

# ERIC OGDEN M.P.

## Who does he serve?

FOR over ten years the national press ignored Eric Ogden, the minor back-bench Labour MP for West Derby, Liverpool.

But suddenly he shot into the limelight when censured by his local party. Newspapers have pictured him as a heroic, moderate MP. A man challenged by dangerous extremists on the executive of the West Derby Labour Party.

The censure vote was on a minor issue and had nothing to do with a struggle between left and right. One of the movers of the motion was Merseyside councillor Francis Burke, a JP and former Lord Mayor of Liverpool. Hardly a dangerous agitator.

The fact is that local Labour parties and voters have little real control over an MP once he is elected.

Here we look at some of the little-known activities of Eric Ogden, and we ask: "Who exactly does he represent in the Commons?"

### A cheap trip to Rhodesia

IN THE SUMMER of 1972 Eric Ogden, a Methodist and former miner, toured Rhodesia.

Who paid his fare? - That was a question which intrigued a number of MPs in the Commons.

Ogden answered: "I paid my own fare... at least from Johannesburg to Salisbury."

Pressed further, he said reluctantly: "There is a right time and a right place."

Finally he spilled the beans: "I went under the umbrella of a company which happens to be called Ogden's Tobacco Co, with which Mr Speaker knows I have unfortunately no financial relationship. I have no directorship with that company."

After his cheap tour, Mr Ogden returned to Parliament to speak powerfully against economic sanctions.

"Apart from a few dedicated people and organisations there is little support for the continuation of sanctions against Rhodesia."

The way to reach a settlement, he said, lay in "investment and persuasion."

Perhaps Mr Ogden was himself persuaded by the economic plight of that multi-national firm the Imperial Tobacco Company, who own Ogden's Tobacco.

Later in the debate one MP pointed out that sanctions were seriously damaging the tobacco industry in Rhodesia. (Much of this industry was owned by Imperial.)

If the government had been of the same "persuasion" as Mr Ogden, sanctions would have been lifted. And Imperial could legally have got their hands on that Rhodesian tobacco, picked by cheap black labour.

Mr Ogden probably wouldn't look back on this speech as his only proud moment in Parliament. There have been others.

### Helping docks to lose work

ONE OF his achievements was to help the Mersey docks lose work valued at £1,850,000 a year.

Behind this feat lies an interesting tale.

In the late sixties and early seventies the giant oil firm Shell were looking for quick and cheap ways of pumping oil from their massive super-tankers to their refineries at Stanlow, Merseyside.

At the time their super-tankers had

to anchor in Liverpool Bay and unload into smaller tankers which then sailed up the Mersey to pump the oil ashore at Tranmere terminal.

This wasn't fast enough for Shell. There were too many tidal delays. And time meant money.

Far simpler would be two mooring buoys out at sea, where the super-tankers could tie up and pump their oil directly ashore.

They found the ideal place. But it wasn't on Merseyside. It was off the unspoilt beaches of Anglesey.

Shell first had to persuade Anglesey council that what was good for Shell was good for Anglesey.

Quite a task. But, as the Sunday Times said, "Shell's public relations officers criss-crossed Anglesey meeting people, showing films, explaining, cajoling, dampening talk of pollution."

Anglesey council agreed to promote the necessary Bill in Parliament, and to rebuild Amlwch harbour at a cost between £¾ million and £1½ million.

The council accepted that pollution would be negligible and wouldn't affect tourism. And they agreed to Shell building 15 storage tanks, each twice the size of Conway Castle (though not quite as attractive).

The council's attitude stunned a number of MPs. One said: "The way in which they have approached the Bill has been negligent, cavalier and superficial to a degree which is a betrayal of the people they represent."

Another said more bluntly: "Shell are taking Anglesey for a ride."

There was still a possibility of opposition from Merseyside, where the docks stood to lose over £1m a year in revenue because of the move. But Shell's public relations officers came across Eric Ogden.

They didn't find the West Derby MP on Merseyside, nor even taking a last dip on Anglesey's unpolluted beaches.

They found him in sunny South Africa.

Mr Ogden was there with two other Labour MPs as guests of the South Africa Foundation, a public relations organisation, which publicises the other attractions of South Africa (apart from apartheid).

While he was there Ogden was shown around Shell's oil terminal and single buoy mooring in Durban. This was similar to the one they wanted to impose on Anglesey.

Ogden returned, a firm supporter of the Anglesey plan.

Forget about pollution fears. Tankers didn't discharge into the sea instead of the pipes. He told Parliament he had walked on beaches for whites, for coloureds and for blacks - and they were clean.



Yet in the same debate the local MP for Durban was quoted. He had said oil (from the Shell terminal and from other ships) was "making these beaches so unpleasant that people cannot use them."

Ogden himself admitted there were 32 spillages totalling 80 tons of oil from the terminal in Durban.

Parliament was told that the Anglesey terminal would take away work from the Mersey docks worth about £1.3 million a year.

Ogden was quick to reply: "The £1.3 million is a balance, the figures are false."

To be kind, perhaps Mr Ogden forgot who gave Parliament this figure. It was Commander Leonard Hill, port manager of the Mersey docks, in answer to a question... from Eric Ogden.

At today's prices that figure is about £500,000 higher.

**Ogden's help benefited only Shell. Merseyside will lose about £1.8m a year. Anglesey will end up with just over £1¼m over the next five years (most of it already spent on the new harbour), oily beaches and giant tanks.**

Some might think Mr Ogden has been taken for a ride, just like the Anglesey council.

But Mr Ogden doesn't think so. He said in the Commons: "I have no financial interest... in the Bill." And he added: "I want to put on

record my appreciation of the help I have had as a member from Merseyside from the Shell Oil Company with information and statistics."

### Paid by the pharmacists

OGDEN, once a miner in Bradford Colliery, was the first parliamentary candidate outside a mining area to be sponsored by the National Union of Mineworkers. The union pays the constituency £50 a month.

But Ogden never let this hinder his enthusiasm for the oil terminal plan. Nor did he let his sponsorship hide his distaste for a private member's Bill which was likely to help former miners suffering from pneumoconiosis (a deadly disease caused by coal dust).

The Dangerous Drugs and Children Bill indirectly helped these sufferers to claim badly-needed compensation.

It was also designed to improve standards of safety in the manufacture and sale of drugs, help thalidomide victims, and make it easier to sue drug companies for negligence.

Ogden is the paid parliamentary adviser to the Pharmaceutical Council of Great Britain, the organisation which represents pharmacists. Naturally he declares his interest.

The NUM supported the Bill, and Ogden eventually voted for it. But he spent much of his time attacking it. He said it wouldn't help in pneumoconiosis cases. And he came to the aid of companies who made thalidomide.

"As I may have incurred some unpopularity I might as well go the whole hog and say something good about thalidomide," he said.

"To keep a balanced debate, we should put on record that thalidomide has done many people a great deal of good."

**'Thalidomide has done many people a great deal of good'**

There is one mining interest Ogden has supported ever since he entered Parliament. The Channel Tunnel.

Ogden became chairman of the all-party group for the Channel Tunnel. And then the scheme - which would have cost anything up to £2,000 million - was chopped, by the Labour government.

The West Derby MP was furious.

The promoters of the tunnel included some of the most powerful business interests in the country. There was Rio Tinto Zinc (in which the Queen owns many shares), there were the bankers, Morgan Grenfell, Robert Fleming, Hill Samuel, Kleinwort Benson, S.C. Warburg, plus three American banks.

It was clear who stood to gain from the tunnel... and who was taking all the risks.

Anthony Crosland, the minister, said the promoters were "determined to wrap their project round a considerable government cocoon."

And another MP said: "The real motive of RTZ and S.G. Warburg and all the other bankers... was to make money."

### Support for £70 pay rise

SLASHING the wasteful Channel Tunnel caused Ogden to link arms with the Tories. But cuts in housing, social services and education have scarcely raised a murmur from the Honourable Member. Certainly not when they were made by a Labour government.

He is presently accepting the cuts meekly. And in 1968 he voted to end free school milk in secondary schools and voted for 20p prescription charges. He did this knowing that the West Derby Labour Party had a policy against any charges on the National Health.

But then some of Ogden's most passionate speeches are made when he's telling ordinary working people to make sacrifices.

In July this year he voted for the £6 wage limit. The same month he condemned as 'miserable' the £24-a-week pay rise to MPs. Ogden wanted another £70 a week, plus expenses.

"The new salary scale panders only to the prejudices and ignorance of the uninformed inside or outside the House," he said.

Ogden certainly wasn't living in poverty. Just a few months earlier he had moved from his small house in Middleton to an expensive one in Essex.

And when his son had to have his tonsils out, Ogden spurned the National Health. Yes, our Labour man chose to pay for a private consultant.

Perhaps Mr Ogden summed up his own position better than anyone:

"When I came to the House I thought I was a left-winger. I have been pushed by circumstances so far to the right that I have come to think there was only Woodrow Wyatt between me and the extremity of the right."

**'I want to put on record my appreciation of the help I have had from the Shell Oil Company ...'**