

OUR HISTORY

Pamphlet 78

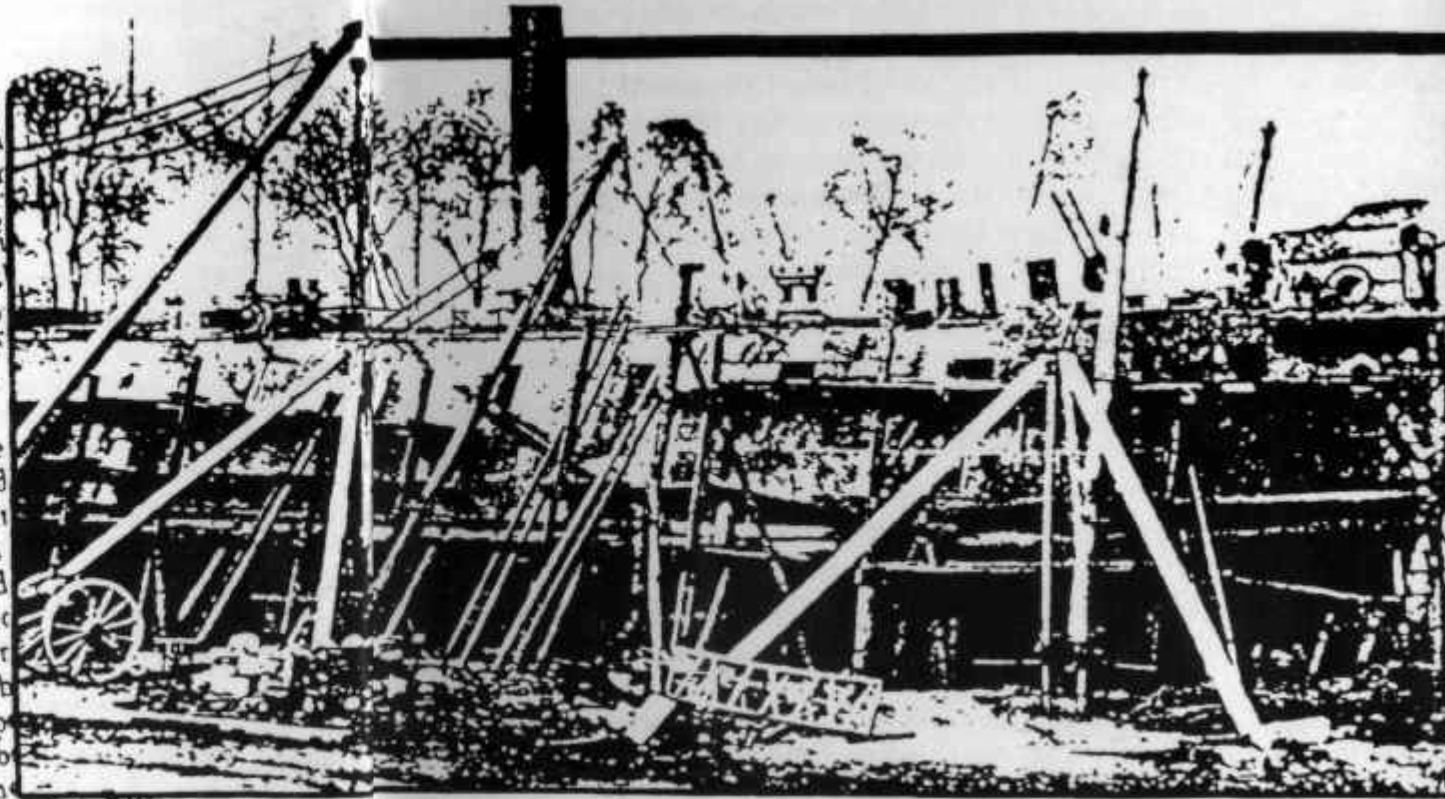
Price £1

THE MAKING OF A CLYDESIDE WORKING CLASS

WAKE UP MEN OF GOVAN AND PARTICK!

There is great distress among the workers in the Clyde shipbuilding trade. In the larger yards there is little or nothing on hand. The solitary exception is that of Messrs. Russell & Co., Port Glasgow and Greenwich. "Men will tell you quite quietly," says the "N. B. Daily Mail," "they have been eight, nine, and twelve months idle. If you ask them how they have managed to pull through they will say, "God knows!" They will tell you that they never know in the morning where the day's food is to come from. As for rent, they pay none. Factors have gone on trusting them in hope that work would be got, or times would improve. If shopkeepers, butchers, bakers and grocers had extended credit and hung on hoping for better times, shipbuilding districts ere this have been more largely dilapidated than they are. Now shopkeepers closing up, the heavy losses during the last five years or so are telling those landlords and shopkeepers who have not succumbed are closing accounts and refusing to open new ones. Such a picture of listless despair will arouse the enthusiasm of our Glasgow comrades to make fresh efforts for the cause.

Justice 7 May 1887



SHIPBUILDING & WORKING CLASS
ORGANISATION IN GOVAN

by Calum Campbell

The History Group of the Communist Party,
one of the specialist groups set up by the Communist Party
in the late 1940's (and in continuous existence since then)
seeks to develop discussion of the Marxist approach to history
and to foster a critical and informed understanding of the past
among all those active in the labour and democratic movements.
While membership of the group itself is confined to members
of the Communist Party and Young Communist League,
it does publish suitable monographs as '*Our History*' pamphlets
and articles for '*Our History Journal*' by non-members.
The History Group thus makes an important contribution
to the political knowledge and understanding
of all active comrades.

Annual membership subscription
is £7.00 waged, £3.00 unwaged, which includes any
'*Our History*' pamphlet and any copies of
'*Our History Journal*' issued during the year.

All enquiries and subscriptions to be sent to the Secretary,
CP History Group, 16 St John Street, London EC1M4AY,
giving your name, address and telephone number
(and if a CP member, the name of your Party Branch).

*The cover photograph shows HMS Erebus under construction in Robert
Napier's Govan Yard in 1856. It was the first all-iron warship to be built
for the British Navy, and was ordered during the Crimean War to
bombard Russian shore defences.*

July 1986

Typeset & Printed by Sheffield Women's Printing Co-op (TU) Ltd. (0742) 753180

THE AUTHOR, Calum Campbell, died in 1983. He submitted his B.A.
dissertation, 'Migration into Govan and Labour Politics in Shipbuilding
1870-1900', in 1977, and this work forms the basis for the present study.
The research has been completed by his wife, Katy Campbell, and
incorporates a certain amount of new material which has been published
since 1977.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of this century Govan contained one of the biggest
concentrations of heavy industry workers in Britain. Prior to its amalgamation
with Glasgow in 1912, its population of 95,000 was second only in size to
that of Paisley among Clydeside towns. Almost half its adult males, 14,500
in all, were employed in shipbuilding and engineering.

This industrial concentration was matched by a high level of support for
Labour and Socialist politics. In the 1913 elections, a year after amalgamation
with Glasgow, it was in Govan that Labour candidates secured their best
results. In the Fairfield and Central Govan wards they won over 60% of the
votes cast.¹ In 1915 Govan led the successful city-wide agitation for a rent
freeze, and in the 1918 general election, largely fought on the issue of pro-
war chauvinism, Govan was the only constituency on Clydeside to be won
by Labour.² Its candidate was the anti-war, ex-SLP (Socialist Labour
Party) socialist Neil McLean. Two months later, in the regional general
strike of January 1919, Govan's shipyards formed the strongest base of
opposition to the government and the employers.³

At the time this depth of support for working-class and socialist politics was
relatively unusual in Britain and fairly unique in Scotland. It did not,
however, develop spontaneously or as some automatic accompaniment to
the scale of heavy industry. On the contrary, it was only won as a result of
complex and difficult struggle in conditions that were initially extremely
hostile. It is the story of *how* this was achieved, between 1870 and 1906,
that forms the principle subject of this pamphlet.

In this period Govan had a population strongly divided (along Catholic-
Protestant lines). From the beginning of Govan's shipbuilding industry, its
employers had attempted to exercise a particularly detailed control of local
life which, at times, included the active use of these religious divisions. More
than this. These two factors, the potential for employer control over labour
and the existence of strong religious divisions, appear to have been closely
linked to the investment decisions which led to the town's phenomenally fast
growth as a centre for shipbuilding in the second half of the nineteenth
century.

In 1840 Govan was no more than a semi-industrial village with less than 3,000 inhabitants. Its previous industrial staple, cotton weaving, was in terminal decline, and the coalmines and iron foundries in Teucherhill and Drumoyne provided employment for only a few hundred. Then, between 1842 and 1867, four major shipbuilding concerns, together with a number of smaller companies, moved into Govan to exploit the new technology of iron shipbuilding.⁴

Napiers, originally marine engineers based in Glasgow, built their first yard in 1842. In 1843, Smith and Rodgers established a yard which had close London connections long before it was formally taken over, in 1864, by a consortium of London bankers and merchants to become the London and Glasgow Shipbuilding Company. Randolph and Elder, also marine engineers from Anderston in Glasgow, built a yard in 1852 and were joined in 1863 by a Kent shipbuilder, William Pearce, who had previously run an Admiralty yard on the Thames. Finally, in 1867, Stephens moved their shipbuilding business from the north side of the Clyde at Kelvinhaugh to Linthouse in Govan. By 1870 the town's yards were producing up to 20% of the iron tonnage on the Clyde and almost 10% of the shipping built in Britain.

In the fifteen years between 1865 and 1880, the town's population expanded from 9,000 to 45,000 - almost entirely through immigration. In 1871, 95% of its heads of household had been born outside Govan - most, 65%, elsewhere in Lowland Scotland, but 20% coming from the highlands and 15% from Ireland.

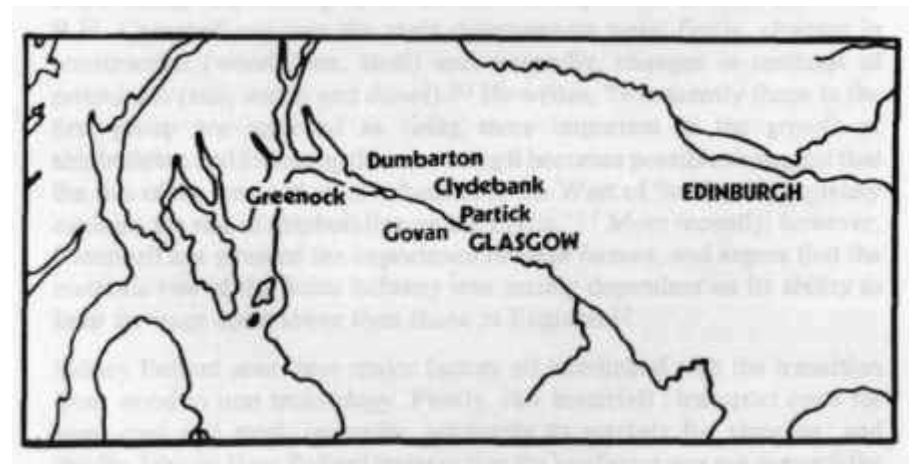
For the new shipbuilding employers Govan had three major attractions. It possessed easy access to iron (and later steel). It was situated on a tidal estuary with adequate space for large launches. Finally, but by no means least, it seemed an ideal place at which to concentrate an entirely new labour force free from the traditions of trade union organisation which characterised the existing centres of the industry on the Tyne, Mersey and the Thames (from which at least some of the new employers came).⁵

In this respect it was undoubtedly significant that Govan's only existing major employer, the coal and iron firm of Dixons, had from the 1830's outlawed trade union membership among its workers. In the aftermath of the high militancy which had marked the Lanarkshire and Ayrshire coalfields in that decade, Dixons had adopted a policy of excluding trade unionists and insisting that its workers joined its own compulsory benefit scheme.⁶ Dixons also provided its own tied housing and a number of other services (all technically illegal under the Truck Acts) which enhanced the company's power over its workers and their families. When the new shipbuilding

employers entered the area they took over these existing policies to the letter. In sharp distinction to their competitors in England, they adopted a strict 'non union' position. Known trade unionists were excluded. Lockouts were organised in 1867, and again in 1878, specifically to break trade union organisation. Employment policies gave priority to the maintenance of a core of skilled supervisory workers and foremen (usually also provided with tied housing). The rest of the labour force was hired and fired in step with the fluctuations in shipbuilding demand.

In pursuing this militantly 'free labour' line, the shipbuilding employers were able to take advantage of Govan's geographical position. Govan stood at the entry point to industrial Scotland for immigrants from Ireland and the Highlands. To the south and west there were the poverty-stricken communities of Renfrewshire and North Ayrshire, where the cotton industry had collapsed spectacularly in 1841-2. Then, up the river, was Glasgow with its permanent pool of mass unemployment.

In these circumstances, the shipbuilding firms were able to achieve relatively remarkable results. Despite the speed with which the shipbuilding industry grew, and the scale of the labour required, wage rates in Govan remained lower than in any other major shipbuilding centre for a full generation. Still in 1880s the wages paid in Govan were a good 10% lower than those on the Tyne and Mersey, and 5% lower than those elsewhere on the Clyde.



This pamphlet attempts to reconstruct the consequences for working people in Govan. The first section of the pamphlet examines the creation of an ethnically divided labour force in the yards and the scale of poverty, overcrowding and disease in the surrounding burgh. The second section looks in more detail at the policies of management, the response of the workforce and the way in which sectarian and religious differences were exploited. The last section tries to piece together the equally remarkable story of how Govan's workforce fought back, created a united Labour Movement and by 1915 had become the most formidable component of Red Clydeside.

The pamphlet is based upon the B.A. dissertation of the late Calum Campbell. This dissertation was completed in 1977. Since then and Calum's death in 1983, a considerable amount of new material has been published, and where possible this has been incorporated. However, this study of the making of a Clydeside working class remains in its conception and analysis, as Calum left it

CHAPTER ONE GOVAN AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY

In 1793 a Govan minister, Dr. John Pollock, reported that the population consisted of 224 families whose houses were in general old, ill-aired and extremely incommodious.⁷ Archibald Craig, writing in the last decade of the 19th century suggested that, "If a third Statistical Account were to appear how greatly it would differ from its predecessors. The writer would have to tell that within the last three decades of the century a densely populated industrial town had taken the place of the ancient village and well nigh obliterated every trace of it"⁸ Govan was constituted a Burgh in 1864 under the provision of the General Police and Improvement (Scotland) Act 1862. This Act was the watershed between the old and the new Govan. T.F. Brotchie writing about Govan in this period states, "within its boundaries it is impossible to get beyond the sound of a hammer."⁹ By the 1870s the only remaining legacy was one silk mill. The handloom weaving industry which had employed 340 people in 1839 had been ousted and replaced by the shipbuilding and allied trades as the leading industry in Govan.

Before dealing with the effects that the shipbuilding industry had on Govan it is necessary to understand the reason why shipbuilding was established on the Clyde and that industry's strengths and weaknesses. There are various explanations put forward by historians to explain the emergence of shipbuilding as a leading sector in the economy of the West of Scotland. R.H. Campbell suggests the main determinants were, firstly, changes in construction (wood, iron, steel) and, secondly, changes in methods of propulsion (sail, steam and diesel).¹⁰ He writes, "Frequently those in the first group are regarded as being more important in the growth of shipbuilding and following this reasoning it becomes possible to suggest that the rise of the iron and steel industries in the West of Scotland adequately explains the rise of shipbuilding on the Clyde."¹¹ More recently, however, Campbell has stressed the importance of wage factors, and argues that the meteoric rise of the Scots industry was mainly dependent on its ability to keep its wage costs lower than those in England.¹²

Sidney Pollard sees three major factors all interlinked with the transition from wood to iron technology. Firstly, raw materials : transport costs for iron, coal and steel; secondly, proximity to markets for shipping; and thirdly, labour. Here Pollard stresses that the key factor was not so much the actual wage levels (those composed only a third of total shipbuilding costs

and varied only slightly from one area to another) as the malleability of labour, and the degree to which more extensive exploitation of labour could be introduced. Factors such as a lack of strong craft tradition and the lack of resistance to the introduction of new production methods and organisation were of great importance. Pollard writes, "It is certain that the marked tendency for the industry to leave the large cities for the open banks of their rivers was to some extent at least due to a 'hope for a more intensive exploitation of labour."¹³ Here, Pollard adds a new dimension with this thesis regarding the "malleability" of labour as a factor in the siting of the shipbuilding industry on the Clyde.

In order to create the conditions for a greater malleability of labour the general trend was to move away from the large industrial towns. The East End of London was only one of the victims and as Engels wrote, "the removal of the iron shipbuilding trade from the Thames was enough to reduce the whole East End of London to chronic pauperism."¹⁴

This process of relocation took place in the 1850s and 60s, and forms the backcloth to the growth of Govan as an urban centre. Clydeside's shipbuilding tonnage expanded spectacularly each decade from 1860 onwards. It did so, however, in sharp bursts that were followed by equally spectacular slumps. The population of Govan, whose yards usually built about a fifth of the Clydeside tonnage, reflected these fluctuations very closely. Figure 1 shows the relation that existed between the periods of expansion in shipbuilding and the flood of immigrants into the town.

The four boom years 1870 to 1873 saw the population double from 14,000 to 28,000. Again between 1880 and 1883 the population jumped from 46,000 to 58,000, and during the warship building boom of the Boer war period, 1897 to 1903, it again expanded massively from 69,000 to 91,000. Yet there were also years of stagnation and actual decline. During the lull in shipbuilding demand between 1864 and 1867 the population stuck at 9,000 for four years. Between 1877 and 1879 it fell by two thousand and between 1884 and 1887 by four thousand. During these depression years Govan's employers would pay off many of their workers, and a significant proportion of the younger men would seek work elsewhere.

This fast but volatile pattern of growth is reflected in the birthplaces of household heads. In both 1871 and 1891 the vast majority were immigrants. In 1871 95% had been born elsewhere, and twenty years later the percentage (within the much larger population of 62,000) was still 94% (Table 1).

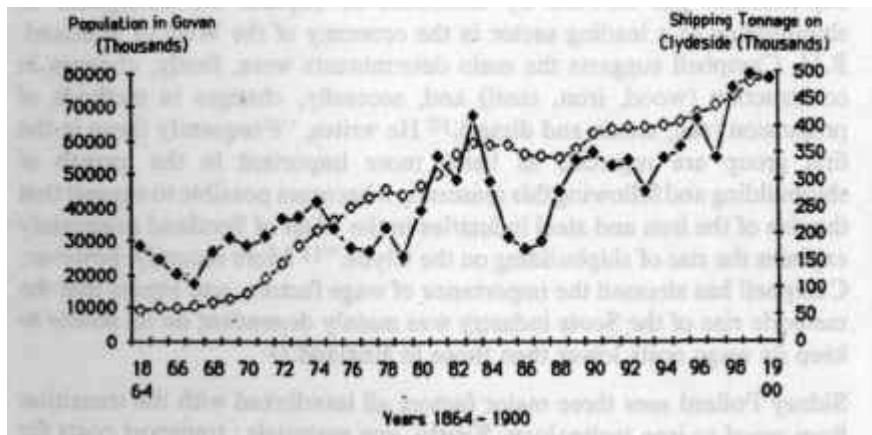


Table 1 : Birthplaces of household heads : percent¹⁶

	1871	1891
Govan	4.9	6.0
Lowland Scotland	43.6	41.8
Glasgow	12.2	11.6
Highlands	19.9	11.8
Ireland	14.5	23.4
England	4.5	4.8
	99.6	99.4

Of the immigrants over half came from Lowland Scotland - either from Glasgow or outside - and consequently can be assumed to have had some experience of semi-industrial wage labour employment. On the other hand, well over a third came either from Ireland or the crofting areas of the Highlands. Many of these immigrants, Highlanders as well as Irish spoke English only as a second language.

The cultural cleavage had major consequences for employment. Although the vast majority of the household heads were immigrants, those coming from elsewhere in Lowland Scotland secured a quite disproportionate share of the better paid employment Using the very general Socio-Economic groupings adopted by the Registrar General in 1951 to construct the census schedules, we find that in 1871 Lowland Scots almost monopolised the first two categories (owners and managers) and took the lion's share of the skilled manual jobs (Group 3).

Table 2 : Socio- Economic Groups: heads of household 1871

Socio-Economic Group	All	of which:		
		Lowland	Highland	Irish
1	3.7	3.6	.0	.0
2	10.1	9.2	.8	.1
3	38.4	27.9	8.5	1.9
4	26.6	16.4	6.5	3.7
5	20.9	7.7	4.4	8.8

Conversely, Highlanders and Irish were employed predominantly in semi-skilled and unskilled work (Groups 4 and 5). Twenty years later in 1891, we find that this pattern is continued and even intensified.

Table 3 : Socio-Economic Groups: heads of household 1891

Socio-Economic Group	All	of which :		
		Lowland	Highland	Irish
1	2.1	1.9	.2	.0
2	6.5	5.3	1.1	.0
3	33.2	26.2	3.5	2.8
4	29.5	22.1	4.2	4.2
5	28.6	9.3	2.8	16.6

In 1871 61 % of Irish immigrants came into Group 5 as against 22% of the Highlanders and 12% of the Lowlanders. In 1891 70% of the Irish were in Group 5 with 23% of the Highlanders and still only 12% of the Lowlanders. A quite disproportionate number of those described as 'general labourers' in the census schedules were Irish : 53% in 1871 71 % in 1891. At both dates Highlanders also provided about twice the number of general labourers as could be expected from their numbers in the population.

In shipbuilding itself, the contrast of occupational achievement is, if anything, even more stark. First, looking at the general pattern of shipbuilding employment, it is clear just how dependent the industry was on the labour of Highland and Irish immigrants.

Table 4 : Proportion of household heads employed in shipbuilding

	1871	1891
All heads	42%	56%
Irish born	47%	60%
Highland Born	52%	43%

Although by 1891 the proportion of Highlanders falls below the average, probably reflecting the decline in the volume of new Highland immigrants by the 1880s, the proportion of Irish household heads still remains significantly higher than average. Plainly, therefore, the Clydeside industry's remarkable capacity for expansion was largely dependent on the steady stream of migrants from outside Lowland Scotland who were willing to take very low-paid and casual jobs.

This becomes very clear when we look at the type of employment which these immigrants entered. Almost without exception, the Irish were relegated to the worst paid, most arduous and dangerous jobs -jobs which, moreover, were largely seasonal in character.

Table 5 : Proportion of household heads in shipyard labouring

	1871	1891
All heads	16%	34%
Irish born	52%	67%
Highland born	11	18
Lowland born	9	9

So, while the proportion of labouring jobs increased very sharply between 1871 and 1881, as the industry moved towards a fully iron and steel technology, the additional demand was met entirely by Irish and Highland born. By 1891 the Lowland immigrant to Govan was, compared to the Highlander, only half as likely to end up in a labouring job. The Irish immigrant, by contrast, was seven times more likely to work as a labourer than a Lowlander.

The same pattern, in reverse, is revealed when we look at the best paid shipyard employment. In 1871 the four best paid craft occupations were those of ships carpenter, smith, fitter and engineer. Together these comprised just under 20% of the shipyard labour force, (Table 6). No Irish were employed in these occupations, and only a quarter of the Highlanders. The proportion of Lowland immigrants in these privileged grades exceeded 50%.

Table 6 : Craft grades in Govan Shipyards, 1871¹⁷

	Hours per week	Wage	% of workforce	% of Lowland workers	% of Highland workers	% of Irish workers
Carpenters	60	30s 7d	8	28	15	0
Fitters	60	28s 9d	4	8	4	0
Smiths	60	28s 9d	5	11	6	0
Engineers	60	26s 9d	2	5	20	0
Four crafts combined			19	52	27	0

In 1891, looking at the four occupations which then stood at the top of the wages table and comprised 33% of the workforce, we again find no Irish immigrants while 51% of the Lowlanders and 31% of the Highlanders occupied skilled positions. The rest of the Lowlanders and most of the Highlanders (together with a few Irish) worked in the semi-skilled grade of rivetter or in the platers' gangs.

Table 7 : Craft grades in Govan Shipyards, 1891 is

	<i>Hours per week</i>	<i>Wage</i>	<i>%of workforce</i>	<i>%of Lowland workers</i>	<i>%of Highland workers</i>	<i>%of Irish workers</i>
Carpenters	54	38s 3d	8	12	9	0
Boilermakers	54	37s 0d	6	10	9	0
Shipwrights	54	36s 0d	6	9	9	0
Engineers & Fitterl	54	34s 0d	13	21	14	0
Four crafts combined			33	52	32	0

Accordingly, we can conclude that the workforce of Govan's shipbuilding was sharply stratified. Immigrant lowland workers principally gained the skilled jobs. The Highlanders tended to move into an intermediary band of less secure semi-skilled grades such as rivetting. The Irish were mainly dependent on very unstable and badly paid labouring work. The central question of how far this stratification was the result of active or passive discrimination by management will be examined in the next section. One thing, however, is indisputable. A strong perception of cultural difference did exist and this is well evidenced when we look at the pattern of house occupation in the surrounding community.

Several factors would have determined the settlement patterns of immigrants into Govan in this period. These would include nearness to work, the availability of housing and, of course, its rent in relation to income. However, the main factor seems to have been cultural background. In statistical terms the chance of a Highlander having neighbours who were also from a Highland background was, in 1871, 2.2 in a hundred. For an Irish family it was 4 in a hundred. Yet, as is clear from Table 9, the actual situation reveals a very much higher scale of concentration: fourteen times more than expected for the Irish and twenty times for the Highlanders. There is also a considerably higher figure for neighbouring *between* the two non-Lowland cultural groups.

Table 8: Housing concentration among Highland & Irish immigrants

	1871		1891			
	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Expected</i>	<i>Actual Expected</i>	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Expected</i>	<i>Actual Expected</i>
Highland with Highland neighbour	46%	2.2%	120	23%	1.4%	x16
Irish with Irish neighbour	56%	4.0%	x14	61%	5.5%	x11
Irish with Irish or Highland neighbour	70%	6.3%	x11	76%	6.3%	x12

By 1891 the difference between the actual and the expected is somewhat less for both groups - although the doubling of the proportion of Irish families to 23% means that the actual number of Irish families with Irish neighbours was greater. This apparent reduction in the rigour of cultural segregation may, as we will see, reflect changes in attitudes within the working population that would ultimately become very important. Nonetheless, for Govan's formative period as an industrial and urban community, it is clear that there were deep-seated cultural barriers dividing its people.

These cultural divisions appear, in turn, to have had a significant impact on the balance of power between capital and labour. Combined with the constant influx of new workers, it gave Govan's shipbuilding employers a major advantage in their battle to prevent union organisation and to depress wages and conditions. In 1878, twenty years after the first big expansion of iron shipbuilding in Govan, the iron workers presented their employers with details of the wages paid in Govan, on the Clyde generally and in England. This material underlines the scale of the differential between the Clyde and England. Wages on the Clyde were up to 20% lower and hours also longer. No less important, however, it shows that wages in Govan were around 5% lower than elsewhere on the Clyde.

Table 9 : Differences between Wages paid in England, on the Clyde and in Govan, 1878¹⁹

	<i>Angle-Smiths</i>	<i>Platers</i>	<i>Riveters</i>	<i>Caulkers</i>	<i>Holder-up</i>	<i>Hours</i>
Difference between Clyde and England	5s 10.5d	5s10d	6s0.25d	5s3.5d	7s 0d	1.5
Difference between Govan and England	8s 0d	7s 8d	6s93/4d	6s 0d	7s 11.25d	1.5

This difference between Govan and other Clyde shipbuilding towns still seems to have been the case five years later. In 1883 John Stephens was writing to Barclay Curie complaining about higher rates being paid by competitors elsewhere : "I may mention that I know higher rates are being paid in other yards".²⁰ For the Clyde as a whole, the lower rates seem to have been maintained till the early 1900s.²¹ The figures assembled by Bowley and Wood make it clear that Clydeside rates were generally 10% lower than those on the Tyne through the 1870s and 80s and up to 20% lower than those on the Mersey.²²

Table 10: Clyde Wages as percent UK (1883 UK average = 100)

	1866-72	1873-82	1883-89	1890-99
Clyde	90	91	95	104
Mersey	96	105	102	113
Tyne	88	102	103	111

So here we have the ultimate consequence of the particular freedom of Govan's labour market Its employers were able to maintain their 'no union' position for a generation, and construct a labour force that was massively stratified into antagonistic ethnic and cultural groupings. The result was, inevitably, lower wages for *all workers*.

It is therefore easy to understand why Govan's record - even by Scotland's own low standards - was so appallingly bad when we examine the town's housing and mortality statistics. Its skilled workers had to provide for their families on wages significantly lower than those elsewhere. Its unskilled workers faced both lower wages and long periods without work. Food prices and rents were naturally no lower than elsewhere, and indeed the cost of housing, which was mainly provided by speculative builders, seems to have gone well above the average during Govan's periods of fast expansion. In 1885 a letter in the Govan Press noted: 'we are hearing every day of more light being brought to bear on the cause of the Highland crofters; while I sympathise and wish them Godspeed, I cannot but help thinking that the Govan workmen are being rackrented by a system of landlordism equally one sided and blind to every interest but £.s.d.'²³ At the same time that pressure of incoming labour depressed wages, so it also enabled landlords to increase the level of rents. As Butt points out, 'the basic difficulty for many labourers trying to house their families was essentially a wages problem... It was not the low percentage of income allocated to rent by this group which was the cause of poor living conditions ; it was that the income level for labourers in a wide range of Glasgow's industry was too low to allow a man to keep his wife and children in decent accommodation.'²⁴

Table 11: Percent of families in houses of different sizes, 1871 (1891)

	1 room	2 rooms	3 rooms	4 rooms	5 or more
Scotland	32% (22)	37% (39)	12% (16)	6% (7)	14% (15)
Govan	44% (29)	35% (57)	10% (8)	3% (3)	9% (3)
<i>of which</i>					
Lowland	39% (30)	33% (51)	11% (11)	4% (5)	12% (4)
Highland	49% (23)	30% (60)	7% (11)	2% (2)	3% (2)
Irish	61% (29)	35% (69)	2%(0)	1%(0)	1%(2)

The result was a level of overcrowding that was far worse than the (bad) Scottish average. In 1871 just under a third of Scottish households lived in one room accommodation. In Govan 44% did so. Among the highland immigrants the figure was 49% ; among the Irish 60%. In the same year, 79% of all Govan families lived in either one or two room houses. Over the following twenty years, during a period when the proportion of Scots living in one or two room houses fell to 61% the number of Govan families increased to 86%. Indeed, by that date a full 96% of all Irish families were living in such accommodation, and the scale of overcrowding (measured by persons per room) was quite bad as in 1871.

Table 12 : Number of persons per house in Govan, 1881 (1891)

	1 room	2 rooms	3 rooms
<i>Average</i>	3.4(3.1)	5.2 (5.2)	5.0(5.1)
Lowland	3.3 (2.9)	4.8 (4.8)	4.9 (5.0)
Highland	3.4 (2.9)	5.3 (4.4)	5.7 (5.0)
Irish	3.6 (3.7)	6.6 (6.1)	—

This overcrowding brought its one legacy in terms of death and disease rates. At the end of the century Dr. Barras, Govan's medical officer of health, produced his 'Statistical inquiry into the causes of death in the burgh of Govan 1864-1898'.²⁵ This vividly illustrates the impact of Govan's housing conditions. The peaks in the infant mortality figures - when over 5% of all children aged below five died in the course of the year - coincided with those periods of severe depression when unemployment would have been at its worst: 1877-8, 1887 and 1893.

Over the whole period this meant that between a quarter and a third of all children born in Govan died before their fifth birthday. This terrible statistic was, as Barras notes, concentrated overwhelmingly among working class households. Between 1864 and 1898 he found that 'measles accounted for 1,200 deaths, chiefly due to pulmonary complications amongst children of the poorer class amongst whom it is regarded as a disease of little moment. In the case of well nourished children in healthy homes, the mortality is practically nil'²⁶

Table 13 : Deaths per thousand among children aged below 5

1870	1880	1890
47.1	54.9	52.0
1 54.0	1 54.7	1 50.3
2 54.8	2 55.7	2 49.2
3 57.8	3 54.9	3 60.0
4 57.5	4 52.1	4 45.4
5 57.6	5 53.0	5 45.7
6 54.0	6 51.0	6 50.1
7 58.2	7 53.2	7 51.9
8 61.7	J 46.6	8 56.0
9 54.7		

At the other end of the age range conditions were no better. Most of those who survived a working life in the shipyards seem to have died in the poor house. In 1884 this had 884 inmates - at a time when the total number aged over 65 in Govan was not much over 2,000.²⁷ In 1884 almost a quarter of those inmates, 234 per thousand, died in the course of the year. When the Commissioner in charge was questioned about this figure, he replied that there was no need for undue concern as 'most of the inmates only entered the poor house in order to die'.²⁸

Yet we should not forget that shipbuilding was kind to some. These years saw the owners of the yards, the Elders, Stephens and Pearces, accumulating massive fortunes. William Pearce, who eventually became the managing partner of the Elder's Fairfield yard, left £1,200,000 when he died in 1888.²⁹ This represented roughly sixteen thousand times the full annual income of a shipyard worker. In 1884 five months after a 10% wage cut had been enforced in the yards, *Justice*, the paper of the Social Democratic Federation, reprinted the following extract from a shipping journal: 'It is said that Mr. William Pearce, sole partner of the firm John Elder and Co., will clear at least £ 100,000 profit on the two steel steamers he is building for the Cunard Company. This is partly by reason of a fall in the cost of material, *but chiefly by the reduction in wages*'. *Justice* goes on to comment: 'we desire to call the attention of working men who are not yet Socialists to this cool admission, asking them to note the words we have italicised. How long will they continue to allow themselves to be plundered in this wholesale fashion'.³⁰

Chapter Two LABOUR DIVIDED

The particular weakness of Govan's Labour Movement was not accidental. There seems every reason to believe that those who decided to switch their investment and orders to Clydeside in the 1850s and 60s did so with full deliberation. They had a clear intent to create a new type of workforce that was permanently freed from the grip of the craft unions. They also appear to have deliberately wished to utilise ethnic and cultural divisions in achieving this objective. This 'free labour' stance, which was to typify the Clydeside shipbuilding communities during their formative years, emerged during that very period when the mainstream of ruling class opinion, in England at least, was moving strongly towards the full constitutional recognition of trade unionism. After 1868 both the Conservative and Liberal parties were competing for trade union support, and most large employers in England were by then endorsing the principles of arbitration and free collective bargaining. To this extent, the new Clydeside employers represented something of an anomaly. In order to exploit the Clyde's potentially immense reserve of labour, they stood for the full assertion of market freedom. This difference was explicitly put to a parliamentary select committee by a Clydeside employer in 1869. Rejecting the new collective bargaining procedures adopted elsewhere, he argued "our main objection both to arbitration and conciliation as palliatives of Unionism is that they sanction, nay necessitate, the continuance of the system of combination as opposed to that of individual competition".³¹

'The continuance of combination' was something that the employers launching the new technology of iron shipbuilding on the Clyde were determined to prevent. The old wood-using industry had been run on virtual subcontract lines with the shipwrights naming their price and then building the ship. The Thames Shipbuilder, Clifford Wigram, testified to this in 1867 before another parliamentary select committee. He was asked: 'If there were not this powerful union, you would make the contract with certain shipwrights who under that contract would employ inferior artisans at a cheaper price than'. His answer was a simple - Yes.³²

The much heavier investment demanded by iron shipbuilding made it all the more vital that this power was broken. The full profit could only be drawn from the new technology if the composition of the workforce was transformed (with the introduction of large amounts of semi-skilled and unskilled labour) and production re-organised under detailed management control.

At least two of Govan's five major yards possessed directors who had shifted their operations from the Thames for this very reason: (the London and Glasgow company, and Pearce, with his Cunard and Admiralty contracts at Fairfield). Trade union organisation had, therefore, to be strangled at birth - all the more so because Clydeside's own native tradition of trade unionism had in the 1830s and 40s been particularly militant and radical.

The tactics adopted were brutal and coercive, and the maximum advantage taken of the Clyde's labour reserve of immigrant workers. The violent fluctuations in shipbuilding demand were used to create what were effectively two grades of workman: a permanent core of skilled workers and a much larger body of workers who would be hired and fired as needed.³³ The continuing core of foremen and skilled workmen were given relatively privileged positions, provided (at Stephens especially) with company housing and given access to benefit schemes. The loyalism of these workers was further buttressed by masonic (and sometimes Orange) organisation in which they were joined by their employers (such as William Pearce). Then, on the other side of the divide, were the labouring and semi-skilled workmen who were taken on as needed. The pattern of employment which this generated was, as we have seen, highly stratified in terms of geographical and ethnic origin. In some cases this may have been the result of explicit management policy. In other cases it is more likely to have been imposed by the prejudices of foremen and gang leaders themselves. With this structure each downturn in demand could be used punitively to force down wages, to impose harsher conditions of work and eliminate any open manifestation of trade unionism.

In 1864/5 the employers demanded a three shilling cut in wages (a little over 10%), and successfully broke the strike that resulted.³⁴ Later in 1865 the Clyde employers locked out 20,000 workers to enforce a longer working day and, having done so, required a 'no union' pledge from returning workers. By 1868 the Clydeside membership of the main union, the shipwrights, was down to 156³⁵ In 1874 there was another concerted attempt to erode the gains in wages and conditions that had been achieved during the rapid expansion of the early seventies. The success of the Clyde employers in locking out their workers was subsequently used on the Tyne to enforce similar reductions there.³⁶ Then, in 1877, when the workers attempted to retrieve these losses by putting forward a reasoned demand for a 10% increase, the employers once more responded with a lockout. This was intended, according to Mortimer, to 'smash trade unionism on the Clyde'.³⁷ The dispute lasted over thirty weeks and cost the boilermakers'

union, the main organisation of skilled metal workers, £13,000. By the end of the lockout the workers were on their knees and were only taken back on condition that they would leave the wages question 'on the table' for six months. Many of the unions accepted these conditions on 1st December 1877 in what is described as a 'conciliatory spirit'.³⁸ However, when the six months had elapsed, the employers themselves demanded a 7.5% cut in wages and an extension of the working week from 50 to 54 hours.³⁹ Hence in July 1878 the boilermakers struck again. This strike lasted for another twenty weeks when the workers returned to accept the major worsening of work conditions demanded by the employers.

Shipbuilding trade picked up between 1880 and 1883, but there was a downward trend in 1884. This signalled another offensive by the employers who attempted to cut wages. W. Pearce, who by this time was the leading shipbuilding employer in Govan, offered his men 1879 rates of pay, which represented for most shipbuilding workers a cut in wages of 0.5d. per hour. The unions made representations to the employers and put their case against any reduction in wages. Their letter was dealt with at a meeting of the Masters Association on 15th January 1885 where they considered the letters from the shipwrights, engineers and blacksmiths regarding the notification of the proposed reduction in wages. The Govan Press 17th January 1885 carried the following report of the meeting, "Though the employers could not see any likelihood of sufficient reasons being brought forward to cause them to rescind the reduction, they appointed a committee of their members to meet with deputations from the Workmen's Association in friendly conference."

This "friendly conference" took place on Thursday, 22nd January 1885, in the Directors's Room of Merchants House to discuss the proposed wage reductions. The Govan Press report on 24th January stated, "The committee consisted of seven Clyde Shipbuilders while there were four delegates present from the Associated Shipwrights, five from the Associated Blacksmiths society and three from the Amalgamated Engineers Society. The delegates met with the committee at 3 p.m., but after a statement by the employers it was agreed that the representatives from each society be heard separately." After a series of meetings the employers agreed to modify the reduction to a farthing per hour. Most of the unions accepted and continued working for less pay except for the Ironworkers who struck. Their strike terminated on the 3rd April 1885 and they had to accept a cut in wages. However, as the Govan Press reported on 11th April 1885, "During the last fortnight the Govan shipbuilding Company secured the services of large numbers of ironworkers and when the men who were on strike presented

themselves at the works many of them found they could no longer be re-engaged."⁴⁰

It was such tactics that enabled the Clyde shipbuilding employers, and Govan's in particular, to achieve the remarkable feat of actually increasing the scale of wage differentials over England during a period when their own expansion was at its height (as can be seen from Table 10). Indeed, the bargaining strength achieved by capital on the Clyde was by the 1870s being used fairly systematically by employers elsewhere to force worse conditions across the country.

This workplace power was matched in Govan by an attempt to exercise a fairly all-encompassing control over the surrounding community. Poor relief was gripped through the parochial board and the poor house - to which the shipbuilding employers were the major donors. Education was, from 1872, controlled by the School Board, chaired for almost two decades by John Stephen.⁴¹ From 1864 the shipbuilding employers effectively possessed their own police force. In that year, Govan was established as a Police Burgh under the terms of the 1862 Police Act.⁴² Its new council was almost exclusively composed of employers, shopkeepers and shipyard managers. It seems to have used its powers with the same type of class-motivated licence that typified the early days of the Stormont regime in Ulster. In 1867, at the depth of the worst depression of the sixties and just after the employers had won their lockout, the council appear to have manufactured a deliberate sectarian confrontation. On the pretext of Fenian actions in England, they demanded (and got) a supply of arms from the Home Office.⁴³ There was in Govan, they claimed, 'a large labouring population, mixed in nationality, a considerable proportion of whom would be doubtless most susceptible to Fenian influence and impressions'.⁴⁴ A massive additional force of 900 special constables was then enrolled - deriving, it is reasonable to presume, largely from the ranks of foremen and masonic loyalists in the yards. On their first parade they were told by the chief magistrate, Bailie Hinchlewood 'we may give all Fenians a touch of the Auld Scottish thistle and remind them that none may assail it with impunity'. Early in 1868 these Specials, armed with batons, were marched through the slum streets of central Govan, nicknamed the 'Irish Channel' because of their concentration of Irish immigrants. The symbolism of this identification of armed force, employer power and ethnic superiority is unlikely to have been lost on either the Irish or the employer loyalists enrolled in the Specials. Ten years later, during the next major employer offensive, it is noteworthy that serious anti-Irish rioting took place in the aftermath of the Orange marches of July 1877.⁴⁸

It seems (though this may just be from lack of evidence) that up till the late 1880s there was no direct employer promotion of ethnic conflict in order to secure their ends in industrial relations. It was simply used implicitly to structure the labour market and sustain loyalism. In 1888, however, we find ethnic divisions being deliberately manipulated to stop union organisation. This occurred in a dispute involving Govan's dockers, the second biggest contingent within the burgh's labour force.⁴⁶ These labourers were largely Irish Catholics and had in 1887 formed the Glasgow harbour mineral workers union. The employers' ultimate response, in 1888, was to sack them all and import several hundred protestant workers from Belfast (the advertisement in Belfast explicitly stated 'protestant' labourers). The lockout lasted two months. It provoked fierce battles between the Union men and the blacklegs, and at least fifty pickets were given terms of imprisonment for assault. On the other hand, the conduct of the labourers from Belfast did not turn out to be quite as expected. Some refused to blackleg and returned. Others, as a result of the intervention of trade unionists in the yards, secured better-paid work in shipbuilding. Even among the remainder problems occurred, and by the end of September 1888 there had been disturbances involving police action. In these circumstances, the harbour authorities procured a settlement on the terms set by the union men, and the unionisation of this key segment of labouring work was confirmed.

This attempted use of sectarian conflict in a direct way seems to have been at the initiative of the small, subcontract employers operating in the docks, and it is notable that it failed. Nonetheless, it seems clear that the later 1880s, especially in the period after the Home Rule campaign of 1886, did see a greater resort to sectarian rhetoric. The *Govan Press*, if it did not precisely promote it, certainly reflected it. It introduced a Joke Column with a prize for the best joke submitted each week. Over the period up to 1890 between a third and a half of the jokes selected for printing were anti-Irish or anti-Catholic.⁴⁷ A few examples give the flavour. 'Once upon a time two bricklayers (Irishmen of course) were ...', or 'a little daughter of Erin', or 'Master to servant (who had just entered the office) "Hello, Pat, what do you want?" "Plaze yer honour, an cud ye gi me a week's vacashun an' a five poun note____" '. In 1889, after a Catholic had been elected to the School Board, the Knoxites Secret Society was formed 'to rescue our schools' and keep Catholics off the School Board as 'no man can serve two masters : here are two - the City of Glasgow and the Pope'.⁴⁸

Chapter Three SOCIALISM AND WORKING CLASS UNITY

The years from the mid 1880s onwards, with the beginnings of unionisation among the unskilled being matched by the more overt use of sectarian bigotry, represent something of a watershed in the development of Govan's Labour Movement. The crucial new element seems to have been the first real emergence of coherent socialist organisation. The socialists, mostly workers in the yards and principally organised by the Social Democratic Federation, now consciously sought to build within Govan's divided labour force the unity and class solidarity it had previously lacked. Their main vehicle was Govan Trades Council. Formed in 1890, this had as its main objectives the unionisation of non-skilled workers and the establishment of a broader working class unity within the population that encompassed all groups.⁴⁹ Within fifteen years these objectives were well on the way to fulfillment and the unchallenged dominance of the shipbuilding employers was at an end. In its way, this achievement was quite as remarkable as that of the shipbuilding employers over the previous generations, and, like theirs, it seemed to have depended on a sustained and clear-sighted attempt to harness wider economic and social forces to conscious class goals.

These elements in the wider social and economic situation were threefold. There was the character of the shipbuilding industry itself. There were the rich traditions of radical politics brought into Govan by its immigrant workers. And, not least, there was the particular nature of shipbuilding trade unionism as it existed at British level. Together, they were consciously combined by Govan's socialists to form a force that was eventually able to break the grip of shipbuilding capital in Govan.

First, there were the economics of shipbuilding itself. Initially, the technology of iron and steel shipbuilding gave the advantage to the employers. It permitted the establishment of a new division of labour that enhanced management control. Its highly cyclical nature gave employers the power to lay workers off wholesale and to construct a workforce that was divided into permanent and temporary sections. Yet, this very success brought its own problems. The concentration of a dozen major firms on the Clyde - building up to a third of the world's total tonnage - made the local industry highly competitive. Yards fought among themselves for orders and prompt delivery dates became crucial. Moreover, although the overheads in a shipyard were still relatively small (compared to other sections of heavy industry) the materials and components now being built into the great battleships and Cunard liners had a very high capital value. Delays could be

immensely costly. Correspondingly, while slumps in shipyard demand gave employers a very substantial advantage, the subsequent booms could provide the workers, if properly organised, with the opportunity for making major gains. The employers had little defence. Their only resort was fear of subsequent retribution and the profound social and cultural cleavages that existed within the workforce - particularly the fact that neither the permanent core of loyalist tradesmen nor the vast majority of non-skilled workers had any form of union organisation.

This made the response of working class activists to the particular backgrounds of Govan's immigrant workforce vitally important because these workers, although they came to Govan as outsiders, did not come as simple units of labour. In different ways, they all brought with them important traditions of struggle and social radicalism.

The bulk of the Lowland workforce came from the semi-industrialised rural counties of Lanark, Renfrew and Ayr. All these areas had suffered severely from the collapse of handloom weaving and the Scottish cotton industry over the previous generation. The workers in the village communities had long sustained the traditions of the United Scotsmen, of the 1820 rising and of radical Chartism. Between 1810 and 1840 the Scottish cotton trade unions based in these communities had been notably militant, and the persistence and dedication with which a nucleus of trade union organisation was kept alive in the shipyards of the 1850s, 60s and 70s must have owed a great deal to this particular cultural background. Indeed, Govan's own native working population, minute though it was, also contained these same traditions of popular radicalism associated with the weavers, and the central ceremony at the annual Govan Fair commemorated a two centuries-old popular revolt against landlordism.⁵⁰

The Highlanders brought their own more recent and brutal experience of landlord expropriation. By the early 1880s the crofters' movement against rackrenting and clearance had assumed proportions that had compelled the government to establish a committee of enquiry, and by the 1880s the regular army (backed up by gunboats) was being used to evict cottagers who had occupied land in the Western Isles.⁵¹ In Glasgow the Land Restoration League provided an umbrella organisation of resistance. This united highlanders, socialists and lowland radicals into something of a mass movement on the question of Highland landownership.⁵² The Gaelic churches, of which there were two in Govan, and the highland-based Free Churches also found themselves drawn into the movement, and the repeated campaigns to defend imprisoned crofters' leaders brought this agitation to a climax between 1884 and 1888.⁵³

The Irish added a still further dimension of national and anti-imperialist struggle. Many of Govan's Irish came from those famine-stricken areas of West and North West Ireland that formed the base for Michael Davitt's Land League in the early 1880s. Davitt himself a relatively frequent visitor to Clydeside, was a champion of trade unionism in both Ireland and Britain, and had close links with those who established the Marxist Social Democratic Federation in Britain in 1881-4.⁵⁴ The intensity of political struggle in Ireland throughout the 1880s, combined with the Orange and masonic associations of most Govan employers, ensured that the loyalties of the Irish community were highly mobilised. It is difficult to tell how far there also existed common political ground between the Highlanders and the Irish. Davitt and his colleagues certainly shared the platforms of the Scottish Land Restoration League, and there also seems to have been some recognition of common gaelic roots. In June 1884 *Justice* gave prominence to a report that British authorities in Dublin had seized and imprisoned a party of highlanders attending a Gaelic athletic event for wearing, in contravention to the arms act, dirks as part of their highland dress.⁵⁵ Potentially, therefore, the backgrounds of all three immigrant groups contained elements that could be combined into a highly militant and combative working class culture.

The third major factor which assisted Govan's socialists was, paradoxically, the strongly class collaborationist character of shipbuilding trade unionism at British level. This effectively prevented, or prevented for a long time, the consolidation of a coherent labour aristocratic stratum within Govan's Labour Movement that could - as happened elsewhere - hold it steady against the influence of New Unionism and Socialism. At British level the boilermakers' executive had pursued a policy of conciliation and strike-avoidance since the 1860s.⁵⁶ Most of the members worked in firms that recognised trade unions and which gave skilled tradesmen status with authority over non-skilled men (who were almost always non-unionised). Consequently, the boilermakers' English-based executive showed very little understanding of the problems of union members on Clydeside, where unions were not recognised. They were, in particular, very reluctant to put up union funds to support strike action. In 1883 they were criticising the Clyde district for being involved in 'petty and unnecessary strikes' over allowances and job allocation, and in the 1860s, 1880s and 1890s they became involved in conflict with their Clydeside members when they refused to pay strike benefit⁵⁷

For their part, the Clydeside members saw the use of strike action during periods of boom as the only way of gaining a grip on production and

recruitment that could provide a more permanent defence against management. Hence, long before the shop stewards movement of the first world war, there existed on Clydeside a distinctly different philosophy of trade union action. The 'no union' position of the Clyde employers, and their consequent refusal to recognise 'outside' union officials, encouraged the emergence of a yard-based network of trade representatives. The local unions, although skilled tradesmen, seem to have had quite distinct attitudes from the privileged labour aristocrats of the south or the loyalist core of permanent workers on the Clyde. They were combative not collaborationist. Their tactics depended on the active use of collective work group strength. They were in particular based in the workplace rather than the union branch, and from the 1880s were already beginning to assume the bargaining functions later associated with shop stewards. Accordingly, at this crucial period in the formation of a broader trade union movement, the ideas of Lib-Lab reformism did not find the same secure base in the Clydeside Labour Movement as they did in the south.

To this extent the Social Democratic Federation began its local campaigning in relatively favourable circumstances. Both the Highland and Irish populations were being politically mobilised by the government's use of armed force in their native areas. The local trade union movement, though quite small, was more radical than elsewhere and now faced, in the depression of 1883-7, a collapse in shipbuilding that cut output (and employment) by virtually half, and brought with it a particularly vicious series of lockouts.

The Scottish SDF organisers seem to have been well aware of these opportunities. Initially they entitled their organisation the Scottish Land and Labour League (Scottish section of the SDF) and directed their work particularly among the unemployed, the Irish and the Highlanders.⁵⁸ Already in the autumn of 1884 the new organisation was able to organise a march of a thousand unemployed along the fashionable shopping streets of central Glasgow, and through 1886 and 1887 sustained a high level of open air mass activity.⁵⁹ *Justice* estimated that over 30,000 attended a demonstration at Glasgow Green in March 1886 addressed by the SDF engineers' leader John Burns, and that 10,000 took part in the anti-Irish Coercion rally in April 1887 at which most of the speakers were SDF.⁶⁰ In June 1887, at the height of the shipbuilding slump, Tom Mann was in Glasgow campaigning for an eight hour day and state ownership of industry.⁶¹ That month three thousand attended an SDF demonstration demanding the nationalisation of the railways.⁶² In December 1887 40,000 gathered at Glasgow Green for a united 'Free Speech' demonstration jointly

organised by the SDF, the Socialist League, the Irish National League and the Land Restoration League.⁶³

It was in these circumstances, and probably at the initiative of Tom Mann, that the SDF in Glasgow began to organise among the non-unionised labourers in the docks. The Harbour Labourers Union, the first sign of New Unionism on Clydeside, held its inaugural meeting in September 1887, and was followed by the formation of another dock labourers union in Port Glasgow in January 1888.⁶⁴ In April 1888 Tom Mann and John Mahon were back in Glasgow addressing meetings held under the auspices of the Irish National League, and in autumn 1888, when the Govan-Kinning Park-based Harbour Labourers' Union had been locked out, the SDF were holding regular open air support meetings at Govan Cross.⁶⁵ By then trade union yards had begun to revive and on this occasion strike activity erupted not just among the skilled trades but among semi and unskilled workers. By September 1888 the blacksmiths, rivet boys and labourers were all out on strike at the Fairfield and Napier yards in Govan, and by November 1888 the semi-skilled hammermen had formed themselves into a union (its inaugural meeting was chaired by an SDF member Comrade Waugh).⁶⁶

There would seem little doubt, therefore, that the depression of 1883-7 marked a crucial period of re-orientation within at least some sections of the working population on Clydeside. The intervention of the SDF helped fuse together radical elements among the skilled trade unionists and the unemployed. It did so at a time when the Liberal government which previously held the support of both Irish and most skilled workers was involved in intense political conflict in Ireland, and, to a lesser extent, in the highlands. Added to this there was the impact of unionisation among the labourers and semi-skilled workers in the yards and the docks. It was here, in these grades, as we saw earlier, that Highlanders and Irish were most concentrated. Effective unionisation demanded a unity that crossed ethnic boundaries, and, initially at least, this unity brought success. Like the dockers' strike in London the following year, the strikes of 1888 brought the first tangible hopes of better conditions to a grossly exploited and largely casual labour force. By July 1889 the Harbour Labourers' Union was claiming 3,000 members, and in November 1889 James Morton, a long-standing member of the SDF who was to lead Glasgow's general workers for the following decade, presided over the first meeting in Glasgow of the National Federation of Labour Unions.⁶⁷

1890 also saw another event of considerable local importance: the formation of Govan Trades Council. As with the other trades councils

formed in 1890-1, its founders saw themselves as pioneers of a new type of trade unionism. The old craft unions (and the old trades councils) conducted themselves simply as representatives of their members' sectional interests, and politically worked through the existing parliamentary parties, principally the Liberals. In contrast, the new unionists saw themselves as creating union organisations that were explicitly socialist. They wanted union structures that encompassed all grades of worker, and were politically committed to upholding the interests of labour as a class, through independent electoral representation. In this respect the new trades councils were particularly important. On Clydeside they were seen as active centres of unionisation, and the base for wider political campaigning on housing, transport and public amenities. In Govan itself the Trades Council was quickly being denounced (by the Govan Press) as a front for the SDF - although the council's membership was broadly representative of the local trade union movement and at least some of its leading figures were members of the Independent Labour Party.⁶⁸

This radicalisation was taken a stage further in 1891 when the experience of the boilermakers and the Trades Council intersected in a particularly important way. With shipbuilding once more in recession, the employers were again demanding wage cuts.⁶⁹ The boilermakers on Clydeside voted for strike action. The boilermakers' executive, and particularly its general secretary, Robert Knight, refused the call and insisted on conciliation. The Clyde members went ahead, were denied strike pay and, with the assistance of the trades council, organised a nationwide subscription among union branches to maintain themselves. Though defeated, this experience laid the basis for the rank and file revolt that later in the decade was to overthrow Knight and his executive. Meanwhile, Knight himself attempted to consolidate his position in a way that was to have long lasting effects for the structure of the British trade union movement.⁷⁰ As leader of one of the strongest craft unions within the TUC, he successfully moved for a change in standing orders to exclude trades councils from representation. He did so, he claimed, to protect the TUC from being undermined from within and turned into a socialist debating chamber by external forces. For their part the trades councils, or at least the socialist elements within them, attempted to form a rival trade union centre at British level.⁷¹ When this failed to gain support, the Scottish trades councils convened their own conference to establish a Scottish Trades Union Congress. Govan sent four of the seventy-four delegates to the founding conference.⁷² In the debate at the preparatory meeting in Dundee one of the Govan delegates argued that the TUC was now effectively run by a 'clique of six individuals' using the block votes of

the craft unions.⁷³ He was supporting a delegate from Aberdeen trades council, an SDF member, who had claimed that in the TUC there had been 'two classes of representatives', delegates from the old trade unions and those from the 'iron trades councils, who represented the new trade unions'. At this founding conference, and in strong contrast to the BTUC, the STUC declared itself committed to the common ownership of the means of production and the independent representation of labour.

Locally the Govan Trades council had, by the mid-1890s, secured recognition as the main organising centre for the shipyard unions. In 1895 the shipwrights requested the Trades Council to form a united committee for all shipyards unions to campaign for the weekly payment of wages.⁷⁴ In 1899 its STUC delegate, the shipwright Peter Ross, was voted on to the STUC's political committee, principally to represent shipyard interests.⁷⁵ The Trades Council's leadership also seems to have been quite aware of the need to maintain a wider unity within its social base. The Trades Council's influence depended on consciously and explicitly rebuffing attempts, by employers and others, to exploit religious and cultural differences between its members. In 1898, a year marked by renewed Orange activity, its STUC delegate successfully led the opposition to a resolution that sought to restrict immigration into Britain.⁷⁶ To this extent, if the later 1880s saw the first emergence of new unionism in Govan, the 1890s seem to have witnessed the consolidation of a new type of political leadership that welded together in common campaigning the increasingly militant skilled shipyard trades with non-skilled workers both inside and outside the yards.

The employers themselves were only too alert to these developments. By the early 1890s they had recognised all the potential dangers within the new alignment, particularly the unionisations of the non-skilled, and changed their position on union recognition. They now began to see the virtues of negotiation with responsible officials at national level. In 1891 this had much to do with the conflict between Knight and his union membership on Clydeside. In 1895, when the radical wing of the boilermakers were on the point of ending Knight's grip on the executive, the Clyde employers locked out their members largely on issues of union procedure.⁷⁷ Two years later, in 1897-8, there was the national engineers' lockout. This was almost entirely about the issue of who had the right to call a strike. The employers, led by the Clyde shipbuilders, demanded that this only take place at the national executive after full negotiation had taken place at lower level.⁷⁸ Though the employers won the lockout, the ultimate result was, paradoxically, to give added stimulus to the growth of the shopstewards movement. With union district committees now legally debarred from endorsing strikes, it fell

to the 'unofficial' shop stewards' committees to organise local defensive action.

Accordingly, by the beginning of the new century, we can already see in Govan many of the elements that would later go to make up the Red Clyde. A shopstewards movement was coming into being that saw itself as expressing a new concept of militant trade unionism, and took the politics of new unionism back inside the old skilled unions. A conscious unity was being established between different ethnic groups and organisationally the Trades Council provided these forces with a coherent centre.

It would be wrong to credit the Marxist socialists of the SDF with sole responsibility for this. By 1893-4 the Independent Labour Party had been established and won the allegiance of many Trades Council members. Nonetheless, the interventions of the SDF were undoubtedly important. By 1900 the South Side branch of the SDF had reached a size that allowed the formation of a separate Govan branch. By 1902 a youth section and weekly economic classes had been started.⁷⁹ The Govan branch secretary described the branch as keeping 'the red flag of class conscious socialism flying in the iron burgh of Govan'.⁸⁰ In 1903 a Tradeston branch was formed (with John Maclean as minute secretary) and by 1905, with another branch formed in Plantation, the Govan SDF had acquired permanent premises.⁸¹ That year also saw the Govan Trades Council marking up the first electoral victory of its two candidates contesting the burgh elections against sitting Lib-Lab councillors: one was successful and the other only narrowly lost.⁸²

In the General Election of 1906 Govan was one of the few Scottish seats to be contested by Labour with the Trades Council supporting the boilermaker and Labour Representation Committee candidate, John Hill.⁸³ In many ways Hill crystallised the scale of political movement which had occurred in Govan over the previous decade. A skilled craftsman, he nonetheless supported that wing within the boilermakers' union that had fought to overthrow the class collaborationist policies of Knight. A member of the congregationalist church and a mason, he also campaigned for Irish home rule. Within the Labour Movement he attempted to satisfy both the Marxist and the constitutionalist wings. *Justice* quotes him addressing a meeting of the Glasgow LRC in November 1905: their demands 'were "in a constitutional method, but if that were long delayed then just as revolution was presently justified in Russia, even it would be justified here, and he was prepared_" (the remainder of the sentence being lost in the great cheering that followed)'. In the ensuing contest, which Hill fought against both Liberal and Conservative opponents, he gained 4,200 votes. This was just under 30% of the total, only 6% behind the Conservative who won.

CONCLUSION

By 1906, therefore, a firm foundation had been laid for the united and mass working class vote that was to characterise Govan in the following decade. The Trades Council's campaigning on rents, housing conditions, transport, public hygiene and washhouses had already begun to erode the grip of employer patronage. In the yards the unions had used the warship building boom of the Boer War to eliminate the remaining wage differentials and bring their wages into line with England.⁸⁵

To this extent the position of the 1860s had been reversed. The champions of working class organisation, no less than the employers before them, had been able to exploit objective circumstances to limit the coercive force of the capitalist market. The battle was a long, complex and difficult one. Time and again the collapse in shipbuilding demand had enabled the employers to take the offensive and snatch back improvements in wages and conditions. Yet the difficulty of this battle also meant that the lessons were well learnt. The Marxist economic classes run in Govan by the SDF provided dozens, and later hundreds, of workers with a clear and sophisticated class analysis of the origins and nature of their exploitation. The petty despotisms of privately-provided or employer-controlled social services had been used to build a mass commitment to the collectivisation of all public services and amenities. No less important, there was a growing understanding that sectarian bigotry had no place in a working class community. In 1912-14 Carson and other Belfast protestant loyalists attempted to create a mass movement of support on Clydeside.⁸⁶ They found the result disappointing (particularly compared to the response in the non-industrial metropolis of Liverpool). In contrast the same period saw Govan Trades Council able to collect relatively vast sums of money at cinema queues and in street collections towards the Dublin workers locked out in their own fight for unionisation and better conditions.⁸⁷ Govan workers were already beginning to learn the lesson, reinforced during the war, that working class solidarity must also be internationalist.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Forward*, 8 November 1913. The Govan area contributed three of the six Labour victories secured in Glasgow in 1913. Labour candidates secured over 60% of the vote in Central Govan and Fairfield wards. Labour also won Kinning Park and only lost Plantation by 1441 votes in 1480. Irene Sweeney in 'Municipal Politics and the Labour Party in Glasgow, 1909-1914', BA Dissertation, Strathclyde University, November 1985, describes the background to this achievement. She notes particularly the anger felt against local housing factors who took advantage of the lower Glasgow rates (after Govan's amalgamation in 1912). Instead of reducing the joint (compounded) payment for and rates, they kept the payments at the old level and pocketed the difference. The campaign against this, led by previous Labour members of the Govan Burgh Council, David Denny and J. S. Taylor, built on earlier rent campaigns in Govan and the local work of the British Socialist Party (previously the Social Democratic Federation) one of whose members, John Maclean, had been instrumental in establishing the Scottish Federation of Tenants' Associations in 1912. We are very grateful to Irene Sweeney for permission to use this material.
2. Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, Edinburgh 1983, supplies the voting figures. The weakness of this somewhat tendentious book is its complete failure to examine events before 1914, and the absence of any effective treatment of the shipyards where wartime militancy was demonstrably strongest. Some of this ground is, however, covered by David Unger, 'The Roots of Red Clydeside, 1900-1914', PhD dissertation for University of Texas at Austin, 1979.
3. McLean, *op cit*, and James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards Movement*, London 1973.
4. T.C. Brotchie, *The History of Govan*, Glasgow 1905, p.248 supplemented by S. Pollard and D. Robertson, *The British Shipbuilding industry*, Harvard, 1979, p.250.
5. Pollard and Robertson, *op cit*
6. J. Melling, 'Scottish industrialists and the changing character of class relations in the Clydeside region' in *Capital and Class in Scotland*, T. Dickson, ed., Edinburgh, 1983.
7. Archibald Craig, *The Elder Park*, Govan 1891, p.5.
8. Craig, *op cit*, p.7.
9. T.C. Brotchie, *op cit*, p.183.
10. R.H. Campbell, *Scotland Since 1707*, Oxford, 1971, p.225.
11. *ibid*, pp. 225-226.
12. R.H. Campbell, *The Rise and Fall of Scottish Industry*, Edinburgh, 1980, p. 190.
13. S. Pollard, 'The Economic History of British Shipbuilding 1870-1914', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, London University 1951.
14. F. Engels quoted in E. Hobsbawm, *Labour's Turning Point*, London, 1949, p.19.
15. Brotchie, *op cit*, p. 184 and p.250.
16. This material is derived from a random sample of census schedules for the burgh of Govan. For 1871 the sample included 611 households; for 1891 430. The method adopted is that of Armstrong in E. A. Wrigley, ed., *Historical Demography*, Cambridge, 1969. Highland heads of household are defined strictly as those coming from the highlands proper and not from developed urban centres, such as Perth or Inverness, north of the highland line.
17. Wages and hours from PP.1887 LXXXIX House of Commons Accounts and Papers: Miscellaneous Statistics, p.284.
18. Wages and hours from Royal Commission on Labour 1893-4, Group A, Appendix IX, p.480 and Appendix LIX p.551.
19. Memorandum to Employers by Clyde Iron Workers, Glasgow, 23rd July 1878, Glasgow Shipwrights Records, TD 389 1877 (Mitchell Library collection).
20. John Stephen (of Alex Stephen, Linthouse) to Barclay Curie, 8th June 1883. Clyde Shipbuilders Association (Mitchell Library).
21. R.H. Campbell, *The Rise and Fall of Scottish Industry*, pp. 190-191.

22. Pollard and Robertson, *op cit*, p.53.
23. *Govan Press*, 21st January 1885.
24. John Butt, 'Working Class Housing in Glasgow' in S.D. Chapman (ed), *The History of Working Class Housing*, Newton Abbot, 1971, p.82.
25. J. Barras, *A Statistical Enquiry into the Causes of Death in the Burgh of Govan, 1864-1898*.
26. *ibid*
27. 'Mortality rates for Govan Poorhouse', *Govan Press*, 3rd January 1885.
28. *ibid*.
29. *Govan Press*, 5th January 1889.
30. *Justice*, 14th June 1884.
31. Select Committee, 1869 quoted by S. Damer, 'Property Relations in Victorian Glasgow', Discussion papers in Social Research, 15, Glasgow University, 1976.
32. Answer to Question 16,624, RC on Trade Unions, PP 1867-8 XXXIX.
33. Sylvia Price, 'Clyde riveters' earnings, 1889-1913', in J. Kuuse and A. Slaven, eds., *Scottish and Scandanavian Shipbuilding seminar*, Glasgow University, September 1980.
34. J. Mortimer, *History of the Boilermakers Society 1834-1906*, London, 1973, and W.H. Marwick, *A Short History of Labour in Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1967, p.33.
35. Mortimer, *op cit*
36. *ibid*
37. *ibid*, p.97.
38. Glasgow Shipwrights Records, TD 389 1877 (Mitchell Library).
39. Mortimer, *op cit*, p.97.
40. *Govan Press*, 17th and 24th January 1885 and 1 lth April 1885.
41. *Govan Press*, 3rd and 17th January 1885.
42. Brotchie, *op cit*, p.233 and p.176.
43. Minutes of the Burgh Police Commissioners, 14th October 1867.
44. Brotchie, *op cit*, p. 176.
45. *Partick Observer*, 14th July 1877.
46. The following account is derived from *Justice* for 15th, 22nd and 29th September, and 13th October 1888.
47. *Govan Press*, passim 1885 - 90.
48. *The Knoxites Secret Society*, Glasgow, 1889.
49. W.H. Marwick, *op cit*, p.69.
50. Brotchie, *op cit*, p.271. Norman Murray, *The Scottish Land Loom Weavers*, Edinburgh, 1978, p.208ff. R Page Arnot, *A History of the Scottish Miners*, London, 1955, pp.21 - 2 cites evidence on the radicalism of both miners and weavers in the West of Scotland. There is as yet no full study.
51. E. Richards, 'How tame were the Highlanders during the clearances?', *Scottish Studies*, XVII, 1973.
52. J. Young, *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class*, London, 1979, p.143.
53. *Justice*, 25th May 1884, 16th June 1884 (on the Free Church), 21st June 1884 and 21st January 1888.
54. C. Tsuzuki, *H.M. Hyndman*, Oxford 1961 ; T. Moodey, *Michael Davitt and the Irish Revolution*, Oxford 1981, p. 481 and p. 548 ; J. Young, *op cit*, p. 151.
55. *Justice*, 6th June 1884.
56. Mortimer, *op cit*, and Knight's evidence to RC on Labour 1893 - 4, q.2, PP 1893 - 4, XXXII Group A, Q. 20, 806.
57. Mortimer, *op cit*, p. 174.
58. *Justice*, 25th October 1884 and 1st November 1884.
59. *Justice*, 20th December 1884.
60. *Justice*, 20th March 1886 and 30th April 1887.
61. *Justice*, 18th June 1887.
62. *Justice*, 23rd June 1887.
63. *Justice*, 25th June 1887 and 10th December 1887.
64. *Justice*, 17th September 1887 for inaugural meeting held in the SDF halls. Further reports occur on 1st October, 22nd October and 29th October 1887. The Port Glasgow Union is first reported in *Justice*, 21 st January 1888. *Justice*, 10th March 1888 comments on the SDF's direct role in forming the Glasgow Harbour union.
65. *Justice*, 21st April 1888 (for INL meetings) and 15th and 29th September for SDF meetings at Govan Cross.
66. *Justice*, 29th September 1888 and 3rd November 1888 (for hammermen).
67. *Justice*, 7th July 1889 and 23rd November 1889.
68. *Govan Press*, 18th January 1884. *Justice*, 8th July 1892 notes that the Vice-President of Govan Trades Council was a member of the Glasgow Harbour Labourers' Union (which had been refused affiliation by the more conservative Glasgow Trades Council).
69. Mortimer, *op cit*
70. *ibid*
71. This material is drawn from Angela Tuckett's MS *History of the Scottish Trades Union Congress*, Chapter 1, section v. We are very grateful for permission to use this important work.
72. *ibid*.
73. *ibid*
74. Mortimer, *op cit*.
75. STUC Third Annual Report, 1899, and Fourth Annual Report, 1900.
76. At the 1898 Conference of the STUC a motion was put forward supporting current legislation to 'alien' immigration. It was successfully defeated by an amendment from Peter Ross of Govan Trades Council: 'aliens leaving their native lands.... deserving of sympathy... no special objection be put in the way.'.
77. Mortimer, *op cit*.
78. Hinton, *op cit*, p.61.
79. *Justice*, 8th March 1902 describes the inauguration of the Socialist Sunday School in the Co-operative Buildings, Kinning Park. *Justice*, 13 th September 1902 mentions the economics class. The secretary was W. Clelland, 15 Elder Street: *The Socialist*, August 1902.
80. *Justice*, 13th September 1902. In May 1903 a number of Scottish Branches of the SDF broke away to form the Socialist Labour Party, initially influenced by the American syndicalist De Leon. The story of this split can be traced in the monthly of the Scottish District of the SDF, the *Socialist* (initially printed with assistance from Connolly's Irish Socialist Republican Party). The Govan Branch did not join the breakaway and acted to convene a conference of Scottish branches to re-establish the Scottish District of the SDF in May 1903 (*Justice*, 9th May 1903). The initial attempts by the SLP to secure a base in Govan were unsuccessful. James Connolly held meetings for the SLP at Govan Cross in August 1903 (*Socialist*, September 1903), but an organised presence did not appear till some time later. The main elements in both the SDF and the SLP were merged into the Communist Party in 1920.
81. *Justice*, 9th May 1903 reports the formation of the Tradeston branch. *Justice*. 17th September 1904 reports the Govan branch as holding three meetings a week and recruiting fast By 14th October 1905 (*Justice*) the Plantation branch had been formed and permanent premises acquired for the central Govan branch at 7 Broomloan Road.
82. *Govan Press*, 15th September 1905 and 10th November 1905 : the winning vote was 917 for the LRC and 832 for the Lib-Lab candidate ; the losing vote was 655 to 720.
83. *Govan Press*, 6th October and 10th November 1905. In October W. Bull of the Yorkshire Miners Association, then locked-out by the employers, spoke at the Cross on behalf of Hill, and in November Keir Hardie.
84. *Justice*, 25th November 1905.
85. R.H. Campbell, *The Rise and Fall of Scottish Industry*, p. 191 uses the wage census for 1906 to show wage levels for both men and boys in Clyde shipbuilding as above the UK average.

86. Joan Smith, 'Labour Traditions in Glasgow and Liverpool', *History Workshop*, 17, 1984.
87. *ibid.* The collections were organised by Harry Hopkins, Secretary of Govan Trades Council, and a principal figure in the 1915 Rent Strike. In 1919, by which time he had become Glasgow Secretary of the Engineers, Hopkins led - in defiance of his right-wing executive - the Glasgow 40 hours strike. Hopkins was the last secretary of Govan Trades Council. In 1916 it was merged with Glasgow Trade Council. Its papers have not been discovered.

HISTORY GROUP PUBLICATIONS

Back Issues of OUR HISTORY currently available

June 1986

Duplicated format		<i>Price</i>
24	<i>Lancashire Cotton Famine</i> by Stan Broadbridge	£1.00
36/7	<i>Prints of the Labour Movement</i>	1.00
Printed format		
18	<i>Sheffield Shop Stewards</i> by Bill Moore	1.00
58	<i>The Miners of Kilsyth in the 1926 General Strike and Lockout</i> by Paul and Carol Carter	1.00
60	<i>Time and Motion Strike Manchester 1934- 7</i> by Mick Jenkins	1.00
61	<i>Middle Class Opinion and the 1889 Dock Strike</i> by Gillian Cronje	1.00
65	<i>The 1926 General Strike in Lanarkshire</i> by John Maclean	1.00
67	<i>Spain against Fascism 1936- 39</i> by Nan Green & A.M. Elliott	1.00
69	<i>Rank & File Movements in Building 1910 -1920</i> by Peter Latham	1.00
70	<i>The Struggle against Fascism and War in Britain 1930-1939'</i> by Mike Power	1.00
71	<i>From Radicalism to Socialism: Paisley Engineers 1890 -1920</i> by James Brown	1.00
72	<i>The People's Theatre in Bristol 1930 -45</i> by Angela Tuckett	1.00
73	<i>T. A. Jackson: A Centenary Appreciation</i> by Vivien Morton and Stuart Macintyre	1.00
74	<i>The National Question in Cornwall</i> by Royston Green	1.00
75	<i>The 1842 General Strike in South Wales</i> by Heather Jordan	1.00
76	<i>Armed Resistance & Insurrection: The Early Chartist Experience</i> by John Baxter	1.00
77	<i>Appeasement</i> by Bill Moore	1.00

Subscriptions

Our History: £5 for four issues (approximately two years)

Our History Journal: £4 for four issues (approximately two years)

Our History/Journal combined: £8

Also available from the History Group:

Communist Party pamphlets:

When the People Arose. The Peasants Revolt of 1381 by A.L. Morton .50

William Morris Now. Socialism by Design by Roger Simon 1.00

Orders to:

History Group, 16 St. John Street, London EC1M4AL.