

The Titanic and The Herald

George Lansbury

George Lansbury's book The Miracle of Fleet Street: The Story of the Daily Herald has just reappeared after being out of print for many years (price £15 from www.spokesmanbooks.com). This short excerpt records how the Herald broke the news about what really happened when the Titanic went down.

The Daily Herald's report of the Leeds Convention of June 1917, entitled British Labour and the Russian Revolution, is also available from Spokesman, price £3.95.

As the first issue of the *Daily Herald* went to press on April 15, 1912, the *Titanic* was sinking. The ship had been pronounced unsinkable. On this first voyage it was trying to make a speed record with the Chairman of the White Star Line, Bruce Ismay, on board. At first faked messages of 'all's well' were sent out, but it was soon realized that 1,300 persons were drowned. As soon as it realized this, the *Daily Herald* struck a distinctive note. W. R. Titterton was sent to Southampton to meet the rescued seamen and passengers. On April 18 the following appeared:

'Mr Bruce Ismay, Chairman of the White Star Line, has been saved ... Why is it that so few of the steerage passengers have been saved?'

It was not till the 26th that the full story was known, and then, under the 'streamer': 'Women and Children Last!' the *Daily Herald* published a biting analysis. It pointed out the 121 steerage women and children were saved, 134 were drowned; 246 first and second class women and children were saved, and only twenty drowned; fifty-eight of the 173 first-class men passengers were saved. More than half the steerage children were drowned. The following biting words were printed:

'Where were those fifty-three steerage children, Mr Ismay, when you saved yourself?' The White Star Line's profits were pilloried as follows: 'They have paid 30 per cent to their shareholders and they have sacrificed 51 per cent of the steerage children. They have gone to sea criminally under-equipped with means of life-saving; they have neglected boat drill; they have filled their boat with cooks and valets, with pleasure gardens and luxurious lounges; they have done all this to get big profits and please the first-class passengers.'

And when the catastrophe came they hastened to get their first-class passengers and their Chairman safely away. Fifty-three children remained to die. They were steerage passengers! One hundred and thirty-four women and children were slain. They were steerage passengers!

Anticipating what was to come, the *Daily Herald* denounced firstly the Board of Trade for its criminal negligence, and the appointment of Lord Mersey (previously named Bigham) to head the British Inquiry, which was delayed and dragged out interminably. It recalled Lord Mersey's behaviour in the Penruddock case:

'That was a case of infamous cruelty to a child. The cruelty was undoubted, the infamy glaring. The sentence was nominal. The defendant was a woman of good station. *A first-class passenger...* Here is a case of steerage children dead and a rich company on its defence. What is likely to be Lord Mersey's judgment here?'

Jack Jones

'Ten commandments were taught in the socialist Sunday schools, but not those one heard in church. I remember particularly:

Honour good men and women, be courteous to all, bow down to none.

Do not hate or speak evil of anyone; do not be revengeful, but stand up for your rights and resist oppression.

Do not be cowardly. Be a friend to the weak and love justice.

Remember that the good things of the earth are produced by labour. Whoever enjoys them without working for them is stealing the bread of the workers.

Observe and think in order to discover the truth. Do not believe what is contrary to reason, and never deceive yourself or others.

Do not think that they who love their own country must hate and despise other nations, or wish for war, which is a remnant of barbarism.

Look forward to the day when all men and women will be free citizens of one community and live together as equals in peace and righteousness.'

From *Union Man*, Jack Jones' Autobiography

Jack Jones told us he had respected those ideas throughout his life and tried to be guided by them.

Not only millions of trade union members, but millions of pensioners and the poor of the whole country have every reason to be grateful to Jack Jones, who fought throughout his long life to live up to those principles.