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NINA FISHMAN 1946–2009:
Leading Member of the
British & Irish Communist Organisation 1970-1987

First Published: Nina Fishman Archive

<https://sites.google.com/site/ninafishmanarchive/In-Memorial/nina-and-the-b-ico>

It would be as misleading to suggest – as in Geoffrey Goodman’s *Independent* obituary, at www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/professor-nina-fishman-dynamic-labour-and-social-historian-best-known-for-her-work-on-trade-unions-1879739.html – that Nina Fishman had spent her life as a non-Communist, as it would be ever to suggest so in my own case. Eventually she did indeed become, as I myself have been for almost three decades, an ex-Communist – although neither of us, when Communists, followed our respective parents into any of the orthodox Communist Parties to which they themselves belonged [CPUSA and CPI; nor was Nina ever in the CPGB], notwithstanding the political legacy, influences and values that we “CP children” undoubtedly inherited from them. [See www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2008/mar/18/1 and www.irelandscw.com/ibvol-ORiordan.htm for obituaries of Leslie Fishman and Michael O’Riordan, respectively]. During the period when my father was General Secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland, I myself was a member of the British and Irish Communist Organisation from 1971 to 1982, serving as Chairman of its Dublin Branch for most of those years. These years overlapped with most of the period that Nina Fishman herself had been a leading member of the B&ICO’s London Branch, from 1970 to 1987.

It was as such a Communist activist and thinker that, in November 1972, in the columns of *The Communist*, theoretical journal of the B&ICO in Britain, Nina [under her then married name of Nina Stead] began to author her ideologically groundbreaking work, *The British Road to Socialism* – reproduced online at <http://sites.google.com/site/ninafishmanarchive/works/the-british-road-to-socialism> and not to be confused with, and so radically different from, the Communist Party of Great Britain's programme of the same name, first drafted by JV Stalin.

With that foundation laid, and again as a Communist activist and thinker, Nina went on to become the driving force behind - and principal author of - the January 1974 B&ICO Policy Statement entitled *Workers' Control in Britain*, reproduced online at <http://sites.google.com/site/ninafishmanarchive/works/workers-control> and so much at odds with the self-destructive Luddism of both the CPGB and the Institute for Workers' Control.

But the Nina Fishman of those years and the B&ICO itself were also so much in tune with the strategy being pursued by then General Secretary [from 1969 to 1978] of the Transport & General Workers' Union - Britain's greatest post-War Union leader and my own good comrade and friend, Jack James Larkin Jones [1913-2009]

[See http://free-downloads.atholbooks.org/pamphlets/jackjones_MI5.pdf and <http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs071/1102805358929/archive/1103324435341.html#LETTER.BLOCK36> for more on Jack Jones]

Indeed, it was at my request that Jack Jones was pleased to provide an introduction to the first issue, dated February-March 2008, of a new series of *Problems of Capitalism and Socialism*, which includes reprints of more B&ICO material on workers' control co-authored by Nina Fishman during her own Communist years.

See http://free-magazines.atholbooks.org/problems_2/ for a free download of all six issues of that series. Edited by Joe Keenan and Conor Lynch, the series was published for the purpose of revisiting the lessons to be learned from the workers' control campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s, in which B&ICO members Fishman, Keenan and Lynch had played such leading roles.

NINA FISHMAN MEMORIAL MEETING

TUC, CONGRESS HOUSE, LONDON, JANUARY 31, 2010:

Manus O’Riordan

Some personal reflections

Annette and I travelled from Dublin for Nina’s memorial meeting. Among those present were others who had also been members of the B&ICO during Nina’s own years of membership, namely, Peter Brooke, Seán McGouran, Hugh Roberts and Michael Robinson.

The meeting had been organised by Nina’s husband, Phil McManus, who requested that Peter Brooke speak about the period in her life as a B&ICO member. He did so most effectively, when called upon to do so by the meeting’s chairman, Geoffrey Goodman, author of the *Independent* and *Tribune* obituaries.

Veteran labour correspondent Geoffrey Goodman, now in his late 80s, had been one of the closest friends of the late Jack Jones, and was chosen by him in advance to deliver his funeral oration on May Day, 2009. His *Independent* obituary of Nina had, however, made the erroneous statement that she “refused to join any political grouping”. Accordingly, in inviting Peter to speak about the B&ICO, he was, in effect, asking himself to stand corrected. He was also corrected by another speaker who pointed out that Nina had gone on to join the Labour Party.

The first speaker called was the 93 year old historian and CPGB veteran Eric Hobsbawm, Nina’s academic mentor, who spoke about Nina’s work as a historian of both the pre-war and wartime roles of Communists in the British trade union movement, although he took issue with her conclusion that, by WWII, the NUM leader Arthur Horner had, in reality, ceased to be a Communist.

But the meeting did not have to await Peter’s address before the record was already being set straight as to Nina’s own Communist period. The second speaker called, Alan Green, immediately spoke of the impact on his thinking when he first read a B&ICO pamphlet by Nina on industrial democracy, and how the failure to support Jack Jones and the B&ICO perspective on the 1977 Bullock Report on Industrial Democracy had been the greatest self-

inflicted wound on the part of the British working class movement, opening the door for the triumph of Thatcherism.

Ernest Wistrich, Director of the European Movement during the 1975 UK referendum on EEC membership, also spoke of how Nina had led a delegation of B&ICO members to his office, emphasising that they were not CPGB, to announce that they wished to establish Communists for Europe as a 'Yes' campaign group for that referendum. Wistrich revealed that his office was afterwards visited by a leading Tory front bench MP who, having protested against the number of "in your face" red coloured posters, proceeded to tear down Nina's "Communists for Europe" poster from the wall! And who was that furious vandal? None other than Margaret Thatcher!