

# Eric Heffer

Eric Heffer, one of the Society's two members at Westminster (Joan Lestor the other) died, aged sixty nine, on the 27th of May, after a long struggle with fatal cancer, during which he worked on an autobiography which we hope to see later this year, or early in 1992.

Born in Hertfordshire, he had early experience of industrial dispute – as an eight-year-old choirboy! Associations with industry as with the Church continued to the end. The Anglican Bishop of Liverpool, friend of many years, said of him: “His religious beliefs were a driving force for bringing about political change which would enable poor people to have their say-so to shape the world.” So perhaps he is best described, not quite in Kingsley – Denison-Maurice terms, as a Christian Socialist; closer in outlook to Stephen the Deacon than to Saul of Tarsus – for whose story look into the New Testament, Acts of the Apostles, chapters 6,7 and 8.

Schooldays ending as for most folk before 1945, at fourteen, he went to work in the building trade, became a carpenter, and from the age of nineteen was an active member of the old Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers (now UCATT). Briefly a member of the Communist Party, he left it in 1948, and in 1956 joined the Labour Party. Elected a Liverpool City Councillor in 1960, he went on to win from this base the Liverpool Walton seat in Parliament, holding it with ever-increasing majorities until his death. Doris, his wife, was always at his side at Westminster, working as his secretary.

Seven or eight years ago, the two of them hosted a memorable William Morris Society visit to the Houses of Parliament, on which occasion it was arranged for the party – a very large one – to view ancient Westminster Hall, the Peers' Gallery, and the Robing Room, where we saw, under the guidance of Hilary Morgan and John Kay, the splendid mural paintings by William Dyce, Daniel Maclise and others, carried out a hundred and fifty years ago while the Barry-Pugin Palace was still building and the first extension of the franchise had not yet been won. Afterwards, at a jolly tea party, our hosts were presented with a book, flowers, and our warm thanks.

During his years in Parliament, Eric Heffer was, briefly, a Minister for Industry: he was a member of the Labour Party Executive from 1975 to 1986. When, a few years ago, the William Morris Gallery seemed in danger of closure as funding was squeezed, the Society was able to enlist his, and Joan Lestor's, support in the successful campaign which led to the founding of the Friends of the William Morris Gallery.

Essentially a campaigner for peace and social justice, he found in William Morris the best of guides to present action and future hopes. Like John Ball in the Archbishop's prison, he “saw, as of old, the great treading down the little, and the strong beating down the weak, and cruel men fearing not, and kind men daring not, and the saints in heaven forbearing and yet bidding me not forbear: forsooth, I knew once more that he who doeth well in fellowship and because of fellowship, shall not fail though he seem to fail today, but in days hereafter shall he and his work yet live, and men be holpen by them to strive again and again.”

As was said of Morris: “You can lose a man like that by your own death, but you cannot lose him by his.”