

THE LABOUR LEFT

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SUMMARY

Throughout its lifetime the Labour Party has experienced ideological divisions resulting in the formation of Left and Right factions. The Labour Left has been the more prominent and persistent of the two factions, intent on defending the Party's socialist principles against the more pragmatic leanings of the Party leadership. During the 1930s and 1950s the Labour Left played a significant, yet increasingly reactive, role within the Party. In the 1970s, however, the Labour Left launched an offensive with a wide-ranging political programme, a set of proposals for an intra-Party transferral of power, and a political leader with exceptional skills. By 1981 this offensive had succeeded in securing the election of a Party Leader whose whole career had been very closely identified with the Labour Left, in achieving a significant shift of power from the parliamentarians to the constituency activists, and in developing a Party programme which incorporated certain major left-wing policies. Success, however, contained the seeds of decline. A split in the parliamentary Party and continual bitter intra-Party factional divisions played a

major part in the Party's disastrous electoral performance in the 1983 General Election. The election result gave additional impetus to the Labour Left's fragmentation to the point that it is no longer the cohesive faction it was in previous periods and is now a collection of disparate groups.

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"What a mysterious thing 'the Left' is."

Richard Crossman commenting in his diary in  
1951

"The Labour Party is a very broad party, reflecting a wide variety of opinions from Left to Right. This diversity of view is a great source of strength and we must vigorously resist any attempt that is made to drive the Left or the Right out of the party."

Tony Benn, speaking in Birmingham at the  
May Day rally, 1979

"This Conference deplores the growth of factional groups inside the Party, whether of the right or left or centre. Whilst recognising that, in a broadly based Party, it is natural for members holding similar opinions on controversial questions to co-operate to press their views, it believes that the establishment of such groups on a permanent basis leads to intolerance and intrigue, and to the formation of what are in effect parties within the Party, and that they constitute a threat to the Party's unity and effectiveness as a fighting force."

Resolution submitted by Bristol South CLP  
to the 1981 Labour Party conference

## INTRODUCTION

Delegates to the Labour Party's annual conference, meeting in Blackpool in October 1980, decided that the Party should adopt a wide range of commitments including an alternative economic programme, a withdrawal from the European Economic Community, a unilateral policy of nuclear disarmament, and an abolition of both private education and private medicine. They also decided to introduce an electoral college to choose the Party's Leader and Deputy Leader and to reaffirm a previous commitment to introduce the practice of mandatory reselection of all Labour MPs. These conference decisions were the culmination of a long campaign by the Labour Left to change the character of the Party. Further confirmation of the extent to which the Party had changed came in November 1980 when Michael Foot, a long-standing member of the Labour Left, was elected by the Parliamentary Labour Party as its new leader. Both Party Leader and policies were now closely identified with the Left. Never before in the Party's history had the Labour Left been so powerful.

The forward march of the Labour Left is the subject of this thesis. First, to explain its rise to such a prominent position within the Party. Some Labour Left critics claimed that the victories had been secured by conspiracy and by irrational and forcible tactics reminiscent of the pre-war German fascists. One object of this thesis is to demonstrate how wide of the mark and how

hysterical were these attacks. This thesis suggests various alternative reasons why the Labour Left came to power.

The foundation for the rise of the Labour Left was the collapse of post-war social democracy with its commitment to a mixed economy, economic growth, full employment, universal social services and free collective bargaining. By the mid-1960s a weak economy, low economic growth and an unstable currency led to challenges to the political consensus. On both the Left and the Right of the party spectrum there was a reaction to the social democratic consensus and the emergence of a more fundamental politics believed to be more appropriate to current political circumstances. Public expenditure cuts and labour law reform by Labour governments and free market economics by Conservative governments are specific examples of the extent to which conventional politics had collapsed.

Full employment and a steady growth in money wages had been the background to industrial relations for almost twenty years but by the end of the 1960s pressures to curb increases in money wages resulted in the growth of trade union militancy, firstly over wages but then in defence of traditional legal immunities. A new generation of trade union leaders emerged from this militancy more in sympathy with the Labour Left than their predecessors. The alliance between Party leaders and certain senior trade unionists, first forged in the 1930s, which had placed the Labour Left in so weak a position with the Party, no



longer prevailed.

The political terrain had shifted and the Labour Left responded to this by producing a cogent analysis of the economy and restating the relevance of a traditional form of socialism which emphasised the importance of structural changes to the capitalist economy rather than a more restricted notion of socialism which had prevailed in the 1950s. Furthermore, as well as a relevant programme the Labour Left also had powerful political leadership in the person of Tony Benn, a most able political communicator and senior Labour politician, who emerged to weld together a wide range of groups and individuals into a single, powerful left wing force within the Party.

A new political generation, both male and female, entered the Labour Party in the 1970s/1980s. They were primarily younger people with a higher education, radicalised in the late-1960s, and likely to be public service professionals. The Labour Left inspired and then capitalised upon the recruitment of this new political generation.

Finally, in explaining the rise of the Labour Left, the emergence of a new local government left is significant. The development of trade union militancy had been a major source of support for the Labour Left in the mid-1960s and early 1970s but by the mid-1980s the unions were less of a radical force primarily due to large scale unemployment, and parts of local government had replaced them as a radical institutional base of support. Local government could not provide the votes within the Labour

Party as had the affiliated unions but it could provide a source of ideas, outside the usual parliamentary-dominated Party channels, could provide the opportunity to test out in practice some of the ideas developed by the Labour Left, and often in doing so acted as the sole institutional focus of opposition to the Conservative Government.

This thesis compares this 'new Labour Left' with its predecessors of the 1930s and 1950s and notes its distinctive strengths and weaknesses. Some of the weaknesses have contributed to its fragmentation and decline since 1981 which leads to the third object of the thesis which is to explain the realignments now occurring within the Labour Left. Terms have been used recently such as 'hard' and 'soft' left, 'new' and 'traditional' left, 'vanguardist' and 'participatory' left. These terms need examining in order to ascertain the significance and force of today's Labour Left.

Before examining the contemporary Labour Left in any detail it is necessary to place this faction within a Party framework. Chapter One suggests reasons for the existence of a Labour Left and the conditions within the Party that facilitate its activities.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE LABOUR PARTY: PURPOSE, STRUCTURE AND VALUE SYSTEM

The Labour Party began life as an indirect party, namely that its membership was composed solely of affiliated bodies - primarily trade unions, socialist societies, and trade councils; not until 1918 was the direct element, namely the dues-paying individual, formally incorporated into the Party constitution. Since then Party membership has comprised both forms - affiliated and individual but during the past sixty seven years the importance of indirect membership has declined, except as a means of revenue-raising, as the Party constitution has been amended to stipulate that participants in the Party's formal decision-making process should be individual, paid-up Party members.(1)

Individual Party membership is open to applicants who are over the age of 15; who are British subjects, citizens of Eire, or have resided in Britain for more than one year; who, if eligible, belong to a TUC affiliated or bona-fide trade union; who are not members of political parties or organisations deemed ineligible for affiliation to the Party; and who accept and conform to the Party constitution, programme, principles and policy.(2) This last stipulation might be seen to require a rigid uniformity of opinion within the Party but, in fact, the Party's purpose has been a constant source of

intra-party debate.

The Party defines its objects in its constitution. The fourth clause is entitled "Party Objects" which is sub-divided into seven sections of which five deal with domestic issues and the remaining two concentrate upon international matters. The first of the Party's objects is stated as being to organise a Labour Party inside and outside Parliament; the second, is to co-operate with the TUC; the third is to put into effect the principles agreed by the Party conference; and the fifth, sixth and seventh are concerned to improve people's standards of life in Britain, the Commonwealth and the world, but it is the fourth section of this clause which is most specific in defining the Party's objects. It commits the Party to

...secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.(3)

Rather than settle any arguments over the Party's purpose this clause has been a constant source of intra-party dispute. Acceptance of Party constitution, programme, principles, and policy does not therefore imply some uniformity of opinion on the part of the individual membership. An historian of the Labour Party, Kenneth Morgan, has written

The history of the Labour Party is a story throughout the century... of tension between a gradualist, moderate parliamentary party and leadership, and political constituency activists

and trade union rank and file militants usually attempting to goad the party in a more explicitly socialist direction.(4)

Not all parliamentarians have been gradualists and not all Party and trade union activists have been militants. Crosscurrents of opinion exist within all the Party's institutions. Nevertheless Morgan's thesis that a tension has existed continuously within the Party between gradualist and militant is accurate.

#### Divisions of Purpose

During the Party's first eighteen years existence its programmatic commitment was limited to resolutions passed at annual Party conferences of which the most important was the one to establish

a distinct Labour Group in Parliament, who shall have their own Whips, and agree upon their policy, which must embrace a readiness to cooperate with any party which for the time being may be engaged in promoting legislation in the direct interest of Labour, and be equally ready to associate themselves with any party in opposing measures having an opposite tendency...(5)

In this period the Labour Party existed as a force to represent working class opinion in the House of Commons. Attempts in those early years by the Social Democratic Federation and the Independent Labour Party to inject a socialist commitment into the Labour Party's objectives and to secure commitments to a recognition of the class war or to public ownership of the means of production were defeated leaving many socialists disillusioned and disappointed. Immediately before the First World War a

good deal of dissatisfaction was expressed in the party about the performance of the Parliamentary Labour Party (hereafter PLP). Many felt that the PLP was too closely tied to the Liberal Party(6) and with the growth from 1910 onwards of working class militancy, resulting in major industrial disputes in the mines, docks and railways, syndicalism emerged as a serious challenge to this newly-established alliance of trade unions and a parliamentary Labour Party. No consensus existed within the Labour Party as to its function or its future.

It was the First World War which rescued the Labour Party by providing an impetus from which emerged a constitutional commitment to socialism and a greater degree of consensus over the Party's function and future. The reasons why the Labour Party emerged in 1918 with a new constitutional commitment and a new political programme are varied. The fact that the national war effort necessitated state intervention and control provided a considerable boost to socialist ideas of planning. Divisions within the Liberal Party and the rapid growth in trade union membership were both factors which encouraged Labour's leaders to draw up a distinctive political programme. Perhaps the major impact of war, and then of the Russian revolution, was in stimulating a class consciousness which Labour's leaders responded to, particularly in the 'War Emergency: Workers National Committee'.(7) Common ownership of the means of production had its origins in the 'conscription of riches' slogan adopted by this Committee. A socialist commitment in the

revised Party constitution and a new and comprehensive political programme, Labour and the New Social Order, which was distinctly anti-capitalist in tone and set out four key policy objectives,(8) transformed the Labour Party. Nevertheless it is incorrect to describe the Labour Party as united in purpose after 1918.(9)

The 1918 constitutional commitment did not settle the argument as to the meaning of socialism, rather it was a "rallying point around which the adherents of different ideologies and the representatives of different interests assembled".(10) The adoption of Clause 4 meant that "an objective had been proclaimed which both accommodated and concealed a large diversity of particular concerns".(11) Divisions existed within the Party over the meaning of socialism and the basic purpose of the Party, apart from its commitment to winning seats in the House of Commons, remained in dispute. Division is clearly apparent at the Party conference convened in January 1918 to discuss the Party's new programme.

The very first resolution at this conference deplored the "anarchic individualism and profiteering of the competitive capitalism of pre-war time" and called for "a new social order based... on the deliberately planned co-operation in production and distribution".(12) However, there was nothing in the resolution about ownership and a delegate from the British Socialist Party moved an amendment deleting the section on planned co-operation and substituting "the Social Democratic ownership and control of industry in order to secure that the machinery of

production and distribution is utilised for the welfare of all".(13) In moving the amendment the BSP delegate opined that co-operation between capital and labour was the wrong course and that control of industry would never be achieved whilst the ownership remained in private hands. Sidney Webb's retort to this on behalf of the National Executive Committee (hereafter NEC) was to state that whilst the Party's constitution laid down the commitment to the common ownership of the means of production "they did not want repeatedly, over and over again, to ring the changes on the old shibboleths"(14) - a rather strange response considering that this was the first resolution, grandly titled, 'The Task of Social Reconstruction', at a conference held to approve a new programme. Nevertheless the BSP amendment was defeated.

Again conflict emerges in the debate on the second resolution for discussion, entitled 'The Need for Increased Production', which condemned capitalism for its inefficiency and argued that increased production was vital for social reconstruction. This increased production would be secured by "the elimination of every kind of efficiency and waste..."(15) Ramsay MacDonald's speech in moving this resolution reflects the prevailing ideas of the Party leadership at this time - a commitment to eliminate inefficiency combined with a sentimental rhetoric concerning a transformation in society.(16) Against Ramsay MacDonald's opposition, the Northampton Labour Representation Committee succeeded in inserting into the resolution an amendment that "the socialisation



of industry" was necessary to secure the elimination of waste.(17) What emerges from the debates on these two resolutions is the tension between those who regarded the Party's purpose as being to transform the relationship between capital and labour and those who viewed it as being to improve the efficiency of the British economy. It is this tension which provides a major source of the Left/Right divisions within the Party.

Divisions within the Labour Party over the meaning and purpose of its socialist commitment have extended beyond economic affairs, however, and into foreign affairs. Certainly Party unanimity was greater in foreign affairs than in economic affairs in the inter-war years. The belief in a socialist foreign policy based upon anti-capitalist presumptions was firmly held at all Party levels. The four key principles of this socialist foreign policy were internationalism, class solidarity, peace and antipathy to power politics. Nevertheless in the 1930's arguments within the Party over the realism of these principles emerged and were fought out over such issues as non-intervention in Spain, collective security and rearmament. However, it was after 1945 that divisions over foreign policy became a major item of Party affairs. Tension developed between those believing in the possibilities of transforming international relations by maintaining principled commitments and those observing the nature of contemporary world politics and concluding that a strategy of 'realpolitik' was necessary. Tension was exacerbated by the Cold War: some in the Party were

unwilling to become too closely identified with the USA whilst others regarded this country as the defender of liberal democracy from authoritarian communism.

These divisions over the nature of a socialist foreign policy have complemented the divisions over domestic policy. Labour Left and Labour Right tended to adopt coherent lines of thought which straddled both the domestic and foreign fields and which brought both factions into consistent opposition.

#### Factionalism in the Labour Party

Party members share a variety of values, beliefs and attitudes held together by an overall mobilising vision of 'the good society'. The party is a coalition of individuals with a very wide range of beliefs. Some of these individual members will be organised into functional or attitudinal groupings which reflect their particular interests. For example, groupings exist to represent such functional interests as law, teaching, medicine and social work.(18) Party members also organise into alliances to mobilise support on specific issues; two recent examples of alliance formation occurred over the issue of British membership of the European Economic Community and the issue of devolution of powers to assemblies in Scotland and Wales.(19) There is also a third type of grouping, the faction. The faction exists over a longer period of time than the alliance and is concerned with more than one issue; it also straddles the opinions of the specific functional interests within the Party. The faction is an

intra-party group with clearly recognisable political views, which exists over a certain length of time, which has a modicum of organisation, and which attempts to maximise its influence within the Party.

Factionalism has been of only limited importance in the history of the Conservative Party. Factions in that Party have not been entirely absent, but limited emphasis upon ideology, lack of interest among Party members over policy discussions, and a structure restricting the role of the Party member in policy-making have all curbed its incidence. It is only in the nineteen seventies that factionalism became a crucial feature of Conservative politics as a specific group emerged and eventually dominated both the Cabinet and the Party organisation.(20) In contrast factionalism has been a permanent feature of Labour's politics. Both Labour Left and Right emerge as distinct factions during the Party's lifetime.

The Left/Right divide is a result of the lack of agreement within the Party as to the meaning and nature of socialism. The divisions of purpose within the Party in the twentieth century have varied only in their intensity and the factors which have affected this intensity include the Party's overall parliamentary strength, the proximity of a general election, the Party's electoral performance, and whether the Party Leader is due for retirement.

The factional differences can be summarised as being the contrast between the pursuit of transformation or amelioration of society, between the visionary and practical approach to politics, between an oppositional

and governing mentality, between an emphasis upon class and nation, between support for industrial militancy and pursuit of industrial harmony. Some of these differences are apparent when one examines statements from some of the leading figures, past and present, from Labour Left and Right. Aneurin Bevan writes of the "classic conflict" between Left and Right and argues that the Left (or "fundamentalists")

are people who believe that there are certain principles that have held good and are likely to hold good so long as British society is based in the main on the institutions of private ownership. They take the view that if the Labour Party was to abandon its main thesis of public ownership it would not differ in any important respect from the Tory Party. The only conflict would be about nuances, about semi-tones and half-tints... If the Labour Party decided to adjust its policy in accordance with these ideas, it would be practically certain to wreck itself. The Party has been nurtured in the belief that its *raison d'etre* is a transformation of society... The controversy is between those who want the mainsprings of economic power transferred to the community and those who believe that private enterprise should still remain supreme but that its worst characteristics should be modified by liberal ideas of justice and equality.(21)

Eric Heffer argues that

the Labour Party must completely reject the concept of the mixed economy, which has been the official view of the Party since the late 1950s. It has been tried and it does not work. It does not bring about a redistribution of wealth; nor does it bring growth in the economy.(22)

Heffer's views begin from the premise that

because we live in a class society, based upon private ownership, there is a fundamental struggle between those who own and control industry and those who do not. In other words, the class struggle is a reality. If there were no class struggle, there would be no strikes, no 'irregular' industrial action, no sit-ins, or

work-ins. That struggle takes many forms; sometimes it is quiescent, but at other times it is violent in nature... Control of the state is fundamental in the political struggle. Those who control the state determine the future development of the economy, of law, of public ownership, and of just about everything else... The myth has grown that in our society the state is neutral. It is not, and never has been. Therefore its apparatus must be democratised and made more responsive to the needs of a democratic society. The theory has also developed that the Labour Party too should be neutral in relation to the class struggle once it obtains office, or even before... there cannot be neutrality in the class struggle. Either one is for the workers in their struggle or against them. That is why I am convinced the Labour Party should state clearly that it is not neutral. As far as the workers are concerned, we must forthrightly stand on the side of the trade unions in their fight for better wages and conditions.(23)

The permanence of class struggle, the need to support workers in their battles with capital, and the need to control the capitalist state are common themes on the Labour Left. None of these appear in Tony Crosland's defence of socialism. In answer to the question why be a socialist, Crosland suggests three answers.

First of all the rising material standards and apparent contentment, the areas of avoidable social distress and physical squalor... are still on a scale which narrowly restricts the freedom of choice and movement of large numbers of individuals. Secondly... we retain a disturbing amount, compared with some other countries, of social antagonism and class resentment, visible both in politics and industry, and making society less peaceful and contented than it might be. Thirdly, the distribution of rewards and privileges still appears highly inequitable, being poorly correlated with the distribution of merit, virtue, ability or brains; and, in particular, opportunities for gaining the top awards are still excessively unequal. This significant residue of distress, resentment and injustice affords a prima facie justification for further social change - as I think, and shall argue, in a socialist direction. It may not justify the

same saeva indignatio as mass unemployment and distressed areas before the war - rather a purposeful, constructive, and discriminating determination to improve an already improved society. However, the belief that further change will appreciably increase personal freedom, social contentment and justice, constitutes the ethical basis for being a socialist.(24)

Crosland perceives the prosperity of the mixed economy whilst Heffer witnesses a continuous class struggle. Crosland is concerned with the pockets of deprivation whereas Heffer worries about the overall nature of the state.

The late John Mackintosh captures the essence of Labour Right opinion. He argues that it is

reformist in outlook; it accepts the existing economic system but wants many ameliorations. It considers that the conduct of large firms has to be watched over, some may need curbing and others require aid, while in certain cases public ownership may be appropriate, but all this does not add up to any concept that an alternative economic system is possible or desirable.(25)

The differences between Left and Right are about more than particular policies. What transcends even the policy differences is a culture, a way of life, an approach to politics. A person on the Left of the Party is by inclination an 'outsider'. The Left does not link easily with parts of the political establishment such as the senior civil service, controllers of the media, and representatives of industrial or financial capital, whilst the Right is more at ease with and more likely to be in the company of such people. The language and behaviour of the two factions reflects this 'outsider/insider' dichotomy. The use of the term 'comrade' has been much

more an accepted part of the language of the Left reflecting its commitment to a revolutionary working class tradition of collective action, and the singing of the Red Flag is an important symbol of this tradition. No Labour Solidarity meeting - the current Labour Right group - would end with this international hymn of revolution.

Today these distinctive traditions remain important. There is a great deal of policy agreement between Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley. Nevertheless, even though both emphasised their unity after their election as Party Leader and Deputy Leader in October 1983 both would continue to operate within distinct political spheres with a distinct language and symbolism. For example, just as Kinnock would neither be invited to nor attend a Labour Solidarity rally so Hattersley would neither be invited to nor attend a Tribune rally.

It would be incorrect to assert that the respective factions have maintained rigidly consistent opinions over a long period of time. Shifts of opinion and differences of opinion occur within the respective factions, but nevertheless in the Party's past, and still so in the present, it is possible to predict the response of many individual Party members to particular issues on the basis of their factional position.

There are authors who claim that the terms Left and Right are of limited value in the study of politics. David Butler and Donald Stokes argue, in a comprehensive study of British electoral behaviour, that the terms have no significance for the British mass public.(26) Samuel

Brittan argues that the terms have no value in political analysis or discussion and he states that the specific term Labour Left is "an anachronism associating under one umbrella a whole variety of ideas... which do not belong together".(27) David Lipsey argues that to categorise the divisions in the Labour Party as being between Labour's Left and Right is to create a "bogus dichotomy". He states that the variations within the categories are considerable, that the trade unions cannot be classified in such terms on many of the day-to-day issues that confront their leaders, and that these two categories exclude the non-aligned from consideration.(28)

The difficulties in defining these terms Labour Left and Right are acknowledged but nevertheless as distinctive ideological perspectives or sets of attitudes to which individual members of the Labour Party often adhere, they are useful, since they correspond to the reality of political conflict in which many persons on a wide range of issues will coalesce continually together and divide from others.(29)

One example of Party members coalescing into distinctive Left and Right factions is revealed in the voting behaviour of the twenty nine members of the National Executive Committee.



Table 1 NEC Recorded Votes (30)

Year	Number of votes
1982/1983	52
1983/1984	14
1984/1985	37

By ascribing a score of +1, -1 and 0 to NEC members' votes For, Against, and Abstention (or absence) it is possible to use simple correlation analysis to ascertain whether any voting patterns prevail. By isolating the correlation scores of .95 and above two distinct groupings are identified within the 1982/1983 NEC. One group has a membership of Tony Benn, Laurence Coates, Jo Richardson, Dennis Skinner and Audrey Wise and the other includes Ken Cure, Anne Davis, Gwyneth Dunwoody, John Golding, Denis Healey, Neville Hough, Dennis Howell, Shirley Summerskill, Russell Tuck and Eric Varley. Fifteen NEC members (52% of the total membership) divide into these two factions, with ten in one and five in the other. Our correlation matrix reveals how cohesive are both factions: for example, Tony Benn, Jo Richardson and Audrey Wise voted together on every occasion during that year and Dennis Howell voted against them on every occasion.

Table 2 Correlation Matrix: NEC Votes(1982/1983)

(the full correlation matrix is contained in Appendix 1)

	Benn	Coates	Cure	Davis	Dunwoody	Golding	Healey	Hough	Howell	Richardson	Skinner	Summerskilll	Tuck	Wise	Varley
Benn	1.0														
Coates		1.0													
Cure			1.0												
Davis				1.0											
Dunwoody					1.0										
Golding						1.0									
Healey							1.0								
Hough								1.0							
Howell									1.0						
Richardson										1.0					
Skinner											1.0				
Summerskilll												1.0			
Tuck													1.0		
Wise														1.0	
Varley															1.0

The number of NEC recorded votes in 1983/1984 is insufficient to carry out a correlation analysis but the 1984/1985 votes allow further analysis. Again by extracting the correlation coefficients of .95 and above it is possible to distinguish two distinct factions, one whose membership includes Tony Benn, Joan Maynard, Jo Richardson, Dennis Skinner and Audrey Wise, and the other whose members are Betty Boothroyd, Gwyneth Dunwoody, Alan Hadden, Roy Hattersley, Neville Hough and Neil Kinnock. In comparison with the 1982/1983 NEC the voting patterns reveal that factional membership has diminished: only eleven NEC members (38% of the total) can be placed in such tightly-knit groups. The second point of comparison is highlighted by Neil Kinnock's identification with the right-wing members of the NEC. This graphically reveals the process of Labour Left fragmentation which occurs during the 1980s and which is discussed in Chapter nine.

The alliance of Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley as Party Leader and Deputy Leader respectively is reflected in their voting together in thirty two of the thirty seven recorded votes. Kinnock's voting behaviour reveals the fluidity of factionalism over time: nevertheless the data still reveals the existence of distinct factions within the NEC in 1984/1985. For example, our correlation matrix reveals that Gwyneth Dunwoody and Roy Hattersley voted together on every occasion and were opposed on every occasion by Dennis Skinner.

Table 3 Correlation Matrix: NEC Votes(1984/1985)

(the full correlation matrix is contained in Appendix 2)

	Benn	Boothroyd	Dunwoody	Hattersley	Hough	Maynard	Richardson	Skinner	Wise	Hadden	Kinnock
Benn						.98					
Boothroyd			1.0	1.0	.98			-1.0		.98	.97
Dunwoody		1.0		1.0	.98			-1.0		.98	.97
Hattersley		1.0	1.0		.98			-1.0		.98	.97
Hough		.98	.98	.98				-.98		.96	.95
Maynard	.98										
Richardson									.97		
Skinner		-1.0	-1.0	-1.0	-.98					-.98	-.97
Wise							.97				
Hadden		.98	.98	.98	.96			-.98			.95
Kinnock		.97	.97	.97	.95			-.97		.95	

It is true that the Left and Right factions will be divided amongst themselves on particular issues and this thesis will refer specifically to these divisions in the Labour Left but it will be argued that at times there is a common bond of ideas and sentiment uniting a faction and dividing it from another.

It is also accepted that the trade unions reveal broad agreement on certain issues which straddle any Left/Right conflict but the trade unions still tend to divide into Left/Right categories in Party debates. For example, the 'praetorian guard' of the 1940s/1950s which sustained the Labour leadership consisted of the right wing General and Municipal Workers' Union, the Transport and General Workers' Union and the National Union of Mineworkers whereas the Left advance of the 1970s was dependent upon the support of the Transport and General Workers' Union and the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers. In the late 1970s it was the leaders of such unions as the Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff, the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union and the Union of Post Office Workers who were meeting in order to try and re-establish the strength of the Right within the Labour Party whilst on the other hand the National Union of Public Employees emerged as a key union on the Left.

Finally Lipsey's point that a considerable number of pragmatists exist within the Labour Party committed to neither of these factions is correct. At every level of the Party, from branch to PLP there are those who associate with neither Left nor Right but regard themselves as belonging to 'the non-aligned centre' deciding each issue on its merits rather than on ideological commitment. For example, a recent survey of Labour Party members in a northern Labour constituency reveals that 33% identified themselves as being part of

the centre and 25% of them regard the terms Left/Right as being irrelevant: only 38% associated themselves with either Left or Right.(31) It is clear that not every single member of the Labour Party divides on Left/Right lines on every single issue but on certain well-defined issues Left/Right differences are apparent and often both factions will be attempting to mobilise support amongst these non-aligned in pursuit of their objectives.

Lipsey dislikes factionalism within the Labour Party because he believes it curbs creative thinking by making people prisoners of political slogans. There is evidence to show that at times this criticism is apt. For example, since 1979, the unwillingness of the Labour Left to examine and debate the planning of incomes, or the Labour Right to consider detailed proposals for controlling the economy as contained in the alternative economic strategy were the result of factional intransigence. Nevertheless the terms Left and Right are not creations of sloppy journalism but have a distinct reality to the events and persons that make up the Labour Party and are important in understanding the distribution of power within the Labour Party.

Factionalism has been engendered by ideological differences but it has also been facilitated by two factors: first, the Party structure and organisation; and, second, the Party value system.

### Party Structure

The Party structure affords the opportunity for

factions to pursue their points of view at various levels. First, the 'indirect' nature of the Party enables factions to extend any debate beyond one, single Party channel into the forums of the affiliated bodies such as the trade unions, the Co-operative societies, and the socialist societies. Decisions taken within these affiliated bodies, especially within the trade unions with their considerable voting strength at the Party conference, can have far-reaching consequences within the Labour Party. Second, within the 'direct' section of the Party, namely the individual membership organised into CLPs, there are constituent elements - women and youth - which are given separate representation at national, regional and local levels and these provide alternative channels for the expression of factional opinion. The women's section of the Party has not, until recently, become a target for factional pressure but the youth section has been a constant point of factional pressure for organised groups both within and outside the Party.(32) One of the factors in the Party leadership's opposition to the proposal for a separate section to be created for black Party members may be its fear that such a section might be used for factional advantage.

A feature of the Party's origins as an extra-parliamentary and federal body has been the emphasis placed upon the formality of voting. Election by members of the PLP of the Party Leader, Deputy Leader, Chief Whip, Chairman of the Parliamentary Party, the Parliamentary Committee when in Opposition and the Liaison Committee

when in Office,(33) and of the NEC by affiliated bodies separately or together, provides an obvious opportunity for factional campaigning.

The contest between Aneurin Bevan and Hugh Gaitskell for the Party Treasurer's post in 1954, the election of Ian Mikardo as Chairman of the PLP in 1974 and his subsequent replacement in the following election by Cledwyn Hughes, and the electoral challenge to Michael Cocks as Chief Whip in 1983 are just some of the more well-publicised examples of factionalism emerging in internal Party elections.

Apart from the structural dimension and the emphasis upon voting both providing the opportunity for factionalism to extend throughout the Party there is also the fact, notably absent within the Conservative Party, of the ambiguity and tension over the ultimate source of authority within the Party which itself becomes part of the factional argument. Before the Party adopted its revised constitution in 1918 there had been a tension between the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary Party and this was not alleviated by the new constitutional form. The new constitution declared that the work of the Party would be "under the direction and control of the Party Conference"(34) whilst the NEC would be "the Administrative Authority of the Party".(35) No mention was made in the constitution of the powers or responsibilities of the PLP. The gap was filled in practice by the PLP leadership taking the initiative in policy formulation and implementation in conjunction with the NEC, and the NEC

then adopting an influential role in the annual conference supported by some of the major trade unions. However, factional argument over the legitimacy of particular Party institutions to determine policy has been a substantive part of the intra-party debate. The ambiguity in the Party's constitution over the source of authority has enabled factions, if defeated in one forum, to fight in another and to use this constitutional ambiguity to claim a legitimacy for their activity. For much of the Party's history the Labour Left has been in a minority within the Party's leading institutions but when defeated in the PLP and the NEC it has appealed to delegates at the annual Party conference. The fact that a majority of trade union leaders regularly cast their bloc votes in support of the Parliamentary leadership in the 1930s and from 1945 until the early 1960s meant that the Left suffered defeat but on very rare occasions the Parliamentary leadership came close to defeat(36) or made concessions prior to the annual conference in order to meet Left arguments.(37) During the 1960s the practice of PLP initiative sustained by the NEC and supported by the annual conference broke down and the Left was in a position to win votes at both the NEC and the annual conference. However, the ambiguity concerning the respective powers of the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary parties has remained. Michael Foot, for a large part of his political career a leading left-wing rebel but more recently a senior figure of authority in the Party notes that the Party constitution "contains one extraordinary feature - the recognition of two



sovereign authorities" and argues that "many of the internal rows of the Labour Party, in modern or ancient times, have revolved around this anomalous, theoretically impractical, constitutional arrangement".(38)

This intra-party factional activity has been further stimulated by Party values which applaud the spirit of discussion and debate as central to democratic socialism in contrast to monolithic Conservatism and Communism.

#### Party Value System

Perhaps the most explicit statements appealing to this spirit of democratic socialism were those made in 1937 by participants involved in the debate as to the future position of the Socialist League within the Party. First, the NEC claimed that:

The Labour Party has never exercised an iron discipline nor does it demand unthinking loyalty. It encourages free discussion and it has been tolerant in its fellowship. It seeks a loyalty to its general principles based on understanding and democratic comment.(39)

Then Harold Laski, in defending the Socialist League at the 1937 Labour Party conference, made what is perhaps the classic statement demanding tolerance of a minority position and appealing to the spirit of democratic debate:

I would like to remind the Executive of this Party that mechanical uniformity of opinion is the supreme vice of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and therefore I do not want to see it introduced into the Labour Party of Great Britain. Accordingly, I ask from this Conference the right... to take all the steps that are open to me as a member of the Party to persuade my fellow-members that majorities are not always in the right and that truth may begin, even in this

Party, in a minority of one. Accordingly... I ask this Conference to insist to the National Executive that it is interested in no sort of heresy hunt, whether of the Left or of the Right; that it is not interested in the question of 'wings'; it is interested in the flight and in the direction of the bird... There are all kinds of questions within the ambit of our policy upon which differences of opinion are not merely legitimate, but are essential to the progress of our ideals. I stand here to plead for tolerance and for generosity. Out of tolerance and generosity alone can there come understanding; out of understanding only can there come that firm adherence to the right and to reason that will ultimately give us triumph. The principles for which we stand may today be the minority view; tomorrow they may be the view of the majority. We ask for the right that has always distinguished this Party, freely to make our opinions known.(40)

The degree of anguish apparent in Laski's plea should perhaps warn the student of Labour politics that tolerance of intra-party activity has often differed in theory and practice. The spirit of tolerance has been tempered by another idea, that of the need for political unity in the face of political enemies. In fighting the class enemy a working class organisation's strength lies in its unity and this can only be undermined by organised factional activity. Two parliamentary rebels, Michael Foot and Dick Crossman, have noted the hostility that exists within the PLP to organised rebellion. Michael Foot, in his comments on the disaffiliation of the ILP in 1932, writes that whilst isolated abstentions in the House of Commons are tolerated on the grounds of individual conscience nevertheless

the sin against the Holy Ghost of the Party machine was the 'organised conscience', the attempt of two or three or more gathered together to make their conscientious scruples effective in action.(41)

Dick Crossman, as Leader of the House of Commons in 1966, comments that conscience "must be individual, not collective, nor organised".(42)

In order to ensure that organised factionalism was almost impossible to sustain Herbert Morrison, on behalf of the NEC, moved an amendment to the Party constitution in 1946 which stipulated that

Political organisations... having their own Programme, Principles and Policy for distinctive and separate propaganda, or possessing Branches in the Constituencies... shall be ineligible for affiliation to the Party.(43)

Since, as was pointed out at the very beginning of this chapter, individual membership of the Party is not possible for anyone belonging to an organisation deemed ineligible for Party affiliation, this constitutional amendment provided the Party leadership with the means to control the extent of organised factionalism within the Party. It was by invoking this constitutional provision that Victory for Socialism's activities were curbed by the NEC in 1956 and that five senior figures in the Militant Group were expelled from the Party in 1983.

Such hostility to organised factionalism has placed the Labour Left in a considerable dilemma as one of its leading figures for over forty years, Ian Mikardo, has commented:

If they (ie members of the Labour Left) get together and organise they are condemned as sectarian and as a threat to the solidarity of the Movement, and are thereby crushed, and if they remain informal and unorganised they are out-manoeuvred and picked off one at a time.(44)

'Unity is Strength' has been a strong trade union principle and has been invoked by trade union leaders to curb intra-party activity in the 1930s and 1950s. The tolerance shown by the Party leadership towards the Left has been limited. Its members have often been cast as 'splitters', undermining the Party's electoral appeal, and therefore they have been expelled, proscribed, disaffiliated, or generally harassed. Only in the 1960s did a more tolerant attitude towards factionalism begin to emerge. This new attitude was reflected in a NEC resolution passed in 1976 which stated

In the last decade the Labour Party has thankfully reached new heights of tolerance and understanding of differences within its own ranks. The threat of discipline and expulsion has never won one political argument and never will. In the present circumstances we reiterate the idea that the principle of tolerance must be one of the basic concepts of democratic socialism.(45)

This greater tolerance was extended to group activity in the Party. In the 1950s it would have been the case that Independent Labour Publications, the Labour Coordinating Committee, and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy - three active and well organised groups on the Labour Left today - would have been deemed to be groups contravening the Party constitution but in the 1970s the Party constitution was applied less rigidly and these groups were tolerated. By 1983 a register of non-affiliated groups had been established, albeit as a specific response to the organised Militant Group activity within the Party which eventually led to the expulsion of

some of its leading members, but nevertheless this gave group activity some constitutional legitimacy for the first time since 1946. The Labour Party however still does not provide the formal legitimacy for factions in the decision making process that is provided in some other socialist parties - a point to which I shall return in the conclusion to this thesis.

This chapter has provided the overall context within which Left and Right factionalism operates within the Party. Chapter Two provides greater details on the nature of Labour Left ideology, organisation and personnel between 1918 and 1970 in order that comparisons can be drawn, where appropriate, with the contemporary Labour Left in later chapters.

FOOTNOTES

1. In 1962 the Party constitution was amended to ensure that only trade unionists who were individual members of the Labour Party could be trade union delegates to the Party conference. (Clause VII[i]) In 1965 the provision was extended to trade union delegates attending constituency Party meetings. (Model Rules, Clause VII[i])
2. Labour Party Constitution Clause II(4) and Clause III(3a & b).
3. Ibid., Clause IV(4).
4. K.O. Morgan 'The High and Low Politics of Labour: Keir Hardie to Michael Foot' in M. Bentley & J. Stevenson (eds.) High and Low Politics in Modern Britain, p.311.
5. Labour Representation Committee Report, 1900 p.13.
6. This dissatisfaction with the PLP's strategy was an important factor in Victor Grayson's decision to stand as an independent Labour candidate in the Colne Valley by-election of 1907.
7. See: R. Harrison 'The War Emergency Workers National Committee 1912-1920' in A. Briggs & J. Saville (eds.) Essays in Labour History 1886-1923, pp.211-59. Also: J.M. Winter Socialism and the Challenge of War, ch.7.
8. These four key policy objectives were the complete security against destitution for every worker, the re-organisation of industry on the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, a more progressive system of taxation, and appropriation of surplus wealth.
9. See: S.H. Beer Modern British Politics, ch.5.
10. R. Harrison ibid., p.259.
11. Loc.cit.
12. Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party (hereafter LPACR), 1918, p.43.
13. Ibid., p.44.
14. Loc.cit.
15. Loc.cit.
16. Ibid., p.45.
17. Loc.cit.
18. The Society of Labour Lawyers, the Socialist

Educational Association, The Socialist Medical Association, and the Association of Labour Social Workers.

19. The Labour Committee for Europe and the Labour Common Market Safeguards Committee; also Labour Against Assemblies in Edinburgh and Cardiff.

20. P. Seyd in Z. Layton-Henry Conservative Party Politics, pp.231-243.

21. Quoted in M. Foot Aneurin Bevan, vol.2, p.651.

22. E. Heffer The Class Struggle in Parliament, p.278.

23. Ibid., pp.280-282.

24. A. Crosland The Future of Socialism (reissued edn. 1980), p. 80.

25. J. Mackintosh 'The Problems of the Labour Party' Political Quarterly, 43 (January-March 1972), p.2.

26. D. Butler & D. Stokes Political Change in Britain (2nd edn.), pp.323-337.

27. S. Brittan Left or Right: the Bogus Dilemma, p.75.

28. D. Lispey 'Labours Left and Right: a bogus dichotomy'. Mimeo paper for conference on The Politics of the Labour Party, Nuffield College, Oxford, September 1980.

29. A clear example of the automatic way in which people in the Labour Party are classified into Left and Right is given by Neil Kinnock. In an interview he states: "I know I am on the Left because I see other people on the Right". Marxism Today, June 1983, p.6.

30. The NEC first introduced recorded votes in 1981. Any member could request such a vote. This was part of the Labour Left's campaign to secure greater accountability of the Party's elected representatives to the Party membership, by ensuring a greater knowledge of their voting behaviour. The 1985/1986 NEC has modified the procedure by now requiring that a majority vote should be secured requesting a recorded vote before such a vote is taken.

31. J. Tidball A Study of Barnsley Constituency Labour Party, MA thesis, University of Sheffield, 1981, pp.121-122.

32. See: Jack Clearly and Neil Cobbett 'Labour's Misspent Youth' in Workers' Action supplement 1979.

33. Since 1982 the Party Leader and Deputy Leader have been elected by an electoral college made up of other elements within the Labour Party as well as the PLP. See chapter six.

34. Labour Party constitution, 1918, Clause V(i).
35. Ibid., Clause VI(a).
36. For example, over the issue of German rearmament in 1954.
37. For example, some of the ambiguities contained in Industry & Society (1957), or in Policy for Peace (1961) were a deliberate attempt to satisfy Left demands.
38. M. Foot Another Heart and other Pulses pp. 160-161.
39. Statement of the NEC on the Labour Party, 1937.
40. LPACR, 1937, p.158.
41. M. Foot Aneurin Bevan, vol. 1, p.149.
42. R. Crossman The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister Vol. 1., p.96.
43. LPACR, 1946, p.174. This resolution was carried at the Party conference without debate. The NEC had discussed the resolution at a meeting earlier in the year but no discussion of the subject is minuted in any of the NEC sub-committees (NEC Minutes, March 27, 1946). This key constitutional amendment was therefore introduced with almost no discussion at any level within the Party.
44. I. Mikardo Tribune, September 12 1947.
45. NEC resolution, December 15 1976 quoted in LPACR, 1977, p.383.



CHAPTER TWO

THE LABOUR LEFT 1918-1970

Ambiguity of purpose has been a permanent feature of the Labour Party. Ideological arguments have therefore been common and these have provided the basis for the emergence of the Labour Left as the most consistently distinctive faction in the Party. Advocating and defending its idea of socialism in domestic and foreign affairs against the Party's social reformists, gradualists and pragmatists has been a continuous task of the Labour Left. There is no single body of ideas which can be ascribed to this Labour Left. Divisions of opinion and disputes over strategy have prevailed (and still do so) and to this extent it would be incorrect to write of the Labour Left as 'a party within the Party'. Nevertheless there has been enough common ground to bind members of the Labour Left together, giving them a sense of community and of solidarity in which they recognise their friends and allies and are aware of what divides them from their political opponents both in and out of the Labour Party.

If we examine leading figures on the Labour Left we see a range of influences including pacifism, libertarianism, christianity, marxism and collectivism which have been important in the development of their left wing political commitments. For example, three leading

figures in the 1930s display a variety of such political influences. Stafford Cripps' opinions were based upon a Marxist economic determinism from which emerged his class analysis of both national and international politics. What appears in hindsight to be a rather crude version of Marxism perhaps helps to explain his sudden shift to the Left in 1931 and his subsequent movement away from the Left in the 1940s.(1) Sir Charles Trevelyan, first a Liberal then a member of the Labour Party, had political beliefs based upon a commitment to internationalism and pacifism.(2) G.D.H. Cole, an influential intellectual in the labour movement and another prominent figure on the Labour Left subscribed to the Marxian tradition in the 1930s although in later years he rejected this approach. Cole's socialism was always eclectic and difficult to categorise but his basic commitment to a revolutionary conception of socialist ends originated in a radical individualism opposed to all forms of totalitarianism.(3)

Another person active on the Left in the 1930s and its leading figure in the 1950s, Aneurin Bevan, was committed to a form of socialism which synthesised Marxism and liberalism. His biographer writes that Bevan was "a convinced Marxist but never a Communist" whose belief in the class struggle as central to the political process remained unshaken throughout his life.(4) Fenner Brockway's commitment to the Left spans almost all of the twentieth century based upon a humanist, ethical belief in the need for a transformation of society combined with an attachment to libertarianism.(5)

This libertarian stand is again apparent as a major influence on Dick Crossman, a leading member of the post-war Labour Left. His socialism is primarily an anti-establishment sentiment. He records in his diary

...my radical passions have never been based on a moral or egalitarian philosophy. It's been really an expression of my bump of irreverence, based on my conviction that governments and establishments are fools and that participation by the people will probably improve government in this country.(6)

A similar variety of formative influences is apparent when one examines the ideas, interests and interpretations of prominent personnel of the contemporary Labour Left. Two leading figures in the 1970s, Michael Foot and Tony Benn, represent the radical, dissenting tradition of British politics. Foot's inspirations are primarily in eighteenth century English literature whilst Benn's are in the Bible and seventeenth century English history.(7) Neither of them are marxists yet both recognise and respect the influence of Marxism on the Labour Left. For example, Tony Benn states

I would not think it correct to call myself a Marxist

yet he believes

It would be... unthinkable to try to construct the Labour Party without Marx...

but he is

... consciously seeking to re-establish the relevance and legitimacy of the moral teachings of Jesus(8)

Eric Heffer is another whose Christian commitment is an important source of political inspiration but so also is his Marxist upbringing as a member of the Communist Party in his earlier years.(9) Another for whom Marx is a formative influence based upon his experience in the 1960s is Arthur Scargill. He states

There is a class conflict, we do live in a class society - those who own and control the means of production, distribution and exchange and those who work by hand and by brain. There is no middle class as is suggested by those academics and intellectuals who would like to stratify society. There are only two classes in the strict political sense.(10)

Michael Meacher is one who today reflects the traditional ethical strand within the Labour Left. His commitment is to a socialist humanism in which values such as co-operation and altruism would prevail in a market socialist order where power would be decentralised and production would be determined by social priorities.(11) Stuart Holland's programme is in parts very similar to Meacher's but he reflects more the technocratic element on the Left committed to central planning of the economy.(12)

Finally, there are those on the Left more from a pragmatic impulse arising from their experience in society and because of the prevailing values of the particular community in which they were brought up than from an intellectual inspiration of one source or another. Neil Kinnock is one who refers to this pragmatic impulse as an important factor in his own political commitments.(13) So also does Ken Livingstone who, in reply to a question on whether any one particular book influenced him towards

socialism answered

No. It was all practical things. My workplace involvement, helping my American friends, etc. I've never been a theoretician.(14)

Ben Pimlott, in Labour and the Left in the 1930s, refers to the "continuity in the political attitudes and causes of Labour's left-wing which no other British Parliamentary group has matched".(15) James Jupp also, in The Radical Left in Britain 1931-1941, comments on the "basic continuity (of the Labour Left) throughout the history of the organised Labour movement", and argues that whilst the issues and personalities change over the years its "essential concerns, objectives and tactics remain remarkably similar."(16) It has been argued already that the Labour Left has not been a single, homogenous bloc of people who have agreed on everything; nor have their attitudes been consistent over a period of fifty years. Divisions of opinion have occurred amongst those who have regarded themselves as on the left of the Party and where agreement has existed at one moment of time these people have sometimes changed their minds and arrived at a different consensus of opinion at another moment in time. Both the varieties of opinion and the shifts of opinion need to be emphasised but nevertheless a solid core of people in the Labour Party have coalesced together to become the Labour Left sharing similar sentiments, values and ideas.

The previous chapter has already referred to the political differences which existed within the Labour Party in 1918 and which the new Party constitution did

nothing to diffuse. It was between the two world wars that a distinct Labour Left gradually emerged, convinced that unjust and inefficient capitalism should be transformed rather than reformed and apprehensive that the Labour leadership was moving away from the Party's constitutional commitment, contained in Clause Four, section four, that there should be a complete transformation of Britain's economic relationships. For example, Left critics of the Party's policy statement Labour and Nation (1928) were worried that even though it contained proposals for the public ownership of land, coal, power, transport and industrial insurance the Party was concerned solely with securing a rationalised capitalism.(17) Similar doubts were expressed by Left critics in 1934 in discussions over the Party's policy document For Socialism and Peace. The document contained proposals for the drastic reorganisation of a wide range of industries - banking and credit, transport, electricity, water, iron and steel, coal, gas, agriculture, textiles, shipping, ship-building and engineering - which would require "for the most part nothing short of immediate public ownership", (18) but the ambiguity of these words raised questions as to what would in fact be nationalised and set off the debate as to whether the purpose of the exercise was to modernise and rationalise a decaying economy or else to transform the prevailing economic relationships.

The Left's objective at this time was "the complete transference of all major industries and industrial operations to public ownership and socialist

control".(19) It was opposed to the idea of any reconstruction of capitalism. Private ownership of property was both inefficient and inhumane and it resulted in a class war. The Labour Left's aim was to remove power from the owners of capital. Any modification in this objective was deemed to be gradualism and this was what the Labour Left was intent on ensuring did not prevail within the Party. G.D.H. Cole and G.R. Mitchinson attacked gradualism as being "based on the assumption that the capitalist system will remain in being, and continue to function successfully, except in those particular industries or branches of economic activity which the Government picks out for successive socialisation".(20)

In the inter-war years the specific differences between Labour Left and the Party leadership on domestic policy matters were not great. The Party leadership was as critical of the system of property relationships as the Labour Left. For example, the Party policy statement For Socialism and Peace (1934) states that:

The choice before the nation is either a vain attempt to patch up the superstructure of capitalist society in decay at its very foundations, or a rapid advance to a Socialist reconstruction of the national life. There is no half-way house between a society based on private ownership in the means of production, with the profit of the few as the measure of success, and a society where public ownership of those means enables the resources of the nation to be deliberately planned for attaining the maximum of general well-being.(21)

Arthur Henderson, introducing the statement to the 1934 Party Conference argued:

The present system involves serious injustices, it affords unmerited privileges to the few, and

acute and undeserved hardship, privation and suffering to the many. It condemns numbers of decent, honest, self-respecting, law-abiding citizens to long periods of enforced idleness and unrelieved misery.(22)

At a general level all within the Party were critical of capitalist society and all were agreed that the specific remedy for dealing with this inhuman and inefficient society was nationalisation. For example, Hugh Dalton writes in 1935 that the "rapid extension (of the socialised sector of the economy) is one of the principal objects of the Labour Party".(23)

Whether any difference existed in practice between Cole's demand for "the complete transference of all major industries" into public ownership and Dalton's "rapid extension" of the public sector could and would only be settled after a period of Labour government. Three years of minority Administrations in the inter-war years did not provide that opportunity to test the rhetoric in practice and therefore the Labour Left's concern remained at the level of a general critique of gradualism.

The specific policy differences that occurred between Labour Left and Party leadership at this time arose more over foreign affairs. At a general level there was agreement within the Party that a socialist foreign policy entailed a commitment to internationalism and world peace, an antipathy to power politics, and a need for international working class solidarity, but the rise of fascism in Europe and, in particular, the invasion of Abyssinia and the outbreak of civil war in Spain, resulted in specific disagreements within the Party.



Various strands of opinion existed on the left of the Party concerning foreign affairs at this time but the two most distinctive were the Marxist belief that war was an inevitable feature of capitalism and the pacifist dislike of rearmament. Both strands were united in their belief that fascism should be resisted by international working class solidarity in refusing to participate in capitalist war, to support the League of Nations, or to support a rearmament programme. An example of this sentiment is contained in the resolution passed at the Socialist League's 1935 conference which stated:

For British workers any war entered into by a capitalist Government, whatever its allies, will be an imperialist war conducted for imperialist ends.(24)

The Labour Left's widespread pacifism and support for war resistance began to crumble in the face of European fascism. Many came round to the view that collective security through the League of Nations and rearmament, albeit with a 'Peoples Government' in office rather than the National Government, was necessary.

The Labour Left in the 1930s: organisation, support and leadership

An identifiable Labour Left began to develop in the 1920s centred around Lansbury's Weekly(25) and the Independent Labour Party (hereafter the ILP) after Clifford Allen's retirement as its Chairman in 1925 and his replacement by Jimmy Maxton. Over the next seven years

the ILP established its own distinct political programme beginning with the 'living wage' proposal in 1926 and developing this into Socialism in Our Time, (1927). The ILP organised a regular caucus in the PLP, sponsoring group amendments on the House of Commons Order Paper; it used its extensive constituency-based individual membership to canvas support within the Party; and it articulated its distinctive viewpoint within the Labour movement through ILP newspapers such as The Labour Leader, the Birmingham Town Crier and the Leicester Pioneer.

After the ILP's disaffiliation from the Labour Party in 1932 over its disagreements with the Party leadership's gradualist tendencies and their unwillingness to tolerate an alternative source of organised power within the Party, the Socialist League became the organised expression of Labour Left sentiments. The Labour Left was handicapped, however, by the Socialist League's limited, London-based membership, its very close identification with one dominant and controversial personality - Stafford Cripps - and the direct competition for working class support that it faced from the Communist Party.

The Socialist League never secured the individual support that the ILP retained in the 1920s. Whereas the ILP had over 1,000 branches and a membership of around 56,000 in the mid-twenties(26), the Socialist League never recruited more than 3,000 members. Furthermore, as A.J.P. Taylor writes,

The Socialist League was the ILP with a difference. The ILP had been predominantly

working class in composition, despite some intellectuals near the top. The Socialist League was intellectual and nothing else, all leaders and no followers. Its branches counted for little; its programme of ideas was all that mattered.(27)

Its membership was concentrated in London and the Home Counties, and it was run by "a London-based clique".(28) Only two leading trades unionists - Arthur Pugh and Harold Clay(29) - were associated with it for any length of time and it attracted trade union hostility because Stafford Cripps was its leader. At the 1935 Labour Party conference Charles Dukes, from the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, criticised the Socialist League's policy of mass resistance to war in the following terms:

What does Sir Stafford Cripps know about 'mass action'? I do not mind a Bevin or a Marchbank, or anybody else, who really can say to this Movement: 'I tomorrow will lead my men'; but I resent people who have no idea as to what those people think - people who have no authority, no responsibility, no influence - talking in this conference as though it were possible to organise mass action against political action.(30)

At the 1937 conference John McGurk from the Miners' Federation of Great Britain spoke out against Cripps in similar fashion:

Sir Stafford Cripps is a rich man with rich pals around him, and they are the biggest danger to the Labour Party in this country. You will find those chaps where Mosley is before much longer.(31)

The Socialist League's very close identification with Cripps was a political handicap. He was a very good speaker, energetic and enthusiastic in his commitments but

the political base for his ideas was limited and he therefore flitted from one panacea to another. Cripps' Aunt, Beatrice Webb, described him as "oddly immature in intellect and unbalanced in judgement... ignorant and reckless in his statements and proposals".(32) An example of this recklessness and lack of political sensitivity which was unlikely to win him and the Labour Left much support amongst trade unionists and workers was his comment in 1936, at the time that Anglo-German relations were deteriorating:

If Germany should defeat Great Britain in a capitalist and international war... I don't believe it would be at all a bad thing for the British working classes. A disaster for the profit makers and capitalists but not necessarily for the working classes.(33)

He also lacked the ability to work closely with others. Kingsley Martin, editor of the New Statesman in the 1930s, comments that "Stafford was a lone wolf, too conscious of his superiority, to those around him and completely incapable of making intimate contacts with the rank and file".(34)

The Labour Left was also limited in the 1930s by the fact that the Socialist league was competing with two other bodies, both outside the Labour Party, for working class support. After the ILP's disaffiliation in 1932 it became an outspoken critic of the Labour Party and a rival to the Socialist league, but in fact its impact, measured by its membership which shrivelled in just four years from 16,773 in 1932 to 4,392 in 1935,(35) was marginal. It was the Communist Party which was the major force in left wing

politics in the 1930s. James Jupp writes that "... it is impossible to write about the successes and failure of the Left in the 1930s without putting Communists at the centre of the story".(36) Until 1933 the Communist Party was antagonistic to the Labour Party but from then onwards, in response to the rise of fascism, it campaigned first for a united front of labour organisations and then in 1936 applied unsuccessfully to affiliate to the Labour Party. The Labour Left was so concerned with the impact of fascism that it eventually organised jointly with its two rivals a united front. Joint activity with the ILP and Communist Party, organisations competing with the Labour Party for electoral support, was the ground for disaffiliating the Socialist League and threatening to expel any individual who continued to work in the united front campaign. As a consequence of this action by the Party leadership the Socialist league was wound up. This was the last occasion on which the Labour Left had direct access within the Party as an affiliated organisation. No such constitutional legitimacy was ever afforded to the Labour Left again and the Party constitution was amended in 1946 in a manner designed to make any organised Labour Left unconstitutional.

#### The Labour Left in the 1930s: an assessment

Both Pimlott and Jupp believe that the Labour Left suffered in the 1930s from its lack of a specific programme. Jupp argues that the Left's socialism was

"instinctive rather than well defined, idealistic rather than practical".(37) He argues that it played only a limited role in policy making because it had little to offer in foreign and economic affairs, constitutional matters, or in general political strategy. Pimlott agrees, arguing that whereas leading Party figures such as Dalton and Jay were concerned with analyses and programmes the Left relied on "symbolic campaigns". The Labour Left was ineffective in the 1930s, he believes, because it had a "predilection for the noisy confrontation", was led by "the brilliant and egotistical figure of Sir Stafford Cripps", was an "elitist, inward-looking intellectual coterie" which "engaged in factional fight after factional fight whose main effects were to alienate Labour opinion", and "showed a disastrous insensitivity to the realities of political power and influence within the Labour movement".(39)

However, the Labour Left's part in rallying the flagging morale of Party activists, disappointed and disillusioned by the very limited response of the Party leadership to the threats to social democracy both within Britain and abroad, should not be underestimated. The fact that Cripps, Laski and Pritt became members of the NEC in 1937 on the first occasion that constituency delegates alone elected seven representatives to serve on this body reflects the fact that support for a radical party was not so small as might be assumed merely from a study of the annual conference voting figures during this period. Jupp argues that the Left was "indispensable"(40) acting as a

conscience and propagandist, not amongst the electorate who had little sympathy for its views, but within the Labour Movement. The Labour Left acted as "a source of inspiration"(41) within the Labour Party, especially amongst CLPs which held no chance of electing a Labour MP. He claims that it played "an invaluable role in educating and enlivening a professedly radical but basically conservative movement".(42)

A study of the Labour Left in the inter-war years should also note its long term impact. The war years must be included as an extension as well as an enlargement of the preceding decade and the Labour victory in 1945 cannot be understood simply as a response to wartime radicalisation.(43) Pimlott acknowledges this point in arguing that it had a "profound and long lasting influence"(44) on British politics in the personnel, the issues and the groupings which emerged after 1945.

The Labour Left had an extensive mass membership organisation in the 1920s. In the 1930s it had the support and advice of intellectuals such as Harold Laski and G.D.H. Cole, but the Labour Left wished to challenge the Labour Party by establishing its own collective view, its own alternative structure of power, and eventually its own recruitment of working class socialists in competition with the Labour Party. It became an alternative party within the Party. This the Party leadership would not tolerate. The ILP's confidence that, with its long history and tradition as part of the Labour Party, it could stand on its own after 1932 was revealed as unsound as its

membership shrivelled. The spectre of that ILP collapse has haunted the Labour Left over the subsequent fifty years and acted as a reminder that it would have very little impact on working class politics independent of the Labour Party. Eventually forty-three years after the ILP disaffiliated from the Labour Party Independent Labour Publications renewed its commitment to the Labour Party but as a very small organisation in comparison with the original ILP or with the other socialist society which had been part of the Labour Party at its foundation, and remains so today - the Fabian Society.

The Labour Left in the post-war years (1945-1963): ideas

Labour Left criticism of the Party leadership had been muted to some extent in the inter-war years by the fact that the Party did not secure an overall parliamentary majority and therefore the opportunities for Labour governments to transform British capitalism were constrained so some believed by lack of numbers.(45) After 1945 that constraint no longer prevailed. Rhetoric and practice could be compared and the Labour Left's response to the Attlee Governments was to argue that not enough had been achieved in the domestic field whilst in foreign affairs not enough effort was being made to curb the development of the Cold War.

The Labour Left believed that the extent of the domestic transformation achieved by the Attlee Government was limited. The public ownership of the major utilities



and of iron and steel was not the end of the work but merely the beginning. The Labour Left resisted Morrison's desire to consolidate these reforms(46) and argued the need to push on with a further programme of public ownership. It argued the need for public ownership of the key industries in the British economy in order to control 'the commanding heights'. A shopping list of further industries to be nationalised included land, chemicals, aircraft, insurance, engineering and shipbuilding.(47) Public ownership remained the defining characteristic of socialism for the Labour Left.

In the 1950s the Labour Left was placed more and more on the defensive on economic issues. Lacking any extensive research and analysis of the structural changes occurring in the British economy it tended to react to the initiatives from the Right of the Party. For example, in response to revisionist(48) claims that *ownership of industry* was no longer so central to socialism it reiterated the principles contained in Clause 4 of the Party constitution. General slogans rather than detailed policies became the norm for the Labour Left on economic issues. As early as 1952 Dick Crossman records in his diary that on economic matters "...there is literally no difference between the Left and the Right of the Party."(49) He notes that it was quite possible to agree on the need for socialist planning of the economy and that between the two leading protagonists of Left and Right - Bevan and Gaitskell - the only differences on domestic policy were ones of "...emphasis, temperament and

will...".(50) But he also records that on foreign policy "there are really basic issues dividing us (i.e. Left and Right)..."(51)

The Labour Left's response to the development of the Cold War had been to criticise the Attlee Government's policies of mounting a holding operation against Soviet expansion, organising an alliance with the Atlantic nations, and backing these two objectives with military power.

The critique developed from various standpoints. The pacifist opposed policies dependent on the use of force and armaments; the fellow-traveller offered unquestioning support for the Soviet Union; the neutralist argued for a third force in world affairs, European-based and independent of both the USA and the USSR; and the antimilitarist expected welfare rather than armaments expenditure.

Shifts of opinion occurred within the Labour Left according to the behaviour of the two super-powers. The Labour Left's initial strong support for the Soviet Union after the war was eroded as the cold war developed, leaving only a small number of fellow-travellers giving the Soviet Union unquestioning support. On the other hand the support expressed for the USA's position in 1948 had shifted to criticism of its re-armament policies by 1951. Also the support expressed for the idea of a 'third force' in international politics in 1947-1948 waned until it re-emerged as support for neutralism in 1951.

Division and shifts of opinion occurred

therefore within the Labour Left but certain general principles prevailed. First, the belief that in any ideological conflict it would be economic and social factors rather than military expenditure which would win popular support. Second, the view that the moral standpoint remained important in international diplomacy, and therefore example should not be subordinated to deterrence based upon ever-expanding military expenditure. Third, the opinion that foreign policy could not and should not be isolated from domestic affairs. As a consequence the Labour Left disagreed with the extent of rearmament in the 1950s claiming that it would have a harmful impact upon the British economy. The Labour Left also wished the arms budget to be reduced because it had its doubts about American foreign policy and felt the need for a greater degree of independence from the USA. It was also sceptical that the Soviet Union was as great a threat to world peace and stability as was generally believed, but neither pacifist nor neutralist sentiment prevailed on the Labour Left. For example it endorsed initially the establishment of NATO although this gave way to a commitment to the idea of Britain leading a neutral third force in international politics.

Division of opinion and different emphases existed therefore in this period but as the Cold War developed there emerged two distinct foreign policies within the Party - Left and Right - with differing assessments of the international situation and differing objectives and vying with each other for the allegiance of

the Party membership. As outlined by Gordon they were, on the Left:

distrust of American capitalism, half-trust in the Soviet system, antagonism to armaments, and concern for the domestic effects of rearmament...(52)

and on the Right:

(t)rust in the valuable American ally, concern for the system of Atlantic security, apprehensive of Soviet intentions, and faith in power balancing...(53)

The Labour Left in the post-war years (1945-1963):  
organisation, support and leadership

The post-war Labour Left no longer organised as in the inter-war years. Whereas the ILP and Socialist League had been affiliated bodies, accorded therefore certain formal rights of representation within the Party, with an extensive branch structure and policy-making apparatus, the post-war Labour Left had nothing similar. The Party leadership no longer wanted to provide the opportunities for organised factionalism that had prevailed in the 1930s and therefore, immediately after the war it amended the Party constitution in a manner which determined the nature of Labour Left organisation for the next thirty years. The amendment ruled out the possibility of a group with a distinct programme, or policy, or branch organisation having any legitimacy within the Party.(54) Any attempt to establish such an organisation in an open manner was immediately met with hostility by the Party leadership and the threat of

expulsion of the individual Party members concerned. Between 1945 and 1970, Labour Left organisation was almost entirely centred around the parliamentary caucus. Even this was deemed to be unconstitutional between 1952 and 1966, and therefore had to be organised in a clandestine manner.(55)

Opposition to the Party leadership within the PLP was not organised as a cohesive force in the period of the Attlee Governments. Gordon has described it as "fragmented into various groups and cliques lacking in cohesion".(56) Berrington's study of Labour backbenchers over a ten year period (1945-1955) reveals a lack of continuity amongst left-wing MPs, especially with regard to foreign affairs and defence. For example, only 31 MPs who voted against the Party Whip over defence policy in March 1952 also joined the 62 rebels, again over defence policy, in March 1955. Out of these 31, only 19 appeared to be part of the left rebellions between 1945 and 1950.(57) Steck's analysis of 3 major backbench rebellions between 1951 and 1955 reveals that a total of 106 MPs were involved of whom only 14 rebelled on all 3 occasions, 40 rebelled twice, and 51 protested only once.(58) Steck concludes that the parliamentary left was "a heterogeneous grouping with a minimal unity provided by a dislike of official policy and by Bevan's person".(59)

A small nucleus of parliamentarians did meet together to produce two pamphlets - Keep Left (1947) and Keeping Left (1950) - and after Bevan's resignation in 1951, welcomed him to their ranks. By September 1951 the

group had been given the name of "The Bevanites".(60) Regular meetings of the group occurred to discuss parliamentary business but as Michael Foot notes "the Bevanites... (never) had whips and party managers and the paraphernalia of a party within a party...".(61) Dick Crossman comments that

Bevanism and the Bevanites seem much more important, well-organised and machiavellian to the rest of the Labour Party, and indeed to the USA, than they do to us who are in the Group and who know that we are not organised, that Aneurin can never be persuaded to have any consistent or coherent strategy and that we have not even got to the beginning of a coherent, constructive policy. What we have, and it is very important, is a group of MPs who meet regularly, who know and like each other and who have come to represent 'real Socialism' to a large number of constituency members.(62)

Between 1951 and 1955 backbench rebellions involving Bevanite MPs occurred in defiance of the PLP leadership on certain major issues(63) and three pamphlets were produced which were associated with the Bevanites.(64) However, Crossman records in his diary how limited was the extent of Bevanite activity. In 1951 he notes that "the Group has no coherent analysis or policy whatsoever..."(65) and again in 1953 he refers to "...the appalling absence of Bevanite policy".(66)

One reason why the Bevanites failed to develop any clear policies was that the group was very dependent upon Bevan. Crossman notes that "...we are nothing without Nye as a mouthpiece",(67) but this was counter-productive in many ways, since Bevan was an individualist, with leadership ambitions, but with no liking for detailed discussion of policy.(68) Bevan needed the group for the

support it gave him in his conflicts with the Party leadership and the group needed Bevan because he gave it a standing in the Party that none of the other Bevanite MPs could provide and, furthermore, if Bevan secured the leadership of the Party then his patronage powers would presumably benefit members of the group. However, Bevan made no attempts to act as a fully-participating member of the group - his attendance was erratic and he did not consult the group on major decisions.(69)

The Bevanites suffered from too close an association and too great a dependence upon one single person who possessed his own leadership ambitions. They also suffered because amongst their leading figures were no trade unionists of note. Just as Bevin had been able to denigrate the Labour Left in the 1930s because its leadership contained no major trade union figures so when Gaitskell described the Bevanites as a group of "frustrated journalists"(70) he was attacking the Labour Left at a vulnerable point. The Bevanites recruited very few trade union MPs(71) but included some prominent journalists (Crossman, Driberg and Castle) amongst their ranks. However, Steck's analysis of the 57 MPs who defied the Party Whip on defence policy in March 1952 reveals that "the Bevanites were somewhat unrepresentative of the Party as a whole in displaying a middle class bias"(72) but that they were more of a coalition of working class and middle class MPs than Gaitskell's comment might suggest.(73)

The Bevanites made few attempts to plan their

support within the extra-parliamentary Party. Their opponents presumed that because six of the seven CLP representatives on the NEC by 1952 were Bevanites, an extensive factional organisation and network existed. However, Crossman records that there was no planning of strategy or tactics by the Bevanites prior to the 1952 Party conference and as a consequence, they were "...going to it as an army of innocents".(74) Crossman does note caucus meetings for the six Bevanites prior to NEC meetings in 1953(75) and resolutions were drafted as suggestions for CLPs to submit to the 1953 Party conference,(76) but the Left's linkage with the 'rank and file' was informal and 'ad hoc' in the early 1950s. In the summer of 1950, the Keeping Left group had first initiated constituency Brains Trusts - panels of MPs, the majority of whom were from the left of the Party, visiting CLPs for question and answer sessions - which the Bevanites continued. Eighty seven such meetings were held in 1953 involving twenty six MPs. Both the PLP and the Organisation Sub-Committee of the NEC approved resolutions banning these Brains Trusts in February 1953, although this ban was not confirmed by the NEC.(77)

The Bevanite MPs won an impressive degree of political support in the NEC constituency section elections. Between 1951 and 1954 the successful Bevanite candidates only polled less than 50% of the votes cast on two occasions and by 1954 they were polling 6 of every 10 votes cast.



% of CLP votes for Bevanite MPs\*(78)

	<u>1951</u>	<u>1952</u>	<u>1953</u>	<u>1954</u>
Bevan	75	84	89	-
Castle	59	76	80	80
Crossman	-	54	61	71
Driberg	56	65	65	68
Greenwood	-	-	-	75
Mikardo	49	55	49	63
Wilson	-	55	73	81

\* i.e. % of the total vote cast in this section.

Support for the MPs was widely distributed and "represented an over-whelming personal vote of approval for a group of MPs representing a common ideological outlook".(79) However, personality often plays a significant part in these elections to the CLP section of the NEC. As prominent publicists and propagandists who championed the Party's rank and file these Bevanites won support which was not forthcoming for the Labour Left ideas in general. After analysis of resolutions to three party conferences (1952, 1953 and 1954) Steck concludes that CLPs were "far more conservative, far less militant, and far less active" than the Left (or Right) assumed.(80)

By December 1953 Crossman was writing in his diary that Bevanism was "...collapsing as a force"(81) and eleven months later he recorded that the Bevanite group

"...had totally disintegrated".(82) Formally the Bevanite Group had been disbanded after the PLP banned such factional groupings in October 1952, but Bevanites continued to meet informally at Crossman's flat and by 1954 some Bevanites were meeting on a regular basis with Left wing parliamentary candidates, trade union officials and academics in an organisation called The Second Eleven.(83) Its main objective was to recruit more left wing Labour MPs and therefore it discussed possible candidates, constituencies in which Labour MPs were likely to be retiring and any forthcoming by-elections. It also circulated some suggested Party conference resolutions, but by 1956 it was reported to the Second Eleven by Harold Wilson that the NEC was considering proscription of the group and as a consequence it was wound up.

Very few attempts were made to establish any constituency-based organisation of the Labour Left during this whole period. Socialist Fellowship was formed in 1949 with two Labour MPs - Ellis Smith and Fenner Brockway - as sponsors, with a rank and file apparatus and an annual conference, but this was proscribed by the Party leadership in 1951 as a consequence of the leading role played in the organisation by Trotskyists.(84)

Another attempt to create a constituency-based organisation was made in 1958 when some of the Bevanite MPs, led by Ian Mikardo, decided to reactivate *Victory for Socialism*. VFS had been established in 1944 as an organisation "pledged to work for the early attainment of a Socialist Society".(85) By the end of the 1950s its

activities were limited to periodic conferences (86) and by 1956 it had a membership of only 91 and a budget of £150.00. However, after Bevan's speech to the 1957 Party Conference, in which he appeared to have abandoned his left colleagues, some Left MPs felt the need to re-establish a left presence in the constituencies. Even though VFS was almost moribund and had in the words of one Bevanite MP a "sour smell of ineffectualness", (87) it also possessed some degree of legitimacy amongst the Party leadership in the sense that its regular meeting at the annual Party Conference was reported in the official diary of events. The revised VFS was the first attempt since 1937 by the Labour Left to create a nationwide extra-parliamentary organisation with an individual membership, elected officers and executive, and local groups.

In the first flush of enthusiasm and publicity, 14 groups had been established and almost 1,000 members had joined by July 1958. Analysis of these members reveals that one-third were from the London area, with the highest concentration in Hampstead. In the provincial cities only Birmingham and Liverpool had more than 30 members - 34 and 33 respectively - whilst there were no members in Wales. By March 1959 paid-up membership had slumped to 223. (88) This small London-based organisation settled into a limited existence over the next five years, producing the occasional pamphlet (89), providing members with draft conference resolutions for them to advocate within their CLPs, and attracting the occasional publicity for a political statement. (90)

The experience of the VFS leadership determined to a large extent the nature of Labour Left organised activities in the 1970s. The Party leadership remained hostile to an organised, constituency-based Left faction(91) and VFS members faced the threat of Trotskyist takeover by the Socialist Labour League from 1961 onwards.(92) The hostility of the Party leadership and a threatened Trotskyist takeover convinced many of this generation of left activists that it was impossible to establish a membership-based, extra-parliamentary Labour Left organisation. Many of the members of the Tribune Group who, in the late 1970s opposed the creation of the extra-parliamentary Tribune organisation were those who had been active in VFS between 1958 and 1961.

After 1961 many of the prominent figures in VFS moved over to support a new organisation - the Unity Group - which emerged from an appeal by some members of Cambridge Labour Party after the 1960 Party conference decision on nuclear weapons for 'Party Unity Behind Conference Decisions'. The Unity Group deserves mention because it was a forerunner of the more typical Labour Left organisation of the 1970s in that it was not dominated by parliamentarians and it was more concerned with organising support within the CLPs and with co-ordinating left wing strategy immediately prior to the annual Party conference rather than with the usual publicity-seeking behaviour of the Labour Left at this time.

The Labour Left (1945-1963): an assessment

During the 1950s the Left made little headway in the Party. Revisionist sentiments prevailed at the top of the Party and so the place of public ownership in the Party programme was reduced and the Party's electoral strategy was to court rather than attempt to influence existing electoral preferences. However, as Lewis Minkin argues, revisionist ideas and strategies did not have extensive support amongst the Party's rank and file. He states that there was "no fundamental transformation of opinion within the Party towards the revisionist position on public ownership" but that the shift of policy on this issue was secured "by a remarkable and complex mixture of factors which included deliberate ambiguity, a significant pattern of mandate distortion, and the manipulation and bias of the Conference procedures".(93) The alliance of the Party leadership and the 'praetorian guard' of trade union leaders enabled left wing challenges to be defeated, deflected or marginalised. Throughout this period from 1952 until 1963 the majority of the seven CLP representatives on the NEC were on the left of the Party but they were in an overall minority. David Howell argues that on the crucial policy issues these left representatives "made no impact".(94) Furthermore, no conference victories were secured by the Left until the Party conference approved a commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament in 1960. Labour Left campaigns within the trade unions were all unsuccessful. For example,

Bevan's campaign to be elected Party Treasurer attracted only 1.2 million votes in 1954 and this number was almost halved twelve months later. No major trade union leader supported the Labour Left until Frank Cousins' election as General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union in 1956. The style of Labour Left activity in this period, epitomised by the leading Bevanites who appeared as public-school-educated professionals to be disloyal to the Labour Party leadership, offended many trade union leaders.

However, the Labour Left contributed to its own weakness by failing to analyse the socio-economic changes occurring in Britain. Little attempt was made to re-examine in any depth the nature of the 'humanised capitalism' of post-war British society. The political initiative passed to the Right, first in the form of Morrisonian consolidation and, second, in the form of revisionism. The Left produced nothing to compare in comprehensive analysis of post-war Britain with Tony Crosland's The Future of Socialism. As a consequence, the Left tended to react to events rather than to deal with long-term trends. The Left possessed some able publicists and propagandists but produced few researchers. Bevan, who to a large extent determined the tenor of the left wing activity in the 1950s, epitomised both the strength and weakness of the Left at this time. He was a fine individual socialist who inspired very many rank and file members and who gave the Bevanites a political impact they would not otherwise have gained, but he was an erratic and

unpredictable individualist. He was concerned with the broad sweep of ideas and less with intricate details. Questions concerning the management of the economy, which became increasingly important in political debate in the 1950s, were ones to which he was not attuned.(95)

The Labour Left was also hamstrung by the centrality of the Cold War in the 1950s. Jupp's comments on the Communist Party in the 1930s, namely that it operated "at the centre of the stage" of left wing politics, is not true of the 1950s. Communist Party propaganda and recruitment were no longer significant, but Communism and the Communist Party remained important to the political fortunes of the Labour Left. Because the Soviet Union was generally perceived to be the major threat to Western security and Communists as an internal threat to Britain's security, the Labour Left's past identity and association with both was a disadvantage which was exploited by its opponents. The 'fellow-travelling' element within the Labour Left was small and during the period the Labour Left began to distance itself from the worst features of Stalin's Russia, nevertheless its refusal to adopt the anti-Soviet Cold War position meant it was vulnerable to accusations of flirting with 'the enemy'. Furthermore the position of the Communist Party within the labour movement remained important during this period. Trade Union leaders regarded Communists in some cases as wreckers out to undermine their legitimate authority. The Labour Left, who were very often critical of the trade union leadership in the 1950s as failing to

represent the true voice of the rank and file, were therefore linked with these Communists agitators. Trade Union leaders missed no opportunity to condemn the Labour Left as Communist sympathisers. Only in the 1960s, as the Cold War began to decline in its intensity, did the 'Red smear' become of less political significance. We will see in a later chapter that an attempt by the Social Democratic Alliance in the 1970s to link some of the leading figures in the labour movement with the Soviet Union failed to make the impact it desired and instead it rebounded to the detriment of the SDA.

Although the 1950s was a period in which the Labour Left was weak within the Party, a weakness compounded by its own lack of any strategic response to the economic boom and by the international tensions between the world's two super-powers, it appeared to have recovered some of its strength by 1963. A factional dispute had waged within the Party after its third successive election defeat in 1959. The defeat had prompted the revisionist Right to challenge some fundamental Party commitments. For two years the disputes centred around the twin issues of public ownership, in particular the contemporary relevance of the commitment in the Party's constitution to "...the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange...", and a defence policy dependent upon the use of nuclear weapons. The arguments were intense and bitter at both the ideological and the personal level, but by 1962 they were waning. The Left had successfully beaten off the Right's



attempts to delete Clause Four from the Party constitution, and the Right had established a defence policy based upon the principles of multilateral disarmament and membership of NATO.(96) Furthermore, the Party's domestic policy, as outlined in Signposts for the Sixties (1962), was more critical of private enterprise than previous policy documents of the 1950s. Finally, after Gaitskell's death in 1963 his replacement, Harold Wilson, was a man associated with the Left due to his resignation with Bevan from the Government in 1951 and to his challenge to Gaitskell's leadership of the Party in 1960. The Left welcomed his victory in 1963 as a defeat for the revisionist Right and in the belief that the Labour Party would now be led in a less determined right wing factional manner than by the previous incumbent. Left wing expectations had been raised: the undermining of those expectations over the following years was to have a considerable impact on the Labour Party. The re-emergence of a distinct Labour Left in the 1970s, more extra-parliamentary in its organisation and more critical of the parliamentary Left than ever before, had its origins in the disenchantment which arose in the years after 1963.

#### The Labour Left (1964-1970): ideas

Both the Labour Left and Right had united around a Party programme Signposts for the Sixties (1962), in which its ideological ambiguities had enabled both factions to draw satisfactory conclusions concerning a

future Labour government's programme. The Left noted that the programme was more critical of the failures of post-war private enterprise than any other policy document in the 1950s and that it offered the possibilities of substantial public ownership. However, the only specific public ownership commitment was to the renationalisation of steel.

The Labour Left lacked any coherent programme of its own during this period. Its overriding priority was that the Labour Government should manage the economy in a more efficient manner than the Conservatives in order to produce an economic surplus to improve the level of social services and peoples' standard of living. It was therefore placed in the position of reacting to the Wilson Government's failure to renationalise steel in the 1964-1966 Parliament, and then after 1966 its abandonment of economic planning, its introduction of wages policy and its attempt to reform the trade unions. In foreign affairs it tacitly accepted the existence of the nuclear deterrent, although it was very critical of the Government's failure to distance itself from American policy in Vietnam.

The Labour Left (1964-1970): organisation, support and leadership

During this period organised Labour Left activity centred around the PLP. After the 1964 General Election, a group of left wing backbenchers met

unofficially on a weekly basis to discuss parliamentary affairs and business. Liberalisation of PLP affairs in 1966, under the Crossman-Silkin regime,(97) led to the formal establishment of the Tribune Group. We shall discuss the operations of the group in a later chapter but one important point needs to be made here concerning the Tribune Group membership. In contrast to the parliamentary left of the 1930s and 1950s many prominent members of the Tribune Group were trade unionists with a manual worker background.(98) These members were conspicuous in the Labour Left fight against the Labour Government's wages policy introduced in 1966 and then against the proposals to reform industrial relations contained in the Government's White Paper In Place of Strife (1969). Previously the Labour Left had argued that a wages policy was an essential part of a planned economy but now it had shifted to opposing the idea because workers' standard of living would be depreciated whilst non-manual wage earners and other income earners would not be so affected. For the first time ever the parliamentary left and the Trade Union Group of MPs(99) were working in harmony against the Party leadership. No longer was there the same social divorce between the 'professionals' of the parliamentary left and the 'manuals' of the parliamentary right. The establishment of this new alliance between rank and file unionists and the Tribune Group was of major importance in intra-Party affairs.

These new roots for the parliamentary left amongst manual worker trade unionists were nourished

further by the election of a group of senior trade union leaders in the late-1960s who, at the time, were directly associated with the Labour Left. Elected in 1967 were Hugh Scanlon, President of the Amalgamated Engineering Union and Tom Jackson, General Secretary of the Union of Post Office Workers; in 1968 Lawrence Daly, General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers and Richard Seabrook, President of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers; and in 1969 Jack Jones, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union.

Extra-parliamentary Labour Left activity re-emerged in 1967. First, at the 1967 Party conference when a 'teach-in' on the economy, workers' control, the welfare state, Vietnam and the internal mechanism of the Party was organised in order to rally the Left and "to begin to work out and spell out an alternative socialist strategy for the movement".(100) Second, in June 1968 when a group of sixty six Labour MPs, trade unionists and academics "deeply disappointed and disillusioned" by the Labour Government, published an 8-point charter outlining Labour Left opinion and inviting others to sign up as supporters.(100) By 1969 this Socialist Charter had a National Organising Committee and a National Convention but the group had some major problems.

First, the extent of organisation was very limited. A Registrar, Brenda Brett, provided a national linkage and attempted to meet the needs of Party activists for left wing speakers, but little more. In part this was deliberate since a membership organisation acting in a

corporate manner within the Party would be likely to face proscription. Second, considerable tensions emerged between the parliamentary left in the Tribune Group and this group of non-parliamentarians. An example of the tension occurred in 1970 when the National Organising Committee of Socialist Charter nominated its Chairman, Royden Harrison, as a candidate for election to the CLP section of the NEC. This was not welcomed by many members of the Tribune Group who were themselves candidates. Whilst some, such as Stan Newens withdrew in order not to divide the vote, others, including John Mendelson and Stan Orme were most annoyed at this 'outside' intervention in an election which many regarded as the preserve of the parliamentary left.(102) Third, Socialist Charter experienced similar Trotskyist attentions as VFS in 1961, and by 1972 Socialist Charter was in the control of the Trotskyists.

During the six years that Labour was in Office the parliamentary Left was restrained and restricted in its criticisms. Between 1964 and 1966 it was restrained by Labour's small parliamentary majority of three and its unwillingness to be seen to threaten Party unity in the manner adopted by Woodrow Wyatt and Desmond Donnelly over steel nationalisation.(103) Furthermore, in those first two years the tenor of government remained wedded to the Party's pre-1964 sentiments and commitments. Only after the 1966 General Election as the serious economic problems emerged did the Labour Left's dilemmas develop. The restraint of the small parliamentary majority vanished

after the 1966 General Election, but the personal loyalty of many Left parliamentarians to Harold Wilson prevailed. Wilson exploited this sentiment by encouraging private discussions with leading backbench figures on the parliamentary Left and by his Prime Ministerial patronage powers. Potential critics had been silenced by Ministerial office and immersion in the day-to-day pressures of office,(104) whilst others outside the government were constrained by Wilson's patronage. For example, his dispatch of Harold Davies, an ex-Bevanite, on a peace mission to North Vietnam in 1965 had more to do with internal Party management than with international diplomacy.(105) Wilson's obsession with right wing coups by senior Cabinet Ministers communicated itself to some of the Tribune Group who were therefore somewhat constrained in their rebelliousness. Nevertheless, individual left wing backbenchers kept up a constant criticism of the Government.(106) However, the Labour Left, dominated by parliamentarians, suffered from its close association with the Wilson Governments.

Towards the end of the 1960's a radical left rapidly emerged critical of the Labour Government, able to exploit the disillusion of many over Labour's performance in Office, and acting as a serious rival to the left within the Labour Party. Part of this new left was made up of socialist intellectuals, many of whom had been optimistic of socialist change when Harold Wilson became the Party Leader. As a result of meetings in the summer of 1966 amongst a group of intellectuals the May Day

Manifesto was published in 1967 critical of the Labour Government and the Labour Left and calling for the creation of local, campaigning, socialist groups.(107)

Another part of this new left was made up of emergent Trotskyist groupings, especially the International Marxist Group and the International Socialists, who by the mid-sixties had abandoned entryist tactics and were now extremely critical of the Labour Party.(108)

Finally, there was the emergent student movement which was associated with particular student occupations, such as that at the London School of Economics in 1966, but which also developed such organisations as the Revolutionary Socialist Students' Federation. This student revolt provided a considerable boost to the membership of both the International Marxist Group and the International Socialists. The various parts of this new left came together in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, formed in 1966, in which the Labour Left was not the leading force, which arranged two major marches and demonstrations in 1968 against American involvement in Vietnam and against the Labour Government's complicity in America's policy.(109)

The Labour Left's impact within the Party and its appeal beyond the Party was weak by 1970. The promise of a Labour Government led by a member of the Labour Left introducing radical change had been undermined by a government which subordinated the interests of labour to those of capital and revealed few signs of

internationalism in foreign affairs. The Labour Left's use of the Party's institutions and procedures in an attempt to change the course of the government's policies had failed to make any significant impression whilst it appeared as if many in the Party leadership now believed socialism was outdated and the mass party a thing of the past. A catastrophic decline in individual Party membership occurred in the last years of the decade. At a time when significant changes had occurred in the social composition of the recruits to the parliamentary left and when the election of some leading trade union officials reflected the left's growing base within the trade union movement, it appeared that left wing support amongst individual Party members was declining. No analysis has been conducted into this decline of individual Party membership at the end of the 1960s, but it can be surmised that dissatisfaction with Labour Government policies, and with the Party Leadership's devaluation of the role of the Party member and of the Party conference, as well as alternative political attractions either amongst some of the new 'good cause' pressure groups or the new left sects played an important part in this collapse of the Party membership at CLP level.(110)

#### The Labour Left (1964-1970): an assessment

During this period the Labour Left reached its weakest point since 1918. When asked in 1968 to describe the influence of the current Labour Left Michael Foot was



able to claim just two instances of its impact: first, Barbara Castle's attempts to co-ordinate inland transport and, second, Dick Crossman's pressures to secure an abandonment of the Government's East of Suez defence policy.(111) At this time it lacked any clear ideological commitment in either domestic or foreign affairs: it was trapped by personal loyalties to the Party Leader who knew how to exploit these sentiments; and new left groupings had emerged which appeared more attractive, especially to the new generation of political activists enjoying the benefits of higher education.

### Conclusions

This brief examination of the Labour Left over a period of fifty two years reveals an almost continuous existence, constantly reminding the Party leadership of socialist commitments and arresting any move to abandon them. On occasions the Party leadership appeared ready to dismiss the Left and realign the Party in a rightward direction (for example, first the disaffiliation and then the threatened expulsion of the Socialist League in 1937, the proposal to expel Bevan from the Party in 1955, and the threats to Victory for Socialism to curb its organised activities in 1958) but it drew back from such a complete break in recognition of the significant support for the Left amongst the Party's rank and file. Nevertheless the Labour Left's position within the Party was weakened by its programmatic deficiencies, its lack of support amongst

trade union leaders, its increasing parliamentary orientation, its close identification with one person, and its restricted composition.

#### Programmatic deficiencies

In the 1920s the ILP made serious attempts in Socialism In Our Time (1927) and in its 'Living Wage' proposal to develop a coherent alternative to Labour economic policy, but when Keynes produced a means by which the worst feature of capitalism could be eradicated without major structural change he undermined the Left's demand for socialist structural transformation. Not until the 1970s did the Labour Left present an explicit socialist challenge to Keynes.

Two other features of post-war politics made the Labour Left's task of presenting a credible socialist programme more difficult. First, the post-war reconstruction of Britain, involving a mixed economy and universal social services, plus the country's relatively successful economic performance provided no compelling reason for structural alterations. Second, socialist ideology was often identified with Soviet Communism and this model had been undermined by its practice of internal political repression, as for example revealed by Khrushchev in 1956, and by its external aggression as practised in its East European satellites. As a consequence of the cold war the Soviet Union was identified in many people's minds as the enemy. This Soviet model, mistakenly identified as

socialism, was (and still is, to a certain extent) a limiting factor in developing a credible socialist model in the public mind.

The Labour Left had become trapped between the successful performance of Western capitalism and the practice of Soviet Communism and it was exceedingly difficult to present any form of socialist alternative.

#### Lack of support amongst the trade union leadership

The Left faced an alliance in the Party between leading trade unionists and leading Labour parliamentarians which developed in the 1930s, reached its pinnacle of accord in the late-1940s and early-1950s, and only began to crumble towards the end of the 1950s. Trade union leaders were often willing to sustain the Party leadership's right-wing orientation as a consequence of the Party's deliverance of full employment, a rising standard of living for their members, state provision of social welfare, and free collective bargaining. The distribution of power within the Party resulted in trade union votes sustaining the Party leadership at annual Party conferences and electing personnel to the NEC who would be similarly supportive. Occasionally victories were secured by the Labour Left but the balance of power was overwhelmingly arranged in such a manner as to leave the Labour Left in a permanent minority within the PLP, the NEC and the annual conference.

Increasing parliamentary orientation

It was amongst the Party membership that the Labour Left had most of its support but after the disaffiliation of the ILP in 1932 and the disbandment of the Socialist League in 1937, the focus for Labour Left activities became the PLP. The result was that the Labour Left became more caught up in the intricacies and conventions of parliament and consequently lacked the links with trade unions at their base and ignored, underestimated, or disagreed with the need to shift the balance of power from the parliamentarian to the Party member.

Close identification with one man

During the 1930s and 1950s the Labour Left became very closely linked to the fortunes of single, dominant personalities. This was attractive because it was attached to a 'political star' who commanded attention, but it was decidedly counter-productive since the individuals concerned (Cripps and Bevan) were often unpredictable, unaccountable, and personally ambitious and the Labour Left's progress was therefore too closely identified with the personal behaviour of the individuals concerned.

Restricted social composition

Finally, the Labour Left failed to attract manual worker/trades unionists to leading positions which made it very vulnerable to attack by the Party leadership as being unrepresentative of the Party mainstream and socially exclusive.

Throughout this period then the Labour Left acted as the socialist conscience, the 'gadfly', constantly there to be knocked away, but unable to be completely ignored. Two examples of its existence and persistence determining the nature of the Party's commitment were, first, the nationalisation of the steel industry in 1949, and second the maintenance of Clause Four as part of the Party's constitutional objects in 1959.

Ralph Miliband is one amongst many academic critics of the Labour Left who dismisses its impact upon the Labour Party. He argues.

...the whole history of the Labour Party has been punctuated by verbal victories of the Labour Left which, with some few exceptions, have had little influence on the Labour Party's conduct inside or outside the House of Commons, but which have always been of great importance in keeping up the hopes and the morale of the activists.(112)

Numerous other authors have reaffirmed Miliband's thesis that the Labour Left's influence is marginal. Their argument has better basis during this period than after 1970 when the Labour Left began to remedy the deficiencies noted above and since has become a

powerful and, at times, dominant faction within Labour politics.

By 1980 the Party's policies and structures reflected many of the Labour Left's demands. This political metamorphosis which occurred over ten years was due to the collapse of revisionism, the organised political initiatives of the Labour Left, and the re-emergence of a left wing rank and file in both the CLPs and the trade union branches. This is the subject of the rest of this thesis, commencing in the next chapter by describing the development of a new Labour Left programme and its impact on the Labour Government elected in 1974.

FOOTNOTES

1. E. Estorick Stafford Cripps; C. Cooke The Life of Richard Stafford Cripps.
2. C. Trevelyan From Liberalism to Labour; A.J.A. Morris C.P. Trevelyan 1870-1958: portrait of a radical.
3. A. Wright G.D.H. Cole and Social Democracy.
4. M. Foot Aneurin Bevan Vol. 1., p.147.
5. F. Brockway Towards Tomorrow.
6. R. Crossman The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister Vol. 2, pp.190-191. Typical of Crossman's honesty is the way this particular diary entry ends: "Can I hope that if irreverence is my main socialist quality and not moral indignation, it won't necessarily be blunted by the marvellous kind of life we're able to live here at Prescote?" Perhaps a very pertinent commentary on why some Labour Left leaders modify or abandon their earlier radical commitments.
7. M. Foot Debts of Honour and 'Credo of the Labour Left' New Left Review, 49, May-June 1968, pp.19-34; A. Benn Arguments for Democracy and Arguments for Socialism.
8. Tony Benn 'Democracy and Marxism' Marxism Today, May 1982, p.8.
9. Eric Heffer 'Why I became a Socialist' New Socialist, July/August 1982, p.56.
10. 'Interview with Arthur Scargill' Marxism Today, April 1981, p.10 (Scargill's emphasis).
11. Michael Meacher Socialism with a Human Face.
12. Stuart Holland The Socialist Challenge.
13. 'Interview with Neil Kinnock' Marxism Today, June 1983, pp.6-12.
14. K. Livingstone 'Why Labour Lost' New Left Review, 140, July-August 1983, p.25.
15. p.5.
16. p.204.
17. For the ILP criticism of Labour and the Nation see G.D.H. Cole A History of the Labour Party from 1914, pp.205-213.
18. Labour Party For Socialism and Peace, 1934 p. 15.

19. G.D.H. Cole & G.R. Mitchison The Need for A Socialist Programme, p.33.
21. Labour Party For Socialism and Peace, 1934, p.12.
22. LPACR, 1934, p.54.
23. H. Dalton Practical Socialism for Britain, p.27.
24. Socialist League National Council Report, 1936, p.9.
25. Lansbury's Weekly, published between February 1925 and July 1927, had a circulation of 172,000 at its peak. See R. Postgate The Life of George Lansbury, pp.230-244.
26. A. Marwick 'The Independent Labour Party in the Nineteen-Twenties' Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, 35, 1962, p.64.
27. A.J.P. Taylor English History 1914-1945, pp.348-349.
28. B. Pimlott Labour and the Left in the 1930s, p.57.
29. Arthur Pugh was Secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and a member of the TUC General Council; Harold Clay was the Assistant General Secretary of the Transport & General Workers Union.
30. LPACR, 1935, p.173.
31. LPACR, 1937, p.160.
32. B. Webb Diaries 1924-1932, p.304.
33. Manchester Guardian, November 20, 1936.
34. K. Martin Editor, p.51.
35. B. Winter The ILP: A brief history, p.11.
36. J. Jupp The Radical Left in Britain 1931-1941, p.201.
37. ibid., p.133.
38. B. Pimlott op.cit., p.199.
39. ibid., p.6 (Pimlott's emphasis).
40. J. Jupp op.cit., p.184.
41. ibid., p.188.
42. ibid., p.196.
43. See P. Seyd 'Factionalism within the Labour Party: the Socialist League' in A. Briggs & J. Saville (eds) Essays in Labour History 1918-1939, p.224.



44. B. Pimlott op.cit., p.5.
45. In fact what was presented by the Party leadership as a strategic constraint upon the Party's freedom of action was part of its principled commitment to social reform. This strategic constraint was again invoked between 1976 and 1979 during the time of a minority Labour government and an economic crisis as a reason for delaying implementation of Party policy designed to transform the economy.
46. Herbert Morrison argued the need to consolidate the public ownership programme at the 1948 Labour Party conference. (LPACR, 1948, p.122) Aneurin Bevan called for a "radical extension of public ownership" and argued that it was "foolish" to advocate consolidation.
47. See Tribune, December 12, 1952; January 2, 1953; and January 16, 1953.
48. On revisionism see L. Minkin & P. Seyd 'The British Labour party' in W. Paterson & A. Thomas (eds) Social Democratic parties in Western Europe, pp.122-123 & fn.77 on p.143.
49. J. Morgan (ed) The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman, p.185.
50. ibid., p.186.
51. ibid., pp.186-187.
52. M.R. Gordon Conflict and Consensus in Labour's Foreign Policy, p.117.
53. loc.cit.
54. The wording of the resolution is quoted in Chapter one.
55. On October 23, 1952 the PLP approved the following resolution by 188 votes to 51: "This Parliamentary Labour Party... calls for the immediate abandonment of all group organisations within the party other than those officially recognised." The Times, October 24, 1952.
56. M. Gordon ibid., p.211.
57. H. Berrington Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons 1945-1955, p.111.
58. H.J. Steck Factionalism, Leadership and Ideology in the British Labour Party, 1951-1959, p.82.
59. ibid., p.84.
60. The Bevanites was a term first used by Tribune, September 21, 1951.

61. M. Foot Aneurin Bevan, Vol. 2, p.385.
62. J. Morgan (ed) op.cit., pp.47-48.
63. The three major rebellions were over a Defence White Paper (March 1952), the Atomic Energy Bill (April 1954), and the Defence Estimates (March 1955).
64. One Way Only (1951); Going Our Way (1951); It Need Not Happen (1954).
65. J. Morgan (ed) op.cit., p.52.
66. ibid., p.206.
67. ibid., p.170.
68. ibid., p.53; p.99; p.206.
69. ibid., p.336.
70. See M. Foot op.cit., p.383.
71. H.J. Steck op.cit., p.65.
72. ibid., p.87.
73. ibid., p.57.
74. J. Morgan (ed) op.cit., p.138.
75. ibid., p.183 & p.196.
76. ibid., p.223.
77. ibid., p.205.
78. H.J. Steck op.cit., p.108.
79. ibid., p.108.
80. ibid., p.132.
81. J. Morgan (ed) op.cit., p.283.
82. ibid., p.366.
83. Leading personnel in the Second Eleven included Ian Mikardo, Michael Foot, Barbara Castle, John Freeman, Hugh Jenkins, Renee Short, Stan Orme, Jo Richardson, Ralph Miliband and Geoffrey Drain. See P. Duff Left, Left, Left, p.46.
84. See M. Jenkins The Bevanites, Ch.4.
85. VFS Letter circulated to all local Labour Parties, 1944.

86. Conferences were held on Foreign policy (1951). International Affairs (1952), and Industrial Affairs (1952).

87. Unsigned Memorandum (in the author's possession).

88. VFS, Executive Council Minutes, March 1959.

89. VFS pamphlets were Tho' Cowards Flinch (1956); The Red Sixties (1957); Policy for Summit Talks (1958); Equality in Education (1958); A Roof Over Your Head (1958); Industry Your Servant (1958); Why Nato? (1960).

90. In 1959 VFS attracted considerable publicity when Stephen Swingle issued a press statement immediately after the General Election suggesting that Gaitskell should resign as Party Leader.

91. For example, in March 1958 the Party General Secretary, Morgan Phillips, sent a letter to all CLPs outlining the NEC's hostility to a VFS revival and advising them of the need to abide by the Party constitution. See The Times, March 1, 1958.

92. It is interesting to note that the VFS internal inquiry set up to consider the Trotskyist infiltration at the 1961 AGM had, as one of its members, Jim Mortimer who, twenty one years later (as General Secretary of the Labour Party) had to deal with Trotskyist infiltration into the Labour Party.

93. L. Minkin The Labour Party Conference, p.86.

94. D. Howell The Rise and Fall of Bevanism, p.11.

95. It is interesting to note that Michael Foot revealed similar weaknesses during the 1983 General Election campaign.

96. The proposed amendment to Clause 4, part 4, of the Party constitution was only "noted" by the 1960 Party conference, and the original 1918 commitment remained intact. The Party's defence policy statement of 1981 was a compromise between Left and Right. It recognised that a British independent nuclear deterrent no longer existed but it reaffirmed a strategy of multilateral disarmament.

97. Crossman was appointed Leader of the House of Commons and John Silkin was appointed Chief Whip.

98. Recruits to the Tribune Group who had been elected in 1964 included Eric Heffer, Stan Orme and Norman Atkinson.

99. The Trade Union Group of MPs had been a significant force on the Party Right in the 1950s. See W.D. Muller The Kept Men?, especially Ch.4.

100. K. Coates (ed) A Future for British Socialism?, p.6.

101. Tribune, June 7 1968. The eight points of the Charter were: the need for Britain's economic independence; the need for a national plan; further public ownership; the redistribution of wealth; workforce democracy; ending racial, religious and sexual discrimination; an independent foreign policy; and a democratic Labour Party.

102. Based upon the author's own experience at the time as an active helper in Royden Harrison's campaign.

103. Woodrow Wyatt and Desmond Donnelly used Labour's small parliamentary majority as a means to stall the Government's plans to renationalise the steel industry in 1965. See H. Wilson The First Labour Government 1964-1970, p.100-102.

104. Barbara Castle, Dick Crossman, Fred Lee, Tony Greenwood, and Frank Cousins were appointed to Cabinet posts sometime between 1964 and 1970. Other Labour Left personnel were appointed to junior Ministerial posts. For example, Stephen Swingle, a prominent Left critic in the late 1950s/early 1960s was appointed as Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Transport (1964-1967) and then promoted to Minister of State, first in the Ministry of Transport (1967-1968) and then in the Department of Health and Social Security (1968-1969). He died in 1969. Other persons on the Labour Left to secure appointments were Judith Hart, Joan Lestor, John Lee, Norman Buchan and Peter Shore.

105. "I am pretty sure this mission is only a gimmick." R. Crossman The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister, Vol.1., p.269.

106. In 109 Divisions between 1966 and 1969 one or more members of the PLP dissented from the Party Whip. The areas of substantial disagreement and in which the Labour Left contributed the bulk of the Government's critics were: Vietnam, cuts in public expenditure, prices and incomes policy, House of Lords reform, and industrial relations. Opposition to the Government's policies on Rhodesia, Nigeria and coloured immigration attracted critics from both Left and Right of the PLP. See P. Norton Dissension in the House of Commons 1945-1974, pp.258-377 & p.609.

107. S. Hall, E. Thompson & R. Williams (eds) New Left May Day Manifesto, 1969 subsequently published as R. Williams (ed) May Day Manifesto 1968.

108. The Executive Committee of the International Socialists approved a resolution in 1965 rejecting "...the Labour Party as an instrument for social change... (and) as a milieu for mass conversion to socialist consciousness..." but regarding it as "...primarily an area for ideological conflict and a source of individual recruitment to a revolutionary programme". See D. Widgery

The Left in Britain, p.210.

109. See P. Shipley Revolutionaries in Modern Britain; J. Tomlinson Left-Right: The March of Political Extremism in Modern Britain; B. Baker The Far Left; and N. Young An Infantile Disorder.

110. See Chapter four for an extended discussion on this subject.

111. M. Foot 'Credo of the Labour Left' New Left Review, 49, May-June 1968, pp.19-34.

112. R. Miliband Parliamentary Socialism, p.27.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LABOUR LEFT RESURGENCE

The emergence of an increasingly powerful Labour Left had its origins, first, in the performance of Labour governments between 1964 and 1970 and, second, in the adoption of a more ideological version of Conservatism between 1970 and 1972. Both undermined Labour's prevailing right-wing ideology and stimulated a commitment to a more traditional form of socialism.

#### Labour in Office 1964-70

The Labour Governments of 1964 and 1966 were led by a man associated with the Labour Left in the 1950s, and some of his colleagues were also from the Labour Left(1) but the senior Government Ministers - at the Treasury and the Foreign Office - were people from the Party's Right and, overall, revisionism dominated the Government. So much of revisionism was based upon the idea of an efficient and growing economy. Socialism was made possible through the redistribution of the economic surplus in which public expenditure would create equality of opportunity. By discreet government intervention capital would operate in a socially responsible manner, but with the absence of sustained economic growth, with curbs in public expenditure, and with a rise in unemployment the

revisionist position was undermined.

From the moment of Labour's election in 1964 the Government faced major economic problems highlighted by Britain's balance of payments deficit. By 1966 economic growth had been subordinated to the achievement of a balance of payments surplus to be secured by orthodox economic policies which involved the cutting of public expenditure and the curbing of wage increases. The revisionist claim that a socialist society could be secured by the redistribution of abundant resources and that the imbalance between 'private affluence and public squalor' could be remedied by fiscal measures was undermined by Britain's economic decline. By 1970 some Labour supporters were claiming that the poor had become poorer during the six year period of Labour government.(2)

Furthermore, Labour's pre-1964 claim that an incomes policy was concerned to plan the growth of real wages and secure social justice was subordinated in 1966 to deflationary necessities. First, a wages policy was introduced which was admitted to have nothing to do with fairness(3) and then, after the difficulties experienced in maintaining wage controls, the Labour Government attempted reform of the trade unions as a means of securing long-term economic growth. Revisionists had shown little sympathetic understanding of the trade union movement, criticising its conservatism in the face of socio-economic changes in the 1950s and arguing that Party/union links should be broken because of the electoral unpopularity of the trade unions.(4) Even though

the Government's White Paper on reform of industrial relations, In Place of Strife, proposed to strengthen individual rights to trade union membership and bargaining three proposals created considerable opposition - the granting to the Secretary of State for Employment of the right in an unofficial strike to order a return to work for twenty eight days whilst arbitration took place if he/she believed the effects of the strike would be serious; the empowering of the Secretary of State where he/she believed a strike would be a threat to the economy or to the public interest to order a ballot of the union membership; and, finally the introduction of financial proposals concerning inter-union disputes. The reforms proposed in the Government's White Paper prompted a rank and file reaction within the trade union movement, alienated some trade union leaders who previously had supported the Party leadership, and helped forge an alliance between the Parliamentary Left, the Trade Union group of MPs, and some trade union leaders which had considerable long-term implications for the future of the Labour Party. Whereas it had been possible for some trade union leaders to accuse the Left in the 1930s and 1950s of being middle class intellectuals out of touch with trade unionism, this was no longer possible since it was now the Labour Left which was to the forefront in defending the traditional bargaining rights of the union movement. The division between the Party leadership and the trade unions over In Place of Strife was a most significant factor in contributing to the rise of the Left in the 1970s and the



eventual split in the Labour Party in 1981.(5)

The election of a Conservative Government in 1970 seemingly intent on implementing an ideological Conservatism which challenged essential features of the post-war political settlement also undermined the Labour Right's strategy which, based upon the 'end of ideology' thesis, had adopted a pragmatic and classless political appeal. Conservative abandonment of some forms of economic planning, withdrawal of state aid to ailing firms, establishment of a new legislative framework for industrial relations, revision of the funding process for council housing, and implementation of a budgetary strategy giving tax benefits to the high income earner initiated intense inter-party political debate. Conservatism appeared to be attacking the working class and this gave the Labour Left the opportunity to reassert its belief that Labour's appeal should be based upon both a more principled commitment to socialism than had been the case in the 1960s and a defence of the working class. Terms such as capitalism, crisis and class now appeared more relevant in political debate and as such influenced the direction of Labour's political appeal.

The leftward direction of political debate within the Labour Party was given a further shift as a consequence of the growth of industrial militancy from 1966 onwards. The number of stoppages of work and the aggregate number of days lost due to stoppages increased every year between 1966 and 1970.(6) The impact of this industrial militancy was felt in the election of some new

trade union leaders, many of whom were more closely associated with the Labour Left. We have already referred in the previous chapter to the fact that new trade union officials were elected to four of the six largest affiliated trade unions in the period from 1967 to 1969. Perhaps the most significant of these elections was that in which Hugh Scanlon replaced the 'loyalist' Lord Carron as President of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers. The alliance of Scanlon with Jack Jones of the Transport and General Workers' Union provided the core to a powerful Left-wing trade union vote at the Party's annual conference. By the time Labour lost Office in 1970 the Right-wing bloc vote was no longer dominant at the Party conference. In its place was an emerging left-wing bloc vote which provided the base for a powerful left-wing thrust which developed in the constituency Labour Parties.

Although a steady stream of resolutions had been submitted to the annual Party conference throughout the 1960's calling for extensions to public ownership the last occasion on which it had debated the subject had been in 1962. But the Party conference agendas for the Opposition years, 1970, 1971 and 1972 contained an increasing number of resolutions demanding commitment to public ownership, either in general terms, often affirming a commitment to Clause Four, or with regard to a specific industry.(7) Such a high number, from both CLPs and trade unions, was both a response to the Conservative Government's proposals for denationalisation and a reaffirmation of traditional socialism. Conference decisions from 1970 onwards included

specific public ownership commitments as well as a declaration in favour of Clause Four of the Party constitution - that clause which revisionists had first tried to delete from the Party constitution and, then having failed in that objective, tried to downgrade in importance.(8)

This left wing thrust from the CLPs, dependent upon a trade union base of support, was given direction by the NEC. In 1970 a right wing majority still existed amongst the twenty eight members. Only eleven were on the Left: six of the seven CLP representatives (Allaun, Benn, Castle, Driberg, Lestor and Mikardo); three of the five Women's section representatives (Hart, Jeger, and Short); and only two of the twelve Trade union section representatives (Kitson and Forden), but by 1973 the balance of power within the NEC had shifted towards the Left following the election of one additional left winger to both the Women and Trade union sections (Maynard and Forrester), and also the creation of an additional place on the NEC for a representative of the Young Socialists (Doyle). The Left was now in the majority on occasions, reflected in the fact that by October 1974 two of the important NEC committees (Home Policy and International Affairs) were both chaired by left wingers (Benn and Mikardo) for the first time ever. By 1978 Eric Heffer had also been elected to chair the important Party Organisation committee giving the Left the chairmanships of the three major NEC committees.

This growth of left influence on the NEC had an

important impact upon the Party policy, electoral strategy and internal power arrangements, but before considering these we need to examine in more detail the nature of the Left's programme as it emerged in the 1970s.

### Labour Left Programme

During the 1970s a more comprehensive Left programme was drawn up than at any time since the 1930s. For a great deal of the post-war period the Labour Left had been more oppositional in manner, responding to the latest proposals of the Party leadership - the consolidationist proposals of Herbert Morrison and the reform proposals of Gaitskell and his fellow-revisionists - by defending the Party's traditional commitments. The Left might have possessed all the best slogans, such as peace, equality and justice, but it lacked any detailed programme for achieving these ends. During the 1970s, however, the Labour Left was willing to think beyond slogans and draw up a programme covering a wide range of policies. For the first time in forty years the Labour Left was no longer trapped in the defensive and reactive mentality of much of the post-war period: it possessed a credible alternative to the Party leadership.

The common ground on which the Labour Left developed its ideas was economics and defence: first, in producing an alternative economic programme and, second, in its criticism of British defence policy.

Economic programme

The seminal influence on intra-party political debate in the 1970s was The Socialist Challenge, written by Stuart Holland. He attacked Tony Crosland's analysis of the mixed economy and asserted that Keynesian techniques of demand management no longer worked. The reason they no longer worked was because the economy was dominated by multinational firms whose power was so great as to minimise the impact of government intervention. These firms operated in the 'mesoeconomic' sector of the economy and occupied the contemporary commanding heights of both the national and international economy. Power resided with a small number of top managers running monopolistic firms and a divergence arose between the public interest as pursued by governments and what was perceived to be that interest by these economic controllers. Different perceptions existed on such issues as the balance of payments, regional development, industrial investment, prices and productivity. Multinational companies could undermine a government's monetary, exchange control, fiscal and locational policies. Whereas Crosland had argued in 1956 that there had been a transfer of economic power to political authorities, Holland stated that the power of multinational and monopoly capital in the mesoeconomic sector was considerable. Holland therefore argued that the trend towards national and multinational monopoly "supports the traditional socialist argument that without public ownership and control of the dominant means

of production, distribution and exchange, the State will never manage the strategic features of the economy in the public interest".(9) He argued that modern capitalism was irresponsible and inefficient and it perpetuated a class structure in which the degree of inequality was unacceptable. In a language far removed from that used by Crosland in The Future of Socialism Holland stated that "... the private sector in Britain is failing the nation on a massive scale, and represents a dead weight on the backs of the working class people...".(10)

Here then was a contemporary justification for public ownership and control drawn from analysis of economic developments so lacking in Left arguments in the 1950s. Holland did not propose the destruction of private sector capitalism but thought that the mix between private and public ownership should be shifted towards more public enterprise and ownership. Holland predicted that by the mid-1980s 100 companies would control two thirds of net manufacturing output and these key firms needed to be controlled by a mixture of public ownership and socialist planning. He argued for the public ownership of approximately 20 to 25 of the top 100 companies in manufacturing in order to control one third of total turnover, two fifths of profits and one half of total employment.

Holland made considerable use of European experience, especially from Italy, to develop ideas for more state planning by the creation of a state-holding company to manage the affairs of a large sector of the

economy and by the introduction of planning agreements. The state-holding company would purchase equity shares in firms in order to establish some degree of public enterprise within particular sections of the economy as a stimulus to growth and efficiency. Furthermore voluntary planning agreements would be drawn up between the government, trade unions and the largest companies covering prices, wages, investment and labour policies. Voluntary is perhaps something of a misnomer since it was envisaged that where companies failed to negotiate satisfactorily with government and the unions, then the government would use its purchasing and contract powers to force the company to adopt the required policies.

The importance of The Socialist Challenge to the political debate within the Labour Party was recognised by at least one member of Labour's Right who asserted that the book:

is glib and cocksure in style and sloppy in argument; if it could be considered solely on its intellectual merits, no one would have to take it seriously. But it cannot be considered solely on its merits.

Politically, this is a work of the first importance, which the social democratic wing of the Labour Party, in particular, will have to take very seriously indeed. For what Mr. Holland has done is to pour new wine into old bottles of Clause Four: to provide, for the first time for twenty-five years, an at least faintly plausible theoretical justification for the prejudices of the Labour Left. He has done so, moreover, at a time when the Labour Left... is in desperate need of plausible theories. In these circumstances, it seems to me as certain as anything in politics ever can be that his arguments will be seized on with delight; and for that reason, if for no other, his opponents will be forced to pay a good deal more attention

to them than they deserve.(11)

The Right took little notice of David Marquand's advice. Leading revisionists were either silent or made little attempt to present an argument which incorporated the evidence of Britain's economic decline. For example, Tony Crosland reasserted his revisionist position in the 1970s with no examination of the dilemmas or failings of the 1964-1970 Labour governments.(12)

The tenor of Holland's criticisms of capitalism, his attacks on Crosland and his reassertion of the need for public ownership placed him very clearly on the Labour Left, but his proposals for state planning were not so obviously part of a Labour Left programme. Proposals in the Labour Party's policy document Industry and Society, published in 1958, to purchase equity shares in companies had been attacked by many on the Left as being a surreptitious attempt to undermine the traditional commitment to outright public ownership, whereas now Holland's proposed state agency to purchase shares was welcomed by the Left. The difference however, was one of tenor of language. In 1958 the Labour Party's proposal was made assuming a framework of relatively efficient and humane private capital which needed to be tempered by a modicum of public involvement, whereas in the 1970s the proposals to manage the economy at the micro level were put forward as a means of tempering inefficient and irresponsible capital. Nevertheless, although the tenor of language was more hostile towards capitalism than had been the case in 1958, the Labour Left envisaged an economy in



which private ownership of capital remained substantial.

In contrast to the 1930s when the Labour Left envisaged public ownership of all major industry the contemporary Labour Left was more concerned to shift the mix of public and private ownership of capital in such a way as to ensure that the economy was run on lines other than solely profit. Few of the contemporary Labour Left argued for the elimination of private ownership of capital. Eric Heffer wrote that "...no one to my knowledge in the Labour Party wishes publicly to own everything"(13) and Tony Benn stated that

the Labour Party has never been for 100% nationalisation of every sweetshop. What we have talked about are 'the commanding heights', which in terms of numbers of companies represents about 20% and in terms of output represents about 50%.(14)

It was only the Trotskyists within the Party demanding, for example, the public ownership of the two hundred leading monopolies who seemed intent on eliminating the private sector of the economy. Holland specified that the leading banks, financial institutions and building societies, along with twenty to twenty five of the leading companies in the manufacturing sector of the economy, would be sufficient to determine the overall nature of the economy. However, much of the time the Labour Left used general statements along the lines of "a really substantial extension of public ownership"(15) or "a substantial and vital sector of the growth industries, mainly in manufacturing".(16)

The Socialist challenge was published in 1975 but, as we will see later in this chapter, the key ideas of public ownership, a state planning agency and planning agreements were filtered into Labour's policy documents by the NEC Left before Holland's book was published. These economic proposals were further extended as a consequence of the problems facing the British economy from 1975 onwards. In three areas - public expenditure, imports and the EEC - the Left developed specific and distinctive proposals.

Revisionists had placed great stress upon public expenditure because it fitted their belief that fiscal and social welfare measures were a more appropriate means of alleviating social inequalities than structural change to property relationships. The Left did not disagree that social welfare expenditure was important in alleviating inequalities but it placed more emphasis on public ownership. However, by the mid-1970s some on Labour's Right were questioning whether any further commitment could be made to expand public expenditure without posing a threat to liberal democracy,(17) whilst the Labour Left had become the explicit defenders of public expenditure as part of its demand for the economy to be reflationed and as part of its opposition to Labour Government expenditure cuts. The Left argued that increased public expenditure would be a stimulus to employment, would relieve some of the serious problems of social deprivation and inequality, and would go some limited way towards modifying the capitalist pricing mechanisms. For some on the Left it now

appeared as if public expenditure had replaced public ownership as the crucial feature of socialism! For example, Stan Orme wrote in 1978: "I nail my colours to the mast of public expenditure" and concluded that the objective of high public expenditure was why he was in the Labour Party.(18)

The Left's commitment to reflation raised the issue of import penetration because it was argued that stimulating demand would only increase the level of imports. By the mid-1970s the serious problem of Britain's deindustrialisation was apparent and it was in response to the decline in the traditional manufacturing base that some on the Labour Left began to develop the case for import controls. This proposal has been associated in particular with the Cambridge Economic Policy Group, one of whose leading members has been Francis Cripps, a sometime adviser to the Tribune Group in the 1970s and an economic adviser to Tony Benn between 1974 and 1979. Import controls have generated considerable disagreement on the Left and they remain one area in the economic programme where considerable differences of opinion have prevailed. Some oppose the idea because import controls have been historically associated with high food prices and a reduction in people's living standards and others believe that they undermine the socialist commitment to internationalism. Sensitivity to such criticisms was reflected in early proposals that controls should be placed on finished goods rather than on goods from third world countries and later stress that the present level of

imports should be maintained without allowing a further large increase in a period of reflation.(19) By making such amendments import controls emerged as an important part of the Labour Left's programme but such controls would be illegal under EEC rules and therefore they served to reinforce the Labour Left's opposition to the EEC.

British membership of the EEC has been an issue which at times has transcended the Left/Right divisions within the Labour Party. For example, in the early years of debate over whether Britain should join, Eric Heffer on the Labour Left was in favour, whilst Douglas Jay on the Labour Right was against entry, but increasingly the Labour Left opposed entry on grounds of principle and of practice. The Labour Left's principled opposition was based on the view that the EEC was formed on purely capitalist ideals, namely the free movement of capital, goods and services and the restriction of government powers to control or plan the economy. Additional objections were that Britain would lose some degree of sovereignty to an unelected and unaccountable set of political institutions and that Britain would inexorably become drawn into a European foreign and defence policy. In the 1970s the Labour Left's practical objections were related to the impact of membership upon the British economy, in particular that membership contributed to Britain's de-industrialisation by opening the British market to import penetration, to the view that the Common Agricultural Policy would be a considerable burden upon the taxpayer and would raise the cost of living, and to

the belief that the development of the European Monetary System would further restrict Labour's freedom of action. The Labour Left's greatest worry was that its freedom of action to introduce a programme of public ownership, state planning and import controls would be vetoed by the EEC. For this reason the Labour Left campaigned in the 1975 referendum for the rejection of the negotiated terms of entry and continued to demand that Britain withdraw from the EEC until after the 1983 general election defeat when a division of opinion emerged.

Public ownership, economic planning, public expenditure, import controls and withdrawal from the EEC had all become part of a programme which by 1976 had been given the title of The Alternative Economic Strategy (hereafter AES). This programme was more comprehensive than any put forward by the Left in the past. It was a programme of limited but achievable reforms rather than a demand for instant socialism. It moved beyond the Labour Left's usual ability to monopolise the good slogans but ignore specific policies. It also encouraged the Left to think more in terms of power rather than permanent opposition. The AES was the beginnings of a programme for government but the programme had its weaknesses.

First, the inclusion of the word strategy implied some detailed planning on the implementation of the policies, which was not the case. For example, on the EEC there was no attempt to consider the process of withdrawal or to develop a post-withdrawal strategy of international trading. The absence of such a strategy was

eventually to result in the Labour Party's commitment to withdraw from the EEC becoming electorally counter-productive in the 1983 General Election campaign.

Second, there was the question of whether the programme of state ownership and intervention was any more than a corporatist rationalisation of a declining capitalist economy. Whilst some, such as the Labour Coordinating Committee and the Conference of Socialist Economists, envisaged it being the first stage towards the socialist transformation of the economy, there were others who viewed it in a more orthodox Keynesian framework as being the means to secure the recovery of the British economy.(20)

Third, the emphasis in the programme on central planning suggested a corporate or state capitalist economy. Stuart Holland was aware of this danger and argued that this would be the case without also a programme of workers' control(21). But the demand for workers' control has been one area in which the Labour Left remains at the level of slogan rather than considered practical proposal. With the exception of the Institute for Workers'Control little attempt has been made to consider in detail any specific plans because this is an issue on which the Left was, and remains, divided: there are those who argue that workers' control is an essential means of extending democracy but others argue that it would only be a means of undermining trade union power in a capitalist society.(22) Divisions have existed within the trade union movement with conflicting evidence

submitted to the Bullock Committee established in 1975 and a divided response to the final report.(23) One reason why the Labour Left, with the exception of the Institute for Workers' Control, did not develop a more coherent set of proposals was because of its wariness of alienating sections of the trade union movement which, on other issues, would support the Left. This also partly explains the Labour Left's unwillingness to discuss the problem of incomes in the AES.

Only the Labour Co-ordinating Committee and the Conference of Socialist Economists discussed the issue and admitted that implementation of the AES would put considerable pressure on wages. They affirmed the need to extend the bargaining strength of trade unions and reaffirmed the importance of free collective bargaining, but argued that in isolation it was ineffective. They claimed that there might be an agreement on incomes reached if the total share of wages in total income was not reduced, that there were specific measures to control prices and dividends, taxation measures to redistribute incomes and that any restriction on wages would be matched by an increase in trade union powers and control within the firm.(24)

A fourth weakness of the AES was that it tended to be discussed in technical and economic terms and yet the political consequences of its implementation would be very considerable. There was little discussion of the capitalist reaction, it being assumed that government powers to withhold contracts or to refuse price increases

to recalcitrant firms would produce the desired objectives. But no guarantee that government would secure such collaboration was possible and there was little attempt by the Labour Left to campaign and educate trade unionists to act as the only possible mobilising force to counteract capitalist hostility.

The final weakness of the programme was that the frame of reference was the nation and it failed to recognise the degree of interdependence of European economies. It is somewhat surprising that with the development of multinational capital so well documented by Stuart Holland in The Socialist Challenge the Labour Left should place so much reliance on a national strategy of planning and control and should make no attempts to develop any multinational discussions in the Labour movement. This contrasts sharply with the Labour Left's defence policy where there has been greater emphasis upon a European movement against nuclear weapons and upon a European nuclear-free zone. In defence matters the Labour Left's emphasis shifted between the late-fifties and the late-seventies from national to international strategies.

#### Defence and Foreign Affairs

The Labour Left has concentrated in previous periods more on foreign affairs than domestic issues. The rise of fascism in Europe, the Spanish civil war, the rearmament of Germany and the development of the cold war have been some of the major international events which



stimulated a specific Labour Left response. We have argued in the previous chapter that in foreign affairs the Labour Left both embraced various strands of opinion and shifted the emphasis of its demands according to changing international circumstances. However, the 'third force' of neutralist ideas of earlier times remained significant in the 1970s. On the one hand the Left remained critical of American foreign policy especially its involvement in South East Asia at the beginning of the decade and its intervention in the domestic affairs of Chile in 1973. On the other hand the Left's hostility towards the Soviet Union was greater than in the 1950s. Whilst a very small number on the Labour Left remained friends of the Soviet Union, many more were critical of the treatment of dissenters in the Soviet bloc. Nevertheless, the Left held a view of the Soviet Union, distinct from the Right, which influenced its view of defence policy requirements. The Left invoked political reality, so often claimed to be the sole property of the Right, to argue that the Soviet Union was a status quo power concerned more with the consolidation of territory than expansion, that military expansion in NATO member countries would create internal problems for the Soviet leadership and that ideological confrontation, perpetuated by the Soviet leadership, was more concerned with maintaining internal stability within the Soviet bloc than with external aggression. The Left therefore argued that Britain should take a lead in reducing arms expenditure since this would reduce international tensions and would not be exploited by

Soviet aggression.

For much of the decade the Left's main concern was with the overall level of Britain's defence expenditure and with developing the argument that it was too high, in contrast to other NATO countries, and should be reduced. Defence expenditure was "a parasite on the economy"(25), diverting valuable resources away from investment, research and development and hindering the export market. Britain should take unilateral action to reduce the military budget and to restrict arms sales in order to break the log-jam of disarmament negotiations. Such action by Britain would provide a positive contribution to the lessening of international tension.

In arguing this case, the Labour Left was in a stronger position than in previous periods because a great deal more planning and forethought had been given to the question of defence policy. An NEC study group on Defence Expenditure, the Arms Trade and Alternative Employment, established in 1974, brought together left-wing defence specialists to work out how policy commitments might be implemented and the reports published by this study group presented more detailed analysis on this subject than ever before.(26)

The level of defence expenditure was an overriding Labour Left concern throughout this period but the issue of nuclear weapons re-emerged as the central feature of its programme by the end of the decade. Nuclear disarmament had racked the Labour Party in the late-1950s but with the election of the Labour Government in 1964 the

question became of less importance in political debate. Individual members of the Labour Left had retained their concern and commitment to Britain's unilateral abandonment of nuclear weapons, and for some, a withdrawal from the NATO alliance, but for the Labour Left in general, detente and the seeming success of the nuclear deterrent in preserving peace between the superpowers was instrumental in little emphasis being placed on the issue over a period of almost fifteen years between 1964 and the late 1970s. Perhaps in hindsight nuclear disarmers would be justified in concluding that the Labour Left had used the issue as a means to attack Hugh Gaitskell in 1960 and indirectly to secure Harold Wilson's election as Party Leader in 1963, but had then subordinated principle to Party. Only in the late-1970s did the issue of nuclear weapons re-emerge as an important feature of Left/Right Party debate.

It re-emerged as a consequence of the deterioration in Soviet-American relations, especially after Russia's invasion of Afghanistan, the election of a new American President committed to arms expenditure in order to bargain with the Russians from a position of military strength, the Labour Government's decision to renew Britain's nuclear defence forces and then the Conservative Government's decision to accept Cruise missiles as part of NATO defence strategy.(27)

In this situation the old divisions of the late-1950s between the unilateralists of the Left and the multilateralists of the Right re-emerged with the Left arguing that British possession of nuclear weapons and

dependence upon American missiles made this country more vulnerable to nuclear attack. When this argument had divided the Labour Party in the late-1950s the Labour Left had placed great emphasis upon Britain's likely influence in the world in making a unilateral gesture but less was heard of this particular argument and greater emphasis was placed on securing a European nuclear free zone independent of, and removed from, the arms race of the two superpowers. The demand for European nuclear disarmament from Poland to Portugal has been the theme of much of the contemporary Labour Left argument.

The Labour Left's unilateralist position on nuclear weapons won support within the Party primarily because of the attractiveness of its moral commitment against such horrifying weapons of destruction but there were weaknesses in its case which became apparent during the 1983 General Election campaign. It was never made clear how Britain would be safer from nuclear attack by unilaterally abandoning nuclear weapons, neither was it ever explained in a convincing manner how Britain would continue to participate in NATO as a non-nuclear power.

Economic affairs and defence were two areas in which the Left developed a distinctive position during the 1970s. It also enlarged its commitment into other areas including two of particular interest; the first being its attitude towards the liberal democratic state and the second being its view on the position of women in society.

The State

There has always been a part of the Labour Party sceptical of either the neutrality or sensitivity of the state's institutions, in particular Parliament and the judiciary, towards the demands of the underprivileged. The Labour Left has regarded direct action and disobedience of the law as a necessary part of socialist strategy. From Poplar Borough Council to Clay Cross Urban District Council, from the unemployed in the North East of England, to the women of Greenham Common, acts of resistance and disobedience are regarded as sometimes essential.

This attitude needs distinguishing from the revolutionary critique of Parliament as part of the bourgeois state requiring overthrow. The Labour Left argues that Parliament - both the institution and the procedures - produces a conservative political hegemony. Extra-parliamentary political pressure is necessary therefore in order to stimulate radical change. Furthermore, regular political accountability of the parliamentarians to the Party membership is necessary in order to ensure that they maintain their socialist commitments. The Labour Left adopts a scepticism towards and a scrutiny of this institution but does not argue for its abolition and replacement by some form of workers' assembly. The most explicit contemporary critique of parliamentary procedures and values comes from Dennis Skinner. No such critique emanates from the Labour Right which, in contrast, places greater stress upon the

legitimacy of the state institutions, the necessity of abiding by the parliamentary process and working for change within the institutional framework. It is very uncommon therefore to find the Right advocating or participating in extra-parliamentary direct action and disobedience of the law.

After the collapse of the 1929-1931 Labour Government Laski, Cripps and Cole argued that the election of a future Labour government would stimulate institutions such as the Monarchy and the House of Lords to obstruct its policies. The Socialist League entitled one of its earlier publications 'Can Socialism Come by Constitutional Means?', making clear its doubts concerning the neutrality of the state. However, by the 1950s the topic attracted little attention on the Labour Left for the obvious reason that it appeared that the state machinery was amenable to socialist initiatives. Only in the 1970s did the Left return to the question in the light of what it regarded as the partiality of judges, housing commissioners, district auditors, civil servants and controllers of the media.

Two issues which focused the Left's attentions on this subject were the Conservative Government's industrial relations and housing legislation. It was argued that in both cases the law was being used to discriminate against the weak. Organised labour was being restricted in its day-to-day business and the withdrawal of housing subsidy was forcing council house tenants to pay higher rents. In both cases the left argued that the law was discriminating against the underprivileged and was

being administered in a partial manner and therefore it should be disobeyed rather than wait for the normal electoral and parliamentary procedures to secure amendment.

The Left's challenge to the 'rule of law' was given considerable boost by the TUC's decision in 1972 that its affiliated members should not register with the Registrar of Friendly Societies, thus making them liable to legal action in industrial disputes, nor should they recognise the decisions of the Industrial Relations Court. This policy culminated in the TUC's threat to call a general strike in July 1972 following the arrest of five London dockworkers for contempt of court.

Greater collective solidarity existed amongst trade unionists in the non-implementation of the Conservatives' industrial relations policy than amongst Labour Councillors over the Housing Finance Act. Eventually only one local authority (Clay Cross) refused to implement the Act, resulting in the surcharging and disqualification of twenty one councillors.

The Labour Left's commitment to extra-parliamentary direct action was part of its challenge to the PLP's dominance of the Labour Party. We will examine in Chapter five its specific challenge to Labour parliamentarians' security of tenure but will note here the Left's critique of a political strategy reliant solely on parliamentary activity. The Left believed in the need for extra-parliamentary agitation as a necessary auxiliary to parliamentary activity in order to generate a radical

popular consciousness and stimulate radical change. Direct action was a necessary feature of socialist activity because of its impact upon popular attitudes and the political elite.

Apart from this general critique of the state and the nature of the law the Labour Left developed more specific criticisms of certain state institutions which recruited from a very narrow social base and were therefore felt to be out of touch and sympathy with a radical point of view. It believed that the judiciary displayed this bias in its treatment of organised labour. Its experience of senior civil servants during Labour governments of the 1960s and 1970s was that the mandarins were willing to sabotage radical initiatives. One group of Labour Left MPs commented that

senior civil servants... wield a great deal of power and exercise it to the full to prevent any changes, which they do not want, from being carried through.(28)

It regarded the controllers of the media as irresponsible, unaccountable and antagonistic towards organised labour.

The Labour Left's proposals for dealing with this bias were ill-thought-out however. It tended to argue for more open recruitment to the judiciary and civil service as the means to curb their anti-Labour sentiment rather than examine the structures and roles of such institutions. The group of Left Labour MPs referred to above did suggest that civil service power should be restricted by the creation of "a ministerial committee



system" under which Labour backbench MPs would comprise a departmental cabinet to ensure that Party policy was adhered to. However, it was the local government left which made an attempt to curb the power of conservative institutions by creating new structures, new posts and expecting senior personnel in these posts to adopt a new, more radical, role. We will examine this development in Chapter ten.

Finally, in considering the development of a wide-ranging Labour Left programme, we should consider the impact of feminism.

#### Socialist feminism

The emergent women's movement took many forms in the 1970s - radical, socialist and reformist - and led to many types of political intervention; for example, the establishment of battered women's refuges and women's aid centres, and campaigns to defend existing abortion legislation and to demand equal pay and equal rights. This new feminism was not necessarily linked to socialism. For example, divisions occurred amongst feminists arguing that class relationships (gender-based as well as occupation-based) were the major source of women's oppression and those arguing the primacy of biological differences. Those arguing the latter point of view rejected the linkage between socialism and feminism. I do not intend to examine this debate here but merely to note the important contribution of socialist feminism to Labour Left

ideology. Socialist feminists added another dimension to the Labour Left's demands for a fundamental reorganisation of society; they argued that the transformation of social and sexual relationships was only possible within a non-capitalist environment. Sally Alexander, for example, argues that "...our demands, even at their minimum, cannot be achieved without a fundamental reorganisation of society".(29) Here was a powerful, additional intellectual thrust to the socialist case, but it needs to be noted that the linkage has not been without tensions. On the one hand those on the Labour Left adopting a traditional 'economism' have argued that female oppression is a diversion from the 'real' class struggle which has its roots in the ownership of the means of production. On the other hand some socialist feminists believe that the predominant maleness of the Labour Left ensures that women remain subordinate even amongst those claiming a commitment to radical transformation. Furthermore, apart from such ideological tensions there have also been disagreements on specific items of policy. For example, women have argued that the AES was designed to restore (male) jobs in the economy and ignore questions of female employment(30) and the demand for a distinctive and autonomous position for women within the Party has also created argument which we will examine in a later chapter.

The development of this/<sup>Left</sup>programme, encouraged by the NEC and sustained by the surge in political support within the constituency parties and the trade unions, enabled the Labour Left to gain the political initiative

within the Party. This was reflected in significant Party developments between 1970 and 1974.

### Economic policies

The Labour Left's re-emergence as a powerful political force within the Party is reflected in the longest and most comprehensive policy document ever produced by the Party - Labour's Programme 1973. It was the product of a considerable exercise of policy deliberation carried on in many NEC sub-committees and study groups, many of which often became particular strongholds of Left or Right opinions.(31) The policy document contained a comprehensive cover of Party policy on a wide range of topics including the EEC, housing, transport, agriculture, pensions, education, civil liberties, overseas aid, European security and foreign policy with recommendations, most of which were acceptable to Left and Right. Where the serious factional divisions occurred and where the Left's renewed strength was reflected concerned the analysis and recommendations contained in the first forty pages covering the Party's industrial strategy.

The tenor of the language and the specific proposals angered the Right. The change in tenor from previous years can be displayed by comparison of Signposts for the Sixties, Labour's Programme 1972, and then Labour's Programme 1973. In 1962 the Party regarded the mixed economy as inefficient but capable of reform:

The danger that faces us, after a decade of complacent Tory Government is not the sudden catastrophe of slump and mass unemployment, but piecemeal economic deterioration and gradual political decline. These processes of decay have, indeed, already begun. But there is still time to halt them...(32)

In 1972 criticism of the economy remained relatively mild:

...the market economy has many defenders, some advantages, and a great deal of defects.(33)

However, by 1973 the language had become uncompromisingly critical:

The experience of Labour Governments has made it increasingly evident that even the most comprehensive measures of social and fiscal reform can only succeed in masking the unacceptable and unpleasant face of a capitalist economy, and cannot achieve any fundamental changes in the power relationships which dominate our Society.(34)

Labour's Programme 1973 indicted capitalism as inefficient, inhumane and irresponsible and asserted the need for public control of the leading sectors of industry either by means of outright public ownership or by selective investment in, and control of, particular sections of industry by a new state agency, the National Enterprise Board.

What caused considerable argument within the NEC was the specific proposal that the Party would take a controlling interest in twenty-five of the largest manufacturing firms.(35) Furthermore, it was proposed that both public and private firms would be encouraged to draw

up, in consultation with the trades unions, planning agreements detailing key decisions concerning firms' policies on matters such as pricing, investment, profits and labour. It was made clear that the Party would expect such agreements to be drawn up by the one hundred largest manufacturing firms.

The programme contained many ambiguities and was based upon as many revisionist as traditional socialist assumptions. For example, the fact that it contained proposals for the purchase of equity shares in firms as a means of control, a proposal which many on the Left had opposed in 1958 when contained in a Party policy document Industry and Society, tended to be overlooked by the Left since the general emphasis in the programme was on an economic policy which stressed the need for physical intervention by the state in place of the revisionist emphasis in the 1960's on fiscal measures as a means of economic inducement.

The NEC was responsible for Labour's Programme 1973 but it was from another body, the Liaison Committee, that a second important policy document, Economic Policy and the Cost of Living, emerged.(36) This contained a commitment to abolish the legal framework of industrial relations' legislation introduced by the Conservative Government, to introduce economic, social and industrial measures designed to redistribute income and opportunity to working people including price controls and subsidies, rent restraint, pension increases, abolition of prescription charges, reform of the tax structure and

schemes of industrial democracy, and finally to respect the trade unions' concern for free collective bargaining. This rejection of wages policy and legal intervention in collective bargaining was a complete reversal of the Labour Government's previous policies in this area.

### Defence

The Left's demands on defence were incorporated into resolutions carried by the 1972 and 1973 Party conferences. In 1972 the conference approved a resolution which

opposed... any British defence policy which is based on the use or threatened use of nuclear weapons either by this country or its allies and demands the removal of all nuclear bases in this country.(37)

The following year both these demands were again carried with, in addition, two further points. First, that these commitments be included in the General Election manifesto and, second,

that Britain should cut its military expenditure initially by at least £1,000 million per year.(38)

The specificity of these demands resulted in the NEC asking for the resolution to be remitted, and when this failed asking for its defeat but the resolution secured a majority of seven hundred thousand votes.(39)

Apart from a significant shift in Party policies

on the economy and defence the renewed strength of the Left was displayed in the Party's response to specific Conservative Government policies.

Non-compliance with the law

The Left perceived the Government's industrial relations and housing policies as direct attacks on working people and demanded that the Party should support non-compliance with the relevant laws. For example, a resolution passed at the 1972 Party conference, against the advice of the NEC, fully supported those "campaigning for non-co-operation and non-implementation of the Housing Finance Act", and called for retrospective relief for any councillors who suffered financial penalties for their action.(40) At the 1973 Party conference, by which time collective resistance to the Housing Finance Act had collapsed, both NEC support and conference approval was given for a resolution promising retrospective removal of all penalties, financial and otherwise, for the Clay Cross councillors who had refused to implement the Housing Finance Act.

The Labour Left's impact was felt during these years in certain important areas of Party policy but there were also other features of the Party's politics, in particular its electoral strategy and its internal distribution of power, in which the growth of the Labour Left was beginning to have an impact.

Electoral strategy

Whereas the revisionists had used psephological research to justify an electoral appeal devoid of socialism or class commitments in order to attract a 'middle ground' in the electorate the Left's electoral strategy was one with an explicit socialist and working class commitment. It's view was that the Party had lost the 1970 General Election because of working class defections and that this electoral base required nourishing. This electoral strategy was fortified over the next four years by the Conservative Government's economic, industrial relations, housing and social welfare policies, some of which appeared to discriminate along class lines. An ideological Conservatism, apparently benefitting the more affluent members of society, strengthened the Left's demands for a more explicit affirmation of socialist ideology and a commitment to defend the working class. Thus Labour's election manifesto of February 1974 stated that the Labour Party had "Socialist aims and... (was) proud of the word".(41)

Internal distribution of power

The Left's view of the distribution of power within the Party also differed from that of the revisionists. The Left retained a commitment to the Party member as important policy-maker and political communicator whereas the revisionists had tried to



downgrade the role of the Party member in both, particularly since it believed that political communication was best carried out through the media and advertising. The Left believed that one of the reasons Labour lost Office in 1970 was because the Party leadership had ignored the views of the membership and had thus devalued the relative importance of the extra-parliamentary Party. The Left was now intent on ensuring that the previous imbalance was rectified. First senior Party officials were appointed whose terms of reference made clear their prime obligation to the extra-parliamentary Party.(42)

Second, parliamentarians could no longer expect automatic support from the NEC in any disputes between them and their constituency parties. Under previous right wing control the NEC had supported the parliamentarian in any local Party conflict, even to the point of threatening to disband any CLP which appeared unwilling to readopt its incumbent Labour MP.(43) In 1970 Party rules were changed, making the task of 'deselecting' an MP slightly easier,(44) and when Lincoln CLP abided by these new rules in removing its MP, Dick Taverne, the NEC did not come to his support. The Lincoln Party's actions mark a significant change in the Party's internal power relationships. This 'deselection' and Taverne's exit from the Labour Party establish important precedents for the future of the Party. The immediate impact was within local parties. Sheffield Brightside CLP followed Lincoln's example by dismissing its MP, Eddie Griffiths, in 1974 to

be followed by Newham North East CLP. The expulsion of Reg Prentice from Newham became a 'cause celebre' within the Party and stimulated grass roots Party support for a well-organised campaign to make all Labour MPs regularly accountable to their CLPs which will be discussed in Chapter five. Between 1970 and 1979, when the rules concerning reselection were again changed, eight CLPs rejected their incumbent MP and the NEC endorsed the local Party's decision in six of the cases.(45)

Finally, the NEC adopted a more tolerant attitude towards organised factionalism within the Party. It believed that the harassment of the Left in the 1930s and 1950s should not be repeated. Organised activities which previously had been curbed by the NEC under the 1946 constitutional amendment were now accepted, and the Party's 'proscribed list' of organisations was abolished in 1973.(46) It refused to act against the Militant Group after the Party's National Agent had produced a report in 1975 suggesting that it was acting in an unconstitutional manner(47) and in 1976 it appointed a Militant activist, Andy Bevan, as the Party's Youth Officer.(48)

By 1974 the Left was optimistic. The Party had rediscovered and reaffirmed its socialist and working class links and the internal power relationships had altered. This is reflected in the fact that the usual history of organised factionalism within the Party had been reversed. Until 1970 the Left had been forced to organise almost continuously whereas the Right, apart from the time of the Campaign for Democratic Socialism between

1960 and 1963, had no need for such activities. However, in the 1970s various organised bodies of the Right emerged within the Party - the Social Democratic Alliance, the Manifesto Group, and the Campaign for Labour Victory - whereas the Left had no need to organise extensively since the Labour Party had become the voice of the Left.

The Right appeared demoralised and disunited. First, Dick Taverne criticised his former CDS colleagues for their timidity in not fighting the Left's upsurge, whilst they were privately critical of his judgement in forcing an open conflict with the Left. Second, in July 1975 leaders of the SDA attacked such leading Right wing figures as Roy Jenkins, and Tony Crosland for their pusillanimity in dealing with the Left.

The Party fought and won the 1974 General Election with manifestos more specific in their commitment to public ownership than their counterpart ten years earlier.(49) The fact that Labour was returned to Office due to a decline in Conservative electoral support was passed over.(50) Labour was now the governing Party with a left wing programme. Even the new PLP reflected this leftwards shift. A new intake of Labour MPs after the two General Elections appeared to be closely associated with the Left. The Tribune Group's membership rose to 90, its largest ever figure, and it seemed as if the Left had begun to reverse its traditional weakness amongst the parliamentarians when Ian Mikardo, a senior figure of the Labour Left, was elected Chairman of the PLP in 1974. But from this apparent position of strength the fortunes of

the Left declined over the next five years.

Labour Governments 1974-1979

"...we have now become the natural Party of Government in this country." Harold Wilson(51)

"We were all conned." Ian Mikardo(52)

The Left position shifted from one of apparent strength within the Party in 1974 to one of apparent weakness by 1979 and as a consequence its mood changed from one of confidence and optimism to one of dismay and despair. The Labour Government abandoned many of the key commitments made by the Party in Opposition, it drew up a parliamentary pact with the Liberal Party without any consultations within the Party, it suffered electoral losses in seven Parliamentary by-elections including the loss of such safe Labour seats as Ashfield, Birmingham Stetchford and Workington, and it became involved in confrontations with certain large trade unions over wages policy in which some leading figures in the Labour Government seemed to relish the opportunity to make verbal attacks on trade unionists.(53) The culmination of this saga was the production of an election manifesto in 1979 which ignored some of the main commitments which the Left had secured in preceding years. These five years of Labour Government could have led to the complete collapse of the Left as it experienced similar setbacks to those in the late 1960s. Remarkably, however, whilst tensions within the Left resulted in a degree of fragmentation, the

overall position of the Left, as it once again in 1979 prepared for a period with Labour in Opposition, was one of increasing strength.

The watershed for the Left was the referendum on the terms of entry into the EEC, held in June 1975. This referendum was the result of a Left victory within the NEC in 1973 committing the Party to the testing of public opinion on this issue by the use of a procedure alien to the political system. The opponents of the EEC regarded this device as a means of checking the pro-Europeans within the Party and at first the strategy appeared to be successful. Majorities were opposed to entry on the terms negotiated by the Labour Government within the NEC, at a special Party conference, and even within the PLP; only within the Cabinet did a majority support entry on the negotiated terms. However, Harold Wilson was successful in persuading the Party to allow all members the freedom to campaign as they pleased thus avoiding an outright Party split.

The campaign within the Labour movement against entry into the EEC was spearheaded by members of the Labour Left and the referendum result was interpreted by many commentators as a defeat for the Left. Considering the fact that the Labour Party was divided, with the Prime Minister and his senior Cabinet colleagues supporting entry, and the imbalance of campaign expenditure and media coverage, the anti-EEC vote was remarkably high, (54) but Harold Wilson's response to the referendum result was to interpret it as a defeat for the Left and therefore as the

opportunity to remove Tony Benn from the Department of Industry.

### Labour's Industrial Strategy

The twenty-one-member Cabinet formed in 1974 contained only four people whose past association had been with the Labour Left - Michael Foot, Barbara Castle, John Silkin and Tony Benn. As Secretary of State for Industry, Tony Benn was in the key position to implement the Party's industrial strategy which he had been prominent in working out in Opposition. Benn introduced the Industry Bill, which established the National Enterprise Board as the instrument for promoting the re-organisation of industry, for extending public ownership into the profitable areas of manufacturing and for creating new industrial enterprises, in February 1975. He also provided financial support for workers' co-operatives at Meriden, the Scottish Daily News and at Kirkby, but in pursuing these policies he incurred the considerable hostility of the Confederation of British Industry, sections of the media and even parts of his own Ministry.(55) The aftermath of the EEC referendum therefore provided a convenient moment for the Prime Minister to shift Benn to a less politically sensitive department and appoint a new Minister, Eric Varley, who, while being an anti-European, had played a limited role in the EEC referendum, had displayed little commitment to the NEC's industrial strategy and owed his initial political promotion to Harold Wilson.(56) Harold

Wilson and Eric Varley were more likely to secure the confidence of industrial and financial capital than Tony Benn.

In the face of the sinking pound and a deficit on the current account of the balance of payments the Labour Government's clear objective became one of securing the confidence of, first, national and then, second, international capital. By the time the Party conference met in October 1975 the NEC was beginning to express doubts about the Labour Government's commitment to the original industrial strategy. In a policy document Labour and Industry the NEC described the "appalling record of failure by British industry" and argued that the economic crisis made the need for Labour's industrial strategy even greater. Whilst praising the Labour Government for its achievements so far it added that the Government "must now begin in earnest to involve itself in the kind of economic and industrial planning originally envisaged in Labour's Programme".(57) It argued that the Industry Bill now fell "very considerably short of our original proposals" and concluded that planning agreements needed to be introduced in which the government held reserve powers, that the NEB should receive £1 billion per annum for the next five years, that public ownership of whole industries should be introduced, that there was the need for a substantial public sector in banking and, finally, there was the need for selective import controls.(58) Both Judith Hart and Tony Benn, the NEC speakers at the Party conference on this policy document, demanded more commitment from the

Government to this industrial strategy.(59)

By November 1975 the NEC's fears were confirmed when the Government's industrial policy was outlined. In papers presented by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the new Secretary of State for Industry to an industrialists' conference stress was put upon the need for a profitable sector of the economy. No longer was the tone of language one of condemnation of the irresponsibility and inefficiency of capital, but rather one of support stressing "...the importance of sustaining a private sector of industry which is vigorous, alert, responsible and profitable."(60) Such a perspective required the co-operation and support of capital, in particular of the peak organisation of industrial capital - the Confederation of British Industry. The CBI was totally opposed to the NEC's interventionist industrial strategy and campaigned against it. It found the Government aid to private firms acceptable but was opposed to the idea that such aid should be used as a means of securing structural change in the economy.

CBI opposition to an industrial policy designed to secure structural change in the British economy was successful in that the NEB operated in a manner entirely different from that envisaged by the NEC and the planning agreement procedures were still-born. In terms of both the limited scope allowed to the NEB to invest in private industry and its limited role in acting as a catalyst for structural changes the NEB acted primarily as the State's holding company for Government money invested in firms.



Furthermore, only one planning agreement was introduced during the lifetime of the Labour Government and this one proved useless in alerting the labour force in the Chrysler company to the firm's imminent sale to a foreign company.(61)

Another important aspect of Labour's industrial strategy was worker control in industry. Both Holland and Benn had stressed its significance. For example, Holland in The Socialist Challenge had distinguished state capitalism from socialism by "the extent to which working people can exercise control over the conditions and results of their own activity".(62) In 1975 the Labour Government had appointed a Committee of Inquiry, chaired by Sir Alan Bullock, to consider the best means to achieve "a radical extension of industrial democracy".(63) The majority of this Committee reported in 1977 in favour of employees having a statutory right to be represented on Company Boards by trade union worker directors, but divisions amongst the Committee's membership, divisions amongst trade unions on this subject, and outright and sustained opposition by industrialists to industrial democracy resulted in the Government proceeding no further than general statements of support for worker participation in company decision-making during the remaining years it was in Office.(64)

The Social Contract

The Government began its term of office by introducing a range of industrial measures designed to satisfy the wishes of the trade unions. The Conservative Government's Industrial Relations Act was repealed as was the legislative framework of its prices and incomes policy and new Trade Union and Labour Relations Acts were introduced in 1974 and 1975 which, among other things, legalised the 'closed shop'. The Employment Protection Act and the Industry Act were also introduced in 1975 both of which included provisions which trade unions wanted and to these can be added the creation of the Manpower Services Commission, the Health and Safety Commission and the Advisory, Arbitration and Conciliation Service, as well as the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination legislation. In specific areas of industrial policy this Labour Government introduced more legislation designed to meet the wishes of trade unions than any previous Labour Administration. This receptivity of Labour Ministers to specific trade union demands was of crucial importance in explaining why the trade union movement softened its criticism of the Labour Government for renegeing on its commitments in other areas of the social contract.

As a result of the rapid rise in the retail prices index in the first half of 1975 the Government abandoned its commitment to free collective bargaining and introduced a policy of wage restraint, voluntary in name but increasingly backed up by administrative measures

which the government used against employers to force wage increases to be kept to a norm. This policy received initial TUC support in 1976 and again in 1977, but with a commitment to a phased return to free collective bargaining. Then in 1978 the TUC rejected a policy of a 5% limit on wage increases. During the period between March 1975 and June 1977 real take home pay fell by 8%(65) and the Government eventually confronted the seamen, firemen and public service workers in industrial disputes during which many Ministers displayed considerable hostility towards the trade union movement.

This strategy of trying to stimulate economic growth by building up capital's confidence and by curbing labour's bargaining powers failed to alleviate Britain's economic problems and furthermore it failed to secure the equality to which the Party was committed. From the Budget of April 1975 onwards the Government was intent on cutting public expenditure and thus undermining a key area of the social contract. In July 1976 public expenditure cuts of £1,000 million were announced followed by a cut of £2,500 million in December 1976 prior to an application to the International Monetary Fund for a loan of £2,300 million. Not only did this lead to the abandonment of welfare commitments(66) but it also generated additional unemployment which hovered throughout 1977, 1978 and 1979 around the one and a half million mark.

A third area of policy in which the Labour Government pursued policies markedly different from those approved by the Party when in Opposition was over defence.

Defence

In order to ensure that its commitment to cut military expenditure by £1,000 millions per annum was implemented the NEC established in 1975 the study group on Defence Expenditure, the Arms Trade and Alternative Employment "to assess how and with what consequences it (i.e. party policy) might be implemented...".(67) This study group, whose membership included three Junior Ministers - two from the Ministry of Defence and one from the Foreign Office - received considerable documentary evidence on how and where cuts in the military budget might be made as well as examining alternative forms of production which would safeguard jobs.

Two major points of difference existed between the Government and the Left - on Soviet intentions and on the impact of unilateral actions - and the Government's perceptions on both resulted in the Left's demands being rejected. The Government argued that the Left was unrealistic with regard to Soviet foreign policy. Russia remained a threat only curbed by military preparedness: any perceived weakness in Western defence would be exploited by the Soviet Union. Therefore whilst the Government's long-run objective was disarmament and a run-down of NATO and the Warsaw Pact alliance it was vital

that neither side weakens its defensive arrangements to such an extent that the other side is able to take advantage of this weakness to force through agreements which, far from

enhancing the stability of inter-state relations, might actually harm them in the long term. Thus, from the point of view both of the Alliance's interest in the pursuit of detente and of the maintenance of an effective deterrent force, it is important that Alliance members do not reduce their contributions and, where possible, actually improve the effectiveness of their forces so as to stem the widening gap between the Warsaw Pact and NATO.(68)

This statement, with its implicit commitment at the end to an expansion of arms provision was a complete rejection of Party policy. Further rejection was contained in the Government's belief that the Warsaw Pact countries would not follow any unilateral action by Britain and that such action would act as a destabilising influence in international relations. Thus the Government's attitude was that on political, military and economic grounds there was no case for substantial cuts in future defence expenditure. Between 1974 and 1979 it increased defence expenditure and it also decided to modernise Britain's independent nuclear defence force.(69)

### Conclusion

The period from 1970 to 1979 was one of shifting balances in the factional struggle. Labour was in Office for fifty months, but for thirty six months of this period lacked an overall parliamentary majority, and in Opposition for forty four months. These ebbs and flows in electoral support and parliamentary majority were matched by ebbs and flows in the relative strengths of Left and Right. The Left increased its powers and influence in the

years of Opposition but it was weak during Labour's period in Office. The confidence and optimism of 1974 was replaced by dismay and despair as the carefully prepared policies devised in Opposition were abandoned.

Both the NEC and the Party conference expressed opposition to the Labour Government's policies on occasions. The NEC was often openly critical of the Government, passing resolutions "deploring", or "deeply regretting" some aspects of Government policy, openly criticising the Government at Labour Party conferences, and even supporting a public demonstration against the Government's public expenditure cuts in November 1976(70). But the NEC wavered in its condemnation at times and in certain situations majorities could be found on the NEC for supporting the Government. For example, at the 1978 Party conference the NEC recommended acceptance of a resolution which "support(ed) the economic strategy of the Labour Government..." and asked for remission of a resolution critical of the five per cent wages policy. In both cases the Party conference failed to heed the NEC's advice: in fact the delegates to the Party conference displayed an even more critical approach to the Government by defeating the NEC on a total of twenty one separate occasions at the four conferences when Labour was the governing party between 1975 and 1978.(71)

We have already referred to the parliamentary left's opposition to the Government's policies. Backbench rebellions were led by members of the Tribune Group, but they continued to sustain the Government on votes of

confidence. Some of the anguish, frustration and despondency of the parliamentary left can be gauged from Ian Mikardo's speech during a 'confidence' debate in the House of Commons in 1978

I voted with the Government last night with the utmost reluctance and with deep unhappiness. I voted for a policy in which I did not believe and only because I did not wish to be a party to an attack from the Opposition Benches which was manifestly hypocritical. I supported the Government with great unhappiness, but I must tell my Right. Hon. and Hon. Friends that I shall not do it again.(72)

Yet again the Labour Left had helped to sustain a Labour government in Office with very limited socialist ambitions.

How did the Government survive these attacks from the NEC, the annual Party conference, and from some members of the PLP? It was able to undermine this opposition by developing consultative procedures with key trade union leaders from which emerged a degree of consensus. By introducing a considerable range of measures in the area of Labour law the Government was able to maintain the support of enough trade union leaders to sustain some degree of political authority within the Labour movement. Government consultations with the trade unions tended to be with the six trade union representatives on the National Economic Development Council (NEDC) and the trade union members of the Labour Party/TUC Liaison Committee.(73) What occurred during this period was a division between 'the Party of Government' and 'the Labour Party'. Whilst the Labour Party channelled

its discontent through the NEC and the annual conference, the Government used the Liaison Committee to undermine the influence of the extra-Parliamentary Party. The Liaison Committee emerged as the key institution for 'the Party of Government' whilst the NEC was demoted in political importance. The Party's Research Secretary has described how the NEC "was at a disadvantage compared to other major interest groups, including the CBI, the City, the TUC and others".(74) Senior trade union leaders were willing to sustain the Labour Government in Office even when differing with Ministers on policy matters because of the serious threat facing the trade union movement if a Conservative Government led by Margaret Thatcher was elected to power. Whereas the Left had been very critical of much of the trade union leadership in the nineteen fifties for being unrepresentative of rank and file opinion it was loathe to criticise in the nineteen seventies. It did not wish to upset the base upon which the Left's political majorities had been established. Furthermore, some of the leading figures upon which this alliance between the Left and the trade unions had been created, notably Jack Jones and Michael Foot, were now the architects and defenders of the alliance between Government and trade unions. The latent tension which was present between the Left and this trade union leadership eventually exploded in a personal confrontation and public argument at the Tribune rally held at the 1976 Party conference when Jack Jones was so enraged by Ian Mikardo's comments on the trade unions that he forced himself onto



the platform demanding a right of reply.

If this explains how the Government managed to survive the criticisms of the left-dominated Party it does not explain why the Government abandoned some of the major commitments made by this left-dominated Party. Three major explanations can be advanced: first, the policies were unrealistic; second, powerful institutional restraints prevailed; and, third, the people in Office were of weak calibre and commitment.

The argument that the policies were at fault is based upon the view that economic crisis necessitates orthodox economic policies. The AES, and in particular increased public expenditure, was entirely inappropriate at a time when the British economy was suffering from rapid inflation and a weak pound. This point of view is argued most ably by Martin Holmes in The Labour Government 1974-1979.

The interpretation which emphasises the institutional restraints on the Government considers both international and national factors at work. It is argued that the sovereignty of any government is limited by treaty obligations and in the case of the Labour Government membership of NATO and the EEC made it impossible to abandon nuclear commitments unilaterally or to introduce import controls. Beyond treaty obligations there is also the power of multinational capital anxious to avoid any national restrictions placed upon its freedom of action to maintain its transfer pricing arrangements,

to shift investment capital and, as an ultimate measure, to withdraw entirely from the economy. National capital can also bring pressures to bear on governments by withdrawal of confidence. The CBI threatened not to cooperate with the Government if the proposals contained within the Bullock Committee Report on worker control were implemented, and talked of an investment strike against Government economic policies.(75) By 1976 the weak economy necessitated arranging a loan with the International Monetary Fund and the price extracted from the Government was the abandonment of its 'social contract' commitments. Finally, the institutional pressures from the bureaucracy on a radical government can be considerable. It has been argued that the proposals contained in Labour's industrial strategy were sabotaged by senior civil servants at the Department of Trade and Industry.(76)

A third explanation for the Left's failure was that the Government personnel were drawn from the Labour Right and they had no intention of implementing the Party's pre-1974 policy commitments. During the years in Opposition the policies had shifted but not the personnel who merely lay low waiting for times to change and for their chance to return to Office.

It is impossible to make an authoritative judgement on which of these three explanations is most accurate, but what is important is to note that the Labour Left regarded the third as being the most convincing, along with part of the second which covers the civil service. A right wing set of Ministers, with their

conservative advisers, had sabotaged the Left and therefore the main thrust of Labour Left activity after 1979 was to rid the Party of 'dishonest' politicians. By establishing procedures to place regular pressures on Labour MPs, by removing the PLP's sole right to elect the Party leadership, and then by electing persons from the Left to lead the Party 'sell outs' would no longer occur. Party policy was satisfactory: it was Party structures and personnel which required changing.

There is no doubt that one of Callaghan's last acts as Prime Minister provided a considerable boost to this left interpretation. The Party had agreed that the general election manifesto should not be produced in a hurried manner but instead a long-drawn-out and elaborate process of consultation between Ministers and the NEC had been instituted in order to arrive at a Party programme which reflected Party policy but was also sensitive to the problems of governing in the late-seventies. However, at the very last minute this draft manifesto was replaced by a document drawn up by the Prime Minister's office in which were missing some of the key Party commitments made during previous years by the Party conferences including the abolition of the House of Lords.(77) The cavalier manner in which Callaghan and his colleagues pushed to one side the policies drawn up over the previous years contributed directly to the structural reforms of the Party in the 1980s.

The Labour Left had been thwarted between 1974 and 1979 but the consequence of this check was to

stimulate an increase in Labour Left activity. Labour's Right had been further undermined during this period, first because the majority of the personnel in the Labour Cabinets had been drawn from its ranks and, second, the Left's programme had been replaced by emergency measures identified with the Right. This close association and identification of the Right with the Labour Government weakened its position. On the other hand, the Left could not be accused of bringing the Government down by open rebellion: their loyalty was not in doubt.

The Labour Left was not faced, as in 1970, with other competing left groups. The growth of the left wing sects had subsided and the radical student movement had dwindled. Individual membership of the Party, always notoriously difficult to estimate accurately at this time, appeared to be rising, albeit from a very low base(79) and within the CLPs a large-scale grass roots rebellion was under way due to the manner in which Party policy had been ignored.

The rise of the Left was given an added boost by the emergence of a senior Labour politician with Cabinet experience as its figurehead, able to weld together all the disparate elements into one single force by 1981. But before considering the influence of Tony Benn we need to examine the left wing grass roots rebellion.

FOOTNOTES

1. See footnote 104, chapter two.
  2. Child Poverty Action Group Poverty and the Labour Government. This interpretation has been challenged by Michael Stewart in W. Beckerman (ed) Labour's Economic Record 1964-1970, Ch.2. Valuable evidence on Labour's treatment of the low paid is contained in P. Townsend and N. Bosanquet (eds) Labour and Inequality, especially in Chapter six.
  3. "It is not a primary function of the Government's prices and incomes policy to redistribute incomes." H. Walker, Parliamentary Secretary at the Department of Employment, Hansard Vol. 780, 1968-1969, Col. 1625.
  4. For revisionist criticisms of the trade unions see M. Abrams and R. Rose Must Labour Lose?
  5. On the opposition to Labour's White Paper see E. Heffer The Class Struggle in Parliament; also L. Panitch Social Democracy and Industrial Militancy, pp.165-203.
  6. W. Beckerman (ed) op.cit., p.321.
  7. The number of resolutions submitted to the Party conferences demanding public ownership were as follows: 1970 - 31(5), 1971 - 53(7), 1972 - 87(11). The figures in brackets refer to the number of resolutions reaffirming commitment to Clause Four of the Party constitution. See Agenda for the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, 1970, 1971 and 1972.
  8. The specific public ownership commitments approved by the Party's annual conference were as follows:
    - 1970 Opposition to Conservative denationalisation proposals.  
Extension of nationalisation as part of a socialist programme.
    - 1971 Renationalisation without compensation of industries denationalised by the Conservative Government.  
Reaffirmation of Clause 4.  
Nationalisation of all banking and insurance companies.
    - 1972 Implementation of Clause 4.  
Public ownership of major monopolies.
    - 1973 Nationalisation of important parts of the British economy.
- LPACR, 1970. p.145 & p.167; LPACR, 1971. p.233, p.235 and p. 298; LPACR, 1972. p.175 & p.178; LPACR, 1973. p.173.
9. S. Holland The Socialist Challenge, p.15.
  10. ibid., p.69.

11. D. Marquand 'Clause Four rides again' Times Literary Supplement, September 26, 1975.
12. A. Crosland A Social Democratic Britain.
13. The Times, January 2, 1981.
14. 'Interview with Tony Benn' Capital and Class, 17, Summer 1982, pp.17-35.
15. Tony Benn Arguments for Socialism, p.53.
16. Labour's Programme 1973, p.30.
17. By 1976 Roy Jenkins was wondering whether the level of public expenditure had reached such a high level that the values of a plural society and, in particular, the maintenance of freedom of choice could be sustained. See, for example, The Times, March 4, 1976.
18. Tribune, September 22, 1978.
19. The Tribune Group advocated a curb on finished goods rather than third world goods in a policy document entitled The Crisis in January 1975. Subsequently it advocated quotas or surcharges on machine tools, heavy engineering, cars, textiles and footwear in Back from the Brink in June 1975, and then widespread controls across manufacturing by means of a four/five year flexible licensing system in The Alternative Strategy issued in October 1976.
20. Conference of Socialist Economists and the Labour Co-ordinating Committee The Alternative Economic Strategy, p.7, 77, 137 & 140.
21. S. Holland op.cit., p.153 & 225.
22. A. Scargill and P. Kahn The Myth of Workers' Control.
23. See J. Elliott Conflict or Co-operation?: the Growth of Industrial Democracy, Ch. 16.
24. CSE/LCC op.cit., pp.131-132.
25. M. Kaldor, D. Smith and S. Vines Democratic Socialism and the Cost of Defence, p.64.
26. loc.cit.
27. The decision to proceed with improvements to the British polaris missile system, taken by a small sub-committee of the Labour Cabinet, is analysed by M. Cockerell, P. Hennessy and D. Walker Sources Close to the Prime Minister, pp.112-114.
28. Campaign Group Parliamentary Democracy and The Labour

Movement.

29. Quoted in H. Wrainwright, S. Rowbotham and L. Segal Beyond the Fragments, p.212.

30. For example, Anna Coote argues that the AES does not address the problems for women of the kind of work they do, the time they spend on it, the pay and the degree of economic dependence and control. She concludes "...in spite of its radical pretensions, it is embedded in the same old-fashioned patriarchal values that inform and distort all mainstream political thinking today". 'The AES: a new starting point' New Socialist, 2(November-December 1981), pp.4-7.

31. See M. Hatfield The House the Left Built.

32. Signposts for the Sixties, p.8.

33. Labour's Programme 1972, p.12.

34. Labour's Programme 1973, p.30.

35. Eventually when Harold Wilson lost his majority on the NEC he felt compelled to announce that he would exercise a veto to ensure that the proposal to nationalise twenty five companies would not appear in the election manifesto. His declared intention of using a veto was instrumental in providing the first initiative for some on the Labour Left to concern themselves with the political accountability of parliamentarians which was to emerge as a major issue by the end of the 1970s.

36. The Liaison Committee had been established in 1972 in an attempt to repair the damage incurred to Party-union relations in the late 1960s. This forum for discussions drew equal membership from the NEC, PLP and TUC. In time this committee developed into the most influential of Party institutions used by the Party leadership to undermine the influence of the Left within the extra-parliamentary party.

37. LPACR, 1972, p.221.

38. LPACR, 1973, p.301.

39. ibid., p.312.

40. LPACR, 1972, p.137.

41. The Times Guide to the House of Commons 1974, p.311.

42. When Ron Hayward was appointed as Party General Secretary in 1972 his terms of appointment stipulated his "...first line responsibility for propagating and seeking the implementation of the policies of the Party as laid down by Conference and the National Executive Committee..." L. Minkin The Labour Party Conference,

p.329.

43. In March 1955 Liverpool Exchange CLP voted not to readopt its sitting Labour MP, Bessie Braddock. An NEC Committee of Inquiry threatened that if Mrs. Braddock was not adopted the CLP would be disbanded. A. Ranney Pathways to Parliament, pp. 189-190.

44. For the rule changes in 1970 see Chapter Four.

45. See Chapter four for the list of cases in which local CLPs attempted to dismiss their sitting MP.

46. LPACR, 1973, p.11.

47. In November 1975 the NEC agreed by 16 votes to 10 that Reg Underhill's report should 'lie on the table'. Minutes of the NEC, November 1975.

48. Bevan's appointment was agreed by the NEC in December 1976 by 15 votes to 10. Minutes of the NEC, December 1976.

49. Labour's election manifesto in February 1974 promised: "In addition to our plans... for taking into common ownership land required for development, we shall substantially extend public enterprise by taking mineral rights. We shall also take shipbuilding, ship repairing and marine engineering, ports, the manufacture of airframes and aeroengines into public ownership and control. But we shall not confine the extension of the public sector to the loss-making and subsidised industries. We shall also take over profitable sections or individual firms in those industries where a public holding is essential to enable the Government to control prices, stimulate investment, encourage exports, create employment, protect workers and consumers from the activities of irresponsible multi-national companies, and to plan the national economy in the national interest. We shall therefore include in this operation, sections of pharmaceuticals, road haulage, construction, machine tools, in addition to our proposals for North Sea and Celtic Sea oil and gas. Our decision in the field of banking, insurance and building societies is still under consideration." The Times Guide to the House of Commons 1974, p.309. Labour's election manifesto in October 1974 reproduced most of this paragraph from the February manifesto except to remove the specific proposals concerning pharmaceuticals, road haulage, construction and machine tools. Whereas the February manifesto had implied that the public ownership of banking and insurance was being considered this had now been modified to proposals to ensure that they made a better contribution to the economy. See The Times Guide to the House of Commons October 1 1974, p.303.



50. The General Election results were:

	<u>1970</u>		<u>February 1974</u>		<u>October 1974</u>	
	votes	% of poll	votes	% of poll	votes	% of poll
CON	13,145,123	46.4	11,872,180	37.9	10,462,565	35.8
LAB	12,208,758	43.1	11,645,616	37.2	11,457,079	39.2

51. LPACR, 1975, p.186.

52. LPACR, 1975, p.323.

53. "I have great pleasure in crossing this picket line. This is one of the most irresponsible strikes I have ever seen." David Owen commenting on a strike of civil servants in support of a wage claim. The Times February 23, 1979.

54. 35.5% of those voting in the referendum cast a 'no' vote. The pro-Market organisation spent £1.4m and the anti-Market organisation £0.1m in the run-up to the referendum. See D. Butler and U. Kitzinger The 1975 Referendum.

55. See B. Sedgemore The Secret Constitution, Chapter 5.

56. Eric Varley had been one of Harold Wilson's two parliamentary Private Secretaries after the 1966 General Election.

57. Labour and Industry: The Next Steps, p.1 & 4.

58. ibid., pp.3-10.

59. LPACR, 1975, pp.210-212 & pp.227-229.

60. The Times, November 6, 1975.

61. There is a one-sentence reference to this planning agreement in the PLP report to the 1977 Party conference. LPACR, 1977, p.128. Chrysler UK was sold to Peugeot-Citroen in July 1978.

62. S. Holland The Socialist Challenge, p.153.

63. Quoted in J. Elliott Conflict or Co-operation? The Growth of Industrial Democracy, p.218.

64. The Government published a White Paper, Industrial Democracy, in May 1978.

65. D. Coates Labour in Power?, pp.72-73.

66. For example, the Labour Government postponed the child benefit scheme and cut council house subsidies.

67. M. Kaldor et al op.cit., p.4.

68. ibid., p.527.

69. M. Chalmers Paying for Defence, p.100 & pp.103-105.

70. NEC statements of disapproval of Government policy included the following:

"This NEC deplors the Government's White Paper on Public Expenditure, the effects of which are in direct conflict with the election pledge of a 'fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families.'" (April 1976)

"...the NEC deeply regrets the decision of the Government to postpone the introduction of the child benefit scheme..." (May 1976)

"That the Home Policy Committee places on record the belief that cuts in council house subsidies would have disastrous consequences..." (December 1976)

"This NEC of the Labour Party, being deeply concerned at the difficult economic and political situation, believes that the time has arrived for the Government to reflate the economy, and secure a return to full employment while continuing the fight against inflation." (June 1977)

"That the NEC... ask the Chancellor in his Spring Budget... to reverse the cuts in housing, health, education and other social services, so as to relieve the misery caused by inadequacies in these services, and simultaenously to reduce the number of unemployed..." (January 1978)

71. See LPACR, 1975, pp.147-148, p.167, p.175, p.245, p.251 & p.330; LPACR, 1976, p.181, p.239, p.269 & p.303; LPACR, 1977, p.308, p.327 & p.349; LPACR, 1978, p.201, p.230 & p.297.

72. Hansard, Vol. 960, No. 32, 14 December 1978, Col. 972.

73. Between 1974 and 1979 the trade union members of the Liaison Committee were David Basnett, Sid Greene, Jack Jones, Hugh Scanlon, Alf Allen, Len Murray, Dan McGarvey, G. Smith, Moss Evans, Geoffrey Drain and Terry Duffy.

74. G. Bish in K. Coates (ed) What Went Wrong?, p.165.

75. J. Elliott op.cit., p.244. Campbell Adamson who, by 1979, had become Director General of the CBI, has stated: "We certainly discussed an investment strike... We also discussed various things about not paying various taxes... And a list... of things which in themselves would not have been legal." The Writing on the Wall, Channel 4, Programme 4.

76. B. Sedgemore op.cit. Chapter 5.

77. The 1977 Party conference approved a resolution calling for the total abolition of the House of Lords by 6,248,000 to 91,000 votes. LPACR, 1977 p.275.

78. P. Seyd and L. Minkin 'The Labour Party and its members' New Society, 49, September 20, 1979, pp.613-615.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE RANK AND FILE

The re-emergence of the Labour Left has been examined already in terms of the collapse of revisionist ideas, the increasing wage militancy of trade unionists, the breakdown of the alliance between certain trade union leaders and the Party leadership, and the emergence of a Left majority on the NEC. Another key element was the support from the Party's 'rank and file', 'the grassroots', or the 'poor bloody infantry'.(1) Who and what does one have in mind when using such terms? In this chapter I am concerned with the individual Party member, in particular the active member participating in the activities of the local branch and General Committee and thus involved in the selection of parliamentary and local council candidates, the debating of resolutions, and the organisation of local electoral activities.

The assumption is usually made that activists are on the Left of the Party,(2) an assumption often based on the resolutions submitted by CLPs to the Party's annual conference. Lewis Minkin concludes after a survey of such resolutions between 1956 and 1970 that "on nuclear disarmament, Socialism, Conference decisions, EEC, Vietnam, prices and incomes legislation and Rhodesia, the overwhelming volume of resolutions and amendments were either critical of official Party policy or to its Left in

sentiment and rhetoric".(3) Minkin also points out that "(c)ontrary to common misconception, the preliminary agenda as a whole has never been dominated by Left-wing resolutions".(4) Other observers have pointed out that local Party members are just as divided in their political opinions as other sections of the Party (for example, the trade union membership). Martin Harrison's study of the Trade Unions and the Labour Party, published in 1960, concluded that "local parties... (have never been)... as fanatically left-wing as popular legend decreed".(5) Janosik concluded a study in 1962/3 of leading personnel in thirty six CLPs by supporting those who argued that "the politics of the constituency parties cover the spectrum of Labour Party politics".(6) A study in the early 1960s of Newcastle under Lyme - a constituency with a left wing MP and a left wing political tradition - found consistent left wing attitudes held by only 5% of the membership. The Left's support in this particular constituency was won on an ad hoc basis with the composition of that support changing from issue to issue.(7) This also is the case at the Party's annual conference where each policy issue dealt with has resulted in a different balance of opinion amongst CLP delegates. Minkin suggests that between 1956 and 1970 the Party leadership won the support of the majority of CLP delegates on its defence policy and its incomes policy legislation but not on the issue of public ownership.(8)

Whether or not the common assumption about the political nature of the Party activist can be sustained or

disproved for the 1950s or 1960s, what is important to note is the growth in support for the Labour left within the CLPs in the 1970s.(9) There are various reasons which can be advanced to explain this trend. First, it could be that the Party membership was converted from Right to Left opinions. Or, second, that Party members on the Right became disillusioned and departed leaving the Party in the hands of the Left.(10) Third, a differential recruitment process could have been operative with the new members of the Party more likely to be on the Left. Finally, it could be that the entryist tactics of the Trotskyist organisations succeeded in controlling many of the local Labour Parties. It is impossible, short of a comprehensive survey of Party membership over the past two decades, to answer definitively which of these factors is most significant but it is possible to suggest some answers on the basis of an examination first of some of the findings of recent surveys of Party membership conducted in specific constituencies, second, of some of the instances in which Party members have asserted their powers over Labour MPs by operating deselection procedures and, third, of some of the details of a survey of Sheffield Party activists.

Before examining the Party membership in detail it is as well to point out the attempts by Labour's Right to devalue the political importance of the mass party, in particular the political importance of the Party member as a political communicator, in the 1960s.

At the time when revisionists were far more

preoccupied with boosting the role of the Party Leader, and tended to write off the role of the mass party as obsolete, Tony Crosland wrote in an influential pamphlet:

...the élan of the rank and file is less and less essential to the winning of elections. With the growing penetration of the mass media, political campaigning has become increasingly centralised; and the traditional local activities, the door to door canvassing and the rest, are now largely a ritual.(11)

These views had impeccable academic support from Robert McKenzie, author of the standard work on British political parties and an opponent of Labour's intra-party democracy.(12) He was not on his own. Leon Epstein, an American expert on political parties and British politics, argued strongly that the development of new forms of political information and communication - television, advertising and sample surveys - enabled party leaders to deal directly with the mass electorate and far more efficiently and effectively than through a party membership.(13) The authoritative British 'Nuffield' election studies indicated that local factors of candidate and organisation were of only limited importance in causing any deviation from what was then a relatively uniform swing of electoral opinion.(14)

The attitude of Labour's leaders in the last two decades fitted into this pattern of beliefs. After the famous occasion in 1960 when Gaitskell, then the Party's Leader, succeeded in defying a major Party Conference decision it was widely held that the Party's activists were an uninfluential element in the Party power

structure, and were irrelevant to its electoral appeal. The Leader - his prestige, his image and his media appeal - was given central prominence. Consequently the Parliamentary leadership expressed little concern at the health of the Party's grass roots. Most of them proved unenthusiastic about the campaign, launched in 1966, to secure a complete overhaul of Party organisation.(15) The resulting 'Simpson' Commission of Enquiry aroused little interest amongst Labour Ministers apart from Richard Crossman. Indeed in the fifteen years from 1960 to 1975 it is difficult to trace any major speech of the Party's leadership where the condition of Labour's organisation and membership was given prominent attention.

#### Individual Party membership: numbers and opinions

It is not possible to provide accurate figures for individual Party members until the 1980s. The figures published by the Labour Party headquarters have been based upon the affiliation fees paid by local parties to the Party at national level. Because the Party has a fixed minimum membership upon which CLPs can affiliate nationally, and because this figure was high between 1957 and 1981, the published figures have been an inaccurate overestimate of Party membership. The figures are of limited value only: all they reveal until 1980 is the general trends of individual Party membership.



TOTAL INDIVIDUAL PARTY MEMBERSHIP

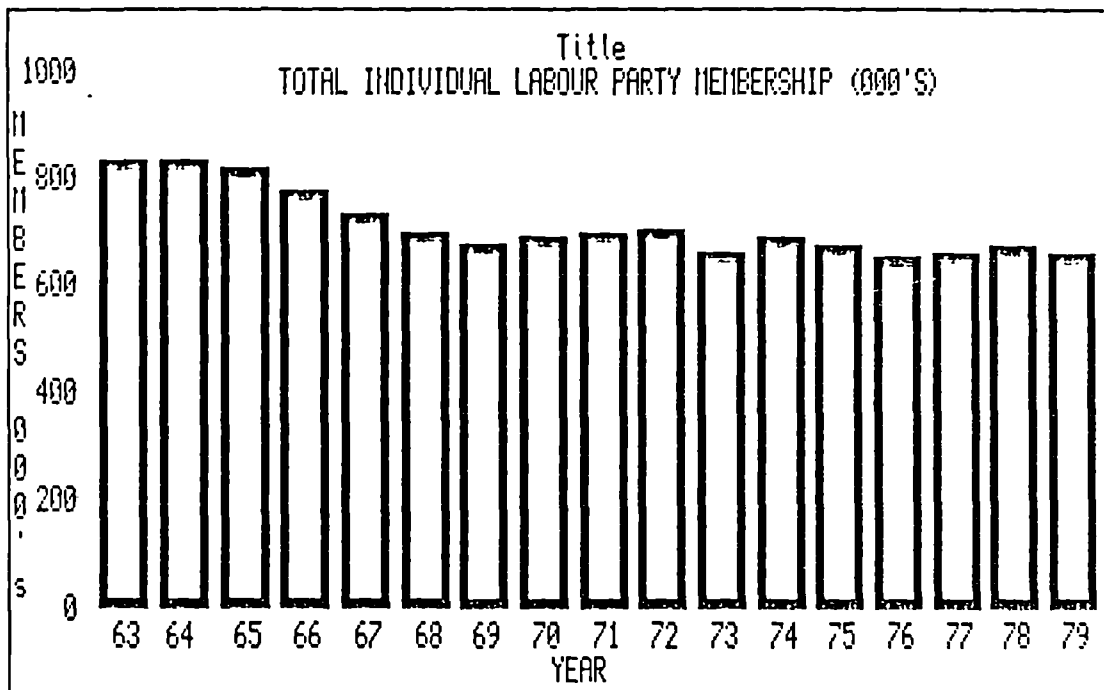
1928	214,970	1956	845,129
1929	227,897(min.aff:250)	1957	912,987(min.aff:800)
1930	277,211	1958	888,955
1931	297,003	1959	847,526
1932	371,607	1960	790,192
1933	366,013	1961	750,565
1934	381,259	1962	767,459
1935	419,311	1963	830,346(m.a.:1,000)
1936	430,094	1964	830,116
1937	447,150	1965	816,765
1938	428,826	1966	775,693
1939	408,844	1967	733,932
1940	304,124	1968	700,856
1941	226,622	1969	680,656
1942	218,783	1970	690,191
1943	235,501	1971	699,522
1944	265,763	1972	703,030
1945	487,047	1973	665,379
1946	645,345	1974	691,889
1947	608,487	1975	674,905
1948	629,025	1976	659,058
1949	729,624	1977	659,737
1950	908,161	1978	675,946
1951	876,275	1979	666,091
1952	1,014,524	1980	348,156(min.aff:256)
1953	1,004,685	1981	276,692(min.aff:128)
1954	933,657	1982	273,803(min.aff:167)
1955	843,356	1983	295,344

(Source: NEC Report 1984, pp.103/4)

Attempts have been made to ascertain the true membership of the Party. The Nuffield election study of 1970 estimated an individual membership between 310,000 and 385,000.(16) Pinto-Duschinsky believed the figure to be "barely 300,000" in 1970.(17) The Report of the Committee on Financial Aid to Political Parties (The 'Houghton' Committee) put the figure at 317,000 in 1976,(18) but Whiteley argues that this was an overestimate and put the figure at 250,000 in 1978.(19) A survey carried out by Martin Linton for Labour Weekly estimated the figure to be 284,000 in 1978(20) and a similar survey by Harold Frayman put the figure at 300,250

in 1981.(21)

Whatever the exact figure of Party membership it is the overall trends which are of importance in this study. The trend is upwards reaching a peak in the 1950s, but from then on it is downwards. During our period of study the general trend is downwards. Between 1964 and 1979, during which time all CLPs affiliated on a minimum membership of 1,000 members, the recorded drop in Party membership was 164,025 (20%). The major share of this decline occurred during the first five years of Labour government (1964-1969) when a drop of almost 150,000 was recorded.



Confirmation of this declining membership, particularly amongst the largest parties, is detailed in the annual reports of the NEC. In 1955 the NEC reported

forty five CLPs with a membership of 3,000 or over, but by 1977 this number had dropped to six. A further confirmation of the decline is best illustrated from the formal membership figures of CLPs in urban areas which have had no Labour Club to provide social facilities to artificially boost the level of membership. Salford East, for example, one of the Party's most active CLPs, sunk in membership from a 1952 figure of 3,724 to a 1978 figure of 1,291 members. A decline in some of the London constituency parties was very marked. Bermondsey had 4,689 members in 1952 but by 1978 it had less than one thousand. Battersea South had 2,089 members in 1952 and it too had sunk by 1978 to less than a thousand. The mighty party in Lewisham South had 7,674 members, whilst Lewisham West had 4,336 and Lewisham North 4,309 in 1952; by 1978 the two reorganised Lewisham parties had around 4,000 members between them.(22)

Some local parties experienced a traumatic decline during the 1964-1969 years. The NEC Reports reveal that whereas sixty CLPs had affiliated in 1965 on a membership of 2,000 or above this number had dropped to twenty two by 1969. The process is graphically portrayed in the annual reports of the Brixton Labour Party which in 1965 had 1,212 members and in 1970 had 292 members.(23)

Academic studies of individual CLPs confirm this rapid decline in membership: the only difference of opinion is over the date at which the decline commenced. For example, Tom Forrester's survey of Brighton Kemptown reveals that membership was halved between 1965 and

1969.(24) John Tidball's study of Barnsley states that membership "plummetted" between 1965 and 1970. In fact the 1970 membership figures for this CLP was the lowest recorded since 1951 when detailed figures became available.(25) These studies confirm Lewis Minkin's assertion that "active Constituency Party organisations shrivelled to a skeleton during the period from 1966 to 1970".(26) A combination of social change, neglect and political disillusionment almost destroyed the Labour Party as a mass party. In terms of ward and committee attendance, and electoral work, activity was the lowest in living memory.

It would appear reasonable to assume that the decline in Party membership between 1964 and 1969 was more likely to involve a Left exodus of those disillusioned with the Wilson Government's foreign policy, particularly its support for American policy in Vietnam, and with its economic and social policies, particularly its failure to redistribute resources and so alleviate 'private affluence and public squalor'. The formation and growth of alternative left wing political organisations such as the International Marxist Group (1965) and the International Socialists (independent of the Labour Party from 1967) and the emergence of 'good cause' pressure groups, such as The Child Poverty Action Group (1965), The Disablement Income Group (1965), Shelter (1966), and The National Union of Claimants' Unions (1968), was in part a reflection of this disillusion and defection on the Left. By 1970 the Right might have gained, by default, more influence within local

parties but Whiteley argues that a "substantial part"(27) of the decline in Party membership was due to the decline of working class involvement in the Labour Party. He argues that a working class member is more instrumental in joining the Party and the persistent policy failures of Labour governments between 1966 and 1970 (and again between 1976 and 1979) caused the manual worker to defect. If the working class Party member is more instrumental and less ideological than the middle class member, then the Right may also have suffered from the defecting of individual members in the late 1960s. So it is not clear whether Left or Right benefitted from the defections from the Labour Party in the late 1960s.

However, it does appear as if Party membership began to increase slowly during the 1970s.(28) Forrester notes a steady annual rise in Party membership in Brighton Kemptown between 1970 and the end of his research project in 1973, although it should be noted that the 1973 membership figure had not reached the level achieved in 1965.(29) Tidball shows a steady rise in the membership of Barnsley CLP throughout the 1970s (with the one exception of 1976 which might be due more to local administrative matters) until in 1980 Party membership was four times the 1970 figure.(30) What is remarkable about Barnsley is that one half of the membership had been recruited since 1974 and almost one quarter (23%) since 1979.(31) These figures confirm the author's own experiences of a steady rise in individual membership in the second half of the 1970s.

It appears that these new members were more

likely to be young, to be employed in non-manual occupations and to be more ideological in their political commitments than previous members. Bochel and Denver's survey between 1976 and 1979 of Party members attending parliamentary selection contests in eighteen CLPs in the North of England and Scotland reveal that left wing views predominated in these local parties and it was the younger, non-manual selectors who were more likely to be concerned with prospective candidates' political opinions since they were "more likely to take political composition of the PLP into account and to do so in order to favour the Left".(32) Whiteley argues that the Party activists in the 1970s were more middle class and more ideological.(33) Forrester finds that middle class members were disproportionately more active at Party meetings.(34) Tidball refers to the fluctuating social composition of Party membership in Barnsley where middle class recruitment rose from one-third of the membership (1945-1951) to over one half (1956-1963), then fell back to one third (1964-1970), before rising again to one half the membership (1971-1978). Tidball refutes the suggestion that in Barnsley the Labour Party "has received an influx of highly educated, middle class activists (or non-activists) in the past decade".(35) However, Tidball perhaps does not place enough stress on the determined attempts by the Yorkshire NUM from the middle 1970s onwards to increase its influence in the local CLPs by raising its local affiliations and by ensuring that local miners attended meetings of the local parties as

delegates. Inevitably this policy increased the number of manual worker activists within the Barnsley CLP. In nearby Sheffield Chandler, Morris and Barker argue that the middle classes do predominate amongst the Party members(36) but they argue that it is the public service professionals in particular who join the local parties. Just over one third (35%) of all Party members were employed in the public services: this figure included teachers and lecturers who made up one quarter of all the membership.(37) The predominance of public service occupations is even more noticeable at this time amongst the Labour ward secretaries in Sheffield. Two-thirds (66.7%) were in non-manual occupations and an overwhelming 85.7% of these non-manuals were employed by the local authority.(38) In neighbouring Barnsley 50% of the Party members classified as middle class were employed in the local public sector (e.g. local government administration, social work, and teaching) whilst only 9% worked for some form of private enterprise.(39) One cautionary note in interpreting these local figures is that in areas such as Barnsley and Sheffield which have found it very difficult to attract new private enterprise to replace the older, declining industries it is the public sector, often the socialist local authorities themselves, which provides a larger proportion of total employment in the local economy than in cities of comparable size in either the Midlands or the South of England. Nevertheless, Peter Jenkins jibes about the "lumpen-polytechnic"(40) and its influence within the Labour Party cannot be ignored.

Finally, Whiteley argues that there is a "significant relationship between ideology and age"(41) with younger respondents more left wing than older respondents. He suggests the reason for this is early political experiences and contemporary political events, in particular the failures of the Wilson Governments of the 1960s and the 1968 student troubles. The late 1960s was an era of lost opportunities and wasted hopes that made its mark on present-day young Party activists.

What these studies suggest is that the recruitment of new members in the 1970s was primarily concentrated amongst young, educated, public servants. A new radical generation, many from working class homes who had benefitted from Labour's post-war educational reforms, was being recruited to the Labour Party. These new members provided the political base and impetus for the rise of the Labour Left.

A good example of a local party in which some of these changes were occurring, and the tensions which they caused, is Bermondsey. Bermondsey was a working class constituency, with a long tradition of Labour representation in the House of Commons and of Labour control of the local authority, in which local Party membership had declined and Party activity had diminished to little more than the periodic mobilisation of voters to elect Labour representatives to the local council. However, in the 1970s younger Party members were recruited, critical of the Labour MP - Bob Mellish - and of the senior Labour councillors on Southwark Borough



Council and, in particular, of the Leader of the Council - John O'Grady - and they succeeded in winning control of the local Party in 1980. The new CLP Secretary was Peter Tatchell who, when he joined the Labour Party in 1978 at the age of twenty six was an ex-social science Polytechnic graduate, employed by the local authority. When Bob Mellish was appointed to the London Docklands Development Corporation, and therefore obliged to stand down as an MP, Peter Tatchell was selected by the local Party to be Mellish's successor, but the intense dispute within the Party over Tatchell's candidature, and the Labour Party's subsequent loss of the parliamentary by-election in February 1983 was a disastrous period in the Party's history and was a presage of the general election defeat which occurred later in the same year.(42)

So far in this chapter it has been suggested that a differential recruitment process prevailed in the 1970s, namely that those joining the Party were more likely to be on the Left. The explanation for this is based upon generational, educational and occupational factors - the recruitment of young people who benefitted from the expansion of higher education from the mid-1960s and who, then, proceeded into public sector employment. But there is another factor which deserves special mention - gender. In the 1970s a new generation of women joined the Party.(43) Young females were a significant force in the Party's rank and file.

Female recruitment

The recruitment of women was continuous throughout the 1970s but it was particularly associated with two phases. The first wave of recruitment occurred as a consequence of the growth of female trade unionism and the resultant concern of some unions with discrimination against women at work, as revealed in their pay, status, and social security provisions. The demand by women trade unionists for equal rights was highlighted by an equal pay strike at Ford's Dagenham factory in 1968 which led Barbara Castle to initiate equal pay legislation before the fall of the Labour Government in 1970. The Women's TUC was developing as an important forum on women's rights which succeeded in prodding the TUC into producing a Women's Charter in 1975. The influence of the new female leaders of the National Council for Civil Liberties (Patricia Hewitt, Anna Coote and Harriet Harman), who were instrumental in developing the organisation's work in this area of women's rights, was important in developing the commitments of both the TUC and the Labour Party. In 1973 the Party conference first debated the issue of sexual discrimination. Employment protection and sexual discrimination legislation was introduced following the election of a Labour government in 1974. Women trade unionists concerned with specific women's rights were a growing influence within the TUC and the Labour Party.

The second wave of recruitment occurred in the late-1970s and involved women's liberationists,

radicalised by the women's movement during the late-1960s and the 1970s who had often been working with the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or new left groupings such as the International Marxist Group, the International Socialists or Big Flame. In the early part of the decade such women were most unsympathetic towards the Labour Party, regarding it as a non-radical, conventional, male-dominated organisation. But by the end of the decade some were reconsidering this position and expressing disillusion with Leninist 'vanguard' politics of the various revolutionary socialist groupings. Beyond the Fragments, published in 1979,(44) contained a long essay by Sheila Rowbotham in which she voiced this sentiment. The book had a considerable impact and prompted a wide debate on the nature and strategy of socialist feminism. A conference held in Leeds on August 30th 1980 to discuss the ideas contained in the book attracted an audience of over one thousand. Whereas ten years earlier such a gathering would have poured general scorn on the Labour Party and spent little time discussing it now the opening sentence of a discussion paper prepared for the conference stated

It is evident that many Socialists who have been active in the Fragments over the past ten years have been considering joining the Labour Party recently or at least forming local alliances with Labour Party activists in the constituencies.(45)

Many women had been attracted to the Party by the growth of the Left during the 1970s and by the attempt

of the Labour Left's leading figure at this time, Tony Benn, to identify with and mobilise the support of radical feminists.(46) One experienced feminist has commented that "a whole new generation of women, politicised in the 1970s by the women's movement... (were) now entering the Labour Party" and in her opinion one "has only to look around the local Party GC (General Management Committee) to see the gap between the older women who remained loyal during the Wilson/Callaghan years and the much younger ones who wouldn't have joined the Labour Party until the Left move in the late 1970s".(47)

Not all of the women recruited to, or active in, the Party in the 1970s were on its Left. Discussion within the Party concerning the need for a separate women's section prompted considerable disagreements. Many of those women recruited to advance women's rights regarded separate sections with some suspicion as institutionalising the traditional role of women in servicing the needs of the Party's men, but others who had often participated in women's support and consciousness-raising groups tended to agree with a separate structure. Many long-standing women members who had succeeded in rising to positions of Party Office were often unsympathetic to these new recruits and their demands.(48) Women were not a united group within the Party but nevertheless an alliance on the Left between rank and file men and women was forged in these years which contributed a very great deal to the pressures within the Party for greater democratisation. Only after 1981 did tensions

develop within this alliance over the choice of persons on the 'Left slate' for NEC elections, over the priority to be given to the demands for a restructuring of the Women's Organisation in the campaign to democratise the Party and, finally, over the limited number of women being chosen as parliamentary candidates. These tensions will be discussed in a later chapter but by the mid-1980s some Labour women were arguing that the Party remained a male Party and that the shift to the Left had merely enabled Left men to replace Right men.

#### The sacking of Labour MPs

The second approach in considering the trends amongst the Party's rank and file in the 1970s is to examine some of the cases in which Labour MPs were deselected by their constituency parties. In Chapter three reference was made to the change of Party rules in 1970 thus making the CLP's task of deselection slightly easier. Prior to 1970 a four stage procedure had been in operation involving three GMC meetings, specifically called to discuss the issue of deselection, a meeting of all locally affiliated bodies at which GMC delegates would be mandated, and then a final ratification or rejection of the decision by the NEC. This procedure was replaced by one necessitating two GMC meetings and a four week interval between them in order that locally-affiliated bodies could discuss the matter, followed by the right of appeal by the deselected MP to the NEC. The deselection

procedure still remained complex but under the new rules there was a little less deliberation of the matter by the GMC, the mandating of affiliated bodies' delegates was abandoned, and the NEC now played a lesser role in the proceedings. These new rules prevailed until 1980 when a major change occurred, which is the subject of Chapter five.

Under the rules which prevailed between 1970 and 1980 the following cases of dismissal, or attempted dismissal, occurred:

<u>MP</u>	<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Date of Dismissal Attempt</u>	<u>NEC response</u>
A. Irvine	Liverpool Edge Hill	1971	MPs appeal upheld
D. Taverne	Lincoln	1972	MPs appeal rejected
E. Griffiths	Sheffield Brightside	1974	MPs appeal rejected
E. Milne	Blyth	1974	MPs appeal rejected
R. Prentice	Newham North East	1975	MPs appeal rejected
F. Tomney	Hammersmith North	1976	MPs appeal rejected
A. Irvine	Liverpool Edge Hill	1977	MPs appeal rejected
M. Colquhoun	Northampton North	1977	MPs appeal upheld
M. Colquhoun	Northampton North	1979	MP endorsed by NEC as parliamentary candidate
N. Sandelson	Hayes & Harlington	1979	MP endorsed by NEC as parliamentary candidate

In these ten instances the NEC ruled that in six the local

Parties had operated within the rules laid down and therefore there were no grounds for supporting the MPs. It is not possible here to examine these cases in detail. Some of the deselections were due to personal issues or to personality clashes between the MP and the local Party (Milne and Colquhoun) but others involved differences on a wide range of policy matters, in which a right wing MP was faced with a leftwards leaning CLP (Taverne, Griffiths, Prentice, Tomney, Irvine and Sandelson). By examining some of these cases we may shed light on the nature of the leftwards shift within the local Parties.

#### Lincoln 1972

Dick Taverne's deselection by Lincoln CLP in 1972 was a watershed in Party history. It marked a significant break with the past and was a portent of the future split in the Labour Party. It reflected Party activist dissatisfaction with Labour Government policies after 1966; it represented a challenge to those Oxbridge-educated professionals who expected the passive, deferential support of local Party activists; it signified the activists' increasing concern that Party representatives be accountable to decisions taken by the extra-parliamentary Party; and it revealed that the NEC was no longer willing to impose an MP on an unwilling CLP and that, as a consequence of the shifting political composition of the NEC, the National Agent and staff could no longer be used for factional gain by the parliamentary

Party leadership. In 1972 Taverne's fellow-members of the Labour Right believed his response to his local Party's action, namely an independent electoral challenge, was incorrect because they felt it still remained possible to regain control of the Party and therefore they were unwilling to give him open support once he resigned as Labour MP to fight a by-election. Only nine years later did Taverne's Campaign for Democratic Socialism (CDS) colleagues make this break from the Labour Party to form the SDP.(49)

Lincoln CLP was one in which in the 1950s the officers and the main activists were "mainly middle-aged members committed to supporting their MP and the national party leadership and to opposing the left-wing of the party as represented by the Bevanites".(50) Their MP since 1950, Geoffrey de Freitas, had been on the Right of the Party. He paid £50 per month into local Party funds and as a consequence there was very little need for the local party to recruit new members. Party activity was confined to "an occasional social function and canvassing at election times".(51) The local Party leaders "were content to let their MP function virtually independently of his local party, as de Freitas had done".(52)

When de Freitas resigned in 1961 to become High Commissioner in Ghana he had recommended to local Party officers, on the advice of Hugh Gaitskell, that his successor should be Dick Taverne. De Freitas and Jim Cattermole, the East Midlands Labour Party Regional Organiser and an active CDS supporter, provided Taverne



with the necessary local contacts to guarantee nomination. Then the National Agent (Sara Barker) and Jim Cattermole ensured that the short-list of 3 candidates included no left-wing or unilateralist candidate.(53) Some discontent at the manner of Taverne's selection was expressed by five members of the GMC who walked out in protest, but Taverne was selected by 23 votes to 16, won the subsequent by-election in 1963, and then secured immediate promotion in 1964 to Ministerial office in Harold Wilson's first government.

The tensions between Taverne and his local party only developed after 1966 when Labour's policy of wage restraint, its raising of prescription charges, and then the proposal to restrain trade union powers angered the trade union activists in Lincoln. Those tensions were exacerbated over Taverne's commitment to the EEC and his vote in favour of the principle of entry into Europe in October 1971 in defiance of a Party three line whip and in the knowledge that the local Party had called upon every Labour MP to vote against entry.(54) Taverne's vote appeared to be sustaining a Conservative Government in Office which was attacking trade union rights, was raising council house rents, and was providing tax benefits for the wealthy. As a consequence Lincoln CLP in November 1971 approved a motion of 'no confidence' in its MP by 54 votes to 50 with 5 absentions.

Four out of five local Party officers and the local Party Agent voted in favour of the 'no confidence' motion. The active membership of the GMC, namely those

voting, had increased in numbers from 39 in 1962 to 109 in 1971. The active members in 1971 were almost equally divided in their loyalties but between the November meeting of the GMC and one in June 1972, at which a resolution was passed by 75 votes to 50 requesting that Taverne stand down, all local wards had elected new delegates to the GMC. The Left organised to ensure that its support was maximised in these ward elections. Dickson comments

Taverne's opponents ran a concerted canvassing campaign in the wards to ensure that anti-Taverne delegates were elected... Wives of members, children of members, all of whom had never before taken an active role in the party, now turned up at ward meetings to support anti-Taverne candidates. Also, the Chairman and Agent attended ward meetings, hoping to influence ward members by their presence. The campaign appeared in March to have been successful, when all the major positions in the party went to anti-Taverne members at the AGM.(55)

Finally the NEC confirmed that the Lincoln Party had abided by the Party rules in making its decision and for the first time in nine years a Labour MP had been sacked.

The reasons for Taverne's rejection were both political and personal. His very close association with the policies of the Wilson Governments between 1964 and 1970, his lack of sympathy for extra-parliamentary pressure on the Conservative Government over its industrial relations legislation, and his aloof personal manner were contributory factors. Also the Lincoln Party had grown in membership since Taverne had first been selected. This was reflected in the size of the GMC in

which there were thirty nine voting members when he was first selected in 1962, one hundred and nine in 1971, and one hundred and twenty five in 1972.(56) Many of the new members were trades unionists actively opposed to Labour and Conservative governments' attempts to restrict their bargaining strength. Also Taverne's critics were now willing to organise in a manner previously only seen in Lincoln on the Right of the Party.

Lincoln was a case in which trade union militancy was of major importance in this rank and file challenge to parliamentary dominance of the Party. Sheffield Brightside was a constituency that followed Lincoln's example and was similar in that it was again the emergence of Labour's traditional constituents - manual worker, trade unionists - in rebellion against the anti-trade union sentiment expressed by the Labour Government and the impact of the Conservative Government's trade union and housing rent policies upon working people.

#### Sheffield Brightside, 1974

Sheffield Brightside was a traditional working class constituency with a large Labour majority, a low individual Party membership and little activity except at election times. Between 1935 and 1968 it had been represented by only two MPs. Eddie Griffiths had been selected to fight the 1968 by-election, following the death of the previous incumbent, from a short list of five. His connection with this constituency was based upon

his employment in the steel industry as an industrial chemist, and his appointment as one of the worker directors on the Board of the publicly-owned British Steel Corporation.

There was none of the manipulation of the short list or walk-out from the selection conference as had occurred in Lincoln. Griffiths was an acceptable candidate to the constituency Party at this time. But recruitment of new members in the constituency between 1968 and 1974 resulted in the complete changeover of the GMC with an entirely new political composition. A major factor in prompting this new recruitment was the Labour-controlled City Council's decision in 1967 to raise council house rents. This generated considerable local political activity, the formation of local tenants' associations, and the recruitment to the Party in the late-1960s/early-1970s of many who were active in this campaign on behalf of council house tenants. This issue caused a split in Sheffield between the ruling Labour Group on the City Council and the Sheffield Labour Party (at this time organised as the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council) and was a major factor in the Labour Party losing control of the City Council in 1968. (See Chapter ten)

Tensions between the MP and the GMC were increasing. The main areas of disagreement were as follows. First, on the issue of the European Economic Community, whilst Griffiths had not been one of the 'rebels' in 1981 alongside Taverne and his colleagues, he was not antagonistic concerning British membership.

Second, Griffiths was in favour of an incomes policy. Third, he was unsympathetic towards extra-parliamentary direct action against the Government's Industrial Relations Act, against the British Steel Corporation's proposed closure of the local River Don steelworks, against the Government's Housing Finance Act (which the nearby Clay Cross Urban District Council had resisted and refused to implement) and he did not support the miners' overtime ban put into operation in 1972. A local Party leaflet issued in 1974 at the time of the dispute with Eddie Griffiths to explain the CLP's position called for an MP who would oppose the EEC and compulsory wages policies, would be active in Parliament on such issues, would co-operate with local trades unions and councillors in their struggles, would hold regular public meetings and, finally, would live in the constituency. The local Party wanted an MP who would identify with issues which were affecting working class people and would adopt a very different style from that which had prevailed in the past. He or she would have to be an active local campaigner, working with the trade unions to defend workers' rights rather than being the London MP rather distant and aloof from the immediate political struggles. Some idea of the change which was being demanded is apparent from a survey, conducted in 1967, of the relationship between Sheffield MPs and their local parties which concluded that

The demands made upon the Member of Parliament by his constituency party in Sheffield are slight, and unlikely to offend his conscience. Loyalty is given to the man and there are very

few attempts to influence the policy he will follow.(57)

It was reported in this survey that one local MP never attended his local Party meetings, four attended occasionally, and only one attended regularly.(58)

In a city with a large working class population and strong trades unions the CLP wanted someone who would understand and act in support of the people who were facing increasing economic and social problems. Perhaps something of the flavour of this clash of style is gleaned from the MP's comment to the local Party's charge that he had adopted a style of life unfitting for a Labour MP. He replied that

The Brightside party's thinking seems to be that unless you have a cloth cap, a muffler and a boiler suit, you are not fit to be a Labour MP.(59)

In July 1974 the GMC voted by 40 votes to 12 to reject Griffiths, and this was reaffirmed in September by 40 votes to 10. In his place the GMC selected Joan Maynard, a left winger who had been first elected to the NEC in 1972.

The sacking of Eddie Griffiths attracted none of the publicity given to the previous sacking in Lincoln. Griffiths was not an attractive media personality as was Taverne, neither had he been a Minister in the Labour Government, but it was no less significant a case than in Lincoln and in one sense it was more important. This was a traditional working class constituency in which the Labour

Right had been in control for generations; Party members had displayed a deference to parliamentarians and were little concerned with political activity outside of local and national elections, but Labour's traditional communities were changing; they were becoming less deferential and demanding more action to defend their living standards. An aggressive political and economic militancy was beginning to make itself felt in such local parties. In Brightside's case this led to the sacking of its MP, the CLP playing a prominent and active role in the national campaign to make the PLP more accountable to the active Party membership, and the leading part in local city politics. Brightside's influence on the emergence of a new left in local city politics was considerable since this local Party provided most of the leading personnel within the ruling Labour Group by the end of the 1970s.(60) (Further discussion of the Sheffield local government left arises in Chapter ten.)

#### Newham North East, 1975

The deselections in Lincoln and Sheffield Brightside were the result of the recruitment of new members critical of recent Labour governments (1964-1970) and many of whom as trade unionists and council house tenants were experiencing the worst features of the Conservative Government. Neither were cases which can be explained in terms of 'entryism' by groups of revolutionary socialists, but in our third case, Newham

North East, it has been claimed that 'entryism' was the major reason for sacking the incumbent Labour MP.

Paul McCormick has argued that "Newham North East is the most famous example of a new trend in British politics... Marxist takeovers of constituency Labour Parties".(61) He claims that Reg Prentice was deselected as Labour MP for this constituency because the local Labour Party was taken over between 1972 and 1976 by Marxist infiltrators. He states that in the early 1970s the local party was "a shell dominated by elderly men and women"(62) into which came an organised group of new, young members - forty at a maximum - who selected the area in which they were to live on the basis of "securing the greatest impact in the local Labour party".(63) By July 1975 McCormick claims that this organised infiltration and subsequent use of intimidation, cheating, provocation and manipulation tactics(64) had succeeded when the GMC decided to call on Prentice to resign by 29 votes to 19. McCormick estimates that out of the 29 voting to dismiss Prentice only 3 had been members of Newham North East CLP prior to 1970, and only three were locally-based people.(65) None of these figures is surprising.

There is no disagreement with McCormick that the local Party was run-down and moribund. Partly this was explained by the nature of the local community which was declining in population. This decline is reflected in the number of MPs for the area. The Boroughs of West Ham and East Ham, which were incorporated into the new Borough of Newham in the reorganisation of local government in the



early 1970s, had been represented by six MPs between 1918 and 1949, and by four between 1950 and 1970, but by 1974 the new Borough returned only three MPs. Parts of the Borough had suffered from the decline of the docks. Trade union affiliations in the constituency were virtually non-existent and in some wards the local Labour Party did not meet.(66)

This was a changing working class community in which skilled manual workers with employment potential had moved elsewhere, often to the suburbs and new towns surrounding London, and the subsequent in-migration tended to be Asians or a limited number of white non-manuals attracted by cheap housing. The expansion of the local North East London polytechnic was influential in attracting non-manuals to the area.

It only needed a few of these new inhabitants to become *Party members for the impact to be felt within the local Party*. Alan Haworth, Philip Bradbury and Anita Pollock - all key personnel in the deselection issue - were examples of this phenomenon. They all joined the local Party in 1971 and 1972.(67) Alan Haworth had become a GMC delegate by 1972, whilst Bradbury and Pollock were immediately made Chairman and Secretary respectively of their local ward (Manor Park). They took on these responsible positions not because of some organised infiltration and manipulation but because older Party members welcomed this infusion of younger blood and encouraged them to become active as Party officers and delegates.(68)

Whereas in Lincoln and Sheffield Brightside the new members were predominantly manual workers in traditional trades unions in Newham there were more non-manual workers in public sector employment. It was certainly true that the new members often claimed to be Marxists - some as a consequence of their academic background and studies, others as a consequence of their membership of bodies explicitly Marxist in their political commitment (e.g. the Militant Group). There was a revolutionary socialist involvement. In this case the growth of the local left was an amalgamation of both revolutionary and non-revolutionary socialists, but they were not a homogeneous group in their political attitudes, except in their criticisms of the Labour governments of the 1960s, in their belief in the legitimacy of extra-parliamentary direct action and in their annoyance at Reg Prentice's arrogance in dealing with local Party members. Only later were the differences between the two left strands to emerge.

After the litigation between Julian Lewis and Paul McCormick on one side and the officers of the Newham North East CLP and the Labour Party at national level on the other side had been completed the local Party selected in July 1978 a former Chairman of the Tribune Group, James Dickens, as its candidate by 37 votes to 20 for Nick Bradley, a leading member of the Militant Group. Nine months later Dickens resigned when fewer than half of the GMC voted in support of his proposed Election Address. The differences of opinion between him and a large section of

the GMC were very considerable. He claimed that the divisions within the local Party "were more profound than any I had known in over thirty years' activity in the Labour Party". He pointed out that these divisions were not of the classical Left/Right nature but "were rather the result of the entry into the Party of a number of ultra-left groupings who were attracted by the Prentice affair and had remained in the Newham North East Labour Party subsequently".(69) Dickens argued that these Marxist revolutionaries, making up almost half of the GMC, were out of sympathy with "virtually all aspects of Labour Party policy" and "some of them also opposed Parliamentary Democracy". They "treated with contempt" the Labour Government's policies, especially the Social Contract and they were extremely critical of the Tribune Group for its failure to impose more left wing policies on the Government. They also believed that a Labour MP had no grounds for political independence but was a delegate of the Party's annual conference and the local party's General Committee and finally, they expected him to support every pay claim and every strike.

These three cases in which local Parties sacked the incumbent Labour MP confirm the findings in the first section of this chapter, namely that the Party was attracting new, younger, radical members in the 1970s. It is also the case that revolutionary socialist intervention, either as Trotskyist 'entryists' or as declared revolutionaries, which had been made more possible by the abolition of the 'proscribed list' in

1973, was part of the process of change. Not until the 1980s did the difference between the "revolutionary reformists"(70) and the revolutionaries become important to Party political debate but it would be incorrect to treat them both as part of a single left wing entity in the 1970s.

This chapter has so far considered the changes occurring within the rank and file by examining, first, a wide range of studies of individual constituency parties and, second, a selection of cases in which constituency parties deselected a sitting Labour MP. This has enabled some conclusions to be drawn about the shifting nature of the Party membership. A third method of examining and explaining the changes is by conducting a survey of Party activists or members. A country-wide survey would require extensive resources not available to the author. Instead a limited survey of Party activists (defined as delegates to the CLP General Committee) was carried out in two contrasting Sheffield constituencies (Sheffield Hallam and Sheffield Attercliffe). The survey was conducted in January and February 1986. The limitations of such a survey are recognised: first, it is based in a city which has been a Labour stronghold since the mid-1920s and is not therefore typical of Labour activists nationwide; and, second, it is based upon present-day Party activists and therefore does not measure changing attitudes over time. Nevertheless the survey does allow certain conclusions to be drawn concerning the extent and depth of left wing attitudes amongst a group of Party activists whose social

background varies quite considerably. (For details of the survey see Appendix 3).

Hallam and Attercliffe are two very contrasting constituencies. Hallam has returned a Conservative MP and Attercliffe a Labour MP in all thirteen General Elections since the end of the second World War. Boundary changes in the periodic parliamentary redistribution of seats has not disturbed the electoral safety of either constituency,(71) which reflects the distinctive socio-economic composition of both sets of voters.

The 1981 Census reveals the following class composition:

Table 1 Social Class (Registrar General's classification)

	<u>Hallam</u>	<u>Attercliffe</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
I (Professional)	13.6	2.6
II (Intermediate)	42.3	14.5
IIIN (Skilled Non-manual)	13.8	11.5
IIIM (Skilled manual)	18.0	45.4
IV (Semi-skilled manual)	9.2	18.8
V (Unskilled manual)	1.8	5.8
Other	1.3	1.1
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100	100

The two constituencies are asymmetrical in socio-economic composition with seventy per cent of Hallam's population classified as non-manuals and twenty nine per cent as manuals and twenty nine per cent of Attercliffe's population classified as non-manuals and seventy per cent as manuals. Hallam has a higher proportion of its workforce possessing degrees or professional qualifications (34%) than any constituency in Great

Britain; by contrast Attercliffe has one of the lowest proportions (6%) and ranks 606 out of 633 British constituencies. Nearly three-quarters of Hallam householders are owner-occupiers (73%) whereas almost half of Attercliffe householders (49%) are council tenants.

The two CLPs have quite distinct political reputations. Hallam's left reputation has prevailed for twenty years during which time the CLP nominated and actively supported one of its members, Royden Harrison, as a left-wing challenger to the political composition of the NEC in 1970 and 1971 (for further details see Chapter eight); consistently supported the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy; cast its vote for Tony Benn in the 1981 Deputy Leadership election; and has voted consistently for the 'left slate' in NEC elections.(72)

In contrast, Attercliffe has a right-wing reputation based in part upon the politics of the incumbent MP, Pat Duffy, and upon its recent decision to expel six of its members who were associated with the Militant Group.(73) But this right-wing reputation is slightly misleading as neither MP nor CLP have displayed consistent support for right wing issues and personnel. When Pat Duffy was selected to replace the retiring MP, John Hynd, in 1970 he had emerged as the left candidate on the short-list. In the 1981 deputy leadership election Duffy cast his first vote for John Silkin and then abstained on the second ballot. But in 1983 he did vote for Roy Hattersley in the election to choose a new Party Leader.(74) Similarly the CLP has a somewhat mixed record

of political identification in the 1980s. In 1980 it passed a resolution supporting Michael Foot as Party Leader; it voted in 1981 in favour of Tony Benn as the Party's Deputy Leader in both ballots; and it voted for Kinnock as Party Leader in 1983. Its vote in NEC elections has tended to follow a left pattern although its support for Gerald Kaufman and Jack Ashley in the CLP section, and for Gwyneth Dunwoody and Betty Boothroyd in the Women's section reveals some rightward tendencies.(75)

Finally the two constituencies differ in their level of Party membership.

Table 2 Individual Party membership(76)

	<u>Hallam</u>	<u>Attercliffe</u>
1982	607	230
1983	624	308
1984	928	384

Hallam CLP has the largest membership of all fifty one local parties in Labour's Yorkshire region.

If we now turn to an examination of the two sets of Party activists we find that amongst Hallam's there are almost no affiliated trade union representatives whereas amongst Attercliffe's there is an even division of trade union and Party branch representatives.

Table 3 Organisations represented by delegates to  
the General Committee

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
Party branch/ward	90.5	(57)	49.4	(44)
Trade union	7.9	( 5)	46.1	(41)
Young socialist	1.6	( 1)	2.2	( 2)
Co-operative party	-	( -)	2.2	( 2)
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100	(63)	100	(89)

But amongst both sets of Party activists, even though there are almost no affiliated trade union representatives in one constituency, we find a similar recruitment pattern. Over half of the activists have joined the Party since 1975, with the greatest concentration between 1980 and 1984.



Table 4 Year of joining the Labour Party

<u>Year of recruitment</u>	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
Pre-1964	19.0	(12)	16.9	(15)
1965-1969	-	( - )	6.7	( 6 )
1970-1974	19.0	(12)	5.6	( 5 )
1975-1979	17.5	(11)	16.9	(15)
1980-1984	44.4	(28)	39.3	(35)
1985-	-	( - )	6.7	( 6 )
Unknown/No response	-	( - )	7.9	( 7 )
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100	(63)	100	(89)

These recruits are completely new to Party activism in the sense that they have not belonged to other parties prior to joining the Labour Party (85.7% of Hallam and 92.1% of Attercliffe activists are completely new to any form of Party activity) and nor have their parents been Labour Party members (over three quarters of their parents in both Hallam and Attercliffe were not members).

Hallam activists are younger than their Attercliffe counterparts (mean ages 41 and 52). Two thirds of Hallam activists are between the ages of 31 and 50, whereas one quarter of Attercliffe activists are aged 61 or over.

Table 5 Age of Party members

<u>Age</u>	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
20 & under	1.6	( 1)	2.0	( 2)
21-30	14.3	( 9)	10.8	( 9)
31-40	28.6	(18)	20.4	(17)
41-50	38.1	(24)	19.2	(16)
51-60	15.9	(10)	18.0	(15)
61 & over	1.6	( 1)	27.7	(23)
Unknown/No response	-	( -)	1.0	( 1)
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100	(63)	100	(89)

Both sets of Party activists are predominantly male.

Table 6 Gender of Party activists

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
Male	63.5	(40)	71.9	(64)
Female	36.5	(23)	27.0	(24)
Unknown/No response	-	( -)	1.1	( 1)
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100	(63)	100	(89)

It is no surprise, considering the socio-economic structure of these two constituencies that the two sets of Party activists differ in their educational and occupational backgrounds. Hallam activists have had a Grammar school education and have proceeded to University; in contrast Attercliffe activists went to Elementary or

Secondary Modern schools with one-third leaving without any formal educational qualifications.

Table 7 Type of schooling

<u>School</u>	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
Elementary only	1.6	( 1)	33.7	(30)
Secondary Modern	6.3	( 4)	32.6	(29)
Comprehensive	15.9	(10)	14.6	(13)
Grammar school	60.3	(38)	15.7	(14)
Other (eg private)	14.2	( 1)	3.4	( 3)
Unknown/no response	1.6	( 1)	-	( -)
	<u>100</u>	<u>(63)</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>(89)</u>

Table 8 Highest educational qualification

<u>Qualification</u>	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
School cert.	1.6	( 1)	12.4	(11)
Higher school cert.	-	( -)	2.2	( 2)
CSE	-	( -)	1.1	( 1)
'O' levels	9.5	( 6)	13.5	(12)
'A' levels	6.3	( 4)	5.6	( 5)
Technical	7.9	( 5)	12.4	(11)
Degree	68.3	(43)	12.4	(11)
No qualification	3.2	( 2)	38.2	(34)
Unknown/No response	3.2	( 2)	2.2	( 2)
	<u>100</u>	<u>(63)</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>(89)</u>

Two-thirds of Hallam activists are employed in

full time jobs whereas one quarter of Attercliffe activists are unemployed.

Table 9 Present employment position

<u>Employment status</u>	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
Full time	68.3	(43)	38.2	(34)
Part time	11.1	( 7)	13.5	(12)
Unemployed	6.3	( 4)	25.8	(23)
Student/retraining	4.8	( 3)	4.5	( 4)
Domestic homecare	6.3	( 4)	2.2	( 2)
Retired	3.2	( 2)	13.5	(12)
Unknown/no response	-	( -)	2.2	( 2)
	<u>100</u>	<u>(63)</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>(89)</u>

An overwhelming number of those Hallam activists in full-time employment work for a public body with half being paid employees of a local authority (predominantly Sheffield City Council). The main employer of Attercliffe activists is the private firm, with another one-third employed by the City Council.

Table 10 Type of Employer

<u>Employer</u>	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
Private firm	11.6	( 5)	32.4	(11)
State institution (eg. civil service/ nat. industry)	7.0	( 3)	5.9	( 2)
Local council	55.8	(24)	29.4	(10)
Trade union	18.6	( 8)	20.6	( 7)
Self employed	7.0	( 3)	2.9	( 1)
Unknown/no response	-	( -)	8.7	( 3)
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100	(43)	100	(34)

A vivid contrast in the class composition of the activists emerges from comparison of those in full-time work (or having previously been employed full-time). Almost ninety per cent of Hallam activists are non-manuals where sixty per cent of Attercliffe activists are manual.

Table 11 Social class of Party activists

<u>Social class</u>	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
I (Professional)	23.7	(14)	-	( - )
II (Intermediate)	52.5	(31)	25.7	(18)
IIIN (Skilled non-manual)	10.1	( 6)	14.3	(10)
IIIM (Skilled manual)	11.9	( 7)	38.6	(27)
IV (Semi-skilled manual)	1.7	( 1)	21.4	(15)
V (Unskilled manual)	-	( -)	-	( -)
Unknown/No response	-	( -)	2.2	( 2)
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100	(59)	100	(72)

Finally, amongst both sets of Party activists owner occupation is the most common form of housing tenure, although one-third of Attercliffe activists rent their home from the City Council.

Table 12 Type of housing

<u>Tenure</u>	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
Owner occupation	85.7	(54)	57.3	(51)
Rented from council	3.2	( 2)	34.8	(31)
Other (eg. private rented; living with parents, etc.)	11.1	( 7)	7.8	( 7)
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100	(63)	100	(89)

An examination of the socio-economic characteristics of these two sets of constituency Party activists reveals features which are stereotypical of the contemporary Labour Party. Hallam is made up of middle

class, highly-qualified public sector professionals and Attercliffe is composed of manual worker trade unionists. Often the assumption is made by political commentators that the political attitudes of these two types of Party member differ, with the Hallam activist on the left and the Attercliffe activist on the right. But the evidence of this survey is that left-wing attitudes are firmly based amongst both sets of activists.

A majority of activists are committed to the economic objectives of public ownership and worker control as outlined in Clause 4 of the Party constitution. Attercliffe activists have a stronger attachment to Clause 4 than do Hallam activists, almost one-quarter of whom do not see its implementation as a central concern of a future Labour government.

Table 13 Attitudes towards Clause 4

(Statement: "The central concern of the next Labour Government should be to implement Clause 4 of the Party Constitution")

	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
Agree*	55.6	(35)	68.5	(61)
Neither agree nor disagree	12.7	( 8)	11.2	(10)
Disagree*	22.3	(14)	8.9	( 8)
Don't know/no response	9.5	( 6)	11.3	(10)
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100	(63)	100	(89)

(\*in all the following attitudinal tables the "strongly agree"/"agree" and "strongly disagree"/"disagree" responses have been merged)

This could be interpreted as more a loyalty towards the Party constitution per se than a commitment to public ownership, but another question on nationalisation reveals that almost one-half of the activists would wish to see a Labour government take over the largest two hundred companies in the economy.

Table 14 Attitudes towards nationalisation

(Statement: "The next labour Government should nationalise the largest 200 British companies"(77))

	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
Agree	42.9	(27)	48.3	(43)
Neither agree nor disagree	20.6	(13)	12.4	(11)
Disagree	28.6	(18)	34.9	(31)
Don't know/no response	7.9	( 5)	4.5	( 4)
	<u>100</u>	<u>(63)</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>(89)</u>

Unilateral disarmament has the support of a majority of Party activists in both constituencies. Amongst Hallam activists there is overwhelming support, with almost eight in ten (77.8%) expressing "strong" support for this policy.



Table 15 Attitudes towards unilateral nuclear disarmament

(Statement: "The next Labour Government should not unilaterally give up Britain's nuclear weapons"(78))

	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
Agree	4.8	( 3)	31.5	(28)
Neither agree nor disagree	3.2	( 2)	7.9	( 7)
Disagree	92.1	(58)	56.2	(50)
Don't know/no response	-	( -)	4.5	( 4)
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100	(63)	100	(89)

But the Party activists do not agree in their attitudes towards NATO. A majority of Hallam activists believe that a Labour government should withdraw from the organisation whereas opinion amongst the Attercliffe activists is much more evenly divided, with a slight majority against such action.

Table 16 Attitudes towards NATO

(Statement: "The next Labour Government should withdraw from NATO")

	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
Agree	63.5	(40)	39.3	(35)
Neither agree nor disagree	6.3	( 4)	13.5	(12)
Disagree	27.0	(17)	43.9	(39)
Don't know/no response	3.2	( 2)	3.3	( 3)
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100	(63)	100	(89)

Both sets of activists are convinced that private schooling and private medicine should be eliminated by a Labour government.

Table 17 Attitudes towards private schools

(Statement: "The next Labour Government should abolish all private fee-paying schools")

	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
Agree	77.8	(49)	62.9	(56)
Neither agree nor disagree	11.1	( 7)	19.1	(17)
Disagree	11.1	( 7)	15.8	(14)
Don't know/no response	-	( -)	2.2	( 2)
	<u>100</u>	<u>(63)</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>(89)</u>

Table 18 Attitudes towards private health care

(Statement: "The next Labour Government should not completely abolish all aspects of private sector health care")

	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
Agree	19.0	(12)	25.8	(23)
Neither agree nor disagree	6.3	( 4)	10.1	( 9)
Disagree	73.0	(46)	60.6	(54)
Don't know/no response	1.6	( 1)	3.4	( 3)
	<u>100</u>	<u>(63)</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>(89)</u>

We have noted in Chapter three that the Labour Left adopted the view that some of the laws passed in the 1970s and 1980s were discriminatory and should not be

obeyed. But on this question the two sets of Party activists were divided in their opinions. Those from the working class constituency display a much greater respect for the law than those from the middle class constituency.

Table 19 Attitudes on breaking the law

(Statement: "The Labour Party should not support trade unionists, councillors or anybody else undertaking activities which break civil or criminal law of the land")

	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
Agree	11.1	( 7)	48.3	(43)
Neither agree nor disagree	17.5	(11)	7.9	( 7)
Disagree	69.8	(44)	42.6	(38)
Don't know/no response	1.6	( 1)	1.1	( 1)
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100	(63)	100	(89)

One subject on which a majority of both sets of activists do not share the Labour Left point of view is on prices and incomes policy. The experience of such policies after 1966 led the Labour Left to oppose any restraint on trade unions' rights of free collective bargaining symbolised by the phrase 'prices and incomes policy'. But this phrase did not arouse such hostile emotions in our survey and in the working class constituency of Attercliffe two-thirds of the activists supported such a policy.

Table 20 Attitudes on voluntary prices and incomes policy

(Statement: "The next Labour Government should encourage a voluntary prices and incomes policy in order to control inflation")

	<u>Hallam</u>		<u>Attercliffe</u>	
	%	Nos	%	Nos
Agree	54.0	(34)	66.3	(59)
Neither agree nor disagree	9.5	( 6)	7.9	( 7)
Disagree	31.7	(20)	20.2	(18)
Don't know/no response	4.8	( 3)	5.6	( 5)
	<u>100</u>	<u>(63)</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>(89)</u>

Our conclusion from this limited survey is of a growing body of Party activists, most recruited during the past ten years, with a strong Labour Left commitment, irrespective of social background, to the need for public ownership in the economy and to Britain's unilateral abandonment of its nuclear armaments. On two other issues, however, on which part at least of the Labour Left have campaigned, namely withdrawal from the NATO alliance and civil disobedience of bad laws, working class activists do not display the level of support that is forthcoming from middle class activists. And on one issue, prices and incomes policy, activists do not share the Labour Left's hostility.

Without a comprehensive survey of individual Party membership in the 1970s it is impossible to draw conclusions whether the Labour Left's forward march in the local Labour Parties was the consequence of Right defections, infiltration of entryists, individual

conversion from Right to Left opinions, or the recruitment of new (Left) Party members. It is almost certain that over Britain at large all of these factors played some part in the leftwards shift. But from this survey of the literature on Party membership, an examination of some constituency Parties involved in deselecting their MP and a particular study of two sets of Sheffield activists it would appear that two forces were at work which played an important part in the emergence of a more left wing rank and file. First, the Party was attracting a new generation of articulate and radical members often highly-educated and professionally-qualified. Many had been first made aware of Marxism in their intellectual studies but then adopted the ideas as part of their political perspective. Second, a new generation of manual worker trades unionists, often living in council housing, had joined the Party to defend their standards of living and were less deferential than previous generations to their Party and trade union leaders.

This emergent left rank and file channelled a good deal of its activities into the issue of Party democracy intent on ensuring that the parliamentarian was made more accountable to the extra-parliamentary Party. It is to this subject that we now turn and also to the activity and influence of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (hereafter CLPD).

FOOTNOTES

1. A phrase used by Ron Hayward, the Party's General Secretary.
2. Perhaps the most renowned comment on Party activists was Sidney Webb's, when he was reported as saying that "...constituency parties were frequently unrepresentative groups of nonentities dominated by fanatics, cranks and extremists..." Quoted in R. McKenzie British Political Parties, p.505.
3. L. Minkin The Labour Party Conference, p.45.
4. loc.cit.
5. M. Harrison Trade Unions and the Labour Party, p.238.
6. E. Jasonik Constituency Labour Parties in Britain, p.58.
7. F. Bealey, J. Blondel and W. McCann Constituency Politics: a study of Newcastle under Lyme, p.285.
8. L. Minkin op.cit., p.88.
9. Examination of the vote for the left candidates in the CLP section of the NEC during the 1970s reveals a surge in support between 1974 and 1976 and then again in 1979.  
Successful Left candidates' vote as a % of the total vote in the CLP section

1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
55	54	53	53	58	65	67	55	58	65
- Source: NEC election results and CLPs voting strength in Labour Party conference report, 1970-1979.
10. Michael Pinto-Duschinsky believes this to be the explanation. He argues: "An important effect of declining local Labour Party membership appears to have been that moderates have departed and extremists have remained. The fall in membership therefore has tended to be accompanied by an increase in political militancy within constituency Labour parties." British Political Finance, p.294.
11. A. Crosland 'Radical Reform and the Left' Encounter, 1960 reprinted in The Conservative Enemy, p.130.
12. R. McKenzie British Political Parties and 'Power in the Labour Party: the issue of intra-party Democracy' in D. Kavanagh (ed) The Politics of the Labour Party, Ch.8.
13. L. Epstein Political Parties in Western Democracies.

14. D. Butler and R. Rose The British General Election of 1959, pp. 237-238.
15. Plan for an Efficient Party (PEP) was launched in 1966 in a manifesto sponsored by Richard Clements (on behalf of Tribune), Rita Hinden (Socialist Commentary), Paul Johnson (New Statesman), and Dick Leonard (Plebs). PEP's organiser was Jim Northcott. PEP published regular newsletters in 1966 and 1967.
16. D. Butler and M. Pinto-Duschinsky The British General Election of 1970, p.265.
17. M. Pinto-Duschinsky British Political Finance, p.160.
18. Report of the Committee on Financial Aid to Political Parties, p.31.
19. P. Whiteley The Labour Party in Crisis, p.55.
20. M. Linton Labour Weekly, September 28, 1979
21. H. Frayman Labour Weekly, February 26, 1982.
22. The author's research. See P. Seyd and L. Minkin 'The Labour Party and its members' New Society, 49, September 20, 1979, pp.613-615.
23. loc.cit.
24. The membership dropped from 1,232 to 628. Tom Forrester The Labour Party and the Working Class, p.157.
25. The membership dropped from 334 in 1965 to 159 in 1970. J. Tidball A Study of Barnsley Constituency Labour Party (unpublished MA dissertation, University of Sheffield, 1981), p.14.
26. L. Minkin op.cit., p.87.
27. P. Whiteley op.cit., p.61.
28. Pinto-Duschinsky suggests a static or slightly declining membership. Pinto-Duschinsky op.cit., Figure 1, p.158.
29. T. Forrester op.cit., p.157.
30. A rise from 159 in 1970 to 631. J. Tidball op.cit., p.14.
31. J. Tidball op.cit., p.58.
32. J. Bochel and D. Denver 'Candidate Selection in the Labour Party: What the Selectors Seek' British Journal of Political Science, 13(1), 1983, p.62.
33. P. Whiteley op.cit., pp.64-69.

34. T. Forrester op.cit., pp.118-119.
35. J. Tidball op.cit., p.62.
36. 62% of Party members are part of the Registrar General's classes I to III. J. Chandler, D. Morris and M. Barker 'The Ascent of Middle Class Politics: the middle class membership of the Labour Party' (paper presented to the 1982 annual meeting of the Political Studies Association), p.3.
37. J. Chandler, et al op.cit., p.4.
38. M. Barker, J. Chandler and D. Morris The Labour Party Ward Secretary: a socio-political profile (Sheffield City Polytechnic occasional paper No. 7., 1978), p.28.
39. J. Tidball op.cit., p.47.
40. P. Jenkins The Guardian, October 4, 1980.
41. P. Whiteley op.cit., p.40.
42. Peter Tatchell notes that in 1978 Bermondsey CLP membership was below 400 and that ward meetings were poorly attended. P. Tatchell The Battle for Bermondsey, especially Chs. 1 & 2.
43. This statement is based upon the author's own experiences and general observations during the 1970s as a Party branch secretary, General Committee delegate, District Labour Party delegate, and Party conference delegate. Until 1970 the Labour Party distinguished between males and females in its individual membership figures but since then no national Party records are available which record the growth in female party membership.
44. S. Rowbotham, L. Segal and H. Wainwright Beyond The Fragments.
45. 'Notes for Discussion on the Labour Party' Beyond the Fragments Conference, Leeds, August 30, 1980 (in the possession of the author).
46. See, for example, Tony Benn's interview in Spare Rib, 35, December 1980, pp.30-35. For all Benn's efforts to take the feminist movement seriously the interview reveals a good deal of tension between himself and the feminist interviewer.
47. Jean McCrindle New Socialist, July/August 1983, p.3. It should be pointed out that her letter to New Socialist was prompted by an article by the author which had ignored the significance of women in the forward march of the Labour Left.



48. The tensions were apparent in Sheffield in the 1980s. The traditional working class CLPs (Sheffield Attercliffe & Brightside) possessed women's organisations but the middle class CLP (Sheffield Hallam) had no such organisation and by tradition refused to send delegates to the Party's national women's conference believing such structures to be unnecessary. But after an acrimonious debate lasting over a period of three years Hallam CLP created a separate women's section in 1982 which adopted a critical stance towards the more traditional role for women in the Sheffield Labour Party. Hallam women faced considerable opposition in their demands to change both local Party attitudes and structures especially from the small number of local women who had secured leading positions within the Party and Labour-controlled Council.

49. The Campaign for Democratic Socialism had been founded in 1959 by members of the Labour Right to campaign for a revision in the Party's objectives and to sustain Hugh Gaitskell in his campaign against the unilateralists. Taverne was a senior figure in CDS as its Treasurer. For a detailed examination of CDS see P. Seyd Factionalism in the Labour Party: a case study of CDS (unpublished M.Phil. thesis, University of Southampton, 1968).

50. A.R. Dickson MPs' Readoption conflicts (Ph.D., Paisley College of Technology, 1979), p.249.

51. loc.cit.

52. ibid., p.273.

53. On the advice of Sara Barker the GMC rejected by 23 votes to 16 a proposal that two additional names be added to the list. ibid., pp.252-253.

54. ibid., p.257.

55. ibid., p.263.

56. Confirmation of this growth in local Party membership has been provided by Leo Beckett, the Lincoln Party Secretary at this time. Party membership when Geoffrey de Freitas was MP had been approximately two hundred but an active recruitment campaign in the late-1960s, in which University undergraduates were paid to canvass and recruit members in their vacations, combined with a tote scheme and a thriving Labour Club resulted in an individual membership of approximately one thousand, seven hundred and fifty. Interview with Leo Beckett, October 2, 1985.

57. W. Hampton Democracy and Community, p.86.

58. loc.cit.

59. Sheffield Morning Telegraph, September 1974.

60. The City Council Leader from 1974 until 1980 was George Wilson and his successor was David Blunkett. Both were councillors for Wards in the Brightside constituency. Other leading members of the Labour Group Executive who were either members of the Brightside CLP or were councillors in this constituency were Clive Betts, Peter Price, Roger Barton and Bill Michie.
61. P. McCormick Enemies of Democracy, p.200.
62. ibid., p.43.
63. ibid., p.49.
64. ibid., pp.176-199.
65. ibid., p.57.
66. Interviews with Alan Haworth, Philip Bradbury and Anita Pollock. I am grateful to Alan Haworth for his detailed comments on this section.
67. Both Alan Haworth and Philip Bradbury were social science students in their early twenties studying at this time at the North East London Polytechnic.
68. Reg Prentice welcomed their membership and active participation as a means of stimulating the local Party. Interviews with Alan Haworth, Philip Bradbury and Anita Pollock, May 1984.
69. This quotation and all others in the paragraph are taken from 'My resignation as Parliamentary Labour Candidate for Newham North East: a Memorandum by James Dickens', May 1979 (in the author's possession).
70. A term used by Eric Heffer. Speech by Eric Heffer to a 'Turning Left' conference, Cambridge, November 2, 1985. Text kindly provided by Eric Heffer.
71. Labour's vote in Attercliffe has ranged from 77.3% (1966) to 51.5% (1983). The Conservative vote in Hallam has ranged from 70.8% (1951) to 48.9% (February 1974).
72. LPACR, 1981 Appendix 7; LPACR, 1983 Appendix 8; LPACR, 1984 Appendix 8.
73. The expulsions included a sitting Sheffield councillor (Paul Green). The NEC confirmed this expulsion by 14 votes to 13 in December 1985.
74. LPACR, 1981 Appendix 7; LPACR, 1983 Appendix 8.
75. LPACR, 1981 Appendix 7; LPACR 1983 Appendix 8; LPACR, 1984 Appendix 8.
76. Annual Reports of the Yorkshire Region Labour Party, 1982, 1983, 1984.

77. The figure of 200 companies was chosen because this is a major campaign slogan of the Militant Group. Neither Hallam nor Attercliffe CLPs have, or have had, more than a few supporters of the Militant Group, yet it is clear that activists do want to see a very considerable public presence in the economy.

78. Some of the statements were phrased in a negative manner in order to eliminate any bias that might have arisen from respondents merely affirming every statement.

CHAPTER FIVE

DEMOCRACY IN THE PARTY(1): The Campaign for Labour Party  
Democracy and the reselection of Labour MPs

The Labour Left's perspective has always been wide-ranging, extending beyond specific policy items to embrace views on the Party's internal distribution of power. It has always believed that the individual Party member and affiliated trade union member holds views more akin to the Labour Left than Labour Right but that these views are often modified, sometimes even misrepresented, by a parliamentary and trade union leadership. For this reason the Labour Left traditionally has stressed the powers of the extra-parliamentary Party as the institution in which the 'real' views of the individual Party member are likely to be voiced. Labour Left experiences of the Labour Government between 1966 and 1970, followed by Harold Wilson's declaration of a personal veto over the NEC proposal to include the nationalisation of twenty five companies in the 1974 election manifesto, his ignoring of Party opinion in 1975 concerning membership of the EEC, and the performance of the Labour Government from 1976 onwards, fuelled their demands that the extra-parliamentary Party should play a more positive role in Party affairs and, in particular, that Labour MPs should be made more accountable to the CLPs.

We have considered in the previous chapter the

moves made by some CLPs to sack their MPs following a slight easing of the Party rules in 1970. However, there was a growing demand, kindled by the experiences of Lincoln, Sheffield and Newham Party members, that the rules should be changed to ensure a regular selection procedure during the lifetime of every Parliament. It is worth noting in passing that a leading figure in the Labour Left in the 1950s, Dick Crossman, described a similar proposal to make Labour MPs more accountable to their CLPs as "impracticable" and "insanely dangerous".(1) The fact that a successful campaign could be mounted in the 1970s to secure the introduction of an automatic, mandatory reselection procedure in all constituencies represented by a Labour MP is perhaps a sign of the changing nature of the Labour Left - namely, less deferential to parliamentarians and less dominated by parliamentarians.

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy: origins and purpose

We believe that policy decisions reached by Annual Conference should be binding on the Parliamentary Labour Party and undertake to secure the implementation of this principle.

(Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, Statement of Aims)

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (hereafter CLPD) was first mooted in 1972 by a small group of people from the Socialist Charter group, who had become dismayed by the internal disputes within the group which were primarily the consequence of Trotskyist infiltration.

It is worth emphasising the point that Trotskyist infiltration of the Labour Left was the reason for CLPD's formation because outside commentators considering the advance of the Left in the 1970s have treated orthodox and Trotskyite left as a single entity which was not the case.

CLPD held its first public meeting in 1973 at the Labour Party conference and announced the support of ten Labour MPs and sixty individual Party members. From these small foundations the group grew in support and influence to the point where six years later at the 1979 Party conference it finally secured what had become its major objective - an amendment to the Party constitution establishing automatic reselection procedures in all constituencies with a Labour MP.

CLPD's object was to ensure that Labour governments implemented Party policies as decided by the annual conference and the NEC, and its initial proposals were ones intended to make the NEC more accountable to the Party membership.(2) No mention was made in the original statement of aims about candidate reselection but after CLPD's first meeting at the 1973 Party conference it announced,

In the light of the points raised at Blackpool and the comments received from CLPs and others, the sponsors of the Campaign feel that the statement of aims should be reformulated to include reference to specific procedures which would ensure a closer link between Labour Party members and their elected representatives. In particular we feel that we must take account of the strongly urged proposal for automatic reselection conferences in Labour-held parliamentary seats....(3)

As outlined in the previous chapter the Labour Party conference had approved in 1970 an NEC recommendation that the rules concerning dismissal of a Labour MP by a constituency party be modified. It was under these new rules that Party members in Lincoln, Sheffield Brightside, Blyth, Newham North East, Hammersmith North, and Liverpool Edge Hill had challenged and rejected their Labour MP.

CLPD argued that these rules should be altered on grounds of principle and practice. The principled opposition to the existing procedure was that it protected the parliamentarian to an undue degree from accountability to the Party membership. The introduction of an automatic reselection procedure would necessitate that the incumbent MP would take seriously the opinion of the Party membership as recorded within the CLP and at the Party conference.

Accountability of MPs would... end the fruitless confrontations between Annual Conference and Parliamentary Labour Party. Under the present arrangements there is no way the Conference can effectively influence the Parliamentary Labour Party. By its very nature Conference can, as a rule, do no more than lay down the broad outlines of policies. It has no machinery to ensure that its policy of recommendations are acted on. However, the individual accountability of each MP to a regularly-held selection conference, backed up by the possibility of replacement, can bring about this fundamental change which no Conference can accomplish.(4)

CLPD wanted to reduce Labour MPs' security of tenure believing that insecurity would concentrate their mind on the commitments made at Party conferences.

It is the relative independence of the Parliamentary Labour Party, rooted in the almost automatic readoption of Labour MPs, which makes

it easy for Labour governments to abandon Labour Party policies. The only way to undermine this independence and to make MPs more mindful of party decisions is to reduce their security of tenure. Mandatory reselection would achieve this.(5)

What CLPD does not consider in these early statements is the order of priorities in the event of a difference of opinion between a CLP and the Party conference. To whom then would the Labour MP owe his or her loyalties? CLPD statements assume that the CLP and the Party conference will be in accord. If this is the case then should the MP obey conference decisions? It is unclear whether CLPD allows any room for the Labour MP's independent opinion. CLPD's statement of aims, quoted at the beginning of this section, states that annual conference decisions should be "binding on the Parliamentary Labour Party" and the CLPD Newsletter, quoted above, states the need to "ensure" that annual conference recommendations "are acted upon", whereas the second Newsletter quoted only stated the need to make MPs "more mindful of party decisions".

By 1981 CLPD is clearer on this question. The first CLPD Bulletin in 1981 discusses whether MPs have a duty to exercise their own judgement even when this will lead them to take a contrary view to the annual conference and it concludes that

No one, in fact, denies them this right. All that is expected of them is that they should be able to justify their decisions to those who selected them.(6)

Chris Mullins and Charlotte Atkins, in a pamphlet written for CLPD, adopt a similar position



arguing that

The purpose of mandatory reselection is to establish an open and honest relationship between the MP and his or her constituency party...(7)

In their view the MP must be given the time and opportunity to discuss political issues with the CLP membership and thus develop a close relationship. They stress that the CLP needs to behave in as responsible a manner as the MP and state

Accountability is a two-way process which confers responsibility on the party as well as the MP.(8)

Michael Meacher, a prominent campaigner for reselection, has written

MPs are persons with privileged access to inside information, personal knowledge of the leaders, measured judgement of events built on long experience, and (it is to be hoped) a degree of competent leadership, and that these assets and qualities should be permitted to be used to the full, subject to regular contact and genuine consultation with those whom they represent, and subject above all in the end to being held to account for the way that these special privileges have been exercised.(9)

Others on the Left but not necessarily leading members of CLPD regard the MP as no more than a delegate of the CLP, the assumption being made that the CLP and the annual conference would be of the same opinions.(10)

The ambivalence concerning the role of the MP and the relationship between the annual conference and the CLP caused some leading figures on the left of the Party in the 1950s and 1960s, with a long tradition of parliamentary rebellion, to vigorously oppose CLPD. Michael Foot was one who had been sustained in his rebellions against the Party leadership by his local Party

- first, Devonport and, then, Ebbw Vale - and did not take kindly to the notion that he should act as a delegate of the Party conference.

The pragmatic argument used by CLPD against the existing procedures for sacking an MP was that they were cumbersome in the sense that the process took time during which internal party conflict was exacerbated and the media was provided with the opportunities for hostile coverage of the constituency party activists. One person actively involved in the reselection saga in Sheffield Brightside commented:

...I can assure you it is an experience I would not like to recommend to any of you here. It is a very lengthy drawn-out procedure, one which leaves the management committee to come under extreme fire and stress from the press and the people. Dirt is thrown around, people are accused, you cannot walk down the streets without people accusing you of being Marxists, International Socialists; everything is thrown at you. It is a procedure that goes on far too long, it is something that could happen to anyone here. If you find yourself unsatisfied with your local MP and you have the problem of trying to replace him, believe me, the job is monumental and the stress one puts on one's officers is really too much.(11)

Yet the sitting MP in Sheffield Brightside, Eddie Griffiths, had attracted less media attention and support than that given to either Dick Taverne in Lincoln or Reg Prentice in Newham North East! CLPD's argument was that by establishing an automatic procedure a great deal of the hostile media coverage would be dissolved because all constituency parties with a Labour MP would be reconsidering their representatives sometime in the life

of each Parliament and the process would not immediately appear as a direct vote of no-confidence in any one person.

Before examining the main developments within the Party over reselection it is necessary to say something about the nature of CLPD. What was this organisation? And who were its leaders?

#### CLPD: organisation and leadership

We have already made reference to the origins of CLPD as a group of people, small in number who, in response to the Trotskyist takeover of Socialist Charter, held a fringe meeting at the 1973 Party conference which attracted the interest of sixty individual Party members, three members of the NEC (Frank Allaun, Joan Lestor and Joan Maynard) and a further eight Labour MPs (Norman Atkinson, Lewis Carter Jones, Eric Heffer, Neil Kinnock, Edward Milne, Stan Orme, Jim Sillars and Dennis Skinner).(12) Brenda Brett and Sid Hiett, as organiser and secretary respectively, were the two who guided it through its first months.

In 1974 the group adopted a more formal structure with a defined membership, an elected executive and an annual general meeting, a rather surprising development considering the vulnerability of such structures to organised infiltration and the recent experience of the founders. Two forms of membership were created, individual and affiliated, but in order not to

transgress the Party constitutional rules restricting the establishment of a branch-based membership organisation, both categories were deemed to be supporters.(13)

Membership figures reveal a relatively small number in the group until 1978 after which it rose considerably to a peak in 1982 since when it has declined, although membership today is still larger than in the early part of the 1970s.

Table 1

MEMBERSHIP OF CLPD:1974-1984(14)

	Individual members	Individual(£) subscription	Affiliated members				
			CLPs	CLP branches	Trade Union branches	Trade Union Other*	Others <sup>2</sup>
1974	60	1.50	4	1	0	0	1
1975	140	1.50	21	5	1	0	5
1976	248	1.50	47	18	8	12	9
1977	305	2.00/2.50 <sup>3</sup>	74	32	25	14	28
1978	289	2.00/2.50	75	34	47	30	28
1979	443	2.00/2.50	77	37	85	49	46
1980	807	3.00/3.50	107	81	112	49	51
1981	1016	3.00/3.50	118	88	113	68	51
1982	1203	4.00/4.50	153	103	105	55	27
1983	1081	4.00/4.50	97	88	91	59	19
1984	668	5.00/6.00	101	60	77	50	10

\* e.g. Shop Steward committee

<sup>2</sup> includes Co-operative branches, young socialist branches and University/Polytechnic Labour Clubs

<sup>3</sup> individuals/couples

A similar picture of the group's activities and support is revealed in its finances. A considerable growth occurs until 1982 by which date the group's income was over three and a half times, and the group's expenditure almost four times, the 1977 figure: but since then a decline has set in.

Table 2

CLPD FINANCES (INCOME AND EXPENDITURE): 1977-1984<sup>(15)</sup>

	<u>Income</u>	<u>Expenditure</u>	<u>Balance</u>
1977-1978	3,968	4,179	-211
1978-1979	5,738	4,961	+777
1979-1980	10,539	10,075	+464
1980-1981	14,063	16,661	-2,598
1981-1982	14,578	13,841	+737
1982-1983	14,493	16,071	-1,578
1983-1984	11,656	11,000	+656

The bulk of CLPD's income has come from individual subscriptions and donations from trade unions, the London Co-operative retail society, the Claverton Peace Trust, and individuals. By the end of 1984 CLPD had accumulated a deficit of £2,300 owed to its bankers and to its Secretary.

CLPD has never been an organisation of left 'super-stars', namely prominent left parliamentarians, nor has it been an organisation whose main mode of operation has been the well-publicised public meeting. Rather than platform speakers with success measured in terms of column inches or broadcast times, it has been activists working the duplicator, distributing information and guidance to other supporters around the country, with success measured

in 'model' resolutions and amendments.

Some Labour MPs have taken titular roles as President and Vice-President(16) but the work has been done by the elected Executive. CLPD's Executive has grown considerably during its lifetime until in the 1980s it included over 20 specific posts(17), six without any specific responsibilities, six co-opted members, and a further number of regional representatives. It was a very large body and in order that no one might be attracted solely by any notion of prestige of office the CLPD constitution stipulates that all executive members have to undertake "at least three hours work a week on Campaign work"(18), and the annual report of the executive details the time individuals have spent at the group's headquarters assisting in the work.(19) Monthly executive meetings have been tightly structured (perhaps not surprising considering the size) with the times stipulated for discussion of topics which have included such regular matters as the group's 'model' resolutions and amendments for the Party's annual conferences and regional conferences, the strategy for mobilising trade union support, the group's financial affairs and publicity matters.

Over an eleven year period the personnel involved has fluctuated but certain people have been prominent throughout its lifetime. Vladimir and Vera Derer were founder members and it is from their house that the group's activities have been directed. Vladimir Derer replaced Sid Hiett as Secretary in 1974 and has held the

post continuously since. Victor Schonfield has been the group's Treasurer since 1975 and has been one of the major figures in developing friendly links with the trade unions. Peter Willsman first joined CLPD in 1976, soon became a 'key person' on the Executive and by the late-1970s had become a leading figure. These four people have worked closely together and have been prominent over a longer period than anyone else. Francis Prideaux is another who has had as long a commitment and involvement; for a time however in the early 1980s, when the group was seriously divided along both political and personal lines, he was one who differed from the Derer group. Other people who have played a leading role at times have been Steve Bodington, Chris Mullins, Reg Race, Andy Harris, Jon Lansman, John Bloxam, Walter Wolfgang, Heather Gaebler, Mandy Moore, Frances Morrell and Anne Pettifor. With the exception of Vladimir and Vera Derer, Steve Bodington and Walter Wolfgang the CLPD leadership has been young with most of the people in their thirties at the time of the group's major impact. Furthermore they are overwhelmingly products of higher education.

Until 1981 a considerable degree of unity prevailed within the group as it fought the Party leadership on the specific issue of automatic reselection of MPs. Vladimir Derer has written that "until about 1981 CLPD was a broad alliance whose membership encompassed almost the whole of the Labour Left spectrum and even beyond".(20) However, after securing its prime objectives of automatic reselection, the group suffered from serious

divisions and organised factionalism became a prominent feature of its own activities. We will return to these divisions later but first we need to examine the main developments on the question of the reselection of Labour MPs since it is both a technical and a complex subject.

#### Debates and decisions on the reselection of Labour MPs

The issue of the automatic reselection of Labour MPs was first debated at the 1974 Party conference. Three resolutions to the 1973 Conference calling for a change in the rules had been remitted to and considered by the NEC in its overall review of Party structure. It reported to the 1974 conference that the constitutional provisions for removal of a Labour MP were adequate and therefore required no amendment.(21) Ken Coates moved what became known as 'the Rushcliffe Amendment' requiring "that every constituency party shall hold a selection conference once at least in the lifetime of every Parliament."(22) Ian Mikardo, on behalf of the NEC, recommended rejection of the amendment arguing that whilst CLPs should have the right to reject their MP such a procedure already existed - as used by Lincoln and Sheffield Brightside - and the procedure should be made no easier. He argued that "divorce should never be easy, because divorce is a last resort".(23) The Rushcliffe Amendment was lost by 3,260,000 to 2,044,000 votes.

In the following two years CLPD attempted to reopen the issue. Twelve CLPs submitted conference



resolutions on the subject in 1975 and forty in 1976 but on both occasions the Conference Arrangements Committee ruled them out of order under the 'three year rule'.(25) Emergency resolutions at the 1975 and 1976 Party conferences challenging these Conference Arrangements Committee rulings were deemed out of order and at the 1976 conference a reference back of the Conference Arrangements Committee report, a means of challenging this ruling, was lost by 3,906,000 to 2,280,000 votes.(26)

At the 1977 Party conference the 'three year rule' could no longer be invoked on this subject of automatic reselection and sixty-seven CLPs submitted the proposed CLPD constitutional amendment.(27) On this occasion CLPD's desire to debate the topic was again thwarted by the Party's procedural rules, although in this case the rule was one approved by the 1968 Party conference of which CLPD was clearly unaware. The '1968 rule' was that constitutional amendments should be referred automatically to the NEC for consideration and report back to the following Party conference for debate. Clearly this ruling was disadvantageous to CLPD in that it delayed the matter for a year: further, that on the basis of previous NEC attitudes, the report back was likely to be hostile to the proposed amendment; and finally that the debate on this topic at the following year's Party conference would be structured as part of the NEC Report thereby giving the NEC some political initiative which might make CLPD's task more difficult. For these reasons the '1968 rule' was challenged by moving the reference

back of the Conference Arrangements Committee Report but this was lost by 5,154,000 to 1,217,000 votes.(28) Rather than have a debate on a specific constitutional amendment CLPD had to make do at the 1977 Party conference with a debate on a general resolution calling on the NEC to amend the Party's rules on reselection and to insert a new clause in the Party Constitution establishing automatic reselection. From CLPD's point of view what also made this debate unsatisfactory was that this general resolution was moved by Ray Apps from Brighton Kempton, a supporter of the Militant Group and the resolution's wording reflected Militant's views. CLPD and the Militant Group both agreed on the principle of reselection but were divided over the strategy. Militant's position was that the Party's rules should contain both the existing procedure for removal of a Labour MP, as invoked in Lincoln and Sheffield Brightside, and the proposed automatic procedure in order that instant accountability of an MP could be maintained by invoking the existing procedure at any time over any issue if the CLP desired in addition to the automatic procedures being invoked sometime in the life of every parliament. The disagreement over tactics bedevilled the campaign throughout this period and was used by CLPD's opponents who placed great emphasis upon the Militant position.

At the NEC meeting immediately prior to the 1977 Party conference, at which it determined its attitude towards the resolutions on the final agenda, it voted by 15 to 13 votes to accept the principle of automatic

reselection but to advise the conference to remit the resolution. The opponents of the principle of automatic reselection demanded a card vote in order to register their opposition but remittance was carried by 4,858,000 to 1,560,000 votes.(29) In the course of his speech on behalf of the NEC Ian Mikardo gave an undertaking that,

...We shall put down at next year's Annual Conference all the amendments to the constitution necessary to provide automatic reselection in the way and in the sense that the sponsors of those 60-odd resolutions want. I do not think there is the least chance of the Executive renegeing on that undertaking.(30)

Such a clear commitment from Ian Mikardo appeared to imply that CLPD's campaign on the particular issue of automatic reselection had reached a successful conclusion but at the NEC Organisation committee meeting in December the Party's National Agent submitted a paper asking for certain guidance in drafting rule amendments on this issue. Some of the National Agent's questions were concerned with technicalities such as whether reselection should be carried out by the GMC or at a meeting of a large number of individual Party members, what should happen in the event of a snap general election, and should both automatic and extraordinary reselection be included in the rules. However, the National Agent's first question to the committee revealed that Ian Mikardo's public commitment was not being honoured and that there was lingering opposition to automatic reselection procedures because it asked:

(a) Should a Selection Conference be mandatory in

all constituencies where there is a sitting Member of Parliament (except where the Member of Parliament has announced an intention to retire), or

- (b) Should the Constituency Labour Party have an option either
  - (i) to reselect the Member of Parliament without a Selection Conference with other nominees, or
  - (ii) to hold a Selection Conference with the full procedure, or
  - (iii) should each Constituency Labour Party hold a special General Committee meeting to first consider whether or not the Member of Parliament be reselected and, if not selected, the full procedure be set in motion?(31)

As a consequence of these questions from the National Agent the NEC established a Working Party in January 1978

- (a) To consider the questions set out in the paper prepared by the National Agent and other relevant questions

- (b) In accordance with the answers to these questions to consider what amendments to the Party Constitution and Rules should be proposed.(32)

This working party contained thirteen members, including four from the NEC Organisation Committee (Bryan Stanley, John Cartwright, Eric Heffer, and Ian Mikardo), three from the PLP (Sydney Irving, George Park and Jo Richardson), two trade union representatives (Moss Evans and Terry Duffy), one representative each from the Party Agents (Bill Alston), the Parliamentary candidates (Bernard Kissen) and the Co-operative Party (David Wise) and, finally, Ray Apps representing the CLP which moved the resolution. The Working Party was evenly divided between Left and Right although the Right was likely to be in a majority because of the disagreements on the Left over strategy. The final report of the working party revealed this division on the Left with three - Eric Heffer, Ian Mikardo and Moss Evans - agreeing to a mandatory meeting of the CLP to consider whether to invoke the full reselection procedures or not which contradicted the commitment made by Ian Mikardo at the 1978 Party conference. These three aligned themselves with the majority of the working party by rejecting the idea of automatic reselection procedures in every constituency with a Labour MP but offering CLPs the opportunity for reselection if they desired. Three members of the working party signed a minority report reaffirming their

commitment to automatic reselection procedures together with the retaining of the extraordinary dismissal procedures already provided in the Party's rules.(33)

CLPD's dilemma following circulation of the Working Party report to all the Party's affiliated bodies in May 1978 was whether to maintain its original demand, as advocated in the sixty seven resolutions to the 1977 Party conference, for an automatic reselection procedure to be invoked once in the lifetime of each Parliament, whether to support the compromise proposal of a reselection procedure where demanded by a CLP, or whether to support the minority signatories of the report who demanded both the automatic procedure once in the lifetime of each Parliament but also the retention of the powers to dismiss an MP at other times during the life of a Parliament. CLPD's position was made more difficult by the fact that the NEC Report to the 1978 Party conference did not contain the amendment to the constitution proposed in 1977 by the sixty seven organisations which had been automatically remitted to the NEC for report back the following year and therefore no advance warning was given to affiliated bodies that the debate at the conference would also include this original option. At the time that many affiliated bodies were determining their attitude on this issue it appeared as if the choice was between the majority and minority positions contained in the working party report and it was very likely that the majority position, containing as it did the support of both Right and Left members of the working party and two leading

trade union officials - Moss Evans and Terry Duffy - would prevail. Later the NEC admitted a mistake in not including the original constitutional amendment in its report to the Party conference and a supplementary report was published for conference delegates.

CLPD decided to stick by its original position but then had to ensure that in the vote to be taken at the 1978 Party conference its original constitutional amendment be taken before the NEC recommendation which incorporated the majority view of the working party because the TGWU and the AUEW, supporters of the principle of automatic reselection, would vote for the compromise proposal if that was taken first, thereby leading to a conference majority for this view and thus ruling out the possibility of automatic reselection. This necessitated considerable CLPD pressure on the NEC to advise the Conference Arrangements Committee of the desired order of business. This pressure succeeded in ensuring that one of the CLPD-sponsored amendments was voted on first at the end of the debate.

The debate itself was organised in a way that enabled conference delegates to choose one of three approaches on this subject, either the CLPD view of automatic reselection, or the NEC view of a mandatory CLP meeting to decide whether to proceed with the reselection procedure, or the commitment to both automatic and extraordinary reselection as reflected in the minority position on the working party. The CLPD position was made even more difficult by the fact that the NEC spokesman

spoke twice, introducing the NEC proposals and summing up the entire debate, that he suggested that the CLPD position would discriminate against union-sponsored candidates and that he claimed the NEC proposals to be more democratic because they gave the CLPs the democratic right to choose whether to reselect or not.(34) Furthermore, whilst opposition from the ranks of the PLP was not unexpected, two opposing contributions in particular posed a serious challenge. First, Joe Ashton, a member of the Tribune Group, appealed to trade unionists by arguing that automatic reselection would eliminate the rights of an MP to some form of job security, that it would result in fewer manual workers in the PLP, and that it would cause splits in approximately twenty five constituencies. Second, the Chief Whip, speaking in the debate very much as the PLP's shop steward stated:

I am very much concerned about the effect of automatic reselection, and you must look at this. Labour Members are subjected to far more strain in their job than Tories. The average Labour constituency is very much further away from Westminster. There is a great deal of travel. Most represent urban areas with very great problems, so there is a great deal of constituency work, both individual and in the constituency, on the wide range of problems. The uncertainty of an MP's life is made very much worse if he does not know what his position is going to be. What is going to happen when local parties put pressure on a Member?(25)

Notwithstanding the procedural difficulties that had confronted CLPD and the political opposition to its proposal which had been voiced during the debate, pre-debate tallies of trade union and CLP support appeared to suggest the chance of victory but the votes cast by the AUEW destroyed this possibility.



The AUEW delegation had considered the issue at its customary pre-Conference delegation meeting and had decided by twenty-five votes to twenty-two to support the CLPD position. Hugh Scanlon, known to be unsympathetic to this position, recalled the delegation prior to the debate but again it voted by twenty-five votes to nineteen in favour of automatic reselection, but the AUEW vote was not cast in favour of Amendment 1 (the CLPD position) and this was defeated by 3,066,000 to 2,672,000 votes. Hugh Scanlon immediately rose on a point of order and claimed that he had not voted for this amendment because he believed that another composite resolution was to be voted upon which incorporated the CLPD position. Scanlon's confusion seems difficult to accept when the Chairman of the Conference had made quite clear on three occasions the procedure to be adopted.(36) As a consequence of Scanlon's failure to cast the AUEW vote in the manner decided by the delegation, the vote was then taken on the NEC proposals which were carried by 4,081,000 to 2,519,000 votes.(37)

It was after this setback that CLPD's commitment and organisation was most impressive. An inevitable feeling of dispirited resignation prevailed amongst many of the supporters of this reform after the Party Conference with them thinking that the compromise proposal was at least some form of improvement and also that there was little chance of overturning this new set of rules. However, CLPD continued to mobilise active support for the principle of automatic reselection during the next twelve months.

Its campaign was centred around reopening discussion on the reselection issue at the 1979 Party conference. To overcome the hurdle of the 'three year rule' it had to persuade affiliated organisations to submit a large number of resolutions to the NEC demanding reconsideration of the subject, and then a similar large number of resolutions for the Party conference. In this campaign it set out to mobilise support within the CLPs and trade unions, at the regional Party conferences, at the national Women's conference, at the Co-operative Party conference, and within the NEC itself.

Three weeks after the annual conference CLPD sent out a letter to all its individual supporters advising that they move 'model' resolutions to be sent to the NEC and the regional conferences asking that the reselection issue be debated at the 1979 Party conference. By March 1979 CLPD's efforts had narrowly failed, when the NEC defeated by eleven votes to ten a proposal from its Organisation Committee that the 'three year rule' be waived, but the NEC did add the rider that "if branches and parties continued to show strong support for automatic reselection, there was still time for it to approach the Conference Arrangements Committee".(38) By May two regional conferences - Greater London and the North East - had passed the CLPD resolutions demanding that the subject of automatic reselection be again debated at the next Party conference. When in June the NEC Organisation Committee again proposed that reselection be debated CLPD sent out the following letter marked "very urgent" to all

its individual supporters:

The full NEC will be considering this recommendation in about two weeks' time and it is crucial that maximum pressure is brought to bear on the NEC now. The forces are very evenly balanced and immediate action is needed... We therefore ask you to raise that matter as an emergency at your Trade Union Branch, Labour Party Branch and/or CLP and urge them to write immediately to the NEC along the following lines:

"this Branch/CLP welcomes the recommendation made by the Organisation Subcommittee of the NEC that the issues of Reselection and method of election of Party leader be placed on the Agenda of the 1979 Annual Conference, and urges the full NEC to support this recommendation."

...In the past, individual letters to waverers on the NEC have proved extremely effective. In the present context this appears to include Michael Foot, Judith Hart, Lena Jeger, Joan Lestor and Renee Short. Your help now may make all the difference.(39)

In July the NEC agreed that the issue should be debated again at the Party conference although even then this decision was not to CLPD's complete liking since the NEC had agreed that the issue should be discussed and not the constitutional amendments as contained in 'Amendment Number 1' debated at the 1978 Party conference. Thus CLPD was likely to be faced with the '1968 rule' on constitutional change yet again. To meet this twenty-one CLPs submitted a CLPD 'model' amendment demanding the waiving of the '1968 rule' in order that the constitutional change which was proposed in a CLPD 'model' resolution submitted by twenty CLPs could be debated and, if passed, implemented in 1979.

Two composite resolutions were debated at the Party conference. One, drafted by CLPD, first asked the conference to waive the '1968 rule' and debate the constitutional amendments submitted whilst the second supported the principle of reselection and asked the NEC to bring forward subsequent constitutional amendments.(40) This second composite was moved by two members of the Militant Group and CLPD was worried lest some trade union leaders with mandates in favour of reselection would support this composite rather than the first since this would delay implementation for a further year and give opponents the opportunity to marshal their forces for another debate at the 1980 conference. CLPD pressure to withdraw this composite failed, however, and further antagonised the relationship between CLPD and Militant, especially when Militant claimed the success for the reselection decision after the conference.

Nevertheless even with this division over tactics the CLPD-sponsored motion was passed by 4,008,000 to 3,039,000 votes(41) and the subsequent vote on the constitutional amendment was passed by 4,521,000 to 2,356,000 votes.(42) The CLPD campaign on this specific issue had eventually succeeded six years after the group's formation and five years after the campaign had been mounted in a systematic manner.

The adoption of this automatic reselection procedure did not prove to be the immediate challenge to incumbent MPs as some members of the PLP feared. Two problems regarding the procedures to be adopted in

implementing the decision delayed and limited the reselection process.

The first problem, a relatively minor technical hitch, was the advice given to the NEC by its legal advisers that the 1979 constitutional amendment was unsatisfactory and required redrafting. Accordingly the NEC presented a revised amendment before the 1980 Party conference. This enabled the opponents of mandatory reselection to debate the subject further in an attempt to defeat the proposal. One trade union consistent in its support for the Right - the Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff (APEX) - had a resolution on the agenda calling for the implementation of the optional reselection procedure, the original compromise proposal recommended by the majority of the Working Party in 1979 and this was debated at the conference but the NEC amendment was carried by, 3,798,000 to 3,341,000 votes.(43)

The second problem concerned the guidelines issued by the Party's national Agent on the conduct of the reselection procedure which threatened to undermine CLPD's long and successful campaign. In December 1980 the NEC Organisation Committee agreed that a short list of one candidate was permissible, which might enable an incumbent MP to avoid a contest with other candidates. Intensive lobbying of the subsequent NEC meeting by CLPD Officers persuaded a majority of its members that such a procedure could undermine the element of choice, and thus the principle of political accountability, which reselection

offered. So the NEC returned the recommendation to the Organisation Committee for reconsideration but this sub-committee reaffirmed its view by six votes to five, with its Chairman abstaining.(44) Again the NEC referred the issue back to the Organisation Committee by fourteen votes to thirteen.(45) After the Organisation Committee reaffirmed its position for the third time the following meeting of the NEC decided that "the reselection procedure should follow the practice normally adopted for ordinary selection conferences" (46), namely of more than one person being put forward for consideration. However, evidence in the following months of constituency Executive Committees recommending shortlists of one, often under pressure from the Party's regional organising staff, prompted the NEC in May 1981 to agree by fifteen votes to nine that local parties should be advised that it would not be the normal practice to have a short list of one when other names had been submitted.(47) CLPD believed that "attempts to sabotage reselection through the 'manufacture' of short lists of one" were occurring and therefore demanded that the NEC be instructed that "shortlisting shall only be authorised where the number of nominees makes it necessary."(48)

Eventually this matter was discussed at the 1982 Party conference, and a CLPD-sponsored resolution calling for the NEC not to endorse candidates selected from shortlists of one, except where one person alone was nominated, was overwhelmingly defeated on the NEC's recommendation.(49)

CLPD was right to regard this shortlisting procedure as a means of protecting some incumbent MPs from a genuine reselection contest(50), nevertheless this was a relatively minor procedural modification to the principle of reselection and did nothing to undermine the shift in power from parliamentarian to Party activist which had occurred when reselection had been introduced.

Before considering the group's strategy in achieving its success three points of general interest affecting the Labour Left should be noted. First, the issue of the mandatory reselection of Labour MPs highlighted divisions within the Labour Left which makes it difficult to write of 'a party within the Party' as an organised and united segment of opinion. Not all of those persons normally associated with the Labour Left on political issues supported the principle of mandatory reselection.(51) Debates on the topic tended to reveal these differences of opinion. Perhaps the most striking example of the tensions that this issue caused within the Left was on the occasion of the elections for the constituency section of the NEC in 1978, when Ian Mikardo a long-time and leading figure in the Labour Left was replaced by Dennis Skinner. Mikardo had been involved in attempts to find a compromise position on this issue whilst Skinner had been a leading spokesman for mandatory reselection.

Second, this issue revealed the tensions between the Labour Left inside and outside Parliament. The initiative on this issue was taken primarily by the extra-

parliamentary Left. At times this tension became public as, for example, when the leading figure in the campaign, Vladimir Derer stated that:

Tribune, like the majority of members of the Parliamentary Tribune Group, has always been deeply suspicious of the attempt by rank-and-file Labour Party members to use re-selection as a means of democratic accountability.(52)

Third, this issue caused argument within the extra-parliamentary Left over the strategy to be adopted. Bitter accusations regarding the tactics of the Militant Group were made by the CLPD leadership at the Party conference briefing meetings of 1978 and 1979.(53)

#### The group's strategy

"Constituency Labour Parties are the fuse and the Trade Unions are the bomb"

(CLPD Officer in interview with the author)

CLPD strategy was to bring pressure on the Party leadership by mobilising the dismay of many individual Party members over the performance of Labour Governments, by harnessing this dismay to the unease of many trade unionists at the industrial policies adopted by the Labour Government from 1976 onwards, and thereby to build up majority support for its position at the Party conference. For over six years the main focus of CLPD's campaign was the annual Party conference. It concentrated upon building



up commitment within the constituency and trade union branches which would then be reflected in the debates and votes at the Party conference. It also put pressure upon the NEC both to support the principle of automatic reselection and to determine the conference agendas in a manner favourable to the group but in order to sustain the issue and ensure that it was debated at the Party conference it had to campaign at all levels and in all segments of the Party.

#### Constituency Labour Parties

During the period 1973-79 the group was strikingly successful in persuading a large number of CLPs to adopt CLPD 'model' resolutions as their annual submission for the Party conference. CLPD circulated these 'model' resolutions to its individual and affiliated membership in May of each year leaving the individuals then to argue the merits of the resolutions in their respective branches and General Management Committees. A total of one hundred and thirty one CLPs submitted one or more CLPD-inspired resolutions sometime between 1975 and 1979 on the specific issue of candidate reselection. The 1977 conference agenda contained the CLPD model resolution submitted identically by sixty-seven CLPs.

Table 3

CLPD-SPONSORED RESOLUTIONS TO LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE(54)

YEAR	NUMBER
1975	12
1976	40
1977	67
1978	25
1979	50

CLPD's success in persuading CLPs to submit these resolutions was remarkable when one considers the technical nature of the 'model' resolutions which were unlikely to inspire much emotion or socialist rhetoric when being debated in competition with other resolutions at meetings of GMCs called to decide upon their conference resolution. Furthermore, the fact that the NEC was seen to be putting forward a compromise in 1978 made the group's task more difficult and then the fact that this compromise was approved by the Party conference due to the miscasting of a vital trade union vote might well have led CLPs to abandon the issue in 1979. CLPD maintained its pressure and for the 1979 Party conference twenty one CLPs submitted the group's model constitutional amendment on candidate reselection, whilst a further twenty nine CLPs submitted a general resolution or amendment on the subject in line with CLPD instructions. In 1979 CLPD's organisation of motions was crucial because only the demonstration of CLP's continuing concern with this issue forced the NEC to reconsider its earlier decision not to debate the issue again at the conference.

Trade Unions

CLPD consistently recognised the importance of the trade unions in the Labour Party's internal power structure. It recruited trade unionists as affiliated or individual members of the group and it attempted to organise trade union support by means of individual informal contact with both leading trade union officers and individual trade unionists as well as more formal contact with those trade union branches likely to be sympathetic, and by intensive lobbying at trade union conferences through fringe meetings and leafletting. The importance of the group's trade union work is reflected in the fact that it established a trade union officer on its Executive Committee and created a Trade Union sub-committee specifically for the purpose of increasing trade union contacts and support. This CLPD activity within the trade union was concerned with winning the votes of the trade union delegations at the Party conference. The fact that key trade unions such as the Transport and General Workers' Union, the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, the National Union of Public Employees and the National Union of Mineworkers cast votes at the Labour Party conferences in favour of the principle of automatic reselection is testimony to the activities of CLPD since many trade union leaders' initial response on this subject was to regard it as an internal Party matter of limited importance. Other trade unions that cast votes in favour of the CLPD position were the Association of Scientific,

Technical and Managerial Staff (ASTMS), the Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Section of the AUEW (TASS), the National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers (NUAAW), the Firebrigades Union (FBU), and the Bakers Union. Certain trade unions consistently opposed the group's objectives including the General and Municipal Workers Union (GMWU), the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union (EETPU), the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) and the Post Office Engineering Union (POEU).

Trade union voting behaviour at Labour Party conference is dependent upon a set of influences ranging from the decisions taken at each individual trade union conference or in the executive committees down to the deliberations of the trade union delegations themselves at the Party conference. The problems faced by CLPD in its campaign to win trade union support can be highlighted by the example of the voting behaviour of the NUM delegation to the 1979 Party conference which decided not to support a procedural motion calling for a vote on the constitutional amendments implementing automatic reselection even though its own union conference had voted in favour of the principle of reselection at its 1978 and 1979 conferences. Joe Gormley, the NUM President, convinced the delegation that notwithstanding the union commitment the procedural motion to by-pass the '1968 rule' should be opposed.

An important contributory factor in winning some

trade unions' support for the principle of Party democracy and for the specific proposal of the automatic reselection of Labour MPs was that the issue of democracy and accountability of leaders was of immediate relevance in their own internal affairs. For example, NUPE was one of the first trade unions to support CLPD and it was involved in a major reorganisation in 1975 in an attempt to improve its democratic structure. Democratic accountability of Labour MPs fitted in well with the new-found enthusiasm for democratic accountability within the union itself.

It was on the two largest affiliated trade unions that CLPD concentrated its attention. By establishing contact with the individual branches of the TGWU and by the help of sympathisers within the union it was possible to secure the support of two of the TGWU regional committees in 1977. At the union's biennial conference in 1977 six resolutions were submitted in support of automatic reselection and CLPD sent a member to lobby delegates throughout the week, but the issue was not debated due, in part, to the opposition of the union's General Secretary, Jack Jones. Therefore pressure had to be put on the union's General Executive Council. CLPD was in contact with senior officials within the union such as Moss Evans and Alex Kitson and this strategy of winning over the officials was assisted by the fact that one of the CLPD's Vice-Presidents was Walter Greendale, a leading lay-member of the TGWU. At the 1979 biennial conference twenty one resolutions on reselection were on the agenda and this time a debate resulted in the TGWU's commitment

to support the demands for an automatic reselection procedure.

CLPD's campaign within the AUEW was aided by the existence of a well-organised Left faction which was committed to the principle of greater accountability of parliamentarians. The split between Left and Right on the National Committee within this union was close but in 1978 and 1979 a small majority within the AUEW delegation to the Labour Party conferences was in favour of automatic reselection.

#### The annual Party conference

The culmination of this continuous lobbying process within all sectors of the extra-parliamentary Party throughout the year was the 'compositing' advice given to the organisations sponsoring CLPD 'model' resolutions and amendments and the advice given to all sympathetic conference delegates. The first occurred during September when the Final Agenda for the conference had been published. From all the resolutions and amendments CLPD Officers drew up 'model' composites, would then discuss these in the weeks running up to the conference with sympathetic organisations from amongst those who had submitted resolutions or amendments, and would then be on hand outside the hall in which the compositing meetings were to take place to offer last-minute advice.

The CLPD would hold a rally on the Sunday

afternoon, after the composite resolutions had been agreed and published, and before the start of conference proceedings on the Sunday evening or Monday morning. This rally was a working 'briefing' meeting rather than a star-studded show, as for example has been the Tribune rally later in the same week. The meetings have always begun with one or two NEC representatives (usually Joan Maynard and Dennis Skinner) giving details of the latest happenings within the NEC before they departed to the traditional Sunday afternoon meeting of the NEC. Then it has been usual for a prominent trade unionist to speak in order to dispel any feeling among trade union delegates that Party democracy was purely a matter for the CLPs to discuss.(55) These first prominent speakers would also help to attract the large audience which was necessary for fund-raising purposes. Then, however, it was down to the real business of briefing delegates on the necessary action to be taken in dealing with the Conference Arrangements Committee report on the conference agenda, in supporting composite resolutions (in particular not to be trapped into supporting resolutions which might appear to be supportive but which would undermine the campaign(56), and in developing the arguments to be used by movers, seconders and others in support of the resolutions. This part of the meeting was in the hands of experienced members of the group. It was well-conducted, specific in detailed advice and of considerable value, especially to the new delegates unaware of the pitfalls and dangers of conference procedure.(57)

### Conclusions

CLPD's immediate objective was secured in defiance of the Party leadership and the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party, in spite of the divisions within the Labour Left over both the principle of reselection and the strategy for its achievement, in spite of the use of procedural devices at the annual Party conferences by the group's opponents and the breaking of mandates, intentionally or mistakenly, by certain trade union leaders in the casting of votes at the annual Party conferences. In the light of powerful and sustained opposition the group's success was remarkable and shows how a group with a specific objective, operating within the Party at a time when 'greater democracy' drew widespread support due to the performance of Labour in Office, could use this prevailing political mood to maximise its advantage and could succeed so long as it was willing to organise its support. Vladimir Derer, the group's secretary, has summed up the success in the following manner:

...our experience in CLPD has shown that in the context of the present party structure, important advances towards the achievement of Labour's goals can be made. But an indispensable condition for such an advance is a massive pressure by the rank and file. Such pressure rarely - if ever - emerges spontaneously. A concerted effort by party activists must act as a catalyst.(58)

CLPD acted as the catalyst in the move to redistribute



power between the PLP and the constituency Labour Parties.

What made the success even more remarkable was that the group managed to overcome the disappointment and disillusion which occurred after the 1978 Party conference when Hugh Scanlon miscast the AUEW vote in such a crucial way as to defeat the proposal for automatic reselection at the moment when it appeared that group success was likely.

Four reasons can be advanced for CLPD's success. First, it capitalised on the disillusion widespread within the Party based upon the belief that the Party leadership would fail to implement the policies which had been drawn up by the National Executive Committee and approved by the Labour Party conferences. This had been the experience between 1966 and 1970 when the Labour Government ignored certain key Party conference decisions. This disillusion was reinforced first by Harold Wilson's decision to campaign for a 'yes' vote in the 1975 EEC referendum notwithstanding NEC and Party conference opposition to the terms of entry into the EEC, and second by decisions taken from 1976 onwards by the Callaghan Administration, especially in the fields of public expenditure, employment and wages policies, which ignored NEC and Party conference opinion. This disillusion was not confined to any particular faction or to any particular section of the Party: it extended beyond the Labour Left and it affected the trade union movement as well as the constituency parties.

A second reason for the CLPD success was the manner in which it capitalised on this general disillusion

amongst Party members. It used organisational skills in a manner exceedingly rare amongst Labour factions. It should be noted that CLPD depended upon the dedicated efforts of a very few individuals with no professional, full-time assistance. Whereas other groups on the Labour Left have secured grants from the Rowntree Trust to pay for office and secretarial services CLPD was turned down by this charitable trust on three occasions - the reason given was that the group was too successful! Even with limited resources the group's output was very impressive and no other group in the Party during this period organised in as consistent a manner as CLPD. Only one other group, the Campaign for Democratic Socialism, on the Labour Right, compares in organisational ability in the history of Labour factionalism and that group had the indirect support of the Party leadership and the Party machine at Transport House.

A third factor in explaining CLPD's success was the development of the dispute between the Newham North East CLP and its Member of Parliament, Reg Prentice, which dragged on throughout 1975 and 1976 and which added force to the group's arguments. The fact that there was considerable media attention on the dispute, the great bulk of it supportive of Prentice and critical of the constituency Party officers, the fact that a small group of people used the Law Courts in an attempt to defend Prentice, the fact that the Party Leader along with one hundred and eighty members of the PLP signed a letter in defence of Prentice whilst Roy Jenkins and Shirley

Williams spoke at a public meeting in the constituency in support of Prentice, highlighted the issue of reselection and helped crystallise the arguments in a manner favourable to the group since it appeared that a sizeable segment of the PLP showed little regard for the views of the Party membership but preferred to support an MP whose opinions were hostile on certain issues to those being expressed as Party opinion at the Labour Party conferences. CLPD constantly suggested that the political behaviour of members of the PLP should be closely scrutinised and they should be regularly accountable to Party activists for their behaviour. Clearly the experience of the Prentice dismissal and his subsequent declaration of support for the Conservative Party so soon after being a Labour Minister had a considerable political impact within the Labour Party upon which CLPD capitalised.

A fourth factor contributing to CLPD's success was the strategy of Labour's Right. Although CLPD officers were associated with the Labour Left the campaign drew on wider support. CLPD was assisted in drawing this support by the behaviour of the Right in the PLP which appeared to be arrogant and disdainful of constituency party activists: this manner was exemplified in its most explicit form by the behaviour of Reg Prentice. Others, whilst not going so far as Prentice in refusing to meet his constituency delegations and publicly disassociating himself from his constituency party activists' opinions, nevertheless made clear their belief that constituency

party activists were unrepresentative of political opinion and should not be taken too seriously.

The Right also made a serious miscalculation in opposing the demand for automatic reselection. For a long time in this battle the Right opposed any alteration to the procedures for reselection. For example, the Campaign for Labour Victory argued that automatic reselection would result in MPs becoming "the puppets of a few party activists"(59) and Denis Healey suggested that they would become "grovelling zombies... (subject) to the arbitrary dictates of self-appointed caucuses which meet in secret".(60) The Right appeared to be limiting the democratic rights of the individual Party member and it only argued in favour of extending the numbers participating in CLP selection/reselection conferences to all individual Party members when it appeared that it was losing the struggle. But the right could have afforded to support the reform since party activists had in the past displayed only a limited concern with the ideological position of the contestants and rather more concern with the contestants' political experience and speaking abilities.(61) More concern was being shown in the nineteen seventies with contestants' political opinions but it was possible for a conscientious and responsible MP of either Right or Left, intent on maintaining good relations with his/her constituency party activists, to succeed at a reselection meeting.(62)

Victory was achieved because of a broad base of Party support, Left organisational skills and right wing

arrogance and ineptitude. This successful campaign had taken six years but the momentum for further Party reform was now considerable, fuelled by the Labour Government's policies, the tenor of Labour's election manifesto and its election campaign, and Labour's subsequent election defeat. This momentum resulted in the creation of a powerful Left alliance demanding further Party reforms and a campaign to remove the Party Deputy Leader, Denis Healey - a senior figure on the Party Right closely identified with the Labour Government's policies - and elect in his place Tony Benn.

FOOTNOTES

1. J. Morgan (ed) The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman, p.42.
2. CLPD Original Statement, 1973.
3. CLPD Progress Report, 1973.
4. CLPD Campaign Newsletter, 2, May/June 1975, p.2 (the author's emphasis).
5. CLPD Campaign Newsletter, 13, September 1978, p.2.
6. CLPD Bulletin, 1, September 1981, p.8.
7. C. Mullins & C. Atkins How to Select or Reselect your MP, p.5.
8. ibid, p.7.
9. M. Meacher Tribune, September 25, 1981.
10. See, for example, in Chapter four the views expressed by some delegates in Newham North East CLP to which the Labour candidate James Dickens took exception.
11. Peter Price, the delegate from Sheffield Brightside CLP, speaking in the debate on candidate reselection at the 1974 Party conference. LPACR, 1974, P.173.
12. CLPD Progress Report, 1973.
13. At no time has CLPD established a branch structure which might have made it more vulnerable to official Party displeasure for breaking the constitution.
14. Source: CLPD annual reports.
15. Source: CLPD annual financial reports.
16. Frank Allaun was CLPD's first President. Joan Maynard replaced him in 1975 and remained in this position until 1983 when she was removed during the divisions within the group and was replaced by Alan Sapper. Vice-Presidents have included Jo Richardson, Ernie Roberts and Audrey Wise.
17. The posts have included Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons (3), Secretary, Treasurer, Assistant Secretaries (2), Registrar of Supporters, Minute Secretaries (3), Press Officer, Publicity Officer, Trade Union Organisers (2), Press correspondence Secretaries (3), Newsletter Circulation Manager, Meetings Promoter, Conference Meeting

Organiser and Legal Advisor.

18. Clause 5, II. CLPD Constitution.
19. For example in 1982 the annual report notes that Vera Derer put in 508 hours work during the year, Heather Gaebler 303, Victor Schonfield 231 and Andy Harris 1.5.
20. Secretary's Report to 1985 AGM, p.4.
21. LPACR, 1974, p.332.
22. ibid., p.170.
23. ibid, p.181.
24. ibid., p.182.
25. The Party constitution stipulated "When the Annual Party Conference has by Resolution, made a declaration of a general Policy or Principle, no Resolution or Motion concerning such Policy or Principle shall appear on the Agenda for a period of three years from the time such declaration was made, except such Resolutions or Motions as are, in the opinion of the National Executive Committee, of immediate importance." The Constitution and Standing Orders of the Labour Party, Standing Order 2(6). This standing order was deleted in 1979 but in 1981 a 'three year rule' was reintroduced to cover constitutional amendments. See Standing Order 2(7).
26. LPACR, 1976, p.137.
27. Labour Party Agenda for the 76th Annual Conference of the Labour Party, 1977.
28. LPACR, 1977, p.163.
29. ibid., p. 324.
30. loc.cit.
31. National Agent's letter to NEC Organisation Committee (NAD/109/12/77).
32. LPACR, 1978, p.443.
33. Ray Apps, Bernard Kissen and Jo Richardson.
34. NEC spokesman's speech LPACR, 1978, pp.273-275 & pp.280-281.
35. Michael Cocks ibid., p.279.
36. ibid., p.271, p.273 & p.275.
37. ibid., p.282.

38. Reported in Labour Weekly, March 2, 1979.
39. CLPD Letter to individual supporters, June 12, 1979.
40. For the wording of the two resolutions see LPACR, 1979, pp.262-263 & pp.264-265.
41. ibid., p.271.
42. ibid., p.272.
43. LPACR, 1908, p.142.
44. NEC Organisation Committee Minutes, January 1981.
45. NEC Minutes, January 1981.
46. NEC Minutes, February 1981.
47. NEC Minutes, May 1981.
48. CLPD Letter to individual supporters, June 1981.
49. The CLPD-sponsored resolution was defeated by 4,780,000 to 1,846,000 votes. LPACR, 1982, p.75.
50. CLPD highlighted three instances of CLP selection conferences in which the Executive Committees had recommended exclusion of other nominees than the incumbent MP. These occurred in West Bromwich West, Cardiff South East, and Pontefract and Castleford.
51. For example, Joe Ashton voiced his opposition in public but others, such as Stan Newens were opposed but did not express their doubts in too public a manner.
52. Letter in Tribune, May 19, 1978.
53. Based upon the author's own observations from attending these 'briefing' meetings.
54. Calculated by the author. This table may underestimate CLPD support since some resolutions might not have been included in the Party's Agenda because the Conference Arrangements Committee had excluded them under the 'three year rule'. Not all of the CLPD-sponsored 'model' resolutions proposed an amendment to the Party constitution concerning candidate selection: some dealt with the 'three year rule' or the '1968 rule'. CLPD had to bypass these two constitutional rules in order to debate the substantive issue of candidate reselection.
55. It has often been a speaker from the NUM. For example, Arthur Scargill spoke in 1976 but after he used his speech to advocate proportional representation in elections he was not invited again until 1981. Instead Eric Clarke, the Scottish NUM Secretary, has often spoken.



56. CLPD often found that Militant-backed composites could undermine the campaign since they could be used by trade union leaders to frighten union delegations into backing away from support.

57. Only in 1978 was the effectiveness of this part of the CLPD rally undermined by Pete Willsman who, in running the briefing session, managed to leave delegates in a very confused and bewildered state of mind.

58. Secretary's Report, CLPD AGM December 1979.

59. Labour Victory, 13, October 1979, p.1.

60. Labour Solidarity, 3(1), June 1981, p.4.

61. See A. Ranney Pathways to Parliament, pp.209-210.

62. Evidence of constituency Party activists' respect for a good constituency MP who worked closely with the local Party, even though there might be differences over political views, is provided during the reselection contests taking place in 1981. Dickson Mabon, Bruce Douglas Mann and George Cunningham were three Labour MPs who were reselected but then defected from the Labour Party.