New Socialist at Conference 2017

New Socialist.

Robust intellectual discussion and intransigent rabble rousing

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Corbynism from Below at The World Transformed

We are delighted to announce the details of *New Socialist's* session at The World Transformed, which will take place on Tuesday September 26th at 1pm at the Synergy Centre.

Our session 'Corbynism from Below' will focus on three critical goals for the movement: building community and workplace solidarity; democratising and opening up the Labour Party so that it truly reflects the needs and concerns of working and marginalised people; and delivering upon the promise of Corbynism and Labour's election manifesto, both in and outside of government. Our panel will discuss why these aims are vital to both the Corbyn project and the wider labour movement, how we can make them a reality, and the challenges that will confront us in our efforts to do so.

List of speakers

- Dawn Foster, *Guardian* columnist
- Tom Gann, Editor, Theory & Strategy co-editor, *New Socialist* (Chair)
- Maya Goodfellow, Writer and researcher
- Laura Pidcock, MP for North West Durham
- Hilary Wainwright, Co-editor of *Red Pepper* magazine
- Matt Zarb-Cousin, former spokesperson for Jeremy Corbyn

Speaker bios

Dawn Foster, Guardian columnist

Dawn Foster is a *Guardian* columnist, writing on politics, economics and social affairs. She has also written for the *London Review of Books*, *The Independent* and *The New York Times* and is a regular political commentator for Sky News, Channel 4 News, and Newsnight. Her book, *Lean Out*, was published in 2016.

Tom Gann, Editor, Theory & Strategy co-editor, New Socialist (Chair)

Tom Gann is Theory & Strategy co-editor of New Socialist and has written on Labour, anti-imperialism, housing and urban struggles for a range of publications. Tom is a long-standing Labour member and stood for Parliament in 2010. He has also been involved in housing struggles across South London and successful trade union organising against zero-hours contracts.

Maya Goodfellow, Writer and researcher

Maya Goodfellow is a writer and researcher. A regular columnist for *Media Diversified*, she is a former staff writer for *LabourList* and has also written for *the Guardian*, *the New Statesman* and *the Independent*, among others. Her work mostly focuses on UK politics, immigration, gender and race. She is also a doc-

toral candidate at SOAS, University of London where she studies race and racism. She previously specialised in conflict studies, primarily examining social movements.

Laura Pidcock, MP for North West Durham

Laura Pidcock was first elected as MP for North West Durham at the 2017 general election. Since her election she has joined the Justice Select Committee and become Vice-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Mental Health. Before her election she worked as a mental health support worker and for Show Racism the Red Card.

Hilary Wainwright, Co-editor of *Red Pepper* magazine

Hilary Wainwright is a Fellow of the Transnational Institute and co-ordinates the European dimension of its New Politics Project; a founding editor and current co-editor of *Red Pepper*; and an active member of Momentum Hackney. Her latest book is *A New Politics from the Left*, forthcoming. Her other books include *Reclaim the State: Experiments in Popular Democracy*; *Arguments for a New Left: Answering the Free Market Right* and *Labour: A Tale of Two Parties*.

Matt Zarb-Cousin, former spokesperson for Jeremy Corbyn

Matt Zarb-Cousin is a former spokesperson for Jeremy Corbyn, and since leaving the leader's office has written for *the Guardian*, *the Independent*, *Jacobin* and *Vice*. He is now spokesperson for the Campaign for Fairer Gambling, which campaigns against Fixed Odds Betting Terminals.

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Mums4Corbyn at the World Transformed

New Socialist are very happy to announce details of our comrades and collaborators, Mums4Corbyn's events at The World Transformed on Saturday 23rd September.

'Mumrades' - rise up! The inequality faced by women in society is often linked to our role as mothers and carers. Women are not only lower paid than men but our labour in the home goes unpaid, and this double burden also contributes to the underrepresentation of women in politics. So what are we going to do about it? Mums4Corbyn will be addressing this question and unpacking the demands that self-identifying women can and should be making in and outside the Labour Party to end inequality. Come and tell us what your demands are as we prepare our Mums4Corbyn charter.

Home Truths: Housing is a Feminist Issue (11.00 - 13.00)

Whether spending a higher proportion of their earnings on rent or being more likely to be affected by the bedroom tax, women are hit hardest by the housing crisis. Now more than ever, housing is a feminist issue. Join us to talk about the impact of the housing crisis on women and how we organise the fight-back.

Line-up:

- Dawn Foster (*Guardian* Journalist)
- Daisy-May Hudson (Film-maker with Experience of Homelessness)
- Yvette Williams (Justice for Grenfell)
- Chaired by Samiah Anderson

Radical Demands From the Grassroots (13.00 - 15.00)

From the vote to wages for housework, women have always been getting organised and making radical demands on society as well as in their own movements. These demands often shine light on areas long-ignored by otherwise progressive movements and, most importantly, force radical change. What demands should women be making today, and how do we realise these demands? In answering these questions, we'll be taking inspiration from movements past and present, including the Black Panthers.

Line-up:

- Shami Chakrabarti
- Maya Goodfellow
- English Collective of Prostitutes
- Vanessa Olorenshaw

Childcare (15.00 - 17.00)

What does a better, more radical approach to childcare look like? Mums4corbyn will be in conversation with Tracy Brabin, shadow minister for early years discussing this topic.

A study from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development found that Childcare costs in the U.K. are the highest in the world and yet childcare professionals are some of the lowest paid. A survey by Mumsnet and the Resolution Foundation found that those mothers on the lowest incomes who are wanting to take on extra hours are prevented from doing so due to the cost of childcare. Finding childcare that fits around the reality of women's lives is increasingly difficult and the quality of childcare and state subsidies is piecemeal. Parents know there has to be something better than what is currently on offer.

Lineup:

In conversation with Tracy Brabin (Shadow Minister for Early Years), Andrea Marie (*New Socialist* Theory and Strategy co-editor), Selma James and Camille Barbagallo. Chaired by Momentum Kids co-founder Natasha Josette.

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New Socialist recommends… at Labour Conference and The World Transformed

Navigating the vast programme of fringe events, debates, parties and floor discussions taking place in and around Labour Party Conference and The World Transformed can be a pretty overwhelming exercise, particularly for those attending either event for the first time. With this in mind *New Socialist* has prepared its own select programme of recommended events, with a particular emphasis on events that align with our aims and those involving key figures from the left of the party and the wider movement.

The *New Socialist* programme covers proceedings on the conference floor, 'official' fringe events and those at The World Transformed, where *New Socialist's* event is taking place. As such many of these require either a conference pass or a TWT pass - our listings clearly list these entry requirements. These recommendations do not necessarily represent an endorsement of the hosts of each event or all the panellists. Unfortunately due to the wealth of exciting events on

offer many of those we recommend clash.

Several *New Socialist* editors and contributors will be in Brighton and we hope to see you there.

Key (LP) - requires conference pass (TWT) - requires The World Transformed Pass (OTA) - open to all

For the full timetable for proceedings on the conference floor see here, the full fringe listings here and the programme for The World Transformed here.

Saturday 23rd September

Home Truths: Housing is a Feminist Issue - organised by Mums4Corbyn *11:00am, Synergy Centre, 78 West St, 7 Middle St, Brighton BN1 2RA* (TWT) Samiah Anderson (Economist and Contributor to On The Ground At Grenfell); Daisy-May Hudson (Film-maker with experience of homelessness); Yvette Williams (Activist with Justice 4 Grenfell); Dawn Foster (Journalist and Author of Lean Out)

The Corbyn Effect: Two Years On *11:00am, Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, Brighton, BN1 1AF* (TWT) James Stafford (Academic and Co-editor of Renewal); Monique Charles (Post-doctoral Researcher in Grime Music); Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite (Co-editor of Renewal); Mark Perryman (Editor of The Corbyn Effect and co-founder of Philosophy Football); Jeremy Gilbert (Professor of Cultural and Political Theory at the University of East London). Read our interview with Mark Perryman.

Radical Demands from the Grassroots - organised by Mums4Corbyn *1.00pm, Synergy Centre, 78 West St, 7 Middle St, Brighton BN1 2RA* (TWT) Shami Chakrabarti (Shadow Attorney General for England and Wales); Maya Goodfellow (Writer, Researcher, Columnist for Media Diversified and LabourList); Vanessa Olorenshaw (Author of Liberating Motherhood); English Collective of

Prostitutes; Helen Hester (Feminist Academic); Nadine Houghton (Activist with GMB and Mums4Corbyn)

Whose Job Is It Anyway? Radical Childcare - organised by Mums4Corbyn *3.00pm, Synergy Centre, 78 West St, 7 Middle St, Brighton BN1 2RA* (TWT) Natasha Josette; Tracy Brabin MP (Shadow Minister for Early Years); Camille Barbagallo (Sociologist and Activist with Plan C); Andrea Marie (Theory and Strategy Co-editor for New Socialist); Selma James (Author of Sex, Race and Class and Activist for Global Women's Strike)

Labour Women Leading: Making our vision a reality - organised by Labour Women Leading *17.30pm, Brighthelm Centre, North Rd, Brighton BN1 1YD* (TWT) Chair: Ruth Hayes (Director of the Islington Law Centre); Cat Smith MP (Shadow Minister for voter engagement and Youth affairs); Emma Dent-Coad MP; Dawn Butler MP (Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities); Councillor Claudia Webbe (Labour NEC member); Liz Davies (long term Labour activist, Hackney Momentum);; Christine Blower (NUT); Maria Exall (CWU)

CLPD Rally - Conference Lift Off! - organised by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) *6.30pm, Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, Brighton, BN1 1AF* (OTA - £3 / £1 unwaged) Chair: Lizzy Ali (Co-Chair, CLPD); Iona Baker (NPF Representative); Ann Black (NEC Member); Richard Burgon MP; Clive Lewis MP; Paul Mason; Steve Turner (Unite); Peter Willsman (CLPD)

Sunday 24th September

Football from Below - organised by Philosophy Football *11:00am, Community Base, 113 Queens Rd, Brighton BN1 3XG* (TWT) Mark Perryman (Editor of The Corbyn Effect and co-founder of Philosophy Football); Attila the Stockbroker (Punk Football Poet); Bobby Kasanga (Founder of Hackney Wick FC); Suzy Wrack (Sports Writer for The Guardian); Heather Wakefield (Head of Local Government at UNISON); Jacquie Agnew (Founder of Equality FC Initiative);

Joe Kennedy (Author of Games Without Frontiers); Kadeem Simmonds (Sports Editor for the Morning Star); Mark Doidge (Author of Fan Culture in European Football and the Influence of Left Wing Ideology); Naomi Westland (Director of Amnesty International UK's #FootballWelcomes Campaign); Steve North (Co-author of Build a Bonfire: How Football Fans United to Save Brighton). Read the *New Socialist* piece on Football from Below.

Cultural Democracy: Relaunching Arts for Labour *15:00pm, Fabrica, 40 Duke St, Brighton BN1 1AG* (TWT) Lois Stonock (Founder of the Jennie Lee Institute); Tracy Brabin MP (Shadow Minister for Early Years); Loraine Leeson (Visual Artist and Author of Art, Process, Change: Inside a Socially Situated Practice); Hamish Pirie (Associate Director at the Royal Court Theatre); Chris Sonnex (Associate Director at the Royal Court Theatre); Moussa Amine Sylla (Community Organiser at The Selby Centre); Hassan Mahamdallie (Playwright and Author of The Creative Case for Diversity); Hilary Wainwright (Fellow of the Transnational Institute and Co-editor of Red Pepper); Nabil Shaban (Actor and Founder of The Graeae); Peter Kennard (Visual Artist); Cat Phillips (Visual Artist)

BAME Representation and the Transformative Agenda *17:30pm, 68 Middle St, Brighton BN1 1AL* (TWT) Cecile Wright (Member of Momentum NCG); Huda Elmi (Member of Momentum NCG); Diane Abbott MP; Jon Lansman (Chair of Momentum); Claudia Webbe (Councillor in Islington and member of Labour's NEC); Imran Hussain MP; Kingsley Abrams (Activist for Unite the Union and the Momentum Black Caucus)

'Politics of a Parallel Reality': Understanding Corbynism *17:30pm, Fabrica, 40 Duke St, Brighton BN1 1AG* (TWT) Chair: Rosa Gilbert; Alex Nunns (Author of 'The Candidate'); Richard Seymour (Author of 'Jeremy Corbyn: The Strange Rebirth of Radical Politics'); Maya Goodfellow (Writer, Researcher, Columnist for Media Diversified and LabourList)

Winning for Labour - How We End Tory Austerity - organised by Labour Assembly Against Austerity and Unite the Union *5:45pm, Charlotte Room, The Grand,*

97-99 King's Rd, Brighton. BN1 2FW (LP) Chair: Steve Turner (Unite); Diane Abbott MP; Rebecca Long-Bailey MP; Richard Burgon MP; Cat Smith MP; Chris Williamson MP; Danielle Tiplady (Nurse & NHS campaigner); Roger McKenzie (UNISON); John McDonnell MP (invited)

Migration & Rights in Europe and Beyond - organised by Labour International & Brussels Labour *6:00pm, Durham Hall - Argyle, Hilton Brighton Metropole, Kings Road, Brighton. BN1 2FU* (LP) Chair: Colin O'Driscoll and Keir Fitch; Diane Abbott MP (Shadow Home Secretary); Jude Kirton-Darling MEP; Julie Ward MEP

Towards A Nuclear Free World: Cancel Trident Replacement, Support The Nuclear Ban - organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Labour CND and Labour Action for Peace *6:00pm, St Paul's Church, 60 West Street, Brighton, The City of Brighton and Hove BN1 2RE* (OTA) Chair: Kate Hudson (General Secretary, CND); Diane Abbott MP; Fabian Hamilton MP; Heather Wakefield (UNISON); Maya Goodfellow

Monday 25th September

Stuart Hall Reading Group: ***The Great Moving Right Show (1979)*** *9:30am; 68 Middle St, Brighton BN1 1AL* (TWT) Jeremy Gilbert, Professor of Cultural and Political Theory at the University of East London

Organising From The Roots: How Labour Can Empower Social Movements - organised by Labour Energy Forum and Platform London *12:00pm, Buddies Cafe Bar, 46-48 King's Rd, Brighton BN1 1NA* (OTA) Hilary Wainwright (Red Pepper); Councillor Aydin Dikerdem (Queenstown Battersea); Ewa Jasiewicz (Organiser, National Union of Teachers); Martin Smith (Head of Community Organising, The Labour Party (invited)); Amina Gichinga (Take Back the City (invited)); Pilgrim Tucker (Unite Community (invited)); Farzana Khan (Community & Youth Organiser, Voices that Shake & Platform)

John McDonnell's Speech to Conference *12.15pm, (LP, but live on BBC Parliament)*

Building an Industrial Strategy for the 21st century *15:00pm, Synergy Centre, 78 West St, 7 Middle St, Brighton BN1 2RA* (TWT) Alice Martin (Labour Party member and trade union activist); Rebecca Long-Bailey MP; Joe Guinan (Democracy Collaborative and Next System Project); Kate Hudson (Midlands Regional Secretary for CWU)

Ending Austerity Through Fairer Finance - organised by the Robin Hood Tax Campaign and Unite *5:30pm, Charlotte Room, The Grand, 97-99 King's Rd, Brighton. BN1 2FW* (LP) Chair: Gail Cartmail (Unite); John McDonnell MP; Ros Wynne-Jones (Daily Mirror); Faiza Shaheen (CLASS); David Hillman (Robin Hood Tax Campaign)

Priorities For A Socialist Government - organised by the Trade Union Coordinating Group *6:00pm, The Tudor Room, The Old Ship Hotel, King's Rd, Brighton, The City of Brighton and Hove, BN1 1NR* (OTA) Chair: Ian Hodgson, President, BFAWU; Matt Wrack, FBU; Yvonne Patterson, NAPO; Kevin Courtney, NUT; Mark Serwotka, PCS; John McDonnell MP

Governing from the Radical Left *7:30pm, Synergy Centre, 78 West St, 7 Middle St, Brighton BN1 2RA* (TWT) Paul Mason (Activist, author, and former Channel 4 News economics editor); John McDonnell MP; Theano Fotiou (Syriza's Alternate Minister of Social Solidarity)

Tuesday 26th September

Winning Scotland Back to Labour *11:00am, Komedia Studio, 44-47 Gardner St, Brighton BN1 1UN* (TWT) Grant Aitken (Member of Scottish Labour Young Socialists); Neil Findlay MSP; Danielle Rowley MP; Rhea Wolfson (Members' Representative on Labour's National Executive Committee)

Who Runs Britain: The Many or the Few? *11:00am, Fabrica, 40 Duke St, Brighton BN1 1AG* (TWT) Chair: Gail McAnena (Westminster co-editor, *New Socialist*); Laura Pidcock MP; Jon Trickett MP

Resisting dictatorship in Turkey and building a democratic alternative in Syria – the critical role of the Kurds in defining a new Middle East - organised by Unite, Peace In Kurdistan and the Freedom For Ocalan Campaign *12.30pm, Charlotte Room, The Grand, 97-99 King's Rd, Brighton. BN1 2FW* (LP)

Corbynism from Below - organised by *New Socialist 1:00pm, Synergy Centre, 78 West St, 7 Middle St, Brighton BN1 2RA* (TWT) Chair: Tom Gann (Theory and Strategy co-editor of *New Socialist*); Dawn Foster (journalist and Author of Lean Out); Maya Goodfellow (Writer, Researcher, Columnist for Media Diversified and LabourList); Laura Pidcock MP; Hilary Wainwright (Fellow of the Transnational Institute and Co-editor of Red Pepper); Matt Zarb-Cousin (Campaign for Fairer Gambling and former spokesperson for Jeremy Corbyn)

Screening of *Dispossession: The Great Social Housing Swindle* *17.30pm, 68 Middle St, Brighton BN1 1AL* (TWT - suggested donation of £3 to cover costs) Followed by Q&A with the director Paul Sng (read our interview with Paul)

Labour - Government In Waiting - organised by the Labour Representation Committee *6:30pm, Main Hall, Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, Brighton, BN1 1AF* (OTA) Chair: Clare Wadey (Vice-Chair, Labour Representation Committee); John McDonnell MP; Matt Wrack (General Secretary, FBU); Mark Serwotka (General Secretary, PCS); Ian Hodson (National President, BFAWU); Chris Williamson MP; Kathy Runswick

Wednesday 27th September

Jeremy Corbyn's speech to Conference *12.15pm, (LP, but live on BBC Parliament)*

4

Austerity is not Gender Neutral

by Labour Women Leading

Austerity is not gender neutral. The Labour Party's analysis indicates that 86% of the burden of austerity since 2010 has fallen on women; not only through attacks on services for women and girls such as those experiencing domestic violence, but cuts affecting all aspects of women's lives.

Tory policies have left many women in dreadful situations – unable to make their wages stretch far enough, they are forced to turn to foodbanks in ever higher numbers. School holidays mean holiday hunger for many families. Many women, some juggling caring for children and supporting older relatives with multiple paid jobs, are exhausted. Women are left with no choice but to stay in exploitative relationships because they have nowhere else to go. Women at university are in huge debt, while WASPI women are plunged into poverty. Hate crime such as Islamophobia is on the rise, leaving BAME women facing multiple forms of discrimination and oppression.

The UN's recent findings that the government was guilty of "systematic viola-

tions" of the rights of people with disabilities should have been a catalyst for positive change, but the Tories have simply dismissed them. In contrast, the last Labour Party manifesto offered real hope to millions of women, with transformative policies. A £10 per hour minimum wage, investment in housing and childcare provision, and bolstering rights at work are policies which would change many people's lives for the better. Ending student fees and lifting the public sector pay cap would enable women to reach their full potential, and to continue to continue to play a vital role in public services, after their tireless efforts in the forefront of the fight against austerity.

There is a huge surge of interest in politics, with the Labour Party now the largest left-of-centre political party in Europe. People want to be involved, to campaign and to build a more just society. Ensuring that women from all backgrounds are heard, and that their priorities are central to debate, is essential. This not only benefits women, but the whole movement. Not all Labour Party structures yet facilitate engagement and support people in their efforts to be more active, but members are now demanding change to ensure that the party becomes genuinely democratic - and they are organising for that change, including through initiatives like Labour Women Leading

We are however profoundly disappointed that the arrangements for this year's Labour Party's Women's Conference have been badly communicated. It does not have the resources and standing that it needs. It cannot consider resolutions and has no mechanism to impact on the main conference. We hope that this will be addressed next year and that Jean Crocker and Teresa Clark - both of whom are also backed by both Momentum and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy - are elected to the Women's Conference Arrangements Committee to help ensure this happens.

The NEC's recent decision to make nearly 50 of Labour's top target seats women only shortlists is great news. The left now has to provide support and encouragement to women who will argue for policies which address the core concerns of women in those constituencies and across the country. The recent general elec-

tion saw some outstanding women elected, and they need to be joined by many more. If this opportunity is not taken, we will let down the millions of women who need urgent and radical change.

Our politics looks to tackle economic injustice, to engage with people living on working-class estates, trapped in insecure work, and who feel that they have been ignored too often by politicians of all parties in the past. Women now make up the majority of Labour's supporters, and their voice matters. Under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, party policies have broad popular appeal. We need to involve women in campaigning and to empower them to take up leadership roles at all levels.

A number of activists who support the party's policies have been developing the Labour Women Leading network, to enable women to share experiences and provide mutual support. Critically, we want to ensure that women understand party structures and can play a full role across the movement. A very successful event was held in the spring, and there will be a fringe meeting in Brighton over conference weekend, with leading women MPs and trades unionists speaking.

Change is in the air across Britain. Women are currently involved in disputes such as the BA Mixed Fleet, the McDonald's strike and the campaign against the public sector pay cap. We have a proud history of tackling sexism and discrimination in our movement, and we are fighting to ensure that before long there will be a Labour Government in power which will deliver genuine empowerment, justice and equality.

Labour Women Leading's fringe meeting will take place from 5.30 pm till 7.15 pm on 23 September at the Brighthelm Centre, North Road, BN1 1YD. Speakers include MPs Diane Abbott, Cat Smith and Emma Dent Coad as well as former NUT general secretary Christine Blower, barrister and activist Liz Davies and Labour NEC member Claudia Webbe.

5

The NPF and Party Policy at Conference

by Chris MacMackin

One of the promises made during Jeremy Corbyn's leadership campaigns was for greater membership involvement in policy formation. According to the Labour Party rule book (Chapter 1, Clause V, 2):

> Party conference shall decide from time to time what specific proposals of legislative, financial or administrative reform shall be included in the Party programme. This shall be based on the rolling programme of work of the National Policy Forum. No proposal shall be included in the final Party programme unless it has been adopted by the Party conference by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the votes recorded on a card vote.

Introduced in the Blair years, the National Policy Forum (NPF) is supposed to bring together different components of the party to do the detailed work needed

for policy formation. It replaced the previous process whereby policy was developed through motions passed at conference. Party members are involved by submitting evidence to the NPF and electing a portion of its members. However, what we have seen in practice is that the NPF produces vague, meaningless documents which, while appearing to be free of any politics, reproduce the neoliberal assumptions of the Labour right. These get rubber-stamped by conference and may or may not be a constraint on the manifesto, for which it is supposed to be the basis. If the NPF documents are poor and the leadership has not kept to those narrow limits then this could be used against it by the right of the party.

With the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader, one would have hoped that this would change. However, this year's set of annual reports from the NPF fits the old pattern. Though published with no publicity, the NPF has the audacity to claim that "We want as many people as possible to get involved". The best of the reports, each of which correspond to a different policy area covered by one of the NPF's eight commissions, only bring policy in line with the June election manifesto. Others are, in fact, to the right of the manifesto and commit to continued neoliberalism. None of the reports come to clear conclusions about the main problems of the area discussed (with the partial exception of the Business and Economy report). None give any idea about alternative solutions considered or provide any background materials.

In frustration with the low quality work being produced by the NPF, a group of party members (including this author) came together on the Left Futures website to critique as many of the reports as possible. In the end, reviews were produced for all of them except the Justice and Home Affairs report. These reviews were collected together into a document which is being distributed as widely as possible within the party prior to conference, where there will be a vote on whether to approve the NPF reports. Unfortunately, there has been little interest from the national leadership of Momentum or the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. Without the backing of the organised Labour left, the reviews will depend on the grassroots for dissemination.

The Early Years, Education, and Skills report sets the pattern by listing the broad topics discussed at commission meetings but giving no indication of what was actually said about them. Where issues are identified, no progress is made towards offering solutions. No mention is made of academies or free schools. While the party is opposed to new grammar schools, it appears nothing will be done about existing ones. A number of progressive commitments made in the manifesto receive no mention, prompting the question of how the body tasked with developing policy can be so far behind the party's stated position.

However, the Economy, Business, and Trade report is somewhat better and in line with the Keynesian approach of the manifesto. Some good policies are mentioned such as improved workers' rights, a national industrial strategy, rejection of austerity, and new forms of social ownership. However, it fails to offer the detailed research needed for economic policy. It also rejects directive planning from central government, glosses over questions of whether the private sector would cooperate with its industrial strategy, continues to pander too much to fears of deficits, and fails to address the dominance of the financial sector. Nonetheless, this represents the strongest of the NPF reports.

The reports covering Environment, Energy, and Transport suffer many of the same weaknesses of the one on Education. Once again, no detail is given of what was discussed at meetings or of solutions to the identified issues. The only type of transport discussed at any length is local bus services, with a meaningless call made for a "national strategy". On energy, there appears to be a continued commitment to the liberalised market, with only limited, decentralised forms of public ownership considered. Concerningly, submissions from the membership are only mentioned if they coincide with what the commission wanted to say. For example, a submission arguing for national public ownership of electricity and an end to the energy market receives no acknowledgement.

Also, the Health and Care report is another which is behind the election manifesto in its thinking. It has not confronted trends in health privatisation or dared to criticise the internal market in NHS England. Nothing is done to address the

question of how to fund social care. Nor does the report consider how social care is structured and funded. In particular, it needs to face up to how social care is fragmented across the country depending on the local authority, provided mostly by the private sector, and heavily means tested, making it very different from the NHS.

The material produced on Housing fails to address the scale of the affordability crisis in this country. The goal of building 100,000 council homes a year (which is not very ambitious) is mentioned but nothing is said about how this will be funded. Labour appears to continue to support policies for the "squeezed middle", such as reducing barriers for first-time home buyers, rather than focusing on the genuinely struggling. No attention is given to planning law or how property is taxed.

The International report is very conservative in its defence of the status quo. Brexit negotiations are framed around the assumption of current trading relations being optimal, with no analysis given to justify this. It claims an "evidence-led" defence policy, seemingly unaware of the fact that the same evidence can lead to different policies depending on one's morals and goals. Furthermore, little evidence is actually provided. The report is unflinching in its support of Trident, NATO, and the "special relationship" with the US, assuming the latter two always to be virtuous. Its rhetoric is nationalistic, placing the interests of Britain ahead of those of the wider world. No mention is made of the more progressive elements of foreign policy contained in the manifesto.

Finally, the Work, Pensions, and Equality report shows that the NPF has acceded to much of Tory policy. Universal Credit and other reforms seems to be accepted in principle, despite being vastly inferior to the systems they replaced. There is no commitment to lift the household benefit cap, despite it driving more children into poverty—an issue about which the commission claims to be concerned. The notion that people are always better off in work, no matter what the job (and despite the negative effect this has on productivity), goes unchallenged.

It is clear that major problems exist in the output of the National Policy Forum.

The leftward move in the party leadership has not reached the NPF and, as a result, it continues to churn out much the same neoliberal policy as before. The leadership's position and the Left's hold on the party will remain tenuous if the grassroots does not gain control of basic party functions such as policy formation. Furthermore, any Corbyn government will quickly be forced into retreat unless it has detailed, well thought out policy available which it can implement.

In previous years, conference has approved NPF reports as a matter of course. This year, for the first time, delegates will have a chance to vote on individual reports rather than on all of them as a package. It is hoped that delegates will take the time to read the NPF reports and these reviews, so that they may consider if adequate progress has been made in advancing policy over the past year. If conference rejects even one of the NPF reports then this would send a strong message demanding the membership's right to play a role forming policy.

6

Introducing The Politics of Contemporary Motherhood and Mums4Corbyn

Mums4Corbyn will be holding three events, Home Truths: Housing is A Feminist Issue, Radical Demands from the Grassroots and Whose Job is it anyway? Radical Childcare, at which Andrea Marie will be speaking, at The World Transformed in Brighton on September 23rd.

The idea of Mums4Corbyn, that is mothers organising as mothers within a Corbyn-led or left-led Labour Party (the point is not so much about Corbyn as an individual), raises two fundamental questions. To put these in the simplest way, “Why Mums?” and “Why Corbyn?”, or put more precisely, if Mums4Corbyn is mothers organising with qualified autonomy within Labour, why qualified?, or why autonomy? This can be clarified by addressing the two broad alternatives to Mums4Corbyn and, finally by addressing what it is that these alternatives share that limits them.

The first alternative, then, attached to “Why Mums?” is why organise with any

degree of autonomy within Labour (or the labour movement more widely), why not organise merely as individuals within Labour, Momentum or Trade Unions? What's so special, politically, about being a mother? Mothers, especially working class mothers have always been excluded from the two dominant Labour traditions, the traditional limited working-class politics of labourism on the one hand and the middle-class, technocratic modernisation from above represented most consistently by Fabianism. These at first may appear antagonistic, but are, in fact, mutually dependent and, approaching them through the question of motherhood, can precisely reveal this mutual dependence. This exclusion of mothers is not contingent, nor accidental, it is grounded in the deep structures of these traditions and, ultimately, in their acceptance of a broadly subordinate position within British capitalism.

Corbynism, to an extent (and this is part of "Why Corbyn?"), is a break from these traditions. However, at present, both because of tendencies internal to Corbynism and because of the deep institutional inertia of the Labour Party apparatus, Corbynism only represents a qualified and vulnerable break. Significantly more is required, whether in terms of institutionalised party culture, or policy, or the general theoretical attitude (and this is a theoretical attitude which is strongly practically expressed and reproduced), for mothers to be included adequately within the labour movement. This, and the range of positive changes that go far beyond the interests of working class mothers (whilst these interests are always necessarily central), justify the need for mothers organising autonomously within the Labour Party.

Why Mothers?

Labourism

The 'labourist' tendency in the Labour Party has often excluded women and struggles around reproduction, indeed it could be argued that it is constituted, to an extent, by precisely this exclusion. This is because this tendency stems from the importance of the organisation of a particular section of the working class in the inception of the labour movement and then how this privileging has been institutionally reproduced along with the continuation, for some time, of its material bases. Stuart Hall describes how this configuration organised predominantly in workplaces and were formative in instituting the movement's political and cultural forms:

> For this skilled and semi-skilled manual working class stratum defined the dominant patterns of industrial unionism at a formative stage of the labour movement. It is also where the traditions of militancy and struggle are nurtured in the popular memory of the movement. It also defined the culture of the working class movement (1982, p. 17).

Although they later describe how the politics of the miners strikes went beyond their labourist tendencies, Hilary Wainwright and Doreen Massey describe these communities, that were initially emblematic of this type of politics, as

> Predominantly white; they are socially conservative; traditional sexual divisions of labour – woman as home-maker, man as bread-winner – have been deeply ingrained…Their politics have been workplace-based. They are the fiefdoms of one of the most important unions in labour movement history, symbolizing – at least for men – the old strengths of a solidarity born of mutual dependence at work, and the reliance of a whole community on a single

industry…They are heartlands of labourism [1].

It is not only that women were not subject to the politicisation of work place struggles; they did have a role that included them in the social whole of the wider world of labour through their, often strictly policed, separation; that is, they were included by being excluded. As Lise Vogel argues, capitalism is unique in "forc[ing] a severe spatial, temporal, and institutional separation between domestic labour and the capitalist production-process" [2]. The separation of domestic labour from wage labour means labourist struggles are strictly separated from and do nothing to improve the conditions of women in the spaces of reproductive labour. Moreover, this also means that the traditional spaces of the acquisition of class consciousness, even as women's labour in the household worked to support labourist struggles carried out largely by and for men, were alien both structurally and experientially to the majority of women. As Hall acknowledges, "working class unity and labour movement fraternity have often been underpinned by certain versions of masculinity, traditionalism and domestic respectability" (1982, p. 19).

Labour Modernisation

On the other hand, where the Labour Party has rejected these labourist tendencies, such as in Fabianism and reaching the highest point of this rejection in the New Labour era, it has predominantly done so as part of an agenda which often deploys a critique (Hall) of "the patriarchalism of leadership, hierarchy and authority which so strongly marks earlier styles of political and industrial organisation" (1982, p. 19) to justify forms of modernisation from above. Here it is necessary to distinguish the thrust and intention of Hall's work from the (mis)use of it by New Labour. Part of this move to modernise was based on the understanding

[1] Hilary Wainwright and Doreen Massey, "Beyond the Coalfields: The Work of the Miners' Support Groups" in Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners' Strike, London: Schoken, 1985, p. 149.

[2] Lise Vogel, Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Towards a Unitary Theory, Chicago, Haymarket, 2013, p. 159.

that labourism was an old-fashioned waning class politics that no longer held any relevance or power in modern Britain. This was because, as the working class was being recomposed in the final third of the twentieth century, the material basis for 'labourist' political forms was being dismantled. This lead occupational communities like the miners to be viewed, in Wainwright and Massey's words, as "'old fashioned', sectional and, by implication, bankrupt. Male manual workers, the old working class with a vengeance, fighting to save jobs in what is officially described as a declining industry, state-owned and located in isolated declining regions" [3].

The lack of faith in the industrial and organisational strength of that part of the class which had defined the movement in its labourist formation meant, further, that any attempt to define purposes oppositional to capital, it was felt, had to be relinquished. Labour politics had to adapt itself to a pragmatic acquiescence to capitalist purposes and accept the limitations imposed by a technocratic top-down model of politics tinkering around the edges of, but ultimately not challenging, the shift in power from labour to capital. Raymond Williams explains in 1967 how

> The discussion about 'modernized Britain' is not about what sort of society, qualitatively, is being aimed at, but simply about how modernization is to be achieved. All programmes and perspectives are treated instrumentally. As a model of social change, modernization crudely foreshortens the historical development of society. Modernization is the ideology of the never-ending present. The whole past belongs to 'traditional' society, and modernization is a technical means for breaking with the past without creating a future" (2013, p. 40).

For Silvia Federici, there is a symbiosis between the way a left modernisation agenda views women and the Global South:

[3] Wainwright and Massey, "Beyond the Coalfields", p. 149.

> In this sense, there is an immediate connection between the strategy the Left has for women and the strategy it has for the "Third World."…In both cases they presume that the "underdeveloped"- those of us who are unwaged and work at a lower technological level- are backward with respect to the "real working class"…In both cases, the struggle which the Left offers to the wageless, the "underdeveloped," is not a struggle against capitalism, but a struggle for capital, in a more rationalized, developed and productive form. In our case, they offer us not only the "right to work" (this they offer to every worker), but the right to work more [4].

In New Labour, this analogous attempt to modernise in both international and domestic policy can be seen in the justifications of the wars in Iraq and, in particular in Afghanistan – as intervening on behalf of women's rights against a pre-modern backward society, and also in their framing of withdrawal of support from women and families as offering a way to advance women's equality by ending their 'dependence'. For example, when Labour won office in 1997, they enacted the previous Conservative government's plans to cut income support. Supporting the cuts to lone parent premium which she had previously opposed, Harriet Harman called the impoverishment of single mothers, "a pioneering programme which marks a radical new approach to welfare, bringing work, skills, opportunities and ambition".

That the political equality of women within a modernisation frame ultimately runs alongside and articulates capitalist purposes, is, explains Vogel, inevitable given its "material roots in capitalist relations of production." Vogel explains how "individual freedom" is "bound to class-exploitation by the very logic of capitalist reproduction" [5]. Going back to Marx, this is because of the need to free labour-power for exchange in the market, engendering that double sense of freedom - that workers freely meet (not being bound by feudal bondage or slavery) with

[4] Silvia Federici, Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle, Oakland, PM Press, 2012, pp. 29-30.

[5] Vogel, Marxism and the Oppression of Women, p. 171.

the owners of the commodity, capital, to sell their labour-power as a commodity, but also, that they are free from other means of survival, forcing bearers of labour-power into the exploitative conditions of production. As Vogel explains:

> Marx devoted considerable effort to showing that this exchange of equivalents 'on the basis of equal rights' of buyer and seller goes hand in hand with the exploitation characteristic of capitalist production. In the sphere of circulation, paradoxically, the requirements of the capitalist mode of production itself decrees that equality must reign [6].

This does not mean struggles for political equality are futile; equality is "a real tendency" [7] carrying material effects, it does mean, however, that equality in the sphere of circulation is compatible with, and logically bound to, exploitation in the sphere of production. While struggles to obtain equal rights and freedoms have the potential to go beyond themselves because of their ability to organise the working class; when posed in a modernisation frame that does not aim at the transformation of society, it risks aiding "the perfection of the conditions for the free sale of labour-power" [8].

In this way, the Labour Party's modernisation agenda has been ambiguous; while transforming sexist discourse and increasing equal opportunities both in the Party and wider society, introducing positive discrimination in all-women short-lists and at work, this has gone hand in hand with removing the means of survival from families precisely in order to end women's dependence. This is based on an understanding that views not only the Party and society as backward, but women themselves, and is how a seemingly modernising liberal agenda can go hand in hand with authoritarian interventions into those women and their families who are resistant to change.

[6] Vogel, Marxism and the Oppression of Women, p. 170.

[7] Vogel, Marxism and the Oppression of Women, p. 171.

[8] Vogel, Marxism and the Oppression of Women, p. 174.

The Division of Women's Lives from Politics

While seemingly at odds with one another, the labourist and modernising tendencies in the Labour Party are in fact founded on the same sharp separation of the every day lives and struggles of women from the terrain of politics.

Labourist struggles taking place in predominantly male workplaces were premised on the sexual division of labour and did little to directly improve the conditions of women in the spaces of reproductive labour or challenge sexist cultures and practices excluding women. So too, modernising tendencies, while seeking to overcome the discrimination that kept women away from the workplace, equally, did nothing to transform the position of women in the household, or, for that matter, their working conditions in production, with 'women's jobs' often repeating the conditions and undervaluation of their domestic role. A 'modernising' view that sees women's domestic position improve as they enter employment fails to see that it is "not the sex-division of labour or the family per se – that materially underpins the perpetration of women's oppression and inequality in capitalist society" [9]. Rather, as Susan Ferguson and David McNally write, summarising Vogel's argument,

> The socio-material roots of women's oppression under capitalism have to do instead with the structural relationship of the household to the reproduction of capital: capital and the state need to be able to regulate their biological capacity to produce the next generation of labourers so that labour-power is available for exploitation [10].

Federici critiques the Left in its modernising mode for

> [Translating] their ignorance of the specific relation of women to capital into a theory of women's political backwardness to be overcome only by our entering the factory gates. Thus, the logic of an

[9] Vogel, Marxism and the Oppression of Women, p. 177.

[10] Vogel, Marxism and the Oppression of Women, p. xxv.

> analysis that sees women's oppression as caused by the exclusion from capitalist relations inevitably results in a strategy for us to enter these relations rather than destroy them [11].

In this way, working class mothers are central to capitalism; exploited as direct producers in the sphere of production, as working class men are, but also, subject to the functional disciplining of men on capital's behalf to ensure they fulfil they're role in social reproduction. That is, the reproduction of that 'special commodity' labour power, which is the source of the capitalist's profit, and which, in turn, links women to the work of wider domestic labour of daily maintenance and care, which, uniquely in capitalism, is spatially, temporally and institutionally separated from other processes of labour, in private households.

Standing at the sharp end of these contradictions between production and re-production in capitalism means working class mothers have a unique standpoint from which to understand and struggle against it – something which is often a necessity, not a choice. This echoes what Lukács writes about the standpoint of the proletarian:

For the proletarian the total knowledge of its class-situation was a vital necessity, a matter of life and death; because its class situation becomes comprehensible only if the whole of society can be understood; and because this understanding is the inescapable precondition of its actions. Thus the unity of theory and practice is only the reverse side of the social and historical position of the proletariat. From its own point of view, self-knowledge coincides with knowledge of the whole so that the proletariat is at one and the same time the subject and object of its knowledge [12].

Mothers, similarly, understand their situation under capitalism. We know how difficult it is to meet the requirements of a job and find time to care for our children. We, especially if we are lone mothers, know how hard it is to make ends meet

[11] Federici, Revolution at Point Zero, p. 28.

[12] Georg Lukács, History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics, Exeter, Imprint Digital, 2010, p. 20.

on a wage that undervalues our work and can never cover the costs of raising children. It is this necessity, as various pieces in our Motherhood series will show, that not only means mothers grasp their situation theoretically, but that this grasping can confront it, practically, as "a matter of life and death" for us and our children. This may be a question of struggling for access to the means of survival, for example, against housing benefit cuts (and their eugenicist intentions and implications), it may be direct confrontation over housing, as in Mary Barbour's army and the Glasgow rent strike; it may be, armed with this understanding, for radical innovations as in Alexandra Kollantai's vision for a network of children's centres; it may be for the proper resourcing of care work or better support for feeding babies. But it may go beyond the limits of demanding state resources, whether this is in communal struggles against loneliness or against the targeting of children by police and the judicial system, all of which are explored in our series.

Why Labour?

Corbyn and the new 'New Left'

Corbyn has provided an opportunity to move beyond the labourist and modernising tendencies of the Labour Party, taking up some of the demands of mother's struggles to address these issues from an expanded site of politics. On a policy level this may include a commitment to forms of rent control, making access to the means of survival more affordable, or, more speculatively, as documented in the *Alternative Models of Ownership* report, to developing forms of economic democracy whereby the struggles of everyday life and of reproduction can impact on and even determine production.

In this way, Corbyn is bringing to bear on the Party today some of the New Left struggles he was a part of in the 1980s. As Wainwright examines in Labour: A

Tale of Two Parties, the efforts of the socialist feminists did a great deal to extend the appeal of the Party beyond male sectional interests, and extend the sites of politics beyond workplaces. In taking up the insights of socialist feminism, the New Left was also able to go beyond Labour's technocratic Fabian tendencies, with Wainwright explaining that, for the women's sections within Labour,

> The liberation of women is not a matter of political equality alone. Unless women also have economic independence, and control over their own bodies and sexuality, unless child care and other domestic work is reorganised, then women will still, whatever their formal rights, be subordinate. This approach frequently leads the new women's sections to work with groups of women involved in social, community and economic issues which the rest of the party, left and right, does not consider 'political' [13].

Through this approach, although met with resistance, women were able to expand the sites of political struggle beyond work-places and production. Labourism saw the "factory, office or enterprise" as "a black box with the value of labour power going in one end, and surplus value coming out of the other", and viewed politics as a "confrontation between sectional interests" [14] over the spoils; while Labour's technocratic tendency accepted capital's victory for these spoils and concentrated its efforts on the 'efficiency' of the process, hoping that this would persuade capital to trickle down its wealth. Here, then, the labourist and the technocratic tendency can be shown to be mutually dependent. Both the kinds of processes of social reproduction required to produce 'the value of labour power' as well as what went on inside the 'black box', which was a site of struggle taken up by 1980s New Unionism and other parts of the Labour left, were politicised, addressing the concerns of women, both as the new workers of capitalism and within households as primary carers, and, often, now performing the 'double shift'.

[13] Hilary Wainwright, Labour: A Tale of Two Parties, London, Hogarth Press, 1987, p. 166.

[14] Wainwright, A Tale of Two Parties, p. 256.

However, Corbyn's readoption of these struggles in the Labour Party today have not gone far enough. For example, rent controls, for Williams, by aiming to "take rents out of politics", were opaque, hard to enforce and based on a compromise between the interests of landlord and tenant, compared to the rigid, clear forms under the Wilson government. This lead William's to complain that "the government has sacrificed many of those most in need of protection" (2013, p. 24)). Even more tellingly and obviously for the lives of mothers, Labour's existing childcare policies risk a slide into technocracy and the more efficient meeting of the needs of capitalist society rather than the expansive, democratic and co-operative implications that could be drawn out from the *Alternative Models of Ownership* report.

Organising as Mums4Corbyn means that, in the same ways as women's sections did as part of the New Left in the 1980s, we can push the potential of this break in a way that other alternatives cannot.

Liberal and Anarchist Alternatives

The alternatives pull in two directions, one that can be characterised as broadly 'liberal', one as broadly 'anarchist'. Both these tendencies would respond to the very clear limits of Labour as it stands when it comes to women, and particularly mothers, by organising independently of Labour.

From the liberal perspective this would mean accepting the broad categories of the state and parliamentarianism with all its mediations (all its mediations perhaps except for political parties), and organise around awareness raising and lobbying of MPs and government to improve policies and cultural understanding of the issues faced by motherhood.

From the anarchist perspective, this would mean an absolute refusal of the state and its mediations, favouring grassroots organising of mothers both to challenge the state directly, for example, over Labour councils' "gatekeeping" practices with

housing support, or organising to directly meet mothers' needs without any state mediation.

The first response to this is to point to the pure numbers involved in Labour, even in terms of the direct meeting of needs, a Party of hundreds of thousands of members with a significant presence in almost every community is potentially (but only potentially, the struggles of "Why Mums?" are key to realising this potential) a formidable weapon.

Secondly, Corbynism - at least those tendencies within it which break with labourism and technocracy - is at least potentially porous to social movement organisation as it was in the 80s New Left, which Corbyn was a part of:

> Many individuals from the new left, the left that both initiated and were attracted to the party by the reform movement in the last seventies…learnt from the tactics and of mass movements like CND, the women's movement and black community politics. This persuasive, outward-going kind of politics is particularly clear in the behaviour of the new breed of MP and parliamentary candidate: Jeremy Corbyn in Islington [15].

This porosity to social movements can be a means to challenge those entrenched interests and practices hostile to working class mothers within the Party itself. Moreover, a Party, which is already in government in Wales, already runs local councils across the country and which is potentially the next government in Westminster, and which is potentially radically transformed and democratised- a potential only unevenly met at present, will be a valuable instrument for unifying theory and practice, for bringing the experiences and struggles of mothers to bear on policy in a way which can transform lives beyond heroic local efforts at organising for survival.

The rejection of the anarchist perspective on autonomous organising can only be made good on if the Party is transformed beyond its mutually dependent

[15] Wainwright, A Tale of Two Parties, p. 163.

labourism and technocracy, that is, by responding to the pressures enacted in the “Why Mums?” side of the question. Ultimately, moreover, both potential critiques of “Why Mums?” and “Why Corbyn?” rely on a sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit set of separations which are fundamental to capitalist society, these are the strict separations between politics, the economy (and a further separation between production and reproduction, a separation which occludes reproduction) and a third term, which could be denoted by community, culture, if culture is broadly understood, or everyday life. Labourism and Fabianism are mutually dependent, for example, within Labour with the idea labourist struggles take care of the economy and Fabian managerialism takes care of politics, liberal autonomism, privileges purely a narrowly understood idea of politics and a vague and narrow notion of culture, whilst the anarchist critique entirely centres struggles in the economy of everyday life. Ultimately, the standpoint of working class mothers can unfold a perspective that unifies these sites against capitalism and the state in all its dimensions.

7

Women and Childcare in Capitalism: A Dialectical and Materialist Study - Part 4: Reformism as Response: Transforming Childcare Now

Andrea Marie will be speaking at Mums4Corbyn's session Whose Job is it anyway? Radical Childcare at The World Transformed in Brighton on September 23rd.

This is the last Part of a four part examination of the care of children under capitalism, which draws extensively on Lise Vogel's (2013) *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* in order to theorise exactly how childcare functions in the UK today[1] and to suggest alternatives.

[1] Raymond Williams, "Notes on Marxism in Britain since 1945" in Culture and Materialism, London, Verso, 2005.

Part One examined how the establishment of childcare outside the home in capitalist society is vulnerable to co-option by capitalist purposes for both production and reproduction, and I summarised Vogel's central thesis in order to explain how.

Part Two explored how this co-option functions in the current situation, and the exact ways childcare is used to facilitate women's work and stabilise the rearing of children both through childcare inside and outside the home.

Part Three looked at how childcare can be deployed in other ways to those dictated by the purposes of capitalism, drawing on Nancy Fraser's understanding of how the sites of class struggle can be widened beyond the productive realm in order to redraw the boundaries between production and reproduction. To inquire how childcare can be reclaimed for our own purposes rather than ceding them to capitalism, I used both William Morris and Alexandra Kollontai to explore how the sites and nature of both work and care can be transformed.

Finally, this is Part Four which discusses how this transformation can be initiated today, understanding reformism as a potential part of a revolutionary strategy, and suggesting sites of struggle that working class women can take up to influence Labour Party politics.

4. Reformism as Response: Transforming Childcare Inside and Outside the Home Now

As argued above, capitalism poses a huge problem for childcare, standing at it does at the crossroads between the contradictions of production and reproduction. It appears inevitable that these contradictions will be resolved, or given "room to move" (p. 198), by free riding on the unpaid labour of women. Given these profound challenges to providing good childcare outside the home in capitalism, it seems difficult to suggest a way forward within capitalist society without reverting to an abstract, and ultimately idealist, position of total anti-capitalist opposition, that objects to any practical improvements as a compromise, and indeed a distraction from the only serious task, that of overthrowing capitalism

itself.

This requires a consideration of a form of reformism that involves a total understanding of society and of the limits imposed by capitalism, this kind of reformism is suggested in Raymond Williams's notion of "reformism as response"[2]. This kind of reformism must be distinguished, firstly, from an ameliorative reformism in which, perhaps, as with the struggle to shorten the length of the working day, the workers' movement may act in the interests of capitalism in the long-term against the short-term interests of capitalists, as Marx argues, uninterrupted by struggle, capitalism "undermines the original sources of all wealth – the soil and the worker". It is in this way that demands for childcare in the name of 'education' against childcare for maternal employment have been deployed (see Part One), but, in fact, are often a way to assert capital's long-term need to stabilise social reproduction against the short-term need for profit through freeing women for capitalist production. Secondly, reformism as response must be distinguished from a reformism of transitional demands which is, essentially, a crude pedagogical strategy that does not, in the last instance, aim at real reforms but at mobilising around demands which while "reasonable", capitalism cannot meet.

Reformism as response for Williams proceeds from a particular situation, and the state and capital's failure to meet human needs, but then, both in theory and practice, pushes beyond the limited and particular so that "one struggle connects with and implies another"[3]. Childcare, precisely because of how it stands within absolutely fundamental contradictions within capitalism, certainly has this dynamic possibility. There are then three fundamental aspects of a reformism as response when it comes to childcare. Firstly, that childcare cannot be addressed on its own, it implicates other struggles, one of the most notable of which is over work, particularly the length of the working day. Secondly, that a reformism as response is part of the radical end of boundary struggles- an attempt to go beyond simply providing some relief to women from their double shift of productive

[2]Raymond Williams, "Notes on Marxism in Britain since 1945" in Culture and Materialism, London, Verso, 2005.

[3]Williams, "Notes on Marxism in Britain since 1945", p. 248.

and reproductive labour, through potentially revolutionary struggles against these spatial distinctions of capitalism that are central to women's oppression. Thirdly, that even if capitalism cannot be overcome in the short-run, that any serious child-care reformism must be anti-capitalist. It is in this vein that the following reforms are suggested.

Work

Shorter Working Week

One key demand that attacks the boundary between waged and domestic labour, based on an understanding that the real length of the working day does not end after returning from paid work, is to shorten the working week. This would increase the time available for those domestic aspects of necessary labour for which workers are not paid, including care of children, as well as attacking the amount of surplus labour capital extracts from paid workers.

Demands for an eight hour day were beginning to be formulated at the time of the Industrial Revolution. Since then, the working day has been naturalised, with an eight hour day established as the norm and even extended. Although struggles against zero hours contracts, bogus self-employment and piecework are important to resist the demand for complete availability to work, our struggles need to go beyond being defensive with a clear demand for a shorter week, that, between paid work and unpaid work, may even provide some time to recuperate.

A pilot project in a Swedish care home found a shorter six hour working day improved wellbeing among both staff and residents, and, crucially, was particularly beneficial to carers of children:

> The perceived health of the care workers increased considerably in relation to stress and alertness. This was especially apparent in child-caring age groups. Having longer to recuperate and spend time with family is evidently an important factor in creating a sustainable work-life balance.

The way this article frames this experiment is in terms of the long-term interests of capital against overwhelming attacks on the scheme as "too expensive", desperate to show that

> Some of the cost of employing the new care workers is offset by lower payments from the social security system, and the net increase in cost drops to approximately 10%. It is worth noticing that the calculation still doesn't take into account any long-term effects, which are sure to lower the total even further.

However, although phrased as ameliorative reforms, the strength of capital's opposition to something which, in some ways would benefit it, reveals how the potential breaking down of certain constitutive boundaries of capitalism and the empowering of workers - especially women workers, through this measure, is a greater problem for capital than the deterioration of the work-force and the expense to society of "unemployment, poor working conditions, early retirement and sick leave".

Here perhaps the clearest theoretical parallel may be found in Michal Kalecki's "Political Aspects of Full Employment", and the argument that, "there is a political background in the opposition to the full employment doctrine, even though the arguments advanced are economic". In other words, even if the capitalist economy may be more efficient under conditions of full employment, a significant disciplinary power over the working class would be lost to capital. In the Swedish case, this political challenge to capital is less about discipline, more about the constitutive, internal boundaries of capitalism, those that underpin women's oppression, being challenged. Once this political perspective is introduced, beyond the ameliorative reformist perspective of the contradiction between capital's short and long term interests, capital's political stake in the boundaries that partially cause women's oppression should become clear. For a challenge to the length of the working day combines demands for better conditions for production and reproduction and unites women and men in that struggle.

Care Bank

While a shorter working week goes some way to recognising that the real length of the working day includes work in the domestic sphere as well, it needs to go hand in hand with a recognition not only of its existence, but of its importance. Recognising care as labour that can resist commodification, providing a potential site of work that, following Morris, is governed by "social morality, the responsibility of man towards the life of man", it is also a potential critique of productive labour that does not meet the real needs of people, advocating "work for livelihood, instead of working to supply the demand of the profit market".

This means people, particularly women, need to be better resourced in order to undertake this important work, which would also begin to transform the conditions (of submission, isolation and drudgery) under which it is performed in both the household and the productive realm. As Nadine Houghton argues in *New Socialist*, about the demand for resourcing care:

> The natural consequences of raising it address the structural impact of unpaid domestic labour on women working outside the home. Such a demand should be linked to the experiences of low paid women - not simply as a tool for solidarity but as a practical organising tool that shifts the debate around low pay to a clear analysis of class, race and gender.

However, as argued in Part Three, the way unpaid care is resourced needs to not only give women more control over how to resolve the contradictions that capitalism make so decisive for their lives, but to question the boundary between them and the polarised choice they present to women. Houghton writes of the need to remove

> What is often seen as a binary decision between work at home and work outside the home - we should be demanding a system whereby the situation is more fluid and women and parents have the ability to fluctuate more easily between the two.

This creates a demand that everyone, both men and women, parents and non-parents, should have a 'Care Bank', paid care time, which they can draw upon throughout their life span, whenever they need to, to care for children, elderly relatives, other family members or friends, with employment protections so that they can return to work when they choose. This would enable both mothers and fathers to take maternity and paternity leave together at this demanding and important time, rather than the current system, which allows parents to share their leave, but in reality, has not been taken up by fathers. It also allows time to be taken at other crucial life moments.

A Care Bank, unlike a wage, which commodifies care work, potentially opening up social relations further to the discipline of capitalist production and oversight, while not necessarily transforming the conditions in which reproductive labour is carried out – particularly collapsing care with the drudgery of housework, and potentially maintaining women in their isolated domestic role; equally, is not just welfare, which does not conceptualise care as work and, in consequence, does not adequately compensate carers for their labour. It challenges the division between the production and reproduction while also potentially opening up the sharp distinctions between men and women's responsibility for care work and the stipulation that care is done in isolation.

Childcare

While shortening the working day and a Care Bank could provide parents time together to care for their children, the family needs to be further integrated into the community, both because families need to be supported more widely, and to increase the capacity in the community for care in general. A mix of state provision, co-operatives and well resourced informal care, with the boundaries between the three being porous, provides a way to challenge the spatial, temporal, institutional and cultural splitting off of the domestic sphere[4] as a place where care is carried out in conditions of submission, isolation and drudgery as well as

[4] See Lise Vogel, Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Towards a Unitary Theory, Chicago, Haymarket, 2013, p. 159.

making the social realm inclusive of families, rather than excluding children from public life.

Childcare as a Free, Universal Service

It is clear that the current model of childcare, predominantly formal private nurseries (79% of childcare places) that parents have little involvement with except as consumers, cannot provide the means of 'socialising the domestic' that challenges either the conditions of care that takes place inside the home, or to fully integrate care within the community in a way that meets women and children's needs.

This is because, in this model, childcare is treated as a 'black box', where government money goes in to private companies to deliver the government's policy aims, which are described by the Conservatives' own evaluation of the extension of free hours as a confused mixture of predominantly enabling parental, and in reality maternal, employment and some early years education[5]. As a Reformism as Response strategy would suggest, without delivering childcare on the basis of a total critique of capitalism, these purposes are not only liable to co-option to capitalist purposes for production (coercing women into the labour-force) and reproduction (educating and stratifying the future workforce), as explained in Part One, but the way these aims are delivered become subordinate to the profit motive, which means it becomes only incidental that the services companies provide are useful for the community. Subsequently, there needs to be strong counter-pressure by government to maintain standards, however, by ceding control of how childcare is delivered – what goes on inside the black box, the only mechanisms available for this is a purely external regulatory framework, involving OFSTED inspections, which not only are inappropriate to measure caring interactions (as, after all, care is labour which potentially resists commodification and capitalist forms of measurement), but also act to commercialise knowledge and

[5]" While the universal entitlement is focused on supporting child development, the aim of the extension is that "Additional free childcare will help families by reducing the cost of childcare and will support parents into work or to work more hours should they wish to do so" (DfE, 2017, p. 12).

restrict access to other alternative forms of care).

Yet, as the purposes of childcare move more towards an outcome external to the content of care – enabling maternal employment seen in the Conservative restriction of free childcare to the children of working parents, the government is not only ceasing to assure quality to counter the downward pressure of privatised provision, but rather is favouring a landscape of privatised care, presided over a series of deregulatory reforms to enable private companies to cut costs. This can be seen in the government wanting providers in the 30 hour trial to "test different approaches that drive **market innovation and efficiency**, trialling different ways of supporting providers to achieve economies of scale and reduce costs" (DfE, 2017, p. 12). By encouraging "economies of scale" to enable them to keep their subsidy low, the government is also acting to create a favourable regulatory and funding framework for larger chains of for-profit childcare providers at the expense of independent, cooperative or voluntary sector provision, part of the sector that is decreasing as for-profits take over.

This is the only way in which this model of childcare – low government subsidies going to private childcare chains delivering increasingly poor quality provision and paying low wages to workers – has any chance of working. Forty-three per cent of the early implementers of the 30 free hours reported that they joined the scheme because "they saw it as a good business opportunity" (DfE, 2017, p. 14). However, the fact that the state functions to enable private companies to make a profit out of delivering essential services allows firms to frame demands for increased subsidies as meeting need and identifies the concerns of children, parents and society as a whole with private childcare providers. This can be seen in the identification of providers' and parents' interests in demanding a higher state subsidy to provide the free 30 hour entitlement to three and four year olds. While this is necessary for it to be practically possible to deliver this extension of free hours in the current circumstances, with research showing that without a higher subsidy "nurseries would have to pay their staff below the minimum wage to break even", the logic of capitalism means good quality childcare is impossible,

even with strong state entitlements, if it is delivered through companies governed by the profit motive.

While private companies make a profit from caring for our children, as well as the free entitlement for working parents being structurally undeliverable by all but the big childcare chains paying women childcare workers the minimum wage, it is also inconceivable that parents, and mothers in particular, could define their own purposes for childcare to meet their needs and for the kind of society that we want, such as having childcare provision for time off from care work as well as paid work. In *The Playgroup Movement*, Brenda Crowe writes, "there is a very real need for mothers to go off duty for a couple of hours occasionally. Who else is on the job for twenty-four consecutive hours, seven days a week, without even a break for meals?"[6]. Parents and childcare workers have only minimal control over the services they use and provide. Parental input is only very weakly determined by market mechanisms, as 'consumers' of childcare; and even then, these mechanisms and the pressure of competition serves not to improve standards or further choice but to drive smaller independent and voluntary providers out of business and lower standards, often by intensifying the exploitation of childcare workers, who have minimal control over the pay and conditions in which they work, which are some of the worst in the country.

However, socialising childcare is not the same as ceding it to the market, rather, as Fraser observes has been the case with earlier socially democratic governments, "some aspects of social reproduction were transformed into public services and public goods, de-privatized but not commodified". Recognising care as labour which potentially resists commodification provides a strategy to oppose the integration of childcare into the very narrow horizons of existing capitalist purposes, and recognise the work that childcare workers do, even in conditions that mitigate against a generalisable support structure for that work. However, in order to genuinely value and support their care work, as well as meeting the needs of parents and their children, we need to start by bringing childcare back into

[6]Brenda Crowe, The Playgroup Movement, Oxon, Routledge Library Editions, 1983, p. 1.

public hands by not allowing private companies to profit from the care of our children. Childcare needs to be recognised as a national service, like the NHS or education (and here, the Labour Manifesto (p. 35) promising a National Education Service from cradle to grave is positive), with simple supply-side funding through general taxation, available to all parents and free at the point of use. It should be a flexible resource to suit parents, whether in employment or not, so that they can also use it when they are not doing paid work, to have time to rest or to pursue other meaningful activities and long-term projects.

However, this does not mean ceding control over the care of our children, for the ways in which childcare is delivered should not be incidental to our aims, taken out of democratic control and handed over either to private companies, or the state. Here it is important to go back to Federici:

> It is one thing to set up a day care center the way we want it, and then demand that the State pay for it. It is quite another thing to deliver our children to the State and then ask the State to control them not for five but for fifteen hours a day…In one case we regain some control over our lives, in the other we extend the State's control over us[7].

Alternative Models of Childcare: Co-operative Playgroups

Like the Playgroup Movement in the 60s, 70s and 80s, a grass roots self-help movement by mothers, and it's New Zealand equivalent, the Playcentre Movement, which began during the war and is still active, parents democratic involvement in care challenges the sharp distinction that views childcare as only occurring when parents, particularly mothers, are absent from it (and ideally at work). Federici, again, observes how "welfare mothers, for example, denounced the absurdity of the government policy that recognizes childcare as work only when it involves the children of others"[8]. In contrast, the Playcentre Federation describes

[7] Silvia Federici, Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle, Oakland, PM Press, 2012, p. 21.

[8] Federici, Revolution at Point Zero, p. 43.

in its philosophy how it “recognises the parents as the first and best educators of their own children. Playcentre families receive a unique early childhood experience with opportunities for whanau/families to learn together.”

There needs to be a more fluid conceptualisation of childcare that belies the strict separation between formal and informal childcare, and care inside and outside the home. This means childcare that mothers, and parents in general, are not excluded from. Instead of parents only relation to other parents being as consumers, co-operative provision allows women to create networks of support in their local community. In this 1980 film, Parents in Playgroup, one woman describes how “I was a lonely mum, came to Honiton with my husband’s job, I didn’t want to come, I started playgroup, and I needed the playgroup, very much, I was very lonely, I was a mum help and then I started staying when I wasn’t a mum help.”

Cooperative care recognises and builds on the capacities that parents have, and are already using everyday, to care for children, but without naturalising this ability – and Crowe explains how fathers were involved in Playgroups too, as they have been in delivering co-operative childcare today. It allows for parents to learn from the shared wisdom of other parents, as well as recognising that parents need support, and benefit from interactions with, and training from, childcare professionals. This means childcare workers are given a new importance, reflected in their pay and conditions1, as Crowe writes, when parents turn to professionals for “advice, guidance and support”, they do so “within the context of a redefined relationship of self-confidence and partnership”[9]. In this sense of partnerships, it is important that childcare workers also have co-operative control alongside parents. Lucie Stephens has further researched how co-operatives operating today are beneficial for children, parents and workers.

It also increases the capacity of the community for care in general, as Crowe describes, in her 1972 book *The Playgroup Movement*, how the Pre-school Playgroups Association (PPA), “continues to promote the principles of mutual support

[9] Crowe, The Playgroup Movement.

and self-help for the benefit not only of pre-schoolers but of their parents and the wider community. This fosters the morale, self-confidence and the general capacity to cope among a much wider age range that the movement's name would suggest" For example, "PPA has started to involve teenagers and the retired. A further new development might be to enlist the interest of the redundant and the unemployed to the benefit both of those made to feel unwanted by society and of young children most of whom see far too little of male figures in their every day life"[10].

In order for this to be practically possible, the government should provide a legislative framework and set up a shelter organisation, like the Playcentre Federation in New Zealand, to give support, advice, training and funding to parents and workers. This NEF report also has further suggestions for how cooperative childcare could be supported.

A System of Fluid Care

In order to truly attack the spatial separation of the domestic, parents need to be resourced, with the money and time, to be able to have the choice to look after their own children, create their own informal arrangements with their peers, where they can be present or not, or have democratic control over more formal, state arrangements; or, ideally, be able to use all these ways of caring fluidly to fit into their lives and the lives of their children. In this way, a system of paying parents directly, or vouchers, could help parents combine a truly flexible use of provision. To paraphrase Marx, to be able to "leave your child at nursery in the morning, for you and friends to look after your children in the afternoon, join other parents at playgroup in the evening, look after your child at home after dinner", and be paid for the care you are doing across all these settings, at home and outside the home.

Again, this is not commodifying care through providing a wage; neither does it classify mothers as non-working dependents through welfare. It is a way to

[10] Crowe, The Playgroup Movement, p. xi.

challenge capitalism's sharp division of the domestic sphere and obscuring of the labour done there, often in conditions of isolation, by allowing women to socialise their domestic care arrangements in pleasurable ways that suit them and their children.

However, as direct payments and vouchers have been used to integrate care into the purposes of capitalism (in particular, with how PIPs payments have replaced DLA) and been way to remove support from people, particularly people with disabilities and women, on the grounds of facilitating their 'independence', this tentative suggestion needs to be approached with care. Payment is not enough, especially in the current regulatory and funding framework; knowledge also needs to be socialised and support needs to be available to help parents, and mothers in particular, set up the type of childcare that suits their needs and those of the family and wider community.

Society

A Transformation of Space

To help grow the general capability of the community and equip public space with facilities to accommodate families so that children would become a part of daily life rather than excluded from the public realm and relegated to the domestic sphere.

Alongside "the good community playgroup, firmly rooted in its own locality"[11], child-friendly spaces need to become the norm in public buildings and work places. Birmingham Impact Hub provides #radicalchildcare, a co-operative pop-up on-site creche facility alongside its workspace, which parents can use flexibly. One mother describes how the creche did not enact a strict separation of her from her child, neither did it for the childcare worker and her child:

> Co-creche was relaxed and easygoing, it gave me opportunity to work, while knowing that my kid is just upstairs and I can visit as

[11] Crowe, The Playgroup Movement, p. 1.

> many times as I want; just to see him through the glass door happily playing with other kids or getting inside to give him a cuddle when he was upset or even breast feed him if he was hungry. I felt I was there for him, and I didn't just leave him in a nursery and went. It was also good to get to know lovely ladies, childcare professionals who were there every week to take care of our children. One of them had her baby in the co-creche which felt more personal, like a community.

It is also important to note the importance of architecture, with the glass partition allowing parents to work undisturbed alongside their children. Although this is a workspace for freelancers, workplaces in general could have a similar arrangement, with co-operative creche facilities and working rights that allow parents to have some allocated time working in the creche.

Child-friendly spaces such as creches, soft play areas, unisex baby changing, breastfeeding rooms, would also mean families, childminders or co-operatives of parents and professionals could fluidly care for children both in each others homes and in public spaces, and means informal groups of parent-carers do not necessarily have to provide a premises. Having already been transformed, spaces are ready to use for such groups. This divorcing of space from collectives of parents reconceptualises formal and informal childcare, allows groups to develop more easily and informally and naturally as a pre-cursor to perhaps establishing more formal arrangements.

Increasing the Capability and Responsibility of the Community for Care

Further to ready-made child friendly spaces, organisations should also have the responsibility to provide childcare. Wainwright describes how women's sections transformed the Labour Party so that in one branch, "they have changed the time of meetings to suit parents and provide two hours' paid child care"[12].

Wainwright also discusses women's demands for a mobile creche: "their idea

[12]Hilary Wainwright, Labour: A Tale of Two Parties, London, Hogarth Press, 1987, p. 175.

was that creche workers would take play equipment and set up a creche on demand, at adult-education classes for instance, or health centres or community centres”[13].

These are all ways to reform childcare that need further examination.

[13] Wainwright, Labour: A Tale of Two Parties, p. 169.

8

Wages4Housework and Beyond

by Nadine Houghton

At a recent meeting discussing a Universal Basic Income, one of the speakers expressed surprise that women (who still carry out the largest share of domestic and reproductive labour in the home) would demand a wage for their work, his assumption being that our work was a labour of love.

With my new baby strapped to me I was feeling the sharp end of the wedge of reproductive labour. It hadn't occurred to me that people on the left still saw the invisible, unpaid work carried out in the home as not deserving of a wage - or to put it more strongly that the workers carrying out that work (predominantly women and mothers) are not justified in making demands for a wage.

As Silvia Federici says in *Revolution at Point Zero*,

> The unwaged condition of housework has been the most powerful weapon in reinforcing the common assumption that housework is not work, thus preventing women from struggling against it, except

> in the privatized kitchen-bedroom quarrel that all society agrees to ridicule, thereby further reducing the protagonist of a struggle. We are seen as nagging bitches, not as workers in struggle [1].

It is undoubtable that Jeremy Corbyn's recent success marks the biggest step forward for the left in a generation and with that a great advance for women's rights. There is so much in the manifesto that will improve the lives of women in the workplace, in education, in healthcare and in the home. Yet, there are still many more demands that women can and should be making on the Labour Party.

The Wages for Housework campaign led by feminists in the 70's was an attempt to politicise domestic labour, to frame a demand that's natural conclusion was the necessity of women's collective struggle. It rightly sought to identify women's role in the home as unrecognised, uncompensated labour. If the very existence of capitalism is dependant on this labour (the creation and raising of new workers, the care and servicing of current workers) it wasn't simply the men on the factory floor that needed to organise against their exploitation but the women in the kitchen too.

Times have clearly moved on and it's fair to say that the situation for women now is less restrictive. However the recent debate within the Labour Party around a Universal Basic Income has once again brought the idea of Wages for Housework to the fore.

Removing what is often seen as a binary decision between work at home and work outside the home - we should be demanding a system whereby the situation is more fluid and women and parents have the ability to fluctuate more easily between the two with an acknowledgment that when a parent is at work inside the home it is still just that - work, that their role should not be diminished in any way simply because they are not employed. I'm sure I'm not alone in feeling a

[1] Silvia Federici, Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle, Oakland, PM Press, 2012, p. 16.

sense of the work I do at home as being invisible to the rest of the world. Whether or not the Wages4Housework demand is deemed realistic, the cornerstone of the demand and one that deserves a hearing is one of validation for the role of unpaid labour.

The shape and semantics of the demand - whether we call it wages4housework or a basic income are almost less important than what the demand represents, because the natural consequences of raising it address the structural impact of unpaid domestic labour on women working outside the home. Such a demand should be linked to the experiences of low paid women - not simply as a tool for solidarity but as a practical organising tool that shifts the debate around low pay to a clear analysis of class, race and gender.

You are more likely to work in a low paid job if you are a working class woman, this increases if you are a woman of colour and/or migrant worker. While there are various structural, historical and economic reasons for this, one over arching theme is that women's work is often seen as an extension of the unpaid work women do in the home - child raising, caring, cleaning - if it's unpaid in the home why should it be highly paid outside of it? The two are inextricably linked. A wages4housework demand is not some lofty, ideological, outdated, feminist demand - it is directly rooted in one of the causes of low pay for women in today's society.

Think of the role of the women working at the Ford Dagenham car plant that went on strike to demand equal pay. Their work at the plant was portrayed as inconsequential, little more than what they already did in the home, a little bit of sewing - until they organised collectively and their strikes brought production to a stand still. The diminished role of women in the home reinforces the view that it's somehow ok to continue this exploitation in the workplace, until that is, we use our collective strength to arrest this view.

The Labour Party manifesto addresses the dire, low pay that paid carers of children receive, it also commits to a £10 per hour minimum wage and improvement

of collective bargaining rights, which are all of course needed to address low pay. However what it doesn't fully address are the conditions which force many women into low paid jobs - a more radical approach to childcare and better employment legislation are necessary, but so to is addressing the role of women in the workplace being seen as an extension of their role in the home and therefore of less monetary value.

The manifesto, rightly commits to professionalising the role of early years children's carers, this approach needs to be extended to all caring roles. The last Labour government introduced the Schools Support Staff Negotiating Body which aimed to offer schools support staff (overwhelmingly a female workforce) similar national bargaining rights to teachers (currently support staff pay and conditions are determined at a local level causing fragmentation) helping to professionalise the role. Jeremy Corbyn's Labour have committed to re-introducing this, but to go a step further we could build a job evaluation system that values the role of affective labour. Knowing that my son feels loved and cared for when he goes to school is just as important to me as whether or not he can read and write. We could eventually consider similar arrangements for those that care for the elderly depending on the shape our social care system takes under a Labour government.

The role of domestic, catering or retail staff needs also to be elevated and their importance honoured, acknowledging and elevating these roles in the home as well as the workplace. Take for example a hospital, it is the cleaners and hostesses who are paid the least and are most poorly treated, yet they provide the foundation for the whole running of the hospital. A dirty hospital can't keep a patient free from infection and good food supports recovery.

The recent heroic struggle of Serco workers at St. Barts hospitals shows what can be achieved through mass collective struggle, breaking down the legislative barriers that make this sort of action (currently) difficult to organise would make it easier for women to self organise against low pay.

These struggles will inevitably elevate both societies view of low paid women workers but more importantly will impact on the way that women workers view themselves and their own ability to capitalise on their collective strength (as previous mass action led by women has shown us) - the growth in the confidence of working class women, the disputes we will lead and the gains we will win will have a direct impact on the strength of our future demands.

But to ensure our collective strength is not diluted, the struggle in the workplace and the one in the home must be linked. Whether it is the Focus E15 Mums demanding better housing, the Ford Dagenham strikers demanding equal pay or the Dockers wives organising a rent strike in support of their striking husbands - there are concrete lessons we can learn. Our task now is to seize the opportunity that Corbynism presents us.

9

‘A Bold and Radical Shift’: Richard Leonard and Scottish Labour

by Lauren Gilmour

It has been a turbulent decade for the Scottish Labour Party. Since 2007, the party has gone from being the dominant force in Scottish politics to being the third party, behind the Conservatives. This article comes at a time when Scottish Labour is at a crossroads and it is once again tasked with choosing the direction it goes in.

In choosing Richard Leonard in the upcoming leadership election, Scottish Labour would break away from the idea that workers are constituents to be protected from the worst excesses of predatory capitalism and move towards the idea that they can be active agents of change. This is the major shift that the Scottish Labour Party needs and not simply the bland protectionism that is being offered by Leonard’s opponents. A Richard Leonard-led Scottish Labour Party would be a victory for the left; not just in Scotland, but across Britain too.

Who is Richard Leonard?

A representative of the Central Scotland region, Leonard has been a Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) for just over a year. Before he announced his candidacy for the leadership of Scottish Labour, he did not even possess a Twitter account. Outwith the Labour and trade union movement, he has a relatively low profile. This may traditionally be seen as a detriment, but with a reputation as tarnished as that of Scottish Labour, having a low profile may be seen as a benefit.

For over twenty years, Leonard has been a trade union organiser: his most recent position before becoming an MSP was political officer for GMB Scotland . He has been involved in a variety of causes of the left over the years and is considered to be an intellectual and ideological heavyweight within the Scottish left. A protégé of communist academic John Foster, Richard Leonard has played an important role within the left in Scotland, often at crucial times in its recent history.

Leonard is a strong performer when it comes to policy, industrial strategy and economic change. His politics centre on economic, social and political transformation. Throughout the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014, he was fiercely anti-nationalist and was not involved with the jingoistic and deeply conservative Better Together campaign, preferring instead to talk about returning power to the people:

> "Let me start with a gentle reminder. Our goal in this movement is not and has never been about shifting power from one parliament and one set of politicians to another. Our goal is about shifting power from those who own the wealth in this country back to those, who through their hard work and endeavour create the wealth in this country."[1]

[1] http://redpaper.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/RedPaperLabourVoicesMay2013_A4.pdf

Leonard's views (shared by others) were, at the time, sadly overlooked in favour of the overtly British nationalist messages that the Better Together campaign was spinning. Had the Scottish Labour Party run its own distinct campaign in the independence referendum, then perhaps it would not be in a situation today where it has only 7 MPs in Westminster.

Throughout his tenure as an MSP, however, Leonard has been far more cautious. He has been a quiet supporter of Jeremy Corbyn throughout his term so far, signing an open letter in support of him, along with Neil Findlay, Elaine Smith and Alex Rowley, but has rarely made a show of it. He has been reluctant to associate himself with the left-wing Campaign for Socialism (CfS) group, despite their growing influence and support within the party.

Leonard is, however, firmly committed to the ideas, policies and ideology of the left, and to running as the left's candidate. He would bring a sense of optimism and change to a party that has been doing the same things for too long and yet expecting different results.

How can Leonard win?

The Labour Left in Scotland has been revitalised and rejuvenated. This process began in late 2014, where the left-wing group Campaign For Socialism (CfS) played a high profile role in organising MSP Neil Findlay's Scottish Labour Leadership election against Jim Murphy. Whilst Findlay did not win, his campaign brought together a group of young activists who were inspired to start a movement campaigning for change within the youth wings of Scottish Labour (and beyond), now known as Scottish Labour Young Socialists. His campaign also built the foundations of a revitalised left that, in 2015, began winning internal political positions such as the National Policy Forum slate. For the first time in many years, a left-wing majority made up the Scottish Young Labour executive committee. The Corbyn campaign in 2015 (and 2016) also brought back many

people on the left who had previously felt abandoned by the Labour Party.

Richard Leonard's campaign is taking on the Scottish Labour establishment and machine. However, there is still a very good chance that he could win; according to the bookies; he is the current favourite. His leadership will be just that: leadership. It will focus on radical and bold ideas, including public ownership, industrial strategy, investing in public services and ending austerity. These, he stated in a Sunday Mail article earlier this month, are not ideas he has adopted for current convenience, but beliefs he has held throughout his time in the labour movement:

> "These are not new ideas to me. They brought me into the Scottish Labour Party over 30 years ago and guided my work as a trade union organiser across Scotland for 20 years."

Leonard's campaign, much like Corbyn's in 2015, has started with little more than a website and a Twitter account. For many, this is the moment they have been waiting for. The 2013 Collins Review infamously implemented a system of electing a Labour leader that was intended to stop a left-wing candidate from even getting on the ballot, let alone winning the entire contest. But the opposite outcome was ultimately delivered due to the creation of the affiliated and registered supporters categories, enabling people to sign up for £3 to get a vote in the leadership election. While Corbyn would have won the contest without this quirk, it was registered and affiliated supporters that turned his leadership victory into a landslide, , handing him close to 60% of first preference votes.

The same thing could theoretically be replicated in Scotland, if the same drive and ambition to secure a leader who will deliver a change in direction exists. Like Richard Leonard, we must be audacious in our drive to win this leadership contest. From stalls to sign up people in the street, to social media campaigns targeting the young people who voted Labour for the first time in this year's general election, we must ensure that we have a comfortable majority of people who

want a new kind of politics reflected in the Scottish Labour Party.

A Leonard-led Party

For too long, the Scottish Labour leadership has focused on endless ‘gotchas’ directed at the SNP. Their political arguments have lacked substance. To start reigniting the interest and the trust of Scotland, Scottish Labour must position itself as a genuine alternative to the SNP. Richard Leonard’s political outlook will deliver this much-needed departure from the bland, centrist, social democracy that has characterised both the SNP and the Scottish Labour Party since devolution. Instead he will transform the Scottish Labour Party into a party that talks about economic and social injustice, and how that can be changed. Richard Leonard will implement a far more ambitious industrial strategy than the current leadership or the Scottish government. This would bring much-needed jobs and investment to Scotland.

The crucial difference between a Sarwar-led Scottish Labour Party and a Leonard-led party is their position in relation to workers’ relationship to capital. This is the fundamental shift that needs to take place within the Scottish Labour Party. Leonard offers a bold and radical shift away from social democratic protectionism, towards a parliament that puts power back in the hands of the people. If the members of Scottish Labour choose to put their faith in Richard Leonard as leader, it will be the another step towards an essential left-wing shift within the party.

10

Paul Sng interview - Dispossession: The Great Social Housing Swindle

"Every time I see a person in a cardboard box in London," Tony Benn once told parliament, "I say, that person is a victim of market forces." He explained that, "I do not share the general view that market forces are the basis of political liberty."

Until Jeremy Corbyn's election as leader of the Labour Party in September 2015, the type of scepticism towards markets articulated by Benn was not abundant in British political life. The process of neoliberalisation that began under Margaret Thatcher (or, arguably, Jim Callaghan) restructured the economy to centre it around private enterprise, increased competition, and reduced collective bargaining; an economic model which lumbered on untrammelled under successive governments, Conservative and Labour. In the throes of the "End of History", there was never a choice. Market-based reforms were spun as a political and economic necessity.

The housing sector has been at the heart of this marketisation of public services.

In Paul Sng's new documentary *Dispossession: The Great Social Housing Swindle* (in cinemas now) he interrogates the ways in which the actions of central government, local authorities and the private sector have intersected to transform the UK – in fewer than four decades – from a country freshly revelling in the joys of home ownership, to a country where homelessness has risen for six consecutive years, and it's harder than ever to find a home to live in, let alone own.

New Socialist's Culture co-editor Jack Frayne-Reid spoke to Sng about the difference (or lack thereof) between regeneration and demolition, the creative process behind political filmmaking, the contradictions between Jeremy Corbyn's radical left movement and Labour at the local level, and how we should look at social housing in the wake of the Grenfell Fire.

NS: Would you say Dispossession…'s primary concern is the marketisation of housing, and that it's of the perspective that housing is a human right?

PS: I would say that is the key focus of the film; the fact that council housing and social housing – housing full stop – is now determined by market forces. But really the film is about value and community, and how the value that's placed on people who live in social housing has decreased over time. That goes back to the last few decades where in the arts and media we've gradually seen the stigmatisation – and even, in some cases, denigration – of people that live on council estates. You turn on the TV on any morning or evening, switch on Channel 5 or even Channel 4, and all you'll see is these "poverty porn" shows like *Benefits Street* and *Council House Crackdown*. I think that's really helped the private housing market, because nobody really seems to want to live in council housing, because they seem to think that it's somehow for people that are undeserving or haven't really "made it" in life. That certainly wasn't the intention or the reality back in the 50s, in the 60s and even the 70s, but over the last three or four decades the desired tenure of home ownership has just increased and increased and increased. It's kind of like a perfect storm for council housing, and people that haven't really wanted to have government support for it. The Tories

have been cutting investment in social housing for years and, on council housing, didn't have an iron-clad agreement with the Treasury to replace what was sold off during Right to Buy. So I don't think there's any one cause for the housing crisis, but certainly the way the market and private landlords have been allowed to run away is a major cause.

You say that the demand for home ownership has gone up and up and up. Do you think that with the precarity of the housing market, it's still going up, or are people placing more value in simply being housed, rather than necessarily owning their own home? Do you think that maybe, perversely, because of the instabilities created by these market forces, that maybe that craze for home ownership might be on the wane?

Yeah, it's so expensive to own a home, and we've seen recently the big estate agents like Foxton's have seen – I think– a 64% reduction in profits, so clearly home ownership is becoming out of reach for the current generation of people in their thirties and younger. But, I mean, where do they go? Because they can't get a council tenancy. Finding secure, affordable, stable accommodation in any major city in this country is incredibly difficult, and that puts the power in the hands of the landlords. You saw last year where they tried to put through a bill to make homes fit for human habitation [1] and it was voted down, mainly by Tory MPs, seventy-one of whom are landlords. Home ownership has decreased, but I don't think it's because fewer people want to own homes; I think it's just out of reach financially.

There's quite a striking figure on the website of the film. In 1980, when Margaret Thatcher's government introduced the Right to Buy scheme, 42% of people lived in council housing. By 2017 it was an incredibly marginal 8%. I was wondering if you could talk about the part housing plays in the quite fundamental change over the last thirty years in the very way our society is

[1] Sng refers to the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Bill 2015/16, introduced by the Labour MP for Westminster North, Karen Buck – who is interviewed in the film – in order "to amend the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 to require that residential rented accommodation is provided and maintained in a state of fitness for human habitation; and for connected purposes."

structured.

It's actually less than 8%. You can't just blame the Tory government. New Labour didn't really do enough to fix the problem. They gave a lot of power to housing associations, but they've not built in the quantity that's needed. I think it comes down to both the Tory government and to a certain extent New Labour believing that the market would solve the housing crisis, and I think that was very short-sighted. I think the Conservatives see council housing as something that is akin to Accident & Emergency: it's something where you'll end up there, and you'll be looked after. It's not something they think people should desire or have any great belief in wanting to actually attain, and I think that's wrong, because back in the '50s, the '60s, the '70s, and even the '80s, it was designed for working class people or lower middle class people, or people in jobs that didn't necessarily pay big wages but were key jobs: nurses, teachers, those kinds of jobs. I think the problem now is that the Tories want to reduce council housing to a rump that will only be for the people that are desperate. And they've got similar plans for the NHS, haven't they? So I think that's an issue that, if you're doing alright, if you don't live in council housing, then you're not going to particularly care about, but if you're somebody that lives in it or would like to have the benefits of a lifetime's tenancy…

I think, essentially, that New Labour also saw council housing as something that was akin to Accident & Emergency at a hospital. The problem with that is that, if you reduce something like council housing to a rump, you then put all your faith in the private rental market or housing associations, and neither of those have been able to provide secure and stable accommodation The relative ease with which the Housing and Planning Bill became the Housing and Planning Act – with very little public interest compared to the junior doctors' strike or the Iraq War – shows you the lack of interest in council housing, because I think we've all been conditioned to see it as something for people who are really desperate, and that nobody would ever choose to live in. I think the problem with that is that there are people who work in key service industries – whether that's nurses, people

who are starting out in teaching, or people who work in the service industry – that need places to live and, if they're having to spend between fifty and seventy percent of their wages on being housed, it doesn't create a very fair society.

Can you elaborate a bit on the contents of the Housing and Planning Act?

The government claimed it was designed to address the housing crisis, but I think it was really designed to enable people to own homes, because that's where they see their votes as being. The reason the Tories brought in the Right to Buy policy was to win working class votes, because they knew that people who lived in council housing generally voted Labour, so that's why we were then stuck with the Tories for another seventeen years after that. But in terms of the Housing and Planning Act, I think we won't know the full extent of some of the things it's introduced until maybe later this year, and then it'll be ongoing, because it was very much I think a kind of Frankenstein's monster of an act – various bits of previous policy ideas taken from here and there. But in terms of what it does to end lifetime tenancies, for instance, I think it's very bad, because that affects families.

For instance, in the film there's a woman called Rhonda Daniels, who's got a brother who's got severe autism. When their mother eventually goes, that flat will be taken away. It's very worrying in terms of people who've got children or vulnerable adults to look after. It was an act designed to enable people to own homes and it doesn't do very much for council housing, and there are concerns from people like Shelter (the anti-homelessness charity) that it's going to take away more than one hundred thousand council homes in the end.

How do regeneration and redevelopment factor into the wider narrative about the housing market put across in your film? And how do you think we should reflect on this in light of the Grenfell fire, which seemed to bring together a lot of these concerns about market forces failing people in the grotesque way possible?

I think regeneration, which really means demolition, is a very complex subject.

There are certainly going to be estates that need repairs, and in a lot of cases these estates have been allowed to fall into those states of disrepair through a process of managed decline. Council tenants and leaseholders pay service charges, council tenants pay rent, and a percentage of that money is ringfenced by local authorities to pay for refurbishment and repairs. So, in the case of some estates like Cressingham Gardens or the Aylesbury Estate where they're saying "look, it's going to cost too much to repair the estate so we're going to have to demolish it and build a new one" – that's a bit of a swindle if you've been paying money towards that for however many years. The case of the Heygate Estate is a prime example of where regeneration has had a very negative impact: about 1000 homes on the Heygate Estate were demolished, and 2,704 new ones were built – but only around 80 of them will be available for social rent.

That's pretty disgusting, really, when you look now at what that estate has become. It's called Elephant Park. The reason that local authorities do this is that they don't have very much money, they're in debt, so they think that by building a new development, including social housing but then also having some private housing for sale, they can pay down debts. You can understand why they would do it, but what actually happens is it's de facto social cleansing, especially when you don't let the estate's original residents come back. It happened on Balfron Tower, when (housing association) Poplar Harca received the building when it was stock transferred from Tower Hamlets, and, as you saw in the film, they evicted the tenants and didn't let any of them back, and now it's being sold as luxury apartments.

So the problem with regeneration is that it actually means demolition, and there are alternatives. People have proposed building on these estates – in Cressingham Gardens they proposed a plan where they would build more social housing, at a fraction of the cost of what Lambeth had planned, but that plan was ignored because Lambeth need to make money by selling luxury apartments to pay off debts. It's there in their accounts – you can see how badly their accounts have been managed if you Google something called Lambeth Audit. It was a report

into the mismanagement of Lambeth's finances, and it's shocking reading. That's a council that's just announced that the cost of its town hall is currently £104 million, and this is a borough that's got 14,000 people on the housing waiting list. So, as councils go, Lambeth are pretty shocking. Again, it's run by the Labour Party, and it seems to me to be unaligned with what Jeremy Corbyn is saying about what Labour would do in government.

A lot of councils are. There seems to be this wider dissonance between Labour at the local level and the leadership.

Yeah, it's massive. It'd be good if the Labour leadership would speak out on that. Obviously there's a need for Labour to try and maintain unity and be seen as a unified party to get into government, but I do think we need to hear from Jeremy Corbyn about what he thinks is enabling the social cleansing of working class areas in London. I'm sure he's not happy about it, and I know he's been told about it. His brother (Piers Corbyn) is a prominent housing campaigner who's urged him to get on the estates and make his voice heard but for whatever reason he's yet to do that. I think he would give the people on these estates who are fighting to save them a lot of hope. A lot of people look up to him and respect him and I don't think he can be happy about it, but he hasn't said anything, and the silence is beginning to become deafening.

He was very well received when he went to Grenfell in the aftermath of the fire, wasn't he? Especially in contrast to Theresa May.

Exactly. I'm not a Labour voter – I live in Brighton, my MP is Caroline Lucas – but I do think Jeremy Corbyn is a principled and decent man. I don't agree with everything that he says but he is somebody that, when he says something, you do believe him. I think he's a man of principles. It would be nice for him to speak out about this stuff, but this is where we are. We've also written to him to ask him to watch the film. He wasn't able to make a screening; he's obviously very busy but I'm hopeful that he will watch the film and then engage with some of the issues in it.

You managed to get Maxine Peake to narrate the film.

Yeah, Maxine's great. If she's free, hopefully she'll come along. I'm surprised Jeremy Corbyn hasn't watched it yet as because I think he's friends with Maxine, so I might have to ask her if she'll have a word with him and see if he'll take a look at it.

But, going back to Grenfell, I think it has made the film more relevant. The people in Grenfell were not valued by their council and that's why so many of them lost their homes and however many of them died – we obviously still don't know the figure. But those people weren't valued; they were seen as not worth investing what would've been probably a few extra thousand pounds in cladding or materials that would've saved their lives – a sprinkler system or whatever else. And that is the problem with council housing up and down the country; that the people who live in it are not valued by local authorities or central government. They make a lot of noise about these things, especially in the wake of Grenfell. You see MPs like David Lammy, who lost a friend of his in the fire, making a real noise about it, which I think people need to do. But in David Lammy's own constituency, he did very little to stop the £2 billion Haringey development project that's going ahead. He wrote a letter at the eleventh hour – where was he two years ago when that campaign were crying out for him to do something?

I think he was very moved by losing his friend, so it was kind of an emotional reaction for him. He's never come from a particularly radical tradition in the Labour Party – I think he's had, one could say, a bit of an awakening since suffering that horrible loss. However, it's positive, isn't it, to see MPs who you'd almost think of as kind of Blairite like Lammy taking these issues seriously, even in the most appalling of circumstances? But from the right-wing Labour MPs and councillors who simply have a lot of faith in markets, to the leadership who, like you say, have not been particularly vocal on these issues, there is a kind of cross-Labour complicity in these problems. Do you think there is a similar level of cross-party complicity?

I was struck by your interview with Nicola Sturgeon, where she gave these quintessential politician's answers – very careful not to criticise anybody or criticise the policy in question, perhaps because everyone is a bit guilty of it. And maybe that's a reason why you don't hear Jeremy Corbyn turn his fire on the social cleansing, whatever you wish to call it, that's going on on councils' watch; because he knows a lot of them are his own people and with regular local elections he doesn't want to be seen to attack Labour's electoral candidates. Do you think this is a widely held feeling across politics?

Oh, definitely, but Jeremy Corbyn wants to do politics differently, doesn't he? He made a big thing of "the kinder politics" and how his whole MO is that he's different. That's why he appeals to people; because he's principled. You can see, throughout his career as an MP, what he's voted on, and the causes he's supported; I see him as someone who is very fresh. But my question is, is he having to make compromises as a politician? I think he has to play politics now; he's the Leader of the Opposition. And I do get it. He's in a very awkward position, but the whole thing with Corbyn was that he's different. And if he's going to become like the others…people have said to me, when he gets into power, he's going to fix those council houses – well, he might not get into power and, when he does, he's going to have to deal with the aftermath of Brexit and God knows what else.

Deep state interference. MI5 not being happy with a socialist government. Just to get all "tinfoil hat" for a second. But realistically that will happen.

Yeah. And the thing is, the estates that are in need of support… a lot of them will be gone by then. So the time is now for Corbyn to say something. I don't think it'd lose Labour the council in Lambeth – what I think it'd do is reduce their majority a bit, maybe.

Are you familiar with Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Housing, John Healey?

Yeah, he was invited to do an interview for the film, but his team refused. Interesting, isn't it? Gavin Barwell also refused, who was the Housing Minister at the time. His team said "call us if you get a TV commission", but you don't know that you're going to get a TV commission until you've made the film. So he dodged us too. And, obviously, Lambeth Council dodged us. Poplar Harca dodged us. Whatever you say about Nicola Sturgeon, she found the time and she's the First Minister of Scotland, so she's easily the busiest person of the people we approached. Yet John Healey couldn't find the time.

You interviewed Caroline Lucas as well, another party leader. I was a bit critical of earlier in that she gave very, very diplomatic answers regarding anyone who might be seen as complicit in these policies. But you're right, at least she did appear and put her case forward. John Healey's not from the Labour left – he seems to be a bit of a housing specialist, to the extent that I've read that he's kind of unsackable. He resigned when the other sixty MPs did last year to try and get rid of Corbyn, and then he just came back when Corbyn was re-elected, as if they didn't want to appoint anyone in his place. I'm not sure what it is about John Healey that gives him this kind of iron grip over housing policy in the Labour Party. But in terms of the people you talked to, you did manage to get hold of a couple of Labour MPs, including Karen Buck and Rushanara Ali.

And Jim Fitzpatrick. They made themselves available. We would've got (Shadow Education Secretary) Angela Rayner too but we had to reschedule and she wasn't able to make the second appointment, but she was willing to talk, which was good.

(Journalist) Dawn Foster is a talking head in the film, and is compelling as always; particularly on so-called "sink estates". What do you think about this concept?

It's a horrible term, and it was one that Cameron, when he came out with that statement about how they were going to fix however many "sink estates" around

the UK…people live on these estates, they're homes first and foremost, and to describe somewhere as a "sink estate" is not a very nice thing to say, really. It also fits a convenient narrative where you can demonise not only the estate itself, but the people who live on it, because bricks and concrete don't turn people a particular way in terms of their behaviour; that's society, that's deeply ingrained inequality, in areas that've been deindustrialised or areas where there may be high rates of crime, but it's nothing to do with the buildings themselves. I think it's a troublesome term, and it's one the media just ran away with and everything became about, "oh, it's a sink estate!" And a lot of the places are fine. St Ann's in Nottingham, which is in the film, some people might describe as a "sink estate", but it's a great place, it's got a great community, people there are really tightknit; close together. It's a media thing, really, I think, this "sink estate" nonsense.

You talk to a lot of residents – particularly in St Ann's – who really reject the way that their areas and their communities have been portrayed by the media and by politicians. In St Ann's they talk about this great sense of community. So did you find it really interesting, and also quite moving, I suppose, to go around to all these places and meet the residents? In the estates you visit, such as Cressingham Gardens or Central Hill, there are very strong communities, and people feel like they haven't been given a fair rap, that they're under threat, and that they've been neglected. In the film, the residents of Central Hill estate in Glasgow talk about almost performative clean-ups of their estate by the council, followed invariably by a rapid slide into decrepitude.

Lots of people have theories around that, and a lot of people think that it's deliberate neglect reason: some say so that when these estates fall into a state of disrepair they can demolish them more easily, or when it's a whole area – as was the case with the Gorbals in Glasgow – they can then redevelop it. The Gorbals is pretty much unrecognisable now from what it was in the past. You've seen in the film that to rent a flat there costs £600 a month, which people that had been to the Gorbals back in the day would be really shocked at. You do have to wonder

– certainly in inner cities where estates are in areas near to good transport links or to parks, like Cressingham Gardens is – why the estate has been allowed to fall into what they say is a state of disrepair. The people of Cressingham commissioned their own private report into it and it's not the case that demolition is justified.

I think there is an agenda behind it – whether that agenda is driven by what they ultimately see as altruistic motives is another question. I think Lambeth would probably argue that they need to demolish the estate to build more housing, to have greater density and help solve their housing crisis. They're not doing it from the point of view that they're just greedy or evil. It's just the only way they feel they can solve – or make inroads into solving – their housing crisis is by demolishing. And that'll be the case in other areas as well. Govanhill (in Glasgow) is a very distinct area. There are efforts going into it, it's just they're not good enough, and I think there needs to be more money spent on education in that area because there is a high migrant population and people coming from another country don't necessarily know about things like recycling and that there's about bloody five different coloured bins for various bits and pieces. The litter problem there is something that could be changed by education and that means not just putting up signs in English but putting up signs in however many different languages you need to, and being able to communicate better with people there.

Do you think that's a case of local government cutting corners and, rather than investing more in making an estate more hospitable to people from other countries for whom English isn't their first language, being prepared to just knock it down? But perhaps not entirely through malicious intent – do you think there's a case to be made that central government offload many of the most grievous cuts to local authorities in an effort to keep their hands clean?

I think so. With the whole issue of council housing and the housing crisis, I don't necessarily think that there's a group of shadowy men in suits smoking cigars in some backroom, pushing it through, speaking to their friends in the

media to get them to stigmatise and demonise council estates and the people who live on them. I think it's just been one thing after another that has created this situation, and it's created a perfect storm. When you've got the failure to replace the housing stock sold off from Right To Buy, you've got the freedom that the private rental market is given, that there aren't enough regulations on being a landlord, you've got the issue with wage stagnation, you've got benefit cuts, austerity, and all of these things when you put all of them together have made it nigh-on impossible for most people to get a stable, secure, affordable home these days.

You mentioned Ken Loach is presenting a screening of the film with you in Bath. Is he an influence on your filmmaking?

Oh, definitely – he's someone whose films I've watched since I was a kid. I saw *Kes* when I was about ten years old and cried my eyes out, so it's going to be a big pleasure to meet him tonight. He's going to be doing a Q&A panel with us after the screening, because we're working with some people up there on an estate called Fox Hill, which has been given a demolition order by the housing association that owns it. Ken's supporting the campaign, and we've made a short film for them. It's happening all over the country – it's ridiculous.

I feel we've discussed the contents of your film but not really the process behind it. Do you feel it's a kind of straight agitprop film, in that you can play it at activist events and tie it in with these local campaigns? How do you approach being a director with political intent?

It's a big responsibility when you make a film about people's lives and the issues that are affecting them. The main thing for me is that these are always human stories, and something that I was very mindful of when I started making the film was that you have to earn people's trust and respect. You can't just tip up on a council estate and get the camera out and start filming. You've got to meet people. You've got to get to know them a bit. So that's something I'm always very mindful of.

My first film is about a band called Sleaford Mods (2015's *Sleaford Mods: Invisible Britain*.) It followed them on a tour of what later, I suppose, became the Brexit heartlands, and other places, in the run-up to the 2015 general election. That film was very much a polemic, and my politics were very much at the fore in terms of my thoughts about austerity and what happened with deindustrialised communities. But I sort of realised that, with documentary filmmaking, you need to win people over. It was very polemical, and I think that in some cases the people that agree with you think "yeah, it's a great film", but you don't then connect to another audience that maybe would appreciate the film, but because they see it as a polemic were immediately put off.

So I think it was really important with *Dispossession…* to tell a balanced story. I mean, it would've been nice to interview a few more Tories or people on the right but that didn't happen. The main thing about *Dispossession…*, one of its strong points, I think, is that it's a very balanced film. It's critical of people on both sides of the Houses of Parliament.

That's true, but without this kind of artificial balance that seeks to draw a false equivalence between these ruinous right-wing policies and, say, socialist or social democratic ones: it draws attention to the inequities of the current system without claiming any alternative would be equally disastrous. It's not *Newsnight* getting someone on to defend Nazi protestors in America. It's fair without trying to shoehorn reactionary views in there to give an illusion of balance.

I think you're exactly right with that. Having two polarised views isn't true balance, is it, really? It's very difficult to get what people would consider to be a fair balance of views, but having two people that are exactly opposite doesn't leave much middle ground. So I think what we tried to do with the film was present a range of views. Primarily, for me, the most important people in the film are the people that live on estates; people that are fighting to save their homes or have already lost them. I think they give the film its real point of interest, and its soul in a way, because it's great to hear from experts, whether they're politicians or people in

the housing industry, but ultimately you want to know the people who are affected by this; what they think.

There are some moving stories in the film: the person who took advantage of the Right to Buy and bought their flat, before redevelopment was announced, leaving them as the sole resident of their block of flats.

That was Beverly. She bought the flat on the Right to Buy, then a few months later found out the estate's going to be demolished. They offered her a paltry amount of money – something like £60,000 – for it; I think the latest offer is £250,000 but it's still short of what she expects because for £250,000 you're not going to get a two-bedroom flat anywhere in Southwark. You're looking at £450,000 plus for that. If she wants a two-bedroom flat she's going to have to move to somewhere like Manchester; out of London definitely. There are places in the UK, particularly places in the North of England, where you can buy houses really, really cheaply; you can get a house for fifteen, twenty grand. But if an area's been deindustrialised; if there aren't jobs, there aren't very good public services there, you wouldn't want to live there. That's the crisis: it's very acute.

Dispossession: The Great Social Housing Swindle will be in cinemas throughout September, October, November, and will be screened at The World Transformed on September 26th from 5:30 pm - 7:15 pm.

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Football from Below

Mark Perryman of Philosophy Football explores the possibilities of fan culture as a social movement.

During the international break a mini-spat over the England players' pride, or lack of, in wearing the three lions on their shirt provided a helpful starting point towards the remaking of football as a social movement. Explaining England's inability to go even 1-0 up against the proverbial minnows of the Maltese football team until well into the second half has a lot less to do with the lack of emotional commitment from Harry Kane et al to end now the more than half-century's worth of years of hurt than their actual inability to play. 'Pride' is the easy cop-out, what we're actually witnessing is the ever-decreasing quality of English football. How many of England's starting eleven would Paris Saint German be chasing after with their chequebooks, or Barcelona and Borussia Dortmund be in the market for after their most talented players have been sold off? Of course the best eleven England can put on a pitch isn't all bad but mostly their talent is boosted at club level by playing alongside foreign, more technically gifted and able players. On their own they're not half as good. And for the players who turn out for United, City, Chelsea, Liverpool and Spurs a World Cup Qualifier, and short of reaching the long-forgotten semi-final stage, the tournament itself, doesn't come close to

being the biggest match of their careers compared to the more realistic chance, until recently at any rate, of Champions League glory. It gets worse, the enormous wealth the Premier League provides to their clubs means even for those players far away from making it into the Champions League, the season-long battle to maintain that status pushes England games pretty far down their, and their coaches, list of priorities. Arguably we might even stretch this to securing promotion from the Championship (sic) to the Premier League too.

Lack of passion? No, the result of commercial calculation. This is at the core of the sickness of what football has become, the hopeless confusion of mistaking the richest league in the world with being the best. It's no accident that the Championship play-off final is described almost exclusively in terms of the riches awarded to the victor rather than the quality of the football played.

For a period those disillusioned with the Premier League and all that adopted the mantra 'Against Mod£rn Football.' We first turned this into a T-shirt having spotted a Croatian Fans' banner at Euro 2008 'Against Mod€rn Football.' The sentiment was internationalist enough to make perfect sense. But being 'against' is the classic oppositionalist default position. A catchy phrase that fits neatly on to chest sizes small-XXL but 'Against Mod£rn Football' is increasingly problematic in three ways.

Firstly, there's more than one version of modernity, is the 'against' aimed at the growth of women's football, refugee leagues, a game without borders, the irresistible plurality of where fans come from, race, gender, sexuality and nationality divisions broken down? Being against all that ends with oppositionalism masking conservatism, or worse. Secondly the business of football has become inseparable from multinational corporate power. The macro-politics to reform the game traditionally adopted by both Labour and groups such as the Football Supporters Federation means any agency to enforce these policies seems almost impossible to imagine. Somehow I think an incoming Labour Government is going to have more immediate issues on its mind than nationalising the Premier League. Thirdly, therefore, there is a necessity to reimagine fan culture not as

hard-pressed consumers but as a social movement with the capacity itself to make change.

Currently this is very much a minority movement, but all such movements start out with big ambitions and modest advances. Their potential to grow and effect change is dependent on the ability to inspire via small victories which help convince wider forces this is a direction of travel worth pursuing. We can see this in the rise of militantly anti-racist ultra groups, at Clapton, Whitehawk and elsewhere. The growth of start-up football clubs, Hackney Wick FC, City of Liverpool FC and the women's football club AFC Unity in Sheffield. The spread of community ownership up and down the divisions. The pro-refugees message heard from at least some stands, not on the scale of what was seen across the Bundesliga but present nevertheless.

At the core of any such movement is gender. Recognising that if football is to become modern for all then the sport's entrenched masculinity has to be challenged. Treating women's football as different yet equal is a key step towards a truly inclusive game. On this basis the Equality FC initiative at Lewes FC where mens and womens playing budgets are the same, is a model for all clubs to aspire to if the pressure 'from below' can be built.

This isn't fantasy football. It is about the remaking of the political, the recognition that it is in popular culture more than any other space that ideas are formed, the limitations on what is possible challenged and transformations take shape. Brighton, now a Premier League club, playing in their own city, an ambition only made possible because of a 15-year campaign by their own fans is a vital illustration of this possibility, a club culture absolutely framed by that fan-led campaign. And it is fitting therefore that it is in Brighton at The World Transformed Festival alongside Labour Party Conference that many of those involved in these practical initiatives will be gathered together by Philosophy Football to launch a discussion on what a 'Football from Below' might look like.

Any such discussion if it is to have a meaningful purpose demands allies. Labour

and the trade unions via such a dialogue will be forced to address the narrowness of their own agendas and the scarcity of their own alliances. Football is a signifier of so many other spaces in popular culture where Labour and the trade unions need to be present, be part of, connecting ideas to lived experience towards change. New Labour adopted football in the same way it adopted Britpop as a cultural accessory, providing photo opportunities and celebrity endorsements. A flimsy appropriation out of a flimsy politics. Corbynism promises something different, the framing of a popular, cultural politics will be vital to any fulfilment of that proud boast. Football just one of what should become countless journeys of putting the ideas of Corbynism into practical extra-parliamentary achievement.

'Football from Below' wears the colours of FC St Pauli as our inspiration. But it is time to make that change in our own image too. From the bottom-up, not in opposition to those who choose to follow the Premier League moneybagged bandwagon, that would be not only futile but also self-destructive. Instead as a minority we will be pioneering the practical possibility of building a game that doesn't have to be run in the way it is. Rethinking football as a sport for all not a business to be run. Idealistic? Guilty as charged.

Philosophy Football's Football from Below T-shirt is available from here

12

Labour's 'Contentious Alliance' at Conference

by Tom Blackburn

> Its operation regularly taxes the comprehension of the vast majority of those who participate in it. To appreciate that is perhaps the first step to its understanding. Lewis Minkin on Labour Party Conference[1]

The Labour Party Conference occupies a central role in the party's culture. A great deal of the internal organising and factional manoeuvring which goes on within the party revolves around its annual Conference. But there have always been serious questions asked about how much political weight it actually carries - not least because of the intense stage management for which it has become renowned in recent years, and the long-established tendency of party leaderships to shrug off Conference decisions of which they disapprove.

Nevertheless, there has been a huge drive - mainly by the Labour left - to mobilise

[1] Lewis Minkin, The Labour Party Conference, Manchester University Press 1980, xv

ahead of this year's Conference. Indeed, around 1,200 grassroots delegates are expected to attend the 2017 Conference in Brighton. It seems fair to say that this was mainly in pursuit of the so-called 'McDonnell amendment', which as it turns out has effectively been superseded by a deal agreed by the party's National Executive Committee (NEC) and its leadership. Conference will vote on these proposals in Brighton.

But as yet, Jeremy Corbyn's oft-proclaimed 'new politics' has yet to make much of an impact on this old party gathering and key focal point. The contrast in Liverpool last year was striking - while attendees gathered for a diverse and eclectic range of debates and discussions at The World Transformed fringe event, the party's old guard comprehensively outmanoeuvred the left at the Conference itself, adding two more rightwing members to the NEC and tipping the balance on it away from Corbyn and the left.

While Conference remains relatively untouched by Corbynism, revitalising and empowering it will be an important aspect of the wider democratisation of the party. But first we need to demystify Labour Party Conference, to understand its exact function, and to highlight what effective powers it has now and has had previously, and how it has deployed them over the years. Part of this involves making sense of the role at Conference of the party's affiliated trade unions - which comprise one half of what Lewis Minkin has termed a 'contentious alliance'[2] between the political and industrial wings of the labour movement.

Despite the centrality of Conference to the Labour Party, there are few in-depth studies of how it functions. This essay is therefore heavily indebted to Minkin's 1980 book The Labour Party Conference - which, while accounting for its age, remains the most detailed and insightful study of its subject - as well his other two major works on the Labour Party, the aforementioned Contentious Alliance and The Blair Supremacy[3]. All three titles are remarkable for the depth of Minkin's scholarship and the intimate attention to detail demonstrated within, and a single

[2] Lewis Minkin, The Contentious Alliance: Trade Unions and the Labour Party, Edinburgh University Press 1991

[3] Lewis Minkin, The Blair Supremacy, Manchester University Press 2014

essay can do no more than scratch their surface.

The block vote

The most obvious manifestation of trade union influence at the Labour Party Conference is the block vote. The target of much scepticism and often fierce criticism from both left and right, the block vote no longer wields the same influence at Conference as it once did; it was abolished for leadership contests in 1993 and since 1996, trade unions have accounted for half of all other votes at Conference[4], with constituency parties having an equal share of the vote. Nevertheless, it continues to be a substantial and very tangible presence in Conference decision-making and is still surrounded by much mythology.

From its foundation, the Labour Party has had a federal structure, with power divided among the unions, the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), the Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) and the party's affiliated Socialist Societies. The block vote itself, however, has not been an ever-present feature of trade union practice. As Minkin points out, prior to 1890, votes at the Trades Union Congress were taken on a show of hands - in other words, unions did not have voting rights commensurate with their membership but according to the number of delegates present in the hall. The block vote emerged as those arguing for the foundation of independent political party started to gain a hearing in the unions at this time. Minkin asserts that the block vote was devised by their opponents, with a view to stymieing their progress[5].

Furthermore, not all trade union votes at Labour Conference have been cast as a block. Some unions, particularly those with strong traditions of federalism such as the Textile Workers and the Mineworkers, were known to split the votes they cast at Conference prior to 1953. But this practice ended with the introduction

[4] Minkin 2014, p335

[5] Minkin 1991, p279-80

of ballot boxes by Labour's then-general secretary Morgan Phillips - who was fearful of the symbolism of trade union leaders holding up their voting cards for TV audiences to see - and has never happened since[6].

The block vote has been at the centre of much resentment and tension on both the left and right of the Labour Party. On sections of the socialist left, it has occasionally been held that the perceived bureaucratic and economistic tendencies of trade unions may make them at least as likely to hinder as facilitate any push for socialism inside the party[7]. While not taking this exact position, Tariq Ali and Quentin Hoare wrote in New Left Review in 1982: "The block vote has historically been one of the most potent weapons in the hands of the right, and strategies based on hopes for its utilisation by left bureaucrats rather than right bureaucrats have proved particularly barren."

Certainly, abuses of the block vote are not unknown in the history of Labour Party Conference. There have been various ways to skin this particular cat. Until 1982, for instance, it was possible for individual unions to increase their affiliation (and hence their voting weight) shortly ahead of Conference, having surveyed the likely political lay of the land[8]. Furthermore, over the years both left and right have often taken a somewhat flexible approach to union mandates where they felt they had the opportunity for creative interpretations. To quote Minkin:

> the procedures at the Conference did greatly increase the discretionary possibilities left open to union delegations and thereby often to the union's leaders in interpreting mandates. It must be stressed that union Conference decisions did have such a binding quality that union leaders were extremely reluctant to break them

[6] Minkin 1991, p283-6

[7] Minkin 1991, p159

[8] Minkin 1991, p289-90. Clive Jenkins and ASTMS were among those accused of 'buying votes' in this manner. However, despite the tightening up of the rules, some unions continued to report unchanged affiliation numbers despite declining overall membership as the 1980s wore on. By 1990, 19 affiliated unions were casting votes in excess of the number of levy payers declared to the Certification Officer.

> directly. If the mandate at Conference was clear and precise, and if the Conference resolution was also clear and precise, then the vote had to be cast accordingly. Yet often this was not the situation. So the mandate had to be applied with an eye on the principles underlying the mandate as well as the mandate itself[9].

Minkin also documents how union officials lumbered with a mandate of which they disapproved could sometimes use the compositing process (whereby motions are combined with other resolutions on the same subject to create a single resolution, with a better chance of being selected for a debate and a vote at Conference) to manoeuvre out of them through "judicious wording"[10]. Despite this, it would be something of a caricature to say that the block vote was a simple matter of union general secretaries acting as a law unto themselves (although there were occasions when this did happen). Minkin again puts this usefully into perspective:

> …arbitrary and autocratic power exercised from the trade union delegations was highly unusual… Rarely were the mandates openly broken or disregarded. But it was an important feature of the policy process that such rare instances did occur… they were usually in response to the needs and cues of the PLP leaders[11].

Union delegations to Conference have rarely been as politically monolithic or as supine before the will of union leaders as is often supposed. Differences of opinion within them have often been substantial, and there have been many occasions where union leaders have been unable to stamp their authority on their Conference delegates ahead of crucial votes[12]. Furthermore, complaints about

[9] Minkin 1980, p165

[10] Minkin 1980, p139

[11] Minkin 1980, p324

[12] Minkin 1991, p196

the block vote from the left have sometimes deflected attention from inadequate left organisation inside the trade unions, or simply sought to rationalise a lack of support for socialist policies among some trade unionists. Minkin comments that trade union culture also played a role in providing union delegations with a considerable degree of autonomy:

> There have always been Left-wing trade unionists who felt that the representative should take his mandate from his own union Conference. But a much more powerful body of opinion has felt that it was improper for the union to lay down an official line and attempt to lay down formal restrictions[13].

Minkin does however note that often, union delegates "were prepared to exercise their judgement in a way that did not always coincide with the mandates of their own organisation but instead sustained the role of the Parliamentary leadership"[14].

The unions' presence and role at Conference has also been the subject of a robust socialist-feminist critique, not just because of their historic tendency to send predominantly male delegations there[15] but also because block votes once determined the composition of the since-abolished women's section of the NEC - with minimal reference to the views of their rank-and-file women members.

Hilary Wainwright partly ascribed the unwillingness or inability to adequately represent marginalised and oppressed groups within the working class to what she has described as a 'fundamental weakness' of Labourist ideology and culture:

> …tending to treat the collectivities to which it is loyal - the trade union and the state in particular - as often idealised wholes apart from the individuals who compose

[13] Minkin 1980, p268

[14] Minkin 1980, p268

[15] Minkin 1991, p282

> them… which in practice involves a failure to recognise that social structures, though certainly existing prior to individuals, also depend on their agency and activity.

Furthermore, Wainwright drew attention to a long-running Labourist reluctance to probe and push the boundaries of political respectability, suggesting that it was this that tended to "[stop] the process short when it comes to women members' right to direct representation at the centre of the party's power structure, and to the constitutional (or for that matter political) recognition of black members' rights to self-organisation".

But despite terming the block vote an 'anti-democratic farce… Labour's own House of Lords', Ali and Hoare acknowledged that this link to the organised working class - though bureaucratic and even deferential in important respects - has in fact restricted Labour leaders' room for manoeuvre at crucial times, terming it:

> a class constraint on Labour leaders, which makes it, for example, more difficult for them as we saw in 1978–9 to embrace austerity policies with impunity than for the SPD [Germany's Social Democratic Party] or even a party like the PCI [Italian Communist Party].

This "class constraint" might have proved somewhat less effective in later years as the trade union movement declined in size and influence, but it continued to be the case that Labour leaderships could not act with total indemnity in this regard. Ali and Hoare's conclusion on the matter - that any attempt to sever this link, whatever its flaws, would be "a massively regressive move" - therefore still applies.

Conference sovereignty, the unions, and the revisionist challenge

Union leaderships have been by no means unquestioningly subordinate to the PLP and its leadership. Spells of serious truculence on the part of union leaders have flared up throughout the Labour Party's history, as happened after Ramsay MacDonald's betrayal in 1931, or when Bevin's blistering speech from the Conference rostrum in 1935 effectively destroyed George Lansbury's leadership[16].

However, this has always sat uneasily with a lot of Labour parliamentarians given their vision of themselves as being above class interests and the mucky business of class struggle - as Panitch has argued, the party's identification with the advancement of working-class interests has always been "particularly tortured and ambiguous". Labour MPs have very often tended to have a somewhat mystical view of their own function as fulfilling a higher national purpose, "not in the Gramscian sense of formulating and leading a hegemonic class project, but in the conventional idealist sense of defining a 'national interest' above classes"[17].

Minkin notes that even in the party's early years, many Labour MPs therefore sought to assert their independence from the Conference and the NEC - and hence from the broader labour and trade union movement - by demonstrating an orthodox 'fitness to rule'. As Ramsay MacDonald himself told Conference in 1928:

> There is one thing I would like to say, and I think it is about time we said it. As long as I hold any position in the Parliamentary Party - and I know I can speak for my colleagues also - we are not going to take our instructions from any outside body unless we agree with

[16] Minkin 1980, p19

[17] Leo Panitch, 'The Impasse of Social Democratic Politics', Working Class Politics in Crisis: Essays on Labour and the State, Verso 1986, p14

them[18].

But the political earthquake of MacDonald's defection, taking place against the backdrop of deepening global political and economic crisis, forced leading intellectuals in and around the Labour Party to reconsider some of their fundamental political assumptions. As John Saville puts it:

> The crisis of 1931 had profoundly disturbed the complacency which had affected large sections of the Labour movement concerning the ease with which radical change could be introduced… Even such a moderate socialist as R.H. Tawney felt it necessary to emphasise that the attempt to implement a socialist programme would be a 'pretty desperate business' to be met with 'determined resistance' by every section of the privileged classes; and the political position of the newly established Socialist League (1932), in the words of Stafford Cripps, was that in their defence of property rights the 'ruling class will go to almost any length to defeat Parliamentary action'. It was this sort of thinking that largely influenced the politics of the left in the first half of the 1930s, against the background of the worst economic crisis world capitalism had so far experienced[19].

Clement Attlee was one of those leading Labour figures moulded by the experience of 1931, and Minkin notes that his Labour government after 1945 (at least for its first three years) made a point of respecting Conference decisions and abiding by them. Conference itself came to be seen as a kind of bulwark against the threat of 'MacDonaldism', the very name now a byword for betrayal[20].

[18] Minkin 1980, p14

[19] John Saville, The Labour Movement in Britain, Faber & Faber 1988, p58

[20] Minkin 1980, p26

However, with the onset of the Cold War and the waning radicalism of the Attlee government, the party leadership and the trade unions both tightened their grip on the party Conference. Minkin highlights the fact that 'the platform' suffered eight defeats from 1946-8 - with not one in the key areas of foreign and defence policy. Agenda management thereafter intensified even further and after 1950, the party leadership went a decade without suffering a reverse at Conference[21].

After Labour's third successive election defeat in 1959, the party's 'revisionist' intellectuals, gathered around the leadership of Hugh Gaitskell, embarked on a round of soul-searching. It's worth noting here that Tony Blair and his acolytes have often sought to portray New Labour as a kind of Year Zero for the Labour Party - lumping the diverse strands of the party before 1994 into one homogenous, formless 'Old Labour' blob. In fact, New Labour was never as alien to previous incarnations of Labourism as it liked to claim - or, indeed, as it would come to be seen by many on the Labour left. In fact, Gaitskellite revisionism would serve as an important precursor to Blairism, as we will see.

What remains of this revisionist strand of Labourism today is in a parlous state, but as Radhika Desai has argued, the Gaitskellites put forward "a bold revision of the aims and methods of socialism"[22] as conceived in its orthodox Labourist incarnation. In Anthony Crosland's The Future of Socialism, the Gaitskellites had a more systematic statement of their creed (whatever its shortcomings) than their Bevanite rivals did of theirs. But in the process of mounting this challenge to some of the party's main articles of faith, the Gaitskellites earned themselves not only the hostility of the left, but also enduring suspicion among the more traditionalist elements on the Labour and trade union right.

As the Gaitskellites set about calling into question the very fundamentals of Labourist ideology, they struck up a close working relationship with political sociologists and psephologists - disciplines then coming into their own for the

[21] Minkin 1980, p23-4

[22] Radhika Desai, Intellectuals and Socialism: 'Social Democrats' and the Labour Party, Lawrence & Wishart 1994, p66

first time, and thereby providing the revisionists with a seemingly scientific basis for their arguments[23]. Whereas criticism of the party's policymaking structures had previously come mainly from the left, they now started to originate from the Gaitskellite right[24], putting the Bevanites on the defensive.

It was argued, in a highly proto-Blairite manner, that the prominent role of the trade unions at Conference and on the NEC had become a major turn-off for the middle-class voters Labour needed to win to stand any chance of forming a government, and that in any case the party's activist base could be jettisoned in favour of the pursuit of positive media coverage. Despite the 'revisionist' tag, as we have seen, asserting independence from the party's rank-and-file and the trade unions was in itself nothing new on the Labour right. However, the Gaitskellites were the first to consciously formulate this aim and articulate a strategic rationale for it.

Anthony Crosland made the Gaitskellite case for change in October 1960: "With the growing penetration of the mass media, political campaigning has become increasingly centralised; and the traditional local activities, the door-to-door canvassing and the rest, are now largely a ritual."[25]

It stands to reason, therefore, that the Gaitskellites had relatively little regard for the sovereignty of Labour Conference, which remained sacrosanct for most party activists. As it would for the Blairites decades later, for the Gaitskellites distancing themselves from what they considered to be Labour's shibboleths became an electoral strategy in itself. A direct showdown with the old guard at Conference was therefore in their interests, Minkin suggests. Furthermore, he notes, a confrontation on defence was likely to be of particular use to the revisionists as they sought to deflect attention away from the issue of public ownership, where they had largely failed to shift party and trade union opinion[26]. But Gaitskell's

[23] Minkin 1980, p274

[24] Minkin 1980, p275

[25] Quoted in Minkin 1980, p276

[26] Minkin 1980, p283

attempt to scrap the original Clause IV failed, with even traditionalist rightwing trade union opinion against him on this.

In 1960, Labour Conference voted for unilateral nuclear disarmament. It was clear during the previous year that opinion on the matter had been shifting inside the trade unions, particularly inside the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) and the General and Municipal Workers Union (GMWU)[27]. Gaitskell himself appears to have anticipated this, making ambiguous statements in this period about his stance on Conference sovereignty, first hinting at repudiating it and then affirming it[28].

Conference's support for unilateral nuclear disarmament was neither accepted nor simply ignored, but actively rejected by the leadership, which mobilised to overturn it via the pro-Gaitskell Campaign for Democratic Socialism. Harold Wilson - then shadow chancellor - challenged Gaitskell for the leadership as a result, duly mouthing pieties about the "important pronouncements" of Conference while refusing to commit himself to full Conference sovereignty[29]. In the end, Wilson won the votes of fewer than a third of Labour MPs.

The vote on unilateral nuclear disarmament was duly reversed at Labour Conference in 1961, with the Gaitskellite 'Policy for Peace' document, stipulating full support for NATO, passed by an overwhelming margin. But as Minkin argues, though Gaitskell had seemingly got the outcome he wanted, he had only done so with the assistance of the trade unions, thereby amounting to "an acceptance of the very authority which was being challenged"[30]. While the episode helped to cement the Gaitskellites' dominance within the party it did not, as Minkin argues, enable them to shake off the yoke of the trade unions or detach themselves from the wider labour movement.

[27] Minkin 1980, p273

[28] Minkin 1980, p274

[29] Minkin 1980, p288

[30] Minkin 1980, p288

Heading towards breakdown

Upon Gaitskell's death in 1963, Wilson ascended to the Labour leadership. Many of his supporters read into this a reassertion of Conference sovereignty, as this appeared to have been the issue on which Wilson - a former Bevanite to boot - had challenged Gaitskell for the leadership three years earlier. They were to be sorely disappointed; as one Labour MP would later put it, this was to be the era in which "the grass came away from the roots"[31]. As has generally been the case with Labour leaders, Wilson considered it essential to demonstrate his credentials as a dependable steward of British capitalism. It appeared to him that the most effective way to do this - in line, tellingly, with Gaitskellite prescriptions - was to assert his independence from the trade unions and the Labour Party rank-and-file[32].

While the Conference agenda-setters and the NEC worked overtime to shield the new Labour leadership from embarrassing defeats[33], the 1964-70 Labour government would have its foreign and defence policies rejected by Conference on six occasions[34]. This did nothing, however, to deter the government for proceeding with its staunchly pro-US line on Vietnam. Discontent within the party and the trade unions was mounting, and the situation would soon start to prove unsustainable.

After 1967, the NEC would increasingly start to align itself with the critics of the leadership, although its dissident role should not be overstated. Moderate rightwingers like Jim Callaghan, who enjoyed close relations with the trade unions at this time, started to take up more independent-minded stances[35]. The NEC - including Callaghan - passed a motion rejecting Wilson and Barbara Castle's flagship In Place of Strife white paper (an attempt to curb the powers of the

[31] Quoted in Minkin 1980, p290

[32] Minkin 1980, p292

[33] Minkin 1980, p150

[34] Minkin 1980, p291

[35] Minkin 1980, p296-7

unions) by 16 votes to 5, although it did also spurn a Conference vote on the situation in the former Rhodesia at around the same time, suggesting it was not entirely motivated by a commitment to Conference sovereignty[36].

Wilson and the Labour frontbench continued to defy Conference decisions after returning to government in 1974, in particular ignoring the verdict of a special Conference on the Common Market the following year[37]. These years of ongoing disregard for the views of Conference on key issues was proving catalytic, setting the stage for the battles that would shake the party to its foundations during the second half of the 1970s and the early 1980s. As Patrick Seyd observes:

> During the 1960s the practice of PLP initiative sustained by the NEC and supported by the annual Conference broke down and the left was in a position to win votes at both the NEC and the annual Conference[38].

Seyd also notes that the battles over In Place of Strife had serious repercussions inside the trade unions, inciting a reaction which would make a crucial contribution to the revival of the Labour left in the 1970s[39]. However, Minkin asserts that "what is striking is not their [the unions'] aggression but their restraint in refraining from using the Labour Party as an instrument' following In Place of Strife"[40] - in other words, though they had a range of potential sanctions at their disposal, ranging from cutting sponsorship or calling a special Conference to pressurising union-backed MPs, they were reluctant to use them.

This is an important thread which runs through the history of the party-union relationship - the unwillingness of trade union leaders, even the more radical among them, to intrude too much on what is seen as the politicians' turf. But

[36] Minkin 1980, p302

[37] Minkin 1980, p331

[38] Patrick Seyd, The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left, Palgrave 1987, p20-21

[39] Seyd 1987, p5

[40] Minkin 1991, p177

at this period, a new generation of trade union leaders was emerging, with new leftwing leaders elected in four of the five largest affiliated unions[41]; the most dramatic shift was seen in the Engineers' union (AUEW) where Hugh Scanlon replaced rightwinger Bill Carron, although the right would regain ground here again after 1972[42].

While there were important political differences between them, Scanlon and like-minded TGWU leader Jack Jones were different from even their leftwing predecessors in that they were prepared to associate with the grassroots Labour left - including Tribune and the Institute for Workers' Control - and both backed campaign group Socialist Charter in its efforts to make the PLP "an instrument of popular control responsive to the members and their Conference"[43].

Although the two largest unions were left-led by this point, the right remained in control of a number of smaller and medium-sized unions - which meant that the left was deprived of a rock-solid majority at Conference[44]. Nonetheless, it was clear by this point that the best efforts of the revisionists to change the soul of the labour and trade union movement had failed. Minkin observes that the frustrations of the Labour left had been pent up throughout the years of revisionist control of the party apparatus[45] - and now, backed up by some of the movement's most powerful trade unions, they were forcing their way onto the agenda at Conference.

[41] Minkin 1991, p161

[42] Minkin 1991, p162

[43] Minkin 1991, p164

[44] Minkin 1980, p322

[45] Minkin 1980, p326

Trade unions and the twilight of post-war social democracy

By the mid-1970s, with a global economic crisis again flaring up, post-war social democracy was staggering towards its expiration. It would be left to Margaret Thatcher to administer the final coup de grace, but the initial neoliberal turn had been made by Callaghan and Denis Healey after 1976[46] - sending shockwaves through the entire labour movement. As Ali and Hoare wrote about the period, "the reduced ability of British capitalism to make economic concessions [to the working class]… made it increasingly hard for union leaders to make deals with successive governments, thus undercutting the traditional union-Labour relationship". But although the Wilson and Callaghan governments of the '70s are commonly portrayed as helpless prisoners of intransigent trade union 'barons', this is in fact a crude caricature of the reality.

In fact, union leaders made great efforts to safeguard the '74-'79 Labour government. While many workers experienced years of real-terms falling wages, the trade unions did win some substantial gains from this arrangement - Minkin lists measures including the repeal of Ted Heath's Industrial Relations Act, the abolition of statutory incomes controls, freezes on rents and price controls, linking pensions to average earnings, and the Health and Safety Act 1974. Minkin also states that at around this time, Jones and Scanlon "became as sensitive to the idea of the social wage as much as the cash wage"[47]. The knowledge of what the looming spectre of Thatcherism likely portended, of course, also gave trade union leaders another reason to cling tightly to Wilson and Callaghan.

The trouble for Jones and Scanlon was that, in doing so, they were inadvertently helping to fuel the left upsurge they were hoping to quell[48]. The pair emerged as crucial bulwarks of government stability, bringing them into further conflict

[46] John Medhurst's That Option No Longer Exists (Zero Books, 2014) provides a very useful account of this period.

[47] Minkin 1991, p166

[48] Minkin 1991, p165

with the left in their respective unions[49]. But internal elections in some unions were starting to indicate a rightward shift. The hard-right Terry Duffy, who would later become a key figure in the battles against the Labour left in the subsequent decade, was elected AUEW present in 1978 and by the end of that year, the union's executive council had no leftwing members remaining[50]. The rightward movement in the unions was uneven and took years to play out in full, but it was well underway by the latter half of the 1970s.

Scanlon had also set his face against constitutional reform of the party, increasingly a key demand of the Labour left. Under heavy pressure from Terry Duffy[51], Scanlon defied the will of his AUEW Conference delegation to vote against the proposals of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) for mandatory reselection at the Conference of 1978. The left was apoplectic at this abuse of the block vote, though Scanlon somewhat dubiously claimed it was a genuine mix-up on his part[52]. While Jones was more sympathetic to the reformers, he too maintained a distance from CLPD. Scanlon however considered internal party reform to be "chicken shit" compared to the big economic and social issues of the day[53] - apparently not sharing the view that, as the Labour left at the time was arguing, to address these issues in a manner beneficial to the working class (rather than on the terms of capital), democratisation of the party and empowerment of its grassroots was a prerequisite.

Changes elsewhere in the trade unions worked to the advantage of the Labour left, however. The National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) - probably the most radical trade union in Britain by the late 1970s - had seen its affiliation to the party rise by 350,000 from where it was at the start of the decade[54]. This served to partially offset moves to the right in other affiliated unions, and according to

[49] Minkin 1980, p350

[50] Minkin 1980, p356

[51] Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, The End of Parliamentary Socialism: From New Left to New Labour, Verso 2001, p150

[52] Seyd 1987, p107

[53] Minkin 1991, p181-2

[54] Minkin 1980, p357

Minkin a net total of about 500,000 votes had been added to the left's tally at Conference by 1979[55].

The Conference of that year, in the wake of Labour's epoch-breaking election defeat, saw a tidal wave of anger unleashed at the platform. In 1978, Conference had delivered a stinging rebuke to Callaghan by rejecting his pay policy, only for the leadership to then go ahead and - in a fit of hubris - implement a below-inflation 5% pay increase in the public sector. The 1979 manifesto also greatly disappointed much of the Labour and trade-union rank-and-file, with a raft of Conference-backed policies, including Lords abolition, excluded. The demand for constitutional reform - specifically mandatory reselection of Labour MPs, extending the vote in leadership elections to CLPs and unions, and handing the NEC control over election manifestos - was thereafter pursued "with a ferocity which shocked many in the PLP and indicated the full extent of the resentment they had generated amongst Labour's activists"[56].

Union leaderships, however, were by no means eager to stick the boot in. Most union leaders by this point were aligned with the centre and right of the movement, and there was much anxiety and guilt within the movement at the way trade unionists had been seen to bring down a Labour government[57]. However, the depth of the anger among CLP delegates - not just young upstarts but time-served, dedicated Labour members - went some way to swaying union delegations and made it harder for the leaders to control them[58].

The Bennite insurgency and 'hammering the left'

The upsurge of the left in the CLPs and the unions "[shook] the whole structure and raised fundamental questions about the relationship between unions, party

[55] Minkin 1980, p358

[56] Minkin 1980, p351

[57] Minkin 1991, p193

[58] Minkin 1980, p365

and parliamentary representation", as Ali and Hoare put it. But it was the right wing of the trade union movement which would subsequently play the decisive role in rolling back the advance of the left during this period. Dianne Hayter's Fightback[59] gives the most comprehensive insider account of this. The shock of the SDP split and the subsequent damage it caused to Labour's electoral prospects, however, considerably strengthened the right's hand - and they were assisted by the fact that the SDP's attempts to woo unions from Labour had proved singularly unsuccessful.

John Golding, MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme, had been elected to the NEC at the 1978 Conference but this initially flew largely under the radar of the left[60]. Indeed, the left overall considered itself strengthened by the NEC elections of that year, thanks to the addition of Neil Kinnock (still considered to be on Labour's radical left at this time) and Dennis Skinner. But Golding was to prove instrumental in the counter-offensive against Labour's Bennite new left, helping to establish the St Ermin's Group of rightwing trade union leaders single-mindedly committed to wresting control of the NEC from the left. By the Conference of 1982, all of those leftwing members of the NEC targeted for removal by the St Ermin's Group had indeed been deposed[61].

But it wasn't just hostility towards the right of the party and its leadership that had fuelled the left's upsurge in the 1970s and early '80s. In fact, the perceived failings of the leftwing Tribune group in Parliament had come under sustained criticism from the rank-and-file Labour and trade union left. The Tribune group was no more than loosely organised, with some MPs joining it for what Seyd calls "cosmetic reasons", simply to placate leftwing constituency parties[62]. Tribune was also strictly a parliamentary grouping, with no serious effort to cultivate an extra-parliamentary base. Indeed, previous attempts by the left to build such an extra-parliamentary grassroots organisation - as with Victory for Socialism in the

[59] Manchester University Press, 2005

[60] Panitch and Leys 2001, p151

[61] Panitch and Leys 2001, p200

[62] Seyd 1987, p77-8

1950s - had been clamped down on hard by the party's bureaucracy[63].

CLPD therefore pursued its three key reforms - mandatory reselection, tasking the NEC with producing manifestos and introducing an electoral college of CLPs, unions and MPs for leadership elections - with the aim of subordinating the PLP and its leadership to Conference, thereby (in theory) ensuring that they would implement its decisions. Their experiences had taught them that it did little good to pass radical policies at Conference, only to then leave it to a leadership and MPs who didn't believe in them to implement them. However, CLPD managed to win some support from beyond the socialist left by adopting "an ambivalent attitude to campaigning on issues other than the constitution", enabling it to "attract people with differing ideological views but a common desire for democratisation within the party"[64]. As the organisation had argued in a 1975 newsletter:

> Under the present arrangements there is no way the Conference can effectively influence the Parliamentary Labour Party… It has no machinery to ensure that its policy recommendations are acted on. However, the individual accountability of each MP to a regularly-held selection Conference, backed up by the possibility of replacement, can bring about this fundamental change which no Conference can accomplish[65].

While it received support (including financial backing) from different sections of various trade unions[66], the only larger unions to back all three of CLPD's constitutional changes at both the 1979 and 1980 party Conferences were TGWU, ASTMS and NUPE[67]. Relations between the last of these - which had been at the centre of union unrest during the Winter of Discontent - and the parliamentary leadership remained highly strained at this time. TGWU general secretary

[63] Seyd 1987, p76

[64] David Kogan and Maurice Kogan, The Battle for the Labour Party, Fontana Paperbacks 1982, p41

[65] CLPD Campaign Newsletter, May-June 1975, quoted in Seyd 1987, p85

[66] Kogan and Kogan 1982, p43

[67] Minkin 1991, p198

Moss Evans had tried to broker a compromise in the party on the matter of constitutional reform, but failed to impose his will on his union's delegation and its executive committee[68].

The rightwing unions, at this time, displayed a high level of disorganisation and, in some cases, tactical ineptitude. Ahead of the January 1981 special Conference to decide the make-up of the electoral college for leadership elections, AUEW's executive council had instructed the union's delegation to vote against any formula giving less than 51% of the vote to the PLP. This meant that, once their own proposal to give the PLP 75% of the vote fell, they could not switch their support to GMWU's alternative motion, which would have given MPs 50% of the vote. Meanwhile USDAW, another right-of-centre union, put forward a motion proposing to give 40% of the vote to the PLP, 30% to unions and 30% to CLPs. Sensing that this had a good chance of passing - as indeed it eventually did - CLPD and the leftwing Rank and File Mobilising Committee adroitly threw their own weight behind it.

But after that debacle, by October of the same year, the right-leaning unions were starting to get serious. Tony Benn's then-recent bid for the deputy leadership had alienated some of his left-of-centre trade union allies, including ASTMS' Clive Jenkins and TGWU's Alex Kitson, providing the right with an opportunity. The rightwing counter-offensive not only saw key leftwingers removed from the NEC altogether, but saw others deposed as chairs of its influential subcommittees[69]. Benn himself was one of the victims, as his tenure as chair of the Home Policy Committee - which had had a major influence on party policy in the preceding years - was brought to an end. Some of Benn's allies in CLPD, including Vladimir Derer, had noted the relative flimsiness of his victories in supportive unions during the deputy leadership contest, and felt that this could soon be reversed[70].

While the left's push for reform continued, union leaders were coming under in-

[68] Minkin 1991, p198

[69] Seyd 1987, p160

[70] Minkin 1991, p203

tense pressure from sections their own rank-and-file to "sort out the mess"[71]. In January 1982, the NEC and trade union leaders met at Bishop's Stortford, where it was agreed that there would be no more constitutional changes (which also meant no reversals of the recent reforms), and no further challenges for the leadership or deputy leadership. The change of the NEC's orientation was crucial. The constitutional changes achieved thus far had been achieved by an alliance of the left on the NEC and CLP and trade union activists. Without NEC support, the left elsewhere would inevitably struggle to steer its reforms through Conference[72].

Divisions also started to open up on the left over the proscription of Militant and other issues. CLPD was badly split and voted narrowly in favour, but the lasting tensions within the organisation were such that it was unable to campaign effectively for further reform in the following years[73]. A section of the Labour left would subsequently realign itself after 1983 with the leadership of Neil Kinnock, who had in turn realigned himself with the party's centre-right. He was assisted in his efforts by a number of trade unions. For example, while not a single major union changed its own policy on EEC membership between 1983 and 1986 - outright withdrawal had been party policy at the 1983 general election - there was a feeling that the disastrous election result had settled the matter for them. Hence union leaders backed Kinnock in his efforts to change party policy in this area[74].

The platform continued to suffer defeats at Conference in the Kinnock years, however, being on the receiving end of 17 reverses from 1987-89 alone. Between 1948-59, by contrast, the then-leadership had suffered only a single defeat at Conference[75]. But Kinnock was successfully able to earn the support of the unions in a range of crucial areas - including reform of the party's HQ as well as

[71] Minkin 1991, p203

[72] Minkin 1991, p204

[73] Seyd 1987, p164

[74] Minkin 1991, p296

[75] Minkin 1991, p311

its stances on economic policy and public ownership - as he sought to orientate the party away from some of its central policy commitments of preceding years[76].

Blair and the 'awkward squad'

Come the advent of New Labour, bringing both Conference and the NEC to heel was a key concern of party managers. The pitched battles of the 1980s, and the radical policies of NEC subcommittees, had to be avoided at all costs. After the Conference of 1994 - where Tony Blair signalled his intention to scrap Sidney Webb's Clause IV, and in which he would succeed where Gaitskell had failed - a tight-knit group of advisers was convened by the leader to bring Conference under control. Crucial to this was avoiding constitutional changes being put forward by delegates, coupled with a "pervasive concern over presentation" emphasising Blair's personal dominance of the party[77].

Blair's close coterie came to believe that having a 'good' Conference - i.e. one where the leadership got what it wanted with minimal trouble - was crucial to the party's performance in the opinion polls. Liam Byrne produced figures asserting that the Labour Party had declined by 10% in the opinion polls after the Conference of 1981, but had gained 11% in the wake of the far less fractious Conference of 1983[78]. This intensified Conference management soon scored successes, avoiding defeats on a string of potentially dicey issues (including railway renationalisation, Trident, the minimum wage, education and the blocked candidacy of Liz Davies in Leeds North East) at the Conferences between 1995 and 1997[79].

By the mid-1990s, the trade union movement had been in sustained decline for years. In 1996, trade union membership was below 7 million, down from 12 mil-

[76] Minkin 1991, p314

[77] Minkin 2014, p333

[78] Minkin 2014, p334

[79] Minkin 2014, p334-5

lion in 1979[80]. Union voting strength at Labour Conference was reduced to 50% that same year, but managing the unions in the run-up to Conference remained a crucial concern for Blairite party managers - although CLPs were at this time viewed as a likelier source of unrest - and indeed unions themselves were initially keen to assist in this task[81].

Union leaders, highly conscious of the damage a hostile media could do to the Labour Party and its standing with the general public, were largely supportive of the New Labour project early on. As with the Gaitskellites, while senior Blairites were wary of being associated with anything that smacked of 'Old Labour' - especially over-reliance on trade union leaders - they were forced to bend to reality and acknowledge the clout the trade union movement had within the party, and to work with it on party management.

Despite this, senior Blairites were often publicly at pains to dissociate themselves from the trade union movement. In October 1996, Stephen Byers - then Labour's industrial relations spokesperson - hinted to the press that the party-union link could be severed altogether, though this was swiftly denied[82]. More ambiguously, Blair pronounced that New Labour would "be respectful of the unions' part in our past", but that it would "have relations with them relevant for today" - and, revealingly, the unions by 1995 accounted for 54% of the party's income, down from 77% in 1986.[83].

There were still dissidents among the union leaderships. GMB's John Edmonds and Unison's Rodney Bickerstaffe both had their run-ins with Blair, more and more so as he pursued an increasingly hardline and neoliberal approach to public sector reform after 2001. TGWU meanwhile was more internally divided, though its executive generally favoured co-operation with the Labour leadership[84]. Serious tactical divisions occurred between GMB and Unison, with Edmonds taking

[80] Panitch and Leys 2001, p240

[81] Minkin 2014, p335

[82] Panitch and Leys 2001, p235

[83] Panitch and Leys 2001, p235

[84] Minkin 2014, p336-7

a more confrontational approach and Bickerstaffe's successor, Dave Prentis, a more accommodating one (he would be more sympathetically treated by party officials as a result, at least to begin with)[85].

But come the late 1990s, participation at Conference was noticeably on the wane. Minkin reports that the hall was frequently half-empty, with delegates instead taking advantage of other sessions - including training events - which were often of more interest than what was going on inside the hall itself[86]. The resolutions-based Conference system was effectively brought to an end alongside the introduction of the National Policy Forum (NPF)[87]. The NPF, meanwhile, was hamstrung from the start. Minkin notes that it was "open to creative democratic development, but it was also vulnerable to creative managerial control"[88]. Interest in it among the CLPs rapidly dissipated[89]. Minkin summarises by saying that "…the party's collective independent role in [policy] formulation had disappeared and 'partnership' had become in great measure managed subordination"[90].

From 2001 on, however, there was mounting anger among the trade unions at Blair's ever-more intransigent approach to public sector reform. GMB cut its affiliation to Labour from 650,000 to 400,000 in November 2001, with John Edmonds stung not just by the policy the leadership was pursuing, but the manner in which that policy was arrived at[91]. So serious was the tension, Minkin reveals, that Blairite managers even considered blacklisting GMB as a union for party officials[92].

With the invasion of Iraq looming, it might have been expected that the increasingly disgruntled unions would look to exact their revenge on the leadership on

[85] Minkin 2014, p494

[86] Minkin 2014, p345-6

[87] Minkin 2014, p356-7

[88] Minkin 2014, p303

[89] Minkin 2014, p330. In 1997, 800 party members put themselves forward for the 27 NPF seats reserved for the CLPs. By 2000, this number had collapsed to just 41.

[90] Minkin 2014, p307

[91] Minkin 2014, p508

[92] Minkin 2014, p532

this issue at the Conferences of 2002 and 2003. But this failed to materialise, as the unions concentrated more on domestic issues on both occasions. However, the NEC was forced to withdraw its statement on Iraq at the 2002 Conference after GMB and Unison warned that they may not have been able to get their delegates to vote for it[93]. Opposition to the war on the TUC's General Council was often ferocious at this time, though unions constrained themselves carefully in public. The TUC's then-general secretary, Brendan Barber, declined any invitations to appear on anti-war platforms[94]. By the time of the 2003 Conference, there was a feeling that the occupation of Iraq would prove short-lived. A contemporary resolution tabled by the RMT on the war was ruled out of order, reconsidered privately for three days, and then rejected again[95].

At this time, a subtle shift was occurring in trade union politics. A new wave of union leaders - rapidly dubbed 'the awkward squad' by the press - emerged, including Derek Simpson of Amicus and TGWU's Tony Woodley (both aligned with the left at this time), while Prentis was involving himself in internal party politics to a greater extent than his predecessor Bickerstaffe had done[96]. However, Minkin observes that the response of the party leadership was generally muted, noting that previous union leaders with a far more solid grounding in leftwing politics - namely Jones and Scanlon - had been tamed by Wilson and Callaghan. Minkin also points out, however, that Jones and Scanlon had been granted the kind of influence and attention that Blair and Brown would never have dreamed of giving to their latter-day counterparts[97].

It did become clear, however, the 'awkward squad' lacked a coherent alternative political vision for the party and the wider movement. Minkin points out that at no point did they push for constitutional changes which could have strengthened their own position vis-a-vis the party's leadership[98]. But cracks were opening up

[93] Minkin 2014, p543
[94] Minkin 2014, p545
[95] Minkin 2014, p565
[96] Minkin 2014, p550
[97] Minkin 2014, p551
[98] Minkin 2014, p563

elsewhere. Two left-led unions - the Fire Brigades Union and the RMT - both disaffiliated from the party in 2004, while Blair himself would announce his own departure from the political stage at the Trades Union Congress in September 2006.

Later that month, with Blair's resignation imminent, the Labour Conference was a somewhat ill-tempered affair. Dave Prentis had his mic cut off while he addressed the hall, while a host of critical resolutions - including on employment rights, the NHS and pensions - were all passed against the will of the platform, although only a minority of CLP delegates supported each of them[99]. Trade union leaders subsequently looked to Brown with some sympathy and discussions with the unions in this period were cordial, but as much as they might have wanted to, it was hard for them to discern any substantial political difference between him and his predecessor[100].

The 2010 general election defeat, widely considered to represent the final demise of New Labour, was followed by the rise of Ed Miliband, the union-backed candidate, to the party leadership. Unfortunately for the unions, however, Miliband would spend the next five years visibly cringing at the mantle. Under intense pressure from a Blairite right vastly overrating the popularity of its own politics and demanding he distance himself from the unions - and on the pretext of what turned out to be a bogus row over a candidate selection in Falkirk - it as Miliband who inadvertently opened the door to Labour's socialist left, introducing one-member-one-vote (OMOV) for leadership elections.

The unions, astutely sensing an opportunity to obtain a Labour leadership that was more to its liking, endorsed the change - which had been intended to have the opposite outcome - and it was passed overwhelmingly at a special Conference in March 2014. The rest, of course, is history.

[99] Minkin 2014, p650

[100] Minkin 2014, p735

Corbynism, the unions, and Conference

Despite the best efforts of the party managers during the Blair and Brown years, it is unlikely that political contestation will ever be permanently stamped entirely out of Labour Party Conference. It might decline in salience, urgency and ferocity, but the demand for Conference democracy - at various levels of the party and its affiliated organisations - persists. As Minkin argues, understanding the culture of the party is central to understanding this point:

> …the Conference of a political party is always more than simply a forum in which issues are fought over and decisions are taken. In the operation of its procedures and in the role allocated to it in the Party's authority structure are embodied a syndrome of political ideals: in the case of the Labour Party, these are egalitarian and participatory[101].

While Corbyn retained the support of most affiliated trade unions during the turbulent leadership contest of 2016, it is fair to say that scepticism towards him and his agenda remains among sections of the movement. GMB endorsed Owen Smith in 2016, while Unison's Prentis expressed opposition to the pursuit of major rule changes - unavoidable if Corbyn is to reshape Labour in his political image - prior to this year's general election.

The Labour left continues to face what was singled out nearly four decades ago as the party's "central dilemma"[102] - namely that imposing leftwing policies on a parliamentary party that doesn't want to implement them, or doesn't believe they can be implemented, is doomed to fail. While a major confrontation on constitutional appears to have been avoided this year with the deal over the 'McDonnell amendment', it seems doubtful that the various sections of the party and the

[101] Minkin 1980, xii

[102] Charlotte Atkins and Chris Mullin, How to Select or Reselect Your MP, CLPD/IWC 1981. Quoted in Panitch and Leys, The End of Parliamentary Socialism, p140

unions will be able to put it off indefinitely. Avoiding the appearance of division so soon after June's far better-than-expected general election result may well have been a factor behind the compromise successfully brokered this year, though we should not delude ourselves that a lasting peace has broken out.

But the Labour left's dominance of the party is far from guaranteed. Its organisation inside the trade unions has been a historic Achilles heel. Seyd notes that the Labour Co-ordinating Committee of the 1970s made a point of extending "the influence of the Labour left into rank-and-file trade-union activities"[103] but this remains exceptional in the Labour left's history. It has also long had a tendency to assume that support for its ideas among rank-and-file trade unionists is stronger than it actually is[104]. It would be foolish to argue that trade unions consist of an inherently socialist membership continually tricked, misled and betrayed by a wily rightwing bureaucracy.

The Labour left's alliances even with leftwing trade union leaderships, as we have seen, have often tended to be uneasy and contingent, breaking down when serious pressure has been applied. Leftwing union leaders have, as we have noted, very often been reluctant to interfere in what are seen as the prerogatives of the politicians. This has been partly out of reverence for the conventions in this area demarcating the respective areas of responsibility of the industrial and political wings of the labour movement, but also the product of a wariness on the part of trade unions at being seen to exert excessive influence (with the risk of negative electoral repercussions for the Labour Party). Their rightwing counterparts have generally been less troubled by this particular burden, given that their political interventions have so frequently come at the prompting of Labour's parliamentary leaders. Corbyn's current position, secure in the leadership but still lacking in loyal parliamentary support, potentially complicates matters.

There is a need, then, not just to build stronger links with the organised left inside the trade unions and to orientate those unions in a more decisively socialist

[103] Seyd 1987, p93

[104] Minkin 1991, p184

direction, but also to engage in the long-term process of helping to rebuild them. Trade union membership is roughly half of what it was at its peak in the early 1980s. The Labour left must be prepared to engage in the task of strengthening organisation in the workplace; this might include CLP-backed unionisation drives, a renewed Labour Party recruitment drive among trade unionists, or perhaps even an adapted version of the old Labour left idea of setting up workplace branches. As Wainwright wrote some 30 years ago, but which remains relevant: "it is more and more urgent for Party members to organise as Party members within the union".

It is possible that the Labour left could become entirely fixated on what Gregory Elliott has termed "composited triumphs" at Conference, with an "addiction to inner-party struggle"[105] taking precedence at the expense of the vital task of cultivating a base in communities and workplaces, building up robust, organised, self-confident support for socialist ideas and policies. Factional manoeuvring inside the Labour Party can become all-consuming, but it must not be allowed to become the be-all and end-all for the party's rank-and-file left.

But it is essential that the task of democratising the Labour Party, a prerequisite for which will be the further empowerment of Conference, is fought and won by the left. Without this, the party - with the best will in the world - will be unable to bring about a decisive shift of wealth and power in Britain. If the opportunity which Jeremy Corbyn's leadership represents for socialists is allowed to slip from our grasp, we cannot be sure when anything comparable might come around again. Whatever the past and present shortcomings of Labour's party democracy, Minkin's verdict from 1980 applies with equal force now:

> …there is now an opportunity for a serious attempt to build a more vigorous and fertile Party life. In this effort the Party's tradition of intra-party democracy can be, as it was in the past, an encouragement to active

[105] Gregory Elliott, Labourism and the English Genius, Verso 1993, p131

involvement[106].

[106] Minkin 1980, p334