

**The London Labour Choral Union, 1924-1940:  
A Musical Institution of the Left.**

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## **Declaration of Authorship**

**I, Maria Kiladi, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own.**

**Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.**

**Maria Kiladi  
October 2016.**

## Abstract

### **The London Labour Choral Union, 1924-1940: A Musical Institution of the Left.**

In 1924, the leader of the London Labour Party, Herbert Morrison, along with the socialist composer, Rutland Boughton, launched the London Labour Choral Union (LLCU), an organisation aiming to co-ordinate the activities of the various local socialist choirs active in London. The activity became particularly popular and successful under Boughton's conductorship. After his resignation in 1929, Alan Bush took over, and a gravitation towards Communism becomes evident.

Under Bush's leadership, the organisation is transformed. The Union slowly begins to attract communist-sympathetic individuals, such as Randall Swingler, who became Bush's close collaborator. Together they composed a number of songs which the Union performed, all of which used Agitprop techniques, and along with the introduction of works by Hanns Eisler, a trajectory from socialism to communism begins. There is also a conscious attempt to transform the organisation from a national to an international one, largely thanks to Bush's insistence, with the Union becoming affiliated to international organisations such as the *Internationale der Arbeitersänger*, and participating in International events like the Communist-organised Workers' Music Olympiad in Strasbourg during 1935, and the 1939 Festival of Music for the People.

The thesis examines to what extent this gravitation to communism was voluntary or enforced by the leadership (and Bush in particular) and how it was achieved; what type of organisation was the Union, and to what extent was political indoctrination more important than providing music education for workers. This is analysed through close study not only of the political background during the 1920s and 1930s that directly affected the Union's membership, but also of the repertoire performed in both decades of the Union's existence, as well as the reaction of the choir members towards it, and the various other activities in which the Union participated.

# The London Labour Choral Union, 1924-1940: A Musical Institution of the Left.

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Maria Kiladi  
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**List of Abbreviations.**

BL	British Library
BSP	British Socialist Party
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CVUs	Clarion Vocal Unions
DAS	Deutsche Arbeitersängerbund
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
IDAS	Internationale der Arbeitersänger
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IMB	International Music Bureau
IRTA	International Revolutionary Theatre Association
IVKO	Internationale Vereinigung Kommunistische Opposition
IWTA	International Workers Theatre Movement
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands
KPO	Kommunistische Partei Opposition
LCC	London County Council
LCP	Lord Chamberlain's Office
LLCU	London Labour Choral Union
LLDF	London Labour Dramatic Federation
LLSO	London Labour Symphony Orchestra
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
PCF	Partie Communiste Francais
PROKOLL	Proizvodstvennii Kollektiv
RACS	Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society
SDF	Socialist Democratic Federation
SPD	Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands
TNA	The National Archives



WMA	Workers Music Association
WML	Workers Music League
WMMS	William Morris Musical Society
WTA	Workers Theatre Association
WTM	Workers Theatre Movement

## Introduction.

### Research Questions.

The London Labour Choral Union (LLCU), an organisation which was founded in 1924 by the leader of the London Labour Party, Herbert Morrison, and the socialist composer Rutland Boughton, has been either neglected or under-researched by musicologists and labour historians alike. References to the organisation can only be found in various secondary sources, usually in biographies of individuals connected to it. To date, the only slight exception is Duncan Hall's study on Music and the British Labour movement between the Wars which devotes a small section to the Union and its significance for the Labour movement of the Metropolis.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Hall's study is the only secondary source that not only refers to the Union, but also places it in the context of the popularity at national level of socialist choral societies that started in the 1890s with the formation of the Clarion Vocal Unions in Birmingham.<sup>2</sup>

The Union is briefly mentioned, though this time in relation to the London Labour Party (LLP), in two further sources. Bernard Donoughue's and George W Jones's book on Herbert Morrison, leader of the LLP and co-founder of the Union, points towards its success in the 1920s, albeit briefly, without analysing its impact in any detail.<sup>3</sup> Comparative Labour historian Stefan Berger also provides a very brief account of the Union's success, this time in relation not only to the LLP, as Donoughue and Jones did, but also to the German Socialist Party (*Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD) from which he concludes Morrison was inspired to create the LLCU.<sup>4</sup> In his book on Rutland Boughton, Michael Hurd provides a

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<sup>1</sup> Duncan Hall, *'A Pleasant Change from Politics': Music and the British Labour Movement between the Wars* (London: New Clarion Press, 2001), 63-66.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 63-64.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Donoughue and George W Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 71-72. The discussion here mentions how Morrison as a cultural impresario managed to inspire the Labour Party to organise such groups as the LLCU with a zeal and efficiency more often associated with Germany. p. 71

<sup>4</sup> Stefan Berger, *The British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats, 1900-1931* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). See also Berger, 'Herbert Morrison's London Labour Party in the interwar Years and the SPD: Problems of Transferring German Socialist Practices to Britain', in *European Review of History*, Vol. 12, no. 2 (July 2005), 291-306, Berger, 'Organising Talent and disciplined Steadiness: The German SPD as a Model for the British Labour Party in the 1920s?' in *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 5 no. 2 (1996), 171-190, and Berger, 'The British and the German Labour Movements before the Second World War: The *Sonderweg* revisited', in *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 3, no. 3 (1992), 219-48.

more balanced approach, studying the organisation as an activity that allowed the two men who co-founded it to combine ‘their energies in the belief that music-making among the workers could be an invigorating element in socialist politics and culture’.<sup>5</sup>

Nancy Bush’s book on her husband, LLCU conductor and successor to Rutland Boughton, Alan Bush, contains surprisingly little information on the Union, given that the organisation was a major part of Alan’s life.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps predictably, references to the Union contain mainly biographical details related to Alan Bush: They include, for example, his journey from working with local Labour choirs to the leadership of the LLCU without focusing on matters such as repertoire, or, when referring to the Strasbourg Olympiad of 1935, where the Union participated, the main focus is on Nancy’s impressions of the trip, rather than on any specific details on the Union’s participation (repertoire, how the Union managed to participate in such an event, etc).<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in Bush’s 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Symposium published in 1981 and edited by his friend, Ronald Stevenson, the focus is primarily the Workers Music Association (WMA) which was founded in 1936, whereas the book contains no contribution on the LLCU.<sup>8</sup> A further source that touches briefly on the Union is Ian Kemp’s biography of Michael Tippett, where his participation in the organisation is traced through his affiliation with the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS).<sup>9</sup>

It seems therefore that, while almost all the sources mentioned above present it as a very successful activity for the LLP and one that inspired the inauguration of further workers’ cultural organisations such as a Labour Orchestra and various Drama groups, none of them attempts to scrutinise the LLCU further. Additionally, they fail to provide an objective account of what the Union really was: for example, in the case of Donoughue and Jones, it is used mainly to reinforce the importance of Morrison’s organisational skills, while Stefan Berger uses it mainly to reinforce his argument that the LLP ‘copied’ such activities from the German Social Democrats.

With the Union clearly moving towards Communism during the 1930s, one might have expected that sources documenting the intellectual history of the British Left would

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Hurd, *Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festivals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 171.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy Bush, *Alan Bush: Music, politics and life* (London: Thames Publishing, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 17-18, and 30-34.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald Stevenson (ed), *Alan Bush: An 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Symposium* (London: Bravura Publishing, 1981).

<sup>9</sup> Ian Kemp, *Tippett: The composer and his music* (London: Eulenburg, 1984).

contain references to this organisation. However, this is not the case, as they curiously prefer to focus on the Left's Theatre/Drama activities rather than music, with music being mentioned only as a secondary preoccupation. There are, for example, noteworthy studies specifically on the Theatre of the Left, the most important of which are Colin Chamber's book on Unity Theatre,<sup>10</sup> and a volume by Raphael Samuel, Ewan MacColl and Stuart Cosgrove on the Theatres of the Left between 1880 and 1935 that hardly mention the role of music in the various productions that were staged, let alone who or which organisation provided it.<sup>11</sup> In the 1970s book *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the 30s* edited by Jon Clark, Margot Heinemann, David Margolies and Carole Snee there are valuable contributions on literature, poetry, cinema or the Left Book club, including two on the Left Theatre in the 1930s, but music is conspicuously absent.<sup>12</sup> This gives the rather misleading impression that the Left in Britain completely ignored musical activities and merely focused heavily on Drama.

As a result, it could be said that this thesis fills-in a gap in documenting the significance that music had not only for socialists, but also as a 'weapon in the class struggle' for communists. In fact, what makes the Union unique as a music organisation and a topic worth studying is its trajectory from Socialism to Communism. Whereas other socialist music organisations (such as the Clarion Vocal Unions in Birmingham during the 1890s) started as socialists and remained as such, the Union, largely thanks to Bush, gravitated from Socialism to Communism during the 1930s, and more so after 1935 when he became a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). The Union's journey to the far left was done at a period (1920s and 1930s) of intense political activity at national and international level, when a hostile climate between socialists and communists prevailed, so it certainly raises questions as to how it was achieved and whether there were consequences for the Union's membership as a result. Indeed, one of the most interesting questions is whether the 1926 General Strike had any consequences for the organisation and how serious these were, as well as whether the disillusionment felt by a large number

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<sup>10</sup> Colin Chambers, *The Story of the Unity Theatre* (London; Lawrence and Wishart, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> Raphael Samuel, Ewan MacColl and Stuart Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left, 1880-1935: Workers Theatre Movements in Britain and in America* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

<sup>12</sup> Jon Clark, Margot Heinemann, David Margolies and Carole Snee (eds), *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the 30s* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979).

of Labour Party members, resulted in membership loss and choirs' disaffiliations for the Union. Certainly, it is obvious that its conductor, Rutland Boughton, chose to resign just three years after the Strike, leading to questions of whether this also resulted in a different 'phase' in the Union's evolution.

When Alan Bush took over in 1929, it becomes clear that his own comfortable background gave him the advantage of being able to travel abroad especially to Germany. Nancy Bush, for example, cites three different trips he made to Berlin between 1925 and 1929, initially to study piano with Artur Schnabel and ultimately to register as a student at the Humboldt University, where he read Music and Philosophy.<sup>13</sup> As a result, he was in a position to encounter first-hand how workers' music organisations in Germany operated and this gave him a point of comparison with developments at home which appeared to him to be disappointingly slow. It also generated a desire to affiliate the Union to International Workers Music Organisations such as the *Internationale der Arbeitersänger* (IDAS), which paved the way for the LLCU's participation in tours and workers' festivals abroad, such as the tour to Holland in 1933 and the Strasbourg Workers Music Olympiad of 1935. Consequently, while the LLCU was originally conceived as an umbrella organisation to bring together local socialist choirs active in London, it developed into one with international contacts, effectively representing British workers' choirs in workers' festivals abroad and therefore acquired an international outlook, unlike the CVUs.

The Union's internationalist outlook raises further questions regarding its repertoire. It is clear that the organisation is moving towards a new phase after 1929 mainly because of its international contacts which enabled it to access repertoire influences from workers' choirs of other countries. This raises an important question as to the degree to which the repertoire of the LLCU was affected by such developments. At the same time, it is evident that during the early 1930s there is an 'encroachment' of the Union by what seems to be wealthy left-wing individuals, that pull it towards communist-sympathetic circles, which in turns generates further repertoire questions. Gradually, the LLCU abandons the traditional socialist repertoire that was heavily used during the mid-1920s, consisting of sailor shanties

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<sup>13</sup> Bush, *Alan*, 14-21. It is not entirely clear from Nancy's account whether the first trip to Berlin was in 1925 or 1928, as she initially cites 1925 as Alan's first trip to Berlin to study with Schnabel (p. 14) but changes this to 1928 (p.20).

or Elizabethan songs, as well as the tradition of singing new socialist text using old, popular and easy to learn tunes, for a new, revolutionary one.

Particularly during the early 1930s, not only new repertoire is composed (usually by Bush, with texts provided other by Communist-sympathetic individuals or CPGB members such as Randall Swingler), but material by Hanns Eisler is also translated from German so that it is accessible to British choirs (the translation provided quite often by Bush's wife, Nancy). The fact that workers were now compelled to learn new repertoire, rather than rely on popular tunes upon which to sing new texts, raises the question of the degree to which the LLCU had transcended its original purpose and was now openly aiming to inculcate workers through singing socialist/revolutionary songs.

As the new repertoire begins to crystallise, with new techniques, such as those deriving from Agitprop, which were used by Bush, and with the four-part song that dominated the socialist repertoire now being regarded as a 'bourgeois' style, one wonders what the consequences of the new repertoire were for the long-standing survival of the LLCU, and whether indeed workers were indeed happy to sing repertoire that consisted mainly of Eisler's songs, or Eisler-inspired songs composed by the Union's leadership. There is also the very important and interesting question of whether this type of repertoire was indeed of much use to some affiliated choirs, such as the Deptford Socialist choir, which were accustomed to participating in philanthropic events in hospitals, or Elizabethan Festivals. Yet by 1938, the Union was able to perform Eisler's *Maßnahme* translated in English under the title of 'The Expedient', while his songs feature consistently on the Union's programmes after 1935.

Between 1935 and 1939 in particular, it becomes clear that the Union is not just gravitating gently towards communism, but has now become an organisation that fully endorses communist affiliations. As well as his CPGB membership (at a time of conducting a socialist choir) Bush's participation in a communist-controlled event, the Strasbourg Olympiad which was organised by the *International Music Bureau* (IMB), an artistic organisation formed within Comintern, speaks volumes as to the direction the LLCU is now taking. Its activities also change accordingly, including not just concert performances, but also participation in works combining various different artistic activities such as the Swingler/Bush Revue 'Peace and Prosperity' in 1936. The Union's Left affiliations are further

underlined by its leading role in the 1939 Festival of Music for the People, a Communist Pageant that took place in London in April that year and in which Bush was heavily involved.

At the same time, it remains an open question as to what extent Bush's CPGB membership was deemed controversial, especially if we take into account that the Union at the period of 1935-1939 was in fact dominated by communists or individuals with sympathies to the Left of the Communist Party. Michael Tippett for example, who was not only conducting the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society choirs but was also adjudicating for the Union during the 1930s, started his journey to the Left of the Labour Party in 1934, and this led him briefly to CPGB and finally to Trotskyism. Equally, the fact that the LLCU was dissolved in 1940 and regenerated as the WMA Singers under the auspices of an organisation with strong communist sympathies raises the question whether this was effectively the result of a seemingly successful socialist choir being destroyed by what appears to be a 'hard march to the Left', spurred by its conductor who appeared at times insistent on imposing his ideas about what the Union should be: for instance, the IDAS affiliation mentioned above was achieved after a relentless two year campaign by Bush designed to convince choir members and LLP officials alike of its importance.

Equally telling in this respect, and a fact that further reinforces the idea of Bush as the Union's Patriarch or the leader who knows what is best for the LLCU, was his insistence on its participation in the Strasbourg Olympiad, despite the many (mainly financial) obstacles that the organisation had to overcome in order to participate. As a result, one could conclude that during the 1920s Bush used his money, resources and contacts to take the Union in the direction he wanted and occasionally rode roughshod over the wishes of individual choir members.

This notion is perhaps further supported by the Union's development between 1938 and 1941. While it was dissolved in 1940, a year later it was resurrected, this time as the Workers' Music Association Singers (or WMA Singers as they became known). As a result, the LLCU is effectively a socialist choir turned Communist and now working under the auspices of a Communist-sympathetic and influenced organisation. In hindsight, looking back to the early and mid-1930s, one wonders whether Bush was indeed preparing the Union to become a Communist one, knowing fully well that if it disaffiliated from the LLP, it would by default be incorporated in his own (WMA) organisation.

## Scope and Content.

The focus of the thesis is the London Labour Choral Union from its founding in 1924, to the point when it was dissolved in 1940. The main concern is how it developed, and how the political background (the 1926 General Strike, the rise of fascism) influenced its trajectory. I am not so much concerned with the political beliefs of individuals such as Bush or Tippett, hence the reason why I am not going into great detail about this undoubtedly interesting topic. With Bush in particular, the temptation to analyse his political beliefs and how these were manifested in the many left organisations he initiated during the 1930s was great. Even more so, the very interesting topic of the WMA, as well as the fact that both Bush and his WMA were the subject of MI5 investigations had to be briefly touched upon, but only as far as the Union was concerned. To be accurate, the WMA is probably a very interesting topic for a thesis on its own, as are Bush's politics and his involvement in other left organisations. The richness of the period studied (1920s and 1930s) and which had to be used as the background for the Union, inevitably restricted the scope of this study.

A further difficulty was that of the lack of primary sources regarding the LLCU. Indeed, there is no such thing as an LLCU archive. Instead, the history of the Union and its activities had to be pieced together from various different primary sources. The most important of them was the London Labour Party Archive, housed at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) in Clerkenwell, London.<sup>14</sup> The difficulty, however, with this particular source was that it was not catalogued in detail. As a result, in order to find information about the Union, one has to go through entire boxes of loose-leaf material, while in years when the party was preoccupied with elections (such as 1929) references to all other activities, including the Union, tend to disappear. Nevertheless, and much to my delight, the early years of the Union were fairly well documented in this particular archive, as the organisation clearly presented an exciting activity and a propaganda opportunity for the Party. The material additionally included some indication of membership figures, though generally the figures referred to in the thesis are reconstructed from all available primary and secondary sources, but sadly not beyond 1930. No details of individual members

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<sup>14</sup> LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A



(names or numbers) or even concrete evidence as to the number of choirs that affiliated at the various stages of the Union's existence were found.

Other primary sources expected to produce results but failed to do so, were the archives of individuals involved in the Union, such as Herbert Morrison, Rutland Boughton and Alan Bush. With Morrison in particular, the difficulty was that he had destroyed his own archive in the 1960s, with the only surviving material at the moment being the interviews that his biographers, Donoughue and Jones, conducted, and which are housed at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).<sup>15</sup> Similarly, there was hardly any material from Boughton regarding the Union in his papers and archive, deposited at the British Library.<sup>16</sup> This state of affairs was slightly different with the Alan Bush Archive, also housed at the British Library, though again, and despite the fact he was heavily involved in the Union, the material was not as extensive as one would think.<sup>17</sup> Certainly, there are files on some of the Union's activities (the Pageant of Labour in 1934 and the Festival of Music for the People of 1939) containing details on the events' organisation as well as programmes. More material was found in some of Bush's other correspondence (arranged chronologically) but other than that, there is hardly any information regarding the Union's concerts, membership, repertoire, minutes of meetings or anything else.

Two other small sources provided unique material which was particularly valuable for this research. The first was Sir Frederick Warner's Archive in the Albert Sloam Library of the University of Essex, which contained the only copies of the Union's official *Organ*, *Red Notes*, introduced by Bush in 1936 and which was perhaps the only helpful source in deciphering the various debates that the new repertoire generated during the mid- and late-1930s.<sup>18</sup> This archive also contained scores used by the Union in various events, as well as the only available copy of Eisler's 'The Expedient', the English translation of his *Maßnahme*. A further very small archive containing scores of some songs performed by the Union, as well as newsletters of some associations where Bush was involved (such as the

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<sup>15</sup> Donoughue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison*, preface of 1973 edition, also included in the 2001 edition. Morrison's archive at the LSE is catalogued as MORRISON.

<sup>16</sup> His papers can be found at the British Library, Rutland Boughton Papers, Add MS 57838-57840. The Rutland Boughton Trust had no additional material.

<sup>17</sup> Bush's correspondence is catalogued as MS Mus 429-611. The Alan Bush family had no additional material on the Union, other than that found in Archives.

<sup>18</sup> Albert Sloam Library: University of Essex, Sir Frederick Warner Archive, WARNER/A/2/3/A.80.

William Morris Musical Society) was the private archive of Janey Buchan and John Miller, originally in the possession of John Powles, which subsequently became part of Glasgow University's Janey Buchan Political Song Collection.<sup>19</sup>

Additional material from archives abroad was used to document the various International events in which the Union participated, most notably the Strasbourg Workers Music Olympiad of 1935. Here, the Strasbourg City Archive was particularly valuable, as it contained the file of the event's organisation, including correspondence between the organising committee and the City's officials, the official programme of the event, as well as reviews from the local press.<sup>20</sup> Further information on this event, and on Eisler's/IMBs involvement in particular, was found also in the German Communist Party Archive in Berlin, and the Schweizerisches Archive in Zurich; both helped in piecing together the organisation and the aftermath of the Olympiad, but also the reaction of the various workers' organisations behind it (IDAS and IMB) after the conclusion of the event.<sup>21</sup>

### **Overview of the thesis.**

The chapters of the thesis are arranged chronologically, usually having as cut-off points significant events that defined the Union. Each chapter also seeks to address specific research questions, generated by the material examined, some of which are followed throughout the various chapters, as patterns emerge (for instance, the issue of communists taking over). The first chapter studies the first few years of the Union, from 1924 to 1929, when Rutland Boughton resigned from its conductorship and Alan Bush took over. It additionally seeks to address questions such as why the Union was founded at all and what are the key differences (or similarities) with other equivalent organisations that existed before 1924. A more detailed account of the political and intellectual background of the 1920s is given, with special references to the socialist tradition that the Union was following

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<sup>19</sup> At the time of research, the collection was at the possession of John Powles. It is now part of Glasgow University, catalogued as The Janey Buchan Political Song Collection, PSC.

<sup>20</sup> Archives de la Ville et de L'Eurométropole de Strasbourg, 234 MW 130. Service des cérémonies, salles et exposition, Dossier Olympiade Ouvriere.

<sup>21</sup> Bundesarchiv, Germany, Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, RY 1/I 4/8/2, Internationale revolutionäre Musikbewegung; Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, Zurich. Dossier Ar.58.36.1 – IDAS, IDOCO, Mappe 1: 1926-1935.

during its early years, and a discussion on how the 1926 General Strike affected its trajectory.

The second chapter spans the period of 1929 to 1934, and is largely documenting these years as the beginning of new phase in the Union's history, with the main contributing factor being Boughton's resignation and his replacement by Bush. It is noted that the Union now begins to attract communist-sympathetic individuals, such as Randall Swingler and Michael Tippett who also begins his journey from the Labour Party to Communism/Trotskyism. Bush also experiences a parallel transformation in his political beliefs, but he is also discussed as a wealthy individual with the ability to travel abroad, with very clear ideas about how a workers' music choir should operate and who is powerful enough to implement it (indeed, one could argue even force choir members into following him, as apparently was the case with the affiliation to the IDAS). The new repertoire that he attempts to introduce is discussed in the context of his friendship with and admiration for Hanns Eisler, while further questions are asked as to whether the choirs really enjoyed the new repertoire, or objected to it, or simply felt patronised by Bush's actions.

The third chapter focuses solely on one event, the 1935 Workers Music Olympiad that took place in Strasbourg during the summer of that year. Here, the Union is studied as a socialist choir participating in a Communist-inspired event: the Olympiad was organised by the International Music Bureau (IMB) which was indeed a cultural section of the Comintern. This further reinforces the notion of the LLCU slowly gravitating towards Communism, having being encroached by several communist-sympathetic individuals during the early 1930s, all of which belonged to Bush's circle of friends (Randall Swingler, for example). Again, the common thread of the repertoire is taken up, this time exploring to what extent it is changing. Bush is discussed as an individual insisting on the Union's participation despite the fact that the choir resisted the idea, mainly for practical reasons such as lack of funds, a resistance that appears to have been ignored by its conductor.

In the fourth chapter, which studies the period of 1936-1938, it becomes clear that the Union is now embracing communism, while still under the auspices of the LLP. The issue of whether Bush's CPGB membership is as controversial as it appears to be is discussed in the context of the popularity of Communism during the 1930s, especially as other individuals participating in the LLCU also embraced it (Randall Swingler) or have already

been through Communism and even through a journey further to the left (Michael Tippett). Furthermore, and more importantly, the new emerging repertoire is discussed in greater detail and is compared to that which the Union was using before the 1930s. Manifested objections through the pages of the Union's organ, the *Red Notes*, are used to support the idea of the workers being patronised by the organisation's officials who know better, especially as their objections are met almost with indifference on behalf of the Union's leadership.

The last chapter of the thesis focuses on the Festival of Music for the People (1939), a Communist-inspired pageant in which the Union participated. By now, there is little doubt that the LLCU is moving towards Communism. The main question in this chapter is whether the Union was used as a vehicle to promote works of specific individuals, mainly of Bush, but also of others around him (such as Randall Swingler or Hanns Eisler), all of whom were from his close circle of (communist or communist-sympathetic) friends. The chapter discussed briefly the additional dimension of endangering choir members by attracting the attention of the British Secret Service at a time when even communist-sympathetic individuals with hardly any evidence that they were communists were subjected to MI5 scrutiny.

Lastly, in the conclusion, I attempt to address the question as to whether the Union, which started its existence as a successful socialist choir, was effectively destroyed by what appears to have been the seemingly relentless 'March to the Left' that was primarily engineered by Bush.

In terms of material that had to be excluded from the thesis (some of which was mentioned above), this includes activities in which Bush was heavily involved, but which lack any substantial evidence as to the extent to which the LLCU participated. Two examples are the adaptation of Handel's oratorio *Belshazzar* that took place in 1938 at the Scala Theatre<sup>22</sup>, and a 'Festival of Co-operation' (or 'Towards Tomorrow') that took place at Wembley Stadium on 2 July 1938, again with Co-operative choirs participating. Though it is

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<sup>22</sup> It should be pointed out that Bush's choice of this Handel oratorio may well have been inspired by similar left-wing performances of the work that took place in Germany in the early 1930s. See Richard Bodek, 'Red Song: Social Democratic Music and Radicalism at the End of the Weimar Republic', *Central European History*, 28, No. 2 (1995), pp. 224—227.

true that the boundaries between socialist and co-operative choirs are blurred during the mid-1930s, with members participating both in the Union and in various co-operative choirs, as late as 1936 the Union is actually still defined as an organisation of socialist and Labour choirs, pointing therefore towards the fact that the majority of the choirs participating being affiliated to the Labour Party, rather to the Co-operative movement.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, there was a distinct difference between the Co-operative choirs and those organised by the Labour Party in terms of repertoire choices. While the Labour choirs (such as those participating in the LLCU) were performing workers songs, the Co-operative choirs were 'the principal medium for workers' participation in serious music'.<sup>24</sup> In 1927 for example Co-operative choirs staged a performance of Bizet's *Carmen* at the Royal Albert Hall.<sup>25</sup> Such was their musicianship level that by 1932, Sir Henry Wood apparently conducted one of them at a concert in Peckham.<sup>26</sup>

Further evidence to reinforce the fact that the Union's participation at the *Belshazzar* performance or in the 1938 pageant was of secondary importance, was found in the *Red Notes*. In its issue of May 1938, the performance of *Belshazzar* is announced as one where 'quite a few of LLCU members are taking part', rather than the Union as a whole.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, the LLP's Official Organ, *The London News*, which contained a contribution on the choir almost on a monthly basis during the 1930s, chose to completely ignore those two events, again implying that the Union did not participate and therefore these events were not of much interest to the Party. Part of *Belshazzar's* adaptation was used for the 1939 Festival of Music for the People as part of the Pageant's fifth episode, but in this case the Festival also included participation of Co-operative choirs as well as the LLCU, which probably means that the work was performed by the Co-operative choirs which were already familiar with it.

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<sup>23</sup> Leaflet, *Co-ordinating Committee for Workers Musical Activity, Concert Demonstration and Conference March*, c. February 1936, Albert Sloam Library, University of Essex, Papers and Correspondence of Sirt Frederick Edward Warner, WARNER/A/2/3/A.81.

<sup>24</sup> John Attfield, *With Light of Knowledge: A hundred years of Education in the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, 1877-1977* (London: RACS/Journeyman Press, 1981), 47.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Red Notes*, No. 15 (May 1938), 1.

### **Defining terms: labour movement, socialism, and working-class culture.**

Having clarified the differences between the London Labour Choral Union and the Co-operative choirs, it is perhaps essential to make also a distinction between the terms 'Labour movement', 'socialist movement' and 'working-class culture', particularly as they will appear quite often in this thesis. The term 'Labour Movement' is a quite broad one. It includes not only the Labour Party and the Trade Unions, but also their cultural, educational and other ancillary organisations.<sup>28</sup> As an 'ancillary organisation' of the LLP, the LLCU fits into this description and can therefore be considered part of the labour movement. On the other hand, 'Socialist Culture' includes activities of all socialist associations and parties that existed before the formation of the Labour Party in 1900 (for instance, the culture developed by the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the Labour Churches of the 1890s). There are additional distinctions between the 'labour movement' and 'working-class culture'. The term 'labour movement' includes a political organisation (the Labour Party), and as a result, it describes a culture created by this particular party, and one that does not necessarily appeal to all working-class people, as historian Stefan Berger rightly argues.<sup>29</sup> The leisure industry in England provided an alternative working-class culture while choral singing not associated with a political Party was also part of British working-class culture. Other political organisations, such as the Conservative Party and Liberal Party, developed their own activities to target the working-classes: the Conservative Party for example had its 'working men's clubs', which organised activities, such as sport, for their members, including women and young people.<sup>30</sup>

At this point, it would be helpful to also discuss briefly the labour movement in London before the formation of the London Labour Party, under the auspices of which the LLCU was founded. The Labour Party in Britain was founded in 1900 first as the 'Labour Representation Committee', subsequently renamed in 1906 as the 'Labour Party'.<sup>31</sup> However, socialist groups had existed in London already since 1868. As well as being particularly active, they also made a significant contribution to the formation of the Labour Party and its ideology. The first society to use the term 'Labour' as part of its title was the

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<sup>28</sup> Berger, *The British Labour Party*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 144.

<sup>30</sup> Berger, *The British Labour Party*, 146.

<sup>31</sup> Alistair J Reid and Henry Pelling, *A short history of the Labour Party* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1.

Labour Representation League, of 1868, formed primarily to achieve the representation of the working class in Parliament. Poor finances however resulted in the inability of the organisation to make any impression in the political scene.<sup>32</sup> That same year (1868), the Trade Unions Congress was founded in London and federated the network of Trade Unions which were active in the area.<sup>33</sup>

The Great Depression of 1873-1896 dramatically reduced the living standard of the working classes, bringing about the realization of the human welfare importance, resulting in increased class consciousness of the working class. This in turn led to the founding of associations that would have the improvement of working class conditions as their main purpose.<sup>34</sup> Already since 1870, working class representatives were elected with the support of the Liberal Party, facilitating the development of a significant Liberal-Labour tradition by 1870. Middle-class voters, however, were hostile towards working-class candidates in areas where the middle-class presence was particularly strong. By 1885, the Liberal Party was struggling to align the interests of the two conflicting classes it aimed to represent. In order to gain working-class support, the party sought to re-think its policies and adopt more radical ones.<sup>35</sup> The combination of the Great Depression and the working-class recognition that its interests could no longer be represented by the Liberal Party resulted in 'socialist propaganda falling on more receptive ears'.<sup>36</sup>

Historians Alistair Reid and Henry Pelling have divided the first socialist groups that developed between 1880 and 1900 into three broad categories. The first is described as the Liberal-Labour group (Lib-Labs), consisted of the Trade Unions that were federated under the Trade Union Congress of 1868. Lib-Labs were influenced by the Liberal policies and by Gladstone's leadership of the Liberal Party between 1860s and 1890s. As early as the 1880s they were already referring to themselves as the 'Labour Party'.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Henry Pelling, *Origins of the Labour Party* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2.

<sup>33</sup>Reid and Pelling, *A short history of the Labour Party*, 1.

<sup>34</sup>Richard Price, 'Britain', in Rojan, Jürgen and Mariel von der Linden, *The formation of Labour Movements 1870-1914: An international perspective* (Köln: E J Brill, 1990), 3-24.

<sup>35</sup>Alan Ball, *British political parties: The emergence of a modern party system* (London: Macmillan Press, 1981), 34-45.

<sup>36</sup>Ball, *British Political Parties*, 47.

<sup>37</sup> Reid and Pelling, *A short History*,1.

The second group within the Labour movement represented Ethical socialism and was more under the influence of the liberal-radical tradition. The main representative of this group was the Independent Labour Party (ILP), which was founded in 1893. Its members were usually younger in age compared to Trade Union members that represented the Lib-Labs. As a result, their socialist outlook was more bohemian and radical compared to Trade Unionists that were more liberal. This group also had very strong ideas about culture and socialism, advocating that popular involvement in the socialist movement would bring cultural change.<sup>38</sup>

The last group consisted of two organisations, both influenced by Marx: The Social Democratic Federation (SDF) (1884) and the Fabian Society (also 1884). The founding of the Labour Party in 1900 was the result of the alliance of those three main groups that consisted of the Trade Unions, the Independent Labour Party, the SDF and the Fabian Society. The variety of existing socialist organisations that could represent the working class, and the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1918 which gave the vote to more social groups (such as women), led to the decline of liberalism and the subsequent rise of Labour.<sup>39</sup> It was in this context that the London Labour Party (LLP) was formed in 1914, having as its main objective to organize the various local Labour party branches under the umbrella of one Labour Party.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, it was concerned with the development of a strong labour movement at a municipal level, within the London County Council (LCC), the main administrative body in the capital. The rise of the LLP, along with the significance of music for socialists, which will be examined in more detail in the first chapter, created the appropriate context for the formation of the LLCU in 1924.

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>39</sup> Ball, *British political parties*, 28-73. An additional factor of the decline of Liberalism was the decline of nonconformity. For more details on this aspect, see John F Glasser, 'English nonconformity and the decline of Liberalism', in *American Historical Review*, 63 (1958), 352-363. See also Paul Adelman, *The decline of the Liberal Party 1910-1931* (London and New York: Longman, 1981), 63-73.

<sup>40</sup> Donoughue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison*, 38, and Thompson, *Socialists*, 283-5.



## Chapter 1.

### **The founding of the London Labour Choral Union.**

Amongst the central questions of this thesis, as was pointed out in the introduction, are why there was a need for the founding of an organisation like the London Labour Choral Union under the auspices of a political party, what was its function, and in what ways it differed from other, similar organisations? Indeed, one of the factors that gave rise to organisations such as the Union, was the tradition of socialist culture that had existed in Britain until the 1920s. From the 1890s onwards, socialists understood the importance of culture as a necessary aspect of a socialist society, and as an intrinsic part of creating ‘good socialists’. Music in particular was believed to promote moral reform and as such was deemed a significant aspect of socialist culture.<sup>41</sup> It was a form of art that ‘could encourage intense feelings of shared identity, important in developing the spirit necessary for entry into the new moral world’, and a means of ‘awakening in individuals new ‘universal sympathies’, developing their understanding of the homology that existed between the universal laws of harmony and the orderly arrangement of mankind in society’.<sup>42</sup>

This idea of music as a ‘refining’ art, and one that promotes moral reform was not a unique discovery of socialists. In fact, it was this very idea that promoted music to form a necessary role in school education in England. Indeed, when the first Parliamentary Grant towards elementary education was considered in 1833, advocates of the idea of music as part of the school education noted that it ‘would be found to exert a distinctly civilising influence upon the youth of the working class’.<sup>43</sup> Emphasis was placed primarily on vocal music, as the ideal vocal education could ensure that moral texts of songs and hymns would ‘impress themselves upon the minds of the singers who performed them’.<sup>44</sup>

By the 1840s, music became synonymous with ‘rational recreation’ through charity festivals organised in Britain. Victorians gradually developed a notion of music as an

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<sup>41</sup> Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 101.

<sup>42</sup> Waters, *British Socialists*, 100- 101.

<sup>43</sup> Bernarr Rainbow, *The Land without music: Musical education in England 1800-1860 and its continental antecedents* (London: Novello, 1967), 30.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, 31.

elevating amusement that promoted Christianity and the moral of philanthropy.<sup>45</sup> Individuals (and particularly poor working-class individuals) were expected to find in it a 'healthy distraction and a disciplined activity'.<sup>46</sup> In the case of vocal music, it was thought that it led to 'increased community cohesion and therefore to more frequent and more focused attendance at church'.<sup>47</sup> As a result it was offered not only to school children, but also to all those who 'would otherwise be tempted to seek [entertainment] in vicious and debasing pursuits'.<sup>48</sup>

### **The Labour Churches.**

The Labour Churches were an attempt to accomplish exactly that: a combination of socialism, philanthropy and aspects of spirituality. The movement was inaugurated in 1891 by Unitarian Minister John Trevor whose rejection of his Calvinistic upbringing led him to the search for a more acceptable faith.<sup>49</sup> It was neither dogmatic nor sectarian, with the intense involvement of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) turning its meetings into political ones.<sup>50</sup> References to the 'Religion of the Labour Movement' can be found as late as 1906, an indication that the movement, the activities of which were primarily philanthropic, was still active until then.<sup>51</sup> Philanthropy was a favourite activity of socialists that generated a debate as to whether it was acceptable or not. Some socialists regarded it as a superficial activity, and a form of supporting middle-class patronage, proposing that the working class should take its destiny in its own hands instead.<sup>52</sup> Generally however, it was recognised that there was common ground between socialism and philanthropy, and this was in the cultural sphere, though the two had a different outlook. Philanthropists for example regarded as a very important task the elevation and re-moralising of the working class, particularly during the 1860s and 1870s when poverty was seen as a 'personal and moral failing of the

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<sup>45</sup> Charles Edward McGuire, *Music and Victorian Philanthropy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 32-34.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 66.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, 47.

<sup>48</sup> Rainbow, *The Land without music*, 36.

<sup>49</sup> John Saville and Richard Storey, 'John Trevor', in Joyce M Bellamy and John Saville (eds), *Dictionary of Labour biography* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), vi, 249-153, here 250.

<sup>50</sup> Saville and Storey, 'John Trevor', 251.

<sup>51</sup> Hall, *A Pleasant Change from Politics*, 32.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 66-72.

individual',<sup>53</sup> while socialists believed that this type of culture could not be imposed, but had instead to be created within the ranks of the working class. Chris Waters argues that:

While the philanthropist and the socialist wanted the working class to benefit from the recreational activities they offered, the ends they had in mind differed enormously: the former often wanted to secure the status quo, to elevate workers to middle-class standards of taste in order to prevent social disorder; the latter wanted to prepare the ground for a new socialist culture by elevating workers so they could see the necessity of further developing that culture and hence begin to struggle for its realisation.<sup>54</sup>

The Labour Church movement was created exactly out of this belief, to generate an alternative form of philanthropy, a type of philanthropy established by workers, and for workers. Music played an important part in the movement's sermons. The description, taken from a biographical entry on the life of John Trevor, of the very first meeting of the Labour Church movement that took place in October 1891 is very revealing in this respect:

[...] After the opening music from a string orchestra and a prayer from Trevor, there was a reading of James Russell Lowell's poem, 'on the capture of fugitive slaves'. A Unitarian minister read the fifth chapter of Isaiah, the choir sang 'England, Arise!' and Trevor gave a sermon. He spoke of the need for bringing 'religion into the struggle' and attached the absence of support from the traditional churches, and concluded that what was required was a religious movement of their own outside the churches, which should allow them to live a righteous and godly life, and yet secure the freedom for which they lived.<sup>55</sup>

Indicative of the significance of music for the movement is the fact that the Church had its own hymn book ('The Labour Church Hymn Book', first published in 1892, that contained an anthology of appropriate music for those meetings.<sup>56</sup> Compiled by Trevor himself, it contained the text but not the actual music for 89 songs most of which were chosen for expressing the importance of self-help, inspiring optimism, encouraging workers to work together and presenting God as playing a role in facilitating the 'good-time coming'.<sup>57</sup> A number of songs explore the idea of the socialist Utopia:

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<sup>53</sup> Waters, *British Socialists* 65.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid*, 95.

<sup>55</sup> Saville and Storey, *Trevor*, 250.

<sup>56</sup> Hall, *A pleasant change*, 36-38. See also Trevor, *The Labour Church Hymn Book*.

<sup>57</sup> Waters, *British Socialists*, 107-114.

Courage working brothers,  
 The day has come at last  
 The clouds are lifting quickly  
 The night is breaking fast.<sup>58</sup>

God and the Church also feature. Hymn no. 51, for instance, asks God to bless, love, help and keep little children, whereas Hymn 52 reminds the Labour Church congregation that God is to be found in all the beauties that Nature has to offer: the song of a bird, the fresh flower.<sup>59</sup> A fundamental difference, however, between this hymn book and a religious one is the references to men as 'God's fellow workers',<sup>60</sup> with God being perceived as equal.

### Local Socialist choirs in London.

The idea that music was an important part in creating good socialists gave rise to a number of socialist choirs. As a result, during the early twentieth century, a number of Labour Party branches in London created their own choirs. By 1912 there were choirs in Willesden Green, Tooting, Hackney, Fulham and Putney,<sup>61</sup> though one of the most successful representatives of the movement was the Deptford Socialist choir, which was organised by the local ILP. The choir was formed in 1913 by the Mayor of Deptford, Councillor G. Tams, and its organizing committee consisted of MPs and councillors of Deptford, with Labour MP C. W. Bowerman as its President, and councillor E. C. Wood as Chairman until 1923. Its conductors (for the majority of whom virtually nothing is known apart from their surnames) included Wall (1913-1915), Woodroffe (1915-1919), Ritchie (1919-1921) and Sydney Court (1921, though it is not known until when he remained conductor of the choir).<sup>62</sup> The choir's activities between 1913 and 1924 were mainly philanthropic and involved visits to local hospitals or to poor London boroughs (such as Poplar, Greenwich and Lambeth) where money was raised for the local population.<sup>63</sup> Its

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<sup>58</sup> Trevor, *The Labour Church Hymn Book* (Manchester: the Labour Prophet, 1892), 13 (Hymn no. 12), Warwick University, Modern Records Centre, Tom Mann Papers, Facs. of Labour Church Hymn Book, MSS.334/5/S/5.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid*, 20-21, hymns no. 51 and 52.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>61</sup> Rutland Boughton, 'Socialist Music Festivals', *The Clarion*, 16 February 1912.

<sup>62</sup> Sydney Court, 'Music and the People: A message to the Labour Movement', in *The Labour Magazine*, Vol. 2 (November 1923), 444-6. Unfortunately not much is known about Sydney Court, other than that he was very well regarded in the socialist music circles as a conductor of the Deptford Socialist Choir.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid*.

popularity, evidenced in the fact that it had an ‘unbroken existence since it was founded in 1913’<sup>64</sup> earned it much respect in the Labour Movement, subsequently becoming one of the founding members of the London Labour Choral Union in 1924.<sup>65</sup> The choir’s participation in the 1923 First Elizabethan Festival in Kingsway Hall reveals also an educational aspect in its activities.<sup>66</sup> Despite not winning the competition, Court indicated that

while not becoming a ‘prize choir’ derived the greatest possible advantage from association with other choirs, the hearing of the varied renderings of the pieces at which they had worked so hard, and the analytical remarks of such great musicians as Dr Harvey Grace and Vaughan Williams, who were the adjudicators.<sup>67</sup>

A further very important socialist organization in London that counted music as a significant activity was the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS), founded in 1868 from a group of engineers in Woolwich and from the 1880s onwards, many working men’s clubs in the area organized regular concerts in the Co-Operative Hall of Powis street.<sup>68</sup> These were in fact ‘enhanced’ by socialist lectures between 1904 and 1918. So popular was music in the ranks of the RACS, that by 1919 it already had two junior and three senior choirs, which participated in many activities furthering the society’s cultural work, which included concerts organised by the Society, accompanied by socialist lectures, a competitive festival initiated in the early 1920s.<sup>69</sup> The Festival in fact became so popular that it had to be abandoned and replaced by London wide-festivals at the Crystal Palace and Caxton Hall, run by the London Joint Educational Committee’.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Duncan Hall, *A Pleasant Change from Politics: Music and the British Labour Movement between the Wars* (London: New Clarion Press, 2001), 64.

<sup>65</sup> Herbert Morrison to Secretaries of borough and divisional Labour Parties, Draft Constitution of the London Labour Choral Union, 1 February 1924, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/9.

<sup>66</sup> Waters, *British Socialists*, 109. For a detailed account of Socialist Song books, see 107-127. The First Elizabethan Festival attracted a small audience, but was reviewed by *The Spectator* as ‘praiseworthy’, though it was noted that ‘competitors had strange and diverse views in performing Elizabethan music’. See C. H., ‘Tudor Musicians’, in *The Spectator*, 24 March 1923, 44-45.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, 446.

<sup>68</sup> John Attfield, *With Light and Knowledge: A hundred years of education in the Royal Arsenal Co-operative society 1887-1997* (London: RACS/Journeyman press, 1981).

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, 46-48.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, 48.

## The London Labour Party and music.

The size of London created the additional need for a central organisation to coordinate the activities of local socialist choirs. London's geographical expansion did not allow the development of a stable community necessary to create solidarity among the working class that existed in provincial cities as was the case with Manchester and Birmingham.<sup>71</sup> Social classes were separated into socially distinct residential districts where the presence of the working class was dominant, mainly in areas where London industry and trade was developing, like for instance in Woolwich.<sup>72</sup>

The city's absence of heavy industry, such as iron, steel or mining, led to the development of a small scale industry instead, like gas and dock works. Furthermore, the working or middle-class character of some boroughs was insufficient to providing the right conditions for the development of a successful Labour movement. Certainly, particularly wealthy boroughs dominated by the middle and upper classes, such as Chelsea and Hampstead, represented a challenging ground in which the Labour movement might develop. On the other hand, contrary to what one would expect, working class boroughs such as Camberwell and Stepney, also failed to provide the right background for the labour movement's development, as their chronic poverty led to political apathy.<sup>73</sup>

The formation of the London Labour Party (LLP) in 1914 attempted to organise the various local Labour Party branches in London, and revive not only an interest in politics for the local population of each borough, but specifically an interest in socialism. Under its leader, Herbert Morrison, who led the party from its inception in 1914, the LLP became according to Stefan Berger, the Party expanded. By the early 1920s, Morrison, who had experienced the structure of the German Socialist SPD and its ancillary organisations such as workers choirs,<sup>74</sup> became like a 'cultural impresario', convinced that the LLP should additionally provide similar organisations for its members that would 'create comradeship'

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<sup>71</sup> Paul Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The struggle for London 1885-1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 1-4. On London in particular, see Thompson, 5-16.

<sup>72</sup> Thompson, *Socialists*, 239-263.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid*, 239.

<sup>74</sup> Stefan Berger, 'Herbert Morrison's London Labour Party in the interwar years and the SPD: Problems of Transferring German Socialist Practices to Britain', in *European Review of History*, Vol. 12, no. 2, 291-306, here 295-297.

and 'unify the party'.<sup>75</sup> In this sense therefore, it could be said that the Union was also partly created to further the party's objectives.

The LLP was among the party branches that took advantage of the active socialist choirs in London during the 1920s. The party organised events called 'Demonstrations' that were in fact nothing more than social occasions, an opportunity for various local Labour Party branches to meet. They combined singing with a talk, usually by more than one prominent Labour MP of that time. The audience was expected to participate, singing along with the choir or choirs in between speeches. To facilitate audience participation, the leaflets advertising the events also contained the words of the songs scheduled to be performed, though they did not always contain the names of the participating choirs. The singing took place without accompaniment by orchestra or any other instrument such as piano. The structure of these events had therefore similarities with the sermons of the Labour Church movement, where music was also used between talks. The repertoire included some of the most popular socialist songs of the day: In one demonstration at the Caledonian Road Baths in November 1923 for example, the programme included Morris's 'March of the Workers', 'When wilt thou save the people?' by Ebenezer Elliott, and concluded with Edward Carpenter's 'England, Arise!'.<sup>76</sup>

Morris's 'March of the Workers' first appeared in his publication 'Chants for Socialists', published by the Socialist League in 1885, with an indication that it should be sung to the tune of 'John Brown' (also known as 'John Brown's Body') about the popular abolitionist during the American Civil War, John Brown.<sup>77</sup> Setting new socialist texts to existing popular tunes was very common for socialists, as most workers were unable to read music. As well as ensuring participation, this was also seen as a way of 'deepen[ing] and intensify[ing] the emotion already aroused by new words'.<sup>78</sup> This practice however quite often led to problems. For instance, poetry deemed particularly suitable for socialist singing was left out of songbooks if no appropriate tune could be found, and vice versa. The Aberdeen Socialist League selected songs for their events not for their 'revolutionary poetry'

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<sup>75</sup> Donoghue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison*, 71.

<sup>76</sup> Programme of the Demonstration in Caledonian Road Baths, 12 November 1923, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/09.

<sup>77</sup> William Morris, *Chants for Socialists* (London: Socialist League, 1885).

<sup>78</sup> Waters, *British Socialists*, 116

but purely because appropriate tunes were found for some of the selected texts. But also printing song books with tune indications resulted sometimes in complaints about the poor setting of an otherwise perfect socialist text. Socialist Jim Connell's 'Red Flag' for example first appeared with an indication to use 'The White Cockade' as appropriate tune, it was nevertheless replaced with the more popular tune of the German song 'Tannenbaum', despite his protest.<sup>79</sup>

As well as Morrison, the Socialist composer Rutland Boughton was also heavily involved in it (in fact the suggestion for the Union's founding belonged to him) and brought with him his experience as a socialist choirs' conductor.<sup>80</sup> His participation in such organisations started in 1906, at the age of 28, when he moved from London to Birmingham, frequently dubbed the 'hotbed of liberal socialism'.<sup>81</sup> His socialist tendencies were already evident in his articles for the *Musical Standard*, where he tended to describe music as a socialist activity: not as a 'pleasure hunt' (an idea espoused by the upper classes), but as a 'factor developing the brotherliness of man'.<sup>82</sup> Birmingham provided him a stimulating environment to work as a singing teacher between 1905 and 1907 and as conductor of the Birmingham City Choral Society at the end of 1906.<sup>83</sup>

While in Birmingham, he also had the opportunity to work with the Clarion Vocal Unions (CVUs), originally organized by Montague Blatchford in 1894. In the absence of any other representative of the movement at that time,<sup>84</sup> these choirs became the 'largest socialist choral body in Britain'.<sup>85</sup> From 1897 onwards they organized an Annual Festival,

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<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, 117.

<sup>80</sup> Morrison to secretaries of Borough and Divisional Labour Parties, 24 October 1923, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/9.

<sup>81</sup> Michael Hurd, *Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festivals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 28-32.

<sup>82</sup> Rutland Boughton, 'Signs of the Times: IV Socialism' in *Musical Standard*, 6 August 1904, 85. Boughton's articles from 1905 and 1906 can be found in the *Musical Standard*, e.g. 'Music and the People', *Musical Standard*, 7 October, 1905, 225-227; 14 October, 1905, 242-243; 21 October, 1905, 258-259; 28 October, 1905, 274-275; 4 November, 1905, 337-338; 2 December, 1905, 353-354; 9 December, 1905, 369-370; 6 January, 1906, 5-6; 13 January 1906, 21-22; January 27, 1906, 52-53. Additionally see articles in *Clarion*, especially 24 November, 1911, 'Musical Matters', 1 December, 1911, 'The Blowing of the Clarions', 22 December 1911, 'A note on Crators' [sic], and 16 February 1912, 'Socialist and Musical Festivals'. Later articles by Boughton with more references to music and socialism can be found in the *Daily Herald* (1923).

<sup>83</sup> Hurd, *Rutland*, 28.

<sup>84</sup> Duncan Hall, *A pleasant change from politics. Music and the British Labour Movement between the Wars* (London: New Clarion Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>85</sup> Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the politics of popular culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 124.



where participating choirs competed before a judge, though this led to the dilemma of either creating 'good socialists' through their musical activities, or creating good musicians able to perform the most complex of repertoires.<sup>86</sup>

From as early as 1912, Boughton apparently intended to create a federation of socialist choirs in the Midlands,<sup>87</sup> after observing in 1911 that the Clarion choirs separately are 'small and can of course only do themselves justice in suitable music, but masses they are simply magnificent for shatter[ing] the wall of monopolist Jericho,'<sup>88</sup> (meaning the musical establishment). As a result, he proposed that every branch of the British Socialist Party should organize its own socialist choir.<sup>89</sup> By 1912, he was also aware of socialist choirs active in the London area, in boroughs such as Woolwich, Willesden Green, Tooting, Hackney, Fulham and Putney.<sup>90</sup> In an article that appeared in 1923 for the *Daily Herald*, he outlined his idea to unite all existing socialist choirs in London under one organization, to enable choirs to participate in events organized by the Labour Party.<sup>91</sup>

This was finally materialised in January 1924, when representatives of existing socialist choirs from the Deptford Labour Choir, South East Ham ILP choir, the Woolwich Pioneer, London Co-operative Kentish Town choir, Stepney Labour Choir, and Chelsea Labour choir convened to form the London Labour Choral Union (LLCU).<sup>92</sup> From the constitution of the choir, which was drafted the same year, it is evident that the Union's aims were to assist the party with propaganda ('to provide its service to the Labour Movement of the Metropolis'), but at the same time to provide an educational opportunity for the people participating in it ('to develop the musical instincts of the People').<sup>93</sup> Indeed, the idea was to provide an umbrella organisation for all the socialist choirs in London to participate and co-ordinate their activities.<sup>94</sup> Boughton was suggested (and became) the first

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<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, 15.

<sup>87</sup> Rutland Boughton, 'Socialist Music Festivals', in *Clarion*, 16 February 1912.

<sup>88</sup> Rutland Boughton, 'The Blowing of the Clarions', in *Clarion*, 1 December 1911.

<sup>89</sup> Rutland Boughton, 'A note on Crators [sic]', in *Clarion*, 22 December 1911.

<sup>90</sup> Rutland Boughton, 'Socialist Music Festivals', in *Clarion*, 16 February 1912.

<sup>91</sup> Rutland Boughton, 'Shall we Sing?' in *Daily Herald*, 10 October 1923.

<sup>92</sup> Morrison to local Labour Party branches, *Proposed Labour Choir*, 24 October 1923, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/9, Morrison to local Labour Party branches, 1 February 1924, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/9, and Summary of Secretary's Reports, 7 February 1924, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/9.

<sup>93</sup> London Labour choral Union constitution, 1 February 1924, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/9.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

Musical Adviser (conductor) of the Union, with Morrison assuming the secretarial position of the Union on behalf of the Party.<sup>95</sup>

### **Activities of the London Labour Choral Union: Propaganda and education.**

One of the most important activities of the Union was that of providing propaganda services to the LLP. This was mainly done through events organised in various London boroughs where no socialist choir existed, in the hope of inspiring the local population to form a socialist choir and promote as a result socialism through music. The first such event took place in May 1925 at the Limehouse Town Hall, aiming to generate an interest in the creation of a Labour Choir at Poplar and Stepney. The Union provided the music, but the event also included talks from Morrison and George Lansbury, the local socialist MP, who subsequently became the leader of the Labour Party in between 1932 and 1935. In boroughs where a low-membership socialist choir existed, the concert aimed to revive it and inspire local more locals to join.<sup>96</sup> Between 1925 and 1928 at least 8 events of this kind were organized in various areas of London such as Woolwich, Camberwell, Hackney, Tottenham, North Lambeth and Bermondsey.<sup>97</sup>

More overtly propagandistic activities were the Union's participation in political events organised by the Party. There were, for instance, about 18 demonstrations organised in support of the *Daily Herald* between May 1924 and June 1925, and Union strike meetings, such as the one organised by the Tailor's and Garment Workers.<sup>98</sup> During the first Rally for the *Daily Herald* in 30 November 1924, which incidentally was the first engagement of the Union, Morrison's political hero, the Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald was expected to attend.<sup>99</sup> MacDonald was the first Prime Minister in the 1924 Labour Government and a very prominent Labour MP, and became leader of the Labour Party between 1911 and 1914, and again in 1922 and 1931.<sup>100</sup> By March 1924 his name appeared also as President of the

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<sup>95</sup> Summary of Secretary's Report, 15 February 1924, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/9.

<sup>96</sup> Various documents, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/10, 11 and 12.

<sup>97</sup> Various documents, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/10, 11 and 12.

<sup>98</sup> Report of the Executive for 1924-5, 'Public Engagements', LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/11.

<sup>99</sup> Summary of Secretary's Report, 15 February 1924 and 5 November 1924. Also Donoughue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison*, 19, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/9.

<sup>100</sup> Donoughue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison*, 19

Choral Union (though his involvement in it is doubtful) a development that ensured the right publicity not just for the LLCU, but also for Morrison himself.<sup>101</sup> The Union was also promoted through the LLP's official organ, the *London Chronicle* (edited by Morrison and later renamed *London News*), as an exciting and very important activity for the Labour Movement.<sup>102</sup> In one of his articles in the *London Chronicle*, Morrison concluded:

The effort is a matter of great importance both to Labour and to music and it is earnestly trusted that all Labour, Socialist and Co-operative choirs in Greater London will join the Union and thus become associated with this new work of the London Labour Party.<sup>103</sup>

This short extract seems to imply that, while co-ordinating the activities of the local socialist choirs, Morrison was also hoping to ensure that local labour party branches were also associated with his LLP. This is further reinforced by the fact that throughout 1924, in all correspondence between Morrison and local Labour Party branches, affiliation forms for the LLCU were included.<sup>104</sup> But also during rehearsals, choir members were reminded that this was not just a musical activity: Boughton apparently used rehearsals to give little 'lecturettes' on socialism.<sup>105</sup>

Another indication that the Union was also a way for Morrison to demonstrate his organisational skills is his decision to organise other cultural activities for LLP members. In fact during the 1920s, not only he organised them, but he also made an effort to attend every single meeting of their Executive Committees.<sup>106</sup> The first such activity was the London Labour Dramatic Federation (founded in June 1925)<sup>107</sup> with a London Labour Symphony Orchestra (LLSO) following the same year.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, it appears that Morrison had planned all three activities from early on: A leaflet issued in 1925 under the title 'The work of the London Labour Party 1924/25', indicated the London Labour Symphony

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<sup>101</sup> Morrison to secretaries of Borough and divisional Labour Parties, 14 March 1924, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/9.

<sup>102</sup> Various documents in LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/9.

<sup>103</sup> Herbert Morrison, 'The work of the London Labour Party', in *The London Labour Chronicle*, March 1924.

<sup>104</sup> Various documents in LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/9, especially after 29 February 1924.

<sup>105</sup> Anon., 'Our Singers', in *The London Labour Chronicle*, May 1924.

<sup>106</sup> Donoughue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison* 71-72.

<sup>107</sup> Morrison to local Labour Parties, 25 September 1925, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/11.

<sup>108</sup> Morrison to Executive Committee of the London Labour Party, 9 June 1925, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/10.

Orchestra as ‘the third phase of artistic work in connection with the movement’.<sup>109</sup> The orchestra followed the same principles of the LLCU, acting again as federation of existing socialist orchestras, though it is not clear to what extent and how many of them existed at that time.<sup>110</sup>

Organising a Labour Orchestra however was far more challenging than organising a choir, as a choral Union did not require potential members to demonstrate particular instrumental skills or musicianship, while the formation of a Symphony Orchestra required both musicianship skills, but also possession of an instrument. The additional problem was Morrison’s ambition regarding the orchestra’s size: 3 flutes, one to be a piccolo, 3 oboes of which one to be a Cor Anglais, 2 clarinets but preferably 3 if possible, 2 Bassoons, 2 (if possible 4) French Horns, 2 or 3 Trumpets or Cornets and 2 Trombones as far as the wind and brass instruments of the orchestra are concerned. The percussion part was to consist of Timpani, Triangle and a Bass Drum to be used occasionally, while the string section was envisaged to incorporate 12 to 16 1st violins, 8 to 12 second violins, 6 to 10 violas, 5 to 8 cellos and 4 to 6 basses. In short, the orchestra needed something between 52 and 75 musicians. As conductor of the orchestra, the composer and conductor F W De Massi-Hardman was proposed.<sup>111</sup>

Despite his initial enthusiasm for the cause though, he resigned just a year after being appointed citing ‘pressure of work in connection with his other musical activities’.<sup>112</sup> He was replaced by Percy Grayer, a committed conductor and a past president of the London Branch of the Musicians’ Union. Grayer had also worked as deputy conductor for the Coldstream Guards and other orchestras, like the London Professional band of the Musician’s Union, the London County Council Band of London, and the London and North Eastern Railway Musical Society.<sup>113</sup> He didn’t last long either, and by the end of April 1926 he too resigned.<sup>114</sup> The orchestra continued to struggle, until finally in October 1926 it was

<sup>109</sup> Leaflet ‘The work of the London Labour Party, 1924/1925’, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/11.

<sup>110</sup> Morrison to local Labour Parties, 4 December 1925, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/11.

<sup>111</sup> Morrison to secretaries of local Labour parties, 7 December 1925, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/11. De Massi-Hardman was also the author of a *Practical guide for the Conductor and Useful Notes for the Orchestra* (London: William Reeves, 1932).

<sup>112</sup> Summary of Secretary’s Reports, 28 January 1926, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/11.

<sup>113</sup> Summary of Secretary’s Reports, 31 December 1925, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/11.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.* and Summary of Secretary’s Reports, 29 April 1926, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/11.

dissolved.<sup>115</sup> By December 1927, Morrison began to realise that the administrative and organizational aspects of the cultural activities he helped establishing were absorbing a significant amount of his time, and as a result he left all Executive Committees, leaving other administrators of the London Labour Party to act on his behalf: essentially, however, he was still the one to make decisions on behalf of the Party and approve suggestions made by Boughton.<sup>116</sup>

A second aspect of the Union's activities was educational. This was best illustrated in the organisation of a yearly Competitive Contest and Festival which took place usually in November. The event gave the opportunity to the Mass Choir (formed out of all affiliated individual choirs and usually containing about 500 members) to demonstrate its musical abilities. It was also an occasion for the individual (local) choirs to compete and demonstrate their musicianship. The idea of course was not new: Festivals of this kind were already organised by the CVUs from 1897 as has already been mentioned, so in this sense, the Union was following the tradition of its predecessors. The first LLCU Festival took place in 12 November 1924 at Shoreditch Town Hall. Choirs were divided in two different categories, or 'classes', according to the number of members participating in them, as well as their musical skills (class A for the musically advanced, and Class B for the rest).<sup>117</sup> 'Class A' for example consisted of choirs with more than 30 members, while 'Class B' choirs had less than that. In both cases, the awards were printed scores to the value of £2 in the first category and of £1 in the second, all provided by Curwen Music Publishers. The festival also included two soloists, a violinist (Desiree Amis) and the baritone (Frederick Woodhouse). Ralph Vaughan Williams appeared as adjudicator.<sup>118</sup>

Participating choirs had to prepare a number of pieces which were common for all of them, though the ones performed on the day were drawn by ballot just before the

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<sup>115</sup> Summary of Reports, 28 October 1926, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/12.

<sup>116</sup> 'The Work of the London Labour Party, 1926-27', LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/11. See also Donoughue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison*, 72.

<sup>117</sup> Programme of the Contest, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/10.

<sup>118</sup> Vaughan Williams was in fact participating in most contests of the Union during the late 1920s as an adjudicator. While he was not affiliated to any political party, he was happy to help both Rutland Boughton and later Alan Bush, but he also indicated that this did not necessarily mean that he agreed with their political opinions. See Paul Harrington, 'Holst and Vaughan Williams: radical pastoral', in Christopher Morris (ed.) *Music and the Politics of Culture* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), 106-127.

contest.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, this seems to have been similar (if not identical) to the format of the CVUs contest, where choirs apparently selected the piece to be performed on the day of the contest 'out of a large number of possibilities'.<sup>120</sup> During the second part of the Festival the massed choirs and small ensembles (usually violin and piano or a singer accompanied by piano) performed. The contest always concluded with the choir and the audience singing either Parry's 'Jerusalem' or 'England, Arise!'.<sup>121</sup> Examining the repertoire closely however, makes the educational aspect of the Union more evident.

### Repertoire.

There are, unfortunately, no surviving LLCU song books from the 1920s with the exception of a Song sheet, published by the London Labour Party sometime in late 1924, containing just seven songs.<sup>122</sup> Information about the repertoire performed in various events during the 1920s (including festivals and contests) is drawn from Archives, particularly the London Labour Party Archive, with the Alan Bush Papers also providing some supplementary information, which gives a fairly accurate picture of the types of songs used by the Union, and how these changed throughout the years. The LLP Song sheet probably appeared between November 1924 and early January 1925.<sup>123</sup> It was quite possibly produced as an easy way of having all popular socialist songs in one sheet as it included 'Jerusalem' (William Blake/Hubert Parry), 'The Marseillaise' (Rouget de Isle, 1792), 'England, Arise!' (Edward Carpenter), 'The Red Flag' (Jim Connell), 'When wilt thou save the People' (Ebenezer Elliott), along with two pieces that were to be sung to popular traditional melodies but using new socialist texts: 'Hark! The battle cry' (tune: March of the Men of Harlech, by H S Salt) and 'Onward, friends of Freedom!' (tune: Onward, Christian Soldiers, by Arthur Sullivan).

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<sup>119</sup> Programme of the Contest. LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/10.

<sup>120</sup> Duncan Hall, *A Pleasant Change in Politics: Music and the British Labour movement between the Wars* (Cheltenham: New Clarion Press, 2001), 89.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*, There were no speakers at the Festivals.

<sup>122</sup> London Labour Party Song sheet, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/10. Unfortunately, there is no accurate date for the Song sheets publication.

<sup>123</sup> The speculation as to the date is based on the fact that the song sheet was found in the 1924-1925 box of the Archive, and various letters after January 1925 where Morrison refers to the song sheet.

Out of the seven songs of the collection, only two of them ('England, Arise!' and 'Hark! The battle cry') appear constantly in almost every socialist song book from the 1880s. A second song book, the *ILP Song Book*, used by choirs participating in the Union, had few similarities with the *Labour Churches Hymn Book*: From a total of 40 songs that the ILP song book contains, only 12 of them are also included in the Hymn Book.<sup>124</sup> In addition to that, out of a database of forty songs used by the Union between 1924 and 1929 (compiled from various references in Archives) only two featured in the ILP's 1925 Song Book ('England Arise!', and 'Hark! The battle cry'). From this it can be concluded that the Union was attempting to escape the standard socialist repertoire already from its first years of existence by avoiding its use.

Indeed, this tendency is revealed by a closer examination of the songs used between 1924 and 1926. The Union's repertoire incorporated traditional songs (such as 'Sumer is icumen in',<sup>125</sup> a song celebrating the arrival of the summer, with the growing flowers and the cuckoos singing) but also songs by British composers, some of whom were not necessarily associated with the socialist movement. Vaughan Williams, for instance, was a very popular option, as was Gustav Holst and Charles Villiers Stanford.<sup>126</sup> Gradually, the Union's festivals became not just an opportunity to sing socialist songs, but more of an occasion for (socialist) workers to show off their musical abilities or even their changing musical tastes. Frederick Woodhouse who was mentioned above, participated regularly in the Union's Festivals and contests, starting with the first one where he performed songs by

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<sup>124</sup> The first lines of the songs are: 'Ah! The wrong that might be righted', 'England Arise! The long, long night is over', 'Forward! The day is breaking', 'Have you heard of the golden city?', 'Men whose boast it is that ye', 'O, beautiful my country', 'Songs of labour, keep ye moving', 'Tell me not in mournful numbers', 'These things shall be! A loftier race', 'Truth is growing, hearts are glowing', 'Where is the true man's fatherland?', and 'You cannot pay with money'. Neither the LLP Song Sheet nor the ILP Song Book contains any notation.

<sup>125</sup> The song (also known as 'Summer Canon') was composed in 13<sup>th</sup> century and it generated a debate amongst scholars regarding its two texts that survive, one in English known as 'Summer Canon' and a Latin (Perspice Christicola'), mainly as to which of these texts was the original. Further debate involves the refrain 'Sing cucu nu, sing cucu' (sing cuckoo now, sing cuckoo) and whether this is to be taken as a request to the bird cuckoo to sing, a request to the listener to sing, or in fact the whole refrain is metaphorical and refers to adultery. The song is described in literature as having being popular with 'amateur and professional musicians'. See G H Roscow, 'What is 'Summer is Icumen in?' in *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 50, no. 198 (May 1999), 188-195; Wolfgang Obst, 'Sumer is Icumen in': A Contrafactum?' in *Music & Letters*, Vol. 64 No. 3-4 (Jul. Oct. 1983), 151-161; Lisa Colton, 'Sumer is icumen in', in *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (Accessed 17 September 2015)

<sup>126</sup> Around 1895, Holst 'began to hear about socialism' according to his daughter, Imogen, and started reading books by William Morris. He went as far as joining a socialist club in Hammersmith, though Imogen claims that his socialism was 'never active', instead, she implies that he remained a member simply because he 'found a new sort of comradeship'. See Imogen Holst, *Gustav Holst* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 16-17.

Vaughan Williams's 'Songs of Travel' ('The Roadside Fire', 'Bright is the Ring of Words') and Sailors' Shanties.<sup>127</sup>

The Festival also offered the chance to the Union's conductor, Rutland Boughton, to have his own works performed. During the first annual festival and contest his songs 'To Freedom', and 'Pan' were used, while in the second the 'Faery Chorus' from his opera *Immortal Hour* was included.<sup>128</sup> While the song is very long (15 pages) it can't really be described as complex or challenging.<sup>129</sup> The first thing to notice for instance is the opening that consists of 'la la la' instead of any other lyrics, a pattern that continues until bar 29, when the first verse is finally sung by the sopranos. However, the remaining voices continue to sing either 'la la' or simply 'ah' using only one rhythmic pattern each.

**Ex. 1.1: Rutland Boughton, 'Pan' (London: Curwen, 1914), bars 1-4.**

The musical score for 'Pan' by Rutland Boughton, bars 1-4, is presented in a five-staff format. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The Soprano, Alto, and Piano parts begin with rests in the first two bars. The Tenor and Bass parts begin with a half note 'La' in the first bar. The Soprano and Alto parts enter in the third bar with a melodic line and 'la la la la la la la la' lyrics. The Tenor and Bass parts continue with a steady quarter-note accompaniment of 'La la la la la la la la la la la la'. Dynamics include *mf* for the vocal entries and *piano* for the piano accompaniment.

After a section where the text breaks from the 'la' and 'ah' and praises Pan instead, a second section with all voices singing simply 'ah' and 'la' appears (starting from bar 61), this

<sup>127</sup> Hubert Foss, *Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: George G Harrap & Co Ltd, 1950), 85.

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Rutland Boughton, *Pan* (London: Curwen, 1914).



time lasting 4 pages. Yet again rhythmic patterns that consist of semiquavers and quavers either ascending or descending appear, as in Example 1.1.

**Ex. 1.2: Rutland Boughton, 'Pan' (London: Curwen, 1914), bars 29-32.**

The musical score for 'Pan' by Rutland Boughton, bars 29-32, is presented in a five-part setting. The key signature is D major (one sharp) and the time signature is 2/4. The Soprano part begins with the lyrics 'All ye woods and trees and bow ers' in a *p* dynamic. The Alto part provides a vocalization 'ah' in a *pp* dynamic. The Tenor and Bass parts both sing 'la' syllables in a *pp* dynamic. The Piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern of semiquavers and quavers, also marked *pp*. A large slur encompasses the vocal lines from the beginning of bar 29 to the end of bar 32.

Finally, the 'la' section is broken in bar 96 where the text again praises pan for being 'great' and 'just', and the song concludes with a section again consisting of 'la' and 'ah'. Two conclusions can be drawn from this: First, while the song is very long, the ascending and descending patterns make it very easy to learn. Second, the fact that the majority of the song consists only of 'la' and 'ah' means that the choir members do not have to learn a 15 pages long text.

Boughton's 'Song to Freedom' is equally easy to learn. Marked to be performed 'Joyfully and elatedly', it has a very simple melody in D major, posing no significant

difficulties for amateur choir members. Based on a text by Edward Carpenter,<sup>130</sup> it praises beautiful beyond compare' freedom, while humanity, described as freedom's children, sings Freedom's joy. The elation of the song is underlined by the dynamics that range only from *f* to *fff* and belonged to a collection of songs on texts by Edward Carpenter, composed between 1906 and 1907 and published in 1909 by Novello under the title of Four Songs (Boughton's op. 24).<sup>131</sup>

Songs by Stanford, Holst, Bainton and Dunhill were also frequently used. In fact Dunhill (1877-1946), a pupil of Stanford at the Royal College of Music, appears to have been a quite popular choice, with two of his songs ('The Mother's Lamentation' and 'The Keel Row') appearing regularly in the Union's repertoire. Both works are simple and one could argue designed for amateur choirs. They are both arrangements of folk songs (a popular type of repertoire for the Union as has already been mentioned), the first of a border folk song, and the second of an Irish one. They extend to no more than 4 pages and offer no obvious technical difficulties or rhythmic complexities.<sup>132</sup> 'The Keel Row' for instance is an SATB arrangement, with the music being essentially homophonic, making the voices very easy to learn, particularly as the verses remain simple too.

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<sup>130</sup> Carpenter was a very good friend of Boughton. It is not clear when the two met, it was possibly around 1907. Boughton referred to him as someone he has grown to 'look on as [my] own brother'. Born into a wealthy family in 1844, he was initiated into socialism in 1883 by reading the works of Hyndman of the Social Democratic Federation and by 1885 the Fellowship of the New Life. He was also instrumental in the setting up of the Sheffield Socialist Society in 1886, participated in Labour Churches where he managed to attract as many as 2000 people to his lectures for the Labour Church in Sheffield, and developed into a 'major Socialist Propagandist in the twenty years after 1885'. See Hurd, *Rutland Boughton*, 37-38; Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, 'Edward Carpenter' in *Dictionary of Labour Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 85-92, and Stanley Pierson, 'Edward Carpenter, Prophet of a Socialist Millennium' in *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 13 No. 3 (March 1970), 301-318.

<sup>131</sup> Rutland Boughton, *Pan* (London: Curwen, 1914).

<sup>132</sup> Thomas Frederick Dunhill, *The Keel Row* (London: Novello & Co, 1907) and *The Mother's Lamentation* (London: Novello & Co, 1907).

**Ex. 1.3: Thomas Frederick Dunhill, 'The Keel Row' (London: Novello & Co 1907), bars 1-4.**

The musical score for 'The Keel Row' by Thomas Frederick Dunhill, bars 1-4, is presented for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Piano. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The lyrics are: 'p As I came down the Sand - gate the Sand - gate the'. The piano part features a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes.

Bainton's 'The Ballad of Semmerwater' (published by Curwen in 1910) was a further popular piece adopted by the LLCU. He was another Royal College of Music pupil who also studied with Stanford, and was a very good friend of Boughton's since their RCM years, so much so that they even shared lodgings. Hurd also implies that Bainton was responsible for introducing Boughton to socialism by suggesting Carlyle's *The French Revolution*, a book Hurd describes as 'decisive' in Boughton's life for 'turning his thoughts to the problem of social justice'.<sup>133</sup>

The 'Ballad' describes the social injustice of wealthy classes ignoring the lower ones. It uses a text by English poet William Watson, describing an idyllic village close to the lake of Semmerwater, where a beggar arrives, asking for food and drink that no one is willing to give him, apart from one villager. He then curses the village to disappear deep in the waters of the lake. The score does not appear to pose any technical difficulties for amateur choirs either, which might be the reason why it became popular. However, it seems to require a certain level of musicianship in terms of expression, as its dynamics range from *ppp* to *f*.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>133</sup> Hurd, *Rutland Boughton*, 15.

<sup>134</sup> Edgar Bainton, *Ballad of Semmerwater* (London: Curwen, 1910).

Other compositions that appeared in the Union's programmes included Stanford's 'The Train' and 'The blue Bird', Granville Bantock's arrangement of the traditional song 'Annie Laurie', Edward Elgar's 'My love dwelt on a Northern Land', Gustav Holst's 'Swansea Town' and Thomas Morley's 'You that wont to my Pipes' sound'.<sup>135</sup> All of them fall into a category of songs preferred by the Union (and indeed by socialist choirs before the Union) of either traditional songs, folk songs, or songs that praise love and nature. Bantock's and Holst's songs are arrangements of traditional ('Annie Laurie') or Folk songs ('Swansea Town', a Hampshire Folk song), while Morley's song is a madrigal from his 'First Booke of Ballets to Five Voyces'. Stanford's 'The Blue Bird' is focused on the topic of nature, while 'The Train' describes the journey of a train in 'tearing through the night' but which carries loved ones to their destination (both songs are from his op. 119, no. 3 and 4 respectively).

The repertoire used therefore confirms a tendency to include in the programmes contemporary British composers such as Vaughan Williams, Dunhill, Holst, Bainton and Bantock and Boughton rather than to stick heavily to the previous socialist tradition. Incidentally, most of the composers included in the Union's repertoire at that stage were also Stanford's pupils, with the exception of Bantock who studied at the Royal Academy of Music. Another observation is that the repertoire became gradually more challenging, with songs such as Boughton's 'Pan', a detail that points towards the educational side of the Union, and subsequently to the dilemma that most socialist choirs faced before the formation of the LLCU as to striking the ideal balance between the political and musical elements in the chosen repertory: In other words, is the socialist message more important than musicianship for a socialist choir? As Hall argues:

Were [these choirs] for making socialists, or performing the best music to the best of the players abilities? How could the former be maintained when, the latter goal became increasingly important?<sup>136</sup>

It has been mentioned above that the CVUs experienced exactly the same problem in the late 1880s, and as a result the 'socialist' associations of the choirs had to be removed from the programmes in favour of expanding musicianship. At a competition in Manchester

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<sup>135</sup> Charles Villiers Stanford *The Train* (London: Steiner & Bell, 1910), and *The Blue Bird* (London: Steiner & Bell, 1910). Thomas Morley *You that wont to my Pipes' Sound* (n.p., 1914), Gustav Holst, *Swansea Town* (London: Curwen & Sons, 1924), Granville Bantock, *Annie Laurie* (n.p., 1918), Edward Elgar *My Love dwelt on a Northern Land* (London: Novello & Co, 1917).

<sup>136</sup> Hall, *A Pleasant Change*, 15.

in 1899, for instance, the CVUs claimed to be ‘established for the cultivation of the musical taste of those to whom the wealth of unaccompanied English choral music was almost unknown’.<sup>137</sup> Consequently, as the level of musicianship of these choirs slowly improved, and their repertoire became more complicated than before, the festivals failed to attract working class audiences. Instead, it was ‘mayors, aldermen, and presidents of musical societies, and other kindly disposed people who are interested in musical culture’ that attended,<sup>138</sup> an indication that these choirs now began to resemble middle class ones, by performing repertoire not necessarily associated exclusively with socialism.

### **Lansbury’s Sixpence Songs.**

Although there appear to be no surviving songbooks used by the Union from the mid-1920s (indeed, there are no indications that there were any, as the organisation seems to have relied on scores printed specifically for its events) the existence of a set of two song books under the title ‘Sixteen Songs for Sixpence’ and ‘More Rebel Songs for Sixpence’ is perhaps a good indication of what other socialist singers were keen to sing, though it should be stressed that there is no concrete evidence as to whether those song books were actually used by any socialist choir at all.<sup>139</sup> Both publications appeared in 1925 in George Lansbury’s *Labour Weekly* newspaper. His disillusionment with MacDonald’s leadership led to his resignation from the post of General Manager at the newspaper and the founding of his own paper, the *Labour Weekly*. As well as publishing these two songbooks, he also issued a set of recordings again under the auspices of his newspaper.<sup>140</sup> A believer ‘in the music the masses enjoy’,<sup>141</sup> he advocated the use of music as means of enhancing socialist gatherings and even meetings, believing that good music could somehow transform the event even in cases when the speaker was particularly poor.

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<sup>137</sup> Clarion Vocal Union, Programme of the 1899 Competition, at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, 13 May 1899. Back cover of the programme. Quoted in Waters, *British Socialists*, 123.

<sup>138</sup> *Clarion*, 18 March 1898, 23. Quoted in Waters, *British Socialists*, 123

<sup>139</sup> *Sixteen Songs for Sixpence* (London: Lansbury’s Labour Weekly, ca. 1925), and *More Rebel Songs for Sixpence* (London: Labour Weekly, ca. 1925).

<sup>140</sup> On Lansbury and the Daily Herald, see John Shepherd, *George Lansbury: At the Heart of Old Labour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 138-157. On his resignation from the Daily Herald, 222-224.

<sup>141</sup> Edgar Lansbury, *George Lansbury: My Father* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co, 1934), 99.

The majority of songs included in the first song book ('Sixteen Songs for Sixpence') were already part of the standard socialist repertoire. Included in the publication are for instance 'The International', 'The Red Flag', 'The March of the Workers', 'England, Arise!'. From the remaining songs, the majority belongs to those by poets already used by the socialists (William Morris, Percy Shelley, Ebenezer Elliott and Edward Carpenter). What was new however in socialist song book anthologies was the inclusion of two Russian Songs, 'The March Song of the Red Army' and 'The Red Army March', which had almost identical titles, were arranged by the same composer (who appears as R. Liebich), both describing the effort of the Russian people to overthrow the ruling classes, 'the crown of the tyrants of favour', as it was translated in English.<sup>142</sup> While the first song calls the workers to save the world, the starving children and the poor with the Red Flag as their guide, the second describes then fighting united for Liberty against the oppressive rulers.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> No information could be found about this composer.

<sup>143</sup> Douglas Robson and R. Liebich, 'March Song of the Red Army' in *Sixteen Songs*, 7, and R. Liebich, 'The Red Army March', in *Sixteen Songs*, 14. Lansbury's support to Russia is well documented. Having been an advocate of the 1917 Revolution, he travelled to Russia in 1920 and had an opportunity to meet Lenin, a meeting that led to the speculation that the *Daily Herald* was financed by Russian money, an accusation he strenuously denied. He may have experienced Russian songs while in Russia, as he additionally reported from various locations and working class environments, such as labour organisations and factories. See Anon. 'Mr Lansbury in Russia' in *The Times*, 22 March 1920. For more details about Lansbury's visit to Russia, see Shepherd, *George Lansbury*, 183-188. Lansbury also published his account of this trip in his publication *What I saw in Russia* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1920).

**Ex. 1.4: Douglas Robson and R. Liebich, 'March Song of the Red Army', in George Lansbury, *More Rebel Songs for Sixpence* (London: Labour Weekly, c. 1925), 7, bars 1-4.**

Musical score for 'March Song of the Red Army' in G major, 4/4 time. The score consists of two systems. The first system contains three measures with the lyrics: "Whirl-winds of dan - ger are rag - ing around us O'er whelm-ing forc - es of". The second system contains one measure with the lyrics: "dark - ness as - sail". The music features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with various chords and rhythmic patterns.

**Ex. 1.5: R. Liebich, 'The Red Army March', in George Lansbury, *More Rebel Songs for Sixpence* (London: Labour Weekly, c. 1925), 14, bars 1-4.**

Musical score for 'The Red Army March' in G major, 4/4 time. The score consists of one system with four measures. The lyrics are: "Com-rads the bug - les are sound - ing Shoul der your arms for the fray". The music features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with various chords and rhythmic patterns. A dynamic marking of *f* (forte) is present at the beginning of the first measure.

The second publication included three Russian songs ('The Chain Song', 'Red Cavalry Song' and 'A Funeral Song') but also American songs, highlighting the contradiction of people 'dying of hunger, privation, unemployment and homelessness' in the 'home of the brave and the free'.<sup>144</sup> There are also two songs by Boughton (his 'Song of the Labourer', op. 17 no. 3, from his collection 'Songs of Manhood', the text for this song is by Ellwyn Hoffman, and the 'Song of War' with text by Langdon Everard) both written in 1903. None of them can be said to be particularly challenging for an amateur choir. The 'Song of the Labourer' for

<sup>144</sup> Lansbury, *More Rebel Songs*, Forward.

instance is marked as 'Slow and Heavy' and while it is in 6/8 it does not contain any modulations or complicated rhythmic devices, while its length is only one page. While the 'Song of the Labourer' describes the grim reality of the labourers, the 'Song of War' urges workers to stand united and fight their battles with courage.<sup>145</sup>

The three recordings which appeared with the second song book ('More Rebel songs for Sixpence',) contained two songs each: 'The Red Flag' and 'The International', 'England, Arise!' and 'God Save the People', 'The Red Army March' and 'Lift the People's Banners' with another set of three being in preparation: 'The Rebel Song' and 'Hear a Word', 'March Song of the Red' and 'What, ho! My lads', and 'March of the Workers' along with a three minutes talk by George Lansbury. All of them were also to be included in one 'record album'.<sup>146</sup> The songs recorded were apparently originally rejected by other record companies and the decision to release them was mainly made to stem a problematic decrease in the *Labour Weekly* circulation.<sup>147</sup> There is no other indication, for instance, whether that there were other motives for the release of these recordings (such as demand on behalf of the readers). The date of the release is not clear, though it was probably sometime between 1925 and December 1926.<sup>148</sup>

The publication of the two song books along with the issuing of the recordings confirms the socialist interest in music. The fact for instance that the newspaper thought these recordings will help in its circulation is quite telling. It is also indicative that Soviet songs were included in the two song books: From an examination of the repertoire used by the Union, there are no indications that either the Union, or any local socialist choir used any songs from Russia at that stage. This perhaps might indicate a rift between socialist singers (and perhaps choirs) from as early as 1925, with some of them being happy to include Russian songs in their repertoire, while others (like choirs participating in the LLCU) preferring the more traditional socialist songs as appropriate repertoire. Of course, the fact

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<sup>145</sup> Lansbury, *More Rebel Songs*.

<sup>146</sup> All information about the recordings was found at the back cover of *More Rebel Songs for Sixpence*.

<sup>147</sup> All recordings can be found at <http://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/Library/Archives-Online/Recordings-from-Lansburys-Labour-Weekly>, accessed 23 July 2014. See also Shepherd, *George Lansbury*, 246.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* Shepherd cites as his source Professor Philip Bagwell and not the Bishopsgate Institute. He also mentions recording no. 6 as being released in 1926, but does not clarify whether this was the first record release or not. None of the songs in these recordings uses choir.



that these two song books were not published for the use of any choir should also be considered, as they appear to have been exclusively issued to raise sales for the paper, rather than for any other reason.

### **Popularity and unpopularity of the Union and its Festival.**

In 1925 the venue of the Festival changed from the Shoreditch Town Hall, which offered a limited seating of 600 people, to the more prestigious Kingsway Hall with a capacity of 2,000 people, a result of the membership rise.<sup>149</sup> Indeed, by 1925 the Union grew from 8 choirs and an aggregated membership of 261 members to 14 choirs and 500 members. By 1926, when the membership reached 635 members the festival was separated from the competition and two different venues were used: Queen's Hall for the festival, and Eccleston Guildhouse for the competition. Queen's Hall was seen as the ideal venue for the event, with a capacity of 3,000 persons including the orchestra, compared to 2,000 seats of Kingsway Hall, and was deemed more appropriate to accommodate both choir members and audience.

Queen's Hall was one of the most important concert venues in London during the 1920s<sup>150</sup> which explains why the change of venue was described as 'a bold step forward'.<sup>151</sup> It could also be argued that its use by the Union signified the workers' ability to conquer a symbol of 'High Brow Music', a venue dominated by the middle classes both as audiences and as performers. Morrison commented in 1925:

The modern working class is not waiting for well-to-do-people, however well-intentioned, to uplift them. We are going to uplift ourselves [...] We are going to force the doors open, we are going to take our place at the feast of beauty. There will be an Art of the People, produced by the People, played by the People, enjoyed by

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<sup>149</sup> Morrison to secretaries of local Labour parties, 25 June 1925, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/10. For a list of the Union's festivals, see Appendix 2.

<sup>150</sup> Its official opening took place in 1893, and became the first home of the promenade concerts, with the first such concert taking place in August 1895. The Hall's Orchestra (Queen's Hall Orchestra) 'created' the London Symphony Orchestra in 1904, which appeared under some of the most significant conductors of that period between 1922 and 1924, including Goossens, Busoni and Furtwängler.

<sup>151</sup> Leaflet, 'The Work of the London Labour Party, 1927', LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/12.

the People, for we will not be content with the commercialized stuff of modern capitalist society.<sup>152</sup>

The practice of having the Festival and the competition as separate events in those two venues (Queen's Hall and Eccleston Guildhouse) continued until the 1930s, though the bigger and more prestigious venue alone was not enough to generate larger audiences or ensure a successful event. The decision of splitting the Festival from the contest however put a great strain on the already suffering finances of the Union. There was, in fact, a decline in membership between 1924 when the Union was founded, and 1928: Having started with 8 choirs and 261 members altogether, it reached 20 choirs and 635 members by 1926, but this was followed by a decline to 19 choirs and 595 members in 1927, and 18 choirs amounting to 572 members a year later. The combination of the decline in membership and the choice of a bigger venue, led to a disastrous 1929 Festival which generated a £30 loss (some £1,002.60 in today's money).<sup>153</sup>

The decline in membership and the unpopularity of the Union's festival raises the question of what really changed between 1926 and 1928. The first, and probably most significant factor to consider, is the political developments in Britain during the mid-1920s. The wide variety of socialist groups active between 1900 and 1920 were indicative of an elusive struggle for socialist unity.<sup>154</sup> This was further fuelled by the formation of the Comintern (Communist International) in Russia in 1919, which was conceived as a 'parent organisation' of which all national communist parties were seen as constituent members.<sup>155</sup> A number of British socialist organisations attempted to affiliate to it as a means of

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<sup>152</sup> Herbert Morrison in *The London News*, August 1925.

<sup>153</sup> Summary of Reports of the Executive Committee, 30 September 1926, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/12. Figures on memberships are compiled from various sources and archives, primarily from the London Labour Party Archive. For conversion of money in today's values, see [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency), where there is the option of automatically converting the money. The year used for this was 1925. A second site was used to understand how the money was divided in the 1920s. [www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/questions/moneyold.htm](http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/questions/moneyold.htm).

<sup>154</sup> For details of the various socialist organisations, see Leslie Macfarlane, *The British Communist Party: Its origin and development until 1929* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1996), 18-31. Some of the associations, which were founded already in the 1880s included the Socialist Democratic Federation (SDF), an organisation founded in 1881 and of which William Morris was a member. A further organisation was the Independent Labour Party (ILP) of 1893. Additionally, between 1900 and 1916 the Socialist Labour Party was formed (in 1903, an organisation that grew out of the SDF) and the British Socialist Party (BSP) which resulted from the amalgamation of the ILP and the SDF in 1911. In 1913 the Workers Socialist Federation (WSF) was formed, headed by Sylvia Pankhurst, and 1917 was the year of the United Socialist Council formation, which resulted from the amalgamation of the BSP and the ILP.

<sup>155</sup> Thorpe, *The British Communist Party*, 7, and Thorpe, 'Comintern 'control' of the Communist Party of Great Britain', in *English Historical Review*, 113 (June 1998), 637-662, here 637.

achieving ‘socialist unity through the Communist International, both to defend the Revolution and to carry it into Britain’.<sup>156</sup> The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) itself was formed after a Unity meeting in July 1920 with the participation of other socialist organisations such as the British Socialist Party, the Socialist Labour Party, the Workers Socialist Federation, where delegates agreed on ‘acceptance of the Soviet System, Dictatorship of the Proletariat and affiliation to the Third International’, as well as affiliation to the Labour Party.<sup>157</sup>

The General Strike of May 1926 gave hope to the CPGB that it had the potential to develop into an organisation of a similar size to the Labour Party, which already had 3,388,286 members (as opposed to the 12,000 members that the CPGB had in October 1926, the highest number of members for that year).<sup>158</sup> But the Strike divided the Left further instead as miners found themselves ‘locked out of the pits until they would agree to substantial wage reductions’, while twelve days after the strike started, the Trades Union Council General Council was forced to ‘submit to the government’s demands’, accepting a cut in wages, and the 8 hour day proposed by the government.<sup>159</sup> The Communist Party however seized the opportunity to demonstrate militancy, condemn the Labour Party for its betrayal of the miners, and to make significant efforts to organise workers, supporting them in their struggle.<sup>160</sup> Clearly, as MacFarlane argues, the Party saw the political opportunity of the situation:

The Communist Party was the only party on the left to see the political possibilities of the General Strike and its clear political line was in sharp contrast to the scarcely veiled opposition to the Strike from the leaders of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the timidity and confusion of the leaders of the TUC General Council.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Leslie John MacFarlane, *The British Communist Party: Its origins and development until 1929* (London: MacGibbon & Key, 1966), 23.

<sup>157</sup> Macfarlane, *The British*, 55. According to Pelling, Sylvia Pankhurst disagreed with the idea of affiliation and re-named her WSF to the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International’ at the same year the CPGB was formed (1920). Delegates on the Unity convention agreed to name the new party as ‘Communist Party of Great Britain’ to distinguish it from that of Pankhurst. For more details, see Pelling, *The British Communist Party*, 7-10, and Macfarlane, *The British*, 65-68.

<sup>158</sup> For membership figures of the CPGB see Andrew Thorpe, ‘The membership of the CPGB 1920-1943’, in *Historical Journal*, 43, 3 (2000), 777-800, here 781. For membership figures of the Labour Party see Reid and Pelling, *The British Labour Party*, 206-207.

<sup>159</sup> Margaret Morris, *The British General Strike of 1926* (London: The Historical Association, 1973), 1-9.

<sup>160</sup> Pelling, *the British Communist Party*, 63.

<sup>161</sup> Macfarlane, *The British*, 164.

The militancy of the Party, which saw about 5,000 of its members being persecuted, and some 400 jailed, was accompanied by a significant rise in membership. Having started with just 5,125 members in 1920 (the year of its formation), it fell to 4,900 by January 1926, but rose to 10,730 by September that year and to a further 12,000 by October.<sup>162</sup> However, between 1925 and 1926 it lost 14,416 members (3,388,286) a loss that rose dramatically in 1927 to 94,617 members (3,293,615). Only between 1927 and 1928, the Labour Party lost 1,001,446 members, falling to 2,292,169 members for the first time during the 1920s, which seems to imply that the General Strike and the Party's actions during it led to a significant decline in membership.<sup>163</sup> It could therefore be argued that the same tendency was also evident in the Union's membership, as was stated above, with Labour Party members not only leaving the Party itself, but abandoning also activities that the party offered, such as the Union.

Quite apart from the implications of a political event such as the General Strike, there are also other factors that could have led to the decline in the Union's membership and the demise of its Festival. At this juncture for instance, the advent of the radio cannot be underestimated as a contributing factor, as it was the medium responsible for bringing music into every home. The BBC which was initially formed in 1922 as British Broadcasting Company, divided musical culture in Britain.<sup>164</sup> It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that it was blamed for almost everything: the decline in concert attendances, decline in sales of sheet music, and even the students' reluctance to practice their instruments, allegedly because they were listening to the radio instead. Duncan Hall, however, asserts that in fact, the opposite was true. The radio simply created a desire to listeners to see 'what they have heard on the wireless', which resulted in larger audiences at concerts, while 'sheet music sales increased sharply owing to the huge demand for live dance music'.<sup>165</sup> It could therefore be argued that the attitude towards the radio as a medium was merely

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<sup>162</sup> For imprisonment of CPGB members see Macfarlane, *The British*, 166. For membership see figures of the CPGB see Thorpe, 'The membership' 781.

<sup>163</sup> Reid and Pelling, *The British Labour Party*, 206-207. The Party did not accept individual membership until 1920, when it saw its membership at the highest level during the 1920s, to 4,359,807, when the CPGB had just 5,125 members as it was explained above.

<sup>164</sup> Stephen Jones, *Workers at Play: A social and economic history of leisure 1918-1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 104.

<sup>165</sup> Duncan Hall, *A pleasant change from politics: Music and the British Labour Movement between the Wars* (London: New Clarion Press, 2001), 152.

scaremongering on behalf of the music establishment, as Hall has proved, as there is no concrete evidence that it indeed harmed music in any way.

The popularity of Dance Halls and the cinema might have been another reason why the Union and its festival lost support by 1928. Between 1918 and 1924, about 10,000 new dance halls and night clubs opened in London.<sup>166</sup> As well as promoting music, the radio also became the medium used to widely advertise popular events. Quite apart from Dance Halls and cinemas, the electric recording introduced in 1925 was also a significant change in entertainment. Between 1927 and 1929 alone, 40 manufacturing gramophone and record companies were formed in the UK, an indication of the gramophone's popularity.<sup>167</sup>

As a result of the Festival's unpopularity, the finances of the Union began to suffer, though it should be stressed that the organisation does not appear to have been particularly stable financially at any point. Right from the start, collection of affiliation fees from local Labour Party Branches was almost impossible, though it is not clear whether lack of money on behalf of the local branches, or lack of necessary mechanisms to collect fees on behalf of the LLP was to blame.<sup>168</sup> The fees were set at a sixpence per member per year, but choirs could affiliate only under the condition that each choir had at least 20 members, amounting to ten shillings per year (in today's money, that would be £14.99 per year for each choir).<sup>169</sup>

Not accepting individual memberships, however, was a factor that restricted the Union's income, particularly during its first years of operation. This changed in 1925 when individual memberships from areas where socialist choirs did not yet exist were accepted (at three pennies per week) but only on the condition that members would agree to join local choirs as soon as they were formed.<sup>170</sup> In this context, it becomes clear that forming new choirs basically served two purposes: propaganda, but also additional income for the organisation.

The combination of various other responsibilities (such as hiring venues for events, organising contests and festivals) along with the difficulty of collecting affiliation fees,

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<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*, 44.

<sup>167</sup> Jones, *Workers at Play*, 52.

<sup>168</sup> Various letters from Morrison to local Labour Parties, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/9 and A/10.

<sup>169</sup> London Labour Choral Union Draft Constitution, 1 February 1924, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/9.

<sup>170</sup> Reports of the Executive, 1924-25, 'individual Membership', LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/11.

resulted in an almost yearly deficit.<sup>171</sup> By the end of 1924 it had reached £33,15.04 – some £1.011,99 in today's money, while a year later it was reduced to an impressive £5 (£149.85), a result of the rise in membership (from 8 choirs and 261 members, to 14 and 401 respectively). Nevertheless, rise in membership alone was not a guarantee of better finances: in 1926 when the membership of the Union reached its highest numbers (20 choirs and 635 members), the deficit rose again this time to £24 (£719.28). This was possibly the result of the separate Festival and choral contest of 1926, when the deposit for hiring the Queen's Hall was £31 (£929.07).

An additional financial headache for the organisation was the publication of the material needed for events, such as scores. Curwen was the only publishing house willing to associate its name with a socialist choir and as a result became the only publisher to provide printed material for the competitions and festivals.<sup>172</sup> This was almost certainly the reason why in 1925 Boughton proposed the formation of a publishing company that would enable the Union to publish its own material, though it should be stressed that this was suggested primarily for the Union to be independent, rather than any censorship tendencies on behalf of Curwen.<sup>173</sup> The venture was also suggested as a much-needed source of income for the Union, as it was estimated that 3,000 copies of a printed score would generate a profit of £37.<sup>174</sup> Although the idea was initially accepted by the LLP and it actually resulted in a publication in September 1925 (Dunhill's 'A Call to Arms'), by 1927 it was decided to abandon the publishing company altogether as it too became unaffordable and an additional drain to the Union's finances.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Figures compiled by a wide range of archival material, including letters, reports of executive and articles that appeared in the Party's organ, *The London News*. Archival material used was primarily from LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/9, A/10, A/11 and A/12.

<sup>172</sup> Programme of the first contest, 11 November 1924, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/10. The Curwen firm was associated with the amateur choral singing in general because of its Tonic Sol-Fa Publications. Both Spencer Curwen and his father, John, played a significant role of promoting music as an activity with moral dimensions. John was a congregational minister with no musical education. After discovering Sarah Glover's Sol-Fa method of teaching children music, John adopted it and developed it further. In 1963 he founded the firm Curwen & Sons, which practically became the advocate of the method that John re-named as 'Tonic Sol-Fa', and associated it with philanthropic movements of the Victorian era, mainly the temperance and missionary movements, by promoting the method as the best way to learn music and promote moral reform through this. For Curwen promoting the Tonic Sol-Fa as an activity with moral dimensions, see MacGuire, *Music and Victorian Philanthropy: The Tonic Sol-Fa Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>173</sup> Memorandum on Music Publishing, 28 August 1925, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/11.

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> Memorandum on Music Publishing, 28 August 1925, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/11.

## Conclusions.

One of the most pertinent questions raised by the formation of the LLCU is whether the Union was indeed seen by the socialists (or by the LLP that organised it) as an entertainment activity: Was this intended to keep the workers out of the pubs, for instance? And to what extent was this meant to represent a self-help activity, an organisation provided by workers to educate other workers? To a degree, the question as to whether this was an educational activity, has been answered above, as it is clear from the archival evidence that the Union had indeed an educational purpose. Deptford choir's participation in the 1923 Elizabethan Festival for example (a Festival that had nothing to do with socialism) points towards the strong educational purpose these choirs had, attempting to provide music education to workers. In this sense, the Union can be seen as an organisation along the lines of mutual improvement societies, the aim of which were to give workers a chance to develop new skills, and which were usually organised by co-operative associations. Jonathan Rose for instance mentions the first such associations as being organised either by working or lower middle classes, under the auspices of churches or chapels, giving workers an opportunity to develop oratory skills.<sup>176</sup>

Indeed, by 1847 apparently 'hardly any village in West Riding or Lancashire was without a Mutual Improvement Society'.<sup>177</sup> In London, they seem to have appeared around the 1790s, with their precursor being the London Mechanical Institute of 1817.<sup>178</sup> As a matter of fact, it was out of this organisation that a Mutual Improvement Society was born, which included in its activities also music for one night a week, along with reading and discussions (though the nature of them is not specified) for the remaining nights.<sup>179</sup> Most of these societies appeared to have appealed, as they offered members opportunities for entertainment, political discussions (usually radical in nature), but were also seen as a way to 'ameliorate badly paid toil', not to mention of course a chance to socialise.<sup>180</sup> It could

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<sup>176</sup> Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 58.

<sup>177</sup> Christopher Radcliffe, 'Mutual Improvement Societies and the forging of Working-Class political consciousness in nineteenth-century England', in *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, Vol. 16, no. 2 (March-April 1997), 141-155, here 142.

<sup>178</sup> *ibid.*, 146.

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *ibid.*, 147.

therefore be argued that the Union resembles in this respect these societies (defined by Rose as 'friendly society[ies] devoted to education'<sup>181</sup>) as part of its aims was to educate workers musically. In actual fact, Rose mentions the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (which as mentioned had a choir participating in the Union) as another example of an 'organisation that made a contribution to mutual education'.<sup>182</sup>

There is no indication, however, to assume that the main aim of the Union was to keep workers out of other activities such as pubs for example, at least not during these early years of the Union that this chapter examines. There is indeed no correspondence either from Morrison or from Boughton to imply that this was the case, and as a result it is impossible to know. One suspects however, given there are no references to this in any correspondence (or indeed in Boughton's articles on music and socialism) that during the 1920s, this was not the case.

A second interesting question is what the workers were hoping to achieve through the Union. Was this an opportunity for them to receive music education that they could not afford otherwise? Was this entertainment, even a way for them to demonstrate their loyalty to the party and its activities? Or was it all of the above? Again, the lack of evidence regarding membership, either figures or testimonials of choir members that participated in the Union's socialist choirs during the 1920s, makes it impossible to know. Certainly though, the working classes were particularly fond of music and took every opportunity they could participate in musical activities. By 1913 for example, about 86 percent of working class families in Britain did so, and this included anything from 'Sunday singalongs, playing a violin or accordion, banging away at a piano or harmonium (with or without lessons), playing gramophones, singing in a choir, attending the opera or a band concert'.<sup>183</sup> It is, therefore, evident that music played a significant part in working class life.

But it wasn't just music of course that workers were interested in, and this is perhaps important to stress, as it puts the Union in the context of a working class interested in many other activities. Durham mining villages of the 1880s for example had the chance to experience Shakespeare through visits of 'caravans of barnstorming actors', which led many

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<sup>181</sup> Rose, *The intellectual*, 58.

<sup>182</sup> *ibid*, 78-79.

<sup>183</sup> Rose, *The intellectual*, 197.



workers appropriating Shakespeare as a working class hero, though this interest waned at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>184</sup> In many UK cities, libraries provided by workers for the use of other workers were apparently a frequent phenomenon until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, an indication of the demand for books by the working classes.<sup>185</sup> Science was another area of interest, with many workers excelling, most notably the Scottish naturalist Thomas Edward (1814-1886), whose occupation was a shoemaker, but his interest in science led to his election as an associate of the prestigious Linnean Society in 1866.<sup>186</sup> As a result, workers did not participate only in choirs when they had free time, but showed interest in a variety of subjects, quite often supported by mutual improvement societies.

The Union's membership figures also appear to imply that a number of choir members saw the Union as a political activity, one through which they demonstrated their loyalty to the party. This is particularly evident after 1926 and the consequences that the General Strike had for the Labour Party. Between 1926 and 1928 the LLCU went down from 20 to 18 choirs, with the aggregate membership falling from 635 in 1926 to just 572 in 1928, a clear indication that Labour Party members were deserting both the party and its various activities. The declining membership figures of the Labour Party were indicative of this disillusionment that many of its supporters felt: The 3,388,286 members of 1925, were reduced to 2,292,169 by 1928, with the majority of them disaffiliating between 1927 and 1928, when the party lost 1,001,446 members.

The early years of the Union therefore were primarily spent in propaganda activities supporting the party, and with a preoccupation of educating workers in music, following the path of previous socialist choirs that were active in Britain. Even the format of the Festival and contest followed the steps of that organised by the CVUs (the CVUs festivals for instance also contained the element of drawing the pieces to be performed on the day by ballot, as did the LLCU's festival) but there was one perhaps significant difference: The Union's repertoire clearly showed a tendency to escape the repertoire used by other socialist choirs. There were hardly any Elizabethan songs used (a popular repertoire for some of its affiliated choirs, such as the one in Deptford), while the repertoire gradually

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<sup>184</sup> *ibid.*, 122-4.

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*, 73.

<sup>186</sup> *ibid.*, 70.

gravitated towards songs by British composers of the time, including those composed by the Union's conductor, Rutland Boughton. A further significant difference between the Union and organisations that preceded it was the tendency to avoid the very common practice of using popular tunes to set new socialist text. Instead, choir members were more often than not required to learn new songs from scores (therefore to have or to develop the ability to read music) which inevitably increased the element of education in the Union's aims.

## Chapter 2

### **The Union's development between 1929 and 1934.**

#### **1929: The beginning of a new era.**

Some of the immediate consequences of the General Strike such as the widespread confusion experienced by the Left, leading to Labour Party members not only abandoning the Party but also the Union which was attached to it, paved the way for a new phase in the Union's history. Three notable events came to the surface during this period: Boughton's resignation from the Union's conductorship, Morrison's resignation from the Union's leadership, and the fact that this allowed Alan Bush to take over, replacing Boughton as the Union's conductor.

Boughton belonged to a group of Labour Party supporters that became disillusioned with the party after the General Strike and aligned themselves more closely to Communism. After 1926, he was increasingly critical of the Labour Party through the pages of the Left-wing newspaper *Daily Herald*, to which he had contributed regularly since 1923. His initial target had been the newspaper's editor, Hamilton Fyfe. One particular bone of contention between the two men had been Boughton's tendency to contribute long articles on matters other than music. This resulted in Fyfe's discontent on what he saw as Boughton's 'long screeds' about trade unionism rather than on musical matters.<sup>187</sup> The feud between them escalated further during the mid-1920s, according to Boughton's biographer, Michael Hurd, with Boughton being convinced that his freedom of speech was compromised by Fyfe's 'restraining hand', which was widely interpreted as the Labour Party's attempt to 'officially compromise in all important issues'.<sup>188</sup>

Boughton attacked the Labour Party through his articles, though indirectly, by attacking Fyfe personally, accusing him of following orders from the Party: in June 1926 he produced a scathing review of Fyfe's book *'Behind the Scenes of the Great Strike'* for another left newspaper, the *Workers Weekly*, sarcastically recommending it as one providing excellent evidence to remind workers of the Labour Party's treason, of 'how MacDonald, Henderson, Thomas and the rest contributed to the sufferings of the coming

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<sup>187</sup> Michael Hurd, *Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festivals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 171. I have not been able to verify this source.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

months [of the General Strike]'.<sup>189</sup> In November of the same year, he claimed that an article on the Musicians' Union, which highlighted the fact that the Union's needs 'happened to conflict with MacDonald's policy in foreign affairs', was turned down, and as a result he wondered whether the *Daily Herald* belonged 'to the Labour movement as a whole, or is it an instrument for imposing upon us an oligarchy of officials'.<sup>190</sup> Quite indicative perhaps of his disillusionment with the Labour Party is what he thought about the party's reaction during the General Strike:

It came out very clearly during the General Strike. Eccleston Square sent out agonised appeals that the masses should trust their leaders and that while these leaders were receiving such a measure of trust as had never before been accorded to British Labour leaders. Perhaps part of the agony lay in the fact that they knew as they sent out the appeals that they were engaged in betraying those who trusted them. Anyhow, it was very noticeable that while these cries were ringing, the Communists were making an exactly opposite appeal, urging the Labour 'leaders' to trust the people who were standing so solid and faithful even where they were isolated in little country places, even while they were being lied to and threatened by means of every instrument which the Government could control and organise. The difference of mentality is a vital one. So long as officials trust their rank and file, so long as theoretical socialists realise that the masses of the people (even though starved of education) are a creative and not a destructive force (as the master class quite honestly fears), so long these officials will be faithful.<sup>191</sup>

Boughton finally joined the CPGB in 1926 and even visited Russia a year later after an invitation from the USSR Society for Cultural Relations, to attend the celebrations for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian Revolution.<sup>192</sup> Hurd points out that his resignation was more the product of his difficulties commuting to London for the Union's rehearsals, after he relocated to Kilcot in 1927.<sup>193</sup> In the letter of resignation which was published at the *Sunday Worker* in July 1929, however, it is evident that politics played a more significant role in this.<sup>194</sup> The final straw appears to have been the Union's expected participation in a 'Victory

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<sup>189</sup> Rutland Boughton, 'Wanted: A proletarian editor for the Daily Herald' in *Workers Weekly*, 11 June 1926.

<sup>190</sup> Rutland Boughton, 'How come these traitors?' in *Labour Monthly*, 8 (November 1926), 691-696.

<sup>191</sup> *ibid.*, 693.

<sup>192</sup> Hurd, 183.

<sup>193</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Rutland Boughton, 'Boughton breaks with Morrison', in *Sunday Worker*, 7 July 1929.

Celebration' at Queen's Hall in June 1929, honouring the second Labour Government of 1929. This was regarded by Boughton as a celebration of capitalism, rather than of the workers:

The victory has been one for those capitalist interests which have induced the Labour leaders to take the reign of government under such circumstances that only a liberal policy can be followed. Indeed, worse may happen: the LP government may even find itself in the position of completing the shackling of existing working class organisations and so enable the next government to enforce an active fascist policy. Further it seems to me that putting the most favourable interpretation upon the heading speeches of Mr MacDonald and other Labour leaders a merely liberal policy in the interests of the capitalist system is what they intend.<sup>195</sup>

Boughton's contempt for the Labour Party, however, did not extend to Morrison, to whom he referred to as an 'organising genius':

I have much admired your genius for organisation and at one time hoped that the day might not be far off when that genius would have been placed at the service of a socialist state. Had a militant socialist policy been pursued by the LP during the last ten years, I believe you would have been found to date on the side of the workers. Now you also are pledged to the conditions of a capitalist institutions and the sheer joy you have in handling your machine will, I fear, place you presently in open opposition to the welfare of the workers of this country and of the world.<sup>196</sup>

Morrison's resignation from the Union was the second decisive factor that contributed to a new era in the Union's history. As the 1929 Labour Government came to power, he assumed the position of Minister of Transport, making it impossible for him to keep up with the Union's leadership on behalf of the Party, inevitably leading to his resignation from the LLCU.<sup>197</sup> Although he appointed other officials to act on his behalf in the Union's Executive Committee, his resignation quite possibly signalled the end of the Party's direct involvement with the LLCU. Without a doubt, Bush's arrival at the leadership of the Union was by far the most decisive factor that led the Union to a new phase.

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<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> Bernard Donoghue and G W Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a politician* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 129, and Memorandum by the Chairman and Treasurer, 4 July 1929, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/14.

Bush was born in 1900 in Dulwich into a wealthy family. His musical career started at the Royal Academy of Music in 1918 where he studied composition and piano, and continued as a professor of composition from 1925, a post he held until his retirement in 1975. After completing his studies in London, he visited Berlin for the first time in 1928 initially to study piano with Artur Schnabel, and later enrolled at the University of Berlin where he studied music and philosophy between 1929 and 1931.<sup>198</sup> His involvement in politics started in 1924 when he joined the Independent Labour Party (ILP), which he abandoned for the Labour Party in 1929, after the ILP's disaffiliation from the Labour Party. Between 1924 and 1929 he became involved in working class socialist choirs, initially conducting the Finchley Socialist Choir from as early as 1925, during the Union's second Annual Festival and contest.<sup>199</sup> A year later (1926) he also appears as conductor of the Union in an event organised by the London Labour Party for the *Daily Herald*.<sup>200</sup> This was no doubt, the beginning of his 'life-long association with choral conducting, with workers' choirs in particular and with the whole musical life of the Labour movement'.<sup>201</sup>

Bush soon acquired a reputation for being a conductor with a 'vigorous and precise style', quite often conducting without the need of scores during the rehearsals.<sup>202</sup> Without a doubt, a seminal influence on his development as a choral director were his frequent visits to Germany, which played a decisive role in his perception of what should constitute an 'ideal socialist song'. Shortly after his first visit in 1928, he had the opportunity to attend a rehearsal of a branch of the German Workers Music Movement, the *Deutsche Arbeitersängerbund* (DAS), from which he concluded, somewhat disappointed, that the movement in London was still in its infancy.<sup>203</sup> As well as the size of the Hall where the German choir was rehearsing, the repertoire was what Bush found even more impressive since it often featured songs by the unknown composer to him at that point, Hanns Eisler.<sup>204</sup> In order to appreciate Bush's influence on the Union, it is vital to understand Eisler's

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<sup>198</sup> Nancy Bush, *Alan Bush*, 14-20.

<sup>199</sup> Concert programme, Union's second Annual contest at Kingsway Hall, 11 December 1925, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/11.

<sup>200</sup> Concert programme, London Labour Party Demonstration for the Daily Herald, Royal Albert Hall, 7 February 1926, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/12.

<sup>201</sup> Nancy Bush, *Alan Bush*, 17.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>203</sup> Alan Bush, 'Für Hanns Eisler: Beiträge von Freunden, Motarbeitern und Schülern', in *Sinn und Form, Sonderheft Hanns Eisler*, 1964, 329-333. Unfortunately Bush does not give titles.

<sup>204</sup> *ibid.*, 329.

influence on his workers' music, since one of Bush's main contributions to the Union was the introduction of new songs (quite often composed by him) to the its existing repertoire.

### **Eisler's influence on Bush's workers' music.**

In an article written for a volume dedicated to the memory of Hanns Eisler, which was published in 1964 by the *Deutsche Akademie der Künste*, Bush indicates Eisler's workers' songs as having had a crucial influence in his own musical development after 1928.<sup>205</sup> He reinforces this impression by discussing the DAS rehearsal he attended, pointing out that he brought Eisler's 'Solidaritätslied' and 'Heimlicher Aufmarsch' to Britain after another visit to Berlin in 1931.<sup>206</sup> To assess the degree to which Eisler's music influenced Bush's development, it would be useful to consider five songs he composed between 1926 and 1931 ('Song to Labour' (1926), 'Song to the Men of England' and 'The Road' (1929), 'Question and Answer', 1931, and 'Hunger Marchers' Song', 1934) and then compare them with Eisler's songs from the same period such as 'Rote Wedding' (1928/1929) and 'Solidaritätslied' (1929-1930).

The 'Song to Labour' was Bush's first attempt at composing workers songs specifically for the Union. It was composed on Boughton's request, after Bush impressed him with his String Quartet in A Minor (*Dialectic*).<sup>207</sup> The Song betrays a man who 'knows how to get the best out of amateur choirs' as Lewis Foreman points out.<sup>208</sup> It is a very simple four-part song in A major without any modulations or challenging rhythmic devices, energetic, with a text urging the workers to take the world in their 'skilled right hand' instead of just complaining about poverty and hunger.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid. Bush does not discuss individual songs by Eisler as having a particular influence on him, but a general influence that Eisler had on his musical development.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 330. Unfortunately he does not give the titles of the songs rehearsed that night.

<sup>207</sup> Nancy Bush, *Alan*, 18.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 105

<sup>209</sup> Alan Bush, 'Song to Labour', in Alan Bush and Leonard Pearce (ed.), *Twelve Labour Choruses* (London: ILP, 1930), n.p.

**Ex. 2.1: Alan Bush and Charlotte Perkin Gilman, ‘Song to Labour’, in Alan Bush and Leonard Pearce (ed.), *Twelve Labour Choruses* (London: I.L.P. Publication Department, 1930), n.p, bars 1-5.**

**Energetic**

S  
A  
T  
B

Shall you complain who feed the world, who clothe the world, who

5  
house the world? Shall

Similarly his ‘Song to the Men of England’ (based on a text by Percy Shelley) is equally simple musically. It is an A-B-A song with the text restricted to describing the sad situation of workers being exploited by their bosses.<sup>210</sup> Equally, ‘The Road’ (on a text by Violet Friedlaender) is another such example of a simple four part song, which again contrasts the hard-working workers and the bosses who own everything.<sup>211</sup>

<sup>210</sup> Alan Bush, [Song] To the Men of England (London: Curwen, 1929).

<sup>211</sup> Alan Bush and Violet Friedlaender, *The Road* (London: Curwen, 1929).



Ex. 2.2: Alan Bush and Violet Friedlaender, *The Road* (London: Curwen, 1929), bars 5-9.

Slowly, and with sustained intensity Broadly but very quietly

Soprano  
feet is heard up on the stones that now we break, we shall be -

Alto  
feet is heard up on the stones that now we break, we shall be

Tenor  
feet is heard up on the stones that now we break, we shall be

Bass  
feet is heard up on the stones that now we break we shall be

Piano

A Tempo

S.  
come to where the cross-roads meet For us the

A.  
come to where the cross-roads meet For us the

T.  
come to where the cross-roads meet For us the

B.  
come to where the corss - roads meet For us the

Pno.

Bush's 'Question and Answer' song however, is radically different in every respect from the previous ones cited here. Written on a text provided by the Union's Chairman Roy Atterbury, Bush abandons the notion of a utopian future for the working class and the acceptance of the status quo, for a determination to fight the ruling classes instead, with a

text that Emer Bailey has described in her dissertation on Bush's songs as having a 'pointed nature of anti-establishment'.<sup>212</sup> To begin with, the language is very simple and leaves no space for ambiguity. The most impressive element of the song is the fact that the audience is invited to participate in the dialogue during the song's performance, modelled to a certain extent on the Brechtian principle of *Lehrstück*.

Indeed, the printed score of the song has the clarification 'The choir asks the questions, the audience answers' in its subtitle.<sup>213</sup> The text is a juxtaposition of questions and answers, starting always with a question ('Are the workers badly fed?') followed by an answer ('Yes! Most of 'em') followed by another question ('Are the workers badly housed?') and another answer ('Yes! Most of 'em'), continuing along these lines, describing eloquently the worker's sad reality (of being badly fed, badly housed, being robbed and starved). In performance such a song seems more reminiscent of the kind of material one might expect soldiers to sing at a camp, rather than one where a pleasing melody is enjoyed by the audience. Of course, the practice of having the audience participating in the concert was already familiar to socialists as was mentioned in the previous chapter. The new element, however, is the fact the audience is expected to reply, rather than to sing along with the choir.

But it is not just the text that contains new elements: the music also appears to contain new components, being dominated by frequent pauses which appear in almost every two bars. In fact, a closer inspection reveals that the text dictates how the music should be composed: each pause is used in such a way as to facilitate the delivery of the question (posed by the choir) and the answer (given by the audience).<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Alan Bush and Roy Atterbury, 'Question and Answer', in *The Left Song Book*, Alan Bush and Randall Swingler (eds) (London: WMA, 1938), 56-57. Emer Bailey, *The Music and Politics of Alan Bush with reference to the application of his socialist principles to his workers' choral music and songs between 1926 and 1939* (MA Dissertation, Waterford Institute of Technology, 2013), 39.

<sup>213</sup> G R Atterbury and Alan Bush, 'Question and Answer' in *The Left Song Book* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), 56-57.

<sup>214</sup> *ibid.*

**Ex. 2.3: Alan Bush and Roy Atterbury, *Question and Answer*, in *The Left Song Book*, Alan Bush and Randall Swingler (eds) (London: WMA, 1938), 56-57 bars 3-6.**

Quick March Time

Are the wor - kers bad - ly fed? Yes!

Most of 'em!

The song has some notable similarities to Eisler's 'Rote Wedding' (1928/29). In this song, Eisler uses the opening 'links, links...' to give a marching feeling to the material, a deliberate ploy designed to not only to enhance political feelings, but also to enable a relationship to develop between performers and audience, by changing performers to demonstrators and those standing by as the audience.<sup>215</sup>

<sup>215</sup> Hartmut Fladt, Hanns-Werner Heister and Dietrich Stern, 'Eislers Massenlieder', in *Das Argument*, AS5 (Berlin: Argument Verlag, 1975), 154-182, here 163.

Ex. 2.4: Hanns Eisler, 'Die rote Wedding', in Manfred Grabs, *Hanns Eisler: Ausgewählte Lieder V. Lieder, Balladen, Chansons für Gesang und Klavier* (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1972), 6-8, bars 1-4.

Marschtempo

Links, links, links, links! Die Trom-meln wer - den ge - führt

This element of demonstration is also evident in Bush's 'Question and Answer', delivered through the short questions and answers being shouted between audience and performers. Other workers songs composed by Eisler during the late 1920s and early 1930s, also appear to have similar characteristics. His 'Solidaritätslied' (1929-30) has verses sung by the soloist and chorus sung by the choir, the verses presenting an argument, according to Fladt, Heister and Stern, with the consequences of the argument being highlighted in the chorus (sung by the choir).<sup>216</sup> In the last verse, for example, workers of the world are called to unite in order to be free, to break the tyranny of their governments, while the chorus that follows gives an indication as to how this will be achieved: by ever moving forward and never forgetting solidarity, both in good and bad times. In a similar manner, Bush has constructed his song in such a way, so that the answers delivered by the audience are highlighting the points made by each question the choir asks: 'Are the workers badly fed?' 'Yes! Most of 'em!' and so on.

Another common characteristic between Eisler's songs and Bush's 'Question and Answer' is the fact that solo voices are not stretched to their limits, an element which facilitates audience participation.<sup>217</sup> In the 'Solidaritätslied', for example,<sup>217</sup> the highest note is d'' which appears only in the last two bars of the chorus, while the soloist is limited to a

<sup>216</sup> *ibid.*, 156-7.

<sup>217</sup> *ibid.*, 157.

range between a and c''. Similarly in Bush's 'Question and Answer', the choir is limited to a range between d' and b'', with e'' appearing only once in bar 16.

**Ex. 2.5: Hanns Eisler, *Solidaritätslied*, in Manfred Grabs, *Hanns Eisler: Ausgewählte Lieder V. Lieder, Balladen, Chansons für Gesang und Klavier* (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1972), 22-23, bars 7-10.**

The image shows a musical score for the song 'Solidaritätslied'. It consists of two staves: a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in 4/4 time and has the lyrics: 'vor - wärts nicht ver - ges - sen die So - li - da - ri - tät!'. The piano accompaniment is in 4/4 time and features a rhythmic pattern of chords and moving lines in both hands.

In contrast, in his 'Song to Labour' which was more along the lines of a traditional four-part song, Bush seems to be making use of a wider range for the voices. The sopranos for instance appear to move between a'' and e'' very frequently, making it more difficult for the audience to participate or sing along. Eisler's influence, argues Joanna Bullivant in her PhD thesis on Modernism in Britain during the 1930s, enabled Bush to develop a musical language that was unique in Britain until the early 1930s though at the same time, he lacked the 'rhythmic vitality and innovative construction' of Eisler's works such as the 'Solidaritätslied'.<sup>218</sup> This influence nonetheless enabled him to depart from the standard four-part socialist songs that the Union was using during the 1920s.

Another work by Bush that demonstrates Eisler's influence is his 'Hunger Marchers' Song', which signified the beginning of his long collaboration with the left poet, Randall Swingler, who provided the text. A Communist Party member who joined in 1934, Swingler was, like Bush, from a comfortable upbringing, indeed, one of his uncles was apparently the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson.<sup>219</sup> Swingler's radicalisation started while he was a student at Oxford in 1930, and particularly after founding the Promethean Association in June that year, expressing 'generational revolt against the old men, the representatives of

<sup>218</sup> Joanna Louise Bullivant, *Musical Modernism and Left Wing Politics in 1930s Britain* (PhD Thesis, Oxford: 2009), 216.

<sup>219</sup> Andy Croft, 'Swingler, Randall Carline' in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography online, [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com)

the Pre-War' who were 'likely to lead Britain into another war'.<sup>220</sup> It was apparently through this organisation that he came into contact with other young like-minded individuals, who would eventually become CPGB members.<sup>221</sup> His connection to Bush starts possibly in 1933, when the two met under unclear circumstances, which also seems to imply that Bush was already frequenting Communist-sympathetic circles from as early as 1933.<sup>222</sup> The inspiration for his 'Hunger Marchers' song was provided by the fifth Hunger March, a form of protest first organised by the National Unemployed Workers Movement in 1922 so again, the text, described by Bailey as 'angry',<sup>223</sup> derived from actual events from workers' everyday life.<sup>224</sup> This time, the phraseology of the text appears to be closer to the militaristic language usually associated with the Communist Party: the workers are urged to continue their struggle, while verses contain sections of 'stamp, stamp, stamp, stamp' (hence the description of 'angry' from Bailey, cited above), and choruses concluding 'We will stamp the Starvation Government, beneath the workers' tread!'.<sup>225</sup> But also the musical language of the song is closer to the 'Question and Answer', rather than the 'Song to Labour': once again, it is to be sung in unison, with a limited vocal range for singers (c' to e'') while the section 'stamp, stamp' is to be 'shouted rather than sung'.

The techniques described above (used by Bush and Eisler) are the products of the German political theatre and Agitprop (Agitation-Propaganda). Originally a form of Theatre from Russia, it was conceived as a way of engaging amateurs as performers, and acting as a way of 'communicating news' to the largely illiterate Russian population with productions that included a mixture of theatre, gymnastics, song and dance, and scripts taken from everyday life (usually newspaper articles).<sup>226</sup> Works had to be simple, while the texts

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<sup>220</sup> Andy Croft, *Comrade Heart: A life of Randall Swingler* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 29-30.

<sup>221</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>222</sup> *ibid.*, 37-40. Croft suspects that Swingler was an active CPGB member by November 1934 as he is mentioned as a 'communist poet' in a book on Dylan Thomas. Swingler is mentioned there as 'very active in the communist interest, on the cultural front, acting as a sort of link between Party headquarters and bohemia'. Constantine FitzGibbon, *The life of Dylan Thomas* (London: J M Dent & sons, 1965). No page number is given. Not sure what this means. Is there not a precise page reference?

<sup>223</sup> Bailey, *The Music*, 43.

<sup>224</sup> 'Hunger Marches: When the unemployed fought back' in *The Socialist Newspaper*, 19 October 1911. For Bush and Swingler, see Andy Croft, *Comrade Heart: A life of Randall Swingler* (Manchester: MUP, 2003). The song was inspired by the fifth Hunger March, which arrived in London in February 1934, having left Glasgow in January that year. See Croft, *Comrade*, 44.

<sup>225</sup> Randall Swingler and Alan Bush, *The Song of the Hunger Marchers*, in Bush and Swingler, *Left*, 53-55. The song was written in 1934.

<sup>226</sup> Inness, *Erwin*, 23-24. Inness refers to the equivalent of the Town Crier in the European Tradition.

needed to be easily understood and easy to learn, hence the favouring of newspaper articles as the basis for scripts.<sup>227</sup> Members were encouraged to ‘express their opinion and their convictions on stage’.<sup>228</sup> Composing the music for the scripts was a collective activity, though quite often, rather than composing new music, popular songs were used, while unison singing was generally favoured as they were easier to learn by amateurs. One troupe member, summed up the ideal music for Agitprop theatre as:

[The music] was sung in unison. [...] Each word was articulated with a strong rhythm. For us it was the text that was important, and we underlined it with short rhythmical movements.<sup>229</sup>

The last extract seems to point towards exactly what Bush was attempting to achieve with his two newly-composed songs referred to above: The text was very important, the music ‘underlined’ it with ‘short rhythmical movements’, while for its greatest part the song was in unison, ensuring each word is ‘articulated’ with a ‘strong rhythm’. With the introduction of Agitprop elements in his workers songs and with a language moving closer to the Communists, Bush can be seen as attempting to give a new direction to the Union’s repertoire. Yet these attempts appear to have been timid at first, and nowhere is this more illustrated than the Song Book ‘Twelve Labour Choruses’ (co-edited by Bush along with Leonard Pearce), published in 1930 by the Independent Labour Party which somewhat surprisingly does not contain either the ‘Question and Answer’, or the ‘Hunger Marchers’ Song’.<sup>230</sup> Featuring some of the standard socialist repertoire (‘The Red Flag’ and ‘The Internationale’), as well as William Morris’s ‘Day of Days’ and Boughton’s ‘Song of War’,<sup>231</sup> the song book includes Bush’s ‘Song to Labour’ (which had a more traditional form and subject matter) and his ‘Song to Freedom’, which again falls in the same ‘inoffensive’ category of socialist songs, lacking the cutting edge of the ‘Question and Answer’, or ‘The Hunger Marchers’ Song’.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> *ibid.*, 24-26.

<sup>228</sup> *ibid.*, 82-85

<sup>229</sup> Helmut Demarius, Communist and leader of the ‘Kollone Links’ troupe cited in Bodek, *Proletarian*, 87.

<sup>230</sup> Alan Bush and Leonard Pearce (eds), *Twelve Labour Choruses* (London: ILP, 1930).

<sup>231</sup> The publication was actually printed by Curwen, which, as was explained in the first chapter, championed the Tonic Sol-Fa method and was also contributing towards awards for the Union’s Festivals and contests.

<sup>232</sup> *ibid.*, n.p.

Two songs by Boughton were also part of the collection, his 'Song of War' and 'Day of Days', which again were four -part songs.<sup>233</sup> The remaining songs are 'Hey for the Day' (Tom Maguire/M. Faulkner) 'Rise Brothers' (anonymous/Felix White), 'The Ideal State' (W. Jones/Edgar Bainton), 'The True Man's Fatherland' (James Russell Lowell/anonymous), 'The Divine Image' (William Blake/English traditional melody) and 'All Goodnight' (by Felix White on a German melody) all alluding to a Utopian future that was previously found in other socialist song books collections.<sup>234</sup> White's 'Rise, Brothers', for instance, urges workers to march, for 'the future is bright', 'slowly the life of the millions out of the dark grows to birth'. Similarly Faulkner's composition 'Hey for the day' opens with the line 'Darkest is night! We do not fear, Dawning is near', while elsewhere 'There shall be light where gloom used to be' is a reference to the utopian 'better days to come'.

### **Reactions to the new songs introduced in the repertoire.**

Without a doubt, an interesting question arising from the new repertoire presented by Bush is the extent to which choir members actively enjoyed singing songs that were strongly related to Agitprop and could even be described as projecting anger, as these were essentially much different from the more traditional socialist repertoire the choir was used to sing with the more mellow 'better days to come' utopian expectations. At this stage, the repertoire appears to have been a mixture of old and new, something that quite possibly minimised the reactions to the new songs introduced, and ensured that all members of the choir were happy with what they were asked to sing. Nowhere was this more evident than in the 'Twelve Labour Choruses' song book discussed above. Surprisingly enough, however, it was not the new songs that attracted the most criticism, but Boughton's 'Song to Liberty' composed in 1911 on a text by Helen Bantock. The song is in fact especially long for an amateur choir, extending to 40 pages and includes sections sung by a solo tenor and others by solo contralto (bars 69-91 tenor, and 92-111 for the contralto), which evidently meant that the choirs choosing to use it, would have to ensure they also had soloists with sufficient technical acumen to sing these parts. Furthermore, as the following music example

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<sup>233</sup> Bush and Pearce, *Twelve*, n.p.

<sup>234</sup> *ibid*, n.p.



illustrates, the tenor part was rather demanding with a range that extended from a lowish E flat to a high G:

**Ex. 2.6: Rutland Boughton, *Song to Liberty* (London: Curwen, 1911), bars 72-77.**

Such an example is a far cry from the short songs set to popular tunes that the choir was normally accustomed to sing, or indeed from Bush's short and succinct 'Song to Labour'.<sup>235</sup> But quite apart from the musical difficulties of Boughton's song, the text also appears to be somewhat more militant in tone. The choir is encouraged to sing a 'battle song', to shame the 'cowards in the fight', the 'loiters', while it ends in unison with vigorous semiquavers and the choir singing 'up brothers, up and sing, and fight, fight, fight!'.

The choir's objection to this particular song was above all directed against its length and technical difficulty, its musical complexity deemed totally unsuitable for an amateur choir.<sup>236</sup> Unfortunately, in the absence of any other archival material regarding the frequency this particular song was used by the Union, it is impossible to know both whether this song was used before 1930, but also why the particular objection to this work surfaced in 1930 since it was composed as long ago as 1911. One could also speculate that these complaints were not only directed against the music but also the text. This was possibly the result of the political context of that period: the 'cowards in the fight' could easily have been

<sup>235</sup> Rutland Boughton, *Song of Liberty* (London: Curwen, 1911).

<sup>236</sup> 'Report of visit paid by the Chairman and Musical Adviser of the Choral Union', 8 February 1930, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 645.

interpreted as the Labour Party leaders, while the call for ‘fight’ might have been perceived as a call for the type of revolution that the CPGB was advocating.

Another possible explanation, however, is that the objection was not so much directed against the actual song and its text but more against its composer, who, by 1930, had already been a CPGB member, albeit one that joined in 1926 and had resigned by 1929.<sup>237</sup> Yet at the same time, while some choirs were not particularly satisfied with Boughton’s musical style and his political outlook, the London Labour Party and the Union’s officials did not appear to have objected to his work with the Union. If anything, the inclusion of his composition in the ‘Twelve Labour Choruses’ Song Book is a testament to that. As a matter of fact, in the ‘Twelve Labour Choruses’ he additionally provided the arrangement for two of the most popular socialist songs (which were part of the standard socialist repertoire since the 1890s), and contributed two further songs, both newly composed (1930). Out of the twelve songs of the Song Book, four of them have Boughton’s name either as arranger or as composer.<sup>238</sup> It should also be stressed that there is not enough evidence from the Union’s archival material to suggest whether and to what extent the choir members or indeed the London Labour Party and Morrison himself were aware of Boughton’s CPGB membership, so it is not clear if objections to Boughton’s songs were related to any question of his party affiliations.

But while there is at least some evidence that some choir members complained about singing Boughton’s songs, there is no indication that a similar reaction was targeted against Bush’s ‘Question and Answer’ song. The *London News* suggests otherwise, and in fact, the opposite could be argued. In December 1929, Roy Atterbury, Chairman of the Union, commented on the fact that some choir members had been in touch with the Union’s officials, asking for more ‘propaganda songs’ to be composed for the choir’s use, though it is unclear from this article why this request was made:

Many people have asked why we do not sing more propaganda pieces. The main reason is that the movement has not yet produced the necessary music. May I here be allowed to put forward my own personal view? It is not necessarily our function to do this. A choir is

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<sup>237</sup> Michael Hurd, ‘Rutland Boughton’ in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1980), iv, 92-93.

<sup>238</sup> The songs include ‘The Red Flag’ (arranged), ‘The International’ (arranged), ‘Song of War’ (composer on a text by Langdon Everard), and ‘The Day of Days’ (composer, on a text by William Morris).

formed for the purpose of singing good music, when pieces are produced with propaganda value and are worth singing, we will certainly sing them, but we ought not to be expected to sing bad music simply because the poem has propaganda value. Bad music is bad propaganda so far as we are concerned.<sup>239</sup>

The above extract, with choir members apparently requesting more ‘propaganda songs’ seems to imply that choirs to the left of the Labour party already flourished within the Union, and were also willing to sing more songs such as Bush’s ‘Question and Answer’. The Union at this stage appears to have been already divided between those who actually preferred the old socialist repertoire (with Elizabethan Songs and the songs traditionally associated with the movement, such as ‘The Red Flag’) and those who were in favour of more radical and politically explicit songs that through their texts endorsed the CPGB’s condemnation of the Labour Party and its leaders. There are no indications, however, that the choir was singing any Eisler songs by then, and archival material seems to point towards the fact that no songs by Eisler were introduced to the repertoire by 1930.

### **Affiliation to the *Internationale der Arbeitersänger* (IDAS)**

As well as new repertoire, the Union’s new era was also characterised by an international outlook, which set it apart from other similar organisations that existed up to that point (the CVUs for instance). Its affiliation to the international workers music organisation, *Internationale der Arbeitersänger* (IDAS) was a result of this. The IDAS was an international socialist-led organisation, consisting of affiliated national choirs with its headquarters in Berlin. Founded in Hamburg in 1926 by representatives of workers organisations from Germany (the German Workers Music Movement was one of the largest in the world), Austria, Czechoslovakia, Alsace and Hungary, it had as its main objective to bring together ‘Labour singers of all nations’, the ‘advancement of socialist ideals’ through singing, and the ‘interchange of intellectual, artistic and musical productions’ through the organisation of proletarian festivals, that were hoped to enable the exchange of visits between participating nations.<sup>240</sup>

<sup>239</sup> Anon., ‘Labour Choral Union: Why Labour Choirs are good Business’, in *The London News*, December 1929.

<sup>240</sup> IDAS Verhandlungsniederschrift der Grundskonferenz, 12 June 1926, Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, Dossier Ar.58.36.1 and IDAS memorandum, 19 November 1930, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 645.

At the heart of it was the Socialist-led *Deutsche Arbeitersängerbund* (DAS) of the German Workers Music Movement, giving Germany and the German workers music movement the advantage of being in a predominant position. The IDAS had very clear political lines with emphasis on a socialist orientation, and an aim to develop a socialist culture by only admitting as affiliated members other socialist national organisations (rather than communist ones).<sup>241</sup> Though there is no clear evidence as to whether the choir members were happy to take this opportunity for an international direction, one can suspect from the lengthy process of affiliation, that the affiliated choirs displayed a level of indifference that almost certainly frustrated Bush.

It is quite obvious that he was determined to affiliate the Union to IDAS. Between 1930 and 1931 not only did he make efforts to explain the necessity for this affiliation to Union officials, but he also attended a festival organised on behalf of IDAS by the German DAS in Czechoslovakia, where, according to him at least, ‘the enthusiasm of everyone when they heard that England was really coming into [IDAS] was quite remarkable’, which can be seen as ‘promoting’ the possible affiliation of the Union as an event of international significance.<sup>242</sup> Nevertheless, this enthusiasm that IDAS was apparently demonstrating with the prospect of a British affiliation could be questioned by the actual true motives behind it: The British participation was presented as essential to encourage the French to affiliate their organisations too. As a result, Bush’s reported ‘enthusiasm’ on behalf of IDAS was not really for the actual British affiliation, but more for the prospect of attracting the French.<sup>243</sup>

In any case, there is no doubt that both Bush and the LLP were particularly determined to ensure this affiliation would be successful. Quite indicative is one of his letters to the secretary of the Union, John Atkins, where he stressed the importance of this prospect, and indeed writing quite passionately about it:

Because we must feel ourselves strongly in favour of doing so on grounds of socialist principle; Because it may aid us in our task of organizing the labour singing movement in England on a national scale; Our entry would (so I am informed on very good authority)

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<sup>241</sup> IDAS Verhandlungsniederschrift der Grundskonferenz, 12 June 1926, and 26 June 1926, Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, Dossier Ar.58.36.1.

<sup>242</sup> Bush to Atkins, 1 March 1930, and 1 July 1931, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 645.

<sup>243</sup> Carl Fehser to Atterbury, 18 February 1932, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 645.

lend a somewhat increased prestige to the IDAS and especially might encourage our comrades in France to enter'.<sup>244</sup>

The *London News* also started a similar campaign already from 1931 with reports comparing the British and the German movement, wondering 'why should this country [Britain] lag behind'.<sup>245</sup> Further articles presented the affiliation as a 'turning point' for the history of London choirs, emphasizing the small size of the Union as 'no credit to England', at a time when the German DAS had 250,000 members, compared to just 450 of the LLCU.<sup>246</sup> The Union's successful affiliation, which was finally achieved in 1932, opened the way for its participation in an international festival in Belgium and Holland between 2 and 12 June of 1933 which additionally included a broadcast from the local radio station at Hilversum.<sup>247</sup> As was the case with the IDAS affiliation, the tour was promoted through the pages of the *London News* as an exciting prospect.<sup>248</sup> Quite indicative of this enthusiasm on behalf of the Union's leadership were the frequent articles regarding the event, which appeared almost each month until June 1933, with the proposed programme described as 'typically English', containing 'Madrigals from Elizabethan days, folk songs' but also Bush's 'Song to Labour', in other words, the more 'traditional' socialist repertoire, than the newly-composed Agitprop-influenced Bush songs.<sup>249</sup>

But while the Union was participating in international events and organisations with clear socialist lines abroad, the events in which it participated in the UK were closer to Communism rather than Socialism which the LLCU was supposed to represent, as was the case with its participation to the 1934 Pageant of Labour, organised between 15 and 20 October that year. It is quite intriguing that this type of political pageants was appropriated by the CPGB in the 1930s: Indeed the Party organised a number of Pageants and Festivals which became an important aspect of the CPGB not only as a means of recruiting members

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<sup>244</sup> Bush to Atkins, 19 November 1930, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 645.

<sup>245</sup> Roy Atterbury, 'German choirs' movement: Why should this country lag behind?' in *The London News*, July 1931.

<sup>246</sup> Roy Atterbury, 'What will the annual meeting bring? Turning point in history of London Choirs', in *London News*, September 1931 and Bush to Atkins, 19 November 1930, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 645.

<sup>247</sup> R J Boone, 'Our Musical Festival', in *The London News*, May 1933.

<sup>248</sup> Roy Atterbury, 'Choral News', in *The London News*, February 1932.

<sup>249</sup> R J Boone, 'Our Musical Festival', in *The London News*, May 1933, and Nancy Bush, *Alan Bush*, 31.

but also as an important medium for communicating the Communist message to the masses.<sup>250</sup>

If there was any doubt as to how far to the Left the event was, Bush's description of it suffices: The proposed scenario was 'what I had myself projected but placed in a setting far more adequate than any I had dared to dream as possible':

I have never before this moment made propaganda on my own behalf but I am entirely driven to it now by necessity. My desire as an artist to take a creative part in this production is so overwhelming that I have lost all sense of shame or discretion (the latter especially as it will probably damage my reputation in orthodox professional circles, however good the music is).<sup>251</sup>

This appears to be a direct admission that he was already attracted to Communism and decided that this was the appropriate time for him to get involved in direct 'propaganda', while also admitting his desire to have done so earlier and was prevented from doing so by the damage that this could have done to his reputation. Indeed, when asked by the organising committee to provide a brief autobiography, he described himself as an individual whose forte is not politics, but 'is decidedly inclined to be left-wing, but not at present a communist, though he gets gradually redder as the years roll by.'<sup>252</sup> The seeds of communism therefore were already there, but the timing was not right for him to become a full member of the CPGB yet.

Another individual with such 'red' inclinations to the left of the Labour Party was Michael Tippett, who, according to Bush, was 'absolutely on our [the organising committee's] side politically and would be agreeable in the circumstances'.<sup>253</sup> Tippett was, like Bush and Swingler, from 'comfortable middle-class existence' derived from his father's investments, exactly as Bush had a comfortable life thanks to his grandfather's business.<sup>254</sup> His meeting with the Hungarian mathematician Paul Dienes in 1932 was decisive, as Dienes

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<sup>250</sup> Mick Wallis, 'Heirs to the Pageant: Mass Spectacle and the Popular Front' in Andy Croft (ed.), *A weapon in the Struggle: The cultural history of the CPGB* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 48-67, here 48-54.

<sup>251</sup> Bush to Genn, 24 February 1934, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 621.

<sup>252</sup> Bush to Genn, 3 June 1934, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 621. Cripps was one of the founders of the Socialist League, a splinter of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) formed in 1932. Bush addressing Miss Gorringer as 'Dear Comrade', in a letter sent to her on Boxing Day 1934.

<sup>253</sup> Bush to Genn, 27 February 1934, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 621.

<sup>254</sup> Michael Tippett, *Those Twentieth Century Blues*, 4. For Bush, see Nancy Bush, *Alan Bush: Music, Politics and Life* (London: Thames Publishing, 2000), 8-10.

introduced him to the writing of anarchists (Kropotkin and Bakunin, who he read apparently 'avidly'), while his close friend Phyllis Kemp attempted to introduce him to Marxism during the mid-1930s.<sup>255</sup>

Tippett became involved with working class music organisations in 1932, after being invited to conduct the South London Orchestra, organised by Morley College. Designed to 'keep unemployed professional musicians in practice', the orchestra was founded by Dan Franks, the father of Tippett's best friend (and indeed lover), Wilfred.<sup>256</sup> It was through the South London Orchestra that Tippett realised the 'importance of music making and theatre in communicating messages and ideas of significance, especially to the more deprived sections of the community'.<sup>257</sup> Through Francesca Allinson, a dear friend and conductor of choirs that participated in the LLCU, Tippett met Bush, and became involved in conducting workers amateur choirs such as the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS). He also became adjudicator of the LLCU's festivals and contests throughout the 1930s.<sup>258</sup>

Apparently by joining the RACS, Tippett is seen as making a decisive move to the Left already from 1932.<sup>259</sup> Indeed, by July 1934 (during the period that the Pageant was organised), he expressed to Bush his desire to talk to him about Communism.<sup>260</sup> It was around that period (1934) that he also became more vocal regarding the Union's repertoire during the contests he was adjudicating. During one such event he disapproved of Thomas Morley's song 'April is in my mistress' face', criticising it for being inappropriate for the working class bourgeois song.<sup>261</sup> Despite such criticisms however, the two men enjoyed a fruitful co-operation based on mutual respect, with Tippett being thankful for Bush's help as

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<sup>255</sup> Tippett, *20<sup>th</sup> C*, 7, 24, and 46.

<sup>256</sup> Ian Kemp, *Michael Tippett*, 27.

<sup>257</sup> Tippett, *20<sup>th</sup> C*, 40. See also Kemp, *Tippett*, 30. Kemp also argues that a trip to Tees Valley with Franks, during which Tippett experienced the deprivation among its inhabitants, played a decisive role in getting involved in amateur working class music organisations.

<sup>258</sup> Kemp, *Tippett*, 30. See also *Red Notes*, no. 3 (December 1936), 3.

<sup>259</sup> Kemp, *Tippett*, 31.

<sup>260</sup> Thomas Schuttenhelm, *Selected letters of Michael Tippett* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), 122.

<sup>261</sup> Kemp, *Tippett* 33 and 34. It has not been possible to verify this information from the Archives, as unfortunately the Union's Official Organ, the *Red Notes*, which provide all the information for such debates, was launched in 1936.

‘an older composer’ able to advise him on musical matters, but also for getting him involved in the Pageant, which he saw as the ‘high water-mark of the movement’.<sup>262</sup>

The 1934 Pageant was described in its official programme as an event that starts with the ‘enslavement of the worker by the capital’ as its theme; it is arranged in six episodes starting from the 18<sup>th</sup> century which depicted key moments in working class history, moving on to the working-class political Chartist movement (1838-1948) and the Rochdale Pioneers (the precursor of the Co-operative movement). Its last few Episodes give a fleeting description of key events in working class history: the Chartists, the Triumph of the Trade Unions (1834), the Rochdale Pioneers (1844), the Matchgirls’ Strike (1888) and the London Dockers’ Strike of 1889. The last episode (VI) dealt with more contemporary events, with the appearance on stage of important working class figures such as Henry Hyndman (founder of the Socialist Democratic Federation that played a key role in the formation of the socialist movement in Britain), and Marx. Lastly, it describes (albeit briefly) Trades Unions and their importance in the working class struggles, studiously avoiding even a passing reference to the most recent events of the General Strike of 1926, most likely in order to avoid highlighting what a lot of Labour Party supporters saw as betrayal of the party.<sup>263</sup>

Its political message is transmitted through a fictitious family called the Fletchers, followed from 1790 to the 1850s.<sup>264</sup> Initially portrayed as a happy one, with their main occupation being weaving and spinning, the capitalist’s grip makes them gradually unhappier, first by forcing the children to work in a mill from a young age. This offers an opportunity to the Pageant’s scenario to comment on the horrors of child labour, a result of the introduction of machines in factories: children starving or being flogged for sleeping and punished severely for not doing the job quickly enough, ‘stunted in mind and body, starved, misshapen and crippled’, deprived of any kind of ‘joy, spontaneity and mischief’, all these being a hallmark of the ‘martyrdom of the children at the hands of a brutal industrial system’.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Michael Tippett, ‘A Magnetic friendship: An attraction of opposites’ in Ronald Stevenson (ed.), *Alan Bush: An 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Symposium* (Kidderminster: Bravura Publications, 1981), 9.

<sup>263</sup> BL, LCP 1934/25, and Pageant of Labour Programme, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 621.

<sup>264</sup> Pageant of Labour Programme, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 621.

<sup>265</sup> *ibid.*



The corrupting qualities of capitalism that turn innocent individuals to horrible masters at work are underlined further by the fate of one of the Fletcher children, who, while having revolted against the injustice of rich and poor, is by 1820 a master himself, and slowly but steadily adopts capitalist ideas. Nowhere is this more succinctly described than in the fourth Episode, where the Fletcher child (Robert), having become by 1848 significant enough to be able to participate in a 'political reception in a London mansion', explains his ideas about Chartism that should 'die a natural death' if the capitalists would give the workers cheap food and 'alleviate some of their more pressing hardships'.<sup>266</sup> The French Revolution of 1789-1799 is described as a nuisance, with mobs frightening some of the attendants that were 'unlucky' enough to be studying in Paris during that period.<sup>267</sup>

Music was used in the background during the scenes only in cases needed to reinforce a message: There is for instance a moment during the political reception described above, when Schubert's 'Hark, hark the lark!' is used, referencing the musical tastes of the upper classes.<sup>268</sup> Generally, however, music was provided by the choir after each scene and commenting in this way on what has just happened on stage.<sup>269</sup> Popular socialist songs were used, such as 'The Red Flag' (set on the German 'Tannenbaum'). The event concluded with a new song composed by Bush, the Pageant Song, which was performed while a red flag was unfurled. The song describes the worker's flag as being red from the martyr's blood (the martyrs, of course, being the workers) giving hope to people for a new world where there will be no threat (presumably from the capital) and even the leaders fight for peace and not war; where all the people can live together in harmony with health and joy.

'Up rise, up in your might!  
All sacrifices dare,  
To win the blackest night,  
A word for all to share!'<sup>270</sup>

As expected, an event that used phraseology associated with the CPGB (workers 'enslaved by the capital', children at the mercy of the 'brutal industrial system') but also

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<sup>266</sup> BL, LCP 1934/25.

<sup>267</sup> BL, LCP 1934/25.

<sup>268</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>269</sup> LCP 1934/25 and BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 395.

<sup>270</sup> *ibid.*

communist symbols (the unfurling of the red flag at the conclusion of the event) attracted the attention and criticism of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, which was not particularly sympathetic to it and did not hesitate to censor the pageant. It was branded as 'one-sided propaganda', apparently unfairly portraying all rich politicians as 'smugly indifferent' to the working class, not even crediting the Tory party, according to the Office, for 'its successful efforts in abolishing the worst of them [rich politicians, bishops etc]'.<sup>271</sup>

The section of the pageant dealing with the suffragettes' movement was criticised for containing vulgar expressions (such as 'Brazen bitches') while the representation of the First World War was found as one-sided for being presented as a 'righteous war'.<sup>272</sup> Further criticism was reserved for the section depicting children in factories, which was found as 'extremely gloomy and sometimes almost unbearably painful', the representation of beaten, starved and miserable children criticised for being very inappropriate and offensive, noting that 'at least something might be said about it'.<sup>273</sup> In the end, the Office agreed that it would be 'impolitic to interfere with this pageant', as, despite the representations that were found distasteful, it was decided that 'living politicians are not brought in to be ridiculed but to say what they have said'.<sup>274</sup>

### **Reception, press and choir members' reaction: the 1933 Festival and the Pageant of 1934.**

While the 1933 tour mentioned above was reviewed only by the LLP's Official Organ which reported enthusiastically about it, an event of the scale of the Pageant in 1934 attracted a lot of attention from all sections of the press, not least because it took place in London. It would therefore be reasonable to conclude that the 1933 tour's review was not particularly impartial, having appeared in a publication that was connected to the Union and its officials. In any case, the *London News* presents the Union as having received a wholehearted reception from local choirs in its 1933 tour to Belgium and Holland. In each visited city, the choir was received with a 'concert and a social',<sup>275</sup> while in Amsterdam it

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<sup>271</sup> BL, LCP 828.

<sup>272</sup> BL, LCP 1934/25

<sup>273</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>275</sup> R J Boone, 'Labour choir goes abroad', in *The London News*, July 1933.

performed in a venue described by the British choir members as ‘the equivalent of the London Queen’s Hall’, along with a local choir that consisted of 600 members.<sup>276</sup>

On the other hand, the Pageant’s reviews make some interesting reading, as they come from different parts of the press with diametrically contrasting political affiliations (both those close to the CPGB, such as the *Daily Worker*, but also from the right, such as the *Daily Mirror*). They additionally reveal that neither the communist nor the socialist part of the press were particularly impressed by the message of the pageant, quite possibly because this was an event with participation of socialist organisations (such as the LLCU) but using abundantly Communist symbols (such as the Red Flag). Perhaps an idea of what to expect in the reviews came from The *Daily Mirror* which didn’t provide a review of the event but more of a preview, a description of the forthcoming event four months before the Pageant took place (2 June): indeed, the paper described it as a step backwards for Britain, forcing people to dwell on the past and forget the present, while at the same time stirring a ‘gentle form of patriotism’, a somewhat unfair appraisal of an event that had not taken place. Moreover, it was also suspected (one could say correctly predicted) that the General Strike will be ‘gracefully skated over’ so as not to cause any embarrassment to the Labour Party that the Pageant represents.<sup>277</sup>

The Socialist *Daily Herald* reviewed it on the other hand as a ‘tensed drama’ containing episodes ‘with the relentlessness of Greek Tragedy’.<sup>278</sup> But equally the Communist *Daily Worker* complained that it was designed to promote heavily the Labour Party: there were no references to Marx, meaning there was inadequate explanation of how socialism begun, no references to the Russian Revolution, while the entire event was apparently designed as an opportunity for the Labour Party to ‘build its history on national lines, resulting in patriotism, a Utopianism, a jingoism that comes very near to fascism.’<sup>279</sup> The appearance of the Red Flag at the conclusion of the event was noted as a further embarrassment, particularly as it was apparently accompanied by what was described in the

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<sup>276</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> Anon., ‘Long live Pageantry!’ in *Daily Mirror*, 2 June 1934.

<sup>278</sup> Anon., ‘Stalwart relieve their fight for liberty’, in *Daily Herald*, Tuesday 16 October 1934.

<sup>279</sup> Anon., ‘Fascist flag flies at Labour Pageant: The Workers’ struggle ‘forgotten’, in *Daily Worker*, 18 October 1934.

paper's report as 'dancing nymphs'.<sup>280</sup> The lack of references to the General Strike was also noted as an example of the embarrassment the Labour Party still felt:

The Pageant finds it difficult to mention events since the war. What could they say? The treachery of the leaders in the General Strike? The complete failure of the two Labour Governments? The new policy of open unity with capitalism in confrontations and arbitration boards? The break-up of the Second International with the failure of the Labour Parties (social-Democrats) in Germany and Austria? The building up of the United Front in every country? These would never go!<sup>281</sup>

Other newspapers such as *The Manchester Guardian*, *The Observer* and *The Times* avoided strong criticism and limited their reviews to describing the sequence of events as portrayed on stage. *The Manchester Guardian* for example, while admitting it was 'unashamedly propagandist' for depicting only the struggles of the working class people and their subsequent class consciousness, did not fail to comment on the chorus that sang with 'good tone and discretion'.<sup>282</sup> *The Observer* also approved of the chorus and music of the Pageant that was not used to 'decorate, as to intensify the Pageant's significance'.<sup>283</sup>

Exactly what was the reaction of the choir members participating in both events, is quite difficult to know, as again there is no surviving archival material to document this. There was, for instance, no Official Organ of the Union at that stage (a development that took place in 1936), where officials and choir members could discuss matters relating to the Union, as indeed they did once this was found. The only other alternative was the LLP's Official Organ, *The London News*, which, again, cannot be considered particularly reliable as contributions on the Union were made only by the Choir's officials, and not by choir members themselves, and it additionally did not contain discussions or suggestions from choir members, as indeed was the case with the *Red Notes*. On the other hand, at least these contributions at the *London News* give an indication about the nature of the debates that took place within the choir.

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<sup>280</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>281</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> Anon., 'The Pageant of Labour: A Picture of the industrial revolution' in *The Manchester Guardian*, 14 October 1934.

<sup>283</sup> Anon., 'London's Pageant of Labour: 1500 performers to take part: Ballet of Machines', in *The Observer*, 14 October 1934.

In the case of the 1933 tour, Bush's wife, Nancy, reports on its great success for the choir members, for some of who this was probably their first time of travelling abroad. She also describes the entire tour with great enthusiasm.<sup>284</sup> The *London News* equally reported on the 'fantastic reception' the Union received, emphasizing that this was not just an occasion for workers to indulge in sight-seeing, implying that choir members were there more for their participation in the event and for showcasing what British workers choirs were capable of doing, rather than visiting sites in the cities where they performed.<sup>285</sup>

A similar situation (with hardly any insight on what the choir members thought) arises with regard to the 1934 Pageant. Certainly, it is clear that the music Bush originally composed for the Pageant's ballet was not to everyone's taste. The organising committee found it apparently too discordant, the type of music that made people 'squirm' during its first performance to the committee, forcing Bush to explain his compositional techniques (with the problem being a suspended ninth).<sup>286</sup> It was also described as 'difficult to dance to' by the ballet choreographer, Sybil Spencer, who also expressed her reservations.<sup>287</sup> Yet despite these criticisms, the *London News* was happy to report the Pageant as a 'matter for self-congratulation', providing 'propaganda value [that] has been proved time and again', giving also an indication of what the future plans for the Union were: choirs participating in the Pageant agreed for a closer co-operation with other left dramatic groups as an essential part of their activities, which demonstrates that at least some choir members and their leadership were very happy to continue along the same lines of the Pageant and get involved in collaborative events such as this, with other left groups.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Nancy Bush, *Alan Bush*, 30-31.

<sup>285</sup> R J Boone, 'Labour choir goes abroad', in *The London News*, July 1933.

<sup>286</sup> Bush to Keith, 30 June 1934, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 621. There are no references to which specific part of music the objections refer.

<sup>287</sup> Bush to Genn, 21 July 1934 and Bush to Spencer, 26 July 1934, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 621. Unfortunately only the final version of the ballet music survives and it is impossible to know what type of music Bush composed in the first place. There are almost no revisions in the BL manuscripts of the Pageant (with the exception of one of two crossed out sections which only amounts to a handful of bars) indicating that this was perhaps the final version of the manuscript, which was very lightly revised during rehearsals.

<sup>288</sup> J R Boone, 'After the Pageant: What a worker's choir can do', in *The London New*, December 1934.

## Conclusions.

The Union during the period examined in this chapter appears to move into a different, new phase. Political events such as the General Strike, resulted in the disillusionment of Labour Party members such as Boughton, who felt betrayed by the party and joined the CPGB instead. His resignation from the Union was not entirely politically motivated, as it has been noted. There were also other practical issues that prevented him from continuing his work with the choir, such as long commuting, and as a result his involvement with it did not intensify, but diminished instead. Nevertheless, his inclusion in the 1926 Song Book *Twelve Labour Choruses* is a testament to the fact that despite his resignation, he was still on good terms both with the leadership of the Union and the choir members. His resignation gave the opportunity to Bush to become the Union's conductor, a development which signalled the beginning of a new era, with the introduction of new repertoire, and ambitions to expand internationally as an organisation.

The repertoire changed, as it was noted, by receiving influences from Eisler and Agitprop. The texts of the songs became gradually more explicit politically than they were before, not just referring to vague socialist 'better days to come', but directly urging the workers to take matters in their own hands and fight against injustice, with the subject matter being derived from workers' everyday life. Emphasis was given more on the texts than on music or the melodies accompanying them, with the Agitprop technique of using the music to emphasize the text (such as with pauses that emphasized words) being favoured. As it has been explained, Bush's songs composed for the Union during that period (such as his 'Question and Answer') were examples of this, abandoning the traditional four-part song that was favoured by socialists so far, and adopting more direct texts to which workers could relate.

There is no doubt that the Union was originally conceived as a British organisation, as both Morrison on behalf of the Party but also Boughton who was leading and conducting the Union, did not express at any stage any ambitions to take the organisation to an international level or to festivals organised abroad by other working-class music organisations. Equally, it is certain that Bush thought otherwise. No doubt drawing from his experience as a student in Berlin, and from becoming familiar with the German Workers Music movement, he had the advantage of experiencing first-hand how these organisations

operated, but also to draw inspiration regarding the repertoire, as he indeed did with bringing material composed by Eisler. As has been mentioned, his insistence on affiliating the Union to IDAS lasted two years, from 1930 to 1932 when the affiliation was finally achieved. At the same time it seems that the Union was not extremely keen to declare an international affiliation (as demonstrated by the fact that Bush needed two years to convince the organisation for the necessity of achieving this) though it is evident that he had the support of other Union officials such as Morrison, though the pages of *The London News*.

By now, Bush appears to fit the description of a wealthy left-wing supporter who was moving to the left of the Labour Party, particularly, since it was noted above, he was already frequenting communist-sympathetic circles. Tippett of course was another such case of an individual from a wealthy background moving to the left of the Labour Party while working with the Union, as was Swingler. As a result there is an emerging pattern of wealthy left-wing individuals surrounding the Union at top levels: Bush as a conductor, Tippett as an adjudicator, and Swingler as Bush's collaborator. In addition to that, as the *London News* noted as early as 1929, there were already choirs within the LLCU ranks asking for more 'Propaganda songs' which an emerging radicalisation within the Union's participating choirs, of choirs also moving to the Left of the Labour Party and demanding a new, more revolutionary repertoire instead of the standard socialist one that they were performing so far. This however appears to have created a division within the LLCU, with some choirs feeling comfortable using a more radical repertoire, and others objecting to songs such as Boughton's 'Song to Liberty'. The main conclusion, however, regarding the years 1929-1934 for the Union, is the emergence of a number of CPGB members (Boughton, Swingler) already working with the organisation, along with others who were already communist-sympathetic ones (Bush, Tippett), and which not only signified the beginning of a new era, gravitating the Union towards Communism, but additionally paved the way for the next important step in the Union's history, its participation in the Communist-inspired 1935 Workers Music Olympiad in Strasbourg.

### Chapter 3.

#### **The *International Music Bureau* and the 1935 Workers' Music Olympiad in Strasbourg.**

#### **Fascism in Europe before the 1930s and the 'Popular Front'.**

The end of the First World War brought significant changes in Europe which facilitated the rise of fascism in the interwar period. In the words of historian Philip Morgan, during the First World War,

Countries had fought themselves to an exhausted standstill, employing against each other all the resources of modern industrial societies. The outcome was human and material devastation and destruction on an unprecedented scale and extent. [...] Such a destructive war appeared to mark the end of civilization, and of the expectation, now the illusion, of uninterrupted 'progress' towards greater human freedom and prosperity.<sup>289</sup>

One tangible result of the war was the destabilization of parliamentary democratic systems. After 1918, it became almost impossible to maintain a single nationality state in those countries where a pre-war mix of nationalities existed.<sup>290</sup> In many cases, coalition governments were formed with the participation of parties representing different ethnic groups. The war additionally had significant economic repercussions, devastating economies to a great extent, as 'there was no escaping the fatal connection of reparations to the international repayment of war debts'.<sup>291</sup> This led to post-war societies using tax-revenues elsewhere (such as arms) than they would have done, had it not been for the war. The 'threat from the left' (meaning the threat of an expansion to Europe of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917), became an additional source of instability. This was made more prominent by a number of communist risings in Europe including the short-lived Soviet republics in Hungary, Bavaria and Slovakia between 1919 and 1923, the civil war in Finland between 1917 and 1919 where Communists were suppressed by anti-communist forces, and the communist rising in Bulgaria in 1923.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Philip Morgan, *Fascism in Europe 1919-1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 29.

<sup>290</sup> One such example was for instance Poland, where Ukrainian and Polish peasant parties represented their respective groups but were unwilling to co-operate politically. See Morgan, *Fascism*, 8.

<sup>291</sup> *ibid.* 12.

<sup>292</sup> *ibid.*, 9-10.



Alongside the destabilization of democracies, another factor that enhanced the rise of Fascism during the interwar period was the disillusion of civilians who had served as soldiers in the war, and who returned home unable to 'adjust to civilian life, as there were not enough jobs, or because they were no longer temperamentally suited' to employment away from the front.<sup>293</sup> Not only did this facilitate the rise of many paramilitary organizations in Europe (particularly in Germany because of German disarmament), but it also enabled fascist groups to exploit the patriotic feelings of disillusioned soldiers. The Treaty of Versailles (June 1919) curtailed Germany's military power resulting in a humiliating defeat for the country. The situation was exacerbated further by the 'Guilt Clause', which named Germany as the state responsible for starting the war, and enforcing territorial losses.<sup>294</sup>

Coincidentally, during the same year as the Treaty, fascist parties were formed both in Germany and Italy. They gained particular ground in Italy thanks to the inauguration of Benito Mussolini's *Fascio di Combattimento* the membership of which expanded dramatically from 870 members in 1919 to 250,000 by 1921.<sup>295</sup> The real face of fascism in the country, however, became apparent in 1921 and 1922, when a 'systematic dismantling of Socialist and Union power' became increasingly the norm.<sup>296</sup>

The rise of fascism in Germany, was not quite as rapid. In 1919, the German Workers Party (*Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*) was formed and renamed a year later as the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* by Adolf Hitler himself, who happened to be one of the latest recruits of the party and its chairman from 1921.<sup>297</sup> Though it was banned in 1923 after a failed military coup, resulting in Hitler's imprisonment, it made a spectacular 'comeback' in 1925, when Hitler, released from prison, re-founded it and started 'energetic recruitment campaigns': Initially polling just 2.6% in the 1928 elections, it achieved an impressive 37.3% by 1932. In January 1933, Hitler was finally appointed Chancellor, unleashing an unparalleled terror, at first primarily targeted against his political opponents

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<sup>293</sup> Alan Cassels, *Fascism* (New York: Crowell, 1975), 16.

<sup>294</sup> Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), 90.

<sup>295</sup> Alexander J De Grand, *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), especially chapter 3 on the Rise of Fascism and Nazism. See also Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 66.

<sup>296</sup> De Grand, *Fascist Italy*, 17.

<sup>297</sup> *ibid.*, 95.

on the Left such as the socialists and communists.<sup>298</sup> This forced the Communist international (Comintern) to change its tactics.<sup>299</sup>

Initially, in the early months of 1933 after Hitler came to power, the Comintern was almost certain that 'friendly relations of the German and Russian military commanders' might continue, and that Nazism would soon disappear, 'either as a result of a military coup or through a failure to secure popular support'.<sup>300</sup> Equally, the German Communist Party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, KPD) was convinced that, faced with all the responsibilities of government, Hitler would inevitably be discredited, which would eventually clear the way 'for their own achievement of power'. Nevertheless, the Nazis seemed to have had the upper hand in this battle effectively destroying the German Communist Party by making it illegal in March 1933.<sup>301</sup> Furthermore, any prospect of the Left gaining influence in Germany was effectively scuppered by the sharp divisions between socialists and communists that had existed for some years.

At international level, during the late 1920s the 'Class against Class' period of International Communism (which was approved by the Comintern itself as a necessary step to prevent the Social Democrats from 'tricking the workers' in more moderate approaches against capitalism) resulted in a bitter struggle against the Social Democrats, who were now seen as 'key enemies' of the workers.<sup>302</sup> Consequently, any prospect of co-operation between the two parties became impossible.<sup>303</sup> Social Democrats became highly suspicious of any offers from communist parties, seeing them as an attempt at infiltration: in England, for example, both the Trade Union Council and the Labour Party rejected communist proposals in 1933 as suspicious. The Comintern's leadership was also divided as to whether

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<sup>298</sup> Griffin, *The nature of Fascism*, 95-106.

<sup>299</sup> Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe (eds), *International Communism and the Communist International 1919-43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 1. The Comintern (also known as the Third international) was founded in March 1919 in Russia by the Soviet government and became the 'central party apparatus' of national communist parties, most of which were founded in the early 1920s. As such, national parties were expected to obey the central policies approved by the Comintern, as they were seen as 'national sections of a world party'.

<sup>300</sup> Henry Pelling, *The British Communist Party: A historical survey* (London: A & C Black, 1975), 75.

<sup>301</sup> Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 102. See also Pelling, *The British Communist Party*, 75.

<sup>302</sup> Rees and Thorpe, *International Communism*, 4.

<sup>303</sup> Rees and Thorpe, *International Communism*, 4

a policy of approaching Social Democrats as possible allies in the fight against Hitler was a realistic one.<sup>304</sup>

The French General Strike, however, of February 1934 offered an example of a possible co-operation between Social Democrats and Communists. The strike, which was very successful, resulted in the co-operation of French Social Democrats and Communists workers, who 'ignored ideological barriers and united against a common fascist threat', making Paris the 'centre of the European anti-fascist movement' but at the same time 'thrusting' the French party (*Partie Communiste de France*, PCF) to the 'forefront of Comintern's attention'.<sup>305</sup> Initially suspicious of the French party's co-operation with the Social Democrats, as it appeared to blatantly ignore the international policy, the Comintern's leader, Georgi Dimitrov, saw in it a proof that socialists and communists could in fact co-operate successfully.<sup>306</sup> With his approval, the PCF's leadership appealed to the Social Democrats for a closer co-operation. On 10 October, the PCF's leader, Maurice Thorez, delivered a speech appealing to the centre-left for what he called a *Rassemblement Populaire*, or 'Popular Front', thus marking the birth of the term and laying the foundations for the new policy.<sup>307</sup>

In reality however, the application of a popular front at international level was more difficult than originally thought. Communists had 'to persuade extremely wary socialist leaders that, after five years of 'socialist fascist' abuse, the Comintern's hand of friendship should be taken seriously'. Nevertheless, communist parties worldwide, and particularly those that remained legal 'responded enthusiastically' to the new line. The CPGB, along with the French, American and Czech communist parties belonged to this group.<sup>308</sup> But despite the initial enthusiasm on behalf of the CPGB, it soon became clear that the application of the Popular Front in Britain was problematic. Not only were British socialists very suspicious of the offer for the reasons mentioned above (such as the possibility of communist

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<sup>304</sup> Pelling, *The British Communist Party*, 76.

<sup>305</sup> McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, 123.

<sup>306</sup> *ibid.*, 123. Georgi Dimitrov was a Bulgarian Communist who lived in Berlin and was highly respected by Stalin. He was appointed General Secretary of the Comintern from 1933 to 1943 by Stalin himself. McDermott and Agnew also claim that Stalin trusted Dimitrov to a great extent. Dimitrov was apparently given a '*carte-blanche*' by Stalin to 'experiment' with the new policy, though he himself was particularly hostile to a possible co-operation with the Social Democrats.

<sup>307</sup> Rees and Thorpe, *International Communism*, 6. See also McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, 126

<sup>308</sup> McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, 133.

infiltration, not to mention the fact they were branded as ‘social fascists’ for so many years), but there was also the additional problem of

the sheer disparity of size between the Labour Party and the T.U.C. on the one hand, and the five or six thousand Communists on the other, made the idea of a ‘united front’ between these organisations seem ludicrous.<sup>309</sup>

Only the ILP viewed the prospect of a possible co-operation with the Communists more positively. Having been disaffiliated from the official Labour Party in 1932, it had already become a refuge for critics of the organisation during the 1920s. Indeed the ILP’s influence had grown steadily to the extent that in the early 1930s, it was regarded as important as the Communist Party. For this reason, the CPGB sought to absorb it viewing this as a possible solution to creating a ‘mass’ communist organization.<sup>310</sup> But whereas the ILP contained a group that advocated ‘sympathetic affiliation to the Comintern’, the Comintern advocated ILP’s liquidation and absorption by the CPGB, rather than forging any kind of alliance. Between 1930 and 1933, the rivalry between the two parties escalated further, with the Comintern making repeated attempts to split the party, and the party attempting to expose the Comintern’s tactics as heavily influenced by Russian policies. Yet in 1934, the ILP abandoned its desire to co-operate with the Comintern in favour of a ‘limited joint activity for specific issues’, a development that resulted in mass desertions from the ILP to the official Labour Party.<sup>311</sup>

### **The Comintern and its artistic international organisations.**

During the early 1930s Communism increasingly became ‘fashionable among the young, and especially among students and intellectuals’, with a significant number of them attracted to it at an international level, by ‘the apparent logic of international events [the rise of Hitler], combined with feelings of social guilt thrust upon them by the depression’.<sup>312</sup> This trend is also evident in the CPGB’s membership: In May 1930 the Party had 2,860

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<sup>309</sup> Pelling, *The British Communist Party*, 76.

<sup>310</sup> *ibid.*, 77.

<sup>311</sup> Pelling, *The British Communist Party*, 77-79.

<sup>312</sup> *ibid.*, 80.

members (compared to 2,346,908 of the Labour Party) while at the beginning of 1935 the figure rose to 6,500 members (2,377,515 for the Labour Party), and to 7,500 by July that year.<sup>313</sup>

This rise of Communist popularity was matched by a growing demand for material related to its political ideology. In Britain it resulted in an increasing demand for left-wing books and political pamphlets, while the circulation of the CPGB's organ, the *Labour Monthly*, rose from 4,500 copies in 1934 to 6,500 two years later.<sup>314</sup> A number of international Communist-affiliated artistic organisations made their appearance, with Moscow becoming the centre of co-ordination of artistic and cultural-political efforts of the Left. As a result, the rise of fascism fed into intensifying workers' solidarity at international level. This became particularly important after Hitler's victory in 1933, when, the destruction and terror he caused in Germany, 'meant that millions of people, in Britain as in other countries, became drawn into the struggle against fascism, or this or that aspect of fascism, in one or another form'.<sup>315</sup>

Amongst the most salient examples of cultural co-operation on the Left was the foundation in 1929 of the International Workers Theatre Association (IWTA) which in 1932 became the International Revolutionary Theatre Movement (1932), one of the first Comintern-led artistic organisations.<sup>316</sup> Similar efforts were made in the musical field. In 1931, the Siberian composer and musicologist Grigori Schneerson (who was also a pianist and conductor at the Moscow Dramatic Theatre and as such had developed significant contacts with international music organisations)<sup>317</sup> reported to officials of the IWTA that workers' choirs from Germany, France, Czechoslovakia, England and the US, have been in touch, requesting Russian music and 'songs of the proletariat' from the Association.<sup>318</sup> The

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<sup>313</sup> Andrew Thorpe, 'The membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1945', in *The Historical Journal*, 43, 3, 2000, 781.

and Alastair Reid and Henry Pelling, *A short history of the Labour Party* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 206-8.

<sup>314</sup> Pelling, *The British Communist Party*, 84.

<sup>315</sup> George Klugmann, 'The crisis of the Thirties: A View from the Left', in Jon Clark, Margot Heinemann, David Margolies and Carole Snee, *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), 13-36, here 18.

<sup>316</sup> Inge Lammel, *Arbeiterlied, Arbeitergesang. Hundert Jahre Arbeitermusikultur in Deutschland* (Tetz: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2002), 232.

<sup>317</sup> *ibid.*, 289.

<sup>318</sup> Lammel, *Arbeiterlied*, 233.

IWTA proposed as a result the organization of a music section with Schneerson as its general secretary, aiming to exchange material and experience between workers' music organisations.

The new music organization was to offer a much needed 'international musical front' and help towards 'the absence of a single international centre of revolutionary music',<sup>319</sup> which 'hinders creative initiative in this field [of revolutionary music] and helps the penetration and spread of petit-bourgeois reactionary music among the working masses'.<sup>320</sup> The IWTA Committee noted in the letter sent to all prospective affiliated organisations that at workers' demonstrations

one hears militant songs which train and unite the working class in its struggle against oppression and against capitalism in general [...] The sharpening of the class contradictions as a result of the ever deepening general crisis of capitalism has driven the musical world into two camps. Part of the composers who continue to serve the bourgeoisie, untiringly are striving to adapt their creative work to the requirements of modern capitalist society, which is in the process of disintegration. They strive, through their compositions, to help the bourgeoisie forget the bad business and losses on stock-exchanges and the better to carry out their brutal plans of oppressing the working masses: shooting into workers' demonstrations, strike-pickets, mass arrests and persecutions in order the more easily to attack the working and living conditions of the proletariat, in order to shift the entire burden of the economic crisis onto the shoulders of the proletarian masses by cutting wages and lengthening working hours.<sup>321</sup>

The IWTA recognized the necessity of encouraging the popularization of music's class significance through the press and the publication of material that will demonstrate 'the development of revolutionary proletarian music in various countries'. As a result many pamphlets, reviews, notes and articles were published and the IWTA also issued an anthology of 'Songs of the proletarian world Revolution'. Another way of enhancing the prestige of the IWTA was the proposal to hold an international conference with the

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<sup>319</sup> Letter of Instructions regarding work for the international conference of revolutionary musical organisations, Bundesarchiv, RY1/I4/8/2.

<sup>320</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>321</sup> Letter of Instructions regarding work for the international conference of revolutionary musical organisations, Bundesarchiv, RY1/I4/8/2.

participation of workers music organisations from all over the world that was to take place in Moscow in November 1932.<sup>322</sup>

### **The International Music Bureau (IMB).**

One of the directives that resulted from the ITWA conference was the initiative to establish an international music organization that would replace what was until then the music section of the (now re-named) 'International Revolutionary Theatre Association' (IRTA). This resulted in the founding of the 'International Music Bureau' (IMB). One of its main objectives was to link Russian composers with those from other countries, and to promote left-wing composers from other countries in Russia. Other aspirations included the organisation of conferences and international meetings both in Russia and abroad, and the promotion of concerts with works by Russian and foreign composers.<sup>323</sup> This was in fact part of a deliberate strategy by the Soviets to enhance cultural contacts with the West. As Caroline Brooke argues, there was a determination at the highest levels of the Soviet government that there should be pro-active Russian participation in international music competitions.<sup>324</sup> This offered a tangible opportunity for Russia to demonstrate its artistic superiority, and above all, the superiority of the Soviet system.<sup>325</sup> It also offered a chance to improve Soviet relations with the West, but additionally 'strengthen international proletarian solidarity'.<sup>326</sup> Furthermore, so important became the export of Russian music that the state planned to publish brochures on Russian composers in foreign languages as well as articles in the Western press and 'special issue editions' of Russian music.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid. There is no indication as to which organisations received the letter, other than vague references to 'revolutionary music organisations'. Inge Lammel indicates that the music section of the WTA developed contacts with many countries, including England, though she does not give names of specific organisations. See Lammel, *Arbeiterlied*, 234.

<sup>323</sup> Lammel, *Arbeiterlied*, 236.

<sup>324</sup> Caroline Brooke, 'Soviet Music in the International Arena 1932-41', in *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 31 (April 2001), 232. In particular, Soviet participation in international competitions started in 1927, when four Soviet pianists (amongst them Dmitri Shostakovich) participated in the Chopin piano competition in Warsaw. Two of them were awarded the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> prize.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>326</sup> Brooke, *Soviet Music*, 247.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 251.

The IMB participated actively in the publication of Soviet music editions. Its most significant achievement was a collection of songs, published by the Soviet State music publisher, Muzgiz, under the title of 'International Collection of Revolutionary Songs'.<sup>328</sup> This was indeed what the Soviet state described as 'special issue editions': The introduction appears in four languages (English, French, German and Russian), a clear indication that this was intended for use abroad to strengthen international solidarity: Indicative of this is the fact that the slogan 'Workers of the World, Unite!' also appears in four languages.<sup>329</sup> The editorial note points out that this is the 'second in the series of an international collection of song books', and as it was produced for use by amateur singers, a brief description of each song is provided – an explanation of the meaning of each song and what it represents – as well as an indication on the song's level of difficulty.

Contributors are not only Russian composers but also left-wing ones associated with the IMB, such as the Hungarian Ferenc Szabo, or Hanns Eisler. Among the notable Russian contributors to this book, are proletarian composers Aleksandr Davidenko (1899-1934), Boris Shekhter (1900-1961) and Marian Koval (1907-1971), all founding members of Prokoll, a Russian organization formed in 1925 by musicologists and students of Moscow Conservatory.<sup>330</sup> Prokoll aimed to facilitate the 'search for new musical forms consonant with the times and based on the achievements of past and present musical culture', and the composition of works for mass performance.<sup>331</sup> Its members submitted their works for discussion during meetings where other proletarian music issues were discussed.<sup>332</sup>

The IMB collection is divided into three parts, the first being 'songs of the class struggle under capitalism', while the second and third are entitled as 'Songs of the USSR', and 'Songs from the Past of the Russian Proletariat'. Overall, out of the 20 songs that form the collection, 11 belong to the second and third part, promoting Soviet music as a result. Perhaps more intriguing, however, is the only British contribution to this song book, a translation of a Russian song, composed by Davidenko and translated by Tom Thomas,

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<sup>328</sup> Valentina Ramm (ed), *International Collection of Revolutionary songs* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1935).

<sup>329</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>330</sup> Neil Edmunds, *The Soviet Proletarian Music Movement* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000), 211.

<sup>331</sup> Neil Edmunds, 'Aleksandr Davidenko and Prokoll', in *Tempo*, New series, 182 (Sept. 1992), 2-5.

<sup>332</sup> Edmunds, *The Soviet Proletarian*, 211-213. See also Edmunds, *Aleksandr*, 2.



which appears in the third part of the publication.<sup>333</sup> Thomas was in fact one of the most significant contributors to the Workers Theatre Movement (WTM) and was heavily involved in left theatre groups.<sup>334</sup> He was one of the founders of the left drama group the *Hackney Labour Dramatic* Group, formed in London in 1926. Already a member of the ILP (though he disaffiliated after the General Strike of 1926), he additionally developed an interest in music, having being a member of the London Philharmonic Choir since 1921.<sup>335</sup> No documentary evidence survives, however, to explain how Thomas became involved in this collection of songs, though his participation in this project implies that there must have been active contacts between the IMB and the Workers Theatre Movement in Britain during the early 1930s.<sup>336</sup>

### **The Communist Party of Great Britain and its cultural activities.**

At this juncture, it seems appropriate to examine in more detail the cultural activities of the CPGB which like the Labour Party, also had a cultural life, primarily associated with left-wing drama groups, like the ones to which Thomas belonged. Before the 1930s, a number of such groups were founded by communists or communist-sympathisers, although none of them was affiliated to the CPGB. There was, for instance, the London Labour Dramatic Federation (LLDF), which was formed in June 1925 with the collaboration of the LLP and the ILP.<sup>337</sup> Rutland Boughton seems to have been the initial driving force behind it, the project apparently triggered by the success of the LLCU.<sup>338</sup> Using the same blueprint as that of Union, the LLDF worked with 15 local Labour dramatic groups that affiliated to it, after Morrison's suggestion.<sup>339</sup> A year later, it organized its first production, four

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<sup>333</sup> Ramm, *International Collection*, 93.

<sup>334</sup> In fact, Thomas had the only British contribution to the IMB song book discussed above, with a translation of a song by the Russian composer Davidenko. This perhaps implies contacts of the IMB with the Workers Theatre Movement in England, however, it was not possible to confirm this from the archives examined.

<sup>335</sup> Raphael Samuel, Ewan MacColl and Stuart Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left 1880-1935: Workers Theatre Movements in Britain and America* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 81.

<sup>336</sup> Though he also contributed to the *Workers Theatre Movement Song Book*, discussed below.

<sup>337</sup> Summary of Secretary's Reports, 25 June 1925, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/10.

<sup>338</sup> Michael Hurd, *Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festivals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 176.

<sup>339</sup> Bernard Donoughue and George William Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 72. See also Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left*, 23.

performances of the *Insect Play* at the *New Scala Theatre* (7-9 October 1926).<sup>340</sup> As well as the various left dramatic groups active in London (with the *Hackney Dramatic Labour Group* being the most important representative of the movement), in 1924 groups of communists and members of the ILP formed the *Council for Proletarian Art*.<sup>341</sup> It was out of this that the Workers Theatre Movement (WTM) was organized in 1926.<sup>342</sup> Though as was already mentioned, most dramatic groups were organized by the ILP, the actual Workers Theatre Movement experienced a 'turn to the left' after the 1928 adoption of the 'class against class' line of the Communist Party.

Emphasis was given to a theatre focused on class struggle rather than on the idea of 'elevating the masses' through art, as was the Labour Party's 'artistic policy'.<sup>343</sup> During the late 1920s some Labour Dramatic groups chose to change their names: the Hackney Labour Dramatic Group was re-named the Hackney People's Players in 1927, and became Red Radio in 1929, the inclusion of the word 'Red' in its title pointing towards a communist-sympathetic policy. Though the WTM was not controlled by the Communist Party, many of its members were in fact from the Party's Youth Communist League or indeed Party members.<sup>344</sup> By the late 1920s, 'Labour college students were expelled for taking part in WTM productions', resulting in the final break between the WTM and the Labour Movement.<sup>345</sup> To reflect this change, the new Theatre of the Left became more concerned with agitation as the perfect medium for dramatizing the class struggle and in 1931 it affiliated to the Comintern's International Workers Dramatic Union.<sup>346</sup>

Whereas the Labour Movement had established well-developed musical activities reaching as far back as the 1880s, the Communist left appeared to have been more concerned with organizing drama activities than ones focusing on music. Indeed, no reference has been found in the archives to any musical activity organized either by the party, or by party members before the early 1930s. There are only references to music in

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<sup>340</sup> Donoghue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison*, 72, Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left*, 23, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/12.

<sup>341</sup> Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left*, 37, and Colin Chambers, *The Story of the Unity Theatre* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), 25.

<sup>342</sup> Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left*, 37.

<sup>343</sup> *ibid.*, 33.

<sup>344</sup> Chambers, *The Story*, 26- 29.

<sup>345</sup> Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left*, 37-46.

<sup>346</sup> *ibid.*, 46.

relation to the WTM, where it seems to have played a significant role.<sup>347</sup> One of the plays for instance, organized in 1928 by the WTM was a show composed of Russian songs of the Red Army such as 'The Funeral Song for a Dead Comrade', and 'The Prison song'.<sup>348</sup> Another production of the movement included a play in 1930 under the title 'Strike Up!' where Jazz was used as part of the show. In fact, this particular production was heavily criticized by the CPGB Organ, the *Daily Worker*, as 'Slavish copying of jazz not good propaganda'. Asserting that by concentrating on 'feeble parodies' the movement will never produce the 'stirring working class songs' that was so badly needed, the review is a testament to the importance that the movement placed on music in the context of a play.<sup>349</sup> It implies that the proletariat was 'expected' to produce appropriate music, working-class songs to inspire it in its class struggle, rather than just creating parodies of already existing songs irrelevant to the cause and inappropriate for the pro-active agitation that the Workers Theatre Movement represented.

It is therefore quite extraordinary that a movement which placed such importance on music did not attempt to organize separate musical activities to improve the situation. One drawback for achieving such an objective must have been the relatively small membership of the party as compared to that of the Labour Party. This prevented it from aggregating the necessary amount of members to form choirs or other similar ensembles. It is only in 1932 that the first references to a music group associated with the WTM appear.<sup>350</sup> The May Day celebration that year not only included sketches, but demonstrators could also 'march to appropriate tunes and sing songs from the new song books which John Horrocks (or John Morton as his real name was)<sup>351</sup> and his music group circulated to all groups by mid-April'.<sup>352</sup> Indeed, a song book was distributed on that day, bearing the title *Workers Song Book*, a welcome addition that the *Daily Worker* claimed 'Britain has wanted for a long time'.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left*, 90-94.

<sup>348</sup> *ibid.*, 86.

<sup>349</sup> *Daily Worker*, 10 February 1930

<sup>350</sup> Chambers, *The Story*, 36.

<sup>351</sup> Inge Lammell, *Arbeiterlied-Arbeitergesang: Hundert Jahre Arbeitermusikultur in Deutschland* (Tetz: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2002), 292, n.21.

<sup>352</sup> Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left*, 93.

<sup>353</sup> *Daily Worker*, 4 May 1932.

This is a collection of songs mainly written by the WTM itself.<sup>354</sup> Drawing also from the socialist tradition, it included songs favoured by the socialists such as the 'Internationale' and the 'Red Flag', but also songs composed by Tom Thomas. It additionally contained new titles like a 'Soviet Airmen's song' (a WTM collective composition), which highlights the airmen's courage and their fight against the 'world's imperialistic greed', and their efforts to 'drop leaflets' to the 'wage slaves and toiling masses' while they bomb their bosses.<sup>355</sup> Parody songs are also included with two songs by Thomas standing out, 'Jimmie Maxton [ILP MP] and all his men' and 'Just one more chance', both commenting on the betrayal of the Labour Party, its lies, and the fact it needs 'one more chance' to prove it can serve workers and not 'squeeze their wages'.<sup>356</sup> The socialist practice of indicating popular tunes (such as the German *Tannenbaum*) for new text is used for four out of the seventeen songs of the collection.<sup>357</sup> The music group, for which Horrocks was apparently responsible, was re-named Workers Music League (WML), though the date when this happened is unclear.<sup>358</sup> Certainly, it was not affiliated to the CPGB.<sup>359</sup>

### **The duality of Alsace-Lorraine and its implications.**

The organization of the Olympiad started in 1934, and while it is unclear why the chosen location was Strasbourg, the duality of the region might have been one of the reasons. The Strasbourg area had particular significance for France. Standing geographically between France, Germany and Switzerland, it was divided in two areas, the Bas-Rhin and the Haute-Rhin, and had been the subject of numerous annexations by France and Germany. Annexed to Germany from France in 1870, it was returned to France in 1918 after the First World War, but the region was always considered as strategically and politically

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<sup>354</sup> *The Workers Song Book* (London: Workers Theatre Movement, 1932).

<sup>355</sup> *The Workers Song Book*.

<sup>356</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>357</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>358</sup> Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left*, 94.

<sup>359</sup> Tom Thomas, 'A propertyless Theatre for a propertyless class', in Raphael Samuel, Ewan MacColl and Stuart Cosgrove (eds), *Theatres of the Left, 1880-1935. Workers Theatre Movements in Britain and America* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 90 and 94. For instance, the fact that the London Labour Choral Union had a party affiliation, means that we can find some material about it in party archives, which unfortunately is not the case for the Workers Music League. Information about the League can only be found from material of the Workers Theatre Movement.

important from both countries, which resulted in an ever-increasing tension over identity and affiliation in the region.<sup>360</sup>

The 1918 annexation proved particularly difficult for Alsatians. Having been integrated into the German political and cultural system before, the region was required to re-integrate back into the French one. As well as facing the problem of identity, the populace also had to face the very hostile attitude of the French towards anything German in the area. Implementing French administration also meant the suppression of the German language, and this became particularly problematic: In 1926 for instance, only 192,842 of the total population spoke French, while the other 940,944 of the total 1,153,396 spoke either German or Alsatian.<sup>361</sup> Alsatians soon developed a distaste for the new rulers, and this gave rise to an autonomist movement in the area, which became very important by 1927. Communism was also popular especially in Bas-Rhin where Strasbourg belonged. Characteristic of this popularity was that the party rose from 14.4 per cent in the 1925 elections, to 21.75 per cent by 1929, while in the municipal elections of that year it gained 11 of the 36 municipal seats.<sup>362</sup>

The importance of the area's duality can be seen in the implications it had in the development of what historian Samuel Goodfellow describes as 'Communist Autonomists': a form of Alsatian Communism that was so Germanophilic and anti-French that it did not hesitate to support Nazi Germany during the early 1930s in order to demonstrate their distaste for anything French.<sup>363</sup> The Communist Autonomists of the area rejected the main principle of Communism (class-struggle) in favour of national identity. As a result, 'Autnomism became the ideological bridge that carried them from left to right'.<sup>364</sup> At the same time, and because of the rise of Nazism in neighbouring Germany, a great number of German immigrants found the region as an attractive 'exile destination' and as a result Alsace maintained strong links with the struggle against fascism in Germany. The fact that

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<sup>360</sup> Samuel Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine: Fascism in Interwar Alsace* (Illinois, Northern Illinois University Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>361</sup> Samuel Goodfellow, 'From Germany to France? Interwar Alsatian National identity', in *French History*, 7 (1993), 455.

<sup>362</sup> *ibid.*, 7.

<sup>363</sup> *ibid.*, 69-70.

<sup>364</sup> Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika*, 251.

the area was bilingual meant greater access to media (newspapers mainly) both from France and Germany.

The duality of the region was also evident in its workers music organisations. The Workers Music Movement of Alsace-Lorraine (*Union Ouvrière des Sociétés de Musique d'Alsace et de Lorraine*), which was active since 1918, had received cultural influences both from Germany and France, through the various annexations of the region and judging by the number of participants (nearly 3,000 members by 1934), appears to have been successful, which might have been another reason why the region was chosen for the Olympiad. The region's workers' choir Union (*Union Ouvrière des Sociétés d'Alsace et de Lorraine*) had more than 1000 members by the early 1930s. The movement was also affiliated to the IDAS since the inception of the organization in 1932, but disaffiliated in 1933 to join the Communist-led IMB, perhaps not surprisingly, given the popularity of Communism in the area. This, in fact, might have been the second reason why the area appeared as ideal for such an event, as the success of the Communist movement would ensure that the Olympiad was more likely to attract large audiences.

### **The city of Strasbourg and the event: Recession and the significance of the Olympiad.**

It is quite clear from surviving archival evidence that the municipal authorities of Strasbourg were not initially impressed by the idea of a music Olympiad being organized in their city, as they ignored the organizing committee's first letters to them outlining such a proposal.<sup>365</sup> This changed swiftly as soon as the scale of event was realized, and it was obvious that the music Olympiad could be financially beneficial to the city. Given the severe recession in the early 1930s, the prospect of an Olympiad attracting a significant number of visitors from all over the world and reviving the local economy became very attractive. Indeed, officials agreed that 'it should be the obligation of the city to ensure, that the event is supported in any way desired'.<sup>366</sup> An additional factor that contributed to this was the IMB's decision to downplay significantly the political dimensions of the Olympiad, especially

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<sup>365</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>366</sup> Report, Dossier Olympiade Ouvrière, 234 MW 130, 19 December 1934, Archives de la ville et d'Eurométropole de Strasbourg.

the fact that it was organized by a Comintern-led music organisation. This was particularly obvious in the correspondence between the organizing committee and the city's officials. The Olympiad was promoted mainly as 'a contest', while any other references to the political aspects of the Olympiad were ignored.<sup>367</sup> This idea is further re-enforced by evidence found in the Alan Bush Archive. In a letter to Bush, the General Secretary of the Olympiad's organizing committee admitted that

we wanted to have been able to have given a completely different character to this Olympiad, but we had to [...] highlight the art of competition [...] as this corresponds to the mentality of the music workers unions of Western European countries.<sup>368</sup>

The above extract clearly demonstrates the committee's desire to highlight the political dimensions of the event, but were prevented from doing so, in order to ensure wider participation from other European countries who might have been more interested in the contest than the politics behind it. *Die neue Welt*, a paper with a clear anti-fascist approach and official organ of the Opposition Communist Party of Alsace-Lorraine (known as *Kommunistische Partei Opposition*, KPO<sup>369</sup>) chose to deliberately highlight the Olympiad as an purely anti-fascist event, a big international celebration against fascism.<sup>370</sup> The Chairman of the Organising Committee, Emile Schaefer, declared 'the most important thing at the moment is to make the workers cultural movement even stronger, and fight with it the common enemy [of fascism]'.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> Organising committee to the Mayor of Strasbourg, Dossier Olympiade Ouvrière, 234 MW 130, 15 September 1934, Archives de la ville et d'Eurométropole de Strasbourg.

<sup>368</sup> Organising committee to Bush, 26 February 1935, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 634.

<sup>369</sup> The KPO was a 'dissident communist organisation' affiliated to the equally 'dissident' German communist group, the *Internationale Vereinigung Kommunistische Opposition* (IVKO) between 1929 and 1934, when it was expelled from it. This led the KPO from cutting all its Marxist affiliations, and gravitate so much towards the right, that it became independent and united with the Alsatian Nazis. See Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika*, 77-79.

<sup>370</sup> Anon., 'Ein grosses internationales Musikfest', in *Die Neue Welt*, 21 January 1934.

<sup>371</sup> E[mile] Sch[aefer] 'Was ist die I. Internationale Arbeitsmusik- und Gesangsolympiade', in *Die Neue Welt*, 9 April 1935.

## Why using the term Olympiad?

While the use of the term 'Olympiad' might sound strange today, as this clearly defines a Sports event in our days, this was not the case in the 1930s, especially in Russia, and as a result, the proposed Olympiad in Strasbourg might have been inspired by these Russian Olympiads. Apparently it was quite common in the 1930s for such events to take place in the Russian province of Ivanovo, and developed to a national phenomenon that included

general amateur evenings at the local theatres, holiday appearances in public parks and performances by amateur performers in factory and village clubs. The Olympiad format was essentially a presentation of a variety show which provided a combination of song, music, dance, and other forms in different genres.<sup>372</sup>

Their popularity and success in that particular region has been attributed by scholars such as LaPasha, to the 'fundamental human need to perform and be appreciated by others'.<sup>373</sup> There was a significant degree of state intervention, as these Olympiads were organised by local government officials who were not only responsible for choosing venues, but also acted as judges (or in cases were responsible for selecting judges for the event) and selected participants.<sup>374</sup> So high was the number of participants they attracted, that they became chaotic as a result. In one of the organised in 1934 for instance, 2000 performers attended and 6 venues were used.<sup>375</sup>

The main reason for their organisation was educational, in the hope that they will somehow raise the cultural level of participants, performers and audience alike. To performers, they offered an educational opportunity (as they had to learn the repertoire they were to perform) but it was also hoped to inspire them in tackling more complex repertoire for the next Olympiad. As far as the audience was concerned, the main object was to improve their cultural experience.<sup>376</sup> Judging by the repertoire performed, it seems

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<sup>372</sup> Robin LaPasha, 'Amateurs and enthusiasts: folk music and the Soviet state on stage in the 1930s', in Neil Edmund (ed.), *Soviet Music and Society under Lenin and Stalin: The baton and the sickle* (London: Routledge, 2004), 123-147.

<sup>373</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>374</sup> *ibid.*, 125-131.

<sup>375</sup> *ibid.*, 131.

<sup>376</sup> *ibid.*, 134-136.



that performers chose pieces with a considerable level of complexity: In a trade Union Olympiad for instance, organised between 12 and 22 October 1935, participating orchestras performed Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony* and works by Edvard Grieg. In another one that same year, the repertoire included Beethoven's Overture from *Egmont*, and works by Borodin (from *Prince Igor*), Mozart (from *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*), as well as Mendelssohn's Violin concertos. The reason why the level of performance was so high can perhaps been explained by the fact that factories quite often 'sponsored' their musician/workers. For this reason areas characterised by heavy industry (and therefore male-dominated) had developed factory-sponsored orchestras, while mill towns with female labour force were more likely to establish choirs.<sup>377</sup>

Due to budgeting problems however, the authorities in many cases did not give any awards to those that excelled.<sup>378</sup> Even worse, their achievement was met with indifference on behalf of the city's officials that organized the event: No only were they ignored, but they were also expected to participate and perform in official events such as elections or commemorations of the October Revolutions. It therefore apparent that participants were not too interested in awards, but more in improving their performance level.<sup>379</sup>

### **The British Delegation: Preparations for the visit to Strasbourg.**

As was the case with the IDAS affiliation, where Bush campaigned for it about two years before it actually became reality, so in the case of the Strasbourg Olympiad, he started the preparations in January 1935 in what looks again like a campaign to convince the Union as to the significance of its participation. While it is clear from his correspondence with the organizing committee that he was expected to gather a delegation of 50 choir members, the Union only managed 25 to 30 by late January, putting the British participation at risk.<sup>380</sup> Clearly irritated by this development, Bush accused the Union of 'not been sufficiently

<sup>377</sup> LaPasha, *Amateurs and enthusiasts*, 134-138. Unfortunately no details of the event are given

<sup>378</sup> *ibid.*, 136. There is no indication as to what these awards were, though LaPasha mentions the case of a talented six-year old boy and self-taught accordionist, who was awarded 250 roubles.

<sup>379</sup> *ibid.*, 136.

<sup>380</sup> Various letters from April 1935, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 645, and Schaeffer to Bush, 7 April 1935, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 645.

conscious of the importance of this Olympiad',<sup>381</sup> its members lacking imagination to grasp life under fascism, having a lack of 'knowledge and understanding of the present situation', of 'lulling themselves into a false security'.<sup>382</sup>

Bush's reaction to what he saw a reluctance on behalf of the choir members to participate in the Olympiad, was somewhat excessive and harsh. This, after all, was a workers' choir, its members were effectively asked to take a number of days off work, as one of the choirs' conductors pointed out.<sup>383</sup> Some of them were required to find friends or colleagues to replace them. Others had young families and were unable to find friends or family members to look after their children while they were away with the Union. And of course there was also the problem of funding the trip. While the original cost was apparently £6.10 (the equivalent of £221 per person in today's money and four days' wages in 1935), Bush managed to pare it down to £4.10 (£147), no doubt in order to make it more appealing.<sup>384</sup> However, no other financial help was offered to those who wished to participate, instead, choir members were expected to fund themselves.<sup>385</sup> The additional problem was also that the Olympiad was taking place during Whitsun 1935 (9 June), meaning that participants had to abandon their plans for that Monday's Bank holiday. As one of the conductors reminded Bush, '[...] we forget that many young people in Labour choirs work long hours in shops, offices and workshops for small wages, and they certainly need the holiday when it comes'.<sup>386</sup>

The fact that at least one conductor from a choir participating in the LLCU wrote to Bush to protest against his position, points towards the fact that choir members and their conductors found Bush's response as to their inability to participate as unreasonable, and took his accusations of their ignorance and lack of imagination quite seriously, feeling insulted by them. The last remark by the conductor for instance, on the hard, long hours that many young workers had to put up with in shops and workshops for small wages, could

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<sup>381</sup> Bush to affiliated choirs, 7 April 1935, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 645.

<sup>382</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>383</sup> Rowland to Bush, 23 April 1935, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 645.

<sup>384</sup> *ibid.* For converting money from 1935 to today's money and cost of living for that year, see the National Archives, at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid>

<sup>385</sup> Rowland to Bush, 23 April 1935, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 645.

<sup>386</sup> *ibid.*

also be seen as an implicit attack against Bush whose comfortable background effectively insulated him against a direct appreciation of the harsh circumstances facing many workers.

A further and important hurdle facing Bush in his efforts persuade the LLCU to participate in the Olympiad was the fact that he was effectively attempting to convince a socialist choir to participate in a communist-led event. As a matter of fact, Labour Party members attempting to participate in activities organised by the communists were quite often threatened with expulsions. Such was the case in 1928 when the Central Labour College expelled some of its members for participating in a production by the WTM, arranged to raise funds in support of a strike at a North London garment factory.<sup>387</sup> Although no surviving evidence suggests that the LLP threatened choir members with expulsion, this was palpably not the case with the official Labour Party which, according to musicologist Inge Lammel had apparently taken steps to try and dissuade its members from participating in the delegation.<sup>388</sup>

The threat of expulsion (if there was indeed one) highlights a possible rift that had emerged between the Labour Party and the LLP, especially since the LLP actively supported the choir in its decision to participate. One possible reason for this divergence of opinion can be attributed to the lack of popularity accorded to Herbert Morrison by the Labour Party: From as early as 1919 he was apparently 'engaged in a wrangle with the Labour Party about its relationship with the LLP' which was expanding due to its success. Since Morrison had acquired a burgeoning reputation for being an outstanding organizer through his stewardship of various cultural activities, it is quite likely that the LLCU's success was seen as his own personal success, and was resented as such by the Labour Party.<sup>389</sup>

The fact that the LLP was happy for the choir to participate in the Olympiad raises the question as to why a Labour organization could even have considered participation in a Communist event. It is all the more intriguing given that Morrison was one of the most staunch anti-communists within the Labour Party, devoting a considerable amount of time

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<sup>387</sup> Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left*, 37. See Also Raphael Samuel, 'Documents and Texts from the Workers Theatre Movement (1928-1936), in *History Workshop Journal*, 4 (1977), 102-144.

<sup>388</sup> Lammel, *Arbeiterlied*, 269. In fact, Lammel indicates as source the *Press-Bulletin* issued on 12 June 1935 in Strasbourg, which apparently reported this.

<sup>389</sup> Donoghue and George William Jones, *Herbert Morrison. Portrait of a Politician* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 64.

to fighting them as well as the fascists. In fact, he had the reputation of constantly taking ‘a tough line, and at almost every party conference he made a major speech against the communists and their collaborators’.<sup>390</sup> Yet despite his strong anti-communist feelings, in foreign policy he actually ‘preached collaboration with the Soviet Union’, believing Russia to be ‘a genuine power for peace’ during the 1930s.<sup>391</sup> This perhaps might explain why the *London News* that reflected the LLPs policies, viewed the Union’s participation as a significant development for the party, with delegates reminded that showing their support for the Union was effectively a demonstration of their solidarity with the working class movement.<sup>392</sup>

But it was not just Bush who, was very anxious to ensure participation of the Union in the Olympiad. The organizing committee of the event was also very clear from the start that British participation was not just desired, but almost necessary to give the movement an international character, particularly since the other organisations that already knew they would participate, were mainly from much smaller countries such as Holland and Switzerland.<sup>393</sup> British participation was apparently essential to give a ‘good international picture’ of the international workers’ music movement.<sup>394</sup> In fact, the Union’s participation was described as the main event, the ‘crown’ of the Olympiad, helping the IMB in its propaganda purposes.<sup>395</sup>

A further question raised of course is whether there was indeed any Communist music organisation active in the UK that could send a delegation to the event. Indeed, the WML mentioned above, was nowhere near having enough members to be able to fully participate. This, along with a lack of the level of organization and experience garnered by the LLCU, was almost certainly the reason that prevented it from sending representatives to the Strasbourg Olympiad, despite being sympathetic to its cause. Nevertheless, the LLCU and the WML possibly co-operated by working together on the LLCU’s programme after

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<sup>390</sup> *ibid.*, 223-237.

<sup>391</sup> *ibid.*, 254.

<sup>392</sup> R J Boone, ‘Choral Union Notes’ in *The London News*, June 1935.

<sup>393</sup> Schaeffer to Bush, 6 March 1935, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 645.

<sup>394</sup> Bush to organising committee, 6 February 1935, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 645.

<sup>395</sup> *ibid.*

Bush was notified by the Olympiad's committee that John Morton of the WML also made enquiries regarding the event.<sup>396</sup>

The major problem as far as the CPGB was concerned was that it appeared to be lacking sufficient clout to make a decisive impact in Britain. It was 'to remain the despair of the Communist headquarters. A British revolution did not come, nor did it even look like a remote possibility', with the General Secretary of Comintern, Georgi Dimitrov, commenting in 1932 that the movement was 'in pain. It will not grow, nor will it die'.<sup>397</sup> For this reason, the Comintern appears to have kept it under close observation, resulting in significant funds being sent from its Moscow Headquarters to Britain to support it, in the hope that it would eventually grow.<sup>398</sup> This however was not the case. Instead, when the CPGB was required to shift from the 'Class against Class' line towards the 'Popular Front', divisions within the CPGB were triggered, with some members refusing to abandon the previous 'Class against Class' policy.<sup>399</sup> Yet despite all these difficulties, and much to the delight of the Alsatian Organising committee, Bush finally managed to secure a choir of 53 singers, which enabled the Union to participate. It is, however, unclear from the archives as to how this was achieved. In an article on the Olympiad, Michael Tippett seems to imply that the delegation was almost exclusively drawn from one particular Co-operative choir, the Federation Operatic at Abbey Wood.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Organising committee to Bush, 25 January 1935, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 645 and Organising committee to Bush, 3 March 1935, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS Mus 645. There is, unfortunately, no surviving material regarding the reaction of the LLCU choir members, with the prospect of collaborating so closely with an organization identified with the Communist left, such as the WML.

<sup>397</sup> Andrew Thorpe, 'The Communist International and the British Communist Party', in Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe, *International Communism and the Communist International* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 67.

<sup>398</sup> Thorpe, *The Communist International*, 71-72.

<sup>399</sup> *ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>400</sup> Michael Tippett, 'International Workers Music Olympiad', in Meiron Bowen (ed), *Music of the Angels. Essays and Sketchbooks of Michael Tippett* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1980), 34-36, here 34.

### The Strasbourg Olympiad programme.

Altogether, 70 music organisations from various European countries attended, amounting to about 3,000 members of the international workers music movement. This included 4 choirs and orchestras from France, 33 from Alsace, 2 from Holland, 15 from Switzerland, and the LLCU as the only British representative.<sup>401</sup> The honorary committee and adjudicators included 45 members, amongst which were Hanns Eisler, Erwin Piscator, and Bertolt Brecht.<sup>402</sup> Railway workers, engineers, chauffeurs and directors of local music establishments also rallied to help in the organization of the Olympiad, an indication of how important the event was considered by the local community.<sup>403</sup> Participating choirs and orchestras were divided into 9 groups, and 9 different venues were used, with instrumentalists separated from the choirs, as the event also included 6 instrumental competitions, three of which included orchestras. Participants in this case were divided according to the number of members, with competitions including also categories for mandolin, wind, and trumpet. Choirs were further divided into mixed (where the Union competed), male and female choirs.<sup>404</sup>

Most participating choirs, after performing the test piece by Franz Landé *Wir Warten*, chose pieces by Gustav Adolf Uthmann.<sup>405</sup> The compositional style of Landé's song is reminiscent of the four part-songs that the Union was using during the 1920s, as it is short, simple, and goes only as far as describing the workers' desire for the Revolution (as opposed to spurring them into action). Uthmann, who has been described by Eisler as the first proletarian composer, whose text were effective, popular but lacking quality,<sup>406</sup> was one of the most popular composers of the German Workers' music movement, considered as a 'prolific composer capable of providing lively, rousing songs expressing socialist

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<sup>401</sup> Programme, Internationale Arbeiter Musik – und Gesangs Olympiade Europas, Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, AR. 58.36.1.

<sup>402</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>403</sup> Programme, Internationale Arbeiter Musik – und Gesangs Olympiade Europas, Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, AR. 58.36.1. Unfortunately no information is given about the actual musical establishments. In fact, those individuals involved in musical activities are referred to as '*Directeur de musique*', without any further details.

<sup>404</sup> Programme, Internationale Arbeiter Musik – und Gesangs Olympiade Europas, 6, Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, AR. 58.36.1.

<sup>405</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>406</sup> Hanns Eisler, 'Geschichte der deutschen Arbeitermusikbewegung von 1848', in Günter Meyer (ed), *Hanns Eisler: Musik und Politik, 1924-1948* (München: Rogner & Bernhard, 1973), 212.

convictions'.<sup>407</sup> Out of the nine Choirs participating in the same category as the Union, four of them chose songs by Uthmann as their favoured piece. The LLCU chose Edgar Bainton's 'Ballad of Semmer-water', a song published by Curwen Publishers in 1910.<sup>408</sup>

Bainton was a composer whose songs appeared in the Song books used by the Union, so the choice is hardly surprising, as choir members were very familiar with this particular song. Indeed, it had been performed already in the Union's first festival and contest in 1924.<sup>409</sup> The selection of the Bainton also points towards the fact that Bush was eager to demonstrate the type of repertoire that English socialist choirs were singing in London at that time, songs that he thought could compete with those of well-known socialist composers of other countries. Given that the choir was familiar with it, this ensured the best possible performance from an amateur choir. The piece is a relatively easy one, even for an amateur choir, though its fairly complex rhythm makes it more difficult to learn. It certainly requires a level of musicianship in terms of expression, as it is marked with *pianissimos* throughout, containing only one burst of *forte*, making it perhaps more challenging for an amateur choir as it is required to master the appropriate 'colours'. In any case, it appears that the choir did its best and the result was extremely encouraging as it shared the first prize with the Parisian choir (*Chorale Populaire de Paris*).<sup>410</sup> The success is quite significant as the Olympiad was primarily a contest; an opportunity for workers choirs and musicians to demonstrate their musical abilities, and to be judged for their performance, and not for their political beliefs.

On the 9 June, the day of the contest, singers participating in the event also read out a resolution against Fascist Germany and demonstrated in the city of Strasbourg singing the 'The Internationale'. This gave the opportunity to the local police to harass them and use brutal force, breaking anything from instruments to bicycles, conducting searches at gun-point, and arresting about 27 participants.<sup>411</sup> An extra dimension to the hostile reception they received from local authorities was given by Eisler's temporary imprisonment after

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<sup>407</sup> Dieter Dowe, 'The Workingmens' Choral Movement in Germany before the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13 (April 1978), 269-292, 278.

<sup>408</sup> Programme, Internationale Arbeiter Musik – und Gesangs Olympiade Europas, Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, AR. 58.36.1. Edgar Bainton, *Ballad of Semmer-Water* (London: Curwen Press, 1910).

<sup>409</sup> Programme of the Concert, 24 November 1924, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/10.

<sup>410</sup> Lammel, *Arbeiterlied*, 268.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, 270-271.

criticising the standard of workers' life in the US during an interview for the local radio. This resulted in the programme's interruption, at the exact point when he was referring to the poor conditions of the workers at the Ford factory in Detroit, with the official explanation being that the radio station was owned by Henry Ford.<sup>412</sup> As a result of this incident, Eisler was arrested, a development that led to an international outcry with many left-wing organisations, local workers' organisations and the Communist Party of Alsace, agitating for his release.<sup>413</sup>

The significance of the region's duality which was discussed earlier in the chapter becomes important when discussing the local Press's reaction to this incident. On one hand was the daily *L'Humanité*, which reflected the views of the French Communist Party and as expected condemned the police's reaction which was discussed in the newspaper in the context of the 'French imperialism politics in Strasbourg'.<sup>414</sup> Wondering whether singing the 'Internationale' was enough to provoke the police in France, it was implied that, had this demonstration by workers happened in France, the police would not have reacted this way.<sup>415</sup>

In contrast, the other part of the press, such as the German-speaking *Elsass-Lothringer Zeitung* and the French *Nouveau Journal de Strasbourg* were particularly hostile. The *Elsass-Lothringer*, founded in 1929, was the paper of the autonomists, and, as was explained earlier in the chapter, they did not hesitate to support Nazism in their attempt to demonstrate their opposition to anything connected with France. This particular newspaper had apparently a 'favourable' position towards Hitler in the early 1930s, and advocated that his rise was the result of France's 'obsession with turning Germany into a 'second-class nation', while it also exhibited an admiration for Mussolini.<sup>416</sup> No wonder therefore that its appraisal of the 'Internationale' sung during the demonstration was that of being a 'revolutionary hymn, and at the same time Russian National song of today'.<sup>417</sup> Eisler did not escape criticism and was described as a ruthless individual who blatantly promotes

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika*, 79, and Lammel, *Arbeiterlied*, 270-271.

<sup>415</sup> Lammel, *Arbeiterlied*, 270-271.

<sup>416</sup> Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika*, 107-108.

<sup>417</sup> Anon., 'Die Zwischenfälle bei der Musik- und Gesangs-Olympiade', in *Elsass-Lothringer Zeitung*, 12 June 1935.



'Communist propaganda'.<sup>418</sup> The *Nouveau Journal de Strasbourg* also commented unfavourably on his political connections, suggesting that for him music without Moscow is unthinkable, while his value as a composer was not deemed as worthy of discussion:

the composer Eisler who is considered as more important than he actually is, and who knows how to take advantage of whatever publicity he attracts, has managed to show through the whole organization of the Olympiad, that Bolshevik politics are far more important for him than Music.<sup>419</sup>

### **The IMB's appraisal of the Olympiad.**

The IMB appeared to have done everything possible to ensure the success of the Olympiad, going as far as suggesting a closer co-operation between IMB and IDAS already in April 1935, two months before the Olympiad took place. One can speculate that this was done primarily for two reasons: First, the majority of workers' organisations in most countries (if not all) were organized by the Social Democrats, with the Communists only just starting to establish their own musical activities, therefore participation of the social democrats would ensure a large number of participants and more chances of the event being successful. Second, the IMB's gesture can be understood as part of the Popular Front context, as a way of a communist organization extending a suggestion for co-operation with a Social Democrat one (IDAS), reflecting in this way the newly approved (by the Comintern) policy.

The first approach between IMB and IDAS was in a letter signed by the theatre director Erwin Piscator and the Hungarian composer Ferenc Szabó on 15 April 1935.<sup>420</sup> In an attempt to demonstrate that workers' choirs can unite socialists and communists and present this as a development that has occurred in the past, IDAS was urged to remember the hard times during the Bismarck era when the Socialist Party was banned, and how workers' choirs helped creating solidarity among the working classes. Recognizing the importance of the Social Democrats in working towards this goal, the hostilities between

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<sup>418</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>419</sup> Anon., 'Musik und politische Verhetzung', in *Le Nouveau journal de Strasbourg*, 12 June 1935.

<sup>420</sup> Bundesarchiv, letter *An das Sekretariat der internationalen der Arbeitersänger*, 15 April 1935.

Social Democrats and Communists were ignored while Russia is represented as an advanced state, 'the land of the successful Proletariat' and 'the land where art was flourishing'. The letter concluded with the offer of a positive co-operation between the two organisations which was described as the IMB's responsibility, without however diminishing the (presumably political) 'fundamental differences' between IDAS and IMB. In this respect, the Olympiad is offered as the ideal opportunity for social democrats and communists to demonstrate their solidarity against fascism.<sup>421</sup>

The IDAS, however, completely ignored the letter, a manifestation of the deep-rooted antipathy between social democrats and communists that persisted in the mid-1930s, and chose to discuss its content during the organisation's conference in Prague that took place 14 and 15 September 1935, almost three months after the conclusion of the Olympiad. Moreover, Eisler along with the composer and representative of the IMB, Hermann Reichenbach, were not initially allowed to participate in a discussion on 10 September to explain the IMB's position.<sup>422</sup> It was only thanks to participants in the conference, such as Alan Bush who represented England, that Eisler was given 15 minutes to defend the IMB.<sup>423</sup> During his short speech, he attempted the impossible: he denied that the IMB had any political purposes (despite the fact of course that it was effectively organized by a cultural section of the Comintern) and highlighted those aspects of the co-operation that were probably more attractive to IDAS: the creation of a publishing house for workers music, something that the IDAS had failed to organize despite its initial suggestions already since 1926 when the organization was founded, and the organization of a yearly meeting for all workers associations.<sup>424</sup>

The response of the delegates gives a very good idea as to why such an international co-operation was impossible: In some countries, the antipathy between social democrats and communists was so strong, that it would render impossible any suggestion for co-operation between the two parties. The Dutch delegate for example responded that such a co-operation would be considered as 'suicide' in his country, with any material printed by a

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<sup>421</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>422</sup> Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, *IDAS Protokoll von der 5 IDAS Konferenz*, September 1935.

<sup>423</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>424</sup> *ibid.*

publisher suspected of having communist affiliations to be regarded as worthless.<sup>425</sup> Other countries completely ignored the political dimensions of the co-operation (perhaps Social Democrats were not too hostile towards communists in some countries and there was some room for co-operation between the two) and focused more on the practical side of things: Bush for example was more interested in the idea of a workers' publisher, something that the UK lacked, reminding delegates that the IMB's suggestions of a workers' music publisher was indeed very attractive, especially since the IDAS music publisher failed to materialise.<sup>426</sup>

Nevertheless, the final outcome of this discussion was not encouraging for the IMB. It would appear that the political differences between the two organisations were so strong, that there was no possibility for any kind of co-operation. While the IDAS recognized the idea of a united workers music movement as an interesting one, it concluded that the creation of solidarity among the working class was 'the responsibility of political parties'.<sup>427</sup> Even more significant was its conclusion that singers participating in organisations affiliated to IDAS are 'not just singers, but also party members and as such [they are also] responsible for [their] actions for the Party'.<sup>428</sup> As it was explained in the second chapter, the organisation had clear political lines with a very strong socialist orientation, specifically affiliating socialist national organisations rather than communist ones.<sup>429</sup>

It is, however, quite an oxymoron that the two organisations agreed to co-operate in exchanging printed material: in this sense, it could be argued that essentially socialist organisations were encouraged to sing material more appropriate for communist organisations and vice versa; on the other hand, this could have been just a decision to facilitate practical matters, with the IDAS taking advantage of the IMB's resources and ability to organise a publishing house. In any case, as was demonstrated during the Olympiad, socialist organisations such as the LLCU that were affiliated to IDAS were allowed to participate in the IMB's event, without suffering any repercussions (such as expulsion from IDAS for example).

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<sup>425</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>426</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>427</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>428</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>429</sup> IDAS Verhandlungsniederschrift der Grundskonferenz, 12 June 1926, and 26 June 1926, Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, Dossier Ar.58.36.1.

Despite the IDAS rejection of a more substantial co-operation between the two, the fact that affiliated-IDAS organisations were allowed to participate in the Olympiad, led the IMB to conclude that the creation of a united front of music-intellectuals and worker singers was achieved.<sup>430</sup> Nonetheless, this did not prevent the IMB from blaming IDAS for its ‘Sabotage’ which apparently prevented the event from attracting more participants, a conclusion somewhat unjust, given that socialist choirs were allowed to participate. The fact that delegates’ attendance was not higher, was blamed on delegates’ financial difficulties, problems with visas (for those choirs wishing to participate), but also organizational and political difficulties. At least one choir, from Prague, was mentioned for having been prevented from participating due to financial difficulties. Organisational and political obstacles (without specifying their exact nature) were blamed for preventing choirs from Belgium and Sweden participating, while choirs from the Netherlands were apparently unable to get visas for the event.<sup>431</sup>

### **The impact of the Olympiad in Britain: British Press and reception.**

Though the success of the Union in the Olympiad did not have any impact whatsoever on the choir (it did not, for instance, result in more affiliations for the LLCU) the Press generally showed interest in the Union’s participation. Presumably the fact that a socialist organization attended a communist-organised event, was enough to attract the Press’s attention, especially since, as was implied elsewhere in the chapter, the choir participated despite a possible threat of expulsion for those Labour Party members that took part in the delegation. The socialist newspaper *Daily Herald* provided a generally favourable report, highlighting the number of participants (4,000 according to the paper) as a means of demonstrating the event’s success.<sup>432</sup>

Being enthusiastic about it, the paper reported that the British choir ‘won the majority of awards’, when in fact there was only one award the Union won, as it competed

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<sup>430</sup> Resolution der Internationalen musikbüros beim IRTB, 9 July 1935, Bundesarchiv, RY1/I4/8/2.

<sup>431</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>432</sup> Anon., ‘British victories at music Olympiad’, in *Daily Herald*, 10 June 1935

in one category only (that of mixed choirs) and there is no report of the police's brutality against participants at all: Instead, the police is described as providing 'strong forces and mobile guards [...] as a precautionary measure', giving the impression that the event ran smoothly and the workers demonstration was peaceful.<sup>433</sup> Equally, there are no references either to Eisler, or to the organizing body behind the Olympiad (the IMB). One suspects this was done deliberately to present the Olympiad as a socialist-organised one, eliminating references even to Eisler that might highlight his communist affiliations to *Daily Herald* readers.

But while the *Daily Herald* chose not to ignore the event despite its communist affiliations, other socialist newspapers chose to do the opposite. The *New Leader* for instance, which was associated with the ILP (an organization that had many choirs affiliated to the LLCU) completely ignored the Olympiad. The reason for that might be the fact that the ILP, which the newspaper was representing, became quite often the CPGB's and the Comintern's target during the mid-1930s as has been mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, and as a result, the paper quite possibly wanted to avoid highlighting the significance of a communist-organised event.

The *Manchester Guardian* (which had no party political affiliations) provided a more balanced report simply describing the facts, giving a brief account of the event that appeared very basic: while attendance in terms of audience is described as 10,000 people (the same number also appeared in a separate review in the *London News* so it is possibly correct)<sup>434</sup> the Union is described as 'receiving a silver cup' without any indication as to why this happened, and whether this was an award for something or not; Bush is reported as being 'highly complimented by the committee on his conductorship', without any suggestion as to whether this resulted in anything more meaningful either for Bush (a conductorship award) or for the Union.<sup>435</sup>

The *Musical Times* chose a somewhat elitist and patronizing approach, describing the event as one of some 'social significance, if of doubtful musical achievement'. It was

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<sup>433</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>434</sup> Alan Bush, 'Choral Union's Strasbourg Triumph', in *London News*, July 1935.

<sup>435</sup> Anon., 'Workers Music international festival' in *The Manchester Guardian*, 12 June 1935.

apparently an attempt to demonstrate a '*credo* – the ambitious belief that there can be distinctly *class consciousness* content in music!', the exclamation mark at the end of the sentence indicating the writer's incredulity as to whether this was actually possible. In what appears as a hint to what Bush was doing all those years with the Union, the author of the article concluded that 'it is one thing to advance a theory as to 'Music and Class-struggle' and another to find evidence in substantiation'. It was, however, recognized that the Olympiad 'records a definite move to create the widest interest in music in that widest stratum of society, the working classes'.<sup>436</sup>

Michael Tippett, who also participated in the Olympiad as choir member on behalf of the RACS, made an enthusiastic contribution to the RACS official organ, *Comradeship and Wheatsheaf*, though he chose to focus more on political developments and the history of Strasbourg, rather than musical matters.<sup>437</sup> In fact, he doesn't even mention that about 13 members of the RACS actually managed to travel with the British delegation.<sup>438</sup> Instead, more than half his article is dominated by his impressions of Strasbourg and its working class history, particularly on what he thought represented a 'foretaste of a free, classless society': children apparently being free to walk on the microphone platforms and talk to participants, free to participate in the event but also in the demonstrations without being 'ordered about', and (most impressively according to Tippett) knowing the history of Strasbourg inside-out and being able to guide visitors in the city.<sup>439</sup>

He also appears to have no doubts as to what the Olympiad represented: Though no other part of the British press mentioned this, he blatantly describes it as an opportunity, though a too short one, to understand 'how the United Front was forged', and was pleased to see 'the sympathy the English rank and file comrades showed for it, many of the Labour Party members returning the clenched fist communist salute on the march through the streets'.<sup>440</sup> This last comment also seems to imply that British delegates participating in the Olympiad were under no illusions as to the political affiliations of the event and were happy

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<sup>436</sup> Anon., 'A "Workers" Music Festival at Strasbourg', *Musical Times*, 76 (July 1935), 653.

<sup>437</sup> Michael Tippett, 'International Workers' Music Olympiad: English Choir visits Strasbourg', in *Comradeship and the Wheatsheaf*, August 1935, 14-15.

<sup>438</sup> In fact, Tippett does not mention a number. The article contains a photo of 13 members, with the caption 'a group of RACS choir members who took part in the Olympiad'. See Tippett, *international Workers*, 14.

<sup>439</sup> Tippett, *International Workers*, 14-15.

<sup>440</sup> *ibid.*

to demonstrate their solidarity with the communist participants, despite participating in a socialist choir.

Alan Bush on the other hand, provided a very enthusiastic report for the LLP's Official Organ, *The London News*, but chose to focus more on musical matters rather than politics, quite possibly because his position was very delicate: he conducted a socialist choir in a communist-organised event after all, and the readers of this particular publication (*The London News*) were affiliated the LLP.<sup>441</sup> Instead, he comments on the organisers creating a 'wide front against war and fascism' (avoiding the description of United/Popular Front unlike Tippett) describing those participating in the Olympiad and its committee as 'progressive intellectuals to the extreme left wing of the organized working class' and not communists or communist-sympathisers.<sup>442</sup> As a result of his approach to report only on the musical side of the event, he commented on the enthusiastic reception the choir received whenever it performed, particularly during the contest in what he describes as a 'packed house' that 'greeted [the choir's] entry with vigorous applause', pointing out that 'even the judges clapped', an indication of the Union's quality of performance.<sup>443</sup>

### **The Union's new repertoire: A direct result of the participation to the Olympiad?**

Bush's closer ties with Eisler (such as the fact that they were good enough friends for Eisler to initiate Bush to communism) now resulted in promoting material by Eisler for the choir. Such was the case with choruses from Eisler's work, *Die Maßnahme*. Although the choir only gave a full performance of the work (in English) in 1938, it would appear that the Union was already performing choruses from it since 1935. As a matter of fact, it could be that this particular detail might have led to the confusion regarding the work's first performance in England. While it is certain that the work was first performed in full in 8 March 1938 at Westminster Theatre (there are surviving programmes to demonstrate it), Bush himself in an essay written in 1980 mentions its first performance as having taken place sometime between 1934 and 1935.<sup>444</sup> Bush's friend, Ernst Hermann Meyer, points out

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<sup>441</sup> Alan Bush, 'Choral Union's Strasbourg Triumph' in *The London News*, July 1935.

<sup>442</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>443</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>444</sup> Alan Bush, *In my eighth decade and other essays* (London: Kahn and Averill), 21.

that during his first meeting with Alan in 1934, a possible performance of 'The Expedient' was discussed, which implies that the work (or parts of it) were already translated and ready for performance.<sup>445</sup>

Certainly, on 24 March 1935, the Union performed Eisler's 'In Praise of Learning', 'Report on the Death of a Comrade' and 'The Party's in Danger', all choruses from *Die Maßnahme*.<sup>446</sup> In addition to this concert, a separate one took place in November that year (27 November 1935) at Battersea Town Hall, which again had the form of a Demonstration (or at least was named as one) and where the Union performed two choruses from 'The Expedient', though it is unclear as to which ones (the report provides no titles).<sup>447</sup> What is, however, certain, is that this event had communist tendencies, as, according to the report, it opened with a 'red flag streaming', with the choir being described as wearing its 'red and white costumes', thus embracing signifiers of communism.<sup>448</sup>

In fact, Eisler's work had been already introduced to the Union through an article that appeared in the *London News* in May 1935, two months after the first performance of 'The Expedient' choruses took place.<sup>449</sup> Comparing him to Bush (with the Labour Movement being described as lucky to have them both in its ranks), the article introduces him as Schoenberg's pupil but not one that has embraced Schoenberg's new techniques exclusively, which led to compositions described by the paper as 'musical cartoons', 'songs and choruses directly inspired by the particular political events', presumably here introducing the techniques used in those choruses sung by the Union from 'The Expedient'.<sup>450</sup> In any case, this article, along with the timing (it appeared around the time the union was performing its first material by Eisler) demonstrates an orchestrated attempt to get the Union acquainted with Eisler's work, and quite possibly to build up enthusiasm for his work amongst the Union's rank, that would eventually lead to 'The Expedient's first performance a year later. The reaction, however, of the choir members regarding the

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<sup>445</sup> Ernst Hermann Meyer, 'Alan Bush in the Thirties' in Ronald Stevenson (ed.), *Alan Bush: An 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Symposium* (London: Bravura Publishing, 1981), 74-75, here 74.

<sup>446</sup> Alan Bush, 'Eisler Demonstration' in *Left Review*, Vol 1 no8 (May 1935), 330-33, here 332.

<sup>447</sup> J R Boone, 'Choral Union Notes' in *The London News*, January 1936.

<sup>448</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>449</sup> R J Boone, 'The BBC takes notice', in *The London News*, May 1935.

<sup>450</sup> *ibid.*



introduction of Eisler's songs to the Union's repertoire is unclear. Certainly, at this stage at least, there are no indications that choir members overtly objected to singing his music.

**Conclusions: A socialist choir moving dangerously close to communism.**

With its participation in an event organized by a Communist cultural organization, it could be argued that the LLCU was now getting dangerously close to communism. This becomes even more apparent if one takes into account the fact that the year 1935 was also when Bush joined the CPGB, a membership that lasted until his death in 1995.<sup>451</sup> It is unclear whether he joined the CPGB before or after the participation of the Union in the Olympiad. In any case, it clearly demonstrated an individual with strong communist leanings and as such, it could be said that there is now a more visible encroachment of left-wingers/communist sympathisers like Bush, willing to take the Union further to the Left of the Labour Party and associate it with communist activities.

Bush's initiation to communism was apparently the result of his friendship with Hanns Eisler, with whom he lived very close when Eisler was in England (during 1935), although, according to his own admission, he was already close to communism by then.<sup>452</sup> It has been mentioned, for instance, in the previous chapter that he was already familiar with communist-sympathetic circles since at least 1933, when he met Swingler. Clearly, he saw his CPGB membership as a sign of his personal maturity, rejecting his Labour Party membership that lasted between 1929 and 1935 (he was an ILP member also between 1924 and 1929) as a 'mechanical materialism of [his] boyhood'.<sup>453</sup> He subsequently became one of the CPGB's most faithful members, regarding Marxism as a 'guide to action'.<sup>454</sup>

As a result, the communist sympathisers and communist members that were already close to the Union (Randall Swingler for example who was discussed in the previous chapter) now also include the Union's conductor. There is also an apparent 'top-down'

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<sup>451</sup> Nancy Bush, *Alan Bush. Music, Politics and Life* (London: Thames Publishing, 2000), 39, and Alan Bush, *In my Eighth Decade and Other Essays* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1980), 20.

<sup>452</sup> Bush, *In my Eighth Decade*, 20 and Schafer Murray, *British Composers in Interview* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 54.

<sup>453</sup> Bush, *In my Eighth Decade*, 20.

<sup>454</sup> *ibid.*, 21.

structure evident by now, with the Union being forced to participate in events that it would not otherwise have done, had it not been for its conductor's insistence. The affiliation to the IDAS discussed in the previous chapter was one of them; it was for instance pointed out that Bush almost campaigned for it for two years until the affiliation became reality. A similar case was the Olympiad, where Bush again appears to have campaigned vigorously and made efforts to overcome even the most obvious problem of all, that of expenses, in order to ensure the Union's participation. The members' protest as manifested in the conductor's letter mentioned above, is quite telling. Although it doesn't demonstrate indifference towards a possible participation, it does seem to imply that members and conductors representing them were aware of the gap between choir members struggling to make ends meet, and the Union conductor's comfortable background that could allow him a trip to Strasbourg.

This turn to the Left however was carefully considered: Not only was there an introduction of new, left material ('Question and Answer', Eisler's choruses from 'The Expedient') but this was balanced with performance of other socialist songs, with which the Union was comfortable (Bainton's 'Ballad of Semmer-water'). In the case of the Olympiad's repertoire performed by the Union, the choice of Bainton's song was probably a strategy designed to ensure that choir members were singing material with which they were very familiar; also, given that the delegation was almost scrambled the last minute, it ensured minimum amount of rehearsal time. However, this could have equally been a way for the leadership to ensure participation in the Olympiad, in case choir members objected to singing songs such as the 'Question and Answer', for finding it too 'radical' and inappropriate for a socialist choir.

The last and very interesting point is of course that of a socialist choir participating in a communist event. This indeed is intriguing, especially when examined against the background of the hostilities between the Social Democrats and Communists during that period. Such a paradox can probably be explained by what appears to have been blurred boundaries between the two organisations, IDAS and IMB. While the IDAS for instance made clear it had strong socialist affiliations, it was explained that organisations such as the LLCU did not have any repercussions for participating in IMB's Olympiad. Indeed, the two organisations also managed to find ground for co-operation when it came to printed

material. The additional complication of Bush, having taken the Union to the Olympiad, was also allowed to participate as a delegate representing the Union in the IDAS September conference, also seems to reinforce the not-so strict dividing lines between IDAS and IMB.

Lastly, comparing the reaction of the UK Press to the 1934 Pageant of Labour and the 1935 Olympiad, reveals that in the second case it was more sympathetic towards the Union. It is also notable that, while the 1933 tour the Union did not receive Press coverage at all as was noted in the previous chapter (with the exception of the LLP's official organ) the Strasbourg Olympiad participation appears to have elicited widespread attention. This can perhaps be explained by the political background, rather than the Union suddenly becoming popular with the British Press. The 1934 Pageant for instance was a British event; the Communist press judged it as inappropriate for not criticising the Labour Party enough for its actions during the 1926 General Strike. On the other hand, the Socialist Press criticised it for being too communist. In contrast, the Strasbourg Olympiad was an international event, one where workers showed solidarity against fascism, a completely different cause from criticising parties at national level through a Pageant. The fact that even that part of the press not traditionally associated with the Left (such as the *Manchester Guardian* for example) chose to provide a report, even if it was inadequate demonstrates that the Press felt it was almost an obligation to report the developments from Strasbourg.

It would therefore appear that the Union is continuing its journey towards Communism, which started almost timidly in the early 1930s. The process begins with a number of communist-sympathetic individuals participating in its activities, and gradually, through the introduction of new repertoire (Bush's songs, but also Eisler's). The participation in this Olympiad further reinforces the gravitation towards communism, though still the Union's leadership insists on participating in socialist International organisations (such as the IDAS) rather than brazenly attempting to affiliate it to an overtly communist organisation such as the IMB. The participation in the Olympiad, along with Bush's official espousing of Communism through his CPGB membership, takes the Union further to the left, though it still remains a socialist-organised choir, under the auspices of the LLP.

## Chapter 4.

### **The London Labour Choral Union, 1936-1938.**

#### **International Trotskyism and the British Left: Communist and Trotskyist debates within the Union.**

Since Bush had become a CPGB member in 1935, the leadership of the LLCU was now effectively under the control of a communist. Similarly, however, it would appear that other prominent members of the Union were moving even further towards the Left, spurred on by international political developments. A notable example is Michael Tippett who, as it was explained in the second chapter, was already more closely aligned to the Left of the Labour Party having joined the RACS in 1932, and had been raising his concerns regarding the LLCU'S repertoire since 1934.<sup>455</sup> He followed Bush in 1935 in acquiring a short-lived CPGB membership after being introduced to Marxism by his friend, Phyllis Kemp.<sup>456</sup> Convinced that the CPGB branch he attended was preoccupied with 'matters of which [he] had no knowledge', he disaffiliated and was subsequently introduced to Trotskyism by a member of Morley College.<sup>457</sup>

The initial seeds of the Trotskyist movement in the UK emerged in 1929 with the formation of the Marxian League.<sup>458</sup> But it was only in 1932 with the inauguration of the Balham Group, named after a collection of local CPGB members and leaders who clashed with CPGB leadership, that Trotskyism came more into the mainstream.<sup>459</sup> Tippett's involvement with those organisations is hazy. He is reported as having joined the Musician's Group of the Bolshevik-Leninist fraction of the Labour Party (also known as the Militant

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<sup>455</sup> Ian Kemp, *Tippett: the composer and his music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 31-34 and Letter from Tippett to Bush, 24 July 1934 'I want to see you a lot to talk Communism with you seriously'. Letter reproduced in Thomas Schuttenhelm, *Selected letters of Michael Tippett* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), 122.

<sup>456</sup> Joanna Bullivant, 'Tippett and politics: the 1930s and beyond' in Kenneth Gloag and Nicholas Jones, *The Cambridge Companion to Michael Tippett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 68-85, here 70.

<sup>457</sup> Kemp, *Tippett*, 32-33, Suzanne Robinson, 85 and Michael Tippett, *Those Twentieth Century Blues: An autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), 46-47.

<sup>458</sup> Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, 438-9. Trotsky did not agree with the policies of this group, and it 'disappeared in obscurity' soon after it was formed.

<sup>459</sup> Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, 440. Those members were expelled and formed the Communist League in 1932. The organisation changed its name in 1936 to become the Marxist League. Other Trotskyist groups in Britain included the Socialist League (formed by ILP members in 1932) and the Marxist group (1934) formed by branches of the ILP controlled by Trotskyists. For more details on the various British Trotskyist groups, see Grant, *History*, 440-445.

Group after the Party's official organ called *The Militant*).<sup>460</sup> At the same time, there are additional indications that link him to Executive Committee meetings of the Militant Group, along with the ornithologist and fellow Trotskyist, Denzil Dean Harber.<sup>461</sup> The main evidence for that is an undated letter to Bush (possibly late July 1936) in which he describes Harber as 'our organiser Comrade Harber', an individual with 'lucidity and clarity and coldness of judgement'.<sup>462</sup> Tippett also appears as being active in Trotskyist circles as late as 1937, with his possible involvement in a splinter from the Militant Group, known as the Workers International League.<sup>463</sup>

This evidence appears to somehow contradict Kemp's notion that Tippett never joined any Trotskyist group even though he was a known Trotsky sympathiser.<sup>464</sup> He additionally dismisses Tippett's journey to the radical Left as 'naïve dabbling in territories he did not understand', for 'simply following the romantic fashion to align with the dangerous and exciting politics of the left-wing'.<sup>465</sup> His commitment to Trotskyism is described as 'ambiguous', as he was deliberately avoiding to get involved 'with sticky political in-fighting'.<sup>466</sup> Musicologist Joanna Bullivant supports this line pointing out that Tippett's involvement in Trotskyist organisations does appear ambiguous with no evidence of extensive involvement with any specific group.<sup>467</sup> While there is indeed no concrete evidence to connect Tippett to any substantial work with Trotskyist groups, his journey to the far left certainly added one more far-left/radical individual participating in the Union's

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<sup>460</sup> Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, *Against the Stream: A history of the Trotskyist movement in Britain, 1924-1938* (London: Socialist Platform, 1986), Appendix two. Tippett's participation in that group was also confirmed apparently by another Militant Group member, see Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, 284.

<sup>461</sup> JJ Plant, Michael Tippett Obituary, in *Revolutionary history*, originally written for Vol. 7 no. 1.

<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol7/no1/plant.html> Accessed online, 23 July 2012. Harber (1909-1966) was an ornithologist and Trotskyist. Having ill-health all his life due to asthma which cost him his education, he went on to teach himself Russian, and study at the London School of Economics. His Russian language knowledge was such that enabled him to work as an interpreter for a Canadian journalist on tour in Russia during 1931, an event that left him disillusioned about Russia. After settling in Eastbourne, he studied geology and became a prominent ornithologist, a member of the British Ornithologist's Union and of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. See Obituary, in *British Birds*, Vol. 60 (1967), 84-86.

<sup>462</sup> Tippett to Bush, late July 1936, BL, Alan Bush Collection MS Mus 449.

<sup>463</sup> Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, 284.

<sup>464</sup> Kemp, *Tippett*, 33.

<sup>465</sup> *ibid.*, 38.

<sup>466</sup> *ibid.*, 33.

<sup>467</sup> Bullivant, *Tippett*, 70.

ranks, as conductor and adjudicator. In this respect, the idea of CPGB members and other radicals advancing within the Union's leadership is further reinforced.

### **The Workers Music Association (WMA).**

The year 1936 signified a further development in Bush's journey to the Left: It was the year he initiated a workers' music organisation under the name of Workers Music Association (WMA). Although there is no evidence that the WMA was founded as a result of any personal frustrations with the Union's development, one can speculate that it was created out of his need to lead a music organisation that he could control better, rather than just being a conductor in a socialist choir controlled by the Labour Party. Indeed, it looks like his conviction that one working-class music organisation (LLCU) was not enough for London, led him to the founding of the WMA. In what appears to have been an open letter to the LLCU in 1936, Bush remarked:

In the past, you have done nothing except what other societies have done. What is the good of doing exactly the same as Conservative Associations are doing? It is better than nothing, but you want to do something that has a real relation to what you are doing.<sup>468</sup>

The term 'conservative associations' here does not refer to choirs or musical institutions of the Right; there are no indications that the Conservative party offered any kind of musical activities for its members during the mid-1930s. Instead, it is almost certainly used as a derogatory description for all other choirs active in London dominated by 'petty bourgeois elements' he so disliked, with the term 'conservative' being utilised pejoratively as the opposite of 'revolutionary', supposedly represented by the LLCU.

As a matter of fact, it won't be too far from the truth to say that Bush had been particularly busy initiating revolutionary music organisations already since 1935. The inauguration, for example, of the WMA took place at Whitechapel Art Gallery in London on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1936, with the participation of other left-wing organisations including the LLCU, the RACS, but also an organisation under the name of Co-ordinating Committee for Workers Musical Activity, established in 1935 by Bush (who was also its Chairman), the membership

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<sup>468</sup> Bush, *Music with a Social purpose*, x.

of which included other left-wingers and communist sympathisers such as Michael Tippett and John Morton.<sup>469</sup> Morton, it should be remembered, was a member of the Communist-sympathetic WTM's music group that formed the Workers Music League, as was discussed in the third chapter of the thesis.

While the WMA shared similar aims to those of the LLCU, seeking to 'bring existing workers' music-organisations into closer touch with another, it also aimed to include professional musicians within its ranks, in order to ensure 'skilled assistance' in training amateurs, while it was clear that all members were expected to be from working class trade unions and other co-operative organisations.<sup>470</sup> The Association also intended to stimulate music compositions and provision of appropriate repertoire for all working class music organisations that were interested in combining music with left politics, implying that there was not enough appropriate material available. While Bush assumed the position of President, other contemporary composers, such as Michael Tippett, Benjamin Britten and Hanns Eisler, all appeared as 'Vice Presidents' of the association, though the extent of their active involvement in the organisation remains unclear. More likely, their names appeared in the WMA as an indication of their sympathy with its aims.

The WMA's inauguration took more the form of a celebration of radical music and theatre, as it showcased not just music from choirs and bands, but also ballet and the participation of various dance and drama groups and unemployed musicians, in an event that resembled a Pageant.<sup>471</sup> There were songs by Elgar, Purcell and Handel (though there is no information as to which songs these were), as well as Yiddish Folk-songs, but also Eisler's 'In Praise of Learning' from 'The Expedient', with which, as it was pointed out in Chapter 3, the choir was getting increasingly familiar, and a new work under the title 'The Red Front', a choral ballet written by Sylvia Townsend Warner, with Bush providing the music.<sup>472</sup> Townsend Warner was another fellow CPGB member, having joined the party in 1935 like

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<sup>469</sup> Lammell, *Arbeiterlied*, 250, and leaflet, Co-ordinating Committee for Workers Musical Activity, Albert Sloam Library, Papers and correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner, WARNER/A/2/3/A.79.

<sup>470</sup> Albert Sloam Library, Papers and Correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner, WARNER/A/2/3/A.79, leaflet, Co-ordinating Committee for Workers Musical Activity.

<sup>471</sup> 'Music and 'Left-Wing' Politics', in *Musical Times*, Vol. 77, no. 1118 (April 1936), 363 and 'National link up for worker musicians. Scheme outlined by Mr Alan Bush' in *Daily Herald*, 27 February 1936.

<sup>472</sup> Music and 'Left-Wing' Politics', in *Musical Times*, Vol. 77, no. 1118 (April 1936), 363.

Bush, and was also active in 'attending meetings, fund raising and contributing to left-wing journals'.<sup>473</sup>

The text she provided for Bush has an overt revolutionary content, encouraging workers to join the struggle against the ruling classes, asking them if they finally had enough, if they are 'lean enough, bold enough' to join the fight for the revolution. Bush's music is strongly reminiscent of the 'Question and Answer' discussed in Chapter 2 of the thesis.<sup>474</sup> He uses short rhythmic cells to underline the text, in a work that is marked 'steady marchtime', while the flow of the music is interrupted every now and again with a section of 'Red! Red! Red!' for which he uses pauses in the same manner he did in the 'Question and Answer'. This, however, is not a unison song: It is in fact a four part-song, and the 'Red! Red!' section is not one to be shouted at the audience, but one to be sung.<sup>475</sup>

By the mid-1930s, Bush's ideas about what appropriate music for the proletariat should be, had been crystallised. The very few articles he wrote during his early years as a CPGB member are quite revealing of his changing attitude towards music and its function in society. In 1936, for instance, he discussed in an article for the RACS official organ, *Comradeship and Wheatsheaf*, the significance of music for the working classes as having a 'biological value', upsetting the process of 'natural ossification' that occurs naturally in human beings.<sup>476</sup> In order to be useful to the working classes, music had to be connected to society and

must be allied in present circumstances to a concrete text which will focus people's minds on what we [co-operative music associations] are trying to do. Music could intensify emotions, stimulate to action, and inspire people to do what they would not otherwise do; it could make theoretical problems more palatable; it could stimulate people to discussion<sup>477</sup>

The importance of text is highlighted, as it should encourage workers to fight against the ruling classes, and would eventually lead to action. The texts chosen should be

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<sup>473</sup> Biography of Sylvia Townsend Warner from the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society, <http://townsendwarner.com/biography.php> retrieved 2 August 2016.

<sup>474</sup> Albert Sloam Library, Papers and Correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner, WARNER/A/2/3/A.65. The text for the song also appeared in the *Left Review*, vol.1 no.7 (April 1935), 255.

<sup>475</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>476</sup> Alan Bush, 'Music with a Social Purpose: What can co-operative groups do?' in *Comradeship and the Wheatsheaf*, May 1936, ix-x.

<sup>477</sup> Bush, *Music with a social purpose*, ix.



‘revolutionary and not capable of being misunderstood’, thus using simple language to convey their revolutionary ideas, avoiding all associations with ‘petty bourgeois elements’ in order to be ideal as ‘weapons in the class struggle’.<sup>478</sup> Writing for the *Left Review* in 1936 on ‘Music and the Working Class Struggle’, he reiterated his view that the significance of text to convey revolutionary meanings was easier to achieve than with an orchestral work. Here, he seems to imply the inferiority of orchestral music when it comes to class struggle, its value diminished by the ‘atmosphere in which the concert takes place’, as opposed to vocal music that has the power to arouse emotions ‘directed into the channels suggested by the text’.<sup>479</sup> So inferior and inappropriate for the class struggle is instrumental music, that unless it indicates a revolutionary cause through its title, or its composer is ‘known to be a fighter for the working class’, it is deemed worthless for the cause. It is also stressed that popularity is irrelevant to any kind of revolutionary meaning, and indeed it appears to be an indication of the opposite.<sup>480</sup>

The ideal revolutionary song should additionally break free from the traditional part-song writing, a tradition he presumably saw as being set by the upper classes throughout the centuries and a hallmark of ruling-class domination as a result, evoking associations with past styles. Other characteristics of bourgeois music, such as major and minor scales, should also be avoided (for recalling ‘past styles’) in favour of modality. ‘Fanciful harmonic or colour devices’ (no clarification is provided here as to what exactly constitutes such devices) associated with the ‘idyllic pre-capitalist era’ should be abandoned: ‘Where possible, the music should be built up by means of rational constructive elements’, which seems to imply that the melody should be simple, with a natural rhythm that follows or accentuates the text, such as was the case with the techniques used by Agitprop.<sup>481</sup>

Bush appears more and more preoccupied with what he saw as ‘cultural domination of the ruling classes’, an idea very close to the CPGB, and begins to preach his communist ideas in other CPGB-associated publications. In a volume edited in 1937 by fellow CPGB member and poet Cecil Day-Lewis, he pointed out that

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<sup>478</sup> *ibid.*, 647.

<sup>479</sup> Bush, ‘Music with a social purpose’ 646.

<sup>480</sup> *ibid.*, 650.

<sup>481</sup> *ibid.*

The atmosphere of the worker's daily work, where the economic suicide of his class goes on without cessation, is no basis for culture. His leisure hours are spent amid the cultural influences of the capitalist state, whose function it is to preserve the present property relations intact as far as possible and whose prime need must therefore be to keep the worker ignorant of his true position and to delude him into thinking that his interests are being served by the preservation of those property relations. Deceit can never form the basis of a living art. Hence it is no wonder that the cultural products of the present ruling classes are so perverse when they are not entirely devoid of any kind of value.<sup>482</sup>

The answer to this problem seems to be the very popular 1930s CPGB slogan of 'Class struggle'. A classless society, in which 'mankind produces not for profit', is the key:

The workers culture can only be centred in the class struggle. Out of the experiences and needs of the class struggle will be evolved those new elements which will bring about a true revival of art. At first such works of art, designed as weapons in the class struggle, may be crude and primitive. But they will share those characteristics with the Early Christian music, the early Protestant music and the early expressionist music of the beginning of the seventeenth century when compared with the highly cultivated Greek music, Roman Catholic music, and classical style of the respective periods.<sup>483</sup>

It therefore appears that, as well as forming a number of associations, all of which had the combination of 'revolutionary politics and music' at their centre, Bush also becomes bolder in expressing his views that seem to be aligned with the philosophy of the Party. The workers are oppressed by the ruling classes in every way, including culturally, as they have no other option than to consume the culture created by bourgeois circles. The alternative seems to be offered through the CPGB-associated organisations, such as the ones he initiated, that would not only provide an alternative culture for workers, but will also ensure they are spurred into action against the ruling classes.

Gradually, Bush also acquired the reputation of being one of the most prominent musicians to be associated with almost 'all left-leaning organisations'.<sup>484</sup> More concerning for him, however, was the fact he was now also regarded as a subversive communist by the

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<sup>482</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>483</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>484</sup> 24.04.39, TNA, KV2/3515.

Secret Services and as a result he came under close scrutiny from MI5.<sup>485</sup> Amongst the activities that fuelled the Secret Services suspicions was his founding of yet another left-wing music organisation, the William Morris Musical Society (WMMS), sometime between 1938 and 1939. As was the case with the Co-ordinating Committee for Workers Musical Activity and the WMA, he was again Chairman of the Executive committee of the organisation as well as a member of the research sub-committee and responsible for the publication of the society's two bulletins in 1941.<sup>486</sup> Material relating to this very obscure society demonstrates that entry to the WMMS was 'restricted entirely to party [CPGB] members' (unlike the WMA that wanted to bring together Labour, co-operative and other working-class music groups regardless of whether they were associated with the CPGB), though, according to a party member, it 'did not include any reference to the party [CPGB] for obvious reasons', thus protecting the society's members from being identified as communists.<sup>487</sup> According to one of the organisation's members, this was an attempt by the Communists to form a music society, aiming to apply 'scientific method to the various problems of music and its development'.<sup>488</sup> In any case, MI5 had no doubt that this was a 'Communist-inspired organisation'.<sup>489</sup>

Evidence housed in the National Archives suggests that the WMMS was infiltrated by MI5 and finally dissolved by 1941 as a result.<sup>490</sup> Certainly though, the initiation of an openly Communist organisation such as this intensified MI5 efforts to additionally investigate the WMA. Though the earliest surviving Secret Services material on the WMA, also deposited in the National Archives, dates from 1940, the fact that the Association was scrutinised in this manner suggests that the government regarded it as a potential threat: Indeed, by 1940 it was regarded effectively as a branch of the CPGB, described as a 'communist inspired movement' that aimed to increase the 'sphere of communist influence' and 'get communism spread by musical culture'.<sup>491</sup> Furthermore, it supposedly embraced the

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<sup>485</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>486</sup> Bush to John Miller, 23 November 1970, University of Glasgow, Political Song archive, PSC/1/2/1. The 1<sup>st</sup> bulletin of the Association is available at Albert Sloam Library, Papers and correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner, WARNAR/A/2/3/A.81.

<sup>487</sup> Bush to Miller, 23 November 1970. University of Glasgow, Political Song Archive, PSC/1/2/1.

<sup>488</sup> Bush to Miller, 23 November 1970. University of Glasgow, Political Song Archive, PSC/1/2/1.

<sup>489</sup> 13.04.45, TNA, KV2/3515.

<sup>490</sup> Bush to Miller, 23 November 1970. University of Glasgow, Political Song Archive, PSC/1/2/1.

<sup>491</sup> 20.02.40 and 18.08.40, TNA, KV3/375.

communist techniques of 'infiltration' as a means of achieving its goals.<sup>492</sup> Focusing even more on the WMA after this, the MI5 accused it of promoting communist ideology in the army, reporting that communist songs were found at military rest rooms during 1940, 'so that communist ideas can be taken up by soldiers through choruses'.<sup>493</sup> Though it is unclear whether there was a closer co-operation between the CPGB and the WMA, the Party regarded it as 'rather reactionary' for including in its ranks a number of co-operative choirs and elements of the Labour Party (such as the LLCU).<sup>494</sup> However, there is no evidence to suggest that the WMA was in any way affiliated to the CPGB.

While the press appeared to overlook all other organisations initiated by Bush, the founding of the WMA proved almost impossible to ignore, not least because it attracted a lot of participants and was directly involved in theatre and ballet performances, as well as music. The *Musical Times* reflected considerable unease at the unveiling of the association, pointing out that there was a plethora of working class, amateur music organisations that already produced plenty of work and participated in competitive festivals, though it was acknowledged that these were not of 'extreme Red beliefs', like it presumably regarded the WMA to be. Despite describing it as representing both 'ordinary work' (presumably non-left-wing propagandist work) as well as 'advanced Left propaganda', readers were reminded of the danger of the movement falling into the hands of 'extremist composers' (meaning Bush) in a combination (music and politics) nothing short of 'oil and water, [...] or oil and acid'.<sup>495</sup>

A more sympathetic appraisal was provided by the socialist *Daily Herald* welcoming the WMA for encouraging the founding of an organisation similar to the LLCU and become a 'national council to fuse Labour, co-operative miners' choirs and factory unemployed workers' bands and orchestras into one big organisation'.<sup>496</sup> Indeed, it was acknowledged that the scale of the two organisations was different: while the LLCU catered only for

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<sup>492</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>493</sup> 23.7.40, TNA, KV3/375.

<sup>494</sup> 14.11.40, TNA, KV3/375.

<sup>495</sup> 'Music and 'Left-Wing' Politics', in *Musical Times*, Vol. 77, no. 1118 (April 1936), 363.

<sup>496</sup> Anon., 'National link up for Worker musicians. Scheme outlined by Mr Alan Bush', in *Daily Herald*, 27 February 1936.

socialist choirs active in London, the WMA aimed to create links between working class music organisations from all over the country.<sup>497</sup>

### **Eisler's *Die Maßnahme* as part of the Union's repertoire**

During the mid-1930s Eisler's works featured heavily on the Union's repertoire, culminating in a full performance of his *Die Maßnahme* in 1938, though the Union was already performing parts of it since 1936. Bush himself thought this to be an 'exceptional' composition, leaving a lasting impact on him and impressing him deeply, after attending one of the performances in Berlin during 1931.<sup>498</sup> The work is certainly 'exceptional' in the sense that its genre was nothing like any repertoire the Union had been performing until then (other than performing choruses from it of course). It is a didactic play (or *Lehrstück* as the genre is better known), aiming to 'teach certain broad social and communal virtues, not so much to an audience as to those taking part'.<sup>499</sup> The concert in this way is 'transformed into a political meeting by the combined effect of Agitprop groups, workers' choruses, orchestras and projected texts'.<sup>500</sup> During the play, four agitators from Moscow describe to a choir how a young comrade, thinking he was actually helping the party, effectively was doing the opposite by being too eager: He prevented police justice during a strike, quarrelled with bourgeois when he was sent to win their support, and attempted to 'lead a hopeless revolution' too soon.<sup>501</sup> By describing the comrade's actions, the agitators justify their decision to kill him, which is greeted by the chorus as justified and correct.<sup>502</sup>

The piece is divided into 8 parts, described in the German edition of the work with roman numerals, with each of the parts being sub-divided into 2 to 4 different sections, containing a mixture of songs, recitatives as well as discussions.<sup>503</sup> Each one of these depicts a different situation in which the young comrade was asked to help the Party but failed to

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<sup>497</sup> Bush mentioned in the paper: 'It is not generally realised [...] what a mass of working class musical organisations there are up and down the country. Yet these bodies pursue their work independently of one another, when it would be greatly to their advantage to co-operate.' *Daily Herald*, 27 February 1936.

<sup>498</sup> Alan Bush, 'Alan Bush: Für Hanns Eisler' in *Sinn und Form, Beiträge zur Literatur, Sonderheft Hanns Eisler* (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1962), 330.

<sup>499</sup> *ibid.*, 116-7.

<sup>500</sup> Albrecht Betz, *Hanns Eisler: Political Musician* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 94.

<sup>501</sup> Willett, *The Theatre*, 38.

<sup>502</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>503</sup> Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler, *Die Massnahme* (Wien: Universal-Edition, 1931).

do so, taking the audience into a step-by-step analysis of his actions. The choir, which appears to play the role of the Party's leadership, provides comments and passes judgement on every action of the young comrade and the four agitators.<sup>504</sup> The structure of the work resembles a 'courtroom setting [...] which allows objective observation, reporting, presentation and associated commentary' or 'a party tribunal'.<sup>505</sup> The examining committee, represented by the chorus, sits in judgement over four illegal agitators who have been obliged, in the interests of the cause, to kill their fifth companion [...] who had been too soft-hearted and undisciplined and posed a threat to the Party of a possible catastrophe'.<sup>506</sup>

The work has a strong political text and in the original (German) edition there are no attempts to conceal the name of the party (Communist) to which the agitators belong. For instance, in the first part (*Die Lehren der Klassiker*) they introduce themselves by explaining they come from Moscow to do propaganda in the town of Muckden; this is followed by a chorus entitled *Lob der USSR* ('In Praise of the USSR') where they are commended by the choir for having broadened the 'ABC of Communism' with their actions.<sup>507</sup> The Party is unequivocally named in the second section of the second part (3b, *Sprechchor* of Part II: *Die Auslöschung*) where a speaking chorus points out that workers wishing to fight for Communism, must know how to fight and when to stop.<sup>508</sup> References to the Communist Party were quite possibly the reason why the work was not performed in the *Neue Musik* Festival in Berlin in 1930 where it was submitted: it was banned for its 'formal inferiority of the text', which seems to imply its explicitly political text was the problem.<sup>509</sup> In any case, its first performance had significant consequences for the German socialist choirs as it resulted in dividing the movement.<sup>510</sup>

The work has two different English translations, pointing towards performances of the work in different forms. As well as a score under the title 'The Expedient', a second

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<sup>504</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>505</sup> Betz, *Hanns Eisler*, 95

<sup>506</sup> Sergei Tretiakov, 'Hanns Eisler' in *Sinn und Form*, 122.

<sup>507</sup> Brecht and Eisler, *Die Maßnahme*, 10-16.

<sup>508</sup> *ibid.*, 22.

<sup>509</sup> John Willett, 'Die Massnahme: The vanishing Lehrstück' in David Blake (ed), *Hanns Eisler: A Miscellany* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), 80.

<sup>510</sup> Willett, *The Theatre*, 137

English translation survives as 'The Decisions'.<sup>511</sup> The latter does not include a score and has the form of a play script. It is not however clear whether this was ever performed as a play, or even if there was a separate score as 'The Decisions'. In fact, there are no references whatsoever to this script neither in bibliography, nor in primary sources studied for this thesis. One of the songs in the script (in part V, 'The Merchant's Song') has a note of 'awaiting translation', a detail potentially putting the performance of this script into doubt.<sup>512</sup>

The script of 'The Decisions' appears to be a word-by-word translation of the 1931 Brecht text.<sup>513</sup> It remained faithful to the German original, but there were a few alterations which are noteworthy. The *Die Auslöschung* part of the work, which contains references to Communism, was altered in the English translation to read the 'ABC of Revolution', rather than the original 'ABC of Communism', which is again repeated in the concluding chorus of the work (*Schlusschor*).<sup>514</sup> Quite intriguingly, however, references to communism were left in the translated section of the *Lob der USSR*, which appeared in the English translation as 'In Praise of the USSR', where Lenin is mentioned as a 'comrade' at the end of Section III (*Der Stein*, as The Stone in the English translation).<sup>515</sup>

The surviving score of 'The Expedient' is not complete but contains only the chorus parts, and as a result conclusions regarding the omitted section can only be inconclusive.<sup>516</sup> The work keeps Eisler's and Brecht's numbering of parts and sections, although the contents page of 'The Expedient' appears to be misleading, as it implies that there are some sections missing. These are section 3a from the Second Part (*Recitativ* from *Die Auslöschung*); 6a and 6b from the third part (*Diskussion* and *Lenin-Zitat* from *Der Stein*); 7b from part IV (*Diskussion* from *Gerechtigkeit*) and section 8a from part V (*Recitativ* from *Was ist eigentlich*

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<sup>511</sup> 'The Decisions', Albert Sloam Library, Papers and correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner, WARNER/A/2/3/A.75

<sup>512</sup> *ibid.*, 14.

<sup>513</sup> Busch, *Bertold Brecht*, 67-96. This is the edition of the text rather than the score, as it appeared in 1931. All editions of the work can be found in the Suhrkamp Edition of Busch.

<sup>514</sup> Albert Sloam Library, Papers and correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner WARNER/A/2/3/A.75, 'The Decisions', 5.

<sup>515</sup> *ibid.*, 70, and 77.

<sup>516</sup> The Expedient throughout this section means the English translation of the Maßnahme.

*ein mensch?*).<sup>517</sup> A closer look on the score reveals that three out of the 5 missing parts are in fact included in the score. These are the 6a discussion and 6b *Lenin-Zitat* from the third part of the work (*Der Stein*), and the 7b discussion of part IV (*Gerechtigkeit*).<sup>518</sup> Since the translators and editors of 'The Expedient' included the original numbering of Eisler's parts, it is unclear why they chose not to use the original numbering for those three parts. Instead, on the contents page, they appear as part of the previous section (after the 'Song of the Rice-barge Coolies' for instance the next section is 'Speaking chorus: Discussion' which are 6a and 6b respectively, and the 'Strike Song; (7a) is also followed by a 'Speaking Chorus: Discussion', which is 7b of the original).<sup>519</sup> The exclusion of communist references noted above was probably a deliberate attempt to ensure the work's performance, especially since the LLCU was still largely a socialist choir. Such omission could also ensure the approval of larger audiences that would include Labour Party supporters too.

Although there is no surviving review of the work's full performance that took place in 8 March 1938, it is clear that, as well as Bush, other officials of the Union thought this work to be outstanding.<sup>520</sup> The *London News* for example referred to it as 'something never seen before by an English audience' (despite the fact that parts of the work were already performed since 1935) while the reviewer's comment that 'one wondered how [the audience] would react' points towards uneasiness about the work's reception on behalf of the Union's leadership, but also on behalf of the performers, given that it has such a strong political text.<sup>521</sup> Nevertheless the performance was so successful that Bush was called onto the stage many times.<sup>522</sup>

### **The Revue 'Peace and Prosperity'.**

Encouraged by the reception of parts from 'The Expedient', Bush along with his friend and fellow Communist, Randall Swingler, decided to collaborate this time in writing a

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<sup>517</sup> Albert Sloam Library, Papers and correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner WARNER/A/2/3/A.75, 'The Decisions' WARNER/A/2/3/A.75, *The Expedient*, contents page and Hanns Eisler, *Die Maßnahme. Lehrstück von Bertold Brecht*, Op. 20 (Wien: Universal-Edition, 1931), Inhalt.

<sup>518</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>519</sup> WARNER/A/2/3/A.75, *The Expedient*, contents page.

<sup>520</sup> J R Boone, 'Choral Union notes', in *The London News*, 6 April 1936.

<sup>521</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>522</sup> *ibid.*



Revue under the title 'Peace and Prosperity'. The idea was partly prompted by international developments, such as the 1936 Spanish coup that dragged Spain into a civil war, presenting a further opportunity for the choir to demonstrate solidarity at international level, in this occasion with the Spanish People.<sup>523</sup> The play was divided in 10 scenes, each one giving a snapshot of the worker's reality during the 1930s: A group of 8 workers talks to an individual that is described only as 'Questioner'. The subject of their discussion is the situation in Britain and how the National Government has changed the country. Naturally, the Questioner is at first convinced that the government has ensured prosperity for the British society, demonstrated by the falling unemployment figures. This, however, is questioned by the workers, who agree to show him through a play that he is wrong.<sup>524</sup>

During the play the audience is introduced to the rising prices of food (Scene II for instance is a sketch where three actors, representing meat, butter and bread discuss the rising prices and the fact that workers cannot afford to buy meat, butter or bread as a result), the rising rents (Scene III), unemployment (Scene IV), the changing landscape of industry production (scene VII, an industry that is now producing bombs and battleships instead of food and clothes), the need to support the Spanish people (Scene VI and VII), while in Scene VIII the Questioner appears finally converted to the workers' cause, concluding that the people are 'hoodwinked' by the government. In Scene IX the ugly reality of the factory work is revealed through a sketch that depicts a horrific industrial accident of a young man that dies as a result, while his wife is offered money as compensation by a ruthless boss.

The last scene (X), which attempts to provide a commentary on international issues such as the war in Abyssinia and the Spanish Civil War, is dominated by the Foreign Secretary confronted by various foreign officials, being intimidated into bargaining away various territories such as Abyssinia, Gibraltar, North Africa, and India. A stark contrast is represented by the appearance of a poor Indian worker in need of British help to survive, and who is nevertheless completely ignored by the Foreign Secretary. A Russian representative reminds the audience that this is the only country where the workers 'turned

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<sup>523</sup> See also Duncan Hall, *A pleasant Change from Politics: Music and the British Labour movement between the Wars* (London: Clarion Press, 2001), 108-11, where he also refers to the increasing influence of the Spanish Civil War on the material performed by some British choirs, especially during the late 1930s.

<sup>524</sup> BL, LCP 1937/16.

guns against their oppressors' and built a country for peace and socialism as a result, while the entire scene (and the play) ends with the message that only workers' unity can make the world a better place for all, help the Spanish people and workers achieve a better future, by suppressing the rise of fascism.<sup>525</sup>

This particular scene attracted much criticism from the Lord Chamberlain's Office as representing a threat to national security, apparently with the potential of destabilising international relations.<sup>526</sup> The Office concluded that the entire work was a 'communist tract in dramatic form', containing 'demonstrable untruth [...] gross distortion', pointing out, however, that it would be best to 'tolerate than to suppress this sort of thing' as one would expect from a 'normal functioning democracy'. For the work to be performed, alterations to the script were recommended: rather than identifying nations (Germans, Italians etc) and territories to which they laid claims, fictional names were suggested.<sup>527</sup> It was also recommended to replace 'fascist rule' with 'heroic rule', a suggestion that could easily be read as the identification (by the British state) of fascism as a heroic act.<sup>528</sup> Further national security issues arose from the perceived intention on behalf of the play writers to identify 'British Statesmen' such Ramsay MacDonald, Phillip Snowden and James Thomas.<sup>529</sup> Worse still, there were direct references to the British Foreign Secretary, Samuel Hoare, and the Hoare-Laval Pact of 1935.<sup>530</sup>

The music, provided by Bush, consisted solely of workers' songs. These included the 'Labour's Song of Challenge', 'Three Cheers for National Prosperity', the 'May Day Song', 'Question and Answer', 'Workers' Peace Song', and the 'Song for Spanish Democracy'. The 'Labour's Song of Challenge' (text provided by Swingler) is more complicated than the songs

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<sup>525</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>526</sup> BL, LCP 1937/294.

<sup>527</sup> The Japanese for instance were to be represented by an actor wearing a yellow shirt, the Italian wearing a Green one, while the German had to dress in a 'Nordic fashion'. The name of Ping Hi was suggested as a substitute for Japan, Wang Ho for Manchuria and Rastisia for Abyssinia. See Letter to Bush from Lord Chamberlain's Office, 2 April 1937.

<sup>528</sup> BL, LCP 1937/294.

<sup>529</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>530</sup> Hoare, along with his French counterpart, Pierre Laval, attempted to offer in 1935 a large part of Abyssinia to the Italian Benito Mussolini in return for ending the war between Italy and Abyssinia. It was suggested by the Lord Chamberlain's Office that Hoare's name should be changed to 'Lamuel' from Samuel and the Hoare-Laval Pact to Loare-Haval. See LCP1937/16, p. 19-20 and Letter to Bush from Lord Chamberlain's Office, 2 April 1937. For more details on the Hoare-Laval pact, see James Robinson, 'The Hoare-Laval Plan' in *Journal of contemporary history*, Vol 10, no. 3 (July 1975), 433-464.

that Bush composed so far (such as his 'Question and Answer') as it contains very frequent time signature changes (Ex. 4.2). Unlike the simple, 2 pages long 'Question and Answer', this song extended to 10 pages.

**Ex. 4.2: Alan Bush and Randall Swingler, *Labour's Song of Challenge* (London: London Labour Choral Union, 1936), bars 9-13.**

Unison - Men and Women

Work mates we must fight and strive if our child-ren are to live

Sopranos  
Altos  
Tenors  
Basses

The text itself is modelled on the techniques adopted in Bush's 'Question and Answer' song, again with a series of questions and answers ('Do you forget who deceived you and misled you? Do you forget who ill-housed you and ill-fed you?') with the answer to all these being that Labour's power should prevail.<sup>531</sup> The same tune was also used for the 'Song for the Spanish Democracy', a song on a text by Thomas Hurley, encouraging workers to demonstrate their solidarity with the Spanish People.<sup>532</sup>

The song 'Three Cheers for National Prosperity' was composed by Bush's friend Ernst Hermann Meyer under his pseudonym, Peter Baker.<sup>533</sup> It is a song for a small male chorus, and to be sung in unison. Short rhythmic clusters are used to underline the text (provided by Kathleen Nott) describing the dire situation of the working class, with rising rents and landlords profiting while the working class remains poor.<sup>534</sup> The 'May Day Song' (words and music by Arthur Hurley but arranged for this Revue by Bush) embraces similar techniques to the 'Labour's Song of Challenge' (the opening for instance contains again questions such as

<sup>531</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>532</sup> BL, LCP 1937/16.

<sup>533</sup> Albert Sloam Library, Papers and correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner WARNER/A/2/3/A.76.

<sup>534</sup> *ibid.*

‘Shall the might we workers wield, shall all the wealth we’ve made but never known, this, our right, to shirkers yield?’), with quavers and dotted quavers accentuating the rhythm of the text and giving it a marching tempo.<sup>535</sup>

**Ex. 4.3: Arthur Hurley, ‘May Day Song’, in Alan Bush and Randall Swingler (eds), *The Left Song Book* (London: London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), 49-52.**

The first system of the musical score for 'May Day Song' features four staves: Soprano, Alto, Baritone, and Piano. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics for the vocal parts are: 'Shall the might we work - erswield Shall all the'. The piano accompaniment consists of chords and rhythmic patterns in both hands.

The second system of the musical score continues the vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The lyrics for the vocal parts are: 'wealth we've made but ne - verknown'. The piano accompaniment continues with chords and rhythmic patterns. A measure rest is indicated above the vocal staves for the second measure of this system.

As well as objecting to the script of the Revue, the Lord Chamberlain’s Office additionally expressed strong hostility towards the texts of some of the songs. ‘The Workers Peace Song’,<sup>536</sup> to be sung at the end of Scene IX, was censored for containing the phrase

<sup>535</sup> Arthur Hurley, ‘May Day Song’, in Alan Bush and Randall Swingler, *The Left Song Book* (London: WMA, 1938), 49-52.

<sup>536</sup> The score for the Workers Peace Song is lost, only the text survives.

‘Class War against the Class enemy’, presumably reminiscent of the ‘Class against Class’ party line of the CPGB, and ‘Down with the robber’s armament programme!’.<sup>537</sup> Equally, the ‘Song for Spanish Democracy’ came under the Office’s scrutiny, raising objections to references of fascism: phrases such as ‘The fascist thugs’, and ‘To stand against the death-machines of the fascist millionaires’ both appeared as needing revisions, though there was no suggestions by the Office as to what should replace them.<sup>538</sup>

Despite concerns that the revue could set a dangerous precedent for other such proto-Communist material to be presented to the British public, the Lord Chamberlain’s Office was asked by the Home Office to give licence to this play with the strict proviso that the last scene would be drastically revised.<sup>539</sup> It was suggested that it would be wiser for the authorities to tolerate ‘this sort of thing’, as the police could be instructed to deal with whatever ‘opposition’ the references to fascism created (‘opposition’ probably used as a synonym for any trouble that the authorities expected a play like this might generate between Communist sympathisers and right-wing supporters who might wish to attend the play in order to create mayhem).<sup>540</sup> Indeed, the rising popularity of Fascists in Britain gave enough reasons to worry about potential trouble, with a real possibility of right-wing infiltrators attending the play specifically to cause problems.

Comparing Eisler’s *Die Maßnahme* / ‘The Expedient’ and the Revue, reveals striking similarities, and potentially places the Revue into the category of didactic plays. Like Eisler’s work, the Revue contains songs and discussions with a view to instruct performers and audience alike, transforming the event into a political meeting, as Albrecht Betz has noted with regard to Eisler’s *Maßnahme*.<sup>541</sup> By asking his questions, the questioner provokes a discussion regarding the government and its actions, all of which is analysed through the play. In Scene V, for instance, when the Questioner asks whether the industry is still producing food and clothes for the people, the negative replies come from the choir that points out the industry’s products are battleships, bombs and gas.<sup>542</sup> The choir appears to play a similar role in both works, offering comments on the situation discussed and

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<sup>537</sup> BL, LCP1937/16.

<sup>538</sup> BL, LCP1937/16.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid.

<sup>540</sup> BL, LCP1937/16.

<sup>541</sup> Betz, *Hanns Eisler*, 94.

<sup>542</sup> BL, LCP, 1937/16.

sometimes possible solutions: In Scene X, for instance, when the Italian representative appears on stage demanding Abyssinia from the British Foreign Secretary, the choir asks the Secretary to take ‘sanctions against the aggressor’, and ‘close the Suez Canal’.<sup>543</sup> As a result, it could be argued that the Revue, much like ‘The Expedient’, also aimed to provoke ‘observation, reporting, presentation and associated commentary’ and instruct performers and audiences alike on the ‘evils’ of the British National Government.<sup>544</sup>

While the Revue’s performance was largely ignored by the press, the little coverage it received appears to be mixed. Surprisingly enough, even the LLP’s organ was not very impressed by it, pointing out that the work was not supportive enough of the Labour Party’s policies, and could have provided a much better material for propaganda purposes: it was condemned for criticising heavily the National Government of 1935-1937 as a Tory-sympathetic one, instead of concentrating on what the Labour Party had to offer as alternative.<sup>545</sup> Even the Labour Party itself was not too happy about it: while the Revue was originally drafted to be performed before the 1937 elections as a form of Labour Party propaganda, it was decided that its performance would ‘distract attention from the essential hard craft of electioneering’. One suspects, given the work’s appraisal by the *London News*, that it was viewed as too aggressive and pro-communist in places, almost identifying prominent MPs such as MacDonald, Thomas and Snowden as Tory sympathisers.<sup>546</sup>

In contrast to the *London News*, the socialist *Daily Herald* thought that the Revue was appropriate, ‘first-rate propaganda against the ‘National Government’s record’, addressing a wide range of issues, from fascism to the BBC and ‘dope entertainment’, an interesting comment given that the work contained hardly any reference to the Corporation with the exception of Scene VII which concludes with living posters (men holding posters on stage) one of which bears the inscription ‘BBC Men’.<sup>547</sup>

The work represented a milestone for the Union as it appears to have brought the realisation that a wider collaboration with other like-minded left organisations was the best

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<sup>543</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>544</sup> Sergei Tretiakov, ‘Hanns Eisler’ in *Sinn und Form*, 122.

<sup>545</sup> Cardan, ‘Choral Union news and notes’, in *London News*, June 1937.

<sup>546</sup> Cardan, ‘Choral Union’s new Revue’, in *London News*, February 1937.

<sup>547</sup> Anon., ‘Revue is a living newspaper’ in *Daily Herald*, 7 April 1937.

form of propaganda. In August 1937 the *London News* mentioned that co-operation between the Union and other performing arts such as theatre and dance, could potentially be ideal in a bid to 'liven up' political events, such as talks and meetings.<sup>548</sup> This report is also indicative of the Revue's success, especially if one takes into account the fact that 'Peace and Prosperity' appeared frequently in the paper's reviews between April 1937 (when it was first performed) and August 1938, with performances taking place in various locations in London, including Hackney, Shoreditch, Stoke Newington, Kensington, West Ham, Ashford in Kent, and at the Unity Theatre.<sup>549</sup>

The Union continued its propaganda work supporting the Spanish people during the mid-1930s. Indeed, the majority of its engagements between November 1937 and November 1938 were apparently in support of Spain, with the most important of them being organised at the Royal Albert Hall in 22 May 1938, under the title 'Save Spain'.<sup>550</sup> The event was advertised in the pages of the newly founded *Red Notes* (which became the Official Organ of the Union, first published in 1936) as 'an experience which is rarely equalled', where the LLCU along with a Welsh choir (the Rhondda choir, consisting of unemployed miners) and the Ashford Labour Male Voice choir participated.<sup>551</sup> The concert was organised by the Labour Party and included a collection to support Spanish people, when £1400 was collected, despite hopes from the organisers to collect £5000.<sup>552</sup>

Nevertheless, this decision to support Spain and the Spanish people occasionally landed the Union in trouble. After organising an event in support of the Spanish Medical Aid Committee in 1936 (it is not clear exactly when), the choir was banned from using the Royal Albert Hall for another scheduled event, though it is unclear what even this was. The Union's Executive Committee was almost certain that this was the result of its participation in the Spanish aid event and were scathing about the Albert Hall authorities who had argued that politics had no place in the Hall's events: 'No doubt we should have been permitted to

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<sup>548</sup> Carden, 'Labour Singers at work' in *London News*, August 1937.

<sup>549</sup> Reminders to the readers of the *London News* regarding the Revue were published in February, June and August 1937, and early during 1938.

<sup>550</sup> Anon., 'Choral Union looking to 1939', in *London News*, November 1938, and *Red Notes*, No. 15 (May 1938), n.p.

<sup>551</sup> See *Red Notes*, No 15 (May 1938), n.p. and the *Daily Herald*, 23 May 1938.

<sup>552</sup> *ibid.*

sing had we performed Loch Lomond or say, Cloches de Corneville'.<sup>553</sup> Similar problems arose in 1938 when a Hall in Finsbury Park was booked for a concert in aid of the Basque children, transpiring on the day of the performance that neither the Hall manager nor any other member of Staff knew anything about it. Despite the Union's insistence on the existence of correspondence between officials from both sides confirming the booking, the event did not materialise in what appeared to have been the council's refusal to honour the booking.<sup>554</sup>

Festivals abroad continued to be part of the Union's agenda, enhancing further Bush's desire to embrace a more international approach to its activities. Following the success of its participation in the 1935 Olympiad, the choir was now invited to take part in a French Festival in Paris during the Whitsun of 1937. Though hardly any information on the event survives (equally there is no information on the repertoire performed), it appears to have attracted a large audience of 3,000-4,000 people, described as particularly receptive to the repertoire presented.<sup>555</sup> It is worth noting that the British Press completely ignored this festival abroad, even though it was happy to report on the Olympiad the previous year. This might simply be a case of the event being a small-scale one, therefore not deemed as worth a review by the British Press. Besides, there is no doubt that the Olympiad was by far a more important occasion, judging by the number of participants it attracted (about 10,000 in the audience alone, excluding performers,). Additionally, the Olympiad was organised by a cultural section of the Comintern and as such attracted much wider attention, whereas the French Festival was a more local affair lacking the international and political connections of the Olympiad.

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<sup>553</sup> *Red Notes*, No. 3 (December 1936), 2. The article is not signed.

<sup>554</sup> *Red Notes*, No. 15 (May 1938), n.p. The issue of the Spanish civil war divided British society and politics. Regarded by Communists as a 'crusade against fascism', a number of communists did not hesitate to 'volunteer to fight in Spain'. As a result, a possible support to the Spanish people by the Labour Party could have resulted in the closer co-operation with the CPGB, which the Labour Party was trying to avoid, especially since the 'class against class' period of the Communists had created 'deep resentment' between the two parties, but especially for the Labour Party'. See Andrew Thorpe, *A history of the British Labour Party* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 96-97.

<sup>555</sup> 'Choral Union news and notes', in *London News*, July 1937.



## The 'Left Song Book'.

As well as engaging in co-writing left propaganda such as the Revue, Bush also co-edited, along with his close collaborator, Randall Swingler, an anthology under the title of 'The Left Song Book'. The Song Book was published by the WMA and the Left Book Club Musician's Group, an auxiliary organisation of the Left Book Club organised by the publisher Victor Gollancz in May 1936, aiming to 'provide knowledge without which a really effective united front of all men and women of good will cannot be built'.<sup>556</sup> The collection consists of four parts, dividing songs into Traditional Workers' Songs from different countries (such as 'The International', 'The Red Flag' and 'The Marseillaise'), Traditional Songs of Revolt from the British Isles ('England, Arise!' and 'The March of the Workers' belong in this category), Topical Workers' Songs of different countries (which includes 'The Song of the Hunger Marchers' and the 'Question and Answer'), and concludes with five famous rounds with new lyrics (in which popular tunes are used for the new text).<sup>557</sup> Justifying their publication, Bush and Swingler describe it as significant for the 'progressive movement', with a power to 'bind together in a single edition all those who are united by a common interest and a common purpose'.<sup>558</sup> Particular care was taken in the selection of the texts:

Where the song is entirely new, or where new words for an old tune were wanted, we followed the principle of making the text as concrete and as clearly related to our movement as possible. We must sing what we really mean and sing it as though we mean it, or else our singing is only a pleasant way of passing the time. Which is will be of course, but it must be much more as well, if we are to get the true value from our singing, and to develop the art of music in the process.<sup>559</sup>

Elsewhere, the significance of the 'closest possible relation to the class struggle' of music used by the socialist movement was emphasized, as the only way in which 'the working class movement [will] show itself as the force which both preserves and develops culture'.<sup>560</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> Anon., 'Editorial', in *Left Book News*, 1 May 1936, 2

<sup>557</sup> Alan Bush and Randall Swingler, *The Left Song Book* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), Title page. See also Croft, 'The Ralph Fox', 173.

<sup>558</sup> Bush and Swingler, *Left Song Book*, introduction. It is interesting to note that the editors of the *Left Song Book* thought it was appropriate to write an introduction to their publications and explain the reasons for selecting the included songs. In the 1926 *Twelve Labour Choruses* for example, the publisher (ILP Publication Department) did not feel the need to justify the selection.

<sup>559</sup> Bush and Swingler, *Left*, introduction.

<sup>560</sup> Alan Bush and Randall Swingler, 'The Left Song Book', in *Left News*, Vol. 21 (January 1938), 656.

One of the questions that arise from this publication is whether it was meant to appeal to socialist or to more revolutionary organisations, or perhaps to both. Indeed, the collection contains only two songs from Russia (a 'Funeral March' with words by Swingler, the music being probably a Russian traditional song, arranged by Ernst Hermann Meyer again under the pseudonym of Peter Baker, and Shostakovich's 'Salute to Life' with a translation by Bush's wife, Nancy) so this was certainly not a song book of Russian propaganda or a collection of revolutionary songs. There are popular songs associated with the Labour movement, such as 'The International', the 'Red Flag', 'England Arise', all of which were particular favourites with socialist choirs.<sup>561</sup> However, the third part contains songs with more direct references to the struggles of the people, such as the 'Song of the Hunger Marches' and the 'Question and Answer'. Also included is Eisler's 'United Front song' (*Solidaritätslied*). This, therefore, is not primarily a communist song book. Despite being edited by two communists and published by a communist-sympathetic organisation (WMA), there are relatively few songs of an explicitly communist/revolutionary nature. On reviewing the Song book, the *Left Review* (the only extant review from a publication that included Swingler on its editorial board) praises its combination of 'the old and the new', introducing new songs (without however indicating their titles) and 'refurbishing' old ones.<sup>562</sup> This achievement was described as all the more impressive given the previous lack of appropriate (revolutionary) repertoire.<sup>563</sup>

### **The Union's new phase: Marching to the hard Left.**

There is no doubt that during the mid-1930s Bush was giving the Union a new direction, through the use of revolutionary songs rather than relying too heavily on past socialist repertoire. The *Red Notes* became the ideal place to discuss the repertoire. Indeed, one wonders whether this publication was Bush's answer to the *London News*, his idea of founding a journal/newsletter over which he could exert absolute control, as opposed to

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<sup>561</sup> The songs 'The Red Flag' and 'The Internationale' also appear in the *Twelve Labour Choruses*, published by the ILP in 1926. 'England Arise!' and 'The Red Flag' appear in the 1931 *Labour Song Book* again published by the ILP. Additionally, the songs 'England Arise!' and 'March of the Workers', both of which appear in the ILP song book of 1931, are now in the category of 'traditional songs of revolt' in the *Left Song Book*, rather than in a category of Labour songs.

<sup>562</sup> Julius Lipton, '25 Workers' Songs' in *Left Review*, Vol. 3 no. 15 (April 1938), 953-4.

<sup>563</sup> *ibid.*, 954.

the *London News* that was overseen by LLP officials and Morrison (and where presumably it was not very easy to support his ideas for a new, revolutionary repertoire).

As a result, the publication heralded the Union's new approach as a 'new phase', a 'new road' that Labour choirs were required to take, though this appears to have been done in a somewhat aggressive manner. In a contribution by Bush, for instance, it was made clear that the new changes were 'agreed unanimously' during a meeting in June 1936 (stated in a manner as if to convince those who disagreed) where the need for a repertoire with 'some bearing on the workers' struggle' was discussed. His description of 'unanimous', however, appears somewhat inaccurate, as the agreement was apparently made by the 75 singers that attended the meeting. Given that there is hardly any information on membership, one wonders what percentage of the Union's membership this actually represented.<sup>564</sup> Nonetheless, by January 1937, there are indications that the Union had a 'Permanent' and 'Optional' repertoire in place. Indeed, the existence of the optional one points towards the fact that not all choirs were comfortable with performing only new revolutionary songs.

The 'permanent' repertoire was the one that all choirs were expected to learn in order to be able to participate in the massed choir rehearsals, whereas the optional was apparently 'often sung' at massed choir performances.<sup>565</sup> It contained six songs, such as the 'Red Flag' and the 'International' which were part of the Union's repertoire already since the 1920s.<sup>566</sup> The remaining four included songs such as 'Labour's Marching Song' (composed by Ernst Hermann Meyer on a text by Helen Farley) and the 'Workers' Peace Song'. The optional one contained songs such as the 'Song to Labour' (Gilman/Bush, discussed in chapter 2), the 'Call to Freedom' by Hans von Bülow and Eisler's 'In Praise of Learning' (*Lob des Lernens*, a song from the work *Die Mutter* (1932), by Brecht and Eisler). The 'Call to Freedom' was an English translation by Bush's wife, Nancy, of the German 'Bundeslied', by Georg Herwegh and Hans von Bülow'.<sup>567</sup> Certainly the song's style does not

<sup>564</sup> *Red Notes*, No. 1 (October 1936), 2.

<sup>565</sup> *Red Notes*, No. 4 (January 1937), 4.

<sup>566</sup> It is not clear whether the repertoire list was decided by Bush alone or by a committee, though it is more likely it was decided by a committee.

<sup>567</sup> The Call to Freedom (Berlin: The German League of Labour Singers, c. 1930. The song was regarded as controversial in Germany. It was composed in 1863 for the *Allgemeinen Deutschen Arbeiterverein's* anthem, after the party's request, but was criticised for being a 'four part bourgeois music', 'unworthy and unsuitable

represent the revolutionary songs Bush had in mind, but was more like the traditional ones that the Union had always performed: It is a four-part song describing the oppressed by their bosses workers, deprived of any freedom, buried in the coal mines to provide for their children, and urged to understand their power and 'break the yoke of slavery'.<sup>568</sup>

The appropriate (revolutionary) repertoire for the Union's new era was one with text and melody 'inseparably welded together' to ensure that the text would be easily understood by the audience which did not consist of 'tiara-ed, near duchesses suffer[ing] agonies of boredom at Covent Garden listening for fashion's sake', but real working class people.<sup>569</sup> The absurdity of an audience listening to a song in another language without understanding the text was to be completely avoided.<sup>570</sup> Those seeking poetry in the Union's new song lyrics, should look elsewhere: 'It has to be remembered that art has only value in relation to human progress and all poetry does not have to be written in the style of the 19<sup>th</sup> century'.<sup>571</sup> Choir members were reminded that

When we sing about oppression we sing about something with which we are in daily contact and we identify ourselves completely with the sentiments expressed in our songs, which of course is not the case with professional singers who are often forced by the necessity to earn a living to sing music to which they object.<sup>572</sup>

The new line for the repertoire, however, was not to everyone's taste, and as a result, it generated a heated debate amongst choir members and conductors alike. Already from October 1936, the Chairman of the Union pointed out through the pages of the *London*

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for the workers', the music of which should be 'a melody which the worker can sing informally and unselfconsciously in the workshop in time with the beat of his hammer'. It was gradually removed from the repertoire of the *Arbeiterverein* in favour of simple, more familiar tunes. For more details on this song, see James Garratt, *Music, culture and social reform in the age of Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 207-8.

<sup>568</sup> The Call to Freedom (Berlin: The German League of Labour Singers, c. 1930. The song was regarded as controversial in Germany. It was composed in 1863 for the *Allgemeinen Deutschen Arbeiterverein's* anthem, after the party's request, but was criticised for being a 'four part bourgeois music', 'unworthy and unsuitable for the workers', the music of which should be 'a melody which the worker can sing informally and unselfconsciously in the workshop in time with the beat of his hammer'. It was gradually removed from the repertoire of the *Arbeiterverein* in favour of simple, more familiar tunes. For more details on this song, see James Garratt, *Music, culture and social reform in the age of Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 207-8.

<sup>569</sup> 'Words and music' in *London News*, October 1938.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid.

<sup>572</sup> Anon., 'Choral Union looking to 1939', in *London News*, November 1938.

News that there was apparently a 'relatively small number of the choir' that chose to sing 'workers' songs, as opposed to the orthodox part-songs and madrigals', with some choirs apparently being described as 'standing aloof' from the Union's work, implying that there were choirs choosing not to participate in the Union's meetings to avoid singing the new revolutionary songs they were now expected to sing. This did not remain unnoticed by the Union's officials who saw it as a development that might fracture the Union and 'bring disaster in its train', potentially dividing the choir into socialist and communist singers.<sup>573</sup> By January 1937, the leadership expressed its concern again through the pages of the *London News* as local Labour Party secretaries chose not to attend performances.<sup>574</sup>

As this threatened to derail the entire Union, with some choirs apparently singing more radical repertoire than others, meetings were called with the object of discussing a new repertoire policy that might be deemed appropriate for all. It was consequently decided that the new repertoire should be embraced by the majority of the choirs, while songs should have 'a definite relation to the object of demonstration' in those cases when the Union was participating in an event that included a speaker. This would apparently ensure greater enthusiasm amongst choir members, but would also offer more relevance for an audience that would be 'more interested in songs about the Spanish and Chinese situations than in songs about nymphs and fauns in the woodlands', as the past socialist repertoire was described somewhat derogatively.<sup>575</sup> The aim now is to use songs that could make 'the LLCU an effective weapon in the Working Class struggle', a description blatantly placing the Union amongst those organisations espousing the Communist cause.<sup>576</sup>

A general annual meeting during late 1936 was reported to have generated 'tumult and shouting', leading to the conclusion that there was already some kind of division amongst the Union's ranks.<sup>577</sup> Though complete membership figures for the Union during the 1930s do not survive, the little available information points towards confusion and

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<sup>573</sup> Richard Boone, 'Labour Choirs take new road' in *London News*, October 1936.

<sup>574</sup> N[icholas] Carden, 'Choir News' in *London News*, January 1937.

<sup>575</sup> Anon., 'A very busy winter' in *London News*, 1938. A further interesting engagement appeared in the first issue of the *Red Notes* (October 1936) with Bush conducting on an event at Shoreditch Town Hall, celebrating the Anniversary of the Russian Revolution. The matter was also further discussed in an undated document (possibly from 1935-1936) found at Albert Sloam Library, Papers and correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner WARNER/A/2/3/A.81.

<sup>576</sup> *Red Notes*, No. 4 (January 1937), 4.

<sup>577</sup> Anon. 'Choral Union', in *London News*, December 1936.

disagreement, division of opinion between choir members and individual choral groups. While some choirs disaffiliated, others joined or were even initiated as a result of the new repertoire policy that advocated more direct propaganda songs. For the Fulham Choir for instance, the repertoire was 'not good enough for the Choral Union' (no explanation as to what that meant was given but presumably the objection was against revolutionary songs) and disaffiliated in December 1936 as a result, with the Dulwich and Woolwich Labour Choirs following suit the same year. At the same time, the new repertoire attracted members to local choirs and even inspired them to create new choirs, as was the case with Epsom, St Pancras, Kentish Town and Wimbledon.<sup>578</sup>

By now, the Union not only embraces new repertoire, but also other signifiers of Communism. Through the pages of *Red Notes*, choir members are addressed as 'Comrades'. The Union's uniform also conforms to that: members had to choose between an outfit with a red flower or one with a red scarf (red being of course the colour associated with communism), leaving some parts of the choir contemplating their disaffiliation from the Union altogether.<sup>579</sup> Members visiting Russia are treated with awe and asked to report on their trip answering questions from choir members, resulting in a description of a 'vivid picture of happy, peaceful country with many nationalities living in harmony'.<sup>580</sup> Names of newly-formed choirs also reflect this more radical approach. While there are still some Labour choirs affiliating ('Becontree Labour Choir', and 'South West St Pancras Labour Choir'), others chose to demonstrate their radical or working-class credentials ('West Ham Workers' Choir', 'Islington Progress Players', 'New Progress Choir').<sup>581</sup> This was noticed by the Secret Services that claimed the LLCU was a Communist organisation by the late 1930s.<sup>582</sup> The fact that from 1937, the *Red Notes* advertised the WMA's conductors' class, even asking for singers to form choirs to facilitate conductors with their WMA conducting classes, certainly did not help in convincing MI5 otherwise.<sup>583</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> Figures drawn from the *Red Notes* between October 1936 and January 1937.

<sup>579</sup> *Red Notes*, No. 3 (December 1936), 1. It is not clear from the handful of surviving *Red Notes* copies what was the nature of the objection to wearing a uniform.

<sup>580</sup> R J Boone, 'Choir News', in *London News*, January 1937.

<sup>581</sup> *Red Notes*, No. 3 (December 1936), 8 and No. 4 (January 1937), 8.

<sup>582</sup> See for instance TNA, KV3/375

<sup>583</sup> The first indication appears in the *Red Notes*, No. 15 (May 1938), 2.

## Reactions to the new revolutionary repertoire: A socialist choir destroyed?

An interesting question regarding the repertoire is what exactly the choir members thought of it, given that the majority of songs now had a more revolutionary language. Certainly, some choir members voiced their concern and objections, while others felt forced to leave: some found it 'not sufficiently propagandist', pointing towards the fact that by now the Union had in its ranks choirs comfortable with revolutionary material, while others thought it was too propagandist.<sup>584</sup> There were also references to uneasiness with the 'spirit of class hatred that appears in some of our songs', as 'the capitalist system is hateful enough', therefore it is unnecessary for the choir to embrace this:

It would be romantic folly to suppose that a thorough revolution can be brought about without some violence and much suffering [...] but if we teach ourselves to hate all members of the employing class indiscriminately, there is likely to be much needless violence and prolonged bitterness of struggle.<sup>585</sup>

Some members argued that not all persons who 'have to work the system [are] selfish blood suckers'.

Many of the employers are victims of capitalism as helpless as any wage-earners, driven to oppress and exploit because there is no other way to keep going the crazy machine that is the only instrument of production they can imagine: and it is not wage earners alone who lose their livelihood in the economic muddle.<sup>586</sup>

In fact, this type of repertoire was seen by some choir members as a strategy that would lead to isolation: Some workers were forced by the capitalist system to become bosses, and it was implied that they would actually be willing to join the workers in their fight against capitalism. By engaging in a 'class struggle' though, these 'forced bosses' could be alienated:

If we go round shouting that 'our' gain is 'their' loss, and spitting fire at everybody whom the capitalist system has obliged to be a boss, can we wonder if 'they' stiffen into opposition, and do everything in their power to prevent us from getting our own way?<sup>587</sup>

Bush's 'Question and Answer' song was one that triggered a specific debate amongst choir members. So strong was the criticism against it, that the leadership was forced to

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<sup>584</sup> *Red Notes*, no. 1 (October 1936), 3.

<sup>585</sup> *Red Notes*, no. 3 (December 1936), 5.

<sup>586</sup> *Red Notes*, no. 3 (December 1936), 5.

<sup>587</sup> *Red Notes*, no. 3 (December 1936), 6.

defend it, though this was done anonymously through the pages of the *Red Notes*. The language of the song was strongly criticised for using too colloquial words such as ‘bosses’, a word that some members additionally found ‘too slangy’.<sup>588</sup> In defence of this strategy, the argument followed that such phraseology was expected from this type of song and reflected a profound difference between the songs that represented music as a ‘weapon in the class struggle’, and the more traditional socialist songs. It was reiterated that the new repertoire was designed to be direct, using everyday language in order to become immediately understood, but to also to reflect the worker’s grim reality, unlike the socialist songs of the 1920s where music was used to ‘elevate and educate the masses’ and such words were therefore avoided.

As for the song being ‘not poetical enough’ (as opposed to the more traditional socialist songs), it was pointed out that it is indeed difficult to define what good poetry is, but in any case,

it does not seem possible to me to clothe in beautiful language the ugly facts of starving the children, children in rags and slums. The ugliness and inequality are the points we must emphasize and not the ‘golden gates beyond’.<sup>589</sup>

Bush in particular clearly thought that the era of singing socialist songs implying Utopia, some of which were used already from the 1880s when the first choirs were formed, belonged to the past and was truly over: The old repertoire was too vague for this purpose, it was not written to help workers in this fight, therefore it had to be replaced:

It would be a very odd composer who in an attempt to write a love song or a hymn of praise to the angels in Paradise, turned out a successful fighting song for the Workers’ struggle.<sup>590</sup>

The ‘energetic effect’ of the music (the type of which requires the audience to enter a dialogue with the choir) was deemed essential, as the ‘musical effect is not enough without the words’. Roy Atterbury, the Union’s Chairman and the one who provided the text for Bush’s ‘Question and Answer’ song, openly admitted he was no poet and could justifiably be

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<sup>588</sup> *Red Notes*, no. 3 (December 1936), 5.

<sup>589</sup> *Red Notes*, no. 3 (December 1936), 6-7. The name of the individual appears as Meg Boone, probably a relation of the Union’s then Secretary R J Boone and quite possibly a member of the choir.

<sup>590</sup> *Red Notes*, No. 4 (January 1937), 2.



criticised for lacking poetic talent. He nonetheless made his point by creating a parody of a socialist song:

Heigh, come, my lads and lassies all,  
 Bring pipes and tabors, for we call.  
 Come, leave your woods, your values and lawns,  
 Shun dalliance with nymphs and fauns.  
 Fa, la, la, la, la, etc.  
 The world is turning upside down!  
 Let not your tears like fountains drown  
 Your brains in sentiment so false.  
 Help turn the World to Freedom's course.  
 Fa, la, la, la, la, etc.  
 Low cunning satyr fascist demon  
 Seeks to take away your freedom!  
 Yet sight not swains and nymphs so slim:  
 Got down to it, and fight to WIN!  
 Fa, la, la, la, ad nauseam.<sup>591</sup>

Here, Atterbury contrasts the 'Question and Answer' with what he thought socialist songs represented, where nymphs and fauns are the protagonists, fascism is described as a satyr, while the 'Fa, la, la' singing of past socialist songs is followed by the 'ad nauseam' indication in the last verse. The leadership of the Union defended strenuously the new choice of repertoire and pointed towards its popularity, demonstrated apparently in the audiences that attended its concerts.<sup>592</sup> By 1937 there was no indication of those disagreements regarding the repertoire being silenced. Bush insisted that the Union should focus on radical songs specifically written to help in the fight for socialism, as 'music not specifically written for this purpose can only serve it in exceptional cases'.<sup>593</sup> In a somewhat condescending approach, those willing to criticise were advised to perform the music first, understand it, and then offer constructive criticism which would help improve the repertoire.<sup>594</sup>

But it was not just choir members objecting to the new repertoire: conductors reacted similarly, with the most significant objection being that by Michael Tippett. In July

<sup>591</sup> *Red Notes*, No. 3 (December 1936), 5.

<sup>592</sup> *Red Notes*, No. 1 (October 1936), n.p. Unfortunately no attendance figures were given, and there is no surviving (archival) material to confirm the popularity of these concerts.

<sup>593</sup> Alan Bush, 'Our Music' in *Red Notes*, No. 4 (January 1937), 2.

<sup>594</sup> *ibid.*

1936 he openly clashed with Bush during adjudication for the Union. Bush subsequently accused him for having offered a ‘Stalinism Versus Trotskyism’ analysis of the repertoire, though Tippett denied this was the case and blamed Bush’s Stalinist convictions for interpreting the matter in this way.<sup>595</sup> In a separate incident in December of the same year, he offered yet more criticism which was described as ‘sensational’ in an anonymous entry at *Red Notes*.<sup>596</sup> As this particular contest was hailed in the *Red Notes* as the Union’s first ‘all propaganda contest’ and a ‘milestone’ as a result, implying that the majority of songs used were of revolutionary content, it is not surprising that Tippett objected.<sup>597</sup> Indeed, he criticised it for being too political, verging more towards political propaganda and as a result completely inappropriate for a choir:

As I see it, the information and slogans of politics are controlled by the Political Party. The Party newspaper deals directly with the problem [sic] of spreading this information and the proper slogans. A Party Choral Union puts across the information and slogans not as a newspaper but as a Choral Union. It has to use a different technique from the newspaper and the political speech. Isn’t that common sense, comrades?<sup>598</sup>

Consequently, he had offered as a more appropriate song the ‘Song of the Shirt’,<sup>599</sup> suggesting that anyone who ‘used my adjudication to pick a quarrel with the LLCU is no partisan of mine [...] Do not let your heads turned by the remarkable spectacle of Comrade Bush wiping the floor with Comrade Tippett!’<sup>600</sup>

By 1937, he was also criticising the use of Eisler songs in the Union’s contests, a culmination of his conviction that political songs used as propaganda offer nothing in actually changing the situation of the working class.<sup>601</sup> Tippett himself confirmed that after

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<sup>595</sup> Tippett to Bush, late July 1936, BL, Alan Bush Collection MS Mus 449.

<sup>596</sup> *Red Notes*, No. 3 (December 1936), 3.

<sup>597</sup> *Red Notes*, No. 3 (December 1936), 1.

<sup>598</sup> *Red Notes*, No. 3 (December 1936), 3. Emphasis by Tippett.

<sup>599</sup> The text for the ‘Song of the Shirt’ was written by Thomas Hood. It describes the sad reality of a hard-working seamstress whose work is described as that of a prisoner. She works with ‘eyelids heavy and red’, her wages are only a ‘bed of straw’ and a ‘crust of bread’, while she is leaving in destitute. Bush seemed to have implied that this was no more an appropriate repertoire for a socialist choir (perhaps such songs were favoured by the affiliated choirs of the 1920s, such as the Deptford Choir which was mentioned in the first chapter, and which included philanthropic activities in the events they organised) as it only described the sad reality of workers, without however urging them into action to change it. ‘The Song of the Shirt’, text by Thomas Hood, music by J. H. Tully (London: The Punch, 1844).

<sup>600</sup> *Red Notes*, No. 3 (December 1936), 3.

<sup>601</sup> Ian Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and his Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 34.

the 1935 Workers Music Olympiad, he experienced a disillusionment with political repertoire, which 'struck [him] as too uninteresting musically'.<sup>602</sup> However, the problem with Eisler's songs was more complicated than that, as he also admitted a personal antipathy towards him: on one occasion (possibly after the 1935 Strasbourg Olympiad), 'Hanns Eisler came and sang his songs and thumped at the piano', leaving Tippett 'unimpressed'.<sup>603</sup> In 1937, he reiterated his concerns about the danger of turning a Choral Union into some kind of Party newspaper (referencing perhaps the Agitprop techniques used, where the majority of subject matters was drawn from newspaper articles), this time provoking Bush's anger in return. Tippett seems to have been offended by the fact that Bush intervened after he voiced his concerns in front of choir members, explaining again his conviction that Bush was somewhat confused as to what a choir attached to a political party should be, clearly disapproving of the level of propaganda evident in the Union's songs.<sup>604</sup> Moreover, he implied that by 1937, the Union also included some reactionary elements, though it is not clear if by this he meant Communists (therefore reactionary towards the Labour Party) or Trotskyists (reactionary towards both the Labour Party and Bush's own political convictions).<sup>605</sup>

This alarmed Bush to a great extent, resulting in a heated argument with Tippett during the contest. He was convinced these remarks had been made in an 'untactful way', threatening to highlight his own Communist Party membership in front of the choir.<sup>606</sup> For his part, Bush did not hesitate to lodge more criticisms in a letter to Tippett after the incident against the Trotskyist movement, adding that 'admittedly your [Trotskyist] movement seems to attract a large number of people who make great nuisance of themselves and do a good deal of harm'.<sup>607</sup> To underline Tippett's political immaturity, Bush concluded the letter by asking Tippett to return his copy of Marx's *Das Kapital* (which he

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<sup>602</sup> Michael Tippett, *Those Twentieth Century*, 44.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid. He does not state which piece was performed.

<sup>604</sup> Alan Bush Archive, Tippett to Bush, 20 December 1937

<sup>605</sup> 'I was not aware of course of voicing the feelings in a reactionary section of the Union and so in my idea I was giving advice on how to move on the stage of propaganda art'. Alan Bush Archive, Tippett to Bush, 20 December 1937. See also Tippett to Bush, 30 December 1937, 'The knowledge that I have 'followers' in the choir is news!'

<sup>606</sup> Bush to Tippett, Christmas day 1937. 'Good gracious me, I was only too painfully aware of the risks I was running. But there are times when we must all take risks, even if we don't negotiate them 100% as I did not on this occasion'.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

had lent to the composer at some point), implying that he lacked the appropriate intellect to understand it fully, after becoming so preoccupied with the 'self-styled hyper-revolutionism of Trotsky's fundamental romanticism'.<sup>608</sup>

This incident, and Bush's horror as to having his CPGB membership revealed in front of his choir members, might give an explanation as to how a Communist member was conducting a socialist choir. According to the Secret Services files, Bush was 'about to announce his CPGB membership' in 1940, five years after he joined.<sup>609</sup> However, his party membership might not be as controversial as it appears to be. One should remember for example that Tippett himself was also briefly a CPGB member during 1935, and also a member of various Trotskyist groups while conducting the RACS, but also adjudicating for the Union. Even more, Rutland Boughton was a CPGB member between 1926 and 1929 when he resigned both from the Union and from the CPGB. And of course, the Union's participation in the 1935 IMB's Olympiad offered yet another example of communist associations through a socialist choir. Also, some of Bush's collaborators (Randall Swingler, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Cecil Day-Lewis) were all CPGB members working with Bush. All this points towards the fact that Bush was certainly not alone in being a CPGB member associated with the Union.

## **Conclusions.**

From the material discussed in this chapter it is therefore evident that the Union not only continued its journey to the Left of the Labour Party, but is now dangerously close to communism and indeed to the CPGB itself – having been described by its leadership as 'a weapon in the class struggle'. Bush's collaborators include mostly Communist members (Swingler) or individuals associated with the radical left (Tippett). Though Bush's membership was not such a controversial issue as he was clearly not the only communist in the ranks of the Union (Tippett and Boughton before them were also CPGB members while participating in the Union's activities as conductors or adjudicators) it certainly reinforces the idea of Communist members almost taking over a socialist organisation.

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<sup>608</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>609</sup> 23.11.40, TNA, KV2/3515.

This is further supported by examining Bush's collaborators, as this reveals a tendency to use repertoire either produced or translated by his close CPGB friends, or even family members. In the case of 'The Expedient' for instance, not only was the work by one of his closest friends (Hanns Eisler), but was additionally translated by his wife, Nancy. Nancy in fact provided further translations for other songs used by the Union (the *Bundeslied* which was translated as 'Call to Freedom', or Shostakovich's 'Salute to life' included in the Left Song Book). By now Eisler's works are used intensively: some of his songs are included in the optional repertoire, with the union even attempting a production of his didactic play 'The Expedient'. Similar is the case of another close friend, the composer and musicologist Ernst Hermann Meyer, who was in fact also Eisler's pupil. Meyer provided songs for the Union ('Three cheers for National Prosperity' which was included in the Revue, and 'Labour's Marching Song', part of the Permanent Repertoire), not to mention of course Randall Swingler, who provided texts for revolutionary/propaganda songs, but also the script for the Revue which the Union performed. All this points towards Bush having a close circle of left/CPGB member friends, and that the Union was primarily being used as a vehicle to promote their work.

It is also notable that Bush appears to be founding a number of left music organisations during this period (1936-1938) such as the Co-ordinating Committee for Workers Musical Activity, the William Morris Musical Society and the Workers Music Association, the latter being openly a communist organisation. In all organisations, he appears either as their Chairman or President. This, along with the fact that each organisation had a different aim within working-class music (the WMMS for instance was to deal with theoretical issues in music rather than performance, the WMA was bringing together amateur and professional left musicians, while the Co-ordinating committee and the LLCU which he led were associated with amateur musicians only) might imply that he wanted to be in a position to exert the greatest possible control on workers' music. This is further reinforced by the founding of the *Red Notes*: as a way to monitor what is reported from the Union's activities, rather than having contributions being controlled by the LLP, as was almost certainly the case with the *London News*.

This tendency reveals almost a kind of paternalistic power structure within the Union: Bush appears to dictate to the LLCU what it should do, and the organisation is

expected to follow suit almost without questioning. This was particularly evident in the new repertoire proposed. Although it was clear that the Union was divided, with choirs, individual choir members and conductors voicing their concerns regarding the new direction that the Union was taking, and meetings being described as containing ‘tumult and shouting’, the repertoire was strenuously defended in the pages of the *Red Notes*, quite often with contributions by Bush himself. As has already been mentioned, in one case choir members were reminded that they can indeed object, but they should try the revolutionary repertoire first before objecting, which implies that they had no choice but to learn the repertoire anyway.

Additionally, their criticism had to be ‘constructive’ in order to be taken into account, implying that objections would be taken seriously only if they were based on a sound theoretical basis (for instance, a way of justifying that they are not really helping the workers’ cause). This argument appears somewhat unfair, given that these were amateur choirs, the majority of which included members that saw their participation in a choir also as a form of entertainment. It could be argued from this that members’ concerns were of little value to the leadership: the choirs were treated as being naïve, not knowing themselves what ‘good repertoire’ is, and expected to follow their leader (in this case Bush) who knew better.

This last point, on the theoretical background of the repertoire, might point to a further reason why choirs were considering disaffiliation. In the section on this chapter where the repertoire was discussed, it was noted that some choir members objected to Bush’s ‘Question and Answer’ song, as it was found ‘too slangy’ and ‘too colloquial’. This seems to imply that choirs preferred singing repertoire that was more traditional (with ‘nymphs and fauns in the woodlands’, as these type of songs were mocked in the *Red Notes*) rather than those that had any relevance to contemporary issues such as the plight of the Spanish people, or that tended to underline and emphasize the grim reality of workers. It was, after all, made clear by the members that the ‘hatred’ of this particular song (‘Question and Answer’) was not to everyone’s taste. As a result, in this march to the Left, the leadership sacrificed the repertoire that the majority of choirs were comfortable singing, risking losing a great number of affiliated choirs from its ranks.

The fact of course that in the end, both permanent and optional repertoires were created suggests that there was some kind of compromise on behalf of the leadership. Certainly, it was an attempt to silence critics, but to additionally ensure the minimum amount of damage for the Union which was obviously fearful at the prospect of mass disaffiliation and the resulting loss of income that might follow such action. As it was noted, the permanent repertoire, which was compulsory for all choirs, included mainly socialist songs that were already popular amongst choirs (such as 'The Internationale') therefore ensuring some kind of connection with the (socialist) past, while the optional was more revolutionary in content and included songs also by Eisler, no doubt for those choirs that felt closer to the communist cause.

The new communist direction that the Union was now embracing was also visible in other aspects of its organisation, such as the proposed uniforms. Again, this generated further controversy, with members objecting to the use of red scarves, although in this case quite possibly the leadership chose to compromise: there are only a few references regarding debates on the uniform, which implies that the matter was resolved quickly. In any case, clearly the leadership did not see this as an important issue, and the new uniform was not defended as much as the repertoire was. The objection on behalf of the choir members, however, was quite telling: The red colour used was yet another signifier of communism which produced more divisions within the Union.

This march to the Left had also further implications: It is not exactly clear to what extent members of the Union were under surveillance by the Secret Service, as there are no membership lists for choir members (and even if these were available, there is no evidence as to whether MI5 files for such individuals survive or are available for consultation), but certainly Bush and those close to him were under surveillance for being 'Communist sympathisers'. Of course it is entirely possible that some choir members. However, neither the march to the Left nor the potential dangers resulting from Secret Service surveillance deterred Bush from ensuring the participation of the Union in the 1939 Festival of Music for the People, that took place between 1 and 5 April 1939 (and which will be studied in more detail in the next chapter).

## Chapter 5.

### **The Festival of Music for the People, London, 1-5 April 1939 Organisation of the event.**

Nearly five years after the 1934 Pageant of Labour, an event on a similar scale, the Festival of Music for the People, took place between 1 and 5 April 1939. However, whereas the Pageant of Labour was organised by individuals associated with the Labour Party, the 1939 Festival was masterminded by Communist sympathisers, including Bush. Essentially, this type of pageant, originally associated with the Labour movement, was appropriated by the Communist Party by the late 1930s.

The Festival of Music for the People was by no means the only large-scale cultural event to have been spearheaded by communist sympathisers. From 1936 onwards, a number of communist-influenced pageants took place around the country specifically in metropolitan centres, though it is not always clear to what extent such occasions featured organised choral singing. The earliest of such events, sponsored by the London District Communist Party on 20 September 1936,<sup>610</sup> took the form of a demonstration from Embankment to Shoreditch, with banners depicting key aspects of the 'progressive tradition', including the Chartists, William Morris, Marx and Engels.<sup>611</sup> Communist MP Ted Bramley regarded it as an event that 'open[ed] a new chapter in [the CPGB's] history',<sup>612</sup> an opportunity for the party to 'speak to the English workers in a language they understand', a new type of propaganda, 'based upon the knowledge of history and experience of the British workers [...] touching a chord that does and will arouse a mighty response from the great English working class and progressive forces'.<sup>613</sup>

It was also an ideal occasion in which to recruit members for the Party and demonstrate its size and popularity by the amount of demonstrators it attracted. This Pageant for instance attracted 20,000 people, all of whom were described by the International Press Correspondence (IMPRECORR) somewhat misleadingly as Communists,

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<sup>610</sup> Mick Wallis, 'Heirs to the Pageant: Mass Spectacle and the Popular Front' in Andy Croft (ed), *A weapon in the struggle: The cultural history of the Communist Party of Great Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 48-67.

<sup>611</sup> *ibid.*, 48.

<sup>612</sup> Ted Bramley, 'London's Historical Pageant. Thousands march behind C.P. banners to Hyde Park' in *International Press Correspondence*, Vol 16 No. 44, 1936, 1201.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*, 1201 and Wallis, *Heirs*, 49.



though that day alone the CPGB recruited 810 people.<sup>614</sup> Between 1936 and 1939, similar events followed not just in London, but also elsewhere in Britain: a Pageant of English History in Manchester (July 1937); the March of History in Liverpool (19 September 1937); a Centenary Pageant in Manchester (June 1938), and the Pageant of Co-operation (also known as 'Towards Tomorrow') on 2 July 1938.

These Pageants, of course, coincided with the period of the Popular Front. Throughout the mid- and late 1930s, the CPGB's official organ, the *Daily Worker*, called for the workers to intensify their efforts towards the formation of a Popular Front against the threat of fascism.<sup>615</sup> In 1937, the CPGB, along with the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Socialist League (a group created out of ILP members), launched the Great Unity Campaign against fascism, war, and the National Government which had been re-elected in 1935.<sup>616</sup> The above-mentioned 1936 Pageant, for instance, was referred to by the CPGB as yet another proof that the Labour Party should agree to a closer co-operation between the two parties.<sup>617</sup> Against this background, the CPGB, along with what theatre historian Mick Wallis names as its 'satellite political, educational and cultural organisations', attempted to work more closely alongside other organisations from the Left.<sup>618</sup>

The Festival was a tripartite event: A Pageant on the 1 April, followed by two concerts, at Conway Hall on the 3 April and at Queen's Hall on 5 April. Bush, who was the main organiser,<sup>619</sup> worked alongside a number of societies that covered a wide political spectrum including the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, the London Symphony Orchestra, the London Co-operative Joint Educational committee, the LLCU, the Unity Theatre and the Left Book Club.<sup>620</sup> The organising committee that participated in the Festival also included intellectuals and musicians associated with the Left during the 1930s, such as Edward Clark, Alan Rawsthorne, Elizabeth Maconchy, Benjamin Britten, Christian

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<sup>614</sup> Bramley, *London*, 1201.

<sup>615</sup> See, for instance, Harry Pollitt's contribution in the *Daily Herald*, 2 February 1936, 'Let us get together to discuss unity', generally drawing parallels to the situation in Germany in an attempt to convince the Labour Party in Britain about the need for a Popular Front.

<sup>616</sup> Harry Pollitt, 'Great Unity campaign launched' in *Daily Herald*, 18 January 1937.

<sup>617</sup> Bramley, *London's*, 1201.

<sup>618</sup> Mick Wallis, 'Pageantry and the Popular Front: Ideological production in the 'Thirties', in *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 10 no. 38 (May 1994), 132-156, here 133.

<sup>619</sup> In fact Mick Wallis refers to the event at the 'singular brainchild of Alan Bush', see Wallis, *Heirs*, 58. See also Croft, *Comrade*, 90, who implies that Bush was the one who assembled the organising committee.

<sup>620</sup> Various letters, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 622-626.

Darnton and Erik Chisholm. With the exception of Darnton, however, none of the other names on the organising committee were CPGB members.<sup>621</sup>

The inclusion of Edward Clark in the committee is worth noting, as he was a champion of contemporary music, but with not especially pronounced political affiliations. An administrator and conductor, Clark studied in Europe before the First World War and was associated with Debussy and Ravel while in Paris, and with Schönberg while in Berlin.<sup>622</sup> He became involved with the BBC in 1924 initially working in Newcastle as its Music Director but moved to London in 1927 to become the Corporation's Programme builder, resigning in 1936.<sup>623</sup> His love for contemporary music shaped an entire era for the BBC through programmes that outlasted him, such as the Concerts of Contemporary Music broadcast between 1926 and 1939.<sup>624</sup> So passionate was his commitment to contemporary music that he did not hesitate to organise in 1938 'a series of concerts of *Entartete Musik* to accompany an exhibition of Art banned by the Nazis at the New Burlington Galleries'.<sup>625</sup>

As well as including intellectuals sympathetic to the Left, the committee also insisted on involving individuals outside the left-wing circles, almost certainly to ensure the event was not perceived as being left-centred, and would as a result attract audiences outside the left-sympathisers' circles. This was particularly obvious from the efforts to secure the participation of individuals such as Vaughan Williams who had already been associated with the LLCU as an adjudicator, as mentioned in chapter 1. Despite being sympathetic to the LLCU's cause, he was always very reluctant to become involved in party politics. His contribution to the Festival was to compose a Fanfare for Brass ('Flourish for Wind Band') which however he agreed to do after two failed attempts by the committee to get him involved in other compositions: to compose music for Sylvia Townsend Warner's 'Red Front', or an overture. One can speculate that in the case of the 'Red Front' (which is not clear if this was a new arrangement for Townsend-Warner's piece discussed in the previous chapter), the text might have appeared too politically explicit for Vaughan Williams's taste.

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<sup>621</sup> Joanna Bullivant, *Musical modernism and Left-wing Politics in 1930s Britain*, 61 and 132.

<sup>622</sup> Jenny Doctor, 'Clark, Thomas Edward' in Stanley Sadie (ed), *Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, second edition (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001), 912-13 and Jenny Doctor, *The BBC and Ultra-Modern Music, 1922-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 81.

<sup>623</sup> Doctor, 'Clark', 912 and Doctor, *the BBC*, 81 and 329-332.

<sup>624</sup> Doctor, *Clark*, 913.

<sup>625</sup> Bullivant, *Musical modernism*, 193.

After all, he complained to the committee about their definition of 'The People', to justify his refusal to compose the overture, additionally criticising the Pageant for depicting bourgeois elements ('battles and Kings, and coronations and highwaymen and Kind squires') that would give a 'false impression' of the People's music.<sup>626</sup> It is not clear from existing sources why he finally agreed to get involved in an event which he had initially criticised strongly but one can speculate that the lack of text in the Fanfare minimised the chances of him being accused of being politically compromised by associating himself with communist propaganda.

This incident with Vaughan Williams highlights the difficulties that the committee faced in their attempt to 'recruit' individuals outside the usual left-wing circles. It was also an indication of the desire, prompted by the influence of the Popular Front, to make the Festival appeal to a wider spectrum of society by featuring composers that were not politically engaged and thereby demonstrate the increasing success of the CPGB.<sup>627</sup> This anxiety of the committee to include both musicians outside the Left as well as established composers points, according to Bullivant, towards the indication that the organisers 'felt a need to legitimise and promote the event through association with leading composers, over and above the artistic and political goals'.<sup>628</sup>

### **Appealing to Adrian Boult and Henry Wood.**

In a similar manner, Adrian Boult was contacted to conduct the Queen's Hall concert. One of the reasons why he was the committee's first choice of conductor was his position as director of Music and principal conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, which made him one of the most influential musicians in the country. He was also a committed interpreter of new British music. In March 1938 he conducted the first performance of Bush's Piano Concerto (op. 18) at BBC Broadcasting House with Bush as soloist.<sup>629</sup> The Concerto, Bush's

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<sup>626</sup> Vaughan Williams to the committee, 7 January 1939, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 623. The committee does not mention the proposed text by Townsend which Vaughan Williams refused to set.

<sup>627</sup> There are no indications, however, that this particular event was planned as a recruitment opportunity for the party.

<sup>628</sup> Bullivant, *Musical Modernism*, 196.

<sup>629</sup> Nancy Bush, *Alan Bush: Music, politics and life* (London: Thames Publishing, 2000), 38, and Ronald Stevenson (ed), *Alan Bush: An 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday symposium* (Kidderminster: Bravura Publications, 1981), 170. See also Michael Kennedy, *Adrian Boult* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), 183.

first large-scale composition, contained a chorus in its last movement, with the text provided by Randall Swingler.<sup>630</sup> Yet the performance was mired in a degree of controversy, as Boult ‘cut short the very warm applause’ from the audience in the BBC studio, ‘launching straight into the National Anthem’. To what extent his actions reflected his personal opinion of the work’s political orientation remains unclear. On the one hand, it has been interpreted as an opportunity to underline the ‘tensions between those who promote our concert and the [political] position Bush was taking’,<sup>631</sup> on the other, as his ‘strict adherence’ to the time constraints of BBC programming.<sup>632</sup> The latter suggestion is apparently further supported by the fact that a few years later, he was also forced to abandon the ‘extra repeat in the *scherzo* of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony because it would cause an overrun into the 10pm news bulletin’.<sup>633</sup>

Whichever view more accurately accords with Boult’s position (and one might well argue that his decision to perform the National Anthem so precipitately after Bush’s work represented a gesture of defiance rather than some kind of slavish adherence to the BBC’s time constraints), the committee’s ‘kind invitation’ to Boult was refused. Certainly, the reasons for his refusal are open to contrasting interpretations. Despite his commitment to performing new British music, Boult may not have relished the prospect of allying his name to such a politically charged event. He additionally had the perfect excuse for not participating since he was already heavily committed to other musical events during the same period, and so was able to find the necessary get-out excuse given that he would not be able to find sufficient time to attend rehearsals.<sup>634</sup>

Following Boult’s refusal, Sir Henry Wood was approached. Wood was another prominent musician, having been particularly associated with the Promenade Concerts for many years. In 1938 he had celebrated 50 years as a conductor with a special concert at the Royal Albert Hall, an indication of his status by then in British Music. Wood’s initial enthusiasm for participating in this event, turned into horror when he was presented with the piece he was meant to conduct: Eisler’s ‘Lenin Cantata’ (Lenin Requiem).

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<sup>630</sup> Bush, *Alan*, 38.

<sup>631</sup> Lewis Foreman, ‘Spanning the Century: The music of Alan Bush’ in Nancy Bush, *Alan Bush*, 108.

<sup>632</sup> Kennedy, *Adrian*, 183.

<sup>633</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>634</sup> Boult to secretary of the committee, 18 October 1938, BL, Alan Bush Collection MS MUS 622.

His agreement to participate for a 'reduced fee'<sup>635</sup> was apparently retracted after being presented with the Eisler score, blaming the committee's over-enthusiasm for having 'taken [him] by storm' before giving him a chance to consider the matter of his participation.<sup>636</sup> Yet his sudden refusal led the organisers into a state of turmoil.<sup>637</sup> In a private conversation with Edward Clark, Wood confessed his shock about Eisler's score.<sup>638</sup> Presumably this conversation was subsequently communicated to the committee resulting in them changing tack and describing the piece as one with an 'extravagant and violent text', 'unsuitable in character' for a concert of this kind, particularly for concluding the Queen's Hall programme. Certainly these remarks illustrate the committee's willingness to backtrack in an attempt to reach an awkward compromise, in order to regain Wood's participation.

The whole episode, which appeared to have been an embarrassing blunder, resulted in the removal of Eisler's piece from the Queen's Hall programme, and in the suggestion to shorten the concert so as to 'make a scheme of conducting which would be logical and possible for Sir Henry Wood to accept'.<sup>639</sup> Yet by the time these concessions had been suggested, Wood had already made up his mind not to associate his name with the Festival, citing that he was committed to working on other projects at the time of the Festival.<sup>640</sup> The committee then decided to offer the conducting engagement to Constant Lambert who fortunately agreed to participate.<sup>641</sup>

For his part, Bush was obviously eager not to damage his friendship with Eisler over this debacle, and so suggested that other pieces by the composer be incorporated into the programme. These were 'News from Vienna 1938', 'Cantata of Exile' (*Kantate im Exil*, *Kammerkantate* no. 4), and the 'Prison house Cantata' (*Zuchthauskantate*, *Kammerkantate* no.9) but because of the intimate forces they required, they were assigned to the Conway

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<sup>635</sup> Minutes of meeting, 2 December 1938 and 7 December 1938, BL, Alan Bush Collection MS MUS 622.

<sup>636</sup> Wood to the committee BL, 5 December 1938, BL, Alan Bush Collection MS MUS 622.

<sup>637</sup> Minutes of meeting, 7 December 1938. BL, Alan Bush Collection MS MUS 622.

<sup>638</sup> Alan Bush Archive, MS MUS 622, Minutes of meeting, 14 December 1938.

<sup>639</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>640</sup> Minutes of meeting, 14 December 193, BL, Alan Bush Collection MS MUS 622.

<sup>641</sup> Unfortunately, the process of selecting another conductor after Wood's refusal is not documented. Lambert, who studied composition with Vaughan Williams and conducting with Malcolm Sargent at the Royal College of Music, became a successful ballet conductor which led him to conduct for other organisations such as the BBC. He also worked with the Sadler's Wells Ballet between 1931 and 1947. See Hubert Foss, 'Constant Lambert, 23 August 1905-21 August 1951' in *Musical Times*, Vol. 92, no. 1304 (October 1951), 450.

Hall concert.<sup>642</sup> In contrast to Boult and Wood, a more surprising refusal to participate in the Festival came from Rutland Boughton. Although he had resigned from the LLCU in 1929, he had not completely severed his ties with the Union. His refusal was justified by the organisers' dilatoriness, especially their inability to send him a complete script of the Pageant, for which he was asked to compose part of the music, as well as failing to provide proper details of the orchestra's range. This resulted in him suggesting his 'May Day Ballet' as appropriate substitute for any new work he might have composed.<sup>643</sup>

While the committee attracted support from distinguished figures of the musical establishment (Vaughan Williams, Constant Lambert) and managed to book prestigious venues (such as the Queen's Hall), internal divisions were generated by what some choir participants saw as Bush's dominance over this event. Unity's Male Voice Choir expressed such reservations through its conductor, John Goss. Goss (1894-1953) was a Canadian baritone, who had a career in Canada as a singer, working with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and the Winnipeg Male Voice Choir during the early 1930s, until coming to London in 1938 where he stayed until 1939. During that period, he joined the CPGB, and organised Unity's Male Voice Choir.<sup>644</sup> Goss expressed his hostility towards the committee's efforts, disapproving of the choice of repertoire (though without going into details of specific pieces), criticising the event as being 'Musical leftism', a desperate attempt to give 'struggling leftish efforts such a grandiose title'.<sup>645</sup> This, he continued, gave the very deceptive idea that the Labour movement had 'tremendous forces at its disposal' and was 'seething with musical activities' of a very high standard.<sup>646</sup>

As well as disapproving the deplorably low level of musicianship achieved by most labour choirs, Goss focused particular objections towards the inclusion of Bush's Piano

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<sup>642</sup> Clark to Wood, 23 December 1938, BL, Alan Bush Collection MS MUS 622. The works were in fact not performed on the day, as they mysteriously disappeared on the way to the venue. Instead, they were replaced by other Eisler works, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

<sup>643</sup> Organising committee to Boughton, 4 January 1939, and Boughton to Clark, 5 January 1939, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 623, Boughton to the Committee, 29 January 1939, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 623.

<sup>644</sup> <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/john-goss-emc/> accessed 24 February 2015 at 16.00. Goss returned to Canada after his brief stay in London where apparently he adjudicated Festivals and music competitions, and while in New York in 1949 was arrested for his political beliefs and sent back to Canada. In 1950 he returned to England where he died in 1953.

<sup>645</sup> Alan Bush Archive, MS MUS 622, Letter from Goss to Clark, 11 December 1938 and Goss to Clark, 19 January 1939.

<sup>646</sup> Goss to Clark, 11 December 1938, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 622,

Concerto in the programme, particularly since the Unity's Male Voice Choir was asked to participate in the performance.<sup>647</sup> Goss suspected that Bush was 'using the Movement to peddle his own wares', leaving the remaining participants feeling like a 'steadying weight on the tail of Alan Bush's kite'.<sup>648</sup> To an extent, it can indeed be argued that Goss was right. Though the event was organised by a committee, it is evident from the correspondence that the decisions regarding the repertoire were made between Clark and Bush. To be precise, it is clear that Bush was the one suggesting the repertoire to Clark, therefore indirectly imposing his own choices, as was the case with the incident involving Eisler's works. In this respect, the committee of the Festival appears to resemble Bush's WMA Vice Presidents list, where a number of composers appeared to be part of it, without however any indication of them having made a significant contribution to the organisation's operation.

### **The Programme.**

Swingler's Pageant 'Music and the People' opened the five days celebration on 1 April at the Royal Albert Hall and contained music by composers such as Bush, Vaughan Williams, Edmund Rubbra, Elisabeth Lutyens, Elizabeth Maconchy and Christian Darnton. Paul Robeson appeared along with twenty three Labour choirs (including the Unity Male Voice choir) amounting to 500 voices, and another 100 dancers.<sup>649</sup> The scenario was reminiscent of that of the 1934 Pageant of Labour as it depicted the people's achievements, this time arranged in nine episodes starting with feudal England of 1350 and ending in the more recent 1930s.<sup>650</sup> The point was to 'recount tradition', in this case the tradition of the working classes. This, however, was somewhat condensed, as it incorporated nearly 600 years of history in a relatively short space of time.<sup>651</sup>

The scenario is characterised by an avoidance to document more recent events in working class history (for instance, the Russian Revolution of 1917 was conspicuously absent), and a tendency to muddle up key events in history, though admittedly this second

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<sup>647</sup> Ibid.

<sup>648</sup> Goss to Clark, 11 December 1938 and 19 January 1939, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 622 and MS Mus 623.

<sup>649</sup> Croft, *Comrade Heart*, 90.

<sup>650</sup> Wallis, *Pageantry*, 149.

<sup>651</sup> Wallis, *Pageantry*, 147.

point may well have been prompted for the sake of condensation. Constructed in two parts, it contained a very small introduction, 9 episodes (Episodes 1 to 5 in the first part, and 6 to 9 in the second), and a conclusion.<sup>652</sup> The opening of the Pageant offers a glimpse of the main idea behind the Festival: That Music springs from the hope of the People, and it is not 'for certain rare and lofty minds who can afford to leave behind the races and troubles of the world', a direct reference to the way upper classes used music as a distraction.<sup>653</sup> The first part of the Pageant takes the action from 1350 (episode 1), to 1381 (episode 2 and 3), ending at 1728 with the second documenting events from the French Revolution, briefly mentioning Nazi Germany (in episode 7) and closing with a finale that appears to send the message that the people are fighting united for peace, in a finale under the title 'For Peace and Liberty'.<sup>654</sup>

One of the muddled-up episodes was Episode 7 ('Prisoners') the music for which was provided by Bush. The episode begins with the appearance of Beethoven on stage (after the previous episode depicting the French Revolution)<sup>655</sup> who, being quizzed by an announcer to say whether he was 'lost in the wild landscape of his music' during the French Revolution, goes on to criticise politicians and bankers, concluding 'the nobles who govern us, have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing'.<sup>656</sup> This is immediately followed by a group of men who appear to be prisoners from Nazi concentration camps, singing Eisler's 'Peatbog Soldiers'.<sup>657</sup> There is, therefore the paradox of Beethoven criticising modern-day politicians and bankers, and commenting on the late 1930s reality. The sudden lurch from Beethoven's era to the horrors of Nazi concentration camps without any material bridging the two periods appeared to be disjointed and somewhat incoherent. The role of music in the pageant is not entirely clear.<sup>658</sup> Each episode appears in the programme with the name of a

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<sup>652</sup> Festival of Music for the People, Pageant Programme.

<sup>653</sup> Albert Sloam Library, Papers and Correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner, WARNER/A/2/3/A.75, Scenario for Pageant Music and the People, 1.

<sup>654</sup> Festival of Music for the People, Pageant Programme, 7-9.

<sup>655</sup> Festival of Music for the People, Pageant Programme, and Albert Sloam Library, Papers and Correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner WARNER/A/2/3/A.75, Scenario for Pageant Music and the People, 14-15.

<sup>656</sup> Albert Sloam Library, Papers and Correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner WARNER/A/2/3/A.75, Scenario for Pageant Music and the People, 14-15.

<sup>657</sup> Festival of Music for the People, Pageant Programme, and Albert Sloam Library, Papers and Correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner WARNER/A/2/3/A.75, Scenario for Pageant Music and the People, 15.

<sup>658</sup> *ibid.*



composer who composed the music for it.<sup>659</sup> Certainly, songs were part of the script: Episode 6 for instance which takes place during the French Revolution includes French popular songs such as *La Carmagnole* in two forms: The first was probably instrumental (the script indicates that it should be played 'lightly' by a band during the scene) while a second choral version was also performed during the episode, which concluded with the choir singing the 'Marseillaise'.<sup>660</sup>

The last part of the Pageant concluded with the final chorus of Bush's and Swingler's adaptation of Handel's oratorio *Belshazzar*, initially performed at the 1938 Festival of Co-operation (also known as 'International Co-operative day) in 2 July 1938, with the participation of Co-operative choirs.<sup>661</sup> This was an abbreviated version of Handel's original work with no significant attempts to alter its overall structure.<sup>662</sup> The chorus used at the Pageant, however, was not part of Handel's original work.<sup>663</sup> While the original, which describes the fall of Babylon, closes with a chorus between the prophet Daniel and Belshazzar's mother, Nitocris, both of which praise God, Swingler's adaptation makes references to war and slavery that should be eradicated, while liberty and peace should 'stretch their reign from shore to shore'.<sup>664</sup> The chorus additionally consists of Jews, Persians and Babylonians singing together, implying 'the dream of international peace, brotherhood, and extended freedom'.<sup>665</sup>

The Finale, entitled 'For Peace and Liberty' concluded the Pageant with the need for people to stand united in the struggle to be free, with Germany, Italy, China and Spain being mentioned as examples where the people are struggling for their freedom.<sup>666</sup> The church also makes an appearance with the Dean of Canterbury participating in the Finale, an inclusion interpreted by Wallis as a reference to a broad church and a broad Popular

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<sup>659</sup> Festival of Music for the People, Pageant Programme.

<sup>660</sup> Albert Sloam Library, Papers and Correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner WARNER/A/2/3/A.75, Scenario for Pageant Music and the People, 14.

<sup>661</sup> Festival of Music for the People, Pageant Programme and WARNER/A/2/3/A.75, Scenario for Pageant Music and the People, 13. Programme of the Festival of Co-operation.

<sup>662</sup> BL, LCP 1937/16.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid.

<sup>664</sup> BL, LCP 1937/16. For Handel's/Jennen's libretto of *Belshazzar*, <http://opera.stanford.edu/iu/libretti/belshaz.htm> accessed 13 September 2015.

<sup>665</sup> Programme of the Festival of Co-operation.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid.

Front.<sup>667</sup> The Pageant concluded with a song reminding the Popular Front idea, under the title 'Men awake! The day is dawning'.<sup>668</sup> Published by the Labor stage,<sup>669</sup> a US organisation with a branch in London to which both Bush and Swingler belonged,<sup>670</sup> the song calls workers to awake and break their chains, but also to 'put away yesterday and its sorrow', which can be interpreted as a call for socialists and communists to unite.

The Conway Hall concert (3 April) contained a mixture of folk songs, Russian music, but also Eisler's cantatas. It was 'somewhat more intimate in character' compared to the one at Queen's Hall (which was to follow), quite possibly due to the size of the venue that could seat only 300 to 480 people, as compared to the 2,500 capacity of the Queen's Hall.<sup>671</sup> Folk songs mainly from the UK were performed: Vaughan Williams's 'Bushes and Briars' (which was incidentally the first folk song he ever collected in 1903) and his 'Turtle Dove' of 1924; Percy Grainger's settings of 'I am seventeen come Sunday' and his 'Marching Tune'; folk songs from Hungary (from Kodály's *Matra Pictures*: 'Vidrocki's Hunting', and 'Stealing Chickens'), all sung by the Fleet Street Choir, an organisation formed in 1929 after a conference that took place in Newcastle.<sup>672</sup> This was a professional choir, based in Battersea, and had toured abroad between 1930 and 1938, with the latter being funded by the British Council, in Czechoslovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Poland.<sup>673</sup> Its repertoire was versatile and included works by Kodály and Milhaud but also Elizabethan madrigals and works by British composers such as Holst, Rubbra and Vaughan Williams.<sup>674</sup> The Conway Hall programme was also to include three cantatas by Eisler's (*News from Vienna 1938*, *Cantata of Exile*, and *Prison House cantata*) concluding with

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<sup>667</sup> Wallis, *Pageantry*, 152.

<sup>668</sup> Albert Sloam Library, Papers and Correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner, WARNER/A/2/3/A.67, Harold J Rome, *Pageant of Co-operation No. 8, Men Awake!* (New York: Labor Stage, n.d.). The song was arranged by Alan Bush.

<sup>669</sup> Colin Chambers, *The story of the Unity Theatre* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), 136-7.

<sup>670</sup> *ibid.*, 137.

<sup>671</sup> Alan Bush Archive, MS MUS 622, Clack to Robeson, 5 November 1938.

<sup>672</sup> Rosemary Hughes, 'The Fleet Street Choir' in *Musical Times*, Vol. 92, no. 1302 (August 1951), 345-348. Conway Hall Programme from BL, Ernst Henschel Programme Collection, Box 26 (1939). In fact, the Fleet Street Choir had also the opportunity to visit Nazi Germany during 1937, in a tour that took it to Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Nuremberg and Munich. While visiting Nuremberg apparently the members were told that Herr Hitler was having coffee at a hotel nearby, and asked if they wanted to join, which they did, though they did not join Hitler's entourage. It is not clear whether Hitler also attended their concert in Nuremberg that day, but he sent one of his staff to congratulate the choir on their successful tour. See 'Fleet Street choir in Germany: Congratulations by Herr Hitler', in *The Times*, 14 October 1937.

<sup>673</sup> Hughes, 'The Fleet Street', 346 and 348.

<sup>674</sup> *ibid.*, 347.

Schoenberg's *Peace on Earth*, translated by Nancy Bush.<sup>675</sup> The second part of the concert was to be dominated by Russian music performed by the Medvedeff's Balalaika Orchestra. This was probably a Russian ensemble comprised of 4 individuals (two men and two women) which appears to also have been popular with the BBC throughout the 1920s and 1930s as it was included on its broadcasting programmes on a regular basis.<sup>676</sup> Prokofiev's Gavotte from the *Symphonie Classique*, and Koval's Three Dances from incidental music (written for the play *Shapayeff*) were to be performed, with more Russian songs (by Dunayevski and Tyulin) this time alongside the Fleet Street choir.<sup>677</sup>

Mick Wallis sees in the structure of this concert a carefully choreographed narrative, arguing that the Festival was designed to 'pay a tribute to the musicians of Europe who have linked their art to the progressive social forces of the period in which they lived or are living'.<sup>678</sup> It opened with folk songs from the UK, moving to Hungarian folk songs (which Wallis calls 'universal folk songs', 'roots of a common democracy') and continued with works by Eisler (whose cantatas gave an 'international dimension' to the concert) which also introduced the concept of the very contemporary threat of fascism.<sup>679</sup> The audience is then reassured by Schoenberg's *Peace on Earth* (suggesting that humanity will win in the end the war against fascism), while the second part of the concert is dominated by Russian music (created by the collaboration between Russian and British ensembles), apparently leaving no doubt as to which 'state forges flawless weapons in truth's defence in 1939'.<sup>680</sup>

This narrative of 'progressive musicians' continues with the third (and last) concert at Queen's Hall (5 April) with the participation of 12 Co-operative and Labour choirs and the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Constant Lambert.<sup>681</sup> Opening with Beethoven's

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<sup>675</sup> BL, Ernst Henschel Programme Collection, Box 26 (1939), Conway Hall Programme.

<sup>676</sup> Entries for the orchestra as part of the BBC's programme appear for the first time in *The Times* for Saturday 4 March 1933 on London's regional programme until 14 June 1942. Thereafter it appears as part of the broadcasting programme from a series 'Music in the Parks, from 27 June 1942 to 14 June 1947. The only surviving information for this ensemble can be found in a short clip at the British Pathé website from 1947, where the size of the orchestra is just 4 musicians. <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/nicholas-medvedeff-and-his-orchestra-aka-medvedeff/query/RUSSIAN+SONG>, accessed 25 February 2015 at 15.00.

<sup>677</sup> BL, Ernst Henschel Programme Collection, Box 26 (1939), Conway Hall Programme.

<sup>678</sup> Alan Bush Archive, MS MUS 622, Memorandum on the Festival of Music for the People, 5 September 1938. Also quoted in Wallis, *Pageantry*, 137.

<sup>679</sup> Wallis, *Pageantry*, 137.

<sup>680</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>681</sup> BL, Ernst Henschel Programme Collection, Box 26 (1939), Conway Hall Programme.

'Egmont Overture', the first part continued with Britten's 'Ballad of Heroes' (composed specifically for the event) as well as the second and third movement of Bush's Piano Concerto.<sup>682</sup> The second part of the concert featured only Ireland's 'These things shall be'. With the exception of Beethoven's work, this was a celebration of contemporary British music. Britten's 'Ballad of Heroes' (his op. 14) composed on a text provided by Swingler and Auden (Swingler provided the text for the first movement, Auden for the second, while both collaborated for the last movement of the piece) was written to commemorate the return of the British volunteers from Spain (after fighting in the Spanish Civil War) and those who did not make it back to Britain. The opening text addresses the British public that chose to remain apathetic instead of participating in the fight, convinced that it had done its best.<sup>683</sup> In the second part, Auden describes the grim reality and the horrors of the Spanish Civil War, underlining the courage of the men who fought against the Franco regime and left their comfortable lives behind. In the last part, hope is offered as 'Europe lies in the dark' by those 'men just and worthy of the earth'.<sup>684</sup>

The symbolism of the final words in the text of this work have given rise to a certain degree of speculation. The last verse reads as follows:

So goodbye to the house with its wallpaper red  
 Goodbye to the sheets on the warm double bed  
 Goodbye to the beautiful birds on the wall  
 It's goodbye dear heart, goodbye to you all!<sup>685</sup>

Donald Mitchell interprets this text as a way of both Auden and Britten saying their farewells for leaving behind not only England, but also their roles in the British Left during the 1930s. By the time the *Ballad* was performed, Auden was already in the US with Isherwood (since January 1939) with Britten to follow in April 1939.<sup>686</sup> At the same time, Auden's decision to leave for the US was made after finding his 'public role as court poet to the Left' intolerable, a role that apparently Britten had also acquired by the time the work

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<sup>682</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>683</sup> Croft, *Comrade*, 93, Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten*, 123 and Mitchell, *Britten*, 142.

<sup>684</sup> Benjamin Britten, *Ballad of Heroes* (London: Winthrop Rogers, 1939).

<sup>685</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>686</sup> Donald Mitchell, *Britten and Auden in the thirties* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), 143.

was performed, and which he was also now leaving behind.<sup>687</sup> Further, the *Ballad of Heroes* was also Britten's

final exercise in quasi political commitment, and he was never to return to the style or substance of those works that helped to shape the thirties. It was indeed, 'good-bye to you all': not only to family and friends, but also goodbye to the decade itself.<sup>688</sup>

However, though Britten was associated with the Left circles during the 1930s, there is hardly any indication that he achieved the role of the left's 'court composer' as Mitchell claims.<sup>689</sup> Britten's involvement with the GPO Unit which brought him in contact with Auden and the wider Left was purely accidental as this was the result of Clark's suggestion.<sup>690</sup> Unlike other composers (such as Bush or even Tippett), Britten never joined any left Party, whether the CPGB or the Labour Party, though he became involved with the Peace Pledge Union in 1935 and additionally claimed to have discussed communism with his (unsympathetic to the cause) mother.<sup>691</sup> In comparison to Britten, there is far more evidence to suggest that Bush better fits the description as 'court composer of the Left', given his involvement with both the Labour Party and the CPGB, with left circles, organising most left musical events during the 1930s, composing songs for left-wing choirs (such as the LLCU) and initiating large-scale events and festivals for the Left, while also composing their music.

This point can be exemplified in Bush's Piano Concerto (op. 18, the third piece performed at the Queen's Hall concert) which contained a politically explicit text by Swingler. The work was written in 1937 and, as mentioned above, had its first performance in 1938 at the BBC (studio performance) with Bush as the soloist, the BBC Male Voice Choir and its Symphony Orchestra participating, with Adrian Boult conducting. It was never officially published (in fact Nancy Bush in her book mentions Alan as the publisher) though apparently a publication by Joseph Williams existed.<sup>692</sup>

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<sup>687</sup> Mitchell, *Britten*, 142-3.

<sup>688</sup> *ibid*, 144.

<sup>689</sup> *ibid.*, 143.

<sup>690</sup> Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), 42.

<sup>691</sup> *Ibid*, 68.

<sup>692</sup> The British Library has no record of this publication. In a list provided for me by the Music Manuscripts Curator, Dr Nicolas Bell, it is made clear that there is only the the original Manuscript of the score that is available at the British Library.

One peculiarity of the work, which follows a precedent set in Busoni's 1904 Piano Concerto, is its last movement which contains a chorus for a Baritone solo, and a Male Voice choir. The text demonstrates strongly communist affiliations. Firstly, it makes clear references to the Marxist outlook of art (and in this case of music) as an essential part of society that should relate to people's lives and not be used to 'stupefy them':

Art is no drug nor yet oblivion's river  
 Music is the mind-changer, the light giver  
 The future's design, the release of a new endeavour<sup>693</sup>

Secondly, it describes in more violent terms the grip of the upper classes, the bosses, on the working class, urging indirectly the oppressed to start a revolution against their oppressors:

And men in hope landed to gather to loosen the collar of oppression  
 and to beget happiness  
 At the expense of cash profit  
 Stamp it out with the violence of their law  
 Strengthen their frenzied grip,  
 Cry 'faster, faster' to the mills that grind men's labour into profit  
 And to the hounds that guard their parks of privilege  
 Cry 'fiercer, fiercer'  
 Their throne grows narrow  
 The gulf gapes for them  
 Their frenzy increases as despair seizes upon them  
 For they shall fall, fall, fall for ever  
 Their rule and their practice shall be stamped from the earth  
 The soil shall cover it  
 Its chains lie rotting in the furrows  
 Only in death shall it be fruitful  
 Only its utter annihilation shall cleanse the world<sup>694</sup>

The workers in this case are not just urged to take action, but to 'stamp out' violence with violence, while the oppressors should suffer 'utter annihilation' as this is the only way to 'cleanse the world' from their 'frenzied grip'. The text of this work offers a very interesting contrast to Eisler's *Lenin Cantata*, to which both Wood (and possibly Boult)

<sup>693</sup> Alan Bush Archive, MS MUS 330, Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, Volume 2 (Parts 3 and 4).

<sup>694</sup> Alan Bush Archive, MS MUS 330, Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, Volume 2 (Parts 3 and 4).

objected. Here is a text that does not imply violence but is actually describing it, and yet Boult was happy to conduct Bush's Piano Concerto for the BBC in 1938.<sup>695</sup>

The concert concluded with Ireland's 'These things shall be', a work written between 1936 and 1937 on a text by John Addington Symonds.<sup>696</sup> Ireland was both Bush's composition teacher between 1922 and 1926, and a lifelong friend.<sup>697</sup> He was also not unknown to the left-wing circles of the 1930s: Fiona Richards points out his involvement with an organisation called the 'International Peace Campaign', the aim of which was to 'strengthen the League of Nations in order to stop war'.<sup>698</sup> He was also associated with Swingler after setting Swingler's text 'Ways of Peace', a work described by Richards as a 'propagandist part-song with piano' for the international Peace Campaign, though the exact dates of the work's composition and of Ireland's association with Swingler are unknown.<sup>699</sup> The original text has also been read as having 'undertones of homosexual freedom', as apparently Symonds himself was 'known as a writer with an interest in the concept of Platonic love and male beauty' (as a result references to 'happier men' and 'free comrades' have been interpreted as having such undertones). At the same time such references point towards an 'imagined Utopia', a central idea of socialists, despite the fact it was commissioned for a BBC concert commemorating the coronation of King George VI.<sup>700</sup>

Being under pressure to finish the piece, Ireland asked Bush to help him by working on its orchestration.<sup>701</sup> Originally Bush had included references to the 'Internationale' in the horn parts, which Ireland was forced to remove after the first performance, when it was widely speculated that he was a communist.<sup>702</sup> Ireland justified his decision to remove these references however, as:

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<sup>695</sup> It should be stressed perhaps that it is not for certain whether Boult refused to participate in the Festival because of Eisler's *Lenin Cantata*. This seems to have been something that the committee assumed, unlike in the case of Sir Henry Wood when it was certainly the work that disturbed him.

<sup>696</sup> Foreman, *Spanning*, 100. See also Fiona Richards, *The music of John Ireland* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 184-188.

<sup>697</sup> Bush, *Alan*, 16, and Foreman, 'Spanning the century', 100.

<sup>698</sup> Richards, *The Music*, 186.

<sup>699</sup> *Ibid.* The piece is also listed as having an unknown date in the John Ireland Music Trust, <http://www.johnirelandtrust.org/ttoy.htm>, accessed 2 August 2015, at 11.30.

<sup>700</sup> Richards, *The music*, 184-5.

<sup>701</sup> Foreman, 'Spanning', 100, Stewart Craggs, *John Ireland: A catalogue, discography and bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 95, and Richards, *The Music*, 185.

<sup>702</sup> Richards, *The Music*, 188.

[...] Some musician spotted the tune about two years ago, and I found that rumours were being circulated that I am a communist, and that my use of that tune was a proof of it. [...] what I have put in its place is more appropriate and cannot by any possibility be taken to have any political significance. It was only a subordinate inner part, not meant to be specially heard. The work was written in 1937, and since then things have changed considerably. What was then only mildly 'pink, now stands out as 'bright red'! It is clearly demonstrated, not, that 'communism' will not bring about the Utopian state of affairs suggested by the poem – quite the contrary!! So I think you will agree that it was best to remove anything in the music which could suggest Stalinist aims.<sup>703</sup>

Taking into account Wallis's narrative in all three events, it could be argued that this last work was chosen to remind the audience of the socialist 'better days to come'. Indeed, in the Queen's Hall concert, the audience already heard two works describing the evils of war (in the 'Ballad of Heroes') and the evils of the working-class oppressors, with the second work (Bush's Piano Concerto) containing a violent text. In this respect Ireland's work offers a glimpse of hope, the reassurance that society will indeed change for the best (the implication being that socialism will help in this case), and that better days are coming. There are however two ironies in this. The first is that Ireland's work was written for the King's coronation (hardly a working class/socialist event). The second is that the performance of this seemingly optimistic work took place only months before declaration of war in September 1939) thereby trashing every hope of humanity pulsing as one fraternity, of the earth becoming a paradise.

This last concert at Queen's Hall concluded the Festival on 5 April 1939. The assumption that the Festival was a great success was boosted by the claims that the Festival was attended in total by 10,000 people.<sup>704</sup> It demonstrated that the working class was capable of organising an event on a massive scale, with 1,000 performers taking place, an event which demanded a great deal of effort on behalf of the largely amateur performers. Such was the scale of the preparation that rehearsals had to be arranged for individual choirs before the dress rehearsals could take place. Eight dress rehearsals of the massed choirs took place between 17 March and 4 April for the Queen's Hall programme and

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<sup>703</sup> Ibid.

<sup>704</sup> Croft, *Comrade*, 94 and Wallis, *Pageantry*, 152.



another four for the Pageant, a very significant commitment for amateur choral singers who used the choirs as a part-time activity.<sup>705</sup> The sheer effort from the organisers and the participants, as Wallis claims, became an inspiration for the audience, which might have included choir members who did not participate, but attended to support 'their choirs'.<sup>706</sup> It additionally gave the impression of the working class solidarity for the Popular Front cause, though there are no indications it was used by the CPGB as a recruitment event or indeed as a political meeting.<sup>707</sup> If the success of the Festival is to be measured by the amount of money the committee managed to gather for the Basque Children, then its success is doubtful: it ended with a deficit of £650 (some £18,668 in today's money) with just £5 donated to the children (the equivalent of £143.60).<sup>708</sup>

As a result, the Festival's organisers struggled to find donors to cover the deficit. A number of associations and organisations known for being sympathetic to Left causes were contacted for financial help.<sup>709</sup> Bush's family appears to have been the most generous donor: His mother, Alice, donated £500.9.0 (the equivalent of £14,372.92) while an anonymous donor (quite possibly Alan himself) donated another £400 (11,488.00).<sup>710</sup> Convincing other organisations to donate money and support the event proved a difficult task. As well as the financial difficulties that most of them faced anyway, the politics behind the event was perhaps an additional problem that prevented them from making donations. The LLCU donated £5, a quite generous donation, given the difficulties it was facing during the mid-1930s with its membership. However, it remains unclear whether the London Labour Party, which was also approached for this cause, donated at all.<sup>711</sup> The RACS also refused to donate despite being a founding member of the Union, citing the fact it had 'no funds available from which assistance could be given for the purpose'.<sup>712</sup>

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<sup>705</sup> Alan Bush Archive, MS MUS 626, programme of the rehearsals, no date.

<sup>706</sup> Wallis, *Pageantry*, 150.

<sup>707</sup> *ibid*, 152.

<sup>708</sup> Sahnou to Bush, 21 April 1939, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 626,. Mick Wallis indicates the deficit as £600. See Wallis, *Pageantry*, 152.

<sup>709</sup> Various letters from the committee to individuals and organisations regarding donations, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 622-626.

<sup>710</sup> Sahnou to Bush, 21 April 1939, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 626. For conversion in today's money, see <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid> , accessed 24 February 2015, at 17.00.

<sup>711</sup> For the Union's donation, see Sahnou to Bush, 5 May 1939, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 626. For the London Labour Party, see Minutes of meeting, 1 March 1939, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 624

<sup>712</sup> RACS to Clark, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 626.

## The Festival as a response to the London Music Festival

The almost simultaneous occurrence of the London Music Festival, organised by conductors Owen Mase and Sir Thomas Beecham, led historian Mick Wallis to conclude that the dates for the Festival of Music for the People were deliberately chosen.<sup>713</sup> In this context, the Festival is viewed as a response to the London Music Festival, highlighting the notion of ‘their music and ours’, meaning ‘bourgeois music versus working-class music’.<sup>714</sup> This idea is also reiterated by Andy Croft in his book on Randall Swingler.<sup>715</sup> However, in the material studied for this chapter (particularly that from the Alan Bush Archive) nowhere is this idea of challenge explicitly expressed, indeed the London Music Festival is completely ignored. The manifesto outlining the aims of the Festival of Music for the People describes it as an event that would enable the working class to lift the obstacles experienced by the masses in musical production and enjoyment, and give it the opportunity to experience music that relates to the working-class struggles.<sup>716</sup>

Moreover, musicians participating in the Festival would be those who have ‘linked their art to the progressive social forces of the period in which they lived or are living’, therefore those who embrace the Marxist idea of music being a reflection of society.<sup>717</sup> A closer look at the dates reveals that the London Music Festival was not exactly simultaneous. In reality, it took place between 23 April and 2 June 1939, some 20 days after the Festival of Music for the People had ended.<sup>718</sup> It was an impressive set of events and involved not just music but also theatre. Venues used included Westminster Abbey, the National Gallery, the Covent Garden as well as Glyndebourne and Sadler’s Wells, with Shakespeare plays being performed in Stratford-upon-Avon, and visits to unnamed venues in Oxford and Cambridge. A festival of Church music took place at the Albert Hall, and Toscanini participated by conducting the BBC orchestra on a number of occasions.<sup>719</sup>

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<sup>713</sup> Wallis, *Heirs*, 58-59, also repeated in Wallis, *Pageantry*, 136.

<sup>714</sup> Wallis, *Pageantry*, 136.

<sup>715</sup> Andy Croft, *Comrade Heart: A life of Randall Swingler* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 94-95.

<sup>716</sup> Alan Bush Archive, MS MUS 622, Memorandum on the Festival of Music for the People, 5 September 1938.

<sup>717</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>718</sup> BL, Ernst Henschel Programme Collection, Box 26 (1939), London Music Festival programme.

<sup>719</sup> ‘The London Music Festival’ in *Musical Times*, Vol. 80 no. 1154 (April 1939), 257-8. The event however did not get particularly glowing reviews in a following *Musical Times* issue, and was described as ‘[what] we can hear in the normal course of affairs, and while [the concerts] brought increase and richness into London music

Comparing the programme booklets produced for both festivals is also revealing. The London Music Festival produced a 120 page long booklet, complete with the London underground map to enable audience to find the venues.<sup>720</sup> Patrons of the Festival were King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, with the Grand Council of the event including also Sir Adrian Boult and Sir Henry Wood.<sup>721</sup> Designed to be a ‘five-weeks family party of musicians and music lovers’, as well as the concerts and other events, music publishers such as Novello offered their ‘very comfortable rooms’ for those audience members wishing to examine the scores of the performed works ‘at their leisure’, or consult periodicals from other countries.<sup>722</sup> Somewhat dubious at 1939 was the Festival’s decision to include exhibitions of music books from France, Germany and Italy, which opened with a service at Westminster Abbey given by the Archbishop of York.<sup>723</sup>

The Festival of Music for the People’s programmes however were significantly different. Two 15-pages long programmes were produced, one for the Pageant that opened the event, and a second containing details of the two concerts at Conway and Queen’s Hall.<sup>724</sup> As well as providing information about the event, such as participating choirs, individuals etc, they also feature the texts of the songs used, true to the socialist tradition. The Pageant programme for instance describes the individual episodes, while the booklet for the concerts contains the text of each work performed (including the lengthy text of Bush’s Piano Concerto).<sup>725</sup>

The fact that both Festival of Music for the People programme booklets included an advertisement for the London Music Festival is also interesting in itself. Wallis for example points out that this is a ‘seemingly casual inclusion of an advertisement for a hostile event’, aiming to demonstrate to the Festival of Music audience that ‘all this can be coped with’, that the working class is equally capable of organising a major musical event without any help from the upper classes and their resources.<sup>726</sup> It additionally reinforces the notion of

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they provided no matter for special comment’. See ‘London Concerts’ in *Musical Times*, Vol. 80 no. 1155 (May 1939), 382, and BL, Ernst Henschel Programme Collection, Box 26 (1939), London Music Festival programme.

<sup>720</sup> BL, Ernst Henschel Programme Collection, Box 26 (1939), London Music Festival programme.

<sup>721</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>722</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>723</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>724</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>725</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>726</sup> Wallis, *Pageantry*, 136.

‘their music and ours’, meaning ‘the music of the upper classes, and our music (of the working class)’.<sup>727</sup> Perhaps even the idea of including the indication (in capital letters) of ‘Five Hundred Singers, One Hundred Dancers, The People’s Festival Wind Band’ in the first page of the Pageant’ programme, followed by a detailed description of all choirs participating (divided in ‘acting’ and ‘mass’ choruses in the second page, taking up the entire A6 Page of the programme) is also an attempt to highlight that this was an equally extensive event, requiring much effort for its organisation, just like the London Music Festival.<sup>728</sup>

### Reception.

Generally, the press greeted all three events of the festival with indifference and much sarcasm, and in this sense it could be argued that instead of creating a Popular Front, the event divided opinions further.<sup>729</sup> The Pageant attracted much criticism. The right-wing *Daily Telegraph* for example found it a mainly tedious, tiring and never ending affair, a production for which participants had little to feel proud of.

The event was long. At one point the compere of the Pageant, Wilfried Walter, said ‘Light grows! What is the date now?’ One consulted the clock: It was still April 1 [...] Music was misapplied: And the whole made such a tasteless mixture that the Dean of Canterbury’s words in his address ‘Music always speaks from the heart’ were like mockery.<sup>730</sup>

*The Times* too greeted the Pageant with much scepticism. Quite apart from the technical problems such as inaudibility of the words, the goal of the pageant, the choice of repertoire and the inclusion of the People on the title of the event were questioned:

[...] a festival of music which professed to be ‘for the people’. Without stopping to examine the implications of such a vague phrase, the idea and the general lines on which its execution is designed may be commended for its bold attempt to [...] relate our music to the life of our times. But the artistic results of burning zeal may be no more than tepid if artistic principles are abandoned for

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<sup>727</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>728</sup> BL, Ernst Henschel Programme Collection, Box 26 (1939), Festival of Music for the People programme, Pageant Programme.

<sup>729</sup> Wallis, *Pageantry*, 152-3.

<sup>730</sup> Anon., Politics and Music. Jamboree at the Albert Hall, in *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, Monday 3 April 1939.

the sake of pointing a moral, rewriting history, or making political gestures.<sup>731</sup>

For the *News Chronicle* however the Pageant was ‘extraordinarily interesting to watch’, a ‘constructive effort’ deserving admiration for its scale.<sup>732</sup>

The concerts, however, were equally criticised, with reviewers wondering what exactly the people were to do when they were told to take over:

One song the other evening sought to prepare the ‘people’ to ‘take over’, but no information was added about what they were expected to take over – the Foreign Office, Hitler, Greenwich Observatory, or Littlewood’s pools.<sup>733</sup>

An interesting detail is that the Eisler works performed in the Conway Hall concert were not those originally chosen (‘News from Vienna 1938’, ‘Exile Cantata’ and ‘Prison House Cantata’) as all of them mysteriously disappeared just before the performance, though there is no indication as to whether this was intentional – it may as well have been bad organisation on behalf of the committee for instance.<sup>734</sup> There is no surviving evidence in the Archives as to the exact works that replaced the missing ones, although it is certain that Eisler’s ‘In Praise of Learning’ from *Die Mutter* was performed. This is concluded safely thanks to the *Daily Telegraph*’s review, which criticised the ‘Class War Cycle’ out of which the song came, and which included the line ‘You must learn your ABC, you must be ready to take over’, for which the song was described by the paper as naïve:

[...] the British proletariat will have become more internationally-minded, more mouzhik-like, before such songs go to its head. [...] If ever we hear revolutionary mobs chanting in our streets Eisler’s ‘You must learn your ABC’, it will be difficult to believe them natives of this land.<sup>735</sup>

Based on the publication where the English translation of this song was found in the Archives, an LLCU publication which also contained English translations of Eisler’s *Die*

<sup>731</sup> Anon., ‘Festival of Music for the People’ in *The Times*, 3 April 1939

<sup>732</sup> Anon., ‘Music for the People’, in *News Chronicle*, Monday 3 April 1939.

<sup>733</sup> Anon., ‘Music for the People’, in *The Guardian*, 6 April 1939

<sup>734</sup> Clark to Miss Wood, 11 April 1939, BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 626. See also *The Times*, *Music for the People: London Festival*, Tuesday 4 April 1939. See also contribution to the *News Chronicle*, Tuesday 4 April, ‘owing to the mysterious disappearance of music of three cantatas by Hanns Eisler, three other songs by the same composer were substituted. These were sung by Richard Wood with an assurance which made it difficult to realise that the performance was a last minute stop-gap’.

<sup>735</sup> *The Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, *Schoenberg and the People. Second Festival Concert*, Tuesday 4 April 1939.

*Mutter, Grabrede* (published as 'Report on the Death of a Comrade') and *Steh auf! Die Partei ist in Gefahr* ('The party's in danger!') one can speculate that it was these three songs that replaced the missing cantatas.<sup>736</sup> The publication, along with the fact that three works by Eisler were replaced with new ones by the same composer despite not being part of the initial programme (therefore not sufficiently rehearsed) points towards the choir's familiarity with Eisler's output by 1939.<sup>737</sup> Further criticism came from *The Times*, which reduced Eisler's songs to material appropriate for a political demonstration, songs of 'pure political doctrine', rather than appropriate for a Music Festival.<sup>738</sup>

*The Times* and the *News Chronicle* took the opportunity to contrast Bush's and Britten's works from the Queen's Hall concert, coming to different conclusions, with the *News Chronicle* pointing out that the (politically explicit) text which was a common denominator in both works, resulted in 'music suffering artistic frustration'.<sup>739</sup> While *The Times* found Britten's resource 'astonishing', with a material far superior than that of Bush, the *News Chronicle* described it as a work 'not fully developed', arguing that Bush's work had a more coherent musical design.<sup>740</sup> For the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Manchester Guardian*, however, Britten's work was baffling, a direct result of its text:

It is a pity that other verses [...] should seem too eccentric for a choral composition. [...] then the sense of the exhortation 'Dry their imperfect dust!' is baffling. [...] And although Mr Swingler's metaphors can be unhappy (he can talk of a 'bird whose wings beat in a vacuum) we were made to feel that the hearts at least of these artists of the left are in the right place.<sup>741</sup>

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<sup>736</sup> Albert Sloam Library, Papers and Correspondence of Sir Frederick Edward Warner, WARNER/A/2/3/A.70. It is unclear when and how the Union organised a publishing house. Though, as noted in the second chapter, there were discussions regarding this, they plan was rejected by party officials. However, the evidence from the Warner archive indicates otherwise. There is no surviving correspondence to document the process.

<sup>737</sup> The original is again a *Lehrstück* like *Die Maßnahme*, describing how Palagea Vlassova, the mother of a worker, gets involved in the revolutionary movement. It had its first performance in 17 January 1932 in Berlin and unlike *Die Maßnahme*, where the chorus had a significant role as the party's leadership, in *Die Mutter* the chorus was 'relegated to a very minor role. The score also lacks the extended recitatives and speaking choruses of the *Massnahme*, with the exception of the *Lob des Kommunismus* which opens with a recitative, and the *Lob der Wlassowas* which is in fact a recitativ. See also Hanns Eisler and Bertold Brecht, *Die Mutter* (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik 1977), 37 and 69.

<sup>738</sup> Anon., 'Music for the People. London Festival' in *The Times*, 4 April 1939.

<sup>739</sup> Anon., 'Music for the People: Benjamin Britten's *Ballad of Heroes*', in *News Chronicle*, 6 April 1939.

<sup>740</sup> Ibid.

<sup>741</sup> Anon., 'Music of the Left. A Spanish Elegy by Benjamin Britten', in *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 6 April 1939. The last line of the review is a reference to Swingler's text for Bush's work, where indeed the second entrance of the Baritone starts with the line 'Yet in our day the influence of thought is caged and bonded, like a bird whose wings beat in a vacuum'. See BL, Alan Bush Collection, MS MUS 330, Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, Volume 2 (Parts 3 and 4).

Indeed, *The Manchester Guardian*, taking Auden's part 'The fishes are silent deep in the sea, the skies are lit up like a Christmas tree' out of context, ridiculed the text, but praised Britten for 'lending as much atmosphere and point a possible to pretentious doggerel' and linked this to the work by Bush:

further catalogue of words by Mr Swingler which began 'Friends, we would speak a little of this performance. You have heard the intricate orchestra, the warm horns curled like snails, the cunning flutes'. Presumably it was in an attempt to reproduce a noise like warm horns curled like snails that Mr Bush opened his *lento* and finale from a concerto for piano and orchestra by making the lower strings imitate the phrases associated with Wagner at the beginning of 'Siegfried'.<sup>742</sup>

Bush's concerto was also offered as an example where political dogma can lead nowhere artistically, an 'instance where political conviction and artistic creativity nearly succeeded in digesting some gritty dogma, but shows signs of dyspepsia'.<sup>743</sup>

Above all however, a debate was generated on the Press as to the definition of 'The People' on the Festival's title, and the general consensus was that there are in fact individuals who happen to agree politically with the organisers. The committee was criticised for making no attempt to conceal its political inclinations, resulting in a Festival of crude political propaganda, organised by a 'politically conscious sect with a particular ideology'.<sup>744</sup> In this context, it was noted that the BBC was already fulfilling the supply of music to 'all sorts of people, whether the word is spelt with a small or a capital P', the implication being that a Festival for the People was superfluous.<sup>745</sup>

[...] a festival of music which professed to be 'for the people'. Without stopping to examine the implications of such a vague phrase, the idea and the general lines on which its execution is designed may be commended for its bold attempt to [...] relate our music to the life of our times. But the artistic results of burning zeal may be no more than tepid if artistic principles are abandoned for

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<sup>742</sup> Anon., 'Music for the People', in *Manchester Guardian*, 6 April 1939. The reference to Bush's work is from the opening lines of the Piano Concerto.

<sup>743</sup> Ibid.

<sup>744</sup> Anon., 'The Music for the People. Politics and Art', in *The Times*, 8 April 1939.

<sup>745</sup> Ibid.

the sake of pointing a moral, rewriting history, or making political gestures.<sup>746</sup>

Specialist music journals weighed into the debate with the *Musical Times* raising particular concerns about attempt to link Music with Politics in an article under the title 'FMP=x', where x represented 'the unknown quantity of the event's achievement', pointing out that the only result can be artistic inferiority and poor quality.<sup>747</sup> The journal also concluded that it is only music amongst the arts that should be politically detached and untainted. The combination for example of literature and politics is more appropriate, as this is literature's function (presumably to be politically engaged) which apparently also explains according to this article the existence of 'Left, Right and Labour Book Clubs', a direct reference to the success of Gollancz's Left Book Club.<sup>748</sup> Music 'can define nothing' and should have a 'unifying influence and it is still among the few things that give the Peoples of a harassed world a common meeting-ground'.<sup>749</sup>

Along the same lines, the *Manchester Guardian* pointed out:

I can understand music for music lovers such as Mozart's and Bach's and Schubert's; I can understand George Gershwin and the warbling of Gracie Fields; I can understand 'Asleep in the Deep' and 'They wanted a song bird in heaven, so God called Caruso home'. But this 'Festival of Music for the People' with its fluctuations between Beethoven, Kodaly and Mr Bush has recalled Mr Chesterton's remark about the kind of forward movement which marched solemnly in all directions. Why don't these people laugh at themselves now and then? Just for fun.<sup>750</sup>

The enthusiastic attendance indicated in the Left Press was questioned by *The Times* which clearly found it less impressive and concluded that certainly, the musically minded people are not always interested in politics: 'For the people, meaning the population at large and not a politically conscious sect with a particular ideology, does not normally choose political themes for its music'. Instead, according to the paper, they choose folk song, they choose Jazz, because the folk song represents 'generations of peasants and proletarians', while Jazz 'is the immediate choice of the indiscriminating masses'<sup>751</sup> This,

<sup>746</sup> Anon., 'Festival of Music for the People', in *The Times*, 3 April 1939.

<sup>747</sup> 'FMP=x' in *Musical Times*, Vol. 80, no. 1155 (May 1939), 382.

<sup>748</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>749</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>750</sup> Anon., 'Music for the People', in *Manchester Guardian*, 6 April 1939.

<sup>751</sup> *Ibid.*



was 'really a festival of ideological music and, as such, achieved a moderate success in a peculiarly difficult field'.<sup>752</sup>

### Conclusions.

The Festival of Music for the People belongs to the tradition of Popular Front pageants, which started in 1936 and were designed to depict the progressive tradition and key events in working class history just like the Pageants organised by the socialists in the early 1930s (the 1934 Pageant of Labour being an obvious example). As well as recruiting members, they were also used as a way of promoting communist-related propaganda through their various episodes which depicted key events in working-class history. The 1939 Festival of Music for the People was designed to demonstrate the appeal of the Popular Front, which might explain the committee's attempt to ensure participation from individuals outside the usual left circles (such as Adrian Boult and Henry Wood).

Wallis's interpretation of the two concerts (at Conway and Queen's Hall respectively) as containing a narrative is convincing, despite the lack of evidence as to whether the committee actually intended this. Although there is also no concrete proof that the Festival of Music for the People was designed as a working-class response to the upper-class London Music Festival, contrasting the two events produces some useful conclusions. On one hand, there is the London Music Festival with Patrons the King and Queen; with celebrated conductors participating (Wood, Toscanini); with a month-long duration and multiple venues used, in and outside London. On the other hand, the Festival of Music for the People was an event organised by a communist-sympathetic committee, with amateur organisations and choirs participating, spanning only 3 days in central London venues. The inclusion of the London Music Festival advertisement in the Festival of Music for the People programme does raise questions, as Wallis points out, and it does imply that Bush and the organising committee attempted to contrast the two Festivals to prove the working class's ability to organise events of such scale.

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<sup>752</sup> Ibid.

The programmes produced for the two Festivals are also indicative of what each festival represented. On one hand, there is the Festival of Music for the People programme, which included also the texts for some of the works performed as well as a brief explanation of the Pageant's episodes. This ensured a better understanding of the performances, with the audience being in a position to feel included and possibly (or hopefully) educated. The London Music Festival's programme lacks this detail, taking for granted that its audience is already adequately educated and in a position to understand the works performed: in any case, they are also offered publishers' rooms to study performed works in their own leisure. Vital information is not the texts of the works, but the London Underground's map – in other words, information on how to get to the venues is more vital for this type of audience, than the works performed. As such, this festival represents the complete opposite of what the Festival of Music for the People was trying to achieve. Complete understanding of the texts performed in the London Music Festival is implied as non-essential, with audiences quite possibly listening to works 'for fashion's sake, to operas which in some cases they were unable to understand because they are sung in a foreign tongue', where they had to be careful 'not to sob in the wrong place'.<sup>753</sup>

This is perhaps one of the fundamental differences between the two Festivals: While the Festival of Music represents what Bullivant calls as 'Music under capitalism', the Festival of Music for the People represents music composed to rectify this, a type of music that is hoped to call audiences (and the masses) into action rather than stupefy them as a drug.<sup>754</sup> Bullivant also notes that the works composed for the Festival of Music for the People aimed to 'foster appreciation of the role of music in proletarian history and thus encourage workers to create a true music of the People', which was achieved through the involvement of various composers in the compositional process.<sup>755</sup>

However, as she rightly points out, it is questionable whether these aims were indeed achieved. In fact, the Festival appears to have failed in almost every respect. Financially, it created a deficit which could only be covered by various donations from individuals sympathetic to the political cause of the Festival. The organising committee

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<sup>753</sup> F.S., 'Words and Music', in *London News*, 2 October 1938.

<sup>754</sup> Bullivant, *Musical modernism*, 195.

<sup>755</sup> *ibid.*

appeared to have been largely disorganised. Some of the first choice of composers (such as Boughton for example) were not engaged, due to the organiser's inability to send the relevant material.<sup>756</sup> On the day of the performance, the Eisler pieces failed to arrive at the venue, which points more towards a disorganised committee than towards a conspiracy theory. Designing the programme for the concerts did not go according to plan either, as the committee had to make concessions: Eisler's *Lenin Requiem*, for instance, had to be removed from the original repertoire as it appeared too shocking for conductors such as Adrian Boult and Sir Henry Wood.

Bullivant also notes the committee's preoccupation with established composers and conductors, rather than with left individuals that had 'shared sensibilities', which, she argues, was a way for the organisers to 'legitimise and promote the event through association with leading composers over and above artistic and political goals'.<sup>757</sup> This, I will argue, was also done as a means of promoting the CPGB's Popular Front policy, to present a strong and unified Left which encompasses individuals from a wider political spectrum. Again, whether this was achieved is also questionable, particularly since the Press criticised the event as one-sided political propaganda.

The discussion in the Press focused heavily on the Festival's politics which appeared to have been its major flaw that led to artistic inferiority. Clearly for the majority of the newspapers that reviewed the event, there was a division between this type of inferiority and the remaining music lovers listening to Mozart and Schubert. The implication was also that the working class remains unable to produce any artistically meaningful Festival, because of its lack of education.

By the time the Festival of Music took place, it was becoming evident that the choir has not only moved to the Left of the Labour Party, but indeed closer to the CPGB with its participation in this Popular Front Pageant organised by a communist (Alan Bush). This was also reflected in its repertoire choices which enabled it to sever its ties with the socialist repertoire performed during the late 1920s. Gradually it included an increasing amount of pieces by Eisler (who by now was Bush's personal friend) but also works that were the result

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<sup>756</sup> This is also noted by Bullivant, 196.

<sup>757</sup> Bullivant, 196

of the Bush'/Swingler collaboration; Swingler, again, being another personal friend of Bush since the early 1930s. Translations of various works were provided usually by Bush's wife, Nancy, as was the case with 'The Expedient' (*Die Maßnahme*) or Schönberg's *Peace on Earth*, performed at the Festival's Conway Hall concert. This points towards a monopoly spearheaded by Bush who promoted repertoire either composed by himself and his personal friends, or translated by his family. In this sense, it can be argued that John Goss was right to express his objections to the Festival's aims, accusing Bush of trying to advance his own personal interests through the Festival, especially if we consider that his own Piano Concerto was one of the highlights of the programme.

## Conclusions.

### **The political background after April 1939.**

The political changes after April 1939 were sweeping, especially for the CPGB. On 23 August 1939, the German-Soviet Non-Aggression pact was signed. This development took the Party by surprise, especially as it was campaigning for an Anglo-French alliance with the participation of Russia, its negotiations being already under way in Moscow.<sup>758</sup>

Nevertheless, it was decided to support this decision and indeed it was justified as an essential one.<sup>759</sup> The political situation intensified further after Germany's invasion of Poland on 1 September. This resulted in an unavoidable military conflict that led Britain and France to declare war on Germany.<sup>760</sup>

The CPGB was now faced with the dilemma of either endorsing the Russian decision which effectively meant offering indirect support to Nazi Germany, or promoting the British efforts against Germany. Instead, it chose to uphold a 'war on two fronts', maintaining as a result the fight against Fascism while also attacking the National Government of Chamberlain, which the party held responsible for Britain's involvement in this war.<sup>761</sup> Following Stalin's suggestion that the war was an imperialist one which workers should simply ignore, the CPGB issued a manifesto declaring the war as unjustifiable: it was the ruling classes, both in Britain and France, who wanted to take advantage of the war against Fascism 'for their own imperialist aims', while the Russian decision to sign the non-Aggression pact was also justified as a way of 'consolidating peace', not just in the interests of the Russian people, but for 'all the peoples of Europe'.<sup>762</sup>

After the declaration of war, the LLP explained its position and its duty to support the workers, by continuing its activities uninterrupted:

It will generally be agreed that, throughout the war period, it is imperative that the Labour Party should maintain its identity and its

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<sup>758</sup> Andrew Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920-1943* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 256.

<sup>759</sup> John Attfield and Stephen Williams (eds), *1939: The Communist Party of Great Britain and the War* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984), 24.

<sup>760</sup> Thorpe, *The British*, 256.

<sup>761</sup> *ibid.*, 256-7. See also Attfield and Williams, *The Communist Party*, 27.

<sup>762</sup> Thorpe, *The British*, 257 and Attfield and Williams, *The Communist*, Appendix V: Manifesto of the Central Committee, October 7 1939, 170-1

organisation. We have a duty to help our country to the fullest extent in these critical times. But we also have a duty to the people to keep alive those ideals of human brotherhood and a better world which are fundamental to our Socialist faith. A live Labour Party is an asset to the country.<sup>763</sup>

Between April 1939, when the Festival of Music concluded, and December that year, the LLCU appears to have continued its work. Indeed, a surge of engagements was reported, especially between September 1939 and January 1940, including the formation of new choirs, while the Union also managed to maintain the allegiance of those groups that were already affiliated to it.<sup>764</sup> In fact, on 30 April 1940, the LLCU participated in a concert at Queen's Hall organised by the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR, which featured Russian music, including pieces by Myaskovsky and Tchaikovsky.<sup>765</sup> Only one very damning review of this concert seems to have survived, published in the *Monthly Musical Record*, which described it as a 'curious' event with some kind of political colour.<sup>766</sup> Along with songs by Russian composers, other workers' songs were performed, which the paper criticised as 'worthless' ditties, their texts proclaiming vigorously the communist faith, giving the event a 'street-corner rubbish' character; the Union's performance nevertheless was described as exceptionally good, 'providing the model for every other choir in the Kingdom'.<sup>767</sup>

An element of personal attack was reserved for Bush, specifically about his views on music and politics. One of his recent contributions to the Russian *Sovietskaya Muzyka* was disseminated, particularly his conviction that a composer should 'show concern with the basic problems that progressive cultured humanity has to face'.<sup>768</sup> The choral finale of his Piano Concerto was described as a 'desiccated and brain-spun score [...] a setting of a communist text', while his workers songs were criticised for being 'feeble unison songs'.<sup>769</sup>

A further scheduled participation of the Union this time in a Pageant (2 July) that year at the Royal Albert Hall, which also included contributions from the WMA failed to

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<sup>763</sup> Morrison to all secretaries of affiliated Trades Unions and Co-operative Societies, 21 September 1939, LMA, LLP Archive, ACC/2417/A/25. Emphasis (underlined text) by Morrison.

<sup>764</sup> R. J. Boone, 'London Labour Choral Union' in *London Labour Party News*, n.d.

<sup>765</sup> Anon., 'Choral Union Triumphs', in *London News*, June 1939, and Ernst Henschel Programme Collection, Box 26 (1939). The programme does not include titles of songs, but only the names of the composers and a vague statement that it would include works by Myaskovsky and Tchaikovsky.

<sup>766</sup> Anon., 'Notes of the Day', in *Monthly Musical Record*, Vol. 69 no. 807 (June 1939), 129-131.

<sup>767</sup> *ibid*, 129-130.

<sup>768</sup> *ibid*, 130.

<sup>769</sup> *ibid.*, 130-131

materialise, in an apparent refusal of the authorities to give permission for the event.<sup>770</sup> Perhaps predictably, the *London News* interpreted the authorities' refusal as a 'sharp reminder of the fascist tendencies of certain elements in this free country', and a retaliation to the fact that some choirs might have appeared to authorities as behaving in a more 'revolutionary' manner than was deemed acceptable.<sup>771</sup> This last comment is perhaps important, as it clearly demonstrates that a number of choirs were already bolstering the leadership's 'turn to the Left'. Additionally, given that this paper was the LLP's official organ, it demonstrates the party's tacit and perhaps grudging acceptance of the 'revolutionary path' that some choirs had chosen.

Inevitably, however, cultural activity in London was seriously affected after war broke out. The effects were particularly badly felt by the cultural organisations on the Left. The Unity Theatre's activities, for example, were disrupted as transport problems prevented members from commuting to regular rehearsals.<sup>772</sup> Likewise, the LLCU had to re-think its plans. Proposals to send a delegation to Russia had to be put on hold, while a scheduled visit to London of the Strasbourg Workers' choir and orchestra had to be abandoned.<sup>773</sup> In fact, the WMA seems to have offered solutions for the Union to continue its work. In November 1939, a central choir was formed at Toynbee Hall under Alan Bush which, however, did not appear to have been given a distinctive name initially.<sup>774</sup> Although the LLCU is still referred to as a separate organisation until December 1939, even electing its own officials, it becomes increasingly evident that the boundaries between the two organisations (WMA and LLCU) begin to blur.<sup>775</sup> This close co-operation between them culminated in a 'Demonstration Concert of Music and Variety' on 15 December 1939 organised by the WMA, with the participation both of the LLCU and of other Co-operative choirs.<sup>776</sup> Works performed included Britten's 'Advance Democracy' (on a text by Swingler) along with two new songs by Bush and Swingler, 'Against the People's Enemies', and 'Make your Meaning

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<sup>770</sup> *ibid.* and anon., 'Choral Union Notes', in *London News*, September 1939.

<sup>771</sup> Anon., 'Choral Union Notes', in *London News*, September 1939. The Pageant from the Festival of Music for the People is wrongly mentioned in the article as 'Pageant of Music'.

<sup>772</sup> Colin Chambers, *The Story of the Unity Theatre* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), 228.

<sup>773</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>774</sup> Anon., 'Labour Choral Union Notes' in *London News*, November 1939.

<sup>775</sup> Anon., 'Choral Union Notes', in *London News*, December 1939

<sup>776</sup> *ibid.*, and anon., 'Choral Union Notes' in *London News*, 1940. The LLCU choirs participating in the event were the Clapham Labour Choirs, and the Central London Labour Choir.

Clear'.<sup>777</sup> It is worth noting that both works by Bush appear to lack the Agitpop elements that the composer exhibited in his 1931 'Question and Answer', as they both display uninterrupted, flowing melodies.<sup>778</sup> They were nonetheless very well received, described in the *London News* as examples of 'forceful and austere work', with 'determined and passionate tunes which enhances the fine text by Randall Swingler'.<sup>779</sup> Britten's 'Advance Democracy' however, did not receive similar appraisals either then or more recently. Indeed, scholars commenting on this work in the post-war era were particularly critical. For example, in his book on the music of Britten, Peter Evans describes the work's text as being so problematic that it 'cripples' the entire work, expressing 'high-minded and imprecise sentiments in simplistic and hideously banal language', while curiously, Andy Croft in his Swingler biography completely ignores it, citing Paul Kildea's description of the work as 'dreadful doggerel' instead.<sup>780</sup>

In any case, following this concert in December 1939, the Union seems to mysteriously disappear. At the same time, no concrete evidence or document survives to provide any details of the Party's decision to suspend its activities. In fact, it does not look like the Party actually suspended it. Equally, the *London News* completely ignores the Union's activities after its last concert leading to speculations as to two possible scenarios: Either the organisation was indeed dissolved in 1940 due to various problems related to the declaration of war (such as problematic commuting for participants), or it indeed merged gradually with the WMA and continued its existence under the auspices of this organisation instead. This second explanation appears the more likely, given the close co-operation between the two.

Unfortunately secondary sources also fail to solve the mystery. Nancy Bush for example mentions that the LLCU 'went out of existence about 1940' and was replaced by the WMA Singers in 1941, so in this case, she leaves the exact point when the Union was dissolved quite vague.<sup>781</sup> This is also echoed in Stuart Craggs's sourcebook on Bush, who

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<sup>777</sup> Programme at the Warner Archive. See also Anon., 'Choral Union Notes', in *London News*, December 1939 and anon., 'Choral Union Notes' in *London News*, 1940.

<sup>778</sup> For the songs' analysis, see Bailey, 81-88.

<sup>779</sup> Anon., 'Choral Union Notes' in *London News*,

<sup>780</sup> Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten* (London: J M Dent & Sons, 1989), 76, and Andy Croft, *Comrade Heart: The Life of Randall Swingler* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 81 and 267.

<sup>781</sup> Nancy Bush, *Alan*, 34.



describes the WMA Singers as being formed ‘in place of the London Labour Choral Union’, without, however, giving any more details about how or why this happened.<sup>782</sup> Confusingly perhaps, Charles Ringrose in a contribution to Bush’s 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday symposium suggests that the WMA singers were founded in 1942 and not 1941.<sup>783</sup> As a matter of fact, the Secret Services files partly confirm this, describing in 1940 the LLCU as ‘chief among’ those organisations affiliated to the WMA in 1940, reporting it as passing a resolution to ‘cease to exist as an entity and become part of the WMA instead’ in 1942, and thereby describing it as the ‘choral section of the WMA’.<sup>784</sup>

### **The Union from 1924 to 1940: An overview.**

In any case, and regardless of the exact year that this happened, the Union’s ‘rebirth’ as a choir under a Communist-sympathetic organisation leaves very little doubt as to its transformation from a socialist to a communist organisation. This reinforces the statement made in the Introduction of the thesis that this organisation is particularly worth studying since it exemplifies this trajectory from socialist to communism. The founding of the LLCU in the 1920s was primarily generated out of the need to bring together all the socialist choirs that were active in London at that time, and though it has been noted that Herbert Morrison was influenced by the German Socialist Party in enabling it to prosper, the main inspiration behind it was Boughton’s work with the Clarion Vocal Unions in Birmingham. As has already been mentioned in Chapter 1 Boughton had always intended to create a similar organisation in Birmingham already since 1912, inspired by the CVUs, but this only materialised in 1924 with the founding of the Union in London.

As well as bringing socialist choirs together, there is also little doubt that the LLCU had an additional educational aspect. It was, for instance, part of the organisation’s manifesto that it should not only provide its service to the Labour Movement of the Metropolis, but it should also aim to develop the musical instincts of the people. Nevertheless, it could be argued that musical education was not its prime goal during its

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<sup>782</sup> Stuart Craggs, *Alan Bush: A Sourcebook* (London: Ashgate, 2007), 18.

<sup>783</sup> Charles Ringrose, ‘Alan Bush and the WMA: The Early Years’ in Ronald Stevenson (ed), *Alan Bush: An 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Symposium* (Kidderminster: Bravura Publications, 1981), 81.

<sup>784</sup> 5.12.40, TNA, KV3/377, 19.06.42, KV3/377 and 26.06.42, TNA, KV3/377.

first few years of existence, when the repertoire was primarily based on techniques such as asking choir members to sing new socialist texts using popular tunes. As a result, there was no need to educate workers in reading music from scores. Music education became more of a pressing matter probably after 1929 when Bush took over, and certainly during the 1930s, when the repertoire not only included new songs composed by Bush, but also English translations of Eisler's songs, which resulted in the need to ensure choir members were able to read staff notation.

It additionally becomes clear that in the 1930s, education as part of the LLCU is not restricted only to music, but also expands to encompass some kind of political indoctrination, which becomes particularly prominent as the organisation moves closer to Communism. The texts of songs become more direct, urging workers to take matters in their own hands and convey revolutionary ideas. Quite tellingly, choir members' objections to the repertoire are met with an almost indifference on behalf of the leadership, which appears to approve the new repertoire without a shadow of a doubt. Members are told to perform it first in order to understand the ideas it conveys, before they voice any concerns, if they still have any. In a way therefore, choirs are forced to learn the repertoire, whether they actually like it, or not.

This last point is significant, as it also implies a paternalistic attitude on behalf of the leadership, not prominent in the 1920s but quite obvious during the 1930s. This became first apparent in 1932 with the Union's affiliation to IDAS which was achieved after what looks like a two-year vigorous campaign by Bush, despite the Union's indifference towards the cause. The participation in the Strasbourg Olympiad was similarly imposed, this time despite the many financial obstacles that many affiliated choirs and choir members faced, with choir members being even accused of naivety and inability to understand the political situation of the early 1930s (the rise of fascism), all this by a leadership that enjoyed a fairly comfortable standard of living. Equally, one is also left wondering whether the organisation's trajectory was in fact imposed from above rather than being the result of Communism's growing popularity amongst intellectuals during the 1930s.

The idea of an almost 'forced' gravitation towards communism is further reinforced by what looks like a domination of the Union by wealthy, left-wing communists during that period. This initially started in 1929, when a second phase of the Union's existence is

evident, spurred by Bush who took over after Boughton's resignation. As has been noted, Bush's comfortable upbringing gave him the privilege of being able to travel abroad (mainly in Germany) where he experienced the German Workers Music Movement. This became an inspiration not only in affiliating the Union to IDAS, an organisation he came across while he was in Germany, but also in introducing the repertoire that the German choirs were singing, such as works by Hanns Eisler.

Bush's circle of friends during the early 1930s included other CPGB members and communist sympathisers, such as Randall Swingler (another left-winger from a wealthy background). The two of them collaborated very closely during the 1930s and produced a number of workers' songs that were used by the Union, while the LLCU also performed Swingler's Revue 'Peace and Prosperity' in 1936. Michael Tippett, who briefly 'flirted' with the CPGB until he gravitated towards Trotskyist groups in 1935, was also part of that circle, and appeared to have had regular arguments with Bush regarding the repertoire, resulting in debates on Communism and Trotskyism during the mid-1930s, mainly during rehearsals and in front of other choir members. All this provides also an answer to the question as to whether Bush's CPGB membership in 1935, amidst the hostile climate between communists and socialist, was indeed as controversial as it sounds. Indeed, it does look like Bush was not the only CPGB member associated with the Union, but rather part of a wider communist-sympathetic circle.

A further research question of this thesis set in the introduction was whether the LLCU was conceived as a metropolitan, or indeed as an international organisation. As well as the affiliation to IDAS in 1932, a year later the Union undertook its first tour abroad in Hilversum, while in 1935 it participated in the Strasbourg Workers Olympiad, implying that the early 1930s were characterised by an international outlook and a desire to become part of the wider international workers' music movement. It certainly started as a local organisation, as demonstrated by its own manifesto drafted in 1924 ('to serve the Labour Movement of the Metropolis'). As such, its main preoccupation was to participate mainly in activities organised by the local Labour Parties and help in the organisation of new choirs in areas of London where no Labour choirs existed. The international aspect arrived when Bush took over from Boughton. In this way, it could be said that the Union started as a metropolitan organisation but became internationalised in the early 1930s. Again, in this

case it could be again argued that the LLCU had an international trajectory 'imposed' upon it by its leadership, especially if the affiliation and the Strasbourg trip is analysed in the context discussed above. Indeed, one can convincingly argue that Bush went so far as to intimidate choir members to fall in line and bow to his demands..

The Union's international stance raises further questions regarding the repertoire, and the extent to which this changed because of the organisation's international contacts. Here, two points stand out: The introduction of works by Hanns Eisler, but also of Bush's new workers' songs, influenced by Agitprop. Indeed, the Union's repertoire appears to have been heavily dominated by Eisler's works. Starting in 1935, around the time of the Olympiad, initially with works such as *Die Maßnahme*, the Union gradually acquired a familiarity with his output which culminated in the full production of this work in 1938. As far as Bush's songs are concerned, influences from Agitprop can be identified already from 1931 with his 'Question and Answer' song, discussed in much detail in Chapter 2 of the thesis, while other songs followed along the same lines ('Hunger Marchers' Song' of 1934 and 'Labour's Song of Challenge' of 1936, all three on a text by Swingler). Despite those two strands of new elements in the Union's repertoire, there are however hardly any differences between the other repertoire performed before and after the LLCU's international contacts.

This generates the question as to why the Union did not receive any further influences from abroad. Although there is no concrete evidence to support any theory as to why this happened, it could be speculated that Bush's contacts and frequent trips to Germany limited his choice of repertoire from this country only, and Eisler in particular, whose work he admired already since 1928 when he attended a rehearsal of the German Workers Music Movement. Arguably, promoting Eisler's songs is also reinforcing the idea of Bush encouraging the performance of works by his circle of friends, as he indeed did in the case of Swingler.

There is also the important factor of the repertoire that choirs wanted to use in their activities, especially when this did not involve singing with the LLCU. The first chapter provides discussion regarding the Deptford choir's proactive philanthropic work which quite often involved visits in hospitals, as well as participations in Elizabethan Festivals. This obviously creates a need for a specific type of repertoire appropriate for these activities, where revolutionary songs are almost certainly inappropriate. The enthusiasm with which

this choir performed such repertoire provides possibly an additional reason why a number of affiliated choirs objected to the imposition of revolutionary introductions in their repertoires.

This leads to the question as to whether the choir members were in fact happy to use a different, more revolutionary repertoire, regardless of how useful they thought it was. Evidently it was not to everyone's taste, as the fourth chapter of the thesis established. Though it is uncertain what choirs thought about Eisler's songs, it is certain that the new songs by the Bush/Swinger combination generated a number of debates regarding their quality. There was, for example, the instance where choir members complained about the 'Question and Answer' song in the *Red Notes*, finding it too colloquial, as a song that resulted in class hatred. In an act that demonstrated determination on behalf of the leadership however, not only was the offending repertoire not removed, but it was decided to solve the problem by creating a standard repertoire which all choirs had to learn, and a second 'choice' repertoire that included more revolutionary songs, in an apparent attempt to satisfy all choirs, both those that preferred the new revolutionary repertoire, as well as those objecting. The choir members' reaction towards the Eisler songs is probably more difficult to determine as the *Red Notes* do not seem to contain any discussions on his songs, with the main repertoire debates concerning new songs composed by Bush. Given the full production of the *Maßnahme*, however, it could be assumed that the reception in Eisler's case was different, and that choir members did not object to performing them.

The final research question of this thesis, whether through his own actions Bush in fact destroyed a successful thriving socialist, amateur choir, has no clear answer. Definitely, by 1940, the Union did not resemble a socialist choir anymore, but a communist one: Its activities became linked to those of communist organisations (the participation in the IMB Strasbourg Olympiad, and in the 1939 Festival of Music for the People). Its repertoire gradually becomes more dominated by revolutionary songs, thereby abandoning the standard socialist repertoire used during the 1920s. While the Union itself as a socialist choir ceases to exist in 1939 it is regenerated as a Communist one under the WMA. As a result, one can only argue that Bush destroyed the socialist choir. However, was the amateur element in the choir also destroyed? Certainly, as has been pointed out above, the fact that the repertoire becomes gradually more complex, seems to imply that while amateur singers

participated in the LLCU, their training became quite intensive, and in any case, again as has already been stated, the singers now possessed the ability to read notation rather than relying on popular tunes.

### **Further research topics emerging from this thesis.**

Although the thesis concentrated on the LLCU, a number of further research questions emerged, that could almost certainly become separate projects. Two relatively minor examples may be mentioned first. One is the *Belshazzar* performance of 1936, which this thesis did not include for reasons explained in the Introduction. This could be done for instance with special references to the Co-operative choirs and what they represented. Chapter 4 also alluded to the striking similarities between Eisler's *Die Maßnahme* and the revue by Bush and Swingler, raising interesting questions of comparative study between the two works, as well as whether the Revue was indeed an attempt on behalf of Bush and Swingler to write and produce their own didactic play.

Much more significant would be an examination of the Union's fate-after this thesis' cut-off point of 1940 and the new organisation that emerged as the WMA Singers. It would be interesting, for example, to study the trajectory of the WMA singers during the war and post-war era. Specifically, it would be of particular interest to examine this organisation as a continuation of the LLCU (as indeed it does appear that this is actually what it was), given that Alan Bush was the common denominator between the two organisations.

Research questions for example in a project such as this could possibly include similar ones to those that this thesis has attempted to address for the LLCU. There are indeed a lot of similarities between the two organisations, and as a result one could also argue for the necessity of a comparative study between them. The political background of the 1940s and 1950s was, for instance, equally fertile as that of the 1920s and 1930s. The WMA Singers' activities could be put in the context of the Second World War, but also against the backdrop of the Cold War during the 1950s. The importance of the 1926 General Strike, that played a significant role in the apparent decline in affiliations for the Union as a result of the membership loss that the Labour Party experienced, is now replaced by the Cold War and events that affected the CPGB membership, such as the 1956 uprising in

Hungary. Did these have any consequences for the WMA Singers membership for example? This type of research could also lead to a study of the favoured repertoire that is analogous to the approach I have taken for the LLCU.

Another aspect of such a project could be the activities in which the new choir participated, both in London/UK, as well as abroad. Were there, for example, international Festivals similar to the Strasbourg Olympiad, where the choir contributed, and if so, was this done with the consent and enthusiasm of the choir members, or was there again a case of members being almost forced to participate? From this, the research question of repertoire is also raised, and again, as I have done with the LLCU, it would be interesting to determine whether participations in international events and festivals actually influenced the choice of repertoire, as well as to what extent Bush's influence is evident in the same way as it was in the Union's case.

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Box 25: 1938

Box 26: 1939

Box 27: 1940-1945

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