

**U DX78**

**Papers of J.E. Barlas relating to the  
Social Democratic Federation  
and letters from the 12th Duke of Bedford  
and Guy Aldred**

**1886-1948**

**Historical Background:**

**John Evelyn Barlas** (pseudonym Evelyn Douglas) was born in Burma in 1860 and later educated at Merchant Taylors' School and New College, Oxford. As a poet, he was part of the decadent movement and briefly of the Rhymers' Club, publishing eight books of verse between 1884 and 1893. Politically, he was a revolutionary socialist, becoming a member of the Social Democratic Federation and later contributing to the socialist journal *Commonweal*.

In 1891, suffering from mental illness, Barlas was arrested after firing three shots at the House of Commons. His bail was paid for by Oscar Wilde, with whom he had maintained a friendship since their days at Oxford, but he was eventually admitted to Gartnavel Asylum in Glasgow, where he died in 1914.

**Hastings William Sackville Russell, 12th Duke of Bedford** was born on 21 December 1888, the son of Herbrand Russell, 11th Duke of Bedford. He was educated at Eton and later at Balliol College, Oxford. In 1914 he married Louisa Crommelin Roberta Jowitt Whitwell and they had three children, two sons and a daughter. Bedford was a keen naturalist and was particularly interested in parrots, on which he wrote a book entitled *Parrots and Parrot-like Birds*. He also successfully bred several species of parrot in captivity and was the inaugural President of the Foreign Bird League.

Although he never fought in World War I because of ill health and later became a pacifist in the 1930s, he did gain the rank of Lieutenant in the 10th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment. Despite being a patron of the British People's Party, a group accused of fascist sympathies, he also contributed to Guy Aldred's socialist journal *The Word*. He succeeded to the Dukedom of Bedford in 1939.

He died in 1953 from a gunshot wound. Recorded as accidental death by the coroner, his eldest son later suggested it was deliberately self-inflicted.

**Guy Alfred Aldred** was born on 5 November 1886, in London. Guy spent his childhood at the home of his maternal grandfather, Charles Holdsworth, who was a Victorian radical. After completing his education he found a job as an office boy with the National Press Agency, where he was later promoted to sub-editor.

Initially influenced by evangelist teaching, he co-founded the 'Christian Social Mission' and became known as the Holloway Boy Preacher. His connection with the Christian Social Mission lasted roughly six years before he started speaking at the Institute of Theism, later founding his own Theistic Mission (1904) and slowly shifting towards atheism. He gained a reputation as a great and forceful orator and meetings at his Mission (later called The Clerkenwell Freethought Mission) could sometimes become fairly hostile.

In 1906, Aldred joined the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). During the First World War he was a conscientious objector on political grounds. He also founded the Glasgow Anarchist Group, supported the October Revolution and founded the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation (APCF) in 1921. He later split with the APCF in 1932 and went on to establish the Workers Open Forum, later known as the United Socialist Movement which worked to oppose military action during the Second World War.

With his partner Rose Witcop, he was an advocate of family planning and birth control. He also established the Bakunin Press and edited five anarchist periodicals including *The Commune* and *The Word*. He died on 16 October 1963 from a heart condition.

**Dr Charles Brook** was born in 1901 in Lincoln and later educated at Cambridge University where he became secretary of the Socialist Society. He went on to work as a GP and become a member of London County Council, later moving his practice to Eltham and becoming a Kent County Councillor.

Brook co-founded the Socialist Medical Association (SMA), acting as Hon Secretary until 1938 and playing a key role in the SMA campaign for the establishment of a National Health Service. He was also a member of the Medical Practitioners Union, the first medical delegate to the Trades Union Congress in 1935, a founding member of the Spanish Medical Aid which helped members of the Spanish Republican Government forces and the International Brigade and between 1951 and 1953 he was instrumental in the founding of the Royal College of General Practitioners. He died in 1983.

**The Social Democratic Federation (SDF)** was the first organised socialist political party created in Britain. Its founder was H.M. Hyndman and its first meeting was held on 7 June 1881. Its early membership included William Morris, Eleanor Marx and George Lansbury. The party's policies were particularly progressive for the time and advocated for the end to child labour, the provision of free education and for gender equality, amongst other issues.

Henry Hyndman dominated the SDF from the beginning, causing tensions and divisions within the party, which reached a climax at Christmas 1884. The party split with several members leaving to establish the Socialist League, including William Morris and Eleanor Marx. The split, however, served only to strengthen the SDF, as the remaining members' views were more homogenous.

The SDF went on to put three candidates up for election for the 1885 general election, although all were unsuccessful. Attempts at mass agitation, initially in response to the belief that protectionist trade policies would help the unemployment problem, during the winters of 1885-1887, only served to prove the futility of such endeavours and refocused the Left's mind on attaining parliamentary representation.

Although focused on gaining seats in Parliament, the SDF initially refused to support the creation of a new Labour Party and as such, caused more members to leave. More members later left because of Hyndman's dogged pursuit of parliamentary success over involvement in the trade union movement and others left to join the Independent Labour Party (ILP) led by Keir Hardie. Eventually, the SDF became formally united with the ILP and other left-wing parties with the establishment of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), which ultimately became the Labour Party. However, problems continued within the SDF, largely

owing to Hyndman's divisive leadership and various members left to found their own socialist parties.

The political force of the SDF was effectively at an end and in 1911, sections of various left wing organisations, including the remainder of the SDF combined to create the British Socialist Party, which lasted until 1920. Hyndman, left the group in 1916, owing to differences within the party over what position to take in the First World War, and set up the National Socialist Party.

**Custodial history:**

Donated by Dr C.W. Brook, 218 Court Farm Road, Mottingham, Kent, 1970

**Description:**

The first part of this collection comprises letters and related printed material received by J.E. Barlas, a member of Crieff branch of the Social Democratic Federation, over the years 1886-1889. This was an important period in the history of the socialist movement in Scotland, leading up to the formation of the Scottish Labour Party in Edinburgh in 1888. The letters contain details of SDF organisation in Crieff and Dundee, Kier Hardie's role in the movement at that time and Barlas's political campaign work in Stockton, on behalf of the National Labour Electoral Association. The second part of the collection comprises correspondence between the 12th Duke of Bedford (Hastings William Sackville Russell, a lifelong pacifist and Nazi apologist), the anarchist and political propagandist Guy Aldred and Dr Charles Brook (founder of the Socialist Medical Association). The letters date from during and after the Second World War and discuss pacifism, opposition to the war and various political issues and figures of the period.

**Extent:** 128 items

**Related material:**

Papers of Roden Noel and Reverend Conrad Noel [U DNO]

Papers of Robin Page Arnot [U DAR]

The Dictionary of Labour Biography Archive [U DLB]

Archives of the Socialist Health Association [U DSM]

**Access conditions:** Access will be granted to any accredited reader

U DX78/1	Letter from H.H. Champion, 10 Gray's Inn Place, London Replying to a letter addressed to the editor of 'Justice'; suggestions for forming a branch of the Social Democratic Federation in Chelmsford; fears events which may occur in coming winter in London and other centres, 'the distress is awful ... the authorities are still blind to their danger'	21 May 1886
	1 item	

Hull History Centre: Papers of J.E. Barlas

U DX78/2	Printed. 'Speech for the Defence', by John Burns, delivered at his trial at the Old Bailey for riot and unlawful assembly in Trafalgar Square at an unemployed demonstration 1 item	18 Jan 1888
U DX78/3	Letters from William Comrie, 58E High Street, Crieff to JE Barlas Crieff branch of the Social Democratic Federation; birth of his son; visit from Tom Mann ('in Mid Lanark assisting Kier Hardy's candidature'). With accounts 3 items	14 Feb- 29 Apr 1888
U DX78/4	Letter from H.W. Lee, Secretary, Social Democratic Federation, Bridge House, 181 Queen Victoria Street, London, to the Secretary of the Federation des Travailleurs Socialistes de France Introducing J.E. Barlas 1 item	27 Apr 1888
U DX78/5	Letter and postcard from James Kier Hardie, Cumnock, to J.E. Barlas, Dundee and Crieff Agrees with scheme, but doubts value of appointing agents; suggests an annual conference of Socialist organisations; 'get your Societies to affiliate with our Scottish Labour Party'; cannot attend Convention in Dundee, being in London and 'I like to rest on Sunday' 2 items	17 Oct- 03 Nov 1888
U DX78/6	Letter from John Leslie, Edinburgh branch of the Social Democratic Federation, to J.E. Barlas, Crieff Enclosing printed circular calling a conference in Edinburgh of all Scottish Socialist Societies (which resulted in the formation of the Scottish Labour Party) 2 items	13 Nov 1888
U DX78/7	Letter from William Cameron, Secretary, Dundee Central Branch of Social Democratic Federation [to JE Barlas?] Branch news; visit of Thomas Mann and proposed debate with McCutcheon; anti-machinery arguments advanced by the latter; good wishes for new Labour Electoral Association 1 item	28 Jan 1889
U DX78/8	Letters from George Bateman, National Labour Electoral Association, and National Labour Party, to JE Barlas, Stockton Election of Barlas to the NLEA; work to be undertaken in Stockton (bill posting; distributing literature, etc.) 2 items	9 Dec 1888- 21 Jan 1889

Hull History Centre: Papers of J.E. Barlas

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| U DX78/9  | <p>Letters from 12th Duke of Bedford (Hastings William Sackville Russell), Newton Stuart and Woburn to Dr Charles W. Brook</p> <p>Anti-war views; 'The Word' and G.A. Aldred; Labour Party 'disintegrating' (30 March 1942); Bertrand Russell and his sons (14 May 1945); Attlee; Dalton; Russia; India; anti-Semitism; reform (monetary, law, medical, second chamber, education); coal industry; British People's Party; danger of war (24 July 1948) (26 &amp; 1 copy reply from C.W. Brook). With two duplicated anti-war pamphlets ('The Way Out', (1941))</p> <p>29 items</p> | <p>1 Jan 1941-<br/>29 Jul 1948</p> |
| U DX78/10 | <p>Letters from Guy A Aldred, The Strickland Press, Glasgow to Dr Charles W Brook</p> <p>Politics; printing; 'The Word'; 'Battling Surgeon', by C.W. Brook; 12th Duke of Bedford and John Beckett; British People's Party; MacGregor Reid; James Maxton; Aldred's parliamentary candidature; India (81 &amp; 3 copy replies from C.W. Brook)</p> <p>84 items</p>  | <p>29 Sep 1942-<br/>3 Jan 1948</p> |
| U DX78/11 | <p>Pamphlet. 'Sown in Dishonour: a Christmas Musing in Prison', by Guy A Aldred (Strickland Press)</p> <p>Written in Barlinnie Prison, 25 December 1921</p> <p>1 item</p>   | <p>1945</p>                        |
| U DX78/12 | <p>Letter from Charles Hill, Secretary, British Medical Association to Dr Charles W Brook</p> <p>Salary (Askwith) scales for hospital medical officers</p> <p>1 item</p>  | <p>15 Jul 1946</p>                 |