THE BRISTOL TRADES COUNCIL

1873-1973

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Bristol Trades Council 1873-1973 is the thirty-second pamphlet published by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association. In a year in which the City of Bristol is celebrating the six hundredth anniversary of its famous charter of 1373, it is desirable that the people of Bristol should also remember that 1973 marks the first centenary of the Bristol Trades Council, the history of which is here examined by Mr. David Large, Senior Lecturer in History in the University of Bristol, and Mr. Robert Whitfield, a postgraduate student who is at present engaged in studying the history of the labour movement in Bristol in the twentieth century.

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The next pamphlet in the series will be by Miss Kathleen Barker, historian of the Theatre Royal, Bristol, and will deal with entertainment in the city in the eighteen-nineties.

Eight of the pamphlets in this series have now appeared in book form under the title of *Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Patrick McGrath, and published by David and Charles at £3.75.

A full list of publications is given on the inside back cover. The pamphlets can be obtained from most Bristol booksellers, from the Porters' Lodge in the Wills Memorial Building and in the Senate House, or direct from Mr. Peter Harris, 74 Bell Barn Road, Stoke Bishop, Bristol, 9. The Branch hopes that readers will help the work by placing standing orders for future productions.

The Bristol Trades Council

1873-1973

by DAVID LARGE and ROBERT WHITFIELD

Far too little is known about the history of Bristol's working people. In particular the history of their trade unions has been much neglected although their existence can be traced back to the eighteenth century. By the time the first Annual Trades' Union Directory was published in 1861 there were at least twenty eight trade societies in the city.[1] The Nazis must bear some responsibility for this since many invaluable records perished during the fire raids in 1940-41, including much pertaining to the history of the Trades Council whose centenary year this essay is designed to celebrate. Ironically its first minute book carried the inscription 'this book must never be destroyed'.[2] Fortunately, Sidney Webb, researching for the famous partnership's *History of Trade Unionism*, made detailed notes in 1901 on the contents of this minute book of the Trades Council from its origin in 1873 until the year of the great London Dock strike of 1889 and also preserved at least some of its annual reports, financial statements and rule books. From Webb's notes, together with brief reports in the local press,[3] we learn that the Trades Council owed its existence to a small group of trade unionists led by John Cawsey, who was to serve as its first President,[4] who met at a pub called The Cock and Bottle on Castle Green on 26 January 1873 to consider,

1. *First Annual Trades' Union Directory* (London, 1861), pp. 4-5.
2. According to the T.U.C. souvenir booklet issued for its meeting in Bristol in 1931.
3. *Bristol Times and Mirror* (*B.T.M.*) 26 Jan 1873; *Bristol Mercury* (*B.M.*) 26 Jan 1873.
4. He was a tailor and the most prominent trade unionist in the city in the 1860s and 1870s.

as they might do today, 'the important question of altering the laws affecting trades unionists and in every possible way to aid any section of the industrial classes in the West of England to organize themselves.'[1]

Sidney Webb's notes quite rightly observe that the lack of a permanent body to bring together trade unionists from the various individual trade societies in what was hoped would become 'a Labour Parliament for the West of England', had been felt for some years past. Local trade unionists were aware that Bristol was behind most cities of comparable size in lacking a Trades Council[2] and had tried in vain to remedy the defect. A Council of Amalgamated Trades had been launched in 1868 with Cawsey as its President but it was absorbed the following year by the Board of Trades Delegates, a body chiefly dedicated to organizing working class support for the Liberal party but this, too, petered out in 1871.[3] The stimulus to try again was provided by a national *cause célèbre,* the savage sentence of one year's imprisonment imposed on several London gas stokers for allegedly conspiring to promote a strike against victimisation. Trade unionists considered Mr. Justice Brett's decision as 'contrary to justice, dictated in a spirit of revenge, and if further carried into practice totally subversive of the freedom of speech and liberty of action of all Trade Unionists', to quote one example of the nationwide protest that ensued.[4] John Cawsey and his colleagues had met to launch the Trades Council immediately after holding a public meeting at the Broadmead Rooms to add Bristol's voice to this protest.

In its early years the Trades Council was not a powerful body and in the early eighties there was more than a possibility that it would go the way of its predecessors. The number of societies affiliated to it during the first year was a bare 15 and by 1890 this had only risen to 24. The membership of these affiliated societies was returned as 2,755 in 1874 and 3,522 in 1878. It had declined to 2,160 by 1885 but recovered to 3,709 in 1890. Funds were

1. London School of Economics: Webb Trade Union collection: general history, Section A vol. iii ff. 244-281 for the notes.
2. The first Trades Council was formed in Liverpool in 1848 followed by Glasgow (1858), Edinburgh (1859), Bolton (1859), London (1860), Maidstone (1862), Leeds (1862), Birmingham, Manchester and Preston (all in 1866), Sheffield (1867), Oldham (1867), Aberdeen (1867) Leicester (1870) and Swansea (1872). See W. H. Fraser, *Trades Councils in England and Scotland,* 1858-1897, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Sussex, 1967) p. 570.
3. B. J. Atkinson, *The Bristol Labour Movement,* 1868-1906 (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford 1969) pp. 188-190 for these predecessors.
4. I. MacDougall, ed. *The minutes of the Edinburgh Trades Council* (Scottish History Society, 1968) p. 348.

slender in the extreme: at the end of the first year receipts were £8 5s.; on the eve of affiliation to the T.U.C. in 1878 income was £11 and even by 1890 it had only risen to about £27.[1] So hard up was the Council that its delegate to the T.U.C. was expelled in 1881 because his expenses had been paid by a source other than the body he claimed to represent.

This weakness paralleled the experience of Trades Councils throughout the country in these years, although Bristol was an extreme case. The downturn in the trade cycle of the late seventies and early eighties reduced business activity and hit trade unions hard: membership affiliated to the T.U.C. fell from just under a million in 1874 to only 379,000 in 1884. Trades Councils also necessarily suffered from declining support.[2] But, in addition, it has to be recognised that trade unionism in Bristol was weak, especially when compared with the northern industrial areas. It has been estimated that nearly half the entire union membership of the United Kingdom in 1889 was to be found in the six counties north of the Humber and Mersey[3] and it was in the heavy industries which Bristol lacked that high percentages of workers were to be found in unions. It was by contrast a city with a multitude of trades with many small craft unions which had grown up as a writer in *The Beehive* explained in 1868 to protect the skilled worker from 'the grasping conduct of many employers' and 'from the drunken, careless, improvident disposition of a portion of working men . . . who were often induced to accept any terms that grasping employers offer and are made the instrument for reducing the wages of the sober, industrious and reflecting.'[4] The societies represented in the first year with their membership figures provide the flavour: they include the Rope and Twine makers (60), Saddle and Harness makers (52), Amalgamated Tailors (100), Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners (104) Operative Stone Masons (700), Painters (100), Boiler makers and Iron Ship Builders (170), Amalgamated Plasterers (120), Amalgamated Coachbuilders (69), No. 1 Lodge Carpenters and Joiners General Union (150), No. 2 Lodge of the same (204), Operative Builders' Labourers (400), Shipwrights (340), Operative Corn Porters (170) and Amalgamated Plumbers (16).[5] The list indicates that modern industry had not entirely

1. Balance sheet, 1874; *Western Daily Press* (W.D.P.) 14 May 1877; 18*th Annual Report,* 1890-1.
2. H. A. Clegg, A. Fox, A. F. Thompson, *A history of British Trade Unionism since* 1889, i 3.
3. *ibid.* i 2.
4. *The Bee-hive* 6 June 1868.
5. *First Annual Report* (Howell Collection, Bishopsgate Institute).

passed Bristol by nevertheless there was only limited signs of organization among the dockers, boot and shoe workers and miners of the city and among relatively new groups such as the gas-workers and railway men. No wonder a delegate from Newcastle-on-Tyne, addressing a poorly attended recruiting meeting at the Colston Hall in 1878, when the Trades Council was host to the T.U.C., commented that in the union movement 'Bristol did not occupy the position which it should amongst the large cities'.[1]

The Trades Council in Bristol was essentially the creation of the older craft unions, particularly in the building trade. It was long to remain dominated by their leaders and was unable to build up numerically impressive support until Bristol unionism itself underwent major change. Signs of such chance can be detected in the late sixties and early seventies[2] but it was not really until 1889 that new unionism made its impact in Bristol and transformed the basis of support, although not the leadership of the Council. It would, however, be misleading to imagine that because it was weak in numbers and resources the Council was unable to command respect or achieve anything before 1889. There is evidence to the contrary both in the political and industrial fields.

Politically speaking, its aims were threefold: to keep Bristol trade unionists in touch with national political developments affecting the working man. This it did chiefly by communicating with the T.U.C's parliamentary committee which kept a close eye on labour issues in the legislature. Secondly, it sought to establish itself as the authoritative body to which the local establishment turned for information and opinion on matters affecting working men. By the mid-eighties some success had been achieved: for instance, when in 1884 the Bishop established a prestigious committee to make a substantial investigation of Bristol's poor, the Council was invited to nominate a member[3] and, again in 1885 when the editor of *The Bristol Mercury* wanted a feature on distress in the city a reporter was sent to interview the President of the Trades Council. Putting the case for the poor, the unemployed and the employee to the public early became and has

1. *B.M.* 14 Sept. 1878.
2. e.g. the founding of *The Bristol, West of England and South Wales Trade and Provident Society* showed that a craft society could and did develop an interest in spreading unionism among labourers.
3. See *Report of the Committee to inquire into the condition of the Bristol poor, presented* 22 *Dec.* 1884 *to the Bishop.* John Fox, plasterer, general secretary of the Trade and Provident Society for 34 years and for a time President of the Trades Council served alongside two Wills, one Fry, nine Reverends and a Monsignor.

always remained an important and valuable function of the Council. Thirdly, it sought to bring pressure to bear on the city's M.P.s and on local bodies, such as the City Council, the School Board and Poor Law Guardians, to give favourable consideration to labour questions.

Tactically the Council, reflecting the then widespread belief that politics and unionism should not be mixed, began by being strictly neutral between the existing Liberal and Conservative parties, not even giving official support when its President stood and narrowly lost election to the School Board in 1874. Even this posture produced some effect. For instance at the general election of 1874 when it asked all candidates where they stood on three questions vital to trade unions — equality in contract between Master and Servant,[1] exclusion of industrial action from the law of conspiracy and the legality of peaceful picketing — the Liberals showed a marked anxiety to stand well with the Council by adopting a considerably more favourable line on these issues than they had originally intended.[2] By 1878, however, the Council with but one dissentient had come to believe that more was to be achieved by declaring public approval of the Liberals in the hope that they would reward support by concessions on labour questions and be prepared to endorse working men standing at elections for local bodies.[3] Nevertheless, by 1885 the Council had become dissatisfied with the meagre results of this policy. It was well aware that for some time there had been a growing agitation in the city for direct representation of labour on local bodies and eventually in parliament.[4] Consequently it issued a stirring invitation to 'fellow workmen' to subscribe 1/- a year to create a great 'Local Labour League' to achieve this. The Council urged that the distinguished part played by the T.U.C. Parliamentary Committee in shaping legislation had demonstrated 'the Royal Right of British Workmen to seats in the British Senate' and now when 'the long neglected Tillers of the Soil were about to exercise the vote for the first time, 'the toilers of the town' should fraternize with them and 'be astir' to take hold of what was within reach, seats on local bodies even if running

1. Bristol trade societies had long been concerned over this issue see e.g. their protests over the Master and Servant bill of 1844 (*Northern Star* 13 April 1844).
2. *Webb notes*, 29, 30, 31 Jan. 5 Feb. 1874.
3. *ibid.* 29, 31 Jan. 5 Feb. 1878.
4. The undercurrent of independent working class political action in nineteenth century Bristol is illustrated in Dr. J. Cannon's pamphlet in this series, *The Chartists in Bristol*, while Dr. Atkinson (*op. cit.*) has traced the new phase that began in 1870.

a candidate for parliament was still out of their reach[1]. The Council's call was heeded. The Labour League was established and in 1886 scored its first success when John Fox, a prominent member of the Trades Council, was returned unopposed in the School Board elections to the chagrin of the Liberals who had done all they could to take him under their wing and prevent him standing as a Labour candidate. A year later a more spectacular victory was won when R. G. Tovey, who doubled the role of secretary to the Trades Council and the Labour League, became the first labour councillor by winning St. Paul's. In short, the Council can lay claim to having played a substantial if not exclusive role in originating the present-day Labour group on the city council.[2] However, its efforts in 1886 to contest a parliamentary seat were defeated by lack of funds and the still firm commitment of the majority of working men to the Liberal cause.

Nevertheless, throughout its history the main concern of the Trades Council has been with industrial affairs. In the early years it saw its chief function as mobilizing help for member trades in dispute. It tried but substantially failed to create a fund to provide those on strike with the full amount of wages they had been receiving by a levy from all affiliated societies who were to form themselves into a federation officered by the Council. The attempt was imaginative but over-ambitious for the business depression already referred to meant that the Council and its member societies were forced to be cautious and defensive. More often than not disputes with employers ended in defeat,[3] employers often refused to negotiate or submit to arbitration and frequently resorted to lock outs. Unemployment in the city seems to have been considerable, particularly in the winters of the mid-eighties.[4] However, towards the end of that decade the climate was changing. Even before the great labour revolt in the autumn of 1889 there were signs of militancy and union growth among hitherto unorganized workers. The seamen who had no union in the 1880s established one in February 1889 with the aid

1. City Library for the Address. Bristol stood out along with the Councils in London, Birmingham, Glasgow and Edinburgh in going as far as forming an organization to achieve labour representation at this time (W. H. Fraser, *op. cit.* p. 417).
2. The Bristol Socialist Society, founded in 1884, also played a significant part. The most prominent of the tiny band of Socialist delegates to the Council in the eighties was John Gregory, the poet-shoemaker at Clifton College, who was Vice-President in 1885.
3. e.g. in 1879 the building trades were compelled to accept a cut in wages which was not restored until 1890.
4. Bristol's first M.O.H., Dr. D. Davies, remarked in 1884 'there are so many people out of work or only partially employed in Bristol that the suffering of these classes is intense—greater than I have ever known it'. (*Homes of the Bristol Poor by the Special Commissioner of The Bristol Mercury,* (1884), p. 98.

of the President of the Trades Council. The Bristol gasworkers began to form a union in 1888 and by July 1889 were considering amalgamation with the London-based Gasworkers and General Workers' Union led by Will Thorne. In the spring and early summer of 1889 the miners of Bristol formed The Bristol Miners' Association and, led by William Whitefield its energetic Northumbrian agent, launched a series of strikes or negotiations for a 10% pay rise.[1] Nevertheless, it was clearly the example of the great London Dock strike in the autumn of 1889 which touched off the full scale labour revolt in Bristol.

The Trades Council vigorously collected funds for the London dockers[2] and along with the Gasworkers and the Bristol Socialist Society arranged the demonstration to mark their victory at which H. H. Gore, the Christian Socialist, made the most dramatic speech calling on Bristolians to support the Londoners since 'they were fighting a battle the same as Bristol men would be fighting.'[3] How right he was. Throughout the autumn of 1889 there was an unprecedented uprising often of hitherto unorganized workers, including many women. Strike followed strike in the city, first among the galvanised-iron workers at Lysaghts, then by the gasworkers,[4] the dock workers,[5] the boot and shoe operatives[6] and a host of smaller groups such as the women employed at Bristol's only cotton mill,[7] the tramwaymen, the tobacco workers and so on. Some spectacular victories were won, particularly by the gasworkers and dockers whose 'new unions' gathered thousands of members from a variety of occupations and formed links with their national leaders. Immediately after the Bristol dockers had won their tanner — after a three day strike compared with the five weeks struggle in London — down came Tom Mann and Bristol-born Ben Tillett, President and Secretary of the new Dockers' Union to hold a mass meeting of many thousands to gather support for an organization that was eventually destined

1. *c.f.* the growth of the Boot and Shoe Operatives to a membership of over 600 by 1889. From 1885 they had been sending delegates to the Council.
2. The Londoners reciprocated by sending £60 to aid the Bristolians (H. Llewellyn Smith and V. Nash, *The story of the Dockers' Strike* (1889) p. 186.
3. *W.D.P.* 2 Sept. 1889.
4. *W.D.P.* 3-11 Oct. 1889 for this brilliantly effective strike by workers who had not had a pay rise for 15 years; W. Thorne, *My Life's Battles,* pp. 88-9 and for the general position of gas workers. E. J. Hobsbawmn, *Labouring Men,* pp. 158-178.
5. *W.D.P.* Oct.-Nov. 1889 for their strike.
6. 2000 rivetters and finishers came out on unofficial strike for a 10 per cent increase. (A. Fox, *A history of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives,* (1958) p. 163).
7. They also asked for a 10 per cent increase but without success (J. Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the nineteenth century,* 1887-1900, p. 14).

to become the dominant union in the city and the progenitor of Britain's largest union, the T.G.W.U.

The Trades Council certainly played a very active part in the labour revolt of 1889. Individual members of the Council can be found busily counselling strikers and serving on the Strike Organizing Committee which emerged to co-ordinate action all over the city. The Council helped collect the vitally necessary funds to sustain those on strike and took the lead in organizing victory demonstrations or protest marches. Nevertheless it is fairly clear that it was the Socialists, and in particular H. H. Gore, who captured the limelight and the enthusiasm of the strikers and it was new officials, such as Vicary of the Gasworkers and Gorman of the Dockers, aided by national organizers such as Tom McCarthy,[1] who put in much of the hard work of organizing the new unions.

What, then, were the consequences of the upheaval of 1889 for the Trades Council? First, membership increased as never before until by 1898, when the Council was again host to the T.U.C., it could truly be said to represent almost the whole trade union movement in the city. In 1890 only 24 societies or branches were affiliated: by 1898 there were 63[2] and thenceforward down to 1914 affiliations hovered around this figure, which meant that probably less than a dozen organisations were not members of the Council. It was rare to find more than one union of consequence that was not affiliated at any particular time.[3] Although some of the new bodies, the miners in particular, were slow to affiliate,[4] division between the older and newer unions, which as in Sheffield, for instance, led to the emergence of two rival Trades Councils in the same city,[5] was avoided in Bristol. Almost overnight in the early nineties there was a trebling of the individual membership for whom affiliation fees were paid from the 3,709 of 1890 to the 8-10,000 which was the usual figure down to 1914. About half of these were members of unions that had emerged in the late eighties.

Nevertheless, the influence of the new unions must not be exaggerated. After their inauguration they long found the going very hard and their true achievement was to survive rather than to grow. The employers, temporarily caught off balance in 1889.

1. He was a Limehouse Irishman who resigned in 1889 as secretary of the exclusive Stevedores' Union to become organiser of Ben Tillett's newly formed Dockers' Union (J. Lovell, *Stevedores and Dockers* (1964) pp. 98, 240). The Liberal press in Bristol habitually regarded him as a sinister troublemaker.
2. *Financial Statement*, 1898.
3. The seamen were only intermittently affiliated.
4. The miners joined in 1897 but the gasworkers did so in 1889 and the Dockers in 1890.
5. See S. Pollard *et* al. *Sheffield Trades and Labour Council* 1858-1958.

counter-attacked vigorously and there were inherent difficulties about organizing effectively among the semi-skilled and unskilled in a wide range of jobs, as both the Gasworkers and Dockers tried to do. Workers of this kind could be and were so easily replaced by blackleg 'free labour'. No doubt such conditions help to explain why the new unions found it expedient to cooperate in the Council with the older craft unions for whom the 1890s, especially for those in the building industry, were a boom period in contrast to the previous decade. Indeed the majority of the newcomers to the Council in the nineties were craft unions, often new branches of existing unions in the building trade which was then probably Bristol's second largest industry in terms of the workers it employed. The Council contained a majority, but happily not an overwhelming one, of delegates from such bodies,[1] and its officers tended to be drawn, though not exclusively, from such circles. John Curle, for instance, of the Carpenters and Joiners, became secretary in 1890 and held this key post for many years.[2]

The increased size of the Council meant that when its delegates gathered in force something like a parliament of labour *did* result: by 1907, for instance, 165 delegates were entitled to attend. Consequently it had become necessary to develop a committee structure to handle business between Council meetings and to pay its secretary a very modest salary. Furthermore, the increased size and prestige of the Council clearly led tiny societies to affiliate as a means of having their say and drawing sustenance from their stronger brethren. For example, by Edwardian days signs of the development of 'white collar' unionism were apparent in the affiliation of small societies of Life Assurance Agents, Prudential Assurance Agents and the Railway Clerks' Association. The burgeoning educational world, too, was first represented by a society of Council School Caretakers.

What did the Council strive to achieve and what measure of success did it have in the two decades preceding the first world war?

Politically speaking in the two decades before 1914 the Council continued to campaign for labour representation, but it met with

1. In 1907, for instance, of 165 delegates, 39 came from the building trades, 33 from the Dockers, Gasworkers, Miners and Builders' Labourers; 10 each from the engineers, the printing trades and the boot and shoe workers; 9 from the railway men and the rest from a rich variety of occupations mostly of a craft nature (*34th Annual Report*, 1906-7).
2. W. Gorman, for long local secretary of the Dockers' union, also served the Trades Council as its treasurer for many years beginning in 1895. John Curle became a Labour councillor for St. Pauls, 1896-1904 alderman 1904-1910 and Lord Mayor 1927-8.

chequered and limited success. As late as 1914, Liberals and Tories still monopolised Bristol's parliamentary representation, and only 7 Labour councillors and one alderman sat on the 92 strong City Council. Nevertheless the trend was clear: there was growing support in the city for labour representation independent of existing parties and having a distinctive ideology. For an increasing number of workers, such as the young Ernest Bevin, this meant socialism.[1] The Council made a substantial contribution to this development although as time passed bodies such as the Bristol Socialist Society, the I.L.P., the Fabians and from 1906 onwards, the Labour Representation Committee (on which the Council was powerfully represented) tended to take over more of the political activity which the Council had pioneered with its Labour League of 1885 and its successor of 1891-1906, The Bristol and District Trades Council Labour Electoral Association (L.E.A.). This association was basically the political arm of the Council which supplied half of its executive and the offices of President and Secretary. It is worth noting, too, that the Council decided that the L.E.A. must have a political fund of its own to be nourished by unions who were to join corporately and contribute likewise. In so doing the Council anticipated the solution to the problem of financing the election and maintenance of *bona fide* working men that was to be adopted by the labour movement on the national level years later. For fifteen years the L.E.A. fought for labour representation, slowly adding to Labour's modest strength on the city council, usually but not invariably working in harmony with the political bodies just mentioned whose influence within the Council certainly increased as time passed. On the eve of the first world war the newly elected President of the Council was no longer speaking the mild language of the Lib-Labs but was proclaiming that the 'fight between Capital and Labour was becoming more determined and bitter' and that Labour would have to adopt, 'far more drastic . . . and unconstitutional methods if it was to end the cursed system of wage slavery'.[2]

Such language no doubt also reflected the Council's experience of industrial conflict in Bristol which was indeed acute both in the early nineties and between 1910 and 1914 when dockers and transport workers launched a series of struggles to better their conditions. The most striking incident in the earlier period was the Council's part in resisting the employers' offensive which led

1. A. Bullock, *Life and Times of Ernest Bevin*, i pp. 12-15 for his conversion to socialism.
2. *W.D.P.* 6 Feb. 1914.

to a clash with the city magistrates on Black Friday 23 December 1892 when cavalry and police charged to clear the streets and a considerable number of casualties wound up in the Infirmary. For months before this the Council had been supporting the weekly demonstrations of the timber workers in the port, who had been locked out by their employers, as well as the strike committee which were seeking union recognition for the women at Sander's Confectionery factory.[1] Finally it was planned to hold a mass march from the Grove to the Horsefair. Torches and Chinese lanterns were to be carried since the marchers were to assemble after work at 7 p.m. City Centre shopkeepers became alarmed lest Christmas shoppers be scared away: the police were appealed to and the Chief Constable ruled that no torches or lanterns were to be carried and defined a route avoiding the city centre. The organizers of the march accepted the ruling on lanterns (a fire risk was involved) but denied the right of the police to dictate the route, whereupon the magistrates sought the help of 200 Hussars and Dragoon Guards who were duly sent from Aldershot by special train. The move clearly inflamed a tense situation. The Trades Council furiously condemned 'the criminal stupidity' of the magistrates, blamed them exclusively for the ensuing riot and argued that it would never have happened if the magistrates had not been 'a non-elective body and chosen exclusively from the employing and capitalist classes.'[2] Black Friday long remained a bitter memory in Trades Council circles and was celebrated in defiant songs[3] and speeches for years afterwards. More immediately, Black Friday forced the Liberals temporarily on to the defensive since it was a Liberal Mayor who had called in the troops. The upshot was a small but significant advance in labour representation. John Curle, the Council's secretary, became Labour's first city magistrate; Frank Sheppard, another Council member, began his outstanding career on the city council by being returned unopposed for St. Paul's in 1893, John Sharland, a fellow

1. The Council's sympathy with women workers is noteworthy: earlier it had paid them scant attention e.g. in 1874 it rejected an appeal for help in organising a union among the girls at the cotton mill and it excluded women from its Labour League of 1885.
2. *W.D.P.* 23, 24 Dec. 1892. The paper defended the authorities but admitted that no inflammatory speeches had been made by the demonstrators; *20th Annual Report* 1892-3.
3. One ran
   'Not long ago some people said,
   We'll march in grand array
   Through Bristol's city one fine night
   With bands and banners gay
   Some Chinese lanterns, too
   We'll tie on our walking sticks . . .'

socialist and Council member had an easy win in St. Philip's North and William Gorman, soon to be the Council's treasurer, won a seat on the Bedminster Poor Law Guardians.

The later nineties were relatively peaceful and at such times the Council was concerned with less dramatic matters such as pressing the City Council to observe the resolution it had adopted on the suggestion of the Socialist H. H. Gore that contracts for work done on its behalf should contain clauses requiring payment of union rates of pay. Nationally and locally, achieving this was one of the most important if unspectacular victories of Trades Councils. Time and time again, in a city with at least its fair share of employers hostile to unions, the Council tried with varying success to help groups of workers such as the tramwaymen when they were locked out in 1901 or the blind workers in 1910, who were being paid at exploitation rates. It was also particularly concerned in Edwardian days with the plight of the unemployed and with the struggles of the dockers and transport workers. 1908-9 were the worst years for unemployment since the mid eighties: members of the Council assisted the Right-to-Work Committee (whose secretary was the energetic young carter, Ernest Bevin) in stirring the public conscience and putting pressure on the City Council to institute public works to provide jobs.[1] Council members were also very active in supporting the Bristol dockers in 1910[2] in their sharp and victorious tussle with local employers and the Shipping Federation whom many rank and file dockers believed were engaging in unscrupulous strike-breaking tactics. Thereafter, however, the Council, for reasons not altogether clear, appears to have played a much more limited role in the very violent upheavals of the summer of 1911[3] when there seems to have been something of a revolt from below by many rank and file dockers, carters and railway men during which troops from Horfield barracks were in action, firing blanks over the heads of excited crowds, and the police made baton charges against strikers who were attacking blacklegs. Indeed, it would appear that there was a substantial breakaway from union leadership at this time and that as a result the Council was unable to co-ordinate the actions of the strikers.[4] Subsequently in the continued struggles of 1912-13 it was much more effective in such a role.

It would be wrong, however, to leave the impression that the Council was solely exercised by industrial and political questions:

1. Among the results was the creation of the lake in Eastville Park.
2. *W.D.P.* 21 July 1910.
3. It is difficult to find any evidence of the Council's activity between Dec. 1910 and Sept. 1911.
4. *W.D.P.* June-Aug. 1911.

there was another side to the story. It was much concerned to brighten and enlighten the lives of working folk. To the first end it promoted entertainment and social activities: by Edwardian days it was organizing outings tug-of-war competitions and its own brass band, joining with the Co-op to promote concerts, holding an annual garden party (at the Zoo) and, along with the Socialists, winning for Bristol the reputation in the labour movement of being a city where singing and poetry were held in high esteem. Also from its earliest days the Council was very much concerned with education: as early as 1874 it had invited Dr. Percival, the headmaster of Clifton College, to address it on technical education, and later many of its members took part in and encouraged evening classes throughout the city. Through its members on the School Board and, later, on the Education Committee, it kept up a consistent pressure for the improvement of educational facilities for the working classes. The Council was also deeply concerned about housing and health. For instance in 1910 it considered the scourge of T.B. in Bristol. One delegate, Ernest Bevin, stood up to argue that bad housing, poor food, and factory conditions fostered the disease and that the City Council's health committee was ignoring the problem. He wanted the treatment of the sick to be a charge on the rates and the Council adopted a resolution urging all unions to demand that the City Council should embark on a programme of building houses for the working classes.[1]

Paradoxically while the first World War witnessed a massive upsurge in union membership in Bristol the Council suffered some erosion of its effectiveness and curtailment of its role. The major reason for this was the spectacular growth of the Dockers' Union which by drawing into its ranks a great variety of workers made much of the running in the labour movement and to some extent overshadowed the Council.[2] Signs of such a development were evident on the eve of hostilities. It was Ernest Bevin, leading local figure among the Dockers' rather than the Trades Council, who called a mass meeting on the Grove to consider the unfolding European conflict and persuaded it to pass a resolution urging British neutrality and calling on the T.U.C. and Labour party to convene a national conference at once to consider how to prevent the country going to war. Bevin personally declared in favour of a general strike.[3]

1. *W.P.P.* 16 Dec. 1910.
2. Membership figures for the Dockers' Union are not available, but the expansion of its annual income from Bristol from £3,723 in 1914 to £27,791 in 1919 plainly indicates its substantial growth.
3. *W.D.P.* 3 Aug. 1914.

Once war began, however, the Council was by no means inactive. It sought particularly to protect workers from its adverse effects. Within a few days of the beginning of hostilities it sent a deputation to the Mayor pressing for a citizens' committee to be established to regulate food prices and relieve the unemployment already felt as a direct result of the conflict. The Council probably expressed the outlook of most Bristol trade unionists when its spokesman commented that 'whatever their views might be about the war, their only business now was to look after the people and avoid all unnecessary suffering.' Its demand, often to be repeated, was that the sacrifices demanded by war should be borne equally by all classes but that given the existing inequalities of society it was inevitable that working folk would bear the brunt unless there was massive government intervention to control the allocation and price of basic necessities.[1] In the early months of the war such a demand united the labour movement in Bristol: even the city's two I.L.P. branches, which consistently opposed the war as a conflict between capitalists in which no true Socialist could take part, nevertheless supported the Council's demand.[2] The I.L.P's anti-war stand, however, was not that of the majority of trade unionists of the time: indeed union agreement to suspend industrial action and wage claims for the duration of the war was an accomplished fact in Bristol even before the industrial truce was proclaimed nationally by the T.U.C. and Labour party.

However, while Asquith remained prime minister, the Trades Council's demand for effective price-control went largely unheard: prices continued to rise. There was little the Council could do but protest. In February 1915, for instance, it held a mass meeting to rally support for Labour M.P.s pressing for such control in the Commons.[3] Nothing was achieved: Asquith rejected state intervention and in effect told wage earners to grin and bear it. The upshot was predictable. The Trades Council's affiliated unions, faced with ever rising prices and ineffective government action, were in an ever stronger bargaining position as the demand for labour to feed the war machine soared, and eventually they broke the industrial truce and demanded higher wages. The dockers led the way, obtaining a war bonus in March 1915,[4] and by June the engineers, boot and shoe operatives, railwaymen, miners, furniture workers and bakers had all won increases. The industrial truce had broken down as became glaringly obvious when in May 1915 the

1. *W.D.P.* 9 Aug. 1914.
2. Bristol I.L.P. minutes 10 Aug. 1914.
3. *W.D.P.* 2 Feb. 1915.
4. *Dockers' Record,* Mar. 1915.

workers at Douglas Bros., engaged in making vehicles for the army, ignoring a Kitchener-style appeal to speed up work, walked out on strike.[1] It was the first strike the city had known for ten months but the forerunner of many that followed a similar pattern: there was a spontaneous outburst by hitherto often unorganized workers against the refusal of notoriously anti-union employers to grant a wage increase to match rising prices.[2] Organized workers were winning their increases. The obvious moral was to organize, and this was where the general unions, the Gasworkers, the Workers' Union and, above all, the Dockers came in. Such unions rather than the Trades Council were very active in recruiting and organising the hitherto unorganised. The result was that such workers looked more to the ever-growing Dockers' Union than to the Council to express their aspirations effectively. Significantly, T. C. Lewis, the Council's secretary until 1917, a member of the Operative Bricklayers' Society, decided to resign and join the vigorous Dockers' union. He quickly found himself an organizer with special responsibility for East Bristol, one of the fastest growing branches. By the end of the war the Dockers' Union probably contained as many members as *all* the unions of pre-war Bristol put together, and there was scarcely a trade or industry in the city that was not represented in some degree in it. Not surprisingly, such a giant union, held together not as craft unions were by common possession of a skill but by loyalty to a centralized leadership and the class solidarity of its heterogeneous membership, tended to regard outside bodies such as the Council or rival general unions as threats to its own cohesion. Smaller unions complained to the Council that the Dockers poached on their preserves, but there was little it could do to prevent this any more than it was able to prevent the Dockers taking the lead on questions previously regarded as the Council's special concern. Two examples must suffice: in 1917 the Dockers ignored the Council when they convened a mass meeting to hear the minister, H. A. L. Fisher, expound the principles of the Education Bill he was about to pilot through parliament.[3] Education questions had hitherto been regarded as Trades Council business rather than that of a single member union. Again, in the later stages of the war, it was Bevin in his capacity as National Organiser of the Dockers' Union, not as representative of the Trades Council, who led the campaigns in Bristol against profiteer-

1. *W.D.P.* 4 May 1915.
2. The climax was reached in a series of strikes against the Tramway Co. whose managing director, Sir George Verdon-Smith, was regarded as the most violently anti-union employer in the city.
3. *W.D.P.* 15 Oct. 1917.

ing, especially in the food trade,[1] an issue which the Council thought it had made peculiarly its own.

The erosion of the Council's effectiveness during the war was also due to the mixture of impotence and militancy it displayed over the major issue of conscription. In June 1915 it sought to give a lead to the labour movement in the city by coming out unequivocally against conscription. Unhappily for the Council, opinion was much divided. The I.L.P. whose influence was considerable in the Council, though increasingly limited in the city itself, was firmly anti-conscriptionist. The I.L.P's chief spokesman, Walter Ayles, city councillor and office-holder in the Trades Council, was such a staunch objector that he was to serve on the No-Conscription Fellowship's national executive and end up in prison for his beliefs.[2] On the other hand some prominent unionists and Labour councillors such as Whitefield, the miners' agent, and Frank Sheppard, were firmly 'patriotic' and supported the policy adopted by the T.U.C. when it met in Bristol (for the third time) in September 1915 that every encouragement should be given to Lord Derby's voluntary recruiting scheme. It was the 'patriotic' group which made the running, issuing a 'Bristol Trade Union Manifesto' warning that 'The Empire is in danger from Prussian aggression', calling on unionists to volunteer and implying that if they did not it would be their own fault if conscription was introduced[3]. This was followed up in November 1915, with a recruiting rally in the Colston Hall addressed by 'patriotic' socialists such as the ex-Bristolians Ben Tillett and James O'Grady (Labour M.P. for Leeds) and Will Crooks.[4]

The Trades Council reacted by contradicting T.U.C. policy. It declared neutrality towards the recruiting campaign and eventually under I.L.P. pressure it proceeded to mount a campaign against conscription. But it left this until very late in the day, launching it when the bill was actually before parliament in January 1916 and, militant as some of the speeches were at the mass rally

1. *ibid.* 9 July 1917.
2. W. H. Ayles (1879-1953) was the dominant figure in the I.L.P. in the West country, serving as general secretary of the Bristol branch for 12 years and on the party's national administrative council. At this time he was also President of the Bristol L.R.C. He was leader of the 'absolutist' wing of the No-Conscription Fellowship, refusing to undertake national service of *any* kind (for the Fellowship see D. Boulton, *Objection Overruled* (1967). Later Ayles became Labour M.P. for Bristol North, 1923-4, 1929-31 and for Southall 1945-1950 and Hayes and Harlington 1950-1953.
3. *W.D.P.* 26 Oct. 1915.
4. *W.D.P.* 22 Nov. 1915.

sponsored by the Trades Council, the practical upshot was nil.[1] Furthermore the Council, again much influenced by its I.L.P. members, almost certainly further isolated itself from majority opinion in the Bristol labour movement by continuing to oppose conscription once it was the law of the land and by declaring in April 1916 that it would do all it could to help conscientious objectors. Brave though such a stand was, given the often brutal and hysterical response of authority to conscientious objectors, the truth was that if the Council did not want to lose support or prove its ineffectiveness there was only one policy on an issue as contentious as this and that was to say nothing, as Bevin realised. However, it is probable that the Council had no option but to take a stand and accept the consequences. If it had followed the totally different view of the ultra-patriotic Bristol branch of the British Socialist Party, the result would probably have been the same.

Finally, in the closing year of the war far-reaching changes in the organisation of the Labour movement occurred. The Labour Party's 1918 constitution abolished Labour Representation Committees in which Trades Councils had often been highly influential. In Bristol, for instance, in 1914, the President of the Council was also President of the L.R.C. Instead, there was established local Labour parties at constituency and ward level which in the 'coupon' election in December 1918 contested four out of five Bristol parliamentary seats, though without success.[2] In addition, The Bristol Borough Labour Party was set up as a central co-ordinating body, with delegations from local ward and constituency parties, affiliated trade unions, and political societies, and with responsibility for deciding policy in municipal affairs. In effect, the Trades Council had lost most of its previous political function and the new arrangement imposed an organisational separation on the political and trade union wings of the movement.

Almost immediately, however, the Trades Council and Borough Labour Party began discussions on the question of fusion. As the central co-ordinating bodies of different wings of the same movement, a wasteful duplication of effort, if not friction, would have been unavoidable had the two bodies maintained an entirely separate existence. In 1919, therefore, they set up a Fusion Committee, and the following year adopted its recommendation that henceforth they should be known as the *Bristol Trades and Labour Council,* employing a single full-time secretary, and using

1. *B.T.M.* 17 Jan. 1916.
2. Labour contested Bristol North. South, East and Central constituencies. Ernest Bevin was candidate in the latter.

the same headquarters, but retaining separate executives and delegate meetings.[1] Edwin Parker, a member of the Dockers' Union, was elected first secretary of the new body, and he continued to serve in this capacity throughout the inter-war period, until illness forced him to retire in 1942. The fusion survived intact under his secretaryship, but increasingly since the Second World War, the two bodies have developed an independent existence.

Changes in the Trade Union world, as well as in the Labour Party, also impinged upon the functions of Trades Councils at this time. The growth of national rather than local collective bargaining and the increasing centralisation of authority within individual unions reduced the scope for local initiative. Trade Councils, since they linked workers in various unions and different industries, cut across the lines of authority in individual unions. Hence union national executives have, for the most part, opposed extensions of their functions, or at least insisted on a clear definition of their role. Since 1924 the TUC's General Council has sought to integrate the Trades Councils into the changed structure of the trade union movement — by, for example, sponsoring an annual conference of Trades Councils and seeking to use Councils as its local agents. They have headed off the threat to the authority of national executives of individual unions, which is implicit in the structure of Trades Councils, by restricting their representation at the T.U.C. Annual Congress to a single fraternal delegate, and by seeking to control their activities by drawing up a register of recognised Councils which conformed to the General Council's conception of what their rules and functions should be.

In the inter-war period, the Bristol Trades and Labour Council adapted itself to these changed circumstances. On what might loosely be called the political side of its work, it sought to take advantage of the practice, increasingly evident from the war onwards, of co-opting Labour representation on to a variety of official and semi-public bodies to put the trade union point of view. Industrially, in the twenties and early thirties, the main concerns of the Council were the maintenance of union membership and the rallying of support for unionists involved in disputes.

One of the most important functions of the Council was to organise recruiting campaigns in association with the officials of local unions. From time to time the Council would act as the local agent of the T.U.C. during national campaigns aimed at specific groups of workers among whom trade unionism was weak, such

1. B.T.C. papers in the City archives.

BALANCE SHEET.

INCOME.

Name of Society.	Number Represented.	Name of Delegates.	Amount Received. £ s. d.
Rope and Twine Spinners	60	HIPPPET, ...	0 5 0
		GOLDSWORTHY.	
Sadler and Harness Makers	52	SPILLER, ...	0 4 4
		WHITE.	
Amalgamated Tailors	100	CAWSEY.	0 8 4
Almalgamated Carpenters and Joiners	104	WEDLAKE, ...	0 8 8
		GREESWAY.	
Operative Stone Masons... ...	700	HODGE, ...	2 10 0
		HAMLEY.	
Painters	100	PARKER, ...	0 6 4
		GREEN.	
Boiler Makers & Iron Ship Builders	170	PERRIN.	0 14 2
Amalgamated Plasterers ...	120	FOX, ...	0 3 0
		RUTHER.	
Amalgamated Coach-builders...	60	WHITFORD, ...	0 5 9
		CARTER.	
No. 1 Lodge Carpenters & Joiners G. U.	150	TUCKER, ...	0 6 3
		SMALL.	
No. 2 Lodge do.	204	RICHARDS, ...	0 8 6
		JONES.	
Operative Builders' Labourers	400	PREECE.	0 16 2
Shipwrights	340	VICKERY.	0 14 2
Operative Corn Porters	170	JOHNSON, ...	0 7 1
		EDWARDS.	
Amalgamated Plumbers	16	AVERN.	0 0 8
To Balance from Gas Stokers	...	... ...	0 3 0
	2755	Total Income	£8 5 5

EXPENDITURE.

	£ s. d.
To Printing Circulars to form Council	0 4 6
" Minutes, Account Books and Stationery	0 15 5
" Printing Rules, &c.	0 18 0
" Paid Secretary for loss of time	0 7 6
" Postage	0 4 0
" Rent of Meeting Room	2 0 0
	- - -
Total Expenditure	£4 9 5
" Balance in hand	3 15 0
	£8 5 5

Audited and found correct,

Signed, GEO. F. JONES, Delegate No. 1 Lodge Carpenters and Joiners, G. U.
JOHN FOX, Delegate Bristol District National Association of Operative Plasterers.

NOTE.—*There are more Societies represented than those mentioned, but as they have not paid contributions they are omitted.*—T. THOMAS.

The first balance sheet of the Bristol Trades Council, 1874
Bishopsgate Institution

THE MARCH OF THE WORKERS

FRIDAY, DEC. 23rd,

THERE WILL BE A

BIG LANTERN PARADE

OF THE

Locked-Out Deal Runners,

Sanders' White Slaves,

And the GENERAL ORGANIZED TRADES.

The PROCESSION will assemble at the GROVE, at 7 p.m. sharp.

FINISHING WITH

A MONSTRE MEETING

In the HORSEFAIR.

The Christmas Bells are ringing, the sky is clear and bright,
Your masters pray for peace, but are compelling you to fight.

Away with Politics. Labour to the Front.

Poster advertising the 'Black Friday' march 23 December 1892.
City Library

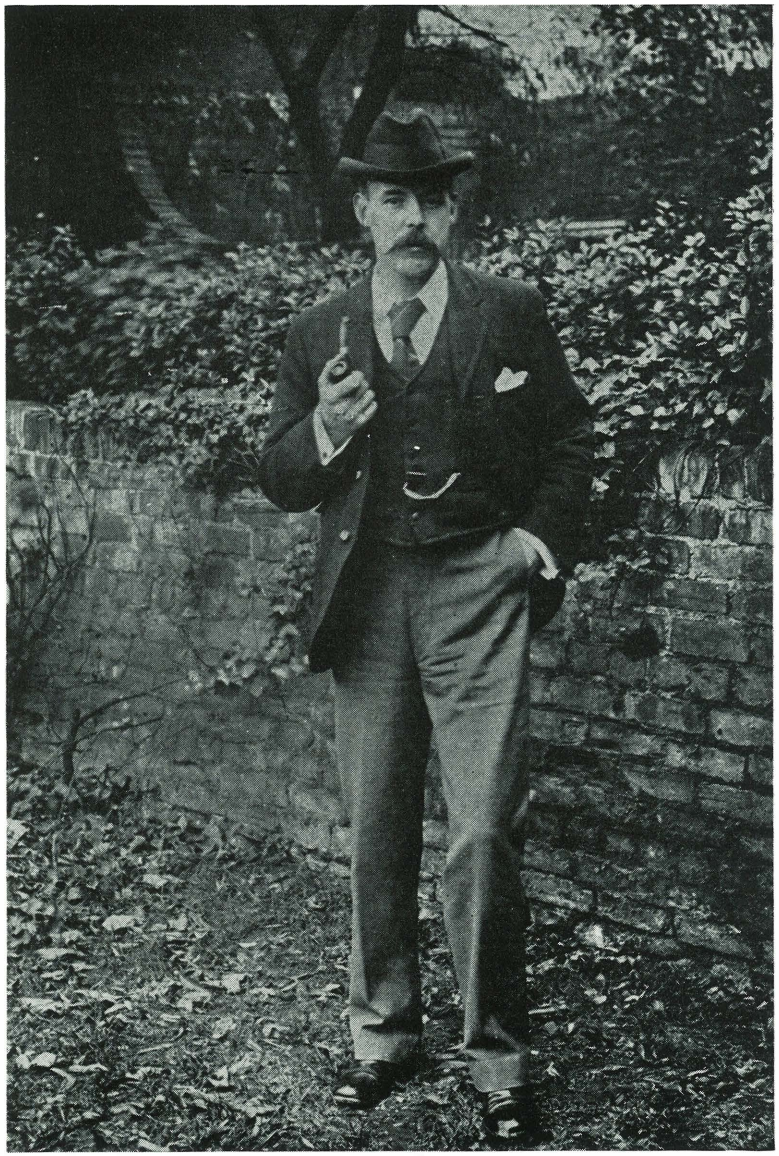
FRIDAY'S POLICE RIOT.

All PERSONS who were INJURED by the Brutality of the POLICE & SOLDIERY on Friday night, are requested to IMMEDIATELY send their NAMES and ADDRESSES, together with an account of such injury, and shortly the circumstances connected with it, to

Mr. W. J. PETHERICK,

The Secretary, Bristol Strike Committee,
British Workman, St. Jude's, Bristol.

Handbill issued after the 'Black Friday' march.
City Library



James O'Grady, 1866-1934, Socialist, Trade Unionist and Labour M.P. 1906-1924. Photograph taken in 1898 when he was President of the Trades Council and President of the T.U.C. when it met in Bristol in that year.
City Archives

as women workers. Other campaigns were the result of local initiative and aimed at specifically local "blackspots". Immediately after the war union membership reached an all-time high, but with the onset of the depression in 1921, with consequent heavy and persistent unemployment, union membership fell sharply, especially amongst groups of workers where there was no long tradition of trade unionism. The position of the unions in the tobacco factories, for instance, suffered a severe setback, whilst on the tramways unionism was virtually eradicated in 1923. All unions lost heavily. The T.G.W.U. (heir to the Dockers' Union) which in 1921 claimed 40,000 members in Bristol[1] had shrunk to a mere 12,000 in 1928.[2]

With workers leaving the unions at such a rate, there was little that the Council could do to stem the tide. It did, however, try to co-ordinate and encourage the efforts of the various unions to recoup their losses. Workers in the printing trades attracted the attention of the Council's recruiting drive in 1925—6, while in 1927 a campaign was aimed at the tobacco factories, but success was limited. The women's tobacco worker branch of the T.G.W.U. had shrunk from a membership of almost 2,900 in 1922 to 737 in 1927. Despite the campaign, membership of the branch continued to fall, there being 425 members in 1928.[3] It was only when employment prospects improved in the mid-thirties that the Council's efforts met with some success and union membership once more began to climb.

The years 1919-1926 witnessed unprecedentedly bitter struggles between Capital and Labour. The sacrifices demanded of workers during the war prompted them to press their demands for a better, more secure standard of living in the post-war world with exceptional militancy. Socialist ideas gained a greater currency than ever before. In 1921, however, the post-war boom collapsed, turned into a slump, and mass unemployment established itself as a permanent feature of the inter-war years. The slump brought in its train demands from employers, often enforced through lock-out, for wage reductions. All the gains won in the previous period by the unions were now threatened. Strikes and lockouts, both local and national, were frequently prolonged and fought with determination and bitterness on both sides. Several times the Council was called upon to organise support for unionists in dispute. On occasion this was of a moral kind, as when during the 1924 national railway engine drivers' strike the Council and

1. *W.D.P.* 24 Oct. 1921.
2. T.G.W.U. *Ann Report.* 1928.
3. T.G.W.U. *Ann. Reports passim.*

A.S.L.E.F. jointly arranged a meeting to put the strikers' case before the public.[1] Sometimes financial help was given as in the mining lock-out of 1921 when the Council raised over £1,000 for the Bristol miners.[2]

During the 1926 General Strike, however, the Council was called upon to play a much more important and active role. Indeed this had been prefigured a year earlier when the miners faced the threat of wage cuts for the second time in four years, and called on the T.U.C. for support. Throughout the trade union movement there was tremendous sympathy for the miners' cause and a readiness to take action in support, for the defeat of the miners in 1921 had been the prelude to wage cutting throughout industry. A further defeat for the miners would weaken the resistance of the whole union movement to another round of wage cuts. This had been the view of the Trades Council in 1921, as expressed by its secretary, E. H. Parker. "The present critical industrial situation", he wrote, "is caused by an attempt on the part of organised capitalism to establish a right of unlimited plunder. It must be resisted at all costs, for it is not only an attack on the miners but the beginning of an offensive against the standard of life of the whole community".[3] Thus when, in 1925, the miners called on the T.U.C. for support in their resistance to wage reductions, the Council prepared for action. In the event of sympathetic action being called by the T.U.C's General Council, Trades Councils were to act as local organising centres passing on instructions to local trade unionists. On July 31, "Red Friday", a special delegate meeting of the Bristol Trades Council was convened at the request of the T.U.C. to discuss plans for the strike. At the last moment the Government backed down and granted the coal industry a subsidy to enable it to continue paying the old wages for a further nine months. A telegram announcing this news and declaring the strike off arrived during the course of the Council meeting.

The crisis had been postponed. During the period of the nine-month subsidy the Government made extensive preparation to meet a General Strike. And when in May 1926 the Government refused to renew the subsidy but insisted instead that the miners should accept wage reductions, the miners called on the T.U.C. to carry out the threatened General Strike. On 3 May the stoppage began. Workers everywhere responded to the strike call with enthusiasm and determination. On the first day in Bristol

1. *W.D.P.* 28 Jan. 1924.
2. *W.D.P.* 21 May 1921.
3. *W.D.P.* 16 April 1921.

18,000 workers downed tools; nine days later, just before the strike was called off, that number had doubled.[1] Among local miners, dockers, transport workers and railwaymen the strike was solid from the beginning. These groups were joined by others as the General Strike spread, electrical power station workers, builders, printers and engineers coming out in the course of the nine days, while yet other groups of workers were waiting for the call when the order to return to work was received. Although the tramways and the local press managed to continue operations, the major industries of the town were effectively brought to a halt, and despite the show of force by the Government — warships were moved into the Avonmouth and City Docks and sailors guarded the power station — there was no sign of weakening while the strike lasted.

With such a large number of workers on strike and awaiting instructions the role of the Council was crucial. Before May the Council, like the T.U.C. at national level, had made no detailed plans for the strike, and it was not until the evening of 3 May, only hours before the General Strike was due to begin, that delegates met to discuss local organisation. Nevertheless, despite their unpreparedness Bristol unionists showed that same capacity for spontaneous self-organisation which characterised the strike in several localities. The meeting on 3 May decided to set up a *Central Strike Committee* representing the Council and those unions involved. This was to be in session day and night and to be responsible for conveying messages and instructions from the General Council to the rank and file, and was to transmit information about the position in Bristol to headquarters. Special sub-committees were established to deal with communications and publicity, the latter issuing regular strike bulletins. A system of cyclist messengers was devised for carrying information speedily from the centre to all points of the city.[2] The system seems to have worked well, and though some delay and confusion was experienced in the issuing of strike orders to some workers, this did not hamper the general effectiveness of the strike.

Hence when on 12 May the T.U.C. unconditionally called off the General Strike the news was received in Bristol with a mixture of shock, anger and dismay. There seemed no apparent reason why the unions should accept defeat; the local A.E.U. official observed later that "We were in a strong position on the 12th."[3] At first the assumption was that the unions must have

1. *T.U.C. Library.* (H.D.5336). General Strike, local reports.
2. *W.D.P.* 4 May 1926.
3. A.E.U. *Monthly Report.*

won a victory. When it became clear that the T.U.C. had accepted defeat the reaction was one of protest, followed by demoralisation. The miners fought on alone but they too were eventually beaten. In December, after a lock-out lasting seven months, the exhausted and penniless Bristol miners were forced back to work on the employers' terms of reduced wages and longer hours. The trade unions emerged from the General Strike as a movement in retreat. Many employers used their position of strength to impose new and more onerous terms on unionists who had taken part in the strike, and to curb the future activities of the unions. In the next few years the Council was but rarely called upon to organise support for unionists in dispute, for a strike was a very rare occurrence in Bristol.

Between the wars, the Council's attention was directed increasingly to the struggle of the unemployed. Even in 1919, at the height of the post war boom, large numbers of ex-servicemen were unable to find work. Many of them joined organisations specifically for ex-servicemen, some of which tended to blame the unions for the unemployment of their members. Craft restrictions on the number of apprentices, for example, came under attack as being allegedly practices which caused unemployment. And the continued employment of women on the trams, after the war, led to physical attacks on tramcars and the company offices by ex-servicemen demanding that these jobs be given to men. After several such attacks in April 1920 the Tramways Company agreed to the ex-servicemen's demands.[1]

The Council's attitude at this time was one of sympathy with the demand for work or for full maintenance, mixed with suspicion of the aims and methods of the ex-servicemen's organisations. During 1919 and 1920 when these bodies had leadership over the local agitation, the Council tended to hold aloof, and thus to confirm the suspicion of many ex-servicemen that the trades unions were indifferent to their cause. This attitude, however, carried with it severe dangers. At the municipal elections in 1919 the ex-servicemen's organisations put up nine candidates, eight of them in direct opposition to Labour candidates, thus threatening to split the working class vote. For the trade unions there was the very real danger, in a period of intense industrial conflict, that vast reserves of unemployed workers, hostile to the unions, might be recruited to break strikes. In fact, unionists on strike were always careful to form links with the unemployed and thus minimise the risk, but the threat remained.

1. *W.D.P.* 27-9 April, 1920.

The policy of aloofness from the struggles of the unemployed was very much that of the T.U.C. The early unemployed organisations tried repeatedly to press the T.U.C. into taking on the responsibility for directing the struggle, but without success.[1] But at a local level, aloofness was proving increasingly untenable. In 1921 unemployment increased rapidly, and trade union membership suffered. In that same year, the special post-war donation benefit was ended and the unemployed, if they were ineligible for Unemployment Insurance benefit, had to apply to the local Board of Guardians for outdoor relief. The unemployed themselves were beginning to adopt a more militant stance, demanding the raising of relief scales by the Guardians. In September 1921, after a series of demonstrations and baton charges by the police outside the Guardians offices in St. Peter's Hospital, the relief scales were raised.[2]

In 1920 and 1921 the Council began to take a more active role in the organisation of the unemployed, attempting to formulate a policy that would link them with those still in employment. A Bristol Unemployed Association affiliated to the Trades Council, was set up in 1921, and this body, although not formally under the control of the Council, did provide the vehicle by which the Council wrested control of the local unemployed movement from the militants. Its secretary, E. H. Parker, was also the Trades and Labour Council Secretary, and its organiser, J. Linton, was a former local leader of the ex-servicemen. The B.U.A., in the months and years following the violent clashes of 1920—21, steered the movement away from physical confrontation with the police and into constitutional channels. The correct way to fight unemployment, it argued, was through the ballot box by the election of a Labour Government at Westminster and a Labour Council in Bristol. Deputations to the Board of Guardians, and occasionally to the City Council, were still a feature of its work, but without the accompanying march and demonstration at the gates of St. Peter's Hospital. Indeed, one of the first demands formulated by the B.U.A. in 1921 was for the unemployed to be given the use of halls for their meetings so that they had no need to meet on the streets and so risk a clash with the police. The Guardians themselves were very grateful to the B.U.A. when in October 1922 the Board called in the police to protect their offices during a meeting, in the fear that the militants were re-establishing their influence and planning a demonstration. The Chairman of the Board hastened to express his gratitude to

1. W. Hannington. *Unemployed Struggles*, (1936).
2. *W.D.P.* 8 Sept. 1921.

Messrs. Parker and Linton who 'had been very valuable in keeping the men in check."[1] The Council was active in pressing the claims of the unemployed and in formulating schemes of work to absorb them back into employment, but in the hardening climate of retrenchment, it was able to win very few concessions. A scheme prepared by the Council to take over from the Guardians the contract for cutting a new road at Southmead, and so employ a large number of unemployed, whilst still paying full trade union rates, was turned down flat.[2]

The unemployed struggle tended to subside somewhat after 1923, though the B.U.A. and the Council continued to work together. In 1927 a major reorganisation was instituted, when the B.U.A. was taken directly under the wing of the Council. At the same time, a more precise formulation of aims was issued: the objects of the Association were stated to be 'to combine in one organisation the employed and unemployed for combatting the evils arising from unemployment, to impress upon the Government and local authorities the need for providing work, and to obtain for the unemployed persons as high a standard of living as possible, and the inauguration of schemes which will prevent the degradation of those who are workless and their dependants.'[3]

In part the Association functioned as an organising auxiliary of the trade union movement. Members were issued with a membership card, similar to any trade union "ticket", and this was interchangeable with the appropriate union card when the holder found employment. It was on this basis that the trade unions, which had long approached the question of independent unemployed organisation with considerable reserve, gave their support and financial backing to the scheme. They were well rewarded. In 1932 it was reported that the B.U.A. had, since 1927, turned over at least 700 members to local union branches.[4]

As a trade union for the unemployed, the B.U.A. sought recognition from the authorities of its right to negotiate on their behalf. This recognition was granted, and annual reports of the trades council from the period tell of the work of the Association in 'handling many hundreds of individual cases with the Public Assistance Committee, at Courts of Referees, and rent and rate cases.' A major part of its work, however, was concerned with unemployed welfare. This is reflected in the composition of its

1. *B.T.M.* 28 Oct. 1922.
2. *W.D.P.* 16 Jan. 1922.
3. *B.T.M.* 2 Feb. 1928.
4. T.U.C. *Congress Report* 1932 p. 123.

committee of management which included representatives not only of the Trades Council and the unemployed themselves, but also representatives of the Christian churches, City councillors and members of the Board of Guardians. Increasing emphasis was placed on the educational and welfare side of its work, with weekly public speaker meetings, and an annual outing for the children of the unemployed paid for by public appeal.

The scheme was very successful in enrolling the unemployed of Bristol in membership. Branches were set up in various parts of the city; within six months there were already four branches, and later more were added, including two for unemployed women. Indeed the B.U.A. was so successful that the T.U.C. considered adopting the scheme and sponsoring similar associations in other towns. At the 1928 annual Congress the General Council reported that, "Arising out of the success attained by the Bristol Trades Council in organising unemployed workers in an association under the direct auspices of the Council, the Trades Councils Joint Consultative Committee gave consideration to the possibility of extending the scheme." The General Council recommended to Congress that an experimental scheme be launched on the Bristol lines in six towns. Congress, however, was not convinced, and referred the proposal back.[1] Several Trades Councils, on their own initiative, did study the Bristol scheme and start similar associations in their towns, and in 1932 the whole question again came before the T.U.C., which agreed to take over responsibility for this type of unemployed organisation, and ratified a model constitution for the guidance of Trades Councils.[2]

The local unemployment index for the years 1928—1939 shows that even though Bristol suffered less unemployment than the national average, and certainly less than many of the northern industrial cities, the rate was high by any standard. Among insured adult male workers there was not at any time less than 10 per cent unemployment in the years 1928—1937, and during the worst years of the slump, in 1931—1933, the rate was well over 20 per cent, with a peak in March 1932 of 24.5 per cent.[3] Moreover, in 1931, with the formation of the National Government, relief scales came under attack and means tests were introduced, in an effort to cut Government expenditure. In response, the struggles of the unemployed became more intense, and the Trades Council Unemployment Association found its leader-

1. T.U.C. *Congress Report* 1929. p 111.
2. T.U.C. *Congress Report* 1932 p. 121.
3. *Ministry of Labour Statistics Division. Local Unemployment Index.*

ship of the local unemployed movement challenged with increasing success by the more militant National Unemployed Workers' Movement (N.U.W.M.). During 1932 to 1934, the latter body made the running. The unemployed again appeared on the streets in force, marches and demonstrations backing up deputations to the City Council or Public Assistance Committee (P.A.C.). In September 1931 the N.U.W.M. led a march, not to the City Council but to the T.U.C., which was meeting at the time in Bristol. The Congress, as in former years, refused to admit the deputation. Frequently these marches came into conflict with the police. Baton charges were used against the unemployed in September 1931, and on five separate occasions in 1932. *The Evening Post* described one such incident in June 1932, thus:

"DEMONSTRATORS AMBUSHED BY POLICE IN CASTLE STREET

In a police charge in Castle St. shortly before 10.30 there were seventy casualties and twenty nine people were treated for more or less serious injuries. The scene was a remarkable one. It was just between the lights and as the electric street lamps came on just after the charge was made, the street looked like a battlefield. Men lay prone in every direction and blood ran on the pavements . . .

Just what precipitated the trouble is not clear, but suddenly there emerged from side streets and shop doorways a strong body of police reinforcements with batons drawn. They set about clearing the streets. Men fell right and left under their charge, and women who had got mixed up in the crowd were knocked down by the demonstrators in the wild rush to escape. The cries of men and terrified shrieking of women added to the tumult. Then came a troop of mounted police charging through Castle St. from the Old Market End, and scattering the last of the demonstrators. In a few minutes the streets were clear, save the men who lay with cracked heads groaning on the pavements and in shop doorways where they had staggered for refuge".[1]

The Council joined in the chorus of protest from the Bristol Labour movement at this attack. But its link with the unemployed had been considerably weakened. On the one hand, the B.U.A. had to compete for leadership of the local unemployed with the N.U.W.M., an uphill task in the years 1931—1934. But also, the secretaryship of the B.U.A. had been resigned by

1. *Bristol Evening Post* (B.E.P.) 10 June 1932.

Parker in 1931 and taken over by Councillor Berriman, the secretary of the Bristol I.L.P.[1] While the Trades Council was still involved in the organisation of the unemployed, its activity on this question was increasingly a matter of political action through public protest meetings organised jointly with the Labour Party, and through the work of Labour councillors on the City Council. But the organisation of the unemployed themselves could not be ignored. It was the marches and deputations in 1932 which forced the City Council to delay the operation of the P.A.C. relief cuts for six months. The Means Test was the subject of a continuous agitation, as was the test work system — the practice of forcing the unemployed men applying for assistance to undertake test or task work, at very low wages, in order to prove their availability for employment. In August 1933, some 250 test workers took strike action.[2] The Trades Council, the B.U.A. and the N.U.W.M. were all active in organising the strike and putting pressure on the City Council to abolish the system of test work. But association with this more militant action placed the Council in something of a dilemma. The test-work strikers decided in September to send a deputation to the 1933 Trades Union Congress to demand that it support their cause. If the Council had been implicated in this action it would have come into conflict with the T.U.C. which had consistently refused to receive unemployed deputations. Rather than allow this to happen the Council's secretary abandoned the cause of the test workers and withdrew from the strike committee.[3] The strike collapsed two weeks later.

During 1934 and 1935 the B.U.A. and N.U.W.M. maintained separate agitations on the unemployment question. By this time, however, economic activity was beginning to pick up and unemployment was on the decline. The campaign in 1935 against Part II of the 1934 Unemployment Insurance Act was the last major protest by the unemployed in Bristol. In 1937 the local rate of unemployment dipped below 10 per cent and although it crept up again to over 11 per cent in mid-1938, the general trend was downwards. By June 1939 the rate had fallen to 6.3 per cent.

One of the major factors in the recovery was the pre-war rearmament, and this was particularly true of the Bristol region, with major aircraft factories situated at Filton, Patchway and Yate. These factories underwent an enormous expansion in the years immediately preceding the war, thus opening wider em-

1. *Bristol I.L.P. Mins.* May 1931.
2. *W.D.P.* 1 Aug. 1933.
3. *W.D.P.* 4 Sept. 1933.

ployment opportunities. The Council, however, believed that this employment was "necessarily of a temporary character".[1] Re-armament, moreover, implied a growing threat of war, and this threat, and the need to define its attitude to it, increasingly preoccupied the Council in the late 1930s. Ever since 1918, the Council had allied itself with anti-war groups. In August 1920, following the T.U.C.'s initiative in establishing a Council of Action to organise strikes against any attempt by the British Government to intervene in the Russo-Polish war on the side of the Poles, a Trades Council local Action Committee was set up.[2] During the 1920s the Council was an enthusiastic supporter of the League of Nations Movement and one of the main sponsors behind the Bristol No-More-War Movement, which united all pacifist and anti-war groups. Later, a Bristol Peace Council, was formed, uniting the Council with Labour, socialist, and other political and religious groups whose common denominator was aversion to war.

The victory of fascism in Italy and Germany, and its rise in Spain, was seen by the Trades Council as a clear threat to the international working class movement. It created a situation in which pacifism was seen as inappropriate. A significant section of the Bristol Labour movement advocated with increasing force from 1936 onwards an independent working class response to the fascist threat, based on a United Front of all socialist, labour and co-operative organisations. The Trades Council's 1934 Annual Report speaks of its active assistance to a movement against fascism in Britain. After the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the Council agitated on behalf of the Republican cause, and advocated that Britain should supply arms and active assistance to the Republicans. But, in line with official Labour Party and T.U.C. policy, the Council refused to associate itself with the campaign for a United Front, or with the later Popular Front campaign.

During 1938 and 1939, war seemed at all times imminent. The Trades Council's response was somewhat confused. On the one hand, it was still affiliated to the predominantly pacifist Bristol Peace Council. But on the other hand, it advocated increasingly, a firmer stand against Hitler, and an end to appeasement. When Chamberlain negotiated his notorious 'peace with honour' at Munich in September 1938, the Council unequivocally condemned the settlement as being one which would make war inevitable. A resolution passed by a full delegate meeting expressed its "ab-

1. B.T.C. *Statement of Accounts*. 1936.
2. *W.D.P.* 23 Aug. 1920.

horrence of the betrayal of Czechoslovakia by the British Prime Minister and his Cabinet" and called upon the British Labour movement "to offer every opposition to the proposed destruction of the Czechoslovakian state."[1] In the Councils view, a firm stand was necessary. Because of its absolute distrust of the Chamberlain Government especially after Munich, the Council opposed its preparations for war, such as conscription. But its opposition was somewhat equivocal, since war was clearly implicit in the Council's demand for firmer action. The alternative — an independent working class policy of opposition to fascism — was one which the Council refused to adopt.

When war was finally declared in September 1939 the Trades Council accepted the inevitability of the situation and adopted the role it had sought to perform during the First World War of watchdog over working class interests. Within days of the conflict beginning the joint executives of the Trades Council and Borough Labour Party set up Vigilance Committees in the wards and parliamentary divisions to watch out for profiteering and distress.[2] As refugees arrived from the continent the Council offered them help, collecting and distributing money. For the most part the Council continued its routine work during the war despite the destruction of its offices in an air raid in 1941. But the war also led to a shift of emphasis in its activity. On the one hand, disputes were infrequent and always unofficial, since the trade union leaders had agreed not to use the strike weapon. Unemployment all but disappeared. Trade union recruitment was important, and indeed the unions grew at a rapid rate, yet while Trades Council support was a valuable asset in any recruiting campaign undertaken by the unions, the difficulties that had previously stood in the way of union growth had been removed by wartime conditions. Hence there was very little scope for Trades Council activity in those areas which had traditionally attracted its attention.

On the other hand, trade union support for the war effort was assiduously cultivated, especially after the formation of the 'National' Government in 1940, which included Ernest Bevin as Minister of Labour. Increasingly during the war trade unionists were co-opted on to official committees to represent the trade union point of view and to tie the unions more closely to the war effort. The Council's job was to nominate suitable candidates for such posts. E. V. Rees who took over as Trades Council secretary after Parker suffered a stroke in 1942 recalls that he

1. *B.E.P.* 22 Sept. 1930.
2. Bristol South Divisional Labour Party. *Mins*. Sept. 1939.

served on no less than 22 such committees during the war. Apart from the Council's involvement in A.R.P. work and in recruiting campaigns for the forces, it was also represented on various committees set up by the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Labour, on bodies concerned with increasing production, and was involved in the mechanics of rationing. Mr. Rees, for example, was charged with the responsibility for distributing petrol rations to the trade unions in the South West Region.[1]

Doubtless it was the enhanced importance of the Council which was responsible for the increase in the proportion of local unions affiliated to it. In 1945 an unprecedentedly high 95 per cent was claimed. Announcing this at the 1945 annual meeting, the Council's President G. Bullock drew the attention of the assembled delegates of the problems and potentialities of the approaching peace, which he greeted as heralding a new era. He expressed the opinion that the coming year "might prove the most momentous in the history of mankind", for they were about to lay the foundations for a lasting peace and a social system where unemployment was abolished and poverty exterminated.[2]

Later that year Labour's landslide victory at the General Election and the winning of a Labour majority on the City Council in November 1945 seemed to offer the chance for a fulfilment of these hopes. The sweeping reforms introduced by the Attlee Government were welcomed but, inevitably perhaps, there were disappointments. Full employment was achieved but poverty was by no means exterminated, and considerable criticism was made of the policies of Sir Stafford Cripps, M.P. for Bristol East, as Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Council was especially critical of the Cripp's wage freeze of 1947. At a local level the issue that aroused most controversy within the labour movement was housing and in particular the slowness with which the Corporation tried to make good the severe post-war housing shortage, and the decision of the Labour Council in 1948 to raise Council house rents.

Since it was an integral part of the labour movement, the Council was expected to show loyalty to the policy of the Labour Party at Westminster and the labour-controlled City Council. Moreover, some of its officers and delegates were themselves councillors and therefore shared responsibility for these policies. Councillor G. Bullock, for example, who was Council President in 1944, 1945, 1949 and 1950, was also vice-chairman of

1. Conversation with the author.
2. *W.D.P.* 16 Feb. 1945.

the Housing Committee.[1] On the other hand, as the body representing the trade union wing of the movement the Council did have an independent voice, and criticism of the policies of the Labour Government was expressed through delegate meetings. Indeed, so apparently worried was the Borough Labour Party by this that at a meeting in October 1947 it dissociated itself from Trades Council criticisms which, it said, were the work of a minority of Communist delegates.[2] But, for the most part, opposition arose outside the Trades Council and the traditional channels of the labour movement. In particular, on the issue of Council house rents the campaign of opposition seems hardly to have involved the Trades Council at all and was instead led by a body known as the Bristol Council House Tenants' Defence Association.[3]

During the past quarter of a century the Trades Council has continued to be active in the role which previous developments had marked out for it. It continued to strive to maintain itself as the voice of the city's trades unionists as a whole on those matters which were not the immediate responsibility either of the individual unions or the political wing of the movement, while maintaining close relations with both. The Annual Report of 1967—1968 best expressed the Council's own view of itself and its functions by saying that it was not much concerned with the narrow area of the working day but with the "total environment affecting working people:— at work; travelling; in health and sickness; in school and in the home; in leisure and recreation." At the same time the Council has sought to act as an educational influence on its members by arranging for expert speakers to address its monthly meetings, and among a wider audience it has sought to propagate the philosophy of the trade union movement. The Bristol "T.U.C. 100 Festival" in 1968, organised by the Council in association with local unions, was nationally recognised as being one of the most successful of its kind in the country.

Organisationally speaking, however, if the Council was to command attention, as it consistently realised, it must strive to speak as the representative body of all trade unionists in the city. This meant its trying to achieve 100 per cent affiliation to it of local union branches and good attendances of delegates at monthly meetings. Success was by no means achieved in either respect. Annual Reports year after year express concern at the

1. Conversation with the author.
2. *B.E.P.* 10 Oct. 1947.
3. *W.D.P.* 8 June, 1948.

consistently low attendance of delegates, and at the dropping off in affiliations of important sections of the union movement. Branches of the A.E.U., for example, have long had a poor record in this respect. During the 1930s there were never more than two and frequently only one of the twelve or more local engineers' branches affiliated. By the 1950s this number had increased, but the eight affiliated branches of 1957 had fallen to four by 1959, despite the fact that in the major engineering dispute of 1957 the Council raised a considerable sum of money for the strikers. The number of A.E.U. branches affiliated has remained consistently low since then.[1]

In part this gap in Trades Council membership reflects changes within the trade union movement. In an earlier period it was the growth of national collective bargaining and the increasing centralisation of unions which detracted from the importance of Trades Councils. But the post-war world has witnessed the growth of increasingly powerful centrifugal forces within some unions, particularly in the engineering industry in which the workplace has replaced the geographically based branch as the centre of trade union activity, and shop-floor bargaining by shop stewards has taken over much of the work of the national negotiations. Since Trades Councils are precluded from establishing direct organisational links with shop stewards the return of collective bargaining to the workplace has not been accompanied by an enhancing of the importance of the Councils. The basis of affiliation to the Council is the union branch. Where branches are based on the workplace, as is increasingly the case in some unions, and where they maintain an active branch life, the Council is able through its affiliates to keep its links with the vital centres of trade union activity. But the decline of branch life in some unions and its replacement by workshop-based organisations with which the Council has no direct link, must ultimately detract from the importance of the Council.

Nevertheless, the continuing relevance of the Trades Council is demonstrated by the fact that it has been able to secure the affiliations of union branches, often in white-collar organisations, as these unions have themselves increasingly become affiliated to the T.U.C. The growth of white-collar trade unionism has been a striking feature of the last twenty-five years, and more and more of these organisations have expressed their identification with the working class movement by affiliating to the Trades Council. In the sixties in particular this trend brought an infusion of

1. Bristol Trades Council. Annual Reports *passim*.

new blood into the Council as, for example, teachers and workers in the media began to play a part in its affairs.

From time to time during the post-war period the Council has expressed opposition in a variety of ways to Government policies that it felt to be abhorrent. In 1956, for example, Council delegates joined with the rest of the labour movement in protesting against the invasion of Suez by British and French forces.[1] Unemployment, though for the most part not a serious threat to living standards for twenty years after the war, has recently returned to the scene, evoking memories of the 1930s, and drawing from the Council condemnations of the economic policies which it regarded as responsible for the situation. In opposition to both the Labour Government's 'In Place of Strife' legislation, and to the Industrial Relations Act, the Council joined with the whole trade union movement, and particularly in regard to the latter used its resources to explain to local trade union members the implications of this legislation for the movement.

The Council, however, has not confined its attentions to the immediate interests of local union members. Three examples from 1971 illustrate this fact. During the year the Council led a campaign in Bristol to bring to light the conditions of acute poverty and distress prevailing at a local Salvation Army hostel, and demanded better accommodation for those who were forced to rely on such facilities. At the same time, the Council provided two object lessons in international trade union solidarity. As an expression of sympathy with the plight of oppressed and poorly paid black South African coal miners, the Council used its links with local railwaymen to prevent a consignment of South African coal being imported through the port of Bristol. For this gesture of solidarity a member of the South African Congress of Trade Unions conveyed the thanks to the delegates. Later in the same year an organiser from the United Farm Workers of America (U.F.W.U.) told a monthly meeting of a strike in California of immigrant grape-pickers for union recognition and higher pay, and appealed to the Council for support. As a result a picket was placed outside a local restaurant which had trading links with the American company involved. International pressure such as this was said by the U.F.W.U., in a letter to the Council, to have contributed to the ultimate victory of the strike.

Throughout the past hundred years the Trades Council has sought to give expression to the views of trade unionists and to organise support for the members of unions involved in disputes.

1. B.T.C. *Ann. Report* 1956-7.

It is still actively trying to fulfill these functions. For years after the General Strike there were very few large scale confrontations between employers and unions and so this side of the Council's work fell largely into disuse. More recently, however, national confrontations have again dominated the headlines and several times the Council has been called on to help union members. In 1971, for example, local Post Office workers benefited from the active assistance of the Council during their stoppage. In 1972 a much more severe confrontation occurred when in July five London dockers were imprisoned for defying a judgement of the National Industrial Relations Court and it is interesting to note that it was a somewhat similar incident one hundred years ago which had called the Trades Council into existence. Within hours, in 1972, the Council had organised a protest meeting in Queen's Square, calling on the government to immediately release the dockers and on the labour movement for all possible support. That the Council acted so promptly on this occasion illustrates its continuing determination to uphold the independence of the trade union movement. Nevertheless the fact that this meeting was not well attended shows that the Council has not entirely solved the problem of how to command the attention of those very trade union members it strives to represent. For since 1945 it has certainly been active in a range of valuable, if unspectacular ways. It has shown a keen interest in occupational health problems: it was, for instance, early in the field campaigning for cervical cancer screening facilities for women workers. It has sought to safeguard the rights of young workers under day release schemes and to see that union members are properly represented before the innumerable tribunals adjudicating cases arising out of welfare legislation. In these and many other ways the Council has striven to deserve the respect of the public and the support of trade unionists: it hopes to continue to do so in the future.

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