Manse Wife Leads L.P. An Evening with Gladys Langham

WHEN the forty-second National Conference of Labour Women opens at Largs next Tuesday, the Chairman will be Mrs. Gladys Langham, wife of the Superintendent of the Ormskirk circuit, the Rev. Harold W. Langham.

News of this unusual role for a lady of the manse sent me hurrying from an assignment in Newcastle upon Tyne across the Yorkshire moors to the small country town of Ormskirk to talk with Gladys Langham about the politics of her life, and how she combines this work with her activities in the church and the home.

It was a grand north of England coal fire that we sat by until after midnight and from our talk I gradually realised a most interesting fact about Gladys Langham.

She is both a minister’s wife with all that that entails and an active political thinker and worker at one and the same time. No water-tight compartments, political responsibility for her—allied to the party she supports—is a ‘working out of her faith.’ ‘We have to act,’ she says, ‘according to the light we are given.’

Views Respected

Her colleagues in the Labour party know where she stands as a Christian; the members of her husband’s church and of her own Women’s Fellowship, of which she is president, know where she stands politically. All accept her position because they know the one is bound up in the other. But Mrs. Langham is not intolerant about the politics of other people. ‘I respect their views,’ she says, ‘as I hope they respect mine.’ And they do.

Many influences have contributed to Mrs. Langham’s politics. A burning memory from childhood is that of the Jarrow Marchers—‘something I can never forget,’ she says. There was a headmistress with strong Labour sympathies, and a family background, worker. Not surprising then that at the age of nineteen one of those who formed the Farinon (Berkshire) Labour party, Farinon was Mrs. Langham’s home, and for the record—her first was that of private secretary, the chairman of the local Conservative party, also secretary of the local Hunt. Mrs. Langham smiled when I suggested that she might also have been an influence in turning her to the left.

First a Minister’s Wife

She has never hankered after parliamentary career. If thought has ever occurred to her sense of responsibility a minister’s wife—and she is and foremost a minister’s wife. This position has never presented a problem to Gladys Langham. Indeed, she sees few things, problems—running a twelve-manse (to say nothing of domestic help), presiding at the weekly WF, singing occasionally in the choir, and, recently, teaching in the Sunday school. Her nineteen-year-old is at college in London.

Until last September Mr. Mrs. Langham had been in Largs for some fifteen years, during that time Gladys Langh...