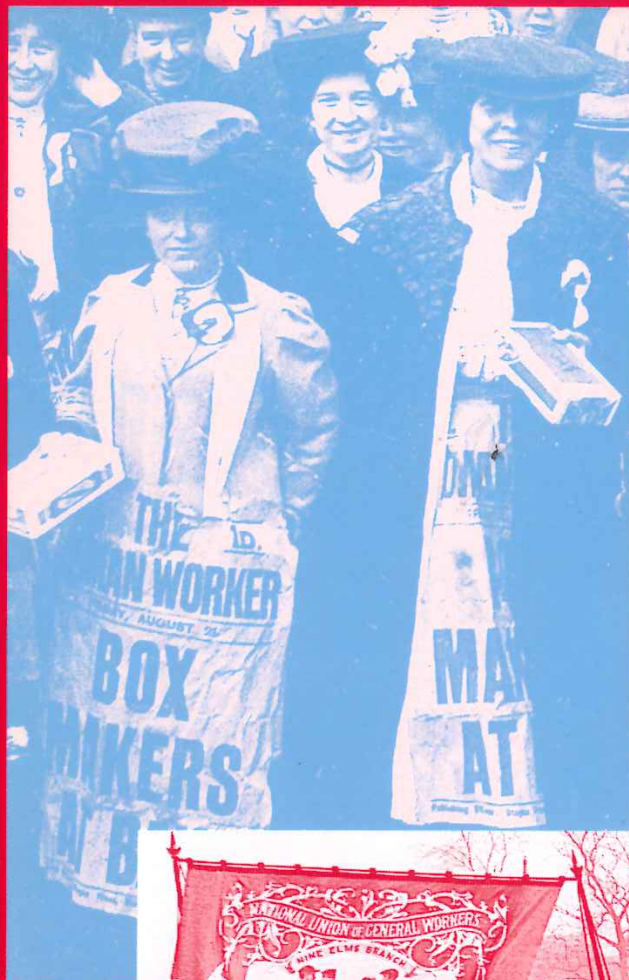
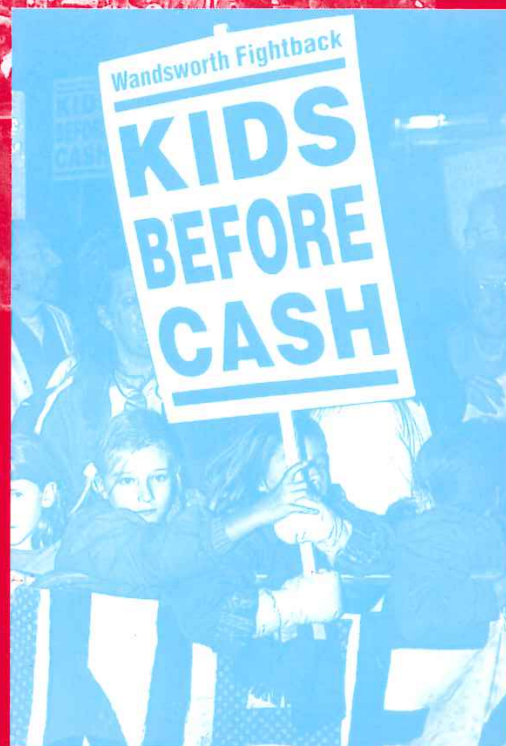


# BUILDERS OF THE BOROUGH



A century of  
achievement by  
Battersea and  
Wandsworth  
Trades Union  
Council from  
1894 to 1994



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Ben Rudder

*Ben Rudder  
many thanks*

BATTERSEA & WANDSWORTH TRADES UNION COUNCIL  
177 LAVENDER HILL, LONDON SW11 5TE

Builders of the Borough: A century of achievement  
by Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Union Council  
from 1894 to 1994

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## Preface

A hundred years ago a worker's life was cheap.

The onset of ever more exploitative forms of capitalism meant that health, safety, security and decent pay came a distant second to the great god profit. Realising that no one else was going to act in their interest, workers began the process of building a movement to articulate their demands; the general unions and the trades councils are the legacy bequeathed to us from that mighty struggle.

The working people of Battersea and Wandsworth have faced a multitude of challenges, experienced victories and defeats during the century. Those events are described here, along with personal accounts of the struggles that shaped the lives and consciousness of generations of activists.

It is a great honour to be asked to introduce this document. Looking back through the pages of our history, you realise what an immense debt the organised workers of the 1990s owe the class fighters of the past. It is our responsibility to keep fighting in defence of our culture, our organisations, and our conditions, both for the generations of workers described in these pages, and those yet to come.

Our trades council will continue to battle against injustice, for all those disadvantaged by what continues to be a monstrously cruel political system. We may not yet have built Jerusalem in Battersea and Wandsworth's green and pleasant lands, but I think a worker's life is now worth a little more than in 1894. Let us all strive to ensure that by the time of the bicentenary we live in a world where the worth of the working class is reflected at every level of society.

*Toby Kinder*  
*President*





Battersea Trades and Labour Council executive committee members in 1906. Clockwise from top left: G. Streat, J. P. Dixon, G. Sermon, F. Colborne, E. Smith, W. Greaney, J.P. Hoyle, F. Scammell, J. H. Brown (secretary), W. Melville (president), F. Bench, W. Jelley

## A weapon is forged

Hungry children, unshod and dressed in rags, were a common sight in London in 1894, as the London Trades Council minutes of that year record. Parts of Battersea were as poor as anywhere in the notorious East End, with many families living in single rooms. Diphtheria, scarlet fever, measles, whooping cough and diarrhoea claimed the lives of hundreds of children that year. Nearly 500 babies under a year old died in the neighbouring and more middle-class borough of Wandsworth – the health inspector's report said it was a 'good year' because of the mild winter.

A pall of coal smoke hung over the five million inhabitants of the largest city on earth, and respiratory diseases were the biggest cause of death. The poorest were crowded on to the city's low-lying marshes, where foul air, flooding and disease were most prevalent, and life averaged fourteen years less than that expected for residents of the fashionable high ground of Hampstead. The old marshland of the Thames included the riverside areas of both Battersea and Wandsworth, where streets of poorly drained houses ran right up to the factory gates of Morgan's 'Plumbago Crucible Works' and Battersea Mills on Church Road, or Price's 'Belmont Works (Candle and Soap)' and Garton's 'Saccharum Works' on York Road. Amenities were rudimentary, water obtainable only from standpipes in the poorer areas. The Wandsworth public health inspector commented that the water provided by the private suppliers was 'often not better than the Thames'.

It was a far cry from the days when lavender was grown on Lavender Hill, and Wandsworth Common was the edge of the countryside. Battersea's population grew from a mere 6,887 in 1841 to a cramped 150,558 by 1891. The small parish had been inundated

with the sons and daughters of farm labourers and small-town manufacturers from all over Britain and Ireland, come in search of work.

The work they sought was hard and unpredictable. Saturday working and at least 60 hours a week was the norm. In many trades, especially building and on the docks, daily, or even hourly hiring was standard. There was no health service, no unemployment pay, no social services, and 'poor relief' meant the workhouse.

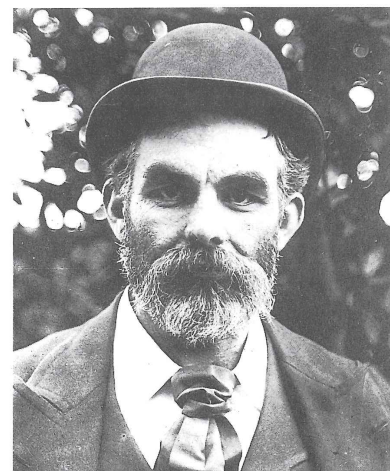
Today, severe poverty is rising again, but a time traveller to 1894 would nevertheless be struck by the shoddy clothing, adulterated food, dark and unpaved streets, poorly furnished rooms and extreme overcrowding. At work, our time traveller would most likely be speechless with sheer physical exhaustion from each long day's labour – though such silence would save them from being sacked for answering back.

In Battersea, hard manual work was demanded on the wharves and riverside factories. The engineering work at the Nine Elms and Longhedge locomotive building and repair yards was no light task, nor hauling the levers in the dozens of signal boxes on the half-dozen separate railway companies' lines that criss-crossed the area. Women did heavy work in laundries, packaging factories, Price's candles, or as domestic servants in the Wandsworth Common and Clapham villas of the middle classes.

The average number of births to women born in 1860 was six, of whom perhaps two could be expected to die before adulthood. Many women worked, even though keeping the house and childcare was more than a full-time job. Even those women not registered as working almost certainly took in laundry or sewing and dressmaking. Mud and dust was constantly brought in from unpaved streets, while water, coal, and foodstuffs were often carried long distances. All washing was done by hand and without modern detergents, so elbow grease was the only way of removing the dirt.

Nevertheless, the late 1880s were witness to a mood of rising hope. After three generations of merciless exploitation by industrial capital, at last a true weapon seemed to have been found

John Burns, who came to prominence as an organiser of the 'new unions', was elected to parliament in 1892 as MP for Battersea. He and Keir Hardie were the first to espouse the cause of labour in the House of Commons



for the working class – the general trade unions. They had burst on to the London scene in a blaze of strike action, especially the match girls' strike of 1888 and the victorious month-long dockers' strike of the summer of 1889, which ended sub-contracting and gained an hourly rate of 6d (2.5p).

The 'new unions', as they were known, drew on the experience of the old skilled unions, but also brought the power and volatility of mass membership. Battersea was an important focus for new unionism, and provided the popular base for two prominent advocates, Tom Mann, best remembered for his life-long campaign for the eight-hour day, and John Burns. The Battersea Social Democratic Federation (SDF) backed Mann's campaign and threw itself into the fight to get Burns elected to parliament in 1892.

In Battersea there was a useful mix of craft learning and unskilled enthusiasm. Close by the overcrowded and chronically poor areas, like the 'Little Hell' of Little Europa Place near Morgan's, lived a

substantial community of skilled workers and craftsmen in places such as the Shaftesbury Park Estate, lying between Lavender Hill and Eversleigh Road. Burns owed his election to the men of such estates – for neither unskilled men nor any woman yet had the vote. Burns was himself a resident of the Shaftesbury Park Estate. He and Keir Hardie were the first MPs to espouse the cause of labour.

Burns had risen to public prominence largely through his oratory while recruiting to the 'new unions'. In 1889, the year of the dock strike, Burns organised the gas workers at the large Vauxhall works. They took strike action soon after. He also recruited for the General Railway Workers Union at the nearby Nine Elms goods yard and locomotive works.

In the same year, Burns and the SDF were involved in the founding of the Battersea Labour League. The league served as a co-ordinating body between the socialist and radical-liberal wings of the group backing Burns' election campaign. Four years later, in November 1893, the league decided to set up a local trades union body, the 'Battersea Trades and Labour Council', though membership was extended to political organisations as well. Its first secretary was Burns' young lieutenant, Stephen Sanders.

## Pioneers of municipal reform

Though the trades council movement had begun in Liverpool in 1848, Battersea was one of the first London areas to form a trades council. Open to all trades and based locally, trades councils were the principal conduit for working class political aspirations in the period prior to the formation of the Labour Party.

In Battersea this political and social role was clearly recognised, the trades council being described by its founders as 'a permanent organisation, constituted upon a democratic basis, and capable of expressing in an authoritative manner the wishes and desires of the organised workers in this locality'.

And what were the wishes of this newly awakened force? To judge by the early programmes of the trades council, the first priority was not with members' pay and conditions, but with housing, lighting, drainage, food, health, and local amenities.

The power to make such municipal improvements lay with the 'vestry', the parish ratepayers' organisation which preceded borough councils. The trades council's first task was to join forces with the Liberals to ensure the election of their joint nominees, the 'Progressives'. One target in the sights of the trades council were the grasping private contractors employed by the vestry. A pledge to oppose the middleman was required of all nominees.

Thanks to trades council campaigning, and the success of national working-class pressure to extend the franchise, the Progressives swept into control in 1894, securing seventy-three seats against the Moderates' forty-two. Battersea was nationally renowned for its success in labour circles, having a high number of 'labour' candidates on the Progressive slate.

Though many political tendencies were represented, it was upon





1898: roadmenders on Albert Bridge Road. One of the first direct works departments in Britain was set up in Battersea after vigorous campaigning by the trades council

the trades council that policy was thrashed out. Battersea trades council can justifiably claim to have played a major part in setting the agenda for municipal development for decades ahead. Even Tory-controlled boroughs were eventually obliged to offer some of the services pioneered in Battersea.

A direct works department was set up, one of the first of its kind in the country and in the world, and was encouraged by the trades council in 1897 to begin work on the Latchmere Estate. The trades council was a staunch defender of its principles, and when in 1897 a group of London County Council (LCC) councillors denounced direct labour, Battersea went to the London Trades Council, successfully insisting that the detractors got a sound public drubbing.

Within a few years, the trades council's sponsored councillors – many like J. H. Brown served first on the trades council before being elected to local government – were witnessing the fruit of their



January 27, 1889: The official opening of Battersea municipal workshop by William Davis, later Battersea's first mayor. John Burns is to the left of the table. William Melville is third from the right in the front row

policies. In only a few years, the borough, created from the vestry in 1899, had, alongside its council housing, a municipal laundry, extra public baths and libraries, free school milk, a battalion of sanitary inspectors, its own cheaper electricity supply, and was the first borough to have health visitors and a local food analysis laboratory.

In those days it was common for food to be deliberately adulterated by unscrupulous manufacturers, and when the laboratory was established in 1905, the only one of its kind in the country, one in eight items were found unfit to eat – and that followed the 1904 abolition of 'insanitary underground bakehouses'.

Electoral success was further assisted by the canny introduction of an electoral registration office, the first of its kind. The trades council repeatedly won concessions on tram fares for the local workforce, and boasted of its success in ensuring workers a ten-minute ride from East Hill to Westminster.



In addition to its pioneering work in local government, the trades council maintained an impressive activity in more traditional trade union matters as well as national and international affairs. Battersea became a national focus for the campaign to end the British war against the Boers. In 1898, the thirty-three affiliated organisations of the trades council backed South Wales miners on strike. In 1899 it held public meetings against compulsory smallpox vaccination, then being used as a condition for employment. In 1901 it supported striking Penrhyn Quarrymen, and later raised money for Russian workers in the 1905 revolution; there was also a large Battersea contingent on the July 9, 1905, London march which formed part of the national campaign for unemployment relief.

The names Reform Street and Freedom Street, lying side by side on the Latchmere Estate, nicely hint at the often fiery political coalition on the trades council ranging between its church-going, upright Liberal reformers and die-hard revolutionary socialists. At the same time, the names of Joubert Street, after a Boer general, and Odger Street, in honour of a trade union leader, reflect both international and traditional trade union concerns.

This spirit of collaboration, despite interludes of friction and the transfer of the old Liberals into the Labour Party right-wing and the revolutionary social democrats into the Communist Party, was to become characteristic. After becoming the local affiliate to the Labour Representation Committee in 1902, following a visit by Ramsay MacDonald, the trades council was subsequently disbarred in 1905 for maintaining its contacts with the Liberals. Two decades later the trades council was again disbarred from the Labour Party, though by then it was for its associations with the Communist Party.

One serious, and many might argue, still unresolved matter which has spanned the century is the question of the involvement of women – or rather the lack of it. The very first trades council annual report confesses a failure to establish a women's section, and says: 'The need for the organisation of women in this district is, however, very urgent, and the League delegates on the Trades and Labor (*sic*) Council have been instructed to move a resolution on that body to



The founding meeting of Wandsworth Labour Party on Wimbledon Common in 1907 included delegates from the trades council. The banner is that of the Wandsworth Independent Labour Party, founded nationally by Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald. The ILP played a leading role in the Labour Representation Committee, forerunner of the Labour Party. It had a national membership of 16,000 in 1906

take the matter in hand. It is a noticeable and regrettable fact that Battersea has not returned even one woman to the Vestry.'

Women have been continuously under-represented in the trades council and on local elected bodies, though this is of course a national failing, as is the fact that women today still receive only three-quarters of men's earnings for similar work.

**'Troublous times'**

Workers in the larger but more middle-class Tory borough of Wandsworth were no doubt inspired by the power of local trades unionism in Battersea. Indeed, for its first two public meetings – aimed at expanding the trades council and securing labour victories at the polls – the Borough of Wandsworth Trades and Labour Council invited speakers from the neighbouring borough.

Earlier, when the Wandsworth body was set up on April 6, 1904, by George Wyver and a 'small band' of colleagues who later met regularly in the Sailor Prince on Earlsfield Road, the Battersea trades council had sent its best wishes. On many occasions before their merger seventy years later, the two organisations staged joint events, and co-ordinated feeder marches from south-west London to Hyde Park for numerous national demonstrations.

Wandsworth was not without a trades union connection: London Trades Council (LTC) founder George Potter is thought to have lived in the borough, local women laundry workers organised their own union in 1889 and women workers were soon to take strike action at the Corrigan Box factory on Garratt Lane in 1908.

But the experience in Wandsworth was in many respects a stark contrast to that in Battersea. The Tory majority was overwhelming, and the trades council came too late to develop links with the waning Liberals. Despite a decline in the fortunes of Wandsworth's middle classes after World War I, there was never a Labour majority in the council, and, therefore, no direct labour. The influence on municipal affairs was always in the form of protest, and never as controllers. Ironically, perhaps, this was later to give the Wandsworth trades council a vitality which had been lost in Battersea – but that is leaping many years ahead. Back in 1904, Wandsworth trades

council set up an organisation for the unemployed, supported local workers in trade union matters, campaigned for cheap trams and better services – and looked on with awe at the achievements in the neighbouring borough. Wandsworth activists were surely alarmed when, in 1909, divisions broke out both within and between the socialist and Liberal camps in Battersea. The row caused both groups to stand their own candidates, splitting the progressive vote and surrendering control of Battersea council to the Tories.

The Progressive Alliance was re-formed in time to win the 1912 elections, Duncan Carmichael playing a notable part. But things were never the same. The Progressive Alliance was again thrown into crisis in 1915, when some Liberal councillors voted with the Tories to sack thirty roadmenders rather than increase rates. Though some Liberal members sided with the socialists – some eventually joining the Labour Party – the old alliance was doomed, formally ending its days in 1919.

The underlying national basis for the political connection between Labour and the Liberals was a certain mutual interest shared by the reforming industrialists and the wage workers against landlords, speculators and aristocrats. But conflicts between industrial employer and worker were to sharpen as British domination of world commerce and colonialism came under attack from elsewhere in Europe. The pressure from Europe was also precipitating war.

In 1911, with a wave of strikes and union militancy sweeping the country, and unable temporarily to influence council affairs, activists on the Battersea trades council pitched into industrial affairs – and produced the first report for three years.

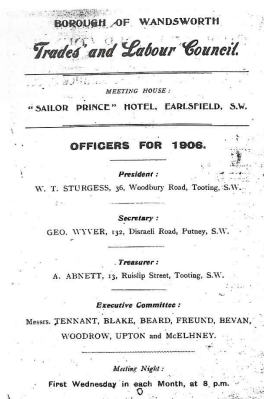
'Let no more time be wasted in sectional strife, for have we not lived to realise the evils of past differences within our ranks?' says the report, urging unity for the council elections. Commenting on the industrial situation, it adds that due to stagnant wage levels and widespread speed-up 'at last there are signs of a formidable revolt against these harsh and exacting methods adopted by the employing corporations of today'.

In fact, the revolt was almost at its end, but the trades council had

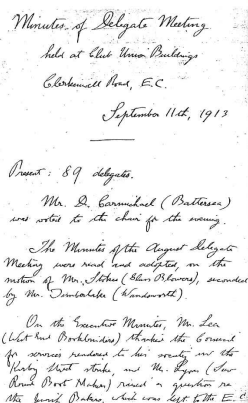
The 1908 Trafalgar Square demonstration by women strikers from the Corriganza box factory on Garratt Lane







Left: The opening page of the first Wandsworth trades council annual report 1904-5. Right: A page from the 1913 minutes of the London Trades Council, mentioning items from both Battersea and Wandsworth



nevertheless helped force every printshop in the borough to concede a two and a half hour reduction in printers' hours to fifty a week, raised nearly £30 through a 'Bohemian concert' for the families of locked-out Cambrian miners, demonstrated in support of shopworkers, joined the victory march for the rail strikers in Hyde Park on August 20, and backed strikes by both the National Transport Workers and the Watermen and Lightermen. A Tory attempt to rescind the forty-eight-hour upper limit on the working week for Battersea council workers was defeated thanks to a trades council march and demonstration to Battersea Town Hall.

We know from LTC reports of organisation meetings in Tooting, Balham and Wandsworth, that Wandsworth trades council was active in the union expansion after 1909, and Battersea trades council organised a 'Labour Week' in October 1913 for trade union recruitment. The campaign coincided with a three week strike at

Garton's in which nine hundred workers joined the Workers' Union, a forerunner to the Transport and General Workers Union.

The trade unions were growing again, though unlike the last expansion of the late 1880s, the unions had an independent political party, and a popular goal of 'socialism' – nationalised industry and social equality.

But if the goal was agreed, the method of arriving there was not. The divisions around this latter question were to hamper the movement for decades – not least in Battersea and Wandsworth. For within a few weeks of the founding of the London Labour Party in 1914 – whose founding spirit and first secretary was Fred Knee, a Battersea trades council member and LTC delegate honoured by a blue plaque in Sugden Road – Europe was at war. The majority of socialists in Britain, France and Germany, supported the war – imagining they could postpone socialism until afterwards. In Britain, only a faction of the tiny British Socialist Party eventually backed Lenin, and argued that workers should wage war not against fellow workers abroad, but against capitalists at home. The revolutionary view was represented by only one or two voices on the two trades councils, though both held numerous meetings and demonstrations against the price inflation and food shortages which brought near riots to Battersea. The Battersea trades council defended the right of conscientious objectors to meet in the town hall in 1916, while disagreeing with them. And in 1916 it opposed conscription – though offered to recruit volunteers itself.

Several delegates were called up, and some never returned. The 1917 Battersea annual report states: 'We cannot do less than convey to them our best wishes for a safe journey through the trying and troublous times that are before them, and that the time is not far distant when they will be amongst us once again, and resume their position in the great cause that will eventually emancipate the worker from the oppression that has kept him in subjection for so long.' After the war, says the report: 'Let us realise that at no distant date the labour movement will have to face the greatest industrial and economic problem the world has ever encountered.'





Charlotte Despard, the famous Irish republican and socialist who was supported by the trades council in her failed bid to become Battersea's MP in 1918. With her on the plinth in Trafalgar Square several years later are (from the left) Sheffield shop stewards' leader, J. T. Murphy and Communist Party member Shapurji Saklatvala who was elected MP for Battersea in 1922 with the support of the trades council

### The Red Flag flies over Battersea

The terrible scars of war only too fresh, growing unemployment at home and revolution in Russia, the British government wisely granted all men and some women the vote. Though the famous Irish republican and socialist Charlotte Despard failed to become a Battersea MP in 1918, the working classes of Battersea gave a landslide to Labour councillors the following year. The trades council was the only affiliate to the national Labour Party from the borough. After the break-up of the Progressive Alliance, Battersea trades council had been reorganised to include a separate political section – though in local matters this was still the junior of the industrial section. Some former Progressives joined the political section, thanks to the national Labour Party's introduction of individual membership in 1918.

But the right-wingers were not predominant at this time, and local trade unionists leaned more towards left-wingers and avowed revolutionaries. A popular Battersea revolutionary socialist, and former trades council delegate to the LTC, Duncan Carmichael, spoke in 1919 at trades council meetings in Wandsworth against British intervention against the Russian revolution. In Battersea, the trades council was deadly serious when it called on London's printers to strike if the press were critical of the labour movement.

Several Battersea organisations merged to form the local Communist Party branch which included some prominent trades council members. Jack Clancy was a delegate to the Communist Unity Convention in September 1920 along with Peter Keating, a left-wing Independent Labour Party member and, like Clancy, a delegate from the trades council to the LTC. At that time, though not for long, the national Labour Party permitted its members

to hold simultaneous membership of the Communist Party.

The trades council was closely involved in several of the LTC's huge marches during 1920 and 1921. These included demonstrations against the imprisonment of Irish republican Terence McSwiney on August 25, 1920, who later died on hunger strike in Brixton prison and a march on October 18, 1920, against unemployment in which the Battersea banner was destroyed in Whitehall during a police baton charge on the demonstrators.

Wandsworth and Battersea trades unionists helped organise several marches for unemployment relief and were involved in an occupation of the Swaffield Road workhouse in July 1921. Thousands marched to Brixton again when George Lansbury and the Poplar councillors were imprisoned for their protest against government failure to provide for unemployed relief. The Battersea movement played a key role by setting up a Council of Action in late September 1921 as the labour movement prepared for conflict with the government in the wake of the Poplar arrests. But within a few days, Lansbury and his fellow councillors were released, and the government retreated.

In November 1922, the Indian lawyer Shapurji Saklatvala, a Communist Party member, was selected and backed by the trades council as parliamentary candidate for Battersea North. Saklatvala was successful in 1922, lost in 1923 and regained the seat in 1924, campaigning each time with trades council support. In the first two elections he had the backing of the Labour Party nationally. Among his close supporters were the former black Battersea mayor John Archer and Charlotte Despard. That all three were considered natural leaders in Battersea is a measure of the internationalism and revolutionism of the local workers' movement.

The free association of Communists and Labour Party members typified by the Battersea labour movement was viewed with profound suspicion by the national TUC and Labour leaders. Those seeking an end to joint membership were in a minority in the national Communist Party, but in the majority in the national trade union leadership. From the middle of 1922, the Labour Party right-

wing won a series of formal decisions that Communists should be expelled. At every turn, the majority on Battersea's trades council protested against the decision. Though a stalemate prevailed for a while, Battersea soon fell victim to the deepening rift in the British labour movement between revolutionists and social democrats.

Following the defeat of the miners locked out in 1921, there had been a decline in trade union membership and militancy. In response, leaders like Duncan Carmichael, now secretary of the LTC, conducted flying visits to Wandsworth and Battersea at the invitation of the trades councils as part of the LTC's 'Back to the Union' campaign. In July 1923, for example, he addressed at least eight open-air meetings organised by trades councils, including three in south west London.

Such was the national standing of the left-wing in Battersea, that when the fight against the right-wing Labour leaders was formally initiated as the National Minority Movement in August 1924, the trades council played host to the founding conference.

The right-wing reacted quickly, and by 1925, the Labour Party began taking disciplinary action against affiliates with links to Communist Party members, while the TUC forced its member bodies to disaffiliate from the National Minority Movement (NMM). The Labour Party offensive against Battersea trades council in 1925 no doubt strengthened the hand of those responsible for sending Special Branch spies to report on the activity of trades council members. The reports were filed regularly to the Cabinet, and confirm both the high degree of activity of Battersea trades unionists, and the worry they caused Baldwin's Tory administration.

The post-war economic slump continued apace, and the majority of employers, led by the coal owners, were keen to cut wages to preserve their profits. The timetable for the coming national conflict was set by the government, when, at the end of July 1925 – dubbed Red Friday – it offered a subsidy to the coal industry which would expire on May 1, 1926.

In the autumn of 1925, Battersea trades council was closely involved in two meetings of the NMM intended to forge close links



March 21, 1926: The National Minority Movement meeting hosted by Battersea trades council five weeks before the General Strike. On the platform in Battersea town hall are Tom Mann and Shapurji Saklatvala

between militant trades unionists in preparation for a time when the Red Friday truce would come to an end. The government and police were also preparing, and late in 1925, several Battersea homes, as well as Saklatvala's Highgate home, were raided by police in a London-wide round-up. Twelve Communist Party members were arrested and clapped in jail.

Battersea trades council was clearly a priority target not just for the Tories, but also for the right wing, for when its delegates overwhelmingly refused to impose political proscriptions, it was expelled by the Labour Party in February 1926.

## The General Strike

Harry Wicks, a Battersea trades council delegate in 1926, blames the right-wing London Labour leader Herbert Morrison for forcing through the expulsion of the trades council from the Labour Party. Battersea's stand against political proscriptions had been lost. It was fifty years before the TUC finally lifted its bans, conceding in action, if not in words, the correctness of Battersea's desire for unity.

In early 1926, after disaffiliation but before any rival existed, the expelled trades council organised several marches from Clapham Common to Wandsworth prison, where the jailed Communist Party members were held. The marches were led by the LTC.

As the expiry of the coal subsidy drew nearer, trades unionists were looking to the TUC to organise support for the miners, threatened as they were with longer hours and lower pay. In Wandsworth, trades council secretary Archie Latta called together a Council of Action for Friday, April 30. He had written to the TUC that week: 'In view of the crisis that will soon be on us I am requested to ask that any information or instruction be sent to me as soon as possible. This will enable the Council of Action to decide clearly what they shall do in the event of an industrial upheaval.'

The coal owners, enthusiastic for a wage-cutting battle in which the government would be drawn in on their side, locked out the country's one million miners on Friday, April 30, the day the government subsidy expired.

The next morning's May Day marches around the country were the biggest in memory. Wicks' gripping autobiography reports an excited atmosphere in London, where a conference of TUC executives representing over three-and-a-half million workers overwhelmingly decided upon strike action from midnight of





Local trades unionists march along Battersea Park Road on the first day of the General Strike. The banner in the foreground is that of the Nine Elms general workers, followed by Battersea builders labourers and the South West District Communist Party

Monday, May 3. Battersea trades council formed its Council of Action the day the strike was announced, after local trades unionists returned to Battersea from Hyde Park. Saklatvala had called on the troops camped out in the park to join with the workers – he was to be jailed two days later for sedition.

Expressing the needs of the hour, G. W. Blake, Battersea (2) branch secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, wrote to the trades council on May Day: 'Dear Comrades, In view of the need for urgency, the great issues at stake, and, if ever there was a time for concerted and united action by the whole of the members in the industrial movement it is now. On behalf of the members of above Branch the following resolution is submitted for the approval of this meeting: That this meeting is of the opinion that all the delegates of the Battersea Trades and Labour Council should be called together at the earliest possible moment (sink all their differences) and work together with one common aim and object, First of all to support the miners in their endeavours to obtain a living existence, Second to at once put into operation the machinery to deal with the contingencies as they arrive, locally. United we stand, divided we cannot do anything with success.'

Wicks describes the Council of Action as 'two-headed', bringing together the right-wing, the minority on the trades council who had favoured its expulsion, with the left. The 127-strong delegate body representing seventy organisations elected Jack Clancy to the chair, and George Fineran as secretary.

The TUC had called the strike without any preparation, and had expressly excluded the trades councils from an official role, fearing their radicalism. Nevertheless, all over the country, the working class population, both in and outside trade unions, responded to the strike call with an enthusiasm which propelled the trades councils into the forefront. In Battersea, crowds of marching pickets set off on the first day of the strike to Morgan's, then Carson's paint factory, ending up after a tour through the borough at Nine Elms. The Council of Action later endorsed the marching picket. Unsuccessful attempts by strike-breaking 'volunteers' to start a tram service led to clashes



Near the end of the strike, probably Tuesday, May 11, Wicks records that 'special constables battered trade unionists in strike

Wandsworth Trades Council and Borough Labour Party.  
 Affiliated to the National Labour Party, The London Trades Council and The London Labour Party.

Mr. Treasurer: A. BERRY, 11, BEDFORD SQUARE, HENDON, W. H.

Chairman: A. BAKER, 10, THE PLANT, PUTNEY, S.W.15.

Mr. General Secretary: A. T. HAYES, 10, THE PLANT, PUTNEY, S.W.15.

9 The Plant,  
 Putney, S.W.15.  
 June 9th 1920.

Battersea Council of Action.  
 HAZEL.  
 Dear comrades,  
Refusing Franchise.

We ask your assistance in running a meeting on Sunday evening next outside Wandsworth Prison. We suggest that there be no demonstration owing to the S. D. A. I have written the Sunday Worker, E. G. W. P. A. and I think there will be a good meeting. As we have a Council of Action meeting at the same time Johnny Holmes of S.D.A. 14th Street, Bedford is making the arrangements. I suggest you write to him giving the names of the people who are prepared to speak.

Yours fraternally,  
*Wm. B. Thompson.*  
 Propaganda Secretary.

However, the next day, workers everywhere were shocked that the strike had been called off without any agreement with the coal owners. Wicks describes the news reaching Battersea 'like a thunderclap'. Shortly after Clancy had reported to the TUC 'all factories of note idle' and 'the general spirit prevailing is magnificent', the Council of Action dispatched him to TUC headquarters in Ecclestone Square to check on the rumours. Addressing a packed town hall with the grim truth, Clancy was confronted with angry booing and jeering. Wicks says Clancy was

'shattered' by the incident. The Communist Party members handed out leaflets encouraging a continuation of the strike – Alf Loughton, later a trades council delegate and later still a mayor of Wandsworth, was arrested while carrying such leaflets – but Wicks believes the Communist Party attempt to steer the strike came too late and after too much muddled analysis in the run-up to the conflict. In any case, with the exception of the railworkers, who stayed out because of an attempt at massive victimisation by the employers, there was a relatively orderly return to work. The Council of Action continued in form for a period, but unlike other boroughs, it could not simply return to being a trades council, because it was composed of two halves, one acceptable to the Labour Party and TUC, the other not.

Giving a summary of the activities of Council of Action members, Fineran wrote on June 1: 'They co-ordinated the work of the trade unions in the district, provided rooms and halls where members of the various unions could sign on and receive strike pay, also where members from other districts could sign. They formed a picket committee who organised pickets and supplied them with badges. They ran meetings every day in the Town Hall (Grand Hall) and gave concerts to the strikers and their wives and children free. These were arranged by the social committee. Their propaganda committee published a bulletin of information (2,500 copies each day) as to the progress of the strike in other districts, and was responsible for supplying the *British Worker* (the TUC strike bulletin). They had other committees who advised men and women as to the best method of obtaining relief; to collect reports from other districts and the TUC. The foregoing is briefly a few of their multifarious duties which was carried out by them.'

In Wandsworth, 48,000 copies of *The Wandsworth Strike Bulletin* had been distributed by the end of the strike. Wandsworth had a corps of motor and pedal cycle dispatch riders operating for its Council of Action, and the trades council report – confirmed by the Plebs' League survey of responses to the strike call – says the borough was '100 per cent' solid during the strike. The trades council there also encouraged a rent strike.

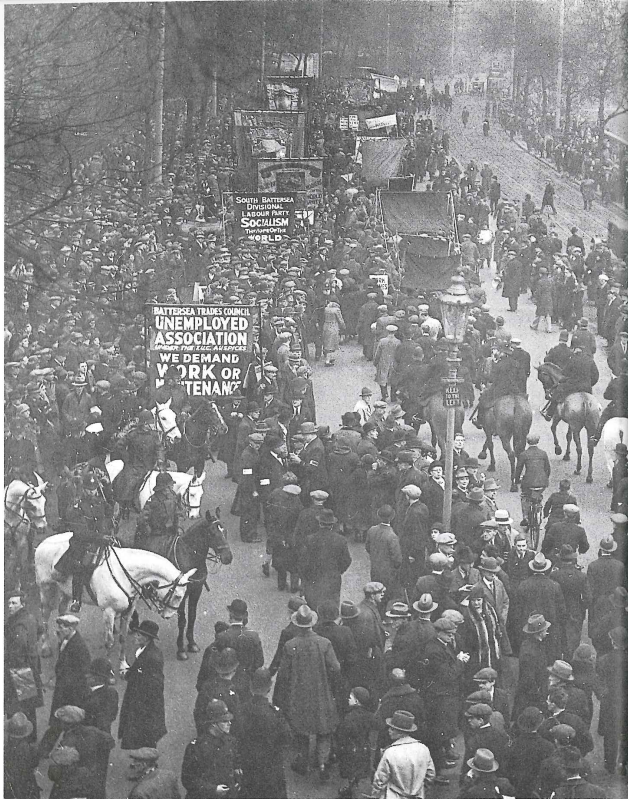
## Fighting unemployment and fascism

The Battersea Council of Action continued to raise money for the miners, despite arrests of its street collectors. In June 1926, miners' leader A. J. Cook attended a concert organised in Battersea. Both trades councils organised protests outside Wandsworth prison, where many jailed under the Emergency Powers Act were held.

The political implications of the defeat of the General Strike came early in Battersea, with victimisation at the workplace, and proscriptions on the trades council. By July 1926, encouraged by the demoralisation which followed the General Strike and the recriminations in the Communist Party against the trade union and Labour Party leadership, the right-wing set up a new 'official' body. Significantly, its constitution included the membership of two constituency parties for the borough – a further constitutional erosion of the powers of the industrial section.

But the old trades council continued to operate right up to 1929 before its remaining delegates finally decided to go over to the new body. At the Winstanley Ward bye election in November 1926, Clancy, the candidate of the unofficial trades council, beat the official Labour Party candidate. For a while there were a handful of unofficial trades council nominees on the council, though the official body's elected council members voted with the Tories to keep Clancy and his colleagues from participating in any of the committees.

In Wandsworth, the trades council struggled to pay off debts, but was able in 1927 to assist shopworkers in a dispute with the Meadow Dairy by holding a parade of sandwichmen in Tooting and Earlsfield. It also campaigned against long hours and poor pay for the 'asylum workers' at Tooting Bec Hospital. But even in



February 5, 1933: The national march against unemployment assembling on the Embankment. Battersea trades council's unemployed association and the South Battersea Labour Party banners are visible

Wandsworth, new rules barred those with Communist Party links.

In 1928, widespread Communist Party disgust with the Labour Party leadership was given added effect by the new line emanating from Moscow. The Labour Party was now characterised by Stalin as the chief enemy of revolution, and its members were to be considered as 'social fascists'. In Battersea, where members of the expelled trades council were vilified by the right-wing leadership of the official Labour Party in the borough – an organisation many of the expelled trades council members had helped build – practical collaboration between the two wings of the local movement was especially difficult. Time was to show, however, that despite repeated attempts, the right-wing was never able to keep alive the trades councils in either Battersea or Wandsworth without activists – and the activists were, almost by definition, those most intolerant of official proscriptions. So it was, for instance, that by the early 1930s, after the demise of the unofficial body, the official trades council elected Jack Clancy as its delegate to the LTC.

In the early 1930s, the trades councils organised conferences on industrial health and a Wandsworth trades council public meeting was the venue for an outspoken LTC attack on Ramsay MacDonald's decision to join the coalition government in 1931.

In 1933, the TUC for the first time asked trades councils if they were organising women. Battersea trades council reported factory recruitment drives, and a campaign to win trade union rights for the young women working for a measly 16 shillings a week at Arding and Hobbs. But when the trades council called a meeting on the subject, 'the attendance of union organisers had been unsatisfactory'. Nearly 30,000 women in paid employment lived in the borough.

As unemployment rose, both trades councils held campaigns and demonstrations, and set up unemployed organisations at the request of the TUC. Official unemployment in 1932 reached nearly 7,000 in Battersea and 8,000 in Wandsworth. A year later these figures had risen another 50 per cent.

The TUC's unemployment initiative was largely aimed at countering the Communist Party-influenced National Unemployed



Workers Movement, and the unemployed were never allowed any say in trade union affairs. Battersea trades council got its own proof of TUC obsessions in 1933, when the TUC wrote soon after the old-time Burnside Stephen Sanders had addressed the unemployed at Latchmere Baths. Sanders had complained to the TUC that 'the well-known Communist speaker' J. R. Campbell was also on the platform. Sanders had 'gathered that some sort of united front committee was functioning in Battersea' with proscribed bodies. Secretary George Fineran wrote a stiff reply to a TUC letter, saying that Campbell had been invited by the unemployed themselves, and that to override their decision 'would be an end of any hope of building the organisation'. The TUC responded in apologetic tones and the matter was dropped.

In 1935, when the Communist Party abruptly abandoned its accusation of social fascism against the Labour Party and sought an alliance against the real fascists, relations improved on the trades council. One ironic result is a Battersea resolution passed in 1937 congratulating the Soviet workers on achieving socialism.

When the South Wales hunger marchers arrived in Battersea, and were put up in the Gideon Road School in November 1936, the trades council arranged a welcome. Fineran is praised in the trades council minutes for almost single-handedly raising £53 to provide the 120 marchers with mutton, jam, cakes and pies instead of the bully-beef, bread and margarine they got on public assistance.

The same meeting that thanked Fineran for his work also set up the local Aid for Spain Committee. Battersea had been early in demanding trades union action in support of republican Spain, LTC delegate Frank Smith had successfully demanded a protest from London's trade unions against the British government's refusal to support the fledgling democracy. Volunteers to fight dictatorship and fascism included delegates from the trades council. By January of 1937, two had died, including trades council delegate Dave Guest. When Clive Branson came home he toured Britain campaigning for the cause for which his comrades had died.

In 1937, the Battersea trades council sent a fully equipped

ambulance to the front line, driven by Percy Cohen. In Wandsworth also, despite a funding crisis, the trades council held fetes and social events and was able to send £35 to the International Solidarity Fund, £35 to the Spanish Medical Aid Fund, and £4 to the International Brigade Dependents Fund.

When Battersea's fund for Spain was eventually closed in 1940, it had raised £1,183. The minutes record: 'Bro Wye drew the council's attention to the admirable job rendered by the committee in their endeavour to assist practically the heroic defenders of democratic Spain against armed Fascist intervention. The efforts were a splendid achievement and constituted a record in the British Isles of monies collected.'





An Anglo-Soviet Friendship Society meeting in Battersea Park in 1941. The group organised public meetings, with trades council support, after Russia joined the war against Hitler following Germany's invasion of the USSR

## At war again

The onset of the World War II is recorded in trades council minutes in a strangely matter-of-fact tone, perhaps reflecting a view that a war against fascism had long been inevitable, and perhaps also a certain weariness after so many years fighting unemployment.

On the trades councils in both boroughs, delegates were elected to the local Bureau of Information – which considered unemployment, conscientious objectors, evacuation, and legal aid – and to the Food Control Committees, which dealt with rations and prices. Protests were made against charges levied against working-class parents of evacuated children, and warnings made to the public about the 'serious curtailment of democratic control' envisaged under the wartime legislation.

Harry Wicks was sent as an official delegate from Battersea to the No Conscription League conference in 1939, which passed a resolution that war 'will bring hunger and dictatorship to the great mass of people in all belligerent countries'. However, anti-war motions put forward by Battersea's industrial section were rejected by the political section.

The development of poor relations between the industrial section and the political section was not solely a political matter; the trades council had to fight the borough council (whose majority Labour members were nominated by the political section of the trades council) on several industrial matters, combating the use of low wage contractors to build air-raid shelters, successfully preventing sackings from direct labour the same year, and in 1942, successfully resisting a borough attempt to end trade union conditions and pay for painters.

In August 1941, after the invasion of Russia, a local conference of trades unionists was called 'to discuss ways and means of rendering

effective aid to the Russian workers and peasants' heroic struggle against Nazi aggression'. The delegates heard of 'complaints of mismanagement and inefficiency...in vital war factories'. Delegates agreed to look into 'discrepancies and scandals'. By the end of 1941, the Battersea trades council had set up an All Aid for Russia Committee with a fund that eventually reached £1,689 in 1945, much of it raised during weekend meetings on Clapham Common.

The problems with production during the war focused attention on national economic planning, especially in the mines, and in 1942, the Battersea trades council called for nationalisation of the coal industry and backed the miners' union demand for a weekly basic pay of four pounds and five shillings (£4.25).

Increasingly, women were employed in the Projectile factory off the Wandsworth Road, and in the Morgan Crucible works. At Nine Elms, 600 women were employed doing heavy work on the railways, such as shifting sacks and crates of milk. In Battersea, the trades council visited factories employing women to ensure there was adequate provision for daytime shopping before the air raids. It also campaigned for improved pay for women working on the buses and tubes. Its union recruitment drive in 1943 included a conference at Latchmere Baths and visits to Dawnays, Price's, Dorman Long, Morgan Crucible, the Projectile factory, London Power and Garton's. By 1944, for instance, Morgan's shop stewards had reported a 700-strong increase in membership in one year, putting trades unionists in a majority.

One incident raised by Battersea trades council in 1943 gave rise to a government ruling. The Home Guard stationed in a local factory had threatened shop stewards during an industrial dispute. Thanks to the furore raised by the trades council, the government was obliged to issue a statement in parliament limiting the powers of the Home Guard in industrial matters.

Local bombing created much homelessness, and the trades council not only helped to organise transport and temporary accommodation for those bombed out, but was also quick to support those who squatted homes left empty by landlords.



V2 bomb damage at Petergate, East Hill. The trades council helped to organise temporary accommodation for those bombed and supported families who squatted empty properties

In Wandsworth, the trades council was involved in a campaign against the closure of Vine Cottage Laundry, which washed Morgan Crucible overalls, and held a very successful campaign with leaflets and meetings on the need for a National Health Service.

At the start of the war, the Battersea trades council proposed that a fair wage was a £3 minimum for a forty-hour week. This was still only double the sum deemed adequate by the trades council for vestry workers in the year of its foundation. Yet by 1944, while the average woman's wage had risen to £3, average male earnings were double that, at £6 a week.

The war marked another curtailment of the political freedom of the Battersea trades council, which since the 1928 reconstruction had been constitutionally the junior partner to the Labour Party. However, the Industrial Section had always attracted more active

participation, including as it did, active trades unionists and several Communist Party and revolutionary sympathisers and activists. The conflict came to a head in 1943, when London Labour Party chief Hinley Atkinson and the TUC official for trades councils, Vic Feather, were both drawn in.

At one point, Atkinson wrote to Feather that the industrial section secretary, Harry Law, had always 'misused' the strength of industrial membership 'as an instrument of political influence'. Law insisted on calling the industrial section 'the trades council' and 'exercises it as a separate body with political powers'. As an additional piece of criticism to ensure Feather's support in curbing trades council independence, Atkinson wrote that Labour Party members thought Law to be 'politically unreliable'.

In a rules revision, the industrial section was forbidden to pass resolutions on political matters, and the balance of power was decidedly shifted in favour of the increasingly right-wing Labour Party membership of the borough. By the end of the war, the Labour Party in Battersea used its enhanced power to censure the industrial section for allowing the Trotskyist Harry Wicks and the Communist Party member John Evans to speak at the 1945 May Day meeting on Clapham Common, and even refused to discuss local election strategy with the trades council.

This did not dampen hopes held by the trades council for the post-war Labour government. In September 1945, delegates passed a resolution expressing confidence in the Labour government 'to solve the tremendous problems of the post-war', welcoming instructions to consult with workers and calling on all trades unionists 'to play his, her full part in assisting our Government to carry through this most difficult task which has ever confronted any government of this country'.

### Unfulfilled promises

The post-war mood of hope owed much to the confidence gained by women. Battersea delegate Jim Dicks remembers many women attending meetings at that time, including the newly elected MP Mrs Caroline Ganley, and Sisters Sturrock and Taylor, who were elected to the executive. Mrs Ganley had been in the British Socialist Party, and was elected to Battersea council in 1919. She had served on the Labour Party national executive council for many years, and represented Battersea on the LCC during the 1920s and 1930s.

A resolution which won unanimous support was moved by Miss A. Sturrock to the effect 'that the Battersea trades council urges that the minimum hourly rates for women be equivalent to (the) male labourer's rate in the engineering trade'. This marks a change in attitude from the period after the first war, when Battersea trades council had publicly expressed alarm at the employment of women in 'men's jobs' during the war. In 1948, a Women's Advisory Committee was formed, and met regularly for a time.

Battersea trades council campaigned for firemen to be paid on the police scale and against the use of too many contractors on bomb damage work. At Garton's there was a dispute over non-unionism and the Battersea trades council was called in to investigate two factories with low wages. Brother Philips reported one factory in which a man and wife took five hours to make a dozen lampshades between them, getting 2s 6d (12.5p) for every dozen.

However, Battersea trades council's progressive activity was to suffer further curbs at the hands of the right-wing, though the blow was precipitated by the decision of Communist Party member John Evans to stand in the local elections. The local Labour Party succeeded, after a long wrangle, in getting Evans expelled from the



trades council in 1948, the TUC and Feather reneging on an earlier promise to allow the trades council to accept delegates regardless of political affiliation.

The row was linked to national developments, as the Labour government was fast recanting many of its promises. In Wandsworth, motions were taken to the LTC demanding the government take action against the decline in the real wage. Battersea trades council's last really large meeting of delegates was held in May 1948, a motion was carried calling on the Labour government 'to reinstitute its original programme for the building of houses, schools, hospitals, clinics and industrial undertakings as the only real socialist approach to the solving of our present economic difficulties'.

In a motion typical of Battersea's far-sightedness, Harry Law successfully argued in the summer of 1948 that the type of nationalisation adopted by Labour was in danger since it failed to devolve management to those who worked in each industry.

Around this time, July 1948, the Labour Party in Battersea seriously considered getting shot of the rebellious trades council altogether. But the local party eventually concluded that this would only 'strengthen the opposition'. It decided to keep the local trades unionists tied to the Labour Party, even though the industrial delegates were opposed by fifty-six to seven to the Labour Party's decision to veto branch delegates it found politically disagreeable. Harry Law resigned in protest, and the trades council was once again 'reorganised' by the right wing.

The effects were dramatic. The 1950 annual report cites 'poor attendances', no conferences, no industrial disputes, its sole affiliation to the National Film Society and only two donations – to an old people's tea fund and the Socialist Medical Association. Thus was the rebellious voice of the once mighty Battersea trades council finally silenced by bureaucrats leading the TUC and Labour Party.

The long-standing secretary of Battersea trades council in the 1950s, Jack Dunning, later mayor of Battersea, perhaps sensed the terrible limitations on his work. He eagerly joined with Wandsworth trades council in a cost of living conference, and a protest

outside Battersea town hall after the Rotary Club refused the trades councils a stall during 'Careers Week' in 1953.

Dunning could hardly have been unaware of the growing militancy and what the official Labour Party would have viewed as unsavoury political influences at work on the trades council next door. He later argued from the rostrum at the national trades council conference that the ban on political discussion was 'not very wise', since political matters were regularly discussed in trades union branches. The alternative was to confine the activities of trades councils to 'discussion groups and sewing classes'.

Wandsworth trades council in the immediate post-war period seems to have been firmly in the grip of Labour, though one-time president and later Labour mayor George Rowe recalls a continual battle against 'communist troublemakers'. Rowe was the principal force behind Wandsworth trades council's 1948 launch of the *South West Herald*, a local newspaper designed to counter nearly a dozen Tory-owned newspapers in the borough at that time.

Evidence of the lively minority referred to by Rowe is given in 1947, when there was a challenge to the self-imposed ban against Communist Party delegates introduced in 1938. The motion was defeated in 1947 by fifty-eight to twenty-four, but a similar move was eventually agreed in 1955, the year the right-wing leadership was finally deposed. The looser constitutional relations with the Labour Party in Wandsworth, due in part to its less radical past, promoted a more relaxed atmosphere, and even the staunch Labour chairman Alf Barton expressed anxiety in 1950 over the TUC witchhunt. In 1953, when the TUC disaffiliated the London Trades Council for allegedly providing a platform to 'disruptive elements', the move was welcomed in the once left-wing Battersea but denounced in Wandsworth.

Wandsworth joined with Battersea in work on industrial health, but was disappointed with the lack of powers of a scheme set up with participation of the government and employers. And both trades councils gave active support to the striking bus workers of London in 1958. Cuts in services that followed the strike and poor

service on routes 168 and 49 were a regular source of protest.

By the mid 1950s, trades council members in both boroughs were serving on literally dozens of local committees dealing with unemployment, benefits and appeals, youth councils, hospitals, pensions and disablement. It is easy to forget in post-Thatcher Britain how much of government at that time involved the trade unions, right down to local level.

Among Wandsworth resolutions are those deploring a 1953 TUC message of goodwill to Winston Churchill, against the police attack on a lobby of parliament in January 1955 and for a clean air policy in 1955, the period of deadly smogs in London. Its stand in opposition to racism against West Indian workers arriving in Britain earned the trades council some threatening mail from the Ku Klux Klan; this was handed over to the Special Branch, but nothing seems to have come of police inquiries. In 1958, the trades council sent a delegation to the House of Commons to protest against British deployment of the hydrogen bomb.

Mike Taylor, chair of the trades council in the early 1970s, remembers the 'highly politicised' atmosphere when he joined at the beginning of the 1960s. 'I remember one meeting in which we even had members of the Communist Party opposing each other. Fred Scott and Dave Capper were going at it hammer and tongs.' At the same time, there were others, like secretary Harry Sparrow, who were truly catholic in their politics. 'He used to drink at the Conservative Club and take the *Soviet Weekly*,' recalls Taylor.

In 1964, the year the two boroughs merged, the Projectile factory on the Wandsworth Road closed down, part of a developing wave of industrial closures that was to sweep through the borough. Nationally however, it was a year of a revitalisation of the labour movement, expressed in the election of the Wilson government.

## A breath of fresh air

Thanks to the merger of the boroughs, the activities of Wandsworth trades council – especially in matters such as rents and direct labour – now had an impact in Battersea, where the trades council was in a poor state. By a twist of fate, the borough described as 'backward' in its first annual report was now providing the most active trades council. And it is the traditions of the Wandsworth trades council during the 1960s and 1970s that are the most immediate forerunner to today's organisation.

The Communist Party and militant influence on the Wandsworth trades council meant it was less inclined to keep quiet about attacks on the workers' movement by the Labour government. When 1966 brought the wage freeze and the seamen's strike, the trades council was quick to back the strikers and make its views known. Secretary Harry Sparrow wrote to local newspapers declaring that the trades council 'strongly opposed' the wage freeze, regarding it as 'utterly contrary to Labour's principles, and a grave threat to the whole of the trades union movement'. The council believed the Labour government could resist the bankers by cutting arms expenditure and imposing a ban on the export of capital.

The Communist influence also had, in retrospect, its less attractive side. When, in 1968, a union branch delegate moved a motion condemning the arrival of Soviet tanks on Czechoslovakian streets, it was defeated by thirteen to three. The same year saw the trades council lobbying the borough council in opposition to cuts in its building programme, condemning Enoch Powell's diatribes against immigration, and supporting strikers at Morgan's. Affiliation to the trades council increased from thirty-three to forty-four during 1968, reversing a decline which had begun in the mid-1950s.

Local battles fought that year included opposition to two councillors elected under a Tory manifesto, who later declared their allegiance to the fascist National Front. Demonstrations and lobbying by the trades council eventually forced their resignation.

When the Tories won the general election in 1970, the trades council was already battle hardened. It had cut its teeth on Labour's hated 'In Place of Strife' policy by independently organising a general strike in the borough. The new anti-union enemy was the Tory Industrial Relations Act, which had powers to fine and jail strikers, and was the target of much campaigning.

Also in 1970, the trades council was a sponsor to a one-page advertisement in the *New York Times* against the war in Vietnam, raised funds for striking local authority workers, organised public meetings against joining the Common Market and against productivity deals, but still found time for extensive correspondence about an incident in which Mrs Marsh, an old age pensioner, tripped and fell during an outing to the sea.

Early in 1971, Wandsworth trades council organised local strike action during the TUC's protest against the Industrial Relations Act and distributed 20,000 handbills.

In May 1972, the trades council organised a joint campaign with tenants against the Housing Finance Act, which forced councils to put up rents. Their united action played a vital part in sustaining the Labour council's resistance to the Tory Act. Jim Atkinson remembers perhaps the high point of the campaign, when he was chairing a public meeting at the Wandsworth Town Hall timed to coincide with a crucial council meeting on rents. 'It was choc-a-bloc with tenants. We had rather too many speakers on the platform anyway, and an old boy from Roehampton stood up, saying he had a point of order. "I've come here to know what we are going to do, not to hear a load of waffle," he said. "You get down and lead us round to the council meeting and we'll let them know what we think".' And that is what the angry tenants did, pushing Atkinson through the Town Hall gates at their head.

Later that year, the trades council organised local strike action on

September 5 to free the dock strike leaders jailed under the Industrial Relations Act. The anger of the trades council had earlier been expressed by a telegram to TUC general secretary, Vic Feather, demanding action to free the dockers. Later, after the dockers were released, one of the 'Pentonville Five', Bernie Steers, addressed a public meeting organised by the trades council.

Local industrial action under the Heath government always received solid support from the trades council, and the minutes record donations, picketing and joint meetings, including one in March, 1973, for 'all local trades unionists on strike...teachers, hospital workers, gas workers, railway workers and civil servants'.

The same year, the trades council handed over evidence of non-union lump 'strong-arm gangs' on borough building sites to the council, which later changed its policy to eliminate lump labour. When the struggle against lump labour was met by the jailing of the Shrewsbury pickets for conspiracy, the Wandsworth trades council was in the forefront of local organisations campaigning for their release, and demanding that the TUC take action.

The two trades councils finally merged in 1974, the year that the boroughs played host to striking miners for the second time in less than two years. Miners from Kent were housed and fed by the united trades council. Mike Taylor recalls one occasion when the lights went out while a meeting was in session. 'We thought the revolution had come – especially when the lights went out. We used to join the pickets at the Battersea Power Station,' he recalls.

The trades council's action did not bring revolution, but it played its part in the fall of the Heath Tory government and the re-election of Labour – albeit the same Labour that had departed while trying to impose 'In Place of Strife'.





Miners picketing at Battersea Power Station during their 1974 strike. The trades council provided accommodation and picketing support during the strike, which brought down the Heath Tory government

## Under attack

The loss of the old riverside firms and railway work was continuing apace at the time the two trades councils merged in 1974. In the previous decade and a half, more than 53,000 jobs were lost in the enlarged borough of Wandsworth, part of the reduction of a quarter of a million jobs in Inner London. The list of household names that disappeared between 1960 and 1980 is too long to mention, but included Morgan's, the Nine Elms railworks, Massons, Phillips, Decca, Airfix, Ind Coope, and Garton's.

There was also the National Front to cope with in Wandsworth, where the fascists had not forgiven the trades council for its successful ousting of councillors. When the trades council organised a conference against racism in February 1975, the National Front tried to break the meeting up. A press release a few days later said of the fascists: 'They were asked to leave numerous times, and were still refusing to do so when suddenly, and without provocation or justification, they attacked the chairman. The other National Fronters, as if this was a signal, suddenly erupted and attacked the other stewards with their fists and hurling chairs at them.' At one stage, chairman Mike Taylor 'escorted' one fascist from the meeting. A photographer had to go to hospital, and others who had come to attend the meeting were injured. 'I would call chairing that meeting my finest hour!' remembers Mike Taylor.

During the year Shrewsbury picket Ricky Tomlinson, recently released from jail, spoke at one public meeting. Further meetings were held on abortion rights, social services cuts and the struggle for socialist policies in Portugal following the defeat of fascism the previous year. Local action included support for Asian women who organised a sit-in at Decca's, and backing for a strike at Garton's.

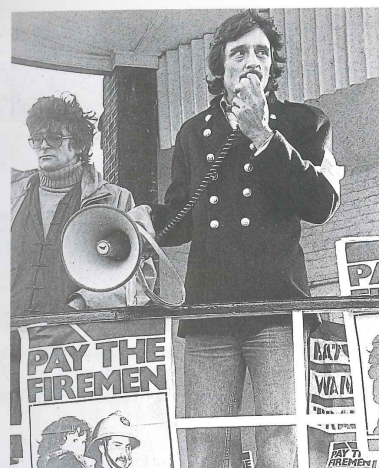


Wandsworth Against Racism, an organisation set up by the trades council, leads a 1978 march against racist attacks in the borough

In 1975, in a move which has its relevance to this story, the TUC lifted its ban on Communist Party members being representatives on trades councils. The decision put an end to more than half a century of proscriptions in the trades councils, arguably the source of the demise of the old Battersea trades council, and a terrible thorn in the side of the national movement. The TUC action was especially welcomed on the trades council by delegate Sid Easton, a veteran fighter against the bans and proscriptions in the transport union, and a former bodyguard of Communist Party leader Harry Pollitt.

The decision was to have its own ironic twist a couple of years later, when the Communist Party majority influence on the trades council was overturned by an alliance of the Trotskyist-influenced International Socialists (IS), the International Marxist Group and other non-aligned left-wingers. Despite the 'coup', relations remained friendly on the whole, and the level of activity was maintained. 'There was a real united front, and we organised some

Hugh Richards (left) and Jim Fitzpatrick, FBU delegate, address a trades council rally during the 1977 firefighters' strike for pay



very good campaigns,' says Norman Maclean, who was president for two years in the late 1970s. He had joined the trades council in 1972 during the big tenants' movement, and was one of the younger IS members who worked energetically alongside the Labour Party and Communist Party-influenced trades council members.

Martin Upchurch, later to be president, remembers that one of the highlights of the work at the time was the 'adoption' in 1976 of a Chilean political prisoner, Juan Luis Oyarzun Barrientos. The campaign led to his release, and in 1977, aged eighteen, he travelled to Britain and addressed the trades council, telling of his arrest at age fifteen and of his torture at the hands of the Pinochet military regime. The trades council took a firm position against military rule closer to home by affirming, against TUC policy, its view that British troops should be withdrawn from the north of Ireland.

Later that year, when the firefighters took strike action, the trades council organised a local march and raised over £2,000, while Fire



August, 1979: Trades council delegates join building workers to picket private contractors Croudace in Upper Tooting. The company had been hired by the Tory-controlled Wandsworth council in place of direct labour

Brigades Union delegate Jim Fitzpatrick kept the trades council in touch with developments.

The trades council was also well represented among the mass pickets at Grunwicks that year – and among the numerous people arrested outside the north-west London film processing factory. The trades council successfully persuaded many local chemists to stop sending their customers' films to the scab-labour company. The council also found time to publish its own experience of the injustice of the supplementary benefit appeal system.

## Thatcher's test-bed

As Britain plunged sharply into the present long-lasting state of high unemployment and sustained attacks on the working class, events were to thrust local trades unionists into the front line against a new enemy about to burst upon the country – monetarism. The Tory group came to power on Wandsworth borough council in 1978. Worse was to come – the following year arch-privateer Christopher Chope became borough Tory leader in a coup, while in Downing Street, his close political ally Margaret Thatcher assumed power over the whole country.

In another characteristically clear-sighted remark, the annual report for the year said that as the trades council got down to fighting the local Tories, it would not forget 'that these attacks are part of a general offensive against social services expenditure for which the Labour Government's policies of cash limits and public spending cuts are responsible'.

The trades council participated in a Fightback campaign, and a large meeting was held to protest their cuts programme on the night the Tories took office. Having pioneered direct labour and 'municipal socialism' nearly a century before, the trades council and local authority unions now found themselves in the forefront of their defence. The trades council delegates defied court injunctions banning building workers from picketing building sites where private contractors Croudace and Turriff had been employed by the council in place of direct labour.

At St Benedict's Hospital, Tooting, in early 1980, workers occupied and successfully ran the geriatric hospital with trades council support for a year. 'We could have gone on for ever,' recalled occupation leader and COHSE health union delegate at the





October, 1980: The Decca factory on Queenstown Road is suddenly closed down as industrial redundancies sweep the borough. Shocked workers arriving at the factory find their lockers dumped on the street

time, Arthur Hautot. 'They had to end the occupation because we were doing the work better and so much cheaper.' Without the trades council, he believed, the occupation could not have got going. 'The trades council had all the contacts, a mailing list, access to printing facilities. Simple things but important – your lines of communication are your most important things – one of the few useful things I learnt in the army.' His wife June, trades council chair, Jeremy Weinstein, and Ernest Rodker were also involved on a day-to-day basis in the occupation.

The trades council focused national attention on the tragic case of Richard 'Cartoon' Campbell, a nineteen-year-old found dead in Ashford remand centre. An inquiry organised by the trades council found that Richard had been 'a hapless victim of a series of crucial failures by the authorities based on a lack of respect for Richard and on a racism that underpinned almost every aspect of the system'.



Police arrests outside St Benedict's hospital in Tooting included many trades council members. The health workers' occupation kept the geriatric hospital open and running in 1980, in the face of Tory cuts policies

Throughout this period, the trades council gave assistance to the local authority unions fighting cuts in direct labour. By May 1981, three years into Tory control, 1,800 council jobs had been lost – even before privatisation began. Unemployment was now over 15,000 in the borough, and in an effort to assess and publicise the impact of the most recent manufacturing closure at Garton's, the trades council conducted a survey, finding 30 per cent still out of work more than a year after 670 redundancies. The report was published, pointing to the dangers of allowing a decline in links between the trades council and local branches. This had played a part in the failure of the campaign against closure, the report said.

The trades council also took a keen interest in the fate of young people forced into government-sponsored cheap labour schemes. While consistently opposing the TUC's acceptance of the schemes, the trades council did not abandon those forced on to them. Dick



February, 1981: Angry tenants opposed to rent increases lobby councillors arriving at a council meeting. Banners demand that the arch privateer and Tory leader Christopher Chope be 'chopped'

Muskett remembers lively times introducing youngsters to the principles of trades unions.

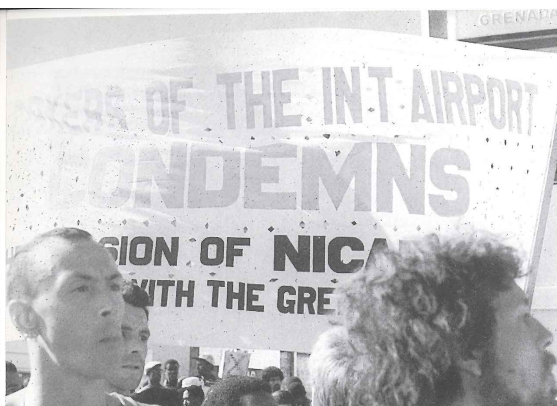
In 1982 the Tory council steamrollered street cleaning and refuse collection into private hands. The trades council played a major part in the organisation of large demonstrations and strike action by local council workers. The campaign was lost, but not without attracting national attention to the issues. In retrospect, the Wandsworth experience has been vital to the more recent, and in many cases more successful campaigns against compulsory competitive tendering by the local authority unions. Many of these cases have been won using European legislation, but a crucial weapon has been the demonstration of the failure of privatisation in terms of efficiency and cost in the pioneer borough of Wandsworth. The reality was summed up in 1982 by the Grand Met lawyer who admitted that



The trades council banner near the head of a demonstration protesting the death in Ashford remand centre of Richard 'Cartoon' Campbell. A public inquiry organised by the trades council blamed 'failures by the authorities'

private companies were obliged to adhere to fair wages legislation, and not cut pay, then 'there can be no question that there is no purpose in privatisation'.

Trades council activists had to come to terms with the different complexion of disputes with contractors who were viciously anti-union, where recruitment and union facilities were non-existent. Graham Petersen remembers being involved in the unionisation and strike at Pritchard's, on the grounds maintenance contract in 1983. Though the strike eventually resulted in a defeat, it brought trades council activists into close contact with workers employed by the private contractors. The fight against the deterioration in pay, terms and conditions faced by these workers was to become a recurrent theme throughout the campaigns of the 1980s and early 1990s.



March, 1983:  
Members of the  
trades council  
delegation to  
Grenada join  
a local  
trade union  
demonstration  
held in St  
Georges to  
support the  
Nicaraguan  
revolution

It was soon apparent to local activists that this new strain of rabid free-market Conservatism was being tested in Wandsworth as a precursor to a national policy of smashing the unions. With hindsight, it is clear that the significance of the assault in Wandsworth was not appreciated by national unions. Their failure to mobilise against the privatisation of dust collection in Wandsworth was probably the most glaring example of this short-sightedness. Only during the later 1980s did they come to value the experience of Wandsworth trades unionists who had been in the vanguard of resistance to Thatcherism. For example, the local government union NALGO began in 1989 to show a keen interest in the development of the Wandsworth Tories' anti-trade union strategy. The union invested in research to enable the national membership to prepare for a similar onslaught in their own localities.

## A way forward

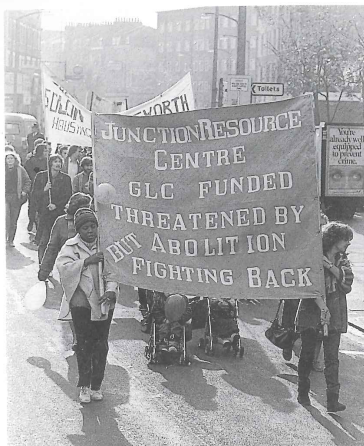
During 1983, the trades council organised a visit to the socialist Caribbean island of Grenada. Funds raised by the trades council went towards building an airstrip – but as Martin Upchurch remembers, islanders already foresaw that its completion would likely bring the attentions of the Reagan government. The assassination of Maurice Bishop and the US invasion were a source of sadness that year.

However, despite the setback, in Wandsworth a vigorous campaign against the privatisation of council homes was built up, and the 1983 trades council festival was, according to secretary Shaheer Mohammed's annual report, 'a great success, thanks to the hard work and expertise of the festival committee, including the Junction Resource Centre workers, who put so much into it'.

GLC funding was used to establish a permanent trade union resource centre at Clapham Junction which during the early 1980s was a major focus. Calum MacIntosh, a former trades council secretary, recalls: 'It combined good facilities, some staff time and deepened the links between trades unions and the community. In that period, trades council affiliation went up from fifty to seventy-five branches. Several sub-committees functioned; including a grouping of civil service unions which combined their issues with the benefit advice service for Wandsworth disputes, like Pritchard's, Grand Met, and Jack Barclay's; a housing sub-committee, bringing together housing workers and council tenants on issues such as privatisation of caretakers; and an employment sub-committee, which contributed heavily to national events like the SERTUC People's Marches for Jobs and the Jobs Express.'

One of the highlights of 1986 was at the end of June, when





The Junction Resource Centre, funded by the GLC, was an important asset to trades council work in the fight against Tories both locally and in Downing Street

Melvin Benn, president of the trades council, shook hands with Oliver Tambo, president of the African National Congress, just south of Chelsea Bridge. This was to formally welcome him and a huge anti-apartheid march to the borough of Wandsworth on the way from Hyde Park to Clapham Common.

The annual festival, sprung from an experiment on Clapham Common in 1980, reflected a desire to escape from the image of political and trade union work as factional and irrelevant. 'We pioneered the idea that politics can be fun,' says Dick Muskett. 'We decided that instead of lots of speakers, we would provide entertainment, with the politics as the backdrop.' Purists still scoff, but the concept was to lay the ground not only for the regular annual festival and events organised by the trades council, but also its very successful fund-raising arm, the Workers Beer Company.

Although the company – which the Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Union Council wholly owns – is run by an independent

management committee, leading executive committee members have, from the beginning, taken an active part in the management committee. In particular, Melvin Benn (EEPTU) and Steve Pryle (MSF), both of whom were presidents of the council from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, played a leading role in the development of the company. The last convenor at Garton's, Peter Clay (TGWU), also played an active part in the company's formation. Of the 1993 executive committee members, Anthony Burbage (Equity), Steve Blease (MSF), Bert Schouwenburg (GMB), Martin Smith (NUCPS) and Steve Pryle serve on the management committee, the latter as chairperson of the company. The company secretary from the beginning, in 1985, has been Tim Mills.

The trades council and the Workers Beer Company were honoured to be asked in 1989 to organise the reception after the massive Wembley stadium event to welcome the release of Nelson Mandela of the African National Congress from jail.

The desire to cut a new path to grassroots political influence perhaps arose out of the defeats at local and national level after 1978, and, as Muskett points out, the recognition that the skilled workers so vital to traditional trades unionism in the borough had all but vanished, gone in search of leafy suburbs.

From the historical standpoint, however, the outcome of the anti-privatisation struggle had a special significance for Battersea and Wandsworth, and perhaps for the wider movement too. The town hall unions, in a 1983 analysis of their defeat, warned other local authority unions facing privatisation that they could no longer take it for granted that all Labour councillors were opposed to privatisation. It was a telling remark, coming from the direct labour force established ninety years before by trades council nominees whose first oath was to oppose private contractors on public work. Over those nine decades, however, the trades council's influence over local labour representation had gone from total control to virtual bystander – a process marked by national edicts from the Labour Party, TUC and even the Communist Party.

Events left little time for reflection. Another major test of



Demonstrating in 1992 against the closure of seven primary schools in Wandsworth because of council education cuts. The trades council has been in the forefront of Wandsworth Fightback

traditional trades unionism was soon to dominate. Throughout the historic miners' struggle against pit closures of 1984-85, the trades council supported a full-time miners' representative in the borough, organised dozens of public meetings and produced a weekly newsletter in addition to providing accommodation, pickets and fund-raising events and food parcel collections.

The trades council established very close links with the colliery village of Shirebrook in North Derbyshire that remain strong; and the newsletter brought information about police and government victimisation, harassment and brutality against strikers that was never seen in the national press and media.

In addition to its tireless work in support of the miners, the trades

council also produced an Anti-Racist Action pack, intended for use in schools, streets, workplaces, and hospitals.

In September 1986, J. E. Hanger Ltd., the artificial limb manufacturers owned by the multinational firm BTR, sacked its entire Roehampton workforce of 3,000. The trades council initiated a massive support campaign. Picket lines and demonstrations were organised. There were fund-raising social events and food vouchers for the strikers were collected at Christmas. The dispute ended in May 1987 with a financial settlement. Steve Blease, current trades council treasurer and veteran of the dispute, says: 'After eight months' bitter struggle, the trades council had proved its commitment to the trades unions in Wandsworth.'

More recently, the establishment of the Workers Beer Company has permitted the trades council to consolidate its position. The trades council has pioneered new methods of raising funds for the defence and advancement of trade union rights.

With support from local branches, the trades council has closely monitored the mounting failures of private contractors and competitive tendering in the borough. It has also campaigned to unionise workers in private companies. According to the Centre for Public Services, the active trades council and its mobilisation of the community has significantly hampered Tory attempts to give a free rein to the grasping middleman. The opposition had whittled down the Tory majority on the borough council by the late 1980s, making it the subject of obsessional hatred and scheming in Thatcher's Downing Street cabal in 1990 during the run-up to local elections. A key factor was the success of the trades council in joining forces with voluntary organisations to resist swingeing cuts to thirty-four organisations serving children, pensioners and disadvantaged groups. Big marches were held in the borough to oppose the cuts.

In the end, the entire apparatus of Whitehall was coerced into the service of the money-grubbing privateers of Wandsworth, as was made scandalously clear with the award of a government grant a few weeks before the May 1990 elections enabling the council to set a £148 poll tax – by far the lowest in mainland Britain. Despite the

warnings of the trades council, the con-trick worked and the Tories pulled off a fourth successive local election victory.

Out of the gloom and depression which followed, the germ of a new direction for the labour movement emerged. Later that year, Gary Williams of NALGO moved a successful resolution calling on the trades council to employ a full-time campaigns worker. The campaign was to be jointly resourced by Wandsworth NALGO and the Workers Beer Company. Since October 1990, Shonagh Methven has worked tirelessly on behalf of the trades council to assist unions and community groups in their joint struggle against the cuts resulting from the increasingly dogmatic Tory majority in the town hall. Jim Atkinson, recently returned to trades council membership twenty years after his secretaryship, says that the co-ordinating role of the trades council is its strong point, and a reason for keeping trades councils alive.

Fighting the Tories both locally and nationally throughout the last period has been a bracing experience for the trades council, and has clearly helped foster a degree of professionalism, energy and purpose so tragically lacking in the mainstream organisations of the labour movement. Thanks to the Workers Beer Company, and the hard work put in by its staff and volunteers, the trades council is at present financially secure, and is one of the few working-class organisations actively and confidently seeking new ways to develop its work. The growing success of the annual London Fleadh, and the manifold cultural activities now advanced through the trades council's work are worthy of serious consideration as well as the respect and support of socialists everywhere.

An important factor mentioned by Muskett, Taylor, Maclean and others has been the desire of trades council delegates in recent years to put practical unity before factional argument. In fact, the desire for unity echoes the spirit that marked the pioneering decades of the trades council. Despite the obstacles placed in its way, unity has been an essential element in the past century's great achievements.

Battersea and Wandsworth trades council's recent work gives hope that all trades councils – which in their long history have



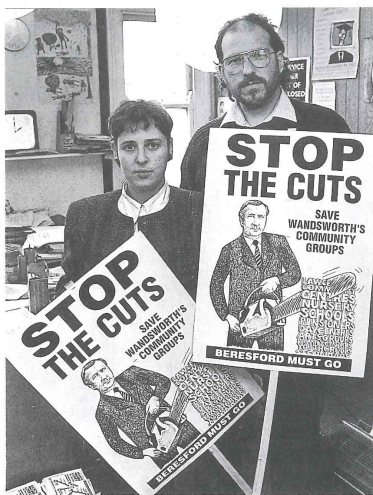
Shonagh Methven, Bert Schouwenburg and Steve Pryle of Battersea and Wandsworth trades council present a cheque to Timex strikers at the 1993 TUC. The £920.67 donation was raised at the Scottish Fleadh

played a singularly innovative role in the workers' movement – still have much to contribute.

A special tribute is also due the working classes of the two old boroughs of Battersea and Wandsworth, for their pioneering work on behalf of the rest of the labour movement, both in good times and bad. Activists today may sometimes feel they are fighting a losing battle. But if the devoted fighters for workers' rights from the early days of the two trades councils were to return, they would no doubt reassure us that despite some setbacks and failures, conditions today are nevertheless better, because their work lives on. They would also surely urge us to keep up the fight against exploitation, inequality and bigotry, wherever it is found, because the power for change lies in our hands.

As it marks its centenary, the trades council is developing its





Shonagh Methven and Bert Nightingale, secretary of Wandsworth Fightback, launch the campaign against local cuts at the time of the zero poll tax in Wandsworth

Workers' Charter and building links with trades unionists on the continent of Europe, including plans to twin with a trades council in Paris. The most recent campaign, against the privatisation of local housing management, has seen the trades council forge unity between workers and tenants, continuing to expose the hypocrisy of a council which sees its prime duty to support private enterprise.

As the workers' movement addresses the challenge of greater international economic integration and the ongoing struggle against exploitation, the trades council's new agenda promises to sharpen the edge on that weapon for labour forged a hundred years ago.



Members of Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Union Council in 1993. Clockwise from the left: Toby Kinder (president), Kathy Pick, June Tipping, Martin Smith (secretary), Jim Atkinson, Peter Evans, Steve Pryle (vice president), Shonagh Methven (organiser), Steve Blease, Alyson Moore

Trades unions represent more than eight million workers in Britain. If you are in work, there is a union for you. It will offer advice and protection against unscrupulous employers, on health and safety, and your rights at work. Your trade union branch may affiliate to any local trades council in the country, so long as one or more of its members either lives or works in the locality.

Battersea and Wandsworth trades council may be contacted at 177 Lavender Hill, London SW11 5TE. Telephone: 071 228 5638.

## Trades Council Secretaries and Presidents

### *Battersea trades council secretaries*

William Stephen Sanders (1894-99)  
H. Giles (1899-1901)  
William Melville (1902)  
James H. Brown (1903-10)  
C. E. Mason (1911-20, 1924-25)  
R. C. Kiloh (1922)  
George Fineran (1926, 1933-38)  
C. H. Young (1927-32)  
A. R. Skegg (1938)  
H. G. Law (1939-48)  
A. Rignall (1949-52)  
Jack Dunning (1953-68)  
Edna May (1969-1974)

### *Wandsworth trades council secretaries*

George Wyver (1904-05)  
G. Freund (1906)  
Harold Fairweather (1907)  
W. H. Dobson (1912, 1918)  
H. Ward (1913)  
E. H. Northcott (1925)  
Archibald Latta (1926-29)  
Ernest Hicks (1930-31, 1934, 1936-37)  
H. J. Williams (1931)  
C. H. Few (1932)  
F. H. Gibbs (1935)  
Sidney Church (1938-40)  
F. P. King (1941)  
Hubert Handford (1943-51)  
F. E. McKay (1952-55)  
E. E. Humphries (1956-60)  
H. G. Sparrow (1961-69)  
Jim Atkinson (1969-70)  
Robert Stanford (1970-73)  
Doris Welsh (1973-74)

### *Battersea trades council presidents*

James H. Brown (1899-1902)  
William Melville (1903-08)  
A. Welsh (1911)  
A. Winfield (1912-17)  
Jack Clancy (1926)  
E. W. Coles (1939-42)  
A. Rignall (1943)  
Horace Harling (1944-48)  
P. Stewart (1969)

### *Wandsworth trades council presidents*

W. T. Sturgess (1904-06)  
J. M. Allen (1925-26)  
S. Peck (1927-32)  
F. T. Jordan (1936-37)  
Mrs E. K. Goodrich (1938-39)  
George Rowe (1939)  
Alf Barton (1949-55, 1967)  
J. Ardley (1956-1957)  
J. McGovern (1958-1959)  
J. Perry (1960-1962)  
Mike Taylor (1968-1974)

### *Battersea and Wandsworth trades council secretaries*

Martin Larkham (1975-78)  
Caroline Stephens (1978)  
Nick Williams (1979-80)  
Calum MacIntosh (1981-82)  
Shaheer Mohammed (1983)  
Martin Chambers (1984)  
Margaret Conroy (1985)  
Kelly Mannah (1986-87)  
Carolyn Jones (1988)  
Derek Sutton (1989)  
Steve Blease (1990)  
Anthony Burbage (1991)  
Martin Smith (1992-93)

Due to missing records the above list is, sadly, incomplete.

### *Battersea and Wandsworth trades council presidents*

Mike Taylor (1975-77)  
Norman Maclean (1978-79)  
Jeremy Weinstein (1980-81)  
Dave Peers (1982)  
Martin Upchurch (1983)  
Andy Fairclough (1984-85)  
Melvirf Benn (1986-88)  
Tony Dennis (1989)  
Steve Pryle (1990-91)  
Toby Kinder (1992-93)

## Sources

A detailed chronology and list of sources for this book is held by the trades council.

The primary resource was the minutes, annual reports and correspondence of the trades councils. Unfortunately, much of the early material from Wandsworth has been lost, and there are gaps in the Battersea records. The early Battersea annual reports are held in the Wandsworth local history library, while minutes from the late 1920s to the late 1940s and some correspondence are held by the Battersea Labour Party. Recent Wandsworth material is held by the trades council. Some correspondence and early annual reports are held by the TUC, both in London and in the Warwick University archive. Wandsworth local history library also holds material from the Battersea and Wandsworth Social History Group.

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Cover pictures: 1908: Strikers from Corruganza Box factory  
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