

THE PAPERS OF JOHN TURNER WALTON NEWBOLD, 1888–1943: AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE

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The radical and socialist aspects of the complex political life of Walton Newbold have, directly or indirectly, attracted the attention of several historians of the British and international labour movement in recent years. While the secondary literature on Newbold is not extensive, the frequency of references to him in historical publications is hardly surprising, as this Lancashire-born, university-educated, 'birthright' Quaker from a wealthy Liberal background, with inherited private means at his disposal, was involved in a range of significant interests and causes for over thirty years, during which time he was associated, sometimes closely, with many leading public figures.

To date, the extent and results of scholarly interest in the political career of Newbold have been uneven. There is no biography or major study, but a review of the relevant historiography reveals that serious attention has at least touched on the following concerns and rôles: as a Quaker and Independent Labour Party investigative journalist in the pre-1914 peace movement, his exposure of the threatening influence of the private armaments industry and of capitalist militarism;¹ his emergence as a Marxist intellectual and revolutionary propagandist from 1917, including defence of the Russian Revolution;² his promotion of independent working-class education via the Plebs

¹ For a brief critique of Newbold's exposé journalism see Clive Trebilcock, 'Radicalism and the Armament Trust', in A.J.A. Morris (ed.) *Edwardian radicalism 1900–1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 180–201; also Douglas J. Newton, *British labour, European socialism and the struggle for peace 1889–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), notably ch. 2, 294–315; Colin Cross, *Philip Snowden* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1966), 131–2 acknowledges Newbold's groundwork research for Snowden's two-hour long speech attacking the arms conspiracy, House of Commons, 17 March 1914; and Newbold's stance merits a single line mention in A.J.P. Taylor, *The trouble makers* (London: Hamilton, 1957), 117.

² See the important references in Stuart MacIntyre, *A proletarian science* (Cambridge: University Press, 1986); and in the same author's penetrating article, 'Imperialism and the British labour movement in the 1920s', Pamphlet 64 in the 'Our History' series, published by the History Group of the Communist Party, autumn 1975; brief acknowledgements in Walter Kendall, *The revolutionary movement in Britain 1900–1921* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), and Raymond Challinor *The origins of British Bolshevism* (London: Croom Helm, 1977); Stephen White, *Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution* (London: Holmes and Meier, 1979) quotes Newbold on the 'Hands Off Russia' campaign.

League and Labour College movements;³ as a labour researcher, his contribution to the dockers' union case, presented by Ernest Bevin to the Shaw Inquiry of 1920;⁴ his involvement in the Left Wing Committee of the I.L.P. and its campaign for membership of the Communist International in 1920–21;⁵ his participation as a maverick but high-profile Communist Party activist, culminating in a brief episode as first Communist Member of Parliament (Motherwell constituency, 1922–23), and terminated by resignation from the Communist Party in 1924;⁶ and, as a member of the second Labour Government's Committee on Finance and Industry, his resurfacing for the last time to an influential position on the political stage.⁷

Between 1931 and his death in 1943, it would appear that Newbold failed to make any significant impact on the political scene and, consequently, he fades from the historical record. However, as can be gleaned from the few claims and indicators in secondary sources, he did not disappear entirely into political obscurity. We are informed that he supported the stance of MacDonald and Snowden in the 1931 crisis, acted as an agent for J.H. Thomas in the 1931 General Election, joined the National Labour Party but soon afterwards fell out with the erstwhile Labour leaders, and allegedly supported the candidature of Winston Churchill at Epping in the

³ MacIntyre, *Proletarian science*; and brief mention in J.P.M. Millar *The Labour College movement* (London: N.C.L.C. 1978), 182–4.

⁴ The contribution of Newbold and of his wife, Marjory, is acknowledged in Ken Coates and Tony Topham, *The history of the Transport and General Workers' Union* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 728–9.

⁵ The principal source is still Robert E. Dowse, *Left in the centre: the Independent Labour Party 1893–1940* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966).

⁶ James Klugmann, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, vol. 1 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), contains important factual references on Newbold, including a potted biography to 1923 (235–6); for accounts of Newbold's political rôle at Motherwell between 1918 and 1923 see Robert Duncan, *Steelopolis: the making of Motherwell* (Motherwell District Council, 1991), chs 8 and 9, and 'Motherwell for Moscow: Walton Newbold, revolutionary politics and the labour movement in a Lanarkshire constituency 1918–22', in *Scottish Labour History Society Journal*, 28 (1993). See also Ross McKibbin, *The evolution of the Labour Party 1910–24* (Oxford: University Press, 1974) 196–204, in the context of a case-study of the Labour Party's constitutional problems in the face of Communist pressure in Motherwell constituency during 1922–24. Neal Wood, *Communism and British intellectuals* (London, 1959), provides leads on Newbold's resignation from the Communist Party (183, 185–6). In *Second Congress of the Communist International: minutes of the proceedings*, vol. 2 (London: New Park Publications, 1977), 299, Newbold is wrongly cited as a delegate to this conference in 1920: it was his wife, Marjory, who participated (see R. Duncan, 'Marjory Neilson Newbold: tribute to a socialist pioneer', *Scottish Labour History Review*, 6 (1992–93), 4–7).

⁷ On the work of the Committee, see Robert Skidelsky, *Politicians and the slump* (London: Macmillan, 1967 and Pelican Books, 1970). While Skidelsky merely notes that Newbold was a member of this Committee alongside Ernest Bevin – the other Labour representative, Alan Bullock, *The life and times of Ernest Bevin*, vol. 1 (London: Heinemann, 1960), dismisses Newbold as a crank economist, without, however, producing any supporting evidence for his assertion (425). For this period, Iain McLean in *The legend of red Clydeside* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1983) contrives, wrongly, to give Newbold a second stint as a Member of Parliament (277).

1935 General Election (after having stood against him there unsuccessfully in the 1929 Election).⁸

Clearly, with such flawed credentials in this latter phase of his political life, Newbold would have little chance of even a minor plinth in the pantheon of heroes of the labour and socialist movement. Indeed, judging by the recorded impressions of former Party comrades and other political associates, Newbold is a discredited figure. In their memoirs and attributed statements, Newbold is variously characterized as rude and insensitive, difficult, awkward, caustic, insufferable, intellectually arrogant, eccentric, lacking in political judgement, and unfit for 'Communist work'.⁹ Intriguingly, none openly condemns him as a renegade, despite his very public abandonment of the Communist Party in 1924–25, and his subsequent continuing drift to the right of the political spectrum. Nevertheless, whether such unfavourable impressions are jaundiced or justified would have to be properly weighed up in any final assessment of Newbold's significance. At this provisional stage, whatever the value of this kind of testimony, it should not be allowed to detract from the already recognized positive contribution which he had made to the movement before 1924. Building on the existing groundwork laid by several historians, it is now a feasible proposition to attempt a meaningful and objective reconstruction of Newbold's political career. Of all the historians who have demonstrated serious interest in Newbold, only Stuart Macintyre has produced a serious critique of his political anatomy; and while extremely useful and sharply focused, his work has been restricted to an analysis of Newbold's understanding and application of Marxism and his grasp of the nature of imperialism between 1917 and 1925. Obviously, much more hard research, close analysis and clarification will be required before a comprehensive and full-length study is possible.

For this task, the personal papers housed in fifty-two boxes in the Special Collections Division of the John Rylands University Library are an indispensable source, irrespective of the value they might also have as a quarry for other research projects.¹⁰ However,

⁸ Compiled from an entry in *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament, Vol. III – 1919–1945*, eds M. Stenton and S. Lees (Brighton: Cass, 1979), 261, and Betty D. Vernon, *Ellen Wilkinson* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), who mustered a scathing denunciation of Newbold's political conduct and personal relations with Wilkinson, to whom he was briefly engaged in 1913 (29–39).

⁹ For the sources of this testimony, see MacIntyre, *Proletarian science*, 101–2, and the footnote references, 250; also Vernon, *Ellen Wilkinson*.

¹⁰ In Jack and Bessie Braddock, *The Braddocks* (London: MacDonalds, 1963), Bessie referred to Newbold's large library of books, charts and other materials: 'I wish I knew what happened to his possessions when he died – they were invaluable social material and should have gone to some university' (11). The archive of personal papers consisting of fifty-two boxes does not include a library of books and represents only a small part of Newbold's prodigious output of published work.

as various historians have remarked, the collection is difficult to use. Recently, the two historians of the Transport and General Workers Union referred to the 'chaotic papers' of Walton Newbold which 'require a major labour of sorting and indexing before they can be fully used'.¹¹ Another historian cites them as 'unedited, unnumbered, and undated'.¹² The collection is uncatalogued, and all that exists as an indication of the contents is an outline list of two typed pages and consisting of summary headings for each box. As such, the outline list is of limited practical value for accessing the collection. In many instances, the box headings are not sufficiently clear in identifying the character of the items and provide a haphazard guide, although the rough classifications which are used in the outline list are helpful to some extent. However, once the boxes are opened, in many cases the researcher is confronted by a congerie of different items, some of which are incomplete, missing or misplaced, all adding to the sense of frustration when confronting the collection.

To begin the process of tackling and resolving some of the outstanding problems associated with this archive, this report is intended as the first brief introductory and contextual guide to the Newbold Papers, with the fundamental aim of making them more accessible to researchers. This work is an outcome of a preliminary survey of all the boxes, first in order to gain an overview of the contents, and then, in particular, to attempt to establish the location of all those items which would readily provide information of an autobiographical nature.

It should be made clear, however, that this search of the Newbold Papers was conducted only and essentially after a substantial base of prior knowledge had been acquired, derived from extensive research elsewhere into primary and secondary sources relating to the personal life and political career of Newbold. Without this vital knowledge base, it would have been an impossible task to accomplish the primary objective of the examination, namely to unravel and put into order the largely unsorted cache of approximately 300 unpaginated typed sheets of autobiography which were located within several folders in the box entitled 'Autobiographical Material Relating to Newbold's Political Life. Politics of the Labour Party and the Communist Party. Communism and Russia'. This is undoubtedly the key box and the essential starting point for research into the collection. Moreover, the typescript memoir which has now been assembled is the most important primary source on and by Newbold. As many historians and researchers had consulted the typescript sheets of memoir in their unsorted state and by sheer perseverance and/or good luck had

¹¹ Coates and Topham, *History*.

¹² Vernon, *Ellen Wilkinson*, 38.

managed to make some sense of them, or else had balked at the first hurdles and retired in disappointment, it is worth outlining the method of enquiry and results achieved, if only to encourage them and future researchers to consult the memoir and the rest of the collection in the light of the findings of this short report.

Re-assembling the memoir was a complicated exercise. The typescript sheets in the various folders had to be carefully sifted. Once the existence of duplicate pages was revealed, it then had to be established whether a discrete and complete manuscript actually existed among the mass of papers. Using those sheets which had headings marked in by the author, it was possible to arrange the material into recognizable chapters or sections. The outcome was seventeen chapters and a possible additional one, but the few pages in question - following the sheet headed 'Three Reformers in the Service of Lenin' - were found to have been discarded by Newbold and incorporated into a revised version making up one of the seventeen existing chapters. Then came the vital presentational task of arranging the chapters into a chronological sequence. The memoir contains 180 pages of closely-typed script, covering his life to 1930. The titles of the respective chapters/sections of memoir, together with inserted information on pagination and chronology are given below in summary, tabulated form.

'The Wars of This World Revolution 1901-1941' [This is the general title supplied by Newbold]

<i>Title of chapter/section</i>	<i>No. of pages</i>	<i>Page Sequence</i>	<i>Chronology</i>
Paths of Peace	3	1-3	1888-98
The Cloud in the West	3	3-5	1892-1910
The Passing of the Long Peace	5	6-10	1910-13
Social Democracy and American Democracy	9	11-19	1911-15
Religion and War Resistance	8	20-7	1914-15
With Maisky to Marxism	7	28-34	1915-16
When There Were No Leninists	11	35-45	1916
For Litvinov and for Lenin	12	46-57	1916-18
1 Line up with Lenin	10	58-67	1918-20
Into and Out of the Communist Party	11	68-78	1919-23
Marxism and the Marshalling of the Irish	12	78-89	1918-22
And so to Singapore	19	90-108	1922-23
The Parting of the Ways	17	109-26	1922-24
Watching the Duellists of the War Debt	12	127-38	1924-25
Westward Bound to Winnipeg, Washington and Wall Street	20	139-57	1924-27
Intellectual Approach to Re-armament	13	158-70	1927-29
Treasury Committee on Finance and Industry	9	171-9	1929-30

Although the memoir is a fascinating document, it has to be treated with great caution. The reader not only has to contend with Newbold's frequent lapses into convoluted and tortuous prose, but

is faced with more complex issues, including the value and status of much of the testimony, given his obvious colossal arrogance and attribution of exaggerated influence to his own actions, and an uncompromising failure to bother to make any concessions to the reader regarding contexts of time and place, trains of thought, nuances and allusions to persons and events. Indeed, the stylistic and textual problems are so evident that the memoir in its existing form is not fit for publication. Careful editing and heavy explanatory annotation would be required for any such undertaking. It is better to treat the memoir as a major primary source in conjunction with the large body of material which is available on Newbold, taking into account the other substantial Newbold papers and the sources which are located elsewhere, particularly his published work consisting of three books, many pamphlets, and voluminous political journalism which, primarily, is scattered throughout the socialist press.

As the general title of the memoir appears to indicate, Newbold had intended to write further instalments of autobiography, to take his story beyond 1930. Apparently, this plan was never accomplished. However, in the same key box, there are several pages of longhand notes, with rough synopses, which were used by Newbold to prepare his memoir. For instance, the eight pages which are headed 'Always Think Ahead 1911-1938' are an essential primary source; and of these eight pages, the six pages which provide a synopsis of his various interests, movements and political activities during the 1930s are an invaluable record in the absence of any narrative memoir of those years, especially as his political career and other associations are difficult to track down for that period. Also in this box, other clues to Newbold's interests in the 1930s are contained in three letters which are worth particular mention. They provide, also, valuable retrospective information about his political concerns in the early 1920s. The first letter is from Newbold to Colonel Liddell Hart (then defence correspondent of *The Times* newspaper) dated 26 November 1937. This typed letter is incomplete, but over its five pages Newbold refers to his forthcoming book *Armaments and European industry*; to his earlier publications on armaments; to the evidence which he gave to the *Royal Commission on the Private Manufacture of and Trading in Arms* (P.P. Command Paper 5292, 1936); and to an account of his firsthand observations of Soviet military strength in 1923, while an executive member of the Communist International and a guest of Trotsky. A second letter, also incomplete, and without the first page, sets out Newbold's views on grand strategy in the 1930s, and on war preparations in Britain and in Europe. A further typed letter, six pages long and incomplete, written in or around 1940, also includes useful information on Newbold's Communist phase, as well as references to his political views and activities in the 1920s and 1930s.

Turning to other boxes which contain items of particular autobiographical and biographical significance, several items in the crowded box entitled 'Miscellaneous Notes and Articles' throw light on his views on religion and international politics in the 1930s. The brown folder 'Essays on the Catholic Church and Politics' includes correspondence to and from Newbold, dating from 1940–42, on the role of the Catholic Church; his discovery of a Catholic and Nazi conspiracy in the international 'crusade against Marxism' and the Soviet Union; and the vexed issue of his own relationship with the Catholic Church in the last years of his life. A separate item, 'A List of Addresses', dating from the early 1930s, reveals an intriguing range of contacts in political and public life, indicating a busy and varied life which would require careful unravelling by historians.

'Notes on the History of Armaments' (Box I only) contains at least two items of special autobiographical interest. A two-page typescript entitled 'Armaments: Their Place in Modern History' summarizes in epigrammatic form Newbold's reasoning on the issue of armaments production and deployment; the application of his Quaker outlook; and his perspectives on the peace movement from his initial involvement in 1912–13 up to the time of writing, that is, 1935.

There is also a seven-page typescript written in March 1938 which is the introduction for his intended book *Armaments and European civilisation*. This unpublished manuscript is likely to be the same project as 'Armaments and European industry' (op. cit.). The introduction to this book of nineteen chapters is highly autobiographical, giving details of Newbold's rationale for his life-long active involvement in the study and politics of armaments from 1913 onwards. A full copy of this manuscript book has now been assembled and is placed in an accompanying box 'Thesis on the History of Armaments. Typescript'.

The box entitled 'Material Relating to the Two World Wars, British Policy and Armaments' contains some of Newbold's writings from 1938–42 on international relations, grand strategy, recent arms production and war preparations. Among this material, which has had to be re-sorted, are two substantial political essays: 'Why the War Came . . . And How 1923–41', and 'Westminster and Washington 1911–41', which not only review the international scene in Newbold's idiosyncratic way, but include elements of his own personal history interwoven with the events, and are akin to a 'life and times' account of a keen observer and contributor. It has not been possible as yet to ascertain whether any of the essays and articles belonging to the 1938–42 period found their way into publication. As a point of further identification of substantial manuscript material, this box also contains the longhand and typed drafts of his book *How Europe prepared for war*, which was published

in 1916, with its dedication to the anti-militarist and revolutionary socialist Karl Liebknecht.

Finally, as an interim summary of the remainder of the collection, this concluding section serves to indicate the character of those boxes which have not already been mentioned. Among the more important ones are a set of three boxes, 'Minutes, Memoranda and Other Communications of the Committee on Finance and Industry' which provide an additional and complementary source to his last chapter of memoir dealing with his involvement on this government committee in 1929–31. Box I contains memoranda prepared by Newbold for the committee in 1930, and invites comment on his perspectives on the economic crisis, while most of the other contents in all three boxes are copies of the official record of the committee's work, and are more available elsewhere.¹³

'Articles, Essays Etc. by Newbold, Extracted from Newspapers and Periodicals. Leaflets, Newspaper Cuttings and Extracts from Periodicals Collected by Newbold' contains two categories of items, now clearly separated out. One batch consists of articles written by Newbold, which are principally a random selection contributed to the socialist and communist press between 1913 and 1928. The other batch consists of articles/materials collected by him, but written by various individuals, covering his political interests, which do not appear to have any particular significance as source materials.

The single box 'Letters Addressed to Newbold' is disappointing and rather slim in content, although containing a few items of interest, including 'letters of introduction' from notable public figures such as Philip Snowden and Ramsay MacDonald for whom Newbold acted as an unofficial emissary in his information-gathering trips in Europe and in North America in the mid- and late 1920s.¹⁴

The remaining boxes – the bulk of the collection – are mainly ephemeral in character. There are eighteen boxes of rough notes, containing miscellaneous research notes for his studies of the history of industrial capitalism and international finance; three boxes of notebooks, with handwritten jottings and lists relating to company structure, ownership and shareholders, particularly to firms engaged in armament production; three boxes of typescript and manuscript historical articles, including a long piece of sixteen chapters, written in 1920, surveying the history of American

¹³ *MacMillan Report on Finance and Industry, and Minutes of Evidence*. Parliamentary Papers, Command No. 3897 (1931).

¹⁴ David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977) quotes from a couple of letters from MacDonald to Newbold, in 1925 and 1930 (458 and 538). Although the letters deal with other matters than Newbold's surveillance trips abroad, his own account of his peculiar relationship with the Labour leader runs through his unpublished memoir.

capitalism; and, lastly, several boxes with miscellaneous cuttings, extracted articles, reports and other manuscript and printed material dating mainly from the 1920s and early 1930s, variously reflecting his abiding concerns, notably his investigation of the armaments industries, their use of new technology and chemicals in weapon production, and their relationship with the state and economy; and, also underpinning and supporting his political interests, the quest to understand and grasp the significance of the changing face and structures of banking, finance, transport and capital formation.