In 1898, the Lord Mayor of Liverpool, John Houlding (1833–1902), visited the Liverpool Muslim Institute (LMI), founded by Abdullah Quilliam (1856–1932), for the Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations. About a hundred Muslims attended the event, where the halls were decked with green lanterns and the gathered crowd was treated to the thirty boys of the Osmani Regiment performing drills.1

Houlding remarked that it was his civic duty to visit the mosque, as he had done with churches of all denominations and the city’s synagogue. The LMI’s weekly, The Crescent, declared this a “triumph for Islam”, noting that the British Muslims had received “formal civil recognition by the Chief Magistrate of the second city in the British Empire”. Yet, this was no fortuitous event. Rather, it was the culmination of a long friendship between Quilliam and Houlding that dated back to the 1870s. Both men shared a commitment to popular Toryism and what might be called “business unionism”, designed primarily to enable trade union members to get the best attainable wage-work bargain.2

In political terms, Liverpool was a latercomer to the Labour Party’s twenty-first century rise in urban Britain, electing its first Labour MP in 1923, and gaining control of the council much later in 1955. Before this, the city’s politics was dominated by a “Tory Democracy” that received Protestant ascendancy. The union’s narrow confessional base was a double-edged sword, providing social cohesion but having to avoid politics and religion to survive and grow.3

Locally, the Tories arranged big summer socials in the city’s parks that consisted of entertainment and political speeches. Both Quilliam and Houlding helped to organise these events, which attracted tens of thousands of people, and personally supported Forwood to succeed Lord Sandon (1831–1900) as MP for Liverpool. Unsurprisingly, given his Temperance roots, Quilliam first came to Tory activism in 1889 through a rather marginal body, the Liverpool Conservative Temperance Association. In 1882, he was proposed for the Pitt-Street Ward in the municipal elections for the Conservatives but came last of three candidates. During his short four-year stint as a Tory activist, Quilliam served as a member of the council and Kirkdale Ward that year (before going on to become Lord Mayor of Liverpool in 1897).4 But Quilliam and Houlding would reconnect in 1890 to work together again – as trade unionist leader on the city council against his Independent Labour Party opponent in the municipal elections.

It is notable too that the carters union had an overwhelmingly (perhaps exclusively) Protestant workforce at its foundation, reflecting bias in employment, given that many of the transport firms were owned and run by the city’s Protestant ascendency. The union’s narrow confessional base was a double-edged sword, providing social cohesion but leaving it open to accusations of exclusivism. Its 1892 rule book forbade any member from expressing political or religious opinions at meetings: disobedience merited a fine of sixpence.5

As a lawyer, Quilliam had a good reputation and was dubbed “The Attorney-General of the City of Liverpool” by the Liverpool Courier, acting as “solicitor to many trade unions, such as the journeymen bakers, upholsterers, brickmakers, and turners”. By the mid-1890s, he was working between 35 and 40 advocacy cases per week, often in defence of working men and the poor. A decade later, the Liverpool Freeman reported that Quilliam had built up “the biggest advocacy practice in the North of England” and frequently had “twelve or fourteen cases a day spread over the Stipendiary’s Court, the County Court, the Coroner’s Court, the County Magistrate’s Court, and some of the suburban courts.”6 The legal work that Quilliam took up on behalf of the MQRCU and its members included unfair dismissal, personal injury claims, determination of inquests, and arbitration with the Cart-owners’ Association at the Board of Conciliation.7
In his capacity as Sheikh-ul-Islam of the British Isles, Quilliam arranged for MQRCU President Houlding and a party of Liverpool gentlemen to be received at the Ottoman court by Turkish officials. Houlding was even awarded the Order of the Imtiaz on the instructions of the sultan-caliph, court by Turkish officials. Houlding was even awarded the "party of Liverpool gentlemen" to be received at the Ottoman

Quilliam arranged for MQRCU President Houlding and a ud-deen F. Peacock, who endorsed Quilliam's candidacy, was interesting to note that the secretary of the union, Fushi-

By the Tramway Employees' Union, only to come last. It is

Instead they advocated support for conciliation and the carrying on with Houlding's policy of cordial relations between employer and employee. In line with "Tory Democracy" and "business unionism", Quilliam endorsed the ongoing use of the carters' board of conciliation and "depreciated the use of a strike, and remarked on the detrimental effect which the engineers' strike must have on the country generally."

In November 1900, he presided over a meeting of the railway carters who wanted shorter hours, overtime pay and ending the exploitation of juvenile carters. Quilliam "strongly urged upon the men the importance of being moderate in their demands, temperate in their language and conduct, and enduring in the struggle, and to act unitedly, giving loyal support on all occasions to their leaders." Despite considerable disquiet at the unsatisfactory responses from the railways companies, the meeting ended with a boilerplate resolution that non-unionised railway carters in the district should join the union."

With its cautious approach and narrow occupational and geographical remit, membership remained flat under Houlding, while under Quilliam it increased modestly by about a quarter, from 3055 in 1897 to 4310 in 1908. However, the roll-call of notices In The Crescent and the Liverpool Mercury during this period reveal the union was well-run, in good financial health and able to deal with the legal claims, and the injuries, sickness and funeral expenses of its members. Its reputation was such that the founders of the Fabian Society called the MQRCU "an effective trade society."

During his period as president, Quilliam attempted to increase his influence in the local union movement and city politics, a strategy that sometimes involved members of the LMI, which was predominantly working class and had trade union members. On the four occasions when the LMI debated trade unionism, presentations given by Reehid Hodgkinson and Nur-Uddin Stephen were repeatedly critical of radical socialism, strikes and the move towards union combination. Instead they advocated support for conciliation and the mutuality of capital and labour whilst displaying a romantic longing for true mutuality, self-reliance, the old guilds and the dignity of labour as propounded by John Ruskin."

In 1900, Quilliam ran a ten-day impromptu campaign as an independent in the city's municipal elections, backed by the Tramway Employees' Union, only to come last. It is interesting to note that the secretary of the union, Fushi-

ud-deen F. Peacock, who endorsed Quilliam's candidacy, was also an LMI member. Another LMI man, Halim Wahby George, was elected as an executive committee member of the Amalgamated Union of Railway Servants in 1901, after having arbitrated on the union's behalf in its dispute with the Taff Vale Railway Company. Quilliam later chaired a meeting of local trade unionists to recognise George's services to the trade union and labour movement.

Quilliam presided over a MQRCU board of trustees with strong Tory representation. It included the local MP for West Derby Liverpool, Watson Rutherford (1853–1927), a committed advocate of "Tory Democracy", Simon jade, Councillor for Netherfield, and ex-Councillor J. R. Ketby-Fletcher, a cousin of Quilliam's wife. Rutherford, whom the carters union had backed in the 1903 West Derby by-election over the Liberal candidate, once lectured the Fabians on the virtues of Tory Democracy, castingigated socialism while promoting policies such as national insurance, abolition of casual labour, abolition of strikes in favour of compulsory arbitration, town planning and the clearance of slums, nationalisation of the railways and many other interventionist measures. In 1906, Ketby-Fletcher stood as a Conservative parliamentary candidate with the informal backing of the MQRCU and the formal backing of the Independent Labour Party for supporting socialist policies like nationalisation of the railways, old age pensions and the taxation of land values."

Quilliam stood down as MQRCU President in March 1908 after thirteen years and was "unanimously elected" Honorary President in appreciation for his "long and valued association". Within two months, The Crescent announced Quilliam was to depart for Istanbul with his oldest son, Robert Ahmed Quilliam (1879–1954), pre-empting the legal scandal of falsifying evidence in a divorce case that would lead to his debarring as a solicitor the following year. His second son, William Henry Billal Quilliam (1885–1965), appointed to deputise as imam in his father's absence, promptly sold off the LMI in Brougham Terrace, leaving its small Muslim community with neither leader nor mosque. He did keep up his father's legal practice, Quilliam & Son, until 1922 but fell into a life of crime and was twice convicted of fraud before being struck off the rolls in 1938. Yet Billal did honour his father's trade unionism and association with the carters union, but took it in a "revolutionary socialist" direction."

During the period of labour unrest before the First World War, there was a nationwide surge in union membership from 2.5m in 1909 to 4m in 1914. One of the most important and extended strikes during this period was the Liverpool General Transport Strike of 1911, the most significant that the city had yet experienced, based on longstanding grievances around low pay, draconian work discipline, work insecurity and anti-union employers. It started with the seamen's strike in June and by mid-August had become a general strike involving 66,000 workers, including the dockers, the carters and many other allied groups, lasting until 25 August. The grievances were not resolved until December when the corporation tramwaymen were reinstated.
the incendiary preacher, George Wise. 16

years of highly provocative anti-Catholic campaigns led by the city had seen Liverpool. This unprecedented solidarity was even more remarkable given that two years earlier the city was near to revolution as anything I had seen in England. ...

For many weeks – nearly three months – nothing moved in as near to revolution as anything I had seen in England. ... 

Dockers, coming “from Orange Garston, Everton and Toxteth ... 

As the strike gained momentum through August, the strike committee organised a mass demonstration for a general strike on Sunday, 13 August. The marchers converged on the city centre outside St George’s Hall, with Billal Quilliam marching next to Mann and Ditchfield underneath the MQRCU banner.17

Quilliam spoke after Mann to the assembled crowd, and said it was a considered decision for 80,000 men to down their tools, before fatefully remarking that calm discipline would be necessary in the face of any police or military provocation. As the other MQRCU officials were speaking, the police, unprompted, attacked the crowd. It was “a savage and monstrous attack ... as left its severe effect upon the heads of hundreds of people. Covered in blood, the poor wretches were falling down stunned all over the street, many lying on the ground either helpless or unconscious.” Billal left the platform and entered the thick of the action in Lime Street, trying to get the crowd to remain calm and keep out of range of the police attacks. But after several charges on those attempting to help the wounded, discipline broke down, and hundreds were injured by police brutality.18

Yet despite police violence, the transport strike was successful in meeting the demands of the Strike Committee over the coming months. The MQRCU was transformed. Its membership rose by 2000 that year and the union extended its membership to all classes of road haulers, and some Irish Catholic workers also joined. The carters union, like many other so-called “unskilled” trades in the period, became a mass organisation. In the coming months, Billal played a leading advocacy role in the monthly The Transport Worker set up by Mann, articulating the union’s demands, advocating expansion, union discipline in refusing to work with non-unionised carters, offering advice on the legality of peaceful picketing, and notably abandoning the conciliation board in favour of direct negotiations with the owners. All in all, it was a radical departure from the cautious “business unionism” of his father.19

The new unionism did not transform the city’s politics but it did lay down some long-term seeds of change. In the weeks after “Bloody Sunday”, some sectarian scores were violently settled, and while the Labour Party won seven council seats that autumn, it did not gain control of the council for another forty years. Conservative machine-politics continued to dominate Liverpool, and the authorities charged Mann with sedition in March 1912 for a pamphlet he did not actually write called, Don’t Shoot, urging soldiers not to shoot strikers. Billal – by then “well-known and appreciated in socialist circles” – acted as his legal counsel.

Billal’s role in the strike has been virtually forgotten except for a television play, Such Impossibilities (1971), written – but never made – by the distinguished dramatist Trevor Griffiths (b.1935), who gave him a lead supporting role to Mann’s protagonist. The BBC claimed it was too expensive to produce, although Griffiths suspected it was rejected for being “too brutal and too overtly political”. Griffiths’ final plea for future production of the play holds a contemporary resonance for the recovery of British Muslim histories, as it reflects our contested present-day predicament when Muslim radicalism has become taboo:

It can be tested against the severest of its intentions: to restore, however tinily, an important but suppressed area of our collective history; to enlarge our “usable past” and connect it with a lived present; and to celebrate a victory.20

Philip Gibb, an eyewitness journalist, reflected that it “was as near to revolution as anything I had seen in England ... For many weeks – nearly three months – nothing moved in Liverpool. This unprecedented solidarity was even more remarkable given that two years earlier the city had seen its worst-ever Catholic-Protestant sectarian violence, after years of highly provocative anti-Catholic campaigns led by the incendiary preacher, George Wise.”

Having recently joined the National Transport Workers Federation, the MQRCU played a pivotal role in this strike by coming out in solidarity with the seafarers, dockers and railwaymen. Three officials of the union – Thomas Ditchfield, its long standing Secretary, William Jones, and Billal Quilliam, its Vice President and Solicitor – were members of the Liverpool Strike Committee, which was led by Tom Mann (1856–1941), the famous socialist and trade-union organiser, who had come up from London to oversee the strike. After decades of experience in strike organisation, Mann had concluded that concerted industrial action was necessary to achieve results, even when political and judicial conditions were favourable – he was the chief figure in the radical new trade unionism in Britain.

To forestall any sectarian tensions between the mostly Catholic Irish dockers and the largely Protestant carters, the Strike Committee forbade any political or religious advocacy. As the strike gained momentum through August, the committee organised a mass demonstration for a general strike on Sunday, 13 August. The carters marched with the dockers, coming “from Orange Garston, Everton and Toxteth ...
Appendix 1

The Respectful Memorial
Sheikh Handwritten
The respectful memorial of William Henry Abdul Quilliam Effendi, Sheikh of the True Believers in the British Isles and Western Europe otherwise Quilliam Ali as wife showeth.

Your memorialist William Henry Abdul Quilliam is the only son of Robert Quilliam and Mary Habeeba Quilliam, who were born on the 13th of Shaban 1300 and died on the 21st day of September 1883 answering to the Muslim calendar of the 21st day of September 1883.

On the 21st day of September 1883 your said memorialists there was married your said memorialists in the presence of Walid Feridon, Preston [signature]; Noshirwan Abdul Quilliam Effendi, Liverpool, England [signature]; and was present on the said 21st day of September 1883 on the occasion of the said marriage your said memorialists were married with the consent and the wish of the witnesses to such marriage. All other witnesses to such marriage are now deceased.

From and after such marriage until now your said memorialists have lived happily together as husband and wife. Your memorialist Mariam Lyon or Quilliam is the only daughter of sir Thomas Lyon and surviving child of Thomas Lyon formerly of Liverpool, England now deceased and was born on the 10th day of January 1888.

There have been born as issue of the said marriage six children and as more

Mariam Quilliam [signature]

THE ISLAMIC REVIEW SPECIAL EDITION

Appendix 2

Archive Contents

Governance Records – Minutes books which record key decisions made by trustees, and the Articles of Association of the East London Mosque Trust

Financial Records – Accounts of the Mosque Fund and further funding appeals. A fundraising receipt going back 80 years is testimony to the efforts to establish a mosque

Biographical information – Correspondence with renowned personalities, including five hundredth-anniversary statements of the Qur’an, including Muhammad Nafis Bullok, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Professor Mohamed Nafis Bullok, Professor Ali and Professor Arberry

Campaigns – Jamaat Muslimi’s campaign in the late 1930s for the purchase of premises on Commercial Road, extensive lobbying in the late 1930s for the relocation to Fiddlegate Street, and community realizations in 1960s to secure land for the London Mosque Centre

Records of Penitentials – The Mosque’s files include details of early interfaith ventures (e.g. invitations to the 1909 and synagogues in the 1980s and 1990s and other civil society partnerships

Building & Architectural records – Building plans and renovation records, showing different phases and design styles

Dealing with Authorities – Letters from the YSIC, to local and central government, including WWII bomb damage claims, arranging soldiers’ visits and food rationing issues

Rationing issues.

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Dealing with Authorities – Letters from the YSIC, to local and central government, including WWII bomb damage claims, arranging soldiers’ visits and food rationing issues
Peter Dorey. For most of the twentieth century, the Conservative Party engaged in an ongoing struggle to curb the power of the trade unions, culminating in the radical legislation of the Thatcher governments. Yet, as this book shows, for a brief period between the end of the Second World War and the election of Harold Wilson's Labour government in 1964, the Conservative Party adopted a remarkably constructive and conciliatory approach to the trade unions, dubbed 'voluntarism'. During this time the party leadership made strenuous efforts to avoid, as far as was politically possibl...