

ARTHUR HENDERSON AS LABOUR LEADER

Arthur Henderson¹ was the only member of the industrial working classes to lead a British political party.² He was the only trade unionist to lead the Labour Party, and, as well, one of only two active Christians to do so. In the history of the Labour Party's first thirty years he seems to have a centrality shared by no other man.³ But what constitutes his centrality is a genuine problem, and both his contemporaries and his colleagues were aware of it. J. R. Clynes once wrote: "I would not class Mr. Henderson as a type, but as one quite unlike any other of his colleagues."⁴ In this article I would like to test this judgement, to examine both Henderson's "typicality" as a historical figure in the labour movement, and the significance of his career as a labour leader.

I

Henderson's personality and habits tell us something about the psycho-

¹ Arthur Henderson (1863-1935), born in Glasgow, but moved to Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1871. Apprenticed as an iron-moulder. Joined the Friendly Society of Ironfounders in 1883, and eventually became a union organizer. 1893 circulation manager of the Newcastle Evening News. 1896 secretary-agent to Sir Joseph Pease, Liberal MP for Barnard Castle (Durham). Elected to both Durham and Darlington Councils as a Liberal. Mayor of Darlington, 1903. MP for Barnard Castle (Labour), 1903-18, and MP for Widnes, Newcastle East, Burnley and Clay Cross, 1918-35. Three times chairman and chief whip of the Parliamentary Labour Party; secretary of the Labour Party, 1911-34; leader of the Labour Party, 1931-32. President of the Board of Education, 1915-16; paymaster-general (labour adviser to the government), 1916; Minister without portfolio in the War Cabinet, 1916-17; led ministerial mission to Russia, 1917, and resigned shortly after his return; Home Secretary, 1924; Foreign Secretary, 1929-31; president of the world disarmament conference, 1932-35.

² I am thinking here of the leadership of the Labour Party as established after 1922. Before that date the chairmanship rotated, and was important only when Ramsay MacDonald held it, 1911-14.

³ I have discussed this elsewhere, see R. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 124-25.

⁴ In an introduction to Edwin A. Jenkins, *From Foundry to Foreign Office: The Romantic Life-Story of the Rt. Hon. Arthur Henderson* (London, 1933), p. vii.

logical and physical aptitudes he brought to the labour movement. In appearance and dress he followed fashion scarcely at all, except to trim his moustache during the war. He had a “clean face, clean collar, clean cuffs, umbrella, and Pleasant-Sunday-Afternoon respectability”.⁵ He invariably wore a bowler hat. Compactness, neatness, cleanliness, were inseparably associated with him. Even the psychologist employed by the *Daily Sketch* could not fail to notice it: “he has a high appreciation of the value of time, is very methodical [. . .] while he has a perfect horror of strife.”⁶ These characteristics led easily to parody or condescension. G. K. Chesterton once suggested that the state could be a “very small number of men in good black coats, in charge of all the telephones and all the police. [. . .] Mr. Arthur Henderson will probably be one of them”.⁷ Yet they were the public face of indispensable qualities he later brought to the Labour Party.

They were not, however, the only characteristics that Henderson presented to his movement. He was all his life a leading Wesleyan Methodist and temperance enthusiast. Born a Congregationalist, he was in his adolescence converted to Wesleyanism by the famous evangelist “Gypsy” (Rodney) Smith — who, in his turn, claimed to have been converted (at the age of eleven) by Sankey!⁸ Henderson at no time questioned his faith: twice president of the national council of the Brotherhood Movement, and an energetic lay preacher, he absorbed nearly all of the values of institutional nonconformity at its height and decline. Furthermore, his only (so to speak) intellectual influences were religious ones. In his reply to the questionnaire sent by W. B. Stead to the Labour MPs of the 1906 Parliament, Henderson disclosed no formative reading other than the Bible (his “best book”) and the sermons of Wesley, Spurgeon, Talmage and Hughes.⁹ He was by no means the only one in that band of brothers to find in his best book his best guide, but the narrowness of his reading was even in this company unusual. It appears from other sources¹⁰ that he had

⁵ Alex Thompson, *Here I Lie* (London, 1937), p. 193.

⁶ *Daily Sketch*, 16 August 1917.

⁷ *Daily Herald*, 22 March 1913.

⁸ See H. M. Murray, *Sixty Years an Evangelist* (London, 1935), p. 82. It is alleged that Henderson publicly attested his conversion at an open-air meeting.

⁹ *The Review of Reviews*, XXXIII (1906), p. 574. Henderson always acknowledged Spurgeon’s influence. Spurgeon was a powerful and compelling evangelist, whose collected sermons alone went through twenty-three editions. He occupies nine full pages in the British Library’s catalogue of printed books.

¹⁰ See, for example, A. Henderson, “Christianity and Democracy”, in: E. T. Whittaker et al., *Man’s Place in Creation, and other lectures delivered in the Central Hall, Manchester* (London, 1905), pp. 28-48.

read the American pastor George D. Herron, and, of course, Benjamin Kidd.¹¹ Spurgeon, Herron and Kidd: exactly the kind of thing one would expect from a man whose reading in the 1890's was utilitarian and designed to provide radical sermon-fodder.

Although (presumably) his religious and political lives developed from the same traits of personality and cultural influences, both reinforced each other. His religion cohered with his political ideology, while his missionary activities were easily adapted to the organizational techniques required by a party still very much in its evangelical phase. His styles of speech and writing were clearly manufactured in the pulpit, and, particularly during the war, when "political" preaching relieved intense emotional pressures, he often used sermons as a way of speaking publicly to current political questions.

The rigid teetotalism was inherent to his religious vocation. In 1910 he told a (doubtless) sceptical audience that he, too, had once drunk and gambled, but that he had abandoned both drink and gambling shortly after conversion.¹² This seems improbable since his conversion was largely of a nominal kind. His family, though not Wesleyan, was pious and chapel, and held conventional chapel views about vice. Henderson took his temperance seriously, and it was the closest he came to "political" nonconformity. He stayed wherever he could, often at the cost of personal comfort, at temperance hotels, and he was an active member of the United Kingdom Alliance and other temperance organizations. It caused difficulties in his political career; though temperance was acceptable to much of the labour movement, it was unacceptable to another part, and Henderson came dangerously close to being damned as a canter.¹³ Furthermore, it was one question upon which he was not prepared to compromise: he could see no sense in transforming capitalism "to a democracy penalised and paralysed by drink".¹⁴ Even so it was not until the 1920's that Henderson's adherence to temperance appeared crotchety. In 1928 there was an embarrassing incident when he resigned from the party election committee

¹¹ For the flavour of Herron's writings, see his essay "Economics and Religion", in *Social Meanings of Religious Experiences* (London, 1897), pp. 49-84. For Kidd, see his "The Function of Religious Beliefs in the Evolution of Society", in *Social Evolution* (London, 1895), pp. 97-117.

¹² Jenkins, *From Foundry to Foreign Office*, op. cit., p. 3.

¹³ See below, p. 99.

¹⁴ Quoted in H. J. Fyrth and H. Collins, *The Foundry Workers* (Manchester, 1959), p. 124.

because the “drink question” was excluded from the manifesto — and he was only *just* asked to return.¹⁵

II

The constancy and importance of these elements in his life made any clear discontinuities in his political developments unlikely to start with. Thus change, when it did occur, was almost imperceptible. All his life Henderson was an advanced radical of the old style, but his radicalism in time became encrusted with habits and patterns of thought collected elsewhere.

It could hardly be otherwise: he grew up in an enfolding radical atmosphere, and at every stage of his early career he had Liberal patrons who advanced him politically. At first it was Stephenson’s, who promoted him to local politics, then the Newcastle Liberal machine under Robert Spence Watson, then the Pease family (large shareholders in Stephenson’s), and then, in his union, Fred Maddison. He had every reason to be grateful to the Liberal Party, and he always was. From Spence Watson’s influence he never escaped,¹⁶ and it is arguable that Henderson’s later and almost exclusive turn to international relations, which is more surprising than it seems, given his own parochialism and industrial background, was partly due to the pacifist radicalism which he absorbed from Spence Watson and his circle. It was they who jobbed him on to the Newcastle Council in 1894 and attempted to get him to Parliament as Morley’s running mate in 1895. In this they failed, but too much has been made of their failure.¹⁷ There is no evidence to support Mrs Hamilton’s contention

¹⁵ Hugh Dalton, *Call Back Yesterday* (London, 1953), p. 172. After he became Foreign Secretary, men of the world like Dalton and Philip Noel Baker coaxed him into drinking a glass of wine with his evening meal. On most other matters of morals he held orthodox nonconformist views. He was a signatory of the minority report of the 1912 Royal Commission on Divorce, and he supported liberalizing divorce legislation thereafter. In the 1906 Parliament he seconded a resolution to permit marriage to the deceased wife’s sister — a typical piece of anti-Anglicanism. On the other hand, at the Labour Party head office he always turned a blind eye to the sexual unorthodoxies of the staff, however obvious.

¹⁶ See P. Corder, *Life of Robert Spence Watson* (London, 1914).

¹⁷ In 1892 the Liberals had lost one of the two Newcastle seats they had held. This was assumed by Spence Watson and others to be due to the reluctance of working-class voters to support middle-class Liberal candidates. In March 1895, therefore, they induced the Liberal and Radical Association to select Henderson as the second Liberal candidate. But the Liberal One Thousand refused to acquiesce, and they nominated instead “one James Craig”, M. A. Hamilton, Arthur Henderson (London, 1938), p. 30. Mrs Hamilton implies that Craig was a nonentity. He was, in fact, the former Liberal MP for the city and much better known than Henderson. It is unlikely that Henderson much regretted the outcome. Both Morley and Craig were defeated, and the balance of the votes suggests that Henderson would have been as well. Furthermore, he liked Darlington (and Barnard Castle)

that Henderson had “seen the cloven hoof. The sight was not forgotten.”¹⁸ It would have been surprising if he had been selected. He was only 32, young for a parliamentary candidate not indigenous to the ruling classes, relatively unknown, and unmoneyed. Liberal bigwiggery made up for the loss, and as consolation, he happily accepted Sir Joseph Pease’s offer of the agency-secretaryship of the Barnard Castle constituency.¹⁹

At the same time his trade-union career was also advancing. By 1903, he was, indeed, the parliamentary candidate of his union, the Friendly Society of Ironfounders.²⁰ Much ambiguity was involved in this selection. The Ironfounders were under as much pressure as the other unions to secure parliamentary representation, but their approach was circuitous and prudential. They resolved that their candidate was to be “allowed a free hand [. . .] so long as he votes with the labour party on matters pertaining to the welfare of the unions”.²¹ Furthermore, even if Henderson’s politics were not well-known before his nomination, they were widely broadcast by his opponents during the selection ballot. He was clearly the candidate of the union’s Liberal wing, and Fred Maddison, the union’s president, openly agitated on his behalf. Though the candidacy was (more or less) understood to be an independent Labour one, Henderson did not feel obliged to give up his position in Barnard Castle, nor did he imagine that any conflict was involved.

Similarly, it seems clear that Henderson’s election for Barnard Castle (in succession to his Liberal employer) involved no ideological conflicts, but did involve conflicts of name and loyalty.²² His union felt the same conflicts: he even doubted whether he would be allowed to stand as “an unadjectival Labour candidate”,²³ and both panicked when it was clear

more than Newcastle, and would no doubt have agreed with his employer and last patron, Sir J. W. Pease, when he told his son Jack: “I hate the Newcastle low political standard. ‘What shall we pocket? in grog? and money?’ My Dalemens are a superior article.” J. W. Pease to Jack Pease, 11 October 1900, Gainford Papers 12B, Nuffield College, Oxford. For further details of Henderson’s earlier career see A. W. Purdue, “Arthur Henderson and Liberal, Liberal-Labour and Labour Politics in the North-East of England, 1892-1903”, in: *Northern History*, XI (1976 for 1975).

¹⁸ Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁹ Not only were the Peases large shareholders in Stephenson’s, but Jack Pease was then MP for Tyneside.

²⁰ For his union career, see below, pp. 88-89.

²¹ Fyrth and Collins, *The Foundry Workers*, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

²² For an account of the by-election campaign, see P. Poirier, *The Advent of the Labour Party* (London, 1958), pp. 196-206.

²³ H. L. Barrett to J. R. MacDonald, 29 March 1903, Labour Party Letter Files (hereafter LPLF), LRC 8/68, Transport House, London.

that he would have a Liberal opponent.²⁴ Henderson won because he could find no graceful way of not standing at all. Even then he was reluctant to sign the constitution of the Labour Representation Committee, and did so only after three months wavering.²⁵

Henderson's transition from the Liberal to the Labour Party was gentle and demanded no abrupt philosophic shift: not for nothing was Keir Hardie excluded from the Barnard Castle contest.²⁶ It is important that the nature of this transition be understood: it was, in the first instance, an institutional and not a political one. In the case of Henderson and the Ironfounders it was made by men who remained advanced radical in tendency, but who knew that if they wanted parliamentary representation they would have to arrange it themselves. Henderson, unlike Richard Bell and a number of the miners' MPs, was (nearly) always loyal to the LRC as an institution, but his politics remained recognizably Liberal-radical in type. This was the subject of more or less discreet ILP criticism,²⁷ and more open attack from other quarters.

There was plenty for his critics to get their teeth into. His maiden speech was in support of free trade,²⁸ and he had to be coerced by the executive of the LRC into not appearing on "neutral" (i.e. Liberal) platforms.²⁹ He defended that action with spirit.

Unless our independence has to become isolation, it is essential that the votes of Labour men and especially Trade Unionists — if we are to retrieve our "legal position" — should be cast by the advice of the Committee (the executive of the L.R.C.) into such channels as will help to secure our object. [. . .] It is remarkable that such a demonstration of feeling should have taken place simply because we pursued the same policy at an election as has been followed by almost every Labour Member and Candidate for some time past. In nearly every constituency in the agitation against Protection, against Chinese Labour, against the Licensing Bill, most of us joined with other

²⁴ See Robert Morley (president of the Workers' Union) to MacDonald, 19 March 1903, LPLF, LRC 7/285; H. H. Hughes to MacDonald, 20 May 1903, LPLF, LRC 9/208.

²⁵ Minutes of the National Executive of the Labour Party, 17 December 1903, Transport House.

²⁶ J. R. MacDonald to A. Henderson, 3 July 1903, LPLF, LRC LB/2/280. According to MacDonald, Hardie felt his exclusion "very keenly", see also K. O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie* (London, 1975), p. 135. Henderson many years later told Cripps, quite untruthfully, that the exclusion was done with Hardie's "complete understanding and approval", Dalton Diaries, 29-30 January 1934, Dalton Papers, London School of Economics.

²⁷ Bruce Glasier thought Henderson "a humbug", while Hardie later found his leadership of the Labour Party "reactionary and timid". L. Thompson, *The Enthusiasts* (London, 1971), pp. 143, 156.

²⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Fourth Series, CXXIX, cc. 1237-41, 12 February 1904.

²⁹ Minutes of the National Executive of the Labour Party, 30 June 1904.

citizens in our protest against the Government policy on these questions.³⁰

It was the policy of the “neutral platform”, which was practised until the outbreak of the war – and then, of course, after it even more –, that lent sting to Tillet’s polemic, *Is the Parliamentary Labour Party a Failure?* Despite its crudity, the activities which it condemned were all too recognizable. “Some of [the PLP’s] leading members [. . .] have stumped the country, subservient to the Nonconformist-Temperance-Liberal Party, ignoring the great tragedy of starvation as represented by the millions unable to find work or food.”³¹ As for Henderson, when he was “a ‘Gospel-Temperance-Liberal election agent’ he was of little public importance, in spite of his multiple offices; but the Labour Party has increased his influence and his value to the bourgeois ‘Temperance’ party.”³² Tillet himself, of course, was also a crank on the drink question – as on much else –, but Henderson, like Shackleton and, indeed, Snowden, left himself open to attacks of this kind, because they were often, in part, true.³³

The “neutral platform” equally provided Victor Grayson with his opportunities in 1908 and 1909. Grayson argued that the Labour MPs in Parliament failed to diminish unemployment, not because they were tied to the government for tactical reasons, but because their political objectives were the *same* as the government’s. This was certainly unfair. The Parliamentary Party had worked hard on unemployment legislation in difficult circumstances; on the other hand, it is not hard to detect in Henderson’s attitude a feeling that unemployment was an issue secondary to other great radical causes. Thus he told Arthur Ponsonby, who had urged on him the need to meet the Lords with forces undivided, that “the position you take [. . .] largely represents my personal opinion. [. . .] I am afraid, however, if the Government were to appeal during the present year without

³⁰ Draft Report to the Friendly Society of Ironfounders on Harborough and Devonport Elections, LPLF, LRC 18/92.

³¹ B. Tillet, *Is the Parliamentary Labour Party a Failure?* (London, n.d.), p. 3.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³³ And given that both Shackleton and Henderson were devout nonconformists, the attacks could scarcely not be. See also Bruce Glasier on Henderson: “His eternal appearances on Temperance and Methodist platforms and the absence of a single proclamation from him of a leadership order gives countenance to those miserable hints and accusations in the *Dispatch* and elsewhere that the party is becoming merely a Liberal tail.” Quoted in Morgan, Keir Hardie, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

attempting to provide permanent remedies for Unemployment — it would divide the forces that ought to attack the Lords unitedly.”³⁴

There is no evidence that his radicalism was much modified before the war, though there were important changes of emphasis. Only one aspect of his behaviour before 1917 is perhaps surprising, and that is his reaction to the outbreak of the war. It is perfectly conceivable that he could have taken the same attitude as John Morley, John Burns and Arthur Ponsonby (who all resigned from the Liberal government), or, indeed, MacDonald. He had the same political background, he lived in the same political world, and the quaker-radical influences in Newcastle and Darlington were intensely pacifist. If, like Burns necessarily, or MacDonald by choice, he had inhabited an almost exclusively middle-class milieu, he might have behaved as they did. But the union connection was strong enough to push him into supporting the war, and it is probably true that, outside those who regarded themselves specifically as socialists, the working class was quite as military-minded as the bourgeoisie: within the labour movement perhaps more so.

Henderson's behaviour during the war was, therefore, always ambiguous. He continued to call himself a “pacifist”,³⁵ and only once descended into the contemporary style.³⁶ He certainly believed that German militarism was responsible for the war, but he also believed that it was caused by diplomats and practitioners of the balance of power: that Sir Edward Grey shared guilt with Bethmann-Hollweg.³⁷ He always argued that the “unmoral” use of German military force had to be defeated, but, as well, that the processes of arbitration and conciliation that he already knew so well would have to supersede the old diplomacy.

It was perhaps the continuing strength of pacifist radicalism in his own make-up as much as the internal evolution of the Labour Party that forced him out of Lloyd George's government in August 1917.³⁸ The only letter of

³⁴ Henderson to Ponsonby, 22 January 1909, Ponsonby Papers C 658, Bodleian Library, Oxford. See also the Master of Elibank's testimony, dated 14 April 1910. His relations with Henderson were based upon “cordiality and trust”. A. C. Murray, *Master and Brother* (London, 1945), p. 48.

³⁵ See, for example, *Daily News*, 11 January 1915.

³⁶ “There are some people who thought that it did not matter [. . .] whether England or Germany came out victors in the war. [. . .] Such people took up tremendous risks. Was any man going to see his child butchered and his wife dishonoured without retaliating. He did not believe it!” *Yorkshire Observer*, 1 January 1915.

³⁷ *Northern Echo*, 15 January 1915.

³⁸ For Henderson's resignation, see J. M. Winter, “Arthur Henderson, the Russian Revolution and the Reconstruction of the Labour Party”, in: *Historical Journal*, IV (1972); more generally, C. F. Brand, *British Labour's Rise to Power* (London, 1941).

congratulation on his resignation that remains in his papers came from his old friend the Revd Tom Sykes, secretary of the national council of the Brotherhood Movement, who wrote: "Toryism dies hard in this ancient land and is the unscrupulous enemy which needs the 'knock-out' – and will get it. I do not mean quite political Toryism, but rather the superior castle-spirit and its press organs."³⁹ Why this letter alone was preserved is not clear, but the old-fashioned democracy of its sentiments accorded well with Henderson's own radicalism and that of the circles in which he continued to move. Thus in 1919 he was recalling the glad days of 1909 and 1910, when Lloyd George "drew his inspiration from advanced radicalism", when he "had the interest of the popular masses at heart", and before he became the "apologist of the class interests which he formerly denounced with more pungency and fervour than any statesman of our time".⁴⁰ In 1920 he was reminiscing nostalgically of Campbell-Bannerman,⁴¹ and in 1921 he announced, with a last Gladstonian gasp, that the great issue of the next election would be Ireland.⁴²

His increasing absorption in League of Nations affairs must be seen in the same way. He showed no sign of regarding the international working-class movement as an alternative to those conciliating institutions traditionally advocated by British Liberals. Henderson, rather, tried to use the strength of international socialism to buttress these institutions. As early as January 1915 he had concluded that "the mischievous effects of [. . .] the balance of power must be superseded by a congress of nations [. . .]. The functions and powers of the Hague Tribunal must be extended, and it must have the assistance of a permanent council of conciliation, and advice with the machinery of arbitration must be speeded up."⁴³ At the meeting of the rump Second International in January 1919, he alone in that disputatious gathering spoke to what he called "practical purposes".

We ought to say to the governments that all their Balances of Power, however scientifically arranged, have failed. Their standing armies have not served to save our children from slaughter. Their secret diplomacy resulted in disaster [. . .]. We should say to Paris: "all this must be revolutionised immediately by a League of Nations *now*."⁴⁴

³⁹ Sykes to Henderson, undated but almost certainly August 1917, LPLF, Henderson Papers, HEN/13/1.

⁴⁰ Labour Party Leaflet, No 44 (1919).

⁴¹ World Brotherhood, ed. by B. J. Matthews (London, 1920), p. 105.

⁴² Manchester Guardian, 28 August 1921.

⁴³ Nottingham Daily Express, 5 January 1915.

⁴⁴ Stenographic Report of the Reconstruction Meeting of the Second International at Berne, 26-28 January 1919, Transport House.

The continental delegations could hardly have been less interested. He completed the circle to his maiden speech in 1904 when he told a Swiss paper fifteen years later that the League “can only succeed in so far as all obstacles to world commerce – customs barriers, for example – are abolished and replaced by a policy of free trade”.⁴⁵ As he did with domestic policy, so in international affairs he saw the working class as now the only effective support of policies which were in the interest of society generally, but which before the war might have been promoted and defended by a vigorous middle-class radicalism.

III

Everything that has been said about Henderson so far points to his viewing British society as one based upon harmonious class relations: a social harmony in which class antagonism would be diminished by an even-handed state on the one side, and by conciliation and arbitration on the other. Although he spoke increasingly after 1917 – as did all labour leaders – of “democratic control of industry”, he did not even then assume that the organization of capitalist industry would change significantly. And, at every stage, his attitudes were, of course, shaped and hardened by a social Christianity that was – to use more recent terminology – specifically class-collaborationist.

In the 1880's Henderson had entered a craft and a union that encouraged such attitudes. The foundries were still fairly small-scale, and even when they were not, labour was organized in a hierarchic and personalized way that allowed the diffusion of an essentially middle-class radicalism – or, at least, a radicalism that was organized in a bourgeois-dominated political party. Henderson, as a “butty man” in a firm like Stephenson's, where relations between men and masters were, on the whole, genial, and where union officials were cultivated by management, could scarcely have escaped its effects. His union, the Ironfounders, was Liberal in its leadership and in its political tendencies, and, although this Liberalism was increasingly contested within the union, Henderson was not one of the dissidents. He was, on the contrary, a protégé of Fred Maddison, the union's Lib-Lab president.

In 1892, after nine years membership of the Ironfounders, he was elected a district delegate, and in 1894 became secretary and senior workers' representative of the North East Conciliation Board. This body, established during the 1894 engineers' strike, revealed his great skills and patience as industrial negotiator. When a similar board was established in

⁴⁵ Quoted in *Le Populaire*, 30 January 1919.

Lancashire under the 1898 act, he was nominated to act as workers' representative there. Thereafter, he was a public protagonist of arbitration; as such he strongly opposed the establishment of the General Federation of Trade Unions as likely to encourage and intensify industrial disputes.⁴⁶ Until the early 1920's much of his time was spent in industrial conciliation; he nearly always acted for his own union, and frequently for others as well. His involvement was often such as to exclude his party work altogether, to the annoyance of coming men like Hugh Dalton, anxiously arranging their political futures.⁴⁷ Before the war, he was a senior negotiator of the railway strike (1911) and of the great Dublin strikes of 1913. Though there was much evidence to suggest that the unions had not done particularly well from arbitrated settlements in this period,⁴⁸ Henderson agreed to be a member of the Industrial Council (1912-13), and, apart from Sir George Askwith himself, he was one of the few to believe that it could work.⁴⁹

His attitude to industrial relations was, in fact, double-sided. Clearly his aptitude as a negotiator was valued by the unions, and he owed his place in the movement to them – but he had a general view of industrial relations which was almost totally unrepresentative of that of the unions. His was, in the broadest sense, *political*. He always argued for the “Australian” system of compulsory arbitration – in 1909 he and Will Crooks even introduced legislation to enforce it – which was repeatedly rejected by the unions and finally disposed of at the 1911 TUC.⁵⁰ It was political in the sense that he conceived solutions as necessarily external to the disputes: the overriding interest was that of the community or the state and not that of the disputants. Since the state must be involved, so must the Labour Party as the political wing of the labour movement. He was thus sceptical of the unions' capacity to take the “broad view”, and he saw himself, and his party, as in some way representing the community. In September 1913, from Dublin, he wrote: “It will take a stiff fight to get sense into both sides”;⁵¹ and in November (also from Dublin) he deplored the way the unions had excluded the party from negotiations: “The Parliamentary Committee [of the TUC] are in possession and you know what that means.”⁵² The refusal of

⁴⁶ Fyrth and Collins, *The Foundry Workers*, p. 102.

⁴⁷ Dalton Diaries, 27-29 March 1922.

⁴⁸ See J. H. Porter, “Wage Bargaining under Conciliation Agreements, 1860-1914”, in: *Economic History Review*, Second Series, XXIII (1970), pp. 474-75.

⁴⁹ See Lord Askwith, *Industrial Problems and Disputes* (London, 1920), pp. 198-99; I. G. Sharp, *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration in Great Britain* (London, 1950), pp. 298-302.

⁵⁰ Report of Proceedings at the Annual Trades Union Congress, 1911, pp. 229-31.

⁵¹ Henderson to J. S. Middleton, 17 September 1913, LPLF, LP/HEN/08/1/89.

⁵² Henderson to Middleton, 13 November 1913, LPLF, LP/HEN/08/1/100.

the TUC to make use of the Joint Board⁵³ maddened him: “The whole of the blame must rest with them and not with us.”⁵⁴

The war did not much change all this. He let compulsory arbitration go, sensibly enough, but the other sides of the policy were grasped even more tightly. They had three closely related characteristics: a reassertion of the overriding interest of the community, a continued rejection of industrial action as against conciliation, and an emphatic opposition to “direct action”, to the political use of the strike. His view that the interest of the community was superior to all others was strengthened by his experience of the war and the Russian Revolution — he was, of course, in Russia in May and June 1917. In February 1917 he said that “capital and labour had often in the past, in the settlement of their differences by lock-out or strike, forgotten that there was a third party, the community, whose interests were being seriously endangered [. . .]. If the State recognized that it depended on capital and labour, he hoped capital and labour would recognize their obligations to the State”.⁵⁵ He urged the same thing on those Russians who cared to listen to him: there should be a “truce as between two extremes”,⁵⁶ as in this country, the “state should act as a buffer between two warring sections”.⁵⁷

But if the community were to be protected from the consequences of industrial strife, the state had to do more than act as a buffer. It had to establish what he called (and what the Labour Party in 1918 became committed to) “democratic control” of industry. He did not, of course, mean by this any necessary structural change in the organization of industry. He meant the development of the conciliation services that he had known before the war, and particularly the development of the Whitley Councils. In June 1918 he admitted (“as a result of his experience in connection with the Conciliation Boards”) that “difficulties would arise in applying the principles of the Whitley Report to many industries, especially those that are unorganized”. But if labour and capital “could come together in a spirit of toleration [. . .] — all concerned in the conduct of industry would profit, and the community would be saved from the recurrent industrial troubles so deplorably frequent in the pre-war years. [. . .] Co-operation is the key word of the Whitley Report. [. . .] Co-operation or disastrous strife, reconstruction or revolution [. . .]. The idea

⁵³ An organization comprising both the political and industrial wings of the movement, and designed to co-ordinate action between the two.

⁵⁴ Henderson to Middleton, 18 November 1913, LPLF, LP/HEN/08/1/103.

⁵⁵ Yorkshire Post, 19 February 1917.

⁵⁶ Henderson to R. W. Raine, 19 June 1917, LPLF, Henderson Papers, HEN/1/29.

⁵⁷ Henderson to T. W. Dowson, 19 June 1917, *ibid.*, HEN/1/30.

that the relationships between capital and labour must necessarily be antagonistic must be abandoned on both sides.”⁵⁸ Even by the end of 1920, when it was obvious that Whitleyism would, at best, have only very modest success,⁵⁹ he was continuing “to attach much importance to the working of the Whitley Council scheme. As a method of Industrial councils the Whitley Councils have very great value.”⁶⁰

It is less clear what “democratic control” meant in concrete terms. It seemed to imply a moral rather than a structural change. Men would have to behave towards each other decently, with mutual respect and courtesy. He was certain, however, that the old forms of deference and class exclusiveness would have to disappear. “The dream of some employers that they will be able again [after the war] to get a docile and contented army of workers, who will readily accept a position of subordination and take orders ‘mechanically’ from their superiors, is a vain dream. The desire of a few less enlightened employers to destroy the trade union movement, to expel from industry the trade union ‘agitator’ [. . .] is an even vainer desire.”⁶¹

The possibility of moral change was, of course, in some sense confirmed by the requirements of his own religion. Thus at an ecumenical methodist conference in September 1921, he said that the

Churches should endeavour to secure the reconciliation of the workers actually engaged in industry, and the humanizing of all the conditions of their employment. [. . .] The Church must assert the fact that the worker was first of all a man, with a human claim to full life, entitled to an adequate minimum of leisure, of health, of education, of subsistence, and an opportunity to develop all the faculties he possessed.⁶²

In practice, however, this was also what he demanded from the Labour Party. It was not, as he saw it, a “class” party: “Labour is in politics, not in the interests of a class, but to further the interests of the community as a whole. The Labour Party is [. . .] a national people’s party.”⁶³ Class prejudice was for others: the propertied classes’ fears of Labour were, therefore, “unreasonable fears”.⁶⁴ The Labour Party could be their party

⁵⁸ Brighton Herald, 29 June 1918.

⁵⁹ See J. B. Seymour, *The Whitley Councils Scheme* (London, 1932), pp. 94-105.

⁶⁰ “The Problem of Permanent Industrial Peace”, in: *Financial Review of Reviews*, December 1920, p. 378.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

⁶² *The Times*, 17 September 1921.

⁶³ *The Ploughshare*, December 1919.

⁶⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 20 March 1920.

as well, but only if they accepted that organized labour had as much right to power and representation as organized capital. When, for example, he complained of the 1918 and 1924 Parliaments as “class” Parliaments, he did not really mean that capital was overrepresented, but that labour was underrepresented, and that narrow and unenlightened interests were perpetuating the old system of social snobbery and class arrogance. The Labour Party was to so order society that this behaviour would no longer be possible.

Equally, Henderson had a quite specific conception of the Labour Party’s place in the wider labour movement, and it presupposed (as it had before the war) the primacy of political action over industrial and the party over the unions. He never doubted the continuing effectiveness of parliamentary democracy, nor did he doubt that “direct action” was just his old enemy “syndicalism”⁶⁵ under a more modish name. In September 1919 he told his own union that “to endeavour to force upon the country and upon the Government by illegitimate means the policy of a section of the entire community – involves the abrogation of Parliamentary Government, establishes the dictatorship of the minority and might easily destroy eventually all our constitutional liberties.”⁶⁶

He argued this at greatest length in an interesting set-piece exchange with Robert Williams, the secretary of the Transport Workers, in September 1920. It occurred on the eve of the miners’ “datum line” strike (October 16, 1920) and the possible resurrection of the Triple Alliance. Henderson had already made known his fear that Lloyd George would use the occasion to dissolve Parliament and that Labour could only lose such an election. Williams answered this, stating flatly that Labour should take whatever industrial action was necessary – “as far reaching and as constructive as the Government appears to be doing”.⁶⁷ Henderson then replied (unusually for him) in a lengthy gloss circulated to the members of the national executive of the party. He began by questioning Williams’s contention that “virile pressure on the industrial side” had done Labour (at least) no electoral harm.

⁶⁵ See his gleeful letter to J. S. Middleton: “We had the finest conference at Newcastle I have yet attended. The delegates filled the floor space and crowded into the gallery. [...] Two or three syndicalists did not get a look in as Wilkie ruled them out of order every time.” Henderson to Middleton, undated but clearly 1913, LPLF, uncatalogued. This was a conference held before the ballots required by the 1913 Trade Union Act. The syndicalists were opposed to “balloting in” and, indeed, to almost any other form of support for the Labour Party.

⁶⁶ Friendly Society of Ironfounders, Monthly Report, July 1919.

⁶⁷ Williams to Henderson, 15 September 1920. LPLF, uncatalogued.

I believe “direct action” propaganda [. . .] has been definitely harmful and has had the effect of frightening away many voters who were inclined to support Labour. [. . .] I hold the view that the coquetting [sic] with Bolshevism and the “direct action” propaganda has prevented our reaping the full fruits of a promising strategical position. [. . .]

I have always been a strong advocate of the closest possible measure of co-ordination between the industrial and political wings of the Movement. Unfortunately this has yet to be achieved, for in actual practice there is a lamentable lack of cohesion except on rare and isolated occasions, and such instances [. . .] of real unity and co-operation have been [. . .] of a temporary character [. . .].

It is impossible to regard the establishment of the Miners’ claim and the defeat of the coalition government as separate and unrelated as Mr. Williams presents them, yet the Miners’ claim has been kept strictly in the hands of the industrial wing, as though it had no relation or bearing on the political situation. [. . .]

In the present case the political wing has been completely excluded from participation in the trade union consultations and conferences. Now Mr. Williams suggests co-ordination of all our forces for the final stage of the struggle. As soon as there is a possibility of the venue being changed to the political arena, the political wing is invited to seek the co-operation of the industrial wing. It seems to me that it would have been a far better policy if the closest co-operation between the two wings had been established as soon as it became apparent that the fight might become more than a Miners’ fight [. . .]. I am strongly of the opinion that a general election on the issue which Mr. Williams suggests would be disastrous [. . .]. We should suffer, I believe, a very severe reverse — both industrially and politically.⁶⁸

This is an elaborate and revealing exposition of his own position, though characteristically it is a tactical rather than an ideological statement. Yet, while it is certainly true that direct actionism was in time abandoned by the unions as a political weapon, this was something that evolved on its own account, and not because of Labour Party pressure. The political wing never gained primacy; never even gained the equality that he had urged in reply to Robert Williams, and the unions continued to follow a policy of industrial sectionalism which effectively excluded the party. In 1926, for example, it might as well have not existed, and the relationship between the unions and the party established after 1931 was hardly what Henderson wanted.⁶⁹ Similarly all attempts to make the National Joint Council⁷⁰ a super-executive of the labour movement failed — as they had done before the war. It is probably true that Henderson’s turning away from industrial

⁶⁸ Notes on Mr Williams’s letter by the Secretary, September 1920, LPLF, uncatalogued.

⁶⁹ See below, pp. 99-100.

⁷⁰ As its name implies a joint council made up of representatives of the Parliamentary Labour Party, the National Executive of the party and the General Council of the TUC.

policy to international affairs was a result of this depressing failure as well as the influences of pre-war radicalism.

In summary, it must be concluded that Henderson's politics moved in a continuous and fairly unbroken way. Even the war seems to have done remarkably little to alter his view of the world – and this is not surprising in a man who was already 50 when it broke out. It is not hard to imagine him acting and thinking in exactly the same way had he remained within organized Liberalism. What had moved ahead with speed, however, was his view of labour's part in the promotion of the old causes. Whereas before 1914 he could genuinely have believed that it was labour's function to push the Liberal Party in the direction that they both wanted to go, after 1917 he was convinced that the labour movement itself must be the vehicle of social improvement. This was a real development and the 1918 reorganization of the Labour Party was the physical symbol of it.⁷¹ It is this development that sharply distinguishes Henderson from MacDonald. MacDonald had always been a socialist. He believed, that is to say, in the inevitability of society's evolution to collective forms of life. But he never believed that the working class would necessarily hasten this evolution: on the contrary, he had long before concluded that the ignorance and parochialism of the working class could actually obstruct it. It was this that made his departure from the Labour Party in 1931 so easy.

IV

How far, then, was Henderson a "type", and how representative was he of his class as a political interest? In the first place, he was certainly an example of the *homo novus* of politics, a man who, in Weber's words, had chosen politics as his "vocation". Men of Henderson's stripe "take the organization in hand. They do so either as 'entrepreneurs' – the American boss and the English election agent are, in fact, such entrepreneurs – or as officials with a fixed salary."⁷² Henderson was successively agent and official, but his career would not have been possible without the division of labour within politics that was everywhere apparent at the end of the nineteenth century, and nowhere more so than in the great working-class parties of Western and Central Europe. As such he was certainly a type of socialist leader: "the Jouhaux, Hendersons, Merrheims, Legiens and Co."⁷³ He shared their characteristics – sobriety, ambition, conscientiousness, toughness – as well as their administrative gifts.

⁷¹ See McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party*, op. cit., pp. 91-111.

⁷² M. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation", in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (London, 1948), p. 102.

⁷³ V. I. Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (Moscow, 1970), p. 46.

The middle and upper classes observed them with both admiration and distaste. In 1915 Bruce Glasier, a leading bourgeois ILP'er, described Henderson as "clever, adroit, rather limited-minded [. . .] — domineering and a bit quarrelsome — vain and ambitious".⁷⁴ The daughter of the British ambassador in Petersburg had reason to explore these characteristics more closely (Henderson had been sent there with a brief to replace her father, amongst other things). She compared the *ancien régime* with this figure from the new order: her father "slim, upright, unmistakably patrician, [. . .] with only a slight twist round his nostrils, a twist which we all knew signified a certain distaste and fastidious disapprobation. Mr. Henderson, on the other hand, square, thick set, rather red in the face, looked completely out of place, [. . .] listening with a complacent smile to the little speech of welcome Prince Lvoff was making".⁷⁵

Robert Michels developed a powerful theory of political oligarchy from the careers of such men, and his picture of the conventional socialist organizer, though drawn from men like Ebert, Scheidemann and their party, could equally be drawn from Henderson and his party. Michels pointed to the fatiguing character of the organizer's life, the endless demands made upon him by the masses, and the magnetic attractions of a leader who was a parliamentarian as well.⁷⁶ Henderson acknowledged this — "it is very stiff night after night speaking from two to three hours"⁷⁷ —, but it was, in fact, his vocation. As a political "entrepreneur" Henderson was instantly recognizable. Hugh Dalton found him at first meeting "eminently a politician",⁷⁸ and Fritz Adler once gently chided him for taking up a position which, as "an old politician", he should have known was too inflexible.⁷⁹

Henderson's aptitudes within a bureaucratic organization are easy to see. He had psychological and physical resilience, internal poise and self-confidence, and a mind sufficiently narrow not to worry too much about the world, yet expansive enough to show him where it was moving. He had immense capacity for work, and he developed a sureness of touch in

⁷⁴ L. Thompson, *The Enthusiasts*, op. cit., p. 206.

⁷⁵ M. Buchanan, *The Dissolution of an Empire* (London, 1932), pp. 210-11. For these purposes Lenin must be regarded as upper-class. See his comments in *Left-Wing Communism*, pp. 46-47.

⁷⁶ Michels, *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1925), pp. 69-72.

⁷⁷ Henderson to Middleton, 13 November 1913, LPLF, Middleton Papers, uncatalogued.

⁷⁸ Dalton Diaries, 26 November 1919.

⁷⁹ Stenographic and Confidential Minutes of a Conference between the Vienna Union and the National Executive of the Labour Party, 19-20 October 1921, Transport House.

dealing with his party that was almost unique.⁸⁰ Weber sometimes saw professional political action as not much more than the creation of systems of patronage.⁸¹ We may well dispute this, yet it is undeniable that the Labour Party created such a system and that it was indispensable in Labour's growth. In turn, Henderson was indispensable in the creation of the system: he recognized faces, organized votes, found money, and put the right men in the right jobs – that it was done so without financial corruption is an even more remarkable achievement. In the long run, it was the most important gift he left his party. Neither MacDonald nor Hardie could have done so.

On the other hand, he lacked many of what Michels rather quaintly called “accessory qualities of leadership”.⁸² He was not a real orator, was no literary stylist – indeed, wrote nothing sustained at all –, and he had few of the external “qualities” possessed by, say, MacDonald. Yet this alone suggests some of the reasons why Michels perhaps misconceived the relationship between leaders and masses in the labour movement. Michels argued that the political identities between leadership and rank-and-file were undermined by the upward social mobility of the leadership, *via* an essentially bureaucratic-bourgeois organization. But in Henderson's case at least, political divisions between the leadership and the rank-and-file were subordinated to or concealed by social identities, by shared styles of life and expectations. Between Henderson and the movement there were three of these identities.

First his pattern life. Throughout his career he remained palpably working-class, and this was never spurious, as it was increasingly, for example, in the case of J. H. Thomas. He had easy relations with people of all classes, but the essentially working-class nature of his life never changed.⁸³ Henderson certainly represented the respectable strain in working-class life, but this was a very powerful one, and it was one reason why Henderson was so popular. The bohemianism cultivated by some middle-class socialists never went down well in the labour movement, and its cultivators showed ignorance of working-class values. Similarly, Henderson's habit of not inviting colleagues to his home – something resented by bourgeois socialists like Dalton – was equally characteristic of his class. This “homeliness”⁸⁴ was important: it can be argued that the demoralization of the Labour Party in 1929-31 was less than it could have been

⁸⁰ For illuminating details, see Hamilton, Arthur Henderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-25.

⁸¹ Weber, “Politics as a Vocation”, *loc. cit.*, pp. 86-87.

⁸² Michels, *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens*, *op. cit.*, pp. 86ff.

⁸³ Hamilton, Arthur Henderson, p. 220.

⁸⁴ E. Wertheimer, *Portrait of the Labour Party* (London, 1929), p. 183.

partly because so many members of the government were identifiably of the same class as the people they represented. This is no longer true of the Labour Party.

The second identity was his sense of loyalty to and solidarity with his class. Although he strongly disapproved of a number of working-class political and industrial habits, he rarely tried to override them, and the few times he was “off-side” with his movement were the occasions of severe mental distress. Thus after his resignation from the government in August 1917, he wrote to Walter Runciman, the Newcastle ship-owner and former Liberal Minister:

I have paid the penalty of trying to serve two masters, the Government and the Labour Movement. I got wrong with one in seeking to be loyal to the other. Yet if I had to go through it again the only thing I would do would be to tender my resignation a little earlier.⁸⁵

His attitude to the break-up of the second Labour government in 1931 was rather different since he did not feel the same conflict of loyalties. But the absence of conflict is itself revealing. By mid August 1931, when almost everyone was admitting of the need to think “nationally” (i.e. adopt those policies urged by Labour’s political opponents⁸⁶), Henderson “launched out into eloquence on the inadequacy of the unemployed grants and all that we had said for thirty years”.⁸⁷ He allowed the government to collapse, and with it almost all his hopes in international affairs, rather than “get wrong” with the movement.

Unity of the movement and, by implication, class solidarity became his chief political tactic. “He will always be on the side of the compact majority. His gospel is the gospel of making the best of both worlds”, the *Labour Leader* argued during the war.⁸⁸ This was certainly a fair criticism; on the other hand, his fear of divisions in the working class and the fracturing of the organized labour movement was intense: “unity is the great need of the moment” was one of his *clichés*.⁸⁹ After the collapse of 1931 this fear was even more deeply felt. By July 1934 the founder-figure of post-war social democracy was the only member of his party’s executive to take seriously the United Front. “The influence of Fascism has aroused

⁸⁵ Henderson to Runciman, 17 August 1917, Runciman Papers, University of Newcastle.

⁸⁶ I have discussed this elsewhere, see McKibbin, “The Economic Policy of the Second Labour Government”, in: *Past & Present*, No 68 (1975).

⁸⁷ MacDonald Diaries, 17 August 1931, Public Record Office.

⁸⁸ *Labour Leader*, 1 June 1916.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Henderson to Camille Huysmans, 26 July 1920, LPLF, International Files.

great feeling throughout the entire working class movement. So strong is the opposition to War and Fascism that [. . .] we may expect that our own forces will be more than ever divided.”⁹⁰ That might have come from a Comintern handout. Similarly, he persuaded himself that the Incitement to Disaffection Act (1934), aimed at Mosley, would be used “against our people”.⁹¹

Finally, his own reformism, political geniality, and his rather ill-defined sense of goodwill to all men, associated him with the dominant strain in British left-wing traditions. Perhaps too much can be made of this. Henderson was very much a man of the North-East and his politics had a distinctly regional quality to them. Advanced radicalism, temperance, class harmony and Methodism were characteristic: “No PM no MP.”⁹² He obviously did not come from the great sinful cities, with their alcoholic, sporting and church-and-king traditions, and he was for much of his career uneasy in them. They, in turn, as we have seen, were suspicious of him.⁹³ Nevertheless, as I shall suggest shortly, these differences came to be of decreasing importance, and by 1931 he was as representative of the rank-and-file as any individual leader could be. In the end, he owed his leadership of the Labour Party to his capacity to identify himself with the general aspirations of the labour movement, and to his skills at formal organization, which were more highly developed in him than in any other labour leader of his generation.

V

There are a number of general conclusions that can be drawn from Henderson’s career. First, that for a large number of labour men, of whom Henderson here is plainly one, it was possible for a sense of an independent working-class movement to develop without any significant ideological shift taking place. For much of his life, even when he was well-established

⁹⁰ Henderson to Middleton, 21 July 1934, LPLF, Middleton Papers.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* He was not above exploiting his well-known sacrifices for the movement as a political tactic. He clearly used his sufferings in 1917 as a weapon to force through the constitutional changes of 1917-18: “a certain door-mat for example is now being used very effectively as an altar-cloth”. Report by Edward Magegan on the January 1918 Conference of the Labour Party, circulated to the Cabinet, 4 February 1918, Cabinet Papers 24/42/3609, Public Record Office.

⁹² *I.e.* “No Primitive Methodist no Member of Parliament.” For the social and cultural background of County Durham, see R. Moore, *Pit-men, Preachers & Politics* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 140-90. Dr Moore, however, inaccurately notes that Henderson “held the Barnard Castle seat for Labour, unsponsored. He had agreed to support the Lib.-Labs. in 1903.” (p. 183) Henderson was, of course, the sponsored candidate of the Ironfounders and sat as a pledged member of the Labour Representation Committee.

⁹³ See above, pp. 85, 97.

as a labour leader, he continued to inhabit the same political world as most Liberals and to hold the same values. This was why it was so easy for individual Liberals to enter the Labour Party after 1918 without undergoing ideological conversion. Now what was true of Henderson was not necessarily true of other labour leaders, but it was true enough of the labour movement to emphasize how subtle and complicated was the relationship between Labour and the older political parties.

Second, that the effect of the First World War on men like Henderson was also a subtle one. That it quite unexpectedly catapulted him into the leading place in the British Left, that is to say, in British progressivism, and that he exploited this place with great skill, was due, so far as *he* was concerned, to structural rather than ideological changes in British politics. The widening of the franchise and the decisive position of the unions within the war economy had overturned the old relationship between the Labour and the Liberal Parties. He knew that there was no going back to 1914; but this did not mean that the old political progressivism should not continue. This explains his attempts to woo former Liberal radicals into the Labour Party, and his comment to C. P. Scott that if “good radicals” wanted to continue the good work they could most effectively do it in the Labour Party.⁹⁴ Thus, although Henderson was certainly influenced by the collectivist thought of the war years, he regarded it as an extension of rather than as a break with the pre-war radicalism.

Third, that Henderson must be seen as a representative transitional figure. Before 1914 he was identifiable as a former Liberal, and a Liberal from a particular part of the country. This was, as we have seen, an important element in his political personality, and it also helped to determine the way that other members of the Labour Party reacted to him. Furthermore, the pull of religion and temperance was in the direction of middle-class Liberalism, and was certainly a divisive force in the labour movement. Increasingly after 1918 this was no longer true. Although they were as much a part of Henderson’s life as ever, they did not define his place in the movement in the same way. He was thus able to act as a bridge from the decidedly fragmented working-class party of 1914 to the more integrated party of the 1930’s.

But the final conclusion is perhaps the most important one. In almost every way the labour movement developed against his wishes. On the industrial side, his view of arbitration and conciliation was quite unacceptable to the unions, whatever the lip-service, and they applauded his efforts to introduce into international relations those institutions they

⁹⁴ The Political Diaries of C. P. Scott, ed. by T. Wilson (London, 1970), pp. 316-17.

would not have at home. Henderson deeply resented the way they behaved. Furthermore, the great unified political-industrial labour movement – his heart's desire – was never, and could never be, constructed. It represented a political conception of working-class industrial behaviour that was also unacceptable to the unions. The complicated bodies established in the 1920's at all levels to impose unity on the movement either did not work at all or were dismantled in the 1930's.⁹⁵ Indeed, Henderson was one of the few labour leaders to hold such a monolithic conception of the working class and he held it in face of all the evidence about that class's dynamics.

Yet even he was disabused in 1931. At a joint meeting of the national executive of the Labour Party and the general council of the TUC on 10 November 1931, he sat in acquiescent silence as Walter Citrine, the secretary of the TUC, lectured him on the history of the Labour Party.

The T.U.C. did not seek in any shape or form to say what the Labour Party was to do, but they did ask that the primary purpose of the creation of the Labour Party should not be forgotten. It was created by the Trade Union Movement to do those things in Parliament which the Trade Unions found ineffectively performed by the two-Party system.⁹⁶

In other words, the party could do as it liked until it affected the particular interests of the unions, and then it was to do as it was told. Though Henderson came in to the party as a trade unionist, that was a conception of the party's function of which he profoundly disapproved.

This, in turn, suggests more generally that Michels seriously overestimated the ability of a party leadership to determine the political nature of the organization it leads. It may well be true that Henderson had an occupational interest in the supremacy of the Labour Party over the unions; it may also be true, as Michels argued, that an oligarchical leadership necessarily becomes divorced from its mass support: the very qualities that characterize this leadership are those most often absent in the industrial working class. Furthermore, many labour leaders, Henderson included, had typically middle-class attitudes to certain aspects of working-class social life – to drinking and gambling, for example. But equally, as Henderson's own career demonstrates, the political leadership was there on sufferance. He had bureaucratic skills which the labour movement needed, and these, together with his delicate sense of loyalty, made him the

⁹⁵ For this, see McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party*, p. 245.

⁹⁶ Minutes of a Joint Meeting of the General Council of the TUC and the National Executive of the Labour Party, 10 November 1931, filed in the 1931 volumes of the minutes of the National Executive.

labour leader *par excellence*. Yet at no time was he able to impose his own ideologies (so to speak) on his party: his leadership — like MacDonald's — was always organizational and rhetorical. Thus, in 1931, when the leadership of the party stood, on the whole, for one set of policies, and the unions for another, the leadership was powerless to do anything else other than either “betray” or submit.⁹⁷ MacDonald “betrayed”, but took no significant part of the labour movement with him. Henderson submitted, and so kept his leadership, but that was now little more than administrative and formal.

⁹⁷ See McKibbin, “The Economic Policy of the Second Labour Government”, loc. cit., pp. 118-20.