

PORTRAIT OF A SCOTTISH REVOLUTIONARY

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# REMEMBERING JOHN MACLEAN

BY HARRY Mc SHANE

## All Hail, the Scottish Workers' Republic!

For some time past the feeling has been growing that Scotland should strike out for National Independence, as well as Ireland and other lands. This has recently been strengthened by the English Government's intention to rely mainly on Scottish troops to murder the Irish Race.

Genuine Scotsmen recently asked themselves the question: "Are we Scots to be used as the bloody tools of the English against our brother Celts of Erin?" And naturally the instinctive response was "No!"

Again, the land of the Highland crofters is arousing the blood of Highlanders driven south to the Clyde Valley for work. Especially the filthy tactics of Lord Leverhulme (an English capitalist), who has terrorised Stornoway wage-slaves as a means of beating the English raiders who seized the farms of Coll and Gress. Divide and conquer again!

Interest in the Highland land question has again been roused, and students are protesting the Highland clearances.

Scottish students are now aware that Edinburgh lawyers and politicians sold Scottish Independence in 1707, although most blame has fallen on John of Stair. Many of us are convinced that ever since the Edinburgh kings' and queens' counsels and politicians have been in the regular pay of London to keep Scotland as the base tool of the English Government. These scoundrels in the eighteenth century helped to ruin Burns, the peasants' and people's poet.

The "Rebellions" of 1715 and 1745 were natural reactions against the treacherous deed of 1707, but these unfortunate outbursts but gave the English the excuse and chance to subdue the Highland chiefs, and then corrupt them with an English education at Oxford or Cambridge.

Since 1790 the chiefs became Englishmen in outlook, and used their clansmen to defend English capitalism against the Revolution started in Paris in 1789. Since the Napoleonic wars Highland regiments have been used to defend the stolen lands of England all over the globe, and have largely helped to extend the English Empire.

# REMEMBERING JOHN MACLEAN

BY HARRY Mc SHANE



**T**o those of us who were associated with John Maclean, the fiery and restless Scottish revolutionary, it comes as a slight shock to realise that it is coming close on half a century since death brought his activities to an end. Only death could do what those in power tried to do, on five occasions, by sending him to prison. The movement to which he devoted his life has undergone many changes since he died, but the goal he strove for has not yet been reached. Some of those who helped to make the changes aimed for a different goal. It would be wrong, however, to say that he fought in vain. The issues he raised are more acute than ever before.

John Maclean became a world figure when he took a stand against the war madness and the seemingly endless slaughter that started on the 4th August 1914. What he did then did not surprise those who knew how devoted he was to the cause of Socialism. No one could fail to be impressed with his intense manner, whether teaching a class on economics or speaking at a propaganda meeting. His sincerity was beyond doubt.

The great interest now shown in the political work of John Maclean seems to necessitate a limit being placed on the amount of space that should be devoted to his childhood and youth in an article of this kind. However, its importance is such that something must be said about that part of his life. His early background is certainly of interest.

On many occasions, when speaking in public, he repudiated the suggestion that he was not of the working class. A brief glance at his background and early life confirms all he claimed regarding his working-class origin. His father, Daniel Maclean, came from Mull. His mother, whose maiden name was Anne McPhee, was born in Corpach. Circumstances brought them both to Nitshill, Renfrewshire, and it was there they were married. They moved to Bo'ness, and then to Pollokshaws where Daniel found employment in a local pottery. Unfortunately, Daniel Maclean died when John was only nine years old. This presented Mrs Maclean with the problem of bringing up a family in the

harsh social conditions of that period.

She tackled the problems by finding work in a mill where she worked as a weaver, the occupation she followed before she met her husband. Taking into account the courage and determination shown by John Maclean in later years one seems to get a glimpse of the kind of woman he had for a mother. She was a woman with a strong sense of duty. She achieved what she set out to do.

The need to augment the family income was not overlooked by John who took on all kinds of jobs that would enable him to make a small contribution. There is evidence that other members of the family played their part. This kind of co-operation helped to make it financially possible for John to pursue his strong desire for education. This desire for education became a passion with him as the years went on. Sometime early in his life it was accepted that he would become a school teacher. That, in those days, was a high aim for a boy of the working class. After leaving a primary school he entered a higher grade school in order to facilitate the aim he had set himself. He worked during the holiday period, and this, together with the co-operation of the family, enabled him to take the first step towards becoming a fully qualified teacher.

His teaching career started when Govan School Board employed him as a pupil teacher in Polmadie School. Because Polmadie is situated several miles from Govan a few words of explanation may be thought necessary. Govan, Pollokshaws and Kinning Park, were separate burghs each having its own burgh council. Govan, in earlier times, covered a much wider area known as Govan Parish. Polmadie is, in fact, situated in the Govanhill ward (but was in Govan Parish). John Maclean continued to be employed by the Govan School Board until he was dismissed in 1915—an event that created a real storm.

Because of his unquenchable thirst for education it is not surprising that John Maclean felt a desire to go to Glasgow University. The members of Govan School Board decided to make his attendance at Glasgow University possible by allowing him time away

from school. It seems no accident that he chose Political Economy as his principal subject when going for his M.A. degree. He was already interested in socialism before going to the university, and the section of the movement to which he was attached regarded the teaching of Marxist economics to the workers as being of vital importance.

John Maclean often declared that he was attracted to socialism by Robert Blatchford, the editor of the *Clarion*, and author of many books and pamphlets. The writings of Blatchford were popular and had a wide circulation. John Maclean, having accepted socialism, found himself faced with a choice between two organisations. The Independent Labour Party was anti-Marxist, and the Social Democratic Federation, led by H. M. Hyndman, openly declared its acceptance of Marxism. John chose the S.D.F. which had in its ranks a number of able workers who carried on a ceaseless campaign for what was, in their eyes, all the necessary educational work for the attainment of socialism. The best known of these workers was Willie Nairne, a stone-breaker, who died in 1902.

When John Maclean joined the socialist movement (72 years ago) the electoral see-saw was between the Liberals and the Tories. It was 1906 before Scotland sent a Labour candidate to Parliament; when two were sent. Conditions were deplorable and religious animosity was acute. Despite all that, the socialist propagandists took full advantage of every opportunity to put their case. Socialists in the workshops made every effort to win over their fellow workers. John Maclean's enthusiasm for educational work brought these activities on to a higher level.

The S.D.F. made a practice of organising study classes with the aim of keeping the members up to scratch. John Maclean threw himself into this kind of work, but, as we shall see later, he was far from being satisfied with this. Meantime, he played a full part in the many activities of the Social Democratic Federation. He founded a branch of the S.D.F. in Pollokshaws, and became a member of the Pollokshaws Co-

operative Society. Along with a young man, James D. Macdougall, he started to hold open-air meetings at Shawlands Cross at which political events of local and national importance were dealt with.

The political climate in which socialists did their work was very different from that which prevails today. The Independent Labour Party, after years of persistent work led by two Scotsmen, Keir Hardie and Ramsay Macdonald, had won over most of the trade unions to the idea of working class representation in Parliament— independent of the Liberals. The Labour Representation Committee was formed in 1900. The I.L.P., the S.D.F., and the Fabian Society were affiliated to it. The S.D.F. delegates to the inaugural meeting tried to get the L.R.C. to recognise the class struggle, but they were not successful. The S.D.F. had an influx of members who, two years later, took the Federation out of the Labour Representation Committee. John Maclean considered the withdrawal from the L.R.C. a serious mistake. He held to that position until the end of the first world war.

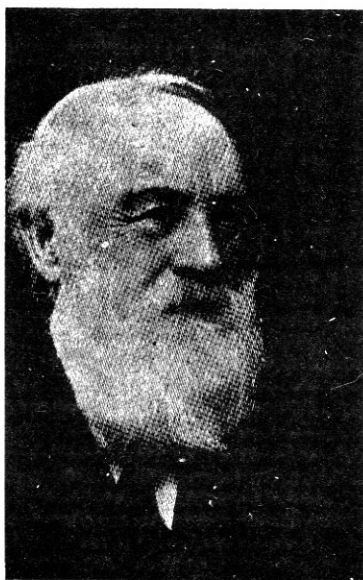
Like most Marxists, before August 1914, he was an admirer of the German Social Democratic Party, then the largest socialist party in the world and making great electoral conquests. Apart from the first volume of *Capital*, very few of Marx's writings were available in English but the gap seemed to be almost filled by the popular works of Karl Kautsky, the German socialist leader. The German socialists seemed to set the pattern in both theory and practice.

John firmly believed that success for the workers in the class struggle depended on a combination of education and organisation. He hoped to see the Co-operative Movement coming to the assistance of workers engaged in struggle with their employers. He wanted the trade unions to be based on industry instead of craft. In addition, he wanted parliamentary activity co-ordinated with industrial action. He stood for class solidarity in every sense of the word. This gave meaning to his work in the field of education. His education classes were enlivened by references to the latest happenings in industry and politics. There was no semblance of impartiality in the conflict between capital and labour.

It is not possible to go into detail in one article on the many activities in which he became involved. He helped in elections and gave support to strikes. He gave all kinds of assistance to those of his comrades who were active in Pollokshaws. They issued a small paper called the 'Pollokshaws News'. He was a regular attendee at the meetings of the Pollokshaws Co-operative Society. He also found time to take part in the agitation on unemployment in 1907 and 1908.

The S.D.F. came into conflict with the I.L.P. on a number of occasions. Attempts had been made to achieve unity. Many documents were issued but no progress was made. John Maclean played a part in the battle, concentrating mainly on the weak leadership of Ramsay Macdonald, Philip Snowden and Keir Hardie. He refused, however, to give support to the slanders against these men that came from Hyndman in later years, after the outbreak of the first world war. It was the refusal of the I.L.P. leaders to accept Marxist principles that prompted the criticism.

While John Maclean was organising classes all over Scotland, in the mining areas in particular, the danger of a world war forced itself on the attention of socialists throughout the world. Much was being said and written on what steps should be taken to stop such a calamity happening. Keir Hardie argued



H. M. Hyndman

at meetings of the Second International that a general strike be called in the event of war being declared. The young people on the Left were more partial to the slogan of Gustave Herve, 'Insurrection Rather Than War'. This anti-militarist attitude was strong among Clydeside socialists. Gustave Herve, it should be said, became a French jingoist when the war did come. It was in this period that H. M. Hyndman and Robert Blatchford started to call for a large navy. John Maclean came out against this call. A division occurred inside the socialist movement.

It should be explained that Hyndman was now leading the British Socialist Party. The Social Democratic Federation, in 1909, substituted the word 'Party' for 'Federation'. In 1910 Victor Grayson made a call through the *Clarion*

for a new British Socialist Party. He met with a good response, but in view of the fact that S.D.P. was to discuss the proposition at its annual conference in 1911 it was decided that the B.S.P. would not be launched officially before then. There was formed, in Glasgow, a provisional B.S.P. which carried out a campaign. A joint committee of the new body and the S.D.P. was set up in Glasgow. It was on this committee that the writer came into close contact with John Maclean. With a few exceptions the leadership of the new British Socialist Party was the same as in the S.D.P. and 'Justice' continued as the official organ of the Party. John Maclean got bigger classes. The period between 1911 and 1914 was one of unprecedented strikes. Local strikes and national strikes attracted the attention of the Press. While feature writers were seeing some mysterious cause for the 'industrial unrest', John Maclean was explaining it in the light of the teachings of Karl Marx. He carried his activities into many parts of Scotland. His approach at meetings and classes always aroused a great deal of excitement. He dealt with issues of local, national and international importance.

## The First World War

Members of the B.S.P. were disturbed over the issue of whether or not to support Hyndman's call for a big navy to counteract the 'German Menace' as it was described by the jingoists. There were a few in Glasgow who supported Hyndman, but John Maclean was outspoken in opposition to this proposal. He was still an admirer of the German social-democrats, and like most European socialists he placed great faith in them. In spite of everything war came and ordinary people went war mad. What was a harmless music hall song, 'It's A Long Way to Tipperary', became a war song. Lord Kitchener became Britain's recruiting agent. Kitchener's photograph with the pointing finger had a surprising effect on young people. Every form of public pressure was used to stampede young workers into the armed forces. This was assisted by the firm belief that the war would be over in a matter of months. The failure of the German Social-Democratic Party to take a stand against the German militarists made things difficult for the anti-war socialists in Britain.

John Maclean lost no time in launching a campaign that was to bring him several terms of imprisonment, and, at the same time, make him a world figure. He took good care, however, that nothing would be allowed to hinder his educational work. The classes grew larger and he had to move from the Templar's Hall in Ingram Street, to the larger Central Halls, Bath Street. Because of the effort he put into the

educational work the classes were as lively as the public meetings. Those who attended the classes became as keen as he was.

### Anti-war activities

In Glasgow, the offices of the Glasgow Corporation Transport Department in Bath Street were used for recruiting work. John chose the opposite corner for the main weekly propaganda meeting. The meetings grew bigger every week, but the audiences included opponents as well as supporters. They brought strength and courage to many who wavered on the war. There were many threats of violence against John and his supporters but they refused to be intimidated. The Defence of the Realm Act had been placed on the Statute Book and those associated with the campaign were without illusions about the way in which it would be used. The police were paying a lot of attention to the activities against the war, but the Act was not used against the Clydeside activists until late in 1915, when all hopes of a short war had faded, and the workers had recourse to industrial action in order to improve their conditions.

The first, and most important strike, took place in February 1915. Important as it was, this is not the place to go into details. It is sufficient to say that the demand made was for twopence an hour. The A.E.U. had asked for this before the outbreak of war. Now the shop stewards, because of exceptional circumstances, asked that the increase be given immediately. It started in Weir's Cathcart, and the leading figure was J. M. Messer. It was out of this that the Clyde Workers' Committee was formed. William Gallacher was elected chairman and J. M. Messer, secretary. The rights which the shop stewards now possess sprang from that struggle. Most of the leading shop stewards involved in that Clydeside strike had attended John Maclean's classes.

The year started with the house-owners deciding to raise rents and ended with Lloyd George facing an angry meeting of workers. The Clydeside workers were able for the first time to win concessions from the employers, and to resist some conditions laid down by the Government for the winning of the war. The shop stewards tended to forget the political issue of the war and got absorbed in fighting for concessions. Ultimately, this became the definite policy of the Clyde Workers' Committee. John Maclean supported the strikes but he was far from satisfied with shop stewards who were opposed to the war but had decided to concentrate on economic issues alone. He spoke openly about this.

The anti-war activities were intensified in September 1915. The Glasgow District Committee of the B.S.P. was

now fully supporting John Maclean despite the fact that Hyndman was using the machinery and the official organ of the Party in support of the war. On the initiative of John Maclean the Glasgow District Committee launched their own paper which took the title of *Vanguard*. The police had been attending the meetings for a considerable time and it was to be expected that they would take action. Speeches made by him on 29th August and 2nd September led to him being brought before the Sheriff on 29th October.

He had said that he had been a member of the socialist army for 15 years and added, 'God Damn All Other Armies'. He had also referred to the war as 'This Murder Business'. These statements were distorted, but the accused stuck to what he did say. The court was full of people who did not hesitate to express their approval of the fearless statements he made in his defence. The sheriff, to the surprise of everyone, passed a mild sentence. John was fined £5 or five days imprisonment. He refused to pay the fine and went to prison.

This prison sentence suited those in control of the Govan School Board down to the ground. It was their opinion that a man who had been to prison was not a suitable person to teach children. Despite many protests he was dismissed. Harry Hopkins, an I.L.P. member of the School Board, made a good fight against the dismissal, but what was of more importance was the efforts of ordinary people to prevent the dismissal. They protested both inside and outside the meetings of the School Board, but the die-hards refused to be moved. John was now without a job. While he was serving a month's notice in Lorne Street School a struggle on rents blew up.

Rents had gone up and evictions had become quite common. The rent increases aroused resentment in many parts of Britain but the highlight was reached in Glasgow. On 17th October the houseowners brought 19 tenants to court for arrears of rent. One of the tenants worked in a shipyard at Dalmuir. The workers there and in other shipyards threw down their tools and marched to the court in Glasgow. The workers in the Fairfield shipyard, when passing the school at Lorne Street, went in and invited John to join them. He never again returned to the school. That rent fight is a story in itself; it brought about the Rents Restriction Act.

### Repression

Around Christmas, Mr Lloyd George, accompanied by Mr Arthur Henderson, a Labour M.P. who had joined the government, came to Glasgow. He met some of the shop stewards at several establishments, but the meeting at

Parkhead Forge was a lively one and led to some new developments. The visit culminated in the famous confrontation in St Andrews Hall.

The government started the year 1916 by attacking all those on Clydeside who seemed to stand in the way of its aims. The paper *Forward* had printed a report of the meeting between Lloyd George and the shop stewards at Parkhead Forge. For this it was suppressed in January. The Clyde Workers' Committee issued a new paper, *The Worker*, which, in its first number, reprinted the report that got *Forward* into trouble. *The Worker* was suppressed. When the military entered the premises of the Civic Press to suppress *Forward* they found the *Vanguard* there and suppressed it. Both *Forward* and *The Worker* came out later, but *Vanguard* did not reappear until 1920.

This was only a beginning. Within a few months no less than seven persons were in prison, and nine shop stewards were deported to other parts of the country. Various sentences were imposed on William Gallacher, James Maxton, James MacDougall and others. The heaviest sentence was passed on John Maclean. The charge against him was on six counts. They covered support for strikes and opposition to conscription. It was alleged that he had said that those who had guns should use them. In his defence he admitted having told workers to strike and had spoken against conscription. He said that the charge that he advised workers to use guns was ridiculous. He referred to his efforts to get a Scottish Labour College established, and his campaign on housing. He was found guilty on four counts. He was sentenced to three years penal servitude.

It could be said that the action of the government in punishing John Maclean and the others brought about a temporary calmness, but it would be a mistake to conclude that everything had come to a dead stop. Before going to prison John had been working hard to get a Scottish Labour College going. All sections of the movement showed an interest in the project. The first conference was timed to take place on 12th February in the Co-operative Hall, Clarence Street—now Dalintober Street. John Maclean was to deliver the opening address but he was arrested on the 1st February and not released on bail until the 13th February, the day following the date of the conference. The address was delivered by James D. MacDougall. Bob Smillie was in the chair. About 500 delegates attended. This was a good start. Its further development will be referred to later.

There seems little doubt that the introduction of conscription in January 1916 had a connection with the arrests and deportations a few months later. As predicted by John Maclean the



Conscription Act did not apply to Ireland. The failure of the Liberal Government to pass the Home Rule Bill because of Tory intimidation together with the fact that John Redmond, the Parliamentary leader of the Irish National Party, gave support to the war gave rise to a great deal of tension in Ireland. On the 24th April, just 13 days after John Maclean was sent to prison, the Easter Rising broke out. This event was to affect John's approach a few years later.

Another event that was to affect his activities was the annual conference of the British Socialist Party, held in May of that year.

The conference rejected the pro-war policy of Hyndman and his followers. The delegates also decided in favour of affiliation to the Labour Party. The Hyndmanites left the conference and, later, formed a new party. The official

Forward, John Wheatley, then leader of the Labour Group in Glasgow Corporation, Harry Hopkins of the I.L.P. and Arthur McManus of the S.L.P. all played a leading part in the campaign. After having been in prison for fully 14½ months he was allowed out on ticket of leave.

He was given a great reception wherever he went. He responded by showing greater vigour than ever before and had a rousing effect on his audiences. He made it clear that he had not been released through any kindness of heart on the part of the government. His classes attracted more pupils than ever before. The classes were held in the Central Halls, Bath Street, Glasgow, on Sunday afternoons, and were followed by evening meetings in the same hall. It was at one of the evening meetings that the proposal that he become the official Labour candidate for Gorbals was

in Russia by the Soviets—better known as the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. The call by the new Soviet Government for peace without annexations or indemnities gave a great impetus to the elements struggling to bring the war to an end. It was a tonic to those who were still depressed by the failure of most of the world socialist leaders to carry out their pledges to oppose the war. This great event stood out as a vindication of the stand he had taken since August 1914.

The new Russian Government lost no time in expressing their appreciation of those who stuck to their principles. Leningrad (then known as Petrograd) had been the centre of the struggle. John Maclean was made an honorary member of the Petrograd Soviet, as was Karl Leibknecht, the well-known German anti-war fighter. This was followed up in January 1918, when the Soviet Government appointed him Russian Consul for Glasgow. A great deal of hardship prevailed among the Russian refugees then living in the West of Scotland. He combined work on their behalf with the fight for the release of two prominent Russians who were interned in this country. They were Chichern and Petrov. Money sent to help him in this work by the Soviet Government was sequestered by the British Government. Letters addressed to him were returned to the senders.

The enthusiasm for war was now replaced by a desire to see the slaughter ended. Many who were quite content to concentrate on issues of only economic significance could no longer ignore the ever-increasing slaughter on the continent of Europe. A large meeting in St Andrews Halls, sponsored by the Government for engineering and ship-building workers, rejected proposals to extend conscription and called for peace. This was at a time when Britain was concerned about the possibility that Russia would make a separate peace with Germany. A separate peace was made inevitable by circumstances created by the allied nations as well as by the Germans.

The Brest-Litovsk Treaty was ratified, after some delay, on the 14th March 1918. John Maclean was arrested on the 13th April. The arrest, and the trial that followed, coincided with preparations for military intervention in Russia. The campaign against the new Soviet Government was fierce. Winston Churchill made great use of his wide vocabulary when preaching hatred of the Bolsheviks. It was in this unfavourable political atmosphere that John Maclean was brought before judge and jury.

He was charged on 11 counts in which such words as 'mutiny', 'sedition' and 'disaffection' were used. There were references to the Russian Revolution and the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. He was, in fact, charged with advocating revolu-



organ, *Justice* was taken away by Hyndman on the grounds that it was his private property. The B.S.P. started a new paper with the title, *The Call*. The policy of John Maclean was now the policy of the British Socialist Party.

All of the others arrested were sent to prison for 12 months, with the exception of Walter Bell who was sentenced to three months. When they came out the demand for the release of John Maclean grew much louder. The overthrow of the Czar of Russia in February 1917 gave the movement a real lift. The Czarist Government was regarded by socialists as the most tyrannical in the world. Political refugees were scattered throughout the world and Britain had a fair share of them. There was jubilation in the working class movement. The campaign to get John Maclean out of prison was intensified. Thomas Johnston, editor of

mooted. This was made possible by the fact that the B.S.P. was affiliated to the Labour Party. The readiness of John Maclean to become the Labour candidate was seen as part of his fight against the war. Gorbals was the only constituency to be represented by a Labour Member of Parliament, but he had joined the war cabinet. This to both the B.S.P. and the I.L.P. was an intolerable situation. The contest, however, could come only after the war was over.

### The October Revolution

In a little more than four months after John's release from prison there occurred an event which has had a lasting effect on the world situation, and certainly had a great effect on the outlook and activities of John Maclean. The reference is to the seizure of power

tion. It is not possible, in one article, to do justice to this historic trial. His speech from the dock has been printed on several occasions and should, perhaps, be done again.

John Maclean called no witnesses for his own defence, but cross-examined the police witnesses brought forward by the prosecution. His speech, in the main, was an indictment of capitalism. He said,

'I am not here, then as the accused; I am here as the accuser of capitalism dripping with blood from head to foot.'

He defended his attitude on production by criticising the attitude of David Kirkwood (later Baron Kirkwood), shop steward at Parkhead Forge. He dealt with the causes of the war, defended the Russian Revolution, and criticised Britain's position in regard to the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. He left nothing out. He set a good example for advocates of freedom likely to come into conflict with those in position of power. He was found guilty and sentenced to five years penal servitude.

### The Gorbals Election

This atrocious sentence added to the discontent which was already spreading among the war-weary people of this country. In his speech from the dock he said that during his previous imprisonment his food was interfered with. This time he decided to go on hunger strike. This decision brought about an intensified campaign for his release, but, in the opinion of this writer, had a disastrous effect on his health. Mrs Maclean did everything possible to direct the attention of the authorities to what was happening in this regard. His release was demanded in all parts of the country. The Government had underestimated the change that had taken place in the country. Reports of discontent in Germany gave encouragement to those opposed to the war in this country and helped to intensify the fight for the release of John Maclean.

When the war ended in November 1918, he was still in prison. The general election was fixed for December, but because of the fact that John could take no part in the struggle, it was decided that William Gallacher, Chairman of the Clyde Workers' Committee, act as deputy candidate in the absence of John who was now the official Labour candidate. George Barnes had been the M.P. for Gorbals from 1906, but he refused to leave the Coalition Government despite the decision of the Labour Party to withdraw. The imprisonment of John became a real issue in the general election in the Clydeside area. Candidates of all parties, in all the constituencies, were faced with the

demand for his release. It is well to mention the fact that the election meetings were well attended in those days. John Maclean just had to be released.

On the 3rd December, one week before Polling Day, he was set free. He had been in Peterhead Prison for approximately seven months where he was expected to serve a sentence of five years. When it became known that he was to be released people flocked to Buchanan Street Station to meet him coming off the train. Those who witnessed the scene can never forget it. There was John on a carriage waving a large red flag. The main streets were thronged. The procession finished up at Carlton Place, near the old A.E.U. Rooms. John, because of the effects of his hunger strike, was unable to speak. He did not speak until the eve of the Poll. It was obvious on that occasion

He had been elected to the Executive Committee of the B.S.P., and that, together with many engagements in England, curtailed many of his activities in Scotland. This did not prevent him from being critical of the many weaknesses he detected in the Scottish Labour movement. It was during this period that the Government tried to allay the growing discontent by introducing the 1919 Housing Act and by setting up the Coal Commission. Then, as now, the Government was calling out for industrial peace, but against this John Maclean was going all out for a revolutionary change.

The B.S.P. became involved in a discussion on the issue of Soviets or Parliamentary Democracy. After this was settled the B.S.P. began playing the role which later became that of the Communist Party. The full facts are not known, but John Maclean walked off



STREET IN LENINGRAD NAMED AFTER JOHN McLEAN

that he had not recovered his health, but the revolutionary fervour was there. He did not win the election but he polled 7,500 votes as against some 11,300 votes for Barnes.

Early in 1919 he was back in the battle. He took up the issue of British intervention in Russia and expressed optimism about a German revolution. He wrote articles and made numerous speeches on the economic situation. Knowing that preparations were being made for a strike of engineering and shipbuilding workers on the Clyde for a 40-hour week he, anticipating a strike of miners in March, proposed that the 40-hour strike proposed for February be put back one month. The Joint Committee sponsoring the strike did not agree. He was in Manchester when the police batoned the strikers. He seized on the opportunity to make a strong attack on the Glasgow authorities.

the E.C. of the Party. Strong pressure was brought to bear to get John to drop all other work and to work full time on the 'Hands off Russia' campaign. He was particularly hostile to Theodore Rothstein who had worked as an interpreter for the War Office during the war. To be fair, it should be pointed out that Rothstein, while working for the War Office, continued to write for the B.S.P. under the name of John Bryan. John, however, resisted the pressure from Rothstein and the other members of the Executive Committee. Few knew of his break with the B.S.P. until he appeared on May Day 1920 on Glasgow Green selling a new issue of *Vanguard*, the paper suppressed along with *Forward* at the beginning of January 1916.

With the assistance of the present writer, meetings were held at Bath Street, Glasgow. After my dismissal

from my employment the campaign was extended throughout the country. After a visit to Dundee, John persuaded Sandy Ross, an ex-policeman, to join in. Sandy Ross introduced Peter Marshall, then a member of the Independent Labour Party. James MacDougall joined in, but because of his state of health he only spoke occasionally. Leaflets on all kinds of issues were put out at 100,000 a time. When the Lord Mayor of Cork was allowed to die while on hunger strike no less than 150,000 leaflets were put out. A call for 'Hands Off Ireland' was made and John wrote a pamphlet, 'The Irish Tragedy', of which 20,000 were sold. The group became known as 'The Tramp Trust Unlimited'.

### The Scottish Workers Republic

It was in August of that year that John surprised the whole Labour movement with his call for a Scottish Communist Republic. A large demonstration on housing was being held on Glasgow Green when the leaflet was put out. It created a sensation. It was certainly something new. It was re-issued later with the heading 'All Hail The Scottish Workers' Republic'. Other events cropped up and hindered any further development, for the time being, of his fight for a Scottish Workers' Republic. He came back to it with vigour, as we shall see later.

In Britain, as in other parts of the world, there developed a movement aiming for the building of a Communist Party. The I.L.P. wrote to Lenin inquiring about the conditions of affiliation to the Communist International. Lenin, in his reply, outlined the famous 21 points. Lenin's reply was publicised in a pamphlet put out by a Left section in the I.L.P. John Maclean agreed with the 21 points. The Tramp Trust sold 400 copies of the pamphlet. John decided to apply for a passport to enable him to visit Russia but Lord Curzon, the Foreign Secretary, turned down the application.

A meeting was held in the City Hall by a section of the movement interested in getting a Communist Party established. The meeting was addressed by William Gallacher who had just returned from Moscow after having gone there illegally. The meeting decided to form a 'Communist Labour Party'. John Maclean wanted a Communist Party established in Scotland, and, in conjunction with the Socialist Labour Party, held another meeting. Some of those associated with the Communist Labour Party turned up and there was a clash which was serious enough to prevent progress. Someone gave a report to the Press. This report was coloured in such a way as to present the participants in the meeting in a bad light. The Communist Party of Great Britain came into being later, but

instead of joining it, John pursued the fight for a Scottish Communist Party.

More trouble was in store for John Maclean in the opening months of 1921. He was busy as a tutor for the Scottish Labour College while, at the same time, fighting alongside the unemployed and attacking the British policy in Ireland. He also kept pointing to the danger of war between America and the British Empire. Early in the year it became clear that the miners would soon be in conflict with the Government and the mine-owners. The miners were locked out on 31st March 1920. John Maclean threw himself into the struggle in such a way as to attract the attention of the police. He had saved some money to buy himself a suit of clothes but he changed his mind and sent the money to the miners. He held meetings in many parts of Lanarkshire. The Government invoked the Emergency Powers Act, and John Maclean was one of the first to be arrested.

The arrest followed a meeting at Airdrie. John Maclean and Sandy Ross spoke; the writer took the chair. Policemen sat in an upstairs room of a cafe taking notes. Both Maclean and Ross were arrested and brought to trial in Airdrie. The main charge arose out of John's call for the extension of the struggle and some references he made to the role of the armed forces. It is unfortunate that no shorthand notes were taken of John's speech in his own defence. He was sent to prison for three months and fined £20 with the alternative of another three months in prison. Ross was sent to prison for three months. This time the fine was paid. While in prison he fought for the right to have his food supplies from outside, and the right to wear his own clothes.

### The Unemployment Campaign

On his release in August, he started to hold meetings of the unemployed while continuing with his educational work. The municipal elections were always held in November in that period and it was decided that two candidates take part. John Maclean ran in Kinning Park and the writer of this article in the neighbouring Kingston Ward. While the preparations were being made John was arrested once again for a speech he had made in Gorbals to the unemployed. The candidate in Kingston had to fight both wards, but well supported by a team of workers. An attempt to label the candidates as standing for the Socialist Labour Party was defeated.

John Maclean was charged with telling the unemployed to take food rather than starve. The chief detective, Lachlan Macdonald, who had tried for years to catch John Maclean out was in his glory. He operated in the Southern Police Division and took the opportunity to arrest John in Carlton Place,

close to the police station, after a demonstration. During the trial, Macdonald kept going to the prosecuting fiscal to give him the low-down on all the defence witnesses. Sheriff Boyd refused to allow John Maclean to make a statement in his defence on the grounds that he had given evidence. He was sent to prison for 12 months. He went on hunger strike and won the right to wear his own clothes and to get his food from friends outside the prison.

He was released in October 1922, just in time to take part in the general election of 1922. Barnes, the M.P. for Gorbals, had declared his readiness to withdraw in favour of the official Labour candidate providing that candidate was not John Maclean. While it was not now possible for him to be the official Labour candidate he was determined to go forward. It was not easy to find anyone in the movement on Clydeside to oppose him, but, eventually, George Buchanan entered the field.

John entered the battle with his colours flying. Whether one agrees with his programme or not, it must be admitted that there never was a more uncompromising candidate. It was the first and last time in which the banner of the Scottish Workers' Republic was raised in a general election. He made no bones about his support for the Russian Revolution, the Irish struggle, and the fight for Indian independence. He stood for the conquest of power by the Scottish working class. He got only 4,027 votes, but he set people thinking.

During 1923 he set out to build a Scottish Workers' Republican Party. He took up a number of local issues including that of a man who died, in suspicious circumstances, in the Southern Police Station. In May of that year he led a demonstration to protest against the eviction of the present writer from his house. No less than 16 candidates were put forward by the new Party in the municipal elections. He went out every evening and covered as many municipal wards as possible. At the same time he was preparing for the coming general election. His campaign in the form of many open-air meetings affected his health. It was always the opinion of the writer that, despite the vigour he put into his work, he overestimated his power of resistance. Whether that be true or not, here he was out speaking on foggy November nights. He was struck down by a severe attack of pneumonia and died on 30th November 1923. Many hundreds of workers turned up on the day of the funeral.

This valiant fighter has not been forgotten. Next year a cairn will be erected to his memory. Much of what he wrote is being reprinted. This man, who died at the age of 44, gave all he had to give for the cause he believed in.

Harry McShane

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