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COUNCILLOR T. DAN SMITH.

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Between the years 1945 and 1950 I partly drifted ~~into~~, and partly determined three strands of action which subsequently dominated most of my life.

The heavy stresses experienced in the war years had been largely the result of my 'left wing-anti war' views. I had the feeling that 'I was right' and was encouraged and strengthened as the war progressed. My wife was still only ²⁴ when the war ended and coming from a non-political background had really experienced enough isolation and more than enough of a never ending stream of way out political people constantly arriving on our doorstep.

My parents, ~~who~~ who had indoctrinated me with their socialist ideals, had never envisaged that I would become a well known and aggressive pacifist and that, as a result, would suffer consequences in ways that they had never dreamt about and certainly never expected to experience.

I pointed out to them that personal and family suffering was the essence of war and when it could be related to 'Love of Country' it was the back bone of exploitable patriotism. When it would be related to a fundamentally good and progressive cause it was truly worthwhile, even if unrecognised by society.

It was against such background discussion that I conceded to the wishes of my wife, who determined, that, if she were to have children, then it was her desire that they would have me as a father and she would have me as a husband and that I would not seek to 'emulate' many of the ^{self-chosen} revolutionaries' she had met, who seemed to see marriage as a joke and a hindrance on the 'march towards socialism'.

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I happily agreed ^{to} the most important personal decision in my life, ^{having} which was to share the experience of children and ^{that} once they were born, they would remain the determining factor in every other major family decision. Our first daughter was born on December 23rd 1947, our second daughter on 23rd ^{March}, 1952, and our only son on 13th December 1956. Of all the decisions that I ^{have} taken, the decision to marry and later to have children were decisions which turned out to be wholly good and worthwhile in every way. My wife and I ^{have no regrets} when in 1939, we decided that it would ^{be} wrong to bring children into ^{that} world of evacuation bombing, injury, and death

We often discussed in later years that the only thing you can do without any training, qualification, or examination was to bring human lives into the world. You have to pass some kind of test for the most elementary job but not to be parents.

I had ^{become} completely sceptical about the war aims of the Western Allies, but even my scepticism did not prepare me for the acquiescence of the consistently arch anti-communist Winston Churchill, in the ruthless handing over by the Allies of one after the other of the nations in Eastern Europe to the Soviet Union sphere of control. There were no ^{negotiated} compensatory concessions for the people of those ^{EASTERN EUROPEAN} countries ^{secured} for them by their "Western Allies"

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Churchill and his War Cabinet had agreed with the Soviet Union, ^{the U.S.A} and the Western Allies that Germany would be divided into ^{two} zones. It was an impossibly stupid decision and it was immediately obvious that it was creating a problem incapable of resolution, outside of a fundamental shift in power ^{on} one or ^{the} other side of the Iron Curtain or by another war between East and West.

Some of those who supported this policy did so believing that the German people should in perpetuity, be divided to prevent them waging another war for a greater German Reich. These people argued that the German people had to be made to accept responsibility for the war crimes of the nazis, even though it meant that countless millions of German children, still unborn, would suffer the consequences of the decision ^{although} ^{they were} not responsible for Hitler or his regime.

The Soviet Union, who had suffered so much death and destruction on their territories arising from the German invasion, were understandably concerned not to have another situation where a unified Germany could ever attack them again.

^{But} the Soviet Union ^{had been} were quite happy to sign the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939 and ^{had} encouraged Hitler to attack the West. It was my view that a combination of brilliant western diplomacy, and a consistent anti-communist hatred by Hitler, ^{the} end led to German involvement in Russia and, with it, certain defeat.

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The worst acts of the 'peace treaties' were those which handed over the Poland ^{after BRITAIN had} and its people to the Soviet Block, ^{gone to war in 1939} to 'liberate' Poland from the German ^{occupation}.

For the people of Czechoslovakia, the peace treaty was and even greater sell-out. Why? Had it not been said by Churchill and most, if not all, of the members of his War Cabinet, irrespective of political party that, when Chamberlain waved his Munich 'bit of paper' ^{having} agreed that Hitler could march into Czechoslovakia ^{it} was the betrayal of a great nation and a courageous people?

At least, Chamberlain could ^{justifiably claim that his action had been} ^{taken} to give Britain more time to prepare for War.

What justifiable reasons, in 1945, could the victorious ~~Allies~~ give, when they agreed with the Soviet Union that Czechoslovakia should remain under Soviet domination as an Eastern European State and part of the Eastern Block? ^{That was an infinitely worse} agreement than the Munich Agreement,

It ~~was~~ my view at that time, a view strengthened with the passing years, that the 'Peace Agreements' concluded after the end of the 1939 war, ^{and especially those relating to} Eastern Europe, were totally unjustifiable. They were an underwriting of the Stalinist Regime which allowed it to move into a position of near world dominance, ^{surpassed only by the U.S.A}

Of course the Western political and military leaders faced complex problems arising from the Potsdam and Yalta agreements which were further complicated by the ^{rapid} military advances to the West by the Soviet Armies. But, if solutions proved beyond the Western Allies in 1948, what possible hope ^{is} there that those same ~~Allies~~ would find peaceful solutions in the future.

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I did not share the anti-Soviet views of those who were on the right wing of politics. The war had dispelled the illusions of those who believed that given half a chance the Russian people would rebel against the tyranny of Stalin and turn to some political system undefined.

On the contrary, the war had demonstrated that the Soviet people, in the mighty conurbations of Moscow, Stalingrad, Leningrad and countless other towns and cities ^{had} shown unbelievable endurance, ^{armed with} Their will and ability, defeated and destroyed a German Army that had then swept the best of European Armies aside. The German Army in all countries except the Soviet Union found plausible Quislings ^{while} other ^{defeated} European Countries had set up Governments in exile to carry on the war. The Soviet Union produced no Quisling Government at home or Emigre Government abroad.

The regimes of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco exposed the disastrous effects of Stalin's Social Fascist policies which led the national communist parties to attack, as their main enemies in each of the countries in turn, those workers who supported Social Democracy. By that policy they ^{caused} defeats to many underground efforts against the Fascists ^{and} great confusion amongst their ^{own} members. The supreme betrayal of their own supporters throughout the world was the Hitler/Stalin Pact ⁱⁿ 1939.

Even though I was taken aback by the accuracy of many of ^{my} war time predictions made in speeches, I realised that I was now outside of mainstream politics which meant that my thoughts and words were largely ignored and my influence was nil.

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I was convinced that neither the Soviet System, and certainly not the political systems of the reactionary independent European States were capable of producing non-military solutions to the social, economic and military problems created firstly by the exploding of the first Atomic bombs and the political and economic consequences of the War.

The Allies so called 'German Solution' was the blue print for other political 'solutions' in Viet Nam, Korea, and the conflict between the Chinese Mainland and Formosa. Each of the 'solutions' contained the seeds of a future conflict between Communism and Capitalism.

The massive Labour electoral victory in Britain coincided with a huge swing to the Left in Europe. Yet none of the post war non Communist Governments saw the necessity for reaching sane and enlightened, economic and social solutions on a scale to match the concessions gained by the Soviet Union across the world. The new political leaders, with the exception of De Gaulle, agreed to consolidate the agreements proposed by their war time predecessors and where radical changes were sought they were mainly placed in the hands of the old bureaucracies to design and implement.

The European Peace Treaties had handed to the Soviet Union the spoils of the War in a manner that was incomprehensible. In a series of agreements the Communist Parties of Europe had been given power over the countries of Eastern Europe. Although the situation in the Far East was more confused, the Peace Treaties had created an embryo structure of Communist States in the Far East.

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The successes of the Soviet Block were reflected beyond the Eastern European States into Albania ^{and} Yugoslavia, while mass based communist parties wielded considerable political and industrial influence in Italy, Greece and France. From each of these collective and separate Communist islands of influence, there was a steady pressure building up around the fascist regimes of Portugal and Spain.

There was no doubt in my mind about the scale of political defeat for the Western Allies and I was astonished that the British Labour movement did not see the need for a massive political offensive to rally Socialist opinion concerned with the political, social and economic problems of their own country and of Europe. They were aware of great new economic and technological advances needing to be harnessed to new concepts of democracy, ^{and of the} possibilities arising as a result of dramatic war time developments. Without such a major political offensive the West could have no political answer to a powerful and firmly established Soviet Block. My wife and hundreds of other enthusiasts worked their fingers to the bone to return Labour M.P.'s, from Newcastle to Westminster in the 1945 General Election. I sat at home in a state of complete disillusionment. To hell with politics and politicians. I would wait and see what this mighty vote of the British people expressed through Parliament would produce. I would settle down and for the first time in my life live 'normally'.

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I started my first business, Smiths Decorators, and it was a decision which I made on the spur of the moment. I was waiting for a bus on the way home from a signwriting job, the bus stopped outside a large store in Newcastle's main shopping street being painted by Bill Nichol one of my trade union friends. I was already undertaking more work than I could personally cope with so I put to him that he should become a partner in my business. He answered 'Yes' and the deal was struck.

He had not long been recovered from an attack of T.B. and had recently buried a young wife who had died from the disease. As a result of his disastrous personal experiences, he had thrown himself into political work and especially into working for the National Council of Labour Colleges whose Northern Area Tutor, ^{Stan Rees,} was a long time friend of mine and a rare Welsh character in the North Eastern Labour Movement.

My new business partner knew me as a Bigg Market Open Air Speaker and as a well publicised 'left winger', and so, naturally, proceeded to woo me back into active politics.

I joined my local ward party and from there was sent as a delegate to the City Party and very soon was added to the Municipal Panel. From this panel the City Party approved candidates from whom the Ward Parties could select prospective councillors to fight the ward seats.

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Newcastle City Council at that time held Annual Elections when one third of all councillors had to retire. There was one appointed Alderman for every three elected Councillors

Once on the Municipal Panel, I ^{HE} began to interest myself in activities of the Labour Group the City Council. Labour had gained control of Newcastle City Council for the first time in their history in 1945. Although they ^{unavoidably} had to face a whole range of problems arising from the aftermath of the War, they achieved little of a decisive nature and by 1949 were well on their way back to the minority position which had always been theirs.

The opposition were 'non-political', being a mixture of 'right wing' Liberals and Tories and with a high proportion of typical Tory women. The best of them was highly competent, imaginative and sensitive. The worst of them were typically hangers, floggers and wore flowery hats.

Because of the loss of council seats the previous year there were a number of ex-councillors who, along with myself, were invited to attend a selection meeting in Walker Ward, one of the safest Labour Seats ^{of} the Council. It was a plum ^{seat} and once elected you could be ^{it} in for life.

With ^{my} political background it was no surprise to find that I had a lot of political opposition from some sides of the Labour Movement. I had served on the National Executive of the I.L.P. and had rubbed shoulders with senior Labour Coalition Ministers during the War time as a result of my I.L.P. Executive membership.

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I had learned quite a lot about International politics and personalities. I had gone through the unique if unenviable experiences of being expelled from the I.L.P. as a Trotskyist and from the Trotskyists as a Centrist, and I was a recent recruit to the Labour Party whose policies I had attacked from open air platforms throughout Britain. In addition I was by then a Humanist and a Republican. I was opposed by other prospective candidates but I was delighted by the response I received from the rank and file ward party members who were present at the meeting. I had prepared my speech carefully and advocated an entirely new approach to Local government, attacking a system which I defined as geographically and functionally obsolete and rooted in the 19th century. I won the vote hands down and went into the election campaign with a song in my heart and with great energy, experience and enthusiasm. The Walker area enjoyed the injection of these qualities and after a happy and efficiently fought campaign I was elected by a large majority.

John Atkinson

The Town Clerk ^{was} a gentleman and a local Government Officer par excellence. ^{He} uttered an ^{immediate} warning to me, "I have seen many councillors totally destroy their lives by spending too much time on council affairs."

That was on May 11th 1950, my 35th birthday and by the 22nd I was summoned to attend my first pre-council Labour Group Meeting. There was an obvious and clear conflict for the leadership of the Labour Group between two contenders. One of the candidates was a long standing Labour Party stalwart, a sightless man who as well as having worked ^{on} the ^{behalf of} Blind People had also served on Newcastle Council for many years. ^{His} special interest was town planning.

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Although long since past his physical and political best, he represented, as did many of his ^{senior} Whitehall Parliamentary Colleagues an age irretrievably gone. Ted Short (Lord Glenamara) who I had met in the ^{now} International Friendship League pre-war was a post war recruit to the Labour Party but ^{was} rapidly making a name for himself in local politics. He had been elected to the Council in 1948, and was clearly politically ambitious. Voting procedure was by a simple vote and on a show of hands.

I had no hesitation in voting for Ted Short ^{as leader on} grounds of his energy, ability, and youth, although I was surprised to find that, unlike ^{voting} in my previous 'left wing' election experiences, politics played no part in choosing ^{this} a candidate. There was no discussion on the political attitudes we would be pursuing in the forth coming year or about the policies we would be advocating in opposition. Ted Short was elected.

There was a noticeable ^{attitude of arrogance} 'superiority' displayed by those Councillors who had already served ^{on the Council.} They ^{believed} that if you were in a Council minority 'you could not do much about it'. Having always been ⁱⁿ a very small political minority, I knew for certain just how foolish such a belief was.

The first Council meeting I attended was held on the afternoon of 24th May 1950. It was the Annual Council Meeting and the day when the incoming Lord Mayor was elected and took office.

The Lord Mayoral Election proceedings struck me at once as being a mixture of Gilbert and Sullivan, Royal Ascot and a Regional Royal Garden Party.

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The procedures were adjudged to be a necessary part of the 'democratic process'. The tea provided was 'municipally meagre', evidence to the ratepayers that the 'Progressive's ' looked after your money. It also aspired to more Royal traditions. Tea was beautifully served on austere tables covered with well laundered white table clothes, and the scene was transformed by the visual evidence of the floral abilities of the city's accomplished Parks Department.

The Lord Mayor's staff in their deferential attitude to the Lord Mayor reflected generations of tradition and competent waiting upon past Lord Mayors. With the ending of the War and the need for more radical reform I could see NO dynamic future for a Local Government system based on NON elected Aldermen and Lord Mayor's chains. No one that day seemed to notice that the traditions had worn thin and that Local Government was under serious threatening attack from many sides. At least if anyone did notice, the Lord Mayor made no reference to any such threats.

The proceedings were a far cry from the slum-ridden streets of Walker, Byker, Shieldfield and the Scotswood areas on which the Labour Party depended for support. I never lost my affinity with the people of those areas and I never achieved any affinity with those who aspired after the high office of Lord Mayor and were mostly ruined by a conceit at the end of their year of office. Being Lord Mayor left the holders of the office with a permanent "suit of 'velvet'. I understood the basis of ^{the} Dick Wittington ^{fehle}.

So far as I could assess, I was in a Council minority of one. My fellow councillors, as though to reassure me, told me that if I remained as a Councillor long enough 'my turn would come'.

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The very thought that one day it might, filled me with forboding. I could see the importance of the office of Lord Mayor only if it represented tomorrows citizens, their fears and aspirations, I saw in it little merit if it was simply playing the role of a 'dignified host' behind which there was only tradition without ambition. The aspiration to be looked up to because of tradition and office was offensive to me.

There were a number of Aldermen and Councillors who I had known for many years and I enjoyed their advocacy of views, especially two of them who had been ex-Liberal M.P.'s, during the depression years. One, ^{Charlton Curragh,} having been a Liberal candidate when Margaret Bondfield fought Wallsend in 1926.

The Council selected members to serve on committees without regard to ability and it was a depressing experience. I had been given no choice or consideration by my own side at the pre-council group meeting on the preceeding Monday evening. It was no surprise to me when my opponents gave me even less thought. As a 'punishment', I was appointed to membership of the 'Libraries Committee' and to a 'Schools and Charities', which was a committee rooted into the City's history and which had the responsibility for dealing with considerable investment resources.

I found committee work a good base from which to gain experience. It also provided an opportunity to elevate the Library Service from what it was, a 'starved' service, into one of the best library services in the country.

When Committee selection was over the Council proceeded to consideration of its 'normal' business. The first afternoon the business covered a range of issues which I later found re-curring until 1958 while Labour remained in opposition until 1958.

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Within two years of my election to the City Council, I began to intervene politically in the City Council debates. I used the Council Chamber on every possible occasion as a platform on which to develop ideas on which the Labour Party had begun to work, and which benefited from hostile discussion. The Labour Party had two political agents, one in the City and one in the East End Constituency, and they were far from ^{being my} friends, but between them they contained the abilities necessary to win support for my political ideas. To get policies into the election manifesto required the endorsement of the City Party. The City Party was a body made up of delegates from Trade Union branches, Constituency Labour Parties and affiliated bodies such as the Co-op and Fabian Society. With their support behind the policies, you were able to advocate them, knowing you could implement them, given power. Those who did the election work on the streets to get you elected could also be involved in formulating the policies. You also knew that following their acceptance, the policies would be discussed at every branch meeting, when delegates gave their reports, ^{and} even though attendances were dropping, an important group of citizens knew what you were aiming to achieve. If any of them wanted to put policy ideas forward, I encouraged them to do so and such ideas were always welcomed and if they had merit, were adopted.

I became Chairman of the City Labour Party in 1955 and held the job for three years creating a precedent by refusing to stand a fourth term. They were three especially important years in the history of Newcastle Labour Party, the City and for Local Government in general.

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Our policy working groups embraced every activity in the political spectrum and as Chairman I insisted on written submissions from groups or individuals on any subject or aspect of a subject. This prevented 'off the cuff' time wasting. The subjects had no order of priority and covered National issues such as German re-armament and Nuclear policies. As National Conference delegate on two occasions and knowing Conference Procedures I managed to get our Newcastle resolutions on the Conference Agenda and also to take part in debates. The German Re-armament debate was marred by the expressed hatred of Nye Bevan although, for my contribution to the debate, which was one of the first to be televised, I was cartooned by 'Vicky' the famous Daily Mirror cartoonist. Politicians, especially M.P.'s, had not learned the power of T.V. in those early days.

passionately international as I was, and determined to air ~~the~~ views I still retained on these issues, I had a deepening conviction, shared with Joe Eagles the Newcastle City Party Secretary, who I greatly respected for his ability and vision, that, by concentrating on local and regional policies, we could carry through Newcastle City Council given the political power; *the changing of the face of Democratic Representative Government in Britain* ~~the~~ *and* far beyond.

Side by side with attending countless frustrating committee and council meetings, Joe and I were producing detailed policies on current issues such as eviction, slum clearance, housing, re-housing, revitalisation of housing, housing design and a host of other live issues.

Our education group were agitating for an independent Newcastle University and for the re-organisation of Newcastle's Education system along comprehensive lines.

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We were also seeking the upgrading of our Technical College and I and a colleague began to pose the concept of a Polytechnic and University being developed on adjacent sites so that, eventually, we could have an M.I.T. type of University Campus in the City. This had educational, design, land, library, catering and a host of spin off possibilities.

A small number of us were certain that the long term future of the North East Region was tied up with the development of three Regional Universities; Tees^side, Durham, and Newcastle with an equivalent of three Polytechnics. We were astonished just how far the Northern University lobby lagged behind areas of the country much less deserving, but much more influentially voiciferous, when such matters as the granting of University Status was decided.

Our Labour Policy Groups were developing regional policies for Sport and Art. Transport Groups were working on Air, River, Port, Bus, Train and general transport integration and the members were not all Labour Party members, nor necessarily from Newcastle, but they were convinced that what we were attempting was workable.

Our general policies could be summed up in "power to the provinces", towards elected provincial government with freedom for the provinces to develop individual initiatives with other Provinces & Europe.

We were arguing for the rejection of the right wing arguments that Trade Unions had too much power; and that closed shops were wrong and people should be free to opt out.

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We counterposed the power of football club directors by *instancing* Newcastle United who had complete autocratic power over a facility that was the enjoyment base for hundreds of thousands of "Geordies" and yet over which the "Geordie" had neither say or right to consultation. *We argued for the* ~~Open~~ ^{ing of these} ~~up~~ areas of real interest to ordinary people *and their inclusion in the* democratic processes, *our most popular slogan.*

To illustrate really powerful closed shops we talked about the House of Lords, the R.I.B.A. and professional bodies.

It was a time when the people of Tyneside and far beyond were pleased to join in the policy arguments we were stimulating. It was creating a momentum which was being reflected in a desire and determination within the City Labour Party to win back political power in peace time Newcastle. Our views on national issues were also beginning to be noted. I used every opportunity to put forward the broad concepts of change while doing everything practical to institute policies in Newcastle which would compel change by showing that such policies and organisational proposals were necessary, enlightened, and more efficient.

Our inner executive group was saddened by the failure of the Labour Party nationally to get to grips with ambitious new Regional Policies rather than develop ^{as they would,} on the Regional Aid concepts of the 30's and 40's. We saw such policies as being the development of ideas rooted in the 1930's and inadequate against the near revolution which was striking at the very roots of the regions' basic industries of mining, steel and ship building, demanding much more fundamental change than Regional Aid could bring.

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We used every occasion in the Council, to illustrate our policy ideas and I recall the night of McMillan's 'wind of change' speech when we turned a simple *Council discussion* into a debate about apartheid.

There *was* a sizable number of Newcastle *Trade Unionists* who were far and away more advanced than their National Officers. *It* was only the shift in political power especially in the T.G.W.U. and the growth in numbers of the Public Sector Unions that made *our radical interpretation of the importance of the Provinces in the restructuring of democracy a valid concept.*

We were certain that the development of a powerful and purposeful Labour movement depended on the consolidation of a new regional political structure and that the line of our regional policies was *internationally relevant* *but especially to* Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. *and the North East clearly* The Party, required a minimum of reasonably paid *solely* Regional and Constituency Staffs who were not dependent *of* the Trade Union for their income. I watched 'left' wing constituencies adopt *North East* right wing Parliamentary Candidates only because the 'right wing candidate would bring in enough finance to more than cover the election expenses.

The position today is exactly the same. Why, as is obvious, *if* the majority of *Constituency party* delegates to the Labour Party Conference are to the 'Left' are the majority of their M.P.'s to the right? The answer lies in the financial structure of the party and the inability of the average Constituency to raise sufficient finance to meet the commitments it should meet, let alone those it is required to meet by way of *needed* additional affiliation fees.

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Labour

The party needs to prosper financially and then employ the staff to maintain a political organisation for the 1980's and 1990's.

Our Council and party political attacks on the Newcastle Tories were clearly having an effect. Certain especially bad housing schemes, with their appalling lack-amenity environments, were being constructed all over the City. They were the objects for political attack. I got to a point, when I had simply to mention the word Noble Street, for a groan to go around the Council Chamber, but I persisted, to the irritation of as many of the old fashioned non-political Labour Councillors as of the bitterly divided Tories.

The City Labour Party Executive had also begun to look more carefully at the kind of people it was permitting to be included on the Municipal Panel. The people it was rejecting were a problem. By the time we came to the critical 1958 election, which we believed could give us the opportunity to implement the policies we had by then formulated, we had a group of highly active and competent councillors and candidates who had already absorbed the kind of spirit which had been injected into our municipal and political work.

The Labour Council Group still saw itself as a law unto itself and above the decisions of the City Party, whose interference it resented. I saw this attitude of theirs as being undemocratic and believed that the role of the Council Group was to direct the professional council officers towards implementing seriously considered party policies. In this way I could see a live democracy at work.

Newcastle had three conflicting strands of Chief Officers who dominated their Departments. The Town Clerk, a solicitor who saw his job as servant of the whole Council, as Legal Adviser to the Committee, and as the defender of his brother officers should that be necessary.

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The City Treasurer ^{who} wielded his power through the Finance Committee, a committee given a seniority among Councillors as it had the final say over the vetting of Committee Estimates and ~~exercised its power~~ in that way. I argued that the Group should lay down the policies, including the financial policies. The concern of the Finance Committee ~~should have been to develop~~ more efficient and more democratic ways of interpreting our ~~policy~~ ^{policy} objectives of social justice and commercial efficiency. ~~Each~~ ^{according to its ability, and to each committee} according to its needs. In this way new priorities took a rightful place in our financial consideration. The old system simply commenced with last years estimates and worked forward from them.

let me quote

A simple illustration, ~~was~~ ^{was} the one which made me decide to press for the setting up of a Regional Arts Association. In 1952 I ~~was~~ ^{was} listened to a Council discussion led by the leader of the Progressive Party majority, in which he reported, that, from an amount set aside under Nye Bevan's Housing and Local Government Act, which allowed a 6p rate for the Encouragement of Cultural Activities (and a penny rate that year produced £10,000;) the sum of £645, had been allocated to Cultural Societies.

Each year the Treasurer prepared his estimates, compared performance during the year, and then set out next years estimates and hoped for performances. Spending Committees were then invited to appear before the Finance Committee to justify their proposed spending.

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It was a largely irrelevant procedure and I was certain that we had to try to change it.

I attended my first group meeting in May 1958, knowing that I was going to be elected to committees of my choice, a right which I had been denied during the eight years I had been a member of the Council. I was elected to the Housing and Planning Committees and although I lost the vote for the Leadership of the Labour Group, I was elected as Joint Deputy Leader,

The Group wanted a particular ^{person as} Deputy Leader and decided, in order to get him, to elect two Deputy Leaders that year. Despite that set back, I succeeded, with the support of the young up and coming Councillors, ~~to bring a resolution~~ which the City ~~had previously supported~~ to bring in non-council members as Aldermen to replace the Tory Alderman we were certain to defeat at the Annual meeting of the Council.

That was my first political victory of a series and as soon as the Annual meeting was out of the way, as Chairman of the Housing Committee I went to meet the City Architect who was in charge of the designing and building of the appalling houses which were then being constructed in many parts of the City and especially along Scotswood Road. Our meeting was unhappy. I stated in unequivocal terms that there must be no more of those houses built and asked him to tear the drawings up.

The Architect was a man of exceptional ability, and had the political system been different in those years, and had he not become the victim of a bitterly fought housing political battle, Newcastle could have seen some advanced housing schemes.

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As it was, his reaction to the Long Benton political housing battle was to produce uninspired if well constructed shockingly designed buildings on totally unsuitable sites.

I was Chairman of Housing for only two years and had a hostile minority group of Labour Councillors who refused to 'support' me. I concluded that Housing design and construction were matters requiring a different committee structure to that which we were operating. I sought the support of certain Civil Servants I had come to know and who seemed happy at the attempts to change the direction of the City's housing policy. The need for reorganisation and new staff was becoming increasingly urgent.

The pressures of major contractors for package deals on Housing Committees were heavy for understandable commercial reasons. Housing was a multi million pound business, all kinds of invitations were received and most rejected. I was quickly aware of the powerful local builders lobby and of its Council supporters on both sides.

It was an odd coincidence that made me aware that there was a powerful builders lobby working to destroy me politically. On a Saturday evening in 1959, I received a 'phone call at home and the voice identified itself through a war time circumstance and turned out to be the voice of a special police officer who had been assigned to 'political work' during the war. He asked if he could come and see me about a certain matter and I readily agreed to the meeting. He arrived and filled in for me all kinds of interesting details about how my war time meetings had been noted. How certain people had been 'played' into and out of my life in order to ascertain my true feelings and my war time political intentions.

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He went on to warn me that there were certain people who he named that were going to whip up a campaign which would possibly destroy me. His purpose for seeing me was a personal and although I was on my guard, I could not imagine what could be the basis of any campaign against me. It turned out to be the Cruden Affair, and it was a controlled effort orchestrated politically in Newcastle and politically backed in London. It was eventually diffused by a number of people of integrity who in my view paid too heavy a price for attacking a sordid conspiracy. The citizens of Newcastle paid financially for the political assassination attempt. I paid by having a heart attack.