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TRADE UNIONS IN BRISTOL

BRIAN ATKINSON



BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
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Trade Unions in Bristol c. 1860-1914 by Brian Atkinson is the fifty-first pamphlet to be published by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association. Dr. Atkinson lectures in History in the University of Kent at Canterbury and is currently engaged on a History of Bristol from 1815 to 1914.

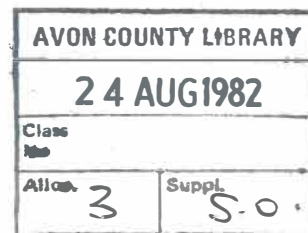
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The next pamphlet in the series will be Dr Jean Vanes' study of education and apprenticeship in sixteenth-century Bristol.

The Appeal Fund which the Branch launched at the end of 1981 in order to put the pamphlets on a sound financial basis is still open. Donations should be sent to Mrs E. Venning, Pamphlet Appeal Fund, Bristol Record Office, The Council House, Bristol BS1 5TR.

A list of pamphlets in print is given on the inside back cover. Readers are urged to place standing orders for future productions. The pamphlets may be obtained from the Porter's Lodge in the Wills Memorial Building, from the shop in the City Museum, from most Bristol booksellers or direct from Peter Harris, 74 Bell Barn Road, Stoke Bishop, Bristol 9.

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TRADE UNIONS IN BRISTOL

FROM THE 1860s TO 1914

To understand the history of Bristol trade unions it is necessary to establish the main contours of the city's economy. First, Bristol was a port whose relative lack of success led in 1848 to municipalisation. From the 1870s onwards a revival took place based largely on the import and distribution of grain. Bristol thus retained important transport functions, rail and road as well as shipping. Secondly, Bristol had been a significant manufacturing centre in the eighteenth century, but in the nineteenth many of its industries such as metal working, pottery, glass and ship-building failed to grow. There *were* developments in the second half of the century, in engineering and, especially, consumer goods, but in the main Bristol's economy tended to be dominated by small-scale concerns and to be craft, retail and service-oriented. There *was* factory production, but, apart from boots and shoes, the factory-based industries employed largely female labour in tobacco, chocolate, cotton, stationery and packaging, and women were not very active in trade union affairs. Therefore the dominant features of Bristol's economy for men were its relatively small-scale nature and its diversity. There was no single staple trade but a wide range of occupations, building, transport, boot and shoe, engineering, coal mining, docks, clerical, and this list is far from exhaustive.

By the standards of the North and Midlands, of London and South Wales, wages were low, although compared to the rural hinterland of the South-west from which Bristol drew many of its immigrants they were, of course, high. As a result, there was considerable mobility of labour. Workers came to Bristol from Somerset, Devon and Gloucestershire, the energetic often moving off again to South Wales or London, much as Ernest Bevin did, though he stayed longer than many.¹ All this

1. Even as late as 1911 over a third of Bristol's population had been born elsewhere; for adult males the fraction was undoubtedly higher.

presented problems for trade union organisers, as did the casual nature of employment on the docks and the seasonal unemployment which bedevilled building and the boot and shoe industry. Bristol trade unionism naturally shared the diversity of the economy: building and engineering provided bases for craft unionism, the gasworks and docks for the new unionism associated with 1889.

In the early part of the nineteenth century we can get only tantalising glimpses of Bristol trade unionism, such as that offered by a dispute in 1815 involving the journeymen plasterers' and painters' 'Benefit Club'. The club was financed by dues of a shilling a month and was seeking to resist an employers' attempt to reduce wages from 4s. 0d. a day to 3s. 6d. Given the unemployment and hardship of that year it probably failed. Fifty years later the economy was more prosperous and trade unions on firmer ground. A directory published in 1861 listed 25 trade societies in Bristol, namely Brushmakers, Boilermakers, Braziers, Brassfounders, Boot and Shoemakers (two branches), Bakers, Cork-cutters, Carpenters and Joiners (two branches), Coopers, Curriers, Carvers, Compositors and Printers, Amalgamated Engineers (two branches), Steam Engine Builders, Glassblowers, Hatters, Ironfounders, Painters and Plasterers, Shipwrights, Stonemasons, Sail-cloth makers, Skinners, Smiths, Tinplate Workers and Tailors. It is noticeable that all the societies were drawn from skilled trades, both new (e.g. engineering) and old, i.e. those little affected or unaffected by changes in modes of production associated with the industrial revolution, such as masons, coopers and, at this time, boot and shoemakers. The so-called 'new model' societies, charging high dues of up to a shilling a week and offering a range of benefits including funeral, sickness and strike pay, were represented by the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (A.S.C.J.) and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (A.S.E.), the latter with over 300 members. Earlier, less developed forms of craft unionism still predominated, however. Interestingly, a third of the branches enumerated were accounted for by engineering and metal working, though it seems probable that it was in building, the city's largest single industry, that unionism in the 1860s achieved greatest importance. By 1861 the Operative Stone Masons' Society (O.S.M.) had established working rules with their principal employers. They covered hours of labour: 6.00

a.m. to 5.30 p.m. in summer, with a 2.00 p.m. finish on Saturdays, light to dark in winter, inclusive of meal times. This meant the hours in summer were 57½ a week, in winter 54. Wages were £1. 10s. 0d. in summer, £1. 8s. 0d. in winter, and were to be paid at 2.00 p.m. on Saturday, and not in public houses. Overtime was to be worked only in cases of necessity and at enhanced rates. Apprentices were to be no older than 16 and to serve for five years. These rules would not apply everywhere, only in shops where the O.S.M. was established, but they acted as a guide and a magnet for those elsewhere.

Such gains as these established the Bristol lodge of the O.S.M. on a firm basis. Membership reached a plateau at a level just over 300. The wages and conditions were the best in the building trade. Yet one must not exaggerate the O.S.M.'s strength. Its membership represented only about a quarter of the masons enumerated in the city in the 1861 census; its paid-up members only about a fifth; the O.S.M. members were an élite within a craft élite. The vast bulk joined the O.S.M. for trade protection: only about a quarter paid into the sick fund. The rest may have belonged to friendly societies and got their security from illness from there. They did not get it from the O.S.M.

By the 1860s, then, trade societies had established themselves in several crafts. They organised only a minority of the better-paid artisans whose privileges they aimed to protect, if necessary, aggressively. They did not co-operate for trade purposes outside their crafts, although they would aid one another financially during disputes. They embraced only a small minority of Bristol workers, but their importance outweighed their membership, for they gave a lead within their crafts which the non-society men would often follow and they set a standard which non-society men would seek to attain. There was no clear gulf or demarcation between the unionist and the average non-unionist. Indeed the unionist might in bad times fail to maintain his contributions and lapse, and the non-unionist in good times might join the union. To this extent they were interchangeable. The unionists, as politicians recognised, could give a lead to the unorganised who might follow the example and opinions of their working class 'betters', and the trade unions provided the working class organisation most able to respond to the changed political and economic circumstances of the later 1860s.

The early 1870s saw a false dawn in the Bristol labour movement. Politically, various ephemeral organisations raised the banner of independent working class representation, and industrially, responding to the economic boom, there were the beginnings of unionism among the unskilled. Yet the most powerful societies remained those in the building trade, and their unions were certainly no mere glorified benefit societies. Four times in the eleven years after 1868 they were involved in serious disputes. Only with the onset of depression were tactics changed to meet new circumstances.

TABLE 1
Industrial conflict in the Bristol
Building Industry 1868-79

<i>Year</i>	<i>Union(s) involved</i>	<i>Numbers involved</i>	<i>Length of dispute</i>	<i>Aim</i>	<i>Cost to union</i>
1869	O.S.M.	123	2 weeks	Resist attack on working rules	£115
1873	G.U.:A.S.C.J.	293	over 3 months	Secure ½d. an hour advance	£1,333
1876	O.S.M.	349	2 weeks	Secure ½d. an hour advance	*
1879	O.S.M.:G.U.: A.S.C.J.	606	O.S.M. 1 month G.U., A.S.C.J. 3 months	Resist ½d. an hour reduction unsuccessful	£2,600

** It has not proved possible to ascertain the cost of this dispute.*

Table 1 understates the importance of the strike weapon in that it takes no account of the occasions on which unions threatened a strike but had no need to carry out their threat. A fairer test of their militancy is to look at the gains they achieved. The carpenters secured reductions in working hours in 1869, 1872 and 1875, bringing them down from 57½ per week in summer, 54 in winter, to 54 and 48 respectively, and they obtained increases in wages in 1869, 1872, 1873 and 1875 pushing the hourly rate up from 6d. to 7½d. The masons were no less successful and achieved a rate of 8d. an hour in 1876.

The unions were increasing in strength. The General Union of Carpenters (G.U.) had 513 members in 1878 as against 356 ten

years earlier; the A.S.C.J. 172 as against 61. The O.S.M. likewise grew, passing the thousand-member mark in 1875. The societies used their increased strength to push up the wages of their members and to reduce their hours of work.

Underpinning this situation was prosperous trade which enabled the unions to ease pressure on their funds when a dispute broke out by sending striking members away to seek work elsewhere. In the masons' conflict of 1876, for example, some 200 of the 350 strikers left Bristol within a week and scattered to places as far afield as London and Bradford in search of jobs. With the onset of depression, the position of the craft societies changed for the worse. Employers were not so worried by the threat to strike, and the men, both society and non-society, were less willing to come out in case they did not regain their jobs when they had little prospect of finding others. Union headquarters found it harder to supply strike payments when there were so many other claims on the funds.

The impact of the depression, coupled with the defeat of 1879, was reflected in the membership figures. The G.U. collapsed from 513 in 1878 to 163 in 1881; by 1889 it was down to 42. Its decline was to some extent the product of competition from the A.S.C.J., which managed to increase its membership from 172 in 1878 to 192 in 1881 and 216 in 1889. The O.S.M. however, like the G.U., declined, losing two of its six Bristol district lodges by 1881.

It was the 1880s which gave the craft unions their reputation for pacifism and, so far as Bristol was concerned, it was a policy well suited to the times. The defeat of 1879 had provided a lesson which it would have been useless to forget: in times of depression it paid to let sleeping dogs lie. And the Bristol employers, if not asleep, at least showed forbearance. Although they succeeded in reducing the masons to the level of the rest of the trade by enforcing a ½d. an hour cut in 1882, they pressed no further attack.

Another aspect of the intense union activity of the 1870s was the foundation of new societies, including a labourers' union, the Bristol, West of England and South Wales Trade and Provident Society (T. & P.). The driving force behind the new body was T.M. Kelly, an Irishman and one-time building labourer. He

received assistance from established local union leaders such as John Cawsey, of the Trades Council, and John Fox, secretary of the plasterers. When the union held its first conference in July 1873 it claimed 2,000 members in Bristol, Bath, Weston, Clevedon, Newport and Cardiff. The primacy of Bristol, with 800 members, was recognised by making it the seat of the executive. A system of benefits, comprising strike pay (12 shillings a week), sickness and accident pay (10 shillings) and burial grant (£8), was established, and Kelly was elected general secretary. Dues were 3d. a week and membership was open to all labourers.

The union grew rapidly. By 30 October it included building labourers, deal and timber porters, sugar labourers, potters, stone sawyers, dock labourers, warehousemen and tanners, and several wage increases had been obtained. Three months later there were said to be 46 branches with 10,000 members spread through the South-west and South Wales. Difficulties were being experienced, however, with members leaving the union as soon as better conditions had been achieved. The dues had to be raised to 4d. a week, a sum still much below the rates charged by craft societies, and in the same year Kelly was replaced as general secretary by Fox.

In 1874 a decline in trade set in, although building was not affected for another four years. The T. & P. attempted to take advantage of this situation. In 1875 it demanded an extra ½d. an hour for Bristol building labourers, accepted arbitration and received ¼d. for the summer only, making 4¾d. the year round. The following year, after a fortnight's strike by 600 men, a further ½d. was secured. This was the last success. A cautious policy became necessary and wage reductions had to be accepted. Over the ten years from 1880 to 1889 only £112 was disbursed from the strike fund, less than one-seventieth of the expenditure in sick and accident benefit.

The union survived because it brought a friendly society approach to labourers, giving them sick benefit and a cautious policy suited to hard times, similar to that which the craft unions were themselves adopting. When faced with trade depression, it accepted reductions without fighting, thus learning the same lesson as the craftsmen without paying the price. But, like the craft unions, it paid another price; caution, once a necessity, became a principle, and in 1889 Fox had not even a reflected share in the glory won by another Bristolian, Tillett.

There were other new unions beside the labourers: the railway-men and boot and shoemakers were beginning to organise, and there were ephemeral unions of miners and working women. A Trades Council, too, was founded in 1873, its inspiration and first president being John Cawsey.

The end of the 1880s saw a massive change in Bristol trade unionism. The first signs occurred among the boot and shoe workers, where membership grew from 276 in 1886 to 642 in June 1889. Wage increases were sought factory by factory with strikes when necessary, even against the instructions of the union.

The seamen, too, organised. In February 1889 Havelock Wilson's National Amalgamated Seamen's and Firemen's Union opened a branch which soon recruited 100 members. The miners were next. The years 1888 and 1889 were times of great decision in the coalfields as the workers came together to form the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (M.F.G.B.). In the summer of 1889, the Bristol miners invited William Whitefield, a Northumbrian, to be their agent and help them secure the ten per cent pay increase which the miners nationally had demanded. Whitefield was successful, and the Bristol Miners' Association joined the M.F.G.B. Membership grew to 2,000 by September 1889.

Thus there were signs of change in Bristol trade unionism before the last quarter of 1889. As well as the seamen and the miners, the gasworkers had an association, going back to 1888, which in the summer of 1889 amalgamated with the London gasworkers. There was also a change in atmosphere, with more militant leaders emerging. But it was the impact of the London Dock Strike which provided the final impetus.

With the strike a fortnight old, the Bristol Gasworkers organised a procession to gather funds for the London dockers. Hugh Holmes Gore, a Socialist solicitor from a prominent local Tory family, was among the speakers: 'He thought it was the duty of the Bristol workmen to remember that the London labourers were fighting a battle the same as Bristol men would be fighting later on (applause).' Robert Gray Tovey, clothier's cutter, elected in 1887 by St Paul's ward as Labour's first city councillor, waxed emotional: 'He did not know that in the whole course of his life he had experienced such intense satisfaction by standing upon any platform to address anyone as he did that day.'²

2. *Western Daily Press*, 2 September 1889.

The contagion spread to Bristol before the end of the London dispute. On 12 September some 200 men at Lysaghts' Galvanising Iron Works went on strike and within a few days socialists, gasworkers and Trades Council members sprang to their assistance. By the 20th the men had won and, a few days later, a similar victory was gained at the Redcliff Galvanising Iron Works. Out of these disputes rose the Galvanised Iron Workers' Union, which affiliated to the Gasworkers. A Strike Organisation Committee was also formed to assist unorganised workers.

A much more important dispute now broke out among the gasworkers. There were 250 stokers, 100 wheelers and 250 yard men in the union, and wage increases all round were demanded. The stokers wanted 8½d. a day more to bring them up to five shillings; the wheelers wanted £1. 8s. a week instead of £1. 3s. 4d. and the yard men £1. 1s. instead of 17s. 9d. The company refused.

The union had prepared well. Promises of co-operation had been extracted from the lamplighters and factory workers; a deputation had been sent to organise the Bath gasworkers, and the secretary of the Liverpool Seamen had been asked to inform Bristol if any blacklegs were dispatched from there. In addition, a full system of picketing was worked out.

The strike began on 9 October. It was brilliantly effective. The pickets received support from a wide range of workers, and it was impossible for labour to be brought into the city without it being known. The company imported 120 men from Exeter, who arrived at Temple Meads railway station at 5.30 p.m. Under strong police escort they were driven off in cabs towards the Avon Street gasworks through hostile demonstrators. They never got there. The narrow street approaching St Philip's Marsh Bridge was blocked by carts, and the bridge itself was a seething mass of people. The police were too few, and a combination of moral and physical force emptied the cabs. Most of the Exeter men got back to Temple Meads, where they were locked in a waiting room to await transport home. By 7.30 p.m. the station was in the hands of an immense mob and although 50 gasworkers from Frome got through, 150 others were sent away.

Success was now assured. Deprived of workmen the company could not maintain the supply of gas. At a conference between the men and the directors (significantly at the police station), a settlement was agreed, and by 2 p.m. the next day all was over.

The men had won a complete victory and were even allowed to consume the provisions laid in for the blacklegs who never arrived.

The victory demonstration, organised by the Trades Council, the gasworkers and the socialists, represented nearly all the trades of the city. Ten thousand people took part. A new confidence was apparent as Vicary, the gasworkers' leader, expounded their duty: 'With the combination of the workers, capital must give way. Anything and everything they saw around them was produced by the workers, and if they produced all they ought to have a share in all . . . The few were rich and getting richer, and the many were poor and getting still poorer; and that must be altered.'³

The next important dispute was the sudden and unprepared strike by the dock labourers. On 21 October they demanded and obtained the 'dockers' tanner' instead of the previous 5d. an hour, but they then realised that they had overlooked the question of overtime. Their claim for 8d. an hour for that, as in London, was refused, whereupon they struck. The deal runners then came out for shorter hours and five shillings a day, an advance of 6d. By 23 October 400 cornporters were out as well. Vicary and Gore now joined in the task of organisation and eventually solidarity enabled all three groups to secure their aims. The dispute had involved 2,300 men and 40 employers, of whom the largest was Bristol Corporation with over a third of the total labour force.

The dockers' success was celebrated in a labour demonstration on 26 October featuring the national leaders, Tom Mann, Will Thorne and Ben Tillett, and witnessed by some 15,000 people. The new unions, the bootworkers and the bricklayers provided the bulk of the procession, the socialists the bulk of the platform party.

The Bristol dockers joined Tillett's union and organised well. By 23 November they were strong enough to strike in support of a closed shop and against the practice of allowing foreign seamen to unload ships. They were only partly successful, but the episode was a tribute to the strength and organising ability of the union.

A considerable number of smaller agitations swept Bristol during the last week of October 1889 and continued into

3. *Western Daily Press*, 14 October 1889.

November. Oil cake millers, sawyers, cotton operatives, tobacco workers, carters, warehousemen, scavengers, brushmakers, hatters, tailoresses, cigar and pipe makers, oil and colour mixers and charcoal workers were all affected. Perhaps only 50 or 100 people took part in any one of these disputes, except for the cotton workers who numbered over a thousand, but the fact that so many different occupations were involved spread the effects of agitation further than ever before. All these trades were unorganised; in many female labour predominated. In such circumstances the Strike Organisation Committee was vital. This body was composed largely of socialists, many of them practised public speakers, many of them middle-class, whose command over their time enabled them to take leading roles. The socialists were important in the success of new unionism in Bristol. Radicals, too, played a part, particularly Gilmore Barnett, who commented that 'his Liberalism led him to believe there was a great work to be done among the unionists',⁴ but they were fewer than the socialists and not as prominent.

Bristol trade unionism was greatly strengthened by the events of 1889. Four new organisations had been founded, Seamen, Miners, Dockers and Gasworkers. In March 1890 the last-named had 3,385 members, of whom the Bristol gasworkers accounted for 794, the cotton workers, 1,379. The rest included chemical workers, galvanisers, tanners, potters, spelter workers, street cleaners, and building labourers. The 'Bristol, Avonmouth and Portishead district of the Dockers' Union claimed 2,544 members in March 1890. If the Seamen are estimated at 600 and the Miners at 3,400, approximately 10,000 Bristolians were enrolled in 1890 in unions which had not existed two years earlier.

This increase in strength was not confined to new organisations. Fox's union boasted 4,121 members in 1890 as against 2,760 in 1889, and the Bootworkers also enjoyed considerable growth. Greater strength boosted the confidence of the working class and its leaders in both political and industrial spheres. But industrially the response was surprisingly conservative. The new unions had been created as fighting organisations, but as early as 1890 they switched their emphasis from strikes to conciliation. The Gasworkers entered into co-operation with the management, drawing up for its acceptance a plan for the running of the

concern. In September 1890 the Gasworkers and Seamen joined a board of conciliation and arbitration set up for the city. Of the important associations only the Miners and Dockers held aloof and by 1892 both had changed their minds. The unions' acceptance of conciliation did not mean the absence of disputes. The years 1892 and 1893 were among the most troubled in the history of industrial relations in Bristol. But none of these disputes was entered into by the men's leaders as an act of deliberate choice.

The first of these disputes broke out in September 1892 over union recognition at a Confectionary Works. About a hundred workers were involved, and the conflict was initiated by the employer, J.A. Sanders. The affair was given wider significance by the actions of the police who, in marked contrast to their quiescence in 1889, intervened to protect those who remained at work. The situation was complicated by a dispute in the docks. Some deal runners struck against the employment of outside labour and, although the union ordered them back, the Timber Importers' Association seized the opportunity to lock out the entire body of deal runners, some 400 men, in order to enforce the reintroduction of the old piece-work system. They came to terms with Graeme Hunter, a supplier of 'free labour', and by 22 November he had provided 60 men. Henceforth the police were engaged in protecting Hunter and his workers, and the courts were continually dealing with strikers on charges of intimidation.

The dockers now joined the confectionary workers in their weekly demonstrations. Police presence at these meetings fanned the workers' bitterness and led their leaders to use language which they might otherwise not have employed. At a meeting on 18 December, Tillett had the crowd take an oath 'to use action, violent or pacific, in defence of our homes, wages and interests', and went on to refer to the Bristol riots of 1831 and to threaten revolution.⁵ The consequences of this were revealed on Friday, 23 December.

The strike committee had decided to organise a procession through the streets of the city, hoping to raise money to give the strikers a little extra for Christmas. The shopkeepers, seriously concerned at the prospect of their trade being affected, appealed to the police for protection. The Chief Constable had insufficient men at his disposal, so military support was requested. On the

4. *Western Daily Press*, 5 February 1890.

5. *Bristol Mercury*, 10 January 1893.

evening of 22 December 200 mounted troops arrived in the city. The Chief Constable intended to enforce his decision that the processionists should march along a route, which he laid down, avoiding the centre of the city. The strike committee, though 'sincerely desirous of preserving the peace of the city . . . will give way only when a stronger force than our own is pitted against us, and then only with strong protest.'⁶ The bulk of the demonstrators, with some police encouragement, kept to the prescribed route, but some escaped and attempted to force a way through the police cordon at Bristol Bridge. During the mêlée several policemen were hurt. Meanwhile the main part of the procession, variously estimated at between 10 and 30,000 strong, had reached the Haymarket, where they were occupied between 8 and 9.30 p.m. in listening to speeches moderate in tone. Within five minutes of the speeches ending the Dragoons moved in to clear the square. Lingerers were 'prodded' with the butt ends of lances. By 10.30 p.m. all was calm. Fifty-seven civilians were hurt during the course of the evening, but none were detained in hospital. Fifty-one police were also injured. The only damage reported was a broken window at the Trades Council Headquarters.

'Black Friday', as the *Bristol Mercury* termed it, gave a valuable memory to the cause of labour representation, a memory kept green until well into 1893 by the trials of Tillett and others, as well as by the continuation of the strikes which had led to the unrest. The weekly demonstrations continued, but everything was eclipsed by the massive gathering of Saturday 4 February. Fifty trades, including all the important ones of the city, skilled and unskilled, and some 30,000 people, Londoners and South Welshmen among them marched in procession along a route laid down by the police, avoiding the narrow streets of the old city.

After this, however, enthusiasm waned. The removal of Tillett's trial to London on the plea that he would not get a fair hearing in Bristol deprived the organisers of a star attraction. His acquittal and the judge's reference to the mild nature of the disorders of 'Black Friday' were useful propaganda for the politicians, but of little material advantage to the strikers.

The dockers' resistance was weakening. Union finances were sapped by the Hull dispute in April 1893. The timber merchants

made it clear that they were not going to give way, so the men's defeat was only a matter of time. On 26 June Hunter's contract expired and his services could be safely dispensed with. Union men and 'free labourers' were working together amicably though the union had not sanctioned a return to work. The timber importers had re-established the old contract and piece-work system and vindicated their claim to employ whom they wished. The confectionary strike had been no more successful. After 26 weeks the impossibility of getting the union established at Sanders' was recognised and the girls were found jobs elsewhere.

There were several reasons why the workers were less successful than they had been in 1889. Trade was depressed. The fevered atmosphere which had promoted solidarity among the workers and led the employers to make hasty concessions, which they afterwards regretted, no longer existed. The employers, on the other hand, enjoyed a high degree of organisation, enabling them to raise a force of 'free labourers'. They also had police support.

The early 1890s were a troubled time, too, for the boot and shoe industry, both in Bristol and nationally. There were disputes in Bristol in 1889, 1890 (when 10,000 operatives were locked out for a month), and 1892 (when 15,000 were locked out), culminating in the national lock out of 1895 when the union was badly beaten. Membership in Bristol and Kingswood had risen to over 3,000 in 1894 and 1895, but after the defeat of the latter year it declined to under 700 ten years later. After a brief period of importance, when their conflicts did much to develop the labour movement in East Bristol, the bootworkers sank back into a comparative insignificance ill-befitting their numbers. Technological backwardness in the local industry, allied to the large numbers of outworkers and women, made the task of their union hard.

The miners, too, had their troubles. Wages in the field were notoriously low. Whitefield contrasted the average Bristol wage of 3s. 6d. for an eight hour shift with Northumberland's 5s. 9d. for seven and a half hours. But the position of the owners was no better: it was claimed in 1893 that only one company had paid any dividend to shareholders in preceding years, and even its average for 1887-93 was only 3½ per cent after seven years with no return at all.

Whitefield was able to secure nationally-agreed percentage

6. *Western Daily Press*, 23 December 1892.

increases, but the policy of keeping wages high hit the uneconomic Bristol pits, especially as in South Wales pay was tied to the price of coal by a sliding scale. The preservation of national percentage increases meant little when short-time and unemployment undermined earnings.

The association was weakened by a 15 months long dispute at the Malago Vale pit involving 300 workers. Pressure on the funds was intensified in 1892 when another company dismissed 200 men, a quarter of its labour force, and put the rest on short-time. In March 1893 it closed down altogether. Under such circumstances Whitefield modified his position. Opponent of arbitration in 1890, he offered it, unsuccessfully, in the Malago dispute in 1892.

The Bristol miners and their union were thus financially weakened when the 1893 national lock-out came upon them, but they held firm, though strike pay fell to 2s. 6d. a week, until the national agreement was reached in November. Charity and, in Bedminster at least, poor law relief, helped, but hardship was inevitable. Yet there was no violence, in contrast to the dockers' dispute of the previous year.

The Gasworkers and Dockers managed to survive because they could rely on certain strongholds to see them through difficult periods. Two-thirds of the Gasworkers' Bristol membership in 1890 were in gas and cotton. From this base the union attempted to organise a wide range of workers – 25 trades enjoyed its ministrations in the years 1889 to 1895 – but with scant success. Membership declined to about 2,000 in the mid-1890s and although there was a recovery to perhaps 2,500 in 1900, it was back to about 1,250 by 1905. Dependence on the gasworkers increased with the decline of the cotton operatives' branch, though the building labourers provided a second resource from 1898 to 1903. Relations in the gasworks remained friendly. In 1897, when the union was pressing for a wage increase, the chairman of the meeting addressed by Thorne in support of the claim referred to the directors of the concern as 'men of understanding, sympathy and judgement'.⁷ Such tactics produced some concessions but not the wage increase. In 1900 the management responded with more 'sympathy' to another bid and gave a 3d. a day increase all round. In 1905, however, the company struck the



Ernest Bevin's membership certificate in the Dockers' Union. The original in splendid colours is in the Bevin Collection at Transport House.

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7. *Bristol Mercury*, 4 December 1897.

BRISTOL BRANCH
OF THE
Provincial Typographical Association.
TO THE JOBBING HANDS.

GENTLEMEN, A Letter has been received from Manchester containing the following resolution of the Council, namely:—

“Whilst sympathising with the Members of the Bristol Branch in their efforts to obtain an Advance of Wages, the Executive is of opinion that, considering the general slackness of Trade, and other things peculiar to Bristol, it is not advisable to push matters to extremities at present; but the Council is prepared at the earliest opportune moment to render the Branch all the assistance in its power.”

This resolution was taken into consideration by the Delegates on Saturday Evening, the 13th inst., when the following resolution was passed:—

“That the opinion of the Jobbing Hands be taken by Voting Papers, whether a fortnight's notice be tendered by the Society Hands or not. The Secretary to communicate the result to Manchester.”

I have, therefore, to request that you will vote on the above resolution, and return this Voting Paper not later than Two o'Clock, on Thursday, the 18th inst., at the Library, Maryleport Street. The Letter from Mr. SLATTERY will be on the Library Table for inspection by all who may wish to see it.

It is important that you should Vote.

FOR STRIKING AT ONCE.	AGAINST.
<i>the result being</i>	
<i>23 for</i>	<i>10 against</i>
<i>5 neutral</i>	

For my guidance and to enable me to be prepared with all information, please let me know the wages you are at present receiving, and the hours per week that you work.

Your obedient Servant,
J. E. SHELLARD.

Mr. _____

Name _____

Office _____

Wages _____ Hours _____

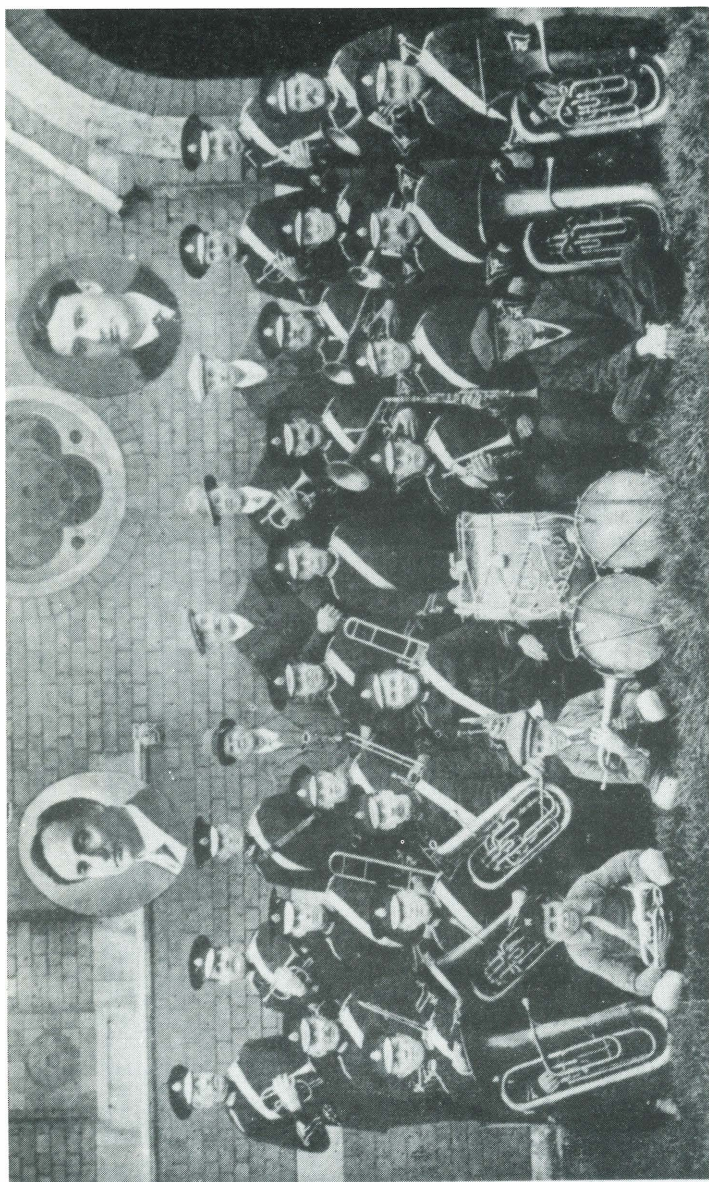


Discharging a banana boat at Avonmouth Dock, Bristol, 23 July 1910. The illustration shows the method of “one man per stem” for taking the cargo from the holds to the railway vans.

From the Ethel Thomas Avonmouth Collection

Result of a strike ballot, June 1876

From the minutes of the Association, Bristol Record Office 34463/2



Avonmouth and Shirehampton Labour Band with insets of Ben Tillet and Ernest Bevin.

From the Ethel Thomas Avonmouth Collection

branch a body blow by introducing machinery.

By then, the Gasworkers had managed to re-establish themselves at the cotton works, giving themselves another base to fall back on. The cotton operatives' branch, with bitter memories of the strike of 1889, was more militant. As soon as the union had been refounded in the factory in 1904 a dispute broke out, resulting in the recovery of a five per cent reduction. The union thus showed its willingness to fight where fighting could not be avoided and where a branch had to be re-established.

The building labourers presented a more complex organisational challenge: the members were not confined to one large concern. The labourers followed a simple membership pattern: growth 1898 to 1900, and then steady decline almost to nothing by 1906. They were not as well placed as the craftsmen to withstand depression.

The Dockers' Union organised a wide range of waterfront labour, deal runners, grain porters, stevedores, lightermen and general cargo handlers. Membership seems to have reached a peak in 1891, when it stood at about 2,500. Thereafter it declined, especially when the deal runners' stoppage took effect. In 1895 it was down to about 1,250, and it continued to fall, probably to no more than 800 ten years later. This core consisted largely of cornporters who enjoyed greater security than the rest of the dock labour force. The union continued to operate on a basis of industrial peace. In the 12 years between 1895 and 1906 dispute pay for the Bristol district did not amount to £50 (excluding a strike at Lysaghts' in 1904 which cost £240 and provided a rare example of the Dockers imitating the Gasworkers in seeking to extend their range of activities). In 1900 the union developed its belief in peace into a system, concluding an arbitration agreement for Bristol docks providing for a wage increase for all classes of docker, the setting up of conciliation boards, the enforcement of agreed rates, the recognition of the union, and the curtailment of reckless action by establishing a guarantee fund to make breaches of arbitration procedures costly. The new system worked well, producing speedier settlement of disputes and, according to the *Dockers' Record*, promoting better understanding between employers and men.

The one exception among the non-craft societies to the story of decline was the least militant of all, the T. & P. Growth was steady, the only setback being in 1893, possibly as a result of the

timber dispute. Expansion was particularly marked after 1895, the number of members trebling in the five years up to 1900. By this time the union was twice as large as Tillet's Dockers and just over half the size of the Gasworkers. Its income was even greater in proportion, for its members paid on average £1. 5s. 4d. a head a year compared with the Gasworkers' 10s. 1d. and the Dockers' 14s. 3d. Much of this expansion after 1890 took place on the South Wales coalfield, and less rapidly, in the South-west of England.

It is necessary to ask how far by 1889 the T. & P. can be considered a trade union. Its secretary thought it was, in the past it certainly had been, and it was affiliated to the Trades Council, but its detractors referred to it as a friendly society, and this aspect of its activities was the most prominent in the 1890s and 1900s. In a typical year, 1899, the union spent £13,600 on sick and accident benefit, £1,300 on funeral pay, £3,500 on working expenses and £7 on disputes.

The T. & P. presents an extreme version of the usual caricature of the pacifist-minded, benefit-ridden craft society. Like the craft societies, it enjoyed prolonged growth during this period. It appealed to workers who may have belonged to more active unions for industrial purposes but who desired the superior benefit facilities offered by the T. & P. Its appeal was to people seeking not militancy but sound finance, and judged by its rapid expansion its services were more popular than those of the new unions, more popular even than those of the craft societies.

The craft unions responded to the rhythms of their own industries rather than to the impact of 1889. Building enjoyed a period of boom from the late 1880s through until 1901, with something of a set-back in 1894-5. Membership of the unions benefited: the A.S.C.J. enjoyed continuous growth from 1889, when it had 216 members, until 1900, when it had 771. Depression caused decline, but a new peak was reached in 1904, 815 members. Even the General Union, which stagnated at around 40 members until 1896, reached 170 in 1904. The O.S.M. however, had passed its peak: in the 1890s its membership remained reasonably constant at about 290. It had been overtaken by the Bricklayers, who did not organise in Bristol until 1884, but who rose from 61 members in 1887 to 741 in 1900. The Bricklayers took over some of the

O.S.M.'s reputation for militancy, but generally speaking, the building unions pursued their aims through conciliation and arbitration. They no longer needed strikes to persuade the employers to do business with them as they had in the 1870s and as others still did in the 1890s.

The main developments were directed towards increasing the sophistication of the negotiating machinery: the 1890 agreement set up a board of conciliation and arbitration to deal with disputes arising from the operation of the working rules, and even the Stonemasons, Bricklayers and the Gasworkers' Union (which represented the building labourers) came into line. It was still open to a union to give the prescribed notice and terminate the agreement altogether, thus regaining its freedom to strike. However, only the Stonemasons and Bricklayers showed any desire to do so, and strikes in 1892 and 1898 brought them little benefit.

In the 25 years after 1889 the building unions obtained wage advances of ½d. an hour in 1890, 1892, 1898, 1900, 1912 and 1914. The working week was reduced by four hours. Thus in 1914 a carpenter, for example, worked a 50 hour week in summer, 44 hours in winter, his rate of 10d. an hour bringing him £2. 1s. 8d. in summer, £1. 16s. 8d. in winter. A building labourer earned 7d. an hour.

The final development in Bristol trade unionism before 1914 came with the national upsurge of militancy in the years preceding the First World War. It was the growth in membership associated with this burst of activity which firmly established the new unions of 1889. The transport industry was particularly affected. Within Bristol the lead was taken by the Dockers' Union. This is perhaps surprising, given the greater militancy over the years of the Gasworkers, but there had long been an undercurrent of rank and file discontent with the moderation of the Dockers' leaders, and in 1910 this discontent burst forth.

The first dispute in 1910 was imported from Newport, where Houlder Brothers were engaged in a struggle. Houlders' diverted one of their ships to Avonmouth, where the dockers refused to handle it. Subsequently the dispute escalated to involve over 1,000 men and, since local officials remained loyal to the 1900 arbitration agreement, an unofficial strike committee was formed. The Docks Committee retaliated by importing 'free labourers' under the auspices of the Shipping Federation, and the

dispute thereupon spread to the City Docks and to the shunters, fitters and engineers employed by the Committee at Avonmouth. Police were called in and some violence occurred. Eventually, with Tillett and the Trades Council exercising a moderating influence, a settlement was reached. The terms were not particularly beneficial to the strikers: Shipping Federation labour was to be withdrawn, but the original point at issue was referred to arbitration which decided against the men. However, the men regarded the settlement as a victory: 'Hilarious delight of the Dock Workers', was one headline in the *Times and Mirror*.

The dispute is interesting for several reasons. First, its scale: 3,000 men were eventually involved, the largest dispute in the city since the 1890s. Secondly, the initiative was taken by the rank and file, non-union as well as union, and the leaders, local and national, had great difficulty regaining control. Moreover, the dispute radicalised the rank and file, especially as they regarded it as a victory; it gave them a sense of their power, and socialist speakers were quick to capitalise on it. And this rank-and-file militancy was indigenous to Bristol. Though the dispute had its origins in Newport, the Newport delegation preached moderation and joined the local officials in the early unsuccessful bids to get the men back: 'they had not come to incite them or get them to throw bombs', one of them said.⁸ Newport merely acted as a catalyst to already simmering discontent. Thirdly, the solidarity of the men was impressive, initially their solidarity with Newport, and later, the solidarity of other workers in the docks, railwaymen and engineers, with the dockers.

These features – rank-and-file initiative, sympathetic action on a large scale, and violence – were to become characteristic of the more famous disputes of 1911, at Liverpool especially, but Bristol in 1910 had anticipated these developments. The cause was not socialist or syndicalist propaganda, which had barely got under way by June 1910, though propagandists took advantage of the disputes once they had arisen, but a long-term build-up of frustration which burst out in an almost blind hostility at a time of recovering trade and when the development of Avonmouth had given the men a sense of their importance. The union benefited greatly. Membership increased, especially at Avonmouth and among the carters, hundreds of whom were employed in and

around the port. The chairman of the carters' branch was Ernest Bevin, who thus began an association with the union which was to take him from his Bristol mineral-water round to the Foreign Office in London.

The union's total membership in Bristol grew further as a result of another period of conflict in 1911. The Seamen's strike, which sparked off a national wave of disputes on the waterfront, had little impact on Bristol. Only five companies regularly signed on crews in the city and within a fortnight all but one had agreed to give their men an extra ten shillings a month. The strike continued, however, in the Bristol Steam Navigation Co. line and sparked off sympathy strikes among some of the dockers. The failure of some employers to honour the Carters' agreement, which came into force on 1 July, led to further trouble with several hundred dockers refusing to load carts for the firms involved. By the end of July, however, these disputes seemed to be dying down as local union officials resumed control.

However, in the first week of August a wage claim by goods workers employed by the G.W.R. led to a conflagration. The men struck; those on the Midland Railway declined to join them, which led to some riotous picketing outside St Philip's Goods Station until the national railway strike brought the Midland out as well. The dockers came out in support of the G.W.R. men – the decision was taken by the rank and file who, having determined to remain out until the railwaymen were satisfied, proceeded to formulate demands of their own, in line with advice they had been given at a mass meeting a fortnight earlier addressed by Thorne and Tillett. The dockers proceeded to call out the carters and in all 6,000 men, excluding the railwaymen, were affected. The dispute spread to some factories and even to miners at two collieries in east Bristol, no doubt to the chagrin of Whitefield, who in the previous month had condemned the Cambrian strikers in South Wales and urged his Bristol members not to act similarly.

Troops were deployed to guard railway installations, and they fired over the heads of a crowd attacking a signal box at Bedminster Down, but there was little violence compared to Hull, Liverpool, or South Wales. The railwaymen went back as part of their national settlement; the dockers returned too, after a week or so, on terms arranged by a joint conciliation committee. The first clause concerned union recognition, which was

8. *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 23 June 1910.

accorded; the second promised no victimisation; the third, legal immunity on this occasion; the fourth, wage increases, the day rate up ½d., from 6½d. to 7d. an hour, the night rate up 1d., from 9d. to 10d., a third of what the men had claimed.

The miners, meanwhile, no doubt observing the dockers' success, struck in support of an increase in the base rate, upon which percentage increases were calculated, seeking to gain what the Somerset men had just achieved. Interestingly, the lead was taken by non-unionists who were said to number 40 per cent of the labour force, and Whitefield was denounced for his moderation. Some success was achieved, but only after 2,000 men had been out from 4 September to 15 November, a loss of over 101,000 working days as against the 30,000 in the dock dispute. Subsequently the miners were able to benefit from the boom in the coal trade and by 1913 their wages stood at 55 to 60 per cent over the standard of 1889, as against 30 to 35 per cent in 1906. However, in 1914 four of the six local pits (Parkfield, Speedwell, Hanham and Deep Pit) closed down and they were reopened only after the Bristol miners had agreed that all disputes should go to arbitration and to set up a guarantee fund to compensate the owners in the event of the men breaking the agreement. The men affected numbered 2,000, of whom 75 per cent were union members, a marked improvement on three years earlier.

By contrast, 1911 represented the high water mark of the Dockers' achievements in Bristol, for although the following year they distinguished themselves by being one of the few ports to come out in support of the London dock strike, they went back after only three days, realising the cause was hopeless and anxious to avoid retaliation by the employers, which they successfully did.

The events of 1910-14 changed the emphasis in Bristol trade unionism. The main beneficiaries were the transport unions, particularly the Dockers. By 1914, the union had established a virtual monopoly in all sections of waterfront labour and it had moved beyond the waterfront organising brickyard workers as far afield as Almondsbury and Mangotsfield, as well, of course, as carters. (Carters and brickyard workers often sought employment on the docks during slack times). It is worth noting that 1910, as well as seeing the upsurge of militancy at the docks, also witnessed the beginnings of a great expansion in trade at Avonmouth as the Royal Edward Dock began to attract the large

liners for which it had been built. This may have increased the men's work-load; it certainly brought home to them their increased bargaining power.

The newly-founded National Union of Railwaymen was also expanding rapidly, from 1,853 members in four branches at the beginning of 1913 to 3,419 in eight branches at the end of 1914. By contrast the once-dynamic Gasworkers withered. The collapse of the cotton operatives' and corporation workers' branches and continued decline at the gas-works reduced their Bristol membership to probably no more than 250 in 1909. Thereafter the Gasworkers were but a pale shadow of the Dockers, re-establishing themselves among the municipal employees, particularly at the electricity works, and among the building labourers, but with a total membership of probably no more than 1,500. Disputes were few.

The craft unions in the building trade show no clear pattern. The A.S.C.J. declined from its 1904 peak of 815 to 611 in 1909, rising to 651 in 1911. Thereafter, in contrast to the Dockers, expansion speeded up, reaching 994 in 1914: it was in 1912 and 1914 that the Bristol building workers were securing advances. The O.B.S. trod a much more troubled path. There was a serious dispute in 1910 'to sustain trade customs', and the Bedminster, Fishponds and St George's branches were amalgamated with the Bristol branch. Membership was down to 405 and had only recovered to 432 in 1914. The large number of excluded members - 75 in 1911, 82 in 1914 - hints at considerable turbulence. As for the O.S.M., decline continued: 239 members in 1906, 131 in 1911, although there was some recovery the following year.

The experience of the Bricklayers modifies generalisations about the peaceful nature of craft trade unionism. In 1914 the Building Trades Committee, representing the masons, plasterers, painters, plumbers and the building labourers' branch of the Gasworkers, and the Carpenters separately applied for a 1d. an hour more and a reduction in the summer working day of one hour. The Bricklayers and United Builders' Labourers applied for the hour's reduction and 1½d. more. The employers offered ½d. an hour and half an hour's reduction which the Trades Committee (except for the Gasworkers) accepted. The Carpenters went to arbitration and got the same with the promise of a further ½d. from 1 January 1915. The Bricklayers and both labourers' unions, however, struck for six weeks before the onset of war and

pressure from union headquarters induced them to accept the same terms as the Carpenters. Some 1,850 men had been out, 1,400 of them labourers. The spread of militancy beyond transport and coal, and the co-operation between at least one craft union and the labourers were noteworthy features.

One last union merits consideration, the original 'new model', the Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

TABLE 2

A.S.E. membership in Bristol, 1871-1911 (ten years intervals) and 1914

1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1914
426	468	496	524	823	1,277

The great boost of the pre-war years is again apparent. Until 1900 the membership seems to have been relatively stable: exclusions were few, five or six a year, and admissions were in the 20 to 40 range. In 1911, however, there were 203 admissions, 23 exclusions: the figures for 1914 were 262 and 64. Perhaps the new recruits were less able or willing to meet their contributions. There was one other marked change: in 1871, Bristol lost 11 members through death: four were aged 28 to 31; the oldest, who died of 'natural decay', was 55. In 1891 six of the members died, the youngest 52. In 1911, 13 Bristol members died: four were in their eighties, the oldest being 88, five more were in their seventies. Five of them had been in the union over half a century and their combined membership totalled 285 years.

Trade unionists were more numerous in Bristol in 1914 than ever before. The largest organisation was the Dockers, with 5-6,000 members, followed, probably, by the N.U.R. with almost 3,500, and the Miners with perhaps 2,000. The Gasworkers, with about 1,500, still outnumbered the 'new model' Engineers with 1,277 and the Carpenters, with almost 1,000, although in terms of influence they counted for far less. In all, bearing in mind a myriad of other societies, some of them like the Bootworkers with over a thousand members, others like the printers and locomen quite large, there must have been 20,000 unionists.⁹ The

unions offered their members protection against natural misfortunes, such as sickness and old age, and against unemployment. But above all – and this is why people joined them instead of just belonging to friendly societies – they offered some control over the working environment and a way of improving wages and conditions. Once the unions had established themselves as viable, which the craft societies were doing in the 1860s and 1870s and the Dockers in the years 1889 to 1900, once, that is, they had established a negotiating relationship with significant numbers of the employers, strike expenditure became rare. On occasions, however, and the craft Bricklayers as well as the rank-and-file Dockers both demonstrate this, frustration could boil over, most dramatically in the years 1910 to 1914. And it was these years which established trade unionism among the less skilled, which put flesh on the skeleton left behind from 1889, and which made a general union – the Dockers – numerically dominant in the city's labour movement.

What had trade unions achieved? The following table sets out the hourly rates, where applicable, and the weekly wages (summer rates in building) for certain groups, though, of course, there was no guarantee that a man would be employed for a full week, and in dock work such a possibility was so unlikely that hourly rates only have been given.

It must be stressed that in the building industry, until the 1890s when, with more formal agreements between unions and master builders, the union rate became generally accepted, the wages given above would be received by only the most established craftsmen. In the 1880s, for example, when trade was slack, the Master Builders' Association returned wage rates for masons ranging from 6d. to 7½d. an hour, for carpenters from 5d. to 7d. and for labourers from 3d. to 5d.

The general course of improvement is apparent. One of the less obvious points to emerge is the narrowing of differentials, within crafts in the 1890s as a standard rate became accepted, and between craftsmen and labourers. In 1861 the building labourer earned 50 per cent of the mason's wage, in 1911 66.7 per cent, in 1914 70 per cent. The docker too, moved up the earnings scale, though more erratically. His ordinary hourly rate as a percentage of the best-paid building craftsman's was 66.7 in 1881, 80.0 in

9. In 1911 there were 104,000 employed males in Bristol.

TABLE 3

Wage Rates									
(Hourly rates in brackets: pence)									
	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1914	
Masons	24/-	30/-	30/-	33/9(7½)	33/9(7½)	40/6(9)	39/9(9)	1911	41/8(10)
Carpenters		26/4(5½)	29/5(6¼)	31/6(7)	33/9(7½)	40/6(9)	39/9(9)	39/9(9)	41/8(10)
Building labourers		15/-	16/-	20/3(4½)	20/3(4½)	27/-(6)	26/6(6)	26/6(6)	29/2(7)
Gas stokers (per 8 hour shift)				4/3½	5/-	5/3	5/3	5/3	5/9
(per week)				30/-	35/-	36/9	36/9	36/9	43/1½
Dockers: ordinary				(5)	(6)	(6½)	(7)	(7)	(7)
overtime				(5)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(10)	(10)

1891, 72.2 in 1901 at the height of the building boom, 77.8 in 1911, 70.0 in 1914. Ironically, for all their industrial activity the dockers' position worsened relative to the less militant builders, and for the first time in over 30 years their hourly rate in 1914 was only equal to that of the building labourer, though the overtime rate remained superior. Yet the new unionists had, in the first 25 years of their organisations' existence, marginally gained upon the old. While the carpenter's wage in 1914 was 32.3 per cent up on what it had been in 1881, the gas stoker was 34.0 per cent better off on his shift rates, the docker 40.0 per cent on his hourly earnings.

Monetary earnings tell only part of the story. When changes in prices are taken into account the living standards of building craftsmen rose even more markedly in real terms in the years 1871 to 1901 though unemployment in the 1880s presented an undoubted check which it is impossible to quantify. After 1901, however, living standards fell, though less markedly for labourers than for the skilled. Despite industrial activity no group of workers in Table 3 succeeded in matching the rise in the wholesale price index from 1901 to 1914.

Systematic figures for other industries are harder to obtain, but there is enough evidence to suggest that the rate for a skilled man in Bristol at the end of the 1850s was between 4s. 6d. and 5s. a day, probably for 10½ hours work. Labourers earned between two and three shillings, round about half the skilled rate, as in building. Women got just over a shilling a day, though a skilled cotton worker on piece rates could treble this. The following decade a female shoemaker would get 12 shillings for a six 10-hour day week, a man £1-£1. 3s. Almost 20 years later the rates had not altered much, though by now a 54 hour week was worked: men £1. 2s., women 12s. 6d. Even as late as 1914 the minimum male wage ranged from £1. 8s.-£1.10s. for a 52½ hour week. One final, interesting, example may be quoted, the engineers. In 1862 union men were paid £1. 11s. for a 58½ hour week, non-union men £1. 6s. 10d. In 1891 for a 54 hour week, the union rate had increased only to £1. 12s., the non-union to £1. 10s., a clear example of the erosion of differentials within the crafts. In 1913 the established rate, for a 53 hour week, was £1. 18s.

By 1914 trade union consciousness affected a large number and

a wide range of Bristol's workers, though as yet by no means a majority. The existence of a broader class-consciousness is harder to pinpoint. At times of high drama, 1889 and 1910–11 especially, workers did act together across barriers of skill and craft. To some extent, too, the Trades Council existed as an institutional expression of class-consciousness. There were also economic and social factors operating which might be thought likely to further such consciousness. The growth of the large employer highlighted the gulf between capital and labour. Yet even as late as 1914 much male labour was still employed in small firms. Further, large prosperous concerns could engage the loyalty of their workers, as did Wills', and even prevent the establishment of unions, as did the Tramway Company. The move to the suburbs and the consequent physical separation of the classes may have promoted separate social identities; yet it is important to note that suburban segregation operated within, as well as between, classes: the artisan was at least as likely to live among clerks as among labourers. Education was potentially a socially-divisive force, the elementary schools catering almost exclusively for the children of the lower classes, yet the schools themselves were split into those operated by the religious denominations and those of the School Board, later the City Council. And there is no reason to believe that the schoolmaster, or mistress, actively promoted ideas of social conflict which might have threatened his or her emergent middle class status. As for the idea of education producing a literate working class, able to read the socialist press, it did: but whether its products preferred *Clarion* to *Tit-Bits* or the *Sporting Pink* is doubtful.

As for the Labour Party, its very existence, more or less continuous since 1885, suggests a degree of class-consciousness, especially when it encompassed almost the whole of the local trade union leadership, as it did by the 1900s. But any estimate of the extent of that consciousness must be based upon an understanding of what sort of a party Labour was and how successful Labour was. The party in Bristol, as later nationally, depended heavily upon the trade unions, whose material interests it sought to serve, and initially these unions were the craft societies. Of the 17 union branches involved in the Labour Electoral Association (L.E.A.) in 1891, 11 belonged to the Carpenters, Stonemasons, Engineers and Bricklayers and they contributed £54 out of a total income of £73. Of the new unions only the Gasworkers were

affiliated, and unlike the craft societies they paid less to the L.E.A. than to the Trades Council.

In 1900, the year in which the national Labour Party was founded, there was an influx into the Bristol L.E.A. and by the end of 1901 the number of affiliated bodies was 43, representing two-thirds of the Trades Council membership. Craft unions accounted for 24 of the branches. Of the new unions the Gasworkers had been joined by the Dockers. By 1905 less than a third of the Trades Council remained unaffiliated – that third consisting of small and unimportant unions. By 1914 Labour had established an independent existence in the Bristol Council chamber, but as very much a minority party. It had failed at constituency level and rarely even embarrassed the Liberals there; it had never cost them a seat. All the evidence suggests that for 30 years after the formation of a Labour party the Liberals had been able to contain Labour; that in 1914, Liberal working men outnumbered Labour working men; that Bristol Labour drew more heavily on trade union consciousness than on socialist class-consciousness; and that working class consciousness was in the Bristol of 1914 potential rather than actual.

BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION LOCAL HISTORY PAMPHLETS STILL IN PRINT

1982

Notes on Sources

My main sources were union records, especially those of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union, the Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union, the National Union of Railwaymen, the Operative Bricklayers' Society, and the Operative Stonemasons' Society, many of which are now most easily accessible at the British Library of Political and Economic Science (London School of Economics) or the Modern Records Centre (University of Warwick); the local press, especially the *Bristol Mercury*, the *Bristol Daily Times and Mirror* and the *Western Daily Press* which are held at the Bristol Central Library and also at the British Library's Newspaper Library at Colindale, North London; annual reports on Strikes and Lock-outs and on Changes in Rates of Wages and Hours of Labour, in *British Parliamentary Papers*. More specific references may be found in my thesis on 'The Bristol Labour Movement 1868 to 1906' (D.Phil., Oxford University, 1969), a copy of which is held in Bristol University Library. I am grateful to all those people, union officials and librarians who so willingly made their records available to me. I also benefited from two university theses: P.J. Leng, 'The Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union in South Wales and Bristol, 1889-1922' (University of Kent M.A., 1973), part of which has subsequently been published as *The Welsh Dockers* (1981); and R. Whitfield, 'The Labour Movement in Bristol 1910-1939' (University of Bristol M. Litt., 1979); and from D. Large and R. Whitfield, *The Bristol Trades Council 1873-1973* (1973).

The illustration on the front cover is one side of a banner of the National Union of Gas Workers, Bristol District Branch. It carries the signature H.E. Stacy Bristol/ after Walter Crane. The date is 1892. Walter Crane was a designer and socialist who had a strong influence on the emblems of the labour movement.

- 3 *The Theatre Royal: first seventy years* by Kathleen Barker. 40p.
- 8 *The Steamship Great Western* by Grahame Farr. 40p.
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