

BLOWING WITH THE
BLACKBURN TRADES
CLUB COUNCIL

Mick Pickup

**BLOWING WITH
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BLACKBURN
TRADES**

by

MICK PICKUP

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ISBN

For Carole (Caroline)

FORWARD

One of the more revealing characteristics of the British Working Class males is the habit of establishing institutions which echo those of the aristocracy. From the Sunday morning “ratting” - the proletarian pursuit of the uneatable - to the mumbo-jumbo camaraderie of the Royal and Ancient Order of the Buffaloes, British workers have developed mirror images of aristocratic male power and privilege.

Nowhere more so than the “Club”, to where the weary male can retreat from the cares of work and home.

Working class males established their own, male-only watering holes in serious emulation of the hallowed halls of St James, London.

I well remember being admitted as a young child to my grandfather’s club, a place spoken of with reverence and mystery. Unprepared as later children brought up with film and television images of James Bond and other assorted spies being briefed at “M’s” club when the contrast would have been even starker - I was taken aback at how dingy, and well - ordinary - the club was. But we are always assured, it’s the atmosphere that counts - the ambience in St James’, the “crack” in my own father’s dated slang.

The “club” is important for working men - and I presume women, too nowadays. It is a refuge, an asylum, but more. It is the scene for Byzantine schemes for power worthy of the Medieval Court, or that other remaining haunt of clever Peter Pan plotters, the House of Commons.

Club politics, particularly election to the all important “Committee” and the consequent positioning, can be deadly. Such intrigues have yet to find their theoretician, as the Medici court found in Machiavelli, though they deserve one. However, club politics have found a witty and entertaining chronicler in Mick Pickup.

The Trades Club in Blackburn was a unique experiment, in that its founders did try to establish a club which would show loyalty to

The political cause of the working class - a relatively easier thing to do in the earlier decades of class consciousness in the tight knit pit villages of Yorkshire and South Wales, but a relatively difficult task in a Blackburn ever notorious for its Conservatism in the 1980s. Blackburn, my home town, was one of the constituencies which vindicated Disraeli's belief that giving the working class male the vote was not such a risk, for he counted on their innate deference and lack of adventure, particularly strong in textile workers, to vote Tory in gratitude.

The founders of the Trades Club tried to make the club the natural home of the politically aware workers in the town - their ultimate failure to do so, and their continuous, and mutual ambiguity towards the local Labour Party speaks volumes.

It is somewhat odd to read about events and people you know when narrated by others. I remember very clearly all the political events which form the background to this book - my successful election to the European Parliament took place during the great Miners' Strike of 1984-5, for example. I also remember mainly at second, or third hand, hearing of the scheming and manoeuvring down the "Trades Club" and I still know and like many of the people who appear in these pages, and though my own judgment may be different than Mick's, I had an entertaining read and a laugh at his description of people and events I know.

The tale of the Trades Club reveals many of the virtues of the working class. It is a story of battling against the odds with great energy and frequent naïvete, stoicism and loyalty against sometimes better judgment; always with humour. All excellent and indeed essential qualities for a Blackburn Rovers fan.

Michael Hindley MEP for Lancashire South 1996

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this book has given me deep pleasure, especially when I cast my mind back to all the crazy things the members and club committee got up to when the place was open.

Many people gave me the inspiration to put pen to paper, but certain people's contributions are worthy of recording my appreciation of. First on this list must be John Lynch, my partner in crime in the running of the Trades. Another John is Cramsie, who along with wife Chrissie not only put a roof over my head, but also loaned me their only working computer to carry out the writing of this book. But the biggest inspiration of all was the club itself. Never was one place so full of so many characters, yet people who would give you their last penny, even the ones off their eyes when they were in their coffin.

The club itself was a comedy and a tragedy for the Blackburn labour movement. It was a comedy because so many daft things went on in the place, yet a tragedy how it all ended so quickly after such a short life of only thirteen years.

At least the club did its bit for people in struggle when they needed help. Miners, Dockers, Railway, Postal, Bakery, Aerospace and Ambulance workers all had their disputes helped by the club and its members.

I would also like to thank the Ethnic Minorities Development Association in Blackburn for allowing me the use of their equipment and especially Sharifa and Penny for helping type it on to the computer disk for me.

Thanks also go to Jim Hammonds for his expertise in helping me put together the finished work in a professional form and Mike Hindley (MEP for South Lancashire) for writing the forward.

Since the club closed I spent just short of a couple of years trying to write this book. I must thank my girlfriend Carole (Caroline) for putting up with what became almost an obsession in my attempts to finish this book and get it published.

PREFACE

In 1984 I was elected, or rather 'Shanghaied' on to the Management Committee of Blackburn Trades Council Club. Two years later I lived to tell the tale and decided to start keeping a monthly record of its activities. This was for my own interest and to win the occasional bet off gullible club committee members.

In 1993 the club closed after thirteen years, much to the sadness of many people, but not enough to set up another similar institution.

When the writing was on the wall for the club, I started looking through my collection of monthly reports and noticed how it came to a substantial number. This gave me the idea of turning them into some kind of a book.

I started writing seriously about the time the club shut down and found it one hell of a slog. If I can do it, so can anybody else. The main thing is the club may be gone, but will never be forgotten, thanks to these pages.

What must be remembered is a club is only as good as its members and there were some great people who came in the Trades. I've tried my best to name as many of them as possible, but the sands of time cover many tracks. Unfortunately there were far too many people whose names I should have included, but with hindsight you can do anything. I must take this opportunity to apologise to anybody who I omitted accidentally.

I have tried to make this book as light hearted as possible because the club was such an eccentric and funny place. Most books I've read about the labour movement tend to be a bit boring. I hope anybody reading this won't tar me with the same brush.

Also as a proud Blackburner, I notice there seem to have been very few books written about my beloved town, even less about the labour movement here. Hopefully I might have done my bit to correct this and show we do have one after all.

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