

OUR HISTORY 60

J T Murphy - The Workers Committee (1917)

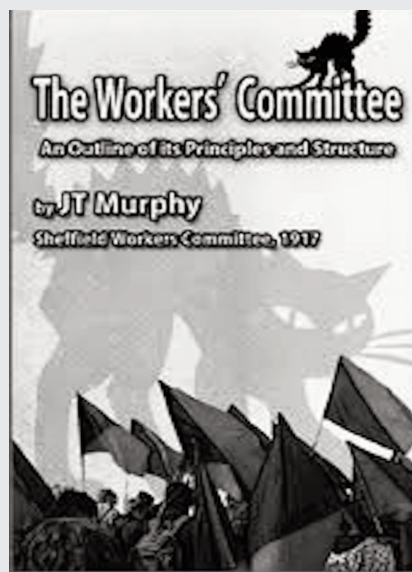
This pamphlet was published by the Sheffield Workers Committee. Its author was John Murphy, born in Manchester of Irish descent, who had started work in the Vickers factory in Sheffield at the age of 13. In 1914, he became shop steward for the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE). In 1916, Murphy was one of the leaders of a strike against conscription of skilled workers. He was a supporter of the syndicalism of De Leon and Connolly and secretary of the Sheffield branch of the Amalgamation Committee Movement. Chair of the Sheffield Workers committee, Murphy also became assistant secretary of the national Shop Stewards and Workers committee movement, which in January 1918 adopted the Sheffield statement as its official statement of policy. The pamphlet sold about 150,000 copies. Murphy joined the Socialist Labour Party, was a member of its executive committee and wrote for its journal, the Socialist. He stood unsuccessfully for the SLP in the 1918 election for Manchester Gorton against John Hodge, Labour MP and Minister of Labour in Lloyd George's coalition government. Murphy joined the Communist Party on its formation, and joined its executive committee, also becoming delegate to the Moscow based Red International of Labour Unions (RILU). He was one of the communist leaders imprisoned in 1925 for seditious libel and incitement to mutiny. He was however critical of the Communist Party of Great Britain's strategy and expelled in 1931. He then joined the Labour Party becoming active in the Socialist League and the Popular Front. In 1939, he returned to the shopfloor as a turner. He wrote a number of books including *Preparing for Power* in 1934 and an autobiography *New Horizons* in 1941. His biography was published by Ralph Darlington in 2000.

'Modern methods of production are social in character.

We mean by this statement that workmen of all kinds associate together, and are necessary to each other to produce goods. The interests of one, therefore, are the interests of another. Mechanics cannot get along without labourers or without crane drivers; none of these can dispose with the blacksmith, the grinder, the forgerman etc, yet in spite of this interdependence, which extends throughout all industry, the organisations of the workers are almost all anti-social in character.'

'They keep the workers divided by organising them on the basis of their differences instead of their common interests. Born at a period when large scale production had not arrived, when skill was at a greater premium than it is today, many have maintained the prejudices which organisations naturally cultivate, while during the same period of growth the changes in methods of production were changing their position in relation to other workers, unperceived by them. With the advent of the general labour unions catering for men and women workers the differences became organised differences, and the adjustment of labour organisations to the changes increasingly complex. The skilled men resent the encroachments of the unskilled, and both resent the encroachments of women workers.'

'Yet everyone of the wage earning classes, whether man or woman, is in the same fix. Each has to work for wages or starve. Each fears unemployment...The only way the mutual interests of the wage earners can be secured, therefore, is by united effort on the part of all independent workers, whether men or women... With the workshops then as the new units or organisation, we will now show how, starting with these, we can erect the structure of the Great Industrial Union, invigorate the labour movement with the real democratic spirit, and in the process lose none of the real values won in the historic struggle of the trade union movement.'



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