

Under one banner: The General Federation of Trade Unions c. 1899-1926

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Under One Banner: The General Federation of Trade Unions c.1899-1926

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of
Wolverhampton for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the early history of the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) from their creation in 1899 until the events surrounding the 1926 general strike. The GFTU were created by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to bring together all trade unions under one banner by acting as an arbitration committee for industrial disputes and administrators of a national strike fund. They quickly grew to be an autonomous organisation that worked alongside the TUC and the fledgling Labour Party, and briefly represented British trade unionists on the international stage. Despite this central role, and a peak membership of more than 1.5 million workers in the early 1920s, their contribution to the labour movement has been largely ignored in favour of the much larger TUC. The GFTU was perhaps marginalised due to being more of a committee than an organisation, and for its moderation in industrial politics.

Although the principal aim of this thesis is to shed light on an ignored institution, it also posits that an emotions history approach can offer a new lens with which to view organisations. It uses the extensive archival records of the GFTU – including their annual reports, management committee records, newspaper articles, special investigative reports, and council meeting minutes – to reveal a more complex reading of trade union politics and culture in the first three decades of the twentieth century, and highlights the use of emotions as a way in which a sense of community was formed. Although much of labour history has tended to focus on more industrially militant organisations and high profile strikes as a way of understanding the organised working class, considering the more conciliatory voices of trade union organisations such as the GFTU reveals a more nuanced picture of the history of British labour movement. This thesis uses a broad definition of emotions that includes culture and experience, and uses five emotions to uncover more about the people involved in the GFTU during this period: hope, friendship, patriotism, exclusion, and hostility. Using these feelings as a lens reveals much about how the GFTU constructed an idea of shared feelings and experiences that was intended as a way of growing and maintaining their membership levels and support of their policies.

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List of Abbreviations

GFTU	General Federation of Trade Unions
TUC	Trades Union Congress
WNC	War Emergency: Workers' National Committee
ASE	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
NAFTA	National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades' Association
ILP	Independent Labour Party
NIGFTLU	National and International General Federation of Trade and Labour Unions
SDF	Social Democratic Federation
GWGLU	Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union
NAUL	National Amalgamated Union of Labour
FSIF	Friendly Society of Ironfounders
NUBSO	National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives
MFGB	Miners' Federation of Great Britain

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As a part-time student, I lost most of my income during the pandemic and I was almost forced to withdraw as a postgraduate student. Through the generous support of the Women's History Network, the Social History Society, and the Royal Historical Society emergency grant schemes, I was able to find resources to help me home-school my children, pay for books that I needed for research, and to keep up with vital bills. At a time of acute hardship, I felt buoyed by the academic community, and was able to finish this thesis despite the difficulties presented by Covid-19. I am enormously grateful to all the anonymous panellists for their kindness.

I was lucky to have been able to complete my undergraduate degree as well as my PhD at the University of Wolverhampton. As such, I have been given endless advice,

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Dedication

A significant portion of this thesis was written under lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. Although I was acutely aware of the stress in finding a balance between home-schooling my children, teaching students, writing a thesis, earning a living, and keeping my family safe, I also found a new appreciation for the importance of this research. I was spending my days thinking about the workers in these pages – the dockers, the weavers, the gas workers, the boilermakers – and their fight for basic rights to safety, fair pay, and dignity at work, whilst our key workers – the nurses, the delivery drivers, the cleaners, the tube drivers - were working in dangerous conditions, often on horrendously low pay, to keep us all safe. The world of work may have gone through significant changes over the last one hundred years, but there is still devastating continuity in low pay, precarity and under-appreciation. Despite the gratitude and support that characterised the early days of the pandemic, the swiftness with which our lowest-paid but most-valued workers have been denied fairer conditions brings the need for collective action into ever sharper relief.

Telling the stories of working-class people and their working environments has never been more important, as is showing the imperative of fighting for and maintaining work-based rights for greater safety, security, and fairness for all.

This thesis is dedicated to all the key workers of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Introduction

'In trades federation there is the possibility of co-operation being taken advantage of in some organised way that will bring us in closer touch and unity with one another'¹

- James O'Grady, 1898

This thesis examines the early years of the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU), from their inception in 1899 until the general strike of 1926. Founded by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to act as administrators of a centralised strike fund and as an arbitration committee to intervene during industrial disputes, the GFTU enjoyed a position of national authority alongside the TUC and the fledgling Labour Party as part of the Joint Board until the first world war. The Joint Board was created in 1908 so that the three national bodies could decide on all matters regarding the labour movement as one collective voice. Their membership reached a peak of 1.5 million workers in 1921, and yet little attention has been given to understanding the GFTU's central role in the labour movement of the Edwardian period. This is likely due to their loss of national influence in the 1920s, but also their aversion to industrial militancy and socialism; labour historiography has tended to avoid the more conciliatory organisations in the movement, in favour of giving attention to high profile strikes and charismatically radical leaders. Whenever histories have been written about more moderate organisations, they have tended to be top-down organisational histories that have done little to uncover much about their trade union culture; similarly, whenever biographies of notable labour leaders have been written, their relationship with the GFTU has been frequently neglected or dispensed with in a couple of sentences.²

Although there is an extensive body of research dedicated to the labour movement's history, the only full volume account of the GFTU is *The History of the General*

¹ TUC Annual Report, 1898, www.unionhistory.info, accessed 22 April 2019.

² For an indicative example see, Sir William Richardson, *A Union of Many Trades: The History of USDAW* (Manchester: USDAW, 1979); The most notable example is that of Ben Tillett, whose biographer Jonathan Schneer wrote a comprehensive history of Tillett without mentioning the GFTU. As this thesis will show, Tillett was a long-term member of the management committee and integral to the organisation of the GFTU.

Federation of Trade Unions: 1899-1980 by Alice Prochaska published in 1982.³ This book is a traditional institutional history that offers a broad overview of this organisation's activities during the twentieth century. However, because of its ambitious chronological scope of more than eighty years, it lacks the depth and nuance required to fully explore the contributions that the GFTU made to the labour movement in the years covered by this thesis. In standard histories of British trade unions, the GFTU is barely mentioned.⁴ This thesis makes its central contribution to labour history by building on the work of Prochaska and creating a foundation for further studies of the organisation and its impact on the shifting politics and priorities of trade unions in early 20th century Britain.

The thesis focuses on assessing the GFTU's early history, from its inception in 1899 until their decisive change in direction after the general strike in 1926. It provides an in-depth insight into the GFTU's role in these dynamic years of profound industrial changes that re-shaped the British political and social landscape. In the aftermath of May 1926, many of the GFTU's largest remaining affiliates seceded.⁵ Although for some their secessions were a result of financial strain on the individual trade unions brought on by declining membership; for other unions, it was the GFTU's reluctance to support sympathy strikes, and the specific lack of support for the TUC's general strike. Regardless, the GFTU chose to focus instead on specialising in representation of smaller unions that had often been overshadowed by larger affiliates of the TUC. The affiliates of the GFTU tended to be small and craft-based, such as unions that organised in the textile and pottery industries. During the 1930s, the GFTU began to use its influence to push for increased safety measures in the

³ Alice Prochaska, *History of the General Federation of Trade Unions* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982).

⁴ Some examples of these standard trade union histories include: Hugh Armstrong Clegg, Alan Fox and Arthur Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889*, Volumes I – III (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964, 1986, 1994); Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963); John Lovell, *British Trade Unions 1875-1933* (London: Macmillan, 1977) Keith Laybourn, *History of British Trade Unionism c. 1770-1990*, (Stroud: Sutton, 1997); Chris Wrigley (ed) *A History of British Industrial Relations 1875-1914* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982); Alistair Reid, *United We Stand: A History of Britain's Trade Unions* (London: Penguin, 2005).

⁵ These included the Tailors' and Garment Workers' Trade Union, Shipconstructors and Shipwrights' Association, the Boilermakers' Union, the Stevedores and the London Society of Compositors (even though the Compositors had refused to support the general strike). There had also been notable secessions, such as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, following the tumult of the Great Unrest in which the GFTU struggled to financially support all claims for benefit.

industries of its affiliates, to campaign for fairer unemployment insurance, and to champion the cause of adult education.

Despite the concept of federation beginning with more socialist ideas of centralising financial reserves, simplifying bureaucratic organisational structures, and tempering the power of individual leaders in order to consolidate power within trade unions, the GFTU never realised the national membership that had been envisioned for it in the late 1890s. The GFTU itself quickly became a more moderate organisation that vocally and decisively eschewed socialist politics. A detailed examination into how and why this happened can shed much-needed light on the complexity of the labour movement and its cultural politics in this period. In order to examine this ideological transition, the thesis examines the GFTU's actions, statements and publications within the wider context of key events in early twentieth century Britain. Doing so through the lens of emotions puts the focus on the role of individual personalities and relationships within the GFTU. This is particularly useful when dealing with an organisation that was ruled by committee, and largely by its general secretary, because personal ideas, animosities, friendships and beliefs all play a crucial part in understanding the GFTU's organisational culture.

As the political landscape changed in Britain, so too did the fortunes of the GFTU, and they were increasingly marginalised by larger, more industrially active trade union organisations such as a Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB), an increasingly powerful TUC, and the growing electoral success of the Labour Party. After the first world war, the GFTU began to fade into a less influential role in national trade unionism, and the leadership of the GFTU became vocal opponents of the growing power of the Labour Party. The scope of this thesis ends at the transitional point of the 1926 general strike, in which the GFTU's last vestiges of national influence quickly disintegrated.

How the GFTU – which was created on such a strong wave of hope for unity and solidarity between trade unions – became a labour movement pariah in just twenty-seven years will be explored through their use of emotions in their reports, articles, minutes, and pamphlets. Each chapter carefully considers their use of these particular emotions and feelings: hope, friendship, patriotism, hostility and exclusion. Through highlighting the ways in which those emotions were portrayed and utilised

by the GFTU to construct shared feelings of kinship for their members, as well as focusing on the events that the GFTU were involved with, I explore the way the GFTU developed their rules around strike benefit and arbitration methods in the context of trying to establish themselves as a national organisation; the role of friendship in the construction of a trade union, and how the organisation's records can be mined for evidence of these emotional connections; how the GFTU navigated the First World War and the notable contribution they made to ensuring servicemen were paid adequately; the ways in which certain people were excluded from the GFTU either overtly or more subtly; and finally, how the GFTU – and more specifically the general secretary at the time – ultimately found themselves disconnected from the wider labour movement.

In the following sections of this introduction, I critically review the shifting trends in the writing of labour history. I then survey the historiography of emotions and how academic engagement with emotions has become a crucial tool for understanding the past. A summary of the methodology, sources, and structure of the thesis is then followed by the five substantive chapters and conclusion.

Labour Histories

The origins of labour history began with a focus on trade unionism and organised groups of working people, with particular attention having been paid to the causes and effects of periods of industrial unrest that shaped the lives of working-class people. Initially, histories of the labour movement were almost synonymous with the history of the working class, as if progressive politics and industrial militancy informed and shaped the daily lives of a seemingly homogenously constructed 'typical worker' in a steady upwards trend of social improvement and increasing political agency. As the twentieth century progressed, the historiography became more critical and reflective, and revealed clear divisions between politics and everyday life. The consequent flourishing of scholarship in the post-war period that embraced the nuances of class, race, gender, politics and industrial relations, closely mirrored contemporary changes in both working class culture and the changing fortunes of the Labour Party. What follows is a brief summary of these key changes in historical understandings of the labour movement and industrial relations in twentieth century Britain.

The pioneer chroniclers of trade unionism and working-class history and politics were husband and wife team Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb.¹ Their extensive writings that covered social and industrial changes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century formed the bedrock of labour history.² Their focus on industrial relations meant that they were the propagators of terms such as 'collective bargaining' that have become integral parts of working life and trade unionism ever since.³ As middle-class socialists and members of the Fabian Society, they provided

¹ For biographical information on Sidney and Beatrice Webb, see their entries in the *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol II*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977) pp. 377-98.

² For key co-written works, see Sidney Webb and Beatrice, *History of Trade Unionism*, 2nd Edition (London: Longmans Green and Co, 1920); Sidney Webb and Beatrice, *Industrial Democracy, with a new introduction* (London: Longmans Green and Co, 1920); Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *The Consumers' Co-Operative Movement* (London: Longmans). Select works on industrial and social issues by Beatrice Webb, see Beatrice Webb, *The wages of men and women: should they be equal?* (London: The Fabian Society and George Allen and Unwin, 1919); Beatrice Webb, *The Co-Operative Movement in Great Britain* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1920); Beatrice Webb, *Women and the Factory Acts*, Fabian Tract no. 67, (London: Fabian Society, 1896); Beatrice Webb, *The Abolition of the Poor Law*, Fabian Tract no. 185, (London, Fabian Society, 1918). For autobiographical information, see Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship* (London: Longmans, 1946).

³ Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *Industrial Democracy, with a new introduction* (London: Longmans Green and Co, 1920) p. 175.

valuable insights into everyday conditions of workplaces and inherent problems with existing social relief measures, filtered through the lens of a pragmatic vision for the betterment of working-class people. Beatrice Webb in particular campaigned passionately for welfare measures that would remedy structural causes of poverty, helping to produce the famous Minority Report after her involvement with the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress from 1905-1909.⁴ Being so embedded in the labour movement, and invested in its success, the Webbs' style of history was often celebratory about the impact that trade unions, co-operatives and the Labour Party had on historical developments, and certainly held that there was a clear 'forward march' from the earlier radicalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that led directly to the establishment of craft and trade unions.⁵ They were joined by fellow Fabians such as G. D. H. Cole, who focused much more closely on explaining the various currents of trade unionism that had grown out of the early radicalism found in the Chartist movement.⁶

The assumption that workers' groups had walked a linear path from early, rudimentary guilds and friendly societies that inevitably ended up as more functional and focused organisations was largely maintained as the twentieth century progressed, with historians such as Henry Pelling continuing to weave the emergence of the Labour Party in the late 1890s and the rise in trade union influence together.⁷ This whiggish view of labour history was further maintained by historians writing in the Attlee government of 1945-51 as a symbolic moment in the forward march of the working class; the huge mandate given to a Labour government on the heels of two traumatic wars and an economic depression in the first half of the twentieth century seemed to be a decisive acknowledgement of the need and desire

⁴ Beatrice Webb, Henry Wakefield, George Lansbury and Francis Chandler, *The Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission* (London: National Committee to Promote the Break-up of the Poor Law, 1909).

⁵ Mike Savage and Andrew Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class* (London: Routledge, 1994) p. 1.

⁶ Selected works by G. D. H. Cole include *The World of Labour* (London: Routledge, 1913); *Labour in War Time* (London: G. Bell and sons Ltd, 1915); *An Introduction to Trade Unionism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1918); *Guild Socialism Restated* (London: Routledge, 1920) *Workshop Organisation* (London: Routledge, 1923); *The Fabian Society, Past and Present* (London: The Fabian Society, 1942); *A Short History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1948). For bibliographical information on G. D. H. Cole, see Howard Coster Maker, "George Douglas Howard Cole", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32486>.

⁷ Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963).

for a socialist government. At this time, the majority of the British workforce were manual workers, with a deep-seated connection between working life and trade unionism developing alongside the progressive expansion of social welfare provision and nationalisation programmes introduced by the Labour Party in 1945-1951.⁸ This was reflected in works that traced and celebrated the emergence of peasants' movements, guild societies, trade unions and the Labour Party, whilst quietly ignoring the existence of any organisations that did not fit this neat model of evolutionary progressive advances.⁹ This was problematic, because some workers still aligned with or voted for the Conservative Party, whilst many remained outside of trade unions altogether. The plethora of institutional studies of trade unions and labour leaders became formulaic, hagiographical, and tended to exclude voices, currents, and politics that did not fit the rather narrow framework of working class history that had been established by the Webbs.

This soon began to change. A far more critical labour historiography of trade unions and the Labour Party was considerably influenced by Marxist historians, particularly those who formed the Communist Party Historians Group (CPHG) from 1946-1956 such as Eric Hobsbawm, John Saville and E. P. Thompson.¹⁰ During the 1950s and 1960s, coinciding with a voting shift back towards the Conservative Party in 1951, historians began to look for other sources of working-class experience that did not necessarily fit the 'forward march of labour' template. Others on the socialist left began to critically reflect on the limitations of the Labour Party and the moderation of the major trade unions. Organisational histories such as Albert Musson's *The Typographical Association* were still dominant, but they tended to be more nuanced accounts that encouraged critique rather than simply charting successes.¹¹ Despite the fundamental social, political and industrial changes that were still relatively young in Britain in the mid-twentieth century, this was still a time in which the study of labour and the working class had to fight for recognition as a worthwhile and

⁸ Savage and Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class*, p. 2.

⁹ Henry Pelling, *Origins of the Labour Party* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); Frank Bealey and Henry Pelling, *Labour and Politics, 1900-1906: A History of the Labour Representation Committee* (London: Praeger, 1958); Asa Briggs and John Saville eds. *Essays in Labour History Vol I* (London: Macmillan, 1967).

¹⁰ Theodore Koditschek, Review of 'How To Change The World: Reflections on Marx and Marxism. By Eric Hobsbawm. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011) *History and Theory* 52 (2013) pp. 433-450.

¹¹ Albert Edward Musson, *The Typographical Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954).

scholarly topic of research. In the 1960s history departments still tended to focus on high politics and economics, but the study of labour history was beginning to get more of a foothold due to the expansion of higher education.

Along with E. Thompson, another historian that worked towards establishing the legitimacy of labour as a worthwhile area of history is Eric Hobsbawm.¹² As a member of the Communist Party, Hobsbawm was fundamentally dismissive of the perceived importance of the Labour Party as a key definer of working-class history; instead, Hobsbawm offered substantial critiques that portrayed the Labour Party as reformist, conciliatory and a general hindrance to what he perceived as the original radicalism of the working class.¹³ Through his critique, interest in labour history – and what labour history actually *was* – became broader, less intrinsically triumphal, and open to organisations hitherto outside the mainstream Labour Party and trade unions. Hobsbawm's preoccupation was in explaining the gap between the growth of industrialism from the end of the eighteenth century, and the emergence of tangible workers' organisations in the late eighteenth century. Firstly, he argued that it took time for workers to assert their rights to economic prosperity. Secondly, and far more influentially, he borrowed the concept of a 'labour aristocracy' from Vladimir Lenin and Friedrich Engels.¹⁴ He maintained that a 'worker elite', those with superior earnings and a better quality of life than the vast majority of the working class, were instrumental in shoring up the capitalist forces that kept the masses subjugated, but that they then became incentivised to act against the capitalist class once they themselves began to lose their economic privileges in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Once the middle of the century had passed, some socialists that were disillusioned with the reforms of the 1945-51 Labour Government began to reflect on the impact that the labour movement had made in working-class communities. A hugely important book was *Coal Is Our Life*, a study by Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter first published in 1956 concerned with mining communities' experiences post-nationalisation, which showed that despite the

¹² For biographical information see Martin Jacques, "Eric John Ernest Hobsbawm", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/105680>.

¹³ Eric Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men* (London: Weidenfeld, 1964) pp. 371-87.

¹⁴ John Foster, 'Eric Hobsbawm, Marxism and social history', *Social History* 39, 2 (2014) pp. 160-71.

triumph of the Attlee's governmental reforms and nationalisation programmes, there had been little change to everyday life in mining communities.¹⁵ Wracked with pessimism and lacking a sense of power within the wider social structure of Britain, the miners themselves expressed a surprising lack of radicalism despite their obvious understanding of the inequality that they still faced in the workplace and as a community. This was a serious critique of the limitations of the politics of the Labour Party. Other studies, such as Michael Young and Peter Willmott's 1957 investigation into the tight-knit community in Bethnal Green and Debden, moved away from relying on statistical evidence as a sole indicator informer of social conditions.¹⁶ Instead, Young and Willmott used social observation to explain that the political side of the Labour movement had failed to fully appreciate the dense bonds of neighbourly kinship found in working class communities.¹⁷ This reinforced the idea that class could not be solely explained through politics. Perhaps, as argued by Abel-Smith and Townsend in 1965, the persistent poverty that had not been remedied by the Attlee government exposed the limitations of Labour's programme for total reform.¹⁸ These sociological studies influenced a new generation of labour historians who were developing their research projects in a context where new social movements were emerging to develop new forms of political radicalism. The 1960s was a key decade for new directions in labour history and grass-roots movements, such as feminist groups, gay rights activists, anti-racist organisations that were yet to find a space in studies of the working class.¹⁹

The 'New Left' historians and sociologists of the 1960s built both on Hobsbawm's arguments and the claims of those underrepresented groups by explaining the lack of socialism in the labour movement as being the fault of the leadership of the major trade unions and the moderation of the Labour Party. According to Ralph Miliband, any radical changes that the workers had wanted were stamped out by the more

¹⁵ Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter, *Coal Is Our Life*, 2nd Edition (London: Tavistock Publications, 1969).

¹⁶ Michael Young, and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*, 2nd Edition (London: Pelican, 1968).

¹⁷ Jon Lawrence, 'Inventing the 'Traditional Working Class': A Re-Analysis of Interview Notes from Young and Willmott's Family and Kindship in East London', *The Historical Journal*, 59, 2 (2016): 567-593.

¹⁸ Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend, *The Poor and the Poorest: a new analysis of the Ministry of Labour's family expenditure surveys of 1953-54 and 1960* (London: Bell, 1965).

¹⁹ Savage and Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class*, p. 5.

reformist and generally middle-class leadership that rejected working-class anger and indignation.²⁰ It was in this context that E. P. Thompson published the hugely influential *The Making of the English Working Class*.²¹ He found working-class radicalism in communities, culture and society as opposed to bureaucratic organisations.²² Thompson was attacked by theorists such as Perry Anderson who, writing in the *New Left Review*, argued that the British working class were particularly unrevolutionary, and that a scattering of revolts did not a revolutionary intention make.²³ However, Thompson's work remained crucial in bringing labour history into the much wider sphere of social history. The key question for many interested in the labour movement's history then became: 'what happened to the radical working class in the years after 1850 which made it into the reformist working class evident in the years after 1945?'²⁴ Thompson's 1965 essay *The Peculiarities of the English* was an attempt to both answer this question and respond to critics such as Anderson.²⁵ He acknowledged that the defeat of Chartism marked the end of the working class's attempts to subvert capitalism, and stressed the important change in tactics displayed by the working class from aiming for a complete societal transformation (revolution) to simply making a rightful place within it for themselves (gradual, progressive change).

The following decades also saw further scrutiny of Hobsbawm's ideas of a labour aristocracy. Although local studies by John Foster, Geoffrey Crossick and Robert Gray indicated that there was evidence to suggest that an elite-class of workers with highly trained skillsets did exist within working class communities, and did indeed use ideas of respectability in order to quell notions of radical organising, the idea that this would have a prevailing effect on semi- and unskilled workers, especially

²⁰ Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: a study in the politics of labour*, 2nd Edition (London: Merlin Press, 1972).

²¹ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 5th Edition (London: Penguin, 1991).

²² For further information on the Chartist movement of the early nineteenth century, see Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: a new history*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Edward Royle, *Chartism*, 3rd Edition (Oxon: Routledge, 1996); David Goodway, *London Chartism: 1838 – 1848*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982); Dorothy Thompson (ed), *The Early Chartists*, (London: Macmillan, 1971).

²³ Perry Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *New Left Review* 1, 23 (1964) n.p.

²⁴ Savage and Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class*, p. 7.

²⁵ E. P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English', in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds), *Socialist Register 1965* (London: Merlin, 1965) pp. 311-362.

considering the wide variety of trades in question, was put into considerable doubt by historians such as Alistair Reid and H. F. Moorhouse.²⁶

These attempts to pinpoint radicalism or deference, politicisation or acquiescence in the labour movement or the working class were appearing against the backdrop of 1970s industrial unrest. As seismic events such as the 1972 miners' strike and the 1978-9 Winter of Discontent dominated headlines, political economists such as Harry Braverman sought another explanation for the lack of overtly revolutionary behaviour. His work, *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, argued that the direction of capitalism moved ownership of skills acquisition and retention away from workers, by reconfiguring working methods alongside technological advancements.²⁷ Gareth Stedman Jones developed his work along similar lines, and argued that workers losing their 'formal' control over their skills and control of craft also led to their loss of workplace traditions, which included their ideas of radicalism.²⁸ Patrick Joyce agreed, pointing out that previously highly-skilled cotton workers in Lancashire became more dependent on employers with the advent of new machinery, and that the subsequent lack of radicalism was tied to shifts in the employer/worker balance in the labour process.²⁹

Although the ideas regarding skills and radicalism engendered new interest in the history of industrial relations, the timeline of these ideas posited by Stedman Jones and Joyce was disputed. Richard Price pointed to the 'Great Depression' in 1873 as the turning point for the increase profitability-seeking that acted as a driving force behind this apparent attack on the highly-skilled element of the working class.³⁰

²⁶ John Foster, *Class Struggle in the Industrial Revolution*, (London: Methuen, 1974); Geoffrey Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society*, (London: Croom Helm, 1979); Robert Gray, *The Labour Aristocracy in Mid-Victorian Edinburgh*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976); Alistair Reid, 'Politics and Economics in the Formation of the British Working Class: A Response to H. F. Moorhouse', *Social History* 3, 3 (1978) pp. 347-362; H. F. Moorhouse, 'The Marxist Theory of the Labour Aristocracy', *Social History* 3, 1 (1978) pp. 61-82.

²⁷ Harry Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, (London: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

²⁸ Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution', *New Left Review*, 90 (1975) pp. 35-69.

²⁹ Patrick Joyce, 'The factory politics of Lancashire in the later nineteenth century', *Historical Journal* 18, 3 (1975) pp. 525-555.

³⁰ Richard Price, *Master, Unions and Men: Work Control in Building and the Rise of Labour 1830-1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). In fact, Stedman Jones' thoughts on the subject of control over labour led to much debate. For further information see Jonathon Zeitlin, 'Craft Control and the Division of Labour: Engineers and Compositors in Britain 1880-1930', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 3 (1979) pp. 263-274; Robert Gray, *The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth*

Placing the resurgence of radicalism within the skilled workforce in the 1870s would help to explain the increase in collective action between the un-, semi- and highly-skilled workforce that led to the expansion of 'new model' unionism, characterised by the Webbs as being amalgamation- and craft-focused, into 'new' unionism, indicating the cohesion of skilled and un-skilled workers into the same unions.³¹

Debates within labour history continued into the 1980s yet by the end of the decade the discipline was in crisis.³² Set against the backdrop of Thatcherism, the defeat of the 1984/5 miners' strike and the widespread cultural demonisation of trade unions, labour historiography took a more pessimistic turn. James Hinton exemplified this gloomy outlook as he lamented that what 'we had thought of as the 'labour movement' has itself entered terminal crisis' by the early 1980s.³³ Up to this point, even if they criticised the overall effectiveness or progressiveness of the labour movement, historians tended not to doubt its considerable impact on British history.³⁴ Regardless of support or criticism, it had generally been assumed that the labour movement was at least in some way representative of the working class. Now faced with a strong Conservative government making such sweeping changes to industrial communities, and a powerless Labour opposition that had lost so many working-class votes, it seemed odd to think that the trade unions had ever been the main site of political aspirations of the working class. There had also been marked changes in the world of work, with industries with formally strong working-occupational identities and political affiliation to the Labour Party undergoing significant downsizing and cultural shifts. The fragmentation of these communities, and the decline in the number of manual workers, was explained as the working class dividing into subgroups, with increasing polarisation between affluent white-collar workers and the permanently unemployed.³⁵ The defeat of the 1984/5 miners' strike has been widely seen as perhaps the final thwarting of organised working-class activism, leaving

Century Britain, (London, Macmillan, 1981); Neville Kirk, *The Growth of Working Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England*, (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

³¹ Laybourn, *History of British Trade Unionism*.

³² For example see Alistair Reid, 'Politics and the Divisions of Labour 1880-1920', in Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Hans-Gerhard Husang (eds), *The Development of Trade Unionism in Great Britain and Germany*, (London: George Allen and Sons, 1985) pp. 150-66.

³³ James Hinton, *Labour and Socialism* (Brighton: Harvester, 1983) p. ix.

³⁴ Savage and Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class*, p. 11.

³⁵ Ray Pahl, *Divisions of Labour* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); Peter Saunders, *A Nation of Homeowners* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

scarred and divided communities that have had very little political or industrial agency ever since. The late 1980s saw the very concept of 'class' being called into question and completely re-evaluated. Barry Hindess in particular labelled class-analysis as reductionist, and pointed to the fallibility of assuming people identified in such a rigid manner without appreciating that they may well prefer to express their identities in other ways.³⁶

The wider literary or linguistic turn in labour historiography was also notable in the 1990s. There was now renewed doubt that it was even possible to locate the 'traditional working class', or indeed, to even define what was actually meant by the phrase.³⁷ Andrew Davies asserted that working class life was full of much more nuance and complexity than any focus on political/industrial activism could possibly show; by looking at different groups such as women and teenagers, and different sites of leisure activities, he presented a vivid picture of the variety of identity and expression in working class communities in the north of England.³⁸ Feminist historians also threw considerable doubt at the very meaning of 'working class community' by highlighting the overt and explicit ways in which men had worked to destabilise and subvert women's activism and agency.³⁹ There was also new insight into women's role in the home, the power they held in terms of family and kinship connections, and also their activism within the suffrage and even the earlier Chartist movement.⁴⁰

Historians that had seemed so sure about the pivotal role that industrial experience and working environments played to class identity now also began to adopt new lenses with which to examine working class history. Stedman Jones argued that

³⁶ Barry Hindess, *Politics and Class Analysis* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1987).

³⁷ Savage and Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class*, p. 13

³⁸ Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992).

³⁹ For selected feminist readings of labour history, see Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History* (London: Pluto Press, 1974); Cynthia Cockburn, *Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change* (London: Pluto, 1980); Sheila Lewenhak, *Women and Trade Unions: an Outline History of Women in the British Trade Union Movement* (London: Benn, 1977); Barbara Taylor, 'The Men are as Bad as their Masters...': Socialism, Feminism and Sexual Antagonism in the London Tailoring Trade in the 1830s', in Judith Newton, Mary Ryan and Judith Walkowitz (eds), *Sex and Class in Women's History* (London: Routledge, 1983) pp. 7-40.

⁴⁰ See for example Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place, An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1984); Carl Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 1988); Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us* (London: Virago, 1978); Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* (London: Temple Smith, 1984).

class could only be identified if it was clearly and articulately expressed in precise languages of class, which in many ways returned to the E. P Thompson's concept of class being something that people 'feel and articulate' through shared experiences.⁴¹ Patrick Joyce further emphasised the importance of language in identifying class, by showing that Lancashire workers did not make specific reference to themselves as working class, but did seem to express notions of populism, particularly in order to position 'the people' against the corruptions of the government and landed gentry.⁴² By the 1990s then, labour history had broadened significantly and no longer relied on the workplace to define the working class, and even opened up the question as to whether the working class existed as an identifiable group. The very significance of socialism in the history of the labour movement was again called into question in this period. Ross McKibbin pointed out that the Labour Party was a statistical anomaly: despite their swift entrance onto the political scene in the early part of the twentieth century, it was still the Conservatives who held most sway over the whole century.⁴³

Although the move away from 'class' as an explain-all term was promoted by historians such as Patrick Joyce and later James Vernon, Mike Savage and Andrew Miles suggested that this was underpinned by a form of linguistic determinism:

Stedman Jones and Joyce do not deny the existence of class, but are prepared only to admit very special languages as languages of class. Only if people use a language which explicitly refers to economic exploitation between classes do the authors allow that they might have stumbled across class. But this is unduly restrictive. There are many sentiments and values which may express feelings relation to the existence of class divisions in an indirect or oblique way.⁴⁴

They go on to argue that the singling out of language, and its effectual decontextualisation borne out of a denial of the class-based social structures the language was expressed in, ultimately removes a much larger scope for

⁴¹ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 5th Edition (London: Penguin, 1991) p. 8.

⁴² Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁴³ Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990). See also John Benson, *The Working Class in England 1870 – 1939* (London: Longman, 1989).

⁴⁴ Savage and Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class*, p. 17.

understanding meaning and expression. Language itself, although important, cannot be the only way in which class, or any kind of identity, is expressed, and it cannot be understood outside of particular social and cultural contexts. Savage and Miles called for a continuation of the Thompsonian tradition of 'feeling and articulating class', with a wider appreciation for the importance of cultural and social contexts. It is within this framework that I argue for further emphasis on feelings as a way of understanding the culture and politics of the British trade union movement through this study of the GFTU.

This thesis revisits the feelings and experiences of the organised working class, not to identify trade unions as synonymous with all working class people, but to identify trade unions as a specific and particular form of working class expression. Perhaps regarded as old-fashioned - indeed, as shown in this literature review, trade union records have been gathering historiographical dust for quite some time – workers' societies and organisations can now offer new insights if viewed with a fresh methodological lens. Highlighting how emotions were framed, expressed and valued can both illuminate areas of labour history that have so far lacked attention, and also revisit old sources with new interpretations. Although there has been a lack of engagement with emotions and feelings in labour history, that is not the case for the wider study of history. The following section offers a brief outline of steps already taken in the field of emotions history in order to place how labour historians can begin to use this new perspective.

Emotions in History

Scholars of emotion are interested in the feelings and impulses that drove the actions of individuals throughout history, rather than actions themselves. Did anger or resentment at the enemy play a part in the actions of Second World War soldiers? When did people begin to expect love rather than affectionate companionship in a marriage? Did early Victorians expect childhood to be happy? Such questions help to inform understanding of experiences as well as actions. In an overview of the historiography of emotions, Rob Boddice has pointed to the vast potential of older

sources being re-examined for their emotional content and importance.⁴⁵ This can be done through new analysis of emotional language and expression found in a variety of documents, from criminal proceedings, newspaper reports, diaries, letters and, indeed, trade union minutes and reports. This thesis focuses on the use of emotional language in minutes, pamphlets, and reports, and applies new concepts from this field, especially regarding the idea of collective feelings, to answer questions about the motivations and aspirations of those involved with the GFTU. In order to do this, I will firstly outline the pathways of these new concepts, and the ways in which different schools of thought are able to inform and inspire new conceptualisations of labour history.

Lucien Febvre, widely considered the father of emotions history, wrote that historians should 'establish a detailed inventory of the mental equipment of the men of the time' with a view to understanding the 'moral universe of each preceding generation'.⁴⁶ His desire to understand the mental underpinnings of actions and expressions formed the basis of the influential *Annales School*, to which other notable historians such as Marc Bloch belonged.⁴⁷ Febvre was interested in the effect of society and culture on individual emotions and expressions, but he knew that understanding feelings that had long since passed would be a mammoth task for historians.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the *Annales School* pioneered the study of everyday life, and private lives, of the lower classes, which transformed the methods of historical research. Although a focus on everyday lives took hold much earlier in historical research methods, the 'emotional turn' did not fully come about until the 1980s.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2017).

⁴⁶ Lucien Febvre, 'History and Psychology', in *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Febvre*, (ed) Peter Burke, trans K. Folca, (New York: Harper and Row, 1973) pp. 5-9.

⁴⁷ Marc Bloch's ideas on the value of emotion in history have also been highly influential. See in particular Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans Peter Putnam (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

⁴⁸ Susan Matt, 'Recovering the Invisible: Methods for the historical study of the emotions' in (eds) Susan Matt and Peter Stearns, *Doing Emotions History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014) p. 41.

⁴⁹ For detailed accounts of the wide range of emotions and historiography, and for further methodological insight into using emotions as a historical lens, see 'Historians and emotions' in Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2017) pp. 8-41; Peter Stearns, 'Modern Patterns in Emotions History', in Peter Stearns and Susan Matt (eds) *Doing Emotions History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014) pp. 17-41; Joanna Bourke, 'Fear and anxiety: Writing about emotion in modern history', *History Workshop Journal*, 55 (2003) pp. 111-133; Jane Davidson and Susan Broomhall (eds), *A Cultural History of Emotions*, 6 vols (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Thomas Dixon, 'Emotion: The History of a Keyword in Crisis', *Emotion Review*, 4 (2012) pp. 338-44; Helena Flam and Jochen Kleres (eds), *Methods of Exploring Emotions* (Abingdon: Routledge,

A number of studies focusing on emotions proved particularly influential. Carol and Peter Stearns' study of the emotional codes of conduct in American society illustrated the existence of social rules on the expression of feelings was the first to place emotions as a central methodology of historical research.⁵⁰ This was an important demarcation between the search for emotions themselves, and the idea that different societies, cultures, institutions or groups developed 'rules' for acceptable emotional conduct. Anger, aggression or fury may have been acceptable, and indeed encouraged or prized, during an early nineteenth century bare knuckle boxing match, but those expressions would have been entirely unwelcome at a middle-class tea party. To describe this idea, they coined the term 'emotionology' to describe 'the collective emotional standards of a society from the emotional experiences of individuals and groups'.⁵¹ The key aspect of emotionology is that it changed over time, revealing how different emotions were valued or came to be valued through social expectations and unwritten but widely understood rules. Through analysing advice literature, popular fiction and diaries, Carol and Peter Stearns concluded that during the past two centuries, Americans had gradually and systematically attempted to restrain and control anger in both the workplace and in the home.⁵² Anger, they argued, was freely expressed and acknowledged in the home and in wider society during colonial America, and that anger even had a specific usefulness in terms of keeping order and control. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, anger became something that ought to be tackled and curtailed, particularly in home environments, with expert opinions on child-rearing and marriage advising that anger was often detrimental to relationships, and that self-control and restraint were key. The nineteenth century brought further emphasis on channelling anger, rather than suppressing it, particularly for boys who could and should engage in physical activities that gave them appropriate outlets for their feelings. The feeling of anger then, had a changing history of acceptability, at least according to the narrow lens of etiquette manuals.⁵³ This could have profound

2015); Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History: Lost and Found* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011).

⁵⁰ Stearns and Stearns, *Anger*.

⁵¹ Stearns and Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying', pp. 813.

⁵² Stearns and Stearns, *Anger*.

⁵³ The Stearns are clear that the advice given in etiquette manuals did not automatically reflect widely held beliefs. This was, in effect, a crucial point about the definition of 'emotionology' rather than emotions: The existence of these etiquette manuals, and their changing ideas on the acceptability of certain emotions, indicates a social instruction and/or social prescription for how to manage emotions.

implications for how we can further understand the anger and indignation that fuelled popular uprisings, the construction of trade unions and the decision to strike.

A key problem of this approach to the 'rules' of emotions, was that historians could not use it to describe the emotions themselves. This limitation was readily acknowledged by the Stearns: 'Clearly, a history of the perception of tantrums, though significant, is not likely to be identical to that of [actual] childish behaviour'.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the idea of emotional conventions and standards still had enormous potential for historians, and so the field grew to include studies of friendship, family, love and grief.⁵⁵ There was also recognition and insight into 'emotional labour', a term first coined by Arlie Hochschild in the early 1980s to describe the regulation and management of emotions depending on the requirements of a person's job.⁵⁶ How emotions are expressed or constrained, and how they are perceived tell us much about the social, political and cultural environment of those doing the expressing or the perceiving. In short, individual emotions themselves have a history that can be explored, whilst historians can also use emotions to find out more about the past, in what are essentially two distinct approaches.

The second influential insight into emotions history methodology came from anthropologist William Reddy. Whilst looking at the emotional impetus behind the French revolution, he designed a framework that attempted to describe the relationship between power and collective feeling. Reddy argued that political structures act as 'emotional regimes' that regulate the acceptability of emotional

Not necessarily that everyone believed this, but that there was enough social pressure to behave in a certain way that it can be seen as important to that society as a whole.

⁵⁴ Stearns and Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying', pp. 828.

⁵⁵ For examples of scholarship on specific emotions, see Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2006) Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Tiffany Watt Smith, *The Book of Human Emotions: An Encyclopaedia of Feeling from Anger to Wanderlust* (London: Wellcome Collection, 2016); Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Barbara Rosenwein, *Anger: The Conflicted History of an Emotion* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2021) Rob Boddice, *Pain: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁵⁶ Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialisation of Human Feeling* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983); Although the meaning of 'emotional labour' has since been blurred, Hochschild originally coined the term to mean the process of managing or displaying emotions as part of a job. Her primary example of the requirement that air hostesses smile and exude friendliness as part of their job description has since been replaced with a general understanding of 'emotional labour' as the mental load of maintaining relationships and managing households. The changing nature of the concept is further explored in Julie Beck, 'The Concept Creep of "Emotional Labour"', *The Atlantic* (2018) <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/11/arlie-hochschild-housework-isnt-emotional-labor/576637/>, accessed 23 June 2022.

displays with various degrees of severity.⁵⁷ When these rules are most restrictive, and people have fewer options to express themselves, then in turn people create their own emotional refuges in which they can relax their social shackles. Clearly, life for the poor in eighteenth-century France was especially economically and socially restrictive, so the idea that people created their own spaces in which their emotional responses to continued subjugation could boil over into open revolution is easy to understand. However, Reddy's assumption that this was a universal happening to *some* degree given any type of political regime of various levels of severity has been notably criticised.⁵⁸

Reddy's other contribution to emotions methodology, which he actually created before *Navigation of Feeling* but took a few more years to fully develop, was his concept of 'emotives'. In a response to questions over whether emotions are biologically or socially constructed, Reddy posited that there was no dichotomy between nature and nurture, but rather that nature and nurture are indistinguishable and therefore only one category of analysis after all.⁵⁹ 'Emotives' were 'affective utterances' – that is, verbalisations of a feeling being felt by the person speaking that were also intended to make the listener feel something. In addition to the affecting nature of the utterance, the person doing the uttering is attempting to reconcile their own inward emotion with a conscious understanding of the cultural expectations they are in. In short, 'emotives' are a three-step process: one, the emotion occurs; two, the emotion is expressed in a culturally acceptable way; and three, the expression of the emotion is designed to make whomever it was expressed to feel *something*.

It is worth remembering that Reddy's training as an anthropologist means a preoccupation with frameworks and theories that historians would perhaps have less desire to use or even to understand. Underpinning Reddy's concepts of 'regimes', 'refuges' and 'emotives' are long academic tendrils connecting to other disciplines that are more concerned with finding out exactly what emotions psychically or

⁵⁷ William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵⁸ The conversation between Barbara Rosenwein, Peter Stearns, William Reddy in Jan Plamper, 'The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein and Peter Stearns', *History and Theory* 49 (2010) pp. 237-265 offers an excellent overview of the criticisms of Reddy's earliest framework.

⁵⁹ William Reddy, 'Against Constructionism: The historical ethnography of emotions', *Current Anthropology*, 38 (1997) pp. 327-51.

biologically are.⁶⁰ It is not necessary for the purposes of this review to scope out this vast body of literature, but suffice it to say for now that historical study is the study of change within context. There may be some valid arguments in biology departments about the locality of emotions in the brain structure, but I am more concerned with the contextualising effect of emotion within cultures for this thesis on the GFTU. After all, some emotions are entirely a felt experience within a cultural framework: an individual, for example, cannot feel embarrassed outside of culture.

The third and final field-changing insight into historical emotions research came from Barbara Rosenwein. A medievalist by training, Rosenwein challenged the supposition made by Norbert Elias in his book *The Civilising Process* that emotional control had improved in a linear fashion over a long period of time, and that emotions and reason were at constant odds which each other.⁶¹ She challenged Elias's assumption that people were gradually exercising more control over themselves and their 'impulses' from a point of 'uncivilised' medieval barbarity to a 'civilised' version of courtly behaviour polite society within a few centuries, by pointing out that his assumption that medieval people were somehow 'child-like' humans in their behaviour was patently false.⁶²

Rosenwein also disagreed with Elias's framing of emotions as external entities that threaten to sweep over people at any given time (being 'overcome' with grief, or 'bursting' with anger are much more to do with our own conceptualisation of how we feel emotions and use language to describe this process), because it did not appreciate the value-based judgement people place on feelings.⁶³ We only become overwhelmed by feelings, Rosenwein argued, in response to our own sets of values, which differs greatly depending on different cultural contexts.⁶⁴ What makes one

⁶⁰ See for example Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia, *Mirrors in the Brain: How Our Minds Share Actions and Emotions*, trans Frances Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Larry McGrath, 'Historiography, affect and the neurosciences', *History of Psychology*, 20 (2017); Jean Decety and Phillip Jackson, 'The Functional Architecture of the Human Brain', *Behavioural and Cognitive Neuroscience Reviews*, 3 (2004); Felicity Callard and Des Fitzgerald, *Rethinking Interdisciplinarity across the Social Sciences and Neurosciences* (Houndmills: Palgrave 2015); Daniel Gross, *Uncomfortable Situations: Emotion between Science and the Humanities* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017).

⁶¹ Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process* 2nd Edition (New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2000).

⁶² Boddice, *Emotions*, p. 209.

⁶³ Plamper, 'An Interview', p. 251; There are a variety of problems with Elias' *Civilising* theory, not least that it relies on Western assumptions of 'good' emotions and 'polite' behaviour that ignores cultural norms from other places in the world.

⁶⁴ Plamper, 'An Interview', p. 251.

person irrationally angry would only provoke a shrug of indifference to someone else. She also believed that Reddy's 'regime' was too heavy-handed for considering emotional contexts outside of those as restrictive as pre-revolutionary French autocracy, particularly as it relied on a construction of statehood that only existed in modern times.⁶⁵ She preferred to describe 'emotional communities' in her emotions history research: groups of people, found in a variety of social settings, that operated on their own levels of emotional connectivity.⁶⁶ People could belong to a multitude of overlapping communities, Rosenwein argued, but observed different rules of emotional conduct depending on whether or not that were at home, at work, or at church for instance. Rosenwein described them as

Precisely the same as social communities – families, neighbourhoods, parliaments, guilds, monasteries, parish church memberships - but the researcher looking at them seeks above all to uncover systems of feeling: what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others' emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognise; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore.⁶⁷

There was still a fundamental relationship to power, but Rosenwein emphasised the fluidity and potential of many 'emotional communities' to overlap and to bring different levels of meaning to the individuals that took part in them.⁶⁸

This emphasis on value-based judgements – different people feeling different things in response to the same situation according to their own experiences or values – and on community is a particularly useful approach for trade union history to take.

⁶⁵ Boddice, *History*, p. 210.

⁶⁶ Barbara Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *American Historical Review*, 107,4 (2002) pp. 821-845.

⁶⁷ Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions' p. 842.

⁶⁸ Rosenwein stipulated that the term 'emotional communities' was deliberately and functionally broad. Due to her emphasis on the social role of emotions, and the way in which they are experienced within societies, she wanted to explore the function of social grouping with and around emotion. Emotions in social groupings within organisations is something pinpointed in occupational psychology. For instance, according to Stephen Fineman (ed), *Emotion in Organizations* (Los Angeles, Sage Publications, 1993) factories are said to have specific physical areas in order to make space for and encourage certain emotions in the workplace. This is not connected to Reddy's assertion that everyone is seeking some sort of emotional refuge from a regime, but rather more an acknowledgement of emotions as a form of social bond.

Expressions of solidarity and struggle have found unequal places in and around trade union and labour movement history. A Lancashire cotton-weaver and a Lanarkshire coal miner would not necessarily have the same emotional response to the successful negotiation for a shorter working day, because their values around trade union negotiation would be informed by different experiences of trade unionists, expectation, and trust. Certain trades had built their unions on a basis of mutual interest with employers, and focused on decent superannuation benefits, strict apprenticeship programmes and eschewed any kind of political or industrial action, whereas others had little experience of being involved in discussions regarding their labour, remuneration or conditions. It may be that after a successful negotiation of a wage rise, workers in the former example would feel something akin to quiet relief and satisfaction, whilst workers in the latter environment would probably experience something closer to sheer elation. How to inspire collective feelings within a workers' organisation then depended on the experience of the workers themselves as well as the type of leadership of that workers' organisation. Further study into trade union records with an emotions-focused lens may offer an indication as to whether this is the case.

This idea has already found similar expression in previous 'psychohistory' scholarship.⁶⁹ Although there has been reluctance from historians to engage with psycho-analysis (Boddice suggests this is linked to an aversion to debunked Freudian influence in the field), it was championed by Peter Gay as a way of centring historical biography within social history.⁷⁰ Gay thought that it was possible to analyse a historical actor's childhood for clues as to the emotional impulses in adulthood, but also that it could be possible to use this method to psychoanalyse entire communities.⁷¹ He was convinced of this because he felt that humans were

⁶⁹ Psychohistory as a specific discipline has been largely debunked since at least the 1980s, although there have been some lingering aspects found in works on historical biography. The history of psychiatry is something altogether separate. For further examples of historical psychiatry, see Maria Gendron and Lisa Feldman Barrett, 'Reconstructing the past: A century of ideas about emotion in psychology', *Emotion Review*, 1 (2009): 316-39; Carolyne Larrington, 'The psychology of emotion and study of the medieval period', *Early Medieval Europe*, 10 (2001): 251-6; Larry McGrath, 'Historiography, affect, and the neurosciences', *History of Psychology*, 20 (2017) pp. 129-47; Carol Stearns and Peter Stearns (eds), *Emotion and Social Change: Toward a New Psychohistory* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988).

⁷⁰ Boddice, *History*, pp. 30-2.

⁷¹ Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); There are remnants of psychohistory within a small branch of childhood studies. It takes to erroneously linear view of

entirely linked to their communities, and that the experiences of a person were entirely dependent on their surroundings, and vice versa. Gay's ideas on this were strongly linked with Thompson's argument that class, and in particular expressions of class identity, were *felt*, and this actually removed him from the Freudian psychoanalysis and placed him more comfortably in the study of culture. However, as Boddice points out, the death of psychoanalysis as a historical method was largely due to its lack of affinity with the prevailing Marxist theory of the 1970s.⁷²

The dominance of Marxist perspectives, as detailed in the discussion of labour histories, left little room for psychohistory to take hold in trade union scholarship. Marxism then gave way to the linguistic turn, and from that point on there was no appetite (nor indeed, any perceived value in) an explain-all theory of universal culture. The old association with Freudian theory that could not shake the embedded notion of a static, immovable base psyche embedded in us all meant that the compelling cultural components of Gay's work has been glossed over. Although Gay's work does not contribute to this thesis directly, it is notable that there are significant cross overs in cultural responses to and feelings of class with both E. P. Thompson's feelings of shared identities and Raymond Williams' 'structures of feeling', and that this could have significance for how the emotional culture of trade unions is formed.⁷³

Lastly, there was another, perhaps more significant, roadblock to investigating the emotions within the labour movement that was laid down by Marxist theory in the 1960s and 70s. To carve out a space for the study of the working class in universities, the historians writing their history had to justify their studies as serious analysis of worthwhile subjects that deserved the same scholarly attention. The study of mass riots, unruly protests and wild seditious speeches had to somehow be framed as rational in order to be acceptable.⁷⁴ Emotions, in this context, were perceived as rationality kryptonite, as industrial unrest was described as strategic, premeditated and tactical rather than the uncontrollably 'emotional' outburst of some angry workers. Again, Peter Stearns tore down the apparent link between the

inevitable progress – namely that childhood experiences always dictate the experiences of adulthood. This point of view has been roundly discredited by the majority of historians of childhood.

⁷² Boddice, *History*, pp. 31-2.

⁷³ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, 3rd Edition (London: Vintage, 1958, 2017).

⁷⁴ Boddice, *History*, p. 97.

irrational and the emotional, and instead showed that people will use their emotional reactions in order to inform their reasoned responses.⁷⁵ Although rationality is still often assumed to be 'better' than emotional responses, they are in fact neatly entwined, as demonstrated by the duality implied by the psychologists' term, 'cogmotion'.⁷⁶ As Boddice neatly summarised:

The questions we [as historians] ask now shift ground: no longer 'what did reasonable people do?' or 'what was the emotional reaction?'; rather 'what did the people do on the basis of their assertion that their reason was uncoloured by emotion?' or 'what was the cogmotional reaction?'⁷⁷

Although this thesis is not psycho-analytical, nor is it taking the perspective of any biological or psychological avenues created by the interdisciplinary space between emotion and history, it will be considering the organisational history of the GFTU through an emotional lens. A foray into the emotional history of trade unionism is overdue, and this thesis intends to explore the potential of these emotions methodologies as new analytical tools for re-thinking labour history.

Methodology, sources and structure

This thesis takes an emotions-centric approach whilst examining the archival records of the GFTU. Firstly, I explore the role of personality: the character of trade union organisations was often heavily influenced by the beliefs, ideologies and friendships of labour leaders. The thesis draws on Chase's ideas on using biographical evidence as a means to uncover trade unionists' experiences, whilst also highlighting the intersection between biography, experience and emotion.⁷⁸ *The Dictionary of Labour Biography*, now on its fifteenth volume, has been a mainstay of labour historiography since the 1970s, and demonstrates the centrality of biographical insight into the

⁷⁵ Stearns, *American Cool*.

⁷⁶ Malcolm Chase, 'Labour History's Biographical Turn', *History Workshop Journal*, 92 (2021) pp. 194-207; Douglas Barnett and Hilary Ratner, 'The Organisation and Integration of Cognition and Emotion in Development', *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 67, 3 (1997) pp. 303-316.

⁷⁷ Boddice, *History*, p. 98.

⁷⁸ Although early examples of labour biography include Graham Wallas, *The Life of Francis Place 1771-1854* (London: Harper Collins, 1898), and G. D H. Cole, *Chartist Portraits*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1941), there was a lack of focus on biography in labour history until the first volume of *The Dictionary of Labour Biography* appeared in 1972.

development of labour history.⁷⁹ I will draw on the importance of biography throughout this thesis, weaving in elements of salient experiences that have influenced key figures in the development of the GFTU, and explain how biographical experience informed the construction of emotional communities. Weaving biographies into this thesis is a direct answer to Chase's call for more 'imagination and, even, speculation in the writing of labour biography... [in order to] make what we write a "good read"'.⁸⁰ Chase went on to further justify his call for further historiographical emphasis on biographical materials by saying that

...biography has been, and will continue to be, a discursive strategy of central importance to labour history. It challenges historians specialising in this field to try and communicate... with an audience whose hunger for life stories can not [sic] be quenched... [and] acknowledges that its characters were situated in social structures or political regimes, but notes that they were not the prisoners of or rendered powerless by these social structures or these political regimes.⁸¹

Writing about experience (and including small details such as children's names and travel experiences) in a way that transports the reader into a more holistic understanding of people's lives at this time is therefore intended to give more depth and nuance to the existing literature on the GFTU. This complements the broad emotions history approach that takes into account the social and cultural experience of feelings, by illustrating exactly how they were not 'prisoners', but instead active participants in their 'emotional communities'. In short, an emotions angle can bring home and working lives together in a way that aids explanation of the public lives.

Despite the lack of explicit study of emotions in the historiography, labour history has been bursting with feeling throughout the twentieth century. This thesis takes a broad interpretation of emotions as being anything that is felt by individuals that is likely to cause a physical or cognitive reaction within that person, and makes use of Tiffany Watt Smith's assertion that 'the meanings we charge an emotion with change our

⁷⁹ Joyce Bellamy, John Saville, Keith Gildart, David Howell, Neville Kirk, eds., *The Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vols 1-15 (London, Macmillan, 1972-2019).

⁸⁰ Chase, 'Labour History's Biographical Turn', p. 200.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

experience of it'.⁸² This explicit melding of cultural and biological understandings of emotions is by no means a universally accepted way of understanding what constitutes an emotion. Indeed, according to Febvre, the difficulty in finding a definition and being able to locate emotions in history with any degree of certainty was 'at one and the same time extremely attractive and frightfully difficult'.⁸³

However, the broad interpretation of feelings coupled with the understanding that the experience of feeling is influenced by society and culture – an approach that Rosenwein herself has been explicitly comfortable with – lends itself easily to the study of trade unions.⁸⁴ Through a plethora of emotions, trade unionists create a specific social community by establishing personal relationships; this, according to Barbara Rosenwein, is an 'emotional community', and it is how the role of emotions can be better understood in a trade union context.⁸⁵

Emotions such as 'agitation', 'struggle' and 'solidarity' are imprinted on the analysis of trade unions, with a general tacit acceptance of the centrality of collective feeling playing a key role in the creation of the labour movement. E. P. Thompson's definition of class still has relevancy here, particularly with its under-explored emphasis on the role of feeling:

Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.⁸⁶

A shared *feeling* is crucial to understanding the formation of trade unions and emotions should be seen as an integral part of the history and culture of the British labour movement. Although its primary concern is to highlight the role of an under-researched organisation in the wider labour movement, it also suggests that at its core, the history of the British labour movement could also be understood as a

⁸² Watt Smith, *Human Emotions*, p. 9.

⁸³ Lucien Febvre, "Sensibility and History: How to Reconstitute the Emotional Life of the Past," in *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Febvre*, ed. By Peter Burke, trans. K. Folca (New York: Harper and Row, 1973) p. 19.

⁸⁴ Boddice, *History*, p. 41-2.

⁸⁵ Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: In Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) pp. 67-74.

⁸⁶ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 5th Edition (London: Penguin, 1991) p. 9.

history of collective feelings and emotions. This can be seen in the construction of emotional communities within individual trade unions, and in larger organisations, such as the GFTU. Thus, there is considerable scope to revisit and revise the usefulness of minutes, pamphlets, reports and articles in order to consider the effects of individual and collective feeling on the history of British trade unionism.⁸⁷

The main source base that underpins this thesis are the GFTU records held at the Bishopsgate Institute in London. They comprise of the annual reports, management committee meeting minutes, general council meeting records, reports of proceedings, quarterly reports, papers from the Joint Board, rulebooks, and miscellaneous records. Through a digitisation project in 2013, many of these documents have been made available online through the Bishopsgate Institute website in order to facilitate greater engagement with academic researchers. I have only used the records applicable to the 1899-1926 chronological scope of this thesis; therefore there are still digitised sources, particularly those of the GFTU's newspaper *The Federation News* (1951-2001), that have been excluded from this study.

The GFTU were a national organisation, which has led to the need for greater contextualisation for their activities than could perhaps be given to smaller, more trades-specific organisations. In addition to using the GFTU records, I have also explored the British Library's newspaper archive to search the pages of the organisation's earliest publication, *The Federationist* (1913-1919), and the first two years of its successor, *The Democrat* (1919-1927).⁸⁸ Only the first two years of *The Democrat* are applicable to this thesis because the general secretary of the GFTU was either an editor, or frequently wrote articles for the newspaper, during this time. In addition to the entries in the fifteen volumes of the *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, I have also accessed census data in order to track some of the more obscure members of the GFTU. There has also been additional information drawn from the Parliamentary Archives London, the Modern Records Centre Warwick, the National Archives, and the Labour History Archive and Study Centre at the Peoples' History

⁸⁷ Neville Kirk, 'Class and the "Linguistic Turn" in Chartist and post-Chartist Historiography', in Neville Kirk (ed), *Social Class and Marxism: Defences and Challenges* (London: Routledge, 1996) pp. 87-137.

⁸⁸ GFTU, *The Federationist*, 1913-1919, British Library: LOU.LON 910 [1913], LOU.LON 871 [1915], LOU.LON 849 [1916], LOU.LON 794 [1917]; *The Democrat*, 1919-1927, British Library: LOU.LON 1919 [1919], LOU.LON 200 [1920] and LOU.LON 199 [1921].

Museum Manchester.⁸⁹ There remains considerable scope to further explore the GFTU's role as a strike arbitrator, but the closure of archives during the Covid-19 pandemic meant that wider research into affiliated trade union archives was severely limited. To mitigate the effects of archive closures, this thesis was redesigned to focus more heavily on sources that were available online.

The chapters are structured around five emotions that align with and demonstrate the importance of specific events and GFTU activities: hope, friendship, patriotism, hostility and exclusion. Not only are these prominent themes within the GFTU's work, but they are also integral to early twentieth century trade unionism. Workers wanting to act together in search of fairer wages and safer conditions did so out of a sense of hope that it was possible. Their collective action operated on a network of friendship that helped to sustain their actions through solidarity and community. The environment of total war in Britain during 1914-1919 meant that trade unions had to navigate and adopt varying degrees of patriotic fervour. Disagreements over ideologies and the very purpose of trade unions caused considerable conflict and hostility between labour leaders. Trade unions themselves could also often be exclusionary of workers deemed to be outside of the 'norm', and the stories of those left outside of union protection should also form a part of the wider narrative of the labour movement. The emotions lens that supports this thesis is indicative of what a new kind of trade union history can look like and how it can inform deeper analyses of the British labour movement, by highlighting how collective feeling could inform collective action.

Although this thesis is primarily concerned with the foundation years of the GFTU between 1899 -1926, chapter one, 'Hope', begins with a brief overview of the hundred years of labour movement growth that preceded its creation. This context is crucial for understanding why the GFTU was established, what was hoped of it, and how it was positioned within the swirl of industrial, political, and social challenges that were a feature of late-Victorian/Edwardian Britain. The GFTU was but one of the many inheritors of a labour tradition that called for more centralised power that had less to do with localised, craft-based support, and more to do with recognising the

⁸⁹ The Parliamentary Archives; The Modern Records Centre (University of Warwick); The National Archives; The Labour History Archive and Study Centre (The People's History Museum, Manchester).

place of representation for the working class in a wider economic scene. The chapter goes on to examine the early tasks of this fledgling organisation as it built on the optimism that fuelled calls for greater unity between trade unions. The GFTU focus on their constitution, and who they appealed to for affiliation, alongside their interpretation of the 1898 TUC's plans for them, reveal the aspirations of their leaders and supporters. The effect of personality on the formation and direction of the GFTU is explored through critical biographies of the first general secretary, Isaac Haig Mitchell (1867-1952) and first chairman, Peter Curran (1860-1910). Their trade union backgrounds, family lives, religious beliefs and politics all brought distinct ideals to the organisational culture of the GFTU. Their focus on building links between the different factions in the labour movement led to their involvement in creating a Joint Board. Consisting of representatives of the GFTU, the Labour Party and the TUC, the Joint Board enabled each partner to consider issues of labour as a united voice. Furthermore, the GFTU's framing of the first episodes of industrial unrest that they became involved in, such as the Penrhyn Quarryman's dispute that began in 1900, gives new insight into how the morality of strikes were portrayed both by the GFTU and the popular press. There were strong emotional repudiations of workers that the committee felt were striking for reasons of laziness, unpreparedness, or sheer obstinacy; this was countered by their almost reverent portrayal of workers that they deemed to be engaged in a more righteous battle for better wages or conditions.

The following chapter, 'Friendship', primarily considers the role of close personal relationships between labour leaders and the effect they had on the direction of their organisations. It explores the life and politics of the most influential general secretary of the GFTU, William A. Appleton (1859-1940). His firm belief in separation between trade unionism and politics, and his staunch support of craft unions over general unions during his tenure from 1907-1938, fundamentally changed both the outlook of the GFTU and its standing as an organisation of national influence. The study of Appleton is complemented by a profile of James O'Grady (1866-1934), GFTU chairman from 1912-1918. The interaction between these two men and other trade union leaders in Britain and abroad form the substance of the chapter which argues that trade unionism was significantly affected by the vicissitudes of friendship networks. A close relationship with the President of the American Federation of

Labor (AFL), Samuel Gompers (1850-1924), allowed the GFTU to carry the mantle of British trade unionism on the international stage. Their close working relationship with Carl Legien (1861-1920), the German counterpart to William Appleton, highlights a much more closely established network between European trade unions than the existing historiography would suggest. The chapter also considers the contested nature of 'official' friendship, and how this worked to create alliances that protected certain labour leaders from the threat of scandals and accusations of wrongdoing. The accusations of money-laundering and bribe-taking levelled at Appleton only two years after he had first become the GFTU's general secretary were simultaneously dealt with and covered over by obfuscating minute-taking. This provides brief insight into what official trade union communications could omit, and what impact it had on feelings of trust and confidence.

'Patriotism', the third chapter, considers the intense fervour of support that the GFTU gave to the British government during the first world war. Many trade unionists and Labour Members of Parliament enthusiastically supported the war effort, and representatives from the GFTU management committee took up places in the War Emergency: Workers' National Committee (WNC) led by the Labour MP Arthur Henderson (1863-1935). After making progress concerning rent controls and mitigating rising food prices, the GFTU liaised directly with Lloyd George's government regarding the issue of wage increases for the armed services. This was a crucial period for the GFTU, as it marked the beginning of their decline in national significance in terms of national trade union politics. The GFTU was enthusiastically patriotic, which is demonstrated through a biography of Navvies', Bricklayers', Labourers' and General Labourers' leader John Ward (1866 – 1934), and this began to set them further apart from other trade unions. Despite this, the GFTU ran a successful campaign to secure wage increases for the armed services.

Chapter four, 'Hostility', follows the thread of the previous chapter to consider how key relationships that the GFTU, and more particularly Appleton, had with individuals and organisations. Personal disagreements and professional differences of opinion began to merge and mix, which dampened hopes of more cross-organisational working and representation. Eventually, the intervention of the powerful miners' leader Robert Smillie (1857-1940) ultimately led to the GFTU's dismissal from the

Joint Board; a development which left an enduring bitter resentment from Appleton that affected the rest of his tenure as leader of the GFTU. His friendship with Carl Legien descended into a hostile and public disagreement whilst the two men battled with the war time expectations of their respective countries. The feelings expressed by delegates to the annual meetings of the GFTU also indicate a hardening of opinion against their former friends in Germany, as many that had lost sons or close friends to the battlefields found it difficult to reconcile their new reality with their previous feelings of international fraternal solidarity and friendship. This is borne out in the story of a GFTU employee that was interred as an enemy alien after the war broke out, and found his former friends and co-workers either could not or did not want to help him.

Chapter five closes the thesis with 'Exclusion', which focuses on the ways trade unions could be and often were impermeable structures to certain workers, particularly women. Although each chapter contains at least one critical biography of a GFTU management committee member or employee, it is notable that this section of the thesis does not contain a profile of a female GFTU official. This is because the GFTU did not have a female member on their management committee until 1970.⁹⁰ However, this chapter outlines methods of exclusion by knitting together the scant details of one woman's fight to keep control of the union she had formed for Manchester weavers that a larger union (and GFTU affiliate) wished to absorb. The few times that women were invited to take part in GFTU proceedings is also considered, with close attention paid to a delegate from the Carpet Weavers' Union that was the first woman to speak on behalf of her own branch at a GFTU meeting.

Ultimately, the GFTU found themselves in a rapidly changing political, social and industrial environment, whilst also struggling internally to align their financial obligations set out in 1899 with their fiscal problems leading up to the general strike of 1926. There is some reflection in the conclusion on the GFTU's opposition to the events of 1926. The GFTU was established to financially support Britain's trade unions, yet by 1926 and the organisation was unwilling to do so. This situation led to

⁹⁰ Her name was Hilda Unsworth from the Amalgamated Weavers' Association, and she served on the GFTU management committee from 1970 -1974.

a large number of secessions, and the beginning of a new directional phase for the GFTU, which lies outside the scope of this thesis.

This thesis is not concerned with measuring the successes or failures of the GFTU, but rather with examining the emotional struggle that underpinned the creation, development, and politics of the organisation. There were sharp divisions of opinion about who deserved to receive strike benefits, how much a trade union could receive, and how and when the GFTU officials should be offering their arbitration services. Pulling these disparate societies together in search of a consensus required the fostering of a collective identity that could not be borne out of a shared experience of a specific trade, a regional connection, or a common political affiliation. This construction of a shared identity – of an emotional community – was crucial in its development as a national organisation.

Chapter One: Hope

'In its inception, the GFTU aroused great hopes.'¹

- G. D. H. Cole, 1937

Introduction

The GFTU came into being in 1899 on a wave of hope for closer national unity, but it had been a bumpy road. Before the New Unionism period saw casual labourers combine alongside semi-skilled workers into large-scale trade unions, workers' organisations had mostly been the preserve of skilled workers that focused on controlling wage rates through guarding artisanal knowledge.² These skills-specific trade unions and friendly societies inherited a medieval guild tradition and were focused on preserving craft knowledge and apprenticeship systems. However, the development of trade unionism prior to the GFTU's creation was varied in terms of localities and industries.

Towards federation: 1830s-1890s

The rigid anti-combination laws operative in the early 19th century did not prevent some workers from engaging in collective action.³ The 1834 trial, conviction and transportation of the Tolpuddle martyrs – George Loveless, James Brine, James Hammett, James Loveless, Thomas Standfield and John Standfield - was the most famous example of struggle in the early 1800s. However, there were other significant union movements happening in other trades and localities in the 1830s. Although Loveless was a farm labourer in Dorset, he had become connected with other pockets of organising workers from as far away as Yorkshire and had adapted new ideas and methods of bargaining from them in order to request advances in wages.⁴

¹ G. D. H. Cole, *A Short History of the British Working Class Movement* (London: Routledge, 1937) p. 259.

² G. D. H. Cole, *An Introduction to Trade Unionism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1954) pp. 76-88.

³ Joyce Marlow, *The Tolpuddle Martyrs* (London: Grafton, 1985).

⁴ William H Oliver, 'The Tolpuddle Martyrs and Trade Union Oaths', *Labour History (Canberra)* 10 (1966) pp. 5-12.

The conviction of Loveless and his compatriots was doubtless indicative of the general anxiety within government at the increasing number of workers attempting to negotiate collectively for better conditions and pay, and the trial and conviction was seen as very heavy-handed. The six farm labourers had not engaged in any bargaining, protests, or strikes; they had simply sworn an oath to represent themselves collectively to their employers and to sign to up to a new organisation called the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union (Grand National) that had been formed in 1833.⁵ The brainchild of Robert Owen (1771-1858), the Grand National's membership figures and affiliate list is not known for sure, but according to G. D. H. Cole, its very formation made employers and government worried over the increasing appetite for workplace organisation.⁶ Although it took years for the Tolpuddle Martyrs to be pardoned, the speeches, marches, songs and general surge of support felt towards them in the intervening years took the government by surprise as highlighted by the Webbs in their classic study:

The Grand National Consolidated Trades Union proved to have a wider influence than the government expected. The whole machinery of the organisation was turned to the preparation of petitions and the holding of public meetings, and a wave of sympathy rallied, for a few weeks, the drooping energies of the members. Cordial relations were established with the five great unions which remained outside the ranks, for the northern counties were mainly organised by the Builders' Union, the Leeds, Huddersfield and Bradford District Union, the Clothiers' Union, the Cotton-spinners' Union, and the Potters' Union, which on this occasion sent delegates to London to assist the executive of the Grand National. The agitation culminated in a monster procession of trade unionists to the Home Office to present a petition to Lord Melbourne - the first of the great "demonstrations" which have since become a regular part of the machinery of London politics. The proposal to hold this possession had excited at the utmost alarm, both in friends and to foes.⁷

⁵ G. D. H. Cole, *British Working Class Politics 1832-1914* (Routledge: London, 1941, 2020) pp. 16-19.

⁶ G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, *The Common People 1740-1946*, 4th Edition (Routledge: London, 1938, 1976) pp. 262-7.

⁷ Beatrice Webb and Sidney Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (London: Andesite Press, 1920, 2015) p. 147.

The peaceful procession was a success, and the 'alarm' caused by its display of unity and the 'cordial relations' created between organisations being noteworthy. However, despite causing alarm, the Grand National itself suffered financially after having to support strikes that it could not afford over the following years, and many unions began to break away or ceased to exist in the face of government hostility before it had any opportunity to effect tangible change.⁸

It would be tempting to point to the Grand National as an informative ancestor of the GFTU, because of its role as a unifying trade union umbrella organisation. True enough, it was the first time that different trade unions and societies had come together in recognition of their shared interests. It is also true that there is a poignant parallel between the GFTU and this other federated umbrella organisation that soon lost its gleam of hopeful potential. However, a more apt comparison can be drawn with a much smaller organisation that formed in the wake of the 'Tolpuddle Martyrs' transportation: the London Dorchester Labourers' Committee. Led by the Chartist leader Robert Hartwell (1810-1875), this was a small group of people that were instrumental in keeping the story of the six convicted labourers alive and whose efforts were largely responsible for their eventual pardon and release.⁹ They did this by printing cheap pamphlets which spread the story far and wide to nurture the memory, and to make sure that memory kept spreading until it was a powerful common cause for unity through the shared feelings the memory created.¹⁰ To this day, the six Dorchester men are remembered through songs, plays and festivals, forming a focal point for the origins of collective labour identity.¹¹ Like the Dorchester Labourers' Committee the GFTU was also spearheaded by a small a small committee of dedicated members that worked to keep connections strong. The GFTU may have numbered well over a million members at one point, but it was the

⁸ Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) pp. 39-41.

⁹ Gerald B. Hurst, 'The Dorchester Labourers, 1834', *The English Historical Review*, 40, 157 (1925) p. 67.

¹⁰ The creation and distribution of cheap pamphlets was a relatively new method of communication at this time. In particular, a pamphlet called *The Victims of Whiggery; being a statement of the persecutions, experiences by the Dorchester Labourers their trial, banishment etc* (1837) was particularly important in spreading awareness of their cause. For more information, see David Englander, 'Tolpuddle: the making of martyrs', *History Today*, 34, 12 (1984) p. 47.

¹¹ Clare Griffiths, 'From "Dorchester Labourers" to "Tolpuddle Martyrs": Celebrating Radicalism in the English Countryside', in Quentin Outram and Keith Laybourn (eds), *Secular Martyrdom in Britain and Ireland* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

dedication of a handful of men on its management committee that ensured their permanence as a trade union presence for 120 years.

The continuing legacy of the Tolpuddle case also found a home within the burgeoning political movement of the working class. The period of 1780-1830 is pinpointed by E. P. Thompson as the time in which most working people began to feel their identity as a group that had interests in opposition to their employers and rulers.¹² The transformation of the 'Dorchester Labourers' in the Webbs' *The History of Trade Unionism* into the 'Tolpuddle Martyrs' is indicative of the powerful pull that stories of subjugation and oppression had on building a collective identity from shared struggle. The emotional pull of shared memories that were spread by people such as the Dorchester Labourers' Committee played a crucial role in the building of that shared feeling of identity. The rise of Chartism in the 1840s, in which millions of working people signed petitions calling for more democratic representation and rights, was an expression of this.¹³ The Chartist petition was ultimately unsuccessful, but it provided the roots of a shared legacy of martyrdom that was invoked time and time again in the building of labour and working-class traditions.

It was not until the creation of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) in 1851, a trade union organisation that would eventually become a founding member of the GFTU, that large-scale trade unionism was seen in a major industry. The ASE's formation also heralded the period the Webbs referred to as 'New Model' unionism, which was characterised by large 'amalgamateds' of skilled workers that prized their craft-exclusiveness.¹⁴ The leaders of the largest of these organisations would meet regularly throughout the 1860s and discussed the ways in which trade unions ought to operate and how they should be representing their members. However, the extent

¹² E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 5th Edition (London: Penguin, 1991).

¹³ For a selection of general works on Chartism, see Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); David Goodway, *London Chartism 1838-1848*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Edward Royle, *Chartism*, 3rd Edition (London: Routledge, 2014); Owen Ashton, Robert Fyson and Stephen Roberts (eds), *The Chartist Legacy*, (Rendlesham: Merlin Press, 1999). For cultural explorations of Chartism, see Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson (eds), *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-60*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982); Kate Bowan and Paul A Pickering, 'Songs for the Millions': Chartist Music and Popular Aural Tradition', *Labour History Review*, 74, 1 (2009) pp. 44-63; Joan Allen and Owen R Ashton (eds) *Papers for the People: A Study of the Chartist Press*, (London: Merlin P., 2005).

¹⁴ Beatrice Webb and Sidney Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (London: Andesite Press, 1920, 2015).

of this influence has been debated. Whilst the Webbs felt that the leaders of these large organisations (whom they termed the 'Junta') discouraged militancy but encouraged trade unions to grow their friendly society membership benefits and centralise their strike funds, later historians have pointed to the wide variety of smaller unions not represented either by these amalgamateds or by their ethos.¹⁵

The trade union landscape in the latter half of the nineteenth century was indeed complex. Some industries, such as cotton or coalmining, were well organised in terms of their cohesiveness and ability to represent workers in wage negotiations and issues of health and safety. Other trades were still rife with division. This was usually a result of differing skill levels and competing ideas of how to control wage rates between craftsmen and labourers, or the divisions were based more on regional factionalism. Despite the variety, actual aggregate trade union membership was low: only about a quarter of Britain's working population paid into a union or friendly society during the latter part of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ However, this low figure can be deceptive, as it was subject to huge geographical and industrial variations that were also affected by questions of gender and age. Nevertheless, the creation of the ASE and their organisational structure was a significant development. They were conciliatory wherever possible and rewarded the loyalty of their members with generous unemployment, superannuation, and sickness benefits.¹⁷ Although the Webbs overstate the influence of the ASE, there is no doubt that this organization helped to entrench the idea that unions were a useful presence and a source of support in many working communities.

The most notable trade union advance of this period was the creation of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in 1868. This was the first national gathering of trade unions in Britain, and marked a watershed moment in the advancement of working-class industrial representation.¹⁸ As an earlier version of a congress that had been focused on the organised resistance to lockouts had quickly collapsed, the new idea of a discussion-based congress took hold after Sam Nicholson and William Wood

¹⁵ Keith Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unions 1770-1990* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1992) pp. 38-9.

¹⁶ Alice Prochaska, *History of the General Federation of Trade Unions* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982), p. 2.

¹⁷ Hamish Fraser, *Trade Unions and Society: The Struggle for Acceptance, 1850-1880* (London: Routledge, 1974) pp. 29-31.

¹⁸ Ross M Martin, *TUC: The Growth of a Pressure Group 1868-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

invited 'trades councils and federated societies' to their version of a middle- and upper-class social science forum.¹⁹ Despite the creation of the TUC and the hope for further advancement that it gave, trade union membership experienced a decline in the later part of the 1870s. It was difficult to exert meaningful power as the Great Depression caused a surge in unemployment.²⁰ Non-craft union membership plummeted, and many smaller unions ceased to exist.²¹ This led G. D. H. Cole and the Webbs to characterise this period of trade unionism as relatively sluggish, even though Cole roundly disputed the Webbs' more general 'New Model' characterisation of the era.²² However, craft union membership appeared to have either remained reasonably steady, or indeed to have grown, which is likely to have been due to their methods of localised negotiation and avoidance of large-scale disturbances.²³ The advent of conciliation was also a notable development, although its use varied greatly depending on locality and trade, and was more likely to be in craft-based trades or in union branches with more moderate leadership.²⁴ Despite the fluctuating fortunes of trade unionism and the varieties in which workers' organisations could engage with industrial matters, the TUC remained a constant presence.

As the British economy recovered, so too did trade unions. Referred to as 'New Unionism' by the Webbs, this later period of the nineteenth century was characterised by the loosening grip of the craft unions on their strict entry requirements.²⁵ There was now a new appetite for trade unionism to have a wider outlook. Perhaps due to the high deprivation and poverty brought on by high unemployment in the later 1870s, new firebrand personalities stormed the stage with their militant speeches and high-profile strikes. The Bryant and May matchstick factory workers demanded safer working conditions and better pay in 1888, proving against prevailing expectations that women workers were indeed able to organise,

¹⁹ Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) p. 71.

²⁰ Albert Musson, 'The Great Depression in Britain, 1873-1896: A Reappraisal', *The Journal of Economic History*, 19, 2 (1959) pp. 199-228.

²¹ John Lovell, *British Trade Unions 1875-1933*, (London: Macmillan, 1977) p. 11.

²² G. D. H. Cole, 'Some Notes on British Trade Unionism in the Third Quarter of the Nineteenth Century', *International Review for Social History* 2, 1 (1937) p. 1-3; Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, 2nd Edition (London: Longmans Green and Co, 1920) p. 350.

²³ Hugh Armstrong Clegg, Alan Fox and Arthur Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889*, Volume I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964) p. 43.

²⁴ Victor Allen, *The Sociology of Industrial Relations*, (Hoboken: Prentice Hall Publishing, 1971) p. 82.

²⁵ Keith Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism c. 1770-1990*, (Stroud: Allen Sutton, 1992) p. 66.

fight and win.²⁶ The following year, the previously factional and unorganised dockers and shipyard workers were brought together by Will Thorne and Ben Tillett to form the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union. The abject poverty of the London dock workers shocked the public, and their successful strike for better conditions came hot on the heels of an increasing level of public sympathy for the working poor.²⁷ Public sympathy in turn brought a new sense of hope that general collective action on behalf of all workers, regardless of their skill level, could create an environment in which all workers had the agency to change their pay and conditions.

This new wave of militancy brought trade unionism together with issues of social justice and politics. Whereas the influence of radicalism and reformism through the Liberal Party remained a tenacious component to any calls for political representation for labour, there was now a growing call for working class people to have their own voice in parliament, especially as the influence of socialism on trade unionism began to take hold.²⁸ Although not necessarily widespread, socialist thought did seem to galvanise the large, high profile strikes of the late 1880s, but this was also against the significant backdrop of other movements and organisations. The Co-Operative movement, non-conformism and the Fabian Society were also gaining influence in particular localities, and the developments support a picture of industrial change that is complex rather than linear. In the cotton spinning and weaving industries, a traditional area of fierce skills-guarding that had focused on unionism for skilled workers only, there was a new wave of militancy, a number of amalgamations created, and a new focus on wider political as well as industrial representation.²⁹ The creation of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) under the leadership of Keir Hardie (1865 – 1915) in 1893 was certainly testimony to the growing confluence of socialism and labour organisation, despite the highly

²⁶ Louise Raw, *Striking a Light: The Bryant and May Matchwomen and their Place in History*, (London: Continuum, 2011).

²⁷ Rob Sewell, *In The Cause of Labour: The History of British Trade Unionism*, (London: Wellred Books, 2003).

²⁸ John Lovell, *British Trade Unions 1875-1933*, (London: Macmillan, 1977) p. 20.

²⁹ Lynden Briscoe, *The Textile and Clothing Industries of the United Kingdom* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1971).

problematic and varied approach that many trade unions had to the question of working-class representation.³⁰

The picture of workers' organisations in the 1890s was complex, but it was pressure from the changing nature of employers' actions that created the definitive catalyst for the creation of the GFTU. Some employers began to work together in a mirror image of the growing partnerships between trade unions, the first of was the National Federated Association of Employers of Labour, which was founded in 1873.³¹ Similar employer-led organisations were flourishing in specific industries throughout the later decades of the nineteenth century, with varying degrees of militant and conciliatory tones, whilst the foundation of the National Free Labour Association in 1893 provided black leg labour for business owners in order to help break strikes.³² The most high-profile battle between an employers' federation and a trade union took place in 1897-8.³³ The ASE's threat to strike for an eight-hour day and further union control over new machine usage led to the Employers' Federation of Engineering Associations (AFEA) calling a bitter national lock out that lasted for seven long months. Throughout, vibrant displays of solidarity and support took the form of fund-raising football matches, concerts and a widely-reported-on demonstration in Hyde Park. The support for the ASE from other labour leaders was highlighted by 'energetic campaigns in the labour press'.³⁴ Thousands of pounds were raised from domestic and international trade union organisations to support the striking workers. However, the effect of the exhilarating shows of support could not drown out the devastating effect of the lockout on other trades operating around the engineering trade. The solidarity between the employers caught other workers in its grasp, as

³⁰ Keir Hardie has been widely credited as the maker of the Labour Party and was a key figure in the development of the labour movement. For biographical information, see: Kenneth O'Morgan, *Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist*, (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975); Bob Holman, *Keir Hardie: Labour's Greatest Hero?*, (London: Lion Books, 2010); Keir Hardie, *From Serfdom to Socialism*, (London: George Allen, 1907).

³¹ For further work on employers' organisations, see Geoffrey Alderman, 'The National Free Labour Association. A Case-study of organised strike-breaking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries', *International Review of Social History*, 21, (1976) pp. 309-36; Ernest Phelps Brown, *The Growth of British Industrial Relations*, (London: Macmillan, 1965) pp. 164-8; Arthur McIvor, 'Employers' Organisation and Strikebreaking in Britain, 1880-1914' *International Review of Social History*, 29 (2008) pp. 1-33.

³² Arthur McIvor, 'Employers' Organisation and Strikebreaking in Britain, 1880-1914' *International Review of Social History*, 29, 1 (2008) p. 6.

³³ Ernest Phelps Brown, *The Growth of British Industrial Relations*, (London: Macmillan, 1965) pp. 162-3.

³⁴ Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 4.

boilermakers and patternmakers found themselves unable to work in the lock out either. The wide-reaching fallout further strained the collective feeling of solidarity as these trade unions attempted separate negotiations with individual employers in open defiance to the ASE.³⁵ The bitterness and resentment caused by this perceived betrayal would have lasting effects on the delicate cohesion between trade unions.³⁶

There was, however, a revitalised appreciation of the need for more effective solidarity between workers' organisations that grew out of the trauma of this failure. Witnessing the destruction of the mighty ASE in the face of employers' solidarity showed trade union leaders that they had to be able to work together more effectively. Financially, the employers were powerful; trade unions could be financially powerful too, but only if they pooled their resources in a more meaningful way than the ad hoc levy system. There began the lengthy discussions, proposals and debates about how financial reserves could be collected centrally to match and eventually surpass the economic hold that employers had over labour throughout the 1890s.³⁷ These discussions eventually brought the GFTU into fruition; indeed, even as far into the future as 1920, the then Chairman of the GFTU Joseph Cross noted that the 'one principal cause of bringing this Federation into existence was the disastrous result of the engineers' strike'.³⁸ The following section will outline how the journey from the ASE's failure to the formation of the GFTU was as complex and variable as the factions of the labour movement, but how ultimately it was the TUC-endorsed scheme, rather than a more socialist plan, that won the endorsements and support required to be able to fully establish a federation for all the trade unions of Britain.

Hope for Unity

At the 1898 Bristol Congress, James O'Grady walked beneath the high, barrel-vaulted ceiling of Colston Hall, stood in front of 450 labour delegates, and gave the

³⁵ Eric Wigham, *The Power to Manage: A History of the Engineering Employers' Federation*, (London: Macmillan, 1973) pp. 46-9.

³⁶ Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, p. 88.

³⁷ Logie Barrow and Ian Bullock, *Democratic Ideas and the British Labour Movement*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp. 109-39.

³⁸ Proceedings and Report July 1920 – June 1921, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/14.

opening address as the first publicly socialist President of the TUC.³⁹ Although O'Grady is perhaps best-known as one of the Labour MPs to enter parliament in the 1906 general election, he had previously worked as a cabinetmaker and a national organiser for the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades' Association (NAFTA). Keir Hardie later praised O'Grady's 'clear, strong pronouncement for Socialism and independent political action' that 'commanded earnest attention, and at one or two points evoked quite a hurricane of cheers'.⁴⁰ O'Grady had declared that the whole movement, the industrial and the political, 'must be concentrated upon the best way to checkmate the latest manifestations of the capitalist force that has threatened the very existence of our trade organisations'.⁴¹ He was referring directly to the ASE lockout. Hardie seemed to consider his appointment as President as a symbol of the possible new direction of the whole movement, in opposition to the likes of Robert Knight, who 'survey[ed] the scene placidly, himself more Tory than Lord Salisbury'.⁴² His hope that O'Grady's presence and speech would 'mark a fresh development of the trade union movement' was clear, although the exact direction of this development was still very much up for debate.⁴³

Even though O'Grady's hurricane of applause had opened the meeting in which the GFTU would be voted into existence, the exact plan with which the trade unionists of the country could federate was still being hotly debated. One scheme for federation that was concocted by P.J. King, an obscure trade union activist who managed to find a willing and enthusiastic supporter in Robert Blatchford, the editor of *The Clarion*, almost got off the ground in the aftermath of the ASE lockout.⁴⁴ King's scheme for a National and International General Federation of Trade and Labour Unions (NIGFTLU) was formally established in the summer of 1898, with Robert Smillie – the then chairman of the Scottish Trades Union Congress and eventual leader of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain – as President, a full two months

³⁹ David E. Martin 'James O'Grady', in *The Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol II*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1972) pp. 286-9.

⁴⁰ *Labour Leader*, 3 September 1898, p. 3; The delegates that year included a number of international visitors, although the TUC's involvement with international trade unionism had been very lax. This was a role that would be taken up by the GFTU and is explored further in chapter two.

⁴¹ TUC Annual Report, 1898, www.unionhistory.info, accessed 20 September 2020.

⁴² *Labour Leader*, 3 September 1898, p. 3; For biographical information on Robert Knight, see Alistair Reid, 'Robert Knight (1833-1911)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol. VI*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982) pp. 177-85.

⁴³ *Labour Leader*, 3 September 1898, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Barrow and Bullock, *Democratic Ideas*, pp. 61-3.

before the TUC could meet.⁴⁵ King was confident that the TUC would simply 'fall in line' and vote to endorse the NIGFTLU because his plan had been so well-publicised by the *Clarion*.⁴⁶

However, TUC proceedings took an unexpectedly dramatic turn. A fire broke out in an adjoining building in the early hours of the following morning, which caused the grand Colston Hall meeting room to go up in flames.⁴⁷ Thankfully there were no casualties, but the vote on federation was adjourned until the following year. This delay proved fatal for Knight's plan, but crucial for the foundation of what was to become the GFTU, because it allowed the TUC's Parliamentary Committee time to organise support for their own plan for federation.⁴⁸ Eventually, a much-reduced number of delegates met again at Manchester on a cold January day in 1899 to officially establish the new centralised strike fund and arbitration scheme that had been designed by the Parliamentary Committee. Excitement and hopeful enthusiasm set against a backdrop of factional arguments that abruptly turned into a more subdued state of affairs would turn out to be an apt beginning for the GFTU.

After some meetings chaired by the Parliamentary Committee in the early months of 1899, the newly elected management committee of the GFTU held their first meeting on the 19th of July at the Westminster Palace Hotel, London.⁴⁹ Their purpose was financial and consultative; their main remit being the provision of advice, mediation and strike benefits to affiliated unions. Trade unions and friendly societies were required to pay a separate membership fee directly to the GFTU in addition to their TUC membership fees in order to be eligible for these benefits; the amount that they paid depended on the size of the union, and the percentage was to take into account the financial requirements and hardships experienced during periods of intense industrial unrest, economic fluctuations, and war. The TUC had little involvement with the GFTU from the moment the Parliamentary Committee voted in the new executive, except for the mutual delegations to their respective annual gatherings, and the management committee of the GFTU were able to act as a fully autonomous

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 124.

⁴⁶ 'Trades Federation', *Clarion*, 20 August 1898, p. 4.

⁴⁷ 'Colston Hall Fire', *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 2 September 1898, p. 5.

⁴⁸ A thoroughly detailed account of the entanglement between the TUC's Parliamentary Committee and P. J. King, and the 'slow start' of the GFTU and the 'quick fade' of the NIGFTLU, is given in Barrow and Bullock, *Democratic* pp. 127-32.

⁴⁹ Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 22.

executive board without any oversight from what they often referred to as the 'parent' body. Individual members of the GFTU management committee were elected at their annual council; they travelled to disputes when they occurred, met with trade union leaders and employers, reported back to the other members of the management committee, and administered benefits when they were required. As the TUC debated and considered, the GFTU acted and functioned.

Within the GFTU, and indeed within the wider movement, there remained significant friction between the socialist-leaning arm of the labour movement that wanted more strikes and faster change, and labour leaders with a more conciliatory outlook on trade unionism. The tensions embodied by the factional support for either King's federation scheme or the Parliamentary Committee's scheme did not evaporate once the GFTU was established; indeed, direct opposition to any kind of federation was still heard in the debates of the TUC once the GFTU had been formed, and tensions between the TUC and GFTU were quick to appear.⁵⁰ This strain was borne out in the discussions over how the GFTU should operate, because whilst some wanted a fighting fund that could be used as a show of financial strength, others wanted the GFTU to be an instrument of conciliation first and a strike fund only when absolutely necessary. There were also many differences of opinion regarding several aspects of the GFTU's rules, including the definition of a dispute and under what circumstances the GFTU ought to pay benefit to out of work workers which was a frequent and contentious point debated at the yearly meetings.

Although the earliest record of the yearly council meeting to include verbatim minutes at the GFTU is 1903, the brief records for 1900 – 02 include proposed amendments to rules. The first proposed amendment from GFTU delegates was issued by the National Union of Gas Workers' and General Labourers' Union (NUGWGL) in which they asked for the GFTU to 'render financial assistance to connect societies directly concerned where disputes do occur, and to assist in their settlement by just an equitable methods'.⁵¹ This amendment highlighted the effect

⁵⁰ As the TUC had made the GFTU to be an autonomous organisation that was to be consulted on all industrial matters, and their creation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 also left the TUC without a need to be consulted on political matters, questions regarding the very purpose of the TUC soon appeared. This was a fundamental question of purpose that plagued the GFTU in its early years, and will be explored throughout the thesis as external factors and political changes affected the existence of the GFTU.

⁵¹ General Council Meeting Records, 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/2.

that a strike or lockout could have on people working in adjacent trades; for example, an employer could be unwilling or unable to offer work to a group of weavers any work if the spinners were striking. There were frequent calls for the GFTU to provide financial assistance in these cases, and requested amendments such as these were commonplace throughout the early years of the GFTU. This request was likely to have been made by Will Thorne (1857-1946), leader of the NGGWGL.⁵² He was a frequent delegate to the GFTU, and a vocal critic of the GFTU's narrow definition of an industrial dispute. Although there were many calls to do so, it was never official GFTU policy to support sympathetic strikes. On occasion, they would use their discretion to determine how directly involved a union was with the dispute in question, but this became too onerous a financial burden as the GFTU headed into their tenth year.

The first management committee, even those that saw themselves as keen socialists, were still adamant that they were to act as advisors to trade unions that wanted to negotiate with employers, rather than generous controllers of an ample purse that could finance lofty revolutionary ideas. How these policies were created were a direct result of the personalities and ideas of the men on the management committee, and so it is useful to consider who the men were, their trade union backgrounds and how their own political viewpoints translated into GFTU policies and practices.

The First Management Committee

The first GFTU meeting elected a diverse mix of personalities and trade union political cultures to their management committee, which included some already well-known and other more obscure labour leaders. The first members of the committee were Peter Curran, representative of the Gasworkers' Union and Independent Labour Party (ILP) member, elected as the first chairman; Isaac Mitchell of the ASE and the ILP was the first General Secretary; and Ben Tillett of the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union (DWRGLU); Joseph N. Bell of the National

⁵² David E. Martin 'William James Thorne', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol I*, Joyce Bellamy and Jon Saville, eds., (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1972) pp. 314-9.

Amalgamated Union of Labour (NAUL); Joseph Maddison of the Friendly Society of Iron Founders (FSIF), Allen Gee of the Yorkshire Textile Workers' Federation; Matthew Arndale of the United Machine Workers; Alexander Wilkie of the Associated Society of Shipwrights; Thomas Mallalieu of the Amalgamated Society of Journeymen Felt Hatters; James Holmes of the National Hosiery Federation; William J. Davis of the National Society of Amalgamated Brass Workers; Thomas Ashton of the Amalgamated Cotton Spinners' Association (Cotton Spinners'); Henry Newell of the National Amalgamated Society of Operative House and Ship Painters and Decorators; James Crinion of the Amalgamated Association of Card and Blowing Room Operatives; and William Boyd Hornidge of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives (NUBSO), were all elected as part of the management committee.⁵³ James Sexton of the National Union of Dock Labourers and John R Clynes from the Gasworkers' Union would serve as the first two auditors, although William Millington from the Associated Shipwrights was also an auditor for the first few months.⁵⁴ Their politics and backgrounds were varied, and although not all of them remained with the GFTU for very long, the range of backgrounds mirrored the continuing disagreements on the very purpose of the GFTU.

The GFTU leadership remained in the hands of representatives from craft unions throughout its existence, but important players from general unions were also represented on its management committee. They included Tillett, Curran, Sexton

⁵³ For biographical information, see their entries in the Dictionary of Labour Biography: Barbara Nield, 'Peter (Pete) Francis Curran (1860-1910)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol IV*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977) pp. 65-8; John Saville and A.P. Topham, Benjamin 'Tillett (1860-1943)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol IV*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977); Keith Laybourn, 'Allen Gee (1852-1939)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol III*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1976) pp. 81-4; Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, 'Alexander Wilkie (1850-1928)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol III*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1976); David Howell, 'James Holmes (1850-1911)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol XI*, eds David Howell, Keith Gildart and Neville Kirk (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2003) pp. 130-40; Margaret Espinasse and John Saville, 'William James Davis (1848-1934)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol VI*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982) 92-9; Naomi Reed, 'Thomas Ashton (1841-1919)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol VII*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972) 8-10. There have been no biographical entries written for Isaac Mitchell, Joseph Bell, Joseph Maddison, Matthew Arndale, Thomas Mallalieu, Henry Newell, James Crinion or William Boyd in either the *Dictionary of Labour Biography* or the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Labour historians have tended to show more interest in leaders that went into politics as well as trade unionism; it is likely that the lack of attention on these names is related.

⁵⁴ Eric Taplin, 'James Sexton (1956-1938)' *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol IX*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993) pp. 248-55; J. S. Middleton and Marc Brodie, 'John Robert Clynes (1869-1949)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2004) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32461>; There are no biographical entries for Millington.

and Bell. Sexton left the GFTU in 1904, although he continued to enjoy the confidence of those on the management committee. During his involvement in the 1911 transport strike, the GFTU brushed off newspaper accusations that Sexton was inciting the strikers to violence, and instead insisted that whilst it was true that 'workpeople occasionally lose their tempers.... the acts complained of are most frequently the work of the unorganised'.⁵⁵ The other three general trade unionists remained for many years and would often highlight the different effects that trade union policies designed for craft unionists would have on the workers they represented. For instance, Tillett's long-running special interest in trade union regulation of the ex-servicemen coming into the work force was guided by the high proportion of them seeking out low or semi-skilled work as dockers, but his reasoning was often challenged by his craft-based colleagues such as Arthur Henderson.⁵⁶ The Cotton Spinners, represented by Ashton, were thought of as one of the 'aristocrats' of trade union organisations, and together with the ASE, represented two of the three biggest trade unions of the 1890s.⁵⁷ Ashton and the other textile union representatives remained constant figures in the GFTU, and only left when they reached retirement (rather than leaving as their organisations seceded or leaving for different jobs in the civil service or politics). This consolidated their dominance in the GFTU, because other delegates that had attended fewer annual meetings and had less opportunity to make their presence felt.

In summary, the people that led the GFTU in its infancy came from a variety of trades and backgrounds, but there was already a significant lean towards craft unionism and a particular emphasis on the textile industry in its earliest days that endured well into the middle of the twentieth century. The GFTU, as an umbrella organisation, did not necessarily have the shared experience of a trade to act as a unifying factor in the same way that a single trade union would, and so it was effectively down to the men in charge to form their own sense of shared unity. Their personalities, experiences and politics played a crucial role in the building of an 'emotional community'. To begin to explore the role of personality in this way, the

⁵⁵ Quarterly Report, June 1911, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/33.

⁵⁶ General Council Meeting Records, 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

⁵⁷ Cole, *An Introduction*, p. 27; The other large union was the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, which never affiliated to the GFTU.

following section will focus on the lives of the two most important men in the GFTU's first decade: the first chairman, and the first general secretary.

Pete Curran: GFTU Chairman 1899 - 1910

Although he only seems to make occasional appearances in labour histories, Pete Curran had earned a reputation as a popular socialist orator by the time of his election to the GFTU chairmanship. Patrick 'Pete' Francis Curran, son of Irish immigrants Bridget and George Curran, a causey layer, was born on the 28th of March 1860 in Glasgow.⁵⁸ Like most labour leaders at the time, Curran received only basic schooling before beginning his working life in a blacksmith's shop at the age of ten.⁵⁹ Although he was raised a Catholic, according to journalist Joseph Clayton (1867-1943) he was non-practicing for most of his life, but was reconciled with his faith before he died.⁶⁰ He became involved with socialism just at the point of its growing importance in Scotland, starting with activism in the Irish and Scottish land reform movements before joining the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) soon after it was founded in 1881.⁶¹ He then married Mary McIntyre, the daughter of an egg dealer, and moved south to find work at the Royal Arsenal in Woolwich.⁶² It has been suggested that this move to London was a result of his growing reputation as a socialist orator on the street corners of Glasgow; although he was building his reputation in his trade union and political circles, he would have had problems finding

⁵⁸ A causey layer worked on road construction; Barbara Nield, 'Peter (Pete) Francis Curran (1860-1910)', *The Dictionary of Labour History Vol IV*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977) p. 65.

⁵⁹ David E Martin, 'Peter Francis [formerly Patrick Francis] Curran 1860-1910', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/45908>.

⁶⁰ Joseph Clayton, 'Irish Catholics and the British Labour Movement', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 14, 54 (1925) p. 290.

⁶¹ For more information on Curran's role in the early socialist movement in the 1880s – 90s in Scotland, see James D. Young, 'The Irish Immigrants' Contribution to Scottish Socialism, 1880 – 1926', *Saothar: Irish Labour History Society*, 13 (1988) pp. 89-98; The SDF was the first organised socialist political party in Britain, and was established by Henry Hyndman who wanted to stop alliances with the Liberal Party in favour of direct political representation for Marxist policies. For more thorough accounts of the SDF see Martin Crick, *The History of the Social Democratic Federation*, (Keele: Keele University Press, 1994); John Callaghan, *Socialism In Britain since 1884*, (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 1990); Henry Collins, 'The Marxism of the Social Democratic Federation', in John Saville and Asa Briggs (eds) *Essays in Labour History Vol 2*, (London: Macmillan, 1971) pp. 212-6; David Murray Young, *People, Place and Party: The Social Democratic Federation 1884-1911*, Doctoral Thesis, Durham University (2003).

⁶² Nield, 'Peter Curran', *The Dictionary of Labour History Vol IV*, p. 65.

and keeping work if employers deemed him too much of an agitator.⁶³ In London, he formed lasting friendships with Will Thorne and Ben Tillett, both of whom would go on to be active members or delegates of the GFTU. Curran worked with Tillett and Thorne to set up the National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers in 1889 (renamed as the National Union of General Workers (NUGW) in 1916) and became one of the first district secretaries. He was a convincing and effective organiser and was integral to the winning of the eight-hour day for his members.⁶⁴

The following year, Curran gained national celebrity status after his conviction for his involvement in a dockers' strike in Plymouth.⁶⁵ Along with George Shephard (Dockers' Union) and John Matthews (Bristol, West of England and South Wales Trade Operatives), Curran attempted to persuade a coal merchant named G. F. Treleven to only employ men affiliated to a trade union.⁶⁶ The merchant accused Curran of threatening behaviour during their negotiations, and so although Curran maintained his innocence, he was found guilty and ordered to pay a £20 fine under the 1875 Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act. Curran's fan base during the trial was significant: the considerable crowd that gathered in support of Curran and the other two men accused of intimidation apparently 'expressed much dissatisfaction' at the verdict.⁶⁷ The Gasworkers' Union had drummed up considerable interest in the case, and Curran embarked on a national tour to publicise his appeal against the conviction: the *Sunderland Echo's* proclamation of support for the 'he Plymouth Martyr' was indicative of the widespread understanding that this one case was more about ending victimisation than it was about the three individual convictions.⁶⁸ Eventually Curran's conviction was quashed in an appeal and, in an added boon for the trade union movement, the Employers' Association became liable for the costs.⁶⁹ Riding the waves of his successful win against such a

⁶³ Nield, 'Peter Curran', *The Dictionary of Labour History Vol IV*, p. 66.

⁶⁴ Joseph Clayton, 'Irish Catholics and the British Labour Movement', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 14, 54 (1925) p. 289.

⁶⁵ 'The Labour Dispute at Plymouth', *Torquay Times*, 24 October 1890, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Nield, 'Peter Curran', *The Dictionary of Labour History Vol IV*, p. 67.

⁶⁷ 'Unionists' Sentences Confirmed', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 10 January 1891, p. 6.

⁶⁸ 'The Gasworkers', *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 9 February 1891, p. 3; The funding for his legal appeal was supported wholly by the London Trades Council.

⁶⁹ Nield, 'Peter Curran', *The Dictionary of Labour History Vol IV*, p. 67.

powerful organisation of employers, Curran was given a post as the national and general organiser of the Gasworkers' Union.⁷⁰

Despite his growing trade union successes, Curran seemed more politically ambitious rather than wanting to stay on the industrial side of the movement, although he certainly held sway in both arenas. He had worked with Keir Hardie to set up the ILP in 1893, and stood for election against W. C. Bannerjee, a Liberal lawyer and Charles Cayzer, a Tory shipowner, as an ILP candidate for Barrow-in-Furness two years later.⁷¹ However, his paltry 414 votes compared to Cayzer's 3192 was a resounding defeat.⁷² He tried again in 1897 in the Barnsley by-election, but the mining community favoured their Liberal candidate, a coal owner that supported the eight-hour day and had the backing of the Yorkshire miners' leaders. Despite enthusiastic support from Hardie, he was stoned by Barnsley miners, attacked by the local women, and even thrown from his trap after attending a meeting.⁷³ A personal attack on him by Ben Pickard from the MFGB about rumours that Curran had deserted his wife Mary seem to have landed heavily, as it highlighted a need for labour leaders to appear 'decent' and have a strong sense of morality.⁷⁴ The accusations that Curran was living with a woman that was not his wife only appeared fleetingly in the press and seems to have been driven by two women canvassers for the Liberal candidate.⁷⁵ Newspaper reporting reflected an Edwardian sense of social decency, which did not necessarily hide questions of morality or marital indiscretions, but it rarely placed them at the centre of their reporting so it is difficult to ascertain any precise information here.⁷⁶ Even so, the origins of the rumour starting with two unnamed women knocking on doors, and the literal violence experienced by Curran, indicate that the knowledge of his rumoured affair was at least partly responsible for the people of Barnsley rejecting him as their MP.

⁷⁰ Martin, 'Peter Curran', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁷¹ *The Clarion*, 13 July 1895, p. 6.

⁷² 'Saturday's Pollings', *Faringdon Advertiser*, 20 July 1895, p. 3.

⁷³ 'The Vacancy at Barnsley', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 24 September 1897, p. 7; J. E. Williams, 'The Political Activities of a Trade Union, 1906 – 1914', *International Review of Social History*, 2, 1 (1957) p. 3.

⁷⁴ Nield, 'Peter Curran', *The Dictionary of Labour History Vol IV*, p. 67.

⁷⁵ *Labour Leader*, 6 November 1897, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Gail Savage, 'Erotic Stories and Public Decency: Newspaper Reporting of Divorce Proceedings in England', *The Historical Journal*, 41, 2 (1998) pp. 511-528.

It is not clear whether this rumour was true, but Curran did marry Marian Barry shortly after losing the Barnsley election.⁷⁷ Barry was an Irish former tailoress and a trade unionist active in the Womens' Trade Union League (WTUL), and her biographer Christine Collette surmised that she met Curran in 1896 when she spoke at a meeting for laundresses held under the auspices of the Gasworkers' union.⁷⁸ His first wife has disappeared from the records, but Curran was living with his second wife, his three children from his first marriage, two young children from his second marriage, and an elderly widow called Ann Duggan that was working as a general domestic, at 17 Blenheim road in Walthamstow by 1901.⁷⁹ It is possible that Mary Curran may have moved back to Scotland after the breakdown of their marriage; the 1891 census shows her and their children visiting her brother John McIntyre in Lanarkshire whilst Curran was visiting his friend and leader of the Aberdeen Trades Council Andrew Bremner, so she probably had strong family ties there.⁸⁰ The record trail for Mary Curran goes cold after the 1891 census record, so it is unclear whether she died or remarried. The private lives of labour leaders such as Pete Curran have often been footnotes to their political and industrial achievements, but events such as remarriages should have more emphasis in our understanding of how character was formed precisely because they are so informative of character. Political hustings, trade union meetings, open air speeches are all helpful indications of politics, ideologies and tactical understandings in people; family life, with its births, marriages, desertions and deaths, adds enriching nuance and depth. In Curran's case, his wife also appears to have played a direct part in his political fortunes, despite her absence from much of the records.

Despite having two electoral defeats under his belt, Curran was clearly not a man to give up easily. He was elected to the chairmanship of the GFTU in 1899, before helping to found the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), serving on its executive council and moving the 'Newcastle amendment' that stopped members

⁷⁷ Martin, 'Peter Curran', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁷⁸ Christine Collette, 'Marian [nee Barry] Curran', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/53244>.

⁷⁹ "Peter Curran," 1901, Census return for 17 Blenheim road, Walthamstow, Essex (RG13, folio 39, p. 37) accessed 2 July 2021, www.findmypast.co.uk; The children were as follows: Johanna (b. 1885), a Relief Stamper, James (b. 1888), May (b.1890), Peter (b.1901) and Philip (new-born).

⁸⁰ "John McIntyre", 1891, Census return for Shields terrace, Govan, Kinnings Park, Lanarkshire (district 43, Schedule 54), www.findmypast.co.uk, accessed 2 July 2021.

from supporting the Liberal or Conservative parties.⁸¹ He involved himself closely with local politics in Jarrow for four years before contesting the seat against the 84-year-old sitting Liberal candidate Sir Charles Palmer in 1906, losing with a much more respectable vote count than his other attempts.⁸² His lapsed Catholicism may have lost him the Irish vote, despite his support of Irish Home Rule.⁸³ It has been suggested by his biographers David Martin and Barbara Nield that Curran also played down his socialism in order to appeal to voters and win the seat, but it seems unlikely that Curran could be so easily divorced from his reputation as a political radical. Palmer explicitly decided to run against Curran in 1906 instead of retiring because, as Curran later recounted, he saw 'that there was an opponent in the field who advocated Socialist principles'.⁸⁴ After he lost the contest, he was the guest of honour at a Jarrow Labour Party dinner some months after, and Curran and his wife were presented with gifts of a dresser and a gold ring, in a show of enthusiastic loyalty and belief that the 'national unrest in regard to the condition of the workers of the country' was far from over, and that Curran would ensure that 'the struggle would not cease until they obtained a better condition of things for the workers generally'.⁸⁵ Further to this, his speech as reported by the local newspaper in the summer of 1906 makes the "Plymouth Martyr's" position crystal clear:

he had heard it stated on more than one occasion that the thirty representatives were not doing that effective work which the trade union and socialist movement expected of them... but...he hoped everyone would be prepared to give consideration to the tremendous forces which were arrayed against them in Parliament... The seed that was sown at the last election would become fruit, and Jarrow would be fought every time on the independent trade union and socialist labour ticket.⁸⁶

Although not openly calling for a socialist revolution during his election campaign, Curran's name was synonymous with socialism in the press.

⁸¹ Nield, 'Peter Curran', *The Dictionary of Labour History Vol IV*, p. 67.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ *Clarion*, 2 February 1906, p. 4.

⁸⁴ 'How I Lost Jarrow', *Jarrow Express*, 2 March 1906, p.3.

⁸⁵ 'The Jarrow Division', *Shields Daily Gazette*, 21 May 1906, p. 3.

⁸⁶ *Jarrow Express*, 22 June 1906, p. 6.

Curran took another chance to be an MP the following year on the death of the elderly Liberal incumbent and entered the House of Commons at the age of 47.⁸⁷ For Curran, his belated entry into parliamentary politics would give him far less time to instigate changes for working and social conditions he had spent his life fighting for than he could have imagined. In his short time in parliament, he certainly did not lose sight of his roots: his disdain for the fripperies and conventions of political debate in the House of Commons was often noted, as was his suspicion of new education programmes that 'allowed' working class people to access Oxford University rather than creating educational institutions for the working class.⁸⁸ As an MP, he became particularly well known for supporting the unemployed both inside and outside parliament. A satirical cartoon by J B Williams of the Musicians' Union also alludes to Curran's support for the emancipation of black workers in the United States of America.⁸⁹ In October 1908 along with fellow GFTU management committee member James O'Grady, he accompanied his old friend Will Thorne to the magistrates court after Thorne had been accused of inciting unemployed demonstrators to 'rush several bakers' shops in London rather than starve'.⁹⁰ When Thorne needed surety for his bail, Curran and O'Grady each put up £50 for their friend.

Curran indeed a very likeable character, known for his 'rollicking good humour... and exquisite blarney', and was considered a good mediator as well as a punchy orator.⁹¹ However, his exuberance may have hidden an underlying problem that he struggled with. An embarrassing conviction for public drunkenness in 1909, for which he received a fine but also unanimous support from colleagues and friends, hinted at a problem with alcohol reliance.⁹² The incident happened at Mansion House, which suggests that Curran made a very public spectacle of himself in front of other MPs.⁹³ Arthur Henderson, a committed temperance man who probably thought Curran's

⁸⁷ Martin, 'Peter Curran', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁸⁸ 'Notes of the Day', *The Globe*, 20 July 1908, p. 1; GFTU Proceedings and Reports July 1908 – June 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/7.

⁸⁹ Menu and booklet for fraternal delegates from America by the TUC, 5 September 1911, Modern Records Centre, MSS.74.5.2.

⁹⁰ 'Mr Will Thorne's Alleged Inflammatory Speech', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 17 October 1908, p. 6.

⁹¹ Ben Tillett, 'Pete Curran', *Justice*, 26 February 1910, p. 3.

⁹² 'The Unfortunate Incident', *Dundee Courier*, 26 February 1909, p. 5.

⁹³ 'Mr Pete Curran MP', *Christchurch Times*, 6 March 1909, p. 2.

actions convincingly proved his stance on alcohol to be correct, chaired the Labour Party meeting that discussed 'the unfortunate incident' and Curran's contrition.⁹⁴ As with the controversy over his remarriage and all the surrounding questions of morality and propriety, public drunkenness was anathema to the projection of labour leaders as solid, dependable and hardworking figures. Curran pledged a completely sober future, and publicly responded to the leader of the Temperance Council, J R Nixon's letter:

Dear Mr Curran, -I really think you ought to sign the pledge- don't you? It is a bad example that you set, as the men look up to you as a leader. You must be convinced that your only safety lies in the total abstinence. My motto is "abstinence for the individual and prohibition for the nation". What's yours?

Mr Curran replied... Dear Sir- Your kind note to hand. Glad to inform you that I have already adopted the advice you offer. Your sincerely, Pete Curran.⁹⁵

Pledge aside, Curran soon felt a lifetime of alcohol consumption catch up with him, and he underwent surgery for cirrhosis of the liver in early 1910.⁹⁶ He suffered complications from the surgeon's knife, and passed away on the 14th February 1910, shortly before his fiftieth birthday.⁹⁷ In testimony to Curran's popularity, and to how much his work as a trade unionist was valued by the local community and his union, his funeral on the 19th February was attended by thousands of mourners that walked for two miles accompanied by music from the Stepney gasworkers' brass band.⁹⁸ His close friend and co-worker Ben Tillett wrote a touching obituary in *Justice* that held the close and genuinely affectionate friendship between the two men up to the light:

To do the ephemeral, mundane work of adjusting wages and working conditions is, after all, a glorious drudgery. I am afraid the persons before the limelights imagine they are "the people," but the best work is done in detail; the teaching and teachers of Socialism have a splendid field of work; the patience that can endure must be made to understand as well. Pete Curran

⁹⁴ 'The Unfortunate Incident', *Dundee Courier*, 26 February 1909, p. 5.

⁹⁵ 'Pete Signs the Pledge', *Dundee Courier*, 26 February 1909, p. 5.

⁹⁶ Martin, 'Peter Curran', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁹⁷ Nield, 'Peter Curran', *The Dictionary of Labour History Vol IV*, p. 68.

⁹⁸ *The Times*, 21 February 1910, p. 4.

did his work in building up the present movement. As a trade unionist he helped to teach economic facts to the toilers, and was at his best when the Socialist movement needed champions, probably more than now. ...For nine years chairman of the Federation of Trades [GFTU]; masterful, adroit, a mixture of the most exquisite blarney and the imperative.... In the Vahalla of warriors, Pete will find comrades. The movement has many things to thank him for... He has organised and initiated and helped to control the most important and recent of working-class movements. In his Irish heart he was a revolutionary and rebel; as all true Celts are... I wish the voice now hushed could still be heard to hurtle intense words of raillery, attack and appeal. I knew him first as a fighter. I weep over his grave as a fighting comrade. I shall remember him and the associations of the strenuous times; they are glorious memories; by them I will judge him and love him till the great Call. His best work will live till the revolution comes.⁹⁹

The GFTU put out a call for donations in order to provide a fund for Curran's four young children and widow, and by the end of February they had received more than £700 from trade unions, co-operatives, politicians and international worker organisations.¹⁰⁰ It is notable that the call for this fund was indeed managed by the GFTU and not the Labour Party or Curran's Gasworkers' Union, because it shows that despite the fast-paced changes that occurred during the first decade of the twentieth century that challenged the position of and even the need for the GFTU (namely the growing power of the Labour Party and the increasing power of the TUC), they were still a prominent enough organisation in the labour movement to facilitate a call for donations of this scale. Ultimately the gesture testified both to the status of the GFTU and to Curran's popularity within the broad trade union movement.

Curran was well-placed as a candidate to be the first GFTU Chairman. He had the zest, energy and geniality that was essential in directing a new and ambitious project that hoped to bolster an entire nation's trade union movement and propel it towards

⁹⁹ Ben Tillett, *Justice*, 26 Feb 1910, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Quarterly Report June 1910, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/29 and Quarterly Report September 1910, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/30; The Quarterly Reports contain the names of the 394 individuals and organisations that donated to the fund in recognition of their generosity.

greater unity. He had been closely involved in agitation on the ground as well as on a national level with the Gasworkers' Union, and had built close relationships with several notable leaders from both the industrial and political movement. Although the GFTU's first mission statement had shed some of the more overtly socialist, even revolutionary, aspects during its embryonic crafting at the succession of TUC meetings in the late 1890s, with Curran's leadership there was no doubt that its early development intended to head away from 'Lib-Labism' and towards a more progressive merging of socialism and trade unionism.

Although Curran, at one point a member of both the Fabian Society and the Social Democratic Federation, was described as 'exuberant... decisive, energetic [and] hard-hitting', Prochaska surmised that he was reined in by general secretary Isaac Mitchell's calmer and more considered personality.¹⁰¹ However, it is perhaps fairer to say that as chairman rather than general secretary, Curran simply could not stamp his personality on the organisation in the same way that Mitchell could. As the first general secretary, it was Mitchell rather than Curran that was responsible for much of the positive interventionism that built bridges between small societies in the earliest years of their policy creation. Although they both threw themselves in to making the hope for great trade unionist unity into a reality, cracks in their unity inevitably appeared. The management committee meeting minutes indicate the high level of communication from affiliates that took up their time, and the vast majority of the disputes involved only a handful of workers which gives a clear indication of the undercurrent of small disputes that occurred in counterpoint to the various high profile strikes of the larger unions.¹⁰² In between the busy work of running the GFTU, the differences in direction of Curran and Mitchell gradually became more evident. Mitchell, as will be shown, was a man of entirely different character, on an entirely different political trajectory to Curran. In the early days of the GFTU, it seemed as if it was only a matter of time before conflict arose.

¹⁰¹ Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, pp. 20-1.

¹⁰² GFTU Management Committee Minutes 1901-1910, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/1-34.

Isaac Mitchell: General Secretary 1899 - 1907

Isaac Haig Mitchell was elected by the TUC's Parliamentary Committee to the general secretaryship of the GFTU at the same time as Curran was elected as chairman.¹⁰³ Until now he has remained an obscure figure in labour history, so details of his life have proved difficult to find. However, through gathering census material and a small amount of political ephemera from his one-off attempt at election in Darlington, this brief biography will help to create a further understanding of his personality. As Prochaska noted, Mitchell did not make a huge mark on the character of the GFTU in the same way that his successor did.¹⁰⁴ He was, nevertheless, notable for his attempts to grow affiliation and for his willingness to mediate in difficult circumstances. As the unopposed candidate on the Parliamentary Committee's list to spearhead the new venture of the GFTU, it is important to consider what they may have known about him and why they felt he would be an effective leader of this new organisation. His background and pathway into trade unionism go some way to demonstrate how Mitchell came to be the GFTU's first general secretary, and what direction the GFTU was expected to take.

Born in 1868 in Roxburghshire, Isaac Haig Mitchell was the fifth child of Alexander (b. 1817) and Isabella (b. 1833) Mitchell.¹⁰⁵ By the time he was three years old, his eldest two siblings Alexander (b.1851) and Violet (b.1852) had joined their parents in the weaving trade, whereas the younger siblings – Isabella (b.1862) and Margaret Douglas (b. 1865) – were at school. Although the cotton industry had previously flourished in Scotland, the Mitchells worked in their home in Hawick rather than in one of the large factories around Glasgow. By the time that Isaac was born, it is likely that the family were suffering financially after the American civil war had disrupted the imports of raw cotton.¹⁰⁶ Growing up in poverty was certain to have at least in some way instilled in him a sense of struggle for wage-fairness and a belief that people should not live in poverty whilst working.

¹⁰³ Provisional Management Committee Minutes 1899, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/1

¹⁰⁴ Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ 'Isaac Haig Mitchell,' 1871, *Census return for 3 Wellington Place, Wilton, Roxburghshire, Scotland* (district 4, schedule 152), accessed 1 August 2021, www.findmypast.co.uk.

¹⁰⁶ A J Robertson, 'The Decline of the Scottish Cotton Industry 1860-1914', *Business History*, 12, 2 (1970) pp. 116-28.

Mitchell did not follow in his family's cotton footsteps, although there is some discrepancy between accounts. According to the 1881 census, he became a clerk's apprentice by the age of 12, but his short biography given ahead of his run for the Darlington parliamentary seat in 1906 insists instead that he was kept at his Church school as a pupil teacher for 'many years longer than is generally the privilege of working lads'.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps the latter version was thought to be more acceptable to the electorate than the former, because it conjured images of studiousness and a strong work ethic. Regardless, he was eventually apprenticed to a Millwright rather than a clerk before the age of 21.¹⁰⁸ By 1891, Mitchell was 23 and living in Newcastle and working as an engine fitter.¹⁰⁹ At some point before 1881 his family had adopted a boy by the name of John Murray that was two years younger than Isaac.¹¹⁰ They seemed close, as they appear to have left for Newcastle together and lodged at 32 Bolingbroke street, a 3 bedroom terraced house, by which point John had taken the surname 'Mitchell'. A widow by the name of Jenie Stewart (b. 1829), along with her two daughters – Elizabeth (b.1851), a dressmaker and Jane (b. 1866), a teacher – rented what was likely a very small room in their terraced house to Isaac and John, as well as fitting in another young girl (described as an adopted daughter) called Emma Whaley (b. 1877) somewhere under that cramped roof. Perhaps this arrangement was a little too overcrowded for Mitchell, or perhaps he had a sense of adventure and a longing to travel, because in November 1892 he was onboard the ship *State of California*, destined for two years working as an engineer in New York City.¹¹¹

In 1905, his colleague Pete Curran would tell future Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, that Mitchell had joined up with the De Leonists, a libertarian Marxist

¹⁰⁷ 'Isaac Haig Mitchell,' 1881, *Census return for 19 Wellogate Place, Hawick, Roxburghshire, Scotland* (Schedule 57) accessed 1 August 2021. www.findmypast.co.uk; 'Report of Meeting: Address delivered by Mr Isaac H Mitchell', *Darlington Labour Representation Committee Pamphlet*, (1903), Darlington Library. U418c.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Isaac Haig Mitchell' (1891) *Census return for Bolingbroke Street, Heaton, Newcastle Upon Tyne, Northumberland, England* (RG12, folio 99, p. 99) accessed 1 August 2021. www.findmypast.co.uk.

¹¹⁰ 'John Murray,' 1881, *Census return for 19 Wellogate Place, Hawick, Roxburghshire, Scotland* (Schedule 57) accessed 1 August 2021. www.findmypast.co.uk.

¹¹¹ 'Isaac Mitchell', *UK, Outward Passenger Lists, 1890-1960*, Departure 4 November 1892, Glasgow, *State of California*. Accessed 1 August 2021. Available at: <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=TNA%2FBT27%2F0086000037%2F00098>.

organisation run by Daniel De Leon, during his time in the United States.¹¹² Although this seems unlikely given Mitchell's later trajectory away from socialism, he did have a background in trade union agitation in his earlier days. He had joined the ASE after seeing the working conditions of the city when he first moved to Newcastle, and 'quickly recognised what loyalty to his fellow workmen required of him', before joining the Newcastle Trades Council.¹¹³ His experience in New York probably built on some burgeoning ideas of the need for workers to organise, but De Leon did not seem to have a lasting impact on Mitchell's politics. Instead, he returned to his apprenticed routes and worked briefly as a millwright in Scotland after his return from America, and (he told his later prospective voters in Darlington) spent this time devoted to the quiet study of political and social matters.¹¹⁴ Although Mitchell was clearly trying to portray himself as a more scholarly candidate that was deserving of their votes, Mitchell's later articles in the GFTU's reports show a clear aptitude for elegant but succinct explanations and statements. He was described in an article for *The Clarion* as 'light-complexioned...[and] a plain, straight-forward speaker, who, perhaps, does not excite great enthusiasm, but... he impresses one as eminently the man of business who has something to do in the world'.¹¹⁵ Despite not being a stirring orator, he seemed to have an air of quiet confidence.

Before he pursued politics in Darlington, he was still laying his trade union roots. In 1895, this time in Glasgow, he was elected as the Scottish ASE representative to the 1896 Trades Union Congress, as well as on his local strike committee.¹¹⁶ He was again the Scottish ASE representative at the 1898 TUC in Bristol, and along with eventual GFTU chairman Pete Curran, witnessed the fire at Colston Hall.¹¹⁷ In the same year that he was elected to the general secretaryship of the GFTU – a role he said was 'one of the most important positions in the movement' - he married Margaret Hunter, also from his home-town of Hawick.¹¹⁸ Two years later Mitchell and

¹¹² Bill Purdue, 'Isaac Mitchell and the "Progressive" Alliance 1903-1906', *North East Labour History Society Bulletin*, 11 (1977) p. 2.

¹¹³ 'Report of Meeting: Address delivered by Mr Isaac H Mitchell', *Darlington Labour Representation Committee Pamphlet*, (1903), Darlington Library. U418c.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ 'Labour's Battlefields', *Clarion*, 4 December 1903, p. 7.

¹¹⁶ Prochaska, *The General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 20.

¹¹⁷ TUC Annual Report, 1898, www.unionhistory.info, accessed 20 September 2021.

¹¹⁸ 'Report of Meeting', *Darlington Labour Representation Committee Pamphlet*; 'Labour's Battlefields', *Clarion*, 4 December 1903, p. 7.

his wife had a daughter called Nancy, whilst also taking in his two nephews, 12-year-old Alexander and 17-year-old William.¹¹⁹ As general secretary to a national organisation, Mitchell's salary could now provide a homelife that was likely to be quite different to the one he had whilst growing up: the 1901 census shows that he could afford to have a 'monthly nurse' (a woman that came to assist new mothers after they had given birth) living with them shortly after Nancy had been born. Within a decade, Mitchell's family also included a live in domestic servant called Olive at their home in Surrey; a further indication of their increasing affluence and social status.¹²⁰

Mitchell and Curran were both members of the ILP whilst they ran the GFTU, but as Bill Purdue has suggested, Mitchell was already seen as being on the very right of the ILP by the time he was courting the Darlington constituency for his first (and only) attempt at being elected in the early 1900s.¹²¹ Given that the Parliamentary Committee were keen to move away from King's NIGFTLU, and that they used the extra six months between the Colston fire and the January vote on federation to design and promote a suitable alternative, Mitchell was a good compromise candidate: socialist enough in his background to potentially appeal to those backing King's plan, particularly those in the ASE, but pragmatic enough to focus on arbitration over hasty strikes.

Mitchell then seems an unlikely colleague of Curran, who was a committed socialist, close friend of Keir Hardie and a member of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) as well as the ILP. They did occasionally travel together as part of their arbitration duties, sometimes co-authored reports on strikes, and certainly attended GFTU management committee meetings together. Mitchell displayed some talent as a diplomat: he was pivotal in setting the GFTU up as the voice of British trade unionism on the international stage, and was crucial in smoothing things over with the Secretary of the International Federation of Trade Unions, Johannes

¹¹⁹ 'Isaac Haig Mitchell' (1901) *Census return for 4 Kerfield Crescent, Camberwell, London, England* (RG13, folio 49, p. 23) www.findmypast.co.uk.

¹²⁰ 'Isaac Haig Mitchell' (1911) *Census return for Auchrannie, Mayfield Road, Carshalton, Surrey, England* (RG14PN2924) www.findmypast.co.uk.

¹²¹ Purdue, 'Isaac Mitchell', *North East Labour History Society Bulletin*, pp. 2-3.

Sassenbach, after their disastrous 1903 conference in Dublin.¹²² The starkest difference between the two men was the drink. Whilst Curran drank himself to an early death, Mitchell was a committed advocate of the temperance movement.

Nevertheless, the two men initially complemented each other. In the GFTU reports, where Curran was energetically calling for the spirit of solidarity to bring workers closer together, Mitchell was calmly advocating for greater understanding between employer and employee. For example, Curran used his 1904 chairman's address to assure the GFTU delegates that 'industry from the working men's point of view, and the question of political emancipation were practically inseparable', whilst Mitchell's introduction to that year's report focused solely on the latest amendments to the GFTU's rules and the state of the bank balance.¹²³ They both wanted the GFTU to be a success, and in their own ways, they worked hard at it. As trade unionists, they were undeniably on the same page in terms of representation for workers; it was politics that muddied the waters and which eventually led to the split between the two men that looks likely to have affected their final years working together at the GFTU.

Mitchell was adopted as the Labour candidate for Darlington in 1903, but from the very beginning objected to any move that would delineate the new Labour Representation Committee (LRC) as a separate political party.¹²⁴ After Curran had moved the 'Newcastle Amendment' at the LRC conference that same year, Mitchell initially refused to sign it.¹²⁵ The amendment forbade any LRC candidates – as Mitchell now was – from promoting the interests of the Liberal or Conservative parties. This was a problem for Mitchell, as according to Bill Purdue he had moved so far away from the ILP that he was 'totally opposed to socialism'.¹²⁶ It was not yet common knowledge in 1903 that Macdonald was putting together his secret electoral pact with the Liberal Party that helped the Labour Party win 29 seats in 1906, and it may have been that Mitchell's awkwardness about the issue was a public thorn in his

¹²² Johannes Sassenbach, *Twenty-Five Years of International Trade Unionism*, (Amsterdam: IFTU Printing Works, 1926) pp. 10-3; The poor planning and management of the 1903 conference will be further explored in chapter two.

¹²³ Proceedings and Reports 1904-1905. Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/3.

¹²⁴ Bill Purdue, 'The Liberal and Labour Parties in North-East Politics 1900-14: The Struggle for Supremacy', *International Review of Social History*, 26, 1 (1981) pp. 8-13.

¹²⁵ Purdue, 'Isaac Mitchell', *North East Labour History Society Bulletin*, p. 6.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

side during the delicate negotiations.¹²⁷ George Barnes, then general secretary of the ASE and Trustee of the GFTU, wrote to advise Mitchell 'in a friendly way' in October 1903 that 'addressing a private meeting of the Liberal Executive is [a] somewhat dangerous proceeding' given the delicate nature of the LRC's new constitution.¹²⁸ Barnes was likely chosen as the non-antagonistic intermediary due to his position on the GFTU and ASE. Mitchell initially responded by haughtily offering his resignation as parliamentary candidate, before being persuaded to stay on and sign the LRC constitution in return for being allowed to meet with the Darlington Liberal Association as part of his election campaign between 1903-06. It is also notable that when questioned on whether he would support a Liberal government if he were elected, Mitchell emphatically responded that he would only support Liberal measures 'as my colleagues and myself believe [it] to be in the interests of Labour', and seem to have had Darlington Councillor Arthur Henderson's very visible support during his campaign.¹²⁹ By this time Mitchell was indeed becoming more sceptical about the potential of a standalone political party for the labouring class, but it was at the GFTU rather than the political scene of Darlington that his line was to be drawn in the sand.

In the last quarterly GFTU report in 1904, Pete Curran published an article called *The Labour Representation Movement*.¹³⁰ In it, he extolled what he felt was the general enthusiasm for the principle of political representation of labour, celebrated the 'tightening' of the constitution in 1903, and concluded with Crane's motto: 'The Unity of Labour is the Hope of the World'.¹³¹ Although the article itself was unsurprising, it was the article that followed it that caused the controversy. Mitchell had written his own article, called 'The Political Organisation of Labour', and had it printed to follow Curran's. The message and tone could not have been more different. Firstly, he admonished the LRC for including socialist organisations like the

¹²⁷ Kevin Morgan, *Ramsey Macdonald*, (London: Haus Publishing, 2006) p. 25.

¹²⁸ G Barnes to I Mitchell, 7 October 1903, quoted in Purdue, 'Isaac Mitchell', *North East Labour History Society Bulletin*, p. 3.

¹²⁹ 'Report of Meeting', *Darlington Labour Representation Committee Pamphlet*; Gillian Cookson, *History of the County of Durham Volume IV* (London: Victoria County History, 2005) p. 103.

¹³⁰ GFTU Quarterly Report, December 1904, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/14.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Fabians but excluding the SDF due to 'petty quarrels'.¹³² The second barbed attack is a barely veiled accusation levelled at Curran himself:

Frequently one hears the statement made by Trade Unionists that they are Socialists first and Trade Unionists afterwards. The surprising thing about the Trade Union official of this type is that he does not devote all his time to the advancement of the movement he holds first in importance. Why, if Trade Unionism is a mere makeshift, does the Socialist-first-Trade-Unionist condescend to accept the fleshpots of Trade Unionism and devote so much time to Trade Union work?¹³³

Curran had repeatedly declared himself as a socialist during GFTU meetings and in his speeches, including his recent chairman's speech at the GFTU, where he had praised the closer working relationship between trade unions and the new Labour Party.¹³⁴ Quite why Mitchell chose to make such a public statement of fundamental disagreement with his colleague is unclear, but he may have been anxious to appeal to the Liberal base in Darlington. Perhaps he wanted to remove all traces of his radical past? What is clear is that Mitchell by this point firmly believed that trade unionism and political representation of workers ought to be entirely separate. In his article, he called on the LRC to become a purely trade union organisation, or to at least give the trade unionist affiliates a fairer representation on the committee. Instead, he provoked MacDonald's ire, who complained to Curran about Mitchell's blind and bigotted [sic] antagonism'.¹³⁵ Curran responded:

'... Yes, Mitchell's article is a spiteful attack on the whole movement but the articles are not the affair of the Federation [GFTU] as they are written on an individual basis. My impression is that the local LRC at Darlington and the EC of the ASE should take the matter in hand as they are responsible for his candidature, and it is also my opinion that you as secretary of the National Movement are within your rights in calling the attention of these bodies to this article... He is anxious to show now that he is not a Socialist but a trades

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Proceedings and Reports, April 1904 to March 1905, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/3.

¹³⁵ Purdue, 'Isaac Mitchell', *North East Labour History Society Bulletin*, p. 6.

independent only, while he claimed to be an extreme Socialist until he got his present position.’¹³⁶

His ‘present position’ was a reference to his general secretaryship of the GFTU – still a new and developing organisation that held exciting prospects for the trade union movement, but also career prospects to whoever ran it. That Curran would rather action be taken by politicians to censure Mitchell, rather than at the expense of their trade union work, is perhaps led at least in part by the need for them to work together at the GFTU. It was also important for the GFTU to be apolitical and to show that they represented a broad church in order for them to encourage wider affiliations. Indeed, for many at the ILP, whatever thin political ice Mitchell had been standing on had already melted as John Bruce Glasier pointed out in their newspaper, the *Labour Leader*, that Curran’s celebration of greater unity appearing alongside Mitchell’s desire for the disassociation of trade unions from socialism had ‘cause[ed] consternation’ in Darlington and in the wider movement.¹³⁷ From this point, Mitchell’s contributions to GFTU reports were much smaller.

Mitchell campaigned for Darlington in the 1906 election, but lost by 288 votes against the sitting Liberal-Unionist Pike Pease. Apparently lacking the political tenacity of Curran, who was finally elected on his fourth attempt, Mitchell abandoned politics entirely after this one election campaign. Instead, he moved into a position with the Board of Trade in 1907. Whilst working his notice with the GFTU that summer, he travelled to Belfast alongside GFTU vice chairman Allen Gee in order to assist with the dock strike after the National Union of Dock Labourers’ (NUDL) general secretary James Sexton requested their help.¹³⁸ Sexton had been a founding GFTU member and remained until 1905, and despite being a passionate trade unionist that knew the Belfast dockers, carters and coalmen deserved far better wages and conditions than they were getting, he was more of a competent trade union administrator rather than an agitator.¹³⁹ Gee, a prominent figure in the Yorkshire textile industry, had

¹³⁶ Pete Curran to J R MacDonald, 16 January 1905, quoted in Purdue, ‘Isaac Mitchell’, *North East Labour History Society Bulletin*, p. 7.

¹³⁷ *Labour Leader*, 20 January 1905, p. 2.

¹³⁸ For a thorough account of the 1907 Belfast dispute, see John Gray, *City in Revolt: James Larkin and the Belfast Dock Strike of 1907*, (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1985).

¹³⁹ For biographical information on James Sexton, see his entry in the G A Phillips, ‘Sir James Sexton 1856-1938’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36030>.

previously called for the GFTU to emphasise their arbitration role over their strike-benefit role: he was unlikely to be supportive of a costly large-scale strike such as this one.¹⁴⁰ In a move that mirrored his impending move to the Board of Trade, Mitchell spent hours negotiating with city officials and employers rather than with rank and file strikers, whilst only handing out a small amount of strike benefit from GFTU funds.¹⁴¹ There was considerable confusion with the settlement of the dispute, but an accusation levelled at the GFTU, and at Mitchell in particular, is that they made some of the men believe that their back-to-work agreement was a victory when in fact nothing of note had been agreed to. What followed was a chaotic and uncertain return to work for some sections of the strikers, and a feeling of resentment which drove wedges between different trade unions that had been given different instructions: H R Stockman, writing in the *Labour Leader*, said that 'there can be no doubt that the men have been shamefully tricked. How far the responsibility for this trickery is divided between Mr Isaac Mitchell and the employers I cannot say'.¹⁴² It was certain now that despite his earlier days with the ASE strike committees, Mitchell had mellowed into a man of negotiation, and certainly set the tone for the GFTU's conciliatory policies. This was the approach that his successor, William Appleton, would develop further.

Mitchell's name appeared sporadically in 1920s and 30s newspaper reports in conjunction with his role as principal conciliation officer for the Board of Trade. His portrait was taken to commemorate his role in a government delegation to Canada in 1926, and has been kept at the National Portrait Gallery.¹⁴³ His arbitration experience had been put to good use by his new employers, most notably during the 1911 Dockers' and Seamen's strike, where he was deployed just in time to stop a riot.¹⁴⁴ Mitchell lived quietly, and never responded to the occasional attacks on him by the more militant figures in the labour movement that appeared in the press (Harry Pollitt, general secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) admonished Mitchell for 'deserting the movement and accept[ing] positions with the

¹⁴⁰ Proceedings and Reports April 1907 – March 1908, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/6.

¹⁴¹ John Gray, *City in Revolt: James Larkin and the Belfast Dock Strike of 1907*, (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1985) p. 110

¹⁴² *The Labour Leader* 9 August 1907, p. 2.

¹⁴³ 'Isaac Haig Mitchell, *The National Portrait Gallery*, (n.d.) NPGx83999.

¹⁴⁴ 'The Great Hull Strike', *Labour Leader*, 18 August 1911, p. 10.

employers and state departments' as late as 1937, showing a lasting grudge).¹⁴⁵ His change of position came with a change of name, as he preferred to use his middle name 'Haig' instead of Isaac. He died in 1952, at the age of 84.

Prochaska is certainly right to highlight the differences between Mitchell and Curran, but she did not allude to the clear tension that existed between them in her account.¹⁴⁶ Mitchell's 'cautious and discreet' leadership style was something that appealed to the apolitical objectives set out in the constitution of the GFTU:

To uphold the right of combination of labour, to improve in every direction the general economic position and status of the workers by the inauguration of a policy that shall secure to them the power to determine the economic and social conditions under which they shall work and live, and to secure unity of action amongst all societies forming the federation.¹⁴⁷

Curran's belief that the economic position of the workers should *also* be improved through political means was unimportant from the GFTU's perspective. Despite this, working alongside people with different political beliefs can create tensions even if the work itself is apolitical, hence the fracas of the 1904 Quarterly Report. Although on the surface it appeared as if Mitchell's quiet was complementary to Curran's loud, it is more likely that this was a simple veneer of professionalism rather than a genuine complementary and uncomplicated working relationship. Soon after Mitchell's departure, Curran made freer use of the opportunity to talk politics through his role as chairman. In 1908, he told the GFTU annual gathering that even though 'many at these tables think that the old type of Conservatism is the best for working [men]', without Labour MPs there would have been reversal of the Taff Vale judgement through the 1906 Trades Dispute Act; no Provision of Meals Act in 1906 that provided school lunches to children; and certainly no Old Age Pensions Bill that year.¹⁴⁸ It seems more as if the two men co-existed rather than worked in harmony, but nevertheless the key administrative and to some extent executive position of

¹⁴⁵ *Daily Worker*, 12 July 1937, p. 4.

¹⁴⁶ Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁷ Martin, *TUC*, pp. 163-4.

¹⁴⁸ The 1906 Act reversed the Taff Vale precedent that trade unions could be sued for damages by trade union officials during industrial disputes. Proceedings and Reports, July 1908 to June 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/7.

general secretary over the figurehead-like position of chairman remained key. Despite Curran's disagreement with Mitchell's politics, he refused the general secretary nomination when Mitchell announced his move to the Board of Trade in 1907.¹⁴⁹ Given his political ambitions, he likely felt that the general secretary role was far too time-consuming and would take him in a direction that he did not necessarily feel suited his interests. Importantly, having these two very different men at the helm of the new organisation did play to the idea of it being a broad church that welcomed trade unionists of all creeds, despite their lack of total harmony. Mitchell's quiet nature meant that the GFTU was seen as a service: a reserve of men who could come and assist in negotiations, who could administer benefits and who could offer advice in troubled times. The character of the GFTU, as an entity with a mission to not only assist organised workers but to also lead them and persuade them of the 'correct' ways to organise, was certainly crafted more after 1908 when William Appleton took over from Mitchell. This will be further explored below, but first it is important to consider some of the earlier achievements and missed opportunities of the GFTU under Mitchell.

First Orders of Business

The GFTU's early meetings dealt with various start-up issues: their emblem, an illustration of a band of straw tied by two flanking men, was designed by Walter Crane to stress the message of unity through strength via one of Aesop's fables, 'Wellwisher, London' was to be their telegraphic address, and the purchase of a typewriter was deemed a useful expenditure. Discussions of policy were evolving at a fast pace, and tended to be fuelled by speculation over the many different forms that strikes could take: Curran's notes from the meetings before the typewriter show that they would allow workers on strike to obtain temporary employment elsewhere, but that they could only claim strike benefit if that work did not exceed fourteen days.¹⁵⁰ The first organisational policy centred on the creation of eight district offices in London, Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle, Glasgow and Belfast, with their own Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen and Secretaries (for names and

¹⁴⁹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 14 August 1907, p. 4.

¹⁵⁰ Provisional Management Committee Minutes, 1899, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/1.

trade union affiliation of the new district officials, see Figure 1).¹⁵¹ This plan was a reflection of the connection that the GFTU was designed to have on a regional level with the rank and file members of the trade union movement. This network, it was hoped, would move executive power into the hands of local representatives of the GFTU, so that decisions regarding arbitration and/or strike benefits could be both timely and well-informed.¹⁵²

London	Manchester
<i>Chairman</i>	<i>Chairman</i>
C W Bowerman, London Society of Compositors	W Mullen, Card Room Operatives
<i>Vice Chairman</i>	<i>Vice Chairman</i>
J Black, ASE	J Sexton, National Dockers
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Secretary</i>
A A Purcell, French Polishers	Tom Fox, British Labour Amalgamation

Bristol	Newcastle
<i>Chairman</i>	<i>Chairman</i>
J Jenkins, Shipwrights	Alex Wilkie, Shipwrights
<i>Vice Chairman</i>	<i>Vice Chairman</i>
J W Betteridge (no union)	Thomas Dobson, Enginemen
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Secretary</i>
Frank Shepperd, Boot and Shoe Operatives	J N Bell, National Amalgamated Union of Labour

Birmingham	Glasgow
<i>Chairman</i>	<i>Chairman</i>
W C McStocker, Amalgamated Brassworkers	L O'Brien, Alliance of Cabinetmakers
<i>Vice Chairman</i>	<i>Vice Chairman</i>
Sam Lakin, Gasworkers	R K Struthers, Enginemen
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Secretary</i>
T F Richard, Boot and Shoe Operatives	Alex Gossip, Cabinetmakers

Leeds	Belfast
<i>Chairman</i>	<i>Chairman</i>
John Davison, Ironfounders	James Baird, Shipwrights
<i>Vice Chairman</i>	<i>Vice Chairman</i>
W G Millington, Shipwrights	Hugh Parker, Smiths and Strikers
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Secretary</i>
W H Leach, Gasworkers	R Bowers, ASE

Figure 1: The District Offices and their staff (Annual Report, 1900. Bishopsgate Institute. GFTU/1/1)

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

The GFTU management committee wanted the District Offices to have a fair degree of autonomy, which worked well alongside the principles of federation that explicitly did not want to interfere with the day to day running of their affiliates. However, the extended network of officers created many opportunities for miscommunication and confusion. Once such incident was detailed in the management committee meeting minutes of the 18th of September 1900.¹⁵³ The general secretary of the National Amalgamated Labourers' Union, Mr Williams, reported to the management committee that a dispute at Chepstow had ended. However, a report from Mr Sheppard, Secretary of the Bristol District, stated that his visit to the area (as per his role as District Secretary) found that the men's case had been lost, and that the men gave 'great complaints as to no Federation Benefit having been paid'.¹⁵⁴ Mr Williams had informed them that the GFTU had not issued strike benefits, which caused 'much indignation [to be] expressed by the committee', as they had copies of letters that they had sent to Mr Williams, one of which had been accompanied by a cheque for strike benefit. The following month, the minutes show that Mr Williams had informed the GFTU that he wished for his society to secede.¹⁵⁵ The committee 'expressed no surprise at the intimation' due to his 'very unsatisfactory' conduct in the matter, but haughtily reminded him that he needed to follow the correct procedure according to their rule book whilst noting that they would send the details of this case to the attention of the District Secretary.¹⁵⁶ Their delegation of this matter to the district office indicates that the management committee at this stage were not presenting themselves as a court of arbitration between unions or with regards to the conduct of individual officials, but rather expected the district offices to be able to do this themselves. Regardless of how the issue was dealt with and who was to blame, it is possible that the men in dispute continued to feel that the GFTU were to blame for their lack of strike benefit because that was the story presented to them. The minutes reveal many communication errors between this very large network of district offices, compounded by widespread misunderstandings of the GFTU's rule book. That these various small errors negatively influenced feelings of solidarity

¹⁵³ Management Committee Minutes, September 1900 – August 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/2.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

between workers and the national movement is likely, and may at least partly explain the slow growth of membership numbers in their first few years.

In addition, the District Office delegation network further reveals that the management committee did not regularly balk at issuing judgements on conduct. Indeed, they had to in order to ascertain which disputes were valid, if the relevant application for benefit had been filled out, or if there were ample efforts at arbitration preceding the strike. This system was entirely open to the subjective assessment of the men appointed to this committee. Concerns over this method of organisation, and its associated pitfalls, became a moot point. Much to Curran's dismay, the district committees were abolished in 1902.¹⁵⁷ Although the district model had been a strong indication of the connection to the local rank and file membership of the GFTU, it proved unworkable and badly organised. The ideal of a local network was undermined by the inherent impossibility of including too many people in a communication chain, with many opportunities for error of judgement marring the purpose of creating the links in the first place. Also, these men were general secretaries or organisers for their own unions, and would probably have found it time-consuming to be taking on this additional work for the GFTU. Without the district committees, the rule-by-executive pathway was a stark deviation from their founding intention of giving direct and speedy advice to unions up and down the country, but it was the only workable solution left open to them. From this point, the management committee were the sole arbitrators of disputes for their affiliates.

The hopeful outlook that characterised the GFTU at the outset was soon dampened by other problems. Despite the very notion of federation requiring a willingness for trade unions to work together, the infighting between affiliates showed this was not a straightforward task. Before the ink was dry on the GFTU's second annual report, the Gasworkers' Union – the union of the GFTU Chairman, Pete Curran - held a special conference to consider disaffiliating due to the lack of financial benefit they could see for themselves.¹⁵⁸ Curran was not pleased about the vote taking place, but was powerless to stop it.¹⁵⁹ As the ASE had similar apprehensions about smaller unions

¹⁵⁷ Annual Report, 1902, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/2.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.; H. A. Clegg, *General Union in a Changing Society: A Short History of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers 1889-1964* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964) p. 48.

¹⁵⁹ Proceedings and Reports, July 1902 to June 1903, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/2.

combining to outvote them, Prochaska was correct in her observation about the continued problem of rife sectionalism. The craft unions were focused on proposing motions to strengthen rules around benefit application processes, whilst general unions called for variations of sympathetic strikes.¹⁶⁰ Although some disagreements over political affiliations occasionally cropped up, it was more common for disagreements at the GFTU to centre on the differing interests of craft and industrial unions.

Unfortunately, the precise cause or character of these early disagreements is often difficult to pinpoint as the records did not include verbatim notes until the 1907 annual meeting in York.¹⁶¹ Before this point, the motions for suggested rule changes indicate the different ideas held by different unions regarding what kind of an organisation they hoped the GFTU would be, but do not show the motivation behind them or who supported or opposed them. For example, a rejected motion in 1903 from the craft-based Amalgamated Society of Felt Hat Trimmers' Union show that they wanted strike benefit to be paid to their retired members so long as they had continued their contributions to the GFTU fund, which reflected a tradition of keeping membership fees and benefits going whilst trade union (or friendly society) superannuation payments were being claimed.¹⁶²

A perennial appeal was for the recognition of the sympathetic strike, or similarly associated lockout, as a valid reason for claiming strike benefit, such as that requested by the National Amalgamated Union of Labour in 1902.¹⁶³ Unfortunately the records do not indicate the discussions regarding these motions, or who argued in support of them, so it is impossible to rate their popularity or examine fully what craft or industrial unions wanted the GFTU to provide until a few years later. Nevertheless, the variety of motions showed the variety of opinion within the labour

¹⁶⁰ Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 26.

¹⁶¹ Proceedings and Reports, April 1907 – March 1908, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/6.

¹⁶² General Council Meeting Records, 1903, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/3.

¹⁶³ General Council Meeting Records, 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/2 and Proceedings and Reports, July 1902 – June 1903, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/2; The first Annual Report explicitly stated that their rules 'have followed the lines of narrowing down disputes to their smallest possible limits, which may be considered the antithesis of the "Sympathetic Strike" policy; in any case we have found it work successfully' (Annual Report, 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/1), however this became a problem if workers were unsure if they were on strike, locked out due to a nearby strike, or taking part in a sympathetic strike, as was the case in the transport dispute of 1912, and the GFTU found itself paying out benefit to people not technically on strike themselves. See Management Committee Minutes, July 1912, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/51.

movement: some felt that the GFTU should put funds into publishing their own research-based journal, provide statistics around the world of work, consult formally with the Labour Party on industrial policy issues, and not only support striking workers but to actively encourage industrial disputes with a view to obtaining profound industrial, political and industrial changes.¹⁶⁴ None of these suggestions were approved by the committee (although a newspaper did briefly appear from 1913 until 1919, and will be discussed in the following chapter), which held the purse strings and which always highlighted the importance of sound financial management.

In the face of a slow growth in membership, the early reports of the GFTU are peppered with Curran's assurances that 'although they had not increased their membership... to an extent they had anticipated', that the trade unionists of the country would eventually fall in with the GFTU's mission.¹⁶⁵ Perhaps they hoped that their continued work in providing strike benefits and conciliation advice at disputes across the country would slowly seed the idea of federation. The management committee met at least twice per month, and kept careful records of claims for benefits that had been granted, were being considered, or were rejected. The slow trickle of support that the GFTU gave to striking workers – for example, the 23 members of the Amalgamated Card and Blowing Room Operatives that struck in April 1904 to enforce district conditions in Hyde, West Yorkshire, or the 4 Darlaston Gasworkers that struck in February 1905 to resist a reduction in their rates – filled the management committee notebooks.¹⁶⁶ Sometimes, the accompanying letter that gave an explanation for the stoppage was considered fully at the meeting, but mostly the notes are scant on detail and only offer glimpses into the reasoning behind the strike. Most frustratingly, only information on the larger, more high-profile strikes tended to be detailed enough to show if the dispute was successful or not.

The potential for using GFTU records to map dispute rates, geographical prevalence, or industrial and trade roots is huge (particularly if cross-referenced with regional newspapers that reported on strikes) but falls outside of the emotional lens of this thesis. However, a brief snapshot seen in Figure 2 of the management committee's

¹⁶⁴ General Council Meeting Records, 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/2; General Council Meeting Records, 1903, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/3; General Council Meeting Records, 1904, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/4.

¹⁶⁵ Proceedings and Reports, April 1905 – March 1906, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/4.

¹⁶⁶ Management Committee Minutes, April 1904 – March 1905, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/5.

work in July 1905 serves to give an indication of the small but regular requests for help that would flow through the hands of the GFTU. Their conciliatory role in a variety of industrial disputes was testimony to the committee's tireless work for many of their affiliates.

Benefit granted:

55 members of the Amalgamated Brassworkers, resisting innovation at Birmingham
11 members of the Amalgamated Brassworkers, resisting reduction at Birmingham
18 members of the London Society of Compositors, upholding Union conditions at London
1 member of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, resisting reduction at Oldham
31 members of the National Glass Bottle Makers, resisting reduction at Conisborough
10 members of the National Gasworkers', resisting reduction at Aston
56 members of the National Gasworkers seeking advance at Llanelly
20 members of the National Gasworkers resisting innovation at Little Hulton
15 members of the Furnishing Trades resisting innovation at Wakefield, Wycombe, Glasgow, Manchester, Bugsworth, Cork and London
41 members of the Tin and Sheet Millmen resisting innovation at Ystalyfera
2 members of the Smiths and Strikers, resisting innovation at Huddersfield
1 member of the Amalgamated Felt Hatters, resisting reduction at Denton

Claim from Ironfounders for member at Sheffield was disallowed
Claim from National Union of Dock Labourers for members in dispute at Liverpool was left to Messrs. Ashton, Crinion, and the Secretary to make inquiries.
Four weeks extension granted members of Amalgamated Society of Engineers (Patternmakers) at Glasgow, and members of Operative Plasterers and Union of Labourers at South Shields
Respecting claim from Amalgamated Society of Engineers, re members on North-East Coast, it was resolved:- "That precedent be followed, namely, that benefit cease as from date of entitlement"

Figure 2: Meeting of Management Committee held at Royal Cardiff Hotel on July 5th 1905.¹⁶⁷

Despite the lack of detail on smaller disputes, the GFTU's records of them which do pertain to them are perhaps unique, particularly for unions that did not survive for long or did not manage their own records effectively. If a request for benefit came in that met the parameters of the GFTU's rules, then the management committee would make prompt payments without much further investigation. However, disputes that were not straightforward, either because they were lengthy or because the evidence required for them did not meet the GFTU's standard, would require a deputation from the management committee to be sent out to investigate further. This often resulted in more details appearing in the minutes as the dispatched management committee members reported their findings back, and so further insight into certain disputes then appears on the GFTU's records. The following section focuses on how and why they investigated, and the ways in which the decisions they came illustrates a shift in how the GFTU began to control the dispute process according to their own terms.

¹⁶⁷ Management Committee Minutes, April 1905 – March 1906, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/6.

A Detailed Dispute: Huddersfield 1900

Given the sheer variety of trades and working practices during this time, deciding on exact definitions and parameters of industrial disputes could be difficult. The management committee notes in their early years offer some insight into how differing examples of industrial action were viewed by those now in a position of arbitration power; that is, through affiliation with the GFTU, it was no longer up to individual unions what constituted a strikable offence, but up to these elected committee members as well. This often generated considerable friction that engendered mistrust or even hostility towards the management committee. One such example of the considerable grey area regarding when to call a strike which is absent from Prochaska's account happened in September 1900 in Huddersfield.¹⁶⁸ Following a report of a dispute with twenty Ironfounders working for Broadbent Central Iron Works, a deputation of the GFTU management committee - consisting of Allen Gee, James Holmes, Ben Tillett and Isaac Mitchell - were sent to conduct an inquiry to see what could be done to bring about a resolution.¹⁶⁹ The men had stopped work because the employer had taken on a man that was not a union member; they cited byelaws that guaranteed their employer would only employ union labour, which had led to five of the twenty-four Ironworks in the area becoming 'exclusively society' i.e. were only employing men that were part of the trade union.¹⁷⁰ The man in question, a Mr Downs, was too old according to their union rules to be accepted as a member, but it was decided that if he paid a lower amount of a shilling per week to the union, he could work within the trade but would not be entitled to any of their in-work benefits.¹⁷¹ This was not an uncommon practice among the craft unions, as protecting their expertise and craft knowledge were central to their control of the workplace and wage rates. What is notable is how the minutes are used to convey a sense of fairness, and most importantly, a sense of impartiality and a focus on a goal of settlement.

¹⁶⁸ Management Committee Minutes, September 1900, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/2.

¹⁶⁹ The company, Broadbent and Sons, had been established for at least fifteen years in Huddersfield, and manufactured engines and engine parts. See 'Starting of a New Engine', *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 29 June 1885, p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ Management Committee Minutes, September 1900, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/2.

¹⁷¹ Such as health or superannuation-related payments.

The report praised how the branch secretary 'lucidly' presented the facts, and how 'courteously' they were received by the employers involved in the case.¹⁷² The GFTU, although a trade union organisation, were making it clear that they were not automatically on the side of all unions in every matter; they were primarily interested in ascertaining 'the facts which led up to the dispute' so that they could be shown to have made a considered and fair ruling as to the validity of the industrial action.¹⁷³ The report goes on to detail the cause of the dispute, which revealed that often disputes are not simply between employer and worker. According to the employer, the entire dispute had nothing to do with him:

The employers declined to interfere, stating that they had nothing to do with the matter, it was a question for the man himself. If he cared to pay the 1s that was his business, if not, still they had no intention of compelling him. As to the men's byelaw, that again was none of their business, they had never heard of it before, and certainly they had never agreed to such a byelaw.¹⁷⁴

After acknowledging this account, the management committee went to the 'office of the firm', noting that 'they were courteously received by the two sons' that owned the firm.¹⁷⁵ The first statement made by the committee was that they 'represented the Federation, and that [their] desire was to bring about a settlement, if possible'. Again, the intention of the GFTU was very clearly to be impartial and to focus on de-escalation wherever possible, which was perhaps rooted in the backgrounds of the deputation. Gee had been leader of the Textile Workers Union (formally the West Yorkshire Power-Loom Weavers Association) for twelve years by this point, and was known as a quiet man that valued trade unionism for its 'friendly society' benefits.¹⁷⁶ Holmes had led the Leicester Amalgamated Hosiery Union for a similar term, was also involved with the ILP and the Co-Operative movement as well as being a well-known spiritualist, but his contributions to discussions at the GFTU frequently emphasised the importance of increasing the financial security of trade unions.¹⁷⁷ This previously careful attitude to money was to be overshadowed by the revelation

¹⁷² Management Committee Minutes, September 1900, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/2.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Laybourn, 'Allen Gee (1852-1939)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol III*, pp. 81-4.

¹⁷⁷ Ned Hewitt, 'The Who's Who of Radical Leicester' (n.d.) www.nednewitt.com/whoswho/, accessed 12 September 2021.

that he had been embezzling union funds to the tune of £6000 - £7000 to buy multiple properties around Leicestershire in 1911.¹⁷⁸ His death soon after was reported with an unusually but understandably muted tone in the following year's GFTU Annual Report.¹⁷⁹ That left Mitchell and Tillett: Mitchell, as previously explored, had already showed that he was more focused on trade unionism being a vehicle for good dialogue between employers and employees, rather than a basis for industrial militancy; Tillett, the only member of the deputation to represent a general union, certainly had a reputation as a firebrand orator who had led the very memorable dockers' strike in 1889, but he was also often accused of playing whichever role suited the situation.¹⁸⁰ When part of a deputation with Holmes, Mitchell and Gee, it was unlikely that Tillett would resort to one of his famously stirring speeches. How the GFTU dealt with the business owners, the striking men, and the worker at the heart of this dispute illustrates how the aims and objectives of these four men become the basis for the construction of GFTU strike and arbitration policy.

The GFTU's report went on to say that Mr Broadbent claimed no knowledge of this bye-law, that he employed Mr Downs as a favour because he had done work for him in the past, and was not even aware that his business only employed union labour. He thought it 'too much to expect him to abide by a bye-law he had never heard of' and 'complained of the manner in which he had been approached on the subject.'¹⁸¹ Tillett, in an apparent effort to continue soothing the situation, advised him to 'not take the abruptness of the men too seriously, as they were, in all likelihood, not accustomed to the niceties of polite society'.¹⁸² This was both an obviously flattering statement from someone known for flowery turns of phrase, but also quite a jarring dismissal of the men that paid membership fees to the GFTU and who he was there to represent. This hints at the existence of a 'labour aristocracy'; workers, like Tillett, that reach a certain amount of power and privilege as labour leaders through their

¹⁷⁸ 'Warrant Issued', *Leicester Daily Post*, 26 August 1911, p. 4.

¹⁷⁹ GFTU Annual Report, 1912, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/12.

¹⁸⁰ Much of the literature on Ben Tillett as focused on his leadership of the Dockers' in the late 1880s, and then on his campaigning for election during the first world war, so his speeches and input to the GFTU annual meetings will be explored further in this thesis in order to add more nuanced understanding of his character.

¹⁸¹ Management Committee Minutes, September 1900, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/2.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

middle-class incomes and effectively become the bosses of workers as opposed to working alongside them.

Despite the GFTU's interventions, it became clear that no resolution could be found: Mr Downs rather petulantly declared that 'he had never refused to pay the 1s, but now he had decided not to pay it', so the committee decided to withdraw, but not before noting that they 'thanked Mr Broadbent for his courtesy'.¹⁸³ At no point did they note their thanks to the men on strike or Mr Downs. Therefore, even though the report is written to convey fairness, from the point of view of the Huddersfield men, it would be difficult not to surmise that the committee favoured the side of the employer through their language and implicit deference, particularly with Tillett's remark on their 'politeness'.

Would reports such as this inspire greater unity between trades, or indeed between unions and employers? It is not a verbatim account, and it was likely that there were many things said that were omitted as the committee wrote their account, but the most notable omission is that they did not check to see if the employer had signed an agreement to only employ union men, or if he had been made aware of the bye-law before. The report did ascertain that his firm only employed union men whilst other sections of the business employed a mix, which was very likely due to the organising efforts of trade unionists within Huddersfield. However, the committee made no mention of any further investigation as to the validity of Mr Broadbent's claim to ignorance. Of course, how these reports were received by the rank-and-file members of affiliated unions likely varied and is ultimately unknowable, but the framing of these reports does at least indicate that the path to solidarity and 'strength in unity' could be a precarious one.

The potential opacity of minute-writing is an important factor in considering how trade unions were framed by the management committee, and indeed how they presented their own conduct as arbitrators. According to the minutes 'a long discussion followed' the presentation of the Huddersfield report, which both indicates that there was a high degree of complexity to the situation and also an unwillingness to share that complexity through genuine transparency.¹⁸⁴ Regardless of considerations of

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

space and brevity, it is notable that they then focused on their ‘being desirous of avoiding the establishment of a rigid precedent’ of trade unions being able to strike for similar reasons, albeit with an obtuse qualification that this statement was ‘almost’ unanimous.¹⁸⁵ Whoever dissented from this view is not named, and the three members of the management committee that voted to deny GFTU strike benefit payments to the Huddersfield men due to the ‘unnecessary haste there had been in resorting to a stoppage of work without first exhausting the means whereby a peaceful settlement might have been arrived at’ are not named either.¹⁸⁶ The Huddersfield case illustrates the manner in which both the dismissive language and actions of the management committee, and their careful curation of the minutes and records of their dealings, shaped the way in which GFTU approached, dealt with and presented their relationships with trade unions in dispute.

‘The quiet belief that they were fighting the good fight’: the Penrhyn Lockout 1900-3¹⁸⁷

Although localised disputes like that of the Huddersfield Ironmoulders were a constant rolling feature of the management committee’s daily responsibilities, they were also involved with more nationally recognised disputes. The North Wales Quarrymen – membership totalling 1,595 in 1901 according to the GFTU’s figures – entered into a bitterly acrimonious and painfully long dispute in October 1900 following a history of difficult relations with the land and business owner, Lord Penrhyn.¹⁸⁸ The history, experience and legacy of this dispute is explored in depth by R. Merfyn Jones in *The North Wales Quarrymen 1874 – 1922*, but only scant detail of the GFTU’s involvement is included.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, Prochaska’s broad overview of the GFTU did not provide meaningful detail on this national dispute.

As GFTU affiliates, the quarrymen received financial support from the management committee on the lower scale, and the Quarterly reports detailed the progress of the

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ ‘The Penrhyn Quarry Dispute’, 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/2.

¹⁸⁸ Annual Report, 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/1.

¹⁸⁹ R Merfyn Jones, *the North Wales Quarrymen, 1874-1992* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999).

dispute.¹⁹⁰ The first Quarterly Report to explain the dispute began with an account of the events leading up to it, and described how the union had been established in 1874, but although the Bethesda quarry's management had formally accepted the union, they had 'rejected it in spirit' by consistently undermining the men's efforts to work collectively.¹⁹¹ The union had diminished in size in the late 1800s, with some men 'hoping, no doubt, that the paternalist patronage of Lord Penrhyn would improve' if they left their union, but also due to the declining economic conditions in the region that would make paying union dues very difficult.¹⁹² However, there had been a significant increase in union membership following Lord Penrhyn's decision to stop the men from being allowed to collect union fees at the quarry in 1900.¹⁹³ The men, 'resenting this further proof of hostility, joined the organisation in hundreds' which led to an increase in 'the growing feeling between the two parties, a feeling which culminated in an unfortunate attack upon three contractors and the trial of 26 of the men at Bangor on a charge of assault'.¹⁹⁴ During the trial, two thousand quarry workers marched to Bangor, and found themselves suspended for fourteen days as a consequence.¹⁹⁵ The resentment that had grown over this incident was palpable.

Following their suspension, the men returned to work only half-heartedly, and the owners locked them out in retaliation.¹⁹⁶ Despite the draconian measures of Lord Penrhyn and the considerable anti-trade union environment of the north Wales quarries, the GFTU management committee were unequivocal in their belief that the Bethesda men had not been right to march in support of the men in Bangor:

Very full consideration of the whole matter was given by your Committee and it was felt that up to the point of resuming work, after the 14 days of suspension, the men had acted wrongfully. Whatever the grievances under which they were labouring may have been, physical force was no remedy, was opposed to Trade Union principles, and must be wholly condemned.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁰ The GFTU paid out 2s 6d per member per week in relief payments for the duration of the lockout, but only to workers that had been members of the union for over a year. See the 1901 GFTU Rule Book for further details on benefit pay rules in Rules, 1902, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/8/2.

¹⁹¹ Quarterly Report, March 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/3.

¹⁹² Ibid.; Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen*, p. 107.

¹⁹³ Quarterly Reports, December 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/5.

¹⁹⁴ Quarterly Report, March 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/3.

¹⁹⁵ Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen*, p. 211.

¹⁹⁶ Quarterly Reports, December 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/5.

¹⁹⁷ Quarterly Report, March 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/3.

The management committee went on to say their antagonistic actions ‘invited the repressive measures introduced’ by Lord Penrhyn, although they did ‘not wish to relieve the management of their share of the blame’.¹⁹⁸ That focus was on the lack of proper organisation of the workers, rather than the arbitrary mistreatment meted out by Lord Penrhyn, serves to highlight the increasingly paternalistic tone that the management committee were using, perhaps to convey their own sense of power to judge the conduct of affiliated unions who were felt not to meet the standards of sensible trade unionism. ‘No such methods [referring to the march] are resorted to by the well organised workers in any trade’, declared the report, in an effort to use the conduct of the locked-out men as an example to all affiliates of how not to react to aggressive employers.¹⁹⁹ There was a clear instruction here to not let volatile and aggressive emotions get in the way of respectable and justifiable trade union activity. Indeed, the management committee went further than their earlier handling of the Huddersfield men in attempting to drive home their impartiality in such cases, by explicitly laying fault at the feet of the locked-out men:

It was deemed advisable, in the face of the mistakes the men had made, to send down a deputation to Bethesda, to make full inquiries into the position on the spot, such inquiries not to be confined to the men, but that Lord Penrhyn and his manager Mr Young, be written to, asking for an interview.²⁰⁰

Unfortunately, Lord Penrhyn did not recognise the GFTU’s authority, and did not grant them an interview. Instead, after talking with the men and realising that they were not going to be able to discuss terms with Penrhyn, the resentment and anger being the dispute was becoming clearer:

...we deem it well to add that, owing to the strained relations which seem to have existed at the quarry for some years, unless something was done to bring about a better feeling, harmonious working would have been impossible for any length of time...There is no doubt in our minds that the result of this has been that the men, by being prevented from freely expressing their grievances collectively...there has arisen a bitter feeling against the

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

management which, with the fear that the contract system would be extended and the hard discipline enforced, culminated in the unfortunate attack upon the contractors.²⁰¹

Through meeting the men and hearing about the conflict directly, the management committee seemed to develop a more nuanced understanding of the strength of feeling involved.

R Merfyn Jones' account, though very thorough, does not make full use of the GFTU's records of this dispute. Further its reports, including a special publication in 1901 that was distributed to all the GFTU affiliates, reveal in detail the frustrations of the GFTU as a body not able to fulfil its purpose, and highlight another crucial view of the dispute. In Lord Penrhyn, the GFTU had encountered a fundamental stumbling block in their mission to promote arbitration and communication; that is, a completely intransigent and unrelenting employer with a 'lordly manner' that had no inclination to treat his works fairly and the money with which to hold out indefinitely, even at considerable financial cost.²⁰² The committee even went so far as to praise the locked out men for working in other quarries whilst they were in dispute (which was contrary to their usual advice of staying available in the hope that employment would resume), and encouraged them to move permanently to other areas in search of work.²⁰³

The quarterly reports published over the course of the three-year long dispute illustrate how the GFTU was learning its own craft in arbitration, even in the face of an unwinnable dispute. The GFTU's failure to bring this dispute to an end was a bitter disappointment to Mitchell, but the experience of assisting the Bethesda workers hardened his resolve about the need for effective trade union organisation.

All of the committee members had themselves been involved with strikes at some point in their careers, and despite their conciliatory roles and tendency to bureaucratised industrial disputes, they were nevertheless keenly aware of how experiencing industrial unrest is a fundamentally emotional experience. This ties in

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Quarterly Reports, December 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/5.

²⁰³ 'The Penrhyn Quarry Dispute', 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/2.

directly with how trade unions constructed emotional communities.²⁰⁴ In the case of the Penrhyn men, this becomes more apparent as Lord Penrhyn becomes increasingly hostile during the dispute, and their efforts at conciliation continue to be unheeded. As the Penrhyn dispute began to fill the pages of labour newspapers, the stories of their increasing struggle against poverty won the sympathy of the general public.²⁰⁵ The Penrhyn choir toured in order to raise funds for the striking men and their families back home.²⁰⁶ This too is borne out in the subsequent reports of the GFTU: in September 1901, the GFTU ‘cheerfully’ distributed strike benefit to Bethesda, and praised ‘the men and their determination to continue the struggle’, despite the ‘un-businesslike attitude’ of Lord Penrhyn.²⁰⁷

Curran and Mitchell by this point were realising that the GFTU could be more than a purse and committee: they were establishing themselves as a hub of trade union information by printing reports on international trade unionism, articles by well-known politicians and activists such as George Cadbury, Tom Mann and Margaret McMillan, and pieces that they wrote themselves on topics such as temperance, education, and welfare proposals.²⁰⁸ The events at Bethesda were the subject of several such articles. By the next quarterly report in December 1901 any hint of the dispute being the fault of the workers themselves had completely disappeared. Instead, portraits of the men leading the North Wales Quarrymen are included alongside a brief history of their union, and their efforts at organisation despite the overwhelming odds against them are repeatedly praised.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴ Barbara Rosenwein and Riccardo Cristiani, *What is the history of emotions?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018).

²⁰⁵ For example, see ‘The Dispute at Bethesda’, *North Devon Gazette*, 23 September 1902, p. 2; ‘The Dispute at Bethesda’, *Uttoxeter Advertiser and Ashbourne Times*, 17 September 1902, p. 8; ‘The Bethesda Dispute’, *Tamworth Herald*, 11 January 1902, p. 7; ‘The Penrhyn Strike’, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 12 October 1903, p. 5; William ‘Mabon’ Abraham, an MP and well-respected Miners’ leader from South Wales, criticised the conduct of Lord Penrhyn in ‘The Bethesda Dispute’, *Bromyard News*, 25 June 1903, p. 2; Even the jury seemed reluctant when they found in favour of Lord Penrhyn for his libel case, reported in *Westminster Gazette*, 14 March 1903, which he had brought against Mr Parry for writing a scathing account of Penrhyn’s conduct that the editor of *The Clarion* published, as they expressed the opinion that there should be a ‘a little more conciliatory spirit on the part of both Lord Penrhyn and his men’. A detailed account of the court case can be found in ‘The Penrhyn Libel Case’, *Liverpool Daily Post*, 13 March 1903, pp. 7-9.

²⁰⁶ *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 30 October 1902, p. 3.

²⁰⁷ Quarterly Report, September 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/4.

²⁰⁸ ‘Special interest’ publications can be found in all the GFTU Quarterly Reports from 1901 – 19, by which point the reports became much shorter and tended to only include articles by people outside of the GFTU on an occasional basis.

²⁰⁹ Quarterly Report December 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/5.

A mere six months after they had 'wholly condemned' the actions of the men when they marched to Bangor, they now referred to it almost righteously as the 'revolt of 1900', and included respectable and professional images of the North Wales Quarrymen Union officials in ties and suits alongside their account of the Penrhyn quarry.²¹⁰ This was no longer a dispute involving two equal sides, but one in which the men were 'crushed in spirit' after their 'long and sad tale of woe' at the hands of 'tyranny and oppression', which had inspired their 'unity and strength [as they] struggled doggedly and courageously for their freedom'.²¹¹ The change in tone may have been abrupt, but it certainly reflected the strength of feeling often found in accounts of gruelling industrial disputes that affect the very poorest of communities. It also shows how the martyrdom of individuals or groups that fought against unfair laws or employers was crucial in the establishment of growing a sense of solidarity in struggle, which went in some way to construct the sense of identity and belonging needed to foster an emotional community around a trade union.

The management committee's change of heart was likely influenced by both the increasing public support of the quarrymen, and the belligerent attitude of Lord Penrhyn himself, but it also speaks to the changing ideas of how disputes can be reflected upon by the protagonists, supporters and observers. The GFTU, by becoming judges of the righteousness of industrial action, both identified and used emotional language to give certain perceptions of disputes, depending on their own judgements. This in turn indicates the complexity of industrial action, and questions exactly whose unity matters in the GFTU's motto 'unity is strength'; the Penrhyn dispute made it clear that creating a federation of trades meant creating a committee of men who had to use their own judgement to decide who was worthy of solidarity either in a financial or moral form, and their unity was just as important as wider unity within the GFTU.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

Conclusion

The subjective differences between those ‘fighting the good fight’ in Penrhyn and the ‘unnecessary haste’ of the Huddersfield Ironmoulders, regardless of the number of rules the GFTU constructed to legitimise their decisions, demonstrated the opportunities for disagreement or the ease with which the committee could change their minds.²¹² Also, by exploring these cases in a level detail not achieved in Prochaska’s account, a more nuanced understanding of the role of the GFTU can be demonstrated. The Penrhyn men were by no means the only group of workers that received sympathetic accounts from the management committee, as the Huddersfield Ironmoulders were not the only ones to have their claims to benefit dismissed, but they are simply offered here in this chapter as an indication of the different ways in which disputes could be framed by the GFTU, particularly by the language of emotion. The implicit moral judgement made by the committee, and the images of bravery or belligerence, hopefulness or arrogance, was in many ways linked to the personalities and trade union allegiances of the members themselves. They also learned as they went along: the early annoyance at the conduct of the Penrhyn men was quickly smoothed over into outright admiration in their descriptions of their noble fight, which shows how the GFTU were learning how important it was to portray struggles in a certain way to guarantee support.

As a proposal to be sent around the TUC, a hopeful hypothetical idea of financial security and unity, the GFTU was an attractive proposal that could easily be worked out as an economic model. However, as this chapter has shown, the economic framework of affordability did not allow much room for the presence of different personalities, or the sheer variety of industrial disputes that could occur. The mixture of trades represented in the management committee served to highlight the complexity of the trade union movement, but also the dual potential of unity and disunity.

Whilst the GFTU grew, and as they carried on carving out their place in the labour movement, the personalities, friendships and connections found in the management committee became increasingly important to how the GFTU both presented itself and

²¹² Penrhyn Quarry Dispute, 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/2; Management Committee Minutes, September 1900, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/2.

how it was viewed by those outside of the organisation. Curran's exuberance and passion for the labour movement was a galvanising force that propelled the GFTU onto the centre stage. With a less energetic chairman, the GFTU could have been a passive project that financially responded to disputes without necessarily seeking out ways to grow or to adapt to its changing environment.

The GFTU had a slow start to its membership numbers, and it was in no small part to Curran's excellent capacity as an organiser that the numbers kept on climbing. Given the fast-paced changes in the wider labour movement during the first decade of the twentieth century, the success of the GFTU is in its longevity and endurance rather than numbers; Pelling's characterisation of the GFTU as being unremarkable because 'it was not a federation but simply a committee controlling a fund, and it never became general, for many...refused to join' remains true on a purely numerical basis.²¹³ However, despite their small number of affiliates, they exerted considerable influence over the national and international scene as arbitrators, as will be seen.

It is perhaps fitting that the GFTU's origins lay in a battle of ideologies – King's ambitious and socialist NIGFTLU did not win against the Parliamentary Committee's pragmatic plan – because the GFTU continued to struggle with what its own ideology was or should be. Designed as a federation of autonomous unions, the early failure of the district system ultimately translated into the management committee taking on the full-time work of preventing, settling or financing disputes, and the effect of this was seen in how they reported their efforts at arbitration. The opinion and judgement of the management committee became increasingly centralised, and deputations criss-crossed the country to offer support but to also offer judgement. They had to contend with difficult disputes that often defied categorisation, and which were difficult to align easily with their eligibility rules. When the management committee decided that a strike was worthy of financial help despite not meeting the obvious criteria, their judgement was invariably called into question by other unions that had not received their favourable judgements in the past.²¹⁴

²¹³ Pelling, *A History of Trade Unionism*, p. 113.

²¹⁴ A long running problem with the categorisation of disputes was the 'sympathetic strike'. If a union called out their members in an act of solidarity with a kindred trade's dispute, the GFTU would not allow them to claim benefit. However, until 1912, if a union (or branch) was locked out as a result of a fellow GFTU affiliate's dispute, then the management committee would usually grant benefit. Of

The appearance of Mitchell's successor in 1907 ensured that it was increasingly the role of the general secretary to set the tone for how the GFTU operated. The management committee still played an important role, but the following chapter will demonstrate how the new general secretary came to lead the GFTU, how he developed the ethos of the organisation according to his own beliefs and those of the other labour leaders he worked with, and how his influence changed the outlook and policies of the GFTU for the following three decades. Hope was still a central component of the GFTU's mission towards the end of the GFTU's first ten years: membership growth was slow, but every report from the general secretary praised even the smallest of new affiliation as a sign of increased unity and strength within the GFTU. However, it was set to be a turbulent time for trade unionism as the world entered the next decade of the twentieth century. The GFTU found itself rocked by many political and industrial changes outside of its control, and increasingly looked towards important friendships with other organisations and leaders in order to sustain their original sense of hope for the future.

course, that was costly, and the policy was abandoned as the bank accounts were drained during the Great Unrest.

Chapter Two: Friendship

‘I have made friends in many countries and amongst every class of men and women’¹

- William Appleton, 1938

Introduction

Trade unions, by their very definition, work on a basis of connecting people through mutual trade/skill or collective workplace interests. Because of this fundamental role of connection and solidarity, they can be understood as emotional communities as well as sites of worker activism, social interactions, and political functionality.² In their capacity as industrial mediators, the GFTU often described disputes in ways that leant on the importance of solidarity and friendship. For instance, during the Clyde strike in 1906 the GFTU ‘commend[ed] the workmen’s case to the public generally’ and encouraged them to ‘show to their colleagues in dispute that true comradeship upon which the Labour movement is based.’³

This chapter will explore how the element of friendship, formed through networks of mutual interest between labour leaders, played an integral role in creating and reinforcing the unseen but tangible boundaries of the GFTU’s emotional community. Although some emphasis on identities and ‘structures of feeling’, particularly from the work of Raymond Williams, is seen in the historiography of the labour movement, less has been written about exactly *how* those identities and personalities

¹ William Appleton, *How I Left the Federation: An Attempt To Clear Up Wrong Impressions* (Self-published, 1938) p. 5

² Barbara Rosenwein and Riccardo Cristiani, *What is the history of emotions?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018)

³ Proceedings and Reports, April 1906 – March 1907. Bishopsgate Institute. GFTU/4/5; Over 4000 shipbuilders in the Clyde area of Glasgow struck for five weeks after their request for wage increases was rejected by their employers (see ‘Clyde Strike Ends’, *Dundee Courier*, 17 November 1906, p. 5). This dispute was brief and contained compared to the much larger (and much more studied) episodes of unrest in the area following the outbreak of the first world war, although mention is made of the pockets of smaller shipbuilding disputes in the years before the war in W Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1936, 1978) and W Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900-1921*, (London: Littlehampton Books, 1969).

interplayed to construct networks of friendship and solidarity.⁴ Friendship, I argue, was integral to this process. The building of friendships, and the way in which these small-scale social interactions constructed emotional communities, was crucial in building solidarities through mutual experiences.⁵ Solidarities could be simultaneously professional and intimate: they could be constructed through casual conversations during tea breaks at trade union meetings but could also influence trade union policy or action if the leaders liked or disliked their counterparts strongly enough.⁶

The canonical texts of labour and trade union history tend to place the construction of solidarity primarily through a shared experience of struggle: this usually takes place on a picket line, a community feeding hall, or on a difficult election campaign trail. Although feelings of solidarity are indeed constructed in these places, it is too narrow a view to say that *struggle* is the only way, or even the primary way, in which solidarity is built. Solidarity was also steadily built by the establishment of friendships which grew over years of branch meetings, annual councils, and union deputations. These slow burning connections formed a more subtle feeling of solidarity than that which has perhaps been found in the more intense shared experience of a strike, but that quiet solidarity could nevertheless be just as strong.

This chapter begins with critical biographies of William Appleton and James O'Grady, in order to continue exploring the effect that different personalities had on

⁴ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, 3rd Edition (London: Vintage, 1958, 2017); There has been more scholarship on the role of personality and identity in politics than in trade unionism. See for example David Howell, *Macdonald's Party: Labour Identities and Crisis 1922-1931* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), as well as the large number of politically active labour leaders in comparison to trade union leaders in *The Dictionary of Labour Biography Vols 1-15*.

⁵ For general scholarship on 'Friendship' see Mark Peel, 'New Worlds of Friendship: The Early Twentieth Century' in (ed) Barbara Caine, *Friendship: A History* (London: Routledge, 2014) pp. 303-87; M Humphries, *The Power of Friends: Reginald Brett, 2nd Viscount Escher, and the political influence of social networks in Edwardian Britain* (Unpublished PhD thesis, KCL 2016); Amy Milne-Smith, 'Club Talk: Gossip, Masculinity and Oral Communities in Late Nineteenth-Century London', *Gender & History*, 21, (2009) pp. 86-106, Simon Koschut and Andrea Oelsner, eds. *Friendship and International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Jon Nixon, *Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Friendship* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

⁶ An extreme example of a personality clash affecting the ability to express solidarity is that of the conflict between Jim Larkin and Ernest Marklew, a socialist and spiritualist. Jim Larkin, leader of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, disapproved of Marklew's status as a divorcé, and found his controversial writings on the 'recreative, generative and regenerative' potential of sex to be so repugnant to his Catholic beliefs, that he refused to speak at a rally in support of the 1913 Dublin lock out if Marklew was chairing. For further details see Keith Gildart, 'Ernest Marklew (1874-1939)' in Keith Gildart and David Howell, eds., *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol XIV* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) pp. 212-22.

the GFTU. It will then consider how far friendship in trade unions was developed, displayed, and utilised in minutes of meetings, with a particular focus on the 1909 general council meeting held in Blackpool. Minutes, as the bedrock of trade union communication and record-keeping, are a key source for the political, social and cultural structures of worker organisations. They are also a key source for understanding the role of emotion in the politics of a trade union because the conversations, disagreements and speeches are all infused with the emotional driving force that propelled the labour movement forward. The ways in which the minutes were constructed also shows how the people on the management committee were able to effectively monopolise the 'official' conversation. This partly mirrored contemporary ideas of respectability and entrenched social hierarchies, but also shows a particular emotional culture that was specific to trade unionism, and particularly the GFTU. The change in leadership from Mitchell to Appleton in 1907 is key to understanding how the emotional community of the GFTU changed in accordance with Appleton's influence.

The anxiety over the impending Osborne judgement in 1909 demonstrate how minutes reveal which collective feelings were acceptable or unacceptable, and how they were encouraged in specific and appropriate contexts.⁷ The Osborne judgement, which would come from the House of Lords a few months after the summer annual meeting of the GFTU, forbade trade unions from collecting a levy in order to fund a political party. It was a deeply unpopular ruling that many felt was a move to deliberately stop vital streams of funding intended for the Labour Party, and so it was an event that interested everyone in the labour movement.⁸ The worry over the impending judgement in the summer of 1909 demonstrates the way in which a movement could have collective concerns. More broadly, certain stylistic conventions in minute-taking reveal feelings of friendship and collective solidarity. The verbatim minutes of the annual general council meetings are used here to demonstrate how important long-lasting friendships and allegiances between leaders of kindred trades were to the construction of the GFTU's emotional community.

⁷ For more information on the Osborne judgement, see Henry Pelling, 'The Politics of the Osborne Judgement', *The Historical Journal*, 25, 4 (1982) pp. 889-909.

⁸ Ross M Martin, *TUC: Growth of a Pressure Group*, p. 107.

1909 was significant for the GFTU in several ways: the navigation of their first ten years had allowed the organisation to find its feet in terms of its rules and operational culture. It was also the first full year of William Appleton's tenure as general secretary, who had a distinctly different outlook on how the GFTU should operate when compared to his predecessor. This marked the beginning of a change in direction for the GFTU. Appleton's leadership was sustained by the friendships and alliances that he chose to cultivate or reject.

Thomas Ashton, leader of the Amalgamated Society of Cotton Spinners, had been a founding member of the GFTU, and so the expressions of feeling at his retirement dinner are a strong indication of the centrality of friendship within trade unionism. Overt expressions of friendship, companionship, and love in their more relaxed celebrations of Ashton's retirement are a useful indication that personal friendships and workplace camaraderie between labour leaders were often blurred. Affectionate and professional friendship was also a part of their internationalist activities, as revealed through the GFTU's use of international reports and biographies of foreign leaders as well as the expressions made by international visitors and delegates to their meetings. Warm feelings between international leaders were especially clear through the close working friendship Appleton and other members of the GFTU management committee had with Carl Legien, leader of the German Trade Union Federation (GTUF), as well as Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor (AFL).⁹ Despite the irrevocable damage that the first world war did to the friendship between Appleton, Gompers and Legien, which will be explored in chapter three, it was an integral part of how the GFTU presented themselves as one cog in the larger international trade union machine before the conflict began and in its aftermath.

Overall, from the minutes, through the connections between GFTU affiliates, to the international network of national leaders, friendship was a vital and integral part of trade unionism. Solidarity was constructed through a feeling of friendship, and

⁹ For more information on Samuel Gompers, see Fred Greenbaum, 'The Social Ideas of Samuel Gompers', *Labor History*, 7, 1 (1966) pp. 35-61; Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland and the Tragedy of American Labor* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999); Bernard Mandel, *Samuel Gompers: A Biography* (New York: Penguin, 1963); Philip Taft, *The American Federation of Labor in the time of Gompers* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957).

expressions of this camaraderie were carefully curated to convey a solid, unbreakable spirit of connection. A sense of camaraderie between labour leaders was shown in the social gatherings around trade union and political conferences; in addition to minutes that mention evening entertainments being laid on for delegates, other documents illustrate the fun experience of these gatherings. In 1909 for example, a dinner for fraternal delegates from the US was held in Ipswich, and a souvenir booklet with humorous cartoon depictions created by Musicians' Union leader J B Williams of labour leaders – many of whom were GFTU members such as James O'Grady and William J Davis – as characters from Shakespeare's plays.¹⁰ The feeling of fun, humour and good feeling is evident. However, in developing and showing strong friendship bonds between certain leaders and trade unions, the idea of solidarity became contested. Strong bonds between some leaders inevitably excluded people that were outside of particular networks, which in turn could lead to animosity and a breakdown in organisational unity. The valuable evidence of *how* the bonds of friendship between certain leaders were created and displayed, and the ways in which hints of disunity from leaders outside of those friendship bonds managed to seep through, is seen in a critical examination of the general council minutes. However, in order to understand the importance of friendships within the GFTU and its wider network, it is important to again highlight the personalities and identities of some of the central people in the management committee of the GFTU.

One central aim of this thesis is to highlight the lives of labour leaders that have not been written about as much as other more famous trade union personalities. James O'Grady, although he went on to have an important role as Governor of Tasmania under Macdonald's 1924 Labour government, does not appear in many historical accounts of early twentieth century Britain. As he was an active and enthusiastic member of the GFTU, his input will be explored throughout the following chapters and the important contribution he made to trade unionism in this period. The following section will focus on O'Grady, the second GFTU chairman, and William Appleton, the second (and longest-serving) GFTU general secretary, in order to

¹⁰ This booklet was from a dinner in Ipswich called 'Menu and commemorative booklet for the complimentary dinner to fraternal delegates from America by the Trades Union Congress parliamentary committee', but there were two others: a year later, a similar dinner was held, and the booklet contained whimsical imaginings of labour leaders had they been Dickensian characters, and a year later they were depicted as if they had followed different career paths. Miscellaneous Papers for Ben Tillett, Modern Records Centre, MSS.74/6/10.

explain how the GFTU's position as an organisation began to change under different leadership.

From 'burly banner-bearer' to Governor of Tasmania: James O'Grady (1866-1934)¹¹

James O'Grady, Labour MP and trade union leader, was born on the 6th May 1866 in Bristol to Irish immigrant parents.¹² He entered the workforce at the age of ten in a factory that produced mineral water, with only a few years at a local Catholic school behind him.¹³ After working at several different jobs, and almost joining the army, he began an apprenticeship with a cabinetmaker whilst he was a teenager. His upbringing was crowded: in 1881, when he was fifteen years old, he shared a home with his two parents, four younger siblings (Johannah b. 1868, Mary b. 1871, Edward b. 1874 and Margaret b. 1880), his grandmother, an aunt and two cousins, and three male lodgers.¹⁴ The extra income from lodgers was probably most welcome, as the census records O'Grady's father's wage as a general labourer as the only official one in the family.¹⁵

After marrying Louisa James in 1887, O'Grady travelled up and down the country in search of work whilst maintaining a close connection with Bristol. Once O'Grady became involved with industrial politics, he soon earned a reputation as a sincere and convincing speaker, and he was popular with the Bristol dockers during their 1892 strike.¹⁶ He moved quickly through the ranks of the local labour movement, becoming president of the Bristol Trades Council and then two years later a Labour councillor.¹⁷ One of his most notable achievements during this time was his foundation of a scholarship programme for promising school children, and he

¹¹ 'Sir James O'Grady', *Leeds Mercury*, 11 December 1934, p. 6.

¹² David E. Martin, 'James O'Grady (1866-1934)', *The Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol II*, eds. Joyce Bellamy and John Saville (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1972) pp. 286-8.

¹³ David E. Martin, 'James O'Grady (1866-1934)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/48767>.

¹⁴ 'James Grady' (1881) *Census return for 2 Tower Court, Bristol St Stephen, Bristol, England*. (RG11, folio 41, p. 7) www.findmypast.co.uk.

¹⁵ 'James Grady' (1881) *Census return*, www.findmypast.co.uk.

¹⁶ Martin, 'James O'Grady', *The Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol II*, p. 286.

¹⁷ Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 15.

continually pressed for collectivist policies and ownership of local services to be controlled by the municipality.¹⁸

In 1898, the TUC held their annual gathering at Bristol, with O'Grady as their President.¹⁹ His thundering speech rocked Colston Hall the night before it burned down, and earned him an approving appraisal by Keir Hardie in the *Labour Leader*.²⁰ It was the first time that the TUC had platformed a presidential address that clearly spelled out the need for a strong connection between trade unions and a separate political party for the working class.²¹ O'Grady would be a founding member of the GFTU, and its Chairman from 1912 – 1918, seeing the GFTU through the first world war. O'Grady left Bristol for London to take up a post as a national organiser for the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades' Association, before entering parliament in 1906 representing East Leeds.²² Belonging to both the ILP and the SDF, he was comfortable with the socialist label in parliament, although he felt more inspired by the work of Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) than Marx or Engels, calling him his 'solace and inspiration'.²³ Unlike his good friend Pete Curran, O'Grady's Catholicism never lapsed, which made him unusual in the group of 1906 Labour MPs with their largely non-conformist backgrounds.²⁴ O'Grady and his wife had eight children together (Norah b. 1892, Mary b. 1894, Ellen Louisa b. 1897, James Gerald b. 1901, Eileen b. 1902, Margaret b. 1905, Terence b. 1907 and Johannah b. 1908), although his home in Clapham Common by 1911 was more spacious than the cramped conditions he had grown up with in Bristol.²⁵

At the outbreak of the first world war, O'Grady fell in with the left's patriotic response with fervour. He joined the British Workers' League in 1916 and became a member of its Council, casting off his socialist principles (at least temporarily) in favour of the nationalistic imperialism he felt was required during the war, but left after two years.²⁶

¹⁸ 'Municipal Elections', *Western Daily Press*, 19 October 1896, p. 5.

¹⁹ 'Trade Union Congress', *Dundee Courier*, 1 September 1898, p. 4.

²⁰ *Labour Leader*, 3 September 1898, p. 3.

²¹ Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 15.

²² Martin, 'James O'Grady', *The Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol II*, p. 286.

²³ William T Stead, 'The Labour Party and the books that helped to make it', *Review of Reviews*, 33 (1906) pp. 568-82.

²⁴ Martin, 'James O'Grady', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

²⁵ 'James Grady' (1911) *Census return for 35 Broxash Road, West Side, Clapham Common, Battersea, London, England*. (RG14PN2244), www.findmypast.co.uk.

²⁶ David Swift, *For Class and Country: The Patriotic Left and the First World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017) p. 197.

His war work mainly centred on lively and well-received recruitment campaigns, especially in Ireland, as well as visiting the front to speak directly with servicemen.²⁷ O'Grady was heavily involved with the GFTU's campaign for increasing the wages of servicemen, which will be explored in greater detail in chapter three. After accepting a position as general secretary of the National Federation of General Workers, O'Grady stepped down from the GFTU's chairmanship in 1918.²⁸ By this point, the GFTU had lost some of their most prominent affiliates after the Great Unrest – a loss that will be explored in more depth in chapter four – and so there were many in the wider labour movement that did not think the GFTU was fit for purpose. Acknowledging the tense relationship that the GFTU had with other organisations in the labour movement by this point, O'Grady assured the 1918 annual meeting delegates that he was parting ways with them as a friend and as a supporter:

The sole reason for my retirement is that I have been called to another post in the trade union movement... I want to make that public because it may be thought that I am getting away from the federation owing to disagreement with its policy or a belief that it is a waning force. It is nothing of the kind. The force of the federation is growing, and if in the future I can help it in any way I shall be only too glad to do so.... I leave my office wishing the federation every prosperity and an ever-growing success.²⁹

After he left he maintained close friendships with several members of the GFTU, but particularly with its general secretary William Appleton, with whom he felt 'had been very close... and very loyal to him'.³⁰ He often spoke of playing billiards with his friends, and had a love of boxing that earned him a caricature as a pugilist in the collection of cartoons by Musician's Union general secretary J B Williams that mused over possible alternative careers for labour leaders in 1911.³¹ As his politics continued to shift to the right, his friendship with Appleton endured whilst his other connections in the Labour Party were increasingly distant.

²⁷ Martin, 'James O'Grady', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

²⁸ Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 135.

²⁹ Proceedings and Reports July 1918 – June 1919, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Martin, 'James O'Grady', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; The cartoons were printed in a booklet from a dinner held in honour of an American political delegation in 1911: Menu and booklet for fraternal delegates from America by the TUC, 5 September 1911, Modern Records Centre, MSS.74.5.2.

The National Federation of General Workers eventually folded in the face of larger general unions, and ceased to exist in the 1920s. O'Grady was by this point well and truly ensconced in politics rather than trade unionism, and spent a great deal of time dedicated to international concerns.³² Having travelled abroad extensively during his time as a trade unionist, including trips to South Africa and Russia, he gained a reputation for cordial diplomacy and warmth. Although his close connections and repeated visits to Russia put him in line for a diplomatic position there, O'Grady was instead made Governor of Tasmania and a Knight Commander of his Majesty's Government (KCMG) in 1924 under Macdonald's government.³³ It was a successful posting that he held for six years, although he had to leave his ailing wife behind in England as she was too sick to travel. He had been reluctant to leave her, but perhaps knowing that O'Grady's experience and skill as a diplomat was highly prized, she insisted that he go.³⁴ She died three years after he left, but he did not return to England until 1931.³⁵ His next post, as Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Falkland Islands, was short-lived: his health, which had been problematic for many years, suddenly became much worse. In 1933, he came back to England to receive treatment for blood poisoning, and died in a nursing home the following year at the age of 68. He was survived by his children.

Like so many labour leaders of this time, O'Grady had found a pathway from poverty to prosperity. The cramped home of his upbringing was not at all unusual, but the way in which he was able to leave the typical working-class story of deprivation, poverty and desperation behind in order to first represent working people like himself both as a trade unionist and as a politician, and then to receive a prestigious posting as the first Labour Governor of Tasmania as well as a knighthood, was indeed exceptional.³⁶ There were fourteen people sharing his home when O'Grady was a teenager; whilst he was in Tasmania, he lived in a 73-roomed palace in Hobart.³⁷ Although this stark difference in wealth is obvious, it is perhaps less easy to quantify the effect that an entire life dedicated to improving the lives of working-class people

³² Martin, 'James O'Grady', *The Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol II*, p. 287.

³³ Martin, 'James O'Grady', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

³⁴ 'Sir James O'Grady Dead', *Nottingham Journal*, 11 December 1934, p.1.

³⁵ 'James O'Grady', *The Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol II*, p. 288.

³⁶ 'Sir James O'Grady', *Daily Herald*, 5 November 1924, p. 1.

³⁷ 'Sir James O'Grady Dead', *Nottingham Journal*, 11 December 1934, p.1.

had. His contribution to the labour movement and the value of his friendship was best summed up by his friend and fellow Labour MP, George Lansbury:

Sir James O'Grady was one of the staunchest and truest friends whom he had known since 1892 in his early days in the Social Democratic Federation. While the country would honour him for public work in the Dominions that company, he felt sure, would wish to convey to the family their sorrow and their glory in the life their comrade had lived on behalf of great causes.³⁸

Like O'Grady, William A. Appleton also dedicated his life to the labour movement. Such dedication was perhaps more specific than O'Grady's, in that Appleton was a staunch trade unionist, and did not pursue any other kind of career. As labour historians have tended to shine more light on trade unionists that were also politically active as was the case for O'Grady, it is perhaps no surprise that despite his long career, Appleton never had a biographical entry in with the *Dictionary of Labour History* or the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. What follows is a brief biography of the GFTU's longest serving secretary, using mainly newspaper articles, his own written materials as well as GFTU documents, and a transcript of a 1938 causerie in which he recalled his childhood. His formative years offer an important insight in understanding the ways in which the GFTU's policies and direction changed under his leadership. Because his life and career were so closely intertwined with the fortunes of the GFTU, his biography will be spread into two sections - one in this chapter, the other in the following chapter - and changing aspects of Appleton's personal life and friendships with other labour leaders will act as markers for shifts in GFTU politics.

'An employer threatened to kick me downstairs': The Early Life of William Appleton (1859 – 1940)³⁹

William Archibald Appleton, the eldest of five children, was born 31st December 1859 in Nottingham, to parents Isabella and Edward. His father, like many in Nottingham,

³⁸ 'Trust of Friends', *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 12 December 1934, p. 7.

³⁹ Report of the veterans' causerie – male trade unionists, 13 June 1938, Modern Records Centre, MSS.292/10.2/17/1.

was a lacemaker.⁴⁰ Although his lasting memory of his brief time at school before commencing employment was a particularly strict teacher that used the cane liberally, Appleton nurtured a lifelong love of learning through attending night school as a teenager and young man.⁴¹ His first job as an errand boy distributing newspapers earned him 2s and 6d, working 12 hours a day for 6 days a week.⁴² The work was so arduous for a ten year old, and in such cold conditions, that Appleton later recalled how he could not put his own shoes on because of horrendous chilblains. Instead, he 'went about in a pair of elastic-sided boots' belonging to his mother.⁴³ Certainly, the experience of painful chilblains, lack of education and long hours was something that many of the early labour leaders knew first hand, and a poverty-stricken childhood was an ever-present shared experience. He married Thomasina Elizabeth, who came from Yorkshire, and had six children: Charlotte (b. 1885), Margaret (b. 1887), Bertha (b. 1889), Frank (b. 1892), Mary (b. 1894) and Arthur (b. 1898).⁴⁴

After working as an errand boy, Appleton joined the local lace making factory, and soon began acting as a trade union activist.⁴⁵ Lace working was a highly skilled trade, and although there was a hard-hitting period of depression in the early 1870s driven by fickle fashion trends and wider economic dips, according to Norman Cuthbert by the late 1870s the most highly-skilled lacemakers could be earning around £6 – 8 per week: enough to enjoy fine cigars and be driven to work in a hansom cab.⁴⁶ Although Appleton did work in the lace trade himself, on the few occasions that he spoke about his own experience before his leadership roles, he tended to emphasise his love of learning and night school attendance rather than his working life.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ 'William Appleton,' (1871) *Census return for St Ann Well Road, St Mary, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, England* (RG10, folio 51, p. 3), www.findmypast.co.uk.

⁴¹ 'Prominent men of Nottingham', *Nottingham Journal*, 15 August 1928, p.7.

⁴² Report of the veterans' causerie – male trade unionists, 13 June 1938, Modern Records Centre, MSS.292/10.2/17/1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ 'William Appleton' (1901) *Census return for 14 Gloster Avenue, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, England* RG13, folio 133, p. 25), www.findmypast.co.uk.

⁴⁵ 'Prominent men of Nottingham', *Nottingham Journal*, 15 August 1928, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Norman Cuthbert, *The Lacemakers Society* (Nottingham: Derry and Sons, 1960) p. 47.

⁴⁷ 'Mr W A Appleton', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 November 1940, p. 6 and 'Obituary: Mr W A Appleton', *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 November 1940, p. 3.

In an article reflecting on his achievements, Appleton described being called upon to help work out piece rates between lacemakers and their employers from a young age.⁴⁸ Employers did not take kindly to his interference, which saw him blacklisted for more than six months as well as one factory owner threatening to kick him down the stairs.⁴⁹ This formative experience regarding the ability to not only own one's own skills, but to be able to calculate the worth of them independently without relying on an employer, became a central element of Appleton's trade union beliefs. He may indeed have been quite helpful to his fellow workers and good at assisting in negotiating or simply explaining the complex piece rate system that was in place, and he was clearly well-liked or well-respected enough that he was elected as the general secretary of the Amalgamated Operative Lacemakers Society in 1896 when he was thirty-six years old.⁵⁰ However, by the time Appleton was interviewed for an article in 1928, he was less than popular in the wider labour movement. The reasons for this will become clear as details of his career with the GFTU are further unpicked.

Appleton's appointment as general secretary to the Lacemakers came on the back of his predecessor's dismissal over his careless (and fraudulent) account-keeping. However, Appleton did not wholly point the finger of guilt at the official:

It is difficult to rightly apportion blame for past events. Undoubtedly the members as a body are entitled to a large share. They have frequently elected men to responsible positions whose qualifications were most meagre, and whose interest in the Society was bounded by the benefits they received or were likely to receive from it.⁵¹

This haughty tone of admonition towards the members for electing someone that made a hole the size of £407 6s 9d in the Society's cashbook, rather than the general secretary himself, would come back to haunt him some years later. However, Appleton led the Lacemakers into a state of genuine prosperity during his tenure. He designed and implemented a pension scheme that initially catered to one hundred members at a time; it became so successful – mostly because the very

⁴⁸ 'Prominent men of Nottingham', *Nottingham Journal*, 15 August 1928, p. 7.

⁴⁹ Report of the veterans' causerie – male trade unionists, 13 June 1938, Modern Records Centre, MSS.292/10.2/17/1.

⁵⁰ Cuthbert, *The Lacemakers*, p. 70-3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 71-2.

affluent Lacemakers funded the pensions not through contributions but through revenue from properties – that by its seventh year they provided pensions for every retiree whilst simultaneously decreasing the membership fees by a third.⁵²

Appleton was also Nottingham Trades Council President for several years, and pushed mainly for housing and education reforms, and was active in the TUC as part of the Education Committee.⁵³ He was also a local Councillor as a Progressive candidate.⁵⁴ Appleton wrote in his 1900 TUC delegates report that the organisation was ‘alienating’ smaller unions in favour of the larger ones because they changed the rules so that the local Trades Council President of the city that hosted the TUC would no longer preside over the TUC, but that the President of the Parliamentary Committee would be that year’s TUC President.⁵⁵ Feeling dwarfed by the larger societies at the TUC, Appleton felt that the Lacemakers could be better represented among the smaller unions of the GFTU, and they affiliated in 1901.⁵⁶

In 1900, Appleton had successfully set up the International Federation of Lace Trade Unions (IFLTU) with the kindred unions in France and Scotland. The IFLTU was successful in bringing parity over wages between the countries, but the Nottingham union remained the largest contributor in terms of membership and money.⁵⁷ He also made an attempt to bring in American lace makers to the fold, even meeting President Roosevelt in the process, but ultimately was not able to convince them to join.⁵⁸ Appleton attributed his success with the foundation of the IFLTU to the ‘good deal of hope’ he brought with him on his first trip to Calais, which offset his lack of French.⁵⁹ Although initially a very effective organisation, there was an acrimonious split that will be examined in more detail towards the end of this chapter that broke up the IFLTU in 1910. However, on the strength of his proven success in establishing international networks, he was elected to the GFTU management

⁵² The value of the property owned by the Lacemakers is not clear, but the scheme is noted to cost them £17 10s per week to run for just 100 members. See Cuthbert, *The Lacemakers*, p. 73 for further details and comparisons with other trade union superannuation schemes.

⁵³ *Nottingham Trades Council Reports*, 1900-1911.

⁵⁴ ‘Mr W A Appleton Adopted’, *Nottingham Journal*, 17 October 1905, p. 6.

⁵⁵ Reports and Accounts, *Amalgamated Society of Lacemakers* 29 September 1900.

⁵⁶ In 1906 the GFTU had a membership of 501,299 from 105 separate unions. By comparison, the TUC represent 1,655,000 workers from 104 separate unions.

⁵⁷ Cuthbert, *The Lacemakers*, p. 78-80.

⁵⁸ ‘Mr Appleton’s Journey’, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 28 December 1906, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Report of the veterans’ causerie, Modern Records Centre, MSS.292/10.2/17/1.

committee in 1906, and then to the general secretaryship in 1908.⁶⁰ It is also worth noting that the friendships he made with his French counterparts were more than professional: Appleton travelled to Calais again in 1912 to be a pallbearer at the funeral of Ernest Sauvage, the general secretary of the Calais Lace Makers' Union.⁶¹

Before charting further aspects of Appleton's career, this chapter will turn its focus back onto the GFTU records. In order to uncover how trade unions operated as an emotional community, and the ways in which ties of friendship helped to create and sustain that emotional community, the verbatim minutes serve a crucial purpose. The following section will broadly explain how I have used the minutes of meetings, particularly those of the 1909 and 1910 annual conferences, to highlight the role of emotions in trade unionism, and how they can be defined as emotional communities.

Finding Emotional Communities in trade union minutes

Trade union minutes differ vastly between different organisations. While some organisations take pains to focus on brevity, others use minutes as an expression of their attendees' conduct and a verbatim record of their discussions. The GFTU chose to publish verbatim accounts of its annual meetings, and occasional verbatim accounts of smaller committee meetings when they thought it important to show clarity. Although trade union minutes and meeting reports form the bedrock of labour history, there has been no critical examination of the records themselves in the historiography. The question of who was taking the notes, how they were typed up, whether they were edited and by whom are all questions quite often rendered unanswerable by the (often gendered) lack of information regarding the typists' identities.⁶² Nevertheless, it is possible to highlight the expressions in speeches and dialogues and their emotional elements with a view to discovering how trade unions instilled feelings of solidarity and fraternity in order to keep members together in their common cause. Trade unions were founded on the understanding that there was a

⁶⁰ Annual Report 1906, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/6; Annual Report 1908, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/8.

⁶¹ 'Funeral of Lacemakers' Secretary', *Nottingham Journal*, 12 November 1912, p. 8.

⁶² Many smaller unions of this period could not afford the services of a professional typist, and so the note-taking was either done by the general secretary or the task was passed around the committee.

shared anger at injustice, and hope for a better future. Their records were the tangible communication method of these shared feelings.

Although their aim was showing the transparency of robust records, the minutes also betray the human connections of camaraderie, humour, disagreement and conflict that are an intrinsic part of collective working. If emotion is central to trade union activity, then how well the minutes, pamphlets or publications reflect and capture their emotional community play an important role in how members felt about their trade union. Similarly, if a trade union wanted their members to feel secure that their membership fees were being spent wisely, then it was in turn wise for them to ensure that their readers felt connected to their debates and decisions through verbatim records. The reading of these minutes was constitutive of the GFTU's collective identity and emotional community. Members at home could feel collective feelings that were inspired by the discussions printed in the reports. This is not to say that simply reading about a delegate's anger over failed legislation would definitely inspire the same reaction in the reader. But rather that the reader both felt and understood that the delegate emotionally responded in a particular way.

Instead of uncovering the emotions of individual people, this thesis focuses on the attempt that the GFTU made, through their minutes, to make their membership feel *something*. It is highly likely that the management committee wanted that *something* to be similar at the very least to what they themselves were feeling, but it is impossible to measure how successful they were.⁶³ For example, in the verbatim report of the 1909 annual meeting, the customary expression of thanks to the Mayor and Mayoress of Blackpool for their hospitality was expressed thus:

the delegates were then invited to signify their feelings with the customary shouts of "aye" and "no" and the chairman declared, amid laughter and cheers, that the "Ayes" were in the majority.⁶⁴

⁶³ The most reliable indicator for how 'successful' the GFTU was would have been their membership numbers: loosely speaking then, it could be fair to say that the GFTU were most successful in building their emotional community whilst their membership increased from 1899-1921, and were unsuccessful after their 1922 decline. However, as indicated in the introduction, this thesis is not concerned with measuring success or failure of the GFTU, but rather their methods and the experiences of people working with or in the GFTU.

⁶⁴ General Council Meeting Records, 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

Statements such as these could have been (and indeed, frequently were in many minute-taking organisations) simply conveyed as a vote of thanks. The custom of including votes of thanks in itself shows the importance of conveying feelings of friendly and convivial appreciation, and notions of politeness and respectability. However, the decision was taken to include the laughter and cheers, as further importance was given to delegates being able to 'signify their feelings', so that the emotional expression of the meetings was clear to the reader.⁶⁵ The minutes both reflected the emotions present at the meeting, and in turn worked to instruct the readers to join in with this expression, emphasising the professional but genuine friendship between delegates and hosts. This was also articulated through their further emphasis on the way in which the thanks were being expressed. The emotional atmosphere was described in such a way that the reader could experience 'it' themselves.

Sometimes, minutes conveyed emotions in more subtle ways. When James Sexton, leader of the Liverpool Dockers, expressed his concern over the effect of Labour Exchanges on the casualised workforce, the minutes offered evidence of disagreement and dissent:

I do claim the indulgence of this conference to put the case of the casual labourer as I think he will be affected by the establishment of Labour exchanges. ("No.") Well we can agree to differ.⁶⁶

The minutes, although they record verbatim speech in this instance, only record the small interjections anonymously. The use of brackets simultaneously interrupts the speech whilst softening the interjection. There is no clear indication of who disagreed with Sexton, or how forcefully (even comically?), or if there was more than one person dissenting, but the effect is that the reader now knows that there was conflict of an indeterminate level. The typist, or minute-taker, made a decision over whose name appears in the official record, and the motivation of this decision is unknowable. For the reader, does this instil intrigue, or perhaps conjure a feeling of acceptance or even the welcoming of differing opinions? In a similar vein, occasionally including (loud cheers) in between speeches showed the delegates'

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

affirming responses to the remarks made, thus emphasising the shared feelings of solidarity to members reading the reports. The emotional effect (that is, the emotions being experienced by the delegates) is uncertain, but the existence of the emotional instruction, or 'emotive', is perfectly clear. The construction of an emotional community was not, after all, an exact science, nor was it necessarily a conscious decision. But neither the precise effect it had nor the precise intention behind the editing decisions can blur the existence and the significance of the emotional constructions within the minutes.

Minutes also held a bureaucratic control over emotional expression. As such, individual delegates gathered to create or express collective feelings: one man expressed 'deepest regret' over their Treasurer's illness at this meeting, then called for 'the sympathy of the whole Conference [to] go out to him' and that the conference 'move... that a letter of sympathy be sent from this Federation' to express their feelings.⁶⁷ This collective expression of sympathy through a formal communication was then voted on and agreed to unanimously, as if the feeling of sympathy had to be legitimised and formalised to adhere to the 'rules' of their emotional community. The moral pressure to vote for official sympathy produced a unanimously carried motion. Again, it is unlikely that every delegate that day had identical feelings of sympathy – the vote could express etiquette-driven formality, but it could not guarantee an emotional elicitation – but it is notable that the expression of the feeling, formal or not, was so valued. It was important to the delegates to express this sympathy, regardless of its authenticity.

Furthermore, as reflections of wider social ideas of emotional respectability and acceptability, GFTU minutes can offer examples of how more direct conflicts can be both laid bare and hidden from view. Alfred Heaton, General Secretary of the National Society of Dyers and Finishers, was a delegate to the GFTU who did not seem to mind being contentious. He had stood for election as a teller for the GFTU in 1909 but, as he came last with only eleven votes in his favour, he did not appear to be one of the more popular delegates.⁶⁸ His first expression of annoyance had been at 'the serious lack of business capacity' of the previous GFTU General Secretary

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Annual Report, 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/9.

Isaac Mitchell.⁶⁹ Under Mitchell's disorganised and inept financial talents, and in an echo of Appleton's situation with his predecessor at the Lacemakers', a bond for a £10,000 investment had gone missing during the previous year.⁷⁰ Heaton was unwilling to allow the present Management Committee of the GFTU to gloss over it. 'What a previous Secretary has done has nothing to do with us,' replied William Mullin of the Card and Blowing Room Operatives, in an effort to move the proceedings on to the next agenda item.⁷¹

Washing their hands of the actions of a paid official merely months after his resignation was accepted may have been a little premature to those who were annoyed or angry about the potential loss of such a large amount of their money, but Curran accused Heaton of being 'distinctly out of order' for asking if the GFTU was still able to receive interest on the lost £10,000 bond.⁷² It is not that there are clear emotion words being used in this exchange (although Heaton does say that the loss of the bond 'impress[ed] in his mind' that the previous Secretary has acted badly), but rather that the capacity of minutes to capture disagreement can work to give weight to one 'side' of a verbal conflict.

Heaton, for all intents and purposes, had a valid point to make about £10,000 of the memberships' money, and it was not simply Curran's or Mullin's words that moved the conversation along. The minutes simply stopped recording the argument. Indeed, the following year the whole issue was forced into the open once again, as the accounts showed that the GFTU had to pay £136 on an indemnity policy in order to retrieve their £10,000.⁷³ What appears in the minutes was also a matter of choice, as is the convention of who gets to speak and in what order. Heaton was declared 'out of order' for raising the issue, not because his complaint was baseless, but because he had not raised this issue in the correct place in the proceedings. This is in effect a silencing of dissent, although an arguably necessary one when dealing with rigid codes of conduct for meetings and debates.⁷⁴ Again, the issue of whether Heaton

⁶⁹ General Council Meeting Records, 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

⁷⁰ £10,000 in around 1910 was worth approximately £780,000 in 2021.

⁷¹ General Council Meeting Records, 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ General Council Meeting Records, 1913, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/6; £136 would be around £10,500 in 2021. Source: National Archives currency converter.

⁷⁴ There are several examples of the use of 'convention' or the citing of the rule book as a means to end a difficult discussion. For example, in 1910 John Hill from the Boilermakers' was stopped from

was correct is irrelevant; instead, how emotions are both displayed and masked using both language and convention within minutes and records is important when considering the role of emotions in trade unions.

Later in the same proceedings, Heaton again provoked Curran's ire by indirectly accusing his union of poaching members that ought to have been affiliated to the former's union. Heaton had not named the Gasworkers as the culprits, but clearly Curran knew that he had meant to:

Mr. A Heaton: (National Dyers), commenting on the paragraph in the report which dealt with the desirability of reducing the number of unions and kindred trades, said he noticed with satisfaction the work of the management committee in this direction, but regard must be had in their efforts to the fact that certain societies were continually trespassing upon the trades of other organisations.

The Chairman: May I ask the delegate if he has any charge to make against the Gas Workers' Union, to make it definitely [sic]? At the present moment I am the chairman of the whole of the organisations in this Federation. If necessary, however, I will defend my own society.⁷⁵

This is a hint here at an emotional undercurrent of resentment and competition, that found its way onto the pages of the report via outside conversations and questions of conduct. The reader would not have known that Heaton was targeting a certain trade union, or indeed a certain representative of that organisation, without Curran's response. But Curran clearly did. This allusion to private conversations and hushed remarks conducted away from official proceedings hints at the way friendship networks also meant that people were outside of those networks.

Heaton was not a part of any of the jovial remarks that passed between Curran and other delegates; Heaton was not considered a friend. Feelings of resentment,

asking a question regarding the poaching of his members by another union, but he was told he could not discuss it as they were not at the correct paragraph on the report yet. See Proceedings and Reports July 1909 – June 1910, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/8.

⁷⁵ General Council Meeting Records, 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

distrust and jealousies were rife within and between trade unions.⁷⁶ The tension between Heaton and Curran was one example of how the verbatim report betrayed cracks in the façade of orderliness to reveal tensions working against the careful construction of an emotional community that the leadership were attempting to maintain. Heaton was butting against the normative expectations of their emotional community that prized solidarity between kindred trades and disliked anti-authoritarianist interventions. Networks between trade unionists were not necessarily built upon voting for each other's proposals but also depended on how well they got on during social events away from the minute-takers' ears.

Minutes offer glimpses of feelings that pushed forward votes and motions. Although it has always been clear that meetings, particularly large ones such as the TUC or other federations, contain famously emotive speeches, enthusiastic declarations of solidarity, or forceful denouncements of inaction, the minute aspects of minutes deserve more careful scrutiny. How they frame conflict, display friendliness, or hide disputes says a great deal about the ties that bound people together into an emotional community. As a part of creating their identity as an organisation, the GFTU also often expressed collective emotion, particularly in response to key events that affected the wider labour movement. How this was reflected in their minutes, and to what extent it had an effect on the activities of the GFTU within the wider labour movement, is explored in the following section.

Waiting for Osborne

The summer of 1909 was dominated by the Osborne court case.⁷⁷ As the GFTU delegates gathered in Blackpool for their annual conference, it is likely that the imminent decision from the House of Lords weighed heavy on them. The judgement was still a few months away, but Curran used his opening speech as Chairman to

⁷⁶ Will Thorne's autobiography, *My Life's Battles*, makes frequent references to colourful clashes at trade union meetings, with 'personal differences, and jealousies between the crafts' being common, and that 'the rising of a joiner to speak was like a red rag to a bull in the shipwrights... [with the] war between these two closely allied trades [being] furious and bitter...'. (Will Thorne, *My Life's Battles* (London: George Newness, 1925) p. 135).

⁷⁷ Henry Pelling, 'The Politics of the Osborne Judgement', *The Historical Journal*, 25, 4 (1982) pp. 889-909.

describe the movement as being 'troubled' by the threat of injunctions and other legal impediments to political representation for the working class.⁷⁸ His tempered description expressed the collective concern and fear caused by the impending ruling that had the potential to hinder working-class representation in politics. Feelings of concern and worry over possible loss of agency and control here highlighted the need for a counterpoint of solidarity and collective, hopeful effort. Curran further emphasised this, as he assured the delegates that 'political action and industrial effort' were 'becoming inseparable,' and was therefore mobilising an emotional effort that translated into effective solidarity.⁷⁹

James Seddon, MP and delegate from the TUC Parliamentary Committee, similarly reassured those that may have been 'surprised at [their] calm exterior' regarding the impending judgement during his speech of fraternal greetings.⁸⁰ He was 'convinced that if [the judgement went] against them it will act as a grand rallying call to the rank and file of the movement.'⁸¹ These were welcome speeches, and as such they framed the emotional tone of the meeting, but they also had a duty to be engaging and inspiring. Curran and Seddon were instilling the feeling of collective support, mutual interest and friendship between workers in the GFTU and other sections of the labour movement. Every year, there were fraternal delegates from the TUC, the Labour Party and often other kindred organisations from around the world to serve this very purpose. Their presence, and the recording of their good wishes and support, was testimony to their friendship. Although this is not the same as ensuring collective emotional uniformity, the message was clear: if there is hardship, we experience it and fight it together.

Of course, friendship cannot be built on mutual worry alone. Curran happily had the 'pleasing duty' as chairman to open the tenth annual meeting of the GFTU, and did so by assuring the special guests that 'although it might appear to some of our visitors that our organisation is not a very large one', they in fact represented over 700,000 workers, and were therefore a definite force in the labour movement.⁸² Size

⁷⁸ General Council Meeting Records, 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ For more information on James Seddon, see David E. Martin, 'James Seddon (1868-1939)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol II*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1974) pp. 332-4.

⁸¹ General Council Meeting Records, 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

⁸² Ibid.

gave credibility, especially with Samuel Gompers, President of the mighty American AFL being one of the visitors that Curran was referring to.⁸³ In order to emphasise the importance of the GFTU in the face of their small numbers, Curran gave an overview of the 'momentous year' that the GFTU had so far enjoyed.⁸⁴ Their 'power' was indicated by their unprecedented strike benefit payments. From March 1908 to March 1909, they had paid out a total of £122,748 14s, compared to the previous year's £24,922.⁸⁵ Curran described this amount as indicating the 'exceptional importance' of the GFTU, as this money was for the 'purpose of protection' of their friends, the working people.⁸⁶

By highlighting the successful financial solidarity that had been issued by the GFTU, Curran was shoring up the connections that the GFTU had forged with their various affiliates. Hope was given by Curran's reassurance that they were all working together through the 'co-operation, encouragement and support' of every affiliated society to ensure that workers could resist pay reductions safely and securely.⁸⁷ Negative feelings such as 'greed' by employers are contrasted starkly against the more virtuous 'perfectly justifiable resistance' of striking workers, ensuring that members felt a righteous and friendly solidarity with their fellow trade unionists.⁸⁸ Curran's speech ended with the declaration of their 'united front' by celebrating that the 'feeling and spirit' of the labour movement was a 'growing political force'.⁸⁹

Inspiring welcome speeches were a staple of British trade union meetings, but they need not be taken for granted as superficial performances. If we disregard the idea that we must know whether these emotions expressed were genuinely felt or not, there is much that we can understand about their emotional purpose. Inspiring

⁸³ Samuel Gompers was elected President of the AFL every year (except 1894) until his death in 1924, and saw its membership climb from 300,000 at its inception to almost 3 million by 1919. See John H. M. Laslett, 'Samuel Gompers and the Rise of American Business Unionism', in Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine (eds), *Labor Leaders in America* (Illinois: Illinois University Press, 1987) pp. 62-88; The other obvious comparison was that of the TUC and other large unions. In 1910, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain were the largest trade union at around 600,000 members alone, and the total membership of the TUC was 1,662,000.

⁸⁴ General Council Meeting Records, 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*; The highest amount of strike benefit paid out in a single year was £219,692 18s 8d in 1919-1920, which included £62,628 8s 4d to the Friendly Society of Ironfounders and £45,781 6s 8d to the Weavers (Annual Report 1920, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/20).

⁸⁶ General Council Meeting Records, 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

solidarity and encouraging friendship was such a crucial part of building unions, that thinking more carefully about what that could feel like is critical to understanding the impetus behind trade union activism. As will be seen in the next section, this emotional push towards friendship and solidarity can be seen on a larger scale in the context of internationalism, and it can be constructed using a variety of communication methods.

The GFTU on the international scene

The GFTU's position in their first decade was one of international as well as domestic connectivity. Their involvement in international trade unionism was mentioned briefly in Prochaska's book: the annual reports of their first decade were awash with reports from trade union leaders of federations in Denmark, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America, Germany, France and beyond.⁹⁰ This section will add more depth to our understanding of the strong thread of internationalism within the GFTU than was originally provided by Prochaska. Occasionally the GFTU reported on international politics as well, particularly during Curran's tenure as Chairman, which probably reflected Curran's personal interest in global affairs. For example, to mark the occasion of the 1904 Labour Party win in Australia, the GFTU telegraphed to 'cement the bonds of friendship between the mother country and the colonies' with a message of 'congratulations to Premier Watson and our comrades in the great Australian Commonwealth'.⁹¹ The report went on to say that it was 'essential that intimate knowledge of the movement in other countries should be obtained to assist us' in the trade union and political labour movement.⁹² This was not a deviation from the apolitical objective of the GFTU, but more a statement of support and solidarity from the GFTU to a new government that it felt aligned with their mission of advancing the rights of workers.

The 1904 annual report devoted twelve pages to biographies and portraits of the new Labour-led Australian parliament, and a report on their new Industrial Arbitration Act. Every profile emphasised and lauded the working-class and/or trade union roots

⁹⁰ Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 91-6.

⁹¹ Annual Report 1904, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/4.

⁹² Ibid.

of each new member. Indeed, the GFTU's annual reports often communicated the advances made by their international counterparts, which highlighted the idea that trade unionists from around the world were part of one collective body aimed at representing workers and improving their conditions.⁹³ Therefore, it was not simply speeches at their meetings that communicated desires for friendship and solidarity, but reports were also essentially open letters that detailed their emotional aspirations for meaningful unity. The countries that were given the most space in the GFTU reports tended to be those with more developed industrial processes in place, but there were occasional reports celebrating successes in states such as Serbia and Bulgaria.⁹⁴

Despite their first decade being notable for their strong global friendships, the GFTU did not make a promising start with their international colleagues. Jens Jensen, the President of the Danish federation of trade unions and formerly a painter by profession, attended the GFTU's 1900 annual meeting, and talked with Isaac Mitchell about the need for greater unity between national trade union centres.⁹⁵ After further communication, Jensen invited other European national leaders to come to the pre-planned Scandinavian Labour Conference in Copenhagen the following year.⁹⁶ After the 1902 International Conference took place in Stuttgart, it was the turn of the British to host. The GFTU arranged for the conference to take place in Dublin in 1903. They did not make a good first impression, and were presented with a long list of complaints signed by every non-British delegate at the end of the conference. After finding themselves being put into shared accommodations, in unclean conditions and full of broken furniture, the international leaders resolved to 'not again trouble our British fellow workers more than is absolutely necessary'.⁹⁷ The problems

⁹³ There was also considerable emphasis on raising financial support for disputes in other countries, and the GFTU would often act as a conduit for foreign funds coming into Britain to support strikes and lockouts. In 1909 there was a general strike in Sweden and the GFTU were called upon to issue an appeal for funds, but Appleton was embarrassed to see that the British response was painfully lacklustre compared to that of other countries: 'The responses have not been satisfactory... the fact remains that for every shilling contributed by the Britisher, the German has contributed about £33 10s.' See *Proceedings and Reports July 1933 – June 1934*, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU5/26.

⁹⁴ Annual Report, 1906, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/6.

⁹⁵ Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 91-2.

⁹⁶ The Scandinavian countries had been co-ordinating their conferences together since the 1880s, and had developed a cohesive system of co-operation between their countries. See Johannes Sassenbach, *Twenty-Five Years of International Trade Unionism*, (Amsterdam: International Federation of Trade Unions, 1926) p. 7.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

at the conference stemmed more from organisation and language-barriers that the GFTU failed to overcome at the time, but another problem was already becoming clear:

The International Conference has given us the impression that the representatives of the British organisation were not in earnest about the matter. We have seen 25 to 30 British delegates, and heard ten or twelve of them speak, but we still do not know which of these are the proper representatives of the General Federation.... Since we were not even given time to hear translations of the speeches we had no opportunity to lodge a protest against this kind of proceeding.⁹⁸

In the four years since the GFTU had been created, the labour movement around it had moved quickly. The TUC Parliamentary Committee, that had been more preoccupied with questions of policy and politics in the later part of the nineteenth century, now found that the new Labour Representation Committee had taken over its political purpose. That left the TUC with its industrial role, but the GFTU was also supposed to be the 'voice of the industrial'.⁹⁹ Through Scandinavian eyes, the still fraught relationship between British politics and trade unions seemed at odds with their own social democratic tradition, and the confusion between who represented the TUC, the GFTU, or the LRC, and which of them spoke for the organised working class of Britain, would continue to grow.¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, the GFTU managed to keep relations cordial over the coming years, helped along by their commitment to including international news as part of their regular communications. It was Mitchell's diplomatic skills and Jensen's keenness for the international project to work that made sure the events of 1903 were overcome.¹⁰¹ International meetings carried on each year until the outbreak of war, although as Prochaska noted, they did not tend to pass any meaningful resolutions nor did they produce anything other than scant publications.¹⁰² However, friendships

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

⁹⁹ Annual Report 1902, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/2.

¹⁰⁰ Report of the veterans' causerie – male trade unionists, 13 June 1938, Modern Records Centre, MSS.292/10.2/17/1.

¹⁰¹ Sassenbach, *International Trade Unionism*, p. 12.

¹⁰² Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 93.

were founded on far more than votes and resolutions. In 1909, the GFTU were pleased to report that ‘representatives of both German and French workmen have been in the country, those from France being here for the purpose of investigating the methods and conditions of municipal employment’.¹⁰³ The GFTU proudly added that these visitors ‘pursued their inquiries under the auspices of the General Federation’, because they were keen to position themselves as the organisation that best represented British trade unionism.¹⁰⁴



Figure 3: Mr and Mrs Appleton are pictured (back row, seventh and eighth from the left) next to Ramsay Macdonald in a photograph taken to commemorate the trip to Germany in 1909. Image reference HC/LB/1/111/20/65 (Parliamentary Archives).

Appleton took it upon himself to wine and dine delegates using 'his own private means' so that the 'dignity and prestige' of the GFTU were maintained, which is a solid indication of how strongly he personally felt about international links.¹⁰⁵ At the beginning of the same year, Appleton and his wife Elizabeth accompanied a

¹⁰³ Annual Report 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/9.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid; In his pamphlet '*How I Left the Federation: An Attempt to Clear Up Wrong Impressions*' (1938/9) Author's own copy.

¹⁰⁵ Appleton, *How I Left the Federation*, p. 8.

delegation of Labour MPs that visited Germany in order to see first-hand how the German system of unemployment bureaus operated (see figure 3).¹⁰⁶ This was an indication of the sense of usefulness in knowledge-sharing that internationalism was built upon, and the idea that 'advances made for workers in one country ought to be [of] help [to] those in every country'.¹⁰⁷

In 1910's Annual Report, the GFTU were pleased that international links 'continue[d] to develop on friendly lines,' although the sheer weight of international bureaucracy meant that the reports from all nations in the International Secretariat's general report were often two years out of date.¹⁰⁸ Johannes Sassenbach, Hermann Kube and Paul Umbreit from the German Federation of Trade Unions were delegates to the 1911 GFTU Annual Meeting, which attested to the 'cordiality of the relationships existing between the difference countries' by the welcoming of international delegates to their meetings so frequently.¹⁰⁹

The building of international friendships was driven by the energetic and enthusiastic efforts of Carl Legien, leader of the *Generalkommission der Gewerkschaften Deutschlands* (German federation of trade unions). Legien represented a solid middle ground between the different tendencies and beliefs of particular nations: Britain and America favoured a pragmatic and industrial model of conciliation, whereas the French and other radical socialist Labour groups were often far more revolutionary in their outlook. In contrast, Germany, and other countries such as Belgium, Austria and the Scandinavian countries, were gradualists. They were able to temper the radical voices and the business-like predilections by encouraging compromises that worked towards reforms to the social and industrial lives of the working classes.¹¹⁰ Legien shared much of the same background as his British counterpart, William Appleton. They both cut their teeth in craft unionism – Legien

¹⁰⁶ 'Work and Workers', *Swindon Advertiser*, 4 June 1909, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ The idea of parity regarding industrial conditions was the staple British point of view during the International conferences in Leeds, 1916. By emphasising that achievements and ideas could be shared, the GFTU hoped that their Italian, French and Belgian counterparts present at the meeting would be able to focus on their similarities with their international counterparts, rather than the huge divisions brought on by war. Proceedings and Reports July 1916 – June 1917, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/11.

¹⁰⁸ Annual Report 1910, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/10.

¹⁰⁹ Annual Report 1911, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/11.

¹¹⁰ Lewis Lorwin, 'The Structure of International Labor Activities', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 310 (1957) pp. 1-2.

had been a woodturner by trade – and had strong inclinations for industrial conciliation alongside gradual political representation, rather than any kind of revolutionary force.¹¹¹ Both Appleton and Legien came under fire from their colleagues for their willingness to talk both with employers and with the government, which was often seen as getting into bed with the enemy.¹¹² However, Legien was generally very well-respected in Germany, particularly for his role in ensuring that trade unions were on equal footing with the SPD (the political wing of the German labour movement).¹¹³

The friendship between Legien and Appleton grew steadily between 1908 and the outbreak of the first world war. Their correspondence, printed in the annual reports and management committee minutes, indicate the relationship was personally close as opposed to simply professionally cordial. Knowing that they would be printed of course added the imperative to portray a strong connection, but that this was done through expressions of friendship rather than simple expressions of work-related agreement is indicative of genuine feeling. At this point, the GFTU certainly deserved the accolade of being the representatives of British trade unionism on the international stage, because they simply put much more effort into forging these crucial friendships whilst the TUC paid scant attention.¹¹⁴ As will be seen in the following section, the GFTU also cultivated their domestic friendships carefully, and the blurred lines between the personal and the professional reveal much about the centrality of affectionate friendship within the GFTU.

‘Because of the admiration and the love he felt towards him’: the minutes of a retirement party in Blackpool¹¹⁵

It was not just orderly and official proceedings that developed the GFTU’s emotional community. Although there were no fun commemorative cartoons, the proceedings and reports often detailed the more relaxed events that took place after the business

¹¹¹ Karl Christian Führer, *Carl Legien (1861–1920) Drei Gründe, warum der Gewerkschaftsführer es verdient hat, erinnert zu werden* (Bonn, FES, 2014).

¹¹² ‘GFTU Council Meets’, *Daily Herald*, 14 July 1922, p. 6.

¹¹³ Führer, *Carl Legien*.

¹¹⁴ Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 91.

¹¹⁵ General Council Meeting Minutes 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

of the day had been completed. Including these in the official records indicated how valued the social aspect of the conferences were. In 1903, the delegates at the Leicester annual council meeting 'happily mingled with the other guests, everyone thoroughly enjoying the good things provided by the Mayor's generous hospitality'.¹¹⁶ The night before the 1909 conference began in Blackpool, a select few members of the management committee and esteemed guests attended a retirement dinner for Thomas Ashton.¹¹⁷ Ashton had been a founding GFTU committee member and active in the Operative Cotton Spinners' Association for nearly 50 years, so his retirement was celebrated with an appreciative and flattering biography in the annual report.¹¹⁸

Small biographies often appeared in the GFTU reports, as they did in other organisations such as the TUC and Labour Party, and served to underpin values of struggle and sacrifice in the name of the labour movement cause. Trade union leaders, particularly long-serving ones like Ashton, tended to command a great deal of fond respect from members, and were often figurative focal points for feelings of loyalty and allegiance. Loyalty to certain leaders was clearly displayed with portraits in union offices or banners, and with the giving of commemorative gifts after milestone achievements. Therefore, the occasion of his retirement would have almost certainly generated warm feelings of regard and appreciation. This was clear in the manner with which his friends spoke openly and generously of their admiration for Ashton and of their working lives together. The inclusion of the speeches given by his long-term colleagues in the official report highlights the importance of friendship and camaraderie to the emotional community of the GFTU.¹¹⁹

Ashton expressed his pleasure at being 'surrounded that night by his friends' after Curran lamented that the GFTU were 'losing a personality that [would] be difficult to replace', how he appreciated his 'many happy hours' playing billiards with him, and his 'regret' that Ashton would no longer be working for the movement on a national level.¹²⁰ This touching speech of appreciation indicated the clouding lines of

¹¹⁶ Proceedings and Reports July 1902 – June 1903, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/2.

¹¹⁷ For more biographical information on Thomas Ashton, see Naomi Reed, 'Thomas Ashton (1841-1919)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol VII*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, ed., (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984) pp. 8-10.

¹¹⁸ Annual Report 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/9.

¹¹⁹ General Council Meeting Minutes 1909, Bishopsgate Institute. GFTU/3/5.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

professional collegiality and personal friendship, but also the strength of bonds created whilst working in the labour movement.¹²¹ Perhaps this distortion between professional and personal was result of the emotive nature of building up trade unions. The speeches voiced admiration for his work ethic and celebrated his important path of personal aspiration that many members of the GFTU had walked themselves.¹²² The officialdom of minute-taking mixed with the relaxed celebratory nature of a retirement dinner exemplifies the cohesion of friendship and work within the emotional community of the GFTU, at least for those invited to the party.

Aside from Ashton himself, the guest of honour was Samuel Gompers, President of the AFL. Despite the difference in size of the organisations, at this time he regarded the GFTU as the voice of British trade unionism over the TUC, mainly because he was staunchly anti-socialist and did not like some of the more hot-headed personalities that graced the TUC's stage.¹²³ In particular, he greatly admired Appleton: in 1922, he would write a foreword for one of Appleton's book, in which he called Appleton 'a leading trade union official'.¹²⁴ The warmth of feeling that many had at the GFTU for Gompers was evident at both the official conference and Ashton's retirement dinner.¹²⁵ Whilst welcoming Gompers to Britain, Ashton described him as 'a shining star in Europe', and said that he hoped that 'the feeling between leaders of our movement will continue to grow in cordiality'.¹²⁶ However, the most enthusiastic praise for Gompers came from William Appleton. He said that Gompers did

the things which men do only out of pure kindness of heart; and it was because they realised this that their feelings towards Mr. Gompers was something more than mere admiration. They admired the risks that he had taken, of course, and the courageous spirit which had kept him through all difficulties and had enabled him to unify the Labour movement; but there was something more. They loved him for himself, and for the kindness which he had extended to some of them... It was because of the admiration and the

¹²¹ 'Tom Ashton', *Northern Daily Telegraph*, 1 July 1909, p. 4.

¹²² General Council Meeting Minutes 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

¹²³ 'Trades Federation: The Visit of Samuel Gompers', *Westminster Gazette*, 25 June 1909, p. 11.

¹²⁴ William A Appleton, *What We Want and Where We Are*, (New York: George H Doran, 1922) p. vii.

¹²⁵ General Council Meeting Minutes 1909, Bishopsgate Institute. GFTU/3/5; Annual Report 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/9,

¹²⁶ General Council Meeting Minutes 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

love that he felt towards him that he asked them to drink to the health of the American Federation and Samuel Gompers, its President.

Perhaps the drinks had been flowing, but the sentiment expressed matches the high esteem that Appleton held Gompers in for many years. There were more trans-Atlantic visits between them over the following decade, as Appleton had been invited to America to stay with Gompers and see American trade unionism in action in 1906.¹²⁷ This declaration of admiration was very much a public statement of the closeness that the GFTU and the AFL had by extension of their leaders.

A common theme in trade union meetings and speeches is that of industrial legacy and inheritance of struggle. Invocations of past battles were used as rallying cries, reasons for maintaining solidarity, motivations for collective mourning and the inspiration for new hopes. This was closely tied to friendship and connectivity being expressed using the language of family. Delegates frequently referred to each other as 'brother', rather than 'fellow worker' or 'comrade' at the GFTU, although the latter did crop up occasionally. There were women present from time to time, and this will be explored in chapter four, but the GFTU were particularly male-orientated during this period, and would remain so for many years. When women were present – most notably Mary Macarthur and Mary Quaile – the delegates still often tended to address the group as 'brothers'.¹²⁸

Although fully autonomous, the GFTU did not forget that they had been created by the TUC, and they repeatedly referred to them as the 'parent' body. The TUC sent David Shackleton, MP for Clitheroe and chairman of the TUC, along with James Seddon as the fraternal representatives to the 1909 meeting. Shackleton referred to himself 'as president of the mother body of organised workers' and that as the GFTU was 'one of their children, they were pleased to see it growing in strength and usefulness'.¹²⁹ Ben Turner, a former weaver turned Labour MP, had, at their Oxford conference the year before, brought greetings from the Labour Party, describing the Party as 'the second infant of the TUC'.¹³⁰ As with all parent-child relationships, there can be strain as well as nurture: the GFTU's toddler growing pains were to transform

¹²⁷ 'Prominent men of Nottingham', *Nottingham Journal*, 15 August 1928, p. 7.

¹²⁸ Annual Report 1911, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/11.

¹²⁹ General Council Meeting Minutes 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

¹³⁰ Proceedings and reports July 1909 – June 1910, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/8.

into full-blown teenage angst during the first world war as they lost their place alongside the TUC and Labour Party on the Joint Board. This family quarrel will be explored in chapter four. In 1909 however, the relationship between the TUC and the GFTU was still cordial, and Seddon stated his hope that 'the Labour Party will work in harmony' with the GFTU by 'standing shoulder to shoulder together in the defence of Labour' in his fraternal greetings speech.¹³¹ There was a growing acceptance, particularly in the wake of the Taff Vale legal ruling that had hamstrung the trade union movement's abilities to finance industrial action, that 'the family' had to work together.¹³²

Gompers, perhaps an international cousin, similarly employed the language of family in his speech with a call for trade unionists around the world to 'unite in brotherhood'.¹³³ He stressed that whilst most working people would not be able to leave vast amounts of monetary wealth to their children, it was imperative that they leave a legacy of 'a better organised Labour movement behind' so that they 'do not leave to the children the work that [they] ought to do'. A central component of family is the impetus to provide for subsequent generations, and the family of labour is no exception here. This bonding sense of being a vital part of a larger organisation both now and in future iterations of organised labour further strengthened feelings of solidarity and friendship both in 1909 and in terms of enduring legacy.

Placing expressions of friendship at their social gathering into the printed minutes of their council meeting highlights the centrality of fraternal ties in the GFTU, as does the embedded nature of friendship networks in their official discourse. Connections of affectionate friendship cemented the crucial feeling of solidarity required to hold together the federation, formed the foundation of their working partnerships with international bodies, and buoyed the GFTU's level of importance on the international stage. It was celebratory dinners as much as council meetings that developed the emotional community of the GFTU, which in turn placed the organisation into a position of importance in the wider British labour movement. Minutes assisted this process by providing space for expressions of solidarity between different

¹³¹ General Council Meeting Minutes 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

¹³² The GFTU fully supported measures to reverse the Taff Vale decision along with the TUC. See John Saville, 'Trade Unions and Free Labour: The Background to the Taff Vale decision' in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds., *Essays in Labour History Vol 1*, pp. 317-51.

¹³³ General Council Meeting Minutes 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

organisations as well as individuals, and the GFTU made extensive efforts to cement these links through their emotional community. However, as previously noted, minutes can also reveal tensions and hostility that bubbled under the surface of familial networks connected to quarrels, disagreements, and scandals.

Does he hold a Trade Union card?

1908 – 1909 was the first full term for William Appleton as the General Secretary of the GFTU, having taken over after Isaac Mitchell's jump from trade unionism to a Board of Trade position. After a successful first term, a motion proposing a raise in Appleton's salary began with a lengthy speech of admiration by William Marsland of the Amalgamated Cotton Spinners, in which he praised the 'kindness', and 'excellent manner' with which Appleton had 'establish[ed] the good opinion of this Federation in the minds of those cotton employers'.¹³⁴ Having reverence for playing nicely with employers rather than fighting against them was unsurprising from the cotton industry; they, along with Appleton's lace makers, were widely considered to be somewhat aloof from the more bellicose general unions. However, after Tom Fox of the British Amalgamation of Labour (BAL) confidently declared that they had 'the right man for the job', the debated pay increase for Appleton was brought to a shuddering halt. An opaque and unattributed sentence in the minutes interrupted the flow of the speech to declare that 'questions were asked as to whether Mr Appleton still held a Trade Union card.'¹³⁵

It became apparent that Appleton had been expelled from his own trade union, the Nottingham Lacemakers, only a few months before. The reasons for his expulsion would not be made officially clear to the 1909 delegates until the following year (the details of the expulsion are examined in the next chapter). Back in Blackpool however, surprise was expressed by some delegates, but it was clearly old news for others. James Crinion from the Card and Blowing Room Operatives doubted that it was appropriate to discuss the issue at a GFTU conference, even though they knew

¹³⁴ General Council Meeting Minutes 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/55; There are scant references to Marsland in the historiography, but some biographical details can be found in 'Obituary: Mr William Marsland, JP', TUC Annual Report, 1917, www.unionhistory.info, accessed 28 July 2022.

¹³⁵ General Council Meeting Minutes 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

‘quite well that there [was] a little difference between [Appleton] and his Society’.¹³⁶ Curran agreed, and added that the GFTU ought not to ‘interfere’ with any animosity between Appleton and the Lace Makers Society.¹³⁷

Selectively deciding not to discuss an issue about their general secretary’s membership status highlights the importance of friendship networks in emphasising power structures within the GFTU. Unperturbed, Charles Freak from the Boot and Shoe Operatives stated that he wanted to know if Appleton paid to a trade union: ‘That is the question I was going to ask’, added Heaton. ‘If he is going to be the Secretary of this Federation he ought to be a member of his union’.¹³⁸ Unfortunately for Appleton, those outside of the management committee could not be altogether removed from the discussion. Could a man be in charge of the GFTU, but not belong to a trade union himself?

The efforts of some of these men to brush over what was clearly a worrying revelation emphasizes the network of friendship that existed between leaders of individual trade unions. This was a disruption to the very purpose of trade union minutes: the sense of orderliness and equity was again stripped back to reveal gossip, hushed up events, and questions of misconduct. This element of silencing power within trade unions has been notably overlooked by much of the existing historiography of the labour movement.

Arthur Taylor from the Amalgamated Engineers was worried this incident was going to ‘cause a lot of trouble’ and insisted that delegates deserved further information.¹³⁹ Appleton, who had been excused from the debate regarding his own salary increase, was called back into the room. Curran did not ask Appleton if he had been expelled from the Lace Makers Society, but only if he held a trade union card. This delicate manoeuvring of language allowed Appleton to save his blushes. He replied that he ‘had some enemies that had taken a certain line of action,’ but demurred from giving details.¹⁴⁰ Labelling his former colleagues as ‘enemies’ shows just how quickly friendship in trade unions can rupture, and it would not be the last time that Appleton

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ General Council Meeting Minutes 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

expressed such a decisive division between himself and other trade unionists. However, despite said enemies, he 'also remembered that [he] had friends', and subsequently he confirmed that he did indeed hold a 'fully paid-up [trade union] card.'¹⁴¹ Heaton, again not shying away from testing the boundaries of the emotional community's rule book, was not convinced by this evasiveness, and remarked that 'we ought to know what union our Secretary belongs to'. Finally, Charles Wardle, the delegate from the Nottingham Lacemakers broke his silence, and confirmed that Appleton had 'been expelled for wrongdoing,' but said it would be 'inadvisable' for him to give the details to the conference. The minutes then go on to reveal that Appleton, who had withdrawn from the room again after he had spoken of his enemies and friends, passed Curran a note (supposedly enlisting the help of a member of staff at the Blackpool Metropole Hotel).¹⁴² This, Curran told the conference, was confirmation from Appleton that he was 'a fully paid-up member of the Scottish Lacemakers Society'.¹⁴³ The potential embarrassment of having a non-affiliated General Secretary was hurriedly resolved with a helpful dose of opaque minute-taking and willing obtuseness from those closest to him, but the idea of hidden friendship networks underpinning the emotional community of the GFTU was briefly laid bare.

The reaction to this news is absent from the record, but as Curran later remarked that this altercation had been 'one of the most extraordinary conflicts... ever witnessed at any conference', it is doubtful that the seventy delegates and their special guests were passive and silent.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, any verbal reactions were minimally recorded, and again the silencing power of the minute taker holds court. However, the general secretary of the GFTU had been recently expelled from his own trade union, and it was patently clear that a significant number of delegates at least knew some of the story, and did not want it openly discussed. The truth of the matter would take many months for the management committee to unpick; it was not until the following year that the delegates were given the chance to hear more of the story. Given that the circumstances of the expulsion lie outside of his time with the

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Annual Report 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/9.

¹⁴³ General Council Meeting Minutes 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

GFTU, the story of how it came to pass will be told in the following chapter as part of the second half of his biography.

Conclusion

The connections between different people in a federal organisation like the GFTU was clearly not without its issues, but there were indeed clear indications of genuine friendship among the professional networks. It was clear that in an environment in which there were frequent disagreements over policy and ideology, there were also agreements that were forged through feelings of friendship. The celebrations of a life dedicated to the labour movement – such as Tom Ashton’s retirement – were valued precisely because they showed just how intertwined working lives and social lives were in trade unions. However, close friendship groups were often closed groups. When whispers of misconduct start to spread, cracks in the circles of friendship begin to appear. When Appleton’s issue with his former society were forced into the open, it was clear that a select few were in the know, but others were not. Someone forced an embarrassing issue into the ostensibly faithful minutes, much to the clear chagrin of those that wanted to silence the debate. Whilst a feeling of solidarity was being carefully developed and nurtured at this conference with expressions of friendship and camaraderie, it was also being clearly and loudly contested. Despite the aims and objectives of the GFTU, there was an inherent frailty in the federation’s emotional culture. Not every delegate could be (or indeed wanted to be) friendly with those in power in the organisation. The consequence of this fragility was a factionalism that led to contested solidarities both within the GFTU and the wider trade union movement. As will be seen in chapter three, these seeds of contested solidarities that were sewn during Appleton’s takeover of the GFTU would eventually bloom into their very public fall from grace in 1917 at the behest of the powerful Miners’ Federation of Great Britain. However, before that could happen, the outbreak of war in 1914 threatened the very fabric of the labour movement, and the GFTU had to contend with new wave of patriotic feeling that swept over Britain.

Chapter Three: Patriotism

'I know it is very difficult to keep one's temper and to preserve a calm outlook while this terrible war is raging on the Continent.'¹

- James O'Grady, 1917

Introduction

The outbreak of the first world war served an abrupt end to the assumption that most of the British left would be pacifist.² Although there were notable pacifists active in the labour movement, even actively supporting the war effort in spite of their personal convictions, fervent patriotism in the face of conflict swept over politicians and trade unionists from all sides of the left spectrum.³ As David Swift noted, once war had been declared, the idea of pacifism being an inherent preserve of labour seemed abstract and unthinkable in practice to many trade unionists, particularly as British Edwardian society was often markedly convinced of its own moral superiority when compared to other nations.⁴ Indeed, as demonstrated by Hugh Cunningham, patriotic feeling and language had been used by radicals throughout most of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to justify the moral imperative of their anti-corruption cause, before becoming more associated with the political right in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵ With the exception of Swift, if the historiography has explored the patriotism of the left, it has been more usually considered with regards to the conduct of politicians such as Ramsay MacDonald, Keir Hardie or Arthur Henderson, but there has been less emphasis on the non-radical political and trade union influence, despite its prevailing effect.⁶ Therefore,

¹ Proceedings and Reports July 1917-June 1918, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/12.

² Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: a study in the politics of labour* (London: Merlin Press, 1972) p. 39.

³ David Swift, *For Class and Country: The Patriotic Left and the First World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017) p. 24.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 34.

⁵ Hugh Cunningham, 'Language of Patriotism', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981) pp. 8-33.

⁶ For example, see Lucy Bland and Richard Carr, eds., *Labour, British Radicalism and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); Kevin Morgan, *Ramsay Macdonald*, (London: Haus, 2006); Chris Wrigley, *Arthur Henderson* (Wales: University of Wales Press, 1990); Kenneth O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie* (London: Orion Publishing Group, 1997).

this chapter will consider the patriotism of the GFTU, in order to give some counterweight to a historiography that tends to favour the radical voices of the left.

Patriotism was a unifying factor, particularly during conflict, and engendered a sense of cohesion and co-operation that the 'labour unrest' of the previous few years had threatened.⁷ As Nicole Eustace has identified, patriotism has been crucial in galvanising national action during times of revolution, as seen from America to France to Haiti, but also that the converse is also true: patriotism can be a galvanising force in favour of a collective acceptance of national purpose, of a widespread adoption of the national status quo when faced with a common enemy.⁸ This is possible through the harnessing of patriotic feeling, and directing it through a love of country, a hope for victory and a desire for an enemy's demise. The GFTU did this by using patriotic language and imagery in their manifesto and their war time reports, championing the rights of British armed servicemen – a cause to which no one could disagree with without displaying a lack of patriotism themselves - and aligning themselves against German trade union leaders despite their former links of friendship.

The GFTU use of patriotism in their writing was less about displaying a 'real' emotion, but was rather a way of solidifying their own cultural identity within the British trade union movement through their presentation of patriotism. This chapter outlines how the GFTU both portrayed and used patriotism in order to build their emotional community, and how that ultimately set them apart from other labour movement organisations. The work of the GFTU within the Workers' National Committee (WNC) is examined, as the emotional language used to describe disintegrating friendships and professional links is key to understanding the impact of patriotism on personal networks that had been hitherto carefully nurtured and greatly valued. All these closely woven networks of friendship and working partnerships, both national and international, gave Appleton ample opportunities to express his increasingly contentious opinions regarding the role of trade unions by using patriotism as a justification and claim to the moral high ground.

⁷ Ross M Martin, *TUC: The Growth of a Pressure Group 1868-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) p. 145.

⁸ Nicole Eustace, 'Emotion and Political Change' in Susan Matt and Peter Stearns, eds., *Doing Emotions History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014): p. 164.

Through Appleton, patriotism affected and adjusted the GFTU's emotional and cultural framework throughout the first world war and into the following years of the early twentieth century. This was borne out in their pivotal but under-researched role in obtaining pay increases for the armed services, where the GFTU managed a substantial and long-lasting victory. The chapter will begin by considering the ways in which John Ward – leader of the Navvies' union and a GFTU management committee member labelled as an 'ultra-patriot' by Swift – helped Appleton steer the GFTU's pro-war message with emotive gusto will be examined through critical biographies of the two men.⁹ A focus on their lives and their different approaches to trade unions helps to illustrate how personalities affected the organisational identity of the GFTU during the war.

'An Indescribable Catastrophe': Labour, the GFTU, John Ward, and the First World War¹⁰

With notable exceptions, the labour movement broadly supported the war as a means to defeat what was widely understood as German militarism and aggression. John Bew wrote that the declaration of hostilities was a sad day for socialists across Europe, in that war 'exploded the dream that the solidarity of workers would bring an end to Imperialist conflicts'.¹¹ The threat of war had taken up much of the time and efforts of the international labour movement, with various proposals adopted that were designed to stand firm against governments that would require working class soldiers for their capitalist squabbles. The proposals included the threat of mass strikes in Britain and across the continent on the announcement of war: the Labour Party chairman explicitly argued that the 'Labour Party is here to denounce war and war-mongering in any disguise'.¹²

⁹ Alice Prochaska, *History of the General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 124.

¹⁰ Trade Unions and the War 1914, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/13.

¹¹ John Bew, *Citizen Clem: A Biography of Attlee* (London: Riverrun, 2016) p. 76. Other work on left politics and trade unionism in the first world war includes Lucy Bland and Richard Carr, eds., *Labour, British Radicalism and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 1* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Caroline Rowan, 'Women in the Labour Party, 1906-1920', *Feminist Review*, 12 (1982): 74-91; and Chris Wrigley, *A History of British Industrial Relations, 1914-1939, Volume 2* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987).

¹² Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, I: the Evolution of Labour's Foreign Policy, 1990-1951*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) p. 57.

On 30th July 1914, Labour MPs unanimously signed a resolution that ‘on no account will this country be dragged into the European conflict in which, as the Prime Minister has stated, we have no direct or indirect interest’. They also called ‘upon all labour organisations in the country to watch events vigilantly so as to oppose if need be in the most effective way any actions which may involve war’.¹³ However, five days later parliament was told by Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey that Britain could not hold its neutral position, as the government admitted that they had already given France assurances of support (despite previous repeated denials in the House of Commons). This meant that from the 4th August 1914, Britain was at war with Germany, and the labour movement had a choice to make.

In addition to controlling their strike fund, the GFTU also ran an Approved Society for the provision of health and unemployment benefits after the 1911 National Insurance Act had been passed, and so they were quick to establish themselves as an organisation concerned with rising living costs, profiteering and reduction in wages due to wartime conditions.¹⁴ Correspondence to the GFTU from Trades Councils and other affiliates shows that labour organisations were feeling the financial squeeze of their workers joining the armed forces and not being able to pay their contributions. Acknowledging such pressures, the GFTU’s management committee resolved in August 1914 that they would call for a number of measures to help working people withstand the financial and social pressures of the coming conflict (see appendix one).

From the very beginning then, the management committee were focused intently on the idea that ensuring the availability of employment was integral to the working people of the country, rather than being forced to rely on charitable donations and

¹³ Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism*, pp. 39-41.

¹⁴ The GFTU had consulted on the design of David Lloyd George’s landmark legislation, and although they argued at length for a system that supported centralised trade union control of benefits over anything state-run, they still welcomed the advent of a national social security system. They set up another arm of the GFTU – the Approved Society – in order to comply with new insurance rules so that they could administer health and unemployment benefit for trade union members that belonged to small organisations that did not have the infrastructure to deal with the paperwork. There was considerable debate regarding how involved the GFTU ought to be: in 1912, Alexander Wilkie from the Ship Constructive and Shipwrights’ Association proposed that the GFTU draft an amendment to the Bill in order to streamline the process for larger unions. Despite Arthur Henderson voicing concern that the GFTU were not the most appropriate organisation to draft legislation, the resolution was carried. This was yet another example of the GFTU hovering between purposes. See Proceedings and Reports July 1912 – June 1913, Bishopsgate, GFTU/4/9; Trade Unions and the War, 1914, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/13.

welfare payments. In order to support their policies, the GFTU published a large quantity of pamphlets and newspaper articles in *The Federationist* to keep the members of their affiliated organisations informed of developments taking place that would be of interest to the labour world.¹⁵ Once the initial employment boom in the first phase of war had fallen away, the unprecedented number of unemployed people that were struggling to find work put a heavy load onto the trade union movement. It was anticipated that many of the men returning from the front line would ask their trade union branches for financial relief and support to find employment, and those branches were nervous of the strain.

In November of 1914, the GFTU corresponded with the London Labour Exchange about the increasing worry over the number of unemployment claims they could not grant.¹⁶ The GFTU were well-placed to be the voice of industrial workers alongside the Labour Party and the TUC at the outbreak of the war, despite lacking the numerical clout of the TUC's membership.¹⁷ This influential position was to change irreversibly during the conflict, not least because some of the men at its helm were becoming increasingly alienated from the wider movement. John Ward was a key element in this: his politics dramatically pivoted away from his socialist youth after his election as a Labour MP in 1906, but his new lean towards the right of the political spectrum found a welcome home in the GFTU.

John Ward was born on the 21st November 1866 in Weybridge, Surrey. His father, Robert, was a journeyman plasterer.¹⁸ After his father died in 1869, his mother Caroline (nee Edmonds) took him and his younger brother Thomas to Appleshaw, Hampshire to be closer to her family, where she worked as a laundress.¹⁹ Although he went to work at the age of seven as an agricultural labourer, Ward spent some time in a workhouse after a failed attempt at joining the Navy whilst underage, but

¹⁵ Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 106.

¹⁶ Management Committee Minutes, July 1914 – June 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/75.

¹⁷ According to their Annual Report, the GFTU's membership total stood at 967,257 in 1914, whilst the TUC had 2,232,000 in 1913. See Annual Report 1914, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/14; Hugh Armstrong Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889, Volume 2 1911-1933* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) p. 570.

¹⁸ John Saville, 'John Ward (1866-1934)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol IV*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977) pp. 190-193.

¹⁹ 'John Ward.' (1881) *Census return for Appleshaw, Andover, Hampshire, England* (RG11, folio 7, p. 7) www.findmypast.co.uk, accessed 14 July 2021.

then managed to find work on the Manchester Ship Canal earning 5½ d per hour.²⁰ He later recalled: 'well do I remember the bitter winter of 1878. To this day I carry the marks of open chilblains and other wounds caused by coupling wagons when it was so cold that my hands stuck to the couplings, and could only be released at the expense of my skin'.²¹ He was twelve years old. Injuries from the cold, much like Appleton's own recollections of chilblains, and the enduring memory of that suffering was often a decisively galvanising force for labour leaders, and Ward was no exception.

The winter that gave him those scarred hands was his first as a navvy on a railway.²² After attending night classes in Weyhill village as a young teenager, he learnt to read with a voraciousness that would stay with him for the rest of his life.²³ Years later, Ward recalled that he learnt to read using the Bible at these classes, then progressed onto John Bunyan before becoming enthralled with *Ivanhoe* and *Robinson Crusoe*, saying that the latter gave him all his 'spirit of adventure... and landed [him] into many troubles, travels and difficulties'.²⁴ He certainly did have a sense of adventure in his youth, because after Ward worked on the Manchester Ship Canal, he signed up to construct railways in Sudan in 1885.²⁵ There he developed strong anti-war feelings and a belief in the potential of socialism to radically transform society for the betterment of the working classes.²⁶

When he returned to England, Ward joined the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) after meeting Tom Mann and John Burns, and he became an active socialist in their Battersea branch, whilst also active in the short-lived National Democratic League (NDL).²⁷ On the 9th of November 1886 he was arrested for taking part in an unemployment demonstration, and charged with assaulting the police and for unlawful assembly.²⁸ Upon appearing at court, Ward wore his two Sudan medals in a

²⁰ 'Death of Colonel John Ward', *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 19 December 1934, p. 7.

²¹ *Pearsons' Weekly*, 15 March 1906, n. p.

²² Marc Brodie, 'John Ward 1866 - 1934', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36733>.

²³ Saville, 'John Ward', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol IV*, p. 191.

²⁴ William T Stead, 'The Labour Party and the books that helped to make it', *Review of Reviews*, 33 (1906) pp. 568-82.

²⁵ Saville, 'John Ward', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol IV*, p. 191.

²⁶ Stead, 'The Labour Party', pp. 568-82.

²⁷ Barrow and Bullock, *Democratic Ideas*, pp. 141-6.

²⁸ 'The Socialists in Trafalgar Square', *Globe*, 11 November 1886, p. 2.

display of patriotism that probably helped him ensure that he received a relatively lenient fine of 10s as punishment.²⁹

After a short time as the Gas Workers' Union Battersea branch chairman in 1889, Ward went on to found the Navvies, Bricklayers' Labourers and General Labourers' Union. Although he also established the National Federation of Labour Union, it never had much of an impact, and it phased out within a few years. The Navvies' union continued, and was the organisation with which Ward identified throughout his career as a trade unionist. After an early history of strikes in the London area, the union ceased to be involved in any particular episodes of unrest.

A startling attack in the *Labour Leader* in 1906 by an anonymous author openly accused Ward of exploiting his trade union credentials for personal political gain, whilst neglecting to work for improvements in conditions. It is entirely possible that the unnamed 'Correspondent' responsible for the article was Keir Hardie himself, or perhaps John Bruce Glasier, as the *Labour Leader* was the ILP's mouthpiece for administering admonishments to anyone that they felt were working too closely with the Liberals. After listing the income and expenditures of the Navvies' union for 1900 and 1904, the writer stated that:

[the figures] prove conclusively that the "Navvies', Builders' Labourers, and General Labourers' Union" is not a trade union at all in the ordinary sense in which the character and purpose of a trade union are understood. The union is simply a benevolent friendly society. And the financial position shows that as a friendly society it is hopelessly insolvent... At this rate another four years will see the society penniless. It may be noted that the "working expenses" absorb 60 per cent of the members' contributions.³⁰

This article appeared seven months after the 1906 general election, in which John Ward had certainly ruffled some labour feathers when he was elected without the endorsement of Labour.³¹ Although he had begun his political career with the SDF in the late 1880s, he moved towards aligning himself more with John Burns after the

²⁹ Saville, 'John Ward', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol IV*, p. 192.

³⁰ 'Is Mr John Ward MP a trade unionist?' *Labour Leader*, 21 September 1906, p. 10.

³¹ Saville, 'John Ward', *Dictionary of Labour Biography IV*, p. 192.

former had moved towards Liberalism.³² In 1900 Ward was a founding executive member of the NDL, a short-lived organisation that aimed to bring members of the ILP and the Liberal Party together to campaign for specific reforms. His support for the NDL preceded an aversion to the ideals of the other the labour organisation that was founded in 1900: the Labour Representation Committee (LRC). Whilst the NDL wanted, among other things, to continue seeking working class reforms through the Liberal Party, the LRC sought to sponsor parliamentary candidates that would support 'a distinct Labour group in Parliament, who shall have their own whips, and agree upon their policy'.³³

The LRC became stronger after the Taff Vale decision in 1901, as trade union leaders threw their weight into the organisation that they felt would best represent the specific interests of labour in the face of a hostile establishment. Despite its dwindling popularity, Ward became the NDL's chairman in 1902, and attempted to have the LRC's constitution amended so that the NDL could affiliate in 1903. This motion was resoundingly defeated, which led to Pete Curran's successful motion that affiliates of the LRC should not promote 'any section of the Liberal or Conservative parties', now known as the 'Newcastle Resolution'.³⁴ Ward, who had already entered into a pact with the Liberal Party to stand as a Lib-Lab candidate for Stoke on Trent, subsequently refused to sign the LRC constitution. Therefore in 1906, a few months before the scathing anonymous *Labour Leader* article appeared, Ward won his first parliamentary seat as a Labour member without the LRC's support. The article is interesting for its clear assertion of hypocrisy on Ward's part; although he was not an LRC member, his Navvies' union was, and it was as if Ward was attempting to navigate both sides of an increasingly tough political terrain. Fence-sitting would not win any favours with the *Labour Leader's* editorial opinion. His Labour label did not continue for long, as Ward gradually changed his political affiliation from Labour to Coalition Liberal in the 1918 election, National Liberal in 1922, and then finally as a Constitutionalist in 1924 (with both Liberal and Conservative support).³⁵

³² For further information on John Burns' political trajectory, see Kenneth D Brown, 'John Burns (1858-1943)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography VI*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1974) pp. 39-47.

³³ Andrew Thorpe, *A history of the British Labour Party* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1997) p. 1.

³⁴ Barrow and Bullock, *Democratic Ideas*, p. 145.

³⁵ Saville, 'John Ward', *Dictionary of Labour Biography IV*, p. 193.

As an MP, Ward cut a dashing figure. Described as ‘the tall, handsome Labour member from the potteries’ in 1906, and even sitting in the House of Commons wearing a sombrero hat in an effort to upset the established sensibilities around parliamentary dress codes, Ward seemed to relish standing out from the crowd.³⁶ Much was made of his stature and strong physique by the *London Evening Standard* in 1912 as they breathlessly reported on how Ward removed a protestor who had accosted Prime Minister H H Asquith on the subject of votes for women:

Mr. John Ward, the labour member for Stoke, who ultimately dealt with this “pale faced youth of about 20”, by lifting him upstairs and dragging him along the corridor, in which process considerable damage was done to the foliage and floral decoration, is a burly giant of 6ft 2in, weighing 16 stone. He was once a navvy.³⁷

Even during routine political debates, Ward’s presence as a ‘rough-hewn, handsome man... with a deep bass voice’ and ‘one of the giants of the House’ was well-noted, and made him a good candidate for caricaturists.³⁸ He laid strong foundations in his constituency, particularly with the Navvies, and although he was a supporter of Liberal policies he was first and foremost a committed local politician. The experience of the war was certainly the most important catalyst for Ward’s split with socialism. Upon his return, he declared that ‘war killed party for me; England and its people, the great race and Empire to which we all belong, is the only thing that really matters now’.³⁹ He was known locally as a politician that represented the interests of the Potteries, which was helped by the affiliation of the pottery unions to the GFTU.

Despite his opposing views on political representation with Curran, he had been working alongside him on the management committee of the GFTU since his election to it in 1901, where he remained until his retirement in 1929. There were some notable heated exchanges between the two of them, but nothing that precluded their continuing work as part of the management committee. As with Mitchell, this working relationship with Curran was probably more of a testimony to

³⁶ ‘My First Week in Parliament’, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 26 February 1906, p. 3.

³⁷ ‘The Attack on the Premier’, *London Evening Standard*, 17 June 1912, p. 7.

³⁸ ‘The Right to Mutiny’, *Sheffield Independent*, 25 March 1914, p. 1; ‘Men of the Moment’, *Westminster Gazette*, 4 July 1908, p. 3.

³⁹ ‘Death of Colonel John Ward’, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 19 December 1934, p. 7.

Curran's ability to navigate many different factions within the labour movement, but also testimony to Ward's belief that trade unionism and politics ought to be separate.

The GFTU was a suitable home for Ward, particularly after Curran's passing, when there were fewer socialists on its management committee. His conversion away from socialism was compounded by his embrace of military action during the war, as he eventually became Lieutenant-Colonel after his extraordinarily successful recruitment campaign of navvies and general labourers.⁴⁰ Ward aligned closely with William Appleton by favouring 'responsible' trade unionism as opposed to 'industrial' unionism, and advocating for less state control in welfare provision. His military action was championed in numerous GFTU reports: his military portrait was printed on page two of the 1916 Annual Report, and his 'gallant' conduct after his ship, the *Tyndareus*, was torpedoed, prompted the management committee to obtain quotes for a commemorative sketch celebrating the staff of the GFTU that had served in the war effort.⁴¹

Ward's experience of fighting the Bolsheviks gave him an enduring hatred of Communism, which led to particularly colourful clashes with Harry Pollitt, a member of Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers' Socialist Federation and later leader of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). Pollitt was an unlikely figure at the GFTU. He was there as a delegate of his union, the Boilermakers', which he had joined during the turmoil of the 'Labour Unrest' in 1912.⁴² Born in 1890, he was still a relatively young man compared to the likes of Ward or Appleton, and as such was often dismissed by them as a young firebrand with lofty ideals but little substance. Although Pollitt was best known for his communist political beliefs and activism, his formative experience with the exclusive and craft-based Boilermakers' Union, which instilled a lifelong sense of labour tradition that prized skills and craftsmanship. Never the delegate of the Boilermakers' himself, he would attend the conferences alongside his friend, the general secretary John Hill, and the pair would often be the

⁴⁰ Swift, *For Class and Country*, p. 40.

⁴¹ Annual Report 1916, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU1/16; Management Committee Minutes, July 1917 – June 1918, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/78.

⁴² Kevin Morgan, 'Harry Pollitt 1890 - 1960' *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35560>.

source of progressive (and unsuccessful) motions put forward at GFTU conferences.⁴³

Ward's clashes with Pollitt over their opinions on Russia were not simply the disagreements of two men with different ideas, but indications of widespread struggle within the labour movement over policy. At the end of the war, there were serious discussions at the TUC regarding direct action to stop the anti-Bolshevik actions of the government.⁴⁴ In May 1920, on Pollitt's and Ernest Bevin's instructions, dockers refused to load weapons onto a ship in London bound to be used against the Soviets.⁴⁵ This position was supported even by notable moderates such as J R Clynes. Ward's staunch anti-Bolshevikism and friendship with the Russian Admiral Kolchak were in opposition to the majority voice of the labour movement.⁴⁶

For Pollitt, Ward was the perfect sparring partner. He usually began his contentious appearances at the annual meetings by denigrating the Annual Reports, before engaging Ward on the subject of Russia. Their last spirited disagreement in 1925 (shortly before Pollitt's arrest and imprisonment for incitement to mutiny) began with Pollitt's objection to the report in which the GFTU claimed to see 'more virtue in negotiation than in war', and accused them of failing to support the rise of socialism in Russia.⁴⁷ Ever since his long and bitter campaign in Siberia, in which he battled against the elements towards the Ural mountains from his starting point in Hong Kong, Ward maintained a decidedly strong anti-Communist feeling. In contrast Pollitt argued:⁴⁸

...There is a war, a class war, and I consider it is our duty to refer this paragraph back and do it with the knowledge that we want to see the General

⁴³ John Hill was not quite as far left as Pollitt, but he was an active (although electorally unsuccessful) member of the ILP, and was a particularly effective leader during the Red Clydeside unrest during and after the first world war. As a negotiator for his union, he was particularly effective in gaining control over the apprenticeship system, and had strong local roots in his home town of Govan that garnered him much genuine affection and support from the members. For more information on Hill, see Barbara Nield, 'John Hill', in *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol III*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1976) pp. 102-8; Alistair Reid, 'John Hill 1863 - 1945', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/48756>.

⁴⁴ TUC Annual Report, 1919, www.unionhistory.info, accessed 4 September 2021.

⁴⁵ 'Well done, London Dockers!', *Woman's Dreadnought*, 15 May 1920, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 171.

⁴⁷ Annual Report 1925, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/25.

⁴⁸ 'Death of Colonel John Ward', *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 19 December 1934, p. 7

Federation tell the workers of the country that the Federation is not merely a financial instrument but is something that is going to take its definite place in helping the workers to overthrow capitalism and establish Socialism in its place.⁴⁹

Ward objected strongly to this, but the meeting quickly moved on. Later in the discussion, Ward and Pollitt clashed again, this time on unemployment. Pollitt called for the GFTU to exert pressure on the government's anti-trade policy with the Bolsheviks as a means to increasing employment. Ward bristled that this would mean extending credit to the Russian state, which he declared was in a state of 'bad government, disorder, Sovietism, and anarchy generally', to which Pollitt simply replied, 'Rats!'.⁵⁰ After discussions continued between other members for a while, the minutes reflected the physical toll of squabbling with Pollitt, when it 'was announced that Lieut-Colonel Ward was indisposed, and the Chairman suggested they should express their sympathy with him'. After discussion continued without Ward, the minutes relayed that 'he was not in a fit condition to take any further part in the proceedings'.⁵¹

Appleton, indicating his level of friendship with Ward, later interjected to say that he was accompanying Ward back to London early on the train. After discussions resumed, Pollitt eventually said 'in my life I have had to withdraw many things but I have never withdrawn anything so readily as this (laughter)'.⁵² Clearly, although the debate had levelled Ward, Pollitt and the other delegates could see the altercation for what it was: a debate, with little chance of a real impact on labour policy, but a chance for the airing of views. Although the encounters with Pollitt does give an indication of Ward's personality and extreme hostility to communism/socialism, it also indicates the inertia of the GFTU in general at this stage in its development. To be able to expound such wildly different beliefs, only to laughingly withdraw them, presents a picture of all talk and no action. This was a disconnect between rank and file experience and their leaders spending time away at a conference, debating,

⁴⁹ Proceedings and Reports July 1925 – June 1927, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/19.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

proposing, withdrawing and voting, which was a perennial criticism aimed at the GFTU by some labour leaders.

Ward's ill health was apparent by the mid-1920s, and once he lost his seat in the 1929 general election to the Labour candidate Lady Cynthia Mosley, wife of Oswald Mosley, he retired to his hometown of Appleshaw.⁵³ He carried on his work as Justice of the Peace, which he had started in 1908 in London, at the Andover bench. He also became active in the British Legion, never relinquishing his military identity. He died on the 21st December 1934, having outlived his wife Lilian by eight years. His youngest son, Dr Larna Botha Ward, had died in 1928 after contracting septic poisoning after performing an operation, but he was survived by another two sons and daughter.⁵⁴

Ward's legacy was one of changeability: known for his arrest after speaking to crowds and being strapped to a horse by police in order to stop him being rescued by supporters; for becoming a Lieutenant Colonel after his efforts in raising the 'Navvies Battalions' during the war; for representing Stoke in parliament for twenty-three years; and for eschewing his socialist principles to fight against both the Bolsheviks and to argue against the communists back home.⁵⁵ Ward was described as 'a patriot and a democrat' by the *Staffordshire Sentinel* upon his death, but at the GFTU he was remembered as a 'genial presence' that had earned a medallion from them in recognition of his sixteen years as their Treasurer.⁵⁶

As a politician, Ward had changed direction slowly over the course of his time in parliament, but he had never wavered in his commitment to the GFTU. Much of his support was underpinned by his friendship with William Appleton, who he greatly admired as a trade unionist and as a leader. Ward wrote an Introductory Note for Appleton's 1922 book, *What we want and where we are*, in which he extolled that 'there is no man in the great Trade Union movement better equipped for the role of adviser than Mr W A Appleton.'⁵⁷ In order to further study the changing role of the

⁵³ Saville, 'John Ward', *Dictionary of Labour Biography IV*, p. 193.

⁵⁴ 'Doctor's Death', *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 September 1928, p. 9.

⁵⁵ 'Death of Colonel John Ward', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 19 December 1934, p. 4.

⁵⁶ 'Death of Colonel John Ward', *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 19 December 1934, p. 7; Proceedings and Reports July 1929 – June 1930, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/68.

⁵⁷ William A Appleton, *What We Want and Where We Are* (New York: George H Doran, 1922): p. xv.

GFTU during the first world war, it is important to turn back to the life of Appleton in order to further study how his management of the GFTU affected its policies during his early tenure.

‘I Created The Federation’: the public and private life of William Appleton⁵⁸

William Appleton’s career had been threatened by questions raised about financial irregularities whilst he was leader of the Lacemakers. The truth of the matter took some time to unfold, but the complicated spiderweb of accusations, court cases, further opaque minute-taking, and expulsions eventually revealed Appleton’s partial guilt, but also the power of clever minute-taking. During the 1909 annual meeting, it was revealed that there was an ongoing court case between Appleton and his former society, but that details could not be shared whilst they were still involved in the dispute.⁵⁹ The following annual meeting in 1910 gave further details about the conclusion of the legal case, but also showed that the GFTU would use its records to subvert and even hide details in order to protect Appleton. The details hidden by the GFTU were dutifully recorded in the Lace Makers’ records, so that a fuller picture of events can be pulled together.

The Standing Orders were intentionally suspended on the second day’s proceedings of the Annual Meeting in 1910 specifically to discuss the matter that had arisen the previous year, and it was finally revealed that it was Will Thorne from the Gasworkers’ that had been the anonymous voice asking about Appleton’s trade union affiliation.⁶⁰ It transpired that there was not one court case that stopped Wardle from being able to discuss the matter in question, but two. The court case that was happening at the time of the previous meeting was regarding the IFLTU, or more specifically, the role of the Nottingham Lacemakers’ within the IFLTU. When Appleton left to become general secretary of the GFTU, Wardle succeeded Appleton to the general secretaryship of the Nottingham Lacemakers’ and assumed that he would also take over Appleton’s position of Treasurer with the IFLTU. Appleton had no plans to give up his role with the IFLTU, which angered Wardle, but another

⁵⁸ ‘International Federation of Lacemakers’, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 18 May 1908, p. 3.

⁵⁹ General Council Meeting Minutes 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

⁶⁰ Proceedings and Reports July 1909 – June 1910, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/8.

potential scandal involving Appleton came to light soon after his departure that further muddled the waters.

For context, this was not the first time Appleton's conduct had been questioned on such matters. In 1902, he had threatened to resign over allegations that he had been accepting cash under the table from employers for working out favourable pay deals:

Mr Appleton said that for some time attempts has been made to damage his reputation, not only amongst the members of the Society, but also with the general public.... Mr Appleton dealt with the charges which had been made against him in detail, and at the conclusion of his address a vote of confidence was carried by an overwhelming majority.⁶¹

Appleton survived the ordeal, but the episode revealed a belligerent streak in his character. He was so affronted at the accusations that he 'then refused to continue unless they agreed to his terms: involving an agreement for three years, and the adoption of certain measures in respect of some of those against whom the secretary had complained'.⁶² A report in the *Nottingham Evening Post* hinted that the 'certain measures' Appleton asked for were the forced resignations of his accusers.

The year 1902 was not the only point at which Appleton was embroiled in public disagreements over his methods. In 1905, the *Nottingham Journal* printed a long article that quoted Appleton as railing against people that he felt did not appreciate his efforts at modernisation, and that he did not have 'illiterate' people in charge of the accounts anymore.⁶³ He seemed to have many supporters around him to deflect these attacks, so much so that the local Tory candidate for Nottingham complained that Appleton was 'too powerful' in the local council.⁶⁴ Indeed, the correspondence between Wardle and Appleton that was published during the IFLTU row show just how closely intertwined Appleton was with his own creation in his mind:

Neither the council nor yourself can claim any credit for the organisation of the International Federation of lacemakers; The federation was my own idea, the

⁶¹ 'Nottingham Lace Makers' Society', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 22 April 1902, p. 6.

⁶² Ibid..

⁶³ 'Mr Appleton and his Critics', *Nottingham Journal*, 27 October 1905, p. 6.

⁶⁴ 'Skeinton Conservatives', *Nottingham Journal*, 25 October 1906, p. 5.

original work was mine... I hold [the position of secretary] because I created the federation'.⁶⁵

His long letter continued to show how Appleton felt personal ownership of the organisation, in that because he had been the one to make the connections between the French, Scottish and English societies, he was most qualified to continue on its committee. Wardle's argument was that although Appleton had organised them all into the federation, the money invested in it belonged to the Nottingham society, therefore the Treasurer should belong to the society that provided the finance. Appleton was so incensed by this, that he sent all their letters to the *Nottingham Evening Post* for publication in what was probably an attempt to embarrass Wardle.⁶⁶

However, the IFLTU question was not the only source of contention. Although Appleton had successfully batted away the previous allegations of under the table dealing, and had the public support of the Lacemakers in doing so, once Wardle took over the account books it became clear that Appleton had indeed been making money from his negotiations.⁶⁷ After some investigation, the Lacemakers employed a solicitor to help them recoup the money, and Appleton paid them back without contesting the charge in court in January 1909.⁶⁸ With the first court case dealt with, Wardle and the Lace Makers decided to further pursue the issue regarding the IFLTU because they had invested so much money in its creation that they wanted a voice on their Executive Committee.⁶⁹ This was the case that ended up being the bone of contention at the 1909 GFTU meeting, despite Appleton's expulsion being the result of the previous court case. The GFTU minutes however, do not reflect this version of events.

The 1910 GFTU meeting must have been deeply uncomfortable for Wardle. On the second day, Arthur Henderson moved to suspend the Standing Orders for a discussion on Appleton and his dispute with the Lacemakers, despite Thorne's concern that doing so would 'lead to an undesirable discussion' even though the

⁶⁵ 'International Federation of Lacemakers', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 18 May 1908, p. 3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Council Minutes of the Nottingham Lace Makers 1908, University of Nottingham Archives, LM/1/M/9.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Proceedings and Reports July 1909 – June 1910, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/8.

'lacemakers, in [his] mind, were perfectly justified in bringing their case forward last year'.⁷⁰ The resolution brought forward by Henderson was that

This council meeting of the General Federation of Trade Unions cordially congratulates its secretary, Mr W A Appleton, upon this successful vindication of his character in the recent trial.⁷¹

In this deliberate show of solidarity, Henderson continued to lament the 'most unfair' way in which the matter had been brought up the previous year, and assured the delegates that Appleton had won the IFLTU court case and that Wardle had been unable to present any evidence to support his claims. David Shackleton agreed that the incident in Blackpool had left an 'unpleasant feeling', but they allowed Wardle the right of reply:

When I came to the Blackpool council meeting last year I was advised by our solicitor to keep my mouth shut. I was tongue-tied to a certain degree. But the panic was created because I informed the council meeting that Mr Appleton had been expelled from the lacemakers' society for wrong-doing... I was instructed [by the lacemakers'] to write to the management committee saying we thought the resolution [of support for Appleton] was a reflection upon our union, and that we had other information to lay before them.... I gave all particulars to the management committee. Mr Wilkie, Mr. John Ward, and Mr Ben Tillett were appointed as a sub-committee to go into the case. Mr Tillett wrote to say that everything I submitted to them would be in strictest of confidence... but the sub-committee reported back to the management committee that they had inquired into the matter, and had not been able to obtain any more information than had already been secured. That was absolutely untrue. I had given the particulars, some of which I have given you here this morning. I wrote to the management committee expressing surprise... [but the IFLTU matter] came along and interfered with our further action. We have fought [the IFLTU case]... and lost on a legal point, but Mr Appleton may rest assured the matter is not done.⁷²

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

Wardle was making a very clear allegation of a cover-up by the sub-committee, and was explaining that the expulsion happened before the IFLTU case, but the minutes simply do not reflect any consideration of these points. The committee members he named rejected his story, and without the minutes of the Lacemakers' society that showed details of the court case and the process of Appleton paying them back in front of the other delegates, Wardle had no proof. The GFTU minutes did not record anyone asking why Appleton had been expelled if his character had been completely vindicated. Perhaps faced with the absolute unity of this friendship network in the management committee, no one could question the statements; but even if they did, it would not have served the GFTU to have the minutes reflect such a clear questioning of its integrity. The 'findings' of the committee were reported in the press, and the whole matter was left with Appleton's triumph and the Lacemakers' secession from the GFTU shortly afterwards.⁷³

In his private life, things were also becoming more fraught for Appleton. At some point around before 1911, a typist by the name of Marie Olive Selfe began working at the GFTU. Born in 1892, she lived with her father Henry, an optician and shopkeeper, her mother Clara and three sisters in Camberwell.⁷⁴ Selfe and Appleton had a daughter, Marjorie Olive in 1916, followed by a son, William Henry in 1920, and began living together as husband and wife in Stevenage.⁷⁵ Although there are no records to show that they officially married, she used the surname Appleton until some point in the later 1920s, when she eventually left Appleton to live alone in Cornwall.⁷⁶ By 1933, she was working for the Home Office as a writing assistant.⁷⁷

According to Ginger Frost in *Living In Sin: Cohabiting as husband and wife in eighteenth century England*, it was not altogether unusual for couples to do this when they could not legally marry, even if the arrangement did cause social and legal problems, particularly for the woman.⁷⁸ It is not clear what effect this move had

⁷³ 'Trade Unions' Federation and Mr Appleton', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 8 July 1910, p. 6.

⁷⁴ 'Marie Selfe' (1911) *Census return for 4 North Cross Road, Camberwell, London* (RG14PN2465), www.findmypast.co.uk.

⁷⁵ 'Marie Appleton' (1921) *Census return for 2 Orchard Road, Stevenage* (RD 136 RS 1 ED 20), www.findmypast.co.uk.

⁷⁶ Electoral roll (1922) for Red House/Prospect House, Hertfordshire, www.findmypast.co.uk; Electoral roll (1929) Porthoustock, Cornwall, www.findmypast.co.uk.

⁷⁷ *London Gazette*, 7 November 1933, p. 3.

⁷⁸ Ginger Frost, *Living In Sin: Cohabiting as husband and wife in eighteenth century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008) pp. 99-118.

on Selfe's relationship with her parents and siblings, but she did move back to using her training as a typist once she left Appleton, and seems to have been able to support herself and her children. The first, and legal, Mrs Appleton moved to Southend with four of her now adult children, and was listed as 'married' with 'home duties' under her occupation.⁷⁹ Charlotte, Margaret, Mary and Arthur were now 36, 34, 26 and 24 respectively, whereas Frank had moved to Australia and it is not clear whether Bertha moved away or got married.⁸⁰

The only clue as to what the relationship was really like between the two Appleton families lies in the occupations of the now grown children: Arthur was a carpenter and Margaret was a shop assistant, Charlotte and Mary were employed by the GFTU; the former as a book keeper for the National Health Insurance section and the latter as a shorthand typist.⁸¹ This would indicate that they had a good relationship with their father, despite his leaving their family home for another woman that was seven years younger than his oldest child. The new arrangement would have undoubtedly had its difficulties, but one last final census detail shows that the family members may have had experience with forgiving supposed moral transgressions. The 1911 census – the last to have Appleton under the same roof as his first family – showed that at some point between her 16th and 26th birthdays, Charlotte had had a baby out of wedlock that had died.⁸² No other details are available regarding this tragedy, but perhaps it is a small indication that the Appletons knew how to traverse family difficulties all too well.

It was perhaps no coincidence that these problems in Appleton's private life occurred at around the same time as his professional life took a turn for the controversial. The first world war was an important milestone in the GFTU's fortunes. At the same time that Appleton was split between two families, he was struggling to maintain professional relationships as well, and was aligning with people like John Ward who were shifting further into anti-labour politics. The next section casts light on how the

⁷⁹ 'Elizabeth Appleton,' (1921) *Census return for 97 Lovelace Gardens, Southend-on-sea* (RD 195 RS 2 ED 65), www.findmypast.co.uk.

⁸⁰ Frank returned briefly to Britain in order to enlist for the first world war, and brought his wife Esther and daughters Lily and Elsie with him to live in Warrington whilst he served (The National Archives; *War Office: Soldiers' Documents, First World War*. Wo363).

⁸¹ 'Elizabeth Appleton,' (1921) *Census return for 97 Lovelace*.

⁸² 'Elizabeth Appleton,' (1911) *Census return for The Laurels, Blackmore, Essex* (RG14PN9814), www.findmypast.co.uk.

GFTU's policies on employment advocacy steered them towards a high-profile campaign for wage increases for servicemen.

The GFTU and the first world war

All eyes were on the GFTU – not the TUC – at the outbreak of war, because it was they who were so inter-connected with the international trade union movement.⁸³ Although many members of the management committee were ready to sign the manifesto prepared by Arthur Henderson, it was decided by the meeting held on the 8th October 1914 that they should instead write their own because they 'felt that in none of the statements hitherto published had the Trade Union position been properly put'.⁸⁴ They published their manifesto, *Trade Unions and the War* (1914), in an attempt to counteract what they felt were 'persistent attempts' at misrepresenting 'the real opinion of the British working-class movement.'⁸⁵

Immediately placing themselves as the voice of reason, despite not representing the majority of trade unionists, may be seen as a bold claim, but it was one that the management committee felt they had the right to make. Even though there was no way of knowing the feelings of the rank and file members of their affiliates – confidently given as 1,006,904 trade unionists in the manifesto - the GFTU still wanted to 'remove all doubt concerning its own position and intention.'⁸⁶ This was a clear sign that Appleton and the rest of the management committee disagreed with Keir Hardie and Arthur Henderson's declaration, written on behalf of the British section of the International Socialist Bureau only days before on the 1st of August 1914, which stated that 'everywhere vehement protests are being made against the greed and intrigues of militarists and armament-mongers', and which called upon all of British labour to do the same.⁸⁷ That Appleton and the GFTU were instead adamantly on the side of war could not be made clearer, and they wanted this emphatic declaration of patriotism to be a galvanising influence on their affiliates.⁸⁸

⁸³ G D H Cole, *Labour in war time* (London: G Bell and Sons, 1915) p. 38.

⁸⁴ Management Committee Minutes July 1914 – June 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/75.

⁸⁵ *Trade Unions and the War* 1914, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/13.

⁸⁶ *Trade Unions and the War* 1914, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/13.

⁸⁷ Cole, *Labour in war time*, p. 25.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

The opening paragraphs of the GFTU manifesto – written by Appleton and signed by the management committee - made jingoistic statements outlining Britain's moral war against inherent German militarism, despite assurances that the GFTU 'always has been on the side of international as well as industrial peace'.⁸⁹ Although this may at first appear to be contradictory or even hypocritical, to the Edwardian working class, there was very little doubt regarding British superiority and moral obligation to fight against Germany.⁹⁰

The GFTU outlined the moral imperative for the working class of Britain to show 'a real love of [their] country' by fighting against the 'outrages on women and children, and the massacres and burnings which have desolated both Belgium and Northern France'.⁹¹ Use of a love of country to inspire a force of emotion into action was now a part of a collective crusade. There was no hint of solidarity with the working class of Germany, as Appleton confidently quoted the bellicose writings of German authors and militarists Friedrich von Bernhardi, Treitschke, and Luther as evidence of 'the considered conclusions of the dominant section of [German] countrymen'.⁹² This was quite a sweeping generalisation to make, and one that effectively demonised a large proportion of the German population, engendering an 'us' verses 'them' feeling and mentality.

According to Joanna Bourke, feelings of fear and anxiety have often been weaponised when used in context of power, and the GFTU were no exception.⁹³ By using a manifesto as an emotional push towards nationalistic support, the GFTU were instructing their affiliates to join in their feelings of patriotism through their emotive scapegoating, or 'othering', of the German military, and by extension, the German people. Through the conjuring of collective fear of a common enemy, and a collective love of country, the GFTU's manifesto instructed its members to feel a commonality with them against an enemy.

⁸⁹ Trade Unions and the War 1914, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/13.

⁹⁰ Swift, *For Class and Country*, p. 34.

⁹¹ Trade Unions and the War 1914, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/13.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Joanna Bourke, 'Fear and Anxiety: Writing about emotions in modern history,' *History Workshop Journal*, 55 (2003) p. 127.

After firmly laying the blame for the conflict at Germany's feet, the manifesto signalled their intention to address the issue of wages in the armed services. Soldiers being asked to leave their homes behind to take up arms and fight for their country, only to find that they have to rely on charity to support themselves and their family once they returned was 'unworthy of a great nation.'⁹⁴ That married men were expected to be the heads of their households and therefore responsible for the family income during the nineteenth century has long been established, but in addition, as Levine-Clark aptly noted, a married man's ability to provide for his family became increasingly entangled with ideas of respectability and male domesticity, particularly in the case of working class men.⁹⁵ This came to be a specific problem when increasing numbers of men volunteered to fight during the first world war, only to find that their allowance for doing so were little more than starvation wages, particularly if they were trade unionists that had come to expect the right to a fair wage.⁹⁶

According to the GFTU, the solution ought to be wages over charity, which would smooth over any possible threats to masculine respectability and avoid feelings of shame and inadequacy.⁹⁷ Indeed, the idea that the government would not pay adequate wages to anyone signing up outraged R. Mann's, delegate to the GFTU from the Mutual Association of Journeyman Coopers, sense of masculine pride: 'if I ever go into the British Army and a man suggests to me that my wife should go to work to keep me, well, he won't keep himself long if I have my rifle.'⁹⁸ That Mann actually had any intention to commit violence is unlikely but also irrelevant, as it is the angry response elicited from having his own sense of masculinity threatened that illustrates the prevalence and importance of feeling with regards to a sense of duty, respectability and emotion.

The GFTU's armed services wages campaign would prove to have the longest legacy of all their wartime activities. However, it took until 1917 for the GFTU to really start pressing the government to listen to their demands, not least because there was ample confusion about who was representing which labour committee

⁹⁴ Trade Unions and the War 1914, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/13,

⁹⁵ Marjorie Levine-Clark, 'The Politics of Preference', *Cultural and Social History*, 7, 2 (2010) pp. 233-52.

⁹⁶ Trade Unions and the War 1914, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/13.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Proceedings and Reports July 1918 – June 1919, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/13.

under whose auspices.⁹⁹ The GFTU management committee perhaps had a little more time to think about co-ordinating a bigger campaign than they would ordinarily have, as one of the first actions of the Joint Board was to agree an order for the cessation of strike action and bargaining attempts in the name of patriotism and support for the war effort. The constant flow of letters notifying the GFTU of intentions to strike or to enter into wage negotiations greatly diminished.

Appleton and the management committee wholeheartedly agreed to the cessation policy as a patriotic principle, and spent much of the war being openly hostile to the 'men [who] live only to fan the flame of discontent' by wilfully engaging in strikes without real cause.¹⁰⁰ They were not completely hostile to all strikes, and admonished the newspapers for their blanket description of strikes during war as 'folly and lack of patriotism', and gave their whole-hearted support to the Jute and Flax Workers, the United Garment Workers and the Calendar Workers in particular that year.¹⁰¹

The lack of strikes brought much needed financial prosperity to the GFTU, as the membership fees kept being paid whilst the number of disputes was remarkably low. What time they saved on travelling to disputes, they were able to use for their campaign for better pay. However, the moratorium on strikes put trade unions into a very challenging position, as they were tied up with a need to show their support for the war effort by building the solidarity of their patriotic membership, but they also had to protect workers' interests after losing what many thought of as their most important and tangible industrial weapon.¹⁰²

In a departure from the strictly industrial remit of the GFTU, Appleton went on to point out that 'if railways can be nationally and effectively controlled, co-ordinated and worked under abnormal war conditions, they can be so dealt with under the easier conditions obtained in times of peace'. This was an unlikely foray into the

⁹⁹ The problem of overlap is seen in a list of who attended the meeting to co-ordinate investigations into 'After the War Problems', because Appleton and O'Grady are listed as representing both the GFTU and the WNC, whilst Sidney Webb represented the Labour Party and the WNC. See "Labour after the war", People's History Museum, WNC/14/5/58.

¹⁰⁰ Annual Report 1916, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/16.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996) p. 110.

political realms of the labour movement, as the issue of nationalisation was to become part of Clause IV of the Labour Party's 1918 constitution. This inclusion in their manifesto would be a cause for concern by the leadership of the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC, as war conditions would exacerbate the problems of overlapping interests between members of the Joint Board. The effect of the GFTU stepping into political territory on their fraternal relations was to be one of the many reasons that they began to be looked on as competitors rather than as kindred organisations.

The outbreak of war brought with it the need for the political and industrial arms of the labour movement to work together in a united voice. Arthur Henderson, who was regarded as a moderate voice on the left, was a regular delegate at the GFTU as a representative of the Friendly Society of Ironfounders, and enjoyed a close working relationship with Appleton, as seen in his whole-hearted defence of him during the trouble with the Lacemakers. Perhaps because of this, and the important role that the GFTU had in terms of conciliatory work during disputes, Henderson invited Appleton to be the Treasurer of his War Emergency: Workers' National Committee (WNC) at the outbreak of the war.¹⁰³ This organisation was to be the central means for the different factions of the labour movement to co-ordinate their war time responses. It had mixed results, mainly owing to the inherent difficulties in holding people that had vastly different beliefs together, but it nevertheless held considerable sway on political action.

The GFTU already had close working relations with the Labour Party as part of its role on the Joint Board, and has been previously outlined, several members of the management committee were also MPs and regular attendees at the TUC. For instance, Alexander Wilkie of the Associated Shipwrights was Labour MP for Dundee whilst he was a GFTU Trustee, and John Ward of the Navvies, Bricklayers' Labourers and General Labours' Union was a Lib-Lab MP for Stoke-on-Trent and long-serving Treasurer of the GFTU. John R Clynes, a representative of the Gasworkers' Union, was an early member of the GFTU management committee, and would eventually become Minister for Food Control under Lloyd George, and then

¹⁰³ Robert Harrison, 'The War Emergency Workers' National Committee 1914-1920' in Asa Briggs, and John Saville, eds., *Essays in Labour History* Vol II, p. 212.

leader of the Labour Party.¹⁰⁴ George Barnes had been a founding member and trustee of the GFTU during its first two years, kept in close contact as a delegate at several annual meetings, became the Minister for Pensions in 1911.¹⁰⁵ The GFTU was then a place very much within the orbit of the new political party for the working class, which further solidified their centrality as the voice of trade unionism on the left in the pre-war period; however, the speed with which they stopped working with the Labour Party and the indicates just speedily things changed in the landscape of the left.

Despite the vote of confidence extended by Henderson towards Appleton and others in his invitation to join the WNC, the GFTU did not have a lasting impact on the actual output of the WNC. Appleton only attended five meetings in his four years as their Treasurer, which did not go unnoticed in the press.¹⁰⁶ When he was in attendance, he was most notable for his indefatigable belief that all British workers should unite behind the government for the duration of the war, seemingly without caveats.¹⁰⁷ He also ruffled considerable feathers by labelling the WNC's *Labour After The War* report as neither 'dignified' nor 'accurate' in a letter to James Middleton, and lamenting that they were not being supportive enough of the government for his taste, even though he did not attend the meeting to discuss his forcefully-phrased criticism.¹⁰⁸

Ben Tillett was also a relatively idle member of the WNC, and took to criticising it for not making enough headway with issues regarding food prices and rent controls, rather than taking more of an active interest in pushing through policies.¹⁰⁹ Appleton and Tillett – and by proxy, the GFTU – made their own war work outside of the WNC for the most part, and decided to pursue the issue of obtaining wage increases and family allowances for the armed services through their own channels, either because

¹⁰⁴ David Howell, *Macdonald's Party: Labour Identities and Crisis 1922-1931* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) pp. 22-3.

¹⁰⁵ General Council Meeting Records 1900, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/1; Martin Pugh, 'The Rise of Labour and the Political Culture of Conservatism, 1890-1945' *History* 87, 288 (2002) pp. 514-37.

¹⁰⁶ Harrison, 'The War Emergency Workers' National Committee', *Essays in Labour History* Vol II, p. 220; 'Questions for Mr Appleton to Answer, *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 15 March 1916, n.p.

¹⁰⁷ Harrison, 'The War Emergency Workers' National Committee, *Essays in Labour History* Vol II, p. 218.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Appleton to J Middleton, 16 February 1916, People's History Museum, WNC 14/5/29.

¹⁰⁹ Harrison, 'The War Emergency Workers' National Committee, *Essays in Labour History* Vol II, pp. 218-9.

of or as a part of the worsening relations between the GFTU and the other members of the committee.

The nature of the correspondence between the GFTU and the other national bodies does not produce a smoking gun in terms of how their relationships soured, but there are indications of strain under the Edwardian sense of gentlemanly restraint. In a letter to Jim Middleton, secretary to the Labour Party and WNC, Robert Smillie, leader of the MFGB, seemed to have a tongue-in-cheek way of showing his impatience with overlapping representation: 'I think that the question of whether or not we should appoint a small committee to act with the committee, appointed by the Joint Board, is a matter for our full committee, and not for the sub-committee... It should not be forgotten that our committee had already dealt with the matter, before the Joint Board took it up, and that we had appointed a committee, to consider the question and report'.¹¹⁰ The seemingly continual creation of new committees that vexed Smillie was further highlighted by the obvious overlapping of interests: for one of those many committees, Appleton and O'Grady were listed as representing both the WNC and the GFTU, and Sidney Webb was also representing the WNC and the Labour Party.¹¹¹ Clearly there were too many cooks, and something would have to give.

That is not to say that the GFTU were not busy with the war effort, nor were they completely against socialism and ideas other than those held by Appleton. Publishing eclectic articles in their reports, such as a brief few pages of prose entitled 'London Town' by the ILP member (and eventual Labour MP for Penistone) Rennie Smith, was one way that they presented themselves as open to a variety of opinions.¹¹² They also published reports on housing by officials of the National Housing and Town Planning Council, an overview of Russian history by politician and writer Ariadne Tyrkova, their own report on rising food prices and suggestions of government remedies, and an investigation into the financial wastage of the national Unemployment Benefit scheme and the Labour Exchange system.¹¹³ They were still

¹¹⁰ 'Labour after the war', People's History Museum. WNC 14/5/17.

¹¹¹ 'Labour after the war', People's History Museum. WNC 14/5/58.

¹¹² Quarterly Report March and June 1917, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/54; Howell, *Macdonald's Party*, p. 17.

¹¹³ Quarterly Report September 1917, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU 5/55; Barbara Alpern-Engel, 'Women in Revolutionary Russia, 1861-1926', in Christina Faure, ed., *Political and Historical Encyclopaedia of Women* (London: Routledge, 2003) p. 255; Management Committee Minutes July

very much a hive of activity during the first few years of the war, and certainly presented themselves as a useful and imperative cog in the wider machine. Their most notable war time achievement – a pay rise for soldiers and sailors – has so far not been explored in military or trade union history. The following section highlights the GFTU's pivotal role in presenting the armed services as workers that were eligible for decent wages.

The sailors, soldiers, and the Commander of the British Empire

The cause for increasing wages and bettering conditions for men in the armed services was almost taken on by the WNC before the GFTU simply went ahead and organised the required meetings (and a new committee) to raise awareness of the issue. However, even Middleton agreed that the GFTU were the best organisation to take on the campaign, because it was a cause they had already been highlighting publicly since 1909.¹¹⁴

Tillett had moved a resolution to write a memorandum for the government, and in particular for the War Office, suggesting that a programme be devised for the training of returning soldiers in specific trades in 1909, but the entire debate was quashed by a row between delegates that fiercely guarded their skills specialisms and long apprenticeships, and other delegates that represented workers in low-skilled and badly organised industries that had to constantly deal with soldiers being used for cheap or blackleg labour.¹¹⁵ Tillett, being a former docker himself, was a likely champion from the latter, but T E Naylor of the London Compositors – a craft union of printers that had strong rules around their seven year-long apprenticeship system – objected strenuously, and in a reflection of the craft-based majority of the GFTU, the resolution was voted down by a considerable margin.

Nevertheless, the war brought the problem of low wages for soldiers and the lack of work opportunities available to them in sharp relief. There were attempts from other corners to set up trade unions specifically for soldiers, such as the National

1914 – June 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/75; Trade Unions and the War, 1914, Bishopsgate Institute. GFTU/10/14.

¹¹⁴ 'Labour after the war', People's History Museum, WNC 14/5/16.

¹¹⁵ General Council Meeting Records 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/5.

Association of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors formed in 1916 by a group of trades councils, the *Daily Herald* sponsored but short-lived Soldiers' and Sailors' Union as part of their demobilisation campaign, and a National Union of Ex-Servicemen that drew in many ILP members attracted to their socialist principles.¹¹⁶ One organisation that did make some waves was the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers (NFDDSS). Formed in 1917, they sought to publicise the plight of the returning soldiers and sailors of the first world war, but different branches had wildly different ideals, achievements and aims.¹¹⁷ Although they were not in existence long, they were a much-overlooked organisation that highlighted the plight of the returning soldier.¹¹⁸ Nick Mansfield asserts that they affiliated to the GFTU, but there is no record of this in their management committee minutes.¹¹⁹ Indeed, as the GFTU had very strict rules about what constituted a trade union, it is unlikely that an organisation of this nature would have been accepted. In fact, when Miss Campbell from the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) raised the issue of wages for disabled ex-servicemen in 1918, she told the GFTU conference that 'the discharged men have a union of their own, and we have absolutely ignored that'.¹²⁰ Appleton's response was terse:

¹¹⁶ The most comprehensive account of this organisation is found in Nick Mansfield, 'The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors 1917-1921: A view From the Marches', *Family and Community History*, 7, 1 (2004) pp. 19-31, however there is also a detailed account of an Irish branch in John Borgonovo, 'Revolution, ex-servicemen and the cork Branch of the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers, 1918-21', in Oliver Wilkinson, and David Swift, eds., *Veterans of the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2019).

¹¹⁷ Mansfield, 'The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors', *Family and Community History*, p. 21.

¹¹⁸ The nature of the NFDDSS was fractured: there were some branches with politically militant leaders, which called for a land nationalisation programme for ex-servicemen in compensation for their sacrifices in the war, whereas other branches wanted to focus on making sure the government supplied financial relief to servicemen no longer able to support themselves. However, they found themselves up against a reactionary organisation of wealthier Officers named the 'Comrades of the Great War' which was more organised and better funded. The government were alarmed at the calls for land nationalisation and malcontent amongst returned servicemen, so a generous grant was offered to any organisation that would represent the armed services without being political. In this way the NFDDSS was effectively forced into an amalgamation with the Comrades, and they were eventually transformed into the British Legion. Any militant leaders were forced into other trade unions or industrial/social pressure groups, and the Legion started work in commemorating the war through statues and village halls up and down the country as a way of representing military sacrifice. The parallels between the NFDDSS and the GFTU – both organisations that struggled to carve out distinct and useful identities and roles within a wider sphere of activism – show how difficult it was for certain groups with specific purposes to navigate rapidly changing environments.

¹¹⁹ Nick Mansfield, *Soldiers as workers: class, employment, conflict and the nineteenth century military* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016) p. 26.

¹²⁰ Proceedings and Reports July 1918 – June 1919, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/13.

It is quite clear that there is only one way to compel the payment of proper wages to disabled men, and that is the way of the trade unions. We must not teach them to lean on anyone else. Anyone who teaches them to lean on any other society is doing an injury to the trade union movement. The society to which Miss Campbell refers is not a trade union, and we have nothing to do with it. Our business is to look after our people in our way, and if we do that thoroughly we shall have a pretty big task.¹²¹

Given this reaction from Appleton, and the clear-cut rules regarding affiliation, the NFDDSS are more likely to have simply corresponded with the GFTU and been given general advice about organising, rather than becoming members.¹²²

Appleton's aversion to trade unionism among service men was further compounded when he submitted a letter in March 1919 in order to 'point out the danger that they create' by engendering confusion when the ex-soldiers return to trades that were already covered by trade unions.¹²³ Instead, the GFTU had called for more openness on behalf of trade unions to accept former soldiers into training for their professions, because they did not view being in the armed services as a profession in itself.¹²⁴ However, the volume of returning soldiers, especially wounded soldiers that had physical and psychological difficulties returning to their former trades, brought the problem into sharper relief post-1914.

The delegates attending the war-time conference frequently spoke about their personal interactions with serving soldiers who were also members of their unions. They also reported receiving letters from trade union members that had enlisted and were seeking support from their trade unions in obtaining better pay. As many British soldiers were serving on the front line for as little as one shilling per day, whilst their colonial counterparts were receiving between 4 and 6 shillings per day at the same rank, it was understandable that the men serving felt they had a strong claim to

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Rule Book 1913, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/8/9.

¹²³ Management Committee Minutes March 1919, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/79.

¹²⁴ 'Soldiering' was still thought of as a service that some men did in addition to their work life, despite earlier wars (such as the Napoleonic or the Revolutionary wars) having a higher proportion of loss of life than the first world war. For further details on how soldiers were viewed as citizens, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707 – 1837* (London: Pimlico, 1991) and Clive Emsley, *British Society and the French Wars, 1793 – 1815* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

better wages.¹²⁵ One example was printed in the September 1917 issue of *The Federationist*: a soldier belonging to the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners wrote to Appleton to ask for the GFTU to 'use their influence and power to get justice for our heroes' that have to 'have to accept this small sum in face of death'.¹²⁶ The issue had already been debated in the conference that summer, after Tillett spoke about his Dockers' Union passing a resolution to call for a 200% increase in pay for servicemen.¹²⁷

It was decided that the GFTU should raise the issue of soldiers' and sailors' pay directly with the government as a matter of urgency. The 3 shillings per day that soldiers and sailors were paid was well below that which their Commonwealth counterparts were receiving.¹²⁸ Morale on this issue was understandably low, seeing as they often fought alongside these other soldiers from Australia and New Zealand, who enjoyed much better pay and conditions. The existence of the Commonwealth should have meant that servicemen should at least seek parity. They were seeking a 100% increase, not the lofty (and notably un-costed) 200% decided on by the Dockers, which was not surprisingly met with agreement and support from servicemen who were on current active service.

The GFTU sent out circulars to every member of parliament on both sides of the political spectrum that outlined the issue and sought support for the issue of raising the wages. Even though their report indicated that un-named critics had labelled this approach as 'audacious', they were successful in forming a Soldiers' and Sailors' Pay Committee with many members coming from different political parties, which Appleton felt added weight to their cause by showing 'adequate parliamentary support'.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Sailors' and Soldiers' Pay Report 1917, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/16.

¹²⁶ 'Lancashire Folk, Look', *The Federationist*, September 1917, p. 2.

¹²⁷ Proceedings and Reports July 1917 – June 1918, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/12.

¹²⁸ Sailors' and Soldiers' Pay Report 1917, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/16.

¹²⁹ Annual Report 1918, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/18; The first committee consisted of Admiral Lord Beresford, Lord Charnwood, the Earl of Denbigh, Lord Rathcreedan, the Earl of Kintore, Lord Ranksborough, A Shirley Benn MP, Colonel Harland Bowden MP, E R Bartley Denniss MP, Sir Charles Nicolson, James O'Grady MP, C B Stanton MP, Alex Wilkie MP, Colonel Penery Williams MP, Colonel Leslie O Wilson MP, W E Wing MP, Sir A Yeo MP, T Owen Jacobsen MP and William Appleton.

O'Grady, who acted as chairman of this meeting, also underlined the GFTU's assertion that a new committee was needed to spearhead this initiative because they as the GFTU did not feel that it ought to be something that the management committee themselves campaigned for.¹³⁰ Even though the management committee would comment on the action of the committee in every report they produced during the war, and certainly took rightful credit for actions both as many management committee members were action on the Soldiers' and Sailors' Pay Committee and because they founded the group in the first place, they were keen to avoid any notion that they were a political pressure group. Nevertheless, the action of setting up the committee garnered positive press, which certainly helped to keep the work of the GFTU in the spotlight.¹³¹

The committee set to work by requesting various meetings and writing letters to the cabinet. Initially, Lloyd George was slow to respond to the requests of the GFTU's newly formed committee. A note from Baron Charnwood to Lloyd George's personal secretary W G S Adams describes Appleton's growing impatience:

'I have just received a letter from Appleton to say that not even an acknowledgement of his letter to the P.M. has been received, and asking my opinion as to the course that he should take.... Of course he would, if not answered soon, summon an urgency [sic] meeting of the Executive Committee, who would then make the greatest fuss in their power'¹³²

Lloyd George responded on the 29th September with a letter that outlined the reform proposals put together by the War Cabinet.¹³³ This early success, which included additions to the rates of pay for both serving men and those that had been discharged, received notable praise from the former Lib-Lab MP turned journalist, Fred Maddison.¹³⁴ He admonished the ILP for 'making trouble' whilst 'Appleton and his colleagues were doing, and not talking', and stressed that 'this gain has not come

¹³⁰ Sailors' and Soldiers' Pay Report 1917, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/16.

¹³¹ 'Col. Wilson on Soldiers' Pay' *Reading Observer*, 30 November 1918, n. p.

¹³² Lloyd George Papers, Parliamentary archives, F/79/14/1.

¹³³ Annual Conference 1918, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/18.

¹³⁴ Maddison had never been associated with the GFTU directly, but was notable for his strong Liberal views and anti-socialist opinions. It is clear that he agreed with Appleton's cross-party approach that did not rely on socialists or the Labour Party. For more information on Maddison see David Howell, 'Fred Maddison' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2004) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/47375>.

as the result of the Labour Party's influence or pressure. A purely trade union organisation has this achievement to its credit.'¹³⁵ However, Appleton decided, on behalf of the Sailors' and Soldiers' Pay Committee, that the Prime Minister's proposals fell short of those required. He decided to press the case further and, along with a deputation, was invited to plead the case with the Prime Minister at Downing Street on 9th October 1917.¹³⁶

As a result of this deputation, Lloyd George accepted that his initial proposals to increase the wages of servicemen had not gone far enough to meet the expectations of the committee or for the wider calls for pay parity. After speaking with his own committee, headed by Lord Carson, Lloyd George responded with an increased offer which, although 'far short of what is due to the sailor and soldier., ...approximates to an advance of 100 per cent'.¹³⁷ This was a resounding success for the campaign, but also an additional boon for Appleton's record of war service. From October 1916 until April 1917, Appleton acted as Labour Advisor to Neville Chamberlain at the National Service Department, a move which was unpopular with people at the TUC because they felt that they were more representative of British trade unionism than the GFTU.¹³⁸

Reports in the press regarding Appleton's ability to truly represent British trade unionism whilst the GFTU had much lower affiliations than the TUC were becoming more frequent.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, it appears that Appleton was a useful and diligent advisor that helped Chamberlain's department set up a Labour Advisory Committee and also Industrial Committees (that Appleton describes as being a remedy to the 'trade union hostility' to conscription starting in 1916) to help the department function.¹⁴⁰ It was for this role that Appleton was one of the very first recipients of the CBE, one of the five classes of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, from King George V in 1917.¹⁴¹ The honour was contentious, as some on the left, such as

¹³⁵ Fred Maddison, 'The Labour Movement: Soldiers' pay' *West Bradford Advertiser*, 6 October 1917, p. 2.

¹³⁶ Annual Report 1918, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/18.

¹³⁷ Sailors' and Soldiers' Pay Report 1917, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/16.

¹³⁸ Martin, *TUC: The Growth of a Pressure Group*, p. 122.

¹³⁹ 'The Labour Mission in America', *Daily News*, 21 February 1918, p. 4; 'Textile Topics', *Daily Herald*, 9 March 1918, p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ Management Committee Minutes July 1916 – June 1917, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/77.

¹⁴¹ Annual Report 1918, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/18.

Will Thorne, did not believe that it was appropriate to accept such an award, and declined it.¹⁴² Despite this, the GFTU's minutes reflect nothing but praise for Appleton and his award.¹⁴³

Conclusion

The war, and the sudden call for patriotism to be displayed loud and clear, caused problems for trade unions and socialist organisations. Political and industrial organisations had to reconcile their beliefs of international class solidarity with the reality of war, because those that had been friends and comrades in the struggle for fairer representation, wages and conditions were now physically and metaphorically pointing guns at each other. National feeling had shifted out of necessity; so too did the feeling of trade unions. Patriotism, Eustace clearly demonstrated, is an especially galvanising force when it is harnessed by an organisation or a particular leader.¹⁴⁴ The GFTU's use of patriotic imagery and language in their reports - punctuated with photos of Ward in his military regalia, and long transcripts of letters with former friends – was testimony to how patriotism can both cause and affect fundamental changes in organisational identity and emotional communities. In short, the GFTU simultaneously conveyed and created patriotism, and thus adapted their own emotional community around war-time conditions. This adaptation had a lasting effect on the organisation's relationships.

As the organisation grew, it continued to be defined by its personalities. Understanding John Ward's changing political allegiances is aided by highlighting his position at the GFTU as the organisation readily fostered his move away from socialism. Spectres from Appleton's past accounts books coming back to haunt him show how questions of integrity and truthfulness shape perceptions of character, but are also easily contested and even disregarded if it suited the character needs of the organisation. Similarly, the choice to establish patriotism firmly within the GFTU's image affected its relationship with affiliates and other sections of the British and international labour movement. Just how those relationships were affected is the

¹⁴² 'Labour Commander', *The Globe*, 25 August 1917, p. 8.

¹⁴³ Annual Report 1918, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/18.

¹⁴⁴ Nicole Eustace, *Passion is the Gale: Emotion, Power and the Coming of Reason* (North Carolina: North Carolina University Press, 2011).

subject of the next chapter. The GFTU had built notable international friendships during its first decade, as seen in chapter two. These relationships – particularly Appleton’s friendship with German Carl Legien, but also the GFTU’s sense of responsibility towards an Austro-Hungarian GFTU employee - were to be another casualty of war as the GFTU, and in particular Appleton, succumbed to the widespread hostility engendered by world conflict. However, the most notable display of hostility came from another trade union federation much closer to home, and the GFTU found itself pushed into the background of the labour movement.

Chapter Four: Hostility

‘The General Federation is not seeking hostilities; it desires only that the Parliamentary Committee shall leave it alone, and it asks Trade Unionists to judge it by the facts and not by the distortions issues by that body’¹

- William Appleton, 1921

Introduction

In 1914, the GFTU were still considered to be a trade union organisation of national standing and importance: up until the middle of 1916, letters from Middleton to various labour leaders still referred to the ‘three national committees’, meaning the Labour Party, TUC and GFTU.² However, this would change after some manoeuvring by other labour leaders that wanted better consolidation within the movement, and the GFTU soon found itself in the firing line. It is perhaps unsurprising that the lingering effect of rampant patriotism during a global conflict should in some way turn towards outright hostility. The hostility shown towards the GFTU by the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain was not a result of the war but a continuance of a dispute that started well before 1914. The reasons for this hostility and the effect it had on the GFTU opens this chapter which examines how the wider labour environment had changed around the GFTU so that they no longer had a specific role within it.

The GFTU were not the only ones to struggle with knowing how to fit into a world full of war time conflict. The correspondence between Appleton and Oscar Beck, an organiser for the short-lived Waiters’ Union and GFTU employee, reveals how the GFTU failed to assist a former friend that was now considered an enemy alien. The publicly disintegrating international friendship between Legien and Appleton go on to show how hostility created by war time conflict changed the course of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU). How Appleton navigated these

¹ Annual Report 1921, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/21.

² Labour after the war, People’s History Museum, WNC 14/5/54.

problematic friendships ran in juxtaposition with the antagonistic utterances of delegates at the GFTU annual conferences. Ranging from the ardently internationalist to the staunchly xenophobic, the tensions that swirled within the labour movement regarding their dual desires of maintaining effective organisation on an international scale whilst also firmly portraying themselves as supportive of British troops, were manifest in the GFTU.

Two Federations battle it out

One of the key remits of the GFTU was to bring about closer unity between kindred trades through helping unions to form amalgamations and federations. This was very effective, particularly for smaller unions that could draw on help and guidance from larger umbrella organisations. The calls for closer unity were not simply the preserve of the GFTU. Smillie's disdain for the overlapping and slow mechanisms of the various committees and national bodies mentioned previously was indicative of a wider trend of wanting greater consolidation of the labour movement. Indeed, the GFTU itself actively brought about amalgamations and federations amongst its own affiliates in the name of 'better organisation'.³ One of its most successful amalgamations was that of the United Garment Workers in 1915, which took four years of organisation by the GFTU, from several regional textile unions.⁴ However, the cause of amalgamation between the three national bodies was also floated, with the idea posited at the Joint Board as early as 1911, although it was determined that (at that point at least) there was still merit in keeping the organisations separate.⁵ Unfortunately for the GFTU, the wider labour movement had changed considerably since their inception in 1899, which was exacerbated by the pressure on the movement during war time, and people that had issues with Appleton's increasingly belligerent views saw an opportunity to knock him from his national position.

It was reported at the 1915 annual meeting that the management committee had 'had to combat a very serious attempt to discredit the Federation and to separate it

³ Annual Report 1907, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/7.

⁴ Management Committee Minutes July 1914 – June 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/75.

⁵ Management Committee Minutes April 1911, GFTU/2/38.

from the rest of the movement'.⁶ In 1913, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) had formally called for the exclusion of the GFTU from the Joint Board at the TUC.⁷ Smillie asserted that in view of the GFTU's failure to represent all of the trade unions in Britain after fourteen years of organisation, and the growing power of the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC, there was no need for the GFTU – a mere strike fund administrator – to have any say on industrial matters. Appleton and the GFTU disagreed entirely, and published several retorts in their management committee minutes, quarterly reports and annual reports.

The GFTU published an account of an argument over demarcation that they had with the MFGB, and maintained that Smillie wanted them off the Joint Board because he did not want to recognise their authority over his during a dispute. Their long account of the matter asserted that the issue began in January 1913 with the National Amalgamated Union of Labour (NAUL) requesting their help to stop the MFGB from poaching their members. Although the NAUL were their affiliates, the MFGB were not, so they knew that the very large MFGB – around 600,000 members in 1910, which rose to 900,000 by 1920 – did not come under their jurisdiction nor would take all that kindly to the advice or admonishment of the GFTU.⁸ Instead, they formed a sub-committee 'to make inquiries into the particular complaint, and into others which had come to hand, and to endeavour also in a friendly way to ascertain what the policy of the Miners' Federation was likely to be towards unions then and previously for catering for surfacemen', and brought the matter to the attention of the Joint Board.⁹ They noted that the MFGB did not respond to their requests for information, which may have been a response to the enigmatic 'other' complaints that they are non-specific about, but also that they rejected the authority of the Joint Board and refused to co-operate.

The GFTU brought the matter to the TUC at Manchester conference that year, only for the MFGB to move that the whole matter be deleted from the records whilst arguing that the Joint Board had never been signed off by the TUC.¹⁰ This claim was

⁶ Annual Report 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/15.

⁷ TUC Parliamentary Committee Minutes 22 May 1913, British Library, S.P.R.Mic.A.85.

⁸ Hugh Armstrong Clegg, Alan Fox and Arthur Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889*, Volume I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 570.

⁹ Management Committee Minutes January 1912, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/45.

¹⁰ TUC Annual Report, 1913, www.unionhistory.info, accessed 29 July 2022.

entirely baseless, but the MFGB were powerful enough to be listened to regardless. As far as the GFTU were concerned at this point, the matter of the NAUL dispute was out of their hands, but the MFGB then

developed definite hostility to the extent of refusing to associate with the national movements... because the General Federation was represented. They have recently... deputed both the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party for the purpose of protesting, so it is alleged, against the continued association of the General Federation with the Joint Board.... Their contention being that the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress deals with every matter relating to the trade unions and the Labour Party with every matter relating to politics.... it is alleged that the Miners' Federation claims an equal right with the General Federation to representation on the Joint Board.¹¹

The MFGB's claim to equal representation with the GFTU rested with their membership numbers: whilst only representing one trade, they each had around 800,000 members in 1913 and were both a federation. The idea of a national federation that had been so desperately needed in the aftermath of the ASE lockout in 1897 had withered against the failure to attract a truly national membership base and the new successes of working-class political representation.

The MFGB, and in particular Robert Smillie, were pointing out that the GFTU were now superfluous to requirements if unions and federations like his could provide benefits to their members, use the new national scheme for health and unemployment benefits, and negotiate with employers and the government, all without the GFTU's assistance. Whilst this was may well have been true for the MFGB and others of a similar nature, the GFTU was still a very useful lifeline to the smaller unions that would not have had the negotiating power of the miners, but Smillie simply pointed to the ways in which the wider interests of labour were now represented directly in parliament through the Labour Party, evidenced by recent legislation such as the 1913 Trade Union Act, and that MPs could earn an income of £400 per year from 1911 and so not have to rely on hereditary wealth. The TUC's

¹¹ Management Committee Minutes January 1912, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/45.

growing strength with their membership soaring from 1,200,000 in 1900 to 2,700,000 by 1914, and the national Miners' strike in 1912 that needed no help from the GFTU, indicated just how quickly the world was changing around them.¹²

Despite this wider context, Appleton remained steadfast in his belief that the GFTU served a central function within the labour movement, but voices of dissent were coming from other unions as well as the MFGB. A crushing blow to the GFTU was the secession of the 171,686 members of the ASE in 1916, but trouble had been brewing there for a while: in May 1915, the ASE applied for strike benefit for 38 of their members striking in Leven, Scotland, but the GFTU delayed their approval by three weeks in order to ascertain more information regarding the cause of the dispute.

Appleton's correspondence with the ASE's leader Robert Young over the ensuing months and around the ASE's vote to secede was printed in the 1916 annual report - including subheadings such as 'no real cause of grievance' and 'not the only reason' - in an effort to show to their affiliates that the loss of one of their largest members was not their fault.¹³ The correspondence makes it clear that 'personalities' had caused a rift over a longer period than just the one strike with 38 members.¹⁴ Symbolically, this was devastating for the GFTU, as in its battle to stay relevant and stay in the Joint Board, their letters and reports often invoked the ASE lockout of 1987 as the reason for their very being.

On a pragmatic level, the scale of industrial disputes during the Great Unrest had severely depleted the GFTU's funds, which led to the annual council deciding to tighten the criteria for strike benefit eligibility.¹⁵ This cut particularly deeply for unions whose members were often put out of work due to a strike they were not directly involved in, but could not access benefits for them. In another blow, it had also faced criticism of its management of the new insurance provision, which was exactly the type of administrative management it had become well known for.¹⁶

¹² Andrew Thorpe, *A history of the British Labour Party* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1997) p. 21-3.

¹³ Annual Report 1916, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/16.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ From 1908 – 1913, the reserve fund went from £162,210 down to £15,888. See GFTU Annual Report 1912, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/12.

¹⁶ J W Edwards from the Dockers' union was a vocal critic of the GFTU's mismanagement of the new insurance scheme. At their 1914 annual meeting, amidst many angry voices representing workers

Appleton lamented in the 1913 annual report that the GFTU could not be as methodical as he would have liked in their management of insurance, because 'sentiment and local feeling had to be taken into consideration', by which he meant that many affiliates wanted to maintain their autonomy and influence, so that they could buil[d] up the existing [insurance] organisation.¹⁷ It was not just Smillie and the MFGB then, that we attempting to wrest some portion of control from the GFTU.

Further to this, the (albeit uneasy and ultimately short-lived) alliance between the MFGB, National Transport Workers' Federation (NTWF) and the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) also threatened to challenge the position of the GFTU by pledging to act in unison for the purposes of industrial action. At the head of this alliance – eventually termed the Triple Industrial Alliance – was none other than Robert Smillie.¹⁸ In 1899, the transport workers were still relatively unorganised, and the Miners' were not yet truly national until the Northumberland and Durham Associations joined eight and nine years later, but within a decade things had changed considerably. As an institution, the GFTU had become subpar to the growing power of the more industrially militant MFGB, NUR and NTWF, and having lost its most high-profile affiliate in the ASE, its relevance and usefulness was indeed shrinking.

For smaller unions, discontent was also rising. Although a handful of unions were excluded from the GFTU in its earliest years, for example the Federal Union of Bakers in 1902 for arrears, the first society to officially secede was the Variety

that had not been given their rightful access to their health benefits, Edwards accused the GFTU of biting off more than they could chew in their promises. When the new Act came in, the GFTU told the unions that if they signed up to them as an Approved Society, they would handle the administration. This became a problem due to the amount of paperwork the new insurance scheme demanded, but also because many of the unions were not good bookkeepers, and the GFTU admin team simply could not manage the workload. The delays caused much resentment. See Annual Report 1913, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/8.

¹⁷ General Council Meeting Records 1913, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/6.

¹⁸ The railway, transport and mining industries were so interconnected that a strike in one of the industries would have led to lockouts or unemployment in the others. The alliance was to create unity between the three, but as the three unions were unequal in terms of size, leadership and conditions, the alliance ended up disintegrating after the transport workers' and the railways workers' unions did not come out in support of the miners in 1921. For more information on the Triple Alliance and its failure, see Phillip S Bagwell, 'The Triple Alliance, 1913 – 1922', in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds., *Essays in Labour History 1886 – 1923* (London: Macmillan, 1971) pp. 96-128.

Artistes Union in 1910.¹⁹ A music hall dispute had arisen over whether performers could also be agents in terms of negotiations, but the Variety Artistes publicly accused Appleton in *The Performer* of siding with the employers over one part of their dispute after a year-long wrangle over representation.²⁰ Their contention was that Appleton himself had prejudiced their negotiations by agreeing with the employers that artists could not also be agents, because that was one of their key negotiating policies; the fact that this was reported in Nottingham, where Appleton had also recently had to defend himself against the Lacemakers' was further salt to a wound.²¹ In a letter to the Artistes, Appleton wrote stinging critiques of their conduct, such as decrying the general secretary's 'capacity for intelligently conveying wrong impressions' and asserting that they had 'no means of directing... public sympathy' without the GFTU's help.²² The Variety Artistes were asked by the GFTU to formally withdraw their remarks, or to leave the GFTU. They chose to do both.

Fractures like these had begun to spring up once Appleton became the general secretary. Although Mitchell had expressed disappointment over the slow progress in membership numbers in 1903's report, his outlook remained one of optimism and encouragement.²³ In Appleton's first report, he admonished the trade unions (taking particular aim at larger unions that could not see the financial benefit of membership) that had not yet signed up with a tone of an exasperated school teacher: 'the excuse of those societies who refuse to affiliate are sometimes interesting and sometimes deplorable; included in the deplorable category are the excuses of those societies who declare that they could not get enough out of the Federation.'²⁴

Appleton's comments the following year could have been read as accusing unions outside the GFTU as lacking in solidarity: 'There are still many societies whom the sense of solidarity ought to bring inside the Federation; the movement cannot be complete or really effective until it includes all those competent to join.'²⁵ It was in

¹⁹ The Football Players' Union joined in 1910 but left after only a few months, due to their unwillingness to formalise the GFTU's rules regarding benefits claims into their own rule book. See Annual Report 1910, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/10.

²⁰ Management Committee Minutes November 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/22.

²¹ 'Music Hall Dispute', *The Nottingham Daily Express*, 15 January 1909, p. 5.

²² Management Committee Minutes November 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/22.

²³ Annual Report 1903, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/3.

²⁴ Annual Report 1908, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/8.

²⁵ Annual Report 1909, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/9.

these small ways that Appleton moved the GFTU from simply being a centralised strike fund administrative body, to an organisation with an opinionated voice at its head that provoked and annoyed rather than enticed and supported. Around him, other trade union leaders were 'remarkable and talented' in the early years of the twentieth century according to Clegg, but Appleton did not make that list.²⁶ His barbed digs and haughty tone in fact did the opposite of drum up support for the GFTU.

Against this backdrop of increasingly condescending remarks, notable secessions, a labour movement with changing demands, and a dwindling GFTU membership figure, Smillie made his move. Appleton reported to the management committee that he had been given a 'list of meetings arranged in connection' with MFGB's move to reconstitute the Joint Board without the GFTU in January 1915.²⁷ The GFTU had not been invited. Appleton quickly wrote to the chairman of the Joint Board Arthur Henderson, who was someone he had been able to rely on before but also now a very influential figure as leader of the Ironfounders, chairman of the National Advisory Committee on War Output, an MP in the coalition cabinet, leader of the Labour Party and chair of the Central Munitions Labour Supply Committee.²⁸

Appleton hoped that Henderson would use his influence and appreciate that any reorganisation of the Joint Board would require the input of all the organisations involved, and could not be done behind closed doors. However, the issue rested on the underlying feelings between the leaders more than it rested on rules and convention. In the 1915 annual report, Appleton bemoans the 'very serious attempt to discredit' the GFTU that had come not just from 'misconceptions', but from 'jealousy'.²⁹ Appleton accused Smillie of working against solidarity, by further warning that 'those who are preaching disunity are advocating suicide' for the movement. According to him, his enemies were 'those who have for years been hostile' to the GFTU, and have 'never ceased to agitate' whilst 'only suggest[ing] vaguely that the Federation does too much or else that it does too little'.³⁰

²⁶ Armstrong Clegg, Fox and Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889 Vol II*, p. 20.

²⁷ Management Committee Minutes, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/75.

²⁸ Armstrong Clegg, Fox and Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889 Vol II*, p. 208.

²⁹ Annual Report 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/15.

³⁰ Quarterly Report September 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/48.

Despite his barbed words, Appleton's arguments fell on deaf ears. Smillie's argument that the GFTU were not national enough to be on the Joint Board gained traction, and once the MFGB refused to financially contribute to the WNC if the GFTU were still represented there during war time conditions, the argument was all but lost.³¹ The minutes of the Labour Party also showed that they were persuaded that the GFTU lacked the national standing to be in the Joint Board.³² By the end of 1916, the Joint Board was reformed to include the Labour Party representing politics and the TUC representing trade unions, and the GFTU was officially adrift.³³ Having lost the ASE, the GFTU also lost the Gasworkers' Union – the union of their charismatic and much-missed first chairman, Pete Curran – over consistent problems providing their members with strike benefits whilst out of work during neighbouring strikes, as well as other smaller unions such as the Society of Enginemen, Cranemen and Boilermen.³⁴

The GFTU continued the 1920s in a state of decline. After publicly criticising the MFGB during the 1921 miners' lock out – fuelled not just by Appleton's anger with Smillie, but also by his disdain for large unions that he felt did 'not want amelioration but revolution' – the GFTU lost one of its stalwart supporters.³⁵ Ben Tillett, one of the founding members of the GFTU, submitted a motion to the 1921 conference that called for Appleton's resignation.³⁶ The newspapers picked up the story ahead of the conference, with the *Sheffield Telegraph* promising Appleton's 'dramatic reply' despite Tillett's health making him unlikely to be at the conference in person.³⁷ Tillett had been unhappy with Appleton's increasing hostility towards other sections of the labour movement for some time, although the 1921 report made it clear that this was not a result of Appleton's role with the GFTU.³⁸ On the day of the conference, Tillett

³¹ TUC Parliamentary Committee Minutes 8 October 1914, British Library, S.P.R.Mic.A.85.

³² Alice Prochaska, *History of the General Federation of Trade Unions* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982) p. 122.

³³ TUC Parliamentary Committee Minutes 14 November 1914, British Library, S.P.R.Mic.A.85.

³⁴ The issue of the 'sympathetic strike' was a perennial issue, but one that greatly affected general unions such as the Gasworkers' because they were first to be affected by strikes in their neighbouring industries. Will Thorne spent many years at the GFTU pleading for greater recognition of this problem, which the management committee met by using their discretion as much as they could. Without an official and equitable policy however, the Gasworkers' voted to secede in 1913. See Annual report 1913, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/13.

³⁵ 'Prominent Men of Nottingham', *Nottingham Journal*, 15 August 1928, p. 7.

³⁶ Annual Report 1921, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/26.

³⁷ 'Labour Troubles: Call for Mr Appleton to Resign' *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 15 July 1921, p. 5.

³⁸ Annual Report 1921, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/26.

failed to show up and support his motion, so Appleton's job was safe on a technicality (although the GFTU was a strong base of support for him, so it was likely that Tillett knew his motion would fail anyway). Ward was scathing of Tillett's conduct, admonishing the Dockers' delegate for having 'neither the courage to proceed nor the decency to withdraw' the motion.³⁹ Tillett never attended a GFTU meeting again, as his union were officially absorbed into the newly created Transport Workers' Amalgamation that did not choose to affiliate to the GFTU.⁴⁰

The decline carried on with continual losses in membership. From their peak membership of more than 1.5 million workers in 1921, just five years later their balance books recorded only 735,000 members.⁴¹ By the point of the general strike in May 1926, the GFTU were not included in negotiations in any way; this was entirely indicative of their new background role after the TUC had become a more central platform. The electoral advancements of the Labour Party had left the TUC with no need to undertake and political representative roles as they had done previously, but the advent of large unions taking on nationally significant industrial disputes that the GFTU could not represent did leave the door open for the TUC to take on a more direct arbitration role.⁴² The loss of so many affiliates, and the sometimes arbitrary discretion with which the management committee could use in their decisions, meant that of the 36 affiliates (amounting to 29,030 workers) that applied to the GFTU for financial help during May 1926, only two individuals received strike benefits. They were members of the National Union of Stove Grate Workers that were working in collieries, and they were deemed genuine as they were also resisting a wage decrease at the same time as expressing solidarity with the MFGB dispute.⁴³ The following months saw a flurry of letters from angry officials that felt let down by the management committee's decisions regarding the general strike, with some denouncing 'the anti-working class propaganda' of Appleton in the matter.⁴⁴

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ 'The World of Labour', *Justice*, 28 July 1921, p. 6.

⁴¹ Annual Report 1926, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/26.

⁴² Ross M Martin, *TUC: The Growth of a Pressure Group 1868-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) p. 196.

⁴³ Management Committee Minutes July 1925 – June 1926, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/86.

⁴⁴ Management Committee Minutes, July 1926 – June 1928, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/87.

The membership figures continued to plummet, reaching a plateau of around 350,000 members in 1940 that lasted for decades.⁴⁵

The GFTU was known by around 1916 as a federation for small unions, particularly because it spent so much of its time organising the national insurance requirements for its affiliates. It was becoming known as a reactionary organisation, thanks to the outspoken views of Ward and Appleton as previously discussed. Their success with the soldiers' pay was overshadowed by Appleton's repeatedly defensive publications, and after their embarrassing removal from the Joint Board and growing list of secessions, the GFTU turned to the one element of their work that was still theirs: the work of maintaining international relations with trade unions and their leaders around the world.

The GFTU's outlook regarding their former friends and colleagues in foreign lands became hostile in response to the war. Firstly, some of their own employees were considered to be dangerous foreign aliens, such as their Austro-Hungarian office worker Oscar Beck, and the GFTU had to walk a tightrope response of caring for their own workers whilst also maintaining their roles as ultra-patriots that supported the government. One of their closest allies, Carl Legien, became a problem for Appleton almost overnight in August 1914, and again the tightrope had to be navigated. However, with their international work being the last element of their national importance, it was paramount for Appleton to make the right call.

The Oscar Beck Affair

It is not clear exactly when Oscar Beck arrived in Britain, but the first newspaper report about his trade union activities appears on the 24th of June 1912. The front page of the *Daily Herald* blazed with news of the 100,000 demonstrators that walked an eight-mile procession to Hyde Park in support of the Transport Workers' Federation (TWF).⁴⁶ The TWF boasted an impressive membership figure of around 125,000, but remained aloof from the GFTU's list of affiliates, much to Appleton's

⁴⁵ Membership numbers began a small uplift in 1970, but membership figures have never recovered to their 1921 high. See Annual Reports, 1900 – 2008 (GFTU 1/1 – 90) for full details on affiliations.

⁴⁶ 'Huge Demonstration of Strikers in Hyde Park', *Daily Herald*, 24 June 1912, p. 1.

chagrin.⁴⁷ Across 6 separate platforms, forty-two speakers were billeted to give speeches to the crowds that had gathered under the summer sunshine; both the sizeable crowd and the financial support collected from other trade unions all over the country in addition to £5,128 in international contributions through the tireless organisation of Carl Legien, was testimony to the widespread support for the Transport Workers'.⁴⁸ Before this mammoth procession reached the park, they intersected with another, smaller but no less enthusiastic, demonstration. Restaurant workers, teashop employees and domestic servants paused their march from Embankment to Trafalgar Square to line up and cheer for the Transport Workers' Federation marchers, before continuing to their own demonstration against the proposed alterations to the Shop Hours Act.⁴⁹

After being introduced by William Anderson of the ILP, there stood Oscar Beck, speaking on behalf of the Hotel, Club and Restaurant Workers' Union.⁵⁰ He denounced the efforts being made by employers to renege on previously won concessions of better pay and conditions, and demanded that the Act be expanded to include 'waiters, waitresses, cooks, carvers, porters, scullerymen, platemen, liftmen, cellarmen, storekeepers, linen-room maids, housemaids, clerks and all servants of whatever grade employed in hotels, restaurants, and clubs.'⁵¹ He addressed the crowd in German, which reflected the high number of German-speaking migrant workers in the hospitality sector of the pre-war period, but also perhaps set him apart from his English-speaking counterparts in trade union leadership positions.⁵² Even though a crowd comprised of many German-speakers

⁴⁷ TUC Annual Report 1912, www.unionhistory.info, accessed 13 February 2022; Some unions that were affiliated to the Transport Workers' Federation or were directly affected by the strike still received strike benefit from the GFTU. 20,000 of the Dockers' Union members, 24 House and Ship Painters and 8,076 Stevedores all put in successful claims, which pushed the GFTU's bank account almost £22,000 into their overdraft. This episode, indicative of the financial strain brought by the period of 'Labour Unrest', forced the GFTU to tighten their rules to exclude all forms of sympathetic strikes, which eventually cost them some high profile affiliates. See Management Committee Minutes June 1912, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/50.

⁴⁸ GFTU Annual Report 1913, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/13.

⁴⁹ 'Waiters Organise', *Daily Herald*, 24 June 1912, p. 1.

⁵⁰ This trade union is difficult to track as it changed its name often, likely because of a changing policy of recruiting from the hotel sector versus café or shop workers. It had been called the Hotel, Club and Restaurant Workers' Union, the Hotel and Waiters' Union, the Alimentary Union and simply the Waiters' Union between the years 1908 and 1915.

⁵¹ 'Waiters Organise', *Daily Herald*, 24 June 1912, p. 1.

⁵² In the years leading to the first world war, as many as 10% of all London restaurant waiters were German, with the 1901 census showing as many as 2,447 foreign cooks in England and Wales. See Census of England and Wales, 1901, Summary Tables, Area, Housing and Population (London,

would have responded well to a solidarity-rousing speech in their own language, it seems likely that Beck's English-speaking colleagues would have struggled to feel that same solidarity with him if they could not fully understand his words. The GFTU often lamented their own lack of foreign language proficiency and reliance on interpreters when they visited their international friends.⁵³

In April 1913, Beck was interviewed for the *Daily Herald* alongside café workers in an article that used heavy innuendo to imply that waitresses 'who earn 5 bob a week... are tempted to lead a life of shame' in order to make ends meet.⁵⁴ This moralistic tone was intended to shock readers into thinking that these women were desperately trying to lead decent Christian lives but were being pushed into a life of depravity by unscrupulous employers. Beck's contribution to the article intimated that they could still be saved if only they had strong unionism to support them.

As Outram has reminded us, this idea of trade unionism as a secular form of salvation bolstered by a feeling of family support away from religious structures is common to many personal accounts of membership.⁵⁵ Beck's wife, described only as 'Mrs Beck', appeared in the *Daily Mirror* in the same month advocating for the same strike, although she does not seem to have taken an official role in trade union organising.⁵⁶ Beck did not shy away from being forthright about the need to organise the very low-paid hospitality workers, and it appears he was an effective leader. Working alongside general secretary Percy Young, at some point in 1913 Beck was appointed as the secretary of the foreign division of the union, and helped to lead several strikes up and down the country.⁵⁷

According to a memoir written by Wilf McCartney - a former restaurant worker born in 1877 who began his career as an apprentice cook at the age of twelve - Beck was part of a tight-knit syndicalist union of catering staff that engaged in wild-cat strikes. He referred to him as 'Comrade Beck' and described him as being a central figure up

1903) p. 252; Panikos Panayi, and Stefan Manz, 'The Rise and Fall of Germans in the British Hospitality Industry c. 1880 – 1920' *Food and History*, 11, 2 (2013) p. 243.

⁵³ General Council Meeting Records 1903, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/4.

⁵⁴ 'Waitresses who earn 5 bob a week' *Daily Herald*, 24 April 1913, p. 6.

⁵⁵ Quentin Outram, 'The Featherstone Massacre and the People's Martyrology: an exploration of Christian culture in British coal strikes', *unpublished paper* (2019).

⁵⁶ 'Anti-Strike Girls' *Daily Mirror*, 10 April 1913, p. 13.

⁵⁷ 'Hotel Strikes', *Reynold's Newspaper*, 23rd March 1913, np.

until the outbreak of war.⁵⁸ McCartney himself spent many of his later years involved with the anarchist movement, although he took a firm line that effective trade union organisation was the key to improving workers' rights, and his memoir stressed the intensely radical and syndicalist nature of this obscure trade union.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were several societies and unions for workers in the hospitality sector, with most having an international focus.⁵⁹ They functioned as an important conduit between migrant workers coming to Britain seeking employment, and restaurateurs hoping to employ the well-trained workers from places such as Germany. These unions have not received much scholarly attention, but they appear to have been fairly influential in the wider movement, if perhaps only for a brief period until they merged into larger general unions. Their memberships also frequently moved and merged, which reflected the semi-transient nature of the largely foreign workforce that were seeking experience and language-learning, perhaps often more so than a permanent home in a new country.

The Hotel, Club and Waiters' Union, of which Beck was an active leader, appears to have drawn in the more radical members that emphasised class-solidarity and syndicalism. Paul Vogel, general secretary of the Waiters' Union, was an ILP member and founding delegate of the 1900 LRC; at his funeral thirteen years later, Beck was noted as one of the speakers in the *Labour Leader's* eulogy, again given in German.⁶⁰

The Waiters' Union, although they had a reputation for wild-cat strikes that defied the GFTU's love of rules and proper process, affiliated to the GFTU in 1913. It is not clear if Beck attended the 1913 annual conference, although Young certainly did. It was to be a short-lived association. When the first world war broke out, German-born workers were swept up in a wave of xenophobic resentment generated in the outpouring of nationalism that accompanied the outbreak of war from the public and the press.⁶¹ As an Austro – Hungarian citizen, Beck's first language was German, and he was clearly more comfortable speaking German than he was speaking

⁵⁸ Wilf McCartney, *Dare to Be a Daniel!*, (2010) www.libcom.org/history/dare-be-daniel-wilf-mccartney, accessed on 4 September 2020.

⁵⁹ Panayi and Manz, 'The Rise and Fall of Germans', pp. 253-4.

⁶⁰ 'Paul Vogel', *Labour Leader*, 9 October 1913, p. 3.

⁶¹ Panayi and Manz, 'The Rise and Fall of Germans', p. 243.

English. Although other professions, such as clerical workers, also had a high percentage of Germans working in their sector, waiters and other hospitality staff were particularly targeted because they were in close contact with the British public in their work.⁶²

Although the extreme nature of wartime anti-German sentiment is notable, there was clear evidence of exclusionary forces at play before 1914. Resentment from the public and the press had indeed bubbled away over foreign labour being willing to accept cheaper wages and undercutting British workers in many sectors, but the outright hostility created by the sudden swerve to nationalistic patriotism certainly increased to the point that it was impossible for most Germans to find work or housing.⁶³ Also, solidarity was not always readily expressed towards foreign workers within the British trade union environment. Indeed, the Loyal British Waiters Society in 1910 (with a membership of 1,625 members at its inception) was expressly for the purpose of connecting British workers with hospitality posts, which shows both an anxiousness from some trade unionists to exclude foreign workers in favour of British ones, and also that there were employers that specifically sought British workers.⁶⁴ Clearly, the war did not create anti-German sentiment, but exacerbated it greatly. As a result, the emotional communities of trade unions would also undergo significant changes in terms of their acceptance or otherwise of 'foreign' membership

This was the environment that Beck was caught up in, only a few short months after his union had affiliated to the GFTU. What did Appleton's firmly patriotic stance mean for him? Appleton had used his influence to attempt to stop the deportation of Russian Jewish trade unionists, which he achieved on the understanding that they enlisted for the British Army.⁶⁵ The idea of foreigners only being 'saved' if they were 'useful' was a persistent trope. Beck's standing in the trade union world was suddenly shaken by the happenstance of his birthplace, and he had to face the prospect of being interned as an enemy alien along with the tens of thousands of German-speaking people that had emigrated to Britain in the few decades before

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 258-9.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 259.

⁶⁵ Management Committee Minutes July 1916 – June 1917, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/77.

1914.⁶⁶ That is not to say that he had not encountered any hostility on account of his origins before, but he had nevertheless managed to attain a position of authority and at least a certain degree of respectability within trade union spheres. He had been welcomed not simply as a trade unionist, but as a leader that was worthy of a Hyde Park platform.

Having a union such as the Waiters', Club and Hotel Workers' successfully lead a small yet effective membership of around 500 workers with a specific 'foreign division' alongside the existence of an explicitly exclusionary workers organisation such as the Loyal British Waiters' society, speaks to the variance in attitude and feeling towards foreign trade unionists in the British labour movement.⁶⁷ Beck being quoted in the press as a trade union leader had to an extent solidified his equal standing amongst his English-speaking counterparts, but his standing was now rocked by the impact of war.

The policy of internment, which rested on the feeling that all German people (particularly but not exclusively men of a military age) were a threat to Britain, was one of the clearest examples of the exclusionary effect of patriotism. As Panayi has argued, the practice of internment came along as part of a wave of hostility directed at anyone outside of the patriotic British ideal: namely the socialists, the pacifists and anyone from an enemy state.⁶⁸ Beck's status as a German-speaking Hungarian placed him firmly in the third category, and the militancy of his union likely placed him strongly in the first as well.⁶⁹

Beck may have felt that his work within trade unionism and the importance that was placed on keeping relations between government and industry cordial would have given him a degree of protection. It appears that Beck was successful in the first instance in obtaining some form of exemption from the internment process when it first began, as he was not one of the 13,600 people taken from August to September

⁶⁶ Panikos Panayi, 'An Intolerant Act by an Intolerant Society: The Internment of Germans in Britain During the First World War', in David Cesarani, and Tony Kushner, eds., *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain*, (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 55.

⁶⁷ GFTU Annual report 1914, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/14.

⁶⁸ Panayi, 'An Intolerant Act', p. 54.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

1914.⁷⁰ However, the violent anger directed towards German residents after the German forces sank the *Lusitania* in May 1915 very likely made Beck fear for his life and his wife's.⁷¹ It became clear to him that he would need further help in order to safeguard his freedom. The government's renewed policy to inter all non-naturalised adult men between the ages of 17 and 55 would be much harder for Beck's influential friends to combat.

In July 1915, Beck used WNC-headed paper to write to James Middleton, the then general secretary of the Labour Party, asking for help ensuring an exemption from repatriation for his wife.

Dear Mr Middleton,

Yesterday the police informed my wife that her exemption form is not signed by anyone. I made the mistake to write on the leave where you and others signed "We know etc Mr Beck" instead Mr and Mrs Beck.

May I ask you therefore for the favour to consider if you could help me out of this trouble. Otherwise my wife would be repatriated.

Perhaps it would [sic] sufficient to write to the Advisory Board that the signature concern both of us. I filled in a form for exemption you understand but it is not signed by others. I enclose here a letter for my wife can you see.

⁷⁰ For more information on the internment processes in Britain and throughout the world during conflicts, see Stefan Manz, Panikos Panayi and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *Internment during the first world war: A mass global phenomenon* (Oxon: Routledge, 2019); Matthew Stibbe, *Civilian Internment During the First World War: A European and Global History 1914-1920* (London: Palgrave, 2019); Mahon Murphy, *Colonial Captivity during the first world war: internment and the fall of the German empire 1914-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Panikos Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain: German civilian and combatant internees during the first world war* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

⁷¹ Panayi, 'An Intolerant Act', p. 56.

Thanking you in anticipation. Yours fraternally, Oskar Beck.

PS Will you please ring me up at the GFTU I am there till 5.45pm. OB.⁷²

Although he was not a member of the WNC Executive Committee, the fact that he was able to use their paper both illustrates the close connections between trade union leaders, and the trust that his colleagues likely had for him. Further evidence of the good standing with which labour leaders were held in is demonstrated by the acknowledgement that Middleton and Appleton had somehow successfully used their influence before. According to the GFTU 1916 annual council report, there was an 'acting secretary of one society, who was an enemy alien' that was interned at the outbreak of war, but the management committee were able to intervene and highlight his work on insurance. This was likely to have been Beck. A word from Appleton and Middleton was enough at this stage to shield Beck from the worst aspects of the increasingly pervasive anti-German feeling that was growing as the war progressed, although he would have had to register with his local police station as an enemy resident.⁷³ That he had not been one of the 13,600 men already interned in the first few months of the war is almost certainly due to his connections in the trade union world. He may well have felt that the issue of his wife's certificate would be a simple fix too requiring a quick letter to the government board. Although British women that married foreign-born men took on the nationalities of their husbands, women in this situation rarely faced the actual threat of deportation.⁷⁴ Although it is not clear whether Mrs Beck was born in Britain, the fact that Beck was worried enough that she was at genuine risk of repatriation would indicate that she was also of foreign nationality.

⁷² Correspondence with Oscar Beck, Labour Party and War Office, People's History Museum, WNC/2/3/2/7.

⁷³ Details of Beck's internment process, his experience as an internee and one medical record have now been compiled by Alison Jones, researcher at the Knockaloe Centre for WW1 Internment: Visitor Centre and WW1 Civilian Internee Database on the Isle of Man. All records for Oscar Beck are filed under ref: 47592A Beck Oskar 2020-70.

⁷⁴ 'Knockaloe: The start of internment', https://www.knockaloe.im/page_346204.html, accessed 29 July 2022.

The chain of correspondence that followed this letter is indicative of the interconnected channels between trade unionists that could be utilised for help in times of need. Middleton contacted William Brace, Lib-Lab MP for South Glamorganshire and member of the WNC Executive Council, along with Appleton in an effort to approach the Home Office on the subject of the exemptions.⁷⁵ Unfortunately for Beck, the previous good word of Middleton did not offer permanent protection, as he received his notice of internment in September 1915.

The anger felt at the sinking of the *Lusitania* was far too pervasive to allow lenient exemptions to continue. However, Beck still had friends fighting his corner. Middleton wrote again to Brace, asking if it was 'possible for anything to be done to preserve Beck's liberty and the continuance of his work with the General Federation of Trade Unions', and to once again 'associate [himself] most sincerely with the representations that have been made by Mr Appleton on [Beck's] behalf'.⁷⁶ Middleton's sincerity and hope for Beck never seemed to waver; as the secretary to the Labour Party, Middleton was adept at keeping strong lines of communication and was a very effective ally to have.⁷⁷

Despite Middleton's entreaties Brace responded that it was 'rather late in the day' to be attempting to secure an exemption from internment, regardless of his standing within the labour movement.⁷⁸ Despite Middleton's clearly genuine desire to help, Beck and his friends were facing an unrelenting wave of anti-Germanism that they could no longer push back against in the same way. The networks of friendship and understanding of respectability were withering against the surge of war time xenophobia. Beck was running out of shelter.

⁷⁵ Correspondence with Oscar Beck, Labour Party and War Office. People's History Museum, WNC 2/3/2/8-9; R Page Arnot, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, 'William Brace (1865 – 1947)' in *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol I*, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, eds., (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1972) pp. 51-3.

⁷⁶ Correspondence with Oscar Beck, Labour Party and War Office. People's History Museum WNC 2/3/2/10.

⁷⁷ David Swift, 'James Middleton' in *Dictionary of Labour Biography XIV*, Keith Gildart and David Howell, eds., (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) pp. 178-86.

⁷⁸ Correspondence with Oscar Beck, Labour Party and War Office.

Hostility and the politics of the GFTU

Appleton's attempts to help Beck sat uneasily with the GFTU's struggle to balance patriotism, friendship and internationalism. The bold claim in the GFTU's 1914 manifesto on the war that the 'dominant section' of German society supported the militarism espoused by Treitschke and von Bernhardi gave birth to some ugly consequences.⁷⁹ Some delegates vehemently dissented. Fred Bramley of the Furnishing Trades Association raised an objection at the 1915 annual conference to the manifesto's implication against their former friends in Germany, also adding that the position taken in the manifesto was done so by the management committee without discussion at conference.⁸⁰ He felt that, although the 'practices indulged by the German military authorities were diabolical in the extreme... he did not suppose that many members of the Trade Union movement looked upon those diabolical military practices as a manifestation of the natural normal German temperament.'⁸¹

If the management committee truly thought that all German people were hostile and warlike, Bramley contended, then surely they would not have included a statement of desire to return to the previous spirit of international solidarity once the war was over. Bramley's disappointment that the GFTU were not attempting to 'keep alive the true international spirit and... the identity of the International interests of the working classes in Europe' was seconded by William Smith from the Boot and Shoe Operatives, but they quickly found themselves in the minority.⁸² Firstly, although Bramley was clearly arguing against the expressions printed in the manifesto, he was doing so by objecting to a far vaguer paragraph in the report. This was in adherence to the standard procedure of the meeting, whereby every paragraph needed to be voted on, but it did mean that wider objections to related materials, such as the manifesto, did not find a space at conference. In quasi-support of Bramley, Ernest Bevin of the Dockers' attempted to move the following resolution:

⁷⁹ Trade Unions And The War 1914, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/13.

⁸⁰ Fred Bramley was a prominent member of the ILP, and was often found touring with the *Clarion* to spread socialist ideas. He opposed the war in principle, but continued to work within the trade union movement and politics, eventually leading the TUC from 1923. He remained a stalwart internationalist, and was a keen and able negotiator on future foreign delegations. For more biographical details, see Patrick Renshaw, 'Fred Bramley (1874-1925)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/47329>.

⁸¹ General Council Meeting Record 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/9.

⁸² Ibid.

That this conference calls upon the joint board to appoint an advisory diplomatic committee whose duty it shall be to specialise on foreign policy and advise the Labour movement.⁸³

Doomed to fail as it did not adhere to the established structure of the conference, this motion was nevertheless indicative of the problem that trade unionists faced during war time. Bevin astutely pointed out that there was no method of deciding foreign policy on behalf of labour, which directly impacted the important international work that they had engaged in for more than a decade. The delegation of executive power to a management committee meant that there was no direct way to exert control or influence over the committee's decisions, except the chance to vote members out of office once a year.

However, it was James Bell, a delegate from the Ironfounders', whose response to Bramley's argument really laid bare the extent of rising anti-German sentiments at the GFTU:

He (the speaker) met men in the workshops and heard their expressions of opinion and saw them when they received news of their sons. He would wipe out every German. He would exterminate them.⁸⁴

There was no challenge to this extreme sentiment recorded in the minutes, although this was probably not surprising given that news of the brutal conduct of German troops, often embellished with fictional details, was now in widespread circulation. On the contrary, supportive statements were made by Mr Bailey from the Leicester Hosiery Union, who questioned why Bramley was so 'anxious to say all good things about German Trade Unionists', whilst R Mann from the Mutual Association of Coopers voiced his anger at Bramley with more visual venom:

[Mann] knew men who had told him of little children who had had their hands nailed to window sills while their little white faces looked through the window. Was that the work of the German Government? It was the work of the

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

German people who were at the back of the Government, and in spirit with them over this war.’⁸⁵

The responses went on, with Appleton’s and Tillett’s accounts of the rising militarism of the German people during their most recent visit to Germany dominating the discussion. Tillett admonished Bramley for ‘utter[ing] sentimental tosh’ and his ‘wanting to kiss these [German] men who have had all the means and power at their disposal, and have used them ruthlessly and brutally to destroy material, manhood and womanhood.’⁸⁶ It later transpired at the 1917 Annual Conference that Bramley had been sent by the Furnishing Trades Association as an extra representative because their executive committee had been so appalled by the vehemently patriotic and pro-war tone of O’Grady’s activities, and they were not comfortable with his remarks at the GFTU being made on behalf of their society.⁸⁷ This is a small but notable indication that organisations did have some mechanisms with which to distance themselves from their representatives if they felt they needed to do so. Nevertheless, someone like Beck – who had been so integral to the movement only a short time before – would certainly no longer find a warm welcome at the GFTU. It was this mire that Beck and his wife were now trapped in.

That Appleton nevertheless tried to help him does illustrate the difference between official policy and personal feeling, but as the war continued and feelings hardened, this was to become increasingly difficult to navigate. On the 26th of September 1915, Beck wrote again to Middleton:

Dear Comrade (Middleton)

I take the liberty of introducing my dear little wife to you (I haven’t a bigger one at home). She has not yet received her exemption paper and is much troubled to see me going to the camp before she is settled. I hope I do not trouble you in asking to be good enough to take a little interest in her. I will carry my lot calmly. But if she would have to go she and me would be broken and ruined. Our little home is the Result of years hard work.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Proceedings and Reports July 1917 – June 1918, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/12.

I thank you very much for your kindly help you gave me in previous time and thank you for everything you will do to [sic] my wife.

Wishing you every success,

I remain, yours fraternally,

Oskar Beck.⁸⁸

His endearing joke about his “little wife” demonstrates the closeness and camaraderie that Beck felt for Middleton. He clearly trusted him and was grateful for the help that he had been given so far in terms of his own status as an enemy alien, and felt comfortable enough to place the wellbeing of his wife in his hands.

Thankfully, and perhaps on the strength of the interventions of Middleton, Mrs Beck did receive her exemption by the following November and was able to stay in their London home once Beck was removed to a camp. However, Middleton still felt compelled to help the couple further.

Although Beck was initially sent to Alexandra Palace Camp in North London, he was sent on to the Knockaloe camp on the Isle of Man by either the 10th or 11th of October 1915. Beck’s new home – Hut 4b, Compound 1 in Camp 4 - was much too far for Mrs Beck to travel to for visitation. Although camp 4 was on the edge of the compound, overlooking fields and gently rolling hills, it would have been a difficult experience. It is not known for sure, but as camp 4 was known as one of the more organised camps, and with Beck’s skills as a trade union organiser, he may have been involved in minor camp administration tasks or correspondance help, in order to stave off the all-too common onset of depression, known as ‘barbed wire disease’.

Middleton wrote to Beck on the 11th of November to reassure him that he and Appleton would make ‘joint representations of a personal kind’ to Brace in order to try and secure his placement in a facility closer to London.⁸⁹ His letter to Appleton highlighted the anxiety that Mrs Beck felt due to being unable to see her husband

⁸⁸ Correspondence with Oscar Beck, Labour Party and War Office.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

under such stressful conditions, but wanted to wait for Appleton to agree to help as well before contacting Brace.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, Appleton's response the following day was a little less enthusiastic.

Dear Middleton, I should be very glad to do anything I could for Beck, whom I always believed to be very straight forward, and while I recognise the general wisdom of transferring interned Aliens to a place like the Isle of Man, I will most certainly go with you and see Brace because we could talk matters over quite frankly with Brace and perhaps secure that something should be done for Beck's benefit.

Yours faithfully,

W. A. Appleton⁹¹

It is clear that Appleton still regarded Beck quite highly, but he was not completely in favour of helping to secure Beck's relocation. There could be a number of plausible explanations for this, including the knowledge that the request was very likely futile, but it was nevertheless a notable cooling of sentiment. Appleton's pointed remark about the righteousness of the internment policy was the first explicit line drawn regarding his estimation of Beck. He was not simply a colleague in need anymore; he was a former colleague that was born in an enemy state. That seemed to have taken precedence for Appleton, and his much vaguer commitment to doing 'something' for Beck shows that Appleton's feelings of patriotism were overtaking his sense of solidarity and friendship. Indeed, there are no further records of communication by Appleton on Beck's behalf. Perhaps the level of anti-German feeling at the annual conference gave rise to Appleton's hardening feelings against his former German colleagues.

Middleton kept up the fight a little longer, arguing that Beck's case should be reconsidered due to his important work with the GFTU, and also because he only had one arm.⁹² His physical disability was being held up by Middleton as an example

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² There is no record of Beck's position at the GFTU, but it is likely that he worked for the Insurance section rather than the GFTU itself. If that is the case, the records covering those years are not available. Correspondence with Oscar Beck, Labour Party and War Office.

of how Beck should not be seen as a threat. It would be hard to imagine, Middleton hoped, a one-armed office clerk having any real effect on the outcome of the war. Brace offered to help repatriate Beck to Germany instead, in an exchange for 'some medically unfit British subject', but was countered by Middleton tersely replying that he had 'no reason for thinking that Mr Beck has any desire to return to Hungary'.⁹³ Perhaps Brace forgetting that Beck was not German was a simple error, but it does illustrate the persuasiveness of xenophobic feelings in that it became easier to cast a blanket term of 'enemy' over former friends. Still Middleton persisted, writing once more to Herbert Samuel, the Home Secretary, in early 1916:

Dear Mr Samuel,

I understand that various cases of interned aliens are being reviewed and that a number of Hungarians have been released in order to take up their normal occupations. I understand representations are being made by the American Embassy with a view to securing the release of Oscar Beck, 2248, No. 4, Compound one, 4B, Knockaloe Alien Camp, Isle of Man. Beck held a position of responsibility in the office of the General Federation of Trade Unions and in view of the fact that he has lost his right arm his would appear to be a case worthy of reconsideration at your hands. I understand, Mr W. A. Appleton, like myself, is prepared to vouch for Beck and I trust it will be possible either to release him so that he can again take up his work and rejoin [sic] his wife, or at least that he may be brought back to one of the London camps where it would be possible for his wife to visit him. Trusting you will be able to give this matter your consideration.

Yours faithfully

Secretary⁹⁴

There was therefore some indication that Appleton still felt a measure of responsibility to help Beck, but it certainly did not appear to be as important to him as

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Correspondence with Oscar Beck, Labour Party and War Office.

it was to Middleton. Despite the main thrust of the argument for Beck's value to the labour world being his position at the GFTU, it was not the GFTU itself calling for Beck to be allowed back. Indeed, as the sentiments expressed at the war time annual meetings had taken such an increasingly and overtly anti-German tone, it was likely that Appleton would not want to be portrayed as helping the enemy.

At some point after this last letter was sent, Beck was transferred back to Alexandra Palace. It is not known if this was a result of Middleton's lobbying, or if it was part of a wider initiative to allow internees to be moved closer to their families from the summer of 1916, but a medical record indicating that he attended London Dalston Hospital on the 9th March 1917 shows he did at least leave Knockaloe. Mrs Beck would have finally been allowed to see her husband. Eventually, perhaps as a result of the difficulty and relentlessness of being interned, Beck chose to be repatriated, and left for Hungary on the 9th November 1917. His 'little wife' would have been provided safe passage to accompany him. There is no indication that Beck ever returned to Britain.

Appleton's hardening tone of anti-German feeling is illustrative of the effect that the war had on the emotional community of the GFTU, and the hostile effect that it would have had on people that had previously felt comfortable within that milieu. Patriotism and nationalistic fervour brought with it feelings of fear and anxiety over real and perceived threats from the enemy, and this brought a hostility that changed the structure and expectations of the emotional community of the GFTU for someone in Beck's position, and indeed for someone like Bramley, who wanted the GFTU to be a welcoming place for someone like Beck.

Considering again Bramley's and Bevin's attempted interventions at the 1915 annual council, the reactions to Bramley's objection at the anti-German feeling are indicative of the changing emotions towards foreign-born trade unionists that had once been welcomed with open arms. James Bell's response that he wished to 'exterminate' all German people, and the lack of a challenge to such an extreme sentiment, indicate a profound change in the emotional temperature of the GFTU. Minutes are based on decisions regarding what to include in order to portray a certain organisational identity, and here the GFTU were loudly declaring a hostile line in the sand.

Appleton's response to Bell was lengthy and verbose, but there was no remonstrance of Bell's declaration. Instead, Appleton further qualified his staunchly patriotic position by saying that whilst he still had friends in Germany and was not ashamed to say so, he still felt that most German workmen and trade unionists were desirous of military domination, and that that justified both his personal position and that of the GFTU. Appleton saw no issue with these sweeping declarations of knowing the German mind whilst also expressing friendship for those very Germans, but this was much easier to do when amongst trade unionists that were not in Beck's position. Instead, Appleton took the opportunity to criticise the Furnishing Trades Association (which Bramley belonged to) for undermining the GFTU's manifesto:

It was more justifiable to [quote from Bernhardt] than that it was for the Furnishing Trades Association to circulate in Germany a statement that these reports and manifestoes had been issued without authority, and that they did not represent the opinion of Trade Unionists... the Germans had paid the furnishing trades Association the complement of publishing its denunciation of British trade union organisations in three languages, but they had not similarly published the management committees manifesto. The management committee was very careful about that manifesto, and he thought all would agree that from beginning to end it did not contain a single offensive phrase.⁹⁵

It was disingenuous to suggest that there could be no offence taken from the manifesto, when clearly there had been much offence caused to people like Bramley. Perhaps more importantly, it offended the most important German person in the GFTU's network: Carl Legien. Although we do not know Beck's reaction to the manifesto, Legien had the opportunity to read all about the GFTU's change in internationalist tone, and the ramifications of that are crucial to understanding the pathway that patriotism and loyalty to King and Country sent the GFTU on. Perhaps the manifesto may have been a knee-jerk reaction to the declaration of war, created in a swirl of patriotic fervour that most certainly spread through even the most resolutely internationalist quarters. Although this was possible, there was a notable lack of regret.

⁹⁵ General Council Meeting Records 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/9.

Yours, Fraternally?

The 1915 GFTU annual conference, with its overt anti-German sentiments, will now be considered more closely. During the afternoon of Thursday 1st of July, James O'Grady addressed the 109 delegates that had gathered at the Temperance Hall in Derby. He extended the usual pleasantries to the host – the Secretary of the Derby Trades Council – and welcomed the fraternal delegates from the Labour Party and the TUC. He began his speech on the financial security of the GFTU, but was interrupted by the entrance of Lieutenant-Colonel John Ward. Ward, the Treasurer of the GFTU, 'entered the hall, and, amidst applause, was welcomed by the Chairman'.⁹⁶

A late entrance to a meeting in progress would hardly ever be reflected in the minutes of a council meeting, as the formality of minute-taking strives to hide the mundane movement of people in favour of recording the debates and decisions occurring. However, Ward, there as a GFTU delegate but nevertheless in full military uniform, was the subject of much patriotic pride for the GFTU. Three years later, when he was awarded the CMG, the committee felt compelled to 'place on record their pleasure... [at] his gallant conduct.'⁹⁷ A spontaneous eruption of applause whilst he walked into the overview of the finances in 1915 then reveals both a genuine burst of emotion on the page of the minutes, and the desire of the GFTU to place its patriotism on the record.

O'Grady continued with his speech, placing emphasis on the GFTU's activities rather than the wider issues of the war. However, he did take the opportunity to reflect that 'as for their own members, they naturally wanted to have not only their presence back in the unions but their presence in the workshops', stressing the importance of work for trade unionist agendas. More muted on the subject of patriotic duty than Appleton, and indeed their manifesto, he nevertheless 'believed that this country was justified in taking up the position it did in the war'. Again, the minutes recorded the applause, bringing to reality the sense of agreement and collective support for the

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ GFTU Management Committee Minutes July 1917 – June 1918, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/78.

patriotic statement that was felt in the room. Soon enough, the discussion of the report took place, and with it came a hardening of the GFTU's feelings towards their former friends in Germany.

War was particularly problematic for the friendship between Carl Legien, the sitting President of the IFTU, and William Appleton. As soon as war was declared, it became obvious that there was no real need (nor possibility) for the IFTU to perform any of its usual functions, but there remained the matter of the relationships between trade union leaders of countries that were now at war. Even though there were cautious declarations of halted, not ruptured, solidarity between national trade union organisations at the start of the war, the relationships quickly descended into a tangle of patriotism during the first year of conflict. This was an issue borne of navigating both the personal and public faces of a friendship; although the friendly affection between Legien and Appleton seemed entirely genuine before the war, there was now an overriding expectation to place country before international alliances.

The public face of the friendship had to take on an entirely new expression. A year into the war, any friendship with a German had become much more problematic, as the close network that the GFTU had established between now warring states was an unwelcome interference in their message of patriotism. Even though Appleton hoped that the workers would 'forget many of the passions' that placed British trade unionists against German ones, Appleton decided to publish the correspondence he had with Legien during the year, along with relevant letters passed between Jan Oudegeest, President of the Dutch Confederation of Trade Unions, Leon Jouhaux, Secretary-General of the French General Confederation of Labour, and Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor, in the GFTU's 1915 Annual Report.⁹⁸

Although the disintegrating relations between the leaders is hardly surprising, the letters are notable for how their tone, language and expressions of feeling change as the conflict intensifies. Their publication in this manner is also notable, with the additional publicity Appleton gave them by publishing some of the letters in the

⁹⁸ Annual Report 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/15.

GFTU's newspaper *The Federationist*, without Legien's prior knowledge or consent. The emotive language used to describe the feelings of the British trade unionists illustrates the damaging effect that patriotism had on the hitherto carefully constructed friendship between the international bodies and lays bare how delicate feelings of international solidarity were.

Sent on the 27th August 1914, a mere twenty-three days after Britain declared war on Germany, the first letter from Legien to Appleton begins by lamenting 'the frightful declaration of war'.⁹⁹ After refuting the British press reports of unsavoury conduct by the German government, Legien attempted to reassure Appleton that foreigners in Germany have been 'treated in the most friendly manner, and [were] well cared for.'¹⁰⁰ Legien also defended the decision of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) – of which he was a high profile member – to grant the German government a war loan, as similar parties in other countries had done much the same, before signing off with his fraternal greetings. It was indeed similar to the actions of other similar organisations; the GFTU were to invest £20,000 in a War Loan to the government the following year.¹⁰¹

Appleton's reply followed on the 18th of September 1914, which expressed his 'profound regret [at] the disastrous effect of the war upon our international relationships'.¹⁰² Blaming the conflict on the 'arrogance' of the few, he expressed the hope that once it was finished 'common people in every land' will aim for 'general well-being and happiness' instead of war, which indicated his commonly shared feeling that the war, though awful, would at least be short-lived.¹⁰³ However, it is clear that Appleton's letters had two intentions: one, to respond to his friend, and two, to show affiliates that he and the GFTU were undoubtedly patriotic in their allegiance. If this had to be at the expense of his friendship, then that was a price he was willing to pay. Appleton informed Legien that it was 'advisable that [he] should realise the attitude of the British people towards this situation', after listing the 'false

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ General Council Meeting Record 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/9.

¹⁰² Annual Report 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/15.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

news' that had been directed at Britain from the German press.¹⁰⁴ Although still moderately cordial, feelings had already soured:

If you were amongst us you would see for yourself that, while deploring the war, they are convinced that they are not responsible for it. They did not desire it, but they are bound in honour to see it through. However grotesque the conceit may appear to you, millions of them believe that this war is a war of liberation from the domination of militarism, and that the success of the Allies means beneficent results for the German people as distinguished from that section which follows the teachings of Treitschke and von Bernhardi. The sale and effect of the latter's book is enormous, and his teachings will present a greater obstacle to the resuscitation of international relationships than the war itself.¹⁰⁵

Appleton's claims to knowledge of sales figures and readership volume of Treitschke and von Bernhardi are dubious, but his use of these two writers is clear. In referring again to the quotes he had included in the GFTU's war manifesto, Appleton was not only justifying his patriotism to Legien, but more importantly to the organisation's affiliates.

On the matter of how Germans were being treated in Britain, Appleton derided the 'foolish ones [that] have had to suffer imprisonment or fines' because they failed to register as aliens, and added that 'some Germans were in a state of serious destitution, and these were arrested more as a matter of kindness than as a matter of hostility'.¹⁰⁶ By labelling arrests as kindness, particularly as Appleton had not seen the conduct of the arresting officers first hand, he was staking out a level of superiority that he bolstered with a veiled accusation of hostility, in that 'as a matter of fact, they are infinitely better off than are the thousands of Belgian refugees who are seeking the charity and hospitality of London' after fleeing German aggression.¹⁰⁷ Appleton further extolled the superior British attitude, by relaying a story of royal sympathy and kindness that had appeared in the press:¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Annual Report 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/15.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ 'The King and German Wounded' *Evening Mail*, 16 September 1914, p. 8.

You may gather how little personal animosity exists, and how anxious our people are to demonstrate the possession of that culture which expresses itself in kindness and chivalrous courtesy from the fact that the King's train was held up at the beginning of the week to allow German wounded instant access to the military hospital to which they had been sent. The King afterwards visited the wards and spent some considerable time in friendly chat with these same German wounded. Public opinion here would have been shocked if the King's train had taken precedence of the wounded, or if he had failed to express sympathy with them in their suffering.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, Appleton ended his letter expressing the 'hope that it will be possible to resume our joint efforts to secure real liberty, equality and fraternity'.¹¹⁰ Legien wrote again in December, 'hoping that [they] may soon again be able to speak of "peace on earth"' and requesting Appleton's help in sending German literature to German trade unionist prisoners of war held at Frimley.¹¹¹

Appleton wrote back, but he chose not to print his response. This omission may have been because he did not save a copy, but the carefully orchestrated nature of the display of these letters perhaps displayed that Appleton had said something a little too friendly and not patriotic enough. Instead, the chain of correspondence switches to a dialogue between Samuel Gompers and Appleton, in which Appleton informs Gompers of his continued friendship with Legien. The strain was beginning to show; although there was 'very little bitterness or anti-German feeling' on behalf of the management committee wrote Appleton, there had been adverse 'opinions expressed that [he] had to combat' in other quarters of the labour movement.¹¹² Set against Appleton's earlier invocation of von Bernhardt and Treitschke, expressing his own innocence was perhaps a little disingenuous, but the lines of communication were still at least friendly. Indeed, *Justice* reported on a dinner hosted during the previous month, in which Appleton stated that 'no one would regret this war more

¹⁰⁹ Annual Report 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/15.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

than Legien.¹¹³ However, this grace was short-lived, and the letters soon reflected the increasing animosity of patriotism that followed the intensification of war.

In early 1915, some national representatives met to discuss the future of the International Federation of Trade Unions. Appleton and Leon Jouhaux, leader of the French trade union federation, the Confederation General du Travail (CGT), wrote to Gompers to say that 'even though there was no sign of personal animosity towards the German people', the continuance of the German IFTU secretariat was deemed a risk due to the 'racial bitterness' that had been caused by the conflict, and therefore supported the decision to move the IFTU operation to a neutral country.¹¹⁴ In his 'anxiety to maintain, irrespective of personalities, the solidarity of [the] movement', they asked Gompers to communicate this request to Legien as a non-belligerent, and brought Jan Oudegeest, leader of the Dutch trade union federation, the Verbond van Vakverenigingen (NVV), into the correspondence chain in order to facilitate the posting of letters between warring nations.¹¹⁵ By April, Appleton was 'afraid [the war] is going to alter and affect rather seriously the international trade union movement' because he felt it was now impossible to stop the British people from becoming as 'bitter as the Belgians and the French'.¹¹⁶ Appleton expressed 'the burden of responsibility' in arranging the transfer of the IFTU secretariat away from Legien, and that he was still 'most anxious to act without prejudice or ill-feeling'.¹¹⁷

Referring to a letter from Appleton – that Appleton again chose not to include in the report – Legien thanked Appleton for his efforts in providing books to some German prisoners of war.¹¹⁸ He outlined his visit to British prisoners of war in German camps, and his being 'really astonished' at the good quality of parcels arriving for them.¹¹⁹ He added that 'it made [him] feel sorry for the Russian prisoners', who barely received anything.¹²⁰ Legien wanted to give Appleton 'a description of what he saw and felt at the camp', specifically to 're-establish and even strengthen the trade union bonds again', which indicates Legien's very clear desire for the international

¹¹³ *Justice*, 5 November 1914, p.1.

¹¹⁴ Annual Report 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/15.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

relationship to continue.¹²¹ Interestingly, Legien also mentions agreeing with an article in the *Federationist*, which stresses the connection that Legien still had with trade unionists in Britain; he was making it clear that he still wanted international solidarity to continue, and that he was not an outsider just yet.

Appleton's response was considerably cooler in tone. Regarding the treatment of prisoners in Britain, he was 'certain that these conditions are much superior to the conditions under which our [British] people are interned in Germany', whilst also questioning the 'honour' of some German officers that had recently been too casual with the parole rules.¹²² Appleton warned

Any efforts [of renewing international friendship] will be rendered more difficult by the methods of warfare adopted. The torpedoing and sinking of the "Falaba", the drowning of unwarned, unarmed, undefended, and helpless non-combatants, and the useless and senseless firing upon would-be rescuers is begetting a hardness of heart that certainly did not exist previously. In addition to this, there is in circulation amongst the medical profession a number of photographs alleged, upon what is regarded as unimpeachable authority, to have been taken on the actual battlefields in Belgium. These photographs are of Britishers who, having fallen wounded, were brutally mutilated. Amongst the cases there are pictures of disembowelled men, and men whose faces have been hacked and whose brains have been smashed out.'¹²³

By using such emotive descriptions of the visceral nature of war, Appleton was drawing a clear line between the men. Blame for the atrocities was not laid directly at Legien's feet, but Appleton's assurance that he would remain 'uninfluenced by these stories' is undermined by his display of them in this report.¹²⁴ Indeed, he admits that his feelings are influenced by them, in that they have 'filled [him] with sadness, because [he] cannot hope that we shall, much longer, be able to keep out of our people's minds the idea of vengeance which attempts to find expression in reprisals'.¹²⁵ If he truly did not want solidarity's 'spirit' to be 'jeopardised' by these

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

events, he would not have reprinted them.¹²⁶ Instead, by now Appleton's motives regarding internationalism were much more driven by his own personal patriotic feeling, or his overriding desire to at least appear patriotic, as he manoeuvred his influence towards the alienation of German trade union representation.

Two days later, on the 23rd April, the friendship between Legien and Appleton was over. Legien had discovered that, unbeknownst to him, Appleton had published Legien's letters in the *Federationist*. Appleton's association with Legien, a high-profile German member of parliament and trade unionist, was something that Appleton felt he needed to qualify, and he did so by publishing his correspondence in a bid to 'prove' that his patriotic feelings regarding the war had superseded his feelings of international solidarity and friendship.

Legien's response was to attempt to convene a conference between all leaders regarding the issue of moving the IFTU secretariat to a neutral country so that the decision was democratic rather than at the behest of the British, French and American representatives only. His letter ended with a barb – 'it need scarcely be pointed out to the officers of the affiliated National Centres that in view of the conditions under which the conference is to meet, this publication should not be made public' – that signalled his annoyance at the publication of his letters.¹²⁷ Indeed, publishing the request to not publish the letters, shows at best a disregard for Legien's wishes and feelings.

Legien wrote to Gompers the following April to admonish the efforts to move the IFTU secretariat to Switzerland, blaming the representatives for being 'led astray' by erroneous news reports that Legien had used the IFTU's resources to support the German war effort.¹²⁸ In Legien's view, it would not matter which country the IFTU operated from, but he was worried that 'the International Federation will never acquire any power of action if... confidence [in it] should be lacking'.¹²⁹ He resorted to the trade union safety net of bureaucracy, by questioning the validity of the decision due to the unofficial nature of the request; changes in policy would need to be subject to a motion, only arrived at through democratic processes, not a tangled

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

web of correspondence between former friends who now had strained and contested feelings of allegiance and solidarity with one another. 'It would not be a good start for our future co-operation', Legien argued, 'which, after the present war, will need much more energy, solidarity and especially more confidence towards one another'.¹³⁰

By April, Legien was also drawing a line under their friendship, in a letter to Gompers:

I take it for granted, of course, that the other National Centres also get the "Federationist" regularly, as well as I do myself. The whole question has after these letters are made public, lost its personally friendly character which you gave it in your letter of the 4th of March. The letter which was to be sent to you on the 11th of April mainly contained my personal views on the matter, but now I feel compelled to first consult my friends. This, of course, will take some time, but you will hear from me on the matter as soon as possible.¹³¹

Legien was being clear that, through the muddying of effects of patriotism and shifting feelings of solidarity, neither Gompers nor Appleton appeared on his list of friends.

Oudegeest, seemingly hopeful of a reconciliation and a return to friendly international camaraderie, attempted once again to act as a messenger in order to bring about the 'the unity, nationally and internationally, of the trade union movement of all countries'.¹³² He expressed regret at the 'the bitterness which has come into existence... between the labourers of the belligerent nations', and disappointment that the IFTU could not simply wait until 'sentiments can take [their] normal course again' after the war was over.¹³³ He attempted to convene a conference in Amsterdam, so that Legien, Appleton and other national trade union representatives could discuss the matter personally. Appleton was not to be persuaded:

Dear Oudegeest, I am in receipt of your letter... Legien has not appreciated the difficulty of carrying out his suggestion for a Conference in Amsterdam.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

Legien is not in a position to appreciate the bitterness which has been engendered in Great Britain, and, I think, in France also, by Germany's utter disregard of the Hague Convention and the usages of civilised warfare. Poisoned wells, poisoned trenches, and the infamous murder of helpless non-combatants have created a new spirit. ... today, there is a cry for vengeance. To-day the papers are publishing photographs of the little babies who were drowned as a consequence of the attack of the Germans upon the unarmed "Lusitania". ...to attend any Conference at the present moment would be to outrage the feelings of a people overwhelmed, not only with horror, but it a determination to punish.'¹³⁴

Appleton was using emotive imagery and language to bolster his display of patriotism not only in his communication with national leaders, but to further entrench British trade union solidarity against the enemy state. There was no real issue regarding travel, especially as the following year Appleton invited Allied international delegates to their conference, and again in 1917, so his hint of that excuse does not stand up to scrutiny.¹³⁵ More importantly, he was aware by this point that his letters would be useful as part of his patriotic public writing in the *Federationist*, and he wanted his British readers to feel collective outrage against Germany because it would in turn create a collective feeling of solidarity against the enemy. Oudegeest was 'very sorry indeed that... endeavours to come to one line of conduct with [Appleton]' had failed, as he had 'hoped... that the relations in our International would suffer no damage on account of increased feelings of bitterness'.¹³⁶ For Appleton, along with Gompers and Jouhaux, a need for public patriotic displays of feeling had developed faster and stronger than the existing bonds of friendship could weather.

The IFTU, as predicted by Legien, continued to not be needed throughout the war, and the issue of its leadership paled into insignificance as the war dragged on. Divisions amongst the warring nations were very much mirrored in the schisms between national trade union leaders, as factions consulted each other but did little

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Prochaska, *History of the General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 144.

¹³⁶ Annual Report 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/15.

by the way of policy creation.¹³⁷ The GFTU annual reports continued to describe feelings of outrage, horror and disgust at German conduct, and hopefulness, righteousness, and glory at the British effort.

Expressions of patriotic feelings had drastically and irrevocably changed the network of friendship and international solidarity between the GFTU and other national leaders, which continued to have an impact in terms of the IFTU leadership when the war was finally over. Conflict had crushed all the countries involved, to the extent that the international movement had to be rebuilt from scratch. Although Prochaska characterised this episode as more of an unfortunate struggle that Appleton found himself in the middle of, closer examination of this period shows that it is much more the case that Appleton seized the opportunity to display his patriotism for his own gain, and probably in the furtherance of the GFTU's standing.¹³⁸ As he wrote in the *Federationist* in 1913 that he wanted the GFTU to be 'the head centre for the spread of actual facts and information concerning trade unionism', he clearly had lofty ambitions for the part that the GFTU should play in the labour movement. His choice to display the chain of correspondence made a clear statement of patriotism, the disregarding of his problematic friendships, and a justification for his conduct on behalf of the GFTU membership.

When viewed through the expressions of patriotism, the decision to display the correspondence in the *Federationist* becomes crucial in understanding the path of international trade unionism both during and after the war. Once peace negotiations had begun, representatives of American, Belgian, Bohemian, Danish, German, British, French, Dutch, Luxembourgish, Norwegian, Austrian, Spanish, Swedish and Swiss national trade union organisations met again in Amsterdam to settle the re-establishment of the IFTU. The nationalistic patriotism stoked up by conflict had not yet dissipated, with the Belgian representatives giving, according to Appleton, 'a painful and profound' account of their suffering after 'the failure of the German trade unionists to effectively arrest the brutalities and deportations perpetrated by the German authorities'.¹³⁹ Wanting German trade unionists, however effective or powerful they were, to admit any real blame for the actions of the military was driven

¹³⁷ Prochaska, *The General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 144.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹³⁹ Annual Report 1920, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/20.

by patriotic allegiance rather than an appetite for restoring solidarity, but it certainly cast a shadow over the entire proceedings.

Prochaska characterised Appleton's account of this conference as 'moderate and conciliatory', but if conciliation was truly his aim, there were far better ways to conduct his position during the conference. He was unimpressed that Legien refused to apologise on behalf of Germany's military, remarking that his responses were neither 'logical, nor convincing – nor did he appear repentant', but after one of the Austrian delegates expressed 'profound regret for all the sorrows and losses' after accepting responsibility for the war, Appleton felt that 'the Conference manifested a disposition to accept the spirit of the declarations made'.¹⁴⁰

However, the following day, Legien and seven other German delegates submitted an amendment, which Appleton felt was due to their being 'afraid of their Press', which 'at once revived suspicions, and the fear that Germany was not sincere.'¹⁴¹ Although Appleton felt that their amendment was for the purpose of rousing up doubts and suspicions, it is not clear if that actually was the case. Indeed, the amendment was not even included in the report. It is likely that this casting of Legien as the only remaining belligerent figure simply served Appleton's choice of narrative regarding the whole affair. That afternoon, Appleton was elected as the President of the new International Federation of Trade Unions, and it was likely that he was anxious to disregard any of his own culpability in the loss of international solidarity. As has been explained earlier in the chapter, Appleton's position alongside other British labour leaders was now utterly precarious. His claim to being the voice of British internationalism was one of his last claims to relevance.

Conclusion

Hostility for the GFTU was both something it experienced and something it caused. Smillie, acting in the interests of his own federation but also perhaps at the quiet behest of those around him that felt that the GFTU were not quite the organisation they had set out to be, manoeuvred effectively and efficiently to force the GFTU out

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

of the Joint Board. The way the GFTU framed this experience in their reports was full of hurt and shock, and it was something that Appleton never forgave. By the time the world was moving on the war, and the labour movement was looking towards building a consensus for what working people needed during a time of rebuilding, the GFTU were also considering where exactly they could fit in. Their last grasp on the IFTU was one such way of retaining prominence, but the entire endeavour fizzled out soon enough. The GFTU had to look towards its domestic duties for a reason to carry on.

For Beck and Legien, hostility was something expressed by the GFTU. The hostility shown towards Beck grew gradually and was perhaps more a symptoms of the GFTU's inability to change certain machinations of war, like the interment program. However, for Beck, the closing of the door to a life he was only just starting to build with his wife must have been a painful experience that does not seem to have been mitigated as much as it could have been by the GFTU. The GFTU itself was also a casualty of its response to international conflict; and Appleton lost a key friend and ally in Legien. The period after 1918 was one of confusion, anger and exclusion for the GFTU, as Appleton and his management committee struggled to define its purpose. The following chapter looks at the waning years of the GFTU in the interwar period, and shine a particular light on the role of women, through the lens of 'exclusion'.

Chapter Five: Exclusion

'I do not think it would be right for the men here, who have spent their lives in the movement, to allow a statement that female labour is not represented, to pass.'¹

- James Crinion, 1918

Introduction

In 1920, Barbara Drake published *Women in Trade Unions*.² It was the first survey of trade unionism amongst women, and it illuminated the long-hidden role that women had played in the labour movement. It specifically showed the ways in which their activism and agency had been excluded from the male-dominated world of trades combinations, friendly societies, craft unions and general unions. With an exclusive focus on women, her book laid down a historiographical gauntlet that failed to find a new champion for decades.³ The generations of labour historians that followed her largely ignored the presence of women in trade unions until the feminist turn of the 1970s and 80s.⁴ In *An Introduction to Trade Unionism*, G. D. H. Cole dismissively remarked that women had never been 'deeply interested in trade unions, or so much influenced as men by notions of class solidarity'.⁵ E. P. Thompson barely mentioned women at all in his oft-quoted quest to 'rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver... from the enormous condescension of posterity' that launched *The Making of the English Working Class* into the historiographical canon.⁶ In 1960, Asa Briggs and John Saville published an edited

¹ Proceedings and Reports July 1918 – June 1919, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/13.

² Barbara Drake, *Women in Trade Unions* (Labour Research Department, 1920; reis., London: Virago Press, 1984).

³ Notable exceptions include G. D. H. Cole, *Trade Unionism and Munitions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923) and J. Ramsay MacDonald's *Women in the Printing Trades* (London: P S King Publishing, 1904). However, these were highly specialised volumes on specific trades, and did not seek to explore the role of women within the wider advances made by the trade union movement.

⁴ For more information on the feminist turn in labour history, and particularly within trade union history see Barbara Taylor, 'The Men are as Bad as their Masters...': Socialism, Feminism and Sexual Antagonism in the London Tailoring Trade in the 1830s', in Judith L Newton, Mary P. Ryan, and Judith R. Walkowitz, eds., *Sex and Class in Women's History* (London: Routledge, 1983) pp. 187-220; Cynthia Cockburn, *Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change* (London: Pluto, 1980); Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

⁵ G. D. H. Cole, *An Introduction to Trade Unionism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1954) p. 234.

⁶ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 5th Edition (London: Penguin, 1991) p. 12.

collection of essays in commemoration of G. D. H. Cole and his significant (if highly gendered) contributions to the study of labour history. This volume, *Essays in Labour History*, did not contain any references to women in its index, although there was one reference to the Women's Provident League.⁷ A second volume followed eleven years later, and although it contained a chapter written by Margaret Cole, women as workers or trade unionists made scant appearances within the pages.⁸ Henry Pelling's *History of Trade Unionism* only found space to mention women seven times, despite spanning nearly 150 years in its first edition.⁹ Ross M. Martin's *TUC: The Growth of a Pressure Group 1868- 1976* contains a paltry six pages of references to women in its index; perhaps a reflection on the lack of women representatives at the TUC, but also showing a lack of curiosity regarding women's input in the movement from this generation of labour historians.¹⁰

So far, this thesis has mostly continued the same unfortunate approach to labour history taken by Cole, Pelling and Martin.¹¹ I have not relegated women to the last chapter by choice, although excluding them from earlier chapters was a deliberate part of the methodological design. This study has so far excluded women because the GFTU mostly excluded them; it cannot, therefore, illuminate women through the lens of the GFTU in the ways in which they deserve to be illuminated. Of the twenty-six annual conferences that appear within the period covered by this thesis, only three saw women delegates seated alongside their male counterparts.

Understanding how and why women were kept out of many unions is an important but neglected part of the story of organised women workers; this chapter will balance the lack of women in its pages by telling the story of their exclusion. Finding absence

⁷ Asa Briggs, and John Saville, eds., *Essays in Labour History Vol I* (London: Macmillan, 1967).

⁸ Asa Briggs, and John Saville, eds., *Essays in Labour History Vol II* (London: Macmillan, 1971).

⁹ Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).

¹⁰ Ross Martin, *The TUC: Growth of a Pressure Group* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

¹¹ The feminist turn of the 1970s and 1980s did much to counter the dominant white male-focused study of labour history, and work on the wider domestic sphere of working class experience led to new focuses on women as mothers and wives, as well as their role in activism, community networks and politics. Although women in trade unions remains a much under-researched topic, there have been notable works on women workers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For further reading see include Lee Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work: Middle-Class Working Women in England and Wales 1850-1914* (London: David and Charles, 1973); Arthur Marwick, *Women at War 1914-1918* (London: Harper Collins, 1977); Angela John, ed., *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1880-1918* (Oxford: Wiley and Blackwell, 1986); Gregory Anderson, *The White-Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers Since 1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War 1* (London: I. B. Taurus, 1998); Cathy Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

in historical records requires a careful balance between highlighting the scant information that is there with the supposition of what could or should have been there.¹² This is not an easy task.

The first woman to be elected to the management committee was Hilda Unsworth of the Amalgamated Weavers' Association. She was elected to the post in 1970.¹³ The current vice-President of the GFTU (elected in 2021), Sarah Woolley of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union (BFAWU), is only the second woman to ever reach that office; Margaret Fenwick of the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers was the first, elected in 1976.¹⁴ Anne Spencer from the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers was the first and only President (also known as the Chairperson) in 1983.¹⁵ There has never been a woman elected to the post of general secretary of the GFTU. In 1949, the GFTU published a jubilee souvenir pamphlet to commemorate their fiftieth birthday, in which they celebrated their sense of 'true brotherhood' as the reason for their longevity.¹⁶ A brotherhood it certainly was.

Although solidarity, collective action, a sense of duty to help neighbours and friends, and a sense of community spirit are vital in the operation of trade unions and the formation of their emotional communities, this feeling of solidarity has not always been extended to certain groups. As women have been the largest 'group' that were kept out of the GFTU in their earlier years, this chapter will begin by outlining how and why many women found a less than warm welcome. As will become clear, the actions and attitudes expressed by leaders of affiliated unions towards women as members varied, which illustrates the changeable position of women within (or outside of) trade unions, particularly as they entered the workforce in greater numbers than ever during the first world war. Women also sought greater independent organisation on separate but equal terms to men as part of the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) and the National Federation of Women

¹² The most notable text on finding historical records of marginalised voices remains Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), although other useful texts are Sonia Di Loreto, 'Margaret Fuller's Archive: Absence, Erasure and Critical Work' 19: *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, (2018) and Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence and the Archive* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

¹³ GFTU Annual Report 1970, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/ 1/64.

¹⁴ GFTU Annual Report 1976, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/70.

¹⁵ GFTU Annual Report 1983, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/76.

¹⁶ Jubilee Souvenir 1949, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/10/35.

Workers (NFWW); the GFTU's reception of these organisations highlights their passing interest but ultimate indifference to their cause.

The fact that women were largely excluded from the GFTU means that there is relatively little material in the organization's records which clearly documents their experience or the Committee's views on women, and this undoubtedly creates problems for historians. Nevertheless, as the following section illustrates, some important insights into the GFTU's attitudes to women can be gathered from its short-lived publications *The Federationist* and *The Democrat* and the 'gaps' or 'silences' in the GFTU's minutes and reports are themselves often revealing on such matters.

Organising Women 1700 - 1918

Drake's *Women in Trade Unions* shed light on the trade union activism of women spanning two centuries.¹⁷ Drake was the niece of Beatrice Webb, and certainly seemed to have inherited the family zeal for the cause of social reform and the scholarly pursuit of tracking the ascension of the labour movement. Her book was published under the auspices of the Labour Research Department and with the support of the Fabians. As well as tracing the pathway of women's trade unionism, she also outlined the male-dominated and exclusionary environment that women were attempting to break into. Throughout the early 1800s little was heard of women in trade unions, but Drake highlighted the early scattered examples of activity. In most cases, the voices of the unionised women were lost; the only traces of them left were visible in the anxieties of men that fretted over women being their competition in the workplace. These anxieties were not wholly misplaced. Employers could easily use women as wage-saving fodder, capitalising on the desperation of families that needed whatever money they could scrape together, and shut the higher-earning men out in the process.¹⁸ This situation became particularly dire as previously skilled jobs became obsolete in the face of the factory-system; where once weavers and spinners could marry and depend on each other as a wage-earning and family unit,

¹⁷ Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*.

¹⁸ Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History* (London: Pluto Press, 1974) pp. 28-30.

they were now starkly separated by combined forces of de-skilling, mechanisation and capitalism.¹⁹ The social pressure to act as breadwinner forced men into competition with women for already meagre wages. This hostility was enforced through the widespread barring of women in trade unions, creating male-only spaces that further entrenched the gendered workplace barriers created by industrialisation.²⁰

This divide became particularly prevalent during the first world war, when men worried that their jobs had been permanently stolen by the leagues of women that swept into the factories whilst they were fighting at the front.²¹ This anxiety was particularly pronounced in craft-based unions, who pushed back against women who had not gone through union-controlled apprenticeship routes and were not paid hard-won union rates. Women were again equated to new machinery that was used to erode men's skills and wages or likened to blacklegs because they worked for lower wages and could therefore be used by unscrupulous employers as money-saving options.²² Nevertheless, as the practice of industrial relations had become much broader to include general as well as craft unions, so too had opinions about who could or should unionise. Some unions, such as the Workers' Union (which grew its female membership from 5,000 in 1914 to 80,000 four years later), had already welcomed women members before the war.²³ Others began to accept women members for the first time.²⁴ However, despite these changes, calls for women to be able to organise in the workplace were heard in tandem with calls to keep them out.²⁵ For example, the ASE refused to admit women members; they were so disapproving of women working in skilled jobs, and distrustful of any promises that

¹⁹ Sarah Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1980) pp. 16-31.

²⁰ Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers*, p. 27.

²¹ Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, pp. 45-56.

²² Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*, p. 5; Rowbotham, *Hidden From History*, p. 69.

²³ Cathy Hunt, 'Her Heart and Soul Were With the Labour Movement': Using a Local Study to Highlight the Work of Women Organisers Employed By the Workers' Union in Britain From the First World War to 1931', *Labour History Review* (2005) p. 168.

²⁴ For example, in 1915 the National Union of Operative Bakers, the National Union of Railwaymen, the National Union of Bookbinders and Machine Rulers and the National Silk Workers' Association opened the doors to their new women recruits, as did the Electrical Trades Union in 1916 and the National Union of Brushmakers in 1918. On the Electrical Trades Union were GFTU affiliates during this time. See Sheila Lewenhak, *Women and Trade Unions* (London: Benn, 1977) for further information.

²⁵ Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, p. 68-9; Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain since 1840* (London: Routledge, 2005) p. 132.

they would leave once the war had finished, that they only grudgingly entered into a representative alliance with the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) after they promised to withdraw all their members from 'men's jobs' once hostilities had ceased.²⁶

Women's struggle to unionise was multifaceted. In addition to the same hurdles that working class men had faced in order to be recognised as workers with a right to fair pay and conditions, women all too often had to also struggle against men for the same rights. Convincing the masculine world of trade unionism that women should be unionised and were not a threat to the hard-won work-place rights of men was a difficult task. High-profile organisers such as Mary Macarthur (1880-1921), Margaret Bondfield (1843-1953) and Mary Quaile (1886-1958) took up that challenge, and did so in various ways with the GFTU.²⁷ Macarthur, a middle class daughter of a draper, was a trailblazer of women's unionism, and was particularly notable for her work leading the National Federation of Women Workers from 1906 until they merged with the National Union of General Workers in 1920.²⁸ Bondfield was a similarly high profile trade unionist and politician, starting out as a member of the National Union of Shop Assistant, Warehousemen and Clerks (NUSAWC) before becoming the first woman elected to the TUC executive committee in 1918 and the first female chairperson in 1923, and one of the first three women Labour MPs in the same year.²⁹ Inspired by Bondfield, Quaile became active in the National Café Workers' Union in Manchester, before working for the Manchester and Salford's Women's Trade Union Council (MSWTUC) until they merged with the men's organisation in 1919. Of these three women trade unionists, it was Quaile that had the closest association with the GFTU, because she was elected to the executive board of the Approved Society of the General Federation of Trade Unions in April 1912 and helped to run their insurance provision for many years.³⁰ Mary Macarthur was also involved in the insurance section, but for a briefer time.³¹ It is unfortunate that there

²⁶ Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, p. 72.

²⁷ Cathy Hunt, *Righting the Wrong: Mary Macarthur 1880-1921, the Working Woman's Champion* (Birmingham: West Midlands History, 2019) pp. 34-7

²⁸ Angela V John, 'Mary Macarthur [married name Anderson],' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2004) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30411>.

²⁹ Phillip Williamson, 'Margaret Bondfield' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2004) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/31955>.

³⁰ As noted in the previous chapter, the Approved Society was run separately from the GFTU.

³¹ Annual Report 1913, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/13.

are not as many records of the Approved Society as there are for the main GFTU office, as this makes their work there difficult to uncover.

Although the GFTU's first annual report recorded that Mitchell had been instructed by the management committee to correspond with the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL), a pressure group that supported the creation of trade unions for women, it was with the vague aim of 'better[ing] the conditions of women workers' rather than seeking any formal connection.³² It may have been on the initiative of Curran, who had supported efforts to unionise women and was married to WTUL organiser Marian Barry, but the reports of these earlier years are vague so it is unclear exactly who on the management committee pressed for a connection. There are scant references to any joint efforts between the two organisations in the minutes of the management committee or the annual reports, so there does not appear to have been much in the way of tangible action on behalf of women in the earlier years of the GFTU's existence. However, in 1905 Mitchell reported to the annual gathering that he wanted to

bring to your mind the work which is being so well and heroically done by the Women's Trade Union League. To go no farther back than the last two or three months, we find that Miss Macarthur has, almost single-handed, grappled with great movements in Dundee, Brechin, Paisley, and Belfast. In the face of immense difficulties, with little money, and at very considerable personal risk, the women connected with the league have been in the van of battle, fighting the fight which is really ours. We have pursued a safe and cautious policy, and have no intention of making violent departures; but much work requires doing, and we have reached an age when more is rightly expected from us, to this expectation we should rise.³³

Perhaps then, Mitchell recognised that the cause of organising women was worthwhile, important and valuable to the movement as a whole, and had recognised that the GFTU was in a good position to assist women workers in obtaining fair working conditions.

³² Proceedings and Reports July 1900 to June 1901, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/1.

³³ Annual Report 1905, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/5.

As previously noted, craft unionists in particular tended to be much more suspicious and hostile towards the idea of accepting women as members, because of their reliance on skills protectionism as a way of mitigating risks during trade depressions. However, the rising influence of new unionism and general unionism in the late 1890s opened the door to a growing consciousness of universal rights as workers for both men and women.³⁴ As an organisation with a significant craft union section, it is perhaps not surprising that there was a dearth of support for women's unionism at the GFTU itself. Women's activism was visible in high profile cases of industrial action, such as the 1888 Bryant and May match girls strike, but other less publicised disputes by previously unorganised women also swept the country during the latter part of the nineteenth century.³⁵ For example, between 500 and 600 Dundee Jute workers struck over a 5% advance that they said should have been 10 in September 1888, whilst around 700 women and girls marched out of the Clark and Son's tobacco factory in Liverpool to protest over a proposed loss of half a day's pay on Saturdays only eight days after the match girls won their fight in London.³⁶ Despite the lack of national attention, these localised strikes point to an undercurrent of collective action among women.

A few men also began to take notice of this rising display of female defiance: Terence A Flynn, an organiser of the soon-to-be-GFTU-affiliated Amalgamated Society of Tailors told the WTUL at their 1892 meeting 'that the women should be allowed to work out their own political and social questions for themselves just the same as men are doing now'.³⁷ Once he became general secretary two years later, they began accepting women members and changed their name to the Amalgamated Society of Tailors and Tailoresses in 1901. Although there does not appear to have been any concerted effort to increase the representation of women in the management of the union, they were notable for being so explicitly welcoming of women in their title. However, the GFTU did not seem to think it was important to

³⁴ Rowbotham, *Hidden From History*, p. 61.

³⁵ The strike of the poorly-paid and highly exploited young women working at the Bryant and May factory has been viewed as a turning point in the fight for the organisation of women workers. See Louise Raw, *Striking a Light: The Bryant and May Matchwomen and their place in history* (London: Continuum Publishing Corporation, 2011).

³⁶ 'The Dundee Jute Spinners' Strike' *Glasgow Evening Citizen* 4 September 1888, p. 3; 'Another Women's Strike' *Tamworth Herald* 28 July 1888, p. 8.

³⁷ Mr Flynn, Amalgamated Society of Tailors, Annual Meeting, *Women's Trade Union Quarterly Report And Review*, 18 January 1892, p. 9.

recognise such an overt show of support for the tailoresses; they continued to call the union by their old male-only name for nine more years in all their reports.³⁸ Although it is difficult to say if that was a deliberate choice, it is important to note that the GFTU encouraged mergers, amalgamations and federations as part of their mission statement, so they were not strangers to the regularity of trade union name changes. In the context of their apathetic approach to representing women, this omission is telling. Further, as Prochaska's account lacks any meaningful consideration of the clear absence of women at the GFTU, and in particular of the reasons behind their absence, this thesis adds considerable depth to not only an understanding of the GFTU itself but also the general environment for organised women during this time.

The WTUL, previously known as the Women's Protective and Provident League, had been founded in 1874 by Emma Paterson (1848-1886) after she gained knowledge and inspiration from the similarly titled American organisation for women.³⁹ As Christine Collette surmised, even though British women were active in the co-operative movements, in localised trade unionism and in political groups such as the ILP, they rarely found opportunities to influence policies or become active members of committees.⁴⁰ This led to the need for dedicated women's spaces, alongside but not a part of the mainstream, exclusionary and male-dominated labour organisations. The WTUL was not a trade union organisation itself, but rather a group of mainly middle-class women that sought to aid and support the creation and maintenance of trade unions for women, and then later to help them gain entry to existing organisations that had hitherto prevented female membership. The organisations they fostered were deliberately modelled on male craft unions; they focused on avoiding strike action, providing benefits and maintaining rather than increasing wages because this was thought of as the model that would flourish the fastest.⁴¹ Paterson's emphasis on emulating the very organisations that excluded the women she wanted to represent was often met with criticism, particularly from Clementina

³⁸ They finally referred to the union by their proper title for the first time in their 1910 Annual Report (Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/10).

³⁹ Norbert Seldon, 'Emma Paterson [nee Smith] (1848-1886)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2004) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/21529>.

⁴⁰ Christine Collette, *For Labour and For Women: The Women's Labour League 1906-18* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) pp. 25-30.

⁴¹ Theresa Olcott, 'Dead Centre: The Womens Trade Union Movement in London 1874-1914' *London Journal*, 2, 1 (1976) p. 36.

Black, who was eventually elected as secretary of the WTUL after Paterson died. A socialist and friend of the Marx family, Black took the view that more direct action was needed for women to gain control over their industrial rights, and she eventually resigned from the WTUL after she chose to publicly support the 1888 matchgirl strike.⁴²

Writing three years after Paterson's death, and despite her clear disagreement with Paterson's methods, Black nevertheless valued the earlier work of the WTUL and acknowledged that their successes were due in no small part to the dedication and practical ground work laid by Paterson in the founding years of the organisation.⁴³ Essentially, the early years of the WTUL were less of a clear success, but more of a chance to learn through trial and error exactly how womens unionism could operate. Black, and other detractors of Paterson such as Lib-Lab politician Henry Broadhurst, pointed to the successes of more militant unions such as the Leicester Society of Seamers and Stitchers that organised 3000 women during a strike in order to show that the gradualist and non-confrontational approach of the WTUL needed to change in order to make more tangible advances for women workers.⁴⁴

After Paterson's death in 1886, Lady Emilia Dilke (1840-1904) took over the presidency of the WTUL and acted on some of the proposed changes to the direction of the organisation. Dilke, a wealthy art critic and active social reformist, devoted much of her life to improving conditions for working class women, particularly those stuck in the sweated trades.⁴⁵ When she died, Mitchell asked the GFTU management committee to donate £25 towards a memorial fund for her in recognition of the 'magnificent and untiring work' she had done, noting that the fund would enable the WTUL to have a permanent headquarters that would be free from rent.⁴⁶ Therefore despite the lack of explicit engagement or formal affiliation, the GFTU were at least aware of the WTUL and approved of their work. After discussion at the general council, where there were 'many expressions of appreciation' for her

⁴² Janet Grenier, 'Clementina Black (1853-1922)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2004) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/37196>.

⁴³ 'Women's Trade Unions' *Dundee Evening Telegraph* 11 November 1889, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Olcott, *Dead Centre*, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁵ Hilary Fraser, 'Lady Emilia Francis Dilke (1840-1904)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2008) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32825>.

⁴⁶ Proceedings and Reports June 1904 – July 1905, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/4.

work, an increased sum of £50 was decided upon after a vote of 42 to 9 in favour.⁴⁷ There is no record of why nine of the delegates did not wish to support the WTUL in their memorial fund – perhaps they simply thought it was too much money - but general objections to and distrust of women's' trade union organisation may well have been a factor.

The extent to which women were unionised generally varied depending on locality and trade, In the textile industry, in particular, union involvement amongst women was extensive, even if they lacked input in the running of the unions. Drake, although admitting that the gendered spaces in which meetings were held were exclusionary to women and that if any woman wishing to enter would need 'a little courage...even to stand for election', still lamented 'the attitude of women [as being] one of indifference'.⁴⁸ However, given the sheer opposition to women that even the cotton trade unions had, it seems probable that there was little encouragement to women to seek out leadership positions in their unions.⁴⁹

As many trade union meetings were still held in public houses, women were socially barred from attendance, and the voting systems generally reflected entrenched notions of homosocial friendship networks that would have given any prospective woman a mountain to climb just to secure nomination. Although there are few direct references to the management committee's perception of women, there is some evidence of how individual members of the committee approached the issue of unionised women, and these go in some way to explaining why women were not actively encouraged to be part of the GFTU. One such example is Joseph Cross, a member of the management committee from 1910 until his death in 1925, whose dealings with women attempting to unionise in his trade show how he may have been resistant to women at the GFTU.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Drake, *Women in Trade Unionism*, p. 61.

⁴⁹ For example, of the 79,000 members of the Amalgamated Association of Card and Blowing Room Operatives in 1918, 60,000 were women. Similarly, 175,000 of the 225,000 Northern Counties Amalgamated Association of Cotton Weavers were women.

‘Men officials were seriously alarmed’: Women outside of the GFTU

Joseph Cross (1859-1925) was general secretary of the Northern Counties Amalgamated Weavers’ Association from 1902 until his death. His society affiliated to the GFTU in 1907.⁵⁰ Although he had a considerable presence in local Lancashire politics, grew his union membership from 88,000 to 224,000 by 1921, attended the TUC as a delegate for a quarter century, and served as GFTU chairman from 1919-21, he has received hardly any historical or biographical attention.⁵¹ The census record for 1911 show that he was living in Blackburn, Lancashire with his wife Sarah, who had been a cotton worker, and four of their five children.⁵² Earlier records of the household show that Cross was working as an insurance agent by the time he was in his thirties, after having started life as a cotton weaver, and that his mother and father were living with them whilst working as a general domestic and a cotton weaver.⁵³ Their eldest son Henry, born in 1884, had left home at some point between 1901 and 1911, and had also left the family trade of cotton weaving for carpentry.⁵⁴ Cross appears briefly in Edwin Hopwood’s *History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry and the Amalgamated Weavers’ Association*, which gives a broad overview of the organisational history of the trade union but does not provide any further biographical information on Cross or his family.⁵⁵ However, using contemporary newspaper reports it is possible to highlight some of his actions as a labour leader and those of another equally obscure trade unionist, Nellie Keenan. The press reports concerned their argument over who was better able to represent the unionised cotton workers of Salford.

⁵⁰ Annual Report 1910, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/10.

⁵¹ ‘Mr Joseph Cross, Blackburn’ *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 13 January 1925, p. 9; There is no record of him in either the Dictionary of Labour Biography or the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

⁵² Arthur, their second child, was born in 1894 and became a carpenter like his older brother. Joseph (born 1897) and Margaret Isabella (born 1899) were listed as school pupils, but their youngest child James’ (born 1902) occupation was blank. It could be assumed he would be at school, as he was nine years old, but it is not made explicit in the record; ‘Joseph Cross’ (1911) Census return for 192 Lambeth street, Blackburn, Lancashire (RG14PN2517) www.findmypast.co.uk, accessed 30 July 2022.

⁵³ ‘Joseph Cross’, (1891) Census return for Randolph street, Blackburn, Lancashire (RG12, folio 166, p. 42), www.findmypast.co.uk, accessed 30 July 2022.

⁵⁴ ‘Joseph Cross’ (1901) Census return for 207 Pringle street, Blackburn, Lancashire. (RG13, folio 123, p. 36) www.findmypast.co.uk, accessed 30 July 2022.

⁵⁵ Edwin Hopwood, *A History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry and the Amalgamated Weavers’ Association* (Amalgamated Weavers Association, 1969).

This public argument with Cross is one of the very few times Keenan appears in the press, despite her work in setting up and maintaining her union. Her name appears briefly in Elizabeth Crawford's *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland: A Regional Survey*, because she was one of the members of the North of England Society for Womens Suffrage (NESWS), along with Eva Gore-Booth and Christabel Pankhurst, who resigned from the anti-militant NESWS after they failed to support Pankhurst's direct action at a October 1905 Liberal meeting held by Sir Edward Grey in 1905.⁵⁶ Although Keenan clearly rubbed shoulders with the middle-class campaigners that ran the WTUL and the NESWS, she was from a far humbler background.

In 1862, Mary Ellen "Nellie" Keenan was born in Dukinfield in Cheshire.⁵⁷ Her earliest years were spent surrounded by thousands of families like hers that relied on either one of the seven cotton factories or the coal pit that put Dukinfield on the map after the rapid industrialisation of the early 1800s.⁵⁸ Her father John was an iron turner and her mother Esther worked variably in the cotton trade and as a housekeeper. At some point around during the 1870s, the family moved to Salford, possibly chasing better job prospects during the economic depression. Nellie was one of six children who survived to adulthood (two had died), and all worked at some point as weavers or tailors. By 1901, Nellie was thirty-nine years old, living in a tiny, crowded home with five other family members, and working as a cotton weaver just as she had since she was a child.⁵⁹ They lived on Oldfield road, which stretched from the bustling Salford docks, over the constantly humming railway lines crawling with tightly packed freight trains, right up to the crescent of the river Irwell. There was an iron works on their road, so it is possible this was where her father worked, although there were many similar businesses that dotted the adjoining streets and riverbanks.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland: A Regional Survey* (London: Routledge, 2006) p. 6; Pankhurst and fellow suffragette Annie Kenny, were convicted and imprisoned for interrupting the meeting and for assaulting the police officer that removed them from the building. For further details see June Purvis, 'Pankhurst, Dame Christabel Harriette', *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2004) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35376>.

⁵⁷ 'Mary Ellen Keenan' (1881) Census return for 154 Oldfield road, Salford, Lancashire (RG11, folio 92, p. 16) www.findmypast.co.uk, accessed 20 July 2022.

⁵⁸ 'Duddon - Duncton', in *A Topographical Dictionary of England*, ed. Samuel Lewis (London, 1848), pp. 96-102. *British History Online*, www.british-history.ac.uk/topographical-dict/england/pp96-102, accessed 8 August 2021.

⁵⁹ 'Mary Ellen Keenan' (1901) Census return for 154 Oldfield road, Salford, Lancashire (RG13, folio 57, p.6) www.findmypast.co.uk, accessed 20 July 2022.

Nearby factories and mills producing chemicals, soaps, dyes and paper clogged up the air surrounding the rows up rows of tightly packed workers' houses. It was a hard, monotonous life, marked by constant poverty, illness and deprivation.

By 1902, Keenan had been spurred to action. Having joined the Manchester and Salford Women's Trades Union Council (MSWTUC) and the WTUL, she spoke to as many women weavers in her area as she could and helped to form the Manchester and Salford Powerloom Weavers Association.⁶⁰ This was done with the blessing of William Wilkinson (1850-1906) of the Northern Counties Weavers' Amalgamation, who had contacted the MSWTUC to request help in organising the female workers in the trade and to offer his financial support for the task.⁶¹ Following two years of steady growth, the MSWTUC relinquished control, and the weavers elected Keenan as their general secretary on a salary of 25 shillings per week.⁶² After running the union independently for five years, she was invited by Joseph Cross to a meeting with the much larger Amalgamated Weavers' Association, in order to discuss a possible affiliation. Keenan and her members found the proposals less than enticing:

It was arranged that the committee should be asked to receive a deputation from the amalgamation, to lay before them the benefits to be derived from joining that body. On September 24th [1907] Mr Cross and Mr Bell met our committee, and in the course of his remarks Mr Cross told us quite bluntly that if we decided against joining the Amalgamation his executive intended to organise an opposition to us.⁶³

This blunt threat backfired, as the women steadfastly refused to join, both on the grounds of financial requirements (the women would have to pay extra in membership fees to meet the Amalgamation's high bar of expectation) but also seemingly on principle. It transpired that the women had approached the Amalgamation seeking affiliation as early as 1903, shortly after Cross had taken over as leader, but had been rebuffed on account of their rules allowing for sick pay

⁶⁰ Drake *Women in Trade Unionism*, p. 62.

⁶¹ Manchester and Salford Womens' Trade Union Council, 4 March 1902 Council Minutes, www.mswtuc.co.uk/content/March-4th-1902, accessed 20 July 2021.

⁶² Manchester and Salford Womens' Trade Union Council, 7 June 1904 Council Minutes, www.mswtuc.co.uk/content/June-7th-1904, accessed 20 July 2021.

⁶³ 'Trade Union Rivalry in Salford District' *The Factory Times* 17 July 1908, n. p.

(almost unheard of in textile unions) and their low membership fees.⁶⁴ The larger Amalgamation saw no need to have this small organisation on their books if they only charged 2d per member and gave such fanciful promises as sick pay.

Despite these low odds the Manchester and Salford Power Loom Weavers' Association began to thrive, and eventually, according to Drake, 'the men officials were seriously alarmed' by their growing success.⁶⁵ So in 1907, the Amalgamation wanted to have them affiliate as a Salford branch, but did not reckon with Keenan and her members deciding that if they had done so well without paying the higher fees to the Amalgamation for four years, then there was no wisdom in rushing to join them and relinquishing their autonomy. They demanded a seat on their executive council as a condition of their affiliation; Keenan's launch into trade unionism went hand in hand with her socialist commitment to women's enfranchisement, and she was not at all disposed to relinquish her hard won organisational work to a committee of men.⁶⁶ 1907 was also the year that the Weavers' Amalgamation affiliated to the GFTU; unfortunately, as no management committee minutes survive for that year, it is impossible to know if the subject of the Salford women was ever discussed.⁶⁷ It would have been unlikely, as the Salford Power Loom Weavers' were not GFTU affiliates and therefore not under their protection from poaching.

The action of Cross, a soon-to-be member of the management committee and eventual GFTU chairman, does indicate a certain attitude towards the independence of some trade unionist women. Firstly, they were so small an organisation that they were not deemed worthy of assistance. This was a lack of solidarity couched in a business decision, because had the women been allowed to affiliate and therefore access assistance in requesting higher wages, the would-be Salford branch of the Amalgamation would have eventually paid in more to its umbrella organisation. Instead, they were excluded, and only when they, despite the odds, showed considerable autonomous success. Even then, they were not invited to join, but were

⁶⁴ Drake, *Women in Trade Unionism*, p. 60.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁶⁶ She appeared alongside Eva Gore-Booth on speakers' platforms many times in the early 1900s, and seems to have held similar suffragist beliefs about trade unionism and political representation of women being entwined subjects. See 'Joint Women's Franchise Demonstration', *Justice*, 19 January 1907, p. 12.

⁶⁷ Annual Report 1907, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/7.

instead subjected to coercion and threats. Had the Salford Weavers' been men, would Cross have taken this action?

In June 1908, Cross carried out his threat of starting a rival organisation and poaching Keenan's members. Her response in the local newspaper was blistering.

Dear Mr Cross. I hear that you have taken names of a number of Haworth's weavers, with a view to forming a branch of the Weavers' Amalgamation in Salford. May I call your attention to the fact that there is already a flourishing trade union among these weavers. In view of the resolution passed at the Trades Congress, condemning the establishment of rival trade unions in a district already organised, and the ante-trade [sic] union character of such a policy, we feel sure that your organisation must realise the mischievous and futile nature of such an attempt. As regards the present association of Power-loom Weavers, Manchester, Salford, and District, it is a registered trade union, established in 1902, and recognised by the largest employers in the district. We are the more surprised at the action of your committee because the late Mr Wilkinson was most sympathetic with the union's early efforts, and even spoke at a meeting we had in Salford. Yours faithfully, Nellie Keenan.⁶⁸

Keenan's astute knowledge of trade union practices, and articulate defence of her members' standing and rights as a collective, firmly contradicts G. D. H. Cole's assertion that women were disinterested trade unionists. Of course hers was one voice and her activism cannot be taken as indicative of all women – indeed, it is clear that many women did not (or could not) take as active an interest in the running of unions – but her strong defiance on behalf of her members in the face of a much more powerful organisation bears witness to the existence of a much stronger spirit of solidarity than has previously been attributed to women like Keenan.

Cross's attempt at the exclusion and then eradication of the Salford Weavers' was backed up by anonymous voices in the press, who admonished Keenan for not accepting that 'the Amalgamation must have no rival unions', only to be met with her strong refutation that 'without [the Amalgamation's] kind permission no trade union

⁶⁸ 'Trade Union Rivalry in Salford District' *The Factory Times*, 17 July 1908, n. p.

can exist'.⁶⁹ The connection with Cross's actions and the GFTU is not clear during this dispute, given that Keenan's society were not under their protection despite the threat coming from a GFTU affiliate. However, there are other clues regarding how the GFTU, or rather Appleton, felt about women workers in other areas. In 1913 the GFTU started their monthly newspaper *The Federationist* which ran until 1919 until it was clear that it was being run at a loss.⁷⁰ Appleton held editorial control, and decided to reinvent the paper as *The Democrat* using his own personal finances.⁷¹ No longer constrained by needing to represent the GFTU rather than his own opinions, Appleton published articles that shows a disdain for women as workers. Most notably, in June 1919 there appeared a cartoon of a soldier admonishing a woman for taking work 'for the sake of pocket money' that should be given to men returning from the war.⁷² This echoed John Ward's previous assertion that women should give up their war work as soon as men returned home once the first world war ended. The environment of the GFTU then was not one which Cross would have been uncomfortable in. The misguided intervention by Cross (and perhaps the stubbornness of Keenan) eventually led to the dilution of local trade unionism amongst the Salford weavers, with such bitterness of feeling engendered by the struggle for control that the two rival unions had less women members between them than they had only a few short years before.⁷³

Although Keenan's efforts were commendable, they were nevertheless hardly indicative of the general situation. Despite the assistance given by the WTUL and the MSWTUC in founding the Salford Weavers', they could not ensure their longevity in the face of such overt hostility and exclusion by larger organisations. The labour historian Keith Laybourn was doubtful about how effective the WTUL were in their earliest years; they opposed strike action, and were thought of more as middle-class reformers than genuine activists, and so could they really push for better representation of women? The numbers were stark. Despite women being at least 30% of the total workforce, they only numbered 7.5% of all trade unionists by 1901.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ 'Salford Weavers and the amalgamation' *The Factory Times*, 31 July 1908 p. 8.

⁷⁰ Annual Report 1918, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/18.

⁷¹ Annual Report 1919, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/19.

⁷² 'What is Tea for you is Bread for me' *The Democrat* 18 June 1919, p. 9.

⁷³ Drake, *Trade Unionism and Women*, p. 62.

⁷⁴ Keith Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism c. 1770-1990*, (Stroud: Allen Sutton, 1992) pp. 77-8.

After twenty-five years of activism by the WTUL, those were indeed uninspiring numbers, but Laybourn's pessimism is not entirely justified. The WTUL were contending with an economic climate that also saw male trade union membership fall by as much as 50%.⁷⁵ Despite the WTUL's lacklustre performance, women were at least beginning to carve out a presence within the male-dominated sphere of trade unionism. The Webbs credited Paterson as 'the real pioneer of modern women's trade unions', in recognition of the importance of these early foundations for working women.⁷⁶ After all, without the foundations being laid, women like Keenan would not have had a place to build from. These were small, but important, steps.

Despite the actions of Cross and the general difficulty that women faced when trying to form or join unions, there were still those that made significant inroads. Women such as Mary Macarthur did play roles in the GFTU in various ways. However, the rules regarding strike benefit allowance from the GFTU could also be left to interpretation when it came to women workers, as the management committee struggled to see the distinction between a sympathetic strike by women, or women refusing to be blacklegs against their fellow affiliates. The following section explores the brief appearance of women in committee meetings, benefit application notes, and at the records of the annual councils.

'Omit "male"'⁷⁷: Women at the GFTU

The ways in which the GFTU excluded women varied. Often, requests and ideas from women were simply not listened to. At other times, the records of the GFTU were used to deliberately hide women, in much the same way as they were deployed to hide accusations of misconduct on behalf of the general secretary.⁷⁸ Dissent against exclusionary practices and requests for greater representation were summarily silenced by the ways in which minutes could truncate conversations recorded for posterity. For example, when Mrs Fawcett and Miss Campbell from the

⁷⁵ Norbert Seldon, 'Emma Paterson [nee Smith] (1848-1886) *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2004) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/21529>.

⁷⁶ Beatrice Webb and Sidney Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (London: Andesite Press, 1920, 2015) pp. 336-7.

⁷⁷ General Council Meeting Records 1913, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/6.

⁷⁸ See Chapter Two: Friendship.

National Federation of Women Workers asked if there could be a woman on the GFTU management committee in 1918, Appleton's response was dismissive:

Mr Appleton: Their failure to secure nomination is purely due to a lack of business aptitude. They have had notices the same as the others.

Mrs Fawcett: Unless the women are prepared to make a fight they are left in the background altogether. It is all very well to soft soap the women when they have the vote, but you ought to have watched their interests before that.⁷⁹

The NFWW likely did have the same paperwork issued as the other delegates, but that was not the full scope of the request. Miss Campbell chimed in to suggest a co-opted post on the committee specifically reserved for a woman, which, she argued, was a sound request considering that the textile unions, Boot and Shoe Operatives and their own organisation represented a large number of women workers. This would have helped the women, relative newcomers in the GFTU, who had not had time to build up the friendship networks within the masculine environment of the organisation. James Crinion was affronted at the suggestion that women had been ignored by the management committee:

I do not think it would be right for the men here, who have spent their lives in the movement, to allow a statement that female labour is not represented to pass. Long before the women's federation was ever thought of there were organisations in existence that were working for the industrial upliftment of women until they have them on an equality with male workers.⁸⁰

As the leader of the Card and Blowing Room Operatives, Crinion clearly felt that he had adequately served his female members by acting in their interests rather than giving them the opportunities to represent themselves. This paternal attitude of protective masculinity was a common feature of the craft unions, and here it was used to say that the women were well-looked after without the need to hear from them directly. Crinion's trade union had 60,000 women members (out of a total 79,000) in 1918, but no female organisers or representation on their executive

⁷⁹ Proceedings and Reports July 1918 – June 1919, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/13.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

committees.⁸¹ However, the words of Crinion and Appleton were not the only methods used to silence Mrs Fawcett and Miss Campbell; once Crinion had admonished the women for suggesting that they had not been adequately represented, the conversation is abruptly finished with that decisive phrase: 'This concluded the business of the first day's Conference'.⁸²

Attitudes and feelings by male workers towards their women counterparts varied from enthusiastic welcomes to outright hostility. Despite the importance of men's attitudes in the workplace to women's experiences, it was often the feelings of the labour leaders that truly dictated whether or not women were allowed to join or take active roles in trade unions. This was equally varied, and often changeable. Although Will Thorne had given his support to the WTUL in 1912 at their meeting in Newport, he also privately said that 'women do not make good trade unionists and for this reason we believe that our energies are better used towards the organisation of male workers'.⁸³ Thorne was never elected to the GFTU management committee, but he was a frequent delegate and popular labour leader in his own union and in parliament, so his support would have been valuable for women attempting to increase their representation within industrial politics.

There is also the issue of private and public opinion, and how they would likely differ given the context of particular political climates. What is surprising is that Pete Curran did not make many interventions on behalf of women. He married Marian Barry in 1898, who was a former tailoress and an organiser for the WUTL.⁸⁴ Before her marriage, she had a gruelling schedule of meetings that took her to every corner of the country in order to assist women in their efforts to unionise their workplaces. Her efforts at her first official meeting as WTUL organiser translated into 200 girls forming a union at their vinegar and pickle factory in Gloucester in 1896, so she was clearly a very persuasive and capable trade unionist. Curran certainly shared his wife's views, as he frequently spoke on women's political rights and desire to unionise during his short parliamentary career, but he may not have felt that the

⁸¹ Drake, *Trade Unionism and Women*, Table II – Analysis of Principal Trade Unions.

⁸² Proceedings and Reports July 1918 – June 1919, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/13.

⁸³ 'Women and Trade Unions' *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 4 September 1912, p. 8; Theresa Olcott, *Dead Centre: The Womens Trade Union Movement in London 1874-1914*, p. 43.

⁸⁴ Christine Collette, 'Marian Curran [Nee Barry]' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University, 2016) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/53244>.

GFTU was the right organisation to spearhead the organisation of women. There are only scattered hints as to this feeling of hostility towards women as trade union members, so there are no conclusive answers to be found as to why women were so unwelcome at the GFTU. However, scattered hints can be drawn together to create at least a partial picture of the kind of environment that women attempted to push against in order to find a seat at the table.

Women workers would often have different reasons for striking than their male counterparts, which left the management committee to decide whether they would be entitled to claim financial support. In 1912 the GFTU were suffering heavy financial losses caused by the Great Labour Unrest, and so decisions regarding benefit applications were being more carefully scrutinised. At October's meeting, the management committee noted that 840 members of the NFWW were about to strike, and decided that they would be eligible for benefit.⁸⁵ In 1914, 23 NFWW workers were granted benefit for being locked out after 'refusing to do men's heavy work', which shows that the GFTU had to make a judgement call about the type of tasks they thought women could and should do.⁸⁶ However, claims against women workers were also granted, as in the January 1916 case of the 963 Clothiers' Operatives that refused to work with women workers 'without wages or terms of employment being settled'.⁸⁷ It may have been that they struck to ensure the women could be given fairer pay, but it is not clear.

In April 1917, 12 members of the Amalgamated Union of Upholsters were granted GFTU benefit for striking in protest at women working with them permanently as opposed to just for the duration of the war.⁸⁸ Even amongst affiliates then, there was a sense of disparity and incompatibility regarding the needs of female and male workers, which the GFTU rules did not help to unblur. Its own strike benefit rules were designed by men with male workers in mind, which was not ever adequately revisited to consider the different ways in which women worked. The closest that the GFTU got to amending the rules in order to cater more for women workers was in 1913 after Mary Macarthur had gone through the Insurance Section's rule book with

⁸⁵ Management Committee Minutes October 1912 Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/54.

⁸⁶ Management Committee Minutes July 1914 – June 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/75.

⁸⁷ Management Committee Minutes July 1915 – June 1916, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/76.

⁸⁸ Management Committee Minutes July 1916 – June 1917, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/77.

her red pen. In total, she proposed nineteen amendments in one meeting, including the simple but effective instruction to 'omit "male"' from the eligibility criteria.⁸⁹

The first woman to appear on the delegate list for a GFTU annual conference was Mary Macarthur. Her union, the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) had affiliated to the GFTU in 1907, and so her name appeared as head of the 1,900 women she had brought into the organisation. In the Proceedings and Reports, the GFTU printed a list of general secretaries' addresses alongside the name of their organisations and membership numbers. All the male delegates, of which there were at least ninety-six invited members excluding the fraternal delegates and representatives of the York trades council hosts, were listed with either their full names, initials or their elected-titles (there were nine Councillors). There was not a 'Mr' in sight, as had been the convention since the reports began to be published in 1900. However, Mary Macarthur was written down as 'Miss'.⁹⁰ This is not to say that being 'Miss' was seen as derogatory, but it was a small act that marked her as *separate* from the other delegates. It is not clear why she was not simply 'M. Macarthur' in order to fit with the clear convention of the reports. Her name written as 'Miss M. Macarthur' clearly marked her out as a woman, and therefore different to the other delegates.

Despite 1907 being the NFWW's first year as affiliates, it does not seem as if Mary Macarthur attended that conference. During the Proceedings and Reports, her name is not mentioned once, which would have been quite unusual for the outspoken leader of the NFWW. There is a possibility that her name and her input was omitted from the report, but that is doubtful. Her attendance at other meetings shows that she never shied away from giving her opinions and using her voice to represent her members. It is likely that she was invited but could not attend. The following year, Macarthur was replaced by Miss Louise Hedges (again, the only delegate listed with her marital title) as that year's delegate, but finally she joined the GFTU for the Approved Society's annual meeting in Cork in 1913 as previously mentioned.⁹¹ Her

⁸⁹ General Council Meeting Records 1913, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/3/6.

⁹⁰ This tradition persisted: When Hilda Unsworth, the first woman to be elected to the management committee, was nominated for the position, she was listed as 'Miss H Unsworth, JP' whilst all the male nominees were listed simply with their first initials.

⁹¹ Annual Report 1918, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/8; Annual Report 1913, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/13.

association with the strike fund part of the GFTU was less straightforward because the records are missing for the years that she may have attended. Once again, the absence of records acts to hinder how well the presence and contribution of women at the GFTU can be understood.

Miss Frew vs the Carpet Weavers'

The first woman that did speak at a GFTU annual conference on behalf of her own trade union was Martha Frew.⁹² Born in 1875 or 1876, Frew had spent at least some of her younger years living with her sister Elizabeth, her sister's husband Stephen Carty, and their young children, in the small weaving town of Strathaven in south Lanarkshire. She may have picked up her weaving experience using a hand loom as a child, but by the time Frew was in her 20s she was a power loom weaver in a silk factory. She became active in the Co-operative Women's Guild at an early age, before becoming general secretary of the Dunfermline Textile Workers' Union, which she created after the local male-orientated unions failed to appreciate the importance of unionising the women workers.⁹³ Frew also became interested in local politics, and became the first woman Councillor in Dunfermline in 1919; she held this position on a socialist platform until 1949, making her the longest serving councillor for the area.⁹⁴ She also served as a local magistrate – again, the first woman to do so in the local area – in the 1930s, and then as a Police Judge.⁹⁵ Details of her life are scant, despite these significant political and industrial achievements. Despite this, her contribution to the local community was so valued, that in 1949 the Children's Committee of Dunfermline Town Council decided to name a new children's home after her.⁹⁶

The year after she became a Councillor, Martha Frew attended the 1920 GFTU general council in Leamington. As it was the GFTU's 21st birthday, the tone of the meeting was reflective, with hints of muted celebration. Their loss of a central

⁹² As previously noted, the National Federation of Women Workers' was the first to send a female delegate, but they represented an umbrella organisation.

⁹³ 'Ladies in Public Work', *Dundee Courier* 7 September 1939, p. 4; General Council Meeting Minutes 1920, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/14.

⁹⁴ 'Socialist Councillor to Retire' *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 24 September 1949, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Ladies in Public Work', *Dundee Courier* 7 September 1939, p. 4.

⁹⁶ 'Proposed Name for Fife Home', *Fife Free Press and Kirkcaldy Guardian*, 1 January 1949 p. 5.

position as national labour representatives and their slow growth in membership were both reasons to be dejected. However, there was still much to celebrate. In his welcome speech, Councillor W Donald congratulated the GFTU on their three major achievements of that year: they had achieved their highest yearly income, their greatest amount in benefits payments, and (much to their relief) recorded the highest aggregate membership of 1,480,108.⁹⁷ As chairman, Joseph Cross from the Northern Counties Weavers' Association reflected on the reasons for the GFTU's creation in his welcome speech.

When we think of the reasons which led to the formation of this federation, and consider its history, perhaps we should feel some regret that we have not been able to reach the ideal or the standard or the altitude which was expected on its own origination. I think that one principal cause of bringing this federation into existence was the disastrous result of the engineers' strike....

That fear and doubt caused the trade union Congress to take into account the position of labour in those days.⁹⁸

A reflection on the feelings of fear and doubt caused by the unexpected defeat of the engineers, and how those worries translated into hope for greater financial unity, shows how important the feelings surrounding the dispute were to the trade union movement, and also how much the memory of that previous failure persisted and shaped their thoughts on their current situation.

Of course, the path of the GFTU had not been easy. Cross went on to assert that the GFTU may have been able to grow further and stronger had they not been subjected to 'not quite friendly' criticism from other kindred bodies.⁹⁹ He was referring directly to the expulsion of the GFTU from the Joint Board. Despite feeling this loss so keenly, there was still much work to be done for their affiliates; their reports of the 1920s showed a constant stream of demarcation arguments, poaching accusations and concern over working conditions. To many of their affiliates, the work of the GFTU was very much of value. The side-lining of the GFTU on the national arena did not always reflect the opinions of smaller, localised trade unions that needed their help.

⁹⁷ Their highest ever membership figure was achieved the following year with 1,583,058.

⁹⁸ Proceedings and Reports July 1920 – June 1921, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/14.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

It was exactly this that brought Martha Frew to Leamington in 1920. Since the previous year, her branch – referred to as the Dunfermline Textile Workers' Union of the Scottish Textile Workers' Federation – had been complaining that some of their members had been relentlessly poached by the Scotch Power Loom Carpet Trades Association.¹⁰⁰

Although many unionised women were found in the textile industry, as the experience of Nellie Keenan showed, this was not a site of universal or equal inclusive acceptance. Much like Keenan, Martha Frew spearheaded the Dunfermline Weavers' Union in 1915 because the women she worked alongside at the power looms were barred from joining the long-established Scotch Power Loom Carpet Trades union. Their male-only stance only began to wither when they saw the successful growth of Frew's union to a membership of nearly 3000 workers within their first few years of existence.¹⁰¹ In June 1918, the Power Loom Association decided to change their rules and allow women to sign up. Despite Frew's union having won significant wage increases and improvements to conditions back in 1916, she was dismayed to find that some of her members had gone over to the Carpet Trades union having been brought over by the male members of their families. Martha Frew, supported by the Scottish National Textile Workers' Federation's general secretary James Nairn turned to the GFTU for mediation.

From the reports of the GFTU's investigation, the reasons for mediation were quickly established. The Power Loom Association routinely either failed to communicate with the Dunfermline Weavers' Union or the GFTU, or simply put forward easily refutable claims as to why they should be allowed to take members.¹⁰² Their first report was conducted in September 1919, which showed that the National Federation of Textile Workers did indeed have a prior claim to the members that had been poached. The GFTU's decision was that the two organisations 'make an attempt to reach a mutual

¹⁰⁰ Unusually, Frew's workers were not being poached by a much larger organisation. At this time, her Dunfermline workers number around 2250, a not insignificant proportion of the 5877 in their Scottish Textile Workers Federation, whereas the poaching society only stood at 2961 members. See Annual Report 1920, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/20.

¹⁰¹ Proceedings and Reports July 1920 – June 1921, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/14.

¹⁰² During a conference between the two societies arranged by the GFTU in September 1919, Frew's union put forward several items of documentary evidence that refuted the Carpet Trades' claims to having secured advances women workers. In one of these cases, the Carpet Trades had even attempted to claim credit for a wage advancement that had occurred two years before they first allowed women to join them.

settlement'.¹⁰³ The report was followed up with a statement that the Power Loom Association wrote to the GFTU to confirm that they had allowed women to join from December 1915, which went in some way to absolve them of their problematic recruitment styles. However, the National Textile Workers' were clearly unimpressed by the GFTU's soft touch, and threatened to secede in January 1920 if the GFTU did not take a harder line with the Power Loom Association.¹⁰⁴

The very act of holding a joint conference and apportioning blame would usually be what was needed in order to have the trade unions resolve their conflict, but as the Power Loom Association apparently did not abide by the GFTU's decision and did not respond to the Textile Workers' requests for further dialogue, it was understandable that the latter failed to see the value in the GFTU's intervention. Nevertheless, Martha Frew, alongside Councillor Heenan, Mr J C Hendry and Miss Oldham, attended a specially convened meeting with the GFTU management committee in order to discuss their reasons for secession. The GFTU listened to their concerns about the inefficacy of the GFTU's decision in September, but the report stated that 'the management committee had done everything it possibly could do; that if there was any fault of any delay the responsibility lay with the Scottish organisation' because they had not communicated their concerns over the lack of progress in the preceding months.

The GFTU's haughty tone showed their sense of authority. Indeed, acting as arbitrators was a central component of their remit, but how this was perceived by whichever trade union was on the receiving end of their judgements varied. In this case, Miss Frew and her Textile Workers' conceded that they had been hasty in their threat to leave the GFTU. Instead, they decided to stay, ultimately deciding that there was value in belonging to an organisation that had by now shown itself to be heavily geared towards the textile industry. Thus, they found themselves in Leamington in 1920, with Miss Frew arguing her case against the Carpet Weavers in front of the full GFTU general council.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Management Committee Meeting Minutes July 1919 – June 2020, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/80.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Proceedings and Reports July 1920 – June 1921, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/14.

Mediating between trade unions in dispute with each other was often a thankless task. Issues of demarcation, recruitment methods, and the undercutting of membership fees created hostile resentment that lasted for many years. On the surface, when affiliating to the GFTU, trade union agreed to abide by the rules of the GFTU. Rule 11, which the GFTU threatened the Power Loom Association with if they did not stop poaching from the Textile Workers', read as follows:

Should any difference arise as to the interpretation of these rules, the question in dispute shall be referred to arbitration. One arbitrator shall be appointed by the management committee, and one by the society or societies aggrieved. These two shall appoint an umpire and the decision given by them shall be final and binding.¹⁰⁶

This idea of a decision being 'binding' came with one persistent problem. Who enforced the 'binding' decision? The whole concept of affiliating to the GFTU and agreeing to abide by their rules rests on a sense of social obligation to abide by rules of fairness and democratic processes. However, if a trade union decided that the management committee's decision was unfair, or if they simply did not agree, then the consequences to their refusals to comply were simply not catered for in any meaningful way. When the rules were drawn up in 1899, and when they had been revised over the years, there simply was nothing to be done about any affiliates that did not abide by the management committee's decision except issue expulsions. Tempers would flare at the questionable conduct of some organisations, but ultimately there were two issues with the expulsion threat. Firstly, it was a very harsh display of control and admonishment that played into the hands of anyone suspicious that federation ultimately meant a loss of trade union autonomy. Many trade unions, and particularly craft unions, were proud of the decades of work that they had done to organise their own members, and did not want an aloof committee to exert too much control over their affairs. Secondly, expulsions hurt the financial health of the GFTU. The experience of the costly Great Unrest, and the growing concerns over post-war employment meant that throwing away membership subscriptions was a worrying prospect.

¹⁰⁶ Rule Book 1915, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/8/11.

These considerations coloured the debate surrounding Martha Frew's complaint about the Carpet Weavers' conduct. The problem of dignity was addressed by E Duxbury of the General Union of Association Loom Overlookers:

[The Carpet Weavers] are bound by the rules as long as they are in the federation, and it is their duty to be amenable to the rules... There is such a thing as the dignity of a large body to be kept up... If they will not walk over the bridge, then, in my view, they ought to fall into the water. We ought to assert our position.¹⁰⁷

The GFTU's authority relied entirely on the permission of its delegates, and deciding on exclusions required tact and diplomacy. When one organisation failed to abide by the rules, the others would be watching to ensure that the standards they adhered to would be the same for all within the federation. Those outside the federation would also be watching for cracks in authority. By 1920, the GFTU had plenty of detractors that could point both expulsions and failure to exclude as indications of failure depending on their line of argument. These considerations made any problematic arbitrations a much wider issue in terms of the GFTU's position as a representative body.

In Leamington, Martha Frew outlined the lack of progress that had been made since the GFTU had held their joint conference in 1919. She and her organisation had offered to discuss amalgamation, or to work more closely regarding membership and representation, but had been met with either cursory acknowledgements or stony silence. The debate over what to do next fell to the general council, as the management committee did not have the power to expel organisations without this prior approval. The motion that had been placed before the council was that the Scotch Power Loom Carpet Weavers be given another six months to comply with the management committee's decision (namely, that they cease poaching members and work constructively with the Textile Workers' union), but that they be expelled if they failed to do so. Leaders of other textile unions were critical of the Power Loom Association's methods, with GFTU chairman Joseph Cross criticising them for failing to show a 'feeling of good-fellowship' by poaching members, deliberately not

¹⁰⁷ Proceedings and Reports July 1920 – June 1921, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/14.

charging an entrance fee, and only moving in after seeing the success of Frew's organising efforts. James Crinion from the Amalgamated Card and Blowing Room Operatives protested strongly against the idea that they should 'put up with these people for six months' after they had so clearly flaunted the rules.¹⁰⁸ However, Charles Kean from the Wallpaper Workers' Union warned that the expulsion of this organisation would not stop the wider problem of poaching:

The question of poaching is constantly before us and there are sitting in this room now representatives, judging on these questions, of societies who have been as much poachers as anyone. (Hear, hear.) So what I'm going to suggest is, that as there is a question of amalgamation of all the textile workers, would it not be well for the executive of this federation to send an independent person down to the culprits to see if he could persuade them to take a more sensible view of the situation, rather than lose 4000, possibly, 6000 members?¹⁰⁹

The issue of poaching was clearly a common one, and the proposed expulsion of one society could not be permanent a salve to this perennial problem.¹¹⁰ Eventually the Power Loom Association remained defiant, and the GFTU were forced to expel them after their six months grace period had run out.¹¹¹

Conclusion

Although the GFTU's emotional community often led to the implicit exclusion of women, it was certainly not alone as a labour organisation that did not have a specific place for them. The historiographical dearth regarding the organisation of women that was outlined at the beginning of the chapter has been slowly melting away, and by illuminating both the methods of how women were excluded and the voices of those that somehow made it into the GFTU, this thesis is going some way

¹⁰⁸ Proceedings and Reports July 1920 – June 1921, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/14.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Poaching was not always treated with contempt. There were occasional jokes about societies stealing members from each other: at this 1920 annual conference, Mr Burt from the Scottish Federation of Power Loom Tenters joked that Mr Bell from the National Amalgamated Union of Labour would know more about poaching than him. The laughter was recorded in the minutes.

¹¹¹ Management Committee Minutes July 1921 – June 1922, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/2/82.

to assist that process. Notable leaders such as Mary Macarthur and Mary Quaile have rightfully been highlighted by historians seeking to uncover women's histories, but that is difficult to do when writing about an organisation that at the very least did not explicitly welcome women. Instead, through careful digging through external records such as newspaper clippings, voices of more marginalised women such as Nellie Keenan and Martha Frew become part of the GFTU's story. Juxtaposing their stories with the hints at an exclusionary attitude from prominent GFTU management committee members such as Appleton, Ward and Cross helps to paint a picture of exclusion and struggle for women wanting to become a part of the GFTU or to simply organise their workers.

Unlike Nellie Keenan, Martha Frew certainly bucked the trend by finding a way to become a part of the GFTU. Her small branch became an autonomous union and was affiliated to the GFTU until 1946 when her 400 members were absorbed into a larger textile amalgamation.¹¹² As previously mentioned, Frew was heavily involved in local politics, and served her community for many years as a Councillor. It is not clear when she died, but in 1951 the local council decided to name a newly built children's home after her in memory of her service.¹¹³ Her presence at the GFTU was also a quiet but effective way of laying the path for future women trade unionists to eventually join the fold.

¹¹²Annual Report 1946, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/46.

¹¹³ 'Dunfermline Plans for Young and Old', *Dundee Courier*, 1 September 1951, p.4.

Conclusion: Solidarity

'They dislike me, and I despise them'¹

- William Appleton

The emotional community of the GFTU

The GFTU was created by a wave of hope that closer unity would give greater strength to the labour movement, but it would prove difficult to truly bring all unions under one banner. After the initial idea of district offices failed to come to fruition, the functionality of the GFTU rested with a small committee of men rather than a truly representative body that could find consensus in every conflict. And conflict, as has been shown, did indeed become entwined with the GFTU. Despite this difficulty, their usefulness in disputes was abundantly clear to smaller unions especially, particularly in their earliest days: the Penrhyn quarrymen were sustained during incredible hardship by the GFTU's funds, which gave an important victory for solidarity despite the failure of the dispute. The small scale of the majority of the GFTU's disputes has often obscured the work they did to support workers in times of need. Throughout the period covered in this thesis, the GFTU paid out £1,164,767 and 7 shillings in strike benefit. In today's money, that equates to more than £53 million.² Without that support, an incalculable number of workers would never have obtained changes to their working conditions or wages. That hope for greater strength in unity embodied in their emblem, with all the obvious difficulties the GFTU faced in finding their place in the wider movement, must have had a profound impact on those needing to turn to strike benefit.

How the GFTU first established themselves was heavily reliant on the friendships that they fostered within the wider labour movement. Although it is possible to chart friendship networks through joint activism and using private papers as records of expressions of friendship, for the GFTU it is also possible to see how friendships were 'officialised' in their meeting minutes. The value placed on events such as retirements or visits from fraternal delegates was highlighted in their inclusion within

¹ 'William Appleton' *Nottingham Journal*, 15 August 1928, n. p.

² Annual Report 1926, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/26; Old Money Converter, National Archives, www.nationalarchives.co.uk/currency-converter, accessed 30 July 2022.

official documents, whereas the ways in which those official documents could also blur and obscure more scandalous events highlights the importance of the reports and minutes as a way of constructing the emotional community of the organisation itself.

When national sentiment swiftly shifted towards patriotism at the outbreak of the first world war, so too did the emotional community of the GFTU. This fundamentally changed their place within the labour movement as they pivoted towards staunch support of the government which was often in opposition to other trade union organisations. For serving soldiers and sailors, the GFTU's focus on patriotism and supporting the war effort brought life-changing wage rises that also helped the labour market cope with the influx of returning demobilised men. The GFTU's support helped to create the notion that military service could be a career rather than an interruption to a career. In particular Appleton's own trajectory from trade union leader to government advisor marked a turning point in his own place within the labour movement; this was fuelled in part because of his personal view and politics, but was certainly brought about by the patriotic fervour of the war.

As Appleton's own place within the movement began to change, so too did that of the GFTU. In the face of open hostility from the MFGB, the GFTU were forced to retreat after their ousting from the Joint Board. As the world of labour had moved on so quickly since their inception in 1899, the GFTU had to reconsider their very purpose as a strike fund administrator that did not speak to the majority of trade unionists. This was exemplified in their total absence from the general strike negotiations in 1926, and the angry reactions of their affiliates that expected but did not receive financial solidarity from them during the dispute. However, the GFTU were not simply passive victims of hostility; they were certainly instigators as well. Oscar Beck and Carl Legien fell victim to the xenophobic hostility caused by the war, but the choice to do this and the way in which it was supported through the words of the annual conference delegates indicates the presence, and indeed the pervasiveness, of hostility within the GFTU's emotional community.

Finally, the GFTU's exclusion of workers – particularly women – that it either could not help through a lack of affiliation, or would not help through a lack of will, also formed a part of their organisational identity. This was in part informed by the wider

exclusionary nature of trade unionism, but the ways in which the GFTU's minutes reflect this exclusion offer considerable insight into how certain people were kept out of workers' organisations. The emotional community was defined by women such as Nellie Keenan that had to fight against the very people that served on its management committee in order to run their own unions, because their experience indicated a prevailing attitude and sentiment towards women that indicates clear boundaries to the GFTU's expressions of solidarity. However, the nature of the GFTU as a committee as opposed to an organisation also leads to a complexity in understanding how rigid this emotional community was: in the case of Martha Frew, the GFTU was a welcoming place despite the exclusionary attitude of the affiliate with which her union had had such difficulties with.

It is the intricate way that individual personality and organisational identity intertwine that fundamentally underpins the emotional community of the GFTU. Although their affiliates number up to 1.5 million people, they did not construct the character of the organisation in any meaningful way. For many affiliates, the GFTU were likely just a line in their own trade union's report that detailed where their membership fees went to. If they were in dispute, then their much-needed strike benefits certainly brought the GFTU further into their minds, but other than becoming a delegate to the GFTU there were precious few opportunities to influence policies in any meaningful way. It was the people that were most active for the longest time on the management committee that truly constructed the emotional community of the GFTU. Their lives, experiences, political leanings and working environments all dictated what they wanted the GFTU to represent. Their biographical information has been crucial in understanding their influence on how the GFTU operated, because it aids in understanding how personal lives and experiences help to define public figures.

In much the same way, the emotions expressed in the GFTU records work hand in hand with the role of personality to further construct the emotional community of the GFTU. This emotions-based perspective offers a new opportunity for other similar organisations to gain further insight into the experience of trade unionism. As this thesis has demonstrated that how the management committee, the GFTU delegates, other labour leaders or workers excluded from the organisation *felt* about the GFTU can illuminate more about the organisation itself, labour historians can take a similar approach to organisational histories.

The continuation of the GFTU

Throughout the 1920s and 30s, the GFTU tried to find a new niche for itself by conducting reports on topics such as old age pensions, policies on industrial diseases, the potential for a 48-hour working week. They also investigated the new introduction of time-management systems – notably the Bedaux system – that were concerning trade unionists in the 1930s. This issue hit craft unions harder than others, because it led to strikes and over the changes from time rates to piece rates. However, it would be many years before the GFTU fully embraced its role as a representative not of British trade unionism, but of small and craft-based unions. Against a backdrop of a struggling economy and a decline of trade union membership in general the GFTU found it difficult to weather the interwar period. Appleton's views became no less contentious with age; in 1931, he was the only trade union leader quoted in the press as being against a rise in the dole rates.³ Their fall from grace had been so decisive, that they had to endure a humiliating motion that was debated at the 1934 TUC annual meeting: a delegate from the Typographical Association moved to levy 1d per member per week in order to provide a strike fund for any trade union in dispute. Consideration for a 'common fund controlled by the general body of the Trade Union Movement' was debated without any hint of awareness that the GFTU had been in existence for thirty-five years.⁴

George Bell, a former organiser for the GFTU took over the general secretaryship of the GFTU after Appleton's retirement in 1938.⁵ Also Appleton's tenure had perhaps created an air of resentment and misfortune, Bell was a likeable breath of fresh air.

³ Alice Prochaska, *The History of the General Federation of Trade Unions* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982) p. 189.

⁴ TUC Report 1934, www.unionhistory.info, accessed 20 July 2022; As a result, Appleton struck up correspondence with Sir Walter Citrine, President of the TUC, which resulted in a meeting between the two organisations in 1937. Appleton's bitterness - by this point a frequent element of his many newspaper articles and GFTU annual council speeches – was palpable as he listed the slights and grievances which he held to be the fault of the TUC's wanton neglect of the GFTU. There followed an uneasy and suspicious negotiation of how their working relationship could move forward, but ultimately Appleton found it impossible to reconcile his opinions with those of the TUC. By that point he was 78 years old; that particular old dog was not ready to learn any new tricks. He retired a year later, but not without a speech admonishing a recently seceded union for selfishness and greed, and publishing a pamphlet detailing the latest injustices that he felt that he had had to endure from other members of the management committee.

⁵ Annual Report 1938, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/38.

The GFTU then greeted the second world war with little influence but a large bank balance. They lent the government £10,000, donated an ambulance to the Red Cross, and devoted their attention to the effect of the war on the craft unions that they represented.⁶ Whilst the GFTU enthusiastically supported the Beveridge report, its implementation, and the creation of the welfare state policies under the Attlee government, it rendered the GFTU's interest in trade union-sponsored health insurance redundant. They maintained their strong connections with craft unions, and patiently oversaw an amalgamation between the previously separatist hosiery workers in the East Midlands into the National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers, and three small furniture unions into the Furniture, Timber and Allied Trade Union (FTAT). Despite their lack of national influence, they worked hard for the small number of affiliates that they did have: for instance, they successfully lobbied the government for extra food rations for the chain makers, due to the gruelling physical nature of their important war work.⁷

A feeling that they were just ticking by was never too far from the minds of the management committee in the 1940s, and there were frequent discussions about winding the GFTU down and dissolving altogether. Although a motion to dissolve in 1948 was lost by 21 votes to 7, the margin between aggregate membership numbers was 143,795 to 125,575.⁸ The main issue that prevented this was their financial strength after years of membership fees, a lack of strikes and the employment of a simple rota of staff. There was concern over whether former affiliates could lay a claim to the pot. However, the support for continuance also indicates the importance of the GFTU to the smallest of unions, who often felt that the TUC did not represent them and needed a formal connection to a national trade union organisation. From the late 1950s, the GFTU focused itself almost exclusively on representing these small unions and looked towards a new change of leadership in 1952.

Bell's successor was elected from one of the smallest of the unions affiliated at that time, the Card Setting Machine Tenters' Society, by the name of Leslie Hodgson.⁹ Under his leadership, the GFTU's monthly publication *The Federation News* took on

⁶ Annual Report 1940, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/40.

⁷ Quarterly Report June 1941, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/5/88.

⁸ Proceedings and Report July 1948 – June 1949, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/4/41.

⁹ Annual report 1952, Bishopsgate Institute, GFTU/1/52.

a new lease of life, and bolstered the connection that the GFTU management committee had with the individual affiliates.¹⁰ There was a new sense of flair, with articles on cricket, art and even an offering on 'Football and Culture' by Asa Briggs.¹¹ At this point in the GFTU's history, and away from Appleton's personalisation of the situation, the small and specialised environment of the GFTU felt less like ostracization from the wider movement, and more of a sanctuary from it. The pressing issues that affected the 36 members of the Teston Independent Society of Cricket Ball Makers' were often not of interest to the likes of the National Union of Miners, and the GFTU was a home suited to the needs of those craft unions. Hodgson's efforts to consolidate the GFTU's usefulness for small unions was exemplified by his decision to only approach unions with less than 5,000 members regarding their possible affiliation.¹² After arguably fulfilling this role since the first world war, the GFTU was finally officially the specialist home for craft unions in 1956, and they finally settled comfortably into the role that they are known for today.

Since then, the GFTU has been led by Peter Potts from 1978, Michael Bradley from 1991, and Doug Nicholls from 2012. There have been many changes to the ethos, purpose and indeed emotional community of the GFTU in that time, although a detailed analysis falls outside the scope of this thesis. Some initiatives – such as the education service that began with scholarship programmes in 1939 – have lasted until the present day, with a very successful Education Trust that advocates for trade union learning courses. As trade unionism continues to adapt to the changing environment of work, so too does our approach to researching and understanding labour history. This thesis has drawn upon the ideas of collective emotion and emotional communities to conclude that the longevity of the GFTU, despite the many obstacles laid down in its path both by external and internal factors, lies not in any 'success versus failure' narrative but in the willingness for the organisation and its leadership to move alongside an ever-changing labour movement. In adapting to the changing economy of twentieth century Britain, the GFTU was able to sustain a sense of solidarity through forging strong connections with their affiliates and other labour organisations.

¹⁰ The Federation News had been started under George Bell's leadership.

¹¹ *Federation News*, April 1955.

¹² Prochaska, *General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 226.

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