

The Politics of Pauperism in Salford in the 1920s

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In the 1920s, mass unemployment brought thousands of workers to the point of destitution. After the short-lived boom, from 1919, until autumn 1920, unemployment began rising, most noticeably in the industrial areas. By December 1921, there were more than two million workers out of a job.¹ Between 1921 and 1939, there was never less than one million out of work. Up to the end of 1922, investigators noted that 1921-1922 were the worst years in the country's records.² In Salford, the Board of Guardians thus faced many demands upon its resources. Such demands were not new. The Cotton Famine of the 1860s, trade depressions in the 1880s and early 1900s had raised the spectre of widespread unrest amongst the working class.³

Salford was above all else an industrial city. Industries such as construction, engineering, chemical works, textiles, and coalmining together with the Docks, formed the main sources of employment. Trafford Park and the factories and workshops of Manchester also provided employment for many Salfordians. Finally, a myriad of small shopkeepers depended on all of these for their own livelihood.⁴

Although all these enterprises helped to create a proletarian city, not all of the borough's sixteen wards were wholly working-class; six of them were mainly middle-class areas. The social class divisions are demonstrated by the spatial distribution of Salfordians across these wards. The middle-class wards were the least densely populated. For example, Kersal ward with 818 acres had a population density of 15.9 persons per acre. In contrast, Regent ward's 128 acres had a density of 129 people per acre.⁵ By 1925, Salford had an estimated population of 244,700.⁶ This leavening of middle-class wards made it difficult for Labour to win total control of the Borough Council. Support in a number of the working-class wards took some time to achieve and Labour only began to make significant gains in council seats in the mid-1920s.⁷

The literature on Salford in the 1920s says little about the Poor Law. In Robert Roberts' *The Classic Slum*, the only reference to the Salford Guardians and the Workhouse pre-dates the First World War.⁸ Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* covers the period when the Public Assistance Committee replaced the Poor Law Guardians.⁹ This "most important novel of working-class life ..." takes us into that period of class conflict typified by the 'Battle of Bexley Square'.¹⁰ Garrard also points to the primacy of class conflict over the other socio-economic and ethnic divisions of the pre-1914 years.¹¹

Other writers whilst considering inter-war Manchester either do not mention Salford, or at best regard it as an adjunct to its larger neighbour. Thus, Mowat in citing *Love on the Dole*, describes it "[...] A novel of Manchester"¹². The brief references to Salford in Astor, *The Third Winter Of Unemployment*, are also irritating. In a chapter on 'Unemployment in Manchester', Salford only appears twice. The first reference simply tells us that Manchester and Salford together have a population of "about a million". The second refers to the Salford dockers, but does not tell us how many are employed at the "Manchester" docks – located in Salford.¹³ Salford does though receive more recognition from the Webbs. In their history of the poor law, the Webbs comment approvingly on the innova-

tive schemes of the Salford guardians of the mid-1920s.¹⁴

The purpose of this article is to make a fuller contribution to our knowledge of the politics of the Poor Law in Salford during the 1920s. In this period, large-scale unemployment made the policy of indoor relief prescribed by the Poor Law almost unworkable. Under the Outdoor Relief Labour Test Order of 1842, able-bodied unemployed men could only receive outdoor relief after they had carried out a 'task of work' set by the board of guardians. As Rose points out, the 1842 Order substituted workhouse relief with outdoor relief based on tasks of "monotonous and unpleasant work". Thus, the change was pragmatic rather than benign. Economic problems and a marked antipathy to the New Poor Law in the manufacturing regions such as Lancashire made 'offering the workhouse' difficult to administer.¹⁵

The focus of this paper is on the politics of pauperism. In the 1920s, party divisions in the debate over the unemployed sharpened, with Councillors and Guardians often in conflict with each other. Central to this theme was the role of the unemployed themselves.

In 1926, when the Labour Guardians came to power, the control of the Board of Guardians was at best a pyrrhic victory. The General Strike demonstrated all too clearly the limited power of the Salford Guardians.¹⁶ Yet, when we consider Labour's Poor Law policy and their strategies for dealing with the unemployed some – highly qualified – optimism appears justified. The final section of the paper suggests that Salford Labour Guardians had learnt from the history of the Cotton famine.

Although unemployment fluctuated over the year, figures recorded at the end of October each year showed that at least 10,000 adult Salfordians experienced unemployment. In addition to adult unemployment, juvenile unemployment ranged from around 700 to over 1,000 in the same period.¹⁷ It was in this period that Labour also began to gain control of the Salford Board of Guardians.¹⁸

Table 1, overleaf, compares unemployment in four towns with Salford. Compared with Leicester and Nottingham, boroughs of similar size, Salford fared badly in the three-year cycles given in the table. However, in Bolton and Oldham, both smaller boroughs, the percentage unemployed was, in the case of Bolton, approximately the same and in Oldham significantly higher. Oldham was much more dependent on the cotton industry than in Salford.

The 1918 Representation of the People Act empowered a much wider electorate. The changing political climate was particularly significant at local level, where the main mechanism for dealing with unemployment was the Poor Law and the elected Board of Guardians. Thus, the enfranchised unemployed now had the right to vote for Guardian candidates of their choice.²¹ And, as I have argued above, despite Labour being unable to win control of the Council, in the mid-1920s, Labour guardians could claim a more constructive approach to outdoor relief.

Initially, though, the rise in unemployment in Salford had led to co-operation between the Labour, Conservative and Liberal councillors in efforts to create work schemes. In early February 1921, out of over 15,500 unemployed persons, the Corporation 'absorbed' 1,200 men on their 'schemes'.²² In May 1921, the left wing Labour Councillor,

	Adult unemployment as at end of October ¹⁹				Population (1931 Census) ²⁰ and unemployment in 1931 as a percentage of the total population
	1923	1925	1928	1931	
Leicester	4,894	5,376	7,120	12,115	240,000 (5.0 %)
Nottingham	8,537	9,480	9,210	17,710	269,400 (6.6 %)
Bolton	7,746	6,039	8,954	19,917	177,800 (11.20%)
Salford	13,061	11,056	12,318	25,131	223,300 (11.33 %)
Oldham	16,610	5,651	15,706	27,158	140,300 (19.4%)

Table 1: Comparative unemployment figures for five county boroughs

J. Gorman, commented:

I have yet to learn of a municipality that has so quickly taken advantage of their powers and commenced necessary and useful work, and as a result found employment for so many men.²³

The reality was that Salford Corporation could not replace so many lost jobs. For example, in September 1922, the Corporation offered repair work on Eccles Old Road to 25 men on alternate weeks. The Corporation were to pay part of the men’s wages with just over half funded by the Guardians. Because of the rainy weather, the men refused to work. This did not bar the men from continuing to draw their relief. This suggests that the sanction of the work-house had already lost some of its punitive value.²⁴

A new approach came from E. Inchley, the Clerk to the Salford Guardians. Mr Inchley proposed the construction of a road (the future East Lancashire Road) between Manchester and Liverpool. The heart of this scheme was that the 16 Poor Law Unions in the region should replace outdoor relief by contributing to the cost of wages for the unemployed men set to work on the new road. The scheme also required the local authorities to meet the cost of materials and other expenses excluding labour.²⁵ There was a further incentive for Councils to take part; the Government offered to provide half the necessary finance.²⁶ Thus, the ratepayers would see the linking of work in return for relief.

Five of the sixteen unions regarded the road too remote, and declined to take part.²⁷ The Manchester Board of Guardians was openly hostile to the Salford plan; arguing that none of the road was in Manchester. Coupled with this was the desire to safeguard the Manchester Ship Canal, and the fear that the road would enable Liverpool to develop as the main distribution centre for Manchester.²⁸

In January 1923, the Conservative Government, recognising the “grave prevalence of unemployment”, insisted on a meeting to resolve the matter. Manchester Corporation informed the Government that it was not in favour of the scheme, thus effectively ending the project for some years ahead.²⁹ For their part, the Salford Board of Guardians had reason to feel aggrieved. The object of Salford’s proposal for an “arterial road” between Salford and Liverpool was solely to relieve the anxiety caused by “so much unemployment”.³⁰

By 1921, distress was common currency in districts such as Ordsall. Here, there were families of up to twelve persons trying to live on 30 shillings a week or even less.

Family Group	Manchester	Salford
2 adults and 1 child	21 s	23 s ³⁸
2 adults and 2 children	24 s	27 s

Table 2: Comparison of scales of relief, July 1922

It was not just the unemployed. With the coalowners warning that all “hope of better times was gone”, Salford coalminers and their families were at the point of starvation. Such was Salford’s plight that soup kitchens again appeared in the borough.³¹

Changes in the Unemployment Insurance Acts (1909, 1911) were to add to the demands on the guardians. In September 1921, the *Salford Reporter* noted that the amendments, provided for

16 weeks’ benefit between March 3 and November 2, with a further six weeks under special circumstances.³²

Many of the unemployed had already ‘exhausted’ their 22 weeks’ entitlement. Under the amended Acts, this meant that they could not draw further unemployment benefits until November 2.³³ In September 1921, the Guardians paid out ‘record’ sums in outdoor relief. If the presence of soup kitchens was evocative of much earlier scenes, the tenets of the Poor Law as an agency for the relief of destitution remained unchanged. One official, speaking to the *Reporter* in September, expressed the remit of the guardians thus:

... [The] causes of the distress were not the concern of the Guardians. Their duty was to relieve distress.³⁴

By October 1921, the guardians expressed their concern at the anomaly created by this ‘duty’. J. Clancy (Roman Catholic) commented that they were “getting nothing in return” for the £3,000-£4,000 per week of the ratepayers’ money. Clancy moved that the Corporation be asked to absorb “unemployed labour on public utilities to the equivalent of £2,000 a week in wages”. The motion stated that “it was impossible” for the Guardians to provide employment or *test labour*.³⁵ Mrs M. Shutt (Independent) commented that there was “work waiting to be done at Hope Hospital”. Implementing this work, this would lessen the “unrest” especially amongst men who wanted to work.³⁶

The cost of poor relief was never far from mind from those of the guardians of the poor on the right wing of local politics. Rosamond, citing the *Manchester Guardian* shows, in July 1922, the Salford rates scales as being higher than those in Manchester (see Table 2, below).

The *Salford Reporter* shows that from 1 July 1922, the Salford scales of relief were reduced to match those of Manchester (see Table 3, below).³⁹

Family Group	June 1922	July 1922
Man and Wife and Child	26 s	21 s
Man, Wife and Two children	31 s	24 s

Table 3: Reduction of Salford scales of relief⁴⁰

It is worth considering the reasoning and politics behind this reduction. A Church (Conservative) member, Mrs. Hampson, proposed that Salford's scales of relief "to unemployed and able-bodied classes be considered with a view to reduction".⁴¹ Mrs Hampson's reasoning was three-fold; first, the maximum scale of relief of £2 10s plus a rent allowance of 10s was more than the money earned by a builder's labourer.⁴² On this basis, Mrs Hampson argued that if men could get £3 for nothing they "were not going to work".⁴³

Echoes of the late Victorian order and of the Edwardian concept of the deserving poor came through even more strongly in Mrs Hampson's second point. One applicant, clearly a heavy smoker, that morning had been quite "rude" when told, "People did not pay rates to ... provide cigarettes".⁴⁴ Mr Hardy, one of the two Labour Guardians present, had more concern for the genuine claimants. The predominant group of claimants, a man, wife and two children only received 31 shillings per week (£1 11s). By however much they reduced the scale, "they would always get undesirable elements".⁴⁵

The third issue put forward by Mrs Hampson was, though, pertinent from a local politics viewpoint. In September 1921, Salford Board Guardians had increased its scales of relief to match those of Manchester.⁴⁶ The *Salford Reporter* shows the *maximum* scales paid by Manchester in September 1921 as two adults and one child as 23s. plus 8s. for the first child, making 31s per week. For two adults with two children the maximum scale was 23s, plus 7s. for the second child, totalling 38s.⁴⁷

In July 1922, Manchester was in the process of reducing its poor law scales, and Mrs Hampson argued that they could not pay more than Manchester⁴⁸ (see above). This was the substantive part of Mrs. Hampson's argument, the issue of the cigarettes being a reflection of the prevailing poor law ethos. Mrs Hampson's timing was, though, politically astute. With eight out of the twelve guardians present supporting Mrs Hampson, the motion to adopt the Manchester scale succeeded by eight votes to four.⁴⁹

In April 1922, the Manchester electorate had reacted against what they saw as "Poplarism" arising from "the payment of extravagant unemployment relief". In addition, the voters were also concerned by the "[...] pressure of the unemployed on the Guardians." It was ironic then that, in September 1922, one Manchester Guardian went so far as to state that Salford "understood the needs of the unem-

ployed far better than did Manchester".⁵⁰

In October 1925, 11,000 unemployed (or about 11 per cent of the total labour force) Salfordians faced the winter with little hope of a job.⁵¹ Labour Councillor T. Walsh took the initiative in proposing

That a special committee be appointed to investigate and examine the question of unemployment in the borough with a view to providing some scheme of public work during the winter months ...⁵²

With the municipal election due on the 2 November, Walsh felt the need to defend his motion by stating it was not an "election stunt". Rather, "it had been forced on him by the large number of people ... of the borough who could not find work ... Many were going to the Guardians and drawing relief, with no return for it."⁵³

In response, Alderman Desquesnes (Liberal) argued that unemployment was a national problem and not a local one. This was only partly correct. After five years, four successive governments had achieved little of substance. Indeed, as Rose points out, the 1920s was an era of "weak Governments".⁵⁴ In the face of this, the aldermanic alternative was to keep the cost of the rates as low as possible, thereby "decreasing the cost of production". The motion would "tend to add to the rates". And, as if to close down the argument, he added that the Corporation was "now employing as many men as possible".⁵⁵

Rather than appoint a special committee, the chairs were asked to act as the committee. One Conservative thought it politic to add that Labour did not have the monopoly of sympathy for the unemployed.⁵⁶ Yet there remained little real help for the Guardians. One factor was the limited scope in borrowing allowed by the Ministry of Health. The second was that the Council had overall control of the borough rate. Nor could the Guardians look to the Overseers for assistance.⁵⁷ Thus although Labour increased its seats on the Board of Guardians and, in 1929, moved so near to winning control of the Council, the Party remained vulnerable to attacks on its policies from its Conservative led opponents.

In 1925, Labour increased its number of seats on the Salford Board of Guardians to five, becoming the second largest group after the 'Church' Party. The 1926 election gave Labour four more seats, making it the largest group on the Board of Guardians (see table 4, below). 1928 was the last year in which Board of Guardian elections took place nationwide. Thus, in Salford, Labour retained control

	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928
C&I ⁵⁸	12	14	17	19	17	15	11	7	9
Lab	8	6	3	1	3	5	9	13	11

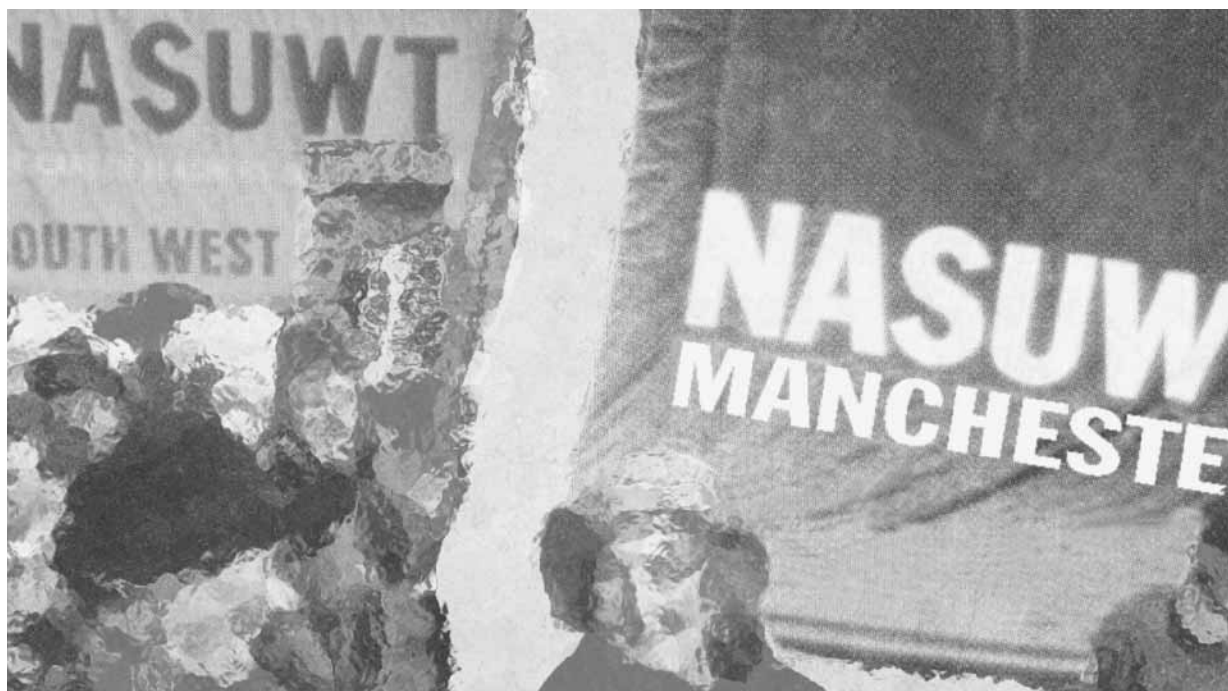
C = Church/Conservative, I = Independents (included Roman Catholics and, between 1921-1924, Non-Conformists)

Table 4: Representation on the Salford Board of Guardians, 1920-1928

	1919-20	1920-21	1921-22	1922-23	1923-24	1924-25	1925-26	1926-27	1927-28	1928-29	1929-30
C/L/I ⁵⁹	54	51	47	50	51	46	42	41	42	42	38
Lab	10	13	16	13	12	18	22	23	22	22	26

C = Conservative, L = Liberal, I = Independent

Table 5: Salford Council seats (councillors and aldermen) by party, 1919-20 to 1929-30



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until the abolition of the Poor Law Guardians at the end of March 1930. Table 5 (on page 29) compares the Council seats held by the Conservatives, Liberals, Independents and Labour from 1919 to 1925.

As Table 4 shows, until 1925, with exception of 1920 and 1921, Labour's strength on the Board of Guardians remained weak. In 1926, Labour became the largest group and gained control in 1927. The loss of two seats in 1928 still left Labour with an overall majority of two seats. However, Labour's control of the Guardians was affected, at least in part, by its failure to win control of the Council. The first major issue arose at the first meeting of the Salford Board after the March 1926 election. The nine Labour Guardians supported by one Independent and one Roman Catholic member carried a motion to increase the rates of Poor Law relief. The increases were strongly criticised by Labour's opponents. The Ratepayers cited the poor law rate in their campaign against the high rise in the local rates. The Conservative Government had a more effective sanction. The Ministry of Health refused to authorise further overdrafts.⁶⁰

In October 1926, after much discussion, the Guardians fixed a revised scale of outdoor relief. A married man with no children and engaged on a Scheme of work under the Council received 25s 0d per week. 'Other Cases' received 20s per week. A man with one child on a Council work scheme received 28s. 0d. per week, whilst a married man with one child and not on a Council scheme received 20s 0d. per week. The maximum payable for a married man with eight or more children was 43s 6d per week if on the Council work scheme, and 36s 0d if not. In addition, there was a maximum weekly rental allowance of 12s 0d per week. Widowers received correspondingly lower scales.⁶¹

The saga came to a head at the Council meeting that same month. The Conservative, Major Fitzgerald Jones, raised a motion worded to show the Salford Board of Guardians as a prime cause of high rates. However, knowing that the scales were already reduced, Fitzgerald Jones then withdrew his resolution, thus denying the Labour Councillors the right to reply. In the ensuing uproar, some in the public gallery sang the 'Red Flag' to which some Councillors and others responded with the National Anthem.⁶²

1927 marked a further critical stage in the role of the Salford Guardians. Typically, the year started with concerns over finance.⁶³ The Board's financial problems were not helped by the "Government policy of reducing unemployment grants under the Unemployment Insurance Act". Therefore, the expense to the Guardians relating to relief to able-bodied persons would continue to increase.⁶⁴

The Board had made a number of cuts in expenditure, though not without some reluctance. One was to forgo a new Children's Hospital. Moreover, the Board now had no power to borrow money to "relieve the position". However, the Board had "wiped out a heavy overdraft ... and thus had a "perfectly clean sheet." ⁶⁵

The subsequent Guardians' election suggested that Labour Guardians, despite the traumas of 1926, could still appeal to working-class voters. In the 1927 election Labour gained four seats giving it a majority of six over the combined other parties.⁶⁶ The Guardians' elections of 1928 for the Pendleton Union saw Labour lose two seats to the Conservatives.⁶⁷ The high municipal rates undoubtedly influenced many voters in a Union in which there was a high middle-class electorate.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, when given the bor-

ough's low rateable value⁶⁹ and with rates always an issue, Labour's control of the Salford Guardians was exceptional.

Furthermore, whilst the Conservative press saw the red hand of socialism in anything above the minimum relief of destitution, the role of Salford's Labour guardians was clearly benign. Therein lay the difference between 'Poplarism' and 'Salfordism'. However, whilst the genesis of Poplarism began in the 1880s, Salfordism had less than half a decade in control.

Nevertheless, there were historical foundations for Conservative anxieties over the politics of pauperism.⁷⁰ Like Salford, Poplar was a proletarian borough and had been a centre for the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). Emerging during the economic downturn of the 1880s, the SDF organised demonstrations by the unemployed.⁷¹ Their aim was to pressurise local councils and boards of guardians to provide work and improved poor law relief. In Salford and elsewhere, as noted earlier, such demonstrations were a tactic much favoured by the radical left.

In the 1890s, Poplar Board of Guardians under the influence of George Lansbury and the Progressive/Labour Alliance moved steadily into radical politics. Until 1914, Poplar did not have a Labour majority group, yet despite this, Labour and socialist minority groups effectively dominated the board. Ryan points out that this led to the implementation of many reforms improving the position of those claiming poor relief.⁷²

In the 1920s, George Lansbury and the Labour Guardians argued that wealthy boroughs should contribute to the cost of poor relief in the poorer boroughs. In support of this argument, the Labour controlled Poplar Council withheld the precepts due to the London County Council, thus creating funds for better poor relief. For defying a court order to pay the precepts, Lansbury and the other Labour councillors went to prison. On their release from prison, Poplar guardians continued to pay outdoor relief above the scale laid down by the Ministry of Health.⁷³ Other boards of guardians, and not necessarily Labour ones – such as Manchester – also paid high scales of outdoor relief.⁷⁴

Turning now to Salford. In the 1880s, Salford had a well-supported SDF branch and there were a number of smaller branches in the Manchester region. In these areas, the SDF were active in organising the unemployed by taking their cause to the streets and encouraging large scale agitation.⁷⁵

In August 1920 at a meeting in London a number of socialist groups including the South Salford British Socialist Party formed the British Communist Party.⁷⁶ This seemed to confirm the worst fears of the right wing circles influential in both national and local government. During 1920-21, the Coalition Cabinet faced with rising unemployment saw these fears manifest in the Cabinet's regular 'Reports on Revolutionary Organisations'.⁷⁷

However, in Salford, neither the SDF, its successor the Communist Party, nor the early Labour Party was able to achieve meaningful political influence; the Salford Council remained in the bailiwick of the Conservatives and their allies. As this paper has shown, even as Labour guardians gained support, the Council remained tantalisingly beyond its grasp. Because of this, Salford Labour Guardians had to seek less radical ways to ease the lot of the unemployed.

Nevertheless, even these less radical but well-meaning guardians were still in thrall to Chadwick. Until 1930, the treatment of claimants for Outdoor Relief remained embed-

ded in the principles of the 1834 Poor Law Reform Act. These principles were manifest in the 'Offer of the House' and 'Test Labour'. As Kidd points out, the New Poor Law of 1834 was designed in the context of an agricultural economy; industrial crises, such as in the 1860s and after, were met with harsh measures towards the able-bodied unemployed.⁷⁸ The Poor Law remained, as it had been at least since the turn of the twentieth-century, an anachronism never designed to meet the needs of the mass unemployed.

However much Salford's Labour leaders admired 'Poplarism' unlike Poplar, Labour did not control both the Council and the Board of Guardians.⁷⁹ Nor, of course, did Salford enjoy the same rateable value, as did Manchester.⁸⁰ This then brings us to the issue of Poor Law Relief in Salford from 1926-1929. Labour control led to a structured attempt to achieve two aims. The first was to obtain some tangible returns in return for relief paid to the able-bodied unemployed. The second was to provide a programme of training and literacy skills for some of the claimants.

Despite the red-tinged fears of the right wing press, Salfordism was not Poplarism. Furthermore, what the Board's right wing opponents chose to ignore was that conditionality remained at the core of the payment of poor relief. It was not simply that the Salford Labour group took a positive approach to the problem of *unconditional* Outdoor Relief. There were also the elements of social control, which to some extent reflected the Webbs' own theories.⁸¹

The Guardians' strategy – for the payment of Outdoor Relief – had two main schemes. The first (Scheme I) was to place men on work on municipal projects provided by the Corporation. There were two main elements to this scheme. First, the work would not normally be carried out at that time, so as not to affect the jobs of the Council's own employees. Second, the unemployed man directed to this work would receive the usual hourly rate of pay applicable to that task. Nevertheless, he would only be allowed to work enough hours to earn the equivalent of his relief entitlement, including his allowance for rent. Thus, if the hourly rate was 1s. 3d. a married man with three children on weekly relief of 3s and 'maximum' rent allowance of 12 shillings would work for 36 hours.⁸²

In 1927, the Ministry of Health's Assistant Inspector made a number of critical observations under two main headings. One criticised the scales paid in Outdoor Relief. The Webbs summarised this particular criticism thus.

The very critical investigation of the Ministry of Health's Inspector in 1927 naturally discovered a certain number of cases in which he thought the Guardians had been unduly liberal ... In comparison with the ... Reports on other Unions ... the judgement on the Salford Guardians was only mildly critical.⁸³

The Salford Guardians did not consider the criticisms 'mild' and they addressed them in some detail. The first was that, "the question of relief under the maximum scale was dealt with [...] in correspondence with the Ministry in 1926". In October (1926) "the scales ... were reduced to a level pre-existing."⁸⁴ Second, the scales of relief were not greater than in the "neighbouring Union of Manchester". Third, some recipients got more than did "persons not in receipt of relief". Again, the Board felt that individual circumstances had justified the payments.⁸⁵

One of the chief parts of the Inspector's objections was that some men employed on the Corporation scheme got more than did the ordinary workman.

It would appear that the scheme ... is open to many grave objections and its continuance would be of doubtful advantage in that

those under it receive a bigger wage and work a shorter working week than the independent workman. ... and it appears [they] are preventing workmen who normally constitute the Corporation's reserve of labour from obtaining employment.⁸⁶

The Guardians argued that it would cause "serious difficulties" if different rates of pay applied in the same department. The men only were paid for the hours they worked and did not (nor could not) earn more than the ordinary workman. There was a far more serious issue. According to the Inspector's report, the men chosen for the Corporation scheme came from the "most unsatisfactory cases".⁸⁷

The Guardians claimed that the statement that "all men on the Joint Scheme are chosen from their *most unsatisfactory cases*" was erroneous. Responding to the condemnation of the Scheme as a whole the Guardians stated that, "The Scheme is superior to that and the Relieving Officers themselves deny the accuracy of the statement."⁸⁸

It was unlikely that the Relieving Officers did not comply with the Guardians' instructions. Not to comply would have almost certainly ended the co-operation of the Corporation.

It would be a grave infraction of the Guardians' intentions if the men selected were unsatisfactory and were to be singled out for the benefits of unemployment under the scheme. ... [The] serious strictures on what is admittedly and substantially a good scheme are regretted.⁸⁹

The Inspector's criticisms were not lost on the political right. The *Daily Dispatch* emphasised the Inspector's comments in banner headlines. "More Poor Law Poplarism" and "Salford Scandals" gave the impression of profligacy on a grand scale. In the next issue, the headline told of "Socialist Rule and the Ratepayers".⁹⁰ The Salford Guardians took strong exception to what they considered a biased piece of reporting. Not only were the criticisms "unfair", they had pre-judged the response of the Ministry of Health to the Guardians' defence of the scheme of work. Whilst the *Daily Dispatch* did carry the Guardians' reply, it was clear that the paper had already passed judgement on 'Salfordism'.⁹¹

In seeking the approval of the Ministry of Health for Second Scheme, the Instructional Classes, the Clerk to the Guardians was careful to stress two things.

The question of obtaining a grant is, however, a secondary consideration with the Guardians, who feel that with so many young men unemployed ... some conditional restrictions on the continued grant of assistance from the Rates should be imposed; ... [The] scheme now put forward appears ... to hold out some promise ... when other *more stringent tests would appear to be impracticable owing to a lack of indoor accommodation* ...⁹²

Let us now turn to Scheme II, which, with Scheme I, throughout their existence, seemed to be on permanent probation. The Ministry of Health limited its approval first for an "experimental period" then six months and then twelve months, by which time Boards of Guardians were within a year of going out of existence.⁹³

Even so, the combination of education in return for relief was a clear recognition that the unemployed might be offered something better than test labour. The Scheme was, as the Webbs observed, an "echo of the Cotton Famine of 65 years ago".⁹⁴

Single men up to 35 years of age, and married men up to 30 years of age – excluding men benefiting by Scheme I – had to attend Instructional Classes. Payment of outdoor relief was conditional on attendance at the classes. The salient features of Scheme II included hour-long classes in English, Drawing, Hobbies and Arithmetic.⁹⁵

In April 1927, there were around 5,000 unemployed men in Salford, which meant that the schemes could do no more than provide a limited, but more enlightened approach to Poor Law relief. Of the two Instructional classes, out of 42 enrolled ten had secured work, which the Clerk to the Guardians considered a “very good percentage”. However, the Ministry of Health was not the only critic of the pioneering schemes. The Salford Unemployed Committee opposed the idea of men of 30 having to go “back to school”. What the Committee wanted was a living wage and regarded working for relief as “task work”.⁹⁶

In the political and economic climate of the period, such a departure from poor law principles was unlikely. Furthermore, as the Chairman of the Board of Guardians commented, even if the Government gave a grant for public work – such as road building – the percentage of unemployed absorbed “would be infinitesimal”.⁹⁷ From the start of the scheme in March 1927, the number of those trained remained low. By January 1928, 210 men passed through the scheme, of these 145 had gained employment, “mostly in consequence of the training and the efforts of the instructors”.⁹⁸

The Salford Guardians retained some of the Chadwickian ethos. Men who proved the least satisfactory and who have “exhausted all benefits” would have to enter the Institution, which was now the official name for the Workhouse. Nor were the instruction classes made so attractive that “men would be tempted to render themselves eligible for relief in order to avail themselves of the advantages of the classes”.⁹⁹

Thus, the imperative for the Guardians was to obtain a return for the rates spent on outdoor relief. The Webbs preferred to concentrate on the “moral efficiency” of the schemes.”¹⁰⁰ The *imprimatur* came from Mr. Grant of the Ministry of Health.

... The Salford Board of Guardians was ... to be congratulated for the efforts they were making ... The Joint Scheme was ... a new development when it was started ... [...] The Ministry had certainly criticised the scheme from time to time, ... it had many merits, it provided work for a considerable number of men and saved them from the evils of enforced idleness.¹⁰¹

For the Instructional classes, there was praise indeed.

Salford again deserved congratulation upon being the inventors of the scheme. The classes were quite new as far as the Poor law was concerned ... they [the Ministry] recognised the effort as a valuable contribution to solving one of the greatest problems of the present time.¹⁰²

Perhaps the Labour Guardians felt as much satisfaction from the visit by the Poplar Board of Guardians. The Poplar Guardians, in complimenting the Salford Guardians on their work for the unemployed, provided a less febrile approach than that evidenced by the *Daily Dispatch*.¹⁰³

By August 1929 the guardians were, though, somewhat disillusioned by the Council. The Chairman of the Salford Board of Guardians, JA Webb, said they “did not feel they could look to the City Council for material assistance. The Council did not appear to realise the difficulties, at any rate, he did not believe they (the Council) were prepared to help them.” Thus, five months into the final year of the Guardians, Chairman Webb’s remarks suggest a Board of Guardians that remained at odds with the Borough Council.¹⁰⁴

It was then a bittersweet irony when, in January 1930, the Board of Guardians was in a position to hand over a balance of £67,000. Mr Webb, Guardians’ Chairman, pointed out that the Council could apply this to a reduction

of 1s 3d. in the pound for the coming financial year.¹⁰⁵

By April 1930, Boards of Guardians were no more. Given that the Salford Board had passed such a sizeable balance to the Salford Council, the ex-Guardians may have believed that they had satisfied their critics. This was not the case. High unemployment and a low rateable value led the Conservative controlled Council to suspend capital expenditure by public departments for twelve months.¹⁰⁶

Labour councillors protested at what they saw as a move to make the Finance Committee the “financial dictators” of Salford. Labour claimed that such stringency would be nothing other than the “death, not only the hopes of the various committees, but of the people outside”. The Anti-socialists dismissed this as a “negative” approach. Moreover, the high rate was due mainly to the “large expenditure of the late Board of Guardians”.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

Salford had often known periods of unemployment, yet nothing had prepared Salfordians for the hardships of the 1920s. Nonetheless, the mix of industries meant that despite the addition of short-time unemployment a large percentage of the workforce had experienced some form of unemployment.

Class played some part in determining the Labour Party’s electoral fortunes. The presence of middle-class wards ensured that anti-Socialist candidates would always gain some seats. This was, though, more evident in the Council elections. Thus, paradoxically, as unemployment increased, and the working class turned to Labour in the Guardians’ elections, the Party failed to gain control of the Council.

Salford Labour had won control of the Board of Guardians in a period when the rise of unemployment seemed inexorable. Despite this, Salford Labour Guardians attempted, with some success, to make Poor Law relief truly conditional. Yet, this seems hardly to have been recognised by Labour’s opponents. The commendation of the Webbs and the hard-won approval of the Ministry of Health meant little to the Council’s anti-Socialists in the post-Guardian recriminations of 1930-31.

The Salford Board of Guardians had attempted to leaven the Poor Law with a pragmatic approach to the unemployed, and at same time offer the ratepayers something in return. Indeed, although the anti-Socialist councillors did not seem to value it, the Board of Guardians had been an important – if misunderstood – safety valve in times of great distress. With the Guardians replaced by a Public Assistance Committee controlled by the councillors, there was no such dedicated body solely responsible for the relief of the poor. Much of the anger over the cuts in unemployment benefits in October 1931 might have been deflected by the one body that had learned to blend the regulations with a degree of humanity and common sense.

Notes.

My thanks to Professor Alan Kidd of Manchester Metropolitan University for reading my drafts of the article and for his generous help and advice on sources

1 Stephen Constantine, *Unemployment in Britain between the Wars* (Harlow, 1980) p.3. Bentley B. Gilbert, *British Social Policy 1914-1939* (1970) pp. 86-7.

2 JJ Astor et al, *The Third Winter of Unemployment* (1922) p. 3.

- 3 RL Greenall, *The Making of Victorian Salford* (Lancaster, 2000) pp. 156, 159, 162; Alan Kidd, 'The Social Democratic Federation and Popular Agitation amongst the Unemployed in Edwardian Manchester', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. XXIX (1984). For general references to unemployment, see also Jose Harris, *Unemployment and Politics* (Oxford, 1972), Kenneth B. Brown, *Labour and Unemployment* (Newton Abbot, 1971), Bentley B. Gilbert, *The Evolution of National Insurance in Great Britain* (Aldershot, 1966), Bentley B Gilbert, *British Social Policy 1914-1939* (1970), John Burnett, *Idle Hands: The Experience of Unemployment 1790-1990* (1994) Chapter 6 pp. 199-264, 'Unemployment Between the Wars', WR Garside, *British Unemployment 1919-1939*, David Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in Britain: From Chadwick to Booth* (1998).
- 4 J. Garrard, *Leaders and Politics in Nineteenth-century Salford: A Historical analysis of urban political power* (Typescript, Department of Sociological and Political Studies, University of Salford) (1970) p. 1. See also Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns 1830-80* (Manchester University Press, 1983) p. 6 and fn 14. For a description of Salford's industrial development, see VI Tomlinson, 'The Coming Of Industry' in Bergin et al, *Salford*, pp. 19-61.
- 5 Salford ward boundaries changed in 1921 and became effective in the municipal elections of that year. *Salford Reporter*, 2 April 1921, See also Manchester and Salford Corporations, *Official Handbooks*, 1921, 1922. See also *Registrar General Censuses* 1921, 1931. For a discussion on the political effect of the boundary changes see also JF Henry, 'Labour and the Proletarian City: A Study of Politics in Salford 1919-1932' (Unpublished PhD, Manchester Metropolitan University, 2005) (hereafter, Henry, 'Labour') Chapter 3, pp. 113, 120-25, 135.
- 6 Based on the Salford Medical Officer of Health *Annual Report* for 1925.
- 7 For an analysis of local election results in Salford for 1919-32 see Henry, 'Labour', Chapter 3, pp. 112-113, Appendices, pp. 454, 455.
- 8 Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum* (1973 edition) pp. 72-74. For the history of Salford see RL Greenall, *The Making of Victorian Salford* (Lancaster, 2000), Tom Bergin et al, *Salford: A City and its past* (Salford, 1989), C. Hampson, *Salford Through the Ages* (1930), A. Davies and S. Fielding, *Workers' Worlds* (Manchester University Press, 1992) and A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty* (Buckingham, 1992).
- 9 Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (1933).
- 10 For Edmund Frow's personal account of the 'Battle' see Edmund and Ruth Frow, *The Battle Of Bexley Square* (Lancashire Community Press, 1994) pp. 7, 12, 18, 20-22. See also, *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Oct. 1931, *Salford Reporter*, 9 Oct. 1931.
- 11 John Garrard 'Heates, Tumults and Factions' in Tom Bergin, Dorothy Pearce, Stanley N. Shaw (eds.), *Salford: A city and its past* (hereafter, Bergin et al, *Salford*) (Salford, 1989) p. 101.
- 12 CL Mowat, *Britain Between The Wars* (hereafter Mowat, *Britain*) (1956 edition) pp. 481, fn. 3, 482, fns. 2, 3, 484, fn. 3, 486, fns. 3, 4, 487, fn. 6.
- 13 JJ Astor, et al. *The Third Winter Of Unemployment* (1922) pp. 218, 222.
- 14 Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Poor Law History, Part II: The Last Hundred Years* (1929) (hereafter Webb, *Poor Law*) pp. 884-87.
- 15 ME Rose, *The English Poor Law 1780-1930* (hereafter Rose, *The English Poor Law*) (Newton Abbot, 1971) pp. 140, 145 Poor Law document 37 B. See also WR Garside, *British Unemployment 1919-1939* (hereafter, Garside, *British Unemployment*) (Cambridge, 1990) p.31.
- 16 For the effect of 1926 on Boards of Guardians elsewhere see also Rose, *The English Poor Law*, pp. 302-303.
- 17 Juvenile unemployment was, of course, a hardship both to the boy or girl unemployed and to their families. However, these statistics and those of short-time working fall outside the scope of this paper.
- 18 Figures based on the monthly returns in the *Ministry of Labour Gazette*. By 1930, adult unemployment reached over 22,600. See also Henry, 'Labour', pp. 303-4. Although unemployment fluctuated over the months, the October figures are chosen because of their closeness to the November municipal elections.
- 19 All figures are from the November issues of the *Ministry of Labour Gazette* in four three-year cycles.
- 20 S. Davies and Bob Morley, *The County Borough Elections of England and Wales, 1919-1938: A comparative analysis* (Aldershot, 1999). See also *Registrar General Census* 1931, Manchester Central Reference Library).
- 21 Bentley, *British Social Policy*, p.51.
- 22 *Salford Reporter*, 5 February 1921.
- 23 Henry, 'Labour', p. 335. See also *Salford Reporter*, 5 May 1921 and Garrard, 'Working Class', p. 127 (Salford University).
- 24 Rosamond, 'Unemployment in Manchester', p. 113, see also *Manchester Guardian*, 19 August 1922.
- 25 Rosamond, 'Unemployment in Manchester', pp. 113-14, also *Manchester Guardian*, 14 Oct. 1922.
- 26 Rosamond, 'Unemployment in Manchester' p. 114, also *Manchester Guardian* 21 April 1923.
- 27 *ibid.* p.115, also *Manchester Guardian*, 6 Dec. 1922.
- 28 Rosamond, 'Unemployment' p. 114. *Manchester Guardian*, 14 Oct. and 6 Dec. 1922.
- 29 Rosamond, 'Unemployment' pp. 114-16. See also *Salford Reporter*, 13 Jan. 1923, *Manchester Guardian*, 2 March and 21 April 1923. It was 1926 before the scheme was considered again. See also, Henry, 'Labour' pp. 337-38.
- 30 *Salford Reporter*, 13 Jan. 1923. In 1926, when the scheme again came under discussion Salford Council estimated that on their section of the road there would be work for 500 men for eighteen months. *Salford Reporter*, 21 Aug. 1926, see also Henry 'Labour' p.338, fn.126.
- 31 *Salford Reporter*, 25 June and 1 July 1921. See also Henry, 'Labour' p. 312 and Garside, *British Unemployment* p.39.
- 32 *Salford Reporter*, 17 Sept. 1921. See also Bentley B. Gilbert, *British Social Policy 1914-1939* (1970) (hereafter Gilbert, *British Social Policy*) pp. 76-8. See also BB Gilbert, *The Evolution of National Insurance in Great Britain* (1966), p. 287. The Unemployment Acts (1909, 1911) never envisaged funding the mass unemployment of the inter-war years of the 1920s. See also, Garside, *British Unemployment*, pp. 38-41.
- 33 *Salford Reporter*, 17 Sept. 1921.
- 34 *ibid.* Some 1,909 cases were relieved at a cost of over £1,700, compared with £303 for the same week in 1920. The actual number of people relieved was 7,368, and in the same period in 1920, the number of people relieved

totalled 847.

35 *Salford Reporter* 22 Oct. 1921.

36 *ibid.* See also *Salford Reporter*, 17 Sept. 1921, which commented on the “demand marches” by the unemployed taking place in the country. In Salford, some 1,900 men went in “orderly procession” to the Poor Law Offices. Their deputation told the guardians they wanted work “not charity”, *Salford Reporter*, 24 Sept. 1921. For government concerns about ‘unrest’ see also Garside, *British Unemployment*, pp. 36-7, 40. See also Bentley, *British Social Policy*, p.75.

37 Rosamond, ‘Unemployment in Manchester’ p. 111 fn.1 and *Manchester Guardian* 27 July 1922.

38 The *Salford Reporter* 1 July 1922 gives the Salford scale of relief in June 1922 as Man, Wife and Child as 26 shillings per week. For a Man, Wife and two children the rate was 31 shillings per week. These suggest a higher rate than given in Rosamond (above).

39 *Salford Reporter*, 1 July 1922.

40 *ibid.*

41 *Salford Reporter*, 1 July 1922, see also Henry, ‘Labour’ pp. 326-27.

42 This allowance, totalling £3, was for a man, wife and six children. A builder’s labourer earned £2 14 shillings per week.

43 *Salford Reporter*, 1 July 1922, see also Henry, ‘Labour’ p. 326.

44 *Salford Reporter*, 1 July 1922.

45 *ibid.* see also Henry, ‘Labour’ p. 326-27.

46 *Salford Reporter*, 24 Sept. 1921.

47 *ibid.*

48 *Salford Reporter*, 1 July 1922.

49 *ibid.*

50 Rosamond ‘Unemployment in Manchester’ p. 110-11. See also, *Manchester Guardian*, 28 September 1922. In the 1920s, the Labour controlled Board of Guardians in Poplar insisted on paying those on poor law relief at scales significantly higher than in many other boroughs. As a result, Guardians in other boroughs believed to be paying over generous poor relief were accused of ‘Poplarism’. In 1924, James Openshaw of Salford Labour Party defended Poplar’s policy in the *Salford Reporter*. See also note 73.

51 At the 1921 Census, the total employed in Salford including juveniles over the age of 12 was 100,544. In 1925, in addition to the 11,000 adults there were 701 juveniles also unemployed. *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, November 1925.

52 The discussion on Walsh’s motion had been deferred from the last Council meeting. *Salford Reporter*, 31 Oct. 1925.

53 *Salford Reporter*, 31 Oct. 1925.

54 Rose, *The English Poor Law*, pp. 293-294.

55 *Salford Reporter*, 31 Oct. 1925. *ibid.*

56 *ibid.*

57 Pat Thane, *The Foundations of the Welfare State* (Harlow, 1982) p. 85.

58 No Liberals stood from this period onwards.

59 Normally the Salford Council had 64 seats comprising 48 councillors and 16 aldermen. Occasionally, this number dropped to 63 due to vacancies usually on the aldermanic bench.

60 *Salford Reporter*, 27 March, 3 April and 1 May 1926.

61 Henry, ‘Labour’ pp. 351, and en. 175, Appendix 49, p. 496 and en. 59, the 1926 scale was later confirmed by the

Public Assistance Committee in 1930. Lewis, *Genealogist* 36, No. 3, (2000), p. 204.

62 *Salford Reporter*, 9, 16 & 23 Oct. 1926. See also Henry, ‘Labour’ pp. 350-51.

63 In the years 1921-1929 Salford Poor Law Rate fluctuated from 3s. 2d. in 1921 to 5s. 3d in 1929. The sharpest increase came in the financial year 1926-1927 when, although unemployment declined from 13,000 to 10,000, the rate rose from 3s. 7d to 5s 4d. Poor Law Rate taken from the Blue Books for each financial year ending 31st March. Thus, each Council commencing its Council year Nov.-Oct. started with a rate fixed in the March of the preceding Council year.

64 *Salford Reporter*, 19 Feb. 1927.

65 *ibid.*

66 *Salford Reporter*, 9 April 1927.

67 This was to be the last election for Boards of Guardians, relief of the destitute would lie with council controlled Public Assistance committees.

68 For Salford Guardians’ elections 1926-1928 see Henry, ‘Labour’ pp. 347-354.

69 *Salford Reporter*, 1 Jan. 1927. Blue Book 1931. The Poor Law rate ended the financial year at 5s 4d.

70 For example, in 1863 Lord Derby was concerned that Poor Law relief did not provide “employment with wages”. This would “establish a form of socialism destructive to private enterprise and demoralising to labour”. Manual For The Guidance Of Local Relief Committees in the Cotton Districts (1863) pp.13-14.

71 Pat Ryan, ‘Politics and Relief’, in Rose, (hereafter, Ryan, *The Poor*) *The English Poor Law*, p. 151.

72 Ryan, *The Poor* p. 163.

73 For an analysis of the events in Poplar from 1919-1923 see Rose, *The English Poor Law* pp. 292-94. See also Noreen Branson, *Poplarism 1919-1925* (1979).

74 From the “flood of Unemployment” in 1921, poor relief in the Manchester Union was largely unconditional. Sydney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government: English Poor Law History: Part II The Last Hundred Years: Vol. II* (1929) (Hereafter, Webbs, *Poor Law History*) pp. 882-84. See also Garside, *British Unemployment*, p.40.

75 Kidd, *International Review*, p.341.

76 Ruth and Edmund Frow, *The Communist Party in Manchester 1920-1926* (WCML, n.d.) p. 13. (The British Socialist Party had developed out of the SDF). See also Declan McHugh, ‘The Labour Party In Manchester and Salford Before The First World War: A case of unequal development’ in, *Manchester Region History Review*, (2000, XIV) pp. 14-23.

77 Bentley B. Gilbert, *British Social Policy*, pp. 11-12, 20, 23-4, 35-6, 75-8.

78 Alan Kidd, *State, Society And The Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke, 1999) p. 9.

79 James Openshaw devoted a full column in his ‘Labour Notes’ in support of Poplarism. *Salford Reporter*, 23 Feb. 1924.

80 The Salford Ratepayers’ Alliance also argued that wealthier boroughs should contribute towards the burden of the rates, *Salford Reporter*, 27 March 1926. See also Henry, ‘Labour’, pp. 341, 346.

81 Kidd, *Economic History Review* (August 1987) p. 402. See also Sydney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government: English Poor Law History: Part II The Last Hundred Years: Vol. II* (1929) (hereafter, Webbs, *Poor Law*

History) pp. 884-87.

82 *Scheme of Employment* in Salford Board of Guardians document (dated 1926 and 1927) (hereafter, *Scheme of Employment*) pp. 3-4. Ref. L352 0424 SAL (Salford Local History Library).

83 Webbs, *Poor Law History*, p. 885. Amongst the criticisms of the Ministry of Health's Inspector was the fact that the Guardians' actions, "made [such] men 5s.-7s. a week better off than genuine work-seekers who are still drawing unemployment benefit". *Salford Reporter*, 15 Oct. 1927 p. 6.

84 Henry, 'Labour' p. 351, see also *Salford Reporter*, 23 Oct. 1926.

85 *Salford Reporter*, 15 Oct. 1927 p. 6.

86 *Salford Reporter*, 15 Oct. 1927, p. 6.

87 *ibid.*

88 *Salford Reporter*, 15 Oct. 1927, p. 6. Significantly, the italics are the Guardians'.

89 *ibid.*

90 *Daily Dispatch* 8, 10 Oct. 1927.

91 *Salford Reporter*, 15 Oct. 1927.

92 *Scheme of Employment*, p. 9. The italics are mine.

93 *Salford Reporter*, 15 Oct. and 12 Nov. 1927, 7 Jan. and 19 May 1928.

94 Webbs, *Poor Law History*, p. 886. During the Cotton Famine of 1861-65, the Salford Board of Guardians made the payment of outdoor relief to the

unemployed cotton operatives conditional. In 1862, the Guardians replaced the 'labour' test with an educational test for men. Sewing schools also opened for women. The Salford Famine Relief Committee also ran sewing schools. In all these schemes, the payment of relief was conditional on attendance.

95 *Scheme of Employment* pp. 8-18.

96 *Salford Reporter*, 2 April 1927.

97 *ibid.*

98 *Salford Reporter*, 28 Jan. 1928.

99 *Salford Reporter*, 5 May 1928.

100 Alan J. Kidd, 'The State and Moral Progress: The Webbs' Case For Social Reform c. 1905-1940', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 7 No 2 1996, p.195, fn. cites Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, Minority Report p. 999.

101 *Salford Reporter*, 28 Jan. 1928.

102 *Salford Reporter*, 5 and 19 May 1928.

103 *Salford Reporter*, 11 Jan. and 1 Feb. 1929.

104 *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Aug. 1929.

105 *Salford Reporter*, 31 Jan. In fact, the rates were not reduced. However, £33,000 of the £67,000 helped to avoid an increase in the borough rate. *Salford Reporter*, 7 March 1930.

106 *Manchester Guardian*, 9 Dec. 1930.

107 *ibid.*

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