

James Squires, BA History (Sheffield Hallam University)

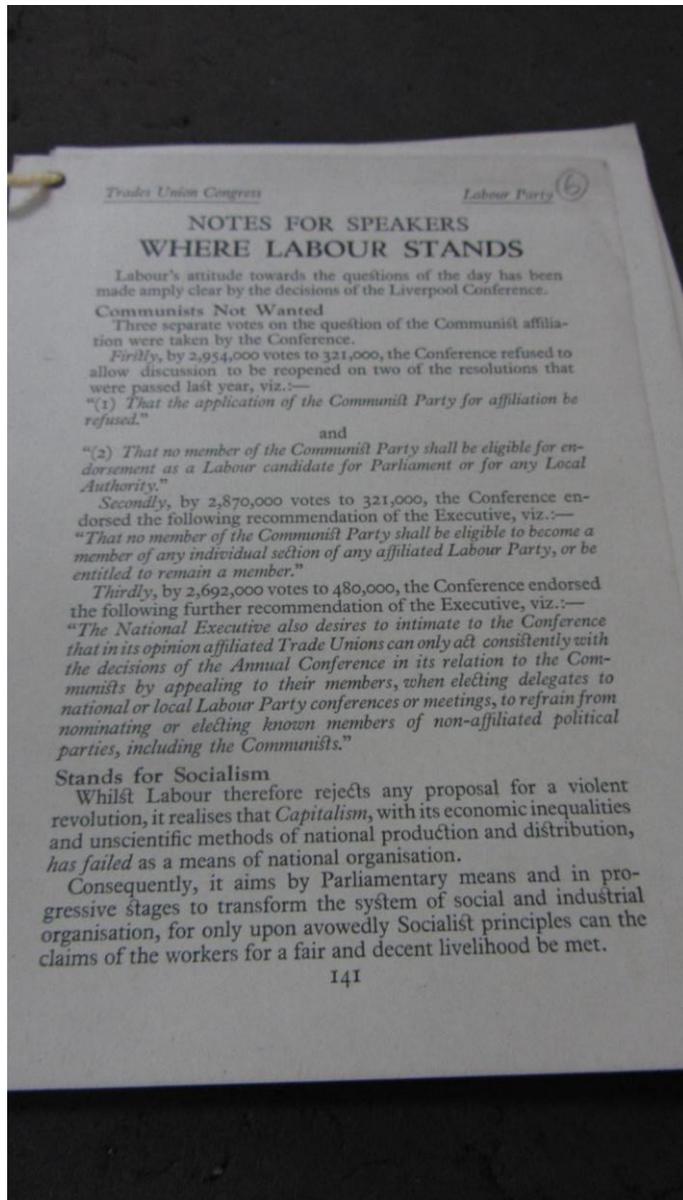
Thanks to the generosity of the Society for the Study of Labour History, I was able to spend a two-day research trip in London, and attended both the National Archives and the Marx Memorial Library. My research focuses on the relationship between the Labour Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) throughout the 1920s. This trip complemented my existing research, and has given me valuable insight into these two political parties.

The Marx Memorial Library was incredibly useful. I found several pamphlets and reports detailing the activities of the 'National Left-Wing Movement' (NLWM), a pressure group formed of left-wing affiliated and disaffiliated groups within the Labour Party that emerged in the mid-1920s. Most accounts of both the Labour Party and the CPGB rarely evaluate the role of the NLWM in much detail, so being able to read original material published by the group, in particular its aims, objectives and membership figures, has fundamentally helped my research. It also helps my dissertation greatly as it proved that Labour severance of communist members was not as clear cut as first thought. Another document I was able to examine was a copy of a letter written by Sharpurji Saklatvala, one of the few communist MPs in the 1920s, that advocates a break away from the Labour Party and the affiliation campaign. This letter in particular has been incredibly influential in my dissertation. It shows that the antagonistic views towards Social Democratic parties that characterised the Class against Class line advocated by the Communist International in 1928 were already apparent within the CPGB several years earlier.

The research I conducted at the National Archives was also valuable. I found documents detailing a condemnation of communist activity within the movement. One document highlighted the motions carried at the 1925 Labour Party conference in regard to the CPGB. That these decisions were reproduced and spread among the Labour movement shows the importance of this conference in severing relations with the CPGB, a key point within my dissertation. Being able to access these documents has thus helped me to understand the thoughts and feelings of all sections of the Labour movement, not just the official party line.

Ultimately, I love being able to attend archive and study centres and discovering new material. That the society gave me funding to do this in London was an incredible experience, and I am extremely grateful.

(Below: Handout detailing the Labour Party position towards communists after the 1925 Party conference. The National Archives, PRO 30/69/1830)



(Below: Extracts of a letter written by Sharpurji Saklatvala, MP for Battersea North, advocating a harsher position towards the Labour Party in 1925 Marx Memorial Library, YC01.12 / COM)

