

9. THE BERMONDSEY REVOLUTION

In the immediate wake of the war, the chances of Ada and Alfred winning any sort of election seemed remote. Those who had opposed the war were at first deeply unpopular. In November 1918 Lloyd-George took full advantage of this by calling a snap general election before the bulk of the troops could return home and tell their stories. Alfred now had his second chance of becoming an MP, as Labour candidate for Bermondsey West, but everything was stacked against him. He could not even count on the new women voters after Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, now openly supporting the Conservatives, sent their activists into Bermondsey. They called on all 'the patriotic women of Bermondsey and Rotherhithe ... to fight the pacifists and pro-Germans in the district'. Unsurprisingly, the election was won once again by Harold Glanville (an Asquith Liberal) on 4,260 votes, with the Lloyd George Liberal on 2,998 and Alfred, third, on 1,956. He had scored only 421 votes more than he had in 1909, a poor return for nine years of hard work.

On the other hand, Alfred could reflect, pacifist candidates were defeated everywhere. In Manchester, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence was defeated by jingoists demanding a punitive peace treaty. She had warned the voters that a vindictive treaty would lead to another war but, she reckoned, only demobbed soldiers heeded her words. As in Bermondsey, 'the electors on that day voted, although they did not know it, for another world war'.¹ Indeed, all across Europe in the first half of 1919 there was a similar pattern of defeats for the anti-war left. In January 1919 Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, both opponents of the war, were murdered. In early June, Lenin's Russian Revolution teetered on the verge of defeat. In late June, the Treaty of Versailles was signed, against the warnings of a range of intellectuals, from Lawrence to Keynes. All agreed that, by heaping on Germany a

burden of reparations she could not possibly pay, Versailles made another world war probable.

At first it looked as if the Bermondsey ILP would spend all of 1919 in one defeat after another. After Alfred's loss to the Liberals came the LCC elections in March. Alfred stood again, but was defeated again. Ada was sent on a 'suicide mission' into Rotherhithe to take on Scott Lidgett, and suffered her worst ever defeat. Lidgett had patriotically supported the war from the start and his son had not long before been killed in action.

The political tide, however, soon started to turn in the Salters' favour. The first sign was in April when Ada was elected to the Board of Guardians. She served on this body for six years and, with other ILP Guardians, was able to make conditions in the workhouse much more humane. The rapid turnaround in public opinion was partly due to rising unemployment, but also due to the return of the soldiers. Jingoism evaporated as the soldiers told their tales. They were not all 'heroes', as the lying press had said, the war was horrific, the British generals were held in contempt, and the atrocities were not all on the German side. Ada and Alfred had always supported the soldiers, whom they regarded as the victims of the war, and now they felt vindicated. During five years of press hysteria all had been obscured, but now the truth began to dawn on the people of Bermondsey as they observed, with their own eyes, how Alfred was warmly applauded for his pacifist stand at meetings packed with former soldiers.

As the toxic atmosphere of the war dissipated, it was possible for ethical socialism to resurface. In October 1919, at Central Hall in Bermondsey Street, George Lansbury gave to a 'men's meeting' (aimed at soldiers) his reflections on the war, delivered in his slow, simple, 'hypnotic' style: 'I hear talk of a "land fit for heroes", but we cannot have a Bermondsey, a country, a world fit for heroes to live in unless we have all countries, all men, living under conditions not only fit for heroes, but fit for living beings to live in ...'. In a voice rising barely above a whisper Lansbury continued: 'All mankind has been searching for individual happiness, and here we are in the twentieth century still searching for it, and not finding it, but only a Europe given over to graves and grasses and ruin and desolation.' The solution, said Lansbury, lay in the text from James: 'Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only'. If every individual acted for the general good, they would find happiness, and if they stopped complaining about politicians and acted

themselves, the world would improve: 'We grumble about the Government, but the Government is what we make of it...'.²

The electors of Bermondsey seemed to take Lansbury's words to heart because the next month, in November 1919, Ada's breakthrough came at Bermondsey's council elections. The result was sensational. From zero the ILP and Labour suddenly won 25 council seats (16 ILP, 9 Labour) out of 54, while the Liberals (split between the followers of Lloyd George and Asquith) took 27 and the Conservatives ('Municipal Reform') took two. Ada topped the poll with the highest vote for any candidate (1,232), the first time a woman had achieved this. She was not only a councillor but the most popular councillor, and Labour was not far from winning control of the council. What a dramatic change this was from 1912 when she had been totally isolated and the ILP was in melt-down.

The November victory was not confined to Bermondsey. Across London Labour won outright 14 out of the 28 boroughs, despite the lowest turnout ever recorded. The low turnout reflected the confusion of the voters, with the Liberals now split, and ex-soldiers contradicting what was alleged in the newspapers. Many soldiers voted for pacifists like Ada rather than the flag-waving 'patriots' who had sent them off to die in France.

But what to do about Alfred? He was still parliamentary candidate yet, since 1907, when he had been elected to the LCC as a Liberal, he had failed to be elected to any substantial position. Now he was not even a councillor though Labour held nearly half the council seats. How could he remain leader of the party? The short-term solution was to appoint Alfred an alderman. Since in those days an alderman could vote on the council, and carried some weight, it was thought Alfred could, from that eminence, act as party leader.

This did not turn out well, and Alfred himself was partly to blame. The problem was that it was not just the Liberals who were divided. There was a division between Labour and the ILP. Labour's 1918 constitution meant individuals could join Labour direct, without joining the ILP first, and this initiated a competition between the Labour Party and the ILP for new members. In addition, Alfred was unsuited to being a council leader. Like Hardie before him, who failed as party leader in Parliament, Alfred was too uncompromising. As Brockway says: 'Salter's own personality did not always make for harmony.' He was 'impatient of criticism' and 'intolerant of those

who fell short of his standards ...'.³ Alfred rated 'fearlessness' above all other qualities and this made him congenitally incapable of avoiding confrontation. He was the opposite of Ada, the conciliator. As a Sister of the People (none of whom could be accused of any deficiency in courage), she had been trained to avoid confrontation, except in extreme cases. She could not have been successful with her roughest of the rough by any other means.

Given his character, Alfred found it difficult, as a council leader who was not an elected councillor, to handle young A. J. Bamford, the leader of the local Labour Party, who clearly aimed to be parliamentary candidate instead of Alfred, but whose non-pacifist, pro-Bolshevik policy preferred Lenin's soviets to parliamentary democracy.⁴ Bamford held Labour meetings where all stood in silence to honour equally those who had fought in battle and those who had suffered as COs since, said Bamford, both had fought for liberty and justice.⁵ Alfred had no objection to this sentiment but Bamford linked it to class warfare, denouncing local capitalists and calling for the municipal takeover of all private enterprises, to 'eliminate the profiteer'. This threatened good employers as well as bad and was, therefore, distant from the discriminating ethical socialism of the Salters. Bamford not only threatened to replace Alfred as parliamentary candidate but also threatened many of Ada's schemes, funded as they were by the generosity of benevolent employers.

By April 1921, the rivalry with Bamford had exacted such a toll that Alfred was suffering from a 'nervous breakdown'. It has sometimes been suggested that he was a depressive character, or perhaps bipolar, but this does not fit. Alfred did suffer from deep depressions, but all seem to have occurred when he had something to be depressed about rather than as part of a cycle. Usually it was Ada who fished Alfred out of such breakdowns. Her regular method was to whisk him off to Devonshire, or Switzerland, and forbid him to speak 'one word about politics' for a month or two. That is what seems to have happened on this occasion. In September, when the couple returned to London, with Alfred much restored, Ada announced she was throwing a party. The idea was no doubt to show Alfred was back to normal and to draw a line under his illness.

In October 1921, *Bermondsey Labour News*, sporting a poem by Edward Carpenter on the front page, reported Ada's party, held on Saturday 15 October. It was a private party, at Bermondsey Town

Hall, simply billed as 'Dr and Mrs Salter At Home' but over 500 people were invited. Ada hired a dance band and singers for the evening. There was a sketch artist with red and black chalks, who entertained the partygoers with 'antics' that were 'uproarious'. Then there was a comedy routine based on a mock auction and, for the youngsters, there was hoop-la, skittles, pipe-smashing and a spinning jenny. Though the party was private, not political, Herbert Morrison was there, since he had lived locally before 1916, and had many Bermondsey friends.

In the end, all turned out well for Alfred. A well-liked trade unionist, Joe Cragie, who had joined the ILP branch in 1908, became party leader on the council, relieving Alfred of that responsibility, and he was to prove a very effective politician. By the summer of 1922 it was Bamford's turn to feel the pressure. There was a row, with Bamford accused of underhand dealings. Cragie handled it deftly, and Bamford's supporters became so disillusioned with him that he felt it wise to move out of the borough. The Bermondsey Labour Party thereupon issued a statement confirming that Dr Salter would be their parliamentary candidate at the next election.

Ada would not have been surprised by Joe Cragie's success. They had worked together since 1919 when they had both been elected Guardians and then borough councillors. Cragie, says Brockway, 'was a solid trade unionist with a droll sense of humour, admiring the doctor's idealism but not sharing his rigid principles'.⁶ Cragie took care to preserve the fine distinction between 'keeping to principle' and 'standing on principle'. He was a temperance man, for example, but, like Ammon, an occasional and 'tolerant' drinker. By trade a railway foreman, he was well-respected not only by workers but by employers for his 'exceptional shrewdness and calm deliberation'. He differentiated between good employers and bad, and never rushed into irresponsible strikes. In 1925, when he celebrated his 25th wedding anniversary, some employers contributed to the 'whip-round' as well as workers. On the other hand, whenever a strike broke out, he was impressively effective. In 1919 there was a rash of strikes throughout the country, even by police and prison officers, and most were lost, but in Bermondsey the railway workers, led by Cragie, were among the few that won. At the end of his life *Bermondsey Labour Magazine* judged that 'much of the success of municipal Socialism in this district' had been due to him.⁷

From 1919 on, Cragie was Ada's regular trade union running-mate in council elections, and also her close colleague on the Board of Guardians. He became Chair of the Board of Guardians after the ILP won control of it in 1925; he was mayor in 1923-24; and, most crucially of all, after 1921 he was leader of Labour and the ILP on the council. By 1928 no other councillor in any other ward approached anywhere near the votes of Ada Salter (1700 votes) and Joe Cragie (1675). They were by far the most popular councillors in the borough.

Ada felt a real affection for Cragie, despite (or perhaps because of) his diplomatic reformulation of Salter policies. When he became mayor in 1923 it was Ada who made the speech congratulating him on election as 'chief citizen'. During her speech she commented: 'We always like him, even if we do not always agree with him. Even with his faults, we like him ... (Laughter) ... We realise his sense of humour and real common sense, and we believe that these attributes will ensure his having a successful year of office.'⁸

Though Cragie was highly esteemed as a union leader and as party leader on the council, what he seemed most proud of was his work on the Board of Guardians, to the extent that he became emotional when the Guardians were abolished by the Labour government in 1930. This was of course contradictory, given that abolition of the workhouse had always been ILP policy, but in 1929 he had explained that, since winning control of the Guardians in 1925, the ILP had effected so many humane improvements (what Ada called their 'human spring cleaning'⁹) he was distressed by the transfer of Poor Law administration to the Conservative LCC. He feared that, 'to save taxpayers' money', which is what Conservatives did, the humane treatment the ILP had introduced would be reversed.¹⁰

In 1931 Ada wrote an article about the Conservatives' intentions which confirmed Cragie's worst fears. It was imperative, she said, for Labour to win control of the LCC as soon as possible: 'The Tories intend to make every recipient of relief feel that he is a pauper and a dependent, and they mean that he should be treated as such. We have to reverse this attitude, and to re-establish humane and sympathetic dealings in Poor Law affairs.' A humanitarian principle was at stake: 'The Tories will save the rates and ratepayer's pocket', that is for sure, but those who administer the Poor Law should always be 'animated by the instinct of human kindness and brotherliness'.¹¹

Joe Cragie was not the only 'new blood' recruited, or discovered, by

the Salters around the end of the war. They took on a new housekeeper, to succeed Ethel Hoadley, who left in 1918. Agnes Poynton stayed with them until 1938 and was much more than a housekeeper; the Salters had known her as a member of the Socialist Quaker Society from before the war. She did the cooking, which Ada hated, but she also helped Ada with her work, at the Co-operative Bakery and in the Women's Sections. There is a photograph of Poynton at a Women's Section meeting in 1928 cutting an iced cake (dubbed the 'Franchise Cake'), to celebrate equal votes for women. Alfred's demands could have disrupted Ada's idyllic relationship with Poynton but apparently did not. According to Brockway, 'The ceaseless activity of Salter was only made possible because at home everything was subordinated to him.' This was normal practice in the home of a doctor, but it did not restrict Ada much (except that Alfred had the study to himself) and, as for Poynton, she found that Alfred left his autocratic character at the front door and was 'the happiest man in a house I have ever known'.¹²

Poynton did other chores, but Ada tended the garden and, at dinner, her role was to give other guests a chance to get a word in, as Alfred poured out a torrent of opinion and laughter: 'Yes, Alfred, but get on with your meat or it will be cold.'¹³ Ada was also constantly on the move, speaking all over the country, and content to leave Poynton in charge at home. To contemporaries 5 Storks Road appeared more anarchic than organised: 'Virtually all their married life was passed in an always busy, always open house in Bermondsey, where she and her husband helped and advised many thousands of neighbours and strangers.'¹⁴

The third addition to the 'Salter team' at this time was the appointment in 1920 of John Douglas, a young, efficient, full-time organiser. Douglas, from very poor circumstances, a protégé of Lansbury and a member of the National Union of Clerks, had joined the Hackney ILP branch in 1910, aged 19. After opposing the war he was court-martialled in 1916 and imprisoned in Wormwood Scrubs. He was tasked with winning the parliamentary seat, winning the borough council and winning the two county council (LCC) seats. If that was not difficult enough he also had to exercise positive discrimination by running a trade unionist in every pair of seats. In his spare time, as it were, he was editor of the monthly *Bermondsey Labour Magazine*, which became in his hands one of the best Labour magazines in Britain.

The fourth notable addition took Bermondsey by storm. Jessie Stephen had been born in 1893, in Marylebone, to a Methodist family, but she was brought up in Scotland and was not religious. She had learnt French and German at school, and won a scholarship, but after a downturn in her family's fortunes could not continue her education. This rankled with her, as it did with so many other women. Obligated to become a servant, Jessie had by 1912 joined the ILP and was starting to recruit the domestic servants of Glasgow into a trade union. By 1913 she had organised the Scottish Federation of Domestic Workers.

Earlier, Jessie had joined the WSPU and been instructed to drop acid into post-boxes: 'Dressed in my maid's uniform I walked from my place of employment down to the corner of the street where the pillar box stood, dropped in my little package....' Sometimes she would glance back out of curiosity and see the smoke swirling out of the red gaping slot. Jessie was in the ILP and WSPU when the two were diverging, but the Scottish ILP was impatient with lily-livered English pacifism and Jessie subscribed to this no-nonsense school of militancy. When shouted down by men at open-air WSPU meetings she contacted her ILP branch and asked for a couple of hefty dockers to sort things out. Abusive heckling stopped immediately, and her suffrage views were henceforth given an attentive hearing.

Such was her reputation by the age of 19 that she became the youngest member of a delegation of Glasgow 'work-women' who went to London to lobby Parliament for the vote. On Westminster Bridge, crossing over to Parliament, they were physically attacked by a gang of ruffians while the police looked on impassively. Asquith's comment on the incident was to the effect that women's place was in the home not on the streets. Jessie compared his comment unfavourably to those by Churchill: 'Never was a more stupid comment made by any so called statesman in this country. Winston Churchill, the idol of the jingoes over the long years, is another violent opponent of women suffrage', she said, but at least he was not as stupid as Asquith.¹⁵

In the suffrage struggle, Jessie soon developed into a formidable platform orator with devastating repartee. One heckler, assuming that all feminists must be lesbians, shouted out to her: 'Would you like to sleep with a man or a woman?' She replied: 'A woman, wouldn't you?'. The heckler retreated in some confusion, to jeers and laughter.

Another man shouted 'If you were my wife, I'd give you poison'. She replied, 'If I were so unfortunate as to be your wife, I'd take it'. Jessie claimed to have invented this one herself, later used by Adela Pankhurst. The first one, however, she admitted copying from another suffragette.¹⁶ Officially, neither the ILP nor the WLL was keen on either riposte. They did not like causing disunity between the sexes, when it was injustice that should be debated. The WLL was similarly irritated by Nancy Astor's reply, when a heckler raised a query about her husband, and she replied: 'I married beneath me. All women do.'

Jessie first met Alfred Salter during the war. It was the occasion when, for the first time in her life, she experienced real fear. At a church service for peace in Southgate, London, she relates in her autobiography, Alfred was one of the speakers. As always, the press publicised peace meetings in advance, to whip up local hostility against them. After only ten minutes a mob of 'patriots' was yelling outside. One ran inside with a can, poured petrol down the aisle, which he then lit, and set the church ablaze. As the speakers fled the burning church they were struck by a fusillade of stones. Alfred was hit several times. Jessie had her hair pulled, and her clothes torn off by the men, a favourite tactic used against the suffragettes.

In the spring of 1917, after a gruelling interview, Alfred offered Jessie the job of women's organiser for the Bermondsey ILP, recruiting women in the factories to trade unions and to the party. Jessie was delighted to be appointed to such a wonderful constituency: 'Bermondsey ILP was one of the strongest in Britain.' Every night there were meetings of some sort. She noticed how important the Co-operative Bakery was to the Salters. It embodied their ideal of what socialism would one day look like in practice. The management committee of the bakery, she noted, was chaired by Ada Salter, and consisted of an equal number of employees and investors. One aspect she found amusing: 'Many of the employees were conscientious objectors who had been granted exemption from military service but had to find employment. This meant the people of Bermondsey found their bread was delivered by a university don or their new milkman was a best-selling author.'

Jessie was an immediate success, both at factory-gates and other open-air meetings. It was thought difficult to attract a crowd on such a topic as trade unions, but Jessie was a born propagandist. She often arranged with two men that they would stage a fight in front of her

platform. They would dispute what she said, come to blows, and a crowd would gather. It is unlikely she mentioned this ploy to Alfred but, had Alfred been aware of Jessie's tricks of the trade, even he might have reined in his criticism, for in two years, Jessie took the much depleted branch of the National Federation of Women Workers from 20 members to 3,500 and of those a proportion joined the ILP.

In 1919 Jessie was elected a borough councillor for Bermondsey and also a Guardian, alongside Ada and Joe Cragie. She was just as explosive a Guardian as a public speaker. The ethical principle Ada applied to the workhouse was that, since poverty was not a crime but a product of the economic system, all workhouse inmates must be treated with respect. This was not Marxist class warfare, nor Labour Party pragmatism, but humanitarianism – the ethical socialism of the ILP. Jessie accepted this ethic, but added her own abrasive edge. When she found inmates in the workhouse, including women in their 80s, were expected to stand up whenever a Guardian entered the room, she did not just wave them to be seated but raged at the Conservative and Liberal Guardians for such insensitivity, and demanded the practice be terminated there and then. That was the first big confrontation. When she then found unmarried mothers in the maternity ward separated from married ones, because the Guardians had been scandalised by the idea that 'immoral women' should be allowed beds next to 'decent women', she was once again ablaze. She declared that hospital procedures must be determined by medical need, not narrow morality. Thirdly, she discovered that the unmarried women were regularly grilled by a subcommittee of male Guardians who claimed to be concerned for their moral welfare. Women should interview them, demanded Jessie: 'One of the men objected, telling us these sordid cases might cause pain to the delicate feelings of women members. I laughed outright. "What you really mean, sir, is that men prefer to wallow in the sordid details."' Yet the women interviewers were as bad as the men. Why were these girls taken to a workhouse, interrogated by Guardians, and pressed to confess their sins, but not the men involved in their pregnancy? Jessie asked, 'If there was sin, it must be equally shared by the man who had brought a girl to this pass.'¹⁷ Ada and Cragie tried to remedy these practices by gentle persuasion, the ILP being in a minority, but Jessie's rage sometimes shamed the majority into concessions.

The ILP thought they could use Jessie's passion nationally, and sent her touring the country as a speaker, campaigning for all working-class women and all adult women to be granted the vote. In 1920 Jessie told the Women's Labour Party Conference that the 1918 Act, which the Labour Party had agreed, was a plain and insufferable injustice: 'I am a Borough Councillor, Poor Law Guardian, a prospective parliamentary candidate, and a woman of 27, but I have no vote.'

In the same year, Jessie represented Ada's (and Bermondsey's) views on foreign policy at the ILP conference. The socialist movement was in the process of splitting between those who wanted to resurrect the Second International, which had failed to stop war in 1914, and those who in 1919 had founded the Third (Communist) International. Ada had been disillusioned in 1914, when the Labour Party supported Britain's entry into war, but at Bern she had been equally opposed to Lenin's idea of welcoming war as an opportunity for armed revolutions. All this was to be debated in 1920 at the ILP national conference in Glasgow. As this was Jessie's home town, she naturally wanted to be the delegate from Bermondsey. The branch was concerned that, if Jessie went, her oratory should be deployed equally against both the Second and the Third International. Ada, in particular did not want to find herself in 1921 at the WILPF conference in Vienna, tied by an ILP vote that favoured either side. Jessie, mandated by the branch, did not let Ada down. Her speech was enthusiastically received in Glasgow and the policy Ada needed was adopted: the ILP seceded from the Second International but did not join the Third. On the vote, the Second International (supported by the Labour Party) was rejected by 529 to 144, while the Third (supported by Lenin) was rejected by 472 to 206. Thus, the ILP aligned itself with the French SFIO, the German USPD, the Austro-Marxists and the Swiss Social Democrats. Lenin was sorely disappointed. He had nurtured high hopes of Glasgow, as the Scottish ILP was on his side, but he might have cast his mind back to Bern in 1915. He had been defeated by ILP women all over again.

In 1921 Ada travelled to the WILPF conference in Vienna, happy with the vote in Glasgow, and for two years the 'Vienna International' (dubbed the '2½ International') tried to reunify socialism by merging the Second and Third Internationals, but to no avail. In 1923 the Vienna International gave up the attempt, and reluctantly joined the Second.

There were other bright new recruits to the Bermondsey ILP at this time. Ada was accompanied to Vienna by Ada Broughton, a forceful speaker from Liverpool. Broughton and Mary Richardson, a suffragette from Canada, had been appointed as assistants to Jessie. Richardson was a student of art, a novelist and a poet but also an arsonist who set fire to buildings and a bomber who exploded a bomb in a railway station. She had started her WSPU career with window-smashing, had been arrested nine times and had spent three years in prison. In March 1914 she had attacked the *Rokeby Venus* by Velazquez, in London's National Gallery, striking the painting five times with a meat chopper. But then she broke with the WSPU and joined the Labour Party.

Ada needed this influx of radical women into Bermondsey to help with her multitude of campaigns, including those in support of women trade unionists. Since 1912, she had been regarded in the press as a champion of women strikers, and when she was elected to the Greater London Council of Action in 1920, *The Times* helpfully explained that this was the revolutionary London Soviet.¹⁸ Jessie Stephen, with Richardson and Broughton, took over nearly all of this work.

Ada was also campaigning to end discrimination against unmarried mothers, for all women to receive the vote (achieved in 1928), and for women's economic freedom (equal pay for equal work, maternity and child care). In an article in 1920 she warned that winning the vote in 1918 was just the first step: 'About 7,000,000 women, mostly wives and mothers, have obtained their birthright of political freedom – the next task is to enable them to visualise a practical scheme of economic freedom.'¹⁹

Ada also needed such radical women for the new Women's Sections since the Sections, inside the Labour Party, tended to attract more moderate women than had the old WLL. The Labour Party, for example, often waved aside discussion of issues that might cause difficulty for the party (birth control, family allowances). Hannah Mitchell, in Manchester, was scathing about these new 'Sections' and declared she for one was not prepared to become the 'permanent Social Committee, or official cake-maker to the Labour Party'.²⁰ Ada, always the unifier, decided to work with both. In 1920 she became President of the Rotherhithe Women's Section in the Labour Party, but was also elected to the National Women's Advisory Committee of

the ILP. The Labour Party carried more weight and had more funds, but in the ILP Ada could be more radical.

Ada understood that the Women's Sections were very important, despite Mitchell's contempt. In 1919 the Sections had over 250,000 members. By 1939 their membership had reached around 300,000 (about half of the total Labour Party membership). In the period from 1918 to 1939 women comprised over half of all individual members of the Labour Party, and they were by no means all cake-makers. This continued strength of Labour women after 1918 was reflected in their conferences. In 1924 the British Labour Party Women's Conference was the largest conference of working women ever held, not just in Britain but in any part of the world, and the second largest Labour Party Conference ever held.

The result of Ada's work (helped by Ada Broughton and Eveline Lowe) was that the Bermondsey Women's Section by the late 1920s was the best women's organisation in the Labour Party. In the best traditions of the ILP it was cultural and social, not narrowly political. It promoted dance classes, tennis, swimming and drama and by 1932 it had grown so large it could no longer have a central New Year social but had to hold one in each ward. Already by 1928 more women councillors were elected in Bermondsey than any other town or city in Britain. Further, it had the largest number of women members in Britain elected to *all* local public bodies. This unique achievement was the result of work that Ada had started in 1906, and which had first borne fruit in the 'uprising' of 1911.

THE LANDSLIDE VICTORY

By November 1922, when the council elections and a general election were due, the Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Women's Sections had done enough work among the new women voters for Labour to feel cautiously confident. The signs were good. In March, Eveline had been elected to the LCC from Bermondsey West and, in a by-election, Charles Ammon, still in the Bermondsey ILP, had been elected MP for Camberwell North. The Liberals were in poor shape. The split between the Asquith and Lloyd George supporters had not been healed and, despite the wrangling between Alfred and Bamford, the stream of defectors from the Liberal camp had continued. From 1921 Labour held a narrow council majority.

Even so, there were few who expected the landslide victory in the council election of November 1922, when Labour won a massive 37 seats out of 54. Suddenly, Labour had complete control of Bermondsey. As in 1909 and 1919 it was Ada who made history. She won her council seat with a huge majority and, when she then became mayor, she became the first woman mayor in London, the first Labour woman mayor in Britain, and one of only four women mayors in the whole country. This was at a time when the office of mayor carried considerable weight and was a much sought after post.

The press spotted that Ada had also become the first married woman ever to be mayor in Britain. This presented the editors with a tricky problem. Previously, a 'mayoress' had been the wife of a mayor, and accompanied her husband to events. What would they call Dr Salter? Some newspapers argued he should be 'consort' while others speculated hopefully that he would not perform his role, so they would not have to report it.

The Bermondsey result was even more remarkable because Labour was routed in most of London. Labour lost control of Camberwell, Fulham, Greenwich, Hackney, Islington, St Pancras, Southwark and Stepney. It retained only Battersea, Bermondsey, Deptford, Poplar and Woolwich. These were called the 'Five Red Boroughs' and four of them were in South London. Bermondsey's swing, however, was far and away the most spectacular. Ada and her team of radical women had attracted the new women voters in a way no other borough could match.

Labour Woman was of course delighted by such a victory for one of their own founders: 'First Labour Woman Mayor in Britain' and 'First woman mayor for London' were their headlines. Mrs Salter was well known all over Britain, they declared, 'for her long years of work in the Women's Labour League and the Labour Party'.²¹ The *Manchester Guardian* was also enthusiastic. It praised Ada's reputation as an excellent public speaker, pointed out she had received the highest vote of any councillor, and reminded readers of her humanitarian work in 1919 when she had rescued starving children from the streets of Vienna.²²

There was one more 'first' for Ada. On 15 November, when Alfred was elected MP for Bermondsey West, Ada, now being mayor, acted as the Returning Officer: 'the first time in our history a Labour woman held that office', reported *Labour Woman* delightedly. Better

still, Ada was ‘the first woman of any party to declare her own husband MP’.

Alfred’s election was not as smooth as Ada’s. As usual, he did not make life easy for himself. Fenner Brockway has vividly described the famous eve-of-poll rally at the Bermondsey Town Hall, chaired by Joe Cragie. At first Alfred had enthralled his audience with denunciations of capitalism, and all seemed well, but then he announced he had something important to tell them. They must be sure to remember it when they went to cast their vote the next day: ‘If you want a member of Parliament who will vote for cheaper beer, you will elect one of the other candidates. If you want a member of Parliament who will vote for an army and a navy to defend Britain and the Empire, you will elect one of the other candidates.’ He reminded them he had supported conscientious objectors during the war and he swore that, if elected, he would close down as many pubs as he could. Alfred, says Brockway, ‘seemed to glory in the effect which his words were having ...’.

Joe Cragie surveyed the audience, some of whom were drinkers, some of whom had served in the armed forces during the war, and was in despair. But Alfred would not let it rest: ‘I will vote for prohibition. I will vote against all credits for the armed forces. If you don’t like it, don’t make me your MP.’ When Alfred sat down, Fenner Brockway records, ‘There was absolute silence for half a minute. Then an extraordinary thing happened: everyone in the hall was on his feet cheering. The applause went on and on, and Cragie’s lifted hand could not stop it.’ When he was finally able to speak, Cragie deftly told them just this: ‘That is your tribute to honesty and fearlessness. If you want a man of principle to represent you, you will vote for the doctor.’ The next day Alfred trounced the Reverend Kedward, his Liberal opponent, by 7,550 votes to 5,225 and became the first Labour MP for Bermondsey.²³

In the legend of Dr Salter, still held in the folk-memory of Bermondsey to this day, this speech ranks high. It was the speech of an honest politician, thought to be an almost extinct species, the sort of speech John Stuart Mill used to make. A local vicar summed up the admiration for Alfred as an honest man: ‘If by saying what he believes to be true, he offends his friends and sacrifices votes, he cares nothing.’²⁴

At the time, however, Alfred’s speech was eclipsed by Ada’s first actions as mayor, which infuriated the press. In line with her Quaker

Socialist commitments to simplicity, equality and peace, Ada announced she would refuse to wear the mayoral chain, or the robes traditional to the office. She abolished the customary prayers before council meetings, led by an Anglican chaplain. If any councillors wished, they could join Ada before council meetings in the mayor's parlour, for a ten-minute Quaker silence. She ordered that royal jubilees and royal birthdays were no longer to be celebrated. The money saved would be distributed to the needy. Ada also ordered the Union Jack be hauled down from the town hall. She flew there instead a red flag bearing local symbols, the badges of Municipal Socialism. The right-wing newspapers were incandescent with rage.

It should not be thought that these actions by the Salters were romantic or self-indulgent gestures. All their policies had a solid bedrock of support, even though the majority might have to be won over to them afterwards. Some in Alfred's audience at the famous eve-of-poll rally would have been pacifist teetotallers, normal at left-wing meetings in the 1920s, and in 1919-21 the mayor for three years running, William Bustin, a Liberal, had managed to close some pubs and had refused to wear mayoral robes. It was just the range and radicalism of Ada's measures that infuriated the press. At the rally Cragie had cringed because Alfred seemed so insistent on committing electoral suicide, and he told Ada that dispensing with the mayoral chain was over the top for the practical reason that at events no one would be able to tell who she was, but all the same he understood that Ada and Alfred proposed what was in line with their core vote. The majority then voted for them out of respect for their integrity.

Ada continued her subversion of the mayor's role right to the end of her year in office and in November 1923 the newspapers were once more aghast. A mayor was traditionally given generous personal expenses. Some mayors would buy themselves a car from it, or even a small house, and this was accepted. But now Ada handed most of the money back to the council, unspent. There was consternation. Previous mayors felt uncomfortable and the Labour, Liberal and Conservative parties all felt uneasy. The press was flummoxed. Ada had saved the sacred 'taxpayers' money' which they had always urged her to place above her namby-pamby humanitarianism.

The press had pondered at the beginning, perhaps with some relish, how Ada would handle the sometimes unruly council meetings which she now would have to chair. Not all mayors had chaired as

impartially as they might have done – how would a ‘revolutionary socialist’ woman manage? But Ada’s acceptance speech on her installation as mayor showed that for her, as for Alfred, the word ‘ethical’ was just as important as ‘socialism’. She would treat all councillors impartially. Speaking as the first woman ever to chair a council meeting in London, Ada was reassuring: ‘You know me as a strong Party woman, but in the chair I shall endeavour not to know “party” as far as giving decisions are concerned, and I shall try to act fairly to those seated on my right as to those on the left. I shall make mistakes, but it will be because of my want of thought or lack of experience, rather than from want of desire to be fair and to do right.’²⁵

Ada was true to her word, and it was universally accepted that her year as mayor was a great success, not only in the firm (but patient and pleasant) way she chaired meetings, but also in progressing charitable work all over the borough. In her final speech as mayor Ada reflected on the role of local councils and affirmed that being a local councillor brought joy and satisfaction in itself, as the best route to one’s own happiness was helping others. She noted that it was just 25 years since she had met her husband: ‘He found me in Bermondsey ... (Laughter) I love the borough. So does my husband, and so do all of you. In public service we feel that we can get the greatest happiness.’ There was a hint of the effort her mayoralty had entailed when she paid special tribute to the other women councillors for giving her support during the debates, but her main message was that working for the people was a joy in itself.²⁶

There was, however, an incident after she had ceased to be mayor, which sorely tested Ada’s chairing. The meeting of Bermondsey’s council on 18 December 1923 witnessed ‘the most dramatic scene in all its history’. Ada was in the chair again, as acting mayor, since the new mayor, Joe Cragie, was ill. A rumpus started after a deputation of local unemployed workers had spoken. Ada made a ruling from the chair that Councillor Bustin alleged was biased. On Ada’s persistence with the ruling, Bustin defied her, yelling ‘vile and vulgar epithets for a quarter of an hour on end’. When he had finished, ‘Abuse and insults were heaped upon her by leading members of the Progressive Party.’

Bustin had been a previous mayor and, just a few weeks earlier, Ada had ended her term of office by announcing she was returning most of her allowances. Bustin had always spent most of his allow-

ances, and this had clearly rankled. Eventually, after the yelling had passed its peak, Ada stood up and restored order. Mrs Salter, said the press admiringly, 'made a noble and earnest appeal to members of the council and to persons in the gallery to restrain themselves ... Her dignified tones finally secured absolute quiet'. Once order was restored Ada called the leader of the Liberal Party, councillor Kedward, to speak, but Bustin had not finished and launched into another tirade of personal abuse. This time, however, he was on his own and Ada simply allowed him to finish. Then she rose and said gravely: 'Mr Bustin, speaking with great restraint and with a full sense of responsibility. I have to say that by the exhibition you have just given you have disgraced yourself, you have disgraced those who are associated with you, and you have degraded this public assembly. You have been a mayor for 3 years, and you ought to have known better. I am ashamed of you.'²⁷ After this Bustin was never of any prominence again in Bermondsey politics, and he stepped down as an alderman in 1925.

THE BEAUTIFICATION COMMITTEE

Becoming a woman mayor, and then performing well, was a historic achievement, but it was a diversion from Ada's chief mission in life which since she had left Raunds had been to fight against the slums. In 1914-18 she had learnt how persistent pressure from below could change the housing policies of the state, and in 1919 she had begun her 'peaceful revolution' in Bermondsey, even when the Liberals still had a majority. As part of the negotiations with Labour in December 1919 the Liberals had agreed that a long-term slum clearance programme could be started and in the short term Ada could form a 'Beautification Committee'. In return, Labour supported Bustin as mayor and did not dispute Liberal control. Labour also insisted on calling a special meeting in January 1920 just to consider housing.

At the special meeting Alfred and Bamford, as leaders of the ILP and Labour Party respectively, moved fifteen motions on housing. Several were defeated but the Beautification Committee went through just as Ada wanted: its brief was to plant trees and flowers but it would also make use of all open spaces, and include amenities for music, sport and children's playgrounds. Any work done would use unemployed labour, and thus reduce unemployment in the borough. Ada and Joe Cragie were careful to emphasise this aspect,

since it secured for beautification the full support of the trade union movement.

There had also been a motion passed proposing another of Ada's projects: the creation of a local 'garden city'. If pursued in co-operation with the neighbouring boroughs of Deptford and Lewisham, it could receive a government subsidy. It was Ada who argued this in front of the council and won the vote. A permanent committee of four councillors was agreed to conduct the negotiations and Ada was chosen as the ILP and Labour representative.

Progress was slow because for nearly two years the Liberals, as majority party, still controlled all the key committees (Finance, General Purposes, Works). If the Asquith and Lloyd George factions combined they could always outvote Labour. Still, there was a considerable Labour presence on the committees Ada, Alfred and Eveline were interested in. In 1920-22 Ada was on the Housing, Beautification, Maternity and Public Health committees, on account of the expertise she had accumulated on those topics in the WLL. Similarly, Alfred was on Beautification, Maternity and Public Health on account of his medical expertise. On beautification, he was able to back up Ada with medical evidence that a multitude of trees and flowers had a positive effect on health.

Ada quickly established a consensus in 1920 because there had already been some progress towards beautification before the war. In 1912, Dr King Brown, Bermondsey Medical Officer of Health, had given an interview to the *Daily Herald*, entitled 'Dreadful Bermondsey', which complained about how dreary Bermondsey was. In 1914, therefore, the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association had agreed with Bermondsey a modest tree-planting scheme. So progress was rapid in 1920. The Beautification Committee met in January and, already by February, 50 poplar trees had been planted by unemployed labourers, mainly ex-soldiers and sailors, paid for by Unemployed Grants. By the end of 1920 there were 376 council trees planted in the streets. Ada led the way on this because she was a member of the London Gardens Guild and she was able to bring in the LGG to organise the first beautification schemes and flower shows.

In 1921, when disillusioned Liberals defected to Labour, the council fell under Labour control and Ada was elected Chair of the Beautification Committee.²⁸ She now began one of the most remarkable episodes in municipal history. In 1920-27 the number of

street-trees under council care rose from 376 to 6,101 and everywhere in dreary Bermondsey, even in the slums, flowers bloomed. Everything was done with a meticulous passion. Intense care was taken over the types of trees planted (as they had to be tolerant of air pollution) and over their aesthetic effect. Along the streets, plane, poplar, lime, acacia and trees of heaven were planted, though plane and poplar, for financial reasons, were by far the most numerous. Ada wrote of her passion for trees in *Guild Gardener* in 1927: 'There is nothing more beautiful than trees; they act as a screen to eyesores', and, as for the slums, the trees 'beautify and dignify the monotonous streets of dingy houses'.²⁹

Ada's Beautification Committee did not merely plant trees but unrolled a vision of the future. The drab and dreary borough of Bermondsey was to be dazzled by flowers and enlivened in every corner with music, games and children's play. Ada's targets were: every street lined with trees; every churchyard ablaze with colours; every house with a window-box; every park and open space with musical performances; and games, from chess to football, played in every place where young people gathered.

After Labour won the election in 1922, Ada had to put mayoral duty first. She stood down as Chair of the Beautification Committee but remained the driving-force in its work. It was she who, as mayor, launched in 1923 the 'Brighter Bermondsey Movement', which explicitly gave music, clubs and playgrounds as much priority as trees and flowers. She also appointed a distinguished gardener, W. H. Johns, as Superintendent of Gardens (1923-44). Johns, from Cornwall and a (distant) relative of W. E. Johns (gardening columnist and author of the 'Biggles' books) was on the Executive Committee of the Kew (Gardens) Guild. His brief was to seek as long a season as possible so that there was a profusion of colour most of the year.

Ada had prizes put up to reward the best gardens and best window-boxes in Bermondsey. This aroused widespread interest amongst the public and soon competition was keen. Bermondsey started to win prizes in London wide competitions. In 1937 Bermondsey won four first prizes in the All London Gardens Competition: 'the best front garden, the best roof garden, the best balcony garden and the best window boxes were all judged to be in the borough'.³⁰ Johns himself won acclaim. Ada encouraged him to experiment, in a quest for plants that would flourish in adverse urban conditions, and he was able to

breed two new strains of hardy dahlias, which he and Ada named the 'Bermondsey Gem' and the 'Rotherhithe Gem'. Ada's interest was that dahlias, of all flowers, were considered the toughest for withstanding slum conditions.

The council's own buildings were graced with either hanging baskets or window-boxes, and some of them bore Ada's personal stamp. Elizabeth Lebas, the historian of 'Green Bermondsey', noticed that Bermondsey window-boxes 'had a distinctive, almost Alpine, stencilled decoration', and wondered whether perhaps 'the fact that Dr and Mrs Salter often spent their summer holidays walking in Switzerland may have been an influence'.³¹ It was more than that of course. Ada had already been well versed in Alpine themes at the Thrapston bazaar in 1887, and admiration for Switzerland had been an integral part of her liberal politics.

Of course other boroughs in the country were experimenting with similar ideas. The Baldwin government acknowledged this national trend in 1925 in its Public Health Act. This allowed councils to mount concerts and other public entertainments (though they could not use taxpayers' money to subsidise them). What was special about Bermondsey was the scale, the dedication and the moral fervour that lay behind it. Music and dahlias were not just for entertainment. They were for the good of the people. Ada had already done what Baldwin belatedly permitted, by private fund-raising and circumventing the rules. Already in 1923 the Beautification Committee had established a borough choir, and was encouraging bands to perform in open spaces, including the churchyards of the beautiful Waterloo church, St James, and the ancient St Mary Magdalen.

Beautification was still held back by restrictions on subsidy, and the Conservative London County Council blocked Ada's proposals for gymnasias, fives courts and open-air swimming-pools. Nor would they give permission for competitive sports in Southwark Park on Sundays. Yet over the years Ada overcame all the obstacles thrown in her path. Her Beautification Department expanded in all sorts of directions, supporting a Bermondsey Municipal Orchestra, holding spring and autumn garden shows, setting up camera and handicraft clubs, regulating commercial advertising on aesthetic grounds, and establishing a network of children's playgrounds which offered supervised play and sports both after school and during school holidays. It takes an effort of the historical imagination now to grasp just how

pioneering at that time, in the early 1920s, were these apparently simple ideas. Similarly, it takes an effort of the political imagination to understand that, for Ada, raising the aesthetic appreciation of the population was the embodiment of her ethical socialism.

Conservative and Liberal opposition highlighted expense, especially as the money was being spent on what seemed to them rather trivial matters. Ada and the council leader, Cragie, claimed they did everything they could to reduce expenditure. They brought in the trees and plants cheaply from Fairby Grange, and, as for the work itself, the council used its own employees as much as possible. Cragie, as a trade unionist, was bent on using the Unemployment Grants Committee, so that all trees would be planted by unemployed workers. Ada, the expert fund-raiser, made full use of charities she was associated with to extract grants for specific projects. She also used her good relations with some employers. The Communists tended to denounce all employers, but she took the ethical socialist view of good employers and bad, some passing the humanitarian test and others failing. In 1921 Arthur Carr, a director of Peek Frean, the biscuit manufacturer (and a firm with a Quaker history), passed the test when he offered to erect a children's slide in St James's churchyard. It was the first 'American slide' (covered slide) in England and, perhaps at Ada's request, was modelled on a Swiss mountain chalet.

Apart from political opposition, there was also a physical problem in Bermondsey of not enough space. For sport, as there was no open land for football and cricket pitches (Southwark Park being controlled by the LCC), Ada's committee came up with the idea of cages for football and cricket practice, a novel idea at the time. When in 1929 the *Bermondsey Labour Magazine* reported that a playground had been opened in Tanner Street by 'Mrs Salter, Chairman of the Beautification Committee', it went on to state that not only was there enough space for net-ball, a football pitch, two tennis-courts and a pavilion with toilets, but the playground was 'quite unique' in England for its state-of-the-art facilities – several cages and enclosures for cricket and football practice. These could be used by local schools that had no sport facilities, and also by the public.

At the opening of the Tanner Street playground Ada planted a tree of heaven, her favourite tree. Knowing the tree of heaven has a Quaker connection some have speculated that the tree was a symbol of Ada's Quaker faith but in fact it has no religious significance. The Quaker

connection was with the eighteenth century Quaker botanist, Peter Collinson, who lived in Bermondsey and was credited with introducing the tree of heaven into Britain from China, along with other Chinese trees and plants. Ada also had good practical reasons for choosing it. She had noticed in her travels that it flourished in urban areas of Switzerland and France; it was deciduous, so more resistant to air pollution than conifers; it was fast-growing and Bermondsey's need was urgent; it had medicinal qualities; it was a good soil stabiliser; its strong-smelling leaves deterred interlopers; and its flowers were strongly scented – eminently desirable in certain Bermondsey streets.

As usual, Ada kept the cost of the Tanner Street playground as low as possible by means of fund-raising. She raised money from the Carnegie Trustees, the City Corporation, Hay's Wharf Limited, the London County Council, the Poulter Trustees and the National Playing Fields Fund. The work was done by the council's own labour force. Acquisition of the land had to be piloted through Parliament, since it included the remains of an ancient church. As the proposal was endorsed by civil servants, such a 'constituency bill' normally passed without dispute, but in this case there was some 'antiquarian' resistance which Alfred had to speak against.

Brockway, as usual, takes every opportunity to magnify Alfred's role, and such is the easy charm of his journalism that others often repeat what he writes. Thus, Elizabeth Lebas notes in *Socialist Arcadia* her opinion that Brockway is a 'not entirely objective source';³² and yet on Tanner Street she blithely follows Brockway's account: 'And so it was that Dr Salter chose to plant the Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus*) at the opening ceremony of Tanner Street recreation ground in 1929 ...'.³³ As it happens, there is a photograph of the event which clearly shows Ada, shovel in hand, centre-stage at the tree-planting, while Alfred merely helps. A second photo from the same event shows her on the speakers' platform, addressing the large crowd, while Alfred sits at the end of the platform, looking rather bored. Naturally, Alfred attended all such ceremonies as the local MP but Ada was the Chair of the Beautification Committee, it was a Beautification Committee event, and it was certainly not Alfred who 'chose' the tree of heaven, Ada's favourite tree.

By 1931 Ada's Beautification Committee had become nationally famous. One report, reflecting on the dramatic change in Bermondsey, comments: 'Outside the Royal Parks it would be difficult to find

anywhere such masses of colour'. There are bright flowers nearly all year round: 'When the tulips and daffodils are over, they will be followed by armies of dahlias, geraniums and antirrhinums'. Bermondsey now has a 'soul': 'It does not fear to spend money out of its slender resources to buy flowers and flowering plants ... It has a sense of collective responsibility for abolishing ugliness and for cultivating beauty...'.³⁴

The *Evening Standard* claimed Bermondsey was now 'the most optimistic place in London', all 'because of the flowers'. It was a joy to see 'tenement buildings made beautiful by nodding yellow chrysanthemums in window-boxes, and the little front gardens where Michaelmas daisies glow like purple stars'. But the real marvel was the civic pride: 'factory girls were hurrying home arm-in-arm ... and the pavements were gay with the shimmer of silk stockings. The girls wore their trim little coats and their close-fitting frocks with what modistes call an "air" ... many had flowers pinned to their coats. Flowers in Bermondsey are not a decoration, but a symbol.'³⁵ They were the symbols of the Bermondsey Revolution.

By the end of the 1920s Johns was taking parties of distinguished visitors, including foreign delegations, around Bermondsey. Over 200 towns in France, Germany, Czechoslovakia and Austria adopted Ada's schemes. Brockway says: 'Films of the streets, gardens and churchyards were shown all over the world and some American visitors included them with Westminster Abbey and the Tower of London in the sights of London.'³⁶ The *Daily Telegraph* in 1927 praised Bermondsey 'as an object-lesson in what can be done to beautify even the poorest neighbourhoods'.³⁷

By the mid-1930s Ada's beautification work had become legendary. In March, 1935, she gave an interview (in a series entitled 'Leading Ladies of South London') in which a journalist described her home and her plans for the LCC to extend beautification all over London: 'There are flowers in almost every corner of the large drawing-room. Bulbs and plants stand on little tables and in the grate ... there was a magnificent vase of beech leaves. Mrs Salter told me she had treated them with glycerine to preserve their colour ... Mrs Salter, white-haired and dignified (even when sitting on a low stool) told me about her ideals of a more beautiful London.'³⁸

Ada explained that everyone should try to make their gardens as attractive as possible, especially front gardens, which have not just a

private but a public interest. In Bermondsey it was often the poorest who took most pride in their front garden and won prizes, and this was Ada's underlying theme: everyone has a civic duty to beautify the world, and the poor can help do this as much as the rich.

In May 1935, Ada gave the journalist Hannen Swaffer, a recent convert to socialism, a conducted tour of beautified Bermondsey. He wrote: 'She pointed proudly to the small gardens which have been planted on every possible site. She took me around the church graveyards, all of which have been turned into small parks and playgrounds for the children.' She regretted that most of the local clergy were opponents 'of that Socialism by which Bermondsey was seeking to make itself into a garden city'. She showed him how thousands of tulips were now brightening Bermondsey, and how flowers now 'grow amidst the smoke, with the cats and the birds as their only enemies'.³⁹

HOUSING

Although Ada's beautification programme was a phenomenal success, it was, nonetheless, subsidiary to her main purpose, which was removal of slum housing. In 1922, despite significant improvements since the days of Mearns, there were still sometimes three, or even four, families to one house. Often they had only one water-tap and one lavatory for several families. Many premises were still damp, rat-ridden and vermin-infested: 'There were networks of courts, passages and alleyways, some of them so narrow that the occupants of the houses could lean out of their windows and shake hands with their neighbours on the opposite side of the street.'⁴⁰

For Ada, beautification was driven by the ethical idea that people would gain self-respect and moral elevation from beautiful surroundings. In addition, socialists expected from slum-demolition a political, not just a humanitarian, gain. When Swaffer was in Bermondsey the Silver Jubilee of King George V was being celebrated. Bermondsey's Labour mayor had refused to participate, and money saved was spent on care for the elderly and jobs for the unemployed. However, while walking around with Ada, passing slums still uncleared, Swaffer noticed the reactionary nature of 'slumdom'. In Bermondsey, as elsewhere, 'the poorer the streets are, the more flags they display. In the narrowest courts there are, outside slum dwellings soon to come down, scores and scores of small Union Jacks'.⁴¹

Swaffer had no real explanation, but Marx had long ago concluded that the 'slum proletariat' was the most reactionary enemy of the working class, and Hardie had observed: 'It is the slum vote which the socialist candidate fears most.'⁴² One of the advantages, therefore, of slum clearance was that, since slums stripped people of their self-respect, so that in compensation they waved flags and hated foreigners, removing slums reduced the incidence of that reactionary mentality.

The overriding problem in slum-removal was the large amount of money slum-clearance and house-building required. In Ada's case her vision of slum-clearance was more expensive than most. She did not just want slums demolished, she wanted garden-village cottages in their place, and she wanted the cottages set in 'beautified' streets.

Ada had developed these ideas in 1912 in her impassioned article, *What Women Demand*, but in 1920, when she tried to navigate her 'utopian' ideas on housing through Bermondsey's Housing Committee, the expense proved an insurmountable obstacle and she lost the vote. She wanted houses, because they had gardens; her opponents wanted flats, because they were a fraction of the cost. Undeterred, Ada argued in April at the full council meeting against the Housing Committee's recommendation of tenement flats. She urged, without apology, that the council should be inspired by a vision of the future, and take the ethical course, without fear of the costs. The money, she said, could be found if there was the will to build a nobler society. She told the council: 'I detest tenements and flats, and I heartily condemn the recommended scheme lock, stock and barrel. Tenement housing does not lead to the New World.'

The Liberal leader, Kedwood, said he agreed with Ada in principle but the government would overrule anything but flats, on financial grounds. He thought it better to have 'some housing in Bermondsey not ideal' rather than no housing at all. Another councillor said he also approved Ada's 'garden city' ideals but there was simply no money for them. The meeting voted against Ada's proposal by 29 votes to 15. It looks as if Ada could not win support even from the Labour Party, only from the ILP, and yet she had strong support from her allies. The *Southwark & Bermondsey Recorder* had carried out interviews in October 1919 with candidates for the council, and several had expressed strong views on housing fully in line with Ada's programme. For example, Alderman Wills, appointed when Ada was first elected

in 1909, was a builder by trade and in favour of garden-city schemes. He had always supported Ada's notion that population must be moved out of London, making room for houses rather than flats, and he backed Ada's call for the improved design of council houses: no more 'rabbit-hutches'. Jessie Stephen and Ada Broughton also supported Ada's programme: labour-saving devices had to be brought in to reduce housework.⁴³

Brockway tries to insinuate that Alfred inspired all these ideas. He writes that in 1923 Alfred unfolded a vision for Bermondsey that was 'breath-taking'. He was going to 'demolish two-thirds of the borough and rebuild it as a garden city ... his Labour colleagues were incredulous ...'.⁴⁴ There is no record of this informal speech. Alfred chose to sit on several committees, but never Housing. He left housing to Ada, as she left health to him. In fact, Ada and the WLL had already submitted such ideas (the Green Belt included) to Addison in 1917, and in 1919 Herbert Morrison, her ally, had backed them in the London Labour Party. If Alfred really had made such a speech, as late as 1923, he would have found Labour councillors not 'incredulous', but bored at hearing the same ideas yet again.

In 1923 the first area targeted by Labour for slum clearance was Salisbury Street, condemned as a slum in the 1890s and now 'one of the meanest and most squalid portions of Bermondsey'.⁴⁵ Squashed in between large buildings on Jamaica Road and huge warehouses on the river, it was not an attractive proposition for private development, so had been left to rot. As a result, the infant mortality in Salisbury Street was 182 per thousand births (compared to 129 in Bermondsey and 103 in London), thanks to high incidences of diphtheria, scarlet fever and tuberculosis. The Salters knew it well since it lay only a few hundred yards from their house, and it was probably the source of the scarlet fever epidemic that killed Joyce.

Ada undertook intensive research for the demolition of Salisbury Street and for the design of what became known as the 'Wilson Grove cottages'. Just as she had done on her Housing Committee in the Women's Labour League, she calculated the construction costs in detail and conducted a survey of what local working-class women actually needed. However, even with Alfred pressing in Parliament, and Morrison pressing the LCC, neither the Conservative government nor the Conservative LCC would grant consent to her scheme.

You have to understand the economic facts, she was told: flats are 'value for money' but houses with gardens are not.

Her opponents had forgotten one thing. She was the first woman mayor and believed she had received a mandate for revolution. As soon as she learned of the government's refusal, she called to the Council Chamber an 'assembly of the people'. She summoned the two local MPs, the LCC councillors, the 17 Guardians, and representatives of 62 trade unions, 65 churches, three Settlements, the Trades Council, and every club and society in the borough. She presided over the meeting herself, Councillor Reverend Llewelyn, Chairman of Housing, set out the background, and Alfred proposed the motion that was to be put to a vote. Faced with the humanitarian disaster which was Salisbury Street, described in unsparing medical detail by Alfred, the meeting agreed unanimously the motion calling for government consent.⁴⁶

The following week, at the Bermondsey Council meeting, Llewelyn told the councillors that the LCC had told him that they would now agree the cottages but then, when he met the Ministry of Health, they told him that the LCC had told them they had not agreed, and had sent him back to the LCC. On hearing this, Ada immediately 'obtained the permission of the Council, as a matter of urgency, to deal with this matter' herself, as the mayor. She went to see the Chair of the LCC Housing Committee and told him Bermondsey Council would block the building of any more LCC tenements in the area.

Ada now proposed this policy to the Council, seconded by Cragie, and added into the motion that the Council would also block those portions of land allocated to business premises. Startled and alarmed, the opposition, led by Bustin, protested. Of course, everyone was in favour of slum clearance, said Bustin, but Mrs Salter's scheme was simply impractical. There was nowhere for the poor tenants of Salisbury Street to go. They would be homeless. Llewelyn, the next speaker, was sinking, but Ada intervened in the debate with a smooth rebuttal of Bustin's remarks: 'Alderman Bustin knows that nobody on the site will be made homeless. He is perfectly well aware that the LCC is bound to find accommodation for the displaced people.' She then put her motion to the vote. It was passed by 33 votes to 0, with Bustin and his supporters daring only to abstain.⁴⁷

The outcome was a public enquiry by the Ministry of Health into the Salisbury Street scheme. It convened under the propitious circum-

stances of the first Labour government (although a minority one). The landlords managed to persuade the slum-dwellers to testify how happy they were living in Salisbury Street, but Ada and Cragie (now mayor) were able to respond with evidence from the Medical Officer, Dr King Brown, and from Alfred. Brown said the tenants had merely become accustomed to their bad conditions. The death-rate was at 24.6 per 1000, compared to 17.5 for Bermondsey and 15.0 for London, and some houses were overrun by rats. Alfred said the area had been condemned as unfit for human habitation back in 1895, and some houses were propped up by steel girders. The property owners replied that they had spent thousands on repairs and all properties complied with current sanitary regulations. The tenants feared they would not find such low rents anywhere else.

Not only did Ada win the enquiry, but there was also a political bonus. The ILP's Ramsay MacDonald was now Prime Minister and the ILP's John Wheatley was Minister of Housing. They passed a radical Housing Act which enabled government to subsidise the building of council houses. Wheatley not only agreed Ada's plans but offered financial assistance. This was endangered when Labour lost power in the autumn of 1924, but the offer was on the table, the Housing Act had been passed, and the Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin was not going to repeal such a popular measure.

Ada's victory over the Salisbury Street slums drew national attention to her beautification programme. The tenor of the debate may be gauged by an article, accompanied by an editorial, in the *Journal of Garden Cities and Town Planning*, which dealt specifically with the proposal by Bermondsey Council for 52 cottages. The article conceded that Bermondsey was grossly overcrowded, with 'inadequate playing space for children, insufficient garden space for adults, and deficient breathing-space for everybody'. It agreed that the Salisbury Street district was 'a disgrace to civilisation ... a death-trap' since 'anyone going to reside there doubles or trebles his risk of dying early'. Referring to the beautification campaign, the editor judged: 'Sympathy will be felt for the enlightened council that has determined to make one of its slum areas blossom as the rose ...'. Bermondsey had become a 'pocket garden city amid factories and warehouses, and is already being copied by Dudley, Sheffield, Sunderland and Wallasey'. Nonetheless, low-rise tenement blocks would house two or three times the number of people, and, although

Bermondsey claimed the 52 cottages would 'assist in the process of distribution of population to other and more suitable places', this had been rejected by one of the country's leading housing experts, Neville Chamberlain, who had pointed out that garden cities must never be confused with slum-clearance. True garden-cities were self-contained satellite towns encircling London. It was inappropriate to plant beautiful housing in the 'unfavourable soil' of Bermondsey. The editor concluded: 'The moral is for Bermondsey idealists to learn ... The slums are part of London, and London is not in Buckinghamshire.'⁴⁸

Ada did not accept the argument that garden cities on the outskirts of London should be reserved for the middle classes, as Chamberlain wanted, nor that Bermondsey was 'unfavourable soil'. In 1925, after deputations to government from the council, led by Ada and Cragie, and backed by Alfred, it was finally agreed that the 'Wilson Grove Estate' would go ahead.

Though Bermondsey would have to borrow large sums of money to build the 52 (in the end, 54) houses, this was a big victory for Ada. She had been campaigning since 1912 for the Wilson Grove 'garden village' style of housing and now she had succeeded. The Wilson Grove houses were pleasing in appearance; they were light and spacious inside; and Ada had obliged the architect she employed (Ewart Culpin, the foremost lecturer on housing in Britain) to meet working-class women and discuss the practicality of the plans before they were finalised. The cottages, of red and white bricks, were beautiful. At the front silver birches were planted, with small lawns and climbing red roses around the doors, while at the rear were gardens of sufficient size to grow vegetables as well as flowers.

They were opened in Janeway Street in 1928 by Arthur Greenwood, the Labour MP and housing expert. At the ceremony, besides Greenwood, were the mayor (Alderman Balman), Reverend Llewelyn, the Salters, Ben Smith MP, Scott Lidgett, Eveline Lowe and a Mr Dence, Chair of the LCC Housing Committee. Alfred was praised for placing the demolition of Salisbury Street on the council's agenda back in 1920, but the heroine of the hour was undoubtedly Ada. Balman expatiated on Ada's view that housing was not just to house the homeless but for 'the upliftment' of the people. Dence told the crowd they should be grateful for the pressure Ada and Llewelyn had put on him at the LCC: 'Mrs Salter' came to the LCC with 'an axe to grind' and 'had stuck to her guns'. Llewelyn reminded

everyone that this unique policy, 'of rehousing by cottages and not by tenement buildings', was being implemented today only because five years earlier Mrs Salter had defied the Ministry of Health and, acting as mayor, had called a conference of all the organisations in the borough. That conference had agreed that Salisbury Street should be rehoused by cottages even if all the cost should fall on the rates. Backed by such a resolution Mrs Salter had been able to extract the government's assent. Llewelyn concluded: 'What we have done here in the heart of London is pioneer work in slum clearance.' Greenwood, himself born in a slum, not only praised Ada's slum clearance but told the enthusiastic crowd that, from what he had read, Ada Salter's beautification work was 'unparalleled in the history of this country'.⁴⁹

All over Europe municipalities had been looking for ways to clear slums without building flats. In June 1928, 46 German mayors, councillors and architects visited Bermondsey to inspect the slum clearance of Salisbury Street. Mayors came from Bonn, Breslau, Erfurt, Dusseldorf, Cottbus, Mannheim and Kiel, with councillors from Munich and Berlin. The largest deputation was from Weimar. Similar visitors arrived later from Austria, France and the USA.

Brockway testified to the 'moral', 'redemptive' effect, Ada had predicted: 'There were soon signs that almost unconsciously the occupants began to live up to their new environment. The housewife, who had given up the struggle for cleanliness and tidiness in her own crowded room, became house-proud. The man, who had gone out each night to the pub, stayed in to listen to the wireless in his own living-room. The young men and women dressed better: their manners changed.'⁵⁰

Wilson Grove was only one battle, however. There was another 'garden village' scheme planned in Rotherhithe, and another for slums in Vauban Street just off Spa Road. At times it looked as if further progress was impossible for financial reasons, but in January 1928 nature came to the rescue of Ada's Housing Committee when Rotherhithe was flooded. Ada had always maintained, against the argument of 'Where's the money to come from?', that if municipal socialists persisted, and if their case was genuinely humanitarian, and if they could keep the momentum going, then over the years opportunities for success would present themselves. In 1924 the windfall of Wheatley's Housing Act saved the day, and now in 1928 came the

flood, as if by divine intervention. The government had no choice but to grant financial assistance for the rehousing necessary.

In 'Down Town' Rotherhithe it had to be flats, since it was funded by government money, but Ada still had designs for spacious courtyards, flower-beds and trees. As Britain entered economic crisis from 1929, the council was more and more forced into such flats, to Ada's distress, but she did her best. This time it was Bermondsey's turn to look to Germany and Austria for inspiration instead of the other way round. In Social-Democrat Vienna, municipal socialists had demonstrated how low-rise blocks of flats might be made attractive, with beautiful inner quadrangles, floral beautification on balconies, and playing areas for the children. Ada adopted these ideas.

There is a hint of rare friction between Ada and Alfred at this junction. Although Ada won some sympathy from Dr Westlake, Alfred's colleague, who also rejected flats as a betrayal of the ideal, Alfred and Cragie had come to accept, as Britain plunged into economic austerity, that houses would not be possible for a long time to come. This time it really was, Alfred told Westlake, 'a case of flats or nothing'.⁵¹ As Westlake was a proponent of Social Credit, he did not accept that financial constraints were an obstacle, and he railed against the 'barrack like flats' being built by the LCC under Morrison. Ada reluctantly accepted the financial constraints, and her pragmatic solution was to build Bermondsey flats with as much Vienna-style beautification as possible.

In September 1935, Ada gave an interview to *Labour*, monthly journal of the TUC, in which she explained how she came to accept flats. At that time, vast numbers of people had to be housed near their workplaces and, 'until the nation controls the location and development of its industries, these multitudes must be warehoused in flats on the limited site areas available.' Nonetheless, Ada's idea was that, as well as having pleasant interiors, the exteriors could also 'possess architectural attractiveness and environmental beauty'. She believed that 'flats are not the ideal dwelling for a large proportion of the English people'. After all, 'There is inherent in the Anglo-Saxon a love of cultivation of the soil, even though it be only a small garden, a forecourt or a window-box. Hundreds of thousands of working men and women desire a cottage home with a garden ... where they can "grow" something.' In the long term she wanted garden-cities: 'But nothing really effective in this direction can be achieved until the

nation owns the land and there is public instead of private control of industry. Then we can create a new England.'

By 1934 government subsidies for slum clearance had been ended by the National Government which MacDonald, to the horror of Ada and Alfred, had formed in 1931 with the Conservative Party. By then, however, as in the case of beautification, Bermondsey had succeeded with rehousing to a degree unequalled anywhere else. Bermondsey had done 'more slum-clearance than the whole of the rest of London put together'.⁵² *The Times* said, 'No borough in the country has done more in the direction of slum-clearance and re-housing during the last few years than Bermondsey... Whole districts, which formerly consisted of hovels of the worst type, have already been transformed by the provision of flats, modern, roomy and with every convenience, such as baths, kitchenettes, and electric light.'⁵³ These were Ada's designs. The writer, Ritchie Calder, confessed in the *Daily Herald* in 1934 that 'whenever I go to Bermondsey I come away feeling that I want to take a soap-box and go round the country preaching the gospel of slum clearance with Bermondsey as my text.' He had been astonished on his last visit: 'The birds have come back, probably for the first time in a hundred years. Butterflies are flitting through a living tapestry of flowers on a spot where, a year ago, bugs dropped down my back and rats scurried away through the filth ...'.⁵⁴ New York and Montreal sent housing experts to study Ada's flats. In 1935 Bermondsey was chosen to represent Britain at the International Housing Congress in Prague. The introduction of beauty and convenience into working-class housing, pioneered by Ada and other WLL women such as Ada Chew, was now internationally recognised.

BATHS

Ada had so far suffered little criticism in the press, beyond dismissal of her garden-city and Green Belt ideas as utopian and unrealistic. It was difficult to argue that people should not have houses with gardens. There was one topic, however, on which the press found an opening. This was on the issue of public baths, part of the beautification programme, but also an offshoot of housing needs.

In 1905, of 19,000 separate dwellings in Bermondsey, only 113 had a bath (and showers of course were unknown). By the 1920s there had, it was generally agreed, not been much improvement. In 1853 some

public baths and wash-houses had been opened in Spa Road but these were out of date and hopelessly inadequate. Ada campaigned for modern baths for two reasons; firstly, because swimming was part of beautification and the LCC had blocked open-air swimming; secondly, because providing working women and housewives with labour-saving devices was part of the housing programme and the baths would include laundry equipment and facilities for babies. Alfred was also keen because certain types of baths had health advantages. So it was that in September 1927, in Grange Road, Bermondsey, 'the finest baths in England were opened, comprising first- and second-class swimming baths, 126 private baths, four baths for babies, and Turkish and Russian vapour baths'.⁵⁵ The Turkish and Russian baths were for treatment of rheumatism (a common affliction since clothes were not waterproof and housing was damp). In addition, there was a public laundry: a wash-house with 8 rotary washing-machines (of the latest design), 43 bowl washing compartments, and 40 drying horses. This was an instant success. The new machinery halved the time washing had taken, and so huge was the demand from housewives nearly 70 women had to be turned away every day.

On the other hand, the luxurious baths were very expensive, even though they were designed by council engineers, powered by the council's own municipal electricity and built by council employees, thus providing jobs for local workers. Both the Conservatives and the Liberals denounced the baths as an outrageous squandering of taxpayers' money. To criticise beautification or slum clearance on financial grounds was difficult, but it was easy to attack Russian vapour-baths and marble swimming-pools. At long last, since she was so closely associated with the baths, there was an angle for attacking Ada. In 1929, *The Bermondsey Observer* demanded to know why so much workers' money had been wasted on lavish public baths – the most luxurious in Britain. The Russian and Turkish baths were being used by only six persons per day. People could not afford the charges. It was too reminiscent of Ada's extravagant waste of money in Wilson Grove: 'How much better it would have been to have erected modern up-to-date flats for the workers instead of those cranky Socialist bungalows and cottages'.⁵⁶ The Liberal Party, concluded the article, had given the British people state education, factory laws, old age pensions, unemployment insurance, a minimum wage and, of course, the vote. What had the Labour Party given them? Nothing.

Labour tried to respond to these points, and the charges for the Russian and Turkish baths were soon lowered; yet there was an underlying truth to the criticism. It was not strictly speaking necessary for one of the poorest parts of London to have more trees than any other borough, the best baths and washing facilities in England, and the best council houses in Europe. In terms of conventional politics, the Liberals were correct to say Ada was extravagant. It was just that the ethical politics of the ILP were not conventional. The Salters acknowledged that the Grange Road baths could not be matched (except perhaps by the Amalien Bad in Vienna) by any others in Europe, and indeed were proud of the fact, but they rejected the accusations of extravagance and of waste. Alfred was almost fanatical about using business methods, strict accounting and efficiency on the job, while Ada was a dedicated fund-raiser who always strove to balance the books – her children's playgrounds charged outside organisations for use of pitches and courts so as to make the playgrounds almost self-financing. But their major defence was always to counterpose the ethical argument against the cost argument. The cost of baths must not be measured in money, but 'by their health-promoting possibilities, by the enjoyment which they confer on the average man and woman, and by the labour-lightening relief which they bring to the hard pressed wife and mother'.⁵⁷ The ethical argument went even further. The aim of the trees, games, music, public baths, and houses with gardens, was not just health, enjoyment, or the reduction of housework, but improving the morale of the people. The ordinary folk of Bermondsey needed to experience the redemptive power of beauty in the marble of the pools, in the quality of the music, and in watching the transformation of a listless street-urchin into a champion athlete. They needed to feel proud of their municipality. They needed to feel they were not second-rate. That way, and only that way, lay the restoration of their human dignity.

MATERNITY

The Salters won these ethical arguments over and over again, and gained just reward in the ballot-box. Similar arguments were deployed when the council had to decide what to spend on implementation of the Maternity and Child Welfare Act. The WLL, in honour of Margaret McDonald, had pioneered 'baby clinics' first in London

and then around the country. Ada now became Chair of the Maternity and Child Welfare Committee, and soon established five infant welfare centres in Bermondsey, as well as subsidising five more. As infant mortality was so high, it was difficult for opponents to counter the humanitarian argument with objections of cost.

At the same time she set up a ground-breaking maternity service. Advice was offered to pregnant women, including unobtrusive contraceptive advice (unobtrusive since opposition from some churches, especially the Catholic, was very strong). Two full-time women doctors were employed, with four part-time medical officers for women and children, and a dental department was established especially for expectant mothers. As a result, in 1922-27 infant mortality in the borough fell by 30%. In 1922-33 it dropped from 102 per thousand to 61, one of the best rates in London and above average for Britain, which was a remarkable statistic given Bermondsey's poverty. The Liberals pointed out that infant mortality was falling all over the country but, even so, the drop in Bermondsey was amongst the highest in the UK. Between 1911 and 1935 the infant mortality rate in Bermondsey fell from 160 to 69. In 1935, when 1,487 babies were born in the borough, not a single mother died in childbirth. This was phenomenal by any standards. During 1937 every woman in Bermondsey who had a baby attended the ante-natal clinic, a record for the whole country. Ada's interventions in maternity and child care are amongst her greatest achievements. When she stood successfully for election to the London County Council in 1928 the manifesto said of Ada: 'Since Dr and Mrs Salter lost their only child from scarlet fever she has given all her time and strength to the mission of saving other children from preventable disease and death.'

HEALTH

Naturally, on the radical health reforms in Bermondsey, it was Alfred who made the major contribution. His first campaign was against tuberculosis (TB), which he suffered from himself. Over 5000 people in Bermondsey suffered from it in any given year and every year there were over 200 deaths. There were two types: 'pulmonary' and 'surgical'. In 1922 Bermondsey had the third highest death-rate for pulmonary TB in the country but this type could be much alleviated, even cured, by simple fresh air and so, following Alfred's own example,

garden shelters were supplied, free of charge, to sufferers. Persuading people to sleep outside every night, or by an open window, was difficult, but achievable, and as a result of this campaign there was a striking reduction in deaths from this type of TB.

The second type ('surgical') attacked not the lungs but joints and bones, including the spine, and often twisted people's bodies out of shape. It was mainly transmitted to humans in milk from cows and there was therefore a campaign to encourage the drinking only of tuberculin-tested ('TT') milk. In the long term this was the solution but in the short term what was to be done about those already affected? Here Ada could help. All her life she kept in touch with her former flat-mate, Grace Kimmins. Grace was now running a school for disabled children in Chailey, Sussex. Inspired by a Dr Rollier in Leysin, Switzerland, she had been successful in using lengthy exposures to sunlight as treatment for children with 'surgical' TB, thus proving that the limited sunshine available in England could still be effective.⁵⁸ The results were so impressive that by 1923 Grace had appointed a full-time heliotherapist to run her 'solarium'. At the end of 1923 Dr Donald Connan, who was in charge of the Health Education department in Bermondsey, made a film about the use of sunlight and ultra-violet light in the treatment of children, *School in the Sun*, in order to convince the council of the benefits from the treatment. That film is now lost, but presumably it was filmed at Chailey. Lebas, in *Forgotten Futures*, not knowing about Chailey or Ada's connection with Grace, believes it must have been filmed at Rollier's school in Switzerland but this is unlikely. It was not until May 1924 that Rollier came to England, visited Chailey, and then gave a lecture at Guy's Hospital where he met Alfred, Dr King Brown and Donald Connan.

Alfred, Brown and Connan now visited Switzerland themselves. Leysin had the advantage over Bermondsey of pure air, and over fifteen hours of sunshine per day, in winter as in summer. Natural sunlight could be extensively used, as well as ultra-violet light, and some of the observed effects were 'magical', declared Alfred; sometimes diseased bones and joints fully recovered. The Public Health Department therefore decided to send six of the worst Bermondsey patients to Switzerland, four of them children badly deformed by disease.

There was of course much muttering about the cost. It was muted because it was difficult to criticise the humanitarian work of the

Salter without appearing mean-minded. The costs of travel and treatment were high, but the ethical politics of the Salters were an imperative. If human suffering could be reduced then action had to be taken and, if necessary, Ada would cover the cost by fund-raising. Nonetheless, as Alfred always took cost and efficiency very seriously, he made the financial case for Bermondsey to have its own solarium, like Grace's in Chailey, on the grounds that it would be cheaper than sending patients to Switzerland. It was opened in Grange Road in July 1926 and thus became the first municipal solarium in Britain. As it used ultra-violet light to supplement natural sunlight, it was also used to treat diseases of the skin. This solarium, together with other anti-TB measures, meant that by 1934 the number of deaths from TB in Bermondsey had nearly halved.

Connan's film was the first in a series of 'medical propaganda films' that made film history, and in 2012 there was an exhibition of Bermondsey medical films by the Wellcome Foundation in London. It is true that public health films had been made earlier (mostly government warnings about venereal disease) but, as in other cases, the radical innovations in Bermondsey were different because they were systematic, and on a much larger scale. The Bermondsey films were part of an awareness campaign against 'dirt and disease', launched by Alfred's Health Committee, and already by 1925 four films and 251 lantern slides had been shown, and 91 talks had been delivered (51 outdoors, 40 indoors). Dr Connan employed all the latest advertising techniques: dramatic electric signs at strategic sites in the borough, such as public toilets and clinics; flashed out rotating images; and slogans, such as 'Fresh Air and Fun'. Powerful photographs warned people about the dangers of maggots, tooth decay and spitting. To show his films, Connan had vans tour the streets of Bermondsey. It is thought that this idea came from Soviet Russia, but the Bermondsey vans were more sophisticated than the Russian. They were customised into 'cinemotors', with cinema-screens in the back, and they drew their electric power from especially adapted lamp-posts. Everywhere in the streets this propaganda extolled personal cleanliness and warned about milk or damp. Dozens of people gathered to watch. Although the films were silent (apart from any accompanying music), the film-shows were not. Expert speakers invited noisy audience participation and, if there was no music, they had children singing along to the captions.

In 1928 Donald Connan took over from King Brown as Medical Officer for Health, but he still continued to produce films. His acknowledged masterpiece is a film called *Where there's Life there's Soap* (1933), which is still good to watch. It must have been effective, since in 1935 he could happily record that in Bermondsey, as a result of the hygiene campaign, 'a high degree of personal cleanliness' had now become 'almost universal'. Connan's Health Propaganda Department also produced leaflets, not just on cleanliness but on the need to drink TT milk; on pregnancy and breast feeding; on how to deal with brown rats and other vermin in the house; and on how to react to measles and other infectious diseases.

There was one very impressive late addition to Bermondsey's health care. This was the Health Centre opened in Grange Road in 1936. It brought together under one roof all the clinics established by Ada and Alfred via the Health and Maternity Committees: the solarium TB clinic, the dental clinics, the foot clinics, the antenatal clinic, and the child welfare clinics. Grange Road was one of only twelve Health Centres in Britain, once again an amazing achievement, considering Bermondsey's poverty.

Historians lavish much praise on Bermondsey's work in public health. In the mid-1920s the free treatment Alfred's huge practice provided for the poor, together with the innovations he and Connan pioneered, anticipated the National Health Service. As Elizabeth Lebas wrote, 'The work of the Public Health Department... can be envisaged as pre-figurative of the National Health Service.' Jerry White has praised Bermondsey's health work on three counts: its defeat of tuberculosis, its health education programme and its hygiene films: 'In demonstrating what could be done, Bermondsey was London's showcase', and other councils followed suit. White quotes a reporter in 1928: 'If I were designing a coat of arms for the Borough of Bermondsey, I should suggest a healthy child in a green field with the motto, "It can be done"'.⁵⁹ Alfred started an NHS before the NHS, just as Ada was a Green before the Greens.

THE BERMONDSEY REVOLUTION

What Bermondsey Council achieved in the 1920s is often referred to as the 'Bermondsey Revolution'. Brockway, in his chapter entitled 'Bermondsey's Revolution', wrote: 'It is doubtful whether municipal

history affords a parallel of similar changes either in the actual reforms carried through or in the spirit of the administration.⁶⁰ Jerry White acknowledged: "The achievements of these years were collectively commemorated as "Bermondsey's Revolution".⁶¹ The term 'revolution' does, however, need explanation. It is often used metaphorically (as in 'fashion revolution') but in history it is normally attached to a political event that radically changes the mode of governance or fundamental structure of a state. The 'reign' of the Salters in Bermondsey did exactly that. Their sensational election victories in 1922-1937 were so one-sided that they transformed Bermondsey into a one-party state, though an entirely democratic one. The Liberal and Conservative Parties virtually ceased to exist, not because they were suppressed, but because the Bermondsey population so overwhelmingly approved of what the Salters did, and what they represented.

Even the first step in 1919 had felt like a revolution. Labour (mostly ILP) shot up from no seats to 24, out of 54, and by 1921 it was 28, thanks to Liberal defections. The Labour landslide in 1922 was equally dramatic. Suddenly Labour led by 37 seats to 17. By 1925 the embarrassment of the Liberals in Bermondsey proper was total. They lost all of their seats, and in Rotherhithe they retained only six seats, making the overall score 48-6. This was repeated in 1928 and even in 1931 when Labour collapsed nationally, there was only a slight setback (45-9). Finally, in 1934, all the seats on the council went to Labour, 54 out of 54, a clean sweep, a result crushingly repeated in 1937. This was annihilation for the opposition. Of the council elections in 1937 Brockway wrote: "Three months later the Tory Association in West Bermondsey was wound up, its offices closed and the furniture sold. The West Bermondsey Labour Party had over 3000 members. The Socialist hold on the borough was unchallengeable."⁶²

In 1938 West Bermondsey Labour Party reached a record membership of 3,156 (10 per cent of the electorate, nearly 25 per cent of Labour voters), the highest total per head of population of any Labour Party in the country. Counting the number of activists, Labour in Bermondsey 'had a higher percentage of politically conscious people than any constituency in the country'.⁶³

The unprecedented electoral landslide was not just confined to council elections. By 1928 West Bermondsey, as well as having more women representatives than anywhere else in the country, had become

the first constituency in the country to reach 100% Labour representation. Its MP, its London County Council seats, every seat on the borough council, and every seat on the Board of Guardians were Labour. As the two LCC seats were now held by Ada and Eveline, Bermondsey was also the only LCC constituency represented by two women.

It is true that Alfred's progress as MP was not such a smooth ride, but nonetheless he did in the end, in 1935, achieve the same 'unchallengeable' status. In 1922 he had been elected MP only because the Liberals were split. In 1923, when the Liberals were reunited, and no Conservative candidate stood, the Reverend Kedward beat him. From that time on, however, Alfred could point the voters to the Labour Party record on Bermondsey Council. As a result, when in 1924 there was yet another general election, Alfred was able to win a genuine victory, which he consolidated in May 1929. This election was the first held in Britain on a fully democratic basis since the previous year women had finally been granted the vote on equal terms with men – it had taken only 61 years since John Stuart Mill first raised the matter in 1867. Alfred won a resounding 13,231 votes and, even if the Liberal (on 4,865) and the Conservative (on 3,853) had been united, they could not have caught him. Thereafter, Alfred remained MP for the rest of his life.

The Bermondsey Revolution was a remarkable experiment. Ada believed the council was pioneering a 'New World' of ethical values. Alfred was adamant that Bermondsey prefigured the 'true socialism' that would one day in the future be realised nationally and internationally: 'we are not out merely to make Bermondsey just more tolerable, more habitable. We do not want merely to ensure a rather more comfortable existence for "the working classes". We are out to abolish the working classes as such and to create a classless society ... That is what we mean by Socialism.' Such a society would be a 'co-operative commonwealth', a 'common ownership by the whole people'. All over the country, in the Salters' vision, there would be thousands of guild health services, co-operative bakeries, Fairby Granges and municipal electricity companies, all running ethically but efficiently, and making a profit. Labour's task in Bermondsey was 'to create the ideal city' and prove it worked in practice.⁶⁴

This ideal city was not just economic or legislative, as it was for the Communists to their left or the reformists to their right. When Ada talked about the 'New World' she was referring not simply to owner-

ship, or legal documents, but to a world that glowed with humane values and was morally illumined by the 'redemptive power of beauty'. The task in Bermondsey was not only to prefigure co-operative institutions and social enterprises but to prefigure the new values of a 'true' (humane) socialism, a 'true' (humane) religion and a 'true' (humane) patriotism. Alfred wrote: 'The wealthy manufacturers and wharfingers and the rich shareholders who make their dividends out of Bermondsey's grime and toil, live out on the Surrey Hills and in other pleasant places of the earth'. In contrast, 'we' who live here 'belonging as we do for the most part to the poorest of the poor, will teach the world a lesson in citizenship and patriotism. We will show the nation how a corporate feeling, a zeal for service and the spirit of true neighbourliness can ... transform a borough, made drab and sordid by Capitalism and Landlordism, into a community of healthy, happy and beautiful homes'.⁶⁵

Alfred's 'true patriotism' was not the narrow and exclusive patriotism of the flag-wavers. Bermondsey people were proud of their borough, and would be proud of their country, for its health service, its housing, and its tree-lined streets, which foreigners came to see from all over Europe. In other words, they were proud of its humane values. 'What does Bermondsey's patriotism stand for?', enquired Alfred. Not war. Not jingoism. Not greed for profits. It stood for 'tender solicitude' and 'collective service to all in need'.⁶⁶

Many in the Bermondsey working class were probably just as bemused by Ada's expenditure on cottage housing, marble baths and trees of heaven, as they were about Alfred's temperance, absolute pacifism and Christian evangelism, but they were convinced that Ada and Alfred were acting in their best interests, so they kept voting for them. Alfred's vow to close as many pubs as he could and Ada's lavish expenditure were vote-winners because they proved 'Dr and Mrs Salter' were honest politicians. Their unyielding principles, which enraged the right-wing press, voters found endearing. People also found from experience that the flowers and window-boxes were actually quite nice; that all the concerts, sports facilities and beautiful gardens, intended to keep them out of the pub, were quite enjoyable; and, what is more, the fancy clinics had saved their children's lives, the trade unions had stopped ugly accidents on the docks, and their new flats were much cosier than the old. So they voted for 'Good Old Alf' and 'Good Old Ada', again and again.

By 1934 the Bermondsey Revolution was drawing to its close. In 1929 the Wall Street Crash had unleashed a world economic crisis that led to cutbacks in state spending and mass unemployment. MacDonald's National Government stopped the housing subsidy and left the Salters high and dry, committed to a massive programme of slum-clearance and rehousing but without the money to pay for it. Ada's fund-raising skills were of no avail here; the sums involved were too large. By 1934, Bermondsey Council had been forced to borrow heavily, and was tied down for the remainder of the 1930s by an incapacitating debt.

Nonetheless, the people kept voting Labour and in 1934 and 1937 Labour won every single council seat. It seemed that, whatever the costs, the ethical argument unflinchingly convinced the voters. The booklet, *Twelve Years* (1934), asserts blithely that the Beautification Department 'will cost more still in the future, we hope'. It is hard to imagine any contemporary politician risking such a sentence. By 1934 the argument had clearly been won. The document quotes Ruskin ('there is no wealth but life') and its humanitarianism is stated categorically: 'We believe that considerations of Humanity must come before considerations of Economy.'⁶⁷ End of discussion. The Liberals and Conservatives had no answer to this. The voters were impervious to the argument that they were over-taxed. They knew the tax was high but felt they were getting good value in return for their cash, and beneath that lay their trust in the Salters.

ALFRED AS MP

Alfred's policies did not have the success in Parliament that Ada's had in Bermondsey. His maiden speech, in favour of a minimum wage, was universally acclaimed and he established himself as one of Parliament's most impressive speakers, but from the beginning he was always at odds with the party leadership over his principled stands. In particular his refusal to vote for 'defence estimates' (military spending) was always an irritant. In May 1926, he was fiercely criticised by Labour leaders for his support of the miners' strike and the General Strike. Alfred had led the Bermondsey Labour Party into wholehearted support for the strikers; the Trades Council had formed a Council of Action immediately; and Alfred, while other boroughs dithered, gave strikers access to the Labour Party office, with its

crucial office equipment. Alfred did not like strikes – in fact he wrote, ‘I hate strikes. So, I believe does every sensible person’⁶⁸ – but he felt the miners’ strike and the General Strike in solidarity with the miners were valid strikes. It was the democratic right of organised labour to defend itself if attacked by employers, and in this case the employers were clearly the aggressors.

Bermondsey’s stance brought conflict with the Conservative government. They needed to secure food and fuel supplies in order to defeat the strike but, as Bermondsey refused to co-operate, the government was forced to appoint a retired army captain as ‘Agent for Food and Fuel’ in the area. Worse still for the government’s plans to grind down the strikers, Ada organised free meals for the wives and children of the strikers, as she had in 1912. Such was the confidence she inspired that this time the dockers made her Treasurer of the London Dock Strike Fund, an amazing gesture of respect from an all-male union. Ada and Alfred found the sight of thousands of impoverished Bermondsey workers giving up their own pay, out of solidarity with other workers they did not know, and would never meet, intensely moving. To them the final defeat of the strikers felt like a crucifixion. Alfred wrote passionately: ‘The call to self-sacrifice was obeyed with an alacrity and a readiness that staggered the owning and possessing classes. Not a man or woman in Bermondsey expected to gain a penny for themselves out of the struggle. Every man and woman knew quite definitely that the strike meant personal loss and suffering to themselves and their families ...’. He found a moral beauty in the strike: ‘A transformation of character seemed to be taking place. Small men suddenly became great, mean men became generous, cowardly men became heroes ... The strike was the most Christ-like act on a grand scale since Calvary.’⁶⁹

Naturally, the ILP supported Alfred in all this, but Labour Party leaders, including MacDonald, denounced him for advocating unconstitutional action against the rule of law. Alfred took no heed. Through Cragie he had the council adopt the Welsh mining village of Blaina, in Ebbw Vale, in solidarity with the miners. Bermondsey collected and sent to them £7000 in aid, a huge sum at that time. Alfred himself travelled down to Blaina, went down a coal-mine and donated *all* his MP’s salary for the seven months the miners were out on strike.

Alfred could never cope with internecine strife. As in 1921, he was in conflict with the Labour Party, which he wanted to represent as an MP, and he now developed a heart condition that was to be with him the rest of his life. On Ada's insistence he saw a heart specialist and then took a month's holiday in Switzerland, 'under the palm trees ... beneath the blue heaven'.⁷⁰ His great-niece, Johanna Crawshaw, still has a postcard from Weissenburg that Alfred sent his brother, John, who lived in Herne Hill. Weissenburg was a spa famous all over Europe for its thermal water, said to be curative of chest complaints, and Alfred had been there before for his tuberculosis. Well-off convalescents, such as Ada and Alfred, stayed in an impressive mansion, the Kurhaus, set amidst the stunning scenery of the Simmen Valley. Today only the ruins of the Kurhaus are left, and the curative water can be sampled for free in a hut at Weissenburg station.

To Ada's deep concern, it was not long before Alfred was embroiled in controversy yet again, this time in Parliament itself. In October 1926, he happened to be addressing the annual meeting of the Golden Stream Lodge of the Good Templars, a temperance organisation, and he criticised the presence of a bar in his workplace, the House of Commons. The press quoted him as saying: 'I have seen many members drunk in the House of Commons, and I am sorry to say no party is exempt.' Reporters besieged his house and Ada remonstrated with him: 'Whatever dreadful thing have you been saying?'⁷¹ Alfred thought his point was perfectly reasonable: it was not normal for either factory workers or office workers to have a bar, selling alcohol, at work.

Many MPs were furious. Alfred was immediately arraigned for bringing Parliament into disrepute and was summoned before the House of Commons for his 'trial'. He could be fined or expelled from Parliament, or, in theory, even imprisoned. Denouncing a world war or supporting a General Strike was one thing, but this was serious. Churchill and Lloyd-George, no less, no doubt anticipating sweet revenge, lined up to speak against him, and the house was packed with MPs. But Alfred refused to apologise and pointed out that if they took the matter further he would be forced, much against his will, to name those MPs he and others had witnessed drunk in the House. This had a calming, one might say sobering, effect on the MPs who had been denouncing his outrageous behaviour. Alfred was found guilty of the charge against him, but no further action was taken.

Alfred's failure as an MP was only partly due to his uncompromising personality and declining health. The chief reason was the disintegration of the ILP. The Labour Party constitution of 1918 had undermined the ILP's separate existence, as individuals could now join the Labour Party directly. Moreover, once the vote had been won for working-class men and women in 1918-28, there was no longer a historical necessity for the ILP, which had been formed to represent the working class, both men and women, in Parliament. True, it looked at first as if the ILP would survive. At the 1922 general election the majority of Labour MPs were still ILP members. Under the leadership of Clifford Allen (Chair, 1923-26) the ILP grew in strength, its relationship with the Labour Party stabilised, and it incorporated Cole's 'Guild Socialism', a belief in industry being run democratically by co-operative guilds. Allen also put the funds of the ILP on a sound basis, securing donations from George Cadbury, some other Quakers, and a few rich individuals (including Oswald Mosley). The result was that in the period 1922-25 'the ILP reached the pinnacle of its success'.⁷² However, after his initial success, Allen began to struggle. The ILP was moving to the left while the Labour Party was moving in the opposite direction. According to Ammon the ILP was effectively finished in 1924, when Labour formed its first government and the new Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, declared socialism not on the agenda.⁷³

The problem for the ILP was that in 1920 the British Communist Party had been founded, and the ILP was from then on squeezed politically between the Communist Party on its left, funded by Moscow, and the Labour Party on its right, funded by the trade unions. When new leaders (Brockway, Maxton, Wheatley) took over the ILP they started to move closer to the Communists, and the Salters were increasingly torn between MacDonald, tacking to the right, and Maxton (Chair of the ILP, 1926-31) tacking to the left. Thus, in 1928, when Maxton signed a manifesto, also signed by Willie Gallacher of the Communist Party, declaring all-out war against capitalism, and did this without first consulting the ILP members, Alfred denounced Maxton's undemocratic behaviour. In an intemperate letter published in *New Leader*, he warned the party they were in danger of degenerating 'into a little rump of "rebels" and quasi-communists', led by 'a pirate chief'.⁷⁴

Once again Alfred had involved himself in a stressful internal dispute, and in June 1929 he became so ill again, both physically and

mentally, that Ada took him off to Devon and forbade him to mention one word about politics for two months. This breakdown was so serious that, after his return, he decided to give up first his medical practice and then in 1930 his aldermanic seat on Bermondsey Council. He continued as the dominant political figure in Bermondsey but in the 1930s he was no longer the force he once had been

It might have been better for Alfred if he had ceased to be an MP. Outside Parliament, Ada had been able to achieve more. He had no influence as a backbencher, and he laughed out loud when someone suggested he might be made a minister by MacDonald: 'I'm too awkward a person to be a Minister. I would bow my knee to no one except my Maker'.⁷⁵ At a dinner he told his fellow-doctors that he 'regarded himself as a failure' in his parliamentary work. Many other revolutionaries and reformers have struggled with the same dilemma. In 1935 the ethical socialist, Richard Tawney, rejected the offer of a safe seat on the calculation that he could do more outside Parliament than inside; Peckham councillor Ruth Dalton believed she could help the socialist cause more as Chair of Parks on the LCC than as an MP; and, famously, Tony Benn later declared that he was retiring as an MP in order to have more time for politics.

Meanwhile the disintegration of the ILP continued, and the crunch came in 1930, when MacDonald was again Prime Minister. Maxton wanted the Labour government to put forward in Parliament the ILP's left-wing programme. Their ploy was that, as soon as it was defeated (as it would be) Labour would call a general election and put the programme to the people. Voters would then have a socialist choice, instead of a choice only between capitalist parties. Alfred pooh-poohed all this, and called the 'antics' of Maxton 'silly and childish'. MacDonald was making cuts of which Alfred did not approve, but he had also introduced several useful progressive measures. Maxton's appeal for full socialism at such a juncture was 'unworkable'. Even if the programme were voted for, by some fluke, it would be undemocratic to impose it. Of the 25 million voters, said Alfred, only 8 million voted Labour, and of those probably only 4 million, at most, were convinced socialists. How could Maxton impose a socialist programme on a country which did not have anything like a socialist majority?⁷⁶

Alfred called a meeting in Parliament of the MPs who owed allegiance to the ILP in order to win their support against Maxton's

'infantile' tactics. Maxton called a counter-meeting at which he ruled that MPs in the ILP must follow his policy since it had been voted for at annual conference. When the dissident MPs led by Alfred refused, Maxton, supported by Brockway, ruled they could no longer be members of the parliamentary ILP: 'Salter left this meeting broken-hearted. The ILP had been much more than a political party to him. It had been a great human crusade and he had known in it a fellowship of kindred souls which was more precious to him than anything in life.' It had always been ILP policy never to expel anybody, but now he was excluded, and 'it hurt him to the depths'.⁷⁷

Worse was to come. Perhaps to counter his low spirits Alfred decided in 1931 to accompany another doctor, Somerville Hastings (prominent in the Socialist Medical Association), on a tour of the Soviet Union, which had recently been granted diplomatic recognition by the MacDonald government. He was fascinated by Russia, and was weighing the gains in health, housing and education against the disturbing lack of individual freedom, when he had to rush back to London. Because of the financial crisis, MacDonald had been under pressure from the bankers to impose drastic cuts in wages, unemployment benefit and social services. Despite advice from economists such as Keynes that he should instead increase public spending and perhaps devalue the pound, MacDonald supported the cuts and formed a 'National Government' with the Liberals and Conservatives. Alfred reached London in time to cast his vote against MacDonald and expel him from the Labour Party.

For Ada and Alfred the criterion was, as always, a humanitarian one. The cuts would inflict suffering on thousands of people; therefore, they were wrong. Inhumane means cannot be justified by any future end. The future is never calculable, and they lied who said it was. What mattered was the human suffering under your own control, within your own responsibility, here and now. That was the essence of ethical socialism. Curiously, this echoed the hedonistic approach of Keynes, which decried the puritanical idea of sacrifices now for a long term gain.

Yet, had they not supported 'right-wing' MacDonald against Maxton and Brockway? How could they, who opposed the right wing of the Labour Party, have made such a mistake? There were two reasons. First of all, they had not regarded MacDonald as right-wing. Because of his anti-war stand in 1914, they had believed he was a left-

wing socialist. The second reason ran deeper. Ada had personal ties with the MacDonalds because of the tragic deaths of David, Joyce and Margaret. As late as 1930 she was inviting Ishbel, MacDonald's daughter, to speak in Bermondsey.

Alfred was now in danger, faced by a general election called for October. Would the public vote for the Labour Party, which opposed the cuts in public expenditure that would harm the needy, or would it vote for the National Government that was imposing the cuts at the direction of the bankers? The result was unbelievable to Ada and Alfred. The country voted for cuts. In all of London only three Labour MPs retained their seats: Alfred, Attlee and Lansbury. In Bermondsey, Alfred had quite a scare. He was up against a Conservative given a free run by the Liberals, and a Communist (Wal Hannington, leader of the Unemployed Workers Movement and a close associate of Brockway) and scraped in by only 91 votes (10,039 votes to the Conservative's 9,948 and Hannington's 883).

Nationally MacDonald's coalition won 554 seats to Labour's 52. The voters, aroused by calls to patriotism, voted for cuts to themselves. It was 1914 all over again. The opponents of austerity (Bevin, Keynes, Mosley, Tawney) were drowned out by the clamour of the jingo press.

There was one final twist of the knife in the self-destruction of the ILP. In 1932 the ILP decided to break with Labour completely by disaffiliating. When the Bermondsey ILP branch voted to remain affiliated to Labour, it thereby broke with the ILP altogether. This was as heart-breaking for Ada as for Alfred. The ILP had been her political home for even longer than Alfred, ever since she had co-founded the Women's Labour League with Margaret MacDonald in 1906. The ILP was the party that supported ethical socialism; it was full of comrades they had loved and ideals they had worked for.

From 1929 onwards Alfred had become increasingly depressed. Ada did not have such problems. She passed with apparent serenity through the death throes of the 'old ILP', though her views were as passionately held as his. This was partly because she was chalking up success after success in Bermondsey, creating the prototype of her 'New World', while he was faction-fighting in Parliament, and partly because she believed in purity of motive. Ada always came to Alfred's rescue, says Brockway, by drumming into him her life-long motto: 'Act according to truth and principle. If one does, there is no need to

be anxious or distraught.⁷⁸ She also held, with George Perris, the optimistic belief that history moved, over the long term, in favour of humanitarian progress. Ultimately, it did not matter to her what cuts were imposed by traitors like MacDonald, or what wars the warmongers like Churchill dragged the country into. Cuts and wars, though horrific, were transitory. In her mission to get rid of the slums, fight for peace, and spread beauty, history was on her side. If the Bermondsey Revolution had now stalled, and the ILP had disintegrated, there were still many alternative routes that could be pursued.

NOTES

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