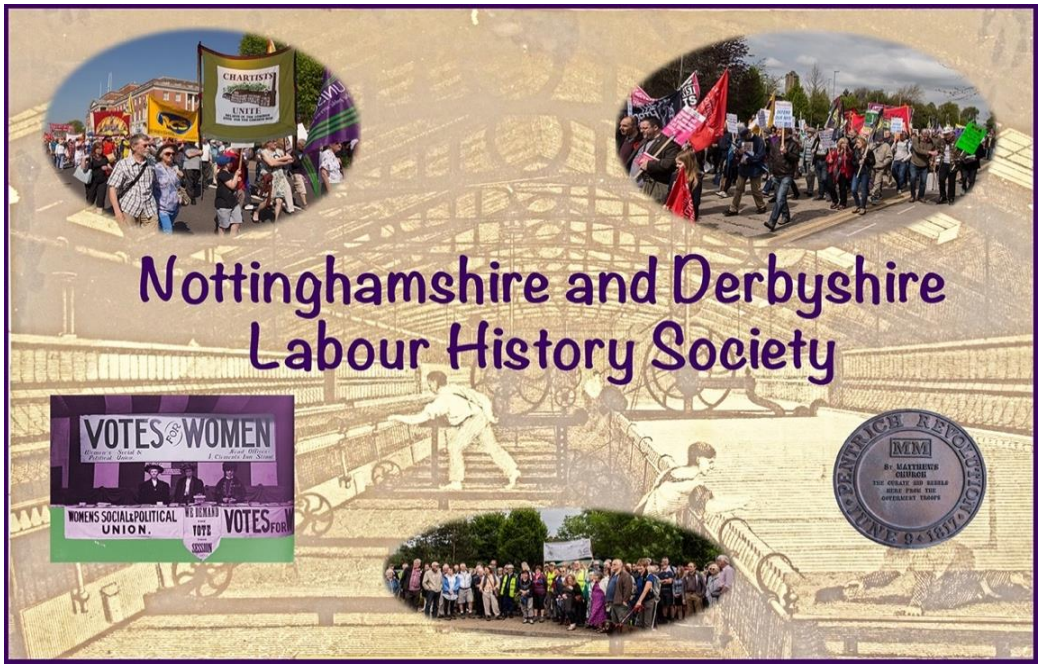


# Newsletter

# March 2026

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## Chartist Lecturers

**by Paul Jones**

Recent academic works, notably by E. P. Thompson, Malcolm Chase, and Katrina Navickas, have increasingly recognised the itinerant Chartist lecturer as central to the movement's organisational capacity and to its ideological and geographical spread. This marks a shift away from the traditional view advanced by Asa Briggs, which portrayed lecturers as peripheral agitators subordinate to petitions, mass demonstrations, and the radical press.

Derbyshire provides a strong example of this revised interpretation. Compared with heavily industrialised centres such as Manchester or Leeds, Derbyshire's mixed industrial–rural character and dispersed population posed distinct challenges for political organisation. While towns such as Belper, Chesterfield, and Derby supported Chartist activity, large areas of the county consisted of upland or semi-rural communities with limited infrastructure for regular meetings or newspaper circulation. In such contexts, the Chartist lecturer was not merely supplementary but an indispensable mechanism for sustaining Chartism beyond metropolitan and industrial heartlands. Derbyshire therefore illustrates the argument that the durability of Chartism lay in face-to-face mobilisation rather than in centralised leadership or print culture alone.

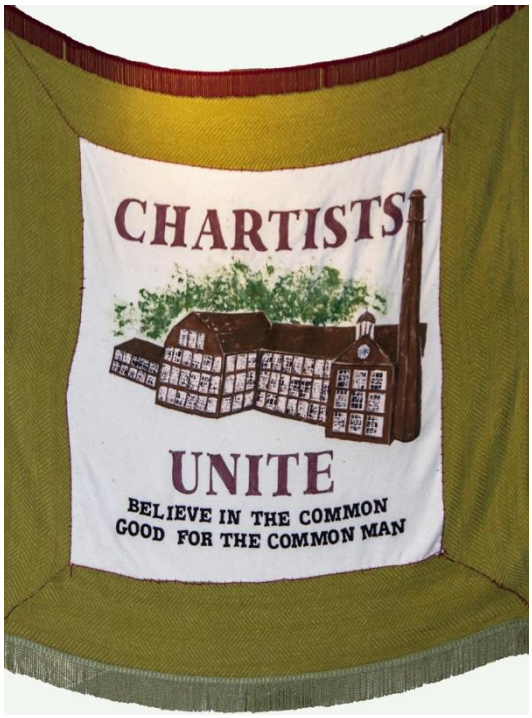
Chartist lecturers were often described as “missionaries”, a term that reflected both their deep personal commitment and the quasi-religious culture surrounding the movement. This religious style was not merely symbolic but also strategic. Because political meetings were frequently banned, gatherings were sometimes advertised as religious meetings in order to circumvent the law. In March 1841, for example, a Sunday meeting was announced in the  Alfreton marketplace to commemorate the Chartist leader John Clayton. Aware of the gathering’s political character, local magistrates consulted the Home Office on how to respond. Although they ultimately decided not to prohibit the meeting, they made extensive preparations to maintain public order, mobilising police, special constables, and military support. This issue persisted, and the following year another Alfreton magistrate again sought Home Office guidance on managing events conducted under the guise of religious worship.


The role of Chartist lecturers extended far beyond public speaking. They functioned as educators and organisers who recruited members and inspired local communities. Lecturers translated the abstract constitutional demands of the People’s Charter into accessible political language, reported developments from other districts, and reinforced a sense of participation in a national movement—particularly among those with limited

As a result, lecturers were required to demonstrate a wide range of qualities: effective oratory, political knowledge, empathy with working-class experience, courage and resilience, organisational skill, and deep commitment to reform. The physical demands of lecturing in rural Derbyshire should not be underestimated. Jonathan Bairstow, the county’s most prolific lecturer, remarked in 1841 that:

> *“Derbyshire… is not flat as a pancake. Its jagged and towering mountains rather resemble the Alps or Apennines. The county is thus none the easier for missionary exertion—though certainly healthier…”*

This observation is significant, as lecturers typically travelled on foot or horseback to reach their audiences, often over considerable distances. The map below illustrates Bairstow's lecturing circuit in 1841 between March and December.




Evidence of Chartist lecturing activity in Derbyshire relies primarily on reports in the *Northern Star* and the local press. These sources provide the most consistent evidence for lecturers' movements, but they should be treated as indicators of activity rather than as a comprehensive record. Advertised itineraries did not always translate into delivered lectures, as visits could be disrupted by weather, illness, arrest, or magistrates' intervention. For this reason, priority has been given to reports that confirm meetings actually took place, rather than advance notices alone.

Wherever possible, lecturers' visits have been corroborated using more than one source. For example, the reported visit of Dr Peter McDouall to Derby in 1842, cited by Graham Stevenson in *Defence or Defiance*, has been omitted here, as no corroborating contemporary press reports can be located. While this approach limits the scope of the article, it avoids attributing certainty to visits that cannot be securely confirmed.

The resulting picture is therefore indicative rather than exhaustive. Absences in the record reflect the uneven survival and reporting of sources rather than an absence of Chartist activity. This problem is particularly apparent in Chesterfield, where press coverage is notably thin despite the town's size and the presence of an active Chartist branch, founded on 3 April 1839 at the Turf Tavern. In May 1842 the Northern Star reported that the Chesterfield branch experienced difficulties with lecturing visits, complaining of:

> *"…persons announcing lecturers to be given at Chesterfield without corresponding with the Secretary previous to their announcement"*

This unusually explicit resolution reveals internal branch discussions that are rarely reported:

> *"That no lecturer will be paid for his services here unless he has received an invitation from the Chartist body in the locality, and no one is expected to attend unless he has written to the Secretary and received an answer from him wishing his attendance; no lecturer will be acknowledged who cannot show his card of membership or his credentials from the locality to which he belongs."*

The limited visibility of lecturing in Chesterfield is more a problem of documentation rather than a lack of activity, reinforcing the difficulty of providing a completely accurate picture of Chartist lecturers visits to the county.

Despite these limitations, what follows represents a reasonable, though necessarily incomplete, picture of the activities of Chartist lecturers in Derbyshire.

| Lecturer | Place(s) of Origin | Years Active in Derbyshire | Estimated Total Number of Lectures | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| John Deegan | Stalybridge (Lancs) | 1839 | 2 | Earliest recorded visit (New Mills,14 & 15 January 1839) |
| George Julian Harney | London | 1839 | 1 | Visit to Chester Green on 28 January |
| RJ Richardson | Manchester | 1839 | 1 | Visited Derby Workingmen's Association April |
| Thomas Benton | Ashton upon Lyme (Lancs) | 1840 | 2 | Lectured New Mills and Glossop June |
| Mr Mason | Not known | 1840-41 | 6 | Lectured at Belper, Derby, Heanor & Milford- December/ January |
| Samson Walker | Denton (Lancs) | 1840-41 | 1 | \|Visited Chesterfield |
| Jonathan Bairstow | Bradford | 1841–42 | 98 | Principal Derbyshire circuit lecturer |
| William Butterworth | Manchester | 1841 | 2 | Lectured at Glossop and Tintwistle |
| Christopher Doyle | Ireland | 1841-43 | 11 | Fourth most prolific lecturer |
| Jospeh Linney | Manchester | 1841 | 1 | Visited New Mills |
| Dr Peter Murray MacDouall | Lancashire/Ireland | 1841-42 | 2 | At least two Derby lectures |
| William Martin | Halifax (Yorkshire) | 1841 | 2 | Chesterfield and Derby |
| J Simmons | Sutton in Ashfield (Notts) | 1841-42 | 3 | Alfreton, South Normanton and Tibshelf |
| John Skeavington | Loughborough | 1841 | 2 | Chesterfield |
| Dean Taylor | Birmingham | 1841 | 23 | Third most prolific visitor |
| James Vickers | Belper | 1841 | 3 | Alfreton, Derby |
| P M Brophy | Ireland | 1842 | 3 | Visited Chesterfield and Derby |
| William Vickers Jackson | Sheffield | 1842 | 1 | Visited Glossop |
| James Leach | Hyde, (Lancs) | 1842 & 1845 | 2 | New Mills. Only Chartist Lecturer to visit in 1845 to Glossop |
| EP Mead | Birmingham | 1842 | 3 | Visited Derby |

| Lecturer | Place(s) of Origin | Years Active in Derbyshire | Estimated Total Number of Lectures | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| John Mitchell | Stockport (Cheshire) | 1842 | 2 | Visted Glossop twice |
| Feargus O'Connor | Ireland/London | 1842 &1850 | 4 | Three visits to Derby one to Belper. Nottingham Chartist MP National leader |
| William Thomason | Vale of Leven (Scotland) | 1842 | 2 | Derby- funeral oration for Chartist Martyr Samuel Holberry of Sheffield on the Sunday and Derby Market Place on the Monday |
| Henry Vincent | London | 1842 | 2 | Derby and Clay Cross |
| John West | Macclesfield (Cheshire) | 1842 | 29 | Second most prolific lecturer Paid 30s per week plus expenses |
| Richard Wild | Manchester | 1842 | 1 | Glossop |
| Thomas Clarke | Stockport (Cheshire) | 1843 & 1847 | 3 | Derby three times-Director Chartist Cooperative Association |
| John Pepper | Selston (Notts) | 1843 | 4 | Alfreton Riddings and Swanwick |
| R. G. Gammage | Northampton | 1843 | 2 | Two lectures, Derby. Author of first history of Chartist movement |
| Robert Dixon | Manchester | 1847 | 1 | Derby- Director National Land Company |
| Philip McGrath | London | 1847& 1849 | 2 | Also, Chartist parliamentary candidate for Derby in 1847 |
| Ernest Jones | London | 1847 &1850 | 4 | All visits to Derby. National Leader |
| Mr Harrison | Belper | 1848 | 3 | Belper & Holbrook Moor |
| Mr Shaw | London | 1848 | 1 | Derby |
| Samuel Kydd | London | 1849 | 1 | As part of a Midlands Tour following release from prison-Derby |
| John James Bezer | London | 1850 | 3 | Part of tour following release from prison Derby and Belper 'Camp' |
| Jospeh Rowlinson | Manchester | 1850 | 1 | Derby |

Subsequent visits to New Mills and Glossop in North Derbyshire by Thomas Benson of Ashton under Lyme in June 1840, and to Chesterfield by Samson Walker from Denton, Manchester, in December 1840, reflect the growing strength of Chartism in north Derbyshire. This growth necessitated more organised lecturing arrangements through agreed circuits, negotiated by delegates from local branches. A meeting of East Midlands delegates at the Ship Inn, Derby, in December 1840 included representatives from Derby, Nottingham, Belper, Loughborough and Duffield, with letters from Mansfield, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Mountsorrel, and Kettering. All praised the work of the lecturer Mr Mason and agreed that:

> *"This meeting are of the opinion that Mr Mason has done much good by his lectures in this district; we therefore appoint him for another month."*

Mr Mason had visited Belper (twice), Derby, Milford, and Heanor during 1840, but despite being retained, I have found no records of him visiting Derbyshire again.

By 1841, Chartist branches increasingly organised on a county basis. In March 1841, lecturer Jonathan Bairstow was engaged for a month to lecture on a circuit covering Belper, Brompton, Chesterfield Derby, Duffield, Heanor, Holbrook, Ilkeston and Milford with individual branches asked to contribute to the cost. He was retained again in April to cover Belper, Chesterfield Duffield, Heanor, Holbrook, Ilkeston and Milford.

By the end of June 1841, the Chartist branches in Derbyshire agreed to divide the county into distinct lecturing circuits areas: Belper covering its locality, Chesterfield covering its own, and Derby covering its area, including Burton-on-Trent, Heanor, Ilkeston, Stapleford, and surrounding districts. Each locality became responsible for engaging its own lecturer. This reorganisation reflected the increasing membership of Chartist branches, which typically held weekly meetings.

Unlike the Anti–Corn Law campaign, Chartism in Derbyshire was overwhelmingly working-class in organisation and finance. To sustain lecturing activity, local supporters formed formal branches responsible for meeting lecturers' wages and travelling expenses. Funding was raised through weekly subscriptions, collections at meetings, and donations. Although the *Northern Star* occasionally provided financial assistance, its principal function was informational: advertising itineraries, reporting meetings, and facilitating coordination between branches. In effect, the newspaper acted as the logistical infrastructure of the lecturing system.

The sums involved were substantial. In 1842, the Derby circuit agreed to pay lecturer John West 30 shillings per week plus expenses—a wage equivalent to that of a skilled tradesman. This underscores both the value placed on lecturers and the financial strain imposed on local circuits. Indeed, deficits were common. In 1843, the Nottingham circuit, which then included branches in southern Derbyshire, reported a shortfall of nearly £7 in its lecturers' fund, prompting urgent discussions on sustainability. These financial difficulties did not diminish reliance on lecturers; rather, they demonstrate the extent to which Derbyshire Chartists prioritised face-to-face mobilisation even under economic pressure.

Previous studies have shown, Derbyshire did not produce its own significant body of lecturers, and of those identified, thirty-nine originated from outside the county. Lancashire-based lecturers formed the largest group, accounting for approximately 30% of visits, followed by London (17.5%),

Yorkshire (12.5%), Ireland (10%) and Cheshire (7.5 %). Ironically there is a report in 1841 of a Mr Powell, formerly of Derbyshire, lecturing in Redruth.

The prominence of London-based lecturers largely reflects visits by national figures rather than routine circuit speakers. These included Feargus O'Connor, who lectured in 1842 in Belper and twice in Derby and later in 1850; Ernest Jones, who spoke in Derby in 1847 and three times in 1850; Philip McGrath (Derby, 1847 and 1849); Henry Vincent (Derby, 1842, twice, and Clay Cross on an uncertain date); Dr Peter Murray McDouall Derby 1841 (twice); and George Julian Harney, (1839). Other London-based figures included Samuel Kydd (Derby, 1849) and a Mr Shaw (Derby, 1848). R. G. Gammage, who visited Derby twice in 1843, later published *The History of the Chartist Movement* (1854), the first historical account of the movement.

Despite its largely rural character- outside Derby, Chesterfield, and Belper- Chartism reached a wide range of Derbyshire communities. On the basis of surviving press reports, Chartist lecturers delivered talks in more than forty-one communities between 1838 and 1851, amounting to at least 245 separate lectures. This figure is almost certainly an underestimate, given the fragmentary nature of newspaper reporting. Obviously, the larger settlement received the greatest number of visits with the later years of Chartism seeing almost exclusive visits to Derby and the odd one to Belper. The visits to Chesterfield are quantified by the comments earlier in the article about the lack of surviving documentation.

**Top ten communities visited by number of lectures delivered:**

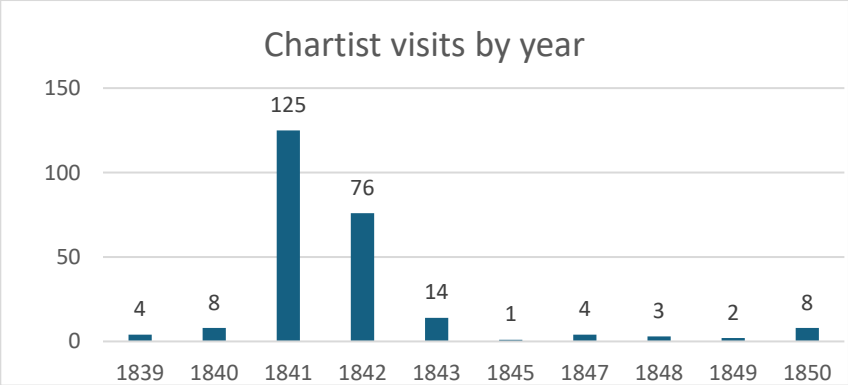
| | |
|---|---|
| Derby | 61 |
| Belper | 30 |
| Ilkeston | 18 |
| Swanwick | 13 |
| Alfreton | 12 |
| Heanor | 12 |
| Duffield | 9 |
| Glossop | 9 |
| New Mills | 9 |
| Chesterfield | 8 |

In support of the changing view of Chartist lecturers, there is plenty of evidence of their visits to smaller communities with populations of less than 1000, especially in the peak of Chartism (1841/42), reinforcing the argument that Chartist lecturing was not confined to urban centres but sought to integrate rural and semi-rural communities into a shared political culture.

**Lecturing in Small Communities (Population under 1,000):**

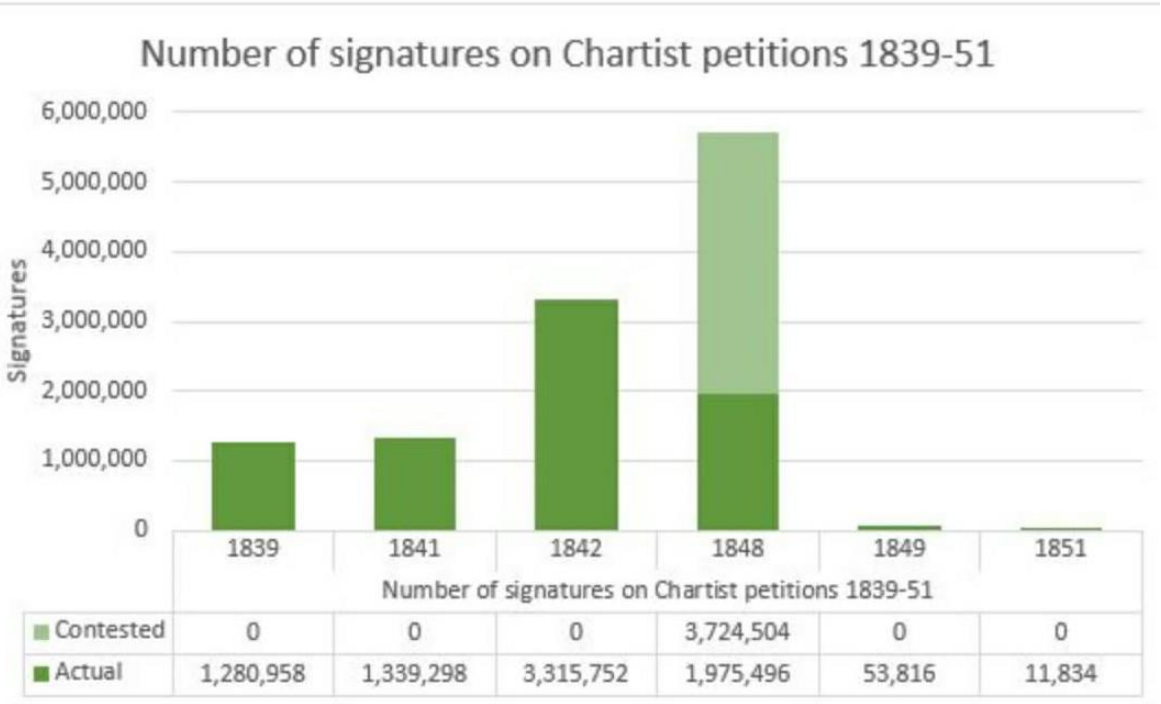
| Settlement | Estimated Pop' | Number of Visits |
|---|---|---|
| Borrowash | 600 | 2 |
| Breaston | 711 | 3 |
| Holbrook | 809 | 5 |
| Mickleover | 760 | 1 |
| Sandiacre | 956 | 1 |
| Simmondley | 676 | 1 |
| Swadlincote | 974 | 6 |
| Tibshelf | 801 | 1 |

The visits to Derbyshire did follow the fluctuating trend of Chartism as shown on the table below:




It was also very seasonal with the months between April to September accounting for over 76% of all visits.

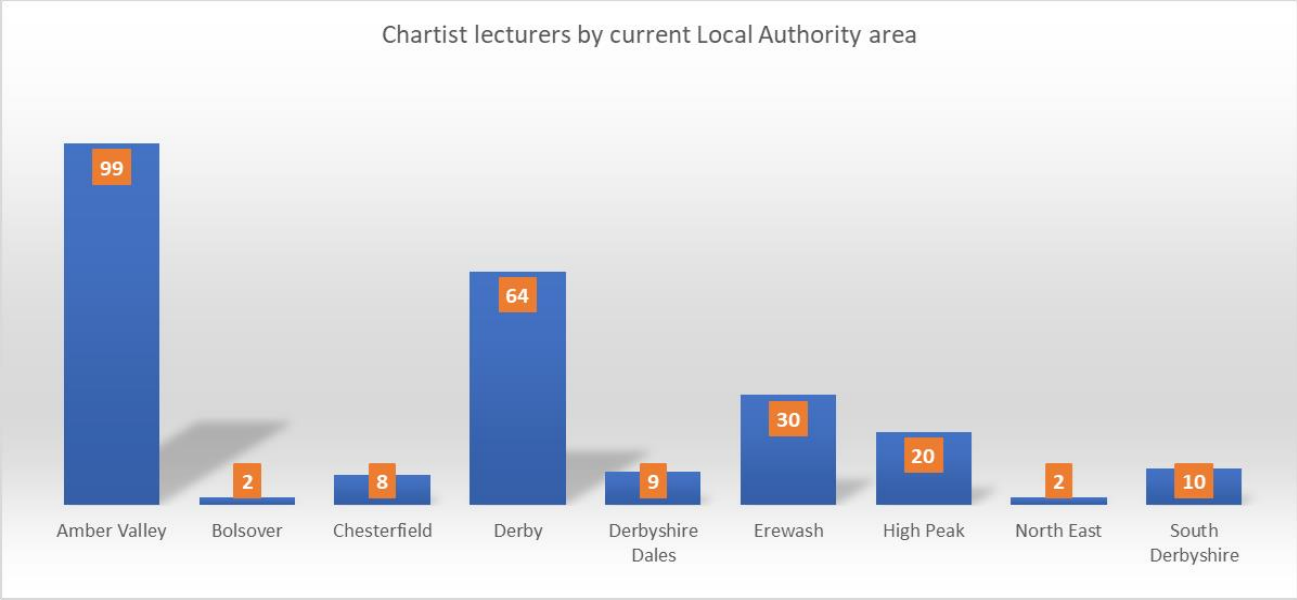
This lack of enthusiasm for the Charter, in later years, was not limited to Derbyshire but reflected the weak support nationally as illustrated below.




This pattern of delegate coordination continued into the 1850s. In August 1850, delegates from Belper, Butterley, Codnor Park, Derby, Swanwick and Sutton-in-Ashfield met at Swanwick and agreed to invite Mr John James Bezer to lecture in their area and at Holbrook Moor. This would be as part of the London Chartists Midland Tour based upon his time in prison. Another delegate meeting followed in September 1850, again at Swanwick, with representatives from Alfreton, Belper, Butterley, Codnor Park, Derby, Swanwick and Sutton-in-Ashfield, and invitations extended to branches at Borrowash, Church Gresley, Swadlincote, and Tutbury. Plans were also made to hold a Chartist ‘camp meeting’ on Holbrook Moor. Further delegate meetings were reported at Swanwick in February 1851, attended by representatives from Alfreton, Codnor Park, Derby and Swanwick.

Taken together, this evidence reinforces the picture of Chartist lecturing in Derbyshire being dependent on external personnel, sustained through inter-branch cooperation, and continually shaped by financial constraints and state repression. The persistence of delegate meetings, circuit negotiations, and efforts to secure lecturers into the early 1850s underscores the durability of Chartist organisation in the county, even as it adapted to changing political and economic circumstances.

Finally, a breakdown on Chartist lectures by current local authority area, with the already referenced caveat about Chesterfield.




Acknowledgments:

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## The Rise of the Nazis – Lessons from History? By Harry Ziegler

The rise of authoritarian regimes in what were once considered liberal democracies, has renewed interest in how the Nazis came to power. There were predecessors, of course, for example the French Second Empire or Italy where the *fascisti* originated, but more people have heard of the Third Reich so this tends to be used as the touchstone. Events take place, however, in a context, and

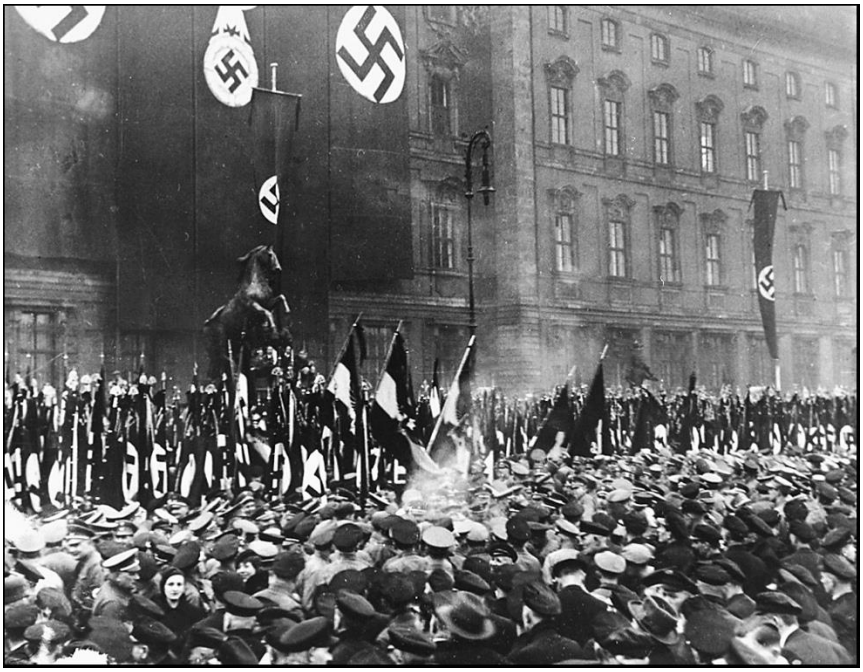
although Marx claims that history repeats itself first as tragedy and then as farce, parallels are never exact and often based on a highly selective reading of events. Comparisons with the Nazis also tend to overlook that their ideology was far from cohesive and, more importantly, not *sui generis*. It was a ragbag of ideas which originated in nineteenth century Europe and, as will be discussed below, the Nazis themselves could not agree on what national socialism actually meant beyond slogans.

The historiography of the Third Reich has undergone several paradigm changes, but outside of academia, outdated views prevail, not least because they are perpetuated by documentaries and other forms of popular history. One of those is Carlyle's notion that "great men make history". It serves as the basis of endless biographies (like, for example, Andrew Roberts' books) which try to explain history out of the character of the main protagonists. This led Ian Kershaw to muse whether Nazism really is best explained by Hitler's monorchism. Although this essay is structured around individuals, it will not follow this approach but consider them as representatives of forces opposed to democracy. It will argue that powerful interest groups, remnants of imperial elites in the Weimar Republic, wanted to replace democracy with an authoritarian state, and that they finally had to concede that the Nazis were the only group with sufficiently broad support through which to achieve this without a civil war. They imagined they could control Hitler and his followers but, in effect, helped remove all checks on his power.

The November Revolution (if the events deserve that grand a designation) did not remove the old power elites in the army, judiciary, state apparatus and industry. In November and December 1918, big business had been forced to make some concessions to the trade unions but many industrialists remained hostile to the Republic and bided their time to return to an authoritarian state (preferably a restored Empire). The social democrats, ostensibly the leaders of the revolution, had also alienated their former comrades from the left of the party who, by the late twenties, were mainly organised in the Communist Party (KPD). The KPD also remained hostile to the Republic and had decided, at the 6$^{th}$ World Congress of the Communist International, that their former comrades were social fascists and their main political enemy as they kept obstructing the proletarian revolution. After the hyperinflation of 1923, however, the political situation had, on the surface, been stabilised, but the crisis which began in 1929, was seen by the reactionary right as an opportunity to roll back the concessions made in 1918 and to dispose of democratic government altogether.

The restricted space does not allow for a detailed development of events. The focus, therefore, will be on a few major factors and players responsible for getting Hitler first into office and then into power, and examine their contribution to Hitler's resistible rise. The financial and economic crisis starting in 1929 will provide a framework in that neither Hitler's appeal nor the machinations of the old power elites would have been possible without it. The first person to consider will be Alfred Hugenberg who provided Hitler with a national platform and a semblance of respectability. Next will be Paul von Hindenburg, former imperial Field Marshall and, since 1925, President of the Weimar Republic, who wanted parliamentary government to end, at least if it included the 'Reds'. Heinrich Brüning, Franz von Papen, and Kurt von Schleicher, Chancellors of Hindenburg's presidential dictatorship will briefly be considered. The latter two stand for two different strategies to get the Nazis into government without being the government. Even once in office, however, Hitler was still dependent on the collaboration and collusion of others before his dictatorship was finally secure.

The crisis of 1929 is usually credited with creating the conditions for Hitler's rise to power, but that obscures the fact that it was not so much the crisis itself that caused hardship and a search for an alternative to the political systems that appeared responsible, but the way in which it was managed. Germany may have been particularly affected, but most European countries experienced a shift to the right as a result of governments pursuing austerity policies which disproportionately affected the least well-off. The crash originated in the United States, but as the world war had turned the US into the major international lender, its effects quickly spread outwards as US banks and companies called in their loans. To make matters worse, all national governments tried to protect their markets through tariffs, and unemployment soared. Governments tried to balance their books through austerity so that external and internal demand collapsed simultaneously, aggravating and extending the crisis in terms of time and severity. German heavy industry especially was under pressure but also saw an opportunity to rescind the concessions they had made in November 1918 to the trade union movement. Fearing the worst at that time in the light of events in Russia, they had consented in the Stinnes-Legien Agreement, among other points, to collective bargaining, the eight-hour working day, trade union recognition, and workers' councils in their enterprises. The Republic had also introduced unemployment insurance to which both employers and workers contributed. It had been designed when there was a much lower rate of unemployment than that created by the crisis, and people were unemployed for a much shorter duration. In the end, the last democratically constituted government under Hermann Müller (SPD) collapsed in 1930 over the question as to whether contributions should be raised or payments cut. The representatives of labour wanted to increase contributions, the representatives of business wanted payments cut. The government fell over the question and was replaced by a presidential dictatorship – instead of having a majority in parliament, successive governments relied on the emergency powers of the president and his right to dissolve the *Reichstag* (the federal parliament).



Alfred Hugenberg (1865-1951) was a German imperialist in both senses of the word: he was an ardent supporter of the Kaiser and of colonial expansion. He was firmly associated with heavy industry and armaments (he had served as Chairman of Krupp's board of directors), had opposed any suggestions of peace in 1917, and remained fundamentally opposed to the Republic and democracy. During the 1920s, he acquired newspapers and news agencies, and a large shareholding in Ufa, the film company. Newspapers did, however, keep their local and/or regional mastheads so that his views dominated much of the news output without readers and viewers being necessarily aware of this. By 1928, he had become the leader of the German National People's Party (DNVP). This provided a platform from which he thought he could rally the German right. The second

revision of the Weimar Peace Treaty (the so-called Young Plan) provided the focus for such a campaign. Most Germans, including the social democrats, believed that the First World War had been a defensive war, and therefore objected to the so-called war guilt clause (article 231 of the peace treaty), which attributed sole responsibility for the war to Germany and its allies. This article was the basis for the demand for reparations for the damages suffered by the Allies. These reparations and associated articles which hindered German businesses, were a constant point of friction between Germany and the Allies and a constant focus of discontent for parties of the right. Even the Allies had to admit implicitly that their economic demands could not be met, which is why they were revised in the Dawes Plan of 1924. The Young Plan constituted a further revision, in many ways favourable for German businesses and it included a reduction of the amount of money Germany owed in reparations. To ease the financial burden further, the repayment period was extended to 1988, and this is what Hugenberg's campaign took as the focus for their "Freedom Law", claiming that an acceptance of these terms would "enslave" Germans for three generations.

The detail of the campaign is not of relevance here, except that it led to a referendum which showed that in 1929, German voters did not support in large numbers this right-wing campaign. Hugenberg had, however, invited Hitler, until then a fringe figure, to join the 'respectable' right. Sitting with the grandees of German nationalism conferred on Hitler a sheen of respectability and importance, and Hugenberg's press gave him a national platform from which to hold forth. How far Hitler was taken seriously at this point is, nevertheless, debatable. Kershaw (2001: 305) writes about a big speech Hitler gave in November 1928: "Critical observers would remain uncomprehending at a mélange of half-truths, distortions, over-simplifications, and vague, pseudo-religious redemptionist promises." Hitler demonstrated in the referendum campaign that he was not willing to compromise with the old elites, but these nevertheless entered into a new alliance with him in 1931 (the short-lived Harzburg Front).

Hugenberg's failed attempts to control and integrate Hitler into an alliance of the right should have served as a warning, but he was not the only one who wanted the Republic abolished and replaced with some authoritarian state. Paul von Hindenburg (1847 – 1934), President of the German Reich, had already started in March 1929 discussions with parts of the right over the 'need' to govern without the social democrats (while they were in government as the largest party in a five-way coalition), and had confided in Brüning (about whom more further down) a few months later that he was willing to "send home" the *Reichstag.* Hindenburg had been a Field Marshall in the imperial army and would have preferred to see a restoration of the Hohenzollern. This was a popular fantasy in some circles of the right, but without broad support. His election in 1925 as President of the Republic did, however, show that the left had managed to lose support while the right was gaining it. At the next presidential election, in 1932, Hindenburg had become the candidate of the republican forces against Hitler, a position Hindenburg very much resented. He had no time for Hitler, to whom he referred as that Bohemian Private, but his main objection was that Hitler was not officer class.
The collapse of the Müller Government in 1930 made Hindenburg, as President, the central power. He appointed Heinrich Brüning (1885 – 1970) as Chancellor although he had no majority in the *Reichstag*. Brüning relied instead on the President's powers to issue emergency decrees. He pursued austerity policies not only to reduce state expenditure but also as a strategy to demonstrate to the Allies that Germany could not service its reparations obligations. His first attempt to push through a budget by emergency decree failed, however, as the *Reichstag* annulled it. As response, the President dissolved the *Reichstag*, hoping that new elections would strengthen

the ‘national’ forces. The result was not what had been intended. The left (communists and social democrats) broadly held their total share, but the vote for Hugenberg’s party collapsed and the Nazis emerged as the strongest force of the right. In the wake of that election, the SPD refused to vote down Hindenburg’s emergency decrees to avoid a further dissolution of the *Reichstag*, and parliamentary government had come to an end. The period from the elections of September 1930 to the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor in January 1933 is commonly referred to as the presidential dictatorship and describes the period in which the right was trying to establish some form of authoritarian rule.

Brüning’s policies of having workers and the lower middle class bear the brunt of the crisis undermined the Republic further. Farmers lost their farms and the rural middle class also felt threatened. Votes for the liberals and right collapsed as voters decided to ‘give the Nazis a chance’. They blamed the Republic and the Reds (they toned down the antisemitism at the time as it had not much support) and promised redemption through the creation of a national community. When Brüning suggested to break up the bankrupt estates of the gentry East of the Elbe and give plots of land to the unemployed, his fate was sealed. Hindenburg was part of that group, and they lobbied him to oppose what they called agrarian Bolshevism. At the end of May 1932, Hindenburg told Brüning that he would no longer sign emergency decrees, forcing Brüning to resign.

The next two Chancellors were Franz von Papen (1879 – 1969) and Kurt von Schleicher (1882 – 1934). Papen asked Hindenburg to dissolve the *Reichstag*, but the elections of July 1932 made the Nazis the largest group by far. Hitler demanded that he be made Chancellor and supported by presidential emergency decree, but Hindenburg refused. Hitler was offered the Vice Chancellorship under Papen, which he tersely declined. In the larger cities, the atmosphere started to resemble civil war with the paramilitaries of various parties clashing and fighting street battles. The Nazis, often responsible for the violence, blamed the left and claimed that they wanted to restore law and order. Papen created an extra-parliamentary cabinet, ostensibly of technocrats, dubbed the Cabinet of Barons, but faced a hostile parliament. Papen asked the President again to dissolve the *Reichstag*, and new elections were held in November 1932 in which the Nazis lost votes. Hitler was offered the Chancellorship but only on condition that he find a parliamentary majority; the President would not back him with emergency powers. Hitler declined again, causing consternation and disillusionment in the Nazi movement. It looked to observers as if the Nazi movement might split. Schleicher convinced Hindenburg to dismiss Papen and appoint him Chancellor so that he might try to construct a government based on the trade unions and the left wing of the Nazi movement. That strategy also failed because Schleicher was opposed by the right as the “Red General” and the Strasser wing (the Nazi left) did not split from the movement. In early January 1933, Papen had a secret meeting with Hitler to discuss how Schleicher could be replaced by Hitler as Chancellor. It took most of January to convince Hindenburg and the idea was to make Hitler Chancellor but boxed in by mainly conservative ministers including Papen and Hugenberg.

As soon as Hitler had been made Chancellor, he demanded the dissolution of the *Reichstag*. The electoral campaign that followed was ugly and violent, and then, at the end of February, the *Reichstag* was set on fire. The Nazis claimed immediately that this was the result of a communist plot. They had Hindenburg promulgate an emergency decree which suspended all civil liberties, ostensibly for the protection of people and state. The hunt for the Communists had begun and stormtroopers were setting up impromptu concentration camps for their opponents on the left. The elections still did not produce a Nazi majority but Goering, President of the *Reichstag*, discounted

the 81 seats the Communist party had gained despite being persecuted, and Hugenberg's nationalists became junior partners in a Nazi coalition government with Hugenberg heading a super-ministry. The Nazis had, however, no interest in parliamentary government and started pushing for an Enabling Act, allowing the Government to legislate, including changing the structure of the *Reich*. For the bill to pass, it needed a supermajority which the Nazis did not have. They needed the cooperation of the catholic Centre party and the remnants of the liberals and the moderate right, which they obtained by making all sorts of promises and threats. In the end, only the social democrats voted against the bill. The bourgeois parties consoled themselves with the idea that Hindenburg could still dismiss Hitler if the Nazis became too wild.

This nearly came to pass in the early summer of 1934. The stormtroopers had taken the name national socialist rather more literally than others in the party and they referred to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor as the national revolution. Now they wanted to see what they called the socialist revolution, i.e., the expropriation of big business, the big department stores, and the disempowerment of the general staff and its replacement through a people's militia (led, of course, by the SA). Business leaders and the army left Hindenburg in no doubt as to what they thought of these proposals. In turn, Hindenburg made it clear to Hitler that he would be dismissed unless this nonsense stopped. Hitler was well aware that he could not have a war based on a militia and small businesses and so had the radicals in his party (and others who had attracted his ire such as Schleicher) eliminated in the Night of the Long Knives. When Hindenburg died a few weeks later, the offices of President and Chancellor were merged in the role of *Führer* and the army swore its oath of allegiance not on the Constitution but to Hitler personally. The dictatorship was finally secure.


Brecht called his play on Hitler's way to power *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* as the Nazis were not this unstoppable force borne by popular support. Neither, however, were they just the hirelings of capital even if capital, or at least some powerful sections of it, wanted to abolish a democratic state which gave workers a voice. In the end, what emerged was a grudging alliance because neither side could achieve their ends without the other.

The main lesson the framers of the postwar order had learnt from the thirties and the war was that political stability required a degree of economic stability. Capitalism had to be managed, and a social safety net created through wealth redistribution. Kalecki had already argued in 1943, however, that capital would not wear such a system for long as it shifted the power balance in favour of labour. Today, despite the nostalgia for the fifties and sixties, it seems that people have forgotten that the stability they wish for was based on high taxation, full employment, and trade union power. Focusing on the leader tends to obscure the fact that the destruction of democracy would not have been possible without the enablers from the old elites, and that these wanted democracy destroyed because it threatened their wealth, control, and possessions. Streeck (2011) argues that capitalism and democracy are, in effect, incompatible as they use very different criteria for resource allocation. This is what Brecht warned about at the end of *Arturo Ui,* which ends on "The womb from which this crept is fertile still".

Evans, R.J. (2003) *The Coming of the Third Reich*, London: Allen Lane
Kershaw, I. (2001) *Hitler 1889 – 1936: Hubris*, London: Penguin

Streeck, Wolfgang (2011) The Crises of Democratic Capitalism, *New Left Review 71*, Sept./Oct. 2011, London
(Because I was asked at the talk about the lack of resistance against Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, there is a student essay in English about the small town which rose up. It's unfortunately the only text in English I can find.)

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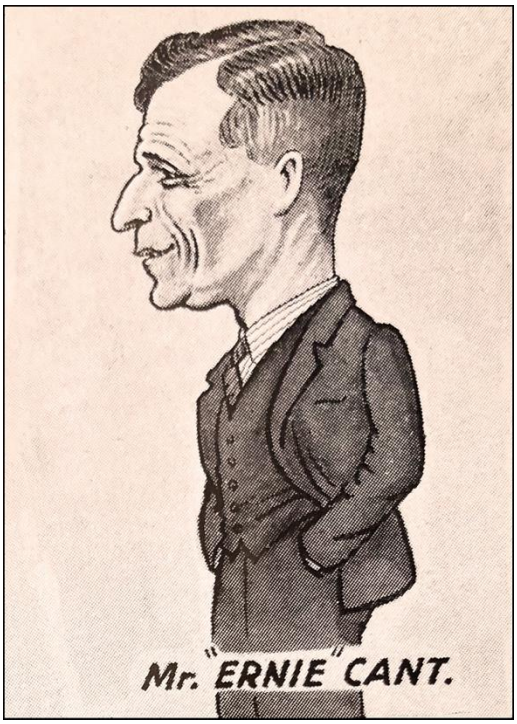
## Ernie Cant by Julian Atkinson

Ernie Cant was prominent in the early Communist Party. Born in London, he later moved to Nottingham where he continued to play an active role in politics. The following is a very partial and incomplete account of an important socialist. There are gaps in the timeline. Infuriatingly the Peter Wyncoll 1969 taped interview with Ernie no longer exists. Hull University has a collection of Peter's taped interviews minus that with Ernie Cant. Peter told me, with his usual good humour, that this interview was a very difficult one. Although Peter was a fellow CP member, Ernie was slightly suspicious of him and extremely suspicious of the tape recorder which could easily be doctored. The Nottingham Local Studies archive contains a shortened written transcript of the interview with a note that the tape had been destroyed by fire.

Ernie made visits to Russia. The first was after the General Strike to work on behalf of Class War Prisoners when he disappears from British sources A further problem is that Ernie engaged vigorously and sometimes critically in CP discussions, and this could mean that he was given less prominent public positions by the CP.
In London he became a Social Democrat Party Young Socialist at the age of 15. Aged 22 he became the national organiser. After the change in name to the British Socialist Party (BSP) he became its London organiser. He refused to fight in the First World War and was sent to prison in 1917 for two years as a conscientious objector.




On release from prison, he became the Scottish BSP organiser from 1919-20. In 1920 the Communist party was formed from several socialist groups including the BSP. The great talents of Cant were recognised, and he became the CP London organiser from 1920 to Autumn 1925. *(Graham Stevenson "Encyclopaedia of Communist Biographies" http://grahamstevenson.me.uk)*

He had been sent to Moscow by the CP and worked for International Class War Prisoners Aid for 18 months. *(Peter Wyncoll interview with Ernie Cant January 9th 1969, Local Studies in the Nottingham Central Library qL33.01)*

Ernie may have had his disagreements with the CP line from time to time, but he was always loyal to the Soviet Union. In an article of 1944, at the height of the detente between the British and Soviet authorities, he spoke of his sense of freedom on entering Russia and his unfettered

ability to travel around the country. *(Nottingham Journal 6 July 1944).*

Cant was no simple "yes man." The discussions inside the CP were freer in the 1920's than they became in the 30's. He was critical of the 1924 Bolshevisation of the Party and agreed with Scottish dissidents where he had previously been stationed. Cant argued that there was inadequate political discussion and members were too busy selling Workers' weekly to even read it. This was in opposition to Pollitt who believed that the crucial issue was that members carried out the Party line. Tommy Jackson, a co thinker of Cant, went as far as saying that Pollitt and the other bolshevisers wanted a party of "yes-men" who carried out party "leads" at the double. *(L J Macfarlane "The British Communist Party" London 1966 pp.86-7.)*
In October 1925, twelve leading members of the CP, including Cant, were arrested under the Incitement to Mutiny Act. This pre-emptive strike indicated that the Government was already envisaging the prospect of a general strike. Five were found guilty and sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment. The other seven, including Cant, were given the option of merely being bound over if they agreed to have nothing to do with the CP. This offer was rejected and they served 6 months in prison.

On release from prison Cant was sent to South Wales and remained in the Rhondda for the rest of the post General Strike lock out of the miners where he was under police surveillance. Cant was impressed by the strength of the strike in the Rhondda and launched the slogan "watch your leaders" because he was convinced there would be a sell out.

He was sent by the CP to Nottingham (which was a sub-district of Sheffield) at the end of 1928 as organiser, "to try and pull them around". He doubted "if there were 100 CP members in the town". The miners were in disarray. The breakaway Spencer union had a sweetheart deal with the mine owners in return for breaking away from the strike. Miners loyal to the official Nottinghamshire Miners 'Association were being victimised. Cant argued that Spencerism was based on fear of unemployment: "if I didn't join them, I'd get the bloody sack". *(Wyncoll interview op. cit.)*

His first public event was a Long Eaton Communist Party meeting with E. W. Cant "of London speaking on 'Will a Labour Government help the Workers?'." *(Stapleford and Sandiacre News 15 December 1928)* Cant was a hard worker and soon appeared at a variety of meetings.
Cant presided at a packed meeting in the Market Square to meet the unemployed marchers. He said that the unemployed were organised to avoid becoming an army of black legs – as had happened in former days. B. Hewins chair of the Trades Council called for a 6 hour day and a 5 day week to make work go around. *(NJ 13 February 1929)*

He was also involved in preparing for elections and proposed qualified support for certain Labour candidates. He explained that "The CP would send questionnaires to all candidates. It would depend on how far the Labour candidate…was prepared to accept items from their programme whether Communists would support him or nor." *(NJ 19 April 1929)*

Cant spent an increasing time on work with the unemployed and developed a friendship with Walter Hannington the national leader of the unemployed movement and the Hunger Marchers. In Nottingham, he worked with the Labour Party on the issue of unemployment: "relationships with the Labour Party were quite close. There was a distinct left wing with them." *(Wyncoll interview transcript)*

In August 1929 Cant was involved in a free speech campaign. E. Cant told a reporter that it had been arranged to hold a CP meeting on Sunday in the Market Place. The Chief Constable decided that no meetings would be allowed without a permit. When the Market was transferred to its present site, the Nottingham Corporation Bill had a clause that said that demonstrations required a permit from the Chief Constable. It had also been stated that fears that the clause was meant to interfere with public meetings were unjustified. Cant said that at a meeting of the Borough LP this question was raised "and the questioner was informed that meetings on the Market-place would not be interfered with". His relationship with the Labour Left had paid off. *(NJ 3 September 1929)*

The Communist International under the influence of Stalin declared a new political Third Period. This promised a period of revolutionary upsurge where Social Democracy would become social fascist and the inadequacy of existing trade unions meant that, in some cases, Red Unions under the control of the CP should be formed. This line in Germany hindered the fight against emerging Nazism. In Britain the membership of the CP fell dramatically and the attempts to set up Red Unions in textiles, tailoring and the Scottish miners failed.
The advice from the Comintern in 1929 was clear: "In our general campaign against the Labour Party we should emphasise that it is a crime equivalent to blacklegging for any worker to belong to the Labour Party". *(Woodhouse. M and B. Pearce "Essays on the History of Communism in Britain" London 1975 p.159)*

"Workers' Life" in November 1929 explained the new line: "The old line was to make the Labour party and trade unions fight for the 'partial demands' of the working class. Our new line is that the Labour Party is a completely social-fascist party, that the reformist unions are strike-breaking instruments and that the party must independently organise and lead the struggle on concrete issues."

R. P. Dutt, a leading intellectual of the British CP, spearheaded the attempt to impose the Third Period turn on the CP. Cant was unhappy with the new political line and argued: "Comrade Dutt has not only been divorced from the masses, he has also been divorced from the actual life of the party…". *(L J Macfarlane The British Communist Party 1966 pp.237/8)*
Cant consistently opposed Spencerism in the Trades Council where he had been elected to its political committee in January 1928. He was now the Nottingham CP full time organiser. In May 1928 he was appointed to the Joint Mining Committee set up by TC, LP, ILP and Co-op to relieve miners victimised for refusing to join the Spencer union. This familiarity with the problems of the miners' union led him to being involved in the Harworth dispute during 1936 and 1937. It was this dispute that enabled the TUC to unify the breakaway Spencer union with the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association. *(Graham Stevenson Encyclopaedia of communist Biographies, grahamstevenson.me.uk)*

Cant was no longer organiser of the Nottingham CP by 1931. A young man of 25, Donald Irving, was sent up from London to replace him. Don Irving was a fervent supporter of the new line. He was active in the unemployment campaigns and organised a meeting that attempted to attack a meeting given by Jimmy Thomas the disgraced ex-leader of the NUR who had decamped to the National Government that included the Tories.

Irving gave full blooded speeches on the Market Square where he eagerly anticipated the coming revolution and was arrested. At his trial it was said that he had addressed large meetings of unemployed between 16th and 25th October. On the 19th he had said "We are told that the Chief Constable of Manchester has been shot and seven policemen seriously injured. I don't know if it's true, but I hope it is as it means eight less class enemies. I want you to turn up in your thousands tomorrow and put on your fighting boots. I am not telling you to bring your six-shooters but I will have mine." On Tuesday 20 October Irving addressed another meeting in the Square and the meeting marched to the Guildhall where the Public Assistance Committee was meeting. Irving said: "...there's food in the shops and it is yours for the taking. Half-a-brick in an old stocking is a useful weapon and if it will help you to get, go and get it…. We must use every means in our power – civil war if necessary". *(NJ27 October 1931)*

In the event, the Magistrates overlooked his rodomontade and simply bound him over to keep the peace on a personal surety of £25. Irving said that he endeavoured to hold orderly demonstrations of the unemployed. He had spoken in the Market Square and a large body of unemployed went to the outside of the Albert Hall where they attempted to break up a meeting where J. H. Thomas was speaking inside. There had been an attempt to force open doors. Irving had said "There is plenty of wealth in Nottingham. *Use your own right hand, there's only a plate of glass between you and it. Go and get it." (NJ 3 November 1931)*
During this period of ultra leftism there is no trace of Cant's political activity in Nottingham. He was away for some of the time. As he explained to Peter Wyncoll: "Wally Hannington roped him in to help with the central office and he became practically the London Organiser."
By the mid Thirties Cant was again fully involved in Nottingham politics. After the catastrophe of the rise of Hitler in 1933, the line of the CP changed. Social-Fascism was forgotten. There was initially a call for a United Front with the LP and then for a Peoples' Front involving not just the TUC, LP and Co-ops but the Liberals and progressive Tories. The difficulty was that the LP and TUC were determined to place a cordon sanitaire around the CP and proscribe its participation in joint activities.

The Nottingham Trades Council was particularly careful to avoid the contamination of cooperating with the CP. It voted strongly against sending a representative onto the Committee of Peace and Friendship with the USSR. *(Tr M 27/1-64 Nottingham University Archives)* These proscriptions even applied to what campaigns supporting the Spanish Republic in its fight against fascism were allowable.

Cant was a frequent speaker for the local Communist Parties. He concentrated on anti-fascism and the fight in Spain against Franco. He also began to play a larger role in the Nottingham Cooperative Society.

Harry Pollitt requested affiliation of the CP to the Labour Party. This was turned down. Cant wrote that the refusal of a United Front was short sighted: "The Labour Party refusal of Communist affiliation is going the same way as Germany and Austria, where they refused a United Front with the known result – the workers were beaten". He also warned against the emergence of Fascist private armies. *(NJ 30 January 1936,NJ 1 February 1936)* This last point brought a reply from the local British Union of Fascists. "There are no private armies but devoted volunteers who 'don a black shirt." The propagandists of Moscow with their Jewish masters, and the squealing little Social-

Democrats,,, cannot conceive of people giving such service unless they were paid for it." *(NJ 5 February 1936)*

Cant spoke at a series of meeting addressing the growth of fascism abroad and at home. Increasingly work around the Spanish Civil War was carried out alongside the Co-op. The historian Chris Richardson explained the importance of the Co-op. The Nottingham Co-operative Society involved itself in campaigning against Franco's fascists. "From the summer of 1936 the Society made frequent donations to the local Spanish Relief Fund – itself a creation of the Co-operative movement, the Trades Council and the Labour Party – and to the national Spanish Medical Aid committee, sent sugar and foods on the Nottingham Foodship for Spain, and, like co-ops throughout Notinghamshire, put collecting cards in all of their 110 shops as part of a national Co-operative Milk for Spain campaign and sent some 25 consignments of dried milk to help relieve the shortages in the Republic. They offered their meeting rooms to organisations supporting the Spanish struggle… (they raised money to) buy, equip and send an ambulance to support the Republican forces and the International Brigades in 1938." *(Speech by Chris Richardson at the Spanish Civil War Memorial re-dedication 27 July 2013)*

The Nottingham Co-op was happy to work with all organisations that supported the Spanish Republic. The Labour Party and the TUC proscribed those aid organisations that included Communists. F. E. Leeman, a Director of the NCS, a LP member but also secretary of Stafford Cripp's Socialist League fell foul of these prohibitions. He worked alongside Cant and the League was committed to the People's Front.

The Nottingham Trades Council policed these bans. "The International Solidarity Fund and the National Joint Committee Basque Children Fund are the only funds recognised by the Joint Committee of the LP and TUC." F W Leeman represented the Co-op Political Committee on the local Joint Committee. He was a Director of the Nottingham Co-operative Society but also the secretary of the local Socialist League. The League was created by Sir Stafford Cripps and Professor Harold Laski and stood for a united front of the LP, ILP and CP. Cripps was excluded from the LP for a period due to this unity campaign.

Leeman was the treasurer of the proscribed Spanish Medical Aid Committee. He was asked to resign from that Committee. He refused and it was unanimously decided "that the services of Mr Leeman be no longer required". Leeman remained an active member of the SMAC and the Co-op continued to make donations to it.

From 1936 Ernie Cant became the voice and organiser of the Nottingham CP. He was the ever-present speaker at public meetings. He spoke mainly on foreign issues and the events in Spain and the French Popular Front. *(Nottingham Evening Post 29 February 1936)*
Cant played a major part in the local Spanish Aid Committee and was enthusiastic for a popular front on the issue that would include non labour movement figures. This approach was not without its critics. Ben Tillett spoke in the Albert Hall to the Nottingham Spanish Aid Committee to a small meeting. Cant said, "If we have not attracted the audience that a united platform deserves, we have ourselves to blame". It was announced that the Bishop of Southwell and Bishop Neville Talbot had written that they were unable to come but would come later. There were cries of "We are better without them…We don't want them". The Rev. Henry Carter, minister of Park-hill Congregational Church Nottingham had recently returned from Madrid and said that there was liberty of

conscience for all and there would be freedom of worship for all creeds as soon as the war was over. *(NJ 13 April 1937)*
In May, a CP member Jim Feeney returned from his six months fighting in Spain and spoke about his experiences. Ernie Cant was the other main speaker and the film "News from Spain" was shown. *(NJ 22 May 1937)*

A meeting was held at the Nottingham Cooperative Hall to protest against Japanese bombing of Chinese civilians. W Leeman called for the use of force by all peace-loving states against the fascist powers. E. Cant moved the resolution condemning the Japanese invasion of China. *(NJ 29 September 1937)* There was a growing relationship between Cant and Leeman as Cant devoted some of his energy into the Co-operative movement. Cant continued to play an active role on the issue of the Spanish Civil War. In order to do this he further concentrated on his involvement in the Co-op.

The trades council received a letter from the Hosiery Workers' union urging it to fund an ambulance for Spain. The Trades Council rightly cautious about precipitate action on anything referred it to a Local Joint Appeals Committee. There it languished. *(Nottingham University Manuscripts Archives Tr M 28/1-61,TC 20 January 1937)* In 1938 the Nottingham Co-op revived the issue and collecting cards were placed in all the Society's shops. Money was raised and an ambulance bought. There was a ceremony in the Market Square. Where the ambulance for Spain was displayed complete with a brass plate: "From the Cooperators and people of Nottingham to the defence of democracy in Spain." *(NJ 15 October 1938)* After the defeat of the Republic the ambulance returned but gave further use. F. W. Leeman recorded in 1944 "after magnificent service in Spain, the ambulance was sent to China and again served the democratic cause" in their war against Japan. *(Notes Of Chris Richardson in possession of author)*

For the 1937 elections the CP was giving qualified support to Labour candidates: "...it is not our policy to nominate a candidate where there would be any danger of splitting the vote, thereby weakening the possibility of a Labour candidate winning the seat". This approach also included local elections when the CP stuck up hundreds of posters with a clenched fist and "For a Labour Council in Nottingham". *(S&SN 3 April 1937, NJ 3 November 1937)*
This approach was part of a Unity Campaign. A unity campaign meeting was held in Long Eaton. A. Marshall, ILP Nottingham, argued that the Labour Leaders should be condemned but not the rank and file. "We want a workers' government." C. E. Mason for the CP made it clear that the Unity Campaign "was not put forward with the idea of making a revolutionary challenge to capitalism and establishing Soviet government in this country" *(Beeston Gazette and Echo 30 April 1937)*

The campaign came to a halt when the leaders of the Socialist League, Sir Stafford Cripps and Harold Laski, were elected to the LP NEC and decided to suspend the unity campaign with the ILP and CP. Cant continued to speak in favour of a Labour victory on the Town Council at a meeting in the Cooperative Hall. *(NEP 6 October 1937, NEP 8 October 1938)* Indeed, Cant spoke at a LP meeting to support H .J. Lloyd, Labour candidate for Forest Ward. *(NJ 1 November 1938)*

The issue of the coming war against fascism increasingly became important. Cant produced a comprehensive plan for Nottingham to deal with the threat of German bombing and an evacuation process. Evacuation of some 90.000 would be carried out by Corporation buses to 14 villages in the county. Bingham was to be the food storage centre. Seven foot trenches were to be dug in local

parks and covered by corrugated iron and sandbags. The scheme would cost £3,000,000. The vulnerability of areas from the Meadows down to Mapperley were listed and this would be the order of evacuation. Nottinghamshire was a "Danger Area No. 1" *(NJ 19 July 1938)*

Cant addressed a CP on the issue of support for Labour candidates and again raised the issue of Air Raid Precautions. The policy of the Communist party would be to support Labour in the absence of a Communist candidate. People should get protection of ARP organisations. *(NJ 10 October 1938)*

Cant's policy on ARP was raised again. It envisaged deep shelters including using some of the city caves. There was a petition to the City Council for evacuation of children, aged and sick with deep shelters for those remaining. This was to include 365 miles of tunnels. *(NJ 20 February 1939, NJ 6 April 1939)*

The Hitler/Stalin pact caused turmoil in the CP position on the war. The October 1939 congress had already produced its documents including a thesis on the coming anti-fascist war. In September the Comintern, reflecting the Hitler-Stalin pact, reversed this and opposed an inter imperialist war. Pollitt, who had become the unquestioned leader of the CBGB by the 1935 party congress, refused to turn but cancelled the congress.

In June 1941, after the invasion of Russia by the Nazis, the line changed again. The war should be supported, and Pollitt was reinstated as General Secretary of the CP. The membership and prestige of the CP increased as Russia became an ally in the war against fascism. *(Kevin Morgan "Bolshevization, Stalinization and Party Ritual" Labour History Review Volume 82, Number 2 July 2022 pp.175-179)*

These changes were reflected in Nottingham. Arnold branch of the Nottingham Cooperative Party, which was dominated by the CP, had denounced the war "as an imperialist war for colonies, imperialist domination, and profits, which can only end in untold misery and suffering for the working people of the world". There should be the cessation of hostilities and a peace conference. *(NEP 24 November 1939)* This is also a period where Cant does not appear as a CP spokesperson.

Cant devotes more of his energies to within Nottingham Co-op where he served as a Director. Cant, however, failed in his attempt to be re-elected to its Board in April 1941, failing by merely 6 votes after two recounts. This possibly reflects the unpopularity of the CP line on the war. *(NJ 22 April 1941)*

The position of supporting the war, after the attack on Russia, brought popularity to the CP and Cant into the front line. Cant fronted the CP meeting on "Demonstrate Your Unity Behind the Government. To Open the Second Front Now." *(S&SN 6 June 1942)* Cant also gave the report from the London Conference on opening a second front to a large meeting in the Albert Hall. He urged Winston Churchill to take a firm position against the right wing of the Conservative Party. *(NEP 11 June 1942, NJ 15 June 1942)*

Throughout the remaining war years Cant remained a major public face for the CP, regularly speaking on its behalf in the Square and at public meetings. The support of the war effort caused the CP to oppose a strike of 600 Nottingham bus workers. The East Midland CP distributed a leaflet:

“Do not let us take precipitate action that would injure our cause in the eyes of the public and would undoubtedly hold up the war effort”. *(NEP 4 Sept 1943, NJ 14 May 1943)*

Cant was elected as a Co-operative Society Director again for two years in April 1943. The Society also voted in favour of the CP being allowed to affiliate to the Labour Party. *(NJ 20 April 1943)*

Cant had many speaking engagements in 1945 and 1947. Several were to Co-Op Party meetings. He spoke on Co-operative Democracy and nationalisation, which he argued should be under workers’ control. *(NJ 21 February 1945, NEP 10 March 1945, NEP I March 1947)* He also made a series of speeches for the CP on the Yalta Conference. He argued that the conflicting ideologies of capitalism and communism had to work together unless a more horrible war was to break out. *(NJ 23 April 1945)*

The nationalisation of the mines was a topic of great interest locally. Ernie Cant, with his record of involvement with the miners chaired a public meeting of the Nottingham Cooperative Party where H. W. Booth of the NUM spoke on “Nationalisation of the Coal Mines.”
By 1948 the Cold War was underway and attacks on communists became frequent. A local MP Louis Gluckstein consistently attacked the communists. In a letter to the Nottingham Journal, Gluckstein alleged that Britons could not freely enter nor move about in Russia. Cant replied that he spent 18 months in Russia and could move freely about. His great hobby had been to go to a point he had not been before, take a long walk and then find transport to take him back to where he was staying. *(NJ 27 January 1948)*

A further indication of the anti-communist tide was when the Nottingham Cooperative Society withdrew its money from the press that printed the Daily Worker. There was an attempt to reverse this at a members meeting but it failed. The war time glow about the CP and the Soviet Union, despite its tremendous losses, was replaced by antagonism.

In April 1949 Cant was not elected to the NCS Directorate. Later that year there were by-elections for the Directorate. Cant did not stand and the CP endorsed another candidate, Diane Purcell who failed to be elected. *(NJ 26 April 1949, NJ 1 November 1949)*

Cant’s role in the Co-op and as a spokesperson for the CP diminished. By the end of the 1950’s Cant almost disappeared from public life. In 1982, at the age of 91 Ernie Cant died. Word arrived at a CP District Committee and Hilary Cave and Fred Westacott went to find out what had happened. Ernie had received help from a caring neighbour who had sent the message to Nottingham. Fred Westacott gave the oration at the funeral. The Internationale was sung and apparently at the phrase “at last ends the age of cant” there were affectionate chuckles. Ernie Cant had given Westacott a letter to be opened after his death. It requested that the Party should not spend money on his funeral. This was ignored. He also wrote that he hoped that “throughout my life I have helped to make the world a happier place”. *(Fred Westacott “Breaking The Chains” Chesterfield 2002 pp. 281/2.)*
Ernie Cant was an important figure in the socialist movement of the first half of the 20th century. He was a loyal member of the CP but not afraid to speak his mind when he thought that political mistakes had been made. He had a lifetime adherence to the Soviet Union, or, perhaps, to the Soviet Union as it should have been.

## Co-operative Flour Milling in Mansfield by Hugh Slaney

Penford's Mill, Skerry Hill 1853

Before the Welfare State was created, health care for a village or a small town, was mainly down to the people themselves, centred around pubs where the landlord and regulars would set up societies, very much like insurance schemes. The members would pay in a few pennies a week and this would cover the cost of doctor's visits and, in the worst case, pay for funerals often with unappealing names like Sick Clubs or Death Clubs.

In the mid 1700's, the clubs started to realise that one of the main causes of sickness was poverty, and the inability of its members to afford decent food. So these clubs, in an attempt to reduce costs, started to purchase basic food items direct from wholesalers and sell the products more cheaply to their members.

Since the rate of discount was based upon the quantity purchased, the larger societies had an advantage, but movement to these societies would be limited by the drinkers' loyalty to their "local". The rivalry between pubs would have been great, so it is surprising that ten of these in Mansfield formed an alliance, called The Ten Amicable Societies, and combined their buying power to get greater discounts. This led to a virtuous spiral, the cheaper they could sell the flour, the more members, and most likely other associations joined, which meant even bigger discounts.

In 1778, the Societies had a combined membership of 1,500 *(Jennifer Tann, The Agriculture History Review No. 28, Jan 1980)* This would account for around a third of Mansfield's population and enough demand for the entire production of one windmill.

In the late 16th century, Mansfield was served by 4 water mills and one windmill but this wasn't enough. By 1772 the population had greatly expanded but the provision had increased by just three additional windmills. After 1772, water mills were being converted from corn to the more lucrative cotton production. By 1778, only one corn water mill and the windmills remained. Therefore it is likely that the societies purchased their flour from outside Mansfield, most likely Newark. This may also account for the lack of opposition from the local millers since they were not in a position to supply them.
In 1778 the societies took the next logical step; on 11th April, they placed an advert in the Nottingham newspapers for millwrights to tender for the building of a new post mill. By October of the same year, a mill was in operation. It is possible that they changed their plans and purchased an existing mill, because it is in exactly the same location as one on the John Chapman's map drawn four years earlier.

The photo is of Penfold's Mill which, from the description of the Club Mill, was built to the same design.

Production started and they started selling best fine flour for 1/6d (7.5p) per stone, this compares to 1/11d (9.5p) sold at other mills, over 20% cheaper. As well as a miller, they employed a manager, tasked with purchasing the cheapest corn.

The local press was very positive towards this venture: the Nottingham Journal called it *"A Striking Example of True Patriotism and Honest Industry"* and urged other towns to follow suit - this they did with varying degrees of success. There were three main problems facing the other towns. The first was getting rival groups to work together; Mansfield was advantaged by the fact that the groups had been working together years before they took on building the mill. Nottingham got as far as purchasing the land, but arguments over the larger societies wanting preferential treatment over the other societies, broke up the union before the mill was even constructed.

The second problem was size; Mansfield's small size enabled it to use the cheapest form of mill, a wooden post mill, whereas cities needed larger mills to produce enough flour for all the members, necessitating a lot of capital expenditure spent before any flour was produced. For example, Sheffield had 43 societies and they built a massive watermill. The opposite was also true, societies that were too small such as Mansfield Woodhouse, a society based at the Greyhound pub, purchased an old club mill in the village, but soon ran into financial trouble since producing small amounts of flour, meant that the cost per stone would be higher than their commercial rivals and therefore no incentive for the members to purchase it. The Duke of Portland paid off their debt and the society joined with the Mansfield Societies. In Nottinghamshire the successful societies were the ones from similar size communities to Mansfield, such as Hucknall and Newark.

The third problem was the lack of business skills; whilst Mansfield employed a miller and manager, others relied on the abilities of their members, leading to some very bad business decisions, the most extreme being the Sheffield watermill mentioned above where, rather than buying the land, they had leased it for 21 years. At the end of this period, the landowner refused to extend the lease and he gained a very nice mill and the societies had nothing.

For 42 years the Mansfield Societies worked together, but in 1820 the mill was put up for sale, and the society disbanded. No reason is given for this decision, but I am assuming that the following had something to do with it.

- Increased competition – at the time of construction there was just one watermill and three windmills, by 1820 there was one watermill and twelve windmills, five of which were the larger tower mills. Whilst the population of Mansfield, over this period, may have risen by roughly 50%, flour production most likely rose over 500%. Just the increased competition between the commercial millers would reduce their prices and the Club's members wouldn't be getting the 20% advantage they got in the beginning.

- Steam – I don't know if it is a coincidence that the Club Mill closed, less than a year after the Pinxton to Mansfield Railway opened. The main purpose of the railway was to transport cheap coal from the Pinxton collieries to Mansfield. Mills that had been adapted by having a flywheel attached to the mill could hook up to a traction engine and could process flour even when there was no wind. Later, permanent engine houses were built next to the mills and usually when costly repairs were required to the sails, the mill switched over to steam only.


- Supply of Corn – the later years of the 1810s were a period of bad harvests caused by volcanic eruptions, known as “The Year Without Summer”. There is a history of grain suppliers favouring commercial mills over cooperatives, possibly because they were willing to pay higher prices.

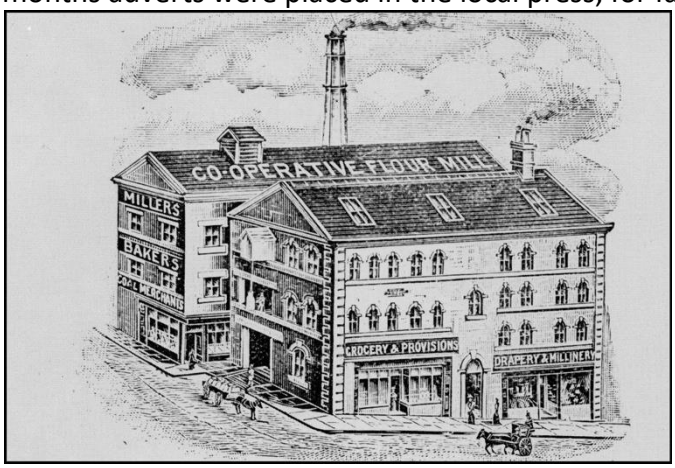
The answer is probably a combination of the above. The mill was sold to a Mr Goodlad, who leased out the mill for a few years before selling it to Humphrey Walliss who successfully ran the mill himself until his death in the 1850’s

**The Co-operative Mill**

Forty-two years after the Sick Clubs disbanded, the Mansfield Co-operative Society was formed and originally they purchased their flour from Newark, but unlike the Club Mill, there was a lot of opposition from the local millers and flour dealers, they physically stopped the flour arriving in Mansfield. The Co-op decided that they should produce their own flour, I don’t know why this would have produced less opposition than purchasing the flour from Newark.

The society in the opening years, had gone from strength to strength, they opened their first store on Leeming Street but quickly outgrew it and so they opened a second store on Stockwell Gate. Shortly after this they decided it would be more efficient to buy some land and build a large store on Queen Street to replace the two small shops, also to build a modern flour mill behind the new store, powered totally by steam, and rather than the usual mill stones it would use rollers. Since this would take around 4 years to build, as a stop-gap they rented a tower mill, known as Rock Mill that had been abandoned and was only 250 metres away from the site of the Club Mill. The Co-op purchased a steam traction engine, so the mill could run without wind. Considering the mill had been abandoned some years earlier, I wonder about the condition of the sails etc. knowing that this was a short-term undertaking and therefore neither the owner, or the Co-op would be willing to undertake major repairs, that the steam engine was the only source of power. The photo is from about 30 years after the Co-op used it.

In 1872 the new mill was ready and ran well for 10 years until December 1882 when a fire broke out destroying most of the building, it took a year for it to be operational again, and within a few months adverts were placed in the local press, for farmers to sell them their corn, as they were now operating 24 hours a day.




In the 1920’s a decision was made to close the mill and purchase flour from the CWS, because of the economy of scale, provided by their massive mills. The Mansfield mill and store was knocked down and a new larger store was constructed and opened in 1927.

# Future Meetings

## Saturday 21st March 2026, 2.00 p.m.
## A talk by Dolores Long
### The St. Thomas Centre Hall, Chatsworth Road, Chesterfield. S40 3AW

When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, men and women, realising that democracy was at stake and fascism was on the rise, left their country and families to support the Republican Government. Dolores Long is the daughter of Sam Wild, one of the men and women from the north who volunteered to join the International Brigades in Spain.

## Tuesday 23rd June 2026, 7.00 p.m.
## Five Leaves Bookshop
## 14a Long Row, Nottingham NG1 2DH

Professor Navickas's latest book is a gripping overview of increasingly restrictive policing and legislation against protest in public spaces. It tells the long history of contests over Trafalgar Square, Hyde Park, Cable Street and Kinder Scout, as well as sites in towns and rural areas across the country. Navickas reveals how protesters claimed these spaces as their own commons, resisting their continuing enclosure and exclusion by social and political elites. Contested Commons offers positive as well as troubling lessons on how we protect the right to protest.

**N.B. Booking is essential and must be done via the Five Leaves website.**

www.fiveleavesbookshop.co.uk

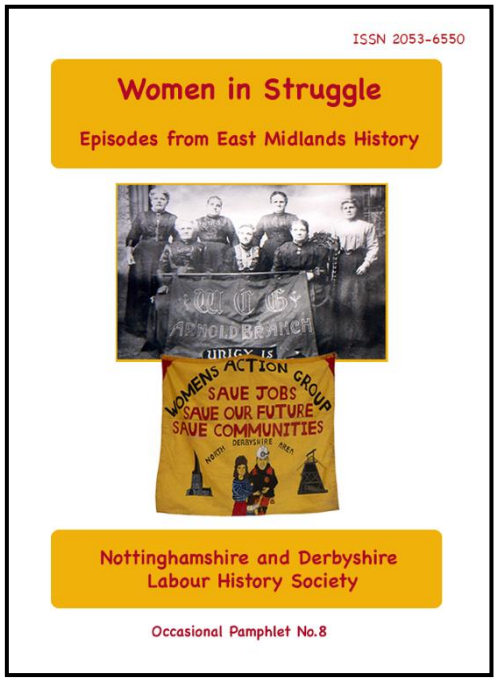
**Pamphlets published by NDLHS**

1. "Volunteers for Liberty: Notts and Derbys Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War", £2.00

2. “Who Dips in the Tin? The Butty System in Notts Coalfield”, Barry Johnson, £2.50
3. “Women in British Coal Mining”, Chris Wrigley, £2.00
4. “Bravery and Deception: The Pentrich Revolt of 1817”, Julian Atkinson, £2.00
5. “Luddism in the East Midlands”, J. Atkinson and R.Tanner, £3.00
6. “Florence Paton M.P.”, Val Wood, £2.50

“Chartism in Nottingham”, J. Atkinson and R. Tanner, £5.00

Our latest pamphlet is now out and can be bought at our meetings or by contacting Roger Tanner at:
rogerntanner@yahoo.co.uk




**NDLHS Members and Supporters books/pamphlets from other publishers:**

1. “Rebel's Way”, Gwyneth Francis, £5
2. “Glossop's Oldest Textile Trade Unionist”, Joe Doyle’s interview with Mr E Watts pub. ‘The Wheatsheaf’ Co-op paper, February 1926, £2
3. “The Co-operative Movement in Nottingham”, Christopher Richardson, £3
4. “Remembering the 1968 Revolts: Voices from Nottingham”, Various, £4.99
5. “Nine Days That Shook Mansfield”, Barry Johnson, £3
6. “Nottingham Miners Do Strike”, Keith Stanley, £7
7. “The Lost Missionary”, Chris Richardson, £2
8. “Nottingham and the Pentrich Rising of 1817”, Roger Tanner, £5
9. “Pentrich to Peterloo”, Ed. Richard Gaunt, £8
10. “Kettling the Unions”, Alan Tuckman, £14.99
11. “How Glossop Supported the Miners”, Gwyneth Francis, £3
12. “The Air of Freedom: the story of the striking boot and shoemakers in Eyam and Stoney Middleton 1918 – 1920” - Steve Bond and Philip Taylor £6
13. “The Derby Lock-out 1833-34 and the Origins of the Labour Movement”, Bill Whitehead, £1.00
14. “A Radical History of Heanor, Derbyshire 1800-1850” Paul Jones, £3.50 (or more as the proceeds from this sale are given to Heanor Food Bank, so please give generously.)

If you wish to buy one, please send the name or number of the pamphlet plus your name and postal address together with a cheque made out to NDLHS to: Roger Tanner, 35, Compton Road, Sherwood, Nottingham NG5 2NH

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