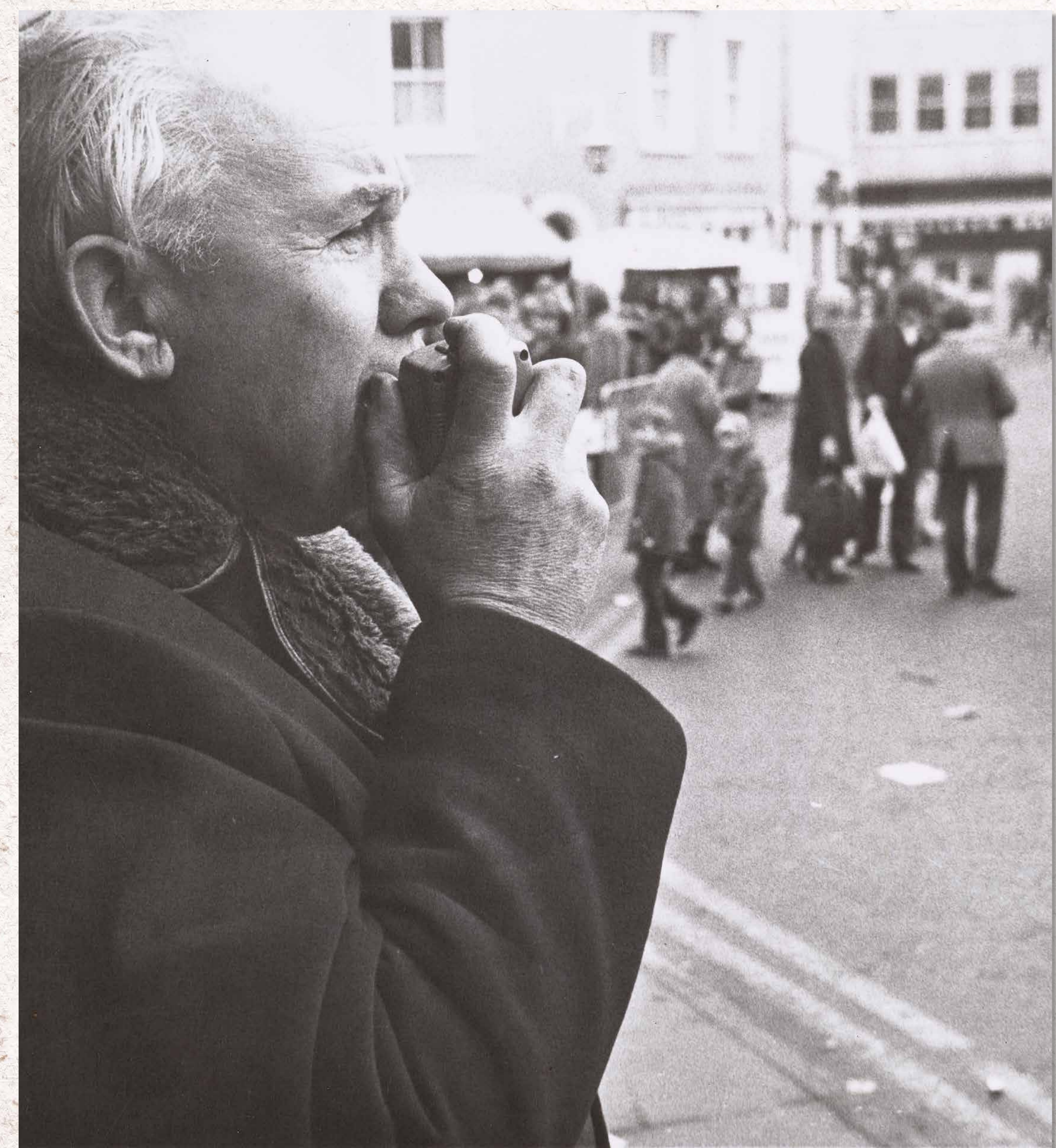


Fred Westacott, Communist candidate

In his autobiography, *Shaking the Chains* (Chesterfield, 2002), Fred Westacott (1916-2001) described election campaigning as “among the most satisfying and stimulating experiences as a political activist”.



Left: Fred Westacott speaking at a rally outside Mansfield Town Hall, February 1974
Westacott Collection, FWC 3/1/2/6/2



*A Selection
of Elections*
Votes, Suffrage and Reform

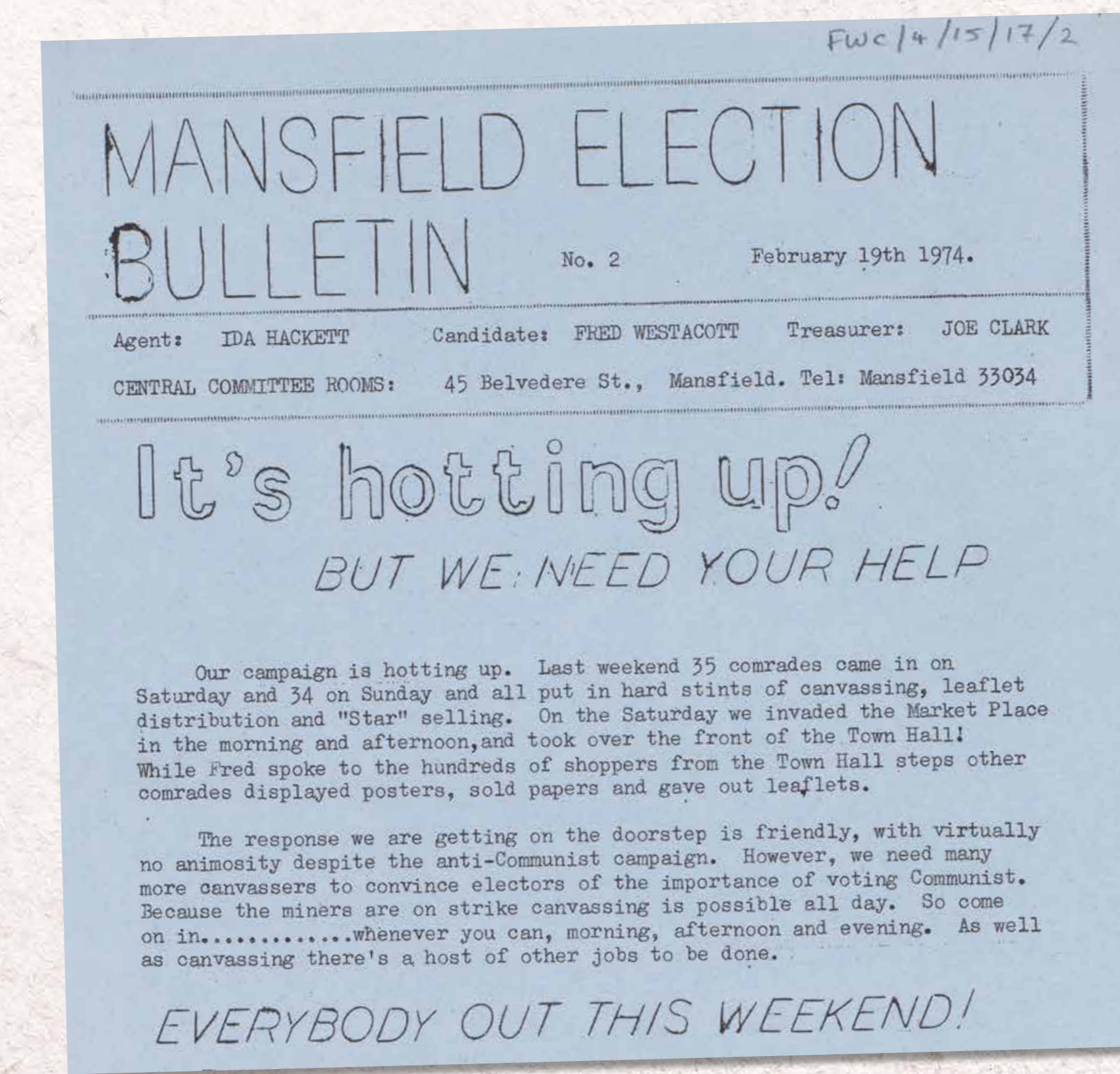


Newspaper photograph of election candidates in Mansfield, from the *Mansfield Chronicle and Advertiser*, March 1966. Westacott Collection, FWC 4/15/19/1. The Conservative Party candidate was Ken Clarke, at the time a 26-year old barrister, but now well-known as MP for Rushcliffe and former member of Cabinet under three Prime Ministers

Westacott was born in the South Wales mining town of Tredegar. He joined the Communist Party in 1936, and first stood for election for the Tredegar Urban District Council in April 1946. After moving to the East Midlands, he stood as a general election candidate for North West Leicester in 1950, and four times for Mansfield between 1966 and 1974. In 1971 he was made Secretary of the Communist Party’s East Midlands District.

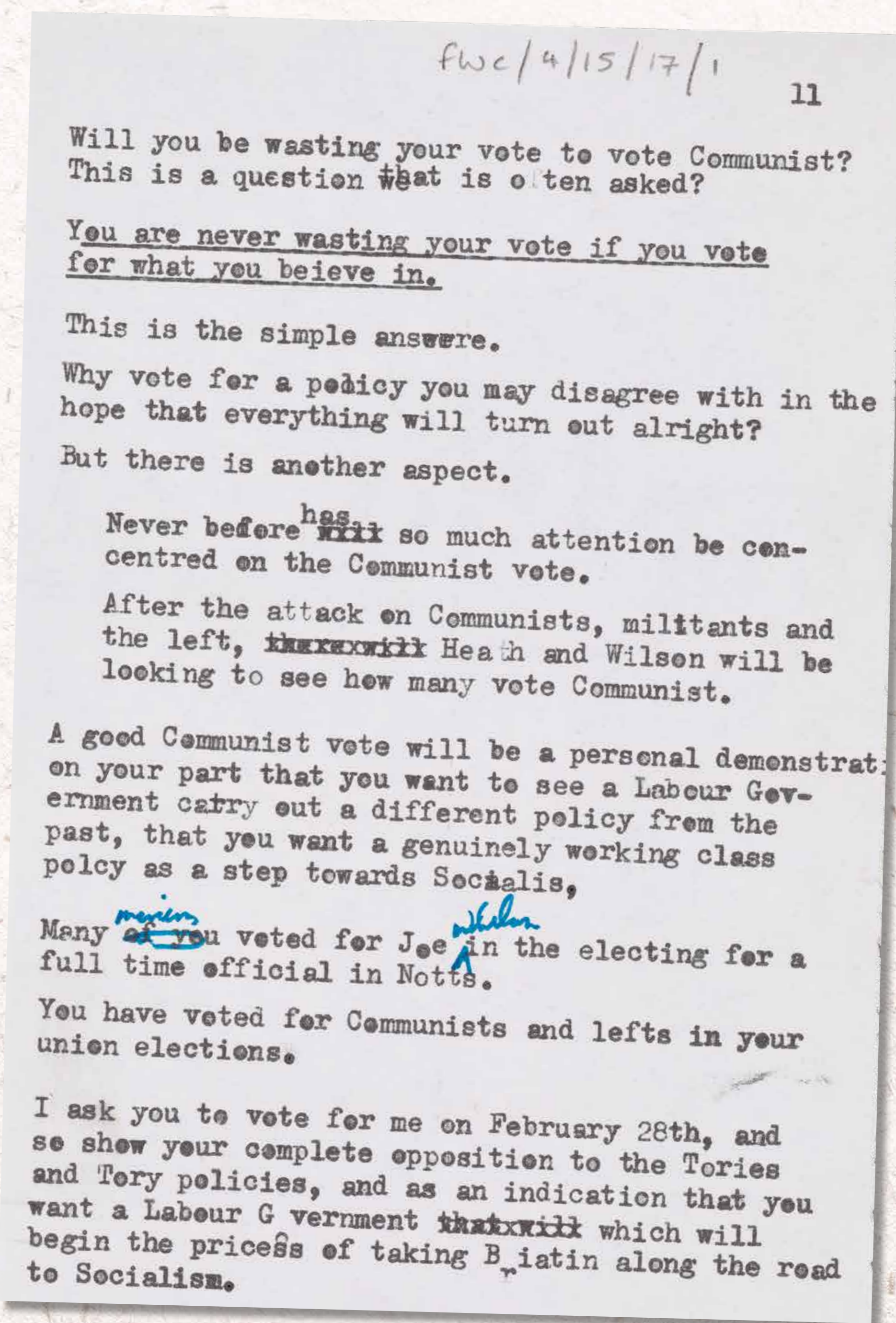
“For a few weeks one could ... concentrate with gay abandon entirely on public activity – on doorstep discussions, pit, factory-gate and street meetings, evening rallies, mass leaflet distributions and torch parades. I felt that this is what politics is all about”

(*Shaking the Chains*, 355)



Left: Mansfield Election Bulletin, February 1974
Westacott Collection, FWC 4/15/17/2

Scrapbooks, campaign leaflets, newspaper cuttings and draft speeches all demonstrate the energy and enthusiasm that he and his comrades brought to their election campaigns. In Mansfield, Westacott had the support of the redoubtable Communist Party election agent, Ida Hackett. She produced the Election Bulletin and rallied supporters, organising leaflet distribution, canvassing and public meetings. In February 1974 the Party “invaded the Market Place in the morning and afternoon, and took over the front of the Town Hall”.



Right: Extract from a draft speech by Fred Westacott, February 1974
Westacott Collection, FWC 4/15/17/1

Loyalty to political parties was deeply-rooted and Westacott found it hard to convert people’s personal liking for Communist Party candidates, and agreement with some of their policies, into votes. The ‘first past the post’ electoral system also encouraged some electors to see a vote for Westacott, in a Labour stronghold, as a wasted vote.