

= George Lansbury =

George Lansbury , PC (22 February 1859 ? 7 May 1940) was a British politician and social reformer who led the Labour Party from 1932 to 1935 . Apart from a brief period of ministerial office during the Labour government of 1929 ? 31 , he spent his political life campaigning against established authority and vested interests , his main causes being the promotion of social justice , women 's rights and world disarmament . Originally a radical Liberal , Lansbury converted to socialism in the early 1890s , and thereafter served his local community in the East End of London in numerous elective offices . His activities were underpinned by his Christian beliefs which , except for a short period of doubt , sustained him through his life . Elected to parliament in 1910 , he resigned his seat in 1912 to campaign for women 's suffrage , and was briefly imprisoned after publicly supporting militant action .

In 1912 Lansbury helped to establish the Daily Herald newspaper , and became its editor . Throughout the First World War the paper maintained a strongly pacifist stance , and supported the October 1917 Russian Revolution . These positions contributed to Lansbury 's failure to be elected to parliament in 1918 . He devoted himself to local politics in his home borough of Poplar , and went to prison with 30 fellow @-@ councillors for his part in the Poplar " rates revolt " of 1921 .

After his return to parliament in 1922 , Lansbury was denied office in the brief Labour government of 1924 , although he served as First Commissioner of Works in the Labour government of 1929 ? 31 . After the political and economic crisis of August 1931 Lansbury did not follow his leader , Ramsay MacDonald , into the National Government , but stayed with the Labour Party . As the most senior of the small contingent of Labour MPs that survived the 1931 general election , Lansbury became the party 's leader . His pacifism and his opposition to rearmament in the face of rising European fascism put him at odds with his party , and when his position was rejected at the 1935 party conference he resigned the leadership . He spent his final years travelling through the United States and Europe in the cause of peace and disarmament .

= = Early life = =

= = = East End upbringing = = =

George Lansbury was born in Halesworth in the county of Suffolk on 22 February 1859 . He was the third of nine children born to a railway worker , also named George Lansbury , and Anne , née Ferris . George senior 's job involved the supervision of railway construction gangs ; the family was often on the move , and living conditions were primitive . Through his progressive @-@ minded mother and grandmother , young George became familiar with the names of great contemporary reformers ? Gladstone , Richard Cobden and John Bright ? and began to read the radical Reynolds 's Newspaper . By the end of 1868 the family had moved into London 's East End , the district in which Lansbury would live and work for almost all his life .

The essayist Ronald Blythe has described the East End of the 1860s and 1870s as " stridently English ... The smoke @-@ blackened streets were packed with illiterate multitudes [who] stayed alive through sheer birdlike ebullience " . Interspersed with spells of work , Lansbury attended schools in Bethnal Green and Whitechapel . He then held a succession of manual jobs , including work as a coaling contractor in partnership with his elder brother , James , loading and unloading coal wagons . This was heavy and dangerous work , and led to at least one near @-@ fatal accident . During his adolescence and early manhood Lansbury was a regular attender at the public gallery at the House of Commons , where he heard and remembered many of Gladstone 's speeches on the main foreign policy issue of the day , the " Eastern Question " . He was present at the riots which erupted outside Gladstone 's house on 24 February 1878 after a peace meeting in Hyde Park . Shepherd writes that Gladstone 's Liberalism , proclaiming liberty , freedom and community interests was " a heady mix that left an indelible mark " on the youthful Lansbury .

George Lansbury senior died in 1875 . That year young George met 14 @-@ year @-@ old

Elizabeth Brine , whose father Isaac Brine owned a local sawmill . The couple eventually married in 1880 , at Whitechapel parish church , where the vicar , J. Franklin Kitto , had been Lansbury 's spiritual guide and counsellor . Apart from a period of doubt in the 1890s when he temporarily rejected the Church , Lansbury remained a staunch Anglican until his death .

= = = Australia = = =

In 1881 the first of Lansbury 's 12 children , Bessie , was born ; another daughter , Annie , followed in 1882 . Seeking to improve his family 's prospects , Lansbury decided that their best hopes of prosperity lay in emigrating to Australia . The London agent @-@ general for Queensland depicted a land of boundless opportunities , with work for all ; seduced by this appeal , Lansbury and Bessie raised the necessary passage money , and in May 1884 set sail with their children for Brisbane .

On the outward passage the family experienced illness , discomfort and danger ; on one occasion the ship came close to foundering during a monsoon . On arrival at Brisbane in July 1884 , Lansbury found that contrary to the London agent 's promises , there was a superfluity of labour and work was hard to find . His first job , breaking stone , proved to be too physically punishing ; he moved to a better @-@ paid position as a van driver , but was sacked when , for religious reasons , he refused to work on Sundays . He then contracted to work on a farm some 80 miles inland , to find on arrival that his employer had misled him about living conditions and terms of employment . For several months the family lived in extreme squalor before Lansbury secured release from the contract . Back in Brisbane , he worked for a while at the newly built Brisbane cricket ground . As a keen follower of the game he hoped to see the visiting English touring team play but , as Lansbury 's biographer Raymond Postgate records , " he learned that cricket watching was not a pleasure for workmen " .

Throughout his time in Australia Lansbury sent letters home , revealing the truth about conditions facing immigrants . To a friend he wrote in March 1885 : " Mechanics are not wanted . Farm labourers are not wanted ... Hundreds of men and women are not able to get work ... The streets are foul day and night , and if I had a sister I would shoot her dead rather than see her brought out to this little hell on earth " . In May 1885 , having received from Isaac Brine sufficient funds for a passage home , the Lansburys left Australia for good .

= = Radical Liberal = =

= = = First campaigns = = =

On his return to London , Lansbury took a job in Brine 's timber business . In his spare time he campaigned against the false prospectuses offered by colonial emigration agents . His speech at an emigration conference at King 's College in London in April 1886 impressed delegates ; shortly afterwards , the government established an Emigration Information Bureau under the Colonial Office . This body was required to provide accurate information on the state of labour markets in all the government 's overseas possessions .

Having joined the Liberal Party shortly after his return from Australia , Lansbury became first a ward secretary and then general secretary for the Bow and Bromley Liberal and Radical Association . His effective campaigning skills had been noted by leading Liberals , including Samuel Montagu , the Liberal MP for Whitechapel , who persuaded the young activist to be his agent in the 1885 general election . Lansbury 's handling of this election campaign prompted Montagu to urge him to stand for parliament himself . Lansbury declined this , partly on practical grounds (MPs were then unpaid and he had to provide for his family) , and partly on principle ; he was becoming increasingly convinced that his future lay not as a radical Liberal but as a socialist . He continued to serve the Liberals , as an agent and local secretary , while expressing his socialism in a short @-@ lived monthly radical journal , Coming Times , which he founded and co @-@ edited with a fellow @-@ dissident , William Hoffman .

= = = London County Council elections , 1889 = = =

In 1888 Lansbury agreed to act as election agent for Jane Cobden , who was contesting the first elections for the newly formed London County Council (LCC) as Liberal candidate for the Bow and Bromley division . Cobden , an early supporter of women 's suffrage , was the fourth child of the Victorian radical statesman Richard Cobden . The Society for Promoting Women as County Councillors (SPWCC) , a new women 's rights group , had proposed Cobden as the candidate for Bow and Bromley and Margaret Sandhurst for Brixton . Lansbury counselled Cobden in the issues of greatest concern to the East End electorate : housing for the poor , ending of sweated labour , rights of public assembly , and control of the police . Specific questions of women 's rights were largely avoided during the campaign . On 19 January 1889 both women were elected ; these triumphs were , however , short @-@ lived . Sandhurst 's qualification to serve as a county councillor was successfully challenged in the courts by her Conservative Party opponents on the grounds of her sex , and her subsequent appeal was dismissed . Cobden was not immediately challenged , but in April 1891 , after a series of legal actions , she was effectively neutered as a councillor by being prevented from voting on pain of severe financial penalties . Lansbury urged her , during the hearings , to " go to prison and let the Council back you up by refusing to declare your seat vacant " . Cobden did not follow this path . A Bill introduced in the House of Commons in May 1891 permitting women to serve as county councillors found little support among MPs of any party ; women were not granted this right until 1907 .

Lansbury was offended by his party 's lukewarm support for women 's rights . In a letter published in the Pall Mall Gazette he made an open call to Bow and Bromley 's Liberals to " shake themselves free of party feeling and throw the energy and ability they are now wasting on minor questions into ... securing the full rights of citizenship to every woman in the land " . He was further disillusioned by his party 's failure to endorse the eight @-@ hour maximum working day . Lansbury had formed the view , expressed some years later , that " Liberalism would progress just as far as the great money bags of capitalism would allow it to progress " . By 1892 the Liberals no longer felt like Lansbury 's political home ; most of his current associates were avowed socialists : William Morris , Eleanor Marx , John Burns and Henry Mayers Hyndman , founder of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) . Nevertheless , Lansbury did not resign from the Liberals until he had fulfilled a commitment to act as election agent for John Murray MacDonald , the prospective Liberal candidate for Bow and Bromley . He saw his candidate victorious in the July 1892 General Election ; as soon as the result was declared , Lansbury resigned from the Liberal Party and joined the SDF .

= = Socialist reformer = =

= = = Social Democratic Federation = = =

Lansbury 's choice of the SDF , from several socialist organisations , reflected his admiration for Hyndman , whom he considered " one of the truly great ones " . Lansbury quickly became the federation 's most tireless propagandist , travelling throughout Britain to address meetings or to demonstrate solidarity with workers involved in industrial disputes . Around this time , Lansbury temporarily set aside his Christian beliefs and became a member of the East London Ethical Society . One factor in his disillusion with the Church was the local clergy 's unsympathetic approach to poor relief , and their opposition to collective political action .

In 1895 Lansbury fought two parliamentary elections for the SDF in Walworth , first a by @-@ election on 14 May , then the 1895 general election two months later . Despite his energetic campaigning he was heavily defeated on each occasion , with tiny proportions of the vote . After these dismal results , Lansbury was persuaded by Hyndman to give up his job at the sawmill and become the SDF 's full @-@ time salaried national organiser . He preached a straightforward revolutionary doctrine : " The time has arrived " , he informed an audience at Todmorden in Lancashire , " for the working classes to seize political power and use it to overthrow the competitive

system and establish in its place state cooperation " . Lansbury 's time as SDF national organiser did not last long ; in 1896 , when Isaac Brine died suddenly , Lansbury thought that his family duty required him to take charge of the sawmill , and he returned home to Bow .

In the general election of 1900 a pact with the Liberals in the Bow and Bromley constituency gave Lansbury , the SDF candidate , a straight fight against the Conservative incumbent , William Guthrie . Lansbury 's cause was hindered by his public opposition to the Boer War at a time when war fever was strong , while Guthrie , a former soldier , stressed his military credentials . Lansbury lost the election , though his total of 2 @, @ 258 votes against Guthrie 's 4 @, @ 403 was considered creditable by the press . This campaign was Lansbury 's last major effort on behalf of the SDF . He became disenchanted by Hyndman 's inability to work with other socialist groups , and in about 1903 resigned from the SDF to join the Independent Labour Party (ILP) . At around this time , Lansbury rediscovered his Christian faith and rejoined the Anglican Church .

= = = Poor Law guardian = = =

In April 1893 Lansbury achieved his first elective office when he became a Poor Law guardian for the district of Poplar . In place of the traditionally harsh workhouse regime that was the norm , Lansbury proposed a programme of reform , whereby the workhouse became " an agency of help instead of a place of despair " , and the stigma of poverty was removed . Lansbury was one of a minority socialist bloc which was often able , through its energy and commitment , to win support for its plans .

Education for the poor was one of Lansbury 's major concerns . He helped to transform the Forest Gate District School , previously a punitive establishment run on quasi @-@ military lines , into a proper place of education that became the Poplar Training School , and was still in existence more than half a century later . At the 1897 annual Poor Law Conference Lansbury summarised his views on poor relief in his first published paper : " The Principles of the English Poor Law " . His analysis offered a Marxist critique of capitalism : only the reorganisation of industry on collectivist lines would solve contemporary problems .

Lansbury added to his public duties when , in 1903 , he was elected to Poplar Borough Council . In the summer of that year he met Joseph Fels , a rich American soap manufacturer with a penchant for social projects . Lansbury persuaded Fels , in 1904 , to purchase a 100 @-@ acre farm at Laindon , in Essex , which was converted into a labour colony that provided regular work for Poplar 's unemployed and destitute . Fels also agreed to finance a much larger colony at Hollesley Bay in Suffolk , to be operated as a government scheme under the Local Government Board . Both projects were initially successful , but were undermined after the election of a Liberal government in 1906 . The new Local Government minister was John Burns , a former SDF stalwart now ensconced in the Liberal Party who had become a firm opponent of socialism . Burns encouraged a campaign of propaganda to discredit the principle of labour colonies , which were presented as money @-@ wasting ventures that pampered idlers and scroungers . A formal enquiry revealed irregularities in the operation of the scheme , though it exonerated Lansbury . He retained the confidence of his electorate and was easily re @-@ elected to the Board of Guardians in 1907 .

In 1905 Lansbury was appointed to a Royal Commission on the Poor Laws , which deliberated for four years . Lansbury , together with Beatrice Webb of the Fabian Society , argued for the complete abolition of the Poor Laws and their replacement by a system that incorporated old age pensions , a minimum wage , and national and local public works projects . These proposals were embodied at the Commission 's conclusion in a minority report signed by Lansbury and Webb ; the majority report was , according to Postgate , " an ill @-@ considered jumble of suggestions ... so preposterously inadequate that no attempts were ever made to implement it . " Most of the minority 's recommendations in time became national policy ; the Poor Laws were finally abolished by the Local Government Act 1929 .

= = National prominence = =

= = = Campaigner for women 's suffrage = = =

In the general election of January 1906 Lansbury stood as an independent socialist candidate in Middlesbrough , on a strong " votes for women " platform . This was his first campaign based on women 's rights since the LCC election of 1889 . He had been recommended to the constituency by Joseph Fels , who agreed to meet his expenses . The local ILP leadership was committed by an electoral pact to support the Liberal candidate , and could not endorse Lansbury , who secured less than 9 per cent of the vote . The campaign had been managed by Marion Coates Hansen , a prominent local suffragist . Under Hansen 's influence Lansbury took up the cause of " votes for women " ; he allied himself with the Women 's Social and Political Union (WSPU) , the more militant of the main suffragist organisations , and became a close associate of Emmeline Pankhurst and her family .

The Liberal government elected in 1906 with a large majority showed little interest in the issue of women 's suffrage ; when they lost their parliamentary majority in the general election of January 1910 they were dependent on the votes of the 40 @-@ odd Labour members . To Lansbury 's dismay , Labour did not use this leverage to promote votes for women , instead giving the government virtually unqualified support to keep the Conservatives out of power . Lansbury had failed to win election as Labour 's candidate at Bow and Bromley in January 1910 ; however , the continuing political crisis which developed from David Lloyd George 's controversial 1909 " People 's Budget " led to another general election in December 1910 . Lansbury again fought Bow and Bromley , and this time was successful .

Lansbury found little support in his fight for women 's suffrage from his parliamentary Labour colleagues , whom he dismissed as " a weak , flabby lot " . In parliament , he denounced the prime minister , H. H. Asquith , for the cruelties being inflicted on imprisoned suffragists : " You are beneath contempt ... you ought to be driven from public life " . He was temporarily suspended from the House for " disorderly conduct " . In October 1912 , aware of the unbridgeable gap between his own position and that of his Labour colleagues , Lansbury resigned his seat to fight a by @-@ election in Bow and Bromley on the specific issue of women 's suffrage . He lost to his Conservative opponent , who campaigned on the slogan " No Petticoat Government " . Commenting on the result , the Labour MP Will Thorne opined that no constituency could ever be won on the single question of votes for women .

Out of parliament , on 26 April 1913 Lansbury addressed a WSPU rally at the Albert Hall , and openly defended violent methods : " Let them burn and destroy property and do anything they will , and for every leader that is taken away , let a dozen step forward in their place " . For this , Lansbury was charged with incitement , convicted and , after the dismissal of an appeal , sentenced to three months ' imprisonment . He immediately went on hunger strike , and was released after four days ; although liable to rearrest under the so @-@ called " Cat and Mouse Act " , he was thereafter left at liberty . In the autumn of 1913 , at the invitation of Fels , Lansbury and his wife travelled to America and Canada for an extended holiday . On his return , he devoted his main efforts to the recently founded newspaper , the Daily Herald .

= = = War , Daily Herald and Bolshevism = = =

The Daily Herald began as a temporary bulletin during the London printers ' strike of 1910 ? 11 . After the strike ended , Lansbury and others raised sufficient funds for the Herald to be relaunched in April 1912 as a socialist daily newspaper . The paper attracted contributions from distinguished writers such as H. G. Wells , Hilaire Belloc , G. K. Chesterton and George Bernard Shaw , some of whom , Blythe notes , " weren 't socialists at all but simply used [the paper] as a platform for their personal literary anarchy . " Lansbury contributed regularly in support of his various causes , in particular the militant suffrage campaign , and early in 1914 assumed the paper 's editorship .

Before the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 , the Herald took a strong anti @-@ war line . Addressing a large demonstration in Trafalgar Square on 2 August 1914 , Lansbury blamed

the coming conflict on capitalism : " The workers of all countries have no quarrel . They are ... exploited in times of peace and sent out to be massacred in times of war " . Lansbury 's position was at odds with that of most of the Labour movement , which allied itself with the wartime coalition governments of Asquith and , from 1916 , Lloyd George . In the prevailing jingoistic mood , numerous readers looked to the Herald ? reduced by wartime economies to a weekly format ? to present a balanced news perspective , untainted by war fever and chauvinism . During the winter of 1914 ? 15 , Lansbury visited the Western Front trenches . He sent eye @-@ witness accounts to the paper , which supported calls for a negotiated peace with Germany in line with President Woodrow Wilson 's later " peace note " of January 1917 . The paper also gave sympathetic coverage to conscientious objectors , and to Irish and Indian nationalists .

Lansbury used the pages of the Daily Herald to welcome the February 1917 revolution in Russia as " a new star of hope ... arisen over Europe " . At an Albert Hall rally on 18 March 1918 he hailed the spirit and enthusiasm of " this Russian movement " , and urged his audience to " be ready to die , if necessary , for our faith " . When the war ended in November 1918 , Lloyd George called an immediate general election , correctly calculating that victory euphoria would keep his coalition in power . In this triumphalist climate , candidates such as Lansbury who had opposed the war found themselves unpopular , and he failed to retake his Bow and Bromley seat .

The Herald re @-@ emerged as a daily paper in March 1919 . Under Lansbury 's direction it maintained a strong and ultimately successful campaign against British intervention in the Russian Civil War . In February 1920 Lansbury travelled to Russia where he met Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders . He published an account : What I Saw in Russia , but the impact of the visit was overshadowed by accusations that the Herald was being financed from Bolshevik sources , a charge vehemently denied by Lansbury : " We have received no Bolshevik money , no Bolshevik paper , no Bolshevik bonds " . Unknown to Lansbury , the allegations had some truth which , when exposed , caused him and the paper considerable embarrassment . By 1922 the Herald 's financial problems had become such that it could no longer continue as a private venture financed by donations . Lansbury resigned the editorship and made the paper over to the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) , although he continued to write for it and remained its titular general manager until 3 January 1925 .

= = = " Poplarism " : the 1921 rates revolt = = =

Throughout his national campaigns , Lansbury remained a Poplar borough councillor and Poor Law guardian , and between 1910 and 1913 served a three @-@ year term as a London County Councillor . In 1919 he became the first Labour mayor of Poplar . Under the then @-@ existing financial system for local government , boroughs were individually responsible for poor relief within their boundaries . This discriminated heavily against poorer councils such as Poplar , where rates revenues were low and poverty and unemployment , always severe , were exacerbated in times of economic recession . Under this system , Postgate argues , " The wealthy West End boroughs were evading responsibility , as though the desolate and silent docks were the results of a failure by the Poplar Borough Council " . In addition to meeting the costs of its own obligations , the council was required to levy precepts to pay for services provided by bodies such as the London County Council and the Metropolitan Police . Lansbury had long argued that a degree of rates equalisation across London was necessary , to share costs more fairly .

At its meeting on 22 March 1921 the Poplar Council resolved not to make its precepts and to apply these revenues to the costs of local poor relief . This illegal action created a sensation , and led to legal proceedings against the council . On 29 July the thirty councillors involved marched in procession from Bow to the High Court , headed by a brass band . Informed by the judge that they must apply the precepts , the councillors would not budge ; early in September , Lansbury and 29 fellow @-@ councillors were imprisoned for contempt of court . Among those sentenced were his son Edgar and Edgar 's wife , Minnie .

The defiance of the Poplar councillors generated widespread interest and sympathy , and the publicity embarrassed the government . Several other Labour @-@ controlled councils (including

Stepney whose mayor was the future Labour leader Clement Attlee) threatened similar policies . After six weeks ' incarceration the councillors were released , and a government conference was convened to resolve the matter . This conference brought a significant personal victory for Lansbury : the passage of the Local Authorities (Financial Provisions) Act , which equalised the poor relief burden across all the London boroughs . As a result , the rates in Poplar fell by a third , and additional revenues of £ 400 @, @ 000 was gained by the borough . Lansbury was hailed as a hero ; in the 1922 general election he won the parliamentary seat of Bow and Bromley with a majority of nearly 7 @, @ 000 , and would hold it for the rest of his life . The term " Poplarism " , always identified closely with Lansbury , became part of the political lexicon , applied generally to campaigns where local government stood against central government on behalf of the poor and least privileged of society .

= = Parliament and national office = =

= = = Labour backbencher = = =

In May 1923 the Conservative prime minister , Andrew Bonar Law , resigned for health reasons . In December his successor , Stanley Baldwin , called another election in which the Conservatives lost their majority , with Labour in a strong second place . King George V advised Baldwin , as leader of the largest party , not to resign his office until defeated by a vote in the House of Commons . Defeat duly occurred on 21 January 1924 , when the Liberals decided to throw in their lot with Labour . The king then asked Labour 's leader , Ramsay MacDonald , to form a government . Lansbury caused royal offence by publicly implying that the king had colluded with other parties to keep Labour out , and by his references to the fate of Charles I. Despite his seniority , Lansbury was offered only a junior non @- @ cabinet post in the new government , which he declined . He believed that his exclusion from the cabinet followed pressure from the king . At the 1923 Labour Party conference , while declaring himself a republican , Lansbury opposed two motions calling for the abolition of the monarchy , deeming the issue a " distraction " . Social revolution , he said , would one day remove the monarchy .

MacDonald 's administration lasted less than a year before , in November 1924 , the Liberals withdrew their support ; Blythe comments that the first Labour government had been " neither exhilarating nor competent " . According to Shepherd , MacDonald 's chief priority was to show that Labour was " fit to govern " , and he had thus acted with conservative caution . The December general election returned the Conservatives to power ; Lansbury maintained that Labour 's cause " marches forward irrespective of electoral results " . After the defeat Lansbury was briefly touted as an alternative party leader to MacDonald , a proposition he rejected . In 1925 , free from the Daily Herald , he founded and edited Lansbury 's Labour Weekly , which became a mouthpiece for his personal creed of socialism , democracy and pacifism until it merged with the New Leader in 1927 . Before the General Strike of May 1926 , Lansbury used the Weekly to instruct the Trades Union Congress (TUC) on preparations for the coming struggle . However , when the strike came the TUC did not want his assistance ; among the reasons for their distrust was Lansbury 's continuing advocacy for the right of communist organisations to affiliate to the Labour Party ? he privately opined that British communists on their own " couldn 't run a wheelk @- @ stall " .

Lansbury continued his private campaigns in parliament , saying " I intend on every occasion to ... hinder the progress of business " . In April 1926 he and 12 other opposition MPs prevented a vote in the House of Commons by obstructing the voting lobbies ; they were temporarily suspended by the Speaker . During frequent clashes in the House with Neville Chamberlain , the Minister of Health responsible for Poor Law administration and reform , Lansbury referred to the " Ministry of Death " , and called the minister a " pinchbeck Napoleon " . However , within the Labour Party itself , Lansbury 's status and popularity led to his election as the party 's chairman (a largely titular office) in 1927 ? 28 . Lansbury also became president of the International League Against Imperialism , where among his fellow executive members were Jawaharlal Nehru , Mme. Sun Yat @- @ sen and

Albert Einstein . In 1928 , short of money following the failure of the family business , Lansbury published his autobiography , My Life , for which he received what he termed " a fairly generous cheque " from the publishers , Constable & Co .

= = = Cabinet minister , 1929 ? 31 = = =

In the 1929 general election Labour emerged as the largest party , with 287 seats ? but without an overall majority . Once again , MacDonald formed a government dependent on Liberal support . Lansbury joined the new cabinet as First Commissioner of Works , with responsibilities for historic buildings and monuments and for the royal parks . This position was widely regarded as a sinecure ; nevertheless , Lansbury proved an active minister who did much to improve public recreation facilities . His most notable achievement was the Lido on the Serpentine and the Long Water in Hyde Park , according to the historian A. J. P. Taylor " the only thing which keeps the memory of the second Labour government alive " . Lansbury 's duties brought him into frequent contact with the King , who as Ranger of the royal parks insisted on regular consultation . Contrary to expectations the two formed a cordial relationship .

The years of the MacDonald 's second government were dominated by the economic depression that followed the Wall Street Crash of October 1929 . Lansbury was appointed to a committee , chaired by J.H. Thomas and including the youthful Oswald Mosley , charged with finding a solution to unemployment . Mosley produced a memorandum which called for a large @-@ scale programme of public works ; this was rejected by the Chancellor of the Exchequer , Philip Snowden , on grounds of cost . At the end of July 1931 the May Committee , appointed in February to investigate government spending , prescribed heavy cuts , including a massive reduction in unemployment benefit .

During August , in an atmosphere of financial panic and a run on the pound , the government debated the report . MacDonald and Snowden were prepared to implement it , but Lansbury and nine other cabinet ministers rejected the cut in unemployment benefit . Thus divided , the government could not continue ; MacDonald , however , did not resign as prime minister . After discussions with the opposition leaders and the king he formed a national all @-@ party coalition , with a " doctor 's mandate " to tackle the economic crisis . The great majority of Labour MPs , including Lansbury , were opposed to this action ; MacDonald and the few who followed him were expelled from the party , and Arthur Henderson became leader . MacDonald 's move was broadly welcomed in the country , however , and in the general election held in October 1931 the national government was returned with an enormous majority . Labour was reduced to 46 members ; Lansbury was the only senior member of the Labour leadership to retain his seat .

= = Party leader = =

Although defeated in the election , Henderson remained the party leader while Lansbury headed the Labour group in parliament ? the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) . In October 1932 Henderson resigned and Lansbury succeeded him . In most historians ' reckonings , Lansbury led his small parliamentary force with skill and flair . He was also , says Shepherd , an inspiration to the dispirited Labour rank and file . As leader he began the process of reforming the party 's organisation and machinery , efforts which resulted in considerable by @-@ election and municipal election successes ? including control of the LCC under Herbert Morrison in 1934 . According to Blythe , Lansbury " represented political hope and decency to the three million unemployed . " During this period Lansbury published his political credo , My England (1934) , which envisioned a future socialist state achieved by a mixture of revolutionary and evolutionary methods .

The small Labour group in parliament had little influence over economic policy ; Lansbury 's term as leader was dominated by foreign affairs and disarmament , and by policy disagreements within the Labour movement . The official party position was based on collective security through the League of Nations and on multilateral disarmament . Lansbury , supported by many in the PLP , adopted a position of Christian pacifism , unilateral disarmament and the dismantling of the British Empire .

Under his influence the party 's 1933 conference passed resolutions calling for the " total disarmament of all nations " , and pledged to take no part in war . Pacifism became temporarily popular in the country ; on 9 February 1933 the Oxford Union voted by 275 to 153 that it would " in no circumstances fight for its King and Country " , and the Fulham East by @-@ election in October 1933 was easily won by a Labour candidate committed to full disarmament . Lansbury sent a message to the constituency in his position as Labour Leader : " I would close every recruiting station , disband the Army and disarm the Air Force . I would abolish the whole dreadful equipment of war and say to the world : ? Do your worst ? . " October 1934 saw the emergence of the Peace Pledge Union ; the 1934 ? 35 Peace Ballot , an unofficial public referendum , produced massive majorities against war . Meanwhile , Adolf Hitler had come to power in Germany , and had withdrawn from the international Conference on Disarmament in Geneva . Blythe observes that Britain 's noisy flirtations with pacifism " drowned out the sounds from German dockyards " , as German rearmament began .

As fascism and militarism advanced in Europe , Lansbury 's pacifist stance drew criticism from the trades union elements of his party ? who controlled the majority of party conference votes . Walter Citrine , the TUC general secretary , commented that Lansbury " thinks the country should be without defence of any kind ... it certainly isn 't our policy . " The party 's 1935 annual conference took place in Brighton during October , under the shadow of Italy 's impending invasion of Abyssinia . The national executive had tabled a resolution calling for sanctions against Italy , which Lansbury opposed as a form of economic warfare . His speech ? a passionate exposition of the principles of Christian pacifism ? was well received by the delegates , but immediately afterwards his position was destroyed by Ernest Bevin , the Transport and General Workers ' Union leader . Bevin attacked Lansbury for putting his private beliefs before a policy , agreed by all the party 's main institutions , to oppose fascist aggression , and accused him of " hawking your conscience round from body to body asking to be told what to do with it " . Union support ensured that the sanctions resolution was carried by a huge majority ; Lansbury , realising that a Christian pacifist could no longer lead the party , resigned a few days later .

= = Final years = =

Lansbury was 76 years old when he resigned the Labour leadership ; he did not , however , retire from public life . In the general election of November 1935 he kept his seat at Bow and Bromley ; Labour , now led by Attlee , improved its parliamentary representation to 154 . Lansbury devoted himself entirely to the cause of world peace , a quest that took him , in 1936 , to the United States . He addressed large crowds in 27 cities before meeting President Roosevelt in Washington to present his proposals for a world peace conference . In 1937 he toured Europe , visiting leaders in Belgium , France and Scandinavia , and in April secured a private meeting with Hitler . No official report of the discussion was issued , but Lansbury 's personal memorandum indicates that Hitler expressed willingness to join in a world conference if Roosevelt would convene it . Later that year Lansbury met Mussolini in Rome ; he described the Italian leader as " a mixture of Lloyd George , Stanley Baldwin and Winston Churchill " . Lansbury wrote several accounts of his peace journeys , notably *My Quest for Peace* (1938) . His mild and optimistic impressions of the European dictators were widely criticised as naïve and out of touch ; some British pacifists were dismayed at Lansbury 's meeting with Hitler , while the *Daily Worker* accused him of diverting attention from the aggressive realities of fascist policies . Lansbury continued to meet European leaders through 1938 and 1939 , and was nominated , unsuccessfully , for the 1940 Nobel Peace Prize .

At home , Lansbury served a second term as Mayor of Poplar , in 1936 ? 37 . He argued against direct confrontation with Mosley 's Blackshirts during the October 1936 demonstrations known as the Battle of Cable Street . In October 1937 he became president of the Peace Pledge Union , and a year later he welcomed the Munich Agreement as a step towards peace . During this period he worked on behalf of refugees from Nazi Germany , and was chairman of the Polish Refugee Fund which provided relief to displaced Jewish children . On 3 September 1939 , after Neville Chamberlain 's announcement of war with Germany , Lansbury addressed the House of Commons .

Observing that the cause to which he had dedicated his life was going down in ruins , he added : " I hope that out of this terrible calamity will arise a spirit that will compel people to give up the reliance on force . "

Early in 1940 Lansbury 's health began to fail ; although unaware , he was suffering from stomach cancer . In an article published in the socialist magazine Tribune , published on 25 April 1940 , he made a final statement of his Christian pacifism : " I hold fast to the truth that this world is big enough for all , that we are all brethren , children of one Father " . Lansbury died on 7 May 1940 , at the Manor House Hospital in Golders Green . His funeral in St Mary 's Church , Bow , was followed by cremation at Ilford Crematorium , before a memorial service in Westminster Abbey . His ashes were scattered at sea , in accordance with the wish expressed in his will : " I desire this because although I love England very dearly ... I am a convinced internationalist " .

= = Tributes and legacy = =

Most historical assessments of Lansbury have tended to stress his character and principles rather than his effectiveness as a party political leader . Although Taylor labels him " the most lovable figure in modern politics " , and the outstanding figure of the English revolutionary left in the 20th century , Kenneth O. Morgan , in his biography of a later Labour leader , Michael Foot , regards Lansbury as " an agitator of protest , not a politician of power " . Journalists commonly accused Lansbury of sentimentality , and party intellectuals accused him of lacking mental capacity . Nevertheless , his speeches in the House of Commons were often flavoured with historical and literary allusions , and he left behind a considerable body of writing on socialist ideas ; Morgan refers to him as a " prophet " . Foot , who as a young man met and was influenced by Lansbury , was particularly impressed by the older man 's achievements in establishing the Daily Herald , given his complete lack of journalistic training . Nevertheless , Foot felt that Lansbury 's pacifism was unrealistic , and believed that Bevin 's demolition at the 1935 conference was justified .

There is much agreement among historians and analysts that Lansbury was never self @-@ serving and , guided by his Christian socialist principles , was consistent in his efforts on behalf of the poorest in society . Shepherd believes that " there could have been no better leader for the Labour Party at the collapse of its political fortunes in 1931 than Lansbury , a universally popular choice and a source of inspiration among Labour ranks " . In the House of Commons on 8 May 1940 , the day following Lansbury 's death , Chamberlain said of him : " There were not many hon . Members who felt convinced of the practicability of the methods which he advocated for the preservation of peace , but there was no one who did not realise his intense conviction , which arose out of his deep humanitarianism " . Attlee also paid tribute to his former leader : " He hated cruelty , injustice and wrongs , and felt deeply for all who suffered ... [H] e was ever the champion of the weak , and ... to the end of his life he strove for that in which he believed " .

After the Second World War , a stained glass window designed by the Belgian artist Eugene Yoors was placed in the Kingsley Hall community centre in Bow , as a memorial to Lansbury . His memory is further sustained by streets and housing developments named after him , most notably the Lansbury Estate in Poplar , completed in 1951 A further enduring memorial , Attlee suggests , is the extent to which the then @-@ revolutionary social policies that Lansbury began advocating before the turn of the 20th century had become accepted mainstream doctrine little more than a decade after his death .

= = Personal and family life = =

For most of their married life , George and Bessie Lansbury lived in Bow , originally in St Stephen 's Road and , from 1916 , at 39 Bow Road , a house which , Shepherd records , became " a political haven " for those requiring assistance of any kind . Bessie died in 1933 , after 53 years of a marriage that had produced 12 children between 1881 and 1905 . Of the 10 who survived to adulthood , Edgar followed his father into local political activism as a Poplar councillor in 1912 , serving as the borough 's mayor in 1924 ? 25 . He was for a time a member of the Communist Party

of Great Britain (CPGB) . After the death of his first wife Minnie in 1922 , Edgar married Moyna Macgill , an actress from Belfast ; their daughter Angela Lansbury , born in 1925 , became a famous stage and screen actress . George Lansbury 's youngest daughter Violet (1900 ? 71) was an active CPGB member in the 1920s , who lived and worked in Moscow for many years . She married Clemens Palme Dutt , the brother of the prominent Marxist intellectual Rajani Palme Dutt .

Another daughter , Dorothy (1890 ? 1973) , was a women 's rights activist and later a campaigner for contraceptive and abortion rights . She married Ernest Thurtle , the Labour MP for Shoreditch , and was herself a member of Shoreditch council , serving as mayor in 1936 . She and her husband founded the Workers ' Birth Control Group in 1924 . Her younger sister Daisy (1892 ? 1971) served as George Lansbury 's secretary for 20 years . In 1913 she helped Sylvia Pankhurst to evade police capture by disguising herself as Pankhurst . She was married to Raymond Postgate , the left @-@ wing writer and historian , who was Lansbury 's first biographer and founder of The Good Food Guide . Their son , Oliver Postgate , was a successful writer , animator and producer for children 's television .

The Lansbury home in Bow Road was destroyed by bombing during the London Blitz of 1940 ? 41 .

= = Books by Lansbury = =

Your Part in Poverty . London : Allen and Unwin . 1918 . OCLC 251051169 .

These Things Shall Be . London : Swarthorne Press . 1920 . OCLC 1109879 .

What I Saw in Russia . London : L. Parsons . 1920 . OCLC 457509320 .

My Life . London : Constable & Co . 1928 . OCLC 2150486 .

My England . London : Selwyn & Blount . 1934 . OCLC 2175404 .

Looking Backwards and Forwards . London and Glasgow : Blackie and Son . 1935 . OCLC 9072833 .

Why Pacifists Should Be Socialists . London : FACT . 1937 . OCLC 826854352 .

My Quest for Peace . London : M. Joseph . 1938 . OCLC 4051871 .

This Way to Peace . London : Rich and Cowan . 1940 . OCLC 4024194 .