

***Walter Citrine. Forgotten Statesman of the Trades Union Congress* by Jim Moher [JGM Books, 2021, pp xxii + 377, ISBN 978 09557 107 28]**

Any sophisticated study of labour law mandates an understanding not only of the discipline's legislative content but also the historical, social, political, and economic context within which it has evolved, and within which its legislation plays out. Thus, labour law scholars have been receptive to socio-legal methods—going beyond doctrinal legal sources and looking to other disciplines. Labour law scholarship stands out for retaining an open, multi-disciplinary approach. Early labour law scholars in particular relied on history to develop new understandings for their discipline and to discover the role played by nonstate actors such as trade unions and employer associations in law creation and law enforcement. More recently, researchers have turned to philosophy and political theory, economics, sociology, and political economy approaches in order to explain and advance the discipline at a time when the labour market has fundamentally changed. Although few contemporary academic labour lawyers would identify as labour law historians, history continues to provide an *entrée* into developing different ways of understanding the origins and future trajectory of labour law and labour relations systems.

In *Walter Citrine. Forgotten Statesman of the Trades Union Congress*, Jim Moher provides a fascinating insight into the role of individuals in shaping non state actors' behaviour. Citrine is mainly known for his *ABC of Chairmanship* on the procedures in the conduct of meetings which continues to be used across the labour movement. Moher principally relies on the voluminous archive of Citrine's unpublished papers held in the LSE Library Archives and Citrine's own two-volume autobiography (*Men and Work* (1964) and *Two Careers* (1967)) to chart the hitherto largely neglected life of a remarkable man who was a leading figure at the top of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) for over twenty years. Moher, in this thoughtful and detailed biography, aims not only to introduce the multiple facets of Citrine's life to a wide audience but also to use him as a lens through which to explore the reasons for the rise and decline of trade unionism in the first half of the twentieth century; a period that is under-researched in contemporary labour law scholarship but which was pivotal in shaping the labour movement which emerged in the UK in the second half of the twentieth century.

Over the course of fifteen chapters, Moher tells Citrine's life story. He was born in Liverpool in 1887 and left school at age 12 to work in a mill, later training as an electrical worker and

joining the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) (chapter 1). He led a number of official and unofficial electricians' strikes between 1912 and 1914 and became the first elected ETU District Secretary in October 1914 (chapter 2). He remained on the Mersey during World War I before moving to the ETU's headquarter in Manchester as an elected national official in 1920 where he set about reforming the finances and administration of the union branches, and first drafted a guide to the conduct of meetings (*The Labour Chairman*) which developed into the *ABC of Chairmanship* in 1939 (chapter 3). In 1923, Citrine was elected as assistant general secretary to the TUC on account of his reputation as an administrative pioneer at the ETU. He took up the position in 1924, becoming acting general secretary in 1925 and general secretary in 1926 following Fred Bramley's death (chapter 4). Citrine was to remain the general secretary of the TUC until 1946; a period explored in chapters 5-13. He was also the President of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) from 1928-1945. He received a knighthood in 1935 and became a Privy Councillor in 1940. He accepted a peerage in 1946. Following Labour's election victory in 1945, Citrine moved from the TUC first to join the board of the nationalised National Coal Board and then became chair of the British Electricity Authority (chapter 14). From 1959, he was active in the House of Lords until his death in 1983 (chapter 15).

A book review cannot do justice to the rich and meticulous detail provided in Moher's book, particularly of Citrine's time as general secretary of the TUC. Individual chapters provide fascinating insights into inter alia the General Strike 1926 (chapter 5) and the evolving relationship between the trade union movement and the Labour Party (chapter 9). The General Strike, in particular, appears to have had a formidable influence on Citrine in learning the limits of exercising union power when not intent on a revolutionary challenge. The failure of the General Strike and the fraught relationship with the Labour Party during that period also led Citrine to view politics as a complementary but by no means primary sphere in which to pursue trade union aims, hence his pursuit of an open and continuous relationship with the Labour Party through the set-up of the National Council for Labour in 1931. Citrine's formative years had been heavily influenced by the Independent Labour Party and there is evidence of syndicalist influences until at least 1921 although he later, after the General Strike, advocated a "New Union" approach which proposed industrial cooperation. This approach was supported by Ernest Bevin, the powerful secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union during this time, who Citrine had first met in 1919 and its implementation was attempted by both during the "Mond-Turner" talks in 1928-1929. Moher subsequently touches upon Citrine's

links with the main political and intellectual debates of the period (chapter 9). For example, in November 1929 he was appointed as a member of Ramsay MacDonald's Economic Advisory Council together with JM Keynes, GDH Cole and RH Tawney (chapter 9). At the TUC, he worked closely with Walter Milne-Bailey, the head of the TUC's Research and Economic Department until 1935 and a mentee of Harold Laski (p. 145). Further exploration of these relationships could yield new insights into key (intellectual) turning points for the British labour movement during this period.

Bevin and Citrine went on to develop a close professional relationship, the description of which dominates the second half of the book. Throughout the second half of the 1920s and the 1930s, Citrine and Bevin "complemented each other's strengths" (p. 132); together they were seen as a "force of nature" (p. 307) and played a key role in shaping trade union and Labour Party politics at the time. However, Moher is also keen to stress, in contrast to a number of Bevin's biographers, that Citrine was "regarded by most government and union leaders of the inter-war years as the key partner in that team." (p. 134) This becomes most obvious in Moher's description of Citrine's role during the first half of World War II. It is well known that Bevin became Minister of Labour and National Service in Churchill's government in 1940 and is widely credited with maximising the British labour supply with a minimum of strikes and disruption during that time. Moher illustrates (chapter 12) how Citrine had ready access to the prime minister, all Cabinet ministers and all government departments. Through his role as President of the IFTU and general secretary of the TUC, Citrine had an international standing from which Churchill wanted to benefit (p. 203). In a letter to the US President, Franklin D. Roosevelt dated 1 November 1940, Churchill describes Citrine as filling "a position in the Labour movement more important to the conduct of the war than many Ministerial offices." (p. 201) Throughout the war, Citrine travelled to America and to the Soviet Union on behalf of the prime minister to garner support for the British war effort (chapter 13). In chapters 12 and 13, Moher charts the breakdown in relations between Bevin and Citrine, which he blames on Bevin's pursuit of personal power, and which eventually led to Citrine's premature departure from the TUC in 1946.

Moher concludes that "Walter Citrine was probably the most powerful figure to have graced the Labour movement in the twentieth century." (p. 308) His biography achieves its primary aim, namely to introduce Citrine to a wider audience but it also sheds new light on the trade union movement's transformation after the General Strike and Citrine's statesman-like role

during World War II (and, by extension, the TUC's relationship with the government during this period). For labour law scholars interested in using historical studies as a tool to better understand the discipline, Moher's biography makes visible the important role played by individuals in shaping law and labour relations. It also serves as an encouragement to scholars to revisit the intellectually rich but often neglected period between the two World Wars when the trade union movement was at a critical point in its development; thereby opening up potential new avenues for multi-disciplinary research.

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