



# WORKERS' CONTROL

How far can the  
structure meet our  
demands?

Tony Benn, Walt Greendale  
and others

INSTITUTE FOR WORKERS' CONTROL  
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## FOREWORD

*The ninth national conference on Workers' Control, organised by the Institute for Workers' Control, took place in Nottingham on March 31st – April 1st, 1973. A large number of industrial seminars met on the Saturday, and the Sunday morning session was given over to two general discussions, one on the kinds of legislation which might replace the Industrial Relations Act, and the other on the question: how far can the structure meet our demands? This pamphlet contains a summary of this last discussion, with some of the main contributions. The platform which opened the argument consisted of Tony Benn, who was speaking for the first time at a workers' control conference, and Walter Greendale, a Hull docker who serves on the Executive Committee of the T&GWU. Joan Maynard was in the chair. Although some contributions are unavoidably condensed or omitted in this short pamphlet, it provides an account of the main gist of the debate. It is still hoped to publish a verbatim report later on, if the demand for this is adequate to justify the effort.*

*Ken Coates. Conference Organiser.*

## HOW FAR CAN THE STRUCTURE MEET OUR DEMANDS?

### Ninth National Conference of Workers' Control

*Walter Greendale:* I am a docker, and basically I came here, like I suppose the rest of us, in order to learn not to try and teach, yet somehow or other I got on this top table, I don't know how yet and I understood like Tony Benn did that I was going to sit here and throw questions and try to answer some others. The point is that we are here to debate, as far as I am concerned, 'How can the structure meet our demands?' Well, our demands are very simple and they know them.

We want workers' control of the industries we are in.

Well, I consider the industry I'm in is probably the easiest one at the present moment in which we can achieve these ends, and there are the means to achieve control of the industries we are in if we have the right people in Parliament to do it. We are a previous example in the docks industry, we do have 50% now control of the Dock Labour Board who basically is our employer, but beyond that we would like, the same as everyone else, 100% control. Then there would be no private employers in the industry. Indeed the previous Labour Government did suggest in a study scheme in 1966 that there would be a nationalisation of the industry with a major extension of industrial democracy within that organisation.

Well, 'a major extension' means more than 50%: if we nationalise the industry it would have to be 100% workers' control in the docks industry.

Unfortunately, between that study group's report and its possible implementation we had ministers there who were not prepared to listen to the report: and at the first signs of nationalisation of the port transport industry, Brian Nicholson and myself were in the invidious position that we had to stand outside Parliament talking to Fred Mulley persuading him not to nationalise the industry within the terms that they were going to do it. It would seem to me as a layman, I'd rather fight employers who I know are my enemies than the people in Parliament who are supposed to be representing me, but that's how our position was at that time. They were prepared to nationalise part of our industry, a part which didn't make a real difference to us anyhow, while they left the growing sector in the hands of private individuals. We would, in fact, have reached the stage where the industrial democracy that we already enjoy in the port transport industry would have been reduced, because we would have had growing alongside us another docks industry with no control whatsoever, purely in the hands of private individuals with no workers' representation on the board, as we have.

Tony Benn said that there is talk in the TUC of worker directors. Well I was in the seminar yesterday listening to Ken Coates, there was approximately fifty of us listening in there, and there was quite a large amount of debate and we were split pretty even down the middle, whether the worker directors, as proposed under the European system, would be any use at all. Some said that there could be no accep-

tance of this method, others said that this was a step in the right direction, let's get on from there.

Well, in the experience we've had in the docks, I am a member of a board, I'm a board member of the National Dock Labour Board, and as such am a director, but the proposals put forward by the EEC based on the German system, in no way satisfy that we would require as worker directors even. The system they enjoy in Germany provides for two boards, one of which will have worker directors on it, but will have no power at all. The other board is the one which will run the actual factory or industry and we would have no say from the workshop as to who the people on this one would be. This is window dressing. If we say we have worker directors even if there are fifty per cent of them on a board which has no power then this to me is illogical. There is no attempt at all to secure democracy in an industry such as this.

In the docks industry we do have 50% on our local boards, we don't have the 50% on the national boards, we could do with that, but the majority of work is done at local board level and this is where we protect our interests. We are endeavouring, as we said in the Docks Seminar yesterday, to secure an extension of this so that we can look after our side more, and so that we can extend the scheme (and when I say extend the scheme I don't want to go into the argument about trying to pinch somebody else's jobs, we are not trying to pinch anybody's job.). We are trying to ensure that all the workers in the transport industry, not only the docks, have the same measure of protection as we do: and we would hope in the future they will have the same measure of control over their whole industry as we have.

*Tony Benn:* Let me begin very briefly by reporting what is actually happening at the moment, to see how far it advances the cause which brings this conference together.

Let me take first of all the work that is being done in the TUC on their attitude towards the advancement of industrial democracy. The Labour Party published a pamphlet on this subject in 1968, which you will know about, produced by its Industrial Democracy Working Party. Since then the NEC Industrial Policy Committee, of which I am Chairman, has also done further work, but we can make no real further progress on this until we know what the trade union movement itself is prepared to demand and wishes to achieve. Therefore, as far as we are concerned, we must wait for the TUC to come forward with its own proposals. The TUC has been nudged into thinking about this, by proposals which have come forward from the Common Market based upon the German co-determination model. This system has always been, in my mind, wholly unsatisfactory and wholly unacceptable. But if the TUC comes forward with something that goes further than this, then it will provide us with the opportunity to formulate our own proposals for our manifesto when the next election comes.

That is the industrial side of the story. The other side of the story follows from the Labour Party Conference last year, at which a number of resolutions were passed

including a definite demand for Workers' Control, not only in existing public enterprise but in firms that were to be taken over by legislation in the course of the period of government by the next Labour Government. The Labour Party is therefore now having to give attention to this question. We are aiming to do this in conjunction with the TUC.

The establishment last year of the Liaison committee between the TUC General Council, the Labour Party Executive and the Shadow Cabinet, represents for the first time what one could properly call a national council of labour, (although the Co-op is not represented on it) and at these monthly meetings we are hammering out a series of proposals which will inevitably become central in the manifesto of the Labour Party at the next General Election.

The first problems we tackled at these meetings last year, was the repeal of the Industrial Relations Act. We are separately and collectively committed to the repeal of that Act in the first session of the next Labour Government. At a recent meeting, the TUC submitted a paper to us, on which they had done a very great deal of work, setting out their views as to what legislation should follow the repeal of the Industrial Relations Act. This problem arises because, when that Act is repealed, it will remove from the statute book almost all the legislation covering Trade Union activities. When that is agreed, it will cover a part of the area of interest to us and we shall be in a position then to discuss this and put it forward, together with our policy statement for the Annual Conference this year.

In addition to this, the revision of Company Law is absolutely essential if we mean, as we do, to tilt the balance of power between capital and labour. Company Law is being looked at at three levels at the moment: first, the Government themselves are preparing and will present a new Companies Bill in the Autumn of this year, which, if the Parliament lasts, will be debated in the course of the next twelve months. They are holding preliminary discussions with the TUC about this. The Labour Party is also to set up a sub-committee on Company Law to consider what amendments we think need to be made. So much for the machinery. One of the most important reforms needed relates to the disclosure of information. My own belief, and I say this from some experience as a Minister, but also from looking at the concrete cases of the UCS and the other closures that have occurred, leading to work-ins in the course of the last two years, is that disclosure of information has a far bigger role to play in extending industrial democracy than has yet been generally recognised. In the Counter-Inflation Act which the Government have introduced there is, of course, provision for total disclosure to Government for the purpose of enforcing their price administration. If this information is required on a regular basis, by law, by an incoming Labour Government, it will provide the greatest single check on the abuse of power by capital that could possibly be devised. The TUC guide for negotiators "Good Industrial Relations", sets out to see what information they themselves regard as necessary for Trade Union negotiation purposes. I refer to pages 17 and 18, and in case you haven't seen it, perhaps I may read what information they regard as necessary.

"Trade Union officials require information about the operation of the company or establishment if they are to bargain in an informed and realistic manner. The

disclosure of information to trade union representatives should cover the following points:— *Man-Power*: number of employees by job description, rates of turnover, short time, absenteeism. *Sickness and Accidents*: details of existing provision for security, sickness, accidents. *Recruitment and Training*: re-employment, promotion and redundancy. *Financial*: sales turnover by main activities, home and export sales, non-trading income, including income from investments and overseas earnings, pricing policy, costs of distribution and sales, production costs, administrative and overhead costs, costs of material and machinery, labour costs including social security payments, costs of management and supervision. *Incomes*: directors' remuneration, wages and salaries, make-up of pay, negotiated rates, payment by results, overtime and bonuses. *Profits*: before and after tax, taking into account Government allowances, grants and subsidies, distributions and retentions. *Performance indicators*: unit costs, output per man, return on capital employed, value added etc. *Work of Company*: details of growth, an up-to-date value of trade investments. *Prospects and Plans*: details of new enterprises and locations, prospective close-downs, mergers and takeovers, trading and sales plans, investment plans, including research and development, man-power plans, plans for recruitment, selection and training, promotion, regrading and re-deployment, short-time and redundancy provision."

And this information which the TUC demands as its own basis for the work of trade union negotiators, whether it can be achieved, either by a revision of the Companies Act or whether it can be secured in part by trade union negotiation, would, if it were secured, in my opinion, tilt the balance of power most substantially.

There are, in effect, three levels at which this transfer in the balance of power must take place. First, at the workshop level itself, to be transferred by the demands which will have still to be formulated by the trade unions for measures of industrial democracy to be embodied in legislation, covering both public enterprise and the private sector in so far as this is practicable. Secondly, a revision of the Companies Act which would change the balance of power substantially between capital and labour. Thirdly, of course, by the enactment, if these measures are still not effective for our purposes, of legislation that would permit this information to be made regularly available to Government.

I have not mentioned in this context, but you will know that the Labour Party Conference has demanded the expansion of the public sector (the expansion of the public sector by bringing into public ownership a number of new sectors of the economy, including Banking and Insurance and the commanding heights of the economy, both through the agency of a state holding company and in other ways). All this would, I believe, enable a very substantial advance to be made.

In conclusion may I stress that the progress actually made will greatly depend upon the extent to which the demands can be clearly formulated from the trade union movement, and injected into the policy of the Labour Party, through Annual Conference decisions, and before that in the formulation of policy that goes on between the Labour Party and the trade union movement in our own NEC committees. Here, too, lies the importance of the work of the Liaison committee to which I referred, bringing together the TUC and the Shadow Cabinet and National Executive of the Labour Party.

*John Williams – ASTMS:* I'd like to ask a question directly to Tony Benn, arising out of his article in last week's *Sunday Times* where he listed seventeen measures which the Tory Government has taken, which he feels could be used by a Socialist Government for the advancement of the working class. I would like him to elaborate a little bit on this, because to my mind these measures are leading us directly into a corporate state, and so I don't see how a Labour Government can use them to help us. That's one question. The second thing I'd like Tony Benn to talk about, if he will, is how we can democratise Parliament. He is a distinguished parliamentarian: can he say how can we get workers' control into parliament? Thank you.

*Tony Benn:* I had a feeling someone might ask that question so I brought the article with me. What I was trying to do was to gather together the items of legislation which the Government has introduced in order to deal directly with management. The article did not deal with the pay legislation at all, but simply the control of the business company. For those who perhaps didn't see the article, can I just describe very briefly what are the seventeen powers that they have taken?

First of all, in the Rolls Royce legislation, the power to nationalise by a one clause bill. When I compare that with the 200 clause bills that we designed when we took into public ownership all the great basic industries of the 1945 parliament, on the great Herbert Morrison model – in which you concrete an industry in to a permanent legislative pattern and cannot even change its management pattern without further Acts of Parliament – I think there is a lot to be said for a more flexible method of achieving public ownership. That is point number one. They have set a precedent with this Rolls Royce Bill.

The second is the power to support, which is in their Industry Act: and I quoted the criteria under which they have acquired the power to support, where the financial assistance is likely to benefit the economy of the United Kingdom; where it is in the national interest that the national assistance should be provided on the scale and the form and the manner proposed; and where such financial assistance cannot appropriately be provided otherwise than by the Secretary of State. Now the importance of that legislation, which is similar to the Industrial Expansion Act, which I myself introduced and which was repealed by the Tories, is that if we intend, as we do, to have the most rigid price control by statute, then the standard answer of big firms will be that if you control our prices then we will be denied money for investment. But, if a Labour Government is ready to put investment money in direct, in return for equity, it can make a major change in the self-financing system, under which the mixed economy has worked.

Power over prices, the third item, is very well known and I won't deal with that.

Power to demand information under the Counter-Inflation Act, lays it down that the Minister has the power, either directly or through the Price Commission, to require any person to furnish, whether by periodical returns or by other means, such estimates or other information as may be specified or described in the notice. This information we were denied, and clearly this was a major handicap to us. We must have a ready and continuing flow of information from private firms, notably from multi-national firms. If this information were flowing regularly into Govern-

ment it would make a very fundamental change in the relationship between the Government and the private sector and particularly the multi-national companies. For example, when a monopoly existed, or where a merger proposal came in, Government would itself be acquainted with all the facts and figures and forecasts of the major firms proposing to merge. Therefore, a monopolies commission enquiry might not in fact be necessary in cases of that kind, because the information would already be available. If you couple with that a determination to see that more information is made available to Trade Union negotiators, under a revision of the Companies' Act, then, of course, Government would be in a position to check with the information that was given to the Trade Union negotiators. The power to demand information which the Government would take would run in parallel with the demand for information which would be required under the Labour legislation.

Next, there is power to amend Statute, existing in Clause 8 of the Counter-Inflation Act, "the Minister may, by order, direct that any provision of any Act, whether passed before this Act or later, which relates to prices, charges or remuneration or any provision having effect under that Act, shall be subject to such exceptions, modifications or adaptations as may be specified in the order." That is to say the Government have taken the power, by ministerial order, to change any Act passed in the past, even including the European Communities Act. Steel prices during Phase One have been held down, contrary to our obligations under the Common Market under the Temporary Provisions Act, by virtue of similar provision, which appeared in the earlier Bill. This marked the restoration of Parliamentary control over and above Brussels direction in the European coal and steel community. This is the most important power, in a way, of the lot.

Then, power over large companies. Well, that is the definition of the commanding heights, the "category one" firms. Control of profits under the Act, which admittedly is only intended for a temporary period, but does, in fact, provide a permanent check, if you choose to exercise it seriously, over profit margins. Power to vet investment plans would have been taken. There is also power over transfer prices, and power to veto directors under the Insurance Companies Bill, which has not yet received Parliamentary approval. The Secretary of State can remove a Director from an insurance company, if he thinks he is not a fit and proper person. Of course, there has never been Ministerial power over appointments in the private sector, until the Insurance Companies' Bill came forward.

Again power to inspect the books: the Insurance Companies' Bill provides that the Minister can inspect the books of the company more fully even than is possible under the Counter-Inflation Bill. Under the same Insurance Companies' Bill, the Government have taken the power to give a directive to an insurance company: I'll read this to you too, because it is the most comprehensive power ever taken as far as I know.

"The Secretary of State may require a company to take such action as appears to him to be appropriate to protect policy holders, or potential policy holders of the company against the risk that the company may be unable to meet its liabilities."



This applies to the private sector the powers that have hitherto been reserved to the public sector under general directives to nationalised industries.

And then there are two other powers which I referred to: one is the definition of an "unfair practice," which at the moment is defined in the Industrial Relations Act in relation to certain types of Trade Union activities. There is absolutely no reason why we should not define, if we choose to do so, unfair practices of any kind we thought necessary, including asset stripping or insider-dealing, and deal with Companies Act provisions in a similar way. Finally, there is the power to appoint a Commissioner, used by this Government, a concept under the Housing and Finance Act, but which would certainly be capable of extension and development to meet quite different purposes for the protection of the public.

Now, we would be very foolish if we ignored this list of powers. I'm not suggesting that in the form in which they are at present, they would be adequate or satisfactory, but they are very formidable powers. They do drive the Conservative Party and business firms, Aims of Industry, and the people who support them, into a most defensive position in the debate about the relationship between private capital and the community: I have absolutely no doubt in my mind that if these powers are democratised (and I now come to your second point) so that they are exercised, not by independent agencies on a corporate state basis, but by specific and explicit approval of Parliament, they offer us valuable guidance on what could be done. Parliamentary sovereignty vis-a-vis the Common Market commission must be restored as well as Parliamentary sovereignty vis-a-vis the decisions of ministers and the boards. Then we really would be making a substantial advance further forward. My article also pointed out that there were developments, and extensions, and reservations that would have to be made, but anyone seriously looking at this question of the survival of the market economy at this time cannot ignore the changes that have been made during this three year period. I believe that they are very significant indeed.

*Bro. Riley – TGWU – Handsworth, Birmingham:* As a lorry driver, knowing that in the past Tony, that when the Labour Government got into power they shifted on to the back of us, as workers, the Balance of Payments while other people got Lordships and M.B.E.'s and O.B.E.'s and all this nonsense: is what you now say a fact, or would you say that it was white-washing the tabernacles for the future with a load of fine words, knowing that there is going to be no action on the case? Is it really going to be so in the future? The major question is this; are you going to attack socialistically the people who are allowed to make vast profits off the backs of us as workers, knowing that a man that does nothing for society, or a gang of such men, can make £135,000,000 profit overnight?

*Tony Benn:* Your question is really a question of confidence. I cannot hope to persuade this audience that the future will be different from the past. But if you look at the influence of the rank and file have on the policy of the Labour Party, not on a weekly or a monthly basis, but over a four or five year span, I think I am

right in saying that on almost every one of the issues on which the Labour Conference conflicted with the last Labour Cabinet, Conference was right and its views prevailed in the end. I was a member of that Cabinet and I must take my full share of responsibility for every decision which was taken. I'm not trying to escape from that responsibility, but if you look at the half a dozen major issues on which the Conference differed from the Cabinet and there was a clash between them, not only has the policy of the Party now changed, but, historically, with the benefit of hindsight, the view of the Conference has been shown to be right.

Let me go through them. One was the undue emphasis on the Balance of Payments to which you referred. Another was the attitude of the Government towards the East of Suez commitment. The third was the attitude of the Government to the Vietnam war. The fourth was the attitude of the Government towards the Industrial Relations Act. The fifth was the attitude of the Government towards the Statutory Pay Policy. The sixth, if you like, was the restoration of prescription charges. I could go on longer, but those are six issues on which the Labour Conference conflicted with the Labour Leadership, and at the time, predictably, all the press, all the media, all the wise men to whom you referred were on the side of the Cabinet against the Conference. Five or six years later on every one of those issues the Conference has succeeded, and Conference view has prevailed, and the Conference view has been accepted. Therefore, I think, I take entirely what you have said to us.

But it would be wrong to be pessimistic about the future of the labour movement or the Labour Party based on too short a view of the time it takes to change opinion. Historically, all change has come from pressure from underneath on those above, whether they were elected or whether they inherited their power, or whatever it was that happened in the old days. It's pressure from underneath that changes things. The next Labour Government will be different from the last Labour Government, in part, if you like, because of what that Government itself may want to do differently. But more than anything else it will differ to the extent that the elements of party democracy and pressure from underneath are effective in pressing demands on that Government. That is my belief, and that is the only possible guarantee that I can give you, other than the fact that all of us learn from experience, including ex-Cabinet ministers!

*George Brown – Stafford Labour Party:* Tony Benn has talked about liaison between the Labour Party, the Parliamentary Labour Party and the TUC. This is liaison at the top. I want to know if they have decided to take that liaison down through the organisation. Are they encouraging, for instance, Labour MP's and prospective Labour MP's in the constituencies to contact the Trade Unionists, the Stewards and not only talk to the Stewards and the Trade Unionists but also to listen to the Stewards and Trade Unionists. I'm rather dubious, I think I have every right to be on our past experiences from the liaison at the top only. I want to see the liaison coming down through the structure of the organisation and I'm pretty sure that some of the present Labour MP's will get decided shocks and will realise that the rarified atmosphere that they operate in at the present time has no relationship to life as it truly is.

I think that we are tending here to get down to details before we have our overall strategy developed or even suggested, and I ask Tony this question: by this approach does he mean that we've got to rehabilitate capitalism? Because I think capitalism at the present time is once again in crisis and I want no part in the rehabilitation of this system. Here I come to what the title of this seminar is: How Far Can the Present Structure Meet our Demands? and I think our answer should be an emphatic 'no', the present structure cannot meet our demands. Does this mean that we have got to go in retirement like many of the sectarians and say that the present structure doesn't meet, cannot meet our demands that that's it? Do we take up this completely negative attitude? Here again, what is our objective? Our objective is to change the present structure and we change the present structure by eroding it. After all, Parliament, the State, the Civil Service, all of these institutions have evolved in order to protect and defend the present system of society, and we've got to realise that we are going to have to build parallel structures. We've got to start building our own workers' state and in this connection I'm astonished that the seminar yesterday on this question was divided on the issue of worker directors on the German model. We've got to make sure that when we participate in these developments, and we must participate in these developments, that we insist there is no responsibility without power. Our strategy has got to be aimed at power, at the working class in this country taking power and in this present crisis of capitalism, unlike the crisis at the end of the war, we've got to ensure that this is in the forefront of our activities, of our plans.

*Peter Price:* I've found it this morning a very heartening discussion so far for after all, what would have happened two, three, even four years ago when we had the white knight of the white-hot heat of technological revolution on the platform. We'd have all, wouldn't we, fallen to and savaged him and this morning we're not doing that.

Two years ago Tony Benn was speaking on the Common Market and there was a question about what the Labour Government did last time. Tony said — and I've always remembered it — “if you expect Socialism through a Parliamentary system, you've got another guess coming.” He didn't put it exactly like that, but that was roughly what he said. Therefore I want to stress that none of us, nor any of our particular sections, should fall into the trap of imagining that our particular organisation, our particular institution, is the one thing going to lead to a Socialist solution.

It's one of the reasons we are here this morning, isn't it, to ask 'can the structure meet our demands?' Can this present structure deliver the goods for us? Can, for instance, our own Party, which is half a Party and half an election machine, deliver Socialism? I think we've got to carry on doing what this conference seems to be doing this morning. Assessing very coolly all our institutions, and rejecting none of them. Using the Labour Party, the Parliamentary Labour Party, Conference, the SLL, the Communist Party; all the various organisations that we've got — the Trades Councils and the rest.

For what they are worth in society we must use them all to press our various goals.

*Bro. Olman – Boilermaker, working in the Steel Industry:* When the Labour Party, first won its election, the first real attack they made was on the workers, when the seamen had a strike for approximately six weeks. Wilson and his lot came around and attacked the seamen, reds under the bed, and so on. We all know very well that the seamen were worthy of an increase in pay they would not yield to them. That was the Labour Party, the Labour Government. However, we've got to look back even to go forward, so I must make that attack. We also had *In Place of Strife*, the forerunner to the Industrial Relations Bill. That again was brought about by the Labour Party, the Labour Government. Then there's productivity. We talk about productivity, they were so damned naive, they wouldn't listen to the trade unionists, that they were going to put us out of work, and that's exactly what they did do, put us out of bloody work.

Right, then they were closing down the mines. Oh yes, they did a good job on that. The railways. Barbara Castle went around, took the job over from Beeching, and from then onwards, closing down the railways. They would not reverse the policy, the Beeching policy, the Tory Government, no, they had to go on closing them. And consequently we all know what the roads are going like today. So eventually we're going to revert back to the railways in the end. That's so much for the Labour Party, the Labour Government on that.

Now, we've got the Tory Government in, and they're now wanting to close the Steel Works. Now I only hope the Labour Party, possibly a Labour Government for the next election, that if they get in, I would like to see that they would stop the closure of the steel works, taking into consideration the consequences that it will have socially in these various areas, with thousands of people put out of work, most of them unable to get jobs and so on. So I hope the Labour Party will undertake to stop the closure of the steel industry.

I heard Wedgwood Benn mentioning 'by law'. You know, this law business, it gets under my bloody skin, because the law is not made for us as workers, the law is made for the ruling class, the landowners. I don't have to lecture you on that, you probably all here know that in any case. So, Wedgwood Benn, I say to you, buggler the law, make it the right to work by law. Make every worker the right to work, the right to have a job. Let's have that by law.

*Chris White* made a short speech in which he said: We all know what is happening with the trade unions that are going into struggle at the moment under Phase 1 and Phase 2. They are being defeated, they are being picked off one by one. The AUEW lost its battle against the Industrial Act, the gas workers have lost, ASLEF have lost, the hospital workers' union are settling down for a long strike with no prospect of victory at all except within the terms of the £1.00 plus 4% and yet at this moment there has never been more of a need for huge wage increases for everyone. The reason they are not winning is because they do not know how to organise to win.

*Clare Doyle:* The resolution (composite number 32) that was carried at the Labour Party conference last year by a large majority was for the nationalisation of the 300 major monopolies under democratic workers' control. This was to be the policy that

the Labour Party should campaign on for the next election, and the resolution meant *campaign*, not put to one side for the next 10 or 20 years and let Terry Pitt burn the midnight oil in Transport House trying to work some other programme for the Labour Party.

*Audrey Wise:* Following on from what a previous speaker said, I think it is much too easy to say if we had a different selection system we would have working class members of Parliament and everything would be alright. In fact, if you look at that selfsame Parliamentary Party, some of the very least representative of our members of Parliament have come from the ranks of the workers; I think we've got to look not just at the selection systems, we've got to look a lot more basically anyway, but at the question of accountability.

The trouble is not that they can make a nice ten minute speech and get selected but then, after that, they go their own sweet way. If we made a few mistakes it wouldn't matter so much, except that these mistakes are then there for life. I want to go back to Tony Benn's very interesting list of things which the Tory Government have done which might be used by Labour. I think that he's right to be looking and thinking, questioning in this way, but I think he's on a very dangerous course. I think what we can learn from these measures is that the Tory Government hasn't hesitated to take powers which can be used against individual capitalists. This is extremely interesting. What they are doing is they're taking control, they're taking means of intervening against individual capitalist enterprises even insurance companies, on behalf of the capitalist class as a whole. Now in my book this is a move to the corporate state. I think we can learn from their boldness, but the lesson we must learn is if they can take powers like this on behalf of the capitalist class as a whole, what we require from a Labour Government is that they take equally sweeping powers on behalf of the working class. I would suggest that the machinery would have to be different, basically different.

I think you formulate the sort of machinery which fits your ends. If your ends are dictatorial, your machinery will be things like orders in council, and ministerial edicts, and I don't think they would push us along a Socialist road at all. I think we've got to be formulating machinery and the sort of laws — more than laws — the sort of structure that would have to be democratic right from the beginning. I don't think we can simply have orders in council, even more power to Parliament, doesn't seem to me the point at all unless we make fundamental changes in the nature of Parliament itself.

I'm speaking here as a Labour Party member and a prospective Labour candidate. I'm not a candidate because I'm enchanted with Parliament, but rather because I'm disenchanted with it, and I think that the whole system, the whole lack of accountability of the Parliamentary representatives to the people who vote for them, the lack of accountability in our own party, these are things which are really basic to us. I agree with the brother who said we haven't even got workers' control of our own organisation and I think that at every stage we must be saying, "does this actually enhance the amount of control that ordinary people have over their work situation and over their own representatives." This has to apply in the Labour Party structure

and it has to apply in the Labour Party policies in relation to the national structure.

*Tony Benn:* May I deal briefly with the points raised?

George Brown asked whether there was liaison other than with the TUC. The short answer is yes. Ron Hayward and I, for example, going to see the executives of many of our affiliated trade unions. We had a meeting with the agricultural workers' this week, followed by discussions in Manchester with USDAW, with the textile workers: and we are seeking the TGWU on the 10th May. We are trying to deepen the liaison.

As far as my own constituency is concerned, immediately after the election I began a series of meetings with the T&G and a Political Action Committee was set up by that union. I also asked the shop stewards at BAC and Rolls Royce, to formulate proposals about the form of workers' control they would like when the aircraft industry is brought into public ownership. This sort of work goes on continually, in my own constituency and I believe elsewhere.

George Brown said, and I agree with him, that one has to have one's objective clear. Our objective is a fundamental and irreversible transfer in the balance of power and wealth in our society. That is why our institutions have to change. But when people say we must start building parallel structures, let us be clear. We *have* parallel structures. We have the Labour Movement, we have the Trade Union movement, we have the Labour Party and I thought what was said by some of the speakers about our failure to achieve workers' control within both the Trade Union movement and the Labour Party was a great deal nearer home than many of the other points that he made, which implied that we had to start from scratch.

One other speaker asked, 'why are you talking to the TUC about industrial democracy?' Well, is he really suggesting that the Labour Party should try to reform our industrial structure without the agreement of the elected leaders of the Trade Union movement? If the Trade Union movement is not satisfied with its elected leaders, then that is for it to decide. But it would be ludicrous, I really believe, if we were to say we had achieved nothing and had to start again from scratch.

Peter Price referred to something he thought I had said about the role of the Parliamentary system in achieving socialism. Of course Parliament, as such, is not a democratic institution. We've had Parliament since 1295 and it was only after 1832 that we began the slow move towards voters' control. We didn't achieve voters' control until one man, one woman, one vote came in March 1970. A parliamentary system as distinct from a democratic system — working through Parliament — is not of itself an instrument of change. Socialism has to be achieved, from the outside, by democratic control of the system and then Parliament has its part to play in this. I also agree with what Peter Price said about working through a whole series of institutions. Thank God the Labour Party has begun to give up, or at any rate, reduce its practice of proscriptions and expulsions and things of that kind. But if you're not going to do that, if you're going to abandon central discipline, which I personally am strongly in favour of abandoning, then you have got to substitute democratic control from underneath. If you're not going to withdraw the whip from MP's and councillors or expel people from the party, then you've got to es-

establish the principle that a member of Parliament or a Trade Union leader is accountable to the people who put him there.

And that's what Lincoln was all about. And that's what a number of other things are all about as well.

The "right to work" law that was raised by our friend from the steel industry, I suppose he was from Shotton, is the key to a great deal of this. There are many people who have been disappointed by UCS and the way it ended. I've got a number of other cases. I have one in my constituency now. Brecknell, Dolman and Rogers. Seventeen hundred people axed after what is the most scandalous example of asset stripping and a double takeover. Briant Colour Printers, as you have probably read seem to have made some progress. Almost all work-ins are motivated by the demand for the right to work. But the workers' control theme which is activated when the right to work is challenged tends to dissipate when that question is settled and isn't carried further forward. This is a problem that requires a great deal more political education.

Our friend from Shotton also said that the Labour Government never raised the question "who governs Britain" in the sense Heath has done as part of his attack on the Trade Unions. I believe, looking back on the Labour Government — and you have to have been in the cabinet to analyse what really went wrong — that our first error was that we did not raise these fundamental questions when the Governor of the Bank of England came along in 1964 and said "you can't raise the pensions". We never put that threat out to the public and said "this is a challenge to the Labour movement". This is the challenge.

*Interruption:* Why didn't you?

That's a very good question. If I may say so, that is one reason why I attach such importance to information, the disclosure of information; not only company information but broader political information too. Government secrecy puts a wall around Government so that what Government is thinking about is not discussed.

We did begin the Green Papers, which was a real improvement; but the challenges facing the Labour Government we've never conveyed to the movement at the time so that they had an opportunity of bringing counter-pressure to bear. The secrecy surrounding Government is one of the greatest enemies of progress, and I think that is a most important point.

There were other points raised. Could I deal with them quickly? Could the Labour Party ignore the TUC on the development of industrial democracy? Candidly, it could not. It's very easy for those who don't work within the Trade Union movement to come along with fancy plans for industrial democracy and then find they meet the implacable hostility of the Trade Union movement because the TUC think they would undermine the achievements they have won over the years through the shop stewards or other bargaining. Having been in China, in many ways the most interesting society in the world — where you get the Revolutionary Committee running the factories, the Trade Union movement as we know it disappears. I took a message with me from Jack Jones to the Transport Workers of China and there was nobody to

to give it to, which caused some embarrassment. I kept saying "When can I present the message from Jack Jones?" and in the end they said "we must tell you that the trade unions have not yet 'emerged' from the Cultural Revolution." There is a real problem here about whether you build upon your existing Trade Union structure or whether you have a superficial management election system which has no relationship to organised workers as they have achieved power up through their trade unions.

Therefore I'm bound to be modest in what I think I can put forward, other than what would be acceptable to the Trade Union movement. That is why the worker-director system on the German model is, in my opinion, sheer window dressing. I attended a conference in Trinidad last year of many of the biggest multi-national companies. They were all talking about the benefit of supervisory boards. They spoke of having the Churches on them, Local Authorities, Trade Unions, and, when you heard them discussing it, you knew why they weren't frightened of it. So when we come forward with our proposals we must build on the strength of the labour movement.

Chris White said we were all losing the battle and cited the gas workers and the hospital workers. I know what he meant. One of the strongest cases for making May 1st into a National day of protest and stoppage is that by that means Labour movement will be enveloping all these individual struggles and making them into a common struggle for the Trade Unions and the Labour Party – which is going to support it. But may I beg our colleague not to be too pessimistic. One of the reasons why our people don't sit down and work out the details of their plans is that they think it is hopeless. I do not believe it is hopeless. I know there are all sorts of failures, and all sorts of theories to explain them, including one that blames it all on treachery at the top. I'm certainly not trying to escape any of my responsibility for past failures, but you know, if you look at the Industrial Relations Act alone, it has been, to a very large extent, neutralised by the opposition not only of the Trade Union movement, by the fact that the British public are not prepared to see a Trade Unionist put in jail under that Act.

I think there are two reasons why we haven't made more progress. One is pessimism, which is spread by the Left, not meaning to produce pessimism, but always underlining the failures until people think it isn't worth trying. It is worth trying and the restoration of self-confidence in the Labour movement by those who wish to make change will be a very important element in our success.

Whatever you may think of Chairman Mao, his statement about paper tigers was one of the most important statements ever made. Here was an under-developed country, living at a low standard of living, facing the hostility of both of the United States and the Soviet Union, the two major super powers in the world and Mao was telling his people that these two powers were paper tigers. It manifestly wasn't true in terms of nuclear weapons; wasn't true in terms of economic and industrial strength, but Mao gave to the Chinese workers the feeling that they could achieve something. Unless we can do that in the Labour movement, then, quite frankly, we shall go down the drain, because people will think it isn't worth trying. That is also the case for having together in the Labour movement people with different traditions, different views, different sectarian beliefs about what socialism is, making their own in-



dividual contributions and also seeing positive features in each other that are capable of developing in a constructive way.

A question was asked about the Parliamentary system and whether it works or not. May I put it like this? I don't believe that what lies at the root of the Labour movement tradition is the belief that Parliament alone can do what is necessary. I have certainly never believed that. But I do believe that when our movement did decide a hundred years ago — and I see no reason to vary that conclusion — that within the context of our own society we had to advance by persuasion, it was right. We decided we had to persuade people if we wanted to make progress. It isn't the Parliamentary tradition but the concept of persuasion that really differentiates us from societies that, due to their quite different circumstances, believe that it's got to be done by military uprising or revolution. The problem of persuasion is not just of persuading the British public against the mass media which is almost wholly hostile to us, but of persuading the movement itself of the advances we want to make.

We have got to persuade, when the time comes, a lot of working people whose jobs depend on the capitalist system, that we have a constructive alternative that will, in fact, increase and enhance their standard of living. And that is the problem we have to face if we are to continue to operate within the context of persuasion.

Finally I come to the question of the article in the *Sunday Times*. I agree entirely with what Audrey Wise said. The real lesson from the Tory period in office is that where you have a will to serve an interest, then it is possible to produce laws that defend that interest. It wasn't the detailed policy we lacked last time. It was the will to change we lacked. That will now applied to the problems of our society, must lead us to be as bold in the development of our instruments as Mr. Heath has been in the development of his. I listed those powers, in that article to show to the Labour Party that where you have the will to safeguard the interests of the rich and the powerful, Parliament can be made to serve them. Therefore, if we have the will, and the electoral power to exercise it, on a democratic basis, we can do the same.

Thank you for listening. I too thought I would be completely savaged here and I have to some extent. But I've learned a lot, enjoyed it very much. Thank you for listening to me.

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