and H.A.Barker - both settings having to vie for space on a stage which was only fifteen feet wide and eight to ten feet deep. But others present at the performance reserved most praise for Morris' debut as an actor in the role of the Archbishop. May Morris went so far as to attribute the entire success of the satire to his performance. She described his appearance in "our primitive conception" of the costume "due to the dignity of the part" as "inimitable", and concluded that

It put everyone in such a joyous and receptive humour that it didn't matter how the rest of us acted (42).

Shaw, writing his "obituary" for Morris nineteen years after the performance, certainly remembered that Morris's first appearance on the stage was greeted with "several minutes of the wildest screaming laughter" and went on to describe that appearance:

He made no attempt to make up the part in the ordinary stage fashion. He always contended that no more was necessary for stage illusion than some distinct conventional symbol, such as a halo for a saint, a crook for a bishop, or, if you liked, a cloak and dagger for the villain, and a red wig for the comedian. A pair of clerical bands and black

stockings proclaimed the archbishop; the rest he did by obliterating his humour and intelligence, and presenting his own person to the audience like a lantern with the light blown out, with a dull absorption in his own dignity (43).

Of the other performers (including May Morris's performance as Mary Pinch, the only woman in the play), little was recorded, apart from Morris's choice of A. Brookes as Tennyson, chosen because he happened to combine "the right sort of beard" with the "melancholy temperament" Morris required. He was "drilled" in a "certain portentous incivility of speech" which (according to Shaw) threw light on Morris's opinion of Tennyson (44).

However, despite Morris' hit as an actor, the first night was not without its problems. Socialist League member H.A. Barker, writing (once again on Morris's death in 1896) in the Walthamstow Weekly Times and Echo, remembered the unbearable tension amongst the performers on the night as they waited, packed into the wings of the small improvised stage. Morris, crammed in with the rest, was in a "high state of excitement" due, in part, to the fact that just prior to the performance he had been forced to "deliver himself pretty straight" to William Blundell (playing the role of Nupkins) who had been taking the first night all too light heartedly. The tension came to its height, when - as Morris was making his entrance - Lord Tennyson fainted in the wings. The prompter struggled into his costume, and Morris, aware of what was taking place, "got excited again", forgot his part and (with the prompter

somewhat occupied) had to improvise something to the best of his ability (45).

Such mishaps did not in any way affect the success of the performance, but one question still hangs over the fact that Morris wrote a play at all. According to Shaw, "no art was indifferent" to Morris, yet,

- and yet - and yet - ! I am sorry to have to say it; but I never could induce him to take the smallest interest in the contemporary theatrical routine of the Strand. As far as I am aware, I share with Mr Henry Arthur Jones the distinction of being the only modern dramatist whose plays were witnessed by him (except Charley's Aunt, which bored him); and I greatly fear that neither of us dare claim his visits as a spontaneous act of homage to modern acting and the modern drama (46).

He goes on to argue that the reason Morris neither "knew nor cared" anything about the theatre "except as a treat for children once a year during pantomime season", was due to the state of the commercial theatre:

You would never dream of asking why Morris did not read penny novelettes, or hang his room with Christmas-number chromolithographs. We have no theatre for men like Morris: indeed, we have no theatre for quite ordinary cultivated people (47).

Reading The Tables Turned or Nupkins Awakened it is clear that no commercial management would have produced it, but what is less clear is why having scored such a success in the movement with his first attempt at dramatic writing (and with the League discovering the propaganda potential in drama), Morris did not try again. Shaw does concede that Morris was "so interested" by his experiment

in this sort of composition that he for some time talked of trying his hand at a serious drama, and

would no doubt have done it had there been any practical occasion for it...(48).

Yet there were many more "practical occasions" of Socialist League entertainment which Morris chose to ignore, whilst still continuing to produce numerous poems for "the Cause".

Two other Socialist League members, Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling, had no such reservation. Their theatrical involvement spanned both writing and acting in the professional theatre, attempting to "change" the face of the commercial theatre by championing Ibsen and (not least) making numerous contributions to entertainment for socialist organisations. It is in the latter field that their work may be of most interest in the present context (for it gives a glimpse of the breadth of dramatic activity in the movement), but taken as a whole, their contribution to the theatre is impressive in its breadth if not in its success.

#### EDWARD AVELING AND ELEANOR MARX.

Shaw gave Dubedat nearly all the characteristic attributes of Edward Aveling: his passion for having everything of the best; the assured and shameless manner in which he borrowed, in order to pay for his pleasures, the scanty cash of even the poorest of his acquaintances; his gift of fascinating the ingenuous, and, in particular, women, in his lyrical and aesthetic affectations and flirtations (49).

Edward Bernstein's description of Aveling, the common-law husband of Eleanor Marx from 1884 until her suicide in 1898, paints him as not the most popular member of the socialist

movement of his day. Yet, he was one of the most active in trying to carve out for himself a career in the professional theatre.

Writing under the pen name of "Alec Nelson", this one time manager of a group of strolling players was responsible for in excess of twelve plays, many of which were performed on the professional stage. Commercially, the most successful was his adaptation of Hawthorne's book, The Scarlet Letter, performed by Janet Achurch and Charles Charrington at the Olympic in 1888; others included The Landlady (performed at the Shaftesbury Theatre in 1889), By the Sea (which ran at the Lyric for twenty nine performances in June 1890) and A Hundred Years Ago, first staged at the Royalty in 1892 (50). One voice was quick to praise his success; Engels' enthusiasm for Aveling's work, expressed here in a letter to Laura Lafargue (Eleanor's sister, then living in France and married to Paul Lafargue), gives the impression of a dramatic writer on his way to the top:

Of Edward's remarkable preliminary success in the dramatic line you will have heard. He has sold about half a dozen or more pieces which he had quietly manufactured; some have been played in the provinces with success, some he has brought out here himself with Tussy [Eleanor Marx] at small entertainments, and they have taken very much with the people that are most interested in them, viz. with such actors and impresarios as will bring them out. If he has now one marked success in London, he is a made man in this line and will soon be out of difficulties. And I don't see why he should not, he seems to have a remarkable knack of giving London what London requires...(51).

Yet Engels was an all but lone voice in his praise of Aveling's dramatic success - and a voice motivated perhaps



more by his affection for "Tussy" than his real admiration for Aveling or his writing. Two lines of a poem "especially adapted for reciting" (none of his plays appear to have survived) give us some idea of his literary "ability":

O the clang of the wooden shoon!  
Ah! by God it started soon (52),

but it is Engels' own phrase, "giving London what London wants" which best sums up the type of plays Aveling wrote - sentimental comedies and adaptations of French plays. The Love Philtre, for example, centred on a love potion which made a girl love its possessor out of duty rather than of love, The Jackal took as its hero a "hard drinking dissolute" man who obtained credit for having written plays which were the work of another man and attempted to seduce the other writer's lover and Madcap was described by the Times reviewer as a story about

a spirited young girl who is loved by her cousin Jack and also by an elderly tutor. The latter is a backward suitor and even undertakes to plead the case of his rival. In doing this he receives unequivocal proofs of the young lady's affection for himself and all ends happily, but not until Madcap has had an opportunity of parading in the garb of a street arab - a costume which she has ordered for use in private theatricals (53).

In these descriptions, the divorce between Aveling's politics and his writing is startling, a point not missed by a journalist from Era who commented in his review of Frog (a comedy drama about love and marriage replete with "well tried accessories" including Christmas carols, snow and "Yuletide sentiment"):

Nothing is stranger than the change which the nature of an individual seems to undergo when he takes pen in hand to write for the stage. The ethereal poet

carpenters together crude melodramas; and the nervous intellectual Socialist, with strongly marked individuality, produces a pleasing but quite conventional and rather feeble drama of domestic life, with very little except certain technical defects to distinguish it from dozens of other concoctions of the same kind (54).

The divorce between his politics and his plays is even more dramatic in the light of Aveling's written pronouncements on the theatre. For, as well as being a dramatist, Aveling also worked on numerous journals as a dramatic critic (including the Dramatic Review where he was a member of staff alongside Shaw) and wrote not an inconsiderable amount on the type of drama he considered suited to the modern age. Much of it berates precisely the London stage Engels assumed he was writing for, attacking it for its irrelevance and for the fact that the majority of pieces played in London were of the kind that a businessman would want to see when his day's work was done

and consequently most of the dramatists failed to understand the advice of Shakespeare, who put into Hamlet's mouth the view that the stage ought to "hold as it were, the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure"... "The body of the time" is exactly what our modern writers dare not touch. Real problems, life questions (I speak always of England) are just as much tabooed on the modern stage as on the academic platform...our modern dramatists...are not in a position to understand the sham civilisation at the end of the nineteenth century...They do not appear to see the fact we live in a transition stage (55).

That transition stage meant the class struggle, and Aveling went on to argue that,

the only essential modern lines along which a dramatist can work are the economic, the religious, the sexual ie, from our point of view, as the greater includes the lesser, the economic only. The

really great modern play when it comes, will deal not with the struggle in two human lives only, but with the class struggle which is the epic of the nineteenth century also (56).

He believed this to be what working men wanted to see in the theatre, and cites the example of the withdrawal of Wilson Barrett's The People's Idol (which included a burlesque of workers on strike) owing to "the pit and gallery" objection:

Working men have no objection to good humoured fun...but they do not forget that the theatre, as presently constituted, is like the rest of our institutions, on the side of the classes, not of the masses. They looked upon the burlesque of the strikers...as a distinct weapon in the warfare of the classes against them (57).

Measured against these writings, Aveling's own contribution seems rather out of keeping, yet two reasons may shed a little light on why he chose to write sentimental comedies and not nineteenth century epics. Firstly (and maybe most uncertainly), Aveling's own personality, as described by Bernstein, strove for the limelight and success which could be more easily achieved by writing precisely the plays London wanted. Secondly, and more prosaically, was the need for money; the Avelings spent much of their life struggling to make ends meet and Eleanor certainly saw the plays primarily as a means of survival and a means of paying the bills, without being too concerned with their content (58).

What is certainly untrue, is Andrew Davies' conclusion that

The divorce between Aveling's writings and his practical efforts reflects...the absence of a strong cultural platform able to sustain forms of experimental drama (59).

Morris's success with Nupkins by itself denies this conclusion, but what is stranger here is that many of Aveling's plays were chosen and performed for socialist entertainments. Following his debut with A Test for the Socialist League in December 1885, the Ladbroke Hall was again the venue for a subsequent play two years later. There is some confusion as to whether in this instance the performance was actually for the benefit of the socialist movement, or simply an amateur performance set up by Aveling in his own interests, but the cast did include Eleanor and the Radford sisters, all members of the Socialist League, and William Sanders, later to become secretary of the Fabian Society. The play, By the Sea, was an adaptation of Andre Theuriet's novel Jean Marie, a tale of Jeannie.

who lost her lover, a sailor in a shipwreck and married an elderly suitor, Robin Gray. The sailor, however returned, and a struggle began between Jeannie's youthful passion and her loyalty as a wife. The latter won and the sailor consented to leave the country (60).

The performance of The Bookworm for the Law and Liberty League entertainment at the Athenaeum Hall in April 1888 was however certainly for the benefit of the movement. The League had been established in the aftermath of the "Bloody Sunday" Demonstration in November 1887 with the aim of defending freedom of speech, the right of assembly in Trafalgar Square and to help the victims of the free speech fight by raising and standing bail. The three entertainments held during April were organised by Aveling himself and were primarily to raise money (the function at which his play was performed yielded a

profit of £5 5s 8d). No details of the play itself have come to light, but it would appear John Burns (a committed Socialist and later a councillor for Battersea) was a member of the cast, at least if he was persuaded by Aveling's letter:

It is only  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an hour part and about 4 short speeches. You'll learn the part in  $\frac{1}{2}$  an hour and you must give about  $\frac{1}{2}$  an hour a day from Wed to Wed to rehearse it. Can you? 'Tis a strong character part (61).

This was followed in 1895 and 1896 by entertainments in aid of the Zurich Committee which

gave Aveling an opportunity to revive his ambition as a playwright by presenting some of his unsuccessful plays such as Judith Shakespeare and A Hundred Years Ago to an uncritical audience (62).

The Committee had been established, under the secretaryship of trade unionist Will Thorne, to raise funds for the London Congress of the International (a meeting also known as the International Socialist Workers and Trade Union Congress of 1896); and an entertainment committee, under Aveling's care, organised three fundraising entertainments. At the first, held on the 15th June 1895 in the SDF Hall on the Strand, Aveling appeared as the Deputy Governor of Portsmouth Prison in his own play In the Train. He was accompanied on stage by H.W.Lee, secretary of the SDF, who played the guard and by Lilian Richardson (later to adopt the stage name of Eva Frye and to marry Aveling). The packed hall was also entertained by the "quaint and pleasing music" from the Japanese fiddle and sleigh bells of Mr Stanley Gibson and by the professional help of Edith Yorke (from the Palace Theatre), who sang "A May Morning", and of George Blackmore (of the Strand Theatre), who

performed humorous recitations including "The Converted Coster" - although the writer gives us no clue as to what he was converted to (63).

For the second evening's entertainment, Aveling produced two of his own plays accompanied by music from the Sylvia Quartette. For Her Own Sake was "a clever, well written lever de rideau of pathetic interest" although cleverly constructed; the second piece, The Landlady, was described (on its appearance at the Shaftesbury Theatre in 1889) as a "slight but pleasing sketch of domestic life". It tells the story of Bob Bateman, an enquiry agent for an emigration society living in lodgings where his landlady is Nell Gwynne, a refined and virtuous music hall singer. She has been introduced to the profession by her disreputable Uncle so she might earn a living for herself and for him, and so he may carry on his life of loafing from pub to pub all day. The two young people fall in love, and the sketch shows their attempts to get rid of the parasitic uncle, a feat they finally achieve by sending him off to Arizona (64).

Professional help was once again on hand in March 1896, when the Committee organised a final evening's entertainment - an evening which this time consisted of three plays. In Lewis Parker's "bright trifle" Reply Paid, the parts were played by Acton Bond and the American actress and writer Miss Elliot Page. This play was accompanied by the "familiar old comedietta" Delicate Ground (which dealt "not quite from the Socialist point of view with an incident in the French Revolution") and by Aveling's Judith Shakespeare, with a cast

that included Aveling himself (in the role of disreputable actor, Frank Evans), Acton Bond (in the "strong and complex" part of Jack Orridge, a London "ne'er-do-well") and Mary Keegan as Judith Shakespeare,

the daughter of Shakespeare, unable, according to tradition, to read her father's plays, who is torn this way and that by her love for Quinney, her admiration for Orridge, her love and admiration of her father and her despair when the manuscript is stolen (65).

The stolen manuscript in question is that of the Tempest which is taken from Shakespeare's house and unsuccessful attempts are made to pirate it in London.

One final performance of an Aveling play for the movement is worth mentioning, when a dramatic entertainment was held at the Social Hall in Wandsworth in aid of the SDF's science classes. On this occasion the evening opened with an overture played by the SDF String Band (conducted by H.W.Lee) and the dramatic entertainment consisted of The Landlady (with parts played by Aveling and Eva Frye), Reply Paid and the "most prominent feature", Grundy's In Honour Bound (66). But Aveling's contribution to the entertainment of the movement was not confined to performances of his own plays. He was also well-known as a dramatic entertainer and reciter of poetry, as Henry Salt recalled in his autobiography, Seventy Years Among Savages. In it he suggests there was something "rather uncanny and impish" in Aveling's nature which made him a "good interpreter of the weird", an idea held out by the fact that Aveling's most famous recitation was of Poe's "The Bells", a story of bells tolled by ghosts. Salt, however, also thought

Aveling's recitations at times too sentimental, and remembers his performance of the last act of "Prometheus Unbound" at his cottage:

As he gave effect to chorus and semi-chorus, and to the wonderful succession of spirit voices in that greatest of lyrical dreams, he trembled and shook in his passionate excitement and when he had delivered himself of the solemn words of Demagorgon with which the poem concludes, he burst into a storm of sobs and tears (67).

Such sentimentality did not stop him from being a success within the movement, and as early as May 1880 he scored an "unqualified success" at an evening organised by the London Secular Choral Union (an ad hoc collection of "various free-thinking groups"), when he performed recitations covering a wide-range from Shakespeare to Francis Brett Harte, an American humourist. From then he went on to recite at many events, including a rendition of "The Tramp of the Workers" for socialists in Burnley (68).

In Burnley, as on so many occasions, Eleanor Marx also shared the stage with Aveling - at this event reciting one of her favourite poems, "The Pied Piper of Hamelin". Eleanor's involvement in entertaining the movement should come as no surprise, not least given her (unsuccessful) attempts to become a professional actress. The training she had, however, did stand her in good stead, as she herself acknowledged in a letter to Jenny:

Even if, as I fancy will be the case - Mrs Vezin finds that she has much overrated my powers the lessons will still be useful to me, and I can always make the recitation venture (69).



To her practical training, and to Bernstein's description of her as "an inspired worshipper at the shrine of the dramatic muse", can be added a more general attachment to the theatre. In her biography, Yvonne Kapp describes both her early love of Shakespeare, "the Bible of the House", from which she could recite whole passages from a young age and the family performances of scenes from his plays. In later life, she went on to describe Shakespeare as "a Republican, free-thinker, a spiritual if not political Democrat and Socialist", to lecture on his plays and to become an active member of Furnivall's New Shakespeare Society. Out of this grew "Dogberry",

a little private Shakespeare Reading Club, whose members subscriptions were devoted to buying tickets for Irving's First Nights, when he always let them have seats in the front row of the dress circle (70).

The connection between Shakespeare and Irving was not arbitrary; Irving's 1874 Lyceum performances of the dramatist (which attempted to break the declamatory style of acting) were favourites of the Marx family, and when Irving became the centre of a furious press storm, they rallied to his defence. Jenny Marx wrote reviews of his performances for the Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt, articles which Eleanor assured them would have been written by Marx himself, for

Mr Irving...interests us very much (although we do not know him personally) firstly because he is a man of rare talent and secondly because all the English press, in consequence of the most miserable intrigues, set itself furiously against him and has got up a cabal (71).

Their support was so convinced, that Tsuzuki concludes they were "as much partisans" of the new Shakespearean actor "as

they would have been if he had been a Socialist agitator" (72). With such a background, Eleanor's involvement in entertaining the movement seems a natural development and she not only recited frequently, but also appeared in many of Aveling's plays.

One of her most significant roles was her appearance as Nora in The Doll's House, at a reading held at her own house in January 1886. This was the first performance of the play in England, a performance which included Shaw in the role of Krogstad ("with a very vague notion of what it was all about"), May Morris as Mrs Linde, and Aveling as Helmer. Their decision to perform Ibsen, albeit in their own home, was part of Eleanor and Aveling's campaign both to defend and to promote the Norwegian playwright, as Eleanor explained to Havelock Ellis:

It is...a real duty to spread such great teaching as his [Ibsen's] and my little effort is just a poor beginning (73).

It was a point she had also emphasised in writing to Shaw a few months earlier:

I feel I must do something to make people understand our Ibsen a little more than they do, and I know by experience that a play read to them often affects people more than when read by themselves (74).

This was, however, the only reading they undertook, but their active involvement in the "pro-Ibsen camp" extended further. In the controversy following the first staged performance of The Doll's House (at the Novelty Theatre in June 1889), the anti-Ibsenite, Walter Besant wrote his own sequel to the play

entitled "The Doll's House and After" which depicted the hopeless state of the family after Nora has left, with Helmer becoming an alcoholic, the son engaged in forgery and the daughter committing suicide. Both Shaw and Eleanor responded, Shaw with "Still After the Doll's House" and Eleanor (in conjunction with the author Israel Zangwill) with "A Doll's House Repaired". The latter was a tongue in cheek picture of Nora as a repentant woman listening obediently to her husband's exhortations of womanliness and of Helmer as a considerate husband who might have left her but chooses instead to live with her as brother and sister. The pair outlined their intentions in the preface:

The play has certain shortcomings, and these shortcomings have, as it seems to us, been rightly pointed out by the English critics, whose sound common-sense revolts at the manifestly impossible, nay, immoral conclusions of A Doll's House...Our repairs not only adhere to English common-sense: we have restored what was evidently Ibsen's original intention...Finally we rejoice that the door of A Doll's House may at last be hospitably thrown open to the English public, and that the most modest woman may enter its portals without bringing a blush to the cheeks of the Daily Telegraph (75).

Alongside this parody, both Eleanor and Aveling, on a more serious note, gave readings and lectures on Ibsen at the Playgoers Club (often having to contribute a "fervent defence" of his work to an "assemblage of barloafing front-row-of-the-pit-on-the-first-night dilettanti"), and Eleanor taught herself Norwegian so as to be able to translate An Enemy of Society and Ghosts (76).

Such an adherence to Ibsen leaves us with one question concerning the Socialist League entertainments: why did they

not use these as a platform for performing Ibsen? There would appear to be no simple answer to this, beyond a supposition that their concern was to find a much wider audience for Ibsen than those socialists who might attend their entertainment.

#### THE RULE OF ANARCHY: THE SOCIALIST LEAGUE AFTER MORRIS.

Even after Morris lost control of both the Socialist League and Commonweal to the "Anarchist-Communists" in 1890 and the whole "League in London (outside of Hammersmith) became a fanatic's playground" (77), notices of dramatic entertainment still appeared on the pages of Commonweal. The paper had previously had reported anarchists' dramatic performances including August Spies' play Die Nihilisten which was being performed in German at the Berner Street Club (the paper recommended at least all comrades who spoke German should attend as the proceeds were to be used to translate a speech into Hebrew). Later in 1888, it was advertising a performance by the Dramatic Section of the Communist Arbeiter Bildungsverein in aid of the Chicago Commemoration Committee (78). Edith Thomas, in her biography of Louise Michel, gives us some indication of the dramatic activities of the emigre anarchists in London, describing one of the entertainments they held to raise funds, which, from her description, seemed to have been a very disorganised affair. On this occasion in March 1893, the anarchists advertised a bill which included a play by Charles Malato, Mariage par la Dynamite, to be followed by Louise Michel speaking on the art of the future. The English audience (which included Robert Buchanan) arrived

on time at 8.30pm, and then had to be entertained in impromptu fashion by songs and recitations given by anarchists in the audience as the actors did not arrive until after 9.30pm. When the curtain finally did rise, the play turned out to be not very witty and the situation was saved only by the eloquent speech of Louise Michel - even though she forgot to deal with the subject which had been advertised. As Edith Thomas comments wryly, we do not know if the occasion raised much money for the anarchists (79).

Under the editorship of Kitz and Nicoll, Commonweal listed a handful of dramatic performances. The popular comedy, The Adventure of Pere Peinard was performed as part of the Concert, Comedy and Dance organised at the Athenaeum Hall in aid of the No Rent propaganda in France. An anarchist drama, Condemned To Death! formed part of a benefit for the paper itself and in 1893, the paper ran a series of satiric pieces written in dramatic form (80). Most significantly, Commonweal serialised Louise Michel's play, The Strike, a drama in five acts and a prologue (81). The play falls into two (connected sections), the first dealing with the unsuccessful revolt in Warsaw (which Louise Michel entitles "The Rose Legend") and the main body with a later revolt, which finally finds success in a neighbouring country. Its international setting is striking (though maybe not surprising from the pen of a French woman involved in the Paris Commune) and so is the price which the play shows is to be paid for liberty. This is no easy picture of a rose tinted future, but a stage all but awash with destruction and the blood of those "grand and pure figures" who fight for liberty. In the process of the struggle

they are shot, executed, betrayed and slaughtered en masse in "hecatombs". Yet it is also no less romanticised than Morris' picture of a country village after the revolution. In The Strike martyrs are idealised, there is virtue in the "red nuptials" of death and no need to grieve for those who die, for

no man is indispensable, and today those who have tried to rouse the masses of the disinherited can die in peace, for it is impossible to put a stop to the movement...Remember for your consolation that it is not without reason we have been compared to the Hydra, each head cut off was replaced by a multitude. My friends, let us salute Death the great mower (82).

This speech from the dying Nemo (one of the revolutionists), his dead body later to be covered by a red flag, is to be an inspiration to others, as is Marius' dignity when he is executed later in the play. The fact that he dies for his ideals and to set an example to others, leads the soldiers to begin to question the world in which they live. There is no single hero or heroine amongst the Revolutionists; Nemo, Esther, Marius, Vladimir, Zniriki (and numerous other named characters and anonymous miners and fishermen) all fight, and die, together. The insurrection is heard "howling outside" in the off-stage choruses of the people:

Tocsin! ring the signal-peal  
For the fight implacable.  
Ring! Tocsin, ring!  
Ring! Tocsin, ring!  
Tocsin! ring the funeral knell  
Let the old world in ruin reel.  
Let it perish!  
Let it perish! (83).

While the Revolutionists are portrayed as a mass, evil is personified in one woman: Gertrude. Although at the start,

she appears as the heroine who is to give the signal for the uprising in Warsaw, she betrays them to the Grand Duke in order to gain power and wealth for herself. In the play itself she appears now married to a banker and full of plans to take over the whole of Europe financially. She is a character without a single shred of goodness, prepared to abandon her baby in the snow, and to ruthlessly manipulate both of her husbands to gain the "universal repression" of which she dreams. Instead, she dies insane.

The play is clearly not written for performance by a small group of exiled anarchists, for amongst the stage directions, it includes the arrival of the Grand Duke on horseback, a house being set on fire and a grand house being turned to ruins in front of the audience. The final stage directions give some idea of the complicated staging the play demands; following a long speech by Gertrude in which she is haunted by the ghosts of her past and by images of Lady Macbeth washing her hands in the waves and turning all the sea to blood (Louise Michel's own "misquotation" from Shakespeare):

(Singing heard in the distance like the harmony of the wind or the waves. Gertrude hastens in silence)

Choir (in the distance):

Vibrate, vibrate in the air,  
Harps with strings of steel,  
With new legends still resound,  
Which fly on music's wings  
Harps with cords of steel,  
Vibrate, vibrate in the air.

(The music is lost in the distance)

Gertrude: There they are. Leave me. Leave me. I am lost!

(She gives a shriek and rushes into the Danube)

Gertrude: The air is full of flying spectres; they rush upon me like carrion crows. Leave me! Leave me!

(The splash of the water is heard into which she sinks giving a last cry. The body of Gertrude appears for an instant carried along by the current. The choir passes by the front of the stage singing. Words and air well known) (84).

Louise Michel may well have been hoping the play would receive a professional production, as her earlier piece Le Coq Rouge had been performed in Paris in 1888, and Edith Thomas does mention that The Strike was performed at the Theatre Villette in Paris in 1890 (85).

Louise Michel was not alone amongst the exiled anarchists in writing plays. Stepniak, a Russian who had been involved both in the successful attempt on the life of a Petersburg police chief and in helping Kropotkin escape from prison (he was killed rather less dramatically by a passing express train), had some success in English literary circles as a novelist. He was also the author of The Convert, a nihilistic drama in four acts, which was performed posthumously in June 1898 at the Avenue Theatre, directed by Charles Charrington. For its performance, the galleries and stalls were packed with the "turbulent spirits" of anarchist London who loudly applauded the incendiary sentiments of the piece, as well as the speech made by Kropotkin at its end. The Era was disappointed with the play, having expected something better given Stepniak's knowledge of the subject. It does show some of his understanding of the precarious life of an anarchist in Russia telling a story of love, discovered revolutionary literature, exile to Siberia, police corruption, prison and murder, central to which is the conversion of Murinov, a rich mine owner, to Nihilism through the actions of his daughter and



through his own experience. Having started the play determined to marry his daughter Katia to Volkov, the nephew of Count Mentrivov, he ends it in prison for the murder of Volkov and persuading Katia to return to Siberia with her true love Dmitri Norov to assist the cause. According to the Times, although the play had the character of a Nihilist demonstration, there was little for the anarchists in the audience to applaud, as the author had (unintentionally, they presumed) portrayed the nihilists as "feeble folk" full of empty words and futile schemes. The performance at the Avenue Theatre was to be its only professional appearance (86).

These anarchist plays may well be just the tip of the iceberg, for although, as E.P.Thomson points out, the anarchists who took over the Socialist League with their "innate tendency...towards the liquidation of all organisation" ensured the League did not survive as a national organisation after February 1891, in

the next few years a rash of Anarchism was to appear in one major city after another (87).

These produced a plethora of papers, from Kropotkin and Carpenter's Freedom and James Tochatti's Liberty to Anarchist, Firebrand and Aestheisitc Communistic Scorcher, as well as establishing a number of clubs - the Autonomie Club in Windmill Street, the Jewish Anarchist Club in Berner Street and the Scandinavian Club in Rathbone Place. All of these (and more) could provide us with more anarchic drama.

The Clarion Players: "A Two-handed Sword, Sharp at Both Edges".

All the political propoganda of the movement is not worth one poem of Morris', or Carpenter's, one play of Shaw's, or Galsworthy's, one picture of Watt's, one Dolly Ballad. When we fight people with mere political weapons we arouse all their antagonisms before they know what we're after. But when we lay before them one of our works of art their minds are captured by its beauty and inevitable truth, and they are ours before they know it (1).

In December 1891, the Clarion made its first appearance on the streets of Manchester. Despite being beset by problems - the printing press went wrong and lumps of china clay stuck to the paper making it virtually illegible and a rainstorm peeled off every Clarion poster from their hoardings - 40,000 copies of that first edition were sold. Within ten years the paper had a circulation of 55,000 and by 1910, it had increased to 80,000. It was, despite its inauspicious start, to become the most widely read socialist paper in the decades leading up to the First World War.

The socialism of the Clarion was firstly the socialism of Robert Blatchford, propagandist, popular journalist, editor of the paper and author of Merrie England, a book on Socialism "with all the hard words cut out" which sold over two million copies, and whose popularity is attested to by Laurence Thompson:

Pamphlets were written against it. Parsons preached on it. "Merrie England" classes were held to study it, "Merrie England" bazaars arranged to raise funds for the movement, and the Labour Church made it a Sunday-school textbook...The book was translated into Welsh, Hebrew, Dutch, Spanish and German. America took it up, and some hundreds of thousands

were sold there...Many years later The Manchester Guardian wrote that for every British convert made by Das Kapital there were a hundred made by Merrie England (2).

The socialism popularised in these plain letters to John Smith of Oldham and in the pages of the Clarion was nothing else if not eclectic. On one hand, Blatchford painted vivid pictures of the destitution and filth of the "breathless courts and gloomy lanes, the fever beds and vice traps" of the cities, and argued (as many other "Commonwealthers" had before) that

the country shall belong to the whole people..and shall be used by the people, for the people...the land, all the machines, tools and buildings used in making needful things, together with all the canals, rivers, roads, railways, ships and trains used in moving and distributing needful things and all the shops, markets, scales and weights used in distributing useful things shall belong to the whole people...shall be worked managed, distributed and used by the whole people in such a way as the greater number of the whole people shall deem the best (3).

On the other hand, he offered a narrow and insular vision of the world in which the people were the nation; socialism could be summed up in four words: "Britain for the British", or, in the words of his autobiography, "we were Britons first and Socialists next". Patriotism was the noblest of virtues, the British (and the Empire) were to be supported in the Boer War (a position which lost him much popularity amongst socialists of the day), and Blatchford declared himself ready to sacrifice Socialism "for the sake of England" but never "to sacrifice England for the sake of Socialism" (4). Perhaps his socialism is best summed up in an attack on Kropotkin and Louise Michel, an attack which says more about Blatchford's

views (including his "Fabian" belief in the state as a force for good) than about the two anarchists:

Plainly we are to have revolt and civil war, battle, murder and sudden death; we are to wade through the blood of our countrymen, lighted on the road by the flames of burning cities...We shall have a godless, graceless, hopeless Commonwealth...Therefore do we say, "down all ye black-hearted, red-handed Communists and traitors; silence your lying blasphemous howlings; we will none of the criminal lunacy which you call Socialism! We want no riot, nor murder, nor sedition but justice for the people of all classes through the Parliament and the Law; and so - Long live the constitution! and God save the QUEEN! (5).

Yet the Clarion was not simply a popular paper or a mirror for the politics of Robert Blatchford - although whatever else it was, it was not a political party. Whilst "practical" politics were to be left to the ILP (founded in 1893), the Clarion concentrated on teaching Socialism and "making" Socialists, for on one point Blatchford was quite certain,

and that is that the first thing to do is to educate the people in Socialism. Let us once get the people to understand and desire Socialism, and I am sure we may very safely leave them to secure it. The most useful work which Socialists can do at present is the work of education and organisation (6).

And education and organisation meant the Fellowship. Defining the term is by no means an easy task - even Clarionettes found themselves floundering when they were asked what it meant. Tom Groom thought it the greatest idea of all but the least explicable; it was "the vague, the nebulous, the indefinite, the altogether undefinable". Hilda Thompson begged readers "Do not, as you love me, ask "What is the Clarion Fellowship?", but if they persisted she was forced to respond with a question:

"What is life?" You think you know. So do we all. But we none of us can explain. There is nothing tangible about life that we can take hold of and say: that is life. Well, the Clarion Fellowship is just such another intangible something which does exist, but which one cannot take hold of and say: **this** is the Clarion Fellowship. The best definition one can give is to be found in the words of a great man who said the Fellowship is Life...It is a strong potent factor which makes Life as distinct from existence for thousands and thousands of people...And just as the Fellowship makes alive the life of these thousands so does the foregathering of them prove the only tangible existence of the Fellowship. They are the Fellowship: the Fellowship is Them! (7).

Ten years later, Frank Pilgrim, the National Secretary of the Fellowship, could not improve much on this vague definition beyond adding that it was a "loosely woven but tightly knit" association of people prepared to "rejoice on the least provocation", ever ready to "give their sympathy where it is needed" and who never lost a chance to "help a lame dog over a stile". Others writing about the Fellowship resorted to phrases such as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace", a "scheme of salvation for the individual", and defining the fellowship as something neither "visible nor tangible" without either "substance colour nor form" - a "great warm hearth in a kind of democratic inn". Only Blatchford (speaking at a Clarion Meet in Bakewell in 1901) appeared to have some concrete answers when he moved a motion stating that the Clarion Fellowship be an association for social intercourse, and for the realisation of Clarion ideals (8). But he too was soon less than certain:

It is necessary that we should not be tied up in cast-iron rules, and this resolution is both clear and vague. The Clarion ideals belong to Clarion readers, and as ideals change it is thought best not to define what they are. What the resolution really means is that the Fellowship exists to promote

social intercourse, and to work for whatever is thought desirable at the time (9).

Sixteen years later, arguing why the Fellowship should not be organised, Blatchford was a little clearer:

The soul of the Fellowship has been and is its broad individual liberty and tolerance. There has been no red-tape, no machinery, no leadership, no dogmatism, no official oligarchy, no intrigue. The members of the Fellowship have been free to join and to help any Socialist body which appealed to them...It has been a non-political refuge where Socialists could meet for rest and recreation (10).

The promotion of "social intercourse", a place to meet for "rest and recreation" - if the nature of the Fellowship was unclear, its methods were easier to define. For to humanise socialism, to reach hearts and rouse them to action, to foster the "spirit of fellowship", social activities (from conversations to music and to dancing) were paramount. They could reach out to those who would not come to a meeting, to those who because of their circumstances could not identify themselves with the Socialist cause. Activity of whatever nature with socialists could convert those "unconscious socialists" by giving them confidence and understanding. And recreation and the arts also served those already converted. It provided

some relief from that greyness and dullness of life against which Socialism is struggling, to establish for themselves immediately some foretaste of that fellowship which it is the purpose of our striving to secure eventually for all mankind (11).

It was an escape from the world, a foretaste of the good things to come, but it was also more. It was "cakes and ale" socialism, a "family gathering" or "jollification" rather than

the nonconformist, self-righteous ascetics which, in Blatchford's view made up the rest of the movement. The Fellowship loved the "humour and colour of the old England tradition", of "Merrie England",

the Labour and Socialist movement of the present day is taking itself too seriously. Granted that the cause is a serious one, you'll find that the man who laughs while he works can smile when he is canvassing and can take a joke against himself, will do more to prove to others that our doctrine is a holy one, than all the "Klars Konscious Komrades" disciples of Karl Marx put together. "Merrie England for Merry Englanders" is our Clarion maxim (12).

The Fellowship was also concerned with regeneration - of man whose innate goodness had been choked and poisoned by "evil influences" and of the working class made "dull, stupid, foolish, miserable, wicked, dunder-headed, blunder brained" by their "betters" (13). And what better way to reach the "dormant consciences" of workers than through art and recreation. Writing about a co-operative theatre in Russia, Julia Dawson spelt out the conclusions:

I have in mind now, a little wooden theatre lately erected in a little country town. When it started the unco' guids (sic) shook their heads at such wickedness. But now it is common talk that men who always used to spend their evenings in the public house, take their wives and children to that little theatre. Men who were never seen out with their wives before - because there was nowhere to take them. Now the theatre is crowded every night (14).

On the pages of the Clarion social activities appear in abundance - the Fellowship even organised separate Clarion Social Clubs. From the ever popular whist drives, literary evenings and dances to free and easies, summer picnics and even the occasional Socialist Flower Show, the impression is

of the "good life" (15). Yet with such importance placed on them social and artistic events could not be left to chance (or the hard work and willingness of a few individuals in a town), but they needed to be encouraged and to some extent organised and throughout its history the Clarion attempted to initiate clubs and to organise various activities. One of the earliest was the Clarion Sketching Club instigated by "Mont Blong" (the pen name of Montagu Blatchford, Robert's brother) which inspired "the boys and girls" to come out with pencils and sketching blocks and make "many Futuristic sketches of galloping cows" (16). This foundered quickly, only to be replaced with numerous other initiatives. In their turn the Clarion promoted Glee Clubs, Cinderella Clubs ("to feed and amuse poor children and to provide them with toys and boots and clothing"), "the bug-hunters" or the Clarion Field Clubs, a Photographic Club and the Handicraft Guild. Some survived longer and were more successful than others (the Cinderella Club in Hull fed and entertained 300,000 children in its first year), whilst others "faded away within a few months of birth" (17).

Two in particular stand out: the Clarion Cycling Clubs (which numbered 32 in 1895) and the Clarion Vocal Union, the latter being another (and far more successful) initiative undertaken by Mont Blong. It started with a speech by him in 1894 to the congregation of the Halifax Labour Church on the need for a socialist choir. Some 150 people responded to the call and soon branches of the Clarion Vocal Union were formed in Glasgow, Halifax, Hull, Keighley, Manchester, Nottingham, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford and Sheffield (18). By 1910 at least



23 choirs were in existence, and the annual competition, started in 1898, had become an event of some significance. On the pages of the paper numerous articles began to appear (by, amongst others, the Blatchford brothers, Georgina Pearce, the papers musical correspondent, and, later, Rutland Boughton) which attempted to provide a rudimentary socialist philosophy of music, a philosophy which very closely reflected the movement's theory of recreation and leisure as a whole. At the most simple level, music brightened the "dingy round" of the political movement. It provided some

more genial and cheering amusement than political speeches and contested elections; and where can you find a more cheering, harmonising and inspiring force than choral music really well sung? (19).

More importantly, music provided a moral and political education. The Vocal Union was out to beat the enemy by "singing noble thoughts" and to fill the world with "beautiful shapes and colours till the ugliness of our streets crumbles in shame". It provided not only "healthy and refining" pleasure to the singers and their friends, but musical training also "morally, mentally and physically" benefited the members. Choral music (in particular) gave an active lesson in fellowship, a

lesson in discipline and socialism of the most convincing sort. It shows the interdependence of each on all; the necessity of each member doing a given duty in a given way at a proper time to the instant, and gives an exultant feeling of precision, unity and power that would raise and dignify a tailor's dummy (20).

Alongside this, the Union also strengthened Socialist bodies and raised their prestige by attracting hundreds of adherents

who would otherwise "have kept aloof from the movement",  
appealing

straight to the hearts of those most benighted people whose highest musical ideal is the singing of the "Rickety-Rackety Crew", by a third-rate music-hall comedian (21).

The songs of the music-hall could be replaced by the songs of a socialist choir,

a first promise of what enjoyment may be obtained from life, when under the socialism which these choirs are using their voices to promote, all men and women have leisure to devote to intellectual pleasures (22).

In short, the members of the Choral Union, as Dave Russell points out, strove to sing themselves to paradise.

What songs did they believe would take them there? Montagu Blatchford thought the choirs should aim to revive an interest in the wealth of English glees, madrigals and part songs "so popular in days long ago when England was a really musical nation". His brother spoke of cultivating once again the music of the English renaissance. Rutland Boughton was confused. On one hand he attacked the "cult of stale pudding", of musicians inviting people to a "feast of notes" written in the fifteenth century, notes which have "long since crumbled to dust, so far as their value in life is concerned". On the other hand he prized "old makers" of choral music and encouraged people to sing their songs for they were more "honest in their work than the majority of the moderns"(23).

In practice, the Choral Unions paid little heed to these suggestions. Whilst madrigals by Dowland, Gibbons, Morley and Wilbye were sung, they accounted for a very small portion of the repertoire. The overwhelming bulk was made up instead from Victorian part-songs and songs within the mainstream of the Edwardian choral tradition: Pinsuti's "Good Night Beloved", Fanning's "The Song of the Viking" and "Moonlight", Danby's "Awake Aeolian Lyre" and numerous songs by Mendelssohn amongst others (24). In this the choirs were remarkably similar to the myriad of non-political choirs which existed at the time. Certainly there were some songs which were more radical in tone. Some were drawn from the past ("The Marseillaise", "The Red Flag" and Carpenter's "England Arise"), others were borrowed from the co-operative movement and some were specially written by members of the movement for the annual competition and concert. So, for example, in 1906, Montagu Blatchford's socialist hymn "Hark, a New Song Rising" was written for a meeting in Manchester. Later, professional composers with radical sympathies were commissioned to compose new material, Rutland Boughton contributing "The City" (which embodied "the composer's vision of the ideal city") and the feminist composer Ethel Smythe offering "1910", a piece dedicated to the women's suffrage movement. Yet whilst songs written by socialists and their supporters dominated the songbooks published by the Clarion, they formed a very small part of the songs sung at concerts (Chris Waters puts the figure at about 4.3% of the entire repertoire). Nor does it appear, in any of their writings about music, that Robert or Montagu Blatchford were particularly concerned with songs which were directly propagandist. Rather it was music itself

(for them defined in terms of "high culture"), and the act of singing which was of paramount importance (25).

The activities and the purpose of the Cycling Club could be seen in a different light. From an initial meeting of seven men in early 1894 at the Wesleyan Chapel in Birmingham, the Clarion Cycling Club started the 1896 season with 120 clubs and by 1897 membership nationally exceeded 7000 (26). Initially, its aims were simply to enable members to escape the smoke filled cities, as John Mahon explains in his biography of Harry Pollitt, at one time a member of the Openshaw Club:

Here at last was the means of escape from city life after the round of daily toil was finished. the power to roam at large on the King's highway - a luxury hitherto almost the exclusive privilege of the rich. The rustic beauties of the county lanes and villages, the cloud-capped hills and scenic panoramas, the meres, lakes, tree-filled valleys, rocks and mountains, all - all could be seen and enjoyed by the mere possession of the magic wheel (27).

The Clarion Cycling Clubs organised day trips and weekends away. There were Annual Meets where members from all over the country came together. The greeting was "Boots", the answer "Spurs". The paper devoted a great deal of space to reporting the latest technical developments and the progress of the various clubs and for a while the Clarion staff also published a cycling journal called King of the Road. But simple escape and enjoyment was not the only basis for the clubs. Saddlebags were crammed with leaflets and carriers piled high with papers. The riders would arrive in a village, find a suitable spot and dismount. This would be followed by singing, the

unaccustomed sound of which would attract people to watch, and then, following a short speech, leaflets would be distributed and papers sold and the Clarionettes would wind up the proceedings with another song and depart. Thus pleasure was combined with propaganda, and it is this combination which is central to understanding the role of the Clarion clubs as a whole. For some, like the Vocal Unions the propaganda was more muted, more ethical and moral. For others like the Cycling Clubs (and their off-shoot, the Clarion Club Houses) it was more overt. There were of course aspects of the Clarion organisation more directly formed for propaganda work. The Clarion Scouts were in essence a group of activists, organised with military precision (and with their own captains and corporals) to "permeate their companions with Socialism", and in the words of their song, to go

Down to the haunts of the parson and squire  
Putting opponents to rout;  
Bestriding his steed with a pneumatic tyre,  
Through village and hamlet, thro' mud and thro' mire  
Rideth the Clarion Scout  
Nailing down lies and disposing of fables  
Improving the landscape by sticking up labels (28).

Their work reinforced that of the other more "political" section of the Clarion's work, the vans, which toured the country during the summer, holding meetings and selling literature. Yet the separation between the recreational or cultural work and the propaganda work of the different organisations was not complete. At best, all had their political aims, the making of socialists by whatever means necessary; at worst, the thrust was to find a way of blending leisure (or pleasure) and politics, as this verse printed on the pages of the Clarion illustrates:

Steal away  
From the roar  
That drowns the single voice;  
Join hands and take this simple oath,  
And teach it to their sons;  
Never through grief or joy,  
To flinch or fail  
To give out a minimum of ten leaflets,  
Pamphlets or books on Socialism  
Till right prevail (29).

One of the most striking combinations of propaganda and pleasure (and one which also illustrates the Clarion's limitations of achieving this combination) was Julia Dawson's suggestion, in 1910, to form the Clarion Strolling Players. She envisaged a company with a repertory of about six plays who would accompany the Clarion vans in summer and take halls of their own in the winter, producing "real Socialist plays", by which method converts to Socialism "would be at least trebled". But the idea of Players pitching their tents beside the Clarion Vans fell on stoney ground, and made its last appearance in March 1911, when Julia Dawson asked:

The Clarion Strolling Players are like the little children in Peter Pan struggling to be born. Who will mother and father them? (30).

The resounding silence which greeted this heartfelt plea suggested no-one would, and the failure to combine the two aspects of work reflected in many ways one of the chief problems which faced the Clarion clubs: how to combine politics and leisure, and how to harness leisure to political ends. It was a problem which was to plague the dramatic initiatives undertaken by the movement, which, although more successful than Julia Dawson's stillborn plan, never quite made it onto steady ground.

### Instilling Socialism in Small Doses.

Against the background described above, it comes as no surprise that Raphael Samuel suggests that it was the Clarion movement which provided the most sustained initiative to organise dramatic activity prior to the First World War (31). To the emphasis on leisure and art, can also be added the theatrical connections of several leading Clarion proponents and journalists. Robert Blatchford was the second son of a strolling comedian and his actress wife, and himself wrote the libretto for two comic operas, In Summer Days and The Mingled Yarn (written with P.J.King in 1897). The former had a rather short and unsuccessful production history, for finding that no London manager would produce it (a fact which does not, as Laurence Thompson points out, necessarily condemn the piece for in 1891 no London manager would produce Shaw), Blatchford decided to back a tour of the Provinces himself for which he undertook to act as stage manager. Despite travelling to various large cities in which the "name of Nunquam had some power", the opera quietly died in Manchester leaving Blatchford £400 in debt.

From the "always merry and bright yet kindly" pen of A.M.Thompson (who wrote for the paper under the name of "Dangle") streamed a long series of musical comedies, many written in association with Robert Courtneidge (one time manager of the Manchester Prince's Theatre) and many of which (including The Dairy Maids, The Mousme and The Arcadians)

became popular West End successes. A. Neil Lyons, who wrote a weekly column for the paper and contributed numerous short stories, also had "an occasional flutter before the footlights" and was responsible for five plays written between 1912 and 1925. Less successful was the "Boulder", Edward Francis Fay, one of the four founding members of the Clarion, who while he knew almost all of Shakespeare's plays by heart, found he himself wrote plays "of the kind which are lost by managers" and although he thought "vaguely of going on stage" instead "starved as a hanger on of journalism" (32).

Yet the first suggestions to organise dramatic societies under the orbit of the Clarion fellowship came not from any of these leading members but in the shape of a report written by Thomas F. Tweed which started with the suggestion that the stage was an excellent arena for instilling socialism in small doses:

Might I suggest that in each town, where a Clarion organisation is in existence, an amateur dramatic society be formed for the purpose of producing plays with propagandist tendencies (33).

His suggestion did not come out of the blue, for the report continued with a review of a performance by the Liverpool Clarion Players (of which Thomas Tweed was at the time a member) of Shaw's Candida. Nor was this their debut performance; the Players had made a start in 1908 by rehearsing Ibsen's The Pillar's of Society, which they had eventually dropped in favour of Widower's Houses. Their choice of this play, Shaw's attack on property owning exploitation and the moral corruption which flows from it, showed the group were aware of the need for plays with "propagandist



tendencies" which Tweed thought desirable, and in this case such aims were further heightened by the fact the play was to be performed in aid of the Clarion bread and soup fund. To this end, the Players (in the shape of James Sexton, later to be both the leader of the dock workers union and a dockers MP) approached Shaw over the matter of royalties. These he refused to waive, arguing it was

a point of trades unionism among dramatic authors that they shall not cut prices by giving their plays away for nothing to charitable or political institutions, for instance (34).

However in a typical Shavian gesture, Shaw sent a subscription of £5 5s to the fund - the precise sum the Players had sent Shaw for the royalties. They went on to have a "very successful run" of Widowers Houses and to build up a "wide local reputation" for the staging of "difficult" plays, following the two Shaw plays with The Silver Box and later with Heijerman's The Good Hope (35).

Nor was Liverpool alone in already boasting a Clarion dramatic society, for although it may have been the most active and the most organised other dramatic efforts were stirring. In Crystal Palace, the Clarion Social Club advertised a weekly dramatic class which by the end of 1909 had evolved into a "Dickens Fellowship-cum-Dramatic Society. The West Leeds Sketch Party (open to all Socialists) entertained the Socialist Sunday School with the scene described by the Clarion as the "jealous scene" from Hamlet in January of the same year and by December the Handforth Clubhouse had seen performances by its own dramatic society of Candida and by the

Openshaw Dramatic Society of Tom Taylor's Still Waters Run Deep, a play remarkable when it was written in the 1850's for its frank discussion of sex (36).

More popular than full dramatic performances were either readings of plays, such as the Ilford Fellowship's attempt at Yeats' Countess Cathleen in early 1905, or (more commonly) recitals by individuals. In January 1905, a brief glance at the Clarion shows the Hackney Fellowship spending a "pleasant and enjoyable" evening in recitation and song, whilst Mr Slade entertained Clarionettes in Kentish Town by reading from Tolstoy's autobiography, Ted Garbutt read Turgenev's Clara Millitch in Birmingham and in Ilford H.Parker treated the Fellowship to readings from Jacobs and Gissing (37).

At larger concerts and socials, recitations and readings were also popular, as at the Birmingham gathering where Tom Groom read Charles Reade's Put Yourself in His Place and at the first Birmingham concert where the artistes included the aforementioned Ted Garbutt, (here billed as the "celebrated expounder of Turgenieff's works") and "Auld Reekie", the "Unparalleled Dialectician" (38). Over time some individuals developed from readings and recitations of prose work to solo performances of dramatic works. Ruth Swift, from Leeds, offered dramatic recitals of various works and in Birmingham, Hubert Humphreys (later to become a Labour Council member in the city and Lord Mayor) was famed both for his dramatic recitals of Shaw's plays and of his own The Philosopher in the Apple Orchard. One of the most popular entertainers in the movement was "the famous actress and socialist lecturer" Daisy

Halling who toured mainly in the north combining lectures with performances of Ibsen and Shaw (39).

This activity formed the background to Thomas Tweed's suggestion, but it elicited no immediate response from the movement until a few weeks later when a letter appeared in response from F.Longley, the secretary, not of a group of aspiring Clarion actors, but of the Sheffield ILP Dramatic Society, a group which had been in existence for some eighteen months. In it he asked if it would not be possible for sections of the different ILP, Clarion and other socialist societies to get into communication with each other, or "better still" could the Clarion "open a small corner" for the use of different dramatic societies to exchange information about plays, staging difficulties and general knowledge. Keighley Snowden, the author of the papers "Stageland" column where the letter appeared, provided a corner for the letter but little comment, simply asking readers to write telling him how the suggestion struck them (40).

A month later, Snowden returned to the subject. He had received one letter from Maurice Elvey, a professional actor, who suggested a performance of a three act play in London and who was prepared to attempt to undertake such an initiative himself. F.Longley had heard from several amateur groups (in, amongst other places, Glasgow, Birmingham and Burton-on-Trent), one of which thanked him for opening "a great field for the spreading of the glorious emancipation through Socialism". Longley also took this opportunity to lay before

the paper's readers the two objects he had in mind for the organisation. These took the shape of both "preaching the gospel of hope and happiness" to the mass of workers and, secondly, the showing up "through novel methods" of the hypocrisy of the two Capitalist Parties. He did not choose to expand on how either of these was to be attained or quite what "novel methods" he had in mind, but alongside the comments made by Tweed, these remarks provide the first tentative steps in outlining a "theory" for the movement.

In the months that followed, Snowden attempted to encourage both these emerging strands: the formation of a professional group and the development of local branch activity. The two were not, however, to be seen as separate, but were bound together by one single idea, that drama could be used in the spreading of socialism for

Non-Socialists will go to see a play who would not listen to a lecture or attend a meeting; and there are many minds unable to seize the Spirit of Socialism in facts and arguments whom plays may win for us..."The plays the thing wherein to catch the conscience of - " the Crowd, I am sure of it (41).

On the professional front, things at first looked encouraging. Maurice Elvey received offers of help from fourteen actors. Arrangements were made to stage The Strong People, a strike drama by the American writer C.M.S. McLellan, which examined the antagonism between "the ideals of happiness and fair play" and the business ideals of "unflinching selfishness" and concluded that only strength could win against the ruthless dealings of the American trust companies. Letters arrived at the offices of the Clarion from members of the theatrical

profession offering help and advice. But the initial excitement faded quickly. By March, the paper was reporting that the plans for The Strong People had to be shelved due to "business considerations" connected with the rights of the play, and although individual professionals continued to offer their services to local groups (and groups were later to be strongly encouraged to use professional help and advice) any idea of a professional company performing in a London theatre disappeared - at least for the time being (42).

On a local level, the initiative proved to be longer lasting and notices began to appear on the pages of the Clarion of the activities of a handful of groups. In Liverpool, the Clarion Players continued to build their reputation with their staging of Ibsen and Shaw. Performances of one act plays were undertaken by the London (North) Clarion Players (who had Keighley Snowden as their President), followed later in the year by a production of Caste by the London (South) Clarion Players. The Bradford Clarion Dramatic Society performed scenes from Shakespeare, whilst in Stockport the Clarion Players made their debut with Gertrude Jennings The Exit and Lancelot and the Lady. In Glasgow, the Clarion Comedy Club took its first tentative steps and produced two sketches, and discovering new found confidence went on to perform two plays: Victor McClure's Two Up Right, a play in one act about Glasgow life which they presented for the first time, and "an old fashioned comedy" by T.H.Bayley, A Weaver in Spite of Himself. Throughout 1911 and 1912, much the same kind of sporadic activity by the same groups (with the addition of a group in Oldham and one attached to the Clarion Clubhouse at

Handforth) appeared with little comment on the pages of the Clarion (43).

Such ad hoc activity would not appear either to justify Raphael Samuels claim of a "sustained dramatic initiative" nor to be a successful attempt to organise or encourage dramatic activity by the Clarion although their actual input to organisation was as yet very limited and the situation was no doubt not helped by the fact that Keighley Snowden had to go abroad in June 1910 (and was not returning). But even such humble beginnings did prove to be a magnet for a number of already established dramatic groups to change their names and "affiliate" to the Clarion initiative. Some were groups associated with other political organisations which either abandoned completely their links with them (in Newcastle, the group originally formed to raise funds for the BSP found its links with that organisation broken and stood on its own two feet as the Clarion Dramatic Society) or attempted to form a bridge between the two. So, in Sheffield, the ILP Dramatic Society very quickly became the Sheffield (ILP) Clarion Dramatic Society, agreeing to the addition of Clarion to the name so they could "make the fellowship". In Coventry, the Players formed in connection with the city's ILP group were the tenth society to be listed by the Clarion - although the paper gives no indication of the name the group used (or indeed of any performances).

Other groups which gravitated towards the Clarion had more tenuous political links; the Pankhurst Hall Dramatic Society, which had already given over forty performances, appealed for

Manchester Clarionettes to join with a view to forming the Manchester Clarion Players and a Salford group, the "purely Socialistic" Irving Dramatic Society after three years of dramatic activity also joined the Fellowship. In May 1910, the Phoenix Dramatic Society in South London, whose members according to a letter in the paper, had all been converted to Socialism by Clarion members had approached the Van Committee in the area with a proposal to "produce, dress and completely stage" Bulwer Lytton's The Lady of Lyons to raise money for the movement. In the end, not only was their offer accepted, and members of the Clarion Cycling Club drafted into the cast, but

provided the venture is supported, as it should be, we anticipate a handsome profit for the Van Funds, and also that the name of the Phoenix will by consent of its members be changed to that of a Clarion Dramatic Society for the coming season (44).

In the end, the Phoenix Society did not even wait for the new season, and the production of Bulwer Lytton's play was reviewed three weeks later as an "apt and efficient effort" by the South London Clarion Players.

That such a wide variety of groups were happy to become involved with the Clarion initiative in many ways reflects how successful it was as a force to bind socialists with different ideas together. More importantly it also reflects the non-political attitude the paper and the groups seemed to take to drama, despite both Tweed's and Longley's stress on propaganda and the spreading of the "gospel". It can be seen quite sharply in the Oldham group's choice of name: Socialist Amateur Dramatic Society and in the South London Clarion

Players appeal for "amateur actors with experience" (who were promised good parts, although ladies were only wanted if they were able to play or sing) or in the advertisement for the surprise item for Boxing Day which although the audience were promised a "modern slap up Problem Play" it was to be "served hot by the Club House Amdramers" (45). Or by Ernest Goodall's description of the Clarion Players' work in Bradford, a description which could be applied to the activities of any of the hundreds of amateur dramatic societies which existed up and down the country:

Our ideas were not formulated further than the desire to meet together for the cultivation of dramatic art and to be able to appreciate the beauty of the mother tongue...We began by reading round the class. Several of our members have had lessons in elocution and one member was appointed to conduct the class and to correct wrong articulation, pronunciation etc. Then we selected characters as suitable to the members as possible. This is a difficulty we have not fully got over, as we have more members than there are parts for and, of course, the capabilities of our members differ. We have had to duplicate the characters. Another difficulty is in sustaining the interest so that the members attend regularly...(46).

This attitude was very much reflected in the way most groups chose to describe their activities on the pages of the paper, concentrating on the acting and performances above all else. So we see that in Stockport, a "shuffling of characters" would have enhanced the "merit of the production" of Ashley Dukes' The Law and the Prophet and a few months later, Hilda Thompson was more concerned with taking to task Mr Jackson (from the same group) for "playing too much to the gallery" and Mrs Bangor for speaking too softly, than in discussing the merits of Shaw's Press Cuttings as a play (47).



Yet it was not simply that groups were happy to be "amateur dramatic groups"; rather that they did not know how to resolve the tension which did exist between "socialist" and "amateur dramatic". The tension was there from the very beginning, in Tweed's juxtaposition of "amateur dramatic society" and "propagandist tendencies". It was expressed in Oldham's choice of name, in the advertisement for the Handforth Boxing Day performance and probably most clearly by Norman Veitch, writing about the early days of the Newcastle group:

From our original intention to produce plays for the purpose of keeping the British Socialist Party's head above the financial breakers, we had gone on to the idea of propagating Socialism, firmly believing that if our audiences could be compelled to ponder the ills of our times they would discover that the only remedy was a Socialist one. There can be no doubt, however, that interest in the drama for its own sake was growing (48).

And it was a tension which continued to exist as the Clarion Players struggled to get themselves organised.

#### Making Rebels.

The first serious attempt both to provide some framework of organisation and to provide a "Clarion" philosophy of drama came from the pen of Norman Veitch on the pages of the Clarion in October 1913 (49). His starting point was precisely the confusion and tension which existed between politics and theatre, and he started the article by outlining the two functions he saw the Clarion Dramatic Societies fulfilling:

One the one hand they should express themselves in an artistic sense as a Dramatic Society and on the other hand they should express themselves in a Socialistic sense as a Clarion organisation (50).

For Veitch there was no contradiction between these two elements, as his article set out to explain. Artistically, the Dramatic societies should aim to educate people, to lay before them "drama at its highest development":

From an artistic point of view, the primary difficulty is that people don't know bad art when they see it. Art - and I am speaking of the arts - must reach a certain standard before its value becomes a matter of opinion; below that standard it is a matter of fact...That Shakespeare is a greater poet than Alfred Austin is not a matter of opinion, it is a matter of fact (51).

In his opinion, the only reason people accepted and applauded "bad" art was because they had nothing with which to compare it. Clarion Dramatic Societies should therefore extend the work of the Repertory Theatres (who were doing good work in this field) and supply people with the opportunities to see "good" drama. Yet, the dramatic societies should not simply extend the highest drama in terms of numbers of performances, but they should also aim (and this for Veitch was the ultimate aim) to "impregnate this movement with the Fellowship spirit and the Socialist ideal". By this he would appear to mean nothing more than performing "good art":

All good art is good propaganda. When you awaken the artistic spirit in a person you create a real need. Immediately that need is felt, it is found that a full expression of the newly born spirit is impossible under the present commercial system and you have your potential rebel. When that spirit is deep and urgent enough to move the sufferer to do things, your potential rebel becomes an active one (52).

Thus Veitch attempted to fuse the artistic and the political, and to this end he urged the movement to keep going, to build

a national movement "full and strong in spirit", which would be "a two handled sword, sharp on both edges".

Over the next two years, Veitch also attempted sporadically to expand on his initial analysis of the role of the Clarion Dramatic Society, using the pages of the paper to add two main ideas. The first, dealt with on only one occasion, attempted to take on the question of being amateurs. In part it was an admonishment to members that they had to take themselves seriously if they wanted those to whom they appealed to do the same:

We are out for a serious purpose: Socialism through Dramatic Art. And we are not any the less serious because we are amateurs...We do not ask to be excused because we are amateurs...(53).

More importantly it was an attempt to link amateurism and socialism:

Socialism and amateurism are synonymous terms. Socialism in art is in direct conflict with professionalism. Socialism demands that everyone has the right to live because he or she is a human-being and gives absolute freedom to individuals to express themselves as they will. Socialism heralds the great age of amateurism (54).

The dramatic societies were a way of putting this into practice in the present (a taste of utopia in the here and now) for while freedom was fettered and leisure limited, they could still strive to give people the "freedom and leisure to express themselves".

The second issue touched on by Veitch looks back to Elvey's plans to create a socialist theatre albeit in a truncated

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Hyde, Southend-on-Sea and one attached to the Handforth Clarion Clubhouse, and she urged them to send reports.

Interest in the drama was clearly apparent from a letter sent by T.H. Bryce of Newcastle who wrote that since their performance at the Clarion Cycling Club Meet in York the previous Easter (where they had performed the second act of Major Barbara and The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet), he had received enquiries from all parts of the country asking for advice as to suitable plays, royalties, licences, properties etc. Hilda Thompson urged people to address their enquiries to the centre (she had received correspondence from Nottingham, North London and Chicago all asking for advice on plays), so they could begin to establish a National Information Bureau. In order to facilitate organisation, she came up with two practical suggestions: the appointment of an Honorary National Secretary and a conference of delegates to be held at the next Easter Meet (57).

The appeal for a National Secretary was answered at the end of December 1913 by Norman Veitch, who began by asking for groups to contact him at once so he could prepare a list of dramatic societies. He proposed organising a meeting at the Easter Meet to which he hoped delegates from every society would come with suggestions for discussion. In the meantime, he hoped every society would try and give at least one performance prior to the Meet to raise funds for the National Van Fund. By the end of January, he was able to publish a list of 9 existing societies, and the news that one was in the process of formation in Birmingham, and at the delegate meeting the

National Association of Clarion Dramatic Societies was finally officially launched (58).

Here, representatives from six dramatic societies, elected their officials. A.M.Thompson was voted in as President, Norman Veitch retained his position as the Honorary Secretary (to which was added the job of Treasurer) and three members were chosen to make up the committee: Hubert Humphreys from Birmingham, Percy Corry from Stockport and F.Bradley from Hyde (58). Little of a practical nature seems to have been agreed upon beyond the paper assenting to publish a monthly report, a cost of 10s 6d a year affiliation and some very confused discussion on how members would vote - although little discussion, it would appear from the report in the Clarion, about what they would vote on. In the end the decision was taken that each individual would vote as an "individual unit", for it was impossible to organise a club vote as "individual members of the clubs were vehemently opposed to one another" - a point which highlights the lack of coherence in the Fellowships approach to drama.

What little discussion there was on policy centred on the availability of plays, royalties and a rejection of Tom Groom's suggestion to offer prize money for the three best plays sent in to the national organisation. With that, the inaugural meeting was closed. And with that the National organisation also reached its highpoint, for although the paper did continue to publish reports and the organisation did do much work in finding plays (a subject dealt with in more detail below), the advent of the First World War put an end to

any real attempt to organise the movement. Just four months after the National Meeting, Veitch had to report that he had received no news from any clubs, nor was the "moment opportune to enter into any discussion of dramatic affairs".

At the second National Meeting (held at Buxton in April 1915), the delegates were full of large scale ideas for the establishment of a Clarion theatre to be the "home of a Socialist and artistic movement", but such schemes were somewhat grandiose for a meeting of delegates from only four groups and by 1916 the National meeting had disappeared altogether. Individually groups did struggle on against the odds of people disappearing into the army, some, such as Hyde and Stockport, choosing to perform to raise money for the local war fund. At the beginning of 1916 Hyde were performing The Tempest and the North London Players were still offering to perform for any Socialist organisation which requested their presence, although they did make a plea that groups requested performances which did not take up the entire evening as they were short of members. But later in the year it was left to Newcastle and Birmingham with their productions of Shaw and Galsworthy to soldier on alone and, overall, Veitch's words of June 1915 summed up the situation:

There is practically nothing to say this month having no reports from clubs. This, of course, in consequence of all of them suspending operations for the time being (60).

Veitch did attempt to encourage work to continue, urging groups that, whilst no doubt things would pick up after "the troubles" it was important not to lose continuity and leave

groups in a position where they would face all the problems of newly formed societies. Those members who were left had a vital duty to "keep the place warm" and he suggested performances of short plays with two or three characters "with the single purpose of keeping the remaining members in harness" and so preserving the club for future activities (61). But such pleas either fell on deaf ears or conscription depleted the groups to such an extent that they could not meet even such modest demands, and activity ground virtually to a halt, with the notable exception of Newcastle. Nor did the end of the war, despite great hopes that the returning soldiers would provide the key to renewed activity, see any real turn in events.

By the mid-twenties, despite an advertisement in the paper headed "Spurs from the Clarion have Arisen" and listing the National Clarion Dramatic Society complete with the motto "That fear not to greatly dare" as one of the existing groups, activity was fairly desultory. What glimpses of life that existed were fleeting. In December 1925, the Club House Dramatic Society in Handforth did manage to produce The Sports by Mabel Coates and Tom Groom's These Things Make a Difference, a comedy by the Clarion "cyclist" which showed (on the serious side) "what a difference things do make when it is £.s.d.", which they followed with Eden Phillpotts The Gap and Robert MacQueen's The Shop Girl. Further north, the children in Glasgow entertained the adults for an evening with a programme which included a play by Miles Malleson. But these two groups proved to be the exception rather than the rule. On the whole, the Clubhouses had turned to entertainers ("The



Swanee Minstrels", the "Club House Tryhards" or the "Funbeams") in place of their own dramatic groups, and the London Clarion fellowship was reduced to trying to put together a dramatic group to add to the other entertainment for their social and dance. Even where groups did exist, as in Handforth, they appeared to be starting from the beginning (the "first" show for this group was billed as The Paris Doctor and The Dream Maker in November 1925) and most dramatic activity listed, such as the Sheffield Play readers or the Stockport Labour Dramatic Society or the Labour College Players was connected primarily with other political organisations. Only in Newcastle and Glasgow was there any consistency in the work, and certainly the Newcastle group was by this time on the road to dropping its political affiliations and becoming in all but name the town's repertory theatre (albeit under the name the "People's Theatre) (62).

Whilst we have come to the sad end for the Clarion Dramatic Societies, it is worth going back to their "heyday" to make a few points about the nature of the work that they did achieve. The plays are discussed in detail below, but their "dramatic theory" and method of work needs some examination and not least some attention needs to be paid to how the tensions between amateur dramatics and socialism resolved itself.

In short, the last point can be answered almost resolutely by the dominance of amateur dramatics, for although Veitch continuously attempted to unite the two by arguing

we are definitely and seriously Socialists, we are definitely and seriously artists and we are definitely and seriously amateurs (63),

the weight of the evidence seems to fall very firmly on one side - at least in the reviews in the paper. The failure of Getting the Facts in Newcastle was ascribed entirely to the Stage Manager for inadequate rehearsals, whereas the success of The Doll's House was ascribed almost entirely to Marion Smith's performance as Nora rather than to Ibsen and the play (64). In the report of the Stockport production of Sackville Martin's Nellie Lambert, the secretary was primarily concerned with the dramatic intensity of Emmie Greenhaigh's "outburst of heroics" and in criticising Tom Potter for his "persistent tendency to a loud monotone" and in Hyde, all attention was focused on getting Jack Ramsden's "wonderful voice" up to concert pitch (65). Veitch himself, despite writing of his concern that groups were not fully alive to their position and usefulness to the Clarion Movement both in creating Socialist centres and using the performances to sell the paper, also takes up much of his book with descriptions such as the following (in this instance of The Man of Destiny performed in 1915), descriptions in which he delights in the writing but which seem to reflect more a concern for drama than socialism (or any relationship between the two):

We had an old and much used sofa with only three legs, the fourth corner having to be supported with a block of wood. The defect was hidden by the cover, the fringe of which reached the ground and there was hardly any indoor scene in which the sofa was not used. On one night...the curtain was up before the stage staff discovered that the block of wood was missing, and they knew that anyone sitting on the sofa would be tipped over to the ground. The actors who were to use it were unfortunately, on the stage, and the only way to prevent a catastrophe was to post a stage hand at all four corners of the stage to whisper a warning to each character approaching not to sit on the sofa. To make sure the warning was heard, it was repeated over and over again until not only the actors but also the audience knew that the sofa was taboo. The audience was naturally curious and their real interest shifted from the play to the

sofa, but the play ended with the sofa untouched and the audience never discovering what the penalty of disobedience would be (66).

Such an attitude was to some extent courted by Veitch's appeal to professional theatre workers for help, an appeal he made plain when Harold E Kinton, at the time a member of Chas H Lester's Company, offered the Clarion Dramatic Societies any help necessary when he was in the neighbourhood:

This sort of assistance is the very thing we need. There must be a number of Socialists in the Profession and if we could get in touch with most of them we should no doubt be assisted over difficulties which may take us otherwise quite a long time to overcome (67).

Others too had offered their professional help; the producer Mr A.C.Holmes was prepared to come to the assistance of any groups in the Sheffield and South Shields areas, in the Midlands help was on hand in design from Norah Doyle and in London, the experienced entertainers, Mr and Mrs Frank Mellor offered their services. How far such help materialised is open to question (we do have some examples in the paper - Fred Moule's work with the North London Players is just one example, to which could be added the "special instruction" given to members of the Bradford Clarion Dramatic Society by a "qualified tutor"), but the desire to involve theatre professionals must have pushed the emphasis more clearly onto the drama rather than the socialism as well as contradicting Veitch's advice on the link between the amateur and socialism. Indeed, on at least one occasion, a Clarion member did cross the divide between amateur and professional, when Ernest Carl Cassel, a prominent member and "well-known figure" at the

Handforth Clarion Clubhouse who had rendered "yeoman services as an actor and elocutionist to the various socialist organisations of the district", was engaged by Miss Horniman at the Gaiety (68).

To this could be added the question of performance spaces, for throughout the emphasis was very much on "creating theatres". In some cases, this must have been an unenviable task, for the rooms provided scant resources from which to work. Writing about his visit to the Clarion Cafe in Williamson Street where the Liverpool Clarion Players performed on occasions, a journalist on the Sphinx was greatly taken aback by its dirty and unprepossessing appearance. Situated next to a "stale and musty" newspaper and barber's shop, a closed door led up a dingy flight of stairs. These opened directly onto a "badly lighted, badly ventilated" room. At one end was situated a "stale and rickety sewing machine" and a long rack of penny newspapers and at the other stood a barber's chair and mirror. The floor was covered with an

old, much worn oil-cloth and round the walls, which were covered with a dirty, non-descript and inevitably stale wallpaper, were hung framed photographs of all ages...To one side was a closed cupboard and to the other a bookcase filled with a miscellaneous assortment of cheap books (69).

The picture was completed with an odd assortment of furniture of the "type usually found in cheap cottages", and the visitor was so astounded at the condition of the room that he refused to believe it was the cafe until he was shown the visitors book complete with the signatures of well-known Clarionettes. Yet, somehow, the Players contrived to perform Miss Julie in

this space, complete with "full scenic effects and stage mountings" (70).

On some lucky occasions, the Liverpool group (along with other amateurs from the city) were able to make use of a ready made theatre space in the shape of the David Lewis Club Theatre, a fully equipped proscenium stage theatre attached to the David Lewis Club which seated 1000 people. But such luxury was generally outside the realms<sup>of</sup> the Clarion groups and most made the best theatre space they could within the confines of the halls in which they found themselves. No descriptions exist of the Central Hall in Stockport, or the Socialist Hall in Leeds or the Labour Institute Basement in Bradford (all homes to Clarion Dramatic Societies), but doubtless they all faced the same problems as the Clarion Players in Hyde did in their attempts to convert the Socialist Church into a theatre. Here it was achieved through the hard work of the members who not only built a stage, but also painted their own scenery and made their own costumes. They were tremendously proud of their efforts, certain that the new proscenium and "wood scene" painted by two comrades would do much to help with the success of the performances of As You Like It and full of praise for their own "sparks" who had installed electric lighting for the stage (71).

The creation of a theatre was certainly something which dominated the life of Newcastle and Veitch describes in detail the Players first attempts to create a stage in the Leazes Park Road home of the British Socialist Party, where they had to contend with sharing an entrance with the audience

but where they did manage to erect a low platform to serve as a stage. However, they were not to be satisfied with this simple arrangement for long and from the beginning "wished to improve both the stage and the hall". In time for the second season, the Clarion Players made two sets of curtains to cover the bare walls (used to denote a change of scene) and constructed a drawing room suite from old boxes and timber stuffed with straw, later adding gas lighting (not without some problems) for the stage. However, even these improvements did not satisfy their desire to create a "real" theatre and the search started for new premises eventually found in the shape of halls in the Royal Arcade. Here, the Players created their dream, adding wings to the existing stage, building box sets, hanging a border to mask the workings of the stage and delighting in the ability to create realistic stage effects such as the fire in Barrie's The Admirable Crichton, where they were

highly gratified with the realistic effect of the slowly lighting brushwood arranged by the stage staff with the aid of an electric bulb and tobacco smoke puffed through a tube from the wings (72).

The occasion of the move to the Royal Arcade, prompted entirely by the Clarion Players' dramatic considerations rather than political necessity on behalf of the parent body, the British Socialist Party led to a sharp disagreement between the Players and some members of the BSP over the relationship between the two. Will Lacey, the dramatic club representative on the "new premises committee", felt the BSP was becoming subservient to the dramatic group:

He accused his dramatic colleagues of being more concerned with the Drama than with the Socialisation of the Means of Production, Distribution and Exchange, and argued that the red herring of play-acting had laid a false trail which led away from the narrow path...Let the members sever their connection with the parent body - he would raise no objection to that - but he was violently opposed to the Socialist faith and principles being stained, sullied and contaminated by the now pernicious connection...He fought doggedly the move to the new premises to the very end...(73).

On this occasion Will Lacey's viewpoint did not win the day, for he attracted only a "very meagre following", but the point was not lost on Veitch who admitted, or at least conceded, that perhaps he did have a point: "the two viewpoints are separate and will not mix". In 1920, the tension erupted again, this time prompted by the Newcastle Socialist Society (the renamed BSP) stating that the future rental of the hall was to be dependent on reserving seats for members of the Socialist Society. Veitch records that the general meeting of the Players replied that they could not comply with such conditions, but he does not write about the final outcome (74).

In part the growing dominance of drama over socialism may have been fed by the growth of groups and by their changing composition. Some groups did increase their membership dramatically and the early appeals for more members was replaced by Hyde being able to boast in December 1912 that they were able to perform A Midsummer Nights Dream with a cast of over 50, all of whom were "our own members". In Newcastle such growth brought with it a dilution of the socialists who had founded the group. From a collection of

Socialists who at the outset were moved not by a "conscious desire for the furtherance of the drama" but who looked to producing plays simply as a temporary expedient to raise money "to be spent on purposes in no way connected with the drama", the Newcastle Clarion Players had, by 1915, grown to such an extent that the membership included many who were not attached to any socialist body and many who were (in Veitch's words) "suspect". The war clearly exacerbated this shift in personnel as the Players were forced, in order to survive, to commandeer any "stranger or near-stranger" who put their head around the rehearsal room door. Attempts were made at least on paper to prevent non-Socialists attaining a key position in the Players (rule VII of the constitution adopted in 1917 stated that "No member may hold any office whatever unless he or she is an avowed Socialist"), but within months this had been all but ignored when a popular non-socialist was elected as secretary (75).

In many ways, the Newcastle group was exceptional within the Clarion Dramatic Society having close connections with (and making its beginnings from) a Socialist organisation. Many others stood on their own feet, and from that point, the socialist credentials of many members could be questioned. Whilst some groups were convinced of the socialist inclinations of their membership (A Midsummer Nights Dream in Hyde was the work of a group of "class-conscious revolutionary, non-compromising Socialists" including a prominent Clarion "vanner"), others were happy to advertise for new members who had "a fancy for amateur theatricals" or a "taste for acting". In fact, the membership of the Clarion



Dramatic Societies no doubt reflected the broad membership of the movement as a whole (at the outset, a few enthusiastic members in Manchester had been hopeful of establishing a large dramatic society as the club boasted 400 members), many of whom were not socialists, as Collin Coates in his description of the Clarion Cycling Club points out. Questioning the usefulness of Club gatherings at Rivington Pike (where riders were addressed by speakers such as R.C.Wallhead and where mass singing of songs such as "England Arise" and "The Red Flag" were a highpoint) he concluded that if they served any purpose they may have been

a means of expanding the minds of many of the Club's own members because not all of them were convinced Socialists (76).

On the other hand, he describes the bulk of the membership as "a quaint procession of characters" comprised of

Reformers of every description...Pioneers of dress reform, advocates of universal suffrage and election change, socialists of various brands. Artists, actors and every sort and shape of "crank" food "faddists", scare-mongers, communal colonists...In the early days doctor and lawyer rubbed equal shoulders with collier and "little-piecer" (77).

Given such a composition, it may be fair to say that many of those who initiated and were active in the dramatic groups had started with a stronger belief in the drama than in socialism.

However, a caveat should be added, for, at least on paper, some groups were consistent in their desire to propagate their politics by dramatic methods. To give just two examples; in Newcastle, they were "a dramatic club definitely and firmly anchored to a Socialist body", and in South London, the appeal

was for comrades "desirous of expressing themselves through dramatic medium" (78).

To the words written on paper, can be added the desire to reach the "unconverted" audience. For whilst Chris Waters, in British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, emphasises the construction of barriers between Clarion members and the bulk of the working class (and quotes one disgruntled correspondent complaining about the evolution of "a cultured elite" within its ranks which excluded those "with less-developed interests"), many involved in the dramatic activity appeared in practice to view their work differently. Indeed Veitch, in laying out the basis for the movement, spoke of the need to extend people's opportunity to see "good" art and of the desirability of Socialists capturing the theatre, albeit as a "modest preliminary" to conquering the earth. To Veitch can also be added the voice of Thomas Tweed who posed the question in this way;

The legitimate stage has already been utilised by the Shaws and Galsworthys, but I very much fear that the majority of their audiences are already of the converted...An amateur company could perform to audiences that the legitimate stage would never reach (79).

He continued by listing groups such as Literary and Debating Societies and Church Fellowship Societies as audiences the Clarion could reach, yet even such limited (and unlikely) people were not found by a number of groups. The North London Clarion Players were in December 1912 happy to advertise a private performance of a three act comedy, to which they expected a "large attendance of members and friends of the

Players" whilst in Liverpool, the Players faced a "carefully selected audience" at their performance of Miss Julie. Whilst, at least in the latter case when the fear of the Censor (for what was only the second performance of Strindberg's play in England) might excuse such caution, neither group seemed to be overwhelmingly concerned with reaching new audiences. However, as with Collin Coates' justification for the speeches and songs at Clarion Meets, theatre performances for members could serve to convert those members who were not convinced to "rebel against tyranny" and equally, as in the songs of the choirs, to provide some uplift for those flagging socialists who attended (80).

The price of the seats could also at times deter people from attending the Clarion "theatres". The cost of 1s or 2s 6d (the latter for a reserved seat) to witness the Liverpool Players production of Candida would have been out of the reach of many people, although it would be unfair not to note both that the reviewer of this production felt moved to comment himself on the "rather high prices" and that the members of Literary and Debating societies so highly prized by Tweed may well have been able to stretch to this amount. Many groups got around the problem of ticket prices by having a collection, although the main concern in using this method of payment was not to attract the workers of the town, but to avoid both royalties and the wrath of the Censor by staging private performances. To this end, some groups (unintentionally) limited their audiences further. In Newcastle, some of the early Shaw performances began to attract a wide audience:

We began to notice that many school teachers and other people interested in literature and drama came

along, and one performance of Major Barbara attracted students from the Armstrong College of Durham University, who were studying for their arts degree, all armed with copies of the play...(81).

How many of these became members (at 6d a time plus the cost of the ticket) when the Players changed their admission policy, Veitch does not mention, but such a membership scheme may well have contributed to a narrower, if more loyal, audience (82).

Others may have been put off by having to make the bridge themselves and enter the portals of a socialist hall (especially where the premises were as uninviting as those in Liverpool), but the groups did not confine themselves to performances on their own territory. Indeed, Tweed's reasoning behind the creation of Clarion Dramatic Societies concerned the possibilities for amateur groups to go out to perform plays. In Liverpool, the Clarion Dramatic Society did find a ready made working class audience at the David Lewis Theatre, where the majority of the tickets cost no more than 2d and also proposed giving several performances of The Silver Box in "local suburban districts and outlying towns". Other groups ventured into schools and Homes for the Aged Poor ("We should like more of this sort of engagement") as well as Tweed's beloved Literary groups. However most of their "outside" performances were to other Clarion or socialist groups. "Are there no Clarion clubs who require our services?", enquired the South London Dramatic Society in January 1911. The answer in the north of the city was certainly a resounding yes, and the Players there performed at the Romford Clarion Camp

Reunion, to raise funds for the Islington Socialist Sunday School, for North Islington BSP and in January 1914 listed invitations from Poplar Workhouse (to help the Socialist Sunday School in Bow), from Shoreditch Social Democratic Club and from the Communist Club in Charlotte Street. At the same time they were offering to provide a "full or part evening entertainment" for any Socialist society in the London district and in response, they received invitations from (and performed for) the National Union of Clerks, the Daily Herald League (Brixton branch) and Camberwell Workers Educational Association (83).

One other dramatic event involving the support of Clarion members deserves a mention, for it shows their willingness to encourage and applaud dramatic activity within the movement and to show the fact that they did see a link between politics and the drama. In February 1914, two Liverpool comrades helped to organise performances in the city by Delia Larkin's Irish Amateur Players who were in England to "relieve the terrible distress amongst the unhappy women and children of Dublin" as a result of the lockout. The Clarion in Liverpool placed their rooms at the disposal of the actors and the delegates from the Irish Transport Workers Union, and the paper encouraged people to attend the performances. There, the Players performed two Irish plays (Rutherford Mayne's The Troth and Thomas Boyle's The Building Fund - both of them "starring" Delia Larkin) as well as offering the audience songs, dancing and selections performed by Irish War-Pipers in costume. Theatrically, the tour was a success, but financially it appears things did not

go so well, and in May, the Clarion carried a heartfelt review of a London performance:

One was near to tears for the dancing children doing their pretty best for the 1400 women who are among Boss Murphy's victims. The hall should have been crowded. Surely Miss Delia Larkin's brave enterprise is the right thing. The only thing possible and none of us can let it go unhelped (84).

Yet, on such evidence, it would be hard to see the Clarion initiatives as either very significant or very successful (with the possible exception of the Newcastle group), but they are worthy of some attention, for however small the steps they did take and however confused the ideas surrounding them, the Clarion Dramatic Societies do represent both the first real attempt from a political group to systematically organise dramatic activity as well as some of the first tentative attempts to try and establish the relationship between drama and politics. On a wider (and possibly less overtly political and less intentional level), their activity certainly helped in the formation of the twentieth century amateur dramatic movement, a movement with a very different basis to the amateur house theatricals of the nineteenth century.

However tentative such achievements, we should not suppose the Clarionettes themselves overemphasised the steps they managed to take. They were aware they were just at the beginning, as Veitch himself admitted in writing at the time of the 1915 annual meeting,

After all, we are just commencing and it is an inter-change of ideas, expressions of aims and discussion of difficulties that is most needful and helpful (85).

More coherent and certainly more impressive were their attempts to begin to create new plays for the movement.

Plays: Breathing the Breath of Fellowship.

Let it be understood then that in speaking of plays that should tell us how beautiful life might be, I had in mind stage pictures - utopian contrasts - not sermons or arguments (86).

To observe the weak spots in our social system, to try by laughter, irony or terror to show how wasteful and wrong is our competitive commercial life, to endeavour to make others see the wisdom of unity of action is, I think, our first duty (87).

Writing on which plays to perform, Norman Veitch happily recommended Shaw, Ibsen and Galsworthy as the most useful and the most playable of authors, a suggestion which many of the groups took to heart for these authors did form a large number of plays performed. Veitch himself admitted that the Newcastle group "outworked Bernard Shaw outrageously" during the first season:

In our recoil from the type of play we had first produced, and, still more, from the futile things we had contemplated producing, we had seized Bernard Shaw firmly by the collar, as it were, and had hung on to him for the rest of the season (88).

But after Shaw made up nine of the twelve plays performed in the first season, he was put on a "handy shelf" and the group set off to "test the worth to us of other authors". This was very much in line with Veitch's recommendations, for when

suggesting the three authors on the pages of the Clarion, he went on to stress not that groups should perform these authors solely, but that they should be used as a measure, a standard by which other writers could be tested (89).

Despite Keighley Snowden's original assurance that there was "a good choice of suitable plays", from the outset, the pages of the Clarion (and the postbag of the Clarion office) resounded to pleas for suggestions of plays to perform. These only elicited two responses: Maurice Elvey recommended Arthur Rose's Rash Bets, as the best one act play he had ever come across, suitable for

propaganda, amusing, touching (it has that rare quality "heart") and easy to stage. There are but three characters - two men and a woman and any interior scene will do (90).

The only group to respond was the Stockport Clarion Players who suggested Boucicault's The Colleen Bawn, Synge's The Tinker's Wedding and Gertrude Robins' Makeshifts (91). Yet, with the exception of Gertrude Robin's play, none of these were performed by any of the Clarion groups, nor were they in any case sufficient to form the basis of a repertory and many groups ended up having to find texts through the same process of trial and error as Newcastle.

Such choice was not however completely unguided; many looked to the best of the Repertory Theatres and the Independent Theatre societies, the plays of which had been reviewed almost weekly by Keighley Snowden, Hilda Thompson and "Dangle" on the pages of the Clarion. The paper had embraced both movements,



praising them for being both "revolutionary" and for seeking to "reform" the theatre into a "factor of vital importance in the intellectual, educational and social sphere of our natural life". Many of their plays were welcomed as "notable and brilliant", as plays of ideas written

not according to the hackneyed conventions of commercial safety and of profit mongering but as spontaneous and untrammelled utterances of men having something to say or as studious experiments in expression designed to extend the scope of the drama (92).

Indeed, a good few months prior to the founding of the Clarion Dramatic Societies, Keighley Snowden, in reviewing the Stage Society's production of Margaret M Mack's Unemployed and George Calderon's The Fountain had already asked: "Why should not the Fellowship acquire them and tour them", and whilst the groups did not seize these two plays in particular, many were raided from the repertoire of these new theatres (93). Thus we find plays such as Stanley Houghton's The Dear Departed, Harold Brighouse's Spring in Bloomsbury, Michael Arabin's Trespasser's Will Be Prosecuted and two short plays by Judge Parry Charlotte on Bigamy and The Tallyman, all of which received their first performances at the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester. To these can be added other "repertory plays", Sackville Martin's Women's Rights, John Masefield's poetic drama The Tragedy of Nan, Basil MacDonald Hasting's The New Sin, Daisy McGeoch's 1904 play Collaborators and Ashley Dukes first play, Civil War, premiered by the Stage Society in 1911.

Amongst the most popular of these were the plays of Gertrude Robins, a young dramatist and actress who performed with Edith

Craig's Pioneer Players, and who became such a Clarion favourite, that it was recommended that every "thinking Clarionette" (which came to the same thing as saying every Clarionette) carry a copy of Makeshifts in their pockets. Along with this one act "middle-class comedy", its sequel, Realities, had found their first performances at the Gaiety (Makeshifts in 1908 and Realities in 1911) and they were both performed by Clarion groups. Makeshifts is a rather bleak comedy of two sisters both mistakenly under the misapprehension that their nightly visitor, a self-satisfied stockjobber's clerk is about to propose to them, whereas he has come to tell them he is to marry someone else. Realities forms its equally bleak sequel, further chronicling the poverty and emptiness of the two sister's lives.

Clarion Dramatic Societies also took Gertrude Robins up on her offer to produce, without fees, any of four further one act plays she had written and The Exit, Lancelot and the Leading Lady, The Point of View and Old Jan all found not only a niche in the Clarion repertoire but also their first performances there. Of the five, Gertrude Robins favoured the Dutch play Old Jan, a play described by Keighley Snowden as

a most dramatic little piece...it is rare to find a play so short that grips so hard. It is not propagandist - none of these plays is directly so - but it is vividly and finely human (94).

Set against the harsh reality of a fishing village, the play chooses not to deal with the lives of the fishermen but rather tells a sentimental story of a step-mother (unable to have children herself) coming to love Little Jan (the son of her

husband's beloved first wife) as the result of a near disastrous fire and the efforts of Old Jan, the dumb grandfather. Likewise, the other plays concentrate on personal relationships; The Point of View is a "little tragedy of marriage", The Exit focuses on a German army officer's wife affair with a man she believes to be a hero but who is proved to be a coward, and Lancelot and the Lady is a comedy in which a "philandering" youth is taught some sense by an actress.

These plays are on one hand less "propagandist" than some of the other Repertory plays, but at the same time reflect many of their main concerns. Individual lives and relationships (and very often "the woman question") are central, although they are always set firmly in a social context and the ills of the world are condemned. So, for example, Arabin's play pillories social conventions and morality, Beiser's Don tackles social and religious hypocrisy, The Tallyman tells of the dangers of getting ensnared by unscrupulous salesmen and Masefield's Nan is the tragedy of a young girl whose father is hanged for sheep-stealing. Some do veer from this path. Daisy McGeoch's Collaborators is a duologue about the nature of "good" theatre and Civil War is a modern day (and political) version of Romeo and Juliet, the story of a love affair between Sir John Latimer's son (landed proprietor and dedicated believer in the need for the dominance of an aristocratic caste) and James Shannon's daughter (turbulent anarchist), a play described by Dukes himself as a "simple-minded drama of social and political oppositions". As a whole these plays are quite succinctly summed up by Lynton Hudson, as plays, not of political revolt, but of rebellion:

What stirred them was the repression of the individual by the conventions of a narrow-minded Puritanism. It was a rebellion against the doctrines of submission to work and duty and of the worship of material success. It was also a rebellion of youth against tyranny of age, against the doctrines of original sin and unquestioning filial obedience (95).

It was a point not lost on Keighley Snowden, writing at the outset of the Clarion Dramatic Societies, before it became apparent that the movement was to favour these plays (although he did include a note to the effect that Socialists should perform these plays, so long as their work did not stop there). He was happy because they all admitted the need for social reform, because they all uncovered some abuses in society, because they were

good to awaken thought, to turn people's minds our way a little, and to give us a chance with those few listeners who may be capable of taking in a new gospel (96).

However, they did have drawbacks; whilst socialists might draw socialist conclusions from the depictions of society they saw on the stage, others might not for the writers either did not see the way to go, or

knowing the way have failed for lack of skill, or opportunity, or courage to point it clearly out (97).

For socialists, the peril would come in "being content that so many men" (and women) had "good intentions"; these plays provided "the leaven", Clarion groups had to go further and be the "bakers and shopkeepers".

Despite this early caution the societies clearly were very tempted by these plays. Some were even encouraged to go along the same path as the Repertory Theatres - but faster. So, along with the Clarion productions of Gertrude Robins' plays unperformed by Repertory Theatres, it is worth noting that at times the Clarion Players performed "Repertory" plays before the Repertory Theatres themselves, as was the case with Liverpool Clarion Players' production of Basil Hasting's The New Sin in December 1912, a play which Goldie cites as first performed in Liverpool by the Repertory Theatre in 1913 (98). Their existence also raised the question of the need for Repertory Theatres in some towns, as was the case in Newcastle where as late as 1927, the Amateur Stage was reporting:

The success of the production at the People's Theatre of The Immortal Hour has raised again the question of an adequate repertory theatre for the city (99).

Yet the Repertory theatres were not the only source of Clarion plays and trial and error at times produced some more interesting choices and experiments. Not least amongst these can be counted the performances by the Newcastle Clarion Dramatic Society of Chekov (The Bear and The Proposal were performed in 1917 and Uncle Vanya followed in 1917) performances which were all, to Veitch's knowledge, the first productions of Chekov's plays in Newcastle. Yet the significance of these performances rests not simply in their being premieres for Newcastle, (although it is worth remembering that the first performance of a play by Chekov in Britain had only taken place eight years earlier with the Glasgow Repertory production of The Seagull, whilst Uncle

Vanya did not reach the stage until May 1914) but also with the Players apparent understanding of the play's style. Jan McDonald, writing about the five pre-war Chekov productions, points out that not only were these early performances of Chekov greeted by many critics as interesting simply as "detailed and accurate pictures of Russian life", but that this analysis also informed both the actors and directors leading to performances which tried to create a naturalistic "slice of life". Compare this to Veitch's description, which whilst it may not accurately reflect either the truth of the Newcastle productions nor a rounded analysis of Chekov, gives the impression the Players saw beyond the surface value of the plays:

Acting in a Chekov play is an experience impossible to convey, and I have often wondered whether the strange atmosphere can be felt in its fullest intensity unless one is actually taking part. You enter a dreamland where nothing is normal and nobody sane; where everyone including yourself, behaves in the most extraordinary fashion, and yet you accept all that happens as inevitable, as something that cannot be helped or hindered (100).

Alongside Chekov, the two productions of Strindberg plays both by the Liverpool Clarion Players (Miss Julie was performed in December 1913 and The Stronger Woman in February 1915) are also worthy of notice, Miss Julie not least for being (or so the Clarion claimed) only the second production of the play in England, and both certainly predate the Pax Robertson productions of 1922-1927 and the J.B.Fagan productions from 1924 in Oxford (101). Other groups looked backwards, and came up with some interesting productions, most notably in Leeds,

where, in 1914, the BSP rooms resounded to three performances of Antigone

staged in the Grecian manner, the background being draped with black, with only one entrance. The front of the stage was fitted with steps which were used for entrance and exits for most of the characters. The chorus leader sat on the front of the stage, and the chorus, who sang Mendelssohn's choral odes were placed in a room away from the stage (102).

And whilst some looked backwards, others looked across the Atlantic for inspiration, most notably to the socialist writer Upton Sinclair, who just prior to the establishment of the Clarion Players had organised a travelling theatre company in the States to produce Socialist drama and which had put on three of his own plays. In England the Players settled on The Second-Storey Man, a short play which recounts not "a pretty story" but a "poor man's story", and it became a popular choice for a number of groups including Newcastle and Hyde. On the surface it is a simple play about a burglar caught in a luxurious apartment and about why people are reduced to crime, but it stands out (in part) because of the sheer brutality of the story Jim, the second-storey man, has to tell to Helen Austin, the liberal lawyer's wife. Sinclair spares no detail as he tells of the horrors of working at the Empire Steel Company (where Jim had a job until he lost his eye in an accident), of a man caught hanging in a crane which he could not be got out of:

They'd have had to take the crane apart and that would have cost several days and it was rush time and the man was only a poor Hunkie and there was no-one to know or care. So they started up the crane and cut his leg off (103).

Or of the death of Jim's second child, killed when a street car

Run over his chest...Can you think what it was to see him...with his eyes staring out of his head and his beautiful little body all mashed flat (104).

Yet it is not simply the fact that Sinclair openly displays the brutality of the world that makes the play stand out. The play has an added twist when it transpires that Helen's husband was the company lawyer who tricked Jim into signing a release form as he lay in a hospital bed, and at the centre of the piece is an argument about both who is to blame and what can be done about this brutal world. Helen is horrified by her husband's actions and in the final moments of the play, despite his pleas that he was only doing his job, she turns away from him. She is devastated by the reality that all the beauty and comfort they have has been "coined out of his tears and agony":

We have wrecked his life! We have murdered his wife and his two children. We have turned him into a tramp and a criminal. We have climbed to success on top of him. We have made our fortune out of his blood (105).

But it is left to Jim to turn down their offer of help for him personally, by asking "And what about the other fellows, hey?", for in his view there can be neither individual blame for what happens nor individual solutions. Mr Austin may be persuaded by his wife to stop what he is doing but they will "have another man in his place" for "it's a machine...it goes right on" (106). In the end it is all a matter of class; despite her good intentions, Mrs Austin has to

live off my class...you have to ride on our backs. And it don't much matter what part you ride on as



far as I can see. You'll make your husband get a new job, maybe; but he'll only do the same thing in another way...But anyway he gets his money it'll come out of me and my kind. D'ye see? I do the work...I'm the man underneath. I make the good things and you get them (107).

These are by no means the only plays performed by the Players which are of interest as being either "advanced" pieces or the best of the repertory plays (the Newcastle productions of Synge's plays, or their own translation of Moliere's The Learned Woman could also have been included), but they are worth pointing to, not least to give some idea of the breadth of plays they did look to and the new ground they did at times break.

Yet alongside these plays Shaw, Shakespeare, and to a lesser extent, Ibsen remained the standard choices, some groups (such as Hyde which was recognised for its "notable" productions of Shakespeare) becoming "specialists" in one particular writer (108). These writers were at times augmented by some light comedies, farces and thrillers, the most notable evening (although also exceptional for performing nothing but farce) in this context being a programme of four one act farces presented by the North London Clarion Players in May 1915. Choosing Sam Hay's A Game of Cards, Frank Price's Two Halves, Fred Moule's Her Fool of a Husband and Thompson and Courtneidge's Upon the Water, the Players performed in aid of the Camberwell and Southwark branch of the WEA, earning praise from the Clarion reviewer who headed the review "North Londoner's Success" and went on to praise the Players for their "highly satisfactory work" (109). No comment was passed

on the suitability of such plays for a socialist dramatic group, nor was any comment made when the Handforth Club House Players chose to perform a farce entitled The Tourist Trade or when Thomas Reid of the Glasgow Clarion Players sent the following appeal to the paper:

We should be glad of some information about one-act comedies that would be suitable for production...we wish to try small, easy plays at first...and in Glasgow just now they require something to make them smile. We are rather afraid that those plays mentioned in the Clarion lately are too heavy and serious for our present purpose (110).

Within three weeks, the Glasgow Clarion Players reappeared renamed as the Clarion Comedy Club performing a "quiet old fashioned comedy" and a farce which "kept the audience in a continual roar of laughter" and seeing themselves as a valuable means of entertainment for "the lighter moments of the Socialist movement" (111).

These choices would seem to contradict numerous comments that had been made about the type of plays the Clarion Players should be looking to perform. They do not appear to fulfill Thomas Tweed's suggestion for "propaganda plays", or Longley's desire to "preach the gospel of hope" and to show up the hypocrisy of other political parties. Nor do they even fulfill Veitch's wishes that the groups perform good art, for good art was good propaganda. But all through the paper, there are ideas about art which run in contradiction to these statements and which would seem to bear out the practice of those groups who wanted to make people smile. Even before the establishment of the Clarion, Blatchford already had doubts about seeing only "solemn and heavy" work as good. When his operetta,

In Summer Days, was attacked by The Sunday Chronicle for being too light hearted for a socialist, he replied in some exasperation:

There are some stupid people who suppose that only solemn and heavy work is good. Have I not from the first day I began to write to you been trying to persuade you that one of the great wants of the people was the want of amusement and pleasure? Have I not told you a hundred times that the people want cheering more than they want improving? Is not the first line of my creed "The object of life is to be happy"? (112).

Although in the future, Blatchford was to talk increasingly of "wholesome recreation" and "pure amusements" (thus mirroring many of the middle class reformers who aimed to improve the poor), ideas of "cheering" the people crept into the pages of the paper time and again. Reviewing Jerome K. Jerome's The Passing of the Third Floor Back in 1908, Alexander Thompson was struck by the fact that in the play, the arrival of the "modern Messiah" converted the inhabitants of the boarding house not only to righteousness, but also to weariness. This did not strike him as being a particularly fruitful use of the stage; instead he suggested

Theatre might be made to serve the community as a stronger factor for social good than the pulpit itself. But is that the sole or even the proper mission of the theatre? Must the theatre become a fountain of ethics because the pulpit has run dry? Would it not be better to amend religion? (113).

His conclusion? Apart from seeing the Clarion's new religion as giving religion back its old purpose, he ended by arguing the theatre must cater primarily "for the people's hunger for amusement" (a stricture he seemed to follow very closely in his own plays).

At times these plays were chosen, not for any intellectual reason, but because groups could not find political plays. The Bradford group, for example, not knowing of any Socialist play they could start with chose instead As You Like It, but ended their report by appealing for "plays with a Socialist message". In London the appeal went out for "acclaimed or budding" playwrights to send in manuscripts of advanced plays and one group offered to read any short Socialist plays sent to them (114). In Newcastle, as late as 1917, the problem was highlighted when the group finally decided to produce a written constitution, the first rule of which stated that the object of the Clarion Dramatic Society should be "the propaganda of Socialism" and the financial assistance of the Socialist movement:

This rule, had we heeded it, would have brought our activities to a full-stop from sheer lack of plays to perform. Few of those we had done - and none of the longer ones - had strictly complied with it. An amendment was immediately tabled: "That all plays be applicable to Socialism or other advanced subjects. That all money over and above expenses be distributed amongst the various movements at the approval of its members (115).

The consciences of those involved could be tinged with guilt at the production of light comedies and farces. Norman Veitch admitted that the inclusion of plays by Barrie and Pinero (on this occasion The Twelve-Pound Look, Rosalind and What the Public Wants) in the 1916-1917 season appeared to be in "deliberate defiance" of the Players recently stated objective:

Were we getting a conceit of ourselves or was it sheer perversity that made us include two farces and a thriller, and this in spite of our recent avowal of "advanced subjects" and the setting down of it in indelible ink? (116).

Yet he also tried to justify their inclusion. R.L.Stevenson's and W.E.Heney's Admiral Guinea may have been a "frank thriller", but "the money it drew no doubt assuaged the Socialist conscience", and the inclusion of Pinero's The Schoolmistress was excused in that it afforded the players (and the audience) some comic relief, although in practice this was far from the truth, for whilst rehearsals began in hilarity, they

ended in tedium, and it was a chastened cast that faced the audience on the first night. We were all heartily tired of the play before it started and playing in it was uphill work (117).

How far the "curious and illuminating" lesson of this play was taken to heart by the group in Newcastle is open to question, for whilst Pinero was never attempted again in Newcastle, he was replaced in following seasons by Lord Dunsany, A.A.Milne and more Arnold Bennett, whilst Admiral Guinea became an often repeated money-spinner.

Newcastle was by no means alone in being criticised for performing "light" plays. The North London Clarion Players were taken to task (albeit somewhat apologetically) for their performance of T.W.Robertson's early success, David Garrick, a play which the Clarion had described as "the best dramatic work they have done":

This may seem no matter for grievance, yet it grieves me greatly and I raise my voice in protest...Surely there are worthier plays for a Socialist Society to produce than David Garrick...May I be allowed to appeal in your columns to Socialist dramatic clubs only to produce such plays as deal with questions of social reform (118).

Yet when it came to suggestions, the author of the letter could only fall back on the Shaw and Ibsen productions he had recently seen by the Newcastle group.

However, some help was at hand to break out of this circle. From the outset, the Clarion Dramatic Societies had been concerned with finding new plays and encouraging new writers. As early<sup>as</sup> April 1910, Keighley Snowden had appealed for "short practicable plays" and included much advice for would-be playwrights, stressing that the plays should be concerned not just with ideas but also with people and emotions, that they should not be

a mere discussion. In a good play things are to be done. The interest is as much in what one sees as in what one hears. A craftsman devises the action first...It is not a simple form of gibe. No play can be much liked that does not contain one strongly likeable character...A good play is not a riddle. It keeps no secrets. With the first word and acts it tells as much as possible....(119).

The need for plays was returned to (without the practical advice) by Veitch in his original article<sup>n</sup> the Clarion when he had asked for

plays that breathe the air of comradeship, that spread the holy ghost of Fellowship...We must build up our new drama ourselves, create our own authors by the life and energy of our movement (120).

In between the two appeals, both London groups had been asking for new plays; South London was prepared to read "short socialist plays" and in the north of the city, the players were happy to offer their services to playwrights who needed to be shown to the world. But it was with the advent of Veich

as National Secretary, that more practical steps were taken, and all Clarion Dramatic Clubs

agreed to encourage local authors and each was to report plays of special merit to the central body. The dramatic clubs were thus to acquire a number of plays of their own which should be under their own control through the National Executive, and the Central Office was to supply scripts and give all necessary information to the clubs desiring to produce the plays (121).

In his role as Honorary Secretary, Veitch took the task to heart and at the first National Meeting was proud to be able to state that he had secured "by methods of a various nature but which will not be made public", exclusive rights for some thirty eight original plays, a complete list of which was to be sent to each secretary. It was proposed that 10% of the gross takings for each performance should be paid to the National Organisation in order to finance the production of copies, which were to be produced in a rough form at the cost of 2d for a one act play (122).

However, the list that was eventually printed in the paper was compiled from productions which had already taken place, and is interesting (with one or two exceptions) more for the idea it gives of what plays the groups were performing than in giving any information about the thirty eight original plays to which Veitch had secured the rights. Heading the list (with productions by three societies) was Ibsen's A Doll's House, its popularity accounted for by the fact it only called for one set. Other full length plays included three by Shaw (Candida, Widowers' Houses and You Never Can Tell) and Galsworthy's A Silver Box - all performed by two societies.

The most popular one act play was Gertrude Robins' Makeshifts (produced by five societies), followed by Sinclair's Second-Storey Man and E.Priestly's Ashes, both of which had been performed by four societies. Then follows a list of plays which had gained popularity amongst two groups (Veitch had given himself the yardstick that if two or more groups had produced a play then it indicated it was favourable to the capabilities of other Clarion Players) which comprised:

Gertrude Robins: Realities  
Lancelot and the Leading Lady  
The Exit  
Old Jan  
Shaw: Press Cuttings  
How He Lied to Her Husband  
J.Sackville Martin: Women's Rights  
Norman Tiptaft: Evolution  
Landon Ronald: The Recognition of the Union  
Charles Fawcett: Bubbles  
T.J.Williams: Ici on Parle Francais  
Daisy McGeoch: Collaborators  
E.Priestly: Cats and Kittens (123).

Perhaps more illuminating is the list Veitch reproduces in his book for the Newcastle Clarion Players 1913-1914 season, a list which includes a series of one act plays most of which came ("in one way or another") from the library of plays deemed particularly suitable for Clarion Dramatic Clubs by the National Organisation. Alongside the plays by Upton Sinclair, Norman Tiptaft, and E.Priestly listed above, the Newcastle list contains two plays by A.Neil Lyons (The Gentleman Who Was Sorry and Getting at Facts) and two plays by Synge (Riders to the Sea and The Shadow of the Glen), as well as Shaw's Overruled and The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet (124).

Amongst both these lists there were just six original plays written either by Clarion members or especially for Clarion



societies. The most popular, at least when judged in terms of the number of productions, was Ashes, its popularity no doubt accounted for by the fact that it was one of only two plays actually printed as a result of the 10% scheme and was therefore readily available (at least until the copies ran out). The other play that was published was Landon Ronald's The Recognition of the Union and this play too, written by a member of the Accrington branch of the Clarion, also became a popular choice, eventually being produced by the "better half" of all affiliated societies (125). Unfortunately no copies have come to light, and the pages of the Clarion provide no information about the actual content of either play. The same is also true for the other two original plays listed by Veitch: Priestly's second play Cats and Kittens and Tiptaft's Evolution, although Norman Tiptaft's first attempt at play writing merits some comment from Veitch, for the comrades in Newcastle were flattered to be offered his play for consideration. They were encouraged to produce it because it was "strong in propaganda", although Veitch admits it was "weak in dramatic merit", for Tiptaft was "no more a practised playwright" than the Newcastle Clarion Dramatic Society were competent producers. In the end, the best that Veitch can summon up to say about Cowards is that both the group and Tiptaft learned something from the effort, but it is interesting to note that from his point of view, it was the propaganda which attracted the group to the piece (126).

For many other new plays and sketches, all that remains is a tantalising mention on the pages of the Clarion. This is true for the socialist sketch written by the manager of the South

London Clarion Players in 1910, for their short play entitled A Paying Order, written by another member of the group, Mrs Challen and for their new sketch St Valentine's Day which "brought the house down" when they visited Walthamstow. Only the title and author remain for Ada Roscoe's original sketch, Mother's Mistake, performed in 1912 in North London, as they do for Blind Iris, Agnes Bain's play produced in South London two years previously. Nor do we know more than the fact that the dramatic committee of the London Clarion Social Club encouraged one of its members to write a light operetta dealing with both topical issues and the club house for Christmas 1914 or that a member of the West Leeds Club, (on this occasion Joe Thornton, secretary of the local British Socialist Party), wrote and starred in a one act play in the summer of 1914 - a performance that was so successful, it was repeated within a few days (127).

Fortunately, these were not the only new plays written for the Clarion Players, and others, especially those performed in Newcastle survive in a little more detail. Here, amongst the first plays by a Clarion writer to be performed were two by the paper's short story writer A.Neil Lyons. The first of these, a "kerbstone romance" and an adaptation of Lyon's own novel, Arthur's had already been produced at the Little Theatre in London by Edith Craig, when it was praised for portraying a "wonderfully realistic London street scene". The Gentleman Who Was Sorry is set alongside a coffee stall sometime just after midnight, and the gentleman of the title turns out to be an alcoholic, apologetic for getting Kitty into trouble. The situation is saved, however, by the faithful

Robert, "a member of the LCC Street Cleaners Brigade", who is prepared to marry her despite the baby (128).

This was swiftly followed by a premiere of a new Lyons play, Getting at the Facts, a play which deals with how the facts of a strike are distorted in the press. The girls at Epstein's Shirt Factory (all of whom resemble, according to Lyons' stage directions, coster girls of sordid appearance) have walked out because their pay has been cut by a farthing an hour, and Lyons starts the play with their own justification for their actions. Queenie, the most voracious of the group, stirs the others by stating their grievances:

Mr Epstein's 'ard up, 'e is... 'e ain't got money enough. 'E wants a noo silk westkit (All jeer). 'E's sucked the little 'andil off 'is walking stick and it wants a noo gold knob (All jeer). The winter's comin', and 'e wants a noo fur dressing-gown (All jeer. A pause and then very deliberately) Girls, 'e wants more money. And - it's - us - 'as - gotter - find - it! (129).

The picket line is approached by a journalist from the Daily Denial, a "lanky youth" wearing badly fitting tweeds of "rather a loud pattern" and eating Spanish nuts. He begins to question the girls about the strike (to "get at the facts") but in the process deliberately twists their story. When one of them is reluctant to talk to him, because she is unsure whether respectable and hard-working women want to appear on the pages of what is a "saucy" newspaper, he responds by licking the stub of his pencil and telling them:

Then I shall say that some of the strikers, on being interviewed by our representative, displayed a remarkable anxiety to avoid discussing the merits of the case. One of them said (actually writing): "We - are - not - saucy - bits - we - are - ladies" (130).

In the same vein he denounces any reality they tell him as "Socialism", and is only rescued from being physically attacked by the women by the appearance of Epstein himself, who in the same way as the journalist, twists the facts, refuses to listen to the women and takes the journalist inside, best of friends already, to get the real facts.

This short piece is on the surface quite a radical departure. Not only does it deal with press lies and is sympathetic to women on strike, but it is also possible to pick out a number of "Clarion" ideas, not least the way Lyons depicts the women, talking about socialism, but denying they are socialists (Blatchford was convinced that much of the working class was moving instinctively towards socialism, if they would only but realise it). Yet at least one of the Clarion traits sits uneasily. Epstein is a Jew, albeit a modern Jew

of the gentlemanly sort - a product of Cambridge...He therefore talks in a high-pitched-academic drawl with just a suspicion of "thickness" at the base of it. He therefore never moves his arms or head or eyes with the result that in his effort to avoid gesticulation, he incurs a certain risk of being mistaken for an automation or an imbecile (131).

Although Lyons is at pains to point out that he bears no resemblance to "the accepted stage type of Jew" (Epstein is well-dressed and clean shaven), he does overwhelmingly end up as a stereotype of the grasping money-maker who wants a fur dressing gown, a motor-car and a gold-topped walking stick and who gives as one reason for the cut in wages the fact that he has to give money to the Mission for the Jews. Such anti-

semitism in the end mars what could have been a sharp piece of Clarion propoganda.

The following season (of 1914-1915) was opened "rather tamely" by two short plays, Thompson and Courtneidge's Upon the Water and what was to be the first of several plays (both jointly and separately) by Percy Beck and Norman Veitch. Stalls for Two, however, was not deemed to be their greatest venture, but rather a "slight effort, the

reception of which could hardly be termed enthusiastic - in fact one could feel a sort of undercurrent of sympathy and pity. The audience took upon itself to encourage the authors in some slight degree as if to point out to the said authors that if they tried hard enough they may count upon making some improvement in the course of time (132).

It took Norman Veitch four years to feel encouraged to try again and Beck even longer (for his next attempt Eunice written once again with Norman Veitch did not appear on the stage until 1928). On this occasion he wrote in collaboration with his wife, Edith, an operetta for children called The Nightingale and based freely on the story by Hans Andersen. This had been developed by work with the children at the Socialist Sunday School at Leazes Park Road, and later found its way onto many stages in the district, ultimately being recorded by the BBC. It was not their first attempt either at writing together or at producing an operetta, for The Nightingale had been preceded by Prosepine. Based on the Greek legend, this too was written with the Sunday School children in mind, for the question of children and art was very dear to the heart of Edith Veitch. In an article written for the Clarion in April 1916, she sets out an ideal programme

for organising a Socialist Sunday School, which she suggests should start with a song and general meeting and then incorporate numerous classes including games and songs for the "Sunbeams" and dancing, drama, English literature and piano playing for the older children. Well over half her suggestions are for artistic activity and this was in no way accidental:

It should not be forgotten that in the first place, in order to produce a play or an operetta a large amount of personal discipline is necessary for the common end; and this in itself is an excellent practical introduction to the Socialist point of view...In the second place, one must bear in mind that in the modern world, especially in the lives of the industrial classes of this country, no side of human life is so badly thwarted in daily experience as the artistic side...It is the essential healthiness of mind of the children that makes them artists in the Socialist Movement, though God forbid that they should be indoctrinated with the humbug of "art theories" (133).

Prosepine represents at least one of her efforts to imbibe the children with ideas of the "common good", and although it was not performed by the Clarion Dramatic Society (although Hilda Thompson, in reviewing the piece does list it under that name), it is worth looking at, not least for the light it can shed on the style and feel of The Nightingale, but also because some of the children involved did in time become members of the dramatic society; and the Veitchs did, through the pages of Clarion, offer the play to other Clarion groups (134).

Prosepine, described by Hilda Thompson as "a jolly little play", was first performed in December 1913 and opens in Hades where Pluto is discovered tunefully bemoaning his lonely lot and the absence of sunshine. Scene Two moves to earth, where

youthful Greeks and Greekesses disport themselves in song and dance on the green sward, and also send up invocations to Mother Ceres. Master Pan arrives,

cracks several jokes and eases himself of a very catchy tune. Enter Prosepine - big round eyes and a manner solemn enough to fit a judge of the High Court - explains that her mother has told her not to wander in the woods, and of course, she won't. And of course she does (135).

There she is met by Pluto who woos her, wins her and carries her away to Hades:

General consternation among the mortals and directions from Mother Ceres to hunt the earth for her child.

Scene four: Hades again. And a cheerful sort of Hades too. The Shades, a happy lot of rascals, crack jokes with a comic waiter and sing to keep their spirits up. And there are six Brownies. Ah! I could have hugged the six of them. They were a treat. But Pan has discovered the whereabouts of Prosepine and Mother Ceres comes to claim her daughter (136).

In the rest of the operetta, the story unwinds itself as in the myth, and the description of it (not least the tone of Hilda Thompson's review) gives us a flavour not just of this Socialist Sunday School operetta, but also of the many others performed by schools up and down the country from the 80 scholars who performed The Princess and the Magic Ring in Hyde in 1910 to Longsight's production of Snow White in 1912. And for the Clarion reader, it must also have provided a performance that nourished the spirit and made "room for the soul to breathe"; as Hilda Thompson is moved to conclude in her review, it had

a deal more sense in it than most of the sermons preached in Newcastle that night (137).

Two other new plays performed in Newcastle need at least to be mentioned. The first is The Recidivist by Ross Hills, who

Veitch notes was a "Clarionet" author, and the second is Gordon Lea's 1919 production of Reconstruction. Lea was the pen-name of a local author, (the production was mounted under his guidance) and like A.Neil Lyons, he was a relatively prolific writer, although most of his success was attained on the amateur stage. Reconstruction was published following its Newcastle debut and "received other presentations in the district", whilst three of his plays (For Russia, The Son of Creation and A Study in Green) all received their premieres at the Arcade Hall in Newcastle in 1920; and Dynamite was performed in the city's Socialist Hall in March 1921 (138).

Whilst Newcastle was overwhelmingly the home of the majority of new plays for which we have any details, one other group is worthy of note in this respect. In St Helens, Mr Burt, the secretary of the BSP, wrote, in 1913, Glimpses, a play for "propaganda purposes" and performed by the "young people" of the Clarion Players in the town. The Clarion carried a long review/synopsis of the piece which is worth quoting in full, not least because it depicts a piece which is a long way from Shaw in style (although it has its echoes of Prosepine), and it is an attempt to find a new way of expressing political ideas in a dramatic form:

Glimpse 1:

The Peasants Revolt 1381 A.D. - John Ball after rescue from Canterbury Gaol, addresses crowd of peasants on steps of Village Cross, Wayford, Kent. Roused by the priests' burning words vividly portraying their wrongs, the peasants, headed by Jack Straw and Wat Tyler and singing the "Song of Revolt" march to defeat the troops sent to recapture Ball. Having succeeded they return with a "Victory Song" to Wayford to prepare for the morrow's march to interview King Richard.



### Glimpse 2:

In Puritan Times 1651 A.D. - A tyrant King has gone to his death. The peasants believe that emancipation has come, but are quickly undeceived. Despite the change of Governments, the Bottom Dog must always carry a load of rulers and satellites. Wayford Cross is pulled down and the village is ruled by the Rev Abednego Sourley, a long faced killjoy and womanhater.

Two Royalist women visitors interview the Reverend. They flatter him and make love to him, so he is forced to call on heaven for aid. "Did You Never Kiss a Maiden, Mr Preacher?" is a capital original song, sung to a catchy original air.

### Glimpse 3:

An English Slave Market 1793 A.D. - John Friend, a Quaker mill-owner from Lancashire, appears in Wayford with his daughter Prudence in search of cheap labour. The Parish has on hand the four children of Mary Needful, a widow, who is willing to part with them for a consideration. The parting of the widow and children brings a lump to the throat, and although Prudence pleads with her father, the children are packed off to Lancashire to make their fortune.

### Glimpse 4:

The Labour Unrest 1912 A.D. - Two young East End Dockers have tramped to Wayford in search of work but have not found any. In typical and picturesque language, they ask with the Psalmist, "Why standest Thou so far off Lord and hidest Thou Thy face in the needful times of trouble?"

Sir Simon Pelf Bart M.P. whom the villagers regard as the Giver of Their All, tells his constituents in a rollicking song "King of Capital" what he really thinks of them; but they fail to understand him. A band of Clarion cyclists and Suffragettes also try to throw light on the village brain, and scenes occur which are exceedingly funny, if not so despairing in showing that the workmen of today has lost even the spirit of his ancestors of 1381.

### Glimpse 5:

Victory - When the People Will - Socialism has triumphed. Spears have been beaten into Pruning Hooks and Dreadnoughts into Ploughshares. The Day is here. Wayford Cross is restored and the village green is packed with peasants; the shades of Ball, Jack Straw and Wat Tyler are looking on. Progress reads the proclamation of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. War casts away his sword. Peace reverently folds the Union Jack and Liberty hoists

the Red Flag. The "Song of Freedom" goes up from all throats and hearts and the curtain falls upon a most interesting and instructive play (139).

The synopsis reads as a combination of "Merrie England", a Dangle popular success and a morality play for the future, but despite such confusion the object was clear. According to the Clarion, it was to show the "Bottom Dog the way out of his troubles is to be found through Socialism", although the tone of both the review and the play suggests that the villagers are really too stupid to understand and need to be led by the enlightened Clarionettes.

This is not the only time such a tone creeps into Clarion writing. Keighley Snowden unashamedly wrote on the pages of the paper that the "best art is, and must always be, above the heads of the majority", and in reviewing A.M.Thompson's The Arcadians (which shows Sombra travelling from the "halcyon glade" of "Arcady the Blest" on a mission to save the people of London who "live in cages and do not know what happy is"), he comments

Your mission failed, my dear; the people who live in cages have lost too much wisdom; they do not know the value of things and want imagination (140).

Thompson himself also reflects such pessimism, for Sombra fails miserably in her task, and returns to the utopian fantasy of Arcady leaving behind the people of London still firmly locked behind their bars. The same question perplexed Hilda Thompson five years later when she attended William Poel's lecture on "Theatres for the People"; she was doubtful

people could be drawn into the "charmed circle" of those who wanted to enjoy the masterpieces of the world's dramatists:

You may drag your ass to the well of truth all right, but you cannot prevail upon the obstinate brute to drink if he has got his wicked eye fixed on a near-growing clump of thistles. It would be as easy to make a drunkard take to water instead of his favourite beverage; or to persuade the British workingman that Socialists are not on the cop (141).

Such pessimism in part reflects Blatchford's own feelings; having started the Clarion confident of converting the British working class to Socialism in a few years by the sheer power of his pen, he had discovered it was not to be so easy and had retreated to comforting himself with the idea that the "unresponsiveness of the main body of workers" may not have been their fault, but it was their misfortune (142). But such pessimism must also in part reflect a perceived failure in the achievements (and indeed the possibilities) of the Clarion Dramatic Societies themselves.

It did not however seem to affect everyone, for alongside the plays written from within the movement itself, another source of plays was also available. From the early and stumbling beginnings of the Clarion Dramatic Societies, authors had offered new works. Some, such as Norah Doyle's The Flower Maker, a piece of "highly effective socialism" showing a "sweating den" and a "vision of hope that comes to a mother and changes gloomy lives", or C. Granville's The Race Spirit, a blank verse play that pictured social problems solved by a king "who has Cromwell's way of dealing with a do-nothing Parliament of quibblers", were not produced. Both demanded either expensive costume or sets and lighting arrangements

which may have prevented groups from trying them, and in the case of Granville's play, the paper had (prior to his offer) reviewed its publication suggesting both that its moral was not quite in keeping with Clarion ideas ("We've got to solve it ourselves as people") and that the play ought to be read not acted. But neither was P.Gordon's offer of two short plays especially written for Socialist performers and both easily mounted taken up. Other offers were greeted with more enthusiasm. Gertrude Robins' offer to waive the royalties for her plays was greeted by a spate of performances, as has been seen above; Daisy Halling, on the other hand, did not advertise her plays herself (although she did use the pages of the Clarion to offer to "tutor amateurs" when she had the time), but was suggested by F.Longley, the secretary of Sheffield ILP. They had already successfully performed her one act play Sans Price and Longley was followed by Fred Coates and J.Donnelly who also wrote in praise of Daisy Halling's work, mentioning in particular, the four act "Socialistic" Pinnacles of the Future and the children's play Jumbo in Rumboland (143).

Born into a theatrical family, and herself an actress from an early age, Daisy Halling had decided at the beginning of the century to exchange the professional theatre for the socialist platform. To that end, she became an active propagandist for the movement, addressing large crowds on a variety of issues, from the necessity of socialism to the church and women's rights. She also found time to write pamphlets and poems for the movement, and to make at least one banner (to a design by Walter Crane) which she sometimes displayed while on tour. Nor

did she abandon her theatrical work, continuing to both act and write. Some clubs did pick up on her plays, although maybe not as many as one would have thought given the warmth with which she seems to have been held in the movement. Her "celebrated sketch" set in an office in Dalston, Sans Price, was given four performances by the Bradford Clarion Dramatic Society at the Bijou Theatre (as part of the ILP'S Great International Bazaar in 1911). In the same year at the Pankhurst Hall in Manchester, she produced her political skit, Jumbo in Rumboland (a piece advertised on the pages of the Clarion as "politics without tears") and the following month, the Pankhurst Amateur Dramatic Society (by then a "Clarion" group) performed Pinnacles of the Future, with Daisy Halling herself taking the leading role. This four act propaganda play had been praised by Shaw, who thought it showed a great deal of talent for the stage:

There is plenty of fun in it - effective stage fun - and that counts for a good deal. The serious parts are neither false in feeling nor lacking in dramatic force. The various characters are quite distinctly sketched (144).

However, despite Shaw's praise, Clarion Dramatic Societies did not seem to be encouraged to produce Daisy Halling's plays, and the next performance, this time of The Setting and the Jewel, was undertaken by the Stockport ILP Dramatic Society in 1912. Here it was so highly appreciated, that they were asked to repeat it in West Hartlepool where it was combined with a rendition of Daisy Halling's poem "The Supreme Chicane", a powerful indictment of "the sway convention holds over the masses of mankind". The play itself (and the production) was reported in the Clarion, which described it as

very superior to the ordinary sketch, and though it does not directly preach Socialism, it must induce the audience to think seriously of economic problems (145).

Even this success did not induce Clarion groups to take up her work on a wider scale.

May Westoby was almost as shy as Daisy Halling in pushing her own plays forward, but she was finally moved to write to the paper in December 1913 because of the shortages of plays. Once she had plucked up the courage to "blow her own trumpet", she put eight plays and sketches at the (free) disposal of the movement. The majority were for children and had been in constant use for several years, but the eight also included new plays ("now being produced") which would suit grown ups and one large play that she would have liked to see produced by a united Socialist Dramatic Society. Of these pieces, three were taken up by the Clarion Players: The Legacy, A Youth Called Ideal and The Tenth Wonder of the World. The last two were operettas, with music by other people, and of the two, it was A Youth Called Ideal which proved the most popular, and in Hornsey the

enthusiasm of the audience seemed to show that they greatly appreciated the struggles of Princess Reala to marry Ideal and the play brought the house down (146).

Their love kindles "a hope that a new world may arise from poverty, hunger and dirt". But the course of true love is not easy, and in the second act, after having witnessed the King and Queen and courtiers yawning "in boredom in the world of bazaar openings and conventional bowing and scrapping", Ideal,

by now the people's idol, is scorned, imprisoned and condemned. However, all is well in the end. Custom, Ease and Egoism are defeated. The audience witness the wedding of Material and Spiritual, Hygiene and Vision and Bodily Weal and Social Love, and, in the words of F.J.Gould (reviewing the play seventeen years later), they "all go home smiling" (147).

Such was an ending which many Clarionettes would have applauded wholeheartedly and it is a fitting note on which to end a chapter on the Clarion Dramatic Societies, for in the words of Collin Coates,

Well, if we did no good, we had a lot of fun (148).

THE RELIGION OF SOCIALISM OR A PLEASANT SUNDAY AFTERNOON: THE  
ILP ARTS GUILD.

Overwhelmingly, descriptions and images of the ILP (which held its founding conference in January 1893) rest on ideas of ethical socialism and religion. They are founded upon statements such as Katherine Glasier's description of the ILP as "a child of the spirit of liberty", of her husband's view of socialism as "essentially a spiritual principle", of Keir Hardie's pronouncement that "Socialism is much more an affair of the heart than of the intellect" and are best encapsulated in a symposium published in 1924 where some 250 party members attempted to define socialism:

One after another they described it as a "fraternity of comradeship"; an "attribute towards life"; a "release from the overwhelming obsession of materialism to realisation of the higher spiritual values of life"; "something greater than an economic doctrine...a way of life"; "an ethical-religious mass movement"; "true brotherhood". "Our politics may be right and our economics sound, but unless we have caught the vision we shall fail, for where there is no vision the people perish" (1).

Such desires are found in Clifford Allen's address to the ILP Conference in 1924 where he spoke of the need for imagination ("the channel of God's voice") and for moral gestures, in his speech to the Summer School in the following year, when he addressed the need for a "re-statement of Socialist ethics" and for a "spiritual crusade" and overwhelmingly they are found in the work of the ILP propagandists. Philip Snowden earned his reputation as one of the greatest ILP propagandists by a recruiting technique known as "Philip's Come to Jesus".



To a background of singing, "converts" were ushered forward while Snowden declared in ringing tones

there are signs on every hand of a great and righteous power at work in the world. The Sun of Righteousness is rising with healing in its wings. The Christ that is to be appears. A new and brighter social order will arise. It is the promised New Jerusalem (2).

So strong, so convincing were the speakers that many were captivated. A striker in Nottingham in 1893 was "touched by something vaguely, unattainably fine" in Margaret McMillan's vision of health, joy and beauty, and, remembering Richard Wallhead speaking at a large demonstration in Blackburn, Fenner Brockway wrote

he pointed to the distance and said "I see socialism coming" and so captured the audience they all turned around to see socialism coming (3).

And for many, it would not take a long time in coming; socialism

is in fact knocking at the door of civilisation and asking admission, just as obviously as a thirsty man calls for water (4).

The task for socialists, and one which was not too hard given its moral superiority as compared to the degradation and corruption of capitalism, was to convince the unconverted:

The weapon of Socialism is education. Socialists must trust to the appealing force of their arguments, to faith in the good sense of the people and the use of peaceful methods of conversion (5).

Yet, this image needs to be offset by another. As David Howell writes, only three decades after its birth, the second Labour government stumbling "into its final disintegration"

contained many who had been active in, or influenced by, the propagandising of the early ILP. Above all, it was two ministers concerned centrally with the ILP's early work - MacDonald and Snowden - who stood at the heart of Labour's 1931 agony (6).

Their insistence on cutting unemployment benefit sits uneasily with visions of a "new Jerusalem", as throughout most of its history the relationship between being a part of the Labour Party (albeit its "left-wing") and an emphasis on electoralism sat, at best, uneasily with the religious fervour and hopes of a better life. At worst, the vision disappeared completely; in the words of Ramsay MacDonald (acknowledged by Keir Hardie as the ILP's "greatest intellectual asset")

I reject what seems to be the crude notion of class war, because class consciousness leads nowhere...The watchword of socialism is not class consciousness but community consciousness (7).

And if MacDonald can be characterised as "the greatest traitor" in the party, his words were echoed (and taken further) by many who were praised as its heroes. Philip Snowden held that socialism had its strongest appeal to "the cultured and leisured" who could not enjoy their riches in the knowledge of the "misery of the men and women and children around him" and, as ILP Chairman, Bruce Glasier declared

I am able to speak and work for Socialism without feeling that I belong to a different cast of beings from that of the ordinary Liberal or Tory (8).

If however, we start from the vision, then it is easy to understand why, as with the Clarion movement, the life of the ILP entailed far more than a round of politics, meetings, committees, propaganda and similar activities. Central to the

life of the party member were the social gatherings - the dancing, the games, the music, the whist evenings, the summer rambles and the teas. Indeed, in the early part of the life of the ILP, these social occasions, dovetailed with the trading side of the party's work, could combine to form a collective culture, an island of socialism forged in a hostile sea, as one observer noted:

Nothing is too hard for the members in their virgin enthusiasm to do. They run their little prints, they sell their stock of pamphlets, they drop their pennies into the collecting box, they buy their ILP tea and cocoa as though they were members of an idealistic Communist community (9).

The breadth of early social life was indeed impressive. Alongside the routine of study classes, Labour Church services and the informal gatherings at the local ILP hall (many of which were open all day, everyday for "reading recreation and fellowship"), ILP members were greeted with an assortment of social activities. Central were the "bright and cheerful" socials and reunions (held by some branches weekly during the winter months) where the entertainment could range from songs and recitations to glees and piano recitals. In January 1898, for example, ILP members in Accrington had an "entertaining programme", an address and dancing at their third annual social. On New Year's Eve, members in Bolton "heartily indulged" in dancing to a band under the leadership of Comrade Preston until the early hours of the morning, breaking off only to sing "England Arise" to greet the New Year, and one participant observed that the "decorations, programme and refreshments were of the best quality". Further south, members of the Tottenham branch welcomed in the New Year with a tea

and social, where the entertainment included violin solos, a laughable duet and a Tug of War between the male and female socialists in which the men "to their disgrace, were singly defeated amidst roars of laughter" (10).

Nine years later such socials were still an important part of branch life. So, in January of that year members in Ashton and Longsight were entertained at a Tea and Concert, in Halifax by a lantern lecture on the Rhine, in Oldham by an evening of songs and sketches, and in North West Manchester by William Mellor speaking on the songs and poetry of modern socialism. Four months later, the North Kensington branch was holding a fancy dress ball:

Dancing was good, fun was good and the treasurer's smile was good. Empire dresses and pretty girls, coons [sic] and pierrots. Britannia enveloped in a red flag attended by the Duke of Lavender Hill was droll...(11).

In the January of 1909, ILP members in Oldham could visit the Japanese Carnival Concert and Dance, those in South London could attend the Grand Dance and Re-Union, and in Merthyr they could celebrate a local labour victory by attending a social, dance and whist drive. In Preston there was a ball, in Birtley a social gathering (where visitors were entertained by members of the branch), and in Hampstead a social dance and whist drive with refreshments at "popular prices" (12).

Unlike the Clarion, no attempt was made to organise these events on a national scale, but this did not dim their scope. Alongside the general social gatherings, the more energetic could indulge in sporting activity and, for a while, the

Labour Leader carried an athletics column. In Halifax, members could join the swimming club or take part in the annual sports day (which in 1899 generated a third of the branches annual income). In Bolton there was a cricket club and in Sheffield the more sedate gardening and rambling sections. On a larger scale, annual bazaars and fairs as well as May Day celebrations provided a focal point around which to organise grander entertainments, although quite frequently this was provided not by members of the ILP but by hired performers and musicians who were not necessarily committed socialists. This was not always the case, however, and certainly later in its life, the ILP took to organising larger concerts or "cabaret dances" at which the performers were either branch members or professional performers who were members of the ILP, as on the occasion of the Cabaret Dance held in London in January 1926 at which Elsa Lanchester (an ever popular artist at ILP events) and Harold Scott performed a burlesque of music halls, and at which John Goss sang sea shanties (13).

Large, national events, such as the annual summer school also provided as much for the social side of life as for the political, as Kath Steele, Wallhead's daughter remembers.

Alongside the daily programme of lectures and questions:

The afternoons were given over to social activities such as tennis, cricket, walking or generally relaxing...after dinner the evening was spent in dancing, talking, singing and general good fun. We always had a Welsh night and a Scots night (14).

She recalls one year, when J.M.Keynes came to lecture at Easton Lodge, bringing with him his Russian wife Ilydia Lopokova, the famous ballerina,

Reginald Paul, a well known pianist of the day was attending the Summer School and he accompanied Lydia Lopokova when she danced for us. At the same time John Goss, a professional baritone was also attending the Summer school and he sang to the accompaniment of Reginald Paul (15).

That may have been an "outstanding evening" in Kath Steele's memory, but NAC members and lecturers seemed to be ever willing to get up and perform at events. James Maxton remembered one particular impromptu social and dance held at the close of a Welsh Divisional Conference in Barry where

we danced, sang and recited. I never heard Dick Wallhead do "Eli" with greater effect. When he squirted machine oil into his false teeth his performance reached a very high level of artistic perfection. Dan Griffiths, whose musical skill escaped the notice of summer school chairmen and Scotch night managers led the Welsh community singing with a real professional touch. Jessie Stephen, who has been doing propaganda work in Cardiff, sang "The Road to the Isles" in her best style (16).

Rather tellingly, Maxton concludes his recollections by saying he thought the evening was "of much more use" to the movement than a meeting in the park would have been. He may not have been so charitable, on the occasion when A.W.Haycock, a local organiser, accompanied the singing of "The Red Flag" at the end of a Northern Voice annual reunion - by playing the piano with one finger:

Apart from striking the wrong note on several occasions, "A.W" has evidently a taste for music, and it was distinctly unkind for someone to have suggested that the second verse be sung without the piano (17).

The affectionate tone of this "reviewer" is repeated for many of the appearances of the well-known ILP members - when the

national secretary played the hero in a "psychological home truth" performed on the last night of one summer school, when the Central London branch organised a cabaret at which John Beckett performed an Italian melodrama and Ernest Hunter conducted a parody of the Glasgow Orpheus Choir (entitled the Adelphi Orfulest), or when James Maxton gave the "fox trot the same earnest attention" he gave to grave matters in the House of Commons, at a dance organised by the London Divisional Council (18).

As Raphael Samuel has noted, the main cultural thrust of the ILP was music; in 1903 the ILP News wrote about music as the "indispensable expression" of both the seriousness of the Movement and "of the happiness there is in it", and the branches were advised to have "singing at all meetings" for a "good hymn puts everybody in good humour". It was advice followed by many branches and vocal or instrumental performances were a regular feature at the Sunday evening lectures, with the "musical programme" lasting for up to an hour prior to the talk. Music also formed the central core of much entertainment outside the weekly meetings, and concerts such as the one held by the Birmingham branch in 1911 (as part of the annual conference) were not unusual. Here the programme (headed by the quotation "Music lightens care and sweetens mirth") was given as follows:

Part I

SONG	"Love could I only tell thee" E.A. Easthope	Capel
SONG	"Come into the Garden Maud" John Moore	Balfe
SONG	"Valley of Laughter" Miss Gladys Ashton	Saunderson

HUMOROUS SONG "Sandy, you're a Dandy" Grant  
David Strachan

DUET "Watchman, what of the Night" Sarjeant  
E.A. Easthope & John Moore

Part II

SPEECH J. RAMSAY MACDONALD MP

SONG "She Wandered Down the Mountainside" Clay  
Miss Gladys Ashton

SONG "I Fear No Foe" Pinsuti  
E.A. Easthope

HUMOROUS SONG "Sandy Macallister's Wife" Aarons  
David Strachan

DRAMATIC RECITAL "The Last of the Welsh Blatchford  
(by request) Borderers"  
Hubert Humphreys

SPEECH J. KEIR HARDIE MP (19).

These songs (and others of their ilk) were repeated at concerts up and down the country throughout the history of the ILP - at the Sunday night musical evenings held monthly at Stapleford, at the "Grand United Choir Concert" held by Nottingham and at the Liverpool "smoking concert". But the ILP did not ignore the music produced by the movement (indeed Rutland Boughton was later to write that one of the most important things music could do for the people was through the singing of fighting songs to give them heart). In the year of the ILP's foundation John Bruce Glasier published Socialist Songs, a collection of eighty-eight songs drawn from all areas of the labour movement and thirty four years later, the secretary of the Edinburgh branch was writing to the New Leader recommending the Labour Community Song Book:

We pass this advice to our comrades everywhere: Get the book, sing the songs at propaganda and election



meetings and turn every branch into a nest of singing birds (20).

The following month, the paper was advertising "Labour Song Records" (which included "England Arise", "the Red Army March" and "The Rebel Song"), alongside Sixteen Songs for Sixpence and More Rebel Songs - all advertised as "gloom dispellers" and in April 1927, the Head office published a "Community Singing Sheet" in the hope it would "teach the movement a large number of songs" (21).

So central were these events to the life of the party, that in 1920, the NAC sent a memorandum to all social secretaries stating

It is the duty of Social Secretaries to provide for the Fellowship needs of the branch and to organise a reasonable number of functions during the year (22).

It suggested that these should include a function for members (in the form a a reception with concert items, games and dancing) to be held at the beginning of each Autumn season where members could meet in "social intercourse" so "that they may know each other". This was to be followed by a number of social events held in members' own houses - "at homes" or garden meetings, members' teas or suppers (where refreshments could be pooled) and small whist drives were all suggested. In order to attract sympathisers from outside their ranks, branches were encouraged to hold monthly dances and (during the summer) garden parties, as well as larger public dances (where an "effort is made to secure the attendance of some of those who are not necessarily interested in the movement") and

annual fairs. Occasional gatherings for the singing of Labour songs were also recommended, as were all manner of sporting activity (including cricket, football, hockey and cycling) and for the summer months, rambles, char-a-banc outings and (for those who could afford it) social weekends in the country were all advised.

The sheer volume of social activities encouraged within the ILP could suggest that members may have found it hard to find time for the more serious matter of politics, but for many there was no division between the two. Indeed, in the late 1890's, the Labour Leader carried a column headed "A Chronicle of the Sayings and Doings of the Young Men in a Hurry" which listed the activities of local branches during the past week, with notices of elections, rallies, meetings, lectures and social events all mixed in together with no distinctions made between the different types of events. However, some members were certainly concerned that branch social life did take ILPers away from politics; Glasier (and other leading figures) were convinced that cycling, football and "other forms of personal recreation have cost us the zealous services of many admirable propagandists", and in December 1896 a meeting of Stockport members heard complaints of.

the apathy and indifference which causes members to absent themselves from Business meetings while regularly frequenting the Club for purposes of amusement (23).

It was an argument echoed on the pages of Labour's Northern Voice over half a century later, when writing "from the Office Armchair" a contributor argued that the "party has not made

its mark on working class politics by running whist drives and billiard handicaps" (24).

Yet, for every voice raised in such concern came numerous others in response, all justifying every type of social activity as a means of either making or keeping socialists. Writing swiftly in reply to the article in Labour's Northern Voice, a member from Longsight and Rusholme ILP admitted that whilst there might be problems with the social side of branch life, it was an invaluable way of meeting people, arguing politics and "creating new members". The more cultural the activity, the easier comrades found it to justify. Once again on the pages of Labour's Northern Voice, we find in 1926 a long article by James Widdop in which he looks at worker s' involvement in leisure activities (be they brass bands, opera or horse racing) as their "ladder out of the conditions into which they are condemned some of the time". He concludes that most people refuse to stake their lives on one interest, and whilst they might be prepared to vote for a Labour candidate "now and again" they were not prepared to drop their interests in exchange for the social life of the ILP branches as it now stood. The branches therefore had to extend the work they were doing in this area if they wanted to appeal to (and hold) a wider layer of people, and there is no clearer statement of this intent than the advice offered to groups on the formation of dramatic societies:

Branches should aim at forming a group attached to their branch for members who have not the ability or aptitude to serve in political work but who are willing to be associated with other efforts (25).

Alongside providing methods of attracting new members, social activity also catered for other needs both showing that under socialism a fuller life would be possible and in giving a foretaste of what life under socialism would be like, as this account of an outing to Bolton Wood shows:

Several thousands of Socialists were present and all seemed to enjoy themselves in good humoured and true socialist fashion. Is it possible that in the quiet and orderly gathering which graced the glades and woods of Bolton lies the real significance of the future? (26)

There was also the less idealistic role of raising of finance - a role which though less overtly political became over time increasingly central, as a glance at the accounts of Halifax ILP shows quite dramatically:

	31.1.1897	Year Ending 31.1.1898	31.1.1900
	£ s d	£ s d	£ s d
Swimming Club		3 0	
Gala		7 5 9	
May Day Festival	4 2 2	6 14 5	39 7 5½
General Ent			55 10 0
Clarion Lantern Show	12 9		
Clarion Vocal Union	1 6 4		
Sports Day			101 10 5
Tea Party			13 6
Kingston Social			3 0 11
<b>Total</b>	<b>6 1 3</b>	<b>69 13 2</b>	<b>144 12 3½</b>
<u>Income in general</u>			
Subscriptions	141 6 4	128 0 0	116 12 2
Entertainments	6 1 3	69 13 2	144 12 3½
<b>Total</b>	<b>147 7 7</b>	<b>197 13 2</b>	<b>261 4 5½</b>

(27).

Attempting to assess in brief the function of social activities in the ILP over a period covering nearly forty years is a dangerous task. Howell argues, for example, that once the electoral impulse gained the upper hand, and the decade of socialist enthusiasm and vision drew to a close at the end of the century, the social life (whilst it still continued to exist) took on new functions. Primarily it was seen not for its ability to create an ever expanding island of socialism but for its ability to remove the last electoral debt or to ensure that there would not be one next time. Alongside this it could also be defined simply as "recreational activity" with little or no anticipation of "a wider socialist fellowship". Such arguments can be persuasive, but need to be challenged, and are best taken up in the discussion of the ILP's attitude to the role culture (and in particular drama) could play in creating socialists and socialism which is discussed in detail below (28).

In the midst of this social whirl, drama had its part to play, although as with all other activities its organisation was left to the whims of each branch's social secretary or committee. A fairly consistent part of the dramatic life of the ILP was formed by individual performers like Ruth Swift, the "girl prodigy" from Leeds, touring branches and giving dramatic recitals. In Dulwich, Victor Hoggins was renowned for his performances from Ibsen and Shaw; in the north, Horace Nobbs fulfilled this role, adding Brioux to the repertoire, and there are frequent advertisements offering the services of

Margaret Murch in a "whole evening of High Class Comedy". One of the most popular performers, a musician rather than an actor, was Walter Hampson or Casey (at one time first violinist with Manchester's Halle Orchestra), who would tour branches with his violin (and sometimes with his pianist wife, Dolly) preaching a "potent mixture of fine music and fiery socialism" which won the hearts and minds of many listeners - or in the words of one advertisement "One touch of "Casey" and the movement grins!" (29).

In the early days of the ILP, some branches did set up their own dramatic groups. In Halifax, the ILP Amateurs were performing in 1911 and two years later, the Amateur Dramatic Society in Nelson offered first a production of School for Scandal in January 1913, and later a four act operetta, Snow White, performed at their annual Meat Tea and Entertainment. In 1912 an initiative was taken in West Salford to form a dramatic society for the purpose of producing "propaganda plays" and in 1913 the group established weekly "At Homes" which proved extremely popular. Five years later, the Kensington branch in Liverpool established a dramatic circle which strengthened the "intellectual atmosphere" at socials by offering readings and performances of Barrie, Shaw, Galsworthy and Tolstoy. Alongside the performances, the group also set up a dramatic study circle which held lectures and discussions on authors (not surprisingly the first two studied were Shaw and Ibsen) and with the help of Norman MacDermott, one of the comrades in the branch (and later to become the founder of the Everyman Theatre), much discussion was also held about methods of staging (30).

Dramatic activity was further developed in Liverpool when a second ILP dramatic society was established in 1917. This group published "a most imposing prospectus" written by Philip Snowden, at the time the National Chairman of the ILP, which outlined aims very different to those followed by the Kensington group:

I believe that the drama is of all the arts supremely the one through which great moral teaching may be done. In the advocacy of our socialist principles we cannot afford to neglect any legitimate methods. The presentation of the facts of life in all their variety will impress where the sermon or speech would fail to do so (31).

The objects of the Society were

1. To introduce into the Socialist Movement, Socialist and Realistic Drama.
2. To educate our members:
  - a) to the principles of Socialism through the medium of drama.
  - b) so as to cultivate within each of us a love for the higher and better Dramatic Art (32).

The largest part of the prospectus was taken up with a long essay by the organiser, E.B.Wright, in which he castigates the commercial theatre (with the exception of the Repertory Theatre) for failing to produce plays "that show us the defects of the present state of existence". He continues with a review of world drama and ends with a rousing call, "Workers of the World, Unite!" (33).

Yet despite Snowden's apparent endorsement of drama and the NAC advice to social secretaries that each branch should aim to form a dramatic group, only four other branches appeared to have heeded this advice. In Gateshead, the ILP Amateur Dramatic Club (in 1924 to become the Progressive Players) made

their first appearance in 1920 with performances of Malleeson's Young Heaven and Shaw's A Man of Destiny and, towards the end of the same year, the Middlesbrough ILP Repertory Society announced it was "busy on" Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, Malleeson's Man of Ideas and Shaw's You Never Can Tell. Two years later, dramatic activity started in Scotland on a more regular basis following the discovery by Shettleston ILP in Glasgow that the performance of sketches at branch meetings could attract a bigger audience. This inspired both the Glasgow group and one of the Edinburgh branches to establish more permanent dramatic groups under the names of the Shettleston ILP Propaganda Party (or occasionally the Shettleston Sketch Party) and the Melbourne Players (34).

However, on the whole, and considering the fact that the ILP boasted 787 branches in 1920, dramatic activity prior to the establishment of the Arts Guild can be described as being little short of sporadic (35). On occasions, the Labour Leader did try to encourage further developments; so in 1917, an article about the "moral" achievements of the Co-Operative Theatres established in Russia attempted to galvanise some kind of activity, pointing to the example of Kensington ILP, to the "score of budding theatrical circles" of the Socialist Sunday Schools and to Plymouth's Women's Co-Operative Guild which had developed its own plays as well as its own players. The movement needed

a harvesting, and sharing out of experience, an ingathering of old and new people's plays and also some inkling of the newer and nobler ways of managing stage decoration, which provide the plays with the right frame, atmosphere and background rather than cumber them with vulgar and costly scenery (36).



The author was no doubt correct to end by asking if it would be left to the Co-Operative Movement in England to provide the organisation needed, for the article appears to have fallen on deaf ears amongst ILP members. On occasion articles also appeared on the pages of the paper which suggested a certain level of consideration of theatre, not on a branch level, but on a much grander scale. Thus the 1913 plans for a "Temple for the Cause of Labour", also included a scheme for a 4000 seat theatre "decorated as only Socialist genius and art can", and with

its great stage occupied by actors and singers whose soul would be in the work and shine through their art...Our theatre, our plays, our concerts would be the talk of London radiating their influence into and shaming a pseudo-art circle whose aim is money-making and whose method is to pander to the banalities of a materialist age (37).

But such dreams came to nothing in the face of harsh economic reality, and the £120,000 which the MP J.O'Grady assessed would be needed was not to be found.

In the eighteen months prior to the formation of the Arts Guild, the Labour Leader showed the beginnings of a stirring of greater interest in drama. In May 1924, the ILP established a branch in "theatreland" to cater for musicians and theatrical workers and, late in the same year, the paper (which since it was reorganised under the editorship of Brailsford in 1922 had reviewed plays on a sporadic basis) set up its first regular theatrical column under the title "The Play from the Pit" and written by Conal O'Riordan. The author promised only to give space to such plays which were open to anyone with half a crown (or at most two half crowns) in his or her pocket, yet

its appearance was still surrounded by uncertainty, and O'Riordan ended his column in December with a note concerning the Editor's misgivings over whether it was sufficiently political for his public (38).

Activity in the branches was somewhat more consistent. Dramatic groups were founded in Accrington, Portsmouth, Erdington (in Birmingham), Golders Green, Hampstead and in West Norwood, where the group was known as The Crimson Ramblers. In Walthamstow, Reginald Sorenson was busy organising programmes of well-known plays or variety shows (incorporating playlets, songs and ventriloquism) with the Greenleaf Players. In some places, plays were performed on a one-off basis. Enfield children offered Miles Malleon's Maurice's Own Idea at the branches Garden Fete, in Wallasey, Comrade J.H. Warren "gave" The Machine Wreckers, Man and Superman was read at a weekly meeting in Tunbridge Wells, and in Long Eaton, Wilfred Wellock's anti-war play Patriots was performed (39).

In March 1924, the paper carried an article in response to the various correspondents who had written urging the ILP both locally and nationally to pay more attention to the artistic side of the Socialist ideal and appeal, but before anyone had a chance to take any action another initiative was underway which helped to encourage dramatic activity in a new direction (40).

The Theatre of Ideals: The Strand Theatre Experiment.

In January 1925 Arthur Bouchier, a member of the ILP since the beginning of the twenties, announced that he was putting the Strand Theatre, of which he had been the manager since 1919, at the disposal of the party on Sunday evenings. Organised by Reginald Stamp (who was assisted on the committee by Kyrle Bellew, the actress wife of Bouchier) the gatherings at the Strand aimed to express the ideal of Labour through a combination of speeches, music, drama and art; as the New Leader expressed it when announcing the new venture

We shall aim not at ordinary political propaganda, but by accompanying our intellectual appeal by beauty and colour, music and movement, shall seek to indicate the artistic beauties of life as well (41).

On the opening night, January 18th 1925, the purpose of the evenings was spelt out both by the chair, Clifford Allen, and by C.P. Trevelyan, one of the evening's speakers. For Trevelyan, it was a case of understanding that while socialists were at war with poverty

our quarrel with poverty is very much more that it cramps the spirit than that it starves the body (42).

For Allen, it was much more a combination of the economic and the spiritual; the best way to thank the Bouchiers for their gift of the theatre was to use it to express "all round" Socialism:

They wished to show that Socialism meant not only an economic policy but a way of life. If Socialism meant only a series of political proposals, Socialists would probably abuse power as much as their predecessors. Socialism must affect their hearts as well as their minds. It was at once a

scientific remedy for the evils of the world and the expression of the idealistic human spirit (43).

The programme for the two seasons which the Strand evenings lasted is impressive in its variety. Political speeches were made by, amongst others, Mary Hamilton, James Maxton, Fred Bramley (of the Trade Union Delegation to Russia), Katherine Bruce Glasier and F.W.Jowett. Artistic matters were at times dealt with in speeches, as on the occasion Arthur Bouchier spoke on Socialism and Art, a subject to which he returned at the Great Final Rally which ended the first season and for which he was joined by Canon Lewis Donaldson and John Wheatley. Performance and speeches were combined in occasional lecture recitals; Hugh Robertson, the conductor of the Glasgow Orpheus choir offered one in October 1925, which was followed a week later by an illustrated lecture on sea shanties given by Sir Richard Terry, organist and director of Westminster Cathedral, and author of The Shanty Book. On this occasion, the illustrations were performed by John Goss and the Westminster Singers (44).

On the performance side, the variety was as pronounced, both in content and in the appearance of both amateur and professional performers. Dance was provided on several occasions by the ever popular Margaret Morris and her pupils, as well as by the Cecil Sharp Folk Dancers. The Arts League of Service offered folk and Hebridean songs and dances and, on one occasion, the audience were entertained by Marjorie Gullein's Verse Speaking Choir, which performed rhythmic movement to spoken poetry. Music was a constant feature of the

evenings, with frequent performances from the West End ILP Orchestra and the Socialist Choir and on special occasions musical items were performed by groups such as the Neath ILP Orpheus Male Voice Choir, the Cathays Juvenile Choir or by professional soloists.

Drama was also performed by a combination of professionals and amateurs. From the professional world, individuals such as Harcourt Williams, Lewis Casson, J. Fisher White, Mary Jerrold and Sybil Thorndyke offered their services (45). They were joined by amateur groups including those of the ILP, the Ruskin College Dramatic Society and the Indian Students Union Dramatic Society, and the pieces they chose to perform also reflected a great breadth. According to Brockway's autobiography, Bernard Shaw, John Galsworthy and Laurence Houseman all gave their support, allowing the ILP to use their one-act plays. Houseman did indeed actively show his support and read his own play, Lord of the Harvest, to a standing ovation. This one act morality play, tells of famine in the midst of plenty, as a miller and his family (tellingly named Drudge, Dole, Bit and Sup) starve while sacks of grain are piled up in the corner. The merchant, Grinder, will not sell the grain until the price has risen sufficiently. Following a pretend banquet and the death of the daughter, the family are interrupted by the arrival of Grinder, pursued by rioters who are led by Strike. The miller is finally moved to pity and hides the merchant in the bed of his dead daughter, and when the rioters arrive they cannot find him. Grinder, however, does not succeed in escaping from his punishment; when the rioters

have departed, the family discover that he has died from fright.

Alongside this one play by Houseman, Galsworthy was represented by two performances (the Cell Scene from Justice and a performance of Defeat), but Shaw was conspicuous by his absence, and the overall choice of plays reflected a far wider depth of dramatic appreciation than simply those three authors (46).

Plays with overtly political themes were, however, few; apart from the Galsworthy plays, there were two performances of Yaffle's Foiling the Reds (one given by the staff of the New Leader), two plays by Miles Malleson (Black 'Ell and Young Heaven), the Gate Theatre company's production of Masses and Man, performed on the penultimate evening, and George Calderon's The Fountain. The plays by Yaffle, Malleson and Toller are dealt with in detail below, but Calderon's The Fountain is worth pausing a few moments to examine, not least for the comparisons which were drawn on its first performance with Shaw's Widower's Houses - comparisons Calderon was at pains to deny:

When you dive down to the very bottom of The Fountain (where Truth dwells) you will find yourself face to face with something as Anti-Shavian as can be, with a tremendous discovery of mine which may revolutionise both Literature and Life (47).

He chooses to set his "tremendous discovery" in the kitchen of a first floor tenement in the East End, in a play that deals, as in Shaw's play, with the issue of house rents, but the conclusions Calderon draws are very different. Whilst Shaw

(like "Lloyd George and all those nurtured in the socialism of the early eighties") still believes in the "fantastic old Wicked Rich myth", a myth which Calderon views as never having been based on real human beings but is drawn from the villains of the tudor stage and the goblins of the medieval mysteries, The Fountain aims to.

show that all the Evil that matters is produced, not by evil intention, as is generally supposed, but by good intention working through the complicated channels of our social system...Bundle all the really wicked people into a lethal chamber, and it will have no visible effect on human happiness (48).

All the miseries in the tenement are seen to be caused by those who go there with good intentions: Chenda, a kind hearted philanthropist who moves in to try and help, a benevolent trustee, a conscientious lawyer, and a noble rent-collector. In the words of Wren (the cynical "hero" of the piece) to Chenda, when she exclaims that he believes charity is a crime

...you don't understand the enormity of the offence you're guilty of...At bottom you're not a bad woman. You are shocked by the same evils in the world as I myself. It's in the remedy that you go wrong. We find society on a false basis; the rich are battenning on the poor. We hope to get the wrong righted. But Nature is hard at work. Her panacea of discontent is in full operation; the poor are discontented; the rich are discontented. It's like the gout coming out; there are shooting pains in the joints; the disease is evaporating. I rejoice, I say, "Stand back, everybody, the crisis is approaching." You haven't the courage to bear the patients groans; you rush forward and souse the poor devil with anaesthetics. You drive the disease in again. If there were no charity and no beer in London the social question would be solved in a week; neither the rich nor the poor could endure things any longer (49).

By the end of the play, Chenda has indeed made a mess of her good intentions, a mess which pleases Wren. Charity has not had the effect he expected (of preventing the full iniquity of the system being seen); rather Chenda's failure has allowed people to discover what a mess the world is in and whilst Wren still sees action as always causing harm, from its ruins rises theory:

WREN

I've learnt more political economy this last week than I did in ten years before. I want to stay here and watch you all at it and penetrate the full irony of the situation. Then I think we might see if we can't give your tenants better value for their money...And if we can spare any time from mending our own ways, we'll spend it in harassing employers, landlords, insanitary people, brewers, publicans, every one who battens the poor...

CHENDA

All the other Chendas in fact (50).

In its conclusions, The Fountain is indeed a long way from Widowers Houses, although in style and language the two plays have much in common.

Apart from these five plays, the dramatic performances reflect an eclectic rather than propagandist approach, although they all, in the eyes of the organisers, bore a relationship to Socialism. When Burchier was attacked by the Morning Post, accused of allowing dramatic art to be used as a "decoy to political proselytisation", he replied by stating that the theatre was to be used not to advertise Socialism, but to express it:

Socialism stands for the highest cultural and spiritual life, as well as for material well-being and it is natural for Socialists to express their ideals through dramatic and musical beauty (51).



The highest "cultural and spiritual life" could be found in many and sometimes surprising plays - in St John Hankin's The Constant Lover, a one act play based on a clandestine meeting in a forest and much discussion on love without responsibilities, on constantly being in love with different people and comparisons to cuckoos; in Charles Lee's Our Special Correspondent, a three act farce; in Lord Dunsany's Fame and the Poet. Less surprising is the choice of Shakespeare; both the Forum scene from Julius Caesar and the trial scene from The Merchant of Venice were performed, the latter (with the central characters performed by Arthur Bouchier and Sybil Thorndyke) receiving seventeen curtain calls - although it is interesting to note that the New Leader reviewer claimed that on the night the Forum scene was performed, the star piece was Lord Dunsany's Fame and the Poet (52).

But it was in the work of the amateur groups that some of the most interesting pieces were offered, maybe an indication that they were less bound by conventional theatre ideas than their fellow professionals. On the 21st February, an Indian evening was arranged, which included music and songs, a recital of Rabindraneth Tagore's poems and a scene from D.L.Roy's Chandragupta - an evening which reflected the concern of much of the labour movement with Indian affairs, especially in the wake of the massacre at Amritsar in 1919. Only one whole evening was devoted to the work of the amateur groups of the movement, but it did produce the only new play to be performed during the entire two seasons. Whilst the Dionysians performed O'Neill's Where the Cross is Made, a play dealing with

insanity, and the Hampstead ILP offered an "illusive phantasy", Edna St Vincent Millay's Aria da Capo, the Parliamentary Labour Club chose a new piece written (and in part acted) by John H.Clynes, the son of J.R.Clynes. The Tomb tells of a party of tourists who wander by mistake into a previously undiscovered resting place of a Pharaoh and his queen, and are forced by them to join the ranks of the dead, a play no doubt influenced by the massive interest in the subject awakened by the discovery of Tutenkhamen in November 1922 and the subsequent death a few months later of Lord Carnarvon. It was praised by Monica Ewer, not only as an effort that did the group great credit (for they had not only written the play, but also produced all the costumes and scenery themselves), but more importantly because no

evening should be complete without something really new to offer the audience...(53).

Unfortunately, the Strand organisers either did not agree or could not find new pieces, and The Tomb remained the only original work performed.

However, the most interesting and significant dramatic performance came not from new writing, but from the pen of the old favourite, Galsworthy; although in this case, it was not the play itself, rather the circumstances of its performance which are worth noting. On the fourth evening, the programme opened with Fenner Brockway speaking on prison life from within, illustrating his "bare" and "merciless" facts with slides. This was followed by the wordless "Cell Scene" from Galsworthy's Justice performed by Milton Rosmer which was

understood at that moment as it never could have been if those merciless facts had not been fresh in our mind (54).

Yet, despite the impact of this performance, it was not an experiment that was repeated during the Strand evenings. The programmes instead tended to alternate, week by week, between political speeches and musical or dramatic evenings (although there were always musical items on the programme), suggesting that although Allen could talk about the combination of the economic and the ideal, these were seen as separate ways of appealing to people; and despite the fact that the New Leader reviewer was impressed by the power of combining speeches and drama, the organisers of the Theatre of Ideals were either unaware of it or consciously separated the two.

The Strand Labour Evenings for the people were, however, a great success in terms of both attracting an audience and in recruiting people to the ILP. At the first six meetings, 250 members were enrolled to the party, and on the first night, as many people were left outside the theatre as managed to get in:

So great was the crowd that certain of the doors were rushed with the result, unfortunately, that some of the early comers did not gain admission (55).

And the same scenes were repeated in following weeks, until the organisers arranged firstly stewards to marshal the crowds and later advance booking of tickets. On one level the popularity can be accounted for by the fact the tickets were free although we do not know how many were taken by "the

**PAGE  
NUMBERS  
CUT OFF  
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working people who live in the mean streets behind the imposing thoroughfares of Central London", who the ILP were making a "special effort" to secure (56). The New Leader preferred to view the success as proof that people wanted the beautiful things in life:

It gives people beauty in a form in which they want it and can grasp it; it tunes their minds; it makes them sing and grow familiar with the songs around which the Socialist tradition and Socialist feeling have gathered (57).

Such a success was no doubt also in part the spur to the establishment of a national organisation, the ILP Arts Guild, which could take such beauty to those further afield than the walls of the Strand Theatre.

#### The Organisation of the ILP Arts Guild.

The first stirrings to organise dramatic work within the branches of the ILP appeared on the pages of the New Leader in March 1924, when the paper noted that various correspondents had written to the party urging it both nationally and locally to pay more attention to the "artistic side" of the "Socialist ideal and appeal". It took that opportunity to notify members that in the London Division the matter had, for the last year, been actively engaging the attention of the social committee and that possibilities were being considered with "the kind co-operation" of Miles Malleon. In the summer of the same year, Malleon took advantage of the National Summer School to address the party on "The Use of Drama by the Socialist Movement". There he gave the impression that some work was

already in hand and directed a reading/performance of Toller's Masses and Men with a company formed prior to the School from volunteers offered "a chance of fame" by the New Leader (58).

The official start to the Guild did not, however, come until the following year when a meeting was held in Caxton Hall on the 5th June 1925 to launch "one of the most promising developments in the history of the ILP". Chaired by Clifford Allen, the meeting attracted support from Canon Donaldson and Arthur Burchier and an audience composed of

authors, dramatists, actors, actresses, musicians, artists, dancers; representatives of the ILP dramatic societies, choirs, art circles and Guilds of Youth and at least one Labour MP, appropriately bearing the name of Hardie (59).

Support from the profession was very apparent, with messages being read from (amongst others) Lewis Casson, Sybil Thorndyke, Laurence Houseman, Edith Craig, Harcourt Williams, Milton Rosmer and Irene Rooke - the last two sending a telegram congratulating the ILP on its "new effort to civilise that old scoundrel the British drama". During the course of the meeting, the aims of the Guild were laid out; these included the co-ordination and extension of existing dramatic groups, the pooling of resources (including the organisation of regional and national festivals and exchange performances), and the giving out of skilled help and advice both in terms of suitable plays and technical help. As the director, Miles Malleson hoped to be able to "act as a missionary" for the movement by touring the country and it was envisaged that the best societies would be invited to perform at the Strand Theatre which would become a "national focusing point" for the

movement. All this was work to be carried out by a national committee, and at a subsequent meeting the following month (once again chaired by Clifford Allen) a National Advisory Council was formed consisting of numerous co-opted experts, one representative of each affiliated group, one representative of the ILP Guild of Youth, and four individuals drawn from the ILP executive and the Strand Theatre Meetings Committee (60).

The project received enthusiastic support from at least some members of the National Administrative Council of the ILP. At the Guild's outset, the Council voted (although by only six votes to five) to make it a grant of £100, but this was to be given on a definite understanding that the money was for initial purposes only, and the NAC would not be involved in any financial responsibility in the future. Further practical help was agreed to at the following month's meeting, when Margaret Bondfield suggested the Arts Guild approached ILP MPs and candidates with a view to getting engagements for Malleson to attend their constituencies for the development of the work of the Guild. In later years, the achievements and problems of the Guild were covered in the annual ILP report, and many prominent members of the organisation gave at least a limited amount of practical help and support as well. The audience for the production of The Adding Machine in March 1927 included a "lively NAC group" which was made up of Maxton, Kirkwood, Brockway, Dalton, Sandham and Paton. "Snatching a seat where she could" was Dorothy Jewson and not far from the main group was Alister MacDonald (Ramsay MacDonald's son), who was later to become treasurer of the Arts Guild until he was forced to

resign in 1928 owing to pressure of work. Most active was Fenner Brockway who not only chaired most of the Arts Guild national meetings and became chairman in 1927, but who also, according to Arthur Marwick, was "an enthusiastic participant" in the productions mounted by the Guild in the London area (61).

The launch of the Guild did not, however, meet with everyone's complete approval nor without some debate. According to H.B. Pointing, the Caxton Hall meeting was divided into two sections which were somewhat at odds with each other. On one side were those who saw the initiative as relating only to the ILP, whilst on the other side (a side which included Pointing himself) were those who wanted to build a wider movement, a "movement for a workers theatre". In a letter to the New Leader in which he wished the ILP the greatest possible success, Pointing hoped they would also see fit to widen their horizons; there was no reason that he could see why there should not be a People's Theatre in London and why a great movement (with this building at its centre) should not spread all over the country:

But all this can only come if we rope in every sort of possible support from all sections of the Labour movement. We want active and enthusiastic co-operation (62).

But such an appeal fell on deaf ears and the Guild's only concession was to allow that groups not directly connected with the ILP (and one must assume this included groups with no political affiliation) would be eligible on special



application to the Committee and entirely at their discretion (63).

Although the Guild limited its horizons to the ILP, it did not limit its work to drama. From the outset it encompassed other areas of the arts and established four sub-committees to cover the different aspects of its work: drama, music, dance and arts and handicrafts. On one level, all had the same initial purpose of establishing and encouraging local groups, offering expert advice and organising exhibitions and festivals, but each area also had its own aims. It was hoped, for example, that the Art groups would "produce really beautiful posters for electoral purposes" and, after a somewhat shaky start (attributed to the "not unjustified tendency" to confuse the label of handicraft with "the rather regrettable products one sometimes sees at bazaars and sales of work"), this section of the Guild attempted to align itself with the dramatic work by concentrating on the production of sets and props. To this end, plans were laid to establish a centre in South London from which dramatic groups could be supplied with their needs at little more than the cost of the materials, but little seems to have come of this beyond the collection of names, and in the event its work incorporated much raffia work, leather work and stencilling. The dance section set out to encourage the study of traditional folk dances of the world, for folk dancing was seen as the most "natural and inevitable expression of a desire for rhythmic movement". For a while (and with the encouragement of Evelyn Sharp) folk dancing did become "a very live branch of the work of the Guild" especially in London, where on one occasion a Folk Dance Party

was held in conjunction with the Parliamentary Labour Club in Soho and weekly classes/dances were held in the city during the early part of 1926. In the end, however, these were discontinued in favour of the more popular "Margaret Morris" dance classes (64).

The musical work started on a firmer footing than the other two groups, choirs already being a familiar feature at ILP meetings. One way in which the Guild hoped to extend this work was through the organisation of a National ILP Musical Festival, and by 1926, with the help of Rutland Boughton and with Leonard Pearce (the leader of the West End ILP Orchestra) as secretary, this section of the Guild had fifty affiliated choirs and orchestras (65).

But without question, the most rapid development took place in connection with the dramatic groups, a claim borne out by the "fresh demands for affiliation" and letters announcing new dramatic groups which were reaching Malleeson by every post in September 1925. Within six months the Guild (which had been formed with the definite knowledge of ten groups) had received sixty applications for affiliation and membership and were in the process of dealing with thirty other enquiries - and this did not include individuals who had joined. Miles Malleeson had travelled "several hundreds of miles" helping groups over the first difficult stages of their existence, addressing meetings and conducting rehearsals. By April 1926, the number of groups had increased to 115, and by October of that year to 130, with 25 groups in London alone. After this date, no figures appear to have been published, but, in the words of the NAC National

Report for 1928, notices of activity from "all parts of the country" showed a "live artistic movement growing slowly but surely" suggesting that if the growth of groups was not outstanding it was still increasing (66).

However, the following year, the party had to report that the development of the Guild was slow (if still continued) and in 1929, at its annual meeting (which had been held every year during the national conference since 1926), the Arts Guild agreed to dissolve the national committee "which had not effectively operated". Its place was taken by a voluntary secretary (a post filled by Marguerite Louis) with the responsibility of co-ordinating the work of the Guild, and on the advice of "consultants" making suggestions for the development of its work. By this time, the number of new drama groups was declining annually (six were reported in 1930, and only half that number the following year) and Marguerite Louis had very little time to make any real changes in the Guild's work before the Annual Conference of 1932 decided that:

Despite the constant efforts of the last few years, it has not been found possible to establish an effective separate organisation for the development of the special activities which the Arts Guild was concerned. It has been decided, therefore, to abandon the separate form and to seek to develop these activities in future as part of the ordinary cultural activities of the branches (67).

Such a sketchy history of the Guild does not, however, even begin to give us a flavour of the breadth of work undertaken by the dramatic groups or begin to look at how the ILP saw its development in relationship to socialism. Nor does it answer

the question of why in 1924, the ILP took that first step to organise the cultural activity of the party.

In answer to the last point, it would be easy to point simply to the growth of dramatic activity that had occurred in the branches through the early 1920s and to argue that the Arts Guild was simply a response to this. Undoubtedly there is some truth in this; in an interview with the Clarion, Fenner Brockway spoke of the "remarkable spontaneous growth" of artistic work within the branches and of the number of applications head office was receiving for advice. Miles Malleson opened his pamphlet on the ILP Arts Guild by discussing the dramatic groups which had been "happening of their own accord" and the steady stream of letters that had been received over the past few years, and the ILP's Annual Report for 1926 spoke openly of the establishment of the Guild as being in response to the "constant pressure from the branches". However, there is more to the story than this (68).

Arthur Marwick points to the central influence of Clifford Allen in the establishment if not of the Arts Guild itself, then in encouraging artistic activity within the party as a whole. From the time he became President in 1922, at a point when the fortunes of the Party were declining and their politics had become "the equivalent in policies of a jumble sale; nothing new but many bargains", Allen did set about reorganising. And in part that reorganisation involved a leaning towards matters more artistic. He was, for example, responsible for re-launching the Labour Leader under H.N.Brailsford (and under the new title of the New Leader) as

a paper with a wider cultural appeal, a "mixture of perceptive comment and romantic fustian" in which four pages out of sixteen were to be devoted to artistic and literary topics in the hope that the "vaguely sympathetic reader" who began by liking the literary articles, might "soon become a convinced and intelligent Socialist". He also presided over a centralisation of the party, steering it towards London, and perhaps most importantly, he was seen as being responsible for the prominence which many of the middle class pacifists and intellectuals (who had flocked to the party during and just after the war) attained. As Dowse points out,

Men like H.N.Brailsford and Frank Wise, both ILP members of very long standing, achieved a great prominence in a party which, although never exclusively proletarian, was becoming dominated at the centre by London intellectuals. Although the party had always a fair sprinkling of middle-class intellectuals, men like Bruce Glasier, the influx during the mid 1920s was more obvious since it was concentrated on the NAC policy committees and became quite apparent in Brailsford's New Leader...Allen's ILP symbolised by the impressive new offices in Great George Street, Westminster, was not the ILP of dingy church halls and Methodist fervour; it was an ILP of the intellectual, the emancipated woman and the London bohemian (69).

Such developments did meet with some hostility, and in the year of the Arts Guild's formation Allen resigned to be replaced by James Maxton. By this time the Party had more pressing matters to deal with - the failure of the first Labour government and the "poaching" of their left wing by the Communist Party. In looking at their response to these two events, combined with Allen's influence on the party, we can begin to see both why dramatic activity and the formation of the Arts Guild happened when they did. The immediate reaction

to 1924 was to rethink the relationship of the ILP to the Labour Party and to sharpen its role in bringing

to the public a realisation of the urgent need for fundamental changes which socialism represents and to influence the Labour Party in a more complete and rapid direction (70).

It thus had a two-fold job; to be (in the words of Dowse) a "tug pulling the great ship "Labour" to the harbour of socialism" and (in the words of Ramsay MacDonald) to be a means of socialist propaganda directed at "making the Socialist mind and outlook" and at the "Socialist morality of service giving" (71). At the same time, the party had to stem the flow of its left-wing to the Communist Party, which meant being able both to distance itself from the failure of 1924 and to offer a clear path to socialism which was distinct from the perceived violence of Bolshevism. To achieve all these ends meant turning the "jumble sale" into a clear sighted and single minded organisation and this entailed education, both of members and of the "general public".

#### Turning Meeting-Halls into Theatres.

On one aspect of the Guild's work, Malleon was clear. The groups, who generally used rooms which were "drab and uninspiring enough to kill any dramatic effort" should do everything possible:

to give these places the look and feel of little theatres - to give them, at least, what is essential in the sense and atmosphere of a theatre (72).

To this end, he was able to write that he was in touch with "several experts" experimenting in developing cheap lighting apparatus, and he recommended the British Drama League exhibition on "Community Theatre Design" which contained a section on models for portable stages. By the time of the annual Arts Guild meeting in 1926, the New Leader was able to report that the Guild itself had devised a "model little travelling theatre" costing £2 to £3 "which could be put up in any hall" and which was "capable of beautiful stage settings" and Malleson had spent much of the intervening time travelling around the country helping groups to turn small grimy halls and back rooms into "Little Theatres" (73).

Malleson's desire to create spaces for performances as close to traditional theatres as possible should come as no surprise given not only his own theatrical background in the West End theatre, but also the fact that as early as April 1918 he was writing a "Plea for the Little Theatre" to the editor of the Nation (74). In it, he outlined the development of the movement in America and Europe and then moved on to discuss the growth in England of the desire for a theatre "that in its attempts and ideals should be other than that of the commercial theatre" - an "after-war theatre". The most encouraging sign, in Malleson's eyes, was the connection between this desire and the Labour movement, for

it is essential that the little theatre, however little it should be in its actual beginnings, should not be little or narrow in its ideals, should not be merely the plaything of a clique, but should keep in touch with the vital forces that are striving for a new world (75).

The Labour movement could also provide more than ideals. It could fulfil the "other essential need" of the Little Theatre - a permanent home. Many Labour halls had at least a small platform. Some also had electric light. Malleeson therefore suggested that the company performed a one-act play at the time the hall was usually used for a political meeting, thus finding not only a suitable space but also a welcoming audience. From there, the group could (over time and after it had learnt from its mistakes) look for a permanent home in the form of a hall which could be transformed into a little theatre, although he stressed throughout that it was essential for it to keep in touch with the "labour centres" - aided by the purchase of a "portmanteau theatre", which at the cost of a few hundred pounds would enable the little theatre to tour to many localities.

Malleeson's ideas did not fall on deaf ears within the Arts Guild, possibly because many of the professionals attached to the Guild had their own connections to the Little Theatre and Repertory movements. To give just a few examples - Lewis Casson, J. Fisher White and Edith Craig were all on the council for the British Drama League (to which both the ILP as a national organisation and individual groups affiliated), Margaret Yarde was on the council of the Play Actors, and Sybil Thorndyke appeared on the advisory committee of the Venturers Society. Not only did the term "little theatre" become common currency on the pages of the New Leader, but there are many examples of the local groups attempting to create a "theatrical" environment in which to perform. Thus, the West Salford group was proud to boast that following their first



season they were hoping to use the ensuing profit to equip a stage (at least with a suitable curtain), and in Long Eaton, the Labour Players used the profits from a performance of Yaffle's Foiling the Reds to pay for a pair of stage curtains. Hayle ILP took their "courage in both hands" and rented a hall which they hoped to "furnish" in a suitable style, and in Gateshead great excitement met the decision in 1922 to invest £20 in a movable stage. Here the group had the advantage of using the local ILP hall as a permanent home, although they did have to share the premises with the more profitable whist drives and dances which meant undertaking the very tedious effort of erecting the stage on Sunday for a dress rehearsal, taking it down at midnight, re-erecting it for the Wednesday performance and dismantling it once again for the Saturday dance. Such conditions were far from ideal for the drama group, and Norman Harrington, one of the group's members, rather wistfully reviewed the first production by the Ashington group which took place in a hall

which can comfortably seat eight hundred people in red plush tip-up and cane chairs; heated throughout with hot-water pipes and built in dome like fashion, so that the voices of the players, however weak, can be heard distinctly at the back of the hall (76).

In addition, Ashington ILP had the use of a permanent stage fitted with headlights, footlights, side-arcs and drop curtains. Harrington finished his review by exclaiming "If only we had something like it nearer home", no doubt thinking of the small unsteady stage at Gateshead with its rudimentary portable lighting board and the small attic rehearsal room (which only allowed six people to move at any one time) with its wall of glass which let in the wind and rain (77).

The Gateshead Progressive Players did eventually get their own "Little Theatre" but they had to wait until 1943 for the privilege, by which time "any political link had long since ceased". In Glasgow, however, the Players were luckier for from April 1928 they had use of the Little Theatre which formed part of the Keir Hardie Institute and which boasted an "up to date" stage and dressing rooms. The group in Bradford were even more fortunate in finding a permanent home in the new Jowett Hall (opened in 1927), and as well as including a reference library, meeting room, cafe and "smoke room", the hall also incorporated a 500 seat little theatre complete with its own dressing rooms. Although it was furnished with a maple floor for dancing (meaning the group still shared the space with other activities), the room boasted a permanent proscenium arch stage complete with full lighting effects, and was tastefully decorated:

The colour scheme is in soft greys, relieved by a blue ceiling. The ILP monogram in crimson and gold decorate the roundels on the balcony front. The stage curtains of petunia velvet complete the artistic scheme (78).

Glasgow and Bradford were however very much the exception, and despite all the talk of creating theatre spaces, many groups had to make do with whatever they could find - and conditions were often far from ideal, as the Bradford group were only too well aware. Prior to the opening of Jowett Hall, they had worked most often in the Textile Hall, a small cramped space where it was impossible to get across the humour of their 1926 production of A Woman's Honour because

the players were unable to be seen or heard by many of the audience or to move freely on the low cramped stage (79).

In West Salford, the Arts Guild used the ILP meeting hall where the size of the room limited the stage area and "general effects", in Enfield, the first performance by the group took place in a small hall on a small stage; and as groups toured around the halls of their local ILP branches or performed as part of larger meetings, they must have become adept at dealing with the most cramped and inauspicious stages. All of which make Malleson's idea of "little theatres" nearer to a dream than to reality (80).

Given such emphasis on creating theatre spaces, the notices of the work of the Guild carried in the New Leader make surprisingly scant reference to the nature of the performances. Unlike the Clarion, there is little comment about the acting abilities of the groups or the stage presentation apart from the occasional remark as in the case of the Hackney ILP Players performance of RUR where the reviewer felt the cast must learn to "dispose rather more with the prompter" or the praise for the "flapping window blinds and banging doors" of Golders Green's 1930 production of Patrick Hamilton's Rope. Other ILP papers were a little more forthcoming and developed a "Clarion" style of review. So, the reviewer from the Northern Democrat criticised the Progressive Players setting for Galsworthy's Windows;

I must confess that I did not like the setting. The ornaments on the mantelpiece, the pictures on the walls, the furniture, and that terrible yellow frieze rather suggested a working-class kitchen than the dining-room of a wealthy man (81).

He went on to comment on the nature of the acting commending Margaret Nixon for speaking well (despite being inclined to

laugh with the audience) and James Rowell for keeping still between his lines, criticising James Conway for trying to imitate "the popular idea of a French Apache", and praising Sylvia Dodds for her "admirable restraint", although she made the mistake of wearing real spectacles on stage which reflected the footlights and were "apt to disconcert the audience". The Leeds Weekly Citizen regularly took the Armley ILP Players to task during their 1926 season, criticising the monotonous delivery in one production, the slipping Irish brogue of another and in a double bill of Brighouse plays pointing out not only the late start of the performances and the use of hard chairs instead of a sofa, but also the fast speech and bad elocution, concluding that "much practise is needed". In Scotland, John S. Clarke, writing for Forward applied similar criticism to the work of Govan ILP, where he noted the sad bunch of flowers carried by one character in their performance of Candida, and the bad publicity, although he did concede that at "this early stage in the movement", encouragement must more than balance criticism (82).

Even less was written in the New Leader about the organisation of the groups themselves. One anonymous group wrote to the New Leader describing their trials and tribulations - the problems of the producer who has an argument and walks out, and the headache of using the ILP hall which is wanted for a hundred other reasons being uppermost in their minds. However, things gradually improved over time, but in this improvement were the seeds of the group's destruction,

For in disaster comradely feeling made the members stand together, but any success was invariably followed by a row (83).

In Bradford, the group was determined not to become a clique, but rather saw themselves as a "band of brothers" all sharing an adventure:

We repudiate the idea of an established producer and established stars. We are not an aristocracy but an artistic democracy, which means chances for all, and the systematic search for ability. We want a continuous flow of new blood and no vested interest in the positions of prominence (84).

However, whilst the national paper seemed to show little interest in the development of the artistic abilities or organisation of these "little theatres", the Arts Guild itself took such matters seriously, and, in London at least, organised a number of schools to help groups.

#### Training the Guild: Weekend Schools.

Towards the end of 1927, the London Committee established a series of weekend schools which aimed, through a series of lectures and "instruction of a practical nature" (presented by experts) to improve the quality of the work of groups in London, and in practice also helped the members to work out a more theoretical framework for the Guild. So, the 170 students who attended the first school in October 1927 were greeted on the Saturday morning by a discussion led by Malleon and Ashley Dukes on the importance of the Socialist movement finding expression through dramatic art. According to the London Secretary, Cecily Cook, Malleon had insisted with "passionate sincerity" that art at its best was "the soul of the people made articulate". Ashley Dukes spoke on the

relative merits of the "drama of romantic assumption" and the drama of "social indignation", challenging propagandist assumptions and concluding that

if posterity were to be the test...then the schools of romantic assumption must be allowed the field (85).

Discussion continued in the same vein after tea, with Frederick Woodhouse asserting that the test of all art was its emotional sincerity (a thesis he illustrated with a selection of English ballads played by A.A.Gregory). and Arthur Hagg, secretary of the Handicraft section of the Guild, discussing the influence of this work on dramatic productions and in the wider movement. Practical work finally emerged in the evening, when the students were entertained by Fulham's production of "The Policeman's Serenade" from Riverside Nights, but it was not until the Sunday that they really started to get to grips with their own problems of production. The morning was spent working on The Price of Coal with Malleson, and in the afternoon, Robert Young talked about stage management, the discussion revealing that

many Groups have advanced far in the direction of modern presentational methods and the desirability of providing a course on up to date lighting methods at the next school was very evident (86).

After tea, and a discussion on the "domestic" matters of organisation, several performances were given, with Dulwich staging McKinnel's The Bishop's Candlesticks, Battersea offering A Night at the Inn by Lord Dunsany, Southend attempting the first scene from St Joan, and Hackney breaking

newer ground by performing a scene from The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist - all of which were commented on by Malleon.

The first school, the most successful to be organised by the Guild (in terms of numbers at least), set the pattern for subsequent sessions. In general, the weighting was more towards "theory" than practice, with H.F. Rubenstein and C.W. Hanson arguing about the relative merit of propaganda in May 1928 and Benn shocking "some of us into a reconsideration of dramatic presentation", and Hilda McNulty discussing American drama at the school held in November 1928. Some of the introductions offered more practical advice; Peter Godfrey (who had lent the Guild the Gate Theatre in May 1928) talked about lighting, Margaret Yarde about make-up, and in 1929 Harold Ridge of the Cambridge Festival Theatre spoke on "How to get the Most from the Actor"; but apart from a few productions by different groups (generally criticised by a professional) there seemed to be little attempt to hold practical sessions for the Guild members. Undoubtedly, these schools did allow them to see the work of other groups; so in May 1928 those at the school had the opportunity to witness two original plays (one by performed by Reading and one by Woodford) as well as a performance of a Brighthouse play by the Pax Players and a "first class" performance of The Dark Lady of the Sonnets) by Hampstead, but when we look at the audiences most groups played to anyway, a question mark hangs over whether this could be construed to be a useful initiative (87).

Looking for the Unconverted: The Question of the Audience.

Whilst the New Leader dreamt of the "immediate joys" the Arts Guild productions might bring to thousands of workers "wearied by a monotonous and sordid struggle for the bare necessities of life", Tom Thomas was less hopeful:

We regarded the Sunday performances of the Malleon group...as falling right inside the category of what we did not want to do...This again was an already converted audience (88).

And, on looking at the evidence from the pages of the ILP press, it appears that Thomas' assessment of the audience for the Arts Guild was closest to the reality. Many (if not most) of the Guild's performances were either for their own or other ILP branches and had a kind of club atmosphere - a night out for the local ILP members and their friends. Even some of the larger performances could reflect this atmosphere of the ILP performing for the ILP, as Trevelyan commented on reviewing the ILP Arts Guild Central Group's performance of Scrapped:

I repeat my wish that a wider public could have been there to appreciate both the drama and the acting skill. I hope that our members and their friends, realising what they have missed in not coming to the first of the Guild productions, will make up for it by coming in January and February to the rest of the series (89).

On a local level, the groups perpetuated an ILP audience by making what must almost have become a tiresome round of the branches nearest to them. Cheetham Hill's schedule for the last three months of 1927 was in many ways typical, comprising several performances for Oldham ILP, a visit to comrades in



Blackpool on New Years Day, and a performance of Foiling the Reds as part of their own social. To Cheetham Hill we could add any number of performances picked at random from the pages of the New Leader - Armley's performances of Our Bessie at neighbouring ILP branches in the winter of 1929, Huddersfield's visit to Normanton ILP with Black 'Ell, the production of Caste by North Westminster which toured branches in Loughton and Leyton, and Hampstead's performance of Conflict taken to Amersham. Such was the abundance of these "internal" performances, that the annual Arts Guild Report for 1930 commented that they were becoming "quite a part of the life of the ILP in their localities" and Malleson offered to help centrally organise performances for different branches (90).

The dramatic groups also became a common feature at many of the nationally organised events. So the Norwich Conference of 1928 was entertained by the London Arts Guild performing Masses and Man, the North West London Annual Reunion was enlivened by the Hampstead dramatic group performing Glaspell's Suppressed Desires, and Hampstead were also present at the London and Southern Divisional Council ILP Rally in 1926 (this time with Golders Green) where there were performances of Dunsany's Fame and the Poet and Shaw's O'Flaherty V.C. (91). However, although these formed the central core of the Guild's work, many groups did venture outside these confines. Some were forced to look to other halls in their localities in which to perform, as in Nottingham where the dramatic group found its home in the local Reform club, in Golders Green where the Players appeared frequently in the hall in Bridge Lane, or in Hornsey where they

organised a series dramatic and musical evenings at the Cambrai Club. Although these venues were used out of necessity by many groups, by virtue of the fact that they were not the local ILP rooms, the groups may have attracted some audience members from outside their own immediate circle (92).

A more conscious effort to find a different audience was tried at times. Performances were arranged for other local political organisations; in Kirkcaldy, for example, the ILP dramatic group organised two performances of The Miner for the Dysart Labour Party Women's Section and in Dumfries, the ILP dramatic Party performed The Price of Coal for the local Labour Party, whilst further south in Birmingham, the Erdington ILP Dramatic Circle performed three one act plays for Water Orton Labour Party. Nor were all outside performances confined to the local Labour Party and the ILP did make some further attempts to find the wider audience who could be persuaded to socialism through drama rather than propaganda. In Wales, the Merthyr group looked for new pastures in the workingmen's clubs at Pentrebach and Cwmaman, and in the North East, the Gateshead Progressive Players (with their self-proclaimed desire to present plays which were "good of their kind" to working class audiences") made good use both of the large number of miners clubs in the locality and of the invitations offered to them by neighbouring dramatic societies. In Tunbridge Wells, the local Arts Guild arranged to perform two short plays in the villages. In London, small groups performed plays for the wider Socialist and co-operative movement and for a week in the summer of 1930, the People's Theatre Players in Southend travelled through rural Sussex with plays by Shaw and

Malleson, performing in villages where the "opportunity for seeing dramatic performances were few and far between". Here they used the opportunity of combining the performances with political speeches and at the Barn Theatre in Little Easton, Essex managed to attract an audience of some two to three hundred "country folk", some of whom had come from a long distance. In touring the villages, the People's Players had been preceded three years earlier by an anonymous ILP group, who were on this occasion accompanied by a reporter from the Daily Herald to their performance in a village hall on the edge of their constituency. Here they performed a play in a village dominated by the landowner, to an audience of some 400 most of whom were "virgin soil". The applause was so good, that according to the accompanying journalist, the players wished that they had had the confidence to bring their anti-war play as well - the omission of which might make us question quite what it was the touring groups did perform to these new audiences (93).

Yet the paucity of examples of this type of performance suggests that the NAC were rather overstretching the mark when they claimed in 1930 that a "number of groups have plays prepared to tour", and we have to conclude that although the desire to perform in other areas may have existed, in practice these performances were few and far between. One of the most startling failures of the Arts Guild is their reaction to the 1926 General Strike and the subsequent miners lockout. As a whole, the party threw itself wholeheartedly into raising money for the miners:

ILP halls were thrown open for every imaginable kind of effort in connection with the miners struggle.

They became improvised hostels for miners choirs, bands, and wandering troubadours; they were meeting places for distress committees; every night of the week there were concerts, dances, whist drives in aid of the miners funds (94).

Dances, whist drives, playing host to miners choirs, open air and promenade concerts, treasure sales, jazz bands, gramophone parties in the street - but very few dramatic performances. The Head Office did send a letter to all branches urging those

within reach of the coalfields to seek to brighten the lives of the miners by arranging for concert parties and dramatic societies to visit them. The ILP Arts Guild has already proved of great value in such work. The National Arts Guild Committee has also suggested to its Guilds elsewhere that they should arrange special performances and send the proceeds to the ILP Miners Fund (95).

But, whilst Brockway claimed that the "whole of the Guild machinery was used" for the organisation of strike concerts and entertainments and that all over the country dramatic groups and choirs "were able to do extraordinarily useful work", the evidence of dramatic performances on the pages of the ILP press is scarce. In the North East, in the heart of the coalfields, the Progressive Players did respond with performances of The Pitman's Pay in Houghton-le-Spring and Ouston. In Bradford, the ILP Arts Guild were able to send between £65 and £70 to the miners' wives and children as a result of three performances of Strife, and in Golders Green performances of The Price of Coal were given to strikers and sympathisers in aid of the women and children. But these three examples, although all of plays relevant to the strike itself,

seem to form the total of the Guild's dramatic contribution to the General Strike and the miners' lockout (96).

It is worth noting, however, two points in conclusion to any discussion of the Guild's audience. Firstly, some performances could attract wider audiences almost by accident, as in the case of one local group's production of Malleon's Conflict which "invited a long press correspondence upon the question of Socialism" and calls for a repeat performance of the play. And, secondly, we should not leave the question of audiences with the impression that the groups simply performed to small groups of friends and comrades. Even performances in their own halls could at times attract large numbers and two examples will suffice to illustrate this point. In Ashington, the theatre held (over a number of nights) 1800 to see the production of Pygmalion in 1928, and in Armley Conflict was seen on one night by 600 in 1926, and in the following year, Scrapped attracted 500 people to one performance (97). In other ways, the Guild also made attempts to stage larger performances which could attract bigger audiences.

#### The Central ILP Players.

One of the keynotes in establishing a national organisation was the encouragement of co-operation between local groups, and in his pamphlet Malleon suggested two simple ideas to this end. Branches should ("where the distance, the size of the cast and production make transport possible") perform for others, and productions could be "exchanged", properties and

costumes being hired to other groups for a minimal charge, thus reducing costs and enabling groups to produce more plays. More ambitiously, and on Malleson's own admission, further distant, he suggested the establishment of a permanent, self-supporting ILP company, rather in the mould of the Arts League of Service, to be made up from those "obviously gifted" members of the Arts Guild, and to be, constantly on the road. Nor was Malleson alone in the desire to create a permanent central company; Trevelyan spoke of the need to create a "Socialist Stage Society", W.C.Raffe looked for a group of "unemployed actors" to be subsidised by the Labour movement and to tour Labour halls performing plays of "propaganda value" and "stimulating local activity in production" and Ronald Gore Graham thought.

it may be a practical possibility for the Labour Party or the ILP to engage in conjunction with the AA [Actors Association] theatrical companies and send them on tour in the provinces presenting a repertoire of suitable plays. Visits could be organised by the local branches, the halls engaged and the event prepared for, and there seems every probability that it would not only be a success in its helping of the cause, but would actually be a financial success (98).

While such grandiose plans were for the future (and never did materialise under the guise of the Arts Guild), the scheme was tried out in miniature. Malleson had suggested the nine London groups not only started work in their own districts, exchanged performances and visited each other, but also that they formed

a company selected from all the groups, which shall not only visit each group, and possibly groups further afield, but give performances when required for the ILP Sunday Evenings at the Strand Theatre (99).

Whilst the performances at the Strand did not materialise (for the Strand seasons had ended by the time the New Leader announced the new project in November 1926), an all-London group, known variously as the Central ILP Players and the Repertory Players, did exist for a short four month period. In that time, the group, which drew its members from the (by then) twenty five London based groups, offered a season of three performances, significantly based not on performances for branches but at large London theatres.

The original announcement for the scheme appeared in the New Leader in November 1926, stating that the company would have its headquarters at the Blackfriars Theatre and that the season would include Alma Brosnan's Scrapped, a Grand Guignol evening, Inheritors by Susan Glaspell and Elmer Rice's The Adding Machine (100). The Susan Glaspell play was soon dropped and the three others made up the final programme which started in December 1926, at the Blackfriars Theatre, with Scrapped. C.P.Trevelyan's review of the play in the New Leader was headed: "Scrapped: An ILP Play", and so it was. Not simply for the fact that it was written by Alma Brosnan, a member of the ILP and a leading member of the Arts Guild in Bath and revised with the help of Miles Malleson, but also because both the form and themes of the piece reflected what were to become some of the mainstays of the Arts Guild productions (101). Trevelyan described the play and the production as.

an unexaggerated piece of real life, culminating in minor tragedy. One after another the different members of a fine family become the victims of unemployment or the other oppressions of our present capitalist existence (102).

A naturalistic piece, Scrapped is set in the "small villa home" of a lower middle class family, the Bergers. In order to emphasise the impact unemployment has on people's lives, the first act concentrates on their triumphs and achievements. The daughter, Ellen wins her much worked for scholarship to college, and John Berger (the father) is absent for much of the Act at the firm's dinner, returning proudly with an initialled suitcase and an illuminated framed address, the reward for thirty-five years dutiful service to the Mercury. The only discordant notes in the entire Act come from Aunt Annie, John Berger's unmarried sister who lives in the house and works as a shop-assistant. Thirty-five years of seeing the reality of business have made her more sceptical than the others; it has taught her that it is "pounds, shillings and pence" that are the real master, and she sees little reason to be proud of a framed address:

They didn't give you a bundle of shares, and make you a director? That 'ud be more to the point, I'm thinking (103).

By the beginning of Act Two, the Bergers' night of triumph has faded and the world of Aunt Annie and unemployment takes hold. Much of the rest of the play is concerned with showing both the destruction of the individual family members and of the family as a whole as it slides into bickering and squabbling. The impact is greatest on John Berger; as his newspaper merges with the town's other paper (its arch rival for many years) and he finds that despite his years of hard work he is no longer needed, he changes from a "loyal husband, loyal worker, loyal churchman, non-smoker, non-drinker" into a human wreck. At <sup>the</sup> end of Act Two, after months of fruitlessly searching for



work, he takes the illuminated address from its place of honour on the wall and smashes it to pieces, and by the beginning of the Act Three, he is a physical wreck, the result of a stroke

...he has no memory and takes no interest in anything, except food and warmth; for all the part he takes in what follows he might be a domestic pet (104).

Nor is he the only member of the family to lose his job and to be altered by the experience. Jack, the "foolish" and cheerful son of Act One, who enjoys nothing better than singing comic songs, very quickly becomes a bitter, angry and at times tearful man, as his seven year apprenticeship comes to an end, and instead of being employed by the company he finds his job taken by a new apprentice. Even Aunt Annie suffers the same fate, turned away from the shop because she is too old and will not be quiet about the manager's son who has got one of the young assistants "into trouble". From the smart and confident woman of the beginning of the play, she becomes unkempt and, like Jack, bitter, although her bitterness is centred on not being able to keep Ellen at college, not being able to fulfil all her hopes through her niece.

Nor is Alma Brosnan content to simply portray the suffering - and it is suffering laid on in an amount which at times makes it feel unendurable. Trevelyan left the performance feeling

far more vividly than before how decent, how simple men and women could be if they were only given a fair share of security. It is that which our present economic system entirely denies to them (105).

Throughout, she is constantly trying to bring into the Berger's small living room both the reasons for all this suffering and the stupidity of the world that creates such pain, and wastes people. Whilst most of the play is set in the house, the outside world is introduced through two interludes inserted between scenes (to be played in front of the curtain): one a scene outside the dole office showing the men queueing to get their money, and one in the shop where both Annie and Ellen work. Whilst these contribute to an understanding that it is the world outside the house which creates the problems, her main method of exposing the causes is confined to the impact of the outside world inside the house.

The reason for what happens is Aunt Annie's: the dominance of money. John Berger's paper merges with the Gazette for profit, apprentices get Jack's job because they are cheaper, Ellen has to give up hopes of becoming a teacher because the family cannot give her sufficient money to stay at college. Much of the railing against the world comes from the mouth of Jack; his experience of life leads him to attack the stupidity of a world that says engineers are not wanted:

Why, even in a town like this, look at the things we could do if they'd let us get at it...things that want doing...and we're tramping the streets! (106).

He learns about the rules of "business" from an article in the paper by Major-General Hughes, an article about

the "Won't-works" and the "Work-shies". I know something about Major-General Hughes; he's a director of Jones'. Well Jones' have just turned off fifty hands - knowing they'll want 'em back in six months. Somebody's got to keep 'em; and they're kept - the dole; parish relief; charity...And Mr Blasted

Jones and Company, living on the dubs, sneer at them, knowing quite well the minute they want 'em the whole crew'll come rushing back, cap in hand, cringing for jobs..."Business" they call it. Anything's alright as long as it's "Business" (107).

He does not confine his attacks to the world outside but also has plenty to say about his father's attitude of "honest service for honest pay" - an attitude which the action of the play shows to be completely misplaced. Yet when it comes to finding solutions or a way out, apart from Jack's throwaway remark about painting the whole house red (to which Mrs Berger replies she had better choose the colour of the paint), neither Jack nor Ellen have an answer. The younger generation sees the only way to survive is to play the world at its own game. If anything is alright as long as it is "Business", then

Why should we be any different!.."Won't-works".  
Work! Why the devil should they! Why don't they  
follow the example of their masters, and rob? (108).

This is exactly what both children set out to do; Jack sets up a mail order business with his girlfriend Babs which buys articles cheaply and sells them as "bargains" for twice the price. Ellen becomes a sales assistant and uses her charm to marry the manager's son in order to get control of the company. It is in the portrayal of Ellen's loss of innocence that Alma Brosnan most clearly argues that such solutions do not save either of them from being "scrapped" alongside the older generation, for they have to give up any principles or ideals in order to survive. At the start of the play, Ellen is a guileless young girl, so unaware that the married Reverend she admires and who inspires her with idealism is in love with

her that she shows him her new and very decoupee evening dress, asking him in all innocence if he thinks it is too low cut. By the end of the play, she is a hard-faced shopgirl, who smokes and preens in front of the mirror and is prepared to marry Ronnie Carlesden because she wants to walk into the shop the mistress of the business. She has even married him secretly, and leaves the house to go on a honeymoon to Paris without telling her mother anything about her marriage.

No solution is forthcoming either from the one character who has not been discussed so far, and the one character who stands outside of the impact of "Business" by virtue of living her life entirely inside the house - Mrs Berger. She spends the play fussing around the other family members, cleaning, cooking, looking after them (Alma Brosnan certainly portrays a housewife's job as never finished). She never lifts her nose from her job, and whilst the enclosed protection of the house means she is not "tainted" by the world outside (her motto throughout is "Be Kind"), it also means she is not equipped to deal with the arguments from it. Yet by the end there is a small glimmer of light. Faced with Jack's description of how he intends to "con" people, she attempts for the first time in the play to respond critically, realising at the same time, her own short comings:

I've been thinking over what you told me just now, and I'm not happy about it. No I'm not. Sometimes I wish I hadn't gone "pottering about the house", as your aunt says, with my nose to the job I was doing, so that I could argue with you now, and show you how wrong you are (109).

While she then goes on to wish Jack's father had been "spared his health" so he could show Jack the error of his ways, and Jack, just a little taken aback, all but ignores her speech to go off and carry on with his great new scheme in the office, the final image of the play leaves her as the central character amidst the wreckage:

...Mrs Berger crosses and sits down. On one side of her old John Berger smiles and twitters, on the other old Annie Berger, with no sound cries...Mrs Berger looks from one to the other. From the other room comes the sound of the piano, and of a rollicking comic song, and of Jack and Babs laughing gaily...Very quietly the curtain comes down (110).

The play is a very moving picture of the human cost of unemployment, and it was a play which succeeded in angering Lever Brothers, the owners of the Blackfriars Theatre. Whilst they allowed the Arts Guild to stage their next performance there, they then prohibited use of the building stating that Scrapped was too "red" (111).

Whilst Scrapped proved, in the eyes of the New Leader, that the Arts Guild had something to important of its own to say and was capable of saying it quite effectively, the second performance, a series of "real thrillers", proved that the Guild did not intend to continue to say the same thing all the time (112). The four short thrillers (to be performed once again at the Blackfriars Theatre) were billed under the collective title of a "Grand Guignol Evening", and the idea for this type of performance may have come from Lewis Casson and Sybil Thorndyke who were both involved in the original seasons of Grand Guignol at the Little Theatre between 1920 and 1922. Indeed two of the plays chosen by the Central London

Players (Progress by St John Ervine and E.Crawshay Williams' Amends) were both performed during these seasons. The other two pieces on this occasion were Aunt Bertha a "delightful trifle" by W.Gibson Cowan (an Arts Guild member from Walthamstow who also performed in the first piece), and Episode by Harley Granville Barker (113).

Grand Guignol (in essence, short plays of violence, murder and ghostly apparition designed to send a frisson of terror through the audience) would seem to be not only a long way from Scrapped, but also a long way from the ideals of the ILP. Yet an examination of the two plays which it has been possible to trace (Amends and Progress) would suggest otherwise. The possible choice of plays from the Grand Guignol repertory was large and varied. It included both witty comedies such as Crawshay Williams' Cupboard Love (in which a man having got into a "nice" girl's bedroom is locked in the wardrobe for the night), and gruesome tales, such as Robert Francheville's The Regiment, a story of a Polish conscript who swops the smallpox vaccine for rabies and infects 1500 men, all of whom (after much howling both on and offstage) have to be shot (114). Yet both pieces chosen by the Guild were realistic tragedies. Each did contain deaths (at the end of Progress a scientist is stabbed to death and in Amends a man is left in a drunken sleep as the room fills with gas), but they were both more than simply pieces designed to shock an audience.

In Amends, which tells the story of a "wreck of a man" visited by his former girlfriend whom he sees as the cause of his downfall and whom he persuades to make "amends" by killing

him, Crawshay Williams stresses the emptiness of life under the present system - a theme which Alma Brosnan had explored in Scrapped. Progress, on the other hand, is essentially an anti-war play and an argument against killing, in which Professor Henry Corrie, the inventor of a formula for a bomb which could wipe out an entire city, is pitted against his sister, Mrs Meldon, whose son Eddie was blown to pieces by a shell in the First World War and whose husband died shortly afterwards from a broken heart. Corrie's "realistic" facts lose out in argument against the human cost of war as put by Mrs Meldon, who is given long and emotional speeches about her son growing up only to be

obliterated, as you say, by men who had never seen him, who didn't even know they'd killed him. And all my years of love and hope and desire and pain - gone! I'd nursed him and cared for him and taught him little lessons and been proud of him - and then in a moment my beautiful son was...obliterated, Henry!

(There is a slight pause while she recovers herself).

You see don't you, Henry, that I can't take a broad view of that. I can only see my son's body mutilated and destroyed. That's all (115).

In the end, she has to use murder to prevent murder, stabbing her brother to death to stop him putting his formula into practice. Whilst not all anti-war plays performed by the Guild ended on such a dramatic note, the arguments about the human cost of war, the futility of the slaughter in the trenches reappear time and again in the plays performed by the ILP.

Unemployment is another recurring theme, already made use of in Alma Brosnan's play and one which reappeared (albeit in a very different style) in the third play produced by the

Central London Players, Elmer Rice's The Adding Machine. Performed at West Central Hall (opposite Goadge Street station), which held twice the audience of the Blackfriars theatre, this was to be the last of the Central Players performances and that fact may account for the reason the New Leader chose not to make any comment on the play at all (apart from noting the number of well-known ILP members who came to see the play) - a strange omission give the innovatory style of the play (116).

Whilst The Adding Machine was the final play in the season by the Central ILP Players, it was not the only attempt by the Arts Guild to set up and produce plays in London with a central company. On 20th January 1928 a note in the New Leader mentions that rehearsals for Toller's Masses and Man were in hand, though there were still parts available for men. The production was being organised by the London Committee of the Guild and was performed at the West Central Hall on Tottenham Court Road on Saturday 3rd March. Reviewing the production, Francis Meynell felt that despite all the difficulties encountered by the group (they had been unable to rehearse the play all the way through on the stage, and had been faced with financial problems and changing personnel), "the performance was not merely good 'considering' but positively, definitely good, better and even in some details best" of the productions he had seen of the play. The "show was so good by any standard, that it needed no adventitious excuses or patronage, no allowances, no sympathy". In his view, the play itself was an obvious, if not an easy choice:

It is the most immediate, and as far as I know, the most significant interpretation in dramatic form of



the conflicting tendencies, ethical, temperamental and tactical which go to make up the international Socialist movement today...It is...a personal record of the spiritual agonies that beset the "tender-minded" who find themselves involved in the blood and mud of war - even of class-war. It is more, it is the universal tragedy of human ideals and limitations, of man's capacity to perceive perfection and his importance in the face of a reality which inexorably links good with evil, of his enforced choice between helpless quietism on the one hand and the violation of the individual conscience on the other (117).

Whilst this description might not have been to Toller's liking (he was not pleased by a later production of the play that emphasised pacifism), Meynell felt the production was remarkably appropriate to the character of the play. In both the realistic and dream sequences, the London Arts Guild brought the audience into the play:

The speeches at the meetings of workers which was to decide for revolution or strike were delivered not from the stage but from speakers' platforms set on opposite sides of the auditorium. I for one felt that I had become a part of the conflict and discussion. In a later scene, the revolutionary leaders trapped in their headquarters, hear the soldiers bursting in. They rise and sing the Internationale. But not they only. The audience without deliberation, without awareness of the aid they were lending the scene - the audience too, took up the song (118).

At the end of the performance, a member of the audience offered £100 for the play to be performed in other places, and, subsequently, a special performance took place at the West Central Hall on Saturday April 14th.

This was followed by another production in the following year also organised by the London Area Committee of the Guild. This time the play they chose was The Man With A Load of Mischief written by ILP member Ashley Dukes. The performance took

place at the Cripplegate Theatre, and was billed, not as a political event, rather as relaxation following the political work of the election. Directed by Francis Pitt (and with a cast that included Arthur Hagg, Vice-President of the Arts Guild and also secretary of the Repertory Players), the production attracted criticism from the usually very partisan New Leader. It attacked both the choice of play, and (somewhat strangely after the very ambitious production of Elmer Rice's play) the standard of the production itself. The paper concluded that not only were period plays difficult for amateurs to enter into the spirit of, and that Ashley Dukes was too difficult for an amateur company to perform, but his social criticism was so nebulous that the choice of play rendered invalid a good deal of "very real Socialist talent" and effort. These criticisms also found an echo on the pages of the Bradford Pioneer, where W.C. Raffe described the play as "quite interesting" but declared it to be "no play for any Socialist group to spend time and money upon, as an element of Socialist propaganda" (119).

Such criticism appears strange when it is placed alongside Macheath's analysis of the play in the Sunday Worker, for he describes the play as "sheer Bolshevism". He concludes that Dukes only set the play in the Regency period to allow him to express criticism of society whilst still enabling the play to be performed in the professional theatre. The assessment of the ILP critics is stranger still when placed next to Dukes' own comments on the play (which he described as being about "the loading of mischief upon a man for his master's ends") and a look at the piece itself further adds to this

impression. The Man With a Load of Mischief tells an old story of a servant (The Man) being told by his master (The Nobleman) to make love to his mistress (The Lady) while he makes love to her servant (The Maid). But it is one which in this instance ends with The Lady falling in love with The Man and the pair eloping, and one which is full of criticism of the ruling class, as this speech by The Man (left alone on the stage) illustrates:

A world of appearance, says my lord - a painted mockery. Brave men, gay women - these are masks and shadows. Green trees, young shoots, high nests for crows - whispers, fancies. Bright mornings, quiver of the sunlight, falling dusk - darkness and dreams. This is an earth that men have made. Our stench corrupts the meadows, and the cattle hold their breath. This is an earth that men have made. All is appearance, says my lord, and smiles again - the smile that freezes laughter. If we are false, what can be true? And yet the folded leaf will open to the sun (120).

Given this (to which could also be added Dukes' declaration to use any money made from the play's American production to subvert and otherwise destroy the West End theatre), the comments of the ILP critics seem oddly directed.

At the beginning of 1929, a further initiative was taken. From the London Central Players, who had performed Masses and Man, a new group, the Experimental Players, was formed with Gibson-Cowan as the instigator. The first show was to be a revival of Alma Brosnan's Scrapped, to be performed in Wandsworth, with the idea of using it for election propaganda. This was followed by a second revival, this time of Masses and Man, which was performed on June 14 and 15 at the London School of Economics. Produced by Gibson-Cowan (who also once again

played the Nameless), and with a cast that included Olive Charles, the production echoed that of the London Central Players with the body of the hall being used as part of the stage. Reviewing the production (which he claimed was the best that he had seen), Benn commented that the play

in spite of the brooding shadow of defeat which hangs over the central characters throughout the play, reaches out to heights of heroism and magnificent endeavour and is written in a spirit that still strives after its primary faith and hope (121).

There were hopes to follow these two revivals with an entirely new production of Vsevolod Ivanoff's The Armoured Train, a play written to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution which tells of the civil war in Siberia, but these seem to have come to nothing - a shame really, given the fact that the Bradford Pioneer described the play (which was written in eight scenes, none of which lasted more than ten minutes) as "one of the swiftest examples of dramatic movement attempted for stage production" (122).

London was not alone in attempting to establish some kind of central company, although nowhere else met with even the limited success of the London organisation. In the North West, the Manchester and Salford ILP Federation (which also embraced choirs and a graphics section) managed to attract members from areas where no local group existed, although no record remains of any performances. In Glasgow, the initiative to set up the Federation of Glasgow Socialist Dramatic Societies was taken by the Clarion Players, although the Arts Guilds were soon very heavily involved, and Miles Malleon spoke at a lecture

recital held in January 1926. The organisation existed for at least eighteen months (from May 1925 to December 1926), but the group only made their "debut performance" at which they performed four one-act plays: Christ in the Kirkyard, A Sabbath Weel Spent, A Meetin' o' The Creditors and A Bargain's a Bargain, all of which were directed by Nell Greig, a long time member of the Clarion Players. It is also difficult to establish whether the performance was undertaken by one joint group, or if each affiliated organisation performed one or two pieces each (123).

More than Bread and Butter: Towards a Theory.

Behind all this activity, the members of the Guild were trying to work out theoretically the role their work could play on the path to socialism. Unquestionably, one starting point for the formation of the Guild (as with the Little Theatre movement) was a reaction to what was seen as the debased art of the commercial theatre; as the Bradford Pioneer made plain:

The commercial theatre is the stranglehold of people who merely wish to make money; in provincial towns the theatrical fare is meagre and worthless (124).

Arthur Bouchier expressed the same ideas, although with a little more understanding both as to why the theatre offered the fare it did, and why people went to see such plays:

In the present competitive capitalist era the theatre seems to be mainly an after-dinner resort or a shelter from the weather for people who have spent their day in some souless business, or some dispiritingly monotonous toil. Most of the theatres offer shows which are to be enjoyed only by leaving

one's brains in the cloakroom. And yet after spending eight or nine hours of the day at one of the many ways in which we win our bread, it is not surprising that a comedian's ribald song in praise of a comely wench or a glass of ale is preferred to an intellectually stimulating play (125).

Despite this understanding of what people might prefer, the Arts Guild set out to "supply better things", to give to those denied access to the "treasures of art and literature" (which should be "the possession of all") at least a small glimpse of that which they were denied. The desire for access to all art (and it was not, as Arthur Ponsonby explained an attempt to force footballers to appreciate Renaissance art or bookies to read Shakespeare) was in part an argument about accessibility and in part a feeling that there was something inherently of value in "great art" - in art that made people think or simply in creativity itself. Comrades themselves were told in no uncertain terms that they should consider it their "duty" to educate themselves, to study Hardy, Shaw, Ibsen and the poets and to read "good books" as "an aid of finding out the highest in life" (126).

At times the argument was couched in the ethical terms of "the higher life", as in Ethel Snowden's belief that people needed culture to make them "gentle and good", to "banish hate from our hearts" and to "plant therein righteousness and the love of humanity" or in the characterisation of the Guild as the "reincarnation of the spirit of William Morris" (127). But behind the flowery language, there was also a hard attack on a world that destroyed people's ability to live and deadened and cramped their potential by forcing them to work in drudgery and to live in poverty:

In this modern and systemised world, creative and artistic impulses are warped, cramped and distorted to an alarming extent (128).

These were the words of the Northern Democrat and the Guild believed that by offering people some "real art", they would begin to see the reality of the world in which they were forced to live. "A knowledge of good art, literature and music" said Comrade Lewis Jones at a lecture to Cheetham Hill ILP.

would help to raise the workers against the squalor of their conditions and make them revolt against the ugliness of it all (129).

To achieve this end, part of the Guild's job was to convince people that Socialism was not just about "bread and butter" nor was it simply "an arid economic system", but it was about the whole of life and the best of life. In the words of Rutland Boughton, artists were "a sort of finger-post", a pointer towards the way of life that might be shared by everyone:

The economic argument explains what must be changed in order to get Socialism, but it only explains part of the way along which we must travel to reach it and tells us very little of why we want it or what it will be like. The artist has to be called in to give the vision, form and content...(130).

In the process of dramatic performances, they could therefore both open people's eyes to the destruction reeked by the current world on their lives, and convince them of the potential for something different. And couched in these terms, it seemed to matter little quite what art was on offer.

Alongside these ideas, were others. By showing that workers were capable of appreciating and understanding the higher life (or in the words of Rutland Boughton, by showing that workers can produce "beautiful songs without any sort of conscious mental training") the Guild hoped to show that "aesthetic emotion" was not the special attribute of a small professional or cultured class, but that it was common to all. And if workers could be as "aesthetically" cultivated, surely they were capable of attaining power and fitted to be in control? Whilst waiting for that day, art could also prepare people for the future and equip them to enjoy the leisure that lay ahead - although sometimes such arguments were couched in terms that were far from "aesthetic":

Some people are fond of saying that Labour could not govern because it has no training, no experience. Now the finest possible training in dealing with men and women and crises is to be gained by organising a dramatic club (132).

All these arguments were riddled with contradictions, and throughout the history of the Guild arguments continued as comrades tried to resolve their dilemmas. For all their belief in the capabilities and potential of the people, there were numerous comments about the working class getting the art it "deserved", as E.G. Barlow in a lecture on "Art and Democracy" told ILP members in Gorton

the lives of the working classes seemed devoid of any beauty, partly owing to the present system of society and their own apathy with regard to these things (133).

There were others who began to question whether it was possible to achieve any real beauty under the present system.



"We cannot conduct our economic life according to one system, and possess a theatre that belongs to another" declared Bouchier. E.G.Barlow did not see how people were going to have "the best in life under a system that was steeped in materialism" and in the words of the programme for a concert held by Enfield branch:

Music and Art will not assume their true place in the everyday life of individuals and the community until the cash basis of life and competition for existence are changed to a new order based on social service for the Commonweal (134).

It was only under socialism that art and culture could truly begin to flourish, and Bouchier cited Trotsky to back up his argument

we shall then live in "a society which will have thrown off the pinching and stultifying worry about one's daily bread, in which communal laundries will wash clean everyone's good linen, in which children, all the children, will be well fed and strong and gay, and in which they will absorb the fundamental elements of science and art as they absorb albumen and air and the warmth of the sun, in a society in which electricity and radio will not be the crafts they are today, but will come from an inexhaustible source of super-power at the call of a central button, in a society in which there will be no "useless mouths" in which the liberated ego of man...will be directed wholly towards the understanding, the transformation, and the betterment of the universe" (135).

Trotsky was also used, this time by John S Clarke, to provide ammunition in another argument raging in the Guild - this time an argument about "access to bourgeois culture". For on one hand there were those who, for good reason, questioned ideas about "highbrow art"; Lewis Jones was concerned that the term would make "ordinary men and women think that a genuine appreciation of art was something beyond them", and A.Williams-

Ellis pleaded for members to be "modern and democratic" in their appeal, rather than "old-fashioned and highbrow". Discussing many members disdain for jazz (and in this he could have included Bouchier who described jazz as the "crude, cacophonous" expression of "the state of society"), he was, it transpired, concerned primarily with the fact that if the ILP looked for beauty only in the pastoral, they might miss it when it really appeared:

Beauty won't come perhaps to some carefully planned entertainment; no not even though there are children dancing there, and we are traitors if we pretend she came. She will go to a speech of Maxton's instead or perhaps to a music hall where you will hear her in the patter of the red nosed comedian or in the wheels and pistons of some great engine (136).

Whilst Williams-Ellis pleaded the case for a broader understanding of art rather than denying bourgeois culture had anything to offer to the workers (or that access to it was something worth struggling for), there were those in the party (and certainly many outside) who believed it worth only consigning to the rubbish bin. In reviewing Trotsky's Literature and Revolution, John S. Clarke used the opportunity to return the attack, spending much of the two part article denouncing those who argued for Proletcult (an idea which Trotsky believed to be a nonsense, for workers could not create their own art under capitalism as they did not control the means of production, and after a revolution there would be no working class to make its own art). He also used the space to explain Trotsky's ideas about how culture developed, and most importantly here, about why access to bourgeois culture was important in the development of the working class, why it was so much nonsense to shout:

Wipe out everything and build anew...A more fatuous gospel than this would be hard to find. Culture, that is, a developed system of knowledge and art in material and spiritual fields of work, is not something that can be manufactured like a pound of sausages. Neither can it be wiped out wholly as one erases a pencil mark (137).

He goes on to quote Trotsky directly, arguing that a new class does not begin to "create culture from the beginning", but "enters into possession of the past" which it sorts, "touches up", rearranges and then builds on. He returns to the argument in the following week, once again quoting Trotsky at length:

The main task of the proletarian intelligentsia in the immediate future is not the abstract formulation of a new culture regardless of the absence or basis for it, but definite culture-bearing, that is systematic, planful, and of course, critical imparting to the backward masses of the essential elements of the culture which already exists. It is impossible to create a class culture behind the backs of a class (138).

For Clarke, this meant the most important job the Arts Guild could undertake was "to ground the Socialist working class in bourgeois culture" (in the already existing knowledge which capitalism prevents them from acquiring in a multitude of ways), for the more this could be achieved prior to socialism, the "more rapidly will the work of cultural reconstruction occur after they have won political power".

Whilst this argument about access to bourgeois culture raged, another (not unconnected) debate over propaganda also runs through the history of the Guild. Writing in the Sunday Worker in October 1926, Ronald Gore Graham, who had by this time joined the Communist Party, started his attack on the Guild by criticising it for looking for access to art:

I should...guess that it was a middle-class body who sentimentalised over the Workers and wanted them to have all the artistic pleasures that go to make up their own comfortable and cultured lives (139).

But he reserved most venom for the fact that the Arts Guild boasted that its endeavours were not merely propagandist. It is a label which seems to have stuck. Raphael Samuel argues that propaganda was "subordinate to the more general aim of making great art available to working people"; Ian Saviile speaks of Malleson seeing drama primarily as a means of "cultural enrichment" which was "worthwhile for its own sake no matter what the content". In the light of the ideas discussed above and of comments from the likes of Snowden describing drama as a force for "moral teaching" or Bradford ILP's proclamation that they wanted to help the movement by "social and educative" effort, such an analysis would seem to be correct. Yet if left simply there, we would miss a part of the story and a part of the argument that raged through the life of the Guild (140).

There are, throughout the pages of the ILP press and in the ILP's writings on the Guild, numerous mentions of propaganda. So, for example, the NAC Report for 1928 welcomed the fact that <sup>the</sup> Guild was developing a new method of propaganda which was more effective than "the old street corner work"; or the Kirkcaldy group reported the great success of their "propaganda concert" in the same year; or the Golders Green group spoke of Scrapped as achieving renown as "good propaganda". These mentions of propaganda are, it is true, equally balanced by comments attacking the idea that the aim

of the Guild should be propagandist. Thus, Socialist Review attacked "didactic" drama as being as "great an abomination as the war propaganda cinematograph" and the Bradford Pioneer proclaimed that "plays, and surely opera, are not good propaganda" and that the ILP Arts Guild "is not propaganda breaking out in fresh places" and warned its readers that the function of a play was not "to enforce morals" but "to deepen and broaden your sympathies" (141). The contradictions were even embodied within individuals. Malleon, writing in his launch pamphlet for the Guild, spoke ("of course") of the fact the Guild would not just do propaganda plays, but neither would they be scared by the word:

After all, our civilisation is on the verge of catastrophe, and there is so much unnecessary misery in the world, largely because the mass of the people are ignorant of the facts of the society in which they live; and those that are loudest in their horror at "propaganda" mean by the word merely the dispelling of that ignorance (142).

Harold Scott, in an article for Socialist Review entitled "Propaganda in the Theatre", was completely incapable of making up his mind. Asking whether propaganda had a place in the theatre, he answered: in the work of a good dramatist, yes, but in the work of a bad dramatist, no, and he concluded by saying that he could discover "no general principles" from which to lay down laws for revolutionary dramatists - the success of the dramatist was dependent not on their propaganda but on the writing of "good" plays (143).

The argument (and the depth of the split inside the Guild) was best summed up by W.C.Raffe who declared

There appears to be two distinct elements at work, one of which believes that dramatic productions

should be "cultural" and the other which aims at propaganda of a very direct kind. The former will produce any sort of play, within its abilities and the available cast, which seems of interest; the other will attempt only work of the most obvious anti-capitalist type (144).

Believing both aims to be inadequate, Raffe himself tried to combine both approaches, arguing that there seemed to be no reason why propaganda should not be artistic:

There is no reason why a stage play should not be humanly attractive to any person apart from their political creed, and yet manage to state the Labour case effectively, in so far as it touches on the problem which may then be dramatically stated (145).

At its heart it was a debate over whether art was a suitable medium for propaganda or whether the Guild should aim to win people to socialism by opening their hearts to new feelings and aspirations - an aim best achieved by "good" and "high" art. At the centre were those, like Raffe (and to some extent Malleson who argued for propaganda plays which were "good" plays), who attempted to combine the two strands. As with the tensions in the Clarion over amateur dramatic groups and socialist dramatic groups, it was a tension that was never fully resolved, and in looking at two examples (and then at the plays produced by the ILP Arts Guild) we can begin to see both the potential and the problems the Guild faced.

In June 1922, the New Leader wrote

There seems to be a great rush of organisations to "broadcast" their propaganda by means of plays and sketches and some branches of the ILP are enthusiastically entering into the propaganda of Socialist pieces. People will come to witness a play when they would never dream of coming to listen to a speaker. The only thing to wonder at is that the

propaganda value of the stage has been so little taken advantage of during the last few years (146).

The article went on to discuss the spectacular success of one branch, which on finding that speakers were only able to half fill their hall, had introduced playlets. On the evening of their first production, they had been greeted with queues and the demand was so great the piece had to be performed three times, all to full houses.

The branch in question was Shettleston ILP and the sketch which met with such great success was The Fear of the Factor. Written by a Socialist magistrate (and performed with the help of music provided by the Clyde Workers Silver Band), the piece deals with issues close to the hearts of the working class in Glasgow: the factor, rents, unemployment and eviction. Whilst the setting of a working class kitchen was unashamedly naturalistic, the piece is full of open propaganda and class politics. In the first scene, this takes the form of "banter" between Meg, the mother of nine who thinks she should get the Victoria Cross for the number of children she has had and her neighbour Bessie, who tells her she would only get the medal if she "had kilt nine". In the third act, we get an open confrontation between the two sides when Jock, the out of work father, confronts the factor. When the factor shows no interest in what happens to Jock and his family, Jock sees clearly that profits are to be put before lives and later when the factor reminds him that he does not own the house, Jock's reply is an indictment of the social system:

Man, I ken that fine. Damn it, I an' mine own nothing but a wheen o' sticks an the claes that cover us. Ma class produces everything, your freens

tak' everything - whaur is the owner who built whit he owns? The mansions and motors, slums and palaces were built by us, and are owned by idlers. They control land and sea, hill and dale, the waters abin and the metals below. They control me and mine - I live by their leave, ma weans are infant slaves. I work when it profits them, I starve when it suits their system (147).

According to Forward the play ends with some rousing socialist propaganda, and its success in Glasgow encouraged the Edinburgh Melbourne Players to perform the piece, an event which they were to follow with a propaganda sketch written by their own branch secretary and entitled The Way Out (148).

In Glasgow, the success of their first attempt encouraged the branch (who had by now named the performers the Shettleston ILP Propaganda Party) to produce a second sketch. What Tommy Fought For was written in much the same style as their first attempt, but the breadth of its political propaganda was extended to include a wider scope of ILP politics, as Mary's opening speech (spoken to the audience as she prepares her husband's work clothes) illustrates:

I wunner wull there be ony work the day. Mrs Henry 'ill want her loaf back before the weans go to schule an I've naething but mae ring tae sen' roon tae the pawn. Tam's claes are wat yet. He widua ha'e started yesterday in sich a hole only we're just at the door. It wis his first shift in six months an' he's feart the place 'ill no last. I canna understan' the bisness at a'! Tam says the pits are stopped because the markets are glutted wi' coal an' here am I a collier's wife withoot as much coal as wid dry his pit claes. There's something wrang somewhere. It's time wimmen wur takin' mair interest in the rinnin' o' the country. I don't mean wimmin o' the Lady Astor kind, but the wimmin that work an' want (149).



In the course of the short piece, the characters discuss underconsumption theory (miners, dockers and builders are out of work because the working class cannot buy what they produce even though they need it, and while so many are out of work they do not have the money to buy things), the ILP meeting Tam has been to (where they discussed the tyranny of the alarm clock), why Black Tam, the mine owner is given a pit by his father but he will not give one to Tam's son and why Tam, during the war, was promised

woodbines an' chocolate, banns playin' an flags wavin'. Tommy this an' Tommy that. Over the top, Tommy, an' a grateful country 'll never forget you. Noo ma wife an' weans are staivin' an' I'm an Al pauper (150).

Inspired by Mary, who constantly asks her husband why he and the "ither simple sowl" do not join together to "get the wurld's wealth for the wurld's workers", Tam begins to think he can do something. At the end of the play, in the face of Miss Knox from the Good Citizens Union who has come to persuade them to vote alongside the mine owner, the landlord and the factor for the government candidate, Tam declares he will not only vote Labour, but will also join the ILP and:

Jist as you an' I have focht haun in haun against poverty, we'll fecht the system that creates poverty. An' when oor weans are men an' women, they'll see - not in France or Belgium - but in the peace an' plenty o' their ain firesides, whit Tommy fought for (151).

Whilst the New Leader at first welcomed the success of these propaganda playlets, it was not long before a small note of caution crept onto its pages. Inspired by the work in Glasgow, numerous short pieces had started to arrive at the paper's

office, but many were "so full of propaganda" that they read like "lectures and are warranted to scare off any but the most enthusiastic Socialist". In response, the paper reminded its readers that a "good propaganda play has got to be constructed like any other play" and advised members to stick to something simple (152).

In comparison to the work in Scotland, the Bradford ILP Arts Guild chose for its performance in February 1930 a comedy of the Italian Renaissance based on incidents in the life of Benvenuto Cellini, a Florentine artist - Mayer's The Firebrand. Although it was described as "no mere conversation play", it was clearly far from being a "political" or "instructive" piece (rather it was a story of Cellini's love affair with Angelica) and was reviewed on the pages of the New Leader by Brockway as a "gaily costumed" and "irresponsible" historical comedy. As such, he found much to recommend its production:

Why should Arts Guilds confine themselves to the nit of repertory and sombre realism varied by an occasional raid into the dark poetics of expressionist plays...I recommend this high comedy to any Guild who cares to forget for one production the necessity of stimulating the intellectual life and social conscience of its audience and to revel in excellent if scandalous fun and gorgeous dressing up (153).

Whilst Brockway may have been recommending the piece only as a part of a more serious repertoire, its production in Bradford brought forth a storm of complaints which found their way onto the pages of the Bradford Pioneer. First to reach print was Mrs Lea Hyam who demanded to know if the Arts Guild just viewed itself as a "few ILPers having fun" and warned of the

danger of it finding that it had been overtaken by the growing amateur movement in the city. The following week, the Bradford Civic Theatre were to perform Conflict, a "quite good Socialistic play" and Mrs Hyam declared in an incensed tone that they were

doing our work and in our spirit while we perform some footling rubbish because (the only reason I can find) the clothes are gorgeous and there are a few passages that sound like poetry to match (154).

Adding her voice to the complaints, Mrs Calvert took up the question of propaganda, which she felt was not being produced because of pressure from within the party:

When I have asked why not, I have been told our members aren't keen on such, that they want to laugh, that their lives are not very jolly, so they look to get fun and amusement out of the Guild (155).

Only two voices were raised in defence of the Guild's choice, one coming from an ILP member who was not in the Arts Guild, who valued the "excursion into another world" and saw the role of the Guild as being to save members "from the narrow outlook which makes our lives a routine of preparation for the next election". To this was added the voice of a Guild member who defined the aims of the Guild as being partly educative, partly experimental, and partly to put on plays by lesser known dramatists not seen at the commercial theatre. The aim of the Guild, in his eyes, had never been to perform propaganda plays. In the end his justification rests more on the fact that ILP members did not support the work of the Guild (if a third of the 800 who had seen The Firebrand were ILPers he was being generous), and the Guild had therefore to

rely on those outside the movement. His letter holds more than a hint of the fact that he clearly did not consider anyone else would come to see propaganda plays, and he ends with a sarcastic jibe at all who thought the work of the group should be propagandist - should the handicraft section embroider the ILP motif on all its work or should the theatre goers distribute propaganda at all the theatres? (156).

Shettleston and Bradford represent two extremes of the work of the Arts Guild, but the criticism sparked off by the Bradford production begins to show that there was no real cohesion in the attitude the members took towards their work - rather a series of debates and disagreements as they attempted to work out quite what their role was to be. And the two extremes also begin to show us that the plays the Guilds chose to perform were drawn from a much wider spectrum than the "fairly conventional diet of Galsworthy, Shaw and Malleon" suggested by Ian Saville (157).

#### Finding the Right Plays.

One of the central and most persistent problem faced by the Guild was the question of repertoire. Most of the letters received by the ILP (even before the establishment of the Guild) asked for advice in the choice of plays, and in his pamphlet Malleon made several practical suggestions concerning sources including recommending the British Drama League list, and the use of translations of plays being

performed in Little Theatres abroad. In order for groups to familiarise themselves with plays, he suggests the immediate formation of play-reading groups (using texts which could be borrowed from the British Drama League library) which would enable them not only to familiarise themselves with "the dramatic literature of the world" but also to discover local talent (158).

But Malleon's suggestions did not fulfill the great desire to perform plays of Labour or social interest. Those groups who chose to do plays with no political or social comment were often chastised in the labour press, a point already noted in connection with Bradford's performance of Mayer's Firebrand. The row was repeated in the wake of Golders Green's performance of Patrick Hamilton's Rope when even the New Leader reviewer was moved to ask

why...should the Socialists choose to revive Rope so recently seen in the West End when there are scores of first class plays crying out for production (159).

On the whole, the groups did manage to find a wide variety of plays they considered suitable for their purposes, and whilst Shaw was unquestionably one of the most popular playwrights (with twenty five of his plays being produced by Guild groups), he was by no means the only writer they looked to (160). In terms of popularity, Galsworthy was second to Shaw and Chekov's one act plays ran Galsworthy a close second, as did the plays of the Arts Guild's chairman, Miles Malleon. Although these numbered some eleven in total, they are incessantly concerned with two connected themes: war (or

rather arguments against war) and sex. The two themes are connected by being the prerogative of the young. They are in revolt against the mess the older generation has made of the world and against the values they hold, and spend much of the plays arguing about the need to do better. Many of Malleeson's leading characters are women; they either suffer loss through the war or are attempting to break free from the shackles of marriage - and they are all (with the exception of the servants) the middle class inhabitants of comfortable suburban houses (161).

Nearly as popular as the plays of Malleeson, were those of Toller - another writer consigned by Huntly Carter to the group of Centre-Left writers who were sympathetic to the workers in their themes but deeply "anti-Labour in their techniques". This view was not shared by the ILP groups or the ILP as a whole who were both quick to praise his work (Malleeson described The Machine Wreckers as "surely one of the greatest plays of our day") and to play an instrumental role in introducing his plays to the British theatre. Their efforts are well documented in an article by Richard Dove, where he points out that it was the ILP member Ashley Dukes who translated The Machine Wreckers (a play Toller dedicated to another ILP member, Wilfred Wellock) for its first English production by the Stage Society in May 1923 and that another ILP member, Lewis Casson produced the first performance of Masses and Man the following year. Given such support from leading members of the party (and on the pages of the New Leader, where as early as June 1922, Wellock was praising his work), it is not surprising many groups turned to his

plays, especially when it is coupled with the political closeness of the author (a member of the German USPD) and the ILP especially over the question of pacifism) (162).

In terms of helping the Guild members to break away from this handful of popular dramatists, the Arts Guild seemed to provide little leadership beyond trying to negotiate a lower fee through the British Drama League (something many amateur groups were involved with) and discussing the possibility of a library. The pages of the New Leader offered little more help. Reviewing the Strand performances in 1925, Monica Ewer included a list of plays (noting that the number of "definite propaganda" pieces available was small, but suggesting many that were of "labour sympathy" and which dealt with causes in which the Socialist movement was directly interested), mentioning Hauptmann, Toller, a large number of anti-war plays (which were easier to find), as well as James Sexton's The Riot Act and H.B. Pointing's The White Lady. No further advice appeared until 1930 when they published a list of those plays available from the ILP Publications Department - a list headed by The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist and which included many of the plays which made up the "Plays for the People" series alongside pieces by Malleon, Fenner Brockway's anti-war plays The Devil's Business and The Recruit and Dukes' translation of The Machine Wreckers (163).

In the meantime many groups had turned to the best of the Repertory and Little Theatre Movement. "Manchester" plays such as Gilbert Canaan's Everybody's Husband (a one act fantasy set on the eve of a young girl's wedding in which four generations

of women decide all husbands are much the same), Harold Brighthouse's The Marrying Man (a comedy centring on a sailor with a wife in every port) and The Converts, first performed in Manchester in 1915. Others came from other Repertory Theatres; Sutro's one act play about a lost bracelet and a husband's affair, The Bracelet (first performed at Liverpool Repertory Theatre in 1912) and Allan Monkhouse's The Grand Cham's Diamonds (in which Mrs Perkins believes she has finished with her life of drudgery when stolen diamonds are thrown through her window, only to discover they have been tossed there by her daughter's fiancée who is a detective, in his attempt to escape from the thieves) which was first performed in Birmingham in 1918; both made appearances on the stages of the ILP. Some were drawn from the amateur stages and independent theatres; F. Sladen-Smith's St Simeon Stylites (an attack on habit first performed by the Unnamed Society in Manchester in 1919) merited an occasional performance, as did John Masefield's adaptation of a Norwegian play about a sixteenth century witch hunt which was first produced at the Court Theatre. The South London Arts Guild chose Mary Pakington's The House With Twisty Windows a play about the "Red Terror" in Russia first performed by the Lena Ashwell Players in 1926 and others chose plays by J.R. Gregson (notably T'Marsdens and The Devil a Saint), at one time the producer at the Leeds Art Theatre.

Many choices seem to have been a result of the individual taste of different groups. Thus Fulham favoured "The Policeman's Serenade" from Riverside Nights, a revue which opened at the Lyric in Hammersmith in April 1926 and Armley



chose Harold Dean's Apron Strings (a three act play in which an actress wife tries to break her husband from his idle life and his mother's hold). Strindberg appeared once in Hampstead and Lord Dunsany made several appearances with Fame and the Poet and A Night at the Inn in both Hampstead and Golders Green who also chose a play by the American writer, Booth Tarkington (in the shape of his incident concerning the French Revolution, Beauty and the Jacobin). The West End stage was not forgotten either, and several of A.A.Milne's light comedies found a place, including Belinda (a story of a husband and wife reconciled after nineteen years following a disagreement over his beard) and The Dover Road, a comedy about elopement. Gertrude Jennings also proved popular and Elegant Edward, a one act comedy about a burglary with none of the the class consciousness of Galsworthy's Strife or Sinclair's The Second Storey Man, and I'm Sorry - It's Out, a trite one acter set in the circulating library of a seaside town were also performed. Unlike The Firebrand or Rope, none of these seemed to attract any adverse comment; neither did the comrades in Merthyr Tydfil who performed "two amusing sketches" (The Wrong Flat and Blatherwick's Diplomacy), or the group which favoured Maurice Baring's short play, Catherine Parr, a dramatised argument between Henry VIII and his wife over the state of his boiled egg and the colour of Alexander the Great's horse (164).

In an effort to provide access to the classics, a few older plays did appear. A handful of Shakespeare productions can be found, North Westminster chose Caste, Nelson performed scenes from A School for Scandal and Frederick Reynold's

The Dramatist made a single appearance. Perhaps the most innovative choice in this area was Reading's good fortune in obtaining permission to give the first public performance of Hardy's The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall which they performed at one of the Guild's weekend schools in 1930. But given the guild's supposed emphasis on bringing art to the people, classic plays made up only a very small part of their repertoire (165).

Overall, the feeling is eclectic, a taste of which is given in the Arts Guild report for 1931, where the Reading's production of Hardy was picked out for mention alongside Bradford's production of The Mikado and Armley's "light operetta", or by Fulham's list of productions for 1926, which comprised Evreinov's Merry Death, Chekov's The Proposal, Lady Gregory's The Rising of the Moon, J.J.Bell's Wolves, Foiling the Reds, Black 'ell and Mrs Jupp Obliges. In fact, the repertoire reflects very closely the plays of the Repertory theatres or of the Little Theatre movement and there seems to be little to back up the ILP's claims to represent the "rebirth of English Theatre", or to see their mission as educating "people into free thinking, responsible beings" or as the "presentation of the Socialist case on a broader and deeper note", on the evidence of these productions alone (166). Indeed, even despite what we might perceive as their eclecticism, W.C.Raffe in the Bradford Pioneer was moved to remark.

we hear of RUR being done again and again; or an old Shaw play is dug up; and a pre-Revolution Russian play is favoured. Or a trifling one act comedy having no bearing on Socialism, will be offered, and the audience wonders why better stuff is not produced (167).

Help was, however, at hand, and the search for suitable plays was helped by a timely initiative, an initiative taken not by either of the ILP publishing companies (the ILP ran both the National Labour Press and the Blackfriars Press in Leicester), but by a company run by Guild Socialists: the Labour Publishing Company. Originally established under the auspices of the Labour Research Department, the Labour Publishing Company had become an independent organisation which aimed to

stimulate and to supply the rapidly growing Labour demand for literature of the most varied types (168).

By the mid-twenties, the varied demand for literature included books that covered working class hobbies and entertainments, and alongside producing a book on the popular pastime of gardening, the Labour Publishing Company also issued (between 1925 and 1928) a series of plays with the title "Plays for the People". Under the editorship of Monica Ewer, the collection eventually numbered nineteen mainly one act plays (the company were also responsible for publishing Ruth Dodds A Pitman's Pay and Monica Ewer's Play Production For Everyone, but neither was published as a part of this series). With the exception of Heijerman's The Rising Sun, which was translated by Christopher St John, all the plays were original and with the exception of the same play, which was one of only three full length plays (the other two were Ian Rankine's A Place in the Shade and Monica Ewer's own The Best of Both World's), all the plays became staple pieces for ILP dramatic groups. Apart from dealing with suitable themes, they were all simple to stage, especially those with contemporary settings: Oswald Whittle's bed sitting room in Josephine Knowle's His First

Money, the bare bedroom of H.E. Bate's The Last Bread and the two or three bushy plants and garden chairs demanded by Stephen Schofield in Sir George and the Dragon. Even those with more outlandish settings did not necessarily demand complex staging; in a note from the author to the producer at the beginning of Horace Shipp's Invasion, (a play set on a garden terrace of a house in the imaginary border country of Lyretia), the writer comments that the play had been written with Community production in mind, and could

be produced as simply or elaborately as the resources of the group permit. If your means and inclination allow, the terrace, with its low wall, its rugs and, perhaps, some gaily striped awning to give Near-Eastern atmosphere, and a back-ground of blue sky, with the distinctive shape of cypresses against it, should make a pleasant scene. It can, however be simplified to the barest necessities: a wall at the back with one exit, side exit to the house, garden table and chairs (169).

Advice on staging (and a design of the stage setting by Christina Walshe, who was later to be active in the Workers Theatre Movement) is also given in Stephen Schofield's The Judge of All Earth, a play set in, the far from naturalistic yet still simple, Kingdom of Heaven. Here, the stage is filled with steps and blocks and a throne made of sugar boxes and wallpaper, all set against the background of a curtain, and the City that Never Was in a time that is "not yet" of Evelyn Sharp's The Loafer and the Loaf meant the setting could be whatever the producer pleased, even a simple dark curtain with a few properties (170).

Their simplicity of staging, the small number of characters and the dearth of suitable material would have been sufficient

to make the play popular for the ILP groups, and this was compounded by the low fees charged by the company. The cost of producing any of the one act plays was set at 5% of gross receipts (up to £2) with a minimum price of five shillings, and for longer plays at 10% of receipts and a minimum of ten shillings. As H.Weston Wells pointed out

the terms are a boon to small societies. No need now for conscientious writers and unbending trade unionists to feel a mental twinge when they defraud a playwright of his royalty (171).

But despite their popularity with local groups, much of the labour press, though they welcomed the initiative, did not receive the plays uncritically. Madeleine Hope Dodds thought them a "pretty hopeless set of plays from the people's point of view" and the remarks of J.F.Horrabin in Lansbury's Labour Weekly and the journalist at the Bradford Pioneer (who entitled his article "A Frank Criticism") are typical of much of the discontent felt about the pieces - criticism which all centred on their gloomy nature. "Labour Grand Guignol" and "shilling shockers" were the terms employed by Horrabin who asked

Need - should - must labour plays be gloomy?...In only one of these eight plays is one allowed to laugh; and in that one - Eveyln Sharp's not very riotously funny "incredible" episode - the scene is set "in the City That Never Was" and the time, we are explicitly informed, is "Not Yet"! Which is a little discouraging (172).

The Bradford Pioneer, whilst recommending that readers should get hold of the plays if they could (without buying them for it was not worth it), thought the series was not "quite the way to help":

All the four Plays for the People are based in form and tone on the melancholy of such second-rate bourgeois work as Galsworthy's. They deal with Labour topics in the pessimistic note of depressed literary people: their poetry and pity feebly echo the Silver Box (173).

Rather than being pessimistic, the Socialist movement is

optimistic to the bone; it is gay, militant and conquering; it pauses to be pitiful and then turns to the constructive and combatitive work which shall end the wrong and heal the pain. If these plays tried to diagnose, it would be well enough in a secondary way, but none of them do diagnose particularly subtly, and they are radically false to our faith inasmuch as the note of resistance, of unbreakable will, of the sunrise on the horizon, is absent (174).

The writer continued by reminding readers of the miners' struggle, the endurance, the heroism, the "magnificent blunders" and the "unconquerable promise of it all", finishing with a question about the plays: "Do these express the inarticulate aspirations behind the General Strike? Rats!" (175).

Such ideas were also reflected in the reviews of H. Weston Wells, a member of the Executive of the London Labour Dramatic Federation, who attacked The Forge and The Street for being defeatist

for men are not made stronger by despair. Moreover, if it be art to hold a Mirror up to Nature I doubt if they are so true to life as they pretend. I am one who believes that there have been and still are souls whom neither the forge, nor the street, nor the gallows can kill and it is time such souls had a better showing in propaganda drama (176).

This criticism provoked a quick response from those responsible for the publication of the plays. In the

Town Crier (which also carried the article "Labour Plays: A Frank Criticism"), B.N.Langdon Davies, the managing director of the Labour Publishing Company defended the publication of tragic pieces not on the basis of their excellence (in fact he thought that with the possible exception of Heijermann's The Rising Sun they had not discovered anything of "particular excellence") but on the simple grounds that out of over 200 manuscripts they had received only 2 or 3 were anything but tragic. He said he had already written letters imploring writers to be less gloomy, to show "some sunshine on the horizon", but at the same time he did try to explain why he thought so many concentrated on the harsh side of life.

the tragedies of life are themselves dramatic...situations and even dialogues which are in themselves humourous are rare and rarer still are those which would retain their humour if written down and published (177).

While this was not an argument in favour of tragedies by any means, it is also worth noting that Malleson himself in reviewing the new plays did not see them as "the perfect pieces". Indeed he dismissed A Place in the Shade as not "quite coming off" and Mrs Jupp and The Bruiser's Election as "slight trifles", concluding that the series was rather the first steps in self-expression ("admirable five finger exercises") than the finished product (178).

A glance at the plays does show many of them to be very bleak pictures of working class life, as Monica Ewer herself notes in the introduction to His Last Bread: "This is admittedly a grim little play" (179). In this short play, H.E.Bates dramatises the brutalising effect of starvation, culminating

in the wife's murder of her husband in the belief that he is an intruder about to steal their last (and for the moment, lost) sixpence. As she lights the candle with the only remaining match to show, so she thinks, the intruder to her husband, Jim, we see instead her husband lying on the stage in a pool of blood clutching a half eaten piece of bread, with crumbs still clinging to his lips - the piece of bread which she has forbidden him to eat until they find the sixpence. In his desperation, he has started to eat the bread in the dark, making the noise that led his wife to think there was an intruder. It was a play which left the audience feeling very pessimistic, as one reviewer noted:

to chill our very senses with horror until we feel helpless in the clutches of a white stony-hearted monster (180).

Others in the series would have sent the audience home in just as melancholy a state of mind. Alma Brosnan's The Street is a grim explanation (set in a one-roomed flat where the fire is empty and the only "decoration" is a gaudy, empty chocolate box, dirty with age) of why women are forced to turn to prostitution. The demonstration which forms the focus for The Best of Both Worlds ends with "kind stupid old Appleby with his muddled brains all over the pavement" and John, "who believed good even of them", shot by the soldiers. His First Money, whilst starting with a poor clerk being left some money, ends with his murder by a workmate more desperate to escape and, in the words of Weston Wells, the hammer of Edwin Lewis' The Forge crushes the bodies and souls of those who inhabit the parlour in Hyacinth Court where



death too plays its part, inglorious death which does not exalt men's souls with the contemplation of character unbroken by its power (181).

Even those plays whose themes have the potential for optimism, choose not to exploit it. The Great Day is the day of the clerk's expected pay rise;

We are shown hope, fear, indifference and co. Alone the Socialist among them is prepared to act. The blow falls, the rise is contemptible. Their trust in their employers is betrayed; dividends come first. The Socialist bullies the secretary, but is talked over, and receiving no support from his fellow clerks, retires beaten, and the grind goes on (182).

The pessimism of Huntly Carter's review is only confirmed by the last lines of the play, as Armstrong, the socialist, says

Yes, they've got the whip hand. There's no doubt about that. Ha!

(For a moment he considers the indignity of his position, then, realising the futility of defiance, he resumes work. Silence)

Slow Curtain (183).

In The Founders, Edwin Lewis' play which shows the "ceremonial side of Trade Union activities" and "the dangers which lay in their path due to the system of espionage and Government agents", the agricultural workers end the piece under arrest, betrayed by one of their members. Lewis does try to make the most of their martyrdom, ending the play with a speech from the Chairman of the Branch as he is led out of the door by the soldiers:

I go, leaving you, Luke Raykes, to the judgement of God and the judgement of my actions to the generations to come. A spark has fired this land of ours and Kings, Dukes, Bishops and agents will fail to extinguish the flame that is kindling. Come your hand, John Oldale - your hand, Josh and Harry. Remember we are as brothers - as founders and martyrs in a great cause (184).

Yet not all the plays are sombre. Both Mrs Jupp Obliges and The Bruiser's Election are comedies at the expense of the ruling class or the parties that represent them. The Loafer and the Loaf opens with an "invisible" minstrel dressed as a morris dancer, playing a nursery rhyme on a penny whistle and continues in this fantastical, light hearted vein until it ends as the cast

stuff cakes into their mouths, and the minstrel still playing, leads them round and round the stage in single file, all dancing wildly, and eating cakes, till all go out, leaving the minstrel, a solitary figure, playing alone in the middle of the stage (185).

But this light hearted feel does not mean the play has no moral (in fact Amateur Stage commented most vigorously on its very apparent use of the stage as a platform), and Evelyn Sharp concentrates on asking (and answering) the question of who steals more, the fat or the lean (186). A Place in the Shade is a gentle satire on kingship, which, in the words of its author, sets out to amuse and to pay tribute to two quarters

to the servant who performs his duties with discretion, with sympathy, with tact, and with most excellent results, and to the masters whose kindly appreciation make service a pleasure to their servants. For this is the essence of human kindness (187).

The kindly king, who was convinced before he ascended the throne that monarchy was wrong and who is first seen reading stories to his children, finally abdicates (once there has been a revolution and people have "earned their republic") and plans to end his days happily in his "second summer" with the woman he loves (188). Even some of those plays which have

sombre themes, also have their moments of beauty and vision; most notable in The Best of Both Worlds, where the heroine, Ruth Allison, is tormented by the choice she has to make between the beautiful things in life and the humdrum routine and hard work of wanting to change the world so everyone has the opportunities for beauty. And the most popular play of the series<sup>was</sup> Yaffle's Foiling the Reds or the Heart of the Labourer. Written, not as a naturalistic tragedy, but as a broad satire, the piece sets out to

awaken the British working class to a sense of duty and to show how the commercial stability of the nation is being undermined by sinister Socialist propaganda. Charlie Muggup, the ideal working man, is the hero and he sails triumphant through the insidious temptations of the Socialist villain, of Trotski with his Russian gold, and of Lola, the vamp, to end at last with Jenny in his arms - Jenny, the innocent factory lass whose "rosebud" mouth is of the type that generally accompanies inability to breathe through the nose (189).

Set in a factory which builds ocean liners supplied on an instalment system to impecunious crowned heads and run on co-operative lines (the workers having eschewed all Bolshevist and Socialist theories, working instead for the pure love of serving their country), trouble begins with the arrival of a Bolshevik agent, and Lola and Trotsky

who by the usual means unsettle the peaceful minds of the British worker and bring about an incipient state of strike and revolt. The great obstacle to the plot is an idealist artificer who delights in breaking records of production and resists the Bolshies but succumbs to the fascination of Lola (190).

He agrees to join in the plot to stun the night watchman and to steal the cash box, but is turned from the "wrong path" by Jennie, the factory angel, and finally defeats the striking

men and the Bolsheviks in single handed combat. Having saved the firm from ruin, he nobly refuses a reward for he has only done his duty.

In style, Yaffle's play was a long way from the naturalism. All the characters are painted in the broadest strokes, pictures aided in the printed text by "Flambo's" cartoons; Charlie Muggup, whose first entrance is accompanied by the boast that he has that morning knocked in 942,464 nails thus beating his previous record by two, is

tall, and with the help of a wig and greasepaint, handsome with fair curly hair. Like all real heroes, he wears a white shirt open at the neck...He speaks perfect English according to the standards set by the best Schools of Elocution when I was a boy, but occasionally lapses into Cockney in order to show by contrast the difference between what he is and what, by self-culture, he is risen from (191).

Jenny is the "ideal heroine" of the films (her face therefore "devoid of expression" reflecting "what is most to be desired in The Girls Men Want namely, that complete emptiness of mind generally known as Innocence") whereas Lola is the seductive Vamp with a walk like a "round-shouldered snake" and a mouth like a "piece of raw beef". The villain of the piece is "of course" the socialist, who is distinguished by his evil, sinister appearance complete with a slouch hat from which protrudes a mass of black matted hair and a perpetual evil sneer and he is only bettered by Trotsky who sports

a fur cap and black beard...Actually Trotski has a small Imperial beard, but patriotic people like to think that all Bolsheviks have big black beards, so let him have one. He speaks in a deep snarling voice. This part should be doubled by the member of the cast with the deepest voice (192).

The acting style demanded by Yaffle fits the characters, with Charlie trotting "lightly and gracefully" around the stage (to show both his athletic habit and his "joie de vivre") and the villain crawling around in a furtive, crouching manner (comporting himself "as typical socialists do, in the minds of the best people"). Yaffle also builds into the play, a number of "set pieces" using a variety of techniques. Thus, at the beginning, the interview between Sir Ezekiel and Mr and Mrs Cunard is

a tribute to the excellent publicity methods of certain great exponents of the instalment system as applied to the purchase of furniture. It should be presented on the lines of those well-known posters, or better still, those wax-work window displays, in which you see an idealistic salesman discussing business with the firm's ideal type of married couple (193).

Throughout the scene, the characters do not look at each other, but sit facing the audience all wearing the slightly surprised look "typical of...the Late-Victorian" school of art. When Sir Ezekiel, comes to see his workmen, all three stand at attention in a "stiff row", only broken by their horror on hearing that another contract has gone to Germany, whereupon, and with military precision

the three men bring their right hands smartly to their brows, slightly raising their left, and lean back one pace on their right foot in simultaneous and well-drilled attitudes of despair. Remaining thus for three seconds, they as-you-were smartly to attention (194).

The final fight "to the death" between Muggup and the socialist is a "decorative" and well choreographed ballet (which has been preceded by another film style fight between Charlie and the three workmen) which ends with the hero

striking "attitudes of heroic exhaustion". Writing in one of his lengthy (and satirical) stage directions, Yaffle describes the acting styles he envisages, which include:

the Ballet, or concerted movement form of presentation, varied when necessary with the Tableaux Vivant method (195).

This has two advantages in his view; firstly it points up the satirical nature of the piece (or accentuates "its deeper meanings") and secondly

it is much easier for amateurs to do it like that, because if they stand in stiff attitudes and repeat the same gestures it gets over the problem of what to do with your hands when you're not speaking (196).

Yaffle's tongue may have been firmly in his cheek when he made this comment (although there was no doubt an element of truth in his assessment of the acting abilities of many of the members), but given the complex demands the play makes on the performers, it would not seem to recommend itself to easy performance.

However, it was precisely its style and satire that recommended it to many ILP groups and critics. The Bradford Pioneer praised it as "superb farce" which had a remarkable "sense of the stage"

It holds up the mirror to the Jix mind, and you laugh. It is more playable, more sincere, infinitely more true to the soul of the movement than any of the others (197).

F.J.Horrabin in Lansbury's Labour Leader was even more forthcoming with his praise:

Yaffle has made one important technical discovery: viz that a sort of mock-heroic style of acting, "holding the pose" and caricaturing it as much as possible, is at once much easier, for amateurs and much funnier than trying to be "natural" (and succeeding only in not knowing what to do with your hands) (198).

He went on to question why the movement did not produce more revues, asking why Labour revues were confined to summer schools "and places where they lark":

Why don't groups in every local Labour party get busy - I was going to say "writing" them; but I'd rather say "rehearsing" them, because all that is needed is a rough draft of a scene, a parody or two of well known songs - "Annie Laurie" or "I Wonder Where My Baby is Tonight" - topical allusions, local references, and a spirit of irreverence. A revue of this sort "grows" rather than is written. As Mr Ashley Dukes points out - "The origin of drama lay in performance." (199).

The article was concluded with a suggestion for having a reader reading a play (both the description and the dialogue) and actors who illustrate it with a dumb show behind, but the pages of the ILP press reveal no takers for this suggestion. Indeed, given the enthusiasm with which Foiling the Reds was greeted, surprisingly few satires graced the boards of Arts Guild stages and with the exception of Bradford's two pantomimes (which provided the group with an opportunity for some "rare and endless parody of local significance") most satire was relegated to sketches at branch evenings (200). So, for example, as part of a series of social evenings and events, West Salford departed from their usual presentation of plays and formed themselves into a concert party. The programme was composed of entirely original items written (with exception of music) by the members and included

burlesques with topical gags and characters, but it is also in the report of this event that we get a clue as to why little work was done in this area, for:

All the efforts were indicative of much racking of the brains and burning of midnight oil & co. and some of the society confessed that if many more original nights were wanted, it would mean them passing completely away (201).

Not everyone was however, completely enthusiastic about Yaffle's play and it was mercilessly criticised by Tom Thomas in an article written in Red Stage in 1932. In his eyes, the play was

often put into a programme in the belief that it is a bit of working-class leaven which will justify a whole evening of bourgeois plays. [It] was mildly amusing when the particular idiocies of the Daily Mail it deals with were topical. But even then, and certainly now, this method of exposing the "bloodstained bolshevik" propaganda is only effective with people who are already convinced



of its absurdity.

To workers - still the majority - who take their views from the capitalist press, this line of exposure is worse than meaningless. It exposes nothing. To them it can only mean that the players are being sarcastic at their expense in picturing them as lazy mental deficient (202).

Thomas was writing six years after the piece first appeared (at a time when the Communist Party regarded the ILP and its ilk as "social fascists") and whilst the play could lay itself open to the charge that the workers are portrayed as somewhat stupid (they either swallow the Daily Mail's propaganda or are easily led by the Bolsheviks), the broad satire of the piece must have left no-one in doubt that here was a "parody of our opponents' parodies of Socialism" (203).

Another potential source of plays for the Guild groups was the earlier series of "revolutionary plays" which Douglas Goldring had persuaded C.W.Daniels to publish under the title "Plays for a People's Theatre" and under his general editorship. The impetus to publish the series seems to have come from Goldring's involvement in the People's Theatre Society, a rather confused venture which started as an off-shoot of Clarte and was founded in conjunction with Harold Scott (amongst others) primarily to perform "dawnist" plays. The original organisation fell apart very quickly due to arguments about a production of Lawrence's play Touch and Go, and after the majority of members resigned, a new group was established with the help of the Curtain Group (a triumvirate of conscientious objectors who had met at Dartmoor and subsequently given one or two productions). Once again, a Lawrence play caused the group to fall apart. This time the

argument was over producing The Widowing of Mrs Holyroyd, and as Goldring could not persuade them to perform the play, he resigned. The People's Theatre Society continued without him (although still with Harold Scott) putting on an elaborate and expensive production of a Serbian play by Tucic called The Liberators and "promptly died of it, in debt" (204).

Despite his rather desultory experience, Goldring showed his commitment to a People's Theatre in the introduction to the first play to be published in 1920 in the new series, his own "pamphlet" play The Fight for Freedom. In the preface he detailed his scheme for an "all-red" theatre of the kind that was springing up all over Europe, arguing for a Labour Theatre which would be (in the words of a somewhat cynical reviewer).

a revolutionary (and hence an internationalist) theatre if it is to be worthy of its name. And it will put on all the good revolutionary plays which will be written in England and which have been written abroad (205).

Goldring certainly believed that the ILP (even at this early date), along with the UDC, the NUR, the miners, the transport workers, the postmen and the police would "interest themselves in the establishment of a Labour Theatre" (206). The new series of plays was not to be the initiative to start a movement for a People's Theatre, but between 1920 and 1922, it did issue nineteen plays.

Goldring's four act play was written to herald in the "breaking of the Red Dawn". It was, in the author's words

an ingenious piece of Communist propaganda which, although the plot has grown old-fashioned, remains

in many ways not only up-to-date but even ahead of its time (207).

As an anti-war play, it dealt with a question central to Socialism of the time, an issue which was to recur time and again in plays written and performed by the labour movement, but Goldring adds a twist of originality to his play by focusing on the impact of war and violence on "the sex instinct". Margaret Lambert, a clergyman's daughter, is engaged to Captain Henderson who goes out to "fight for freedom". When he returns after two years in the trenches, he discovers she is in love with the socialist Oliver Beeching and in a fit of passion Henderson drugs her champagne and seduces her. The family make a desperate attempt to get Margaret to marry her "betrayers", but she insists on defying "respectability" and maintaining her freedom. She anxiously awaits Oliver's return but to her disgust, when he does appear, he refuses to sympathise with her, arguing instead that Captain Henderson is more to be pitied than hated:

The poor devils of soldiers suffer so horribly that they really are not responsible. Human nature can't stand what they are called on to go through. There must be a reaction...in normal times Henderson would probably be quite a decent fellow, incapable of the gross blackguardism of which you were the victim. Surely you must see that. Ten to one he was completely off his head (208).

When Margaret demands Henderson should be imprisoned for his crime, Oliver argues with her that she is attacking the victim not the real criminal:

Punishment for the crimes of soldiers - even for "atrocities" - ought to be visited not on the tortured devils who actually commit them but on the heads of those who made the war...Those are the real criminals. If a soldier commits a crime the proper thing to do is to hang a few journalists -

"propaganda" merchants for choice. The men who have so cheerfully "given" their sons while doubling and trebling their own incomes; the writers who have filled their fountain pens with blood because it paid them - they are the villains Margaret. Keep your hate for them. Punish every man who has made an extra penny out of the war; imprison and flog every scribbler who has fanned the flames of hatred. Don't punish the poor wretches who have lost all, even reason and human decency! (209).

Horrified by what she perceives to be his insensitivity, Margaret declares she was a "blind fool" ever to have believed in Oliver and announces her intention to make her own fight for freedom - the "freedom to be myself". But in the last few pages, events move very swiftly; Margaret is saved from having to marry Henderson when he is declared insane and put into an asylum (thus as, Oliver has argued, absolving him from having done any wrong) and she departs with Henderson's brother leaving Oliver and Margaret's socialist aunt to declare they are the "best of comrades" and to sing "The Red Flag" (210).

The Fight for Freedom was followed by D.H. Lawrence's Touch and Go, a play the author described as "fired by his last sparks of hope in the world", although Goldring, whilst pleased to be able to at least publish the play, thought it was

not really a suitable play for the series, because...Lawrence detested "propaganda" and, though I did not realise it at the time, was completely out of sympathy with my earnest and rather half-baked political preoccupations (211).

Set in a Nottingham mining community, the play (written in 1919) prophetically explores the defeat of a miners' strike and is full of Lawrence's lament for a world in which his characters struggle to remain human against overwhelming odds.

The echoes of Galsworthy's Strife are striking; the play is critical and sympathetic of both miners and mine owner, and ends with a plea to "change the system".

The third play in the series was Hamilton Fyfe's The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory, an attack on kings, queens and emperors, and headed by a quote from Bela Kun:

We don't care about boundaries...All our hopes are in the masses and the possibilities of brotherhood (212).

The rest of the series included Ralph Fox's Captain Youth, a "romantic comedy for all socialist children", Judas by Claude Houghton (a biblical drama) and Eleanor Gray's The Image Breaker, a one act tragedy about Victorian, the socialist MP who gives his life for the revolution (213).

Margaret Macnamara was the only author to have more than one play published in the series and in total it included four of her one act pieces. The Witch is a drama, Love Fibs deals with the difference between a romanticised notion of love and the reality in which each partner tells the other "love fibs" to stop them being hurt, and in Dark Grey or Light, she tackles the question of illegitimacy. Mrs Hodges is subtitled a "comedy of rural politics", in this instance the question of housing. Divided into two scenes, the play opens at a council meeting discussing the finance of a new housing scheme. The members of the committee are all seen to be completely unqualified to discuss the matter, none more so than the architect Feathergill who has never had experience of living in this "class of housing" although he has designed several

dozen of these houses and been awarded a gold medal. Of the other members, Mrs Clam-Digby (of the luxurious furs and "commanding head-gear") is the most vocal, happy only when she is "patriotically" saving money from being spent on erecting "palaces" for the poor. Present too is Mrs Hodges (co-opted onto the committee as a member of the Women's Institute and as someone who has real life experience of living in the houses they are discussing). When she is all but ignored, she takes matters into her own hands, tricking the architect into staying with her family and thus (through a number of comic contrivances) to dispose of his useless plans.

Two translations of Russian plays were also included in the series: Leonid Andreieff's poetic drama, To the Stars, and the symbolist writer, Zinaida Hippus' The Green Ring, a play which she sent in greeting, over the heads of the men of the past "who are timidly hating or indifferently not understanding":

To all those young in years and heart, who in silence forge the weapon of "knowledge and freedom", who have a foretaste of the joy of the struggle and believe in the power of togetherness, to all those near and known, and to those far off and unknown - to all, all! (214).

The play is about divorce, love affairs and the misery and illness they cause - in short, the mess the older generation have made of the world. Underneath are the "new youth" who read Hegel, discuss suicide and free love and who together (and with mercy to those who do not understand) want to break free, to "take that order of things as it is and stand on it firmly with both feet". By the end of the play, the first

tentative new steps are taken; Uncle Mike (the only adult in the play who seems to understand and therefore inspire the young) is persuaded to at least think about marrying his niece for "convenience", and the niece, Finotchka, at the beginning alone in the world and despairing, has found soul-mates in the members of the Green Ring and hope for the future (215).

It has been worth dealing in some detail with the plays published in this series, to see the breadth of subjects being dealt with and the number of plays possibly available to the ILP Arts Guild. Yet from this list they chose to perform only one - Margaret Macnamara's Mrs Hodges. It is possible that members were not aware of their existence (they were published a few years before the Guild was formed, and are not referred to either in Malleson's pamphlet or in any detail in the pages of the New Leader). On the whole they make more complex demands for staging, and the series included numerous full length pieces whilst the Guild favoured shorter plays, but many of the issues dealt with are reflected in the plays the ILP did produce. Nor was it just the ILP who seemed oblivious of these plays. Goldring's drama was performed in Hungary (and possibly also in Frankfurt) but not (as far as I have been able to ascertain) in Britain; Touch and Go had to wait until 1973 for its first performance (216).

But Malleson was not simply content with reproducing plays by others; his great hope was

that as the movement begins to grow and spread, writers will emerge in the local groups writing plays for their comrades to act (217).

From the first, he argued that the real importance of the ILP Dramatic Groups lay in the fact that from them might eventually come a new school of plays, plays not necessarily written (or produced) like anybody else had ever written them. Although he concedes that "nobody can foretell what the future of the movement may be", Malleeson did have ideas of his own. He wanted plays of the calibre of Eugene O'Neill, and although his praise for O'Neill rested on the fact that his plays increased one's knowledge of the lives and circumstances of others, (making the reader more "richly acquainted with the strangeness and variety of human experience"), he recommended that groups concentrated on events closer to home:

It may be said that life in tramp steamers in the East is more vivid and highly-coloured and adventurous than life in an ILP group in an industrial town. That is only partly true. We live in an age of dramatic happenings; in times when the rather jerry-built capitalist system is crumbling before our eyes of its own inherent weaknesses; and we have to imagine another sufficiently vividly and widely, or go down in the general wreckage (218).

Malleeson's desire for new plays was met by members in the groups. At the time of writing his pamphlet, he had already received plays from branches (and he asked that a continual effort be made to keep this up), and a study of the plays performed by the groups (or at least those reported in the pages of the press) shows a number of local writers appearing.

The Chigwell Players gave every promise of fulfilling Malleeson's hopes. In October 1927, they performed three short plays written by C.Lewton Brain, a member of the company: Darkwater Bridge ("almost hackneyed in its theme" although "relentless" in its inevitability), The Morning After The



Night Before and The Miracle of Swanleigh Village. The following year he wrote (and performed in) The Right of Way, a full-length play which dealt with villager's resistance to the new squire's attempts to close an ancient right of way that runs across his land. Led by Lincoln, the school master who prefers dreaming and poetry to the practicalities of life, the villagers pull down the high spiked fence erected across the path; their celebration however turns to consternation as they see the woods are on fire. Lincoln is accused of arson by Brimmer, the squire, who also threatens both to sack him, having become one of the school's managers, and to withdraw his offer of employment to Lincoln's son (who is in love with the squire's daughter). With the arrival of Gypsy Lee, the village hunchback, in the final act, it becomes clear that the fire was started not by Lincoln, but by Brimmer himself when he threw down a cigar in anger at seeing the fence being pulled down. Such just retribution for having tried to close the right of way leads to a happy ending, although the review in the Woodford Times omits to say if the path was left open (219).

The Scottish groups found a prolific writer in James Robertson, the producer of the Kirkcaldy ILP Dramatic Group. In the space of four years he was responsible for as many plays: Summertime's Arrival, a farce, King o' Men, a mining play in three acts, Kirsteen, a tragic play of the West Highlands which attacked the intolerance of the strictly religious and "unco guid", and The Amiable Mrs Miggs, a new departure into the world of pantomime which included all the traditional ingredients. He may also have been responsible for

some (if not all) of the propaganda sketches performed by the Kirkcaldy and Dundee groups. In Dumfries, James Carmichael, a member of the local dramatic group, was responsible for a one act play, The Helmet, which was successfully produced at a social for members and friends (220).

In West Salford, the society's coach made several contributions to the repertoire. In March 1928, he wrote the libretto for The Fiery Cross, a fantasia in four scenes. Using music drawn from various scores, the show illustrated changing industrial conditions, starting in the fourteenth century with "Summer is i-cumin in", and was.

a serious attempt at the presentation of historical propaganda, in a pleasing and interesting form (221).

His talent was also in evidence in the two plays performed at Milton Hall in 1929, one of which deals with social questions and the other with socialist ideas. The Wheel is a tragedy which "portrays the stark truth" and is based, according to Labour's Northern Voice, on a real life experience of the author. The wheel of the title is life itself, which in the words of a character in the play.

is like a wheel that comes round and crushes them as cannot get out of its way (222).

The two central characters of the piece are indeed crushed by life; pestered by the rent man, the laundress, who cannot make her meagre pay cover the necessities of life, finds extra money by turning to prostitution. But even this cannot save her consumptive friend who dies, despite the help of a doctor

prepared to "impoverish himself to help such as she". The second piece, Bill Smith Explains, is somewhat more optimistic; set in the smoking room of the Egocrats Club, in a period which is

any time now, but long overdue. The lights have failed, Bill Smith is sent for and he gives the members, who had imagined they were Socialists, more light than they anticipated. Being all "brain workers" they cannot see that the manual worker should receive as much in wages as themselves, but as Bill says "There ain't a blinking producer among the lot and all their brains wouldn't dig taters or get coals" (223).

Bill's fight is not just against the capitalists, who are few in number, but also with the army of people they have got onto their side by calling them "brain workers", while the "real" worker is crushed at the bottom. In the words of the reviewer, Bill has solved his problems by going in for dog racing (a statement the reviewer does not explain or elaborate on), but leaves the audience wondering whether they will not all "go to the dogs" if they do not "pull up now and start thinking very hard".

In Gateshead, the Progressive Players had an impressive record in encouraging local playwrights, for alongside "rejuvenating old masterpieces", the club saw its role as being to.

foster and "discover" the works of living dramatists...we must be prepared to encourage and cultivate those dramatists who impress us with their sincerity, otherwise the little theatre, which is in reality the Salvation Army of dramatic art, will have forsaken, in their hour of need, some of its most treasured souls (224).

Although the group aimed from the start to work profitably (to safeguard their existence), and in the 1920s. the most

profitable production was She Stoops to Conquer (which netted £13), the Players did not waver from their commitment to new writers and a glance at the list of the club's productions between 1922 and 1945 shows that there were many local writers who did impress them with "their sincerity", including, as it does, the names of over ten new writers. They were justifiably proud of their consistent record; in 1930, the Gateshead Labour Herald compared it favourably with their local rivals the Newcastle Clarion Dramatic Society which, although it claimed to encourage new writing, had not produced an original full length play since Gordon Lea's piece a "dozen or more years ago" (225).

The best known of the Gateshead writers is Ruth Dodds, one of the mainstays of the Progressive Players from 1919 (when she joined the ILP) until her death in 1976. Active in the dramatic group in "almost every conceivable way", Ruth Dodds not only wrote three plays for the Players, but was also, for a long period, their chief producer; along with her sisters Sylvia (who was wardrobe mistress and actress for the Players) and Hope, she assisted them financially in 1939 when the group had to find new premises, was manager of the subsequent Gateshead Little Theatre from 1943 until 1965 and even performed, on at least one occasion, in her own play, The Hill Top, in which she took the part of Maud Ancroft, the president of the Guild of Women Leather Operatives. Politically active prior to joining the ILP as secretary of the Gateshead Women's Suffrage League, she was, from 1929, a local Labour councillor (until her resignation from the Labour Party, prompted by her pacifist and Quaker sympathies, at the outbreak of World War

Two). For a long period, she was also the editor of the Gateshead Labour Herald, for which she wrote many articles under the byline of "Redcap" (226).

Of her three plays performed by the Progressive Players, the most successful, (the club's "greatest venture", according to Hope Dodds) was The Pitman's Pay, a play which deals with the period of the first miner's union and its founder, Thomas Hepburn. As with Edwin Lewis' The Founders, this play has its fair share of spying by the owners in their attempt to discredit the union, but here they do not succeed and central to the play is an argument against the use of violence. It is the company's spy, Wilson, (seen at the beginning of the play plotting with the masters) who attempts to encourage the miners to riot, and it is Hepburn who wins the day by arguing:

We canna best them by fighting; but we can beat them by bearing whatever they put upon us like men, by standing together like brothers, and by obeying the Union rules - no violence, but stand fast (227).

In 1922, the play was entered for a competition held by the Sheffield Playgoers Society (the forerunner of the Sheffield Repetory Theatre) and won. The prize was supposed to be a production of the play by the Society but "that eminently bourgeois body" refused to produce it on the grounds that it would be "too difficult":

Undaunted by this, the Gateshead ILP Dramatic Club tackled their comrade's work, with far less money and fewer resources than Sheffield possessed. The men made the scenery, the women the dresses and the properties. The play was most successfully produced (228).

It became the first play by a local author to be produced by the Club, having six performances in Gateshead and three in Newcastle, as well as going on tour to local villages, even though it was "not easy for workers to find time to go on tour". It was aptly revived in 1926, touring the area once again (this time raising money for the miners) and once again in 1937 whilst the Miners Federation was taking a ballot over strike action against non-unionism (229).

Six year after the first performance of The Pitman's Pay, Ruth Dodds won the Sheffield Playgoers competition for a second time. On this occasion the play, The Pressed Man; or the Sailor's Revenge, was performed by the Playgoers, although not before it had made its debut in Gateshead in 1927. This romantic comedy is set in a Northumberland village during the Napoleonic Wars, and tells a story of press gangs, smuggling, betrayal and two pairs of lovers. Although not so obviously a play of labour interest as The Pitman's Pay (which no doubt accounted for the Playgoer's willingness to perform it), the reviews of its performances suggest certain points which may have recommended it to an ILP audience - not least its central idea that a character who has done wrong can change for the better (with the help of love). The play focuses on the betrayal of Andy Fairweather to the Press Gangs by Jem Stanton, a sailor who has returned from sea to find his betrothed in Andy's arms. Yet, once he has handed Andy over to the gang and his jealousy has subsided, Jem is full of remorse. He sets out to help his victim's mother and sister during the next year, becoming their sole support, and when Andy is discovered a year later, having escaped the press

gang's ship to warn some smuggler friends of a trap that has been set for them, Jem (now in part driven to make good his past behaviour through his growing love for Andy's sister, a character described in one review as "too angelic to live") gives himself up in Andy's place (230).

In between the two prize winning plays, the Progressive Players performed another of Ruth Dodds' plays, an industrial comedy called The Hilltop. The play is set in (or near) Upton Dryfield, an imaginary town and the centre of the Leatherware industry (an imaginary industry). In her introduction, Ruth Dodds explains that she chose a non-specific setting for The Hilltop so that the picture of "modern industrial conditions and methods" would be seen in a general way and unlike The Pitman's Pay (or Sorenson's Tolpuddle or Brighthouse's The Northerners, a play about cotton operatives and both performed by the Players) not be related to any particular trade:

No workers or employers in any particular trade can suppose it to apply to them, either more or less, than to those engaged in other trades (231).

On the surface, the play tells the story of Bill, the Secretary of the United Brotherhood of Leatherware Workers (or the Lewers Society) who inherits £100,000 from an uncle in South Africa. At first he plans to spend the money on building a new Labour Hall in Upton, but the constant arguments between the union and Labour Party members and their distrust of him now he is rich, drive him to take a holiday. For a while he is seduced by the good things in life and drifting in a "holiday dream" he is tempted by Lucy, a banker's daughter, and by the

idea of buying a house, not to return to the dirt and squalor of Upton. In the event, it is Lucy who inadvertently persuades him to go back. She jolts him out of his reverie when she quotes from the Bible: "All these things will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me". The words are a message from his mother, words she spoke to him long ago before she was killed in a factory accident and, <sup>was</sup> buried under the sooty grass. They remind him that he has to.

go back and help - all those folks down there; to fight against the dragon and to go on fighting as long as I live. If you and I find it so good to come out into the sunshine and the green world, wouldn't it be good to give it to those others, to bring them out of the smoke and grime onto the hilltop?...I love you and I love your life - that's why I want it for my own people. But I've no right to all these things, I'm not worthy of them, unless I try to share them - to give everyone a chance (232).

Underlying Bill's dilemma is a story of Trade Unionism and the need for unity in the face of the employers. The Lewer girls are led by Maud Ancroft, a "sturdy determined little woman" who wants to "join things up" and would like to "join up the different classes into one big class that took in everyone" (233). In the course of the play, her big problem is how to join, not everyone into one big class, but the men and the women into one big union so that when they strike over a pay reduction, they know is in the offing, they will all stand together. In the end, the big sticking point is the question of the Strike Fund, for the girls have less money to put into it and during an argument at the Negotiations Committee at the beginning of Act Three, Ruth Dodds uses the opportunity to deal with a number of arguments about the need for unity between men and women in the trade unions. From the mouth of Gibson come a string of objections:



Girls needn't starve; they've got no families dependent on them...we're not going to give them our Funds to buy new hats with...How can they afford to give us a living wage if they can't get girls cheap? Girls has always been cheap...Seems to me that we're the ones you want to do the giving; and what do you offer in return?...their one idea is to get a chap to keep them - or a lot of chaps in this case (234).

He is answered not only by the girls and Maud (who insist they are not asking for anything "out of reason" like equal pay or equal benefits!), but also by a fellow lewer:

The girls will bring us unity, yes, and a good heart for the fight - I tell you their spirit's worth a dozen Strike Funds, and I've seen some trouble in my time. I only wish the chaps had half their keenness. See where we stand. The masters will turn down our proposals next week - that's certain. Then they'll enforce the reduction. Now let's say we don't amalgamate but men and girls both strike together. The girls will be on the rocks a couple of months before us. Say they're forced in at the new rates. What'll happen? They'll simply cut us out, especially at the new processes; most of us will never get back in this world, not on any terms (235).

In the end, Gibson is the only member of the Committee against the merger (and his position is further undermined in the eyes of the audience by the fact that he has been leaking "smear" stories about Bill to the newspapers). But his view is that of the majority of the men, hovering outside the Committee room door in a mass meeting. According to Appleton, that is:

always the way in the Labour Movement. Them that's keen on a thing are shoved on a Committee to deal with it, to keep them quiet. They work out a scheme, get it all out and dried, and then find that nothing on earth'll get the full body to take it up (236).

Maud, however, is confident that the Committee always has "the power to stir up the inert masses" and to "drag them along after us in the end" (237). As it turns out, the

situation is saved not by the Committee, but by another Union Official; Bill returns in time to give his money to the girls' Strike Fund and to save the day.

Ruth Dodds was not the only dramatist amongst the three sisters. Hope, five years Ruth's senior, was if anything, a more prolific (if less original) writer. The group performed at least six of her plays including three adaptations (Great Expectations, Emma and William de Morgan's novel The Old Madhouse, performed under the title of The Golden Apple), as well as three original one act plays: Reaction (an "interesting peep into the future"), The Summons (a study of medieval dictatorship), and Reynold Fox, an English version of the Bluebeard legend which ended in a "sinister, bloodcurdling" climax (238). Agnes Johnson contributed several Tyneside dialect plays including The Old Order Changeth, a romantic comedy about changing methods of transport and The Eye of a Needle, which traced the gradual awakening of one woman to the injustices of the social system, a play described by the New Leader as

a very moving industrial play, dealing with the theme of the rich man who was offered but could not reach salvation, in the Socialist sense (239).

Local plays were not just popular with a Gateshead audience. In 1930, the Progressive Players won first prize in the North East section of the British Drama League's Festival of Community Drama with a play written by a Gateshead journalist. Fred Chadwick's Dregs represented

with dramatic simplicity, what lies behind the all too common paragraphs in the papers, that a man who

has been out of work for so many months or years has lost heart and committed suicide (240).

In the Northern Area final, the play was beaten by a less political piece (Gordon Bottomley's poetic play Gruach performed by the York Settlement Players) but Gateshead had greater success with Allan Henderson's first play, Two Cases (about the "ever present problem" of one law for the rich and one for the poor), which won first prize in a competition for one-act plays organised by the People's Theatre in Newcastle in 1933. Henderson, at the time a coroner and contributor to the Gateshead Labour Herald and later (between 1956 and 1962) Mayor of Newcastle, contributed several pieces to the Progressive Players repertoire during the 1930s, all, with the exception of a thriller entitled The Whistler, with overt social and political themes. Findings Keepings, performed in 1935, dramatised the dilemma of an unemployed man who finds £10, Derelict (read following a lecture by Herbert Scott of the Newcastle People's Players on Plays for the People) dealt with the problems of a derelict shipbuilding town and United Front was a somewhat parochial comedy about the unsociability of socialists (241).

Social concerns were less evident in the thrillers and farces by Wilfred Massey, (writing under the pseudonym of Clayton B Northe), and also in the first full length play, Chevy Chase, written for the Progressive Players in 1936, by Stanley Norman. A light hearted comedy, the play tells of a mysterious biker who finds himself in a tiny hamlet at the back of beyond, faced by the local inhabitants who are determined to

persuade him to go back to "civilisation" and bring back more lucrative tourists. Two years previously, Norman had contributed a one-act piece set on a rubbish tip in Consett where three old women are picking over the rubbish in order to make a living (242).

Other groups were far less prolific than the Progressive Players, but on occasions new plays were performed. So, in Plymouth, Peters, a one act comedy by Bob Hawkins (a member of the group), was performed in April 1929, and at the end of the previous year ILP organiser Edward Hunter wrote Marie Mitanzie or the Disinherited, a "complete indictment of our social system" which included "musical features" of Hunter's own composition and which featured in the programme of Douglas Water. In Nottingham, John Odhams and Arthur Statham were responsible for The Web, a tragedy about the chaos of war and its effect on people's lives in which:

a miner's daughter is in love with a CO [conscientious objector] who goes to prison. Gibes and gossip, together with her father's resentment, force the girl into marriage with a soldier. Her soldier husband deserts her and her CO lover returns to find that, though they cannot marry, they still mean everything to each other (243).

Anti-war sentiments also dominated Wilfred Wellock's Patriots, a popular play with many groups, in which Mrs Seldon loses not only her husband in the First World War but subsequently her son in an imperialist adventure in "Marrigoldland". Surprisingly, given their affection for anti-war plays, Fenner Brockway only appears to have had one of his plays (The Devil's Business) produced, but the ever popular Alma Brosnan appeared on numerous occasions with a third play

entitled At Number 15, another indictment of unemployment. One further play (in this by no means exhaustive list) deserves mention - Reginald Sorenson's Tolpuddle, a somewhat sentimental portrayal of the martyrs which was highly praised by W.C.Raffe as a "play of real interest" which made a "drama of genuine historic Labour value, worked out in an ingenious fashion" (244).

Whilst this may not have been true of all the new plays performed by the Arts Guild, what does become apparent from the above is the breadth of material they used in their performances and the fact that many plays did choose as their themes some aspect of life of importance to the movement. In this, the Guild did differ from the Little Theatre and repertory movement which whilst they might have performed plays with a "social conscience" certainly did not look to the Tolpuddle martyrs or the roots of trade unionism for their themes. And the ILP did not stop with the formation of the Guild in its attempts to use drama, but in 1929 took on a new development.

## MASSES STAGE AND FILM GUILD (MSFG).

The Independent Labour Party has embarked on a very gallant piece of work: it is going to do something for the Theatre. There is no exaggerated emphasis in this statement, for so significant is the effort that one can safely say that the whole life of the Theatre in this country will benefit if the work is successful in achieving its logical aims (1).

On November 15th 1929, the New Leader (very much in style of Harold Scott's pronouncement above) announced "a bold experiment", an event of outstanding importance in the cultural life of the socialist movement - the formation of the MSFG:

If it fulfils its object of bringing modern plays and films of democratic significance within the reach of working class audiences, it will perform a very great service. The fact that only in the last few days has it been possible to show publicly the remarkable Potemkin film is an illustration of the wide field that there is for the Guild to conquer (2).

Its aims were threefold; as well as presenting plays and films of social significance, the Guild proclaimed it would charge for seats at prices within the reach of working class families, offering a low subscription rate and selling half the seats at each performance at 1s plus tax. The Guild also determined to utilise the services of some of the best known actors and actresses of the time. The scheme had the blessing of four Labour cabinet ministers (J.R.Clynes, George Lansbury, Sir C.P.Trevelyan and F.O.Roberts). A committee, chaired by Fenner Brockway, and which represented the National London ILP Arts Guild and the London Divisional ILP Council alongside co-opted experts, was to be responsible for its running.

F.O.Roberts, the Minister of Pensions, acted as treasurer, the executive was chaired by John Beckett MP, and the secretary of the MSFG was Len Waterman. Co-operation on the political side was forthcoming from James Maxton MP, J.R.Clynes, George Lansbury and Frank Horrabin, whilst theatrical people who enthusiastically supported the scheme included Sybil Thorndyke, Denis Neilson Terry, Miles Malleon, Lewis Casson, Moyna MacGill, Kyrle Bellew and Harold Scott (who acted as production secretary).

The aims of the MSFG are pointed to in numerous comments. The ILP Annual Conference report for 1930 saw the MSFG as the biggest development the Arts Guild had undertaken, aimed at

reviving the Sunday evening central London gatherings organised by the London Divisional Council in 1925 and 1926 (3).

Socialist Review saw the job of the Guild as initiating "a policy for a working class theatre", and the most often quoted account comes from Fenner Brockway, who argued the new organisation reflected Clifford Allen's influence on the Party. Writing in Inside the Left, Brockway describes how it produced plays and showed films on a scale never before attempted by the Socialist Movement:

The Guild also had the help of leading professional actors and actresses, including Sybil Thorndyke, Lewis Casson, Milton Rosmer, Elsa Lanchester and Harold Scott. Arthur Bouchier and Kyrle Bellew loaned us the Strand Theatre, and every Sunday night it was packed. Reginald Stamp, who now controls the amusements of London as Chairman of the LCC [London County Council] Licensing and Entertainments Committee, was the organiser of a remarkable series of shows, half drama, half music. Bernard Shaw, John Galsworthy, Laurence Houseman gave their support, allowing us to use their one-act plays. Once a month we had a film showing, crowding the Regal Cinema at Marble Arch with members of the Guild and their

friends; the star film was usually Russian but we also ran shorts by John Grierson and others (4).

In fact, his description reflects more the Sunday Nights at the Strand Theatre than the work of the Guild, especially when it is compared to the most detailed accounts we have, from the pen of the production secretary of the MSFG, Harold Scott. In two articles written for Socialist Review, he lays out the aims and ideas behind the foundation of the Guild, not least tackling its relationship to the Arts Guild itself. He explains quite clearly that it was not intended to supersede the Guild, but to compliment and extend its work:

Already, through its Arts Guild, extraordinarily valuable work has been done towards creating a drama by means of amateur groups. So successful has their work been in some cases that there have been times when it has even seemed possible to evolve an actual working theatre from them, or, at the least to centralise their productive output. This centralisation has been found to be a too difficult method of approach however. The amateur groups will retain their distinctive character, and their work in providing opportunity for experimentation and self-expression will continue to be the most valuable asset the ILP holds for creating the atmosphere of its larger effort. Moreover, there will be room for using this local experimentation in the big scheme from time to time (5).

He went on to argue that there should be "no spiritual barriers between amateur and professional" and he envisaged "a shading of the two sources of production at a later stage", but even at this early stage he realised such a relationship would not be an easy one:

But it would be unwise to make definite predictions along these lines; we are, perhaps, rather a long way from creating a theatre which is of that ideal mixture of amateur and professional, sharing the same aims and the same ability to carry them out (6).



The distinction between the two lay essentially in the Guild's attempt to create a People's Theatre. It started from the assumption that in order to fulfil that function the theatre had to be linked

with those forms of organisation which are brought into being by the existence of social conscience. We have never been without a dramatic literature, never been in want of important exponents of every branch of Theatre Art, but the production of their work has been hampered by the non-existence of any tradition nourished in the public consciousness (7).

The ILP (as an organisation with a "social conscience") could fulfil this role.

By forming this society through the medium of a body whose work is concerned with the organisation of the community's material needs, an important step has been made in asserting the principle that the Theatre is a public need, and that its work should be freed from exploitation by its inclusion among public services (8).

This was not simply a case of the ILP adding its voice to those calling for a National Theatre, to those who want to remedy the problem at one leap and "supply us with a ready-made tradition":

This rather boastful institution is to take precedence on public funds, of all the small artist groups which should be sustained and strengthened to form the actual corner-stones of the larger edifice, but which are allowed to struggle and decay from lack of public money and recognition (9).

Instead, they wanted a "more living, indigenous effort", preferring

to help create a more public-spirited attitude to theatre life by making a centre of it among their own people; to rise up and produce their own plays as an act of service to that section of the community with whose needs they are most directly concerned (10).

The MSFG was a small contribution to this scheme. It was to be set up as a subscription society (at the cost of a shilling per member), to avoid the "vicarious" help of the world of finance, "which is for the Theatre, nearly always an irrelevant and exploitive character". It could be controlled therefore by the consumers - "people who want plays for their own sake". The artistic impulse, however, would really come from the committee, from a coalition of full-time workers for the ILP, co-opted experts and MPs. How much real input the existing Arts Guild groups would have lay in the hands of individuals such as Miles Malleson and those few amateurs who served on the National London ILP Arts Guild.

In terms of the plays it was to produce, Scott gives us very few clues beyond saying they would be plays of "democratic interest". The Committee were "anxious" to produce Andreiev's Samson in Chains, and there was some suggestion that most of the plays would be found from amongst German and middle-European writers (11).

In practical terms, the MSFG aimed to find sufficient members to make it possible for plays and films to be performed in a moderate sized theatre about half a dozen times a year. Despite the fact that the actors were to be unpaid ("a gross injustice"), Harold Scott says that plenty of members of the profession were willing to give their co-operation and that several important members were ready to act as soon as the audience had been found. In time, it was hoped that as membership grew, larger theatres and more frequent performances would enable the Guild to pay actors.

One question Scott does not touch on is the reason why the ILP decided in 1929 to establish the Guild. It must therefore remain a question open to some speculation, but his suggestions that it was the first steps to establish a "People's Theatre" indicate it may have been a continuation of Malleson's original plans for the Arts Guild. The choice of name however (as compared to the Arts Guild) suggests that it also reflects a change in the ILP's politics, a change which had led to Maxton taking over the Presidency from Clifford Allen in 1926 and which had seen the publication of the Cook-Maxton Manifesto in 1928. This was "an attempt to regain the radical initiative" for the ILP, to return to the old values and old visions of Socialism, to

No longer stand by and see thirty years of devoted work destroyed in making peace with Capitalism and compromises with the political philosophy of our Capitalist opponents (12).

Whether such links were there or not is a matter for conjecture, but what was clear was the immediate success the MSFG met with in terms of members.

Membership for the first season at the end of 1929 closed at 800 and by 1931 it had nearly tripled to reach 2,300. In the meantime, the MSFG had staged three plays - in the event (and despite such grandiose plans) the only three they were to stage as a national organisation. The first production, The Singing Jailbirds by Upton Sinclair, was performed at the Apollo Theatre on Sunday 9th March 1930 and was produced by Edith Craig (13). An attack on the Californian prison system, it told the story of the growth of the Industrial Workers of

the World (IWW or Wobblies) and it was a choice of play which reflected (like the choice of name for the organisation) the increasing work and influence of the Communist Party in theatrical work. However the ILP stamped its own identity on the play by changing the ending, much to the displeasure of Frank Horrabin:

I have only one bone to pick with Miss Craig - if she was responsible for the cutting and arrangement of the play. I think the ending, as Sinclair wrote it, with the scene in the 'jungle' preceding Red's death in the prison, and the curtain coming down on the jailers, terrified at the rising swell of the "wobblies" singing, is infinitely more effective than the rearranged version with its "Passing-of-the-Third-Floor-Back" flavour, adopted on Sunday night (14).

Harold Scott defended the choice of play (although he makes no mention of the changed ending) in an article in Socialist Review where he points to the "note of individuality" struck by the play. The Guild had chosen a play which was deliberately different to those performed in the bourgeois theatre and also a play which would not leave them open to the charge of performing something which was similar in character to the work of the Stage Society. The Singing Jailbird differed (at least from the last mentioned group) by appealing not to the intellect but to the emotions, to the "truth people feel in their bones" (15).

The subsequent Guild performance was, however, of a very different nature, although the New Leader were proud to trumpet that it was written by an unknown socialist. Brain, a play of the whole Earth, was performed on Sunday April 27th at the Savoy Theatre and produced by W.L.Gibson-Cowan. Bernard

Shaw associated himself with the production (including helping to "procure a good cast"), having had the script thrust into his hands by "a wild young man at the Sexual Reform Congress". The wild young man turned out to be Lionel Britton, an errand boy who had spent most of his forty years as an assistant in a second hand bookshop and whose play (in the author's own words) was about

nothing less than man's struggle for race continuance in a universe of terrific forces and catastrophic chances (16).

Benn, reviewing the play in the New Leader, described it as being about mankind moving towards destruction:

The beast man is in control and his predatory instincts will inevitably lead if unchecked to a series of world wars that must end in the collapse of civilisation (17).

The only way out is co-operation and the question: how to achieve it? A group of unselfish scientists, authors and others of the "intelligentsia" decide that

an enormous mechanism resembling a human brain must be constructed and that this mechanism be infused with the capacity for thinking and directing the activities of mankind (18).

The "Brain" is built, and at first seems to be the solution to the world's problems. But gradually things go wrong as the mechanism loses its connection with humanity and takes total and dictatorial control of the world. In the process, the world is destroyed. Brain can be read both as a critique of science and technology per se (a not uncommon idea in the wake of the First World War) and as a critique of Stalinism, but these were not the points Benn picked up on in his criticism.

Rather he was concerned as to why Britton did not depict mankind being saved by the workers and criticised the author for his lack of dramatic understanding - a valid point in the light of the play's length and often ponderous dialogue. The Times reviewer was also less than impressed with the play:

Evidently the author of the play has accepted without reserve the Shavian contention that dramatic art is nothing if not didactic. The scientific men he assembles around a table are not so much men as exponents of scientific, or rather pseudo-scientific ideas...But Mr Britton goes a great deal further than Mr Shaw, the chief delight of whose plays is their brilliant dialectic; he is not afraid of being devastatingly dull. When the curtain rose last night at the Savoy Theatre, the members of the Masses Stage and Film Guild seemed as sympathetic as any dramatist would wish an audience to be, but long before the end even they were showing unmistakable signs of impatience (19).

In its experimental style, however, the piece had some redeeming features. Not only were some men's roles played by women, but the whole spanned a period of fifty million years, and incorporated off-stage voices, nameless characters assumed to represent "types" rather than individuals, and actors on trapezes and parallel bars. The final scene takes place in complete darkness:

There is no glimmer of light anywhere. A loud and slightly metallic voice is speaking into the night. It is the voice of Brain.

The voice perhaps comes from the roof of the theatre, and the ideal setting for the scene would be a dome-shaped roof like the inside of a planetarium, where the audience could watch the movement of the earth among the stars as the motion is speeded up and years take place in seconds; or again the voice might speak to a film commentary or accompaniment summarising the world activity of men during a thousand years as they work and live and move to watch infinity of the night sky (20).

In the course of the scene, where the only "actor" is the voice of Brain describing the break-up of the world, the audience sees in the night sky.

a darkness which is different from the other darkness, it is only visible because it blots out the stars. It could be made impressionistically to grow larger and larger as it would do if it were approaching the earth...(21).

The whole play ends as a chorus of voices takes up the cry of "Brain", the star growing larger and larger, cutting off the light of all the other stars, until

suddenly there is a terrific explosion, a blazing flash of light. Then total darkness. Silence. The world has disappeared. It is the night of time (22).

Such a play obviously demanded complex staging, a large demand on a company brought together for only one performance, and in that light it was a bold choice of play for the Guild's second production.

The pressures of creating a "one-off" performance did lead to production problems for the MSFG's final production, as the New Leader commented:

Mr Carrick's sets suggest interiors and exteriors with the utmost of economy of means. The least satisfactory scene was again the first. A field in daylight is not very adequately represented by an empty stage and one "spot". Yet what is the poor producer to do? He cannot have scenery specially painted for one performance (23).

The play in question (which was to have been the opening performance of the Guild's second season) was "a negro production with a negro cast" - Paul Green's In Abraham's Bosom. Performed at the Holborn Empire on 7th December 1930

and once again produced by W.I. Gibson Cowan, it was claimed by the New Leader as the "first play by a negro author" to be played in the West End (24). Although well received, it was deemed (even by James Laver reviewing the play for the New Leader) not to be a great work of literature

but as an appeal for "a chance" for the underdog was well worth doing (25).

In Abraham's Bosom was set in the deep South of America at the turn of the century, and told of Abraham's education and his battle with the whites, ending in tragedy as Abraham kills a man who threatens to steal his crops and is himself shot by a lynching party. The Times reviewer declared the play to be a gloomy and unimpressive one,

for we cannot distinguish clearly enough between the particular case which the author is making and the general. No doubt much of this confusion was due last night to the weakness of the acting and of the production. The play was rather recited than acted and much of the recitation was inaudible. Moreover, Mr Gibson Cowan who produced the play, so darkened the stage that the faces of the actors were at critical moments quite invisible (26).

If this review is to be taken literally, it was a rather inauspicious end to the theatrical ventures of the MSFG, for although the New Leader had announced two theatrical productions for that season (the second to be chose from a short list which included Martin Flavin's The Criminal Code, V.Svanov's The Armoured Train and It is Expedient by Kenneth Ingram), no more plays were produced (27).

On the film front, the Guild was more active. Russian and French films (including Snapshots of Russia and The Earth) had



been screened in London, and following a discussion at the 1930 annual conference (led by Hilda Browning, film secretary of the Guild), attempts were made to show films in other parts of the country. Little is known<sup>of</sup> the success of these showings; Swansea ILP did try to organise a showing of Mother but found the Watch Committee's opposition too persistent, but this is one of only a handful of references that can be found to film showings in the regions (28). What is certain, however, is that despite the fact that the conference decided to send detailed statements on the question to each branch, the ILP was a little confused as to its relationship with the Guild. In Newcastle, the local branch tried to maintain some distance between itself and the MSFG, as this note in Kinematograph Weekly illustrates:

A branch of the Masses Stage and Film Guild is being formed in Newcastle, for the purpose of exhibiting films that have failed to pass the censor. A conference of organisations and individuals likely to be interested in this project is shortly to be convened by the Newcastle Central Branch of the Independent Labour Party, which, however, is only concerned with the movement to the extent of calling the conference (29).

However, this would appear to be contradicted by the report of the Arts Guild meeting at the 1930 conference where "a great deal of interest" was taken in the suggestion that local ILP groups should form local "Masses Guilds" and be responsible for securing the showing of Russian films in their area (30).

Alongside the confusion over the relationship between the party and the Guild, there is also an argument over quite how seriously the Guild did take the showing of films. The New Leader had written that it saw films as a supplement to

the important and significant plays, Harold Scott's early outlines concentrated on the theatre, and, according to Bert Hogenkampf, film

would probably not have been included at all if it had not been for the campaign waged by "Benn", the film critic of the ILP weekly New Leader. In a series of articles - "How Labour Can Use the Films", "A Workers Film Society?" and "Why Not A Socialist News Reel?" - Benn (whose identity is unknown) outlined realistically what a workers' film movement in great Britain might achieve. In the end his ideas were better understood by the FOWFS [Federation of Workers Film Societies] than by the MSFG, his "own" organisation. The MSFG produced no newsreels and was dependent on Atlas Film, the FOWFS production and distribution company for the supply of films (31).

Benn's articles in the New Leader do have a tone of desperation; opening his article on "How Labour Can Use the Films", he pleaded:

This is not so much a note on amateur film societies, and a plea for the extension of the idea to the socialist movement, as a demand that the labour, co-operative and socialist movement sit up and consider the effects that films have on the lives and on the outlook of the workers in general (32).

Yet it would be wrong to assume Benn was alone in either writing about film or sensing its importance for the movement. Writing in the Daily Herald in 1928, Ellen Wilkinson argued that films critical of Capitalism "could be built up that would raise our masses to fury", Huntly Carter advocated the establishment of a Labour Cinema Guild and Philip Snowden wrote about cinema as

a means of healthy recreation and enjoyment. It is an antidote to harmful pastimes and injurious habits (33).

There was certainly antagonism to this new medium as well, although much criticism centred on the commercial films and the "American" influence. Thus Bouchier commented, whilst conceding that film possessed immense educational qualities, that for the majority

the word "pictures" means nothing more or less than American films. And these, on the whole, are inane, vulgar and disappointingly trashy. Up to the present, they have made no contribution at all to the development of art and culture (34).

It was a view echoed, as late as 1937, by Reginald Sorenson who dreaded cinema going on the grounds of "having to spend an hour or two" suffering from a mixture of "glucose, chewing gum, leaden bullets and nasal noises". Others were more generally concerned about immorality. James A. Lovat Fraser, a barrister and ILP supporter, was worried about the "large amount of juvenile delinquency" which he saw as being directly due to the influence of the cinema and Terence Greenidge was convinced that Socialists would always dislike the "musical type of show because of its obscenity" (35).

However, in terms of the film work of the MSFG, commercial cinema was not the starting point, and Benn did touch on the need for the movement to make films - an area which many chose not to discuss. In his articles, he compares the establishment of the Socialist Press to the establishment of a "Film Society with the object of producing and projecting its own films":

In Britain it seems as if we do not realise that there is any need for putting the workers point of view in the Cinema; we realise the necessity of a Trade Union Movement, a Co-Operative Movement, a Socialist Press, Workers Dramatic Groups, etc if working-class needs are to be met, and yet in the

Cinema we are content enough to accept what our masters are kind enough to give us (36).

Yet, in connection with the Guild's film showings, Benn himself was content to suggest using overwhelmingly "ready-made" films, supported by a "working-class short":

One of their programmes, for example, might consist of a Pudowkin or Eisenstein film as the big feature, backed by a Mickey Mouse cartoon (say The Cat's Away), a British instructional nature study, and if possible, a short film made by some working-class group around incidents connected with their everyday working-class struggle (37).

Ironically, given what would appear to be some distrust between certain sections of the movement and films, more films were shown than plays produced, but in comparison to other film societies of the time (and even to Benn's outlined programme), the MSFG showings were fairly limited and they never branched out either into making their own films or into the distribution of films made by other working class groups. This could lead to their work being compared unfavourably to that of, say, the Federation of Workers Film Societies who in their early days produced three newsreels (under the name of Workers Topical News) which dealt with the National Unemployed Workers Movement demonstration of March 1930, the Hunger March (of the same year) and May Day in London. This they followed with two early films by Ralph Bond: Glimpses of Modern Russia (a one reel silent film showing the progress of industry in the Soviet Union) and 1931, which showed

how the dockers, the railwaymen, the miners, the textile and steel workers are exploited under the rationalisation attacks of the employers. The imperialist character of British capitalism is emphasised with shots of slave labour in China and

the suppression of native revolts by the troops and warships. Shots of unemployed workers at the Labour Exchange, and the slums where the workers live are contrasted with the luxury pursuits and wealth of the bourgeoisie. The struggles of the colonial workers are cross-cut with those of British workers and there is a symbolic sequence urging solidarity with the Soviet Union (38).

However, a word needs to be said in defence of the MSFG on this question, not least to restate that the original objectives of the Guild were to bring "modern plays and films of democratic significance" within the reach of a working class audience. In attempting to show Russian and French films both in London and the provinces, it was trying to live up to this simple aim, and to judge its work against different criteria would be to distort its intentions. To this can be added the high cost involved in making films, something the Labour Party came up against as early as 1919 when a Sub-Committee on Literature, publicity and Research considered using film as propaganda and discussed the possibility of making a film illustrating working conditions in the mines. Despite interest from some local branches, by 1920 the Party was forced to shelve the proposal (which by this time had transformed itself into a film about agricultural workers) when they discovered it would cost £2,500 to produce (39).

Ironically, in the battle which ensued over the freedom to even show these films, the Guild could be more "radical" than some of those who advocated film-making instead of "film-showing". Replying to Benn's criticism of his book The New Spirit in the Cinema, Huntly Carter criticises Benn for being caught in the "art of the Cinema" and the "Russian technique fog":

Fighting the Censor is, in my opinion, simply an excuse for wholesale importation of foreign goods (40).

Nor should we, in assessing the success (or failure) of the MSFG, fall into the trap of Andrew Davies in simply looking at its theatrical productions. This said, he does raise a point about these which needs to be taken into consideration, arguing that from the first performance the contradictions of the Guild were revealed:

It was impossible to hire such a theatre without paying large sums of money which meant high admission prices, which in turn kept away working class families, even if they were prepared to venture into the West End anyway...The Guild soon had to abandon its aspirations of forming a "People's Theatre"..(41).

The problem of finding a suitable theatre was one of which Harold Scott had shown himself to be aware. In his article "What Can We Do For The Theatre?", he outlined a scheme to establish a non-profit making theatre to be set up with the help of the £70,000 collected for the by then defunct plan of creating a Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. He envisaged the building of more than one theatre in the middle of London (although not in the most expensive streets) which could be let at a price of about £100 a week, less than a quarter of a West End rent, to all "genuine play-producing" societies. By not aiming to make a profit, the theatre could reprice seats in a way which would bring them into line with cinema prices, and then

They would be filled by the hosts of theatre lovers who are able to pay reasonable prices for their seats, but who quite properly, refuse to be exploited in the interests of a procession of

middlemen. A peaceful revolution would be effected in no time. No heartrendings need be indulged in, no complicated committees of experts need be set up (42).

The only qualities individuals needed (apart from the necessary capital, for even Scott realised the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre money would not by itself cover the entire scheme) were a "normal amount of commonsense" and the "moral courage to act in opposition to vested interests". Yet no such theatres existed at the time of the MSFG, so the Guild was faced with the problem of hiring expensive West End theatres and having to raise the revenue from the sale of tickets.

This raises the problem of why the Guild was so keen to perform in West End theatres. They were not, as in the past, being offered the free use of the Strand, although they had in front of them the successful experiments of other play-producing societies who had managed to survive for long periods by hiring theatres and, although it may not have been an ideal situation, this proved it was possible. Yet this explanation by itself ignores the central problem faced by the MSFG, the question of legislation. In 1931, the 1781 Act prohibiting Sunday performances was resurrected, and it was this that led (as the Conference Report of 1931 noted) to the cancellation of all further theatrical performances (43). On the film side of the Guild, similar problems arose. In the summer of 1930

the LCC, the responsible body for private film societies in London, drew up a series of regulations governing the conduct of these societies which has to some extent crippled the work of the Guild (44).

This had led to smaller enrolements in that year. Problems were also afoot in the provinces, where, as the Annual Conference Report for 1931 commented,

...political apathy existing everywhere together with the very real difficulties relating to hiring of halls, local laws etc has considerably retarded development (45).

Censorship and legal changes (pushed through on the back of "political apathy") undoubtedly played their role in the demise of the MSFG.

These attacks were not accepted without a fight. Whilst the only response to the re-introduction of the 1781 Act in the theatre was the hope that the "difficulty will speedily be removed", over the issue of film the MSFG was more aggressive. The first conflict came in February 1930, when the Guild hit the headlines over the LCC's refusal to licence a showing of Pudovkin's film Mother at the Regal Cinema in London. This Soviet film had been banned by the British Board of Film Censors, but the LCC had given the Film Society (a more middle class organisation with a minimum 25s subscription) permission to show it in 1928. Their refusal to allow the MSFG to show the same film led to an outcry. Benn, writing in the New Leader commented:

The reason for this action seems to be that if you can afford to pay only a bob for membership of a workers film guild you are not fit to see these wonderful Russian films, whereas if you can pay three guineas for membership of a bourgeois film society, then obviously you are quite fit to see any film no matter how "subversive", "brutal" or "disgusting" (46).



Fenner Brockway, announcing a meeting on the question of film censorship at the House of Commons, stated:

We cannot escape the conclusion that the LCC is prepared to allow the select intellectuals to see the film, but is not willing to allow the working classes to see it. Despite the opposition of the LCC we are determined to show the film, and we shall organise a very big and influential protest against the action of the LCC (47).

At the House of Commons meeting on February 24th, Fenner Brockway had to report another defeat. The MSFG had applied to show the film at the Piccadilly Theatre, a theatre licensed by the Lord Chamberlain:

Theoretically this was possible. The LCC has no control over this theatre, and the Lord Chamberlain, it was assumed, had no authority to prevent any film being shown in one of his theatres on a day when his licence was not operative (ie Sunday).

But prevent it he did. Nobody seems to know why, and it would appear that the Lord Chamberlain himself is not very sure of his grounds, for it is expected in some quarters that he will lift his ban (48).

But Fenner Brockway had to tell the meeting that the ban was still in force.

Whilst the House of Commons meeting arranged for delegations to the LCC and the Lord Chamberlain to protest at the ban and to formulate proposals to set up a permanent council on film censorship (49), a letter protesting at the "particularly glaring illustration of the illogical and stupid working of our present censorship laws" (and signed by J.Keynes, Nigel Playfair, Arnold Bennett, Shaw and Laurence Houseman - amongst others) appeared in the press (50). The MSFG decided to pursue the matter further with the LCC, applying to the Theatre and Music Halls Committee of the LCC for permission to show, at

the Regal Cinema, Marble Arch on Sunday 23rd March and Saturday 27th April any of the following films: Mother, Battleship Potemkin, Storm Over Asia, New Babylon, October and The General Line. The first four had been refused certificates by the British Board of Film Censors; the last two had not yet been submitted. The Theatre and Music Halls Committee refused permission for the performance if any of the above films were to be shown, stating in its report:

We have caused inquiry to be made of the Board of Film Censors whether in its opinion those films are provocative or likely to cause a breach of the peace if shown (a) publicly or (b) privately, for example, to members of the guild and their guests. The Board's opinion is definitely in the affirmative on both (a) and (b). The Board further expresses the view that there is little difference between a public exhibition and an exhibition to which the public may obtain admission on payment of 1s (51).

The argument had come down to the interpretation of public and private, as Ralph Bond explains:

Miss Rosamund Smith, Chairman of the Theatres and Music Halls Committee of the LCC has been giving the low-down on the whys and wherefores of the decisions of that remarkable body. It all boils down to the fact that the minimum subscription to the Film Society is twenty-five shillings, whereas anyone can join the other societies on the payment of one shilling. Which means, according to Miss Smith, that any member of the general public can join these latter societies. You see, if you pay twenty-five shillings to the Film Society, you are not a member of the general public.

Class bias? Oh no! Anyway, the combined entrance fee and subscription to the Workers' Film Society for a season of eight performances is 13s, which is just about half that of the Film Society, so when is a member of the general public not a member of the general public? Answer - twelve bob! (52).

Or as Harold Scott spelt out:

One shilling says the Lord Chamberlain, is not a genuine subscription. To a member of the Royal household, it will be readily understood that this sum is more in the nature of a tip; but the Guild

caters for a less exalted membership, and if one had a head for statistics there should not be much difficulty in showing that at one ratio of income a shilling, regarded as an expenditure additional to the means of procuring the necessaries of life, is equivalent to five shillings (53).

Writing in Socialist Review, the Guild's production secretary went on to point out both the stupidity of the present censorship laws and their class nature. The situation

bears a strong resemblance to the police attitude to book publication; which, as everyone knows, allows an edition de luxe of a book which is forbidden in a cheap reprint. The difference is that no question of membership to a society is raised in this case; which perhaps gives the game away to some extent (54).

All the protest finally led the LCC in October 1930 to clarify and tighten up its regulations governing film societies, and not in a way that would guarantee the continuation of organisations like the MSFG. A minimum subscription of not less than 10s was imposed (when the average wage for an industrial worker was 49s a week), the local council had the power to inspect membership forms, seven days notice of uncensored films had to be given, and the number of guest tickets which could be sold was restricted to the number of members of the society. Films which had been submitted to and rejected by the British Board of Film Censors were not allowed to be shown, although films not submitted to the Board could be shown with the appropriate notice.

Whilst the MSFG campaign did pay some unexpected dividends (West Ham's Labour-controlled council allowed Mother to be shown at the Stratford Palladium in March 1930, and the cinema

gained quite a reputation as a sanctuary for Soviet films regardless of the British Board of Film Censors attitude to them, and the Edinburgh Workers Film Society showed Mother in April 1930) the net result of the new legislation was the demise of the MSFG.

Yet not all film societies collapsed in the wake of the new legislation. In fact the opposite was true; many continued to grow and flourish after 1930, and by 1938 there were approximately 100 film societies in England and Wales (55). London working class societies also faced less official obstruction after Labour gained control of the LCC in 1934. If this was the case, it does lead to questions about why the MSFG folded in the face of the new legislation. In response, two points are worth noting. Firstly, the MSFG was not an independent organisation; the ILP was not, like other societies, simply a film society, and it had other concerns and interests. The second point is connected to this; whilst the new regulations were undoubtedly a large contributive factor to the demise of the MSFG, political considerations are also of central importance, as Stephen G. Jones points out:

It is more likely that its early demise was intimately linked to the political difficulties faced by the ILP, which disaffiliated from the Labour Party in 1932, together with a lack of resources and commitment (56).

The demise of the MSFG was not however quite the end of the Labour movement's foray into the world of films. The gap was soon filled by the Socialist Film Council (SFC), which was formed in the summer of 1933 by a number of left-wing intellectuals in the Labour Party. The president was none

other than George Lansbury, who was joined by his son-in-law, Raymond Postgate and the socialist film critics, Rudolph Messel and Terence Greenidge. The aim of the Council was, to quote the title of an article by Greenidge, "Making Films to Make Socialists" and SFC did produce at least three films. The first (produced in 1934 and finally released by the ILP in 1938), The Road to Hell, dealt with the degradation of the means test, Blow, Bugles, Blow! was an anti-war film and What The Newsreel Does Not Show (made by Messel amongst others and released in 1933) aimed to counter the "official" news:

One learns too much about Russia from dingy unenlightened textbooks, and it is wonderful to see factories, railways, dams all erected so quickly not to mention masses of enthusiastic workers, in the first Socialist country. When the scene becomes England a close-up shot of Britannia above the legend "No Foreign Apples" and some telling shots of London slums dispose of Tariff nonsense and discussions about housing such as you get in the intelligent weeklies, absolutely and on the instant (57).

Both The Road to Hell and What the Newsreel Does Not Show were greeted with "much cheering" when they were shown at the Labour Party conference in 1933, but shortly afterwards the SFC appears to have lapsed into silence.

## THE LABOUR PARTY TAKES ITS PLACE AT THE FEAST OF BEAUTY.

The Labour Party holds...that the municipalities and county councils should not confine themselves to the necessarily costly services of education, sanitation and police, nor yet rest content with acquiring control of the local water, gas, electricity and tramways; but that they should greatly extend their enterprise in housing and town planning, parks and public libraries, the provision of music and the organisation of popular recreation (1).

As the Labour Party pamphlet, Labour and the New Social Order outlined at the end of the First World War, the Party was to take recreation and leisure seriously. It was a view that remained with it for a long time (Anthony Crosland writing in the wake of the Second World War talked about turning attention to "personal freedom, happiness and cultural endeavour" which included more open-air cafes, local repertory theatres, more hospitable hoteliers and statues in the centre of housing estates) and which was put into practice by the Party during the course of the second Labour government. Under George Lansbury (as Minister for Works) a number of schemes were implemented which attempted to promote healthy active recreation by building bathing facilities, parks, paddling pools, boating ponds and playgrounds, the most famous being Lansbury's Lido. Local Labour Parties opposed the encroachment of housing on open spaces and in Bermondsey, to use one example, the local Labour council was reknowned for the beautification of the borough. Whilst all these areas of work concentrated on healthy rather than cultural recreation, the two were not totally separate - at least in a theoretical sense, as the Daily Herald pointed out in an article written in 1923; leisure..

is the basis of the diversity in character and taste that makes human society alive and interesting and entertaining, like a pattern of many lines and colours (2).

In accordance with this search for diversity, the Labour Party did not confine its "recreational" work to trying to improve the quantity and quality of capitalist provisions. Local Labour Parties were also providers of opportunities for leisure within the organisation itself, as the frontage of the North Kensington Labour Club with its twin slogans of "Socialism" and "Recreation" proudly proclaimed. Consequently, in Colne Valley, the Divisional Labour Party (building on a network of clubs established in the 1890s) developed a plethora of activities including brass bands, rambles, excursions, sports days and whist drives. One of the most popular events was its annual rally and carnival for which a committee organised events such as skipping races, egg and spoon races, hidden treasure, a relay and side shows. The majority of local parties had at one time or another a specialist committee for the arrangement and co-ordination of social events (which in South Shields went under the title of the "casino sub-committee"), some produced a "diary of events" and many had their own annual rally complete (in the case of Swindon) with May Queen, balloon competition and fireworks. The Cambridge Daily News reported in the 1920s that Labour "socials have become a familiar feature in many villages in the county" (a remark echoed in many other areas) and the executive committee for Cambridgeshire Labour Party noted in 1928 that:

During the winter months our chief activity has been with concerts and socials. Again the smaller villages have been attacked with great success. The

Foxton Follies have continued to give their service and we cannot easily estimate their worth to our cause. They have visited 22 villages for us this season (3).

The reasons behind this branch activity can be accounted for in several ways. On one hand it was undoubtedly generated by Labour's antipathy to commercial entertainment; far better, it was thought, to encourage the provision of leisure activities within the Party (or the wider movement) than to allow it to become the prerogative of capitalism, as a contributor to the Leeds Weekly Citizen remarked

We should learn to play our own games, work at our own hobbies, choose our own associations....(4).

These games were generally the same as those played by capitalism (even down to the provision of Daily Herald playing cards and exhortations to smoke Red Flag cigarettes) but, as Stephen G. Jones notes, they also allowed for the development of fellowship or at least provided "an admirable and enjoyable way to achieve wider goals" (5). Yet at the same time, these activities were generally (and more prosaically) also an offshoot of the fundamental needs of a political organisation. That is to say, the primary concern in the provision of social activities tended to be raising finance and recruitment. So, in Colne Valley, Sam Carey's scheme for a Labour dancing competition was introduced "with a view to interesting young people in the movement and raising finance for Party purposes", and a Report to the Party's Finance Committee in January 1925 was blatant in its appeal to local branches to organise social functions, bazaars and fairs to raise money which the Party desperately needed for propaganda work. The proliferation of



jumble sales, bazaars and whist drives, the copying of "capitalist" leisure forms does indeed suggest more of a concern for attracting money and the public rather than "subverting" Capitalist cultural provision (6).

Within this plethora of recreational activity, more cultural events (including drama) had a role to play, although not all members were happy about the amount of energy given to them. Writing on Labour choirs and orchestras for the Leeds Weekly Citizen in October 1926, H.G.Sears complained that on the whole the Labour Party was too busy to be able to pay much attention to the arts - a view reinforced by Raphael Samuel who argues the Labour Party was "culturally the least ambitious organisation ever produced by the British Left". Sears, on the other hand, was (despite his qualms) forced to admit that the party did find time to do more in this direction than many other parties and whilst it may not have been the most active section of the movement in this direction (and the Executive at times were less than encouraging) it certainly did not ignore or shun cultural activity. Indeed, only eight months prior to Sears' article, the same paper had carried a report from the Leeds Labour Party Annual meeting at which the members had discussed the efforts made in the previous months to interest local branches in drama as "a means of self-expression and propaganda". A circular letter had been issued proposing the formation of dramatic groups, to which three branches had responded (Armley, Headingley and West Hinslett) and each group, with a membership ranging from 12 to 40, had produced plays for themselves and for other organisations (7).

Other general social activity reinforces not H.G.Sears' view, but an image of a culturally active Party. Perhaps the most important of the performing arts for Labour was music (as both Raphael Samuel and Stephen G.Jones point out) and it had its fair share of brass bands, dance bands, jazz bands and choirs, the last of which the Party formed into a Choral Union in 1925 "to develop the musical instinct of the people" and to "render service to the Labour movement". Within a year, the Choral Union had 94 Labour choirs involved in all kinds of activity from co-op musical days and annual competitions and festivals to community singing and organ recitals and attracting (at least in London) a good audience, as this report of a "Socialist Parade" at the Kingsway Theatre indicates:

A fine audience! It made one smile as one thought of the continuous whine from "posh" choral societies about the lack of support, rivalry of wireless and decaying interest in choral music (8).

Not everyone in the Party, however, was so impressed by the number of choirs or by the workers interest in them. A report on the state of the Choral Union in 1926 commented

It would appear that the existence of choirs or musical societies in connection with the Labour Party cannot be regarded as general as we have only secured a record of 94 choirs throughout the whole country, including London (9).

And five years later, G.R.Atterbury (then the chair of the London Labour Choral Union) bemoaned the fact that the movement was lagging behind that of Germany, and also vented some anger on the Labour Movement for not supporting the Festivals. He was nonetheless still hopeful that the choirs could serve a purpose in challenging the "spoon-fed tripe"

which capitalism served to the people and which turned them into robots with brains and limbs and muscles which had wasted away. For whilst Capitalism had "put the average intelligence pretty low" (and Atterbury was very much afraid it would sink still lower), the choirs could help to bring the people back to making their own opinions and their own amusements (10).

Making one's own amusements was not limited to joining a choir, and music formed a central part of branch meetings and socials with the Labour leadership happy to oblige with a song alongside the other members. Thus, George Lansbury delighted his local branch in 1909 with a rendition of "Nancy Lea" and Herbert Morrison proved a great success when he sang a ballad during the musical interlude of a political demonstration held at the Lambeth baths (11).

Whilst music was central to the Party's life and to branch activity, drama was far from absent. Indeed, in writing about the role the movement could play in challenging the "mechanical amusements" and "tinned thought" on general offer, Atterbury specifically mentions the dramatic societies, although in reality, much theatrical activity occurred on an ad hoc basis. So, at the League of Youth Summer School of 1925, all students had to recite, dance or sing for the Friday evening concert and this produced limericks on the Budget, a "Breach of Promise" case, impromptu bands and a "screamingly funny sketch" which depicted a miner's wife being wooed by the Tories, the Liberals and the Labour Party. As part of the celebration for Women's Week in the following year, a pageant "illustrative of the debt London owes to its workers" was

organised, and in 1928, the Labour Women organised an "All-Star Matinee" at the Palladium in aid of the Baby Clinic and Hospital established in memory of Mary Middleton and Margaret MacDonald (12).

In some branches drama groups were set up as part of their general activity, although it needs to be noted that in many cases the differences between Independent Labour Party (ILP) and Labour Party drama groups were often blurred (as was membership of the two organisations). So, for example, Harold Scott, later to be centrally involved with the ILP Arts Guild, was the driving force behind the organisation in Leeds of the dramatic groups and the Armley group quickly became the Armley ILP Players (later changing its name to the Armley Progressive Players) (13).

Yet it is also possible to pinpoint a handful of groups who worked specifically around the Labour Party. The Red Yellers made their first (and possibly only) appearance at the Exchange Divisional Labour Club in Cheetham Hill in December 1926 performing Upton Sinclair's The Song of the Jailbirds. Lansbury's Labour Weekly mentions in passing performances by the Pimlico Players (for the Wimbledon Labour Party) and the People's Players, who performed three one act plays for the Stoke Newington Labour Party in March 1926. The same branch was entertained in the following month by a dramatic group from the Hampstead Labour Party performing Blanco Posnet and the Daily Herald notes the establishment in 1925 of the Norwood Labour Players, although it makes no mention of any plays performed by them. In Holborn, the Constituency Labour

Party (later to be disaffiliated from the Labour Party because of Communist influence) took steps towards a "new form of workers dramatic expression" and in 1926 staged a "Living Newspaper" and at the other end of the country, in Stockport, the Labour Dramatic society put on Tom Thomas' version of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists. In much the same vein, the Levenshulme Labour Party in Manchester proudly announced the formation of a "Workers Theatre", which made its first appearance in October 1927 with a performance by "Worker Artists" of drama, music, satire and community singing - all of which proclaimed the "Labour message in an entertaining form". In Sutton, the Divisional Labour Party's Dramatic Group (under the chairmanship of P.Jolly) were just as ambitious and their first (and possibly only) performance consisted of a humorous sketch "packed with good propaganda" based on Henry Dubb, the chief character in a Daily Herald cartoon:

It portrays the Conservative Dubb reacting to the honeyed phrases of his autocratic leaders, with the Daily Mail as his newspaper guide, until coming into contact with "gadfly" of the Daily Herald, he sees the error of his ways, a happy finale being reached by his marriage with his landlady, Mrs Muggins, and a blessing from "gadfly" who exhorts him to be a Trade Unionist, a good Co-Operator, a Daily Herald reader and to always vote Labour (14).

Two Labour clubs also formed their own dramatic groups. The Parliamentary Labour Club (a permanent centre in Tufton Street where supporters of the Labour Movement could meet for "social life" and the "interchange of views") advertised a dramatic group which held readings once a month and occasional public performances. Another dramatic group was formed at the Half Circle Club which had been established by Beatrice Webb as a social platform for Labour Women.

to give the wives of Labour men, women organisers and the wives of Socialist intellectuals the opportunity for "fastidiously chosen recreation" and social intercourse, by which they could be groomed and trained to take part in public life and to resist the attractions of "London Society" and "the onslaughts of duchesses and millionaires against their integrity" (15).

Both the Half Circle Players and the Parliamentary Labour Club Dramatic Group performed as part of Women's Week at the reunion of London and Middlesex Labour Women held at Alexandra Palace, and for May Day, the Labour Party Women's Speakers Class (which may have been associated with the Half Circle Players) organised an afternoon's entertainment of monologues, duologues and short sketches (16).

The growth of interest in drama is reflected on the pages of both the London News and Labour Woman although most of the interest and activity centred around the work of the youth sections and the Party's League of Youth. So, for example, Labour Woman reported a production of Jerome K Jerome's The Passing of the Third Floor Back by the Heywood Young People's Section in January 1926 and the paper encouraged these groups to give entertainments and dramatic performances later in the same year in aid of the women and children of the coalfields. The number of enquiries received by the paper about plays suitable for young people's sections also led them to print a list of what they felt to be appropriate plays for groups with little or no dramatic experience. The list, which included comedies and plays for children alongside more "serious minded" plays, was printed with the advice that performances were not only a profitable way of making money, but more importantly

many plays are of great propoganda value and bring many new people into our ranks (17).

The following year the paper repeated the exercise, this time with an article aimed primarily at the Women's sections. Margaret Macnamara, organiser of the British Drama League, recommended groups started their activities by performing farces (from which they could continue with pathetic comedies, thrillers and naturalistic pieces), and also suggested religious plays for Sunday afternoon performances. However, unlike the youth groups, there is little evidence on the pages of the paper of women's groups taking up these ideas (18).

One exception can be found in connection with another Labour initiative, the establishment of a People's Theatre in Tottenham, in which, during its initial stages, help was given by the Central Tottenham Women's section. The brainchild of Robert Morrison, a local Labour MP, the idea started its life at the Tottenham Liberal and Radical Club in January 1927, when the Women's Section helped to arrange performances by the Swan Comedy Company of plays by Shaw, Malleon and Monckton Hoffe. This led to a conference being held at Morrison's house at which eighteen delegates were present representing ten Labour and Co-Operative organisations in North Tottenham. Within eighteen months, the People's Theatre had its own home built in the grounds of the Trades Hall and financed through the sale of five shilling shares. It was advertising West End shows at Tottenham prices, performances being given every Thursday by amateur companies including the Walthamstow Players, the Pax Players, the Hackney Players and

on one occasion by the West Green Labour Party Women's section who performed a humorous sketch entitled The Matrimonial Agent. The project survived successfully until 1930 when the licence expired and its successor, the Tottenham Playgoers Club, did not achieve the same results (19).

The starting point for the People's Theatre in Tottenham was making cultural activities generally only in the reach of the rich and well-to-do accessible to the "underpaid wage earner". Yet it was not confined simply to producing West End plays at Tottenham prices (set at 6d and 1s). In opening the new theatre, Robert Morrison spoke about the importance of working class people not allowing "capitalists to do anything for them that they could do equally well for themselves" and the idea behind creating a popular theatre where workers could see good plays was fed by the notion that Labour should concern itself as much with the "cry for a full mind" as for a full stomach (20).

The ideas behind the establishment of a People's Theatre in Tottenham can provide us with one starting point in trying to examine the Labour Party's approach to questions of drama, although, in general, the overlap between the Labour Party and the ILP makes a particular Labour Party strategy difficult to distinguish. In 1922 the Sheffield Forward, the paper of the Sheffield Federated Trades and Labour Council, carried a few comments on the type of theatre they thought the Labour movement should be aiming at, praising in particular the performance by the Oxford Settlement's Dramatic Society of Synge's Playboy of the Western World:



All Labour folk should enlarge their outlook and keep their souls alive in these struggling days by seeing plays such as this. Our movement, tinged with idealism and stirred by aspiration, should be giving rise to local drama and literature, which should be the expression of the common people (21).

The paper was worried that plays about the tragic struggle for bread and butter might knock the joy and vision out of people and called for a theatre which told

the clear-toned truth of the life of the people expressed for all to hear - and so that none may dispute and despise. For we have not merely to get votes, but to conquer the citadel of the mind (22).

Conquering the citadel of the mind meant engaging in battle with the "reactionaries" who had clearly realised the immense propaganda value of the stage and screen, so that

much of our ardent enthusiasm in the Labour movement bears no fruit because the workers are misled by the false doctrines, morbid sentiments and distorted views of life presented on stage and screen (23).

It was left to the Little Theatres to combat such propaganda with plays of real educational value and with "art for art's sake". Such ideas are very reminiscent of many put forward by the ILP (the Sheffield Forward had by 1926 become essentially an ILP paper), but they are ideas also to be found in the writings of Herbert Morrison, the driving force behind the Labour Party's attempt to establish, if not a nationwide organisation of dramatic clubs, at least a London federation. In an article entitled "Man Does Not Live By Bread Alone", written for the Woolwich Pioneer, Morrison outlines the impulses behind the establishment of cultural activities by the London Labour party in terms which do indeed reflect much

of the idealism of the ILP and also the hopes of his namesake in Tottenham:

We seek material betterment for the masses of the people not as an end in itself but in order that the soul and the spirit may be in a sense freed from the fetters of the body and that the predominant and all absorbing struggle for bread should be subordinated to the need for the opening of the mind and the expansiveness of the human spirit (24).

The greatest charge against capitalism was not that it inflicted material insecurity, but that it "cribs, cabins and confines the intellects and the souls of the mass of people". In establishing cultural organisations the Labour Party hoped to be able to help in the development of a love of the arts even under capitalism and to show the public that it was not only in the future that Labour sought to lift humanity above material things. Importantly, it was up to Labour organisations (and to the working class) to take the initiative themselves:

The modern working class is not waiting for well-to-do people, however well-intentioned, to uplift them. We are going to uplift ourselves...We are going to force the doors open, we are going to take our place at the feast of beauty...There will be an Art of the People, produced by the people, played by the people, enjoyed by the people, for we will not be content with the commercialised stuff of modern capitalist society (25).

Such activity was also of use to those comrades in the Party, and Morrison believed

that the London Labour Party had to provide opportunities to satisfy the cultural aspirations of its members and such comradeship would help to unify the party and make it a more efficient political organisation (26).

Accordingly, the London Labour Party undertook several cultural initiatives. 1924 saw the formation of the London Labour Choral Union under the conductorship of Rutland Boughton. A federation of Labour, Socialist and Co-operative choirs, it aimed to be a "furnace in which socialist musicians" could be "finely tempered", helping to improve existing choirs, establish new ones and to provide singing for Labour functions, as well as holding an annual contest at which composers of the stature of Ralph Vaughan Williams and Thomas Dunhill adjudicated. Within the first year, membership grew from 8 choirs to 15 affiliated choirs, numbering between 400-500 singers, and in late 1925 more musical plans were afoot, this time to establish a Labour Orchestral Federation for Greater London. The orchestra did not make its first public appearance until January 1927 when, in conjunction with the London Labour Choral Union and the London Labour Symphony Orchestra (another initiative of the London Labour Party, under the conductorship of Percy E. Gayer, the late deputy conductor of the Coldstream Guards), it performed for the Tottenham Labour Party (27).

Morrison was also involved in organising the London Labour Fair each year from 1921. Essentially a bazaar and bring-and-buy sale with sideshows and stalls, the fairs were very successful, the one in 1924 attracting 6000 people and making a profit of £731. The following year, Morrison organised the largest fair yet. The "Festival of Labour" was held at Crystal Palace and incorporated speeches, choirs, dancing, dramatic displays and various sports. However, this year the profit was only £16 and this led Morrison and others at the London Labour

Party, to abandon the large scale fairs and to establish the London Labour Party Sports Association, for the most popular activity at the Festival had been the sports. The objective of the Sports Association was to establish leagues for football, cricket, tennis, darts, billiards, quoits and swimming, but only the football league seemed to succeed. Even then, the Executive concluded in 1929, despite the fact that over 800 competitors were involved in the Sports Federation, that it was a failure for spectators were few, income was meagre and the sports meetings had suffered a heavy financial loss (28).

Financial problems also dogged the theatrical initiative undertaken by the London Labour Party, an initiative prompted perhaps by a letter to the Daily Herald from the secretary of the Hampstead ILP Dramatic Group, Mr Charles Green. He suggested a federation of existing dramatic groups within the Socialist movement which could be useful in numerous ways, not least in finding suitable plays, discovering and developing playwrights in the Movement, and increasing the opportunity for experiment with hitherto unperformed plays (29). The following week, the Daily Herald, which had welcomed Green's letter as a heartening sign in the Labour movement encouraging "us to hope and work for the building up of a People's Theatre", reported receiving a letter from Morrison in which he told them that the:

London Labour Party (to which he is secretary) has already under consideration the question of forming a dramatic organisation in association with the Party and consultations with persons interested have already taken place (30).

Morrison's project was to be limited to creating an organisation for London, assisted on its organising side from the office of the London Labour Party and giving performances in association with local Labour Parties in London. From its inception, the federation intended not simply to involve Labour Party dramatic groups, as Morrison made clear in a second letter to the Daily Herald in which, after submitting a draft constitution to the next Executive meeting, he proposed to call a conference of representatives of existing Labour, Socialist and Co-operative groups. The broad base for the federation was reinforced by two other initiatives being taken at the same time Morrison was contemplating his new group. At a meeting held at Caxton Hall in June, the ILP made its first moves to "inaugurate a national scheme for the development of dramatic and musical art within the Labour Movement" (the beginnings of the ILP Arts Guild), and Hampstead ILP published its own draft constitution for the National League for the People's Theatre (31). The Hampstead group agreed to co-operate whole-heartedly with the ILP national initiative and finally, before the inaugural meeting of the London Labour Dramatic Federation, agreement was reached between the ILP and the Labour Party that:

the London Labour Party and the ILP are to co-operate in the London area, while the ILP will make itself responsible for the rest of the country. A special feature will be made of the celebration of May Day (32).

The initial meeting of the Federation, held at the House of Commons on June 11th with Dr Alfred Salter in the chair was attended by 17 dramatic groups representing numerous organisations including the Co-Operative movement and the ILP,

and the links with the ILP were further strengthened by the choice of Arthur Bouchier as President of the Federation. Morrison opened the proceedings by outlining the ideas behind the Dramatic Federation, central to which was the desire to "get the working class not only to appreciate good plays but to play good plays" (33).

The two main objects he outlined to achieve this aim were, firstly, to give expert advice on the choice and production of plays, and, secondly, to provide a "common storehouse" from which companies could borrow properties. The Federation would be open to dramatic groups outside the area of London, if they were near enough to work in common with other groups. A draft constitution printed in the Daily Herald a month previously, expands a little on these ideas; it stated that the aim of the federation was:

To promote dramatic and artistic culture among the people and to render service to the Labour Movement of the metropolis; to provide means of co-operation and mutual assistance to affiliated groups and societies; and to promote, from time to time central performances (34).

During the ensuing discussion, Lewis Casson welcomed the new organisation

as a recruit to the movement which was going on all over England to reform the drama and in which the amateur was showing the professional theatre what it ought to be (35).

Yet despite Casson's welcome to the amateur and Morrison's aim of getting the working class to "play good plays", one of the striking features of the meeting is the number of prominent theatrical (and political) figures who made contributions and

who welcomed the new organisation. Not only were Lewis Casson and Arthur Bourchier present (Bourchier spoke about the Strand season and the role it had played in helping more people to understand the spirit of the Labour Party than a great many speeches), but so were James Sexton and Clifford Allen, and Sybil Thorndyke and J.R.Clynes were made vice presidents. Rutland Boughton appears to have been the only person at the meeting who, though happy to co-operate, was a little less enthusiastic than many others, hoping, that no attempt would be made to organise ideals "which were better allowed to grow spontaneously" (36).

Professional help was also very apparent in the one major production the Federation did manage to mount, a production which fulfilled Morrison's dream of hiring one of the largest London theatres and performing a play which united the Choral Union, the Dramatic Federation and the Orchestra (37). The chosen theatre was the Strand (no doubt acquired with the aid of Bourchier), and the play was The Insect Play, an enormous play, that might "well daunt the most hardened professional performer". But the Federation had the help, not only of Nigel Playfair, who had produced the play two years previously at the Regent Theatre, but also of a professional actor, Edmund Willard to play the Tramp (he was replaced by another professional, Malcolm Morley for the repeat performances at the Scala in October 1926) (38). Yet despite the professional help, the overwhelming majority of performers were drawn from the ranks of those amateur groups affiliated to the Federation, or, in the words of Sadie Cheeseman, the secretary of the Production Sub-Committee and herself a member of the

Dilkian Players, were entirely drawn from the ranks of the "workers by hand and brain". Nigel Playfair was helped by the "ceaseless energy and enthusiasm" of Ernest Cove, the music was composed by J.H.Clynes of the Half Circle Players and at least 9 members of the Royal Arsenal Co-Operative Society were involved in the production including a former actress, Monica Thorne, who was "the presiding genius" of that group and who was not only responsible for the production, but also played one of the leading roles (39).

The play had been chosen, despite its scale and the ensuing production difficulties, because it was seen as "probably" the most effective satire on capitalism and war which had ever been staged:

It portrays the lives, the cynicism, the infidelities of the insect world; it illustrates the greediness and cruelty of lower forms of life, culminating in the ant scene, in a great exhibition of wholesale mutual destruction...But the real purpose of the play is to show that social and domestic life under capitalism is perilously near the moral standards of the insect world. The butterfly scene shows the insincerity and fickleness of life among the idle rich, whilst other scenes portray the craftiness and greed which is drilled into the hearts of capitalists in the course of their struggles and the inhumanity of what is known as the struggle for existence. The ant scene is really an exposure of militarism and war...(40).

These were sentiments echoed in W.G.Raffe's review for the Bradford Pioneer in which he wrote of the way in which the character of the play had been further emphasised at the end of the performance when the orchestra concluded with the National Anthem, and the audience "failed to perceive the humour", demanding the "Red Flag" which they got. As to the



play itself, he regarded it not as a complete organic and artistic unity but as.

three satires on the follies of "high society"; on money-grubbing and legal murders; and on the stupidity of brainless obedience and unthinking activity are united only in their anti-capitalistic aspect (41).

He went on to discuss the expressionistic style of the play (which emphasised types rather than individuals), showing dismay that a section of the audience (who are used to "dope entertainment" where they are asked not to think) was not impressed by the style - a few were even inclined to "sniff" at it. Despite these few individuals, the review proclaimed that there need be no hesitation in affirming that the production was a tremendous success dramatically:

A definite period in the development of the Theatre as an instrument of cultural propaganda on behalf of Socialism was marked...(42).

Dramatically, the play may have been a huge success, but success bred some unforeseen problems. The first production at the Strand on Sunday March 21st had been over-subscribed; the theatre had been filled to overflowing, with an audience of 1,200 (a proportion of whom had to stand) and the application for tickets totalled three times that number. Complaints were received about the allocation of tickets, and the London Labour Party spent some time and energy both in defending itself and in distancing itself from the enterprise. Whilst the Party did regret the fact that any dissatisfaction had arisen, it declared it could not itself be held responsible for decisions taken outside of the control of the Executive Committee of the Party or its Party Secretary. In holding the

problems (if not the entire project) at arms length, the attitude and relationship of the London Labour Party to the Dramatic Federation was brought into question and also its role in the final demise of the Federation. From their reaction to the problems we can sense a certain indifference (if not hostility) manifested by the London Labour Party, and it was an attitude also to found in the party nationally. In January 1925, the NEC minutes noted the following item:

People's Theatre: A Letter was reported from the Westminster Labour Party with a resolution urging the Executive Committee to make the People's Theatre a foremost consideration in its propaganda plans - No action (43).

Despite such indifference, the Federation itself did attempt to make good the disappointment felt by those who had been unable to get tickets and four subsequent performances were arranged to be held at the New Scala Theatre in October 1926.

As with the first performance, these too would appear to have been an artistic success, but they were also fraught with problems - this time of a more serious nature. In the words of The Clarion, "courage is costly" and the London Labour Dramatic Federation was faced with a deficit of between £100 and £150. The whole future of their work hung in the balance and a campaign was launched in an attempt to save the group. An appeal was made both to a "few of our friends" who possess the means to liquidate this sum immediately and to ideals, for:

To be able to stage such plays as embody the distinctive ideas of the workers and of the Socialist gospel is an aim worthy of strong support (44).

Once again the Federation was relying on wealthy and famous individuals despite its claims to be an organisation for the modern working class which was not waiting for well-intentioned people to uplift them.

Whether the money was raised remains a mystery, but the Federation did not embark on any subsequent large scale performances. It did carry on, however, albeit in a somewhat morose fashion. An article in the London News for January 1927 attests to its existence, noting that due to the General Strike the Dramatic Federation had to undertake its own secretarial work, under the eye of Sadie Cheeseman and the paper appealed for help from the readers. One more attempt was certainly made at performances, when in April of the same year, the Federation organised a series of "Co-Operative" readings at the offices of the British Drama League, commencing with Hauptmann's The Weavers. However no further mention is then made of the Federation, and it appears to have finally given up some time in 1927 - a rather sad end (and a very small history) for a project which had started with such high hopes (45).

One clue to its demise can be found in Donoghue and Jones' biography of Morrison where they state that by 1926 the local dramatic societies had become little more than play-reading circles and that Herbert Morrison had become disillusioned because the London Labour Dramatic Federation (and his other cultural enterprises) had

used up a considerable amount of Morrison's time and that of the staff, circulating local parties, booking halls and printing tickets. He felt they

would be better occupied in tasks directly related to party organisation and electioneering (46).

To this could be added the recollections from a 1945 article in The Star which refers to Morrison telling the Theatrical Managers Association that running a dramatic federation was "past my organising ability". Morrison's cultural ventures were certainly dogged by financial disaster, but the final demise of the organisation seems to be connected more to the lack of support he received from the Party nationally than to his own lack of organisational talent. Nor should we be convinced that he gave up his ideas of "battering down the doors" or decided art and music had no place in the Labour movement. In 1931, in an article on the London Labour Choral Union, he described the inspiration they provided to "those of us who like the Labour Party to be more than a mere bread and butter movement", and he described, with obvious delight, the sight of ordinary London working men and women who have "learnt to sing for the glory of the cause and the happiness of their souls" (47).

#### Woolwich and Welwyn.

Donoghue and Jones' assertion that by 1926 most Labour Party dramatic societies had become play reading circles should not go unchallenged, and alongside the work of Morrison and the London Labour Dramatic Federation, the work of two Labour Party dramatic groups is worth looking at in some detail: the Woolwich Labour Thespians and the Welwyn Labour Players.

The Woolwich Labour Players are less to be remembered for what they performed, than for being one of a very few examples of dramatic groups solely established by the Labour Party. The Woolwich Labour Party had a lively social life, which had:

developed from the first within our ranks [and] which has found expression in many ways. Ward Committee socials are now a permanent feature of many wards, and a Central Social Committee, consisting of delegates from each ward, has in recent years been responsible for many successful functions. This committee also brought into being the Woolwich Labour Thespians and the Young Labour Entertainers, composed of children of members, who by their talent can fill the Town Hall on consecutive nights (48).

Socials played a twofold role for the Party (both of which reinforce earlier assertions about their role), as the Woolwich Pioneer pointed out in the annual report for 1925, in which year a number of socials had not only benefited the party financially, but had also afforded opportunities for members to gather together. Important work had also been done by the Pioneer Labour Choir (founded in 1907) which was, in the words of an appeal for new members, helping the party to sing "our way to Socialism" (49). Two dramatic groups, both under the direction of Mary Hope, a "talented elocutionist", were formed in September 1925. The Young Labour Entertainers proved to be a popular initiative, and by the time of their first performance at the Town Hall in December 1925, membership had reached a 100 and there was a waiting list to join the group. They concentrated essentially on revue type productions, performing a grand "Chicks Revue" in September 1926 and contributing songs, scenes, ballets and instrumental items to the 25th Birthday celebrations held in 1928. Following items such as "The Dolls Dream" (a ballet scene) and

"A Modern Nursery Rhyme" (as well as pieces played by the Young Labour Orchestra), Alderman H. Barry praised the work of the Entertainers for encouraging the self-expression of children (one of the most "promising aspects of the modern Labour Party's work"), as opposed to the Victorian theory that children should be seen and not heard (50).

In contrast to the revues of the Young Labour Entertainers, the Woolwich Labour Thespians concentrated their energies on performing plays. For their first performance in January 1926, they offered four short plays: A Pretty Piece of Business, The Understudy, Miss Civilisation and The Awkward Railing (which was also performed al fresco at the Labour Party Annual Gala held in Abbey Woods). They performed in the main at branch meetings and party functions giving sketches and one-acters, as J.T. Cotter makes clear in a note in the Woolwich Pioneer in which he writes of the "bright and entertaining" sketches the Thespians had put at the disposal of the party - just the thing, in his view, for secretaries looking to brighten and vary their social functions (51). On occasions, the Thespians did branch out and give public performances of full length plays, plays such as Sheridan's The Rivals or Shaw's The Devil's Disciple, the latter being performed at the Eltham Parish Hall, but the very conservatism of their choice of plays was marked by their performance of Toller's Masses and Men in February 1930. In the words of one of the cast, Ethel Brooks, this propaganda play represented a new departure for the group standing in marked contrast to their more conventional material and proved difficult for the group to produce, requiring long rehearsals to achieve the

necessary precision for the choral speaking and movement in unison. However, despite their worries that the Expressionist style was a "bit over the heads of a lot of people", the play was well received (suggesting maybe that the audience would have liked to see more "new departures"), but it does seem to mark the height of the Thespians' experimental endeavours - if we are not to include the performance of the pantomime, Humpty-Dumpty at the Woolwich Labour Club in 1928, organised by Councillor C.H.Langham and J.Silvester (52).

Nor was it simply that the repertoire of the Thespians reflected a certain conservatism; the role of the dramatic group, under the control of the right-wing leadership of the local Party, became apparent during the General Strike when it was used, not to provide propaganda in favour of the strike but to "keep people off the streets" and to counter Communist threats to public order. One member of the Thespians recalled:

We used to put these things on with young labour entertainers every afternoon at the Town Hall, about three evenings a week as well to give the men something to do. They brought their wives and families and so every afternoon we were full up (53).

Criticism of the Thespians was not long in coming. Shortly after their formation, the dramatic group of the Woolwich District Trades and Labour Council announced their aim of initiating an enterprise which voiced the aims and objectives of industrial workers, for:

the existing Labour and Co-Operative Dramatic Groups are of very little practical use to the working class, as they are not based on the recognition and understanding of the class-struggle (54).

Following a meeting in January 1926 to which all members of trade unions affiliated to the council were invited with their wives and friends, a workers' theatre was set up at the Plumstead Radical Club (with the support of the Trades Council) which aimed to produce:

The antidote to the anti-working class dope of the press, pulpit, school, cinema, wireless and co...An unrivalled method of propaganda, recreation and revenue for the Workers advance to the Co-operative Commonwealth (55).

The new group were to perform plays which were in marked contrast to the "so called Labour plays" which, in the eyes of Charles Ashleigh, were "compounds of diluted Liberal politics, mawkish sentimentality and middle class snobbery" (56). Given such aims, it is a little surprising to find their first performance (which was opened by Tom Mann) included the comedy Mrs Jupp Obliges, a play which if a long way ahead of anything performed by the Woolwich Labour Thespians, was certainly a staple piece for many ILP and Labour groups.

Yet simply to use the example of the Woolwich Labour Thespians as representative of the dramatic groups affiliated to the Labour Party would be only to tell half of the story. The Welwyn Labour Players stand in marked contrast, a contrast which can in part be seen from the fact that whilst the Thespians' pinnacle of experiment was Toller's Masses and Man, the Welwyn Group were, in December 1934, giving the first English performance of Toller's The Blind Goddess, a:

tragedy of a miscarriage of justice. The action develops with something of the cumulative fatality of the Greek drama; but there is a naturalism of characterisation, a relentless realism in the conclusion and a sense of indignation, not against fate but against the injustice of men to each other,



that are essentially characteristic of the author of Masses and Man (57).

Toller was in the audience of the Barn Theatre for the occasion, and had visited Welwyn a few months previously, when he had spoken at the Parkway Cafe to the "intelligentsia" of the town about the difference between political literature and political propaganda "which employs literary methods", an issue which was at the heart of the problems then being discussed by the Labour Theatre movement. However, as striking as is the fact, that an amateur group in Welwyn gave the first English performance of a play by Ernst Toller, it was not the pinnacle of their contribution to the Labour Theatre (58).

The roots of the Welwyn Labour Players can be found in the impromptu and eclectic dramatic performances which made up part of the social activities of the Labour Party in the city, socials which aimed, as one leaflet put it, to take people's minds off the melancholy world around them:

Dark blue, light blue, pinkish, red,  
Politics for once don't matter,  
Labour offers, so 'tis said,  
Music, dancing, fun and chatter,  
Don't you think it's worth a shilling,  
For one evening to be jolly,  
Buy a ticket, show you're willing,  
To escape all melancholy.  
At the Annexe welcomes offered  
Saturday at seven o'clock,  
Take the friendly hand that's proffered  
Come where all wise people flock (59).

Such entertainment came in a variety of forms. A "Muckle Mercat" held in December 1922 included all the usual attractions of a fete plus an art gallery and museum exhibiting a priceless collection of "unknown masterpieces,

objets d'art, articles de vertu, genuine antics, curios, spurios, fossils, fungi and friskilictics". One social in October 1923 included an amusing dramatic sketch entitled Amelia (which was followed by a concert and mimed folk songs) and the final social of the 1923 season incorporated both a sermon and a Russian Ballet, or a series of "grotesque antics" performed by "Comrades De Youngski, Hennelloff, Reiski and Selli" (60).

Nor did all such entertainments ignore politics. The "Muckle Mercat" promised a special attraction (if it was released in time) of The Whiskers of Beelzebub, a socialist morality play with an all star cast. An impromptu charade performed at one social was "an amusing travesty of a Tory meeting" and at another members performed an unrehearsed sketch entitled "Forming the Garden City Klu Klux Klan". The wide scope of the entertainments was also in evidence at a "mock cinema" entertainment, a "six reel drama by Labour Saving Films" entitled A Woman's Hatred. Or Was She Jealous?, in which the part of a ballet girl was played by Mr Hicks and the foreign duke by Mrs Blacklock (61).

Sources date the actual formation of the Labour Players differently and whilst, it would appear that the first official performance of the group did not take place until 1924, plays were being performed by the same group of people as early as April 1922, when they produced W.W.Jacobs' humorous sketch, Admiral Peters (62). In June of the same year, one of the other Welwyn drama groups, the Theatre Society, had performed Shaw's The Showing Up of Blanco Posnet

and the Labour Players responded with a parody of both Shaw (who was a local resident) and a satire on Garden City internal politics entitled The Blowing Up of Bolsho Poshnut. The preview in the Pilot described F.J.Osborn's play as such a "heavy melodrama".

that it is feared the foundations of the City may not be able to stand the excessive strain to which they will be subjected. Strong supports may be found necessary to safeguard the city foundations against any unsuspected structural defects which this wonderful Melodrama may reveal...The Blowing Up of Bolsho Poshnut is we believe a lesson in purely local history applied with the mathematical accuracy of pure artistry. Any citizen who misses this local masterpiece will have missed a most essential course in Civic Education, composed by one who has had a life experience in that department (63).

In reviewing the play, the paper had changed its description from "heavy melodrama" to a "comic history".

of the second Garden City founded by Ebenezer the Conqueror and peopled by villains who deliberately crossed the grass and dug up primroses in broad daylight, hung up their washing on Sundays and drank dandified milk. The clerk to the parish council was also minister to six combined religions, Solicitor to the Boosting Garden City Trust, Editor of the Boosting Garden City News, Secretary to the Sports Club and several other bodies. the chief citizens were Sir Theodore Chambers who wrote " - Britain"; R.L.Reiss, the Champion Billiard Marker and Standardiser of Sanitary rabbit Hutches; Emile Davies, the Tramp Poet; Dickie Wallhead, the Welsh International who got England into the first division of the League of Nations; Solly Purdom, who was assassinated by a drama critic and who really wrote Shaw's plays; Joe Dallas, the agitator who organised a strike of dustmen; C.B.Fry, the vegetarian Cricketer who believes an apple a day keeps the doctor away; and Saint James who invented a fire-proof religion. In this city there were six different religions, three dramatic societies and two and a half political parties. The Liberals and Tories became converted to nationalism, the Labour Party sang God Save the King and they all amalgamated. A committee was set up to find the difference between the Quakers and the Catholics and could find none so they all amalgamated and thus the oneness of the oneness was achieved (64).

This parody was followed on June 9th 1923 by a performance at the Labour Party Sports (or Mucklespree). The Welwyn Pageant of 1971, written in twelve episodes and once again by F.J.Osborn, was a humorous anticipation of how the origins of the city might look to "local patriotism" in 1971, and included another caricature of Ebenezer Howard, the founder of the city:

Mr Howard in the audience enjoyed the fun as much as anybody and with the same sort of reason, for the convention of this pageant was a pull of the leg and a tweak of the nose impartially all round (65).

As with the Shaw parody, the local paper described the Pageant in some detail, and it is worth quoting in full for the flavour it gives us of the style of the piece:

The Pageant opens with the Smoke Fiend (played with much spirit by Mr T Colley) jumping vigorously on the prostrate forms of Labour, Democracy, Science, Art and other allegorical persons. The Smoke Fiend evidently represents the Great City and he is in close alliance with the Money Fiend (a very humorous effort by Mr Rambow) and the War Fiend (Mr Jack Haggis). Peace armed with a garden syringe, drives out war and Eb-El-Welwyn appears as the Wizard who will conquer the Smoke Fiend. In a series of episodes, the foundation of Welwyn Garden City is caricatured. The Wizard buys the land without any money, conjures up magic papers to feed the workers and is assisted by a less sympathetic character who calls himself Biz-izbiz and speaks a sort of modified Yankee dialect.

The Engitect and Archineer are called in and presently Miss Amy New Milk Trust (played by Mrs Jennings) presents herself, and after a somewhat hurried courtship is married by the Wizard to Biz-izbiz. Biz-izbiz is much harried by the ladies adopted twins, Faith and Charity, who clutch him by the leg and impede his movements.

Labour (well played by Mr J.T.Blencowe) unveils the first house on its completion and asks 'Who is the lucky man to live in it?'. Says Democracy:

I think that Labour ought to take it

Since Labour's done the most to make it.

And when a middle aged couple come in and buy the house for weekend jaunts, Labour cries:

I thought we were fools

And this just clinches it;

We build the house  
And this chap pinches it!  
The Pageant ends with the seven curses of the Smoke Fiend, all of which fail under the counter curse of the Wizard and the Smoke Fiend finally dies and is buried at Hatfield Hyde (66).

Whilst the review did note that the piece had been hurriedly written and insufficiently rehearsed, it also deemed the event a success and noted that a repeat performance had been requested. In response, The Welwyn Pageant of 1971, with a considerably augmented cast of between thirty and forty and several new songs and dances was performed on Saturday 14th July in the playing fields adjoining the school in Applecroft Road. All proceeds were donated to the Educational Association for the School Development Fund (67).

The first "official" production by the Labour Players took place in March 1924 at Parkway Hall, when they performed a play written by the local branch secretary H.B. Pointing, The White Lady. Written in three acts and a prologue, the play compared the conditions of agricultural labourers in 1830 (a time of riots when 450 rioters were punished by death or transportation) and 1924, the comparison being made by using modern characters (a labourer and a trade union official) who return to the past. A review in the Welwyn Garden City News concluded that while times change and garden cities are built where villages once stood, the trials of labour are still the same. We are still haunted by the "White Lady", the ghost of the girl who lost her lover in labour troubles a hundred years ago:

In 1830 the man who saw a little clearer than his fellows had to sacrifice himself for their sakes and

to-day the same demand is made of those who see something better ahead (68).

The play attempted to dissolve the differences between the past and present, as the New Leader noted:

Mr Pointing...has skilfully interwoven the struggle for liberty and better conditions of the agricultural workers today and in the early nineteenth century (69),

and the Welwyn Garden City News felt the staging reflected that attempt to break down barriers:

The play, did indeed, bring the stage and the audience together in a manner quite unusual in the theatre, and yet most delightful. The village homeliness of its sentiment and the simple easy way of its performance, its ample and complete rusticity made the performance a domestic occasion where we're all friends (70).

In contrast, the Welwyn Pilot was less than friendly in its review, commenting on the fact that

The play followed Mr Bernard Shaw's method of teaching by long dialogues and conversations. Of action there is little though the last scene was somewhat more dramatic...We cannot believe that it was pure propaganda because the actors made such a mess of things and a propaganda play to be of use must encourage its hearer in the certainty of success which this play most certainly did not (71).

The White Lady was followed in June of the same year by a repeat performance at the Welwyn Garden City Festival of The Blowing Up of Bolsho Poshnut, this time accompanied by The Twelve Pound Cook, a skit on Barrie's play at the expense of "high brows and vegetarians". A repeat performance of both plays was given in the Parkway Hall on July 4th, and in the following March, the Players revived The White Lady. At the end of March 1925 a triple bill was presented at the same

venue. The three plays chosen were: Augustus in Search of his Father by Chapin, Makeshifts by Gertrude Robins and The Unchanging Hills by the local writer and journalist, W.Branch Johnson - the first of several of his plays to be performed in Welwyn. It tells a story, remarkably modern in its concerns, of an ex-soldier turned farm-hand who is incensed at seeing his "beloved" hills being spoiled by the building of week-end villas and cottages. In a frenzy, he sets fire to one of the houses, choosing the one (unbeknown to him) which belongs to his late Commander. The Captain at first declares it his duty to have this former soldier arrested on a charge of arson, but is

so moved by the passionate eloquence of his old comrade in arms that the hills were being desecrated by the erection of house property and also possibly by the pleading of the house-burner's wife (of whose hospitality he had partaken an hour before) that his resolution wavered, the finale leaving one in doubt as to what eventually happened (72).

The Welwyn Garden City Pilot was unconvinced about the realism of the piece, for although the lines contained "many beautiful passages" which revealed a "true poetic passion for the beauty of the countryside":

Whether there exists an agricultural labourer in England who feels the sacrilege so intensely as the author depicts that he sets light to the offending villas desecrating his beloved hills is problematical and may cause Mr Johnson's play to be described as lacking in realism (73).

Realism was, however, not a problem with the Players' next choice of play. At a meeting held on Friday August 7th 1925, (and chaired by R.C.Wallhead, president) 30 members and friends of the Welwyn Labour Players decided to hold monthly

play readings, and that the next production should be Galsworthy's The Silver Box. The evening was rounded off by a reading of Man of Destiny, with Wallhead playing Bonaparte and H.B. Pointing as the Lieutenant. But before The Silver Box could be produced, a major change occurred in the company; at the AGM

the local play actors hitherto known as the Labour Players decided by a small majority to change their name to that of the Welwyn Folk Players, it being considered that the old name was too political to appeal (74).

A few months earlier, H.B. Pointing (an active member of the Players), writing for The Labour Magazine, had already hinted that the players would have to decide

which is the more important part of the title - "Labour" or "Players". In other words they have to decide whether they want to emphasise more in their work that they belong to the Labour movement or to the Theatre movement (75).

In his eyes, the decision was not in doubt, for

An amateur society exists because the theatre exists, and whatever propaganda it can do cannot obscure the fact that its longevity will depend finally on being true to the claims of art (76).

Yet looking at the subsequent work of the Players, it is hard to see a real change in emphasis following the change in name - a change which it should not be forgotten was only decided by a small majority. In his article, Pointing discussed the question of the relationship between theatre and labour:

It is true that the promotion of interest in the theatre is not a legitimate function of a political party. But the theatre is certainly a considerable interest in the lives of those who make up the party. As a matter of principle there may be no call for a "Liberal" theatre, or a "Labour" theatre. Yet it cannot be denied that there are certain problems



in life which affect the working class more than they affect others, and the plays in which these problems are discussed or which show at least an appreciation of the working class point of view, will naturally attract the workers most (77).

Delighting in the growth of a "genuine people's theatre movement", he makes the point of emphasising the fact that the amateur and little theatres have definite purposes of their own, distinct from those of the commercial theatre:

Their work may be said to be of an educational character, but not merely educational. First and last, the purpose of the theatre is to provide entertainment. An amateur society which sought to ram nothing but propaganda down the throats of its audience would very soon come to the limits of that audience's endurance and would bring itself to ruin (78).

Yet while the central purpose of the group should be entertainment, Pointing stressed also that entertainment

is not merely passing the time. Genuine entertainment engages the mind and takes us out of ourselves, and a company of people being entertained is a company of people sharing a common and enlarging experience (79).

The Welwyn Players (under both names) fit Pointing's description in many ways. The report of the Welwyn Garden City Labour Party for 1924 describes the players as performing plays of social significance or local interest, and the Executive report from the same year, discussing the work for the new year, suggests the Labour Players should be encouraged

"to tour the villages with plays of educational as well as amusement value" (80). In 1928, the following limerick caricaturing the Folk Players won the first prize at a Folk Players New Year Party:

A fanatical crowd of Folk Players,  
Produced some quite promising brayers,  
But their plays were too Red,  
So the audience fled,  
Singing "God Save the King" on the stairs (81).

And if this description of the newly named group was a little over the top (even for the Labour Players), the words of R.C. Wallhead, at a social less than a month after the change of name, show the continuing links. He stated that the Folk Players.

were established by a group interested in Drama and were out to give good entertainment by the production of plays or other activities. The Folk Players gave preference to plays portraying social problems or ideas, yet did not exclude others provided they were good plays from the point of view of entertainment (82).

Ideas which are still reflected in the programme notes for The Blind Goddess which states the object of the group as being the production of plays "particularly those with a social interest". Whilst classics were "drawn on", the society made a point of presenting modern and original plays by known and unknown authors. and, writing in 1934, Frederick Osborn described the work of the Folk Players thus:

They believe that the stage can be used by ordinary men and women to reflect and make entertaining the lives of people as "ordinary" as themselves, as well as to focus attention on the weak spots of the world they live in (83).

Following the change in name, the Folk Players concentrated on the weak spots shown up by plays such as Yaffle's Foiling the Reds, RUR and The Machine Wreckers. Alongside these they also read or performed less overtly political plays, including

Anatole France's The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife and Crainquebille, Cheezo by Lord Dunsany and F. Sladen Smith's The Invisible Duke. Yet these plays too were justified as being more than entertainment, as a note on The Silver Box makes clear:

If you want to judge its true dramatic impression as a whole, ask, I think, the genuine lover of the theatre who is busy most of the time earning his living or holding his end up with his family, but who goes to the theatre as often as he can. That man will not be tired of Hamlet; he hasn't had time to be. He won't worship Strindberg, because he is too busy to get himself into the necessary state of mind. At the same time he can't be taken in by the cheap second hand effects so cleverly dished up by the commercial playwrights and actors. He won't be in the latest phase of despising wit, or sentiment, or syntax, or discussion, or movement or whatever is the anathema at the moment. He will usually be able to appreciate what is original, what is powerful, what is heartily amusing and what is deeply moving in the theatre (84).

The performance of local satires did not disappear entirely from the Folk Players repertoire, but their role was much reduced. Indeed, it is only the production of Foiling the Reds that incorporated attacks on the "fiction" written by the local paper, the Pilot, and on the policy of Garden City companies, as well as incorporating an attack on "Comrade 'Arry 'All, an orator" who

recites "What does Karl Marx say in The Building of Satellite Cities on page so and so beginning with the words "Please do not pass across the grass". Them words is as true today as they was then. What we want is a Pear Tree entrance to the station and increased facilities for the class to which we belong" (85).

The last was a reference to a real incident, when the Garden City had closed a footpath and forced the residents to use a bridge instead. F.J.Osborn did write another local satire, the

"Howardsgate Studio's All-Howling, Buzzing and Crackling Masterpiece", The Cherry Tree Singer, but this "film" of "one hundred percent British Whoopee" written in the style of the old Welwyn Labour Players was performed in 1933 not by the Folk Players but by the Theatre Society (86).

Yet if the new Folk Players turned their backs on one of the traditional forms popularised by the Labour Players, they did continue to encourage and perform plays by local authors. In 1928, Ernest Selley's "straightforward little comedy" John Kawdry was performed as part of a triple bill. Based on the reading of Kawdry's will following his funeral, tension rides high for he had been "living in sin" with his sister-in-law. It was to be the first of several plays written by Selley, although the Folk Players only produced one more in 1933, For What We Are About to Receive (87). A more important new play, was the production of H.B. Pointing's second effort, The Man in Leather Breeches, performed in 1930 at the Welwyn Theatre. This was the story of George Fox, founder of the Quakers, and his challenge to Cromwell's use of force in establishing authority in the state. Advertised as the "theatrical event of 1930", it was a play of "action, costume, colour and ideas" which sought in part to repudiate the fact "that the Quakers were a gloomy lot" and which, the author hoped would:

appeal to people of all points of view and shades of opinion (88).

Produced by R.C. Wallhead (who also played the role of Cromwell), the scale of the piece created some problems for the Players. The cast numbered over thirty and the play was

written in six "pageant like scenes"; and the group's inexperience in dealing with crowds on stage was apparent in the performance, although the local reviewer was still convinced that they managed to state the theme of the Quaker appeal to reason "pitted against force" (a theme described in the programme as the "inward experience of God" replacing "the outward authority of man") with "admirable lucidity". Pointing went on to write other plays for Welwyn including The Leading Lady, a short sketch in which an actress, author and producer are transported to heaven where theatre is freed from money making promoters and self-seeking actresses, but this (as with his other pieces) was produced by groups other than the Players (89).

Pointing's second effort was followed by other new plays. In the following year local authoress Violet Toulmin produced The Strap as the Players entry for the newly established Welwyn Drama Festival. Rather improbably described as a comedy (given its subject matter), it was the story of Salvation Army convert Bill Steer whose terrible strap is forever held over his wife and children as a threat. But, as Mrs Steer complains, he never uses it on them because he revels in the sentimental pleasure of self-restraint. Goaded at last, his wife takes the strap and makes it in to a "meat" pie for his dinner. His reply is a new strap, one he means to use this time, but just as he is on the point of hitting her, his hand is miraculously stayed and he thanks God for leading him from temptation (90). At the following year's Drama Festival, the Players once again produced a new play, this time written by John Taylor, a dramatic critic who lived in the city. Another

comedy, The Cab told the story of a North country woman who tried to win her Uncle's affection by taking the "unheard of step" of ordering a cab to meet him at the station. Unfortunately, the husband spends the cab money and ends up returning the Uncle in a wheelbarrow. Unlike Toulmin's play, it would seem to have had little to recommend it to the Folk Players in terms of propaganda or even as a play of social concern (91).

A more promising project was the "experiment" undertaken by the Players in 1932 under the title of "Round About Theatre". The reviewer of the Welwyn News discovered preparations underway in June of that year when he found

one group busy chanting and miming familiar old choruses and shanties, another rehearsing an absurd burlesque melodrama, others practising strange solo dances while squeaky voices could be heard everywhere coming from a Punch and Judy Show of a quite novel kind (92).

This was to form the basis for a "portable theatre", which the Players planned to tour "round about" performing on summer evenings and Saturday afternoons on village greens:

The Folk Players want to demonstrate that the true spirit of drama and mime lie in the heart of the people and that only by coming to them personally and giving of their best in the way of talent and originality will they help to recreate some of the old glory of the theatre (93).

The programme to help recreate this old glory included songs, characters in costume, burlesques and grotesque dances (as well as a puppet show and dancing from the Folk Dancers) - very much a return to the old style of the Labour Players. This return in style was emphasised by the inclusion of a

burlesque melodrama, Stingingnettle Farm, a tale on the old theme of maidenly virtue resisting the "deep, dark villainy" of the local squire and finally finding happiness in the shape of a rustic lover. It was followed by a humorous adjudication of the piece in which the "judge" pointed out the weaknesses of the production (for example, the fact the villain should have consumed real poison not merely coloured fluid), and ending with the presentation of the cup for the best one act play - although there were no others competing. Whilst in style it was a glance back to the old days, in content the satire (especially in the latter piece) was on drama festivals rather than politics, a sign that Pointing's original assertion that drama and art should be paramount had become a reality.

The same is true of the largest performances undertaken by the Players - the open air summer productions of Shakespeare. These started in 1926 with A Midsummer's Nights Dream which was followed in subsequent years by Twelfth Night and As You Like It (scenes of which were filmed by Movietone as one of the first experimental attempts to film an amateur theatre company for the talking pictures). Performed in the woods in Welwyn Garden City:

They really were large events...A train was put on from Kings Cross and coaches were brought in from outlying towns in Hertfordshire...The Music Society, with a good sized orchestra, played Elizabethan music, and, as one may imagine, from a huge effort such as this, the events were a great success. The audience always remembered to bring cushions to sit on, and gnat powder, to ward off gnats and flies which flew around in abundance (94).

All three productions were produced by R.C.Wallhead, and these open-air performances eventually petered out, as he was not always available and no one else came forward to take on such a large undertaking.

Although the Shakespeare plays disappeared fairly rapidly, the history of the Folk Players stretches on into the 1960s when, in 1969, it finally merged with the other dramatic groups of the city to form the Barn Theatre Club, but two points concern us here. Firstly, without doubt the history of Players shows that they were far from being simply a play-reading society or even degenerating into one over time. In this they deny Donoughue and Jones' claim, yet at the same time the length of their existence and the variety of their productions makes the Players somewhat of an exception in terms of Labour Party dramatic societies which needs to be accounted for.

It is perhaps no accident that one of the most enduring groups found its home in a garden city, a city built on ideals and one which attracted people of ideals. C.B.Purdom (writing here about Letchworth founded a few years prior to Welwyn) described the new cities:

Mostly the new inhabitants had come to Utopia. This was the longed-for garden city, the first town in which exploitation by landowners and the ugliness and slums of the old towns were not to exist. There was excitement, a sense of brotherhood, and the conviction that the new order had been established (95).

The new order had a democratic spirit, it was a society where

The Admirable Crichton pulled his weight without the shadow of an impending rescue to put him back in his place...a native democratic sentiment struggled



always against the technical and political forces making for stratification (96).

And, in the words of ILP member Minnie Pallister, the Garden Cities were built not only because people wanted somewhere to live, but because they wanted to "help people to live fully and beautifully as well as comfortably". Surrounded by such idealism, they were apt to be treated as something of a joke by those outside, and Kath Steele, one of Wallhead's daughters, remembered a popular contemporary joke that depicted Welwyn as a town of about 200 "socialists, idealists, utopians, vegetarians and cranks of all varieties". It was certainly a town without street lamps, "a gum boots and lanterns town" but one where life "was exciting and splendid". And if there were no street lamps, there was certainly no entertainment other than that made by the people themselves (97).

In trying to account for the longevity of the Players, this mixture of ideals and the lack of commercial entertainment is certainly central. Frederic Osborn remembers the crowded lectures, the religious gatherings, the political meetings, the socials and tennis parties and the impromptu concerts - all attended by the same people. Purdom recalls that societies for every conceivable purpose were formed; it was a "new start for everything" and the opportunity for "creative action was seized". The Players were not the only dramatic group in Welwyn; the city also boasted the Theatre Society, the French Dramatic Society, the Barnstormers (of which Flora Robson was a member) and the New Stagers, and with the opening of the

Welwyn Theatre in 1928, an amateur repertory company was founded to perform there when the building was not being used as a cinema - all in a city with a population of under 5000. Membership of each society was by no means exclusive; Osborn writes rather of "an interchangeable pool" of producers, actors and musicians. . . . To use just one example, two members of the Players (Ernest Selley and Elsie Colson) took part in the Theatre Society's production of Mr Sampson by Charles Lee which won the 1927 British Drama League Festival. Letchworth also boasted an active dramatic society, founded in 1906 under the watchful eye of Purdom, which had produced 26 different plays (including 8 original works) by 1913, and it was responsible for a series of "gently satirical records of local events" which went under the name of the Garden City Pantomime (98).

Despite all the idealism and the undoubted cultural activity surrounding the garden cities, they were certainly not the utopias the original inhabitants had hoped for, and divisions did emerge. Whilst the extremes of millionaires and slums were "under represented", the city was divided between those who worked in the factories and the directors, managers and executives, and it was the latter, according to Osborn, who "undertook more than their mathematical quota of cultural leadership". This division was reflected in the make-up of the Players and it is worth pausing briefly to look at the composition of the Players, for they are one of the few groups for which such information has come to light. With the exception of one railway clerk and one carpenter, the overwhelming majority of its members were professional people.

These included H.J.B.Fry and Gladys Miall-Smith (both doctors), Russell Jones (a solicitor), James Nichol (a headmaster), A.E.Blomfield (a draughtsman), W.H.Close (director of the Welwyn Garden City Laundry), Frederick Palmer and Walter Wilkes (both owners of small building firms) and Allan Bell (owner of Poultry Services Ltd). Ernest Selley (originally a baker) became the first editor of the Pilot, Welwyn's first newspaper, J.P.Marsden was the warden of a hostel set up for men and women working on the land, George Dallas was (amongst other things) a J.P. and Captain R.L.Reiss had a varied career which included being a lecturer at Magdalen College, Oxford, the head organiser of Lloyd George's Land Enquiry Committee between 1912 and 1913, one of the directors of the Welwyn Times, and a director of the Welwyn Garden City Company. On the other side, many were active in local and national politics and the Players boasted more than its fair share of Labour MPs. Wallhead was MP for Merthyr Tydfil, his daughter, Muriel Nichol, became MP for Bradford, and Mr Cove was at one time MP for Wellingborough and later defended Ramsey MacDonald's seat at Aberavon (whilst his own was being successfully defended by another member of the Players, George Dallas). Others were involved in local politics, including Dr H.J.B.Fry (who was Vice-Chair of the Council) and J.P.Marsden, who was for many years a Labour councillor and treasurer of the local Labour Party until he resigned in 1930 to stand as an independent candidate (99). Whilst this information by no means covers more than a handful of the members of the Players (I have found mention of 154 members between 1923 and 1934) it does begin to fill in something of the picture.

A little more can be filled in by a brief glimpse at another side of the Labour Party's relationship to the theatre: a handful of plays written by Labour MPs for the professional theatre.

Staging the Riot Act: The Case of Some Labour MPs.

Although the Labour Party Executive showed little interest in Morrison's artistic projects and gave them even less support, individual MPs were more sympathetic to theatrical work and some even turned their pens towards the stage. Sir Patrick Hastings (barrister, Labour MP for Wallshead-on-Tyne and later Attorney General in MacDonald's government) had the "honour" of writing what the Morning Post described as "one of the worst plays" it had ever seen, but despite their criticism, Scotch Mist ran at St Martin's for 117 performances in 1926 and starred Tallulah Bankhead and Godfrey Tearle. In terms of political comment, the play has little to offer, but as a story of a wife and the man she attempts to seduce (who are stranded in the mist on the moors) it did cause a sensation and became something of a "success de scandale" as Basil Dean remembered:

Various religious bodies contributed to this result. Several London vicars made the play the subject of Sunday-morning sermons...When the Bishop of London joined the outcry, and his "Clean up the Stage" Campaign Committee announced its request to the Lord Chamberlain "to revoke the play's licence" had been refused and that in consequence the matter was to be raised in the House of Lords, queues at the box office became inevitable (100).

An uproar also greeted the first performance of another play by a Labour MP. Feelings ran so high at the Liverpool Playhouse on 3rd February 1914, that some members of the audience had to be ejected from the theatre and the author of the piece, James Sexton (secretary of the Dock Labourers Union and from 1918 MP for St Helens), was in the end forced to hold a meeting to defend his play, The Riot Act. Much of the fiercest criticism came from the suffragettes who were dismayed that the only female character in the play lied, was disloyal, had a "past", made open love to her employer - and was a suffragette. As one correspondent to the Liverpool Daily Post asked (rather politely considering the disturbance in the theatre): "In making her a suffragette and a renegade does Mr Sexton mean to discredit the movement?". The short answer to this would seem to be "Yes", for not only is Miss Vaughan, the typist at the National Quayside Workers Union, everything described above (and Sexton uses the opening pages of the play to attack the suffragettes), she is also only a suffragette because she is "denied" her true calling:

Why are some women denied the functions of real womanhood. Think of the tragedies of our lives compelled to embrace excitement as an alternative to the embraces we've been denied (101).

Following this outburst, Cunliffe, the General Secretary of the Union (with whom she is in love) advises her to take the day off and to go home to calm herself "like a good woman".

Nor was it only the suffragettes who were enraged by the play. It also raised anger and sharp criticism from some workers, many of whom had crowded the gallery on the first night, who

objected to the way Sexton had chosen to portray the 1911 Transport Strike. It was indeed written as a vindication of Sexton's "responsible" stand during the strike (presumably in opposition to the irresponsibility of the rank and file), an analysis of the events and negotiations as he saw them and Raphael Samuel concludes that the play was a "unique example of right wing trade union self pity". Central to the play is an argument about the tactics to be used during the strike, a strike which Cunliffe does not want in the first place but one he is forced to support by the pressure from his members. On one side of the argument is Tom Maddocks, a syndicalist, who advocates "the spirit of revolt, red hot revolt against the Capitalist system" and who argues with the men not to trust in prince and politicians (who have "spoofed you every time") but to trust in their own solidarity to win what they want. In contrast, Cunliffe believes both that the time for strike action is not yet ("the night from an industrial point of view is still with us") and is a method of the past, and he accuses the workers of being "tied to the chariot wheels of the political gods of his father" (102). Strikes are "cumbersome, costly and disastrous" (more so to the worker than the employer) and

the mob, which calls itself Democracy, is a bigger tyrant and a greater despot than the Capitalist system it so vigorously denounces, with the additional disadvantage that it is an unmitigated ass into the bargain (103).

He sees it as his duty to save the strikers from themselves, and attempts throughout to do a deal with the employers, many of whom are his fellow Justices of the Peace. Over the course of the play Cunliffe manages to convince many of those who

have supported Maddocks (including Maddocks himself) of the danger of letting lose the "mob" (who are shown to be dishonest and ready to use violence on picket lines and to break the law) and in the end it is the actions of this "fickle mob" that leads to Cunliffe being killed by the soldiers.

Undeterred by the strong feeling aroused by his first foray into professional theatre writing, Sexton followed The Riot Act two years later with The Boys of the Old Brigade, a dramatic sketch (this time performed at the Lyric in Liverpool) about "the transport problem, the holding up of supplies and patriotism". Set in the office of a shipping company, The Boys of the Old Brigade starts by arguing that British workers are justified in holding up British ships in port unless they get financial rewards commensurate with that of the "profit-mongering owners. But it quickly pushes any idea of labour against capital to the back as it turns into a patriotic piece in which the young British recruit in the office surprises the spy giving away secrets on the telephone and stops him with a well-directed revolver shot. The curtain falls as all the characters (with the exception of the unrepentant German) "rally to the colours". We have no record of the dockers' or suffragettes' response to this piece, but even the Liverpool Daily Post was less than impressed, describing it as chaotic and "sorely disappointing" (104).

A new play in four acts was promised for the autumn, but Sexton's next dramatic appearance was not to be for two years when he returned to the Liverpool Playhouse with The Corner

Shop. Written with Michael O'Mahony, this one act play is set in Mrs Fitzgerald's living room behind a "humble emporium" in the Irish quarter of an English provincial town. This old woman has given everything to send her son to college and she is now awaiting his return. As she dozes by the fire, the audience learns that instead of coming home covered in glory, the son has become a forger, a thief and a "swell mobsman", but this awful discovery is kept from the mother as the triumphant reunion proves too much for her and she expires in her chair (105).

After this, there followed a gap of several years (a break which coincides with his election to Parliament in 1918 as the Labour MP for St Helens) until his final theatrical effort in the late twenties in the shape of When Labour Ruled, a play which ran for <sup>a</sup> week and which yielded "little fame and less cash" (106). This last play was written in collaboration with Frank Rose, himself the Labour MP for North Aberdeen, and also a playwright in his own right. Rose's theatrical career had started (and reached the pinnacle of his success) whilst he was a Manchester journalist, with a production of The Whispering Well at the Gaiety theatre in March 1913. This play is a modern morality, a Lancastrian version of the Faust legend where monetary greed replaces a passion for life. Set in the eighteenth century, it shows how Robin O'Tims, a young home weaver, becomes dissatisfied with his simple life on seeing the great prosperity of the merchants in Manchester. Returning from selling his cloth in the city, he vents his dissatisfaction on his wife and finally falls asleep in a chair to dream about the search for worldly wealth, which



gives Rose the opportunity to indulge in some grotesque visions, as his dream turns sour. Pacts are made with the devil and, whilst Robin dreams that he gains power it is at the cost of all he loves and he awakes to a realisation of his folly (107).

So successful was this first play, that it was taken up by the Chicago Fine Arts Theatre (after Rose had revised it in "deference to the general trend of criticism") (108), but his subsequent attempt, The Second Mrs Banks, does not even merit a mention in Grace Wyndham Goldie's history of the Liverpool Repertory Theatre where it was performed in October 1913. Indeed, her only comment for the season, states that with the exception of a new play by Eden Philpotts and Ronald Jeans entertaining light comedy The Cage (in its first production outside London) the plays produced at the Rep were either undistinguished or unsuccessful or both, and we can only conclude that The Second Mrs Banks fell into one of these categories (109). This may not be a very distinguished note on which to end a chapter on the Labour Party, but it is one which may (in terms of Labour MPs writing for the theatre) provide more fruitful ground for research.

## CONCLUSION

The story of working class political organisations and theatre clearly does not end with the demise of the Masses Stage and Film Guild or the failure of Labour MPs as playwrights. Before the Guild was even established, the Workers Theatre Movement (WTM) had sprung into existence to "express the soul of the hungry man on the Dole", but whilst many of its proclamations were vehemently sectarian towards "our worthy and well-clothed brothers of the ILP" the break with the Labour movement was not complete (1).

Many individuals crossed the divide from the Arts Guild and other drama groups into the WTM. Monica Ewer found herself on the "Advisory Committee" of the first attempt to establish the WTM, and both John Goss and Edith Craig were mentioned by Christina Walshe in connection with its early days. The Lewisham Red Players grew out of what one of them described as "old SDF families"; two of them had played with the Plebs League and taken part in "Red Concerts" and the Deptford Labour Choir; another was recruited from the Lewisham Labour Party Dramatic group (2).

Sometimes, whole groups schooled within the Labour movement changed allegiances. The Salford Red Megaphones, for example, evolved from a group of Clarion Players, and the Hackney People's Players were recruited within the local Labour Party following an advertisement in the Daily Herald. Much of the early repertoire of the WTM was based, despite criticism, on

the plays of the ILP, and the Woolwich Workers Theatre started their life by performing Mrs Jupp Obliges and The Bruiser's Election, while an early performance at Caxton Hall was organised jointly with the Westminster Labour Party and Trades Council and included Lewis' The Forge, Bates' The Last Bread and Schofield's The Judge of All Earth (3).

Nor did the involvement of those working in early dramatic groups stop with the WTM. Here Malleson provides one interesting example. In 1934, he was to be one of the founding members of Left Theatre. Later, he became a member of the general council of Unity Theatre, and in 1951 (along with Sybil Thorndyke and Lewis Casson) headed the committee to defend the three Unity Theatre members prosecuted for the unlicensed presentation of plays (4).

Such links begin at least to give us some sense of continuity and development, a continuity and development which is present through the earlier work of the movement as well. However, the preceding pages do not offer a complete picture. They are rather simply some pieces of a much larger jigsaw. No mention has been made of the Fabians or the Co-Operative movement or the Socialist Sunday Schools - all of whom were as involved in theatrical presentations as any of the groups discussed. Nor is there any discussion of Joe Corrie and the Bowhill Players or the work of the Plebs League or the National Council of Labour Colleges. All these (and more) would need to be taken into consideration to create a complete picture and they are omitted here only because of a lack of space (5).

Such large omissions point at least in part towards one of the conclusions that can be drawn from this research. A search of a handful of newspapers and other primary sources has shown that there is a wealth of untouched material and much still remains unexamined. So, for example, whilst the chapter on the ILP discusses the work of Welwyn in some detail, there is little detailed examination of the work of the other 130 (or more) groups. Some of these could yield much more material and could be fruitfully related to their localities, thus helping us to understand, for example, why Shettleston produced propaganda playlets whilst others concentrated on Shaw or entertainment.

The same is true for many of the Clarion groups, for whilst the work of Newcastle is discussed in detail by Norman Veitch, the work of the Handforth Clarion Clubhouse or the Liverpool Clarion Players (to cite just two instances) remains largely unknown. A study of the involvement of trade unions in organising benefit performances and in using theatrical performances both to raise money and to raise consciousness could provide us with a through line from the Masons and the Dorchester Labourers to Miles Malleon's and Harvey Brook's Six Men of Dorset commissioned by the Trades Union Congress in 1934, and on to Arnold Wesker and Centre 42. Wider implications for theatrical history are also to be found in the Chartists' involvement in the fight against the monopoly and in defence of the penny gaffs and their involvement in these struggles (barely touched on here) also raises questions about the involvement of other political groups in the workings of the

professional theatre as well as the relationship between the professional and amateur theatre.

Concentrating on the theatre of the organised working class has also led to another omission. Outside lies a much broader and more individual engagement of socialists with theatre, from Tom Mann's lifelong engagement with Shakespeare (which included the establishment of a Shakespeare Mutual Improvement Society whilst he was a young engineer in Chiswick) to James Connolly's nationalistic play Under Which Flag. In between lie

the amateur librettists who mounted operatic and choral concert-meetings; and the open-air "stump" orators who electrified the crowds by reciting verse as much as by preaching the Socialist Word (6),

as well as the hundreds, if not thousands of socialists who bought and read the plays advertised on the pages of socialist newspapers. Any full assessment of the relationship between theatre and socialism needs to find a way of incorporating these individuals.

Whilst such gaps, questions and omissions do exist, some conclusions can be drawn from the material presented here. Centrally, the simple fact that so many working class organisations involved themselves seriously enough in the theatre to produce not only their own drama groups but also their own plays stands as a testament to the existence of an active tradition of political theatre in Britain prior to the WTM. Any assessment of the history and the vicissitudes, the successes and failures, the appearances and the disappearances

of each group has to be seen in the context both of the political organisation of which they were a part and in the wider historical context of the period in which they existed.

Most pressingly, it should add to the debate (posed once again in The Politics of Theatre and Drama and most succinctly in Graham Holderness' introduction) about how we define overt political theatre. The openly propagandist plays of the Chartists and of Shettleston ILP stand with the Workers Theatre Movement as one part of the equation. The other is formed by the numerous discussions (and the theatrical practice) which looked to theatre in and of itself as a "humanising" force which could open people's hearts and eyes to the world in which they lived and to socialism. The debates and the practice engaged in over a hundred years still continue and the work of these groups provides much evidence to add to the argument.

## APPENDIX

### CLARION DRAMATIC SOCIETIES

(Where the groups are referred to by different names, both have been given. There must be some confusion as to whether groups are the same, especially with reference to somewhere like Leeds. Nor has any distinction been made in drawing up this list between those groups which were very active, such as Stockport, and those which are only mentioned once on the pages of the Clarion).

Accrington

Birmingham Clarion Players

Bradford

Bristol

Glasgow

Handforth: Club House Dramatic Society/Clubhouse Clarion  
Players

Halifax

Leeds (West) Clarion Players/West Leeds Dramatic  
Club/West Leeds Socialist Dramatic Society

Liverpool Clarion Players

Litherland Clarion Players

London: North London Clarion Players

South London Clarion Players/South London  
Dramatic Club

West Ham Clarion Players

Manchester: Hyde Clarion Players

Newcastle Clarion Dramatic Club

Nottingham BSP Dramatic Section

Sheffield ILP Clarion Players

Southend on Sea

Sparkhill Clarion Players (Birmingham)

St Helens

Stockport Clarion Players

Wolverhampton

Yorkshire: Club House Dramatic Society

PLAYS PERFORMED BY CLARION DRAMATIC SOCIETIES: 1911-1919

This list does not give any indication of how often each play was performed and to make a more complete list, it should be combined with the plays of the Newcastle Clarion Dramatic Society which are listed separately. It is divided into two sections; firstly plays from the professional theatre and secondly plays written by members of the Clarion Dramatic Society.

Plays from the professional theatre

Michael A. Arabin: Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted

J.M. Barrie: The Twleve Pound Look  
Rosalind  
The Will

Rudolph Beiser: Don

Arnold Bennett: The Honeymoon  
What the Public Wants  
The Title

Robert Blatchford: The Mingled Yarn

William Boyle: The Building Fund

Harold Brighthouse: Spring in Bloomsbury  
The Price of Coal

Eugene Brieux: The Three Daughters of M. Dupont

Anton Chekov: The Proposal  
The Bear  
Uncle Vanya

Ashley Dukes: Civil War  
The Law and the Prophets

Charles Fawcett: Bubbles

John Galsworthy: The Silver Box  
The Eldest Son

William S. Gilbert: Pygmalin and Galatea  
Tom Cobb

Lady Gregory: The Rising of the Moon  
Spreading the News

Basil MacDonal Hastings: The New Sin

Sam Hay: A Game of Cards

Herman Heijerman: The Good Hope (trans Christopher St John)



Stanley Houghton: The Dear Departed  
The Younger Generation  
Phipps

H.Ibsen: The Doll's House  
Hedda Gabler  
The Pillars of Society

Henry Irving: The Bells

Ronald Jean: A Man and a Maid

Gertrude Jennings: Between the Soup and Savoury  
Pot Luck

Daisy MacGeoch: Collaborators

Norman McKinnell: The Bishop's Candlesticks

J.Sackville Martin: Women's Rights  
Nellie Lambert

John Masefield: The Tragedy of Nan

Moliere: The Learned Woman

Fred Moule: Her Fool of a Husband

T.C.Murray: The Birthright

Edward Abbott Parry: The Tallyman  
Charlotte on Bigamy  
Katawampus

A.W.Pinero: The Schoolmistress

Edward Plunkett (Lord Dunsany): The Lost Silk Hat

Frank Price: Two Halves

T.W.Robertson: Caste  
David Garrick

Gertrude Robins: Makeshifts  
Realities  
Little Jan  
Lancelot and the Lady  
The Exit

R.L.Stevenson & W.E.Henley: Admiral Guinea

William Shakespeare: As You Like It  
Hamlet  
The Merry Wives of Windsor  
A Midsummer's Nights Dream  
The Tempest

Bernard Shaw: Arms and the Man  
Candida  
Fanny's First Play

Getting Married  
How She Lied to Her Husband  
Major Barbara  
Man and Superman  
Mrs Warren's Profession  
Overruled  
Pygmalion  
Widowers' Houses  
You Never Can Tell

R.B.Sheridan: School for Scandal

Sophocles: Antigone

August Strindberg: Miss Julie  
The Stronger Woman

J.M.Synge: The Shadow of the Glen  
Riders to the Sea

Upton Sinclair: The Second Storey Man

A.M.Thompson & R.Courtneidge: Upon the Waters

T.J.Williams: Ici on Parle Francais  
The Tourist Ticket

Eliza Comres to Stay  
The Cricket on the Hearth  
The Doctor's Patient  
The Poorhouse  
The Trials of Tompkins

Plays written by members of/for Clarion Dramatic Society

Reverend James Adderley: Struck

Agnes Bain: Blind Iris

Robert Blatchford: A Comedy of Bohemia

Mr Burt: Glimpses

Mrs Challen: A Paying Order

Norah Doyle: The Flower Maker

Daisy Halling: Pinnacles of the Future  
Sans Price

C.Granville: The Race Spirit

Ross Hills: The Recidivist

A.Neil Lyons: The Gentleman Who Was Sorry  
Getting at Facts

W.J.Priestly: Ashes

Landon Ronald: Recognition of the Union

Ada Roscoe: Mother's Mistake

Norman Tiptaft: Cowards  
Evolution

Norman Veitch & Percy Beck: Stalls for Two

Norman & Edith Veitch: MayDay  
The Nightingale  
Proespine

May Westoby: A Youth Called Ideal

Beauty and the Beast

Dream Faces

The Dress Rehearsal

A Model of a Wife

St Valentine's Day

The Wish of the Witch Which Watched

CLARION PLAYERS.

Newcastle Clarion Dramatic Society: Plays performed 1911-1924.

(\* indicates new play)

- 1911-1912: The Bishop's Candlesticks - Norman McKinnell  
Pot Luck - Gertrude Jennings  
The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet - Shaw  
Press Cuttings - Shaw  
Major Barbara - Shaw  
Candida - Shaw  
How He Lied To her Husband - Shaw  
Widowers' Houses - Shaw
- 1912-1913: How He Lied to Her Husband - Shaw  
Widowers' Houses - Shaw  
Candida - Shaw  
A Doll's House - Ibsen  
\*Cowards - Norman Tiptaft  
The Shadow of the Glen - Synge  
Riders to the Sea - Synge  
Ghosts - Ibsen  
Press Cuttings - Shaw  
The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet - Shaw  
Candida - Shaw
- 1913-1914: The Silver Box - Galsworthy  
Widowers' Houses - Shaw  
Pygmalion and Galatea - W.S.Gilbert  
Cowards - Norman Tiptaft  
The Honeymoon - Arnold Bennett  
Press Cuttings - Shaw  
Overruled - Shaw  
Man and Superman - Shaw  
Riders to the Sea - Synge  
Woman's Rights - Sackville Martin  
The Gentleman Who Was Sorry - Neil Lyon  
The Second-Storey Man - Upton Sinclair  
\*Evolution - Norman Tiptaft  
\*Ashes - W.J.Priestly  
\*Recognition of the Union - Landon Ronald  
The Shadow of the Glen - Synge  
The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet - Shaw  
Getting at Facts - Neil Lyon  
Major Barbara - Shaw
- 1914-1915: Pygmalion and Galatea - W.S.Gilbert  
\*Stalls for Two - Percy Beck & Norman Veitch  
Upon the Water - A.Thompson & R.Courtneidge  
The Pillars of Society - Ibsen  
Press Cuttings - Shaw  
Candida - Shaw  
Pygmalion - Shaw  
Arms and the Man - Shaw  
The Eldest Son - Galsworthy

- 1915-1916: Candida - Shaw  
Widowers' Houses - Shaw  
Learned Women - Moliere  
Ashes - W.J.Priestly  
Recognition of the Union - Landon Ronald  
The Eldest Son - Galsworthy  
Pygmalion and Galatea - W.S.Gilbert  
Pygmalion - Shaw  
Riders to the the Sea - Synge  
The Shadow of the Glen - Synge  
\*The Recidivist - Ross Hills  
Man and Superman - Shaw  
Arms and the Man - Shaw  
Candida - Shaw  
You Never Can Tell - Shaw  
The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet - Shaw  
Phipps - Stanley Houghton  
The Dear Deprted - Stanley Houghton  
The Man of Destiny - Shaw
- 1916-1917: A Doll's House - Ibsen  
Fanny's First Play - Shaw  
The Twelve-Pound Look - J.M.Barrie  
Rosalind - J.M.Barrie  
The Schoolmistress - A.W.Pinero  
You Never Can Tell - Shaw  
What the Public Wants - Arnold Bennett  
Androcles and the Lion - Shaw  
Major Barbara - Shaw  
The Proposal - Chekov  
The Bear - Chekov  
Pygmalion - Shaw  
The Man of Destiny - Shaw  
The Will - J.M.Barrie  
Tom Cobb - W.S.Gilbert  
Admiral Guinea - R.L.Stevenson & W.E.Henley
- 1917-1918: Pygmalion - Shaw  
Admiral Guinea - R.L.Stevenson & W.E.Henley  
Arms and the Man - Shaw  
The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet - Shaw  
The Lost Silk Hat - Lord Dunsany  
Uncle Vanya - Chekov  
\*The Nightingale - E. and N.Veitch
- 1918-1919: Major Barbara - Shaw  
Admiral Guinea - R.L.Stevenson & W.E.Henley  
Pygmalion - Shaw  
The Three Daughters of M.Dupont - Brioux  
You Never Can Tell - Shaw  
The Title - Arnold Bennett  
Reconstruction - Gordon Lea  
Arms and the Man - Shaw  
Pygmalion and Galatea - W.S.Gilbert
- 1919-1920: Arms and the Man - Shaw  
The Title - Arnold Bennett  
The Admirable Crichton - J.M.Barrie  
Pygmalion - Shaw  
Hindle Wakes - Stanley Houghton

- Androcles and the Lion - Shaw  
The Proposal - Chekov  
Candida - Shaw  
Major Barbara - Shaw  
The Beaver Coat - Hauptmann
- 1920-1921: You Never Can Tell - Shaw  
The Skin Game - Galsworthy  
Alice Sit-By-The-Fire - J.M.Barrie  
Hindle Wakes - Stanley Houghton  
The Beaver Coat - Hauptmann  
Widowers' Houses - Shaw  
The Title - Arnold Bennett  
Man and Superman - Shaw  
The Merry Wives of Windsor - Shakespeare
- 1921-1922: Plaster Saints - Israel Zangwill  
Admiral Guinea - R.L.Stevenson & W.E.Henley  
The Devil's Disciple - Shaw  
The Silver Box - Galsworthy  
The Beaver Coat - Hauptmann  
Rutnerford and Son - Githa Sowerby  
Heartbreak House - Shaw
- 1922-1923: Mr Pym Passes By - A.A.Milne  
A Doll's House - Ibsen  
Getting Married - Shaw  
The Return of the Prodigal - St John Hankin  
On The High Road - Chekov  
The Snewing Up of Blanco Posnet - Shaw  
Twelfth Night - Shakespeare  
The Dark Lady of the Sonnets - Shaw  
The Post Office - Tagore
- 1923-1924: The Truth About Blayds - A.A.Milne  
Misalliance - Shaw  
The Ship - St John Ervine  
Windows - Galsworthy  
The Cherry Orchard - Chekov  
The Philanderer - Shaw  
Pygmalion and Galatea - W.S.Gilbert



ILP ARTS GUILD GROUPS

LONDON:

Acton	Golders Green
Battersea	Hampstead
Bernondsey	Hackney
Chigwell	Hornsey
Clapham	Lewisham
Dagenham	North Westminster
Dulwich	Paddington
Ealing	Southwark
Finchley	Walthamstow
Fulham	Woodford

Alfreton  
Amersham Common  
Armley  
Ashington  
Barnsley  
Bath: Green Park Folk Players  
Birmingham: Guildhouse Players and Erdington  
Bolton  
Bradford  
Cardiff  
Cheetham Hill  
Derby  
Dumfries  
Dundee ILP Dramatic Club  
Eastleigh  
Eastbourne  
Enfield  
Gateshead: ILP Players/Progressive Players  
Glasgow: City ILP Players & Govanhill ILP Dramatic Club  
Gorton  
Halifax  
Headingley  
Huddersfield  
Keith  
Kirkcaldy  
Lancaster  
Lincoln  
Liverpool: Central & Bootle Southend: People's Theatre  
Long Eaton  
Margate  
Merthyr Tydfil  
Nelson  
Norwich  
Nottingham  
Oldham  
Paisley  
Penge  
Portsmouth  
Preston Socialist Arts Club

Reading
Sheffield
Tiptree
Tonbridge
Tunbridge Wells
Welwyn Garden City: Labour/Folk PLayers
West Bromwich
West Hunslet
West Salford
Windsor & District
Workington



PLAYS PERFORMED BY ILP ARTS GUILD GROUPS

This list does not include Shaw, Galsworthy or Malleon or any of the "Plays for the People" series (which are listed seperately), and for a fuller repertoire it should be read in conjunction with the plays performed by the Progressive Players in Gateshead.

BAKER Elizabeth: Miss Robinson  
The Price of Thomas Scott

BARING Maurice: Catherine Parr

BARKER H Granville: Episode

BARRIE J.M: The Twelve Pound Look  
Dear Brutus  
What Every Woman Knows

BAX Clifford: Mrs Clark's Tea-Party

BELL J.J: Wolves

BENNETT Arnold: What the Public Wants

BERKLEY Reginald: The White Chateau

BLATCHFORD Robert: The Mingled Yarn

BRANDANE John: The Glen is Mine

BRIGHOUSE Harold: Converts  
The Marrying Man  
The Northerners  
The Price of Coal  
The Younger Generation

CALDERON George: The Fountain

CANAAN Gilbert: Everybody's Husband  
Mary's Wedding

CAPEK: The Insect Play  
The Necropolis Secret  
RUR

CHEKOV: The Bear  
The Proposal  
The Swan Song  
The Unwilling Martyr/A Tragedian in Spite of  
Himself

DANE Clemence: A Bill of Divorcement

DAVIES H.H: A Single Man

DEAN Harold: Apron Strings

DEKKER Thomas: The Shoemakers Holiday

DOWNS Oliphant: A Maker of Dreams

DRINKWATER John: A Bird in the Hand

DUKES Ashley: The Man With a Load of Mischief

DUNSANY Lord: Fame and the Poet  
The Night in an Inn

ERVINE John: The Ship  
Magnanimous Lover  
Progress

EVREINOV Nikolai: A Merry Death

FERGUSON G.A: The Scarecrow

GASKELL Mrs: Cranford

GLASPELL Susan: Inheritors  
Bernice  
Suppressed Desires  
A Woman's Honour

GOLDSMITH Oliver: She Stoops to Conquer

GREGSON J.R: The Devil A Saint  
T'Marsdens

GREGORY Lady: Rising of the Moon

GRUNDY Sidney: In Honour Bound

HAMILTON Patrick: Rope

HANKIN St John: The Constant Lover

HARDY Thomas: The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cronwall

HARWOOD H.M: Grain of a Mustard Seed

HOUGHTON Stanley: The Dear Departed  
Hindle Wakes

HOUSMAN Laurence: The Lord of the Harvest

IBSEN: The Doll's House  
Pillars of Society  
The Lady from the Sea  
An Enemy of the People

JACOBS W.W: The Monkey's Paw

JENKINGS Gertrude: Bathroom Door  
Elegant Edward  
The Rest Cure  
Sorry. It's Out

JEROME K Jerome: The Passing of the Third Floor Back

JOHN Gwen: The Tale That Is Told

KAISER: Gas

MCCEVOY Charles: Gentleman of the Road

MCKINNELL Norman: The Bishops Candlesticks

MACNAMARA Margaret: Mrs Hodges

MASEFIELD John: The Locked Chest  
The Witch

MAYER Edward Justin: Firebrand

MILLAY Edna St Vincent: Aria da Capo

MILNE A.A: Belinda  
The Dover Road

MILTON: Comus

MONKHOUSE Allan Noble: The Grand Cham's Diamond

MUNRO C.K: At Mrs Beams  
The Rumour

MURPHY Arthur: The Way To Keep Him

O'NEILL Eugene: Anna Christie  
Where the Cross is Made

PAKINGTON Mary: The House With Twisty Windows

PHILPOTTS Eden: The Carrier Pigeon  
The Farmer's Wife

PINERO A: Sweet Lavender

PIRANDELLO: Right You Are  
Six Characters in Search of an Author

REYNOLDS Frederick: The Dramatist

RICE Elmer: Adding Machine

ROBERTSON T.W: Caste  
David Garrick

ROBINSON Lennox: Crabbed Youth and Age

ROMAIN Jules: Dr Knock

SHAKESPEARE William: Much Ado About Nothing  
The Merchant of Venice  
As You Like It

SHERIDAN: The School For Scandal  
The Rivals

SHERRIF R.C: Journey's End

SIMPSON Harold: In Port

SINCLAIR Upton: The Singing Jailbirds  
The Second Storey Man

SLADEN SMITH F: St Simeon Stylites

STAMPER J: The Tet ered Beast

STRINDBERG August: The Stronger

SUTRO Alfred: The Bracelet  
The Man in the Stalls

TARKINGTON Booth: Beauty and the Jacobin

TRESSELL Robert: The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist

TOLLER Ernst: Masses and Men  
The Machine Wreckers

TOLSTOY L: The Two Pilgrims

WILDE Oscar: The Importance of Being Earnest

YOUNG F Brett & STIRLING W.E: Captain Swing

Anon:

The Building of the Ark - Newcastle Medieval Guild Play

The Adoration of the Three Kings - Coventry Medieval  
Guild Play

A Bargain's a Bargain

A Cranford Idyll

Cheerful Liars

The Cure

The French Robot

Love and Liberty

The Old Rich

The New System

Pied Piper of Hamelin

A Regular Fix

A Hundred Years Old

A Meetin' o' Creditors

Postal Orders

The Romantic Young Lad

A Sabbath Weel Spent

The Storm

Tea Shop Tattle

The Travelling Man

Daisy Darling's Dream

Alice in Wonderland

New Plays.

Where it has been possible to ascertain, the date and place of the first production is included after the title.

BARRETT Len: The Self-Made Man

BRACKWAY Fenner: The Devil's Business

BROSLAN Alma: At Number 15  
Glittering Prizes  
Scrapped (with Miles Haleson)

BRUNTON J. AITKEN: The Way Out (Edinburgh 1922)

CARMICHAEL James: The Helmet (Dumfries 1928)

CHADWICK Fred: Dregs (Gateshead 1930)

CRAWSHAY WILLIAMS E: Amends (Central London Players 1927)

CLYNES J.H: The Tomb (Parliamentary Labour Club, Strand 1925)

DODDS Ruth: The Pitman's Pay (Gateshead 1922)  
The Hill Top (Gateshead 1924)  
The Pressed Man (Gateshead 1927)

DODDS M.H: The Golden Apple (Gateshead 1924)

ELAND Peter: Roger of Manningham or the Wild Boar of Undercliffe (Bradford 1928)  
The Babes of Heaton Wood (Bradford 1929)

GIBSON COWAN E: Aunt Bertha (Central London Players 1927)

GODWIN E: The Tea Shop (Golders Green 1926)

HALLING Daisy: The Setting and the Jewel (Bolton 1926)

HAWKINS Bob: Peters (Plymouth 1929)

HUNTER Edward: Marie Mitanzie or the Disinherited  
(Douglas Water 1929: also two or maybe three other musical plays)

JOHNSON Agnes: The Old Madhouse (Gateshead 1924)  
The Eye of the Needle (Gateshead 1926)

LEWTON BRAIN C: Darkwater Bridge (Chigwell 1927)  
The Miracle of Swanlaigh Village  
(Chigwell 1927)  
The Morning After the Night Before  
(Chigwell 1927)  
The Right of Way (Woodford 1928)

ODHAMS John & STRATHAM Arthur: The Web (Nottingham 1929)

PRIESTLY Edward: Bill Smith Explains (West Salford 1929)  
The Fiery Cross (West Salford 1928)  
The Wheel (West Salford 1929)

ROBERTON James: Kings of Men (Kirkcaldy 1927)

SORENSEN Reginald: Tolpuddle

SMITH H.T: Fooling the Yank (Gateshead 1926)

SPENCE F.P: Dregs (Fulham 1926)

TIPTAFT Norman: Recognition of the Union (Glasgow and District Federation of Socialist Players 1925)

VINE Mr: The One Eyed Wizard of Wissey (Bradford 1930)

WELLOCK Wilfred: Patriots

Anon: The Fear of the Factor (Shettleston 1921)

What Tommy Fought For (Shettleston 1922)

The Miner (Kirkcaldy 1925)

PLAYS FOR THE PEOPLE

A series of plays published by the Labour Publishing Company between 1920-1927.

H.E.Bates: The Last Bread

Alma Brosnan: The Street (A play in one act)

L.H.Burbage: Jack's Quest (A faerie tale for children and grown-ups)

Monica Ewer: The Best of Both Worlds

H.Cecil Fisher: The Great Day

Herman Heijermans: The Rising Sun (Translated from the Dutch by Christopher St John)

Josephine Knowles: His First Money

Edwin G Lewis: The Founders (A play in one act)

Edwin G Lewis: The Forge (A play in one act)

Margaret Macnamara: Mrs Jupp Obliges (A small domestic comedy in one act)

V.T.Murray: Bringing it Home (A play in one act)

Ian Rankine: A Place in the Shade

Stephen Schofield: The Bruiser's Election (A political farce in one act)

Stephen Schofield: The Judge of All Earth (A play in one act)

Stephen Schofield: The Odour of Sanctity (An anachronism in one act)

Stephen Schofield: Sir George and the Dragon (A play in one act)

Evelyn Sharp: The Loafer and the Loaf (An incredible episode in one act)

Horace Shipp: Invasion (A play in three scenes)

Yaffle (A.J.Boothroyd): Foiling the Reds (Illustrated by Flambo)

PLAYS FOR A PEOPLE'S THEATRE

A series of plays published by C.W.Daniels between 1919 and 1924. The title page included the following: "The plays in this series will merit the attention of those whose eyes are turned towards the future."

- 1) Douglas Goldring: The Fight for Freedom (A play in four acts)
- 2) D.H.Lawrence: Touch and Go (A play with a "Labour" interest)
- 3) Hamilton Fyfe: The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory (A Morality in three scenes)
- 4) Zinaida Hippus: The Green Ring (A play in four acts translated from Russian by S.S.Koteliansky)
- 5) Margaret Macnamara: Love-Fibs (A rustic comedy in one act)
- 6) Margaret Macnamara: Light Gray or Dark? (A play in one act)
- 7) Margaret Macnamara: Mrs Hodges (A comedy of rural politics in two acts)
- 8) Stephen Schofield: Men at War (A play in two scenes)
- 9) Margaret Macnamara: The Witch (A drama in one act)
- 10) Leonid Andreieff: To the Stars (A drama in four acts)
- 11) Shaw Desmond: My Country (A play in four acts)
- 12) Liliias McCrie: "Let There Be Light!" (A play for the people)
- 13) Eleanor Gray: The Image Breaker (A tragedy in three acts)
- 14) M.A.Arabin: Yeraz (A tale within a tale)
- 15) Clifford Bax: Old King Cole (A play for children in three acts)
- 16) Edward C.Reed: O-Kai (A phantasy of now and then)
- 17) Claude Houghton: Judas (A tragedy in three acts)
- 18) Frank G.Layton: The Prophet (A play in six acts)
- 19) Ralph Fox: Captain Youth (A play)
- 20) Harold Downs: The Aylesburys (A play in three acts)
- 21) Charles Brumm: In the Track of the Storm (Seven stations on modern history's Via Dolorosa)



- 22) Jacob Schwartz: The Golden Calf (A play in three acts).
- 23) Claude Houghton: In the House of the High Priest.
- 24) John W.Klein: Shelley (A drama in five acts).
- 25) Herbert Tremaine: The Handmaidens of Death (A play in one act)
- 26) Henry Boskill: Which? (A play in eight scenes)

This list may well be incomplete. The New Leader carried an advertisement in November 1924 for plays for a Peoples Theatre which also included The Colours of a Great City, for which no mention is made of an author, and H.W.Bligh's Pennsylvania.

It is also worth noting that all the plays by Margaret MacNamara disappeared from the lists published in the later plays.

GATESHEAD ILP DRAMATIC CLUB/PROGRESSIVE PLAYERS

(\* indicates new play)

- 1920: The Man of Destiny - Bernard Shaw  
Young Heaven - Miles Malleon  
The Locked Chest - John Masefield  
How He Lied To her Husband - Bernard Shaw  
Candida - Bernard Shaw  
A Doll's House - Ibsen  
The Carrier Pigeon - Eden Philpotts  
The Twelve Pound Look - J.M.Barrie
- 1921: Sweet Lavender - Arthur Pinero  
The Foundations - John Glasworthy  
Arms and the Man - Bernard Shaw  
Candida - Bernard Shaw  
The Importance of Being Earnest - Oscar Wilde  
The Building of the Ark - Newcastle Medieval Guild  
Play (Shipwrights Company)  
The Adoration of the Three Kings - Coventry  
Medieval Guild Play
- 1922: \*The Pitman's Pay - Ruth Dodds  
Caste - T.M.Robertson  
Much Ado About Nothing - Shakespeare  
Mrs Hodge's - Margaret MacNamara  
Captain Brassbound's Conversion - Bernard Shaw  
Hall-Marked - John Galsworthy
- 1923: \*The Bruiser's Election - Stephen Schofield  
The Price of Coal - Harold Brighthouse  
Belinda - A.A.Milne  
The Merchant of Venice - Shakespeare  
A Single Man - H.H.Davies  
Hindle Wakes - Stanley Houghton  
Pygmalion - Bernard Shaw  
Arms and the Man - Bernard Shaw  
Dear Brutus - J.M.Barrie
- 1924: \*The Golden Apple - M.H.Dodds (from The Old  
Madhouse by William de Morgan)  
\*Mrs Clark's Tea-Party - Agnes Johnson  
\*Upstream - Clifford Bax  
\*The Hill Top - Ruth Dodds  
The Northerners - Harold Brighthouse  
She Stoops to Conquer - Oliver Goldsmith
- 1925: David Garrick - T.M.Robertson  
Miss Robinson - Elizabeth Baker  
Captain Swing - F.Brett Young & W.E.Stirling  
The Bishop's Candlesticks - Norman McKinnell  
You Never Can Tell - Shaw  
Conflict - Miles Malleon
- 1926: \*Fooling the Yank - H.T.Smith  
\*The Eye of a Needle - Agnes Johnson  
The Pitman's Pay - Ruth Dodds  
The Passing of the Third Floor Back - Jerome K

Jerome

The Price of Thomas Scott - Elizabeth Baker

An Enemy of the People - Ibsen

The Fountain - George Calderon

The School for Scandal - R.B.Sheridan

In Safety - Margaret Macnamara

1927: \*The Pressed Man (The Sailors Return) - Ruth Dodds

The Shoemaker's Holiday - Thomas Dekker

The Foundations - John Galsworthy

1928: Windows - John Galsworthy

The Rivals - R.B.Sheridan

Loyalties - John Galsworthy.

The Way To Keep Him - Arthur Murphy

The Doll's House - Ibsen

1929: Tolpuddle - Reginald Sorenson

The Lady from the Sea - Ibsen

Joy - John Galsowrthy

The Best of Both Worlds - Monica Ewer

1930: \*Dregs - Frank Chadwick

Catherine Parr - Maurice Baring

The Philanderer - Bernard Shaw

Captain Brassbound's Conversion - Bernard Shaw

The Dramatist - Frederick Reynolds

Pillars of Society - Ibsen

New Plays: 1931-1945.

1931: The Old Order Changeth (A Square Peg) - Agnes Johnson

The Good Old Days - Walter Hampson (Casey)

1933: The Giver - Norman Hall

An Authoress in Search of a Plot - Agnes Johnson

Two Cases - Allan Henderson

Great Expectations - M.H.Dodds (from Dickens)

1934: Double Dealings - Clayton B.Northe (Wilfred Massey)

The Gifts of the Old Woman - Stanley Norman

Reaction - M.H.Dodds

1935: The Summons - M.H.Dodds

1936: Reynold Fox - M.H.Dodds

High Street to Hollywood - Allan Henderson

Snappily Married - Fred Chadwick

Derelict - Allan Henderson

Chevy Chase - Stanley Norman

1937: United Front - Allan Henderson

The Whistler - Allan Henderson

1944: Traveller's Pride - Alida Richardson

Emma - M.H.Dodds

BRISTOL LITTLE THEATRE

(\* indicates new play)

First Season: 1923-1924

Other People's Worries - R.C.Carton  
The Cat and the Cherub - C.B.Fernald  
The Mollusc - H.H.Davies  
Mrs Gorrings's Necklace - H.H.Davies  
The Truth About Blaydes - A.A.Milne  
The First and the Last - John Galsworthy  
The Little Man - John Galsworthy  
The Two Virtues - Alfred Sutro  
The Ship - St John Ervine  
Hobson's Choice - Harold Brighouse  
In The Night - C.Harcourt  
The Enchanted Cottage - A.W.Pinero  
Rutherford and Son - Githa Sowerby  
The Romantic Young Lady - G.M.Sierra  
Pillars of Society - Ibsen  
Twelfth Night - William Shakespeare  
The Constant Lover - St John Hankin  
The Return of the Prodigal - St John Hankin  
Magic - G.K.Chesterton  
Everyman - C.H.Caley  
\*The Ninth Hour - C.H.Caley

Second Season: 1924-1925

The Young Idea - Noel Coward  
Doormats - H.H.Davies  
Cousin Kate - H.H.Davies  
Her Husband's Wife - A.E.Thomas  
\*Me and My Girl - Francis Alpe  
Mixed Marriage - St John Ervine  
The Ship - St John Ervine  
Smith - W.Somerset Maughan  
The Land of Promise - W.Somerset Maughan  
Caesar's Wife - W.Somerset Maughan  
Young Imeson - J.R.Gregson  
Isabel, Edward and Ann - Gertrude Jennings  
Love...and What Then? - B.M.Hastings  
The Enchanted Cottage - A.W.Pinero  
Mid-Channel - A.W.Pinero  
\*The Man at the Window - Thomas Jay  
The Great Broxopp - A.A.Milne  
\*Ambition - Charles Whitby  
If Four Walls Told - Edward Percy  
Dear Brutus - J.M.Barrie  
Rosalind - J.M.Barrie  
The Will - J.M.Barrie  
The Twelve Pound Look - J.M.Barrie  
Mr Pym Passes By - J.M.Barrie  
T'Marsdens - J.R.Gregson  
Fishpingle - H.V.Vachell  
An Enemy of the People - Ibsen  
The Vikings at Helgeland - Ibsen

The Blindness of Virtue - Cosmo Hamilton  
The Two Mr Wetherbys - St John Hankin  
The Man From Toronto - D.Murray  
Don - Don Beiser  
John Glayde's Honour - Alfred Sutro  
Mr Pym Passes By - Alfred Sutro  
The Ninth Hour - C.H.Caley  
Clothes and the Woman - George Paston  
The Light That Failed - Rudyard Kipling  
The Witness For the Defence - A.E.W.Mason  
The Pigeon - John Galsworthy  
The Philanderer - Bernard Shaw  
Misalliance - Bernard Shaw  
The Purse Strings - Bernard Parry  
The Bill of Divorcement - Clemence Dane  
At Mrs Beam's - C.K.Munro

Third Season: 1925-1926

Quinney's - H.V.Vachell  
Her Son - H.V.Vachell  
Searchlights - H.V.Vachell  
The Skin Game - John Galsworthy  
A Bit O' Love - John Galsworthy  
Loyalties - John Galsworthy  
Windows - John Galsworthy  
The Round Table - Lennox Robinson  
The Lost Leader - Lennox Robinson  
The White Haired Boy - Lennox Robinson  
\*The Aylesbury's - Harold Downs  
Passers By - Haddon Chambers  
Concerning Mr Conway - Thomas Jay  
Mary Stuart - John Drinkwater  
The Sign on the Door - Channing Pollock  
The New Morality - Harold Chapin  
At the Barn - Anthony Wharton  
Grumpy - Horace Hodges & T.Wigney Percyval  
Ariadne or Business First - A.A.Milne  
Zack - Harold Brighthouse  
\*The Otways - Violet Hearn  
The Notorius Mrs Ebbsmith - A.W.Pinero  
The Lady of Belmont - St John Ervine  
The Way Things Happen - Clemence Dane  
The New World - J.M.Barrie  
The Old Lady Shows Her Medals - J.M.Barrie  
A Well-Remembered Voice - J.M.Barrie  
The Yellow Ticket - Michael Morton

Taken from: A Short History of Bristol's Little Theatre  
(October 1925)

THE STRAND THEATRE

First Season: 1925

- 1) Jan 18th: Opening night including speeches from  
Bourchier, C.P.Trevelyan  
Chair: Clifford Allen
- 2) Jan 25th: Laurence Houseman: reading of Lord of the Harvest  
Frederick Woodhouse, baritone  
Lena Cooper, contralto  
Margaret Morris: lecture/demonstration  
illustrated by professional and amateur  
pupils. Exercises and compositions by pupils.
- 3) Feb 1st: E.F.Wise, ILP witness at Food Commission  
James Maxton MP  
Right Hon F.W.Jowett  
John Scurr MP  
Chair: Ernest E Hunter  
Socialist Choir
- 4) Feb 8th: Prison from Within: Lecture/slideshow by Fenner  
Brockway  
Cell Scene from Justice: Milton Rosmer
- 5) Feb 15th: Tom Johnston MP, editor of Forward, victor of  
Dundee  
Mary Hamilton, prospective candidate for  
Blackburn  
Chair: H.H.Elvin, Gen Sec, National Union of  
Clerks  
Socialist Choir
- 6) Feb 22nd: No mention of performance.
- 7) March 1st: Third Musical and dramatic gathering.  
Trial scene from The Merchant of Venice  
Arthur Bourchier Sybil Thorndyke  
Laurence Anderson Ben Webster  
J.Fisher White Lewis Casson  
Winifred Oughton Anthony Clarke.  
Arts League of Service: songs, folksongs and  
Hebridean songs, dances and sketches  
Hugh Mackay Norah Balfour  
Mark Ward Eleanor Elder  
Judith Wogan Geoffrey Wincott  
Kathleen Dillon Charles Thomas
- 8) March 8th: Rosslyn Mitchell MP, victor of Paisley  
Fred Bramley, Secretary of TUC General Council  
re visit to Russia  
Chair: Dr Alfred Salter  
Socialist Choir
- 9) March 15th: Three One Act Plays by Amateur Societies:  
Hampstead ILP Dramatic Group: Aria da Capo  
(Edna St Vincent Millay)

Parliamentary Labour Club Dramatic Society:  
The Tomb (J.H.Clynes)  
The Dionysians: Where The Cross is Made (Eugene O'Neill)

- 10) March 22nd: Trade Union Delegation to Russia: Fred Bramley  
(second in series of his experiences of social and industrial life in Russia).  
Lantern slides  
Chair: Arthur Burchier  
(To ask questions: send to Reginald Stamp)
- 11) March 29th: Black 'Ell (Miles Malleon)  
Milton Rosmer      Mary Raby  
Martha Vanne      Moyna MacGill  
Douglas Buridge   Elizabeth Arkell  
Miles Malleon (also produced)  
The Constant Lover (St John Hankin)  
Harold Scott      Elizabeth Arkell  
Recital of William Morris and Edward Carpenter  
poems: Harcourt Williams  
Songs: Harold Scott & Elsa Lanchester
- 12) April 5th: Great Final Rally: The Stage, the Church and  
Politics  
Burchier, Canon F.Lewis Donaldson, John  
Wheatley MP  
Socialist choir  
(NB Donaldson ill: unable to speak)

Second Season: 1925-6

- 1) Oct 4th : Lecture recital: Hugh Robertson, conductor of  
Glasgow Orpheus Choir  
Song illustrations: Miss Boyd Stevens  
Piano: Gilbert Esplin
- 2) Oct 11th: Sir Richard Terry, organist and director of  
Westminster Cathedral and producer of  
The Shanty Book  
Lecture on sea shanties with illustrations by  
John Goss and Westminster Singers
- 3) Oct 18th: Cathays Juvenile Choir; conducted by Madame Ben  
Davies (wife of secretary of Cathays ILP)
- 4) Oct 25th: Dancing Committee ILP Arts Guild: organised  
Miss Joan Sharp  
West End ILP Orchestra  
Solo dances: Vivienne Bennett  
Cecil Sharp Folk Dancers  
Gilbert Murray's Electra: Penelope Wheeler
- 5) Nov 1st: No performance
- 6) Nov 8th: Entertainment by Sterling MacKinlay and  
Harcourt Williams  
Margaret Morris Dancers

Exhibition of Dalacroze Eurythmics  
ILP West End Orchestra

- 7) Nov 15th: Cancelled as theatre needed for rehearsals  
Arthur Ponsonby was to have addressed meeting:  
postponed until later.
- 8) Nov 22nd: Musical items for first half of programme  
Young Heaven Produced by Malleson (Margaret  
Yarde as Fred)
- 9) Nov 29th: Our Special Correspondent, a farce in 3 acts by  
Charles Lee. Prod: Rosina Filippi  
West End Orchestra: programme of Irish music.
- 10) Dec 6th: Concert by London Socialist Choir  
Conductor: A.A.Gregory  
Soprano: Dorothy Robson  
Baritone: F.Woodhouse  
Pianist: Rae Robertson  
Cellist: Kitty Moseley
- 11) Dec 13th: The Fountain by George Calderon  
Cast (in original parts) included:  
Mary Jerrold; Hubert Harben; Nancy Price; Fred  
Lloyd
- 12) Dec 20th: Hugh Dalton MP  
C.P.Trevelyan (ex minister of Education)  
Chair: Ernest Hunter
- 13) Dec 27th: No meeting.
- 14) Jan 3rd 1926: Hugh MacKay: Arts League of Service: Songs  
of the Hebrides  
Elsa Lanchester/Harold Scott: Box and Cox  
and programme of songs and scenes.
- 15) Jan 10th: Arthur Burchier: Socialism and Art  
Chair: J.R.Clynes  
Soloists: Rita Mattel, Parry Jones  
New Leader staff: Foiling the Reds
- 16) Jan 17th: Peace Demonstration; Arthur Ponsonby
- 17) Jan 24th: Marjorie Gullein's Verse Speaking Choir  
(Rhythmic Movement to Spoken Poetry)  
West End ILP Orchestra  
A Pedestal by Robert Allen:  
Betty Potter; Bruce Winston; Harold Scott
- 18) Jan 30th: Meeting
- 19) Feb 7th: Forum scene from Julius Ceasar: Neil Porter  
(Old Vic)  
West End ILP Orchestra  
Two One Act Plays: Prd Barbara Horder (Garden  
Theatre):  
John Galsworthy: Defeat



Lord Dunsany: Fame and the Poet  
Recitations: Oliver Crombie

- 20) Feb 14th: Great ILP Demonstration:  
F.W.Jowett; Fenner Brockway; Katherine Bruce  
Glasier  
Yaffle: Foiling the Reds
- 21) Feb 21st: Indian Students Unit Dramatic Society: scene  
from Chandragupta (D.L.Roy)  
Indian music, songs and instruments  
Recital: Rabindreth Tagore's poems  
West End ILP Orchestra  
Ruskin College Dramatic Society: Schofield's  
On the Moor
- 22) Feb 28th: (NB At Bedford Palace)  
R.C.Wallhead MP  
Concert: Neath ILP Orpheus Male Voice Choir  
Soloist: Dorothy Robson (soprano)
- 23) March 7th: Concert arranged by Rae Robertson  
Baritone: Owen Bryngwyn  
Violinist: Mercia Stotesbury  
Piano solos and duets: Rae Robertson and  
Ethel Bartlett
- 24) March 15th: Gate Theatre Company: Masses and Man
- 25) March 26th: Concluding Evening:  
Schumann orchestral Quintette  
Vocal soloists: Edgar Pierce, Constance  
Bower  
Dramatic Performance  
Ernest Hunter: Geneva, ILP & World Peace

PRODUCTIONS OF WELWYN LABOUR/FOLK PLAYERS

(\* indicates new play)

- 1922:     \*The Blowing Up of Bolsho Poshnut - F.J.Osborn  
           Admiral Peters - W.W.Jacobs
- 1923:     \*Welwyn Garden City Pageant of 1971 - F.J.Osborn
- 1924:     \*The White Lady - H.B.Pointing  
           \*The Twelve Pound Cook - F.J.Osborn  
           The Blowing Up of Bolsho Poshnut - F.J.Osborn
- 1925:     The White Lady - H.B.Pointing  
           Augustus in search of His Father - Chapin  
           \*The Unchanging Hills - W.Branch Johnson  
           Makeshifts - Gertrude Jennings
- 1926:     The Silver Box - John Galsworthy  
           Cheezo - Lord Dunsany  
           Crainquebille - Anatole France (1st performance in  
   English)  
           The Man Who married a Dumb Wife - Anatole France
- 1927:     Foiling the Reds - Yaffle
- 1928:     Square Pegs - Clifford Bax  
           The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife - Anatole France  
           \*John Kawdry - Ernest Selley  
           Eldorado  
           As You Like It - Shakespeare  
           Arms and the Man - Shaw
- 1929:     Hindle Wakes - Stanley Houghton  
           Lawyer Patelin - French comedy  
           \*The Pact - Cyril Campion  
           Twelfth Night - Shakespeare
- 1930:     The Man in Leather Breeches - H.B.Pointing  
           \*The Last Hour - George Graveley  
           The Man of Ideas - Malleson
- 1931:     RUR - Capek  
           \*The Strap - Violet Toulmin
- 1932:     The Invisible Duke - F.Sladen Smith  
           Bird in the Hand - Drinkwater  
           Roundabout Theatre  
           \*The Cab - John Taylor  
           Admiral Peters - W.W.Jacobs  
           Man of Destiny - Shaw  
           Aria da Capo - Edna St Vincent Millay  
           The Servant of Two Masters - Goldoni
- 1933:     \*For What We Are About to Receive - Ernest Selley  
           Atlantic Flight - Nordhal Greig (1st performance in  
   English)  
           Pygmalion - Shaw

1934:     \*Terminus - Frank Herbert  
          T'Marsdens - J.R.Gregson  
          The Blind Goddess - Toller

NB: These are only full productions and the list does not include the numerous play readings.

## NOTES

### Introduction.

- 1) Raphael Samuel, Theatres of the Left (1985), p. xx.
- 2) Ian Saville, Ideas, Forms and Developments in the British Workers' Theatre 1925-1935 (1990), p. 11; Andrew Davies, Other Theatres (1987) p. 23 & p. 96.
- 3) Raphael Samuel, Theatres, p. 100; Colin Chambers, The Story of Unity Theatre (1989), p. 25.

### Chapter 1: The Chartists: Beyond Harmless Recreation.

- 1) Dorothy Thompson, The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution (Aldershot, 1974), p. 17.
- 2) Twopenny Dispatch, 10th Sept 1836.
- 3) For a fuller discussion of the disillusion with the reformed Parliament and the background to the rise of Chartism, see D. Thompson, The Chartists, chapters 1-3.
- 4) Ray Challinor "P.M. McDouall and Physical Force Chartism" in International Socialism, No. 12, Spring 1981, p. 56.
- 5) Ibid, p. 59.
- 6) D. Thompson, The Chartists, p. 60.
- 7) James Epstein, "Some Organisational and Cultural Aspects of the Chartist Movement in Nottingham" in James Epstein & Dorothy Thompson, The Chartist Experience (1982), p. 221.
- 8) D.J.V. Jones, "Welsh Chartism" in The Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, no. 23, 1971 p. 18 & p. 77; Midland Counties Illuminator, 27 Feb 1841; Northern Star, 6 May 1843; R. Challinor, "P.M. McDouall", p. 55; Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire (1955) p. 58.
- 9) J. Epstein "Some Organisational and Cultural Aspects...", p. 246; Thomas Cooper, Life of Thomas Cooper (1872), pp. 175-77.
- 10) Northern Star, 17 Dec 1842, p. 6; Cooper, Life pp. 165-166. For the tradition of song in the British Labour Movement see John Miller "Songs of the British Radical and Labour Movement" in Marxism Today, vol. 7, no. 5, 5th June 1963, pp. 180-186 and Dave Russell, Popular Music in England 1840-1914 (1987).

- 11) Northern Star, 22nd Oct 1842; 10th Dec 1842; 17th Dec 1842; 24th Dec 1842; 31st Dec 1842.
- 12) For Scotland see Andrew Wilson, The Chartist Movement in Scotland (Manchester, 1970), p. 123 & p. 201; Northern Star, 3rd Feb 1844, p. 6 & 24th Dec 1842, p. 6; Epstein, "Some Organisational and Cultural Aspects...", pp. 247-8.
- 13) Northern Star, 6th Feb 1841, p. 1; 27th Feb 1841, p. 1; 16th Dec 1843, p. 5.
- 14) Epstein "Some Organisational and Cultural Aspects...", p. 248; Northern Star, 4th Sept 1841, p. 1.
- 15) Nottingham Review, 29th July 1842, p6; see also Epstein, "Some Organisational and Cultural Aspects...", p. 249.
- 16) Notts Mercury, 30 August 1844, p. 139; see also Epstein, "Some Organisational and Cultural Aspects...", p. 247.
- 17) Thomas Frost, Forty Years Recollections (1880), p. 176.
- 18) "The Diary of Ernest Jones 1839-1847" in Our History, 21, Spring 1961, pp. 8-9; Newcastle Weekly Chronicle, 29th Jan 1898, p. 7. Follingar (1841) was rejected by Searle and twice by Drury Lane, Lavangra (1842) by Bunn, Love and the Monkey (July 1842) by the Haymarket and the Adelphi, Montbessian by the Adelphi and the Princess and St John's Eve by the Lyceum. The libretto for The Wood Spirit had a slightly more successful career; it was originally accepted by Balfe in 1842 for performance at the Lyceum Theatre but the theatre failed. Accepted by Matthews at Covent Garden, his management also failed and it was later "as good as refused" by the Prince Theatre.
- George Howell in Newcastle Weekly Chronicle differs in some details to those found in Our History. He does not include Montbessian, but adds Gay Unlan (Sept 1842) which Jones sent to Macready, The Gray Man (of which Jones only wrote one act) and Libertine which Jones read to Kean and Vandenhoff.
- 19) Labourer, Vol III, 1848 pp. 203-218.
- 20) Ibid p. 205
- 21) Ibid p. 213.
- 22) Ibid p. 211.
- 23) Ibid p. 218. It should be noted that the two Chartist leaders in writing for the professional theatre were by no means isolated as radicals who took this path. A line can be traced from Thomas Holcroft at the end of the eighteenth century which encompasses William Godwin (who's Antonio; or the Soldiers Return was performed at Drury Lane in 1800 and was followed by Faulkner seven years later), Shelley, Byron and Leigh Hunt (whos first play The Legend of Florence appeared at Covent Garden in February 1840, to be followed by other plays including The Double and The Secret Marriage). For more details see Burton R. Pollen, Godwin Criticism. A Synoptic Biography (Toronto, 1967); Kenneth Cameron & Horst

Frens "The Stage History of Shelley's The Cenci" in PHLA, Dec 1945, pp 1080-1115; John W. Klein's "Byron's Negelected Plays" in Drama 63, Winter 1961, pp 34-36; Charles E. Robinson's "Leigh Hunt's Dramatic Success: A Legend of Florence" in The Life and Times of Leigh Hunt.

- 24) Boot and Shoemaker, 8th Feb 1879; for more on Hanson see D. Thompson, The Chartists, pp. 182-184.
- 25) Northern Star, 24th July 1841, p. 8.
- 26) Chartist Circular, 13th March 1841, p. 326.
- 27) Home Act IV line 109-110, p. 55.
- 28) Chartist Circular, 13 March 1841, p. 326.
- 29) Ibid, 18th July 1840, p. 182.
- 30) Rules of Barnsley Franklin Club, quoted in Martha Vincinus, The Industrial Muse (1965), p. 107.
- 31) A. Temple Patterson, Radical Leicester (Leicester, 1954), p. 319.
- 32) Cooper, Life pp. 228-9. For performances at Leicester see also Northern Star 3rd, 10th, 24th Dec 1842 & 14th, 21st Jan 1843; Philip Collins, Thomas Cooper, The Chartist (1969) p.12 and A. Temple Patterson, Radical Leicester p. 331. Hamlet was not Cooper's first stage performance. Before he became a Chartist references can be found in the Lincoln and Stamford Mercury to his acting. All are favourable reviews - probably because Cooper wrote them himself! See 26th May 1837, 27th Oct 1837, 10th Nov 1837, 1st June 1838, 19th Oct 1838. (I am grateful to Stephen Roberts at the University of Birmingham for this information).
- 33) Northern Star, 21st Jan 1843.
- 34) Ibid 17th Dec 1842, p. 1; 29th Nov 1845, p. 8; 8th June 1844, p. 3.
- 35) Ibid 1st April 1843, p. 1 & 22nd April 1843, p. 1. The list of places visited is impressive and includes over 20 towns.
- 36) Ibid 29th April 1843, p. 5.
- 37) For Ashton see Northern Star 31st Oct & 14 Nov 1840 and for their performances at Hyde see 31st July p. 1, 7th August p. 2 and 4th Sept p. 1 1841; for East Bierley see Northern Star 27th Feb 1841, p. 1. For the life of Robert Emmett and his speech made at the trial see Robert Emmett by Raymond W. Postgate (1931). The impact of Emmett's last speech did not stop with the Chartists, but entered Irish Republican history; Ulick O'Connor, in Brendan Behan (1970) describes how Behan could "recite Robert Emmett's mammoth dock speech" at the age of six (p. 16).  
For performances of the trial of Robert Emmett in Scotland see above.

- 57) Labourer, 1847, vol. 1 p. 284.
- 58) Bulwer Lytton England and the English (1833; repub. 1976), p. 307 & p. 311; R.G.Horne, A New Spirit of the Age (1844), vol. 2, p. 93.
- 59) Dickens "Amusements of the Poor" in Household Words, 30th March 1850. Reprinted in Miscellaneous Papers (ed. P.J.M. Scott, Millwood, 1983), p. 187. For a fuller discussion of melodrama see Michael Booth, Prefaces and English Melodrama and Louis James, "Taking Melodrama Seriously" in History Workshop, no. 3 (Spring 1977), pp. 151-158.
- 60) Booth, English Melodrama, p. 62; Booth, Prefaces, p. 27; Booth, introduction to The Magistrate and Other Nineteenth Century Plays (1974), p. xiii.
- 61) For a discussion of pantomime see David Mayer III, Harlequin in His Element (Massachusetts, 1969).
- 62) Political Register, 28th April 1821.
- 63) James Sambrook, William Cobbett, p. 139.
- 64) Whilst both supported emancipation, they differed over the necessity of compromise; O'Connell was prepared to accept the endowment of the Catholic clergy in Ireland and the abolition of the forty shilling franchise. Cobbett saw the first as a version of the greatly hated tithes and an attempt by the government, who would be paying the clergy, to cool their revolutionary ardour. The second he saw as a retreat from the extension of the franchise, raising as it did the property qualification of the county franchise from 40 shillings to £10 and these differences led to several sharp attacks. See Green p. 432 and John W. Osborne, William Cobbett: His Thought and His Times (New Brunswick, 1966). For the origin of the subtitle see George Spater, William Cobbett, the Poor Man's Friend (Cambridge, 1982), p. 468, although The Political Register of 24th September 1825 gives the quote as "When I have leisure, I will laugh at the comical miscreant" as written in a letter by Daniel O'Connell to the editor of the Dublin Morning Chronicle.
- 65) Political Register, 24th Sept 1825, p. 772; 8th Oct 1825 p. 815.
- 66) G. Spater, William Cobbett, p. 468 & pp. 542-3; Political Register, 8th Oct 1825 p. 815. Anna Brodie was the daughter of John Williams, proprietor of the paper who on his death in 1812 divided his interest among a number of individuals including his daughter.
- 67) Political Register, 1st Oct 1825, pp. 1-2. The dramatis personae included in the Political Register, 8th Oct 1825 (Cobbett having forgotten to include it in the original publication "not having either seen or read a play for the last 26 years of my life") includes the ghost of Black Dwarf.
- 68) George Spater, William Cobbett, p. 468.

- 69) Political Register, 12th June 1830, p. 772.
- 70) Ibid pp. 772-3.
- 71) Political Register, 19th June 1830. On p. 810, Cobbett describes the play as number 3 of his dramatic works, which could mean he had written a play in between this and Big O and Sir Glory.
- 72) Political Register, 28th May 1831 and Cobbett's Twopenny Trash, vol. I no. XII, June 1831. It was published as a pamphlet in 1834 under the expanded title of Surplus Population and the Poor-Law Bill and included more on the Poor Law Bill which Cobbett saw as making "monstrous provisions" to take money from the poor and put into the pockets of the landlords. See G.D.H and Margaret Cole, The Opinions of William Cobbett (1944), pp. 336-7.
- 73) Ibid.
- 74) Ibid p. 509.
- 75) Keith Francis Chandor, The Dramatic Works of William Cobbett (1989), p. 260.
- 76) Political Register, 4th June 1831, p. 575.
- 77) Ibid, 28th May 1831, p. 500 & p. 504.
- 78) Ibid, p. 504.
- 79) Ibid, 6th June 1835, p. 594. The handbill for the the play had already been produced, listing the cast as follows:
- |   |              |
|---|--------------|
| Sir Gripe Grindum, of Grindum Hall.                     | Mr Lennett   |
| Peter Thimble Esq, a great anti-population philosopher. | Mr Melville  |
| Farmer Stiles.  | Mr Johnson   |
| Dick Hazell, servant to Stiles.                         | Mr Jones     |
| Tom Stiles, nephew to Stiles.                           | Mr Lennox    |
| Barebone.   | Mr G.Tarrant |
| Ned Maple.  | Mr Heslop    |
| Guzzle.   | Mr Pateman   |
| Betsey Birch (going to be married to Dick Hazell).      | Miss Hart    |
| Mrs Birch.  | Mrs Harrison |
- The programme also included Comic songs by Mr Lennett and Mr Johnson, a Favourite song by Miss Hart, and a Comic dance by Mr Tarrant; the whole to be concluded with a "laughable farce".
- 80) See G. Spater, William Cobbett, p. 602 note 4; G.D.H. & Margaret Cole, The Opinions, p. 412; D. Thompson, The Chartists, pp. 182-3.
- 81) Political Register, 23rd May 1835, p. 595.
- 82) K.F. Chandor, The Dramatic Works, p. 20 & p. 65.
- 83) Ibid p. 65, p. 249 & p. 304.



- 84) Operative, 4th Nov 1839, p. 10. Advertisements for plays included Wat Tyler and The Factory Lad both in Charter (21st July 1839 p416, 3rd March 1839 p85) as well as cheap versions of Shakespeare.
- 85) Charter, 21st July 1839, p. 409; Operative, 4th November 1839, p. 8.
- 86) Charter, 10th Feb 1839, p. 37; Northern Star, 11th Oct 1845, p. 8. Queen Victoria was attacked for encouraging such depravity; she had according to Charter been to see the lions at Drury Lane three times and was attending again in state in Jan 1839. Such criticism of the Queen's taste in theatrical entertainment adds a new dimension to her much praised role in elevating the drama. See (for such a view) M. Booth Prefaces pp. 14-16.
- 87) Warwick Advertiser, 17th August 1833; Operative, 4th Nov 1839, p. 10; Champion, 30th Oct 1836, p. 51 & 6th Nov 1836, p. 61. See also T.H.Lloyd's "Dr Wade and the Working Class" in Midland History, vol. 2 no. 2 (Autumn 1973), p. 76. For attitude of radicals to actors see the review of Edward Mayhew's Stage Effects in Charter, 1st March 1840, p. 10.
- 88) Charter, 10th March 1839, p. 119 & 24th March 1839, p. 137. The papers words proved to be an apt warning for what was to come. The following month, dramatic performances were suspended at Drury Lane and the actors had left the theatre on the Saturday of Easter week without their salaries. The paper reported that whilst they had taken no immediate measures to recover their wages, the actors had decided to wait until the following Saturday, when, if the wrong was repeated they were resolved not to appear until they were paid. In the event, Bunn announced a musical performance for the following Saturday thus "leaving the actors without any remedy, but by action against their creature Bunn, who has already pleaded his privilege from arrest, by reason of being one of Her Majesty's gentlemen at arms!" See Charter, 14th April 1839, p. 185.
- 89) Ibid, 3rd Feb 1839, p. 28.
- 90) Ibid, 17th Feb 1839, p. 60.
- 91) Ibid. Watson Nicholson in The Struggle for the Free Stage (New York, 1966), states that the custom only affected the two patent theatres, but The Charter's account clearly refers to other theatres being affected. On the 24th March 1839 it also makes reference to the Adelphi company performing at Woolwich on the days its theatre was closed, giving yet more evidence in support of the fact that minor theatres were also affected but also undermining the arguments that all actors lost wages as a result of the closure.
- 92) The Charter may have been right to suggest the Lord Chamberlain would turn a blind eye to the opening of theatres during Lent. The Marquis of Conyngham, the then Lord Chamberlain, had shown himself to be hostile to the patent theatres and old customs or rights, and had favoured the minors. See Nicholson, The Struggle, pp. 389-91.

- 93) Charter, 1st March 1839, p. 10. See also 10th March 1839, p. 121; 21st July 1839, p. 409.
- 94) Labourer, 1847, vol. II, p. 94. The article as printed in this periodical clearly post dates the lifting of the patents in 1843. Two explanations are possible. Either the article is a reprint from an earlier date, or Jones perceived that little had changed since 1843.
- 95) Charter, 1st March 1839, p. 10.
- 96) For an account of the fight against the monopoly see Nicholson, The Struggle.
- 97) The Statutes, 3rd revised edition, 1950, vol. IV, 1836-1844, p. 300.
- 98) Hansard, 3rd Series, vol. XLVII, 1839, p. 1292 & p. 435. Chartist antagonism to the police was not started by the 1839 Metropolitan Police Bill; see Goodway, London Chartism, pp. 99-105.
- 99) D. Thompson, The Chartists, pp. 69ff.
- 100) Examiner, 25th August 1839, p. 540; Hansard (op cit), p. 1292.
- 101) Paul Sheridan, Penny Theatres (1981), p. 2; Grant is quoted by Sheridan on p. 10 & p. 37.
- 102) Morning Chronicle quoted in Sheridan, Penny Theatres, p. 52-3; Sheridan, Penny Theatres, pp. 54-6; Henry Maynew, London Labour and the London Poor (1967), p. 41.
- 103) Charter, 15th Sept 1839, p. 531; Statesman and Weekly True Sun, 5th Jan 1840, p. 12; Chartist, 2nd Feb 1839, p. 4; Examiner, 30th Oct 1840, p. 12; Harold Scott, The Early Doors (1946), p. 54. When the Royal Victoria Saloon was prosecuted the article in The Statesman was headed "Aristocrats of the Buskin".
- 104) Examiner, 8th Sept 1839, p. 571.
- 105) Ibid.
- 106) For more details of the Union Affair see A.L. Crauford, Sam and Sallie (1933) and Clive Barker, "The Chartists, Theatre Reform and Research", Theatre Quarterly, vol. 1 no.4, Oct-Dec 1971, pp. 3-10.
- 107) Weekly True Sun, 15th Sept 1839, p. 4; Examiner, 22nd Dec 1839, p. 823.
- 108) Quoted in Goodway, London Chartism, p. 105.
- 109) Weekly True Sun, 15th Sept 1839, p. 4.
- 110) Charter, 8th Sept 1839, p. 514.
- 111) Chartist, 2nd Feb 1839, p. 4; Charter, 27th Jan 1839.

- 112) James Grant, Sketches in London (1838), pp. 32-3.
- 113) Chartist, 2nd Feb 1839, p. 4; Examiner, 8th Dec 1839, p. 778 (quoted in James Roose-Evans London Theatre (Oxford 1977), p. 105.
- 114) Examiner, 30th Oct 1831, p. 700; Charter, 27th Jan 1839.
- 115) Maynew, London Labour, vol. 1, p. 40.
- 116) Ibid, p. 10.
- 117) Ibid.
- 118) Ibid, vol. 2, p. 370.
- 119) Ibid, p. 371.
- 120) Goodway, London Chartism, p. 13. The list given relates to his figures for 1839. In 1848, Marylebone is listed as the second largest. Northern Star, 22nd May 1841, p. 8.
- 121) See Charles Dickens, The Travelling Showman, p. 37.
- 122) Quoted in John Russell Stephens, "Thespis's Poorest Children" in Theatre Notebook, vol XI no. 3, p.

## Chapter 2: Owenites, Trade Unions and the Rotunda.

- 1) For one assessment of the politics of Owenism see E.P.Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 857-887.
- 2) Eileen Yeo, Popular Culture and Class Conflict 1590-1914 (Brighton, 1931), p. 87 from which much of the evidence in this section comes.
- 3) Ibid, p. 34.
- 4) Allen Davenport quoted in E.P.Thompson, The Making, pp. 877-8.
- 5) Eileen Yeo, Popular Culture, p. 96.
- 6) Crisis, 14th April 1832, p. 2; E.P.Thompson, The Making, p. 859.
- 7) Davies, Other Theatres, p. 21. The reference to Mr Dobbs is quoted in Robert Estill "The Factory Lad as Propaganda", Theatre Quarterly, vol. 1, no.4, p. 25; J.F.C.Harrison, Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America (1969), p. 190.
- 8) E.P.Thompson, The Making, p. 465 & p. 460.
- 9) Ibid, p. 462.
- 10) Northern Star, 10th December 1842, p. 3.
- 11) Ibid, 29th July 1843, p. 1 & 25th Feb 1843, p. 1.
- 12) Ibid, 15th October 1842 pp. 1,2,8.
- 13) Davies, Other Theatre p. 9 & Patterson, Radical Leicester, p. 125.
- 14) The Literary Gazette, quoted in John Booth, The Old Vic 1316-1916 (1917), p. 36.
- 15) Charter, 21st July 1839, p. 416; The Labourer, 1847, vol. II, p. 94. The benefit by the Booksellers is mentioned in Estill, "The Factory Lad", p. 25.
- 16) Extracts from Hansard are amongst a selection of reviews and notices published in Robert Southey: The Critical Heritage (1972), pp. 232-42, as is the review from Black Dwarf, 26th March 1817, pp. 139-144). Southey was also co-author with Coleridge of The Fall of Robespierre, to which he contributed two out of three acts, although when it was published in 1794 it appeared only under Coleridge's name. This play too exhibits "bold sentiments" and was criticised by some for dramatising too recent political events. See J.R.de J Jackson (ed): Coleridge: The Critical Heritage, (1970) pp. 21-23.
- 17) Extracts from Wat Tyler are published in both New Moral World, 5th March 1838, pp. 158-9 and Edinburgh Review, March

1817, pp. 151-157. Ralph Anthony Manogue in Theatre Notebook, vol. XXXVII, no. 1, 1933, pp. 22-24, claims only two known performances of the play; one in New York in 1857 and one in Whittington in July 1817, for which he gives the playbill.

18) Charter, 31st March 1839, p. 152; 7th April 1839, p. 200; 21st April 1839, p. 200; 28th April 1839, p. 213.

19) Charter, 7th July 1839, p. 376. According to Harold Scott, The Early Doors, pp. 66-70, the Eagle Tavern, managed by Thomas Rouse (who was a builder by trade) included extensive grounds laid out with walks and ornamental buildings - including the robing rooms used at the coronation of William IV. At the southern end of the grounds was the "Rotunda" designed for the performance of burlettas, and complete with stage, tiered seating and a "self-acting" piano. The whole allowed for a fusion of pleasure garden, theatre and variety saloon and attracted in the course of its history performers like Frederick Robson who were later to move on to be stars of the legitimate theatre. The name of the tavern was interchangeable with the Grecian Saloon.

20) Ibid, 21st July 1839, p. 408. The Eagle Saloon seems to have been a highly profitable venue for trade benefits on the whole; the Dorchester Labourers Committee bemoaned the fact that Rouse would not let them use the grounds for their benefit for they believed they could raise the entire £100 needed through one performance there (Charter, 29th September 1839, p. 568). This poses a question of whether it was a particularly sympathetic audience that visited this "cockney arcadia" or simply the size of the grounds compared to a theatre.

21) Ibid, 28th July 1839, p. 424 & 18th August 1839, p. 468. See also p. 417 for a review of the benefit and The National Union of Printing, Bookbinding and Paperworkers by Clement J Bundock p. 13 for an account of the dispute.

22) From a collection of Playbills for Eagle Tavern held at the Theatre Museum; Scott, The Early Doors p. 73. Harold Scott mentions that like "most of the saloons, the Albert was let on occasions for performances given for the benefit of some group or society", a hint which suggests a more careful study of saloon theatres would reveal a far wider range of benefits connected to trade societies. This is borne out by the playbills for the Grecian held at the Theatre Museum which mention benefits for groups as diverse as the Islington Philanthropic Society of United Brothers, the building fund of the Bookbinders Provident Asylum and the Licensed Victuallers School.

23) Charter, 4th August 1839, p. 436; 29th September 1839, p. 568; 6th October 1839, p. 590; 13th October 1839, p. 617; 20th October 1839, p. 624. The Committee paid Mrs Beverley £45 for the rent of the theatre and the accounts published on 8th December 1839 on p. 726 also show a payment of 10s to Mr Woolridge for singing.

24) Times, 6th Nov 1841, p. 5.

25) A copy of the complete address can be found in the Modern Record Centre at Warwick University, MSS 78/OS/4/1/5 and an extract is printed in W.S.Hilton Foes to Tyranny (London 1963) p. 82. Further information concerning the performance, which took place on 16th Dec 1841, can be found in Fortnightly Return, 2nd-16th Dec 1841, p. 4; the "Stone Masons on Strike" (a fortnightly bulletin published for the duration of the strike) 18th Dec 1841, p. 4; Northern Star, 23rd October 1841, p. 7. It may be more than coincidence that the Masons were the first trade to form their own Charter Association in June 1841, which by the 26th had enrolled over 50 members. See Goodway, London Chartism, p. 47.

26) Fortnightly Return, 2nd-16th Dec 1841, p. 4. This was not the only occasion on which the masons hired a theatre or wrote a poem; a year later they were raising money for the orphan of the late William Thomas, who had been "Hurl'd from the railway to a sudden tomb" by holding a benefit at the Royal Victoria Theatre. On this occasion, the poet was (justifiably) proud of the union, for:

"Had not our Union stretch'd its hand to save  
This brothers child had perish'd on his grave".

A copy of this address can also be found in MSS/78/OS/4/1/5 (see note 57).

27) Ibid, 4th Nov 1838, p. 10 & 18th Nov 1838, p. 41.

28) Operative, 9th Dec 1838, p. 93.

29) Commonweal, 23rd August 1888, p. 272; 17th Nov 1888, p. 363.

30) Frank Podmore, Robert Owen. A Biography, (New York, 1968), p. 245.

31) Ibid, p426; E.P. Thompson, The Making, p. 843 & p. 894.

32) Wiener p. 165.

33) Prompter, 4th Dec 1830, p. 54.

34) Quoted in Weiner, p. 166.

35) Wiener p. 165. For Carlile's denial see The Cheltenham Free Press 29 Feb 1840.

36) Prompter, 5th Feb 1831, p. 224 & 19th Feb 1831 p. 254.

37) Ibid, 5th Feb 1831, p. 224.

38) Ibid 26th Feb 1831, p. 269; 12th March 1831, p. 362; 27th March 1831, p. 369; 2nd April 1831, p. 351; 9th July 1831.

39) Weekly Chronicle, 19th August 1843, p. 5. For a history of the Rotunda see Edwin Fagg, The Old "Old Vic", (1936) and Harold Scott, The Early Doors, p. 55.

40) 5th December 1842, quoted in Dorothy Thompson, The Chartists, p. 149. She also notes that the Illustrated London Newspaper of 27th November 1842 carried a report which may

have been tongue in cheek that a "marriage is on the tapis between Mr Thomas Slingsby Duncombe MP and the celebrated patriotess Miss Mary Ann Walker".

41) Harold Scott, The Early Doors, p. 72.

Chapter 3: A Collection of Oddities.

- 1) Cooper, Life, p. 393.
- 2) Eric Hobsbawn, Industry and Empire (1968), p. 126; see Michael Booth et al, Revels History of the Drama in English (vol VI, 1975), for the change in the theatre audience.
- 3) John Mitchell, Robert Tressell's The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists and the Development of the Aesthetic Maturity of the British Working Class (Humboldt, 1964), chapter 2D, pp. 101-120.
- 4) E.P. Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary (New York, 1967), p. 297; Henry Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party (Oxford, 1963), p. 44. Precise figures are obviously difficult to obtain. Compared to Morris and Pelling, Stuart Macintyre, A Proletarian Science (1980), p. 17 cites the membership as 4000 and Engels estimation of SDF membership was even less generous; in 1884 he put the figure (with information from Morris) at 400 in London and around 100 in the provinces. See Engels to Bernstein 29th Dec 1884, in E. Bernstein, Briefe von Engels p. 161.
- 5) Marx-Engels Selected Correspondance, August 30th 1883, p. 419 & January 1886; Morris: "What We Have To Look For" March 30th 1895, quoted E.P. Thompson, William Morris, p. 297.
- 6) Hyndman, Further Reminiscences (1912), p. 459.
- 7) Quoted in Macintyre, A Proletarian Science, p. 18.
- 8) Justice, 18th May 1895, p. 2; quoted in Chris Waters, British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914 (1990), p. 7.
- 9) Waters, British Socialists, p. 28. Belfort Bax became one of the most important intellectual spokesmen for the SDF.
- 10) Karl Marx & Frederich Engels, On Britain (1968), p. 574; Macintyre, A Proletarian Science, p. 17.
- 11) Justice, 5th Jan 1907, p2; 1st April 1911, p. 8.
- 12) Ibid, 29th Nov 1884, p. 3; Chushichi Tsuzuki, The Life of Eleanor Marx (Oxford, 1967), p. 103; Yvonne Kapp, Eleanor Marx (1976), p.103. For more on Aveling and Eleanor Marx (including one more event organised by them for the SDF) see below.
- 13) Justice, 4th Feb 1911, p. 5; 13th May 1911, p. 3.
- 14) Ibid, 8th April 1911, p. 6.
- 15) Ibid, 1st July 1893, p. 2.
- 16) Ibid, 22nd July 1893, pp. 2-3.
- 17) Ibid, 19th Jan 1907, p. 2.



- 18) Ibid, 26th Jan 1907, p. 4.
- 19) Macintyre, A Proletarian Science, p. 25.
- 20) Interview in Daily News, 8th Jan 1885, quoted in E.P. Thomson, William Morris, p. 379.  
The other signatories to the resignation letter from the SDF were Robert Banner, J. Lane, John Mahon, S. Mainwaring, W.J. Clark, J. Cooper.
- 21) E.P. Thompson, William Morris, p. 380.
- 22) Commonweal, July 1885, p. 56.
- 23) Ibid.
- 24) Eleanor Marx to Secretary of Socialist League, 1st March 1886, quoted Kapp, Eleanor Marx, pp. 108-9 & Tzuzuki, The Life, p. 123. Reuss was later denounced as an agent of Bismarck.
- 25) Ibid.
- 26) For Socialist League entertainment see, for example, Commonweal, Jan 1886, p. 8; Feb 1886, p. 16, March 1886, p. 23. For "Evenings for the People" see Sept 1885, p. 84; Oct 1885, p. 92; Nov 1885, p. 100. These evenings were held every second Saturday, the first being organised on 1st August 1885.
- 27) See for example Commonweal, Nov 1885, p. 100; Jan 1886, p. 8; 8th June 1889, p. 183; Kapp, Eleanor Marx, p. 195.
- 28) Kapp, Eleanor Marx, p. 105.
- 29) 21st Jan 1885, quoted in Jan Marsh, Jane and May Morris (1986), p. 203.
- 30) Commonweal, 21 July 1888, p. 232. The Norwich branch of the League also organised a weekly Monday evening entertainment which on April 7th 1888 was given by a minstrel troupe and a fortnight earlier they had arranged a special entertainment (also by a minstrel troupe) in aid of funds for men on strike.
- 31) Kapp, Eleanor Marx, p. 104; Tzuzuki, The Life, p. 162. The cast for Alone was as follows:  
Colonel Challice...Edward Aveling.  
Stratton Strawless...G.B. Shaw.  
Bertie Cameron...Philip Sydney.  
Dr Micklethwaite...J. Hunter Watts.  
Maude Trevor...May Morris.  
Mrs Thronton...Eleanor Marx Aveling. See G.B. Shaw, Collected Letters 1874-1897 (1965), p. 115.
- 32) Kapp, Eleanor Marx pp. 104-5; Tzuzuki, The Life, pp. 163-4. Aveling had offered the play to Beerbohm and Wilson-Barrett, both of whom had refused it.
- 33) Commonweal, 10th Dec 1887, p. 400; 31st Dec 1887, p. 424; 21 Jan 1888, p. 24; 28th Jan 1888, p. 32; 25th Feb 1888,

p. 64. The cast included W.B. Parker, J. Flockton, C. Barker, Mrs Parker, H.A. Barker, H. Mackenzie, E. Mackenzie, J. Lane, W. Layton. The prompter was W. Blundell and music was by W. Barker.

34) Ibid, 31st March 1888, p. 104.

35) Ibid, 22nd Oct 1887, p. 343; G.B. Shaw, "William Morris as Actor and Dramatist", Our Theatre in the Nineties (1932), p. 213; May Morris (ed), Collected Works of William Morris (1960), vol. 20, p. xxx; Commonweal, 22nd Oct 1887, p. 343, 5th Nov 1887, p. 359. Subsequent performances are listed in Commonweal and included one in aid of the Prisoners Defence Fund and numerous performances for other socialist clubs as well as the suggestion from Kropotkin and Reclus of performing the play in a French theatre (Commonweal, 5th Nov 1887, p. 359). In all, the paper lists over 10 performances of the play, the organisation of which was handled by H.A. Barker. The full cast list, as given in Commonweal, included:

Mr La-di-da...H. Bartlett.  
Justice Nupkins...W. Blundell.  
Mr Hungary QC...W.H. Utley.  
Sergeant Sticktoit...James Allman.  
Constable Potlegoff...H.B. Tarleton.  
Constable Strongioath...J. Flockton.  
Mary Pinch...May Morris.  
Foreman of Jury...T. Cantwell.  
Jack Freeman...H.H. Sparling.  
Archbishop of Canterbury...W. Morris.  
Tennyson...A. Brookes.  
Professor Tyndall...H. Bartlett.  
William Joyce...H.A. Barker.  
Usher...J. Lane.  
Clerk of Court...J. Turner.

36) William Morris, The Tables Turned or Nupkins Awakened (1887), p. 7.

37) Ibid, p. 9.

38) May Morris (ed.), Collected Works, vol 20, p. xxix.

39) Morris, Nupkins, p. 22. For the fight for the freedom of speech (including a description of the court scenes following Dod Street and Morris personal involvement in subsequent events) see E.P. Thompson, William Morris pp. 393-403.

40) Morris, Nupkins, p. 23.

41) Ibid, p. 32.

42) May Morris (ed), Collected Works, vol. 20, p. xxx; Commonweal, 5th Nov 1887, p. 359.

43) Shaw, "William Morris as Actor and Dramatist", p. 213. Shaw's description of Morris's use of "symbols" gives us perhaps a clue as to the style of the overall performance.

44) Ibid, p. 212.

- 45) H.A.Barker, "William Morris as a Dramatist", Walthamstow Weekly Times and Echo, 15th Nov 1896, quoted in E.P. Thompson, William Morris, p. 699.
- 46) Shaw, "William Morris as Actor and Dramatist", p. 210.
- 47) Ibid, pp. 213-4.
- 48) Ibid, p. 213. Morris did, as Shaw notes, appear on the stage at least one more time, when he played the old gentleman in the bath chair in a performance of The Duchess of Bayswater at one of the annual festivals of the Hammersmith Socialist Society. He also had the dubious pleasure of appearing as a character in a play by Rossetti entitled The Death of Topsy, a drama of the future in one unjustifiable act. This was probably no more than a skit written by Rossetti for Jane Morris. See Jack Lindsay, William Morris: His Life and Work (1975), pp. 227-230, where it is reprinted in full.
- 49) Eduard Bernstein, My Years of Exile (1931), p. 62.
- 50) Aveling's professional productions of his plays were as follows:  
A Love Philtre Torquay 7.1.1888.  
The Book Worm Athenaeum 18.4.1888.  
The Scarlet Letter olympic 5.6.1888.  
For Her Sake Olympic 22.6.1888.  
The Landlady Shaftesbury 4.4.1889; Vaudeville 8.4.1893 (13 performances).  
Dregs Vaudeville 16.5.1889; Terrys 26.7.1893.  
The Jackal Strand 28.11.1889.  
By The Sea Lyric 9.6.1890 (29 performances).  
The Madcap Comedy 17.10.1890 (82 performances).  
A Hundred Years Ago Royalty 16.7.1892 (with Faithful James co-written with B.C.Stephenson); Royalty 1.11.93.  
The Frog Royalty 30.10.1893.  
Judith Shakespeare Royalty 6.2.1894 Stratford on Avon (as part of Shakespeare's birth week) 1895.
- 51) Engels to Laura Lafargue 11th April 1888.
- 52) Quoted in Kapp, Eleanor Marx, p. 108. These are just the first two lines of a lengthy poem published as a ½d leaflet.
- 53) Times, 20th Oct 1890, p. 4; for The Love Philtre see Dramatic Review, 14th Jan 1888 and for The Jackal see Tzuzuki, The Life, p. 180.
- 54) Era, 4th Nov 1893, p. 9.
- 55) "Das Drama in England" in Neue Zeit, iii Jahrgang 1885, p. 171.
- 56) "Dramatic Notes" in Time, July 1890.
- 57) Ibid, February 1891.
- 58) See for example Eleanor's letter to Laura 9th August 1888, quoted Kapp, Eleanor Marx, p. 258.

- 59) Davies, Other Theatres, p. 34.
- 60) Tzuzuki, The Life, p. 169. By the Sea was also reviewed in the Dramatic Review, where the critic spoke well of the play but was more critical of the performances, chastising Eleanor Marx for being inaudible in parts (although allowing that some of her lines "were prettily spoken") and for not rising to the "height required of the part". Aveling's own performance was dismissed as too inferior "to his clever adaptation for he two to be compared" although he was praised for his third role as the stage manager (for the "cleanliness and smoothness of a well-rehearsed production") of the farce put on in the same hall by the Wellbeck Amateurs. See Dramatic Review, 3rd December 1887.
- 61) Aveling to John Burns 7th April 1888, quoted in Kapp, Eleanor Marx, p. 254. Tsuzuki, The Life, p. 173, describes the part as having "a dash of pathos in it".
- 62) Tsuzuki, The Life, p. 279.
- 63) Ibid.
- 64) Era, 6th April 1889, p. 10; Tsuzuki, The Life, p. 174; Dramatic Notes, 1890, p. 40; Justice, 30th Nov 1895, p. 8.
- 65) Justice, 7th March 1896, p. 8; 14th March 1896, p. 8.
- 66) Tsuzuki, The Life, p. 296.
- 67) Henry Salt, Seventy Years Among Savages (1941), p. 81.
- 68) Tsuzuki, The Life, p. 92 & p. 286.
- 69) Eleanor Marx to Jenny Lafargue 18th June 1881, quoted in Kapp, Eleanor Marx, p. 224.
- 70) Kapp, Eleanor Marx, pp. 192-193. See also p. 33 & p. 172 and Tsuzuki, The Life, p. 12, p. 17, p. 57, p. 93 and for Bernstein see Tsuzuki, The Life, p. 56. One of the members of "Dogberry", Marian Skinner (later Mrs Comyn) remembers that the meetings were most often held in the Marx's House since Eleanor was "the leading spirit". Other members included Edward Rose, Mrs Theodore Wright, Dollie Radford and Sir Henry Juta. The Marx's affection for and support of Shakespeare finds parallels in Tom Mann's founding of the Shakespeare Mutual Society and his family Shakespeare evenings (See Samuel, Theatres, p. 8). Earlier, Jenny Marx had written of the celebration of Shakespeare's 300th birthday, when a young oak was planted in Primrose Hill, around which gathered "only actors who loved their Shakespeare and workers who read him in the cheap shilling editions and held their Will close to their heart". See "Jenny Marx as Critic" in Marx Memorial Library Bulletin July-Sept 1975 p7-8.
- 71) Quoted in Tsuzuki, The Life, p. 57. For Jenny Marx's theatre criticism see "Jenny Marx as Critic" which are republished in full in Betrage zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung, no 16, 1966. The articles pay particular attention to Shakespeare (the third being an account of the

New Shakespeare Society), but they also include numerous interesting insights into the state of the theatre, notably concerning the eventual triumph of Irving and the Batemans over their critics. In one she contrasts the "new middle-class audience" watching Irving to a working class theatre audience:

"It sat in deathly silence, with only an occasional timid clapping...Everyone sat impassive and immobile. How is this to be explained? Perhaps the British middle class is tired of being expected to admire Shakespeare as a mark of "good form"? Perhaps high society prefers melodramatic spectacles with burning ships, real cabs, horses, camels, and goats, to genuine works of art?...The British philistine seldom musters up the courage to have an opinion of his own. every morning at breakfast, together with the obligatory eggs and bacon, he receives his ready-made newspaper hack who thinks for him...The working class has a great advantage. The worker...goes to the theatre and trusts his own eyes and ears, claps or hisses as his feeling and judgement dictate. For a good actor the pit and the gallery have decisive importance. Hence the pride and delight of the celebrated Edmund kean, when at his performance of Richard III, the pit rose as one man to cheer. "Look - the pit salutes me".

72) Tsuzuki, The Life, p. 57.

73) Eleanor Marx to Havelock Ellis December 1885, quoted in Adelphi, Oct 1935.

74) Eleanor Marx to Shaw 2nd June 1885, quoted in Kapp, Eleanor Marx, p. 103.

75) "A Doll's House Repaired", Time, 16th March 1891, pp. 239-35. Walter Besant's "The Doll's House and After" appeared in English Illustrated Magazine, Jan 1890, pp. 313-325 and Shaw's "Still After the Doll's House", in Time, Feb 1890, pp. 197-208.

76) Tsuzuki, The Life p. 183; Playgoers Review, 16th March 1891 & 15th May 1891.

77) For Morris' split with the League see E.P. Thompson, William Morris, pp. 565-579.

78) Commonweal, 30th June 1888, p. 208; 3rd November 1888, p. 352.

79) Edith Thomas, Louise Michel (Paris, 1971), pp. 367-368.

80) Commonweal, 21st Nov 1891, p. 152; 5th March 1892, p. 40. The dramatic satires included A Social Comedy 13th May 1893, p. 3; Saith Man to Man, a pre-revolutionary drama by Thomas Barclay 22nd July 1892, p. 4; The Coal Conference 9th Dec 1893, p. 3.

81) The Strike was serialised in Commonweal between 19th Sept 1891 and 20th Feb 1892.

82) Commonweal, 30th Jan 1892, p. 19.

83) Ibid, 5th Dec 1891, p. 153.

84) Ibid, 20th Feb 1892, p. 31.

85) Thomas, Louise Michel, p. 363; see pp. 328-331 for Le Coq Rouge which is described as a drama of everyday life in which everyday life includes (amongst other things) the wrongful imprisonment of Paul and Rosalie for infanticide and their subsequent martyrdom during a strike at a mine when they set fire to the pit and then flood it! The title was taken from the Red Cock of numerous European folkstories in which it represented fire. Edith Thomas also notes Louise Michel's drama Prometheus (the "archetypal revolutionary man", which she sent to Sarah Bernhardt in the hope that she would play the lead role of Igna, Prometheus' fiancée. It was an offer which Sarah Bernhardt did not accept. See pp. 374-5.

86) Times, 15th June 1898, p. 13; Era, 18th June 1898, p. 11. The cast included Mrs Theodore Wright, Laurence Irving, Margaret Halsaan, Herbert Swears and Charles Charrington and all the proceeds went to Stepniak's widow. A question mark must hang over the performance of this play at the Avenue Theatre: how were they able to perform it without censorship? A search of police reports could provide some more information.

87) E.P. Thompson, William Morris, p. 589. For more details on the demise of the League and the growth of anarchist groups see "Goodbye to the Anarchists" in E.P. Thompson, William Morris, pp. 585-597.

Chapter 4: The Clarion Players: A Two-handed Sword, Sharp at Both Edges.

1) Clarion, 22nd Dec 1911, p. 3.

2) Laurence Thompson, Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman (1951), p. 100; Clarion, "Coming of Age Supplement", 6th Dec 1912, p. 7. The popularity of the book is also attested to by A.M. Thompson, a journalist on the Clarion, in his introduction to Blatchford's autobiography where he writes:

A year before its issue there were not 500 Socialists in Lancashire; twelve months after there were 50,000. A census taken at the time in a North of England Labour Club showed that forty-nine members out of fifty had been "converted" by Merrie England.

Merrie England is by no means the only book for which this claim has been made and others, from different political traditions, also created their fair share of socialists. Probably the tightest competition comes from Robert Tressell's The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists and in the introduction to Jack Mitchell, Robert Tressell and the Ragged Trousered Philanthropists (1969), p. 1, Mitchell quotes Jack Beeching's comments on the book:

Go into any meeting room of the working-class movement in Britain and you will probably find at least one man present, who could say: "That book brought me into the movement. That book made me a convinced socialist. That book altered the whole course and direction of my life".

3) Clarion, 5th March 1926, p. 1; David Prynne, "The Clarion Clubs, Rambling and the Holiday Associations in Britain since the 1890s", Journal of Contemporary History, vol. 11, 1976, p. 66.

4) Robert Blatchford, My Eighty Years (1931), p. 202.

5) Ibid, p. 50.

6) Robert Blatchford, Merrie England (1976), p. 46.

7) Clarion, 9th Jan 1914, p. 8.

8) Ibid, 23rd Jan 1925, p. 10; 22nd May 1925, p. 10; 2nd Jan 1914, p. 7; 19th Aug 1910, p. 5; "Coming of Age" Supplement, 6th Dec 1912, p. 7; L. Thompson, Robert Blatchford, p. 159.

9) L. Thompson, Robert Blatchford, p. 159.

10) Clarion, 26th Jan 1917, p. 1.

- 11) Ibid, 19th Aug 1910, p. 5.
- 12) Ibid, 12th June 1925, p. 10; see also Clarion, 25th May 1895, p. 168; Waters, British Socialists, p. 147.
- 13) Clarion, 16th Feb 1912, p. 1.
- 14) Ibid, 23rd Dec 1911, p. 3.
- 15) See for example Ibid, 6th Jan 1911, p. 6; 20th Jan 1911, p. 7; 5th July 1912, p. 7; 19th July 1912, p. 8. The variety of social events was extremely wide, and alongside those mentioned in the text also included concerts, sports of all varieties (including chess and billiards), visits to the theatre and art exhibitions, and annual grand carnivals and sales of work. Any copy of the Clarion (in particular during the winter months) up until the First World War will give a flavour of these events.
- 16) Ibid, 6th Dec 1912, p. 7.
- 17) See Tom Groom, "Clarion Organisations", "Coming of Age" Supplement, Clarion, 6th Dec 1912, p. 7; A. Neil Lyons, Robert Blatchford (1910), p. 158; Prynne, "The Clarion Clubs", re rambling clubs and Waters, British Socialists, pp. 173-4 re Handicraft Guild.
- 18) "The Clarion Vocal Union. What it is and what it might be", Clarion, 14th Sept 1901, p. 297. Branches and affiliated choirs were established in Armley, Ashton-under-Lyne, Attercliffe, Barrow-in-Furness, Birmingham, Bolton, Bradford, Brighouse, Brighton, Burnley, Coven (30), Darwen and Blackburn, Dunfermline (46), Eccles, Glasgow (60), Halifax (148), Huddersfield, Hull (40), Hyde, Keighley (40), Kentish Town, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester (various affiliated choirs 272), Nottingham (60), Oldham (59), Openshaw, Preston, Ramsbottom, Rochdale (36), Salford West (40), Sheffield (48), Slaithwaite, Staffordshire North, Stockport, Stockton, West Ham and York (15). Figures refer to membership in 1896. See Scout, Feb 1896. Montagu Blatchford had more than a passing interest in music himself. He was not only the honorary conductor of the Halifax Industrial Society choir, but also the composer of several light operas including Phyllis (performed in Halifax 1890), Sylvia (performed in Halifax 1891) and The Highwayman (performed in Halifax 1905). See Joyce Bellamy & John Saville (eds), Dictionary of Labour Biography (1976), vol iv, pp. 31-33  
For more on the CVU see Waters, British Socialists, pp. 120-127; Dave Russell, Popular Music in England (Manchester, 1987), pp. 52-56.
- 19) "Your Voices Raised", Clarion, 12th Jan 1895, p. 13; Russell, Popular Music, p. 53.
- 20) Clarion, 12th Jan 1895, p. 13; 21st May 1926, p. 9; 15th Dec 1911, p. 1; 22nd Dec 1911, p. 3.
- 21) Ibid, 15th Sept 1894, p. 5; 21st May 1926, p. 9.



22) Keighley Labour Journal, 10th Dec 1895, quoted in Russell, Popular Music, p. 54.

23) Clarion, 21st May 1926, p. 9; 15th Sept 1894, p. 5; 5th Jan 1912, p. 5.

24) Waters, British Socialists, pp. 121-123; Russell, Popular Music, p. 55. Waters (p. 122) includes the following breakdown of the songs sung based on a study of the sheet music collection of the Halifax and Bradford branches of the Vocal Union:

Victorian Choral Works:	61%
Traditional Folksongs:	16.3%
English songs of 16th & 17th centuries:	11.4%
"Classical" choral works:	7%
Political songs (by socialists & supporters):	4.3%

25) Russell, Popular Music, p. 54; Waters, British Socialists, p. 122.

26) Denis Pye, "Fellowship is Life: Bolton Clarion Cycling Club and the Clarion Movement 1894-1914, North West Labour History, 1984-1985, p. 22.

27) John Mahon, p. 38.

28) Scout, May 1895; for more on the Clarion Cycling Clubs see Pye, "Fellowship is Life"; Mahon, pp. 38-9. For the Clarion Scouts see Clarion, 19th Aug 1910 and Prynne, "The Clarion Clubs", pp. 67-8.

29) Clarion, 2nd Jan 1914, p. 7.

30) Clarion, 3rd March 1911, p. 3; see also 23rd Dec 1910, p. 3, 3rd Feb 1911, p. 3.

31) Samuel, Theatres, pp. 17-18.

32) L. Thompson, Robert Blatchford, p. 37, p. 67 & p. 71; Alexander Thompson, Here I Lie (1937), pp. 292-301. For A. Neil Lyons plays performed by the Clarion Dramatic Societies (namely The Gentleman Who Was Sorry and Getting at Facts) see below; his other plays included:

a) Three Common People (written with Vera Beringer and sometimes known

as Penny a Bunch): Court 8th Feb 1912.

b) London Pride, a London Play for London People (with Gladys B. Unger): Wyndhams 6th Dec 1916

c) A Bit of A Lad: St James's Theatre 2nd March 1917.

d) The Ring of Bells: Prince's Theatre, Manchester 1st June 1925;

Comedy 24th Nov 1925.

33) Clarion, 26th Nov 1909, p. 3.

34) James Sexton, Sir James Sexton, Agitator: The Life of the Dockers MP (1934), p. 219. For more on Sexton's own plays see chapter on Labour writers.

35) Clarion, 18th Feb 1910, p. 3.

36) Ibid, 8th Jan 1909, p. 9; 29th Jan 1909, p. 9; 17th Sept 1909, p. 9; 26th Nov 1909, p. 10.

37) Ibid, 6th Jan 1905, p. 7; 27th Jan 1905, p. 7.

38) Ibid, 3rd Feb 1905, p. 7.

39) For Hubert Humphreys see for example Clarion, 12th Feb 1909, p. 10; 11th August 1911, p. 7. For Daisy Halling see Clarion, 3rd March 1911, p. 7; 24th Nov 1911, p. 7; 23rd Aug 1912, p. 7 and for more details of her life and dramatic writing for the movement see the section in this chapter on the Clarion plays. It should be stressed that even with later dramatic developments these recitals did not come to an end. See for example Hubert Humphreys performing the "Dream" from Man and Superman (12th Jan 1912, p. 4), the dramatic reading of Mrs Warren's Profession at the Handforth Clubhouse (2nd Jan 1914 p9) and Horace Nobbs rendition of excerpts from The Pickwick Papers (18th Feb 1916, p. 8).

40) Clarion, 28th Jan 1910, p. 3.

41) Ibid, 11th Feb 1910, p. 1. Maurice Elvey had founded the Adelphi Play Society in 1911, a society which specialised in the new European drama and whose productions had included Strindberg's The Father (23 July 1911) and Miss Julie (28th April 1912), Schnitzler's Das Marchen (28th January 1912) and Chekov's The Seagull (March 1912). See Jan McDonald "Productions of Chekov's Plays in Britain Before 1914", Theatre Notebook, vol. XXXIV, no. 1, 1980 p. 35 note 1.

42) Ibid, 18th Feb 1910, p. 7; 4th March 1910, p. 3; 18th March 1910, p. 3. The Strong People was reviewed in the Clarion on 11th Feb 1910 just prior to it's performance at the Lyric Theatre in a production by Mr Waller. In the end, and to the "disappointment of every Socialist in town" Mr Waller had to withdraw the production because of another engagement. Henry C. Gilpin wrote to the Clarion (18th Feb 1910, p. 7) and went one step further than Elvey, suggesting that the success of the Manchester Gaiety showed there was an audience for Socialist plays and outlining the idea he had had for some time that:

a company (of professional layers) might be subsidised from headquarters and could then visit the larger provincial cities playing a piece or pieces that would appeal to people we cannot reach by ordinary methods of propoganda.

However, this led to nothing.

43) Ibid, 18th Feb 1910, p. 7; 11th March 1910, p. 12; 20th May 1910, p. 7; 27th May 1910, p. 6; 2nd Sept 1910, p. 7; 25th Nov 1910, p. 7; 2nd Dec 1910, p. 7; 13th Jan 1911, p. 7; 24th Feb 1911, p. 8; 17th March 1911, p. 6.

44) Ibid, 6th May 1910, p. 3. See also 25th Feb 1910, p. 3; 11th March 1910, p. 3; 15th April 1910, p. 3; 23rd September

1910, p. 7. For Newcastle see Norman Veitch, The People's especially Ch. 1-2.

45) Ibid, 4th Nov 1910, p. 7; 13th Jan 1911, p7; 20th Dec 1912, p. 9.

46) Ibid, 19th April 1912, p. 6; 28th March 1913, p. 3.

47) Clarion, 3rd March 1911, p. 10.

48) Veitch, The People's, pp. 19-20.

49) "Clarion Dramatic Societies and Their Uses", Clarion, 24th Oct 1913, p. 7.

50) Ibid.

51) Ibid.

52) Ibid; Veitch, The People's, p. 11.

53) Clarion, 8th May 1914, p. 12.

54) Ibid.

55) Ibid, 12th June 1914, p. 3.

56) Ibid, 9th April 1915, p. 10.

57) Ibid, 7th November 1913, p.3; 21st Nov 1913, p. 12; 12th Dec 1913, p. 3.

58) Ibid, 2nd Jan 1914, p. 3; 23rd Jan 1914, p. 8; 24th April 1914, p. 3. Clarion Dramatic Societies listed as being in existence (or at least those which had contacted Norman Veitch) were Stockport Clarion Players, Nottingham BSP (Dramatic Section), North London Clarion Players, Hyde Clarion Players, Liverpool Clarion Players, Glasgow Clarion Players, Newcastle Clarion Dramatic Club, West Leeds Dramatic Club. He also noted the existence of a second Liverpool group (later identified as the Litherland Clarion Players). See appendix for full list of Clarion Dramatic Societies.

59) Percy Corry later went on to establish Watts and Corry, one of the largest scenery and lighting hire companies in the north-west, which did sterling service for the amateur movement.

60) Clarion, 18th June 1915, p. 3.

61) Ibid, 24th April 1914, p. 3; 14th Aug 1914, p. 3; 9th April 1915, p. 10.

62) Ibid, 20th March 1925, p. 10; 22nd May 1925, p. 6; 30th Oct 1925, p. 1; 13th Nov 1925, p. 10; 15th Jan 1926, p. 6; 22nd Jan 1926, p. 6.

63) Ibid, 8th May 1914, p. 2.

64) Ibid.

- 65) Ibid, 13th Nov 1914, p. 4; 30th Jan 1914, p. 3.
- 66) Veitch, The People's, p. 28-9; Clarion, 11th Dec 1914, p. 13.
- 67) Clarion, 13th Aug 1915, p. 10.
- 68) Ibid, 4th March 1910, p. 3; 10th April 1914, p. 3; 23rd September 1910, p. 3.
- 69) Sphinx, vol. XIII, no. 15, 27th June 1906, p. 235.
- 70) Clarion, 19th Dec 1910, p. 3.
- 71) Harold and Constance King, The Two Nations (Liverpool, 1938) pp. 74-5 & p. 92; Clarion, 26th Dec 1913, p.3; 2nd Jan 1914, p. 3.
- 72) Veitch, The People's, p. 39. See also pp. 3-4, pp. 8-9, pp. 17-18, p. 26.
- 73) Ibid, pp. 18-19.
- 74) Ibid, p. 19 & p. 42.
- 75) Ibid, p. 63. In the end "Comrade" Trost, the non-socialist elected as secretary, stood down from the post immediately in the face of opposition from Arthur Croasdell who threatened to resign over the matter. Veitch's description of Croasdell as a man "always punctilious on matters of procedure and rules" gives away his own feelings on the matter. See also Veitch, The People's, p. 31 & p. 35 & Clarion, 20th Dec 1912, p. 9.
- 76) Collin Coates: "This Was the REAL Youth Movement", Merseyside's Labour Voice, Oct 1957, p. 7; Clarion, 25th March 1910, p. 3; 20th Dec 1912, p. 9; 2nd Jan 1914, p. 9; 23rd Jan 1914, p. 8. Collin Coates description of the movement can however be tempered by the reminiscences of others such as Stella Davies, a member of the East Manchester Clarion Cycling Club, who was convinced they were "dyed in the wool socialists". See Stella Davies North Country Bred (1963), p. 19, quoted in Waters, British Socialists, p. 70.
- 77) Ibid.
- 78) Veitch, The People's, p. 29; Clarion, 24th April 1914, p. 3.
- 79) Clarion, 26th Nov 1909, p. 3. For Veitch see Clarion, 24th Oct 1913, p. 7. See also Waters, British Socialists p. 162 ff.
- 80) Ibid, 13th Dec 1912, p. 10; 19th Dec 1913, p. 19; 24th Oct 1913, p. 7.
- 81) Veitch, The People's, p. 6; Clarion, 1st April 1910, p. 3.
- 82) Veitch, p. 12.
- 83) Constance and Harold King, The Two Nations, p. 96; Clarion, 9th Dec 1910, p. 2; 17th March 1911, p. 6; 8th March

1912, p. 6; 18th April 1913, p. 7; 25th April 1913, p. 7; 30th Jan 1914, p. 3; 20th March 1914, p. 3; 10th April 1914, p. 3; 9th May 1914, p. 3.

84) Clarion, 15th May 1914, p. 4.

85) Clarion, 19th March 1915, p.10.

86) Keighley Snowden, Clarion, 8th April 1910, p. 5.

87) Gertrude Robins, Clarion, 13th Dec 1912, p. 3.

88) Veitch, The People's, p. 7 & p. 9; Clarion, 24th Oct 1913, p. 7.

89) Ibid.

90) Clarion, 29th April 1910, p. 3; 11th Feb 1910, p. 1.

91) Clarion, 17th June 1910, p. 3

92) Ibid, 14th April 1911, p. 3; 10th Nov 1911, p. 3.

93) Ibid, 2nd April 1909, p. 3.

94) Ibid, 4th March 1910, p. 3

95) Lynton Hudson, The Twentieth Century Drama (1946), pp. 46-47.

96) Clarion, 1st April 1910, p. 3.

97) Ibid.

98) Ibid, 6th Dec 1912, p. 8

99) Amateur Stage, March 1927, p. 90

100) Veitch, The People's, p. 35. See also Jan McDonald "Productions of Chekov's Plays in Britain Before 1914" pp. 25-36.

101) There appears to be some confusion as to the first performances of Strindberg's plays in England. According to Wearing, The Stronger Woman first appeared in a production by the New Stage Club at the Bloomsbury Hall (as the first performance of a Strindberg play in England) in November 1906, but Miss Julie had to wait until September 1929, at least to reach the London stage. On the other hand, Michael Meyer in his biography of Strindberg (1985) gives the first performance as Birmingham in 1914 (when the Repertory Theatre performed The Outlaw) followed by a 1921 performance of Advent at the Old Vic. In either case, the Liverpool productions were clearly ground breaking.

102) Clarion, 13th Feb 1914, p. 12.

103) Upton Sinclair, The Second-Storey Man (Kansas, n.d.), p. 12. A "second-storey man" is a man who "climbs up porches and fire escapes" to break into a house (see p. 17).

- 104) Ibid, p. 17.
- 105) Ibid, p. 18.
- 106) Ibid, p. 30.
- 107) Ibid, pp. 30-31.
- 108) Clarion, 19th March 1915, p. 10. Hyde's Shakespeare productions must have reached a fairly acceptable standard for in January 1914, two members of the cast of As You Like It (one of whom was Horace Nobbs) were invited to appear in Manchester alongside the "eminent Shakespearean" Ryder Boys in Anthony and Cleopatra and in 1916 (although the prize for the best all round Shakespeare production went elsewhere) they won the prize offered by the Manchester Shakespeare Tercentenary Association for the best Shakespeare production at minimum cost against a "score of opposition". See Clarion, 30th Jan 1914, p. 3 & 14th July 1916, p. 5. It is also easy, in dismissing Shaw as "old hat", to forget that some of the Clarion Players performances of his plays represented "premieres" in their districts (such as Newcastle's production of Major Barbara in 1911) and on at least one occasion (Newcastle's production of The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet in the same year) was possibly the first English production of the play. See Veitch, The People's, pp. 4-5, pp. 23-24.
- 109) Clarion, 15th May 1914, p. 3.
- 110) Ibid, 13th Jan 1911, p. 7. For Handforth see 17th Sept 1915, p. 8.
- 111) Ibid, 27th Jan 1911, p. 10; 17th March 1911, p. 6; 25th Nov 1910, p. 7. The "old-time comedy" in question was A Weaver in Spite of Himself by T.H.Bayly, but the farce is unidentified.
- 112) Quoted in L. Thompson, Robert Blatchford, p. 68.
- 113) Clarion, 11th Sept 1908, p. 3. For Blatchford on rational leisure see The New Religion, Clarion Pass On Pamphlet No. 9, n.d., p. 13.
- 114) Clarion, 11th Nov 1910, p. 7; 30th Dec 1910, p. 8.
- 115) Veitch, The People's, p. 30.
- 116) Veitch, The People's, p. 32. The plays in question were R.L.Stevenson's and W.E.Henley's Admiral Guinea (the thriller) and two farces, J.M.Barrie's The Will and W.S.Gilbert's Tom Cobb.
- 117) Veitch, The People's, p. 32.
- 118) Clarion, 5th Jan 1912, p. 5; 22nd Dec 1911, p. 8.
- 119) Ibid, 1st April 1910, p. 3.
- 120) Ibid, 24th Oct 1913, p. 7.

121) Veitch, The People's, p. 15; Clarion, 2nd Dec 1910, p. 7; 30th Dec 1910, p. 8.

122) Clarion, 24th April 1914, p. 3

123) Ibid, 10th July 1914, p. 3. This may not, of course, have been the same list that Veitch promised to send to secretaries.

124) Veitch, The People's, pp. 14-15.

125) Ibid, 19th March 1915, p. 10; Veitch, The People's, p. 16. Both Ashes and Recognition of the Union were performed in Newcastle in 1914 as part of a series of one act plays, and other performances that are traceable on the pages of the Clarion include Hyde (19th March 1915, p. 10) who performed Ronald's play on Good Friday at the Buxton Meet and a performance of Ashes by Litherland in September 1914.

126) Veitch, The People's, pp. 10-11.

127) Clarion, 1st July 1910, p. 2; 14th Oct 1910, p. 7; 24th Feb 1911, p. 8; 3rd May 1912, p. 6; 12th June 1914, p. 3; 4th Dec 1914, p. 12; 19th March 1915, p. 10. For more on Agnes Bain and Blind Iris see the chapter "A Collection of Oddities".

128) Era, 26th Oct 1912, p. 14. The Newcastle production took place in 1914.

129) Clarion, 27th March 1914, p. 1 where Getting at the Facts is reprinted in full.

130) Ibid.

131) Ibid.

132) Ibid, 14th Sept 1914, p. 9; 9th Oct 1914, p. 11. Percy Beck was not himself a member of the Newcastle Clarion Dramatic Society, but he was closely acquainted with many who were. See Veitch, The People's, p. 170. Two further plays of his were produced by the society, both written with Norman Veitch. In 1928, Eunice, a comic opera of the "standard type" was produced seemingly simply because it was a local product of some merit, and in 1936, the pantomime Babes in the Hollywood (in which "the little innocents were to be whisked away to the land of films") reached the Newcastle stage. See Veitch, The People's, p. 82 & p. 170.

133) Clarion, 14th April 1916, p. 5. Her complete list of suggestions was as follows:

- a) Sunbeams: games, songs, fairy stories
- b) Intermediate: mythology, literature
- c) Senior: introductory classes to more advanced subjects
  - a) singing, dancing, dramatics (including operettas, Shakespeare, folk song, folk dance
  - b) mythology (8-14 year olds)
  - c) english literature: border and Robin Hood

- ballads social history, composition of
- plays, poems, stories
- d) history of music and musical composition
- e) french
- f) botany
- g) geology
- h) piano playing
- i) children's parties and picnics

For The Nightingale see also Veitch, The People's, pp. 35-36.

134) Clarion, 6th March 1914, p. 3.

135) Ibid, 5th December 1913, p. 3. Edith and Norman Veitch also co-wrote the 1927 production of King Midas, a "delightful fantasy" (which was broadcast from the Newcastle studios of the BBC) and a tale of Robin Hood, entitled Mayday. See Veitch, The People's, p. 82; Clarion, 6th March 1914, p. 3.

136) Clarion, 5th Dec 1913, p. 3.

137) Ibid, 23rd Dec 1910, p. 8; 1st November 1912, p. 3, 5th Dec 1913, p. 3.

138) Veitch, The People's, p. 27 & p. 37. Arcade Halls (which Allardyce Nicoll cites as the venue for the three Lea plays performed in 1920) would appear to be the home of the Newcastle Clarion Players by this time (Veitch calls the hall The Royal Arcade), but they are not mentioned as performed by the Clarion Players in Veitch's list of productions.

139) Clarion, 14th Feb 1913, p. 10.

140) Ibid, 7th May 1909, p. 3; 16th July 1909, p. 3.

141) Ibid, 27th March 1914, p. 3.

142) See G.D.H.Cole, A History of Socialist Thought (1956), vol. III, part 1, p. 173.

143) Clarion, 11th March 1910, p. 3; 6th Jan 1911, p. 7.

144) Ibid, 18th Feb 1910, p. 7; 4th March 1910, p. 3, 11th March 1910, p. 3, 10th April 1910, p. 3, 21st Jan 1910, p. 3.

145) Ibid, 7th Jan 1911, p. 3. For details of Daisy Halling's life see the introduction to her pamphlet Mrs Grundy - The Enemy (Stockport, 1908), and for examples of her lecturing see Clarion, 21st Jan 1910 & Labour Leader, 5th Feb 1909, p. 96. For Bradford see Clarion, 10th Feb 1911, p. 8.

One of her poems, "The Right to Work" which opens:

The costly tomb for the rich man's bride rises eloquent  
from the ground.  
 The plain white stone for the poor man's wife rises  
dumbly from its mound....

and which ends:



Rulers, the ruled are starving! Their deaths lie at your  
door;  
Grant them the right to work, to live, or speak God's  
name no more!

is printed in full in Labour's Northern Voice, 22nd May 1925.

146) Clarion, 5th April 1912, p. 7; see also 26th Dec 1913,  
p. 3; 13th Feb 1914, p. 12; 6th March 1914, p. 3; 20th March  
1914 p. 3; 9th Oct 1914, p. 11.

147) New Leader, 26th Dec 1930, p. 10.

148) Collin Coates, "This Was the REAL Youth Movement", p. 7.

Chapter Five: The Religion of Socialism or a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon: The ILP Arts Guild.

- 1) McIntyre, A Proletarian Science, p. 53; Geoffrey Foote, The Labour Party's Political Thought (1985), p. 34; J. Bruce Glasier, The Meaning of Socialism (1919), p. 229; Labour Leader, 30th March 1906, p. 163.
- 2) The Christ That Is To Be, quoted in Tony Cliff, The Labour Party: A Marxist History (198), p. 15; Clifford Allen, Putting Socialism into Practice (Address to ILP Conference 1924), pp. 16-17; Clifford Allen, The ILP and Revolution (Address at Summer School, August 1925), p. 6 & p. 9.
- 3) Quoted in Kath Steele, R.C. Wallhead: A Memoir (n.d.), p. 8; Percy Redfern, A Journey to Understanding, quoted in Stephen Yeo, "A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain 1883-1896", History Workshop, no. 4, Autumn 1977, p. 17.
- 4) Clifford Allen, Putting Socialism into Practice, p. 28.
- 5) Philip Snowden, Twenty Objections to Socialism (1924), p. 6.
- 6) David Howell, British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906 (Manchester, 1983), p. 2.
- 7) Ramsay MacDonald, Socialism and Society (1905), p. 128.
- 8) Quoted in Cliff, The Labour Party, p.17; Philip Snowden, Socialism and Syndicalism (n.d.), pp. 15-16.
- 9) Seedtime, July 1894, quoted in Howell, British Workers, p. 336. The writer was Ramsay MacDonald who was soon to join the ILP.
- 10) Labour Leader, 8th Jan 1898, p. 15.
- 11) Labour Leader, 21st May 1909, p. 327; 29th Jan 1909, p. 80.
- 12) Ibid, 20th Jan 1911, p. 48; 27th Jan 1911, p. 62.
- 13) New Leader, 29th Jan 1926, p. 14. This example, plus numerous others cited in this section give the lie to Stephen Yeo's argument that the growth of the Labour Party machine and an increased emphasis on electoralism (coupled with a growing capitalist leisure industry) eroded socialist forms of leisure and branch life. It is point made by Stephen Jones (Workers at Play (1986), p. 143) and borne out by a perusal of the pages of the New Leader in the mid to late twenties. For Yeo see, for example, "A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain 1883-1896".
- 14) Kath Steele, R.C. Wallhead, p. 22; Stephen Jones, Sport, Politics and the Working Class (Manchester, 1987), p. 31; Waters, British Socialists, p. 92.

- 15) Kath Steele, R.C. Wallhead, p. 22.
- 16) New Leader, 24th June 1927, p. 10.
- 17) Labour's Northern Voice, 25th March 1927, p. 5.
- 18) New Leader, 9th March 1923, p. 18; 15th June 1923, p. 15; 22nd March 1929, p. 7.
- 19) The programme for the Birmingham concert is in Harvester Archives of the ILP: 1911/44; Samuel, Theatres, pp. 11-12. The inclusion of Hubert Humphrey's recital in the programme gives us some indication of the role drama played in the early part of the century - see below for more details.
- 20) New Leader, 8th July 1927, p. 15; Labour Leader, 3rd Feb 1911, p. 78 & p. 80; 10th Feb 1911, p. 96.
- 21) New Leader, 8th April 1927, p. 4; 5th Aug 1927, p. 2.
- 22) NAC Memorandum For Social Secretaries, 1920.
- 23) Stockport ILP Minute Book, 6th Dec 1896; Glasier is quoted in Tony Mason: Association Football and English Society 1863-1915 (Brighton, 1981), p. 236.
- 24) Labour's Northern Voice, 13th Nov 1925, p. 3.
- 25) NAC Memorandum to Social Secretaries, 1920; Labour's Northern Voice, 27th Nov 1925, p. 7; 12th March 1926, p. 3. For a more detailed discussion of the relationship the ILP saw between art and politics see discussion on Arts Guild below.
- 26) Keighley Labour Journal, 2nd June 1897, quoted in Louis James, Fiction for the Working Man 1830-1850 (1963), p. 66.
- 27) Halifax branch, Annual Reports and Balance Sheet.
- 28) Howell, British Workers, pp. 336-338.
- 29) Labour Leader, 10th Feb 1911, p. 92; 23rd June 1911, p. 400; 18th August 1911, p. 528; 3rd Sept 1911, p. 560; 13th Oct 1911, p. 656; 8th Feb 1917, p. 12; 21st September 1922, p. 8; Kath Steele, R.C. Wallhead, p. 8.
- 30) Labour Leader, 16th Jan 1913, p. 14; 13th Feb 1913, p. 14; 21st Nov 1912, p. 758; 13th Feb 1913, p. 14; 11th Jan 1917, p. 11; 8th Feb 1917, p. 12; 29th March 1917, p. 10; 6th Sept 1917, p. 12.
- 31) Jerry Dawson, "Unity Comes of Age", Labour's Merseyside Voice, August 1957, p. 5; Stephen Jones, Workers at Play (1986), pp. 29-30. Dawson lists the officers as:  
 General Secretary - Leo Hyam  
 Treasurer - Mrs McArd  
 Vice President - T. Jacks  
 Organiser - Ernest B. Wright  
 Committee - Mrs Charles Barker, Miss Bessie Bamber  
 This group was still, according to Dawson, performing in the

mid-thirties when they gave Elmer Rice's The Adding Machine, Sinclair's The Second-Storey Man and a one man version of O'Neill's The Hairy Ape (written and performed by George Garrett) at their premises in Upper Parliament Street.

32) Dawson, "Unity Comes of Age", p. 5; Jones, Workers at Play, p. 30.

33) Ibid.

34) Labour Leader, 22nd Jan 1920, p. 15; 7th Oct 1920, p. 7, 16th Feb 1922, p. 8; 23rd Feb 1922, p. 8; Forward, 21st Jan 1922, p. 8; 21st Oct 1922, p. 8. The work of Shettleston is discussed in greater detail below in the section on propaganda.

35) Robert E. Dowse, Left in the Centre: the Independent Labour Party 1893-1940 (1966), p. 72. Figures for numbers of branches is given by Dowse as follows:

1918 - 657

1919 - 753

1920 - 787

1921 - 768

1922 - 614

There is tremendous confusion as to how this actually broke down in terms of membership figures. In 1918, MacDonald estimated membership to be about 35,000. In 1919, the ILP Annual Conference report quoted the figure of 80,000, but in the same year the Times placed the figure at around 30,000.

36) Labour Leader, 29th March 1917, p. 8.

37) Ibid, 13th Feb 1913, p. 9.

38) New Leader, 23rd May 1924, p. 18; 28th Nov 1924, p. 17; 12th Dec 1924, p. 17. Prior to the establishment of O'Riordan's column, the New Leader had covered theatrical productions including a Yiddish production by actors from Vilna (10th Nov 1922, p. 6), Henry VI Part I at the Old Vic (2nd Feb 1923, p. 7), Methuselah at the Court (7th March 1924, p. 17) and the Stage Society's production of Masses and Men (13th June 1924, p. 3). The paper also carried occasional reviews of published plays, and did attempt on two occasions prior to "The Play From the Pit" to initiate a regular column ("Weekly Theatre Reviews" written by M.R.A in October 1922 and "The Theatre Column" in February 1923 by E.H.Y. Wiltshire) but both were short lived. other contributors included Ralph Fox, C.E.M. Joad, and H.N. Brailsford himself.

39) Ibid, 25th Jan 1924, p. 15; 8th Feb 1924, p. 15, 13th June 1924, p. 15; 20th June 1924, p. 18; 4th July 1924, p. 15; 18th July 1924, p. 15; 15th Aug 1924, p. 11; 29th Aug 1924, p. 15; 10th Oct 1924, p. 15; 14th Nov 1924, p. 20; 16th Jan 1925, p. 19; 20th Feb 1925, p. 15; 20th March 1925, p. 19. For details of Reginald Sorenson and Wilfred Wellock, both Labour MPs, see below.

40) New Leader, 7th March 1924, p. 18.

- 41) New Leader, 16th Jan 1925, p. 18.
- 42) Ibid, 23rd Jan 1925, p. 14.
- 43) Ibid.
- 44) All the details of the performances can be found on the pages of New Leader between January 23rd 1925 and March 26th 1926. For a full list of the programmes see the Appendix.
- 45) The list of professional performers who were involved in the Strand evenings is impressive in its length. Apart from those mentioned in the text, the NAC report for 1925 lists the following who had offered help:
- |                |                 |
|----------------|-----------------|
| Milton Rosmer  | Irene Rooke     |
| Miles Malleson | Edith Craig     |
| Harold Scott   | Elsa Lanchester |
| Hugh MacKay    | Kathleen Dillon |
- (The last two were from the Arts League of Service).  
From the pages of the New Leader, numerous other names can be added to the list:
- |                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| Laurence Anderson | Sterling MacKinlay |
| Elizabeth Arkell  | Winifred Oughton   |
| Douglas Burbidge  | Nancy Price        |
| Anthony Clarke    | Mary Raby          |
| Hubert Harben     | Martha Vanne       |
| Barbara Horder    | Ben Webster        |
| Fred Lloyd        | Harcourt Williams  |
| Moyna MacGill     | Margaret Yarde     |
- and the entire company of the Gate Theatre.
- 46) New Leader, 13th Feb 1925, p. 18; 5th Feb 1926, p. 15. Houseman's play had received one earlier performance when in May 1910 it had been performed as part of a matinee held at the Royal Court to raise money for the Suffrage Atelier.
- 47) George Calderon, The Fountain (Glasgow, 1911), preface, p. 3.
- 48) Ibid.
- 49) Ibid pp. 50-51.
- 50) Ibid p. 160.
- 51) New Leader, 23rd Jan 1925, p. 14.
- 52) Ibid, 12th Feb 1926, p. 12.
- 53) Ibid, 20th March 1925, p. 8.
- 54) Ibid, 13th Feb 1925, p. 18.
- 55) Ibid, 23rd Jan 1925, p. 14; National Administrative Council Annual Report 1925, p. 26.
- 56) Ibid, 16th Jan 1925, p. 18.
- 57) Ibid, 13th Feb 1925, p. 18.

58) New Leader, 7th March 1924, p. 18; 13th June 1924, p. 14; 20th June 1924, p. 18; 1st August 1924, p. 10.

59) Ibid, 12th June 1925, p. 7.

60) Ibid, 12th June 1925, p. 7; 3rd June 1925, p. 14. The "provisional" list of co-opted experts who had accepted membership of the Council included:

Kyrle Bellew	A.D.Lindsey (Master of Balliol)
Arthur Bouchier	Margaret Morris
Lewis Casson	Oswald Mosley
Edith Craig	H.W.Nevinson
Ralfe Davis	Hugh Robertson
Kathleen Dillon	Irene Rooke
Canon Donaldson	Milton Rosmer
Ashley Dukes	A.Maude Royden
John Goss	Evelyn Sharp
Gerald Gould	Horace Shipp
Evelyn Hope	Sybil Thorndyke
Laurence Houseman	H.Baillie Weaver
Mrs Laura Knight	Harcourt Williams

61) ILP NAC Minutes 1st August 1925, 27th Sept 1925; New Leader, 3rd July 1925, p. 14; 9th April 1926, p. 15, 18th March 1927, p. 13; 12th August 1927, p. 15; 11th May 1928, p. 7; Arthur Marwick, Clifford Allen: The Open Conspirator (Edinburgh, 1964), p. 89.

62) New Leader, 12th June 1925, p. 6.

63) Ibid, 3rd July 1925, p. 14.

64) New Leader, 3rd July 1925, p. 14; 13th Nov 1925, p. 14; 8th Jan 1926, p. 14; 2nd April 1926, p. 15; 16th April 1926, p. 14; 17th Dec 1926, p. 14.

65) ILP Annual Report, 1925, p. 25; ILP Annual Report, 1926, p. 25.

66) New Leader, 13th Nov 1925, p. 14; 16th April 1926, p. 14; 23rd Oct 1926, p. 15; 19th Nov 1926, p. 18; Town Crier, 23rd April 1926; ILP Annual Report, 1928, p. 16.

67) ILP Annual Report, 1932 p. 24; See also the Annual Reports for 1929 (p. 22), 1930 (p. 33) and 1931 (p. 25).

68) Clarion, 19th June 1925, p. 7; Miles Malleeson, The ILP and Its Dramatic Societies (c1925), p. 3; ILP Annual Report, 1926, p. 25.

69) Dowse, Inside the Left, pp. 82-3; Labour Leader, 14th Sept 1922, p. 5. For more on this period in the ILP's history see Dowse, Inside the Left and Marwick, Clifford Allen.

70) ILP Annual Conference Report, 1926, p. 28.

71) Dowse, Inside the Left, p. 124; New Leader, Feb 1923.

72) Malleeson, The ILP and its Dramatic Societies, p. 8.

- 73) New Leader, 9th April 1926, p. 5; 13th Nov 1925, p. 14.
- 74) Miles Malleson, "A Plea for the Little Theatre", Nation, 27th April 1918, pp. 88-90.
- 75) Ibid.
- 76) Northern Democrat, April 1928, p7; "Progressive Players 1920-1980: Diamond Jubilee Souvenir". For West Salford see Balance Sheet and Report for year ending Jan 31st 1926, p. 3 and for Long Eaton see New Leader, 25th Feb 1927, p. 4 and for Hayle see New Leader, 12th March 1926, p. 19. For the links with the Little Theatre movement see, for example, the Stage Year Book for 1928 pp. 193-195. It is also worth noting that an ILP member, Walter Tobias, was the Secretary of the Repertory Players.
- 77) Gateshead Labour Herald, April 1922, p. 1; "Progressive Players 1920-1980: Diamond Jubilee Souvenir".
- 78) New Leader, 11th Nov 1927, p. 14; 30th March 1928, p. 15.
- 79) Bradford Pioneer, Dec 1926, p. 1.
- 80) Labour's Northern Voice, 26th March 1926, p. 7; New Leader, 23rd July 1926, p. 15.
- 81) Northern Democrat, March 1928, p. 7; New Leader, 17th Dec 1926, p. 14; 28th Nov 1930, p. 15.
- 82) Northern Democrat, March 1928, p. 7; Leeds Weekly Citizen, 1st Jan 1926, p. 6; 15th Jan 1926, p. 6; Forward, 21st Feb 1925, p. 4; 26th Sept 1925, p. 14.
- 83) New Leader, 8th Oct 1926, p. 14.
- 84) Bradford Pioneer, 23rd April 1926, p. 8.
- 85) New Leader, 4th Nov 1927, p. 18.
- 86) Ibid.
- 87) Following the first school held at Golders Green on 22-23 October 1927, the Guild organised six others:
- a) February 1928: Poland Street Rehearsal Theatre
  - b) May 1928: Gate Theatre
  - c) 10-11 November 1928: King Alfred School in north west London
  - d) April 1929: Working Women's College, Surbiton
  - e) Jan 1930: Working Women's College, Surbiton
  - f) Sept 1930: Hillcroft College, Surbiton
- See New Leader, 17th Feb 1928, p. 15; 2nd March 1928, p. 15; 27th April 1928, p. 23; 4th May 1928, p. 15; 11th May 1928, p. 15; 9th Nov 1928, p. 15; 16th Nov 1928, p. 15; 29th March 1929, p. 14; 12th April 1929, p. 15; 10th Jan 1930, p. 15; 5th Sept 1930, p. 15. It is worth noting that the personnel lecturing at the schools further reinforces the Arts Guild's links with the Little Theatre Movement.

- 88) Tom Thomas in an interview with Clive Barker, quoted in Ian Saville, Ideas, Forms and Developments, p. 69; New Leader, 13th Nov 1925, p. 14.
- 89) New Leader, 24th Dec 1926, p. 11.
- 90) Labour's Northern Voice, 14th Oct 1927, p. 5; 21st Oct 1927, p. 8; 11th Nov 1927, p. 4; 18th Nov 1927, p. 8; 25th Nov 1927, p. 8; 2nd Dec 1927, p. 5 & 30th Dec 1927, p. 8; New Leader, 29th Jan 1926, p. 15; 19th Feb 1926, p. 15; 16th Dec 1927, p. 15; 20th Dec 1929, p. 10.
- 91) New Leader, 23rd July 1926, p. 14; 23rd March 1928, p. 14, 8th Feb 1929, p. 18.
- 92) New Leader, 15th Jan 1926, p. 15; 5th March 1926, p. 15; 12th Nov 1929, p. 7.
- 93) New Leader, 22nd Jan 1926, p. 15; 26th March 1926, p. 15; 16th March 1928, p. 14; 26th April 1929, p. 10; 11th July 1930, p. 15; 5th Sept 1930, p. 15; Forward, 17th Oct 1925, p. 14; 18th Dec 1926, p. 13; Gateshead Labour Herald, Jan 1928; Feb 1930; N.A.C. Annual Report, 1929, p. 23 & N.A.C. Annual Report, 1931, p. 25; Daily Herald, 2nd March 1927, p. 4.
- 94) New Leader, 31st Dec 1926, p. 14.
- 95) Head Office Letter to Branches, May 1926 (Monthly Circular No. 2).
- 96) New Leader, 21st May 1926, pp. 10-11; 9th July 1926, p. 15; 3rd Dec 1926, p. 23; Gateshead Labour Herald, July 1926. For examples of general social activity organised in connection with the strike see for example New Leader, 18th June 1926, p. 15; 9th July 1926, p. 5 & p. 15; 6th Aug 1926, p. 15.
- 97) N.A.C. Annual Report, 1929, p. 23; New Leader, 18th May 1928, p. 14; Leeds Weekly Citizen, 5th Nov 1926, p. 8; 16th Sept 1927, p. 5.
- 98) Ronald Gore Graham, "Socialism and the Theatre", Socialist Review, April 1925, p. 176; Malleson, The ILP Arts Guild pp. 10-12; New Leader, 24th Dec 1926, p. 12; Bradford Pioneer, 20th May 1927, p. 6.
- 99) Malleson, The ILP Arts Guild, p. 13.
- 100) New Leader, 19th Nov 1926, p. 18.
- 101) Alma Brosnan was the producer of the Green Park Players in Bath and contributed two other pieces to the ILP repertoire: At Number 15 and The Street (which was published as part of the Plays for the People series - both plays are discussed in detail below).
- 102) New Leader, 24th Dec 1926, p. 12.
- 103) Alma Brosnan, Scrapped (1928), p. 14.



- 104) Ibid, p. 66.
- 105) New Leader, 24th Dec 1926, p. 11.
- 106) Brosnan, Scrapped, p. 31.
- 107) Ibid, p. 56.
- 108) Ibid.
- 109) Ibid, p. 79.
- 110) Ibid p. 80. The playing of the song is also a link back to the "unworldly" Jack of the First Act.
- 111) New Leader, 25th Feb 1927, p. 15.
- 112) New Leader, 7th Jan 1927, p. 15.
- 113) Ibid, 4th Feb 1927, p. 15. For the Grand Guignol season at the Little Theatre see Elizabeth Sprigge, Sybil Thorndyke Casson (1971), pp. 134-43.
- 114) Both these plays are reviewed in Era, 1st Feb 1922, p. 10.
- 115) St John Ervine, Progress (1938), p. 168.
- 116) New Leader, 25th Feb 1927, p. 15; 18th March 1927, p. 18.
- 117) New Leader, 9th March 1928, p. 15. N.B.: Cast included W.L. Gibson-Cowan as Nameless, and Olive Charles as the Woman.
- 118) Ibid. Masses and Man was also performed at the 1928 ILP Conference in Norwich on the Monday evening, with the same cast, at the Maddermarket Theatre. (New Leader, 23rd March 1928, p. 14 and 6th April 1928, p. 14)
- 119) Ibid, 28th June 1929, p. 7; Bradford Pioneer, 19th July 1929, p. 6. Other members of the cast included Cecily Cook (on the National Committee of the Arts Guild), Leslie Simpson (as the Nobleman), James Cooper, Francis McAlister and Cicely Lovelace. For the performance, all members of the cast were anonymous, programmes being dispensed with.
- 120) Ashley Dukes, The Man With a Load of Mischief (1925), p. 28; Sunday Worker, 5th June 1925, p. 9; Dukes, The Man, p. 86 ff.
- 121) New Leader, 21st June 1929, p. 11. See also 8th Feb 1929, p. 19 & 7th June 1929, p. 15. There is a photograph of the production in the New Leader, 21st June 1929, p. 11.
- 122) Bradford Pioneer, 19th July 1929, p. 16.
- 123)
- 124) Bradford Pioneer, 23rd October 1925, p. 4.

- 125) Arthur Bouchier, Art and Culture in Relation to Socialism (1926), p. 12.
- 126) Bradford Pioneer, 23rd Oct 1925, p. 4; Arthur Ponsonby, "Socialism and the Arts", Socialist Review, Sept 1922, pp. 108-109; Labour's Northern Voice, 21st Jan 1927.
- 127) Ethel Snowden is quoted in Samuel, Theatres, p. 6; New Leader, 12th June 1925, p. 8.
- 128) Northern Democrat, Jan 1928, p. 7.
- 129) Labour's Northern Voice, 15th March 1929, p. 7.
- 130) "Socialism and Song", New Leader, 28th Sept 1923, p. 12.
- 131) Rutland Boughton, "The Arts as Part of Worker's Lives", Labour Magazine, Nov 1923, p. 302.
- 132) New Leader, 8th October 1926, p. 14.
- 133) Labour's Northern Voice, 4th Feb 1927, p. 7.
- 134) Programme for Enfield Branch Concert, ILP Archives 1924/47; Bouchier, Art and Culture, p. 12; Labour's Northern Voice, 4th Feb 1927, p. 7.
- 135) Bouchier, Art and Culture, p. 7.
- 136) Labour's Northern Voice, 15th March 1929, p. 7; Bouchier, Art and Culture, p. 11.
- 137) Forward, 27th June 1925.
- 138) Ibid, 27th June 1925 & 4th July 1925.
- 139) Sunday Worker, 10th Oct 1926, p. 6.
- 140) Samuel, Theatres, p. 29; Saville, Idea, Forms and Developments, p. 25; Dawson, "Unity Comes of Age", p. 5; Bradford Pioneer, 23rd April 1926, p. 8.
- 141) N.A.C Report, 1928, p. 25; New Leader, 4th Feb 1927, p. 18; 29th March 1929, p. 5; Socialist Review, Oct-Dec 1918, p. 325; Bradford Pioneer, 27th Nov 1926, p. 5.
- 142) Malleson, The ILP Arts Guild, pp. 4-5.
- 143) Socialist Review, Jan 1930, pp. 163-4.
- 144) Bradford Pioneer, 20th May 1927, p. 6.
- 145) Ibid.
- 146) "Socialist Plays", New Leader, 1st June 1922, p. 7.
- 147) Forward, 5th November 1921, p. 8.
- 148) New Leader, 23rd Feb 1922, p. 8; 6th April 1922, p. 8.

149) Forward, 11th Feb 1922, p. 4. The entire script was published in the paper starting on the 11th Feb and concluding on 18th Feb 1922, p. 3. The script is included in the appendix.

150) Ibid, 11th Feb 1922, p. 7.

151) Ibid, 18th Feb 1922, p. 3.

152) New Leader, 1st June 1922, p. 7.

153) Ibid, 14th March 1929, p. 14.

154) Bradford Pioneer, 21st March 1930, p. 5.

155) Ibid, 28th March 1930, p. 5.

156) Ibid.

157) Saville, Ideas, Forms and Development, p. 44.

158) Malleon, The ILP Arts Guild p. 4 & p. 7.

159) New Leader, 28th Nov 1928, p. 15.

160) The Shaw plays produced by the Guild were Annaganska, the Bolshevik Empress, Arms and the Man, Augustus Does his Bit, Back to Methuselah, Candida, Captain Brassbound's Conversion, The Dark Lady of the Sonnets, The Doctor's Dilemma, Fanny's First Play, Getting Married, Great Catherine, How She Lied To Her Husband, Heartbreak House, Jitta's Atonement, Major Barbara, Man and Superman, The Man of Destiny, O'Flaherty V.C., The Philanderer, Press Cuttings, Pygmalion, Saint Joan, The Showing Up of Blanco Posnet, Widowers' Houses, You Never Can Tell.

The fourteen Glasworthy plays included: The Defeat, A Family Man, The First and the Last, The Foundations, Hall-Marked, Joy, Loyalties, The Pigeon, The Roof, The Silver Box, The Skin Game, Strife, The Sun, Windows.

161) Malleon's plays performed by the Guild included The Artist, Black 'Ell, 'D' Company, Conflict, The Fanatics, Man of Ideas, Maurice's Own Idea, Merrileon Wise, Paddy Pools, Young Heaven, Youth. Malleon's own life reflected both of his dramatic concerns. Having been in the army in Malta, he was invalided out and became a convinced pacifist after reading Carpenter's Towards Democracy. When he married his first wife, Constance (with Harold Scott as the witness), both were opposed to a conventional marriage and only succumbed to a legal wedding because Constance was under age. In her own words: "We wanted to put our multitudinous theories to the test, to make our contribution to the fight for personal freedom which was still in its infancy...Malleon and I disbelieved in the whole marriage idea; the promising which cannot be promised and above all the implied denial of the most vital principle of life, the principle of growth". They were divorced seven years later and Malleon later married Dr Joanna Borrell. See Lady Constance Malleon, After Ten Years (1931), p. 82.

162) For Richard Dove see "The Place of Ernst Toller in English Socialist Literature 1924-1929", German Life and Letters, vol. 38, no. 2, Jan 1985, pp. 125-137, and for Wellock see New Leader, 15th June 1922, p. 2. For one example of an ILP production of Toller see Green Park players performance of The Machine Wreckers which is reviewed in detail by Malleson in New Leader, 1st October 1926, p. 14. Huntly Carter, Sunday Worker, 10th Jan 1926, p. 8. The other writers included in this group were O'Casey, Kaiser, Malleson, Sinclair and Gregson.

163) New Leader, 9th April 1926, Conference Supplement, p. iv. Monica Ewer's suggestions appeared in the New Leader, 20th March 1925, p. 8 and the anti-war plays she listed included Monkhouse's The Conquering Hero, Hubert Griffith's Tunnel Trench, C.K.Munro's The Rumour and Margaret Macnamara's In Safety. For more on the plays by Sexton and Pointing see the chapter on the Labour Party. The list from the ILP publications department appeared in the New Leader, 31st Oct 1930, p. 12. Although The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist appears at the top of the list, apart from the Hackney Players (later to become the founder group of the Workers Theatre Movement) only West Salford appears to have performed it. See Labour's Northern Voice, 23rd Nov 1928, p. 6.

164) New Leader, 23rd July 1926, p. 14; 23rd Oct 1926, p. 15; 19th Nov 1926, p. 18; 29th April 1927, p. 19; 13th May 1927, p. 15; 9th Dec 1927, p. 18.

165) Ibid, 19th Feb 1926, p. 15; 14th Jan 1927, p. 14; 5th Sept 1930, p. 15. A fuller list of plays produced by the ILP Arts Guild can be found in the Appendix.

166) N.A.C. Report, 1931, p. 25; New Leader, 19th Nov 1926, p. 18; Northern Democrat, Dec 1927; Clarion, 19th June 1925, p. 7.

167) Bradford Pioneer, 20th May 1927, p. 6.

168) From the prospectus of the Labour Publishing Company issued in February 1921, quoted in Pat Francis, "The Labour Publishing Company", History Workshop Journal, no. 18, Autumn 1984, p. 117, which also gives more details concerning the company.

169) Horace Shipp, Invasion (1926), p. v.

170) Stephen Schofield, The Judge of All Earth (1927), p. viii; Evelyn Sharp, The Loafer and the Loaf (1926), p. vi.

171) London News, Feb 1926, p. 4.

172) Lansbury's Labour Weekly, 25th December 1926, p. 10; Gateshead Labour Herald, August 1926.

173) Bradford Pioneer, 10th December 1926, p. 6. The four plays referred to in this review are The Street, Bringing it Home, The Forge, Invasion.

174) Ibid.

- 175) Ibid.
- 176) London News, Dec 1926, p. 3.
- 177) Town Crier, 31st Dec 1926, p. 3.
- 178) New Leader, 8th Jan 1926, p. 13.
- 179) H.E. Bates, The Last Bread (1928), introduction by Monica Ewer.
- 180) Town Crier, 31st Dec 1926, p. 3.
- 181) London News, Dec 1926, p. 4; Monica Ewer, Best of Both Worlds (1925), p. 66.
- 182) Huntley Carter, "Plays for Socialists", Sunday Worker, 15th Nov 1925, p. 8.
- 183) H. Cecil Fisher, The Great Day (1925), p. 28.
- 184) Edwin G. Lewis, The Founders (1926), p. 23 and title page.
- 185) Sharp, The Loafer and the Loaf, p. 23.
- 186) Amateur Stage, Sept 1926, p. 302.
- 187) Ian Rankine, A Place in the Shade (1925), p. vi.
- 188) Ibid, p. 104 & p. 109.
- 189) London News, Dec 1926, p. 4.
- 190) Welwyn Garden City and Hertfordshire Pilot, 11th March 1927, p. 4.
- 191) Yaffle, Foiling the Reds (1926), p. 26.
- 192) Ibid p. 29. See also p. 19, p. 22 & p. 31.
- 193) Ibid p. 12, p. 20 & p. 26.
- 194) Ibid p. 17 & pp. 45-6.
- 195) Ibid p. 15.
- 196) Ibid.
- 197) Bradford Pioneer, 10th Dec 1926, p. 6. Jix was Joynson-Hicks, Home Secretary in the Conservative government.
- 198) Lansbury's Labour Weekly, 25th Dec 1926, p. 10.
- 199) Ibid.
- 200) Bradford Pioneer, 2nd Jan 1931, p. 8. The two pantomimes produced at Bradford were The Babes of Heaton Wood or the Bad Baron of Bowling by the late Peter Eland (1930) and The One Eyed Wizard of Wibsey by Mr Vine (1931). The former portrayed

seven local scenes (including the Esholt Sewage Works and the Municipal Ballroom) and promised discussion of "serious topics" including infant welfare, food reform, prisons, police and punishment - "and, of course, love". See Bradford Pioneer, 8th Jan 1930, p. 8.

201) Labour's Northern Voice, 29th Oct 1926, p. 7.

202) Red Stage, No. 5, April-May 1932, p. 3. Quoted in Len Jones, The British Worker's Theatre (Halle, 1964), p. 118. One question is however hard to answer, for although Trotsky in Yaffle's piece is seen as a mouth piece not for Bolshevism, but for the New Leader, the ILP's attitude to this Bolshevik leader (and indeed to the Russian Revolution as a whole) was to say the least ambiguous, and they were quick to condemn his book Where is Britain Going on the pages of their papers. See for example the criticisms of Ramsay MacDonald, George Lansbury and Robert Williams (the latter from the Labour Magazine) in Leon Trotsky on Britain (New York, 1973) pp. 214-228). Given such an attitude, Trotsky is an unlikely "hero" for Yaffle to choose.

203) New Leader, 15th Jan 1926, p. 13.

204) Douglas Goldring: Odd Man Out (1940), p. 247ff.

205) John Francis Hope in The New Age, Jan 8th 1920, p. 157.

206) Huddersfield Worker, 3rd Jan 1920, p. 4.

207) Goldring, Odd Man Out, p. 207.

208) Douglas Goldring, The Fight for Freedom (1919), p. 89.

209) Ibid.

210) Ibid pp. 92-96. One other difference between this and many ILP plays can be noted in Goldring's dealings with anti-war sentiments, for here, he uses Oliver Beeching not simply to attack the inhumanity of the war, but also to attack the Labour Party's role in it.

211) Goldring, Odd Man Out, p. 257; Keith Sugar (ed.), A D.H. Lawrence Handbook (Manchester, 1973), p. 322. If Goldring had not had doubts about Lawrence's political differences from personal experience, a reading of his preface to Touch and Go would have convinced him. In it Lawrence argued for a People's theatre which produced "plays about people. Not mannequins. Not lords nor proletarians nor bishops nor husbands nor co-respondents nor virgins nor adulteresses nor uncles nor noses. Not even white rabbits nor presidents. People. Men who are somebody, not men who are something." See Keith Sugar, A D.H. Lawrence Handbook, p. 322.

212) Hamilton Fyfe, The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory (1925), p. 2.

213) For a complete list of plays published in the series see the appendix.

- 214) Zinaida Hippus, "Green White and Flame: A Sort of Afterword", The Green Ring (1920), pp. 103-4.
- 215) Ibid, p. 68. The play received its first performance in Russia in 1916, directed by Meyerhold.
- 216) See Huddersfield Worker, 3rd Jan 1920, p. 4; Keith Sugar, A D.H. Lawrence Handbook, p. 322. Lawrence's The Widowing of Mrs Holyroyd was performed by the Altrincham Garrick Society (which included several miners) in March 1920. See Keith Sugar, A D.H. Lawrence Handbook, pp. 284ff.
- 217) Malleson, The ILP Arts Guild, p. 5.
- 218) Ibid.
- 219) New Leader, 4th November 1927, p. 18; 16th March 1928, p. 15; Woodford Times, 9th March 1928, p. 3.
- 220) Leaflet in G.S. Ireland Collection, Dundee Public Library; New Leader, 12th March 1926, p. 19; 14th March 1927, p. 14; 27th April 1928, p. 23; Forward, 19th Dec 1925, p. 14; 6th Feb 1926, p. 14.
- 221) Labour's Northern Voice, 9th March 1928, p. 8; 23rd March 1928, p. 7; 30th March 1928, p. 7; Salford City Reporter, 24th March 1928, p. 3. Priestly also performed in the piece.
- 222) Labour's Northern Voice, 1st March 1929, p. 7.
- 223) Ibid.
- 224) Northern Democrat, January 1928. For a full list of the productions of the Progressive Players see Appendix; for a more detailed history of the group, which is still in existence (although it lost its political affiliations in the 1950s) see Maureen Callcott and Margaret 'Espinasse', "The Gateshead Progressive Players, 1920-1980" in Dictionary of Labour Biography, ed. J.M.Bellamy and John Saville, vol VII (1984), pp. 67-68.
- 225) Gateshead Labour Herald, Dec 1930; Progressive Players, Diamond Jubilee Booklet 1920-1980.
- 226) Callcott and 'Espinasse', "The Gateshead Progressive Players", p. 67; New Leader, 16th Jan 1925, p. 19. For details of Ruth Dodds life see Callcott and 'Espinasse', "The Gateshead Progressive Players", pp. 63-67; Gateshead Post, 18th April 1974, p. 14; 8th April 1976, p. 1 and an interview with Councillor Ruth Dodds (n.d.) in Gateshead Personalia (a collection of cuttings held at Gateshead Public Library: CRW2.GCL). For Sylvia Dodds, see Gateshead Post, 2nd May 1969, p. 3.
- 227) Ruth Dodds, The Pitman's Pay (1923), p. 33; M.H. Dodds, "Socialists and the Drama", Labour Magazine, July 1923, pp. 109-110.
- 228) M.H. Dodds, "Socialists and the Drama", p. 110.

229) Ibid; New Leader, 9th July 1926, p. 15; Gateshead Labour Herald, July 1926; March 1937.

230) Northern Democrat, Jan 1928; Amateur Stage, Dec 1928, p. 343.

231) Ruth Dodds, The Hilltop, author's note, p. 4. A typescript of the play is deposited at Gateshead Central Library.

232) Ibid, pp. 70-1.

233) Ibid, p. 14.

234) Ibid, pp. 78-79.

235) Ibid, p. 78.

236) Ibid, p. 80.

237) Ibid, p. 80.

238) Gateshead Labour Herald, Jan 1938; March 1935; Dec 1935. Madeline Hope Doods was educated at Newnham College, Cambridge (1904-1906), later becoming the librarian for the Newcastle Society of Antiquities and a well known local historian publishing numerous books on early local history. Like her sister Ruth, she was a Quaker, pacifist and socialist, and produced plays in the early days of the Progressive Players. See obituary in the Gateshead Post, 19th May 1972, p. 7 and Times, 28th June 1972. The Gateshead Public Library also holds a handwritten copy of A Book of Short Plays which contains numerous pieces written by both Ruth and Hope Dodds.

239) New Leader, 25th Feb 1927, p. 14; Gateshead Labour News, Dec 1930 & Feb 1935. Her Tyneside comedy, Mrs Clark's Tea Party, performed by the Players in 1924, won first prize for the best Northumbrian play in a competition organised by Armstrong College.

240) Gateshead Labour Herald, Feb 1930.

241) Ibid, Nov 1933; Feb 1935; Jan 1937.

242) A typescript of Stanley Norman's The Gifts of the Old Women is in Gateshead Central Library (87/2/5). See also Gateshead Labour Herald, Jan 1934; May 193; March 1936; Oct 1936; Nov 1937. Norman also wrote a piece entitled The Hunger March performed by the High Heaton Tennants Association in March 1935. See Gateshead Labour Herald, March 1935.

243) New Leader, 22nd Nov 1929, p. 10. For Plymouth see 20th April 1929, p. 10. For Hunter's play see 14th Dec 1928, p. 14.

244) Bradford Pioneer, 1st April 1927, p. 15. Brockway's play was performed in Portsmouth. See New Leader, 1st April 1927, p. 15.



Chapter 6: The Masses Stage and Film Guild.

- 1) Harold Scott, "The ILP and Play Production", Socialist Review, Nov 1929, p. 43.
- 2) New Leader, 15th Nov 1929, p. 3.
- 3) ILP Annual Conference Report, 1930, p. 33. The Sunday evenings were of course the Labour Sundays at the Strand Theatre.
- 4) Fenner Brockway, Inside the Left (1942), p. 148; Socialist Review, March 1930, p. 33.
- 5) Scott, "The ILP and Play Production", p. 44.
- 6) Ibid.
- 7) Ibid, p. 43.
- 8) Ibid, p. 44.
- 9) Ibid, p.43.
- 10) Ibid.
- 11) Harold Scott, "Propaganda in the Theatre", Socialist Review, Jan 1930, p. 164.
- 12) Quoted in Dowse, Left in the Centre, p. 141. See also McKinlay & Morris, The ILP, pp. 186 ff. The Cook-Maxton Manifesto is published as an appendix in Dowse.
- 13) New Leader, 14th Feb 1930, p. 13. The cast included:

Red Adams	Ben Welden
Jack Attorney	Brember Wills
Jake Apperson	George Merritt
Chinaman	Roy Emerton
Stenographer	Brian Tuke
	Peggy Robb Smith

Other parts were taken by George Skillan, Bruce Winston, and Elizabeth Arkell
- 14) Ibid, 11th April 1930, p. 14.
- 15) Socialist Review, March 1930, pp. 276-7.
- 16) Ibid, 2nd May 1930, p. 13. The cast was as follows:

Librarian	Richard Goolden
Professor	Alan Napier
Newsboy	Vincent Pearmain
An Old Gentleman	Norman Shelley
President	Wilfred Fletcher
Brookes	Alexander Sarner
A Member	Lilian Moubray
Another Member	Brember Wills
First Businessman	Alice O'Day

Second Businessman	Harold Young
Third Businessman	Henry Hallatt
Fourth Businessman	Russell Sedgwick
Fifth Businessman	John H Moore
Sixth Businessman	Sidney Bland
Home Secretary	Patric Curwen
War Minister	Osmund Willson
Prime Minister	J. Fisher White
First Minister	Godfrey Baxter
Secretary	Emlyn Williams
Voices	Muriel Dale & Jo Marvil
Youths of the	Robert Harris, Atholl Fleming, Clive
Future	Morton, Dorothy Black
A Girl	Madeleine Carroll
Youth	Emlyn Williams
A Woman Biologist	Veronica Turleigh
A Student	Donald Woolfit
History AN 074254	Wilfred Barbage
Physics EL 196382	Sybil Jane
Actor OM 375276	John Trevor
Myology ET 224424	Beatrix Lehmann
Wildeye	Harold Scott
Routine Centre	Godfrey Baxter
Voice in Earth Mind	J. Fisher White
Response in Earth	Henry Hallatt
Mind	
Brain	Henry Hallatt

The play was to have been produced by Theodore Komisarjevsky, but owing to illness W.L. Gibson-Cowan took over.

17) Ibid.

18) Ibid, 12th Dec 1930, p. 14.

19) Times, 28th April 1930, p. 12.

20) Lionel Britton, Brain (1930), p. 124.

21) Ibid, p. 126.

22) Ibid, p. 129.

23) New Leader, 12th December 1930, p. 3.

24) Ibid, 28th Feb 1930, p. 15.

The cast for the play included:

Puny Hunneycutt	Harry Crosman.
Bud Gaskins	J.W. Alexander.
Lik Avery	Jefferson Caldwell.
Abraham McCranie	John Payne.
Colonel McCranie	Arthur Brandip.
Lonnie McCranie.	Russell Sedgwick.
Goldie McAllister	Grace Walker.
Muh Mack	Selma Vaz Diaz.

According to New Leader, 28th Feb 1930, p. 15, the play was originally to be produced by Kyrle Bellew and performed at the Gaiety Theatre, and no reason was offered for the changes.

- 25) Ibid, 28th Feb 1930, p. 15.
- 26) The Times, 8th Dec 1930, p. 10.
- 27) New Leader, 17th Oct 1930, p. 14.
- 28) Kinematograph Weekly, 18th Sept 1930, p. 23, quoted in Bert Hogenkampf, Deadly Parrallels (1986), p. 51. The Guild's regional activities were not only confined to film showings; the MSFG in Birmingham organised a dance for Birmingham Labour followers who travelled to London to watch the 1931 FA Cup Final between West Bromwich Albion and Birmingham City (Birmingham Town Crier, 17th April 1931).
- 29) Quoted in Hogenkampf, Deadly Parrallels, p. 39; New Leader, 15th Nov 1929, p. 3.
- 30) New Leader, 25th April 1930, p. 7.
- 31) See Hogenkampf, Deadly Parrallels, pp. 45-58. Stephen G. Jones suggests that Benn was the left-wing intellectual Gary Allingham.
- 32) Benn, "How Labour Can Use Films", New Leader, 26th April 1929, p. 7
- 33) Daily Herald, 27th Dec 1928, p. 5. For Ellen Wilkinson see "Say It With Pictures", Daily Herald, 22nd Sept 1928, p. 9 and for Huntley Carter see Daily Herald, 10th Sept 1928 & 3rd Oct 1928.  
For more on Labour's attitude to films see Stephen G Jones, The British Labour Movement and Film (1987), especially Ch. 2.
- 34) Bouchier, Art and Culture, p. 10.
- 35) Hansard (Commons), 5th Series, vol. 328, cols. 1233-5, 4th Nov 1937; "The Talkies and the Socialists", Socialist Review, June 1930, p. 12.
- 36) Ibid. Benn's other articles in the New Leader on the Labour Movement and film included "A Worker's Film Society" (3rd May 1925) and "Why Not A Socialist Newsreel?" (31st May 1929).
- 37) New Leader, 3rd Jan 1930.
- 38) Hogenkampf, Deadly Parrallels, p. 58.
- 39) Jones, The British Labour Movement and Film, pp. 139-40. For more on the Labour Party and their attempts to use films see Ch. 6 of this book.
- 40) New Leader, 2nd Jan 1931, p. 13.
- 41) Davies, Other Theatres, p. 101.
- 42) Scott, "What Can We Do For the Theatre?", p. 28.
- 43) Annual Conference Report, 1931, p. 31.

44) Ibid.

45) Ibid.

46) New Leader, 28th Feb 1930, p. 1.

47) Times, 22nd Feb 1930, p. 7. The hastily rearranged programme included Ivor Montagu's Daydreams starring Elsa Lanchester.

48) Ralph Bond, "Acts Under the Acts" in Close Up, April 1930. Reprinted in Don MacPherson (ed.), Traditions of Independence (1980), p. 109.

49) The delegates comprised:

Lord Lymington (Conservative); Miss Megan Lloyd George and Geoffrey Mander (Liberal); Fenner Brockway and Frank Horrabin (Labour).

The deputation to the LCC in March 1930 presented three demands:

a) Private societies to be allowed to see censored films, so a review of censorship process could be held.

b) Permission be granted to show educational and instructional films to education bodies without interference by the censor.

c) LCC should support the Parliamentary Committee on Film Censorship in asking for a Government Inquiry.

50) See New Leader, 7th March 1930, p. 4.

51) Quoted in the Times, 10th March 1930, p. 11.

52) Ralph Bond in MacPherson, Traditions p. 109.

53) Harold Scott, "The Law's A Hass! - But - !", Socialist Review, April 1930, p. 326.

54) Ibid, p. 327.

55) James C. Robertson, The British Board of Film Censors (1985), p. 52.

56) Jones, The British Labour Movement and Film, p. 142.

57) Terence Greenidge, "Films of the Month", Socialist Review, Sept 1933. See also Jones, The British Labour Movement and Films pp. 42-3.

Chapter 7: The Labour Party Takes its Place at the Feast of Beauty.

1) Quoted in J.S. Harris, Government Patronage of the Arts in Great Britain (Chicago, 1970), p. 150.

2) Daily Herald, 19th Feb 1923, p. 5. For Crosland see Cliff, The Labour Party, p. 260. See also Jones, Workers at Play, p. 134 ff.

3) Cambridgeshire Trades Council and Divisional Labour Party Report of the Executive for the year ending March 1928, p. 5; Jones, Workers at Play, pp. 145-6 & p. 150; Daily Herald, 13th May 1929. For North Kensington see photograph in John Borman, To Build Jerusalem (London, 1980), p. 117.

4) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 22nd April 1932, p. 7.

5) Jones, Workers at Play, p. 146.

6) Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Colne Valley Divisional Labour Party, 16th Feb 1929; Head Office Report to Finance Committee, Jan 1925, p. 2.

7) Leeds Weekly Citizen, 22nd October 1926, p. 6; 19th February 1926, p. 6; Samuel, Theatres, p. 12.

8) London News, Jan 1926, p. 3; Sunday Worker, 31 May 1925, p. 10; 1st Nov 1925, p. 8; 6th Dec 1925, p. 8. For more on the London Labour Choral Union see below.

9) Minutes of the Organising Sub-Committee of the Labour Party, 20th Jan 1926. They reported choirs in the following areas and of the following political affiliation (which gives us an idea not only of the relative strength of the Labour Party choirs in relation to other groups, but also of the political make-up of the Labour Choral Union):

	Lab	ILP	Soc	Clar	Co-Op	Vars
N.E.Counties	9	1	3	2	1	
N.W.Counties	3		1		6	
Mid Counties	16	1			1	
London	10	2	1		2	1
Eastern Counties	2	2			2	
Home/South	13	1			1	1
S.W.Counties	3	1			1	
Wales	3	1				
Scotland	1	2				

10) London News, April 1931, p. 5; July 1931, p. 4; August 1931, p. 2.

11) Samuel, Theatres, p. 12.

12) Labour Woman, Sept 1925, p. 158; London News, April 1926, p. 2; March 1928, p. 4.

13) Ibid, 19th February 1926, p. 6. For details of the Armley ILP Players see Leeds Weekly Citizen, 7th Jan 1927, p. 5; 9th & 16th Sept 1927, p. 5; 21st Oct 1927, p. 5; 11th Nov 1927, p. 4; 20th Jan 1928, p. 5; 9th March 1928, p. 5 & 28th Sept 1928, pp. 4-5. The repertory of the Armley ILP Players included plays by Malleeson, Monica Ewer's The Best of Both Worlds and Alma Brosnan's At Number 15 as well as W.W.Jacob's thriller The Monkey's Paw and a french comedy (translated by Mrs Davies), The Common Failing. The group appears to have achieved some success, performing Scrapped in September 1927 to an audience of over 500, and repeating the play in East Leeds, Yardsley, Bradford and Yeadon, so that even greater numbers would witness "how workers can put into dramatic form their everyday problems under the present stupidly cruel economic system".

14) Labour's Northern Voice, 31st December 1926, p. 8; Lansbury's Labour Weekly, 27th March 1926, p. 15; 6th Nov 1926, p. 15; Daily Herald, 25th April 1925, p. 8; Sunday Worker, 18th April 1926, p. 8; The Watchman, April 1926, p. 7; Samuel, Theatres, pp. 22-23. The People's Players may have been connected with the Hackney People's Players who under Tom Thomas became the focus for the Worker's Theatre Movement in 1928; they were originally recruited within the local Labour Party with no more than the modest intention of livening up branch nights. The first meeting was held in the premises rented by the Central Hackney Labour Party in Dalston Lane and members included Kath and Sandy Duncan (both ILP members) and three prominent Labour Party members: Herbert Butler (later MP for Hackney), Albert Cullington (later a Labour mayor) and George Jeger (later MP for Goole). See Samuel p38.

15) Jones, Workers at Play, p. 147; Labour Yearbook (London, 1926). See also Mrs Sidney Webb, "The Parliamentary Labour Club: Its Origins and Uses", The Labour Magazine, May 1924, pp. 12-14.

16) London News, June 1925, p. 2; Woolwich Pioneer, May 1925, p. 5. There is some confusion over whether the Parliamentary Labour Players and the Half Circle Players were actually separate organisations; Labour Woman (August 1925, p. 139) states that the dramatic entertainment for Women's Week was provided by the Parliamentary Labour Club Half Circle Players.

17) Labour Woman, Feb 1926, p. 47; see also Jan 1926, p. 31; London News, Jan 1931, p. 2. The plays with a "serious purpose" suggested by the paper included:

Alan Monkhouse, The Conquering Hero

St John Ervine, Jane Clegg

Lennox Robinson, The Cross Roads

J.M. Synge, Deidre of the Sorrows

Susan Glaspell, Inheritors

Miles Malleeson, Youth

Granville Barker, Waste

and any play by Galsworthy. Comedies included Chekov's The Proposal and The Bear and any by Shaw, A.A.Milne and Lady Gregory and "children's plays" included Peter Pan and A Kiss for Cinderella (both by Barrie) and Miles Malleeson's Paddy Pools and Little White Thought.

18) Labour Woman, Nov 1927, p. 173.

19) North Tottenham Citizen, Jan 1927, p. 1; August 1927, p. 2; Nov 1928, p. 3; Jan 1929, p. 1; Feb 1929, p. 4; April 1929, p. 4; Dec 1929, p. 1 & p. 3; Jan 1930, p. 1; May 1930, p. 4; Nov 1930, p. 2. Two sample months of the performances at the theatre will give a flavour of the plays performed:

January 1929:

3rd: Mollie Denton's London Company: Babes in the Wood

10th: The Green Flag

17th: Maritana

24th: Betty Weldon & Co

October 1929:

7th: Shoreditch Dramatic Society: The Devil's Disciple

14th: Ronald Gunn's Company: Telling the Tale

21st: Caste

28th: Walthamstow Players: Tolpuddle

20) Ibid, Nov 1928, p. 3; Feb 1929, p. 4.

21) Sheffield Forward, April 1922, p. 1.

22) Ibid.

23) Ibid, Sept 1922, p. 1.

24) Woolwich Pioneer, Feb 1926, p. 3.

25) B. Donoghue and G.W. Jones, Herbert Morrison (1960), p. 71.

26) Ibid.

27) Ibid; London News, Feb 1926, p. 2. The Executive Committee of the London Labour Choir included J.Ramsay MacDonald as President, Margaret Bondfield, George Lansbury and H.J.May as Vice Presidents, Rutland Boughton as Musical Adviser and S.A.Court as Chairman of the Executive Committee.

28) Donoghue and Jones, Herbert Morrison, p. 72. Finance certainly seems to have been a constant problem; both the orchestra and the Choral Union also made appeals for donations or statements in the London News about financial worries.

29) Daily Herald, 9th April 1925, p. 6.

30) Ibid, 16th April 1925, p. 8.

31) Ibid, 4th June 1925, p. 6. The proposed constitution of the National League for the People's Theatre was also published in the same edition and included:

a) To multiply effort and produce fresh impetus by co-operation.

b) To stimulate the authorship and production of plays among the workers.

c) To arrange for exchange performances among affiliated groups and societies.

d) To arrange lectures, discussions and exhibitions of the

arts pertaining to the theatre.

e) To arrange for joint productions among affiliated groups and societies.

f) To form a library of suitable plays and books about the theatre.

g) To provide mutual aid and advice throughout the Labour Movement in matters pertaining to Dramatic Art including the provision of dramatic entertainments for non-affiliated but kindred organisations.

32) Ibid, 18th June 1925, p. 8.

33) Ibid, 12th June 1925, p. 7.

34) Ibid, 14th May 1925, p. 8. The constitution of the Federation also included a note of the affiliation fee, set at 6d a head per annum, with a minimum of 10s per group.

35) Ibid, 12th June 1925, p. 7.

36) Ibid. Whilst numerous professionals were present, amateurs were well represented on the committee, one member being chosen from each group present, as follows:

Dilkian Players	Miss Sadie Cheeseman.
Peckham Dramatic Class	Miss Barlin.
Head Office Group	Miss R. Gottsmann.
Half Circle Players	J.H. Clynes.
Socialist Round Table	C.B. Beardsworth.
West Lewisham Players	H. Weston Wells.
Balham & Tooting Dramatic Section	
New Malden Elocution Class	Mrs Davey.
Welwyn Labour Players	H.B. Pointing.
Bermondsey ILP Dramatic Section	C. Hexter.
Woolwich ILP	J. Cotter.
Marylebone	Miss N. Jacob.
Tooting Women's Co-Op Guild	Mrs Marshall.
Bermondsey Women's Co-Op Guild	Mrs Maskill.
Nth Woolwich Women's Co-Op Guild	Held Over.
Arts League of Service	Held Over.
Hampstead ILP Dramatic Group	President/Secretary.

Miss Rose Smith of the Half Circle Players, who proposed the motion to accept the Committee was for several years secretary of the Entertainment Sub Committee for the London Labour Fair as well as being one of the performers there in 1927. See London News, Sept and Dec 1927, p. 2. For H.B. Pointing see Welwyn Labour Players below.

37) Woolwich Pioneer, Feb 1926, p. 3.

38) London News, April 1926, p. 1; New Leader, March 1926, p. 5; Bradford Pioneer, 22nd Oct 1926, p. 3.

39) London News, April 1926, p. 1; Sept 1926, p. 4; Samuel, Theatres, p. 23. Monica Thorne's contribution to the drama of the Royal Arsenal Co-Op was certainly prolific. From the mid-twenties she was one of the most active tutors for the drama group, and taught, wrote and produced for the Society. According to John Attfield in With Light of Knowledge (1981), she left her mark on the careers of more than one professional



actor whose early training was received in her RACS class. In 1928 she co-wrote a co-operative play with Joseph Reeves called Achievement, which contrasted the ideals of co-operative principles with the practice of paying high dividends. Nor was her work confined to that of the RACS; she was also involved with the Plumstead Literary Institute Players, and the New Eltham Players. She moved to Derby shortly before her death at the age of 46 in 1938. See Woolwich Gazette, 11th Oct 1927, p. 3; Woolwich Pioneer, 27th April 1926, p. 2; Attfield, With Light, pp. 46-49.

40) London News, Oct 1926, p. 3.

41) Bradford Pioneer, 22nd Oct 1926, p. 3.

42) Ibid.

43) Labour Party NEC Minutes, 29th Jan 1925, p. 55.

44) Clarion, 15th Oct 1926, p. 6; 29th Oct 1926, p. 1.

45) London News, Jan 1927, p 4; Daily Herald, 6th April 1927, p. 6.

46) Donoghue & Jones, Herbert Morrison, p. 72. The amount of time that they suggest was being spent on organising events leads to the conclusion that local productions may also have been taking place.

47) London News, May 1931, p. 3.

48) W.Barefoot, Twenty-Five Years' History of the Woolwich Labour Party 1903-1928 (1928), p. 40.

49) Woolwich Pioneer, May 1925, p. 13; Feb 1926, p. 7.

50) Ibid, Feb 1926, p. 7; July 1926, p. 13; Woolwich Gazette, 20 March 1928, p. 3.

51) Woolwich Gazette, 25th Oct 1925; 12th Jan 1926, p. 3, 5th Aug 1926, p. 2.

52) Richard Dove, "The Place of Ernst Toller in English Socialist Theatre 1924-1939", German Life and Letters, vol. 38, no. 2, Jan 1985, p. 129; Woolwich Gazette, 23rd Nov 1926, p. 2; 1st March 1928, p. 3.

53) Deborah Thom, Woolwich: The General Strike (1976), quoted in Samuel, Theatres, p. 23.

54) Sunday Worker, 10th Jan 1926, p. 8; Samuel, Theatres, p. 36.

55) Ibid, 11th July 1926, p. 8.

56) Ibid.

57) Unattributed note in files of F.J.Osborn (FJO) which also includes a copy of the programme; for further details of the performance see Welwyn Times, 6th Dec 1934, p. 1; 13th Dec

1934, p. 4. The translation was by Edward Cruikshank, and the play was produced by Frank Herbert, a leading member of the Welwyn group who also played the part of the Warder, with the set designed by his brother, Stanley Herbert. The entire cast of over 32 characters was drawn from the group and included the local author W.Branch Johnson, as well as many, such as John Blencowe, E.Mason Jennings, and A.A.Drover who had been active since the inception of the Welwyn Labour Players.

58) Welwyn Times, 18th Oct 1934, p. 1; 25th Oct 1934, p. 4.

59) Leaflet (n.d.) in FJO K77.

60) Advertisement for Muckle Mercat, 16th Dec 1922 in FJO; Welwyn Garden City News, 3rd Nov 1922, p. 2; 4th May 1923, p. 3.

61) FJO; Welwyn Garden City News, 16th Feb 1923, p. 3; 27th April 1923, p. 6; 18th May 1923, p. 6.

62) Ibid, 7th April 1922, p. 2.

63) Welwyn Garden City Pilot, 27th June 1924 p. 2. This was not Osborn's first attempt at a parody of Shaw. In 1912 he had written All for the Cause (after Shaw's Press Cuttings) for a social at the Forest Gate branch of the Fabians, as he explained in his preliminary excuses to the typescript: "It was intended for performance at a social evening in April last, when Bernard Shaw, the social habits of Ilford and such places, the alleged weaknesses of the Womens Suffrage Movement and the quality of Shaw's Press Cuttings would have been matters of very present topical interest. Shaw had demanded a fee for the performance of his play, and our fraternal indignation was the feeling which first inspired this extravaganza". There is a copy of the script in FJO, although in the end it was never performed - the group deciding to pay Shaw his royalties and hence producing what Osborn claims was the first production of Press Cuttings. Osborn had also been assistant editor (alongside) St John Ervine of the Fabian Nursling, a manuscript magazine.

64) Ibid, 4th July 1924, p. 3.

65) See Welwyn Garden City News, 27th June 1923, p. 5.

66) Ibid.

67) Ibid, 29th June 1923; 13th July 1923.

68) Ibid, 4th April 1924, p. 4.

69) New Leader, 16th May 1924, p. 13.

70) Welwyn Garden City News, 4th April 1924, p. 4.

71) Welwyn Garden City Pilot, 4th April 1924, p. 2.

72) Welwyn Garden City News, 3rd April 1925, p. 8. The cast for The Unchanging Hills included W. Branch Johnson as Bill Higgins the soldier.

- 73) Welwyn Garden City Pilot, 3rd April 1925, p. 5.
- 74) Ibid, 2nd October 1925, p. 3.
- 75) H.B. Pointing, "Workers as Players", Labour Magazine, July 1925, p. 108.
- 76) Ibid, p. 108.
- 77) Ibid, p. 106.
- 78) Ibid, p. 106.
- 79) Ibid, p. 107.
- 80) FJO, The Welwyn Garden City Labour Party in 1924, notes by the Executive Committee, 31st Jan 1924.
- 81) Welwyn Garden City News, 6th Jan 1928, p. 8.
- 82) Ibid, Oct 1926, p. 2.
- 83) FJO, Welwyn Festival, 1934.
- 84) FJO, notes on the Performance of The Silver Box.
- 85) Welwyn Garden City Pilot, 21st Oct 1927, p. 5.
- 86) Welwyn Times, 23rd March 1927, p. 5.
- 87) Welwyn Garden City News, 10th Feb 1928 p. 5; 24th Feb 1928, p. 5; Welwyn Times, 18th May 1933, p. 1.
- 88) Welwyn Times, 23rd Jan 1930, p. 5; 6th Feb 1930, p. 5; 13th Feb 1930, p. 1; New Leader, 14th Feb 1930, p. 13. The programme is in FJO.
- 89) Welwyn Times, 7th Jan 1932, p. 4. The script for The Leading Lady is in FJO.
- 90) Welwyn News, 28th May 1931, p. 1; 18th June 1931, p. 5. The Welwyn Festival was founded in 1929, the year after the completion of the Welwyn Theatre and has run annually (with the exception of the Second World War and 1963 due to a fire) since. Osborn was the chairman and Flora Robson the Stage Director, and the Festival gained something of a national reputation. See notes in FJO and for Unity Theatre's involvement see Colin Chambers The Story of Unity Theatre (1989) p. 157, p. 179, p. 208 & p. 249.
- 91) Welwyn Times, 30th March 1933, p. 4.
- 92) Welwyn News, 2nd June 1932, p. 2.
- 93) Ibid, 16th June 1932, p. 1.
- 94) Kath Wallhead Steele, R.C.Wallhead: A Memoir (m/s), p. 30.
- 95) C.B.Purdom, Life Over Again (1951), p. 48.

- 96) F.J. Osborn, Green Belt Cities (1946), p. 116.
- 97) New Leader, 4th July 1930, p. 13; Steele, R.C. Wallhead: A Memoir, p. 21.
- 98) Osborn, Green Belt Cities, p. 116; Purdom, Life Over Again, p. 50. For more on the Letchworth Dramatic Society see C.B.Purdom, The Garden City (Letchworth, 1913) and Purdom, Life Over Again pp. 170-173.
- 99) I am indebted for much of this information to Harry Stull of the Barn Theatre Club in Welwyn Garden City.
- 100) Basil Dean, Seven Ages: An Autobiography (London, 1970), p. 234. This was Hastings second attempt at writing a play; the first, The River, was performed at St James' Theatre in June 1925.
- 101) James Sexton, The Riot Act (London, 1914), p. 13; Liverpool Daily Post, 16th Feb 1914, p. 5. For more on The Riot Act see also Sexton pp. 215-6, Samuel, Theatres, pp. 65-6 (note 34) & Davis, Other Theatres, p. 77.
- 102) The Riot Act, pp. 29-31 & p. 51.
- 103) Ibid, p. 73.
- 104) Liverpool Daily Post, 21 March 1916, p. 8; Clarion, 24th March 1916, p. 3.
- 105) Liverpool Daily Post, 21 May 1918, p. 2.
- 106) Sexton, p. 221.
- 107) Rex Pogson, Miss Horniman and the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester (1952), pp. 140-1.
- 108) Clarion, 6th Feb 1911, p. 3.
- 109) Goldie, Miss Horniman, pp. 87-8. These were not the only plays written by Rose to be performed. Others included The Hanging of Hey-go Mad Jack (Gaiety 13th April 1914), The Young Guv'nor (Liverpool Playhouse 30th April 1914), Trouble in the House (His Majesty's, Carlisle 19th May 1922), Just a Darling (Steiner Hall, 19th May 1927) and Madame Kurenda (Opera House, Leicester 29th August 1927).

## Conclusion

- 1) Sunday Worker, 27th Sept 1925, p. 8.
- 2) Samuel, Theatres, pp. 37-8.
- 3) See Ian Saville, Ideas, Forms and Developments, p. 51, p. 53, p. 71.
- 4) Chambers, The Story of Unity, p. 33, p. 137, p. 320.
- 5) Some of these groups have been covered in some detail. See for example Ian Britain on the Fabians and Bernadette Kirwan's thesis on the Co-Operative Movement.
- 6) Samuel, Theatres, p. 8.

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