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The Evolution of the Northampton Labour Party, 1888-1918

In its formative years, the British Labour Party was ideologically, culturally, and regionally diverse. The complex and fragmented nature of the party during this period has made the carrying out of local studies particularly important and existing work in this area has contributed to our understanding of the early relationships and experiences that helped to shape the ideological and organizational trajectory of a number of local parties.² Yet the evolution of the party in Northampton, historically seen as a 'Mecca of Radicalism', has been hitherto relatively neglected.³ Theses at both MA and PhD level have been written on certain aspects relating to the topic, such as the town's early socialists and trade unions, but these often offer one-sided accounts which fail to take into consideration the local and national context.⁴ Other works on the history of the Labour Party in Northampton, while useful, only briefly touch upon important developments prior to its formation in 1914.⁵

The work of Marie Dickie on the ideology of the Northampton Labour Party is, however, particularly valuable.⁶ Dickie's stress on the ideological importance of localism, or 'town

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² For examples see Mike Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); David Clark, *Colne Valley, Radicalism to Socialism: The portrait of a Northern constituency in the formative years of the Labour Party 1890-1910* (London: Longman, 1981); Peter Wyncoll, *The Nottingham Labour Movement 1880-1939* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985); Peter Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Bill Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism: Leicester working-class politics 1860-1906* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987); Andrew Thorpe, 'J.H. Thomas and the Rise of Labour in Derby 1880-1945', *Midland History*, 15 (1990), 111-28; Jon Lawrence, 'Popular politics and the limitations of party: Wolverhampton, 1867-1900', in *Currents of Radicalism: Popular radicalism, organised labour and party politics in Britain 1850-1914*, ed. by Eugenio F. Biagini and Alastair J. Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 65-85.

³ *Northampton Mercury*, 22 July 1892. Lawrence, pp. 65-85.

⁴ For examples see John Buckell, 'The Early Socialists in Northampton 1886-1924' (unpublished MA thesis, University of Leicester, 1977); William Griffin, 'The Northampton Boot and Shoe Industry and its Significance for Social Change in the Borough from 1880 to 1914' (unpublished MA thesis, University of Cardiff, 1968).

⁵ For example, see George Atwell, 'The History of Northampton Labour Party 1914-1971' (unpublished manuscript, Northamptonshire Central Library, 1975).

⁶ Marie Dickie, 'The Ideology of the Northampton Labour Party in the Interwar Years' (unpublished MA thesis, University of Warwick, 1982); Marie Dickie, 'Town patriotism and the rise of Labour: Northampton 1918-1939' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 1987).

patriotism', to the local Labour Party is certainly convincing, at least for the inter-war period, and has influenced my own study. Furthermore, there is certainly some evidence that particularly local circumstances and peculiarities influenced the trade union and socialist organizations in Northampton even prior to the formation of a Labour Party in 1914, especially relating to the political and economic traditions of the town.⁷

Yet Dickie's analysis of the important developments in labour and socialist politics before 1914 suffers from imbalance. The role of socialist organizations in the formation of the Labour Party, while certainly important, is overemphasized, thus neglecting the equally important non-socialist contribution.⁸ Dickie's failure to engage with the extensive records of the Northampton 'Trades' Council between 1888 and 1914, a body which played an equally important role in forming a Labour Party and which was more representative than the socialist societies at the time, inevitably contributes to this one-sided analysis.⁹ As a result, while Dickie's work raises important questions, more extensive research is needed on the Northampton trade unions to determine how far 'town patriotism' existed before 1914, and what other factors influenced Labour politics during this period.

By situating the evolution of one of the local party's central components, the Northampton 'Trades' Council, within the wider historical scholarship of the development of Labour, this essay considers its complex relationship with local Liberalism, its changing attitude towards state intervention and its increased legitimization amongst political elites in the town. This article argues that although there were attitudinal continuities amongst trade unionists throughout this period, including a strong class independence and awareness, increasing disillusionment with the Liberal government from 1906 and the experiences of the war from 1914 should be considered turning points in the ideological and political evolution of the nascent Northampton Labour Party.

The experiences of the trade unionists and their organizations that would go on to form the local party must be placed in their industrial context. By 1888 the dominance of the boot and shoe

⁷ For example, Jon Lawrence argues 'preponderant occupational groups' such as Northampton's shoemakers 'were able to impose their strong organizational and political identities on the wider community'. See Lawrence, p. 66.

⁸ For example, Dickie suggests the Northampton Labour Party was created by socialist organizations. See Dickie, 'The Ideology of the Northampton Labour Party in the Interwar Years', Introduction.

⁹ For example, whereas the Northampton branch of the Social Democratic Party claimed a membership of 560 in 1909, by 1911 the trades' council represented 6,000 members. See Buckell, , p. 14; Northampton 'Trades' Council, *Annual Report 1915*, in NTC 3 (acc 1977/44), in Northampton, Northamptonshire Record Office (NRO).

trade in Northampton had made it into a 'virtually one-industry town'.¹⁰ As a manufacturing centre, the town produced 'large quantities' of boots and shoes for the trade in London, the export market, and for the army and navy.¹¹ Between 1886 and 1895, the industry went through a number of changes which saw the growth in the number and size of factories and the concentration of workers into these establishments.¹² During this period, over half of the town's workforce was engaged in the trade, and even other Northampton industries such as printing and engineering relied on the shoe manufacturers for orders.¹³ An increase in demand after 1911 was further augmented during the First World War, when the industry prospered due to army contracts; Northampton became a 'boom town'.¹⁴

The dominance of the boot and shoe trade influenced the composition of local trade unionism. Northampton delegates were present at the foundation meeting of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Rivetters and Finishers (NUBSRF, later renamed the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives) and the town was the location of its first conference in 1874. However, it was not until the 1887 lock-out that the union's position began to improve in the town, as membership only then began to grow amongst the various grades of workers. Northampton-based officials also played an important role in the affairs of the national union; W. B. Hornidge, former president of the local branch in 1891, became General President and then General Secretary, eventually being replaced by Northampton-born E. L. Poulton in 1908.¹⁵

Although men dominated trade union affairs and politics both locally and nationally, the large numbers of women involved in the boot and shoe industry were not ignored. As early as 1892, organizing drives by the NUBSRF targeted women workers and encouraged them to join, and become speakers for, the union.¹⁶ By the end of 1911, when almost half of Northampton's population (both male and female) were employed in the trade, an estimated 1,200 women workers were members of the local NUBSO branches out of a total membership of 6,346.¹⁷ However, it was not until 1913 that the first female delegates were sent to the trades' council and

¹⁰ Henry Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 110.

¹¹ Alan Fox, *A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives 1874-1957* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), p. 12.

¹² Dickie, 'Town patriotism and the rise of Labour', pp. 24-5: Previously some of the processes involved in boot-making had been carried out at by 'outworkers' in their homes.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁴ Fox, p. 368.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 88, 104, 258, 330.

¹⁶ National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives (NUBSO), *Monthly Reports 1891-92*, February 1892, in 547/P/1/8, in Warwick, Modern Records Centre (MRC), University of Warwick.

¹⁷ Dickie, 'The Ideology of the Northampton Labour Party in the Interwar Years', p. 8; *Northampton Mercury*, 22 September 1911; NUBSO, *Monthly Reports 1911*, December 1911, in MRC 547/P/1/27.

trade unionism continued to remain weak amongst women workers by 1916.¹⁸ During the war, the trades' council took an interest in the changing nature of women's work, who were now involved in jobs which had hitherto been restricted to men, and encouraged those outside the union to join and agitate for an equal wage.¹⁹ However, agreements between unions and employers relating to female labour were often intended as temporary, and varied opinions were expressed as to women's role after the war.²⁰

It was the local NUBSRF that had played the central role in forming a trades' council, a body intended as encompassing representatives of various trade union societies, in the aftermath of the 1887 lock-out.²¹ Initially the council was concerned primarily with supporting strikes morally and financially, unionising workers in surrounding areas, and writing letters to local politicians and newspapers.²² Dominated financially and numerically by the NUBSRF branches, the trades' council's membership fluctuated until 1911-12, when it began to steadily rise to over 15,000 by 1915.²³ It was during this period of growth that the trades' council, despite its initial tendency towards the Liberals and its apathy towards the national Labour party, worked with the town's two socialist societies to form a Labour Party in 1914.²⁴

¹⁸ NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 15 January 1913, in NRO, NTC 2 (acc. 1977/44); *Northampton Mercury*, 29 September 1916: The National Federation of Women Workers complained of the lack of organised women in the town.

¹⁹ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 22 March 1916, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44); *Northampton Mercury*, 26 November 1915: For example, female labour was used in the preparing, checking and rough-stuff departments of the boot and shoe trade from which they had been 'entirely barred' before the war.

²⁰ For example, at a meeting organised by the trades' council in 1916, one trade unionist argued that although priority should be given to the men whose place had been filled, a guarantee of other employment for the women should be given. See NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 22 March 1916, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

²¹ *Northampton Mercury*, 12 January 1889: As well as the NUBSRF, the Amalgamated Engineers, Amalgamated Railway Servants, Typographical Association, Amalgamated Cordwainers (men and women's branches), Stonemasons, Amalgamated Carpenters, Plumbers and the National Union of Life Insurance Agents were represented at a preliminary meeting.

²² *Northampton Mercury*, 19 October 1889.

²³ Out of 15,870 affiliated members in 1915, 10,971 (69%) were members of the NUBSO. Furthermore, the total income from affiliation fees was £61.2s.6d., with £33.6s.8d. (55%) provided by the NUBSO branches.

Inconsistencies between the membership lists and the statement of accounts in the 1915 annual report explain the discrepancy between percentages. For example, although the National Union of Railwaymen affiliated on a membership of just 1,000 (6%) it was contributing £6.19s.6d. (11%) of the total affiliation fees. See Northampton Trades' Council, *Annual Report 1915*, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc 1977/44).

²⁴ *Northampton Mercury*, 24 October 1890: The local Liberals were even accused of being dominated by the trades' council at the 1890 municipal elections; Northampton Trades' Council (NTC), *Minute Book 16.7.1913-12.7.1916*, 21 October 1914, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc 1977/44): The town's socialist organizations were the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), a Marxist-influenced organization formed in 1886, and the Independent Labour Party (ILP), formed in 1908; Victor Hatley, *Shoemakers in Northamptonshire 1762-1911: A Statistical Survey* (Northampton: Northampton Historical Series, 1971): At the time of the 1911 census, there were 16,961 shoemakers in the Borough of Northampton (male and female) of whom 4,516 were members of the NUBSO (27%). However, trade union membership had almost doubled by 1915.

The relatively late arrival of a unified Labour Party in the town owes much to the continued influence of Liberalism on the town's workers. During the period covered in this article, Northampton was predominantly a one-party town. The almost uninterrupted Liberal success at parliamentary elections between 1880 and 1923 (see Table 1.1), although not matched with consistent control of the municipal council, was partly based on the prevalence of Nonconformism in Northampton.²⁵ Although there was also a tradition of secularism in the town, developed during the struggles to elect the atheist Charles Bradlaugh in the 1880s and continued by the local branch of the socialist Social Democratic Federation (SDF), the political hegemony of Liberalism over a large bulk of local trade unionists continued until 1918 at least.²⁶

²⁵ Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections*, p. 110.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110; *Northampton Mercury*, 3 January 1919: The defeated Labour candidate in the 1918 Northampton Parliamentary election admitted that the Coalition candidate's victory was based on the working-class vote.

Total votes gained at Northampton parliamentary elections, 1880-1929

<i>Year</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Conser.</i>	<i>SDF</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>MPs</i>
1880	7,985	5,978	-	-	Labouchère (Lib) and Bradlaugh (Lib)
1881 (B)	3,437	3,305	-	-	Labouchère (Lib) and Bradlaugh (Lib)
1882 (B)	3,796	3,688	-	-	Labouchère (Lib) and Bradlaugh (Lib)
1884 (B)	4,032	3,664	-	-	Labouchère (Lib) and Bradlaugh (Lib)
1885	9,160	3,890	-	-	Labouchère (Lib) and Bradlaugh (Lib)
1886	8,923	7,306	-	-	Labouchère (Lib) and Bradlaugh (Lib)
1891 (B)	5,436	3,723	-	-	Labouchère (Lib) and Manfield (Lib)
1892	10,601	6,886	-	-	Labouchère (Lib) and Manfield (Lib)
1895	10,848*	7,214	1,216	-	Labouchère (Lib) and Drucker (Con)
1900	10,718	8,602	-	-	Labouchère (Lib) and Shipman (Lib)
1906	8,708	8,048	5,010	-	Paul (Lib) and Shipman (Lib)
1910 (J)	10,687	9,033	3,489	-	Lees-Smith (Lib) and McCurdy (Lib)
1910 (D)	12,204	9,435	-	-	Lees-Smith (Lib) and McCurdy (Lib)
1918†	18,010	-	-	10,735	McCurdy (Coalition Lib)
1920 (B)	16,650	-	-	13,279	McCurdy (Coalition Lib)
1922	23,727‡	-	-	14,493	McCurdy (National Lib)
1923	11,342	11,520	-	15,556	Bondfield (Lab)
1924	9,436	16,097	-	15,046	Holland (Con)
1928 (B)	9,584	14,616	-	15,173	Malone (Lab)
1929	11,054	20,177	-	22,356	Malone (Lab)

*The Liberal total includes the votes for an independent Liberal candidate.

†Northampton became a one-member constituency in 1918.

‡The Liberal total includes the votes for an independent Liberal candidate.

However, the religiosity of the Northampton working-class should not be exaggerated. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the expansion of churches and chapels in the town suggests that Northampton experienced a 'golden age' of religious fervour, and it was still considered the 'most Puritan town in England' when Bradlaugh made his first visit in 1859.²⁷ Yet although Nonconformism was certainly stronger than the Anglicanism in Northampton, there is evidence

²⁷ Griffin, pp. 152-53; Fergus D'Arcy, 'Charles Bradlaugh and the World of Popular Radicalism, 1833-1891', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Hull, 1978), p. 302: During the 20 years after 1868, 4 churches, several mission churches, and 16 to 18 chapels were erected or acquired.

to suggest that a general lack of interest in religion was more prevalent amongst the town's residents, especially within the working-class.²⁸ On a Sunday in November 1881, only 26% of Northampton's population went to public worship, suggesting that Christianity was a declining force.²⁹ Vicars in the town complained of a wide range of attitudes and behaviour within predominantly working-class parishes, ranging from general indifference to 'disgraceful rowdiness' towards evangelists.³⁰ Shoemakers in particular gained a reputation for their poor behaviour, and in 1881 one vicar claimed that Northampton as a whole was simply 'not Christianised'.³¹ One must be wary, therefore, of overemphasising the importance of religious influence upon voting patterns in Northampton at this time, especially amongst working-class electors.

The continuing popularity of Liberalism amongst the town's industrial workers placed advocates of independent labour politics in a difficult situation. There was little desire amongst the bulk of Northampton's workers, especially before 1910, for a break with the local Liberals who, on the whole, shared their radical views. Duncan Tanner has argued that in southern, Liberal strongholds such as Northampton and Bristol, the newly-formed Labour parties merely 'replicated the bulk of the Liberals' proposals' while also offering support to groups who sought state-based remedies to their problems.³² During this period, if 'Labour was only really successful where the Liberals failed to live up to their radical capabilities', then it is understandable why independent labour candidates in Northampton struggled to break voters away from their traditional allegiances.³³

The complex relationship between Liberalism and the labour movement was not confined to Northampton. In the period prior to the First World War, the national Labour Party's position in relation to the Liberals has been characterised as 'one of humiliating dependence'.³⁴ Throughout this era, a number of developments underlined the continuing influence of Liberalism on the British labour movement; the co-operative movement continued to disassociate itself from the Labour Party, large minorities of members of the largest unions had voted to remain politically

²⁸ D'Arcy, 'Charles Bradlaugh and the World of Popular Radicalism, 1833-1891', pp. 302-3.

²⁹ D'Arcy, 'Charles Bradlaugh and the World of Popular Radicalism, 1833-1891', p. 304.

³⁰ Griffin, p. 155: A Salvationist claimed Northampton was the 'worse town as regards behaviour I have ever visited'.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

³² Duncan Tanner, *Political change and the Labour party, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 286.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

³⁴ Ross McKibbin, 'James Ramsay MacDonald and the Problem of the Independence of the Labour Party, 1910-1914', *The Journal of Modern History*, 42:2 (1970), 216-235 (p. 219).

neutral, and the powerful Miners' Federation continued to favour a hybrid Liberal-Labour ideology.³⁵

There has also been a suggestion that the Liberal and Labour parties were linked ideologically, especially with respect to the New Liberal ideology which influenced a number of welfare programmes associated with the Liberal governments after 1906, including health and unemployment insurance.³⁶ For Michael Freedon, the influence of this intellectual tendency saw 'the basic tenets of liberalism [...] fundamentally reformulated in a crucial and decisive manner'. Furthermore, the ideological similarities between New Liberalism and Labour suggests that 'the split between Liberalism and Labour was not a question of creeds or programmes'.³⁷

Yet despite these apparent similarities, there was an 'increasing opposition to the Lib-Lab alliance' within sections of the Labour Party prior to the war, the culmination of which changed the nature of British politics.³⁸ Numerous attempts have been made to understand the split between Liberalism and Labour, each with their own distinctive approach and method.³⁹ As Matthew Worley has convincingly argued, the 'differences of emphasis' between social and political approaches to the question 'will no doubt continue indefinitely'. While accepting that challenges have successfully discredited any deterministic reading of Labour's growth, Worley has instead proposed a synthesis of both approaches which would see the 'relationship between social-economics, politics, cultures and the individual as a fluid, multifarious interaction in which a complex range of factors both fed off and affected one another'.⁴⁰

It is this 'multifarious' method which has informed the approach taken in this essay to the Party's evolution in Northampton. Applying this strategy has revealed a number of continuities in class-based attitudes within the trades' council between 1888 and 1918. A number of developments throughout the period, including a growing desire for labour representation and political

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-21.

³⁶ James Hinton, *Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement 1867-1974* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983), p. 96; Peter Dewey, *War and Progress: Britain 1914-1945* (Harlow: Longman, 1997), pp. 10-11.

³⁷ Michael Freedon, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 1.

³⁸ Ian Taylor, 'Ideology and policy', in *The Labour Party: An Introduction to its history, structure and politics*, ed. by Chris Cook and Ian Taylor (London: Longman, 1980), pp. 1-31 (p. 6).

³⁹ For an overview of the historiography on this topic see Matthew Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars* (London: Tauris, 2005), pp. 1-18. For class-based interpretations, see Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). For challenges to this analysis, see Tanner. For a more recent analysis see Martin Pugh, *Speak For Britain! A New History of the Labour Party* (London: Bodley Head, 2010), pp. 100-114.

⁴⁰ Worley, p. 6.

disillusionment with the Liberal government, acted as catalysts for the full break with the Liberal Party. These events and developments supplemented, rather than transformed, already-existing class-related attitudes amongst organised workers.

Even prior to the formation of a local Labour Party, Northampton Liberals consistently appealed to these class-based attitudes. Despite the class divisions within the Liberal Party itself, which Liberals attempted to downplay and deny when appealing to workers, there was still often political unity between organised labour and the Party.⁴¹ For a Liberal candidate in the 1890 local elections, his economic status was not the main determinant; he claimed he was *not* standing on a class basis. The candidate's appeals for a 'commonwealth' of all, and for relatively progressive policies and sympathy for the poor, were supported by the local trades' council and the local NUBSRF, despite his position as a shoe manufacturer and an employer.⁴²

This attitude was further expressed by a journalist writing in the Liberal-leaning *Northampton Mercury*, who argued that 'Liberalism knows nothing of class. It only judges a man by his political creed and conduct'.⁴³ In fact, there was little difference politically between the local Liberals and the trades' council at this time. Liberal attitudes towards House of Lords reform, municipal control of monopolies, and an eight hour day for municipal employees were all shared by the trades' council.⁴⁴ As early as 1890, trades' council delegates were elected to the local municipal council with Liberal support and local Liberal journalists consistently emphasised their agreement with most socialistic proposals.⁴⁵ A Liberal and labour alliance was regularly encouraged in the local press and this relatively close relationship even led to accusations that the Liberals were being dominated by the trade unions of the town.⁴⁶

Despite this political unity, the Liberals, including working-men members, sought to downplay the importance of class; politics, it was argued, was the dividing line between people. In an

⁴¹ In 1891, the Liberals put forward two candidates at the municipal elections; Daniel Stanton, a trade unionist, and Henry Wooding, a shoe manufacturer. The candidates had sat on opposite sides of the negotiating table during boot and shoe disputes; a clear example of the class alliance nature of the local Liberals. See Dickie, 'Town patriotism and the rise of Labour', p. 52.

⁴² *Northampton Mercury*, 22 August 1890: John Maddy, a former worker-turned-employer who believed that 'Liberalism could do all that was practicable in Socialism'.

⁴³ *Northampton Mercury*, 24 October 1890.

⁴⁴ *Northampton Mercury*, 16 March 1893; *Northampton Mercury*, 26 October 1889.

⁴⁵ *Northampton Mercury*, 7 November 1890; *Northampton Mercury*, 03 November 1893: The Mercury ran through the SDF programme and argued that the Radicals supported the municipalisation of monopolies and an 8 hour day for municipal employees once trade unions adopted it, but opposed municipalisation of the hospital, the setting up of municipal bakeries and coal stores and was vague on payment of elected officials.

⁴⁶ *Northampton Mercury*, 11 June 1894; *Northampton Mercury*, 24 October 1890.

election speech in 1890, Daniel Stanton, a working-man candidate for the Liberals, argued that 'capital and labour together made England what it is, so the middle and working classes on the council could work together for the common good'.⁴⁷ A fellow working-man candidate, Fred Inwood, also argued that until 'they got the Socialist ideal [...] the interest of the middle-class - the distributors - and the working class - the producers - must be identical'.⁴⁸ These statements neatly summarise the attitude amongst many Liberal members of the trades' council at the time; there was an acceptance of economic divisions based on class, but this was combined with a genuine desire for joint action 'for the common good'.

However, the issue of direct labour representation on political bodies in and around Northampton became a divisive issue for both the Liberal associations and trades' councils. Throughout 1894 two independent labour members were elected to the municipal council in nearby Kettering, the trades' council in Northampton discussed standing its own candidates in municipal elections, and a Labour Electoral Association was formed in Wellingborough for the same purpose.⁴⁹ From officially denying the importance of class and promoting a united, progressive party, the Northampton Liberal organizations responded to these demands by accepting that labour organizations, such as unions and trades' councils, desired to be represented by members of their own class.

The 'shoe war' throughout the boot and shoe industry in 1895 also appears to have influenced the attitudes of trade unionists towards labour representation.⁵⁰ The Manufacturers' Federation, frustrated by union policies with regards to new machinery, arbitration, and illegal strikes, issued a set of 'commandments' aimed at reaffirming employers' rights in the management of factories.⁵¹ Rejected as 'illegal, unjust, unworkable [and] unpractical' by the union executive, a lock-out involving nearly 50,000 workers throughout the country was underway by March 1895.⁵² In Northampton, the militancy of the boot and shoe workers corresponded with

⁴⁷ *Northampton Mercury*, 17 October 1890: Stanton was a NUBSRF delegate to, and one-time president of, the trades' council from 1888 to 1913.

⁴⁸ *Northampton Mercury*, 17 October 1890: By 1890, Inwood had served as president of the Northampton branch of the NUBSRF, as the first chairman of the trades' council, and as a member of the executive of the Liberal and Radical organization in the town.

⁴⁹ *Northampton Mercury*, 2 February 1894; *Northampton Mercury*, 05 October 1894; *Northampton Mercury*, 28 December 1894.

⁵⁰ *Northampton Mercury*, 05 April 1895.

⁵¹ Fox, p. 221.

⁵² *Northampton Mercury*, 25 January 1895; Fox, p. 227.

radicalization of the trades' council.⁵³ A May Day demonstration alongside the local SDF was organised by the trades' council, a rare example of friendship between socialists and non-socialists at this time, and resolutions were passed unanimously in favour of collective ownership.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the trades' council decided to stand independent candidates *against* the Liberals in the municipal elections.⁵⁵ Even former Liberal councillors seemed to be inspired by this increased militancy; Stanton, formerly a Liberal local election candidate and leading NUBSRF trade unionist in the town, was singled out by the Manufacturers' Federation for saying employers would go to hell if they could get a pair of boots cheaper.⁵⁶

Local Liberals sought to keep the demand for labour representation within the confines of the Party, and were largely successful in doing so, by selecting a trade unionist to stand in the two-member Northampton parliamentary constituency during the dispute in 1895. Initially, two potential candidates were proposed, one of which was the General Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, Edward Harford. Politics was certainly not the dividing line between the candidates, as it was accepted that the two shared similar viewpoints. Yet some delegates at the selection meeting supported Harford's adoption for the simple reason that he was a working-man candidate.⁵⁷

The significance of class, even to local Liberals, can be seen clearly in the election campaigns of Harford and the sitting member Henry Labouchère. Harford's speeches prioritised class appeals over politics, and stressed his desire to represent the class who did not have the appropriate representation for their numbers.⁵⁸ Labouchère, although not claiming to be a working-man, still made use of class appeals in his addresses; the Conservatives should be removed from power because they were an aristocratic government, led by aristocrats who believed the aristocracy should rule.⁵⁹

⁵³ Dickie has argued that despite the 'major defeat' of 1895, Northampton trade unionists were 'now more ready' to support the SDF. See Marie Dickie, 'Liberals, Radicals and Socialists in Northampton before the Great War', *Northamptonshire Past & Present*, 8:1 (1983-84), 51-54 (p. 54).

⁵⁴ *Northampton Mercury*, 10 May 1895: For relations between trade unionists and socialists in Northampton during this period, see Dickie, 'Liberals, Radicals and Socialists in Northampton before the Great War', pp. 51-54.

⁵⁵ *Northampton Mercury*, 13 September 1895.

⁵⁶ *Northampton Mercury*, 5 April 1895.

⁵⁷ *Northampton Mercury*, 14 September 1894: The other candidate was John Robertson, who went on to stand as an independent Liberal candidate in the subsequent election. For more on Harford's candidature see Philip S. Bagwell, *The Railwaymen: A History of the National Union of Railwaymen* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963), pp. 199-202.

⁵⁸ *Northampton Mercury*, 12 July 1895.

⁵⁹ *Northampton Mercury*, 12 July 1895: The meeting at which he made this statement was large and representative, with both Socialists and Conservatives in attendance.

Despite their difference in social standing, in political terms the two candidates were both advanced Liberals or Radicals. Yet while the political viewpoints of the candidates were undoubtedly important for the Liberals, these were often mentioned alongside class-related appeals. Class and independent labour demands were becoming a reality in local politics, but at this stage trade unions and other labour organizations were content to work alongside Liberals and, through them, members of other classes. Liberal-supporting journalists felt confident in this alliance and often sought to convince workers 'of the futility of trying to get adequate representation upon public bodies without co-operation with their friends, the Liberals'.⁶⁰

However, by 1900 there was no single, unified progressive party in a number of Northamptonshire towns. Splits between Liberals and independent labour candidates had occurred in Wellingborough, Rushden and Kettering throughout the 1890s, mostly in local electoral contests only.⁶¹ Trades' councils and union bodies had, on a number of occasions, considered the idea of running independent labour candidates to challenge both Liberals and Conservatives, and in some cases had gone through with the idea.⁶² Despite the political allegiance of many workers and leading labour men in the towns to the local Liberal associations, there was a feeling of political and class independence that united the trades' council. Any candidate, Liberal or independent, who wished to be elected by the workmen of these towns had to consistently stress their class credentials and their programme for improving the lives of the workers. A resolution which prohibited the council from allying with any political party enshrined this principle of political independence into the rulebook in 1898.⁶³

If the decade prior to 1900 only contained within it the seed of the future estrangement, then it was throughout the period leading up to 1918 that the full fracture between Liberalism and Labour occurred.⁶⁴ From 1900 onwards, the Northampton trades' council started to move more consistently away from the Liberals and began to confidently assert its independence. Resolutions were passed in support of various policies and bills emanating from the national

⁶⁰ *Northampton Mercury*, 4 March 1898.

⁶¹ *Northampton Mercury*, 30 November 1894; *Northampton Mercury*, 28 December 1894; *Northampton Mercury*, 29 March 1895.

⁶² *Northampton Mercury*, 18 May 1894: At the annual conference of the NUBSRF in 1894, the General Secretary William Inskip complained of the poor relationship between Liberalism and labour in Northampton. He had intended to speak at a Liberal meeting but was prevented from doing so due to the trades' council stance on political neutrality, much to his frustration.

⁶³ NTC, *Minute Book 29.5.1895-26.9.1909*, 16 February 1898, in NRO, NTC 1 (acc 1977/44).

⁶⁴ After all, Northampton continued to elect Liberal MPs until 1923. See Dickie, 'Town patriotism and the rise of Labour', p. 165.

Labour Party as early as 1903, and further praise was offered to the Party's MPs due to their action on the Trades Disputes Bill.⁶⁵ The trades' council's advice to electors in the 1906 general election was to ignore the Liberals and vote for 'the only two trade union candidates before the constituency' and a resolution explaining the council's disappointment with the failure of the Liberals to pass an Old Aged Pensions Act, whilst also endorsing the stand taken by the Labour Party, was passed in 1907.⁶⁶ Revealingly, a letter listing those MPs who voted for and against Labour's Unemployed Workmen's Bill was met with surprise by the council in April 1908, as it showed that Dr John Shipman, one of the two the local Liberal MPs, had sided with the majority voting *against* it.⁶⁷

Further disappointment was increasingly expressed by delegates towards the relative moderation of Liberal reforms, with one delegate suggesting that David Lloyd George 'did not understand the needs of the workers'.⁶⁸ The reaction of the trades' council to Winston Churchill's circular on civilian police and the formation of police reserves in industrial disputes led one local journalist to suggest that 'the absolute cleavage of Liberalism and Labour cannot long be delayed'.⁶⁹ At a meeting to discuss the issue, one leading council member argued that 'from the evasive replies of Mr. Asquith in the House of Commons it was quite clear Trade Unionists must take care of their own interests'.⁷⁰

This independent spirit was most clearly expressed in the trades' council's decision to rescind a resolution prohibiting it from carrying out political action separate to the two main parties and the agreement to form a local Labour Party in 1912.⁷¹ The suggestion to remove this resolution from the minute books came from the council's secretary, F. O. Roberts, a member of the local Independent Labour Party (ILP) and a consistent advocate of the formation of a local Labour Party.⁷² Although local unions had already affiliated to the national Party, a local committee,

⁶⁵ NTC, *Minutes 1895-1909*, 21 January 1903, in NRO, NTC 1 (acc 1977/44); NTC, *Annual Report 1906*: 'The thanks of all trade union members are due to Labour Members'.

⁶⁶ NTC, *Minutes 1895-1909*, 28 December 1905, in NRO, NTC 1 (acc 1977/44): These candidates were also members of the SDF.

⁶⁷ NTC, *Minutes 1895-1909*, 19 June 1907; NTC, *Minutes 1895-1909*, 15 April 1908; both in NRO, NTC 1 (acc 1977/44).

⁶⁸ NTC, *Minute Book 20.10.1909-15.7.1913*, 25 July 1911, in Northampton, NRO, NTC 2 (acc 1977/44).

⁶⁹ Attached to NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 20 September 1911, in NRO, NTC 2 (acc. 1977/44).

⁷⁰ Attached to NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 15 November 1911, in NRO, NTC 2 (acc. 1977/44).

⁷¹ NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 11 August 1911; NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 20 March 1912; both in NRO, NTC 2 (acc. 1977/44).

⁷² NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 11 August 1911, in NRO, NTC 2 (acc. 1977/44): After a failed attempt to form an ILP in the town in the 1890s, a new branch was formed in 1908 and quickly gained an influence on the trades' council. Its authority over the newly formed local Labour Party after 1914 led to the adoption of one of its own members

composed of the trades' council, the ILP, and the BSP (the British Socialist Party, formerly the SDF), was finally formed in Northampton in 1914.⁷³

It would certainly be incorrect to suggest there was a linear, painless progression from Liberalism to Labour for the organised workers in and around Northampton; the pattern of development of both parties in a number of towns was uneven. Some organizations, initially set up to further the cause of labour representation, united with Liberals for electoral contests later on.⁷⁴ Furthermore, some union leaders who had challenged Liberals in contests went on to stand for them.⁷⁵ However, the full organizational split in the progressive party in Northampton had officially been declared by the outbreak of the war, as it had been in many other historically Liberal constituencies throughout the country.

For example, a Labour Party was formed in the East Northamptonshire constituency and, despite being represented by the future Labour MP Leo Chiozza Money, put forward an NUBSO member as candidate in the December 1910 general election.⁷⁶ Further afield, the labour movement in another footwear centre, Leicester, had broken with Liberalism in the 1890s, both organizationally and ideologically.⁷⁷ Despite similarities with Northampton, such as a shared heritage of dissent, an NUBSO-dominated trades' council and a historic reputation for radicalism, Leicester elected a James Ramsay Macdonald as Labour MP in 1906.⁷⁸ In Bristol, where an independent Labour League had been established as early as 1885, an NUBSO candidate unsuccessfully challenged the sitting Liberal MP in January 1910.⁷⁹ In the Colne Valley, where trade unionism was historically weak, an independent Labour candidate was elected in a

as the Labour candidate in 1918 instead of the NUBSRF candidate. Roberts became Labour MP for West Bromwich in 1918. See *Northampton Mercury*, 1 January 1909; *Northampton Mercury*, 5 July 1918.

⁷³ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 21 October 1914, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

⁷⁴ A good example is in Rushden, where the Labour Party, formed in 1894 to challenge both parties locally, worked electorally alongside the Liberals in 1900. See *Northampton Mercury*, 30 November 1894; *Northampton Mercury*, 11 May 1900.

⁷⁵ *Northampton Mercury*, 27 October 1899: Stanton, who was originally on the local Liberal and Radical Union executive and stood as a labour candidate with their support between 1888 and 1891. He stood as an SDF candidate in the 1893 elections before rejoining the Liberals and winning a council seat for them in 1899. A dislike of the SDF, expressed consistently during the negotiations to form the local Labour Party, remained with him until the last years of his life. See newspaper report attached to NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 29 April 1914.

⁷⁶ *Northampton Mercury*, 16 December 1910.

⁷⁷ Lancaster, pp. 115-16.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁷⁹ *Bristol Observer*, 22 January 1910.

1907 in a three-cornered contest.⁸⁰ Furthermore, this experience was shared in other northern constituencies such as Bradford, Halifax, Homfirth, Huddersfield, and Keighley.⁸¹

To understand the split in Northampton, it is necessary to take a long-term look at the period between 1888 and 1918. The idea of a single, unified progressive party seemed to be, at best, wishful thinking on the part of the Liberals by 1900. Any alliance between organised labour and Liberalism by 1900 in Northampton was just that: an *alliance* of separate, but politically similar, movements.⁸² This association continued as long as local Liberalism retained its radical and 'advanced' characteristics. However, leading up to the First World War, there was a growing sense within labour organizations that Liberalism was not an effective method of achieving their own, independent goals; trades' councils became more confident in refusing co-operation with the Liberals and acting alone in the political sphere. Disillusionment with Liberalism went hand in hand with, and was in fact influenced by, a greater awareness on the part of the labour organizations of the need for independent methods and solutions.

The evolution in the relationship between local Liberals and the trade unions took place alongside a growing legitimization of trade unionists in the town, and the increasing influence of socialists within the labour movement. These developments were not unique to Northampton; from its foundation as a small party committed to sectional interests in 1900, the growth of the national Labour Party eventually allowed it, through the war years, to gain 'significant footholds...within the wartime operations of the state'.⁸³ The wartime government's need for industrial co-operation, combined with trade unions' increasing role within the economy and government, led to an acknowledgement of labour amongst political elites which contributed to Labour's increased share of the vote at the 1918 election.⁸⁴

After its formation, the trades' council's lack of size and influence was matched by the newly formed local branch of the SDF, who also had delegates on the trades' council. Relations were initially poor between the two organizations. During a discussion on a proposed May Day demonstration in 1892, the council decided to stand on a separate platform to the SDF as a

⁸⁰ Clark, p. 157.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁸² NTC, *Minutes 1895-1909*, 28 October 1892, in NRO, NTC 1 (acc. 1977/44): The division between Liberalism and an embryonic 'Labour Party' was acknowledged as early as 1892.

⁸³ Hinton, p. 102.

⁸⁴ Larry G. Gerber, 'Corporatism in Comparative Perspective: The Impact of the First World War on American and British Labor Relations', *The Business History Review*, 62:1 (1988), 93-127 (p. 99).

number of trade unionists refused to co-operate with them.⁸⁵ The formation of an ILP in the town was also met with suspicion, with one delegate wondering what this organization was, as he 'knew of no other Labour party except the organised trade unions and their councils [...he] considered that council to be the labour party of Northampton (Hear, hear)!'.⁸⁶ A proposal from an SDF delegate from the local NUBSRF to rescind the ban on the trades' council's neutrality led to a heated discussion, with one delegate suggesting that the socialists would not be happy until they had a dictatorship on the council.⁸⁷ Another delegate reminded members that they should represent their societies, not 'outside' organizations that had nothing to do with them.⁸⁸ Although some attempts were made to reconcile the various socialist and labour organizations in the town, a feeling of distrust characterised their relations throughout the 1890s.⁸⁹

Despite this, trade unionists continued to stand for, and sometimes win, elections to local governing bodies in nearby towns such as Wellingborough, Kettering, and Rushden throughout the 1890s.⁹⁰ Northampton trades' council members were appointed governors of a local grammar school and demanded representation as trustees of a local hospital charity.⁹¹ The efforts of the council in relieving distress caused by unemployment in 1901 further gained it legitimacy amongst political leaders in the town, with the Liberal Mayor agreeing with its proposals to alleviate suffering amongst the unemployed.⁹²

Relations between the socialists and trades' council also improved between 1900 and 1914. After an initial period of reluctance, the trades' council began to attend and organise May Day parades alongside the SDF in 1906.⁹³ The trades' council approved of some SDF election candidates (as long as they were trade unionists) and an SDF member was unanimously elected president of the council in 1908.⁹⁴ Various SDF initiatives were also discussed and supported at trades' council

⁸⁵ *Northampton Mercury*, 18 March 1892.

⁸⁶ *Northampton Mercury*, 28 October 1892: This early attempt to form an ILP failed. A new branch was formed in 1908.

⁸⁷ *Northampton Mercury*, 30 November 1894.

⁸⁸ *Northampton Mercury*, 30 November 1894: After 1895 the SDF began to gain an influence within the two branches of the NUBSRF. See Dickie, 'Town patriotism and the rise of Labour', p. 42.

⁸⁹ *Northampton Mercury*, 07 April 1893.

⁹⁰ *Northampton Mercury*, 30 November 1894.

⁹¹ NTC, *Minutes 1895-1909*, 29 June 1896; NTC, *Minutes 1895-1909*, 30 June 1897; both in NRO, NTC 1 (acc. 1977/44).

⁹² *Northampton Mercury*, 18 October 1901.

⁹³ NTC, *Minutes 1895-1909*, 18 April 1906, in NRO, NTC 1 (acc. 1977/44).

⁹⁴ NTC, *Minutes 1895-1909*, 18 November 1908, in NRO, NTC 1 (acc. 1977/44): W.B. Johnson replaced E.L. Poulton as president in 1908. The two SDF parliamentary candidates in 1906 were James Gribble, a local NUBSRF member, and Jack Williams, an SDF organiser. For more on Gribble and Williams, see Martin Crick, *The History of the Social-Democratic Federation* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1994), pp. 305, 318.

meetings during this period, and joint action was taken to hold a local plebiscite on a proposed 'Feeding of Necessitous Children Act' in 1910.⁹⁵

The period leading up to the First World War was characterised as increasing the 'vitality of the trade union movement' in the town, with the formation of new unions, the growth of the trades' council, and the election of a number of SDF, ILP, and trades' council candidates to the town council.⁹⁶ There were also preliminary discussions over the formation of a consolidated Labour organization representing both socialists and the trades' council.⁹⁷ In fact, the failure to form such a body earlier was not due to a lack of desire on the part of the trades' council and the trade unionists; if it were not for the SDF's intransigence over its election candidates, it may well have been created earlier.⁹⁸

Despite the improved nature of the relationship, the foundation conferences of the consolidated Labour Party were heated affairs, with various delegates participating in animated discussions over the name, aims, and organizational structure of the new body.⁹⁹ Even though proposals to commit the new party to a socialistic programme were rejected, the socialist bodies and the trades' council continued to work together inside and outside the new party. However, with the growth in trade union membership in the town, the relative strength of the SDF (renamed the Social Democratic Party, and then the British Socialist Party) within trade unions began to decline, expressed most clearly in their failure to capture the presidency of the trades' council in both 1911 and 1914.¹⁰⁰

Although socialist organizations and trade unionists had both gained a certain level of influence in local politics with their elected councillors, poor law guardians, and magistrates, it was the war years that accelerated this development and which gave labour organizations further legitimacy

⁹⁵ NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 27 January 1910, in NRO, NTC 2 (acc. 1977/44).

⁹⁶ NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 20 March 1912; Newspaper cutting attached to NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 16 July 1912; NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 20 November 1912; NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 12 November 1911; NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 16 February 1913; all in NRO, NTC 2 (acc. 1977/44): In 1910-11, 50 delegates were on the council representing 24 societies and 6,000 members. In 1911-12, 57 delegates were on the council representing 28 societies and 12,300 members. Branches of the National Union of Gas Workers and General Labourers were formed in the town during this period.

⁹⁷ NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 11 February 1912, in NRO, NTC 2 (acc. 1977/44).

⁹⁸ NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 21 August 1912, in NRO, NTC 2 (acc. 1977/44): After initial discussions with the ILP and the trades' council in 1912, the BSP pulled out of talks to form a united body for labour representation. It subsequently stood municipal candidates under its own name in five wards, ignoring appeals for joint action from the ILP and the trades' council.

⁹⁹ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 29 April 1914, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁰⁰ NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 19 July 1911, in NRO, NTC 2 (acc. 1977/44); NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 15 July 1914, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

and confidence. Almost immediately after the declaration of war, the trades' council began to work alongside other groups and individuals, including employers and other political parties, which it had opposed in the past. The council organised 'Vigilance Committees' in various wards of the town to watch over the interests of the working class in distress and those who felt neglected by the local authorities. A letter was sent to the War Office promoting the boot manufacturers of Northampton, who were 'well equipped' to provide boots for the army, and an invitation from the Mayor to send delegates to a recently formed Relief Fund Committee was accepted by the trades' council.¹⁰¹

Despite its near-unanimous support for the war effort, the trades' council was divided over the question of participating in army recruitment campaigns. The desire to contribute further to the war effort was supported by Gribble and other members of the local SDF branch, who argued that trade unionists should contribute more to a just war fought to uphold the rights of small nations.¹⁰² Anxiety towards the prospect of conscription eventually led the trades' council to send delegates to the Northampton Recruiting Committee, a decision supported by Gribble, who believed that it was the 'supreme duty of everyone to back up the government and carry the war to a successful issue'.¹⁰³ The trades' council requested, and received, permission to send delegates to the Recruitment Tribunal set up to accept or reject candidates, a body which also comprised employers, politicians, and other eminent local individuals. The trades' council's 'patriotic' action on recruitment even led to praise from unlikely sources, including local newspapers and the sitting Liberal MP, Charles McCurdy.¹⁰⁴

In April 1915, Gribble initiated a scheme to help various war-related causes and charities called the 'Northampton Allied War Fund'.¹⁰⁵ The 'Gribble scheme' was a manifestation of his belief that all parties, whether 'labour, socialist, Conservative or Liberal', should sink their differences and work towards ending the war as speedily as possible.¹⁰⁶ The scheme, in which all adult workers were to contribute a sum per head per week to a central fund, was met with approval

¹⁰¹ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 19 August 1914, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁰² NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 18 November 1914, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁰³ Newspaper cutting attached to Northampton NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 27 October 1915, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁰⁴ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 31 October 1915; NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 7 November 1915; both in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁰⁵ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 21 April 1915; Northampton Trades' Council, *Annual Report 1915*; both in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁰⁶ Newspaper cutting attached to NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 30 August 1915, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

from the Town Council and an executive committee was formed.¹⁰⁷ The composition of this committee emphasises the unity amongst various political and economic actors within Northampton at the time; the town's Mayor took the Presidency, whilst representatives from the Manufacturers' Association, the trades' council, various trade unions, the Licensed Trades' Association, the Free Church Council, the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Ladies' Auxiliary filled the other roles.¹⁰⁸ That this scheme, supported by leading political, economic, and religious leaders in the community, was initiated by a socialist and a trade unionist, is a strong indication of how far both movements had come since their formation.

The legitimization of trade unionists and socialists in the town is neatly exemplified in the political careers of two locally important individuals: Gribble and Edward Poulton. Originally representing the NUBSRF on the trades' council, 'Ted' Poulton was elected its president in 1892, took a leading part in the boot trade dispute in 1895, and was elected to a local school board.¹⁰⁹ A supporter of the Liberals and Gladstone, or 'the people's premier' as he referred to him, Poulton was in favour of evolutionary means to improve the lives of workers including the collective ownership of the means of production.¹¹⁰ He was subsequently appointed an alderman on the town council in 1898, became the first working-man Mayor of Northampton in 1906, and was elected General Secretary of the NUBSO in 1908.¹¹¹ He was also, at various times, member of the 'Technical Instruction Committee; Governor of the Northampton General Hospital; active in Sunday school work [...] as a teacher, secretary, and superintendent' and became the Chairman of the town council's Education Committee.¹¹²

James Gribble, who worked as a finisher before the age of twelve, returned to Northampton after his service in the army.¹¹³ As a delegate from the NUBSRF/NUBSO on the trades' council, he joined the SDF and stood for them as a municipal council candidate as early as 1898.¹¹⁴ In 1901, he was involved in various disturbances in the town relating to unemployed demonstrations, which eventually led to his summoning for breaching the peace and for fighting

¹⁰⁷ NTC, *Annual Report 1915*, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁰⁸ Northampton Allied War Fund, *Report of the Annual Meeting*, 1916, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc 1977/44).

¹⁰⁹ *Northampton Mercury*, 29 March 1895.

¹¹⁰ *Northampton Mercury*, 16 March 1893; Fox, p. 332; *Northampton Mercury*, 13 April 1894.

¹¹¹ *Northampton Mercury*, 18 November 1898; NTC, *Minutes 1895-1909*, 21 November 1906, in NRO, NTC 1 (acc. 1977/44); Newspaper cutting attached to NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 17 February 1915, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹¹² Fox, pp. 331-32.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

¹¹⁴ *Northampton Mercury*, 3 June 1898.

policemen.¹¹⁵ This 'irresponsible agitator' was chosen by his union to take charge of a strike amongst bootmakers in Raunds, a town in rural Northamptonshire, in 1905.¹¹⁶ 'General' Gribble proceeded to organise a march of strikers to the House of Commons, interrupt the debate taking place, and skirmish with policemen, breaking an ankle in the process.¹¹⁷

Initially hostile to the Parliamentary Labour Party due to its lack of a socialist programme, he was nevertheless instrumental in the eventual formation of a local Labour Party, a body which united the various socialist and trade union bodies in Northampton.¹¹⁸ His respected work during the war, which included raising funds for allied causes and working in the recruitment campaigns, led to him being officially honoured by the Committee of the Allied War Fund, a body of his own creation which included the Mayor and other leading individuals in the town.¹¹⁹

The legitimization of the trades' council and various socialist individuals within Northampton was a long, uneven process that was accelerated during the war years. The trades' council seemed well aware of how far it had come as a body; it had, by 1915, moved beyond the 'passing of pious resolutions of protest or commendation on some abstruse subject which concerns this day and generation but very little'.¹²⁰ With the election and appointment of socialists and trade unionists onto various local governing bodies, the local Labour Party built on this influence to achieve a 'creditable performance' at the 1918 election, despite a Liberal campaign against it for being 'taken over by Bolshevik sympathisers'.¹²¹ Labour did not have to wait long to contest the seat again, and Margaret Bondfield was selected to challenge the sitting MP Charles McCurdy in a 1920 by-election.¹²²

The choice of Bondfield highlighted the growing influence of the ILP within labour circles in Northampton. Although by 1920 she was known nationally as an active socialist and leading trade unionist, Bondfield had taken a similar line to Ramsay Macdonald on the war by opposing

¹¹⁵ *Northampton Mercury*, 14 March 1901.

¹¹⁶ *Northampton Mercury*, 22 November 1901.

¹¹⁷ Fox, p. 288.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 336; NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 30 November 1913, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹¹⁹ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 28 June 1916, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹²⁰ NTC, *Annual Report 1915*, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹²¹ Dickie, 'Town patriotism and the rise of Labour', p. 164: One of Northampton's MPs during the war, Hastings Lees-Smith, opposed certain policies of the wartime government and joined the Labour Party in 1919. For his views on the war, see *Northampton Mercury*, 11 October 1918.

¹²² Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Margaret Bondfield* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1924), p. 141: McCurdy had to stand for re-election owing to his appointment as Food Controller.

conscription and joining the Union of Democratic Control.¹²³ Nominated by the ILP, and supported by the national Labour Party, Bondfield received the aid of notable anti-war activists such as Macdonald and Arthur Ponsonby during the 1920 election campaign.¹²⁴ Yet despite the continuing 'tide of prejudice against pacifists', Bondfield managed to reduce McCurdy's majority with a campaign primarily focused on rising prices and profiteering.¹²⁵

In spite of this setback, Bondfield continued to regularly visit Northampton and put 'a lot of work' into the constituency.¹²⁶ After unsuccessfully contesting the seat again in 1922, she was selected to challenge McCurdy for a third time a year later. By this time, Bondfield's prestige had increased with her election as Chairman of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, and the local Labour Party entered the campaign with confidence of victory.¹²⁷ With accusations of Bolshevism from rival parties brushed aside, Labour campaigned on a positive programme of free trade, the capital levy, improved international relations, and constructive works for the unemployed.¹²⁸ With the announcement of the results, Bondfield recalled that 'the constituency went nearly crazy with joy' and she was carried around the streets by supporters.¹²⁹ The election of Bondfield as Northampton's first ever Labour MP completed the long process of legitimization that had begun in the 1890s.¹³⁰

By the time of Bondfield's election, the local Labour Party had a relatively coherent set of policies and proposals. This ideology was largely shaped by the experiences of its constituent trade unions and socialist societies between their formation and 1918, and the local political and industrial environment. The continuing influence of Radical-Liberalism, an ideology which remained predominant amongst Northampton's workers until the First World War, was certainly apparent.¹³¹ 'Liberal' attitudes towards the House of Lords, education reform, electoral reform,

¹²³ Marion Miliband, 'Margaret Bondfield', *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, ed. by Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, 12 vols (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1974), II, p. 41: Bondfield had been active in a number of unions throughout her life, including the National Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen, and Clerks, the Women's Trade Union League and the National Federation of Women Workers. She was also on the executive of the Trades Union Congress from 1918 to 1924. The Union of Democratic Control was a pressure group formed during the war by a number of leading Liberal and Labour members, and advocated a more responsible foreign policy.

¹²⁴ Hamilton, p. 142.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 142; Margaret Bondfield, *A Life's Work*, (London: Hutchinson, 1948), p. 243.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹²⁷ Hamilton, p. 146.

¹²⁸ Bondfield, p. 251.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

¹³⁰ Dickie, 'Town patriotism and the rise of Labour', p. 165.

¹³¹ Lawrence, p. 84.

and limited nationalisation were frequently displayed at least until 1914.¹³² In this sense, 'Labour was not so positively attractive [...] that Liberalism no longer seemed a viable creed' for Northampton's workers.¹³³

There were, however, attitudinal changes throughout this period amongst the trade unionists of the town, especially with regards to the state and government intervention. Anthony Fenley has argued that the philosophy of trade unions was initially 'voluntarist', an idea which suggests that they had an 'ambivalent attitude to the role of the modern State'.¹³⁴ Lewis Minkin has also suggested that a distrust of the state developed from the unions' tradition of independence, self-reliance, and free collective bargaining.¹³⁵ However, as Ross McKibbin has argued, although traditionally sceptical towards the state, the unions were impressed by its power during wartime.¹³⁶ By 1918, the 'Triple Alliance' of unions showed little sign of voluntarism by demanding a 'more radical, explicitly socialist, version of collectivism entailing nationalization of their respective industries'.¹³⁷ This apparent leftward trend within the unions manifested itself in a new found appreciation of the state's role in social and economic affairs.¹³⁸

Attitudes on this issue amongst Northampton trade unionists gradually evolved between 1888 and 1918. Throughout the 1890s, a certain level of suspicion of the state was displayed consistently by members of trades' councils and trade unions. This was most demonstrated in the views of a number of workers towards restricting the hours of employment, an issue which seemed to divide opinion amongst trade unionists.¹³⁹ The Northampton trades' council was split evenly over the question of a parliamentary enforced eight hour day in 1894, although many on the council supported the demand for a restriction in hours worked amongst municipal

¹³² For example, see *Northampton Mercury*, 30 June 1893: The report of an ILP foundation meeting in 1893 highlights ideological tensions between Radical-Liberals and socialists in Northampton.

¹³³ Tanner, p. 385.

¹³⁴ The notion relates to the unions' preference for collective bargaining with employers as opposed to direct intervention by the state into their affairs, which permitted 'unions to give priority to their industrial objectives'. See Anthony Fenley, 'Labour and the trade unions', in *The Labour Party*, ed. by Cook and Taylor, pp. 50-83 (pp. 50-52).

¹³⁵ Lewis Minkin, *The Contentious Alliance: Trade Unions and the Labour Party* (London: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), p. 7.

¹³⁶ McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party*, p. 88.

¹³⁷ Gerber, p. 111: The 'Triple Alliance' was made up of the Miners Federation of Great Britain, the National Union of Railwaymen, and the National Transport Workers' Federation.

¹³⁸ Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1967), p. 44.

¹³⁹ *Northampton Mercury*, 06 March 1891; *Northampton Mercury*, 06 May 1892: In 1891, the Kettering trades' council passed a resolution suggesting that 'the time has not yet arrived when parliament is called upon to legislate on the eight hours question' whereas a resolution was passed at a May Day parade in Northampton calling for legislation on this question just a year later.

employees only.¹⁴⁰ A hostile view towards state intervention was also expressed in reaction to the compulsory vaccination laws, with particular anger directed at fines for non-compliance. One delegate even joked that if the fine for non-compliance was ever applied in Northampton, the vaccination officer would soon find himself in the local river.¹⁴¹

Opinions amongst trade unionists in the town were also divided over the issue of nationalization.¹⁴² The national conference of the NUBSRF passed a resolution in favour of nationalization of the land and the implements of production as early as 1894.¹⁴³ This resolution was, however, criticised by the General Secretary of the union, William Inskip; nationalization as advocated in the resolution was, for Inskip, 'confiscation' which meant 'there was no recognition of ability, that the idle and unscrupulous should be on a par with the thrifty man who exercised his ability and energy'.¹⁴⁴ It was his union's commitment to nationalization that led to his resignation as a potential parliamentary candidate for Northampton.¹⁴⁵

However, at the turn of the century political proposals put forward by the trades' council suggest that the positive potential of state and municipal intervention was beginning to gain more acceptance; one set of statist demands called for the payment of MPs, a free breakfast table for each family, the extension of graduated income tax, an old age pension, an eight hour day for all government departments, consolidation of the Factory and Workshop Act, and the extension of compensation regulations to all workers.¹⁴⁶ Demands for municipal control and ownership of local amenities and monopolies were also being made, with proposals including the creation of municipal bakeries, the corporation erection of artisans' dwellings, municipal lodging houses, public baths, and for the supplying of gas to the town.¹⁴⁷ Details of how these proposals would be implemented in practice were, however, not recorded.

¹⁴⁰ *Northampton Mercury*, 13 April 1894; *Northampton Mercury*, 01 June 1894: Opinions within the NUBSO were certainly not uniform. The national union officially supported the introduction of an eight hour day at its 1888 conference, but it was to be achieved by trade union action alone. Prior to conference, the executive urged members to consider the possible negative consequences of its adoption, such as wage reductions, the abolition of overtime and increased competition from abroad, where shoemakers worked longer hours. See NUBSO, *Monthly Reports Jan 1887-Dec 1888*, May 1888, in MRC 547/P/1/6.

¹⁴¹ *Northampton Mercury*, 20 May 1898.

¹⁴² *Northampton Mercury*, 13 April 1894.

¹⁴³ *Northampton Mercury*, 18 May 1894.

¹⁴⁴ *Northampton Mercury*, 18 May 1894.

¹⁴⁵ *Northampton Mercury*, 12 May 1899. Before his resignation, Inskip presented his political programme to the Northampton NUBSRF branches in 1893-4. It received a mixed response from the local NUBSRF branches due to its moderation, which Fox sees as a sign of a 'movement towards independent working-class candidates with a broadly Socialist programme [...] in the trade union movement generally'. See Fox, pp. 194-96.

¹⁴⁶ NTC, *Minutes 1895-1909*, 31 May 1900, in NRO, NTC 1 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁴⁷ NTC, *Minutes 1895-1909*, 19 September 1900, in NRO, NTC 1 (acc. 1977/44).

By 1907, the Northampton trades' council was working more closely with the town's socialists and was advocating various statist measures proposed by the national Labour Party. The council proposed a number of reforms, including old age pensions to be funded by increased death duties, a graduated income tax, and taxation of land values.¹⁴⁸ With reference to the blind, the council believed charity was inadequate; what was needed were municipal workshops, technical schools, and pensions, all to be provided by the state.¹⁴⁹ On education, the trades' council supported a measure in Parliament dealing with improved care and training for adolescents and unanimously agreed that the exchequer 'should bear an increased share of the cost of this national service'.¹⁵⁰ On national insurance, the council unanimously agreed that 'no scheme of national insurance against sickness, disablement or unemployment can be satisfactory which is not wholly – or, at least, mainly – non-contributory, and in which the bulk of the funds necessary are not provided by Parliament'.¹⁵¹ The trades' council, although in favour of the Liberal government's state insurance policy, in principle, was critical of it as 'it [did] not go far enough'.¹⁵²

During negotiations over the formation of a local Labour Party throughout 1913 and 1914, delegates discussed a number of proposals relating to the state's role. When a resolution was proposed to commit the new body to the ultimate aim of the 'socialization of the means of production, distribution and exchange', a number of delegates protested and argued that the new body should exist as a piece of electoral machinery only.¹⁵³ The majority eventually agreed not to include this in the party's programme due to the fact that the affiliated societies contained members of all political shades of opinion and that, by accepting this resolution, it would alienate the organization from many workmen.¹⁵⁴ Despite this rejection, perhaps owing more to tactical rather than ideological reasoning, that this proposal was even debated clearly underlines some of the evolving attitudes towards the state amongst trade unionists at the time.

Ideas within the trade unions towards the role of the state in economic and social life were further influenced by the experiences of the First World War. These attitudinal changes were not limited to the Labour Party; there was even some Conservative support for full state control of

¹⁴⁸ NTC, *Minutes 1895-1909*, 20 February 1907, in NRO, NTC 1 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁴⁹ NTC, *Minutes 1895-1909*, 19 June 1907, in NRO, NTC 1 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁵⁰ NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 25 May 1910, in NRO, NTC 2 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁵¹ NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 25 July 1911, in NRO, NTC 2 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁵² *Northampton Daily Chronicle*, attached to NTC, *Minutes 1909-1913*, 25 July 1911, in NRO, NTC 2 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁵³ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 22 April 1914, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁵⁴ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 22 April 1914, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

the alcohol industry, as well as the nationalization of key industries such as coal and the railways.¹⁵⁵ The 'much-expanded role' for the state during these years was supported and encouraged by trade unionists in Northampton.¹⁵⁶ At the first meeting of the trades' council after the declaration of war, the business was focused primarily on the impact of the war on the home front and, more specifically, the working-class. A resolution was passed in favour of distributing flour from Canada in accordance with people's necessities, a proposal was made for the local government to regulate the price of bread, and another delegate proposed the setting up of a municipally-owned bakery.¹⁵⁷ The impact of the war on changing attitudes towards state intervention can be clearly seen in a resolution, initially proposed in August 1914, that 'the whole food supplies of the nation' should be taken over by the government.¹⁵⁸ Although the resolution was initially rejected by the council, a similar resolution was unanimously passed just four months later.¹⁵⁹

During the first months of the war, the council was also active in proposing various measures to relieve distress, including the provision of adequate housing for those out of employment caused by the conflict and the feeding of necessitous children of unemployed workers.¹⁶⁰ In 1915, the council agreed with a proposal put forward by an SDF delegate, who criticised the rising price of bread, flour, coal, meat, and other necessities; it was proposed that the government and the Labour Party should take action on this matter.¹⁶¹ One outcome of this resolution was the organization of a joint conference of the local socialist organizations, trade unionists, and other labour-related bodies on the question of foodstuffs and the war.¹⁶² Speakers at the meeting urged the government to set a maximum price for coal, advocated more governmental control of shipping, and proposed a more centrally-organised distribution of coal supplies.¹⁶³ One delegate even argued that all those making profits out of the war should be interned as 'alien enemies'.¹⁶⁴

This increased demand for further state intervention by the trades' council and other labour bodies in the town was not, however, a universal principle. There was continued opposition and

¹⁵⁵ Pugh, pp. 113-5.

¹⁵⁶ Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy since the Industrial Revolution* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1984), p. 177.

¹⁵⁷ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 17 August 1914, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁵⁸ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 17 August 1914, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁵⁹ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 20 January 1915, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁶⁰ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 19 August 1914, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁶¹ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 20 January 1915, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁶² NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 20 January 1915, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁶³ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 17 February 1915, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁶⁴ Newspaper cutting attached to NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 17 February 1915, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

hostility to some forms of government interference, most notably conscription.¹⁶⁵ Although the trades' council as a body opposed it and even worked in recruitment campaigns in the town, some delegates did nevertheless support conscription as a way of getting the middle-classes, or 'the fancy sock brigade' as they were described by the speaker, to contribute to the war effort.¹⁶⁶ At a special meeting held on recruitment, delegates argued that the aristocracy and workers were giving their best, but the middle-class 'dodgers' were not; the working class were shouldering the burden and they would 'prove themselves worthy' of the government's trust.¹⁶⁷

At a meeting organised by the local branch of the ILP, itself an affiliate of the newly-formed Labour Party in the town, various state-based proposals were again discussed and accepted.¹⁶⁸ The chair of the meeting believed that 'the man who had gone forth to fight should come back to a position not worsened, but if anything bettered during their absence'. John Bruce Glasier, a leading ILP member, attended the meeting and advocated a larger state control of industry, the nationalization of the railways, state control of agriculture, a right to work bill, the introduction of a minimum wage, an increase in old aged pensions, pensions for widows, and hostels for married soldiers.¹⁶⁹

This new, positive appreciation of the state's role can not only be seen within labour circles in Northampton; it was also stressed clearly in the resolutions, based upon *Labour and the New Social Order*, the programme adopted by the national Labour Party conference in 1918. The proposals urged that the task of post-war reconstruction should be 'organised and undertaken by the Government', and should be based upon 'the gradual building up of a new social order, based, not on the internecine conflict, inequality of riches, and dominion over subject classes...but on the deliberately planned co-operation in production and distribution'.¹⁷⁰ This positive appreciation of the role of the state in social and economic life was the culmination of an ideological evolution within the organised working class before 1914, in Northampton and

¹⁶⁵ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 16 June 1915, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁶⁶ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 16 June 1915, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁶⁷ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 7 November 1915, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁶⁸ NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 16 January 1916, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁶⁹ Newspaper cutting attached to NTC, *Minutes 1913-1916*, 6 February 1916, in NRO, NTC 3 (acc. 1977/44).

¹⁷⁰ Labour Party National Executive Committee, *Resolutions on reconstruction to be discussed at the Party Conference on Wednesday, June 26th, 1918, and two following days*, 1918, in London, London School of Economics and Political Science, British Library of Political and Economic Science, Archives - Special, D(4)/968. Other resolutions called on the government to take action on wages, improve current social legislation relating to housing, education and health, and to take control of a wide range of industries.

elsewhere. However, it was the experiences of the war that 'accentuated developments which were already discernible in the pre-war years'.¹⁷¹

The growing acceptance of state intervention influenced the Northampton Labour Party's campaign for the 1918 election, and gave the organization a more defined ideological character.¹⁷² Avowed socialists such as Gribble and Roberts were suggested as possible candidates by local trade unions, but eventually a pacifist member of the local branch of the National Union of Railwaymen was selected, highlighting the growing influence of the ILP within the electoral machinery of the Northampton Labour Party.¹⁷³ A socialist, Walter Halls, advocated a programme of progressive taxation, a six-hour day, a 'national minimum of comfort', and workers' control of their respective industries.¹⁷⁴ However, despite polling over ten thousands votes, Halls accepted that the Liberal majority was 'obtained by the working-class vote'.¹⁷⁵

One should be wary of making generalizations based upon local studies. The social conditions in Northampton between 1888 and 1918 were not replicated in all centres where Labour grew during this period; the history of Radical-Liberalism and the dominance of one industry in particular influenced the nature of Labour's development in the town.¹⁷⁶ The artisanal nature of working-class culture in Leicester, another centre of the boot and shoe trade, certainly shares similarities with the Northampton example.¹⁷⁷ The relative persistence of older methods of production in the industry, especially in Northampton, encouraged a strong emphasis on independence amongst boot and shoe workers.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, the lingering perception that state intervention was impractical in a largely consumer-based industry differed from the attitudes of

¹⁷¹ Fraser, p. 177.

¹⁷² For example, see *Northampton Mercury*, 29 November 1918.

¹⁷³ *Northampton Mercury*, 7 June 1918; *Northampton Mercury*, 5 July 1918; *Northampton Mercury*, 9 August 1918: T.F. Richards, General President of the NUBSO, was also suggested but believed his support for the war prevented his adoption.

¹⁷⁴ *Northampton Mercury*, 29 November 1918.

¹⁷⁵ *Northampton Mercury*, 3 January 1919.

¹⁷⁶ However, even in areas with political and economic conditions similar to Northampton's, Labour's growth and development differed. For example, Derby went Conservative in 1895 and elected a Labour MP in 1900, and in Leicester, socialism had replaced Liberalism as the 'main form of working-class political expression' by 1906. See Thorpe, p. 119; Lancaster, p. 85.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 115: Northampton's boot and shoe industry, despite also experiencing mechanization in the 1890s, was not as advanced as Leicester's.

workers in other, more stable industries, such as the dockers and the miners, and may have contributed to the perseverance of Radical-Liberalism in Northampton.¹⁷⁹

Furthermore, the 'advanced' character of local Liberalism, with its relatively positive attitude towards labour representation, was certainly not universal throughout Britain at the time. As Jon Lawrence has argued, the ideological evolution of workers in Wolverhampton from Liberalism to Conservatism during this period is a more common trend than the Northampton example.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, the contrasting development of Labour even in areas which shared Northampton's political and religious heritage, such as Bristol, highlights the regional diversity of the party's evolution.¹⁸¹ Matthew Worley's assertion that 'different determinants [...] played different roles in defining Labour's progress in different places at different times' is certainly supported by these examples.¹⁸²

Nevertheless, a number of the turning points and continuities in the Northampton example contribute to our understanding of Labour's history. The complex relationship between Liberalism and the trade unions appeared to have ended with the formation of a local Labour Party just prior to the war. Yet despite the Radical-Liberal ideological dominance within local trade unions at the time, an attitude of stubborn class and organizational independence existed as early as the 1890s. Events such as the formation of a national Labour Party, the moderation of Liberal reforms, and industrial struggles all acted as 'turning points' in the history of labour in the town, supplementing an already existing spirit of class independence. This underlying attitude, combined with certain political and economic developments, led to the conclusion that labour bodies needed their 'own' political organization.

The experience of the war was crucial for the future progress of the local Labour Party. Although a number of inroads had been made in achieving local representation prior to 1914, the attitudes and actions of the Northampton trades' council and pro-war socialists during the war years accelerated the process of legitimization. The rise to local prominence of trade unionists and socialists contributed to this development, and helped the labour movement gain a foothold within local government, laying the foundation for its post-war electoral success.¹⁸³ The

¹⁷⁹ Tanner, p. 293.

¹⁸⁰ Lawrence, p. 84.

¹⁸¹ Tanner, p. 234.

¹⁸² Worley, p. 6.

¹⁸³ Dickie, 'Town patriotism and the rise of Labour', p. 14.

war also shaped attitudes and altered perceptions towards widespread state intervention, an issue which had hitherto been largely perceived as an impractical solution to Northampton's distinctive economic situation. Although issues such as nationalization and collective ownership had been debated and sometimes supported prior to 1914, the increasingly interventionist role played by the government in organising the nation's resources was overwhelmingly supported by the labour movement in the town. Although there was a 'sharp reaction' against state intervention among other political parties after 1918, the experiences of the war fundamentally reoriented Labour Party thinking on the issue, culminating in the adoption of state-based policies by both the national Labour Party and the local branch in Northampton.

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