

OUR HISTORY 57

Fred Henderson - The Case for Socialism (1911)

Fred Henderson was a socialist poet, writer and local activist. Born in Norwich, he moved to London to work for TP O'Connor's radical paper *The Star*. He returned to Norwich in 1886 and formed a branch of the Socialist League. An ethical socialist and member of the Norwich Labour Church, for whom he wrote a pamphlet on *Politics in the Pulpit*, he was a friend of William Morris and Edward Carpenter. In 1887 he was arrested for heckling the prime minister, Lord Salisbury, at a meeting in Norwich and locked up in Norwich gaol, where he was put on the treadmill. The arrest led to questions in parliament by the radical MP, Cunninghame Graham. Henderson was elected to the Norwich Board of Guardians in 1890, and also became associated with John Mahon's Labour Union, but moved back to London, where he founded the Clapham Labour League. He edited a paper *The Labour Leader*, through which he sought to recruit members for a new political party. When the ILP was established in Bradford in 1893, he took the Clapham Labour League into the new organisation. In 1892, sponsored by the Labour Representation League established by the London Trades Council, he was elected to the London County Council and joined the progressive group. However in the following year he was found guilty of stealing three shillings from a prostitute, and though protesting his innocence, was forced to resign his seat and served a four months sentence of hard labour.

Returning to Norwich, Henderson worked as a journalist before being elected as the first socialist on Norwich City Council in 1902. He became an alderman in 1923 and Lord Mayor in 1939, serving a total of 55 years on the council, till his death in 1957 at the age of 90. He was a vigorous propagandist, publishing *The Case for Socialism for the Clarion* in 1911. This book was reprinted several times – the opening chapter was adopted by the ILP as a statement of the socialist position. Henderson was a libertarian socialist and was also close to a number of anarchists, including Fred Charles and Charles Mowbray who were also active in the Norwich socialist movement. During the First World War, Henderson was associated with a radical anarchist-leaning bookshop in Charing Cross Road, known as the 'bomb shop'. As well as further volumes of poetry, Henderson published a number of further polemics, focusing on the principles of socialism, and the relationship with the

modern consumerist society – *The Labour Unrest* – What it is and what it portends in 1911, *The New Faith* in 1915, *The Economic Consequences of Power Production* in 1921, *Money and Power* and *Human Life* in 1932, *The Socialist Goal*, also in 1932 and *Capitalism and the Consumer* in 1935. There is no entry for Henderson in the 13-volume *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, nor is there a biography of him in the volumes of the *Labour Annual* and *Reformers Yearbook* in the 1890's and 1900's. Norwich Library services published in 1940 a short pamphlet listing his publications. Edward Thompson interviewed Henderson for his study of William Morris, which includes a set of letters from Morris to Henderson. Henderson also features in Steven Cherry's 1989 pamphlet on *Politics and the Labour Movement in Norwich 1660-1914: Doing Different?* The elderly Henderson also appears in the last few shots of a film *Labour* and the *New Society* made by the Norwich Labour Party in 1951, which can be viewed at www.eafa.org.uk/catalogue/635.

"We socialists refuse to accept as an adequate standard of life any standard which stops short of full human life....We set up a human standard. And whatever kind of life the general resources of the world can make possible for all men has got to go into the standard... To reserve for the enjoyment of a class alone any of these things which might be the common human heritage is evidence of injustice in social organisation. And if the whole of the proposals of the orthodox political parties for 'social reform' within the existing order were carried out tomorrow, this fundamental injustice of class division and class privilege would still remain. Socialism puts it to you that the settlement of this problem of poverty can only be brought about by getting rid of the placeholders who are bleeding the life of the country white by the tribute-levying system of private ownership of land and capital of the country. The nation, if it desires its resources to get into the homes and lives of its people, must own its land and its capital, and so control the sources of wealth upon which it lives; must organise its own industry, and carry on the production of the national wealth for use in the general national life."

"That is socialism: The nationalisation of the land and of the means of producing and distributing wealth; and the organisation of industry as a civic service under public ownership and control for the benefit of all, instead of, as now, under private ownership and control for private profit."



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