

‘SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SOUTH YORKSHIRE’:
ACTIVISM IN SHEFFIELD IN THE 1970S AND 1980S

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A thesis submitted to the
University of Birmingham
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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September 2015

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Abstract

This thesis explores the tensions present in left-wing projects of renewal in the 1970s and 1980s by examining the activism of one city; Sheffield. It finds that behind the ‘Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire’ lay a more complex set of relationships between activists from different movements, strands of activism, and local government. It sets out Sheffield City Council’s attempt at a new left-wing politics, its form of ‘local socialism,’ and explores how the city’s wider activism of trade unionism, women’s groups, peace, environmentalism, anti-apartheid, anti-racism, and lesbian and gay politics was embraced, supported, restricted or ignored by the local authority. Despite deindustrialisation and contemporary discussions of the decline of class politics, there was a persistence of class and a dominance of the labour movement in Sheffield. Unsurprisingly archival evidence, oral histories, and photographs point to tensions between class and identity politics. Yet, the focus of this thesis on how a number of new social movements and identity-based groups operated in one place, and its detailed analysis of the sites, methods, and relationships of activism has revealed the extent to which tensions existed, not only between class and identity, but between the different subjectivities represented in new social movements and identity politics.

Sheffield City Council aimed to build a new constituency of voters by embracing more radical causes and relating them to class politics. However, to avoid alienating voters, the Council kept a lid on more radical elements. To a certain extent the same movements were left on the periphery of the wider activist milieu as well, showing definite limits to left-wing solidarity. Whilst acknowledging that the politics of other cities need more analysis, this thesis shows how a vibrant, grassroots politics developed in Sheffield in the 1970s and 1980s but suggests that left-wing politics struggled to be cohesive even without the pressure of presenting a pragmatic front to voters. In this way Sheffield’s activism sheds light on the wider British left, showing the resilience of class-based politics and how popular notions of renewal were limited by conventions of solidarity.

Acknowledgements

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Matthew Hilton for his encouragement, patience and drive. His generous support and formidable knowledge helped keep this project on track as, at points, it threatened to sprawl across Sheffield. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with him. At the University of Birmingham, I have also benefited from the brilliant advice and warm words of Matthew Francis, Gavin Schaffer, Chris Moores, Simone Laqua-O'Donnell, Kevin O'Sullivan, Matt Houlbrook, Hera Cook, Ben White, Sadiya Qureshi, Corey Ross, Shirley Ye, and Chris Hill. I would also like to thank Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Helen Smith for their insights on various aspects of this work, and Helen for generously lending me a pre-release copy of her manuscript. I'm grateful to Gary Rivett, Adrian Bingham, and Mike Foley at the University of Sheffield for involving me in the Stories of Activism in Sheffield project. I would like to thank the project volunteers for their insights into Sheffield's activism and especially those who participated in my oral history interviews; for their time, stories, documents, and hospitality. I am immensely grateful to friends at Birmingham for their encouragement, conversation and for providing necessary distractions. My thanks therefore go to Amy Edwards, Saima Nasar, Jamie Perry, Eliana Hadjisavvas, Patrick Longson, Andy Jones, Rebecca Crites, Kelly Waterhouse, Sam Humphries, Bob Brown, Geoff Humble, Het Phillips, Holly Pike, Ellis Stacey, Laura Sefton, Rebecca Jones, Anna McCaskie, Dave Richardson, Rosalind Fursland and Katy Wade.

This project was made possible by an Arts and Humanities Research Council scholarship. The College of Arts and Law kindly provided further funding on occasion to cover conference attendance. I am especially grateful for the assistance provided during my research by the staff at Sheffield Archives and Sheffield Local Studies Library. Their efficiency, kindness and enthusiasm made my frequent visits productive and enjoyable. I'm also grateful to staff at the University of Warwick Modern Records Centre, the People's History Museum, the Feminist Archive North, and the Hall Carpenter Archives at the London School of Economics.

Finally, huge and heartfelt thanks must go to my family and friends who have kept my spirits up and endured my grumbling and neglect with immeasurable patience and understanding. Special thanks go to my friends Emma Godden, Nina Wale, Sophie Constantinou, Jeremy Woolley, Jenn Ramsdale, Polly Hofmann, Sophie Francis-Cansfield and Tim Grundy, and to Clare Doolan and Aaron Stapleton for being so generous with their time and their home. Amy

Edwards, Chelsey Miller-Brown and Carly Brown have done a fantastic job at keeping me both at and away from my desk. I am extremely grateful for the support provided by my sister Sophie Payling, my grandparents Ella and Jim Ilott and Jean Payling, and my aunt and uncle Lucie and Brian Martin. My partner's parents Julia and Peter Hood have been supportive and kind; providing me at times with a home away from home and a sturdy writing table. Without the steadfast support, past and present, given by my parents Sally and Duncan Payling, this thesis would never have come to fruition. My partner Callum Hood has known instinctively (and often before me) whether I've needed support or space and provided both without question. Without his encouragement and enduring patience, this project would have been a great deal more difficult, a lot less fun, and the thesis a shadow of what follows.

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List of Abbreviations

AAM	Anti-Apartheid Movement
ACT-UP	AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
ANL	Anti-Nazi League
APEX	Association of Professional, Clerical and Computer Staff
ASLEF	Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
AUEW	Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers
AYM	Asian Youth Movement
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BWRC	Black Women's Resources Centre
CHE	Campaign for Homosexual Equality
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
COHSE	Confederation of Health Service Employees
CP	Communist Party
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CSSB	Celebrated Sheffield Street Band
CVS	Council for Voluntary Service
FoE	Friends of the Earth
GLC	Greater London Council
GLF	Gay Liberation Front
GMB	General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trade Union
GRAW	Gay Rights at Work
GWM	Gay Workers Movement
IFM	Irish Freedom Movement
ISTC	Iron and Steel Trades Confederation
LGSM	Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners
MP	Member of Parliament
NALGO	National and Local Government Officers' Association
NF	National Front
NHS	National Health Service
NMUW	National Movement of Unemployed Workers
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUPE	National Union of Public Employees
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
NUT	National Union of Teachers
OWAAD	Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent
SADACCA	Sheffield and District African-Caribbean Community Association
SCAR	Sheffield Campaign Against Racism
SCCAU	Sheffield Coordinating Centre Against Unemployment
SCRE	Sheffield Council for Racial Equality
SDC	Sheffield Defence Campaign
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SFTC	Sheffield Federated Trades Council
SFTLC	Sheffield Federated Trades and Labour Council

SOA	Stories of Activism in Sheffield
SWP	Socialist Workers' Party
SYCC	South Yorkshire County Council
TGWU	Transport and General Workers' Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress
USDAW	Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers
UTU	Urban Theology Unit
WAVAW	Women Against Violence Against Women
WEA	Workers' Educational Association
WLM	Women's Liberation Movement
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union
WWCC	Working Women's Charter Committee
YCAAA	Yorkshire Campaign for Action Against Apartheid
YCL	Young Communist League

Introduction

Sheffield: A Radical City

South Yorkshire County Council and Sheffield City Council became known informally as the ‘Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire’ in the late 1970s. This name was first used mockingly by Conservative Councillor Irvine Patnick, but was then adopted willingly and with a sense of pride by those in the Labour Party and trade unions. By the mid-1980s it had been immortalised as a slogan and reproduced on badges made by Councillor Roger Barton to raise funds.¹ The term ‘Socialist Republic’ was meant as hyperbole at the time, but taken seriously it can be a useful concept in examining Sheffield’s activism as it was presented by the local authority.

This thesis uses the ‘Socialist Republic’ to explore left-wing politics in 1980s Britain. It captured a moment in Britain when the left was reaching out to new constituencies of voters in an attempt to combat Thatcherism. David Blunkett and Sheffield City Council embraced aspects of social movements in an attempt to build this new constituency, whilst continuing to use class as a uniting force. By framing identity and movement politics as traditional concerns, the Council tried to make them more attractive to working class voters, whilst keeping their radicalism in check. Peace was connected to coal mining through slogans such as ‘Mines Not Missiles,’ and became an issue relatable to everyday life. Sexism and racism were presented as exacerbating unemployment and disadvantaging family incomes. They became concerns to be rallied against by the majority. Blunkett wanted to win ‘hearts and minds’ back from Thatcherism, and invest them in ‘collective response[s]’ to the city’s

¹ Alan Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of the Socialist Republic*, (Sheffield, 1987), 53.

problems.² Whereas Thatcherism strove to make individualism ‘ordinary,’ Sheffield’s socialism attempted to do the same with collectivism. However, in trying to keep a lid on the more radical elements, Sheffield City Council denied certain activist movements space.

Behind the ‘Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire’ lay a more complex activist milieu. The labour movement had a long tradition in Sheffield, but by the 1970s it was starting to weaken under the strain of recession. Sheffield also had a strong radical tradition, which new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s had added to. These forms of activism interacted with each other and the Council, but tensions developed as certain movements held more sway than others. Left-wing politics in Sheffield struggled to be cohesive even without the pressure of presenting a pragmatic front to voters. In this way, Sheffield’s activism sheds light on the wider British left. Even with the rise of identity politics, class politics was still a prominent and connecting issue, but renewal based on class had its limits.

New Times: The ‘Crisis of the Left’ in the 1980s

The 1980s were a difficult decade for the Labour Party. They suffered successive General Election defeats, an erosion of their industrial base, and their allies in trade unions were vilified by politicians and the press. The leadership was criticised and there was disillusionment within the traditional left.³ It has been suggested that the two ‘central developments’ of the 1970s were the growth of rights-based movements and identity politics campaigning for formal equality for women and ethnic minorities, and deregulation and free market economics which led to greater inequalities in terms of wealth and class.⁴ The latter

² Martin Boddy and Colin Fudge, *Local Socialism? Labour Councils and New Left Alternatives*, (London, Basingstoke, 1984), 246.

³ Andy McSmith, *No Such Thing As Society: A History of Britain in the 1980s*, (London, 2010), 54; Mark Garnett, *From Anger to Apathy: The Story of Politics, Society and Popular Culture in Britain since 1975* (London, 2008), 7.

⁴ Thomas Borstelmann, ‘Epilogue: The Shock of the Global’, in Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, and Daniel J. Sargent (eds.), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), 354.

arguably became apparent in the 1980s as Thatcherism's commitment to monetarism had harsh effects. Unemployment rose above 3 million, and de-industrialisation ground down Labour constituencies.⁵ It has been claimed that this break in the post-war consensus led to a widening of the gap between rich and poor and also changed the social and cultural fabric of Britain.⁶

Some on the left saw this as a period of 'crisis,' but with the Labour Party in opposition there were opportunities to strategise and suggest paths back to power; to design a 'renewal' of the left. Stuart Hall identified the 'swing to the Right' in 1979, and called for a serious left-wing politics to counter it.⁷ He recognised that the rise of Thatcherism and the 'crisis of the left' were two sides of the same coin. Hall was not alone in identifying this 'crisis' or calling for renewal. In 1978, Eric Hobsbawm argued that Labour's decline had its roots in the structural changes of 1950s post-war capitalism, and that working class identity and solidarity had become fragmented and weakened.⁸ The same year Rowbotham, Wainwright and Segal published *Beyond the Fragments* which confronted the divisions within the left from a socialist-feminist perspective, and argued that many strands needed to be brought together to reshape the labour movement.⁹ In the journals *Marxism Today* and *New Socialist* there was widespread concern regarding the need for political 'renewal.'¹⁰ Many of the *Marxism Today* articles were subsequently published by Hall in collections *Hard Road to Renewal* and *New Times*.¹¹ These ideas culminated in Hall's Gramscian notion that

⁵ Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, (London, 1996), 272.

⁶ Stuart Hall, *Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left: The Hard Road to Renewal* (London, New York, 1988), 2; Paul Addison, *No Turning Back: The Peacetime Revolutions of Post-War Britain* (Oxford, New York, 2010), 260; McSmith, *No Such Thing as Society*, 298; Jeremy Black, *Britain Since the Seventies: Politics and Society in a Consumer Age*, (London, 2004), 176; Garnett, *From Anger to Apathy*, 6.

⁷ Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show,' *Marxism Today*, January 1979, 14.

⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Forward March of Labour Halted?*, (London, 1981).

⁹ Sheila Rowbotham et al., *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism*, (London, 1979). A shorter version was originally published in pamphlet form in 1978.

¹⁰ James Curran et al. *Culture Wars: The Media and the British Left*, (Edinburgh, 2005), 4; Hall, *Road to Renewal*, 11.

¹¹ Stuart Hall, *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s*, (London, 1989).

the left needed to form a ‘counter-hegemonic strategy’ that would come from acknowledging the ‘diversity of different points of antagonism in society; [and] unifying them... within a common project.’¹² Hall explained that ‘to construct a new cultural order, you need not to reflect an already-formed collective will, but to fashion a new one.’¹³ By hanging on to class politics, the left was clinging to an old collective will, and one that was not only old, but damaged. Hall recognised this in the fragmentation of class solidarity. He wrote that there was ‘no inevitable or guaranteed link between class origin and political ideas.’¹⁴ For Hall and his contemporaries, the renewal of the left lay in the ability to mobilise around something beyond class politics, such as identity politics, to create a viable ‘image of modernity’ and combat Thatcherism.¹⁵ These ideas were perhaps best articulated by Hall, but they were part of a general exploration of a new politics that was developing across Britain.

One area where these and similar ideas were being worked on was local government. Local authorities made attempts to combine class politics with elements of identity politics to develop distinctive and varied ‘local socialisms.’ These aimed to make local politics more democratic and develop ‘new ideas about the future of socialism.’¹⁶ Political scientists at the time identified common themes including the restructuring of local capital, decentralisation of local services and increased participation in provision by users, and positive action towards women, the poor, and ethnic and sexual minorities.¹⁷ It was practiced by councils dominated by the new urban left; which included new, younger councillors, party members, community workers and activists, and even local government officers, who were expected to be

¹² Hall, *Hard Road to Renewal*, 11, 171; Denis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left and the Origins of Cultural Studies*, (Durham, London, 1997), 255.

¹³ Hall, *Hard Road to Renewal*, 170.

¹⁴ Hall, *Hard Road to Renewal*, 281, 178.

¹⁵ Hall, *Hard Road to Renewal*, 209, 178.

¹⁶ John Gyford, *The Politics of Local Socialism*, (London, Boston, Sydney, 1985), 1.

¹⁷ Patrick Syed, *The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left*, (Basingstoke, London, 1987), 141. Gyford, *Politics*, 18.

sympathetic and committed to the politics of the councils.¹⁸ ‘Local socialism’ was an attempt by some Labour-led local authorities to gain mass support through new alliances whilst at the same protecting old ones. It was also *local*, and therefore differed depending on the political priorities of each area. Hall recognised his ‘image of modernity’ in the actions of the Greater London Council, but also expressed his frustrations with the left’s inability to embrace ‘race’ and gender throughout the 1980s.¹⁹ This thesis looks at Sheffield’s ‘local socialism’ to trace the development of these ideas in a city where class was very much still the leading force in politics.

Dworkin suggests that Hall’s writings ‘exemplify the British cultural Marxist tradition at its best,’ placing them in a wider, longer term project of renewal and revival of socialist ideas.²⁰ Hall and *Marxism Today*’s “New Times” may not have been wholly ‘new,’ but the articles represented a culmination of this thinking and reflected the ongoing reorientation of left-wing politics throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Michael Rustin complained at the time that *Marxism Today* was ‘more or less the theoretical organ of Labour revisionism.’²¹ The ideas published in *Marxism Today* throughout the 1980s influenced policy, but in turn were inspired by ongoing practical experiments in local politics. These experiments both tested notions of renewal and encouraged more abstract reflections on the results of their attempts. Hobsbawm, Hall and other *Marxism Today* writers, cast by some as the eventual forebears of New Labour, were often responding to changes in left-wing politics as well as leading calls for renewal.²² Indeed, Rosanvallon describes how in the 1970s identity politics and new social movements increasingly dealt with ‘post-material’ issues and became a more suitable

¹⁸ Boddy and Fudge, *Local Socialism*, 5; Gyford, *Politics*, 17.

¹⁹ Hall, *Hard Road to Renewal*, 210.

²⁰ Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*, 260-1.

²¹ Michael Rustin, ‘The Trouble with New Times’ in Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (eds.), *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s*, (London, 1989), 303.

²² Hobsbawm was celebrated with the Companion of Honour award in Blair’s first New Year’s Honours list (*The Guardian*, 31st December 1997), and Geoff Mulgan was part of the Downing Street policy unit (*The Times*, 21st October 1998).

and attractive form of left-wing politics than class-based, hierarchical, old social movements, like the labour movement and trade unions.²³ Geoff Eley takes this further, claiming that, by the 1980s, if there was a new left then it was present in local government.²⁴ He explains how local government became a space in which class and identity politics could work together constructively on community projects that went beyond the purely ‘negative coalitions’ usually associated with new social movement alliances.²⁵ Indeed, this was in part because of a new generation of councillors who were experienced in activism. Labour’s local election defeats in the late 1960s and local government reorganisation in the 1970s had facilitated a sea-change in Labour councillors across Britain.²⁶ A change of personnel brought a change in attitudes. These councillors, the ‘new urban left,’ were trained in the activism of the 1960s and counter-culture – rather than Marxism and Methodism. They saw beyond class-based politics and appreciated the concerns of new social movements.²⁷

Stuart Hall recognised that the Greater London Council was an example of this kind of politics in 1984, and Eley concurs.²⁸ However there is a lack of literature dealing with ‘local socialism’ outside of London. Liverpool is an exception as the city has received some attention given the role of Militant and the disruption that entryism caused on the left.²⁹ Yet it is acknowledged that different cities embraced ‘local socialism’ in diverse ways. ‘Local socialism’ represented a balancing of tensions between the old left politics of class and the new left politics of identity built around ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Julia Unwin, who

²³ Pierre Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*, (Cambridge, New York, 2008), 61-62, 47. Post-material is used here to denote a politics based on personal belief and identity rather than on material needs such as housing, food, and work. See Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution* (Princeton, 1977).

²⁴ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford, New York, 2002), 461.

²⁵ Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy*, 15.

²⁶ In 1968 Labour took a net loss of 1,602 seats and the Conservative a net gain of 630 seats across England and Wales (Syed, *Labour Left*, 139).

²⁷ Curran et al. *Culture Wars*, 31, 42.

²⁸ Hall, *Hard Road to Renewal*, 233; Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 461.

²⁹ David E. Lowes, *Cuts, Privatization, and Resistance: Neoliberalism and the Local State, 1974 to 1987*, (Pontypool, 2012), 96-111.

worked for Liverpool and Southwark Councils as well as the GLC in the 1980s, describes how Labour authorities were motivated to engage with community groups and new social movements to ‘generate a new constituency.’³⁰ This political agenda was developed around attracting voters who were interested in more than class politics. In cities like London which had large ethnic minority populations and middle class residents, building left-wing coalitions around ‘race’ and gender made sense. However, elsewhere these coalitions were not as attractive. In the words of Unwin ‘we have to bear in mind how very different things looked in different parts of the country.’³¹ Indeed, Sheffield’s constituency had remained relatively stable and working class until the late 1970s. The search for a new constituency in Sheffield was bound to be different from one in London where deindustrialisation had happened much earlier.

However, it has been argued that despite the promise of engaging with identity politics, and the media storm around the “loony left,” local authorities were not particularly radical. Despite its radical reputation, the GLC’s spending commitments suggest that new urban left councils could be rather traditional in practice. It was estimated that in 1984 just 1.8 percent of GLC grants went to ‘controversial organisations.’³² This is not surprising as new urban left councils were mostly aiming to extend rather than replace Labour’s core support base.³³ Moreover, as Hall complained, the left struggled to embrace ‘race’ and gender fully. In the main, Labour leaderships remained overwhelmingly male, and labour movements were often sexist.³⁴ In addition to this, working class solidarities were disrupted by ‘race’ and national identity, as work on the struggles of black and minority ethnic workers

³⁰ Nick Crowson, Matthew Hilton *et al.*, ‘Witness seminar: the voluntary sector in 1980s Britain’, *Contemporary British History*, 25:4 (2011), 504.

³¹ Crowson and Hilton, ‘Witness seminar’, 503.

³² Curran *et al.* *Culture Wars*, 18, 49.

³³ Curran *et al.* *Culture Wars*, 19.

³⁴ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 398.

within trade unions has shown.³⁵ There was a difference between adapting established policies with new identities and interests in mind and creating imaginative future socialisms that bound new social movements to existing working class solidarities.³⁶ How Sheffield City Council strove for a politics of renewal is to be examined in this thesis, as is how class and identity movements interacted with each other and local government. Under ‘local socialism’ each area developed and tested new ideas that could set an example of what a socialist government could do at a national level. Sheffield City Council’s ‘local socialism’ was based on carefully defined notions of working class community. This was disrupted by activists working inside and outside of local government, but contrary to popular notions of renewal, even in more radical movements class still played a large role.

Sheffield

This thesis uses a single city to test the problematic of left-wing renewal. Sheffield makes for a good case study to explore how different streams of activism and local politics interacted with each other as it is a city with a strong labour tradition, a vibrant history of radicalism, and it had a local authority which was willing to engage with both in the 1970s and 1980s. The thesis places Sheffield’s local politics within the national picture, and uses the city to draw out previously ignored facets of activism in the late twentieth century. The local approach allows access to interactions between movements which might not be apparent when movements are looked at in isolation or solely within the national context. Through an in-depth look at Sheffield’s local politics we can see how the Labour left engaged in building new constituencies of voters by mixing persuasion with pragmatism, and by engaging with

³⁵ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 399; John Wrench, ‘Unequal Comrades: Trade Unions, Equal Opportunities and Racism’, in John Solomos and Richard Jenkins, *Racism and Equal Opportunity Policies in the 1980s*, (Cambridge, 1989).

³⁶ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 468.

activists from the labour tradition and more radical new social movements. This was a conscious attempt by a local authority to build an alternative politics, but the activist milieu fostered by Sheffield City Council in the 1980s had existed in some form from the late nineteenth century.

Other than the ‘Socialist Republic,’ Sheffield is most often described as a ‘Steel City,’ or as ‘an unambiguously Labour city.’³⁷ Its strong working class and labour tradition developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Sheffield was granted city status in 1893 and became the largest manufacturing city in the country with a population of 334,000.³⁸ Population growth was largely due to people coming from surrounding rural areas to work in the expanding steel industry, keeping Sheffield’s population relatively homogenous.³⁹ Timothy Mitchell has theorised how political agency grew out of conditions similar to those seen in Sheffield. Mitchell argues that in the 1880s in Northern Europe and America, new energy systems developed from ‘the mutually reinforcing interactions between coal, steam technology, and iron and steel.’⁴⁰ In locations where coal could be mined the skilled manufacture and operation of cutting equipment, lifting machinery, and railways developed. Workers concentrated in these areas held no small amount of control over the production and distribution of energy which they used to bargain for mass democracy.⁴¹ As Mitchell explains, workers’ new found political agency came not only from organisations and

³⁷ Karen Evans, Ian Taylor and Penny Fraser, *A Tale of Two Cities: Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England: a Study in Manchester and Sheffield*, (1996), 35; Samuel P. Hays (ed.), *City at the P.O.I.N.T.: Essays on the Social History of Pittsburgh*, (Pittsburgh, 1989); David Hey, *A History of Sheffield*, (Lancaster, 2005).

³⁸ J. Edward Vickers, *A Popular History of Sheffield*, (Wakefield, 1982), 99; David Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers: Rebels and Radicals in Sheffield History*, (Great Britain, 2011), 113

³⁹ Hey, *History of Sheffield*, 187, 201-2.

⁴⁰ Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, (2013), 19.

⁴¹ Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*, 21.

political alliances, ideas and demands, but from their ability to force the issue by withholding much needed carbon energy by striking.⁴²

Sheffield fits Mitchell's template; its skilled workers capitalised on this agency and formed an emerging labour movement. But in the 1890s union activity was still quite disjointed. The development of well-administered engineering "amalgamated societies" was an exception in Sheffield's steel industry.⁴³ Instead Sheffield Federated Trades Council was the 'chief organisation voicing working class political claims.'⁴⁴ The SFTC was led by Liberal sympathisers who headed up the "light trades" societies and sat as 'Lib-Labs' on the Council, representing cutlery workers living in the Central area of Sheffield.⁴⁵ From 1895, working class politics shifted into Brightside and Attercliffe in the east of the city where the heavier trades were based. The men who lived there were steel workers and engineers rather than cutlers. They lacked the tradition of collaborating with Liberals and turned towards Socialist organisations.⁴⁶ This caused a division within labour politics and between 1908 and 1920 there were two rival trades' councils in Sheffield. The old SFTC combined most of the societies in older, light trades, and was sympathetic to the Liberal position, while the Trades and Labour Council included the remainder in the heavier industries and leaned towards socialism and the Labour Party.⁴⁷

World War I helped to develop and consolidate working class politics in Sheffield. In 1916, 12,000 workers went on strike against conscription and although many relied on the armaments industry, pacifism was strong in working class organisations. The *Sheffield Guardian* denounced the war in 1914-15.⁴⁸ In this period, and the recession that followed the

⁴² Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*, 20-21.

⁴³ Sidney Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield*, (Aldershot, 1993), 171.

⁴⁴ Pollard, *Labour in Sheffield*, 171.

⁴⁵ Pollard, *Labour in Sheffield*, 197.

⁴⁶ Pollard, *Labour in Sheffield*, 198.

⁴⁷ Pollard, *Labour in Sheffield*, 199.

⁴⁸ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 118; Pollard, *Labour in Sheffield*, 268.

war, the Trades and Labour Council vigorously defended working class interests to the detriment of the more Liberal and patriotic Sheffield Federated Trades Council. In 1918, the Reform Act increased the electorate and brought election successes to the Labour Party across the country. The resulting Liberal-Conservative coalition disrupted Lib-Lab partnerships in Sheffield, and in 1920 the SFTC was quietly absorbed into the Trades and Labour Council, becoming the Sheffield Federated Trades and Labour Council.⁴⁹ The newly strengthened labour movement supported the 1926 General Strike in solidarity with its 10,000 miners and also on behalf of engineers who had suffered cuts in wages and conditions in 1922.⁵⁰ In the election of that year, the Labour Party won the City of Sheffield, and barring losses in 1932 and 1968, held it consistently until 1999.⁵¹ The important role the trade unions played in securing a Labour local authority was integral to Sheffield's politics, and the link between politics and labour remained.

This is the main distinction between Sheffield and another 'Steel City'; Pittsburgh. Chapman notes that in Britain industrialisation developed before democratisation which made it harder for workers to separate collective workplace struggle from the campaign for enfranchisement.⁵² This in turn made alliances between the working and middle classes less likely, which we can see in part in the shift in support from the Sheffield Federated Trades Council to the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council. This and the lack of foreign immigration made working class politics stronger and more unified in Sheffield than in Pittsburgh, where Chapman argues that German, Irish and Southern European migrants formed distinct communities with different needs within the labour movement, whilst some workers made

⁴⁹ Pollard, *Labour in Sheffield*, 265.

⁵⁰ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 123.

⁵¹ William Hampton, *Democracy and Community: A Study of Politics in Sheffield*, (London, New York, 1970), 313-4.

⁵² Herrick Chapman, 'Pittsburgh and Europe's Metallurgical Cities: A Comparison', in Samuel P. Hays (ed.), *City at the P.O.I.N.T: Essays on the Social History of Pittsburgh*, (Pittsburgh, 1989), 414.

alliances with business owners that also weakened the movement.⁵³ Sheffield's labour movement developed from a more homogenous working class politics than Pittsburgh's and consequently put more emphasis on grassroots action.

Communism and Christianity, especially Methodism, also influenced Sheffield's labour movement. The British Communist Party formed in 1920 from the British Socialist Party and the Socialist Labour Party, and between fifty and sixty people attended the first meeting of the Sheffield branch.⁵⁴ Individual members were only reluctantly expelled from the Labour Party in the 1920s because the National Executive demanded it. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s Sheffield CP was small but disciplined and its members were mainly in the engineering unions.⁵⁵ They had very little electoral power, but individual Communists, such as George Caborn, a shop steward in the Heavy Engineering Department at Firth-Brown's from 1938, were able to influence the City Council through the SFTLC.⁵⁶ George Caborn was active in Sheffield's politics well into the 1970s, and his son Richard Caborn was Labour Member of Parliament for Sheffield Central from 1983 to 2010. Another well-known Communist was Alan Ecclestone, the vicar of Darnall. Although some in the church authorities disagreed, Ecclestone did not find the church and Communism incompatible.

Methodism was popular in Sheffield and many Methodists were also members of trade unions and friendly societies in the nineteenth century. By 1851, 56.5 percent of Sheffield's church attendances were by Dissenters.⁵⁷ Methodism was not just about church attendance; it was about commitment to a cause that had social and political implications. In

⁵³ Chapman, 'Pittsburgh and Europe's Metallurgical Cities,' 417.

⁵⁴ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 120.

⁵⁵ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 140.

⁵⁶ Andrew Thorpe, 'The Consolidation of a Labour Stronghold 1926-1951,' in Clyde Binfield et al. (eds.) *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843-1993. Vol. 1. Politics*, (Sheffield, 1993), 117; Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 141.

⁵⁷ Clyde Binfield, 'Religion in Sheffield,' in Binfield et al. (eds.) *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843-1993. Vol. 2. Society*, (Sheffield, 1993), 391-2.

the late nineteenth century this commitment was usually expressed by a Liberal political stance, but by the twentieth century it had embraced socialism. By the 1940s, it was the commitment and techniques of Methodists that were admired by Catholics wanting to reach out to tenants on housing estates, and by Ted Wickham whose Industrial Mission reached into the labour movement.⁵⁸ Methodism remained strong in the city; Victoria Hall's congregations were still the largest in northern Methodism in the 1950s and 1960s, but other denominational missions were also prominent in the city. In the 1970s, John Vincent's Sheffield Inner City Ecumenical Mission started in Pitsmoor and made close links with the African-Caribbean community.⁵⁹ Whatever their motives, what these different missions had in common over the decades was their concentration on inner-city issues such as poverty. They interacted with the labour movement, as did members of the Communist Party, and so both Christianity and Communism played a role in the development of Sheffield's labour milieu.

This milieu dominated Sheffield's politics right up until the 1960s and 1970s. William Hampton's work on democracy and community in Sheffield uses data from the 1961 Census to show that Sheffield had a larger than average proportion of manual workers compared to other cities in England and Wales. Of those manual workers, Sheffield had a larger proportion of skilled workers than any other city; 44 percent compared with under 35 percent in England and Wales as a whole.⁶⁰ This is significant as traditionally skilled workers 'formed the heart of the British trade union movement.'⁶¹ Data from every decade from 1926 to 1966 shows that over the years a larger proportion of Labour councillors in Sheffield were manual workers than any other type of employment, and in 1968 more were skilled than

⁵⁸ E.R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, (London, 1969), 216; Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 144; Binfield, 'Religion in Sheffield,' 419.

⁵⁹ Binfield, 'Religion in Sheffield,' 423-3; John Vincent, *Into the City*, (London, 1982).

⁶⁰ Hampton, *Democracy and Community*, 43-45.

⁶¹ Hampton, *Democracy and Community*, 45.

unskilled.⁶² Most of its local Labour Party leaders were active trade unionists.⁶³ Sheffield remained a relatively homogenous city into the 1960s with little immigration, a continued dependence on steel, and a large working class. The continued dominance of its labour milieu was, therefore, ‘not surprising.’⁶⁴

Sheffield’s labour milieu was one part of the city’s activism. The other was a radical politics that included internationalism, peace, a concern for the environment, and nonconventional notions of gender and sexuality. Although these streams of activism were quite distinct in character there was some overlap and interaction between movements. Sheffield’s radical politics also bloomed in the late nineteenth century but changed character in the following decades whereas the labour movement remained relatively constant. One of its early figures was Edward Carpenter; a middle class man who was involved in the development of Sheffield’s socialism.⁶⁵ Through his reading of Walt Whitman’s ‘celebration of the ‘manly love of comrades’’ in *Leaves of Grass and Democratic Vistas*, Carpenter came to recognise and accept his homosexuality.⁶⁶ Carpenter wrote extensively about sexuality and though some in Sheffield’s socialist circles did not appreciate his views, his work on the oppression of women influenced the women’s suffrage movement.⁶⁷ Sheffield’s women’s suffrage movement is said to have its grounding in the Sheffield Ladies Anti-Slavery Society founded in 1825 and it was Quaker abolitionists, among other women, who formed the Sheffield Female Political Association in 1851.⁶⁸ In the 1900s the movement was split between the Women’s Social and Political Union and the Women’s Freedom League who were more sympathetic to the labour movement. In 1912 Molly Morris, who had lived in

⁶² Hampton, *Democracy and Community*, 190.

⁶³ Hampton, *Democracy and Community*, 46.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 74-6. For a comprehensive account of Carpenter’s sexuality and socialism see Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love*, (London, New York, 2009).

⁶⁶ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 74.

⁶⁷ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 84.

⁶⁸ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 104-5.

Salford's slums before arriving in Sheffield, became the WSPU's paid organiser in Sheffield. Morris organised a militant campaign, personally putting fire bombs in letter boxes. She was connected to the labour movement through the prominent communist J.T. Murphy who she married in 1920 after rejecting three of his previous proposals.⁶⁹ Women continued to be active within tenants' associations, community associations, the labour movement and in other campaigns, but women's activism specifically reignited again in the 1970s with the feminist movement. In 1974 Sheffield put on a radical Women and Health conference, and from the mid-1970s women's newsletters were produced monthly to campaign and discuss feminism. Sheffield also hosted the Campaign for Homosexual Equality conferences in 1975 and 1982, but in the 1980s most lesbian and gay activism kept a relatively low profile, running social events and counselling services.

Edward Carpenter, like his acquaintance John Ruskin, had also been a great advocate of rural life. Others interested in rural life and preserving the environment were a group founded in 1924 that later became the Sheffield branch of the Council for Protection of Rural England, the Sheffield Clarion Ramblers, and various other rambling groups that took part in Mass Trespass in 1932.⁷⁰ They campaigned for access to the countryside and through their efforts acquired Green Belt designation to the west of Sheffield and the Peak District National Park in 1951.⁷¹ The campaign against Heeley bypass and the subsequent creation of Heeley City Farm in the 1970s and 1980s followed this tradition. In 1982 Sheffield Campaign for Access to Moorland was founded on the same principles as the original Mass Trespass.⁷² Whilst much of this rural activism followed the same practice set by the early rambling organisations, Sheffield also developed a very active branch of Friends of the Earth

⁶⁹ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 110-2.

⁷⁰ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 127, 134.

⁷¹ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 127.

⁷² Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 136.

in the 1970s which focussed its energy on recycling campaigns and environmentalism. FoE's lifestyle politics went further than conservation and land access.

Peace and internationalism were also recurring themes in Sheffield's radicalism. Sheffielders fought in the Spanish Civil War, and were commemorated in the city's Peace Gardens. In 1937 a branch of the Left Book Club formed, and in 1938 a Fund for Jewish Relief was created alongside the Sheffield Co-ordinating Committee for Refugees.⁷³ War on Want emerged in Sheffield in the mid-1950s, coordinated by Harry Ireland, a prominent Quaker.⁷⁴ Despite better coordination of the movement on a national level by the late 1960s, the Sheffield-branch led a semi-independent existence, raising an impressive £4,000 per annum by late 1960s.⁷⁵ The emphasis on 'international socialism' was not too far removed from the politics of the labour movement, though it was more radical in nature; both in aims and organisation. Later campaigns with an international aim included the anti-apartheid movement, of which there was a large following in Sheffield. The Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, and Chilean Solidarity Campaign were also significant and Sheffield welcomed refugees from these areas. The Chilean Solidarity Campaign had a trade union element to it as well, and the labour movement was particularly welcoming to Chilean refugees. Pacifism was important to the labour movement. Alan Ecclestone, the communist Vicar of Darnall, was the Chair of the Sheffield Peace Committee in 1950. The Committee collected 50,000 signatures towards the 473 million worldwide Peace Petition, and in November 1950 Ecclestone chaired the first day of the controversial World Peace Conference in Sheffield.⁷⁶

⁷³ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 103.

⁷⁴ Mark Luetchford and Peter Burns, *Waging the War on Want. 50 Years of Campaigning Against World Poverty: An Authorised History*, (London, 2003), 20-23, 42-4.

⁷⁵ Luetchford and Burns, *Waging the War on Want*, 57-9.

⁷⁶ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 142.

By the 1960s other peace organisations were active including the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament which had a University branch.

In 1953 students and settlers from Africa and the Caribbean set up the Coloured Peoples' Association. This changed its name to the West Indian Association in the 1960s, and then in 1984 became the Sheffield and District African-Caribbean Community Association.⁷⁷ The organisation aimed to promote social welfare and cultural activities. Other black and minority ethnic community groups developed as their presence in the city grew, such as the Yemeni Community Association and the Asian Welfare Association. Whilst catering for their communities many of these groups also fought racism. Some worked with the Sheffield Campaign Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League, and others organised independently. In the late 1970s, the Asian Youth Movement started a defence campaign in Sheffield after Asian businesses were attacked.

From the nineteenth century to the 1970s both the labour movement and various forms of radical activism were present in Sheffield. However towards the end of the 1970s the labour movement was threatened by deindustrialisation. Until 1979 the 'special steel' cutlery and tool making industry in Sheffield looked relatively safe. However, due to a world-wide over-production of steel and the Conservative Government's deflation of the economy, the steel industry collapsed.⁷⁸ Nearly 70 percent of Sheffield's redundancies between 1979 and 1986, nearly 50,000 jobs, were in metal manufacture, metal goods, and engineering.⁷⁹ In June 1971 the steel industry employed 16 percent of Sheffield workers, in September 1989 that had shrunk to just 3.1 percent.⁸⁰ Unemployment in Sheffield rose exorbitantly to 16.3

⁷⁷ SADACCA, 'History,' <http://www.sadacca.org/home/history?start=2>, (accessed: 3/12/2012).

⁷⁸ Evans, Taylor and Fraser, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 64.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

percent in 1987.⁸¹ Pollard breaks this down, explaining how at this time 19.4 percent of men in Sheffield were unemployed, whilst female unemployment was at 11.8 percent.⁸² White, working class men were hit particularly hard by the steel collapse. Engineering trade unions were traditionally some of the city's strongest, yet the employed membership of the Sheffield Engineering Employers Association halved in this period.⁸³ Given the close relationship between the Labour Party and the trade union movement in Sheffield, this had a negative effect on Labour's share of the vote. It weakened the political agency of the labour movement. In the 1983 General Election, Labour held all of its seats in Sheffield but in each case less than forty percent of the total electorate voted for them.⁸⁴ In the city's four Labour strongholds, Labour's percentage of the total vote had decreased by 23.9 percent since 1950.⁸⁵ Two of these strongholds, Central and Brightside, ranked 24th and 74th highest, respectively, out of 633 constituencies for their male unemployment rates in the 1981 Census.⁸⁶ The decline in the steel industry and the subsequent levels of unemployment meant that Labour's working class support could 'no longer be guaranteed.'⁸⁷ However this did not mean the end of the labour movement in Sheffield. Evans *et al* position Sheffield in a wider category of marginalisation; northern England. As the majority of redundancies happened in northern industrial areas, the north developed a 'sense of solidarity and reciprocity rooted in the experience of marginalisation or expropriation.'⁸⁸ Sheffield's labour movement, although weakened, could still organise and fight. Sheffield City Council's unswerving focus on unemployment emphasised this. Indeed, Price remarks that in the 1980s the Council was

⁸¹ Evans, Taylor and Fraser, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 278.

⁸² Evans, Taylor and Fraser, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 277.

⁸³ Evans, Taylor and Fraser, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 277; Dave Child and Mike Paddon, 'Sheffield: Steelyard Blues,' *Marxism Today*, July 1984, 19.

⁸⁴ Child and Paddon, 'Steelyard Blues,' 21.

⁸⁵ Child and Paddon, 'Steelyard Blues,' 22.

⁸⁶ Sheffield Archives, CAPOL/17/62 Appendix H: Sheffield 1981 Census Report 13: Unemployment in Yorkshire and Humberside.

⁸⁷ Child and Paddon, 'Steelyard Blues,' 21.

⁸⁸ Evans, Taylor and Fraser, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 18.

further left ‘than at any other time in its history,’ stemming from a commitment to fight against Thatcherism.⁸⁹

Sheffield City Council’s left-wing nature came from embracing the radical stream of politics as well as that of the labour movement. Due to the declining electorate, the Labour Party was looking toward attracting new constituencies of voters, and there was a vibrant spectrum of activists open to persuasion. Although other forms of activism contributed to Sheffield’s politics for most of the twentieth century and had interacted with the labour movement before, many activists had previously come up against a local authority unwilling to further their demands. Given the rise of Thatcherism and the ensuing ‘crisis of the left,’ left-wing local governments were trying to build coalitions of progressive movements. This included redressing the labour movement’s record on ‘race’ and gender, writing policies on peace, and hiring left-wing officers to work for the Council. In Sheffield, the local authority attempted to bring together the labour movement and other radical organisations into a grassroots mass movement. Sheffield held a significant place in British domestic politics in the 1980s. The 1984-85 Miners’ Strike kept the nation’s eyes on South Yorkshire, but it was David Blunkett that drew the Labour Party’s attention. In 1983 Blunkett was elected to the Constituency Committee of the Labour Party NEC and became a significant ‘voice of local government.’⁹⁰ Sheffield’s initiatives had the support of Neil Kinnock, who declared Sheffield “a model of much that has to be built, not just in other localities, but in the country as a whole.”⁹¹ Sheffield’s initiatives were seen as a viable attempt at an alternative politics, one that for a while was considered a success by Blunkett and others, and could have had national significance.⁹² In the story of the renewal of the left, Sheffield’s socialism was a

⁸⁹ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 149.

⁹⁰ *The Sheffield Star*, 4th October 1983, 1.

⁹¹ *The Sheffield Star*, 20th June 1984, 7.

⁹² David Blunkett, *On A Clear Day*, (London, 2002), 149.

considerable ‘what if’ and an important development in left-wing politics. This thesis will explore how the Council and labour movement interacted with different movements, and in doing so use a local setting to show how the tensions between different types of left-wing politics played out in 1970s and 1980s Britain.

Methodology

We can see how the alternative politics of the ‘Socialist Republic’ was planned and articulated through looking at Sheffield City Council minutes, Sheffield Labour Party manifestos, and the writings of political figures such as David Blunkett. However, Sheffield’s politics went far beyond what the City Council envisaged. Mapping how Sheffield’s many forms of activism interrelated is a more complex task. For Charles Tilly, social movements are not synonymous with all popular political action. The term social movement ‘means the distinctive combination of campaign, repertoire’ and displays that highlight the ‘worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment’ of participants.⁹³ Social movements make collective ‘claims that, if realized, would conflict with someone else’s interests’ and they involve governments ‘in the claim making, whether as claimants, objects of claims, allies of the objects, or monitors of the contention.’⁹⁴ New social movement theory defines movements which developed in the 1960s around women’s rights, gender relations, environmentalism, ethnicity, peace and international solidarity, with middle class support, non-hierarchical structures, and direct action tactics, as being ‘new.’⁹⁵ As they continued to develop into the 1970s and 1980s, it is argued that these movements ‘challenged old identities and valorised the new ones.’⁹⁶ This notion sets up a dichotomy between class and identity, suggesting a

⁹³ Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768 – 2004*, (2004), 7.

⁹⁴ Tilly, *Social Movements*, 3.

⁹⁵ Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, (Malden, Oxford, 2006), vii.

⁹⁶ Steven M. Buechler, *Understanding Social Movements: Theories from the Classical Era to the Present*, (London, 2011), 159.

conflict of interest between movements. However, Tilly and Craig Calhoun argue that ‘new social movements’ campaigning for autonomy and identity have been around since the nineteenth century; the evidence of which can be seen in Sheffield’s radical history. Tilly and Calhoun seek to dissolve distinctions between these types of movements, leaving the conflict of interest undefined.⁹⁷

Tilly’s notion of polity can help here as it provides a model to explain which movements are in contestation with which. Tilly explains that the polity of a place is made up of government and a number of well-established groups. Groups on the outside challenge the polity. Members of the polity have easy access to decision makers through routine political strategies, whilst challengers lack this access and ‘must resort to collective action if their interests are to be represented and their voices heard.’⁹⁸ Those challenging the polity may seek alliances with polity members, or a ‘more ambitious campaign that is not geared to a specific grievance but rather gaining entry into the polity.’⁹⁹ Tilly’s notion of polity sets up the idea that within a local political setting there are movements on the inside who work well with each other and local government, and movements on the outside. It also suggests that the dynamics of the polity can change. This model is useful when explaining Sheffield’s activism and the interactions between movements and local government.

Social movement theory on networks can shed further light on the interactions between movements in Sheffield. Tilly’s definition of an organisation prioritises ‘networks’ – people who are linked by interpersonal bonds – and ‘categories’ – broad social identities, such as ethnicity, religion, gender, or locality. Tilly writes that an organisation emerges ‘to

⁹⁷ Craig Calhoun, *The Roots of Radicalism: Tradition, the Public Sphere, and Early Nineteenth Century Social Movements*, (Chicago, London, 2012).

⁹⁸ Buechler, *Understanding Social Movements*, 128-9.

⁹⁹ Buechler, *Understanding Social Movements*, 128-9.

the extent that it comprises both a category and a network.’¹⁰⁰ Networks are very important within social movement theory. They facilitate recruitment to movements, can apply a moral pressure to act, and can make people aware of other issues. Della Porta argues that social networks within small communities can often become the most important reference group for individuals rather than the formal or national movement.¹⁰¹ Expanding on Tilly, she suggests that although lots of factors can affect how you relate to a social issue, and sharing class, nationality, or gender can help build recognition and a sense of identity, ‘it is through the channels of communication and exchange, constituted by social networks, that the mobilisation of resources and the emergence of collective actors become possible.’¹⁰² Without networks activists are unable to mobilise properly.

Another aspect of this is that personal contact between activists can be ‘instrumental in linking organisations to each other.’¹⁰³ Interactions between activists in different movements and activists having affiliations to multiple movements are not unusual by any means. Della Porta illustrates this with reference to a study done on activism in Vancouver in the 1990s. The study looked at the affiliations of over 200 activists in seven movements; labour, urban/anti-poverty, gay/lesbian, feminism, environmentalism, peace, and aboriginal. In doing so it documented the extent of overlap between movements but also which movements overlapped the most with each other. The findings were that ‘only 27 percent were active in a single organisation, whereas 28 percent collaborated with multiple organisations within the same movement, and 45 percent with multiple organisations in several movements.’¹⁰⁴ Peace and urban/anti-poverty movements had the most ‘multiple activists,’ whilst gay/lesbian, feminist environmentalist, and aboriginal movements had the

¹⁰⁰ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilisation to Revolution*, (New York, 1978), 63.

¹⁰¹ Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 117-20.

¹⁰² Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 121.

¹⁰³ Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 128.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

least. Labour, peace, and urban/anti-poverty organisations made up a ‘core bloc’ of activism and feminist and environmental organisations were linked to this bloc through their connections to labour and peace movements.¹⁰⁵ Obviously one study cannot be taken as a norm, but it can be used to illustrate Tilly’s notion of polity. Some movements are on the inside, while others are on the periphery – loosely connected – or on the outside. By identifying networks and categories in a local polity we can begin to understand the rules of the polity and why those left on the periphery are there. To explore the interactions between movements, this thesis has taken a qualitative approach rather than the quantitative approach of the Vancouver study. This thesis lacks the comprehensive raw data of who exactly was in how many movements, although it does present some. Rather, it describes how activists saw themselves as part of a wider activist milieu, and how they related to other movements and local government. It does this by looking closely at Sheffield’s activism through a variety of sources.

Activists are generally atypical. They make a special effort to change society and in doing so they attract attention. Furthermore, activists are generally organised. These two criteria generate archive material that is either produced about them or by them. In Sheffield certain campaigns attracted the attention of the City Council and of the local press and their actions were recorded in minutes and newspaper articles. In particular, peace activism and industrial strikes received the lion’s share of attention. Other campaigns commanded less attention from these institutions. However, often activists themselves view what they do as ‘special’ and socially important, or as being personally important to them. For this reason they might, consciously or not, create their own archives. Some of these are professionally curated, and this thesis makes use of the Hall Carpenter Archives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender history at held at the London School of Economics, the Feminist Archive

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

North at the University of Leeds, and the Tandana digital archive of the Asian Youth Movement. For some movements and activists the process of archiving material is less formal. Many activists apologize for being hoarders, but their personal archives of minutes, leaflets, and letters have been invaluable in exploring activism that carried less weight in Sheffield in the 1970s and 1980s, for example environmental activism. As Raphael Samuel noted ‘the best local documents, in short, will often be found not in the library or the record office, but in the home.’¹⁰⁶

Another way to understand the actions of activists and their engagement with various movements is through oral history interviews. The problems associated with oral history-based approaches have been widely discussed in texts such as Perks and Thompson’s *The Oral History Reader*.¹⁰⁷ This work, among others, draws attention to concerns regarding the influence the relationship between the interviewer and the participant can have on a testimony, as well as the accuracies of people’s memories. However those that use oral sources argue forcefully that no source is free from bias, whether written or spoken. As Elizabeth Tonkin suggests, ‘oral history is not intrinsically more or less likely to be accurate than a written document.’¹⁰⁸ Celia Hughes notes how ‘oral history narratives illuminate the complex relationship between memory, politics and subjectivity’ simultaneously.¹⁰⁹ In histories of activism, oral history can serve as a means of ‘remembering not only past activist selves, but also for reshaping political subjectivity in a left landscape transformed beyond Margaret Thatcher and New Labour.’¹¹⁰ Interview participants’ current politics can affect how they remember past activism. This had a variety of effects in this study; most common

¹⁰⁶ Raphael Samuel, ‘Oral History and Local History,’ *History Workshop*, 1:1 (1976), 201.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 1998).

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts: the Social Construction of Oral History*, (Cambridge, 1992), 113.

¹⁰⁹ Celia Hughes, ‘Negotiating ungovernable spaces between the personal and the political: Oral history and the left in post-war Britain,’ *Memory Studies*, 6:1 (2013), 72.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

was a valorisation of activism in the 1980s. Memories of hope and positivity were contrasted with current feelings of dejection. In contrast, David Blunkett was careful to downplay the radicalism of the City Council and present his actions while leader as within the development of New Labour politics. This can be problematic, but awareness allows the historian to negotiate these subjective stories. Furthermore, sole reliance on more conventional, written historical sources – such as Council minutes or newspaper articles – can also skew the local picture. They may prioritise certain types of activism, and certain details; such as place, date and action, rather than who and why. Whilst they provide an outline of events and certain campaigns, the close relationships formed by activists that provide important context to their actions are not detailed. Furthermore, when the official histories of movements have been written by activists themselves, oral history can often provide a counter-argument to the dominant narrative. Hughes details this in her work on far left organisations, as does Jeska Rees in her exploration of lesbian involvement in the Women’s Liberation Movement.¹¹¹ Hughes acknowledges that participants ‘historicise’ events as well as recollect, knowing that ‘the interviewer will record their testimony for historical posterity in a printed text.’¹¹² This, of course, is another form of narrative creation, but it can illuminate the role an activist had in a movement and the tensions they felt. In providing different perspectives oral history interviews can offer important information regarding who was perceived to be inside or outside of the activist milieu and individual movements. Such information is integral to this thesis.

Out of respect to the notion that ‘the interviewee can be historian as well as the source,’ interviews were conducted with two aims in mind.¹¹³ Each interview took a semi-

¹¹¹ Hughes, ‘Negotiating ungovernable spaces,’ 75; Jeska Rees, “‘Taking your politics seriously.’” Lesbian History and the Women’s Liberation Movement in England in Sonja Tiernan and Mary McAuliffe (eds.) *Sapphists and Sexologists, Histories of Sexualities: Volume 2*, (Newcastle, 2009), 100-2.

¹¹² Hughes, ‘Negotiating ungovernable spaces,’ 75.

¹¹³ Perks and Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, ix.

structured approach and asked general questions on Sheffield's activism and more specific questions relevant to the particular movement each activist had been engaged in. The questions emerged from key themes found in archive material. At the same time, each participant was given space to tell their story; to put forward their own thoughts on activism, draw on anecdotes and focus on themes that they considered significant. This often resulted in another look at the archive material; in the words of Raphael Samuel again; 'oral evidence should make the historian hungrier for documents, not less.'¹¹⁴ In some cases, activists arrived at the interview with material, either to jog their memory or corroborate their story. This dual approach prioritised the subjectivity of the participants rather than attempting to uncover the past as 'it really was.' It foregrounded their experiences as activists in Sheffield in the 1980s.

Given the focus on the subjectivity of experience this thesis cannot speak for movements as a whole, but relies on those activists who participated to represent their movement. The contemporary nature of this thesis allowed for the collection of twenty seven interviews. Participants were chosen to reflect the diversity of movements in Sheffield, though this means that there are often only one or two activists representing each movement. As this thesis focuses on participants' sense of being part of a wider activist milieu rather than a detailed history of each movement this was appropriate. Participants were found using the 'snowball' technique whereby respondents recommended others for interview, and by using contacts provided by the Stories of Activism in Sheffield project.¹¹⁵ If this thesis relied solely on oral interviews this would be problematic as the snowball technique skews the probability of activists knowing each other and being part of a milieu. However, by using the method of 'continuous interplay' between oral and archival sources, as recommended by

¹¹⁴ Samuel, 'Oral History and Local History,' 204.

¹¹⁵ Stories of Activism in Sheffield, <http://storiesofactivism.group.shef.ac.uk/> (accessed: 19/08/2015).

Samuel, this was overcome.¹¹⁶ Often the documents provided by interview participants supplied the empirical figures to complement their subjective stories. Contact sheets for different movements and calendars from newsletters provided evidence alongside oral testimony that some of these activists were operating as part of a milieu, whilst others felt alienated by it. Often in oral history interviews, respondents would mention, unprompted, activists from different movements that they had shown no previous connection with. Sometimes activists would say how much they liked an individual, or express that they felt uncomfortable around another group of activists. Many provided local knowledge of how sites of activism fit into the geography of the city that can be difficult to find written down.

My involvement in the Stories of Activism in Sheffield project from its inception in 2011 has enriched this thesis. Stories of Activism collects and archives campaign paraphernalia and oral histories, making them accessible in Sheffield Archives. Organised by academics at the University of Sheffield but directed by a committee of Sheffield's activists, the project aims to be more than an archive. In conversation with activists, it emerged that SOA needed to 'offer opportunities and spaces for people to learn skills that they could use to collect their own stories, taking control over the process of learning, training, collecting stories and creating materials.'¹¹⁷ This became a core principle of the project, and one of the ways it was put into practice was by working with the Workers' Educational Association to provide oral history training to activists and volunteers. Sessions at Sheffield Archives have introduced members of the public to material and encouraged them to think about politics and activism, and to create badges and posters of their own which were displayed in the Winter Gardens.¹¹⁸ Valuable discussions were had at workshops about 'the meanings of activism and

¹¹⁶ Samuel, 'Oral History and Local History,' 204.

¹¹⁷ Laura King and Gary Rivett, 'Engaging People in Making History,' *Arts Engaged Blog*, 28th June 2013, <http://arts.leeds.ac.uk/artsendagedblog/engaging-people-in-making-history/> (accessed: 20/08/2015).

¹¹⁸ Ignite Imaginations, 'Stories of Activism,' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfNJtyrBI-E> (accessed: 22/08/15).

how people saw themselves as activists.’¹¹⁹ The intention is for this knowledge to be passed on, with collections available ‘for everyone to learn about the activism in their area, *and* to understand the act of activism itself.’¹²⁰

I met a number of interview participants through working with the project in its early stages and these meetings influenced my research. Initial SOA workshops set the parameters of the project to focus only on activism loosely defined as left-wing, and this thesis, aimed at examining left-wing renewal, follows that decision. SOA also affected the interviews I organised. As Hughes notes, oral history interviews represent the ‘dynamic meeting of two subjectivities, of interviewer and interviewee.’¹²¹ The interviewer builds a rapport with the interviewee, which involves ‘being receptive to their emotional state,’ and can alter the course of the interview.¹²² Having an existing relationship with the interviewee can help to build trust, allowing a deeper line of questioning, but it can also take away from the spontaneity of the encounter and restrict the process. I interviewed the majority of participants on the first and only time I met them and was able to build a rapport with nearly all of them. Many had heard of the Stories of Activism project and saw it as an opportunity to educate a younger generation. Their perceptions of my age placed me directly into this category. One woman commented on first sight that I looked exactly like she had imagined a student to look and another, a man who I met in a public place, was careful to make sure that I, as a young woman, felt safe and comfortable meeting him. A third paused the interview half way through to give me some cake, and another gave me home-grown vegetables to take home along with personal archive material. Their position as older educators sat beside a

¹¹⁹ Laura King and Gary Rivett, ‘Engaging People in Making History: Impact, Public Engagement and the World Beyond the Campus,’ *History Workshop Journal*, 80 (2015), 11.

¹²⁰ Gary Rivett, ‘Stories of Activism in Sheffield,’ <http://storiesofactivism.group.shef.ac.uk/about-the-project/> (accessed: 19/08/2015).

¹²¹ Hughes, ‘Negotiating ungovernable spaces,’ 71.

¹²² Hughes, ‘Negotiating ungovernable spaces,’ 75.

recognition that I might better remember the actual dates of events and happenings, but they often emphasised the day-to-day experience of organising; the methods and the emotions. Hughes explains that research has indicated that women are more likely to tell personal stories whereas men are more likely to tell stories centred around events.¹²³ I found this to largely be the case. There was also a noticeable difference between interviews with activists and interviews with politicians; current Members of Parliament and councillors. Interviews with activists could last up to three hours and cover a wide range of stories and anecdotes. Interviews with politicians were on average around 45 minutes long, were more selective, and tended to focus more on methods. This is unsurprising as I often met with politicians at their workplaces, on work time, and when they were very aware of how their past might reflect on their current politics. The semi-structured interview approach was beneficial here as it allowed me to prioritise questions I wanted answers to but also gave space to probe further and pin down more evasive answers, or get behind rehearsed anecdotes. The semi-structured interview process also allowed for consistency across interviews. By asking all participants if they engaged with other campaigns and what they thought of the term ‘Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire’ I was able to assess how all of the activists interviewed placed their activism in the wider context of Sheffield’s politics.

This thesis also makes use of photographic evidence. Most of the images used are from the Martin Jenkinson Image Library and are reproduced here with their permission.¹²⁴ As Stephen Brooke acknowledges, photographs are not ‘unproblematic and unmediated “documents” of a particular social reality’ and there is a ‘crucial tension’ between the photographer and object.¹²⁵ Brooke highlights how the subjectivity of the photographer

¹²³ Hughes, ‘Negotiating ungovernable spaces,’ 82.

¹²⁴ Martin Jenkinson Image Library, <http://martinjenkinson.photoshelter.com/> (accessed: 20/08/2015).

¹²⁵ Stephen Brooke, ‘Revisiting Southam Street: Class, Generation, Gender, and Race in the Photography of Roger Mayne,’ *Journal of British Studies*, 53:2 (2014), 458.

constructs a ‘particular vision’ seen through the photographs.¹²⁶ Martin Jenkinson moved to Sheffield in 1976 where he worked as a maintenance fitter at a wire factory and became a deputy convenor of the Amalgamated Engineering Union.¹²⁷ Made redundant in 1979, Jenkinson became a freelance photographer and specialised in trade union assignments. He was the official photographer of the 1981 People’s March for Jobs and for the National Union of Mineworkers’ paper *The Yorkshire Miner* during the 1984-85 Miners’ Strike, but he also documented other forms of protest such as CND and anti-apartheid protests.¹²⁸ He was a photographer, but also part of Sheffield’s labour movement and wider activist milieu. Erika Hanna has shown how photographs have been ‘reread as evidential documents... provid[ing] a range of plausible truths.’¹²⁹ Hanna’s work shows how images were ‘contingent, circumscribed, and produced through the complex interplay of their social, material, and visual dimensions,’ and could be used to reinforce ‘state-sanctioned histories.’¹³⁰ Jenkinson, whose ‘love of photography combined with his politics and his belief in social justice, fairness and equality,’ aimed to show events unsanctioned by the state, and combat representations of miners shown in mainstream media.¹³¹ In this way, his photographs present a wide range of activism sympathetically and often show the rather mundane, everyday parts of campaigning as well as the larger, more dramatic protest events. This thesis uses his photographs to provide a sense of space and scale, as well as showing on occasion how well attended certain marches were and by whom. All of these sources help to reconstruct Sheffield’s activism so that it can be compared to the notion of the ‘Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire’ defined by Sheffield City Council.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ Mark Metcalf, Martin Jenkinson, Mark Harvey, *Images of the Past: The Miners’ Strike*, (Barnsley, 2014), i.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

¹²⁹ Erika Hanna, ‘Photographs and “Truth” during the Northern Ireland Troubles, 1969–72,’ *Journal of British Studies*, 54:2 (2015), 461.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

¹³¹ Peter Lazenbury, ‘Martin Jenkinson Obituary,’ 1st July 2012

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/jul/01/martin-jenkinson-obituary> (accessed: 20/08/2015).

Thesis Overview

This thesis explores how the new urban left vision came together in Sheffield in the 1980s. Sheffield City Council's 'Socialist Republic' aimed to unite the labour movement with certain radical movements to encourage political participation in the community. This project of renewal, although it offered a branch to radical movements, was still firmly based on the working class politics of labour. Despite the persistence of class politics, there was a vibrant radical milieu in Sheffield, and some overlap between different forms of activism. However, collaboration and solidarity between movements could not be sustained for all campaigns and certain activists found themselves on the periphery of Sheffield's politics. This was in part because they were deemed too radical for the City Council's pragmatic attempt at renewal, but also because their subjective priorities were not shared by the wider milieu.

Chapter 1 presents the image of the 'Socialist Republic' by laying out Sheffield's 'local socialism' in the context of the social changes of the 1980s and it asks to what extent this was a coherent vision. By using oral history interviews with councillors including David Blunkett, as well as Council minutes, Blunkett's political writings, and newspaper reports, it defines Sheffield City Council's 'local socialism.' Detailing four distinct policies; support for peace and anti-apartheid movements, subsidised bus fares, the development of the Community Work Apprenticeship Scheme, and the fight against rate-capping, the chapter shows how the City Council engaged with new social movements, but its focus was still firmly on the labour movement, combating unemployment and placating its working class constituency. The City Council's 'local socialism' was a reasonably coherent project but one that did not represent the full spectrum of Sheffield's activism. However, the perceived radical nature of Sheffield attracted activists and their arrival altered the city's politics.

Chapter 2 uses the Miners' Strike and unemployment activism to examine the extent to which the labour movement continued to dominate the city's politics in the 1980s, and to further illustrate the City Council's unwillingness to support initiatives it deemed too radical. Along with the decline of the steel industry, the 1984-85 Miners' Strike was a key social and political event in South Yorkshire and Sheffield, and class and the labour movement were large parts of Sheffield's collective history and identity. Sheffield City Council supported the miners, but the Miners' Strike also attracted support from various movements, including women, ethnic minority and gay activists. Examining the Miners' Strike through campaign leaflets and oral history interviews, this chapter shows how activists from different movements engaged with and learnt from each other, finding solidarity within Sheffield's activist milieu. However, it also shows how solidarity was checked by attitudes within the labour movement and the City Council's pragmatism. Among the Council and working class activists there was an attitude of having to 'start where you're at;' working with the general consensus rather than pushing radical policies. In practice, this meant focussing on fighting unemployment, and refusing to fund independent police monitoring campaigns and Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners. Behind one of the biggest struggles of the decade lay a pragmatism that held Sheffield's radicalism in check.

Sheffield had a vibrant but divided women's politics, which Chapter 3 explores. Using oral history interviews and newsletters from the Working Women's Charter Committee, this chapter shows how an older generation of women fought for gender equality within the labour movement. In the late 1970s and early 1980s they welcomed a group of younger socialist feminists into the Working Women's Charter Committee; many of whom came from outside of Sheffield and brought with them more radical campaigning ideas. Despite offering support, some older labour women grew frustrated with the often middle class socialist feminists, and both groups struggled to engage young working class women in

gender politics, and to influence their male counterparts. Alongside the Working Women's Charter Committee there was also a Women's Liberation Movement in Sheffield. Again, this mainly represented white, middle class women, and an examination of their newsletters and bulletins shows that they dealt with issues of 'race' and sexuality in a limited way. However, oral history interviews reveal that there was a strong lesbian presence in Sheffield's WLM in the early 1980s, and by the mid-1980s, with other feminists moving into the WWCC, lesbian activists had more say in the running of the WLM. African-Caribbean and Asian women remained unrepresented in the WLM, and this chapter shows how many preferred to organise independently, and how often their activism was not recognised by the wider movement. The analysis of gender activism in Sheffield shows how solidarity could break down within identity politics over class, 'race' and sexuality.

Chapter 4 explores the breakdown of solidarity further by examining the wider activist milieu. Using peace, environmentalism, the anti-apartheid movement, and anti-racism as case studies this chapter shows how Sheffield's activists negotiated new social movements and racial politics. Through archive material, oral histories, newspaper reports, and photographs it shows how movements and activists shared spaces and personnel in the city, but also where the limits of solidarity lay. Peace and environmentalism, while both new social movements, did not enjoy the same levels of support. The peace movement, with its long history of activism in the city and ties to the labour movement, was granted more support and resources than environmentalism, at least until the late 1980s when the effects of rate-capping and the 'Green Surge' took effect. The anti-apartheid movement ran a very effective cultural boycott, gained broad-based support through protecting its single-issue status, and also benefitted from a long history of labour support. The labour movement and wider milieu's limited response to anti-racism however shows that fighting racist policies abroad was not the same as fighting them at home. Solidarity was not the same as subjectivity

and members of Sheffield's activist milieu struggled to recognise the priorities of others. This chapter further demonstrates how black and minority ethnic-led organisations such as the Asian Youth Movement and the Sheffield and District African-Caribbean Community Association operated within Sheffield's politics to create distinct methods of organising.

Chapter 5 looks at gay politics in Sheffield to show where solidarity met its limit. In the 1980s in Sheffield sexuality was often considered to be a private matter of individual rights rather than a political identity. Despite limited support from trade unions for workplace equality campaigns, Sheffield's labour movement avoided involvement with gay politics. Sheffield City Council found the occasional request for funding from lesbian and gay organisations especially problematic in the latter half of the 1980s as it tried to distance itself from the 'loony left' of the Greater London Council under the increased scrutiny of local government finance. Due to the lack of labour movement support and past negative experiences of working with the wider left, many gay activists preferred to focus on gay identity politics, whether within workplace campaigns or in the social and pastoral sphere, and organise themselves. Often their focus on developing counselling services and safe spaces to socialise was not deemed to be political by the wider milieu. In 1980s Sheffield, lesbian and gay identity politics was where subjectivity trumped solidarity. This was partly because of rising homophobia and constraints to local government funding, but it was also because Sheffield's labour movement failed to recognise the political significance of sexual identity at a moment when left-wing gay activists were turning more fully towards it.

This study attempts to cover a wide spectrum of activism, but there are movements missing or mentioned only in passing. Chapters 2 and 4 do touch on the involvement of churches and Christian support of the anti-poverty, anti-apartheid, and anti-racism movements, and Chapter 5 briefly mentions Sheffield Cathedral's opposition to the use of its forecourt for a Campaign for Homosexuality Equality demonstration. However, in general,

discussion of church involvement is limited. The Chilean Solidarity Movement is also absent from this thesis. A popular movement in Sheffield, it gained a lot of support from the labour movement, and generally followed a similar pattern to the anti-apartheid movement. There were large and active tenants' movements too, and Blunkett was keen to engage tenants as they represented his idea of community. As expected, members mainly organised around issues of housing, but they did interact with other campaigns. Community worker John Lawson mobilised tenants against the Poll Tax. Another community worker, Paul Dearden, and activist Bill McDonnell of Theatreworks took theatre and improvisation sessions onto housing estates to educate and agitate tenants on a number of issues including housing bills, the Poll Tax and Credit Unions.¹³² Theatreworks also performed for trade unions and various groups including the Women's Cooperative Guild.¹³³ These movements, and others such as the steel strike and campaigns around health care, were important parts of Sheffield's politics. However, in order to look at movements in depth, this thesis could not examine everything. The case studies presented here were chosen to reflect how prominent new social movements and identity politics operated within a labour-dominated politics, and to explore how new urban left ideas were received.

This thesis shows that behind the 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' lay a more complex set of relationships between activists from different movements and strands of activism. By setting out Sheffield City Council's attempt at a new left-wing politics and by showing how Sheffield's activism was embraced, supported, restricted or ignored, this thesis explores Sheffield's politics to a breadth and depth not usually afforded to the study of individual movements. The use of one city as a case study allows for this. Sheffield City Council aimed to build a new constituency of voters by embracing more radical causes and

¹³² Interview with Bill McDonnell, 1st August 2013.

¹³³ Bill McDonnell Personal Archive, Letter from the Secretary of the Women's Cooperative Guild to John Goodchild, 1989.

relating them to class politics. However, in attempting to keep a lid on the more radical elements, Sheffield City Council kept certain activist movements on the outside. To a certain extent the same movements were left on the periphery of the wider activist milieu as well. Whilst the politics of other cities need more analysis, this thesis suggests that left-wing politics struggled to be cohesive even without the pressure of presenting a pragmatic front to voters. In this way Sheffield's activism sheds light on the wider British left, showing the resilience of class-based politics and the limits of popular notions of renewal.

Chapter 1

Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire

Picture, therefore, the dismay that swept through the lobby of the Athenaeum as the television showed Perkins coming to the rostrum in Sheffield town hall to acknowledge not only his own re-election with a record majority, but to claim victory on behalf of his party.

“Comrades,” intoned brother Perkins.

“Comrades, my foot.” Sir Arthur Furnival was apoplectic.

“Told you the man’s a Communist”

Chris Mullin, *A Very British Coup*, 1982¹

In 1981 Sheffield City Council’s May Day celebrations splashed onto the front page of *The Sheffield Star* under the headline ‘Uproar... as the red flag flies from Town Hall.’² The flag, hoisted to celebrate International Labour Day, was taken by some as a sign of allegiance to the Soviet Union. On the day it was met with protestors carrying a coffin draped with the Union Jack and placards reading “Better Dead Than Red.”³ Five days later, *The Sheffield Star* published letters calling for the flag-flyers to be ‘deported to Russia’ and claiming ‘no wonder the Town Hall is being referred to as the Kremlin!’⁴ In response to the backlash, a frustrated David Blunkett explained the flag was flown “to recognise the dignity and solidarity of working people throughout the world” and that “the whole thing is taking on an absurdity which is distorting everything else. We should be talking about the real issues the Council are dealing with.”⁵ Of these ‘real issues’, the most prominent were the city’s rising

¹ Chris Mullin, *A Very British Coup*, (London, 2010), 10.

² *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Uproar... as the red flag flies from Town Hall,’ 1st May 1981, 1.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Letters: Seething red!’ 6th May 1981, 6.

⁵ *The Sheffield Star*, 1st May 1981, 1.

unemployment level and the attack on local services caused by a reduction in government grants.

Sheffield City Council set up a Department for Employment and Economic Development to focus on the local economy, worked to slow council house sales, and campaigned to keep cheap bus fares in South Yorkshire in an attempt to address these ‘real issues.’ It also took part in some of the more radical initiatives being put forward by new urban left councils, such as the Greater London Council. These initiatives, which included positive action on ‘race’ and gender, came under the banner of ‘local socialism’ and were part of a broader renewal of the left in British politics. ‘Local socialism’ had two key characteristics. First, it was about finding a balance between class and identity politics, and welding them together in an attempt to find a new left-wing ideology that worked and could gain mass support through new alliances whilst protecting old ones.⁶ And second, it was *local*, and therefore differed depending on the political priorities of each area. Geoff Eley shows the Greater London Council to be an example of this kind of politics. An in depth look at Sheffield’s politics and the ideas that influenced them shows that Sheffield, a city with a very different demographic to London, had its own ‘local socialism’ with which it intended to influence national politics.

In an interview in 1984 the leader of Sheffield City Council, David Blunkett, described Sheffield’s initiatives as socialist ‘beacons’ that he hoped would ‘spread the vision across the country.’⁷ Blunkett spoke of winning ‘people’s hearts and minds’ back from Thatcherism, and not just in ‘isolated islands’ of socialism.⁸ He had an ‘alternative vision of

⁶ See Martin Boddy and Colin Fudge (eds.) *Local Socialism? Labour Councils and New Left Alternatives*, (London, Basingstoke, 1984); John Gyford, *The Politics of Local Socialism*, (George Allen & Unwin: London, Boston, Sydney, 1985; Stewart Lansley, Sue Goss, and Christian Wolmar (eds.) *Councils in Conflict: The Rise and Fall of the Municipal Left*, (Basingstoke, London, 1989).

⁷ ‘Interview with David Blunkett’ in Boddy and Fudge (eds.) *Local Socialism?*, 246.

⁸ *ibid.*

the world' and the future which he knew could only succeed if it was shared.⁹ This vision represented a deliberate attempt to formulate a left-wing politics to counter Thatcherism; a challenge which preoccupied many on the left in the 1980s. This chapter focuses on Sheffield's socialism to show what renewal meant to its adherents in a very different city. In comparison to other major provincial cities, Sheffield in the 1980s was predominately white and working class, and its extra-parliamentary politics was dominated by steel unions and the Miners' Strike. In this sense, Sheffield does not seem like an obvious candidate for revitalising left-wing politics around new left issues as the city's constituency was predominantly made up of traditional Labour voters. But if this was the case what was Blunkett attempting with his 'alternative vision'? This chapter will explore Sheffield's socialism through looking at the ideas that influenced it, contemporary writings by David Blunkett and collaborators, oral history interviews with councillors, and archive material detailing the actions Sheffield City Council took on new left issues such as peace and anti-apartheid, and also on transport and community development in the 1980s.

Political and Social Context

The phrase 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' caught on in the 1980s, but the roots of Sheffield's 'local socialism' lay over a decade earlier. Sheffield Labour Party's embarrassing defeat in the 1967-68 local elections, only the second since they took control in 1926, ultimately led to the election of an entirely new council in 1973, and a new cohort of councillors. Between 1970 and 1979 seventy eight new Labour councillors were elected.¹⁰ Power had previously rested to the right of the Labour Group in the hands of a small group of senior councillors with trade union or working class backgrounds, but the new cohort rose through the ranks to chair important Council committees. In 1980 David Blunkett, one of this

⁹ 'Interview with David Blunkett' in Boddy and Fudge (eds.) *Local Socialism?*, 245.

¹⁰ Patrick Seyd, *The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left*, (Basingstoke, London, 1987), 144.

cohort, became leader of the Council which reinforced the dominance of the new urban left. Sheffield's press greeted his appointment reasonably positively, with both the *Morning Telegraph* and the *Sheffield Star* publishing interest pieces. As well as predicting that a Blunkett-led Council was likely to 'spend, spend, spend', and noting that he was 'concerned with helping average folk help themselves to a better standard of life and livelihood'¹¹ and would 'often defend "working people,"'¹² the press focused on the novelty of his ideas. *The Star* noted that 'David Blunkett's commitment is to "democratic socialism" as he calls it... He is one of a new breed of young, radical politicians who are exerting an increasing influence on Town Hall politics.'¹³ The *Morning Telegraph* called him 'that unusual political animal, one who has taken the time to read Marx beyond the fly jacket' because of his politics degree.¹⁴ Whilst the newspapers speculated that Blunkett's education might hinder his relations with the Labour Group; 'Flaunt your degree course in political sociology round there and they'll tell you where to stick it,' Sheffield's new generation of councillors settled in relatively peacefully.¹⁵ Their take over was not the sharp shock it was in other areas; this was 'an uncharacteristically smooth transition... a bloodless palace coup.'¹⁶ As socialist-feminist Hilary Wainwright explained; 'In Sheffield, there was no lost generation of the sixties and seventies,' instead the 'younger generation was assimilated relatively peacefully into the leadership with a leg up from the left minority in the generation before.'¹⁷

Blunkett was one of the key personalities in Sheffield, but the gentle rise of Sheffield's new urban left can be explained by elaborating on the other councillors; Bill

¹¹ *The Morning Telegraph*, 16th May 1980, 7.

¹² *The Sheffield Star*, 15th May 1980, 14.

¹³ *The Sheffield Star*, 15th May 1980, 14.

¹⁴ *The Morning Telegraph*, 16th May 1980, 7.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Dave Child and Mick Paddon, 'Sheffield: Steelyard Blues', *Marxism Today*, July 1984, 18.

¹⁷ Hilary Wainwright, *Labour: Tale of Two Parties*, (London, 1987), 108. As well as co-authoring *Beyond the Fragments* Wainwright had a trade union background and worked for the GLC in the 1980s.

Michie, Roger Barton, Peter Price, Joan Barton, Clive Betts, Helen Jackson, Mike Bower and Rev. Alan Billings, and some of the key officers; Dan Sequerra and Jim Coleman.¹⁸ The councillors were all, bar Bower, Billings, and Jackson – who was from near Leeds – ‘homegrown... activists’ born and bred in Sheffield’s East End.¹⁹ Some were university educated, but most came from families of manual workers. Bill Michie had left school at fifteen, worked as a skilled engineer for twenty years, and was a shop steward in the Amalgamated Engineering Union.²⁰ Roger Barton was also a skilled engineer and had come to politics through the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council, of which he was at one time Secretary.²¹ Both Barton and Peter Price were sons of steelworkers, though Price himself went to grammar school then university to become a technician.²² Joan Barton was a clerk with the Yorkshire Electricity Board, and Betts was from a family of manual workers though he went to Cambridge before returning to the city. Many councillors came through the Labour Executive of the Trades Council, but Councillors Barton and Mike Bower, as well as officers Sequerra and Coleman also served on the Industrial Executive.²³ Wainwright wrote; ‘the most significant historical feature about Sheffield Labour Party is its intimate relations with the trade unions.’²⁴ This intimacy had developed in the joint Trades and Labour Council, which only separated in 1974 after much protest, and in the generations of political families who passed through both the Trades Council and local government.²⁵ Geoff Green and Alan Billings both note the importance of the labour movement in shaping Sheffield’s

¹⁸ David Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers: Rebels and Radicals in Sheffield History*, (Great Britain, 2011), 152.

¹⁹ Patrick Seyd, ‘The Political Management of Decline 1973-1993’, in Clyde Binfield et al. (eds), *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843-1993* (Sheffield, 1993), 157. Interview with Helen Jackson, 29th April 2013

²⁰ Seyd, ‘Political Management,’ 157.

²¹ Sheffield Archives, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1984-85

²² Seyd, ‘Political Management,’ 157.

²³ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1981-82; SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1977-8.

²⁴ Wainwright, *Tale of Two Parties*, 106.

²⁵ Warwick Modern Records Centre, MSS292 D 79/151, Vernon Thornes, Evidence Against Labour Party NEC Proposals, 29th June 1972; Wainwright, *Tale of Two Parties*, 106.

socialism.²⁶ Their familiarity with trade unionism meant councillors understood local working class culture and were seen as being part of it. They were neither middle class ‘infiltrators’ nor ‘geographically outsiders.’²⁷ As Blunkett puts it; ‘we were rooted in the trade unions.’²⁸

The working class and trade union background of Sheffield’s councillors was a significant factor in determining the character of Sheffield’s socialism, which was developed to suit the needs of the constituency, as well as attract new voters. Compared to London Sheffield was much more working class and white, but new urban left policies were designed to appeal to ‘new social constituencies including progressive sections of the middle class.’²⁹ Although Labour dominated the Council and held five of Sheffield’s six parliamentary seats there were still political battles to be won, especially in predominantly middle class Hallam.³⁰ Furthermore, Sheffield’s constituency was changing. By 1983 the Council was Sheffield’s largest single employer, employing seventeen percent of the workforce.³¹ Nevertheless, in 1981 only 4.6 percent of Sheffield’s population were classed as ‘professionals,’ and at the 1991 Census only around five percent of Sheffield’s residents were black or minority ethnic which was less than the national average.³² This is not to deny the existence of middle class and black and minority ethnic residents in Sheffield. The 1981 Census revealed that the constituency of Hallam had a disproportionately large percentage of middle class residents, at over seventy percent. In comparison, around thirty percent of people in the Brightside and

²⁶ Geoff Green, ‘The new municipal socialism,’ in Martin Loney, Robert Boccock, John Clarke, Allan Cochrane, Peggotty Graham and Michael Wilson (eds.) *The State or the Market: Politics and Welfare in Contemporary Britain*, (London, 1991), 274; Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

²⁷ Seyd, ‘Political Management,’ 157.

²⁸ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

²⁹ James Curran et al. *Culture Wars: The Media and the British Left*, (Edinburgh, 2005), 5.

³⁰ Child and Paddon, ‘Steelyard Blues,’ 18.

³¹ William Hampton, *Local Government and Urban Politics*, (Harlow, 1991), 23; Child and Paddon, ‘Steelyard Blues,’ 19.

³² Karen Evans, et al. *A Tale of Two Cities: Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England: a study in Manchester and Sheffield*, (1996), 88, 201.

Central constituencies were middle class.³³ In Sheffield Central constituency 8.8 percent of households were headed by ‘a person born in the New Commonwealth or Pakistan,’ whereas in the constituencies of Attercliffe, Brightside, Hallam, and Heeley the percentage ranged between 1.4 and 3 percent. These statistics, although in part problematic, illustrate Sheffield’s significant middle class and black and minority ethnic populations.³⁴ However it is also clear that the majority of residents, especially in the Labour strongholds of Attercliffe, Brightside and Central were white and working class. Because of this, Sheffield was less amenable to the culture of extra-parliamentary identity politics and its councillors understood that. As such policies were focused on the working class, or ‘working people’, generally rather than singling out particular sections of society.

Arguably the main political and social concern in Sheffield in the early 1980s was unemployment caused by the decline in the steel industry and mine closures. Unemployment in Sheffield had risen to 16.3 percent by 1987, with 19.4 percent of men looking for work.³⁵ Male unemployment was a problem that affected a lot of working class families in Sheffield, and which many of Sheffield’s councillors, coming from similar industrial backgrounds, could sympathise with. Between 1979 and 1983 there were more than 57,000 notified redundancies and over eighty percent of them were in manufacturing.³⁶ This collapse had a large effect on engineering trade unions; traditionally some of the city’s strongest. The employed membership of the Sheffield Engineering Employers Association halved in this period.³⁷ Given the close relationship between the Labour Party and the trade union

³³ Robert Waller, *The Almanac of British Politics*, (London, New York, Sydney, 1987), 195-200.

³⁴ The ‘head of household’ question in the 1981 Census failed to take into account the rest of the household, British-born minority ethnic residents, and members of other diasporas, however in the absence of any direct question this was the ‘best alternative.’ Robert Waller, *The Almanac of British Politics*, (London, New York, Sydney, 1983), 7.

³⁵ Sidney Pollard, ‘Labour’ in Clyde Binfield et al. (eds.) *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843-1993* (Sheffield, 1993), 278.

³⁶ Child and Paddon, ‘Steelyard Blues,’ 19.

³⁷ *ibid.*

movement in Sheffield, this had a negative effect on Labour's share of the vote. In the 1983 General Election, Labour held all of its seats in Sheffield but in each case less than forty percent of the total electorate voted for them.³⁸ In Sheffield's four Labour strongholds, Labour's percentage of the total vote had declined by 23.9 percent since 1950.³⁹ Two of these strongholds, Central and Brightside, ranked 24th and 74th highest, respectively, out of 633 constituencies for its male unemployment rate in the 1981 Census.⁴⁰ The decline in the steel industry and the subsequent levels of unemployment meant that Labour's working class support could 'no longer be guaranteed.'⁴¹ From this it can be reasoned that keeping its working class electorate was a more pressing priority for the Labour Party in Sheffield than winning over middle class voters in areas such as Hallam. This priority led to an emphasis on employment and class issues in the Council's policies, as well as an attempt to engage working class constituents in politics to defend the services they had need of. These aims can be seen in both the ideas councillors had and the policies that were put into practice.

Ideas and Influences

We can see how Sheffield's 'local socialism' took shape in the 1980s by looking at David Blunkett's interviews and writings. From the start of his leadership Blunkett was calling on communities within Sheffield to engage with politics, and this, more than any new urban left policy, was the overriding ethos of Sheffield City Council at this time. Over the course of the decade, engagement with community groups gradually came to include black and minority ethnic and women's organisations, which led to policies of a more new urban left flavour. In 1980 however, Blunkett made it clear that his idea of community meant the traditional

³⁸ Child and Paddon, 'Steelyard Blues,' 21.

³⁹ Child and Paddon, 'Steelyard Blues,' 22.

⁴⁰ SA, CAPOL17 62 Appendix H: Sheffield 1981 Census Report 13: Unemployment in Yorkshire and Humberside.

⁴¹ Child and Paddon, 'Steelyard Blues,' 21.

institutions of the working class; ‘we are going to have to rely on people in the community – the trade unions, the district Labour Party, tenants’ groups – to help identify the worst effects of Government policy and to suggest ways of overcoming them.’⁴² His aim then was to bring departments and these ‘active groups in the community’ together in a coordinated approach to Sheffield’s problems. This was reiterated in the pamphlet *Building from the Bottom* published in 1983. Here Blunkett and Geoff Green explained that Sheffield’s community involved ‘a sense of shared experience and interdependence’ and that this sense was ‘built around principles long embodied in the trade union movement.’⁴³ By drawing on the opinions, skills, and ‘everyday experience of working people,’ and by winning their ‘hearts and minds,’ Blunkett and Green aimed to build a ‘mass movement’ – but at this stage it was a movement that prioritised class rather than the fusion of class and identity politics favoured by the new urban left.⁴⁴ Blunkett was building on his experience as chair of the Social Services committee where he had encouraged people to ‘feel that the services belonged to them, not to the council.’⁴⁵ Fellow councillor Veronica Hardstaff agreed. Hardstaff remembers that they encouraged people to take ‘more responsibility’ for their communities.⁴⁶

Ultimately *Building from the Bottom* set out to ‘re-establish the importance of ideas in winning the political battle for Labour,’ and Blunkett was searching for ideas in a number of places.⁴⁷ He explains that in the 1980s the political right had appropriated intellectual thinking which before then had been the territory of the left. He read about the New Enlightenment and Futurists, and saw the renewed interest in Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman as a challenge.⁴⁸ Blunkett and Green were trying to find their own alternative that

⁴² *The Sheffield Star*, 15th May 1980, 14.

⁴³ David Blunkett and Geoff Green, *Building from the Bottom: The Sheffield Experience*, (London, 1983), 2.

⁴⁴ Blunkett and Green, *Building from the Bottom*, 2, 28.

⁴⁵ David Blunkett, *On a Clear Day*, (London, 1995), 147.

⁴⁶ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

⁴⁷ Blunkett and Green, *Building from the Bottom*, 1.

⁴⁸ Blunkett, *On a Clear Day*, 150; Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

was neither Thatcherite nor old Labour: the ‘Middle Way.’⁴⁹ In a piece of revisionism befitting his role under New Labour, David Blunkett goes as far as to claim that they were searching for a ‘third way’ a decade before Anthony Giddens coined the term. Blunkett explains that it was partly ‘to keep people’s morale up’ and partly ‘to light a spark’ that could show what might happen in the future.⁵⁰ Early socialist pioneers were cited as one influence, as were the everyday experiences of councillors and constituents. Rousseau, Marx, and George Dangerfield’s *The Strange Death of Liberal England* were others.⁵¹ Further influences appear in the examples used by Blunkett and Green. The directive to listen to steel workers who knew their industry hints at the Institute of Worker’s Control and industrial action at Lucas Aerospace that Blunkett still names as influences today. But he also makes it clear that although the trade unions were a ‘sounding board’, councillors were not ‘patsies’ and would not save jobs that could not be saved when they could be concentrating on creating replacement jobs.⁵² The suggestion to learn from women who set up refuges after experiencing physical violence from their partners points to an engagement with women’s organisations that may have been inspired by the work other new urban left councils were doing through their women’s committees.⁵³ Blunkett and Green had both read politics and political philosophy at university and so were, in Blunkett’s words ‘familiar with the grandees.’⁵⁴ To supplement this they also looked towards contemporary thinkers.

Geoff Green admits that while ‘few councillors had read the theoretical reformulations of the state by Marxist intellectuals’ these ideas filtered down through pamphlets and conversation.⁵⁵ Indeed, although Blunkett’s writings did not reference

⁴⁹ Blunkett, *On a Clear Day*, 149.

⁵⁰ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

⁵¹ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

⁵² Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

⁵³ Blunkett and Green, *Building from the Bottom*, 3; Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

⁵⁴ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

⁵⁵ Green, ‘The new municipal socialism,’ 277.

Marxism Today directly, in arguing for the return to political ideas and using phrases such as ‘hearts and minds’, his work echoed Stuart Hall.⁵⁶ Blunkett advocated combining theory and practice in what he termed a ‘realistic view of socialism’ that supported community action and political education.⁵⁷ He even invited Hall to speak at the first of Sheffield Council’s own Marx Memorial Lecture series. Described in the local press as ‘a heavyweight contest with everyone in the red corner,’ it was packed with ‘the cream of the socialist cream; ... little old ladies in woolly hats; every Labour councillor with an eye on public image’ as well as a ‘Greenham Commonish woman’ annoyed by the collection of pint-pots.⁵⁸ Blunkett invited Hall because he was ‘a great thinker...we were trying to get some real, high level intellectual thinking into this.’⁵⁹ He had tasked Michael Barrett-Brown, head of Northern College at the time, with helping to organise the lecture series and choose speakers. Despite this emphasis on intellectualism there was little engagement with political scientists and the wider academic community. Blunkett regrets this and notes that if he had his time again he would have engaged more with the University of Sheffield and what was the old polytechnic, as well as the Institute for Local Government Studies at Birmingham.⁶⁰

However, Blunkett was aware that political scientists were interested in the challenges faced by local government and the methods local authorities were implementing to combat them. Indeed he was interviewed by Martin Boddy and Colin Fudge, two of the political scientists at the forefront of this research. The interview shows that he took a keen interest in what other councils were doing even if Sheffield City Council did not always follow the same path. Indeed, Councillor Alan Billings remembers thinking the GLC was ‘bonkers.’⁶¹ When

⁵⁶ Blunkett and Green, *Building from the Bottom*, 1, 28; Hall, *Road to Renewal*, 177.

⁵⁷ Blunkett and Green, *Building from the Bottom*, 2, 26.

⁵⁸ SA, CA-POL15/29 Policy Review Sub-Committee 4th November 1982; *The Sheffield Star*, 15th March 1983, 8.

⁵⁹ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

⁶⁰ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

⁶¹ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

asked in 1984 about Sheffield City Council's lack of women's committee, Blunkett replied; 'It is on the agenda, but we're doing it in a non-adventurist way. People have accused us of sneering at middle class feminists, but I don't think that's true. What we've said is we want to give opportunities to all women not just a few. We've set up a section of the Employment Department to promote opportunities for women.'⁶² He elaborated; 'we're not antagonistic to the developments that have taken place in the GLC and Camden and so on. It'll be interesting to see how it goes, but we've got our own job to do'⁶³. Blunkett had a lot of opportunity to learn what other councils were doing. Although he was elected to the Labour Party National Executive Committee in 1983, Blunkett had been attending NEC Regional and Local Sub-Committee meetings since April 1980 and was joined over the years by other prominent figures such as Ted Knight (Lambeth) and Ken Livingstone of the GLC.⁶⁴ Blunkett recalls that he used to 'hear people say things about what they were doing and come back and say to our officers – I think we better find out if they are actually doing this. Quite often they weren't.'⁶⁵ Blunkett was paying attention to what other local authorities were, or were not, doing but was also careful to separate Sheffield from the rest, especially from Liverpool City Council.

Despite the early reluctance to fully align with the new urban left, by 1987 Blunkett and Keith Jackson were celebrating some of Sheffield's achievements that tied in with policies of the new urban left. They mentioned engaging with the Sheffield and District African-Caribbean Community Association by offering funding and resources to supplement SADACCA's social, educational and training facilities. Blunkett and Jackson claimed that

⁶² 'Interview with David Blunkett' in Boddy and Fudge (eds.) *Local Socialism?*, 254.

⁶³ 'Interview with David Blunkett' in Boddy and Fudge (eds.) *Local Socialism?*, 255.

⁶⁴ People's History Museum Labour History Archive and Study Centre: Labour Party NEC Minutes March 1980, Regional and Local Government Sub-Committee Minutes, 28 April 1980; Labour Party NEC Minutes 23 June 1982, Regional and Local Government Sub Committee Minutes, 17 May 1982; Labour Party NEC Minutes March-June 1983, Regional and Local Government Sub Committee Minutes, 21 February 1983.

⁶⁵ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

while local politics had not had a large impact on racism or inequality, they had made a space where African-Caribbean and Asian voices could be heard.⁶⁶ Blunkett and Jackson were also proud of their engagement with the peace movement by setting up a Nuclear-Free Zone and providing educational resources on peace. They wrote positively of taking up international issues of justice and aid such as opposing apartheid and allowing staff time off to work on water projects in Nicaragua. They argued that ‘the furtherance of peace and justice cannot be left to international statesmen alone; it needs to be part of the politics of everyday life’ and that local government could and should be less parochial.⁶⁷ Furthermore, they mentioned engaging with women, but often women outside of ‘explicitly feminist organisations,’ citing an event held by the Centre Against Unemployment on Women’s Day in 1987 at which hundreds of women demonstrated their needs to the authorities.⁶⁸ From 1980 to 1987, it can be seen that Blunkett prioritised bringing Sheffield’s communities into the processes of local government. For him, and others within Sheffield City Council, collective action had a ‘rightful place alongside electoral representation.’⁶⁹ Indeed, for some this emphasis went too far. Deputy Leader of the Council Alan Billings, a man described by the *Daily Telegraph* as ‘not keen to have either a Left-wing or Right-wing label pinned on him,’ remembers the discussions of collective action with some frustration.⁷⁰ Billings recalls that ‘there was a lot of talk about bottom up politics, bottom up industry, bottom up this, bottom up that,’ which was both ‘extraordinarily idealistic, optimistic’ as well as ‘naive, unrealistic.’⁷¹ Although Blunkett originally spoke of connecting with institutions of the traditional working class such as trade unions and tenants’ associations, as the decade progressed influence and necessity

⁶⁶ David Blunkett and Keith Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis: The Town Halls Respond*, (London, 1987), 92.

⁶⁷ Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 94.

⁶⁸ Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 90.

⁶⁹ Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 7-8.

⁷⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, ‘Assorted images of socialism,’ 30th September 1975.

⁷¹ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

encouraged him to engage with wider movements and groups more often seen working with new urban left councils.

Sheffield City Council and David Blunkett drew influence from a variety of places. They were aware of new urban left policies and incorporated some of them, but their priorities remained with working class constituents and class-based politics. Councillor Clive Betts maintained that behind the radical reputation, Sheffield City Council generally took a ‘practical approach.’⁷² Blunkett and Green called for a new left-wing intellectualism and encouraged both local government workers and service users to participate and ‘see that they are part of community action, that they are part of the political education with a small ‘p.’⁷³ But they recognised that this engagement started with working people’s experiences – ‘where they’re at. Not just in their lives but in their heads’ – and that any form of renewal had to start with the everyday problems the city faced. Despite this some of their policies did have a radical dimension which added to their reputation as the ‘Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire.’ This reputation brought activists to Sheffield to work for the Council and the ‘Socialist Republic’ developed beyond what the Council had initially envisaged. This can be seen in the policies the Council put into practice.

The Socialist Republic: An Alternative Vision?

The following case studies show how Blunkett’s ‘alternative vision’ for Sheffield worked in practice. Case studies on peace and anti-apartheid show how the Council framed new urban left policies as economic and employment issues to make them more palatable to traditional Labour voters. Sheffield City Council used a similar framework when it focused on gender and ‘race’ as well, but these will be addressed in later chapters. A look at the Campaign for

⁷² Interview with Clive Betts, 19th July 2013.

⁷³ Blunkett and Green, *Building from the Bottom*, 26.

Cheap Bus Fares shows how they dealt with traditional causes and the case study on the Community Work Apprenticeship Scheme explores how they put one of their key ideas into practice and how it helped to cement their reputation as the ‘Socialist Republic.’

For a policy described as ‘gesturism,’ Sheffield City Council put rather a lot of time and money into its peace initiatives. The Council funded peace films and theatre groups, supported torchlight vigils, and invited MPs to nominate the Greenham Common women for a Nobel Peace Prize.⁷⁴ It engaged with radical interests and tactics. However, the Council also formulated peace and anti-nuclear policies that served the interests of Sheffield’s working class constituents. By 1984, 23 percent of people surveyed in Britain supported unilateral nuclear disarmament, while 23 percent of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament’s supporters were church goers.⁷⁵ This was by no means a majority but it shows that anti-nuclear ideas were more widely accepted in the 1980s. Furthermore, the support base had shifted from the middle class to the working class; of the 23 percent who supported unilateral disarmament, 37 percent were unskilled workers, and 30 percent were middle class.⁷⁶ By focussing on anti-nuclear policies attractive to working class voters, Sheffield City Council incorporated peace and the nuclear question into its own form of socialism.

The Council did this by directing anti-nuclear policy towards economic issues; addressing nuclear power rather than weapons first. In July 1981, Sheffield City Council motioned to support the South Yorkshire County Council’s stance against the Sizewell nuclear reactor.⁷⁷ The leader of the SYCC, Ron Ironmonger had argued; “We are sitting

⁷⁴ SA, CA-POL16/255-7, Sheffield Nuclear Free Zone Working Party, 11th November 1983; CA-POL17/127, Policy Review Sub-Committee, 3rd April 1984; CA-POL17/321, Policy Review Sub-Committee, 4th September 1984.

⁷⁵ Anthony Messina, ‘Post-war Protest Movements in Britain: A Challenge to Parties’, *The Review of Politics*, 49:3 (1987), 412; Kate Hudson, *CND Now More Than Ever: The Story of a Peace Movement*, (London, 2005), 141.

⁷⁶ Messina, ‘Post-war Protest Movements,’ 412.

⁷⁷ SA, CA-POL14/46, Policy Committee, 28 July 1981.

on one of the most successful coalfields in the country, and at a time when the Coal Board is talking about closing pits, we should not be committing ourselves to this unsafe and expensive alternative.’⁷⁸ Ironmonger constructed nuclear power as a threat to Sheffield and South Yorkshire’s mining industry; a threat that would affect many workers in the county. In supporting Ironmonger’s position throughout the 1980s, the Council framed this radical campaign as an employment issue. The Conservative government’s proposals on nuclear power were also read as an attack on the National Union of Mineworkers, motivated by fear of future miners’ strikes and a repeat of the 1974 energy situation.⁷⁹ Sheffield City Council supported the NUM and had contributed £200,000 towards relocating their headquarters to Sheffield.⁸⁰ The perceived attack arguably added fuel to the Council’s opposition to nuclear power.

Sheffield City Council framed nuclear weapons in a similar way. The Council’s call for central government to close British nuclear bases because it ‘deplore[d] the Government’s policy of increasing military spending at the expense of... other... services’ made the economic element clear.⁸¹ Six years later, they reaffirmed this position whilst planning celebrations for the International Nuclear Free Zones Day in June 1987. The Council described nuclear weapons tests as a ‘colossal international diversion of public resources away from the provision of... services.’⁸² The Sheffield District Labour Party’s 1983 manifesto developed this position, describing spending on nuclear weapons as an affront to local autonomy and the democratic use of resources. This objection to the undemocratic use

⁷⁸ Alan Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of the Socialist Republic*, (Sheffield, 1987), 73.

⁷⁹ Wolfgang Rüdig, ‘Maintaining a Low Profile: The Anti-Nuclear Movement and the British State’, in Helena Flam (eds.), *States and Anti-Nuclear Movements*, (Edinburgh, 1994), 82.

⁸⁰ SA, CA-POL19/290, Policy Committee, 4th April 1986.

⁸¹ SA, CA-POL13/243, Policy Committee, 24th February 1981.

⁸² SA, CA-POL24/Appendix E, Nuclear Free Zone Working Party, 20th February 1987.

of resources as well as the perceived dangers and threat to coal from nuclear power tied Sheffield's economic concerns to some of the more general tenets of 'local socialism.'⁸³

Blunkett's emphasis on political education can be seen in the Council's relationship with Sheffield Peace Forum, also known as the Sheffield Peace Liaison Committee. The Peace Forum was an activist run organisation that coordinated peace-related events in the city and ran the Peace Shop which sold merchandise, acted as an information centre, and printed leaflets for activist groups. The Forum and Shop received pockets of funding from the Council in the 1980s. These included £1,112 to buy an electric cutter to be used on publicity material, a generous grant of £7,667 to cover the rates charged on their premises on Leopold Street for 1984-85, and a promise to pay the Peace Shop's rates in the future.⁸⁴ However, in 1987, the Forum received a letter from Blunkett informing them that their rates would no longer be paid by the Council. Instead they would receive a one off grant. How to spend this grant was left up to the Forum but it was heavily implied that the Peace Shop was not doing the job envisaged. Blunkett wrote; 'I had hoped that the Peace Movement might be able to make a much more public contribution to reaching the undecided on the issue of nuclear weapons than has so far been the case for the last year, but we will have to see what happens in the next four weeks.'⁸⁵ Blunkett supported the peace movement's initiatives as long as they matched his own.

One month previously Councillor Roger Barton had also been in touch with the Peace Forum to suggest that they open up the Shop to the Anti-Apartheid Movement and to War on

⁸³ SA, CA-POL16/37/Appendix A, Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto, 1983.

⁸⁴ CA-POL/17/127 Policy Review Sub-Committee 3rd April 1984; CA-POL/20/81 Nuclear Free Zone Working Party 22nd May 1986.

⁸⁵ SA, X588/2012/106: Sheffield Peace Forum Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Letter from David Blunkett, 15th May 1987.

Want.⁸⁶ This suggests that Sheffield City Council felt similarly about educating Sheffielders on these issues as well. The Council had been vocal in its opposition to apartheid throughout the 1980s and it is something that Blunkett remains particularly proud of. When, in 1982, Blunkett missed Oliver Tambo speaking at their anti-apartheid conference to be at his son's birth he had to fend off friends suggesting that he name the boy Nelson.⁸⁷ In June 1981 the Council had affirmed their 'abhorrence' of apartheid and agreed a boycott of South African products.⁸⁸ Throughout the decade they maintained this policy, and developed others in support of the anti-apartheid cause; including naming a pedestrian walkway after Nelson Mandela, and flying the African National Congress flag from the Town Hall.⁸⁹ The Anti-Apartheid Movement was associated with the new left of the 1950s and 1960s but it was at its most popular in the 1980s.⁹⁰ The Sheffield branch of the Anti-Apartheid Movement was one of the largest in the country with up to eight hundred members, perhaps indicating a successful programme of political education.⁹¹

Sheffield City Council also linked their opposition to apartheid to local struggles against racism, and, just as it did with peace, focussed on the economic side of the argument. Despite the Trades Union Congress' worries in the 1960s that economic sanctions would damage British workers, by the 1980s Sheffield District Labour Party was claiming that the anti-apartheid campaign was about protecting British jobs from multi-national companies 'exporting jobs and increasing the dependence of the British economy on South Africa.'⁹²

⁸⁶ SA, X588/2012/106: Sheffield Peace Forum Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Minutes of Sheffield Peace Forum, 7th April 1987.

⁸⁷ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

⁸⁸ SA, CA-POL14/61, Policy Review Sub-Committee, 30th June 1981.

⁸⁹ SA, CA-POL20/21, Anti-Apartheid Working Party, 2nd May 1986; CA-POL18/170-1 Anti-Apartheid Advisory Panel, 1st February 1985; CA-POL35/195, Anti-Apartheid Panel, 22nd April 1988.

⁹⁰ Rob Skinner, *The Foundations of Anti-Apartheid: Liberal Humanitarians and Transnational Activists in Britain and the United States, c.1919-64*, (Basingstoke, New York, 2010), 201.

⁹¹ Interview with Paul Blomfield, 9th September 2013.

⁹² Skinner, *Foundations of Anti-Apartheid*, 165; SA, CA-POL16/37/Appendix A, Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto, 1983.

The District Labour Party was selling anti-apartheid as benefitting Sheffield workers in its manifesto. For the purpose of winning elections it emphasised the local economic benefits of anti-apartheid, rather than the campaign's radical legacy.

For the most part Sheffield City Council constructed its anti-nuclear and anti-apartheid policies around established left-wing concerns such as the economy, employment, and class solidarity. Both movements are often seen as popular new urban left concerns; however Sheffield City Council's actions show that cities dealt with them on their own terms as part of their unique 'local socialism.' Sheffield City Council's framing of the nuclear issue in this way emphasises that, because of its working class residents, Sheffield's new form of politics still prioritized the traditional concerns of class and employment. By connecting the nuclear question to coal, the Council highlighted how important the politics of the Miners' Strike was to the area. Sheffield City Council offered support to new social movements like CND, the Greenham Common women, and the Peace Forum but its analysis of the nuclear question kept returning to coal and the familiar priorities of class and employment shared by its working class constituents. Likewise, an emphasis on trade made the anti-apartheid cause relevant to the local economy. From this we can see that the 'Socialist Republic's' radical reputation disguised policies that had a more traditional class aspect to them.

The maintenance of cheap bus fares, one of the best-known policies of the 'Socialist Republic,' was also rooted in economic concerns. Despite this, Clive Betts argues that transport was the reason Sheffield was known as a 'radical' local authority.⁹³ The policy was first put forward by the South Yorkshire Labour Party's Manifesto Working Group in December 1972. They saw cheap fares and free public transport for 'the elderly, the handicapped and the disabled as an immediate objective,' but planned to develop a

⁹³ Interview with Clive Betts, 19th July 2013.

programme of ‘free transport for all’ over the following years.⁹⁴ Whilst unable to make public transport free for everyone, South Yorkshire Transport Committee kept fares low until 1986. In 1975 they set fares at the rate of one of the cheaper districts under their purview and refused to increase them. Inflation reduced the real price of fares over the decade and the shortfall was subsidised by rates.⁹⁵ Interviewed in *The Sheffield Star*, Councillor Roy Thwaites, Chairman of South Yorkshire Transport Committee and Labour Group Chief Whip, couched the policy in socialist terms. Thwaites said; “It’s not simply a question of ‘Can we afford it?’ We think it is right as Socialists. We think public transport should be a public service available to all.”⁹⁶ Answering the critique that some rate-payers never used public transport, Thwaites argued that “as a citizen, one must accept the responsibility that goes with it.”⁹⁷ Indeed, defending the policy in the 1980s, David Blunkett argued similarly that the policy was a ‘practical contribution to the social and economic life of the community’ as a whole.⁹⁸ Spending on transport aimed to save rate-payers money in other areas, reducing the need for investment in larger roads and car parks, and encouraged other economic benefits such as increasing the amount of disposable income available to families spending in the city.⁹⁹ Furthermore, the policy was directly beneficial to a large number of Sheffield’s residents. In 1981, 49.6 percent of Sheffield’s population did not own a car.¹⁰⁰ In districts such as Castle and Manor, car ownership was as low as 26.6 percent and 30 percent respectively.¹⁰¹ In 1985 adults could ride buses for six miles for 10p, children for 2p, disabled people for free, and pensioners for free outside of peak hours. The 10p adult fare compared

⁹⁴ Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 71.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Prices, politics and our bus services,’ 6th February 1975, 12.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 71.

⁹⁹ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Sheffield’s Most Powerful Man... and he’s only 32,’ 15th May 1980, 14; Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 75.

¹⁰⁰ Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 73.

¹⁰¹ Publicity Department, City of Sheffield, ‘The Bus Booklet: The effects of rate capping and the Transport Act in Sheffield April-October 1986,’ (Sheffield, 1987), 8.

with 58p in Manchester, 55p in London, and 50p in Leeds.¹⁰² The benefit for residents can be seen in the numbers using services. During 1982-83 more passengers boarded per mile in South Yorkshire than anywhere else in England, and bus travel increased by seven percent between 1974 and 1984, compared to a 30 percent decline in urban areas nationally.¹⁰³

Cheap bus fares across the country were threatened by the courts ruling the Greater London Council's Fares Fair policy illegal in 1982. In response, Sheffield's councillors came out in favour of cheap fares. Clive Betts argued that constituents in South Yorkshire had consistently voted for cheap fares.¹⁰⁴ Peter Price said that the fares were "one of the most progressive pieces of socialist planning ever seen" in Britain and that they were "working."¹⁰⁵ Blunkett and Jackson reiterated this sentiment, writing that cheap fares were a 'practical as well as ideological threat' to their political opponents.¹⁰⁶ Sheffield City Council and Labour-supporters in Sheffield campaigned to keep cheap bus fares for economic reasons but also for what they represented for left-wing local government. Blunkett wrote in *The Sheffield Star* in 1982 that bus fares could quadruple and that the effects would be 'horrific,' altering the social life of the community 'overnight.'¹⁰⁷ But, furthermore, he suggested that if courts were allowed to decide policies then councillors "might as well pack up and go home."¹⁰⁸ This was an issue of local democracy as well as social and economic fairness. The leader of the Labour Party Michael Foot agreed. Foot pledged to protect local government autonomy should Labour win the 1983 General Election.¹⁰⁹ Cheap bus fares galvanised support across South Yorkshire. In January 1982, a demonstration 'stoppage' of public transport in Sheffield

¹⁰² Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 74.

¹⁰³ Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 73.

¹⁰⁴ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Prospect of no more cheap bus fares 'horrific,' 4th February 1982, 8.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 73.

¹⁰⁷ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Prospect of no more cheap bus fares 'horrific,' 4th February 1982, 8.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Foot backs buses,' 12th February 1982, 1.

was supported by engineering and steel workers.¹¹⁰ Councillor Roger Barton made badges that read “The air is cleaner because of cheap bus fares.”¹¹¹ A petition to save South Yorkshire’s cheap fares collected 100,000 signatures in its first week and 250,000 in total.¹¹² One tenants’ action group in Sheffield collected more than 1,000 signatures.¹¹³ Brennan Bates, organiser of the Save Our Cheap Fares Campaign, was ‘astonished’ by the support, suggesting that “people are obviously beginning to regard cheap fares as a right.”¹¹⁴ The institutions that made up Blunkett’s notion of community, trade unions and tenants’ groups, came out in support of cheap bus fares.

The 1985 Transport Act introduced privatised and deregulated bus services throughout Britain, putting an end to cheap fares subsidised by rates. South Yorkshire Transport Board’s spending limit was cut by 27 percent and resulted in a 250 percent fare increase. Bus fares in Sheffield rose from between 5p and 25p to between 10p and 80p. Free travel for pensioners and people with disabilities was abolished, and child fares increased from 2p to 5p. March 1987 saw a further fare increase of 6.2 percent.¹¹⁵ The final bus to operate under cheap fares in Sheffield set off on 31st March 1986.¹¹⁶ Jude Warrender, an environmental activist, remembers hearing it pass her house and thinking that it represented the ‘end of an era.’¹¹⁷ Over the summer of 1986, bus use decreased by 23 percent.¹¹⁸ Shortly after the fare increases were implemented Sheffield City Council surveyed nearly 1,000 people. Half of those interviewed were using buses less frequently, with unemployed people

¹¹⁰ Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 72.

¹¹¹ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

¹¹² *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Foot backs buses,’ 12th February 1982, 1, Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 72.

¹¹³ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Marching to defend cheap bus fares,’ 3rd February 1982, 9.

¹¹⁴ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Cheap fares campaign gets show on the road,’ 12th February 1982.

¹¹⁵ Publicity, City of Sheffield, ‘The Bus Booklet,’ 3-4.

¹¹⁶ Martin Jenkinson Image Library, Photograph, 31st March 1986,

<http://martinjenkinson.photoshelter.com/gallery-image/1980s-Protest/G0000ADCbo9sFqdl/I0000L6z4O.Tcau4/C0000PXenaeUbs6c> (accessed 04/08/2015).

¹¹⁷ Interview with Jude Warrender, 14th June 2013.

¹¹⁸ Publicity, City of Sheffield, ‘The Bus Booklet,’ 6.

and those on low incomes reporting the most change. Almost two out of three unemployed people said they could no longer afford to travel as much, making it more difficult to ‘look for work, shop, visit friends, use the markets and city centre or go to social events.’¹¹⁹ The changes also affected employment in the region. The South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive cut 31 percent of its workforce resulting in 1,500 job losses. Nearly 1,000 of these were in Sheffield.¹²⁰ Every Leyland bus contained twenty five tons of Sheffield special steel, and so declining demand for buses affected heavy industry.¹²¹ The British Steel Corporation closed Tinsley Park steelworks in 1985, cutting 1,114 jobs.¹²² The end of cheap fares also affected other areas of local service provision. Sheffield’s Family and Community Services Department faced additional costs of £30,000 per year to fund travel for home helps as families struggled with the added cost of travelling to look after elderly relatives.¹²³ The significance of South Yorkshire’s cheap fares policy was not only that it served Blunkett’s notion of community. It also helped to sustain it.

Blunkett was also ‘very proud’ of the Community Work Apprenticeship Scheme.¹²⁴ The scheme took twelve people who were active in their communities in Sheffield and trained them to be community workers. In every ten weeks they spent one week studying at Northern College, learning the history of community work and reading theorists like Sivanandan, and the other nine working on community projects.¹²⁵ The scheme took Blunkett and Green’s rhetoric about engaging people in the community and made it happen. Blunkett said that ‘it stemmed from the belief that I still have that there is enormous talent in communities where people have not had opportunities to develop.’ They took talented people

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ Publicity, City of Sheffield, ‘The Bus Booklet,’ 20-21.

¹²¹ Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 78.

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ Publicity, City of Sheffield, ‘The Bus Booklet,’ 9.

¹²⁴ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

¹²⁵ Interview with John and Sue Lawson, 17th May 2013.

and trained them ‘so that they could be the voice of and the activists within the community as well as the workforce.’¹²⁶ Both Kath Mackey and John Lawson completed the scheme and went on to work for the Council; Mackey in the Department of Employment and Economic Development, whilst Lawson developed his occupational health programme with the Race Equality Unit.¹²⁷

The scheme itself was quite radical. For a start, of the twelve people chosen to be on the scheme there were six men, six women, six black and minority ethnic people and six white people. They were deliberately chosen to represent their communities and also learn from each other’s struggles and experiences.¹²⁸ John Lawson explained that they learnt the history of different types of community work; from its philanthropic and liberal roots, to Marxism and ‘in and against the state arguments’ before deciding what type of community worker they wanted to be. In the words of John Lawson;

‘We could be a philanthropic – picker up of dog shit- type of community worker, organising lunch clubs and cleaning, you know- getting lights put up in streets. Or... [it was] entirely valid to do a Marxist and services type community work where you were an in and against the state type fella person who was... just helping community organisations to get to a certain level and then stop. Or you could carry on agitating and agitating.... Essentially I became a paid agitator... Which was wonderful.’¹²⁹

As Councillor Helen Jackson put it, Northern College ‘churned out activists.’¹³⁰ But this did cause some difficulties and it added to Sheffield’s radical reputation. As Blunkett said; ‘I think it was Sir Keith Joseph who described them as urban guerrillas – we used to have a

¹²⁶ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

¹²⁷ Interview with Kath Mackey, 10th January 2014.

¹²⁸ Interview with Kath Mackey, 10th January 2014.

¹²⁹ Interview with John and Sue Lawson, 17th May 2013.

¹³⁰ Interview with Helen Jackson, 29th April 2013.

laugh about how you spelt it.’¹³¹ The Tories on the Council accused Labour of developing a revolutionary cell and the resulting uproar landed Blunkett on Question Time, which was reasonably rare for a local politician; it ‘sort of made my name.’¹³²

Sheffield’s radical reputation was cemented nationally. Even before the scheme, people on the left had come to Sheffield to work with the Council. When Councillor Alan Billings left Leicester after being attacked for his anti-racist views he had thought ‘Where’s a good Labour town?’ before choosing Sheffield.¹³³ Likewise, Emma Rattenbury who later headed up the Council’s Women’s Unit came to Sheffield because she ‘wanted to be where the real working class were in the North of England and we were Southerners.’ As soon as they arrived her and her partner Dave Morgan, who later became a councillor, joined the Labour Party. They had previously been members of the Socialist Workers Party.¹³⁴ Jol Miskin, a member of Militant, said ‘I naively thought with my experience, with my education – given what South Yorkshire was like politically... – I would get a job!’¹³⁵ Newcomers were altering labour movements across the country, introducing ‘rainbow coalition[s]’ of community interests.¹³⁶ But in Sheffield they had been invited. When Blunkett and Green wrote that ‘people who work for local authorities have got to be committed to a new type of politics... they should have a commitment not to an isolated individual but to the community itself... they are part of community action,’ they got more than they bargained for.¹³⁷ As Blunkett admits; ‘we got hoisted with our own petard... when you call for everyone of good

¹³¹ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

¹³² Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

¹³³ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

¹³⁴ Interview with Emma Rattenbury, 9th April 2013.

¹³⁵ Interview with Jol Miskin, 18th March 2013.

¹³⁶ Green, ‘The new municipal socialism,’ 274-275.

¹³⁷ Blunkett and Green, *Building from the Bottom*, 26.

will and the same ilk to rally you don't always know what worms are going to creep in with them.'¹³⁸

Writing in 1981, Keith Bassett, an academic and Labour councillor based in Bristol, reported that there was a growing group on the left who, inspired by the ideas in *In and Against the State* and *Beyond the Fragments* were focussing on struggles against the local state. They were facing questions such as 'how can the Labour Left's proposal for extending state intervention be reconciled with the critique of the welfare state that emphasises its contradictory and often oppressive nature?'¹³⁹ Just as *In and Against the State* had been written by those who worked for the local state or for state-funded organisations, so many of the activists who worked for or with Sheffield City Council saw the need to bring 'the struggle for socialism into our daily work' which included fighting against the state sometimes.¹⁴⁰ Blunkett was not inherently against this critique and encouraged discussion. Sheffield held an *In and Against the State*-themed conference in June 1981 for local authority staff to talk about 'Working for the "Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire."' ¹⁴¹ It was attended by Council officer Dan Sequerra, future councillor Dave Morgan, Keith and Helen Jackson, Geoff Green and David Blunkett himself, who contributed a paper about whether 'social policy at a local level can contribute to the redistribution of wealth.'¹⁴² This engagement with radical ideas drew left-wingers to Sheffield. According to Blunkett members of the Socialist Workers Party, the Revolutionary Communist Party and the International Marxist Group came to work for Sheffield City Council. He said 'the more

¹³⁸ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

¹³⁹ Keith Bassett, 'Political Responses to the Restructuring of the Local State,' in Martin Boddy and Colin Fudge, *The Local State Theory and Practice: Papers from a Conference held on 6 December 1980*, (Bristol, 1981), 57-58.

¹⁴⁰ London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, *In and Against the State*, 1980 <http://libcom.org/library/preface-first-edition> (accessed 3/05/2013).

¹⁴¹ SLSL:MP2331M, Common Ground Resources Centre, *In and Against the State Day Conference Report* – Sheffield, 1981.

¹⁴² *ibid.*

Sheffield's image became that of a radical, forward-looking left-wing authority, the more these people gathered here because they could see it as a base from which they could develop their own particular revolutionary propaganda.¹⁴³ At the time Blunkett saw this as a problem; a radical step too far. He was quoted in *The Star* saying "these people pretend to be on the side of the working people while at the same time they aim to smash the only major organisation in the city capable of carrying out radical policy." They were "bent on destroying" the labour movement.¹⁴⁴ Now he has a calmer approach; it 'was a problem... because it made life very difficult... whatever we did there was always someone denouncing it as being inadequate or right-wing or toadying or whatever.'¹⁴⁵

This was certainly the case with John Lawson who suggests that with the Community Work Apprenticeship Scheme the Council 'created a monster.'¹⁴⁶ Lawson was left feeling particularly disappointed by Sheffield City Council's response to the Poll Tax. During the campaign to stop private landlords buying up council houses, John Lawson had built up a large network of activists on Parsons Cross, the largest estate in Sheffield. At the behest of Blunkett he had 'educated' them – 'what he meant was agitate.'¹⁴⁷ When the Poll Tax was announced Blunkett phoned Lawson again asking him to mobilise the tenants of Parsons Cross against the Poll Tax. He did and for a while had Blunkett's support to use the 'Can't Pay Won't Pay' slogan. However after a while Blunkett did a 'complete about turn and said you'll start have to paying Poll Tax. And he got thrown off estate! He got booed out of the building.'¹⁴⁸ This came as no particular surprise to John Lawson nor his wife Sue: 'having the politics that we had you just don't expect revolution to come from Town Hall.'¹⁴⁹ However

¹⁴³ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

¹⁴⁴ *The Sheffield Star*, 7th April 1983, 1.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with John and Sue Lawson, 17th May 2013.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with John and Sue Lawson, 17th May 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with John and Sue Lawson, 17th May 2013.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with John and Sue Lawson, 17th May 2013.

they were frustrated and saw it as hypocrisy on Labour's part. Sheffield City Council developed a radical reputation as the 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' but for the activists who worked for it, it did not do enough. As Lawson puts it; the Council created 'little beacons of hope for people... but we want a bakery not fucking crumbs.'¹⁵⁰

Rate-capping: End of the Experiment?

Many of the themes of Sheffield's socialism, such as community involvement and balancing radicalism with pragmatism, can be seen in the city's campaign against rate-capping. From 1984-1985, David Blunkett and the Labour Group of Sheffield City Council ran a campaign against the Thatcher government's rate-capping measures which aimed to appear moderate and reasonable, as well as satisfying the left-wing and radical elements of the local labour movement. From the start they agreed to the principle of non-compliance with the new centrally-fixed rate levels in order to protect jobs and services; a stance which was supported by the national Labour Party despite its illegality. Blunkett, however, as chair of the National Executive Committee (NEC) Local Government Committee, had his own ideas about how to present this campaign. Rather than martyr Labour-led local authorities to a cause, Blunkett was determined to persuade central government and the electorate that high-spending councils were not necessarily inefficient and wasteful, and instead put forward the argument that high rates went towards necessary services. He put in place a 'continual review' of Sheffield's budget to reduce inefficient spending and identify priority areas, and in 1985 the Audit Commission deemed Sheffield a 'shining example' of local authority efficiency despite their high spending.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Interview with John and Sue Lawson, 17th May 2013.

¹⁵¹ Stephen Pollard, *David Blunkett*, (Great Britain, 2005), 144.

Blunkett was raising Sheffield City Council up as a model to be emulated, but at the same time he questioned local authorities who acted differently. Veronica Hardstaff remembers that there was a fear in Sheffield that Derek Hatton and Ken Livingstone could ‘wreck everything’ they had tried to implement.¹⁵² Councillors in Sheffield strove to distance themselves from Liverpool and the GLC. At the 1985 Labour Party Conference David Blunkett confronted Derek Hatton, and persuaded him to publically agree to open Liverpool City Council’s finances up to scrutiny, an act that made the scale of Liverpool’s excessive spending clear.¹⁵³ The campaign in Sheffield was run under the slogan ‘Sheffield Against Rate Capping for the Right Reasons,’ which articulated that there were ‘right’ reasons; protecting jobs and essential services such as luncheon clubs for pensioners, and ‘wrong’ reasons; blind opposition to the central government and funding ‘loony’ or wasteful projects. This position was communicated through advertising campaigns, and information and education programmes through trade unions. A ‘Pay Your Rates’ campaign was mounted to ensure income streams. By February 1985, meetings had been held with 28,000 of the local authority’s 33,000-strong workforce.¹⁵⁴ This was an effective strategy and on 7th March 15,000 marched against rate-capping in the city’s biggest demonstration of the decade.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, thousands of workers pledged the income from two hours of unpaid labour. The saved wages were to be set against Council losses.¹⁵⁶

As the campaign against rate capping wore on, Blunkett’s self-styled ‘firm left’ approach, in opposition to Livingstone’s ‘loony left’ and Hatton’s ‘hard left,’ came under pressure.¹⁵⁷ As Labour-led councils across Britain began to set rates, Sheffield found itself

¹⁵² Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

¹⁵³ Pollard, *David Blunkett*, 159-60.

¹⁵⁴ Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 177.

¹⁵⁵ SA, 396 SQ, Double Shift, Issue 18, May 1985.

¹⁵⁶ Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 180.

¹⁵⁷ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 155; Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Postwar Britain*, (Manchester, New York, 2007), 139-140.

among a dwindling group of resisting councils including; Camden, Greenwich, Hackney, Islington, Lambeth, Southwark and Liverpool, most of whom were seen as profligate spenders.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, by May 1985, Sheffield was the only local authority of this group committed to refusing to set a rate. The strategy of the other authorities was to continue to delay making a rate in the hope that the Government would be forced into negotiations.¹⁵⁹ This made Sheffield City Council look the most radical, and they began to face criticism locally for their stance. Peter Ford, the President of Sheffield's Chamber of Commerce, accused the Council of damaging the city with "silly socialism" and of "parting company with traditional Yorkshire commonsense."¹⁶⁰ Ford argued that Sheffield had become "identified in the public mind with Liverpool and with certain inner boroughs of London."¹⁶¹ David Blunkett was losing his battle to appear 'durable and reliable.'¹⁶² This required a change in tactics and one week before the budget vote on 7th May 1985, Blunkett asked the district Labour Party to agree to set a maximum legal rate and combine it with a deficit budget in the hope that central government could be persuaded to make up the shortfall.¹⁶³ The motion was rejected by eighty one votes to forty eight and the official Sheffield Labour policy remained a refusal to set a rate.¹⁶⁴ However, on the night of the budget decision, moderate Labour rebels joined with Conservative and SDP-Liberal Alliance councillors to agree to set a rate, and left-wing rebels dismissed Blunkett's further calls for a deficit budget. On what Blunkett described as 'the worst night of [his] political life,' Sheffield City Council set a legal rate and ended their campaign against rate-capping.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁸ PHM LHA&SC, NEC Minutes and Papers May 1985, Folder: Local Government Committee 13th May 1985, May 1985 Local Authority Rate Making 1985/6.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Socialism 'damaging Sheffield,' 16th April 1985, 8.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*

¹⁶² Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 155.

¹⁶³ Pollard, *David Blunkett*, 147.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *The Sheffield Star*, 'City's rate defiance finally crumbles,' 8th May 1985, 9; *The Sheffield Star*, 'Rate is set after split by Labour,' 8th May 1985, 1.

Sheffield City Council and David Blunkett were now tasked with trying to implement their new budget whilst protecting jobs and services. Speaking to *The Sheffield Star* Blunkett maintained that the Labour Group would “do the best for the people of Sheffield, which is the only thing we have ever tried to do.”¹⁶⁶ Although Blunkett claimed that they could partially bridge the gap between income and planned expenditure with £17 million from Council balances and had identified £3 million in potential savings, there was still a shortfall of £12 million to make up.¹⁶⁷ To avoid having to make large and immediate cuts Sheffield City Council found ways of postponing some of their spending, hoping that the election of a Labour Government in 1987 would bail them out.¹⁶⁸ By 1988, local authorities nationally had a deficit of around £2 billion.¹⁶⁹ Sheffield City Council was in a difficult financial position, and Sheffield residents were feeling a squeeze on their services. The new urban left in Sheffield went into retrenchment, ‘both materially and ideologically,’ inviting a new era of ‘sober realism.’¹⁷⁰ The City Council entered pragmatic partnerships with central government and the private sector, turning away from the ‘bottom up’ approaches of the early 1980s. Sheffield Development Corporation was set up in 1988 to bring economic regeneration to the Lower Don Valley area of Sheffield, facilitating the Meadowhall shopping centre and creating 18,000 jobs.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, Geoff Green has suggested that ‘the relentless pressures of managing the local state in a hostile political and economic environment... caused weariness or exodus into oblivion or parliament.’¹⁷² At least one of these was apparent in Sheffield as by 1992, three instrumental councillors; David Blunkett, Helen Jackson, and

¹⁶⁶ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Rate is set after split by Labour,’ 8th May 1985, 1.

¹⁶⁷ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Rate is set after split by Labour,’ 8th May 1985, 1.

¹⁶⁸ Allan Cochrane, ‘Book Review Essay’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 12:2 (1988), 319; John Gyford, Steve Leach and Chris Game, *The Changing Politics of Local Government*, (London, 1989), 309.

¹⁶⁹ Gyford, Leach and Game, *Changing Politics*, 310.

¹⁷⁰ Green, ‘The new municipal socialism’, 290; Gyford, Leach and Game, *Changing Politics*, 316.

¹⁷¹ Hansard, ‘Sheffield Development Corporation (Area and Constitution) Order 1997,’ HL Deb 06 February 1997, vol 577, cc1801-4.

¹⁷² Green, ‘The new municipal socialism,’ 290.

Clive Betts, were representing Sheffield as Members of Parliament, leaving the local authority to a new cohort.

Conclusion

For David Blunkett and his contemporaries in Sheffield, the ‘Socialist Republic’ was ‘about a moment in time’ when finding successful alternatives to combat Thatcherism was the priority.¹⁷³ In Sheffield these alternatives were rooted in an older class-based politics. Once we look past the red flag we can see that Sheffield’s radical reputation hid a more traditional reality as they prioritized material concerns, such as the economy or transport, over newer social movements and identity politics. The ‘Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire’ was just that; socialist policies tuned to the needs of South Yorkshire and Sheffield residents. It integrated radical policies aimed at building new constituencies of voters, but did so in such a way as to avoid alienating its core working class voters and, indeed, to win some of them back. Its policies were aimed at engaging voters and encouraging them to participate in local politics. The Community Work Apprenticeship Scheme strove to train talented working class people to work for and represent their communities. The campaigns for cheap bus fares and against rate-capping mobilised large numbers of residents and workers. Sheffield City Council always intended to engage its constituents but the reputation it garnered for activism took it somewhat by surprise. Sheffield City Council’s priorities lay in housing, transport and employment, but they were open to new ideas and radical thinkers. Influenced by New Left theorists, new urban left local authorities, and their own experiences, Sheffield City Council reached out to communities and developed new urban left policies, albeit framed by an economic perspective.

¹⁷³ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

This openness to new and radical ideas gave Sheffield a reputation. A reputation not helped by red flags and Marx Memorial lectures. Rather than act as a beacon to communicate socialism across the country like Blunkett had intended, the ‘Socialist Republic’ acted as a beacon that attracted left-wingers to Sheffield; drawing in activists like moths to a flame. Many of these left-wingers came specially to work for the Council. There they engaged with Sheffield-born activists in the communities they were put to work in. Sheffield’s push for community-led activism opened up a debate over who this community included. Often activists were involved in a number of movements outside of their work, such as peace, environmentalism and feminism. In these movements they built their own activist milieu in the city. This was an activist-led ‘Socialist Republic’ that existed both inside and outside, or in and against, the state, and will be explored in the following chapters.

Chapter 2

Sheffield's Labour Movement

You can't do this, says Cath. We're going over to my sister's. Not today, love, you're not. Why not? says Cath. Why can't we? I have reason to believe that you're liable to cause a breach of the peace. You can't do this, says Cath again. Turn your vehicle around or you'll be arrested. I start the car. Martin, she says. He can't do this. I say, Yes he can. Yes, he bloody can – We warmed your houses. Your kitchens and your beds.

David Peace, *GB84*, 2004¹

On 7th April 1984, around 7,000 miners from all over Britain gathered outside Sheffield City Hall to express their support for the national strike.² They were joined by ‘nurses, dockers, MPs and trade unionists’ who, in between speeches and calls for donations, sang “Who do you think you are kidding Mr MacGregor?” and “Arthur Scargill Walks on Water.”³ At the meeting inside City Hall councillors accused Thatcher’s Government of planning to destroy the trade unions, and the chairman of the South Yorkshire Police Committee, George Moores, argued that the police should be brought under democratic control and compared media reporting of the strike to the propaganda machine of Nazi Germany.⁴ Dennis Skinner, Member of Parliament for Bolsover, summed up the mood with the statement that “the freedom of the individual in this country is being fought on the picket lines.”⁵ To activists the strike represented the freedom of individuals as well as the defence of communities, and as such garnered support from many quarters.

In Sheffield in the 1980s the class-based politics of industry and unemployment overrode any other political concerns. On some occasions the labour movement embraced

¹ David Peace, *GB84*, (London, 2005), 40.

² *The Sheffield Star*, ‘7,000 lobby crucial NUM gathering,’ 19th April 1984, 1.

³ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Miners make it a gala,’ 19th April 1984, 3.

⁴ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Govt. ‘engineered miners’ dispute,’ 19th April 1984, 14.

⁵ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘7,000 lobby crucial NUM gathering,’ 19th April 1984, 1.

new tactics and forms of activism that provided potential intersections with the concerns of identity politics; however for the most part class eclipsed identity politics. The labour movement accepted help and support when offered, but struggled to return the favour when called upon. Throughout the course of the Miners' Strike, women, black and minority ethnic activists, lesbians and gay men, middle class professionals, and Christians all offered their support; fundraising and supporting soup kitchens, picketing, and calling for independent monitoring of the police. Groups such as Women Against the Pit Closures, the Asian Youth Movement and Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners drew on past experiences and mobilised new activists in support of the labour movement. Yet when these groups called for support after the strike, their requests were often presented as existing outside of the narrow definition of class politics favoured by Sheffield labour movement and Labour Group. Deindustrialisation had weakened trade unions in the city and some looked towards the new urban left for a new politics, but despite this a specific form of class politics persisted in Sheffield and continued to trump identity politics again and again.

This chapter examines the persistence of the labour movement in Sheffield's political scene even as industry declined in the area and left-wing thinkers began to discuss class in terms of its relationship to a variety of new social and cultural identities.⁶ Its continued prominence can both be explained and evidenced by the close relationship long shared by the Trades Council and the Labour Party, and by the continued influence of adult education centres such as Wortley Hall and Northern College on local activists and politicians. Sheffield's institutions of class politics and the role of certain political families in maintaining the close relationship between industry and politics are discussed in the first section of this chapter. The second section examines the extent to which these institutions

⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Forward March of Labour Halted?*, (London, 1981); Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism*, (London, 1979).

embraced new left ideas to meet the challenge of mass and youth unemployment, and explores the role of Militant and other left-wing factions in Sheffield. The final section delves further into the 1984-85 Miners' Strike to demonstrate how important class and the labour movement remained in Sheffield and to show how class eclipsed newer forms of identity politics even as alliances with other movements were formed.

Examining the Miners' Strike through campaign leaflets and oral history interviews, this third section shows how activists from different movements engaged with and learnt from each other, exploring the solidarity within Sheffield's activist milieu and creating the potential for intersections between class and new left concerns. Groups like Women Against the Pit Closures and Policewatch gave women a greater role in class activism, and once politicised, the women in turn offered support to other movements such as anti-racist campaigns. In this sense, the experience of class-based activism helped to drive a movement based around identity politics forward. However, the less than enthusiastic response of Sheffield City Council's Labour Group to some of the groups supporting the miners also shows how the persistence of class excluded some forms of politics. New left hopes for a fusion of class and identity failed in Sheffield not so much because it was too difficult to integrate the myriad concerns of identity politics, but because old identities resolutely refused to accept their new left partners in anything other than a subsidiary role. Blunkett aimed for socialist policies that integrated radical concerns without alienating core working class voters, but the pervasive nature of the labour movement in Sheffield's politics may have led to the exclusion of some activists from this collectivist ideal.

Class and the Labour Movement in Sheffield

Sheffield's political identity was built around class and the labour movement. This emphasis remained in the 1980s despite Sheffield's industrial decline, legislation dividing the Trades

Council and Labour Party, and the rise of forms of activism representing a variety of new social and cultural identities. The persistence of the labour movement can be seen in activists' continued desire for the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council to remain a single organisational body. This was supported by kinship networks with members of prominent political families holding roles in both the political and the industrial groupings, and reinforced at adult education and political training sites such as Northern College and Wortley Hall where Communists, Labour Party members, and trade unionists learnt their politics side by side. By the early 1980s, new left ideas were being taught at Northern College and filtering through the labour movement, but there was also an emphasis on everyday working class life and the struggle in the surrounding coalfield. Institutions of adult education in Sheffield and personal networks kept Sheffield's labour movement together and united, but also somewhat resistant to change.

Sheffield Labour Party maintained a particularly close relationship with the city's trade unions. From the early 1920s the Labour Party and Sheffield Trades Council had operated as one body, the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council, uniting political and industrial struggles in Sheffield. In 1972 the Labour Party National Executive threatened the relationship between the political and the industrial by deciding to separate Britain's remaining joint Trades and Labour Councils, citing local government reorganisation as a reason for the timing, if not the actual divide.⁷ This was not particularly controversial. It had been happening in other cities for a couple of decades and by the early 1970s there were only thirty six joint councils remaining. Most union leaders, including Hugh Scanlon, President of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, and Jack Jones, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union – the 'terrible twins' of left-wing unionism – took 'the traditional

⁷ Warwick Modern Records Centre, MSS292 D 79/151, Trades Union Congress Joint Trades Council and Labour Parties, 3rd July 1972.

position that politics was politics and trade unionism trade unionism.’⁸ They felt a division of trades and labour could allow a more independent Trades Union Congress to lobby Government more effectively. The Sheffield Trades and Labour Council did not agree with this argument and fought hard to remain a single body. It complained that the organisation would no longer be able to afford a full time secretary and worried that industrial activity would decrease. Organisers also feared that branches would not affiliate to Constituency Labour Parties once separated from the political wing of the joint council and that city-wide campaigns would fail as unions could be excluded from direct participation. At the 1972 annual meeting both the industrial section and the political section voted overwhelmingly – 164 to 12, and 126 to 14 respectively – to remain as one organisation.⁹

Vernon Thornes, Secretary of the Trades and Labour Council, was particularly vigorous in his opposition to the separation; writing to the TUC and drumming up support in the Trades and Labour Council 1971/72 year book. Thornes’ protestations reflect what Lewis Minkin describes as an ‘emotional and moral element’ to trade union solidarity with the Labour Party.¹⁰ Thornes argued that Sheffield’s 150,000-strong manufacturing workforce gave the city its political strength and its identity, and that such an identity, a ‘sense of belonging,’ was ‘the most essential factor’ for Labour’s future success in local elections.¹¹ Thornes concluded that a new system ‘may well prove fatal’ in the 1973 local elections which would destroy any chance of building ‘a socialist local authority... working closely together, for the common good.’¹² Ron Ironmonger, leader of the South Yorkshire County Council, agreed. He wrote that the decision to split the joint council was a ‘bitter

⁸ Lewis Minkin, *The Contentious Alliance: Trade Unions and the Labour Party*, (Edinburgh, 1991), 162, 177.

⁹ Sheffield Archives, AC.2002-130, Sheffield Trades and Labour Council 1972/3 Year Book, 5.

¹⁰ Minkin, *The Contentious Alliance*, 178.

¹¹ WMRC, MSS292 D 79/151, Vernon Thornes, Evidence Against Labour Party NEC Proposals, 29th June 1972.

¹² *ibid.*

disappointment.’¹³ However, Ironmonger determined that they must work together to ensure unity between the groups and form the ‘strongest bastion’ of Labour authorities in the country in order to build a socialist future.¹⁴ The strength of Thornes’ and Ironmonger’s concern indicates how integral the connection between the trade unions and the Labour Party was to Sheffield’s politics. The ‘Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire’ that emerged in Sheffield was based on more than just class politics and the labour movement, but Thornes’ and Ironmonger’s objections indicate where it originated, and help to explain why the labour movement and a certain form of class politics remained such a strong force into the 1980s.

The Sheffield Trades and Labour Council separated in 1974. Nevertheless the Labour Party won the 1973 local elections in Sheffield and kept control of the local authority for the next two decades. The ‘Political Executive’ of Sheffield Trades and Labour Council became the ‘Labour Party’ and the ‘Industrial Executive’ the ‘Trades Council,’ but their activities, relationships, and personnel remained somewhat interchangeable. Indeed by 1984 the two organisations shared a secretary once more; Councillor Roger Barton who was affiliated to the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW). Barton did acknowledge that the TUC had to be ‘careful on Party-Political leaflets’ in a letter written to General Secretary Len Murray in 1983 when he was secretary of Sheffield Labour Party. Yet at the same time he pushed Murray for a quote that spoke ‘in a language that our supporters understand.’¹⁵ The following year he became the secretary of Sheffield Trades Council as well; a position that enabled him to coordinate joint campaigns more easily. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the Labour Party and Trades Council in Sheffield continued to produce a joint year book which

¹³ WMRC, MSS292 D 79/151, Letter from D.A. Perris Secretary of Birmingham Trades Council to Mr K. Graham of the TUC, 5th September 1972.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ WMRC: MSS.292D/79/153: Sheffield Trades Council September 1980 – August 1985, Letter from Roger Barton acting Secretary of Sheffield Trades Council to Len Murray, General Secretary of TUC, 7th January 1983.

was political in nature. It declared that Thatcher's aims were 'a menace to all we are attempting to achieve,' spoke of 'disastrous monetarist policies,' and described unemployment as a Tory 'weapon' against trade union activism.¹⁶ In 1981 it expressed their 'determination to defend Socialist policies,' and by 1984 called for 'positive links with Community, Peace, Women's and Tenants' Groups' which 'must be forged if policy formation is truly representative of the people we claim to represent.'¹⁷ This was a nod to the new urban left, but shared David Blunkett's focus on traditional working class organisations like tenants' and community groups.

Andrew Taylor has argued that the relationship between trade unions and the Labour Party was 'unstable... because the party's conception of socialism transcends class interests such as those represented by the trade unions.'¹⁸ As such, Taylor argues, there was 'no labour *movement*' but instead a 'coalition of more or less like-minded interests who coalesce for limited electoral purposes.'¹⁹ This analysis does not fit Sheffield in the 1970s and 1980s. Sheffield Trades Council, although divided from the Labour Party by a technicality, remained close and shared its politics and personnel. The joint year books expressed trade union concerns and argued for policies in line with those proposed by Sheffield City Council's new urban left ruling Labour Group. Many of Sheffield City Council's new urban left councillors came through the Political Executive of the Trades Council, but Councillors Roger Barton and Mike Bower, as well as officers Dan Sequerra and Jim Coleman also served on the Industrial Executive.²⁰ Close links were maintained between the political and the industrial.

¹⁶ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1975-6; SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1980-1.

¹⁷ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1983-4.

¹⁸ Andrew Taylor, *Trade Unions and the Labour Party*, (London, Sydney, 1987), 1.

¹⁹ Taylor, *Trade Unions and the Labour Party*, 3.

²⁰ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1981-82. SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1977-8.

Sheffield's labour movement was cohesive and remained an important part of Sheffield's politics, even as links were encouraged with 'newer' forms of politics.

However, early 1970s concerns about the labour movement were not groundless. Sheffield's dominant industries of steel and manufacturing had been gradually shrinking since the 1950s. From 1952 to 1965 there was a drop of seventeen percent in those employed by tool manufacturing.²¹ The steel industry remained reasonably strong until 1979-1981, but even so deindustrialisation and rising unemployment were growing concerns of Sheffield politicians and trade unionists. Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s the Sheffield Trades Council tracked the rising unemployment figures with a growing sense of frustration, as can be seen in Figure 2.1. In 1976 Sheffield Trades Council lamented the 15,000 jobs lost in the city in the previous decade; and in 1979 promised that 'job creation will remain our first priority.'²² The 1980s brought more pessimism: 'Britain is being bled to death by the EEC.'²³ Unemployment in the city continued to rise with more than 57,000 notified redundancies between 1979 and 1983; over eighty percent them coming from the manufacturing sector.²⁴

By 1987, unemployment in Sheffield had risen to 16.3 percent and 19.4 percent of men were looking for work.²⁵ This collapse in industry had a large effect on engineering trade unions; traditionally some of the city's strongest. The employed membership of the Sheffield Engineering Employers Association halved in this period and trade union membership declined generally, if erratically.²⁶ In 1971 there were 255 union branches affiliated to the

²¹ William Hampton, *Democracy and Community: A Study of Politics in Sheffield*, (London, New York, 1970), 47.

²² SA, AC.2002-130, Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1972/73; SA, AC.2002-130, Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1975/76; SA, AC.2002-130, Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1978/79.

²³ SA, AC.2002-130, Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1979/80.

²⁴ Dave Child and Mick Paddon, 'Sheffield: Steelyard Blues', *Marxism Today*, July 1984, 19.

²⁵ Sidney Pollard, 'Labour' in Clyde Binfield, et al. (eds.) *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843-1993* (Sheffield, 1993), 278.

²⁶ Child and Paddon, 'Steelyard Blues', 19.

Sheffield Trades and Labour Council with 52,251 members.²⁷ By 1988 that had decreased to 120 union branches with 36,000 members, although, as Figures 2.2 and 2.3 illustrate, neither suffered a smooth decline. This can perhaps be attributed to the growth of local government unions the National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO) and the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE).²⁸ As Taylor elaborates, between 1970 and 1982, NALGO and NUPE both increased their nation-wide memberships by over fifty percent, reflecting Britain's changing occupational structure.²⁹ One could argue that Sheffield's labour movement was weakened by deindustrialisation and rising unemployment. However, bolstered by the local government unions and white-collar workers, it was more that Sheffield's labour movement absorbed different types of workers, and with them some new ideas.

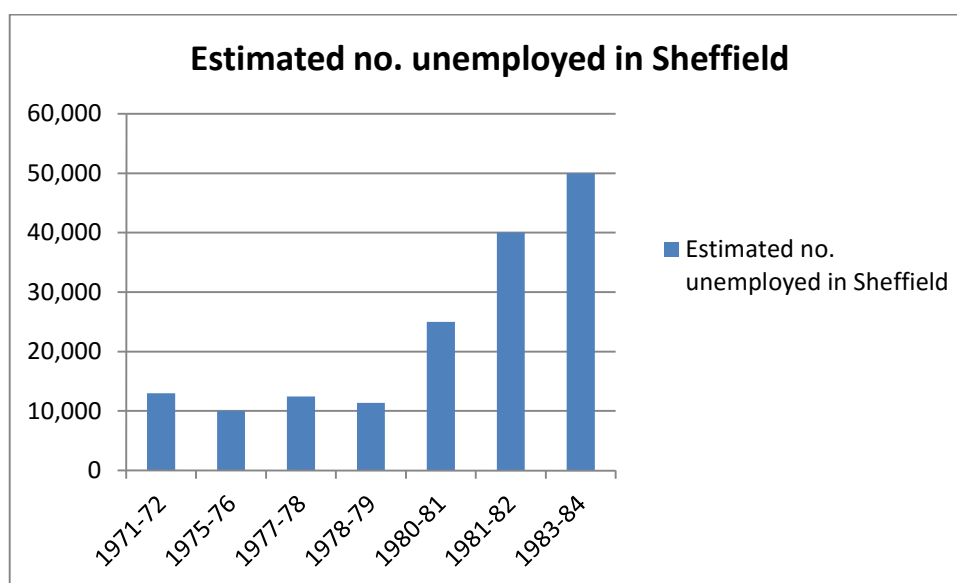


Figure 2.1: Number of people unemployed in Sheffield as estimated by Sheffield Trades Council.³⁰

²⁷ WMRC: MSS.292D/9/151: Sheffield Trades Council September 1970- January 1975, Trades Union Congress Annual Return from Trades Council 1971.

²⁸ WMRC: MSS.292D/79/154: Sheffield Trades Council January 1986 – June 1990, Trades Union Congress Annual Return from Trades Councils 1988.

²⁹ Taylor, *Trade Unions and the Labour Party*, 152.

³⁰ SA, AC.2002-130 Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Books, 1971/72 – 1983/84.

Despite the shifting occupational structure, trade unions maintained a visible and political presence on the streets of Sheffield and surrounding areas throughout the 1980s. This was in part because of the increasing politicisation of the public sector in the 1970s and 1980s.³¹ On 2nd February 1980 the steel strike spread into the private sector and 600 steel strikers marched through Stocksbridge chanting: “What do we want – 20 percent” and “Maggie, Maggie, Maggie – out, out, out.”³² Over the course of the strike it is claimed that around 8,000 men and women from South Yorkshire participated in pickets all over the country.³³ February 1980 also saw 4,000 trade unionists march through Sheffield against public spending cuts.³⁴ Public sector unions NALGO and NUPE, as well as Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE) and Sheffield Hospital General Workers Group, were well represented but they were joined by steel workers from Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) and miners from the National Union of Mineworkers. Marchers brought their families and carried signs proclaiming; “Stop the Cuts”, “Save Our School Meals” and “Hospitals before Bombs.”³⁵ Trade unions met the policies of Thatcherism with industrial action. Strikes were also organised against the Labour-led City Council. In 1984 the city’s 7,000 NALGO members were out for fourteen weeks over pay grading for people operating new technology and health and safety.³⁶ Between 1982 and 1984 health workers in the city were intermittently on strike to protest privatisation and redundancies, and to fight for a twelve percent pay increase.³⁷ At points over one thousand health workers were out on

³¹ Taylor, *Trade Unions and the Labour Party*, 181.

³² *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Jubilant steel men in demo,’ 2nd February 1980, 1.

³³ Real Steel News, *Steel Workers Power: The steel strike and how we could have won it*, (London, 1980), 12.

³⁴ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Thousands in cuts strike’, 18th February 1980, 1.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Nalگو gets ‘final offer,’ 5th December 1984, 9; *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Town Hall strike over,’ 18th December 1984, 1.

³⁷ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘“Solid’ back for health strike,’ 19th July 1982; *The Sheffield Star*, ‘“All-out’ threat at hospitals,’ 21st July 1982; *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Health strike is now a minefield,’ 10th August 1982, 1; *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Four arrested in health picket scuffles,’ 2nd October 1984, 3.

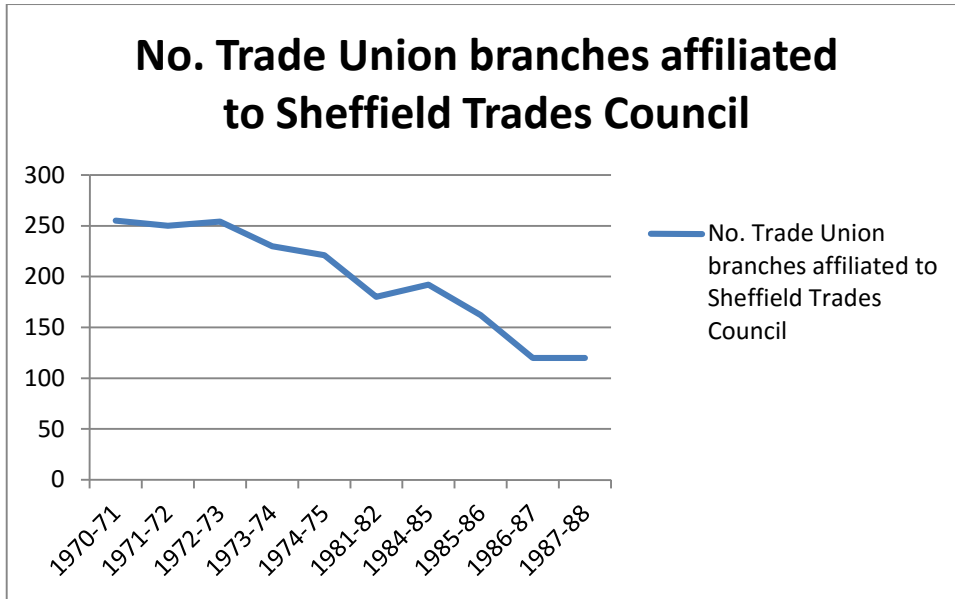


Figure 2.2: Number of trade union branches affiliated to Sheffield Trades Council.³⁸

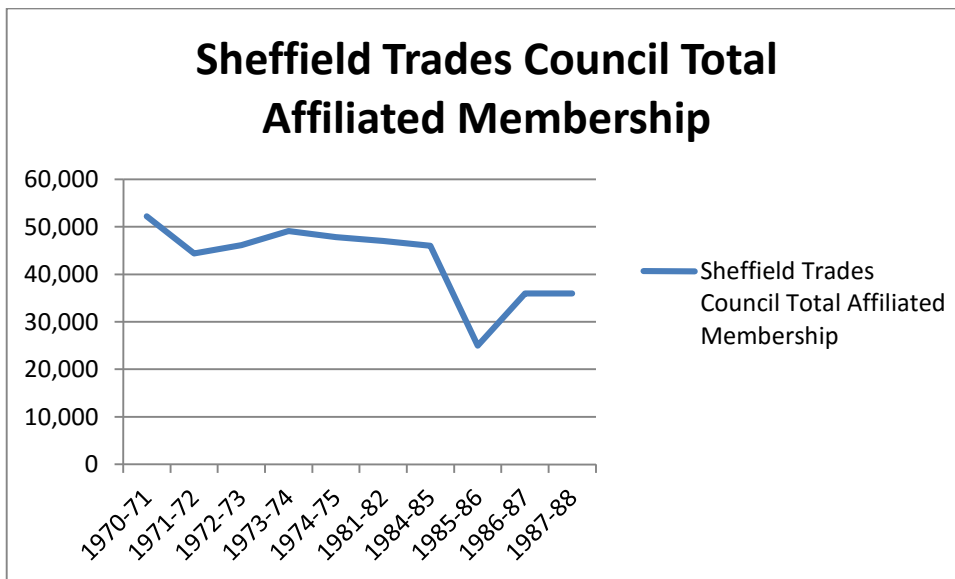


Figure 2.3: Total number of members affiliated to Sheffield Trades Council.³⁹

³⁸ WMRC: MSS.292D/9/151: Sheffield Trades Council, Trades Union Congress Annual Return from Trades Council 1970- 1988.

³⁹ *ibid.*

strike and their pickets were supported by the miners.⁴⁰ This solidarity led to one of Sheffield largest one-day demonstrations.

The Trades Union Congress's Day of Action in solidarity with health workers on 23rd September 1982 was a huge expression of trade union militancy. Union officials claimed that 40,000 industrial workers were out on strike for the day at firms such as Firth Brown, Shardlows, and Bassets, all coal pits in the region were closed, and 10,000 marched through Sheffield in 'solidarity and friendship' with health workers.⁴¹ Len Crossley, district committee chairman of the Local Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions emphasised the political nature of the demonstration; "If we are charged with taking political action today we proudly plead guilty to the charge."⁴² Jack Taylor, president of NUM Yorkshire, reiterated that spending on health was a matter of political priorities; "This is the only thing the Tory party will understand. We have money for the Falklands escapade... We could have money for the health service."⁴³ Sheffield's trade unions maintained their political stances into the 1980s, and the solidarity of the labour movement and significance of industrial action remained especially important in the city despite the shifting occupational structure.

The politics of Sheffield Trades Council were influenced by the Communist Party as well as the Labour Party. Before 1974 the joint Trades and Labour Council had barred Communists from being on the executive committees, and Geoff Green suggests that fear of communist influence spreading from the industrial to the political was a prominent reason behind national Labour Party pressure to split the Council.⁴⁴ But, rather than remove

⁴⁰ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Hospital revolt – unions rally,' 8th June 1982, 1.

⁴¹ *The Sheffield Star*, '40,000 in shutdown,' 23rd September 1982, 3.

⁴² *The Sheffield Star*, '10,000 workers turn out in Sheffield's biggest demo,' 23rd September 1982, 3.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Geoff Green, 'The new municipal socialism' in Martin Loney, Robert Bocoock, John Clarke, Allan Cochrane, Peggotty Graham and Michael Wilson (eds.) *The State or the Market: Politics and Welfare in Contemporary Britain*, (London, 1991), 276.

Communists from the labour movement, the division between the Trades Council and the Labour Party allowed Communist members to move into more influential positions on Sheffield Trades Council. The Communist Party of Great Britain had a reasonably large following in Sheffield, particularly in the steel unions.⁴⁵ As Callaghan explains, from the 1940s Communists had risen to leadership positions in unions such as the *Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers* (USDAW), the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), and the TGWU, but union leaders had tended to back official Labour or TUC policies.⁴⁶ Communists were ‘stronger’ in the Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Section (TASS) of the AUEW than in ‘any other union,’ and the AUEW was one of the strongest in Sheffield.⁴⁷ Kath Mackey, a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain who was instrumental in setting up Sheffield Women Against the Pit Closures remembers a Communist presence in ‘most of the shop stewards committees across the city,’ and a number of Labour members were ex-Communist Party members.⁴⁸ Indeed, as Francis Beckett writes, after 1972, Communists were an ‘accepted, even respectable, part of trade union machinery’ and by the 1980s ‘the Communist Party in trade unions had come to stand in for traditional trade union values.’⁴⁹ Communists held significant positions in Sheffield’s labour movement and, despite changes in trade union membership, helped to maintain the movement’s focus on traditional class-based politics through personal relationships and kinship networks.

Sheffield’s labour movement has been described as being like an ‘extended family.’⁵⁰ With generations of activists and politicians coming from families like the Flannerys, Caborns, and Bartons, for some the family connection was literal. Communist and Labour

⁴⁵ Interview with Kate Flannery, 3rd December 2013; John Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, (Oxford, New York, 1987), 32.

⁴⁶ Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, 166.

⁴⁷ Francis Beckett, *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party*, (London, 1995), 187.

⁴⁸ Interview with Kath Mackey, 10th January 2014.

⁴⁹ Beckett, *Enemy Within*, 179, 184.

⁵⁰ Interview with Helen Jackson, 29th April 2013; Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

politics sat side by side in these notable political families. The influence of Communism can be seen vividly in the political careers of Martin and Blanche Flannery, and George Caborn. Martin Flannery, a teacher active in the National Union of Teachers (NUT) had left the CPGB for the Labour Party in 1956. Flannery served as the vice-president of the Political Executive of Sheffield Trades and Labour Council from 1971 until 1974 when he was elected Member of Parliament for Sheffield Hillsborough, a seat he held until he stood down in 1992.⁵¹ Unlike Vernon Thornes, Flannery supported the division of the Trades and Labour Executives. The separation allowed Blanche Flannery, Martin's wife, who had joined the CPGB in the 1930s and remained a member until it disbanded in 1991, to join the Trades Council Executive as a representative of the Association of Professional, Clerical and Computer Staff (APEX) in 1975. Blanche Flannery quickly rose up the ranks of the Trades Council, becoming vice-president in 1980 and president in 1984.⁵² George Caborn, district secretary of one of the most dominant unions, the AUEW, was also a member of the CPGB. Caborn never joined the Trade Council Executive but instead became active on the Sheffield Industrial Development Advisory Committee on behalf of the Trades Council.⁵³ Caborn's son Richard was vice-chairman of both the Political Executive and Industrial Executive of the Trades Council and later became a Labour Member of the European Parliament. Both George and Richard Caborn were significant actors in Sheffield's politics and labour movement. However, the junction of Spital Hill and Carlisle Street became known as Caborn's Corner after George, as he often led rallies and marches from there.⁵⁴ After Caborn's death in 1983, the City Council honoured his commitment and dedication to political action. Although a

⁵¹ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Books 1970/1, 1973/4.

⁵² SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Books 1980/1, 1984/5.

⁵³ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1975/6.

⁵⁴ Nikky Wilson, 'Caborn's Corner: A bit of Sheffield's history under threat?', *Burngreave Messenger*, 69, 2007, <http://www.burngreavemessenger.org/archives/2007/april-2007-issue-69/caborns-corner/> (accessed: 20/02/2014).

Tesco supermarket was built on the site in the late 2000s, Sheffields – especially those who are politically active – still know it as Caborn’s Corner.⁵⁵

The Caborns, Flannerys and Bartons, the third of Sheffield’s political families, helped to shape Sheffield’s labour movement through fostering a close-knit activist milieu, reinforced by Labour Group camping trips and retreats to Wortley Hall, a site of political and adult education, in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵⁶ Wortley Hall – known as the “Workers’ Stately Home” – was just that, a stately home, first rented and then bought by Sheffield’s labour movement with the twin aims to ‘to serve both as an educational centre for the Trade Unions and the wider Labour Movement, as well as offering holidays for both working and retired people.’⁵⁷ Whilst as Lawrence Black suggests, there were ‘no innate politics to country piles,’ members of the labour movement did enjoy subverting the building for socialist purposes.⁵⁸ Just as Conservative political colleges like Swinton College reinforced persistent connections between Conservatives, aristocratic homes, field sports and ‘rural images of Englishness,’ so the taking over of Wortley Hall celebrated the ideals of Mass Trespass and reclaiming land.⁵⁹ In this way Wortley Hall encouraged a traditional form of left-wing politics. The first meeting in 1950 included representatives from the AEU, Fire Brigades Union, NUM, USDAW, NUR, Co-operative and Labour members. To be involved, one had to be a member of or affiliated to an organisation within the labour movement.⁶⁰ Over the decades, Wortley Hall hosted conferences for societies such as the Esperanto Society, the British Soviet Friendship Society, and the Belfast Cooperative Women’s Guild; held summer and weekend

⁵⁵ Museums Sheffield: Caborn’s Corner <http://www.museums-sheffield.org.uk/project-archive/burngreave-voices/cabornsCorner.html> (accessed: 20/02/2014), Interview with John Lawson, 17th May 2013.

⁵⁶ Interview with Helen Jackson, 29th April 2013; Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

⁵⁷ John Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley Hall: The Story of “Labour’s Home”, 1951-2011*, (Sheffield, 2011), 5.

⁵⁸ Lawrence Black, ‘Tories and Hunters: Swinton College and the Landscape of Modern Conservatism,’ *History Workshop Journal*, 77 (2014), 2.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley Hall*, 15.

schools for the Communist Party Women's Group and unions such as General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trade Union (GMB), Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), COHSE, NUPE, and NALGO among others; and put on a range of events including the British Youth Peace Festival.⁶¹ Wortley Hall exerted great influence on the labour movement, and many who spent time there went on to be heavily involved in Sheffield's politics such as David and Richard Caborn, Roger Barton, Joan Barton, David Blunkett, Paul Blomfield, Jill Angood, and Helen Jackson.⁶²

Indeed, George Caborn and Blanche Flannery were both members of Wortley Hall's executive committee and their respective children were immersed in politics at Wortley from a young age.⁶³ Kate Flannery camped on the grounds as a member of the Woodcraft Folk, and David Caborn (another of George Caborn's sons) attended Young Communist League weekend schools at the Hall where he discussed dialectical materialism with alumni that included James Klugmann, editor of *Marxist Review*, Arthur Scargill, and Jimmy Reid of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders.⁶⁴ Kath Mackey said of George Caborn;

'he used to take a gang load of us... Richard Caborn's mother and all of us to Wortley Hall. We used to have weekends of education, political education... political weekends for shop stewards, and tenants and all sorts of people.'⁶⁵

Wortley Hall was where 'cadres were trained, where comrades' political viewpoints were transformed and strengthened,' and where traditional trade union values were instilled in generations of Sheffield's activists.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley Hall*, 38, 75-6, 87.

⁶² Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley Hall*, 8; Interview with Kate Flannery, 3rd December 2013; Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014.

⁶³ Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley Hall*, 32; Interview with Kate Flannery, 3rd December 2013.

⁶⁴ Interview with Kate Flannery, 3rd December 2013, Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley Hall*, 53.

⁶⁵ Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014.

⁶⁶ Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley Hall*, 92.

But Wortley Hall was not the only site of political education in the area. In 1978 another residential adult education centre opened near Sheffield – Northern College; the ‘Ruskin of the North.’ Although Northern College originally caused the organisers of Wortley Hall some concern over competition, the College’s students were granted permission to use the Wortley Hall Club and ‘good relations’ developed.⁶⁷ Indeed, Northern College had support from Sheffield Labour Party at its very inception in 1975 and Sheffield City Council along with Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham Councils acted as the College’s financial guarantors.⁶⁸ David Blunkett and Martin Flannery were singled out as being ‘quite useful’ and ‘particularly helpful’ in the early days. Both of these men had connections with Wortley Hall; Blunkett bought shares in it in 1980 and Flannery through his wife’s involvement with the executive committee.⁶⁹ Keith Jackson, who co-authored a book with Blunkett in 1987 and was married to Helen Jackson; a councillor and later MP with connections to Wortley Hall, was hired as Northern College’s first senior lecturer.⁷⁰ In this sense the generation who grew up with Wortley Hall went into the 1980s determined to help Northern College support another generation of activists and politicians through the traditional working class route of adult education.

It has been mentioned that Northern College ‘churned out activists’ through its Community Work Apprenticeship Scheme, but from the start it was set up to encourage active participation in public affairs; an ideal of the new urban left. Although it provided education aimed at bridging the gap between school and university, perhaps leading to further study and employment, the College also placed a high value on ‘the growth in self-

⁶⁷ Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley Hall*, 190.

⁶⁸ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1975/6; Malcolm Ball and William Hampton, *The Northern College: Twenty-five years of adult learning*, (Leicester, 2004), 39.

⁶⁹ Richard Taylor, ‘Creating Northern College,’ in Malcolm Ball and William Hampton, *The Northern College: Twenty-five years of adult learning*, (Leicester, 2004), 39; Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley Hall*, 190.

⁷⁰ Taylor, ‘Creating Northern College,’ 36.

confidence, the expansion of cultural values, and the enhanced ability to participate as active citizens in public affairs that comes from adult learning.’⁷¹ The first principal, Michael Barratt Brown, and Keith Jackson were ‘committed socialists,’ although they came from different left-wing perspectives. Barratt Brown was ‘old left’ and interested in the economy, whilst Jackson was ‘new left’ and was enthusiastic about cultural studies; a discipline that developed from interdisciplinary study in adult education.⁷² Jackson pushed for the curriculum to include ‘social and political activism.’⁷³ There were core courses on Trade Union and Industrial Studies, Social and Community Studies, and Liberal and Gateway Studies – which covered education, gender, ‘race’, class, work, art, the land, industry, empire and trade.⁷⁴ These were later joined by Women’s Studies, Black Studies, and Development Studies courses.⁷⁵ Tom Steele argues that cultural studies decentred working class identity from left-wing politics allowing space for ‘other suppressed identities’ to emerge; including new left concerns such as anti-racism and anti-sexism.⁷⁶ At Northern College, much emphasis was put on the ability of short courses to keep students immersed in the real political world of their local communities. Courses were regularly developed in consultation with local groups such as trade unions, tenants’ associations, community groups and minority ethnic organisations.⁷⁷ Indeed, consultation with the Wosborough Community Group led to members establishing one of the first Women’s Support groups in the miners’ strike.⁷⁸ In this way, students and political activists were introduced to new left ideas but also grounded in a more traditional class-based experience.

⁷¹ Ball and Hampton, *The Northern College*, 13.

⁷² Tom Steele, *The Emergence of Cultural Studies, 1945-65: Cultural Politics, Adult Education and the English Question*, (London, 1997), 2.

⁷³ Taylor, ‘Creating Northern College,’ 45.

⁷⁴ Michael Barratt-Brown and David Browning, ‘Northern College – the Early Years,’ in Malcolm Ball and William Hampton, *The Northern College: Twenty-five years of adult learning*, (Leicester, 2004), 52.

⁷⁵ Barratt-Brown and Browning, ‘Northern College – the Early Years,’ 54.

⁷⁶ Steele, *The Emergence of Cultural Studies*, 200-1.

⁷⁷ Ball and Hampton, *The Northern College*, 3.

⁷⁸ Barratt-Brown and Browning, ‘Northern College – the Early Years,’ 57-8.

Both Wortley Hall and Northern College were set up to facilitate education for working class people and strengthen the labour movement, but as they became known as left-wing or socialist places they attracted a range of activists with different experiences. Kath Mackey describes the impact that attending courses at Wortley Hall had on her activism;

‘What was great about some of these schools is ...we were exposed to some of the really hard feminists from Leeds. It was really different for me as a working class woman to be introduced to all that because it was really really hard line feminist... But you learnt quite a lot and a lot of good stuff came out of it. And I think it was at one of these Sunday meetings that me and other women decided to do something in the Miners’ Strike.’⁷⁹

Kate Flannery spent a year at university in Bristol but admits that she was expecting it to be like Northern College; ‘that’s what I expected from higher education. I thought I was going to meet all these exciting, intelligent politicians who wanted to change the world.’⁸⁰ Wortley Hall and Northern College provided opportunities to learn and share experiences that instilled a working class perspective in students and activists. But, alongside strengthening the labour movement, they also attracted activists from other left-wing movements who shared their experiences and introduced class activists to alternative ways of thinking about things.

Sheffield’s labour movement remained a powerful influence on the city’s politics throughout the 1980s. Despite deindustrialisation and changes to the movement, trade unionists, Communists and Labour Party members remained united by kinship networks and shared experiences of political education and activism. The Trades Council and affiliated unions refused not to see cuts and deindustrialisation as a political attack by the Conservatives, and years of courses at Wortley Hall – whose shelves were bright with the red of Victor Gollancz’s Left Book Club – and Northern College gave them the tools to recognise

⁷⁹ Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014.

⁸⁰ Interview with Kate Flannery, 3rd December 2013.

this and respond to old and new challenges. Labour activists in Sheffield predominantly focused on labour issues like protecting jobs and services, but the city's strong institutions of class politics and left-wing reputation offered opportunities for collaborations with other movements and 'newer' forms of left-wing politics. As the political and industrial climate shifted in the 1980s these opportunities were needed but not always capitalised upon.

New Issues in Old Politics

By the 1980s, Sheffield's rising level of unemployment meant that the labour movement had to shift its focus towards youth and unemployment. While these were not 'new' issues for the labour movement, they required a shift in emphasis. In Sheffield, the challenge of mass unemployment became a driver of new alliances. From how Sheffield's labour movement tackled unemployment we can see how class politics evolved in the 1980s, and attempted to make links with newer forms of politics. The strength of Sheffield's organised labour kept Trotskyites and Militant Tendency from gaining support, instead the movement engaged with new left practices. To a certain extent though, campaign tactics continued to speak to a longer tradition of class activism, and the strength of the labour movement often restricted new alliances by failing to build reciprocal relationships and offer support in return.

On 8 May 1981, 5,000 marchers took to the streets of Sheffield to support the local leg of the Peoples' March for Jobs. South Yorkshire had fielded one hundred and forty marchers, the largest amount from any area in the country, for the long walk to London to draw attention to rising levels of unemployment. Even so the turn out for the local leg impressed organisers who described it as "magnificent."⁸¹ Support came from all directions; those completing the entire Liverpool to London march were given one night's free accommodation at Northern College and Wortley Hall, they wore 'Chartist green anoraks, a

⁸¹ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Fantastic' 5,000 on jobs march,' 8th May 1981, 1.

present from the TUC,' and transported their bedrolls and cooking pots in a van provided by War on Want.⁸² On the march through Sheffield they were joined by representatives of the National Union of Mineworkers and the National Union of Teachers, by local government workers and journalists, by 'vicar and skinhead.'⁸³

Unemployment was a political issue that united many in Sheffield, and inspired new political alliances. As march-organiser Brennan Bates put it "What we see today is ordinary people fighting for an ordinary existence on an extraordinary march."⁸⁴ While the march might have seemed 'extraordinary' in terms of the support given by various different organisations, the emphasis on an 'ordinary existence' and the form of protest – the march itself – called back to an earlier time and a longer tradition of class-based activism. The People's March for Jobs imitated the hunger marches of the 1930s and in doing so borrowed their tactics and moral rhetoric. James Vernon explains how the hunger marches of the 1930s, mostly organised by the National Movement of Unemployed Workers, demanded work or full-maintenance for the unemployed by demonstrating their fitness for work and drawing attention to their struggle. The hunger marches sought to 'establish that the unemployed were not unemployable but victimised by the neglect of unrepresentative and unresponsive government,' an aim shared by the People's March for Jobs in 1981.⁸⁵ In the 1930s, the NUWM succeeded in insisting that unemployment was 'a national class experience' against government claims that it was specific to certain industries and areas.⁸⁶ This too was an aim shared by organisers fifty years later.

⁸² *The Sheffield Star*, 'On the march...' 8th May 1981, 9; Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley Hall*.

⁸³ *The Sheffield Star*, 'On the march...' 8th May 1981, 9.

⁸⁴ *The Sheffield Star*, "'Fantastic' 5,000 on jobs march,' 8th May 1981, 1.

⁸⁵ James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2007), 43.

⁸⁶ Vernon, *Hunger*, 248.

Another similarity with the earlier march came in the form of Church support. In 1936, the Bishop of Sheffield declared the Jarrow Crusade “a very English and constitutional thing.”⁸⁷ In 1981, a different Bishop of Sheffield, Rev. David Lunn, told the 1,500 marchers who made it into City Hall that “To choose to be idle is sinful. To force people to be idle is a terrible wrong.”⁸⁸ Rev. David Lunn was more critical of the government than his earlier counterpart and his rhetoric can be read as part of the ‘redefinition of Protestant work ethic’ used by the Church to refute Thatcher’s ‘Protestant justification for capitalism,’ but both Bishops offered support in a relatively non-political way.⁸⁹ Indeed, whilst Lunn offered his support to the People’s March, support for ‘inner-city’ and ‘industrial’ missions was left to John Vincent and Alan Billings. Vincent ran the Sheffield Inner City Ecumenical mission in Burngreave and the Urban Theology Unit which focused on bringing diverse communities together to organise around different struggles and combat racism.⁹⁰ Rev. Alan Billings, Vicar of St. Mary’s in Walkley and Deputy Leader of Sheffield City Council, linked up with the Urban Theology Unit to work on community projects, and the UTU helped to coordinate soup kitchens during the 1984-85 Miners’ Strike.⁹¹ Billings went on to represent Sheffield on the commission that produced *Faith in the City* in 1985; a document largely seen as attacking the Conservative Government.⁹² *Faith in the City* offered twenty three recommendations to the Government including increased funding for local councils and central urban programmes, job creation schemes, and a revision of the taxation and social security system. The initiative ‘owed a great deal to a sociological understanding of relative poverty’ which led some to suspect that it was ‘politically rather than divinely inspired.’⁹³ Billings describes

⁸⁷ Vernon, *Hunger*, 253.

⁸⁸ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Churches back the big march for jobs,’ 9th May 1981, 2.

⁸⁹ Eliza Filby, ‘God and Mrs Thatcher: Religion and Politics in 1980s Britain,’ PhD Thesis submitted to University of Warwick, September 2010, 85.

⁹⁰ John Vincent, *Into the City*, (London, 1982).

⁹¹ Brian Jenner, *The Coal Strike: Christian Reflections on the Miners’ Struggle*, (Sheffield, 1986).

⁹² Commission of Urban Priority Areas, *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation*, (London, 1985), v; John Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher: The Iron Lady*, (2003), 390.

⁹³ Filby, ‘God and Mrs Thatcher,’ 68-69.

himself as donning ‘two hats’ for this period; one as a vicar and one as a Labour councillor, though it could be argued that at times they became interchangeable.⁹⁴ In the early 1980s the labour movement in Sheffield drew on older forms of class-based activism and religious condemnation of the causes of poverty to combat unemployment and other inner-city problems. This reinforced the traditional labour movement’s place in Sheffield’s politics, but also created space for new alliances.

There were some significant differences between the hunger marches of the ‘hungry thirties’ and the People’s March for Jobs that suggest an evolving labour movement which encouraged potential alliances with other movements and politics. For a start the People’s March had the support of the wider labour movement and other organisations, such as War on Want, from the get go. In the 1930s the Labour Party was reluctant to offer support because the Communist Party was influential within the NUWM. The Jarrow Crusade of 1936 helped to change the perception of hunger marches through its use of veterans (male-only), its emphasis on ‘pride and discipline,’ the moral and religious connotations surrounding ‘Crusade,’ and its insistence that marchers were “sober at all times.”⁹⁵ The People’s March for Jobs was a more diverse and colourful protest representing the politics of the 1980s and the youth component. In contrast to the sobriety of the hunger marches, the People’s March for Jobs ended with a ‘Rock for Jobs’ concert in Brockwell Park, London, bringing the cultural into the political.⁹⁶

Images of the marches illustrate the differences. James Vernon includes a photograph of Lancashire hunger marchers looking tired but determined, resting with their packs in 1932.

⁹⁴ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

⁹⁵ Vernon, *Hunger*, 244, 252.

⁹⁶ Archive: UK Rock Festivals, <http://www.ukrockfestivals.com/Peoples-March-for-jobs-81.html>, (accessed 26/03/2014).

The men are tidily dressed in regulation clothing.⁹⁷ By contrast, Martin Jenkinson's photographs of the People's March show less regulation of clothes and marchers, though a similar weariness is present on the faces of some participants.⁹⁸ Jenkinson's photographs portray men, women and children on the march; mostly white but there were African Caribbean and Asian participants too. Photographs of a young black woman listening to a portable radio with a spoon in her pocket, and a young white woman with a shaved head playing cat's cradle as she walked emphasise the involvement of young people (Figure 2.4).⁹⁹ Though many of the banners photographed represented trade unions, Jenkinson recorded other political displays. A young man pictured having a Mohican shaved in (Figure 2.5) forwent his 'People's March for Jobs' t-shirt in favour of a home-made "SMASH THE NF SCUM" shirt reflecting his anti-racist politics. Although the People's March for Jobs utilised a tactic of the old left and traditional class politics, the nature of unemployment in the 1980s and who it affected brought in other political movements and actors, encouraged alliances with new left politics, and in some ways make it look like a very different protest.

Yet, significantly, many activists in Sheffield were well-aware of the hunger marches and their connotations, and applied them to the 1980s. Those in the labour movement who were familiar with Wortley Hall may have read Ellen Wilkinson's book about the Jarrow Crusade, *The Town that was Murdered*, published by the Left Book Club in 1939.¹⁰⁰ For others, Jarrow and other struggles of the 1920s and 1930s had become a kind of folk memory. Helen Jackson, when talking about the People's March for Jobs, accidentally referred to it as

⁹⁷ Vernon, *Hunger*, 245.

⁹⁸ Martin Jenkinson was a Sheffield-based photographer and former steel-worker. He photographed a number of demonstrations in the 1980s. The Martin Jenkinson Image Library, an archive of his work, can be found here: <http://mjenkinsonphotography.co.uk/galleries.php> (accessed: 26/03/14).

⁹⁹ Martin Jenkinson, People's March for Jobs Gallery, Martin Jenkinson Image Library, 1981: Woman with radio, http://mjenkinsonphotography.co.uk/galleries/PMFJ%201981/index_2.php; Women with Cat's Cradle, <http://mjenkinsonphotography.co.uk/galleries/PMFJ%201981/> (accessed: 26/03/14).

¹⁰⁰ John Lewis, *The Left Book Club: An Historical Record*, (London, 1970), 149.

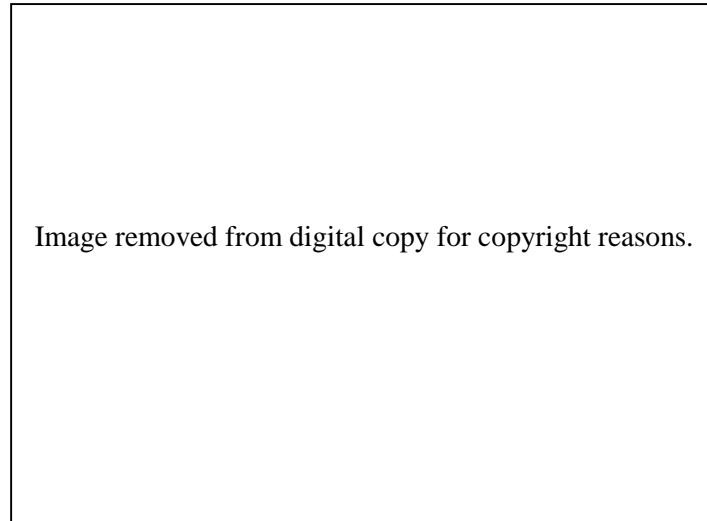


Figure 2.4: Young woman marching with a radio on the People's March for Jobs, 1981.

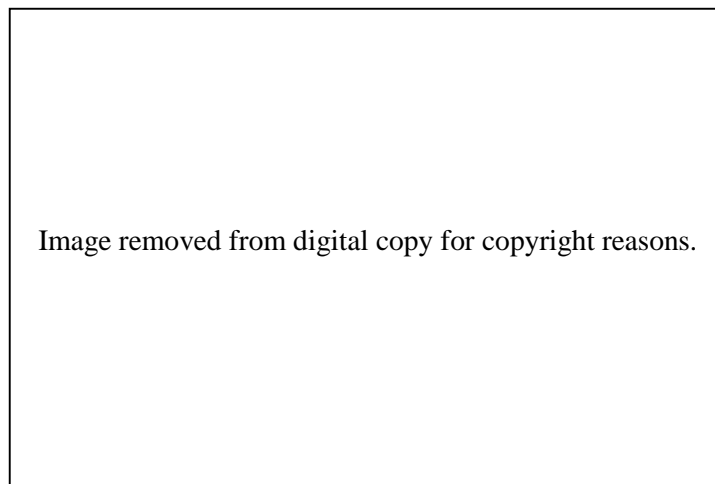


Figure 2.5: Young man having a Mohican shaved in before the next leg of the People's March for Jobs 1981. Photographs by Martin Jenkinson, Martin Jenkinson Image Library.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Martin Jenkinson, People's March for Jobs Gallery, Martin Jenkinson Image Library, 1981, Mohican Haircut, <http://mjenkinsonphotography.co.uk/galleries/PMFJ%201981/> (accessed 26/03/2014), Woman with Radio, http://mjenkinsonphotography.co.uk/galleries/PMFJ%201981/index_2.php (accessed 26/03/2014). Reproduced here with permission from Justine Jenkinson and the Martin Jenkinson Image Library.

‘the Jarrow march.’¹⁰² In 1982 Sheffield Women’s Printing Co-op re-printed *Six Years of Labour Rule in Sheffield, 1926-32*, a pamphlet originally published in 1932 to celebrate the first six years of Labour control. David Blunkett wrote in the foreword,

‘it is an irony of fate that it is exactly fifty years on that with unemployment and cuts in living standards reminding people so vividly of the 1930s, the ‘anti-Labour’ forces raise their heads once again to throw back the forces of progress.’¹⁰³

Left-wing activists and politicians in Sheffield drew comparisons between the 1930s and the 1980s both unconsciously and with calculated intention. Remembering the radical past can itself be a political act. As cultural anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla explains, remembering struggles through historical walks can affect political action as physical and emotional methods of memory-making not only supply knowledge, and contribute to understanding, but can suggest alternative visions of society.¹⁰⁴ Left-wing historians and sociologists now and in the 1980s looked back on the poverty and protest of the “hungry thirties” searching for parallels. In *Wigan Pier Revisited*, Beatrix Campbell traced George Orwell’s ‘journey... to see... the state of emergency among the Northern unemployed.’¹⁰⁵ Beckett and Hencke opened their 2009 account of the Miners’ Strike with the claim that ‘the story of the 1984-85 Miners’ Strike starts in 1926.’¹⁰⁶ Vernon claims that remembering the 1930s ‘still remains central to the program of British social democracy’ as does remembering the protests of the time.¹⁰⁷ Activists and politicians in Sheffield looked for inspiration in parallel radical movements of the 1930s as well; invoking traditional forms of politics but adjusting them to

¹⁰² Interview with Helen Jackson, 29th April 2013.

¹⁰³ Sheffield Women’s Printing Co-op, *Six Years of Labour Rule in Sheffield, 1926-32*, (Sheffield, 1982), 1.

¹⁰⁴ Yarimar Bonilla, “‘The Past is Made By Walking:’ Labor Activism and Historical Production in Postcolonial Guadeloupe,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 26:3 (2011), 315.

¹⁰⁵ Vernon, *Hunger*, 271; Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the 80s*, (London, 1984), 2.

¹⁰⁶ Francis Beckett and David Hencke, *Marching to the Fault Line: The Miners’ Strike and the Battle for Industrial Britain*, (London, 2009), 1.

¹⁰⁷ Vernon, *Hunger*, 271.

meet new challenges. As Blunkett surmised; ‘the lessons of history have to be learned,’ and the People’s March for Jobs called those lessons to the fore.¹⁰⁸

One of those lessons was a united labour movement and the importance of bringing the unemployed into that movement, a purpose for which Trades Councils set up Centres Against Unemployment. After attending Northern College and the Community Work Apprenticeship Scheme, Kath Mackey found employment at Sheffield Centre Against Unemployment, later Sheffield Coordinating Centre Against Unemployment (SCCAU). SCCAU had been set up by the Trades Council with Sheffield City Council support and funding, as well as funding from individuals who could sign up to contribute through their wages.¹⁰⁹ It was conceived in the early 1980s to ‘take care of the casualties of Thatcherism’ and was originally located in an ‘old bus shelter down Bridge Street.’¹¹⁰ However, as the decade wore on Kath Mackey explains how the fight against unemployment became a more prominent issue:

‘in the 1980s you soon started to realise that unemployment wasn’t going to go away; there was more unemployment. And it wasn’t just about giving them advice it was about moving people on. To say, you know, these engineering jobs aren’t coming back, they’re dismantling the factories, everything’s gone, you’ve got to start looking at retraining people.’¹¹¹

Politicians and activists began to focus on the needs of the unemployed not just the need to protect jobs. By 1982 Sheffield Trades Council was celebrating the city’s ‘thriving Unemployed Workers Centre with six full time workers.’¹¹² In 1984, SCCAU moved to a ‘newly painted and newly carpeted’ office that was promptly ruined by striking miners; ‘all

¹⁰⁸ Sheffield Women’s Printing Co-op, *Six Years of Labour Rule in Sheffield, 1926-32*, (Sheffield, 1982), 1.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Jol Miskin, 18th March 2013.

¹¹⁰ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1980/81.

¹¹¹ Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014.

¹¹² WMRC: MSS.292D/79/153: Sheffield Trades Council September 1980 – August 1985, Sheffield District Trades Council Biographical Notes – photocopy taken 4th October 1982.

these miners came in – because it was absolutely shelling it down with rain – and it was filthy afterwards because how many hundreds of miners had come in for a cup of tea. It was filthy!’¹¹³ Jol Miskin who worked at the centre during the Miners’ Strike, explained how they brought together the various drop in centres and educational initiatives from across the city, and also how they tried to link up with unemployment centres in Newcastle and Liverpool. He maintained that they ‘received good trade union support, some significant financial support, especially from NALGO’ and they made sure to represent the unemployed at various labour movement events.¹¹⁴

In her time at SCCAU, Kath Mackey focussed on youth unemployment, as despite all the action around re-training for industrial workers they ‘were not making inroads into working with young people.’¹¹⁵ The young unemployed in Sheffield were becoming increasingly frustrated with how they were treated. In December 1981 forty people attended a protest against Government plans for the introduction of a compulsory training scheme for young unemployed people. The demonstration was organised by Sheffield Labour Party Young Socialists, many of whom would have been members of the entryist organisation Militant, formerly the Revolutionary Socialist League.¹¹⁶ They argued that the scheme was a way of ensuring cheap labour and a ‘cosmetic exercise’ to keep unemployment figures down.¹¹⁷ Vernon Thornes on the Trades Council recognised this, referring to young people ‘passing time’ on Manpower Services schemes.¹¹⁸

Mackey tried to address this frustration by setting up Dolebusters; a scheme where young people in bands or music groups could organise and perform at gigs held at the

¹¹³ Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Jol Miskin, 18th March 2013.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014.

¹¹⁶ Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, 197.

¹¹⁷ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Govt. Training plan angers young’, 14th December 1981, 8; *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Trainee pay protest’, 16th December 1981, 4.

¹¹⁸ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1981/82.

Leadmill. Mackey remembers that the idea came to her when ‘Red Tape Studios was coming on stream and the notion of culture, media being one of the new industries’ was being talked about. At the time ‘all you saw was young people signing on’ and then they would get together with their friends to play music in bands and choirs.¹¹⁹ Mackey contacted workers at the Bow Centre for African Caribbean youth and the Leadmill and started to organise a music group. Like the People’s March for Jobs this was an example of the labour movement making new alliances, and more clearly engaging with new left concerns. The film *Ghostbusters* was in cinemas and so ‘one of the lads said why don’t we call ourselves Dolebusters because we’re trying to burst out of the dole.’¹²⁰ The one rule was that in order to play at the gigs, at least one member of each band had to attend weekly meetings at SCCAU to help organise the gigs. Mackey ‘[led] from the back’ and those involved had to take responsibility for the project. They secured funding from the South Yorkshire County Council and Sheffield City Council Arts Department, and hired equipment from Red Tape Studios and the Leadmill. Of the gigs themselves, Mackey said; ‘they’d been playing on their guitars in like little like rented rooms somewhere with like carpet on the walls... and there we were putting them on Leadmill stage... they loved it.’¹²¹ The scheme offered young, unemployed people an innovative experience, and shows how class politics embraced culture and evolved to suit Sheffield’s new industrial situation by attempting to tap into the city’s new ‘industrial,’ electronic sound.¹²²

Dolebusters ran for a number of years and put on a number of gigs and outdoor festivals, with the poet Henry Normal acting as occasional compère. The festivals created an opportunities for campaigners to set up stalls on different issues, further encouraging

¹¹⁹ Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014.

¹²⁰ Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014.

¹²¹ Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014.

¹²² Eve Wood, *Made in Sheffield: The Birth of Electronic Pop*, (DVD: Sheffield, 2005); Richard Wood and Eve Wood, *The Beat is the Law: Fanfare for the Common People*, (DVD: Sheffield, 2010).

alliances between movements. For the festival held in Weston Park on 1st September 1985, SCCAU called on the wider labour movement to help run the day; ‘Union members have been asked to support the festival by helping with the stewarding, putting on stalls in relation to issues like the Transport Bill, helping with specific items – e.g. AUEW Construction – stage scaffolding, NUPE and Socialist Medical Association providing first aid.’¹²³ Of those involved in the scheme some found success. Mackey remembers ‘one lad who went to work for BBC World Service’ and there were others whose bands became well-known nationally.¹²⁴

The ‘extended family’ of Sheffield’s labour movement made some new alliances but was not welcoming of all aspects of the left. Organisations such as the Socialist Workers’ Party and Militant Tendency found it difficult to make roads into the tight-knit activist milieu. Sometimes attempts by the far left to influence the movement were suppressed by close familial relationships. Veronica Hardstaff, a Labour councillor in the 1970s who knew Martin Flannery ‘very very well – I lived across the road from him for a number of years,’ tells of how she had to have a quick word with his son Jim in the run up to the 1987 election.¹²⁵ Jim Flannery was a member of a left-wing faction that was making waves and criticising councillors in order to boost support for their own candidate for the Hillsborough seat in anticipation of Martin Flannery retiring at the 1992 election. Hardstaff recounts how she took Flannery aside and said “Jim, don’t you want your dad to win the next election?” before explaining that organising against popular figures could lose Labour their already fragile majority by providing the rival parties with the argument that “the left-wing loonies

¹²³ WMRC: MSS.292D/79/153: Sheffield Trades Council September 1980 – August 1985, Sheffield Coordinating Centre Against Unemployment Report to Trades Council, 27th August 1985.

¹²⁴ Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014. Bands included Treebound Story and Mackey’s son joined the line-up of Pulp a few years later.

¹²⁵ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

have taken over.”¹²⁶ Jim Flannery apologised with a bottle of whisky and when Martin Flannery stood down Helen Jackson – who was on the left but not Militant – took the seat.

Tensions around militancy were not always so easily solved. Alan Billings, Deputy Leader of Sheffield City Council, remembers that ‘the militancy and the politics was very raw, very sharp’ and led to ‘long meetings and a lot of abuse.’¹²⁷ Despite the situation in Sheffield being ‘not as bad... as some places,’ Sheffield Labour Group did share Foot and Kinnock’s fear of Militant Tendency.¹²⁸ Eric Shaw paints David Blunkett as a ‘peace-maker’ in the dispute with Militant-led Liverpool City Council over their repeated refusal to set a rate in 1985 and describes him attempting to calm the Labour Party conference and pushing for compromise.¹²⁹ Yet both Shaw and Price explain how Blunkett lost patience and turned on Hatton and Liverpool, calling for an NEC enquiry into the Liverpool Labour Party.¹³⁰ This may suggest that Blunkett and the Labour Group were not too worried about Militant Tendency in the early 1980s and that their concern only appeared later over rate-capping, but this was not the case. Militant had a relatively weak hold in Sheffield, in part because of its low membership figures nationally; by 1983 it had only 4,700 members, but also because Militant was strongest where other socialist tendencies were weak, and Sheffield had its own strong socialist tradition.¹³¹ Indeed, as one Militant member said in 1982; ‘In other parts of the country we stand out as an opposition – in Sheffield we are part of a much bigger left movement.’¹³² In 1982, Militant had two councillors on Sheffield City Council; Paul Green and Mike Smith, and were influential in Sheffield’s six branches of the Labour Party Young

¹²⁶ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

¹²⁷ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

¹²⁸ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

¹²⁹ Eric Shaw, ‘The Labour Party and the Militant Tendency,’ *Parliamentary Affairs*, 42: 2 (1989), 189.

¹³⁰ Shaw, ‘The Labour Party and the Militant Tendency,’ 190; David Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers: Rebels and Radicals in Sheffield History*, (Great Britain, 2011), 156.

¹³¹ Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, 205, 199.

¹³² *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Sheffield on course but Militant left out in the cold’, 6th November 1982, 6.

Socialists, who were known to be controlled by Militant nationally.¹³³ Militant Tendency was not a credible threat in Sheffield but Blunkett and the Labour Group were concerned enough to try to discredit far-left groups like Militant and in the process distance themselves from the far-left.

In April 1983 *The Sheffield Star* reported Blunkett's claims that 'ultra-left wing groups are bent on destroying the local Labour movement... He even hints at distant links with the CIA.'¹³⁴ This accusation came two months before the 1983 General Election showing that Blunkett, like the Labour Party leadership, was concerned that the perception of far-left extremism within the party would work against Labour in the election.¹³⁵ Billings describes their fear that the GLC and Liverpool would 'wreck everything' they had built in Sheffield.¹³⁶ The Labour Group in Sheffield was concerned with trying to distance itself from far-left organisations. Blunkett began to publically refer to Sheffield's Labour Group as 'firm left,' drawing a contrast with Liverpool's 'hard left' and the 'loony left' label that saddled the GLC.¹³⁷ Whether Blunkett's claim to be 'durable and reliable, without being inflexible' was accepted is uncertain.¹³⁸ As *The Sheffield Star* noted drily; 'For those who see the hue of Sheffield's Labour movement as the brightest of reds, the idea of left-wing groups trying to undermine it can only produce faint incredulity.'¹³⁹ Yet within Sheffield, members of far-left organisations and Trotskyite groups were certainly viewed with suspicion by the tight-knit labour movement.

¹³³ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Sheffield on course but Militant left out in the cold', 6th November 1982, 6; Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, 197.

¹³⁴ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Vulcan: What's left in politics?', 8th April 1983, 12.

¹³⁵ Nick Thomas-Symonds, 'A Reinterpretation of Michael Foot's Handling of the Militant Tendency', *Contemporary British History*, 19:1 (2005), 30-31.

¹³⁶ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

¹³⁷ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013; Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Postwar Britain*, (Manchester, New York, 2007), 139-140.

¹³⁸ Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, 155.

¹³⁹ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Vulcan: What's left in politics?', 8th April 1983, 12.

Militant member Jol Miskin's career trajectory and time at the SCCAU indicate this. Miskin found that his way of doing things was not always well received in Sheffield. When he arrived in the city as 'a middle class lefty coming from the South,' he struggled to find work; 'Trotskyists especially those coming from middle class background weren't loved shall we say.'¹⁴⁰ After he volunteered at SCCAU, Keith Jackson gave Miskin some paid teaching work at Northern College as he had experience working with the GMB and the Workers Educational Association. Later, when he returned to SCCAU as a trade union labour movement development worker – 'I was then being paid to be a kind of political agitator! It was really fantastic!' – he found again that his politics almost worked against him. SCCAU had employed Miskin and another member of Militant, Rob Jones, at the same time which Miskin claimed was a 'risky' move.¹⁴¹ Miskin said that he heard 'when they decided to employ both Rob and myself that David Blunkett said 'you can't have them both' and George Burrows [an independent left-wing councillor] said 'Fuck off.' Whilst Miskin admits 'I don't know whether that's true or not, but it's a nice story'; it shows how he perceived himself as an outsider.¹⁴² Indeed, he may not have been wrong; Jol Miskin's name came up in conversation with Alan Billings and his partner Veronica Hardstaff in the context of him being an archetypal Militant. Billings claimed that the militancy and different factions on the left made it a very 'tense' and 'difficult time', but noted Miskin's workplace with a wry 'we funded them all.'¹⁴³

Militancy was often blamed on new members to Sheffield's labour movement. Billings explains that a lot of the far-left groups in Sheffield were populated by teachers and social workers, and many of them were members of NALGO whose influence in Sheffield

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Jol Miskin, 18th March 2013.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Jol Miskin, 18th March 2013. Rob Jones is the father of left-wing journalist Owen Jones.

¹⁴² Interview with Jol Miskin, 18th March 2013.

¹⁴³ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

Trades Council had grown in this period. Hardstaff suggests that ‘there was quite a split actually between the working class members of the party who were much more moderate and had their feet on the ground’ and those in Militant Tendency, Socialist Workers Party, and the International Marxist Group who were often middle class.¹⁴⁴ Billings and Hardstaff would joke that Miskin, whose father was apparently a high court judge, ‘was an infiltrator to bring down the Labour Party.’¹⁴⁵ Emma Rattenbury, who started out as a member of the Socialist Workers’ Party also felt that being middle class gained her less respect in Sheffield’s labour movement.¹⁴⁶ Hardstaff did concede that ‘Militant Tendency were not as mad as the three or four other groups... you had a choice of half a dozen newspapers all more mad than the next one,’ but she viewed its members and the members of other far-left groups with suspicion.¹⁴⁷ The far-left failed to gain traction in Sheffield, but they raised the suspicions of a labour movement and ruling Labour Group which prided itself on discipline, making them reluctant to engage with more radical groups.

But even outside the sphere of employment, Sheffield’s labour movement did attempt to make alliances with some newer forms of politics. The anti-racism movement was probably its most successful collaboration, with a number of high-profile figures supporting the Socialist Workers’ Party’s Anti-Nazi League and Sheffield Campaign Against Racism. Alan Billings had originally moved from Leicester to Sheffield in the early 1970s because he had been harassed by the National Front for his stance on immigration. After receiving no protection from the police – “With views like yours what do you expect?” – he moved to Sheffield because it was a ‘good Labour town.’¹⁴⁸ In Sheffield he found like-minded people,

¹⁴⁴ Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, 198.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013, Interview with Kate Flannery, 3rd December 2013.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Emma Rattenbury, 9th April 2013.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

but there was also a National Front presence. Martin Flannery was active in the Anti-Nazi League and outspoken against racism, which led in part to the words “Nigger Lover” and “Commie Bastard” being painted on his windows.¹⁴⁹ The Anti-Nazi League was popular with the left, and mobilised 80,000 people at its carnival in London in April 1978. It also received support in Sheffield despite the labour movement’s wariness of far-left groups. As Callaghan argues ‘fortunately the anti-racist struggle was far too important for the SWP’s self-interests to deter participants who disagreed with its politics.’¹⁵⁰ Renton explains how the Anti-Nazi League attracted support from the ‘broader left’ including forty Labour MPs and trade unionists such as Arthur Scargill and the NUM.¹⁵¹ He suggests that uniting the left in this way was relatively straight-forward as ‘a clear-cut common goal had been set – the decrease of the influence of the NF.’ Whether it was about fighting racism, motivated by a concern that marginal seats might be lost because of NF votes, or about encouraging revolutionary social change – defeating the NF was a shared goal.¹⁵²

Perhaps this cynicism is why Mukhtar Dar of the Sheffield Asian Youth Movement found the Anti-Nazi League to be ‘too soft’ for his liking.¹⁵³ Dar wanted more than the ANL’s ‘jamborees’ could provide and was more impressed with the Revolutionary Communist Party’s Workers Against Fascism group. Ramamurthy suggests that the ‘SWP only appeared to want to control... or use’ young Asian activists, which Callaghan’s analysis of SWP tactics corroborates.¹⁵⁴ Dar was also involved in the Sheffield Campaign Against Racism. George Caborn helped to found SCAR in the late 1970s and it found some support within the labour movement. By the mid-1980s SCAR leaflets directly targeted at trade

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Kate Flannery, 3rd December 2013, Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014.

¹⁵⁰ Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, 102.

¹⁵¹ Dave Renton, *When We Touched the Sky: The Anti-Nazi League, 1977-1981*, (Cheltenham, 2006), 80.

¹⁵² Renton, *When We Touched the Sky*, 130.

¹⁵³ Interview with Mukhtar Dar, 23rd August 2013.

¹⁵⁴ Anandi Ramamurthy, *Black Star: Britain’s Asian Youth Movements*, (London, 2013), 79; Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, 101-2.

unions asked ‘Are you affiliated?’ and spoke of having ‘80 organisations in membership, including trade union and Labour Party branches.’¹⁵⁵ Kate Flannery, Martin’s daughter, organised the youth group of SCAR, emphasising that the labour movement’s familial links extended into the anti-racism movement. SCAR spoke in the language of the labour movement and was a well-liked campaign. Yet for Mukhtar Dar this was part of the problem. Dar calls the campaign ‘problematic,’ explaining how it kept a lid on the struggle. Aneez Ismail, a member of Sheffield University’s Black Consciousness Group, experienced racist threats when trying to raise concerns beyond the tabled agenda.¹⁵⁶ This was anti-racism on the labour movement’s terms and time. Dar and Ismail’s experiences with SCAR tell a familiar story of left-wing organisations attempting to mobilise black communities “‘into *their* political struggles” without supporting the right of black people to mobilise independently and offering solidarity in that way.¹⁵⁷ Despite a willingness to engage with new left interests, the emphasis Sheffield labour movement placed on unity and discipline left it unable to build complete and reciprocal alliances. Activism against unemployment offered opportunities for new alliances but also reinforced traditional methods. A weak Militant Tendency meant the labour movement could concentrate on new left interests rather than fight the hard left, but the climate of suspicion that surrounded those outside of the tight-knit labour grouping stifled new alliances before they could get off the ground.

Responses to the Miners’ Strike, 1984-85

Much has been written about the relationships built during the Miners’ Strike between feminists and pit women, lesbians and gay men and mining communities in South Wales, black and minority ethnic support groups, as well as on the solidarity of the trade unions and

¹⁵⁵ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1984/85.

¹⁵⁶ Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 153.

¹⁵⁷ Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 79.

the growth of community activism within pit villages that subverts and explores the narrative of traditional working class struggle.¹⁵⁸ One recent article on Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners argued that the solidarity expressed by ‘alternative’ support groups, such as LGSM, provided ‘important insights into the weakening of the hegemonic position of ‘class’ as a concern for the left in the 1980s.’¹⁵⁹ Whilst in some ways this is difficult to dispute, local variations need to be taken into account. The bonds made by LGSM with the residents of the Dulais area of South Wales were not replicated in Sheffield. Whilst Sheffield and South Yorkshire’s mining communities did engage with and accept support from a variety of groups, the expectations of and responses to solidarity were complex and not always clear-cut. There was an outpouring of support for the Miners’ Strike from various movements in Sheffield; however the collective class identity that was attached to the strike was not extended to activists outside of the labour movement either during or after the end of the strike. Who was and was not excluded emphasises how the dominance of the labour movement acted to bolster or stifle other forms of activism in 1980s Sheffield and ensure the persistence of class politics.

It comes as no surprise that Sheffield Trades Council supported the miners in their strike. The various leaflets they produced stated that miners were ‘not just fighting for their own jobs’ and called for solidarity within the community.¹⁶⁰ Blanche Flannery’s President’s Foreword in the 1984-85 yearbook opened with mention of the Miners’ Strike. She described the strike as ‘probably the greatest – and most important’ in British labour history, and wrote

¹⁵⁸ Doreen Massey and Hilary Wainwright, ‘Beyond the Coalfields: the Work of the Miners’ Support Groups’, in Huw Beynon (ed.) *Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners’ Strike*, (London, 1985); Jean Spence and Carol Stephenson, “Side by Side With Our Men?” Women’s Activism, Community, and Gender in the 1984-1985 British Miners’ Strike’, *International Labor and Working Class History*, 75:1 (2009), 68-84; Diarmaid Kelliher, ‘Solidarity and Sexuality: Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners 1984-5’, *History Workshop Journal*, 77:1 (2014), 240-262.

¹⁵⁹ Diarmaid Kelliher, ‘Solidarity and Sexuality: Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners 1984-5’, *History Workshop Journal*, 77:1 (2014), 2.

¹⁶⁰ Sheffield Local Studies Library, MP 6026M, Leaflet- Sheffield Trades Council says support the miners, Sheffield Trades and Labour Council, 1984.

that it was ‘a great honour to have played a not unimportant role, and in such close proximity to the miners, who surround Sheffield in the coalfield, and their leaders, whom we are privileged to have now in our midst.’¹⁶¹ Flannery painted an evocative picture; highlighting the importance of mining to Sheffield, not just economically but culturally, and making a positive reference to the relocation of the NUM’s headquarters to Sheffield. Flannery continued, highlighting women’s involvement through Women Against the Pit Closures and the Trades Council Miners’ Support Group, as well as the ‘frightening’ media reaction and the ‘brutality’ of police and curtailments to freedom, which was ‘reminiscent of South Africa.’¹⁶² In this way she widened out the conflict to create links of solidarity with the anti-apartheid cause. However, by thanking dockers, transport workers, NUR and ASLEF members for their support, and by describing victory for the miners as ‘a victory for the entire working class whose vanguard they are,’ Flannery firmly constructed the strike as a class conflict. She went on to write about other campaigns on ‘Rate Capping, Unemployment, Racism, and... horrific Government cuts’; most of which were labour issues of jobs and services. Signing off with optimism, Flannery predicted that ‘next year will see a rejuvenation of the whole movement, moving steadily towards victory against the enemies of working people.’¹⁶³ This was a clear positioning of the Miners’ Strike as a class conflict; a fight for working class people against their ‘enemies.’ Class solidarity was extremely important, something the NUM’s ‘Coal not Dole’ leaflets also made very clear, acknowledging ‘the magnificent solidarity of our Sisters and Brothers throughout the Trade Union and Labour Movement.’¹⁶⁴ The rhetoric was of class solidarity practiced by a strong and united labour movement.

¹⁶¹ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1984-85.

¹⁶² SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1984-85.

¹⁶³ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*

In practice, the Sheffield Trades Council set up a Sheffield Trades Council Miners' Support Committee which encouraged every affiliated union to have a support group.¹⁶⁵ They produced tens of thousands of stickers and leaflets, provided information on the strike and collected food in Fargate; the city centre. Food collection points were also set up at the NALGO offices, the NUM offices, at SCCAU and the Trade Council Trades Club among other places.¹⁶⁶ Sheffield City Council set up a shop for miners where they could go for advice. It was run by Roger Barton, secretary of both the Labour Party and Trades Council. Women Against the Pit Closures printed leaflets there, and also used SCCAU which provided meeting space.¹⁶⁷ Individual union branches offered support by 'adopting' pits. Trade unionists at the Manpower Services Commission headquarters adopted Kilnhurst Colliery, organising weekly food collections. Likewise, COHSE members at a Sheffield care home supported Dinnington pit, and SCCAU adopted Maltby pit.¹⁶⁸ Sheffield City Council also supported the miners by providing information and financial support. They gave an initial grant of £5,000 towards the campaign, and used the public libraries to distribute leaflets and act as food collection points. They provided information on benefits and welfare and publicised the effect of pit closures on Sheffield in a booklet "Coal Matters in Sheffield" produced in conjunction with the NUM.¹⁶⁹ They extended free school meals for children of those involved in the dispute beyond the return to work in 'cases of hardship,' and at Christmas they provided mining families in Sheffield with food hampers worth thirty pounds.¹⁷⁰ In response to reports of police violence the City Council granted the National Society for Civil Liberties £500 towards an independent inquiry into the policing of the

¹⁶⁵ SLSL, MP 6026M, Leaflet- Sheffield Trades Council says support the miners, Sheffield Trades and Labour Council, 1984.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014.

¹⁶⁸ *The Sheffield Star*, 'MSC unions 'adopt' pitmen,' 10th May 1984, 5.

¹⁶⁹ SLSL, MP 6026M, Leaflet- Sheffield Trades Council says support the miners, Sheffield Trades and Labour Council, 1984.

¹⁷⁰ SA, CAPOL/18/212 Policy Committee 4th April 1985; SA, CAPOL/18 51 Policy Committee 5th December 1984.

strike.¹⁷¹ The labour movement in Sheffield, the Labour Party and the Trades Council, mobilised in support of the strike. As Kath Mackey explained; ‘In Sheffield everybody pulled stops out.’¹⁷²

This was the case for other institutions of class politics. During the strike Wortley Hall allowed unions to put on fundraising events free of charge, and provided sixty free meals every Sunday for local miners.¹⁷³ Furthermore, they refused Nottingham NUM’s usual booking for eight weekend schools, stating that it was “inappropriate at this time.”¹⁷⁴ Northern College was instrumental in the inception of Sheffield Women Against the Pit Closures and also founded ‘Policewatch’ which monitored policing at the picket lines.¹⁷⁵ The College had been supported organisationally and financially by the NUM since its inception and was located in the ‘heart of the...Yorkshire coalfield.’¹⁷⁶ Residential students at the College supported mining families by giving up their meals and rooms when needed, by organising food collections and attending picket lines. Bob Fryer writes; ‘our values made such decisions relatively straight forward’¹⁷⁷ as did their location and the working class background of many of their students. Some short-course students at the college who were members of Wosborough Community Group established ‘one of the first’ Women’s Support Groups in the strike. They also published a book on their strike activism and created a theatre group which toured the region.¹⁷⁸ Their experiences of the strike paired with the skills

¹⁷¹ SA, CA-POL/17/316 Budget Sub-Committee 31st August 1984.

¹⁷² Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014.

¹⁷³ Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley Hall*, 92.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Bob Fryer, ‘The Northern College from Thatcherism to ‘New Labour’: A Personal Reminiscence,’ in Malcolm Ball and William Hampton, *The Northern College: Twenty-five years of adult learning*, (Leicester, 2004), 84.

¹⁷⁶ Bob Fryer, ‘The Northern College from Thatcherism to ‘New Labour,’ 83.

¹⁷⁷ Fryer, ‘The Northern College from Thatcherism to ‘New Labour,’ 84.

¹⁷⁸ Michael Barratt-Brown and David Browning, ‘Northern College – the Early Years,’ in Malcolm Ball and William Hampton, *The Northern College: Twenty-five years of adult learning*, (Leicester, 2004), 59.

developed and resources available at the College enabled them to set up an organisation with longevity past the end of the strike.

Women Against the Pit Closures was made up of women from a ‘multiplicity of backgrounds,’ including teachers, housewives, local authority workers, engineers, pensioners, students, ‘peace women,’ bus drivers and miners’ wives.¹⁷⁹ Over the duration of the dispute they raised £100,000 which they distributed to local pits mostly as food packages.¹⁸⁰ They also travelled the country giving talks to raise awareness and build links, and they maintained a visible presence on the picket line.¹⁸¹ Whilst the women who were involved gained new skills and confidence through campaigning, many also built on skills and connections they already had. Jean Spence and Carol Stephenson have argued against the dominant narrative of the Miners’ Strike that ‘suggests that the typical strike activist was a miner’s wife who, in solidarity with her man, left the domestic sphere to defend her family, community, and inherited “way of life”’ only to undergo ‘a metamorphosis from housewife to political activist, transformed by collective engagement with the men’s struggle into a new female working class vanguard.’¹⁸² This is a narrative that emerged during the strike in newspaper reports about ‘women who were too shy to speak at local parish meetings’ addressing hundreds at meetings, and was cemented afterwards by the testimony of the women involved; ‘in the strike we’ve done things we’ve never done before – picketing, organised food parcels, demonstrated, spoken at public meetings... We’ve had to challenge all the ideas and arguments that say “our place is in the home” – well – WE ARE NOT GOING BACK!’¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ SWAPC, ‘*We are women we are strong...*’: *Sheffield Women Against the Pit Closures*, (Sheffield, 1987), 5.

¹⁸⁰ SWAPC, ‘*We are women we are strong...*’: *Sheffield Women Against the Pit Closures*, (Sheffield, 1987), 10.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014.

¹⁸² Jean Spence and Carol Stephenson, “Side by Side With Our Men?” Women’s Activism, Community, and Gender in the 1984-1985 British Miners’ Strike’, *International Labor and Working Class History*, 75:1 (2009), 73.

¹⁸³ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Women with ‘sense of spirit and purpose’’, 8th October 1984, 6; SLSL, MP6024M: Women’s Pit Prop, Bulletin No.1, May-June 1985.

While this may have been the experience of some women, Spence and Stephenson argue that such narratives obscure the organising that women were already doing in their communities and work places.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, before the Miners' Strike, the women of Wosborough Community Group's first campaign was to protect their village police station, and SWAPC included activists with trade union experience, members of the Communist Party, and women who had been to Greenham Common.¹⁸⁵ This was the same across the coalfield. One of the women Spence and Stephenson interviewed was initially involved with CND, Peace Action Durham, and the Woodcraft Folk before joining the campaign.¹⁸⁶ However, even at the time there was an attempt to remove these other political experiences from aspects of the campaign. Janet Heath remembers her and Kath Mackey working hard to keep radical far-left politics out of meetings to avoid splitting the group and alienating less political members.¹⁸⁷ Heath recognised that they had to start where the non-political women were comfortable, even if they found it frustrating. As Heath wrote shortly after the end of the strike; 'it was most essential that the mining women should not be alienated from the group, and you couldn't just tell them to shut up, so we had to go along with it.'¹⁸⁸ In practice this meant making compromises to act in line with the wishes of women from mining families, who were often described as non-political, stressing that 'it was *their* dispute and that they must be fully involved in the major decisions,' and always sending at least one mining woman to speak at events; 'it was an unwritten rule.'¹⁸⁹ Frequently the starting point for involvement was even more traditional and cakes became part of meetings. Heath wrote after the strike; 'they liked baking, the mining women, and it was important that they could

¹⁸⁴ Spence and Stephenson, "Side by Side With Our Men?", 73.

¹⁸⁵ Barratt-Brown and Browning in Ball and Hampton, *The Northern College*, 58.

¹⁸⁶ Spence and Stephenson, "Side by Side With Our Men?", 78.

¹⁸⁷ Janet Heath, "Holding it Together: Strategies for Broad Based Work," in Vicky Seddon (ed.) *The Cutting Edge: Women and the Pit Strike*, (London, 1986), 68.

¹⁸⁸ Heath, "Holding it Together," 65.

¹⁸⁹ Heath, "Holding it Together," 65-68.

bring something, contribute something to the group.’¹⁹⁰ She remembers this now with some exasperation; ‘I didn’t want them to have bloody cake – I didn’t eat cake!’ but it was a starting point for involvement, and not an unusual one for women in Sheffield’s labour movement.¹⁹¹ That women with such a variety of experiences were brought together over the strike shows the strength and persistence of class politics as an issue. At the same time, that the traditional narrative surrounding WAPC was reinforced from inside and outside of the movement emphasises how traditional Sheffield’s labour movement could be when faced with other political experiences.

Despite this, the variation in experience and difference in employment among the women was used to positive effect within the campaign. One woman, a clerical worker at the City Hall at the time, used her position to send out leaflets for miners’ benefits and fundraisers. She explained;

‘I was quite friendly with a guy called Warren Lakin and Warren’s partner Linda Smith... I used to promote a lot of their things actually... I used to use the Council’s mailing systems to mail out Sheffield Popular Theatre’s flyers. Through the internal system of course!’¹⁹²

This was possibly not as cheeky as it might sound as Roger Barton and the Sheffield Trades Council had agreed to fund Lakin and Smith’s ‘Pit Stop Tour’; a ‘morale-boosting tour to the South Yorkshire coalfield.’¹⁹³ As well as resources, skills were shared. Women who had been to Greenham Common taught the others to write the phone numbers of solicitors on their arms before going to pickets.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, Greenham women’s experience was drawn upon across the board. Paul Dearden, a community activist, remembers running from a police

¹⁹⁰ Heath, “Holding it Together,” 66.

¹⁹¹ Interview with Janet Heath, 2nd July 2014.

¹⁹² Interview with Anonymous, 2013. Linda Smith later became a regular comedian on BBC Radio 4 programmes *Just a Minute* and *I’m Sorry I Haven’t a Clue*.

¹⁹³ Warren Lakin, *Driving Miss Smith: A Memoir of Linda Smith*, (London, 2008), 96-7.

¹⁹⁴ SWAPC, ‘*We are women we are strong...*’: *Sheffield Women Against the Pit Closures*, (Sheffield, 1987), 29.

charge into the woods at a picket near Doncaster, and finding ‘miners on the floor’ with police ‘whacking the shit out of them.’¹⁹⁵ Also in the clearing was Lesley Boulton who is well-known as the woman clutching her camera about to be hit by a mounted police officer in one of the most famous images of the Miners’ Strike (see Figure 2.6).¹⁹⁶ Boulton was taking photographs of the police when Dearden heard a voice say through a megaphone “‘woman taking photographs” and they stood up like automatons and walked off.’¹⁹⁷ A police inspector arrived and exposed the film, prompting Dearden to later ask Boulton if it was not all a bit futile. He remembers her response as this;

“‘It wasn’t futile because if I hadn’t have been there taking photographs they would have carried on hitting those men. So the fact that I was taking photographs kind of saved them a few more bruises or even being killed.” She said... “I was involved in Greenham... and some of the tactics the miners use are really useless you know, what’s the point of standing there- it’s just so predictable – you stand there, the scabs come in, a few bricks thrown, the police come in and kick the shit out of everybody... at Greenham Common we had different tactics, we’d never use the same tactics.””¹⁹⁸

Paul Dearden saw this as a practical application of Saul Alinsky’s rules for radicals;

‘Wherever possible go outside the experience of your enemy’ or ‘never use the tactics of the enemy, always invent your own,’ a philosophy he brought into his own community activism when he began to use theatre in tenants’ activism.¹⁹⁹ Women applied tactics learnt elsewhere to the Miners’ Strike and they were often positively received.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Paul Dearden, 4th September 2013.

¹⁹⁶ Photograph of Lesley Boulton at Orgreave, taken by John Harris at reportdigital.co.uk http://www.bbc.co.uk/southyorkshire/content/articles/2009/03/02/lesley_boulton_orgreave_photo_feature.shtml (accessed: 22/02/14).

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Paul Dearden, 4th September, 2013.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Paul Dearden, 4th September, 2013.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Paul Dearden, 4th September, 2013; Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals*, (Vintage Book: New York, 1989), 127.

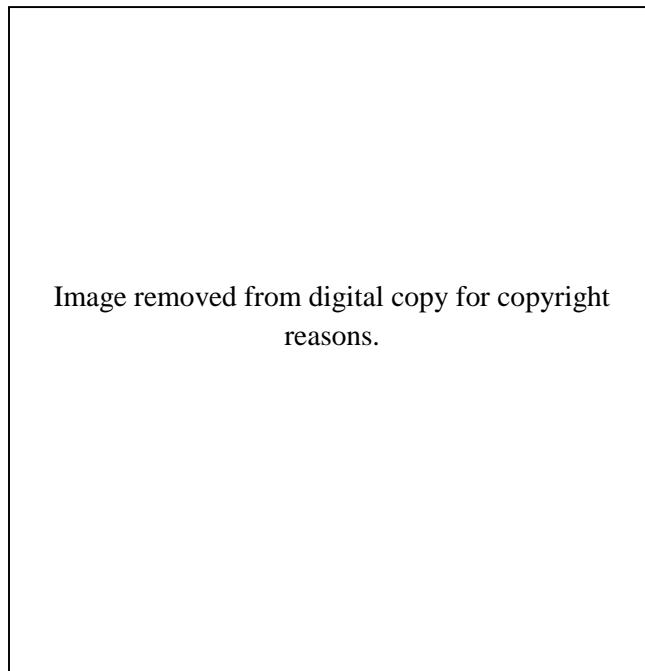


Figure 2.6: Photo of Lesley Boulton at Orgreave by John Harris/reportdigital.co.uk.²⁰⁰

However, sometimes the relationships between members of Women Against the Pit Closures and other activists were not as cordial. As one woman remembered ‘we did come in for some flak from some men and sections of the feminist movement asking “weren’t we perpetuating women’s roles?”’²⁰¹ But as she explained; ‘feminists were failing to recognise women’s actual position from which their action must start.’²⁰² For some women their only previous political experience was organising a Labour Party jumble sale.²⁰³ Kath Mackey reiterates this with her earlier experiences of meeting feminists from Leeds – ‘the real burn your bra lot’ – at Communist Party women’s weekends. Mackey realised that realised that the male, industrial politics of the CPBG ‘didn’t represent my view of the world’ but the hard line feminists ‘had gone too far for me’ and had different experiences of life.²⁰⁴ Both, however, helped her find a middle ground that she was happy with, and to build her activism

²⁰⁰ Reproduced here with permission from John Harris at reportdigital.co.uk.

²⁰¹ SWAPC, ‘*We are women we are strong...*’: *Sheffield Women Against the Pit Closures*, (Sheffield, 1987), 29.

²⁰² SWAPC, ‘*We are women we are strong...*’: *Sheffield Women Against the Pit Closures*, (Sheffield, 1987), 29.

²⁰³ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014.

from that point. As mentioned, Mackey and Heath took this attitude into SWAPC. Whilst contributing to and echoing the narrative that Spence and Stephenson wish to dispel – that women found activism through making sandwiches – these experiences highlight the complexities of solidarity brought on by such a large campaign. The lighter side of these uneasy collaborations was that having a few feminists in the car made it easier for Kate Flannery and others to tell police at road blocks that they were on their way to a feminist conference to avoid being turned back.²⁰⁵

The organisation Policewatch had a similarly mixed membership to SWAPC, which was likely due to their shared Northern College background; however more members of Policewatch were local government workers in the ‘caring’ professions.²⁰⁶ Policewatch was an independent organisation of between forty and sixty people who sent volunteers in small groups to monitor policing at picket lines on a daily basis.²⁰⁷ Two-thirds of the volunteers were women, and career-wise they were administrators, social and community workers, teachers, academics, clergymen, students, unemployed people, one ex-MP, one solicitor, and one councillor.²⁰⁸ The first meeting had been called by Sheffield Trades Council and they were given office space at SCCAU. Many members were probably trade unionists, part of the wider labour movement or sympathetic to the miners’ struggle, but it was made clear that they were not a miners’ support group and the labour movement recognised the need for ‘complete independence.’²⁰⁹ Observers were often shocked at what they witnessed and what they occasionally experienced when they were mistaken for pickets.²¹⁰ The experience of police violence or harassment was positioned as a shared experience and a platform on which

²⁰⁵ Interview with Kate Flannery, 3rd December 2013.

²⁰⁶ Fryer, ‘The Northern College from Thatcherism to ‘New Labour,’’ 84; John Field, ‘Police Monitoring: The Sheffield Experience’ in Bob Fine and Robert Millar, *Policing the Miners’ Strike*, (London, 1985), 214.

²⁰⁷ Sheffield Policewatch, *Taking Liberties: Policing during the miners’ strike*, (April – October, 1984), 2; Field, ‘Police Monitoring: The Sheffield Experience’, 214.

²⁰⁸ Sheffield Policewatch, *Taking Liberties*, 2.

²⁰⁹ Field, ‘Police Monitoring: The Sheffield Experience,’ 208-10.

²¹⁰ Sheffield Policewatch, *Taking Liberties*, 10-9.

to build solidarity and new alliances. Many in the labour movement saw what they had experienced as being similar to that of Irish or black and minority ethnic communities. Arthur Scargill was quoted in *New Socialist* in October 1984 saying; ‘Police tactics in this dispute have revealed clearly to us what black and Asian communities throughout Britain mean by ‘police harassment.’²¹¹ After the strike, one member of SWAPC said ‘whilst that kind of harassment may have stopped for most of us, it won’t stop for people in the black or Irish communities... We have received a lot of support from them in the last year, and I hope we’ll be returning that support.’²¹² The magazine *Women’s Pit Prop* published at the end of the miners’ strike certainly encouraged this. They advertised SWAPC’s ‘Education on Racism’ evening at SCCAU which was organised because, having suffered similar harassment ‘that black people have suffered for years... we would like to understand the roots of racism better and to help in fighting it.’²¹³ *Women’s Pit Prop* also advertised anti-apartheid and CND events indicating that solidarity had emerged with other new left campaigns as well.²¹⁴

Diarmaid Kelliher writes that Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners built their solidarity with Welsh miners around a ‘shared experience’ of mistreatment by police rather than class.²¹⁵ However, in Sheffield, miners and their supporters used that same shared experience to encourage solidarity with black and minority ethnic communities against racism, as did the Asian Youth Movement. Paul Gordon argues that before the strike the labour and trade union movement had ‘not wanted to know what was happening to black people.’²¹⁶ Indeed, for some this was the case during the strike. Mukhtar Dar remembers arriving at Orgreave early one morning with a group from the Asian Youth Movement to

²¹¹ Paul Gordon, ‘If they come in the morning...’: The Police, the Miners, and Black People’, in Bob Fine and Robert Millar, *Policing the Miners’ Strike*, (London, 1985), 161.

²¹² SWAPC, ‘We are women we are strong...’: *Sheffield Women Against the Pit Closures*, (Sheffield, 1987), 45.

²¹³ SLSL: MP6024M: Women’s Pit Prop, Bulletin No.1, May-June 1985.

²¹⁴ *ibid.*

²¹⁵ Kelliher, ‘Solidarity and Sexuality,’ 8.

²¹⁶ Gordon, ‘If they come in the morning...’ 172.

overhear one miner say “What the hell are these Pakis doing here?”²¹⁷ Dar’s response was to look past it – “That’s his problem. We can see the bars and he can’t.”²¹⁸ He remembers that South Asian and black communities raised a lot of money for the miners, and mobilised support around a shared class consciousness as well as the experience of similar treatment by the police; ‘we saw echoed on their faces and in their language the same things we were saying. The same hatred that they had developed.’²¹⁹

John Field suggests that a ‘shared experience’ at the hands of the police changed the attitude of the labour movement to a certain extent, but also highlights the continued role of class in determining support and how the labour movement controlled the definition of class. In the early 1980s policing had not really been an issue in South Yorkshire partly because the policing at the steel strike was conducted with ‘relative good humour.’²²⁰ At that time, pressure for a police monitoring unit came only from Sheffield’s small African-Caribbean community and larger, but more dispersed, Asian communities who were ‘easily fobbed off by the local Labour Party.’²²¹ Until the Miners’ Strike, police monitoring was ‘low on the priorities of the labour movement.’²²² Mukhtar Dar may have viewed himself as being part of Sheffield’s working class but the validity of Asian working class experience was not necessarily recognised by the labour movement even after acknowledging the common experience of police harassment. This ‘shared experience’ certainly did not stretch to lesbians and gay men in Sheffield. Indeed, when LGSM asked Sheffield City Council to fund a documentary and exhibition on their work “to inform people of the links that were made, the common problems of media distortion, police harassment and state oppression of both the

²¹⁷ Interview with Mukhtar Dar, 23rd August 2013.

²¹⁸ Interview with Mukhtar Dar, 23rd August 2013.

²¹⁹ Interview with Mukhtar Dar, 23rd August 2013.

²²⁰ Field, ‘Police Monitoring: The Sheffield Experience,’ 205.

²²¹ *ibid.*

²²² *ibid.*

mining communities and lesbians and gays’’ they were met with hostility.²²³ David Blunkett replied that ‘it would be inappropriate for us to provide funding for the kind of exhibition which you indicate, as it is not directly related to the support of these issues [miners and their families’ welfare, ‘proper’ class politics] but rather to illustrate solidarity by another organisation related to a particular cause.’²²⁴ Kelliher notes that this attitude was unusual and that support was given by the NUM nationally and by the Dulais support group.²²⁵ This may just indicate the attitude of specific members of the Labour Group to homosexuality, as Clive Betts admitted people were ‘quite prejudiced’ in the early 1980s.²²⁶ But perhaps it indicates something broader about the refusal of the labour movement to incorporate new left identities in a meaningful and reciprocal way. After the strike, some trade unions and miners’ support groups joined the campaign of black and minority ethnic communities for a permanent police monitoring unit, however it was rejected by Sheffield Labour Party’s leadership.²²⁷ Parts of the labour movement may have been ready to join forces with new left identity politics on some issues but the Labour Group on Sheffield Council wanted to keep this radicalism in check. Whilst the labour movement could be willing to explore connections with other movements outside of class politics, or even to redefine class politics to include ethnic and sexual minorities, it was also disciplined and followed the Labour Group’s lead. Only the Labour Group had control of the city’s budget and so could define the parameters of the city’s activism. Their need to win over the rest of the electorate kept radicalism in check and stifled new alliances.

Solidarity in Sheffield in the 1980s was a complex concept. One SWAPC member said; ‘You see a badge on somebody, just a little badge and they are a friend. You don’t know

²²³ Kelliher, ‘Solidarity and Sexuality,’ 13.

²²⁴ *ibid.*

²²⁵ *ibid.*

²²⁶ Interview with Clive Betts, 19th July 2013.

²²⁷ Field, ‘Police Monitoring: The Sheffield Experience,’ 215.

anything about them but they are automatically your ally, comrade and friend.’²²⁸ Shared campaigns and experiences helped to form solidarities, but so did reciprocal alliances. This was a lesson that some felt the miners needed to learn. Although Kath Mackey and Kate Flannery remember everyone pulling together, there were incidents of tension between different groups in the labour movement. For example, although many viewed the Miners’ Strike as the next attack on the unions following on from the steel strike, there were differences in the reaction this produced. For many steel workers it made the Miners’ Strike an even more important fight, whilst others questioned where this solidarity had been during the steel strike.²²⁹ SWAPC reported the latter reaction; ‘steel workers say “Well no one supported us, why should we support you?”’²³⁰ For steel workers who felt they had been hung out to dry, solidarity was a reciprocal process built on being there for one another’s battles. But it was also based around class and a sense of ‘belonging’ to Sheffield’s political culture. In the early 1980s this was still dominated by the labour movement; a traditional steel and coal mining milieu. Although the movement made alliances with new left actors through campaigns against unemployment and the Miners’ Strike, some activists still remained on the outside. These included lesbian and gay organisations and members of the Sheffield Asian Youth Movement whose support was not always welcomed and reciprocated due to the persistence in Sheffield of a narrow definition of class politics that the tight-knit labour movement often retreated to.

Conclusion

Raphael Samuel concludes his article about Thatcherism and ‘Victorian Values’ by suggesting that ‘it would not be the Prime Minister, but the miners defeated in the strike of

²²⁸ SWAPC, *‘We are women we are strong...’: Sheffield Women Against the Pit Closures*, (Sheffield, 1987), 19.

²²⁹ Interview with Kate Flannery, 3rd December 2013.

²³⁰ SWAPC, *‘We are women we are strong...’: Sheffield Women Against the Pit Closures*, (Sheffield, 1987), 12.

1984-85 - her 'enemy within' - who would have the stronger claim.'²³¹ When Samuel describes these values as 'family solidarity, the dignity of work, the security of the home, or simply the right of the free-born Englishman to stay put' it is easy to see what he means.²³² But 'Victorian Values' were also about looking to the past for answers about the present, something that James Vernon has recognised in the working class autobiographical reminiscences of the 1930s that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s from adult education organisations like the WEA. Vernon describes how, in these accounts 'nostalgia for a world of class solidarity that was lost disguised the active exclusion of people who could not share the Englishness of the remembered past and the script of class redemption it afforded.'²³³ These reminiscences encouraged the prevalence of the same narrative of a collective community identity that was based on class and the experience of industry and mining that surrounds Women Against the Pit Closures, and was often celebrated by Sheffield's wider political milieu. As Ben Jones has noted, these nostalgic narratives were produced at a time when working class people and communities, and the politics committed to valorizing them, were under attack. As such these narratives can be read as attempts to both critique 'stigmatizing representations' of working class people, and to defend a political position that supported the institutions of the working class.²³⁴ Both during and after the Miners' Strike these narratives helped to hold the labour movement together, but they also held far-left radicalism and the identity politics of the new urban left in check.

The labour movement in Sheffield was for the most part a coherent force that combined members of the Labour Party, the Communist Party and trade unionists. Multiple

²³¹ Raphael Samuel, 'Mrs Thatcher and Victorian Values,' in *Island Stories: Theatres of Memory, Vol II*, (London, New York, 1998), 347.

²³² Samuel, 'Mrs Thatcher and Victorian Values,' 347.

²³³ Vernon, *Hunger*, 261.

²³⁴ Ben Jones, "The Uses of Nostalgia: Autobiography, Community Publishing and Working Class Neighbourhoods in Post-War England," *Cultural and Social History*, 7:3 (2010), 356, 369.

generations of the same families were represented and many learnt their political craft at the same institutions of adult education; Wortley Hall and Northern College. In this way Sheffield's labour movement was in touch with its history and a longer tradition of class activism. Even when mobilising around newer forms of politics, labour activists in Sheffield still looked to traditional tactics and forms of organisation. In campaigns against youth unemployment and racism the labour movement attempted to make new left alliances, however sometimes those they allied themselves with were left feeling disgruntled and forced into a class perspective. In this way, the labour movement in Sheffield attempted to drive 'newer' movements forward, but often ended up eclipsing them.

The collaborations between the labour movement and other organisations during the Miners' Strike of 1984-85 illustrate how vibrant Sheffield's activism was, and how much potential there was for new alliances to be made on even terms. However, support was not welcome from every organisation and often a narrow definition of class trumped other shared experiences such as police harassment. Yet some alliances proved successful, and although these collaborations may have started because the labour movement needed support, class activists were sometimes keen to continue these alliances post-strike. However, as with the campaign for an independent police-monitoring unit, the final decision often lay with the Labour Group, who, despite their new urban left rhetoric, were not enthusiastic about funding these collaborations and embracing different forms of activism.

In this way the discipline and unity of Sheffield's labour movement offers another side to Sheffield City Council's 'beacon of socialism' rhetoric. In both cases, class politics trumped all. While Blunkett aimed for socialist policies that integrated radical concerns without alienating core working class voters, the labour movement's repeated insistence on putting class politics first led to the exclusion of some forms of radicalism from this collectivist ideal. When new alliances were made, they were often not reciprocal, causing a

breakdown of solidarity. Movements around peace and environmentalism could be worked into Council policy. Gender equality and racism could to a certain extent be turned into workplace issues. Activism around lesbian and gay rights, and more direct anti-racist organising around defence, could not however be turned into class concerns. As such they were excluded from Sheffield's activist milieu. Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis discuss who was included and who was excluded from this milieu in more detail.

Chapter 3

Women in Sheffield's Politics

*We don't need Government approval for anything we do
We don't need their permission to have a point of view
We don't need anyone to tell us what to think or say
We've strength enough and wisdom of our own to go our own way*

*We are women, we are strong,
We are fighting for our lives*

Mal Finch, *Women of the Working Class*, 1985¹

Sheffield's Women's Liberation Group started in 1969 and was one of the first Women's Liberation Movement groups outside of London. Many of its founding members were young, middleclass or university educated, and had experience of left-wing politics. Some had attended women's groups in London, and many had their political awakening in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign.² From 1969 to 1979, Sheffield's WLM grew to include many consciousness-raising and discussion groups with around sixty dedicated members and a further fifty who participated in a less regular way. Within this expanded group there was not much change in the demographics of Sheffield's WLM, however. In a retrospective issue of the *Sheffield Women's Paper* looking back on their first ten years, many women saw the need to be more outward-looking and inclusive, especially of working class women.³ Indeed, many of the women involved had chosen to move to Sheffield because they were 'fed up with the south' and wanted to live 'up north'. The *Sheffield Women's Newsletter* explained that 'doubtless [Sheffield's] identity as a 'real working class city'' had been 'politically attractive' to many as well.⁴ Many members of Sheffield's WLM were self-styled 'immigrant radicals'

¹ Mal Finch, *Women of the Working Class*, Songsheet from Liverpool Socialist Singers, Spring 2014, www.liverpoolsocialistsingers.net (accessed: 6/08/2015).

² Feminist Archive North, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, October/November 1979.

³ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, October/November 1979.

⁴ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Newsletter*, Spring 1978.

and saw their ‘community’ as a ‘magnet to draw more like-minded people up here.’⁵ In this sense many were the type of activist that Blunkett was learning to incorporate into his vision of socialism in the 1980s. Yet, despite their acknowledgement of and enthusiasm for Sheffield’s labour movement, many of these women found themselves unable to engage working class women in Women’s Liberation, and instead some turned their attentions to altering the gender dynamic within the very labour movement that drew them to the city, albeit with limited degrees of success.

A number of Sheffield’s WLM worked in local government occupations and other public sector jobs that engaged them in trade union activism. Through union involvement they came into contact with an older generation of working class feminists who by the 1980s had worked their way into prominent positions in the labour movement. But in general Sheffield’s WLM feminists found it difficult to engage other women in the labour movement beyond so-called ‘working women’s’ issues. Working class women were identified as a group they found particularly hard to communicate with and as such they saw themselves ‘very much as a group of ‘outsiders’’ in a working class city.⁶ Despite this they aimed to build ‘common experiences with women around’ them, and in 1979 took the election of a Conservative Government as an opportunity to frame women’s campaigns within the broader left-wing struggle.⁷ Nevertheless, regardless of these intentions, Sheffield’s Women’s Liberation Movement remained largely white and middle class and struggled to incorporate working class and black and minority ethnic women into the movement, echoing the difficulties of the national movement.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Newsletter*, Spring 1978.

⁷ FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Bulletin*, October 1979.

In the late 1970s some of the middle class, ‘incoming’ feminists found their way onto the Trades Council’s Working Women’s Charter Committee. At the same time, splits in the Women’s Liberation Movement over sexuality and the framing of male violence as an expression of ‘male supremacy’ began to manifest themselves in Sheffield’s WLM. These divisions came to a head in April 1978 at the Women’s Liberation Movement’s last national conference in Birmingham. Literature on the movement presents this conference as a defining moment where divisions that had been building between socialist, radical, and – after the 1977 Edinburgh conference – revolutionary feminists, forced their way to the top of the agenda.⁸ The root of the fragmentation lay in the revolutionary feminist term ‘male supremacy,’ which was defined as the ‘system by which men as a class oppress and control women as a class.’⁹ Socialist feminists objected to the inclusion of this term in the seventh demand which called for an end to male violence against women. Objectors claimed that the demand ignored the question of class oppression and unequal class relations in society, placing blame solely on men. The objection was heeded, but only after the conference plenary had dissolved into chaos with revolutionary and socialist feminists proclaiming each other ‘fascists.’¹⁰

These divisions were present in Sheffield’s WLM, though they took a less antagonistic form. From the late 1970s onwards the character of Sheffield’s WLM changed. First it became more vocally accepting of lesbian and bisexual women, and then, a few years

⁸ Jeska Rees, ‘A Look Back at Anger: the Women’s Liberation Movement in 1978’, *Women’s History Review*, 19:3 (2010), 342; Eve Setch, ‘The Face of Metropolitan Feminism: the London Women’s Liberation Workshop, 1969–1979’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 13:2 (2002), 172. Works such as Elizabeth Meehan, ‘British Feminism from the 1960s to the 1980s,’ in Harold L. Smith (ed.), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, (Aldershot, 1990), 91; Paul Byrne, ‘The Politics of the Women’s Movement,’ in Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris (eds.), *Women in Politics*, (Oxford, 1996), 63; Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women’s Liberation*, (Oxford, 1987); David Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge: the Movement for Women’s Liberation in Britain and the USA*, (London, 1983); and Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain, 1914–1999* (London, 2000) follow this narrative.

⁹ Rees, ‘A Look Back at Anger,’ 343.

¹⁰ Rees, ‘A Look Back at Anger,’ 348.

later, it became more stringently 'women-only'; reflecting the influence of revolutionary feminism and separatism on the wider movement. These changes occurred gradually in the early 1980s, and a comparison between the newspapers and newsletters of Sheffield's WLM and *Double Shift*, the newsletter of the Working Women's Charter Committee, indicates that in this period many socialist feminists left the WLM and looked to the labour movement to address gender inequality. By 1985 a cohort of lesbian women were leading Sheffield's WLM and many socialist feminists increasingly looked towards the labour movement; bringing more radical elements, such as criticisms of pornography and male violence, to the attention of the Working Women's Charter Committee. However, whilst feminists in the Working Women's Charter Committee mainly focussed on issues that affected working class women, and campaigned around the early demands of the WLM; equal pay, education, and job opportunities, 24-hour childcare, and free abortion and contraception on demand, they often found themselves speaking *for* working class women rather than alongside them. The WWCC, though rooted in the labour movement, also struggled to attract working class members; middle class socialist feminists swelled its ranks. Furthermore, like the WLM, the WWCC also struggled to engage Sheffield's African-Caribbean and Asian women who tended to organise themselves first and foremost against racist oppression.

Despite this division, there was not as much animosity within Sheffield's feminism as the national story of the Women's Liberation Movement would suggest. Jeska Rees argues that the narrative of fragmentation has been predominantly constructed from the personal recollections of socialist feminists published in newsletters *WIRES* and *Spare Rib*, and unfairly blames revolutionary feminists for the split.¹¹ Eve Setch claims that this focus on division 'does not do justice to the diversity of the movement or the extent to which division

¹¹ Rees, 'A Look Back at Anger,' 348, 350.

and its expression was integral to it.’¹² Indeed, much has been made of how the WLM’s non-hierarchical character allowed for a wide range of women with different perspectives to get involved, linked by a common cause.¹³ As Martin Pugh reiterates, Women’s Liberation remained a broad church and many women adapted its principles to the needs of their own communities.¹⁴ Setch argues that more work needs to be done on these local grassroots movements where divisions were put aside and overcome in order to readdress the binary focus present in much of the literature. Work in this vein has been done on some London-based groups, such as those in Lambeth and Islington, and Women’s Liberation in Leeds has also received scholarly attention for its sizeable contribution to the national movement.¹⁵ The Women’s Information, Referral and Enquiry Service (WIRES) was established by the Leeds-based Chapeltown Women’s Liberation Group in 1975, and the city and university were a hub for revolutionary feminists, some of whom developed Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW).¹⁶ Recently Bridget Lockyer has focused on the Bradford Women’s Liberation Movement, identifying its character as having ‘a strong working class dimension and links to a fierce gay liberation movement.’¹⁷ Lockyer’s emphasis on discovering the ‘distinct flavour’ of Bradford’s movement makes an important contribution to answering Setch’s call for a grassroots focus.

In light of these historiographical debates, this chapter looks at Women’s Liberation in Sheffield and sets it within the wider context of women’s political involvement in the city.

¹² Setch, ‘The Face of Metropolitan Feminism,’ 186.

¹³ Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 27.

¹⁴ Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement*, 320.

¹⁵ E. M. Ettore, ‘Women, urban social movements and the lesbian ghetto’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 2 (1978), 499-520; Lynne Segal, ‘A local experience’ in Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism*, (London, 1979); Elizabeth Arledge Ross and Miriam L. Bearse, *A Chronology of the Women’s Liberation Movement in Britain: organisations, conferences, journals and events, with a focus on Leeds and Bradford, 1969–1979*, (1996). Available at the Feminist Archive North, Special Collections, Brotherton Library University of Leeds.

¹⁶ Bridget Lockyer, ‘An Irregular Period? Participation in the Bradford Women’s Liberation Movement,’ *Women’s History Review*, 22:4 (2013), 664.

¹⁷ Lockyer, ‘An Irregular Period?’, 644.

By using oral history alongside archival material from Sheffield's Women's Liberation Movement and the Trades Council Working Women's Charter Committee this chapter traces the development of socialist feminism in the labour movement and in Sheffield's WLM, teasing out the tensions between an older generation of working class women and younger middle class women who came to the city looking to engage with labour politics. This section shows how the older generation of women generally welcomed the enthusiasm of younger feminists and the Working Women's Charter Committee fostered a close and productive relationship across generations and class differences. However, this was feminism on the labour movement's terms; organised by committee and revolving around working women's issues. Furthermore, there was a struggle to get male members of the labour movement involved, and the WWCC found it almost as difficult to engage younger working class women as the WLM had throughout the 1970s. By the mid-1980s many of the WLM's socialist feminists had shifted their focus from pushing class issues in the WLM, to working within the labour movement on gender equality in the WWCC. Feminists were more connected to the labour movement in Sheffield than in other cities, and this was due both to the strength of the labour movement in Sheffield and to the fact that many of the feminists who had come to the city in the 1970s had done so because of Sheffield's reputation as a thriving radical working class city. They wanted and intended to work with working class people. Despite intentions, Sheffield's WLM remained more middle class in demographic, and character, than in other predominantly working class cities such as Bradford.

Another reason for the migration of socialist feminists in Sheffield out of the WLM and into the labour movement in the early 1980s was the divisions around sexuality and separatism present in the national movement. Though lacking the animosity of arguments at the 1978 Birmingham conference, analysis of WLM newsletters and oral history interviews in this chapter shows how these debates were present in Sheffield and resulted in the WLM

opening itself up to lesbian and bisexual women. This changed the focus of the movement and some socialist feminists saw the labour movement and thriving WWCC to be a better fit for their politics. This left an opening in the WLM and this chapter shows how lesbian and bisexual women took control of the movement. While tensions around sexuality and class still existed, this split did not isolate the WLM from Sheffield's politics completely, as many of the lesbian women had connections to the labour movement through campaigning for more opportunities for women working in non-traditional and manual trades, and by offering one of the few safe spaces in the city for working class lesbians.

This chapter also details how both the WLM and WWCC in Sheffield struggled to engage black and Asian women in their feminism, even more so than the national movement. Instead, black and minority ethnic women tended to fight for gender equality within Black¹⁸ community and identity politics and within campaigns against racism. This chapter will illustrate this through cases studies on the development of two Black women's groups; Sheffield Black Women's Group and the Black Women's Resources Centre and their relationship with Sheffield WLM. It will also examine the various Asian women's groups in the city and the role of women in the Asian Youth Movement. The propensity for African-Caribbean and Asian women as well as lesbian women to organise around identity highlights the problems broader left-wing movements had with incorporating diverse voices and representing difference. Despite these difficulties, shared spaces such as the Commonground Resources Centre showed that many women were also part of a flourishing radical and alternative milieu mainly made up of 'middle class radicals'. In this sense, Sheffield's politics was a lot like any other university town. However the strength and persistence of its labour movement shadowed the rest of its politics as will be shown here and in the fourth chapter.

¹⁸ 'Black' is used here, reflecting the word's contemporary usage as a political term and shared identity covering not just those of African descent, but all non-white people facing racial oppression.

Even within more radical movements, the politics of class was always a key concern; shaping movements and their priorities.

Class, Feminism, and the Labour Movement

Traditionally trade unionism and the labour movement have been seen as male-dominated; however there were always a significant number of women involved and by the 1970s and 1980s more women were taking on bigger roles within the movement. In Sheffield women like Vi Gill, the first female trade union convenor at Firth Tools and member of the Communist Party of Great Britain; Joan Maynard, Labour MP for Sheffield Brightside from 1973 and known as ‘Stalin’s Granny;’ Joan Barton, chair of the Labour Group; and Blanche Flannery, life-long member of the Communist Party and first female President of Sheffield Trades and Labour Council, campaigned for women’s concerns alongside and within socialism. By the 1970s and 1980s they were leaders within the labour movement and helped to smooth the way for a younger generation of women, both those who had grown up in the city and those who had come to it from elsewhere.

In the 1960s the number of women on Sheffield City Council increased ‘significantly’ as a result of boundary changes.¹⁹ In the 1973 local election, sixteen of the ninety elected councillors were women, taking fourteen percent of the seats.²⁰ The majority of these women were in the Labour Party. Although the percentage of women on Sheffield City Council fluctuated throughout the 1970s and 1980s with a third of representatives regularly up for election, women’s representation gradually increased. From 1976 onwards it was consistently higher than the national average (see Table 3.1). This increase was the result of more women

¹⁹ Sylvia Dunkley, ‘‘Women in Public’’: Women Elected Representatives in Local Government in Sheffield 1870-1992’, in Clyde Binfield *et al.* (eds.) *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843-1993, Volume II: Society*, (Sheffield, 1993), 289.

²⁰ Sheffield City Council Election, 1973 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheffield_City_Council_election,_1973 (accessed: 26/01/15).

standing for election. In 1986, a third of the candidates in the local election were women, which was double the number who had stood in the 1976 election.²¹ The push for more women on the Council was not the preserve of the left, as the *Sheffield Star* noted; ‘the figures are good news for the Sheffield branch of the 300 Group,’ which aimed to see three hundred women in Parliament, and more in other public arenas.²² The Secretary of the Sheffield branch of the 300 Group, Beryl “Bobby” Fleming, was also the Conservative candidate in Stocksbridge. Unfortunately for Fleming, the Conservatives, and the 300 Group, Stocksbridge was won by Malcolm Bresford of the SDP-Alliance.²³

Year	Average Women on Local Councils in England and Wales (%)	Women on Sheffield City Council (%)
1964	12	10
1976	17	24
1985	19	28
1991	-	33

Table 3.1: Representation of women on Sheffield City Council compared to a national average.²⁴

The increase in female candidates could in part reflect the changing composition of the trade union movement. Between 1966 and 1976 Britain’s public sector employment grew from approximately 16 to 27 percent of the workforce, employing a significant number of women.²⁵ Female membership in trade unions grew at a rate of 73 percent between 1966 and 1979, compared to a rate of growth of approximately 19 percent among male workers.²⁶ Over the course of these thirteen years, almost 52 percent of the overall increase in trade union

²¹ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Women aim for power in politics,’ 1st May 1986, 11.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Sheffield City Council Election, 1986 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheffield_City_Council_election,_1986 (accessed: 26/05/15).

²⁴ Dunkley, ‘Women in Public,’ 289-90.

²⁵ Tara Martin, ‘The Beginning of Labor’s End? Britain’s “Winter of Discontent” and Working-Class Women’s Activism,’ *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 75 (2009), 53.

²⁶ Martin, ‘Winter of Discontent’, 54.

membership was made up of women, benefitting unions such as the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE) and the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE).²⁷ This change in union demographics may explain Sheffield's trade union membership. In 1974-75, 221 trade unions were affiliated to the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council, resulting in a combined membership of 47,847 workers. By 1981-82, after the collapse of the steel industry, the number of affiliated unions had reduced to 180, but membership remained around the same at 47,000 workers.²⁸ It is possible that this shortfall was made up of women working in public sector unions. Tara Martin suggests that women's newfound 'numeric dominance' of trade unions 'rarely translated' into positions of leadership.²⁹ Female councillors in Sheffield in the 1970s and 1980s tended to have shorter terms and to not occupy senior positions such as committee Chairs.³⁰ Furthermore, Members of Parliament for Sheffield were rarely women; Joan Maynard and Helen Jackson were the exceptions in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. Dunkley suggests that this was due to MPs often being trade union sponsored and that women's trade union membership in the city was 'traditionally weak.'³¹ Even if female union membership increased on the scale seen elsewhere in Britain, it certainly was not reflected on the Industrial and Political Executives of the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council. From 1970 until 1982 there were never more than two women on the Industrial Executive out of around thirteen positions, and never more than four women out of twenty-one positions on the Political Executive.³² Sheffield's labour movement was certainly male-dominated. But there were women on the City Council and Trades Council who pushed to change this and campaigned to improve the lives of women within a socialist programme.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ Warwick Modern Records Centre, MSS292 D 79/151-4, Trades Union Congress Annual Return from Trades Councils.

²⁹ Martin, 'Winter of Discontent', 54.

³⁰ Dunkley, 'Women in Public', 292.

³¹ Dunkley, 'Women in Public', 295.

³² Sheffield Archives, AC.2002-130, Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Books.

Some of these women did not see their activism in terms of gender. Veronica Hardstaff, a Labour councillor in the 1970s, remembers 'worthy attempts' by women to set up a women's group within the Labour Party which largely went unnoticed.³³ Maureen Whitebrook, a Labour Party member who was heavily involved in the campaign against rate-capping in the 1980s claims that she never felt discriminated against within the Labour Party and thought that the idea of a women's group seemed 'very middle class.'³⁴ Whitebrook, like David Blunkett, preferred not to single women's issues out, however she conceded that the rise of women in the labour movement in the 1970s may have contributed to the ease she felt. Veronica Hardstaff was one of the new female councillors in the 1970s. Hardstaff campaigned against restrictions to free school milk, for family allowances to be paid to mothers, and in 1973 organised a petition of five hundred signatures for a play scheme.³⁵ However, whilst much of her work focussed on women and families she claims that she took it for granted that women were just as capable as anyone else and felt no need to join a women's section.³⁶ Hardstaff wanted to encourage other women to enter politics, but maintains that she had never needed encouraging. Many women in Sheffield's labour movement made jam for bazaars and organised jumble sales and those were their ways of contributing. Hardstaff thought this was important and valid, and saw her work as another way of working towards the same goals.³⁷ In 1973, Sheffield Trades Council expressed a hope that 'more women from the trade union movement will join us in our activities.'³⁸ These included campaigning for equal employment opportunities for women, but also revolved around the home, family and children. As well as supporting the aforementioned petition to have family allowances paid directly to mothers, the Trades Council held a 'Handicrafts

³³ Interview with Maureen Whitebrook, 24th April 2014.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1972-73.

Exhibition,' and campaigned against VAT on children's clothing and footwear.³⁹ For many women in Sheffield, this was their entry into politics, and in line with Blunkett's later vision of socialism, it was very much about 'starting where they're at.'⁴⁰

Blanche Flannery recognised this despite being politically active herself from a very young age. Flannery, a member of the Communist Party from the 1930s onwards, became President of the Trades Council in 1984, having worked her way up through the executive committee.⁴¹ Flannery had been heavily involved in trade union politics for decades but had found it difficult at times to be the only or one of very few women at meetings. Despite this, in 1975 she made it onto the Trades Council Industrial Executive where she campaigned against sex discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace, for equal pay legislation, and for health and fertility rights – offering vocal support to the National Abortion Campaign.⁴² These issues, to quote her daughter Kate Flannery, were not 'the preserve of middle class young women,' but helped attract support from women like Sue Lawson, who was married to a striking steel worker and went on to champion occupational health.⁴³ Of feminism, Lawson said; 'I feel more comfortable with talking about sort of class issues, rather than just sitting and talking about you know women's issues.'⁴⁴ Lawson framed gender equality through workplace struggles and she felt strongly that women should be paid equally for equal work. Flannery also focused her feminism on economic issues; setting up a Women's Sub-Committee in the Trades Council to campaign for women in the workplace, which later became the Working Women's Charter Committee.⁴⁵ Whilst Flannery campaigned on this and many other issues; including peace and the anti-apartheid movement,

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

⁴¹ SA, AC.2002-130 Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Books.

⁴² SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Books 1974-5 and 1976-7.

⁴³ Interview with Kate Flannery, 3rd December 2013.

⁴⁴ Interview with John and Sue Lawson, 17th May 2013.

⁴⁵ Transcript of Blanche Flannery's funeral, 9th November 2010. Provided by Kate Flannery.

she also raised money alongside her campaigning. Her fundraising took on a traditional form; she made crafts, soup and jam for *Daily Worker* socials and bazaars.⁴⁶

Despite her famed knitting skills, producing ‘fantastic’ cardigans and socks, Blanche Flannery found it difficult to balance her politics with her family-life. Although she was an equally important figure in Sheffield’s politics as her husband Martin Flannery, MP for Sheffield Hillsborough, it was Blanche Flannery who was expected to do the domestic work at home.⁴⁷ Kate Flannery remembers a childhood of being taken on Anti-Vietnam and CND marches, then to feminist demonstrations in London and Leeds, and playing in the Communist Party bookshop under the watch of various comrades.⁴⁸ At other times she was looked after by her much older sister. Blanche Flannery delegated: she had four children, and by the 1980s, grandchildren, which she balanced alongside her work and her activism. She is remembered as saying; ‘Home was where you went when you didn’t have a meeting to go to!’⁴⁹ and as such Flannery was intimately familiar with the struggles that working women faced as well as the struggles of women in politics.

It was to this end that Flannery pushed the causes of working women within the labour movement. Arthur Scargill, speaking at Flannery’s funeral in 2010, described her as ‘a leading activist’ in the struggle for women’s rights and remembered that she ‘helped to forge the connection between feminism and trade unionism’ when she established the Working Women’s Charter Committee on Sheffield Trades Council in 1973.⁵⁰ This connection was not always prioritised by the Sheffield WLM movement. Although women’s refuges and Women’s Liberation campaigns around issues like abortion rights, women’s health, and equal

⁴⁶ Vi Gill speaking at Blanche Flannery’s funeral, 9th November 2010. Video provided by Kate Flannery.

⁴⁷ Transcript of Blanche Flannery’s funeral, , 9th November 2010. Interview with Kate Flannery, 3rd December 2013.

⁴⁸ Interview with Kate Flannery, 3rd December 2013.

⁴⁹ Kate Flannery, Transcript of Blanche Flannery’s funeral, 9th November 2010.

⁵⁰ Arthur Scargill speaking at Blanche Flannery’s funeral, 9th November 2010. Video provided by Kate Flannery.

pay did bring women from different backgrounds together, within Sheffield, as elsewhere, there were tensions between working class and middle class feminists, Black and white women, and heterosexual, bisexual and lesbian women. Echoing the origins of the wider Women's Liberation Movement, Sheffield's WLM had begun with a largely white and middle class left-wing membership, and had an affiliation to the University of Sheffield.⁵¹ With regard to the formation of new social movements Alberto Melucci explains that a movement's 'collective identity' is created in 'submerged networks' of small groups of people connected to each other in their everyday lives.⁵² This shared identity is based on the recognition of a 'collective injustice' experienced by those in the network.⁵³ The WLM fits this framework as many of the women involved in the early WLM nationally tended to be from similar white, middle class, university-educated social backgrounds, and were often involved in wider networks of left-wing activism where they faced sexism from male activists. The organisation of Women's Liberation members into consciousness-raising groups that quickly closed to new members contributed further to the uniformity of social backgrounds and experience within the movement.⁵⁴ Whilst exclusivity was essential for building the trust and intimacy that consciousness-raising thrived on, it also made it difficult for women with no prior contacts in the movement to join. Working class and ethnic minority women were often excluded.

However, whereas in London and Oxford networks were primarily made among women involved in new left organisations, class and the politics of the old left remained a priority in Sheffield. Sheffield's political climate was one where working class women like

⁵¹ SA. MD7966/1/4/9, Sheffield University Women's Liberation Group, *Uplift*, March 1971.

⁵² Alberto Melucci, 'The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements', *Social Research*, 52 (1985), 789–816.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Natalie Thomlinson, 'The Colour of Feminism: White Feminists and Race in the Women's Liberation Movement,' *History*, 97:327 (2012), 463.

Blanche Flannery and Vi Gill had a voice and political experience.⁵⁵ Despite many of Sheffield's WLM coming to the city to interact with working class people and politics, they struggled to adapt their politics. Attempts to engage with working class women were often clumsy and unsuccessful, even when they occurred within labour movement structures. Sheffield Women's Liberation Movement remained a primarily middle class organisation, a fact lamented in the Spring 1978 issue of *Sheffield Women's Newsletter*.

In Sheffield working class women came into contact with Women's Liberation through their links to the Labour Party, the Communist Party and other far-left organisations like the Socialist Workers' Party, rather than through new left and university networks. Two such women, Kath Mackey and Janet Heath, were working class members of the Communist Party, and later became instrumental in Sheffield Women Against the Pit Closures. They were interested in feminism but found aspects of the WLM alienating. In the 1970s, Mackey and Heath attended Communist Party-run Women's Weekends at Wortley Hall; an institution for political education that Blanche Flannery was heavily involved with. Heath attended in her capacity as Communist Party District Women's Officer, and Mackey as a member who wanted to learn more about politics. Mackey speaks positively of her interactions with feminists from Leeds who she describes as 'the real burn your bra lot.'⁵⁶ These women may have gone on to be part of the revolutionary feminist movement in Leeds. Heath remembers that many of them had a university background.⁵⁷ Although ultimately their politics 'had gone too far' for Mackey, they helped her find her own perspective as a woman, and to realise that the industrial politics of the CPGB 'didn't represent my view of the world.'⁵⁸ However she recognised that many of these women did not share her experiences of life and

⁵⁵ Thomlinson, 'The Colour of Feminism,' 462.

⁵⁶ Interview with Kath Mackey, 14th January 2014.

⁵⁷ Interview with Janet Heath, 2nd July 2014.

⁵⁸ Interview with Janet Heath, 2nd July 2014; Interview with Kath Mackey, 14 January 2014.

she had to find her own middle ground. Mackey remembers these encounters as positive learning experiences, but Janet Heath recalls more contentious meetings, where learning happened on both sides.

Janet Heath remembers one weekend in particular where middle class feminists from Sheffield, Birmingham, York and Leeds, made her and her working class friends feel inadequate and unwelcome at their own Communist Party school. Heath describes how she found both her hobbies and her clothes under attack from women from Birmingham who had ‘all come in overalls.’⁵⁹ Heath’s friend Pauline ran a book stall at Wortley Hall that sold cookery books alongside feminist texts. This was seen as ‘unfeminist’ by some women, but instead of starting a discussion, the women hid the books. Pauline was in tears and Janet Heath was furious. Later, during a group discussion over feminism within the Communist Party, the debate became heated;

‘these other women... said “Well look at you all, you’re all dressed up, you’re just, you’re not feminists”... I really had a go. I said... “most of you are from middle class backgrounds, you’ve no idea what our lives are like...We get dressed up for us, not for men. We don’t want you coming here, to our school, that we organise and telling us what we can and can’t do.”’⁶⁰

Afterwards the women who hid the books apologized, and Heath explained her point of view more fully;

““for us, there are some women who are coming to this weekend school who are on the verge of being political ... we have to look at where women are at, not where we want them to be, not full of bloody books... that they wouldn’t understand.”’⁶¹

⁵⁹ Interview with Janet Heath, 2nd July 2014.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *ibid.*

Heath maintained that although the schools were about women who wanted to become more political, they had ‘to start somewhere,’ and one way was to include books on topics that most women were familiar with. Heath later took this attitude into Sheffield Women Against the Pit Closures where she and Mackey worked to keep radical far-left politics out of meetings to avoid splitting the group and alienating less political members.⁶² It was shared by working class women in London interviewed by Sue Bruley for her work on socialist-feminism who preferred practical action over talking about theory.⁶³ Although the arguments were over specific issues, Heath makes it clear that, for her, they were rooted in class differences. On the topic of clothes, she said; ‘when we went to Wortley we brought our best clothes at night, because we went for a drink.’⁶⁴ She attributes this to ‘working class pride,’ and in contrast described a middle class woman from Birmingham as ‘scruffy,’ and complained that she had not washed her hair.⁶⁵

Beyond class differences, some of the antagonism was caused by personality clashes and by differences that echoed the divisions between socialist and revolutionary feminists. Both Janet Heath and Sue Lawson, another working class woman involved in revolutionary left-wing politics, found separatism particularly alienating. Lawson recognised the need for women-only groups but argued that women could not completely shut men out; ‘you need time to be able to discuss things separately, but you can’t live separately.’⁶⁶ Lawson was loosely involved in *Women’s Voice* meetings, which the SWP ran from 1978 until 1982 alongside their journal of the same name.⁶⁷ *Women’s Voice* focused on issues relating to

⁶² Janet Heath, ‘Holding it Together: Strategies for Broad Based Work,’ in Vicky Seddon (ed.) *The Cutting Edge: Women and the Pit Strike*, (London, 1986), 68.

⁶³ Sue Bruley, ‘Jam Tomorrow? Socialist Women and Women’s Liberation, 1968-1982: an oral history approach,’ in Evan Smith and Matthew Worley (eds.) *Against the Grain: The British far left from 1956*, (Manchester, 2014), 159.

⁶⁴ Interview with Janet Heath, 2nd July 2014.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Interview with John and Sue Lawson, 17th May 2013.

⁶⁷ Bruley, ‘Jam Tomorrow?’ 165.

working class women, and like Janet Heath, recognised that some women liked to cook; ‘everybody would probably enjoy cooking if we lived in a different society. If it wasn’t considered women’s *daily* work.’⁶⁸ *Women’s Voice* has been seen by some as a cheap strategy to recruit more members to the SWP, and mocked by others for encouraging ‘the wrong sort of transmission;’ of women out of the SWP and into the WLM rather than the other way round.⁶⁹ For Lawson though, *Women’s Voice* meetings provided an important space where she could hear that her experiences were not unique. Lawson explains that; ‘the things that they were saying at the time were how I felt. I was a young mother then with two children who was at home and when John [her husband] was out on strike once I went out and ... did some contract cleaning... that was an eye opener (laughs)... I thought nobody should be treated like this: man, woman or whatever it is.’⁷⁰

Lawson’s struggles were class-based and family-based which affected her relationship with the Women’s Liberation Movement. She was not one of the women the SWP lost to the movement; ‘it wasn’t for me.’ As mentioned above, Lawson felt more comfortable talking about ‘class issues’ rather than ‘women’s issues,’ and this feeling may have been shared by the one thousand people who took part in a *Women’s Voice* rally in Sheffield in 1978.⁷¹

Heath’s story echoes this to a certain extent. She describes the how the Wortley Hall schools allowed women space; ‘you only got to know these things when you had women’s schools; what their lives were like really... it were our version of us awakening up and,

⁶⁸ Mary Beaken, ‘Cooking forward to socialism’, *Women’s Voice*, posted on David Renton, *lives:running*, 30th October 2013, <https://livesrunning.wordpress.com/2013/10/30/cooking-forward-to-socialism-mary-beaken-womens-voice/> (accessed 10/02/15).

⁶⁹ John Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, New York, 1987), 103; Bruley, ‘Jam Tomorrow?’ 165.

⁷⁰ Interview with John and Sue Lawson, 17th May 2013.

⁷¹ Interview with John and Sue Lawson, 17th May 2013; David Renton, ‘Women’s Voice: in retrospect’, *lives:running*, 26 September 2013, <https://livesrunning.wordpress.com/2013/09/26/womens-voice-a-retrospective/> (accessed: 10/02/15).

realising what we could and couldn't do."⁷² For Heath, the women's schools acted as a kind of consciousness-raising, but one that she insists was 'totally different' from the experiences of middle class women, as she and others had arrived at feminism through the labour movement. Disdain for the consciousness-raising of middle class women was shared by those involved in Bruley's study. One woman described the process as 'a lot of women sitting around moaning,' an opinion some middleclass women were aware of.⁷³ Rose Pearson, a member of Sheffield's first Women's Liberation Group explained; 'the jibes about it being just a middle class gossip shop... had a ring of truth.'⁷⁴ The perception of the WLM as 'anti-man' was also prevalent. For Janet Heath and a lot of her married friends, this perceived separatism was unappealing and frustrating as they wanted advice on how to navigate their changing perceptions of marriage. As Heath explains, 'it was hard when you were married and you were taking on, not only society, you were taking on your husband as well.'⁷⁵ For Heath, women's schools were supposed to be the kind of learning experience that Kath Mackey enjoyed. This was in part what made her so angry; 'they should have helped us instead of ridiculing us.'⁷⁶ Regular members of Sheffield's WLM shared this view. Dilys Warner left the movement in 1973 because she did not like certain 'attitudes on men and on women with children' which she attributed to the 'domination of meetings by the gays.'⁷⁷ Many women involved in Sheffield's WLM looked back on the early 1970s as an unsupportive time where members were working out their politics and were too timid to ask for help, never mind offer it unprompted.⁷⁸

⁷² Interview with Janet Heath, 2nd July 2014.

⁷³ Bruley, 'Jam Tomorrow?' 166.

⁷⁴ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, October/November 1979.

⁷⁵ Interview with Janet Heath, 2nd July 2014.

⁷⁶ Interview with Janet Heath, 2nd July 2014.

⁷⁷ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, October/November 1979.

⁷⁸ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, October/November 1979.

Due to her earlier experiences, Janet Heath stayed away from Women's Liberation meetings once she was back in Sheffield. However, in the early 1980s, accompanied by some middle class friends she made within the CPGB, such as Gill Greenwood, she joined the Working Women's Charter Committee. There she headed up a campaign for cervical smear testing to be made readily available to working women. The issue was first raised in 1981, and by 1983 there was a Cancer Screening Sub-Committee which launched their campaign at the TUC Women's Action Day on 29th October 1984.⁷⁹ The campaign aimed to educate women about cancer screening, urged them to use available facilities, helped women in trade unions raise the issue with workplaces and make agreements for paid leave, and tried to secure a mobile screening caravan which could travel to workplaces and housing estates to ensure that screening was accessible to all women.⁸⁰ Although campaigners met with resistance; indignantly reporting that managers 'actually said it was discrimination against men to arrange these facilities for women!'⁸¹, they secured employer agreements to pay workers for time-off taken for cervical smears with many local workplaces including the City Council.⁸² Janet Heath acted as the campaign's main contact for years and throughout her political life she was involved in a lot of women's campaigns, including those around equal pay. She also adopted a feminist perspective in her personal relationships. Heath is representative of many political working class women in Sheffield in that they were not opposed to feminism, but found fighting for women's rights and gender equality in the labour movement more appealing than joining Women's Liberation groups. Women's Liberation groups in Sheffield, as well as nationally, were mainly populated by middle class women, a trend they were aware of. The *Sheffield Women's Newsletter* complained in 1978 that there

⁷⁹ SLSL: 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 8 (September 1981), Issue 14 (October 1984), Issue 19 (June/July 1985).

⁸⁰ SLSL: 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 14 (October 1984).

⁸¹ SLSL: 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 19 (June/July 1985).

⁸² SLSL: 331.88 SSTQ: Sheffield Trades Council Working Women's Sub-Committee reports; February 1984, November 1984.

was ‘really very little positive working contact between Sheffield’s feminists and women who are actively fighting in other ways – in trade union and labour movement, tenants’ associations, community groups, single parent family groups and so on.’⁸³ Despite recognising this, few attempts were made to engage such women. Sheffield’s feminist press did however advertise a Working Women’s Charter Committee session in 1979 discussing women’s trade union involvement, suggesting they recognised the work the WWCC was doing to bridge gaps between working class and middle class women.⁸⁴

Indeed Blanche Flannery had continued running the Working Women’s Charter Committee throughout the 1970s. In 1978 Emma Rattenbury (Morgan at the time) took over the running of day to day events as Secretary whilst Flannery stayed on as Chair. Like many of the women involved in Sheffield’s WLM, Rattenbury had come to Sheffield in the early 1970s because she ‘wanted to be where the real working class were in the North of England.’⁸⁵ She was from a middle class Communist intellectual background and was a member of the SWP, but as soon as they arrived in Sheffield her and her partner joined the Labour Party. Although Rattenbury had been at university in the early days of Women’s Liberation she did not find feminism until she began working with the labour movement. In Sheffield, working women quickly became her focus and under her guidance the Working Women’s Charter Committee organised day schools and discussion meetings on Women and the Cuts, Positive Action, Racism, Job-Sharing, and Health and Safety. As well as cancer screening, they campaigned for a specialised Day Care Abortion Unit in Sheffield, and repeatedly marched in support of the National Abortion Campaign, calling John Corrie’s Private Members’ Bill to amend the 1967 Abortion Act ‘a real threat to working class

⁸³ FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Newsletter*, Spring 1978.

⁸⁴ FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Bulletin*, October 1979.

⁸⁵ Interview with Emma Rattenbury, 9th April 2013.

women.’⁸⁶ They reported on women’s involvement in the steel strikes and the 1984-85 Miners’ Strike, and also highlighted women’s unemployment.⁸⁷ They campaigned for women to march under the banner ‘A Woman’s Right to Work’ at the People’s March for Jobs in 1981 and for representation at the Centre Against Unemployment drawing attention to the finding that women’s unemployment was rising faster than men’s in the city.⁸⁸ By July 1981, 34,049 women were registered as out of work in Sheffield, and the WWCC suspected that including unregistered unemployed women the number would have been much higher.⁸⁹

The first issue of the WWCC newsletter *Double Shift*, published in 1979, stated that the committee existed to promote the aims of the Trades Union Congress Charter for Women at Work. This included demanding improved rights and opportunities for women; ‘at work, in education, in social benefits, in family planning, maternity rights and abortion, in provision of childcare, and legal status.’⁹⁰ Although focussed on combating problems faced by women ‘in the trade union movement, at work, and at home’ the newsletter called for ‘all workers and trade unionists, men as well as women’ to support women’s causes and get more women involved in the labour movement.⁹¹ The WWCC supported Women And Manual Trades, an organisation established to encourage women in traditionally male-dominated occupations; celebrated when four Labour Party Women’s Sections were established in Sheffield in 1981; and encouraged women to join the Sheffield Trades and Labour Social Club, to put a stop to ‘male domination of the games room’ and ensure that the Club did not affiliate with the ‘discriminatory’ Club and Institute Union.⁹² The WWCC tried to show that they were ‘not a

⁸⁶ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 2 (September/October 1979).

⁸⁷ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 3 (February 1980), Issue 17 (November 1984).

⁸⁸ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1981-82; SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 7 (1981).

⁸⁹ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 8 (September 1981).

⁹⁰ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 1 (June 1979).

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 10 (June 1982), Issue 9 (February 1982), Issue 8 (September 1981), Issue 6 (February 1981).

separate section with interests apart from the mainstream of the labour movement' and that women were affected by 'every attack' on the working class.⁹³ Despite the struggle to be acknowledged, they were not uncritical of labour movement culture and actions.

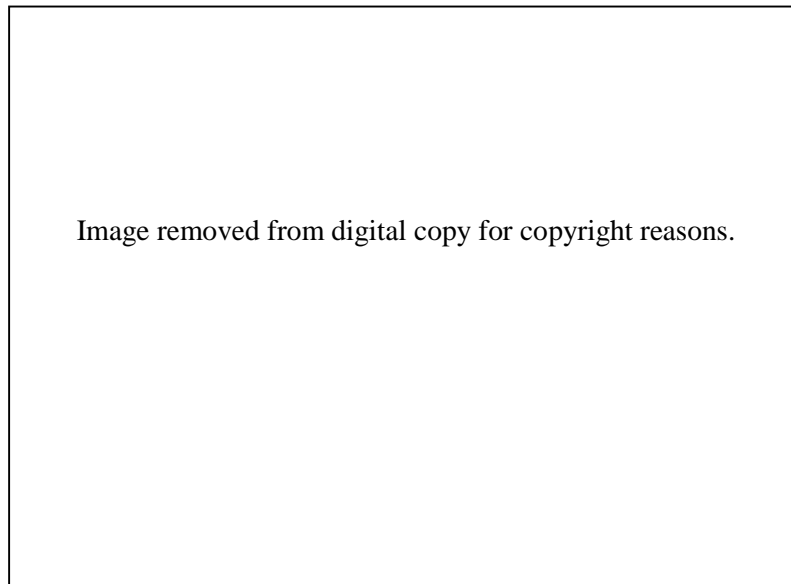


Figure 3.1: Song by Peggy Seeger, illustrated in *Double Shift*, Issue 15 (February 1984).

The fifteenth issue of *Double Shift* was devoted to discussing the role of women in trade unions. Interviews with the District Secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union (AUEW) and a representative from local engineering firm James Neills raised important issues about pay grading and union representation of women in engineering.⁹⁴ The interviews were illustrated by a cartoon and song showing the difficulties women faced even getting into engineering (Figure 3.1). This was followed by a breakdown of what the National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO), the National Union of Teachers (NUT), the Society of Civil and Public Servants (SCPS), NUPE, and the Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff (APEX) could offer their female members. The WWCC also critiqued the Labour Party, and gave space for up and

⁹³ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 8 (September 1981).

⁹⁴ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 15 (February 1984).

coming female politicians. In February 1980, 'Prospective Labour Councillor' Helen Jackson wrote an article questioning Labour's policy on rate increases, calling for 'much more political honesty' and questioning the integrity of campaign badges celebrating the 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire.'⁹⁵ Sheffield City Council was also spotlighted as an unfair employer. Case studies from Chris McConnell, an Adult Education Worker, Rose Ardron, a joiner, and Emma Rattenbury, a teacher, highlighted problems such as part-time contracts not being honoured, women in manual trades having their qualifications dismissed while their male contemporaries were hired, and women not having jobs to return to after maternity leave.⁹⁶ Furthermore, the WWCC Low Pay Campaign discovered that of the 17,000 women Sheffield Local Authority employed (seventeen percent of all working women in the city), fifty two percent worked part-time, and many at a level of pay 'well below the TUC definition of low pay:' £90 per week or £2.30 per hour.⁹⁷

The WWCC, though campaigning on behalf of women and the wider labour movement made it clear that women faced 'additional discrimination on the grounds of our sex as well as our class.'⁹⁸ Their campaign to highlight sexual harassment illustrated this, although the WWCC did acknowledge that men could also be the victims of harassment.⁹⁹ In 1982, they approved of NALGO's guidelines and research into the issue, work that was not met with approval from all quarters. *The Sheffield Star* reported the same news with derision, lamenting that 'nipping a pretty typist's shapely backside or even giving her a saucy glance across the filing cabinets can now land town hall workers in hot water.'¹⁰⁰ In 1983, *Double Shift* ran an article by the Sheffield Rape Crisis Centre which looked into how different trade

⁹⁵ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 3 (February 1980).

⁹⁶ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 11 (November 1982).

⁹⁷ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 14 (October 1983).

⁹⁸ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 8 (September 1981).

⁹⁹ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 9 (February 1982).

¹⁰⁰ *The Sheffield Star*, 'No sex please, we're in NALGO,' 3rd December 1981, 9.

unions in Sheffield dealt with sexual harassment. Representatives from COHSE, NALGO, and CPSA, all male, were generally sympathetic but prioritised other causes. The representative from AUEW left survey takers ‘feeling angry and worried’ for women raising cases. He apparently asked “How much do you charge for it, love?” before admitting that the union did not take it “very seriously,” but would support any woman who complained of harassment.¹⁰¹ The article concluded that more needed to be done locally and by 1988 Sheffield’s branch of NUPE became one of the first in the country to establish an officer to deal with harassment cases. This appeared long overdue as the officer received forty-three calls within the first three weeks.¹⁰²

Despite this activity, the Working Women’s Charter-Committee had a core of only six to ten active delegates and a further twenty or thirty contacts who attend discussion meetings from time to time.¹⁰³ Most of these women were from white-collar unions and included a journalist and a woman who worked at Sheffield Polytechnic, though they were ‘keen to provide solidarity with blue-collar workers.’¹⁰⁴ In 1983, *Double Shift* celebrated ten years of the WWCC, but in amongst praise for successful campaigns and calls for unity between male and female workers, Blanche Flannery wrote; ‘we sadly lack the attendance of shop floor women workers... office workers will continue to work to involve such women.’¹⁰⁵ Despite their focus on class politics the WWCC, like the WLM, struggled to engage younger working class women. That same year, the WWCC organised a Women and Employment Day School to encourage more working class women to get involved in politics. Ninety women attended leading to the creation of the Women’s Employment Forum; a regular meeting where different women’s groups could coordinate responses to problems of employment,

¹⁰¹ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 14, (October 1983).

¹⁰² *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Women seek help on sexual hassles’, 16th June 1988, 9.

¹⁰³ SLSL, 331.88 SSTQ: Sheffield Trades Council Working Women’s Sub-Committee Annual Reports 1981.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Emma Rattenbury, 9th April 2013.

¹⁰⁵ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 12 (February 1983).

unemployment and training. The ninety delegates represented a wide variety of political women. Adrienne Pyne, another self-described ‘newcomer’ to Sheffield, wrote that she was ‘somewhat bewildered by the diversity of activity in Sheffield.’¹⁰⁶ The Day School was reportedly attended by; ‘older and younger women; individual women and women from left organisations and campaigns; women at home; employed and unemployed; with and without children; socialist feminists and radical feminists; women from the labour movement; working class; middleclass, and professional women; women in low paid jobs, in manual jobs – almost everybody seemed there.’¹⁰⁷ There were even ‘consciousness-raising clowns’ from the Women’s Circus in attendance. African-Caribbean and Asian women were notable in their absence, which was attributed ‘possibly...to a clash of dates’ rather than provoking any meaningful discussion about why black and minority ethnic women may have not wished to attend.¹⁰⁸

One socialist feminist in attendance was Fi Frances, a member of the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs and the Women’s Liberation Movement. Frances wrote that the Day School was ‘the best political day I have had for months, years even.’¹⁰⁹ She explained that; ‘Since 1977 I have found the Women’s Liberation Movement increasingly difficult to be hopeful in or about. It has been hard not to see us as progressing steadily towards disintegration.’¹¹⁰ But at the Day School, Frances saw a chance for new groups of women to work together. For a decade Sheffield’s WLM had failed to attract working class women to its movement, and by the late 1970s it seemed to have stopped trying. Rose Pearson, a middle class member of Sheffield’s WLM, wrote in 1978 that she was ‘not too depressed about the slowness of our ideas to spread among working class women’ as

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

they had campaigns and events to focus on.¹¹¹ Unlike the WLM, the WWCC was actively seeking to engage with working class women and wanted to build feminism into the labour movement. For Fi Frances this was an exciting opportunity, and the sentiment was shared by many socialist feminists in attendance who turned their political focus away from WLM and towards the WWCC and the Women's Employment Forum. From the issues appearing in *Double Shift* after 1983; a week of action against pornography, research projects into violence against women, a more serious engagement with sexual harassment, we can infer that the WWCC was listening to women with interests outside of employment and labour movement.¹¹² In the same period the newsletters of the WLM also shifted focus; away from employment and health issues and towards sexuality. This is particularly evident in the conspicuous absence of Women Against the Pit Closures and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike from WLM material. Reports on WAPC appeared regularly in *Double Shift* across 1984 and 1985, but the WLM's *Sheffield Women's Bulletin* included only two mentions; an advert for *Women's Pit Prop*, the WAPC magazine, and a notice that WAPC were selling tapes of Mal Finch and the Flaming Nerve performing 'Women of the Working Class' to raise funds.¹¹³ From this we can infer that in searching for more working class women, the WWCC succeeded in attracting more 'incoming' middle class socialist feminists, leaving the WLM to the more radical component.

Through their activities women in the labour movement and socialist feminists aimed at 'getting a woman's voice' into Sheffield's traditionally male-dominated labour movement to combat the 'invisibility' of women.¹¹⁴ They were not the only women attempting this and managed to make links with working class women who were fighting for the same cause

¹¹¹ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, October/November 1979.

¹¹² SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 13 (June 1983), Issue 18 (May 1985).

¹¹³ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Bulletin*, August 1985; FAN, *Sheffield Women's Bulletin*, October 1985.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Emma Rattenbury, 9th April 2013.

outside of the committee structure of trade union politics. Emma Rattenbury remembers a theatre group called the Chuffinelles fondly as;

‘very definitely working class, women who set up this kind of... it was like a comedy musical group that used to do the tours of meetings, you know of trade union and labour events.’¹¹⁵

The Chuffinelles were part of comedian Linda Smith’s Sheffield Popular Theatre and had a show called “Gerrin’ worked up!” which dealt with ‘problems such as low pay, sexual harassment, health and safety and privatisation’ through ‘comedy, songs and poetry.’¹¹⁶ They toured various campaign groups and trade unions and managed to convey their message to a variety of organisations, receiving rave reviews from NUPE, the Sheffield Low Pay Campaign, Betty Heathfield at the North Derbyshire Women’s Action Group, and Jenny Goodman from *Spare Rib* magazine.¹¹⁷ Rattenbury viewed them as ‘in a different way creating that visibility.’¹¹⁸

Rattenbury also saw it as her role to support Blanche Flannery in her aims as an advocate for working women, and she recognised the support that Flannery and other older, more established women gave them. She acknowledges that her work on the Working Women’s Charter Committee was not always welcome or seen as a priority within the trade union movement in Sheffield, especially among men, as the survey on sexual harassment suggests. But Rattenbury claims that they did manage to make links despite class and generational differences, partly through women such as Flannery and Vi Gill acting as mediators. She explains that;

‘although a lot of us were both middle class and incomers... I think we did manage to make links with women who were Sheffield born and bred and were working class... [Vi Gill] was always very

¹¹⁵ Interview with Emma Rattenbury, 9th April 2013.

¹¹⁶ SLSL, 042SQ – Local Pamphlets Vol. 55, Sheffield Popular Theatre.

¹¹⁷ SLSL, 042SQ – Local Pamphlets Vol. 55, Sheffield Popular Theatre.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Emma Rattenbury, 9th April 2013.

supportive of it and always saw it as useful even though that kind of what I would call feminist approach wasn't natural to her.'¹¹⁹

Kate Flannery sheds some light on how Blanche Flannery saw the committee and the women involved; through dual lenses of generational and class differences. Flannery explains that 'Blanche had a different life from these women.'¹²⁰ They did not have a 'historical base in the city' or share Blanche Flannery's experience, but they were 'good socialists who wanted to see equality for women.'¹²¹ Kate Flannery suggests that Emma Rattenbury and the other middle class women on the committee wanted to view Blanche Flannery as a figurehead because she could command respect within the wider labour movement. Flannery claims that male trade unionists did not trust women like Emma Rattenbury. Not because they could not be trusted, but because of their backgrounds, and Rattenbury recognised this to a certain degree; 'there were tensions around these kind of slightly noisy, middle class, incoming women.'¹²² For Blanche Flannery, feminism was part of her wider activism. She admired these women for their energy and was happy to smooth over any tensions between them and the wider labour movement, but she also saw them as 'young and naïve.'¹²³ Flannery's praise of the Greenham Common women in *Double Shift* shows this. She commended them for bringing 'a new impetus to the struggle,' but quickly moved on to the 'splendid record the Cooperative Women's Guild have on Peace and Disarmament,' stressing that the younger women were a small part of and a new development within a much longer tradition of activism.¹²⁴ But by offering her support to Greenham and to socialist feminists, Flannery 'wove those two strands' of activism; feminism and socialism, together.¹²⁵ Gradually,

¹¹⁹ Interview with Emma Rattenbury, 9th April 2013.

¹²⁰ Interview with Kate Flannery, 3rd December 2013.

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² Interview with Emma Rattenbury, 9th April 2013.

¹²³ Interview with Kate Flannery, 3rd December 2013.

¹²⁴ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 12 (February 1983).

¹²⁵ Arthur Scargill speaking at Blanche Flannery's funeral, 9th November 2010.

Sheffield's labour movement became accustomed to the Working Women's Charter Committee and their newsletter *Double Shift*. Whereas in 1981, a report complained that 'we still have to hassle people for articles and sales, and look forward to the day when delegates and organisations will send in ... orders, without any nagging!', within a few years they were getting 'a lot of guilt sales out of the blokes.'¹²⁶ Whilst not a resounding success, Rattenbury argues that 'even if they... left it lying around and their wives read it that would have been good.'¹²⁷

Rattenbury's perspective can be explained by her recollection that the Working Women's Charter Committee received criticism from more traditional women in the labour movement and some of the older female councillors as well as male trade unionists. Rattenbury explained that hostility reached its peak when she headed up the long fought for City Council Women's Panel in 1986. By this stage her husband Dave Morgan was a councillor and they were fully ensconced in the Sheffield Labour Group. But the campaign led by the WWCC to secure a Women's Panel, rather than a Women's Committee within the Council's Personnel Department, had increased tensions, and from the perspective of the WWCC, the Labour Group's 'failure to consult with women's groups' had produced a 'climate of mistrust.'¹²⁸ Rattenbury became aware of the extent of the hostility on a Labour Group camping trip to the Lake District. She recalls with indignation that 'all the blokes on Sunday would go to the pub and the women would cook a full Sunday lunch, in a campsite! Can you believe it?'¹²⁹ When another woman challenged this, Rattenbury felt the atmosphere become uncomfortable, with many women resisting the notion that they should have a night at the pub and leave the men to cook. Helen Jackson, a Sheffield councillor from 1980 and

¹²⁶ SLSL, 331.88 SSTQ: Sheffield Trades Council Working Women's Sub-Committee Annual Reports 1981-1986; Interview with Emma Rattenbury, 9th April 2013.

¹²⁷ Interview with Emma Rattenbury, 9th April 2013.

¹²⁸ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 18 (May 1985).

¹²⁹ Interview with Emma Rattenbury, 9th April 2013.

later MP, describes these camping trips very differently. In her words; “It was lovely... [we] didn’t talk politics a lot... we’d go for walks, fall out of boats – that sort of thing... oh it was great.”¹³⁰ Another councillor, Alan Billings, described them as a “great bonding exercise.”¹³¹ Rattenbury, Jackson and Billings all told this anecdote without being asked specifically about it to illustrate the separate points they were making; that the Labour Group liked traditional gender roles, that being political in the 1980s could be great fun, that the Labour Group was like family – but these divergent tellings of the same event illustrate where Rattenbury was coming from. For a lot of members of Sheffield’s labour movement gender roles were not up for debate, or at least not a priority. Even Helen Jackson, occasional contributor to *Double Shift*, did not notice, or remember, or consider worth mentioning the tensions Rattenbury referred to and felt so acutely. Like Blunkett, who saw the labour movement in genderless terms as ‘a struggle of working people for control over their lives and resources, not a separate struggle for women,’ many in the movement saw feminism, especially feminism outside the realms of employment rights, as unnecessary, or worse, as a distraction from the cause of socialism.¹³²

Despite the work of the WWCC to incorporate women’s concerns into Sheffield’s labour movement, to show women as part of the working class and feminism as integral to socialism, there was little acknowledgement of ‘the personal is political’ in the Sheffield Labour Group, partly because of class and generational differences. Older, working class women such as Blanche Flannery welcomed the enthusiasm that younger women brought to the labour movement. They pushed for socialist-feminist causes; such as work-place struggles and abortion rights, but drew the line before ‘the personal is political.’ As mentioned above,

¹³⁰ Interview with Helen Jackson, 29th April 2013.

¹³¹ Interview with Alan Billings and Veronica Hardstaff, 14th June 2013.

¹³² ‘Interview with David Blunkett,’ in Martin Boddy and Colin Fudge (eds.) *Local Socialism? Labour Councils and New Left Alternatives*, (London, Basingstoke, 1984), 254.

Blanche Flannery did not expect her husband to contribute equally to domestic work at home, and many at the campsite saw cooking as a non-issue. Meanwhile, the growing lack of concern for working class women in the WLM encouraged many middle class socialist feminists to focus their efforts on the WWCC and gender equality within the labour movement, leaving the WLM open to more radical feminists and lesbian women. Socialist feminist women made a large contribution to the WWCC and introduced more issues that affected women outside of the workplace. While some of these ideas were welcomed and sparked campaigns, there were others that over-stepped the boundary of what more traditional men and women in the labour movement thought were valid and useful to socialism. Many of Sheffield's middle class 'incoming' feminists had come to the city to work with working class people. Failing to incorporate them into the WLM, they switched to campaigning for gender equality within the labour movement. In doing so, however, they learned to compromise and live with the tensions their activism created.

Sexuality in Sheffield's Women's Liberation Movement

The position of lesbian women within the Women's Liberation Movement in Sheffield underwent a noticeable change between 1975 and 1985. In 1975, lesbians did not have a prominent voice within the movement, especially not in the literature, but by 1985 they ran Sheffield's WLM. Lesbian women filled a void left by socialist-feminists moving into Sheffield's Working Women's Charter Committee, but the development can also be attributed to the rise of revolutionary feminist rhetoric in the mainstream WLM and the effect this had on the perception of lesbians within the movement nationally.

Lesbian women were first mentioned in Sheffield's feminist press in 1976, two years after the sixth demand – the right to a self-defined sexuality and end to discrimination against lesbians – was accepted at the Edinburgh National Women's Liberation Conference. Early

absence in the feminist papers does not necessarily suggest a lack of interest on the part of Sheffield's feminists. The Sheffield Women's Newsletter was not regularly produced between 1971 and 1975 and was not always representative of group discussions. In 1976 the newsletter published a generally positive report on a National Lesbian Conference held in Bristol written by a Sheffield woman who had attended with friends, 'a number of whom wouldn't call themselves lesbians.'¹³³ The difficulties faced by lesbian mothers were presented as being particularly important, as was the disco; 'an expression of the warmth and togetherness women create with each other.'¹³⁴ The second day was spent dealing with the aftermath of an altercation at a women-only club night between a lesbian woman and some men who tried to force entry, leaving the woman in hospital with her jaw broken in four places. The second day had been scheduled as a series of workshops on pottery, car mechanics, lesbian erotica, self-defence, as well as two football matches. Jeska Rees suggests the planned events indicated a depoliticisation within National Lesbian Conferences post-1974, made even more striking by the violence faced by women at one of the discos.¹³⁵ Rees explains that post-1974, political debates around lesbianism moved into the Women's Liberation Movement. On the one hand this provided space for lesbians by accepting their right to define their sexuality as recommended in the sixth demand, but on the other, the movement repressed critical discussions of heterosexuality out of a fear of being 'pejoratively associated' with lesbianism, revealing a level of 'unthinking homophobia.'¹³⁶ Paired with the remembrances of Janet Heath, who wanted more discussion of heterosexual relationships and assumed the WLM was 'anti-man,' and Dilys Warner, who was uncomfortable with the number of 'gays' in meetings, the absence of lesbians from Sheffield's feminist press

¹³³ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Newsletter*, March 1976.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ Jeska Rees, 'Taking your politics seriously.' *Lesbian History and the Women's Liberation Movement in England* in Sonja Tiernan and Mary McAuliffe (eds.) *Sapphists and Sexologists, Histories of Sexualities: Volume 2*, (Newcastle, 2009), 99.

¹³⁶ Rees, 'Taking your politics seriously', 96, 99-101.

suggests that there was a fear of being associated with lesbianism present in Sheffield's WLM too.

By 1977 discussions around separatism and lesbianism were making headway into the National Women's Liberation Movement alongside the rise of revolutionary feminism. These debates exploded at the Birmingham national conference in 1978, the flames of which were fanned by Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group's article 'Political Lesbianism: The Case Against Heterosexuality' published in *WIRES* in 1979 which defined the political lesbian as 'a woman-identified woman who does not fuck men.' Furthermore, it argued that abstaining from heterosexual sex was an imperative for feminism and women who did not were 'collaborators with the enemy.'¹³⁷ Lesbian and heterosexual women alike critiqued this position; for reducing the patriarchy to 'fucking' and for implying that lesbianism was a political choice rather than about sexual attraction and relationships between women.¹³⁸ Separatism had been part of the WLM since the London Women's Liberation Workshop became a 'women-only' space in the early 1970s, but 'Political Lesbianism' was separatism at its most extreme. These debates put heterosexual women, a majority within the movement, on the defensive, and acted to shut down discussions on how to be a feminist within a heteronormative relationship.

Both the conference and the paper were heavily criticised at the time and have since been written in to the narrative of the decline of the Women's Liberation Movement, with some help from contemporary socialist feminists. As Eve Setch explains the historiography of women's liberation often focuses on the 'binary division' of socialist and radical feminism. Radical feminism has often been conflated with revolutionary feminism, with the two

¹³⁷ Onlywomen Press, 'Love your enemy? The debate between heterosexual feminism and political lesbianism' (April, 1981), 5 <https://materialfeminista.milharal.org/files/2012/10/Political-Lesbianism-The-Case-Against-Heterosexuality-LRFG.pdf> (accessed 10/12/2014).

¹³⁸ Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 245.

positioned ‘in opposition to socialist feminism as the enemy.’¹³⁹ To a certain extent the framing of political lesbianism as a destructive force can be seen as a symptom of the ‘prejudice that continues to overlook lesbian history.’¹⁴⁰ Rees claims that throughout the 1970s there was a continued, unexamined heteronormativity in the mainstream movement which suppressed lesbianism. Disparity between contemporary written records and oral history exposes this. Quoting Al Garthwaite, a prominent revolutionary feminist, on the ‘Political Lesbianism’ paper; “[it was] what a lot of lesbians said between themselves but didn’t tend to say publicly,” Rees positions oral history as an important tool in drawing out the discussions around lesbianism that were kept out of the mainstream feminist press before the late 1970s.¹⁴¹ This section uses Rees’ analysis and methodology to frame the disparity between Sheffield’s feminist press and oral history on the issue of sexuality within the Women’s Liberation Movement in Sheffield before 1979, and its continuation into the 1980s.

There are very few mentions of lesbianism in Sheffield’s feminist press in the 1970s. However there are instances which, when paired with oral testimony, suggest a strong lesbian and bisexual presence. From 1976 national debates around sexuality started to feature in Sheffield. The newsletter reported on conferences held in Newcastle in 1976 and Bradford in 1977. Issues of difference were raised in Newcastle by an awareness-raising play called ‘Les Be Friends’ which was ‘hilarious’ but ‘alienated a lot of people,’ and in Bradford by a ‘frightening’ intervention by the Bradford Dykes, a largely working class lesbian group attached to the Bradford WLM.¹⁴² The Bradford Dykes raised their marginalisation in the

¹³⁹ Setch, ‘The Face of Metropolitan Feminism,’ 172. Historiography such as Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, (Oxford, 1987); John Chavret, *Feminism*, (London, 1982); Lynne Segal, ‘Slow Change or No Change? Feminism, Socialism and the Problem of Men’, *Feminist Review*, 31 (1989); David Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge: The Movement for Women’s Liberation in Britain and the USA*, (London, 1983); Elizabeth Meehan, ‘British Feminism from the 1960s to the 1980s’, Harold L. Smith (ed.), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, (University of Massachusetts Press: Massachusetts, 1990).

¹⁴⁰ Rees, ‘Taking your politics seriously’, 102.

¹⁴¹ Rees, ‘Taking your politics seriously’, 100-102.

¹⁴²FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Newsletter*, May 1976; Lockyer, ‘An Irregular Period?’ 649-650.

movement by shouting, “You’re all closet queens that’s why you’re afraid of us” and “The sixth demand is the only demand.”¹⁴³ Following the conferences separatism was largely criticised in Sheffield as unworkable and likely to fracture the movement, but lesbians were viewed sympathetically and interest was shown in learning more about their oppression and marginalisation within the WLM and society as a whole.¹⁴⁴ A group began meeting on Fridays to discuss ‘sexuality’ in early 1978.¹⁴⁵ There were no written mentions of divisions over homosexuality in Sheffield’s WLM, and the Spring 1978 issue of *Sheffield Women’s Newsletter* went as far to say that ‘It’s very nice that there aren’t tensions between gay, bisexual and heterosexual women in Sheffield’s women’s movement.’¹⁴⁶

There were however, tensions around marriage. One woman, named only as Sue, from the Raven Road consciousness raising group wrote that she ‘felt alienated because I was married, because I actually wanted to be married, and would get married now.’¹⁴⁷ Sue’s alienation in the late 1970s echoed Janet Heath’s feelings from years earlier. However, unlike Heath, Sue did not feel ‘rejected’ by the movement in part due to the careful language used around discussions of marriage. In April 1978, the Sheffield WLM ran a campaign called ‘Why be a Wife?’ critiquing the institution of marriage. But they emphasised that they were not criticising married women; ‘we rejected the title “Don’t get married girls” for this reason. Being a wife is nothing to do with whether you’re married or not,’ but more about the assumption of ‘selfless service’ attached to the institution.¹⁴⁸ The authors of Sheffield’s feminist press were trying not to alienate women like Sue who were still unsure of their politics. Indeed, Sue concluded her piece with the confession; ‘I don’t know if I’m a feminist.

¹⁴³FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Newsletter*, July 1977.

¹⁴⁴ FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Newsletter*, July 1977; *Sheffield Women’s Newsletter*, September, 1976.

¹⁴⁵ FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Newsletter*, Spring 1978.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Newsletter*, Jan/Feb 1978.

I want to be a socialist.’¹⁴⁹ Criticisms of their newly set up Women’s Centre urged feminists to remember that ‘the women’s movement exists in part to help women out of their isolation, to help them with their problems at home and at work’ and should not become an ‘exclusive club.’¹⁵⁰ Aware that they were struggling to attract working class women, Sheffield’s WLM did not want to alienate married women as well.

The careful use of language and framing of feminism as unthreatening and inclusive of heterosexual and married women continued into the 1980s. Though alongside there were more mentions of sexuality, lesbianism, and discussions of whether meetings should be women-only. Though part of the WLM from its inception, women-only spaces were particularly prominent in revolutionary feminist thinking and the stipulation was adopted by the national publication *WIRES* in June 1979.¹⁵¹ From October 1979 the *Sheffield Women’s Bulletin* advertised meetings and events for lesbian women to socialise with one another rather than discussion groups on sexuality.¹⁵² Furthermore, lesbian women started to exert more control over the production of the paper, and took on more organisational roles within the group. Ros Wollen, who founded Sheffield’s Young Lesbian Group and later the Women’s Cultural Club, a women-only bar and café, organised the Sheffield WLM Monday night social at the Cambridge Pub.¹⁵³ Whilst not a specifically lesbian event, Wollen suggests that the crowd who attended ‘were probably seventy-five percent lesbian and twenty-five percent heterosexual.’¹⁵⁴ Wollen elaborates that within the WLM in Sheffield;

¹⁴⁹ FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Newsletter*, Spring 1978.

¹⁵⁰ FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Newsletter*, Jan/Feb 1978.

¹⁵¹ Jeska Rees, ‘‘Are you a Lesbian?’’: Challenges in Recording and Analysing the Women’s Liberation Movement in England,’ *History Workshop Journal*, 69 (2010), 179.

¹⁵² FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Bulletin*, October 1979.

¹⁵³ FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Newsletter*, Spring 1979. The Young Lesbian Group were criticised in 1987 after three teachers faced a disciplinary hearing for inviting them to give a talk on homosexuality during a sex education lesson. (*The Sheffield Star*, 15th July 1987).

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Ros Wollen, 13th September 2013.

‘there were a lot of women who had been in relationships with men and who had become lesbians... political lesbians rather than born lesbians...So I would say... that the feminism and the lesbianism was sort of together.’¹⁵⁵

‘Political Lesbianism’ had had an impact in Sheffield, and gradually throughout the 1980s, lesbians began to have more of a voice in Sheffield’s WLM.

Ros Wall, founder of Sheffield Lesbian Line, was involved in discussions of what the Women’s Centre and Women’s Paper should be like, putting sexuality firmly on the list of topics that should be written about alongside men, health, employment, housing, education, abortion, childcare, and personal stories.¹⁵⁶ Discussion of the Women’s Centre raised the notion of women-only spaces, only to dismiss them, though for practical rather than political reasons; ‘We thought it was important to recognise that men can be like kids – if it’s forbidden territory to them, they’ll use any excuse to come for a snoop.’¹⁵⁷ The *Sheffield Women’s Paper* and associated feminist press; newsletters and bulletins, also remained open to men and women until 1985. Discussions about the direction of the paper published in 1979 emphasise that Sheffield WLM was trying to attract new members. They criticised the assumption of knowledge present in past writing as being too inward-looking.¹⁵⁸ The new-form *Sheffield Women’s Paper* ran from 1979 to 1982, and from Spring 1981 consciously replicated and subverted a traditional women’s magazine format. Between 1981 and 1982 every issue opened with the same editorial explaining how the paper was laid out like a traditional women’s magazine, including a recipe section, but also treated women as ‘individual people capable of our own thoughts, ideas and interests.’ Despite Wollen’s claim that there were many lesbians in the movement, the editorial presented Sheffield’s WLM in

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Ros Wollen, 13th September 2013.

¹⁵⁶ Ros Wall Obituary, <http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2010/oct/07/ros-wall-obituary> (accessed 09/12/2014); SA, *Sheffield Women’s Liberation Bulletin*, October 1979.

¹⁵⁷ SA, *Sheffield Women’s Liberation Bulletin*, October, 1979.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

heteronormative terms; even though ‘most of us are wives, mothers, girlfriends etc ... that’s not all we are.’¹⁵⁹ The editorial made further efforts to address feminism’s negative reputation, almost disassociating themselves from the movement; ‘this is really all that ‘women’s libbers’ or feminists are saying – but you’d never believe it from the way we’re described in the papers...(bra-burning, man-hating, hairy, ugly, ambitious, jealous ...)’¹⁶⁰ Ros Wollen suggests that in the early 1980s, ‘separatism was like big ... I wasn’t actually a separatist, but there was a lot of debate about separatists.’¹⁶¹ Yet separatism was absent from the paper which refused even to dismiss male opinions; ‘everyone who reads it can make up her (or his!) own mind whether they agree or not.’¹⁶²

By February 1985 however, the *Sheffield Women’s Paper* had been replaced by a monthly women-only *Sheffield Women’s Bulletin*. Much of the material included in WLM newsletters contained highly personal information in the tradition of consciousness raising groups, and for some a women-only restriction was seen as integral to the development of the movement.¹⁶³ When *WIRES* became women-only in 1979 it did so with the statement; ‘The *WIRES* newsletter is for women only as it is the internal newsletter of the WLM and we ask all of you to respect this and not make it available to men.’¹⁶⁴ Yet WLM newsletters had always published personal content, and *WIRES* had done so for years with no restriction. Rees suggests that ‘the tendency towards restriction was not especially noticeable until the late 1970s and early 1980s;’ or until discussion of revolutionary feminist ideas and separatism entered the mainstream of the movement.¹⁶⁵ There was arguably a connection between the emergence of women-only restrictions and the rise of separatist thinking.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁹ FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Paper*, Spring 1981.

¹⁶⁰ FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Paper*, Spring 1981.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Ros Wollen, 13th September 2013.

¹⁶² FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Paper*, Spring 1981.

¹⁶³ Rees, ‘Are you a lesbian?’, 180.

¹⁶⁴ Rees, ‘Are you a lesbian?’, 179.

¹⁶⁵ Rees, ‘Are you a lesbian?’, 179.

¹⁶⁶ Setch, ‘The Face of Metropolitan Feminism,’ 188.

Sheffield Women's Bulletin became women-only in 1985 with no given explanation. The separatist ideas Ros Wollen was aware of in the early 1980s were gaining currency within the Sheffield WLM by the middle of the decade, perhaps due in part to the movement of socialist feminists out of the WLM and into the Working Women's Charter Committee after 1983. The *Bulletin* did not openly discuss separatism but it focused a lot more on lesbian issues and lesbian events. Meetings for Lesbian Line, gay club nights like Changes and Checkers, and women-only nights like the Leadmill Women Performers Club, which, though not exclusively aimed at lesbians, were frequented by many, dominated the diary pages.¹⁶⁷ Individual lesbian women influenced the production of the *Bulletin*. A photograph of Gwenda Stewart, a famous female motor-car racer, graced the front cover of the July 1985 issue (See Figure 3.2). Stewart was the namesake of Gwenda's Garage; a mechanic service set up by Ros Wall and run by Wall and Wollen, who almost certainly had a hand in choosing the cover image, and perhaps the rest of the *Bulletin* content.¹⁶⁸

Ultimately, due to the disparity between oral testament and written evidence, it is difficult to discern Sheffield WLM's position on sexuality, especially as it seemed to vary depending on which grouping had control of the feminist press at any time. However, a disparity between written and oral accounts is evident, giving credence to Rees' notion that until the late 1970s lesbian voices were given less space within the movement, and the lesbian history of the WLM has been hidden since. Many feminists came to Sheffield in the 1970s but it is doubtful that a new cohort of lesbians arrived in 1980s. But from 1979 onwards, lesbians became more vocal in Sheffield's WLM and may have contributed to and benefited from both the normalisation of a mild form of separatism and the lessened fear of repercussions from feminism being associated with homosexuality. That socialist feminists

¹⁶⁷ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Bulletin*, August 1985; Interview with Ros Wollen, 13th September 2013

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Ros Wollen, 13th September 2013

shifted their attentions from the WLM to the WWCC from 1983 left the WLM open to take a newer, lesbian-friendly direction.

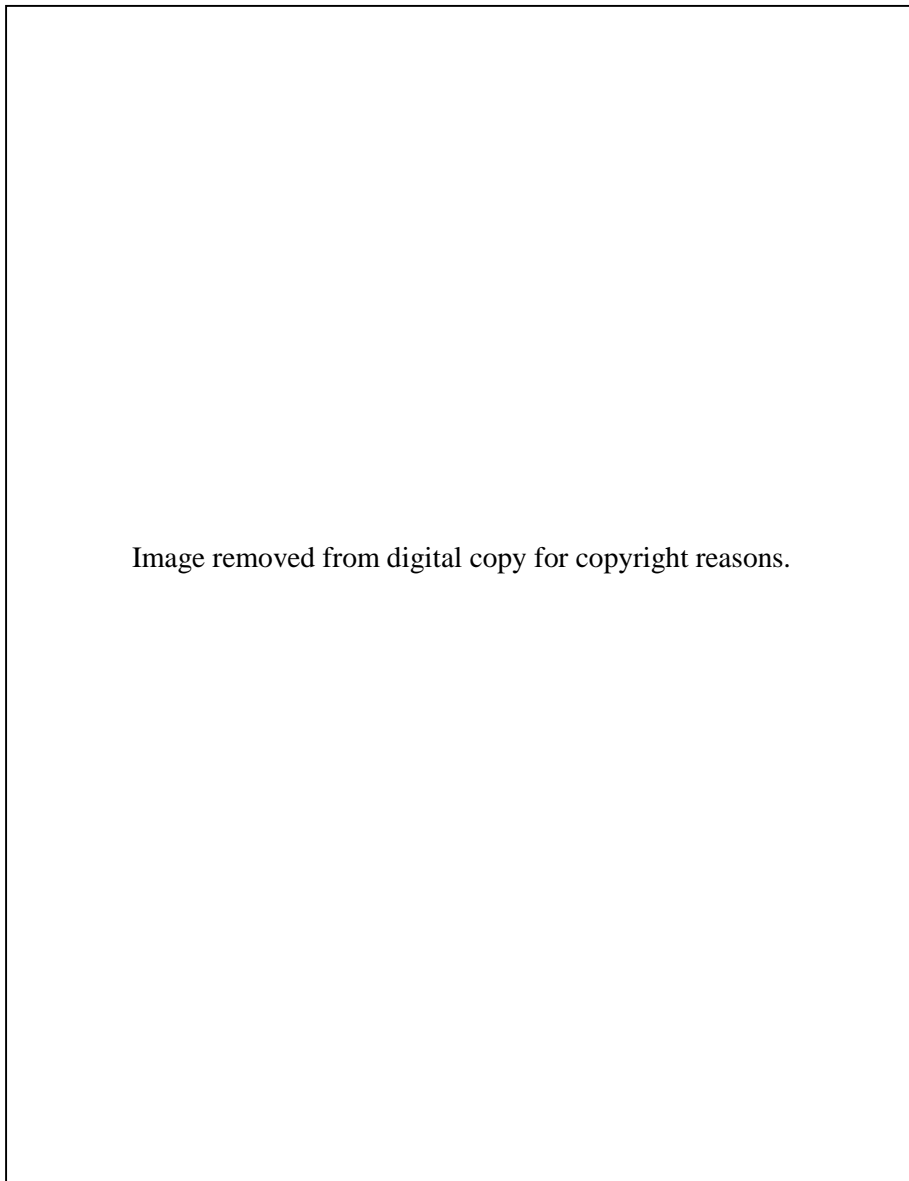


Figure 3.2: Front cover of *Sheffield Women's Bulletin*, June 1985.¹⁶⁹

The new direction brought many overlapping causes and similarities in tactics used by feminists and lesbians. Campaigning for the National Abortion Campaign, Ros Wollen spray-painted “women’s right to choose” on the brick-work of the Crucible Theatre.¹⁷⁰ Similar

¹⁶⁹ Reproduced here with permission from Feminist Archive North.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Ros Wollen, 13th September 2013.

spray-painting and sign-making was seen in Women Against Section 28, a more lesbian-centred campaign, albeit one that the wider left including feminists mobilised around. Wollen recalls how Ros Wall made “Sheffield Lesbian Capital of the North” signs in the workshop at Gwenda’s Garage, to protest Section 28. They hung them on all the main roads coming into Sheffield and ‘caused a bit of a stir’ (See Figure. 3).¹⁷¹ Wollen remembers being joined on anti-Section 28 demonstrations by women from Women’s Aid and the National Abortion Campaign, as well as the Young Lesbian Group.

Lesbian activism existed inside and outside of the WLM. One cause kept separate was the Lesbian Extravaganza of South Yorkshire (LESY), which was a month of events put on to celebrate five years of Lesbian Line, a telephone helpline and social group for lesbians. The Extravaganza was ‘very much about us coming out in public’ as previously Lesbian Line had been ‘a bit closet;’ with women meeting in pubs asking for the ‘LL group.’¹⁷² LESY was not well received by some Sheffielders, including those on the left. It played into fears about the misuse of rate payers’ money that Blunkett had considered when he refused to fund Lesbians and Gays Against the Pit Closures. A few months before LESY *The Sheffield Star* published a letter from a ‘Socialist and a miner’ who, in response to the news that Sheffield City Council had awarded the Young Lesbian Group a ‘controversial’ grant of £340, wrote; ‘I am angry every time I hear a Labour-controlled council have made a grant to a lesbian group or a homosexual group... there are many other more important causes..., like our collapsing health service, education services, and funds being cut from all our prime services.’¹⁷³

During LESY the *Sheffield Star* ran with this theme. Reporting the news that ‘Mr Angry,’ Arthur Chapman, had torn a Lesbian Extravaganza poster off the wall in Hackenthorpe

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*

¹⁷² *ibid.*

¹⁷³ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Letters: Misuse of the funds,’ 22nd March 1988, 4; *The Sheffield Star*, 3rd March 1988, 4.

Library before shredding it in front of staff, the *Star* noted that a £200 Council grant to fund the events had been ‘abandoned at the last minute after councillors decided the authority could not be seen to be supporting the extravaganza at the same time as making savings in vital services.’¹⁷⁴ The following week’s letters page generally agreed that this was the right course of action; ‘the mind boggles at a month of lesbian events,’ one woman wrote in, ‘[I] would strongly object to the funding of any such group coming out of my rates.’¹⁷⁵

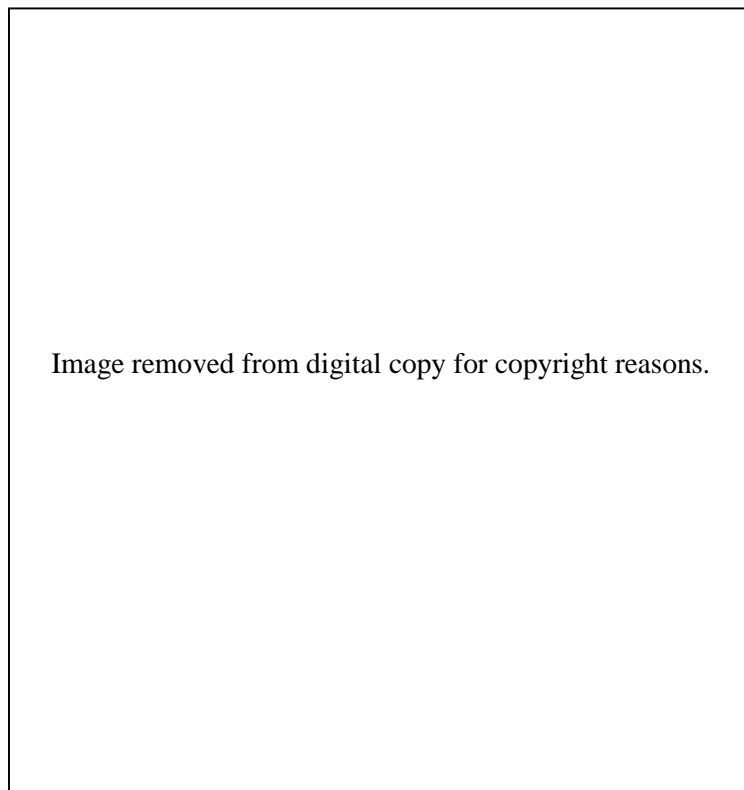


Figure 3.3: Sheffield Lesbian Capital of the North, photograph taken by Woman against Section

28.¹⁷⁶

Sheffield City Council and the broader labour movement had ongoing problems recognising gay identity politics and reconciling them with class-based interests. But the

¹⁷⁴ *The Sheffield Star*, 14th May 1988, 5.

¹⁷⁵ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Letters: Lesbianism should stay underwraps,’ 24th May 1988.

¹⁷⁶ Hall Carpenter Archives: HCA/EPHEMERA-1292, Miscellaneous material from Sheffield Women Against Section 28, Photograph of ‘Welcome to Sheffield Lesbian Capital of the North’ on ‘South Yorkshire supports a Nuclear Free Zone’.

Council did offer some support, and on a one-to-one basis women within the labour and women's movements and lesbian women were generally supportive of one another. Sheffield was known for encouraging and supporting women in manual and non-traditional trades, offering grants for training courses.¹⁷⁷ The Working Women's Charter Committee emphasised this, showcasing the different groups open to women interested in learning or practicing manual trades.¹⁷⁸ Ros Wollen recalls that, though they were separate, 'quite a lot of the women' involved in manual trades were lesbians.¹⁷⁹ Through her own work as a mechanic and her involvement in youth work Wollen made important connections with others in the labour movement, including Communist Party member and SCCAU worker Kath Mackey who remembers Wollen and her motorcycles fondly.¹⁸⁰ Although the labour movement as a whole was poor at supporting gay politics, there were connections and friendships between gay and straight women in the labour and women's movements.

Sheffield City Council's big show of support came with a grant for the Women's Cultural Club in the early 1990s. The initiative for the Club came from women involved in Lesbian Line who wanted their own space to meet. As Wollen remembers; 'It came out as a result of how we'd been treated in local pubs particularly the Royal Standard where the women had been caught snogging and the guy said "we don't want you next week. Go."' ¹⁸¹ The Women's Cultural Club was 'kind of known as a lesbian club' but it was open to all women and ran bingo nights and craft workshops, as well as encouraging women to develop skills in first aid, computer literacy, and food hygiene.¹⁸² Opening to all women, not just lesbians, allowed the Women's Cultural Club to operate relatively unscathed by the press.

¹⁷⁷ SA, CA-POL/16/235 Urban Strategy Panel 14th November 1983.

¹⁷⁸ SLSL, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 10 (June 1982), Issue 12 (February 1983).

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Ros Wollen, 13th September 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Kath Mackey, 10th January 2014.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Ros Wollen, 13th September 2013.

¹⁸² *ibid.*

Indeed, *The Sheffield Star* celebrated the innovation; ‘pioneering Sheffield women have already put the city at the forefront of the growing demand for female-only events.’¹⁸³ Sheffield City Council backed the development, providing a grant to help finish refurbishments and bringing the site into its new Cultural Industries Quarter.¹⁸⁴ Newly elected MP for Sheffield Hillsborough, Helen Jackson, cut the ribbon for the official opening.¹⁸⁵ Despite the generally supportive atmosphere surrounding the club, there were signs of disapproval. Joella Bruckshaw, volunteer coordinator, raised the issue in a newspaper interview: “In the past there have been cliques who have made people feel unwelcome. We would feel very uncomfortable if women have been made to feel that way.”¹⁸⁶ Here Bruckshaw was perhaps referring to internal divisions such as the tensions between working class and middle class women over smoking and also around the sadomasochism scene which was a controversial issue among lesbian communities at the time and heavily debated in Sheffield.¹⁸⁷ Ros Wollen was particularly critical of ‘right on’ middle class women who made a fuss; ‘I just thought come on you know, you can choose to ... drink where you want really... whereas in actual fact for some working class women who live on estates at that time it was a bit of a refuge.’¹⁸⁸ Although class concerns were not usually a priority for the radical, lesbian element of Sheffield WLM, some lesbian women still recognised the need for a safe space inclusive of all lesbians.

Interviews with the local press indicate that there were outside criticisms of the Club’s feminist and lesbian ethos. Irene Simpson, the bar organiser, was quoted in the local press

¹⁸³ *The Sheffield Star*, 6th July 1991, 5.

¹⁸⁴ For more on the Cultural Industries Quarter see Adam Brown, Justin O’Connor, Sara Cohen, ‘Local music policies within a global music industry: cultural quarters in Manchester and Sheffield,’ *Geoforum*, 31 (2000), 437-451.

¹⁸⁵ Newspaper cutting provided by Ros Wollen, no date.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Susan Ardill and Sue O’Sullivan, ‘Upsetting the Applecart: Difference, Desire and Lesbian Sadomasochism’, *Feminist Review*, 23 (1986), 31-57; Interview with Ros Wollen, 13th September 2013.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Ros Wollen, 13th September 2013.

saying: “I think a lot of people have got the wrong impression of us... We have perhaps been too politically correct, too feminist,” with Bruckshaw adding; “We’re not anti-men.”¹⁸⁹ Once again, Sheffield’s feminists found themselves rejecting the separatist label. That Simpson and Bruckshaw felt the need to say this suggests that they faced accusations of being ‘too feminist’ and had been made cautious by the backlash against LESY. Indeed, the insistence that they were not ‘anti-men’ was made in a local newspaper rather than in their own paper. Rather than showing the ‘unthinking homophobia’ of previous feminists, this defence was indicative of a sound understanding of how separatism and lesbianism would be received by the *Star* and its Letter’s page. Bruckshaw described the Club as ‘like a [working] men’s club for women,’ attempting to rationalise it but unconsciously raising a tension that was emerging between working class men and middle class women. The Women’s Cultural Club was part of the City Council’s Cultural Industries Quarter which aimed at replacing Sheffield’s devastated steel industry with a thriving arts and music industry.¹⁹⁰

Whilst the WLM in Sheffield had struggled to incorporate working class women into the movement in the 1970s and 1980s, in the 1990s they attempted to offer them, and others, a new safe social space in an area of the city recently vacated by the steel industry. Club culture was important to Sheffield’s identity as a city and two of Sheffield’s working men’s clubs have been committed to screen; The Dial House in Peter Nestler’s 1965 documentary and the Shiregreen Club in the 1997 film *The Full Monty*.¹⁹¹ The Working Women’s Charter Committee’s call for women to join the Sheffield Trades and Labour Social Club a decade earlier had challenged the masculinity of Club culture. With the Women’s Cultural Club, Sheffield’s radical feminists attempted to tap into the same traditions but in doing so

¹⁸⁹ Newspaper cutting provided by Ros Wollen, no date.

¹⁹⁰ Adam Brown et al, ‘Local music policies within a global music industry,’ 438.

¹⁹¹ Club Historians, The Dial House: http://www.clubhistorians.co.uk/html/dial_house_club.html (accessed 12/01/15), Shiregreen Club: <http://www.clubhistorians.co.uk/html/shiregreen.html> (accessed 12/01/15).

completely subverted a working class male culture that was already in decline.¹⁹² Unlike Sheffield's socialist feminists, the city's more radical feminists were not as connected to Sheffield's labour movement, but their activism did not exist in a vacuum. Their rise to prominence within the Sheffield WLM was the result of changing ideas around separatism and lesbianism in the national movement, and from 1983, the absence of socialist feminists more interested in working with men on the left. While this reflects the national picture, it does separate Sheffield from places like Bradford where working class radical feminist lesbians were firmly embedded in the local activist milieu, and questions how class and sexuality operated in different local political spaces.

'Race' and Racism in the Struggle for Gender Equality

Sheffield's politics of gender equality was not inclusive of African-Caribbean and Asian women. A problem within the national Women's Liberation Movement, it was heightened by Sheffield's relatively low black and minority ethnic population. At the 1991 Census only around five percent of Sheffield's residents were black or minority ethnic which was less than the national average and amounted to around 25,000 people.¹⁹³ Reports from 1985 suggest that Sheffield's Pakistani population numbered between eight and nine thousand people.¹⁹⁴ Within Sheffield, black and minority ethnic women engaged with white feminists on some level but also created autonomous groups or worked within existing organisations which were fighting against racism and for equal opportunities. This section looks at how well black and Asian women were reflected in the politics of the WLM and the Working Women's Charter

¹⁹² Ruth Cherrington, 'The development of working men's clubs: a case study of implicit cultural policy,' *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 15:2 (2009), 187.

¹⁹³ Karen Evans, et al. *A Tale of Two Cities: Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England: a study in Manchester and Sheffield*, 1996, 88, 201.

¹⁹⁴ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Voting row splits Pakistani group,' 30th September 1985, 7.

Committee in Sheffield, and explores how many black and minority ethnic women campaigned for women's rights within Black organisations rather than the other way round.

From the late 1970s onwards Sheffield's feminist press reported on black and minority ethnic women's struggles alongside other feminist issues. Often though these were framed as 'news' pieces, rather than as a consistent attempt to tackle racism in the WLM and society more broadly. Reports appeared on the strike started by Asian women at the Chix bubble-gum factory in Slough, drew attention to racism in hospitals and violent racially-motivated attacks on the street, and highlighted immigration campaigns such as the Anwar Ditta Defence Campaign; supporting Ditta's appeals to immigration authorities to allow her to bring her children to Britain.¹⁹⁵ Despite including these stories, *Sheffield Women's Paper* failed to mention the Asian-led groups campaigning around these issues, such as the emerging Asian Youth Movement and the Sheffield Campaign Against Immigration Laws.¹⁹⁶ These articles were information pieces for a white readership rather than informing black and Asian women of ways to get involved. The *Sheffield Women's Paper* acknowledged their black and Asian readers in other, more trivial, ways. Hand-drawn cartoons showed black and Asian women working alongside white at Women's Aid refuges and the recipes section included directions for a 'Gujerati (sic) meal.'¹⁹⁷ The March 1980 issue reviewed "Black Women: Bringing it all Back Home" by Margaret Prescod-Roberts and Norma Steele, though the (likely white) reviewer talks of 'West Indians' as 'them' and 'they' rather than 'us.'¹⁹⁸ *Double Shift*, the organ of the WWCC, was slightly more representative. It covered the deportation of Afia Begum and the campaign to keep her in Britain, but unlike the *Sheffield*

¹⁹⁵ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, Summer 1980; *Sheffield Women's Paper*, March 1980; *Sheffield Women's Paper*, Autumn 1981.

¹⁹⁶ Tandana Archive: MH146, Sheffield Campaign Against Immigration Laws Leaflet.

¹⁹⁷ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, Autumn 1981; *Sheffield Women's Paper*, Summer 1980; *Sheffield Women's Paper*, March 1980.

¹⁹⁸ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, March 1980.

Women's Paper, it reported on the Sari Squad, a group of Muslim women 'actively campaigning against the deportation of black women' and asked for donations for the twenty-one women arrested at Heathrow Airport on the day Begum was deported.¹⁹⁹ The feminist press in Sheffield made attempts to be inclusive, but whole issues of both *Double Shift* and the *Sheffield Women's Paper* passed with no mention of black and minority ethnic women or with only small, occasionally clumsy mentions. Often articles by or about Black women were featured near the back of the papers. Sheffield's feminist press shows that white feminists in Sheffield were attempting to listen to and include Black women; but that they were not always successful and Black women's voices were not prioritised.

This was not unique to Sheffield, and many white feminists faced accusations of racism for their perceived apathy or disinterest in Black women.²⁰⁰ In 1982 Hazel Carby wrote that 'White women in the British WLM are extraordinarily reluctant to see themselves in the situation of being oppressors, as they feel that this will be at the expense of concentrating on being oppressed.'²⁰¹ This tendency was evident even in white women's acknowledgement of racial oppression. In 1976 a woman named Parsley wrote a piece in the *Sheffield Women's Newsletter* about the connections between racism, sexism and homophobia. She claimed that 'racism is one of the worst manifestations of sexism' and called for a 'revolutionary point of unity' between black people, gay people, women, and the left.²⁰² Her words; 'the enemy is the same – but manifests in different ways to different oppressed groups,' acknowledged that Black women's experience of oppression was different to white women's, but in categorising racism as a form of sexism Parsley failed to lay any responsibility for Black women's oppression at the feet of white women. In the following

¹⁹⁹ SLSL: 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 17 (November 1984).

²⁰⁰ Thomlinson, 'The Colour of Feminism,' 454.

²⁰¹ Hazel V. Carby, 'White woman listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood,' in Heidi Safia Mirza, *Black British Feminism*, (London, New York, 1997), 49.

²⁰² SA, MD7966/1/1/8, *Sheffield Women's Newsletter*, May 1976.

issue, Jenny Owen, a socialist-feminist, responded to Parsley. She wrote that she found Parsley's words:

'very confusing: it feels nice to assume all those links between racism and sexism, to feel that 'parallel struggles must and will unite in the final objective – the demolition of sexism in all its forms'... but what does that really mean to us? Sometimes it just seems like revolutionary mysticism.'²⁰³

This was the end of the theoretical discussion in Sheffield WLM, though socialist-feminists in the WWCC later attempted to address intersectionality. In 1981, *Double Shift* reported on the 'staggering' growth of Black women's unemployment in the 1970s and acknowledged that 'for black women the oppression is double.'²⁰⁴ Like a lot of WWCC campaigns, this was about addressing equality in the workplace but the WWCC also campaigned against the British Nationality Act, arguing that the working class should not 'be divided along racist and sexist lines.'²⁰⁵ This was a laudable aim but there was still a lack of discussion around how to ensure this unity and make sure African-Caribbean and Asian people had a voice within the women's and labour movements. Indeed, it was not until a study on Positive Action and the City Council in 1985 that the WWCC appeared to actually ask Black women what problems they faced because of their gender and 'race'. The women surveyed responded somewhat unsurprisingly that there was 'no awareness at all within the Council of their particular needs.'²⁰⁶

Debates around 'race' and racism made more headway in the national WLM in the early 1980s. Linda Bellos became the first Black member of the *Spare Rib* editorial staff in 1981, and one year later a one-day conference on 'race' and class was held in Sheffield. As

²⁰³ SA, MD7966/1/1/9, *Sheffield Women's Newsletter*, July 1976.

²⁰⁴ SLSL: 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 8 (September 1981).

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

²⁰⁶ SLSL: 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 18 (May 1985).

Natalie Thomlinson notes, that this conference was based in Sheffield, ‘one of Britain’s less racially diverse cities,’ revealed ‘the importance that these issues had acquired in the movement.’²⁰⁷ And yet, in 1984 Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar wrote that ‘white, mainstream feminist theory... does not speak to the experiences of Black women and where it attempts to do so it is often from a racist perspective and reasoning.’²⁰⁸ For Black radicals and theorists, apathy and disinterest were not neutral states, but attitudes that sustained the racist state. Anything that was not explicitly anti-racist was deemed to be racist. However, as Thomlinson explains, this critique does not do justice to the complex ways that white feminists engaged with ‘race.’²⁰⁹ Many white feminists were also members of anti-racist groups. Anti-racist meetings and workshops were regularly advertised in Sheffield’s feminist press.²¹⁰ But many white feminists had come to anti-racism through a connection to left-wing anti-imperialist politics, and paradoxically many failed to relate this to their feminist activity. Furthermore contemporary theorists Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Margaret Coulson explained that some white feminists saw anti-racism as competing with anti-sexism for funding. They argued that this view contained ‘an assumption that anti-sexism concerns white women and anti-racism concerns black people.’ This was reflected in the way women’s anti-racism groups were often set up to combat sexism faced by white women in the anti-racist movement, rather than to bring Black women’s voices more fully into the WLM, as was the case with the Women Against Racism and Fascism group in London.²¹¹ For Bhavnani and Coulson this meant that white women could not assume ‘automatic sisterhood’ with Black women, not least until they acknowledged the power relations between white and Black

²⁰⁷ Thomlinson, ‘The Colour of Feminism,’ 471.

²⁰⁸ Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, ‘Challenging Imperial Feminism’, *Feminist Review*, 17 (1984), 3-19.

²⁰⁹ Thomlinson, ‘The Colour of Feminism,’ 454.

²¹⁰ FAN, *Sheffield Women’s Bulletin*, June 1985.

²¹¹ Thomlinson, ‘The Colour of Feminism,’ 467-8.

people and re-examined feminist practices with this in mind.²¹² Instead solidarity and sisterhood was to be found in Black women's groups.

These attitudes combined with the exclusivity that consciousness-raising groups thrived on, and Sheffield's relatively small black and minority ethnic population, begin to explain why the majority of women's groups in Sheffield seemed unable to attract many Black women. Speaking of Sheffield Women Against the Pit Closures, Janet Heath notes that there were only one or two black or minority ethnic women who came to meetings, and Emma Rattenbury suggests that the Working Women's Charter Committee was mainly white.²¹³ Even at the Sheffield conference on 'race' and class, the majority of participants were white and middleclass, and one Black woman who attended reported a lack of 'real solidarity from white middle class feminists for either Black or working class women.'²¹⁴ However, there were black and Asian feminists present in Sheffield and these women often followed in the footsteps of those in London who promoted self-organisation, creating the Black Women's Group, the Black Women's Resource Centre, many Asian Women's organisations and campaigning for gender equality within anti-racist movements and Black community politics.

We can trace the development of the Sheffield Black Women's Group through mentions in Sheffield's feminist press. Early in 1979, Christine Seneviratne wrote an article about Asian women speaking out against immigration authority practices such as 'virginity' tests. Seneviratne ended her article on the positive note that 'in recent years more groups have been formed to organise support among black women' and provided a list of such

²¹² Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Margaret Coulson, 'Transforming socialist feminism: The challenge of racism,' in Heidi Safia Mirza, *Black British Feminism*, (London, New York, 1997), 62.

²¹³ Interview with Janet Heath, 2nd July 2014.

²¹⁴ Unknown, 'Yes but . . . what do Black and Working Class Women Think?', *Spare Rib*, cxxii (1982).

organisations.²¹⁵ These included the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD) which ran from 1978-1982, Brixton Black Women's Group, United Black Women's Action Group, and AWAZ; an Asian women's refuge and resources centre, all of which were based in London. The only other group on the list was the Black/Brown Women's Liberation Newsletter based slightly closer to home in York.²¹⁶ Yet, despite the distance, Black women in Sheffield were interested. A year later an anonymous woman wrote in the *Sheffield Women's Paper* of racism she had faced and how it had intersected with sexism;

'The insults and possible violence I faced from men on the street (as all women do) were not just sexist but racist. A 'jokey sexist comment' often turned to vicious racism when I refused to play the game. I got scared.'²¹⁷

This woman wrote of attending OWAAD's Black women's conference alongside two hundred and fifty other black and Asian women and explained that hearing others articulate what she had felt gave her 'strength and solidarity.'²¹⁸ Like others at the conference, she was inspired to set up a group in Sheffield and called for interested women to get in contact. From 1981 Sheffield's Black Women's Group welcomed 'all women of Afro-Caribbean or Asian descent.'²¹⁹ The initial article had stated; 'variations in our shades of black are of little importance compared to the common experiences we share in racist Britain.'²²⁰ The group met every fortnight at the Commonground Resources Centre in Sheffield. They focused on drawing attention to institutional racism and published a report specifically on racism in health care. Despite forming their own autonomous group, Black women in Sheffield

²¹⁵ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Newsletter*, Spring 1979.

²¹⁶ *ibid.*

²¹⁷ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, March 1980.

²¹⁸ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, March 1980; Brixton Black Women's Group, 'Black Women Organizing', *Feminist Review*, 17 (1984), 84.

²¹⁹ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, Autumn 1981.

²²⁰ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, March 1980.

continued to engage with white feminists. Interactions were made easier by the fact that they shared meeting spaces at Commonground. Predominantly-white feminist groups recognised the Black Women's Group and requested their involvement in joint initiatives; such as sending a delegation of women to picket Armagh Jail on International Women's Day in 1985. Often though, invitations came with the specifically expressed desire that different sections of the community represent themselves. Whilst this was a step towards wider recognition of Black women in the WLM, it placed the onus on the Black Women's Group to provide someone 'representing differen[ce],' rather than on white women's groups to be more inclusive.²²¹

From the mid-1980s, black and minority ethnic women in Sheffield also set up the Black Women's Resources Centre (BWRC) in Burngreave with the help of a City Council development worker. Burngreave is in the constituency of Sheffield Central which had the highest percentage of black and minority ethnic residents at 8.8 percent in 1981, compared to much lower figures of between one or two percent in other constituencies.²²² Shirley Allen Jackson was on the BWRC committee and explains that the Centre acted as a support group for local women of all cultures and backgrounds and emphasised the importance of personal development. Like the earlier Black Women's Group, for Allen-Jackson and the women at the BWRC, 'Black' was a political identity shared by those who faced oppression.²²³ The women who attended took part in discussions about gender, culture and ethnicity, imperialism and racism. These discussions acted as consciousness-raising exercises for black and minority ethnic women and encouraged new perspectives on oppression. On a practical level, the BWRC also ran a nursery for children in Burngreave which was open to all.

²²¹ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Bulletin*, March 1985, Letter inviting Black women to join the International Women's Day picket of Armagh jail, 12 February 1985.

²²² Robert Waller, *The Almanac of British Politics*, (Croom Helm: London, New York 1987), 197.

²²³ Interview with Shirley Allen-Jackson, 6th September 2013.

Allen Jackson places the Black Women's Resources Centre in the wider context of her activism around Black politics and women's issues which she sees as being entwined. She had come to the BWRC through her experiences with the Sheffield and District African Caribbean Community Association (SADACCA). In the 1980s, young members of SADACCA were engaged in Black community activism and building political relationships with Sheffield City Council. Allen Jackson explains;

'We were young people then – and they [her parents' generation] saw us as being... “too radical for our own good.” (laughs) ... [We] wanted to be in a position to influence change, to impact on our lives... to be involved [at a] strategic level within the Council.'²²⁴

Working with the Council involved applying for local government funding which placed SADACCA in direct competition with other minority ethnic organisations. State funding was often allocated on the basis of ethnicity which had far-reaching consequences. Kenan Malik argues that, by allocating funds on the basis of ethnicity, the state encouraged people to see their ethnic identity – as opposed to a more inclusive Black political identity – as the most direct way to obtain 'power, influence and resources.'²²⁵ State funding 'did not respond to the needs of communities, but to a large degree *created* those communities by imposing identities on people.'²²⁶ This in turn damaged the strength of a shared Black political identity. Allen Jackson recognised this; 'we realised how funding divided us as different BME communities... it's that divide and rule bit that always happens.'²²⁷ To counter this, SADACCA started engaging with Sheffield's Yemeni and Somali communities and Black activists formed the Black Women's Resources Centre, and later the Black Community Forum, to pool resources and address common issues.

²²⁴ Interview with Shirley Allen-Jackson, 6th September 2013.

²²⁵ Kenan Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad: the Rushdie Affair and its Legacy*, (London, 2009), 69.

²²⁶ Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, 67.

²²⁷ Interview with Shirley Allen-Jackson, 6th September 2013.

Allen-Jackson did not actively engage with white feminists in Sheffield. Instead she looked at women's issues from a Black, marginalised perspective. Working with women helped her to focus on the common issues faced by marginalised people. The BWRC sparked her interest in feminism and Allen-Jackson embarked on a Women's Studies degree at university. On the degree course they talked about common issues that women had, but also how some issues affected women from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds differently. Shirley Allen-Jackson read bell hooks and found her work extremely useful, however when Black women were brought up on the course it was always African-American women and their issues that were discussed. Allen-Jackson found this difficult; 'I felt very strongly that I couldn't identify with African-American women's Black issues because I felt that my issues as...an African-Caribbean woman, were different from the African-American issues.'²²⁸ In response Allen-Jackson sought out feminist Caribbean writers.²²⁹ Despite the recognising the importance of her own Caribbean and Yorkshire identity, Allen-Jackson saw a lot of similarities in the oppression women at the BWRC faced. Her ability to identify with a lot of women's issues, regardless of her own cultural background, outweighed the differences, reinforcing her understanding of a shared Black political identity.²³⁰ Shirley Allen-Jackson's feminism lay firmly within her Black community politics. Unlike the Black Women's Group, the BWRC was not approached by white feminists, nor was it really recognised as a feminist organisation. Ros Wollen, a white woman involved in Sheffield's Women's Liberation Group considered the BWRC to be a 'local' or 'neighbourhood' project rather than a 'political' or overtly feminist project.²³¹ This may have been due to a difference in method. The BWRC engaged more seriously with Sheffield City Council and provided much-needed services, rather than carrying out direct action and civil disobedience. Yet it is also indicative of the

²²⁸ Interview with Shirley Allen-Jackson, 6th September 2013.

²²⁹ *ibid.*

²³⁰ *ibid.*

²³¹ Interview with Ros Wollen, 13th September 2013.

division caused by identity politics, and the lack of priority placed on incorporating difference by the WLM.

We can assume that some Asian women in Sheffield also attended the Black Women's Group and the Black Women's Resources Centre, however as these groups' records are not archived is hard to be certain. A failing of this project's snowball methodology is that I have not interviewed any Asian women. Whether this is indicative of Asian women playing a diminished role in Sheffield's wider activist milieu is difficult to say. However archival evidence of their involvement in various groups suggests that like African-Caribbean women and other Black women, Asian women in Sheffield tended to organise primarily around 'race' rather than gender. A database of activist organisations in Sheffield from the 1960s onwards produced for the Stories of Activism in Sheffield project details seventy four groups that campaigned around anti-racism or for black and minority ethnic interests.²³² This database is by no means comprehensive but gives an indication of the scale of organising around 'race' and ethnicity in the city. Of the groups in the database, many described themselves as 'Asian,' though there were also organisations identifying as Pakistani, Bengali, and Bangladeshi. Twenty one black and minority ethnic organisations dealt with women's concerns specifically. In 1988 alone, Sheffield City Council provided funding for eight independent Asian women's organisations.²³³ Throughout the 1980s Asian women in Sheffield organised themselves around a variety of issues and concerns. In 1986 the Asian Women's Refuge received £11,200 from the Council to provide assistance to Asian women facing violence in the home and the Asian Women's Employment Project received £12,000 to encourage Asian women into work.²³⁴

²³² I created this database as part of a scoping study for the Stories of Activism in Sheffield project in 2011.

²³³ SA, CAPOL31/Appendix D: Race Equality Panel 12th January 1988, Asian Women's Facilities.

²³⁴ SA, CAPOL/19/171 Race Equality Panel 14th January 1986, Urban Programme: Asian Community Facilities 1985/86.

These organisations shared aims with groups run by white feminists; Women’s Aid and the Women’s Employment Forum for example, but they were led by and run for Asian women and were not acknowledged in Sheffield’s feminist press. Women involved in Sheffield’s Asian Youth Movement articulated the intersection between racism and sexism much more thoroughly than white feminists, as they lived with both forms of oppression. A group of Asian ‘Sisters’ wrote to *Kala Mazdoor*, the journal of the AYM, to praise their ‘many victories due to the unity of its members,’ but criticised the lack of women involved in the movement.²³⁵ They asked; ‘How can we begin to fight for our freedom within this country when we are imprisoned as women within our own homes?’ They argued that ending the ‘unseen and unheard’ oppression of Asian women would make the AYM ‘stronger;’ ‘It is when our sisters are liberated that together in solidarity we can fight against racism.’²³⁶ To their credit the AYM recognised in their reply that Asian women were ‘not only subjected to racism but also sexism,’ and encouraged more women to attend AYM weekly women’s meetings to ‘ensure that AYM reflects your views and fights back against all forms of oppression.’²³⁷ Asian women in Sheffield were fighting sexism alongside racism, and fighting sexism to strengthen their unity against racism. For Asian women these causes were interconnected in a way that was just not experienced by even anti-racist white feminists.

To this extent, black and minority ethnic women in Sheffield made their own spaces as white feminism consistently failed to incorporate their voices and needs, and in some cases, even to recognise their activism. For women in the BWRC and AYM, this space came out of an existing black and Asian community politics campaigning against racist oppression rather than Sheffield’s developing feminist scene. The need for their own spaces in the face of indifference from the wider left was a problem shared by many black and minority ethnic

²³⁵ Tandana Archive, MH249, *Kala Mazdoor* No.2, ‘Letters.’

²³⁶ *ibid.*

²³⁷ *ibid.*

groups. The relatively small size of Sheffield's BME population exacerbated this problem, but it was a national one. Although anti-racism was an attractive cause for many on the left, actual representation for black and minority ethnic people in left-wing political structures was a more complicated issue, to be explored further in the next chapter.

Conclusion

In 1986, after a long campaign by the Working Women's Charter Committee and Women's Employment Forum to secure a commitment to positive action, Sheffield City Council established a Women's Panel.²³⁸ The Panel, led by Emma Rattenbury, made recommendations focussed on eliminating sexism in all Council departments, advised the Women's Unit in the Personnel Department, and attempted to build links between the Council and women in the community regardless of age, class, 'race', marital status, sexuality or physical and mental disability, with a view to responding to their varied needs and concerns.²³⁹ For six months, fifty percent of officer time was spent on outreach work with the community and on encouraging more women to come to Panel meetings.²⁴⁰ By 1988 the Panel was making a special effort to co-opt representatives from 'under-represented' groups of women, such as 'black and ethnic minority women, working class women, lesbians, women with disabilities, young women and older women.'²⁴¹ The Women's Panel developed the WWCC's focus on employment and training, but also lent support to campaigns against the closure of the Nether Edge Maternity Unit and against the licensing of

²³⁸ SA, CA-POL21/5, Policy Committee, 23rd September 1986; SA, CA-POL21/Appendix S, Report: Establishing a Women's Panel, 23rd September 1986.

²³⁹ SA, CA-POL22/148, Women's Panel, 14th November 1986.

²⁴⁰ SA, CA-POL22/196, Women's Panel, 12th December 1986.

²⁴¹ SA, CA-POL38/Appendix C, Women's Panel, 16th September 1988.

sex shops in Sheffield, co-ordinated by Women Against Violence Against Women; an organisation with revolutionary feminist roots.²⁴²

Sheffield City Council liaising with revolutionary feminist organisations might suggest that the labour movement had successfully incorporated all forms of feminism. But the relationship between the labour movement and women's movement remained complicated. Although the labour and women's movements were connected in Sheffield by the determination of older working class women and the enthusiasm of a younger generation of middle class women with favourable attitudes to class politics and structures; the very existence of the Women's Panel was a huge victory for the WWCC and socialist feminists. As Emma Rattenbury's memories of camping with the Labour Group suggest; the Panel and their work were not met with approval from all. The campaign against sex shops, whilst connected to the revolutionary feminist issue of male violence, was broad-based enough to be deemed worthy of the Panel's time and energy. Indeed, six years earlier a pensioner named Mrs Turner, more used to organising petitions for pelican crossings, had collected 550 signatures protesting the opening of a similar shop.²⁴³ The Women's Panel was a significant victory for socialist feminists, and their choice of campaign and partners showed attempts to incorporate radical views and the views of black and minority ethnic and lesbian women into their work. But Sheffield's women's politics, though strong, had not discovered the hallowed 'revolutionary point of unity.' Instead, Sheffield's socialist feminists continued to fight for gender equality within the labour movement, making pragmatic links where they could. More radical feminists and lesbians continued to organise outside of labour movement structures. Likewise, many black and Asian women and feminists, despite the Women's Panel's call for

²⁴² SA, CA-POL25/33, Women's Panel, 10th April 1987.

²⁴³ *The Sheffield Star*, 'I'm not a narrow-minded old so and so,' 6th May 1981, 5.

diversity, remained focussed on fighting for gender equality within Black community politics and anti-racist organisations.

This is not to say there was no overlap between socialist and radical feminists, heterosexual, bisexual and lesbian women, and white, black and Asian activists. Indeed, many activist organisations in Sheffield shared spaces and resources centres. One such place was the Commonground Resources Centre. Commonground was set up in the summer of 1980 by Sheffield Resources Association and included a community printshop, photography darkroom, radio workshop, meeting rooms, playroom, cafe, exhibition space, baby feeding and nappy changing facilities, and a room that acted as a base for activities organised by local women's groups.²⁴⁴ Different 'collectives' were responsible for the resource areas and were there to offer their skills and active co-operation to community groups, voluntary organisations and individuals who were 'doing anything socially or culturally worthwhile.'²⁴⁵ The value of the centre was recognised by Sheffield City Council who granted Commonground two thousand and nine hundred pounds for building repairs in May 1981, but for the most part Commonground was one of the sites in Sheffield used by a more radical political milieu than the labour movement.²⁴⁶ This milieu was made up of women's organisations such as; the WLM, the Black Women's Group, and the Socialist Feminist Group, as well as the Women's Room Collective, the Women's Printing Co-op, and WAVAW.²⁴⁷ The centre was also used by a number of anti-racist organisations and defence campaigns, like the Newham 8 Support Group, Sheffield Defence Campaign, the Asian Youth Movement, and Women Against Racism. Troops Out, South Yorkshire Film and TV Group, and Sheffield Alternative Medicine Group also used the centre, as did the Sheffield

²⁴⁴ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, March 1980.

²⁴⁵ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, March 1980.

²⁴⁶ SA, CA-POL/13/363 Policy Committee 19th May 1981/285 Urban Strategy Sub-Committee 10th March 1981.

²⁴⁷ FAN, *Sheffield Women's Paper*, Summer 1981.

branches of the Socialist Workers' Party and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. There were some vibrant currents of activism present at Commonground and a lot of anti-establishment ideas circulating whilst people used shared printing machines, the café, and playroom.

Many of these organisations also had connections to the University of Sheffield, Sheffield Polytechnic, or the art school, and in some ways Sheffield's radical milieu was much like that of any other University town. However, just as many of Sheffield's feminists had come to Sheffield to live, work, and protest in a 'real working class city,' Sheffield's radical milieu was also informed by the strength of the labour movement. Different factions of the radical milieu related to the labour movement in different ways. Like the broad left elsewhere in Britain, Sheffield's labour and women's movements were quickly discovering 'the indignity of speaking for others.'²⁴⁸ The labour movement had traditionally always spoken for others. It was structured around committees and representation. In the 1970s and 1980s it had to incorporate other voices. This was a difficult feat, even for movements with a more horizontal organisational structure. In the WLM, middle class women struggled to engage working class women on issues of class and gender; white women campaigned against racism but often failed to recognise their own role in racism and incorporate the voices of black and Asian women; and heterosexual women contributed to the silencing of lesbian women. In Sheffield, this resulted in working class women campaigning within labour movement structures; black and Asian women predominantly organising around ethnicity; and lesbian women, even after they took control of the WLM, continuing to focus primarily on sexuality. They each spoke to their own demands, and in doing so divided the women's movement. The labour movement successfully incorporated the views of socialist

²⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, 'Intellectuals and Power', in Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984* (New York, 1996), 76.

feminists because they worked within the committee structure, joining and dominating the Working Women's Charter Committee, and representing both themselves and a broader working class. But the more identity-related politics of the 'personal is political' were left out of committee-run politics. When women attempted to voice these concerns they were accused of distracting from the socialist cause. As well as identity politics, Sheffield's radical milieu was made up of new social movements and single issue campaigns such as peace and the anti-apartheid movement. Unlike the demands of identity movements, the demands of these campaigns could be articulated by anyone. How these movements interacted with the labour movement will be discussed in the next chapter.

The politics of representation versus the politics of identity was a problem for the left and the Labour party in general in the 1970s and 1980s, but it was intensified in Sheffield because the labour movement was so dominant. In some respects socialist feminists' connection to and enthusiasm for the labour movement in Sheffield gave them more power to bring about change; however it also stymied the discussion of identity politics. Instead, these discussions were had outside the labour movement; in the remaining WLM and in black and Asian women's organisations. Furthermore they were often mediated through university experiences such as Women's Studies courses and discussions of imperialism. While this led to a divided women's movement, it lacked the animosity of the national split. Sheffield was small enough and had enough shared resources centres that women from various backgrounds knew each other or of each other's projects. Often, as with socialist-feminists and lesbians working in manual trades, they were able to find points of convergence. Sometimes however, as with Ros Wollen and the Black Women's Resources Centre, they could not see past their own idea of what feminism should look like.

The Women's Panel's call for all types of women to be represented suggests that, although identity politics were not up for debate, different subjectivities would be listened

too. A Women's Panel report on how to improve women's lives in Sheffield noted that there was 'no perfect system- we just have to find the one that suits women in Sheffield best.'²⁴⁹ Although staffed predominantly by middle class incomers, this echoes Blunkett's sentiment that Sheffield had its 'own job to do,' and Janet Heath's insistence that you have to 'start somewhere.'²⁵⁰ For many fighting for gender equality in Sheffield, this involved working within the labour movement and the politics of representation. For the rest it involved addressing further demands for equality of 'race' and sexuality, but even those forms of activism were not removed from the wider radical milieu and a politics of representation.

²⁴⁹ SA, CA-POL38/Appendix C, Women's Panel, 16th September 1988.

²⁵⁰ 'Interview with David Blunkett,' in Boddy and Fudge (eds.) *Local Socialism?*, 255.

Chapter 4

Sheffield's Radical Milieu

Jasper said he read the Worker because one should know what the opposition was doing; but Alice knew that he secretly had Trotskyist tendencies. Not that she minded about that; she believed that socialists of all persuasions should pull together for the common good.

Doris Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, 1985¹

In 1981, Cath Burke saw amateur singer and violinist Pete Stewart perform 'You can always sell a war' at Sheffield's Hefts and Blades Folk and Dance Club. A few months later, she overheard Sally Goldsmith playing the saxophone at the Lifespan Educational Trust, a 'co-operative community' in Penistone also frequented by Pete Stewart and his French Horn-playing friend Sam Paetcher.² Burke was studying for a Ph.D. at the time; researching the history of working class politics in Sheffield. Spending days in Sheffield Archives reading the newspapers of the Social Democratic Federation, the Sheffield Independent Labour Party and the Trades Council, she began to collect the protest songs detailed in their pages; such as 'There's always a war,' sung by the Clarion Choir in 1927. Burke, like many young activists in the 1980s, looked to Sheffield's longer labour history for parallels and inspiration, and she recognised these songs as a powerful form of political resistance.³ Wishing to emulate the Clarion choirs, miners' marching bands, and the street musicians who accompanied the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament's Aldermaston marches from 1958 onward, Cath Burke

¹ Doris Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, (London, 2010), 46.

² Sheffield Archives: MD7966/2/5, Women's Film Co-op, *Alternatives in Sheffield Directory*, 1970s; Comment by Cath Burke on the Celebrated Sheffield Street Band Facebook Group, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150535066908335&set=o.298649060158251&type=3&theater> (accessed: 24 April 2015).

³ Comment by Cath Burke on the Celebrated Sheffield Street Band Facebook Group, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150535057888335&set=o.298649060158251&type=3&theater> (accessed: 24 April 2015).

met with Pete Stewart, Sally Goldsmith, Sam Paetcher and other musicians at a Sheffield pub and began to hash out some songs to fit the climate of the 1980s.⁴ This was the start of the Celebrated Sheffield Street Band.

Between February 1982 and October 1986, the Celebrated Sheffield Street Band played at over fifty protest events in and around Sheffield.⁵ They played at demonstrations to defend Sheffield's cheap bus fares and the National Health Service; to campaign against unemployment, racism, and Margaret Thatcher's 1983 speech at the Cutlers' Feast celebration of Sheffield's industry; and in support of the anti-apartheid movement, revolution in Nicaragua, and Mass Trespass.⁶ They supported CND demonstrations locally and across the country; playing in Heeley in Sheffield, in London, at Faslane Nuclear Base, Menwith Hill, RAF Cottesmore, Molesworth, and the female band members played at Greenham Common.⁷ Indeed, nearly half of their performances in this period were in aid of peace and anti-nuclear protests. Their commitment to peace was recognised in 1986 when Sheffield City Council's Nuclear Free Zone Working Party granted them £100 towards the cost of attending events, and loaned them a megaphone on a semi-permanent basis.⁸ As well as updating earlier protest songs, the Celebrated Sheffield Street Band rewrote the words to well-known tunes to fit their protests. A folk song 'There's a tavern in the town' proved to be flexible; it became 'Trident in the town' on peace protests, and 'Norman Fowler must resign, what he's doing is a crime' on NHS marches. The song 'Daisy, Daisy' was updated to 'Crazy, Crazy' for anti-nuclear protests, and 'La Cucaracha' got a surprising make-over as

⁴ George McKay, 'A soundtrack to the insurrection': street music, marching bands and popular protest,' *Parallax*, 13:1 (2007), 25.

⁵ Comment by Cath Burke on the Celebrated Sheffield Street Band Facebook Group, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150533576018335&set=gm.339659866057170&type=1&relevance_count=1&ref=pf (accessed: 24 April 2015).

⁶ Comment by Cath Burke on the Celebrated Sheffield Street Band Facebook Group, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150533576018335&set=gm.339659866057170&type=1&relevance_count=1&ref=pf (accessed: 24 April 2015).

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ SA, CAPOL/20/124, Nuclear Free Zone Working Party, 11th July 1986.

‘Save our cheap buses, save our cheap buses, let’s fight to keep them on the road.’⁹ Like London’s Big Red Band, the CSSB played a recognisably internationalist repertoire; ‘a musical statement of its members’ political sympathies which would be understood by its core audience at leftist demonstrations.’¹⁰

In this way, the CSSB provided a soundtrack to Sheffield’s wider activist milieu. Eyerman and Jamison argue that music at protests can ‘create a collective identity and a sense of movement in an emotional and... physical sense.’¹¹ The band’s members, clearly supporters of the peace movement, were involved in a wide variety causes and organisations, and their presence at demonstrations helped to create a sense of solidarity between movements, and a feeling of being part of something larger. Early members met at Lifespan, a co-operative commune which featured in the *Alternatives in Sheffield* directory put together by a small, ‘ad hoc’ group of activists from various movements such as the Campaign for Homeless and Rootless and the Women’s Film Co-op, for the purpose of providing information on Sheffield’s radical scene and highlighting gaps that needed to be filled.¹² The directory was in part facilitated by a group called Community Action, a volunteer organisation for students run between Sheffield City Polytechnic and Sheffield University. Indeed *Alternatives* specifically catered for ‘those newly arriving in the city,’ students or otherwise, such as those heeding Blunkett’s call for ‘like-minded’ people.¹³ One of the authors, Jill Angood, fits that description herself, though she had come to the city in 1975 having successfully applied for a job as a youth worker advertised by Sheffield City Council in *Spare Rib*.¹⁴ Angood was a feminist, lived at the Lifespan commune for six years, was

⁹ Celebrated Sheffield Street Band Facebook Group Photos, <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=o.298649060158251&type=3> (accessed, 24th April 2015).

¹⁰ McKay, ‘Soundtrack to the insurrection,’ 25.

¹¹ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilising Traditions in the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge, 1998), 35.

¹² SA, MD7966/2/5, Women’s Film Co-op, *Alternatives in Sheffield Directory*, 1970s.

¹³ *ibid*.

¹⁴ Interview with Jill Angood, 5th July 2013.

heavily involved in the peace movement and Women Against the Pit Closures, and became a member of Sheffield Socialist Choir in 1988.¹⁵ Despite her involvement in movements, Angood was hesitant to describe herself as ‘an activist’ preferring the labels ‘libertarian’ and ‘alternative.’¹⁶ This was a theme present in the directory as a whole, and one that was a signifier for wider tensions within Sheffield’s activist milieu.

Indeed, most of the organisations advertised were new social movements aimed at a more ‘radical’ than ‘traditional’ political milieu, with few connections to the labour movement and socialism. Organisations aimed at working class people specifically included a Claimants’ Union and a Workers’ Educational Group, but the two trade unions mentioned were public sector; NALGO and Rank and File, a sub-group within the National Teachers’ Union. Feminists also made up a strong readership as many of the letters coming in complained of the inclusion of anti-abortion or anti-choice groups Society for the Protection of Unborn Children and LIFE. Pat Stubbs, a supporter of Heeley Labour Party, and occasional trombonist in the Celebrated Sheffield Street Band, wrote in to complain that political groups; such as the Communist Party, the Socialist Workers’ Party, and the International Marxist Group, had been removed from an earlier draft. These choices were justified by a Christian influence on the directory and an ‘insistence largely of one person that if organisations such as the Socialist Workers’ Party and the Communist Party went in, so should the National Front.’¹⁷ Whilst these were not the views of the collective as a whole, the directory claimed to question ‘what ‘alternatives’ really do help to make the world a better and happier place.’¹⁸ This questioning focused more on lifestyle politics and the ‘personal is political’ than the structural challenges faced by the labour movement. These tensions were

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ SA, MD7966/2/5, Women’s Film Co-op, *Alternatives in Sheffield Directory*, 1970s.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

present in the CSSB and the Socialist Choir as well, as member Alun Griffiths remembers. In a discussion over the repertoire for an event, Griffiths found himself quietly seething at ‘one of those dungarees,’ presumably a feminist, who argued that it was inappropriate for them to sing a miners’ song; in his opinion disrespecting the miners’ class struggle.¹⁹ Another band member Colin Grant worked at the Commonground Resources Centre and claimed that ‘it was hard to get a fair hearing as a white man’ at times.²⁰ There were tensions between activists over gender, ‘race,’ and class; tensions that affected how they operated in shared spaces and put forward rights-based demands. However, for many in this radical milieu, the ‘personal is political’ and so-called ‘life-style politics’ had to go hand in hand with a focus on collectivism and class politics. Sheffield’s peace, environmental and anti-apartheid movements had close connections with the labour movement, just as some of Sheffield’s feminists maintained similar links, and parts of the labour movement attempted to build an anti-racist coalition.

This chapter addresses how well these movements worked together and shared the same spaces by making use of local newspapers, local movement archival material, oral histories, and new archival material collected from oral history participants’ personal archives. Paired with the oral histories, these newly collected materials help reconstruct the detail of local movements and to tease out the personal connections often left out of national movement histories. Of course, like with any archive, the historian has to work with what has been deemed important enough to save – even more so when years’ worth of material might have been lost in a particularly zealous ‘sort out’. One development this chapter makes use of

¹⁹ Comment by Alun Griffiths on Celebrated Sheffield Street Band Facebook Group, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150614202507292&set=o.298649060158251&type=3&theater>, (accessed: 24th April 2015).

²⁰ Comment by Colin Grant on Celebrated Sheffield Street Band Facebook Group, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150614202507292&set=o.298649060158251&type=3&theater>, (accessed: 24th April 2015).

is activists sharing their memories and material on social media sites like Facebook. Cath Burke, self-labelled ‘archivist’ of the Celebrated Sheffield Street Band, created a Facebook group with Pete Stewart for material and memories of the band. A historian herself, Burke made sure to collect photographs and write diaries of when and where the CSSB performed throughout the 1980s. Uploading her content to Facebook has allowed others to chip in with their memories; sometimes corroborating events, sometimes contradicting them, and made these memories available to the wider public and researchers.²¹

Like any archive, and especially any personal archive, this resource is constrained by what Burke and others in the band have collected and what they choose to upload.

Facebook’s comment function adds another dimension to this archive, however, and band members can add their memories, squabble over dates, and provide commentary on and reasons for why they have chosen to share certain material. There is also an awareness that they are creating a source and of the practices of history. When called out on his use of the term ‘dungarees’ to describe a feminist, Griffiths apologized but wrote; ‘this is oral history you know, have to remember it just like it was.’²² Burke, ever the historian, wrote back that ‘memory and oral history... is as unreliable as the next piece of evidence.’²³

This crowd sourcing of information is invaluable to the contemporary historian, but it does throw up some methodological questions. Does one treat these like unstructured oral histories where people contribute memories off the top of their head, complete with misrememberings and exaggerations? Are they informal witness seminars, with the questions

²¹ There is an ethical concern about using material from social media as one cannot be sure if participants realise how public material is. In this case, permission to use the site was received from co-creator Pete Stewart.

²² Comment by Alun Griffiths on Celebrated Sheffield Street Band Facebook Group, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150614202507292&set=o.298649060158251&type=3&theater>, (accessed: 24th April 2015).

²³ Comment by Cath Burke on Celebrated Sheffield Street Band Facebook Group, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150614202507292&set=o.298649060158251&type=3&theater>, (accessed: 24th April 2015).

and topics of discussion set by the participants themselves? Or are they, as composed and written comments that can be edited, deleted, and even responded too, more like archive notes shared around in order to be verified? They are an important resource, but they also have their limitations. Ravinder Kaur has recently highlighted the impermanence of online archives, while Elise Chenier questions the ethics of digitising material previously stored, and assigned copyright, offline.²⁴ Furthermore unlike oral history, the researcher has no role in the creation of such sources and so cannot ask a question to encourage a participant to expand or clarify a point. As seen with Griffiths and Burke's exchange, the group might police an individual's language choices; choices that can be analysed to assess, in this case, the relationships between different activists and movements. That policing, however, can also indicate similar tensions within the group. As Burke notes, collections of memories can be unreliable, but when paired with other sources they can also add more detail and more perspectives than a traditional archive, allowing insight into how activists shared political spaces and prioritised different campaigns and causes.

Charles Tilly suggests that social movements make collective 'claims that, if realized, would conflict with someone else's interests.'²⁵ This is particularly likely when new social movements based on 'post-materialist' values such as self-actualisation, quality of life, and moral values, develop in areas dominated by a labour movement usually more concerned with satisfying material needs.²⁶ Yet this does not rule out collaboration completely as movements can have shared aims or appeal to the wider effects of inaction to gain more support for their aims. Tilly's notion of polity sets up the idea that within a local political

²⁴ Ravinder Kaur, 'Writing History in a Paperless World: Archives of the Future,' *History Workshop Journal*, 79 (2015), 245; Elise Chenier, 'Privacy Anxieties: Ethics versus Activism in Archiving Lesbian Oral History Online,' *Radical History Review*, 122 (2015), 130.

²⁵ Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768 – 2004*, (2004), 3.

²⁶ Nick Crossley, *Making Sense of Social Movements*, (Buckingham, 2002), 10; Anthony Messina, 'Postwar Protest Movements in Britain: A Challenge to Parties', *The Review of Politics*, 49:3 (1987), 410; Frank Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism: The Social Bases of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament*, (Manchester, 1968), 34.

setting there are well-established movements on the inside who work well with each other and local government, and movements on the outside who do not.²⁷ Tilly also suggests that the dynamics of the polity can change, as those on the outside build alliances and challenge the centre. This model is useful when explaining Sheffield's activism and the interactions between movements and local government. Social movement theory on networks can shed further light on the interactions between movements. Tilly's definition of an organisation prioritises 'networks' – people who are linked by interpersonal bonds – and 'categories' – broad social identities, such as ethnicity, religion, gender, or locality. For Tilly an organisation only emerges if it 'comprises both a category and a network.'²⁸ Della Porta reiterates the importance of networks, arguing that social networks within small communities can often become the most important reference group for individual activists rather than the formal or national movement.²⁹ Melucci suggests that for new social movements to operate there has to be a 'certain degree of emotional investment... which enables individuals to feel themselves part of a common unity' encouraging activity.³⁰ The 'social capital' gained from participating in a movement; including feelings of trust, tolerance and reciprocity, can encourage further activism within a movement and acts of solidarity with activists from other movements.³¹ Expanding on Tilly and Melucci, Della Porta suggests that although lots of factors can affect how one relates to a social issue, and a shared class, nationality, or gender can help build recognition and a sense of identity, 'it is through the channels of communication and exchange... that the mobilisation of resources and the emergence of

²⁷ Steven M. Buechler, *Understanding Social Movements: Theories from the Classical Era to the Present*, (London, 2011), 128-9.

²⁸ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilisation to Revolution*, (Random House: New York, 1978), 63.

²⁹ Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, (Malden, Oxford, 2006), 117-20.

³⁰ Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*, (Cambridge, New York, 1996), 71.

³¹ Robert Putnam, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital,' *Journal of Democracy*, 6: 1 (1995), 65-78.

collective actors become possible.³² The personal contacts activists have with other activists are ‘instrumental in linking organisations to each other,’ and interactions between activists in different movements and activists having affiliations to multiple movements are not unusual occurrences.³³

Tilly’s notion of polity and how interpersonal networks play a part in forming it can shed some light on how and why different organisations group together. By identifying networks and categories in a local polity we can begin to understand the rules of that polity and why those left on the periphery are there. Sheffield’s politics in the 1970s and 1980s was complex, inchoate, rich and diverse; a mix of new and old social movements where ‘post-material’ problems of peace and human rights mobilised large followings alongside movements organised around economic concerns like the 1984-85 Miners’ Strike. Sheffield’s polity was dominated by the labour movement, but also contained a vibrant radical milieu of new social movements. Generally the labour movement was supportive of new social movements, especially as influential members such as David Blunkett were looking towards the fusion of class and identity politics in a ‘common project’ promoted by the new urban left and theorists like Stuart Hall.³⁴ However, not all of these new social movements were received with equal enthusiasm and support. This chapter uses four movements; peace, environmentalism, anti-apartheid and anti-racism to explore how and why the common project of the new urban left broke down at a local level.

This chapter looks at Sheffield’s local peace and environmental movements as peace and environmentalism have surface-level similarities. Both are archetypal new social

³² Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 121.

³³ Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 128.

³⁴ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford, New York, 2002), 463-4, Stuart Hall, *Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left: The Hard Road to Renewal*, (London, New York, 1988), 71.

movements; focused on solving post-material problems, made up of non-hierarchical grassroots organisations that use direct action, and forged in the 'long sixties', albeit at either end; the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament developing in 1958 and Friends of the Earth forming in 1971.³⁵ Adam Lent categorises environmentalism and the revival of CND in the 1980s as the second part of a 'long explosion' of movement activism in post-war Britain.³⁶ Yet the peace movement received much greater support within Sheffield's politics than environmentalism. In part, this was because of Labour Party support for the anti-nuclear campaign and local authority-organised Nuclear Free Zones making sure that peace was on the agenda, but it was also because the peace movement had a much longer tradition in Sheffield. It was a movement attached to the initial formations of the New Left which fused the protest characteristics of CND with established socialist traditions, and one which older, influential members of the labour movement, such as Blanche Flannery, had been involved in for decades.³⁷ In contrast, environmentalism was much more a movement of young professionals which focussed on developing expertise and finding solutions rather than building coalitions with the labour movement.

Likewise, at a first glance left-wing support of the anti-apartheid movement and anti-racist and anti-fascist movements seem to have a principled anti-racism in common. However, Sheffield's political milieu was much more effective at mobilising against apartheid than against racism and listening to the demands of African-Caribbean and Asian organisations. Again, the anti-apartheid movement had a long tradition of broad-based activism which, like CND, reached back to the 1950s. The early anti-apartheid movement had roots in the Movement for Colonial Freedom, which had some Labour Party support. In

³⁵ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Social and Cultural Transformation in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, 1958-74*, (Oxford, 1999).

³⁶ Adam Lent, *British Social Movements since 1945: Sex, Colour, Peace and Power*, (Basingstoke, 2001), 97.

³⁷ Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies*, (Durham, London, 1997), 77.

contrast, anti-racism developed in the 1970s, and whilst both anti-apartheid and white support of anti-racism can be viewed as movements on behalf of others, the growth in Black political consciousness in the 1970s gave anti-racism a different dynamic.³⁸ Sheffield's politics was much more adept at promoting racial equality abroad than it was at home. This chapter will trace the intersections and boundaries of these four movements to show how Sheffield's polity or politics functioned, and how the local standing of each movement had a significance that went beyond the national organisation. Whilst there was a crossover of personnel, and mutual support from differing organisations, each movement and organisation within each movement had their own priorities. Often activists could not see beyond their own demands, and so, at a local level, the fusion of old and new social movements promoted by the new urban left often broke down.

Peace

Sheffield had a thriving peace movement in the 1980s, with the membership of Sheffield and Rotherham CND reportedly reaching 1,500.³⁹ CND were just one of over thirty five organisations in the city which represented different concerns within the peace and anti-nuclear movement. Among others, these included student groups such as Sheffield City Polytechnic Anti Nuclear Campaign and Sheffield University Disarmament Society; religious groups like the Catholic organisation Justice and Peace and the Quaker group Hartshead Friends Peace Committee whose secretary Jessie Baston was also instrumental in Sheffield's branch of War on Want; and women's groups like Women in Sheffield CND and the Women's Peace Group, whose secretary Leslie Boulton used photography as a tactic against

³⁸ 'Black' is used here, reflecting the word's contemporary usage as a political term and shared identity covering not just those of African descent, but all non-white people experiencing racial oppression.

³⁹ Interview with Andy D'Agorne, 19th May 2013.

police brutality during the Miners' Strike.⁴⁰ Other notable groups include NALGO against Nukes, Sheffield Peace Films Group, the Peace Tax Campaign, Medical Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons (which had around 90 members), and local organisations across the city such as Broomhall Anti-Nuclear Group, Heeley CND and Totley Peace Group.⁴¹ As James Hinton suggests, many of the local groups that emerged in the 1980s were 'initially resistant to accepting the CND identity,' preferring to focus on their local campaigns.⁴² However, many saw the need for coordination and affiliated to the Peace Liaison Committee, later the Sheffield Peace Forum, who kept track of local meetings, ran an information caravan on the Moor and later a Peace Shop where they sold goods and printed leaflets. Speaking of the local branches of CND, Andy D'Agorne, a member of Sheffield CND, remembered that many of them used Dan Plesh's *Disarmament Action Manual* to help them organise. D'Agorne describes the manual as a 'very comprehensive guide' that encouraged activists to emulate an American-style of community and neighbourhood activism inspired by Saul Alinsky.⁴³ D'Agorne suggests it encouraged people to work with their local churches and trade unions on peace issues, and though they did not 'slavishly follow' the guide, it certainly inspired some activists to build links with each other and the labour movement. From torch-lit vigils outside the Town Hall and 'die-ins' in the Peace Gardens, through small-scale civil disobedience at Molesworth where each activist cut one piece of wire, to Sheffield's Peace Week, which introduced the wider public to the issues through 'activities that were more festivities,' Sheffield's peace and anti-nuclear movement was vibrant and connected to the city's wider politics.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Sheffield Local Studies Library, M2849S, *Sheffield Tomorrow?* Newsletter of the Peace Liaison Committee, Date Unknown.

⁴¹ Sheffield Local Studies Library, M2849S, *Sheffield Tomorrow?* Newsletter of the Peace Liaison Committee, Date Unknown; *The Sheffield Star*, 'CND challenge to Mrs Thatcher', 24th November 1984, 5.

⁴² James Hinton, *Protests and Visions: Peace Politics in 20th Century Britain*, (London, 2010), 184.

⁴³ Interview with Andy D'Agorne, 19th May 2013.

⁴⁴ Interview with Andy D'Agorne, 19th May 2013; *The Sheffield Star*, '200 join protest as Cruise arrive,' 15th November 1983; *The Sheffield Star*, "'Die -in' demo,' 13th September 1982, 3.

The wide range of organisations in Sheffield reflected the rise in popularity of peace issues in Britain generally. The early 1980s saw a resurgence in support for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and wider peace movement partly due to the Thatcher government's decision to allow American Cruise missiles to be based on British soil, but also through the work of a broad coalition of activists drawing attention to the issue. In 1979 just six people attended a vigil in Sheffield protesting the Thatcher government's announcement that they would host American missiles, but by 1982 the numbers attending demonstrations had grown to thousands.⁴⁵ In Sheffield, Barry Hine's 1984 film *Threads* brought the effects of a nuclear attack terrifyingly close to home. Six hundred local people featured in the film as survivors of a nuclear attack, but the brutal depiction of a post-nuclear world shocked the city's residents.⁴⁶ Carol Dawes, a shop manager from Wincobank, claimed that her reaction to a four-minute warning siren would be to get "blind drunk and wait for it."⁴⁷ Local government officer, Leslie Hodgkinson said that if his wife suffered injuries like that seen in the film, he would "finish her off."⁴⁸ Another viewer, Diane Naylor, said; "I didn't take much notice of CND, didn't understand a lot of it and turned a blind eye. I don't think I will as much now."⁴⁹ Naylor was evidently not the only one as in the week following the screening, the Sheffield branch of Labour CND gained nineteen members.⁵⁰ Residents of Sheffield were not the only people disturbed by *Threads*. Mary Whitehouse took umbrage with the film, demanding to know whether the 'fallout from terror and horror from the film might be just as destructive [as the nuclear threat] to people's hopes and feelings about the future.'⁵¹

⁴⁵ SLSL, MP2843S, Sheffield Anti-Nuclear Campaign and CND: A Nuclear-free Europe Silent Torchlight Procession, Thursday, 16th December 1982; *The Sheffield Star*, 'Sheffield as a Peace City,' 10th April 1982, 1; *The Sheffield Star*, 'Thousands join peace demo,' 1st April 1983, 1.

⁴⁶ *The Sheffield Star*, 'A flash and Sheffield was no more...' 21st September 1984, 12.

⁴⁷ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Threads: What Sheffield thinks of TV bomb horror,' 24th September 1984, 3.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Nuclear film boosts support,' 3rd October 1984, 5.

⁵¹ Daniel Cordle, "That's going to happen to us. It is': *Threads* and the Imagination of Nuclear Disaster on 1980s Television,' *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 10:1 (2013), 77.

By 1984, 23 percent of people surveyed in Britain supported unilateral nuclear disarmament, and CND had 90,000 national members, up from 9,000 in 1979, and a quarter of a million in its local groups.⁵² Furthermore, the support base had shifted from the middle class to the working class; of the 23 percent who supported unilateral disarmament, 37 percent were unskilled workers, and 30 percent were middle class.⁵³ The growth in working class support was perhaps a motivator for Sheffield City Council's support of the peace movement. Hinton argues that nuclear issues and 'Protect and Survive,' the Government's dismal civil defence plan in response to people's fears of nuclear attack, were some of the main areas where the Labour Party could attack the Government and feel like they were winning.⁵⁴ Many local authorities set up nuclear free zones in the 1980s and Sheffield City Council was one of the earliest. The Sheffield City Council minutes from October 1980 show the beginnings of Sheffield's nuclear free zone. They stated that the Council was 'concerned with the inherent danger of nuclear material' and was opposed to the construction of any nuclear power station or nuclear waste processing plant within South Yorkshire.⁵⁵ They opposed the building of a nuclear reactor at Sizewell, and agreed with the leader of South Yorkshire County Council Ron Ironmonger's statement that "We are sitting on one of the most successful coalfields in the country, and at a time when the Coal Board is talking about closing pits, we should not be committing ourselves to this unsafe and expensive alternative."⁵⁶ Nuclear power was seen as a threat to Sheffield and South Yorkshire's mining industry; a material threat that would affect many workers in the county, especially those who made up Sheffield's working class constituency of Labour voters. By February 1981 the

⁵² Messina, 'Post-war Protest Movements in Britain,' 412; Kate Hudson, *CND Now More Than Ever: The Story of a Peace Movement*, (London, 2005), 141; Hinton, *Protests and Visions*, 182; Lent, *British Social Movements Since 1945*, 126.

⁵³ Messina, 'Post-war Protest Movements in Britain,' 412.

⁵⁴ Hinton, *Protests and Visions*, 190.

⁵⁵ SA, CA-POL/13/126, Policy Committee, 21st October 1980.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

Council extended its opposition to nuclear weapons; calling on Government to ‘close all nuclear bases on British soil and in British waters and to refuse to base British defence strategy on nuclear weapons.’⁵⁷ This was also couched in economic terms; the Council ‘deplore[d] the Government’s policy of increasing military spending at the expense of... other... services.’⁵⁸ But the fear of nuclear war was expressed as well and the Council argued that having weapons ‘increase[d] the probability of nuclear war.’⁵⁹

Sheffield’s nuclear free zone was a statement of support to the peace movement and its Nuclear Free Zone Working Party translated that support into practical help. In 1983, Sheffield City Council hired Jim Coleman, secretary of Sheffield CND and a member of the Communist Party, to act as Sheffield’s Nuclear Free Zones Officer.⁶⁰ Coleman’s job was to organise conferences and exhibitions, promote peace studies in Sheffield’s schools, and facilitate anti-nuclear activities. Conservative councillors responded to his appointment incredulously; ‘We do not agree with the post in the first place, but if you are going to have a peace officer, a Communist is the last person you want.’⁶¹ Coleman, however, was no stranger to controversy. His appointment as secretary of Sheffield CND in 1981 had been heavily criticised as factionalism. It was described as both an ‘expression of the Communist Party’s desire for power within the CND,’ and as an attempt by others to ‘halt [the] domination’ of the organisation by the International Marxist Group.⁶² If the Conservatives had taken up Coleman’s suggestion to ‘look at my record in the peace movement, they can’t question my ability to do my job,’ they would have seen that he had survived worse criticism

⁵⁷ SA, CAPOL/13/243, Policy Committee, 24th February 1981.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Peace man fires back at critics,’ 8th April 1983, 1.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² SA, X588, 2012/106, Sheffield Peace Forum – Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1981-1983, *South Yorkshire Bulletin for Nuclear Disarmament*, February 1981, No.1.

before.⁶³ Accusations aside, Hinton suggests that nuclear free zones helped encourage local
CND groups to work with strong Labour groups, combining the energy of the peace and
labour movements.⁶⁴ In the case of Sheffield they helped to cement relationships that were
already there. Members of the labour movement, such as Martin and Blanche Flannery, had
been long-time supporters of CND and the peace movement. Indeed, Martin Flannery was the
first Vice-Chair of Sheffield CND.⁶⁵ From the early 1980s, Sheffield Trades Council,
acknowledging the ‘worsening of East – West relations,’ argued for a move to ‘World
Disarmament,’ and mentioned working with CND.⁶⁶ The 1983-84 Trades Council yearbook
called for ‘peaceful solutions to conflicts throughout the world [and] a world free of all
nuclear weapons.’⁶⁷ In April 1983, the Trades Council and District Labour Party chose the
CND slogan ‘Jobs and Services, Not Bombs and Missiles’ to protest Margaret Thatcher’s
invitation to the Cutler’s Feast; a celebration of Sheffield’s industry organised by a trade
guild of metalworkers.⁶⁸ That they chose to use Thatcher’s ‘unwelcoming’ to link labour
issues to peace in a slogan used by CND (see Figure 4.1) rather than a generic chant was
significant. Sheffield was a labour city, but also a peace city. In November 1983, Sheffield’s
Labour group adjourned its weekly meeting at the Town Hall for twenty minutes so that
members could take part in a torch-lit vigil protesting the arrival of Cruise missiles.⁶⁹ And in
February 1986, Sheffield City Council granted paid leave for any Council worker who went
to demonstrate at Molesworth.⁷⁰ Andy D’Agorne remembers there being a ‘feeling in the

⁶³ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Peace man fires back at critics,’ 8th April 1983, 1.

⁶⁴ Hinton, *Protests and Visions*, 189-190.

⁶⁵ SA, X588, 2012/106, Sheffield Peace Forum – Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Letter between Andy D’Agorne and Sheffield MPs re. Unilateral Nuclear Disarmament, March 1989.

⁶⁶ SA, AC.2002-130, Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1980-81 and 1981-82.

⁶⁷ SA, AC.2002-130, Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1983-84.

⁶⁸ SLSL, MP3722M, Sheffield CND AGM Minutes, April 1983.

⁶⁹ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘200 join protest as Cruise arrive,’ 15th November 1983.

⁷⁰ Andy D’Agorne Archive, Sheffield NALGO, *Root and Branch*, February 1986.

city' when it came to peace activism.⁷¹ This feeling was a sense of security and solidarity that came with the peace movement's inclusion in Sheffield's labour-dominated politics.

The development of the Sheffield Peace Shop illustrates the peace movement's attempts to define the political milieu and the changing nature of the movement's role in the city's politics. The Peace Shop was run by the Peace Liaison Committee; a committee of activists from different peace-related organisations. They sold goods to raise money for the movement, such as postcards – one year they even sold Glastonbury tickets – and they had a resources room where they printed posters for other organisations; including long-term contracts with Friends of the Earth and CND.⁷² Affiliated groups were allowed to display notice boards in the shop as long the information provided was 'relevant' to peace and did not advocate violence.⁷³ In this way the committee saw the Peace Shop as a centre for left-wing issues in the city, and as such were able to police which groups and issues were seen as 'relevant' and which were not. This caused some debate when 'friction' arose over the front cover of the Winter 1984/85 issue of *The Sheffield Anarchist* (see Figure 4.2). The cover depicted an injured Norman Tebbit in reference to the bombing of the Grand Hotel in Brighton during the 1984 Conservative Party Conference, and suggested that he had more 'agony' to face. It was deemed too violent for display in the Peace Shop, and Jim Coleman proposed that all Anarchist material be removed from the shop.⁷⁴ This led to a debate where an 'Unnamed Comrade' suggested all non-Peace material including 'socialism, feminism,

⁷¹ Interview with Andy D'Agorne, 19th May 2013.

⁷² SA, X588, 2012/106, Sheffield Peace Forum Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Minutes of Peace Shop Meeting, 18th December 1987.

⁷³ SA, X588, 2012/106, Sheffield Peace Forum Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Minutes of the Sheffield Peace Liaison Committee AGM, 5th February 1985.

⁷⁴ SA, X588, 2012/10, Sheffield Peace Forum Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Minutes of the Sheffield Peace Liaison Committee AGM, 5th February 1985.

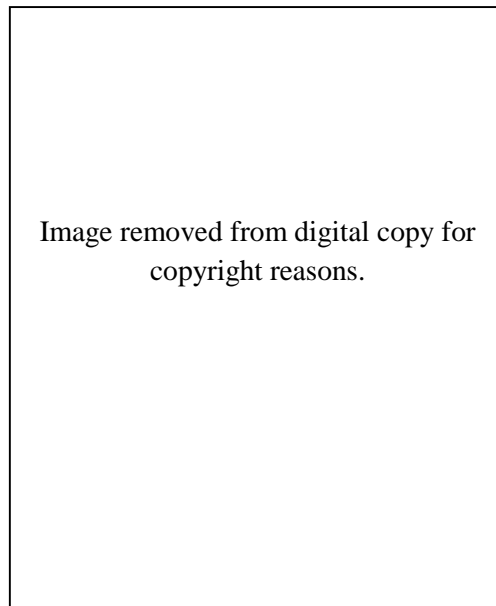


Figure 4.1: CND, 'Jobs and Services, Not Bombs and Missiles', 1982.⁷⁵

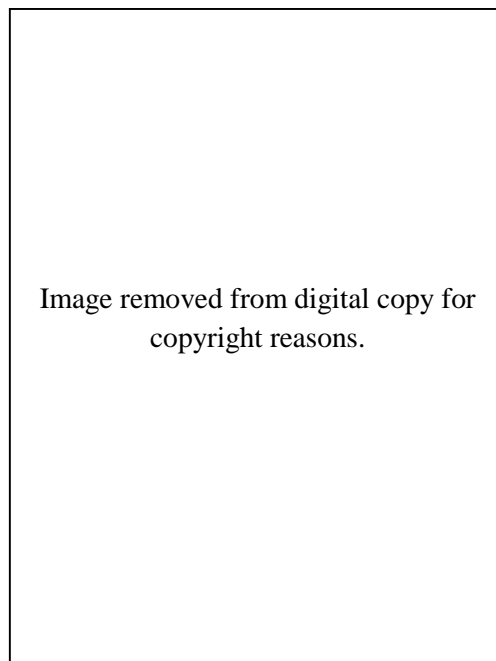


Figure 4.2: The Sheffield Anarchist, 3:7, Winter 1984/85.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ SLSL, MP2844S, CND, 'Jobs and Services, Not Bombs and Missiles,' Leaflet, 1982. Reproduced here with permission from Sheffield Archives.

⁷⁶ SA, X588, 2012/106, Sheffield Peace Forum Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Minutes of the Sheffield Peace Liaison Committee AGM, 5th February 1985. Reproduced here with permission from Sheffield Archives.

animal rights, racism etc' be removed as well. It was decided that just the Anarchist material be removed, and two days later it was voted twenty-one to four that the Sheffield Anarchists should withdraw their membership from the Peace Liaison Committee.⁷⁷ Sheffield's Anarchists were removed from the peace movement's political milieu.

There were other fluctuations of which movements and issues should be part of this left-wing grouping. One meeting mentioned SADACCA and called for more information on an event they were running called 'SOS Racisme,' suggesting that the Peace Liaison Committee was interested in joining forces with if not actually involved in black and minority ethnic politics or anti-racism.⁷⁸ Denise Craghill, Andy D'Agorne's partner and fellow member of Sheffield CND, wrote to the Peace Liaison Committee expressing her disappointment that they had refused to display a poster for a Fight the Alton Bill abortion rights fundraising event. Craghill questioned whether Fight the Alton Bill was unrelated to peace; 'surely 'peace' is at least partly about a freedom from fear?' but mainly she questioned the Peace Liaison Committee's policing of groups.⁷⁹ Craghill wrote 'this seems to me a particularly short-sighted and insular attitude to take – surely in order to sustain our protest we need to support and seek support from as many like-minded groups as possible?'⁸⁰ Drawing the comparison that the Sheffield Coordinated Centre Against Unemployment and SADACCA did not refuse to display their posters, Craghill asked 'where would we be without support from other groups?'⁸¹ From March 1987, the Peace Liaison Committee decided, after prompting by Councillor Roger Barton (chairman of the Nuclear Free Zones

⁷⁷ SA, X588, 2012/106, Sheffield Peace Forum Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Minutes of the Sheffield Peace Liaison Committee Meeting, 7th February 1985.

⁷⁸ SA, X588, 2012/106, Sheffield Peace Forum Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Meeting 23rd September, re. UN International Year of Peace, Sheffield Town Hall.

⁷⁹ SA, X588, 2012/106, Sheffield Peace Forum Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Letter from Denise Craghill, 2nd January 1987.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid.*

Working Party), that ‘widening the scope and usage of the Shop to encompass other groups e.g. Anti-Apartheid Movement, War on Want, Friends of the Earth would be a good idea,’ and they shared profits from a craft fair between CND, Anti-Apartheid and War on Want.⁸² But their idea of ‘relevant’ groups was still limited to those they were already working with and did not include identity politics.

The Peace Shop’s reluctance to widen their circle despite prompting may have contributed to their demise. In April 1987, David Blunkett wrote to notify them of Sheffield City Council’s decision to alter their funding stream; replacing their direct payment of the Shop’s rates with a grant. Whilst Blunkett queried why there would be any objection to this as it gave the Shop and Peace Liaison Committee ‘greater flexibility,’ he also made it clear that he thought the Shop was underperforming and the money would be better spent elsewhere; ‘I had hoped that the Peace Movement might be able to make a much more public contribution to reaching the undecided on the issue of nuclear weapons than has so far been the case.’⁸³ The Peace Shop argued that ‘the peace movement in the city has been undertaking a lot of activities which David Blunkett may not be aware; many members of the peace movement worked very hard for the Labour Party during the election,’ but despite drawing Blunkett’s attention to this, the changes stood.⁸⁴ The Peace Shop only lasted one more year, closing in April 1988.⁸⁵ Its closure was attributed to a waning membership as well as financial difficulties, and Roger Barton claimed that ‘the shop hit trouble when ... other issues such as the Health Service and South Africa, were coming to the fore.’⁸⁶ Despite the

⁸² SA, X588, 2012/106, Sheffield Peace Forum Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Minutes of Peace Shop Meeting, 23rd March 1987; Poster for Craft Fair.

⁸³ SA, X588, 2012/106, Sheffield Peace Forum Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Letter from David Blunkett, 14th July 1987; Letter from David Blunkett, 15th May 1987.

⁸⁴ SA, X588, 2012/106, Sheffield Peace Forum Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Minutes of Sheffield Peace Forum, 2nd June 1987.

⁸⁵ SA, X588, 2012/106, Sheffield Peace Forum Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Press cuttings regarding closure of Peace Shop, 12th April 1988.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

importance of the peace movement to Sheffield's labour movement, its position in the city's politics was not as secure as other issues, and more efficiently run campaigns became more 'relevant' to the interests of the wider political milieu.

Environmentalism

One of the issues coming to the fore in the late 1980s was environmentalism. In the early 1980s environmentalism was connected to the peace movement through campaigns against nuclear energy. In 1979 the Anti-Nuclear Campaign was set up in reaction to the Thatcher government's proposals to construct ten pressurized water reactors.⁸⁷ The ANC was an umbrella group coordinating all anti-nuclear groups in Britain with the exception of Friends of the Earth nationally and moderate conservation societies.⁸⁸ Rüdig argues that the British left had failed to develop a strong interest in environmental questions as it 'remained preoccupied with traditional 'class' issues,' yet the anti-nuclear campaign was strongly supported by the National Union of Mineworkers which brought the debate into the labour movement.⁸⁹ This was due to the threat to the mining industry posed by nuclear energy, one which was perceived as a direct attack by a government 'partly motivated by a fear' of future miners' strikes.⁹⁰ In 1980, the ANC moved its headquarters to Sheffield where there were a 'larger number of office volunteers available' and they could concentrate on relations with trade unions.⁹¹ There they made contact with other organisations working on similar and related campaigns such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and CND, and joined the Peace Liaison Committee where they worked with the aforementioned groups and others, building

⁸⁷ Christopher Rootes (ed.), *Environmental Protest in Western Europe*, (Oxford, New York, 2007), 21.

⁸⁸ Wolfgang Rüdig, 'Maintaining a Low Profile: The Anti-Nuclear Movement and the British State', in Helena Flam (eds.), *States and Anti-Nuclear Movements*, (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 1994), 83.

⁸⁹ Rüdig, 'Maintaining a Low Profile,' 81.

⁹⁰ Rüdig, 'Maintaining a Low Profile,' 82.

⁹¹ SA, X213/3/1, Anti- Nuclear Campaign: Campaign Report, September 1981.

‘very cordial’ relationships.⁹² One of the ANC’s new volunteers Mike Wild went on to work with Heeley City Farm and founded the Sheffield City Wildlife Group which became the Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust.⁹³

With the procurement of North Sea gas, the anti-nuclear energy campaign stagnated, and many activists turned their focus towards peace movements.⁹⁴ Rootes argues that this ‘deprived’ the British environmental movement of ‘the issue that in continental Europe was the chief stimulus to radical environmentalism.’⁹⁵ The consequence of this was that the peace movement ‘largely eclipsed’ the environmental movement in the early 1980s and, ‘despite its lack of direct interest in the environment, probably attracted many who might otherwise have been drawn to environmental protest.’⁹⁶ There is evidence of this in Sheffield’s branch of Friends of the Earth, as the 1981-1982 annual report suggested that ‘the relevance of the whole nuclear issue seems likely to have affected us.’⁹⁷ Membership almost halved between 1981 and 1983 (see Table 4.1), and by 1984 the group appeared in *The Sheffield Star* ‘appealing for more members in a bid to remain an active campaigning group’ having seen their numbers fall to a ‘hardcore of regulars.’⁹⁸ Despite, or perhaps because of, connections to the peace movement, Sheffield environmentalist organisations were struggling to expand. However, by the late 1980s, the peace movement was in decline and environmental issues had become ‘matters of widespread public concern.’⁹⁹ This ‘Green surge’ was reflected in the increased membership of environmental organisations; Greenpeace’s supporters increased from 150,000 to 281,000 between 1988 and 1989, and in the 1989 elections to the European

⁹² SA, X213/3/3, Anti- Nuclear Campaign: Campaign Report, September 1982.

⁹³ SA, X213/3/3, Anti- Nuclear Campaign: Campaign Report, September 1982; Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust, <http://www.wildsheffield.com/who-we-are/history#> (accessed: 24th April 2015), Interview with Jude Warrender, 14th June 2013.

⁹⁴ Rüdig, ‘Maintaining a Low Profile,’ 85.

⁹⁵ Rootes (ed.), *Environmental Protest in Western Europe*, 22.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Jude Warrender Archive, Sheffield Friends of the Earth Annual Report, 1981-1982.

⁹⁸ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Friends in Need of Members’, 24th February 1984, 9.

⁹⁹ Rootes (ed.), *Environmental Protest in Western Europe*, 22.

Parliament the Green Party scored almost 15 percent of the vote.¹⁰⁰ Friends of the Earth's national membership rose from 18,000 to 35,000 between 1981 and 1988, and then to 125,000 by 1989.¹⁰¹ This was reflected locally as well as the Sheffield branch's membership peaked at 200 in 1990, and was, according to branch secretary Jude Warrender, mostly made up of young professionals (see Table 4.1).¹⁰²

Sheffield's peace and environmental movements generally followed the national pattern and there is evidence that some peace activists widened their focus to include environmental concerns towards the end of the 1980s. Andy D'Agorne, member of Sheffield CND, joined the Green Party in 1990, and one of the Peace Shop's most committed volunteers, Nicole Perkins (also known as Gandalf), announced in December 1987 that she would be spending less time at the Shop as Friends of the Earth had offered her a job.¹⁰³ Despite this, there does not seem to have been a rivalry between the organisations, and their aims were not incompatible. When Friends of the Earth secretary Jude Warrender heard that the Peace Shop was in danger of closing, she wrote to D'Agorne to say that though they found it 'difficult, if not impossible, to be active members... we are concerned to see a future presence for the Peace Shop, and will try to do our best to support and preserve it.'¹⁰⁴ Regardless of fluctuating membership levels, Sheffield Friends of the Earth remained active. One of the organisations main projects was collecting and recycling waste, and earning money from it. Waste and recycling was one of Jude Warrender's main interests. Warrender had joined Sheffield FoE in 1974 during their Waste Week. Sheffield City Council had

¹⁰⁰ Rootes (ed.), *Environmental Protest in Western Europe*, 48.

¹⁰¹ Neil Carter, *The Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*, (Cambridge, 2001), 133; Rootes (ed.), *Environmental Protest in Western Europe*, 48.

¹⁰² Interview with Jude Warrender, 14th June 2013.

¹⁰³ SA, X588, 2012/106, Sheffield Peace Forum Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Minutes of Peace Shop Meeting, 18 December 1987.

¹⁰⁴ SA, X588, 2012/106, Sheffield Peace Forum Minutes and Correspondence etc. 1984-1989, Letter from Jude Warrender to Andy D'Agorne, 10th December 1987.

Year	Membership of Sheffield Friends of the Earth
1980-1981	92
1981-1982	Not recorded
1982-1983	50
1983-1984	Not recorded
1984-1985	Not recorded
1985-1986	Not recorded
1986-1987	84
1987-1988	80
1988-1989	130
1989-1990	200
1990-1991	150

Table 4.1: Membership of Sheffield Friends of the Earth, 1980-91.¹⁰⁵

Financial year	Total weight (tonnes)	Total value (£)	Mean value per tonne (£)
1983-1984	19.26	192.60	10.00
1984-1985	24.87	497.25	19.99
1985-1986	35.20	967.00	27.47
1986-1987	37.34	544.35	14.58
1987-1988	57.98	775.32	13.37
1988-1989	57.85	990.00	17.11

Table 4.2: Sheffield Friends of the Earth Waste Paper Collection.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Jude Warrender Archive, Sheffield Friends of the Earth, Annual Reports, 1980-1991.

¹⁰⁶ Jude Warrender Archive, Sheffield Friends of the Earth Annual Report, 1988-89.

stopped collecting waste paper and so FoE stepped in.¹⁰⁷ Whilst they lobbied the Council to start collections again, they collected waste paper around the city, sometimes with the help of a horse and cart from Heeley City Farm, and made anywhere between £190 and £990 a year (see Table 4.2).¹⁰⁸ FoE's work with waste did not stop at paper. They also helped to set up one of the first community, as opposed to local government-led, glass bottle and jar collections, and created a separate charity called SCRAP through which money raised by recycling could be put back into the city's environmental groups.¹⁰⁹

Sheffield Friends of the Earth also tackled issues around energy, pollution, transport, wildlife, education and local planning. However, Jude Warrender's personal focus was on recycling and she was not at all involved in wider political issues at the time.¹¹⁰ Yet, Warrender was aware of the slogan 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' and believes it to have been a 'strong concept within the city.'¹¹¹ One of Sheffield City Council's policies that she found 'immensely valuable' was the protection of low bus fares. Warrender's father, a tram driver, had always said that "Public transport is the life blood of this city!" and Warrender herself described the deregulation of bus services in 1986 as the 'end of an era.'¹¹² Friends of the Earth addressed this by contributing to the national Buswatch campaign which recorded changes to bus services as a result of deregulation.¹¹³ Rarely did Friends of the Earth engage with Sheffield's other political movements, rather they brought environmental issues to the attention of other groups and to the general public through media and education work. They did not make links with trade unions in the city, though Warrender attributes this to a lack of time rather than a conscious decision. Jude Warrender knew David Blunkett

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Jude Warrender, 14th June 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Jude Warrender Archive, Sheffield Friends of the Earth Annual Report, 1986-1987, 1988-1988

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Jude Warrender, 14th June 2013.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Jude Warrender, 14th June 2013.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ Jude Warrender Archive, Sheffield Friends of the Earth Annual Report, 1986-1987.

personally through her work for information services at the Central Library. Warrender spoke both French and German and helped with town twinning arrangements and developing trade links within Europe. She remembers being ‘called over to David’s office to translate or interpret or make phone calls – usually when there was a cock up!’¹¹⁴ Despite this, when FoE engaged with the City Council it was through proper channels; they lobbied the Planning Department over building developments, and worked formally with the Recreation Department to establish a wildlife garden at the Botanical Gardens.¹¹⁵ The City Council began to recognise the importance of environmental issues outside of nuclear energy towards the end of the 1980s. In 1989, the national organisation of Friends of the Earth produced a Charter for Local Government and Sheffield City Council developed its own Charter for the Environment. Sheffield FoE were undecided as to whether this was an ‘image-building exercise’ but liaised with the Council to set up a citywide Environmental Forum ‘aimed toward influencing Council policy’ which they hoped would be ‘representative of environmental issues as well as environmental groups’ and address topics such as; ‘Wildlife and Conservation, Recycling, Pollution, Transport, Energy and Health and Consumer Issues.’¹¹⁶

While Sheffield Friends of the Earth was not as connected to the labour movement as other organisations in Sheffield, they did make connections with other groups. For a short period of time in 1983 they were based in the Commonground Resources Centre where they shared spaces and resources with other organisations. However, in 1984 they moved to the Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) building in Division Street, and this is where they made most of their connections to other organisations. They shared the CVS building with the

¹¹⁴ Interview with Jude Warrender, 14th June 2013.

¹¹⁵ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘How green is our valley,’ 17th May 1988, 4; Interview with Jude Warrender, 14th June 2013.

¹¹⁶ Jude Warrender Archive, Sheffield Friends of the Earth Annual Report, 1988-89.

Tenants' Federation which enabled them to share information about community recycling schemes with thousands of tenants. There Warrender became good friends with Isadora Aitken, who was involved in SADACCA. Aitken was an African-Caribbean woman who was 'extremely positive and jolly and collaborative,' had a 'valuable' habit of 'asking awkward questions.'¹¹⁷ Warrender remembers that SADACCA were 'up for integrating the African-Caribbean community in Sheffield' and so they were willing to work with other organisations on a variety of issues, including education about environmental issues. CVS also hosted the Sheffield Association for the Voluntary Teaching of English (SAVTE). Selima Imam worked for SAVTE and was also a 'huge keen environmentalist and Friends of the Earth member.'¹¹⁸ Through SAVTE, Imam put Warrender in touch with the Asian community in Sheffield and Asian women in particular. FoE also made links with refugee organisations in Sheffield. Warrender recalls that through the SCRAP charity, members of the Somali Community Association collected textiles to raise money to send to their families in Somalia. Warrender was proud of this project and when the national FoE organisation came to Sheffield looking to take publicity photographs, she took them to the Somali Community Association.

'I can remember Friends of the Earth being extremely disappointed that I'd chosen this as the photo opportunity for... this high profile project. They thought this was much bigger than a few people with a few bin bags but for me this was actually really significant that these people were... they were collecting textiles, selling them, and sending money back home. To me that was good enough.'¹¹⁹

Warrender was 'hurt by their disappointment' because for her the important thing was to 'demonstrate that any individual single action makes a difference and that's where it starts.'

In this way Warrender reflected the growing disparity between local FoE groups and the

¹¹⁷ Interview with Jude Warrender, 14th June 2013.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Interview with Jude Warrender, 14th June 2013.

‘increasingly centralised and professional’ national organisation.¹²⁰ Sheffield FoE publicised collections on behalf of ‘any group in the city’ who were raising money through waste, and it was through this rather than connections with the labour movement that Sheffield FoE made links within Sheffield’s wider activist milieu.

Friends of the Earth was not the only environmental organisation in Sheffield. As well as the aforementioned Heeley City Farm and Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust, there were also various conservation groups, of both wildlife and historic buildings; radical organisations such as Greenpeace and the Animal Liberation Front; and as of August 1988 a Vegan Society whose founder was a member of the Green Party.¹²¹ Whilst Friends of the Earth tended to work with ‘respectable and respected organisations,’ Jude Warrender thought ‘the more the merrier.’¹²² It is difficult to discern the number of activists in Sheffield Greenpeace, however one man, Joe Simpson, was particularly committed. In March 1985 he climbed up a 250-foot chimney at Tioxide UK’s chemical plant in Grimsby and remained up there for two days protesting pollution.¹²³ In June 1988, the same Joe Simpson staged an anti-nuclear demonstration at Hinkley Point in Somerset.¹²⁴ Despite largely being considered a ‘separate movement,’ Sheffield’s radical animal-welfare movement is worth a mention.¹²⁵ In 1983, the Human Action Group (membership of 50) staged sit-ins in three city centre shops that sold fur.¹²⁶ This was followed by a spate of attacks on furriers in 1984 which caused £8,000 worth of damage in a fortnight.¹²⁷ In 1985, the Sheffield Animal Rights Group dressed up as clowns to encourage people to boycott the Robert Brothers Famous Circus over

¹²⁰ Neil Carter, *The Politics of the Environment*, 137.

¹²¹ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘The Vegan variations’, 10th August 1988.

¹²² Interview with Jude Warrender, 14th June 2013.

¹²³ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Pollution protest – 250 feet up’, 6th March 1985, 3.

¹²⁴ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Hinkley Point protest demo’, 2nd June 1988, 8.

¹²⁵ Rootes (ed.), *Environmental Protest in Western Europe*, 45.

¹²⁶ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Fur shops hit by sit-in demo’, 15th November 1983, 5.

¹²⁷ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Furriers target in attack by animal rights groups,’ 8th May 1984, 5.

their use of animals, and between 1981 and 1985 Sheffield University's animal laboratories were attacked by Animal Liberation activists six times.¹²⁸ However, these more radical elements tended not to have the networks of more respectable organizations.

Anti-Apartheid

The anti-apartheid movement in Sheffield had a history of support from the labour movement which, in the 1980s, manifested itself as support from Sheffield City Council's Anti-Apartheid Working Party as well as the trade unions. Like the campaign against nuclear weapons, which had similar support from the labour movement, the anti-apartheid movement developed in the late 1950s, and experienced a wave of popular support in the 1980s.¹²⁹ Indeed, the movements emerged in the same context and networks, with the chairman of early anti-apartheid organisation the International Defence and Aid Fund, Canon John Collins, also acting as chairman of CND at the time.¹³⁰ The Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) developed out of the response in 1959 to a call from South African groups for an international boycott of South African products, and for government and public action against the apartheid regime. This was supported by South African exiles and British supporters drawn from trade unions, the Church, and the Labour, Liberal and Communist parties, some of whom had been involved in the Movement for Colonial Freedom in the mid-1950s.¹³¹ Rob Skinner argues that the AAM's framing of apartheid as a 'fundamentally *moral* issue,' enabled the movement to build a broad-based coalition.¹³² Despite this, Skinner also suggests that the AAM, like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, represented a 'more radical and

¹²⁸ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Animal libbers slate circus', 3rd April 1985, 9; *The Sheffield Star*, 'Animal libbers delight,' 25th April 1985, 11.

¹²⁹ Christabel Gurney, 'The 1970s: The Anti-Apartheid Movement's Difficult Decade,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35:2 (2009), 471.

¹³⁰ Håkan Thörn, 'The Meaning(s) of Solidarity: Narratives of Anti-Apartheid Activism,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35:2 (2009), 430.

¹³¹ Lent, *British Social Movements Since 1945*, 32.

¹³² Rob Skinner, 'The Moral Foundations of British Anti-Apartheid Activism, 1946–1960,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35:2 (2009), 401, 415.

rebellious political activism... [and] an emerging critique of Britain's imperial and colonial politics.¹³³ In this way, the AAM represented both the traditional and radical in that it framed its political arguments around morality, securing a range of popular support, but also implicitly encouraged a rather radical anti-imperialist critique and used protest methods, including civil disobedience, which connected it to other 'anti-establishment' new social movements.¹³⁴

From the 1950s to the 1980s, changes to British society altered how the AAM operated. Student radicalism in the 1960s, the shift to the left within sections of the British labour movement in the 1970s, the Thatcher government's restriction of trade union and local authority powers in the 1980s, the development of a political consciousness among young African-Caribbean and Asian people in Britain, and churches developing a political voice all altered who and how activists participated in the movement.¹³⁵ Adam Lent goes as far to suggest that large demonstrations in Britain in the late 1980s were 'as much a protest against' Margaret Thatcher, for domestic issues as well as her refusal to uphold a boycott and branding of Nelson Mandela as a terrorist, than against the apartheid regime itself.¹³⁶ For Lent, the AAM was firmly within the remit of left-wing causes. This and the movement's connection to trade union activism placed it within Sheffield's political milieu. Yet as Håkan Thörn suggests the AAM largely revolved around the individual action of partaking in boycotts and as such 'express[ed] a new relation between individual and collective political action.'¹³⁷ Thörn argues that 'solidarity' defined the 'collective identity' of the AAM; encouraging activists to act in solidarity with and on behalf of black South Africans by

¹³³ Skinner, 'The Moral Foundations of British Anti-Apartheid Activism,' 400, 401

¹³⁴Thörn, 'The Meaning(s) of Solidarity,' 431.

¹³⁵ Gurney, 'The Anti-Apartheid Movement's Difficult Decade,' 472.

¹³⁶ Lent, *British Social Movements Since 1945*, 229.

¹³⁷ Thörn, 'The Meaning(s) of Solidarity,' 432.

collectively taking individual actions.¹³⁸ Organised around a single issue these collective individual actions could inspire a broad-based support, as long as the boundaries of the issue were not breached. The hesitancy to appear too radical lest they alienate supporters could still be seen in Sheffield in the 1980s. This reluctance to colour outside the lines resulted in a movement that found campaigning for racial equality abroad much more acceptable to Sheffield's political milieu than those combating racism at home.

The AAM in Sheffield had the support of the labour movement. Decades before the development of an AAM group in Sheffield, Vi Gill and Blanche Flannery, members of the Communist Party and important figures in Sheffield's trade union politics, were supporters of the anti-apartheid cause.¹³⁹ Christabel Gurney suggests that early Communist Party support was typical nationally, and due to Communists holding uncommonly influential positions in Sheffield's labour movement, the support for anti-apartheid soon spread.¹⁴⁰ By the time Paul Blomfield started Sheffield's Anti-Apartheid Group in 1978, there was support from the labour movement nationally and locally. By 1980, thirty five national trade unions were affiliated to the AAM, compared with fourteen in 1971.¹⁴¹ In Sheffield, Labour Members of Parliament Richard Caborn and Frank Hooley, Councillor Mike Pye (who chaired the National Steering Committee of Local Authority Action Against Apartheid), and representatives from various local branches of the Labour Party and trade unions such as the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers and Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, were present at AAM meetings.¹⁴² Paul Blomfield joined the Labour Party in 1980, was a member of NALGO and served on the Sheffield Trades Council Executive Committee from 1982-83, and had previously been a member of the National Union of Students National

¹³⁸ Thörn, 'The Meaning(s) of Solidarity,' 423.

¹³⁹ Vi Gill, speaking at the funeral of Blanche Flannery in 2010. Video provided by Kate Flannery.

¹⁴⁰ Gurney, 'The Anti-Apartheid Movement's Difficult Decade,' 484.

¹⁴¹ Gurney, 'The Anti-Apartheid Movement's Difficult Decade,' 477.

¹⁴² SLSL, PAMP842S, Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Movement, Annual Report 1984-85.

Executive Committee.¹⁴³ The Sheffield branch of NALGO affiliated to Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Group in 1986.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, in June 1981 Sheffield City Council affirmed their ‘abhorrence’ of apartheid and agreed a boycott of South African products.¹⁴⁵ Throughout the decade they maintained this policy, and developed others in support of the anti-apartheid cause; including naming a pedestrian walkway after Nelson Mandela, and flying the African National Congress flag from the Town Hall.¹⁴⁶ They set up an Anti-Apartheid Working Party and invited representatives from the Sheffield Campaign Against Racism to meetings, linking their anti-apartheid policies to local struggles against racism. The 1983 Sheffield District Labour Party manifesto encouraged others to do the same and argued that the anti-apartheid campaign was about protecting British jobs from multi-national companies ‘exporting jobs and increasing the dependence of the British economy on South Africa.’¹⁴⁷ In 1982, Jim Coleman (Communist and member of the CND) was given two months’ paid leave by Sheffield local education authority to organise the United Nations conference on apartheid hosted by the city.¹⁴⁸ David Blunkett was due to deliver a key note address at the conference; however he had to leave to attend the birth of his son Andrew, whom he was apparently urged to name Nelson after Mandela.¹⁴⁹ While this is a rehearsed anecdote; one that Blunkett enjoys telling and has told many times, it highlights the relatively uncomplicated attitude that Blunkett and the labour movement had towards the anti-apartheid movement in the 1980s.

¹⁴³ SA, AC.2002-130, Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book, 1982-1983; Interview with Paul Blomfield, 9th September 2013. Blomfield became MP for Sheffield Central in 2010.

¹⁴⁴ Andy D’Agorne Archive, *Root and Branch* – Magazine of Sheffield NALGO, Issue No. 3, February 1986.

¹⁴⁵ SA, CA-POL14/61, Policy Review Sub-Committee, 30 June 1981.

¹⁴⁶ SA, CA-POL20/21, Anti-Apartheid Working Party, 2 May 1986; CA-POL18/170-1 Anti-Apartheid Advisory Panel, 1 February 1985; CA-POL35/195, Anti-Apartheid Panel, 22 April 1988.

¹⁴⁷ SA, CA-POL18/108, Anti-Apartheid Advisory Panel, 17 December 1984; CA-POL16/37/Appendix A, Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto, 1983; Rob Skinner, *The Foundations of Anti-Apartheid: Liberal Humanitarians and Transnational Activists in Britain and the United States, c.1919-64*, (Basingstoke, 2010), 165.

¹⁴⁸ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Jim takes message to the roots,’ 4th February 1982, 12.

¹⁴⁹ Stephen Pollard, *David Blunkett*, (Great Britain, 2005), 123; Interview with David Blunkett, 10th January 2014.

Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Group was ‘arguably the biggest in the country.’¹⁵⁰ Paul Blomfield claimed that they had around 800 members, but their 1985 annual report put individual membership at 296 and affiliated organisations at forty one; including twenty trade unions, fifteen party political groups, four women’s organisations and two students’ groups.¹⁵¹ This disparity may mean the organisation grew later on in the decade, or Blomfield may be referring to supporters rather than members. Throughout the 1980s, Sheffield’s Anti-Apartheid Group had two main campaigns running alongside educational events and bookstalls; a consumer boycott and a cultural boycott. For their consumer boycott they identified Coles and Sainsburys as the two main retailers of South African goods in the city and unsuccessfully requested that they stop selling products from South Africa.¹⁵² They then distributed 25,000 leaflets outside Coles and Sainsburys at seven separate protest events in 1984 to 1985 urging customers to ‘look at the labels.’¹⁵³ They also focussed on Barclays bank; holding a regular monthly picket at each of the city centre branches, distributing 10,000 leaflets. This succeeded in encouraging South Yorkshire Housing Association to terminate their account.¹⁵⁴ Paul Blomfield remembers that they aimed to win ‘the political argument’ rather than just change ‘consumer habits.’¹⁵⁵ For Blomfield the goal was to ‘create the political conditions to make it easy’ for Sheffield City Council to support anti-apartheid; to make it a mainstream rather than radical concern.¹⁵⁶

Press attention was also necessary to achieve this. The Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Group’s cultural boycott concentrated on local Sheffield celebrity Marti Caine; a sure bet for gaining press coverage in *The Sheffield Star*. In February 1984 the Crucible Theatre cast

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Paul Blomfield, 9th September 2013.

¹⁵¹ SLSL, PAMP842S, Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Movement, Annual Report 1984-85.

¹⁵² SLSL, PAMP842S, Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Movement, Annual Report 1984-85.

¹⁵³ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Anti-apartheid protestors to picket stores,’ 1st May 1985, 3.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Paul Blomfield, 9th September 2013.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Paul Blomfield, 9th September 2013.

Caine, a popular Sheffield-born singer and comedienne who was on the United Nation's Cultural Blacklist for performing in the Sun City resort and casino in Bophuthatswana, in their production of *Funny Girl*.¹⁵⁷ Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Group picketed the theatre with signs reading "Funny Girl? Black South Africans aren't laughing Marti" and "Don't entertain Apartheid" urging the Crucible to recast and for audiences to boycott performances.¹⁵⁸ As rehearsals went ahead in March, pupils involved in an anti-apartheid group at Marti Caine's former school, Firth Park Comprehensive, protested outside the theatre and handed out leaflets.¹⁵⁹ They were joined by forty nine backstage staff who petitioned the theatre management over the casting decision.¹⁶⁰ In May, three hundred anti-apartheid protesters staged an evening of 'alternative entertainment' outside the theatre on Marti Caine's opening night. There were a dozen speakers including Richard Caborn, Reverend Frank Nunn from the Sheffield Council of Churches, a representative from the African National Congress, and a member of the Crucible Board.¹⁶¹ Caine initially appeared unbothered by protests, stating in *The Star*; 'Oh, more publicity. I'm not angry.'¹⁶² However, later she donated 'a pair of autographed knickers' to the Sheffield branch of Amnesty International for a celebrity auction perhaps in an attempt to improve her reputation.¹⁶³ Whilst, Caine remained on the UN Blacklist, Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Group gained an unprecedented amount of local press attention from their campaign.

The cultural boycotts proved a popular tactic as they provoked coverage from the press. Leo Sayer became another target in November 1984. Having tried to persuade an 'unrepentant' Sayer to promise not to perform in South Africa, Sheffield Anti-Apartheid

¹⁵⁷ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Why Marti is on the UN 'Blacklist,' 22nd February 1984, 10; 'Funny girl Marti canes her critics,' 21st February 1984, 1.

¹⁵⁸ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Funny girl Marti is ready to roll... but no pickets laugh,' 24th February 1984, 5.

¹⁵⁹ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Protest by pupils,' 1st March 1984, 13.

¹⁶⁰ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Marti faces new protest,' 3rd March 1984, 2.

¹⁶¹ *The Sheffield Star*, '300 stage Marti first-night demo,' 19th May 1984, 3.

¹⁶² *The Sheffield Star*, 'Funny girl Marti canes her critics,' 21st February 1984, 1.

¹⁶³ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Saucy gift by Marti,' 5th April 1984, 3.

Group held a torch-lit protest outside his concert, attracting almost two hundred members and supporters, gaining press coverage and ‘reduc[ing] his expected audience.’¹⁶⁴ They also protested at Cliff Richard’s appearance at Billy Graham’s ‘Mission England’ at Bramall Lane on 28th June 1984, which led to ‘considerable media coverage.’¹⁶⁵ Paul Blomfield and the Bishop of Sheffield David Lunn met with Cliff Richard in his hotel room before the event but ‘were unable to secure a commitment’ from him not to return to South Africa so 150 supporters distributed 10,000 leaflets outside Bramall Lane.¹⁶⁶ As well as boycotts they took part in political and educational events, running thirty five bookstalls in 1984, and held city wide demonstrations. A demonstration in September 1985 saw over 4,000 participants from ‘trade union, political parties and ethnic minority groups’ march through the city. This was led by the Celebrated Sheffield Street Band (pictured in Figure 4.4) and marchers reportedly sang the Special A.K.A song ‘Nelson Mandela.’¹⁶⁷ The size of the demonstration can be seen in Figure 4.5. The Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Group also held quieter protests, including services at Sheffield Cathedral to remember the Sharpeville Massacre and demonstrations outside in solidarity with hunger strikers. As photographs of these events suggest, the majority of supporters were white but there were black and minority ethnic activists involved as well (see Figure 4.3).

Indeed, the Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Group engaged with a number of different organisations in Sheffield; activist and not. Paul Blomfield claims that their ‘strength was in the breadth of the coalition.’¹⁶⁸ As well as trade union and Labour Party support, both the National Assembly of Women and Sheffield Women’s Peace Group, two very different

¹⁶⁴ SLSL, PAMP842S, Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Movement, Annual Report 1984-85; *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Bishop in S.A. protest’, 19th November 1984, 3; *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Pop star Leo in storm over S. Africa,’ 30th October 1984, 5.

¹⁶⁵ SLSL, PAMP842S, Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Movement, Annual Report 1984-85.

¹⁶⁶ SLSL, PAMP842S, Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Movement, Annual Report 1984-85; Interview with Paul Blomfield, 9th September 2013.

¹⁶⁷ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Thousands march for sanctions,’ 28th September 1985.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Paul Blomfield, 9th September 2013.

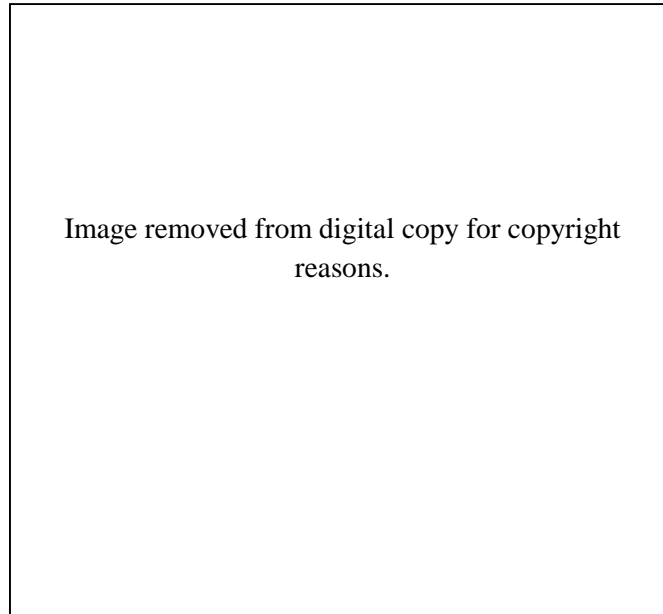


Figure 4.3: Anti-Apartheid Movement vigil in support of hunger strikers in South Africa. Sheffield Cathedral, 2nd April 1982. Photograph by Martin Jenkinson, Martin Jenkinson Image Library.¹⁶⁹

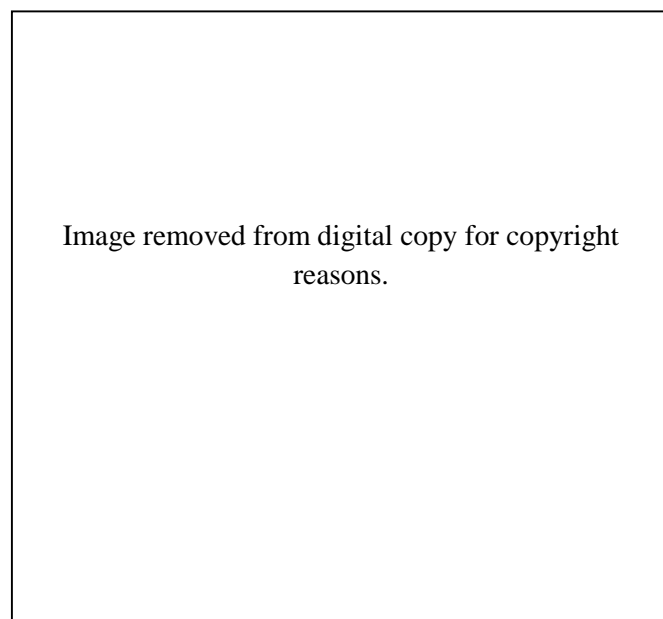


Figure 4.4: Anti-Apartheid demonstration led by the Celebrated Sheffield Street Band, 28th September 1985. Photograph by Martin Jenkinson, Martin Jenkinson Image Library.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Martin Jenkinson Image Library, <http://martinjenkinson.photoshelter.com/gallery-image/1980s-Protest/G0000ADCbo9sFqdl/I0000LRszRdr5hBg/C0000PXenaeUbs6c> (accessed: 11th May 2015) Reproduced here with permission from Justine Jenkinson and the Martin Jenkinson Image Library.

¹⁷⁰ Martin Jenkinson Image Library, http://mjenkinsonphotography.co.uk/galleries/1980s%20sheffield/street%20band/index_2.php (accessed: 11th May 2015) Reproduced here with permission from Justine Jenkinson and the Martin Jenkinson Image Library.

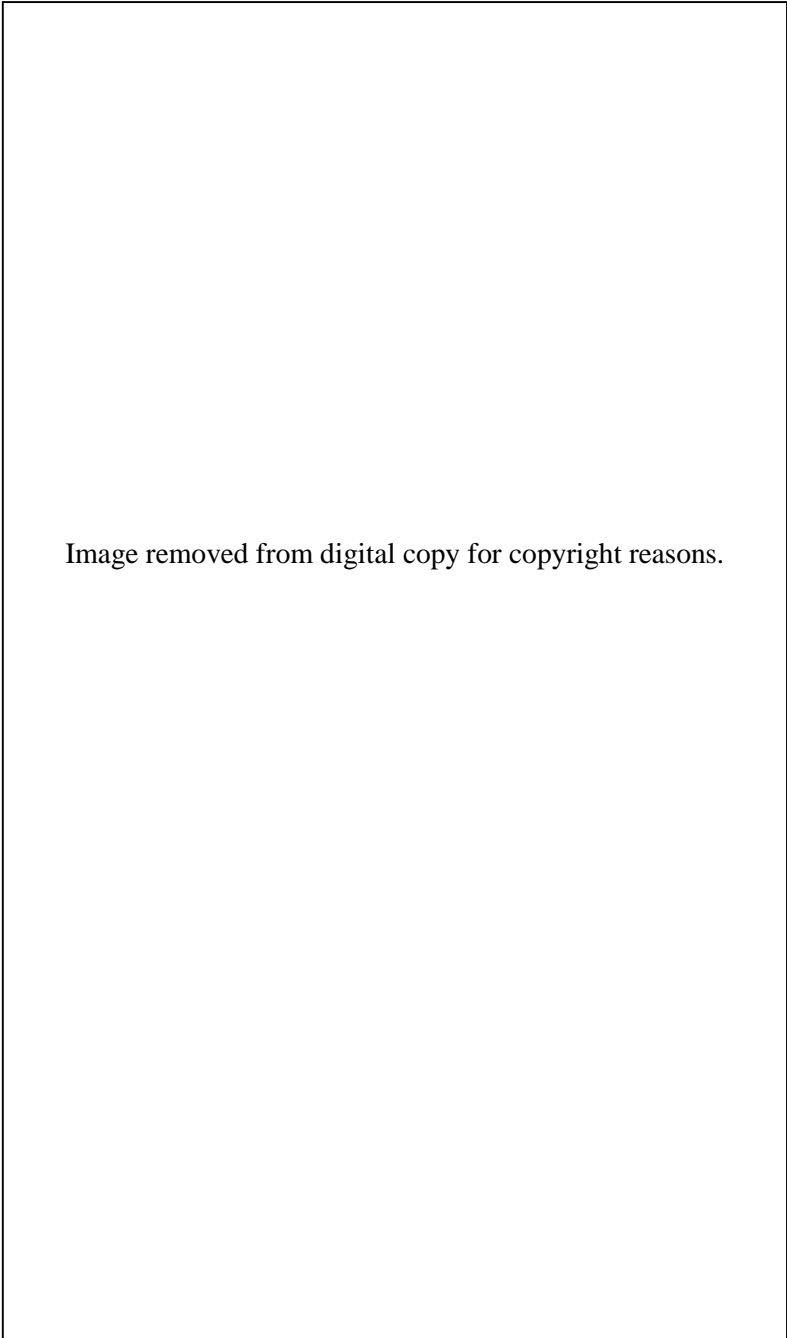


Image removed from digital copy for copyright reasons.

Figure 4.5: Anti-Apartheid demonstration led by the Celebrated Sheffield Street Band, 28th September 1985. Photograph by Martin Jenkinson, Martin Jenkinson Image Library.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Martin Jenkinson Image Library, http://mjenkinsonphotography.co.uk/galleries/1980s%20sheffield/street%20band/index_2.php (accessed: 11th May 2015) Reproduced here with permission from Justine Jenkinson and the Martin Jenkinson Image Library.

organisations, were ‘actively involved in... campaigns.’¹⁷² Furthermore, the Bishop of Sheffield David Lunn was ‘actively involved’ as were other church groups. This echoed the national movement which embraced the diversity of participants by forming committees; a Union Action Group in 1968, a Religious Committee in 1984, and a Black and Ethnic Minorities Committee in 1988.¹⁷³ Blomfield was careful only to campaign against apartheid however. He was determined that the group would not be ‘hijacked by individual political groups.’ Echoing David Blunkett and Women Against the Pit Closures activists Kath Mackey and Janet Heath, Blomfield argued that you have to ensure that ‘what you ask of people...is never so advanced of where they want to be that you fall flat on your face.’¹⁷⁴ This concern was shared by the national movement who did not want to appear too radical for their church-attending support base.¹⁷⁵ At the same time, Blomfield argued that it was ‘nonsense’ to campaign against racism in South Africa but not in Sheffield. In 1984 the Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Group shared a marquee at the Sheffield Show themed around “Standing Firm Against Racism” with the Sheffield Council for Racial Equality and Sheffield Campaign Against Racism, which were mainly white-led anti-racist groups. The Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Group annual report did however claim that there had been ‘a steady growth in involvement from members of the black community which has strengthened our work.’¹⁷⁶

However, Sheffield’s Asian communities also campaigned against Apartheid independently and also occasionally against allies of the AAM indicating the complexities of ‘solidarity.’ Elizabeth Williams argues that among sections of black and Asian youth who came of age from the mid-1970s and early 1980s, there was a ‘growing self-awareness and cultural consciousness’ which looked to international struggles for inspiration, including

¹⁷² SLSL, PAMP842S, Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Movement, Annual Report 1984-85.

¹⁷³ Thörn, ‘The Meaning(s) of Solidarity,’ 432.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Paul Blomfield, 9th September 2013.

¹⁷⁵ Gurney, ‘The Anti-Apartheid Movement’s Difficult Decade,’ 480.

¹⁷⁶ SLSL, PAMP842S, Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Movement, Annual Report 1984-85.

South Africa.¹⁷⁷ Many black and Asian groups who organised against racism and for equality in Britain ‘could not ignore the common denominator of racism’ in Britain and South Africa.¹⁷⁸ Often frustrated with the AAM, which ‘determinedly remained a single-focus organisation and would not officially incorporate fighting against domestic racism into its remit,’ these groups built a platform of support by highlighting parallels between their experiences and those of black South Africans.¹⁷⁹ This can be seen in Sheffield among the Asian Youth Movement and older members of the Asian community represented by the Asian Welfare Association. The Asian Youth Movement connected state racism in South Africa to life in Britain. In an article on Apartheid, they wrote; ‘from our own everyday experience we know that the British state is a racist state.’¹⁸⁰ Like many young black and Asian people in Britain, members were influenced by a wider culture of popular black music, including reggae artists who were conscious of anti-imperial struggles in Africa, and incorporated themes of black liberation struggles into their music.¹⁸¹ Bob Marley was one such musician and his music acted as a ‘cultural bridge’ between black Africans and black and Asian people elsewhere.¹⁸² The impact of Marley’s music was recognised when he was invited to perform at Zimbabwe’s Independence celebrations in 1980.¹⁸³ Mukhtar Dar, an activist in the Sheffield Asian Youth Movement, was particularly inspired by Bob Marley. Dar remembers listening to and memorising Marley’s ‘Redemption Song’ before going running through Sheffield, looking for signs of National Front activity.¹⁸⁴ The Sheffield AYM campaigned against apartheid independently from Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Group;

¹⁷⁷ Elizabeth Williams, ‘Anti-Apartheid: The Black British Response,’ *South African Historical Journal*, 64:3 (2012), 690.

¹⁷⁸ Williams, ‘The Black British Response’, 706.

¹⁷⁹ Williams, ‘The Black British Response’, 706.

¹⁸⁰ Tandana Archive, MH249, Sheffield Asian Youth Movement, *Kala Mazdoor*, Issue 2, 13.

¹⁸¹ Williams, ‘The Black British Response’, 690.

¹⁸² Williams, ‘The Black British Response’, 691.

¹⁸³ Williams, ‘The Black British Response’, 691.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Mukhtar Dar, 23rd August 2013.

helping to promote demonstrations in London and speaking at rallies in Bradford.¹⁸⁵

Members of the Asian Youth Movement and Sheffield Defence Campaign also attended the Yorkshire Campaign for Action Against Apartheid, who were critical of the Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Group. The YCAAA agenda allowed space for reports by the Sheffield Defence Campaign on attacks on Asian taxi drivers in Sheffield, directly addressing racism at home, and noted that ‘copies of an article in ‘Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!’ which exposes the AAM for being Anti-Action were distributed at the (Sheffield AAG) meeting and condemned’ by those there.¹⁸⁶ Members of the Asian community were not only critical of Sheffield Anti-Apartheid Group, but also criticised Sheffield City Council’s response. In 1987, the Asian Welfare Association wrote to David Blunkett expressing ‘deep concerns’ regarding the Council’s contract with Shell, stating that failure to terminate the contract would ‘severely damage your credibility in the black community.’¹⁸⁷ Like the AYM, the Asian Welfare Association linked racism in Britain to racism in South Africa, and saw themselves as part of a black community that was fighting, not just against apartheid, but also for recognition of their own struggle.

Anti-racism

The 1970s saw the rise of the National Front in Britain and with it the formation of a left-wing politics of anti-racism. This coincided with a growth of Black consciousness and self-organisation that, by the 1980s, was more vocally critical of institutional racism and police harassment, and found the anti-racism that focused on fighting fascism and promoting ‘racial harmony’ to be too restrictive. In the 1970 General Election the National Front fielded ten

¹⁸⁵ Tandana Archive, MH183, Sheffield Asian Youth Movement, ‘No to Apartheid’ poster; SC117, Bradford Anti-Apartheid Group, ‘Smash apartheid! Smash racism! Sanctions now’ leaflet, October 1985.

¹⁸⁶ Tandana Archive, MD34, Minutes of the Yorkshire Campaign for Action Against Apartheid Meeting, 7th September 1985.

¹⁸⁷ SA, CAPOL/28, Appendix iii: Joint Meeting of the Race Equality and Anti-Apartheid Panels, 20th October 1987, Letter from Asian Welfare Association to Councillor Blunkett, 27th March 1987.

candidates. By the February 1974 General Election that number had risen to fifty candidates, and rose further to ninety candidates in the General Election later that year.¹⁸⁸ Membership of the NF had risen sharply in 1973 following the arrival of Ugandan Asians, but they continued to attract supporters, gaining 5,000 members in 1976 after a smaller number of Malawi Asian refugees settled in Britain.¹⁸⁹ The NF's electoral presence 'acted as a catalyst' for the creation of anti-racist and anti-fascist committees on the far left, and for the emergence of groups within the organised labour movement.¹⁹⁰ The Socialist Workers' Party set up the Anti-Nazi League, and the ANL's carnivals alongside campaigns like Rock Against Racism gained anti-racism and anti-fascism a popular following. The Anti-Nazi League mobilised 80,000 people at its carnival in London in April 1978. It also gained a following in Sheffield despite the labour movement's wariness of far-left groups. Sheffield sent fifteen coaches of activists to the April carnival.¹⁹¹ As Callaghan argues 'fortunately the anti-racist struggle was far too important for the SWP's self-interest to deter participants who disagreed with its politics.'¹⁹² Renton explains how the Anti-Nazi League attracted support from the 'broader left' including forty Labour MPs and trade unionists such as Arthur Scargill and the NUM, who had also come out in support of the Grunwick Strike.¹⁹³ He suggests that uniting the left in this way was relatively straight-forward as 'a clear-cut common goal had been set – the decrease of the influence of the NF.'¹⁹⁴ Satnam Virdee explains that the socialists leading the movement were 'more conscious of the dangers of racism undermining working class solidarity' than the generation before them, indicating that whether this was about fighting

¹⁸⁸ Lent, *British Social Movements Since 1945*, 114.

¹⁸⁹ Satnam Virdee, 'Anti-racism and the Socialist Left, 1968-1979,' in Evan Smith and Matthew Worley (eds), *Against the Grain: The British Far Left from 1956*, (Manchester, 2014), 217.

¹⁹⁰ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, (London, 1998), 118.

¹⁹¹ Virdee, 'Anti-racism and the Socialist Left, 1968-1979,' 223.

¹⁹² John Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, New York, 1987), 102.

¹⁹³ Dave Renton, *When We Touched the Sky: The Anti-Nazi League, 1977-1981*, (Cheltenham, 2006), 80; Virdee, 'Anti-racism and the Socialist Left, 1968-1979,' 220.

¹⁹⁴ Renton, *When We Touched the Sky*, 130.

racism, or due to a concern that marginal seats might be lost because of NF votes, defeating the NF was a shared goal.¹⁹⁵

Sheffield also saw the growth of a local National Front presence and activists on the left and influential people in the labour movement made attempts to combat racism and fascism, with varying degrees of commitment and awareness. In 1978 Bill Owen, President of the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council, stated somewhat obliviously that ‘Sheffield has a first class record in racial harmony, and we must make sure... that we build a society of true racial equality.’¹⁹⁶ Martin Flannery, MP for Sheffield Hillsborough, was active in the Anti-Nazi League and outspoken against racism, which led in part to the words “Nigger Lover” and “Commie Bastard” being painted on his windows.¹⁹⁷ In the late 1970s George Caborn, Communist and District Secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union in Sheffield, helped to found the Sheffield Campaign Against Racism. Kate Flannery, Martin Flannery’s daughter, organised SCAR’s youth wing. SCAR liaised with the Sheffield Committee for Community Relations, later the Sheffield Council for Racial Equality, through which representatives from BME organisations, trade unions, church groups, the police, and the City Council met regularly to discuss education, employment, health, and community relations, with specific campaigns taken up around the 1981 Scarman Report, combating rickets, immigration, and pension benefits.¹⁹⁸ Both George Caborn and Blanche Flannery were voted onto the Executive Committee of SCRE for 1978 and 1979 ahead of black and Asian candidates, suggesting both the popularity of Caborn and Flannery in Sheffield, and also indicating that this was an organisation acting *on behalf* of black and minority ethnic

¹⁹⁵ Virdee, ‘Anti-racism and the Socialist Left, 1968-1979,’ 214.

¹⁹⁶ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1977/78.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Kate Flannery, 3 December 2013; Interview with Kath Mackey, 14 January 2014.

¹⁹⁸ SA, 2003/24 MD, Sheffield Campaign Against Racism, Sheffield Council For Racial Equality – Annual General Meeting and Conference, 24th November 1982; Sheffield Council For Racial Equality – Report of the Executive Committee, covering the period from December 1981 to November 1982.

people.¹⁹⁹ Satnam Virdee attributes the rise of socialist anti-racism to the ‘class of 68’ who were ‘shaped by imperial retreat’ and the black power movement, but in Caborn and Flannery Sheffield’s anti-racism was that of an older generation; Caborn was born in 1916 and Flannery in 1921.²⁰⁰

As well as working with SCRE, SCAR’s main efforts seemed to involve targeting trade unions requesting affiliations in an attempt to raise awareness and build broad-based support. They sent out leaflets asking ‘Are you affiliated?’ and spoke of having ‘80 organisations in membership, including trade union and Labour Party branches.’²⁰¹ Church groups and black and minority ethnic organisations were also affiliated.²⁰² SCAR organised petitions against racist discrimination in Sheffield’s nightclubs, and marched in solidarity against racism.²⁰³ On 3rd March 1984, the National Front marched in protest against a demonstration by the Irish Freedom Movement, and SCAR marched in protest against the National Front.²⁰⁴ Despite hopes of a ‘large turnout’ and support from the Asian Welfare Association, only 250 anti-racist marchers met on the day.²⁰⁵ Photographs of the demonstration show a small march led predominantly by Asian men (see Figure 4.6). This was a familiar scene, as only 300 had marched in support of SCAR’s inception six years before, and 300 again marched in 1982; far fewer than those who marched against apartheid and for peace.²⁰⁶ Despite their many affiliations, SCAR could not mobilise the numbers. This indicates that within the labour movement and wider activist milieu in Sheffield anti-racism

¹⁹⁹ SA, 2003/24 MD, Sheffield Campaign Against Racism, Sheffield Committee for Community Relations, Minutes of Annual General Meeting, 24th November 1978; Sheffield Committee for Community Relations, Minutes of Annual General Meeting, 14th November 1979.

²⁰⁰ Virdee, ‘Anti-racism and the Socialist Left, 1968-1979,’ 214. George Caborn died in 1982.

²⁰¹ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1984/85.

²⁰² *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Third Saturday march planned,’ 27th February 1984, 1.

²⁰³ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Protest at racist nightspots,’ 8th September 1984, 7; ‘Sheffield marchers hit at racism,’ 13th August 1982, 5.

²⁰⁴ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Police on demo alert,’ 3rd March 1984, 1.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

²⁰⁶ John Vincent, *Into the City*, (London, 1982), 66.

was not a priority. Activists such as Jol Miskin and Emma Rattenbury, although they supported anti-racism and went on occasional demonstrations, were preoccupied with their own political activities around unemployment and women respectively.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, racism was present within the labour movement, even in unexpected places. Matloub Hussain, an engineer who later joined Sheffield Asian Youth Movement, joined SCAR in 1977 because he wanted to fight the harassment he had faced from fellow members of George Caborn's Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, which he found to be 'riddled with' a racism that was never challenged.²⁰⁸ Aneez Ismail, a member of Sheffield University's Black Consciousness Group, had a similar experience when trying to work with the Trades Council to raise awareness of racist and fascist attacks. Ismail remembers 'two henchmen of George Caborn were behind me and said, "If you don't shut up, we'll put you back on the boat."' ²⁰⁹ Mukhtar Dar, another member of Sheffield AYM found SCAR 'problematic' because it kept a lid on the struggle.²¹⁰ This echoed Paul Gilroy's argument that anti-racist organisations were often more concerned 'with the development of racially harmonious social and political relations' and with fighting the threat to democracy posed by the National Front, rather than fighting for black liberation or against the violence that black and Asian individuals and communities faced on an everyday basis.²¹¹ As Anandi Ramamurthy articulates, this was a familiar story of left-wing organisations attempting to mobilise black and Asian communities "into *their* political struggles" without supporting their right to mobilise independently and offering solidarity in that way.²¹² Although members of the labour movement in Sheffield attempted to set up a broad-based anti-racist

²⁰⁷ Interview with Jol Miskin, 18th March 2013; Interview with Emma Rattenbury, 9th April 2013.

²⁰⁸ Anandi Ramamurthy, *Black Star: Britain's Asian Youth Movements*, (London, 2013), 150.

²⁰⁹ Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 153.

²¹⁰ Interview with Mukhtar Dar, 23 August 2013.

²¹¹ Gilroy, 'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack,' 117, 119.

²¹² Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 79.

movement, they were unable to mobilise in large numbers, struggled to combat racism in their own unions, and failed to listen to black and Asian voices.

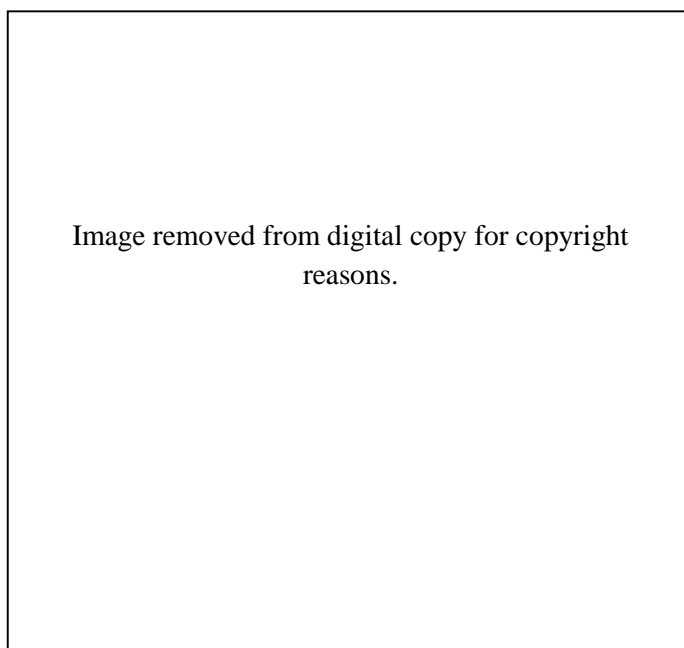


Figure 4.6: Sheffield Campaign Against Racism march on 3rd March 1984. Photograph by Martin Jenkinson, Martin Jenkinson Image Library.²¹³

Sheffield City Council offered a different approach which had its own limitations. In the early 1980s the Council developed an Ethnic Minorities Working Party. This was a small committee which tended to focus on equality within employment, contract compliance, and on funding “worthy” black and Asian community groups, such as the Asian Welfare Association and the South Sheffield Project’s Ethnic Minorities Fostering Scheme.²¹⁴ This was encouraged by on-going central government initiatives like the Urban Programme, which, by the early 1980s had become the ‘new orthodoxy’ of central and local government

²¹³ Martin Jenkinson, Sheffield Campaign Against Racism March, 3rd March 1984, <http://martinjenkinson.photoshelter.com/gallery-image/1980s-Protest/G0000ADCbo9sFqdl/I0000WkmA9jwAhEs/C0000PXenaeUbs6c> (accessed: 6/06/2015). Reproduced with permission from Justine Jenkinson and the Martin Jenkinson Image Library.

²¹⁴ SA, CA-POL13/323, Urban Strategy Sub Committee, 8 April 1981; SA, CA-POL14/331, Budget Sub-Committee, 17 March 1982; Stewart Lansley, Sue Goss, Christian Wolmar (eds), *Councils in Conflict: The Rise and Fall of the Municipal Left*, (Basingstoke and London, 1989), 119-22.

policies addressing racial disadvantage.²¹⁵ By the mid-1980s, however, Sheffield City Council had begun to develop an outlook on ‘race’ that focussed more on anti-racism and identity politics. The Sheffield District Labour Party’s 1984 manifesto advocated anti-racist education strategies to achieve ‘a multi-racial society based on principles of equality and justice,’ and by 1985 the Ethnic Minorities Working Party had evolved into the Race Equality Panel.²¹⁶ There was a brief engagement with the language of identity politics including an explanation of the use of the term “Black” in a Race Equality Panel meeting. The appendix noted that “Black” was ‘essentially a political term.’²¹⁷ It described how, whereas other terms in use had negative connotations, ‘Black’ is a political colour, that seeks to free language from this burden of racist stereotyping that it has come to inherit... and in doing so challenges the assumption on which racist belief and practice is based.’²¹⁸ For these reasons it was the ‘preferred term’ for a ‘progressive local authority.’²¹⁹ Despite this shift in language, Sheffield City Council continued to orientate policy mainly around employment and the economy, supporting the Sheffield Ethnic Minorities Business Initiative.²²⁰ Following National Front attacks on a Rastafarian bookshop on London Road on two consecutive Saturday nights; Mike Aitkens, Sheffield City Council’s Ethnic Minorities Coordinator, urged police to take the NF more seriously.²²¹ Aitkens had been informed by police in the community relations department that ‘they only found out about the first attack while passing through the canteen.’²²² One year later, police priorities appeared not to have changed when South Yorkshire Chief Constable Peter Wright allowed the Irish Freedom Movement and the

²¹⁵ Ken Young, ‘Approaches to Policy Development in the Field of Equal Opportunities’ in Wendy Ball and John Solomos, *Race and Local Politics*, (Basingstoke, London, 1990), 28-29.

²¹⁶ SA, CA-POL17/157/Appendix A, Policy Committee, Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto, 22 May 1984; SA, CA-POL19/74, Ethnic Minorities Panel, 12 November 1985.

²¹⁷ SA, CA-POL20/Appendix D, Race Equality Panel, 10 June 1986.

²¹⁸ *ibid.*

²¹⁹ *ibid.*

²²⁰ SA, CA-POL26/35, Race Equality Panel, 7 July 1987; SA, CA-POL27/Appendix H, Race Equality Panel, 15 September 1987.

²²¹ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Raids by National Front prompt top level meetings,’ 5th April 1983, 5.

²²² *ibid.*

National Front to march through Sheffield despite understanding that ‘most people probably have no sympathy with at least one group [the IFM] and maybe both.’²²³

At the 1991 Census only around five per cent of Sheffield’s residents were recorded as black or minority ethnic which was less than the national average and amounted to around 25,000 people.²²⁴ Reports from 1985 suggest that Sheffield’s Pakistani population numbered between eight and nine thousand people.²²⁵ Whilst relatively small in size, Sheffield’s black and minority ethnic population was well organised into different community groups; some of which fought directly against racism and some of which focused on the other needs of their members. As Paul Gilroy argues; the ‘self-organisation and independent struggles of black communities’ cannot be described or analysed as ‘anti-racism.’²²⁶ Whilst their campaigns might be anti-racist ‘in that part of their effect may be to oppose and dismantle racist institutions and ideologies’ those organising do not necessarily view them as anti-racist.²²⁷ This is because people do not experience racism ‘in the abstract, they feel the effects of its particular expressions: poor housing, unemployment, repatriation, violence or aggressive indifference.’²²⁸ Sheffield’s Asian Youth Movement, however, did campaign directly against racism; against racist attacks, police harassment, and police indifference.

Sheffield Asian Youth movement was formed out of activists’ involvement in the Bradford 12 campaign of 1981-82; where twelve young men from Bradford were charged with terrorism, and later acquitted, for taking defensive action against the National Front. Sheffield AYM had many influences; the Black Consciousness Group at the University, the fight against international student fees, experiences with SCAR and trade unions, but it was

²²³ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Why police allowed the marches,’ 28 February 1984, 5.

²²⁴ Karen Evans, et al. *A Tale of Two Cities: Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England: a study in Manchester and Sheffield* (1996), 88, 201.

²²⁵ *Sheffield Star*, ‘Voting row splits Pakistani group,’ 30th September 1985, 7.

²²⁶ Gilroy, ‘*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*’, 115.

²²⁷ Gilroy, ‘*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*’, 116.

²²⁸ *ibid.*

the Bradford 12 campaign which made ‘the issue of racism which they faced everyday... more central than the international issues’ some members had previously organised around, and introduced the principle of self-defence.²²⁹ Young Asian people from the University, the Polytechnic, local schools and trade unions came together to organise away from Council-driven initiatives which were about ‘controlling youth organisation.’²³⁰ Sheffield AYM made links with broad-based anti-racist organisations in the city such as the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination, Campaign Against Racist Laws, Sheffield Campaign Against the Immigration Laws, and they supported the Anwar Ditta Defence Campaign, but they ‘maintained the spirit of an independent, anti-imperialist force.’²³¹ They believed that the British state was racist and ‘fundamentally oppressive’ and so they maintained complete financial independence, except for receiving one grant to buy a Gestetner printer.²³² Throughout the 1980s they drew attention to racist attacks in the city and the inadequate ways they were dealt with by the local police. In June 1982 there were a number of attacks on Asian taxi drivers in the Manor area of Sheffield.²³³ The police met with ‘Asian leaders’ to discuss the attacks, but this was not seen to be enough. In August 1982, 350 people, led by the Asian Youth Movement, marched to ‘highlight grievances over alleged police attitudes to racist attacks in the city.’ They called for the recognition of the Asian community’s right to defend itself, an enquiry into police behaviour and the sacking of racist police officers. A spokesman said: “We have shown... that Asian youth have a voice of their own which has been ignored over the years by some people in prominent positions.”²³⁴

²²⁹ Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 152.

²³⁰ Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 151.

²³¹ Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 149, 153.

²³² Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 148, 155.

²³³ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Attack on cabbie brings police talks with Asians,’ 2nd June 1982, 4.

²³⁴ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Asian in protest march,’ 16th August 1982, 7.

The AYM encouraged self-defence, often as a direct indictment of police practices as seen in the “Self defence – the only way!” poster (Figure 4.7.) where they specifically named South Yorkshire Police and called them out for harassment.²³⁵ In 1984, the AYM met to organise the defence of the Khan family who had been attacked repeatedly and ‘ignored by police.’²³⁶ A spokesperson told *City Issues* – an ‘alternative monthly magazine’ – that ‘if the family is attacked again, we will take it into our own hands to defend them.’²³⁷ In September 1984, the police claimed that recent attacks on Asian people were not racist but due to a ‘general increase in crime’ as there was ‘no evidence to suggest’ racism such as National Front ‘daubings.’²³⁸ The AYM also defended those who had been arrested for defending themselves against racist attacks. They started the Ahmed Khan Defence Campaign in support of a restaurant owner who was charged with ‘malicious wounding’ after defending himself and his restaurant from fourteen racists after the police failed to arrive for more than twenty minutes despite being based one mile away.²³⁹ They organised a ‘city-wide’ campaign protesting the innocence of Zafar Iqbal who was convicted of carrying an offensive weapon after police found a hammer handle in the boot of his car. A member of the AYM told a sympathetic *City Issues* that; ‘White people would not have been harassed in this way.’²⁴⁰ Iqbal was acquitted to celebrations from the AYM who said; ‘We feel that it wasn’t only Zafar that was on trial, but the whole of our community.’²⁴¹ They also supported anti-deportation campaigns such as the Ranjit Chakrovorty Defence Campaign, which was backed

²³⁵ Tandana Archive, MD45, ‘Self Defence – the Only Way!’

²³⁶ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Asians plan self-defence,’ 5th April 1984, 11.

²³⁷ *Sheffield City Issues*, May 1984, No. 5.

²³⁸ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Attacks on Asians ‘not racist,’’ 19th September 1984, 7.

²³⁹ Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 155.

²⁴⁰ *Sheffield City Issues*, May 1984, No. 5.

²⁴¹ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Cheers as Asian gets OK,’ 31st March 1984, 13.

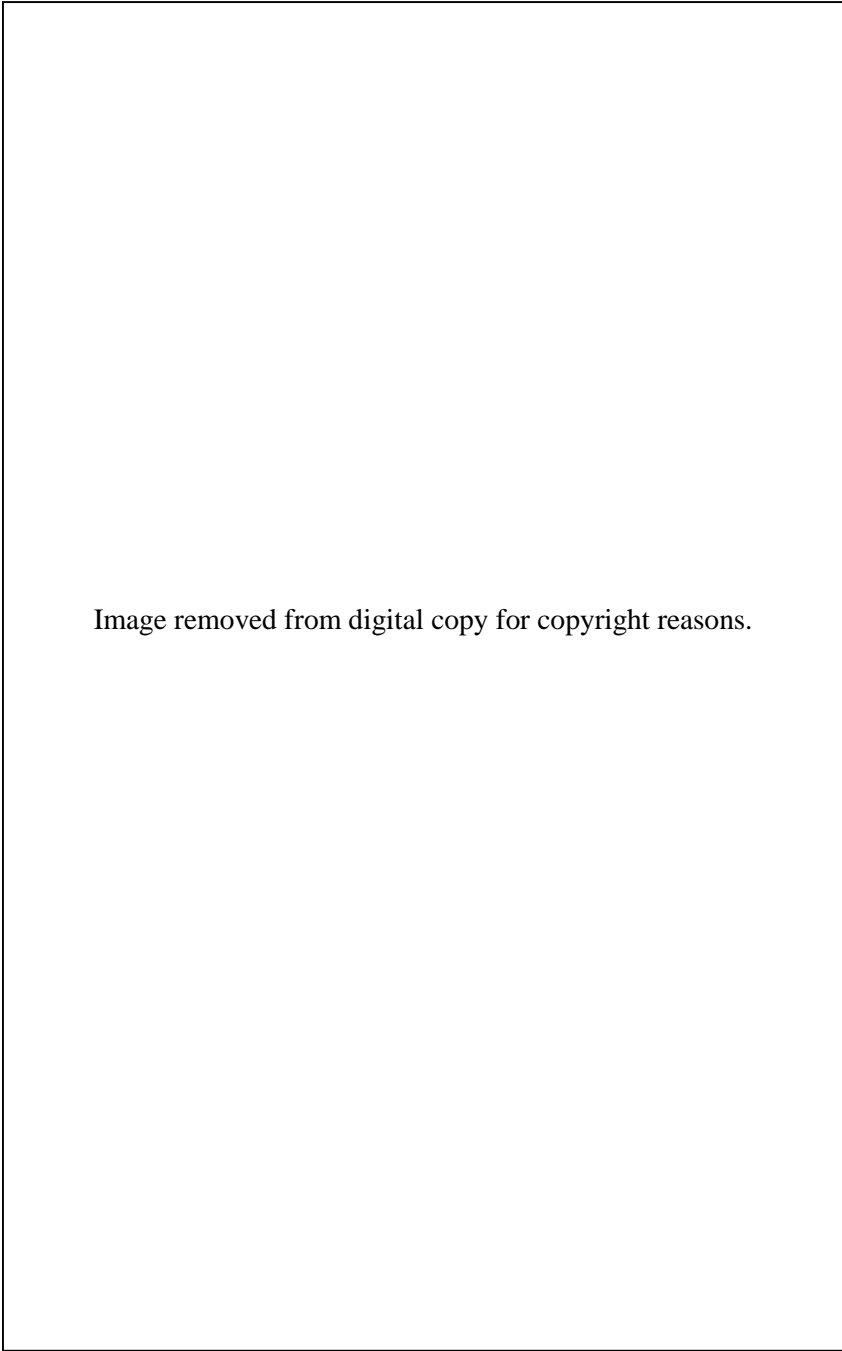


Image removed from digital copy for copyright reasons.

Figure 4.7: AYM poster: Self Defence – the Only Way! Tandana Archive.²⁴²

²⁴² Tandana Archive, MD45: AYM poster: Self Defence – the Only Way! Reproduced with permission from Dr Anandi Ramamurthy and the Tandana Archive. <http://www.tandana.org/data/pg/search.php?Ref=MD45> (accessed 12th May 2015).

by SCAR,²⁴³ and they campaigned for the Fargate Three, who were three African-Caribbean men attacked by the police in the Fargate area in 1986.²⁴⁴

The Sheffield Asian Youth Movement campaigned under the wider Campaign Against Racial and Police Harassment to encourage ‘solidarity amongst all anti-racists’ fighting harassment.²⁴⁵ They affiliated to the Sheffield Defence Campaign along with the Sheffield Campaign Against Immigration Laws and various Labour Party groups.²⁴⁶ The Sheffield Defence Campaign was established to organise black and white anti-racist activists who wanted to work ‘in independent anti-racist organisations.’²⁴⁷ Like the AYM, the SDC took defence to mean three things; defending people from deportation, defending people from organised racist attacks, and campaigning against police harassment.²⁴⁸ The Sheffield Defence Campaign met at Commonground Resources Centre, based at 87 the Wicker. That SDC met in at Commonground rather than at the CVS building or elsewhere is significant as Andy Shallice, Race Equality Officer for Sheffield City Council, insisted that the Wicker, along with the Market, were ‘black areas’ of the city, whereas Barkers Pool (where a lot of labour marches began), Division Street (where the CVS building and Friends of the Earth were based), and Fargate (where African-Caribbean youth were routinely arrested), were ‘white areas.’²⁴⁹ This was ‘known’ to the extent that when the Bow Centre, an African-Caribbean-led youth club based on Holly Street, a few roads from Division Street, was threatened with closure in 1988, it was widely assumed that it was because Sheffield City Council did not want a black youth club so close to the town centre.²⁵⁰ Commonground was a

²⁴³ Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 157; *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Feuding Asian to hold demos’, 11th February 1983, 5.

²⁴⁴ Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 157.

²⁴⁵ Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 156.

²⁴⁶ Tandana Archive, MD20, Sheffield Defence Campaign, <http://www.tandana.org/data/pg/PDF/MD/MD20.PDF> (accessed 12th May 2015).

²⁴⁷ Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 157.

²⁴⁸ Tandana Archive, MD20, Sheffield Defence Campaign, <http://www.tandana.org/data/pg/PDF/MD/MD20.PDF> (accessed 12th May 2015).

²⁴⁹ Interview with Andy Shallice, 29th April 2013.

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*

hub of political activity in the city and was used by many movements, but it was also in a safe ‘black’ space, just down the road from SADACCA at 48 the Wicker. Commonground also gave the SDC and AYM opportunities to engage other activists, though as Mukhtar Dar remembers from conversations with peace activists, many could not understand the urgency of the AYM’s campaigns. He recalls them being so focussed on the threat of nuclear weapons that they could not register the bodily threat Asian and African-Caribbean residents faced from the National Front.²⁵¹ Colin Grant from the Celebrated Sheffield Street Band claims that it was ‘hard to get a fair hearing as a white man’ at Commonground, but it was also difficult for those fighting everyday racism to get a hearing from white activists; even those who would consider themselves ‘anti-racist.’²⁵²

Unlike the AYM, the Sheffield and District African-Caribbean Community Association (SADACCA) did not campaign directly against racism and were not opposed to working with Sheffield City Council. Dorrett Buckley Greaves remembers that they only secured their premises at 48 the Wicker with help from a Race Equalities Officer. Initially the Council was reluctant to allow SADACCA the use of 48 the Wicker because it was a listed building, but as Buckley Greaves explained, this was part of the attraction; ‘Oh yes, that’s what we want. If it’s listed, it’s not going away, is it?’²⁵³ Despite the Council’s reluctance, SADACCA continued to make demands of them. Shirley Allen Jackson, whose father Joslyn D. Allen was a founding member of SADACCA, remembers that though she never marched against racism, her and other young African-Caribbean activists made ‘a lot of demands’ of the Council and attended Council meetings.²⁵⁴ Education was a main concern and Allen

²⁵¹ Interview with Mukhtar Dar, 23rd August 2013.

²⁵² Comment by Colin Grant on Celebrated Sheffield Street Band Facebook Group, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150614202507292&set=o.298649060158251&type=3&theater>, (accessed: 24th April 2015).

²⁵³ Burngreave Voices, Interview with Dorrett Buckley Greaves, June 2006, <http://www.museums-sheffield.org.uk/project-archive/burngreave-voices/GreavesDB3.html> (accessed, 12th May 2015).

²⁵⁴ Interview with Shirley Allen Jackson, 6th September 2013.

Jackson in particular was involved in recruiting African-Caribbean people to become school governors.²⁵⁵ Hector Franklin, another early member of SADACCA who went on to work for the Council's Sheffield Ethnic Minority Business Initiative, was on the Sheffield Council for Racial Equality's Education Sub-Committee.²⁵⁶ SADACCA also arranged a course on the African diaspora run through the University of Sheffield's life-long learning department, and developed the Pathways Project; a series of access courses that enabled African-Caribbean people to get into the probation service, housing and social services.²⁵⁷ SADACCA worked with Sheffield City Council and made attempts to change it from within. While Allen Jackson made good use of state funding, she also recognised the problems that came with it. First, that it ran out, but Allen Jackson learnt 'to make sure... that there's some follow on somewhere... so that, if it's going to die, there's something that has come out of it, that can be sustained.'²⁵⁸ Second, that state funding can play a divisive role. Kenan Malik argues that, by allocating funds on the basis of ethnicity, the state encouraged people to see their ethnic identity – as opposed to a more inclusive Black political identity – as the most direct way to obtain 'power, influence and resources.'²⁵⁹ State funding 'did not respond to the needs of communities, but to a large degree *created* those communities by imposing identities on people.'²⁶⁰ This in turn damaged the strength of a shared Black political identity. Allen Jackson recognised this; 'we realised how funding divided us as different BME communities... it's that divide and rule bit that always happens.'²⁶¹ To counter this, SADACCA started engaging with Sheffield's Yemeni and Somali communities and activists

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*

²⁵⁶ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Grant boost to help black entrepreneurs,' 6th April 1989, 12; SA, 2003/24 MD, Sheffield Campaign Against Racism, Sheffield Council for Racial Equality, Minutes of Meeting with Education Sub-Committee 4th October 1983.

²⁵⁷ Interview with Shirley Allen Jackson, 6th September 2013.

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*

²⁵⁹ Kenan Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad: the Rushdie Affair and its Legacy*, (London, 2009), 69.

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*

²⁶¹ Interview with Shirley Allen-Jackson, 6th September 2013.

formed the Black Women's Resource Centre, and later the Black Community Forum, to pool resources and address common issues to make 'a difference that supports all of us.'²⁶²

Conclusion

In 1988 the Sheffield Socialist Choir developed out of a Workers Educational Association course on protest music where people shared their experiences and turned them into songs. Andy D'Agorne, Jill Angood, and some members of the Celebrated Sheffield Street Band joined. The Socialist Choir was made up of activists from the Labour Party and the Green Party and those involved in movements such as feminism, anti-apartheid, Chilean solidarity, and the peace movement.²⁶³ They sang at anti-poll tax demonstrations and at pit closures in the early 1990s. They learnt 'The Internationale' in Chinese to sing in solidarity with protesters at Tiananmen Square in 1989, and performed at Sheffield Cathedral in celebration of Nelson Mandela's release from prison in February 1990.²⁶⁴ Andy D'Agorne remembers that they aimed to inspire people on demonstrations, and Jill Angood concurs; 'something about singing together gives you a sense of solidarity... the music inspires the struggle. It's an important way for people to express their identity.'²⁶⁵ Like much new social movement activism, this was an 'expressive' form of politics.²⁶⁶ It was about performing a radical identity, and building 'social capital,' but it was also a way of commemorating Sheffield's longer activist tradition of Clarion choirs and the labour movement. D'Agorne says that the Choir was 'a very important network' of activists from different organisations who would support each other and make links between movements.²⁶⁷ Angood remembers that by the early 1990s, this network included gay activists, who, as the following chapter will show, had

²⁶² *ibid.*

²⁶³ Interview with Andy D'Agorne, 19th May 2013.

²⁶⁴ Interview with Andy D'Agorne, 19th May 2013; Interview with Jill Angood, 5th July 2013.

²⁶⁵ Interview with Jill Angood, 5th July 2013.

²⁶⁶ Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism*, 34.

²⁶⁷ Interview with Andy D'Agorne, 19th May 2013.

previously been somewhat excluded from Sheffield's politics. The Socialist Choir sang Tom Robinson's 'Glad to be Gay,' however Angood acknowledges that singing in solidarity is not the same as singing for your own identity and demands and 'exposing yourself' to an audience like Out Aloud, Sheffield's Gay Choir who formed in 2006, currently do.²⁶⁸

Both the Socialist Choir and the Celebrated Sheffield Street Band represent the coming together of radical movements in Sheffield's politics. The CSSB played at many protest events but attended peace and anti-nuclear marches more than demonstrations for any other cause. The Socialist Choir, again supported many movements, but above all else was inspired by the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa.²⁶⁹ The peace and anti-apartheid movements achieved a privileged position in Sheffield's politics, and this can be seen in the support they gained from Sheffield City Council and the numbers who mobilised for their demonstrations. In the 1980s, peace and anti-apartheid were popular movements across Britain, but in Sheffield the activists who supported them also managed to connect their issues successfully to labour movement concerns to build broad-based support. They made considered efforts to do this; the peace movement campaigned for 'Jobs and Services, not Bombs and Missiles' and the AAM determinedly remained a single issue campaign that aimed to win the political argument to make anti-apartheid a mainstream issue. But the labour movement in Sheffield was already sympathetic to these concerns due to a long tradition of left-wing involvement in these movements. The left in Britain, and left-wing activists in Sheffield, had been mobilising around peace and anti-apartheid since the 1950s. That these movements made it onto the table of new urban left concerns too was unsurprising.

In contrast, environmentalism and anti-racism, though sharing similarities to peace and anti-apartheid in their methods and principles, were not able to mobilise Sheffield's

²⁶⁸ Interview with Jill Angood, 5th July 2013.

²⁶⁹ Interview with Andy D'Agorne, 19th May 2013.

political milieu to the same extent. It might have been the case that, as Rosanvallon argues ‘negative coalitions are easier to organise than positive majorities.’²⁷⁰ Mobilising large numbers *against* nuclear weapons and *against* apartheid was easier than encouraging people to recycle or to actively address their own racism and fight for racial equality. However, it was also the case that, barring campaigns for the continuation of cheap bus fares, Friends of the Earth did not reach out to the labour movement in Sheffield. FoE was mainly concerned with finding solutions to problems of waste. While they would link up with other organisations interested in recycling and the environment, as a group of young professionals they did not share the same political spaces as activists like Paul Blomfield of the AAM and Jim Coleman of CND who had trade union backgrounds and were involved in Sheffield Trades and Labour Council. Anti-racism, on the other hand, did share space and personnel with the labour movement and principles with the anti-apartheid movement, but was still unable to mobilise the same levels of support as other causes. This was in part because of racism within the wider labour movement, but also because the Sheffield Council for Racial Equality, although it involved African-Caribbean and Asian activists on its sub-committees, was led by white activists George Caborn and Blanche Flannery. As such it was acting on behalf of black and minority ethnic people in Sheffield. As Angood acknowledged with ‘Glad to be Gay,’ singing in solidarity was not the same as singing for your own subjectivity. Likewise, campaigning in solidarity was not the same as fighting racism every day, and fighting against racism in South Africa called for a different approach and different tactics to fighting racism at home. African-Caribbean and Asian organisations, like SADACCA and the Asian Youth Movement, were mobilising black and Asian activists against racism – the AYM more directly than SADACCA – but they found it difficult to persuade activists from other movements to prioritise fighting against racism and for racial equality. Colin Grant of

²⁷⁰ Pierre Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*, (Cambridge, New York, 2008), 15.

the CSSB may remember finding it 'hard as a white man' to get his points heard at Commonground, but so did Mukhtar Dar and Aneez Ismail of the AYM; at Commonground and at the Sheffield Council for Racial Equality.

Sheffield's politics, though dominated by the labour movement, represented a diverse combination of old and new social movements, representing shared and competing subjectivities of class, gender, 'race', and sexuality. In the 1980s, proponents of the new urban left were trying to unite class, new social movements and identity politics into a common left-wing project that would mobilise against Thatcherism on a mass scale. However, as the inchoate nature of Sheffield's politics suggests, at a local level the new urban left's project broke down. Links and alliances were made between many movements and individual activists, but often tensions over differing priorities and between activists fighting for owned demands and those campaigning on behalf of issues were too great to overcome.

Chapter 5

City Limits: Sexual Politics in Sheffield

*Read how disgusting we are in the press
The News of The World and the Sunday Express
Molesters of children, corruptors of youth
It's there in the paper, it must be the truth*

*Sing if you're glad to be gay
Sing if you're happy that way*

Tom Robinson, "Glad to be Gay," 1976¹

In 2014, Matthew Warchus' film *Pride* appeared in British cinemas telling the story of how a small group of lesbians and gay men in London formed Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners; raising money for and building friendships with a mining community in Wales. *Pride* gives what was a complex, sometimes fraught, and intensely political alliance the 'feel-good British comedy' treatment.² Frequently mentioned in the same sentence as other films about mine closure and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike such as *Brassed Off* (1996) and *Billy Elliot* (2000), *Pride* struck a chord with most reviewers in the centre-left press. Some reviewers celebrated the gains made by gay men and lesbians since the 1980s, while others seemed resigned to the failure of the strike and class politics thereafter.³ The *Guardian's* Mark Kermode, a critic with a self-confessed 'banner-carrying, badge-wearing' past as a student activist, wrote that *Pride* 'reminds us of a time when things were more black-and-white –

¹ Tom Robinson, "Glad to be Gay," 1976 <http://gayinfo.tripod.com/glادتobegay.html> (accessed 29/07/2015).

² For a more nuanced account of LGSM see Diarmaid Kelliher, 'Solidarity and Sexuality: Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners 1984–5', *History Workshop Journal*, 77:1 (2014), 240-262.

³ Geoffrey MacNab, 'Two tribes and plenty of nostalgia in this feel-good hit', *The Independent*, 12th September 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/pride-film-review-two-tribes-and-plenty-of-nostalgia-in-this-feelgood-hit-9727720.html> (Accessed: 13/06/2015).

when the venality of Thatcher's government asked everyone 'Which Side Are You On?'⁴ This is something Warchus was consciously trying to portray. He wrote that the film's portrayal of 'the power of unity' was 'refreshing' and 'proof of how far we have drifted.'⁵ What Kermode saw in *Pride* and what Warchus put there is the notion that the left-wing politics of the 1980s had a sense of solidarity that is missing today, and that the left would do well to recover it.

This analysis of *Pride* partly comes from nostalgia. This is not unique to the left, as right-wing responses to the 2011 Thatcher biopic *The Iron Lady* showed. Despite Toby Young's insistence in the *Daily Mail* that *The Iron Lady* is 'the only exception' to a 'disgraceful series of truth-twisting films' recently produced on the 1980s, the film glossed over the decade's politics in favour of presenting Thatcher as a sympathetic post-feminist heroine, rather than the divisive figure she was and still is.⁶ Yet behind the nostalgia, there is a danger that these simplified versions of events will become ingrained in public memory. In doing so they may silence those who did not experience solidarity and encourage activists today to think that solidarity and intersectionality come easily. Not to do *Pride* a disservice; there are moments of tension between the two groups where hesitation and hostility are expressed on both sides. Yet, at the heart of the film is the notion that the mining community and LGSM accepted each other because of 'bigger concepts of generosity and compassion.'⁷ This may have some truth to it but it also cleanses the story of political machinations.

⁴ Mark Kermode, 'Pride Review – Power in an unlikely union', *The Guardian*, 14th September 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/sep/14/pride-film-review-mark-kermode-power-in-unlikely-union> (Accessed: 13/06/2015).

⁵ Matthew Warchus, 'Why I made a romcom about gay activists and striking miners', *The Guardian*, 21st May 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/may/21/matthew-warchus-pride-gay-activists-miners-strike> (Accessed 13/06/2015).

⁶ Toby Young, 'Enough to make you WEEP! No wonder Red Ed 'blubbed' over a film about gays and miners...', *The Daily Mail*, 3rd April 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3023916/Enough-make-WEEP-No-wonder-Red-Ed-blubbed-film-gays-miners-Like-British-films-today-mawkish-Leftie-propaganda.html> (Accessed 13/06/2015).

⁷ Matthew Warchus, 'Why I made a romcom about gay activists and striking miners', *The Guardian*, 21st May 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/may/21/matthew-warchus-pride-gay-activists-miners-strike> (accessed: 13/06/2015).

Mark Ashton, who headed LGSM, is shown in *Pride* deciding to collect for the miners at the 1984 Pride parade on a sympathetic whim. In contrast, Ashton had a history of linking his socialist and sexual politics. He hung a red flag from his window in honour of Pride in 1983, tabled motions on gay rights at meetings of the Young Communist League, and became the first out gay General Secretary of the YCL in 1985.⁸ Friends have stated in interviews that Ashton was a politically savvy socialist who planned LGSM with the intention of gaining National Union of Mineworkers support for gay rights at Labour Party conferences; a plan that seemed successful when the Labour Party conference formally adopted gay rights in 1985 and confirmed support in 1986.⁹ Likewise, the miners in *Pride* are shown to mishear who is offering the initial donation due to a dodgy telephone line, but as Diarmaid Kelliher explains; by the 1984-85 strike financial solidarity was welcome and more achievable than expecting other threatened industries to strike in solidarity.¹⁰ Furthermore, Kermode suggests that due to the ‘conciliatory and celebratory’ tone of *Pride*, we ‘laugh with...rather than at’ the separatist organisation Lesbians Against Pit Closures.¹¹ But this act of even gentle ridicule ignores the real issues that some lesbian women had with sharing political spaces with men that led to the formation of separatist groups. It further ignores the debates that followed on whether separatism was the correct course of action, or if it was more valuable to remain in male-dominated movements to fight sexism from within.¹²

⁸ Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in post-war Britain: How the personal got political*, (Manchester, New York, 2007), 164-5.

⁹ Elise Nakhnikian, ‘Film Review: *Pride*’, *Slant Magazine*, <http://www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/pride-2014> (accessed: 16/06/2015); Stephen Brooke, *Sexual Politics: Sexuality, Family Planning, and the British Left from the 1880s to the Present Day*, (Oxford, New York, 2011), 235, 245.

¹⁰ Kelliher, ‘Sexuality and Solidarity,’ 2.

¹¹ Kermode, ‘Power in an unlikely union’, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/sep/14/pride-film-review-mark-kermode-power-in-unlikely-union> (accessed: 13/06/2015).

¹² Kelliher, ‘Sexuality and Solidarity,’ 7; Colin Crews, ‘1984. Politics: Lesbians Against Pit Closures’, *Gay in the 80s*, <http://www.gayinthe80s.com/2014/09/1984-politics-lesbians-against-pit-closures/> (accessed: 16/06/2015).

As Lucy Robinson argues, Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners was ‘unrepresentative’ of how gay rights movements and the wider left engaged with one another in post-war Britain.¹³ LGSM was on the whole a ‘refreshingly positive’ campaign in that it allowed lesbians and gay men to campaign for a socialist cause without denying their lesbian and gay identities.¹⁴ LGSM’s support was not just acknowledged but reciprocated by the miners when they led the 1985 Pride march. Yet Robinson suggests that this event has been used by the left to ‘wipe clean its slate on the politics of sexuality,’ and in some ways the unproblematized version of solidarity expressed in the film *Pride* attempts the same revisionism. But while LGSM was a specific moment when class and identity politics were unified, the sense of unity did not last beyond the campaign and nor was it widespread during the campaign. The positive effects of LGSM did not reach Sheffield and David Blunkett refused LGSM’s request for funding towards a documentary of their campaign, deeming it an ‘inappropriate’ use of funds.¹⁵ This chapter explores Sheffield’s gay politics to show how left-wing solidarity in the city broke down.

Robinson argues that activist groups were ‘constrained by *either class or identity*,’ with their subjectivities organised in what she terms a ‘hierarchy of victimhood.’¹⁶ The structure of this hierarchy differed for each activist. Gay activists increasingly placed their need for safe expression of their sexual identity at the top, whilst members of the labour movement continued to focus on class issues; deeming the collective more important than sexuality which was often considered to be a private matter of individual rights rather than a political identity. As such, gay activists would frequently focus on gay identity politics, whether within workplace campaigns or in the social and pastoral sphere. Their reluctance to

¹³ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 168.

¹⁴ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 164.

¹⁵ Kelliher, ‘Solidarity and Sexuality,’ 13.

¹⁶ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 194, 187.

share spaces and campaigns with other movements stemmed from both a lack of interest and negative experiences of working with left-wing organisations.¹⁷ Likewise, despite limited support from trade unions for workplace campaigns, Sheffield's labour movement avoided involvement with gay politics. Sheffield City Council found the occasional request for funding from lesbian and gay organisations especially problematic in the latter half of the 1980s as it tried to distance itself from the 'loony left' of the Greater London Council under the increased scrutiny of local government finance. In 1980s Sheffield, lesbian and gay identity politics was where subjectivity trumped solidarity. This was partly because of rising homophobia and constraints to local government funding, but it was also because Sheffield's labour movement failed to recognise the political significance of sexual identity at a moment when left-wing gay activists were turning more fully towards it.

Gay Rights Activism in Sheffield

The politics of class and the politics of sexuality are emblematic of the problems and themes of movements coming together and the barriers which derailed the building of coherent political projects. As explored in the previous chapter, solidarity was not the same as subjectivity, and likewise, a shared subjectivity did not always lead to solidarity between activists. While this is the case for many involved in single issue movements, it was particularly acute in the politics of gay rights in the 1970s and 1980s. For a start gay politics was not always left-wing. *Checkmate*, the Checkers Society 'guide to the gay community' in Sheffield, included five 'political' organisations catering to gay people, though none were based in Sheffield; the Liberal Gay Action Group, the Gay Social Democrats, the Labour Campaign for Gay Rights, the Conservative Group for Homosexual Equality, and the National Council of Civil Liberties.¹⁸ While four of these groups could be broadly

¹⁷ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 162.

¹⁸ Hall Carpenter Archives: HCA/EPHEMERA-940 (8319./1938), Checkers Society, *Checkmate*, 1984.

categorised as left-leaning, the Conservative group could not. Despite later attacks on homosexuality, such as Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act which directed that no local authority should 'promote homosexuality' or the 'acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship,' being gay and Conservative were far from incompatible in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Indeed some affluent gay professionals 'content with the rights they had' did not see the need to campaign further.¹⁹ Others enjoyed the rise of a 'macho homosexuality' and culture of clubbing associated with the early years of Thatcherism.²⁰ Hugh David argues that it was the Thatcher government's failure to respond quickly and adequately to AIDS which caused many gay men to 'lose faith in Thatcherism' and to react against conservatism within the gay community.²¹ Indeed, whereas 1,000 people marched at Pride in 1977, the number had risen to 10,000 by Pride 1985.²² The newly radicalised, however, were not necessarily left-wing and AIDS-related organisations including the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT-UP) often described themselves as 'non-partisan.'²³

For those that were left-wing, bringing together gay politics and class-based politics was also not a simple matter. As Lucy Robinson has shown in her history of gay men and the left, throughout the 1970s and much of the 1980s, the Marxist left and members of the wider labour movement viewed homosexuality as a 'bourgeois deviation' which would fade in the face of socialism.²⁴ As a result of this gay activists involved in left-wing campaigns often side-lined their sexuality in favour of socialism. When the wider left did focus on the politics of sexuality responses varied. Some were negative, as seen in the homophobic treatment of Peter Tatchell in the 1983 Bermondsey by-election; some were considered to be nothing

¹⁹ Hugh David, *On Queer Street: A Social History of British Homosexuality, 1895-1995*, (London, 1997), 240.

²⁰ David, *On Queer Street*, 254-5.

²¹ David, *On Queer Street*, 256.

²² David, *On Queer Street*, 240, 256.

²³ Sheffield Archives, X608/2/1, ACT UP – Sheffield, Leaflet.

²⁴ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 141, 146.

more than 'window-dressing,' as with the Anti-Nazi League; and some, in the case of the Greater London Council, were aimed at the co-option of grassroots activists.²⁵ From this perspective, gay politics and socialism could seem incongruent if not irreconcilable, yet there were gay socialists who fought against this perspective to bring the two together.

Bob Cant and Nigel Young of the Gay Left Collective explained how initiatives like the Gay Workers Movement attempted to reconcile dual commitments to gay liberation and to socialism by attempting to create a 'new anti-sexist' workplace culture.²⁶ This involved making alliances with heterosexual people who were also 'oppressed by the dominant pattern of heterosexism.' These were identified by Cant and Young as single parents, disabled people, young and old people, and women who refused to conform to stereotypical roles.²⁷ But working within the labour movement required gay activists to engage with politics on terms set by the labour movement. Cant and Young described how 'to get a motion accepted, there must be gays who are good at public speaking, who are respected enough for their other trade-union work to be delegated to district and national meetings.'²⁸ This required activists to immerse themselves in trade union politics, risking becoming 'distant' from the gay community. For Cant and Young, the very structures of the labour movement were alien to many gay activists who had come to politics in autonomous, liberational movements. Gay activists were used to fighting against the oppression of their community and lifestyle, rather than against exploitation by employers or the state.²⁹ Furthermore the act of bringing the concepts of oppression and exploitation together was complicated by the middle class nature of gay subculture. Because of this, Cant and Young argued that some gay socialists

²⁵ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 117, 145, 146.

²⁶ Bob Cant and Nigel Young, 'New Politics, Old Struggles' in Gay Left Collective, *Homosexuality: Power and Politics*, (London, New York, 1980), 119-121.

²⁷ Cant and Young, 'New politics, old struggles,' 121.

²⁸ Cant and Young, 'New politics, old struggles,' 122.

²⁹ Cant and Young, 'New politics, old struggles,' 124.

organising in the wider gay community could not have the same relationship to class as the rest of the political left.³⁰ Despite these challenges, many gay socialists recognised that linking the politics of exploitation and oppression was ‘a precondition of socialism’ and set about trying to achieve this in the labour movement and in gay politics.³¹

Uniting these politics however was not straight-forward, and meant different things to different organisations. For example, in 1975 Bradford Gay Liberation Front spoke of integrating working class people more fully into the gay rights movement at the Campaign for Homosexual Equality conference held in Sheffield. Bradford GLF acknowledged the socialist criticisms of gay liberation as a movement of the “petty bourgeois,” but countered that it was ‘stupid’ to say the fight of the working class was more important than that of gay people because exploitation and social oppression were ‘all tangled up together.’³² Yet they recognised that class was important to the gay rights movement, not just because of the significant number of working class gay people in their community, but because they saw class consciousness as ‘the lynch pin of radical activity in Britain.’³³ Despite this though, Bradford GLF were wary of engaging with the labour movement, preferring to link up with the more structurally similar squatters’ rights groups and the women’s movement with whom they claimed to share solidarity. Furthermore, they argued that they could only change negative attitudes within the labour movement by acting ‘thoroughly independent[ly]’ of it. Bradford GLF advocated growing a local working class gay community who would fight issues of job security, police intimidation, and landlord harassment alongside community groups and the labour movement, but would stand separately because ‘what we do comes

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Cant and Young, ‘New politics, old struggles,’ 127.

³² HCA/CHE/13/39: General Papers: Material from other groups 1970s and 1980s, Gay Liberation Bradford 1975 – Published at the CHE Conference, Sheffield August 1975.

³³ *ibid.*

from our own demands and our own needs.’³⁴ Bradford GLF would give and accept ‘active support’ from other movements, but not ‘sympathy’ or ‘false unity.’³⁵ For Bradford GLF, subjectivity trumped solidarity but the importance of class meant that solidarity formed a complex part of their politics.

The complexities of class politics and sexual politics can also be seen in the Gay Rights At Work campaign (GRAW). GRAW was a London-based organisation that campaigned for parity in the way heterosexual and gay workers were treated; fighting for compassionate leave to be granted to workers with same-sex partners, and raising awareness of and supporting individuals who had been fired for being gay. GRAW held their 1981 conference in Sheffield, with the financial support of fifty seven sponsors including branches of the National and Local Government Officers’ Association (NALGO), the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and the Sheffield branch of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW). As this suggests, GRAW worked closely with trade unions, and managed to make links with Sheffield’s labour movement. Indeed the GRAW slogan was “Defend your union,” as can be seen on the 1981 conference poster, which depicted workers marching within the pink triangle of the gay movement. The pink triangle had been reclaimed from Nazi concentration camps and was later utilised in the “Silence = Death” campaigns around AIDS in the late 1980s (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2).³⁶

Visually the two posters are strikingly similar, yet their slogans could not be more different both in tone and in the message they presented. GRAW’s “Defend your union”

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ ‘Silence = Death’, ACTUP New York, <http://www.actupny.org/reports/silencedeath.html> (accessed: 17/06/2015).

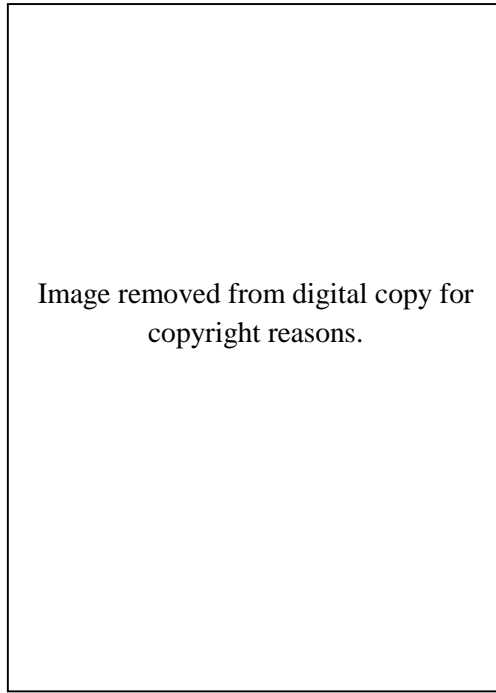


Figure 5.1: GRAW Conference Poster, 1981.³⁷

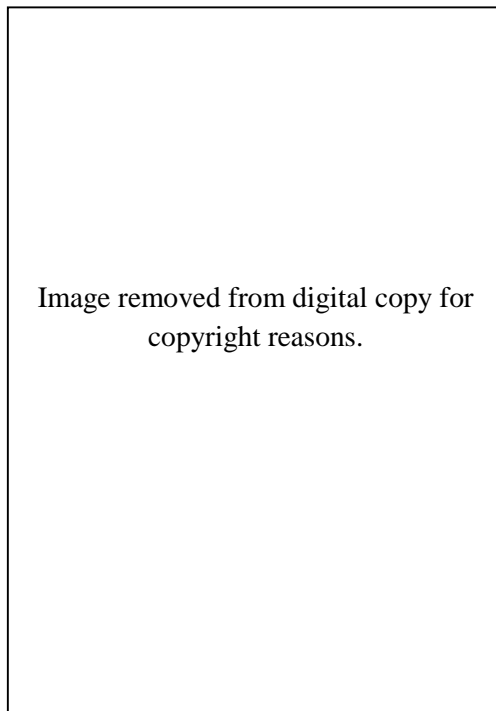


Figure 5.2: Silence = Death Campaign Poster, 1987.³⁸

³⁷ HCA/EPHEMERA/103 Gay rights at work, 1980-1982, GRAW Conference, Sheffield, 28 March 1981.

³⁸ 'Silence = Death', ACTUP New York, <http://www.actupny.org/reports/silencedeath.html> (accessed: 17/06/2015).

placed it firmly within trade union politics, and made solidarity with the unions its main campaign tool. “Defend your union,” it stated, “and your union will defend you” was implied. Coming later, amidst the AIDS epidemic and both the Thatcher and Reagan governments’ inadequate responses to it, “Silence = Death” was a much stronger, angrier, more desperate slogan. It suggested those living with AIDS and members of the gay community who were at risk needed to speak for themselves because no one else would, with tragic alternatives. Indeed, Robinson argues that AIDS inspired a ‘re-ascendancy’ of gay activism that went beyond participation in ‘other people’s causes.’³⁹ Gay activists saw the need for self-defence against attacks from the political right and left, which by the late 1980s had ‘burnt bridges’ with gay activists. This was illustrated by the Labour Party front bench joining the Conservative majority to support the passing of Section 28 without a vote.⁴⁰ Even in 1981, GRAW’s campaign strategy did not go uncriticised by gay activists at the Sheffield conference. A report of the conference recorded that one woman argued that “Gay rights is about humanising people... it’s not just about taking on board another trade union issue.”⁴¹ Furthermore, a number of activists suggested that GRAW was too focused on working with trade unions and the labour movement, and did not listen enough to gay rights organisations.⁴² This problem was shared by the Gay Workers’ Movement in the 1970s, which also had to contend with accusations that it was a front for the International Marxist Group. Campaigner Gregg Blachford noted that ‘often other gays are totally against us and we are ignored by most of the revolutionary left.’⁴³ With GWM and GRAW we can see gay rights movements which worked firmly within left-wing and labour movement territories, yet their grassroots activists struggled to unite labour and gay politics.

³⁹ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 174.

⁴⁰ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 6, 171.

⁴¹ HCA/EPHEMERA/103 Gay rights at work, 1980-1982, Newsletter May 1981.

⁴² HCA/EPHEMERA/103 Gay rights at work, 1980-1982, Newsletter May 1981.

⁴³ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 126.

In the mid 1980s the majority of Sheffield's gay activism was deemed non-political, and gay groups organised independently of Sheffield's wider radical milieu. The focus of Sheffield's gay rights movement was on creating a gay community and establishing safe spaces for gay people to socialise with one another. The Sheffield branch of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) hosted the annual CHE conferences in 1975 and 1982 where wider issues were discussed. The 1975 conference, attended by 1,200 delegates, called for the Trades Union Congress to 'revise its anti-discrimination code to include the category of sexual orientation.'⁴⁴ The smaller 1982 conference, repackaged as 'Gayfest '82,' organised its four hundred delegates into workshops discussing 'Gay Rights and the Labour Party,' 'Sexism in the Gay Movement' and political issues such as law reform.⁴⁵ Matt Cook suggests that generally CHE was an ineffective political organisation. Rather its successes in the 1970s were social and pastoral; evidenced in the development of discos and counselling services.⁴⁶ This was the case in Sheffield, and Sheffield CHE was behind one of the largest gay discos in Britain having fought hard for the right to use Council premises such as the Civic Hall as venues.⁴⁷ Yet for Terry Sanderson, a gay activist who grew up in neighbouring Rotherham, these discos were inherently political. Sanderson wrote that 'the concept of 'gay community' was born in Sheffield through those discos.' The establishment of spaces where 'romance could be safely experienced' was both a radical act and answering a key demand.⁴⁸ As Jeffrey Weeks has suggested, the establishment of a community helped to construct gay subjectivity through action. Community stood 'for some notion of solidarity, a solidarity which empowers and enables, and makes individual and social action possible.'⁴⁹ Participation in a gay

⁴⁴ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Gay to be Gay song ends conference,' 26th August 1975, 5.

⁴⁵ *The Sheffield Star* 'City hosts gay festival,' 21st August 1982, 3; HCA/EPHEMERA/103: 1982 Sheffield Gayfest, 27-30th August 1982: Draft Programme.

⁴⁶ Matt Cook, *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex between Men since the Middle Ages*, (Oxford, 2007), 184.

⁴⁷ Cook, *A Gay History of Britain*, 184; Terry Sanderson, 'Faltering from the Closet' in Bob Cant and Susan Hemmings (eds.) *Radical Records: Thirty Years of Lesbian and Gay History*, (London, New York, 1988), 88.

⁴⁸ Sanderson, 'Faltering from the Closet,' 88.

⁴⁹ Jeffrey Weeks, *Making Sexual History*, (Cambridge, 2000), 185.

community gave gay people, political or not, space to articulate their identity, develop a ‘vocabulary of values’ of what issues were important to them, and learn skills which could be used in later campaigning.⁵⁰ This was significant on a political and personal level, as 68-year old CHE delegate Trevor Thomas, who found himself quoted in *The Sheffield Star* in 1975, recalled; “I was out, and could not have been more obviously out... I’ve summed it up in the phrase that three days in Sheffield did more for me than three years on valium.”⁵¹ In this way, the social and pastoral activism of gay communities was personal, but also inherently political.

In 1980 Sheffield CHE rebranded itself as the Checkers Society, and in 1983 reconstituted itself into a campaigning arm (Sheffield CHE) and a social arm (Checkers Society). The Checkers Society flourished, forming a Gay Community Council in 1984 to avoid the duplication of social events and ‘to speak with a united voice on matters of local and national concern to gays.’⁵² Representing groups such as Sheffield Friend, Sheffield Lesbian Line, Sheffield Gayphone (all counselling and information services), Paulinus (for gay Roman Catholics), the Samaritans, Gay Christian Movement, Parents Enquiry, GLAD-Gay Legal Advice, Sheffield CHE, Gay Switchboard, and Group B (for gay men with Hepatitis B); the Gay Community Council continued to construct a gay community in Sheffield. Checkers Society discos grew in popularity. In May 1984 the Society celebrated the attendance of 6,000 gay people at their discos since January, and predicted many more as their total for 1983 was 11,081.⁵³ The Checkers Society was saving to open a Gay Centre in Sheffield, but they also used the profits from discos to subscribe to the National Council of

⁵⁰ Weeks, *Making Sexual History*, 192.

⁵¹ Cook, *A Gay History of Britain*, 185; *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Glad to be Gay song ends conference’, 26th August 1975, 5.

⁵² HCA/EPHEMERA-940 (8319./1938): Checkers Society, ‘Sheffield Regional Gay Community Information Guide,’ Issue 3.

⁵³ HCA/EPHEMERA-940 (8319./1938): Checkers Society, Newsletter, May 1984.

Civil Liberties and to support Sheffield Friend. In 1984 the Society gave a donation to St Luke's Hospice in Sheffield which may have been caring for patients with HIV and AIDS.⁵⁴

Sheffield Gayphone, set up in 1980, was also an important part of the gay community in Sheffield; providing a phone line for gay people to ring for counselling or advice. In 1984-85 they received 721 calls, which rose to 850 in 1985-86. In 1985-86, 23 percent of calls were for counselling and 31 percent were asking for information. A further 3 percent of calls were specifically about AIDS, 6 percent were abusive or hoax calls, and a startling 26 percent were silent.⁵⁵ While there is no way of knowing the intent behind the silent calls, it is clear that Sheffield Gayphone provided a visible place for gay people to receive counselling and advice anonymously whatever their needs or motivations. Members of Sheffield Gayphone also contributed to a Workers' Educational Association course on 'Gay Studies,' and by 1986 began to discuss setting up support groups for gay people with AIDS.⁵⁶ The overwhelming majority of callers to Sheffield Gayphone were male (see Table 5.1). It is possible that Sheffield's lesbian and bisexual women were calling Lesbian Line, a support line for women, but the dominance of men was commonplace in Sheffield's gay community. The Checkers Society management committee was made up of seven men and three women and all of the volunteers for Sheffield Friend were men.⁵⁷ This was a familiar pattern across Britain's gay communities with many lesbian women choosing to organise autonomously or with the Women's Liberation Movement instead, as discussed in chapter 3. Despite various calls from within and outside of CHE and the GLF to address sexism within the movement this did not change. Throughout the 1980s Sheffield Gayphone attracted no more female callers and

⁵⁴ HCA/EPHEMERA-940 (8319./1938): Checkers Society, 'Sheffield Regional Gay Community Information Guide,' Issue 3; Checkers Society, Newsletter, May 1984.

⁵⁵ HCA/EPHEMERA/702 Sheffield Gay Phone, 1985-87; Sheffield Gay Phone Annual Report, 1985-86.

⁵⁶ HCA/EPHEMERA/702 Sheffield Gay Phone, 1985-87; Sheffield Gay Phone Annual Report, 1985-86.

⁵⁷ HCA/EPHEMERA-940 (8319./1938): Checkers Society, Newsletter, May 1984; HCA/FRIEND/ADDITIONAL/3/45 – Sheffield Survey, 1982-7 Survey for National Friend Annual Report.

instead focussed their energies on AIDS. They developed an AIDS support group with funding from the Terrence Higgins Trust and worked with South Yorkshire Action on AIDS and the AIDS Forum to develop strategies for raising awareness.⁵⁸ South Yorkshire Action on AIDS was described as being particularly important for raising awareness of AIDS in Yorkshire; ‘not just in London – it’s here now.’⁵⁹

Year	Male	Female	Unidentified	Total No. Callers
1984-85	461	50	210	721
1985-86	587	43	220	850
1986-87	442	20	107	569

Table 5.1: Callers to Sheffield Gayphone, 1984-87.⁶⁰

Throughout the 1980s, Sheffield’s gay community focussed on offering support and safe spaces to gay people in various aspects of their lives; through discos, counselling and information services, and support groups. Whilst this was political it was a different kind of activism to that of the rest of Sheffield’s radical milieu. Organising around AIDS did radicalise Sheffield’s gay activists further however. By 1990 some had formed a Sheffield branch of ACT-UP; a non-partisan group which used non-violent direct action to campaign for increased medical research, public education and treatment for AIDS, and an end to discrimination against people living with AIDS.⁶¹ The Sheffield group held an Aidsline stall on Fargate for World AIDS Day and started their direct action campaign by picketing Texaco petrol stations over their practice of mandatory HIV testing for employees. They used slogans such as ‘No blood for Texaco’ and ‘Texaco wants to know: do you have HIV?’ which they claimed had a ‘very positive response from car drivers... many of whom about turned and

⁵⁸ HCA/EPHEMERA/702 Sheffield Gay Phone, 1985-87; Sheffield Gay Phone Annual Report, 1986-87.

⁵⁹ Sheffield Local Studies Library: MP4196S, Sheffield AIDS Education Project, ‘HIV, AIDS and Us: gay men in Sheffield talk about it,’ 1992.

⁶⁰ HCA/EPHEMERA/702 Sheffield Gay Phone, 1985-87; Sheffield Gay Phone Annual Report, 1984-87

⁶¹ SA, X608/2/1, ACT UP – Sheffield, Leaflet.

took their custom elsewhere.’⁶² Sheffield ACT-UP also used the ‘Silence = Death’ slogan, which was stitched on their marching banner (see Figure 5.3). However they made more use of the other half of the slogan, “Action = Life”, which represented their ‘commitment to direct action.’⁶³ In accordance with the wider ACT-UP movement, Sheffield ACT-UP aimed to turn fear, grief and anger into action. Writing that the ‘current climate of fear, prejudice and ignorance surrounding AIDS, ARC, and HIV makes easy partnerships with racism, sexism, homophobia,’ they called for anyone who was ‘angry’ to ‘join us and let your voice be heard.’⁶⁴ More explicitly, in a letter between members Alison Groombridge and Sarah Spanton, Groombridge asked Spanton to publicise future meetings ‘especially amongst heterosexual friends’ to ensure the group’s survival.⁶⁵ By linking homophobia to racism and sexism, and calling on heterosexual support, Sheffield ACT-UP attempted to speak to Sheffield’s wider radical milieu. Furthermore they addressed issues that were surfacing within the gay community, responding to men like ‘Steve’ who told the Sheffield AIDS Education Project that ‘Black people get blamed for AIDS... The gay community should definitely think about all the racism more seriously.’⁶⁶

However, despite the trade union membership of some ACT-UP members – press releases were written on the back of Graphical Paper and Media Union ballot papers – Sheffield ACT-UP did not engage with the labour movement. Furthermore, their headquarters was located at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Society at Sheffield University’s Students’ Union at Western Bank, and they preferred to meet at Western Bank (‘because it’s free!!’) or the Nelson Mandela Building at Sheffield Polytechnic Students’ Union on Pond

⁶² SA, X608/2/1: Flyers, newsletters, stickers etc., 1991-1994; SA, X608/2/2: Campaign banner, (early 1990s): ‘Aids Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT-UP), Sheffield. Action = Life; Silence = Death.’

⁶³ SA, X608/2/1: Flyers, newsletters, stickers etc., 1991-1994, Texaco Leaflet.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ SA, X608/2/1: Flyers, newsletters, stickers etc., 1991-1994, Letter from Alison Groombridge to Sarah Spanton, 1990.

⁶⁶ SLSL: MP4196S, Sheffield AIDS Education Project, ‘HIV, AIDS and Us: gay men in Sheffield talk about it,’ 1992.

Street.⁶⁷ They also engaged with ACT-UP movements in other cities such as Leeds and Manchester. It was noted that Leeds ‘has a stronger tradition of lefty/subversive/political commitment,’ perhaps referring to the radical milieu around Leeds University which had been integral to the development of revolutionary feminism.⁶⁸ Rather than making use of other activist spaces such as Commonground, Sheffield ACT-UP preferred to organise around existing student spaces, and valued the radical University milieu over the labour movement and Sheffield’s wider politics.

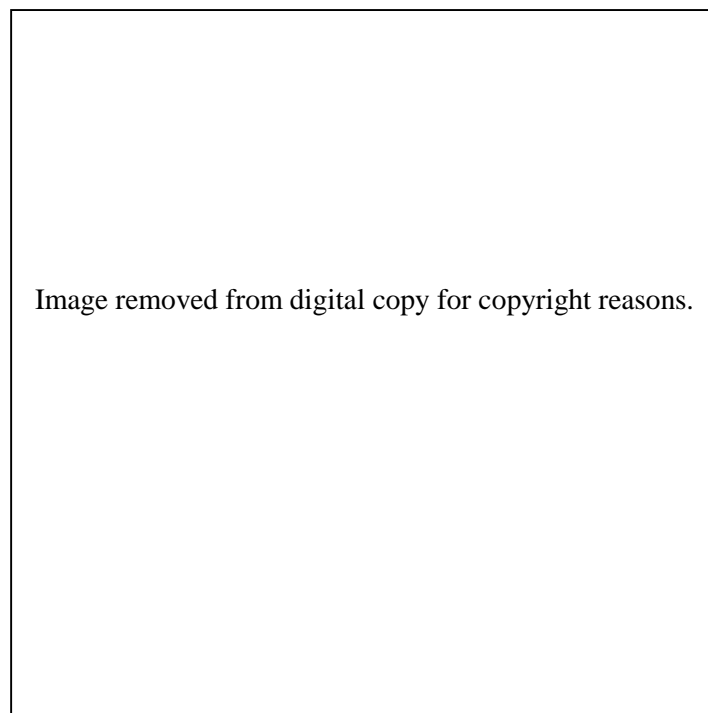


Figure 5.3: ‘Aids Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT-UP), Sheffield. Action = Life; Silence = Death.’⁶⁹

Due to the focus on social and pastoral causes, and then on self-defence, Sheffield’s gay activism was isolated from the wider activist milieu in the city, with other, earlier gay

⁶⁷ SA, X608/2/1: Flyers, newsletters, stickers etc., 1991-1994, Leaflets, Letter from Alison Groombridge to Sarah Spanton, 1990.

⁶⁸ SA, X608/2/1: Flyers, newsletters, stickers etc., 1991-1994, ACT-UP Manchester, Minutes of a public meeting held on 6th December 1993.

⁶⁹ SA, X608/2/2: Campaign banner, (early 1990s): 'Aids Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT-UP), Sheffield. Action = Life; Silence = Death.' Reproduced here with permission from Sheffield Archives.

organisations preferring to organise around the universities as well. Gay students in the Sheffield Students Lesbian and Gay Society and the Sheffield City Polytechnic Gay Soc made some attempts to link up with other organisations in the city; discussing the role of women and promoting Anti-Apartheid boycotts.⁷⁰ But for the most part that solidarity was not returned. Support, especially from the labour movement, was minimal. Equally the gay rights movement rarely engaged with the labour movement. Sheffield City Council welcomed the CHE conference with a £1,000 civic reception in 1975, and allowed them to use the Cathedral forecourt for a demonstration despite complaints from the Cathedral authorities.⁷¹ But on that occasion CHE was bringing an estimated £60,000 worth of trade to the city, and the Council recognised the economic benefits.⁷² When the National Front took offence to the CHE conference and put up posters condemning homosexuality, they were criticised by a number of Labour councillors.⁷³ This was part of a larger response to the National Front rather than explicit support of gay rights, but it was still a significant intervention. In the 1970s the anti-fascist movement was slow to come to the defence of gay men attacked by the National Front. Despite CHE's regular donations to the Anti-Nazi League, the ANL offered little active support when the NF attacked CHE meetings and offices.⁷⁴ This lack of support spread to the wider left. There was no anti-fascist coalition in Bermondsey when the National Front published Peter Tatchell's home address on their campaign leaflets and encouraged their supporters to 'question Mr Tatchell more closely about his views.'⁷⁵

Yet Sheffield City Council's support of gay politics was severely limited compared to that of the Greater London Council. In 1982, Sheffield City Council granted Sheffield

⁷⁰ HCA/EPHEMERA/427 Sheffield Students Lesbian and Gay Society 1985; HCA/EPHEMERA/939 – Sheffield City Polytechnic Gay Soc; Gay Soc Winter 1985.

⁷¹ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Gay delegates...' 16th August 1975, 6; *The Sheffield Star*, 'Letters: 'Gays' and the law of God', 11th September 1975, 13.

⁷² *The Sheffield Star*, 'Gay delegates...' 16th August 1975, 6.

⁷³ *The Sheffield Star*, 'Letters: National Front view,' 11th September 1975, 13.

⁷⁴ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 115.

⁷⁵ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 162.

Gayphone fifty pounds for installation and line rental.⁷⁶ In comparison, that year the GLC founded a Gay Working Party, and in 1984 granted lesbian and gay groups £300,000 in funding and designated a further £750,000 for a lesbian and gay community centre.⁷⁷ In March 1986, the local branch of NALGO reported that Sheffield City Council's Equal Opportunities Code of Practice would, for the first time, make 'specific reference' to sexuality in support of lesbians and gay men, possibly in response to the national Labour Party's conference commitments on gay rights.⁷⁸ Sheffield City Council appeared to be broadly sympathetic to gay rights, but offered very little in the way of active support. Clive Betts, councillor and later MP, remembers Enid Hattersley, a Labour councillor and Lord Mayor of Sheffield in the early 1980s, saying that though she had nothing against homosexuals she would not "bend over backwards to help them."⁷⁹ While Betts, a gay man himself, finds humour in this statement, it was indicative of how many in the labour movement, especially the older generation, felt towards gay rights and gay people.

This reticence, as Lucy Robinson's work suggests, was due to wider problems and a longer history of integrating gay politics and the left, but Helen Smith's recent work on northern sexualities sheds further light on the labour movement's reluctance to engage with gay politics. Smith explains that throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century attitudes towards men having sex with men among the working class in Yorkshire were generally tolerant. Smith attributes this to the prevalence of a homosocial culture in male-dominated heavy industry and Richard Hoggart's notion of a working class 'unidealistic tolerance'; a "mind your own business" attitude born of hardship which allowed people to take what pleasure they could in their private lives.⁸⁰ However, this tolerance had a limit. It

⁷⁶ SA, CA-POL14/450 Lottery Sub-Committee minutes 23rd July 1982.

⁷⁷ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 144.

⁷⁸ Andy D'Agorne Archive, Sheffield NALGO, *Root and Branch*, No. 4, March 1986.

⁷⁹ Interview with Clive Betts, 19th July 2013.

⁸⁰ Helen Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957*, (2015), 111-113.

was based upon sex between men remaining a private and unarticulated behaviour.⁸¹ Smith argues that the ‘vacuum of language’ that existed around sexuality in working class communities into the 1940s and 1950s gave some men the freedom to have sex with men without it influencing their identity or masculinity.⁸² In parts of Yorkshire where working class masculinity was tied to heavy industry, such as Sheffield, Barnsley and Rotherham, men who had sex with men socialised through work and pubs rather than the identifiable gay subcultures seen in cities like London and Birmingham.⁸³ Smith shows the importance of work to identity; citing many cases where men on trial for having sex with men were vouched for by their colleagues and trade unions. Their identities as ‘good workers’ overrode their sexual practice. Sex between men was tolerated as long as it was not the main feature of a man’s sense of self. This culture proved untenable for some men, like the aforementioned Terry Sanderson, who wanted to engage with their sexuality openly and publicly and saw it as integral to their identity. However, for many northern working class men this ‘was a desirable way of life and they could react negatively when gay rights activists attempted to politicise and publicise sex between men.’⁸⁴

The decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967 and rising affluence eroded this attitude. Greater visibility and a more fixed perception of homosexuality in the popular media brought the notion of men having sex with men and what that might mean out of the private sphere. Affluence altered the homosocial culture of the industrial workplace with many men choosing to spend leisure time at home and with their families rather than with male friends.⁸⁵ However, aspects of these attitudes remained, especially in places like Sheffield where industries such as steel survived into the 1970s and early 1980s. The effects of tolerance and

⁸¹ Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire*, 114.

⁸² Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire*, 216.

⁸³ Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire*, 150-157.

⁸⁴ Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire*, 246.

⁸⁵ Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire*, 245.

its limits can be seen on Sheffield's sexual politics. Terry Sanderson remembers facing jeers from heterosexual working class men every time he entered the King William pub in Sheffield in the 1970s to visit the gay pub upstairs. While this was a horrible and alienating experience for Sanderson, Smith notes that such jeering had its roots in earlier workplace 'banter' experienced by men who had sex with men which expressed an awkward form of acceptance rather than hostility.⁸⁶ Without denying Sanderson's reading of the situation, it should be noted that gay men were allowed continued use of the room in the King William. They were never asked to leave and nor were they shut down by the police. Compared to Lesbian Line's removal from the Royal Standard pub in the 1980s after complaints were made about women kissing, customers in the King William showed a level of tolerance.⁸⁷ However, gay activists demanded more than tolerance and set up Checkers and later the Women's Cultural Club as safe spaces to socialise. The development of an emerging gay identity could go towards explaining some of Sheffield Gayphone's silent calls in the 1980s as men who had sex with men perhaps struggled to articulate a newly acknowledged gay identity.

The King William pub and Enid Hattersley's comments suggest that in the 1970s and early 1980s there was still a tolerance of gay people among Sheffield's working class and the labour movement, as long as it was a quiet, unarticulated homosexuality. The 1980s eroded this tolerance further, bringing an increase in homophobia, reinforcement of the cultural understanding of homosexuality as a threat through Section 28 and the Government and media's response to AIDS, and the sexualisation of local government. Despite Stephen Brooke's argument that the Labour Party's commitment in 1985 and 1986 to fight for equality on the basis of sexual orientation was a 'massive sea-change' in the Party's attitude

⁸⁶ Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire*, 244.

⁸⁷ Interview with Ros Wollen, 13th September 2013.

to sexuality that should not be underestimated, these resolutions did not launch a new drive towards sexual equality in Sheffield.⁸⁸ Rather, Sheffield City Council continued to distance itself from gay politics, only engaging when it had to. In response to Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act, Sheffield City Council agreed that they would ‘oppose Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill... and support the campaign launched by various organisations against the Clause.’⁸⁹ That support never materialised. They did send a member of the Policy Committee to attend a seminar in Manchester organised by the Association of Local Authorities and the Local Government Information Unit to discuss the legal issues.⁹⁰ For Sheffield City Council, the legal issues of Section 28 overshadowed the concerns of gay activists. As Sheffield Film Officer Dave Godin told the *Sheffield Star*: “I am worried ... there is a grey legal area here. It is a threat to civil liberties, and like all censorship it is ultimately the censorship of ideas. There is a whiff of fascism about it.”⁹¹ While speaking of ‘censorship’ and ‘fascism’ there was no mention of sexuality. The Labour Group in Sheffield, like the wider Labour Party, made Section 28 into an issue of individual rights rather than gay rights.⁹² Gay rights was not a popular cause outside of gay and left-wing communities, and was seen as too risky for a Labour Group recovering from rate-capping to engage with. Indeed, in 1983, 62 percent of people were against gay relationships. This rose to 69 percent in 1985 and reached 74 percent in 1987 in the wake of the moralising hysteria around AIDS.⁹³ Prosecutions for ‘homosexual offences’ reached a level in the 1980s not seen since 1954, before decriminalisation, and incidents of ‘queer-bashing’ increased ‘dramatically.’⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Brooke, *Sexual Politics*, 246.

⁸⁹ SA, CA-POL/3134 Women’s Panel 15th January 1988.

⁹⁰ SA, CA-POL/34/ 139 Policy Committee 26th April 1988.

⁹¹ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Clampdown on the gay image’, 3rd March 1988, 4.

⁹² Brooke, *Sexual Politics*, 241.

⁹³ Cook, *A Gay History of Britain*, 205; Weeks, *Making Sexual History*, 171.

⁹⁴ Weeks, *Making Sexual History*, 171.

For Sheffield City Council and the Labour Group, gay rights were neither a priority nor popular with the electorate. This position was exacerbated by the association of gay politics with the ‘loony left’ and profligate Labour councils sensationalised in right-wing media. Brooke notes that the tabloid press and Conservative think tanks ‘sexualised, or homosexualised’ local government rates by invariably linking high spending to grants made to gay organisations.⁹⁵ Brooke suggests that local government was negatively identified with the perceived sexual and moral ‘excess of gay and lesbian rights.’⁹⁶ Robinson concurs, suggesting that the GLC’s support of lesbian and gay organisations served as a justification for its abolition.⁹⁷ Sheffield City Council was at pains not to be tarred with the same brush as the GLC and the Militant-led Liverpool City Council, and this can be seen in their campaign against rate-capping. The campaign in Sheffield was run under the slogan ‘Sheffield Against Rate Capping for the Right Reasons.’⁹⁸ This articulated that there were ‘right’ reasons; protecting jobs and essential services such as luncheon clubs for pensioners (see Figure 5.4), and ‘wrong’ reasons; blind opposition to central government and funding ‘loony’ or wasteful projects. In May 1985 Sheffield City Council set a legal rate and planned a programme of budget cuts to meet a shortfall of £12 million.⁹⁹ By 1988, the local authority was still in a difficult financial position, and Sheffield residents were feeling a squeeze on their services. In response to a £340 grant towards the Young Lesbian Group, one Sheffield ‘Socialist and miner’ wrote to the *Sheffield Star* to complain;

⁹⁵ Brooke, *Sexual Politics*, 241.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 145.

⁹⁸ Photograph by Don McPhee,

<http://www.theguardian.com/arts/pictures/0,,1385621,00.html?redirection=gallery> (accessed: 17/06/2015)

⁹⁹ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Rate is set after split by Labour’, 8th May 1985, 1.

‘I am angry every time... a Labour-controlled council... [make] a grant to a lesbian group or a homosexual group. These people have chosen their way through life themselves and so should provide their own funds... there are many other more important causes in this country to support’ such as health and education services.¹⁰⁰ Two months later, after Sheffield City Council backtracked on a proposed £200 grant to the Lesbian Extravaganza of South Yorkshire, another Sheffield resident wrote;

‘Lesbians, like homosexuals, have chosen their way of life and, of course, are quite within their rights, but it should be kept under wraps and not publicised and promoted as being “quite natural”. It... is nothing to be proud of.’¹⁰¹

A third woman commented that she ‘would strongly object to the funding of any such groups coming out of my rates.’¹⁰² What is clear from these letters is that in the late 1980s, the issue of local government spending was still being linked to homosexuality, on a national and local level, and in that climate Sheffield City Council and some of their labour movement supporters were not keen to support gay politics. However, even within these comments we can see the vestiges of tolerance. On the whole, homosexuality itself was not the problem, rather it was the use of rate-payers’ money to fund lesbian and gay groups and promote events that was deemed troublesome and wasteful. Lesbians and gay men were ‘within their rights’ to be gay, but these *Star* readers did not want to hear anything about it and they certainly did not want to fund it. Sheffield City Council’s limited support of gay politics was both a matter of reputation and also because gay rights organisations, with their focus on social, pastoral and personal issues, were not seen as a labour concern.

¹⁰⁰ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Letters: Misuse of the funds,’ 22nd March 1988, 4.

¹⁰¹ *The Sheffield Star*, ‘Letters: Lesbianism should stay underwraps,’ 24th May 1988, 4.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

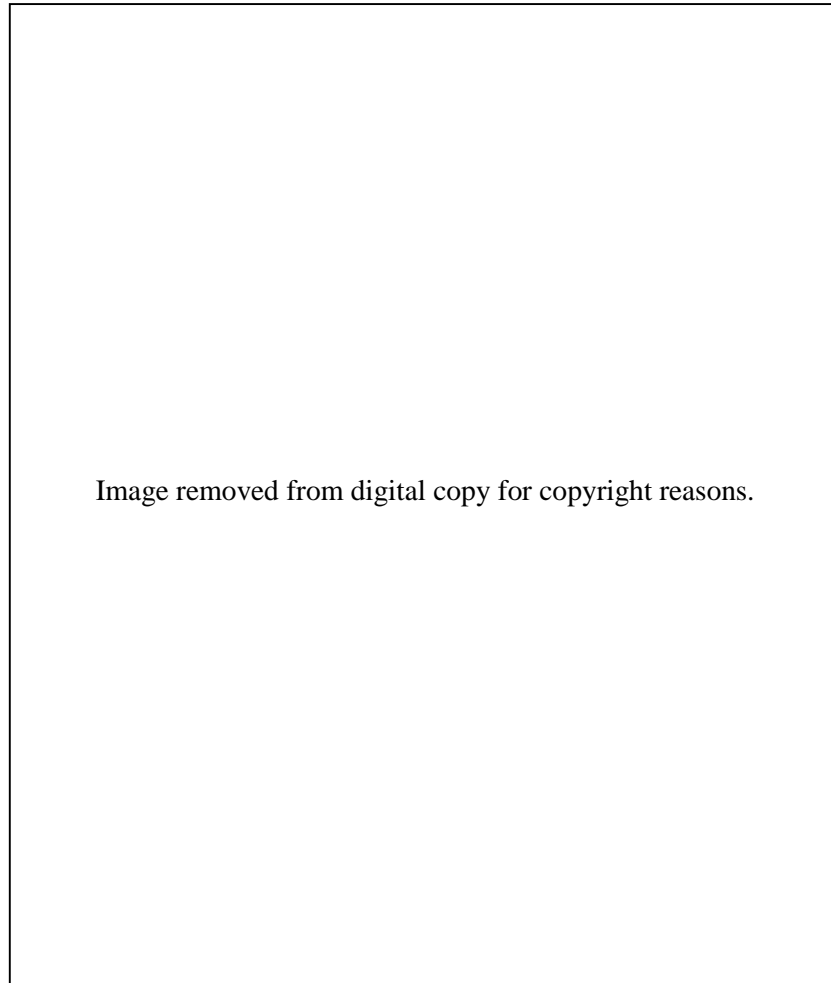


Figure 5.4: Photograph by Don McPhee, Guardian News & Media Ltd, 1985.¹⁰³

Despite this, Stephen Brooke and Lucy Robinson argue that Section 28 galvanised the campaign for lesbian and gay rights within the labour movement nationally, with Neil Kinnock ultimately bringing sexuality ‘into the fold’ of Labour politics, and in doing so transforming the way Labour politics related to sexual politics.¹⁰⁴ This change did not influence Sheffield’s politics until the 1990s when Sheffield City Council began to engage with the organisation Lesbian and Gay Fightback. LG Fightback campaigned against Paragraph 16 of the Children’s Act which, in an original draft, stated that ‘Equal rights’ and

¹⁰³ Photograph by Don McPhee, <http://www.theguardian.com/arts/pictures/0,,1385621,00.html?redirection=gallery> (accessed: 17/06/2015)
Reproduced here with permission from Guardian News & Media Ltd.

¹⁰⁴ Brooke, *Sexual Politics*, 250-1, 254; Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 173.

‘gay rights’ have no place in fostering services’ and Clause 25 of the Criminal Justice Bill which categorised soliciting and procuring as ‘serious sex crimes.’¹⁰⁵ LG Fightback held a demonstration in Sheffield and met every fortnight in the Town Hall, though their mailing address was also the Students’ Union at Western Bank. They drew a direct comparison with Section 28, writing ‘FIRST it was ‘pretended families’ NOW it’s ‘suitable environments.’’¹⁰⁶ However, unlike Section 28, Sheffield City Council agreed to meet with LG Fightback to listen to and support their concerns about fostering. This was a big development from the early 1980s when youth worker Ros Wollen, having completed a fostering course with the Council, informed them that she was a lesbian and was told that she had no chance of fostering.¹⁰⁷

Furthermore, by 1993 prominent figures of Sheffield’s labour movement David Blunkett, Member of Parliament from 1987 onwards, and Bill Moore, Communist and founder of the Holberry Society for the Study of Sheffield Labour History, began to rehabilitate early gay socialist Edward Carpenter into Sheffield’s history. In 1991 a Nottingham group named OUT HOUSE Project claimed Carpenter for the gay movement; arguing that the search for gay roots in the 1970s had saved Carpenter and his ideas from the ‘dustbin of history.’¹⁰⁸ They organised guided ‘rambles’ of Millthorpe, Carpenter’s home, in 1988 and 1991. But in 1993, Blunkett and Moore were ready to claim Carpenter for Sheffield’s socialism. Blunkett wrote the forward to the 1993 edition of Carpenter’s 1916 pamphlet ‘Sheffield and Socialism’ and Moore spoke of Carpenter in an address to a conference on ‘A Vision of Britain: Industrialisation and Beyond, Sheffield’ in September

¹⁰⁵ SA, X608/2/1: Flyers, newsletters, stickers etc., 1991-1994, Lesbian and Gay Fightback Leaflet.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Ros Wollen, 13th September 2013. Later Wollen did foster children and teenagers in Sheffield.

¹⁰⁸ SLSL: MP 3052 S, Out House Project, ‘Edward Carpenter Ramble, 1991

1993¹⁰⁹. However, whilst ready to bring Carpenter back into the fold and praise his politics and commitment, neither Blunkett nor Moore mentioned Carpenter's sexuality. The closest Blunkett came to acknowledging Carpenter's connection to the identity politics of homosexuality was writing that Carpenter 'recognised that our inter-dependence and the rights of the individual are not in conflict.'¹¹⁰ Yet this could also be read as an indication of Blunkett's developing New Labour politics, as he specifically praised Carpenter for noting 'the way in which ideas can permeate society ... – something understood in the twentieth century by Friedrich von Hayek and Margaret Thatcher.'¹¹¹ The early 1990s brought another wave of pit closures in South Yorkshire, and a labour movement and wider radical milieu that was beginning to interact more with the politics of sexuality. Yet Sheffield's politics still had a complex relationship with gay politics. Even in 2013 Kate Flannery, member of the Friends of Edward Carpenter, the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign, and daughter of labour stalwarts Martin and Blanche Flannery, argued that the labour movement considered Carpenter too controversial a figure to commemorate because of his sexuality.¹¹²

Conclusion

Owen Jones, writing in *The Guardian*, suggested the importance of the film *Pride* is that it 'manages to convey what solidarity is to an audience who have been taught to abhor it' by Thatcherism.¹¹³ Yet, for all its celebration of solidarity, *Pride* offers us the optimism without showing the practical difficulties. For all that Thatcherism asked everyone 'Which Side Are

¹⁰⁹ Edward Carpenter, *Sheffield and Socialism*, (Nottingham, 1993), 1; SLSL: MP 4682 M, Bill Moore, Address on 'What attracted Ruskin and Carpenter to Sheffield?' Conference on Ruskin, Morris and Carpenter. A Vision of Britain: Industrialisation and Beyond, Sheffield, September 11/12, 1993.

¹¹⁰ Carpenter, *Sheffield and Socialism*, 1.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² Interview with Kate Flannery, 3rd December 2013.

¹¹³ Owen Jones, 'The British tradition that Thatcher could not destroy', *The Guardian*, 18th August 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/aug/18/solidarity-pride-film-british-tradition> (Accessed: 18/06/2015).

You On?’ it also exacerbated an already existing ‘hierarchy of victimhood.’¹¹⁴ Labour-led local authorities defended their services at the cost of supporting gay communities and other causes considered to be ‘loony’ or wasteful. Whilst parts of the labour movement did join with gay organisations on occasion, for example in Welsh mining communities and the GLC, others did not. Furthermore gay activists, made wary of working with the left to their ‘mutual discredit,’ increasingly organised themselves in social, pastoral or self-defence campaigns.¹¹⁵ Not only was solidarity not the same as subjectivity, but often, when it came to sexual politics, it was not even on the same page, never mind banner.

Through exploring how the politics of sexuality fit into Sheffield’s politics this chapter has shown how solidarity broke down in the city. Many gay socialists were looking for active support from the wider left, but they also wanted to be able to organise themselves on their own terms; to be openly and politically socialist and gay. Campaigns such as the Gay Rights at Work Campaign and the Gay Workers Movement offered gay activists this to a certain extent, however even these organisations faced criticism from gay members that they prioritised labour movement concerns over the politics of sexuality. As a result, many gay activists took their politics out of the traditional sphere and into social or pastoral causes. Not always recognised by the wider left, the development of gay discos and counselling services was inherently political. In those spaces Sheffield’s gay community was formed, and with it came a solidarity that was based on shared subjectivity.

Sheffield’s labour movement was broadly sympathetic to the concerns of gay people; on occasion speaking out against National Front attacks. Yet members of the labour movement, many of whom had come of age at a time when and in a place where homosexuality was tolerated as long as it was unarticulated and discreet, held the view that

¹¹⁴ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 194.

¹¹⁵ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 146.

sexuality was a private and individual concern and not an issue for collective politics. Sheffield's labour movement, and to a certain extent its wider left-wing milieu, failed to understand the significance of the liberational aspect of gay politics and the importance of identity; a concept made even more significant by AIDS where openness was vital. Furthermore, unlike the women's movement in Sheffield, there was no comparative crossover organisation like the Working Women's Charter Committee to bring class and sexuality together. Likewise, though the previous chapter problematises the Sheffield Campaign Against Racism, it offered a forum for black and minority ethnic activists to express their concerns that was not available to gay men. Labour councillors criticised the National Front's views on homosexuality but, like the Anti-Nazi League nationally, the wider anti-fascist organisations in Sheffield were passive about homophobia. Solidarity in Sheffield broke down over theory and practice.

The reluctance of Sheffield's left-wing milieu to engage with the politics of sexuality was further exacerbated by the sexualisation of Labour-led local authorities by the media and Thatcher's government. Rate-capping narrowed Sheffield City Council's remit and important figures such as David Blunkett worked hard to distance themselves from the GLC and Liverpool City Council, 'loony' and 'hard' left respectively, as discussed in Chapter 1. Sheffield City Council did not begin to engage with lesbian and gay politics again until the early 1990s, when they met with Lesbian and Gay Fightback to discuss legislation on fostering. Paragraph 16 of the Children's Act infringed upon gay people's right to foster, a right to parenthood, and therefore could be fought as an issue of individual rights. By the 1990s, the Labour Party had brought sexual politics into the fold where gay rights could be dealt with as individual rights, and some gay organisations – notably Stonewall – were content to break with party politics.¹¹⁶ Blunkett's praise of Edward Carpenter in 1993 was

¹¹⁶ Stephen Brooke, *Sexual Politics*, 252.

symbolic of this shift in attitude and pointed towards a moment where class and the identity-based politics of sexuality could co-exist; side by side, but separate. Not ‘in conflict,’ but not united either.¹¹⁷

Despite what *Pride* depicts, moments of solidarity were not widespread in the 1980s. Section 28’s attack on lesbians and gay men and on local government produced, not a united reaction, but a divided one. Local authorities attempted to disassociate themselves from sexual politics, and some gay activists blamed Ken Livingstone and the GLC’s perceived radicalism for giving Thatcher’s government an excuse to implement the clause.¹¹⁸ Robinson writes that ‘it is unclear how to escape the hierarchy of victimhood or how to gain any meaningful semblance of equality with a binary model’ of class or identity. But what this chapter, and thesis, shows is that the hierarchy of victimhood was not just about class and identity. Rather, solidarity broke down more than that; into subjectivities, spaces, and organisational methods. Different subjectivities were able find points of solidarity, but as with ‘race’ in 1980s Sheffield, for many, sexuality represented a definite limit to the left-wing milieu.

¹¹⁷ Carpenter, *Sheffield and Socialism*, 1.

¹¹⁸ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 146.

Conclusion

The Politics of Left-wing Solidarity

On 7th March 1985, 15,000 people marched against rate-capping in Sheffield's biggest demonstration of the decade.¹ Those marching included members of trade unions, women's groups, black and minority ethnic organisations, pensioners and disabled people. Many waved banners calling for the protection of jobs and services, with some specifically highlighting the need for home helps and housing. Other marchers raised the issue of local democracy; arguing that democratically elected councils should be able to set their own rates. Photographs of the protest show the size of the march and the breadth of organisations represented (see Figures 6.1 and 6.2). Blanche Flannery, President of the Trades Council, called the demonstration 'tremendous' and urged people to 'stand firm and protect their communities.'² Helen Jackson, Chair of the Council's Employment Committee and later Member of Parliament for Sheffield Hillsborough, said;

'It's been the most fantastic demonstration I've ever seen in Sheffield. It isn't just the unions; it's the women's groups, the community groups, the school kids, the old people – the whole breadth of the community. I'm really pleased. Now, it's the next four weeks that will count.'³

The protest culminated in a meeting of Sheffield's councillors who voted to defer setting a rate. David Blunkett and Keith Jackson suggested that for some this was an 'anti-climax' but the Working Women's Charter Committee supported the decision, praising councillors for 'forcing the crisis back on Central Government, where it came from.'⁴

¹ Local Studies Library, 396 SQ, *Double Shift*, Issue 18, March 1985.

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*, David Blunkett and Keith Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis: The Town Halls Respond*, (London, 1987), 177.

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Figures 6.1 and 6.2: Protest against rate-capping in Sheffield, 7th March 1985. Photographs by Martin Jenkinson, Martin Jenkinson Image Library.⁵

⁵ Martin Jenkinson Image Library, Protest against rate-capping in Sheffield, 7th March 1985, Figure 6.1:http://martinjenkinson.photoshelter.com/gallery-image/1980s-Protest/G0000ADCbo9sFqdl/I0000g_eWspFEFS4/C0000PXenaeUbs6c Figure 6.2:<http://martinjenkinson.photoshelter.com/gallery-image/1980s-Protest/G0000ADCbo9sFqdl/I0000GreEhNOUL38/C0000PXenaeUbs6c> (accessed: 30/7/2015). Reproduced here with permission from Justine Jenkinson and the Martin Jenkinson Image Library.

Sheffield's Campaign Against Rate-Capping continued for a further two months. On 30th April, after a 'heated three and a half hour debate' a proposition by the Labour Group to set a deficit budget was defeated, and the decision was made to 'go illegal' and refuse to set a rate. But on 7th May 1985 a group of moderate Labour rebels joined Conservative and SDP-Liberal Alliance councillors in voting to set a rate. Left-wing rebels dismissed Blunkett's calls for a deficit budget, and the opposition to rate-capping collapsed. On what Blunkett described as 'the worst night of [his] political life,' Sheffield City Council set a legal rate and ended their campaign.⁶

Sheffield's Campaign Against Rate-Capping provoked the largest collective turnout of any extra-parliamentary campaign in the city in the 1980s. At the start of the decade David Blunkett made it clear that his idea of community meant the traditional institutions of the working class; trade unions, the Labour Party and tenants' associations.⁷ His 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' would be built on the demands and actions of these groups. By 1987, Blunkett and Keith Jackson had expanded that definition to include; 'single-parent groups... mother and toddler groups, environmental groups, women's refuges, anglers' groups, neighbourhood action groups, alternative Sunday schools in the black community, advice centres, unemployment groups, pensioners' action groups, [and] claimants' unions.'⁸ In providing varied levels of state support to a wide range of organisations, Blunkett and Sheffield's new urban left cohort of councillors aimed to build an inclusive 'local socialism' 'from the bottom' up. Leo Panitch and Colin Leys argue that the 'radical broadening of the public arena, tapping the talent and energy of ordinary people and bringing them into new positions of power and responsibility' was the 'greatest achievement' of the new urban left.⁹

⁶ *The Sheffield Star*, 'City's rate defiance finally crumbles', 8th May 1985, 9; *The Sheffield Star*, 'Rate is set after split by Labour', 8th May 1985, 1.

⁷ *The Sheffield Star*, 15th May 1980, 14.

⁸ Blunkett and Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis*, 89.

⁹ Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism: From New Left to New Labour*, (London, 2001), 266.

The scale of the protest against rate-capping reflected this achievement and the enthusiasm for the project in Sheffield. Yet, with rate-capping and the abolition of metropolitan councils, 'local socialism' became unsustainable. By Blunkett and Jackson's 1987 defence of local democracy, political scientist Allan Cochrane was already suggesting that Blunkett's ideas sounded 'curiously dated' in a post-rate capping age.¹⁰ Indeed, Panitch and Leys claim that any achievements won in the 1970s and 1980s were 'ruthlessly extirpated' by the consolidation of Thatcherism, and Geoff Eley describes the Labour left as 'utterly beaten' by 1987.¹¹ Defeat led some proponents of the new urban left to align with 'modernisers,' such as *Marxism Today's* Geoff Mulgan and Martin Jacques who founded the think tank Demos, and embraced the centre-ground.¹² Jenny Andersson elaborates; certain members of 'the New Times group proclaimed a kind of social vision of individualism, a vision of decentralised mutuality that Geoff Mulgan later brought into the communitarianism of New Labour.'¹³ Others retreated to class politics at the expense of their broader vision to unite class and identity politics.¹⁴ And yet Blunkett's recognition of the importance of civil society is something that left-wing (and some right-wing) thinkers agree with today, even if they disagree on the significance of the individual within it. Sheffield's politics in the 1980s was dominated by the persistence of class and the labour movement, but it incorporated many movements and individuals into its milieu as they struggled against the different facets of Thatcherism. Sheffield's politics developed beyond the Council's notion of the 'Socialist Republic' to include activists from a variety of movements and political backgrounds. But, as the Council and labour movement's response to gay politics, and the wider radical milieu's

¹⁰ Allan Cochrane, 'Book Review Essay', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 12:2 (1988), 320.

¹¹ Panitch and Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism*, 267; Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 463.

¹² Panitch and Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism*, 267. Demos, though independent, was seen as central to New Labour's vision for Britain. Geoff Mulgan went to work inside Downing Street from 1997.

¹³ Jenny Andersson, *The Library and the Workshop: Social Democracy and Capitalism in the Knowledge Age*, (Stanford University Press: California, 2010), 49.

¹⁴ Panitch and Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism*, 267.

attitude towards anti-racism suggest; solidarity had its limits and not everyone's voice was valued. The difficulty in understanding these limits and the role of the individual in community action is part of the ongoing crisis of the left.

Indeed, left-wing thinkers continue to argue that what the left needs is solidarity, unity, and strong grassroots campaigns, often citing examples from the 1980s. Stuart Hall and Alan O'Shea, writing on common-sense and neoliberalism for the *Kilburn Manifesto* in 2013, argue that left-wing political actors today 'do not in any way constitute a single social force.'¹⁵ They compare this situation disfavouredly to the Greater London Council in the 1980s when 'although the traditional left and the new social movements did not always agree and certainly were not unified – they did occupy the same space... and together offered a broader and more effective political force than we have seen since.'¹⁶ Richard Johnson, writing about Hall, remembers that in recent years the two had met and discussed Hall's 'pessimism about politics, and my own reaching for hope.'¹⁷ Johnson's 'hope' infuses his call for an '*optimism of the intellect*' when thinking about left-wing politics.¹⁸ He suggests that today's civil society could be the site of a 'new hegemony' to push back against the tide of neoliberalism, but that 'social solidarity and the understanding of difference-as-power' would be essential to this project.¹⁹ Both Hall and Johnson view solidarity between different groups to be essential to left-wing success; they differ over whether such solidarity is currently achievable.

Owen Jones, writing for a younger generation of left-wing thinkers, falls on the side of Johnson. For Jones, the solidarity of Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners shown in the

¹⁵ Stuart Hall and Alan O'Shea, 'Common-sense neoliberalism,' *After Neoliberalism? The Kilburn Manifesto, Soundings*, (2013), 6.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Richard Johnson, 'Learning from 'SH': 1974-1979, 2012-2014,' *Capital & Class*, 38 (3), 2014, 490.

¹⁸ Richard Johnson, 'Optimism of the Intellect? Hegemony and Hope', Paper by Johnson at University of Birmingham History Reading Group, 2013, 1.

¹⁹ Johnson, 'Optimism of the Intellect?' 4.

film *Pride* is inspirational.²⁰ Indeed, he has recently called for solidarity with the anti-austerity movement in Greece, with London's bus drivers, and against the extremist militant group Islamic State.²¹ Jones sang 'Solidarity Forever' with Mike Jackson and other members of LGSM at London Pride in June 2015, reflecting the sort of shared action that Richard Johnson would like to see.²² Jones' celebration of the trade union presence at Pride was a deliberate, self-conscious call back to Pride 1985, when the miners marched at the head of the parade, but it also informs his current political thinking about class and solidarity. Recently Jones has praised a so-called 'revival of thinking about class in Cameron's Britain;' an agenda he has supported since his 2011 book *Chavs*.²³ He argues foremost that the left needs to get behind 'a clear vision... a coherent distinct set of values' to inspire a grassroots movement; and identifies this vision with a fleshed out programme against austerity.²⁴ This view was shared by a number of young activists at Pride 2015 who Jones interviewed for a video about the 'corporatisation' of the parade. Many expressed the need to find solidarity with other movements; stating 'We're not liberated unless everyone's liberated,' criticising corporate sponsorship of the event and saying that 'You can't get away from abusive human rights by saying "Oh but look we're really good for gays."' ²⁵ When Jones asked one young

²⁰ Owen Jones, 'The British tradition that Thatcher could not destroy,' *The Guardian*, 18th August 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/aug/18/solidarity-pride-film-british-tradition> (accessed: 12/08/2015).

²¹ Owen Jones, 'Greece's radical left could kill off austerity in the EU,' *The Guardian*, 22nd December 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/dec/22/greece-radical-left-austerity-syriza-poll> (accessed: 12/08/2015); Owen Jones, Facebook, 13th January 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/owenjones84/posts/765037493589765> (accessed: 12/08/2015); Owen Jones, Twitter, 13th August 2014, <https://twitter.com/owenjones84/status/499539752945987584> (accessed 12/08/2015).

²² David Braniff-Herbert, 'Mike Jackson, Owen Jones and LGSM sing "solidarity forever" at Pride in London march' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oV91TzF4vbI> (accessed: 12/08/2015).

²³ Owen Jones, 'We're not all middle class now,' *New Statesman*, 24th May 2014 <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2014/05/we-re-not-all-middle-class-now-owen-jones-class-cameron-s-britain> (accessed: 29/08/2015); Owen Jones, *Chavs: the demonization of the working class* (London, 2011).

²⁴ Owen Jones, 'Jeremy Corbyn's supporters aren't mad – they're fleeing a bankrupt New Labour' *The Guardian*, 3rd August 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/03/jeremy-corbryn-new-labour-centre-left> (accessed: 11th August 2015).

²⁵ Owen Jones, 'Has the LGBT movement been hijacked by big business?' *The Guardian*, 29th June 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/video/2015/jun/29/lgbt-movement-hijacked-big-business-video> (accessed: 29/08/2015).

woman how they would ‘reclaim’ Pride from banks and big business, she said; “We have to stand in solidarity with other groups, we have to go on their marches, and be on their demonstrations and occupy with them, like not just come out for a day of partying.”²⁶ The emphasis put, not just on solidarity, but on anti-corporate activism and the language of the Occupy Movement, suggests that activists are striving for an expansive progressive politics still centred around class-based concerns of economic justice.

For those people who LGSM’s Mike Jackson and Owen Jones suggest are ‘begging for radical change,’ this politics may lie in Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party leadership bid. Indeed, Jones describes Corbyn’s campaign as offering ‘a coherent, inspiring and, crucially, a hopeful vision.’²⁷ Corbyn is the 2015 leadership contest’s ‘back to class’ candidate; demanding that the Labour Party focus on class and inequality. Although not utilising class as much as Diane Abbott in the 2010 contest or Jon Cruddas in his 2007 deputy-leadership campaign, Corbyn has called for there to be more working class Members of Parliament.²⁸ He suggests that for the Labour Party to win back working class voters ‘we must reflect those we seek to represent; it is not enough to be for working people, we have to be of working people as well.’²⁹ Corbyn’s call for ‘candidates from the frontline of Tory cuts’ echoes Jones’ equation of anti-austerity politics with working class politics. This is despite vigorous demands from other sections of the Labour Party, including Cruddas, for a politics that speaks to a working class who are “socially conservative and value most their family, their

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Owen Jones, ‘Jeremy Corbyn’s supporters aren’t mad – they’re fleeing a bankrupt New Labour’ *The Guardian*, 3rd August 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/03/jeremy-corbyn-new-labour-centre-left> (accessed: 11th August 2015).

²⁸ Diane Abbott, ‘The myth of the forgotten middle class,’ *The Independent*, 25th August 2010, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/diane-abbott-the-myth-of-the-forgotten-middle-class-2061017.html> (accessed 3/09/2015). In 2007 Jon Cruddas accused Tony Blair of effecting a ‘retreat from class for perceived electoral advantage,’ and of turning Labour into a ‘middle class party.’ (Jon Cruddas, ‘After New Labour’, in Tom Hampson, ed., *Labour’s choice. The deputy leadership* (London, 2007), 25-36).

²⁹ Labour List, ‘[Corbyn unveils diversity fund plans to help get more working class people in Parliament](http://labourlist.org/2015/08/corbyn-unveils-diversity-fund-plans-to-help-get-more-working-class-people-in-parliament/),’ <http://labourlist.org/2015/08/corbyn-unveils-diversity-fund-plans-to-help-get-more-working-class-people-in-parliament/> (accessed: 3/09/2015).

community and their country” and, on issues of welfare, “value justice based on the principle of contribution.”³⁰ In an effort to be ‘tough’ on welfare, Labour MP Rachel Reeves recently stated that ‘We don’t want to be seen, and we’re not, the party to represent those who are out of work.’³¹ Reeves’ comments are suggestive of an attempt to equate work with ordinariness, couching unemployment as somehow deviant or not ‘ordinary’. While the Labour Party has in the past struggled to relate to the unemployed as an organised group, the current rhetoric is a far cry from a grassroots labour movement and party which supported centres organising against unemployment in the 1980s.³² With politicians once again dividing the working class into employed and unemployed, Corbyn’s inclusive anti-austerity message functions as a politics centred on class and working class experience which is palatable to sections of the progressive left.

But the mainstream Labour Party is also re-thinking grassroots politics. Labour MPs Ben Bradshaw and Stella Creasy think the future of the Labour Party lies in ‘locally-branded campaigns’ and encouraging and tapping into existing community campaigning networks through digital contact-collecting platforms such as ‘Network Maker.’³³ Bradshaw and Creasy’s ideas have developed organically from their own constituency experience, but both contain recognisable echoes of the methods of ‘local socialism,’ albeit updated for a public

³⁰ Sam Coates, ‘We have never been so out of touch, Cruddas warns Labour,’ *The Times*, 13th August 2015, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/politics/article4525782.ece> (accessed: 3/09/2015). MPs Jon Cruddas and Frank Field are proponents of a ‘Blue Labour’ politics which aims to appeal to existing, socially conservative working class attitudes towards nation, welfare and immigration within a framework of active citizenship represented by working class self-help and community solidarity: a different form of grassroots politics. (Ian Geary and Adrian Pabst (eds.), *Blue Labour: Forging a New Politics*, (2015)).

³¹ Amelia Gentleman, ‘Labour vows to reduce reliance on food banks if it comes to power,’ *The Guardian*, 17th March 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/mar/17/labour-vows-to-reduce-reliance-on-food-banks-if-it-comes-to-power> (accessed: 29/08/2015) Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite explains in her article ‘“Class” in the development of British Labour Party ideology, 1983-1997’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 53 (2013) how the Labour Party shifted away from class imagery to a language of ‘ordinariness’ whilst still working towards a majoritarian constituency.

³² The Communist Party was at the forefront of organising hunger marches in the interwar period and the Labour Party was largely unsupportive at first. (James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2007), Chapter 3).

³³ Richard Angell and Adam Harrison, ‘Interview: Labour Deputy Leadership,’ *Progress*, September 2015, 16, 18.

relations and tech-savvy present. Ideas of renewal explored in the 1980s are present in the left's current re-thinking. There is a want in some quarters, even in the Labour Party, to see progressive groups come together to build vibrant bottom-up campaigns – the kind hoped for by Richard Johnson. But what this thesis shows is that for all that there was a genuinely rich and diverse grassroots politics in Sheffield with class at its centre, and a reasonably successful attempt to build a politics around active constituents, in practice Sheffield's 'local socialism' was limited and should not be emulated without analysis of the problems and difficulties.

This thesis has taken the 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' seriously and has attempted to determine whether it was a coherent social and political force, a descriptor Stuart Hall claims for the GLC.³⁴ For David Blunkett and the wider Labour cohort of councillors, the 'Socialist Republic' was rooted in traditional notions of community and class-based politics. They put forward socialist policies tuned to the needs of South Yorkshire and Sheffield residents. The Council integrated radical policies aimed at building new constituencies of voters, touching on feminist and anti-racist ideas, but did so in such a way as to avoid alienating its core working class voters and, indeed, to win some of them back. Its policies were aimed at engaging voters and encouraging them to participate in local politics, to widen local democracy. In this vein, policies on peace and apartheid intended to educate constituents about global issues. Radical cheap bus fares encouraged movement around the city and eased the burden on other services. The Community Work Apprenticeship Scheme strove to train talented working class people to work for and represent their communities. But, as illustrated in Chapter 1, these policies also garnered Sheffield a reputation for radicalism that encouraged more activists to come to the city, bringing radical ideas with

³⁴ Hall and O'Shea, 'Common-sense neoliberalism,' 6.

them and taking the City Council somewhat by surprise. These activists had their own ideas of what was meant by the ‘Socialist Republic.’

However, even amongst this growing radical milieu, the labour movement remained dominant and restricted Sheffield’s politics to focus on a narrow definition of class interests. Chapter 2 shows that Sheffield’s labour movement had a long history. Many political personnel in the city had grown up in it, with generations of the same families occupying influential positions; such as the Caborns, the Flannerys and the Bartons. Sheffield’s labour movement gave the city’s politics a strong organisational base and encouraged political education in institutions such as Wortley Hall and Northern College. But the insistence by some labour activists of the enduring importance of class in the face of emerging newer forms of activism led to the exclusion of these newer forms from Sheffield’s activist milieu. The collaborations between the labour movement and other organisations during the Miners’ Strike of 1984-85 illustrate how vibrant Sheffield’s activism was, and how much potential there was for new alliances to be made on even terms. However, support was not welcome from every organisation and often a narrow definition of class trumped other shared experiences such as police harassment. Some alliances proved successful, as parts of the labour movement were looking to engage with a new politics. These collaborations may have started because the labour movement needed support, but many class activists were keen to continue alliances post-strike. However, often suspicions of far-left activity or an inability to reciprocate got in the way of meaningful solidarity. As with the campaign for an independent police-monitoring unit, the final decision often lay with the Labour Group, who, despite their new urban left rhetoric, were not overly keen to fund these collaborations and embrace different forms of activism outside of what they had already planned. In this way, they held Sheffield’s radicalism in check.

As Chapters 3 and 4 have shown, the forms of activism that did find a place within Sheffield's labour-dominated milieu were those that shared personnel, spaces, tactics and organisational structures with the labour movement, and those with a longer history of left-wing mobilisation. Chapter 3 shows how an older generation of women in Sheffield's labour movement generally welcomed the enthusiasm of younger feminists and details how the Working Women's Charter Committee fostered a close and productive relationship across generations and class differences. However, this was feminism on the labour movement's terms; organised by committee and revolving around working women's issues. It proved attractive to some socialist feminists in the city who left the Women's Liberation Movement to focus their energies on the Working Women's Charter Committee. Feminists were more connected to the labour movement in Sheffield than in other cities, and this was due both to the strength of the labour movement in Sheffield and to the fact that many of the feminists who had come to the city in the 1970s had done so because of Sheffield's reputation as a thriving, radical, working class city. However, even within the WWCC, feminists still struggled to engage large numbers of working class women and men. Answering Blunkett's call for 'like-minded people' they wanted and intended to work with working class people, but in bringing their own concerns to the table, they also altered the labour movement.

The migration of socialist feminists in Sheffield out of the WLM and into the labour movement in the early 1980s reflected the divisions around sexuality and separatism present in the national movement. Though lacking the animosity of arguments at the 1978 Birmingham conference, analysis of WLM newsletters and oral history show how these debates were present in Sheffield and resulted in the WLM opening itself up to lesbian and bisexual women. This changed the focus of the movement and some socialist feminists saw the labour movement and thriving WWCC as a better fit for their politics. Lesbian and bisexual women filled influential positions in the WLM and placed a greater emphasis on

sexual politics. While tensions around sexuality and class still existed, this split did not isolate the WLM from Sheffield's politics completely. Many of the lesbian women involved had connections to the labour movement through campaigning for more opportunities for women working in non-traditional and manual trades, and by offering one of the few safe spaces for working class lesbians in the Women's Cultural Club.

Despite Sheffield WLM's embrace of sexuality, they did not incorporate identity politics around 'race' and ethnicity into the movement. Following the national picture, many white feminists in Sheffield struggled to recognise their own role in the oppression of black and Asian women and did not prioritise their concerns.³⁵ Some white feminists even dismissed organisations such as the Black Women's Resources Centre as a community group rather than feminism despite its basis in a theoretical understanding of 'race' and gender learnt through Women's Studies courses. Even within the broad identity politics of gender, different subjectivities, of class, sexuality and 'race,' were prioritised over others. Many African-Caribbean and Asian women in Sheffield organised themselves into independent Black women's organisations, or worked within existing Black identity politics to raise women's concerns and fight sexism alongside racism.

Chapter 4 further explains the breakdown of left-wing solidarity into separate subjectivities by showing how different movements operated within Sheffield's wider activist milieu. The support afforded to each movement depended on the amount of personnel, spaces, and organisational structures they shared with the labour movement and other radical movements, and whether they had an established history of mobilisation within Sheffield's politics. The peace and anti-apartheid movements achieved a privileged position in Sheffield's politics, evidenced in the support they gained from Sheffield City Council and the

³⁵ Natalie Thomlinson, 'The Colour of Feminism: White Feminists and Race in the Women's Liberation Movement,' *History*, 97:327 (2012), 453-475.

numbers mobilised for their demonstrations. In the 1980s, peace and anti-apartheid were popular movements across Britain, but in Sheffield the activists who supported them also managed to connect their issues successfully to labour movement concerns to build broad-based support. They made concerted efforts to do this; the peace movement campaigned for ‘Jobs and Services, not Bombs and Missiles,’ and the AAM resolutely retained a single issue focus; aiming to win the political argument to make anti-apartheid a mainstream issue. But the labour movement in Sheffield was already sympathetic to these concerns due to a long tradition of left-wing involvement in both movements. The left in Britain, and left-wing activists in Sheffield, had been mobilising around peace and anti-apartheid since the 1950s. That these movements made it onto the table of new urban left concerns was unsurprising.

In contrast, environmentalism and anti-racism, though sharing similarities to peace and anti-apartheid in their methods and principles, were not able to mobilise Sheffield’s political milieu to the same extent. It might have been the case that ‘negative coalitions are easier to organise than positive majorities.’³⁶ Mobilising large numbers *against* nuclear weapons and *against* apartheid was easier than encouraging people to recycle or to actively address their own racism and fight for racial equality. However, it was also the case that, barring campaigns for the continuation of cheap bus fares, Friends of the Earth did not reach out to the labour movement in Sheffield. FoE was mainly concerned with finding solutions to problems of waste. They would link up with other organisations interested in recycling and the environment, but as a group of young professionals they did not share the same political spaces as activists with trade union backgrounds. Furthermore, FoE met at CVS House rather than at the Town Hall or the Commonground Resources Centre; the more popular activist meeting places in the city. Anti-racism, on the other hand, did share spaces and personnel with the labour movement and principles with the anti-apartheid movement, but was still

³⁶ Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy*, 15.

unable to mobilise the same levels of support as other causes. This was in part because of racism within the wider labour movement, but also because the Sheffield Council for Racial Equality, although it involved African-Caribbean and Asian activists on its sub-committees, was led by white activists George Caborn and Blanche Flannery. As such it was acting on behalf of black and minority ethnic people in Sheffield. As Jill Angood of the Socialist Choir acknowledged with 'Glad to be Gay,' singing in solidarity was not the same as singing for your own subjectivity. Likewise, campaigning in solidarity was not the same as fighting racism every day, and fighting against racism in South Africa called for a different approach and different tactics to fighting racism at home. African-Caribbean and Asian organisations, like SADACCA and the Asian Youth Movement, were mobilising black and Asian activists against racism but they found it difficult to persuade activists from other movements to prioritise fighting against racism and for racial equality.

Chapter 5 articulates this point further by looking at Sheffield's gay politics. Through exploring how the politics of sexuality fit into Sheffield's wider politics, Chapter 5 shows how solidarity broke down in the city. Many gay socialists were looking for active support from the wider left, but they also wanted to be able to organise themselves on their own terms; to be openly and politically socialist and gay. Campaigns such as the Gay Rights at Work Campaign and the Gay Workers Movement offered gay activists this to a certain extent, however even these organisations faced criticism from gay members that they prioritised labour movement concerns over the politics of sexuality. As a result, many gay activists took their politics out of the traditional sphere and into social or pastoral causes. Not always recognised by the wider left, the development of gay discos and counselling services was inherently political. In those spaces Sheffield's gay community was formed, and with it came a solidarity that was based on shared subjectivity.

Sheffield's labour movement was broadly sympathetic to the concerns of gay people; on occasion speaking out against National Front attacks. Yet members of the labour movement, many of whom had come of age at a time when and in a place where homosexuality was tolerated as long as it was unarticulated and discreet, held the view that sexuality was a private and individual concern and not an issue for collective politics. Sheffield's labour movement, and to a certain extent its wider left-wing milieu, failed to understand the importance of identity and rhetoric of liberation; concepts made even more significant by AIDS where openness was vital. The labour movement and wider radical milieu misunderstood both the motives and the methods of gay organisation. Furthermore, the reluctance of Sheffield's left-wing milieu to engage with the politics of sexuality was exacerbated by the sexualisation of Labour-led local authorities by the media and Thatcher's government. Rate-capping narrowed Sheffield City Council's remit and important figures such as David Blunkett worked hard to distance themselves from the GLC and Liverpool City Council, 'loony' and 'hard' left respectively. Sheffield City Council had adapted to incorporate some forms of activism and identity politics, but gay politics was deemed too radical.

Geoff Eley writes that Labour-led local councils were an important site of left-wing politics in the 1980s, and that the 'strength' of these councils lay in their 'their ability to lower the boundaries between party control and broader activism.'³⁷ But forms of activism 'achieved uneven entry' into mainstream local politics and many 'local socialisms' remained 'dogmatically class-centred.'³⁸ The fusion of class and identity politics was essential to new urban left notions of renewal, yet the tension between these forms of politics 'defined much of the potential' for left-wing renewal in the 1980s.³⁹ This thesis set out to explore these

³⁷ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 464.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

tensions in Sheffield, a city under-written in histories of the British left. Despite contemporary discussions of the decline of class politics, there was a persistence of class and a dominance of the labour movement in Sheffield, and unsurprisingly, archival evidence, oral histories, and photographs point to tensions between class and identity politics. Yet, the focus of this thesis on how a number of new social movements and identity-based groups operated in one place, and its detailed analysis of the sites, methods, and relationships of activism, has revealed the extent to which tensions existed, not only between class and identity, but between the different subjectivities represented in new social movements and identity politics.

Jeffrey Weeks argues that the co-existence of different communities and movements depends on the ‘recognition that the condition of toleration of one’s own way of life is a recognition of the validity of other ways of life.’⁴⁰ Most activists in Sheffield recognised the validity of other activists’ ‘ways of life’. What they were less adept at recognising was the validity of others’ priorities and ways of organising. Some in the labour movement saw the social and pastoral organising of the gay rights movement as a non-political ‘lifestyle choice.’ Some white feminists could not recognise the feminism present in the Black Women’s Resources Centre. Some peace activists could not prioritise the immediate bodily threat Asian activists faced from the National Front over the more abstract threat of nuclear weapons. Solidarity has as a condition the ability to look past one’s subjective experience and recognise the importance of another’s political cause in order to offer active mutual support. And yet solidarity with another does not make their experiences your own. Lucy Robinson writes of the difficulty of finding equality within a ‘hierarchy of victimhood’ bound by a ‘binary model’ of class and identity.⁴¹ This thesis questions that binary model. It shows that the

⁴⁰ Jeffrey Weeks, *Making Sexual History*, (Cambridge, 2000), 192.

⁴¹ Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in post-war Britain: How the personal got political*, (Manchester, New York, 2007), 146.

hierarchy of victimhood was not just about class and identity. Rather, Sheffield's politics broke down more than that; into subjectivities, spaces, and organisational methods, restricting solidarity and the renewal of the left that rested on it.

We have the narrative that Stuart Hall's road to renewal did not work nationally. The inchoate, messy nature of Sheffield's politics shows how the new urban left's project broke down at a local level. Links and alliances were made between many movements and individual activists, but often tensions over differing priorities and between activists fighting for owned demands and those campaigning on behalf of issues were too great to overcome. To a certain extent Sheffield City Council kept some forms of radicalism in check, but so did other activists. Leftwing thinkers today celebrate solidarity and elevate grassroots networks without acknowledging the practical difficulties; the hierarchy of values, and the exclusionary practices present in the 1980s left, which are very much still there. Blunkett believes that when attempting to build a grassroots, community politics, you have to 'start where you're at.' This 'at' is often the point where most people's subjective experiences lie. But a shared subjectivity does not equate to solidarity, and when experiences differ, solidarity is not the same as subjectivity.

Despite this, the 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' represented a vibrant response to the pressures of Thatcherism and a serious attempt at an alternative politics. Supported by a majority of the local electorate and praised by Neil Kinnock as a 'model' alternative, it was, to a certain extent, a successful, if short-lived, experiment. By tracking similar processes in other cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Birmingham, Bristol, and Southampton, we might find other programmes of renewal. Those programmes, their accomplishments and pitfalls, might lead us closer to a comprehensive narrative of the British left in the 1980s. How each place grappled with renewal and developed its own form of 'local socialism' reminds us that there were different routes travelled that failed to feed

into either Thatcherism or New Labour, and some which surfaced in surprising places. Understanding how these developed will give us a more complete picture of the left in Britain; one that shows successes as well as failures, and illuminates the processes by which identity politics fed into the mainstream. Thatcherism may have been about ‘remaking Britain, on her terms,’ but we should not forget that the left in the 1980s was also under construction.⁴² What was being built, however, was neither coherent nor certain, and could differ significantly from city to city depending on the political culture present.

⁴² Jon Lawrence and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, ‘Margaret Thatcher and the decline of class politics’ in Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (eds), *Making Thatcher’s Britain* (Cambridge, 2012), 134.

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