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Socialism with a Northern Accent: Radical traditions for modern times Paul Salveson

The socialist tradition in Britain is diverse and multi-layered. Its pattern of development differed markedly across the great industrial centres where it first put down roots. In this new book – which is so much more than a work of history – Paul Salveson re-asserts the strength and distinctiveness of the socialism which emerged in the mills, mines and railway yards of the North of England. The core of his argument is that popular socialism today needs to reconnect with its local and regional roots, and relocate power to the regions and localities.

Central to Salveson's account is his discussion of the rise of the Independent Labour Party, which was formed in Bradford in 1893, and whose character differed markedly from the metropolitan-based socialism of the Marxist-inclined Social Democratic Federation. Its emphasis was on ethical values, community and culture; and it was decentralist and democratic rather than centralist and authoritarian. And, as the book also documents, a number of outstanding women – including Katharine Bruce Glasier, Caroline Martyn, Sarah Reddish and Enid Stacy – played a central role in its campaigning.

Salveson reminds us of the role of working-class writers such as Allen Clarke, who converted thousands of his readers to socialism 'by making them laugh', and of the Clarion cycling clubs, which introduced a generation of working men and women to a new kind of politics, one which was fun and recreational. He also shows how the co-operative movement and the trades unions, alongside the ILP, helped shape a working-class culture which was remarkably durable and independent.

As Salveson argues, in reconnecting with these local radical traditions in a modern context Labour could find valuable resources for its renewal.

Paul Salveson is a professional railwayman and visiting professor at the University of Huddersfield. He is vice-chair of Colne Valley Labour Party and active in his union TSSA. He has written widely on labour movement history in the North; his most recent previous book is *Allen Clarke/Teddy Ashton: Lancashire's Romantic Radical* (Little Northern Books 2009).

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