

The ILP Past and Present (Part One)
By Barry Winter
revised edition
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Preface

This brief account of the ILP and its politics is published to mark the 130th anniversary of the organisation's founding in January 1893. It is a revised and updated version of the first edition of *'The ILP Past and Present'*, also written by Barry Winter and published 30 years ago to coincide with our centenary celebrations.

Like its predecessor, the 2023 version describes the role played by different generations of ILPers in endeavouring to create a humanitarian, socially just society for all. It reviews the changing circumstances that they confronted – the times of war and peace, during booms and slumps, and through numerous developments locally, nationally and internationally – while tracing the ILP's ever-changing relationships with other political agencies and organisations, not least the Labour Party.

Unlike its predecessor, it is published in two parts. This pamphlet, Part 1, covers the first half of the ILP's story, from its formation in the

last decades of the 19th century, through the ups and downs of its development in the early decades of the 20th to 1945 when it found itself isolated from mainstream politics and a dwindling political force on the left.

Part 2 to be published later in 2023, will chart the post war years and, in particular, focus on the 1970s return to Labour as Independent Labour Publications and its role over the last half century as a distinctive left voice within and outside the Party.

No doubt, some of the material here will be familiar from the first edition. But Barry's long years of research and careful re-writing means that there's much that's new too, including tales of previously forgotten ILPers whose quiet dedication and dogged local campaigning was as important to the organisation and its cause of ethical socialism as the more lauded achievements of its better known names.

Indeed, through all its shifting shapes and fortunes, what comes across most clearly is the survival of the ILP's core concern – to help create a society of peace, fellowship and security, where all have an equal chance to develop and thrive.

Interestingly, this edition coincides with a period when the Labour Party once again is wrestling with itself, torn between the ever present need for broad electoral appeal and the desire among many not to lose sight of the longer term goal of a fully transformed society.

We think there are lessons to be learned, on Labour's left as well as its right, from the ILP's long and chequered history – lessons about the relationship between radical movements for change and progressive political parties, but also about the need for a comradely, tolerant, respectful, inclusive and democratic culture.

Although it sometimes fell short, at its best the ILP has embodied and promoted these values throughout the years as it has sought to create a more democratic world. Of course, there have been many disappointments and setbacks along the way. But in the end, this is a story about people, men and women who not only wanted a better society but strove collectively and tirelessly to secure one.

Their efforts are an inspiration to us today. We hope they are for you too.

To find out more about the ILP today, please visit our website:

<https://www.independentlabour.org.uk/>