

But this was not all. In the middle of February they sent a deputation to Sir Alfred Mond, the Minister of Health, asking for a very exhaustive inquiry into the administration of the Poplar Board. This Sir Alfred eagerly promised they should have, "within the next week or so."

Accordingly, on March 13th, a month before the Guardians' Elections were due, Mr. H. I. Cooper, Clerk to the Bolton Board of Guardians, was sent down to Poplar. He himself says, in his report, that one of the first things he did was to seek "two interviews with the Secretary of the Municipal Alliance with the object of ascertaining whether the Alliance had any evidence to put before me if I commenced a Public Inquiry." He sought no interview with the Board, nor with any member of the Board. The men and women whose work he had been sent to overhaul were asked no questions, given no opportunity to explain what had been done, or to refute charges made against them. Mr. Cooper ignored the Board of Guardians, but sought inspiration from their political opponents.

Rumours were spread through the Borough during the election campaign that startling revelations would be made as a result of the Inquiry, and every possible use was made of it to influence the votes of the electors against the Labour Party.

The day after the poll, when it was known that the Alliance, far from gaining the sweeping victory which they had anticipated would follow the assistance given by Whitehall, had suffered the greatest defeat in its history, when 21 Labour members had been returned for 24 seats, Mr. Cooper wrote to the Alliance asking if they still desired the Inquiry to be in public, and a chastened, despondent secretary replied, "We are of opinion that no real good would result from a Public Inquiry."

Political propaganda . . . that first and last . . . was the purpose of the Cooper Inquiry. Whatever may have been its result elsewhere, in Poplar itself, where the work of the Guardians was known, it served only to strengthen the determination of the overwhelming majority of the people of Poplar to remain loyal to the Labour Guardians who had striven to help them in their need.

Much the same methods were adopted later in the year at the November Elections for the Borough Council. The Cooper Report was used in an attempt to discredit Labour administration on the Council. But the good work which had been done in the three previous years was well known to the people, and the opposition could make little headway. The election resulted in the return of 36 Labour Members for 42 seats, and as the whole of the Aldermanic Bench was now Labour, the Party was still in the same overwhelming strength and able to continue its work unhindered for another three years.