

## Forward

When Volume I of Dona Torr's life of Tom Mann, Tom Mann and his Times. (1856-1890) was published in 1956, the publishers, Lawrence & Wishart, expressed the hope that a second volume covering 1890-1910 would in time appear, the original plan having been for a three volume work. But the author's death took place later the same year. Among her papers there was a plan of the book and many notes for further chapters. In particular, there was a draft of the first chapter and parts of a second, which were, subsequently put together and considerably augmented by E.P. Thompson who discussed the whole project with the author during her last illness and has since classified her notes. The present pamphlet comprises the almost complete draft chapter (though the author would undoubtedly have done more work on this, particularly sections 2 and 5) and some of the material for the next, including an unpublished correspondence between Tom Mann and John Burns. We are glad to publish these which, though in unfinished form, throw new light on the development of the labour movement at this period and Tom Mann's part in it.

Tom Mann, it may be recalled, was born in Warwickshire in 1856, left school at nine and from the age of ten to fourteen worked in a coalmine before being apprenticed as an engineer in Birmingham, where he had his first introduction to radical politics. In 1877 he went to London where, during a period of economic depression, he had only casual jobs for four years until in 1881 he started work as a skilled engineer and joined the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (forerunner of the A.E.U.) He became a socialist in 1885, joining the Social Democratic Federation in May of that year, the Battersea branch established by John Burns. From 1886-9 he was active as a socialist propagandist, becoming too well known to get a job, a period of activity which culminated in the London Dock Strike of 1889, dealt with in the final chapter of Dona Torr's published volume.

This pamphlet takes up the story from the aftermath of the strike, which ended in a victory in September of that year and marked a turning point in trade union organisation and activity - the advent of the "new unionism". The Dock Strike gave a national reputation to John Burns, Ben Tillett, and Tom Mann who became president of the Dockers' Union and in 1891 was appointed one of seven trade union members on the Royal Commission of Labour - a body presided over by the duke of Devonshire which sat for two years and took up much of his time. In 1892 Tom Mann was offered the position of secretary of the newly constituted Labour Department but refused it saying, "I would rather be identified with the workers outside, rousing them to make the fullest use of that department". It is with his activities in the working class movement in the years 1890-92 that the present material is concerned.

We are indebted to Edward Thompson for going through this version and allowing the use of his own work, including some notes to the first section and arrangement of and additions to the second, not least his transcript of the Mann-Burns correspondence. We have to thank Lawrence & Wishart for their assistance. And we are grateful to Walter Holmes for permission to publish this addition to the major work of a distinguished Marxist historian.

History Group of the Communist Party.

TOM MANN AND HIS TIMES 1890-92

I. THE NEW CHALLENGE: 1890

1. Tom and Ben

The Port of London was at work again; the Lord Mayor, the Cardinal, and the Bishop had retired; the Mansion House Committee was dissolved; the press looked elsewhere for stories; the dockers remained. So did their employers, the competing dock companies, wharfingers and shipowners. The strength of the great uprising which had kept the port still for five weeks had lain in the order and discipline achieved by leaders versed in trade union traditions; the engineers, Burns and Mann, working closely with the stevedores on the Strike Committee beside Tillett and his companions. Now the Strike Committee's functions had ceased. The great bulk of the strikers had never belonged to a union - there had been none to receive them. Everything had to be started from the beginning. This was true of other new unions formed in that period, but their difficulties were small in comparison with those at the docks.

For Tom and Ben, president and secretary of the new Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourer's Union, and their greathearted fellow officials, Tom McCarthy, Clem Edwards, and Harry Orbell, the job had only just begun. First, of course, there were the imported blacklegs; the dock officials at once broke the pledges given and discriminated against union men; however, the blacklegs had not enjoyed themselves much and there was still some money to spare, so they were asked to join the union and those who refused were given a week's wages out of the surplus funds and told to get out. More than 1,000 men were thus disposed of. But the struggle to get the Mansion House Agreement honoured in face of diverse interpretations speedily invented by the various dock companies and wharfingers (whose methods of employment had never been uniform), the battle for union discipline when union organisation was in its infancy, the struggle for unity between 'preferred' and 'non-preferred' men, where disparities might be great - these were a task barely imaginable.

Of the immediate gains, symbolised by the 'docker's tanner', the chief were fixed time and overtime rates, guaranteed 2s. (four-hour) calls, and fixed time and place for call-ons; far the greatest was the recognition of the union, the right of collective bargaining, the undermining of the sub-contractor's autocracy and powers of dividing the workers. But whether the terms were to be carried out, and all or any of the new rights sustained, depended solely upon collective strength and persistence, upon union organisation and attention to complex details (settling innumerable piece rates and allowances, checking call places and times, the make-up of gangs, etc.) "Of all the work of the strike", writes Tillett,

"nothing was more exacting than the work afterwards of adjusting and administering. Tom Mann, Clem Edwards, Tom McCarthy and myself spent nights and days at the work; the adjustment work gave us more than we had thought possible... Tom Mann did that work while we scoured the country and added to our ranks port after port."

(Short History of the Docker's Union, 1910, p.32)

The last sentence reminds us that the union was becoming, overnight, a national union. Sixty-three new branches were formed in the first three months of 1890 and at the first congress in September the union claimed a membership of over 60,000 of whom 24,000 were in London. (\*) Ben's story of the early work outside London should be read in his own words. In the big ports it was the same as in London: on the one side, brutal rapacious sub-contractors, free play for thieves and bullies, wholesale robbery of the men - on the other, the great meetings, the new union organisation, the struggles for recognition, the first achievements as to regulation of wages, hours and call-ons, the blows struck against blackguardism, the beginnings of self-respect. What Ben learnt on his travels completed the conversion to socialism begun by his fellow strike leaders:

"It manifested the class war so vividly to myself that I have no other reason to urge for being a revolutionary socialist than the bitter class hatred and sordidness of the capitalists as a body".  
(Short History..., p.36)

One or two illustrations must serve to indicate some of Tom's problems in the first year: these were largely bound up with the employers' treatment of the agreement and with trade union discipline and unity.

The Mansion House Agreement was the first of its kind and a maze of conditions resting only on custom had to be adapted to it. A constant source of trouble was the attempt of employers to drop the customary threepence paid to pieceworkers for a half-hour's mealbreak; this was often done by reclassifying pieceworkers as dayworkers. The agreement had only been signed a couple of months when the directors of Hay's Wharf, Southwark (then the great tea wharf) abolished all mealtime payments, thereby provoking a strike unsanctioned by the union (January, 1890). Tom and his colleagues, far from wanting a strike just then, were anxious to continue negotiations already begun; but the union rules were still in the hands of the Registrar and the executive did not have full powers. "We could not compel them then to return to their work... not like now when we are in fair thoroughgoing order", related F.Brien the following year. (Royal Commission on Labour. 1892, xxxv B65). The negotiations broke down and this strike could not be neglected by the young union which eventually decided to grant strike pay. From that moment Tom did his utmost by speech and action to turn the strike into a new experience of solidarity. But after three months of strenuous effort the men were defeated, many were victimised, and the cost to the union was £5,266, with almost £1,200 more for the other four wharfs which became involved. Some late Australian contributions helped to meet this cost.

"Dear Jack", wrote Mann to Burns from the dockers' first headquarters ' at the Great Assembly Hall, Mile End Road, on March 5, 1890:

(\*) Other districts represented by delegates were: Brentford, Bridgewater, Bristol, Cardiff, Dundee, Gloucester, Hull, King's Lynn, the Medway, Newport, Northfleet, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Southampton, Swansea. In the north-west - covering Liverpool, Belfast, Glasgow - a separate union, the National Dock Labourer's Union, had been formed in 1889 by Richard McGhee and Edward McHugh which was still struggling for recognition.

"Enclosed please find receipt for Australian cheque for £500 with sincere thanks from the Union, who are glad to get it, we are spending £300 a week more than we get in, with no immediate sign of reducing the expenditure. Kay's, Brookes, Hedges, Sharpes & Hersoks are still on...We had a cheque for £50 from Australia sent through Shipton (secretary of the London Trades Council). The Trades Council is completely revolutionised during the past six months. . . . Ben is working effectively".

The same letter refers to the Liverpool strike of the National Dock Labourer's Union ('the Glasgow Union') and the attempts to transport blacklegs from London:

"The Liverpool job is a big one; 198 were taken from London, including a number of our men who were instructed to take the money, & three reliable men accompanied them who succeeded in bringing back 151 out of the 198 & got them their fare & 5/\*\* per man. The Liverpool men belong to the Glasgow Union which is making headway but they are paying no strike pay. P.O. for 5/- enclosed to cover postage to thank the Australians..."

Later news to Bums (April 30, 1890) shows that the Hay's Wharf strike had ended in considerable demoralisation, with plenty of blame (besides threats of personal violence) for Tom:

"We have decided to stop strike pay so as to choke off those who would gladly hang on for months, so we reduced strike pay to 8/- this week & 6/- for two following weeks, giving the £1 in a lump to those who cared to take it; about 400 have done so but we have had a hell of a time. I am obliged to carry a revolver, they threaten all kinds of nice things, going to make soup of me & so on, but I reckon I'll come out all right in the end..." (\*)

An echo of the Hay's Wharf strike, heard eighteen months later, recalls another problem - the position of the old-type 'preferred men' in the new union. When in November 1891 the Labour Commission was listening to evidence on the union, Tom being one of the commissioners, two tea-coopers of long standing at Hay's Wharf thought it worth while to walk along from Southwark to Westminster Hall, where Mr. Tom Mann was sitting in his glory, in order to explain at length why they had torn up their cards. George Lloyd said he had been forced into the strike by Mr. Tom Mann, although they had no real grievances; and were afterwards "kept out by being continually talked to". He now got less money than before - the strike had been "for the benefit of another class of labour", though he admitted that his own class was represented on the executive. (See Royal Commission xxxv B 7772-7828). His companion, J. Bowall, had been forced into the union by his own gang but had done his best to get the men back from the moment the strike began. He had interviewed Tom Mann:

Lord Derby (chairman): "What did he say to you?" - "What don't speak don't lie". Witness, who could, not read, handed in a cutting from an unidentified newspaper, reporting a speech in which Mann, referring to someone who had returned to work, was alleged to have said: "the wharfowners could brew him

(\*) This passage occurs in a letter chiefly concerned with London's first May Day, quoted from further below.

and bake him because if they did not the union would....

They should know him that day week, that day fortnight, and that day year...."

Lord Derby: "Did Mr. Mann tell you that the union had made a great mistake and they they would support you now you were out?" - "Yes". Witness had worked as a blackleg under the constant protection of the police but if he went for an evening walk his life was in danger. "I was quite aware that Tom Mann did not understand the business because when I spoke to him at the meeting in the Green Man.... he said, 'I thought you were all one'. I said: 'You do not understand this business any more than if you had never entered it:"

Mr. Tom Mann: "What is your object in coming here to-day?" - "To give evidence against the chairman of the society, Mr. Tom Mann...." "You have come to complain of the threats you received from Tom Mann in Bull Court?....Did you receive some personal threat from me?" - "According to the paper, that piece of the newspaper which I cut cut....and I think it is a shameful thing that I am to be roasted and boiled, I never heard of such a thing...to be roasted and boiled in a week or a month or twelve months. If he did not boil me the union would..." etc.

Mr. Tait: "How many men do you represent here to-day?" - "Myself" "Alone?" - "Alone".  
"Who asked you to come?" - "No one....I offered to come".  
(ibid, 8442-8500)

The accusation that meal-break troubles were "the result of Messrs Mann, Burns, and the rest signing away the men's meal-time" was repeated more than once by those who did not want the union or union agreements. "It is only since the great dock strike that these disputes have cropped up about meal-times....and there will be more and that will be the result of Messrs Mann, Burns and Tillett interfering in what they knew, nothing at all about". (ibid, 8587). But this was only one aspect of the employers' attempts to level down, against which the union must at all costs enlarge the fight for unity and levelling up. The provision for regular call-ons was another clause ignored unless the union was strong on the spot; in November, 1891 the India decks were "taking on men at all hours of the day". (ibid, 953).

It was fortunate that Tom, through his work in the Surrey docks, was already familiar with the better-paid men. For the success of the union would depend on its ability not only to maintain the right of the lowest paid to one penny more per hour and twopence overtime, but to draw solidly together 'preferred' men and others. This depended on understanding of detail. The union official must find ways of replacing the customary personal or group relations, coupled with bribery and sweating, by union relations; he must master every detail of every job, protect customary rates and allowances, negotiate

new ones for all special types of work, and, above all, resist the undermanning of gangs. As Ben recalled:

"Tom Mann worked like a giant possessed; his negotiating capacity-taxed to the utmost, as well as his time and his great reserve of strength....Two generations of wrong had to be redressed...We were up against an army of managerial autocrats. That we did so much is still a wonder to me". (Tillett, Memories & Reflections, 1931, P. 158).

At the same time, abused as he was by the S.D.F, for becoming a trade union official - "Mann, the Champion Compromiser", drawing £3 a week for helping to sweat the dockers (Justice. Nov. 30, 1889) - Tom kept up his socialist propaganda and inspired the union's 'educational work'. "For educational purposes", he tells us, "i.e. to get beyond the immediate concerns of the hour and to deal with the Labour movement nationally and internationally", the union organised large Sunday morning meetings. Tom's Sunday socialist speeches were heard by union members who judged them in the light of his daily work. The grain porters down in Victoria Dock, for example, had some remarks to make. Their job, filling grain sacks by hand in ships' holds, carrying them to the quay for weighing and then overside into barges, are particularly heavy and variable, involving claims for a number of extras on piece-rates - 'hot' money, 'dirty' money, 'awkward' money, etc.'(\*) for which, after a special conference with the company, attended by Mann, the employers had agreed to substitute a higher overall rate, with provision for exceptional extras to be decided by an umpire. After some time of smooth working disagreement arose with the umpire and Tom was sent for; he found the men who had left the ship sitting quietly awaiting him in the Club Room near Tidal Basin:

"I at once took the chair and opened out: 'Good day lads... Who'll state the case?' After a few seconds one of the biggest fellows, well over six foot, came up to me at the table and said: 'Look here, Mr. Tom Mann, the other Sunday morning there was a meeting on the waste ground, wasn't there?' 'Yes, and I. was there'. 'Yes, and you told us then the workers didn't get more than one half of the wealth they produced, didn't you?' 'Yes, that's so'. 'Well, we bloody well want some of the other half. And he returned to his seat". (Tom Mann's Memoirs, 1923, p.110).

## 2. Delegate to the London Trades Council

Immediately after the dock strike and during the continuing trade improvement there followed rapid development in the organisation of the unskilled workers, a great increase in the membership of the old craft unions and the beginnings of organisation among the blackcoated workers.

(\*) 'Hot' money when the grain carried on the men's backs 'sweated'; 'dirty' money when it was so dusty that the men were half choked in the hold and needed drink; 'awkward' when the corn bunkers were so awkwardly placed that the wages earned collectively by each gang of seven were reduced.

The example of the dockers and gas labourers was imitated by printers' labourers, many of whom worked 12 to 14 hours a day in filthy cellars, and the Printers' Labourers Union formed was the parent of NATSOPA. General labourers were included in the General Railway Workers' Union (1889) but the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (1872), an old model trade benefit society which had survived the great crisis, also increased its membership in the three years from 1888 to 1891 from 12,000 to 30,000. Among the agricultural workers Joseph Arch's National Agricultural Labourers' Union (1872), which had shrunk into a friendly society of a few thousand, had gained over 14,000 members by 1890, while the Eastern Counties Labour Federation had 17,000 by 1892. Among unions catering for builders' labourers, carmen, carters, navvies, the best known was the Navvies, Bricklayers' Labourers and General Labourers' Union (1890) of which John Ward of the S.D.F. was general secretary.

Of the craft unions the A.S.E., Tom Mann's own union, enrolled 9,000 new members in the nine months after the dock strike. Between 1888 and 1891 membership of the eleven principal engineering and shipbuilding unions increased from 115,000 to 155,000, and that of the ten largest building trade unions from 57,000 to 94,000. The Boot and Shoe Operatives increased from 11,000 to 30,000, the Miners' Federation, founded in 1888, from 36,000 to 96,000.

The huge inchoate armies of slave driven respectability, the blackcoated workers, at last began to organise; crushed youth and anaemic middle age awakened; the National Union of Clerks (1890) and the Shop Assistants' Union (1891) opened their battles against the 60 to 90 hour week and shameful conditions of work hitherto impotently endured. Postmen initiated the struggle of Civil Servants for the elementary rights of trade unionism and for a weekly minimum of 24s. On the eve of May Day 1890, after demonstrating with bands and banner in Holborn, 2,000 of them crowded the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, when, among letters read from supporters was one from Tom Mann, (Star, May 1, 1890).

"Within a year after the dockers' victory", the Webbs record, "probably over 200,000 workers had been added to the trade union ranks, recruited from sections of the labour world formerly abandoned as incapable of organisation...Even the oldest and most aristocratic unions were affected by the revivalist fervour of the new leaders". (History of Trade Unionism, 1894, 392, 393).

In this time of new life and new possibilities contact with the London Trades Council kindled Tom's quick imagination. Shortly after the strike, when he became a delegate to the council from the Battersea branch of the A.S.E., he had found a "wretchedly flat state of affairs" (Mann & Tillett, The New Trades Unionism, June, 1890). With a group of lefts within and Tillett and others outside he worked for new affiliations; the

tide was setting that way too; in nine months time, by June, 1890, the membership had increased from 18,824 to 45,000. (\*) Tom's vision was of the Trades Council as a real "Labour Parliament", representing not only London's 150,000 trade unionists but the 700,000 London workers still outside to whom special help should be given by forming unions, drawing up rules, coaching new officials etc. (Labour Elector. Jan, 11, 1890 ) He was quickly elected to the executive, on November 7, 1889, and was a very active delegate until July 1891, when his duties on the Labour Commission took him away.

During this period he helped in the rules revision and gave the report on the new rules adopted in 1890, which included the provision that delegates must have worked or be working at the trades they represented. In particular, when the Silvertown rubber workers struck at the close of 1889 he worked hard on behalf of the strikers as a representative of the Trades Council executive. He failed to get a special delegate meeting of all trades called in their support (Trades Council Minutes, Dec. 19, 1889) the engineers employed at the works refused to join the strike. Tom also tried to get "representation from all the different sections of workmen employed in the Silvertown works" to meet the Trades Council deputation but this too failed and the strike was defeated. Tom took part in the settlement negotiations. (ibid. Nov. 7 to Dec. 19, 1889).

Engels who was unaware of these efforts, referred to the main problem of this twelve-weeks' strike in a letter written on January 11, 1890: "the strike was broken by the engineers, who did not join in and even did labourers' work against their own union rules!" (Selected Correspondence, Marx & Engels, 1936, p. 463). Within a few months Engels and Tom Mann, working in different sections of the movement, and many others were turning their attention to a great labour demonstration, carried through despite the apathy and doubts of the old guard in the trade union world.

### 3. May 4, 1890

"Goaded by the attacks of the Socialists and New Trade Unionists", records George Howell, the London Trades Council found itself obliged to participate in "Mayday celebrations in favour of the 'solidarity of labour', Eight Hours and other idealistic proposals." (Trade Unionism Old and New, 1891, pp. 191-7).

Mayday demonstrations for the legal 8-hour day, resolved upon by the foundation congress of the Second International (July, 1889), took place in 1890 in the U.S.A. and in all the chief European countries, to the dismay of the ruling classes. Amid the

(\*) The L.T.C. annual report for 1890 records an increase of 25,354 members from 38 societies in 31 distinct industries, income risen from £156 to £385. (See also, London Trades Council 1860-1950. 1950, pp. 70-1).



general excitement provoked by press accounts of preparations on the continent and arrest's in Paris, Punch, whose cartoons had already depicted haggard men about to destroy the Goose that Lays the Golden Eggs, or to sow tares from a basket labelled Socialism, or to step into an abyss labelled Anarchy, now portrayed "The New Queen of the May" with a bomb in one hand, a lily in the other, a sash labelled "International", and garlands labelled "Eight Hours", "Strikes", "Agitations", "Solidarity", "Dynamite"; but, perhaps as an antidote to continentalism, also printed some lolloping sympathetic lines (April 30, 1890):

They've kept us scattered till now, comrade;  
but that no more may be;  
Our shout goes up in unison by Thames, Seine,  
Rhine and Spree.  
We are not the crushed down crowd, chummy, we  
were but yesterday;  
We're full of the Promise o' May, brother;  
mad with the promise of May.

Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling had initiated in the London east end an agitation which had first introduced English workers to the new Socialist International whose foundation congress John Burns had attended, To carry out the eight hour day resolution they had organised the Central Committee for the Eight Hours Legal Working Day Demonstration, first parent of London's later Mayday Committee. To them we owe our first London Mayday, its international tradition then begun, and the grandeur of the demonstration. The participation of the thirty-year-old London Trades Council, representing mainly the old crafts but now including in its procession the dockers, we owe chiefly to Tom Mann. By proposing a separate demonstration organised by the council he made it possible to overcome the difficulties arising from the invitation of the Central Committee and the dread word 'legal'. At the delegate meeting on April 1C he moved: "that this council of delegates recommend the trade societies of the metropolis to demonstrate in favour of an eight hours working day". This having been carried; he seconded Drummond's motion that a demonstration should be organised by the Trades Council on May 4. (L.T.C. Minutes, see also London Trades Council, p.76),

To Burns, who was supporting the Central Committee, Tom wrote on April 30 with some anxiety:

"Respecting the Trades Council position, re 8 hours. They have decided on a resolution drawn up by myself, and afterwards slightly modified, to the effect that we strive to bring about the 8 hours 'by every legitimate means' and call upon Government to at once start the same in Government Department. I shall be Chairman of the Central Platform provided by the T.C. and I shall urge the importance of Trade Union Action as a means of education up to the demanding of better conditions; I sincerely hope that your

speech and mine will be on the same lines; I shall not of course insist on any sweeping measure as that I am sure is impossible. More and more I am convinced of the impudence of men like Graham, there has been no talk about pledging ourselves to individual effort such as Graham talks about. I suppose you have definitely promised to speak on the platform of the Aveling section. If so, it would be policy to emphasise the importance of Trade Unionism. Large numbers would like to find you and I advocating different methods. If you have any special recommendation let me have it, please, and I will comply. I have endeavoured to state the case in May number of Nineteenth Century and should like your opinion upon it; I don't know what I shall get for it but I shall hand over the cheque towards the £35 Elector account....

"There is no serious difference between the Legalists and L.T.C., we are providing seven platforms and giving one of them to S.D.F, to appoint their own speaker etc.; they have now asked that we provide a 3econd and they will pay for it, so we shall do so; I am on the Sub-Committee making arrangements. It has so upset Ben he has gone to Bournemouth for a day or two. I was at Hull last week and had good meetings..."

Harmonious joint arrangements having been achieved (not without some trouble from George Shipton, secretary of the Trades Council, who made a prior booking of Hyde Park which nearly excluded the Avelings' section) the council had its separate procession, platforms and resolution. Both processions assembled at the same time on the embankment, the Trades Council on the river side, the Central Committee on the north side of the roadway; they then marched by separate routes to the park where each had seven platforms, the Trades Council north and south of the Reformers' Tree and the Central Committee parallel with these by Broad Walk. (Reynolds's Newspaper. May 4, 1890).

Thus in the eyes of the deeply impressed public, the demonstration of Sunday, May 4, 1890 - the processions which took over two hours to file into the park, the crowd which finally totalled half a million (Star. May 5, 1890) - was a single demonstration for the eight-hour-day, a revelation of the new 'idealistic' independence and solidarity of the working class. Fred Henderson . wrote in next day's Star:

We toilers of the field and town  
By long oppression trodden down  
In every clime beneath the sun  
Have seen the new life to be won;  
Seen that all the strife we waged  
Was but fool with fool engaged:  
Where we erst as foemen stood  
Lo, to-day reigns brotherhood.

George Shipton was chief marshall of the Trades Council procession, in which the dockers, despised outcasts eight months before, now marched "in their rough working clothes" together with

the ancient aristocracy: "sandwiched" between them, as the Star recorded, were "hundreds of gentlemen coups, kid-gloved and top-hatted" . No such demonstration in Hyde Park had been seen since 1866; "in point of numbers the most remarkable ever held in London" (Reynolds's May 11, 1890). Every feature excited comment: the novel "small shield-shaped banners" with white letters on crimson backgrounds marking the sections of the Central Committee's procession, and the "acres of splendidly painted silk" carried by the unions. "Along both routes the classes came out to see the masses", reported the Star next day. "The balconies of the great houses... were crowded with ladies and gentlemen of the upper ten thousand. From the upper windows the servants looked on."

Tom Mann had been given the task of marshalling east end workers, not attached to any particular organisation, who were joining the demonstration. (Star, May 1). After marshalling some thousands of "unattached men" on the embankment with the help of two "mounted farriers" Tom, wearing his president's blue sash of the Dockers' Union, was chairman of the main Trades Council platform, from which the resolution was moved by Ben Tillett. Tom's support for the full socialist demand of a legal eight-hour-day was well enough known, his second pamphlet on the subject, The Eight Hours Movement (1889), was just then selling widely, but he spoke loyally to the Trades Council resolution which only recommended getting an eight-hour-day "by every legitimate means in their power". The resolution, Reynolds's noted (May 11) "went quite as far as was judicious for the Council"; the fact that they were met under the auspices of the Council showed that this body "which some thought lethargic, was now making progress".

Tom's platform, well surrounded by dockers, railwaymen, barge builders and ropemakers, was the only Trades Council platform which drew a crowd. By far the greatest masses were gathered round the platforms of the Central Committee, where the speakers included John Bums, Will Thorne, John Ward, Cunninghame Graham, Bernard Shaw, Stepniak, Paul Lafargue and the Avelings. Bums, amid cheers, flung out his challenge to Bradlaugh: if they both spoke to an audience of 200,000 he could still win 90 per cent of it for the legal eight-hour-day. Four branches of the S.D.F. marched with the Central Committee and the S.D.F. had its two platforms near the Trades Council; their resolution added the demand for socialist ownership to that of the legal eight-hour-day.

"What would I give if Marx had lived to see this awakening!" was Engels' first thought as he watched the great scene from the roof of a vehicle. "I held my head two inches higher when I climbed down from the old goods van". (Gustave Mayer, Friedrich Engels, 1936, p. 253). Great though the success had been in other countries, he wrote later in an article in the Vienna Arbeiterzeitung (May 23, 1890), the grandest and most important part of the whole May Day festival was that

"on 4 May, 189), the English proletariat, newly awakened from its 40 years winter sleep, again entered the' movement of its class...The grandchildren of the old Chartists are entering the line of battle".

#### 4. The Battle of the New Unionists ..-

Soon after Mayday the New Unionists on the Trades Council attempted to end the reign of George Shipton, founder and secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Housepainters and Decorators, who had been secretary of the council since 1872. W. Pamell of the Cabinet Makers was the hope of the militants.

A number of curious incidents, such as the withholding of affiliation from dockers' branches which had paid their fees, culminated on the day of the election, June 5y when Pamell, whose name was already printed on the ballot paper, was informed that his union had just held a meeting and elected new Trades Council delegates. The Woolwich engineers' delegate, Fred Hammill, soon to become a leader of New Unionism, hurriedly took up the challenge, but Shipton triumphed by 61 votes to 46. (\*)

That same month, the Trades Union Congress being due in September, Shipton opened a public attack on the New Unionism, immediately answered by Tom Mann and Ben Tillett. The Old Unionists' case was well presented by Shipton in an article "Trades Unionism: The Old and The New" (Murray's Magazine. June, 1890). New Unionism, he said:

(1) Discarded friendly society benefits; Mr. Tom Mann had expounded this policy "with great unction at the first half-yearly meeting of the Dockers' Union", in March, 1890. (Similar principles had been declared in the first half-yearly report of the Gasworkers in 1889 - "We have only one benefit attached, and that is strike pay...The whole aim and intention of this Union is to reduce the hours of labour and reduce Sunday work"; and by the General Railway Workers'

(\*) L.T.C. Minutes. June 5, 1890 Tom Mann's part in this is referred to in London Trades Council (pp. 71-2). The attack on Shipton was opened "by the compositors' delegates, Matthews and Marks, who suggested that the Council should not re-elect him as he had lost the confidence of his own society, which for the first time, since 1880, had not re-elected him its Secretary. After an interval of utter confusion, in which Mann carried on a discussion with the chairman (C. J. Drummond of the London Society of Compositors) from the floor, agreement was reached on procedure. The only speakers were Mann "as opposed to the present secretary" and James Macdonald, who had proposed F. Hamnill (A.S.E.) for the secretaryship, and then Shipton replied. Shipton was re-elected by sixty-one votes to forty-six, and the meeting terminated on a note of amiable compromise. Mann said he was satisfied with the decision and wished to work for the general good of the Council; Shipton declared his willingness to do all in his power to discharge his duties in harmony with the feeling of the minority. The old dominant group had not been ousted, but had been compelled to move with the new powerful current in the trade union world. It was this basis of compromise which characterised the Council in ensuing years, though that is not to say that there was no friction".

Union at the 1890 Congress - "The Union shall remain a fighting one, and shall not be encumbered with any sick and accident fund". See Webbs, Trade Unionism, p. 392)

(2) Believed in loose associations or federations linking together ("more or less") men not only of different grades but different trades;

(3) relied upon "demonstrations by bands of music, banners, Phrygian caps of liberty, and other symbols of aggregate force, as a method of industrial warfare";

(4) was "selfish in its character", meaning "less work for more wages and nothing more";

(5) relied upon stimulating discontent and decrying existing unions;

(6) disparaged old union leaders;

(7) sometimes disavowed conciliation and arbitration;

(8) relied upon "legislation rather than upon combination": the State "to do for the individual what the 'old trade unionists' contend the men should do by themselves, for themselves...The one party seeks to operate politically through legislation, the other by means of liberty and association". The old leaders had won perfect freedom of association and the repeal of all the vicious acts relating to labour; they "sought to develop manhood, self-reliance and mutual help by association". The new unionists "seek to go back to the old state of things"; they rely upon State aid and upon Acts of Parliament.

This final fundamental point rested of course on the claim that "freedom of contract" in selling labour power (now represented by craft privileges and high overtime rates) had already been won by the unions for themselves. Let others do likewise! "To quote the words of the late John Bright", said Howell, "the demand for a legal 8 hours day was 'the offspring and spawn of feeble minds' transplanted from the continent of Europe...by men who have misappropriated to themselves the name of Socialists". (Trade Unionism Old and New, p. 186) Middle class liberals were already bewailing the "cowardice and apathy" of workers who, as the future Lord Haldane complained, asked help from the State instead of "insisting...on combination in their dealings with their employers'!. But Haldane's lament over "the decay of trades unionism in certain districts where this kind of socialism has taken hold" was not a well-timed prophecy. ("The Liberal Creed", Contemporary Review, Oct. 1888).

( \* )

Tom and Ben replied to Shipton the same month(\*)

(\*) The 'New' Trades Unionism. A reply to Mr. George Shipton by Tom Mann and Ben Tillett, June, 1890. (a penny pamphlet). Shipton published A Reply to Messrs Tom Mann and Ben Tillett's Pamphlet etc. 1890.

It is a spirited reply, marked by some of Tom's most characteristic expressions, which gets to the heart of the matter in one sentence: "The real difference between the 'new' and the 'old' is that those who belong to the latter...do not recognise, as we do, that it is the work of the trade unionist to stamp out poverty from the land". But Shipton's case was answered in detail in what is one of the great documents of English working class history.

New unionism must be judged by its fruits. Many identified with it had long been members of their own societies and had grieved bitterly over the workers' poverty, particularly that of the unskilled and unorganised, and at the callous disregard shown by the old societies, even for the labourers in their own trade. The old school had proved unable to organise the unskilled and even to further their own interests. But 'new' unionist activity was overcoming the "frightful apathy" and had added 9,000 members to the A.S.E, that year. The "deadly stupor" affecting other old societies was also yielding to 'new' unionist efforts.

"Branch meetings became more lively, special meetings more frequent, the interests of the labourers were discussed with a new vigour and sympathy...new unions were formed and the old ones became less stone-like...Steps were taken to mix with the labourers at every opportunity. Sundays and week evenings were entirely devoted to the purpose of spreading the principles of progressive trade unionism."

As to 'manhood' and 'self-reliance' (Shipton's phrases) their "methods of determining a change in our present industrial system" were "on a strictly trade union basis." "All our public utterances, all our talks to our members, have been directed towards cultivating a study spirit of independence and instilling a deep sense of responsibility. They had discouraged appeals to Parliament because "we are convinced that not until Parliament is an integral part of the workers, representing and responsible to industrial toilers, shall we be able to effect any reform by its means."

"The statement that the 'new' trade unionists look to government and legislation is bunkum; the key note is to organise first, and take action in the most effective way so soon as organisation warrants action, instead of specially looking to Government. The lesson is being thoroughly well taught and learned that we must look to ourselves alone, though this of course does not preclude us from exercising our rights of citizenship."

Mr. Shipton insisted that "the voluntary principle" must be the basis of trade unionism, that infringements of it "were contrary to law and morals." If this meant that unionists must not refuse to work with non-union men "we frankly tell Mr. Shipton that there is nothing we are more proud of than the fact that it is now known... that in hundreds of places no non-unionist need apply. The voluntary principle, forsooth!" Did Mr. Shipton disapprove of those London shops which engineers and compositors had made union shops? If so, "the sooner he becomes a paid servant of the capitalists the better." "A very startling statement is the charge that we, the

'new' school, 'want to do less work and get more money'... we really had not expected censure for this...except from the capitalists."

"Schemes of federation" had failed, according to Mr, Shipton; the Dockers' Union, however, was an amalgamation now including 55,000 members representing 26 different trader.

If they kept contributions mainly for trade purposes and left sick and funeral benefits to the Insurance Companies that was because the work of trade unions was to get higher wages and shorter hours; "our experience has taught us that many of the older unions are very reluctant to engage in a Labour struggle no matter how great the necessity, because they are hemmed in by sick and funeral claims, so that to a large extent they have lost their true characteristic of being fighting organisations."

The 'new' unions might be "a loose form of organisation" but they insisted on regular attendance at branch meetings, compliance with rules and leadership by democratically elected committees and urged regular affiliation to Trades Councils.

If 'new' unionists "rely upon demonstrations, bands, and banners" then the habit must be growing, for an old union, the London Society of Compositors, was also going in for bands, banners and rosettes. Mr. Shipton himself had been "the gorgeously attired Chief Marshal of the 4th. of May 1890 Demonstration".

The 'new' unions were said to be led by an "academic middle-class". What about Tillett and Thorne? Middle-class persons had however given valuable help in the early stages of some of the unions "while old Trade Unionists like Mr. Shipton stood idly by".

The London Trades Council itself had lost the confidence of the workers. "The Council generally, and its secretary particularly, had shown a decided inclination to associate with those who were 'superior' to workmen, whilst to take part in Labour struggles or to assist in the organisation of the unskilled, that was against their principles and practice". The secretary preferred "picnics to the Channel Tunnel, Sandringham, (\*) and deputations in connection with various semi-politico and patriotic and semi-demi-trade unionist and pseudo-philanthropic movements".

The pamphlet concludes with a re-affirmation of the new unionist outlook and aim and a call to action:

"Poverty in our opinion can be abolished, and we consider that it is the work of the Trade Unionist to do this. We want to see the necessary economic knowledge imparted in our Labour organisations,

(\*) "The Heir. Apparent to the Throne, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, has entertained the representatives of Labour, delegates to the London Trades Council and others, though some of them were roundly abused for their acceptance of the invitation to visit Sandringham". G.Howell, Conflicts of Capital and Labour, 2nd. 3d. 1890, p. 489.

- so that Labour in the future shall not be made the shuttlecock of political parties. Our Trade Unions shall be centres of enlightenment and not merely the meeting place for paying contributions and receiving donations..."

"A new enthusiasm is required, a fervent zeal, that will result in the sending forth of trade union organisers as missionaries through the length and breadth of the country\_\_\_brotherhood must not only be talked of but practised...what we desire to see is a unification of all, a dropping of all bickerings and an earnest devotion to duty taking the place of the old indifference. The cause we have at heart is too sacred to admit of time being spent quarrelling ourselves...we are prepared to work unceasingly for the economic emancipation of the workers."

"Our ideal is a co-operative commonwealth...Whilst striving for the ideal...we can be continually gaining some advantage for one or other section of the workers. The abolition of systematic overtime, reductions of working hours, elimination of sweaters, an ever-increasing demand for a more righteous share of the wealth created by Labour - all these are points in our programme, not one of which can be delayed."

"We will above all things endeavour to be true to ourselves and we call upon all who will to respond to the call of duty as a religious work."

When the Trades Union Congress met at Liverpool in September the two sides in this controversy could be clearly distinguished, not only by their views but by their dress. According to John Burns, the 'old' unionists "looked like respectable city gentlemen; wore very good coats, large watch-chains and high hats", presenting "an aldermanic...form and dignity". No tall hats were to be seen among the 'new' delegates. "They looked workmen. They were workmen. They were not such sticklers for formality or Court procedure, but were guided more by common sense". (J.Burns, The Liverpool Congress. 1890, p.6).

Burns and Mann were delegates from the engineers, Tillett was one of the delegates of the 56,000 dockers, and the 60,000 gasworkers were well represented by Will Thorne and others. Harry Quelch, delegate of the South Side Labour Protection League with a membership of 5,000, moved a preliminary resolution that congress should not adjourn for a river trip with the Lord Mayor. This was lost but it soon became evident to at least one observer that "more than half of the 500 delegates...are socialists and more than 90 per cent of the young men." Joseph Burgess, soon to become editor of the Workman's Times, added: "It is with them and their views that the future lies."(\*)

The resolution in favour of a legal 8 hours day, on which Burns made the chief speech, was carried by 193 votes to 155. George Shipton

(\*) Burgess was made editor of the Workman's Times by its proprietor after recommending that it "should deal with Labour politics from the independent point of view and it should not be afraid of socialism." (J. Burgess, John Burns, 1911, p. 148)



now "publicly declared his conversion to the legal regulation of the hours of labour". (Webbs, Trade Unionism, p. 394-5). One of the most securely entrenched of the old school, Henry Broadhurst, whose own union the Stonemasons now supported the New Unionists, finally gave up the battle and, after expressing a hope that the new unions "will not prove broken reeds in the day of their trial", resigned the secretaryship of the Parliamentary Committee and committed the T.U.C, to the guidance of God.

With the eight hours' resolution so well supported Tom Mann had only to second a vote of censure on the Parliamentary Committee for failing to carry out instructions on the Miners Eight Hours Bill (which was lost, 258 to 92); he also seconded Tillett's motion that the Parliamentary Committee should extend labour organisation by supplying organisers (which was opposed), on which Burns remarked that neglect of the unskilled by the T.U.C, had often led them to "journalistic blacklegs, dead stumped parsons and self-seeking lawyers." (Autobiography. 1901, p. 31) Tom's notion in favour of municipal workshops for the unemployed was agreed to despite the complaint of D. Holmes (Burnley Weavers) that "Congress might as well ask municipalities to take -possession of the sun and moon." (T.U.C. Report. 1890, p. 59). Finally, in seconding Burns' vote of sympathy for the giant struggle of the Australian waterside workers, a battle for the rights of trade union organisation, Tom was able to announce that the Dockers' Union, barely a year old, had already voted £1,000 and telegraphed £500 of it to Australia.

The tide of new life, which had touched all sections of the workers skilled and unskilled alike, was running high at the 1890 T.U.C. John Burns became a member of the Parliamentary Committee and was to become its chairman in 1893; Tillett was elected to the committee in 1892. Victory in the trade union movement was by no means complete: but the influence of the Dock Strike and the New Unionism was making itself felt in many fields.

## 5. What was Won

(\*)

"In a most curious way". remarks J. L. Garvin, the dock strike "gave birth to a new social conscience and to new political emotions." In a most curious way, Chamberlain began to study Bismarck and State Socialism and to consider old age pensions; in a most curious way, Mr. Gladstone's 'high wall' was broken down and the Liberals adopted Asquith's Newcastle Programme, including universal male suffrage, payment of M.P.'s, compulsory land purchase etc. etc.: in a most curious way, elementary education was made free by the Tories in 1891: in a most curious way, a number of attacks, culminating in Taff Vale case of 1900, were once more opened on the rights of trade unionism.

On the eve of the dock strike Chamberlain had been boasting at Highbury that the Unionist alliance had "secured the country against the dangers of disintegration" and made possible "legislation which, I confess, Radical as I have been during the

(\*) Life of Joseph Chamberlain (1932) II, p. 508; our italics.

"whole of my life, I had hardly dared to hope for during the next generation", (Reynolds's, Aug. 18, 1889)

By November, 1891, in Birmingham, once Liberal as the sea is salt, the town hall - where Tom Mann used to listen to the Tribune of the People and Republican Joe Chamberlain - was "as densely crowded for Lord Salisbury as ever it had been for John Bright or Gladstone"; on November 25, Chamberlain, seated beside the Tory Prime Minister, finally "declared the Unionist alliance indissoluble". "By this time his own ascendancy over Tory democracy in the great towns everywhere was undisputed". (Garvin, p.443).

Interrupting the triumphant complacency arises- the voice of the dockers' president: "I see no grounds whatever for believing that Parliament is about to lead the way in solving the social problem..." This above all was the great achievement of the strike for the dockers' tanner. We have spoken of the inception of Tory democracy at the moment when working class leaders had allowed the weapon of democratic struggle to fall from their hands. The dock strike and the extension of the elementary rights of trade unionism to men hitherto declassed were a challenge to Tory democracy and feudal socialism. The rapid growth of organisation thus stimulated, the breaching down of craft barriers exemplified in the new constitution of the A.S.E, of 1891 which admitted labourers, the new militancy on the industrial field, the demand for political independence, the beginnings of Socialist influence - these were soon to bring into being a political party of the working class for which a mass basis had at length been created. The Bradford Labour Union, nucleus of the I.L.P., was founded in the spring of 1891 following the great Manningham strike in Yorkshire; for the next three years the new Workman's Times played an important part in organising the new forces.

The legal 8 hours day, however, was not won, nor even seriously fought for; largely because of internal divisions it was 18 years before the Miners' Eight Hour Bill was passed. When, from 1891, the last phase of the great crisis set in the new unions found it necessary, in the absence of State insurance, to introduce some friendly benefits; before very long some of the new leaders had fitted pretty comfortably into the established bourgeois democratic machine, and the general labourers' unions were not more militant than others.

Tom Mann had correctly foreseen that many of the successes won would be lost when trade depression returned but in forecasting this he insisted again that trade unions must be clear as to their goal which was nothing less than' the abolition of poverty; to work for this goal required organisation. Those who set up a 'Chinese wall' between democratic and Socialist demands failed to appreciate this position. "Better we shall never see the fruit of our labour than... reap it at the cost of principle. Again we proclaim the Class War, raise the Red Flag on high and shout for 'the Social Revolution'";, was the barren comment of Justice upon the dock strike. (Sept. 21, 1889) Its abuse in the following months completed the estrangement of Burns and deterred Tom Mann from further

work with the S.D.F.; he did not formally resign but never resumed active membership. (\*)

"The English Social Democratic Federation is, and acts like, a small sect", said Engels in a newspaper interview a few years later. (Daily Chronicle. July 1, 1893). "It is an exclusive body. It has not understood how to take the lead of the working class movement generally and to direct it towards Socialism. It has turned into an orthodoxy. Thus it insisted upon John Burns unfurling the red flag at the dock strike, where such an act would have ruined the whole movement, and, instead of gaining over the dockers, would have driven them back into the arms of the capitalists. We (i.e. the revolutionary Marxists) don't do this. Yet our programme is a purely socialist one. Our first plank is the socialisation of all the means and instruments of production".

Tom Mann makes his position clear in two striking articles in the Labour Elector (January 4, 11, 1890) which sum up the efforts of the foregoing years to make socialism the inspiration of new life in trade unionism. It is here that he insists that the goal must be "the complete abolition of poverty" and that the chief weapon must be, not Parliament but the trade unions. He is no anti-parliamentarian, Tom writes, but many thought "that if we insist upon good men going to Parliament social evils will rapidly disappear". "I can see no ground whatever for believing that Parliament is about to lead the way in solving the social problem".

The immediate task must be to organise all sections of workers into trade unions, in order "to enlighten them as to the fundamental causes that create degradation in the midst of 19th century wealth". The trade union is far the best place for discussing labour questions effectively - and evidently Tom was thinking here of socialist groups: "Many of us have seen that time spent in theoretic speculations is almost wasted amongst men who are not willing to submit themselves to the discipline of a trades organisation. It is not talk about the future so much as practice in the present that is wanted". The union can best educate workers "in the benefits of organised action and in a real understanding of their industrial position". Brought into direct contact with one another they can thrash out labour questions "with the advantage of having the theory illustrated by the everyday incidents which they must discuss at their meetings" and so "be weaned of the indifference and selfishness which so often characterise those who refuse to undergo the salutary discipline of a trade union".

The next step must be to combine in Trades Councils. Why was the London Trades Council so weak? Its influence would be immeasurably greater if there were only a few thousand London trade unionists who looked upon trades unionism "not merely as a means of maintaining their present rates of wages at a minimum of cost and trouble to themselves, but as the germ of an organisation capable of a full exercise of its industrial, educational and political powers of completely freeing labour and making the worker master of his fate".

---

(\*) His relations with Hyndman were, however, later friendly and after his return from Australia in 1910 he joined the Social Democratic Party, as it had then become, for a short time. He later joined the British Socialist Party on its formation in 1916, thus becoming a foundation member of the Communist Party in 1920.

The underlying aim here is akin to that which Lenin set before Russian Social-Democrats twelve years later. (\*) "The only weapon of the proletariat in its struggle for power is organisation" - this is what Tom Mann was feeling towards. But, turning away from the theorising and individualism of Socialist cliques, Tom turned directly to organisations in which he had already experienced the potentialities of disciplined collective action. His aim - to bring to the mass organisations of the working class both socialist ideas and the necessary leadership and strength to fight for them - remained constant in the coning years though various avenues opened possibilities for action.

(\*) "The task of Social-Democracy is... to divert the labour movement, with its spontaneous trade unionist striving from under the wing of the bourgeoisie and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social-Democracy... Social-Democrats lead the struggle of the working class not only for better terms for the sale of labour power, but also for the abolition of the social system which compels the propertyless to sell themselves to the rich". (What is to be Done? (1902), Selected Works, ii, pp. 62-3, 78)

---

#### EDITORIAL NOTE

The theme of the next section of the projected book was to have been "Which Way?" In the summer and autumn of 1891 the president of the Dockers' Union has many concerns at the docks, while in 1892 Tom Mann, engineer, is involved in the internal politics of the A.S.E. All this time Mr. Tom Mann is sitting at the regular hearings of the Royal Commission on Labour with quite other associates, though he fights as well here as elsewhere: "His grasp of details, facts and figures is not to be beaten. His information is always ready. He is never befogged... The shipowner would like to make picketing illegal. Mann follows him up on his own argument and in a few smart thrusts point after point brings him quickly to a helpless standstill". (Arthur Lynch, Human Documents, 1896, p.77)

Meanwhile Tom Mann, socialist and leader of the new unionism, is in continual demand as speaker and adviser wherever an industrial dispute breaks out or a mass demonstration is planned; he frequently visits the provinces and takes a growing interest in municipal affairs, the co-operative movement, and labour clubs beginning to seek local and parliamentary representation for labour. But he is also courted by the middle-class and before the elections of 1892, which for the last time returned Gladstone to power, is invited by the liberals to take an official post in the state. His thoughts sometimes even turn to the Church of England which, it momentarily seems, might be transformed from within by the right kind of parson so as to hasten (instead of hindering) the abolition of poverty "natural, mental and spiritual" and the advent of the "ideal state".

Only some of the "many beginnings" of the early 1890's are covered in the following pages.

II. MANY BEGINNINGS 1891-2

1. The Docks Once More - Tom and Jack

When addressing the first annual congress of the Dockers' Union in September, 1890, Tom Mann had noted that "the attitude of the employers of to-day is decidedly different to that of a year and a half ago... In every port in the Kingdom steps of some kind are being taken to enable the employers, as a class, to act concertedly". But at this time he welcomed organisation among the dock directors and wharfingers, in the hope that it would reduce the chaos of competing small capitalist interests, make possible uniform conditions of wages and employment, and be a first step towards "industrial order". (\*)

The Shipping Federation, however, officially formed in August, 1890, to enable shipowners "to combine for protection against the tyranny of the 'new' unionism", soon showed a face as ugly as any employers' association in British history. From the first it acted in close alliance with the dock companies. So also Tom Mann and the Dockers' Union worked closely with the seamen's union and its founder and secretary Havelock Wilson. Seamen and dockers were closely related and the National Seamen's and Firemen's Union, founded on the north-east coast in 1887, had increased its membership during 1889 to 65,000. Havelock Wilson had imbibed his trade unionism from boyhood attendance at the Durham miners' gala, from Australian seamen, and from small seamen's friendly societies in the north-east; erratic and egocentric he had no time for Socialism and regarded the union he had founded as his private property. No doubt he did something to draw persecution upon himself, but the injustices he fought were real enough - both for himself and the seamen. "In the whole history of the trade-union movement of Britain", wrote Tom later, "there is no case of such persistent, systematic, and venomous persecution of a union official as that to which Havelock Wilson was subjected by the shipowners of this country". (\*\*)

According to Ben Tillett, the Shipping Federation "while whining about the brutality of trade unionists... have yet armed men with bludgeons, revolvers and supply of intoxicants... gangs of half-drunken men who have resisted with violence men fighting for dear life the principle of fair remuneration. In every dispute the same demoralising work has continued, aided very often by the police". (Minutes of 2nd Annual Congress of Dockers' Union, 1891, p.5). Agents of the Federation established "Free Labour Associations" aimed principally at the shore workers in London, Cardiff, Hull, Gloucester and elsewhere. (\*\*\*)

(\*) Dockers' Record, October, 1890. Later he was to press a scheme for municipalisation of the docks as a truer solution to the problem.

(\*\*) Memoirs, pp. 256-7. Tom, recalling the early days when he worked with Wilson at a time when the latter's name was synonymous in the trade union movement with conceit and dictatorial reaction, emphasised that, however much their views differed, he had then "always found him a straight-forward, honourable and loyal comrade. Moreover he was always at his post early in the day, tackling the most difficult tasks with the utmost readiness."

(\*\*\*) See Ben Tillett, "What is Free Labour?", Dockers' Record. Oct. 1890; J.Havelock Wilson, My Stormy Voyage Through Life, 1925, I, pp.209-11.

Ugly incidents of violence occurred in more than one port and in the years following the great dock strike many plots were hatched in the public houses against the union organisers. "Blackguards have set about me", writes Ben. "I have been sandbagged, brutally hustled, beaten insensible. Knuckle-dusters, life preservers... have been used upon me. Even my meetings were disturbed by the drunken fools inflamed by the incitement of those who exploited them". (Memories... pp. 173-4).

Though the Federation and its agents were active in London, the Bristol Channel was chosen for its first full-scale onslaught, in the spring of 1891, Cardiff the storm centre and the employers' leader, Sir William Thomas Lewis (later Lord Merthyr) was able to bring dock companies, coalowners, shipowners and railway interests into a common attack. The seamen were the first to be attacked, but the dockers came out in sympathy and also in dispute upon a host of grievances which had been the subject of protracted negotiation - in particular the vicious system of sub-contracting which was as bad as that formerly obtaining in London.

Henry Orbell, Ben Tillett, and when he became ill Tom Mann, joined Havelock Wilson at the scene of the conflict. Numerous police reinforcements were drafted in from Birmingham and London. At the height of the struggle, in April, sixty north-east coast seamen were brought, by deception and under heavy police guard, to Cardiff. They were good union men and, finding that they had been brought as blacklegs, joined the strikers as a body, leaving their baggage with the authorities who sent it to various Cardiff boarding-houses to be held as a form of hostage. Next day Havelock Wilson headed a great demonstration which called nt every boarding-house to demand return of the baggage and went on to a grand mass meeting of seamen and dockers addressed by himself, Tom and Ben. Charged with "unlawful assembly and riot" Wilson was sentenced on perjured evidence to six weeks' imprisonment. The seamen's strike was broken; the Shipping Federation enforced its "ticket" - all seamen to engage through Federation offices where preference was given to non-union men. The Cardiff dockers went back with nothing gained.

The Bristol Channel struggle marked the end of the first phase of union building and the onset of new and bitter struggles which culminated at Hull and in Bristol in 1893. Gone were the days of middle-class sympathy and philanthropic interest which had marked the London Dock Strike. The press was becoming more hostile and the middle-class public lent a readier ear to the employers' propaganda about "firebrands" and "excesses." The law was now being freely called upon by the employers and authorities, in particular charges were brought alleging "intimidation." When, after a favourable judgment in the High Court, such cases abated charges were brought for "obstruction" and picketing. In January, 1893, Ben was charged with "incitement to riot" at Bristol.

Meanwhile the unions had a hard struggle to bend the law to the service of justice in cases relating to employers' liability and compensation. "Every dock was a shambles....", Ben records. "Compensation for life or limb or health was stubbornly refused by the dock and shipping authorities... No inspection of gear, inefficient machinery, dangerous appliances, rotten slings and ropes, sacks loosely loaded....all bore their consequences.... Only too often the poor bloody tatters\* of a man were gathered up and thrown into the wings of the ship". It was not until 1895, after Tillett and James

Sexton had presented the dockers' case at the Labour Commission, that the docks were included within the scope of the Factory Acts - but employers' liability was withheld until 1908. (\*)

There were also difficulties within the movement, particularly as concerns joint action. Tom and Ben took a very conciliatory line towards troubles with the South Side Labour Protection League, of which their fellow Socialist Quelch was secretary, and this small general union continued its separate existence. Later attempts at amalgamation with the National Dock Labourers' Union in the northern ports were also unsuccessful. The proposal of Will Thome and the gasworkers that the two new brother unions should make their tickets interchangeable (as the same men were often gas stokers in winter and dockers in summer) was not considered practicable at this difficult early stage. The smaller weekly contribution paid by the gasworkers, and the dockers' claim to preference in employment on account of length of service led to some friction which was overcome by the mutual goodwill of the leaders.

It remained an urgent task to bring all port and associated workers into closer unity to meet the employers' counter-attack. Eventually, after a year's negotiations, there came into being in the autumn of 1891 the Federation of Trades and Labour Unions connected with the Shipping, Carrying and Other Industries, of which Tom became president and Clem Edwards (assistant secretary of the Dockers' Union) general secretary. (\*\*) Its rules, covering objects, financial contributions, powers of the executive council, took more than fifty meetings to draw up. (\*\*\*)

At a mass meeting in January, 1891, to witness the unfurling of the new banner of the Milwall branch of the Dockers' Union, Tom had referred confidently to the forthcoming federation; when it was achieved "they would put their foot down and say they did not intend to work with non-union men". (Daily Chronicle. Jan. 14, 1891) In the event by the close of the year a new phase in the economic crisis had opened and the union, far from continuing the offensive, was conducting a stubborn defensive fight to maintain its position. In September Ben reported to the second annual congress setbacks in several London

(\*) Tillet, Memories, pp. 172-3; Sir James Sexton. Agitator. 1935, chapter 15; Report of Commission of Enquiry into Conditions of Labour on the Docks, 1895.

(\*\*) Unions federated included Gasworkers, Dockers, Sailors & Firemen, General Railway Workers; and the South Side Labour Protection League with some twenty smaller unions covering watermen, lightermen, crane-drivers, ship repair workers, bargemen and coal porters.

(\*\*\*) See Royal Commission on Labour B 8614-8847: Appendices 25, 55, 57- Third Annual Report of Dockers' Union, 1892, p. 7. Even so they proved unsatisfactory and, often failing to secure much-needed amendments, the Dockers Union has to withdraw at the close of 1892 and the Federation to come to an end.

districts: the Medway, owing to depression in the cement industry, Tilbury, Northfleet, and at King's Lynn and other centres. In a letter to John Burns in October Tom wrote that the union's paying membership had fallen from 55,000 to 40,000.

It was at this point, early in September, 1891, that 300 dockers employed at the Hermitage and Carron wharves, Wapping, went on strike. The occasion, as at Hay's Wharf in January, 1890, was the meal hour issue - the employers imposing a cut which amounted to about 3s. a week. With the new trade depression beginning to settle this strike was the first full-scale display of strength in London by the joint forces of the dock employers and the Shipping Federation. It was also the first test of the new Federation of Trades and Labour Unions - and it was to bring a crisis in Tom's relations with his old comrade, John Burns.

The strike was fought with much bitterness. A regular service of blacklegs was shipped to Wapping by the river steamer "Bismarck" owned by the Victoria Steam Boat Association; the Shipping Federation also kept the steamship 'Scotland' in Albert Dock as a "floating boardhouse" for "free labourers", "where the union men could not get at them" and armed the blacklegs with revolvers. "At least in ten or twelve cases men have appeared at loopholes at the Carron and Hermitage Wharves, have presented revolvers at the pickets outside and have threatened to shoot them"; the police, active in protecting the blacklegs, refused to interfere with their arms. (Royal Comm. on Labours B 8640-45, 8708, 8196). Lightermen who refused to take goods to the wharves in dispute were sacked and blacklisted. Despite hearty support from the London Trades Council - which sent official speakers to the big Sunday demonstrations in Victoria Park and advised a boycott of the company's steamers - the continuing supply of blacklegs spelt defeat for the strikers. (L.T.C. Minutes, September 17, Oct. 1, 7, 1891; Annual Reports 1891, p. 6)

John Burns' only official connection with the Dockers' Union was as one of the Trustees(\*) but his great prestige entitled him to give an opinion on its affairs. Since the great strike there had been signs of a slackening of his close friendship with Tom. Burns had been busy with work on the L.C.C. and in Battersea, where he had established a reputation by working for improved housing and sanitation and by ready attention to local grievances; to be M.P. for Battersea, his birthplace, was an ambition steadfastly followed and the previous June the Battersea Labour League had started a special election fund for the next election (Workman's Times, June 12, 1891) Still in demand for all dockers' meetings and demonstrations, Burns had of necessity taken little share in the difficult organisational work following the London strike. The mutual dislike between himself and Tillett made matters no easier and in July, 1891 he had complained in a letter to Tom of extravagance and bad accounting by Ben in claiming minor expenses from union funds; he also objected to the way in which the Dockers' executive had loaned £570 to the Trade Unionist.

The following correspondence tells the story of his intervention in the Hermitage and Carron strike, his reaction to Tom's candidature for general secretary of the A.S.E. at this time, and the outcome. On October 5, 1891, when the strike had been on for about three weeks, Burns wrote to Mann, on

(\*) The union also contributed £1 a week to his income (the John Burns Wages Fund) until September, 1894.



the headed notepaper of the L.C.C. (\*)

Dear Tom,

It seems to me that the price of winning Carron and Hermitage wharf dispute is too high if it is intended to be a general strike. After the Cardiff and Southampton incidents and also Hays Wharf where the men were beaten is it worth while courting disaster when such may be averted.

I think it will be suicidal to extend the area of dispute farther than is necessary and if the meal hour dispute can be settled say by a hourly wage of 7d. that would be better than asking for, and striking for, a privilege - that is payment for meal hours; which no-one can defend as a right.

Considering the state of Trade and the time of year and also the condition of the men themselves towards this dispute who are in the Federation do try in the interests of the preservation of the Unions to bring about a settlement, even at the cost of giving up the interests of the 300 men to defend which may, I believe will, jeopardise the Riverside Unions and through them the whole Labour movement.

Your willingness to give up the dinner hour if breakfast is paid (here the draft breaks off)

Tom's reply, dated October 9, was friendly:

Dear Jack,

Thanks for your letter I agree with every suggestion you make with regard to limiting the area of dispute, and in negotiation to get the question if possible on a more satisfactory basis.

I have purposely refrained from any prominency in this case because I did not consider the terms we obtained from the firm as the result of the negotiations were bad ones. They first determined upon 28/- a week for the right to control the men 7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> hours including meals we got this up by stages until they promised definitely 33/- and would have paid it, and I was favourable to closing with this. The Wapping men however (and they are good sober steady fellows) could only look upon this as meaning an allround reduction and one that ought to be resisted for a time if only for purposes of protestation, ultimately this prevailed and I of course kept quiet hoping to see them score but expecting defeat which is now pretty near....

Dr Jack, re Engineers Sec'ship May I make use of your name on Committee etc.? I think I shall have good support in London but Manchester & Newcastle are doubtful.

Faithfully yours, Tom Mann

P.S. I shall probably be at London West Branch tomorrow night.

(\*) This and the following letters are preserved in the British Museum, Additional MSS 46286, Burns' letters in draft or as copies.

The West London branch of the A.S.E, was Burns' own branch and Tom evidently thought of going there from Bow in hopes of talking with his friends. Burns, however, did not attend the branch but immediately replied with another letter on the strike situation, ignoring Tom's request about the A.S.E.

Dear Tom,

The policy of drift will not suit.

If you believe as you say there is but one step to take and that is to face your men and stop them from going to their defeat. Even if better terms could be got and all the men reinstated the price to pay for it by a general strike is cut of all proportion to the gain. The men's places are filled as at Cardiff and you have nothing to gain by extending the dispute except to punish yourselves. Stop it at once or it is a bad job for you and the Union.

Yours truly, John Burns

He also wrote on October 10 to Clem Edwards:

Dear Edwards,

Don't wreck the Federation just formed you are beaten stop the strike at once. It never ought to have been started under the conditions it was.

Face your men and make them accept the defeat of 300 rather than secure the defeat of 30,000.

Yours truly, John Burns

Tom, having failed to see Burns, wrote again on October 11.

Dear Jack,

It is not quite so simple a job as yr letter w'd imply. I have had three hours with the Strike Committee, I urged the necessity for closing after getting every fact in connection with the business, they are not willing to close believing they can yet score if they get the support of other Unions. Now I have been one to encourage the formation of the Federation & now that it exists it must at least be recognised or we shall not be able to federate after, perhaps you know it has taken a year to bring so much about. Well, last night the Executive of this Federation met, a decent set of fellows too. And I was unable to bring them to my views they believing it possible to do great good, and of course there is this chance at any rate that determined action will prevent a general reduction w'h is contemplated if this goes down, I mean the wiping out of meal time payment. Tomorrow evening at 6.30 the Dockers Executive meet to make this their first business. I c'd make a stand and close it, but to do so at the present hour w'd be to sectionalise and antagonise, not so much myself as an individual but it w'd suit certain representatives to have Dockers officials declaring it must and shall be closed with a most mischievous weapon, I have used plain English to them and shall not hesitate to do so as fully as you w'd wish immediately it reaches a state when more good will be done than harm by such a course.

I hear from Woolwich you have decided to stand for Gen Sec A.S.E, is that 30? as if it is its a pity you didn't give me a hint & I certainly w'd not have stood?

I was at West London last night there was a good attendance but there were more drunken interruptions during the one hour & a half I was there than I have ever observed in any other branch in a similar time.

Yours Truly, Tom

The strike continued. A fortnight after Tom's request for support in his A.S.E, campaign Burns replied to it, on October 24.

Dear Tom,

I have carefully considered your request for my name on your committee for Engineers and after the most anxious thought and deliberate conviction have decided not to take any part in the election whatever.

Yours truly, John Burns

Two undated drafts among the Burns' papers refer to this episode. The first to an unknown correspondent.

Dear Sir,

The rumour attributing to me opposition to Mann's candidature, and that I am doing my beet to keep him out is absolutely untrue.

I have for reasons that commend themselves to me decided to take no part in the election at all.

If I see reason to alter that decision I will let you know what I intend to do.

(This last sentence replaced a previous draft: "When that attitude is altered then I will freely let it be known whom I will support".)

The other letter was to Tom, addressed for the first time by his surname.

Dear Mann,

To avoid all misunderstanding I write to you to say that it was ridiculous you and I not speaking yesterday.

I nodded to you and presuming you did not notice it I intended speaking to you after the meeting but missed you.

There is no desire on my part to quarrel with you if there was it would be childish indeed.

We will have to work together for Labour, easier and better it will be, for that, and both that no trivial pique or disagreement should prevent it.

I write this note so as to make my position clear.

Yours truly, John Burns

There is no evidence that Burns had replied to Tom's previous letter in which he had detailed the difficulties, both with the Strike Committee and with the executive of the new Federation, in the way of ending the strike. Instead he had written an outspoken letter to Ben Tillet on October 17.

Dear Tillett,

I have seen for some weeks that the dispute at the Wharves would end in the defeat of the men and have told Mann and Edwards so. I see now that the dispute is being needlessly prolonged and what is worse neither Mann nor you guiding it either to a speedy end either through admitting defeat or vigorously trying to secure success.

This I regard as positive cowardice and whether it offend or not I tell you frankly that this conduct on your part is almost criminal when at the same time you are spending your time and energy and the Dockers' money in going to religious conferences and addressing meetings in different parts of the country, where dockers interests cannot be served. As a Trustee of the Union I protest against it and as a man I am compelled to say that the conduct of this dispute is the saddest blow that your union has received. If it is a case of rate leaving the sinking ship and also candidly if the Dockers Union has simply become a platform from which you can speak whilst they suffer let me tell you I won't stand it, and ere other action is taken by me I give you my opinion of your action and say, stop this strike at once, ere disaster sets in on you and the men in your union.

Yours truly

John Burns

Here was no "trivial pique or disagreement" but an outright accusation, that two men who had been constantly engaged for the dockers' interests were guilty of cowardice, and of criminal negligence dictated by self-interest, in handling a dispute. Tom would certainly have seen this letter, and would not have missed the bitter jibe ("rats leaving the sinking ship") aimed at him for entering the A.S.E, contest and at Tillett who was now prospective parliamentary candidate for Bradford West, with the full permission of the Dockers' Annual Delegate Congress. (\*)

On the Friday of the seventh week of the strike Burns came down and addressed the union, telling them "they were beaten and must go back"\* On the Sunday, when the strike was finally abandoned, an orderly procession ended in a meeting outside West India Dock Gates addressed by Orbell and by Mann who handled the situation in a way best calculated to promote solidarity, set out the circumstances of the case, and in part replied to Burns.

"Admittedly", he is reported as saying, "good friends of theirs" had held the strike should have been over weeks ago, but the "Dockers' Union was essentially democratic and would not yield its guidance to any autocracy. Other trades unions might be led by a dictatorial and autocratic policy to success but they held in the Dockers' Union that

(\*) A deputation from the Bradford Labour Union waited upon the congress and asked for its authority to nominate Tillett as candidate. After Ben had declared that "should he be successfully returned to Parliament, and he found his secretarial duties (for the union) seriously interfered with he would unhesitatingly retire from Parliament", a resolution approving his candidature was passed by 22 votes to 3. Minute's of 2nd Annual Congress, Sept. 1891, pp.25-6'.

"such a policy was a bad one". "They were pledged to other unions and something of a substantial federation was likely to be brought about, but they held to their own policy and he himself, while he had full right to try and persuade men to his side felt it had been his duty to sink his opinion when he found himself in the minority.." (Morning Advertiser, Nov. 2, 1891)

Tom went on to show that the union had sustained the men and increased its membership, and that with the support from organised collections it was no poorer. The men were not scuttling back as best they could - and they had not done yet with the gentlemen at Carron Wharf. He was going to give evidence that week at the Royal Commission and submit to cross examination on the dock question. He had a scheme for replacing the present owners by a corporation directly responsible to the people. The constant disputes in connection with the docks, wharves, and granaries of the Port of London were forced on them by the conditions - which he vividly exposed. The strikers passed a resolution to allow no victimisation, not to return to work in small groups, and that ship hands and wharf hands should return together.

Seven weeks later a further query from Burns about the debt on the now defunct Trade Unionist was passed to Tom whose reply, dated December 21, shows that relations between the two had become ones of formality.

Mr. John Burns

Dear Sir,

. Your letter of enquiry respecting the indebtedness of Trade Unionist to Dockers Union has been placed before me & in reply I beg to say that the position is exactly as it was at the time yourself & colleagues last went over the Finances of the Union i.e. the sum used by authority of the Executive Council & endorsed by Quarterly Delegate Meeting.

No money is being advanced now nor has any been since you were last communicated with upon this matter the actual sum is £570.

Any thing further you require shall be glad to acquaint you of.

Yours truly

Tom Mann

## 2. A Weekend at Bradford

Despite the heavy claims of his work for the dockers, few months went by in 1891-2 when Tom did not spend at least a weekend (often many days) in the provinces lending assistance to one or another section of the labour movement - helping striking builders' labourers in Derby, addressing a trades council demonstration in Yorkshire, doing some propaganda work for his own union the A.S.E. The incidents of a weekend visit to Bradford in August, 1891, reveal something of the variety of his propaganda work at this time. This was, moreover, Tom's first close contact with the Yorkshire labour movement with which he was to remain closely associated during the next few years.

On the evening of Friday, August 21, he was addressing a meeting in the Colne Valley, at Slaithwaite. He had sent a telegram only that morning informing the newly-formed Colne Valley Labour Union that he would call en route for Bradford, but the news had quickly passed round the industrial village and about 300 crowded the room to hear Tom Mann. After the meeting he had a quiet chat with the committee members.

The union had been formed exactly a month before, on July 21, 1891, when a small group of textile workers and others had met in the Slaithwaite Social Democratic Club. The first entry in the minutes is a resolution to form a Labour Union in the Colne Valley "on the lines of the Bradford Labour Union", the second concerns election of officers and committee, the third runs: "resolved that the Secretary write Mr. Tom Mann of London inviting him to be candidate on behalf of the Labour Union for a Parliamentary seat at the next election". (Minutes Book: History of the Colne Valley Labour Party, 1941)

Since 1884 Socialist propaganda in Leeds, Bradford and the West Riding had been mainly undertaken by a small group of gifted young working class propagandists in the Socialist League. Making little impression at first, they had come to prominence by giving active leadership in the struggles of the 'new' unionism - to builders' labourers and tailoring workers, in the great Leeds gas strike of 1890, above all among the woollen and worsted workers through the influence of such younger union leaders as Ben Turner. The textile workers, who had their own paper championing the cause of independent labour and trade unionism, the Yorkshire Factory Times, were now involved in hard-fought struggles - often against employers prominent in local Liberal politics - to defend conditions already so poor that they roused Tom to indignation when evidence was given on the Royal Commission.

The long strike at Manningham worsted mills in Bradford had led to conflict between the Liberal municipal authorities and the workers in April, 1891. In May the Bradford Labour Union was formed with the aim of securing independent labour representation "irrespective of the convenience of any political party" in municipal affairs and in Parliament. Formed with active Socialist support this, and other new Labour unions in the Colne Valley, at Halifax etc., arose directly out of industrial struggle, or from conflict between the workers and their Liberal employers which demanded expression in the political as well as the industrial field. In a climate of sharpening class struggle the need for "independent labour" representation seemed self-evident: the Colne Valley Labour Union did not even bother to adopt any programme or statement of objects. Tom Mann and Ben Tillett, nationally famous champions of militant trade unionism, embodied the aspirations of the Labour Unions in a practical sense; hence the invitations to these two to contest the East Bradford and Colne Valley constituencies. Ben had been invited to contest by the Bradford Labour Union as soon as this was inaugurated.\*

(\*) Workman's Times, May 8, 1891. He then refused: "My work outside the House of Commons is the most important, more valuable than any could be inside" but some months later agreed to stand for West Bradford. Tom confessed long after that in refusing Ben had acted under his advice. Clarion. September 24, 1909.

Tom did not accept the Colne Valley invitation on this occasion; on the other hand he did not give a final refusal. He told the committee members that the economic issues should be fought out in the trade unionists' clubrooms: and pointed out the need for a much stronger and more active trade union movement in the Colne Valley. But he also promised to consider the invitation further. (Yorkshire Factory Times. August 28, 1891: History of Colne Valley Labour Party, p.7)

An interview he gave to the Bradford Observer at the weekend, which attracted a good deal of attentions clarifies his attitude to this question. Great progress had been made in the last six years by the new movement of labour, he said, there was a splendid outlook with many dangers passed. But a danger remained, that

"the leaders were sometimes too superficial; agitating for Labour representation before arriving at a clear idea of a labour policy, and skipping, so to speak, the real work of trade unionism which is to organise the workers into solid bodies of men systematically meeting and maintaining their contributions".

On the Saturday afternoon a mass demonstration of the Bradford Trades Council passed its first resolution in favour of putting forward Labour candidates at the coming municipal elections - a result of the Manningham strike. On the Sunday afternoon Tom was at the annual demonstration of the Bradford branch of the General Railway Workers' Union, attended by over 4,000 including deputations from neighbouring branches. The procession was headed by the borough brass band and the splendid silk banner of the Manchester and Salford branch. Supporting the resolution on the eight hour day for all railway workers, Tom hammered home his constant theme of organisation. The hours and conditions of railway workers, shameful as they were, were largely due to imperfect organisation; sympathetic meetings in London and Bradford multiplied a thousand times would never alter that fact unless they resulted in more perfect organisation. If the railwaymen could not do better in the future than they had done in the past they were not worth talking to. "Out of their own ranks must come their own deliverers, and... meetings ought to result in a great alteration in the proportion of organised and unorganised workers". If unity was maintained they could, with the help of other workers, revolutionise the conditions under they lived.

This is one instance among many at this period of Tom's persistent habit of urging the workers to do things for themselves - never in the old-fashioned 'self-help' way but in a 'scientific' way, as he said, based on the facts of society, the economic basis of capitalism and socialism. He never commiserated with workers suffering under conditions they were in a position to improve by their own actions. Rather, he told them in straight terms to get on with the job for themselves, offering as the key to achieving their goal, organisation.

When he was asked by the Bradford Observer whether the strong trade union bodies he advocated would have the effect of raising wages, Tom replied:

"I do; but it is not merely a question of raising wages. The aim of trade unions is the perfection of human nature, and insistence on the right of culture for all instead of for the few, and teaching men to appreciate the refinements of life".

Questioned further about the agitation in the Bradford district for labour representation on local bodies and in Parliament, Tom developed his views. The tendency of the times was towards indifference to Liberalism and Toryism.

"I do my best to encourage contempt for politicians. We ask them for nothing; we intend to do our own business. When they approach us, it is only with a view to controlling us for their own purposes, and I do not conceal the delight I feel when I see consternation in the camp of either party".

He did not himself give much priority to representation of labour in Parliament:

"I do not concern myself much about Parliamentary parties. My aim is to spread amongst workmen a knowledge of industrial economics, and the channels for the diffusion of this knowledge are the trades unions and the Cooperative movement, especially the productive branch of Cooperation. This knowledge... will soon assert itself in municipal life, and then the workers will take care to put upon local bodies men in sympathy with their aims. We want all our energy for these things; by them we shall prove our capability and until then it is a waste to attempt Parliamentary work. I am therefore not anxious to run Labour candidates for Parliament".

Finally, however, while stressing yet again the fundamental importance of the mass movement, he qualified this statement:

"The real worker for the people is the man who is changing their habits and thought, and he must work amongst the rank and file. Always remember that Parliament will not change the people, but as the people are changed, they will very soon change Parliament. At the same time I do not deny that there is an advantage in having a few working men in Parliament. They would be specially useful to pilot Labour measures in Committee rooms". (\*)

Yet another engagement was fulfilled this weekend. On the Saturday evening Tom spoke at the Bradford branch of the A.S.E, on the position of the union. Numerically the strongest, financially the richest, society it had led the van of the whole trade union movement, he said, but the position in the localities was not what it should be. Of the 70,000 members who turned up at lodge rooms and paid contributions, few took that interest in the social question required "of all true men". There were still 250,000 unorganised machine-men and labourers. There were a number of small unions in the industry which should be brought into amalgamation.

(\*) The interview was republished in the Yorkshire Factory Times. August 28, 1891, under the headings: "Mr. Tom Mann and Direct Labour. Representation. 'Not anxious to run Labour Candidates'. Strange Attitude".



The need for sectional unions would cease if the executive of the A.S.E. could be persuaded "to produce a more elastic constitution... to broaden the basis of entrance". He hoped to see "good men from each locality" at the forthcoming delegate meeting "who would advocate a policy of 'more go' in the General Office". Loud and continued applause followed his invitation to the audience to say whether the union had an efficient staff of organisers, "men who could hold their own in debate with the educated sophisticated employers of to-day", or whether he was advocating a hot-headed policy. (\*)

Ben Tillett, also present at this meeting, spoke on the theme of the aristocracy of labour. He asked his audience "to be democrats of labour rather than aristocrats upon twenty-nine bob a week". The Yorkshire Factory Times (August 28, 1891) included in its report his tribute to Tom in this connection:

"Now Tom Mann was an aristocrat, but when he (Tillett) had been working some time and some of the would-be, or should-be reformers did not help him, and he said, 'Tom, come and help us', Tom had replied 'Alright, Old Man'? and he did - that fine aristocrat of labour - help him all through to that day".

The events of this one busy weekend illustrate the new interests in the labour movement, Tom's attitude to and involvement in these; his confidence in the power of leadership, his old vigour in no way weakened but matured by recent responsibilities; and his stature in a movement within which, little more than three years before during his propaganda days at Bolton, he had been little known.

### 3. Local Government and the Cooperative Movement

Tom's cool attitude to Parliament was the outcome not only of his dedication to the fundamental task of organising and educating the workers but also to the attraction of the doctrine of municipal socialism. In 1889 he, with John Burns, had joined the Fabian Society, several S,D.F,-ers being members of both organisations. At first this society seemed to him simply a group of well educated people who were active socialists, fertile in practical, well-devised schemes for putting to good use the new weapon of municipal government. They were trying to convert the middle and upper classes to ideas of municipal socialism - if they succeeded, all the better. But some of the ideas took hold.

In August, 1890, a year before his interview with the Bradford Observer, Tom told a Newcastle audience that "the fighting out of the Labour question would take place in the municipalities, not in Parliament. Parliamentary power would become decentralised and greater power would be granted to local bodies". (Workman's Times. Aug. 29, 1890)

(\*) This was one of Tom's efforts to shake up the A.S.E. by an energetic propaganda campaign - which intensified when he put up for the general secretaryship in 1892. He narrowly missed election, polling 17,152 votes as against John Anderson's 18,102.

He pointed out that there was not a single representative workman on the council of that great industrial city, and urged more attention to municipal elections.

By the autumn of 1891 he was being reproached by the Workman's Times (Oct. 2, 1891) for "becoming enamoured with the idea of evolving the New Socialism by means of municipal and co-operative action". Though the same article itself shows some infection with the new conception by noting: "We have in all our towns and cities the germs of socialism already existing. In the Corporations and Local Boards we have the framework of what the future Commune will be built of".

This was a period when the Fabians were actively popularising the gas and water socialism they had derived from Chamberlain: "Bates and housing; gas and water, trams and docks, markets, libraries, public houses, schools and workhouses all began to take on a new aspect when their transfer from private companies to municipal monopolies was seen as a step towards socialism". (History of the Fabian Society, ed. Pease) Something of the spell laid upon John Burns by 'work for the newly formed L.C.C., can be caught from his reminiscences fifty years later. (Star. March 21, 1939)

"We fought for unification so that we could ameliorate the poor by taxing the rich, with Battersea, a parish of the poor, assisted by Belgravia, a parish of the rich... Unused to municipal life, and, in the opinion of many, unsuited to the details of civic administration, I left the workshop to take my part in the management of the city.

"With the ardent spirits who ushered in the dawn of a new municipal life, and upon whom devolved the duty of recasting and carrying out London's work, I cheerfully and energetically worked... In those early years I always kept before me a high ideal of a dignified, unified, beautified London, free from poverty and uncontrolled by selfish interests. My programme was:

"Extension of the powers of the Council so that the City with all its funds and endowments be included in and used by a real Municipality for London.

That all monopolies such as Gas, Water, Tramways, Omnibuses, Markets, Docks, River Steamboats, and Electric Lighting should be municipalised and the profits devoted to public purposes.

Establishment of Municipal Hospitals in every district and control by the Council of those which already exist.

Artisans' dwellings to be constructed and owned by the Council.

The Police of the City and Greater London to be controlled by the L.C.C.

Cumulative rating, the taxation of ground landlords and the provision of new sources of revenue.

Efficient sanitary and structural inspection of dwellings and workshops.

Direct employment of all labour by the Council at 8 hours a day and trade union rates."

In directing attention to the importance of municipal work, Tom was well in touch with the tendency of the times. Between 1882 and 1892 Labour representatives on local bodies (including school boards and boards of guardians) grew from twelve to two hundred; by 1895 they numbered six hundred. The County Councils Act of 1888 provided new opportunities for working class participation in local government but it was the new unionism, wrote Ben Turner, that "brought the new agencies of labour representation. There were not 50 labour men on public bodies in all England before 1888 and not one independent labour man". (About Myself, p.102). This was the road by which Tom Mann approached the question of representation on local councils, linking this closely with trade union work. One of the main functions he had hoped the Trade Unionist newspaper would serve was to bring together the growing trades council movement throughout the country and to encourage it in the sponsorship of municipal candidates,

Tom, however, did not leave union work to take part in managing a city, nor did he long remain involved with the Fabians. Whatever his critics may have thought, he himself still inclined to think it would be through organised strength in trade unions and trades councils that the working class would find political as well as industrial expression. "It is not absolutely certain that it will be through the agency of the Trades' Union Movement that the worker will come right side up", he said at the Dockers' Second Annual Congress in the autumn of 1891. "It may not be, but I rather think it will, noting the forces that are in action now". (Tom Mann's Presidential Address &c. p.16). Meanwhile he was also surveying another field of working class activity - Cooperation.

During the years 1891-3 Tom paid a number of rousing visits to Co-operative Societies up and down the country and local papers often filled columns with his addresses. In particular he addressed the 24th. Co-operative Congress, held at Rochdale in June, 1892, to honour the pioneers of 1844, at which another prominent visitor was Beatrice Potter shortly to become Mrs. Sidney Webb. The Fabians in their first conceptions of the paternal state and municipal socialism (Manifesto, 1884; Fabian Essays, 1888) attributed no importance whatever to the existing organisations of the working class. The other two socialist societies, the S.D.F. and the Socialist League, only saw one side of the truth, namely that the Co-ops had not superseded capitalist production and were steeped in liberalism and class collaboration, (\*) But after the Dock Strike, under the influence of the "to the People" movement in general and Beatrice Potter in particular, the Fabians widened their conception of "permeation".

The new tone was set by the address given to a conference of trade union officials and Co-operators at Tynemouth in August, 1892, later published as The Relation between Co-operation and Trade Unionism by Beatrice Potter (Mrs. Sydney Webb). Its theme, which deeply interested

'(\*) After Chartism "so called Co-operation began to flourish: it was really an improved form of joint stockery, which could be engaged in by workmen but was and is fondly thought by some to be, if not a shoeing horn of Socialism at least a substitute for it". (W.Morris & Belfort Bax, Socialism, its Growth and Outcome, 1893, p.181)

Tom Mann, was that the day of the small self-governing workshop or unit of Co-operative production was past, whilst trade unionism alone could not "secure for the workers the rent and profit new made out of their labour". "Something more than mere trade combination is... required if we are to realise the ideal of a community of workers obtaining the full fruits of their labour. The good trade unionist must supplement his trade unionism by co-operation, local and national, and seek to substitute the community in ~~one~~ or other of its organisations for the private... rent receivers".

It was, however, two months before this that Tom Mann had urged his view, that co-operation should be supplemented by loyalty to trade unionism so bringing together two wings of the mass movement. (\*) He spoke to representatives of a movement which, the gentle J.N.Ludlow had told the Royal Commission that same year, "is becoming very much more of a middle-class movement than it used to be and perhaps less advantageous to the working classes than I hoped at one time it would be". (Q. 1804) Old Holyoake, Chartist, secularist and first historian of the movement, conducted some of the Congress delegates to the graves of James Smithies, William Cooper and others of the "Twenty-eight", but they paused first at the grave of John Bright where Holyoake's praises were as heartfelt as his tributes to the Rochdale pioneers. In 1890 the inaugural address to the Co-operative Congress had been delivered by Lord Rosebery; Manchester and Salford had celebrated their thirtieth anniversary with an address from the Catholic bishop of Salford, while the north-western section had listened at Huddersfield to the Anglican bishop of Ripon.

Tom Mann, in his address to the Rochdale Congress in 1892, strikes a new revolutionary note. As he speaks, pleading for socialist activity in every sphere of working class existence, co-operative society, trade union and municipal council, his never-failing consciousness of struggle transforms the Fabian analysis into passionate life. He calls for closer unity between co-ops and trade unions (let him go and preach that to the T.U.C., grumbled a leading co-operator) (\*\*), attacks the long hours worked by co-operative employees and the 'high divi' policy, calls for a new crusade in co-operative and municipal affairs, and audaciously summons co-operators to march in the great London Mayday processions (again he is a pioneer):

"What an object lesson might have been given to statesmen, capitalists and workers on Mayday last if when the tens of thousands marched to Hyde Park there had been included... a properly representative contingent of the London branch of the Wholesale, which might have included, in addition to banners, well arranged specimens of Co-operative produce, all trade union made".

(\*) The Duties of Co-operators in regard to the Hours and Conditions of Labour, by Mr. Tom Mann, President of the Dockers' Union, Manchester. (Paper read at the 24th. Annual Congress of Co-operative Societies, Rochdale, June 1892).

(\*\*) Workman's Times. June 18, 1891

"Material progress is made, the standard of living raised, but not for all. Who will embrace those whom an imperfect organisation now casts aside?" "Is it consistent for a member of a co-operative store to declaim against the evils of competition and quietly to acquiesce in the working of overtime?" "Very few members are prepared at present to encourage shorter hours for employees at the expense of less dividend ... As yet there is no really healthy appreciation of trades union principles on the part of co-operators as a body nor of co-operative principles on the part of trade unionists. Even yet it is dividend, dividend; that is demanded? thereby exhibiting the pure capitalistic qualities".

"How feeble have been the efforts of co-operators as such on municipal bodies", They should be coming to the front "openly and if need be combatively" and "to prove to themselves and to all concerned the many-sidedness of the industrial movement", Co-operative candidates should be put "in the field of municipal and political activity". Control of state and municipal trading monopolies was a task for co-operators. There should be unity between Fabians, Co-operators and trade unionists: "the three forces working harmoniously together ought ere long to lead us out of the present industrial wilderness".

In London, with 200,000 trade unionists, the co-operative societies were miserably weak. Could not the movement

"send forth its missionaries not in rely to arouse those who sleep but 'to' counsel those who are grasping the principles... Propagandist activity, earnest passionate advocacy of the principles, persistent rappings at the doors of the respective trades organisations". .

A "wider interpretation" of a co-operator's duties was wanted, "Is not a co-operator a citizen?" Collective control of production, whether by State, municipality or co-operative society, involved divergence of interests between the representative body of consumers and the wage workers employed by them. This had been shown in the Leeds (municipal) gas strike and could be seen in every co-op store. Hence the need both for fully organised trade unions and for collaboration between town councils and trades councils.....

All this led up to the conclusion that the co-operative and trade union movements are necessary complements of one another. To-day there is too much friction and jealousy between them, Tom told the congress; their proper relation should be that of the ideal marriage. His speech met with an enthusiastic reception, the more so since he had recently been championing co-operation within the trade union movement.

The following September he was again urging the importance of co-operation on trade unionists. "Trade unions enable us as wage earners to secure fair conditions for the time being, but we require to organise also as wage spenders", he said in his presidential address to the third annual congress of the Dockers' Union. (Third Annual Report, p.84) He had given the matter great prominence at the previous congress, urging union members - and also their wives - to take a much

greater part in the detailed voluntary work of the Co-operative movement. (Minutes of 2nd. Annual Congress, pp. 15-16) He also pressed the question of municipal factories or workshops and (at the 1892 Congress) linked the question of co-operative manufacturing establishments and municipal activity: "the same principle that permeates the co-operative movement ought to permeate our municipal councillors".

Later he presented the full case for replacement of the capitalist system by co-operative and municipal enterprise, through the joint power of the trade union and co-operative movements, at a meeting organised jointly by the Kettering Co-operative Society and Trades Council in December, 1893, in a lecture "The Faults of our Present Industrial System - and How to Remedy Them". The present industrial system, he is reported as saying (Kettering Guardian, December 8, 1893) "was controlled for the profit making of a section instead of for the use of the general community".

"But the time was coming when the reward for labour would be the total value created by the labourer... Co-operation, rightly understood, demanded all that. They would establish a condition of things which was spoken of of old: ' If a man will not work neither shall he eat'... If they felt that trade ought to be conducted for use and not for profit and that the full profit should go to labour let them endorse Co-operation and Trades Unionism in all its forms. Let them do all they could through the Municipalities and Parliament so that trade ere long would be controlled in the public and not in the private interest..."

By contrast with the sectarianism of Hyndman and his fellows Tom in these years was alone in his restless visions of the "many-sidedness of the industrial movement" as he put it at the Rochdale Congress. His sense of the power of the organisations of the people - of the fruits within the people's grasp if only these organisations were rightly used - his broad, constructive approach to existing organisation - these were things which many a "strict Socialist", proud of his superior knowledge, did not yet begin to understand.

---

This is a double number (pamphlets Nos. 26 and 27) of OUR HISTORY which is published quarterly by the History Group of the Communist Party. The annual subscription is 5s. (8s. for overseas), to be sent to The Business Manager, Our History, c/o Central Books, 37 Grays Inn Road, London, W.C.I. Single copies of this number 3s.6d. (post free).