

A detailed analysis of the
Plymouth Sutton Constituency
Labour Party in the 1950s

HIST362 History Dissertation

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Student Number: 10332015

Word Count: 11,774

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Glossary of Abbreviations for Footnotes

PCLP: Plymouth Central Labour Party.

PLLOY (Plymouth League): Plymouth Labour League of Youth.

PSCLP: Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party.

PSCLP SC: Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party Social Committee.

WEH: Western Evening Herald.

WMN: Western Morning News.

Introduction

'Building a firm and permanent parliamentary majority in a marginal constituency is for the most part a slow and unspectacular process. It is the sum total of methodical endeavour by many people day in, day out.'¹ The Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party was active in supporting the election of Labour representatives throughout the period. This comprehensive examination of the institutions, support and interactions of the party will study the developments in a marginal constituency that was geographically distant from the Labour heartlands.

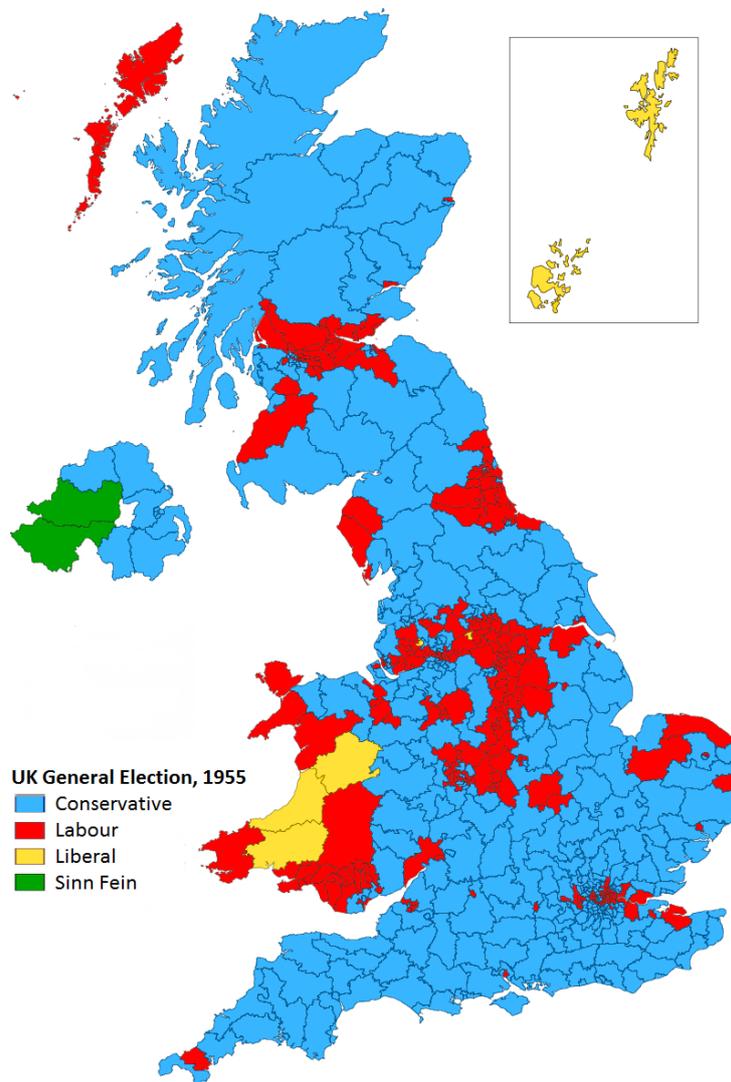


Figure 1 - 1955 General Election results map, showing the distance of Plymouth from the majority of Labour held seats.²

¹ PSCLP 1957 Annual Report, (p.2).

² 'z-election_1955_final.png' in *uk general election maps* < http://wiki.alternatehistory.com/lib/exe/detail.php/resources/z-election_1955_final.png?id=resources%3Auk_general_election_maps > [accessed 24/04/2015].

Due to the difficulty in finding primary sources the historical study of local party politics is a small field. Cohen, Flynn and Mate's study of the South Lewisham Labour Party between 1948-71 successfully documents one of 'Labour's largest constituency part[ies]' in its era. Their discussion of the institutions, policies and wards is the starting point for this study. This dissertation recreates the party institutions to display the discussions in context. It is intended to provide the basis for future study into constituency parties.³

Previously un-accessed primary material of the Labour Party in Plymouth provides the foundation for this work. The remarkably well preserved minute books have been kindly provided by the Plymouth Sutton and Devonport Labour Party, who have since donated them to the Plymouth and West Devon Record office.⁴ It should be noted that the only limitation imposed has been archival survival, the minute books cover April 1950-December 1958 with other committee minutes have rarely survived. This study focuses upon the period between the 1951 and the 1959 general elections.

This dissertation uses a number of photographs and newspapers articles. The newspapers utilised are the *Western Morning News* and *Western Evening Herald*. Both were local daily newspapers and accessed on microfilm at the Plymouth Central Library. The newspapers were the two main local papers for the constituency and had the same owner.⁵ Unfortunately despite emailing, access could not be gained to *The War in Plymouth*, a local oral history project on the effect of World War Two on Plymouth.⁶

³ Gidon Cohen, Andrew Flinn & Lewis Mates, 'Political Culture and the Post-War Labour Party: Values, Practices and Activism in South Lewisham Labour Party, 1948-71' *Socialist History*, 32,(2008), 59-83.

⁴ Luke Pollard, 'Luke and Alison donate Plymouth Labour's archives to the city', in *News* <http://www.lukepollard.org/luke_and_alison_donate_plymouth_labour_s_archives_to_the_the_city> [accessed 26 March 2015]. All of these are now accessible at: 'Plymouth Labour Party', Plymouth, *Plymouth and West Devon Record Office*, 667

⁵ James Mildren, *100 Years of the Evening Herald*,(St Teath: Bossiney Books, 1994), pp.5-6.

⁶ 'The War in Plymouth' in *The Word Machine* < <http://thewordmachine.org/portfolio-item/the-war-in-plymouth/> > [accessed 17/02/2015].

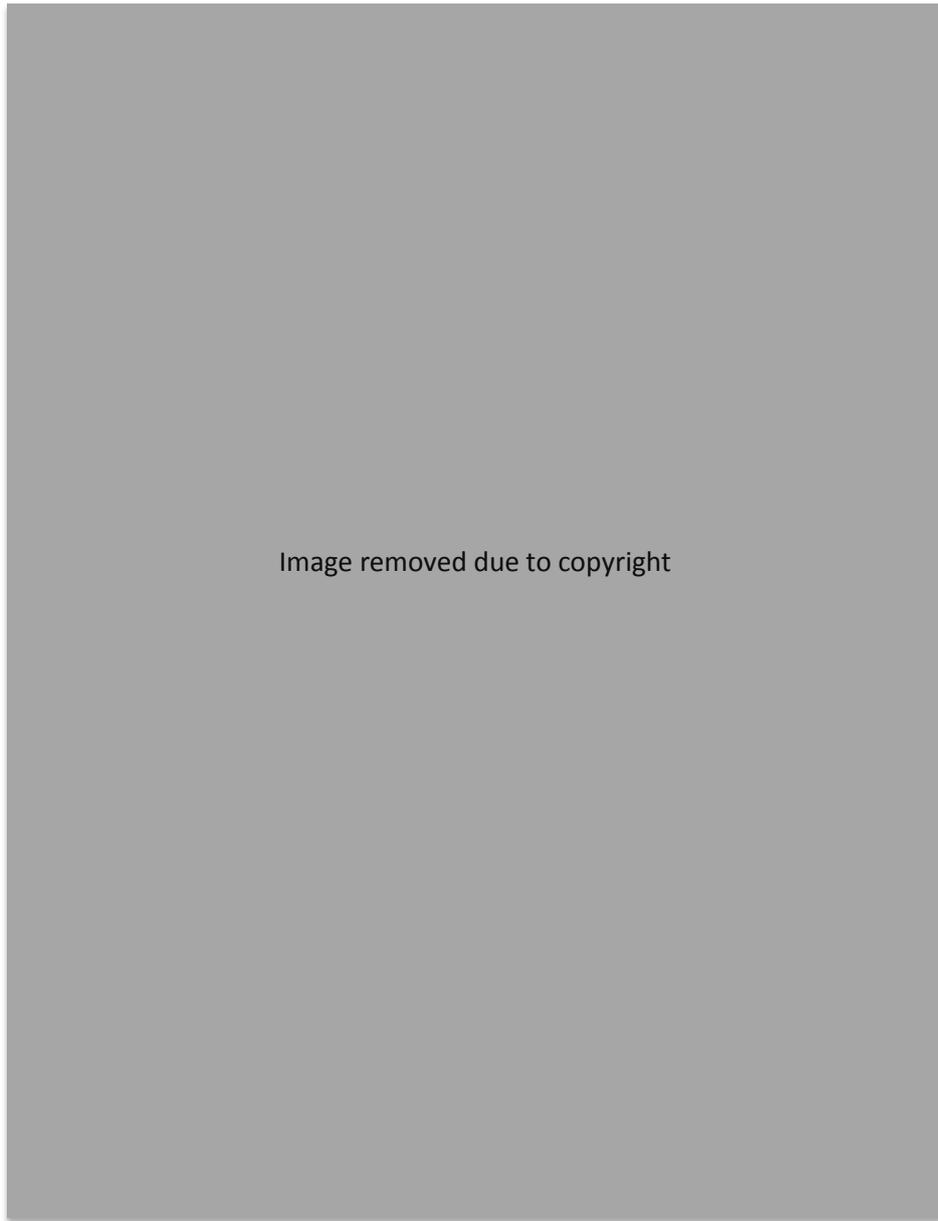


Figure 2 - Example page from Minute Books.⁷

The demographics of Plymouth in the 1950s are crucial to understanding the politics of the city. The constituency relied upon the Devonport Dockyard for a significant amount of employment, despite being located outside of the constituency boundaries. The dockyard employed at least 19,000 workers for the entire period.⁸ The need to diversify the local economy was acknowledged in reaction to the reduction in defence spending after the

⁷ PSCLP 28.1.1953,(p.1).

⁸ Paul Bishop, *The Role of Defence in a local economy: the case of Plymouth*,(Plymouth: Plymouth Business School, 1986), p.7.

World War Two. This was unsuccessful as few other sources of investment were secured for the city.⁹

Plymouth was a marginal city with Labour enjoying a clean sweep in 1945. This was followed by the loss of the seats by 1955, with Plymouth Sutton returning a Conservative in 1951. The local elections were better for the Labour Party; they led the council between 1953 and 1959. Psephologists consider class affiliation to be the central attribute to separate Labour and Conservative voters in this era; Labour secured ninety-one percent of the working-class votes while the middle-class backed Conservatives.¹⁰ It is crucial to understand the reasons for the lack of expected endorsement for Labour by an apparently working-class industrial city. Thorpe explained that this was a result of a strong middle-class vote, supplemented by a working-class vote affected by the military. Thorpe calculated that the middle class and military employees in Plymouth made 39.3 per cent of the electorate.¹¹ As a result of the naval base Plymouth was not a Labour safe haven but two marginal constituencies.

During this period the national Labour Party was more focused upon internal disputes than showing leadership. Despite the ending of the formal Bevanite group by 1952 the left wing of the party was unwilling to compromise until 1956 when Bevan joined Gaitskell's shadow cabinet. This rebellion was endorsed by many constituencies. This is commonly considered to have harmed the electoral chances of the party.¹²

This work analyses four aspects of the constituency party, the management structure, representation, its interaction with other local political bodies and its relationship with the national Labour Party.

⁹ Paul Bishop, 'Defence, the dockyard and diversification' in *Plymouth Maritime City in Transition*, ed. by Brian Chalkley, David Dunkerley and Peter Gripaios, (Plymouth: Polytechnic South West, 1991), pp. 95-106, (p.100).

¹⁰ Kevin Hickson, 'The Postwar Consensus Revisited' *The Political Quarterly*, 75, 2,,(2004), 142-154,,(p.143); Denis Kavanagh, 'Debate: The Postwar Consensus' *Twentieth Century British History*, 3, 2,(1992), 175-190,(p.184); Duncan Fraser, 'The Postwar Consensus: A Debate not long enough?' *Parliamentary Affairs*, 53, 2,(2000), 347-362,(p.348); *Tribune*, 28 December 1951, quoted in Steven Fielding, *The Labour Party; 'Socialism and society since 1951*,(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.32.

¹¹ Andrew Thorpe, 'One of the Most Backward Areas of the Country: The Labour Party's Grass Roots in South West England, 1918-1945' in, *Labour's grass roots: essays on the activities and experiences of local labour parties and members, 1918-45* ed. by M. Worley,(Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), pp.216-239,,(p.217).

¹² Nick Tiratsoo 'Labour and the electorate', in *Labour's first century* ed. by D. Tanner, P. Thane and N. Tiratsoo,,(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000),pp.281-308(p.284).

Chapter 1 – Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party management structure

The Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party had a complex system of committees and officials. The party had an Executive Committee (EC), a General Management Committee (GMC), a Social Committee, a Propaganda Committee, several Women's Sections, a League of Youth, and nine or ten wards each with their own committees.¹ The constituency had other subcommittees that faded in and out of existence during the period. It annually elected a group of between six and thirteen officers. The minute books of the Executive and General Management Committees have been extensively used in this study; occasionally League of Youth and Social Committee minutes have been utilised.

The Executive Committee was responsible for the regular running of the constituency and met monthly. Admittance was permitted by election only. The executive consisted of: two elected representatives from each ward, the full time agent, four trade union representatives,² one from each Women's Section, one from the Propaganda Committee, the Social Committee, and the League of Youth representation.³

The EC had regular attendance of around twenty, out of a possible forty. The executive had responsibility for listening to the subcommittees, wards, sections and trade unions. This task was achieved in two ways. Firstly through the regular committee reports of activity, secondly, the through submitted resolutions which were approved or denied by the EC. These resolutions were of huge importance to the party as they ensured that executive was responsive to the members. These resolutions varied from the criticism of 'the non-attendance of councillors' to an invitation (in June 1958) to the parliamentary candidate to 'discuss his public statements on the H-Bomb'.⁴ Resolutions were then passed on to the GMC if deemed necessary to gain membership approval. The 'non-attendance of councillors' was approved without the need for the GMC and the resolution was sent to the local Councillors and the Central party.⁵ The resolution regarding the candidate's comments

¹ This essay refers to the phrase 'League of Youth' or 'the League' to mean the representative body for the under 21 year old members of PSCLP for the entire period not simply up until 1955, when it was replaced with the Youth Section.

² PSCLP 28.1.1953,(p.1).

³ PSCLP 27.1.1954,(p.1).

⁴ PSCLP 20.6.1955,(p.2); PSCLP 18.6.1958,(p.3).

⁵ PSCLP 20.6.1955,(p.2).

about the H-Bomb was handed to the GMC, which organised a meeting.⁶ These sources confirm Matthew Worley's conclusion that constituencies were meant to be machines not debating classes. Discussions were focused on the implementation of structures and events not for entertainment or sport.⁷

Arguably the most important job of the EC was to ensure that the constituency was financially solvent, its meetings began with a finance report.⁸ As the overseers of the constituency the executive played an important managerial role allowing the wards, sections, subcommittees and candidates to have the freedom from mundane administrative decisions to act proactively for the party.

The General Management Committee was a meeting that all constituency members were invited to attend, usually held on the penultimate Wednesday of the month. Its main responsibility was ensure the EC's decisions were acceptable. The GMC agenda was written by the executive the week before. The GMC meetings were structured around the minutes of the last EC meeting, with their reading the first item on the agenda. This allowed the GMC to validate any resolutions passed by the EC. Resolutions were only allowed to be put before the GMC before EC approval if considered 'items of emergency.'⁹ The GMC was a bridge to the general members of the constituency. As a result the GMC held the AGM and any other meeting or vote that needed democratic approval, such as the approval of the parliamentary candidate.¹⁰

The constituency had between six and thirteen elected officers, elected at the AGMs. Admittance to the AGMs was granted upon membership to the party and every attendee was given a vote. The regular positions were: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary and two Auditors. The positions of Financial, Social and Propaganda Secretary were also commonly used in the first half of the decade, but faded by the end. Their disappearance was due to these roles being adopted by committees. It became the responsibility of these committees to elect their own representative to attend the executive's meetings.

⁶ PSCLP 1.7.1958,(p.1+2).

⁷ Matthew Worley, *Labour inside the Gate; A history of the British Labour Party between the Wars*,(London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), p.87.

⁸ For example PSCLP 20.6.1955,(p.5).

⁹ PSCLP 7.2.1955,(p.1).

¹⁰ PSCLP 28.3.1956,(p.1-5).

In November 1951 it was moved and accepted at the GMC meeting that party employ a 'full time agent'. This move had the predicted annual cost of £300 rising to £475 by 1955.¹¹ The financial considerations of such an appointment were considerable as the constituency would only have an income of £1358 for 1952.¹² The National Executive Committee of the Labour Party (NEC) had championed the use of unpaid volunteers rather than paid agents.¹³ However they helped the constituency financially by covering a quarter of the cost for the first year.¹⁴ The agent, Mr Alf Sweetland, would turn out to be a vital part of constituency for the remainder of the period; he took on many roles including elected positions and the editorship of *Sound Opinion*, its magazine. Sweetland's reluctant acceptance of the editorial responsibility reflects his willingness to take onerous jobs in the interest of the party.¹⁵

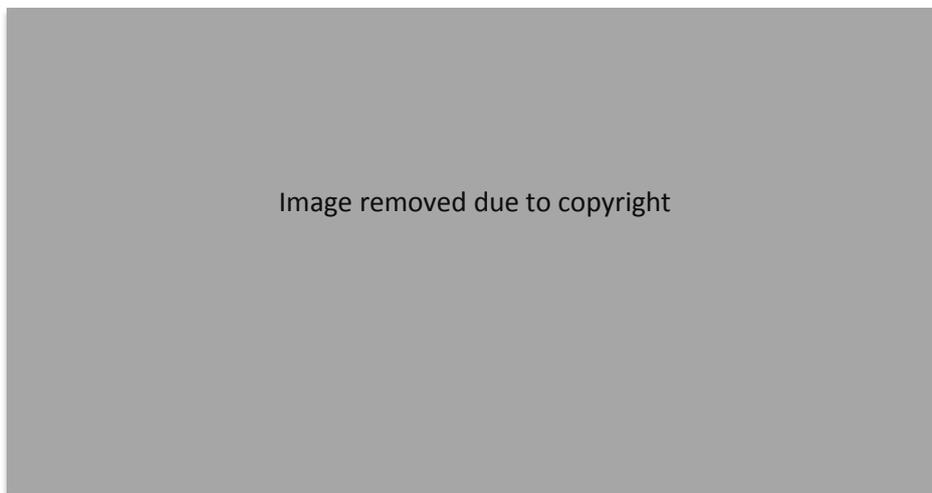


Figure 3 - The PSCLP agent Alf Sweetland.¹⁶

¹¹ PSCLP 9.11.1951,(p.1).

¹² PSCLP 28.1.1953,(p.1).

¹³ Kevin Jefferys, *Politics and the people: a history of British democracy since 1918*,(London: Atlantic, 2007), p.138.

¹⁴ PSCLP 9.11.1951,(p.1).

¹⁵ PSCLP 21.8.1956,(p.1).

¹⁶ 'Lack of Garden drove Alf into Socialist camp' *WEH* 15 January 1959, p.8.

Chapter 2 - Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party and its representation

The Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party was experienced in different ways by different groups. To understand the structure and power of the organisation, it is crucial to understand: the membership of the party, the trade union involvement, and the representation of women and youth.

Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party and its membership

The overall membership of the party is clear from the membership reports given to the Executive Committee (EC). The national membership of the Labour Party reached its highest ever point in 1952 with over one million members.¹ Plymouth Sutton had its membership peak at 2361 in 1955. This was due to the inclusion of a tenth ward; the average membership per ward stayed stable.² The membership total endorses Caldiera et al's conclusion that the most politically active areas were where politics was at its most competitive.³ Worley, by contrast, has argued that the least winnable seats had the most active memberships with the safest constituencies the least active.⁴ Plymouth Sutton was a marginal seat and it had high membership totals; in 1953 the membership was the tenth largest in the South West.⁵ The minimum threshold for membership was raised to 800 in 1956 and while many constituencies were fell below this level Plymouth Sutton's membership stood at 2308.⁶

The constituency changed the method of its membership calculation in 1956. The pre-1956 way, was based on the number of membership cards returned by each ward. The ward would be sent a pre-determined number of membership cards and once the unused cards were returned to the party the number of members could be calculated. This system was replaced by 'a recorded index of party membership throughout the division'.⁷ By 1957

¹ Duncan Tanner, 'Labour and its membership', in *Labour's first century* ed. by D. Tanner, P. Thane and N. Tiratsoo,,(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000),pp.248-280,(p.249).

² PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.12).

³ G. A. Caldeira, S.C. Patterson and G. A. Markko, 'The mobilization of voters in congressional Elections' *Journal of Politics*, 47,,(1985), 490-509(p.507).

⁴ Matthew Worley, *Labour inside the Gate; A history of the British Labour Party between the Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008).p.96.

⁵ PSCLP 27.7.1953,(p.5).

⁶ Tanner, 'Labour and its membership' p.250; PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.12).

⁷ PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.12).

the party declared it, 'now possesses a full and complete record of ... membership in street & Polling District order'.⁸ This new approach resulted in some EC minutes having pages of membership documents attached. These were entitled 'Canvassing in Polling Districts' and detailed individuals, by address and commented on the possibility of them joining the party, from 'call back to collect forms' to 'worth trying'.⁹ This increase in data shows the constituency modernising their canvassing techniques, to prepare for more targeted and efficient campaigning at election time.¹⁰ The minutes fail to support Shaw's conclusion that the Labour Party of the period had strict discipline, restricting those associated with extremist beliefs, by showing no evidence of any expulsions.¹¹

While it is insightful to look at the total membership level of the constituency it should be tempered with reference to the active membership. While membership totals show that the party was able to gain support and members this could have been partly due to the constituency taking the unusual step of paying membership dues' collectors a commission.¹² The active involvement of the members was limited with the average attendance at AGMs being fractionally over 60. The eagerly anticipated election year of 1955 saw a raised attendance of 83.¹³ When it is acknowledged that the AGMs dictated the direction of the party for the next year, through the election of officers, this lack of attendance shows a lack of engagement by the majority of the membership.

Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party and its trade unions

Trade unions were heavily represented in the party throughout the period. The unions were well represented at meetings and were treated the same as the wards. For example seventeen out of fifty-six attendees of the 1956 AGM were trade union members.¹⁴ Only in 1955 did the unions struggle to fill their four allotted positions on the EC.¹⁵

⁸ PSCLP 30.1.1957,(p.6).

⁹ PSCLP 19.9.1956,(p.5-9).

¹⁰ Martin Rosenbaum, *From Soapbox to Soundbite; Party Political Campaigning in Britain since 1945*,(Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p.224.

¹¹ Eric Shaw, *Discipline and Discord: Politics of Managerial Control in the Labour Party, 1951-86*,(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p.51.

¹² PSCLP 3.11.1955,(p.1); Gidon Cohen, Andrew Flinn & Lewis Mates, 'Political Culture and the Post-War Labour Party: Values, Practices and Activism in South Lewisham Labour Party, 1948-71' *Socialist History*, 32,(2008), 59-83.

¹³ PSCLP 23.2.1955,(p.1).

¹⁴ PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.1).

¹⁵ PSCLP 7.2.1955,(p.4).

At a national level during the 1950s trade union affiliation was seen as a counterbalance to the left wing idealists of the party. For example the left considered a national wage policy a political issue to the disagreement of the unions.¹⁶ At the constituency level this balance is hard to ascertain due to the trade unions' lack of engagement in policy. The party did defend the rights of an individual to freely associate with a trade union; in 1955 it condemned the disciplining of a fireman for his trade union affiliation.¹⁷ One of the common ways that unions ensured influence in localities was through providing money for election campaigns.¹⁸ In all of the documents analysed there has been no evidence of this, with no yearly fee from unions nor any one-off donations noted. This lack of monetary endorsement was not necessarily bad for the party, with the strict rules on party funding coupled with the public's predominantly negative view of trade unions.¹⁹

The constituency had fourteen separate affiliated trade unions and a total of twenty-two branches.²⁰ It is imperative to not only look at the quantitative data but also the qualitative, to see the amount of influence they commanded. At the 1952 AGM, two of the four elected trade union officials were sitting Councillors.²¹ It was not uncommon for Plymouth councillors to have a background in trade unionism, as Councillor William Miller had.²² But these two Councillors, Perry and Hatherley, would have had the opportunity to secure great influence for the year by being members of the constituency executive, ward party, Plymouth City Council, its Labour group and their respective trade unions.

The trade unions undoubtedly had an impact on the party during the period, it would have been unavoidable given their proportion of the active membership. However,

¹⁶ David Howell, 'Shut your Gob! The Trade Unions and the Labour Party' in *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, The Post-War Compromise, 1945-64*, ed. by Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman and John McIlroy, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 117-144, (pp. 136+139).

¹⁷ PSCLP 20.1.1955, (p.2).

¹⁸ Tanner, 'Labour and its membership' pp.249-250.

¹⁹ More people blamed the Trade Unions for the cost of living increase in the late 1950s than blamed the Conservative government. Rosenbaum, *From Soapbox to Soundbite ...* p.223; G. H. Gallup, (ed.), *The Gallup international Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain 1937-1975 Volume 1 1937-1964*, (New York: Random House, 1976), p.428 Quoted in Stephen Brooke, 'Labour and the Nation' in *Party, State and Society* ed. by Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor, (Aldershot: Scolar, 1997) pp.153-175, (p.166).

²⁰ PSCLP 25.1.1956, (p.1).

²¹ PSCLP 30.1.1952, (p.4+5).

²² Jonathan Wood, *William Miller: Black Activist in the Plymouth Labour Party from the early 1920s to 1970*, (London: Labour Heritage, 2006), p.5.

due to the active incorporation of trade unions into every section of the organisation it is hard to separate them from the other members to view their influence.

Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party and women

Martin Francis claims that the Labour Party was a 'vehicle for a broader project of emancipation which emphasised human dignity for all, irrespective not only of class, but also of sex.'²³ The constituency had a couple of prominent active women and up to four active Women's Sections in the period.

The Sutton party valued Women's Section as equal to the wards. This can be seen by their two elected members on the executive and equal representation on all other committees.²⁴ The national female voting trend was against the Labour Party in the 1950s, with Conservatives having a thirteen percentage lead in 1955.²⁵ But this does not represent the grass roots with the constituency having up to five Women's Sections. Three of these sections were as active as wards in hosting monthly meetings.²⁶ According to the AGM report of 1952 the Women's Sections 'played their part and had canvassed 8' out of 9 wards.²⁷ The sections were heavily involved in constituency social activities, a fact noted by many of the AGM reports. The sections were also frequently involved with fundraising being regularly involved in the Christmas bazaar. The bazaar and other socials' financial contribution to the party may have been minimal but the contribution to morale is undeniable. Women were integral to the smooth running of the constituency in the period.

The representation of the women as elected officers over the period was very low, with only seventeen percent of the sixty nine elected officers being female. This statistic should be questioned as it includes Councillors and Aldermen who had an advantage due to their position. Excluding Councillors and Aldermen seventy percent of the elections for officials were won by male candidates. Through the eight years of the AGMs documented the Chairman was female only once. It is interesting to note that Mrs Jolly was referred to as the 'Chairman'.²⁸ The trade union representatives did not include a single woman. The 1955

²³ Martin Francis, 'Labour and Gender', in *Labour's first century* ed. by D. Tanner, P. Thane and N. Tiratsoo,,(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000),pp. 191-220,(p.191).

²⁴ PSCLP 31.1.1951,(p.1-3).

²⁵ Francis, 'Labour and Gender', p.207.

²⁶ PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.30).

²⁷ PSCLP 30.1.1952,(p.2).

²⁸ PSCLP 31.1.1951,(p.3).

membership report shows that 1161 members were female, forty five percent of the membership - a relatively high proportion compared to both elected officials and national vote share for the Labour Party.²⁹

Arguably the most prominent public face of the constituency until March 1956 was Lucy Middleton. Middleton was the MP for Plymouth Sutton until her defeat in 1951. She remained as parliamentary candidate until 28 March 1956 when she applied for re-nomination but lost to Julian Richards by 40 percent of the vote.³⁰ She paid the price for the 2.8 percent reduction in votes in 1955. She was an influential national figure through her husband who was General Secretary of the Labour Party until 1944.³¹ The constituency was supported by opinion polls from the era which showed that 'the British electorate claimed that ... they would vote for the parties ... regardless of the candidates' gender'.³² It shows the party and the electorate to be very progressive that they got a female MP elected when it was highly unusual. In 1950 Mrs Middleton was one of only fourteen female Labour MPs and one of only twenty female MPs of any party.³³

²⁹ PSCLP 27.7.1955,(p.6).

³⁰ PSCLP 28.3.1956,(p.1).

³¹ June Hannam, 'Middleton, Lucy Annie' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* < <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/70446> > [accessed 21/03/2015].

³² Jorgen Rasmussen, 'The Electoral Costs of Being a Woman in the 1979 British General Election' *Comparative Politics*, 15, 4,(1983), 461-475,,(p.461).

³³ Richard Keen and Richard Cracknell, 'Women in Parliament and Government', *Social & General Statistics Section*, SN01250, 23 March 2015. Downloaded from < <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/SN01250/women-in-parliament-and-government> > [accessed 27 March 2015].

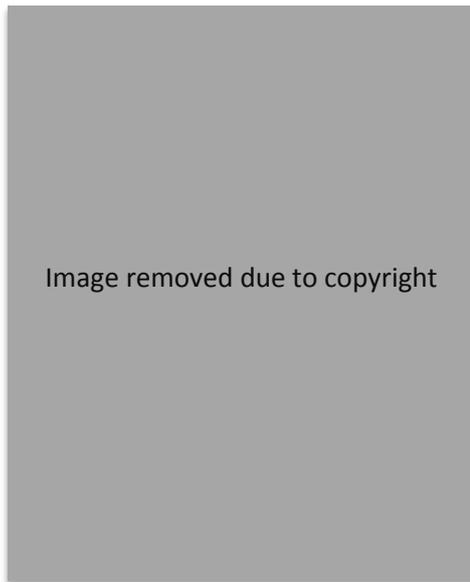


Figure 4 - Lucy Middleton.³⁴

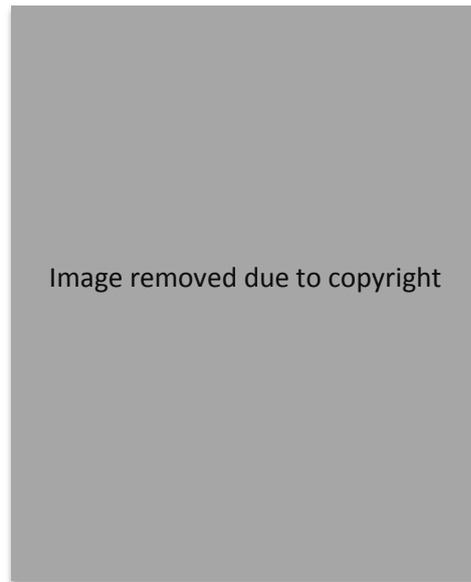


Figure 5 – Julian Richards.³⁵

The Plymouth Sutton organisation may be viewed as a moderately good constituency party in relation to female input in the 1950s, judged by Women's Section representation but not in relation to leadership, despite the presence of Lucy Middleton as MP then candidate.

Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party and youth

In 1945 Plymouth Drake Constituency Labour Party attempted to start a League of Youth (League). The Drake party had trouble in attracting enough members to make the venture worthwhile, so the invitation was opened to all Plymouthian youth.³⁶ The Plymouth Labour League of Youth (Plymouth League) struggled through until 1955.³⁷ The Sutton constituency invited a representative from the local party's youth on to the Propaganda Committee and double to the EC throughout the period.³⁸ The destination of this invitation changed in 1955 when the NEC disbanded the League of Youth 'opting instead to integrate Youth Sections within local parties'.³⁹ The first half of the 1950s was difficult for the Plymouth League as it struggled to supply three members to the constituency committees. Compared to the national trend the Plymouth League was exemplary simply by surviving

³⁴ 'Former City Labour MP dies at 89' *WEH*, 11 November 1983, p.9.

³⁵ PSCLP 'Sound Opinion' December 1957,(p.2).

³⁶ PLLOY 1.7.1945,(p.1).

³⁷ PLLOY 'Historical Preamble,(pp.1-13).

³⁸ PSCLP 31.1.1951,(p.1).

³⁹ Kevin Jefferys, *Politics and the people: a history of British democracy since 1918*,(London: Atlantic, 2007),p.138.

until the death of the national League, from 800 branches in 1951 only 237 were active by 1955.⁴⁰

The Plymouth League minute books between September 1949 and February 1950 allow an insight into the work completed and issues faced. The League was beholden to Plymouth Central Party on financial matters and struggled to put on events throughout this eight month period. The sources do agree with Worley's conclusions that League branches were discouraged from discussing policies and 'wheeled out in election battles, but surplus to requirements in between times.'⁴¹ One repeated success of the League was the sale of *Tribune* copies.⁴² The Youth Section reported that in its first year of existence it was 'fairly small in numbers [but] is quite active and represented in all of the Constituency Committees'.⁴³ The change from the Plymouth League to Youth Section removed the youth from any Central party involvement. The constituency had an active youth movement. This can be partially attributed to the Plymouth League covering multiple constituencies, but after 1955 the youth section remained active showing that an active young organisation could be successfully maintained within the party.

The Plymouth League, like many in the country, suffered from a fluctuation in success through the period. It was very successful in the first half of the decade when combined with all of Plymouth's youth. Throughout the period it was treated as an equal to the wards and Women's Sections despite the occasional lack of active participation.

Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party and its wards

The Plymouth Sutton Constituency consisted of nine or ten wards, with the change occurring in 1955. Every ward had its own committee, meetings and responsibilities. Each ward had a responsibility to both the executive and also to its members. The ward committees each had the obligation, similar to the Women's Sections, of providing a number of positions: a chairman and secretary to attend the EC meetings, a treasurer to attend the Finance Committee, a propaganda secretary for the Propaganda Committee, and a social secretary plus a representative for the Social Committee.⁴⁴ The Propaganda

⁴⁰ Jefferys, *Politics and the people...* p.138.

⁴¹ Worley, *Labour inside the Gate...* p.165.

⁴² PLLOY 13.11.1949,(p.3).

⁴³ PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.28).

⁴⁴ PSCLP 31.1.1951,(p.2+3).

Committee did remark that the wards did not seem to be providing their full support, but this can be attributed to its relatively recent formation and the need for ward elections.⁴⁵ Unfortunately for this study none of the ward minute books could be located so the wards are to be analysed through their interaction with the EC and GMC.

The constituency gave its wards many rights and responsibilities but one unusual role that the wards took upon themselves was purchasing a venue. Beaumont Hall was regularly used for socials, meetings and offices in the years leading up to its purchase. The £1246 cost of the building located at 19 Greenbank Avenue (PL4 8PS) was huge considering the party had a total income of only £2987 in 1957. This was a financially prudent venture, with £484 being spent on renting rooms and venues over the previous six years. It is crucial that regardless of the financial sense shown it was the wards that provided the necessary money for this investment.⁴⁶

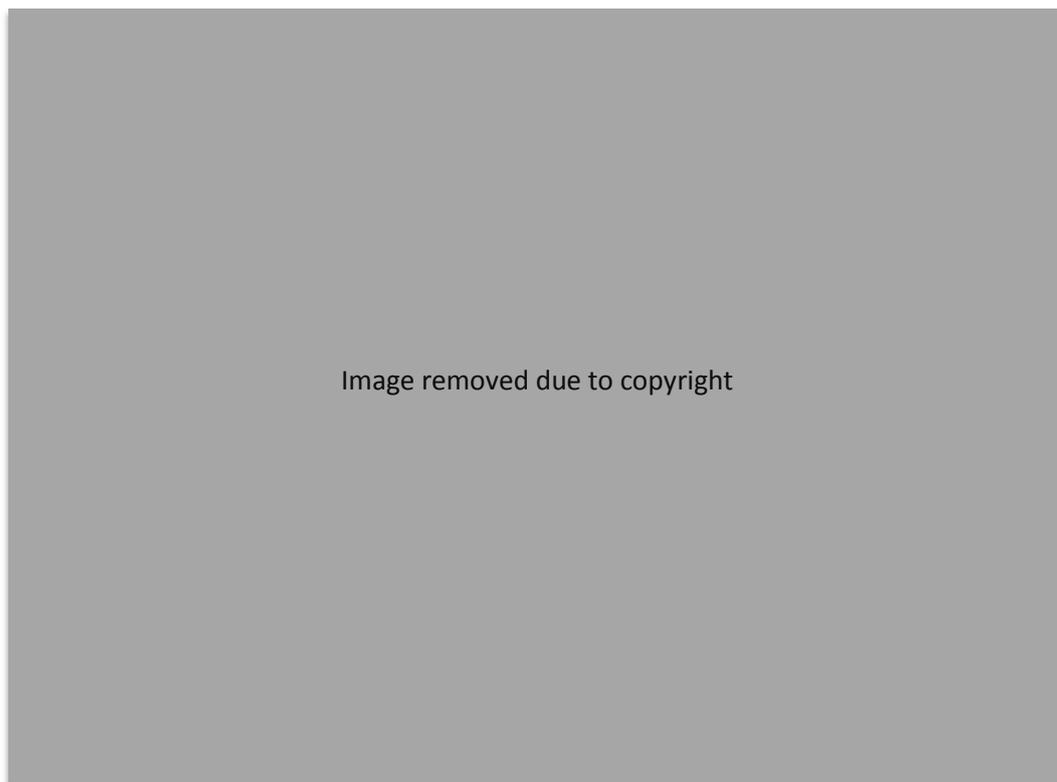


Figure 6 - Beaumont Hall in 1959.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ PSCLP 30.1.1952,(p.3).

⁴⁶ PSCLP 29.1.1958,(p.17).

⁴⁷ PSCLP 1959 Beaumont Hall,(p.8).

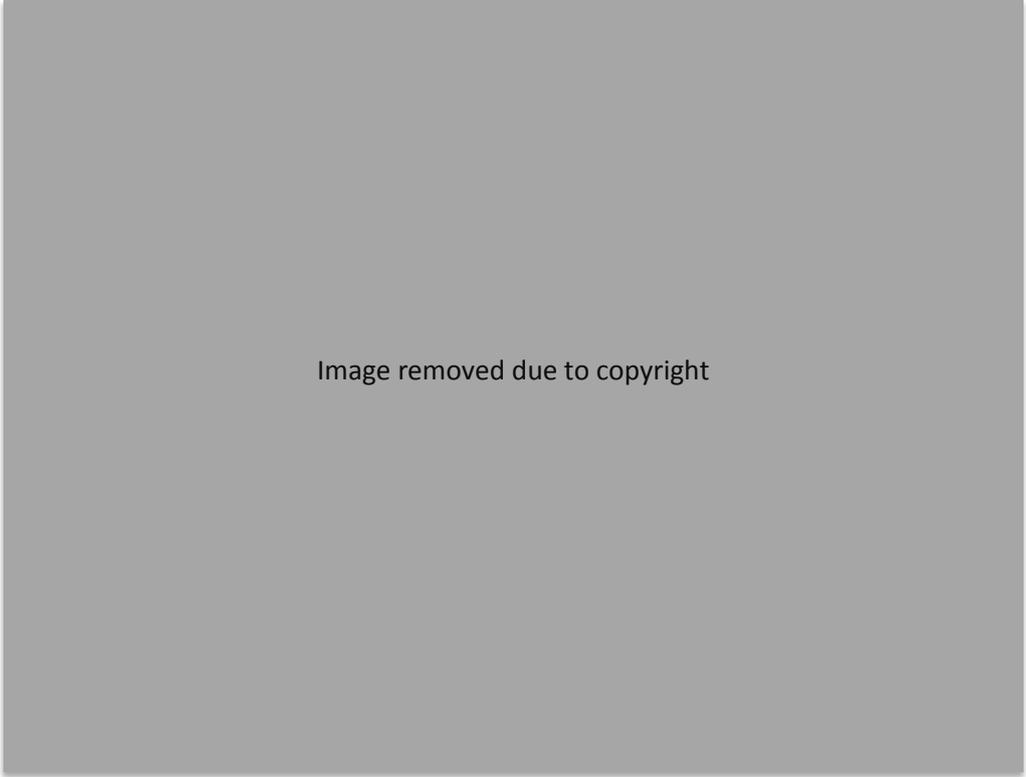


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Figure 7 - Lucy Middleton conducting the 'topping out' ceremony on the extension to Beaumont Hall circa 1957.⁴⁸

The organisation of the constituency meant that the wards played a large role in the executive. However it could be argued that the wards were unfairly equal. The demography of Plymouth Sutton meant that there were certain wards in which Labour voters and members resided in greater numbers. This was not reflected in the relative power and influence of the wards, with all wards given nominal equality. Unfairness was displayed by Peverell and Crownhill wards, both had two EC members while Peverell also had an active Women's Section with two more representatives. In 1957 the Labour Candidate for Peverell lost by 1,200 votes, while the Crownhill candidate collected almost four times more votes.⁴⁹ This is compounded by the 1955 membership figures showing Crownhill to have double the membership of Peverell.⁵⁰ Although the issue of fairness is considerable it should be counterbalanced by the necessity of willing volunteers for the party to succeed. As Peverell could support both a Women's Section and a ward committee then it would be counterproductive for the organisational structure not to support and encourage their involvement. This was especially topical as NEC was considering how it came to lose 35

⁴⁸ PSCLP 1959 Beaumont Hall,(p.8).

⁴⁹ 'Result of Yesterday's Polling in Plymouth Municipal Elections' *WEH*, 10 May 1957, p.5.

⁵⁰ PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.12).

marginal constituencies in 1955 through a lack of action.⁵¹ The constituency was sensibly grateful for the commitment shown by party members in Peverell.

The ward committees had a number of responsibilities including the representation of member's views to the constituency committees, the collection of membership dues and canvassing the locality. The representation of the views, through resolutions has been noted elsewhere. The collection of membership dues and encouraging joining the party has similarly is referred to elsewhere in this dissertation. The last and perhaps the most important responsibility of the wards was the canvassing of the local electorate, though this was rarely mentioned explicitly in the minutes. In the aftermath of the 1955 general election defeat the NEC set up the Wilson Report to look into the failures 'of the Party's organisation, especially at constituency level' it specifically looked at 'the limited numbers of voluntary workers'.⁵² The Wilson Field Committee did not visit Plymouth despite the constituency querying the oversight. As a result the executive complacently concluded that it was because its management was 'sufficiently advanced not to warrant a visit.'⁵³

The wards were of huge importance to the party, with almost all of the constituency's actions traceable to the wards. The wards kept the constituency's committees working and therefore can be saluted for their successes.

Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party and its social activities

The party had an active Social Committee for the entire period of this study, which had responsibilities for organising events and reported to the executive. The Social Committee presented reports to the EC's meetings which gave an insight into its work, however these reports miss out on the regular events and social activities organised. The Social Committee minute book for the period from July 1949 until June 1952 has been accessed and is used for this essay. It is important to note that the book is far from a complete record of the period. This exemplified by the fact that it only records eleven meetings, including only one meeting in the eighteen months between September 1950 and March 1952.

⁵¹ Jefferys, Politics and the people... p.135.

⁵² Tanner, 'Labour and its membership'p.257.

⁵³ PSCLP 30.1.1957,(p.6).

The Social Committee of 1951 consisted of the constituency's 'Social Secretary, together with the Social Secretary and one other delegate from each Ward, and the Sutton Division Women's Section'.⁵⁴ This format continued with only minimal changes until the end of the period. New sections and wards were invited to contribute two members and the election of a Social Secretary was not a regular occurrence. The League of Youth was not involved in the Social Committee as they ran their own socials and events.

The Social Committee worked very closely with the Women's Section. Both the Women's Section and the Social Committee organised the Christmas Bazaar throughout the years. The Social Committee occasionally relied upon the Women's Section for refreshments for some of their events, shown by the dance held by the Social Committee in March 1950.⁵⁵ The harmonious relationship between the Women's Section and the Social Committee did not mirror the Social Committee's relationship with the Fighting Fund Committee, which is saw as 'cutting across the activities of the Social Committee'.⁵⁶ This was referred to the executive, but before they could discuss the matter Mrs Pitts resigned from the Fighting Fund Committee.⁵⁷ The executive subsequently referred the dispute to the GMC where Mrs Pitts stated that she considered socials to be the role of the Social Committee and that the Fighting Fund Committee was unhelpfully encroaching upon this. It was agreed to give sovereignty in all social activities to the Social Committee, and the Fighting Fund Committee was to meet to reassess its purpose.⁵⁸

The period began with constituency social events that were frequent and profitable; by the end of the period this was no longer the case. The 1950s began with the Social Committee holding weekly whist evenings, however these quickly became a burden upon the organisers and when it was realised that they were also unprofitable they ceased.⁵⁹ Despite this regular social being ended the Social Committee did continue to host jumble sales, coach trips and dances. Some of the most profitable money-making activities that the Social Committee organised were the draws. The commendable £71 profit of 1955 was

⁵⁴ PSCLP 31.1.1951,(p.2).

⁵⁵ PSCLP SC 27.3.1950,(p.2).

⁵⁶ PSCLP SC 9.8.1950,(p.1).

⁵⁷ PSCLP 25.8.1950,(p.6).

⁵⁸ PSCLP 30.8.1950,(pp.4+5).

⁵⁹ PSCLP SC 8.6.1950,(p.2); PSCLP SC 9.8.1950,(p.2).

dwarfed by 1953's £264.⁶⁰ By 1956 the EC felt the need to defend the financial effect of the socials. At the AGM it was declared, '[whilst] Social Events have become unprofitable financially, we believe that nothing adds strength to the movement more than bringing our Membership together for social evenings.'⁶¹

The social calendar was being slimmed down throughout the period, due to dwindling interest and consequently lowering of profitability. This was blamed on 'television [leaving]... any organiser with a problem of how to secure an audience.'⁶² The period began with socials being an entirely positive occurrence but they became a costly if effective means to sustain morale.

Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party and its propaganda

The constituency party was active in the locality disseminating information about national party policy throughout the period. This functioned in two prominent ways, firstly through the wards, which has been dealt with elsewhere. The second was through the Propaganda Secretary and Committee. The position of Propaganda Secretary was elected at the AGM in 1951 and 1952. It stopped being elected at the AGM due to the start of the Propaganda Committee.⁶³ This should be seen as sign that the constituency was beginning to consider the potential of effective locally written and produced material in their battle to win votes. The Propaganda Secretary, and later committee, had a responsibility to report to their activities to the EC on a regular basis.

By looking through the yearly financial statements presented at the AGMs an insight can be gained into which form of propaganda was favoured and how this evolved. The first annual financial statement attached in the minute books was 1953, it detailed £77 spent on propaganda during 1952. It broke-down the spending, with £26 being spent on speakers' expenses, and only £16 spent on advertising.⁶⁴ The 1953 reports shows that the expenditure on public meetings had doubled to £168, with £108 spent on the 'Propaganda Meetings' and advertising spending up 400% to £60.⁶⁵ 1954 saw the introduction of printed

⁶⁰ PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.10); PSCLP 27.1.1954,(p.6).

⁶¹ PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.27).

⁶² PSCLP 30.1.1957,(p.7).

⁶³ PSCLP 31.1.1951,(p.2).

⁶⁴ PSCLP 28.1.1953,(p.16).

⁶⁵ PSCLP 27.1.1954,(p.6).

propaganda by the constituency costing £62.⁶⁶ It is surprising that the general election year of 1955 saw a decrease to only £63 in propaganda meeting expenditure, particularly as the NEC's report into the 1951 spoke highly such speaking engagements.⁶⁷ The amount spent by the party was still substantial for the general election with the boost to spending on 'Literature and Printed Propaganda' which was two and a half times higher than the previous year. Despite this alteration in strategy for propaganda it is surprising that it spent £45 less on propaganda compared to 1954.⁶⁸ The propaganda expenses rose slightly for 1956, however the change was miniscule compared to the boost for 1957.⁶⁹ 1957 saw an increase in all three of the propaganda expenses, the largest change was the 300% increase in the amount spent on printed propaganda. This change shows the introduction of the monthly magazine *Sound Opinion* that was distributed free to all members.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ PSCLP 23.2.1955,(p.6).

⁶⁷ LPA, NEC minutes, 7 November 1951, Morgan Phillips, 'General Election Campaign 1951. General Secretary's Report', (not dated), p.6, quoted in Steven Fielding, *The Labour Party; 'Socialism and society since 1951*,(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.28.

⁶⁸ PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.10).

⁶⁹ PSCLP 30.1.1957,(p.19).

⁷⁰ PSCLP 29.1.1958,(p.16); PSCLP 21.8.1956,(p.1).

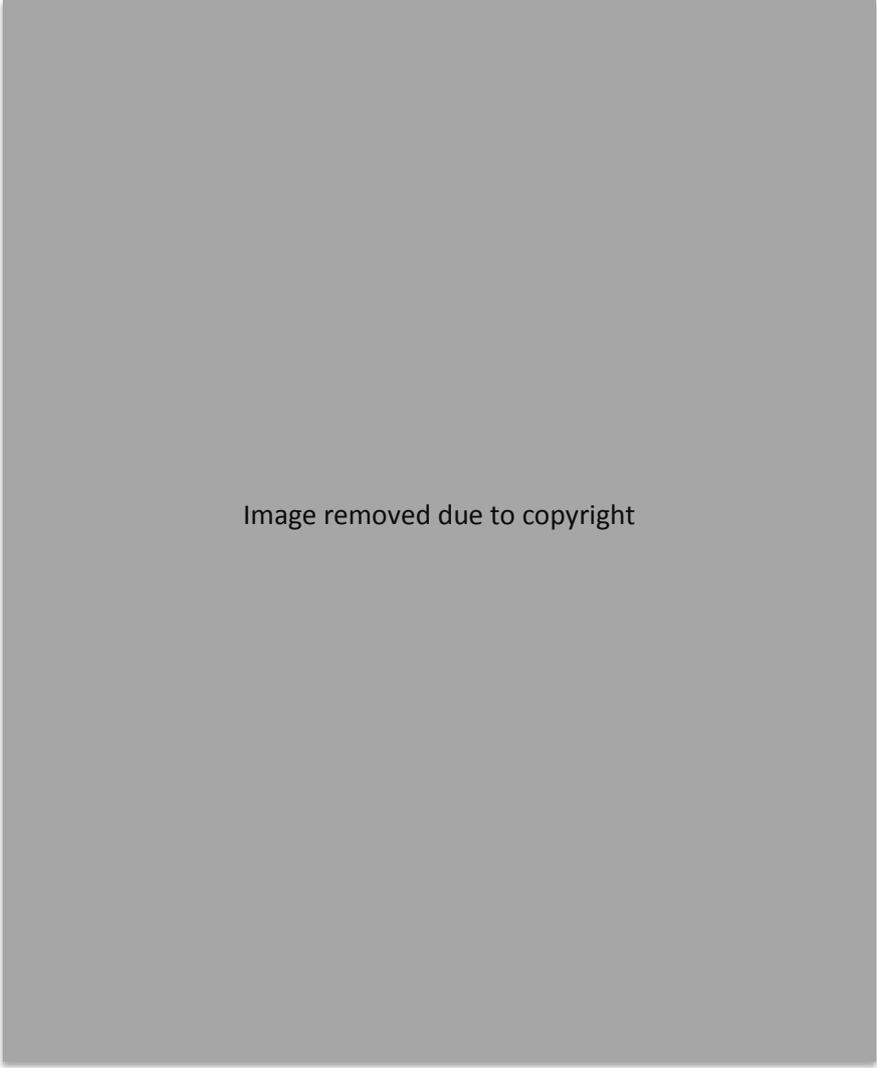


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Figure 8 - Front Cover of the magazine *Sound Opinion*.⁷¹

The city of Plymouth's distance from Labour's traditional heartland did not prevent speakers of reputation attending speaking engagements. It is crucial to note that the constituency worked alongside the Central and Devonport parties on these large events. Twice during the Labour leader spoke in Plymouth, Hugh Gaitskell in 1956 for the May Day parade and in 1958.⁷² The future Prime Minister Harold Wilson spoke in 1953, Aneurin Bevan spoke in the general election of 1955 and future Labour leader Michael Foot frequently spoke to Plymouthians as MP and then candidate for Devonport constituency.⁷³

⁷¹ PSCLP *Sound Opinion* December 1957,(p.1).

⁷² PCLP 24.2.1957,(p.5).

⁷³ PCLP 28.2.1954,(p.1); PCLP GE Speakers,(p.1).

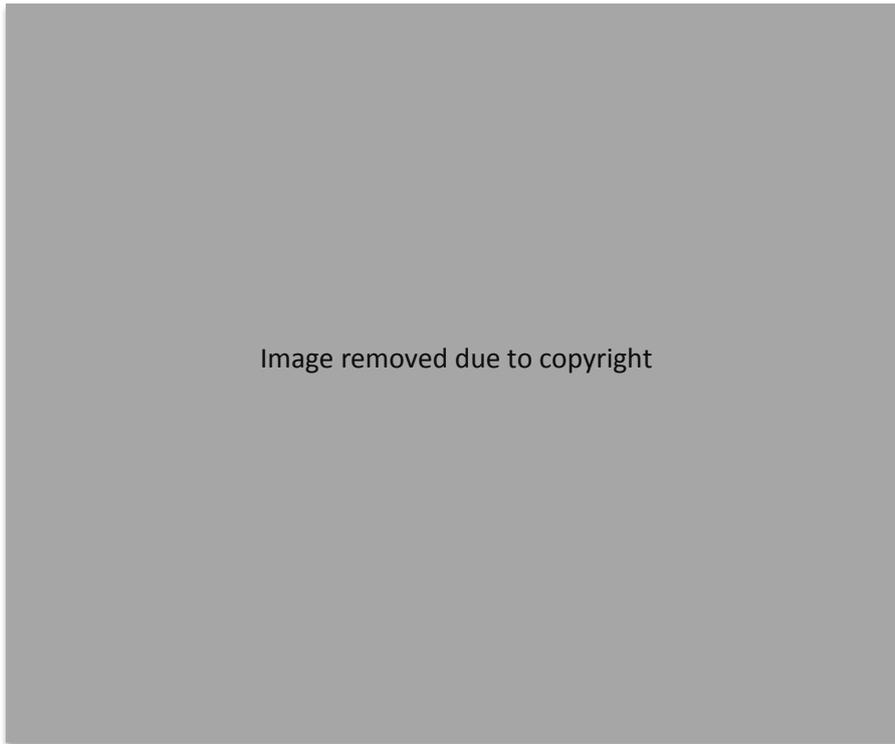


Figure 9 - Hugh Gaitskell speaking in Plymouth 1958.⁷⁴

To quote Stuart Ball, 'local party newspapers... can offer a fruitful snapshot', this 'snapshot' has been utilised by viewing the constituency's monthly magazine *Sound Opinion*.⁷⁵ *Sound Opinion* was first published in September 1956 and exemplified the prioritisation of propaganda.⁷⁶ It was so successful that after a year of production the neighbouring Devonport constituency started a similar magazine, *Clear Vision*.⁷⁷ Using the 1957 April and December editions, the type of articles can be analysed. The majority of the pages were dedicated to policy-based pieces. The next most common use of space was for messages from the parliamentary candidate, Julian Richards. It is also interesting to note that the back cover was an application form for membership.⁷⁸

It can be clearly seen that printed propaganda was becoming increasingly important throughout the period. The cost and prioritising of speakers at events dwindled compared to the overall cost of propaganda. This supports Jon Lawrence's analysis that by the 1950s

⁷⁴ 'Photograph of Hugh Gaitskell', Plymouth, *Plymouth and West Devon Record Office*, 1418/15843.

⁷⁵ Stuart Ball, Andrew Thorpe, and Matthew Worley, *Researching the grass roots: the records of constituency level political parties in five British counties, 1918-40*, (Exeter: Exeter Research and Institutional Content archive, 2004), p.23.

⁷⁶ PSCLP 21.8.1956,(p.1).

⁷⁷ PSCLP 20.11.1957,(p.4).

⁷⁸ PSCLP 'Sound Opinion' December 1957; PSCLP "'Sound Opinion', April 1957' Plymouth, *Plymouth and West Devon Record Office*, 3642/3291.

outdoor public speeches were infrequent and rarely a positive experience.⁷⁹ The constituency's use of propaganda throughout the period displayed its interest in ensuring votes for the municipal elections and any snap general elections.

Financing the Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party

The financial dealings of the party are insightful in understanding a number of aspects about the party. The overall income can be seen as a barometer of the progress of the constituency party, secondly the expenditure shows the priorities. Thirdly the change of focus over time can show the party's evolution and adjustment. Finance was dealt with in a number of ways. The Finance Committee, Treasurer and Finance Secretary all had responsibilities for the monetary control. The AGMs also elected two auditors every year to ensure that the finances correctly recorded. The financial situation is analysed by using the 'fruitful' annual reports between 1952 and 1957.⁸⁰ The one exception is 1955 which was confused by the imminent boundary changes, although the 1956 report details the relevant information of 1955 as a comparison.⁸¹

The overall bank balance of the party was never negative during the period. According to the year-end financial figures between 1952 and 1957, the constituency ran an average annual surplus of just under £40. This is hugely simplified but it shows that through the period the bank balance was larger at the end than the beginning. All of 1953 through 1954, and 1956 ran an average annual excess of £225. The general election year of 1955 had a year-end deficit of £107 as could be expected for an organisation whose main focus is only a small amount of time every election cycle.⁸² The most surprising year in the period was 1957, in which the constituency had a total deficit of £570. Despite it being the year that the party purchased Beaumont Hall this had no bearing upon the year end reports as the money was fully supplied by the wards. It was the 500% increase in affiliation fees coupled with a 300% increase in the cost of the municipal elections that drove the party into overspending for the twelve months.⁸³

⁷⁹ Jon Lawrence, 'The Culture of Elections in Modern Britain' *The Journal of the Historical Association*, 96, 324,(2011), 459-476,,(p.466+473).

⁸⁰ Ball, Thorpe and Worley, *Researching the grass roots...*, p.20.

⁸¹ PSCLP 25.1.1956,(pp.9-16).

⁸² PSCLP 24.1.1956,(p.1).

⁸³ PSCLP 29.1.1958,(p.16+18).

The income over the period, 1952 to 1957 steadily grew from £1358 to its highest level of £3058 in 1956 to dip slightly to £2987 for 1957. A number of the key contributors to the income balance sheet included: membership fees, the Christmas Bazaar, draws and special efforts. The membership fees throughout the period remained remarkably consistent. The highest income was £277 in 1952 and the lowest was £193 in 1956, the average being £223. The membership cards were purchased from the National Labour Party, making an average £52 of this income immediately disappear. The Christmas Bazaar was held in three years and raised a total of £449. A plausible reason behind its omission from the social calendar for two of the years could be in the expenses, it cost an average of £127. The 1956 edition made a total profit of under £2. The draws held vary in results hugely, 1956 was a bumper year with £451 raised, although it was only worth £112 in 1957. The draws also had expenses for all years apart from 1952, these represented between 40% and 96% of the income. The expenses resulted in 1954's draw being worth only £3. The final and indefinite part of the income was 'special efforts'. This phrase was on all of the annual reports, it started at £245 for 1952 and was raised to a massive £2000 in 1956, accounting for two thirds of the income.⁸⁴

The analysis of the party expenditure shows a vast amount about how it viewed its responsibilities. The huge increase in income over the period show that the fundraising in the constituency was going smoothly.

⁸⁴ PSCLP 28.1.1953,(p.16+17); PSCLP 27.1.1954,(p.6); PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.10); PSCLP 30.1.1957,(p.19); PSCLP 29.1.1958,(p.16).

Chapter 3 –Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party and other local Political Organisations

The Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party interacted with other local and regional organisations at an executive level for a number of reasons throughout the period. These relations, documented in the minutes, reveal much about the way that the constituency worked and who it favoured in the city of Plymouth and the South West Region. The local organisations who will be discussed include the Plymouth Central Labour Party, the Plymouth Devonport Constituency Labour Party, the local Conservative Associations and the Plymouth City Council Labour Group (PCCLG). As it has been discussed elsewhere, the interactions between the Sutton, Central and Devonport parties for the purposes of propaganda meetings will not be mentioned in this section.

The only regional organisation that the constituency interacted with was the South West Regional Labour Party (SWRLP). The constituency had the opportunity to elect four members to attend the regional AGM and one annually elected member to the regional executive. 1951 was the only year that the constituency failed to mention the regional party at their AGM.

These elections should not be used to disguise the fact that the constituency had misgivings about SWRLP and rarely interacted outside of the formal elections. The first misgiving was that by being in a relatively secluded city, a significant travel time away from the regional headquarters located in Bristol, the member and executive saw interaction with SWRLP as an expensive and fruitless exercise. This is clearly presented by Efford ward and Sutton Women's Section' resolutions submitted for the 1956 regional AGM.¹ The resolution asked that the Regional Office be moved to Plymouth 'to better serve the needs of DEVON and CORNWALL as Bristol is considered to be geographically unsuitable.'² The second reason for limited involvement is that the constituency worked closely with the Plymouth Central and Devonport parties so negated the need to work regionally. Both of the reasons amply justify the constituency's lack of enthusiasm for the regional party.³

¹ PSCLP 30.11.1956,(p.1).

² PSCLP 30.11.1955,(p.4).

³ PSCLP 31.1.1951,(p.4); PSCLP 30.1.1952,(p.7); PSCLP 28.1.1953,(p.1); PSCLP 27.1.1954,(p.1); PSCLP 26.1.1955,(p.2); PSCLP 30.1.1957,(p.1+2).

The Plymouth Central Labour Party Executive Committee had similar functions to the Sutton executive in the period. The Central EC included elected officers from both Plymouth constituencies. The Sutton party annually nominated a number of members to be put forward for the Central party elections. These nominees were then voted upon at the Central party's AGM. The Sutton party nominees had around a fifty percent chance of being accepted onto the Central party EC, with their only being two nominating bodies. This was the case with forty-four percent elected during the three years.⁴ The Central party like the Sutton constituency had a group of committees that reported back to its executive. These committees were predominantly set up for policy reasons and they were created and disbanded with remarkable frequency throughout the period. When it was appropriate these committees worked alongside their Sutton counterparts.

The majority of external interaction documented in the Central party minute books was with the Plymouth City Council Labour Group. This partially explains the rarity of their interactions with the Sutton constituency. The Central party held the Council group to account, the exceptions being when sections or wards of the Sutton executive had resolutions passed that affected the Councillors. It is important to note that Council group and the Sutton party had common members, so did not need much formal interaction. The most prominent members who were members of both were the Councillors and Aldermen who were elected as Sutton officers a total of twenty five times, with the election of a Councillor as Chairman three times. The Central party was also the link between the two Plymouth Constituency Labour Parties. As a result the Devonport party had very few direct interactions with its Sutton counterparts at executive level. One of the occasions that this can be clearly seen is in the discussions before the 1955 transfer of wards. Both constituencies spoke about the proposed changes to their members and in January the Central party hosted two unproductive meetings between them.⁵ The difference in opinion between the constituencies was based upon both attempting to enhance their chances of electing a Labour MP. Plymouth Sutton had been without a sitting MP since 1951 when Lucy Middleton lost by 710 votes, while Michael Foot's majority sat precariously at just 3.8%. It was therefore imperative for all to attempt to secure a favourable transfer to assist in their

⁴ PSCLP 27.1.1954,(p.1); PSCLP 27.1.1955,(p.2); PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.2); PCLP 28.2.1954,(p.2); PCLP 24.4.1955,(p.2); PCLP 24.2.1956,(p.1).

⁵ PCLP 20.1.1955; PCLP 31.1.1955.

general election campaigns later in the year. Both of the constituencies met with the local Conservatives to attempt to reach an agreement, the only recorded meeting between the local competing parties.⁶ The whole saga ended with no cross or intra party agreement and each local party submitted their comments on the changes individually.⁷

Another interesting insight into the constituency's dealings with other organisations is through the money that was paid for 'affiliations'. The expenditure on this can be viewed through the annual reports presented at AGMs. The party only paid £11 in 1952 (a £10 payment to Plymouth Central and £1 to SWRLP). This figure is shown to be hugely insignificant compared to the £300 that was paid for affiliations in 1957. As time progressed the money suggests that the party began to look for more collaborators, and was willing to pay for them.⁸

The constituency worked closely with Plymouth Central party through the yearly election of officers and representation at their meetings. The relationship with SWRLP was minimal with only an elected executive representative and AGM attendees. The Devonport and Sutton parties worked together on a number of issues, most prominently large propaganda meetings, but this was usually through the Central party not directly. The Council group and the constituency rarely interacted from committee to committee; there was evidently little need as the Central Party and an overlap of members provided the link when needed.

⁶ PCLP 5.2.1954,(p.1).

⁷ PSCLP 28.2.1954,(p.1).

⁸ PSCLP 28.1.1953,(p.16+17); PSCLP 27.1.1954,(p.6); PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.10); PSCLP 30.1.1957,(p.19); PSCLP 29.1.1958,(p.16).

Chapter 4- Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party and Municipal Elections

'Get to know our policy in detail so that you can remove misconceptions that still exist in some people's minds. Identify each and every supporter on the Register and perfect organisation necessary to get them all to record their votes',¹ so rallied Julian Richards in the annual report of 1958. The best way to ascertain the effectiveness of garnering votes for Labour Party candidates is through analysis of the municipal elections, considering the available sources. Attempting to correlate election results to the internal data from the constituency inevitably simplifies the complex choices involved in voting. It is also difficult as all of the contests had two candidates, and no information is known about the Conservative strategy or activity. Municipal elections have been chosen over the general elections for a number of reasons: during municipal elections it would be reasonable to assume that the national political parties, senior politicians, and the national press played a significantly smaller role. This in turn elevates the importance of local campaigning. Also only one general election result falls within the period compared to sixty five municipal elections that can be compared to ward membership levels. Each annual election day had candidates standing in all of the wards and by splitting the analysis by ward it can be seen how the relevant grass roots soldiers of the constituency performed.

Through a number of British and American studies into personal canvassing and campaigning conducted by political parties, two prominent conclusions have been drawn. The first conclusion considers the personal campaigning does not affect the result of an election.² This conclusion came from a number of arguments. The first argument is that campaigning too close to the election day has very little impact as many people have already decided who deserves their vote, meaning the campaigning merely acts as a

¹ PSCLP 1958 Annual Report,(p.2).

² John C. Blydenburgh , 'A Controlled Experiment to Measure the Effects of Personal Contact Campaigning' *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 15, 2,(1971), 365-381,,(p.366); Donald P. Green, Alan S. Gerber, and David W. Nickerson, 'Getting Out the Vote in Local Elections: Results from, Six Door-to-Door Canvassing Experiments', *The Journal Of Politics*, 65, 4,,(2003), 1083-1096,,(p.1094); Alan S. Gerber and Donald P. Green, 'The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment' *The American Political Science Review*, 94, 3,(2000), 653-663,,(p.653); Peter W. Wielhouwer, 'The Mobilization of Campaign by the Party Canvass' *American Politics Quarterly*, 27, 2,(1999), 177-200,,(p.195); G. H. Kramer, 'The effects of precinct-level canvassing on voter behavior' *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 34,,(1970), 560-572,(p.560).

reminder to vote.³ The second argument is that if voting is determined by social circumstances, such as the class arguments for the voting in 1950s Britain, persuasion by a stranger is futile compared with a larger more powerful force.⁴ The third argument is that personal campaigning is not as convincing as other factors, such as a candidate's reputation or media partisanship.⁵

A second group of studies into personal campaigning and its effect on the election argue that it makes a huge difference to the outcome.⁶ This group can be split in to two sections. The first section is occupied by Pimlott who claimed that strangers canvassing in a British local election make a huge difference. This study is focused upon one ward in one election in Newcastle and has a clear limitation in the small size of the sample, but is important due to its similarity with the local elections of Plymouth.⁷ The second section claims that it is the regular conversations about politics by those affiliated to the candidate that greatly affect the result. This is shown by a correlation between the locally active membership and the number of votes won.⁸

There are only three values can be ascertained from the sources available, the membership of the Sutton party from the minute books. The size of the electorate and the voting results are both found in the local newspapers.⁹ One of the easiest ways of analysing these numerical results is to plot them on graphs:

³ Blydenburgh , 'A Controlled Experiment...'p.380.

⁴ R. Huckfeldt, and J. Sprague, 'Political parties and electoral mobilization: Political structure, social structure and the party canvass' *American Political Science Review*, 86,,(1992), 70-86,(p.70).

⁵ Blydenburgh , 'A Controlled Experiment to Measure...' p.381.

⁶ Ben Pimlott 'Does Local Party Organization Matter?' *British Journal of Political Science*, 2, 3,(1972), 381-383,(pp.381-383); P. F. Whiteley, and P. Seyd, 'Local party campaigning and electoral mobilization in Britain' *Journal of Politics*, 56,,(1994), 242-252,(p.250); Wielhouwer, 'The Mobilization of Campaign... p.195; M. A. Krassa, 'Context and the canvass: The mechanisms of interaction' *Political Behavior*,10,,(1988), 233-246,(p.244).

⁷ Pimlott 'Does Local Party....'p.382.

⁸ Whiteley, and Seyd, 'Local party campaigning, p.194; Huckfeldt, and Sprague, 'Political parties...' p.70; Krassa, 'Context...' p.244; Wielhouwer, 'The Mobilization of Campaign...' ,p.178.

⁹ *Western Morning News* and *Western Evening Herald*.

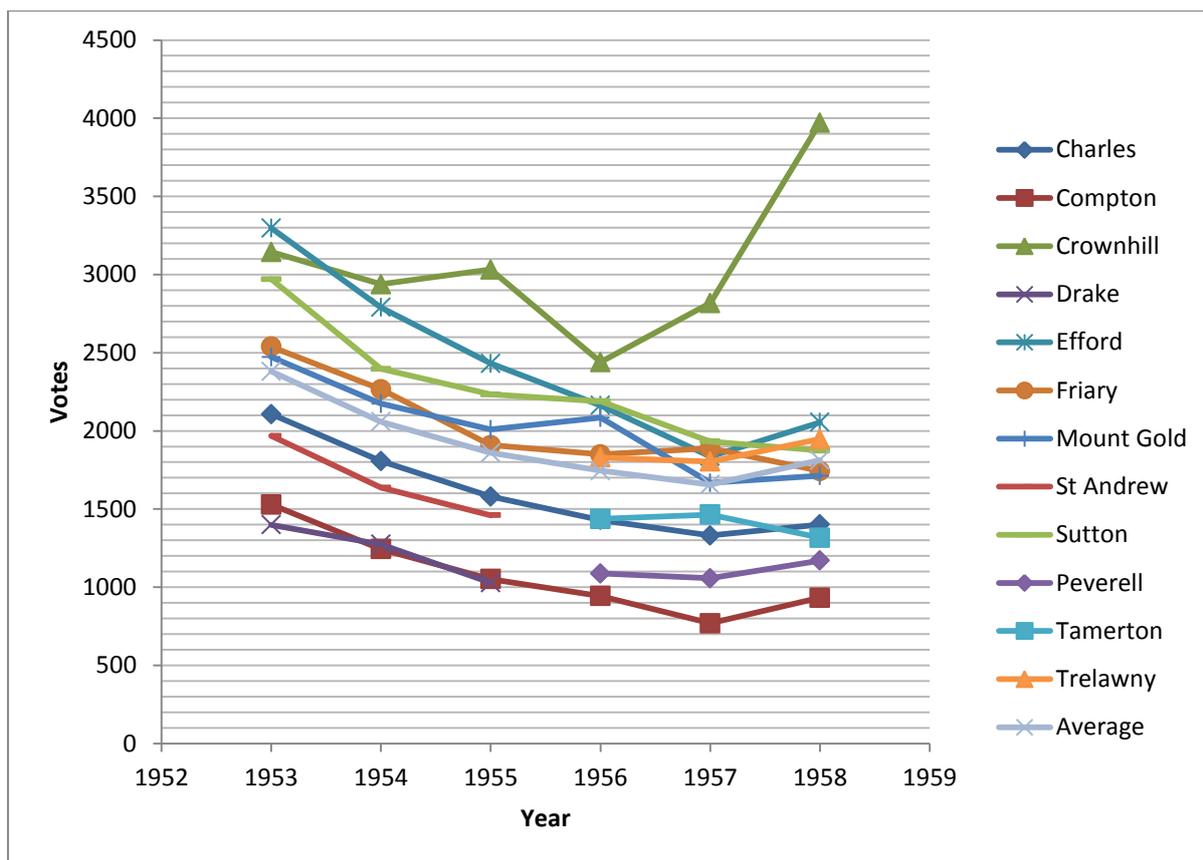


Figure 10 - Votes for the Labour Candidate¹⁰

Figure 10 shows that the voting for the Labour candidates follows the same trend as the Labour majority on the Plymouth City Council. The Labour Councillors had a majority of sixteen seats in 1953 but this was slowly reduced until a hung council in 1958 with both Conservative and Labour Councillors being equal in number. The graph shows that the Compton, Peverell and Drake wards were the lowest performing areas for the Labour Party candidates, never returning a Labour Councillor. Crownhill and Efford wards were frequently the best performing wards for the Labour candidates, although Crownhill's large electorate meant that the large amount of votes resulted in a solitary Labour victory in 1958.

¹⁰ Municipal Election results from newspapers: ('Conservatives lose Control of Plymouth City Council' *WEH*, 8 May 1953, p.7; 'Plymouth voting results' *WMN*, 14 May 1954, p.3; 'Figures of voting from the wards' *WMN*, 13 May 1955, p.1; 'City Tories lose votes – Gain a seat' *WEH*, 11 May 1956, p.9; 'Results of the Plymouth Polling' *WMN*, 10 May 1957, p.1; 'Single Tory gain Produces stalemate on City Council' *WEH* 9 May 1958, p.7).

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Figure 11 - Electoral ward map of Plymouth.¹¹

¹¹ Plymouth, *Central Library*, 'City of Plymouth map of the wards of the city as defined in the Plymouth extension act of 1950'.

When figure 12 is compared with Figure 10 it shows that the decreasing Labour vote was not halted by the panicked increase in spending of 1957.

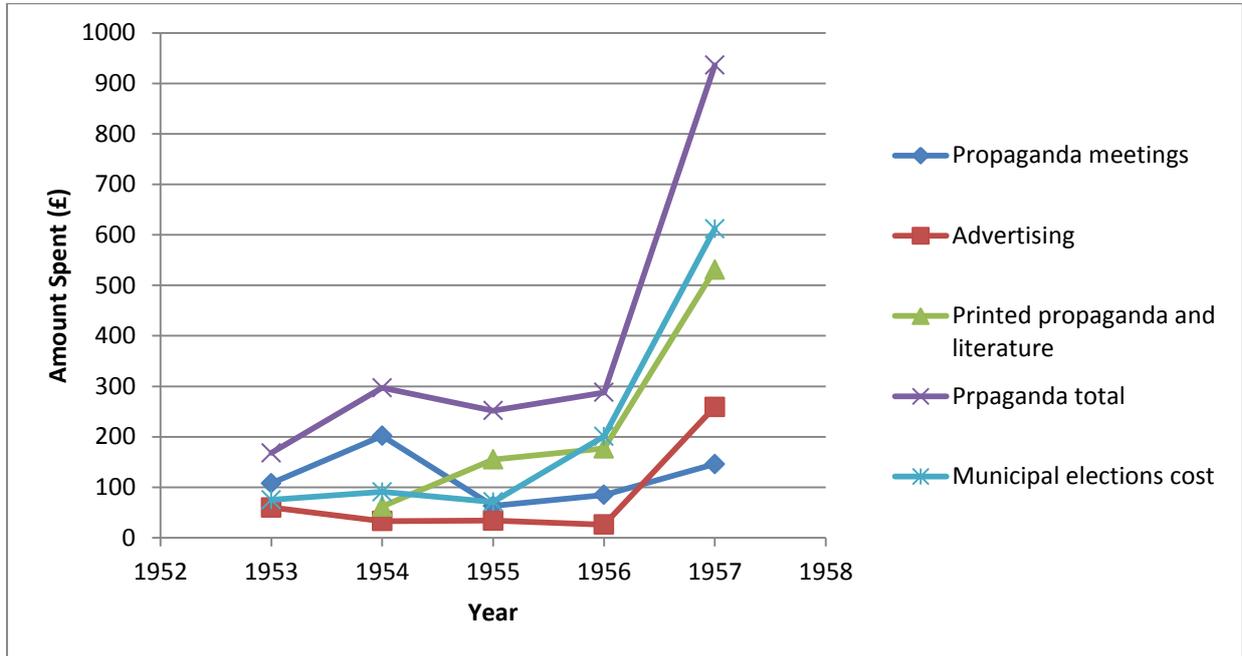


Figure 12 - The amount spent related to municipal elections.¹²

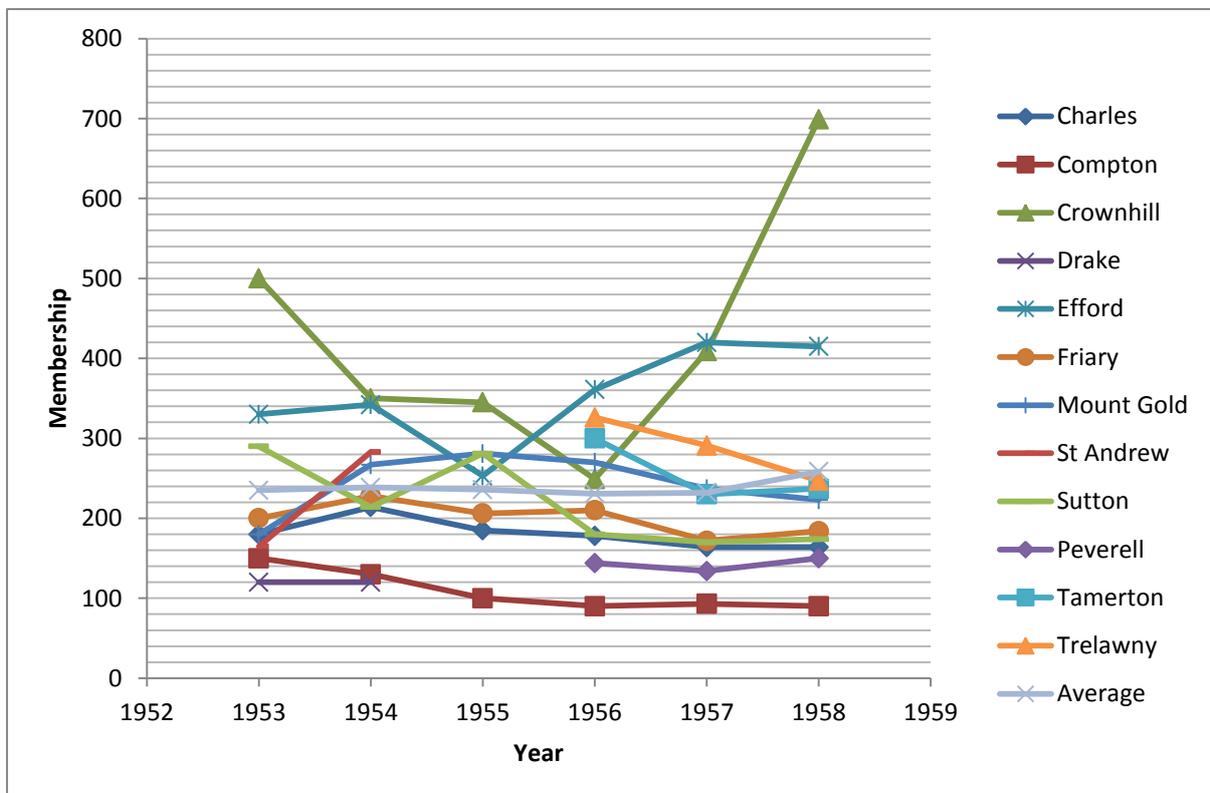


Figure 13 - Membership of PSCLP split by ward¹³

¹² PSCLP 28.1.1953,(p.16); PSCLP 27.1.1954,(p.6); PSCLP 23.2.1955,(p.6); PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.10); PSCLP 30.1.1957,(p.19); PSCLP 29.1.1958,(p.16).

Figure 13 shows that as is stated in the section on membership, the average membership per ward was consistent for the entire period. It is also clear that Drake, Compton and Peverell wards mirror the voting chart and are frequently have the lowest membership in the constituency. The wards of Efford and Crownhill both have the highest memberships for almost the entire period similar to the voting chart. In 1958 Crownhill experienced a growth in population as a result of the opening of a new housing development, shown by the creation of the new parish of Crownhill.¹⁴ Therefore any comparisons between Crownhill before 1958 and in that year should be tempered.

When figure 12 and 13 are compared it can be clearly seen that the amount of money spent on propaganda and the change in membership were independent of each other.

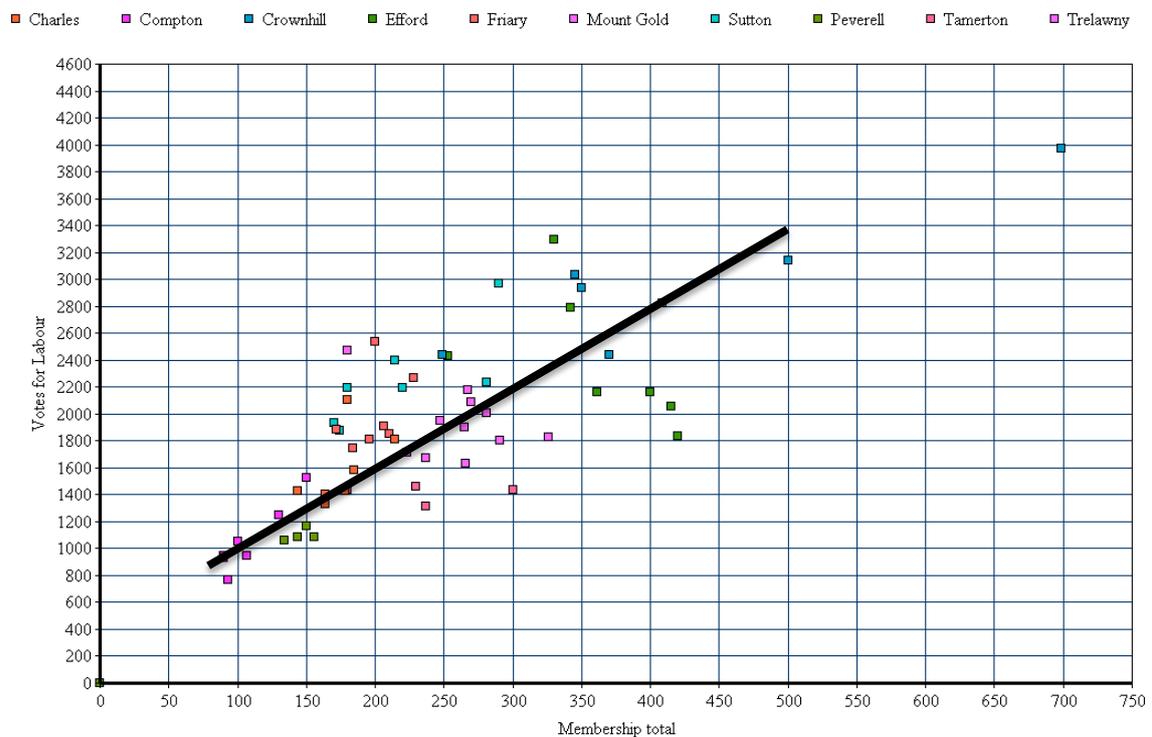


Figure 14 - Membership of the party by votes at election.¹⁵

Figure 14's strongly positive correlation exemplifies the connected nature of membership and the amount of votes won by the Labour Candidate. This graph shows that

¹³ PSCLP 28.1.1953,(p.15); PSCLP 12.1.1954,(p.12); PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.12); PSCLP 30.1.1957,(p.6); PSCLP 29.10.1958,(p.5).

¹⁴ 'Plymouth Crownhill EP' in *A Vision of Britain through time* < <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10077606> > [accessed 24/04/2015].

¹⁵ PSCLP 28.1.1953,(p.15); PSCLP 12.1.1954,(p.12); PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.12); PSCLP 30.1.1957,(p.6); PSCLP 29.10.1958,(p.5); Municipal Election results from newspapers.

on average every ward could be sure of about five hundred votes (as the line of best fit would cross the y-axis at 500) and that every ward member added about six votes on top of that base.¹⁶ This supports the idea that the higher the concentration of supporters for a candidate in an area the higher the vote for that candidate in the elections.¹⁷ This may have been due to one of two theories. The first is that the voting was split along class lines, thus working class areas of Plymouth had more members and more votes.¹⁸ The other theory is that the presence of more members in some wards resulted in better dissemination of Labour ideas, thus ensuring more votes for the candidate.¹⁹ This theory would suggest that Labour was wrong to care so little about the amount of members that it had in the period.²⁰ It is most likely that a combination of these two theories happened in the municipal elections and thus both are supported by the research.

Figure 15 was created to test whether the canvassing drives (which would result in a raise in membership) had any correlation with the voting swing. The graph has no correlation it shows that any increases in membership did not mean an increase in votes, thus questioning the validity of the theory based on the dissemination of ideas through members. This supports the argument that canvassing was ultimately a minor factor in elections.

¹⁶ As the line of best fits is roughly, $y=6x+500$.

¹⁷ Huckfeldt, and Sprague, 'Political parties...' p.70.

¹⁸ Kevin Hickson, 'The Postwar Consensus Revisited' *The Political Quarterly*, 75, 2,,(2004), 142-154,,(p.143); Denis Kavanagh, 'Debate: The Postwar Consensus' *Twentieth Century British History*, 3, 2,(1992), 175-190,(p.184); Duncan Fraser, 'The Postwar Consensus: A Debate not long enough?' *Parliamentary Affairs*, 53, 2,(2000), 347-362,(p.348); *Tribune*, 28 December 1951, quoted in Steven Fielding, *The Labour Party; 'Socialism and society since 1951*,(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.32.

¹⁹ Whiteley, and Seyd, 'Local party campaigning...' p.194; Krassa, 'Context...'p.244; Wielhouwer, 'The Mobilization of Campaign...' p.178.

²⁰ Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley, *Labour's Grass Roots, The Politics of Party Membership*,(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp.18-19.

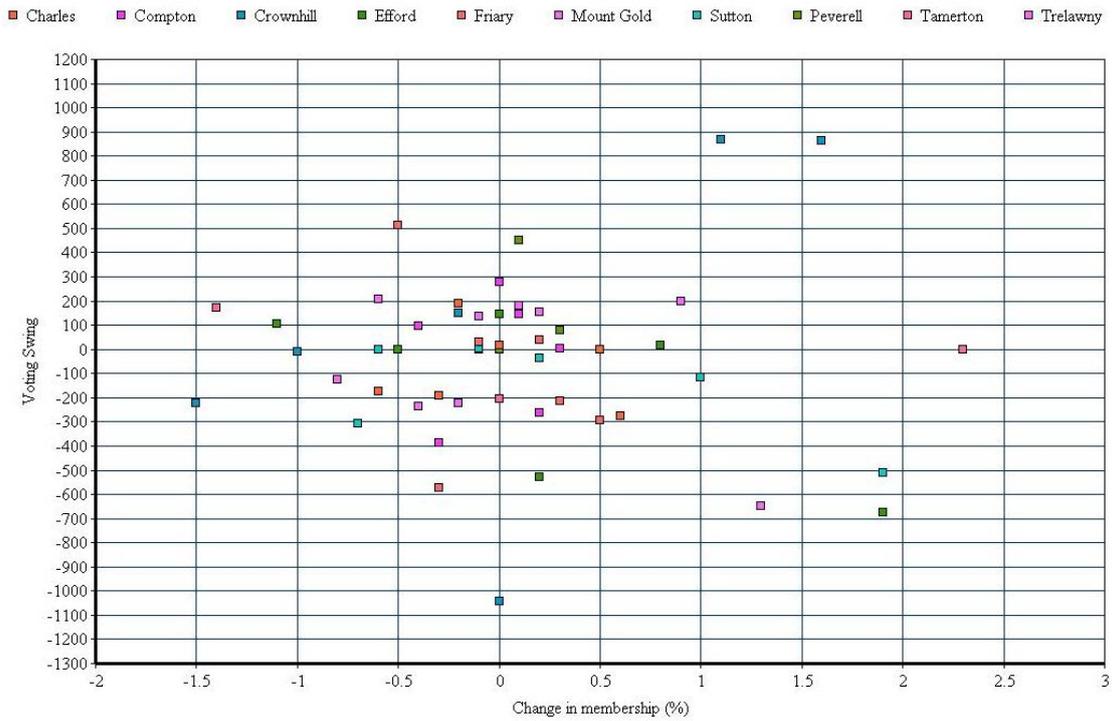


Figure 15 - Change in membership by Voting Swing.²¹

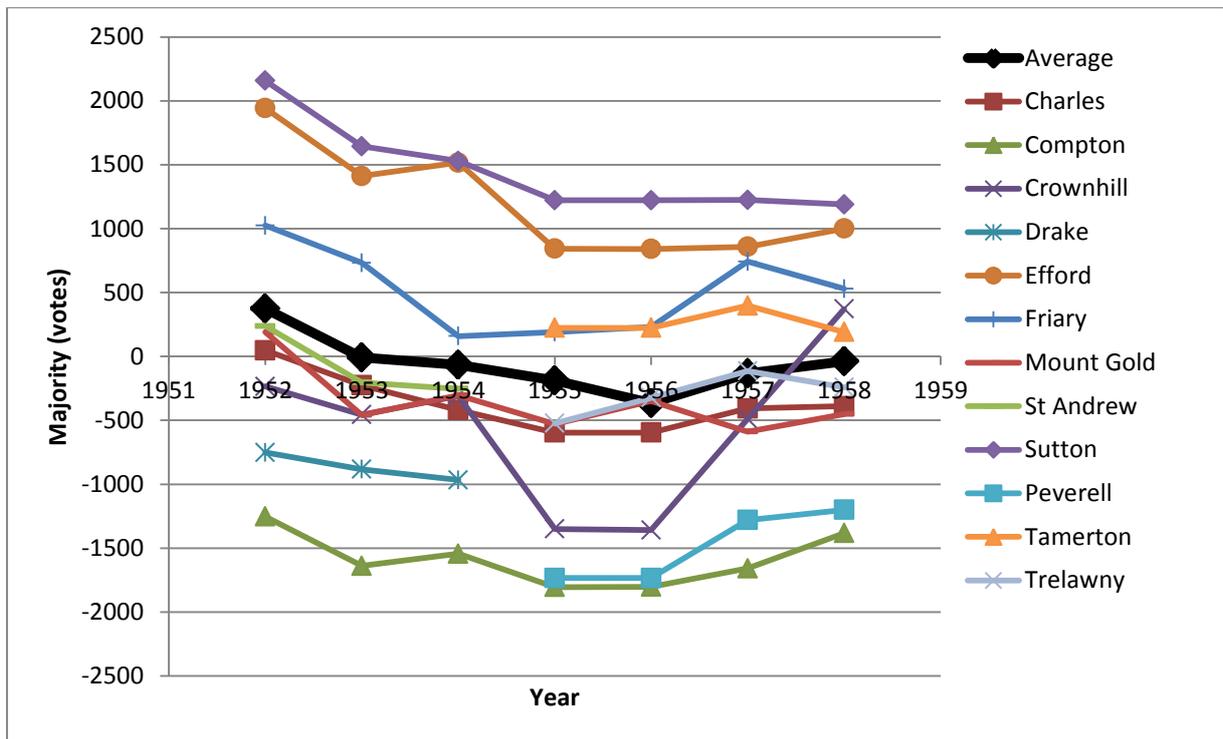


Figure 16 - Majorities in the local elections.²²

²¹ PSCLP 28.1.1953,(p.15); PSCLP 12.1.1954,(p.12); PSCLP 25.1.1956,(p.12); PSCLP 30.1.1957,(p.6); PSCLP 29.10.1958,(p.5); Municipal Election results from newspapers.

²² Municipal Election results from newspapers.

Figure 16 shows how many votes candidates won their elections by. The Conservative candidate's votes are taken away from the Labour candidate's, leaving a positive number for a Labour victory and a negative if a Conservative was elected. The way that the lines are plotted almost parallel to each other show that the city voted with uniformity. This shows that despite the varying amounts of Conservative and Labour voters in each ward, the entire constituency agreed on a swing from the previous election. On such a small area it would have been surprising to see a vastly different swing from one ward to the next. The reason for the Crownhill line showing more movement than others is due to the large size of its electorate, on a percentage change it was similar to other wards but in integer terms it was more changeable.

Overall the municipal elections show two correlations. The first is between the membership total and the votes which shows that despite the constituency's best efforts, neither of the membership drives, or extra spending on propaganda made a significant and uniform difference to the outcome. The second correlation is the uniform voting pattern across the constituency throughout the period. This shows that none of the wards had distinctly different change in opinion of the Labour run Council to other wards.

Chapter 5- Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party and the National Labour Party

The Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party's interactions with the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party (NEC) provide a revealing insight into the members' views of the Labour Party leadership. The majority of the constituency's interaction with the NEC was in preparation for the annual Labour Party Conference. The Labour Party Conference allowed party members to vote on a number of subjects, including national policy and the election of members to the NEC. Through the preparation for these events it can be seen how engaged the constituency's members were with national policy, and which side of the divided Labour Party leadership they supported.

Brian Brivati in his study of Hugh Gaitskell summarised Labour Party politics in the 1950s as 'completely dominated by this bitter power struggle, almost unprecedented in its level of personal animosity.'¹ One of the most significant parts played by any constituency party in the battle between the Bevanite left and the right wing of the national Labour Party was through their seven votes in elections to the NEC. It is important to note that the NEC elections' significance was symbolic as it was the ordinary members' declaration on who they felt best represented their politics.² This became of huge importance as the Parliamentary Labour Party had split on such issues as German rearmament and the introduction of fees to the National Health Service for dental care and spectacles.³

The Bevanite challenge was significant for many reasons, including that the group had a number of high profile figures and who built up huge support in the constituencies.⁴ The 1951 NEC election showed gains for the Bevanites, with four of them elected and all gaining votes on the previous year.⁵ There is an oversight in the constituency minute books unfortunately resulting in the voting being unable to be ascertained.

¹ Brian Brivati, *Hugh Gaitskell*, (London: Richard Cohen Books, 1996), pp. 162-163.

² "Labour at Morecambe", *The Times*, 30 September 1952, p.7.

³ PSCLP 19.5.1954,(p.1); PSCLP 22.9.1954,(p.2); Mr. John Strachey, *Hansard*, 5 March 1952, vol.497 cc555.

⁴ Kevin Jefferys, *Politics and the people: a history of British democracy since 1918*, (London: Atlantic, 2007), p.22; Michael Newman, 'Ralph Miliband and the Labour Party: from Parliamentary Socialism to 'Bennism'' in *Interpreting the Labour Party; Approaches to Labour politics and history* ed. by John Callaghan, Steven Fielding and Steve Ludlam, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 57-70,(p.61).

⁵ Kenneth Harris, *Attlee*, (London: Butler & Tanner, 1982), p.489.

The 1952 Labour Party Conference in Morecambe represented a showdown between the Bevanite wing and the right wing. This ended with the six Bevanites all elected. Two of the oldest members of the NEC, Dalton and Morrison had been deposed.⁶ The constituencies could not have been stronger in declaring backing for the left wing of the party; even Griffiths, the only non-Bevanite elected, was only 'elected because he [was] acceptable to everyone'.⁷ The Plymouth Sutton view of the Bevanite rebellion is significantly less clear. The vote was taken and the seven top placed candidates were then endorsed by the Labour Conference delegates. For 1952 the top eight candidates are shown in the minutes, as there was a run off between three candidates for the last two endorsements. Bevan was top of both the national and the Sutton poll, while Dalton polled second locally. Overall the Bevanite vote was fractionally higher than the non-Bevanite vote in the constituency, 83 to 80. Interestingly sixth, seventh and eighth place all drew on 17 votes, with the only Bevanite in this draw, Mikardo, losing a vote in the run-off with his vote reducing from seventeen to sixteen votes. This shows that in 1952 while the constituency members were supportive of some of the Bevanite group they were apathetic to the cause.⁸

The group of Labour Party MPs who had joined to make the Bevanites was formally disbanded in the aftermath of the 1952 Labour Party Conference.⁹ This was 'under protest' and they continued to oppose the Attlee's, and later Gaitskell's, leadership with frequency.¹⁰ This protest manifested itself on the issue of the development of a hydrogen bomb, with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament becoming a prominent campaign within the left of the Labour Party.¹¹ Bevan and Devonport MP, Michael Foot were prominent supporters of the movement, until Bevan defected at the 1957 Labour Party Conference with his 'naked into the conference chamber' speech.¹² Plymouth Sutton's members stayed true to its position on nuclear disarmament, with Sutton ward submitting a resolution on the subject to the Labour Conference in 1958.¹³

⁶ Hugh Dalton, *High tide and after: memoirs 1945-1960*, (London: Muller, 1962), p.384.

⁷ Richard Crossman *The backbench diaries of Richard Crossman*, (London: H.Hamilton, 1980), p.149.

⁸ PSCLP 24.09.1952,(p.2).

⁹ Jefferys, *Politics...*pp.23-24.

¹⁰ Harris, *Attlee*, p.506.

¹¹ Alastair J. Reid, 'Labour and the Trade Unions', in *Labour's first century* ed. by D. Tanner, P. Thane and N. Tiratsoo,,(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000),pp. 221-247,(pp.231-232).

¹² 'Your Favourite Conference Clips' in *Daily Politics* < http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/the_daily_politics/6967366.stm > [accessed 23 March 2015].

¹³ PSCLP 19.5.1954,(p.1); PSCLP 24.09.1958,(p.6).

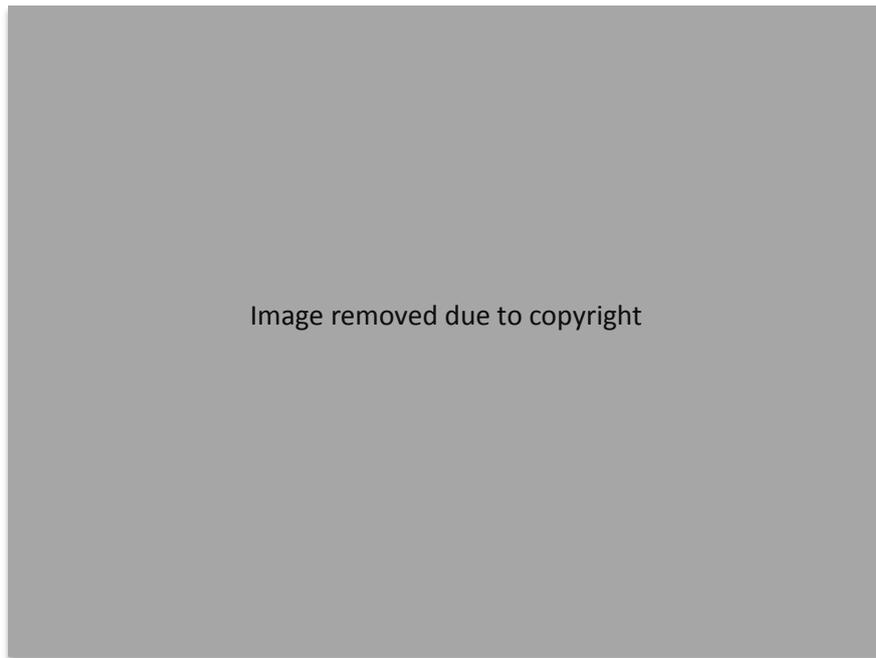


Figure 17 - Gaitskell in Plymouth 1958.¹⁴

Bevan stood against Gaitskell and Wilson for the position of the Treasurer of the Labour Party in 1954 upon the death of Arthur Greenwood. The position was seen by many as a stepping stone to the party's leadership. The constituency's votes were very close with Bevan getting twenty nine to Gaitskell's twenty seven, but Wilson's two ensured that the vote went to a second round. The second round resulted in the constituency endorsing the national winner, Gaitskell by thirty-two votes to thirty.¹⁵ In 1955 the national and Plymouth Sutton Labour Parties lost their general election battles which resulted in Attlee resigning as leader. The man who had been even-handed in frustrating the ideologies of the left and right wing of the Labour Party was replaced by Gaitskell, the young leader of the right wing.¹⁶ The leadership contest was only voted on by the Parliamentary Labour Party, thus preventing any analysis of the constituency. Gaitskell and Bevan reconciled their differences in 1956 as Bevan realised he had little to gain from continued factionalism and in July 1956 was promoted to Shadow Foreign Secretary, thus leaving the left of the Labour Party leaderless, and with significantly reduced appeal.¹⁷

¹⁴ 'Photograph of Hugh Gaitskell', Plymouth, *Plymouth and West Devon Record Office*, 1418/15841.

¹⁵ PSCLP 30.6.1954,(p.2).

¹⁶ Nick Randall, 'Understanding Labour's ideological trajectory' in *Interpreting...* ed. by John Callaghan et al.,pp. 8-22.,(p.18); Andrew Thorpe, *A history of the British Labour Party*,(New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp.131-132.

¹⁷ Thorpe, A history...,pp.127-128.

Throughout the period the constituency was eager to submit its own ideas and its own resolutions to the National Labour Party but it also looked for leadership. It asked for 'a clearer definition of socialist principles' in 1958 to help to campaign as they believed this would help the Labour cause locally.¹⁸ This was opposite to the South Lewisham Labour Party which was held together by a strong leadership and 'undefined socialism'.¹⁹ Thus Plymouth Sutton was either more united than South Lewisham or had stronger leadership.

The members throughout the whole period were remarkably even in their voting with both the left and the right wing equally supported through the period. The issues of armament, both at home and abroad were a special cause of interest in the constituency, due to being close to the Devonport Dockyard.

¹⁸ PSCLP 24.9.1958,(p.6).

¹⁹ Gidon Cohen, Andrew Flinn & Lewis Mates, 'Political Culture and the Post-War Labour Party: Values, Practices and Activism in South Lewisham Labour Party, 1948-71' *Socialist History*, 32,(2008), 59-83,(p.70).

Conclusion

This detailed study of the Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party has shone a light on many of the previously unknown discussion points. The party was made up of a number of hugely important committees, despite lacking large numbers of active membership the executive was successful in their management. Both the EC and GMC took their roles seriously and were answerable to the members of the local party. The representation of youth inside the party was moderate, favoured by the representation that they received from the EC, but unable to utilise this fully due to the lack of members. The representation of women in the constituency had positives in the amount of members and Mrs Middleton's prominence, but lacked equal representation at in the EC. The Social Committee struggled to use the social events to raise money thus they decreased in frequency. The propagandist work of the party was increasing in monetary expenditure through the period, but overall these efforts had no impact on the municipal election results. The municipal elections seemed to have unifying factors, as all of the wards voted with a similar yearly swing. The national Labour Party dealt with the Bevanite rebellion, which the constituency did not support, unlike most other Constituency Labour Parties.

The Plymouth Sutton Constituency Labour Party functioned well during the 1950s, without being spectacular. The wards were losing votes almost every year in the municipal elections but holding control of the Council, Lucy Middleton lost her battle with J J Astor for the parliamentary seat in 1955. However the party did succeed in purchasing a regular venue, Beaumont Hall while increasing the income and maintaining a steady membership of over 2000.

This dissertation is designed to be a foundation stone to any future study of constituency parties, nationally or in the South West. To develop a further study of any of the areas this dissertation has touched upon the use of a number of archives would be beneficial.¹ A study focused on the constituency's role in national politics would benefit from the use of Lucy Middleton's papers which are found within her husband's political papers.² Correspondence of the constituency's agent Alf Sweetland with the Woolwich

¹ These archives were found in the research of this study but due to time and word count restrictions not used.

² 'JS Middleton Papers' Manchester, *Labour History Archive and Study Centre, (People's History Museum/ University of Central Lancashire)*, LP/JSM; '1March -31 December,,(JJ Astor and Mr Lucy Middleton), 950-1952'

Labour Party would be useful for a study on nationalisation.³ For a study of the politics of Plymouth in general elections and their MPs both the Astor family archives and Michael Foots' papers would be helpful.⁴ For a more detailed insight into the Plymouth City Council, Alderman Mason (leader of the Labour Councillors) has papers deposited.⁵

and '1 August-29 March,,(J.J. Astor and Mrs Lucy Middleton), 1954- 1956' Plymouth, *Plymouth and West Devon Record Office*, 186/18/88 and 186/18/90.

³ 'Correspondence with AA Sweetland,(Plymouth Sutton CLP) and John Keys,(Woolwich LP)' Manchester, *Labour History Archive and Study Centre,(People's History Museum/ University of Central Lancashire)*, LP/GS/BMR/3-6.

⁴ ; '1March -31 December,,(JJ Astor and Mr Lucy Middleton), 1950-1952' and '1 August-29 March,,(J.J. Astor and Mrs Lucy Middleton), 1954- 1956' Plymouth, *Plymouth and West Devon Record Office*, 186/18/88 and 186/18/90; '1926-92 papers' Manchester, *Labour History Archive and Study Centre,(People's History Museum/ University of Central Lancashire)*,MF.

⁵ 'Alderman H G Mason' Plymouth, *Plymouth and West Devon Record Office*, 212+439.

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