

THE LANCASHIRE MINERS, THOMAS GREENALL
AND THE LABOUR PARTY, 1900-1906

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THE Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation (LCMF) was the first of the big county miners' unions to become affiliated to the Labour Party. It did so in 1903, a full six years before the general passage of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) from Liberal to Labour. This early alignment of the Lancashire Miners with the new party, though an event of some significance in Labour politics, has not elicited very much detailed comment from historians,¹ for whom the explanation for Lancashire's affiliation has been sought in the unique convergence of pressures affecting the miners of this region. It is generally recognised that the Lancashire Miners shared with their fellow workers in other coalfields a desire for parliamentary representation as a means of securing remedial legislation for the industry. Thus the LCMF had been a prominent campaigner for the Eight Hour Day ever since the issue had first been raised in the early 1890s and had later come to embrace a number of other legislative objectives, including the controversial demand for the nationalisation of the mining industry.² Consequently, the Lancashire Federation was no stranger to electoral activity and in 1892 and again in 1895 had mounted campaigns in the Wigan coalfield to elect miners' leaders to Parliament. Indeed, the Federation President Sam Woods had represented Ince³ as a Lib-Lab for three years from 1892. But historians have been quick to point out that a feature peculiar to the working class of this region held back the Miners in electoral matters; this was the notorious division of political loyalty in Lancashire between Liberal and Tory which, in contrast with other regions, gave rise to a large body of Tory working men and made it difficult, if not impossible, for a union like the LCMF to participate in elections with one or other of the established political parties.⁴ There is, in fact, plenty of evidence to show that Tory colliers were always suspicious when LCMF officials of known Liberal sympathies campaigned for the labour interest, as happened when Sam

Woods and Thomas Aspinwall contested Ince and Wigan in the 1890s. Because of this it was not possible for Lancashire to become an exponent of the Lib-Lab politics favoured by other mining districts and, consequently, the LCMF's record of labour representation compared with areas such as Yorkshire or the North East was generally poor. Therefore, it has been suggested, the Lancashire Miners turned at the earliest opportunity to a new party, offering a completely independent line, as the way out of their dilemma, and sank their old party differences in support for the cause of Labour.⁵

There seems little reason to disagree with the overall gist of this argument. Undoubtedly the LCMF was more willing than the miners' unions in other regions to consider the merits of a new party like the Labour Representation Committee (LRC). But one of the more problematical details of the case concerns the fact that the Lancashire Miners did not immediately join the LRC at its inception in February 1900 but instead waited over three years before eventually committing themselves in May 1903. In view of the alleged attractions of an independent stance this hiatus appears strange and, at the very least, requires some explanation. Furthermore, when the LCMF's electoral policy of the early 1900s is taken into account it becomes apparent that the decision to join the Labour Party was not the straightforward matter that previous accounts have tended to make it. It is, therefore, worth paying closer attention to the political developments of these years and in particular looking at two issues: the circumstances surrounding the Federation's decision to join the forces of independent labour in 1903 and, secondly, the subsequent attempt by Thomas Greenall to capitalise on this decision by contesting the constituency of Accrington as a Labour candidate. An investigation of these two aspects of LCMF activity will tell us quite a lot about the nature of early Labour politics, not only in the North West but in the country at large.

II

It is important to remember that much of the impetus for an independent political stance by the Lancashire Miners came from a relatively small cadre of officials within the Federation. The most prominent among them was Thomas Greenall. Greenall was one of the younger generation of miners' officials who, by the late 1890s, had marked themselves out as being the natural successors to the 'old guard' of leaders—men like Sam Woods, Thomas Ashton, Thomas Aspinwall and Robert Isherwood—whose efforts in the 1880s had been instrumental in the very formation of the

Lancashire and Cheshire Federation.⁶ In some ways the younger leaders, among whom could be numbered, in addition to Greenall, Thomas Glover, J. E. Sutton, Stephen Walsh and Jesse Butler, carried on the same traditions as their mentors. Greenall, for example, owed his rise to prominence in the union to the patronage of Sam Woods. Having started his working life at the age of 11 in the Thatto Heath colliery near St Helens, Greenall continued to work in the pits until his early thirties when he attracted the attention of Woods, who appointed him Miners' Agent at Pendlebury. This was in 1889 and thereafter Greenall remained in the Pendlebury area, lending his support to the leadership's endeavours to create a stronger, more centralised Federation that would overcome the traditional autonomy of the districts,⁷ an objective that was eventually secured by 1897. But where Greenall departed from orthodoxy was in his politics. By the mid-nineties he had broken away from Woods's Lib-Lab influence and joined the Independent Labour Party. At Pendlebury he became deeply involved in the ILP's campaign for social reform and labour representation, helping to spearhead a crusading movement for social justice on such questions as housing and infant mortality⁸ and contributing frequently to the local socialist newspaper *The Pioneer*. In 1899 Greenall was in the forefront of a triple labour alliance between the local miners' and engineers' unions and the ILP which sponsored two successful candidates in the Pendlebury District Council elections of that year.⁹ In this way Greenall reflected a noticeable trend on the part of the younger leaders away from the old Liberal or Tory politics of their seniors and towards the cause of socialism and independent labour. Butler and Sutton, for example, were also members of the ILP in the Manchester area where, from the mid-nineties, Sutton became a key figure in the local socialist movement, representing the ILP on the City Council and cultivating considerable electoral support among the miners of Bradford and Clayton.¹⁰ Glover and Walsh too, though probably advanced radicals rather than socialists, had a record of support for independent labour.¹¹ It was natural, therefore, that they should seek to extend their interests in labour representation from a local to a national level when the opportunity presented itself.

The inaugural conference of the LRC in February 1900 provided Greenall with just such an occasion. He attended as an LCMF delegate alongside Thomas Aspinwall, the long-serving Miners' Agent for Wigan. Like other trade unions on this occasion the LCMF had sent a delegation to the LRC meeting with a watching brief, but Greenall sought a more positive role. When the position of LRC Vice-Chairman was being decided

he offered himself as a candidate, no doubt thinking that if elected his union's affiliation would be secured. Greenall did indeed gain election to the post¹² but on returning to Lancashire to consolidate his *coup* he suffered a reversal: after a number of postponed meetings and much disagreement over voting methods the LCMF finally decided by a very substantial majority in June 1900 not to join the LRC.¹³

The reasons for this decision have never been satisfactorily explained by historians of the miners. Gregory, for example, though emphasising the importance of the LRC for Lancashire, makes no comment at all on the 1900 vote. Raymond Challinor, on the other hand, seeks to explain it as a tactical delay, part of the necessary mental adjustment made by the Miners as they switched from being 'anti-Liberal' to becoming 'pro-Labour'.¹⁴ Challinor is undoubtedly correct in stressing the fact that pro-Labour sentiments were stronger among the Lancashire men in 1903 than they had been in 1900 and, as Gregory points out, the Taff Vale case was partly responsible for this changed outlook.¹⁵ But the whole business of the Labour Representation Committee was dependent upon rather more complex matters than simply the tide of opinion. There are two crucial issues to consider. In the first place, why should the LRC appear to the Lancashire Miners as a more neutral body than either of the conventional parties? Though it averred a working man's point of view it nevertheless contained many socialists and erstwhile Liberals who were no less likely to arouse the resentments of Tory colliers than had the Lib-Labs of former days. Secondly, and equally important, the LCMF was part of a wider community of miners, the MFGB, and its policies were influenced by its relations with this national movement. It is in the context of these two factors that the LCMF's attitude to the Labour party should be assessed.

The fact was that the newly created Labour Representation Committee posed something of a threat to the powerful loyalties that had grown up among the miners of the central coalfields during the course of the joint wages agitation of the 1890s. The MFGB had of course originally been established in 1889 to pursue the objective of collective wage bargaining and Lancashire, it should be remembered, had from the very outset been in the forefront of this movement. Whatever prosperity the colliers of Lancashire had experienced by the turn of the century much of it was due to the combined efforts of the MFGB. Coalfield solidarity, therefore, was more than mere rhetoric for the Lancashire Miners. The problem was, however, that industrial and political attitudes in the MFGB did not coincide. Lancashire's politics were not shared by other MFGB regions where the pre-

vailing sentiments were those of traditional Lib-Labism, best exemplified in the hard-bitten anti-socialism of the Yorkshire Miners' Association and its President Ben Pickard.¹⁶ Pickard, who was also President of the MFGB, was a long-standing opponent of independent labour representation and had fiercely opposed its socialist advocates. He regarded the LRC as a parasitic body formed by weak trade unions with an eye on the funds of powerful groups like the Miners. 'I should like to ask,' he exclaimed in a famous speech at the 1900 MFGB Conference, 'why we, as a federation, should be called upon to join an association to find money, time or intellect to focus the weakness of other trade unionists to do what you are doing for yourselves and have done for the last fourteen years.'¹⁷ True to his own staunch individualism Pickard had proposed as an alternative to the LRC a scheme which allowed the MFGB to retain complete control over its own parliamentary candidates and thereby perpetuate the Liberal sympathies of most of its membership. In 1901 the MFGB accepted its President's proposals and the Labour Fund Scheme, as it came to be known, was implemented.¹⁸

Viewed in this light the delicate nature of the LCMF's position becomes plain. The vote of June 1900 has to be seen as a recognition not only of the problem of divided loyalties among the Lancashire colliers themselves but also of the fact that a declaration in favour of the LRC might have seriously complicated relations with their fellow miners in other regions. These twin pressures were to have a recurring effect on LCMF attitudes during the next few years.

Any doubts there might have been about Lancashire's commitment to the *principle* of labour representation were dispelled, however, by the eagerness with which the Lancashire people exploited the Labour Fund Scheme once it came into operation. Significantly much of the pressure came from below, that is to say from rank-and-file opinion, against the advice of the Federation leadership. The initial response of the LCMF leaders to Pickard's scheme had been a modest one, essentially confined to using it as an opportunity for placing Sam Woods in a local constituency.¹⁹ Following his defeat at Ince in 1895 Woods had been MP for Walthamstow (Essex) but, as Thomas Greenall himself pointed out on one occasion, '... whilst on the whole the miners of Lancashire were pleased that Mr Woods was in the House of Commons [they] never relished the fact the same as when he represented a mining constituency in his own county.'²⁰ Shortly after the Labour Fund Scheme had been settled, therefore, it was proposed that Woods contest the Lancashire division of Newton-le-Willows as an MFGB candidate. But instead of

this representing the sum total of the LCMF's parliamentary candidates Woods's adoption served as the signal for a wave of further proposals from the more militant branches. By the end of 1902 a number of mining constituencies were under discussion in Federation meetings as likely places for future Labour campaigns; St Helens, Westhoughton, Radcliffe-cum-Farnworth, Eccles and Ince were all mentioned in addition to Newton. It seems more than likely that much of this discussion had been generated by the activities of Greenall and his fellow Agents and allies Thomas Glover and Stephen Walsh, the latter, though still a radical himself, now a spokesman for a socialist element within the Federation whose votes had helped him secure election as Agent in 1901.²¹ In November 1902 the three men seized the initiative by recommending that, in addition to the candidature at Newton, the Miners should also sponsor their secretary, Thomas Ashton, at Ince and Greenall himself at Radcliffe-cum-Farnworth.²² In some respects this proposal offered a neat solution for Lancashire: the three candidates would represent the complete spectrum of political opinion in the LCMF—Liberal (Woods) Tory (Ashton) and Socialist (Greenall)—and they would be contesting seats held by both political parties, thus illustrating the Federation's genuine independence; at the same time Lancashire would be obtaining its due reward from the Labour Fund Scheme since, on the basis of its membership, the LCMF was entitled to three candidates. But the idea was not without its critics. Some miners' representatives objected to the clandestine manner in which Greenall, Glover and Walsh had devised it whilst others disagreed with the particular constituencies chosen.²⁸ Above all, Thomas Ashton opposed it. No doubt as a lifelong Tory he was aware that much of the pressure arose from radical and socialist quarters and feared that conflict might be engendered with Tory miners which could undermine the Federation's industrial strength. In the past Ashton had always been careful to stress that, no matter what the personal party affiliations of its candidates might be, the LCMF '... [does] not recognise any politics except Labour.'²⁴ In 1894, for instance, at the time of Woods's and Aspinwall's campaign as Lib-Labs, he had reminded the membership that '... any candidate whose election expenses may be paid from the funds of the Federation must not lend his services to either political party unless an advantage is to be gained thereby affecting the workers generally.'²⁵ At the beginning of 1902, as pressure for more Labour candidates mounted, Ashton issued a strong appeal for caution: 'I think we ought not to be too forward in adopting candidates, there is plenty of time; let other districts in the (MFGB) have a little before we get ahead too far'.²⁶

Ashton clearly felt that a headlong rush into labour representation would once again raise the question of affiliation to the LRC and, in an endeavour to place a brake on proceedings, he refused to allow his own name to go forward as the candidate for Ince.

The interesting fact about Ashton's intervention, though, is the extent to which his counsel was disregarded by the Federation. As an official of long-standing his views usually commanded respect, especially among that body of Tory colliers for whom he had always been a leading spokesman; on many previous occasions a pronouncement by Ashton had been taken by the Federation at large to be a powerful indication of Tory feeling and the Lancashire Miners responded accordingly. This time, however, his caution had virtually no effect on the general desire to push ahead with a new electoral policy. Ashton's place at Ince was immediately taken over by Stephen Walsh and, as if to emphasise the drive for labour representation, the list of candidates was further extended in the following year when Thomas Glover was put up in his home town of St Helens.²⁷ Such manoeuvres suggested a new climate of opinion in which, by about 1903, the interests of 'the miners' as a whole were beginning to take precedence over traditional party loyalties; the experience of a decade and more of industrial solidarity seemed to have acted as a solvent on old sectional allegiances and produced almost a sense of class feeling among the Lancashire Miners.²⁸

Certainly in the early years of the new century the issue of labour representation had assumed an urgency greater than probably at any time in the past. An intense crop of industrial problems were all demanding immediate attention—the evergreen issue of the Eight Hour Day, pressing concerns over safety regulations, old age pensions, compensation for injury and Nationalisation.²⁹ On top of these the Conservative government had introduced a tax of one shilling on every ton of exported coal and brought forth a flood of protest from the mining districts at the 'reckless interference with the principles of free trade to which we owe our commercial supremacy'.³⁰ Industrial action in itself seemed insufficient to tackle these matters and the general need for representation in the House of Commons was reflected in the frequency with which the subject was debated at LCMF conferences in the years after 1901. These conditions gave Greenall and his fellow Agents the opportunity to press the merits of the LRC, particularly since they were able to stress its independence from other parties. When, for example, Walsh was proposed for the constituency of Ince it was noted that he would stand '... on strictly independent lines irrespective of any political party'.³¹ Glover set out his position even more bluntly the following year

when he told an MFGB conference: '... if it was a question of coming out (at St Helens) as a Liberal or a Tory he personally might as well chuck up the position'.³² Moreover, by 1903 the LRC itself had been able to display its credentials to the Lancashire Miners. In electoral terms there was the by-election success of David Shackleton to be taken into account at Clitheroe in 1902, whilst as far as ideology was concerned the LRC had shown itself, under the guidance of men like Ramsay MacDonald and Arthur Henderson, to be a moderate organisation whose left-wing was kept on a fairly tight rein. Equally significant was the LRC's flexibility in regard to affiliated members, making it possible for the LCMF to join without severing its ties with the MFGB. This important concession became apparent when pressure from the rank-and-file in Lancashire was building up to a point where it seemed that the LCMF would join with Labour, sooner rather than later. Informal contacts between Thomas Ashton and MacDonald had resulted in the discussion of the LCMF's existing links with the Labour Fund Scheme and Ashton raised the question of exemption from the LRC's Parliamentary Fund. MacDonald, doubtless anxious not to repel a valuable recruit, had made a non-committal reply which clearly found favour with Ashton for when the Federation eventually did become affiliated it did so on the cut-price basis of paying only the ordinary affiliation fee of ten shillings per thousand members and not subscribing to the Parliamentary Fund. The Lancashire Miners therefore joined the LRC whilst continuing to subscribe to the rival electoral fund of the MFGB, a situation which remained unchanged in 1904 when the payment to the LRC's Parliamentary Fund was made compulsory for all affiliates, the LCMF included.³³ This rather easy-going arrangement no doubt helped to appease some of the old guard Lancashire leaders who had feared that affiliation to the LRC would cause problems with other districts in the MFGB, though, as Challinor has pointed out, the LCMF deliberately underplayed its new alignment by sending relatively obscure delegates to LRC conferences.³⁴ Nevertheless, the general mood of the Lancashire Miners was such that when Harry Twist of Bamfurlong Miners, voicing the hopes of militant branches such as Ashton's Green, Berry Field and Pendlebury as well as his own, raised the question of formal LCMF affiliation to the LRC in April 1903 it went through almost as a matter of course.³⁵

III

Of the candidates put forward by the Lancashire Miners two, Glover and Walsh, fought successful campaigns in the General Election of 1906. Woods, however, suffered from constant ill-health and was forced to withdraw from active political work in 1904. His place at Newton-le-Willows was taken by another LRC man, J. A. Seddon of the Shop Assistants, who also secured a victory in 1906 with help from the Miners.³⁶ In many ways, though, the most interesting case was that of Thomas Greenall himself. As one of the prime-movers of independent labour representation it might have been expected that he would gain most in electoral terms, yet it was Greenall who came off worst. Ironically, his aspirations were blocked, not by the old party loyalties he had been striving to overcome, but by the very organisation he had helped bring into being. Greenall's experiences as a Labour candidate amply repay close investigation for they illustrate very clearly the intrusion of national politics into the activities of the LCMF, Greenall's chosen constituency, Accrington, being involved in the secret electoral pact negotiated between the Liberal and Labour Parties.

He had originally been put forward as the LCMF candidate for Radcliffe-cum-Farnworth but on his own initiative Greenall secured the Federation's approval to switch his campaign to the Accrington division in north east Lancashire.³⁷ On the face of it this seemed a pointless manoeuvre since Accrington appeared less suited for a miners' candidate than did Radcliffe; though a fairly typical east Lancashire seat in that it was markedly working class in its social composition the Accrington division was dominated electorally by workers in the cotton weaving and textile engineering trades. The mining vote, confined to the pit villages of Altham, Hapton and Huncoat and the town of Clayton-le-Moors, was certainly less than 10 per cent of the electorate.³⁸ Moreover, Accrington was a strongly Nonconformist area and was reckoned traditionally Liberal. The seat was held by the prominent Wesleyan businessman Sir John Leese, who had won it by a comfortable margin in the 'Khaki' election of 1900, and had never previously attracted a strong labour interest.³⁹ Greenall, however, claimed that he had been promised good support from the local trade unionists and socialists and estimated that this would more than compensate for the lack of miners. At the start of his campaign in the autumn of 1903 he did indeed receive backing from both the local Trades Council and the influential United Textile Factory Workers' Association, two of whose

representatives—Wilkinson of the Weavers and Ashton of the Spinners—toured the constituency making speeches from the Labour platform.⁴⁰ On this basis Greenall's optimism for his new constituency seemed justified.

But there may have been other considerations for Greenall's change of plan. Though hard evidence on the point is lacking it seems more than likely that Greenall was aware of Liberal difficulties in Accrington which would make the seat an easy picking for Labour. During 1902 the incumbent M.P., Leese, ran into acute financial problems, causing him to make known his intention of resigning the seat at the next parliamentary election. This left the Accrington caucus with the task both of finding a suitable replacement and, at the same time, of keeping the matter secret. 'Secrecy', noted the Liberal Party Chief Whip, Herbert Gladstone, in his record of the affair, 'is all important, otherwise a Labour man would come out'.⁴¹ But the local Liberals failed, probably on both counts; after protracted interviewing they selected an alternative candidate, Franklin Thomasson, in whom they seemed to have little faith, by which time Greenall had already made his move for the constituency.⁴²

With two candidates in the field bidding for the 'progressive' vote Accrington represented a test case for the secret Gladstone-MacDonald pact. As far as dealings over Accrington were concerned, though, they revealed the pact to be a rather one-sided arrangement. It soon became clear that the Liberals regarded the constituency as their own preserve and would tolerate no Labour trespassing. Gladstone, for his part, was unable to exert much pressure for he had always pointed out that he possessed no real power to remove a Liberal candidate if the local caucus was determined to keep him.⁴³ At Accrington the Chief Whip made no serious attempt to displace the Liberal man but constantly urged MacDonald to remove Greenall with the offer of alternative constituencies. MacDonald's task was rendered difficult, however, since Greenall had come to regard his candidature as a matter of principle for the LCMF. He declared that Federation Labour candidates should be seen to be challenging a Liberal seat as well as Tory ones (as Walsh, Glover and, later, Seddon were). The point made sense in view of the difficulties surrounding the LCMF's affiliation and Ashton's warnings about the danger of party discord. Independence, in fact, had been the keynote of Greenall's opening campaign speeches and this made it hard for MacDonald to switch Greenall to a Tory seat where the local Liberals would have been more compliant. '[MacDonald] has seen Greenall and Greenall's friends', recorded Gladstone after an interview with MacDonald at the Leicester Isolation

Hospital; 'he has done his best to persuade Greenall to take South Salford, but G. is obstinate and nothing will move him from Accrington.'⁴⁴ But in spite of the candidate's obstinacy MacDonald applied constant pressure to fulfil what he clearly saw as his part of the deal with Gladstone. His most effective weapon against Greenall was David Shackleton, the victor in the celebrated Clitheroe by-election of 1902 when the LRC scored its first parliamentary success in Lancashire. Understandably Shackleton enjoyed great popular esteem at this time, especially in the Accrington area: he was a native of the district, an official of the Haslingden Weavers and had strong personal connections with the local Liberals, having himself been until recently a member of their party. Shackleton emerged as a willing accomplice for MacDonald in the effort to remove Greenall and was probably aware of the existence of the secret arrangements. He appears to have had a number of meetings with Greenall in an attempt to persuade him that the Accrington candidature was hopeless and that Greenall should take up the offer of another seat. He blankly refused to support Greenall's platform, securing the approval of the LRC itself for this move,⁴⁵ and in this way did nothing but damage to Greenall's chances. It was Shackleton who suggested to Gladstone in the spring of 1904 that the surest way of removing Greenall would be to drop Thomasson and retain Leese as the Liberal candidate.⁴⁶

This indeed proved to be the way out of the impasse as far as the architects of the electoral pact were concerned. Gladstone's success in securing for Leese the funds which allowed him to stay on in Accrington was the real factor, rather than the pressure exerted by MacDonald, that ultimately weakened Greenall.⁴⁷ He considered Leese to be a far tougher opponent than Thomasson (who retired from the contest through ill-health) and in fact estimated that it would cost upwards of another £1,000 to mount a serious campaign against him, admitting that even this amount might not guarantee success.⁴⁸ His decision to withdraw as the LRC candidate for Accrington was therefore taken towards the end of 1904, over a year after the campaign had opened. As an LCMF sponsored candidate, however, Greenall was obliged to explain his reasons for withdrawing to the Federation and did so at two successive miners' meetings in December of that year. The first meeting, held at Manchester, provided an interesting sequel to the whole affair for it revealed both the degree of secrecy that had shrouded the LRC's dealings and the depth of feeling among some sections of the miners in favour of the Accrington campaign, thus bearing out Greenall's assertions about the importance of Accrington in the Lancashire Miners' electoral strategy.

Unfortunately for Greenall, however, it also involved a humiliating examination of his personal qualities and resulted in an undue amount of blame being apportioned to the candidate for the failure of the campaign. He was bitterly attacked by some of the delegates, particularly those representing branches in the Accrington district, for neither attending the constituency frequently enough nor exhibiting sufficient will to win, the implication being that he had lacked resolve and sought an excuse to back out. Many miners seemed to sense a backstairs deal and refused to accept Greenall's financial arguments for withdrawing,⁴⁹ thereby voicing suspicions that had been in the air since the autumn of the previous year when MacDonald had been forced to make a public denial of an allegation that he was attempting to use Accrington as a *quid pro quo* with the Liberals to cover a Labour free-run in nearby Clitheroe.⁵⁰ Accusations of this kind were repeated at the second LCMF meeting held in Wigan to listen to the LRC's explanation of the affair. The party's case was put by Arthur Henderson and John Hodge who argued that the refusal to support Greenall was based on the strategic consideration of preferring him to move to Newton-le-Willows, where the LRC candidate (now J. A. Seddon) was in difficulty because of poor health and shortage of money. Nothing was said about Liberal attitudes in Accrington itself, though many delegates openly declared their suspicions of a political dodge and condemned Greenall for having too readily complied with it.⁵¹ But without firm evidence it proved impossible to press these beliefs and the matter was referred to a committee of enquiry to be set up by the LCMF. It reported speedily and placed the full burden of guilt on Greenall's shoulders: '... he has not displayed that energy and courage in his candidature which he ought to have done ... he has been too apprehensive of defeat and has allowed himself to be too easily influenced by people's capricious opinions'.⁵² The idea that the LRC had been involved in a secret political deal was categorically rejected. Such, then, was the verdict and on its basis the Lancashire Miners resolved to drop the Accrington candidature altogether. Greenall retired in ignominy.

It was an ironic outcome to his efforts. Though he may have contributed in part to his own downfall by switching too hastily from Radcliffe-cum-Farnworth the pressure applied by the LRC to keep him out of Accrington also figured largely; as Thomas Ashton later suggested the role of the LRC had been too leniently dismissed.⁵³ How far the Accrington business affected Greenall's future parliamentary prospects is difficult to judge. To be sure, he suffered many more setbacks as a candidate before eventually, at the age of 64, becoming Labour M.P. for Farnworth in 1922;

this was a new constituency created after the First World War out of the division Greenall had originally been set to contest as one of the Lancashire Miners' very first group of Labour candidates.⁵⁴

IV

Four main points have emerged from the above discussion and all have a wider relevance to the question of political change and the rise of the Labour Party in this period. In the first place, we have seen that the transition of the Lancashire Miners to Labour was a more protracted business than has been suggested in previous accounts. There seems little doubt that fears of political discord in the miners' ranks, both in Lancashire and in the national Miners' Federation, were responsible for the LCMF's decision not to affiliate to the LRC in 1900. Three years later conditions had sufficiently changed to make it possible for the LCMF to take on its new allegiance, though as the backlash to Greenall's withdrawal from Accrington showed there was still a danger of alienating some sections of opinion if the Federation was seen to be complying with pro-Liberal forces. Nevertheless the subsequent successes of LCMF candidates served to vindicate the pressure for the Labour alignment and it might be suggested that this change of direction betokened the rise of a new generation of miners to positions of influence within the union: that, in fact, this was not just a change of policy but one of those significant shifts of emphasis that periodically affect all trade unions as new men with fresh experiences and ideas force their way to the front. Secondly, the rather ambivalent relationship that developed between the LCMF, MFGB and LRC may be seen as pointing up Lancashire's role as a bridge between rival organisations. Although historians generally classify the LCMF M.P.s of 1906 with the Labour group in the House of Commons we can see that the MFGB was equally able to lay claim to their allegiance and perhaps by thus demonstrating that the gulf between the two bodies could be spanned the Lancashire Miners helped to precipitate the general adherence of the Miners' Federation to the Labour Party in 1909. Thirdly, the electoral activities undertaken by the Miners in Lancashire underline the point that the much-discussed Liberal-Labour pact actually involved few concessions for the Liberal Party. The Accrington episode especially lends credence to the view expressed by one recent writer on the subject that '... the pact with the Liberals was generous to the LRC only insofar as it allowed its candidates to win Conservative seats or hold on to ones already gained'.⁵⁵ Finally, the Accrington

campaign further shows that by affiliating to the Labour Party the Lancashire Miners were submitting themselves to a degree of national control in the direction of their political affairs; Ramsay MacDonald's attempts to prevent Greenall's candidature represent in embryonic form the intrusion of a bureaucratic influence which, as the Labour Party evolved, served increasingly to bring about the subordination of local interests to the exigencies of national party strategies. In all these ways, then, the events leading up to Thomas Greenall's abortive campaign at Accrington illustrate some of the profound changes that were taking place in the British political system at the turn of the century.

NOTES

I am grateful to my colleague Dr C. P. Griffin for his comments on an earlier draft of this article.

- 1 The subject is dealt with in some depth in the following: Roy Gregory, *The Miners and British Politics, 1906-14* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 57, 63-4, 82-7; Raymond Challinor, *The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners* (Newcastle, 1972), ch. 14. P. F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971) also discusses the electoral activities of the LCMF: pp. 320-2.
- 2 Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation, *Reports, Minutes and Proceedings* (National Union of Mineworkers' Offices, Bolton), hereafter LCMF, 14 Nov. 1896.
- 3 Not Wigan, as stated by Gregory, *op. cit.* p. 82.
- 4 See H. M. Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885-1910* (1967), ch. 12.
- 5 See Gregory, Challinor, *loc. cit.*
- 6 Challinor, *op. cit.* chs 10-12.
- 7 *Wigan Observer*, 18 May 1892.
- 8 *The Pioneer*, May, Aug., Nov., Dec. 1899.
- 9 *Ibid.* Mar., Apr. 1899.
- 10 *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Nov. 1894.
- 11 T. C. Barker and J. R. Harris, *A Merseyside Town in the Industrial Revolution: St Helens, 1750-1900* (1954), pp. 459-60.
- 12 Labour Representation Committee (Transport House, London), hereafter LRC, *Conference Report*, 1900, p. 15.
- 13 LCMF, 31 Mar., 28 Apr., 26 May, 16 Jun. 1900. The voting was: 168 for, 358 against.
- 14 Challinor, *op. cit.* pp. 232-3.
- 15 Gregory, *op. cit.* p. 82.
- 16 For a very thorough discussion of this attitude see David Rubinstein, 'The Independent Labour Party and the Yorkshire Miners: the Barnsley By-Election of 1897', *International Review of Social History*, xxiii, 1978 (I) pp. 102-34.
- 17 MFGB, *Conference Report*, 1900. See also R. Page Arnot, *The Miners* (1949), p. 353 ff.
- 18 MFGB, Report of Executive Council meeting, 6 Dec. 1901.
- 19 LCMF, 22 Nov., 28 Dec. 1901.

- 20 Speech to the MFGB Conference, *Report*, 1901. Woods had lost the Walthamstow seat in 1900.
- 21 LCMF, 27 Apr. 1901. Walsh was elected Agent in 1901 following the death of Aspinwall. An analysis of the voting figures given in the LCMF reports suggests that in the final ballot he received votes transferred from the Social Democrat John Sparling, a Burnley miner who had polled quite soundly in previous ballots before dropping out. The Social Democratic Federation was strong in the Burnley area and a supporter of the Labour alliance principle through the LRC.
- 22 LCMF, 8 Nov. 1902.
- 23 LCMF, 6 Dec. 1902.
- 24 From a circular issued by Ashton to the Federation membership; LCMF, 12 Apr. 1893.
- 25 LCMF, 10 Feb. 1894.
- 26 LCMF, Jan. 1902.
- 27 LCMF, 25 May 1903.
- 28 For a discussion of the development of class attitudes in Lancashire at this time see Clarke, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
- 29 LCMF, 14 Nov. 1896; Thomas Ashton, *Three Big Strikes in the Coal Industry* (Manchester, [n.d.]), vol. 2, p. 81.
- 30 LCMF, 4 May 1901.
- 31 LCMF, 13 Sept. 1902.
- 32 MFGB, *Conference Report*, 1904.
- 33 LCMF, 20 Aug. 1904. The chief beneficiaries of the LCMF's contribution to both electoral funds were the two successful LCMF candidates of 1906, Walsh and Glover. They received salaries from both funds giving them a total annual income of £550. Though the Federation held back £100 of this from the LRC fund some branches nevertheless considered £450 to be exorbitant, but Conference voted in favour of their having it. LCMF, 24 Mar. 1906.
- 34 Challinor, *op. cit.* p. 232. He states that the LCMF's delegation to the LRC Conference of 1904 contained none of the senior officials—Woods, Ashton or Aspinwall. The point is essentially valid, though since Aspinwall had died in 1901 he could not have attended anyway.
- 35 LCMF, 25 Apr., 25 May 1903.
- 36 LCMF, 7 Nov. 1903, 24 Feb. 1906; LRC Minute Book, 30 Jun. 1904.
- 37 LCMF, 23 May 1903.
- 38 See Roy Gregory, 'The Miners and Politics in England and Wales, 1906-14', unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford Univ., 1963, p. 528; H. M. Pelling, *op. cit.* p. 263.
- 39 The Manchester socialist John Hemsall had in fact contested Accrington in the 1900 General Election but obtained only 433 votes; his campaign was not supported by the major socialist parties. *Accrington Observer*, 22 Sept. 1900.
- 40 *Northern Daily Telegraph*, 29 Sept., 16 Oct. 1903; LRC, Minute Book, 5 Sept. 1903.
- 41 BL Add. MSS., 46484, vol. cxlv, Herbert Gladstone Collection.
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 *Ibid.* 46106, vol. cxxii.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 LRC, Minute Book, 30 Oct. 1903.
- 46 BL Add. MS., 46485, vol. cxlvi, Gladstone Coll.
- 47 MacDonald also sent John Hodge and Arthur Henderson to persuade Greenall to move to Newton-le-Willows. LRC, Minute Book, 27 Sept. 1904.

- 48 LCMF, 5 Nov. 1904.
49 *Ibid.*
50 *Northern Daily Telegraph*, 9 Oct. 1903.
51 LCMF, 3 Dec. 1904.
52 LCMF, 31 Dec. 1904.
53 *Ibid.*
54 He was nominated for Leigh, a Liberal stronghold, as the LCMF candidate in the January Election of 1910 but came last in a three-cornered contest. He was not adopted for December 1910, but put forward at Leigh again for 1915, the War of course intervening. In 1918 he fought Farnworth unsuccessfully.
55 David E. Martin, 'The Instruments of the People?: the Parliamentary Labour Party in 1906,' in David E. Martin and David Rubinstein, (eds.) *Ideology and the Labour Movement* (1979), p. 140.