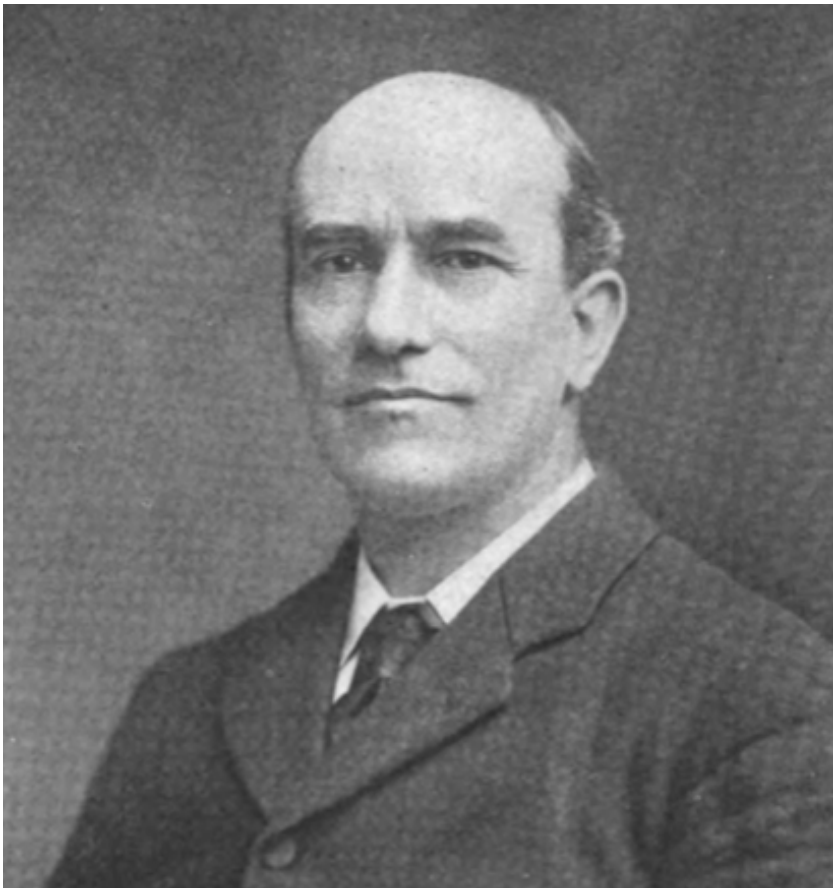
EDWARD McHUGH



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INTRODUCTION

Irishman Edward McHugh (1853-1915) was a radical trade unionist, labour movement activist, social reformer and land rights organiser.

Rural poverty forced McHugh's family to emigrate from Co Tyrone to Glasgow where he witnessed urban destitution, particularly amongst the Irish who had fled the Great Famine of the 1840s and Scottish Highlanders who had moved south because of the Clearances.

McHugh became a firm supporter of Henry George who contended that the unequal distribution of land lay behind all social ills. As the Glasgow branch secretary of the Irish Land League, McHugh's talents as a speaker and organiser saw him chosen to lead a Land League mission to the Scottish Highlands where he helped direct the nascent crofters' agitation along radical lines. He later toured Scotland with Henry George himself.

McHugh's talents were then harnessed by the Trades Union movement. He and Richard McGhee established the National Union of Dock Labourers, leading bitter strikes in 1889 in Glasgow and in Liverpool in 1890 and following which he settled in Birkenhead.

He spent the mid 1890s in New York City where he organised the American Longshoreman's Union and preached George's 'Single Tax Gospel.'

In his death, McHugh was buried at Flaybrick Memorial Gardens, Birkenhead. His headstone was destroyed by the German bombing of Merseyside in WWII. In November 2018 a well attended meeting in Liverpool established a committee to erect a new headstone and this booklet has been published for the planned unveiling on 29 June 2019 at 10.30am.

More details? Journalist Mark Metcalf on 07392 852561 and at mcmetcalf@icloud.com @markmetcalf07 and/or Luke Agnew (Unite rep at the Memorial gardens) on 07792 110973 and at maximun1000@googlemail.com @Lukeagnew11 The original idea for the headstone arose after Mark spoke about his work for the Unite Education department to a group of Unite workplace reps, one of whom was Luke.

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http://www.uta.fi/iasr/fellows/2018-2019/andrewnewby.html

As a student of Henry George and a member of **The Henry George Foundation** of Great Britain, I welcome the proposed memorial to this trade union leader from Merseyside.

In case you have not seen it, I attach one of Henry George's last works, "What Labour Needs", printed in "The Single Tax" in November 1897. How carefully he describes the utility of strikes and that so called coercion by strikers was often a reaction to coercion by employers. I feel he would have approved of McHugh's policy of ca'canny, limiting work hours without a full strike. But in the last section he lays it out straight. The real emancipation of labour will only come by removing the monopoly of ownership of the earth. "There is but one way to escape, and that is by the restoration to all men of their natural and inalienable rights to the use upon equal terms.... the land."

For by allowing the so called "ownership" of land, society set on a course so opposed to natural law, that now we begin to see the trap that was laid. The resulting inequality is supported by a pool of misery, as millions struggle to pay the ever increasing rent. Now our children cannot save enough to accumulate a deposit in order to become a home owner. But, as always, there is but one way to escape.

That is by changing ownership to "usership". The right to use a piece of this earth is granted on condition that the user shall repay to society at large the location benefits enjoyed by the site, which have been created by that society by joint effort. Taxation becomes redundant. Society receives what society makes. Land has no value based on an assumed right to charge rent in perpetuity. Our children can then buy a house for the price of a house. Debt is eliminated. The reward for work is set free to become the whole added value gained by that work.

This is a vision perhaps expressed differently from Henry George, but who can doubt that he and his friend Edward McHugh shared it. We welcome every effort to keep that vision alive.

Tommas Graves

The Single Tax, November, 1897

WHAT LABOUR NEEDS

By Henry George

We have been favoured with an advance copy of a remarkable article contributed by Henry George to the New York Journal. Mr. George says:
I have neglected no opportunity of telling working men that what they have to fight in order to accomplish anything real and lasting, is not their immediate employers, but the false and wrongful system which, by depriving the masses of men of natural opportunities for employment of their labour, compels them to struggle with one another for a chance to work. I have constantly endeavoured in every way I could to induce men to revert to first principles, and to think of these questions in a large way; to convince them that the evils which they feel are not due to the greed or wickedness of individuals, but are the result of social maladjustments, for which the whole community is responsible, and which can only be righted by general action.

UTILITY OF STRIKES

Yet I realise that it is folly to tell working men, as they frequently are told, that they ought not to strike, because strikes will injure them. Not only are there many working men who have nothing to lose, but it is a matter of fact that strikes and fear of strikes have secured to large bodies of them considerable increase of wages, considerable reduction in working hours, much mitigation of the petty tyrannies that can be practised

with impunity where one man holds in his hands control of the livelihood of another, and have largely promoted the growth of fraternal feeling in the various trades The greater number of strikes fail, but even the strike that fails, though its immediate object is lost, generally leaves the employer indisposed for another such contest, and makes him more cautious of provoking fresh difficulties.

THE SYMPATHETIC STRIKE

Nor is it so strange, as some pretend, that one body of workmen, without any special grievance of their own, should strike to help another. The immediate purpose of a strike is to inflict damage upon opposing employers, and there are many places in which employers who could defy their own workmen can be seriously hurt by pressure exerted upon them through the medium of other employers with whom they have business relations. To be sure, third parties, with no direct interest in the quarrel, do suffer, and frequently the greatest sufferers are the men who thus go out to help their fellows. But if the strike be thus more costly, its results, in causing employers to hesitate before engaging in another such contest, are likely to be more decisive and more effective. And men may strike, as men fight, in a quarrel not originally their own, either as a matter of sentiment, or from the more selfish consideration that they thus make alliances that will render them stronger in any quarrels of their own; or, as is generally the case, from the mingling of both motives.

And when men are willing to stop work and submit to loss and suffering in the effort to aid their fellows, does it not show heroism of the same kind as that which prompts men to risk their lives in battle for men weaker than themselves?

Those who would condemn a strike of railroad men in aid of coal miners must, if they be logical and assume the standpoint of working men, condemn the aid which the French gave to the struggling American Republic.

COERCION IN STRIKES

A favourite platitude, now finding wide expression in the American press, is that although men have an unquestioned right to stop work themselves, they have no right to coerce others into stopping work, and the disposition of working men to do this when they are on strike is denounced as not merely wicked in the highest degree, but as un-American.

This is nonsense. When our forefathers struck against England, they not merely struck for them-selves, but compelled everyone else they could to join them, first by "moral persuasion," which amounted to ostracism, and then by tarring and feathering, harrying and shooting, and when they boycotted the East India Company's tea they were not

content with simply refusing to drink it them-selves, but threw it into the sea so that nobody else could drink it. A strike can only amount to any-thing in so far as it is coercive, and whatever working men may say they must of necessity feel that it is only by exerting some upon those disposed to go to work that they can succeed in a strike.

TENDENCY TO VIOLENCE

For the most part, so far, this pressure has been a moral one, and the penalty of contempt as "scabs" had been sufficient to induce men to undergo actual suffering rather than assert what the denouncers of strikes declare to be the inalienable right of every American citizen. But admonitions are not wanting that in these industrial wars – for they are nothing else – there is a growing disposition to resort to more violent measures. And whether right or wrong, the growth of this disposition is natural. The labour associations which have least necessity of resorting to the coarser and more obvious methods of inflicting or threatening injury or loss as a means of coercing employers, are those in trades where special skill is required, and which carefully restrict the number permitted to learn the trade. Beginning at this primary point to interfere with the freedom of the employer and of their own members to teach a trade, and with the freedom of boys to learn it, they are able to so limit the number of those who can take their places, that they can, by their own mere refusal to work, inflict such injury and loss upon employers as will exert a sufficiently coercive power to maintain their wages and enforce their rules. But just in proportion as the organisation of labour proceeds beyond the trades to the learning of which artificial difficulties have been imposed, or which from their nature are not easily learned, do the practicable methods for the exertion of the coercive power necessary to win with employers, become coarser and more obvious.

COERCION THE ONLY COURSE

The mere cessation of work on the part of a strict trades union of glassblowers may inflict such damage and loss upon employers as to compel them to accede to the terms. But a strike of unskilled labourers, when there are thousands of unemployed men eagerly pressing for employment, must be backed either by some sort of coercion to prevent others taking their places, or by some means of inflicting such injury and loss upon employers as will make them afraid to employ men outside of the association.

Now, it is the tendency of constantly increasing labour-saving invention to dispense with special skill on the part of the mass of workmen, and to reduce skilled labour to the status of unskilled; and the extension of labour organisations, which has been so rapid of late years, has been in the direction of the less skilled occupations. This is the reason of the growing tendency of strikes to violence, and the necessity more and

more felt of calling upon men in other occupations for help, by stopping work or by boycotting, to inflict injury or loss upon the employers with whom a struggle is being carried on. If the labour movement is to go on in this direction, every man who looks ahead must see that it will at last come to violence.

WHERE THE BLAME LIES

But for that, not the working man, but the "saviours of society" are to blame. Those who really hold that "whosoever smiteth thee on the right cheek "thou shouldst" turn to him thy other also," and "if any man will take away thy coat" thou shouldst "let him have thy cloak also;" they who hold that the command, "Thou shalt not kill." applies as well to the man in uniform as to the man in plain clothes, might with some consistency condemn violence in strikes. But they are alone.

If there are any such people, however, they are not often found in the editorial rooms of our great dailies or the pulpits of our national churches. On the contrary the loudest denouncers of strikes – those who declare that they ought to be put down by force if necessary – are to be found among the class who have grown rich through extortion backed by force. The very men who are now calling so loudly for the maintenance, by the bayonet if necessary, of the liberty to work, are the most strenuous supporters of a system which denies the liberty to work.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR COERCION

How is it that a land like ours, abounding in unusual natural resources, is tilled with unemployed men? Is it not because of the power which our laws give to some men to prevent others from going to work? Let striking labourers in a city like New York accept the dictum that no man has a right to prevent another from going to work. Let them turn from attempts to compel their former employers to employ them, and where shall they go to employ themselves? Where, indeed, will they go that they will not find someone, backed by law and force, who forbids them to work? There is plenty of unused land in every city. Let them go upon this land and attempt to employ their labour in building houses. How long will it be before they are warned off? Let them cross the East River, the North River, or the Harlem. They will find everywhere unused fields, on which, without interference with any man, they might employ their labour in making a living for themselves and all depending on them. But they will not find a field, though they tramp a thousand miles, on which someone has not the legal right to prevent their going to work. What is left them to do but to beg for the wages of some employer? So if, to prevent being crushed by competition of others like themselves, they strive, even by force, to keep others from going to work, is theirs the blame?

THE PRIMARY COERCION

The very worst the strikers do or think of doing is to prevent others from going to work, in order that they themselves may work – may earn a scant living by hard toil.

But what are the dogs in the manger doing who are holding unused city lots, farm lands, mines, and forests – the natural opportunities, in short, that nature offers to labour? They are preventing other people from working, not that they may work themselves, but that they may live in idleness on what those who want to work are compelled to pay them for the privilege of going to work. If labourers were to form societies which should by force prevent anyone from going to work without their permission; were to charge the highest price for the privilege of going to work, which the necessities of others would compel them to pay, and were then to sit down and live in idleness on this blackmail, they would only be doing to others what organised society permits others to do to them.

While it is perfectly true, as an abstract proposition, that no one ought to be permitted to interfere with the legitimate business of another, or by going out of his own right to inflict or threaten injury or loss as a means of coercion, yet it is also true that, under existing conditions, it is only by combining together to interfere with the legitimate business of others, and to coerce others by the fear of injury or loss, that workmen are at all able to resist the tendency to crowd wages down to the point of bare existence. The great fact that is ignored by those who talk so flippantly about the wickedness of coercion in strikes is that all this coercion is in reality coercion against coercion, the attempt to use force in resistance to force. What labour unions are attempting to do is to secure for themselves a monopoly in supplying labour, and the real cause and only justification of this effort is the existence of monopolies in the things vitally necessary to the use of labour.

AN ILLUSTRATIVE STORY

Before the Cadi of an Eastern city there came from the desert two torn and bruised travellers.

"There were five of us," they said, " on our way hither with merchandise. A day's journey hence we halted and made our camp, when following us there came a crowd of ill conditioned fellows, who demanded entrance to our camp, and who, on our refusing it, used to us violent and threatening words, and, when we answered not their threats, set upon us with force. Three of us were slain, and we two barely escaped with our lives to ask for justice."

"Justice you shall have," answered the Cadi. "If what you say be true, they who assaulted you when you had not assaulted them shall die. If what you say be not true, your own lives shall pay the penalty of falsehood."

When the assailants of the merchants arrived they were brought at once before the Cadi. Is the merchants' story true?" he asked. "It is, but –" "I will hear no more!" cried the Cadi.

"You admit having reviled men who had not reproached you, and having assaulted men who had not assaulted you. In this you have deserved death."

But as they were being carried off to execution the prisoners still tried to explain. "Hear them, Cadi," said the old man, "lest you commit injustice." "But they have admitted the merchants' words are true." "Yes, but they may not be all truth."

So the Cadi heard them, and they said that when they came up to the merchants' halting place they found that the merchants had pitched their camp around the only well in that part of the desert, and refused to let them enter and drink. They first remonstrated, then threatened, and then, rather than die of thirst, rushed upon the merchants' camp, and in the melee three of the merchants were slain.

"Is this also true?" asked the Cadi of the merchants. The merchants were forced to admit that it was.

"Then," said the Cadi, "you told me truth that, being only part of the truth, was really a falsehood. You were the aggressors by taking to yourselves alone the only well from which these men could drink. Now the death I have decreed is for you."

WEAKNESS OF THE STRIKE

In the attempt to meet coercion by coercion, working men, under the present conditions, are at fearful disadvantage. It is not merely that the capitalists and corporations against whom they fight have control of the organs of public opinion and of the courts, but that they can combine, can coerce, can inflict injury and loss in a much more quiet and effective way than can working men. They can evade or take advantage of the law, while working men, to do things of essentially the same kind, must defy the law. Labour, surrounded by law-made and law supported monopolies of all kinds, is virtually told by the law that the only coercive force it can apply to tight off the coercion to which it is subjected is to stop work and starve.

Conscious of the coercion those who have only labour to sell are subjected to, though without fully realising its cause, there are active men in the labour organisations who have dreamed (if so fully organising all kinds of labour in mutually supporting combinations as to make labour, by the stopping of all work, master of the situation. But this dream is hardly capable of realisation. For, putting aside all the difficulties of inducing so many diverse trades to act in concert with any persistence, and putting aside the surety that there must, remain outside of any possible combination a body of labourers pressed by the direst necessity to take work on any terms, the great fact is that labourers as a class live from hand to mouth. They, therefore, are of all classes the least able to maintain a contest of endurance, and would quickest and most severely suffer from any general stoppage of the machinery by which the community is fed and its necessary wants are from day to day supplied.

THE POOR SUFFER FIRST

A partial strike is now maintained for any length of time only by contributions from workmen who remain at work. In the check put upon the supply of coal to New York during the great strike, they who suffered quickest and suffered most were they who buy coal by the bucket, not those who could lay in a season's supply. If the thirsty men in the desert had attempted to compel the merchants to let them in to drink by forming a cordon around the camp and refusing the rights of labour by a general refusal to labour, the merchants could have remained quiet for a long time. How long could the travellers have gone without water?

Suppose, however, that to such a plan were brought the strength of the lawmaking power. Suppose that by properly using their votes labouring men were to succeed in giving the labour associations just such a local monopoly of supplying labour as is now given by our laws to monopolists of things necessary to the exertion of labour. The trades union ideal would then be realised. No one could then go to work without permission of a trades union, just as now no mere labourer can go to work without the permission of a landowner or capitalist.

But, if this were practicable, would not the placing of such power in the hands of managers and trade unions lead to tyranny and abuse of the kind which, as experience has shown, always attend the concentration of power! And outside of the trade unions or labour associations, would there not remain or grow up a class deprived by one set of monopolists of access to the natural means of employing labour, and deprived by another set of monopolists of the power to sell their labour to those who could give them opportunity to use it?

THE ONLY REMEDY

The true line to follow for the emancipation of labour is not the emancipation of restrictions, but the sweeping away of restrictions – not the creation of new monopolies, but the abolition of all monopolies. And the fundamental and most important of all monopolies is that legalised monopoly of the earth itself, which deprives the labourer of all right to the use of the natural means and material for the employment of labour, and which, by thus making him helpless to employ himself, and forcing him to buy some other human creature's permission to even live, compels him to compete with others disinherited like himself for permission to sell his labour.

Out of the multiplying and menacing labour difficulties of our time there is but one way to escape, and that is by the restoration to all men of their natural and inalienable rights to the use upon equal terms of the element on which and from which all men must live – the land. If there were a brisk demand for labour, there would be no surplus of labourers anxious for work upon any terms upon which employers could draw. That there is not such a demand for labour is due simply to the fact that labourers are prevented by the monopoly of natural opportunities from employing themselves. Here is the point on which the efforts of labour should be concentrated. The restoration of these opportunities can easily be obtained by the ballot. In the ballot, working men have in their hands the power of so adjusting taxes as to make tin; dogs in the manger let go their hold. When this is done there will be no necessity for strikes, and competition, instead of crushing the labourer, will secure to him the full reward of his toil.

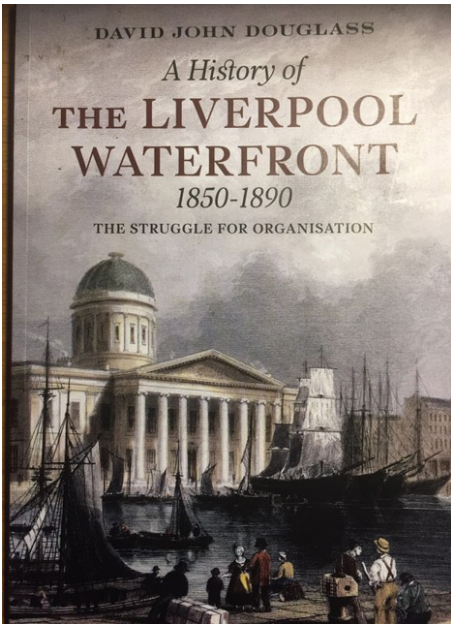
I am delighted that the labour movement on Merseyside has come together to remember and find the funds for a suitable headstone for Edward McHugh, who features prominently in my book A History of the LIVERPOOL WATERFRONT 1850-1890: the struggle for organisation, which can be bought at:- http://www.newsfromnowhere.org.uk/books/DisplayBookInfo.php?ISBN=9781781550618

As the first national secretary of the National Union of Dock Labourers, Edward McHugh is a union leader worthy of memory and respect for his efforts to deeply entrench the spirit and principle of trade unionism on the Mersey. At the same time it is important that we examine some of the mistakes he made.

David John Douglass

LIVERPOOL AND McHUGH

From the early 1830s the Liverpool waterfront, with all its maritime industry and supplementary trades and skills was marked by a relentless struggle for union organisation which touched every skill and trade.



Outsiders thought of dock labour as a general amorphous mass of unskilled muscle; such a view couldn't be further from the truth. There existed a myriad of skills and professions a lifetime in the making, often highly specific though all interrelated.

There were few periods between 1830 and 1890 (when the character of McHugh appears at the port) when the bulk of waterfront labour was not represented by one of the early dockers unions.

But by 1890 the first real attempt to construct a national Dock Union had taken root. McHugh was just 36 when he had become elected in November 1889 as the first general secretary of the National Union of Dock Labourers. (NUDL) McHugh had that year been at the forefront of successful dock strikes in Glasgow aimed at boosting pay and establishing a dock labourers union. He was then sent to Liverpool to build the new union.

McHugh had been born in Ireland but passed his childhood in Scotland. He had been a compositor, a trade which had become cheek by jowl attached to craft skill trade unionism enjoying high levels of workers control. He was a radical activist embracing some of the ideas of American radical economist and philosopher Henry George who advocated land nationalisation. He had embraced other dissident causes including those of the Highland Crofters. He was known as a passionate orator.

Both McHugh and the NUDL President Richard McGhee were greatly influenced by the agitation and ideas of Michael Davitt the Irish land reformer. McGhee had been active in the Midlands in support of the nail and chain makers organised by the newly arrived (American based) Knights of Labour, he had been commissioned by them to act as their Organiser in Glasgow. The Knights of Labour would meet their Waterloo in Liverpool during a clash with the NUDL ironically under McHugh's leadership but that is another story I have told elsewhere.

The great Liverpool general waterfront strike of 1890 starts with a rolling succession of dock by dock strikes over a variety of issues, many led by local unions. While thousands picketed dock by dock, strikers marched along the waterfront calling out their brothers. The NUDL appeared to at first resist any formal involvement. Everywhere the leadership had tried to argue for its' stages' strategies of building a general waterfront 'closed shop' and a strict policy of refusing to work with non unionists. The officials' outright refusal to endorse the strike movement breaking around their ears, laid widespread distrust at their leadership and the tactics of the union. When members of the National Committee had urged the striking grain porters to return to work and bide their time, they were threatened with being thrown in the dock!

STRUGGLES OVER TACTICS

When, at last, under irresistible pressure the officials and the NUDL were forced to endorse the strike movement – and take it under their wing – then it did not end the struggles for control of direction and tactics. These were loudly battled out sometimes with occasional violence at truly massive strike meetings of the whole port as more and more sectors were drawn in along with the other ports along the Mersey. Regular processions to the Pier Head drew 60,000 marchers.

As the ship and port owners sought to import tens of thousands of unsuspecting labourers from around the country and ship them aboard tugs or on trains, often serving them good breakfasts and dinner en route, McHugh and his team would ship and board with them. Doubtless the striking Dockers made full use of the free food, but the result was that as the thousands landed in Liverpool, they joined the strike themselves or occupied the vessels and demanded to be taken back home.

CONSTANT RANK AND FILE PRESSURE

A major clash between the men and McHugh was over the policy to employ towards ship owners and wharf operators who conceded the union demands on wages and organisation. McHugh and the leadership wished for those workers to return to work, to increase commercial pressure on those owners holding out. But the rank and file insisted one out all out, not simply on principle but because strategic groups of workers like coal heavers and trimmers not effected in the dispute were out in solidarity action. It would seem fairly futile for the class of men who were directly affected to be back at work while those simply out in solidarity were giving up their pay and standing out. But the leaderships resolve was weakening, from a position of insistence that no union man would work with non unionists, they were now saying 'in physical proximity' rather than anywhere on the ship or wharf.

Key to the success of the strike was the role of the exclusive and generally moderate Carters who operated in a tightly organised union of their own. Led by Orange Conservatives they generally opposed strikes and swore by conciliation. Their rule book required a two-thirds vote to call strike action. As the great strike wave broke across the waterfront many carters spontaneously joined the strike and enthusiastically threw themselves into its activities. This perhaps pushed McHugh to make the ill advised move of circulating the carters directly over the heads of their union. Its tone was hectoring and arrogant and had the opposite effect, resulting in a massive vote rejecting solidarity action with the rest of the port.

As the strike started to fray and more and more outsiders were being introduced a way out was sought in the form of Michael Davitt who offered to intervene and thrash out a solution with the owners. Although lacking any mandate for this an agreement of sorts was achieved but it was never agreed by the mass of the strikers. Feeling the seething resentment McHugh urged them to return to work operating a Ca Canny, the policy of deliberately limiting their output at work.

The return was ragged and unpopular. Worse and largely under the influence of McGhee the union officials and committee patrolled workplaces to insist that the union's tight rules and restrictions and prohibitions were stuck to by the rather battered and weakened workforce. This may have caused the rank and file to believe the officials were too distant and out of touch with what was achievable. They would have overwhelmingly voted to stay out on strike, but having been almost instructed to return to work on the best terms they could get, they were now being told to carry the burden of ongoing resistance in smaller and sometimes individual actions.

One heroic continuation of the struggle came with the worker imposed reduction of hours. These had not been agreed, instead the entire workforce would simply impose the shorter shifts in accordance with their demands. Short of locking out the entire port there was little the employers could do but take as defacto the men's interpretation of shifts and hours.

The widespread organisation of the union in the port continued with frequent outbursts of wildcat unofficial action. McHugh himself was a casualty of the failures of the strike as he lost his position as General Secretary two years later in 1893 to James Sexton. He travelled to America where he became a national organiser of the Longshoremen.

McHugh's career was short and for a time inspired. He was never a Jim Larkin or Tom Mann but as a union leader he is worthy of memory and respect for his efforts to deeply entrench the spirit and principle of trade unionism on the Mersey.

David John Douglass is a political activist and writer. He worked as a coal miner in the coalfields of Durham and South Yorkshire and was NUM Branch Delegate for Hatfield Colliery from 1979. In 1994/5 he became Branch Secretary at Hatfield Main but after the pit was privatised the NUM no longer had any recognition there. From 1994 to 2006 he helped run the Miners Community Advice Centre in Stainforth. The three volumes of his autobiography were published between 2008 and 2010. He is a member of IWW, NUM and Class War.

"HAPPIEST LEADING A CRUSADE" EDWARD MCHUGH, 1853-1915

By Andrew Newby, Tampere Institute for Advanced Social Research, Finland

I first became aware of Edward McHugh when I was student in Scotland in the 1990s. From studying history, but also from hillwalking and visiting the Western Isles regularly, I became very interested in connections between Ireland and the Scottish Highlands. One thing that particularly interested me was that during the Irish "Land War" of 1879-1882, envoys were apparently sent over to the Highlands and Hebrides to preach the justice of land reform and, as a result, get wider support for the Irish cause.

One name that kept popping up was that of Edward McHugh. Here was an Irishman who had left his native west Tyrone at an early age, and been raised in some of the most crowded urban neighbourhoods in Scotland, in Greenock and Glasgow. From Eric Taplin's work I learned that McHugh moved on from rural land issues to trade unionism, and what started out as a footnote in my thesis ended up becoming a full-length biography of Edward McHugh. Since that book was published, in 2005, I've learned a lot more about the man's life and career, and I hope that someday, someone else will write a new biography – there is definitely plenty of new material available, and certainly room for reinterpretation.

I always felt that the diversity of his interests meant that McHugh was not as well remembered as might be expected. He was the "Irishman who had to tell people he was not a Scotchman", but was also referred to as "the English labour leader from Liverpool", who was "laid to rest in his native city" (i.e. Birkehead). He worked for a variety of causes, all linked to land redistribution and workers' rights, but was never really "owned" by one organisation or another. I visited McHugh's grave, to pay my respects, in March 1999, only to find it was unmarked. Only now, thanks to the great work done by Luke Agnew, is this being remedied.

Edward McHugh was born on 21 August 1853, in County Tyrone. At the age of eight he, along with his parents Mathew and Margaret (née McCrory), and his younger brother Patrick, was "driven out off the land [and]... forced to emigrate to Scotland and struggle along. (1) The family settled in Greenock, where McHugh undertook casual labour at the local docks, and began an apprenticeship as a compositor.

In 1869, he moved to Glasgow to complete his apprenticeship, and found work at Goldie's Lithographers. Glasgow in the 1870s provided myriad opportunities for a young Irishman to become a social or political activist, and McHugh began attending debates

in the Irish Democratic Hall, forming lifelong friendships with fellow Ulstermen, John Ferguson and Richard McGhee. As the New Departure reinvigorated Irish nationalism in the city, McHugh was "one of the first Irishmen in Scotland to enrol among [Davitt and Parnell's] followers," when they "raised the banner of the Irish Land League." (2)

It was also during this time that he met Ellen Quigley, the President of the Ladies' Land League, whom he would marry in 1885.(3)

With the Land War in full swing, the National Land League of Great Britain was formed as an adjunct to the Irish organisation. McHugh became its Scottish organiser, and one of his best-remembered missions was an attempt to harness the burgeoning land agitation – the "Crofters' War" in Highland Scotland (Davitt gave him the nickname "McSkye" in honour of his efforts among the crofters). (4) John Ferguson claimed that McHugh's work represented "the Irish peat" that "set the Scottish heather on fire..." (5)

While his visit to Skye in April-June 1882 was given as proof of a "Fenian conspiracy" by local landlords and the British authorities, McHugh's primary goal was to build on the crofters' local grievances by teaching them "universal truths" about the land question. (6)

The Glasgow radicals saw the Highlands as the gateway to an agitation that could flourish in urban Scotland, promoting a more thoroughgoing social revolution than anything that seemed likely to emerge in Parnell's Ireland. (7)

McHugh's fascination with Henry George's Progress and Poverty ran through his career, and he organised George's successful tour of Scotland in 1884. The tour inspired the formation of the Scottish Land Restoration League, dedicated to promoting George's theory of Land Value taxation (LVT).

In maintaining a position of "loyal opposition" to Parnell, Davitt relied heavily on his Glasgow-based allies to promote socially advanced ideas among the Irish in Britain. (8) The accommodation of such "internationalist" radicalism within the ranks of the Irish National League became increasingly troublesome, and the support given by McHugh, Ferguson and their colleagues to Keir Hardie in the 1888 Mid Lanarkshire by-election, despite official Irish support for the Liberal candidate, highlighted their increasing alienation.

McHugh moved increasingly away from Irish Nationalist politics and towards labour organisation, and with Richard McGhee he was invited to lead the newly-formed National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL). Using many of the same arguments he had employed during the Land War, McHugh became a pioneer of "new unionism" in Britain and Ireland, organising workers previously considered "unskilled" and beyond the remit

of traditional guild-based unions. McHugh became the paid secretary of the NUDL, and oversaw a tense strike in Glasgow in June 1889. McHugh also introduced the policy of "ca' canny," working to rule, which achieved a wage increase for the labourers and was thus adopted as "the distinctive policy of the union." (9) McHugh liaised with leaders of the London Dock Strike, notably Tom Mann and Ben Tillett, as demands for better pay and working conditions spread throughout Britain and Ireland.

After hearing that McHugh and McGhee intended to refocus their efforts on Merseyside, Michael Davitt joked "the poor capitalists of Liverpool are in for a hard time." (10) McHugh moved with his young family to Birkenhead, and along with McGhee and Michael McKeown, a local Armagh-born NUDL leader, attempted to extend the reach of New Unionism. The "Three Macs," as they became known, struggled to maintain control, and a poster exhorting the men to strike – featuring forged signatures of McHugh and McGhee – brought matters to crisis point. In fact, strikes were still seen as a last resort, with McHugh adhering to "ca'canny" tactics that seemed to have worked in Glasgow. R.B. Cunninghame Graham's description underlined McHugh's measured approach: "McHugh, Ulster Catholic, full-bearded, square built, something of Burns' fire and control of multitudes, more than his caution. Enthusiastic, but coolheaded, to hear him speaking to the thousands – his beard floating in the air, determined, dogged, eloquent, humorous mixture of Celt and Saxon, was a revelation." (11)

The NUDL extended its operations to Ireland, and McHugh made a rare return to his native island in the summer of 1891, working with Adolphus Shields in striving to overcome suspicion of "new unionism" by more traditionally minded labour organisers. (12) It is notable that McHugh and McGhee incorporated strictures on LVT at every opportunity in their organisation of the dockers, insisting that all social inequality was caused at root by land monopolies, and equating shipowners with the landowners they had battled during the Land War period. James Sexton succeeded McHugh as NUDL Secretary in 1893. In his history of the Dockers' Union, Eric Taplin highlighted some of McHugh's short-comings when it came to the specifics of dock labour organisation: "his impatience with other local organisations, especially the trades council, his inability to control the union branches and his ignorance of dock work encouraged ad-verse criticism. It is also doubtful whether he had the qualities that a trade union leader required in dealing effectively with the day-to-day administrative tasks of the union. McHugh was happiest leading a crusade. He was ill-equipped for retrenchment in adverse times." (13) Despite his failure to unite different labour factions in Liverpool, and the persistent tension between Irish nationalism and the labour movement, McHugh continued to think big.

McHugh was commissioned by Tom Mann to promote the tenets of New Union-ism among Longshoremen in North America. McHugh arrived in New York in September 1896 (14), with the ambitious goal of forming a union of "ten million members" that "could control the world's commerce." (15)

The American Longshoremen's Union (ALU) was formed in January 1897, with McHugh as its president. The work centred initially around New York and Philadelphia, (16) with a medium-term plan to unite the dockworkers of both coasts of the USA and Canada, and the Great Lakes, and then to unite them with their European counterparts. He sought to overcome racial and ethnic prejudice by including African-American and Italian workers within a single organisation, (17) despite the warning of Sam Woods the prominent British trade unionist, that "it would be next to impossible to unite different races in such a movement.' (18)

Upon his arrival, McHugh made rapid progress in terms of recruitment. He also combined his union activism with the promotion of Georgeite LVT. He spent a lot of time with Henry George, and supported George's New York mayoralty campaign. This focus on George's principles was not especially popular with American socialists, such as Samuel Gompers, who seemed frustrated by McHugh's meddling. Richard Butler, a "jovial Tammany Irishman" who later organised the Longshoremen in New York, recalled that: "McHugh has been criticized for tying up the Labour Party movement in this country with Henry George, the Single Taxer. When George died, our party died with him. If it hadn't been for his death, McHugh would have put over a big labour movement in this country. (19)

Henry George's sudden death on the eve of the election was traumatic for McHugh, but his presence in New York cemented his reputation as one of leading exponents of what was becoming a global movement. The initial success of the ALU unravelled quickly, due to internal divisions within the labour movement, as well as agitation by the employers' organisations. He was arrested for Breach of the Peace and Incitement to Riot after a speech in Philadelphia (20), but more seriously was held partly responsible for the embezzlement of $3,000 by the ALU Secretary, Frank Devlin. Although McHugh's integrity was not called into question, his failure to ensure proper supervision of his officials was deemed negligent. In February 1899 he returned to Europe, and despite the "partial success" (21) of his mission his overriding emotion was "heartsickness" after another project that had been undermined by infighting and rogue officials. (22)

Richard Butler's reflection, though, suggests that McHugh's years in America had not been completely wasted: "The Scotchman was a good influence in my life. All the good I know about union labour I learned from him. He was a fine talker and made a good appearance on a platform, a wiry fellow with a face full of whiskers." (23) The American Longshoremen's Union retained the nickname of "the McHugh Organization". (24)

For the rest of this life, McHugh used his base in Birkenhead to promote an incessant agitation in favour of LVT. McHugh pressured local politicians in Liverpool and maintained close links with James Sexton and the NUDL. On a national level they seemed to be making considerable headway when the Liberal party adopted a policy of limited land taxation (culminating in the 1909 "People's Budget", in which David Lloyd George proposed LVT as a means of destroying the landed aristocracy.)

As a peripatetic LVT agitator, McHugh returned to the Hebrides in 1909, and in 1912 undertook a long tour of Australia and New Zealand. Colleagues had suggested that an Antipodean lecture tour might have had some health benefits for McHugh, as his physical condition had been giving cause for concern. He did nothing to moderate his own workload, however.

On his return to Merseyside, McHugh persisted with classes on the land and labour questions, but his health continued to deteriorate. After a year spent struggling against the symptoms of arteriosclerosis he passed away at his home on Park Lane, Birkenhead, on 13 April 1915. He was survived by Ellen and their children, Henry and Ethel, and laid to rest in Flaybrick Hill Cemetery.

Edward McHugh was praised by his close associate Michael Davitt as "a man of remarkable ability and an ideal propagandist to any just cause that captures his adhesion." (25) Publicity-shy but possessed of missionary zeal in his advocacy of labour, McHugh forwent the opportunity in the 1890s to represent Liverpool Kirkdale in the House of Commons on the grounds that he was "not a politician," but "an agitator."(26)

A reserved autodidact, vegetarian and teetotaller, McHugh was kind-hearted, earnest and sincere, but exceptionally stubborn. It was also noted that his personality might lead him to "take upon himself the part of dictator," should be become frustrated with the slow progress being made by a large and unwieldy organisation. (27)

Colleagues and adversaries alike described an inspirational speaker – "no platform demagogue" (28) whose ability to deal with hecklers would be the envy of the most battle-hardened twenty-first century stand-up comic. His friend, Alexander MacKendrick, concluded a fulsome obituary for McHugh as follows:

"Like all fighters in just causes, Edward McHugh would, we may feel sure, have elected to die with his armour on, and that this desire has been granted to him may well be assumed... To all who knew him, he will be permanently enrolled among the great company of 'those immortal dead who live again lives made better by their presence." (29)

This article is an amended version of a brief biography of Edward McHugh which was published in Saothar: Journal of the Irish Labour History Society (Vol. 42, 2016).

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28. Land Values, May 1915
29. Alex MacKendrick, "In Memorial: Edward McHugh," Single Tax Review, May - June 1915, pp 167-8

The books published up until January 2019 in this series are listed below in the order in which they were published. They can be accessed through the links provided. All have been written and compiled by Mark Metcalf.

TOM JONES – a fighter for freedom and working people.
Spanish Civil War Volunteer and Welsh TGWU general secretary
https://markwrite.co.uk/2018/10/02/tom-jones-a-fighter-for-freedom-and-working-people/

JULIA VARLEY – Trade union organiser and fighter for women's rights
https://markwrite.co.uk/2018/10/02/julia-varley-trade-union-organiser-and-fighter-for-womens-rights-by-mark-metcalf/

THE GREAT DOCK STRIKE 1889
https://markwrite.co.uk/2018/10/02/the-great-dock-strike-of-1889/

TONY HALL: Trade unionist, anti-racist and radical cartoonist
https://markwrite.co.uk/2018/10/02/tony-hall-trade-unionist-anti-racist-and-radical-cartoonist/

BENNY ROTHMAN – a fighter for the right to roam, workers' rights and socialism
https://markwrite.co.uk/2018/10/02/benny-rothman-a-fighter-for-the-rights-to-roam-workers-rights-and-socialism/ See also:- https://markwrite.co.uk/2018/11/29/mass-trespass/

MOHAMMAD TAJ – Steering from the front
https://markwrite.co.uk/2018/10/02/mohammad-taj-steering-from-the-front-2/

Plus:- **ELLEN STRANGE –** A moorland murder mystery explained
https://markwrite.co.uk/2018/10/08/ellen-strange-booklet-2/ and see also:-
https://www.facebook.com/martin.mcmulkin.1/videos/1724276561016587/

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the majority not the one per cent. If you have a plaque in your area that you feel should go on the site then please get in touch.

https://markwrite.co.uk/rebel-road/

The contact details for Mark Metcalf as of January 2019 are as follows:- mcmetcalf@icloud.com
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