

RICHARDSON, Thomas (Tom) (1868- 1928)

TRADE UNIONIST AND LABOUR MP

Tom Richardson was born at Usworth, Co. Durham, on 6 June 1868, the son of Robert Richardson, a miner. He was educated at the Usworth Board School, and started work in the pits at the age of eleven. In early adult life he was made a checkweighman at Washington Colliery, a post he held until he entered Parliament in 1910.

Richardson soon began to interest himself in politics, trade unionism and local government. He was elected to Washington School Board at the age of twenty-two, and was on the parish council for six years; he was a member of Chester-le-Street RDC for seventeen years, vice-chairman of the Council and of the Board of Guardians for three years, and chairman of the Highways Committee for six years; and he served for seven years on Durham County Council, where he was vice-chairman of an education sub-committee. He also served on the Durham Miners' executive and the Durham Coal Conciliation Board, and was vice-chairman of the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund.

Tom Richardson was one of the pioneers of the Labour movement in the North East. He was an early member of the ILP and an active propagandist for Socialism, trade unionism and co-operation. He stood as Labour candidate for Whitehaven in the general election of December 1910. Sponsored by the ILP, he had the endorsement of the national executive of the Labour Party, and the support of the Lib-Labs. The large programme he put before the electors ranged from nationalisation of the mines through Home Rule for Ireland and a Women's Franchise Bill to Poor Law reform on the lines of the famous Minority Report. In a straight fight against the sitting MP, a Tory, Richardson won, nearly doubling the Labour vote and becoming the first Labour MP for Whitehaven.

In the House he does not seem to have spoken very often, but in 1913 he strongly supported the bill to nationalise the mines. He was a pacifist or at least was opposed to the War, and he was a member of the ILP minority led by Keir Hardie. In 1915 he asked questions in the House about the treatment of COs, and in 1916 he asked about the seizure by the police of ILP pamphlets and other literature held by branches of the ILP [*Hansard*, 82, 18 May 1916].

In 1918 he stood again for Whitehaven, but his anti-war activities had now made him so unpopular at this 'Coupon' election that he was mobbed at an open-air meeting in Whitehaven and had to be escorted by police to the house of the Whitehaven miners' agent, which the crowd then stormed and ransacked, without, however, finding him.

In 1919 Richardson decided to try to start a new career in Canada. He took his family to Vancouver, where he engaged himself in local Labour politics, and in 1920 stood as a Labour candidate for Vancouver City in the provincial elections. Politically, however, British Columbia could hardly be called radical or progressive at that time, and the Government won most of the seats. One way or another, Richardson did not succeed in making his way in British Columbia. Two daughters returned home within a year or two. The elder son chose to remain in British Columbia, where he was engaged in a course of study; but Richardson himself, his wife and his younger son returned to England in 1924.

Richardson was by then fifty-six, his financial resources appear to have been minimal, and he found it difficult to organise a way of life anything like his former one. He did propaganda work for labour causes, and was, for instance, useful in many of the by-elections which took place in the next few years. Latterly he became a regular propagandist for the London co-operative movement. But this rather exhausting work proved to be too much for his health. He developed heart trouble, and after a period of illness had finally to enter St Thomas's Hospital, where he died on 22 October 1929.

Richardson was a devout Primitive Methodist and lay preacher (as was his friend J.W. Taylor, MP, for whom he was election agent). He was a brother of W.P. Richardson, treasurer of the MFGB from 1921 to 1930. Tom Richardson had married Mary, daughter of John Purvis on 6 June 1888, and there were three sons and three daughters of the marriage. His wife survived him, along with five of the children. The two eldest daughters were secretaries at the House of Commons, of whom Nance was secretary to the Rev. Herbert Dunnico, MP, first in London and then at the United Nations in Geneva. The third daughter, Mrs Williams, lives (1976) in Los Angeles. Two of the sons had careers in Canada, one of whom was a lawyer, and the third son was a civil servant Tom Richardson was buried at Streatham Vale Cemetery and left effects valued at £30.

Writings: *Profits and Wages in the Durham Coal Trade* (Darlington, [1909?]) 19 pp.; 'How I won Whitehaven', *Labour Leader*, 9 Dec 1910; (with J.A. Walbank), *Profits and Wages in the British Coal Trade, 1898-1910* (Newcastle, 1911); (with others), *Baths at the Pithead and the Works* (Women's Labour League, 1914) 16 pp.; *Labour's Struggle in Canada* (NLP, [1919?]) 4 pp.

Sources: (1) MSS: Labour Party archives: LRC. (2) Other: *Labour Leader*, 2 Dec 1910; *Whitehaven News*, 8 Dec 1910; *Hansard* (1913-17); *WWW* (1916-28); *Dod* (1918); *Daily Province* [Vancouver], 29 Nov and 2 Dec 1920; R. Page Arnot, *The Miners: years of struggle* (1953); R. Gregory, *The Miners and British Politics 1906-14* (Oxford, 1968); biographical information: Vancouver PL; personal information: Miss A. Gaunt, Roehampton, niece and Mrs May Robson, Whitley Bay, niece. OBIT. *Manchester Guardian* and *Times*, 23 Oct 1928; *Durham County Advertiser* and *Whitehaven News*, 25 Oct 1928; *Labour Party Report* (1929).

JOYCE BELLAMY
MARGARET 'ESPINASSE

See also: William Pallister RICHARDSON, John Wilkinson TAYLOR

Comments from William P Richardson (great-nephew)

The date of his death stated above as 1929 is incorrect.

The biography of William Pallister RICHARDSON (brother of Tom) appears in DLB vol. 3.

The biography of John Wilkinson TAYLOR appears in DLB vol. 1.