Labour & Trade Union Review

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EDITORIAL

THE WRITING ON THE WALL

Only in the superficial terms of parliamentary arithmetic is the result of the 1987 general election an improvement over 1983 for Labour. In every other respect it is far worse. Unless the party recognises this fact and its implications it will remain permanently unelectable.

Until June 11, the pundits could get away with blaming the 1983 debacle on Michael Foot's leadership and an inept election campaign. That is no longer possible. Foot's duffel-coat and his antedeluvian electioneering methods can now be seen to have cost Labour at most 21 seats. That is all Kinnock's smart suits and hi-tech campaign have retrieved. To attach any importance to such a paltry recovery is to miss the point altogether.

Foot was given the leadership by the unions, as was Kinnock two and a half years later. But Foot's brief was not to win elections.It was to save the party for Kinnock. The party, under the influence of Bennery, was careering towards the abyss like a pack of lemmings when Foot succeeded Callaghan in 1980. He held it together, induced it to veer from the cliff at the last moment, gave the Labour Right time to regroup, saw off Tony Benn with considerable skill and thereby ensured that the leadership was handed to Kinnock on a platter.

Foot did everything that could reasonably be expected of him in the circumstances. It is absurd to assess his performance in electoral terms. But it is not absurd to judge Kinnock by this yardstick. His brief was to win the election. His failure has been total.

Since June 11, he has been heard to remark that general elections are won in years, not weeks. That may be so. This observation would be entirely apposite had someone else been leading the Labour Party over the last four years. But that is not the case. Kinnock has been losing the election for the last four years.

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

The media, which is almost

continued on page 2

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Neil Kinnock - long on rhetoric

universally relieved to see the only plausible political party confirmed in office, has been falling over itself to offer Labour the consolation prize for having fought the best campaign. The current Labour leadership is so thoroughly dependent on the media for its understanding of British political realities that it is unlikely to resist such flattery. It is correspondingly unlikely to learn anything from the latest fiasco. It dare not admit to itself that it fought a ludicrous campaign that thoroughly deserved to lose.

The character of the campaign was determined by the strategic decision to focus it almost exclusively on the personality of Neil Kinnock, and by the choice of film-maker Hugh Hudson, who directed the pastel-coloured tear-jerker "*Chariots of Fire*", to provide the packaging of the candidate.

Kinnock conducted himself as if he were running for office in a presidential system in a country composed overwhelmingly of working class housing estates as depicted in Channel Four's "*Brookside*". From start to finish, the campaign expressed Kinnock's prostration before the media, and the media loved it.

A capacity for independent political thought was drained out of the British media years ago. All it could see in Kinnock's circus was an extended confirmation of its own self-importance. It was happy to return the compliment. Labour's "brilliant campaign" was an affair of mirrors.

The well-known man of parts and raconteur Peter Ustinov once played a petty thief in the film "Topkapi". Asked why he had accepted the role, he explained that he was attracted to the idea of playing a character who aimed low, and missed. The Labour Party is currently led by such characters.

If it is to recover, it must come to terms with its own history, and then transcend it.

A Two-Party System?

A superficial reading of the general election is that the two-party system is alive and well, given Labour's score of 229 seats and the failure of the Alliance to break through. On that reading, a Labour victory in 1991 or 1992 is conceivable. A more realistic reading is that we now have a one-party system, tempered by the existence of a welter of minor parties devoid of governmental prospects.

England invented modern party politics in the decades following the 1688 Revolution, the 300th aniversary of which the British Establishment is determined not to celebrate next year. The Revolution established the constitutional supremacy of Parliament within the state, and parties developed as a necessary by-product of this supremacy.

The development of a small number of parties founded upon distinct principles enabled the great diversity of opinion represented within Parliament to be contained within manageable limits. It enabled a large number of outlooks to be crystallised into a small number of competing philosophies, and so facilitated the concentration of minds and the conduct of business.

This development equipped Parliament to conserve, consolidate and even extend its legislative role and so preserve its constitutional supremacy. In other countries where the executive branch of the state is strong, parties are weak. Either one party has a political monopoly, *de jure* or *de facto*, or the actual functions performed by the parties are severely limited. This is true of democracies with presidential systems of government, such as France and the USA, as well as the more obvious cases of dictatorship.

The first person to reflect at any length upon the nature of English party politics was Edmund Burke. He defined a political party as "*a body of men united, for the promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed.*" The Tory Party conforms to this definition. This cannot be said of the Labour Party any more than it can be said of the Alliance.

The Tories' Secret

The Tory Party has always based itself on particular and agreed principles. It has had a philosophy and a world view. It is because its conduct of political affairs has always been informed by a definite political philosophy that it has been able to make the great adjustments in policy which have been called for at turning points in British history.

Without the guiding thread of a political philosophy which oriented it in the world, a party which had its origins in the Royalists and Cavaliers of the 17th century could not have survived into the 19th century, let alone prospered in the 20th. In particular, it would not have been able to reorient itself to the new working class electorate after the Second Reform Bill in 1867, as it did under Disraeli and Lord Randolph Churchill, or to the welfare state and the mixed economy after 1945, as it did under R A Butler and Macmillan, or to the development of individualism within the working class, as it has done under Margaret Thatcher since 1975.

The great strength of the Tory Party is its essentially positive world view. It has

always known how to take the world as it finds it. It does not put itself at odds with the world; it is at home in the world and enjoys itself there.

The Labour Party has been dominated by a sentimental and utopian vision of what the world ought to be, and by a fundamentally negative view of the world as it is: "*do not adjust the doctrine, there's a fault in reality*" sums it up pretty thoroughly. This is not really a world view so much as an organised refusal to have a world view. It is the world view of an autistic child.

To say that the Tory Party has a philosophy of politics is not at all to say that it conducts itself in accordance with an elaborate theory or system of concepts. Its philosophy is rarely made explicit and consists of a number of shared assumptions derived from a knowledge of its own history. These assumptions and this knowledge constitute the point of departure for political thought and debate within the party because they are taken for granted by all concerned; all Tory politicians pick up this outlook as they make their way in the party.

Because this philosophy is rarely made explicit, it cannot easily be summed up. But it certainly includes an appreciation of the complexity of society and of the world at large, and a thorough-going mistrust of political and social doctrines as intrinsically simplistic. It also includes an awareness of the limits of political action, the recognition that politics must deal with what exists and with what is realistically possible, rather than abstract imperatives.

What is made explicit within the Tory Party is the diversity of view it contains with respect to matters of current policy. But the Tories can accommodate and indulge this diversity presicely because of the strength of the background assumptions which all shades of Tory opinion tacitly share.

This gives the Tory Party a degree of political flexibility which no other British political party can match, because it ensures that conflicts within the party over matters of current policy give rise to development in policy, instead of threatening the integrity of the party itself. It ensures that the party is constantly aware of alternative ways of skinning the cat and it ensures that the party never gets out of touch with the society.

The Tory Party has seen off the Whigs, the Liberals and the old ILP. It is taking its time about seeing off the Labour Party, but on present form it cannot be seriously doubted that it will outlast it.

Labour's Albatrosses

There is no particular principles or set of principals in which the members of the Labour Party are agreed. The way in which the party conducts itself is not informed by a collective adherence to a philosophy of politics. It has a rag-bag of doctrines rather than a philosophy. The difference between a doctrine and a philosophy is the difference between an albatross around a mariner's neck and a compass in his hand.

There is very little historical awareness within the Labour Party. A knowledge of the party's own history would undoubtedly encourage the development of a functional philosophy of politics. But the internal political processes of the party actively inhibit the acquisition of historical knowledge. The conception of socialism which has been dominant within the party since 1918, if not earlier, has played a large part in this.

There are two fundamentally different ways of conceiving socialism. It can be conceived as the development of working class power. Or it can be conceived as the realisation of a vision of the good society through the deliberate contruction of a particular model of economic and political organisation.

The first conception encourages an empirical approach to politics and is entirely open-ended in its implications. The second conception envisages a final state of society and the end of history in the realisation of an ethical ideal which precludes the possibility of further development.

The second conception evaluates the present by reference to an imagined future. It assesses policies on the basis of whether or not they conform to the utopian vision, instead of whether or not past experience suggests that they will be effective. This conception is profoundly uninterested in the past and incapable of learning from experience, and the Labour Party is dominated by it.

Only during the heyday of Clement Attlee's leadership was this not so. And it is no coincidence that Labour's most effective leader and its *only* successful reforming prime minister was a Tory convert to socialism.

Political debate in the Tory Party arises out of differing appreciations of present realities and opposes alternative approaches to dealing with particular issues. Debate in the Labour Party arises out of alternative visions of a single, fundamentally utopian, outlook.

Anthony Crosland's attempted reformulation of socialism in the 1950s was still a reformulation of the *vision*. Crosland played down matters such as nationalisation and offered a more modest conception of Jerusalem, but he still placed the realisation of ethical ideals at the centre of the socialist project.

The Labour Right has been as uninterested as the Labour Left in the practical and incremental development of working class power in the society, and as devoid of historical curiosity.

Failing to Face Things

It is this state of affairs which accounts for the air of unreality which suffuses internal debate within the party. Policy is not the outcome of the application of shared assumptions to changing circumstances, but the product of the requirements of doctrine tempered, in the run-up to general elections, by the ephemeral findings of market research.

This state of affairs entails eternally recurring trials of strength between the adherents of alternative versions of the true faith. It precludes serious reflection, makes wishful thinking mandatory and generates cynicism and zealotry in equal measure.

Political parties, even great political parties, which prove persistently incapable of coming to terms with major issues confronting the society which it is their business to address cannot expect to outlive such failures indefinitely.

The once great Liberal Party broke itself on the Irish question and the conduct of the First World War. The Labour party has also proved incapable of facing up to the Irish question in recent years. But it has been unable to face up to the realities of foreign affairs and defence policy as well. Only during the Bevin era was it able to do this and since Bevin's death it has forgotten how the thing was done.

Above all, the Labour Party has been unable to come to terms with the question of economic policy in the post-Keynesian age. Its policy on unemployment is to denounce it and throw money at it. Its policy on the decline of British industry is to denounce it and throw money at it. Its policy on the decline of the level and quality of service in the welfare state is to denounce it and throw money at it.

The Battle of Ideas

Mrs Thatcher won the 1979 election on the basis of an idea which addressed the central problem of the management of the economy. She proposed to release individual energies and make the arrangements which would enable them to prosper.

Labour fought the 1983 and 1987 elections on the basis of sentimental rhetoric and merely vehement undertakings to do something about the economy and welfare provision. For all their appearance of detail, these undertakings were entirely bereft of anything approaching the status of a coherent and plausible idea. Their hollowness was self-evident.

Labour could have fought the last three elections on the basis of a new, coherent and plausible idea. It could have taken up the recommendations of the 1977 Bullock Committee and made the cause of industrial democracy its own. It could have made the case that industrial democracy would resolve the class stalemate in British industry, induce a new

NEWS REVIEW

by Madawc Williams

Front Lines in Hackney

Diane Abbott's election as MP for Hackney was well-deserved. She must have known that a black woman with a hard-left reputation would face problems. In fact, she kept nine-tenths of Labour's majority. Considering that Labour did rather badly in many parts of London, this was a very sound result. Much the same was true of Bernie Grant's success in Tottenham. It seems that the average white Labour voters are quite willing to vote for a black candidate.

Hackney is a mixed area - some poor and unemployed, some employed workers, some moderately well off white-collar workers. Our dear Local Council has been good enough to label us "Britain's poorest borough", which is silly. Poverty in Hackney is not noticeably worse than in other parts of London, and not so bad as in less fortunate parts of the U.K. What Hackney does not have are any noticeably rich districts - which improve the average figures without noticeably benefiting the poor. The borough of Fulham, for instance, has many poor areas. It also has Chelsea.

Diane Abbott has been wiser. In an address to voters in Hackney North News, she

● **Diane Abbott.**

argued simply that Thatcher has been bad for Hackney. She was careful on the race issue. No mad denunciations of Labour as "a racist party". No talk of race at all, in fact. I expect she knew that a lot of traditional white Labour voters were a little bit racist, and had to be handled with care if they were to vote for a black candidate.

The ultra-sensitive matter of police and policing was treated with a nice delicacy. The slogan was *"A police service, not a police force"* - which sounds nice, though it's hard to see just what it means. Choosing her words carefully, she complained that *"Crime is on the increase and the clear-up rate has fallen. As worrying is evidence of worsening relationships between the police and some sections of the community."*

(During the campaign, someone set fire to the local Tory headquarters and left it gutted and useless. But Labour can hardly be blamed for that - it was almost certainly the nutters from "Class War", an anarchist group who preach revolution and practice vandalism and hooliganism. In a less tolerant society than Britain, they'd have been rounded up and jailed months ago - or else murdered by "death squads". But even by British standards, they've overdone it. I'd be very surprised if there were not some mass arrests of "Class War" activists over the next few months.)

Diane Abbott is far removed from such foolishness. Clearly, she is trying to please everyone - and that, after all, is the function of an MP, to make some attempt to balance different needs and desires, instead of treating Labour voters as a fiefdom. She may have come from the Far Left, but I would be very surprised if she stayed there. Nor will Bernie Grant - the man was educated by Jesuits, after all.

Unlike the Ken Livingstones of this world, Labour's Black MPs are not a fringe movement. They are the strongest representatives of a community that is gradually finding its place in British society. Livingstone can play games - it doesn't matter much. But if Abbott and Grant don't do their job properly, lots of people could suffer. It's not impossible that Britain's blacks could become a sort of permanant semi-criminal sub-stratum. Black MPs should be able to prevent this.

(There are two other non-white Labour MPs. One is an Asian. Since Asians have already found their niche in British society, it won't matter all that much if he turns out well or badly. The other is Paul Boateng, who saw fit to link his election victory to the struggle in Soweto. I wouldn't be expecting too much from him.)

Of course, Diane Abbott is careful to seek support from all sorts of groups outside the black community. In Hackney North News, page two is full of messages in a range of languages and alphabets. I did notice one oddity - the Greek section is in the Greek alphabet, naturally enough, apart from the words "LABOUR" and "ABBOTT", which are in the Roman alphabet. None of the other non-English messages have such a thing. Is there a Greek-speaking reader who could enlighten us?

I also noticed that there was no attempt to address the constituency's Irish population in Gaelic - reasonable enough, since very few of them would have been able to follow it. But a bit of pandering to cultural nationalism might have been in order.

The back page of Hackney North News has been made into a small poster - black and white on a red background. The red Labour rose is there - but as a photographic negative, transformed into a black rose. Perhaps we should start calling Diane Abbott "The Black Rose of Hackney"!

Two Nations?

Far too much Labour propaganda has been talking about the supposed division of Britain into Two Nations, the Haves and Have Nots.

Now whether you look at the statistics, or just observe the world about you, it should be obvious that life is not so simple. There is a complex and continuous graduation from the very richest to the most miserable and poor.

It is without doubt true that Thatcher has increased the number of the poor and unemployed, and that the very well off have done far better during the Thatcher years than anyone else. But the daily reality for most people - including the bulk of the working class - has been a moderate but steady increase in prosperity. Any argument that hopes to convince people has to accept that observable reality.

You could look at the process as an f-shaped curve.

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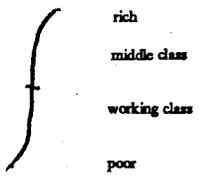
mood of responsibility in the trade union movement, give the workforce a vested interest in higher productivity and thereby inject a new dynamism into the economy.

Labour failed to take up this idea. Its commitment to a utopian conception of socialism inhibited it. Its perennial obsession with distribution precluded it from thinking about production. Its doctrinaire preoccupation with public ownership for its own sake made it indifferent to the development of working class power. And its lack of an historical understanding of British society blinded it to the prospect of Thatcher's counter-attack on behalf of "management's right to manage" in the event of the failure to reform industrial relations in the working class interest.

And now, ten years after the Bullock Report and eight years after Thatcher's first victory, Labour still has not come to terms with the character of the economic and political transformation which has since occurred at the expense of the working class, and with its own responsibility for this. It shows no signs of being about to do so, moreover, except in the most superficial way.



This isn't meant to be exact, but you can see the rich moving ahead fastest, the middle class not quite so well, the working class less well than the middle class, and poor really being left behind. "To him that has much, even more shall be given; and to him that is in want, little or nothing shall be given". That might have got through to people. But tell them that there are two nations, and most of them will decide that they're in the one that's doing rather well!

Saunders of the Swamp

At the time of writing, the matter of just what former Guinness executive Ernert Saunders did or did not do is still a matter for the courts. He may be guilty or innocent; that is not the main point.

As I see it, the main point is that the Stock Exchange is a kind of glorified casino or gambling house, where the owners of money (or their agents) can come and try to secure even more money for themselves. They engage in a number of complex and curious games in order to try to increase their money (that is, to become the legitimate owner of money that used to be owned by somebody else).

There is simple speculation. You buy shares, in the hope of selling them at a higher price. Or you sell shares that you do not in fact own, in the hope of buying them at a lower price before you actually have to deliver them. And of course, any player may end up losing money (forfeiting ownership of money he used to own).

These games only work if everyone plays by a given set of rules, within a common sub-culture. (In some ways, the City resembles a village-full of peasants, in which everyone knows everyone else and has a good idea of what can be expected of them.) The games would lead to total chaos if the rules were ignored - but, as in a game of football, success can come from bending the rules just a little. During the election campaign, for instance, the market would react sharply when each poll gave the Tories a greater or smaller margin of victory. Steps had to be taken to try to stop any bright sparks taking advantage of this.

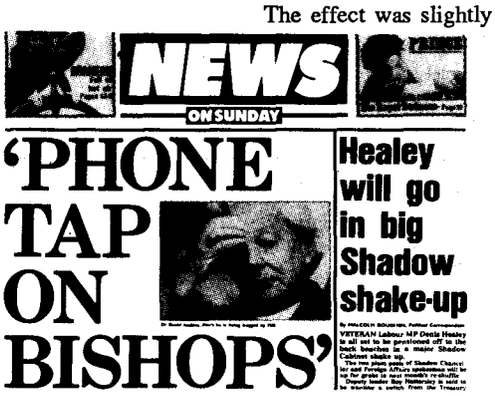
Takeover battles are the biggest game of all. They are also the most complex, and the most open to huge gains or losses. Two or more groups of executives try to persuade shareholders that a given takeover would (or would not) be good for them. All sorts of strange manoeuvres are possible - some legal, some not. And though the battle is fought out only on paper, it can get almost as bitter as battles fought out with fists or with guns.

In the case of the Guinness takeover of Distillers, things seem to have gone over the top. Both sides started abusing each other in large newspaper advertisements. Such behaviour broke the unwritten rules of the City sub-culture, even though it was entirely legal. And, apparently, some illegal deals were done to secure victory.

Should the rest of us care what the owners of money get up to? Unfortunately we must. Because the games that they play on the stockmarket may end up affecting all of us. More importantly, British managers spend a lot of their time planning takeovers, or planning how to fight off takeovers, instead of working out how to boost production. This happens to some degree in all capitalist economies - but in Britain, the "City" is unnaturally large and powerful when compared to the actual industrial and productive sector of the economy. The owners of money do very well, while too little effort is put into the actual production of goods.

In the 1970s, there was a chance to break the system - not by abolishing the stock exchange, but simply by giving workers equal rights with shareholders within their own company. At present, managers and directors only have a duty to the shareholders. They are under no pressure to trim profits slightly in order to benefit the workers - in fact they could be taken to court for doing so.

The Bullock proposals for workers control would have changed all that - but the chance was missed. The Labour Right mostly prefered to keep things just as they were; the Labour Left were certain that they could win power if only the workers were not distracted with such "limited" reforms. The rest is history.


NEWS
ON SUNDAY
'PHONE TAP ON BISHOPS'
Healey will go in big Shadow shake-up

No tits - and no balls either

News on Sunday is turning out to be a very dull newspaper. It decided to launch itself as a Left alternative to papers like the *Sun* and *News of the World*, which were feeding the proles rubbish and right-wing ideas. *News on Sunday* would defeat them by feeding the proles rubbish and left-wing ideology.

They might have got away with it, if only they hadn't tampered with the formula. (Usually it is called "tabloid journalism". But *News of the World* is not a tabloid, and some local papers are tabloid but entirely serious). This type of journalism (which was actually developed first by the Sunday press) depends a great deal on smut and references to sex. But feminists had been campaigning against this sort of thing, and it was judged necessary to leave it out. I don't know if anyone considered trying out a non-smutty eroticism - in any case it was not tried.

An attempt was made to make a virtue of this deficiency, with the slogan "No tits - but plenty of balls". The trouble was, few of those who might buy a "tabloid" would be personally offended by the smutty stories and pictures. People may like such things, or be indifferent to them. But they are upset by the notion of how other people might be affected by them. And in truth, *News on Sunday* had little else to offer. It is already in deep financial trouble. I doubt if it will survive very long.

(The weekend before the election, *News on Sunday* had a special supplement on poverty, complete with grim photographs, to show how socially concerned they were. The effect was slightly spoiled by a couple of advertisements included in that same supplement - for a camera costing £70, and for custom built kitchens with "*...up-to-the-minute laminates, luxurious real wood veneers, beautifully traditional solid wood like oak, cherry, pine and mahogany*".

It has been left to Robert Maxwell to launch a leftish newspaper that is actually worth reading. (It shouldn't have to be left to a socialist millionaire. The Labour movement should be able to come up with something decent on its own account - but the signs are that it can not.) People outside London may not have noticed the appearance of the *London Daily News*, but it is well worth a look.

Tabloid in size, the *London Daily News* is fairly solid and serious. It acts as a forum for a considerable range of views. Ken Livingstone has a regular weekly column - but many other points of view are there, including some from conservatives. It follows a tradition of solid local-paper journalism that often seems much sounder and more serious than the hype and razzmatazz of Fleet Street.

It is currently locked in a bitter circulation war with the right-wing *London Evening Standard* - there is some doubt if London can support two serious local papers. Its survival is not completely certain. But - unlike *News on Sunday* - it at least deserves to survive.

TRADE UNION DIARY

by Dave Chapel

The "Rainbow Coalition" in action - empty gestures in support of lost causes

The Unions and the "Rainbow Coalition"

On Sunday June 14th I caught part of an interview with John Edmonds on the "Boyle on Sunday" phone-in on LBC Radio. John Edmonds is the General Secretary on the GMBATU - Britain's second largest trade union, with 815,000 members.

Edmonds for the most part gave us a Kinnock view of the election. The policies were popular, but people had been made distrustful of the Labour Party by years of bickering by the Left. Labour and the unions needed more time to put across the new image, a good start was made in the 3-4 weeks of the election campaign, and the unions must follow the lead given by Kinnock.

As Edmonds was in full flight of fantasy, Boyle, in a despairing tone, asked him if we were going to have to see videos of Mrs Edmonds senior and all the rest of the Edmonds clan.

The spell was broken. Boyle, an abrasive character, immediately earned my heartfelt thanks, and I'm sure my feelings were shared by millions. Edmonds began to come down to earth. He acknowledged that the personality cult can be a two-edged weapon, at least where it concerns union leaders.

It is, I hope, only a short step for him and others to recognise that the same applies in the Labour Party. That at least as many people were nauseated by Kinnock's ticket-only Nuremburg rallies as were impressed by them.

Edmonds, to my surprise, also went on the defensive about traditional forms of union protest. Under questioning from callers, he used his head and pointed out that "popular" methods of protest like media workers carrying on working but refusing to screen advertisements or train workers not collecting fares were a fantasy as the employers would simply sack the people concerned and so a strike would follow in any case.

But he went on to talk about alliances with the likes of environmentalist groups to campaign for nice things as an alternative to industrial action - another Kinnock-type fantasy. It was the "rainbow politics" people who brought Labour to the brink of disaster - not the revolutionary left - and now John wants to give these people their heads in the unions as well.

He must surely see that "rainbow politics" is what the "London effect" is all about. Militant, for all its Trotskyist nonsense, actually romped home wherever it stood on June 11. The one place where Edmond's "rainbow alliance" has already taken root in the trade union movement is NALGO. And he knows as well as I do that NALGO is an utterly useless trade union. It whines and blusters and delivers nothing. And it turns more and more of its unfortunate members *away* from Labour.

John Edmonds, and others like him, had better realise quickly that our movement needs strong fighting unions in the years ahead. If the Tories implement their plan to emasculate the unions by abolishing the right to discipline members, there will be no union movement left in 1992 to fight for Labour in the next general election.

Much of the recent Tory legislation was progressive and the opposition to it stupid and blind. That doesn't help for the future. It doesn't help members to trust the judgement of the leadership. But that's past and nothing much can be done about it.

What can and must be done is forcefully to make the unanswerable case that the basis of collective organisation is collective action with sanctions, including expulsion, against members who do not abide by majority decisions. This is the other side of the argument that there can be no action without agreement by secret ballot. Otherwise, trade unions do not even have the same rights as a cricket club.

The task facing us is to make this case clear to the public. Complicating it with forays into wally politics will only weaken it. The one arguament against treating the unions as self-governing and self-disciplining associations arises if the unions engage in fads which are of little or no interest to their members in general. Just as the cricket club is about playing cricket, the trade union is about working. It is on that basis that it recruits members.

If we stick to our primary role and get public support for our case, then we can defeat Tory plans to destroy us, should such plans be tried. But even then, we must in the end be prepared to fight a life and death struggle. And we shall be in no position to do this if other unions become like NALGO, which couldn't fight its way out of a paper bag.

The Unions and the Election

Word went out from Walworth Road during the election campaign that trade unions were bad news. So could they please stay out of the news and not become an election issue?

The civil servants and the teachers refused to stay out of the news. But Norman Tebbit made very little indeed of the two major industrial actions, and the unions were not an election issue.

I suggest that Norman had no wish to make an issue of them, other than references to past fiascos like Wapping, the miners' strike and the "winter of

Neil Kinnock had nothing to say to Britain's trade unionists during the the election, although they coughed up to pay for his ego-trip.

discontent" of 1978/79. He could be happy with his reforms of 1979 to 1987. But he knew he was on shaky ground with the Tory proposals for the future. And on the one or two occasions when they were challenged on this, he and the other Tories visibly retreated and waffled on about the past.

Purposeless militancy by union leaders after about 1978 was indeed unpopular, both with the public at large and with union members. But unions themselves are not unpopular. The whizz-kids at Walworth Road have simply been panicked by the media into thinking they are.

Over nine million people are in trade unions and, especially these days, most are in unions because they want to be. The electorate, including union members, favour greater democracy in unions. But there is no evidence that any great numbers want to see the unions *weakened.*

Had Labour taken the offensive on the unions, I believe they would have gained votes, not lost them. As it was, Labour gave the appearance of being shifty, and even of wanting to reverse the progressive legislation on ballots.

Of course, it would be better still if the trade unions and the Labour Party were promoting a really positive role for organised workers. Any real positive role would inevitably involve measures of industrial democracy.

This would not only transfer power to workers but would also make us *responsible* for what went on in our enterprises. Unfortunately, such is the defensive mentality in our movement, no one in a leadership position has the confidence to put the case for industrial democracy to the public.

I am reliably informed that John Smith, the Shadow Industry Spokesman, favours industrial democracy. But he is, it seems, convinced of its unpopularity in the unions and the country. His reaction is to shut up.

Leadership involves putting your case. And I am convinced that the case, once put, will be a lot less hard than John Smith supposes. Of course, the media might give it a hard time. But then it's about time that Labour policies were determined by something other than Sun headlines.

Workers as Shareholders

Individual shareholding by workers in companies makes little or no difference to the way companies are run. The problem is recognised by the unions in British Airways.

The British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA), ASTMS and the T&GWU have persuaded 10,000 workers (one third of the workforce) to hand over by proxy their *voting* rights to a joint union body, giving workers a real collective say.

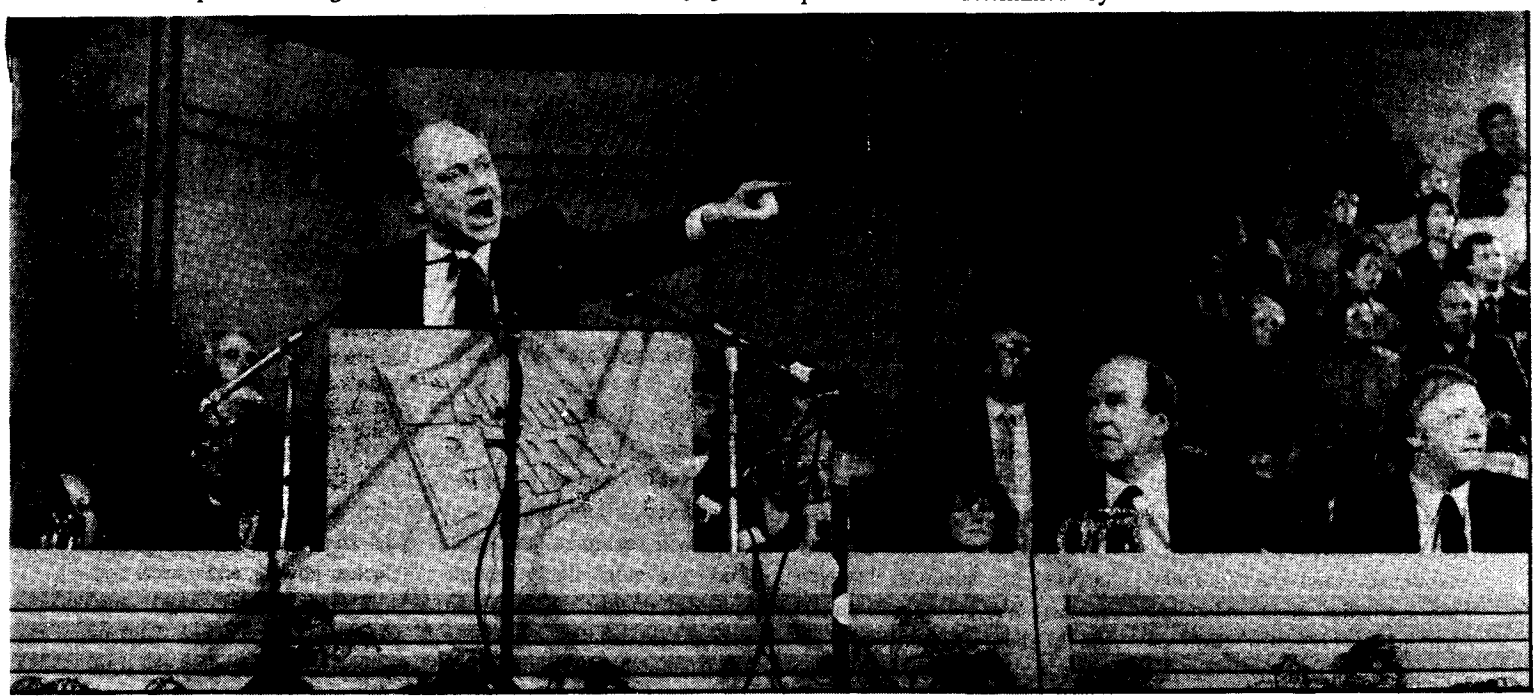
In an interview with the Sunday Telegraph (14.6.87), Mark Young, BALPA's General Secretary, said:

"this provides a sound foundation from which to launch a new campaign among the staff when the second tranche of shares becomes available in August."

The union then hopes to set up a special trust to act on behalf of BA workers. As Mark Young made clear,

"We hope to become the major shareholder in British Airways with 10 to 15 per cent of the shares within five years. So far we have had to do this on a proxy basis because of government opposition. But when August comes we will be able to be far more ambitious and set up a trust of elected workers."

Watch this space.



Labour and Nuclear Weapons

by Brendan Clifford

Thatcherism was not only made possible, but was made necessary, when the Labour leadership, egged on by the trade union leaders, turned its traditional rhetoric into a hard and fast ideology. From 1951 until the seventies traditional rhetoric was used to spice up a basically pragmatic view of the world. The leaders of the Labour Party knew that they never quite meant what they were saying. That built-in insincerity was not a fundamentally sound political condition. Though it was no better than the unrealistic sincerity that replaced it, it was probably inevitable that the ambiguity would sooner or later be resolved in favour of sincerity and at the expense of realism.

Thatcherism's debt to Kinnock

The rejection of the Bullock proposals was the beginning of Thatcherism. The proposals were rejected because they threatened the established routine of trade union practice and because they did not comply with the rhetorical notions of socialism. Labour and trade union leaders declared that it was the business of capitalists to manage. Thereby they opted to be a protest movement. But the Labour movement of the mid-seventies had become too powerful to be a protest movement – unless it always pulled its punches. And the state of mind it was developing was not conducive to pulling punches. England being what it is, it was inevitable that if trade unionists did not begin to undertake the managerial function hitherto performed by capitalists, (and thereby make the capitalist class redundant within the economic form of modified capitalism), then the capitalists would regain an effective power of management.

Neil Kinnock opposed the Bullock proposals in a blatantly insincere manner. He was cultivating his career and keeping in with the trade union king-makers.

Thatcher won in 1979 on a programme of the lunatic fringe on the right. The effect on Labour was to engender a conviction that the next election was won and that caution might be thrown to the winds. The Thatcher victory was a signal for full retreat into an ideology which has been called *"extreme left"*, but was in fact the traditional rhetoric of Labour which until 1979 only a fringe on the left had taken in earnest. With the 1974 election in its pocket the entire Labour leadership got high on rhetoric –except for the ones who left to form the SDP. It was obvious within the first year that Thatcher was not going to do the things which would make a Labour victory a certainty, and by the time this fact sunk in a Labour defeat had become a certainty.

Kinnock, Defence and the Election

Then came Neil Kinnock's hour of destiny. He is the most insincere leader the party has ever had – including MacDonald – though he is not especially realistic. But it turned out that he had one ineradicable point of sincerity, and it spoiled the whole tar-barrel of slick opportunism.

The traditional rhetoric of Labour has least connection with reality in the sphere where the consequences can be most catastrophic – the military aspect of relations between states. War is unpleasant. To think about it realistically is wicked. If you are good your thoughts must take the form of wishful thinking.

It became obvious during the election campaign that Kinnock and Denzil Davies find the sheer fact of the existence of nuclear weapons so horrifying that they dare not make rational calculations based on their continuing existence. They were given a very easy ride on that subject. And the BBC was so kind as to put the avuncular and reassuring Victor Karpov on its World Phone-In on the Sunday before the election to show how peace-loving Russia is.

If Heseltine had been on the Tory front-bench the ride would have been much rougher. But that might have been much better for Labour. As it was they became complacent. They thought they had got the better of the defence debate. And towards the end they were coming out with astonishingly patronising remarks about how the people in the housing estates have other things to think of than war and peace. But it wasn't so.

There is a remarkable objectivity in English society. It is not confined to any class. And it is found among the unemployed and badly paid no less – and perhaps more – than among the affluent. It is a fatal mistake for any politician to think he need not make sense on world affairs to the people in the housing estates. Kinnock and Davies were very foolish, and were very foolishly advised.

Living with nuclear weapons

Nuclear weapons can't be disinvented. They exist, and they will continue to exist. And the most likely course towards nuclear war is an attempt to do the impossible and take nuclear armaments out of the military confrontation.

The only thing to do with nuclear weapons is live with them. The early CND appeared to realise that. Bertrand Russell prided himself on his hard headedness, and his strategy for world peace in the nuclear age was that the world should be finally and irrevocably divided into American and Russian spheres of interest. Each sphere should be strictly policed by its dominant state. That, he said, was the condition of human survival in the nuclear age. (Until Russia developed the hydrogen bomb his policy had been that American should make positive use of its nuclear monopoly to bring Bolshevism to heel.)

Russell's strategy could not work because it conflicted with the burgeoning politics of the Third World and because neither Russia nor America was reconciled to giving up half the world to the forms of society and humanity fostered by the other.

Within that strategy the function of unilateral disarmament by Britain was not to inspire the world towards general disarmament by moral example, but to establish the requisite monopolies by America and Russia. The strategy lapsed when France and China developed nuclear weapons, and there has since then been no coherent strategy in CND.

Toryism is triumphant because it is neither abashed nor intimidated by the obvious sense of things. The obvious sense with regard to nuclear armaments is that the practical choice is between nuclear deterrence of war between the nuclear powers, and nuclear war.

The Tories say that deterrence has worked. And no matter how often they say it, it

does not cease to be true. And no matter how clever the Labour leaders become at explaining away the crude fact that deterrence has worked, a Tory statement of the obvious will continue making sense to the bulk of the people of England.

Hattersley and Deterence

Roy Hattersley was asked, on the Radio Four Election Phone-In (June 1st), whether he didn't think deterrence had worked so far. He made two statements in reply: "The deterrent is the American deterrent. Nobody really believes that we are going to be abandoned by the Americans, betrayed by the Americans. And nobody really believes that Britain would fight a nuclear war on her own". In other words, British nuclear armaments are not functional as a deterrent because everyone knows that Britain would not use them.

With Thatcher in Government the British bomb is seen as a deterrent, but if Kinnock were Prime Minister it might cease to be credible. But if the Soviet Union were led into some action because the British bomb had ceased to be credible under a Labour Government, it might well be that it would be used as an actual weapon of war after it had been made useless as a deterrent. (Two world wars happened because, until after the eleventh hour, the signs given to Germany were that Britain would not fight.)

Hattersley's second statement was that it was not nuclear deterrence which had kept the peace in Europe since 1945: "The reason we've had peace in Europe is the Alliances: NATO and the Warsaw Pact." And his next sentence was: "I'd like to see those Alliances negotiated away."

If Hattersley got his heart's desire (which is a representative desire of the collective heart of

Continuity in Soviet Foreign Policy

Labour), the world would become a welter of states with a welter of conflicts, and with no great conflict combining them into groups with a common interest. Some of these states would have nuclear armaments. And something resembling the European situation of 1945-7 would be restored.

Post War Europe and the Bomb

Russia was cheated of the fruits of victory in 1945 by the American possession of the atomic bomb. When Stalin nevertheless moulded the countries under Russian occupation into satellites, and continued to press against western Europe, Bevin responded by organising NATO. NATO is collective security. If NATO were disbanded the fluid conditions of 1945-7 would be restored, and there is only one state capable of taking advantage of that.

The Labour leaders have been using the term "collective security" as an alternative to military alliances. I assume that they are doing this because they assume that mental confusion is the only virtuous condition where war is concerned. But "collective security", as counterposed to alliances, is the arrangement within which World War 2 occurred. The League of Nations idea was that the entire collectivity of states would keep the peace by causing the weight of the whole to be brought to bear against any state which was endangering the peace. But that kind of collective security is only a kind of high minded make-believe in a world of sovereign states. Everybody's business is nobody's business. (If the League had been made effective, with authority and power to police the world, it would have been a world state. The same goes for UNO. But the independent states of the world have always refused to permit UNO's development towards a world state. The veto given to the great powers at the founding of UNO ensured that it would be as ineffective as the League was.)

The only realistic form of collective security is the military alliance of a group of states with a common interest.

What has kept the peace in Europe is the confrontation of military alliances armed with nuclear weapons. (But the two alliances are different in kind. NATO is a free association of sovereign states: the Warsaw Pact is the military organisation of an empire. NATO is capable of being dissolved by its component states, while the Warsaw Pact is not.)

The Mentality of Clergymen

Neil Kinnock is apparently convinced that because there could be no victor in a nuclear war, nuclear armaments are not a deterrent. It is a strange process of reasoning which concludes from the fact, that nuclear armaments are unsuitable for multi-lateral use in warfare, that they cannot deter war. They have a deterrent effect precisely because of their unsuitability for multi-lateral use.

Kinnock also says that because a nuclear war could not be won, a state with nuclear weapons has no advantage over a state without them. This ludicrous argument is frequently

stated as an emotional principle but never spelt out. But it follows from it that it would be no disadvantage to Western Europe if Russia had a monopoly of nuclear armaments. In such circumstances, however, nuclear weapons would again become as usable as they were in 1945.

In retreat from the implications of emotional generalisations, Labour leaders resort to statements which imply support for American nuclear armament as a deterrent. This is never said outright. It could not be said outright because the argument against British possession of nuclear weapons is usually made in terms of grand statements about nuclear weapons as such.

I conclude from the fact that Labour leaders throw out statements with contradictory implications, and jump about between universal generalisations about nuclear armaments and statements about British nuclear armaments on the presupposition that NATO will remain nuclear, that the Labour leadership does not know what it thinks on this subject, and is determined not to think it out.

Nuclear deterrence has been declared by clergymen to be based on an immoral principle. What clergymen say in the post-Christian era matters little. But it does matter that the Labour leaders have the mentality of clergymen.

How deterence works

Nuclear deterrence works through a rough equality of armaments and a presumed willingness to use them. It works because each side is assumed by the other to be willing to blow up the world.

There is a recurring demand that NATO should declare that it would not be the first to use nuclear weapons in the event of war. If that demand were conceded, and the concession was credible to the other side, the probability of nuclear war would be greatly increased. In the event, a state losing a war which endangers its existence could not be relied on to refrain from using its major weapon, regardless of prior undertakings.

Somebody – Chesterton, I think – wrote in the inter-war period that world peace would come about when every state possessed a super-weapon which would enable it to blow up the world. That state of affairs became feasible in 1945. It could have been averted only if America had – as Bertrand Russell urged it to do – used its post-war nuclear monopoly to blackmail or bomb the entire world into submission and organise itself as a world state. Once Russia got the bomb, and sovereign nation states became the norm, the spread of nuclear weapons became inevitable. And nuclear deterrence of war became the only alternative to nuclear war.

Russia and the Nuclear Stalemate

The argument that because Russia suffered so greatly in the last war it is intrinsically peace-loving and defensive is an historically ignorant argument. States which win a war after being brought to the verge of extinction have a taste for war and an exceptional ability to wage it. France barely survived in 1794, and it carved up Europe during the next few years. Catholic-nationalist Ireland, having won its war of independence, threw itself into a vicious civil war on an issue of nothing. Vietnam had hardly freed itself from America when it invaded Cambodia.

In the normal course of events Russia would have dominated Europe as a whole after 1945. It was totally mobilised for war, there was no public opinion capable of diverting the state from its historic mission, it had substantial internal support in the countries of western Europe, it had by far the most powerful army in the world, and it had acquired the British knack of going to war in the name of peace. So there is a sense in which the atomic bomb perverted the course of history. But the Kremlin never gave up on its historic mission. It has for forty years been searching for ways around the nuclear stalemate.

When the Red Army moved into Afghanistan a Soviet diplomatic source was reported as saying that the job would take 20 years and cost a million lives. That is the kind of calculation that only the Kremlin is capable of making.

Elected governments are decreasingly capable of making long-term calculations as the democratic process erodes the remnants of the old ruling classes – and America has never had a ruling class in the European sense. The short-life expectancy of elected governments is inhibiting strategic policy-making. The Kremlin can devise a twenty-year strategy because the strategists can reckon on having twenty years to implement it. For Western governments there is a political horizon of about three years.

Reagan: immortal yearnings?

Gorbachev's Gambit

It seems that Gorbachev is thinking of putting Afghanistan on the back-burner for a while because he sees an opportunity of de-stabilising the European situation. If movement is possible in Europe then everthing else takes second place. And movement may be possible in Europe because Reagan has immortal yearnings. (The sudden transfiguration of Rabid Ronnie into one of the truly good men of our time in Labour propaganda was startling.)

In the games played between the Kremlin and the White House over the decades it was understood on both sides that the object was to put the other side in the wrong with world opinion, and that no change of substance was possible. Reagan made his *"zero option"* proposal in that spirit, Gorbachev rejected it, and Labour spokesmen explained why it was unreasonable. But then Gorbachev agreed to it. The debate moved on to *"double-zeros"* and *"triple-zeros"*. Debating points took on the substance of real policy negotiations. And suddenly it began to appear that western Europe was to be put into the melting pot. And European politicians, who had engaged in opportunist demagoguery on the assumption that the American presence was absolutely dependable, suddenly found their world coming apart.

Uncle Vic and the Silly Billies

Victor Karpov, in his BBC election phone-in, seemed to envisage total nuclear disarmament. And he assured his listeners that Russia was anxious to remove the prospect of conventional war by reducing the military forces on both sides to a size which was adequate for defence but too small to attack. Of course there is no such thing. It was gibberish. Karpov knew it was gibberish. But he reckoned that he could get away with it, and he did.

Neil Kinnock chipped in a couple of days later with a statement about the well-known superiority of the defence over the attack. This was an echo from the age of the rifle and the machine-gun. In the age of the rifle (1860-1914) the defence was reckoned to have a superiority of 3 to 1 over the attack. (The age of the machine-gun (1914-17) presumably

Bernard Rogers (left) hands over to General John Galvin, his successor as Nato commander.

increased the advantage of the defence – I have never seen a figure: perhaps because no complete war was fought with machine-guns.) On that reckoning a win should have been impossible in World War 1. But all such reckoning was upset by the appearance of the tank, and 1940 saw the weaker force winning by exploiting a hitherto unsuspected superiority of the attack.

The simple truth is that until the actual outbreak of war there is no knowing where the advantage lies, and to reckon on a superiority of the defence is to invite disaster.

The confusion that Gorbachev has produced in Europe with a few statements, and the silliness into which he has led Kinnock and Healey, must encourage him to persist in his western campaign. But I don't suppose he will act so precipitately that Kinnock will have the chance to lead a guerrilla band. The first great object of Soviet policy in Europe is the neutralisation of Germany, which is achievable under a variety of forms if American dis-engagement happens. And in the course of time German neutrality would take the Soviet sphere of influence beyond the Rhine.

NATO's Cassandra

General Rogers, the recently retired NATO Commander, says that Gorbachev's aim is to make Europe safe for conventional war. If Europe ever does become safe for conventional war, that state of affairs will in itself produce a massive Soviet moral influence on west European states, and will tend to make their independence of the Finnish variety.

European war is unthinkable at present. Each side possesses the full range of nuclear weapons. Each side knows what the other possesses. It knows that any move it makes can be countered at the appropriate level by the other side. There is nuclear stalemate. And with NATO openly retaining the option of first strike, there is general military stalemate.

Nuclear disarmament is in the nature of things not possible. All that is possible is that the present certainties might be replaced with uncertainties. And uncertainty is conducive to war.

Butter *and* Guns

The great improvement in the standard of life which, it is said, would result from nuclear disarmament, is a mirage. I know of no reason to suppose that the economic effort which goes into the production of nuclear weapons would go into the building of houses and hospitals if there were no nuclear weapons. There is at present a superabundance of labour, skill and material which might be devoted to the building of houses and hospitals but isn't. Since the problem is not one of resources there is no reason to suppose that de-nuclearisation would solve it. And in the age of paper money the difficulty is not financial in the way it might have been in the age of gold. Europe is awash with surpluses, but it cannot devise an economic means of using them which will not damage the economic arrangement which causes them to be produced.

"Guns or butter" is a false antithesis. An economy which is good at producing guns is also likely to be good at producing butter. The antithesis might have been true when productive forces were comparatively primitive. Shortages today in Europe are not caused by an insufficiency of productive forces.

De-nuclearisation is economically irrelevant. And the politicians who declare it immoral to deter war by a nuclear balance, because peace is protected by a threat to obliterate humanity, will very likely cause the obliteration of humanity by subjectivist bungling if they get the conduct of affairs into their hands.

In Our Next Issue

* John Rhys on the Bevanite tradition in Labour politics
* Dave Chapel reflects on the state of the TUC after the annual congress
* Boyd Black proposes a radical re-think of Labour's economic policy
* Brendan Clifford explains why working class support for the monarchy has been well-founded

plus

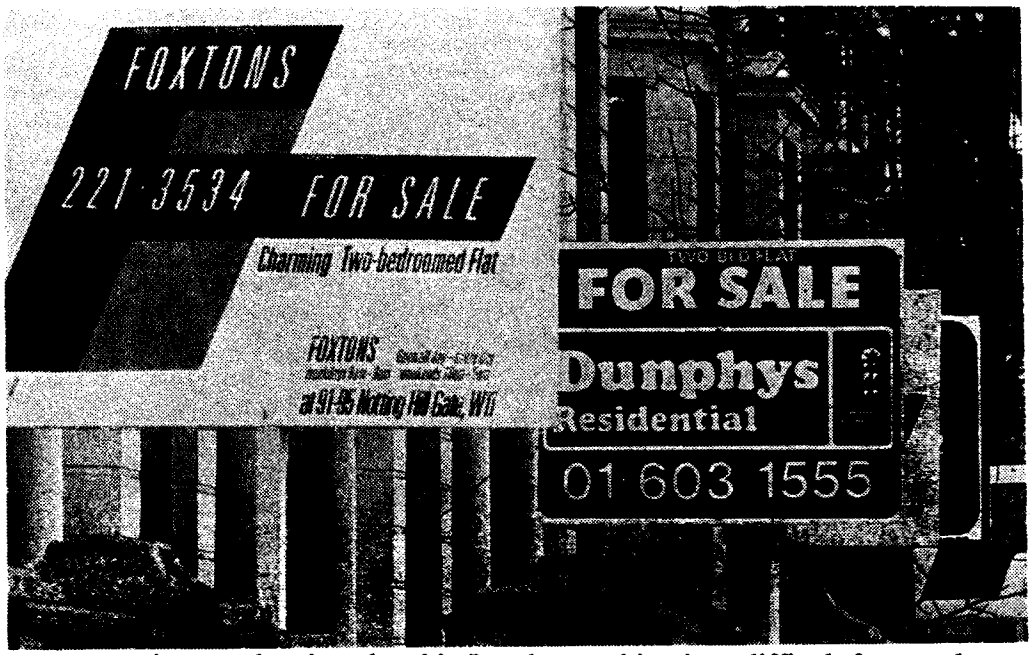
Socialists in Retrospect, More on Industrial Democracy, Readers Letters

and

An analysis of Neil Kinnock's strategy for Labour after the election defeat and what its implications are.....

THE HOUSING DEBATE (continued)

In our first two issues, *Labour & Trade Union Review* has launched an important debate about the future direction of socialist housing policy. An article by Mark Cowling and Sue Smith in our first issue, "Socialism and Home Ownership", prompted very different reactions from Dick Barry and Angela Clifford in our second issue. Here, Mark Cowling answers some of the points made in reply to his and Sue Smith's initial article, and raises new questions for consideration.



House prices are leaping ahead in London, making it as difficult for people to move out of the city's property market as it is to move into it.

A Reply to Clifford and Barry

The reactions in L&TUR vol 1, no 2 (April 1987) to our article on "Socialism and Home Ownership" were very interesting and I should like to respond to some of the points that have been made.

Housing in the South East

Our proposal for the DHSS to fund universal owner occupation was intended to tackle one crucial housing issue which causes particular problems for the Labour Party, that of divided tenure.

As the accompanying editorial rightly indicated, the article did not cover many related issues. One of these has emerged very strongly since our scheme was conceived, namely the gross shortage of housing in the South East and the accompanying massive price increases there.

We recognised that if tenants were able to become owner occupiers with their repayments underwritten by the DHSS there was a danger of inflation at the lower end of the market, and this is now particularly acute around London.

Angela Clifford is quite right to say that the only solution to this problem is more accommodation, and that providing this at the bottom end of the market should be a government responsibility.

Her point that tower blocks should be rehabilitated, not demolished, is sound as a general principle. I lived in one for a time in Middlesbrough, and it was excellent for people without children between one and ten, which was the category of tenant put in by the local council.

Many people in this category have particular housing problems in London. I can add that an effective caretaker made a great difference to the quality of life.

If the point that housing shortages can not be solved simply by fiddling about with tenure is accepted, then the issue of tenure can be returned to as appropriate.

Part of the intention of the universal owner occupation scheme was to facilitate labour mobility. Differing house prices are now impeding labour mobility almost as effectively as council waiting list rules.

Londoners wishing to move and maintain the value of their property now have serious problems: there are, for example, extremely few houses over £100,000 in the Middlesbrough area.

Once settled in a country mansion on the North Yorkshire moors the ex-Londoners also face the probability of being reduced from the semi where they started to a one-bedroomed flat if they wish to return to the capital, as London prices have been greatly outstripping those elsewhere. Some way of stabilising prices in the South East of England is therefore vital.

It is therefore worth asking if Angela Clifford's measures are sufficient. Britain's problem is less a gross shortage of houses than an excess of people wanting particular types of houses in particular places (specifically three bedroom homes and under in the London commuter zone).

In other words, it is necessary to consider ways and means of altering the pattern of demand, a question I can only raise, but not address, here but which should certainly be on the agenda for policy debate from now on.

A Misunderstanding?

Dick Barry's response seems to be based on a misunderstanding of our article. We argued that owner occupiers tend to vote Conservative because the Conservatives tend to look after them. He thinks that if everyone becomes an owner occupier everyone will vote Conservative.

He is right - *if* Labour remains the party of the council tenant. If it becomes the party for *fair* owner occupation, worse off owner occupiers will tend to vote Labour whilst the richer owner occupiers will tend to vote Conservative.

Our view is that once *everyone* has the chance of becoming an owner occupier it will be possible to tackle some of the abuses of owner occupation (notably mortgage interest relief going way beyond need, chiefly, but not simply, amongst higher rate taxpayers) without automatically uniting owner occupiers behind the Conservatives. Dick Barry's view that owner occupation is "near to saturation" because the building societies say so is surely based on the current possibilities of access to owner occupation; we are proposing a new form of access.

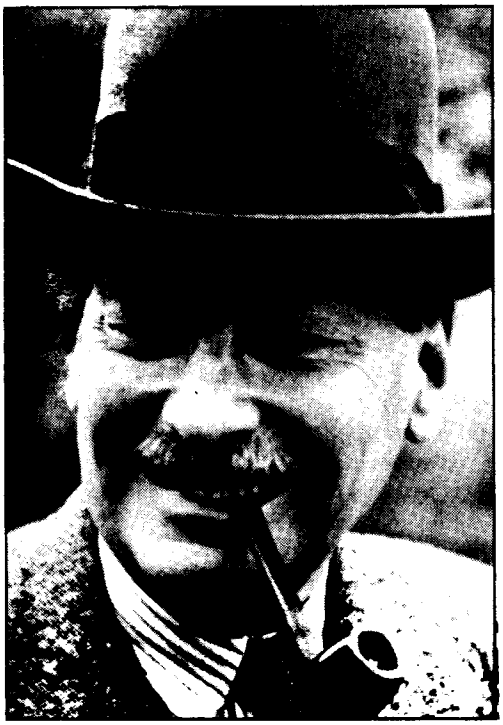
A minimum point which emerges from our article, and one which Dick Barry does not really seem to have accepted, is that with 63% of tenures now being owner occupiers it is crucial to Labour strategy not to upset this group.

Mark Cowling

Socialists in Retrospect: I

CLEMENT ATTLEE

(Attlee, by Kenneth Harris. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, paperback 1984, 640pp, £5.95)



Kenneth Harris's political biography of Attlee is a long book - nearly 500 pages. Yet I found it a very readable book. I must confess that before reading the biography I had only a sketchy knowledge of Attlee's role in Labour Party history. Like everyone else I knew that he had led the very effective post-war Labour administration from 1945-1951, but little else. Harris's biography manages to fill most of the gaps. Those that remain are, I suspect, more Attlee's fault than Harris's. What picture emerges then of Attlee in Harris's biography?

Attlee came from a reasonably well off middle-class family. His upbringing was fairly typical. He attended Haileybury public school and then went on to Oxford to study history. On finishing at Oxford he began to train as a barrister at his father's firm of solicitors. His family had a strong christian-humanist tradition, and while some of this may have rubbed off on Attlee, by the age of 21 his mentality appears to have been that of a slightly cynical, detatched young man with some aesthetic pretensions.

His transformation to socialism took place over a remarkably short space of time. A chance visit to his old public school's youth club in the East End first drew his attention to the plight of the working class and the unemployed. Though distressed by what he saw, his reaction was sharply different from that of a middle-class philanthropist.

He was not attracted by the idea of doing good works for the poor. Rather he did not want there to be any poor. In addition, from his own observations he decided the poor were poor because of the capitalist system's defects. He was not afraid to draw the conclusion that therefore the capitalist system required substantial modification. And so the young man who had been wandering rather aimlessly through life suddenly had a purpose.

Attlee was never a marxist. His socialism was very much in the British tradition based on Owen, Carlyle, Ruskin and William Morris, whose works he particularly liked. He liked the utopian vision in Morris's writings and he seems to have used it to give him moral strength rather than to determine practical political activities.

For a young socialist in those days there were many organisations which he could join. Attlee first joined the Fabian Society but soon left as he felt that they wanted to change society *on behalf of* the working class. Attlee felt that the working class should take its destiny into its own hands. He found a similar attitude in the ILP which he joined on leaving the Fabians. The year was 1908 and Attlee was 25 years old.

Into politics

And so began Attlee's public political career, standing at street corners addressing the passing crowd, canvassing in the local slums, collecting and agitating in support of various strikes, writing articles. He was still engaged in these activities seven years later when the first world war started.

On the outbreak of war Attlee immediately joined the army. This strikes me as being a typical Attlee move. He felt the correct thing to do was to support the war effort. The fact that the ILP was sharply divided on the issue of the war and that Ramsey MacDonald was the main proponent of the pacifist position was irrelevant once Attlee had made up his mind.

Harris gives no account of an agonised Attlee wondering if he was doing the right thing. I doubt if Attlee ever felt a moment's guilt in his entire life (unlike the guilt ridden members of today's Constituency Labour Parties) and I think this is quite important in understanding his effectiveness in the world. Unfortunately, since Attlee had no qualms about the first world war, one then gets no feel in Harris's account for the crisis that affected British and European socialism in this period. We shall ignore here Attlee's activities during the war other than to note that he returned from the war a badly wounded major and plunged straight into East End politics.

He was quickly spotted as MP material and so with the backing of the Irish and Jewish communities was made the Labour Party candidate for Limehouse in the London County Council election of 1919. Although this first election attempt was unsuccessful, he was adopted as the candidate in the general election of 1922, scraping home with a margin of 1,899 votes to be in parliament for the formation of the first minority Labour government with 191 seats. He was Ramsay MacDonald's parliamentary private secretary for the brief life of that parliament before its sudden collapse over an incident involving the communist party.

Attlee was not impressed by MacDonald's handling of this affair. Nor was he impressed by MacDonald's habit of complaining to Attlee himself about the behaviour of his senior colleagues. Labour lost 40 seats in the ensuing general election (the Zinoviev letter election) even though the overall Labour vote went up by over one million votes. Attlee retained his seat with a substantial majority.

The years 1924-1929 were fairly quiet years politically for Attlee. There was the general strike in 1926 for which Attlee worked actively. Its failure finished for him and indeed for many other potential syndicalists the idea that the liberation of labour could be achieved by other than political means. He continued with his public meetings, writing and administrative activities though at a more leisurely pace than before.

In 1928 he agreed to take part in a royal commission on the position of India in the empire, though he did this reluctantly as he felt involvement in the commission would prevent him taking office in the next Labour administration which he felt was imminent. MacDonald assured him that this would not be the case. However, when in the 1929 general election Labour gained a majority and formed a government, he was,

much to his annoyance, not included.

Mosley and MacDonald

By 1929 then Attlee was a reasonably well known and respected member of the party. No one, however, would have believed it possible that within four years he would become leader and remain so for the next twenty years. There is no doubt that lady fortune made several very timely interventions in his career in these years. The first timely intervention was connected with the Mosley affair.

The account of the Mosley affair is unfortunately very brief in Harris's biography. The Labour MP Oswald Mosley in 1930 launched a strong attack on the Labour government. He favoured active government intervention along Keynesian lines to attack the massive problem of unemployment. Harris does not manage to give us much idea of what Attlee really thought about Mosley's proposals. Whatever he may have thought, however, Attlee supported MacDonald in the dispute. Mosley lost and Attlee was given Mosley's old position as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. According to Harris:

"the appointment was most fortunate for Attlee. It widened his range of experience; it relieved him of the burden of having seemed reactionary on India; and it enabled him to be identified with those who, as a result of the crisis of 1933 would later break with the traitors, MacDonald, J.H. Thomas and Philip Snowden."

As Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster he was automatically a member of the economic advisory council which included Keynes, Tawney, Cole, Bevin and Citrine. He learned much from attending the occasional council meetings. In addition he learned how totally incapable of acting MacDonald seemed to be, that he was quite incapable of comprehending anything other than the most sterile orthodox economic remedies.

As the economic situation deteriorated MacDonald in desperation decided he must cut unemployment benefits to help balance his budget. This was the last straw for his cabinet, which revolted. MacDonald tendered his resignation to the King who, without, it appears, much difficulty, convinced him to form a National Government with the Conservatives and Liberals.

In the ensuing general election the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) was reduced to a rump of 50 members. Attlee himself only scraped home by less than 1,000 votes. Every single member of MacDonald's cabinet who had opposed the National Government lost his seat with the sole exception of George Lansbury. And so George Lansbury was elected leader of the PLP while Attlee was elected deputy leader. The ill winds which had temporarily destroyed the Labour Party had brought Attlee nothing but good.

The rebuilding of the labour movement began immediately. As Lansbury was not in good health it fell to Attlee to represent the labour movement in Parliament. Day after day, week in, week out he criticised, mocked, pounded away at the National Government. He spoke more than any other member of parliament in the years 1931 to 1933. Alone, almost, he embodied His Majesty's Opposition.

The Labour Party learned much from MacDonald's failure. It realised that it had to have a worked out set of policies and in addition a clear set of priorities. It was no use going for everything and gaining nothing. Harris's book does not suggest that Attlee was very deeply involved in formulating the major policy documents produced by Labour in the 1930s on which it was to fight the general election in 1945. That work was largely done by Dalton and Morrison. Rather Attlee took the policies, mastered them, propagated them and popularised them. In addition, through his chairmanship of committees he got things produced.

War and the Labour Leadership

It was not however domestic policies which would divide the Labour Party in the period 1931-1939. This period saw the rise of fascism in Europe, the imperialist moves of Hitler and Mussolini and the Spanish civil war. Year after year the Labour Party conferences were dominated by these events. It must be remembered that the labour movement had directly experienced the carnage of the first world war and was still deeply affected by that experience. Attlee himself had seen the worst of it at Gallipoli. The idea that a war between nations could be anything other than imperialist was hardly admitted. In particular, opposition to Hitler and Mussolini was interpreted as just British imperialism on the move.

Attlee, Bevin and Dalton were the first to break with this mentality. Bevin and Dalton in particular realised at an early date that it was extremely probable that a war would have to be fought with Hitler. It appears that Attlee agreed with this analysis but refused to vote in favour of the defence estimates in parliament until as late as 1937. Attlee's excuse was that he was not prepared to arm Baldwin's government whose intentions he did not trust. I suspect however that he took this position to prevent a split in the party since opposing the defence estimates had no practical consequences given the Tory majority in Parliament.

The war issue was yet another historical accident which was to help make Attlee leader of the Party. Lansbury, the leader up until 1935, was a pacifist and he publicly voiced his disagreement with a TUC conference resolution (in September 1935) that the Italian aggression against Abyssinia must be stopped, if necessary by force. At the Labour Party conference in October Bevin launched his famous attack on Lansbury (famous as much for its personal invective as for its political content). Having been defeated in the vote by almost 2 million votes and feeling personally humiliated, Lansbury resigned. Attlee was made leader since agreement could not be reached on anyone else. Everyone saw it as a temporary measure. No one imagined he would still be leader 20 years later.

When I say that Attlee became leader almost by accident I mean that he spent no time trying to work out ways of becoming leader, unlike Herbert Morrison, (who spent nearly his whole life attempting to do so), and perhaps Dalton to a lesser extent. Having become leader Attlee did occasionally take measures to prevent anyone ousting him. Harris suggests that he remained as leader after 1951 simply to exclude Morrison who, he felt, was too vain and pompous to make a good leader. He also suggests that at one point Attlee hoped that Bevan might develop into a potential leader but eventually had to write him off as too unstable. All that however was in the future.

Harris does not deal much with Attlee and Spain. He covers Attlee's visit to Spain and the emotional events at the 1936 conference in Edinburgh but I do not feel that I know what Attlee really thought about it all. There is a throw-away remark to the effect that the republican government was seen as largely responsible for the situation there, and therefore presumably Attlee felt himself to be partly excused for doing nothing, but this is not developed. (This attitude would have been largely shared by Dalton and Bevin).

The years 1937-1939 saw the crisis in Europe deepen. The Labour Party under Attlee strengthened its commitment to opposing Hitler in Europe. Chamberlain was prepared to let things go, but had so committed himself to the defence of Poland that, when Hitler invaded it, he felt compelled to declare war on Germany.

Harris brings out very well that interim period (which one tends to forget) from the outbreak of the war up to the removal of Chamberlain and the assumption by Churchill of the role of National Leader. The Labour Party's role in the removal of Chamberlain appears to have been crucial. It refused point blank to serve in a National Government under Chamberlain's leadership because he was not prosecuting the war actively enough; but it was prepared to serve under Churchill. Since a National

Government was necessary Chamberlain went. Churchill became Prime Minister and Attlee (unofficially) deputy Prime Minister.

Problems of a National Government

Harris's account of the period 1940-1945 is detailed. There are two central themes in this account. The first theme is the task of prosecuting the war. The second theme is the problem of a Labour Party working with a Conservative party in a National Government.

In the task of prosecuting the war Attlee appears to have discharged his duties with immense competence.

"The overall conduct of the war was in the hands of three interconnected committees. The war cabinet, the defence committee and the lord president's committee which ran the civil side of the war. Only Attlee was a member of all three.".

Churchill was chairman of the first two committees, Attlee was his deputy and also chairman of the third. Other than Churchill he was the only person to remain continuously a member of the war cabinet. In addition he regularly deputised for Churchill at Westminster.

"His principlal task was to keep the coalition together; to make political sense of Churchill's dictum: ' Everything for the war, whether controversial or not, and nothing controversial that is not bona fide for the war'".

Harris's account of the period brings out quite sharply the divisions in the government and in parliament on some quite fundamental issues which with the benefit of hindsight seem strange. For instance in December 1940 a number of ILP members tabled a motion calling for a negotiated peace with Germany. Indeed a cabinet committee was set up to determine war aims. When it reported in January 1941 Churchill refused to make a statement on the grounds that *'precise aims would be compromising whereas vague principles would disappoint'.* (This was all before the invasion of the USSR and the bombing of Pearl harbour).

The need to put the war before the pursuit of socialist aims per se led to regular problems within the PLP. These attacks on Labour's role in the national government were invariably led or instigated by Aneurin Bevan who felt that more could be achieved in the social and economic spheres without damaging the war effort. It is interesting that Attlee never held this against Bevan. I suspect he found it fairly useful to have someone putting a doctrinaire socialist position while not actually doing any damage to the war effort. Bevin was much more upset by what he saw as Bevan's treachery.

Two significant rebellions of the PLP occurred in mid-1942. The first was over the government white paper in June on the coal mines which evaded the question of ownership. Eight Labour MPs went into the lobbies against the government. In the division in July on the size of the increase in old age pensions 63 Labour MPs voted against the government.

In October 1942 Bevan launched a vigorous attack on Attlee in the pages of Tribune. Its vehemence is surprising.

"If Mr Attlee has gained some of the toughness which comes with high position in politics, it has been reserved for the members and policies of his own Party.....

.....Were merely Mr. Attlee's reputation at stake we would find it worthy of comment as the passing of yet another socialist into the limbo of collaboration. But...Mr. Attlee is involving the entire LP in the disrespect which his actions...have earned."

In addition Attlee was under continuous attack from Laski and Stafford Cripps. The self-doubt of many members of the Labour Party is well caught in a letter written by RH Tawney to Beatrice Webb In December 1942:

" As far as I can see the Labour Party has temporarily ceased not only to count but to believe in itself..... The only man who, in my opinion, might stop the rot is Bevin"

Bevan,Laski and Tawney may have raised questions about Attlee's political position but Bevin seems rarely to have entertained any such doubts. Indeed Bevin was to threaten to leave the PLP because of the behaviour of people like Bevan, Laski and Cripps. This was over the issue of the Beveridge report. Churchill had rejected any attempt to implement the report during the war. He had also agreed that there would be no commitment against such legislation. The PLP in general wanted immediate moves towards implementation and was prepared to vote against the government:

"In a stormy meeting of the PLP Attlee and Morrison tried to persuade, Bevin bullied, but all three voiced the same theme: backbenchers must not vote against the government."

Bevin threatened to resign if Labour went into the lobby against the government. Attlee made one of his finest parliamentary performances - but to no avail. 97 Labour MPs voted against the government, 30 abstained and 23 supported the government. From now on almost to the last year of the war Bevin suspended relations with the Labour Party, though his relationship with Attlee was unaffected. At the Bournemouth conference in June 1943 Attlee defended the political approach which was guiding his relationship with the Conservatives in the national government:

"The people of this country will not forget that some of the most onerous posts in Government have been held by Labour men who have shown great ability, ability to administer and courage to take unpopular decisions.....We have a body of men and women who are experienced in administration and have proved themselves fit to govern. Had we remained merely a body of critics who left others to do the work, the Party would not have gained the respect and confidence of the country which I know it has today."

The Labour Government, 1945.

"One cannot but be struck...by the extent to which the Labour leaders disliked each other. They were an increadibly vain bunch. Attlee on the other hand had no vanity. Neither was he diffident or deferential. He enabled the Labour party to be effective."

There were to be two other major clashes before the end of the war. By March 1944 large numbers of miners were on strike because of a minimum wages policy. Bevin drafted an amendment to the defence regulations which gave the government additional powers to deal with incitement to strike in the essential services. Bevan led the attackers and in a debate in the Commons only 65 MPs out of 165 voted for the regulations. Attlee called a meeting of the PLP to discuss Bevan's expulsion. When Bevan agreed in future to obey the party's standing orders the matter was not pursued.

The last major clash was over Bevin's white paper on employment policy. Bevan (yet again) accused Bevin of rejecting the solutions to which socialists had been committed for years. Bevin in return launched a furious attack on socialist doctrinaires. The strain of being a pseudo-opposition were clearly showing by the end of the war. Everyone was relieved when the general election finally occurred.

Bevin's and Attlee's predictions of the electorate's reaction to Labour's involvement in a National Government turned out to be correct. The electorate rewarded Labour for its responsible behaviour by giving it a massive overall majority of 150.

Immediately the result became known Attlee's position as leader was again under attack from Laski and Morrison who wanted a contest for the Party leadership before the government was formed. At Bevin's instigation Attlee ignored Morrison and went to Buckingham Palace where he accepted the King's request to form a government. Morrison was presented with a *fait accompli*. There was nothing he could do.

Into Power

The achievements of the 1945-51 Labour administration are well known. I shall not recite them here. It is Attlee's role in these achievements that is of interest here. As always he held the ring. He let his ministers get on with things while keeping a close watch on what was developing. One cannot but be struck in Harris's account by the extent to which the Labour leaders disliked each other. They were an incredibly vain bunch. Attlee on the other hand had no vanity. Neither was he diffident or deferential. He enabled the Labour Party to be effective.

Domestic policy had largely been formulated by Morrison and Dalton. Attlee appeared to have no disagreements with those policies and let his ministers get on with implementing them. He personally took an active interest in foreign affairs, particularly in the termination of the Indian empire, which he effected with great success. The Palestine policy was not successful but there is every reason to believe that there was no policy which could be successful there either then or now. The matter has to be resolved by force of arms.

Towards the end of the first post-war Labour government when much had been achieved, the question arose - what next? The party divided into two groups: the consolidationists and the advancers. The latter wanted more nationalisation and state intervention in accordance with the traditional socialist model. The former were already beginning to ask questions about the usefulness of nationalisation and state intervention generally. Attlee was for consolidation though he was still prepared to nationalise the steel industry if only to hold the party together.

One must bear in mind that at this point (1950) the Labour leaders were quite old. Attlee was 67, Morrison was 62, Dalton was 63, Bevin was 69. They had been actively involved in running the country for over ten years and had achieved many of their original aims. They were never doctrinaire socialists. They soon became aware of the weaknesses of nationalisation as any sort of panacea for the country's economic plight. The nationalised industries, as everyone was aware, had their problems too.

The consolidationists won easily in most of these disputes and so the manifestoes for the 1950 and 1951 general elections were dominated by their approach.

Labour did very well in the 1950 election in terms of the number of votes received. However it had a majority of only 5 seats. It might have survived for some considerable time had the pressure of international events in the form of the Korean war not emerged. Although Nye Bevan was to resign ostensibly over the realisation of charges on prescriptions, in fact much of his disquiet was based on what he felt was a too servile following of American foreign policy.

Harris's whole account of the period 1952-1955 (when Attlee resigned) is very interesting. It suggests that all the disputes of the period were centred around foreign and defence questions, specifically whether Germany should be allowed to rearm, (Bevan and Dalton were very opposed to this), and whether Britain should manufacture its own Hydrogen Bomb. Pressure for German rearmament was coming largely from America which wanted to reduce its commitment to European defence. But many Europeans still had their doubts.

It is interesting to note that on the issue of the Hydrogen bomb there was virtually no support for a unilateral nuclear disarmament position. As Attlee said:

"I don't believe you can do it by saying you will set an example and disarming and hope the other fellows will follow suit. It looks a fine gesture, but suppose it doesn't come off, suppose the other fellows don't follow suit."

Yet despite the dominance of the foreign policy issues at the party conferences one cannot but feel that what was really in question was the whole world outlook of the Labour Party. It was necessary to build a new world outlook which would take cognisance of the victories gained and develop new policies reflecting these victories.

It must surely be admitted that Attlee had little to offer the Party at this juncture. He had been a perfect leader when the Party was clear in its aims but he was never an original thinker and had no new ideas to help the Party in the 1950s. To be fair to Attlee he probably realised this himself.

Harris suggests that in this period 1951-55 Attlee saw himself as caretaker of a party which had run out of steam. He was looking for some one to replace himself. Bevan he liked but eventually decided that he could never be leader since he wanted to lead and rebel at the same time. He did not admire Morrison and felt that Morrison would destroy the party in his antagonism to Bevan.

He eventually decided to throw his support behind Dalton's *protege* Gaitskell who had become very popular. He felt the deep personal antagonism which existed between Bevan and Gaitskell would eventually be overcome. In this he was proved correct. However he did not forsee that he would outlive both of them.

Conclusion

Attlee became leader of the Labour Party by accident in 1935. Yet he was to turn out to be a very effective leader of the Party for the next 20 years largely because his strength was orchestrating the implementation of agreed policies. When a Party is not agreed on its policies it needs a strong leader with some charisma who is able to impose his world view on it. Charisma was not something of which Attlee had very much. Had Gaitskell lived, his charisma and leadership might eventually have got the Labour Party out of the rut into which it had settled. Is it still in that rut?

Martin Dolphin

Socialists in Retrospect: II

HUGH DALTON

(The Political Diary of Hugh Dalton, 1918-1940 and 1945-1960, edited by Ben Pimlott. Jonathan Cape, 1986, £40.)

Socialists like to be able to place their leaders in neat categories, heroes or villains, Bevan and Gaitskell, Benn and Healey. Those figures who cannot be so neatly slotted into place on right or left tend to be forgotten. Dalton is one such figure - a rather peculiar personality, an academic, a practical politician, a leading figure on Labour's NEC for many years and Labour's first and only radical Chancellor.

If he is remembered at all today, it is as the associate and mentor of Gaitskell and Crosland, and thereby a man on the Right of the Labour Party. Yet when he resigned as Chancellor in 1947 he was supported by the Tribune Group and came to be seen as a standard-bearer of Labour's radical policies against the austerity policies of Stafford Cripps, the erstwhile left-winger who succeeded him as Chancellor.

Practical Socialism

These diaries tell the story of Labour's evolution from a party without a practical programme for government in the 1920s into an effective reforming government in the 1940s and ultimately a party locked into an increasingly futile ideological rivalry by the time of his death in 1962.

Dalton was, along with Attlee, Morrison and Bevin, a key figure in turning Labour into an effective party. His most important book, **Practical Socialism** [1935] put the emphasis on planning and nationalisation and its ideas were more or less realised by Labour when in government after 1945.

His overall view was Fabian, in so far as the transition to socialism would be achieved through a series of legislative and administrative acts. His views on economics were expansionist and Keynesian, although unlike Keynes he believed that the expansion of the economy should favour the working class.

He distanced himself from the Left more in the sphere of foreign policy. In the 1930s he was in favour of rearmament and against all attempts by the Communists to infiltrate the Labour Party.

Dalton as Chancellor

When Dalton became Chancellor, the Treasury was not the all-powerful department it is today. Ministerial policy for economic policy was divided between Dalton, who had control over budgetary policy, Morrison, who was in charge of planning and physical controls, and Cripps who ran industry.

As Chancellor, Dalton attempted to relate financial policy to socialist objectives - notably full employment and a fairer taxation policy. Thus in his first two budgets he reduced income tax while increasing surtax and death duties. A further aspect of his policy was cheap money - low interest rates - which would help investment and also enable local authorities to borrow for the housing programme.

His most serious problem as Chancellor was the balance of payments problem - without foreign loans there was little if any prospect of a general rise in the standard of living. However, given these limitations and the overall problems of the post-war era, Labour did succeed in transforming Britain in the interests of the working class.

Personal rivalries and ideological differences

It is interesting to note that for as long as Labour had a clearly defined policy with a common aim and a practical programme for government, its personal rivalries and ideological differences, while always there (as is clear from many entries in the diaries) were never able to divert the party from its chosen path. Personal differences were subordinated to the party's clear sense of purpose and political will to carry out its programme.

Attlee with Hugh Dalton

After about 1950 these rivalries come to the fore and personality clashes, envy and hatred merged into ideological struggles and became inseparable from them. Dalton was a victim of this as much as anyone.

Yet he was not unaware of what this was doing to Labour. As he noted in Febuary 1953, "Labour is making no progress in the country. We don't look or sound like an effective government". Nor was Labour to do so again in his lifetime.

What the diaries demonstrate above all is that when in tune with the demands of a rising social class Labour was able to develop an effective and radical programme for government and was able to put it into practice. But once out of tune with the basic instincts of society it would quickly fall back into an ineffective squabbling opposition.

Today, Labour is not in tune with the working class. Its ideological parameters prevent it from tuning into and leading it. And it seems that not even the prospect of a General Election has been able to prevent Labour from reverting to the sterility of the 1950s.

Erratic Judgement

Dalton himself, for all the self-confidence, vanity and arrogance he displays in these diaries, was very much a flawed personality. In particular, he was much addicted to plotting against his colleagues - especially Attlee, whom Dalton simply could not understand. And he often revealed poor judgement.

In a manoeuvre in 1947, aimed at replacing Attlee with Ernest Bevin, he seems to have expected Morrison to cooperate with this despite the latter's own ambitions to be premier and his deep dislike of Bevin.

But in many of his assessments, Dalton proved to be correct. He saw early on that Aneurin Bevan could not lead Labour, and that Morrison's reputation was fatally damaged after his disastrous spell as Foreign Secretary in 1951. He also felt that Wilson was not to be trusted, observing that "he trims and wavers".

But others do not emerge as rounded figures from the diaries. In particular, one notes that Dalton simply could not make any sense of Attlee - he thought he would be a better leader himself. And was Shinwell really such an odious character?

Yet behind the personality clashes and the intrigue there lies the great success of Labour's reforming government of 1945. In the light of the 1987 election, one may well ask if we shall ever see another one!

J. Papadopoulos

BRITISH HYPOCRISY AND FRENCH LETTERS

Prostitution Laws - Hypocrisy Rules O.K.

Viewed logically, Britain's laws on prostitution are an absurdity. Prostitution *as such* is not illegal. But there are a plethora of laws that make it impossible for prostitutes to operate without breaking the law. Lurid porn magazines are legal, but not discrete little journals where prostitutes could advertise their services. Soliciting is illegal, regardless of whether any member of the public is offended by it. If the laws were strictly enforced, prostitutes would hardly be able to operate at all.

They are not strictly enforced, and few people expect them to be strictly enforced. The police simply turn a blind eye to prostitution in some areas. But they are free to arrest prostitutes as and when they think fit. The penalty for a first offence is a fine; the penalty for further offences is often a larger fine. Naturally, these fines are met by continued prostitution. A prostitute who tried to reform after a brush with the law would risk going to jail!

It's not logical - but without doubt there is a logic behind it. The establishment does not seriously think that it could or should abolish prostitution. But it wants to *pretend* to be doing something; and it wants to keep prostitutes under control, free to operate only where the police choose to turn a blind eye.

What's the solution? One could argue for much tougher laws, to try to get rid of prostitution altogether. For a start, one could make the act of prostitution illegal, both for prostitute and client. Alternatively, the whole business could simply be decriminalised. Specific laws against prostitutes operating and finding clients would be repealed. Prostitutes would be left alone, for so long as they carried on their business without troubling the rest of society.

In practice, hardly anyone is arguing for really tough laws that might seriously limit prostitution. There is a widespread belief that society could not in fact carry on without prostitutes. Few people like to say this; even fewer doubt that it is true. Throughout history, there have been very few societies that could do without them. The real choice is between decriminalisation and the present hypocritical set-up.

The hypocrisy survives because prostitution can not ever be a particularly nice business. The prostitutes would much prefer to be earning the same money in some nicer trade. The prostitutes' clients would much prefer it if their sexual needs could be met within some warm, tender and loving relationship. Both parties to the transaction settle for what they can get. In an ideal world it would not be necessary. But it is unclear how preventing prostitution would take us any nearer an ideal world.

Four types of argument can be put against decriminalising prostitution:

(1) The women involved are exploited, downtrodden victims of society.

(2) To legalise prostitution is to condone immorality.

(3) Criminal elements are involved; one should not make life easier for criminals.

(4) Something has to done about controlling VD and AIDS.

On the first point, it is certainly true that many of the women involved are victims of one sort or another. Usually, they become prostitutes as a way out of trouble - debts or an impossible home life. It is said that high unemployment has boosted the number of prostitutes - but they existed even in the days when almost anyone could get a job. Abolish prostitution, and their original problems would still exist. You do not save people from drowning by taking away their lifejackets.

Feminists tend to stress the "exploitation" argument. Prostitution is men exploiting women; therefore nothing must be done to decriminalise it. Feminists tend to be middle-class and well-educated, mostly with well-paid jobs. They are fairly safe from the pressures that drive women to prostitution; the fact that prostitutes would be somewhat less exploited with decriminalisation does not concern them.

They tend to view women in the sex industry as a species of lower animal; to be pitied and patronised, but never treated as "sisters", or even as fellow human beings. One might have thought that "a woman's right to choose" included the right to be a stripper or a prostitute, if that's what she wants. But feminists seem to consider themselves the lawful joint-owners of the bodies of *all* women, whatever the other women may think about the matter. "A women's right to choose" does not extend to matters which the majority of feminists disapprove of!

(Of course, not all prostitutes are women, and not all clients are men. There was a case in the USA, where a man was being paid by women for various sexual services. He was acquitted of prostitution, because the relevant laws assumed that a prostitute must be female. But it is female heterosexual prostitution that is the main form, and that is central to the question.)

On the second point - prostitution is already accepted in practice, and also looked down on. Social attitudes are not easily made or changed by law. Mothers are hardly likely to recommend it to their daughters as a nice career, were it to be decriminalised. Law is one thing; morality is quite another. The two should not be confused. Besides, as I said before, the present set-up is totally hypocritical. And no one is campaigning for a serious prohibition.

On the third point - when a trade is illegal, of course criminals are going to get involved. Decriminalisation may not get rid of the criminal elements - after all, betting has been legalised without becoming spotless beyond reproach. But with decriminalisation, prostitutes would be allowed to trade on a legal basis. Firm action could then be taken against actual lawbreaking - protection rackets, under-age sex, drugs, turning streets where people live into open-air brothels. The prostitutes themselves might be willing to help, provided they were left free to retail sex in a legal and controlled manner.

On the fourth point, again, the prostitutes could do a lot to help the fight against VD and AIDS. They're not stupid, and these diseases threaten them more than the rest of us. (Not that sex for mutual pleasure gives any immunity, of course.) In Britain and in the rest of Western Europe, prostitutes were insisting on the use of condoms long before anyone had dreamed that such a thing as AIDS might exist.

More could be done, of course. One could make it a requirement that every prostitute

should have weekly check-ups and carry a certificate to prove this. But since prostitutes hate to be listed or registered, there should be no bureaucratic nonsense like asking for real names or addresses. There *should* be really heavy penalties for forging certificates or otherwise abusing the system. And the prostitutes themselves would help enforce the system.

(During a recent BBC programme on "Street Girls", one prostitute commented on another who was operating without using a durex. She said "that's totally out of order; it's really disgusting". I'm sure a lot of them would feel that way.)

Prostitution as such is not a social evil. Its existence is a symptom of much deeper social evils; it is also a limited cure for some of them. (Carrying a handkerchief does not cure a cold. But it makes a cold much easier to put up with). Several attempts have been made to change the law; so far the establishment has used delay and hypocrisy to keep things as they are. But it's high time for a change.

Michael Alexander

Condominium!

It has taken the AIDS syndrome to return the condom to its original purpose. For most of its history, the condom has been marketed as a "family planning" device. In practice it was just as often to let young unmarried people have sex without unwanted pregnancies. But it seems likely that they were first invented as a neat way of not getting a dose of the clap.

The whole notion of sex without reproduction took a long time to get established. Malthus was dead set against any sort of contraception - he thought it better that population be kept down by "misery and vice". And when the leading radical William Godwin argued against him, Godwin's main suggestion was infanticide!

By an irony of history, Malthus's name was used as a respectable cover by the early advocates of Birth Control. Condoms and the like were called **Malthusian Devices**. Their other use was never quite forgotten - prostitutes tended to make their clients use them, for instance. But far too many people thought that "The Pill" was the answer; and homosexuals, logically enough, saw no need to concern themselves with birth control.

Now, at last, the older purpose of the sheath is being remembered. Even Government advertisments say "wear a condom" - but even so, at the time I write this, advertisments for condoms are not yet allowed on TV. Television can show rape and murder, but until recently, it could not show contraceptives. At present, advice about condoms is allowed, but only "ghettoised" is special programs that many people won't watch. The whole point about adverts is that they force themselves on people who have tuned in to watch something else. If they can be allowed for all sorts of useless rubbish, why forbid them for potential life-savers?

Dan Ackroid

LABOUR AND THE SDP

by Hugh Roberts

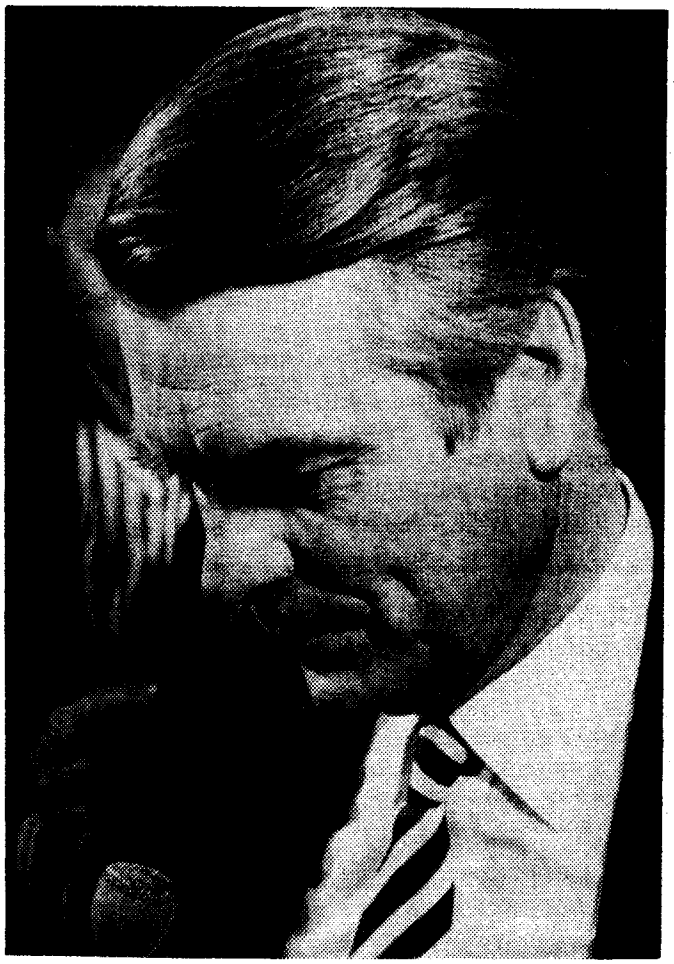
The failure of the SDP-Liberal Alliance to break through on June 11 was the failure of a mirage to substantiate itself. The British state is a parliamentary democracy. The constitutional supremacy of the legislature within the state determines the character of the party system. It ensures that the party system is intrinsically and inescapably adversarial, and has a relentless tendency to resolve itself into the opposition of two major parties competing for office.

There is no room in such a political system for a party of the "centre". The middle ground in this system is continuously contested by the two main parties of the left and right. It is the ground upon which they do battle. It cannot be permanently occupied by a third force. A third party, or alliance of parties, can only function as the occasional receptacle of transient protest votes, or as the voice of the more or less eccentric political fringe. That is what the Liberals have been since the 1930s.

From Jenkins to Owen

The SDP was set up by experienced and substantial reformist politicians who had grounds for believing in 1981 that the Labour Party was beyond saving. Had the SDP set itself the aim of replacing the Labour Party as the party of progressive reform and worked single-mindedly to realise this aim, it might conceivably have got somewhere. Instead it followed the lead of its founder, Roy Jenkins, associated itself with the Liberal, and spent the next six years chasing the mirage of the middle ground.

When David Owen succeded Jenkins as leader of the SDP in 1983, he began to subvert the logic of the Jenkins enterprise. This logic undoubtedly pointed to a merger with the Liberals. Owen did everything in his power to resist a merger and to build up a distinct identity for the SDP. But it was already too late to withdraw the new party from its alliance with the Liberals and Owen therefore set out to live with this alliance in the medium term while keeping alive the option of abandoning it in the longer term.



Owen is right to refuse a merger with the Liberals;

It is now being made impossible for Owen to sustain this delicate balancing act. The Liberals have had enough of it and the Jenkinsites in the SDP, having been marginalised by Owen since 1983, are now determined to regain control over the party and resume the hunt for the mirage. With only 5 MPs, Owen's position is extremely weak. The realistic choice before the SPD appears to be dissolution into an enlarged, but unreformed, Liberal Party and oblivion after the next general election.

The Third Option

There is a third possibility for Owen and his fellow SDP MPs, but it depends on the Labour Party to make it a realistic option. This is for Owen and his supporters to return to the Labour camp. In the current state of civil war within the SDP, it is not possible for Owen to propose this course. But if Neil Kinnock was to extend the invitation, it might be possible for Owen and Co. to accept it.

Owen is without question the most substantial and the most principled of the original "Gang of Four" who founded the SDP. He was the only one of them to argue clearly and honestly against the constitutional changes being made within the Labour Party at the special party conference at Wembly in 1981. He made a powerful speech in favour of the principle of "one member, one vote" on that occasion. He was willing to accept the democratisation of the Labour Party, but argued that this should be a real democratisation, involving the ordinary members, and not simply the creation of powerful extra-parliamentry caucuses and electoral colleges by which the parliamentary party would be bound hand and foot.

Since June 11, Neil Kinock has made it clear that he intends to bring about precisely the constitutional changes which Owen proposed in 1981. It is therefore open to him to point out that there is agreement in principle between him and Owen on how the Labour Party should conduct its business. He could justify his invitation to the Owenites to return to the Labour Party on that basis.

He would undoubtedly have to weather a storm within the party if he did so. But a Labour Party which could once again find room within itself for politicians of the calibre of Owen and John Cartwright would gain enormously in terms of public credibility and respect. It would transform Labour's prospects of winning the next election.

Kinnock's false step

Unfortunately, Kinnock appears already to have ruled out this possibility. Speaking at the Scottish miners' gala in Edinburgh on June 13, he remarked that if forced to choose between associating in political action with Mick McGahey or David Owen, he would choose Mick. "Differences with Communists I have had and have," he said, "but differences are different to divisions."

The sooner Kinnock drops this sort of mindless hair-splitting, the better. Nobody but the CPGB has an interest in forcing Kinnock to make this choice, and the CPGB is in no position to force the Labour Party to do anything it does not want to do.

The Labour Party has everything to gain and nothing to lose from a reconciliation with principled politicians who had serious reasons for leaving it in 1981 and have solid reasons for returning to it in 1987. And it would immeasurably enhance Kinnock's stature if he were to prove big enough to bring this reconciliation about.