



WE MUST FACE THE FUTURE

A
DECLARATION
OF LABOUR POLICY. FOR
THE CONSIDERATION
OF THE
NATION

THE CASE FOR PARTY DEMOCRACY

By Tony Benn

PUBLISHED
BY

An edited version of the Herbert Morrison Memorial Lecture delivered to the
Greater London Regional Council of the Labour Party at the House of Commons
on June 26th 1980.

Published by the Institute for Workers' Control,
Bertrand Russell House, Gamble Street, Nottingham NG7 4ET.
Printed by the Russell Press Ltd., Nottingham 9/80.

The Case for Party Democracy

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1. *Labour is debating the future of Britain*

The debate which is going on within the Labour Party is a debate of as great importance as any we have ever had. On the one hand it is about policy and on the other about party democracy but, above all, it is about the inter-relationship between the two. Nobody should be in any doubt that we are discussing not only the future of the Labour Party, but the future of Britain. Because the unity of the Labour Party depends upon greater democracy and so do our prospects of replacing this Government by a Labour Government.

The Labour Party exists to protect working people, and we must never forget our prime responsibilities. Now, with unemployment figures higher than at any time since before the war; with the welfare state now being dismantled, with the trade unions under attack in a way that takes you back to the old Trades Disputes Act, or the Taff Vale Judgment, if not the Combination Acts; with the risk of war now coming from an accelerated rearmament programme, we must never forget during this debate that our job is to drive the Government back, to get the Government out, to get a Labour Government in and to get our policies carried through. That is the background against which everything we say must be seen.

The ballot box and free trade unionism are the twin instruments by which working people come into their own inheritance. The Labour movement and the Labour Party is the only route to power for people without personal wealth or power. What we are discussing therefore is not just a dry, academic study for those who are doing an 'A' Level in British Government. It is about how the party can fulfil its historic task.

Those who argue that constitutional questions like party democracy are irrelevant to the political struggle against the Government are misreading the whole history of our movement. If constitutional issues are irrelevant, why did the Chartists have to fight so hard in the 19th century? Were the 20th century suffragettes engaged in irrelevant activity when they were fighting for the vote? Constitutional questions are the key to power in a Parliamentary democracy and have played a key role in the development of our Party.

2. *The Labour Party always argues but it will never split*

The Labour Party always has argued, and always will argue but it will never split. Our history proves that. Here is an extract from a resolution passed at the Trades Union Congress, in Dundee 1888:

"No progress can be made with dissension in the camp, and those who create discord are not worthy to associate with earnest men."

And who was the figure accused of creating this discord? Keir Hardie, who then argued that there should be a Labour Party to represent working people, whereas Henry Broadhurst, the Secretary of the TUC, favoured affiliation with the Liberals.

The *Book of the Labour Party* published in the 1920s shows how strong was the opposition to a centre party or to links with other parties.

“The Labour Representation Committee, on the other hand, quite early made it a constitutional offence for any of its Parliamentary members to identify themselves with or to promote the interests of any section of the Liberal or Conservative Parties.”

These quotes show how determined the Labour Party was to separate itself from the other political parties so that it could be free to undertake its own historic role.

We lost a few people even then. There was Mr Bell, who was the General Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, now the NUR. The ASRS had moved the resolution which brought the Labour Representation Committee into being – but Bell, the Committee’s first Treasurer and Chairman, left the Labour Party and joined the Liberals, we are told, because of a telegram of congratulations sent to him by the successful Liberal who had fought a Committee candidate in a by-election in Norwich.

The great Liberal establishment did all it could to check the growth of the Labour Party. On the 6th March 1906 Mr Banks, the Liberal agent for Westminster, sent a letter to every Labour MP:

Dear Sir,

The opinion has been clearly expressed to me by Liberal leaders, who have promised considerable financial support, that a separate organisation should be formed to represent the views of the Liberal Labour Members in Parliament and to secure a substantial increase in their numbers in the next election. It is thought that the Labour Party, within the Liberal Party, will be a great source of strength to both and I am requested to ask your views thereon as a Labour MP.

Would you please be good enough to send me a reply with suggestions during the week so steps may be taken to call an early meeting.”

Today we hear a lot about a break *out* from the Labour Party and the financial support there is for it. It often seems to be an echo of these early attempts to push the Labour Party *in* to the Liberal Party.

We may lose a few people, as we have done in the past but we will never split. The House of Commons Library has prepared for me a list of all those who, having been elected as Labour Members since 1914, defected from the Party. It is a formidable list – 59 MPs including 39 Ministers. We have lost a Prime Minister, a Chancellor of the Exchequer, a Lord Privy Seal and a Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. We have lost seven Secretaries of State, for Air, for the Dominions, Economic Affairs, Education; we have lost two Foreign Secretaries; we have lost ten Departmental Ministers, two Ministers of Labour, two Ministers of Power, Ministers of Public Buildings and Works, Overseas Development, Board of Trade, Transport, Agriculture, a Postmaster-General; we have lost four Law Officers, a Lord Chancellor, an Attorney-General, a Lord Advocate, a Solicitor-General for Scotland and eleven Junior Ministers. But we have never split.

It may be a comfort to know that nothing we are engaged in doing now is any

different from what happened in the very early days of our movement. Against this background Labour people can relax a little when we come to these very difficult questions that are now confronting the Party.

3. How the Labour Movement fought for Parliamentary Democracy

We should also see what is happening against the history of Parliament in our society. To hear some of the speeches made, or to read some of the leading articles in the newspapers, you would think Britain had enjoyed Parliamentary democracy since 1066. But of course this is not so.

From 1066 to 1295 when the model Parliament was summoned, Britain was run by a King who had conquered the country. Anyone who wants to study William the Conqueror's view of how the Government should be run, should read his Coronation Oath delivered on Christmas Day 1066 in Westminster Abbey. He was a dictator. We did not have Parliamentary democracy under the Normans. Britain was run by the King alone until he lost absolute power at Runnymede.

After Magna Carta for about another four hundred years, the Landowners ran the country from the House of Lords. These were the feudal barons and even the King had to be careful of them. All this culminated in the execution of Charles I in 1649, when Britain had the first of the bourgeois revolutions. People forget that 130 years before the American and French Revolutions all the ideas which inspired them had been fully formulated within the English Revolution led by Cromwell.

And our ideas are still much influenced today by what was written at the time by the Levellers, and the Diggers in their famous pamphlets. They too are part of our tradition. But at no stage in the 17th or 18th centuries was Parliament in any sense a democracy.

Britain had a constitutional monarchy from 1688 to 1832, during which time the gentry, the merchants and others ran the country, increasingly using the Commons. The Lords became rather less important and the King had to accept the right of the House of Commons to have some say. But what we now call Parliamentary democracy only began to be *considered* in 1832 with the first Reform Act, and then only in the most partial way. For working men had no vote, neither did women and MPs only represented a tiny majority of the total population.

Today we are sometimes pressed to take Edmund Burke's view that MPs are only accountable to themselves, as if anyone who takes a different view is challenging Parliamentary democracy. Edmund Burke was my predecessor in Bristol two hundred years ago. He was the Member for six years, visited Bristol three times, and his electorate consisted of 2% of the total population of Bristol, all men. His ideas have nothing whatever to do with Parliamentary democracy. He was one of the great Conservative philosophers of the old order which ended with the Reform Act.

It was not until the mid 19th century that the Labour Movement began to try to establish a system of democratic Government designed to meet the needs of working people in which it wasn't a King who ran the country, nor landowners nor the entrepreneurs nor capitalists who had come to power under Adam Smith's liberal ideas but one where all were represented equally. How was it done? Let us examine our past strategy to understand what we have to do next.

4. The democratic strategy of the Labour Movement

The Labour movement always has been and is a democratic one, and its strategy goes back far beyond the birth of the trade union movement to the idea that politics was about social justice and not about hierarchy or honours or titles, or even profit and loss. Social justice lies at the root of every Labour campaign.

The campaign for the right to organise Labour came later. People who had no wealth or power or influence in the land, must organise, and therefore the campaigns against the Combination Acts, the right to organise labour, were also an inevitable part of our democratic development.

The campaign for the vote, by the Chartists, and later the Suffragettes were parallel movements to establish the right for people to find a way of expressing their interests through the ballot box as well as through their unions.

Then came the campaign for Labour Representation in the Commons, and the foundation of the Labour Representation Committee, to secure it, launched with these words: "It is the workers' reply to the aggressive action of Federated Masters and Trusts".

The Labour Party itself was founded in 1906. Labour became a Party in Parliament in its own right. The next step was to commit itself to socialism, which involved more than mere representation.

The campaign for democratic socialism within the Labour Party did not begin in 1918 when it adopted socialist aims. It went back to the early days of the Independent Labour Party and the Social Democratic Federation and all the other Socialist thinkers. Robert Owen was the first man ever to be described as a Socialist. Democratic Socialism was embodied in the Constitution of 1918 "to secure for the workers, by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry".

After 1918 came the campaign to get a Labour Government elected. We had the short ten month 1924 Labour Government, the minority Government of 1929-31, and then finally came the full flood of 1945 with that massive majority, which gave us the opportunity to put our policies into practice.

It is against the background of those long campaigns by the Labour movement to achieve political democracy in Britain in order to pursue social justice that we have to consider the campaigns which are now coming into the forefront of our debates within the party and which are a part of this whole process: to re-establish democracy within the party so that we can develop policies strong enough to win social justice; and be sure of the commitment of the Parliamentary leadership to those policies; and be involved directly in the implementation of those policies when Labour has a Parliamentary majority.

The reason why the Labour movement has never espoused a revolutionary alternative in this country, as some Socialists have done abroad, is because we ourselves fashioned the democracy which expresses itself through a fully functioning democratic Parliament. Therefore to ask the British Labour Movement to abandon democracy and go for the short-cut to Socialism by some coup d'état is to ask us to repudiate our history. We will never do it, so long as the route to peaceful change through Parliament remains open to us.

5. *What are the obstacles to democratic advance?*

What then are the present obstacles to that steady movement which allows those who work by hand and by brain and their families to enter into their inheritance to replace the minority who own capital? Certainly the Conservative Party which has always represented wealth and power, first in land and now in capital stand in our way, expressed, for example, in their consistent attacks on the unions, from the Combination Acts to the new Employment Act.

Today the Labour movement also recognises that much real power in a democracy lies with those who command the means of mass communication. Hence the media are now a major power working for the whole range of the political Right against Labour. Indeed the mass media are much more influential as a political force than the Tory cabinet, which could not stay in office a year without their support.

But what about the obstacles to democracy that exist within our own Party? What about the blockage in our own system of party democracy that sometimes prevents the democratic decisions of our membership from being advocated by the Labour Front bench or ending up in the Statute Book? How does this happen when we have so many remarkable advantages of a Labour movement?

We have 13 million people affiliated to the trade union movement — the biggest percentage of organised labour in our work force of any country in the world. Six million of them are affiliated to the Labour Party. We have one single trade union movement and we are not split into Catholic unions and Communist unions, as they are on the continent.

We have only one political party representing Labour in Parliament, and we do not have, as in other countries, two Socialist Parties and a Communist Party. The Labour Party has clear aims, to which we are all committed as set out in our Constitution.

Why, then, 70 or 80 years after the Labour Party came into existence are we witnessing the return of poverty, the return of mass unemployment, the destruction of welfare, and the risk of war? Those are important questions and it is to them that I wish to turn.

First, to face the fact that even if the full flowering of our own commitment to Parliamentary democracy had been realised, what Labour inherits when it has a big Parliamentary majority falls far short of real power. I am referring to the fact that in democratic Britain the people are only allowed to elect half a Parliament. The other half is the House of Lords, which we know would try to bring us down if we ever tried to implement real socialist policies.

Keir Hardie campaigned for the abolition of the House of Lords in the 1890s, and we are apparently still content that the whole electoral process can elect only half the Parliament while the other half can frustrate a Labour majority at will. Don't ever underestimate the power of the House of Lords. It is enormous.

If you are in a Labour Cabinet and the Lords throw out a Bill, that Cabinet may have the power to take the Bill through the Commons again. But what Labour Government with all the stress and strain of getting legislation through the Commons, and a great volume of legislation, and the pressure of events, wants to take a Bill through a second session with three line whips and late night sittings in Committee stage? The mere threat of Lords obstruction is therefore also very

effective, especially as you get near the end of a Parliament when the Lords delaying power becomes a total veto. The House of Lords commands the Parliamentary timetable when Labour is in power, but not when the Conservatives are in power, because then the Tories enjoy a majority in both Houses and have nothing to fear from the Lords.

Thus the Labour movement after all this effort, and all this commitment, to democracy has ended up with the electors controlling only half the Parliament. Britain is the only country in the world where democratic legislation can still be prevented by those who have inherited seats in Parliament or sit there by the patronage of successive Prime Ministers.

But there are three more major blockages — in the way of real democracy in Britain.

First, the Common Market. British entry into the EEC in 1973 stripped the House of Commons of the power to legislate where that legislation runs counter to Common Market legislation. That is very important because when we next win, as we will, a majority in the House of Commons, every Tory Act that they have enacted we can repeal. But we cannot repeal one single piece of community legislation which the present Tory Government have assented to in Europe, for there is no provision for repeal, save by unanimity within the EEC Council of Ministers.

Even if a Labour Government supported by a huge majority in the House of Commons secures the passage of legislation that runs counter to Common Market Laws, anyone, including the Commission or any citizen, who is aggrieved and favours the *Community* law, can take a Labour Government to the *British* Courts, and British judges will be obliged to find in favour of community law rather than the laws passed by the elected House of Commons. That represents a major erosion of our democratic liberties.

A second threat for our democracy comes from international capital, the multinationals and the IMF which dictated cuts in public expenditure to the Labour Government in 1976. The power of international capital is far greater than the power of domestic capital, from which the Labour movement sought to liberate the British people from the moment when it was founded.

Thirdly, the British people have now lost the control they once had through Parliament of deciding the question of peace and war. This power has now been transferred to friendly allies — the Americans — who have on British airfields, nuclear weapons which they can use without the explicit consent of an elected British Government enjoying the support of the House of Commons and who exercise great influence behind the scenes.

The House of Lords, the EEC, the IMF and American controlled nuclear bases here represent four major blockages in our democracy and deny our people the power to decide our own future, or shape our own destiny.

Our first four objectives must be to abolish the House of Lords, to change Section 2 of the European Communities Act in order to give back the ultimate legislative power of the House of Commons, to adopt an alternative economic strategy to free us from the IMF, and to control our own defence policy so that we can determine our own response to the international situation. We *cannot control* world events, but we must be able to determine the foreign policy we wish to

pursue: an internationalist policy.

These four objectives, all necessary to secure Labour's aim of social justice were all set out in detail in *Peace, Jobs and Freedom* which went to the Wembley Conference and was carried by 6 million votes to 6,000 on the 31st May 1980.

But how do we do it? That is the key question.

6. *How Labour's Manifesto is drawn up – and why the party should decide the policy*

The first problem is how can the Labour Party be sure that its clear policies, agreed at Conference will ever get into the Election Manifesto, or be carried out if we win? Our ability to answer those two questions will determine the credibility of our Party and our capacity to win electoral support. Let us analyse the relationship between the powerful Labour movement with its democratic traditions and its Conference policies, and what actually happens when those policies come to be carried out by a Labour Government.

How do we develop Party policies in the first place?

The National Executive Committee prepares policy statements that go to the annual Conference, on the basis of its own working parties and sub committees.

The Manifesto is the link which connects the policy motivation, and democratic instinct of the Labour Party, with the real power of Government by allowing the party to present its policy to the public, and seek support for it. But recent experience has taught us that the drawing up of the Manifesto is not as democratic as we have a right to expect.

What happens when NEC policy proposals go to conference and get a two-thirds majority, as occurred when the party decided on the abolition of the House of Lords. How does a democratic Labour Party, having got its policies through Conference, get them into the Manifesto?

Clause 5 as now drafted provides that the Manifesto is written by the National Executive Committee and the elected Parliamentary Committee. Let us turn to the historical evidence about how Labour Manifestos are actually drawn up. Dick Crossman's diary February 6th 1966 describes joint meetings before the 1966 General Election.

"After lunch", wrote Dick, "in the somnolence of the afternoon with the weather growing more and more beautiful outside, all we had was a series of set declarations by Ministers punctuated by a few mild comments. The net effect of all this was a vote of confidence in the Government and this will enable Harold Wilson and George Brown, as Chairmen of the Home Affairs Committee, to say to the Executive 'you've had it chums, we've given you your chance to complain – a whole day – you did nothing at all about it!' When the meeting was over, it was clear that writing the election Manifesto this time would be child's play. We would describe how we took the job on after 13 years of Tory rule and how we now want a mandate to finish the job. And we would insert a number of commitments to go a bit further than individual Ministers intend. That is the job we have to do."

Thus the NEC – and even Labour Ministers – were reduced by the Parliamentary leadership to a minimal role in the drafting of the Manifesto. It was just the same last year.

On 6th April 1979, we had the Clause 5 meeting summoned to agree the General

Election Manifesto. Of the 47 people there present that day, 20 were nominated by the Prime Minister — that is to say the Cabinet, appointed by the PM and not elected; 11 were elected by the trade unions at Conference; 7 by the constituencies; 5 — the women's section — by the conference as a whole; 2 by the PLP — that is the Leader and the Deputy Leader; — 1 by the Socialist Societies; and 1 Young Socialist. It was a very important meeting at which the Manifesto was settled and the abolition of the House of Lords was vetoed.

There is no provision in Labour's Constitution for a veto. But the veto was exercised by the party leader. How did the idea of a leader's veto emerge? Let me quote Harold Wilson talking about 1973, when Labour's programme was being discussed prior to Conference and the 1974 General Election.

“At an all-day meeting of the National Executive Committee during the Whitsun recess of 1973, the opportunity was taken late in the evening when many Members had left, to force a snap vote on an outlandish proposal to commit the Party to nationalise 25 of the 100 biggest companies. It was carried by 7 votes to 6. *The following morning I issued a statement indicating the decision was inoperative. It would mean a veto.*”

Anyone dissatisfied with any NEC vote should seek to have it reversed at the next meeting. That is the democratic way to act. Instead the leader invented a veto and his right to use it whenever he disagreed with party policy. If the party leader claims control over the contents of the Manifesto then its function as the expression of the policies of the party is frustrated.

That is why the party is concerned with policy-making in the Manifesto, and why we want the NEC to publish a draft manifesto, to consult on it and to decide the final version itself.

Thus you can see clearly why it is that we are now determined to re-establish the right of the Party to present its policy to the country in the Manifesto. If you want to know why there is such a focus on the drafting of the Manifesto, it is because we must now decide whether we want the Manifesto to come down from the Leadership or to come up from the Membership. That is the crucial question.

The second crucial question is how we can carry Manifesto policies through when Labour is in power. For the policies put forward by the NEC can easily be undermined by the Parliamentary leadership. Consider this passage from page 75 of Harold Wilson's book *The Governance of Britain*.

“Under the Constitution of the Labour Party the Executive has a duty to work out policy for submission to the annual Conference. Inevitably, an Executive elected by Conference includes a substantial number, frequently amounting to a majority on particular issues in 1974-76, who were concerned to prepare policy statements on almost every subject under the sun at home and abroad inconsistent with, sometimes sharply critical of, Government policies. This was liable to cause confusion in certain quarters, including national and international financial markets, where there are many who are singularly uninformed, not to say naive, about our political institutions and on where power really lies. Quite often, therefore, I had to make this point clear, by answers to questions in Parliament or published replies to anxious letters from City based financial institutions, such as the British Insurance Association or the merchant banking community, on more than one occasion, *drafting the letter to which I was at pains to reply myself.*”

Thus we are told, quite clearly, that a Labour leader, when he disagreed with the

policy of the National Executive Committee, himself drafted letters addressed to himself for the City to send back to him to give him a chance to repudiate NEC policy. That is a very important statement of one of the major blockages in our internal party democracy.

7. *How Labour Government policy is made*

There is another issue – that of the Prime Minister who can exclude the party from any real power in policy making, by appointing non-Parliamentarians to advise him not about the carrying out of party policy, which is a legitimate and necessary use of advisers but to determine policy itself, thus undermining the democratic policy making role of the party. I want to quote you four passages from what Bertrand Donoghue said on BBC TV on April 1st 1980. You will recall that he was the chief adviser brought in to Number 10 by Harold Wilson. This is what Donoghue said:

“Then Mr Wilson asked me to come to Number 10 on the evening of March 4th. We went along to the Palace: he went inside and the team, we, stayed outside in the car, and then we went in to Number 10 on March 5th 1974. He formed the Government and I had very rapidly, under great pressure, to construct a policy in it.”

The party is supposed to make the policy for a Labour Government. Yet here was somebody appointed who had been told that it was to be his duty as a political adviser to make the policy. Bernard Donoghue went on to spell it out:

“I brought in young outsiders with considerable expertise and they were able to feed into the Prime Minister an alternative policy view.”

The next passage from the Donoghue interview shows that this system was used, not only to exclude the Labour party, and Labour MPs, but also against Labour Cabinet Ministers.

“The power of the Prime Minister has increased relative to his colleagues and I think the media focusing on him tends to do that. He does have powers at his finger tips. For instance, he can load a Cabinet Committee by putting some people on it favourable towards a decision, or he might choose to leave someone off a particularly important Committee in order not to have problems.”

Thus even Labour Cabinet Ministers were isolated from real decision making.

Donoghue then went on to say something that was even more startling about what really happens when Labour is in office.

“the main areas of economic policy, monetary and fiscal, *were conducted without the Ministers involved.*”

Such a situation is simply no longer acceptable.

8. *The danger of Patronage in Labour Government*

Let me turn next to another unacceptable feature of Government, which is an obstacle too. The Labour Government in office is not a democratic organisation. It is entirely appointed by patronage, by the party leader.

At every other stage in the Labour movement, whether it be in trade unions,

constituency parties, at branch parties or in Labour groups there is an elected leadership. But when there is a Labour Government in power, the Prime Minister, himself elected Labour Leader by the Parliamentary Party, then dispenses his patronage over the Parliamentary Party and chooses who is to form the Cabinet and all other Ministers.

The number of Ministerial appointments made from 1945 to 1976 was 1,494, made up of 309 Cabinet and 1,185 non-Cabinet Members, all done by 7 Prime Ministers, three of them Labour Prime Ministers. Therein lay their power. Any patronage system is inherently corrupting to donor and donee alike.

If a Prime Minister has such power over the making and breaking of Ministers; and Labour MPs are so dependent on the Leader for Ministerial office or, for peerages that they imagine make retirement agreeable, the balance of power between the rank and file in the Parliamentary Party and the Leader, gives that leader undue and unacceptable power. That personal power represents another serious blockage in our democratic system.

But the situation is worse than that. Ministers who are appointed become subject to what is called "Collective Cabinet Responsibility". Collective Cabinet Responsibility to implement the policy upon which the Labour party was *elected*, would be understandable. But that is not the way Collective Cabinet Responsibility is interpreted. The Cabinet is held to be bound by all decisions including those which go against Labour policy as put to the electorate, and upon which they were elected. What actually happens when a Labour Government is elected is that the Manifesto of the Party is put into a pigeon-hole and is only drawn out as and when the Cabinet determines that they will implement it. Therefore, any Minister who publicly advocates the Manifesto once Labour is in power runs the risk of breaking Collective Cabinet Responsibility if that part of the Manifesto, which he advocates, has not yet been endorsed by the hand-picked Cabinet appointed by the Prime Minister. Moreover Collective Cabinet Responsibility can be added to, or subtracted from, by the Prime Minister of the day according to his own inclination. It is, in fact, entirely within his own discretion and is used to reinforce his control over Ministers.

9. The Official Secrets Act keeps the Party in ignorance

The next blockage to party democracy is the Official Secrets Act. When a Labour MP becomes a Minister and leaves the back-bench he or she crosses the barrier of official secrecy. Everything he learns as a Minister he must withhold from his Parliamentary Labour colleagues. The Official Secrets Act, which applies over a whole range of information, most of which should never be subject to it, is one of the major obstacles to the work of Labour in power. When there is a Labour Government in power you will find two classes of Labour MPs: Ministers who know and back-bench MPs who are not allowed to know. Those who know are on the front-benches and those who are not allowed to know are on the back-benches. That is one reason why civil servants and Labour Ministers, both of whom are protected by the Official Secrets Act, are sometimes said to have more in common than Labour Ministers and Labour MPs who are divided by the Official Secrets Act. No wonder the party feels it is left out in the cold, as soon as Labour Governments are elected.

The Cabinet Minutes of 1931, dealing with the last eight days of the Ramsay MacDonald Government – reveal that this secrecy was carried even into the Cabinet itself, as the minutes for August 19th 1931 record:

“At the outset of the proceedings special emphasis was laid on the vital importance in the national interest of safeguarding the secrecy of the facts and figures disclosed to the Cabinet, and it was agreed, that the copies of the most secret memorandum mentioned above should be returned to the deputy secretary after the conclusion of the meeting.”

But having sworn his Labour colleagues to secrecy, MacDonald discussed the situation in detail with the Tories; with the Liberals; with the American bankers, and French bankers. But the Cabinet wasn't allowed to warn their colleagues in the Labour Movement about what was really going on.

Thus, at the critical moment when, if the Labour Movement had been alerted to what was happening it might have responded in such a way as to influence events, it was silenced by official secrecy. Such official secrecy is a major obstacle to the development of Parliamentary democracy. That is why we must have a Freedom of Information Act.

10. *Labour MPs should have more power – and be more accountable for the use they make of it*

Why do Labour MPs accept a position of so little influence or control over Labour front benchers in Government?

The answer is simple. Labour Prime Ministers expect them to be loyal whatever the Government or leadership does. If there is any criticism of the Labour Government by Labour MPs they may receive a warning. I quote Harold Wilson on March 2nd 1967 – speaking to Labour back benchers who had supported Conference policy against a Government decision.

“Every dog is allowed one bite, but a different view is taken of a dog who goes on biting all the time. *He may not get his licence returned when it falls due.*”

Thus, imperceptibly, without our perhaps appreciating it, we find that instead of Labour MPs electing a Leader accountable to them; the Leader decides the policy with the help of advisers and then threatens to remove the licence of the “dogs” who are the elected Members of Parliament.

If you think that was just an accidental reference, read the *Financial World* for May 30th 1980, in which Harold Wilson again comments upon Labour back benchers indicating how easy he found it to keep them under control:

“Compared with the Conservative Party's terminal efficiency, the legions of Labour, left wing or right, are as innocent and innocuous as Labrador puppies.”

I cite all this, not because of the personalities which are not important, but because it is often argued that Labour MPs are threatened with domination by conference, on the NEC, on local parties. In fact the real problem is that Labour MPs have fallen under the control of the Parliamentary Leadership through patronage, official secrecy and demands for total loyalty to the leader personally.

This interpretation of the present debate within the party is important if we are

going to understand what we are discussing. Because the main criticism of the Parliamentary Party is that it hasn't chosen to be strong enough to control the Parliamentary Leadership, and to see that it speaks for the Party.

For example in March 1975, the Cabinet decided to recommend a 'Yes' vote in the EEC referendum. There was no consultation with the Parliamentary Party. The Cabinet didn't even wait for the Parliamentary Party to meet and when the Parliamentary Party gave its view it was in favour of a 'No' vote. The Cabinet didn't take any notice of it nor did it wait for the Special Labour Conference either. That Conference also opposed our membership of the Common Market yet those in the Cabinet who upheld party policy were described as "dissenting Ministers".

The question of the cuts in public expenditure were never put to the Parliamentary Party to decide when the last Labour Government was in power. The question of the 5% wage policy was never put to the Parliamentary Party to decide. In fact back bench Labour MPs were given very little to decide. They were expected to accept whatever was decided by the Parliamentary Leadership, and that is not a situation that we can allow to continue in a democratic party.

The media all tell us that what we are now debating is a widening gulf between the Parliamentary Party and the Conference. But to argue that is to misread history. The gulf that should concern us is that between the Party as a whole, including the Parliamentary Party on the one hand, and the Parliamentary Leadership on the other.

No one wants to see a Labour Government weakened in any way by a revolt of the Parliamentary Party. That is the dilemma facing Labour MPs. Labour MPs are not consulted and yet they must remain a key element in socialist reform. That is why they must have a more positive role. It is not good enough that we should have worked for 100 years to get Labour members into Parliament only to see that when they get there they have little real power.

One sign of this lack of power is that the Parliamentary Labour Party, at its weekly meetings, has no real agenda, few votes, no circulated minutes, no proper consultation, no power to elect the Cabinet and no access to the information necessary to implement the Party manifesto.

No wonder that some argue that, after the Party in the country has worked desperately hard to get a Labour Government elected, that Government may actually seem to be used to protect the Establishment against the Party, thus preventing the Party from achieving its objectives of social justice.

When Labour is in opposition similar problems arise in that the same mechanism, under which the Parliamentary Leadership has full control, may prevent the opposition from presenting Party policy as the alternative to the policy pursued by Tory Governments. It is a mistake to look for scapegoats in this situation or to seek to blame individuals or particular wings of the Party. What is wrong is that there is a fundamental structural weakness in the way the Party is organised in Parliament and in its relationship with the Party in the country.

Now what is the answer of Members of Parliament to this problem? Some just accept it, others do not. Others express a point of view that runs like this: "Once I have been elected to Parliament, I represent everybody – not just the Labour Party". But in what sense does a Labour MP represent everybody in his constituency?

Geographically, of course he does. Everyone in his own constituency will come to him for advice. A Labour MP must try to help all his constituents impartially. But we don't represent the *views* of people who didn't vote for us. This is a very important distinction that must not be blurred.

In no sense can election to Parliament give any Labour MP the right to abandon his or her political commitment or the manifesto policy upon which he or she was elected. It is just because some Labour MPs have seemed to argue that they can do so that there has been a move to secure the accountability of a Labour Member to his CLP by mandatory reselection. The object of reselection is not to get rid of Members of Parliament. It is to introduce that same element of accountability of an MP to his CLP that we want the Cabinet to have in respect of the Parliamentary Labour Party. It is to secure greater power for the Labour MPs over the Parliamentary Leadership, and greater accountability to the CLPs for the use MPs make of that power. Political power must come from the electorate, through the Party, up to MPs, Cabinets and the Parliamentary Leadership in a series of unbroken links. If one or more links are broken democracy itself is at risk.

11. The need for the Parliamentary Party and the Party nationally to work very closely together

The danger of division is not between a Left-Wing Party and a Right-Wing Party; or a Trade Union Party and a Labour Party; but a National Party and a Parliamentary Party. If the Parliamentary Party were to claim its own right to develop its own policy it would be a recipe for disaster. We are already paying the price for twenty years during which socialism was muted in Parliament. All this helped to bring about our defeat in the 1979 General Election and will prevent us from offering coherent opposition to the Conservatives unless we reinstate the explicit socialist commitment and resist the latest pressure for revisionism.

We have suffered from three waves of revisionism:

The first attempt at revisionism was in 1959 to persuade the Party to abandon its formal commitment to Socialism and Clause 4. That attempt failed in that Clause 4 was not amended but in practice we ceased to try to implement it.

The second wave of revisionism was in 1969. *In Place of Strife* was to break the links between the party and the unions. It was then argued that the Party was an embarrassment to the unions, and the Parliamentary Leadership thought the unions were an embarrassment to the Party. That attempt failed because there was a revolt among Labour MPs. But the damage done cost us the 1970 election.

The third wave of revisionism seems to involve an attempt to reduce the influence of the rank and file on the leadership and policy of the party and deny it its democratic role.

If this new wave of revisionism was to succeed it would be a bigger democratic set-back, than either the attack on Clause 4 or *In Place of Strife*. The Parliamentary Labour Party could then come adrift from the Party. We would have worked for 100 years only to give birth to a Centre Party, like the old Liberal Party from which the Labour Party struggled so hard to separate itself at the time of its own birth.

12. Labour must be a broad and tolerant party

For twenty years or more these tendencies to separate the Parliamentary Party from the party nationally have been there and we must see how to bring them together.

We must go back to our tested and tried strategy of strong trade unions, closely linked to the Party, and a commitment to a Socialist analysis, and the accountability of power through greater democracy. We need a broader Party, not a narrower Party. We must work with the trade union movement; establish workplace branches; strengthen the Party itself; and attract community groups, many of which were formed because they did not see, in Labour, the instrument for realising their hopes. They must find that hope in Labour now.

Labour must co-operate with and speak for the Women's Movement; the environmental groups; the ethnic communities; the peace movement. We must reawaken rural radicalism which is still reflected in the battles against the squire-archy. In many parts of England we haven't really made the political impact that we should. We need religious and moral inspiration, now seen as liberation theology. All who call themselves socialists and are truly committed to democracy should abandon their sectarian isolation and become loyal individual members of the Labour Party.

We should broaden party affiliations to include all those groups. If we try to get NALGO or the NUT to affiliate to the Party, why cannot the Women's Movement or the Indian Workers' Association affiliate too?

Above all, we must be a tolerant Party. There are many many tendencies in the Labour Party. We are warned about "entryists". But there are also "exitists" — on the right — those who have gone. There are "departurists" — those who are packing up to go. There are "ultimatists" — those who say they'll go if certain things happen. There are those who are staying — to argue it out. There is the legitimate right. There is the centre, whatever that may mean. There is the left: the Tribune Group, the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, Militant, the IWC, the CLPD, the ILP, SCLV, Clause Four and the Womens' Fightback. And outside the Party, on the left, there are a myriad of Socialist groups who do not want to work with the party.

I believe the Labour Party must be a tolerant Party. The NEC recently passed a resolution on this subject.

"That the National Executive Committee believes that the Labour Party is, and must remain, a broad and tolerant party within which people of widely differing faiths and opinions can work together to secure the aims and objectives of the party as laid down in our constitution; and the policies agreed at our conference.

We believe in free and open debate, conducted in an atmosphere of good will, and in the right of all members of the party to speak and write freely and to seek to persuade others to adopt their views.

The constitution of the party lays down how our decisions are to be taken in branches, constituencies, Labour groups, Parliament, at the NEC and at conferences. These are the democratic decisions of the party at the time they are made, but every member of the party must be free to try to change them by argument.

We also accept the rights of conscience, when members are moved to follow it.

We appeal to the party at every level to respect this tradition of tolerance and not to resort to expulsion against those who differ from majority views, but those holding minority views should also bear in mind the well-being of the party and the responsibility of the majority both at central and local level to carry out party policy.

The party has a duty to protect itself from those who put up candidates against the party, or make arrangements with opposition parties in defiance of party decisions, or stand as, or support, candidates for public election in opposition to duly endorsed Labour candidates or who make the work of the party, at any level, absolutely impossible.

But, we believe that in most cases of disagreement it is better for the majority to make their views clear, and where necessary to dissociate itself from the minority, and to seek to persuade the minority, than to expel those with whom they disagree. The NEC intends to exercise its constitutional role in examining all inquiries into all appeals against expulsion in the light of these principles. We appeal to party members to unite at this time of great danger for our people and to argue out their differences without resorting to expulsion."

We do not wish to go back to the old days of intolerance. Stafford Cripps was expelled at the Labour Conference in 1938. Aneurin Bevan had the Whip withdrawn, so did Michael Foot and Sydney Silverman. It was even argued that Bertrand Russell should lose his membership because he hadn't paid his sixpence contribution the previous month. We don't want to go through that again.

On the other hand there are those who are in the process of ruling *themselves* out of eligibility for party membership by preparing to stand as Parliamentary candidates in opposition to Labour candidates. They are adopting a new tactic to make the Labour Party abandon its historic purpose. We may have to protect the Party by recognising the fact of their own free choice to leave the Party.

13. Party democracy, party unity and Labour's electoral victory

We must rebuild our movement and organisation with strong unions and a strong Party, with all power accountable, and democratic. We must be a campaigning Party, winning by persuasion, and able to convince people that we will carry out our policy when we get there. We must reconnect with those people, whom we were established to represent and who are represented by no other Party. To do all that we need to carry through constitutional changes including the confirmation of mandatory reselection; the acceptance of an accountable Parliamentary leadership of the Party; and Party control over the Manifesto. Campaigning for democracy within the Party will continue in the future because these reforms are indissolubly linked with Labour's integrity and credibility as a Party trying to win popular support. We cannot convince others that we will establish social justice if we doubt our own capacity, as a Party, to adopt an effective policy or to carry it out once we have adopted it.

The 1945 Manifesto *Let us face the future* said very clearly what Labour wanted to do, and the nation believed we meant it and they voted us in with a landslide victory.

"The nation wants food, work and houses. It wants more than that, it wants good food in plenty, useful work for all and comfortable labour saving homes that take full advantage of the resources of modern science and productive industry. It wants a high and rising standard of living, security for all against a rainy day, an educational system that will give every boy and girl a chance to develop the best that is in them. These are the aims. In themselves they are no more than words. All Parties may declare that in principle they agree with them. But the test of a political programme is whether it is sufficient in earnest about the objectives to adopt the means needed to realise them. It is very easy to set out a list of aims. What matters is whether it is backed up by a genuine workman-like plan conceived without regard to sectional vested interests and carried through in the spirit of resolute concentration."

If we are going to be called upon to rescue Britain again, as I believe we will be, we can only do it through a Manifesto approved by all sections of the movement and implemented in close co-operation with the Party and the trade union movement.

If Labour is to remain united to take up its historic task again, and to continue to advance democracy, here and abroad, this 1945 spirit of commitment will be required, not only to convince the electorate that we mean to do it but, more important, to promise ourselves that we will.

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