

? Gibson - (called 'Jock' in Letchworth because, although he was born on Tyne-side, he came to Letchworth from Scotland. He arrived in 1925 & lived there til his death) ^{award of merit} 1887 - 1980

Jock was a time-served engineer - a skilled Centre-lathe Turner. He joined the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in 1909, when Tom Mann was the general secretary. He became a member of the British Socialist Party on the Clyde, just before, or during the '14-'18 war & was a very active literature-seller. Apparently he didn't join the Communist Party until 1935, when he was up in Newcastle for a Trades Union meeting.

On the Clyde, he was a Shop Steward, along with Willie Gallagher.

On his arrival in Letchworth he became, within a few weeks, a member of the A.E.U. District Committee & a delegate to the Trades Council.

He said to me "Always stick to facts. Always tell the truth
& then no one can argue against you."

In Letchworth

~~Tom~~ MANN

We had Tom up here in the Labour Club to speak. The Labour Club went out of existence in 1932, so it must have been before then. We only opened it in 1929. I got married again ~~six times~~ in 1931, and it went out of existence the following year. That year the Hunger Marchers came, not the Farrow March, but the previous one. Three or four of us met them; they joined up at Bedford. They were hunger-marchers. The Scotch and the Tyneside met. And a fellow called Fletcher, the baker from Sheffield.... when we met them here, we went up to the lodging-house there was about thirty or forty of them, he used to feed them with the bread, a van-load of bread came down for them, from Sheffield.

There was a Trades Council, but the Labour Party didn't offer a least bit of help, as a party. None of the hunger marchers got any organised assistance from the Labour Party, but individuals, members of the Labour Party, see, a whole lot, ~~there was all there, in this town.~~ ~~we did our best for them we all mucked in~~ ~~12 years of age~~ ~~my mother was~~

Born in
Sheffield
Tyneside

In 1903, when I was ten, we decided to walk down ~~xx~~ seven miles to Wallsend, to see me father on the buildings, and when we got down there, always used to be a big shed for builders and that was for their tools and everything, and every time there was a building put up, there were these sheds ~~we~~ built, and the next thing was to bring a line down, for to make their own plaster. This brother of mine who got killed in the '14-'18 war, (he would have been a solicitor) and when we got down to Wallsend, there was nobody on the buildings; they were all in the hut drinking, a barrel of beer. Of course he went bankrupt, you see, we had hard times. From

then on, I was absolutely dead against drink, and I thought that the builders were the limit of drink, because I see 'em with me own eyes. My mother had a brother who was a foreman in the engineering works, Armstrong Whitworth and Company and he got me go in to work. I didn't tell me father you see, and when I got home on the Saturday, with me dirty overalls, Father says "Where d'ye get these from?" "Engineers... all engineers wear them." They were the intellegensia, weren't they? I says "I've started work in the factory." "Where?" .. told him. He says "Fitters and turners!" "The raggedy-arsed fitters," he says, "in MY place." It was a damn disgrace, you see, joining the fitters, when he was a builder. He wasn't very long in the building after that, anyhow.

I had to serve my apprenticeship, to become a toolmaker.... from a turner to a toolmaker... In 1908, I was 21 years of age in 1908, when a strike took place; I don't know whether that was a strike or a lockout, on Tyneside. You see in different parts of the country, we all had different agreements.. Tyneside, Liverpool, Glasgow..., now its all one. If you were out of work with a strike on Tyneside, you weren't allowed to go to Liverpool. We were out, as near as I remember from March to ~~September~~ September. No Public Assistance then. You went up to the Parish, and you got insulted. We asked for Parish Relief and we didn't get it. They didn't even pay the rent for ye in those days, you were begging all the time. MY mother was an expert at that; she used to go up to these places and fight for ~~ix~~ the working classes. We weren't, we were done of the lucky people; there wasn't the need, you see. She used to go up and fight these cases. All you got was a chit, for groceries. You look around the shops now and you see "We give double Stamps" well in those days it was "We take Parish Relief tickets." that was in the windows. They nearly all done it, ye see. And that was what they used to dish out to ye, relief tickets, and sometimes you got another eighteen pence. In MY time I never remember anybody getting anything except damn cheek and a few shillings.

In Newcastle, my name was John. But when I went into Glasgow, it was English! You were Englishes. When I went into Alexandria, ~~xxxx~~ in Argyle I was called "The Christmas Conjuror" because I used to do a little bit of conjuring; if there was a party on, I was in it, and I still am. When I went to Darlington, in 1911, the same day as the airship and the airplane race around Britain took place, (it was won by Dechamps and Verdreins was second, Franchmen took first and second place. Copy was in it, you know,

Buffalo Bill O) That was in July. I got called Jim, somehow or another. I went to a little party once, you know, and there was a lot of smart fellows, called by a lot of fellows in the Cleveland Bridge and Engineering Company, and they christened me a new name. One of the fellows says I've got a new song, shall I sing it? It went like this:- Jake's a Geordie, chimney-sweeper; he had a wife and the buggar wouldn't keep her. Allelujia! allelujia! Poor old Geteshead Geordie's deed! That was because they knew I was a bit of a wild character. That was only after about two or three weeks, now in Darlington. From Darlington...

Before Darlington, I was in Manchester; I worked in British Westinghouse in Trafford Park, I was a good worker as well.. must have been... they kept me there for eight weeks! There was three of us together. If I found a five shilling piece on the ground, it was for the three of us, we shared everything. So I was working at British Westinghouse and outside there used to be a big green, Trafford Park, and on this green there used to be all kinds of speakers got there ~~that I had~~ and all kinds, and John Will (his name) decided to be a tipster while I was working inside the place, see. So we had a tip for a horse for the Lincoln Handicap called Count Mercutio, and John Will added one too, for the Grand National. Mark you, Mercutio did win the Lincoln Handicap; we tipped the second one in the Grand National, so the punters nearly got a lot of money for their penny.

We were staying in a place called Failsowrth, and on the way down was going to a Jumping Meeting, at a place called... I forget it's name but coming down the Oldham Rd. towards Piccadilly, Manchester, there was a feller.. this was in 1911, and he stopped us and said, "Here, would you like to buy a blue postcard? So, we had been on all these jobs before that - its a long story. So this fellow wanted to sell these postcards. They were guilt-edged, about 3 in X 2 1/2 in. So I says "Ear mate" I says, "I can teach you your business about that," I says. "Now what'r'ye after?" He says "Well, the drink" A pint ye see, I says, "If you don't want to drink you can have food. You can have whatever you like" He says "No", he says, "I've just come out of jail," "Just come out of jail? why for?" He says, "Just simple stealin'". That's all, just simple things, nothing. So we give him half a crown. John Will, I think it was, who give him this half-crown. He says "Well here you are," he says "Get yourself a pint of beer." And away we went, a couple of minutes... ten minutes is quite a long time. We were about a hundreds away, but he ~~walked~~ after us to give us the change out of the half-crown. In jail for stealing, and yet he wants to give us change out of the half-crown... it makes ye think, doesn't it? We had a damn good day that time and we sent 20 away to that Irish fellow Jim Connolly, for the Dublin Strike.

We won a lot of money. We were knocking about race-courses in those days. If we had about thirty pounds, we were skint. We was all single men... single as for as marriage was concerned, and as far as our mind was concerned, it was single as well.... Other thing, it's good for you.

We went from Manchester to Liverpool, worked there for a short time. We came back again to Stafford, to see me brothers. In Manchester, before I came there, we cut through a place called Boggett's Close, though; it was in Failsowrth, it was a little park. They were talking about closing it at night time, but in this park there was a meeting going on, and the three of us were listening. I was interested in a meeting of any kind; I wanted to know what it was about. When I came to Letchworth in 1925, I walked into a meeting in the Co-operative Hall ~~there~~ and there was a very bad speaker, he was an educated man, but very bad at speaking, and I thought I knew this fellow, though we had only just come to the town. After the meeting I asked him "Were you ever in Glasgow, or wherever I'd be in, he says "I was in Manchester, yes," and it was this fellow that had been on this platform. It was Russel Scott, the esperantist. He'd been speaking against the closure of this park.

I went to Stafford and enjoyed sailing on the river. I got the sick you see in Manchester, I forget what for. I got a lousy job, in my case,

was the same, and Johnny Campbell, and Johnny Gollan, I used to meet him often in Newcastle, when he was organiser in that District.

I always had close contact with two who later on became Lords, (O Lord deliver Daniel!) Manny Shinwell, we always called him Old Shinwell, he's about a couple of years older than me, I think, his father was in the tailoring business down the Gorbals, but anyhow he was one of the fellers that I didn't like; but he was in the movement, and Davie Kirkwood, "Big Davie" I met Davie when he was a lord; I met him in Gateshead, by accident. I walked into Gateshead Town Hall, where he was speaking. Anyhow, the excuse he gave about being was that... it was always the same... you've got to do practically, as some does. If you were amongst wealthy people, you've got to be as they are. I'd be ordering fish and chips, while they ordered.. whatever they liked, you couldn't do with some...

Georggas Square 1919 Shinwell was there. We marched up, the Town.. all work was stopped... it was silent... there's more noise in this house now than there was in the Clyde that day. All the factories were stopped, all the buses were stopped, every mortal thing was stopped. We marched up to George Square, and George Square was packed, side by side; the deputation went in, the deputation... Shinwell was one of them, Davy Kirkwood was another, but Gallagher wasn't on the committee... there's a monument in George Square, and in the side facing the Council, on the plinth, and I stood on this other side with different socialist papers, "Dreadnought", *Sylvia* with Pankhurst's paper, and other little London feller, he had "The Spur", Guy Aldridge, he worked on his own, ye see... all the whole lot, including "The Worker"... the Glasgow Worker... I was stood beside these papers to sell them, but you couldn't move at all. Gallagher had his top coat on, and he had his walking stick... he always had this heavy walking stick... he was facing that way, and at that corner was the parish relief offices in John Street, I was facing the Post Office. We were waiting on the Committee coming out, Jimmy Maxton was there as well, on this plinth, and that Bogey. He turned a fascist.. he was a fascist all along... (Sammy Ross??) Anyhow, when the riot started, it started, I was about a 45° angle to John Street where this policeman on a white horse... of course there's always somebody, whether they're agents provocateurs or not, I don't know, but somebody started, I seen him, pulling this policeman off his horse... at least they seemed to me to be pullin' him off.. if they weren't pulling him off, they were shaking hands with him. The riot started there. The police riot. We couldn't move but the police just attacked. They were on foot; there was only the one mounted that took my attention, him on the white horse at the corner of John St. They used truncheons, and from the office appeared Kirkwood. Of course everybody knew Kirkwood, and his head was bandaged; they'd bashed Kirkwood, and they were making for the people they knew were the leaders... Gallagher.. they were making SKX straight for them... the people were so close together you couldn't scratch yer nose, if you wanted to... it was packed... but they made for Gallagher, but I seen I police come over Gallagher, and he had his baton raised like that,.. Gallagher had his stick up and all.. he'd fight, he know,.. he fought all the time... he fought for these present lords in the Court. He took all the blame,.... anyhow, he had his stick up there,.. I didn't see him get hit.. I see him go down... there was a policeman come over and he had his baton ready to hit Gallagher, like that, and there was a young feller on his right hand side, flung himself on top a Gallagher, and saved him. That pk policeman reconed he'd at killed Gallagher. From there, what happened.... Harry Hopkins, our District Secretary, got them together,.... when the policemen were operated, the people were getting away... they wanted away out the square, there was a room then. We managed to get all the engineers together then, see, except a few like myself that was doing other work. We went out to Glasgow Green and this battle still went on there, these fellers had run down to Glasgow Green hauled up the steel railings, to use as spears. They were

fighting, I can tell you, and anyhow, that finished. It went on all night, just walking about, smashing windows, thousands and thousands of windows was broken... shop windows.. stealing... all the way along the road.

At that time I used to lodge at 372 Argyle St. opposite where they had that big fire a few years ago where the girls were burned to death in that big place where all the windows were barred so they couldn't get out.

They brought up tanks, and they were all along the road, and soldiers with guns stood outside the Post Office. Christians, they call them, who would rather take life than preserve it.

On Mayday 1919, it was a very special Mayday. I was selling "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist," at 1/- a time.... (sometimes I was tempted to charge 2/-, and profiteer)

Letchworth.

During the Miners' lockout, after the General Strike, we had four children to live in the house, from South Wales. A.J. Cook, has been in this house. People used to mend the shoes of the hunger marchers.

My mother used to make up little parcels for sick people, and when I was 16 that's how some of us caught small-pox. I had it the worst. I was in hospital for months. One day I wanted to back a horse in the Northampton stakes. I told the doctor. He said "How much?" I said "A pound." So he said, "If you put the money in a bag, I can put it on for you." So he did, and the horse won.

Letchworth

The ILP had this meeting... Fenner "rockaway" was there, they were going to the People's House. They wanted Maxton to say something like the Russel Scott I mentioned last time, I says "tell boys, there's a bank manager, all well-to-do people, you see, except poor me and another feller, common workers, ye had to wash yer hands coming in and going out of the factory... in this meeting, in the Co-op it was, I got up and asked a question... I knew Jimmy Maxton well in Glasgow, and this other feller, joined the fascists in the end, I was mixed up with them, Maxton says "Aye," he says, "an old friend," he recognised me voice, when that meeting was finished in the Co-op, they all collected and decided to go to the People's House, and have this private meeting, with instructions from the ILP, I says, "You'll have to leave me out boys," Jimmy says "NO, no, you can't be along!" And I says "well, I'm not a member of the ILP!" He says "It doesn't matter whether ye are or not, ye're coming," and I finished up in the committee of the ILP.

There was a meeting in ST INNOX Square, and Davie Kirkwood was up there. He was always a blether, was Davie, but he always left it to other people to do. He piled it onto Willie Gallagher, I tell ye, I can't say too much, because he's gone now. He says "WE'LL GIVE THEM HELL" he finished up like that. When he got to Parliament, he did do a little bit of shouting out, but he was like a little lamb at the end. It's the same in any Trade Union branch, you canna just shout and shout as you like, you've got to respect the Chairmen.

John Maclean was a schoolmaster, from Govan. He and Sandy Ross, the ex-policeman from Dundee and Harry McShane, they used to call themselves the three tramps, and they did do some tramping and all. He would lecture anywhere, in halls or on the streets or anywhere, Sandy Ross wasn't so very good, but Harry was pretty good, but John Maclean was on his own, you see, he was outstanding. And John Maclean and Gallagher, they got at loggerheads quite a lot; Gallagher said some nasty things, he said he was like one of these fellers that's walking about in their sleep.

We used to publish a paper called "The Socialist"; Maclean was fighting on his own all the time, he was never in the ^{union} movement... I was in the British Socialist Party and I met Johnny Campbell,.... I really don't know why there was this animosity between Willie Gallagher and John Maclean, because Gallagher made me realise that I was alive. He used to speak all over the shop; on Glasgow Green thousands of people used to hear him, and on street corners when ^{William} Gallagher was speaking ^{at 10} or three days beforehand there was a notice stuck on the street with a blackboard and somebody standing holding it, telling ye that Gallagher or anybody else would be there. John was arrested a number of times, because he wouldn't give up; his wife left him, or he left his wife; his family broke up, because he wouldn't give up the workers (I fight). I never bothered much about that.. it was a case of Listen to the feller who is speaking, never mind how he got there, or why he got there, but it makes ye think.

My wife and I came down here in 1925. ^{November} I landed here on the Monday, and I met a Tory.. I didn't know who he was at all, and got him talking and he took me in and gave me dinner in the people's House. After that in 1926 when the General Strike was on, I seed this man sitting on the platform, chairman he was, ~~they~~ ^{they} Kindersley was the speaker, the lockout of the miners, they call it the miners strike, but it was a lockout, I was a keen Labour Party member then, I was one of the side-fellers that used to kick up a row, but all the heads of the Labour Party were ILPers, and they were pretty well-to-do. There was a bank-manager and Russel Scott and Miss Cartwright, she was a school-mistress, pretty well-off people, except P.L.R. Smith, he was a working-class fighter; he wouldn't join the Communist Party because he thought he would be held down.. He was always known as P.R., nothing else, he would do any mortal thing.. He led the hunger marchers, they came from Bedford to Hitchin and then down the road to Loddon. There was plenty of organisation, there was an estate agent used to go to London, and collect the Worker's paper (General Strike) and deliver them up the North. There was a committee to organise the distribution, I was on the committee; I was on every mortal thing, I was suspended, so was my wife. She was in the Co-op, and the Labour Party,

I was on the Trades Council at the very beginning. They had a meeting to elect the committee, in the People's House; it was a café and a place for lodgers at the top of Station Rd. where the Lab our Exchange is now. A lot of these fellers didn't like me, because I was from Glasgow, see, a year after that they were all in my favour, including this Russel Scott. They elected me on the Trades Council at the first Trade Union branch I went to, A feller called Harry Freeman was representing our branch on the T/C, he was a JP after that, and he was out of benefit*! I being from Glasgow wanted to know his standing, and he had run out, he wasn't representing anybody except himself. I suggested they should cut him out altogether and put my name down, and that's just what they did. And of course it got all over town, ye see, this ~~young~~ ^{new} feller from Glasgow,.... I'd been saying all kinds of things about the ~~Trades Council~~ ^{Trades Council}.... When I went into the ~~shop~~ ^{shop} I asked for the shop steward, and there was no shop steward and they talked about this wild man from Glasgow,

I held this meeting outside the Krin, when I went in there was... We has this meeting upstairs and I had this argument with the management, because if there's only one member of the federation, they have to be the ~~one~~ consulted on all trade union matters, I had this argument within two days, I canna keep quiet for long, and.. at this meeting of the District Committee they wanted me to be shop steward. I said "It doesn't matter a damn to me what I am. I ~~the~~ ^{days} prefer to work outside, because I'm a stranger here; two weeks in the town, and you want me to be shop steward.. in a factory I know absolutely nothing about, Haven't ye got any courage yourselves? And I went to the factory gate on the Wednesday, ~~and~~ I didn't take very long did I? I prefer the factory gate.

* (e.g. in arrears with his Union dues)

* Krin & Leary's foundry - now closed - married special weeks.

* Iron & Steel Federation

I had this arguement with the management straight away, within two days, I'm not quiet for long, anyway, the "istrict Com ittee wanted me to be the shop steward, "I prefer to work outside, damn it" I said, because I'm a stranger here. " Haven't you got any courage yourselves ? (They didn't talk about guts in those days) There was a patternmaker there "What about you ? You worked in there during the 14-19 war" I was at the factory gate on the Wednesday and on the Saturday I come out of it, I didn't take very long, did I ?

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ I was surprised, to tell you the truth, that I was there longer t han a fortnight, three weeks I was there, ... I was in lodgings. When I got the sack, my missus was a paper-ruler, she used to say to me nearly every day, "Have you got the sack yet ?" She went to a little firm called Clark, non-existent now, and asked if she could have a job as a paper-folder, and he gave her a job, so that kept us going, that was in March, and just after Mayday I got this job in Dixon's. There was a frank feller got chucked into jail because he had deserted his wife, they say it's an ill wind,

I met this Miss Cartwright, I was looking for a house then, when I got this job. The owner of this place, Mr. Tomlin was a member of my Trade Union, and he knew all about me, without me opening me mouth, as soon as I mentioned me name. He says "I'll give ye a job" Miss Cartwright was an ILPer, Miss Cartwright soon found out that SHE hadn't got all the ~~the~~ brains when she met my missus. I f my missus hadn't have had a weak heart she would have been a midwife. We met Miss Cartwright on the street and she said "Where'r ye off to now ?" WE're going to look for a house. She knew someone in the neighbourhood who was going to move, and within TWO DAYS we got a house. We had damn all furnitue. We had a big basket.

One day, when I came home from work in Dixon's, I saw my wife pushing the big feller, seven foot tall, out of the house. She was pus hing him out of the back door; of course I grabbed hold of her, I said, "Here, wh't's the mater with ye ?" "She said "Oh, he's the landlord." He was a real friendly feller, all he want ed was to have a cup of tea, and sit down. He wa a real good feller, he'd do anything for us.

I found my wife lying dead here in this room, when I came in from work one day, and I believe the tears were running from his eyes when he heard about it. I always had some good pals. When I started at Dixon's, old Dixon give me a chair, he did. We had plenty of bed-clothes, and we laid them on the floor, ye see, and there was a feller in Dixon's who said "Have you got a bed ? I said "NO", He gave us a bed with brass knobs, and I got 15 bob for the brass when I sold it. It had lathes, no springs.

**Communist*
During the general strike, as far as I remeber, all the workers came out. There was a party member in there, got them out; he was the only party member in the Krin. *There was quite a lot out - we marched behind a banner!*
ough to trim We adopted a pit in Wales. We gave them so much clothing, Our lot carried on inot the next year, 1927. Members of my trade union gave me so much every week. Everybody got down to the job. We used to collect about twenty pounds every week. The chairman of the Trades Council...

I wanted to send all the money we'd got, ^{my pen} every week, because that'd save a life. *we had a big agreement for this -*

£50 - £30 - £2.
All the members of my T.U.
To prevent the kids dying from shawashi.

We started in 1926 & our lot carried on.