

## THE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF A TRADE UNION, 1906-1914

The British Labour Party was not explicitly socialist until 1918. In February of that year a Special Conference adopted a new constitution which stated that the ultimate aim of the party was:-

“To secure for the producers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of common ownership of the means of production and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.”

Before this change, Ramsay MacDonald, writing in 1911, had said: “The Labour Party is not Socialist. It is a union of Socialist and trade-union bodies for immediate political work...”<sup>1</sup> The new party, founded in 1900 as the Labour Representation Committee, was in many ways *un mariage de convenance* of militant Socialists and Gladstonian Liberal trade-union leaders. The “immediate political work” for which these groups came together was the representation of the working class in parliament. Of the need for such representation both sides were firmly convinced: the Socialists because they hoped to convert the trade unions to their own way of thinking; the trade-union leaders because they were disappointed by the failure of the official Liberal party constituency caucuses to adopt more working-class candidates.<sup>2</sup>

The organized Socialist groups, in the early days of the L.R.C., were a small but vocal minority. The members of the Independent Labour Party and the Social Democratic Federation took the lead in demanding an examination of the principles on which the party was based. If it was Liberal, there was no need for it, they argued. Its very existence implied that its principles were in some way different from those of Liberalism. If this was so, how did they differ? Eighteen years passed by before the Socialists were able to achieve what they

<sup>1</sup> J. R. MacDonald, *The Socialist Movement*, London 1911, p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> H. Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900*, London 1954, pp. 236-7.

had set out to do but meanwhile it was necessary for the party to have some *raison d'être*. It was argued that if the party was to succeed in sending working-class members to parliament it must at all costs maintain its independence of the other political parties.<sup>1</sup>

These discussions culminated in a revision of the constitution in 1903 which embodied the so-called "pledge" of the Labour members of parliament to abide by the decisions of the party:—

"All such candidates shall pledge themselves to accept this constitution, to abide by the decisions of the group in carrying out the aims of this constitution or resign, and to appear before their constituencies under the title of Labour candidates only."

The aims of the party were to secure the election to parliament of candidates "who undertake to form or join a distinct group in Parliament, with its own Whips and its own policy on Labour questions, to abstain strictly from identifying themselves with or promoting the interests of any section of the Liberal or Conservative parties, and not to oppose any other candidate recognised by the Committee." Nevertheless, it proved difficult for the L.R.C. to ensure that its members maintained an independent political line. Richard Bell, one of the two members representing Labour in the 1900 parliament, refused to sign the revised constitution in 1904-5 and was expelled from the party. Shackleton and Arthur Henderson were reprimanded in 1904 for appearing in support of a Liberal candidate at a by-election.<sup>2</sup>

On the whole the revised constitution worked fairly well up to the end of 1908 because it was not too strictly applied. Labour members were left free to vote, in matters of conscience, as they thought right. In the following year the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, numbering over half a million, joined the ranks of the Labour party and brought with them fourteen Liberal-Labour members of parliament. The problems which this situation raised in the constituencies have not, as yet, been fully investigated. Although the M.F.G.B. was founded in 1889 its organization in the early stages was fairly loose and in the matter of political activities the district associations enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy until the Federation became affiliated with the Labour party. The official history of the Miners' Federation<sup>3</sup> is largely concerned with the collective decisions which led to this affiliation and the national events resulting from it. What was happening in the mining constituencies immediately before and after affiliation

<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. Beer, *History of British Socialism*, London, edn. of 1940, II, pp. 335-6.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes, L.R.C. Executive, 30 June, 1904. Cited in Pelling, *op. cit.* p. 239.

<sup>3</sup> R. P. Arnot, *The Miners*, London 1949.

is by no means clear. An examination of the political activities of one of the district associations during this period is therefore relevant to the problem of the Labour party's attempts to maintain political independence.

## I

For many years, long before the foundation of the Federation, the miners' unions had been firmly wedded to Liberal-Labour politics. The story of the Barnsley by-election of 1897 is well known.<sup>1</sup> Ben Pickard, the general secretary of the South Yorkshire Miners' Association and president of the M.F.G.B. from 1889 to 1904, had pledged his union's support to the Liberal candidate who was a mine-owner prepared to favour an eight-hours bill. In opposition the I.L.P. decided to run Pete Curran, an organizer of the Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union, but Pickard did his work so well that Curran was stoned by the miners and mobbed by their women and children. Yet in 1910 when Curran died, leaving four children under ten years of age almost totally unprovided for, the Council of the Derbyshire Miners' Association granted five pounds to his family.<sup>2</sup> This was symptomatic of the changes which had been taking place within the M.F.G.B. between 1897 and 1910. The discussions about Labour affiliation invariably revolved around methods of organization<sup>3</sup> but in the background were the theoretical issues between Socialism and Liberalism. Thus, for example, when the Scottish Federation sent in a resolution to the M.F.G.B. Annual Conference (held at Leicester, January 5-8, 1897):

"That to secure the best conditions of industrial and social life it is absolutely necessary that the land, minerals, railways and instruments of wealth production should be owned and controlled by the State for the people."

Yorkshire countered it with an amendment:—

"That representatives to the Federation Conference, and all Congresses, act on trade union lines as in the past, and not on socialistic lines."<sup>4</sup>

The Derbyshire Miners' Association played a prominent part in opposing affiliation with the Labour party. As early as 1899, W. E. Harvey, assistant secretary of the Derbyshire miners, had argued at

<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. Beer, *op. cit.*, II, p. 306; Arnot, *op. cit.*, pp. 300-2; Pelling, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> Derbyshire Miners' Association, *Minutes*, April 9, 1910.

<sup>3</sup> Vide Arnot, *op. cit.* pp. 352-7.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Arnot, *op. cit.* pp. 352-7.

the Trades Union Congress for individual self-help by the unions instead of collective action.<sup>1</sup> In the ballot on the affiliation of the M.F.G.B. with the Labour Representation Committee in 1906 Derbyshire rejected affiliation by 11,257 votes to 1,798. (At this time the Association had about 37,000 members.) In a card vote taken at the 1907 (Southport) Annual Conference Derbyshire again voted against affiliation. In May, 1908, the M.F.G.B. took another ballot which showed a majority in favour of affiliation. The Derbyshire Association made a gallant bid at the eleventh hour to save the day for Liberalism. It was resolved at a Council meeting in August, 1908, that the following resolution should be sent to the Federation:

“That seeing only half the members of the Federation have voted re joining the L.R.C., we therefore consider the question should again be relegated to the Districts for a fuller vote on such a vital question and the men again be balloted.”<sup>2</sup>

The voting was 61 for the resolution and 19 against. This resolution appeared in a more carefully worded form on the agenda for the Annual Conference. It was moved by James Haslam, the general secretary of the Derbyshire Miners' Association and seconded by Fred Hall. The voting was 97,000 for the resolution and 391,000 against.<sup>3</sup>

## II

The Derbyshire miners were interested in three constituencies; Chesterfield, North-East Derbyshire and Mid-Derbyshire. As early as 1885, within five years of the formation of their union, they began to seek parliamentary representation. It was resolved in Council “that strenuous efforts should be made to send a Working Man Member from one of the Divisions of Derbyshire to the next Parliament, and that the Liberals of the Division agreed upon should make way for such an one, seeing that the labouring classes of the Country are greatly in a majority and have a right to expect this much of direct representation.”<sup>4</sup> This was considered to be necessary in order to make possible a number of radical reforms including “a thorough change in the Land Laws”, the amendment of the Miners' and Employers' Liability Acts, support for Broadhurst's Leasehold Bill, the amendment of the Allotments Act, free education, payment of members of parliament, removal of property qualifications to seats

<sup>1</sup> Pelling, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> D.M.A., Minutes, 1 August, 1908.

<sup>3</sup> Arnot, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

<sup>4</sup> D.M.A., Minutes, 17 March, 1885.

on boards of guardians, the introduction of stipendiary magistrates (“or open the way to the Bench to all classes”) and “a thousand-and-one things that need attention”. The Pension List was “an abomination” and “the swarms of useless sinecure offices” to which “large salaries” were attached were “a disgrace to a civilized nation”.<sup>1</sup> This burst of political activity was linked with the general agitation for the extension of the franchise. The members of the union were informed by their leaders: “We are in hopes that the Government will introduce a short Bill to give us the Vote earlier than next January should an Election take place before then. It is highly necessary that all new electors see their Overseers in their respective District, and ascertain that their names are on the Register. Don’t wait for Agents of any Party to do it for you, do it yourselves. ... Attend to it men, Register! Register!!! Register!!!”<sup>2</sup>

The extension of the franchise and the election both came before the end of 1885 but the Liberals did not make way for “a Working Man Member” in any of the Derbyshire constituencies. James Haslam, the general secretary of the Derbyshire Miners’ Association, stood for the Chesterfield division without the support of the Liberals. Both the miners and the Liberals were conscious of the danger of splitting the Liberal vote. The committee which had been formed for promoting Haslam’s candidature discussed the possibility of arriving at an arrangement with the leaders of the Liberal party in the division and came to the conclusion that “the time for any amicable settlement had now gone by.”<sup>3</sup> J. Stores Smith, one of the Liberal leaders, expressed at a public meeting the hope that “some arrangement would be come to so that the Liberal party in the division might present a united front to the enemy. He had nothing to say against the principle of labour representation but considered that Mr. Barnes had prior claims on the constituency”.<sup>4</sup> The Liberals proposed that the claims of the two candidates should be submitted to an arbitration committee consisting of Sir Charles Dilke, Joseph Chamberlain and others.<sup>5</sup> Haslam’s committee rejected this proposal but expressed a willingness “to consider any reasonable suggestion by which the voice of the people can be taken upon the matter.”<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Haslam’s campaign was unsuccessful. He obtained only 1,907 votes compared with the Liberal’s 3,408 and the Conservative’s 2,136.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 22 October, 1885.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 4 November, 1885.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 14 November, 1885.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 12 November, 1885.

The demand for parliamentary representation continued. In 1891 it was suggested that the Liberals should be prepared to allot the Chesterfield division to the miners at the next general election.<sup>1</sup> The union became affiliated with the Labour Electoral Association and was represented by Haslam at the Association's annual conferences. There were discussions as to whether Haslam's salary should be paid from the funds of the union if at any time he were returned to parliament. The officials were of the opinion that "the phrase (sic) that has been put in letters in the press that it is contrary to the Rules, and would be taking the Funds for an improper purpose is all nonsense."<sup>2</sup> Eventually a ballot was taken but the results were inconclusive. Twelve of the 72 lodges failed to send in returns and others reported that they were unanimously in favour without returning the numbers of ballot papers given out. Only 8,789 of the union's 17,711 members registered votes. Of these, 5,343 were in favour of paying parliamentary expenses from union funds and 3,446 were against. By this time the question of labour representation had appeared on the agenda for the M.F.G.B. conference which was to be held in January 1892 and it was decided to postpone any further consideration of this question until after the conference.<sup>3</sup>

The Miners' Federation had for many years paid the returning officers' fees for candidates selected by the mining constituencies but it was not until the annual conference of 1901 that Ben Pickard, the president of the Federation, succeeded in pushing through his scheme for the payment of members.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, the Derbyshire Miners' Association, like the other county associations, became more concerned with industrial action than with political action. Before the industrial strife of 1892-3 the union had funds amounting to £ 32,000. This was soon distributed in strike pay, and the Association actually mortgaged its offices in addition to borrowing money from sympathetic members of parliament and other sources.<sup>5</sup> Before the Rosebery Conference, from which the Coal Conciliation Board arose, a debt of £ 6,000 had been piled up. Although the debt was paid off and the deeds of the miners' offices were redeemed within six months the union had suffered a serious financial blow and was unable to contemplate any further attempt at sending Haslam to parliament until the general election of 1906.

By this time the Liberals could no longer afford to be unco-operative.

<sup>1</sup> D.M.A. Minutes, 10 March, 1891.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 July, 1891.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 November, 1891.

<sup>4</sup> Arnot, *op. cit.*, pp. 358-361.

<sup>5</sup> D.M.A. Minutes, 17 October, 1893.

Since the 1885 election their majority in the Chesterfield division had dwindled from 1,272 to 689 in the 1901 election. In 1892 and 1893 the figures had been even lower, 180 and 247 respectively. A split vote would almost certainly have ensured the return of a Conservative candidate. The time had obviously arrived when the Liberals would have to make way for a "Working Man Member". This process was facilitated by the resignation of Thomas Bayley who, a fortnight before the opening of the election campaigns, announced that on the advice of his doctor he was reluctantly "bringing his association with the division to a close".<sup>1</sup> There were hurried negotiations between the Liberals and the Derbyshire Miners' Association which led to Haslam's adoption as a Liberal-Labour candidate. Haslam contested this election under the "Pickard scheme" whereby all the county associations contributed a *per capita* levy of one shilling a year to a central fund from which miners' representatives in parliament received £ 350 a year and a first-class railway pass. Haslam obtained 7,254 votes giving him a majority of 1,664 over his Conservative opponent G. T. Locker Lampson.

In December, 1906, the death of Thomas Bolton caused a by-election in North-East Derbyshire. Under the Pickard scheme the county associations were allowed one candidate for each 10,000 members and Derbyshire at this time had about 26,000. Here was a chance to send another member to parliament and W. E. Harvey was an obvious choice. Harvey had helped Haslam in the work of building up the union from its earliest days and had succeeded Haslam as secretary after the 1906 election. Like many trade union leaders of this period he had a long record of public service. He had been a member of the old School Board and of the Chesterfield Town Council. He was an ardent nonconformist – a Primitive Methodist lay preacher – and the powers of oratory which he had developed in the chapel were in great demand on the political platform.<sup>2</sup> Harvey was vice-president of the Labour Electoral Association and had been asked to contest the Handsworth division of Birmingham. The miners of Cannock Chase had also asked him to stand for South Staffordshire but Harvey is reported to have replied: "No; unless I can go to Parliament to represent the men whose servant I am, I will never go to Parliament at all".<sup>3</sup> Some of the Liberals of North-East Derbyshire urged the adoption of Harvey, others favoured the adoption of J. P. Houfton who was the general manager of extensive collieries at Bolsover and Cresswell, whilst a third group demanded the adoption

<sup>1</sup> Sheffield Telegraph, 23 December, 1905.

<sup>2</sup> W. Hallam, *Miners' Leaders*, London n.d., p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Sheffield Independent, 26 January, 1907.



of an outsider to obviate the risk of differences between Liberals and Labour.<sup>1</sup>

At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the North-East Derbyshire Central Liberal Council the names of Sir John Bamford Slack and the Hon. Neil Primrose (the second son of Rosebery) were put forward for consideration but Harvey carried the day.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile the Council of the Derbyshire Miners' Association had adopted Harvey as their candidate subject to a ballot vote of all members.<sup>3</sup> Whilst the ballot was being taken the Conservatives raised the cry "Your association will cost you more"<sup>4</sup> but when the votes were counted 9,788 members had voted for Harvey and 4,506 against.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless the suggestion that Harvey would become a financial burden upon the union was not without its influence. Eventually Enoch Edwards and Thomas Ashton, the president and secretary of the M.F.G.B., sent copies of a letter to various lodges in Derbyshire pointing out that "Mr. Harvey's election will not cost you one penny more than the subscriptions which you now pay under the Parliamentary scheme of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain". This was later distributed as a leaflet throughout the division together with an addendum signed by representatives of practically every lodge in the county which endorsed the contents of the letter from the M.F.G.B. and stated: "If elected to Parliament Mr. Harvey will continue to live in Chesterfield, and will still work for the Derbyshire Miners' Association."<sup>6</sup> These statements had the effect of clearing up a misunderstanding which had existed amongst members of the Glapwell lodge. This was particularly important because two-thirds of the members of this large lodge resided in the North-East division.

This by-election was the first since the mutilation by the house of lords of the progressive legislation concerning education and plural voting which the Liberals had succeeded in piloting through the commons. Harvey made the misdoings of the lords one of the major issues of the election.<sup>7</sup> Eight days before polling day he retired to his bed with bronchitis and the rest of his campaign was conducted by his supporters.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless he obtained 6,644 votes which gave him a majority of 729 over his Conservative opponent.

In July, 1909, the death of Sir Alfred Jacoby caused a by-election in

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 December, 1906.

<sup>2</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 24 December, 1906.

<sup>3</sup> *D.M.A. Minutes*, 22 December, 1906.

<sup>4</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 3 January, 1907.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 January, 1907.

<sup>6</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 18 January, 1907.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 January, 1907.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 January, 1907.



Mid-Derbyshire. Jacoby had supported the campaign of the M.F.G.B. for an eight-hour day and was very popular amongst the miners.<sup>1</sup> After Haslam's success in 1906, Mid-Derbyshire had been unofficially regarded as the next miners' seat<sup>2</sup> but Harvey had now been elected for North-East Derbyshire and the Derbyshire Miners' Association was not entitled to any further financial support from the M.F.G.B. Accordingly, J. G. Hancock, the secretary of the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association,<sup>3</sup> was selected to contest Mid-Derbyshire with the support of the Derbyshire miners. Hancock was a typical Liberal-Nonconformist trade union leader of the period. He was a magistrate, a member of the Nottingham City Council and a local preacher in connection with the United Methodist Free Church. He had served on a board of guardians and various educational bodies.<sup>4</sup>

This was the first by-election to be fought by a miner since the M.F.G.B. had become affiliated with the Labour party and there was some confusion about Hancock's party allegiance. "Is he a Liberal, is he a Socialist, or is he a mixture of Liberalism and Labour, of the pattern of Mr. Harvey, who has done so little since the North-East miners sent him to Parliament?" asked the *Sheffield Telegraph*.<sup>5</sup> Eventually it became known that Hancock had been officially adopted by the Liberal Association of the division on the recommendation of the Derbyshire Miners' Association and the Socialists in the constituency grew restless. At a meeting at Belper, Hancock was asked which side of the house of commons he would sit on if elected. He replied "that there were only two sides, and that he should be with the Labour men on the Liberal side".<sup>6</sup> At Alfreton, where there was a strong I.L.P. organization, about a hundred delegates assembled to hear Hancock's views on labour questions before agreeing unanimously to support his candidature.<sup>7</sup> At another meeting at Crich, Hancock stated that "He had always been actively, not passively associated with the Liberal Party... But circumstances over which he had no control, and for which he was not at all responsible, had compelled him, if he stood at all, to stand as a Labour candidate, and under the constitution of the Labour Representation Committee. He would like to say, however, that the Committee... had thoroughly considered the whole of the circumstances under which he and his supporters were placed,

<sup>1</sup> D.M.A. Minutes, 3 July, 1909.

<sup>2</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 18 December, 1906.

<sup>3</sup> Not "of the Derbyshire Miners" as stated in G.D.H. Cole, *British Working Class Politics, 1832-1914*, London 1941, p. 287.

<sup>4</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 17 July, 1909.

<sup>5</sup> *Sheffield Telegraph*, 2 July, 1909.

<sup>6</sup> *Sheffield Telegraph*, 5 July, 1909.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 July, 1909.

and there had been a consideration shown by the L.R.C. so far as that candidature was concerned, that had never been shown in any other case"<sup>1</sup> In his election manifesto Hancock described himself as "having been recommended by the Miners' Association to come forward as a candidate under the constitution of the L.R.C. and unanimously adopted as such by the Council of the Mid-Derbyshire Liberal Association"<sup>2</sup>

Hancock had signed the Labour party constitution and had expressed his intention of acting with the party in the house of commons<sup>3</sup> but at the same time he was working very closely with the Liberals. A. B. Markham, the Liberal member for Mansfield and a local coal owner, took a great interest in Hancock's campaign. On one occasion he chartered a special train from Manchester to the Duffield district in order to speak for Hancock at three meetings.<sup>4</sup> Both Markham and Hancock attempted to obscure any distinction between Socialism and Liberalism which might have existed in the minds of the electors. At one meeting Markham argued that the L.R.C. was not a socialist body and urged his hearers to vote for Hancock who was a straightforward "simple-minded" Liberal.<sup>5</sup> At another meeting he said that he did not attach much importance to the term Liberal or Labour. "Whatever Mr. Hancock's name, he would, if elected, go to Parliament to serve the interests of the constituency, and to carry out the wishes of the electors".<sup>6</sup> Hancock, in reply to a question at Alfreton, said 'he was a 'Socialist according to the Bible'. He accepted the principles of Socialism as defined in the Bible but he was not a Socialist. He was a Labour man associated with the L.R.C."<sup>7</sup> Amidst such confusion no one was surprised to see Keir Hardie addressing a meeting in support of Hancock and wearing a yellow rosette.<sup>8</sup> The election was important to Hardie because Hancock was the first candidate run by the Miners' Federation under Labour party auspices. He stated quite bluntly that "the Liberals by an act of grace on their part had stood aside, and were lending their support to Mr. Hancock because they preferred a Labour Member in Parliament to a Conservative 'Tariff Reform member'".<sup>9</sup> As this was one of the first elections since the introduction of Lloyd George's famous budget the Liberals

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 8 July, 1909.

<sup>3</sup> *Sheffield Telegraph*, 8 July, 1909.

<sup>4</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 9 July, 1909.

<sup>5</sup> *Sheffield Telegraph*, 6 July, 1909.

<sup>6</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 7 July, 1909.

<sup>7</sup> *Sheffield Telegraph*, 8 July, 1909.

<sup>8</sup> *Sheffield Telegraph*, 13 July, 1909.

<sup>9</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 13 July, 1909.

were anxious to see whether the electors approved these proposals. Hancock received invaluable assistance from the newly formed Budget League.<sup>1</sup>

Hancock was elected by 6,735 votes to the Conservative's 4,392. Arthur Peters, the national election agent of the Labour party commented: "Of course it must be freely admitted that the machinery of the Liberal party was being used, but as the Liberals readily admit, they recognise that the seat has been handed over to Labour. It is but fair to add that the Liberals have worked hard to win the seat for Labour, and many of their M.P.'s have taken an unusually active part in the campaign".<sup>2</sup>

### III

The two general elections of 1910 were conducted under the shadow of the Osborne Judgment.<sup>3</sup> After Mr. (afterwards Lord) Justice Farwell's decision in the Chancery division had been upheld by all three judges in the court of appeal (28 November, 1908) the Executive of the Derbyshire Miners' Association resolved "that no money should be paid over from the Miners' Federation, until the decision of the House of Lords is known, or at least until the position has been placed before the whole membership of the Federation."<sup>4</sup> This decision did not prevent the Association from paying the expenses of Haslam and Harvey when they took their places as county magistrates<sup>5</sup> nor did it have the support of the M.F.G.B. The mid-Derbyshire by-election had been fought with money from the parliamentary fund and Haslam and Harvey continued to receive their salaries from the same source.

Towards the end of 1909 the Association appeared to move into line with national policy and on 20 November Council recommended, rather belatedly, that Haslam and Harvey should sign the constitution of the Labour party "in accordance with the ballot of the Federation."<sup>6</sup> On the following day (21 November, 1909) the house of lords delivered its judgment in the Osborne case but this had no marked effect upon the conduct of the Derbyshire elections of January, 1910. Haslam, Harvey and Hancock contested their seats as Labour candidates and, with the support of the Liberals, were all returned. Guy Radford, the Conservative candidate for Chesterfield complained: "The astuteness of the Socialists in using the Liberals

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 July, 1909.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 July, 1909.

<sup>3</sup> *Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants v. Osborne*, (1910), A.C. 87.

<sup>4</sup> D.M.A. Minutes, 9 January, 1909.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 Feb., 1909.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 November, 1909.

as their tools is nowhere more apparent than in this division, where the former Liberal agent is now agent for Mr. Haslam, and the whole machinery of the so-called 'Liberal' party has been captured, lock, stock, and barrel, by the Socialist wirepullers".<sup>1</sup> Haslam, on the other hand, admitted openly that he had signed the Labour party constitution and had received £ 100 towards his election addresses from J. Ramsay Macdonald.<sup>2</sup>

Before the December elections of 1910 the Association had to face the consequences of the Osborne judgment. On 15 July, 1910 Mr. Justice Joyce, in the Chancery Division, granted to Joseph Fisher, a miner of Huthwaite, an interim injunction restraining the Derbyshire Miners' Association from administering its funds for parliamentary purposes. Counsel for the Association secured a proviso enabling them to raise voluntary subscriptions from their members but no member was to lose the benefit of the union if he refused to join in any voluntary fund.<sup>3</sup> A similar action had been brought against the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association in respect of Hancock on 10 June, 1910.<sup>4</sup> Harvey was outraged: "The only thing that troubles me is that they (the Capitalists) should find curs amongst us to do their dirty work. I am so sorry that Judas Iscariot has left so many relations behind him. But they are not as honest as Judas was because he did go out and hang himself".<sup>5</sup> Frank Hall, the treasurer of the Association stated that the injunction was due to ignorance. He had talked to Fisher and had discovered that he was 64 years of age, had belonged to the union for twelve years, and yet he had never been to a lodge meeting, and had never before made any complaints. "He was totally ignorant of the benefits to be derived from the Union, and he had stated that had he known what he did now, he would never have taken the action he had".<sup>6</sup>

The Association immediately set to work to raise money by voluntary subscriptions. A circular was sent out to all lodges asking for a contribution of threepence from each member.<sup>7</sup> Haslam and Barnet Kenyon were appointed secretary and treasurer of the fund so that it could be kept separate from the general funds of the union.<sup>8</sup> The officials addressed a number of mass meetings in an attempt to raise sufficient money to meet their obligations to the M.F.G.B. parlia-

<sup>1</sup> Derbyshire Times, 8 January, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Sheffield Independent, 18 January, 1910.

<sup>3</sup> Derbyshire Times, 16 July, 1910.

<sup>4</sup> Derbyshire Times, 11 June, 1910.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 July, 1910.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 November, 1910.

<sup>7</sup> D.M.A. Minutes, 27 August, 1910.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 October, 1910.

mentary fund. At a meeting at Brampton, Frank Hall warned his audience: "Unless you men subscribe that money which is asked, we shall be unable to further contest the Chesterfield and North-East Derbyshire Division for Parliamentary representation".<sup>1</sup>

In the December elections of 1910 the Osborne judgment was almost as great an issue as the powers of the house of lords. The Sheffield Telegraph commented: "It is not liberty of political action for the Trade Unions that the Labour Party wants, but liberty to dip its hands into the Trades Union cash-boxes for the exploitation of its own political designs. Mr. Asquith knows this full well. He probably detests the idea quite as much as we do. But he may have to buy Labour votes, and thus he dare not speak his mind or trust to the guidance of his own judgment. Surely no British Prime Minister in history has cut such a sorry figure as that which Mr. Asquith presents today".<sup>2</sup> A writer in the Labour Leader, on the other hand, was extremely worried about party organization in Derbyshire and some of the other mining constituencies.<sup>3</sup> He argued that the sitting members were mostly opposed to a strengthening of the party organization because they had been returned in the past by Liberal organizations and they preferred to go on relying upon these rather than to create electoral machinery of their own on Labour lines. If there were a vacancy in any of these constituencies the Liberals would attempt to recapture the seat and there would be no Labour organization to oppose them. "That is a state of affairs which cannot be tolerated, and if these men are to remain in the Labour party they must conform to the spirit as well as the letter of the constitution.... If Messrs. Hall, Wadsworth, Harvey, Haslam, Johnson and Hancock, M.P.'s, prefer the Liberals to the I.L.P. well and good, but it must be made quite clear that they cannot have both."<sup>4</sup>

There was a rumour that Harvey intended to stand as a Liberal-Labour candidate until the Bolsover branch of the I.L.P. was active in securing a denial from him before a joint meeting of the branches of the North-East Derbyshire Federation.<sup>5</sup> Eventually Haslam, Harvey and Hancock all appeared as Labour candidates with the support of the Liberals although, in the case of Hancock, there was some dissatisfaction amongst the local Liberals at having to accept a Labour candidate.<sup>6</sup> Haslam even went so far as to advocate a modified form

<sup>1</sup> Derbyshire Times, 18 November, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Sheffield Telegraph, 23 November, 1910.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Sheffield Independent, 18 November, 1910.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Sheffield Independent, 18 November, 1910.

<sup>5</sup> Derbyshire Times, 26 November, 1910.

<sup>6</sup> Sheffield Telegraph, 25 November, 1910.

of Socialism: "Who is afraid of Socialism? I am not. I believe the good commonsense of this country would regulate Socialism".<sup>1</sup> Harvey, on the other hand, felt it necessary to instruct his solicitors to take up the matter of his opponent's description of him as "Socialist Labour candidate for North-East Derbyshire" because "it was misleading and could only have been used to try to injure him in his candidature."<sup>2</sup>

All three of the miners' representatives were re-elected in December, 1910 but after the election the Association began to feel the effects of the Fisher injunction in a number of ways. Money for Harvey's legal defence in a slander action arising out of the January elections could only be raised by voluntary contribution.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the union was no longer able to make contributions towards the expenses of those members who became mayors or magistrates.<sup>4</sup> In 1911 it was decided to discontinue the annual demonstration because the union could not consent to "any payment being made for Railway Fares to a Demonstration, or any other expenses connected with a Demonstration."<sup>5</sup> Various suggestions were made to overcome the disabilities imposed upon the union by the injunction. A resolution that a member should be paid for his magisterial duties "when the political fund is recouped" was ruled out of order by the chairman and deleted from the minutes of a Council meeting. Another proposal to raise the salaries of officials who were engaged in political work was not acted upon.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, in parliament, Harvey was joining in the campaign for the reversal of the Osborne judgment. He argued in favour of rule by the majority and defended the use of the ballot. "Suggestions have been made that it can be interfered with and manipulated so as to induce the men to do exactly what their leaders desire. Now, in an organization with which I am acquainted we have 40,000 men and to them we send 40,000 ballot papers. The papers are put into their hands and they record their vote. If that is not a true expression of opinion I do not know what is."<sup>7</sup>

#### IV

By the beginning of 1913 it was becoming obvious to the trade unions that they would not get a complete reversal of the Osborne judgment and they therefore decided to accept the Government's

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 December, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 10 December, 1910.

<sup>3</sup> D.M.A. Minutes, 8 April, 1911.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 September, 1911; 10 February, 1913.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 June, 1911.

<sup>6</sup> D.M.A. Minutes, 12 November, 1910.

<sup>7</sup> 41 H.C. Deb. 5 s., 3047.

proposals for some regulation of political activity which, within a few months, were embodied in the Trade Union Act, 1913.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile the Labour party was working hard to ensure that the ballots which each union would have to take would go in its favour. There was some anxiety about the position in Mid-Derbyshire in view of Hancock's failure to assist in the organization of a Labour party in the division. On 12 April, 1913 there was a meeting at Alfreton to investigate complaints by the local Labour party regarding the conduct of Hancock. It was attended by Robert Smillie and W. Straker of the M.F.G.B., and Arthur Henderson and Arthur Peters represented the Labour party.<sup>2</sup> Lee, the local secretary, argued that it was Hancock's first duty to build up a Labour party, but instead he had subscribed £ 50 to the Liberal agent, attended Liberal party meetings and voted in parliament with the Liberal party. In this he had the support of the Derbyshire miners in the division "who seemed to regard themselves as the Labour party".<sup>3</sup> Hancock denied the charges which were made against him and stated that the Council of the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association had decided against the formation of a Labour party by forty-eight lodges to two.

Smillie and Straker presented a report of the meeting to the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. They expressed surprise at finding that the Derbyshire miners' lodges in the division had held a preliminary meeting, "and practically made up their minds before hearing the case from the other parties in the meeting".

"Speaking generally, we can only add that it is quite evident, pleasant or otherwise as it may be, that the only political organization in the division behind Mr. Hancock is the Liberal Association, and that the Derbyshire Miners' lodges in the division have definitely made up their minds not to support a Labour Party organization but on the other hand to support the Liberal Association".<sup>4</sup>

This was described as being "contrary to all Trade Union principles of loyalty." The Derbyshire Miners' Association protested against this report on the grounds that "only six or seven Lodges in the District had credentials sent to attend the meeting while we have 84 lodges with over 9,000 members in the constituency". When the ballot was taken in July, 1913 in accordance with the provisions of the Trade Union Act,<sup>5</sup> there were 539 votes (representing 26,950

<sup>1</sup> 2 & 3 Geo. V, ch. 30.

<sup>2</sup> M.F.G.B., Minutes, 23, 24, & 25 April, 1913, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> 2 & 3 Geo. V, ch. 30.



members) for the Federation being the unit for the political fund and 314 votes (representing 157,000 members) against.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the death of Haslam had resulted in the adoption of Barnet Kenyon, the Derbyshire miners' agent, as candidate for the Chesterfield division.<sup>2</sup> Kenyon's candidature aroused a storm of controversy. He had been anxious to avoid what he described as "a wicked three-cornered struggle"<sup>3</sup> and appeared before the electorate as the candidate who had "received the assent of the two great national executives which stood for Labour and Progress".<sup>4</sup> In reply to a question at Shirebrook as to whether he could reasonably expect the support of the Labour members who were endeavouring to build up an independent Labour party Kenyon replied that he was nominated by his own union, consisting of 39,000 financial members, "and that nomination had received the approval of Fabians, social democrats, members of the I.L.P., the British Socialists and Syndicalists, and the Executive of the Labour Party".<sup>5</sup> Harvey, speaking in support of Kenyon, announced that "the Labour party were putting all the speakers at their command in order to secure the triumphant return of Mr. Barnet Kenyon".<sup>6</sup> The Socialists in the constituency, however, were opposed to Kenyon's candidature when they discovered that he was working closely with the Liberals.<sup>7</sup> Objections to the candidature were lodged with the national executive of the Labour party and a member of the Chesterfield Trades and Labour Council was reported to have said: "We are prepared to give Ramsay Macdonald a warm time if he comes down".<sup>8</sup> The national executive was eventually obliged to withdraw its endorsement of Kenyon's candidature and this decision was accepted by the National Executive of the M.F.G.B. Shortly afterwards, John Scurr of the Dockers' Union appeared as a British Socialist candidate. Despite his intervention the result of the election was very much as had been expected. Scurr received only 583 votes and Kenyon was elected by 7,725 votes to the Conservative's 5,539.

The Chesterfield by-election of 1913 produced a crisis in the affairs of the M.F.G.B. and of the Labour party. At the first Council meeting of the Derbyshire Miners' Association after the election the affair was discussed at length and a resolution was carried calling for a full

<sup>1</sup> D.M.A. Minutes, 2 August, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 May, 1913; 1 August, 1913.

<sup>3</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 6 August, 1913.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 7 August, 1913.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 August, 1913.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

investigation into the reasons for the refusal of the executive of the Labour party to endorse Kenyon's candidature.<sup>1</sup> A further resolution instructed Harvey and Hall to "consult any legal authority they may consider necessary as to our position with the Miners' Federation, in the event of our disagreeing on Political lines under the Trades Union No. 2 Bill, and that they also consult the Registrar with respect to our becoming a unit under the Bill should it become necessary".<sup>2</sup> The executives of both the M.F.G.B. and the Labour party condemned the actions of Kenyon and there were many discussions and much correspondence between these bodies and representatives of the Derbyshire Miners' Association.

At the annual conference of the M.F.G.B. at Scarborough in October, 1913, practically a whole day was taken up by a discussion of the Chesterfield election.<sup>3</sup> The principal charges against Kenyon were that he had violated the letter of the Labour party constitution by describing himself as a "Labour and Progressive candidate" and its spirit by employing Samuel Short, the former Liberal agent, who was "in a colliery company, secretary for a colliery company, and... on the directorate".<sup>4</sup> A Yorkshire delegate commented:

"Some very peculiar things happened in this election. Mr. House fought a bye-election in Houghton-le-Springs not very long ago, and his opponent was Tom Wing, who went to help Barnet Kenyon at Chesterfield, that in itself no party could have endorsed that stood for Labour, if they had, then Labour wanted purifying. Then we find the Lord Advocate there, another man who was always prepared to oust Labour on every possible occasion. Ure was sent down to Chesterfield to help this gentleman. Then we find another gentleman, a mine owner, Sir Arthur Markham, helping to get Barnet Kenyon in, a supporter of Mining Legislation, and some of us will be able to say something with regard to this policy of getting Mining Legislation from men of this character".<sup>5</sup>

The conference approved the findings of the executive committee<sup>6</sup> and instructed it to request a meeting with the Labour party executive "with a view to trying to do something to put matters right in connection with the Chesterfield Election and to ensure Chesterfield

<sup>1</sup> D.M.A. Minutes, 23 August, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> M.F.G.B. Minutes, 8 October, 1913, pp. 62-103.

<sup>4</sup> M.F.G.B. Minutes, 8 October, 1913, p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

in the future being a Labour seat.”<sup>1</sup> This meeting failed to produce a satisfactory settlement with the Derbyshire miners whose Council resolved: “We are desirous of keeping our connection with the Miners’ Federation and Labour party but unless Mr. Kenyon be adopted and the expenses of the last election be paid, we shall be compelled to Ballot our members as to whether we shall sever our connection politically with the Federation”.<sup>2</sup>

The Chesterfield election was discussed at the annual conference of the Labour party at Glasgow in January, 1914 and the actions of the Derbyshire Miners’ Association were again condemned. Meanwhile Kenyon made the matter a major issue at meetings in his constituency. “I will not” he declared, “have my directions given to me from extraneous organizations unless I should get my instructions to obey from this division and this organization”.<sup>3</sup> In February, 1914 the union faced a difficult situation. There had been further correspondence with the executives of the M.F.G.B. and the Labour party and Kenyon persisted in his refusal to abide by the constitution “except as understood and practised by the late Mr. Haslam”.<sup>4</sup> The executive of the union therefore decided to recommend to the Council that “we cannot see our way clear to advise our members to seek exemption from payment to the Miners’ Federation Political Fund, but we do recommend that this Association still continue to pay its levies to the Fund with with a view to providing Labour candidates at the forthcoming General Election”.<sup>5</sup> This decision was endorsed by the Council and the Association had at last, after six years, moved into line with the national policy of the M.F.G.B.

This change is largely explained by the death of Haslam. His influence in the union, as its founder and faithful servant over many years, was immense. He had been elected to parliament in 1906 before the M.F.G.B. was affiliated with the Labour party and he had been allowed a considerable amount of latitude. The secretary of the M.F.G.B. had written to Haslam on many occasions telling him that he was not conforming to the constitution. The matter had been discussed by the executive committee and it was only Haslam’s age and final illness which had prevented them from reaching a decision.<sup>6</sup> The death of Haslam had not only removed a powerful influence

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> D.M.A. Minutes, 29 December, 1913.

<sup>3</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 21 January, 1914.

<sup>4</sup> D.M.A. Minutes, 21 January, 1914; 23 February, 1914.

<sup>5</sup> D.M.A. Minutes, 23 February, 1914.

<sup>6</sup> M.F.G.B. Minutes, 8 October, 1913, p. 81.

from the Derbyshire Miners' Association but it had also facilitated the enforcement of the constitution by the M.F.G.B.

When, in April 1914, Harvey also died, the break with the past was almost complete. James Martin, the president of the Association, was nominated as a Labour candidate for North-East Derbyshire and a deputation was sent to meet the Liberal executive of the division to inform them of this decision.<sup>1</sup> There had been previous discussions between the Liberals and leaders of the union and, on the authority of the Chief Whip, Sir Arthur Markham had stated that if the Derbyshire Miners' Association decided to run a candidate in alliance with the Liberal party, the Liberals would give the candidate full support and would pay his expenses.<sup>2</sup> The Council had rejected this proposal and the members of the deputation, John Sewell and Frank Lee, were obviously uneasy about their task. They made it clear to the Liberals that Martin would not speak on any Liberal platforms and argued that they were bound by the decisions of their Council. Lee stated: "My sympathies are very largely Liberal, and I am belonging to a Trade Union organization, wise or unwisely, I am one of its permanent Officials, and one can naturally see that if there is to be a National Labour Party, it must be that one of its Trade Union organizations in the County should aspire to belong to that National Party".<sup>3</sup> He went on to criticise the Labour party constitution: "Our hope is, that getting inside the movement we shall be able to so broaden that movement, that the Progressive Forces, instead of being divided, shall come together, as one huge phalanx and fight against our common enemy".<sup>4</sup> Sewell added that Martin would only be a Labour candidate in name. "In action he will be a good Liberal".<sup>5</sup>

Despite these assurances the Liberals nominated J. P. Houfton as their candidate and "freedom of conscience" became one of the issues of the election. Later, Martin described himself as being committed to the policy of the M.F.G.B. but added: "There is no more ardent Liberal in the country than I have been, and there is no more ardent Liberal now".<sup>6</sup> Sir Arthur Markham stated that the Liberal Association "was informed in effect that so far as the Labour Party was concerned Liberalism was extinct and the secretary, Mr. Hall had written to him 'That the consideration of freedom and liberty extended to both their late colleagues, Messrs. Haslam and Harvey, could not, and would not,

<sup>1</sup> D.M.A. Minutes, 6 May, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> D.M.A., Report of a Deputation to the Executive Committee of the North-East Derbyshire Liberal Association, 6 May, 1914, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 8 May, 1914.

be extended to others' ".<sup>1</sup> Martin obtained only 3,669 votes in this election as against the Conservative's 6,469 and the Liberal's 6,155. The prophecy of the writer in the *Labour Leader* had come true.<sup>2</sup> By relying on the dominant personality of Harvey instead of building up their own electoral machinery the Derbyshire miners had lost a seat. In the following August, their Council resolved to set up a Labour party in the North-East division.

## V

It is evident from this examination of the three Derbyshire mining constituencies that the influx of the M.F.G.B. into the ranks of the Labour party served to increase the difficulties of maintaining an independent political line. Although the Labour party was normally opposed to any form of collaboration with other parties it was of necessity obliged to modify its attitude in the face of a large accession of Liberal Labour M.P.'s and their supporters. In the period immediately following the affiliation of the M.F.G.B. Liberal-Labour politics appears to have been a device which commended itself to the Labour party, to trade-union members of parliament and to the Liberals alike; to the Labour party because it was able to use the machinery of the Liberal party for its own purposes, to the trade-union members of parliament because it represented the easiest way of being re-elected and to the Liberals because they were struggling to retain the support of the radical element in the electorate. But the kind of situation which arose in connection with the Mid-Derbyshire by-election of 1909 was not accepted for very long. By 1910 the Derbyshire miners' candidates were standing as Labour candidates but still collaborating with the Liberals and by 1913 both the Labour party and the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. were taking a much firmer line.

This change, in Derbyshire, is largely explained by the disappearance of the old trade-union leaders from the political scene. At the same time, the Labour party was becoming stronger, its organization was becoming much tighter and it was striving increasingly to establish its separate identity even at the risk of losing doubtful seats. The intransigent attitude of those members of parliament and candidates who eventually agreed, under pressure, to accept the "pledge" illustrates the extent to which Liberalism hoped to influence the Labour party from within. As late as February, 1914, Barnet Kenyon wrote: "The majority of the Labour Party itself have assured me that they are going to claim their individual freedom to accept and give

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 May, 1914.

<sup>2</sup> See above p. 13.

help to anybody they think well to do so”.<sup>1</sup> He had discussed with Wilson, Fenwick, Ward, Stanley, Johnson, Thomas, Smith and many other Labour members, as well as with Sir Arthur Markham “and several Heads of Departments”, the possibility of forming a “third Party”. But the Labour party was by this time well on the road to political independence and by 1918 its theoretical position was constitutionally defined.

<sup>1</sup> D.M.A. Letter from Barnet Kenyon to Frank Hall, 25 February, 1914.