

BLOODLESS

WILLIAM GALLACHER

MY old pal Mannie Shinwell (never rated as over-modest in estimating his own outstanding ability) has written a book.* In a recent letter he says I ('his one sure pal' as he once called me) had a lot to do with his writing it. Not this book, Mannie! I wanted him to write a bit of working-class history; this is something entirely different. In this book he makes it very clear that he was the man who won the war and who foresaw what was required to win the peace, and who took the necessary measures to secure victory on this front as well. His colleagues don't come into the picture at all. Right at the start he says: 'So here it is, accurate in its details, but I regret to say, incomplete'.

'Incomplete' it is. There's a lot lacking; but 'accurate in its details'? Well, let us have a look. On page 60 we are told:

In the New Year (1919, W.G.) the West of Scotland was driven to plans for a general strike to begin on 27th January. George Kerr, a trade union organiser and Glasgow Town councillor, presided over a meeting of shop stewards and trade union delegates which issued a call for action.

That's the first time I've read or heard of 'Wee' Geordie Kerr being associated with the shop stewards movement. Never. I don't know if 'Wee' Geordie was still alive at that time. He certainly wasn't active.

The Clyde Workers' Committee organised the strike. It was clear there was going to be a terrific response. The District Committee of the Amalgamated Engineering Union decided to throw in its weight with the unofficial movement. Then on the Saturday before the strike at our shop stewards meeting where I was in the chair, a delegation from the Glasgow Trades Council came and asked to be allowed to participate in the strike. We readily agreed to accept them though they came without invitation. A sub-committee was appointed to supervise strike organisation. Mannie was elected chairman while I was appointed organiser of all strike activities.

We had a great march, on the first Wednesday of the strike, through the streets of Glasgow ending up in George's Square, where the City Chambers are situated. Shinwell proposed that a deputation go in to see the Lord Provost. He, Kirkwood, Hopkins and several others went in and left me to address the strikers from the plinth on the Gladstone monument. When the deputation came out

**Conflict without Malice*, by Emanuel Shinwell, Odhams, 21s.

we were informed that we had to return on Friday. Back to the Square on Friday. The deputation had gone into the Chambers while I held the fort from the same stance. The police were massed in front of the City Chambers and behind the strikers. All of a sudden a signal was given and the police made a savage onslaught on the strikers from the rear and drove them away across the Square. Now Mannie says on pages 62 and 63:

I rushed down in the hope of calming the crowd, but when I got to the door of the City Chambers, the people had been driven back by the police. Men and women were scattering in all directions, many falling under the merciless attacks of the frenzied police. I saw Gallacher standing holding his head.

No, Mannie, you did not. When I jumped down off the plinth I got into a scrap with several police. I got laid out flat. I've told elsewhere how Neil Alexander threw himself over me and saved my face being smashed with a baton. Anyhow, I was pulled to my feet by two policemen each of whom had an arm, and was half-marched and half-dragged across the Square. Nobody saw me 'standing holding my head'. As, with my captors, I approached the City Chambers, I saw Kirkwood, who had run out to the middle of the street, being struck down by a police sergeant, but I didn't see Mannie.

On pages 78 and 79 he has a word or two to say about Wheatley:

Wheatley was always regarded as an extreme Left-winger, but when he was leader of the Labour Group on the Glasgow Town Council he wanted to expel me. I was, in his view, too far to the Left.

What a whopper. True Wheatley didn't like Shinwell, not because he was 'too far to the Left' but for quite other reasons. He didn't trust him. He maintained that his sharp glibness was not sustained by a worthwhile belief in Socialism. I had many an argument with Wheatley on this because I was a friend of Wheatley and a friend of Mannie. I got the feeling that there was something of the anti-Semitic about Wheatley's attitude to Shinwell and this drew me closer to Mannie. I was at his service whenever he wanted me. When he was with the Seamen there were difficult times, but he could rely on me to do a turn at James Watt Street. I was a regular caller at his office and gave him all the help and encouragement that I had available.

Well, anyway, Mannie got himself elected to Parliament in 1922. He tells us he was one of the 'Wild Men of the Clyde'. Not accurate. The 'wild men' were those who composed the group led by Wheatley. Mannie was never one of them. But he went down

in the train with the general body of Scottish Labour Members for the opening of Parliament and here is a paragraph that ends up absolutely accurate:

There was no sleep for us that night. We talked and planned. Much of it was over old ground, but there was a greater sense of urgency. Of one thing we were all convinced. The seventeen of us who represented Socialism in Scotland would maintain the closest unity (note that, W.G.) irrespective of anything the Labour Party might do. With all the efficiency of new brooms we intended to make instant and great changes. We were bloodless revolutionaries, but revolutionaries for all that.

The correct medical term is 'anæmic' revolutionaries, and that's what they proved to be.

Then there is the story of the first Labour Government and a long panegyric about Macdonald, mostly trash. In 1929 Macdonald was vicious against Maxton, who had been of so much use to him in earlier years. He wrote two letters to Shinwell asking him to stand against Maxton for chairmanship of the I.L.P. Here is an excerpt from one (page 103):

If Maxton stands it will be scandalous after what has happened but there is no lack of pure artfulness in him. He loves to be a figure in the press and is affording them fine chances of using him to the detriment of the movement. In the Aberdeen Tory paper there is something every day about him, and the point always is that he is a great and important figure and influence in the party. Vanity, unsupported by a capacity for work is at the root of the trouble they give.

It seems unlikely that Macdonald would ever have written such a letter to Shinwell had he not felt that he could use him against his Glasgow colleagues. So much for the decision to 'maintain the closest unity irrespective of anything the Labour Party might do'. Shinwell says on page 113, 'To dismiss Macdonald as a traitor to Labour is nonsense'. But he was a traitor to Labour and a traitor to every individual, like Maxton or Morel, who put their trust in him. But Mannie was always careful never to put his trust in anyone. For him there are the few clever fellows with 'personality' and then there are a whole lot of nondescripts.

But that is not important. What is important is that he, if we accept his word, scotched several conspiracies directed against Attlee. Yet he tells us that Churchill wanted him into his Government 'but that some of my Labour colleagues had demurred' and from what follows, Attlee was apparently one of them (page 156). This, however, did not deter him from saving the country as we find on the following page:

I formed two objectives which I believed my privilege as an M.P. and my duty as a citizen made needful.

The first was to press the Government to wage war with all the vigour the nation demanded and to use the full resources of the country. The problem of achieving this really simple end was one reason for my activities.

So when he discovered at the end of the European war that the leaders of the Labour Party were contemplating, with Churchill, a joint appeal to the country, he got really on the job in the days leading up to the 1945 Labour Party conference. 'On the Saturday night, when the conference delegates were arriving', he tells us on page 169:

I met Nye Bevan. We had both heard rumours about a recommendation for a joint appeal to the country. We found that we were of one accord: Labour in our opinion could win an election on its own.

Later we sought out Herbert Morrison, whose attitude was unknown to us. My impression was that he had a fairly open mind about the problem, but we convinced him that our chances were good and our duty to the party was certain.

Attlee and Bevin appear to have been the advocates of retaining the Coalition under Churchill, which would have been fatal for the Labour Party. But Mannie still insisted that Attlee was the man to lead the party to victory at the polls. He recalled a meeting held in Workington, Cumberland, during the war,

... when Attlee gave a factual but not very exciting address. I followed him. My first words were: 'We have just heard the speech of an honest man'.

'Brutus was an honourable man.'

During our life in the movement, if things were going bad with him, he always had 'my shoulder to cry on'. When things were going well with him we only had a nodding acquaintance. This relationship carried on until he went to the War Office. From then on I had no dealings with him. He had a host of new friends and V.I.P.s as his associates. That part of the book I don't feel like touching. But I am sure if the world should turn its favours from his face, if those who now seem his friends should turn and rend him, he'll let out a yell for his pal of bygone days and sure as faith I'll answer it. He is one amazing fellow, is Mannie, but he has written a rotten book.

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