Labour & Trade Union Review

May-June 1992 No.29

Price £1.50 (IR£1.80)

Goodbye To All That?

Labour after Kinnockism

Labour's Leadership, Student Politics and the Broad Left

Abortion and a Bill of Rights: an Irish warning

plus

Labour and the Unions
The Green Debate
Notes on the News
Trade Union Diary

Labour, Parliamentary Politics and the Mind of England

Roy Hattersley blurted out a basic political truth on BBC television at about 4am on the night of the General Election when the Tory victory was an accomplished fact. He said that what went on in the mind of the English people was beyond his comprehension. Although he said it in a moment of exasperation with the English people over the way they had voted, it was the truest thing he had said for a great many years. And it was a truth which applied to the other half of the 'dream ticket', and to most of the Labour front bench, no less than to himself.

The parting of the ways between the mind of England and the mind of the Labour leadership was not entirely Kinnock's work, but it was Kinnock, Charles Clarke and their entourage who made the divorce absolute. The process of separation began forty years ago with the resignation of Nye Bevan's group from the Labour Government in 1951.

Bevanism has now run its full course. It has been directly responsible for losing three of the four last elections. And its central strategy in the election it has just lost was to muzzle itself so as not to alienate the electorate. Kinnock seemed to realise that anything he said on the spur of the moment would lose him votes. He imposed a vow of silence on himself and hoped in that way to pass muster and get into Downing Street. The trick nearly worked.

The disability which Hattersley confessed to at four o'clock in the morning is about the greatest disability there could be in the leadership of a political party aspiring to govern the country. The English electorate must be the most objective and dispassionate in the world. And politicians who have no sense of affinity with it in respect of these qualities are unlikely to govern it.

In a bygone era there was two-way communication between the Labour leadership and the country through the activity of the Party. The ideological disposition towards unrealism amongst the leaders was held in check by social influences operating on them through the Party. But the organisational restructuring accomplished by Kinnock and his associates broke that connection between the Party and the country. A state of affairs came about in the Party in the late 1980s which was in fact a Politburo system.

To restore the connection between the Party and the country the changes made ten years ago need to be reversed. The election of a leader should once again be made the business of the Party in Parliament.

The electoral college has proved a disastrous failure. It is wrong in principle because Britain is governed by a Parliamentary system elected on the basis of first-past-the-post, and that system is now likely to continue for the foreseeable future. If the Tories had lost the election perhaps the constitution would have gone into the melting pot and the Parliamentary system would have been dissolved by the introduction of judicial sovereignty (e.g. a 'Bill of Rights') and PR. But the Tories won and therefore the existing system will continue.

The procedure for electing the Labour leader should therefore be brought back into line with the parliamentary constitution. The task of winning parliamentary elections should be restored to the body which has the strongest interest in winning them - the Party in Parliament.

Under the present system, organisations with other functions and preoccupations - the trade unions - have the major say in electing the Party leader. And Constituency Parties which fail to win elections are given an equal say with Constituency Parties which succeed. The principle of reinforcing success is not applied, even though that principle is every bit as valid in Parliamentary politics as in war. It is therefore not surprising that the three elections fought since this system was introduced have been lost.

In a bygone era the Labour Party used to be able to jeer at the Tory Conferences as sham affairs. But now the Tory Party is the more democratically organised of the two. The Kinnock succession to the leadership was decided behind the scenes by Michael Foot and a couple of trade union barons. The 'magic circle' has moved from the Tory to the Labour side. But, whereas the Tory magic circle was entirely preoccupied with the problem of gaining power in Parliament, the Labour magic circle is not.

The old relationship between the unions and the Party in Parliament was about the best that could be arranged. It left the unions free to exert policy pressure at the Party Conference, while leaving the Parliamentary Party free to use its wits to win elections.

The other basic change that needs to be made is to restore autonomy to the Constituency Parties. The Kinnock leadership has pretty well snuffed out the life of the Constituency Parties. We warned in our last editorial that this was likely to result in the actual Labour vote in the election being a few per cent down on the potential vote indicated by the opinion polls, and so it was.

The new Central Committee type of organisation has subverted the life of the Party. Members are now items listed on the central computer and the Branches are by-passed. And the Executive Committee now overrules decisions of Constituency Parties as a matter of routine.

There was a time when the Bevanites were for ever squealing about the disciplinary measures enforced by the 'Right' against them. But those disciplinary measures were as nothing compared with what we have seen since the mid-1980s. The Right of bygone times did not need to crush the life out of the Party in the course of leading it as the Kinnock leadership has needed to do. That was because the old Right knew where it stood, had a fairly coherent view of the world, and could exert influence by force of argument.

The Kinnock leadership - what was it, Left or Right? It was a kind of ultra-left socialism gone sour, and hoping to gain power by counterfeiting a Right position. It could exert no leadership by force of argument because in the last few years there was no reason in its position. It was all posturing and television glitz.

Kinnock has been credited with halting the decline in the fortunes of the Labour Party and bringing it back within sight of power. But it must be remembered that Kinnock was active for many years in the tendency which caused the decline. He is not somebody who stood out against the fashionable but misconceived radicalism of the late 1970s and early 1980s and then came into his own when that fantasy politics was seen to be leading the Party to disaster. If he had been, he would certainly have led the Party to power. He was always on the make, always going with the stream, always advancing his personal ambitions. The politicians who took a stand on principle, and went against the stream, were David Owen and Shirley Williams. And it was their resignation that caused the tide to turn in the Labour Party.

In the late 1980s Kinnock was expelling people for holding the positions he himself had held in the early 1980s. Therefore he had no moral influence, only bureaucratic power.

The chief sin of the Militant tendency was that it kept on saying in the late 1980s much of what Kinnock had been saying in the early 1980s. Of course the pretence was made that Militants were expelled because they had factional organisation. But there was a time when factional organisation was commonplace in the Labour Party, and the honest Right had the self-confidence to live with it. The factional behaviour of the Militant tendency came to seem extraordinary only because what had previously been the normal condition of Party life atrophied around the mid-1980s when the chorus of clones took over.

It should also be borne in mind that, as is explained in detail in an article in this issue, the Party hierarchy which was expelling Militants in the late 1980s included many who had cut their political teeth doing battle with Trotskyism on behalf of the Communist Party in the 1970s, and who continued to engage in this business in the 1980s because it was virtually the only thing they knew how to do, and because they needed a displacement activity of some kind to disguise their hopeless incompetence in matters of political substance.

The fact is that none of the lost elections can be put down to the influence of the Militant tendency. The policies and leadership of Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock, and the widespread feeling of distrust which they evoked, lost those elections. The Militants were never more than scapegoats.

This magazine is all for putting the past twenty years down to experience and starting afresh. But there will be no fresh start if the experience of the past twenty years is discounted with glib phrases. A fresh start is only possible if it is appreciated that the dominance of ideological fads associated with Michael Foot lost the 1983 election and that the retreat into slick blandness proved to be no remedy.

The Tory Party has never been bland, least of all since 1979. Thatcher represented one sort of extravagance, and Major represents another. And Major's is perhaps the more extraordinary. Against the advice of smart advisers and in defiance of opinion polls and media pundits alike he began arguing points of substance like a 19th century Liberal, and people listened.

The Labour Party is a party of the working class or it is nothing. With a political philosophy which people can grasp, and which makes possible the resumption of Branch life; with policies related to real problems; and with a structure which restores a proper autonomy and responsibility to the Party in Parliament, it can win elections again. □

Labour & Trade Union Review

Volume I Number 29 May - June 1992 ISSN 0953-3494

Address- editorial and subscriptions:
114 Lordship Road, London N16 OQP. Tel. 081-802-9482

Subscriptions: UK: £11.00 (individuals), Europe: £13.00 (individuals)
Rest of World: £15.00 (individuals).
Rates for institutional/multi-user subscribers available on application

Back issues available at current subscription rates
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Trade Union Diary

by Dave Chapel

In an interview with Michael Parkinson on LBC over Easter, John Edmonds denied that he and other union leaders wanted to rush the Labour leadership election, or 'bounce' John Smith into position.

On the contrary, he said, he wanted to delay the election as long as 1993 if necessary. I believe him. It was Mr. Kinnock who caused the election to be rushed.

Mr. Kinnock behaved in the same petulant, childish manner in defeat, as he behaved throughout his leadership of the Party.

It is true that the union leaders generally want John Smith to be the new leader. But there is no need for a "stitch-up". Almost everyone wants John to be leader. And it is no bad thing that the wishes of the majority coincide with the wishes of the electorate. It will be a nice change to have a leader who is not a public figure of fun.

The interesting election is that for deputy leader. Here a union "stitch-up" in favour of Margaret Beckett would be most unwelcome.

John Smith is a decent democratic socialist. He is easy on the public eye. He is accessible to party members. He is safe.

It would seem that the union leaders want to take the safety factor a step further and install a safe deputy as well.

The role of deputy leader would merely be to echo the leader. It is understandable that the unions may not wish to have Bryan Gould in that position. Mr. Gould is a cerebral, disconnected sort of person. He is also ambitious without having any clear idea as to what his ambitions should achieve - apart from power. Being deputy to John Smith would do the Party no favours at all.

The only candidate with any clear view of a specific role for deputy leader is John Prescott. As in his previous attempt to become deputy leader, he says the job should concern itself with Party organisation.

He claims that the details of organisation should not be the concern of the leader, whose job it is to become Prime Minister of the country.

How to Lose an Election

Mr. Kinnock took a very great interest in party organisation and made a complete mess of it. Indeed it was, in my opinion, Mr. Kinnock's disastrous handling of the Party's organisation which caused Labour to lose the General Election.

Mr. Prescott is the only Labour leader, to my knowledge, to publicly accept the organisational origins of the Party's defeat.

The defeat occurred, by general agreement, in voters' behaviour on the day of election. Labour did not get the vote out.

The opinion poll companies have now confirmed this view- obvious to many of us on the day. The pollsters have had to carry out an urgent and candid investigation into why they got it wrong. Their commercial future depended on an honest appraisal.

I concur with their position that, regarding voter intentions, they got it right. But on the day the voters, or a significant number of them, did not do what they intended.

Elections are very much decided by electoral skills and party organisation, by rigorous and realistic canvass returns, by numbers-taking at polling stations and by knocking-up of known supporters who have not gone to vote.

I have seen experienced Labour workers sidelined in this election by whizz-kids who thought they knew better. I have seen stalwart members disillusioned out of campaigning because of a leadership which disconnected itself from the local organisations and which often appeared to despise these local parties.

And above all, we have seen the roles of organising and recruiting removed from the branches and transferred to place-seekers and self-servers at Walworth Road. There are various estimates of the number of Party members lost because of this. But the conservative guess is 100,000, and in my experience these included many of the most active.

The result on election day (and on the preceeding canvassing days), was that the necessary troops on the ground were not there. And that those who were there did not always know what they were doing.

If the Trade Unions want Labour elected again, they must see that this issue is addressed. It will not necessarily be addressed by full- time Pary officials - no matter how well- meaning. They have to be overseen by a political figure with a mandate from the members and a committment to organisation.

I am not saying that Margaret Beckett could not fulfill this role. It is simply that she does not appear to see the role as necessary. John Prescott does.

Union Democracy

It would not matter greatly if the union leaders decided among themselves to give the union vote to John Smith as leader. Every one knows what the role of leader should be. And I assume that most of their members feel that John Smith is the man for the job.

But the role of Deputy Leader is a contentious matter. Is the Deputy Leader to be a support which the Leader can fall back on, or is it to be the position from which the Party organisation is to be rebuilt?

These are matters on which the future of the Party depends. It is intolerable that the candidates cannot seek the support of union members who pay the political levy.

The GMB is the only union, so far as I know, which is prepared to ballot its levy-paying membes. Much as I have criticised John Edmonds in the past, he is to be congratulated for this.

But what of Bill Jordan and Gavin Laird in the AEU? These two are forever prattling on about democracy and one-person-one-vote.

Like the T&GWU and others, they think they can get away with meaningless slogans like "the widest possible consultation". This is not good enough. Union membes must demand the vote. Candidates must be pressed to disown support from unions which do not carry out a ballot.

A Candid Look Back

Whatever the outcome, most Labour leaders have promised an investigation into the election and the preceeding years. I have no faith whatsoever in such promises.

It is not a moral criticism to say that there would be a whitewash or cover- up. The leaders have ambitions. They all took part in our recent dubious past. It would be unnatural for them to expose themselves by too much frankness.

We will only get to bottom of things by setting up a formal body to review the recent past. A formal body which can visit local parties and which can take evidence from groups and individuals.

I suggest that such a formal body should consist of respected people from all sections of the party who are themselves no longer pursuing office. People of the experience and calibre of Denis Healey, Peter Shore and Barbara Castle.

Roy Hattersley

Finally, this may be the appropriate point to comment on the outgoing deputy leader. Mr. Kinnock behaved predictably at this crucial juncture. But Roy Hattersley could have spared us the current farce. By not holding the fort until the Party Conference he is as much to blame as Mr. Kinnock.

Furthermore, his new self-appointed role as protector of the Party faith rings very hollow indeed. He has now denounced the triumph of glitz and glitter over politics.

He went along with all the glitz and glitter. Why did he not speak out when this issue mattered? Even the threat to speak out against the way our Party was being misled could have curbed the excesses of the spin-doctors and Walworth road careerists.

I am afraid Roy's place in the history of Labour was established on April 9th. It is too late to alter it now.

Review Article

Labour and the unions: lessons of experience

by Brendan Clifford

*Lewis Minkin: **The Contentious Alliance: Trade Unions and the Labour Party.** Edinburgh University Press, 1991, 704 pages, hardback, £65.00.*

The trouble with this enormous book is that it is not quite a reference work and not quite a political narrative. It would be much more useful if it was definitely one or the other.

The Labour movement in Britain at present has neither a theoretical nor a traditional orientation. The explosion of theoretical theory in the late 1960s and early 1970s blew apart whatever connection there had previously been between thought and accomplishment. It discredited experience as a basis of thought both in general terms and with reference to Labour politics. 'Political science' became the order of the day. The 'Labourism' or 'empiricism' of the wartime generation was scorned. But, while 'empiricism' had failed to deliver all that had been hoped for, it had accomplished something that lasted. Political science, on the other hand, not only failed to accomplish anything, but led to what Minkin calls 'disaster'.

Minkin mentions the disaster but does not in any sense explain it. He says:

"Jones and Scanlon retired in 1978. New union leaders, Moss Evans...and Terry Duffy...replaced them. The linkage of Party and union leaders remained close, but there was not the same personal authority and trust. In any case, the understanding went badly wrong in the period leading up to and following the announcement of the 5 per cent pay policy. The failure to hold an election in the autumn of 1978 after five of the Neddy Six had recommended it, undermined confidence. Above all, for a crucial period, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor failed to heed the warning from their union allies that the pay norm was too low, too rigid and likely to provoke a reaction from the members. After that came disaster.

The disaster was all the more significant because the 1970s were marked by ideological developments which were in the consequences momentous for the Labour Party and the unions.

These were difficult years for the ex-Revisionists. Still a majority among the political leadership, they...now had to face a realigned block vote and a major loss of power in the Party - without obvious issues upon which they could mobilise a counter-assault on the Left" (page 123).

Loss of an election is not of itself a disaster. Minkin does not specify why 1979 was a disaster. I would describe it as a disaster because it led to an internal collapse of the Labour movement and a breakdown of the political consensus favourable to the working class which Attlee and Bevin had established in 1945. And it seems to me that Callaghan's 5 per cent pay policy and failure to hold the election in 1978 are very insufficient in the way of causes to explain why Thatcher's 1979 victory led to the internal collapse of Labour and to two further Thatcher victories.

Minkin does not mention the Report of the Bullock Committee on Industrial Democracy in connection with the 'disaster' of 1979. That Report seemed to me at the time to be a watershed in British social development. What kind of watershed it would be depended on whether it was implemented or rejected, but either way it was a watershed and things would never be the same again. Labour and trade union power had become so great that British society could no longer encompass it as a protest movement. The working class would either take a decisive step towards becoming the ruling class - taking on all the complex problems which that entails - or it would be pushed back into a position of subserviency.

A combination of Left and Right in both the trade unions and the Labour Party made certain that the Bullock proposals were brushed aside. And Ken Coates, leader of the Institute for Workers' Control, who had been blathering about workers' control for ten or fifteen years, used his influence to kill it when Bullock put it on the agenda. It became clear that for him, as for socialist ideologists in general, workers' control was pie in the sky - a beautiful ideal which should not be tainted by any attempt to realise it.

Bullock's name does not even appear in Minkin's Index. But the Report is mentioned incidentally in a section entitled *"Jones'* (sic) *egalitarianism"* (pp. 173-4):

"Jones...opposed, and grew increasingly critical of, 'the talking shops' involved in the tripartite structure created after the Chequers meeting in November 1975. But locked into this structure, he found it difficult to seize any initiative, and Scanlon showed no interest in doing so. Indeed, on the Left's industrial policy, Scanlon's attitude varied from the evasive to the robustly dismissive.

This developing difference in approach between Jones and Scanlon was a feature of several policy areas...

The difference between them was most marked over industrial democracy. Jones deeply resented criticism from the Left that he was unconcerned with the wider Party purpose of 'a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power towards working people and their families'. For him, trade unionism and socialist values fused in the proposals for industrial democracy...

There is no doubt that once the first objectives of the TUC (the abolition of the Industrial Relations Act and its replacement by the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act and the Employment Protection Act) had been achieved, then industrial democracy moved to the forefront of Jones' concern.

The measure of the priority he gave to these proposals was the fact that, with support from Michael Foot, he was prepared to push for an immediate Bill in 1975, despite the fact that he knew that several other trade union leaders were sceptical, despite signs of hostility from sections of the Cabinet, and despite the fact that he knew that there was fierce opposition from the Treasury, from the City and from most employers. The opposition was strong enough to avoid commitment to an immediate Bill and a Commission of Enquiry was instituted as a delaying device. But renewed pressure from the TUC secured favourable terms of reference and a composition which shaped to a considerable extent the outcome of the report. Jones himself was a forceful member of the committee. The majority report with its '2 x plus y' formula was not the simple parity which Jones wanted but its principles...were near enough to those

of the TUC for it to receive a vitriolic response from the opponents of 'trade union power'. The Cabinet majority showed their own reservations and the result was a deadlock between the Ministers concerned. By this stage in 1977, Jones' own position was weakening and he could do little. At the time of his retirement the delayed Government White Paper was still awaited.

For Jones it was a major set-back; for Scanlon it was virtually an irrelevance. Though they had shared the platforms and auspices of the Institute for Workers' Control, there was a sharp difference of view as to what this involved. Scanlon had always doubted that there could be workers' control in a nationalised industry without 'the commanding heights of the economy' coming into public ownership. This view, traditional on the Left in the AUEW, was easily compatible with pure oppositional trade unionism in the early 1970s and just as easily shed in its entirety once the commitment to nationalisation itself had receded."

The 'fundamental and irreversible shift in wealth and power' is something I remember well, and I knew at the time that it was only a phrase. Insofar as it took any definite shape it was in the form of mere legislation. As Minkin says, *"Even the disappointing record of the second phase of the 1974-9 Labour Government...was not bereft of legislation and governmental measures welcome to the unions"* (page 655). But mere legislation is easily undone by more legislation, particularly when the group favoured by it becomes unpopular. The rights and privileges accorded to trade unions by Foot's legislation were easily done away with by Thatcher and replaced with penalties.

If the Bullock proposals had been implemented they would have become part of the structure of society, accomplished facts of social reality.

I did not at the time see the '2x + y' formula as second best. It meant equality of representation on boards of directors for shareholders and workers, the 'y' element being a chairman (and in larger firms a few technical experts) appointed from outside. I thought that was more in accordance with the British mode of development than providing for a workers' majority at the outset would have been, for reasons that I explained at the time. Given the demoralised condition of the capitalists at the time, it was a virtual certainty that wherever the workers applied themselves in earnest to the business of managing an enterprise they would quickly become the predominant influence in it. And if they did not apply themselves in earnest, what ground was there for putting them in control?

I recall that in **Tribune** and **New Left Review** in those times there was much chatter about 'Gramscian hegemony' and articles about 'What The Ruling Class Does When It Rules'. I don't suppose Ernie Bevin ever bothered his head with the concept of Gramscian hegemony. But he knew what a ruling class does when it rules, and there was a lot of working class hegemony in his sphere of influence. But when a Committee of Inquiry made proposals to establish workers in positions from which they might establish hegemony in industry, the theoretical theorists of hegemony all shied away and reverted to attitudes which implied a simple-minded and cataclysmic revolutionism. And Hugh Scanlon was at one with Frank Chapple on the issue.

'Left' and 'Right' ceased to have any effective political meaning at that juncture. And it mattered little that the 'ex-Revisionists' were facing a loss of power to the 'Left' because both had run out of perspective.

Barbara Castle's attempt to put trade-unionism on a footing of law designed sympathetically to its interest was opposed by a great agitation in the country, with the Communist Party at its head, and was shot down in Cabinet by Jim Callaghan, leader of the Right. That decade from **In Place of Strife** to the Bullock Report was a period when the harnessing of organised working class power to hegemonic social structures presented itself as the central problem of practical politics in Britain. A Left/Right combination wrecked every attempted solution (including that proposed by Ted Heath in the second phase of his Government). Eventually the utterly crude solution of Thatcherism was resorted to - and many of those who had wrecked the attempts at progressive solutions quickly adapted themselves to Thatcherism and grossly exaggerated its potential.

Minkin uses the terms 'Left' and Right' without giving them any specific meaning, and his bias is clearly towards the Left. But the great structural reform of 1945 was an achievement of the Right. And it is that reform which was so securely based that in 12 years of absolute power Thatcher could do nothing about it. The Left reforms of the 1970s were very easily reversed.

While Nye Bevan proved to be an excellent administrator when given the job of constructing the NHS, the political framework within which he became effective was an achievement of the Right with which Bevan had been at daggers drawn for many years before 1945.

Minkin mentions their dispute over the Beveridge proposals, but he does not explain what their conflicting views were or consider which was better calculated to achieve a lasting reform. It is many years since I read the material of that dispute. As I recall it, Bevin wanted to implicate Churchill and the Tories in enacting the Beveridge proposals. Bevan saw that as class collaboration and he wanted Beveridge to be made an antagonistic party issue. Bevin wanted to use the power the Labour Party held in the wartime Coalition to begin implementing the Beveridge reform during the life of the Coalition. He had known plenty of conflict in his time, and had become influential by the ability with which he had conducted his side of it. Now he wanted to use the power of Labour in the wartime Coalition to begin the enactment of a fundamental reform while the Tories were in no position to oppose it. Bevan, on the other hand, appeared to see party conflict as an end in itself, and was inclined to see a reform enacted by a Labour/Tory consensus as defeat and betrayal.

Minkin reflects as follows:

"It remains an intriguing historical question as to whether, in these unique external conditions of electoral radicalism, the Left could have organised and sustained a full-scale constitutional revolt which, like that of 1979, aimed to transform the distribution of power within the Party. Certainly at no other time in Labour Party history was the wider context so favourable" (page 66).

But if the Left had achieved its 1979 breakthrough in 1944, would 1945 ever have happened? The achievements of the 1979 reorientation suggest that it would not. And Minkin concedes that *"in Labour Party terms, this Leftwing advance suffered from several limitations. It was spearheaded in many cases by a Left outside the Party - the Communist Party, whose members were prohibited from participating at the Labour Party*

Conference" (page 67).

Minkin only mentions the Communist Party dimension incidentally, but it has perhaps been the most debilitating influence on the Labour Party over the past forty years. This is a strange oversight since it was precisely through the Trade Union/Labour Party connection that the Communist Party had a base in the Labour Party.

During the 1930s and 1940s a realistic programme of reform was conceived and implemented by the Attlee/Bevin tendency in the Labour Party. One has to take language as one finds it, and language says that the Attlee/Bevin tendency was Right wing - even though it conducted the most purposeful expenditure of working class political power ever seen in Britain.

Minkin takes Bevin as being representative of *"the anti-intellectualism of some trade unionists"* (page 14). In fact, Bevin had the most original and powerful intellect in the British Labour movement of his own or any other time. While he lived the Labour Party had a mind of its own. After he died it came increasingly under the influence of the Communist Party. The Kinnock leadership was thick with people who first made their mark as CP propagandists.

I came to the conclusion about 25 years ago that, despite all its 'theory', the Communist Party made purposeful thought about the real world impossible. That may have seemed paradoxical then. But it must now be recognised as the most obvious common sense, seeing how the world of Communist Parties has destroyed itself. And those who have proved to be so incompetent in the conduct of their own states have naturally not had a beneficial effect on the Labour Party.

The British Labour movement will only find its social bearings again when it comes to terms with the fact that its most substantial achievement in the way of social reform was accomplished by a form of politics which is customarily described as Right, and that the other wing of the movement, the Left, which has shaped the uses of language, has, when left to its own devices, been ineffective at best.

The relationship of the Party leadership to the trade unions on the one hand and to the Party activists on the other is not an abstract organisational matter. This complex of relationships works as a political party when there is competent and purposeful political leadership pursuing a realisable aim, and doesn't work when there isn't. It is not reducible to a clear organisational scheme. The business of the Labour leadership is to represent a great and permanent social interest in a way that enables it periodically to gain sufficient support from the fluctuating part of the electorate to form the Government. That will not be done in the Kinnock/Gould manner by presenting a bland 'image'.

(The second part of this book, covering the Kinnock period, will be the subject of a second article in a later issue of L&TUR. Ed.)

Green Culture and Commodity Production

by Madawc Williams

Between the 1760s and the 1940s, the middle classes in Britain totally undermined the existing culture of the nation. Commodity production - production in which money takes the place of social relationships - slowly but steadily grew in importance, and in the end changed everything

The middle class does not of course hold itself responsible for the predictable results of its own actions, even though they were warned about it many many times - by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Cobbett, Ruskin and many others. At the beginning of the process - when the 18th century gentry were carrying through great changes in agriculture - Oliver Goldsmith made his famous complaint:

Ill fares the land, to lingering ills a prey
When wealth accumulates and men decay..

But the bulk of the middle classes continued to undermine the existing order through their commercial activities, while finding various reasons for not deeming themselves responsible; deploring the whole process but blaming it on the failings of others.

Since the mid- 20th century, the British middle classes have lost much of their importance, and have become very much less distinct from the working class. The genuinely rich and powerful no longer bother much about the middle classes, but seek working class support instead. Thatcherism was based on the nouveau-riche teaming up with individualists among the skilled workers. Both of these groups did quite well out of Thatcherism, at least until Thatcher and Lawson managed to blunder and squabble their way into a recession. The middle class got very little out of it, and many previously secure middle class enclaves were undermined. Commodity production goes marching on, but has now outgrown the "bourgeoisie".

What has this to do with culture? Nothing, if you see culture as the isolated activity of superior souls. Peter Brooke (**Down in the Valley, L&TUR No. 28**) does mostly see it that way, even though he makes a few remarks which might imply something different. But I prefer to see culture as something that everyone participates in, the crude and basic life-blood of the society.

Culture in the narrow sense - superior works of long-lasting and perhaps eternal merit - is best ignored in policy debates. Not because such things are unimportant, but because they are unpredictable and uncontrollable. A few superior cultural products are passed on to future generations - a few hundred of the tens of thousands of novels published in the 19th century, for instance. No one can tell which hundred

out of the tens of thousands will be seen as valuable in the future, and no one should be vain enough to try.

The creation of "immortal works" is definitely not controlled by the "highly cultured" people of any particular era. Shakespeare's plays were seen as doubly vulgar by the educated - for being plays rather than poetry, and for ignoring the noble rules of drama handed down from Aristotle. Jane Austen was not rated particularly highly by her contemporaries: she was just one of a large group of female writers, far less popular with the public and the critics than was, say, Mrs Radcliffe. William Blake was mostly ignored: we have his poems only because he was a skilled printer who could publish works that no one else would have been likely to circulate. Coleridge was well regarded as a public lecturer, critic and philosopher, but not as a poet. He only ventured to publish **Kubla Khan** as a 'curiosity', supposedly composed during a dream. (This story is almost certainly false: among other things, a a less polished version of the poem turned up in a manuscript in Coleridge's handwriting, along with a less sophisticated and romantic version of how it was 'spontaneously' composed.)

If a writer like Coleridge could be forced to such ludicrous tricks to get public attention, how likely is it that any process of critical judgment will spot the really significant stuff? The production of artworks of permanent significance might as well be ignored, as totally beyond any sensible human control. And artists and writers are generally at their most silly and least significant when they suppose themselves to be saying something timeless and profound.

The only sensible approach to culture is to ensure its general health throughout the whole society, while preserving everything that might have some merit. Timeless values can be expected to look after themselves, and will do so anyway, no matter what "highly cultured" people think or try to do. Timeless values should be left alone, and the emphasis put on popularising serious well-crafted works, matters that each individual can in some small way either promote or retard. Culture is the sum of all such individual efforts, good or bad. Even the smallest contribution counts for something.

"Ill fares the land", said Goldsmith in **The Deserted Village**, a poem that has been treasured and preserved despite failing utterly in its main and immediate objective. The relatively stable rural society thatGoldsmith admired has gone completelIt was not an inevitable process - China preserved a stable mix of high urban culture and prosperous agriculture for more than 2000 years, and might have continued it indefinitely had European imperialism not disrupted it with opium, guns and free trade. But Western Europe had no true stability after the fall of the Western half of the Roman Empire. (The eastern half, Byzantium, was managing quite nicely until it was wounded by the Fourth Crusade and finally extinguished by Islam.) Western Europe was never able to settle down into any very definite or continuous cultural or social pattern, and in the end it extended its own instability to the rest of the world.

"Ill fares the land" - but has it in fact fared so ill? Would it have been better if Europe had stabilised itself at something like the 18th century level of development? Reading writers like Tobias Smollett, or even Goldsmith himself, I don't feel sorry that that particular social pattern didn't perpetuate itself. I don't think that such stability was impossible. 18th century Europeans, including Adam Smith, reckoned that China was a richer and in some ways better organised society than their own. China was stable: Europeans tried to achieve the same stability. But it didn't happen, and despite all the resulting damage and dangers I am very glad that it did not happen.

The recent election saw the "Green Party" reduced to much the same level as the Natural Law Party, which is where it belongs. British Labour has its own "green" tradition, existing long before anyone thought of using "green" for anything other than Irish Nationalism or Islam. Most notably we have William Morris, with his splendid vision in **News from Nowhere**. His boatman rows people along the because that's what his role in society is. There is no notion of payment. Morris's craftsmen are concerned merely with the creation of the beautiful, not supposing that they can find the transcendent except by accident.

News from Nowhere is a low-tech vision, but there is in fact no need to go that far. Commodity production ties us all to the accumulation of wealth and power, ploughing under all those who refuse to play the game, or who play it badly, or who are simply unlucky. Freed from the endless need to complete, we might concentrate on creating interesting, enjoyable work that was worth doing in itself and without material incentives.

Machines as such are not the problem. When steam engines were first introduced to pump water out of mines, there were no objections. Anyone who fails see why, should try operating hand-pump for a few hours and then imagine doing that all day, every day, for the whole of ones life. The objections, the "luddism", came when capitalists with machines began destroying the whole way of life of skilled handicraft workers. Hand craft as such need not be valuable or life-enhancing - eg tying identical fancy bows in identical ribbons all day. Skilled engineering work using machine tools is probably quite as creative as the work of medieval masons. (And it should be noted that the masons were creating stone propaganda for a repressive church. Also, a lot of what they built fell down again soon after. There was a sort of natural selection - if lasted a few years, try same again, only bigger, till the limit was reached.)

Computers have removed the need for many repetitive unskilled or semi-skilled tasks. There is the need once again for whole human beings. But there is also the problem - a problem we have had since the Bronze age, if not before - that ruthless exploitation and concentration of power is quite often successful. Had the Soviet Union taken a different and rather improbable turn in the 1960s, ie, become a green, clean, tolerant and democratic place, it still might have lost the global power struggle with the West. Might and right are very seldom the same thing. Commodity production is a very effective way of accumulating wealth, even though it will also produce vast and unpredictable changes in any society that allows it.

On the other hand, there is a widespread feeling that an 'epoch of rest' and a cleaning-up of the environment would be the logical next stage, now that industrial society can meet all ordinary needs and many extra-ordinary ones. No one nation can do it alone, but globally it *could* be done. Maybe even Western Europe alone could do it, which is why the Green Party's anti-EC policies are so foolish.

A Green World - with a 'spiritual dimension' as an optional extra - should be the long-term goal for Labour. □

Abortion And A Bill Of Rights:

An Irish Warning

by Angela Clifford

The defeat of Labour in the April General Election will bring to the fore those politicians who look to progressive change coming, not from the arduous long-term task of building labour organisation and coherence, but through manipulation of the instruments of government. Their views are dangerous and reactionary as they presuppose an elite quietly managing public life, but they are cloaked in the language of reform—of Bills of Rights, People's Charters, Constitutional Reform, Judicial Protection, etc. etc. Just how dangerous this line of development is, is shown by *Ireland Versus X*, the Court Case in which a suicidal 14-year-old rape victim and her family were made to return from England where they had gone to get the termination which was illegal in the Republic of Ireland, and face first a High Court hearing and then a Supreme Court appeal, before they were able to continue the course on which they had embarked.

Leaving aside the human issues of Ireland Versus X (which have been discussed in the Cork-based **Church & State** magazine and in the Dublin-based **Irish Political Review**, both available through Athol Books, 10 Athol Street, Belfast, BT12 4GX), that Case is of extraordinary interest to those who want to see progressive social development. It shows how, by means of 'interpreting' a written Constitution containing abstract "rights", the existing but undefined rights and liberties of individuals can be removed at a stroke by a small number of Judges—judges who command legislative powers superior to Parliament and who have at their disposal the entire punitive array of the State.

The people who advocate Bills of Rights so ardently fail to point out that the grand-sounding "Rights" they put forward must be given a practical application and that this involves giving the Courts a legislative function which will supersede that of Parliament. Under a Bill of Rights the Courts will be able to interfere in the lives of individuals to an unprecedented extent, as the Ireland Versus X Case shows. The working class, in the past, has shown a healthy distrust of the Courts and the people who man them, but these instincts seem to be lacking in those carried away by abstractions.

Inventing Law

Ireland Versus X showed how the Courts make new law. The High Court stated that people could be prevented from leaving the Republic, although no legislation controlling people's right to travel had ever been passed by the Irish Parliament. The Supreme Court did not overrule this point, but said that it was unnecessary to make a definitive ruling because the X Case could be decided on other grounds. However, that Court indicated that, if a future case came before it, in which an abortion was not necessary to save the life of the pregnant person, it would feel oblige to order whatever steps were necessary, including a ban on leaving the country, to safeguard the "Unborn".

In the UK, the Courts play no role in law-making. Parliament makes laws. If a person breaches them, they are prosecuted. There cannot be any State prosecutions on any matter which has not first been legislated on by Parliament. Thus a person will always know when they are breaking the law and liable to be prosecuted. This is not the case where there is a written Cosntitution giving legislative power to the Courts, as would be the case under a Bill of Rights, and as exists in the Republic of Ireland. Under the Irish system, a person may break a law which has not yet been defined! This is what happened in the X Case.

Thus, when the X Family went to England, they were following a well-worn trail used by many thousands, since abortion was put on a more humane basis in 1967. Everyone believed this was perfectly legal, since the Irish Parliament had passed no law on the matter, and the Supreme Court had in different circumstances declared that there was a 'right of travel'. People have been travelling freely between Ireland and Great Britain since time immemorial, and this creates an expectation. The fact is, while abortion may be illegal in Ireland, it is legal under certain circumstances in England, and the general supposition in the Republic was that people could avail of their travel rights to go abroad to do acts which were legal there. In fact, John Rogers, the barrister for X, argued that the Court could not limit travel in the absence of legislation giving it the power to do so. The Supreme Court unanimously dismissed this point, and stated firmly the right of the Court to make any rulings it wished on the basis of the Constitution, regardless of whether there were laws regulating such matters or not. Chief Justice Finlay put the matter as follows in his Judgement:

"...I reject also the submission that the power of the Court to interfere with the right to travel of the mother of an unborn child is in any way limited or restricted by the absence of legislation..." (p64, **The Attorney General V. X And Others**, issued by Incorporated Law Society of Ireland, 1992).

McCarthy, a liberal Judge, agreed with Finlay on this point: "I agree with the Chief Justice that the want of legislation pursuant to the amendment [ie, the 8th Amendment of 1983, which placed the rights of mothers and unborn on an equal footing] does not in any way inhibit the Courts from exercising a function to vindicate and defend the right to life of the unborn." (p89-90, ibid.)

In other words, although Parliament had failed to pass legislation setting out how abortion was to be regulated in the Republic, following the Referendum of 1983, this did not inhibit the Courts from acting to fill Parliament's place. The Courts use the wording of the 8th Amendment as the raw material and make Orders which function as regulations determining how social behaviour will be regulated in the light of that Amendment. Irish Courts take the widest possible view of their powers in that regard. They go further than merely stopping doctors doing abortions. They have banned students and women's clinics from giving out information about abortion in Britain. They

have stopped voluntary Women's Clinics counselling women contemplating abortions. And now they have expressed the intention of interfering with every individual pregnant woman if she intends to leave the country.

Nor should the sanctions of the Courts be underestimated. A law passed by Parliament also carries the penalties for non-compliance. People intent on breaking it know what they risk. But, under contempt of court regulations, there are no limits to the powers of enforcement of court-made law. A Court could have ordered X put into a strait-jacket (after all the balance of her mind was disturbed) and force-fed for 9 moths if necessary to vindicate the rights of the unborn. Or, if X and her family had managed to get an abortion despite the Court Order, it could have imprisoned her and her family indefinitely, fined them, confiscated all their goods, or whatever.

That is the result of leaving the Courts to make and enforce law on the basis of abstract principles.

Interning British Women!

Moreover, in the X Case, a majority of the Judges made it clear that this ruling would also apply to non-Irish women, who became pregnant in the Republic and let it be known that they intended obtaining a legal abortion elsewhere. Thus, as things stand, an English woman who found out she was pregnant while in the Republic, perhaps on a visit or working or studying, would be put into the position of a conspirator and a malefactor if she felt that going to England for a legal abortion was her only option. If she did not hide her intentions, the Attorney General could place an Injunction upon her, just as he did with X, and put her Case to the High Court, as a Test Case, and so get the Supreme Court expressed intention made into actual law. Here is the exchange from the Supreme Court proceedings which makes that point clear:

"McCarthy J. [Supreme Court judge]: If an English citizen comes here, finds herself pregnant, can she go home to the United Kingdom for an abortion? Can this Court restrain her? Article 40, s. 2 of the Constitution is limited to a citizen but Article 40, s. 3 is not so limited.

"Peter Shanley S.C. [barrister representing the State]: I cannot distinguish it logically from this case and accordingly I say the Attorney General would have to act as he did in this case. *Lett v. Lett* is authority for the proposition that the equitable jurisdiction acts *in personam.*

Hederman J. [Supreme Court Judge]: You say the case of a foreign citizen in this country must be treated like a citizen of this country. The "unborn life" is in this country in both cases. Can she be detained in Ireland?

Peter Shanley S.C.: I have to say yes." (p42 ibid.)

Chief Justice Finlay, in his Judgement, stated the following:

"Notwithstanding the very fundamental nature of the right to travel and its particular importance in relation to the characteristics of a free society, I would be forced to conclude that if there were a stark conflict between the right of a mother of an unborn child to travel and the right to life of the unborn child, the right to life would necessarily have to take precedence over the right to travel. " (p64, ibid).

EC Implications

That opinion places the Republic in very severe difficulties, not only with regard to its own citizens, who are suddenly facing the imminent possibility of their liberty being interfered with in a drastic way, but places the country in a very difficult position internationally. While it is not too serious if there is non-EC foreign anger about the prospect of foreign nationals being interned in the Republic for the duration of their pregnancies, the position in the EC is very serious indeed.

Court invention of law on the basis of 'rights' has jeopardised the Republic's position in the European Community and even brought into question its continued participation as a full member. It is inconceivable that the European Community, which is building the political structures of a federal state, could allow one segment of the union to prevent EC citizens travelling within the Community. It could not tolerate Irish and other citizens being prevented from leaving the Republic to enter other European countries, nor the converse: EC citizens freely entering the Republic. That would be in breach of the most fundamental principle of a federal State. A comparison with the United States shows how absurd such a situation would be: even though the constituent States have their own constitutions, laws and police structures, no US citizen can be prevented from freely travelling across the legal barriers for lawful purposes. And apart from the travel issue, European attention has been drawn to the militant Catholicism which is the ruling ideology in Irish public life. Until the X Case, the Republic was the only country in the EC with a total ban on abortion. (It should be mentioned here that the position is different in Northern Ireland. If X had been resident there, she could have had a legal abortion under the NHS. It is estimated that there are about 500 therapeutic abortions carried out annually in Northern Ireland, under legislation resembling pre-1967 British legislation.)

The High Court placed an injunction on X and her family from leaving the Republic for nine months. That decision caused panic in the Irish Establishment and led to the Supreme Court reversing that decision. However, they did not reverse it by admitting a right of travel within the EC, which would have solved the Irish 'problem', but by declaring that the 8th Amendment actually allows women whose lives are endangered by a pregnancy to have an abortion. Even though X was then theoretically able to have an abortion in the Republic, she wisely returned to England for termination. The Irish medical service is in the hands of the Church for the most part. Women whose lives are in danger have little chance of obtaining the abortions they require, and which the Supreme Court has now legalised at a stroke.

By reversing the High Court decision in the way they did, the Supreme Court left the Republic in very severe trouble with the EC. It now seems likely that there will be three Referendums in the Republic this year. One will ratify the Maastricht Agreement, which gives EC law priority over Irish law in the Republic, if there is a conflict between the two. However, that Agreement has an Irish Protocol which gives Irish law immunity from EC law in respect of any rulings made under the 8th Amendment, that is on abortion.

The Irish Government fears that if the Maastricht Agreement is adopted as it stands, the Irish Supreme Court will in a future case carry out its expressed intention of banning a pregnant woman from travelling to get an abortion in the EC outside Ireland. The Irish Government tried to amend the Irish Protocol to insert a right of travel (and of information relating to lawful abortion) in order to shackle its own Supreme Court. However, there are 16 other Protocols, all very controversial, and the EC could not allow changes to one part of the Maastricht Agreement, without risking the whole process of European union being brought to a halt. The Irish Government is now forced to tackle its problems more directly.

After the Maastricht Referendum, there is likely to be a second referendum, to make the right of travel inviolate, and to allow lawful information about abortion to circulate. The third referendum would be on the question of abortion itself, and there is a contest between those who want the Supreme Court decision to stand, and those who want to restore the position everyone thought existed prior to that decision: that all abortion, for whatever reason, is illegal. Both liberals and Catholic conservatives have failed to learn the lesson of the X Case: that there is no form of words which will bind a Court intent on producing new law.

Legal Jesuitry

The wording of the 8th Amendment to the Irish Constitution is:

"The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right."

That encapsulates the Catholic position on abortion, which is that mother and unborn are strictly equal. This means that doctors may not intervene in life-threatening situations during pregnancy in order to favour mother or unborn. Thus, a woman who suffers from cancer or heart disease or other serious problems cannot be saved from a pregnancy which threatens her life, even early in the pregnancy, or straight after conception. However, under the doctrine of "double effect", actions may be taken which indirectly kill the unborn at any stage of the pregnancy. A cancerous womb may be removed, even if the child is inside it. Catholic doctors would deny that an abortion had taken place in that situation. Catholic dogma makes no distinction between a fertilised egg, or a fully formed baby ready to be born (though individual Catholics cannot help themselves from making such a distinction based on sentiment and common sense).

When the 8th Amendment was put into the Constitution, some liberal elementstried to argue against it on the basis that it was ambiguous. But all wordings are ambiguous if you look at them for long enough and are determined to see other meanings. The linguistic 'philosophy' is based on this truism. In the light of Catholic dogma, the 8th Amendment was perfectly plain. But in the X Case, two diametrically opposed meanings were put on the formulation. This is a point that is of the greatest importance when considering Bills of Rights. However clear and right the words may seem to those who are formulating them, they are going to be interpreted by quite different people, and there is simply *no knowing* how they are going to be applied.

In the X Case, the High Court dismissed the suicidal tendencies of the pregnant child, and ordered her internment within the Irish jurisdiction, in order to vindicate the equal right to life of the 10 weeks old unborn. The Supreme Court, on the other hand, decided that an equal right to life of the unborn and the mother meant that the unborn was going to lose its life, in order to allow for the risk that the mother might commit suicide. It went further and ruled, in the words of Chief Justice Finlay:

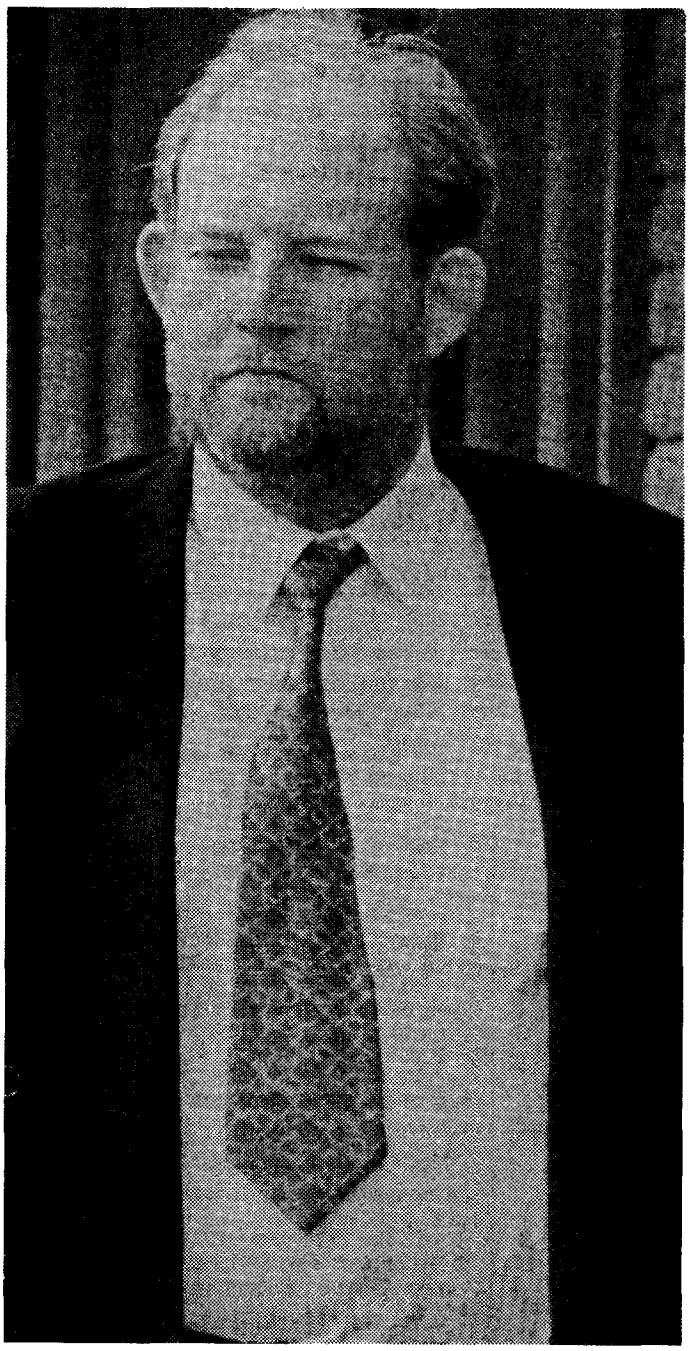
"...if it is established as a matter of probability that there is a real and substantial risk to the life, as distinct from the health, of the mother, which can only be avoided by the termination of her pregnancy, such termination is permissible, having regard to the true interpretation of Article 40, s.3, sub-s 3. of the Constitution." (p60, ibid.)

The Supreme Court 'justified' this interpretation of the 8th Amendment by pointing to the words *"due regard to"*, and *"as far as is practicable"* in the 8th Amendment. As a result, rather than mother and unborn having an *equal* right to life, the Supreme Court has now given priority to the mother's life. That decision directly contravenes the general view of what was being put into the Irish Constitution in 1983. The Catholic fundamentalist lobby has every right to feel aggrieved: as they stated clearly at the time, they were promoting the 8th amendment to avert the very possibility which has now happened—of the Supreme Court legalising abortion, of the Supreme Court putting the mother's life first. They cannot be blamed for seeking a referendum to undo the perverse ruling of the Supreme Court. Irish liberals are resisting this demand: they have been given a gift-horse, if somewhat unfairly, and they want to hold onto it.

Parliament Versus Courts

The X Case also illustrates that the language of "rights" is very misleading. One person's right is another person's restriction. The mother and the unborn may both have "rights", but these entail restrictions on the other. The same applies across the board to the whole "rights" rhetoric. There is not a single aspect of life which cannot be interfered with under the "rights" rhetoric. Taxation, property ownership, planning laws, trade union laws, free speech, pornography—the list is endless, as it covers every aspect of social life. The difficult questions of deciding between rights and restrictions of different segments of societies are best left with Parliament, which can take account of the wider implications of every move, and quickly correct injustices. Through membership of the political parties and of pressure groups, individuals can influence the decisions which Parliament takes, and they cannot lose or gain rights without a proper public discussion of the issues in the course of legislation passing through Parliament. And that legislation will not be retrospective, but only apply to future actions.

The contrast with judge-made laws cannot be greater. Under the Irish Constitution, which contains a Bill of Rights, Judges make laws, without prior public discussion, or submissions by interested parties. Three men hold the destinies of the people in their hands. Only a cumbersome Referendum can alter their decrees. In the 55 years since the Irish Constitution was put into place, there have only been two referendums to reverse decisions of the Supreme Court, and both were on minor, non-contentious issues. The whole system encourages a submissiveness and passivity among the people, who look to these feudal overlords to lay down how life is to be conducted. People wanting a change in social structures tend to look to a Court Case rather than political action to obtain changes to legislation to vindicate their rights. Thus David Norris brought a Court case to try and get homosexuality legalised in the Republic, rather than build up political pressure on the Irish Parliament. (He lost his case in Ireland, won it in the European Court at Strasbourg—not the EC Court—but the Irish Government has not acted to implement his victory. Homosexuality remains illegal.) These are all consequences of having the Bill of Rights approach to social progress, rather than the political approach. *Ireland Versus X* must be heeded in Britain. It shows where the *"Rights"* rhetoric leads.



Labour's Leadership and Student Politics, Part III

The Broad Left

and the End of Labour Politics

The enduring legacy of the Communist-led student movement of twenty years ago is the peculiar form of politics known as the 'Broad Left'. In the third and last article in this series, publication of which has been delayed in deference to Labour's election campaign, ***Hugh Roberts*** *explains the fundamentally cynical and empty nature of 'Broad Leftism' and how it has very largely destroyed the Labour Party.*

The result of the General Election represents the failure of the faction which has directed the Labour Party since 1983. The dominant influence in this faction has not been Neil Kinnock, but the head of his private office, the former president of the National Union of Students, Charles Clarke. The defeat on April 9 was as much a defeat for Clarke as for Kinnock. And in the wake of this defeat, a remark which Charles Clarke made to me in the course of a conversation in the early days of his fatal relationship with Neil Kinnock can at last be assessed at its true value, and the irony in it fully appreciated.

In 1981 Charles Clarke became Neil Kinnock's research assistant. Although our paths had already long since diverged, we were not at cross purposes in those days. He was making it up the inside track of the Labour Party, as a local councillor in Hackney as well as Kinnock's aide, and I was doing something else. The fact that we were operating in different spheres enabled us to maintain friendly relations without difficulty, and since we were not yet aware of how profoundly we disagreed about fundamentals, and still had some respect for each other's judgement, we enjoyed meeting to compare notes at intervals. It was during a meal we were having in a modest restaurant in Hampstead some time in early 1982 that Charles asked me a question to which he seemed to attach considerable importance.

"Are you still in the British and Irish Communist Organisation?" "Yes." "Pity. A great loss to politics."

I did not argue the point. I took his regret as a compliment as well as the tacit acknowledgement of a political debt. I had briefly been an important ally of his at a crucial juncture in his early career, and I was not surprised that he should have hankered after that alliance instead of trying to develop a proper political relationship with what I had become. But the fact that I was intent on remaining what I had become did not deter Charles from staying in touch. It merely meant that I was not available to participate directly in the particular political game he was playing.

The fact that I was not prepared to participate in this game directly did not mean that I did not do so indirectly. The B&ICO kept up a running commentary on developments in Labour politics in its monthly and quarterly publications throughout the 1970s and the early 1980s, and for originality and sheer analytical lucidity there was nothing that could hold a candle to it at the time. Some of this material was made available to Kinnock and Clarke by a then B&ICO member (not me) on his own initiative during the turmoil within the Labour Party in the early 1980s, and received an enthusiastic welcome from them, although the B&ICO bore no responsibility whatever for the use which they made of its material.

I imagine that it will come as something of a surprise to certain readers of this magazine to learn that Charles Clarke maintained cordial relations for years with a member of the B&ICO, and that the relationship ten years or so ago between Clarke and Kinnock on the one hand and certain members of the B&ICO on the other hand were not purely social in nature.

I first met him at a wedding reception of a mutual friend at King's College, Cambridge, in September 1972. He had then just completed his year as President of the Cambridge Students' Union (CSU), and was thinking of standing for the NUS Executive, and I had recently become President of the Oxford University Students' Representative Council and was preparing to launch the campaign to transform the OUSRC into a fully-fledged Students' Union. We liked each other immediately, and saw each other as kindred spirits, at any rate in the context of student politics. I was then in the CPGB, which was running the NUS Left Caucus, and he was precisely the kind of competent, no-nonsense, fellow-traveller which the CP liked to work with and made it its business to promote.

I had taken no part in national student politics, being absorbed by the situation in Oxford, and had been content to leave it to my better connected colleague, Martin Kettle, to represent the CPGB's Oxford Student Branch at the national level. But when Martin suggested that I attend the meeting of the Left Caucus to be held in London in December 1972 to decide the Left slate for the next NUS Executive elections, I went along out of curiosity, and was

delighted to find Charles adopted as the candidate for the post of Vice President for Education. And when a member of the CP's Cambridge branch, Jon Bloomfield, rang me a few weeks later to say that Charles had asked if I could be persuaded to be his campaign manager, I accepted without hesitation.

The Easter 1973 NUS Conference at Exeter University was the first and last NUS conference I ever attended. By the end of it I had established my claim to a career in the NUS, and had seen enough of the NUS to know that I did not want such a career.

During the first 24 hours, I got my campaign team to carry out four intensive canvasses of the conference delegates. (In the two months before it, I had spent hours on the telephone to CP contacts at universities and colleges across the country, to get them to canvass their delegations' support for Charles's candidacy.) The result was that Charles Clarke was elected with a massive majority. This was in sharp contrast both to Mike Terry, the Caucus's candidate for the presidency, who was defeated by the maverick candidacy of John Randall, and to Mike Grabiner, Charles's successor as President of the CSU, who was running for one of the other Vice-Presidencies and was soundly defeated by his Trotskyist opponent. The patchy performance of the Left Caucus's slate was the subject of angry recriminations at a special meeting of the CP after the results were announced, with only the campaign which I had run for Charles being exempt from vigorous criticism.

The other role I played at that conference was as a member of the Oxford University delegation, in which capacity I proposed Oxford's amendment to the main resolution on the annual grants campaign. In doing so, I was challenging the Executive's (and CP's) line, and Digby Jacks, in the chair, was visibly taken aback to see me making my way to the rostrum and even more astonished by my speech, which to the platform's consternation was well received by the delegates. This did me no harm, however, as was made clear when Dave Cook, the CP's National Student Organiser, approached me towards the end of Conference and told me that the Party wanted to run me for the Executive in the next round of elections in the autumn. I told him that I would think it over.

Looking back, I am grateful to Dave Cook for putting me on the spot in that way. My mind was concentrated by his proposal, and it did not take me long to know that the last thing I wanted was to prolong my involvement in student politics. I realised that NUS politics was not at all a simple extension of what I had been up to at Oxford, but something else altogether. What I had seen of the NUS Communists at the Left Caucus meeting in December and during the Conference at Exeter had repelled me very thoroughly, and I knew that I would be lost if I allowed myself to be drawn into their world. And so I told Dave a few days later that I was sorry to disappoint him, but had decided to concentrate on my doctoral research on Algeria. And, just to make sure (since I knew from experience what CP pressure could be), I applied for and obtained a post as an English teacher in a *lycée* in a provincial Algerian town, and so took myself out of NUS politics for good.

But I do not regret my involvement in the Easter 1973 NUS Conference. It was an interesting and instructive experience at the time, and in retrospect I can see that I was a witness to an important moment in the history of the Labour Party, the moment when the politics of student unionism underwent a significant change, and the politics of the Broad Left was born. It is the politics of the Broad Left, in a lethal combination with those of lapsed Bevanism since Charles Clarke joined forces with Neil Kinnock, which have been dominating the Labour Party these last eleven years and leading it relentlessly to disaster.

The politics of the Broad Left was not an evolution of the politics of the Left Caucus, but a mutation of those politics.

The objective of the Left Caucus had been to defeat the 'Right' (the 'Right' being the Labour Party faction which had previously run the NUS) and ensconce the Left in power. As such, the Left Caucus was open to the Left as a whole. Although the CP was the guiding force, it did not seek to exclude the Trotskyists of the International Socialism (IS) grouping or the International Marxist group (IMG) from the Caucus. The Trotskyists had not really figured in the Left Caucus in its early days, they had had other fish to fry. But they had got involved in student unionism around 1971 and at this stage the CP did not seriously try to keep them out. A number of leading Trotskyists had been present at the Left Caucus meeting in December 1972, notably Terry Povey and Mike Hill, the IS bosses of the Polytechnic of North London, who had sat immediately in front of me throughout the meeting. On the contrary, the original purpose of the Left Caucus at least notionally implied mobilising all energies, with 'no enemies on the Left', as the French Socialists used to say in the old days.

This purpose was realised between 1969 and 1971, but the Caucus outlived this purpose for some time. By late 1972 the Left was firmly ensconced in power and there was no 'Right' to speak of, still less to do battle with, at any rate for the time being. And so the external condition of the Left Caucus's cohesion had disappeared. This loss of cohesion was evident at the meeting I attended in December 1972. The decision of John Randall, a non-aligned 'Left', to run as an independent candidate for the NUS presidency when the Caucus, of which he had long been a member, chose to back Mike Terry instead, demonstrated that the moral authority on which the Caucus had once been able to base its collective self-discipline was a thing of the past.

And so, because it had found no new common purpose with which to replace the old one, it eventually fell prey to its internal divisions. And because the practical business of the Caucus had been to organise slates for the NUS elections, the divisions to which it succumbed were those between the main organising building blocks of the Left's electoral coalition, namely the CPGB and its fellow travellers (primarily the 'Clause Four' group on the Labour Left) on the one hand, and the IS and the IMG on the other.

This division developed into an explicit antagonism between December 1972 and Easter 1973. The opposition to the Left Caucus's slate came from a slate describing itself as 'Socialist Alternative'. The prime movers behind this were IS. With the emergence of the CP-IS rivalry into the arena of NUS electoral competition, the old Left-Right dichotomy was superseded by a new dichotomy, that between the 'Broad Left' and the 'Ultra-Left'.

In a sense, it was IS's decision to do battle in the open with the CP-led alliance in the NUS which precipitated the birth of the Broad Left. The 'Ultra-Left' had always existed, at any rate so far as the CPGB was concerned. It was Lenin who invented the term, after all. The electoral challenge from the Ultra-Left forced the CP to redefine the character of the alliance it led, and to counterpose its 'broad' character to the narrowly 'sectarian' perspectives of the Trots.

The practical difference between the two was that the Trots were not interested in all students, but only in students capable of reaching a 'revolutionary socialist consciousness'. IS in particular looked on the student body as a reservoir of potential recruits, but it wanted to sort the wheat from the chaff, because it had use only for the 'revolutionary' minority. The CP, on the other hand, while mildly interested in recruiting leftwing students to the Party, was far more interested (as I have explained in Part II of this series in **L&TUR No. 26**), in preventing students from messing up its plans in the trade unions. It therefore pretended to be concerned with the broad mass of the student body, in order to counterpose them to the Trotskyists' 'adventurism'. The CP used the broad mass to marginalise the Trots, and thereby preserve its own control over the student unions.

As part of this approach, the CP developed the doctrine of the *"levels of struggle"*, and the imperative of *"promoting polices with the objective of mobilising the largest possible numbers of students to collective action"* (Dave Cook, 'The Student Movement, Left Unity and the Communist Party', in **Marxism**

Today, October 1974, pp. 295-6). In other words, it consciously used the principle of the highest common factor, which in politics is rarely high at all: it relied on the apolitical mass of students to support its own essentially conservative attitude to what student unions should be used for. It also, of course, justified this on the grounds that, as Digby Jacks put it on the occasion of his election to the NUS Presidency in 1971, they were *"student union officials first and CP members second"*. (Believe that if you will.)

In other words, the Broad Left, far from being the proper expression of the practical element in leftwing student radicalism, was the political instrument by means of which the CP *smothered* leftwing student radicalism as a whole. It was based on a narrower, not broader, spectrum of leftwing opinion than the old Left Caucus had been based on, and for this reason was inclined, in its battle to repulse the 'Ultra-Left' challenge, to enlist the support of elements of the student body which the Left Caucus in its hey-day would have dismissed as hopelessly 'Right'. And, in this way, the Broad Left began to function as the way up for students on the make who six or seven years earlier would have been content to align themselves in the centre, or even on the Croslandite wing, of the Labour Party within their university Labour Clubs and would therefore have known what and where they were in relation to British society and politics at large, and would have continued to use plain English to express themselves.

The problem for the CP arose out of the fact that the Broad Left had no programme to suggest as the agenda of the student movement, because the student movement, in the CP's perspective, had no purpose of its own. The only elements of a programme the CP could suggest were the figure to be set for the annual grants campaign, plus the defence of the 'autonomy' of student unions. But the Trots were as energetic as the CP in their defence of the 'autonomy' of student unions, and liable to outbid the CP in militancy on the grants campaign. The fact that the student movement did not really exist, and had no real agenda, made it impossible for the Broad Left to defeat the Ultra-Left through reasoned political argument. It therefore sought to defeat it in two other ways, by counterposing the politically inert majority of the student population to it, and by organised bureaucratic manoeuvre.

This state of affairs gave rise to the tendency for the rivalry between Broad Left and Ultra-Left to express itself in a rhetorical auction, and the tendency for all and sundry to engage in relentless displacement activity. There being little of substance to discuss, what was really at issue between the CP and the IS (namely, in case you have forgotten, the class struggle in *industry*) was expressed obliquely through wrangles over student union constitutions and the clash of 'lines' on Chile, Northern Ireland, Poland, Portugal, and so on, *ad infinitum*.

The tendency to engage in constitutional wrangles followed directly from the fact that, lacking either a serious programme or serious arguments, the Broad Left relied heavily on bureaucratic manoeuvre to defend its position. That this should have provoked the Ultra-Left to challenge the existing organisational structures of the NUS and of student unions around the country was entirely natural. But this development had long-term implications. Because the politics of the Broad Left developed in opposition to the Ultra-Left, not in opposition to the Right, Broad Leftists - unlike the Labour Club activists of yesteryear - never learned how to out-argue the Right, there being no longer a Right to out-argue. The result was that a generation of both 'Broad-' and 'Ultra-' leftwing students became saturated with the idea that getting political power depended largely on manipulating constitutional structures if you could and subverting them if you couldn't manipulate them, and as that generation made its way up the Labour Party the idea that power was gained by winning support in argument disappeared from the Party almost entirely.

The tendency to engage in displacement activity via arguments over foreign affairs and so forth also followed directly from the fact that there could be no serious argument about what student unions should be doing about their own agenda proper. The result was a catastrophic divorce in the minds of that generation between the notion of 'policy' and the notion of 'responsibility'.

It has become commonplace over the last decade for Labour-controlled Councils to have 'policies' on matters that do not concern them in the least (e.g. Nicaragua, Northern Ireland, the vanity of 'nuclear-free zones' *etc. ad infinitum*) while failing to have functional policies on matters that do; it is equally commonplace for Constituency Labour Parties and Ward Parties to have what they fondly describe as 'policies' which are not policies in the proper sense at all, and the same can be said of the Labour Party at the national level in recent years.

A policy is a thought-out commitment by a political party to do something specific about a particular issue as and when it is entrusted by the electorate with the responsibility for dealing with the issue in question. The Labour Party in Hackney (of which I have been a member since 1988) has responsibility for dealing with numerous issues in the borough. Its chronic and scandalous failure to discharge this responsibility properly is intimately connected with the fact that it does not have proper policies in respect of them. But its constituent ward parties have 'policies' galore.

My own ward party (North Defoe, in Stoke Newington) has a 'policy' of ensuring that at least 50 per cent of its delegates to the General Committee of Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP are women. This 'policy' is its own invention; there is nothing in the rules of the Labour Party at the national level to mandate or even authorise this. North Defoe Labour Party implements this 'policy' by operating a quota system, such that half of the delegate positions are reserved for women only, whether or not there are women candidates to fill them, the remaining positions being open to men and women alike. If there are not enough women candidates to fill the reserved posts, these may not be filled by male delegates, but must remain unfilled as a matter of...*policy*. The result is that for most of the last six or seven years North Defoe has been chronically under-represented on the GC, and unable to do anything about the fact that the GC has been chronically inquorate, and the CLP has been chronically unable to function, and consequently unable to do anything about the fact that the performance of the Council has been an obscene farce.

The notion that North Defoe (which is the largest ward in the CLP) has a *responsibility* towards the CLP of which it is part to pull its full weight and enable the GC to carry out *its* responsibilities properly (including the responsibility of debating local issues seriously with a view to formulating effective policies on them and thereby assisting the Labour Group on the Council to discharge *its* responsibilities properly) is radically absent from the minds of ward party members. What matters to the people who run North Defoe Labour Party is their 'policy' - that is to say, their fetish. And because the manic indulgence of this and similar fetishes has had the effect of disconnecting North Defoe from the rest of the Labour Party, it eventually brought about a state of affairs by this time last year where the ward party, despite a membership of 150-odd, was no longer able to get a quorum at its own monthly meetings.

This is the sort of thing that the take-over of the Labour Party by student politics has meant at grass-roots level; it has owed nothing whatever to infiltration by Militant. On the contrary, the people who have behaved in this way in North Defoe have almost all been Broad Leftists and Kinnock supporters. Their behaviour, and that of their counterparts in numerous other ward and constituency parties in London and elsewhere, has been a cancer relentlessly destroying the Party, and not the slightest attempt has been made by the national leadership of the Party, under Broad Left management, to remedy this state of affairs.

The tendency to engage in a rhetorical auction was already observable at Exeter in 1973, as CP or CP-aligned speakers on the one hand and IS or IS-aligned speakers

on the other invested their disagreements over grants or what-have-you with a significance that could only be understood by reference to the ideological conflict between orthodox Communism and Trotskyism on wider issues. The predictable result was the alienation and growing cynicism of a large part of the audience.

One of the enduring memories I have of that conference is that, after the first session or two, a large proportion of the delegates at the back of the hall stopped listening to the speeches, and started chatting about more important matters (presumably sex, drugs and rock-and-roll, or at least football) amongst themselves. The resulting hum obliged the orators at the rostrum to raise their voices, which in turn obliged the chatters at the back to chat more loudly. The orators in turn became yet more vehement and histrionic, which eventually provoked the more lucidly cynical of the delegates to riposte: from mid-day on Day Two of Conference onwards, whenever a speaker intoned the word 'struggle' - as virtually every speaker did, in every second sentence - an ironic echo: *"STRUUUGGLE!!"* - reverberated from the back of the hall. As far as I know I was the only member of the CPGB present to find this significant.

It seems to me that the spontaneous tendency to cynicism which these bored delegates displayed, and which unquestionably reflected the attitudes of the wider student body, were an inevitable corollary of Broad Left politics. The fact was that the Broad Left was running student unions with no real function, and to which the mass of students were accordingly fundamentally indifferent. And the indifference (and sound human instincts) of those delegates who were most representative of ordinary students disposed them to see through the clouds of rhetoric of both Broad- and Ultra-Left alike, and to blow raspberries at them at frequent intervals.

This aspect of Broad Leftism - its tendency to concentrate on its duel with its Ultra-Left antagonists, and to be so absorbed in this duel that it has nothing to say to anyone else, and cannot speak in the language of anyone else - has since thoroughly infected the Labour Party, and in conjunction with the tendencies to constitutional fetishism and displacement activity, has comprehensively disabled the Labour Party from relating to the British people.

A fundamental premise of the Broad Left form of politics is the substantial irrelevance of the institutions and apparatuses it controls to the mass of the electorate, whether these apparatuses are national or local student unions, or trade unions, or the local or national Labour Party and whether this electorate is the student body, or the membership of a trade union, or the residents of a London borough, or the British people as a whole. (It is striking that in those trade unions which are now run by coalitions which describe themselves as 'the Broad Left', Broad Left control has coincided with a vertiginous decline in trade union membership, a decline which cannot be explained wholly by the recession or government policies, and to which the Broad Left leaders of these unions have seemed remarkably indifferent.)

"Broad Left campaigning has invariably been a form of displacement activity functioning as a surrogate for representative agitation, or a tactic to render an ill-served and potentially restive membership more malleable."

Kinnockism - the synthesis of Broad Leftism and Bevanism at the end of its tether - has never really had a feel for how Government is actually relevant to the people. Kinnockism has assumed that the people are really indifferent to the Government, and Kinnock's party has certainly been indifferent to the people, and has been psychologically incapable of leading or articulating popular exasperation with the government. In this respect, Kinnockism is a significant departure from the politics of the original Bevanites, many of whom knew very well how to articulate currents of public opinion hostile to Tory misgovernment. It is perhaps in this respect that the take-over of Kinnock's lapsed-Bevanite outlook by Charles Clarke's Broad Leftist outlook is most sharply apparent.

The explanation lies in the fact that Broad Leftism was never a *representative* politics. The 'broad mass of the students' was not represented by the Broad Left, but merely invoked rhetorically as a debating point with which to confound the Ultra-Left. But, if Broad Leftism did not represent student opinion and interests, it did not represent an avowable idea either.

There have been unrepresentative forms of politics which, because they have been the vehicle of an avowable idea, have been perfectly capable of organising effective agitations - Bolshevism in the Lenin-Stalin era, for example. But Broad Leftism was never an agitational politics. It could neither represent student opinion, nor stir it up in the name of a novel purpose. The fundamental purpose which underlay the Broad Left was the unavowable purpose which I have already described, the CP's purpose of protecting its industrial cadre from contamination by trendy lefties. And this meant that the true function of Broad Leftism required it, not to mobilise student political energies, *but to keep them demobilised.*

The truth of this proposition may not be self-evident at first glance, because a characteristic feature of Broad Leftism in power has been its inclination to launch *'campaigns'* on sundry issues at frequent intervals. But the campaigns which Broad Left leaderships have led have never been true agitations. They have invariably espoused objectives which have been tangential to, if not at odds with, the interests and views of the memberships these leaderships have notionally represented. The NUT under Broad Left leadership has launched umpteen 'campaigns' of this kind, and the TGWU has not been immune from this virus in the last decade.

The issues which have been the subject of these campaigns have invariably been the latest fashionable bees in the bonnet of the Broad Leftists themselves, or have reflected the organisational self-interest of the Broad Left ruling coterie. What Broad Left leaderships have been utterly hopeless at doing has been mobilising their memberships on matters that deeply interest them. This is because Broad Left leadership has constantly required and presupposed a fundamentally quiescent and politically defenceless membership. And if one examines the kind of campaign which Broad Left leaderships have been inclined to run in the trade unions they have controlled, they have almost always included an element of ideological intimidation and policing of the memberships themselves, and have thereby served the function of consolidating Broad Left control over these memberships.

In the Labour Party, a characteristic Broad Left campaign was the *'Labour Listens'* campaign, which far from mobilising the party membership by-passed it altogether - indeed, implicitly stigmatised the membership as an obstacle which had to be by-passed if Labour's leaders were to get in touch with public opinion. And the campaign to boost party membership was, of course, a manoeuvre to increase the leadership's control over the *existing* membership. Far from achieving its avowed objective, it led to a *fall* in membership as the role of Membership Secretary at ward and constituency level was abolished. But it achieved its real objective by making the remaining membership a dependent adjunct of Walworth Road and thus prostrate before Kinnock and Clarke.

Broad Left campaigning has invariably been a form of displacement activity functioning as a surrogate for representative agitation, or a tactic to render an ill-served and potentially restive membership more malleable.

The politics I had been engaged in at Oxford was an agitational politics. Somehow or other I grew up with an

impulse to agitate, and because the peculiar circumstances of student politics at Oxford twenty years ago gave this impulse an outlet, I developed a taste for purposeful agitational politics which, as far as I can see, no other member of my generation of leftwing student politicians has ever displayed.

My purpose at Oxford was to create a proper student union at the university level in a collegiate university where both the representative and recreational functions of a student union were already performed at college level by the Junior Common Rooms (JCRs), with the result that the legitimate interests of the student body in university issues were entirely ignored by the university authorities. These interests could be ignored because they were only very ineffectually represented by the university level Students' Representative Council. The SRC was ineffectual because the vast mass of the student body played no role whatever in its deliberations, such that the SRC's claim to represent student opinion could easily be dismissed by the dons. The SRC accordingly had nothing whatever to show for its representative activity. It was therefore scorned by students and dons alike, and so trapped in a vicious circle.

I decided that the only way to break out of this vicious circle was to transform the SRC into a Student Union by persuading ordinary students to participate in it and thereby strengthen the hand of its officers when they negotiated with the university authorities on students' behalf. This meant altering its constitution, not in order to perpetuate or subvert the power of this or that political faction, but in order to enable ordinary students (instead of, as previously, only council members) to vote in elections for its presidency and executive and to take part in its meetings. And since students could not be expected to vote every term (the SRC Presidency being for one university term only), it was necessary to extend the president's term of office to a full academic year, which in turn meant making it a sabbatical post, which in turn meant persuading the JCRs (most of which were bastions of college chauvinism, and heartily opposed to the SRC) to relinquish a part of the money they received from the LEAs to finance this sabbatical.

This was the political mountain that had to be climbed, in the teeth of of opposition from the university authorities on the Hebdomadal Council (on whose recognition the SRC depended heavily) in October 1972. It could only be climbed by a whirlwind campaign of agitation in every college in the university. This campaign had to enlist the students' own deep-seated and largely justified contempt for the SRC as an argument for the changes I and my colleagues in the SRC leadership were seeking to make. Instead of ignoring or patronising or riding roughshod over the real feelings and opinions of students, we had the wit to mobilise these feelings and opinions and then, once they were fully stirred up, channel them into supporting a definite and practical political project that made sense to them. And because we had such a project, and knew that nobody else had one to rival it, we were confident that we could pull off this ambitious manoeuvre and did so.

By the end of that term, in mid-December 1972, motions had been put in over 25 college JCRs, and the support of 23 JCRs had been won (and several JCR presidents who tried to thwart us had been deposed by their own aroused members). And when the Hebdomadal Council responded by saying that it would refuse to recognise the new body born of the constitutional changes, I and my colleagues were able to reply that we had the support we needed, and would go ahead anyway with our plans to hold the first ever university-wide election for the new sabbatical presidency. That election was successfully held the following term and was won handsomely by a complete unknown who came out of the blue on a populist 'voice of the ordinary student' platform and easily defeated the various leftwing candidates, and thereby furthered my purpose by demonstrating that the election had been fair and the constitutional change a real one. And by the time the new president took office the following October, the transformation of the OUSRC into the OUSU had been completed, and Hebdomadal Council had bowed to accomplished fact, and the apolitical upstart president and the Oxford Student Branch of the CPGB had come to an understanding with one another.

The politics of creating a union and the politics of running a long-established union are bound to be different in flavour. But the politics of running a union which performs real and valuable functions for its members will have much more in common with the politics which created that union than they will have with a politics which aims merely to run the union for the benefit of a clique (let alone an occult power behind the scenes) in contempt of the members' views and interests.

What I realised at Exeter in 1973 was that the politics of the NUS Communists, in the absence of any avowable purpose, were cynical in the extreme, and I instinctively wanted no part in them. There may have been elements of misplaced idealism in my activity at Oxford, and I don't doubt, in retrospect, that I lavished my energies on a political object that was not really worth the bother, but there was no cynicism in the agitation which created the OUSU.

But what needs to be understood, if what the Kinnock-Clarke leadership has done to the Labour Party is to be understood, is that the cynicism that underlay the politics of the Left Caucus gave way, in the course of the mutation which produced the Broad Left, to something far worse.

Cynicism - as opposed to the shallow opportunism of the mere careerist - is the perverted expression of an idealism which has been suppressed for one reason or another but not abandoned or replaced by commitment to another ideal. The depth of the cynicism of Digby Jacks and Jeff Staniforth and Co. was in proportion to the idealism at the origin of their political outlook.

The CPGB members who originally formed and ran the Left Caucus nearly all came from the unashamedly pro-Moscow wing of the CPGB. By 1969-70, the main division within the Party was between those who, especially in the wake of the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968, were disposed to distance the Party from Moscow and those who adhered to the traditional line of unconditional loyalty to the USSR and its leadership. The latter were led by Sid French, the Secretary of the Surrey District of the Party, and were accordingly known as the 'Frenchites' or the 'Surrey faction'. To outsiders, especially the Trotskyists, the Frenchites were 'Stalinists'. But this is quite mistaken. Their unconditional loyalty to the USSR made them pro-Soviet irrespective of the vicissitudes of Kremlin politics. They were certainly 'hard-liners', in that they approved of the suppression of the Prague Spring and even of the Hungarian uprising 12 years earlier. But they had no coherent critique of the revisionist policies which had fomented the unrest which it had then taken tanks to suppress on both of these occasions. They most certainly did not defend Stalin's policies against the criticisms and departures of his successors. They merely supported whatever the USSR decided to do to preserve its power. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the term which accurately described them was 'Brezhnevites', in view of their willingness to defend whatever Brezhnev did, and the essentially conservative attitude which underlay Brezhnev's policies and their own activities alike.

In 1969-71, the Surrey faction, while in a minority within the Party as a whole, was the dominant influence on the Party's industrial cadres and controlled the Young Communist League. And the National Student Organiser, Fergus Nicholson, was a Frenchite and used his influence to promote the right sort of Communist (preferable YCL graduates) in the Party's student work. The latter were characteristically second-generation Communists of working class backgrounds who had inherited their unconditional pro-Sovietism from their parents and, while rising in the world through access to higher education, remained loyal to these backgrounds and were inclined to express this complex of attitudes in the student

political arena by militantly asserting the political (and, one might add, moral) primacy of the industrial class struggle and the duty of the student Left to subordinate itself to 'the working class movement'.

'The working class movement' was, of course, that element of British trade unionism which was susceptible to being stimulated to political movement by CP influence. And the general purpose of CP influence was to maintain as large a part of British trade unionism as possible in a state of militant alienation from the state in readiness for the great day when capitalism and bourgeois democracy in Britain would at last be overthrown.

It is often supposed that with the adoption of **The British Road To Socialism** in 1951 the CPGB was converted to a democratic perspective for the transition to socialism in Britain. Nothing could be further from the truth. It may conceivably have been Stalin's intention to convert the CPGB to such a perspective. I doubt it, but who knows? Stalin died in 1953 and took a lot of secrets with him. But there is no doubt whatever that, in the minds of the thoroughly Bolshevised British Communists of the early 1950s, the replacement of **The Soviet Road For Britain** by **The British Road To Socialism** was a change of strategy and not a change of ideology.

The success of Ernest Bevin and Clement Attlee in taking advantage of the exigencies of the war and its aftermath to engineer a massive social reform in the working class interest had given the Labour Party, which had seemed on its last legs in 1931-5, an entirely new lease of life and had made the straightforward canvassing of Bolshevik revolutionism by the CP a futile exercise after 1945. Because the CPGB leadership were intellectually and morally dependent on the Kremlin, it was Stalin who had to adjust their mind-sets for them, which he finally got around to doing in 1951 (he had his hands full before then).

The new orientation presented itself as an acceptance of British liberal democracy. If it had been that, it would have represented the most fundamental ideological change, the abandonment of the Leninist principle of evaluating all states and forms of government in accordance with their class nature, the latter being read off directly (not to say mechanically) from the relations of production in the first instance and, after 1917, from their relations with Moscow in the second instance. In accordance with this principle, British democracy, being the democracy of a country in which capitalist relations of production still predominated and which was a pillar of the Atlantic alliance, was *ipso facto* bourgeois democracy, and there could be no question of accepting that.

From my own experience in the CP in 1971-5, I can say without hesitation that there was no principled acceptance of British liberal democracy in the minds of its members, quite the contrary. And I am therefore certain that no fundamental ideological change occurred in 1951 or at any point thereafter.

What **The British Road To Socialism** actually represented was the abandonment of the CPGB's original ambition to come to power by its own efforts, and a corresponding increase in its reliance on the massively enhanced power of the postwar Soviet Union to create the political conditions for the transition to socialism in Britain. The strategy of counterposing Bolshevist revolutionism to the Labour Party's reformism was ditched, and a strategy was adopted of functioning, within the formal procedures of the democratic constitution, as a disruptive presence on the Labour Party's left flank and within industry, and as a fifth column for Soviet power.

"The removal of secret pro-Sovietism as the ultimate motivation of the CP's activity in student politics...created a vacuum at the spiritual heart of this activity. The way in which this vacuum was filled ensured that the influence which Broad Leftism later exerted on the Labour Party would be destructive in the extreme."

This strategy made sense on the assumption that Soviet power would continue to expand, that the USSR's strategic aim in Europe of neutralising Germany was feasible, and that it would thereafter be possible for Soviet power to exercise an ever-increasing influence on the internal political life of European democracies as it already did in the case of Finland. Within this strategy it was vital to preserve the CP's hegemony over trade union militancy, and block off all influences liable to disrupt this hegemony, just as it was vital to sabotage all the Labour Party's attempts to effect movement toward socialism via incomes policy and industrial democracy, since such movement would subvert the CPGB's position by making it redundant and by undermining the Soviet Union's claim to provide the only valid model of socialist development.

It follows that at the heart of the politics of the guiding force within the Left Caucus was the traditional ideal of the dictatorship of the proletariat as defined by Lenin, that is the realisation of the destiny of the working class in its political mobilisation for, and subordination to, the construction of socialism under the firm guiding control of Communist leadership, with the political weakness of the home-grown Communist leadership being massively compensated for by the strength of Soviet influence operating from without. But this was an ideal which could no longer be admitted, much less proclaimed, by British Communists in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The operation of the CPGB's strategy required its agents to sustain a degree of deviousness which almost certainly far surpassed that required of their counterparts in most other countries. And it far surpassed the element of deviousness which had characterised the CPGB's behaviour in the old, comparatively straightforward, days of **The Soviet Road.** This earlier, relatively limited, deviousness had been understood by the old working class element in the Labour movement. Bevin knew all about the CP and how to deal with it in the '20s and '30s and '40s. But Bevin died in 1951. Was it this which explained the timing of **The British Road**? Did Stalin, who knew that Bevin was the one figure in British socialism that he could not hope to put things past, wait till Ernie was out of the way before getting Dutt and Pollitt and Gollan & Co. to adopt a new tack?

After Bevin's death, there were still people in Labour's leadership who knew what they were for and what they were against. Belief in Labour's own purpose was strong and gave Labour politicians the will to resist CP disruption and scotch it. This will was incarnated, in the working class element of the Labour Party, in people like Bessie Braddock in Liverpool, and it was also present in the middle class element, and was expressed with particular vigour by Hugh Gaitskell at Scarborough in 1960. But, with the increasing demoralisation of the Labour Party under Harold Wilson, it declined rapidly during the 1960s, and disappeared altogether in the course of the 1970s.

But if the will to resist Communist disruption of Labour's politics evaporated in the 1970s, this was in part because the nature of this disruption had become harder and harder to identify and stigmatise. For, while the deviousness involved in the adoption of the CP's new strategy in 1951 greatly exceeded the deviousness involved in the pre-1951 period, it was nothing to the deviousness involved in adhering to the traditional ideal and its strategy in 1971. This was not only because the strategy itself involved deviousness. It was also because, within the CPGB after 1968, the element which sincerely subscribed to the original ideal were in a minority, and the majority of the Party, while continuing to operate the routines of the **British Road** strategy, no longer knew what they believed in in respect of ideals, but knew that they did not subscribe to the Soviet ideal any more.

The fundamental deviousness of the post-1951 strategy lay in the fact that it

involved the CPGB in posing as the most principled champions of traditional British trade unionism as a tactic in a grand strategy designed to secure the definitive destruction of free trade unionism by a triumphant proletarian dictatorship, in which trade unions would be reduced to mere 'transmission belts' of the ruling Communist Party. (That this was the true state of mind of the CP's industrial cadres was made graphically clear by the moral support given by the CP-dominated National Union of Mineworkers to the Communist régime in Poland against the dissidence of *Solidarnosc* in the early 1980s.) But of almost equal importance was the fact that this pose entailed the systematic confusion of the terms 'Left' and 'Right'. Under the CPGB's leadership, the opposition to incomes policy and industrial democracy became identified as 'Left', when it actually implied the preservation of the labour market and of management responsible only to shareholders, and thus the capitalist system, and was as such unequivocally 'Right' in character if the terms 'Left' and 'Right' are given their normal 20th century meanings of 'socialist' and 'anti-socialist'.

The Communist cadres who operated this strategy could tell themselves that they were still really 'Left' insofar as the defence of capitalist relations of production in British industry was a piece of hard-nosed revolutionary *realpolitik* designed to facilitate the definitive suppression of British capitalism in due course. But Communist cadres who had abandoned their adoration of the Soviet Union, that is, of the *deus ex machina* of the revolutionary scenario they had previously fantasised about - what could they tell themselves?

The deviousness at the heart of the Left Caucus up to Easter 1973 was the deviousness of Surrey faction Communists who were operating a strategy which involved them, once they had seen off the old 'Right', in fighting on three fronts at once: against those elements of the Labour Left and the working class who were responsive to the case for incomes policy and industrial democracy on socialist grounds; against those elements of the student Left whose idealistic impulses inclined them to get involved in the industrial class struggle when this was the last thing the CPGB required of them; and against those elements of the CPGB itself who were desperate to distance the Party from all things Soviet and regarded the Surrey Faction as an embarrassing encumbrance.

The deviousness at the heart of the Broad Left was a significantly different affair. By mid-summer 1973 the Surrey faction had lost control of the CPGB's student strategy. The Frenchite Fergus Nicholson had been replaced by the anti-Frenchite Dave Cook as National Student Organiser in 1972. And the role of Digby Jacks came to an end with his departure from the NUS Presidency at Easter 1973.

Charles Clarke escorts Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley past Militant protestors

Thereafter the secret purpose at the core of the CPGB's student strategy became something else altogether.

The removal of secret pro-Sovietism as the ultimate motivation of the CP's activity in student politics, as in British politics in general, created a vacuum at the spiritual heart of this activity. The way in which this vacuum was filled determined the character of the Broad Left, and ensured that the influence which Broad Leftism later exerted on the Labour Party would be destructive in the extreme.

The majority of the CPGB which no longer believed in the Soviet model in the early 1970s did not know what it believed in. A welter of different positions co-existed in the political space made vacant by the evaporation of the old certainties. A few activists took refuge in a discreet pro-Chinese orientation; a larger number were attracted by the model demonstrated in Italy by the PCI, and described themselves as 'Togliatti-ists' at this point, since Gramsci was not yet an intellectual cult-figure and 'Eurocommunism' was still to be invented. A substantial minority were simply for winding up the Party as a whole and throwing in their lot properly with the Labour Left, but this position, by far the most lucid of them all, was never advocated openly, any more than the other positions were. If it had been, it is conceivable that British Communism might at last have genuinely come to terms with British democracy. But the CPGB was incapable of having a proper debate over its political options, because such a debate was bound to threaten one or another set of vested interests in the Party's apparatus. And so the confusion was eventually resolved in favour of the one tendency within the anti-Soviet majority which both had a clear vision and one which was consistent in the short term with the undisturbed survival of the Party's apparatus.

This vision was that of a Communist academic called Martin Jacques.

I met Martin Jacques twice during my time in the CP, and the thing that impresses me most in retrospect is how little an impression he made on me. The first time was in November 1972, when he came to deliver the Political Report on King Street's behalf at the South Midlands District Party Congress in Oxford. I can remember being very impressed at the time by the fluency and eloquence of his speech, but I can't for the life of me remember a single element of its political content, and I think that this amnesia had set in within hours of listening to him. The second time was on my way to Exeter at Easter 1973. I was in a group of CP members travelling there together, and we stopped briefly, for reasons which were never explained to me, to see Jacques at his home in Bristol, where he was then a sociology lecturer at the university, and I can't for the life of me remember a single detail of what was discussed on that occasion either.

Before moving to Bristol, Jacques had been the leading light of the Communist Party branch in Cambridge. I am not sure why this should have been so; perhaps it was connected with the fact that there was little or no industry in Cambridge, and the academic element in the Party could naturally dominate it, and perhaps the particular outlook of the academic element of Jacques's generation was influenced by the particular outlook of the older generation of Cambridge Communists: it was Maurice Dobb, after all, Fellow in

Economics at Trinity, who was the High Priest of Market Socialist revisionism within the CPGB from the mid-1950s onwards. But, whatever the reason, I have little hesitation in saying that it *was* dominated by Jacques's outlook, and that it subsequently played a role out of all proportion to its size in transmitting this outlook to the wider Party and, through the Broad Left, to the British Labour movement as a whole.

Dave Cook, a Yorkshireman of working class origins, was a transitional figure in the role of National Student Organiser. I think that he was appointed by King Street as part of the drive against the Surrey faction, but that his background (as well as his fundamentally decent character) made him acceptable to a wide spectrum within the Party. But he only lasted two years in the role. By the autumn of 1974 he had been succeeded by Jon Bloomfield, a middle-class Communist from Cambridge, and a faithful disciple of Martin Jacques.

Jacques's outlook was made clear in his reply to a long-running discussion in the columns of **Marxism Today** on 'Trends in Youth Culture'. This discussion took place in 1974-1975, and Jacques's reply was published in the April 1975 issue. But the position he put forward in this reply, and which most other contributors to the discussion supported, was simply the evolved expression of a position which he had already been canvassing for the previous five years, if not longer.

This position took as its point of departure certain cultural developments in Britain in the 1960s, the 'radical' aspects of pop music (The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Who, etc.), the popularity of folk songs of the 'protest' variety imported from America (Bob Dylan, Joan Baez), the growth of the 'alternative society' or 'counter-culture' ideology, also imported from America, as well as the student revolt itself and especially that aspect of it connected with opposition to the Vietnam war, and argued that these developments were evidence of the existence of something called 'Youth Culture'. Youth Culture was not to be dismissed as 'petty-bourgeois' or 'individualist' and so irrelevant to Communists. On the contrary, the element of rebellion or revolt expressed in these cultural manifestations was to be taken seriously, and it was the duty of Communists to see to it that its revolutionary potential was realised. While admitting that *"such revolts may well become absorbed and integrated by the bourgeoisie"*, Jacques insisted that

"such revolts can move in the other direction, towards a more generalised opposition based on a more universal understanding of their causes. Here the role of the Party is critical. Its intervention can be decisive in ensuring that the positive aspects of the revolt ultimately prove to be the decisive ones in its development. But in order to make such an intervention, the Party must be involved in these struggles..." (**Marxism Today**, April 1975, pp. 112-113).

In other words, what Jacques was proposing was an entirely new agenda for the CPGB, one which took as axiomatic the postulate that *"for Marxists...the cultural and ideological spheres are crucial areas of struggle"* (p. 112), and which accordingly privileged the political role of Communists inhabiting these spheres, that is, academics such as himself. But the other fundamental aspects of this outlook were its orientation to America and its essentially parasitic and opportunistic relationship to cultural *trends*.

This outlook expressed the acute awareness of elements within the CPGB that pro-Sovietism was no longer fashionable within the British intelligentsia, and a tacit assumption that the intelligentsia mattered more than the working class. Conscious that the Soviet ideal was a turn-off for British academics and students with radical impulses, unable to provide a form of socialist politics distinct from and independent of the Soviet model into which to direct the rebelliousness of 'youth', Jacques & Co. opted for fashion-following as a political agenda, and covered their ideological flanks by investing the fashions in question with not only an anti-capitalist character (which some of them arguably possessed in some measure) but also a socialist potential which could be realised through developing fluids furnished by the CPGB.

The delusion inherent in this outlook, that the *"intervention"* of the CPGB would be enough to triumph over the capacity of *"the bourgeoisie"* to *"absorb and integrate"* these rebellions, should be obvious to everyone today. But the long term significance of the Jacques agenda lay in the fact that the fashions it proposed to follow were all American fashions. Belief in the revolutionary potential of American fashions replaced the old belief in the revolutionary potential of Soviet influence. The vacant space in the mind-set of British Communism where illusions about the USSR had been was filled with hallucinations about the USA.

The politics of what, in the 1980s, was to be called the 'Rainbow coalition' existed in embryo within the CPGB in 1974-5, if not earlier, and Martin Jacques's claim to paternity is stronger than that of anyone else.

The benefits of this new orientation were numerous. It gave the middle-class intellectual wing of the CPGB plenty of things to do in the academic and literary sphere which kept them well away from the industrial sphere in which they no longer took a real interest in any case; it enabled the CP to become influential once again in the British intelligentsia as the authoritative arbiter of what was and what was not progressive in the stream of American fashions in which this intelligentsia lived and breathed; it enabled the CP to *"absorb and integrate"* the new fashion of feminism in particular, and so tap the energies of a new generation of radical middle class women; and it did all this without immediately disturbing in any serious way the various vested interests in the Party's apparatus, and without formally breaking with the general ideology of the Party as a whole (other than in the tendency, scandalous to Frenchite ears, to voice public criticism of the USSR as part of the distancing manoeuvre).

Someone somewhere once wrote that a successful revolution is one in which the professed values (as opposed to the real values) of the old order are made the real values of the new order. By that definition, what occurred within the CPGB between 1972 and 1975 was a kind of revolution, and beneath all the waffle about culture and so forth the central aspect of this revolution concerned the Party's attitude to the working class.

The vigorous championing of the established routines of British trade unionism was, as I have explained, a central element of the strategy of the pro-Moscow Communists to bring about the eventual abolition of British trade unionism. In defending free collective bargaining against the attempts of Labour governments to promote incomes policies, the CPGB professed an attachment to the principles of free trade unionism which it did not really feel. But with the displacement of the pro-Moscow Old Guard by Jacques and his followers, the CPGB lost all interest in the fantasy of a Soviet-style proletarian dictatorship, and its attachment to free collective bargaining became disconnected from unavowable ulterior motives of this kind, and found a natural place for itself within a critique of British social democracy which, for all its Marxist terminology, was in effect a critique from the standpoint of American capitalist democracy.

American capitalist democracy has made room for American trade unionism because this trade unionism accepts the capitalist system as eternal, takes it for granted that collective bargaining in the labour market is its principal if not its only business, has no ambition to take responsibility for management, and is not affiliated to any political party. The American working class has no politics of its own, and its spontaneous attitudes are regarded as the last word in reaction by the fashionable lines of middle class American radicalism.

A mere 20 years after the mutation which produced the Broad Left occurred, the British working class has been all but reduced to the same outlook and situation, and the Labour Party has all but ceased to represent it, and has lost four elections in

a row, and even with Kinnock and Clarke at last out of the way its remaining leaders still cannot put two and two together.

But Martin Jacques has taken all these developments - that is to say, the catastrophe which has engulfed the British working class - in his stride. The striking thing about the way **Marxism Today** under his editorship in the 1980s responded to Thatcherism was that this response was unaccompanied by the slightest regret for - let alone anger at - all the damage Thatcherism was doing to the working class. On the contrary, Jacques enthusiastically embraced the *"New Times"* he so sententiously told his readers about. In this respect, Jacques's outlook exactly mirrored that of the doyen of CPGB academic pundits, Eric Hobsbawm, in 1978 when he announced that "the forward march of Labour" had been "halted" without expressing the slightest concern at the fact, for the excellent reason that it was the indefatigable wrecking activity of Hobsbawm's own party which had been primarily responsible for it.

There was nothing surprising about Jacques's attitude to Thatcherism at all. For the critique of British social democracy from the standpoint of American capitalist democracy which informed his fashion-following agenda for the CPGB in the 1970s was of course, in most points of substance, precisely what underlay Margaret Thatcher's policy-making agenda for the Conservative Party in the 1980s. And since April 9 he has been hammering away in the **Observer** and elsewhere at the theme that Labour must consummate the protracted act of hara-kiri which he has been urging it to commit for years by cutting its last links with the trade unions, and become a party of utter tumbleweeds like himself.

The CPGB has all but achieved its two most important negative aims in British politics, while achieving none of its positive aims. The first great negative aim was to destroy the umbilical connection between the trade unions and the Labour Party, because this connection condemned the CP to a permanently marginal role. And the second great negative aim was to destroy in the mind of leftwing opinion in Britain the attachment to the British tradition of representative government via parliamentary democracy which informed the mainstream of British socialism from the 1870s to the 1970s.

The CPGB has never wanted the British working class to have politics of its own. From 1921 to around 1970 its aim was to impose Soviet politics on it. Since the early 1970s it has been principally engaged in imposing a superficially modified brand of American politics on it. Throughout its entire existence the CP has been determined to destroy the politics which the British working class actually produced for itself, and which were given their highest expression by Ernest Bevin, and which won Labour the greatest number of votes it has ever received in a British general election in 1951.

So the change from the shamefaced Soviet orientation to the tacit American orientation, while involving a radical turning away from the working class, and a massively negative re-evaluation of its spontaneous social attitudes and behaviour, and a genuine (as opposed to hypocritical) acceptance of its free collective bargaining routines, and thus a revolution in the CPGB's attitude to it, was a change only in what one might call the positive content of the CPGB's worldview. It was made possible by the fact that there was no change in the negative content of this worldview, which was preserved intact. And this means that what really motivated the CPGB was a bitter hostility to British society and the British state, rather than a serious sympathy for some other society and state.

"The Ultra-Left was necessary to the Broad Left as the external condition of its own cohesion and the justification for its own activity. The Broad Left needed an Ultra-Left antagonist (just as the New World Order needs an endless supply of Saddams and Qadhafis) because it would have disintegrated without one."

The pre-condition of Jacques's attitude to American fashions was an uncritical orientation to American society founded on a thorough-going lack of curiosity about America which guaranteed that an abstract vision of America could survive in his mind indefinitely because untroubled by any real knowledge of the place. This was, of course, the exact counterpart of the earlier attitude towards the Soviet Union. The dominant characteristic of both attitudes was the radical lack of realism which informed them. And this profoundly unrealistic attitude towards the USSR and the USA is the proof, if proof were needed, that the mind-set of British Communist 'intellectuals' has never ceased to be the mind-set of people living in wonderland, and only sponging off, and shitting on, the real world.

Jacques version of this outlook, subsequently labelled, very inaccurately, as 'Eurocommunist', took over the Party as a whole in the mid-1970s and led it inexorably to its disintegration, because it put the intellectual leadership of the Party at odds with its industrial cadre, and ensured that this cadre could not renew itself. But in the short run it gave the Party's work in the academic sphere a new lease of life and fresh energy, and this energy was injected with vigour into the Broad Left in the student movement.

The effect of this change in the CP was that the content of the outlook at the core of the politics of the Broad Left was transformed from a secretive but self-satisfied Leninist cynicism which at least notionally placed the working class at the centre of the picture to a shameless but self-deluding opportunism which placed American fashions - feminism, anti-racism, anti-sexism, gay liberation, etc., etc. - at the centre of the picture and dressed all this up in Marxist verbiage and redefined 'socialism' in terms of it. In other words, while the orientation of the Broad Left remained fiercely at odds with the real traditions of British democracy and the real interests of British workers, its core became hollow.

With the rise to power of Kinnock and Clarke, the Labour Party was taken over by the *emptiest* kind of cynicism it has ever been its misfortune to be infected by. The cynicism of Digby Jacks and Jeff Staniforth was the cynicism of people who believed in something they could not publicly profess and who were accordingly taking most of the people they worked with for a ride. The cynicism of Neil Kinnock and Charles Clarke has been the unutterably shallow cynicism of people who no longer believe in anything except the gullibility of the British electorate, a belief which has apparently survived repeated demonstrations that it is false.

And this, together with the congenital disinclination of Broad Leftism to mobilise its notional constituency, is why there has been no capacity in Kinnock's and Clarke's Labour Party to organise any kind of agitation in the country against even the most outrageous actions of Thatcher's successive governments, despite the evident disposition of large sections of British public opinion to be mobilised in the most vigorous way if only given a political lead.

It is in the light of these facts, and only in the light of them, that Kinnock's obsessive witch-hunt against Militant can be understood.

The media (with the sole exception of **L&TUR**) have unanimously and consistently supported Kinnock's drive against Militant. The Tory press has always known its business, and that blood-letting in the Labour Party is to be encouraged without reservation. But the witch-hunt against Militant has been supported by virtually the entire pro-Labour press as well, from **The Guardian** to the **Tribune**. What none of these organs have ever done is reflect on the reasons for Kinnock's obsession.

Having no programme or avowable purpose of substance, the Broad Left would have lacked a *raison d'être* that it could proclaim had it not been for the existence of the Ultra-Left. It could not admit that its function, from the point of view of the CP which was orchestrating it, was to divert

leftwing students away from the CP's trade union cadres. Still less could it admit that its other function, from the point of view of the non-Communist elements like Charles Clarke who made up the majority of its activists, was simply that of an electoral machine to get them into NUS offices as the launching pads for their subsequent careers in the Labour Party. And so the business of thwarting the Ultra-Left in student politics became the avowed *raison d'être* of the Broad Left, and assumed the moral dimensions of a crusade. The existence of the Ultra-Left was necessary to the Broad Left as the external condition of its own cohesion and the justification for its own existence and activity. The Broad Left needed an Ultra-Left antagonist (in exactly the same way that Bush's New World Order needs an endless supply of Saddams and Qadhafis), because it would have disintegrated without one.

IS, being active in student politics, was the ideal adversary of the Broad Left within the NUS. But once the Broad Left generation moved into the Labour Party and took over its leadership, they no longer had IS to muster their forces against. The IS had become the Socialist Workers' Party and the SWP has always been resolutely non-entryist. And while elements of the IMG and other smaller Trotskyist groupings were to be found in the Labour Party by the late 1970s and early 1980s, they were too small and too ridiculous to serve the Broad Left's purpose. It was at this point that Militant (aka the Revolutionary Socialist League, RSL) loomed up on the Broad Left's horizon.

The RSL had never attached importance to student unionism, and had taken no part in it. So far as I am aware it was the only trend in British Trotskyism to take student unionism at its true value. Unlike the IMG, the RSL never took its eyes off the working class. And, unlike the IS/SWP, the RSL/Militant never underestimated the strength of the bond between the working class and the Labour Party, and never supposed that building another working-class party in opposition to the Labour Party was a venture that could succeed. (The SWP has been trying to build such a party for twenty years and, for all its energy and determination, has got nowhere.) The RSL accordingly opted for, and stuck to, an entryist strategy. And in line with this strategy its only interest in the student political milieu was in those students active in the Labour Clubs and the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS). As such, it went virtually unnoticed by the Broad Left until the Broad Left graduated from the NUS to the Labour Party.

Michael Foot once described Militant as "a pestilential nuisance". Coping with nuisances is a necessary part of all forms of social activity. Coping with them deftly is an essential aspect of the political art.

From the point of view of any tendency in the Labour Party with a clear position and view of its objectives, every other tendency is a nuisance, unless its energies can be harnessed in some way despite itself. From the point of view of the Attlee leadership in 1950-55, not to mention the Gaitskell leadership in 1959-61, Mike Foot and his mates were a pestilential nuisance on a scale and in a manner to which accurate epithets could not be applied in polite society.

"...the utter emptiness of Kinnockism meant that its leadership of the Labour Party constantly tended to generate opposition to itself from those elements within the Party with any vestige of self-respect or an independent political outlook, and this opposition, being constantly regenerated, had constantly to be suppressed."

It is not to be wondered at that politicians who have made a career out of being pestilential nuisances of the most irresponsible and unreasonable kind should not know how to deal deftly with other political tendencies that make life a trial for them in their respectable dotage. There can be no doubt that, in 1981-3, from the point of view of an Old Bevanite like Foot, Militant *were* a nuisance, and that he heartily wished to have done with them, and that in saying this when he did Foot lent his personal authority to Kinnock's subsequent drive to have done with them.

But the interesting thing about Kinnock's drive against Militant is that it was never over, it was always unfinished, there were always plenty of Militants still in the woodwork at the end of the day, and the drive always had to be relaunched before long. Has it never occurred to Michael Foot, watching his protégé's painful progress over the last nine years, that from the point of view of the merger, in the Kinnock-Clarke tandem, of lapsed Bevanism with Broad Leftism, Militant were not a nuisance at all, but a God-send, in fact a vital necessity?

The never-quite-completed, forever-to-be-recommenced, witch-hunt against Militant was a permanent feature of the Clarke-Kinnock leadership of the Labour Party because it was an indispensable feature. It was indispensable because the permanent presence of an Ultra-Left antagonist was the external condition of the Broad Left's cohesion within the Labour leadership just as it had been in the NUS leadership. It was indispensable because the inability of the Broad Left Labour leadership to engage in proper agitation meant that it constantly needed to engage in displacement activity instead. It was indispensable because the Labour leadership, being at odds with the impulses of the Party membership and spiritually prostrate before the media, needed constantly to play to the media gallery and obtain its approval and applause to bolster its own position. And it was indispensable for another reason, which is that the utter emptiness of Kinnockism meant that its leadership of the Labour Party constantly tended to generate opposition to itself from those elements within the Party with any vestige of self-respect or an independent political outlook, and this opposition, being constantly regenerated, had constantly to be suppressed.

Militant is not the only element within the Labour Party to have fallen foul of the Kinnock-Clarke leadership because of its determined attachment to a certain conception of the working class interest and its refusal to be impressed by Kinnock's empty rhetoric and misconceived strategy. The Ernest Bevin Society and the **Labour & Trade Union Review** have also fallen foul of this leadership. But the problem for Kinnock and Clarke has been that **L&TUR** is not a Trotskyist magazine, and members of the Ernest Bevin Society have not been taking over CLPs and de-selecting Kinnock supporters and running local councils in a controversial manner and so on. They have simply been thinking and publishing their thoughts.

These thoughts have been impossible to attack openly. Time and again **L&TUR** has advocated policies - on defence, on credit controls, on the rates system as the proper alternative to the poll tax - which Kinnock & Co. have eventually been obliged to come round to. Moreover, the policies which Kinnock & Co. have refused to borrow from **L&TUR** - incomes policy, industrial democracy, etc. - while irksome to conservative trade union bosses, are hardly the material upon which McCarthyite accusations can be based. And what would British public opinion make of an open, highly publicised and self-righteous drive to purge the Labour Party of the disciples of...*Ernest Bevin?*

And so the administrative measures taken to scotch the threat posed by **L&TUR** have been furtive measures. MPs and trade union leaders and journalists disposed to read **L&TUR** with interest, if not enthusiasm, have been quietly taken aside and talked to, and whispers have been sent down the grapevines, and important institutions within the Labour movement have been warned not to subscribe to **L&TUR**, or induced, if they already subscribed to **L&TUR**, to cancel this subscription.

These measures have not been taken in any formal way, and have not officially implicated the Labour Party at all, and have therefore allowed of no redress. They have been taken in an entirely informal way, by a tiny circle, and the central element of them has been a smear. This

smear has been to the effect that all is not what it seems, and that **L&TUR** is really a B&ICO magazine, and therefore beyond the pale; that is to say, the organ of a small and little known (and therefore easily misrepresented) leftwing discussion group and publisher which has never been either an electoral adversary of the Labour Party or proscribed by it, but is beyond the pale in any case, because important people say so, and because, in a Labour Party whose constitution has been reduced to a farce and in a media world gangrened by the routines of sycophancy, their word has the force of law.

I do not know for a fact who has been behind this campaign of whispers and slanders. I only know that this campaign has been waged. And since I have known all along that Charles Clarke has known all along that I was a member of the B&ICO from 1977 to 1986, I have not wasted much of my time over the last five years wondering where this smear has originated from.

The crux of this smear has not been its misrepresentation of the relationship between the B&ICO and the Ernest Bevin Society, since there have been important elements of continuity as well as discontinuity between the two. The crux of the smear has been its misrepresentation of the relationship between the politics of the B&ICO/Ernest Bevin Society and the politics of the Labour Party in the days when it had serious politics. The impression has been assiduously fostered that the politics of the B&ICO/Ernest Bevin Society are a bizarre and alien intrusion into the Labour political tradition, when they are in fact the renaissance of the best elements of this tradition.

The B&ICO was the only grouping within British Marxism, since the informal circle which included G.D.H. Cole and John Strachey in the mid-1930s, to come genuinely to terms with British liberal democracy. It did this five years before I joined it, in the course of a protracted internal debate in 1972, which was very thoroughly ventilated in its publications, over the possibilities for socialist development within the framework of parliamentary democracy in Britain. This debate was prompted by the conflict between the trade union movement and the Heath government, and the subsequent Tripartite Talks of the summer of 1972, and it resulted in the B&ICO's explicit abandonment of Lenin's view of the British state, and of the Leninist perspective in the British context, and the equally explicit adoption of the democratic, gradualist and evolutionary perspective originally expounded by Marx and Engels in the 1870s and 1880s, and taken up and applied by Ernest Bevin from around the time of the first world war up until 1951.

I learned of this debate by accident in the autumn of 1972, when I was still in the CP at Oxford. I got hold of the publications in which it was conducted, and read them all with relish. I had been far too well educated in socialist politics by my father to be able to take seriously the lifeless material published by the CPGB or the histrionic material published by the Trotskyists, and when I came across the material of the B&ICO I recognised real intellectual honesty and self-confidence and political purpose and vigour when I saw it.

Because I still had business to transact in the CP I stayed in it for some time longer, but I was reading B&ICO material steadily from then on for the next five years, and found myself in complete agreement with it, as a properly functioning palate and digestion will find themselves in complete agreement with a series of splendid meals. But while this material maintained its extraordinarily high standard throughout, it would have been difficult for it to surpass the quality of the 1972 debate. And so let me here pay tribute to the decisive contribution to that debate made by Nina Fishman, who parted company with the nucleus of the Ernest Bevin Society when the B&ICO was dissolved in 1986, but whose brilliant work 14 years earlier played a large part in drawing me into the B&ICO in the first place.

"The fundamental purpose of Labour politics is the political representation of the labour interest, the interest of the working class, in British society. It has no more important purpose, and no other purposes can sustain it if this fundamental purpose is abandoned."

Although the B&ICO was substantially Bevinite from 1972 onwards, it continued to describe itself as 'Communist' for the next fourteen years, despite the fact that this description was profoundly misleading. The pejorative connotations of the term 'Communist' have historically had everything to do with the notion that Communists are agents of a foreign power and advocates of violent revolution and a dictatorial form of government. The B&ICO from the outset operated on the premise that its organisational independence was the precondition of its intellectual and spiritual independence, and unlike every other grouping in British or Irish Marxism it made a point, indeed a virtue, of never being connected in any way whatever with any other political organisation, let alone a foreign power. And from 1972 onwards it was explicitly committed to the preservation of the constitutional framework of British democratic politics, not its overthrow. It was with some reason, therefore, that certain members of the B&ICO came to feel that the 'Communist' tag was a pointless encumbrance and needed to be changed.

This point of view was argued within the B&ICO by the well known journalist, John Lloyd, of the **Financial Times** and *quondam* editor of the **New Statesman**, at a General Meeting of the B&ICO in Belfast in 1979. But agreement could not be reached on a new name, it was pointed out that the term 'Communist' long pre-dated Lenin and the Bolsheviks and had no necessary connotations of dictatorship, let alone service of a foreign power, and it was felt above all that the business of the B&ICO was to continue its adventure in thought and that if the 'Communist' tag put off certain people that was their problem. And it was agreed by all and sundry, with the exception of John Lloyd, who resigned at this juncture, that the B&ICO was not in the business of public relations, and that a preoccupation with public relations was the worst possible reason for the B&ICO to change its name.

The B&ICO continued its robustly independent intellectual odyssey for the next seven years. But by 1986 the feeling had gained ground within its membership that it had served its purpose. The fundamental task which it had set itself at its inception in the mid-1960s - the general clarification of socialist thought and history - had been largely accomplished; the perspective which had originally informed this task in the mid-1960s - that of constituting the intellectual nucleus of a revitalised Communist movement - had been definitively abandoned in 1972; and the last accounts with the Russian Revolution had been settled in 1985, and the B&ICO no longer considered itself to be Marxist by then. And in view of the fact that B&ICO members in Ireland were being drawn into liberal-democratic agitations which had nothing specifically socialist about them (the Campaign to Separate Church and State in the Irish Republic, and the Campaign for Equal Citizenship in Northern Ireland), it was decided that the time had come to wind the organisation up, and allow each of its constituent branches in London, Dublin and Belfast to go its own way.

By mid-1986 the former London branch of the B&ICO found itself on its own and without a name, and soon lost several of its longstanding and most active members. Nina Fishman, in particular, a leading light of the London branch for 16 years, gave up on Labour politics altogether at this juncture and went off into *Tactical Voting '87* (which subsequently evolved into *Common Voice*). But the rest of us refused to give up on Labour politics at that point and, rather than say die, decided to start publishing a new magazine which would explicitly support and address the Labour Party, and see what happened.

We agreed not to call ourselves anything at first; we considered ourselves to be, and were, Labour Party members who, like so many other Labour Party members, had formerly belonged to something else, and who had a particular point of view which we wished to canvass inside the Labour Party. And so we simply described ourselves initially as "the people who produce **Labour & Trade Union Review**". But we soon found that this description satisfied none of the people at Labour Party meetings and conferences who asked us who published the magazine. And so we decided that we had to call ourselves something, and agreed to call ourselves the Ernest Bevin Society, which was the name of an organisation in which certain B&ICO members had been involved in 1984-5, but which had since become inactive. The first issue of **L&TUR** was published in January 1987, and the editorial board of **L&TUR** was describing itself as the Ernest Bevin Society from around July 1987 onwards, since when the total membership of the Society has grown slightly, but has never remotely looked like reaching three figures.

This is what Charles Clarke and Neil Kinnock have been so scared of, and so unable to come to terms with, and so hostile to. Why?

In the Labour Party from its birth right up until 1979, Left and Right put up with each other because, however much they might disagree with and exasperate each other, they recognised each other as legitimate and necessary elements of the Party. But the irruption of student leftism into the Labour Party after 1979 destroyed this historic understanding, and on capturing the Party leadership in 1983 Broad Leftism set out to complete the process of destruction by launching a scorched-earth campaign against everything disposed to resist its corrupting embrace.

Marx once decribed the rise of the joint stock company, with the concomitant disappearance of the classic entrepreneur as the function of the capitalist became increasingly socialised, as the abolition of the capitalist mode of production within the capitalist mode of production. The Broad Left is the abolition of the Left within the Left. Broad Leftism presupposes the prior elimination of the 'Right', and its advent therefore abolishes the dichotomy which made the term 'Left' meaningful.

Broad Leftism represents nothing. It believes in nothing. It mobilises nothing. And it has achieved nothing of value.

Its ascendancy has stopped the Labour Party from representing the working class, and has induced the Party to abandon all of its principles, and has precluded the Party from mobilising public opinion against Conservative misgovernment, and has destroyed the Party's capacity to address the electorate in a way which meets with belief. It has made the Labour Party unfit for Government and incapable of Opposition alike.

The 'end of Labour politics' is a phrase which can mean two quite different things. It can mean the purpose, the finality, of Labour politics, or it can mean the death of Labour politics.

The fundamental purpose and objective of Labour politics is the political representation of the labour interest, the interest of the working class, in British society. It has no more important purpose, and no other single purpose or pot-pourri of purposes can sustain it if this fundamental purpose is abandoned. This purpose and objective has been persistently canvassed by **L&TUR** since its inception.

The Broad Left has been destroying the Labour Party because latter-day Broad Leftism has no purpose whatever beyond the personal ambitions of its adepts. The lapsed Bevanite at the end of his rhetorical tether has been like the Emperor who wanted new clothes, and Broad Leftism profferred itself to him as a flexible and glossy new suit which would hide his nakedness. But Broad Leftism has been as transparent as see-through plastic, and the British people have seen through it. And **L&TUR** has been the small clear-eyed boy who has fallen foul of the Emperor's tailors and courtiers for telling him that he has been exposing himself when they have been telling him that he never looked smarter.

The Broad Left is the enemy of the Ernest Bevin Society as an impostor is the enemy of the person whose inheritance he has usurped. It cannot deal with the Ernest Bevin Society politically, because it has no politics.

When I broke with student politics in 1973, I knew that I needed time to work out a fresh political orientation to the world, and so I deliberately used my period of research on Algerian politics as a breathing space, and a time for reflection. And when I was finally settled in Britain again in 1977, I simultaneously rejoined the Labour Party in Norwich as the forum within which I could get back in touch with the British working class, and joined the B&ICO as the one element of the British Left that had a clear political vision and clear political principles. If I had not decided to leave my job at the University of East Anglia in 1988, I should still be in the admirable Norwich Labour Party, instead of the disgusting masquerade that calls itself the Labour Party in Hackney. And I should still be in the B&ICO as well if it had not been dissolved in 1986.

But although the B&ICO no longer exists, the politics it had evolved by 1985-6 still exist. These politics are the developed expression, forty years on, of the same honest impulses and sound instincts, the same clear principles and ambitious purposes, and the same intellectual curiosity and political resourcefulness which animated Ernest Bevin and the Labour and trade union leaders who worked with him and made possible the great achievements of Labour in government between 1940 and 1951.

Having started out in the mid-1960s as earnest Leninists who could see that Khruschev and Brezhnev were rubbish and who had the intellectual courage to recognise that Stalin was a continuation of Lenin not a deviation from him, the B&ICO was led by the same intellectual honesty and sense of reality to abandon the Leninist attitude to British democracy, and in the process worked its way back in thought to what Attlee and Bevin had been about when what they had been about had been totally forgotten, if not deliberately obscured, by the various forces on the British Left.

That element of the old London branch of the B&ICO which stayed together in 1986 had every right to call itself the Ernest Bevin Society from 1987 onwards, because its politics since long before 1987 have been the resumption and continuation and development of Bevin's politics.

These politics have been a standing reproach to Neil Kinnock and Charles Clarke, and Charles Clarke and Neil Kinnock have known this in their bones. But they have not known what to do about it, except to batten down all the hatches, and bank once more on administrative measures and opinion polls and public relations stunts and the gullibility of the electorate to see them home. And it hasn't worked, as I have always known it would not work.

The Ernest Bevin Society has not been discouraged, and the opinion polls got it wrong, and the stunts back-fired, and the electorate has not been gulled. And where has that left Kinnock and Clarke?

Well, this is the sense which I am able to make of the character of leftwing student politics twenty years ago and their devastating effect on the Labour Party since then. It is high time that other members of my and Clarke's generation gave their account of these matters. The columns of **L&TUR** are open to them. I have only sketched things from my viewpoint, and not everything can be seen from this viewpoint.

And there are plenty of people with a lot of explaining to do.

But it does not seem to me, in retrospect, that I was the one who was "a great loss to politics" in 1982. The effect of the futile constitutional and ideological turmoil between 1979 and 1981 was to make the Labour Party a politics-free zone. And in pursuing their inflated ambitions within this zone, Charles Clarke and Neil Kinnock, who both started out in the early 1970s with real political talents and virtues, became political zombies, and transformed the 'leadership' of the Labour Party into the political equivalent of the Upas-tree, in the shade of which everything rots. □

Notes on the News

by Madawc Williams

McLunatic polls

It was fitting that Kinnock's leadership should come to an end with a complaint about the media. He had spent his whole time in power trying to make Labour what the media said it ought to be, even when this was quite unlike what Labour's actual supporters wanted it to be. When it came to the election, what he was offering was very little different from what John Major was already providing. Since the Daily Beasts then turned on him, doing as their masters were telling them to do, his defeat was not at all surprising.

If Labour is ever to get elected, it has to forget the dogmas of Marshall McLuhan, the man who first said "the medium is the message". It's just not true - and who even remembers what medium McLuhan used to deliver that particular message? Labour was much too timid about saying the things the media didn't want to hear.

The fact that the Tories have *increased* taxes, and dumped more of them on poor and middle-income groups was just not said often enough. People should have been told time and time again that it was their VAT that was paying for tax cuts. They should have been told time and again that the rich get the lions's share of cuts in income tax.

The Tory campaign concentrated on conning people - convincing them that they were about to be loaded with huge taxes. Labour should not have stuck to polite protests when the media started telling lies. They should have pointed out that top presenters and journalists get very large salaries and have been doing very nicely out of the Tories. They should have called some of those people liars, and pointed out who their owners were. An aggressive anti-media campaign would probably have made all the difference.

Above all, the polls should not have been trusted. The Tory campaign went out to play on selfishness and fear. The gap between the exit polls and the actual votes prove that a fair chunk of the population voted Tory in a rather shame-faced spirit, knowing that good causes like the NHS were being hurt, but imagining that the profits would go into their own pockets.

The media flatter people, kid them into thinking that they are much closer to the 'top people' than they actually are. Most people will rate themselves as well above average, given half a chance.

Most people are also very willing to believe that the media are out to con them. But the Labour leadership was never able to convince themselves that there was indeed a real world of independent-minded people, out there beyond the confines of the media picture. Even Kinnock, with very little left to lose, chose to go with a whimper rather than a bang.

A working-class section?

The new "dream ticket" is being talked about, to balance north and south, left and right, even perhaps male and female. On this basis, perhaps the deputy's job should go to Dianne Abbott. As a black female Londoner, she'd fill three quotas at once. (Considered just as a person, she might actually do a good job - better than some of the names being put up, certainly.)

But what's remarkable is that no one is talking about class or social origin. Smith and Gould are both very obviously middle class. Indeed, John Prescott is the one and only serious candidate who *isn't* middle class. Labour used to be a mix of 'workers by hand and brain. But since the 1960s, it has become increasingly dominated by middle-class public sector workers, especially teachers and lecturers. This one group accounted for no less than 113 of Labour's candidates. (**The Independent**, 27th March.) This contrasts with a mere 25 who were political officers or trade union officials, and a mere 22 lawyers. No figures were given for industrial workers, or even for ordinary office workers - these are presumably so few as not to be worth recording.

Is it any wonder that skilled manual workers switched over to the Tories under Thatcher, and mostly failed to switch back at the last election.

Liberal-Democrats - a remnant once again

Back in the late 19th century, when the working class began to get the vote, some of the Tories decided that they would make that vote their own, leaving the Liberals with just the middle classes. Lord Randolph Churchill (father of Winston) was a pioneer of this policy, but it became part of the general Tory understanding of politics.

In the first half of the 20th century, the Liberals had a brief burst of reforming glory in the 1900s, and then went into decline. It was a complex process - Winston Churchill went from Tory to Liberal to Tory as part of it. But it ended with the Liberals reduced to a remnant, always hoping for great things but never achieving them.

The SDP split from Labour seemed to have changed all that. Surely the Liberals could not waste such an opportunity and go back to being a nice fringe party? It seemed impossible - and yet the Liberals managed it. They wrecked the SDP after the previous election, and this one has put them right back where they started from.

The life-blood of industry

You may remember the recent news that British scientists had developed a practical form of artificial blood. With the menace of AIDS and other blood-born diseases, this is not just an important development, but also likely to be profitable.

But not for British industry. The scientists in question searched in vain for a British backer. Their discovery will be developed by a US firm instead. This is a typical pattern, well-known even in the 19th century. British businessmen are not just ignorant - they don't *want* to know what science has to offer.

Mrs Thatcher was a defector from Industrial Chemistry. She was getting nowhere until she managed to marry a rich businessman, whereupon she began retraining as a barrister, and then suddenly achieved success in politics. Given this background, and her smug aggressive silly self-righteous attitude, it is hardly surprising that she bashed British science, weakening many of the areas in which Britain was still world-class. She gave huge subsidies to the businessmen, but these remain second-rate, true to the traditions that lost us our lead as the world's first industrial nation.

It's lucky we're in the Common Market. If it was left to home-grown 'entrepreneurs', we'd soon be falling behind Latin America.

Dead canaries

During the 1980s we saw ordinary British youngsters sleeping on the streets, while huge resources were pushed into building clumps of luxury office blocks. The 'miracle of the market' led developers to do this, and this same miracle is now dumping a vast surplus of unwanted office space onto a saturated market.

Canary Wharf is a splendid monument to Thatcherism. Enormous and enormously dull, it stands in the middle of the chaos of Docklands, a 'development' area blighted by its lack of good public transport. Its owners, Olympia and York, are looking for some 100 million to complete it. They may get it, too, despite being fully 20 thousand million dollars in debt.

Banks crack down on ordinary debtors, but have to be tolerant of those who are too rich to be allowed to crash, those whose crash might cause a financial panic. Ordinary band depositors and creditors will bear the ultimate burned of bailing out the very rich.

Why was such speculative folly ever allowed in the first place? Ask Thatcher.