Saidie Patterson dies aged 79

MISS SAIDIE PATTERSON, who has died aged 79, was for most of her life associated with her trade union and peace movements in Northern Ireland.

Born into a working-class family in Woodvale Street in Belfast's Shankill Road area in 1906, Ms Patterson had to go to work in the local linen mills at the age of 12, when her mother died and she was left to look after her sick father and six brothers and sisters.

Ms Patterson later became an organiser for the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union in the Belfast linen mills, and was prominent in several strikes which the union staged to gain improvements for the largely female work-force.

About this time, she also became involved with the Northern Ireland Labour Party, and played a leading role in the election of 1945 which saw the party win a number of seats in the Belfast area. She remained closely associated with the Labour Party until recent years, when ill-health forced her to play a less active role.

After the second World War, she also became involved with the Moral Rearmament Movement, which promoted reconciliation between classes and races.

Ms Patterson came from a Methodist family and remained prominently involved with the Church for all her life. In 1978 she became the first person to be awarded the World Methodist Peace Award for her efforts to bridge the divide between the two religious communities in Northern Ireland.

Ms Patterson was involved with a number of peace movements throughout her career, and was a founder member of Women Together, which preceded the Peace People, in which she also took an interest.

She was the recipient of five international awards for her peace efforts, and gave all the money to charities for children, or for arthritis sufferers, of which she was one.

Ms Saidie Patterson