

Labour & Trade Union Review

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Clause 4 Debate

Labour, Euro-Sceptics & Ulster Unionists

Gaitskell Debate

Railways

**Notes on the News
Trade Union Diary
Book Review**

Editorial

The Clause 4 Debate

Need versus Greed

Do we reverse the Thatcherite development, or capitulate to it?

The "New Labour" reformers claim that they are extending the appeal of the Party beyond its traditional roots. It will, they believe, reflect the interests of virtually all the people. That is why they wish to marginalise the trade unions and dispense with socialist ideology.

What they are doing in practice is neglecting the interests of a real social majority - the working class - and pandering to the interests of that section of the middle class which was made uncivilised during the Thatcherite experiment.

Two major programmes for social reform have been proposed in the Labour Party since its formation. The first, in the thirties and forties, succeeded in being enacted. The second, in the sixties and seventies, did not.

Both programmes had two things in common. Firstly, they reflected the real needs of the majority class in society - the working class. Secondly, because general social development required that the working class's time had come, reform in its interests would produce a civilising effect on all classes. And who can dispute the remarkable turn around in the social attitudes of the middle and upper classes between 1945 and 1979?

The 1945 Settlement

The first reform was designed to give dignity, status and power to that section of society, the working class which, though they were the great majority, had previously been marginalised.

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The reformers' other purpose was to create the conditions whereby the primary purpose of the country's productive forces would be to serve the common good.

The ideological source from which the reformers drew their inspiration was the sentiment contained in Clause 4 of the Labour Party's Constitution.

But its details came from the daily experience of the class which would benefit from the reforms. This experience was accurately transmitted by its leaders - and primarily by Ernest Bevin.

The debates within the Labour Party and in parliament very much reflect this, with the reformers always citing the conditions of the workers and their aspirations.

And there certainly was a debate. A fierce debate. There was constant opposition to and carping at the reforms from those in our movement whose ideology was, ultimately, derived from the Communist Party.

The Communist Party was certainly not inspired by any notions of common ownership. Notions of common ownership had been swiftly purged from the Soviets in 1917, never to re-emerge in any Communist Party. At the heart of CP ideology was economic determinism, not the social determinism of the reformers. It regularly used the struggles of the working class, but only to keep it in a state of constant struggle so as to deny it power within the system of liberal democracy.

This ideology came to dominate many in our movement who would never dream of having anything to do with the CP. (And eventually, through its influence in publishing and academia, it seeped over to the Right. Economic determinism is at its most powerful among the Thatcherites - and they're not too gone on working class power either!)

The practical reformers won in 1945. They even made useful administrators in the new system out of some of the waverers - Nye Bevan and Manny Shinwell among them. But the anti-reformist ideology of the CP was to grow in the Labour Party and in the trade unions after 1951, rather than decline.

The Reform that Failed

It was the success of the 1945 reforms that made necessary the proposed reforms of the 60s and 70s. The Tory governments of the 50s allowed the reforms to be consolidated. Organised labour became the greatest power in the land.

The reforms had an effect on the ruling classes as well. Examples include such people as Lord Kearton at Courtaulds and Lord Stokes at Leyland - rich persons who could only feel comfortable by throwing in their lot with that of the working class. Campbell Adamson, head of the CBI, saw the future lying with Labour in 1974.

Peregrine Worsthorne, who seems to have been quite disorientated by the Thatcher years, was, in the mid-seventies, preparing his readers for a fundamental shift of power towards organised labour. He carried out surveys in South of England villages demonstrating that the middle classes felt it was only fair that this shift should occur.

But while organised labour was the greatest power in the land, it retained the reflexes of an oppressed class. These reflexes were reinforced, quite deliberately by leaders saturated with Communist Party ideology. This was true not only of left wingers like Hugh Scanlon and Arthur Scargill, but also of right-wingers like Frank Chapple.

A few trade union leaders and a few Labour politicians recognised the social transformation that had occurred and knew what had to be done. The power acquired by organised labour had to be matched by responsibility, and that power had to be institutionalised. Responsibility meant a legislative framework within which trade unions would operate. It also required institutions within which organised labour could exercise the power it had accumulated.

Whereas Clem Attlee, as Labour Leader, led from the front, Harold Wilson decided to remain neutral and then go with the winning side. Barbara Castle is one of the most substantial politicians of our time. She idolised Nye Bevan. But that didn't prevent her from seeing what had to be done as Ernest Bevin's successor at the Ministry of Labour.

(Later, she entered the European Parliament as a committed anti-European. But she tried to make the most of the situation, and laid the basis for the dominant position that Labour MEPs enjoy today - she saw that the "socialist" little England propaganda at the time of the referendum was a nonsense, and that the ethos of European socialism was essentially that encompassed in Clause 4 of Labour's Constitution.)

Mrs. Castle introduced her trade union reform Bill, "In Place of Strife", in 1968. The main opposition was organised by the Communist Party which wanted to preserve the free collective bargaining ethos in aspic. But the instrument for defeating the Bill was Jim Callaghan, representing the tax collectors and the Police Federation. Mr. Wilson would not stand up to Mr. Callaghan, and deserted Mrs. Castle.

But the matter did not rest there. Some trade union leaders realised that things could not stay as they were. That the employers could not remain in complete control while the trade unions were all powerful. Something had to give. A section of trade unionism decided that the workers should move into the driving seat in the economy. They proposed a system of industrial democracy which the Labour Government, re-elected in 1974 after the miners' strike, was prepared to support.

The leading figure in this movement was Jack Jones, General Secretary of the Transport & General Workers' Union. Jack Jones was a docker and had been a member of the Communist Party. He fought with great bravery in the Spanish Civil War. He went to Chile at the height of the military coup. But Jack was not encumbered by ideology and inspired the Bullock Report on Industrial Democracy in 1976.

He was defeated by the free collective bargaining faction in the trade unions and the Labour Party - the "catch-as-catch-can" element, as Ernest Bevin called them.

The stalemate thus created by an all powerful trade union movement wedded to free collective bargaining and a management of industry unable to manage was therefore resolved, not by a Labour reform, but by a Tory assault on the power of labour. Margaret Thatcher smashed the power of the

unions and introduced an era designed to reverse all the gains made since 1945. We cannot really blame Mrs. Thatcher. We have only ourselves to blame.

Where Now?

If the 1945 reforms had civilised the middle class, then any attempt to dismantle those reforms required that a large section of that class should be uncivilised. Nice people cannot do the work of breaking up the labour movement and breaking up society.

Brutal instincts had to be developed. And these instincts were developed.

(Ian Vallance was once a perfectly decent person doing his best to provide a good telephone system for the public good. He was well paid, but not extravagantly so. Now he rakes in more money than any person could reasonably hope to spend. BT makes vast profits, not by providing a service, but by regularly throwing thousands of human beings on the scrapheap.)

It is in these conditions that the Labour Party is trying to devise a policy for reform in government.

Those of us associated with the Labour & Trade Union Review were at the heart of the Reform that Failed in the 70s. And while the right wing of the movement didn't emerge from the affair covered in glory, it was the left which could have developed the negative power of organised labour into a positive and responsible lasting power for the working class, and choose not to do so.

In the early eighties we opposed these leftist pseudo democrats who decided instead to start messing up the Labour Party - people like Neil Kinnock. We also opposed the so-called looney left in local government, led by the likes of Margaret Hodge, who made the Party into a laughing stock in the country.

It was not Labour's ideals as proclaimed in Clause 4, nor Labour's primary base in organised labour, that lost elections. Clause 4 was the cement that kept the broad church together. And it was only the trade unions who could be relied on to save the Party from some of the wilder excesses of the politicians.

What lost elections were people like Neil Kinnock and Margaret Hodge. They brought the Party into disrepute. (It wasn't Clause 4, but the antics of the likes of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee that caused the near fatal split with the SDP.)

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But they and their friends needed someone else to blame. First it was Militant. Then the trade unions. Then the working class. Neil has gone off to better things. But Mrs. Hodge is at the very heart of New Labour.

Political principle must harmonise with personal ambition. And that is also the essence of Tony Blair. They and others in the leadership represent no social base other than a circle of like-minded people who have absorbed the basic ethics of Thatcherism - much as they regularly denounce these ethics.

They could perhaps have pulled off an election win (and maybe still can) if political silence could go on masking the fact that they represent nothing substantial in society. But, despite all the spin doctoring, the public is just

beginning to get a real insight into New Labour.

At Prime Minister's Questions on 14th February, Mr. Blair, in the manner of a spokesman for the people against the fat cats in the electricity industry, asked a question about the millions that executives were about to get from share options. Mr. Major replied:

"I find much of his opposition to share options to be rather synthetic, since a good deal of his leadership campaign was financed out of the proceeds of share options."

As with the sending of his son to an opt-out school, and his talk of tax breaks for people like himself and Mrs. Hodge, who employ nannies, we can

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expect much much more of this.

Having decided to blur the political distinction between Labour and the Tories, the election could well turn on whether people trust Mr. Blair more than they trust Mr. Major. People have never had a problem with Labour's core values, but they might develop a real problem with Mr. Blair's own values.

And finally, what if New Labour does win? They will still have to run the country. Thatcherism came close to

destroying the entire social fabric. Thatcherite hand-me-downs will hardly repair it. Then long after Mr. Blair has been forgotten, will Labour ever be forgiven?

appology

There was a mix-up in numbering in the last issue of this magazine. It should have been No.45 and not No.50 as it was labeled. Sorry to those who take an interest in such matters!

Trade Union Diary

by Dave Chapel

Blair & the Unions

Unions 94 was the annual jamboree of the "Democratic Left", the former Communist Party of Great Britain. Tony Blair spoke at the opening session last August. In his opinion, the future of the trade unions lay in empowering the individual worker. Mr. Blair has had a long association with this body and wrote for its former journal Marxism Today.

He appears to have been influenced over a long period by its former editor Martin Jacques who believes that the future lies with the individualisation of society. (Mr. Jacques has, for example, even written off collective sports in favour of individual sports - cricket is the sport of imperialism which no longer exists and football is the sport of the working class which no longer exists!)

Atomisation may characterise the circles in which Mr. Blair and Mr. Jacques move. Mrs. Thatcher made every effort to atomise British society. She declared that society no longer existed with the view of bringing about that very situation. She had a certain amount of success.

It is surely not the role of the Labour Party to complete the Thatcherite revolution!

Of course trade unions look after the individual worker. They always have. They do not

need Mr. Blair to tell them to do so in the future. But that is not what Mr. Blair meant.

The primary role of the trade unions is, however, a collective one. They represent what the workers have in common - not any individual ambition or inclination which may divide one worker from another.

The TUC is working flat out to reverse the changes of the eighties. Ultimately it will rely on a Labour Government to undo the anti-social legislation of the Tories. It must not let Mr. Blair and his like foist Thatcherite culture on the Labour Party.

And it goes beyond Tony Blair. Mo Mowlam, addressing a Clause 4 meeting explained to her audience that society had been individualised and that that was the way things would be in the future. That may suit rich people like some in the Labour leadership. For the rest of us it is merely a means whereby we can be exploited to the full.

Labour Mobility

Arguing against introducing European social legislation, the Tories are again emphasising the need for a flexible and mobile workforce. (The "on yer bike" philosophy propounded by Norman Tebbit some years ago.) What they would like to see is all of us running around like

mad things grabbing each other's jobs and pushing down wages.

Mobility and flexibility are, of course, essential in a modern economy. There needs to be a mobile element in the workforce to keep pace with economic and technical developments. Such an element existed in abundance in the period before the 1980s. This writer was part of that element.

Some people are like that. But they can only feel free to move about and to chop and change if there is a large stable base of work. In other words in conditions of full employment.

By shaking up the economy, by sacking hundreds of thousands at the altar of "efficiency", by creating a huge reserve army of unemployed, the Tories have destroyed the culture which facilitated labour mobility. Now everyone is terrified of losing their jobs and so nobody will voluntarily move.

The Job Application

The main television news bulletins on 15th February got themselves worked up about a new "scandal" in Hackney Council. Scandals in Hackney are about as newsworthy as rain in Scotland. But this one was not even of the order of Council officials renting out flats for their own private profit.

Employees, it appears, hadn't told the whole truth when applying for Council jobs! Even at the best of times being a bit "economical with the truth" was necessary to get a job. These days it is almost essential.

When did you last work? Two years ago. Go away! Why did you leave your last job? I hated the boss. Get lost! What experience have you had filling forms? None, I used to be a miner. Sod off!

Clause 4 - The Gaitskell Debate

Opponents of Clause 4 are given to hinting that they are the successors of Hugh Gaitskell. But there is no danger that the "comparison" will ever be spelled out. Below, Pete Whitelegg scetches the debate of 1959-60 and the events that surrounded it. And whatever one says about the Gaitskellites, they believed that the essence of Clause 4 had been achieved and that Labour had to move on.

Tony Blair opposes the essence of Clause 4. In the middle of February, Mr Blair addressed a Labour meeting in St Helens. A woman, speaking from the floor, explained Clause 4 as Labour's dream. "Well, it's not my dream", replied Mr. Blair.

When the first Labour Government was elected with a majority of 187 in August 1945, many in the Labour movement believed that a new era in British history was beginning. - Labour in power. The Party had come to power on a rising tide of change. After six years of war and a decade of economic gloom prior to the war, Labour had finally achieved its historic objective.

Although Britain was crippled with debt and had its commercial and industrial infrastructure seriously damaged, the feeling was that reconstruction could begin. At the time Hugh Dalton wrote in his diary:

"That first sensation, tingling and triumphant, was of a new society to build, and we had the power to build it. There was exhilaration among us, joy and hope, determination and confidence, we felt exalted, dedicated, walking on air, walking with destiny."

The changes envisaged encompassed virtually all aspects of British life. Within the first five years the Labour Government created the Welfare State and embarked on a massive programme of house building. But one of the main planks of the government's programme was nationalisation. The first was the Bank of England in March 1946, then civil aviation in August 1946. Coal and Cable & Wireless, 1946. Transport and electricity, 1948. Gas, 1949. Iron & steel, 1951.

Many of these industries were so run

down and dilapidated that nationalisation was the only way forward. In 1938 it had been reported that the railways were in such decrepit state that only huge subsidies to the capitalist owners or nationalisation would stave off total collapse.

Nor was nationalisation a cheap option. Although the owners had seriously underinvested in these industries, they exacted a high price from the Treasury. Compensation to the coal owners was some £164m, for gas £265m, electricity £540m, and a massive £1,000m for the railways.

Not only did they receive compensation, they also, to a large extent, retained control of their industries. When Labour finally lost office in 1951 to a Tory Government with a majority of just 17, Hugh Dalton was to reflect:

"Nor let us, looking back, belittle the tremendous changes which we made in those five shining years, from 1945 to 1950. No other five years of peace in all our Parliamentary story saw such a surge forward, on so wide a beach."

Dalton, Attlee, and the rest of the Labour Party could not have realised at the time that this would be their last taste of power until 1964.

The Rise of the Revisionists

At the Annual Conference in Scarborough in October 1951 things went well for the Bevanite left. In the results for the constituency party representatives on the NEC, Bevan topped the poll, with Driberg and

Mikardo being re-elected. Also elected was Barbara Castle (who had moved over from the women's section to the constituency section).

Their success was no spontaneous matter, it was the result of good organisation and hard work, particularly by Mikardo who worked feverishly in the constituencies to achieve the result. The success of the Bevanite left and the subsequent loss of the election had disturbed many in the Labour Party. As Labour entered 1952, Bevanism and anti-Bevanism were raging within the Party. This battle was set to continue.

Labour in 1951 had actually gone to the polls with a fairly modest set of proposals. On nationalisation it said:

"...we shall take over concerns which fail the nation and start new public enterprises wherever this will serve the national interest."

This was a statement designed to limit divisions within the Party.

The Bevanite left were not the only ones beginning to debate Labour's future. Hugh Gaitskell was a rising star and, together with Roy Jenkins, Tony Crossland, John Strachey and Douglas Jay, would begin to re-evaluate Labour's position.

During the early fifties a debate had grown around a paper called Socialist Commentary. Founded in 1942 by a group of German socialist refugees from nazism, its main influence was a German political philosopher called Leonard Nelson whose political beliefs were "ethical" rather than "scientific". It was controlled by its 12-member editorial board which was joined in 1952 by two parliamentarians, Kenneth Younger, who had been Minister of State at the Foreign Office in the 1950-51 Government, and Fred Mulley. Both were moderates who afforded Socialist Commentary a degree of respectability.

Socialist Commentary's parliamentary support increased dramatically with the creation of Friends of Socialist Commentary (FOSC). It was through this organisation the Hugh Gaitskell came into full and ultimate contact with the ideas that were to fuel him as Labour's leader.

Through Socialist Commentary and the "New Fabian Essays" leading thinkers were able to develop their ideas,

Tony Crossland and Denis Healy were but two.

On the other side, Michael Foot, Barbara Castle, Wilson and Bevan were responding to the debate through Tribune, New Society and through columns in the papers.

Gaitskell's relationship with Socialist Commentary was not one of discreet interest. It was based on an agreed political philosophy. Indeed, Gaitskell was Socialist Commentary treasurer from 1953 to 1955, only resigning when he became Party leader. Gaitskell had in fact used his influence with the unions to secure donations for the organisation.

Socialist Commentary's political viewpoint emphasised the ethical as opposed to the stark "economism and scientific" approach of the Bevanites. Its outlook was co-operation and participation rather than the class conflict of their opponents. Nationalisation was regarded as basically irrelevant to the continuation of social democratic economic reform. Problems of industrial democracy were considered of far more importance than the narrow objective of ownership and control.

It was Tony Crossland who put the "meat on the bones" of revisionism when in 1956 he produced "The Future of Socialism". Here Crossland was to expand many themes which had first raised their heads in Socialist Commentary. He contended that the wilder excesses of capitalism had been brought under control by the post-War Labour Government. The entrepreneurial capitalist no longer existed and a substantial amount of power had been transferred to the managing, technical and scientific class.

Trade unions had also played their part in restricting the ability of employers to disregard their responsibilities towards their employees. One of the main consequences of these changes was that profit no longer became the only motivation, it had been substantially replaced by prestige.

Crossland believed that there had been a major transfer of power, achieved at the expense of the capitalist class, and towards the state. As a result of this transfer, both Labour and Conservative governments now controlled areas of economic and social life that would previously have been left to the free market - full employment, the rate of

growth, the balance of payments and the distribution of incomes.

With the decline of the capitalist class, the question of ownership and control arose. In the case of capitalism, ownership and control were essentially in the same hands. But with nationalisation, ownership belonged to the state, while control rested with those who were appointed to run the industries and, to a limited extent, those who worked within them.

This question of ownership and control was central to the revisionists' analysis of nationalisation. If ownership and control were not synonymous, then in order to fulfil its responsibilities, the state would have no need to expropriate private property. Socialist ideals could be achieved by controlling and manipulating the economy and the tax system.

Gaitskell and Crossland had also realised that by the mid-fifties people's material lives had improved considerably. Economic growth and full employment had dimmed the memories of the pre-War days. And with the advent of the National Health Service and the Welfare State, people expected a higher standard of living. Gaitskell believed that appealing to the "ravages of capitalism" was not enough. A broader appeal was necessary.

In May 1955, Labour suffered a second election defeat at the hands of the Tories. In December, Attlee resigned and Gaitskell became leader - defeating Bevan and Morrison.

Over the next four years, Gaitskell was to strengthen his position within the unions and inside the Party. With the rise of Gaitskell came that nucleus of politicians who would play their part in the debate that was to follow after another election defeat in 1959.

Gaitskell, Revisionism & Clause IV

Once again in the 1959 general election, the Labour Party had gone to the electorate with a fairly modest manifesto. On nationalisation it was to "restore to public ownership the steel industry and road haulage". Its most radical proposal was to take into local council ownership all existing private housing that had been rent controlled before January 1st 1956. The only nationalisation commitment echoed that

of 1951:

"where an industry is shown, after thorough enquiry, to be failing the nation, we reserve the right to take all or any part of it into public ownership if this is necessary."

Not only did Labour lose the election, but the Tory majority increased from 76 to 100 seats. The debate started almost immediately. This time it was not about whether specific policies should be expanded or diminished, but whether commitment to these policies *per se* was right for the second half of the 20th century.

This time it wasn't the left who made the running but the right, who took the initiative in calling for a complete re-appraisal of Labour Party policy.

The first broadside was fired by Douglas Jay (MP for Battersea North) a mere eight days after the election defeat. In an article in Forward, Jay suggested that Labour had become identified solely with the working class, and was therefore "fighting for a class that no longer exists".

He also suggested that nationalisation was losing Labour votes because of its association with the working class. Jay wanted to create a vigorous, radical, reforming and open-minded party, and to achieve this it would have to change its name to "Labour and Reform" or "Labour and Radical".

The importance of these views lies not in their uncompromising nature, but in the fact that they were repeated, often almost word for word by Gaitskell himself. The Times of 17th October, expressed the view that:

"The first authoritative statement which may fairly be taken as representing Mr. Gaitskell's views on reshaping Labour Party policy was given in an article by Mr. Douglas Jay."

Although it is fair to say that throughout this debate Gaitskell was against changing the name, he did agree on the issues of Labour's class image and nationalisation.

At the November "post mortem" Conference it was Barbara Castle who opened the debate on public ownership. As Chairman, she gave the opening address. Almost with her first breath she pronounced that:

"Economic might has become social right and the devil has taken the communal interest... This then is the

real challenge to us: the dilemma we can't escape. Either we must convince the people of this country that they - and not a few private interests - should control their economic lives, or we shall shrink into an impotent appendage of the welfare state. And this is the real case for public ownership."

In his opening address to Conference Gaitskell outlined his thinking:

"I can only say that in my opinion capitalism has significantly changed, largely as a result of our own efforts."

He wanted to create a "classless" society, and move away from the materialistic towards a "moralistic" view of society. With this change would come a change in emphasis on Clause 4. Crossland's emphasis on ownership and control was central to Gaitskell. With ownership no longer being central to obtaining a socialist society, nationalisation and, therefore, according to Gaitskell, Clause 4, were no longer a full expression of Labour's objectives.

Although it is fair to say that Gaitskell never asked for the removal of Clause 4, it is also fair to say that he never called for its retention either. But he was not averse to other forms of public ownership. In his speech at Conference, he says:

"...we may be more concerned in the future with other forms of public ownership - and there are many other forms; public competitive enterprises, state factories in development areas, a greater share of the total going to the co-operative movement. I would love to see that happen and it would make a profound difference to the outlook of the ordinary man in public or private enterprises."

His speech was geared to changing the direction of Labour's policy. He believed that since the first majority Labour Government, British society had changed drastically. To make Labour electable, he believed it was necessary to modernise the Party.

The left completely disagreed. It was pointed out that Barbara Castle had produced a pamphlet "Keeping Left" that had put forward the idea of extending public ownership in various forms, and not just Herbert Morrison's conception of the big public corporation.

During the Conference Bevan maintained that the major competition

would come from the centrally planned economies rather than the capitalist West. And with reference to the fact that Gaitskell was attempting to change long held Labour beliefs, Bevan said:

"The purpose is to try, having decided what our policy should be, to put it as attractively as possible to the population; not to adjust our policy opportunely to the contemporary mood, but to cling to our policy and alter its presentation in order to win the suffrage of the population."

This debate in 1959 saw differences in the policy arena between left and right reach new heights. It was not just a fight over policies but over fundamental beliefs. It had become a question of ideology.

Gaitskell's replacement or "articulation" of Clause 4 was embodied in his "amplification of aims". This document contained the arguments distilled from the revisionist tracts in Socialist Commentary. He wanted a "classless society" more in social terms than in economic terms:

"...we believe in a classless society - a society without the snobbery, the privilege, the restrictive social barriers which are still far too prevalent in Britain today."

His appeal to "spiritual" and "moral" values was there, rather than the "material satisfaction" of simply economic objectives.

His concern however was also that of a practical politician and not just a theoretician. He believed that Labour needed to achieve power - otherwise all effort would be wasted. He believed that electoral success would be achieved if the middle ground could be persuaded to rejoin labour.

The Backlash

However, by the Spring of 1960 a groundswell of grassroots opinion had begun to move away from the revisionists. Gaitskell's 12 point "Amplification of Aims" would only be acceptable at the forthcoming NEC if it was "in addition" to and not a "replacement" for Clause 4. It would have to stand alongside the original 1918 statement.

At the NEC meeting on 13 March 1960, Gaitskell's draft proposal was accepted as an "embellishment" of the original and was eventually adopted,

with one of its clauses removed, as a proposed part of the Constitution. The clause rejected stated:

"Recognising that both public and private enterprise have a place in the economy it believes that further extension of common ownership should be achieved from time to time in the light of these objectives [the previous nine clauses] with due regard to the views of the workers and consumers concerned."

But matters did not end there. The NEC had only given Gaitskell what turned out to be a temporary compromise. Clause 4 was to be retained completely, but the 12 point plan was to modify its uses. The trade union leaders had provided him with support. But they had acted individually and had not referred the proposals to their unions or to their membership.

In March 1960, it appeared that all sections of the Party had achieved something from the public ownership debate. The left claimed to be satisfied on three counts. Firstly, Clause 4 was still part of the Constitution. Secondly, Gaitskell's new "Declaration of Aims" reaffirmed Clause 4. Thirdly, in the Declaration the phrase "commanding heights of the economy" was included and became the criterion for expanding public ownership.

Moreover, the revisionists were satisfied because the new Declaration had been accepted as part of the Constitution. Elements of the reformist wing of the Party went as far as to say that Clause 4 had now lost its moral authority and had been superseded by its more modern counterpart. Others, particularly Douglas Jay, maintained that since the "commanding heights" were already nationalised there was to be no more nationalisation.

During the Spring and Summer the fragile compromise was to come apart at the seams. Union after union refused to ratify the NEC decision. The Conference season was turning into a rout for Gaitskell's constitutional reforms. In the end only two of the six big unions supported his amendments. These were USDAW and NUGMW.

With all the other big unions supporting Clause 4, the debate at the Annual Conference was looking grim. It

became clear that if Gaitskell was to win he would need the support of virtually every constituency party and all the smaller unions.

It was the lack of support from these quarters above all that persuaded Gaitskell not to proceed with any change to the Constitution at the 1960 Conference.

Instead, at the NEC meeting on 13th July they supported a resolution that decided:

"...not to proceed with any amendments of an addition to Clause 4 but declares the statement which it adopted on March 16th is a valuable expression of the aims of the Labour Party in the second half of the twentieth century and commends it to conference accordingly."

The Constitution remained unchanged, although the "Gaitskell draft" was passed as a "valuable expression of the aims of the Party". The "backlash was not simply caused by

the trade union leaders or left wing activists, but was instead caused by rank and file trade union and Party members who were committed to the social change embodied within Clause 4.

Although Gaitskell and the revisionists suffered a severe drubbing, it was not the total defeat some claimed. Throughout the 1960s many of their practical policies were put into practice.

Gaitskell's defeat showed the inherent commitment of all sections of the Party to the core values. The debate, as it turned out, turned on how to achieve those goals more than the goals themselves. Public ownership was supported, but its form was up for debate, as was the when and the how.

Labour was to return to office in 1964 with Clause 4 intact and, as Harold Wilson explained later:

"...we were being asked to take Genesis out of the Bible. You don't have to be a fundamentalist to say that Genesis is part of the Bible read today."

A Clause 4 Debate

by Pete Whitelegg

Around 200 people gathered at Central Hall, Westminster, on 8th February for the Fabian Society's debate on the future of Clause 4. The protagonists were Jack Straw and Mo Mowlem versus Diane Abbott and Alan Simpson, a real heavyweight contest this.

Jack Straw trotted out the usual, Clause 4 was a middle class fix by middle class activists in smoke filled rooms. Its objective was to nationalise everything and nobody believed we would be put into practice.

This was seven days before Tony Blair told the Press Guild that New Labour was the party of the middle class!

Mo Mowlem, on the other hand, thought that people had become "individualised" and were no longer joiners, that we must learn from history, not live in it, and we must say what we mean and mean what we say, pick up the script from the naff hams in Walworth Road!

Dianne Abbott, speaking in favour of Clause 4, maintained that this debate should be about "real lives". This wasn't about student politics (Shaw was "Communist" National Union of Students' President) but should be focused on what we are going to do about schools, health, and the economy.

But, for my money, the best contribution came from Alan Simpson MP, Secretary of the Campaign Group. This debate, he said, was about a fundamental relationship within our society.

The relationship between labour and capital. Clause 4 is not a definitive proposition but an outline. Its concern is how best to organise the economy, about forms of ownership and administration. This campaign, he said, would not necessarily end on the 29th of April.

Instead of playing politics with ourselves, we should be highlighting the inadequacies of the market and putting forward

alternatives.

Many speaking from the floor were opposed to changing Clause 4 because it was taking us away from the political battles we should be fighting.

It was also pointed out that the money for Blair's campaign was coming from the Labour Party's reserve fund. And by the end of the Clause 4 campaign it will almost certainly be exhausted.

God help us if the Tory Government collapses in the next few months, there may be no money to fight an election. On top of that, we will be recovering from one of the most divisive, and most unnecessary, splits in our history. And ratings in the opinion polls (the Gods of New Labour) falling. And they say that Tony Blair is good for us.

With real issues on which to fight the Tories, speakers wondered how the press was reflecting things.

How were three papers, the Guardian, the Telegraph and the Times reflecting the real issues? Well, between 1st January 1995 and 5th February, they mentioned homelessness 13 times; unemployment, 18 times; and Mr. Blair's attack on Clause 4, 300 times! Nice one, Tony, your name's been in the paper rather a lot!

The Last Word?

Rings and rings of roses.

A Party full of Poseurs,

An issue, an issue,
We all fall down.

[Acknowledgement to Rory Bremner, a.k.a. the real Leader of the Opposition!]

Labour & Trade Union Review

Double Standards!

Jack Straw made a rather odd intervention on constitutional reform in the Commons on 12th January:

Mr. Straw: May I invite the Minister to agree with the following words? The words

"decentralisation to the provinces of England would result in local communities recovering a large measure of the responsibilities they have lost in so many spheres."

were the exact words that the Home Secretary's predecessor, now Chancellor of the Exchequer, used in a Bow Group pamphlet that he wrote recommending elected regional councils. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] It was after he had been chosen as a prospective parliamentary candidate—[Interruption.] Conservative Members are now revealing a further constitutional novelty: nothing that people say before elections should be followed after they have been elected. As a responsible adult and a prospective Conservative candidate, the right hon. and learned Gentleman wrote a pamphlet backing elected regional councils all over England. He was right then, and the Government are wrong now.

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Gentleman wants to be taken seriously, he will have to do better than dredge up 20-year old quotations.

Surely he must have known that the parliamentary candidate for Sedgfield in 1983 told his electors that he was in favour of pulling out of the EEC.

The difference between Mr. Clarke and Mr. Blair was that Mr. Clarke believed what he said at the time.

Note To Readers

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Clause Four Weekly Bulletin
No.5 Sat. 25 February, 1995

Tony Blair & the "Underclass"

The Americans coined the term "underclass". It was a term to describe the crucial division in American society. A majority had a future. A minority - a very sizable minority - is effectively written off. It is corralled in drug-ridden ghettos - with a large proportion put in jails to rot or to be gassed, electrocuted, hanged or shot.

Tony Blair claims to speak for a British majority against a greedy elite at the top. But his actions and instincts belie this. He has no principled criticism of the obscene amounts of money that executives pay themselves. It's just that some of them, and indeed those far from the very top of the pay scale, run monopolies.

The implication is that there should be a greater development of the market system rather than an ethos of public service.

Mr. Blair has no problem with the notion that a person should be motivated by accumulating more and more and more money. That is human nature in the circles in which Mr. Blair moves.

The British people *do still* have a problem with that notion. They still think in terms of "greedy bastards" rather than unfair competition.

Britain has an underclass in embryo, but it does not yet have a real underclass. There is still an instinctive solidarity between those who "make do" and those less fortunate.

Tony Blair does not share this instinct. At meeting after meeting he refers to an *existing* "underclass". Such an attitude, from a possible future Prime Minister, is likely to bring about an actual underclass.

The present, and past, position of the Labour Party, inspired by the sentiments and ethos of Clause 4, cemented the alliance between the bulk of working people, and those who are down on their luck, and the many decent middle-class people.

The assault on Clause 4 is an assault on this alliance. If Mr. Blair is successful, the ethos of beggar-my-neighbour could come to dominate in the future and an American-style underclass will become a reality.

The Magazine

The Current issue of the Labour & Trade Union Review contains among others the following items:

The Clause 4 Debate
The Gaitskell Debate
Labour & the Railways
Citizen's Charter

Labour, the Eurosceptics & the Unionists
The Review is available from the address below price £1.50.

No Time For Self-Indulgence

If it were possible to pick an issue which should have enabled the left to develop a coherent argument for the development of socialism, then Clause 4 should have been it.

The Shadow Cabinet's bland Blairism of "tradition within a modern setting" leaves most of the rank and file members stone cold. Some individuals on the left are developing some cogent arguments against "New Labour". Perhaps the most notable among these are Diane Abbott MP, Alan Simpson MP, and especially Alex Falconer MEP.

Yesterday, the Defend Clause 4 Campaign held its London rally at Conway Hall. Playing to an audience of some 250 people were union leader, Doreen Cameron, Mildred Gordon MP, and that old stalwart of the left himself, Arthur Scargill.

Bearing in mind the central position in which the left has placed Clause 4, it was reasonable to expect that the arguments in its defence would have just as important.

Although there was much cheering and applause for the arguments put forward by the main

speakers, most of the speeches restated pseudo left positions. (Neil Kinnock or Michael Meacher could have made similar speeches only a few years ago!)

There were attacks on Tory trade union reforms and Arthur Scargill played to the gallery more for laughs than as a contribution to serious political argument.

If the left in the Labour Party wants to win this one, it had better come up with something more serious than a parody of a variety hall act which would be more suited to the Hackney Empire.

Unfortunately, there are those amongst us who are prone to theatrical charades. We must purge ourselves of these impulses. Theatrical charades are the stock-in-trade of our opponents.

Our opponents lie to become members of Parliament, they lie to their electors, they lie to fellow Members of Parliament as they rise to power. They spend the contributions of Party members which they control to overturn Party policy.

It is the defenders of Clause 4 who have occupied the high moral ground.

We have won most of the battles up to now. But if the performance at yesterday's meeting is repeated, we could well lose the war. This is no time for left wing self-indulgence. The stakes are too high.

Clause Four of the Labour Party Constitution

National

- 1) To organise and maintain in Parliament and in the country a Political Labour Party.
- 2) To Co-operate with the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, or other kindred organisations, in joint political or other action in harmony with the party constitution and standing orders.
- 3) To give effect as far as may be practicable to the principles from time to time approved by the Party Conference.
- 4) To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, and the best attainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.
- 5) Generally to promote the Political, Social, and Economic Emancipation of the people and more particularly of those who depend directly upon their own exertions by hands or by brain for the means of life.

Inter Commonwealth

- 6) To co-operate with Labour and Socialist organisations in the Commonwealth overseas with a view to promoting the purposes of the party, and to take common action for the promotion of a higher standard of social and economic life for the working population of the respective countries.

International

- 7) To co-operate with the Labour and Socialist organisations in other countries and to support the United Nations Organisation and its various agencies and other international organisations for the promotion of peace, the adjustment and settlement of international disputes by conciliation or judicial arbitration, the establishment and defence of human rights, and the improvement of the social and economic standards and conditions of work of the people of the world.

Clause 4 Weekly Bulletin

Since 7th January, the Labour & Trade Union Review has been producing a weekly bulletin on the Clause 4 debate. We give below some items from these Bulletins. They are available free of charge to supporters of Clause 4. All we ask is postage. If you want tens (or hundreds!) of bulletins to distribute at meetings, then please send lots of stamps or some money!

Press Misrepresentation

The press, from the Mail to The Guardian, is not only behind Tony Blair's campaign but is prepared to blackguard the defenders of Clause 4. Calling those on the side of the status quo 'rebels' is silly enough. The telly and the radio are doing this also.

But the media is also misrepresenting Clause 4 itself. It is perfectly conceivable that many of the chattering classes believed that Clause 4 equalled nationalisation. (It is absolutely certain that the giddy things in Mr. Blair's Office believed it.)

But people like Alf Lomas, Stan Newens and Alex Falconer have pointed out often enough the wide scope of "common ownership", that no one, in the media at least, can be in any doubt that Clause 4 is not the same thing as nationalisation.

It includes municipal socialism, industrial democracy, democratic control of the workers' pension funds that are amongst the biggest shareholders in British industry (Mr. Campbell, please take note!), and, yes, nationalisation.

On nationalisation itself, there has hardly been a time since 1945 when the British people have been so predisposed towards state ownership of basic services. Yet even the John Prescotts of this world are unable to promise that the railways will be taken back into public ownership. Such a promise would, in itself, be sufficient to ensure that the railways couldn't be privatised in the first place.

Dirty Tricks

One assumes that Michael White of the Guardian has forgiven Alistair Campbell for hitting him over a bad joke about the late Robert Maxwell. At any rate, he has managed to do Mr. Campbell (Tony Blair's Press Secretary) a considerable favour.

He has picked up tittle tattle from a book by right-wing author, Brian Crozier, which claimed that six Labour politicians had acted on behalf of the KGB.

It can hardly be a coincidence that he succeeded in recycling the tittle tattle on the front page of the Guardian on the day after the publication of the MEPs pro-Clause 4 ad. in the same paper.

The six names happened to include leading supporters of Clause 4!

The Best Kept Secret

In the last issue of our parent magazine, the Labour & Trade Union Review, we accused Tony Blair of being somewhat deceitful for not mentioning his desire to get rid of Clause 4 during his bid for the Labour leadership.

It has been pointed out to us that matters were much worse than this. Mr. Blair, in fact, categorically stated that he had no intention of interfering with Clause 4. He did this on the Breakfast With Frost programme on the BBC last June.

He kept up this pretence until he landed Conference with his proposal in October. Even members of the Shadow Cabinet and the NEC were kept in the dark. Is this the same Mr. Blair who asks the electorate to trust him to be the harbinger of Open Government?

Labour Leaders Repeat Tory Smears

Some weeks ago John Prescott admitted that Clause 4 was not an issue with the electors, but had to be replaced because the Tories kept teasing Labour with it in parliament. That is not true. Such teasing was rare in the extreme - at least until Tony Blair made an issue of the Party's Constitution.

What wimps cannot put up with a bit of teasing? In any case the most effective Tory teasing recently has concerned Mr. Blair's betrayal of local Labour branches who had been fighting *successfully* against school opt-outs; or Mr. Blair's arrogant attack on his MEPs; or Mr. Blair's rich friends spending money like water to get him elected leader.

On the odd occasion that the Tories referred to Labour's policies, as opposed to Mr. Blair's policies, they accused Labour of wanting to nationalise everything in sight. And nobody took the slightest notice.

The people who are dragging up this hoary old tale are not the Tories, but the Labour leaders themselves. Clause 4 is about Common Ownership as opposed to private profit. But the labour leaders are determined to equate it with nationalisation alone. Indeed they seem to be as opposed as the Tories to municipal socialism, publicly owned housing, industrial democracy, and equal union participation in the running of pension funds, and other forms of Common Ownership.

In an interview in The Guardian last Thursday Mr. Blair said: "...public ownership is important, but it was only seen in the 1918 Constitution as a means to an end. It was never an end in itself."

Of course the 1918 Constitution, and the 1995 Constitution, make no mention of "public ownership". They mention Common Ownership. And Common Ownership was an "end in itself". That is why it was in the Constitution.

Public ownership was *one* of the *means* of achieving Common Ownership.

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Book Review

"The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions, 1933-1945"

by Nina Fishman. Scholar Press, 1995. £45.

Reviewed by Brendan Clifford

This is depressing book. It details with enormous industry a particular aspect of an energetic political movement which carried hundreds of thousands of workers in Britain on the road to nowhere. It is a kind of social mausoleum, lovingly constructed. The talent that went into its making can hardly be judged to have been usefully applied, seeing that what the CPGB led to in the end was the buffoonery of Martin Jacques.

The blurb says:

"Despite its relatively small size the Communist Party occupied a strategic place in the trade union movement; the leaders of the movement, notably Ernest Bevin, refused to acknowledge this at the time."

That depends on what is meant by "acknowledge". Bevin did not write a thesis setting out the extent of the influence the CP had gained in the trade unions, but he acknowledged it by his efforts to curb it and to prevent it from taking on a proportionate political dimension. His attitude was that it was infinitely preferable to prevent the Labour movement from being divided than to be trying to cobble together a "united front" of a movement split into two fundamentally incompatible parts.

Nina Fishman is clearly fascinated by the Party life of the CP, and lives it vicariously through its best period. I know from having observed it in the late fifties that it was an absorbing way of life. If the Labour Party has much too little in the way of Party life, the CP had an extravagant excess of it. It mistook itself for the world - not yet the entire world but the nucleus which was destined to become the entire world. Such being its view it could not act purposefully as a component of the world with the aim of influencing developments within it, as distinct from taking it over. And when it failed to become the world, it dried up internally and collapsed.

Nina refers to Walter Citrine, leader of the TUC, as "the Witch-finder General of the Labour Movement" (p.261). Citrine

and Bevin held the Labour Party together in difficult times and marginalised the CP as an electoral force. On the basis of having done so they made possible the only deliberate and effective socialist reform so far accomplished in Britain. If they had not done so, all that can be said is that things would not have worked out as they did.

In order to make headway in the trade unions CP activists made tactical concessions to the outlook of "Right Social Democracy" which was predominant in them. This became second nature to them. The rationale was that they would build up influence as good militant trade unionists within the established order and then at some decisive moment make use of that influence for a revolutionary purpose. Nina Fishman describes the tactical accommodation with the established order as "revolutionary pragmatism" and gives credit for it to Harry Pollitt and J.R. Campbell.

"Pollitt's and Campbell's stance can be quite clearly distinguished from those 'reformist' leaders to whom they enjoined their members to pledge allegiance. They seized on the rich vein of rank-and-file in Britain's trade union culture and audaciously appropriated it for the Communist Party..."

"When Pollitt and Campbell asserted the Party's primacy in the economic struggle, they did so on behalf of the rank and file..."

"The evident potential for conflict between trade union loyalism and rank-and-file did not deter Pollitt and Campbell from espousing both..."

"I have described the four components of Pollitt's and Campbell's guide to action, trade union loyalism, rank-and-file, the united front, and Life Itself, as revolutionary pragmatism. This paradoxical epithet seems apt to describe an approach to the world which succeeded precisely because it was contradictory. It provided Party

members with a flexible guide to action and definite boundaries within which different activists made many different, sometimes opposing, decisions about how to conduct the 'economic struggle'.

"Revolutionary pragmatism was hardly a hermetically sealed view of the world: its success depended on Party members possessing sound practical reflexes and a discerning judgment. They were required to choose the appropriate blend of its conflicting tenets to apply in their particular circumstances." (pp.10-12) That is certainly something like how it was, on the understanding that "success" only means advancing the Party in the trade unions.

Within the "economic struggle", narrowly understood, the Party's own world outlook might be given a sedative. But the Party was in the "economic struggle" for a political purpose, and it was that purpose that gave its activities staying power. And when political issues relating to the "economic struggle" arose, the Party's activity was determined by its world outlook and it acted out of a "hermetically sealed view of the world".

My first contact with the Party was in the Transport & General Workers Union during the London bus strike of the late fifties. I saw myself as rank and file, but I had a need to understand that what I did as rank and file connected up with a feasible political strategy in the long term. I set about discovering from Party activists where they thought it was all heading. I had an encounter with J.R. Campbell. And I heard John Gollan deliver an oration.

And the conclusion I came to was that what they were doing made neither reformist political sense nor revolutionary political sense. This was confirmed in the late sixties when the Party pulled out all the stops in the campaign against Barbara Castle's 'In Place Of Strife', and of course in the mid-seventies over the Bullock Report. It discarded its revolutionary

objective without acquiring a realistic reform objective and its Party culture just became a thing in itself.

"Revolutionary pragmatism was a guide to action in the real world of British trade union and workplace culture, both areas which positively bristled with subtle, often parochial, traditions and an intriguing variety of interlocking vested interests." (p.333)

So it was. It was highly adapted to the status quo, and its energy and expertise was devoted to preserving the status quo. It knew how to trigger set reflexes in British working class culture. But it manipulated those reflexes with the object of preventing political changes which had become necessary to the preservation of the status which Labour had gained in the state under Bevin's leadership. It defeated Barbara Castle and made way for Thatcher.

The concluding sentence in the book is:

"Pollitt and Campbell cannot be blamed for the fact that Citrine and Bevin failed to generate an accessible and coherent ideological perspective." (p.342)

No?

In a number of encounters with Campbell I tried to find out his position on the reforms enacted by the 1945 Government of "Right Social Democrats". As a labourer I knew from experience that there had been a basic change for the better in the conditions of working class life but I did not pretend to know what should happen next. He wouldn't give a straight answer. The professional revolutionary had become an ideological juggler intent on keeping all possible positions in the air at the same time.

One moment he would be explaining away the 1945 reform as a thing of no real consequence and the next he would seem to be describing that position as ultra-left infantilism. His object seemed to be to engender a slippery state of mind. It was certainly not to devise a realistic programme of reforms, accepting the 1945 reform as substantial and enduring, and designed to function within it. And as long as I had contact with the Party it kept up the propaganda against Right Social Democracy - which of course meant Bevin.

Bevin figured out a reform policy in the thirties and set about realising it during the war. Bevin's reform was not an idea or an ideology but a social structure. The fact that the approach which made that reform

possible died with Bevin and was not a force in British political life in the fifties and sixties certainly has something to do with Pollitt and Campbell. They conducted the main ideological operation in the British working class movement, and they were determined that Bevin should leave no heritage.

To say that it had nothing to do with them implied that they were not part of a common movement with Bevin. And of course there is a sense in which that is true - as Leninist revolutionaries they were, in Lenin's phrase, "an alien intrusion" - but it goes against the burden of Nina Fishman's argument, which is that they made themselves part of the British Labour movement.

She writes that:

"Pollitt's and Campbell's achievement in orientating Party activists towards the trade union movement and the 'economic struggle' was as significant as Togliatti's leadership of the Italian Communist Party in the gestation of Italy's post-war democracy." (p.337)

This is a gross misconception. The two situations are not remotely comparable. Italy, though amongst the victors in the Great War, suffered political dislocation similar to what the victors inflicted on Germany. The complexities of functional democracy melted away and the elementary politics of Bolshevism and Fascism came to centre stage. Nothing of the kind happened in Britain. The Bolshevik development in Britain, though vigorous, was political marginal.

There was political continuity in the state despite the CP's best efforts to break it. It was never in the position of being able to offer a "historic compromise" so that orderly life might continue. Its trade union tactic had the object of securing for it a position within the trade unions such as it had failed to achieve in general political life. And the trade unions, like the state, were there independently of it. If it had not engaged in "revolutionary pragmatism" the result would not have been that the trade unions would have fallen apart but that the CP itself would never have amounted to much.

The only conceivable "historic compromise" it might have made was with the approach of Bevin which brought about the 1945 reform. If it had done that it would not now be in dissolution,

surviving only as a subject of academic discourse. But it never entered its mind to do that.

In writing this review I feel as if I am teaching my grandmother to suck eggs. Twenty-five years ago I learned a fair amount about these matters from Nina Fishman. But, since she appears to have had a fundamental change of mind, I can only say that events in the intervening period confirm what she said then and make what she is now saying rather absurd.

I make no comment on her chapter on the united front and the war. What she writes is so much at variance with my understanding of the role of the CP in them that I would hardly know where to begin.

Political Fraud?

When David Blunkett recently announced that Labour was considering putting VAT on private education, this was, within hours, refuted by Tony Blair.

Then John Prescott claimed that such a move had, in fact, been ruled out by Gordon Brown in November. It was just that no one had bothered to tell Mr. Blunkett or anyone else.

Now he's at it again. Both he and Mr. Blair evaded the question of renationalising British Rail for the last couple of weeks. This has made the RMT and other unions very nervous - as Mr. Prescott and Frank Dobson had in the past said that it *would* be taken back into public ownership.

With the possibility of the unions voting for Clause 4, Mr. Prescott on Sunday last began to give the impression that Labour *might* renationalise. Then he casually announced that in any case the Party has had a working party dealing with the matter since before Christmas. Again, it's just that they forgot to tell anyone!

While not saying that Mr. Prescott is telling porkies, he ought to be aware that it is common knowledge that commercial fraud is all bound up with backdating statements and documents. If he goes on like this, he can hardly avoid the suspicion of political fraud.

Labour's Deceit Over Railways

Bringing the railways back under public control can be both relatively simple and cheap. It is Labour's lack of will that is the problem.

by Angela Clifford

Is the Labour leadership naive about economics, or is it trading on the current lack of political development in the Labour movement and a truly abysmal analytical standard amongst the media? (The one TV programme where politicians were regularly put under searching scrutiny - Brian Walden's - is being taken off the air because of the difficulty of finding politicians ready to put themselves under cross-examination about their policies.)

Labour leaders are declaring that a Labour Government will not be able to re-nationalise public utilities because it will simply not be able to 'afford' to. There will be so many calls on Government revenues that the money will not be to hand to compensate all those shareholders. And 'New Labour' of course will not print money and cause inflationary problems to do the job. It will only be able to stretch to buying back Railtrack, at a possible £4 billion, and bid for the line franchises when present contracts expire.

But all that is nonsense. It is the economics of the household, not of a national economy. A household may use cash to buy groceries, or borrow money to buy a house, but the economics of a country does not work like that at all.

For a start, the national assets in question do not have a fixed value. As we have seen from various stock-market crashes, the value of shares can vary dramatically (in a market economy). Assets have very little intrinsic value: their value is based on the amount of profit they can generate. The value of shares in the public utilities does not reflect the phenomenal cost of establishing such industries from scratch: it reflects the dividends shareholders can expect to gain in the near future.

It therefore follows that, if - for example - it became clear that the utilities were to be heavily taxed, the value of the shares would fall dramatically - and if the tax were big enough, the shares would become worthless as dividends would disappear. I am not proposing that this be done, but showing that we are not talking about fixed quantities. (It could be done, of course...)

The primary objective with public utilities for a Labour Government is to ensure that they function to serve the public interest. If it wished, it could leave the shareholders as owners of the utilities, but impose a new regulatory board which would either supersede the present man-

agement or to which the present management would become subject at appropriate salary levels. Shareholders would continue to receive a dividend, management would be subject to the Government's Board - and it wouldn't cost the country a penny. Whilst ownership would remain in private hands, control would not. If this policy were announced prior to a General Election, there could be no cause for complaint upon its implementation.

Perhaps The Times had something like that in mind when it accused Labour of "naivety" regarding Rail Privatisation in an editorial sub-titled, "Public ownership is not necessary to secure public control" (16.1.1995). The main argument made is that Labour should promise "to revise the regulatory framework to reduce Railtrack's profits, but without buying back the company's shares". In doing this it would be acting "well within the rights of a newly-elected government". Thus it "would be giving formal notice to potential Railtrack investors that the profits they were promised by the present Government were by no means secure" - and that could undermine the whole privatisation venture.

According to The Times, potential shareholders are being promised an excessive rate of return to raise £4 billion. That return will have to be funded by unduly high levels of subsidy to Railtrack in coming years. In other words, the taxpayers of the future are being burdened to fund tax-cuts in the run-up to the next election.

But Labour could also affect share-values in other ways. For instance, by declaring that shareholders will be made responsible for funding full safety standards on railways, or by stating that no services currently running will be allowed to be cut in the privatised companies and that any cuts made will have to be restored. That in itself could ruin privatisation because private companies will hope to increase profits by reducing services. If it is clear that their overheads will increase under Labour, whilst the service must be sustained, there will be little interest in tendering for bits of the rail network or buying shares in Railtrack.

Of course, the present Labour promise to buy back shares and tender for the franchised lines when present Contracts expire, will have the opposite effect: it will sustain interest in privatisation of Railtrack with the idea that the State will

buy back at full price. And companies who buy bits of operating franchise for a few years will have no interest in anything but quick profits (to be made by cutting services and costs) before their Contracts expire. The idea that the Government would then bid to buy back these rail line franchises - which some Labour leaders have suggested - is laughable.

There is another avenue of approaching the regaining of British Rail if privatisation were to go through. Prior to privatisation the Labour Party announces that it will be issuing Railway Bonds to any shareholders, and franchise holders for particular lines. These will be redeemable over a long period (20 - 50 years) and would bear a rate of interest. The control and ownership of the railways would thus pass immediately to the public at little immediate cost. The shareholders/franchise-holders would be compensated in the long term. They would have no cause for complaint as they would have had fair warning before they bought their shares and made their investments. In effect, their capital would be tied up for the period of the Bond (unless the Bonds were sold on through the bond-markets).

Issuing long-term, interest-paying Bonds is the normal manner of bringing large-scale undertakings into public ownership, as our present Labour leaders seem to have forgotten.

Indeed, those leaders almost seem to be using the supposed difficulties of re-nationalising as an excuse to evade making a commitment. The fact is, however, that there is a wide range of measures which a Labour Government could undertake - some at absolutely no cost to the public purse - to make public utilities accountable to the people. It can take control over them, while leaving ownership in private hands. If this procedure becomes unacceptable to existing shareholders, then it can take over the ownership by replacing their shares with bonds. These matters are not at all problematical. The difficult part is finding a vigorous management for the socialised utilities - perhaps this could be an experimental field for workers' control?

In pretending that financial obstacles prevent public control of the privatised utilities, the Labour leadership is being either devious or naive. Either way, it is up to the movement to set it right.

Citizen's Charter

by Michael Craig

A great deal of attention has been focused on the transfer of assets from the public to private sectors. Perhaps as important are the enormous changes which have been taking place in what remains of the public sector. The development of the ominously entitled Next Steps Agencies have created quasi autonomous bodies within government Departments.

Increasingly these are managed by highly paid Chief Executives whose background is not necessarily in the activity concerned. Consequently the use of a whole raft of mainly numerical performance indicators has increased. In addition the relationship between the public sector and their 'customers' has in the last 3 years been governed by a variety of Citizen's Charters.

There are about 40 Citizen's Charters in existence - the Patient's Charter and the Passenger's Charter are among the better known ones. There is also the Jobseeker's Charter, the Taxpayer's Charter and the Road User's Charter.

In the charter world we are all categories of people who consume things - even if we only consume benefits (the Benefits Agency Customer Charter). In addition many smaller organisations such as individual schools have been encouraged to draw up their own charters.

The principles of the Citizen's Charters are as follows:

- the setting, monitoring and publication of explicit standards.
- the provision of full and accurate information about how public services are run.
- the public sector should provide choice wherever practicable. There should be regular and systematic consultation with those who use the public services.
- courteous and helpful service from public servants who will normally wear name badges.
- well publicised, and easy to use complaints procedures.
- efficient and economical delivery of public services.

Since its inception the Charter programme has been firmly identified with John Major. He shakes hands with the representatives of the hundred organisations a year who win Chartermarks - an award scheme for public sector organisations.

Even if the Citizen's Charter is simplistic, superficial and patronising

and superficial it did at least seem to represent a shift in the Tory party's attitude to the public sector. It seemed that Major was attempting to distinguish himself from the Thatcherite dogma of 'private good: public bad'.

Indeed, in a refreshing example of pragmatism, the privatised utilities are also eligible to receive Chartermarks; British Gas being the most well known recipient of one. (There have been suggestions recently that it should be withdrawn in punishment for paying Cedric Brown too much money).

Three years on, people who work in the public sector are more polite to their 'customers'. Some of them do wear name badges. Glossy brochures and publicised standards abound including school league tables and hospital death league tables. However there is a widespread cynicism about the Charter project despite its laudable ostensibly public spirited aims.

There are a number of reasons for this cynicism:

The first is that it was designed within a framework of public spending restraint. Any improvements which arise must be done on the basis of not spending any more money. Indeed, given the substantial costs of developing standards, calculating them, publicising them, establishing complaints procedures and answering complaints promptly - improvements in actual services must be made with less money.

However, given that the Labour Party is now the low tax party, (and suggestions have been made that they may even cut public expenditure), this

kind of setup must be appealing. Inevitably though, improvements that cost nothing are also likely to be modest.

This is a the frustrating aspect of the Charter. As you sit motionless in the train station for three hours, at least, the stewards smile at you; British Gas' complaints department will answer your phone call within 5 rings as the same time as expenditure on safety checks is being slashed.

The idea that Majorism is something substantially different from Thatcherism as far as the public sector is concerned has been undermined by events. The likeable centrist Major blundered on with privatisations which even Thatcher in her dogmatism did not undertake - prisons and the Post Office spring to mind.

The Citizen's Charter initially seemed to represent an acknowledgement that there were bounds beyond which the market could not work its magic. But what sense is there in introducing a Passenger's Charter and then going ahead with the insanity of rail privatisation?

Management by a multitude of numerical, often contradictory, performance targets, is now the norm in the public sector. Senior managers are given targets, usually in financial terms, and judged by them. Either these targets are challenging or they are not.

The fact that many hospitals do not perform operations towards the end of the financial year suggests that very often these targets are difficult to meet. So in many instances managers face conflicting pressures: to meet quality targets set by the Citizen's Charter and to meet financial targets, increasingly related to their pay. Usually the latter is dominant.

Although management throughout the public sector now routinely employs the rhetoric of 'dynamism' and 'competition' (but then so does even the most monopolistic capitalist) in practice the opportunities for entrepreneurialism are limited. The Citizen's Charter video (yes it is promoted with a video) cited a council whose binmen (sanitation contractors) had introduced various types of recycling bins.

But what about the Benefits Agency or the Child Support Agency? It is worrying to think what they might do

to 'grow their businesses'. The result is that managers will soon find that it is easier to (a) manipulate performance indicators and (b) spend more money on marketing than make any real improvements. Result: more and more glossy brochures ostensibly designed to be democratic and informative.

This is combined with more money being spent on press departments so that although the public potentially receives more information its nature is carefully controlled. So it is not surprising that the public, increasingly fed up with constantly being sold things it at least has the option of refusing, is more fed up when Agencies and Departments compete with each other in the production of the most glossy and well designed brochure.

A representative from the Citizen's Charter Unit said he recognised that the public were cynical about the Charter. Without a trace of irony his proposed solution to this is a television advertising campaign.

He also complained that people weren't complaining in the right way. This is quite revealing. As super-democrats, the Charter people have an odd attitude to the masses. On the one hand organisations should be polite and friendly even if valuable time is spent with dealing with complaints along the lines of: 'I don't want to pay any tax' (taxpayers are the Inland Revenue's customers) or 'I'd like more dole please the current amount is crap' (people receiving benefits are the Benefit Agencies' customers).

On the other hand the public are patronised and nannied - Virginia Bottomley tells us how many biscuits we should eat each day and the Parent's Charter lectures parents on showing enough interest in their kid's education (and providing a quiet room for them to study in, incidentally).

Anyway, apparently people complain about their own branch line or their own dustbins. But of course! This is exactly the sort of mentality which is being encouraged. No longer should the problem be defined as railways or, God forbid, a transport policy. It is composed in terms of an individuals personal relationship with the state. *It should be noted that it is called the Citizen's Charter and not the Citizens' Charter.*

Having successfully established the

notion that private economic relationships can be reduced to asocial contractual ones, they are now attempting to present the provision of public services as being a matter for atomised individuals. One view of this development is to say, so what? The reforms of the Child Support Agency were not introduced as a result of distressed customers appealing to their charter rights. They came about as a result of an organised campaign.

It is only by grouping together that people can get a proper perspective on their problems. And ultimately it is really only organised campaigns which public bodies and governments will respect.

Nevertheless this Charterised view of the world is important because it has been so thoroughly absorbed by the Labour Party. Where is the campaign for the collective provision of services? Where is the resistance to the view that

society is more than a set of contractual relations?

Blair expressed surprise that anyone should challenge the view that he should exercise parental choice of his son's school. He called them 'politically correct'. He, for all his calls for 'community' and 'social justice' has accepted this consumerist view of public services. This is the same Labour Party which is embarrassed by its relationship with the trade unions.

The same Labour Party which is intent on saying what it means and meaning what it says about Clause 4. A Labour Party which is committed to introducing a Bill of Rights. Suggestions have come from Gordon Brown about introducing a thing called 'hypothecation'. This means linking particular taxes with particular expenditure. Much like buying a hi-fi really.

Notes on the News

by Gwydion M. Williams

Chechens - New World Disorder

The USA was handed the world on a plate when the Warsaw Pact collapsed in 1989. It knocked the plate over.

Like US society, the New World Order has many unwritten rules that contradict the formal code. I was always sure that Serbs as white Christian Europeans would not be carpet-bombed the way the Iraqis and Vietnamese were. The US remains a deeply racist chauvinist society. It no longer has any means of formally excluding non-white or non-Christian populations. But in practice it *does* exclude them.

As white Muslims on the fringes of Europe, the Chechens could not be massacred without a few verbal protests from the USA. But there was broad approval for what the Russians were doing, even if hardly anyone liked the way they were doing it.

Chechens, like the Bosnian Muslims, treated the New World Order as if it were like a police force that one could reliably call for if bandits invaded one's house. It never has been. The Kuwaitis had had the wealth and foresight to invest in a portfolio of powerful British and American politicians, who launched a war to save their best meal-ticket. No real principle of

International Law was established by the Gulf War.

It now seems that Moscow will get its way in Chechnya. Random terror bombing of the mountain villages seems to have convinced them not to support the secessionists. (*Independent*, 30th January.) Without local support, guerrillas will achieve little.

In Afghanistan, the USSR was taking seriously what Kipling called the 'white man's burden'. They did intend to uproot ancient Afghan traditions and bring them into the Soviet version of the modern world. In Chechnya, there is no purpose except to secure the oil and prove Moscow's superior strength. This will probably succeed.

Europe

The best hope for the future lies in Europe. When nations have unlimited sovereignty, and when each one affects all of the others, that is a formula for war. The European Community was created precisely in order to avoid another war, by limiting sovereignty and pooling power.

Sovereignty is only a fancy word for the right to ignore the law. International law has never meant much because strong nations can always flout it. Only

members of a defeated army can be punished for war crimes.

If Germany were ever to decide to pull out of the limited supranational framework of the European Community, then there would either be a new European War or else a German Empire - most probably both. And yet all sorts of people, both Tories and Labour, prat about as if we were still a Great Power. How stupid can you get?

The feel-bad factor

The economy is said to be booming, and yet none of us feel any better off. Are we all ignorant of our own lives? Or are the figures not the whole story?

The loss of job security is not something that conventional economics measures. Nor the social break-up caused by high and continuing unemployment.

Just as importantly, this is an 'export-led boom'. As *The Independent* puts it, "what the economy is doing at present is producing goods for foreigners to consume - the very inverse of what it did when our own electorate felt so good in the 1980s". (30th Jan 95). This comes of course from the *City & Business* section, the pages that are meant only for the owners and managers of wealth, the people who can continue to do well in an economy that is "producing goods for foreigners to consume". The economic statistics that this government is so proud of having balanced are those which suit the interests of this rich overclass.

For the rest of us, when we feel bad, we are quite right to do so.

The Humiliation of Robin Cook

Following his reaction to the MEPs pro-Clause 4 statement, one of them accused Tony Blair of acting like a Leninist. One favourite Leninist trick was to find a dissident at the top of the party and make him be the one to promote the particular policy that he disagreed with. Quite clever when you think about it!

Robin Cook admitted last Wednesday that he disagreed with Mr. Blair's decision at the Labour Party Conference to change the Constitution. But he had since come to the

conclusion that it was necessary after all to make such a change.

Trailing the announcement of the details of his conversion on the Today Programme, Mr. Cook said he had come up with some ideas for a new Clause 4. He was offering these as his contribution to the great debate. He wasn't insisting that these should be the last word on the matter - they were just his personal suggestions.

We had to wait until later in the day to hear what novel ideas Mr. Cook had to offer. According to *The Guardian's* report of his statement to the Labour Co-ordinating Committee (and confirmed in *The Times*):

Mr Cook "...listed six key objectives... a just society in which rewards were fairly shared; an opportunity economy in which individual talent could thrive; public ownership 'where necessary to meet social needs'; a stable environment; an open democracy; and equal rights for all."

Oh Dear! Something familiar about that lot! And, as they say, familiarity does have the knack of breeding contempt.

We don't think it fair, after all, to call Mr. Blair a Leninist. Mr. Lenin would have been far more subtle. It was one thing to humiliate Comrade X at the Politbureau meeting. But humiliating him before the whole Party could be a bit counterproductive.

Mr. Cook's hangdog look at the press conference, on Thursday, launching Mr. Blair's series of nationwide meetings, said everything.

A couple of weeks ago, we attacked the great debate for excluding anyone who wanted to retain the existing Clause 4. We said that it was a debate merely about the wording of a new Clause 4. We were wrong.

Participants in this "debate" are provided with the actual words before they are allowed to take part.

How To Lose An Election

Tony Blair now repeats, almost on a daily basis, that if Clause 4 is not changed, Labour will lose the next election. When he first raised the issue, this was a nonsense. Mr. Blair, and Mr. Blair alone, has made sure that Clause 4 is an election issue.

The great Irish patriot, and British socialist, James Connolly, once said: "The only true prophet is he who carves out the future he announces." Mr. Blair's prophesy is predicated on his making the matter an issue, in the first place.

(It is one of those ironies of history that the author of Clause 4, Arthur Henderson, as a Cabinet Member in the Coalition Government in 1916, was responsible for the execution of James Connolly. They don't come more "right-wing" than Arthur Henderson - at least until Tony Blair came along.)

If Mr. Blair loses at the Special Party Conference in April, it is indeed quite conceivable that the electorate will return the Tories. But that is not because they have a problem with Clause 4, but because they will see Tony Blair as a weak leader - another loser.

But what if he wins? A very large number of electors will know that the overwhelming majority in the Party support Clause 4, but vote Tony Blair's way because of his election threat. The rest of the electorate will have that fact pointed out to them very clearly by the Tories.

In this era of sleaze, we think that, on balance, the voters will prefer a Party which is true to itself, than one that is living a lie - even if it is led by someone the voters don't entirely respect. That's happened before!

Blair versus Lilliput

by John Claydon

"Lilliput" was a monthly magazine popular during the war years, so named because of its easily pocketable size.

Flicking through its diminutive pages, you enter a lost publishing world where art, photographs and nudes, rub shoulders with left-wing polemics, short stories, poetry and cartoons.

I discovered a great number of copies in my parents' home when I was young. One cartoon I have never forgotten was of a hitch-hiking soldier who was asking a motorist "I wonder if by any chance you are going in the other direction?"

Looking through the only one that had somehow survived, I discovered this article on the Beveridge Report.

Who would have thought that after 50 years as a historical curiosity, it would regain its topicality?

UTOPIA



William Pitt on the Beveridge Report



IN the year 1796 William Pitt, then Prime Minister of England, laid before the House of Commons a Bill, known as "Mr. Pitt's Poor Law Bill," which contained 68 clauses and anticipated the Report of Sir William Beveridge by 147 years.

The Bill was the result of another, proposed by Mr. Samuel Whitbread in December, 1795, which proposed to regulate the wages of labourers in husbandry. Pitt opposed Mr. Whitbread's Bill because, he said, "the proposals were not wide enough to remediate the coils they were intended to remove." Instead, he laid before the House "ideas which had been floating in his own mind, though not digested with sufficient accuracy, nor arranged with a proper degree of cleverness."

His proposals included: *A System of Family Allowances*:—"Let us make relief in cases where there are a number of children, a matter of right and an honour, instead of a ground for opprobrium and contempt. This will make a large family a blessing, and not a curse; and this will draw a proper line of distinction between those who are able to provide for themselves by their labour, and those who, after having enriched their country with a number of children, have a claim upon its assistance for their support."

A Form of Industrial Insurance:—"By giving effect to the operation of friendly societies, individuals would be rescued from becoming a burden upon the public, and if necessary, be enabled to subsist upon a fund which their own industry contributed to raise."

The Extension of Schools and Industry:—"If anyone would take the trouble to compute the amount of all the earnings of the children who are already educated in this manner, he would be surprised, when he came to consider the weight which their support by their own labours took off the country."

The Abolition of Any Form of Means Test:—"The law which prohibits giving relief where any visible property remains should be abolished. That degrading condition should be withdrawn. No temporary occasion should force a British subject to part with the last shilling of his little capital, and compel him to descend to a state of wretchedness from which he could never recover, merely that he might be entitled to a casual supply."

What became of Mr. Pitt's Bill of 147 years ago? It was rejected. On the grounds that its introduction would endanger national unity in time of war.

"LABOUR MUST WAIT"-NOT

by Joe Keenan

Much of the general perspective within which I wish to take up and comment upon the issues raised by Mitchel McLaughlin's article (Special Issue, L&TUR, Oct. 94) seems to me to have been well expressed in the editorial which preceded it.

More specifically, I am entirely of a mind with the following statements in that editorial:-

"The situation now is that the British have declared, perhaps irresponsibly, no further interest in Northern Ireland, and so Unionists and Nationalists must reach an accommodation with each other in such a way that minimises the feeling on either side that it is being put upon by the other side."

"None of this is to say that the unionists should be expected to surrender to Irish nationalism. Irish nationalism owes the unionists the deepest apology. It was Irish nationalism that excluded Irish Protestants and made a united Ireland an impossibility in the past."

"Now that a united Ireland has become a matter of central importance, the nationalists will have to treat the unionists with respect - after all there cannot be unity without them."

"The solution of the problems in Northern Ireland does not have to entail victory by one side or the other - indeed it entails, by definition, the end of Protestant unionism and of Catholic nationalism."

Having said which I must point out that I am by no means writing in full accord with the overall view taken by the L&TUR. I go so far with it and no further.

I certainly do not subscribe to the view that there is any meaningful or progressive sense in which a British government can become "persuaders" to a united Ireland, which the L&TUR has been arguing for some time now. So far as I can see the only effective persuasion of the value of a united Ireland must come from those who aspire to it. Either it is promoted by its adherents, both in argument and in concrete action, as something worthwhile which can engage, if not the enthusiasm, at least the acquiescence, of those who are "invited" to participate in it or the exercise loses credibility.

If the Republic of Ireland does not itself set about becoming something which the unionists or rather, to call a spade a heretic, the Protestants, of Northern Ireland can see a future for themselves in, the making of a united state can be nothing other than their coercion to the untrammelled view of itself which, however it may have been shaken in recent years, is still predominant. In which case the only British persuasion that might signify would be to add its military weight to the coercive force of the

nationalists.

The editorial in the November-December issue of the L&TUR could be read as laying the groundwork of an argument for that kind of "unity without consent".

It is not at all unreasonable to point out that given the abnormal mode of government obtaining in Northern Ireland since partition:-

"...an ethnic majority is not in any meaningful sense a democratic majority. Democracy is a form of government. Voting in Northern Ireland has never had anything to do with electing a Government for the state, and so it cannot properly be called an exercise in democracy."

"At best, voting in Northern Ireland expresses a choice between remaining part of the United Kingdom state or transferring to the Irish Republic. But a majority vote for remaining within the UK on abnormal conditions does not make those abnormal conditions democratic."

I would not at present state the matter so baldly but do not dispute that those are the bald facts of the matter. What I do dispute very strongly is the implication drawn at that point in the editorial that the paper majority in Northern Ireland is therefore "a majority without moral force".

There is nothing at all bald about the notion of moral force as it has been employed here. If the paper majority is in fact a majority without moral force there is no reason under the sun, save practicality, for failing to discount and overturn it. However, the unionist majority does not lack moral force.

As the editorial of October recognised, partition was made inevitable by Southern nationalism's determination to build a thorough-going Catholic state. The unionists of the time did not seek to counter this by establishing abnormal conditions of government in Northern Ireland. Those conditions were forced on them and maintained by successive British governments.

In consequence those abnormal conditions cannot be cited to deprive the paper majority which exists under them of "moral force". It was the nationalists in the first instance and British governments thereafter which established the undemocratic structures and it is nationalism and British policy which must be held to lack moral force in consequence of their very deliberate actions.

Those points of disagreement with the L&TUR to one side I am entirely in agreement with what I take to be its more substantial propositions that British policy has definitively disclaimed any further

interest in Northern Ireland, which rules any "internal settlement" out of court and requires an accommodation within Ireland that must entail, as the October editorial so rightly said, the end of Protestant unionism and of Catholic nationalism.

In that context I am very glad to take advantage of the opportunity which now exists to engage in the kind of debate that has been almost non-existent in these islands since the freezing out of the secular nationalism of the All-For-Ireland-League.

Cllr. Mitchel McLaughlin is entirely right to declare that this opportunity to debate currently exists because:-

"The historic decision of the IRA in early September has opened up many options for the people of Ireland. Not only the end of the 'national' struggle but the opportunity to force a transformation of Irish political life and a re-alignment of politics to permit a genuine socialist debate to begin."

I am sure he will agree that it can only lead to such a transformation and re-alignment if it is conducted within the widest parameters, with no preconception left unchallenged and no conclusion left undrawn. In private life it is frequently imperative that people agree to leave much of what occurs between them unsaid (the alternative to mendacious compromise being often a frank and open divorce).

There is no room for similar reticence in politics, where an agreement to disagree can only emerge when the matter of disagreement is freely acknowledged and clearly understood, and the alternative in this instance is the reality of, or preparations for, war. The debate which the decision of the IRA to cease military operations has enabled to begin can only proceed to a workable conclusion if we commit ourselves at the beginning to call a spade a spade, while recognising that the first murder occurred when the agriculturalist Cain took what was most likely a spade to his pastoralist brother Abel.

It should be clear that I do not agree with Cllr. McLaughlin that "a self sustaining peace will flow from the eradication of the causes of division and conflict in our society". Rather, I hope that we now have the opportunity to demonstrate that the specific divisions which led to the last twenty-five years of war can be overcome in the struggle to realise a new Irish polity within which other, less intransigent, conflicts can be fought out.

According to Cllr. McLaughlin:-

"One of the most perplexing and frustrating dimensions of the conflict has been the divisions between the working

class people, especially in the North. Such divisions, which have existed for generations, are unquestionably wider and deeper now as a consequence of the mutual trauma of street warfare. As a result, aspects of the class struggle in Ireland have never been properly developed during the past 25 years of anti-imperialist struggle. This is a failing which must be rectified."

More than a "failing which must be rectified" it is the fundamental fact which must be recognised and accounted for if the debate, now barely begun, is ever to leap off sterile pages and get somewhere. Working class people in the North have been the agents and the raw material of the "conflict". Not in the South and not in Britain. In the North, for the past twenty-five years, working class people have been killing each other. That might be described as "perplexing", it has certainly been frustrating. What it has not been is "anti-imperialist struggle".

I could understand Cllr. McLaughlin's characterisation of the last 25 years as anti-imperialist struggle if the killing of Protestants in Northern Ireland had been in some way incidental to the real effort against the imperial power - curbing traitors and collaborators, the more effectively to strike against the imperial war machine and its paymasters in the City of London. But the reality is that it was the actions in the imperial heartland that were incidental. That they were also very effective simply makes the point, when one considers the way in which they were effective.

Britain today is a post imperial society which has influence rather than power. And it really only has influence insofar as acts in concert with real power. When it was unaccountably left, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, with the second most effective army in the world (or third most effective, these things are very difficult to calculate - witness Germany as against either Poland or France in 1939) it found itself torn between a la recherche de temps perdu and the reflexes of a client of the United States.

The reflexes of a client state won out. It allowed its army to be used in the furtherance of US interests in the Gulf and its own and US (and German) whimsicality in Bosnia. It is now disposing of its redundant military assets as fast as imperial nostalgia will allow and cannot get out of Bosnia fast enough. That is putting it at odds with the real but incoherent power in Washington, but is allowing it to match military expenditure with (a still inflated, but nonetheless more realistic, assessment of) its political will.

When Britain was still a real, declining but arguably still the dominant, imperial power, it imposed an unworkable arrangement on the unionists of Northern Ireland, on the clear understanding that Ireland partitioned on the basis of devolution would quickly dissolve into some form of unity and leave it in peace.

At no time between partition and the collapse of the devolved administration

here did it do anything to suggest that it wished to hold on to this detached statelet, at every point when the question arose it demonstrated the opposite intent. The barrier to unity was never the British and was always the Protestant population of Northern Ireland whose reasons for rejecting unity were never addressed by either constitutional or physical force nationalism.

Provo campaigns in Britain showed themselves to be effective and incidental both by the same token, that on each occasion they provoked British governments who preferred to ignore the issue to intervene with initiatives that put further pressure on the real enemy - the Protestant population of Northern Ireland. (The one exception to that rule was Roy Mason's period as Secretary of State. The exception I think proves the rule.)

None of that is to suggest that in whatever talks are to come Republicans should beat their breasts and cry mea culpa every time a Protestant enters the room, merely that they should refrain from insulting them with the fiction that they have been incidental casualties in twenty-five years of anti-imperialist struggle.

While the war which has actually occurred cannot to my mind be reasonably described as an anti-imperialist struggle it can without any stretch of the imagination be described as a war against the consequences of imperialist duplicity. The partition settlement which Lloyd George dictated was not one intended to address the good, let alone the better, government of Ireland. It was, to say the least of it, a temporary expedient from the consequences of which we have all of us in Northern Ireland, Catholic and Protestant alike, suffered.

The constitutional experiment that was Northern Ireland (the government based in the City Hall first, or College Green, does it matter?, and only later at Stormont) was never intended to be a framework for settling the national conflict in Ireland. The constitutional lawyers advising Lloyd George persuaded him that this means of distancing Ulster Unionism from the rest of the United Kingdom would keep everyone quiet while he engineered its departure from the state.

Because the unionist politicians of the period, Craigavon and Brookeborough, proved themselves to be more than competent those intentions were frustrated. That can scarcely be taken as an element in the imperialists' grand design, which was that they should behave as incompetently as the caricatures of them suggested and that resistance to Westminster cleverness should speedily collapse.

At the same time neither of the main nationalist strands involved in the argument over the partition settlement, otherwise known as the Treaty, demurred from Lloyd George's strategy with respect to Northern Ireland. It is a long time since I read the Dail debates on the Treaty but I will never forget how struck I was at

finding the matter of partition raised only three times at most, rating no more than perhaps three out of more than a thousand closely typed columns. Note even the Ulster members of that Dail could be bothered to make much of a to do about the loss of Granuaile's fourth green field.

Just as I suggested earlier we are all of us victims of imperialist duplicity we are equally, all of us, Catholic and Protestant both, victims of nationalist duplicity.

The fact is, as the All-For-Ireland-League initially pointed out, that the specifically Catholic nationalism which won the War of Independence was effectively partitionist. It left those Ulster Protestants (and dissenters, and inconveniently self-willed Northern Catholics) who would otherwise have had to be bloodily coerced to it, out of the congenial business of building a Catholic state on the basis of Vatican I's interpretation of canon law.

Now that that congenial business has been completed and is (to the apparent satisfaction of everyone concerned) falling apart we are in an entirely different ball game. That is, we are if only someone will please take time out to tell us so.

At several points in his article Cllr. McLaughlin couches his vision of the future in classic nationalist terms:-

"Peace, a real and sustainable peace, is only achievable when it is democratically based and inclusive of all points of view."

Immediately following:-

"Only on those circumstances can we expect to achieve the essential unity of purpose amongst the working class in Ireland."

And later:-

"The challenge to Sinn Fein and indeed to all shades of political opinion in Ireland will be to maintain a forward momentum to a process that will eventually create the opportunity for unionists, nationalists and republicans to find common cause."

By definition the nation is that which is democratically based and inclusive of all points of view, it is that which achieves essential unity of purpose and it is that which enables all disparate groups to find common cause. The Irish nation which achieved its own state in 1921/22 was all of those things precisely because it excluded the Ulster Protestants from its view, purpose and common cause and restricted itself to policing small groups and individuals that could easily be suppressed and expelled.

Not to put too fine a point on it, leopards change their spots much more readily than nations do. If a new body politic is to be constructed within Ireland, and I very much agree that it must be, it cannot be put together on the basis of the existing nationalism. And if it is now the case that we are in an entirely new ball game in respect of national objectives, would somebody please tell us just how the rules have changed, or (heaven forbid that negotiations might be pre-empted!) at least tell us where the goalposts now stand.

According to Cllr. McLaughlin:-

"The process of the radicalisation of Irish society and the coming together of Irish working people so as to maximise their strength and political influence is a longer term project. It will probably only become an available option after the 'Constitutional' issue has been resolved. That is not to argue that 'Labour must wait'. It is simply to ensure that such a project is based on reality. However its realisation is as inevitable as it is desirable."

But, unfortunately, that is to argue precisely that "Labour must wait"!

I don't have any reference to hand for the details of De Valera's infamous dictum and am relying here on an admittedly shaky recollection. However, I think I'm right in saying that the rule was laid down during the 1918 elections and referred specifically to the requirement that Labour subordinate itself to the construction of Catholic state power in the 26 counties - only after that had been established should Labour seek to speak with an independent voice.

That I think was the original sense in which it was understood that Labour should wait. And in that sense it has already waited far too long. Catholic state power was established in the '20s and '30s. Since at least the '70s it has been on the defensive. It can reasonably be argued that in the '90s it is in the throes of an internal collapse. Throughout all those decades Labour has waited and Labour is waiting still.

Of course, whatever the original sense of De Valera's imperative, for generations it has been used to mean that Labour must wait upon the "reintegration" of the national territory; which is the bottom line in Cllr. McLaughlin's formulation of the issue.

He says that radical working class politics will only become a realistic proposition after a new constitution has been resolved. I would argue very much to the contrary that the possibility of building a new Irish polity, which the IRA decision to cease military operations has opened up, can only be realised on the basis of the forward march of Labour that was halted 87 years ago.

The context of that March of Labour is palpably now, what it can never since the early years of the century have been, the creation of secular institutions of government within the island of Ireland - institutions capable of engaging the enthusiasm of the most progressive elements of both the nations inhabiting this territory (and that important section of progressive opinion which has de-nationalised itself).

It is the institutions of Southern Ireland which are most at question here. Schools and hospitals must be taken out of the control of the Catholic church and entrusted to the people organised as citizens rather than as communicants. The judiciary must be clearly subordinated to the legislature. New social legislation must be framed to give unequivocal support to individual moral freedom.

That is a minimalist and a liberal, rather

than a thorough-going socialist, programme. The point about it is, I think, that it is unachievable without enthusiastic working class participation in the campaigns to realise it. If Labour waits on, if Labour stands still at this point, nothing will happen.

It is also a programme which contains the minimum requirements of an all-Ireland constitutional settlement. Nothing less will be a settlement, merely a return to the endless round of dictation, resistance and coercion; and surely we have had

enough of that.

We must also, I think, understand that Labour is not an inert mass. While it waits it is nothing. It is only in action that Labour can realise itself as a distinct social power. Labour may have to wait to the long term to achieve workers control, it cannot afford to wait on the establishment of the liberal forms of political existence that it requires to facilitate its own growth.

In the meantime, the ball is very much in Sinn Fein's court. It will, I hope, prime the ball, return, and detonate it. That would be an explosion most devoutly to be desired.

Labour's Opportunism from page 20

Government on the European issue against the alliance of Labour and the Tory Euro-rebels, even though their own position is anti-Europe.

They feared a change of Government because they could not assess Labour's Northern Ireland policy at its true value. Mowlem has now convinced them (and particularly the ultra-Unionists, Taylor and Trimble) that Tony Blair is more Unionist than Major.

The Unionists now say that they are ready to bring down the Government. On the other hand the Tory rebels, empowered for a year by the Labour Party, have used their opportunity well and may decide that the changes they have wrought in public opinion and Government policy make it advisable for them to support the Government henceforth.

Labour has been acting against its own declared policies on issues of basic importance in the hope of bringing down the Government while it is still far ahead in the opinion polls. If it fails to bring down the government in the next few months, that approach is likely to end in disgrace.

The Tory Euro-rebels are on the whole in sympathy with the Ulster Unionists. But a significant incident during the exciting days of The Times' leak of the Framework Document was a statement by Portillo, their champion in Cabinet, that in order to continue to make headway on Europe they must hold the line for Major in Northern Ireland. So there are interesting months ahead.

What About The Workers?

Tony Blair, in a much heralded "clarification" of his new Clause 4, said that he wanted to "ensure that power and responsibility must be in hands of the many and not of the few."

We cannot disagree with these sentiments. As it happens, they are the essence of the current Clause 4.

But we cannot believe that Tony Blair really believes these words. Last week we reported the CBI News, Sept. 1994, stating - "Detailed consultation with the Labour Party on its proposed industrial and economic policies has led to the elimination of several unattractive ideas, including industrial democracy..."

So that rules out "power and opportunity" for the majority of "the many". Power and opportunity remains with the Cedric Browns of this world.

It also makes a nonsense of Mr. Blair's pro-European pose. It is not just the Social Democrats in Europe who favour increasing the role of the workers in the control of enterprises, in developing systems of Common Ownership. The Christian Democrats are equally in favour, and even the fascists don't have a problem with it.

So the only politicians in the whole of Europe who are opposed to workers' control are the Thatcherite wing of the British Conservative Party and Tony Blair!

Editorial

Labour's Opportunism with Ulster Unionists & Eurosceptics

The nominal policies of the Labour Party are pro-Europe and pro-United Ireland. Its actual political conduct in recent months has gone against its nominal policy position on both counts in a way that inter-connects the two.

The term "*empowerment*" has been much used in recent times, as has the term "*communitarian*". In British politics the term '*communitarian*' is only a rhetorical flourish. For better or worse, the possibility of basing politics on community in any serious way disappeared in Britain centuries ago. But in Northern Ireland only the politics of community exists.

Exclusion of the region from the party politics of the state ever since it was set up as a constitutional entity has made it impossible for forms of politics related to class and social issues to develop. Communitarianism rules in Northern Ireland with disastrous consequences.

While general responsibility for this state of affairs lies with the Parliament of the United Kingdom, the working out of it has been the responsibility of the Ulster Unionist Party. During the half-century that British rule in Northern Ireland meant Unionist Party rule, the Unionist Party was organised in a way that tied it to the Protestant community and repelled Catholics.

And 23 years after the old Stormont apparatus of rule was dismantled and the Government of Northern Ireland was undertaken by whichever party won the British election, the Unionist Party remains an exclusive communal party of Ulster Protestants.

The segregation of the Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland is not merely a result of policy difference. The cause of it is not that all Catholics detest life in the United Kingdom and therefore none of them join the Unionist Party. The cause of it is that Catholics have been institutionally precluded from participating in the political life of Britain - a thing which over the decades significant numbers of them would willingly have done - and that the 'link' with Britain has been a sectarian party of the Protestant community.

The '*communitarian*' politics of the dominant Protestant community has given the minority Catholic community

no real choice but to reinforce their own communal structures and to look for a political settlement outside the United Kingdom.

The Ulster Unionist Party is sectarian by default or as a result of circumstances. It is overtly and actively sectarian. One of its component parts is the Orange Order, which is a specifically and comprehensively anti-Catholic alliance.

Ulster Unionism did well out of communal politics for half a century. It has not done so well these past twenty years, since the Catholic community developed competent leadership.

The impossibility of making a political settlement in Northern Ireland under Unionist hegemony has caused the Tory Party, under three different leaders, to shift its orientation on the issue. Ulster Unionism is there "*under siege*" and Conor Cruise O'Brien's heart bleeds for it.

On February 4th Marjorie Mowlem went to (London?) Derry to address the Ulster Unionist Party and offer it solace.

Marjorie Mowlem knows what the score is. When she was a junior in the shadow Northern Ireland Office some years ago, it was put to her that the Labour Party should organise in Northern Ireland and make a serious attempt to establish cross-community politics there, as it had done in Liverpool and Glasgow. She didn't want to know, of course, but she could not deny what the situation was.

Her excuse then for doing nothing was that organising in Northern Ireland would be in contradiction with Labour's policy of uniting Ireland. And now in

order to unite Ireland she addresses the (London?) Derry Unionists and encourages them to stand firm against what they see as Major's United Ireland programme!

Of course she had a couple of fig leaves to wave in front of her, but the point of the meeting was not in the fig leaves.

The present writer, who addressed many Labour Party branches on the Northern Ireland issue over a period of fifteen years, always maintained that Labour policy on the issue was not in fact a policy, and was not worth the paper it was written on. Marjorie Mowlem has now put it beyond doubt that Labour policy is a sham.

The object of Mowlem's address to the Unionists was to increase their leverage against Major. The following morning (Feb 5) it was greeted ecstatically on Radio 4 by Unionist MP, John Taylor, who in his seat in the European Parliament sat in the Fascist bloc.*

New Labour is now "*empowering*" Ulster Unionism. For some months prior to Mowlem's address to the Unionists, Labour had been '*empowering*' the right wing of the Tory Party over Europe. It is notionally pro-European, but its every action has been designed to increase the leverage of the extreme anti-European wing of the Tory Party against the Government.

In actual political practice the Government has been the only pro-European force in Parliament for the past year, even though its purpose has been to retard European development from within and gradually return to the old balance-of-power game against Europe. Labour's empowerment of Bill Cash and his colleagues has given them a high political profile in the country and they have used it effectively. Public opinion has been steadily moving towards them.

On the evening before Mowlem's appeal to the Unionists, Major addressed a Tory meeting and shifted his attitude towards Europe in the direction desired by the Eurosceptics.

The Ulster Unionists during the past year or so have supported the

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