

An ILP agenda

This is an edited version of the talk given by Eric Preston to the ILP Annual General Meeting in May 1995. This document (particularly the latter half) will be the subject of an ILP Day School to be held in Leeds on 29th July 1995 (for more details see the back). It is anticipated that all those attending the day school will have read this document.

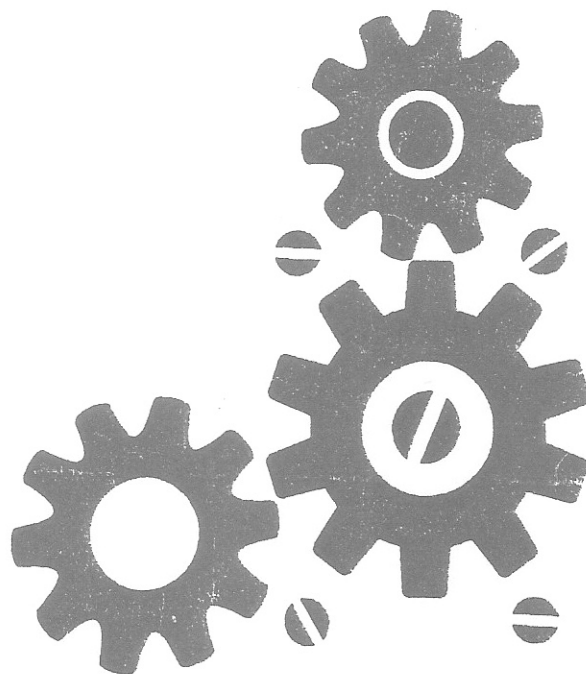
Eric Preston

As some of you will know, I usually start with an apology before any talk that I give to an ILP meeting, and today is no exception.

I make the usual apology for not knowing where to pitch the level. In a talk that needs to say something about Marxism I feel that I am bound to be over the heads of some, boring as hell to others and aggravating as hell to those who don't like my over-simplifications. I know of no way to get round that.

On this occasion however I also have to apologise, ahead of anticipated criticism for other limitations of the talk.

I have neither the time, nor the knowledge necessary to deal with *everything* that could come within the ambit of the British Political Scene and the Centre left response to the right wing legacy.



However, I *hope*, that I've got somewhere near to the more manageable task that I have set myself.

And that is, to outline (*or at least make explicit*) my thinking on a couple of interconnected and important issues of theory and practice.

My aim, as I sat down to write this talk, was to start to suggest how we might begin to become more politically connected and relevant in the present unpromising climate, and to indicate how we might start to relate to the New Labour Party and its leadership.

So my final apology is for the likely short fall between the promise and the

reality.

Economic background

I start, of necessity with a grossly oversimplified economic background; an elementary thumbnail sketch for those who have no inkling of the distinction between market economics, Marxist economics and Keynesian economics and the different political perspectives they

entail. This 'sketch' is tailored to the needs of my talk and is not confounded by post marxian political economy or left or right post Keynesianism.

I need to know only that everyone listening appreciates, that the system of capitalism which is extolled by the market economists and the capitalist class and beyond, is represented as a largely, 'natural', self-regulating and balanced system, where the supply of commodities is, in the medium to long term, equal to the demand of the consumers.

The *theoretical* body of market economics is the place where wages are

considered to be a fair reward for labour, where supply and demand regulate the labour market in a fair and equitable way; where, in the medium to long term, the market determines the appropriate level of wages and brings about 'full employment'; where wealth is said to be a fair reward for enterprise, (entrepreneurial activity), and where the profit motive – the desire to make money – encourages enterprise, by appealing to our base instinct of greed, or, if you prefer it, those 'natures which in most of us contain certain elements not entirely spiritual or unselfseeking' as one leading Tory once put it.

Critics of Market Economic theory, see it as an 'a-historic theory,' which involves numerous unrealistic assumptions relating to the operation of the free market, supply and demand, economic rationality, the symmetry of capital and labour; and the lack of any fundamental conflict of interest between the drive to maximise profit and the determination to own and control and accumulate capital, on the one hand, and the attempt to secure equity and a political/economic democracy, on the other.

The radical alternative and basically socialist view of the system, insists that capitalism is, in effect, an undemocratic class economy, where the large accumulations of wealth and capital are owned or controlled by a powerful minority, which makes the decisions that fundamentally affects the lives of the rest of us.

Socialists

The socialists argue that the wages of workers are not a fair reward for labour, that labour is exploited, and that the exploitation is the source of all capital, and that the accumulated capital in the system represents the historically accumulated exploitation of the class.

They maintain that capital gives power to its owners and controllers and that the immense, accumulated and concentrated wealth and power are used to further dominate the working class and perpetuate the economic exploitation. The system is, de facto, essentially undemocratic and, Marxists would argue,

inherently unstable, because of (1) the tendency towards under-consumption on the one hand and (2) the capital accumulation and the 'falling tendency of the rate of profit' on the other; the first of which tends to produce a deflationary, demand gap, which leads to economic downturn, stagnation and unemployment; the second of which tends to produce a progressive weakening of the incentive to invest, which in turn, leads to a deceleration in the economy which (depending on circumstances) can lead to stagnation and worse.

In short, capitalism experiences recurrent economic crises of differing severity, when there is a down-turn in production, during which times the working class suffer the hardship of short time working, wage cuts and unemployment.

The maldistribution of wealth and the power that flows from the control of huge concentrations of capital, the consequent lack of democracy and the recurrent crises of capitalism, are not optional elements, they are all endemic to the system.

Therefore, argue the Marxists, the system, though it *can* be reformed and some compensation can be made for its worst effects, must be transformed into a different and socialist system if there's going to be a fully developed economic democracy and caring community.

The primary agent for this change, say the Marxists, is the working class, the economically disenfranchised and dispossessed majority which, through its experience will develop into a conscious political force and eventually transform the society.

Keynesians

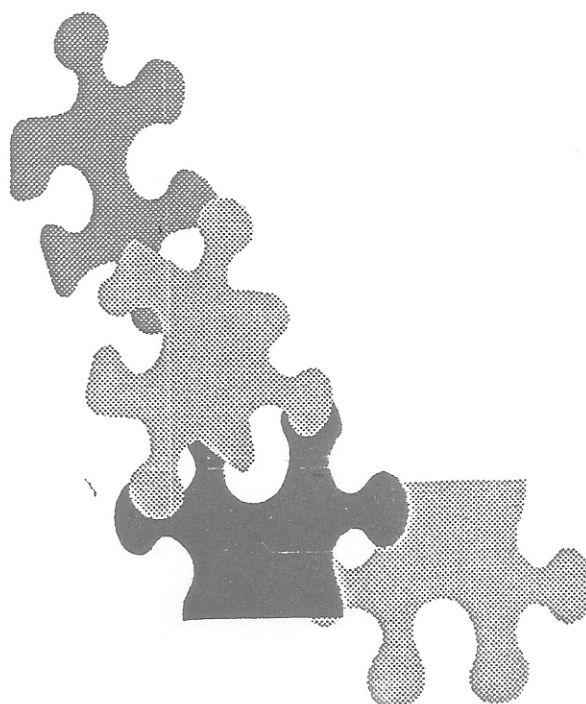
Wedged between these two extremes, so to speak, are all those that come within the Keynesian tradition (and there are a wide variety of them), including the left wing Keynesians who ac-

cept some (and sometimes more than we might expect) of Marxist economics.

Keynes held the view, that although capitalism is inherently unstable due to imbalances between effective consumption and production, it is possible to manage the system to prevent a major crisis and regain a reasonable stability. By using various economic levers and mechanisms it is possible, primarily by government/state intervention, to increase and decrease effective demand, to adjust the balances and bring the system back into equilibrium.

Incidentally, there are marxists of the underconsumptionist school, who do not dispute this theoretical possibility, but would challenge the practicability of such a measure in a world in which monopoly capital can resist government impetus to expand output and, instead, raise prices and push stagnation over into stagflation.

Keynesian economics tends to be associated with social democratic and labour parties, and it is they that developed Keynesianism in practice in the post war period. These political parties tended to take the view that the system could be adjusted without far reaching structural change and that reforms could be had



from within a more stable and, consequently, highly productive market economy, with full employment and tax yields sufficient to finance a Welfare State.

Indeed, some saw this as the best of all possible worlds with a market prompting production and a state attending to the needs of the people. This, of course, left untouched the essential antidemocratic nature of the economy (the private ownership and control of capital) and the maldistribution of major wealth and power within the system.

On the whole the leaders of social democratic and labour parties reject the concept of a politics involving a class motivation. They tended to want to be seen as a national Party representing *all* interests. To this extent, they either denied class or any fundamental conflict of class interest or, alternatively, took the view that they could 'manage' the problem; setting down some fair practice, rather like the Queensberry Rules in boxing.

And, in so far as they tended to be pragmatic reformers, they offered and encouraged no vision beyond a mixed economy capitalism.

This lack of class; the lack of any conflict of interest between the owners and controllers of immense capital assets, and the rest of us, goes hand in hand with the lack of visionary radicalism, since if there is no conflict of interest; no conflict between the concept of a society in which the ownership or control of wealth is in the hands of an unelected and powerful minority and the concept of a democratic political economy and society founded on the principle of empowering the people as a whole, then there is no need for radical transformation.

And, in so far as there is no need for radical transformation, there is no need to contemplate a radically different future society; only the short term ends will then inform the present practice.

Despite this, the membership of the social democratic parties have been divided on the issue of a "socialist society", with some seeing slow incremental

change taking them in the direction of a qualitatively different social system, and others extolling the virtues of a Keynesian managed economy with a mix of private and public ownership and state intervention and social provision.

Here in Britain the pragmatic reformers and the socialist 'revisionists' who extolled the virtues of a mixed economy and a managed capitalism have been predominant and, in consequence, the argument in and around the parliamentary left has tended to centre on the type of mix and the priorities of management.

Otherwise, left wing politics in post war Britain has been divided every which way, though we can basically identify the Marxists and the marxians, and the class struggle and the pursuit of a new society; some via the ballot box and extra-parliamentary activity, others through the violent revolution. And we can identify the socialists in the left reformist camp, who are arguing for cumulative incremental change, and we can point to the 'socialists' who are not really socialist at all, but social reformers who want to manage and ameliorate the worst conditions of capitalism.

N.B. I distinguish left reformists (those who historically have taken the view that through piecemeal reform we can slowly move towards socialism), and "reformers" (those who wish to do good, to improve society, but have no vision of a radically transformed economic system).

Amongst the reformers are the pragmatists, who, it might be said, are sometimes keen reformers, but sometimes nothing other than Labour leaders whose careers have led them into managing the system as best they can.

It should, of course, be said that the first Marxist experiment in the USSR failed badly, and that the post war Keynesian, social democratic and labour experiment also failed badly, but with somewhat less dire consequences for the people – and that, as a result, we have seen the ideological triumph of the political right.

One further point should perhaps be made before I continue. Namely that the failed Marxism and the failed social democracy had a couple of important

things in common, in that they both placed the emphasis on political control of the economy and the role of the state, as co-ordinator and interventionist in the Keynesian economy, and as centralised authority in the Marxist economy of the USSR. And the 'new right' in Europe has built its support for market economics on an anti-political, anti-statist, free economy platform and the failure of the other systems.

I start then with *that* background, and with the complex of characteristics of contemporary society that Barry outlined in his talk; with all the impediments and constraints that we are compelled to take account of if we are to develop an effective socialist strategy and tactics.

I also start with the acute awareness of the political shadow cast by a communist experiment which degenerated into a hideous totalitarianism and then crumbled under the weight of its injustice and economic failure, and which, in so doing, confirmed the worst suspicions that the British public had of it. And which, at the same time, encouraged a suspicion and mistrust, if not a fear of State authority and anything that goes by the name of communist, and by association, anything that is radically socialist.

Labourism

Unfortunately, for us, this problem sits on top of the British experience of Labourism that has done little or nothing, ideologically or practically, in recent times, to renew and rebuild a confidence in socialism.

Indeed, Labour governments bequeathed a 'Morrisonian' nationalised sector that offered a bad example of public ownership. It was ill-conceived, did not involve the workforce in its management, was felt to be unresponsive to the needs of the general public, insensitive to their problems, and bureaucratically officious when dealing with them. And overall it had a popular reputation for waste and incompetence which only helped confirm a popular dislike of the State.

In fact, it could well be argued that socialism has been significantly handi-

capped, if not disabled by many of its standard bearers; by a lot of what has been done in the name of socialism both at home and abroad; by its association with the militant, economic, self-centred and undemocratic trade unions in this country; by the practice and propaganda of the pragmatists who headed the British Post War Labour Governments and who, with the narrowest of visions, administered Capitalism, denied socialism, scaremongered about their own left wing, and got thrown out of office in 1979 leaving behind them a massive rise in unemployment and a greater inequality than when they took office.

Add to that the unrealistic assumptions and pronouncements of the left wing reformist 'Campaign Group', (particularly with regard to support for socialism amongst the populace, and all that that implied), and the crude dogmatic Marxism of the ultra left and the simplistic 'political correctness' of the 'loony left' together with the understandable fear of a British Soviet Socialist Republic - and you have a pretty lousy cocktail for the general public to swallow. Which is, at least, a part of the reason why many chose not to swallow it.

But of course, the political shift to the right, has not simply been a British phenomena but a phenomena that spread throughout Europe and beyond.

In the book 'Mapping the West European Left', the editors, Perry Anderson and Patrick Camiller make the telling point, that in the years 1974-75, for the first and only time in post war history, there were social-democratic prime ministers in every state of the region: Britain, West Germany, Austria, Belgium, Holland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland."

However, 'by the mid seventies, growth rates had fallen, inflation was accelerating, and unemployment rising. It was clear then that the world capitalist economy was moving into a down-swing', and that, 'social democracy not only lacked effective policies to meet the crisis, but it suddenly found itself associated with it'. And the ideological revival of monetarism soon picked out

what its theorists insisted were the causes of the problem, namely an unprecedented expansion in the quantity of money, excessive state spending and over-mighty trade unions which, they said, had caused stagflation (a simultaneous rise in prices, a fall in the value of money, a stagnation of production and increasing unemployment).

'The result was a wave of reaction against the welfare consensus over which social democracy had presided, which brought governments of the right to power throughout the region'.

1980's

Having started with the election of Thatcher's regime in Britain in 1979, the movement spread to West Germany, the Low Countries, and then, more unevenly, to Scandinavia. Only Austria and Sweden resisted the trend in these years.

'The dominant pattern of the eighties was clear-cut. In Northern Europe the left lost political and intellectual ground everywhere to a reinvigorated right on the attack against its *whole post-war record*'.

In Southern Europe, after the initial success of Social Democracy, the left also lost ground. 'In the South, French socialism was routed in the elections of 1993, which gave the right the largest parliamentary majority in the history of the Fifth Republic. In Italy the PSI ... was obliterated ... A few months later, the European elections offered a bleak snapshot of the state of the left throughout the EU. In Spain the Socialist Party was for the first time decisively beaten by its conservative opponents. In France the PS vote fell to less than a sixth of the electorate ... In Italy, support for the largest residual party of the left, the newly converted PDS - the former Communists become social democrats - was reduced to less than a fifth of the electorate ... In Germany the SPD vote fell to its lowest level since the fifties'.

No doubt say Anderson and Camiller, 'The diversity of states in Western Europe makes them unlikely ever to coincide completely. There will continue to be governments led by

social-democratic parties ... But an underlying crisis of direction is unmistakable, and it has not been alleviated, but if anything deepened, by the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. ... In the event, the ideological triumph of the market has been so complete in the East that it has ricocheted against the use of the state for economic regulation or social welfare in the West'.

Of course the irony is, that all this has been happening with capitalism in crisis; indeed it has arisen because capitalism is in crisis, which, according to Marxist orthodoxy, should be the time when socialism makes some advance; when conditions help to politicise the working class.

And the irony is underlined by the fact that at this very time of Capitalist crisis, when the world is in such an economic mess and orthodox market economics lacks validity, the market and the market economists are more popular than ever; providing further evidence, if further evidence is needed, of the ideological hold that the right now has.

Economic debate

Paul Ormerod, one time head of the Economic Assessment Unit at the 'Economist', Director of Economics at the Henley Centre for Forecasting from 1982 to 1992, and subsequent visiting Professor of Economics at London and Manchester universities, insists in his book 'The Death of Economics', that the foundations underlying orthodox economics are 'virtually non-existent' and yet, he says, it dominates political debate *as never before*. The discipline has developed enormously over the past decade, particularly in the field of applied mathematical models, and yet its predictive capacity is exceedingly poor.

'The orthodoxy of economics is trapped in an idealised, mechanistic view of the world, says Ormerod. 'In Western Europe, the economic profession eulogised the Exchange Rate Mechanism and monetary union, despite frequent bouts of massive currency speculation and the inexorable rise of unemployment throughout Europe during its years of existence ... Yet to the true believer, within the profession itself, the ability of

economics to understand the world has never been greater. Indeed, in terms of influence in the world the standing of the profession appears high'.

'Orthodox economics', he says 'is in many ways an empty box . . . a few insights have been obtained which will stand the test of time, but they are very few indeed, and the whole basis of conventional economics is deeply flawed'.

And yet, the whole of economics is becoming more orthodox and more committed to the market economy. The old joke that if you put twelve economists in a room you were bound to end up with 12 different views, unless one of them was a Keynesian, in which case you would get at least 13 views, is no longer the case.

'The obstacles facing academic economists are formidable; tenure and professional advancement still depend to a large extent on a willingness to comply with and to work within the tenets of orthodox theory'.

A right-wing intellectual orthodoxy has emerged, which blithely accepts the market.

According to Ormerod, the standard textbooks for economics degrees, increasingly resemble engineering texts. The subject is not taught as 'a way of learning to think about how the world might operate, but as a set of discovered truths as to how the world does operate'. Although, he says, the similarity with engineering ends there, because when the formulae for building bridges is applied in practice, the bridges usually stay up, whereas the same does not apply in economics.

And yet, he says, the confidence of the true believer has grown like Topsy, and market economics has never been so pervasive, despite the fact that orthodox economic understanding of the world is similar to that of the physical sciences in the middle Ages.

'Conventional economics, says Ormerod, 'offers prescriptions for the problems of inflation and unemployment which are at best misleading and at

worst dangerously wrong. Unemployment in particular now represents a major threat to the fabric of Western society, and it is imperative that a better understanding of its causes and behaviour is obtained'.

Marxian

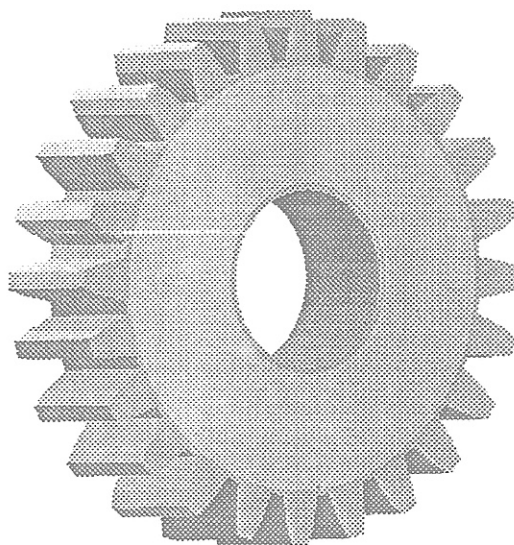
It is a sad irony, that the countervailing Marxian political economy, which has directed its attention to the real world, to chronic problems and crises, to unemployment, to the consequences of market operation, to restructuring, and to the operations of multinational capital; to how and why it is – and to encouraging us to think about how it might be . . . is not getting a hearing.

But, truth to tell, that is an understatement of the situation. Marxian political economy is also in some difficulty; its practitioners are declining in number, as well as influence, and many are in retreat.

Bob Rowthorn is a case in point; for him 'the problem is less, to work out why there is an economic crisis, and what it means, but more, what the model of socialism presented in advanced capitalist countries should be'.

'The crisis has been long and drawn out' he said, 'but I can't see the agencies of change and I'm not convinced about the socialist answer any more'. I think, he said, 'that the failings in Eastern Europe have been very important in the crisis of the left'.

Rowthorn is not alone in thinking that socialists seeking to transform society, must have satisfactory answers to two vitally important questions; (1) what does the socialist society look like (bearing in mind the unacceptability of the soviet model), and (2) how do we get to that society; what is the agency for change – when the working class, which Marxists thought to be the agent, has become increasingly amorphous and has not, in any event, been politicised by its



experience of the capitalist system, as Marxists anticipated.

Having said that, we shouldn't overlook the fact that the left of centre social democrats are also in some considerable difficulty. They may have a more short term project but, no matter, they suffer from the growing anti socialism and anti-statism, and a declining traditional support and the fact that they now do not have the electoral base that some thought they had. They suffer as a result of their own actions and failures, because of association with the economic system and its failures, because of association with a temporarily discredited interventionist State and, to some extent, because of the failures of the USSR.

And, of course, much though we may think we do not deserve it, we suffer with them. Indeed, the gap between the people and the Labour leaders is undoubtedly much narrower than the gap between the general public and ourselves.

Crisis

All socialisms are in crisis.

With significant exceptions, almost all intellectual opinion on the left of centre, has now sensed that this is not a passing phase, but that there are some deep

rooted problems to be faced by the left. And we are no exception, our politics is located in this problematic environment, and though we have been more Marxian (i.e. influenced by Marx) than Marxists (that is, accepting the letter of Marx), and though we have for long been critical of the Soviet Union and the British Communist Party and the British social democrats, we cannot escape the fall-out.

We too are suffering a crisis of confidence in the ability of the left of the socialist movement to find a way through to a support for socialist ideas.

Indeed perhaps the only left which is not suffering a crisis of confidence is the Trotskyist ultra-left, which is closing its eyes and waiting for the world to come to its senses, and re-conform to its theory. It has few, if any, problems with the socialist society of the future and no problems with the agency of social change.

But we do – and there's no way of ducking them.

After all – if we don't really know where we're going, and we don't really know how we might get there, then, we don't really know what we should be doing next to help inch us down the road towards an economically transformed and democratic society.

And though we may still be able to undertake effective political action; to do good, to fight for developments that we think worthwhile and oppose those we see as retrograde, we really do remain at the level of the left reformers who have no perspective on social change and no idea of a future socialist society.

Perspective

We can, of course, espouse the need for transforming society, we can claim to be revolutionary, but in effect, we are sailing under false colours – and though we may have arrived here by default – we have still arrived here.

It must be said that it has not been an entirely inconspicuous process. We have for some time mused on the theoretical underpinnings of our politics. And, in more recent years, we have debated the detectable disintegration of

the left and the radically changed circumstance that has altered the political landscape, obliterated some of the well worn paths and blown down some of the reliable old sign posts.

We have known for some time that a restatement of perspective is necessary to the regeneration of our politics. And we have known that much of what we have argued in relation to class and society, and economic organisation and democracy and the Labour Party and the process of political socialisation, has tended to push us in a particular direction – namely, I think, the direction in which this talk is going.

We may have started with a concept of class and class conflict which originated in classical Marxism, which at one time informed our early practice in the trade union movement and at the factory gate, but in truth it has become less and less relevant to our practice, and though we may have questioned it in theoretical discussion, we have never reformulated it, to become an integral part of our politics and practice.

We outlined a perspective on the British economy in the early to mid seventies, and it stood us in good stead; we predicted the political onslaught of the Tories, the attack on the unions and the intensification of exploitation . . . and we anticipated the response of Labour. Later, we rightly criticised the Campaign Group's mistaken optimism regarding the British electorate, we made politically correct decisions about Labour Party democracy when others were wrong footed, we took a radical yet credible position on Northern Ireland, we campaigned on a variety of issues, and we did much more. But we directed our politics almost exclusively at the 'in house', Labour Party membership, and we neglected the wider community.

The old concept of class

fell away, but we did not articulate a new one. We argued at length about the focus of our publications and proposed publications, but we did not agree on that, or on the main thrust of our political drive.

However, if we are to revitalise ourselves and our political project; if we are to establish any kind of political foothold in the present environment, then we have to sort ourselves out. We have to have a reasonably clear notion of what we are doing, and that implies some concept of class, or the rejection of class, together with some political modus operandi.

Marx

And we can't rely on Marx and the classical Marxists, for although Marx may never have intended it, he encouraged a near fatalistic perspective. For the traditional Marxist the agency of social change and the mechanism of social change were such that there was almost an inevitability about the process; the economic conditions of life had such an inescapable effect on the masses, that they were virtually compelled to oppose, and eventually overthrow the capitalist class which they recognised as being responsible for their misery.

According to Marx and Engels' theory,



outlined in the Communist Manifesto of 1848, all social change throughout history is the result of class antagonism. Each society produces its antithesis which, in time transforms the old order. When it comes to Capitalism, the working class is to be the grave-digger of the system, and the younger Marx predicted a number of developments that would take place.

The workers, who are exploited by the powerful Capitalist class will, in time, experience a decrease in the real value of wages and suffer increasing poverty; there will be a polarisation of the classes, with the intermediary classes (between the Capitalist Class and the working class) being dispersed and absorbed. In the process the working class will become a large homogeneous mass.

As a result of class conflict and the increasing political struggle with the ruling class (all of which will be motivated by the pursuit of self interest on the part of both classes) the workers will become class conscious, that is; aware that they are the exploited class; aware of the reasons for the exploitation; aware of who and what is responsible for the exploitation, and aware of what should be done to put an end to it.

And this complex process of development, will be helped by radical movements, left inclined intellectuals and by the trade unions which Marx conceived as 'schools of class war'.

The problem, as we all know, is that the reality today isn't quite like that. The working class is becoming amorphous; the classes haven't polarised into an explicitly identifiable mass working class and a capitalist class; the gradations and grey areas persist and proliferate and become more complex. Class consciousness has not developed; the conservative culture is alive and kicking.

Marx himself, in later life, began to identify some of the developing complexities of class. There is too much that he leaves untouched and in doubt, but he does concede that the 'middle classes' are blurring the concept of class.

A more complex picture than that in the Manifesto appears in his subsequent writings, including the 18th Brumaire (1852). But the most significant shift

came in the relatively obscure 'Theory of Surplus Value', published in 1910, over twenty years after he died.

In the 'Theories of Surplus Value', he acknowledges that the polarization that he predicted, is not coming about. And he explicitly refers to the growth of the middle class as a phenomena of the development of capitalism. In commenting on Ricardo's work, he actually says, that 'what Ricardo forgets to emphasise is the continual increase in the numbers of the middle classes situated midway between the workers on the one side and the capitalists and land owners on the other.

And, he goes on to say, with respect to Malthus, that 'his great hope is that the middle class will increase in size and the working proletariat will make up a constantly diminishing proportion of the total population. And, says Marx, that is, in fact, the tendency of bourgeois society.

Unfortunately Marx never attempted a refinement of his own theory in light of his observations, and ever since, Marxists have been grappling with the problem.

Edward Bernstein, the German Marxist who joined the German Social Democratic Workers Party in 1871, always insisted on a Marxist economic analysis of Capitalism, but otherwise rejected Marx's predictions on class and argued for making an ethical as well as an economic appeal to the middle classes. But he was such a revisionist of Marx's work, that he was rejected out of hand by his true Marxist contemporaries.

Gramsci

However, in the late 1920s and 30s Gramsci, the Italian Marxist, and founder of the Italian Communist Party, seriously started to entertain the notion that socialism might not get on to the agenda of history. He started to look afresh at the agency of change, and concluded that there is a need for what he called an 'historic block', an alliance of classes and strata, to culturally and ideologically 'counterpose' itself to the old order. Furthermore, he indicates an alliance, that must seek moral and in-

tellectual reform via the expansion of democratic control.

His starting point was the questioning of Marxist assumptions about the way Capitalism, even in crisis, influences political thought and action. He reinforces the view that politics cannot any longer be considered merely as an expression of a narrow conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, but that it is better and more usefully understood as a constellation of factors; concern for social, moral and ethical issues, humanistic preoccupations and priorities, democratic desires, ideological bias and political economic understanding.

He lends weight to the view that we need to look for the coincidence of concern and an homogeneity of outlook as opposed to concentrating on sociological categories; that we should envisage a durable concrete political force being fashioned from the counter hegemonic potential to be found within the shifting and changing world that is all around; from the hopeful attitudes and positive values; from any suggestion of discontent; from any restlessness or confusion or curiosity or intellectual enquiry.

He supports the view that we must win the moral and democratic high ground, demystify experience and offer understanding.

He encourages us to draw together the intellectual, moral and aesthetic potential from which to build a socialist hegemony; a counter culture; a socialist common sense.

He argues, as we have long argued, that progress towards socialism cannot be made or sustained unless a significant number of people have a strong integrating outlook that supports a socialist politics. If this is not achieved; if the moral and social hegemony of Capitalist society is not undermined, then we can always be pulled back from victory.

Gramsci was arrested in November 1926 and sentenced to more than twenty years imprisonment, and it was in prison where he studied and did most of his writing, and therefore, much of what he

wrote was not published until comparatively recently. But in a relatively short time, he has had a significant effect, and has been found to be all the more relevant to contemporary socialism, because of the renewed concern with social change and agency.

He is claimed by both the reformists and the revolutionaries, and that is partly because his work is open to different interpretation and partly because, in a sense, he straddles both traditions.

Harrington

The late Michael Harrington, one time leader of the Democratic Socialists of America, voiced the opinion of a lot of socialists when he said that the Gramscian strategy, with its emphasis on alliances between classes and strata and its appeal to moral values, clearly points in the only direction that contemporary socialism can go.

In 'Socialism Past and Future', Harrington's last book before he died, he says 'that when it comes to the concept of class, the economic is hardly irrelevant . . . but this is not to say that new socialism is simply the old doctrine in a somewhat more sophisticated, multiclass form, if it is primarily economic, it will fail'.

He also said, 'It is not just a matter of tactics, of appealing to social strata and movements that, for a variety of historical and structural reasons are concerned with values and culture. On a much more profound strategic level, it is impossible to sustain a new conception of society on a basis of narrow incremental demands. Beyond strategy, the very conception of socialism requires an emphasis on values, on non-economic as well as economic values'.

And, he said, if growing socialisation (class consciousness) is no longer thought of as the automatic consequence of the economic development of capitalist society, as a transition from capitalist monopoly to socialist monopoly (that is the centralised State); if on the contrary, socialisation is understood as the popular conscious control of their destiny by the people; then it is clearly a goal that extends to all of society, not just the economy.

I think that all of this is true. But I want to stress the link between the economic and the non economic and the link between these and the broad alliance for socialism. As far as I am concerned economic control by a minority is incompatible with democracy, and only by developing and extending democracy can we involve and empower people and encourage the blossoming of society that is the socialist promise.

That places the extension of democracy and the pursuit of the democratic society at the heart of our socialist politics.

Core principle

It must therefore be the core principle of a broad alliance for socialism. Indeed, it is likely to be the one core principle around which we can unite the populace against that class (that elite) which owns or controls the massive concentrations of wealth that are so significant to the well-being of us all.

Perry Anderson in his book 'Arguments within English Marxism' writes 'Strategy without morality is a machiavellian calculus' But, he says, 'Morality without strategy; a humane socialism equipped only with an ethic against a hostile world, is doomed to needless tragedy'

I could not agree more.

We need to help forge the broadest possible democratic alliance against the wealth controlling and powerful elite. It must be a democratic alliance that seeks incremental changes to preserve and extend our civil liberties. But it must make transitional demands linking the immediate to the long term goal. And that, of course, requires us to have some reasonable notion of what the long term goal is. Otherwise we are not only offering people a blind alley, that all history should tell them to be wary of, we are also denying ourselves the possibility of a strategy that links to that future state.

The picture of our democratic socialist society is important for uniting opposition to capitalism and as a means for taking the fear out of the future; for exorcising the old Leninist aphorism, that we 'take them by the hand, so that

we may later take them by the throat'

It is important to helping us move people on, from a reforming to a transforming perspective, for helping us shape transitional demands, and for helping us resist assimilation.

Perry Anderson, in his book 'Arguments within English Socialism' in which he evaluates the entire corpus of Edward Thompson's work, makes the point that the fight for democracy and the preservation and extension of civil liberties will only be truly successful if it is capable of advancing them beyond the threshold of the new right-wing liberal opposition between state and individual, towards a point where the emergence of another kind of state is their logical and practical terminus. He continues, 'the full potential of the political issues of democracy raised by Thompson can only be realised by persistent public demonstration of their convergence in socialism.'

And Geoff Hodgson in his book 'The Democratic Economy' makes a similar point. Of course, he says, 'a vision of the future is not everything. Marxists are right to point out that any successful radical movement must base itself on the conditions and forces of the present. Whatever future we desire, we have to discover the real forces for change in present society. What is necessary however, is an amalgam of an analysis of present conditions with a picture of a feasible future goal'.

A socialist society

Unfortunately the classic Marxist approach not only denies the possibility of knowing the future but has tended to suggest that it is inappropriate to seek to outline the socialist society that we are aiming for.

Marx and Engels saw socialism, not as a knowable ideal entity for which any kind of blueprint could be drawn up, but as the ultimate outcome of the class struggle. In other words the particular form and shape will only emerge as an end product of an historic process. In consequence they refrained from any serious attempt to fill out their ideas about socialism.

Marx did talk about an Association of Producers and gave hints here and there

of what he had in mind, but even when we collate all the information available it remains an incomplete and unsatisfactory picture of a socialist future.

Karl Kautsky the ultra orthodox Marxist in the Second International, in the period 1889 to 1914, faithfully re-stated Marx's ideas and brought them together. They are set out in Selucky's book 'Marxism, Socialism and Freedom' (published 1979).

Marx's most important single text on the subject is 'The Critique of the Gotha Programme', in which he distinguishes two phases of communist society; first there is to be the phase that immediately succeeds Capitalism, when the working class will become the ruling class and will organise the workers State (i.e. there will be a Dictatorship of the Proletariat).

Within this first phase, industry will be so organised that production will soar, and society will then be ready to enter what Marx called the higher stage of communism, when the State will wither away. The workers will have a totally different attitude to work, each will give according to his or her ability, there will be abundance and each will receive according to his or her needs.

'The critique of the Gotha Programme' was not published until 1891, eight years after Marx's death and it was not thought to be a very significant document until Lenin featured it in his 'State and Revolution'. And in keeping with the idea of the two stages of communism, the Soviet Union was officially designated the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, to emphasise that it was in the first phase of communism.

'The Critique of the Gotha Programme' seemingly tells us quite a bit about Marx's future society, and yet if we look closely, we find that it tells us very little. It is a bundle of concepts without definition.

What does it mean, for example, to talk of the workers becoming the ruling class; what does it imply? And what can we make of the withering away of the State? And what kind of economy and industrial organisation is suggested?

Karl Kautsky interpreted Marx as envisaging, in effect, a 'single gigantic industrial complex, in which very similar principles would have to prevail, as in any large industrial establishment'

However, there would be no commodity production, (that is, no goods for sale), and therefore no market as we understand a market. There would also be no labour market. Everyone would be employed by the State, that is, until the State withered away, when presumably everyone would become part of what Marx referred to as the 'association of workers', presumably operating within a centrally planned consumption and production programme.

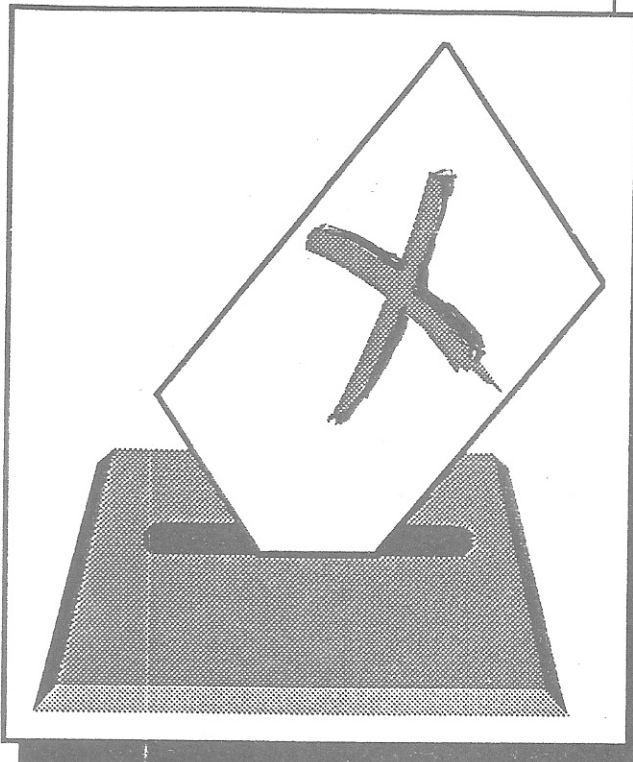
Kautsky himself worried about all this and thought that the choices for the workers in this totally monopolistic environment, would be very limited to say the least, and he clearly puzzled over the contradiction between this and Marx's basic values of freedom and human emancipation.

This new workers society is a planned, marketless economy with a vengeance, yet as Selucky writes, Marx's political concept of socialism consists of a free association of self-managed workers and social communities based on horizontal relations of relative equality, and there is a big contradiction here.

Faced with this, Harrington simply advises us to choose the 'liberation Marx over the Centralist Marx'.

But then, what might that mean in practice? What kind of Socialist society can we envisage? For although we cannot know the detail of the future, we ought at least to have some workable idea of what it might be.

Alec Nove, suggests where we should look for the answer, in his book 'The Economics of Feasible Socialism'.



In summary what Nove says, is that no way exists to effectively avoid the dominant role of a central planning bureaucracy, unless the functions from which it derives its power are significantly reduced. And that means giving considerable autonomy and self management to the productive units scattered throughout the new socialist society. And you cannot do that without commodity production, over which the workers have considerable control, and you cannot have commodity production with autonomous management and workers' control, without a market.

And I have to agree.

Market socialism

Given the finite nature of the resources of the planet and the fact that we cannot seriously contemplate a world of super abundance, but rather a world of relative scarcity, I can see no way of determining what will be produced, and no way of distributing the variety of different commodities without either a centralised democratically restrictive command economy or a market within a society of socially owned capital.

The market that is envisaged is obviously very unlike the market we find within Capitalism.

As Harrington says, 'The point is not just to make a critique of a bad theory. It is to understand the very different relations between planning and markets in very different societies; and to free the socialism of tomorrow, from the guilt-laden assumption that a market in a social order of increasing equality and popular democratic control is somehow as reprehensible as a market that functions to provide shacks for the poor and mansions for the rich.'

He continues 'I am not proposing that the new socialism projects a market Utopia Indeed, the "decommodification" of life is a critical aim of the new socialism I simply insist that in the dimly foreseeable and utterly international future markets can be an important instrument of free choice rather than of perverse maldistribution if, but only if, they are reorganized within a socialist context.'

And Nove, makes a similar point. 'what is here advocated' he says, 'is not an untrammelled free market; a major role exists for planning. The fact that strains and contradictions would arise on the boundary-line between plan and market, between central and local decisions, is indeed predictable, and quite unavoidable - as unavoidable as the fact that the interests and desires of one individual or group might conflict with those of others'.

What is being pointed to here is in effect 'a system in which the greatest possible amount of decision-making is devolved from the centre. Macro plans would be approved by the elected parliament or assembly, and there would be self-management at micro level, though competition is needed to ensure 'automatic' responsibility to customers'.

What we are talking about is a market of societally owned enterprises, democratically controlled by the workforce, which is rewarded for effort and enterprise, but with upper and lower limits on income, where some of the profits are creamed off for welfare and retraining or whatever the community determines. Where the process is overseen by an elected body that exists to determine priorities, to mediate between the conflicting interests that might arise, to

organise planned production and provision of services and whatever is necessary to meet market-neglected need.

It should also be a system that accommodates the self employed, the corner shop and the small scale private business and it should make community-owned property available for rent for such businesses, which should be limited by size or turnover.

It is clear that the role of the democratic and pluralist state will be very great, as guardian of social property, as planner, as enforcer of social and economic priorities.

Indeed there is no escaping the fact that the State can and must be a force for safeguarding democratic practice and meeting need, and we should never fear to stress that and defend such a viewpoint against the rabid anti-statism of the Tories.

As Nove says, 'it is in the nature of the self-management model, that it must rely greatly on the market mechanism, on the self-interest of the production units. The interest of the part can conflict with the interest of the whole - it therefore will follow - that an efficient socialist economy must be an amalgam of plan and market, centralisation and decentralisation, control and local initiative.' economy must be an amalgam of plan and market, centralisation and decentralisation, control and local initiative.'

So what kind of 'mix' can we envisage in a socialist society

The elected Government to oversee the economy and ensure public services and welfare provision.

Societally owned enterprises, some centrally controlled and administered, with worker participation and others (the vast majority) with full autonomy and workers control.

Co-operative and local community enterprises using socially owned capital.

Small-scale private enterprise and family businesses subject to clearly defined limits and self employed individuals.

The disposal of the surplus would be for society to decide, and its scale would be related to the social and other expenditures that needed to be financed through the surplus.

Nove says that he has always been struck by the fact that the functioning logic of centralised planning 'fits' too easily into the practice of centralised despotism.

And he is right.

He asks us thereafter to look towards market socialism and to explore ways and means to secure a democratic socialist society.

And I think that we should.

The massively unequal distribution of wealth and power is an essential feature of a capitalist economy, and as such debars democratic development.

We must propose the democratic society.

In his article 'An Equitarian Market Socialism' Peter Abell writes 'Humankind is probably not perfectible, but surely it can be coaxed into creating something better than we now have. It is futile and dangerous to advocate an ideal society tomorrow, but having some model in mind, guiding and informing a permanent transition, is another matter'

We need an end goal of socialism, for all the reasons that I have suggested; because, as Rosa Luxemburg argues in 'Social Reform or Revolution', 'the final goal of socialism is the only decisive factor distinguishing the revolutionary from the reformer'.

This point is all the more pertinent today when reformists and reformers, as well as revolutionaries, are inclined to link their politics to what they see as enduring values that might renew and broaden their appeal and re-connect them to the populace.

Socialist renewal

Most socialists now know that they have to work for socialist rehabilitation and renewal; that they have to stress the moral ethical, and democratic aspects of socialism as well as the environmental

and economic; that they have to make a break with the burdensome aspects of the past, and eradicate the negative perceptions and fears that are a major block to the process of renewal.

I think that by reconceptualising our notion of class and socialism along the lines that I have suggested, we not only make our political project more feasible, but we make possible the construction of that democratic bridge between revolutionary politics and reform.

The concept of democracy that is central to both, cuts across economic and social boundaries, and is a concept that logically challenges the economic elite, undermines the notion of the ownership and control of powerful capital, encourages community capital and socially owned co-operative projects and underwrites the demand for civil liberties, freedom of information and the extension of democratic practice in all walks of life.

It naturally links to justice and equity and greater equality and the ideas of fair play that most people carry round in their heads. It is essential to any attempt to get rid of many of the negative features of our society. It confirms the principle of equal treatment and all that that implies in our various walks of life and, of course, we should rightly insist that it is ingrained in socialist politics and can only be made to live to its fullest extent in a democratic socialist society.

New Labour

Having said that, we must recognise that this approach finds a reflection in the project of the leadership of the 'new' Labour Party. And the similarities cannot have escaped you.

There is an overlap between the idea of democracy and the values that we must promote in our concept of class and in our political practice, and some of those espoused by the Labour leadership. To deny this, is to deny fact, and to blind ourselves to the dangers and opportunities that it might present.

The new Labour leadership is (has been) keen to clarify the values and principles

within which its politics is to be conducted, and against which it should be judged.

It has opened up a new opportunity for discourse. It has invited us to take its values and principles seriously, and not to regard them as historical hand-me-downs of no contemporary consequence.

It would be wrong to assume that this is a cynical manoeuvre; to reject it as a series of vague generalities that have been concocted simply to provide a smoke screen behind which the betrayal can take place.

In the introduction to the book 'Values, Visions and Voices' (1995) the editors, Tony Wright, Labour MP and Gordon Brown, Labour shadow chancellor, have this to say about democracy. 'When we describe our tradition as democratic socialism, the coupling is more than a matter of habit. It is a genuine fusion, in which democracy lies at the dynamic centre of socialist belief'.

Democracy, they say, has to be won against those who want to keep power for the few instead of being enjoyed by the many. 'Democracy has a belief in equal rights at its centre and its inherent egalitarianism makes it not merely a kind of political system but a kind of society'.

And they say, 'Against those who like to maintain that 'the economy' and 'the market' are arenas governed by their own mysterious laws and are properly free from wider social obligations, the democratic socialist insists that their operation is emphatically a matter of public interest'.

Here we have a measure of agreement. Here we have a basis for dialogue and debate. Here we have an opportunity to exploit.

However, before anyone suggests that I am getting carried away on a hope and a prayer, let me try to set some parameters to

what I am saying and identify what I am not saying.

I am not saying that the project of this Labour Leadership, centred on Blair and Brown, and their advisors, is our project.

I am not saying that the Labour leadership's project is socialist, in any way that we would define socialism.

I am not saying that this leadership has a solution to the significant problems of modern Britain.

I am not saying that it has an overall viable project of desired reform.

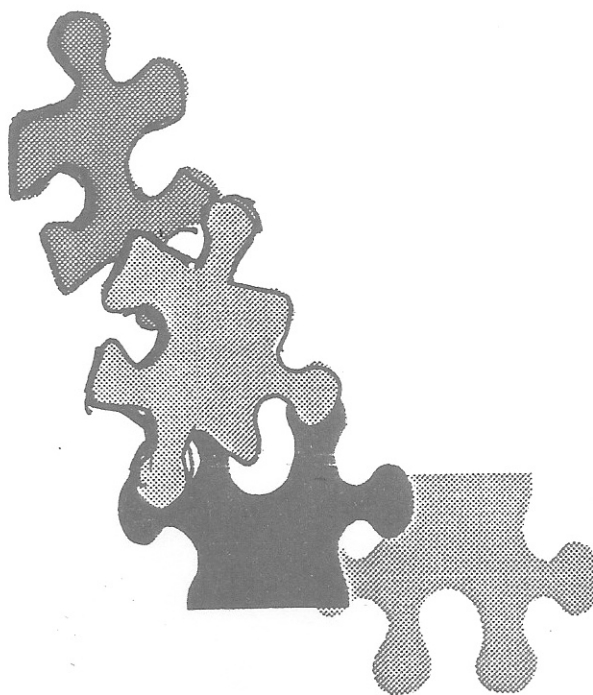
I am not saying that, when in office, it will do much that we approve of..

I am not saying that it will not actually be an unmitigated disaster.

I am saying that this leadership is different from the pragmatic leaderships of Wilson and Callaghan.

I am saying that this leadership has made an ideological pitch.

I am saying that this leadership has tried to think its way through some of the problems to be faced when seeking electoral support for any left of centre parliamentary Party.



I am saying that this leadership has tried to think its way through some of the problems of modern Britain.

I am saying that this leadership is concerned to have a fairer society.

I am saying that it is mixing radical and socialist thinking with highly conventional thinking and reactionary thinking.

I am saying that there is a confusion of ideas, some originating on the left and some elsewhere.

I am saying that some of the emerging policy will reflect that confusion of ideas, some of it will be radical, some less than radical and some awful and some unworkable.

I am also saying that arising out of this confusion of ideas have come some socialist statements and progressive concepts.

I am saying that the socialist and progressive elements together with the populist appeal to values and principles provides an opportunity for us to go with the grain of all that we find compatible with our views. It provides a way in to debate issues of principle, it allows us to contest the definitions of terms and propose policy compatible with what we define to be worthwhile reform. In this way we create an opportunity to further our socialist interests and establish relevance and credibility for the ILP and its politics.

Unfortunately, there are some socialists who refute all the evidence supporting my proposition. They operate on the simple principle of not believing anything that is said or written by Parliamentary leaders, unless it confirms their prejudice. In other words, we should listen to nothing that they say unless it is stereotypically dreadful.

I, know of course, that I can proceed in the certain knowledge that there is no such prejudice in this room.

So let me present you with a little of my evidence.

Clause Four

In the run up to the so-called consultation on Clause Four, Blair and the Na-

tional Executive Committee published a special issue of Labour Party News.

It was not unambiguous, not without contradictions. And it was not devoid of right wing statements, but it contained much that was radical or had radical or socialist implications, depending on what interpretation you gave to it.

It was also a statement that was used to encourage us to vote for a new Clause 4 and was offered as evidence of the political thinking of the proponents of the new clause, and as such, it must stand as a portfolio of their ideas. And the ideas are worth recalling.

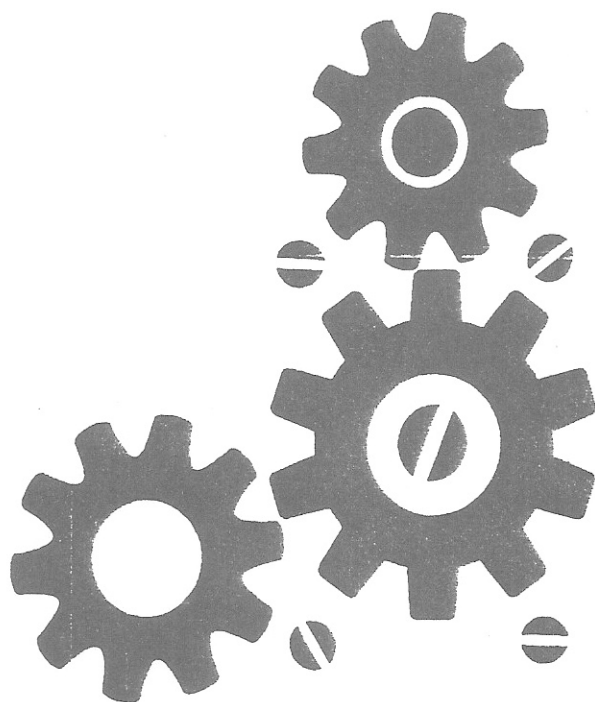
For example, on democracy the NEC said -

'Democracy means rule by the people so that every institution in our society and economy is accountable to those who it serves. The components of democracy stretch beyond national elections to include open and accountable local government, industrial democracy, active and inclusive organisations in civil society, including trade unions, and an economy organised and regulated in the public interest . . . our aim is not just to use and defend democracy, but to extend it throughout society'.

On the community and collective and society. the NEC said that

'Even before Keir Hardie led the Independent Labour Party in the 1890s, people in Britain and abroad came together to argue for the use of collective power - through political parties, trade unions, local authorities and voluntary organisations - to attack privilege and domination and advance the individual interests of the majority of people. . . .

'Socialism is not only an insight into human nature, and the relationship of



society to the individual. It is an argument about the nature of society - and the structure of society most likely to promote the full development of every individual within it. The purpose of socialism is to use the power of all of us to advance the interest of each of us and all of us, individually and together; and that requires a society founded on and marked by values of social justice, freedom, opportunity and responsibility and solidarity at home and abroad'.

'Human life is a network of social relations - relations at their best marked by trust, co-operation and partnership - rather than competition, greed and deception'.

On equality and inequality it says that 'socialists argue for a richer definition of equality. That means the equality of respect and the equality of opportunity . . . But further, it means we also reduce the material inequalities that divide rich from poor and diminish life chances'.

And that 'we need to recognise that inequalities of outcome in one generation do create inequalities of opportunity in the next, and need to be overcome'.

On public ownership it said that 'further, public ownership can be justified to extend principles of universality and

social responsibility as well as on grounds of efficiency and equity'.

'The central question should always be how we protect and advance the public interest in the efficient and equitable production and distribution of goods and services'.

And what about the infamous new Clause 4? What interpretation can we put on that?

Well, it states that –

The Labour Party is a 'democratic socialist party' and this is the first time that this has ever been set down in the constitution.

It believes that '*by the strength of our common endeavour, we can achieve more than we achieve alone*' and that can be taken as an affirmation of collectivism as opposed to individualism.

It intends to promote a community in which '*power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many and not the few*' and that is a commitment to the redistribution of power and wealth. And, as such, has far reaching implications for whole areas of our socio/economic system.

It intends to promote a dynamic economy '*serving the public interest, in which the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition are joined with the forces of partnership and co-operation to produce the wealth the nation needs*' And that could be taken to mean a recognition that the whole economy, not just the parts in public ownership, serve a broader public interest.

It intends to promote 'the opportunity for *all to work and prosper*' . . . and that could be taken as a commitment to the idea that Governments have a responsibility to secure full employment, which is something that the Tories deny. It is also implicitly a commitment to end sweat shops and slave wages.

It intends that '*those undertakings essential to the common good are either owned by the public or accountable to them*' and that is a reaffirmation

that public ownership and/or control will be sought on the grounds of social responsibility, extending the principles of universality, efficiency and equity.

It intends a '*society which judges its strength by the condition of the weak as much as by the strong*' and that is a commitment to reverse the Tory tendency to further disadvantage the disadvantaged.

It intends to secure a society '*which delivers people from the tyranny of poverty, prejudice and the abuse of power*' and that is a commitment to abolish poverty, attack racial, gender and other prejudice, and to end the gross exploitation, harassment, and victimisation by those in powerful positions.

And just in case you think that I am training to become a used car salesman, I must tell you that these interpretations were taken from the Guardian and other newspapers.

Clause 4 is not a rabid revolutionary statement. It is not an explicit socialist statement, in whole or in part, and you could if you wished, reject it as bourgeois reactionary claptrap as many on the left have done.

But that would be a grave mistake, because the problem with wholesale rejection, is that it places you in a position where you cannot, thereafter, claim any of the statement for socialism. You have *voluntarily* given ground. You can't fight for a socialist interpretation, and you can't argue for your socialist politics on the basis of your interpretation of the document. And you can't criticise or indict the leadership for failing to live up to any socialist or worthwhile promise implied by the document, because you've already said that there's none there.

Much better, when we are confronted with proscriptions, be they from the left, right or centre, that we first look for agreement, for advantageous interpretation, for a foothold, for leverage much as we did with 'one member one vote' and the 'electoral college'. And only when that fails do we become oppositional.

We have to find ways and means of getting in amongst the issues, of building a reputation and becoming significant and credible. And the more reasonable and analytical we are and the more we deal in the common currency of our movement and our society, the more difficult it will be to freeze us out and consign us to selling our socialist obscurity outside some badly attended meeting.

I think we have to legitimately use and exploit the socialist potential in the NEC document and new Clause Four, not in an overtly cynical way but in a way that asks the Labour Party member and the bystander to take note. Furthermore, I think that we have to learn to go with the grain of all that is reasonable and reformist as well as all that is socialist.

We have to seek to win support for our interpretation of the concepts of democracy, freedom and justice which this leadership has turned into the common currency of the Labour Party.

If we can't do these things, then we will never get any purchase in the labour movement or in society.

That does not mean that we condone the perspective of the reformer or that we are not critical and oppositional whenever it is important to be critical or oppositional.

It means only that as well as finding and opposing the worst in the Party and the leadership, we find and embrace and promote what is best.

And if you tell me there is no 'best', then listen to Gordon Brown, when he says that –

'there are some who argue that the historic tasks of the Left in Europe have been completed, that free market ideology is triumphant, and that the basic aims of the early socialists – above all of emancipation – can be achieved without a radical transformation of society; in other words we have now reached the end of ideology'.

'I believe', he says, 'that this is not only wrong but it is to misunderstand socialism's task. Socialism has always been much more ambitious in its aspi-

rations than the removal of poverty, unemployment and squalor, tasks that remain to be completed, but which it should be said themselves cannot be accomplished without a major reordering of society'.

'I want to suggest', he says, 'that in the 1990s we can use the power of all to meet the potential of each. In the process, we can build a new popular socialism . . . (with) . . . a commitment to and strategy for tackling all entrenched interests and unjust accumulations of power and privilege that hold people back; in short a new redistribution of power that gives people more control over their lives . . . (and) . . . a new economic egalitarianism which starts from the recognition that it is indeed people's potential - and thus the value of their labour - that is the driving force of the modern economy. Instead of capital exploiting labour for the benefit of the few, the challenge is to rebuild our economy to ensure that labour can use capital to the benefit of all'.

'While capital remains an essential ingredient for the success of an individual company', he says, 'it should be treated as a commodity like plant and machinery rather than the directing force of our economy' (The Politics of Potential; A New Agenda for Labour).

There are socialist sentiments here, and we should readily recognise them as such and promote this side of the Labour leadership as against the other more ambiguous and overtly right wing elements.

We should (particularly at this point in time) seek out and welcome expressions of socialism from every prominent source, and endeavour to push them to the top of the agenda.

And when Labour advisors like David Miliband make a number of points that we would find it hard to disagree with, we should welcome these as hopeful signs, rather than reject them as some kind of sophistry. We might even explore the possibility that we have something in common! Who knows, we might be able to strike up a dialogue with other people!

Early in his introduction to 'Reinventing the Left' David Miliband quotes John

Dunn from the book 'Western Political Theory in the face of the future' (1993).

Dunn argues that a new feature of the political environment is -

'the effective disappearance of any systematic, or even widely credited, conception of how, for many generations to come, (or perhaps even for ever) it (capitalism) could stand in any danger of being replaced by anything more edifying or less dismaying. What has been deleted from the human future, almost inadvertently but still with remarkable decisiveness, is any form of reasonable and relatively concrete social and political hope'.

Now that, it seems to me is David Miliband's starting point. It is not I imagine, wholly unlike the starting point that led Gramsci to look for historical blocs and Harrington to look hard for the building space between capitalism and socialism, and for what he called the *visionary gradualism* needed to do the building.

Harrington looks for a 'new socialism'. Miliband looks for a 'radical new identity', which he says the left needs if it is to do more than rail against the many injustices of the present and (instead) provide realistic hope of change for the future. What is beyond doubt, he says is that we need a 'new model of political change'.

He argues for putting our faith in the politics of constant and continuing re-application of a set of values to changing circumstance, which has a lot in common with Harrington's idea of developing conscious control, and the idea of a developing democracy that is central to this talk.

For over a hundred years, says Miliband, the objects of our attack have been privilege, inequality, unaccountable power and unregulated markets. The left exists today, and needs to exist, because advanced industrial societies are corrupted in fundamental ways, by inequality of income, opportunity and power. And these inequalities are not accidental by-products of economic and social relations, but are integral to them.

Of course I could quote some of Blair's

published views on socialism which are thin, vague and anodyne, and some of Blair's speeches which make the hair on the back of my head stand on end. And I am aware that Blair is the leader of the Labour Party.

It is essential that we retain a balanced picture. But, we must be determined not to spend the remainder of our political lives watching our project run into the sand. We must look to debate with (and/or discuss the ideas and policies of) the best as well as the worst - if we are ever to have any impact.

We must relate to all that is politically significant; embracing the best and criticising and rejecting the worst, whilst all the time making it clear that our view of capitalism requires fundamental change and a move towards a different and democratic society.

The end goal must always be kept in sight to prevent us losing our way as we seek to link with all that is 'relevant' and 'significant' in present day society; as we seek to build the democratic bridge between revolutionary and reforming politics; as we seek to win 'friends' for the ILP and its politics.

We must bear in mind Perry Anderson's comment on the work of Edward Thompson; 'that the full potential of the political issues of democracy raised by Thompson can only be realised by persistent public demonstration of their convergence in socialism'.

Things to do

Having said that, I think, that if we can get our act together, we have cause for some optimism. We now have a number of things to do -

To make explicit our conceptualisation of class; the fundamental democratic nature of our project and the essentially democratic nature of our pluralistic market socialist society of the future.

To organise to campaign inside the Labour Party and in the wider society for the extension of democracy, inching us towards the democratic society.

To seek to link the concept of democracy to what we conceive to be the

positive values of society; underlining the inescapable relationship between greater equality, justice and fairness, empowerment and democracy . . . and by extension setting our democratic socialism against the tyranny of power and prejudice.

To propagate our socialism as the natural embodiment of democracy and positive community values.

To formulate reforming and transitional demands on the basis of that perspective, and to promote these everywhere and inside the Labour Party, all the time seeking, wherever possible, to go with the grain of popular feeling and outlook.

To campaign inside the Labour Party for a constitution that epitomizes a democratic socialist organisation.

To support all reasonable and viable democratic initiatives that prefigure the democratic society.

To produce a 'popular', 'accessible' magazine aimed at a relatively wide potential readership; a magazine which encourages a broad range of contributors and aims to have a cosmopolitan content but with a clearly identifiable vein of ILP politics running through it.

To seek to gather round the ILP a body of 'friends' who are sympathetic to all or part of the ILP project.

To seek to expand the membership and friends and influence of the ILP and to work to build a democratic socialist base to the Labour Party and encourage democratic initiatives and pressure groups in society.

There is a whole new generation of Labour members to be politicised and a much wider, but concerned audience to appeal to.

We need to start the debate on democracy and values, on ideas and priorities and policies and practice, and help the politicisation process by offering leadership.

And, if (and some would prefer to say when) the Labour Party leadership starts to slip and slide, and twist this way and that on its way to failure and further demoralisation, we must be there to explain the failure, to help encourage an

understanding of the nature of the system, and to offer hope and encourage association with the ILP and its ideas.

New Clause Four

In the meantime we must remember that the most important thing about the new Clause 4, is that the present leadership of the Labour party, have not inherited it from their forefathers. This is not something that they can ignore or explain away as an anachronism from the past. This is their own construction. This is something that they deemed necessary; something that they fought to impose on the party.

This, as Blair said, is their '*modern*' statement of Labour's '*aims and objectives which will set out what they stand for in the 1990s and beyond*'.

Had I been Blair, I would not have been inclined to disinter Clause 4. I would have left it to rot. Because in the writing of a new clause 4 he has put himself in a position where he can be made hostage to the new clause, and to the things that he said or condoned in justification of it.

Hugo Young writing in the Guardian (14th March 1995) said that writing new words to Clause 4 "sets a future test for ministers in the Blair government which they might find irksome Having written them, the leaders ask to be held to them. There will be an awkward reckoning. How many Labour leaders since the war have been seriously asked by the party to prove how far they've implemented Clause 4? The new constitution will be a rod for the leader's back that Wilson never had to bear".

We have now got a contemporary reference point, and a significant part of the political struggle will now be over the definition of terms and the logical practical extension of meaning, and the policy interpretation - It is a debate that will centre on the Labour Party and its leadership, but that will interest an audience well beyond the Party.

We should see it as an opportunity and rise to the occasion!

