

# Labour Party MARXISTS

labourpartymarxists.org.uk

Issue No2

November 2012

## Transform Labour into a real party of labour

Not back to the Fabian past, but forward to extreme democracy, working class rule and international socialism

There are still those amongst us who fondly look back to what they imagine to be a golden age. The old clause four (part four) of our constitution committed us: "To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service."

Mistakenly, this is interpreted as a sincere commitment to socialism. But when it was first adopted, in February 1918 - during the slaughter of inter-imperialist war - the idea of Sidney Webb and the Fabians was to divert the considerable sympathy that existed for the Russian Revolution into safe, constitutional, channels.

Needless to say, clause four was mainly for show. However, even if it had been taken seriously and put into practice, Fabian socialism is antithetical to working class self-liberation. Industry, banking, transport, etc, would be bureaucratically nationalised. The mass of the population, however, remain exploited wage-slaves. Capitalism without capitalists.

Nevertheless, the old clause four resulted from mass pressure. Because of World War I, because of the Russian Revolution, capitalism was widely discredited, viewed as inherently irrational, warlike, prone to constantly recurring crises. Socialism was seen as the answer. What was true of 1918 is increasingly the case in the 2010s. There is a widespread rejection of capitalism.

Calls for a return of the old clause four are understandable, but totally misplaced. We need to go forwards, not look backwards. Labour needs to organise on the basis of an explicitly socialist, as opposed to a social democratic, neoliberal or Blue Labour programme. Only then can we fulfil our responsibilities.

That is why Labour Party Marxists advocate extreme democracy in society and throughout the labour movement, working class rule and international socialism.

Historically - in terms of membership, finances and electoral base - our party has largely relied on the working class. This has been our greatest strength; and here is the source of our hope and confidence in the future. Because of its constantly renewed social position the working class tends towards collectivist, socialistic solutions.

Despite Blairism, New Labour and the public sacrifice of the old clause four we remain a distinctly class party. The historic relationship with the trade unions survives, there are still 2.7 million affiliated members and the working class 'core vote' stood up well in the last general election.

It would be a mistake of the worst kind to bank on the election of an Ed Miliband government. Such a government, we are told, will be committed to cuts and maintaining pay freezes.



No to control by faceless bureaucrats

Believe it. And far from austerity-lite being a step towards socialism, it will create demoralisation in the working class and the chances are the election of an even more rightwing and regressive Tory government. That has been the lesson of history. No, our main priority should be rebuilding, democratising and re-educating the entire labour movement. Inevitably that perspective includes transforming the Labour Party into a real party of labour.

As a party we should commit ourselves to energetically campaign to revive the trade union movement. The fall from 12 million trade union members in the late 1970s to some seven million today can be reversed. Party members should take the lead in recruiting masses of new trade unionists and restoring the strength of the unions in the workplace and in society at large. Every level of the party needs to be involved. That includes our councillors and MPs.

Strikes must be unashamedly supported. Not condemned. There ought to be a binding commitment to back workers in their struggle to protect jobs, pensions and fight spending cuts. Inevitably the anti-trade union laws will have to be defied.

In parallel *all* trade unions ought to be encouraged to affiliate to the Labour Party, *all* members of the trade unions encouraged to pay the political levy to the Labour Party and join as individual members.

Unions that have either been expelled or disaffiliated need to be welcomed back: eg, the RMT and FBU. But there are unions which have never had an organised relationship with the Labour Party: eg, PCS and NUT. Indeed of the 58 unions affiliated to the TUC only 15 are affiliated to Labour. Winning new trade union affiliates would help transform our present situation.

Naturally, the fight to transform the Labour Party cannot be separated from the fight to democratise the trade unions. All trade union officials ought to be subject to regular election and be recallable. No official should receive

pay higher than the average of the membership. Moreover, rules which restrict the ability of the rank and file to organise and criticise must be swept away. Such measures bring discredit to our movement.

Trade union votes at Labour Party conferences should be cast not by general secretaries, but proportionately, according to the political balance in each delegation. Conference cannot be dominated by four or five men in suits.

The Labour Party should be reorganised from top to bottom. All socialist and communist groups, leftwing think tanks and progressive campaigns ought to be encouraged to affiliate. The Labour Party must become the common home for all workers and working class organisations - the stated goal in 1900. *Towards that end the undemocratic bans and proscriptions must be rescinded.* Clause two (five) must be reformulated. A whole raft of new affiliated socialist and other such organisations would not bring in hundreds of thousands of new recruits. It would though bring in many highly valuable men and women of talent and dedication. The culture of our party can that way be greatly enhanced.

The Parliamentary Labour Party has to be brought into line. We must end the situation where Labour members vote for one thing and the PLP does another. What is needed is not further measures of bureaucratic control from above, but democratic control from below.

Our ward and constituency parties will continue to wither and die if they remain under the thumb of regional organisers and are expected to act as mere transmission belts for Victoria Street. Local autonomy enlivens, educates and lays the basis for growth and national influence. All officials in the Labour Party must be subject to regular election and re-election.

Labour Party Marxists want the present post of Labour leader abolished. While our party has to fulfil the statutory requirements laid down in the thoroughly undemocratic Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act, the *Führerprinzip* can be left to

others. The leader of the Labour Party should be a nominal position. Instead of a Bonaparte with the power to appoint shadow ministers, the National Executive Committee should be responsible for electing chairs of the PLP, shadow ministers, etc.

At present rank and file Labour Party members are deeply alienated. The Joint Policy Committee, the National Policy Forum and the whole Partnership into Power rigmarole have demonstrably failed. Instead of being reformed, they should simply be abolished. The NEC must be unambiguously responsible for drafting Labour Party manifestos. And, of course, the NEC needs to be fully accountable to

annual conference.

Annual conference must be the supreme body of the Labour Party. We need democratic debate and binding votes. Not a happy-clappy rally designed for Ed Miliband to display his acting talents in front of TV audiences. Make officials and shadow ministers report as humble servants. No more would-be media stars, no more control-freakery, no more business lobbyists, promotions and exhibits. An authoritative, honest, no-holds-barred conference would certainly guarantee an immediate increase in CLPs sending delegates to conference.

As with the trade unions, our elected representatives must be recallable by the constituency or other body that selected them. That includes Labour MPs, MEPs, MSPs, AMs, councillors, etc.

Likewise, without exception, our elected representatives should take only the average wage of a skilled worker. When it comes to existing salaries, the balance should be given to the party. On current figures, that means around £40,000 from each MP (at present they are only obliged to pay the £82 parliamentarians' subscription rate). That would give a substantial filip to our depleted finances.

It should be a basic principle that our representatives live like workers, not pampered, middle class careerists. If that was done, no longer would people say, 'All politicians are the same' or that they are 'In it for personal gain'.

This perspective motivates our 'For a strong, democratic and socialist labour movement' motion ●

### Motion No9 from Labour Party Marxists

## For a strong, democratic and socialist labour movement

The Miliband-Balls leadership's pledge that the next Labour government will responsibly manage the capitalist system will mean maintaining pay freezes and spending cuts, attacking the working class in the 'national interest' of the British capitalist class. This would not be a stepping stone towards socialism.

History shows that Labour governments committed to British nationalism, the monarchy and the existing constitutional order sow disillusionment and demoralisation in our class, paving the way for ever-more rightwing Tory governments. Cameron's Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition government, with its project of privatising health and education, is further to the right than the Thatcher and Major governments, which were more right wing than Heath's.

The capitalist system of exploitation and oppression is in deep, prolonged crisis, inflicting misery on humanity. Only the world's working class can bring the system to an end. But our mass organisations are weak and politically committed to capitalism.

Our key aim, therefore, is to rebuild, democratise and re-educate the entire labour movement. With powerful trade unions, with the parliamentary Labour Party under the control of a vibrant mass membership, with a working class that is militantly political and

consciously socialist, far-reaching concessions can be gained in Britain, and effective solidarity delivered to our brothers and sisters broad. In co-ordination with the international workers' movement, crucially across Europe, capitalism can be overcome and replaced by the rule of the working class and socialism ●

# Not personal but an irrespons

Political differences should be brought out into the light of day. Hiding them for appearance's sake stores up

Delegates at the 2012 TUC congress and the Labour Party conference were no doubt perplexed to find two rival publications on sale with the same name - *Labour Briefing*. Both journals argue for socialist ideas in the Labour Party and both claim to be the continuation of 32 years of *Labour Briefing* as a pluralist forum for the Labour left, trade unionists and campaigners.

The genuine *Labour Briefing* ([labourbriefing.org.uk](http://labourbriefing.org.uk)) is now produced by the Labour Representation Committee, a growing organisation led by John McDonnell MP, with 1,200 or so individual members and around 150 affiliated organisations, including national trade unions, and a democratic structure. The other, self-styled "original" *Labour Briefing* ([labourbriefing.co.uk](http://labourbriefing.co.uk)) has no democratic structure. It is a spoiler launched by six comrades who had come to regard *Briefing* as their personal property and were unwilling to abide by the *Briefing* AGM vote. The LRC had become "too leftwing" for them. Others who opposed the merger have accepted the democratic decision, to their credit. Jon Lansman, for instance, was a signatory of the anti-merger motion, but joined the interim editorial board which functioned until the LRC's November 10 AGM.

Peter Firmin's motion to the July 7 *Labour Briefing* annual general meeting - that *Briefing* should "become the magazine of the LRC" - was carried, and the alternative motion moved by Jenny Fisher that the magazine should continue to be "run by our readers" was defeated, by 44 votes to 37 with three abstentions, after what comrade Firmin fairly described as "by and large a healthy debate". By this slim majority, the AGM agreed to "transfer *Briefing* to the LRC with immediate effect, with the aim of a relaunch at this autumn's Labour Party conference". In fact, an interim 16-page September issue was produced in time for the TUC, and the October issue was out for party conference.

On the day, the *Briefing* AGM debate was thankfully free of the silly online accusation that the whole purpose of the merger proposal was personal: to exclude Jenny Fisher, Christine Shawcroft and others from *Briefing*'s editorial board (EB). In fact the June LRC national committee meeting had already agreed (subject to *Briefing* voting for the merger) to invite all existing EB members to sit on the interim editorial board "with full rights, including voting", alongside those appointed by the NC. Subsequently, they will have the same right as anyone else to a seat on the EB - six to be elected by the LRC AGM and six by the national committee, to give "a balance of independence from, and accountability to, the NC". Co-optees will not have a vote, in order "to maintain the supremacy of those elected". It goes without saying, of course, that this NC plan may be varied by the LRC AGM itself.

This democratic structure will, hopefully, bring transparency and accountability to the editorial board, in place of the previous 'tyranny of structurelessness' which left control in the hands of those in the know, or the most tenacious volunteers. "At present," said the successful resolution, "*Briefing* is run by a small group of people ... its structures and procedures are not very transparent



Christine Shawcroft (left): funny sort of solidarity

and accountable." In the discussion on the two motions, Andrew Berry pointed to the "accountability deficit in *Briefing*". Norette Moore - who, as a recent secretary of Greater London LRC, might reasonably be expected to know - said she had not previously attended a *Briefing* AGM because this was "the first time I heard that it is open". I myself was similarly surprised, earlier in the year, to discover that AGMs were open to readers, and that anyone at all could attend and vote - a fact not advertised, and presumably unknown to most of the roughly 950 *Briefing* readers.

Under these circumstances, it is perhaps inevitable that personal frictions arise and working together may become intolerable to the individuals concerned - in this case between comrades Jenny Fisher and Graham Bash. It was comrade Bash's withdrawal from the EB in February, also withdrawing the use of his home as the EB's office and meeting place, which triggered the revival of the 2008 proposal that *Briefing* should merge with LRC. But behind personal conflict there are usually political differences, and it was wrong for comrade Shawcroft to ask readers to oppose the merger on the basis of personal loyalty, as she did online, dividing the two EB camps into "carvers and carvees".

Despite the much proclaimed commitment on both sides of the merger debate to continuing *Briefing*'s pluralist tradition of carrying articles from different political trends, it is evident that airing differences in public - actually a most healthy thing to do - is regarded by most as an embarrassment. In the online debates prior to the AGM, quite a few comrades bemoaned "wasting time on internal disputes", while there are real issues "out there". At the AGM, Simon Clark (for example), while arguing for the merger, said that the LRC "needs a paper, not debate", and an ex-Islington councillor thought it "sad to dispute amongst ourselves". But unless ideas are openly expressed and thrashed out in the light of day, they fester in an undeveloped form in the dark, and only burst into public view in the rotten form of a crisis - as on this occasion.

During the four years since the merger proposal was previously raised, the idea was not developed and thrashed out in the pages of the journal itself - the logical thing to have done. If that had happened, readers could have become familiar with the arguments and the issue need not have exploded onto a surprised readership in the form of a personality clash. In the period leading to the AGM, *Briefing* did not even carry the text of Peter Firmin's merger motion, though it had been submitted to the EB as early as its April meeting. Surely this was the legitimate business of all readers and supporters, and should have been published in full as early as possible. Pre-AGM discussion in the journal was limited to a single page for each side in the June issue, and again in the July issue, but there were no readers' letters on the merger proposal. So the main debate raged on the Facebook pages of *Briefing* and LRC, where facts and arguments were gradually dragged into the light - but only for those with the time and tenacity to dredge their way through hundreds of messages.

## 'Historic' delay

Chairing the AGM, comrade Shawcroft, drawing attention to the day's agenda, announced somewhat casually and unconvincingly that the merger proposal (or "takeover", as she called it) made it "a historic meeting". But the proposed agenda allocated only an hour and 20 minutes out of four hours to this issue - to be preceded by two hours for four guest speakers and discussion. A comrade from Labour Party Marxists proposed that the "historic" merger proposal - "the reason there is such a big turnout today" - be taken seriously and moved to the top of the agenda. Only if time permitted should we hear the guest speakers. But comrade Shawcroft overruled the proposal, and invited the comrade to challenge the chair's ruling, which would require a two-thirds majority. However, John Stewart asked if more time could be given to the two motions, and the chair agreed to start the item 30 minutes earlier.

Although passions were sometimes high, significant political differences

between the two sides were difficult to discern. Both sides were clearly committed to the struggle within the Labour Party, but at least some of the anti-merger wing wanted to keep a certain distance from the LRC - apparently because they want to keep a certain distance from the non-Labour left. The anti-merger comrades did not dispute the description of *Briefing* in comrade Firmin's four-page motion: "*Briefing* has a unique role in providing a broad, non-sectarian voice for the left, which orientates politically towards the Labour Party and fights to channel the demands of the broader movement and campaigns towards the party and a Labour government." But the motion also emphasised the importance of the class struggle outside the Labour Party and, while comrade Firmin said "the Labour Party is the agency of change", he added that "class struggle is the agency of change in the Labour Party". Richard Price, in contrast, exhibited a severe case of Labour Party sectarianism, fulminating against LRC joint secretary Andrew Fisher for resigning from Labour like so many comrades (though he later rejoined), over the Labour government's 2003 invasion of Iraq. And the LRC, he complained, had split the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance slate and allowed rightwinger Luke Akehurst onto Labour's NEC. Comrade Stewart, who penned the anti-merger page in the June issue of *Briefing*, admitted that "the LRC is too left for me".

Ian Ilett, speaking in favour of the merger, saw the political difference as either "working in the Labour Party, waiting for the class struggle to come in" (anti-merger), or "going out to the class struggle" (pro-merger). Indeed, comrade Jenny Fisher's emphasis, in moving the anti-merger motion, saw *Briefing*'s role almost purely within the Labour Party. "Some in the LRC," she said, "want to build the LRC as an alternative movement". *Briefing* "isn't an organisation: it's a magazine". And, pretending that *Briefing* does not have its own politics, she added: "Don't tell the Labour left the answers - they have ideas themselves." *Briefing* should "give space to the newly elected left on Labour's NEC

and national policy forum". Its role should be "to make the left visible, not to lead it".

With all their talk of pluralism, of giving a voice to all strands of the Labour left, the anti-merger wing of *Briefing* seems satisfied with the left remaining divided, so that *Briefing* can carry on its "non-aligned" role of supposedly being everyone's voice. These comrades do not want organisational unity - which, however, is vital to the task of defeating the pro-capitalist bureaucracy and transforming the party into a pro-working class, socialist party. Reflecting the sad division of much of the left, in or out of Labour, into bureaucratic-centralist sects which forbid public discussion of political differences, they support this backwardness by believing that pluralist organisation, where minorities can express their views, is impossible. Pluralism versus organisation. Wrong.

Hence, the pejorative term, "house journal", that was used by a number of anti-merger comrades. Comrade Fisher most clearly expressed this view in a Facebook posting: "I still don't see how the LRC can produce a pluralist and open magazine if it is the magazine of only one organisation - its mouthpiece, aiming to build that organisation (unless one assumes that organisation is the pluralist left, rather than part of it)."

Perhaps the trump card of the anti-merger wing was veteran Labour CND comrade Walter Wolfgang, who told us that *Briefing* is needed because "*Tribune* is not always consistent". But *Briefing* "must be independent of an organisation ... To make it a house journal would be to murder it." However, the pro-merger trump was John McDonnell, who, after pleading for everyone to accept whatever decision was made and leave the room as comrades, reluctantly admitted that he had been won away from his previous agnostic position by the arguments of Mike Phipps and was now convinced that merger was "beneficial for the movement overall".

## Red-baiting

On July 8, the day after the AGM,

# Sensible political split

trouble, writes Stan Keable

instead of accepting the democratic decision of the *Briefing* AGM, comrades Fisher and Shawcroft issued a press release which, unfortunately, reverted to many of the acrimonious terms and arguments used online before the relatively cordial debate at the AGM. *Labour Briefing* is to “close down” and the LRC intends to launch “its own house journal, using the same name”. Despite the majority vote by the *Briefing* AGM on a motion from members of the *Briefing* editorial board, the press release has it that “members of the LRC - aided by members of the Communist Party of Great Britain, which produces the *Weekly Worker* - attended the AGM of *Labour Briefing* and forced through a vote ...” The merger is “a hostile takeover which is tantamount to political asset-stripping”, the press release continued. “Those readers who have been robbed of their magazine are now the human collateral damage in the LRC’s turn to empire building.”

This red-baiting and fingering comrades as Communist Party members, reminiscent of McCarthyism and the worst aspects of the Labour Party in the cold war period, was repeated uncritically by Jon Lansman in his July 9 Left Futures blog, where he presented what appeared to be a neutral, journalistic report - failing to mention that he was one of the signatories of the anti-merger motion, or the unmissable fact that comrade McDonnell had spoken in favour of the merger.

In the light of their hostile press release, I put two questions to comrades Shawcroft and Fisher. Are you planning to launch a rival magazine, as some have suggested? I hope not. Will you write for the coming issues of *Briefing*? I hope so. Unfortunately, their answer came only with the first issue, the TUC special, of “the original” *Labour Briefing*.

Feigning exclusion, the six splitters - Lizzy Ali, Stephen Beckett, Jenny Fisher, Richard Price, Christine Shawcroft and John Stewart - say they formed the Labour Briefing Co-operative Limited, which owns the “original”, to act as “a custodian of *Labour Briefing* to protect it against being taken over by a hostile group”. Their journal declares itself “an independent voice and forum for socialist ideas in the Labour Party and trade unions”. Its first editorial excused their irresponsible split by repeating the mantra of a “hostile takeover”, although the merger proposal originated in the *Briefing* editorial board itself, most of whom were LRC members. It wrongly accuses the pro-merger comrades of “contempt for Labour Party members”, on the basis of a paragraph in LRC joint secretary Pete Firmin’s successful AGM resolution: “*Briefing* is predominantly sold within the Labour Party to Labour Party members. This is a weakness, as membership of the party has been decimated, and the Labour left is almost invisible to the outside world.” But surely this is merely a truthful estimate of the weakness of the Labour left. Unfortunately, however, the left outside the party is just as weak.

Although a few LRC members expressed the view that the splitters should be expelled, and never again supported in any Labour Party election, most are more sensible. They want Christine Shawcroft to return to the LRC fold, but will support her

in the party in any case. “There is a long list of people I would not vote for before I got to Christine,” wrote one comrade.

In the “original” September TUC special, comrade Shawcroft criticised the “tendency on the left to write off the bulk of party members ... in a game of ‘prolier than thou’”, which “manifested itself on the *Briefing* editorial board occasionally” and “led to *Briefing* drifting away from ordinary party members and away from our original mission of encouraging members to speak for themselves”. Christine argued effectively that the party membership should not be written off. “The ultras” are wrong, she said, to claim “that the fact that David [Miliband] got more votes in the constituency section than his little brother is proof of the inherent conservatism of party members”. In his electioneering, David did not announce “that he was the son of Tony Blair”. “He stood on false pretences, and members were taken in”.

Such arguments are all well and good against those who would give up the fight to transform the party - to democratise it, establish rank and file control over the party bureaucracy, open the party up to include all working class and socialist organisations and tendencies, and win it for the interests of the working class majority and socialism. But they are not good reasons for splitting from the LRC, whose aim is precisely to transform the Labour Party, not abandon it. As the genuine, LRC-controlled *Briefing* underlines, “The LRC is a democratic, socialist body working to transform the Labour Party into an organisation that reflects all sections of the working class.”

Having backed the successful motion at the July 7 *Briefing* AGM that the journal should “become the magazine of the Labour Representation Committee”, many LRC members, as well as *Briefing* readers and supporters not in the LRC, were variously “outraged”, “disappointed” and “sad” on Facebook and Yahoo at the decision of the six anti-merger comrades to flout the majority decision. However, before getting too righteous about the “disgraceful behaviour” of once “trusted comrades” who “ignore democratic decisions”, etc, we should remember that the boot might well have been on the other foot, so to speak, had the vote gone the other way. Some pro-merger comrades made it very clear before the *Briefing* AGM that “we have had enough”, and “we will walk” if necessary. Indeed, Graham Bash had walked out of the editorial board as early as February.

Mike Phipps, who played a pivotal role in winning support for the merger, explained convincingly to the September 8 meeting of Greater London LRC why it was necessary. *Briefing*, Mike said, has been in long-term decline, because the Labour left has been shrinking. There was a real danger that *Briefing* would become unviable, like *Voice of the Unions* before it, which had been absorbed by *Briefing*. The 2011 AGM was attended by only about 25 comrades. On the other hand, the LRC was growing and needed a journal. About 80% of the *Briefing* editorial board were LRC members. Should the same overstretched team produce two journals? Nothing was “forced through”, as the “original” *Briefing* claimed; indeed Christine Shawcroft, a leading

opponent of the merger motion, had chaired the AGM. Both sides had mobilised, and the AGM was unusually well attended. The vote was very close: 44 to 37, with three abstentions. Several of those pulled in to oppose the merger were won over during the debate.

So the merger was necessary. But I disagree with Mike’s insistence that the split was about personalities, not politics. On the contrary, the personal clashes on the editorial board were fuelled by political conflicts. While the splitters use red-baiting to ingratiate themselves with the so-called centre of the party, the LRC is looking outwards to win all trade unions to affiliate to Labour, and to campaigns like Occupy, in the hope that they will supply new blood in the struggle to transform Labour. As Pete Firmin’s merger motion said, “class struggle is the agent of change in the Labour Party”.

The reluctance of *Briefing* cadres to publish their disagreements in the pages of their own journal made it difficult for readers and supporters to discern the unarticulated political differences which gave rise to the eruption of personal hostilities on the editorial board at the start of 2012. As the bulk of the editorial board were LRC members, a merger with the LRC might have seemed non-controversial. But the splitters have been uncomfortable about their association with the LRC, especially its left wing, fearing it will endanger their alliance with the so-called centre of the party, especially the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance, which between them got Christine Shawcroft successfully re-elected to the NEC.

The splitters’ “original” *Briefing* hypocritically claims to be “a non-aligned magazine which is open to all” and that it was set up because readers “did not want to be shut up by the LRC”. But aren’t they the ones who, at the January 2012 editorial board meeting, opposed publication of my letter, mildly critical of sectarian comments by Christine Shawcroft? In her short report of the 2011 LRC AGM, Christine had light-heartedly wished that the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, the New Communist Party and Labour Party Marxists - all affiliates of the LRC - would “go and play in someone else’s organisation”. The argument over whether to publish the letter caused a row, and Graham Bash withdrew from the editorial board, unable to remain in the same room as Jenny Fisher. But my letter was published and freedom of expression was upheld - despite the objections of those who now claim to be “open to all”.

Protecting ‘ordinary workers’ or ‘ordinary party members’ from real debate in the hope of not scaring them away does not educate them and does not prevent splits. Spoon-feeding readers with pre-digested consensus obstructs the necessary clarification of ideas for both readers and leaders. Ideas remain undeveloped. Although the merger decision was made by a democratic vote, a two-hour debate cannot substitute for the kind of extensive written polemic and ongoing discussion necessary for the clarification of ideas. To the extent that a culture of freedom of expression is not adopted, the same political frictions will inevitably continue to fester in the dark, not only between the rival journals, but within each camp ●

## Our aims and principles

1. The central aim of Labour Party Marxists is to transform the Labour Party into an instrument for working class advance and international socialism. Towards that end we will join with others and seek the closest unity of the left inside and outside the party.
2. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, waste and production for its own sake. Attempts to rescue the system through Keynesian remedies are diversionary and doomed to fail. The democratic and social gains of the working class must be tenaciously defended, but capitalism must be superseded by socialism.
3. The only viable alternative is organising the working class into powerful and thoroughly democratic trade unions, co-ops, and other schools for socialism, and crucially into a political party which aims to replace the rule of the capitalist class with the rule of the working class.
4. The fight for trade union freedom, anti-fascism, women’s rights, sexual freedom, republican democracy and opposition to all imperialist wars are inextricably linked to working class political independence and the fight for socialism.
5. Ideas of reclaiming the Labour Party and the return of the old clause four are totally misplaced. From the beginning the party has been dominated by the labour bureaucracy and the ideas of reformism. The party must be refounded on the basis of a genuinely socialist programme as opposed to social democratic gradualism or bureaucratic statism.
6. The aim of the party should not be a Labour government for its own sake. History shows that Labour governments committed to managing the capitalist system and loyal to the existing constitutional order create disillusionment in the working class.
7. Labour should only consider forming a government when it has the active support of a clear majority of the population and has a realistic prospect of implementing a full socialist

programme. This cannot be achieved in Britain in isolation from Europe and the rest of the world.

8. Socialism is the rule of the working class over the global economy created by capitalism and as such is antithetical to all forms of British nationalism. Demands for a British road to socialism and a withdrawal from the European Union are therefore to be opposed.

9. Political principles and organisational forms go hand-in-hand. The Labour Party must become the umbrella organisation for all trade unions, socialist groups and pro-working class partisans. Hence all the undemocratic bans and proscriptions must be done away with.

10. The fight to democratise the Labour Party cannot be separated from the fight to democratise the trade unions. Trade union votes at Labour Party conferences should be cast not by general secretaries but proportionately according to the political balance in each delegation.

11. All trade unions should be encouraged to affiliate, all members of the trade unions encouraged to pay the political levy and join the Labour Party as individual members.

12. The party must be reorganised from top to bottom. Bring the Parliamentary Labour Party under democratic control. The position of Labour leader should be abolished along with the national policy forum. The NEC should be unambiguously responsible for drafting Labour Party manifestos.

13. The NEC should be elected and accountable to the annual conference, which must be the supreme body in the party. Instead of a tame rally there must be democratic debate and binding votes.

14. Our elected representatives must be recallable by the constituency or other body that selected them. That includes MPs, MEPs, MSPs, AMs, councillors, etc. Without exception elected representatives should take only the average wage of a skilled worker, the balance being donated to furthering the interests of the labour movement ●

**If you agree with LPM’s aims and principles or want to contact us, write to: BCM Box 8932, London WC1N 3XX.**

**Or email [secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk](mailto:secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk)**

# Labour turns blue

Ed Miliband has invoked the legacy of Benjamin Disraeli in order to embrace the agenda of Blue Labour, argues Paul Demarty

W e on the far left, despite our carefully cultivated image as fearless revolutionaries on the avant-garde of history, are quaintly old-fashioned in some ways. For example, we foolishly hold to the quirky old shibboleth that 'the purpose of a party conference is to decide policy.'

Not nearly 'modernised' enough a notion for the Labour Party machine in its present state. At least, in the good old days before Blair, Brown and Miliband, Labour tried to *pretend* its conferences mattered, passing all manner of hotly controversial motions, which would then be ignored by the parliamentary party. Now, the purpose of a party conference is the same in their eyes as it always has been in the Tories': to provide a platform for leaders to shine, unchallenged, before the bourgeois media.

Not the only thing they borrow from the Tories these days. The start of Labour's conference was one calculated build-up to the 'main event' on the Tuesday night - when Ed Miliband announced the new branding for his party. It is apparently the party of 'one nation', a phrase cheekily lifted from Benjamin Disraeli in a manner designed to raise a few eyebrows. All the carefully orchestrated buzz the day after focused on that soundbite, and rumours abounded that Labour MPs were under orders to drop it into every interview possible.

## Grumbles

Until Tuesday, the conference had looked like being pretty run-of-the-mill.

Alongside the thin policy announcements and cheap shots at the government, there were the usual gripes and grumbles from those (marginally) to the leadership's left. The leadership's present attitude to such insignificant expressions of dissent is, in one sense, the story of a motion. Its text called in essence for the two Eds, Miliband and Balls, to commit to the reversal of the privatisation and marketisation of the national health service in recent decades - it was a model motion, of which numerous variants were submitted by CLPs.<sup>1</sup>

It was Hull North's version that finally made it to the conference floor. In order to do so, the constituency had to organise a 200-strong lobby of the conference centre and face down the conference arrangements committee, which first attempted to rule the NHS motions out of order and then attempted to gut them through the compositing process, and possible further tricks (it can be overruled by the NEC, for instance).

This is a pretty substantial amount of effort to go to, just to see a motion voted down by a horde of careerist creeps and apparatchiks; or, failing that, ignored with impunity by Ed Miliband, in time-honoured Labour leadership fashion. It is hardly a great incentive to fight for policy, and it is quite miraculous that enough CLP delegates could be found who were sufficiently masochistic to fight a bureaucratic guerrilla war against the party *apparatus*.

Perhaps these individuals were subsequently heartened by 'tough talk' from Unite general secretary Len McCluskey and his Unison counterpart, Dave Prentis. The Eds had endorsed the government's public sector pay freeze, on the basis that they prefer to keep jobs rather than pay, and it was this matter

that exercised the two trade union men: McCluskey called the policy "crazy", and described the jobs-versus-wages argument as a "false choice": it is "time for Labour to once and for all turn its back on the neoliberalism of the past", he concluded.<sup>2</sup>

It may be that, for once, a union figure as significant as McCluskey was inclined to back up his words with action; until he proves it, we must assume that he is all mouth and no trousers (indeed, subsequent statements have made the latter look very much the more likely state of affairs, as we shall see). On that assumption, the interventions of McCluskey and Prentis were a minor theatrical performance: they made intransigent noises, and the Eds dismissed their statements as irresponsible balderdash.

The Eds got to display their 'independence' from the unions (read: cravenness before the capitalist class) for all the world to see. Meanwhile, the union bureaucrats got an extra chance to rally the troops for October 20, and otherwise paint themselves to the left of the Labour leadership. Everybody won, except public sector workers.

The theatrics were insubstantial, but preferable to the main event - the various statements from the Eds and their shadow-cabinet toadies. Stitching up conference is all very well to appease the swing voters of middle England (read: the bourgeois papers they are gullible enough to believe); everything can be stage-managed to be bang on message (apart from the calculatedly off-message rantings of McCluskey) and editors of *The Times*, *Financial Times* and suchlike may be appeased. The late and unlamented polling guru, Philip Gould, would approve.

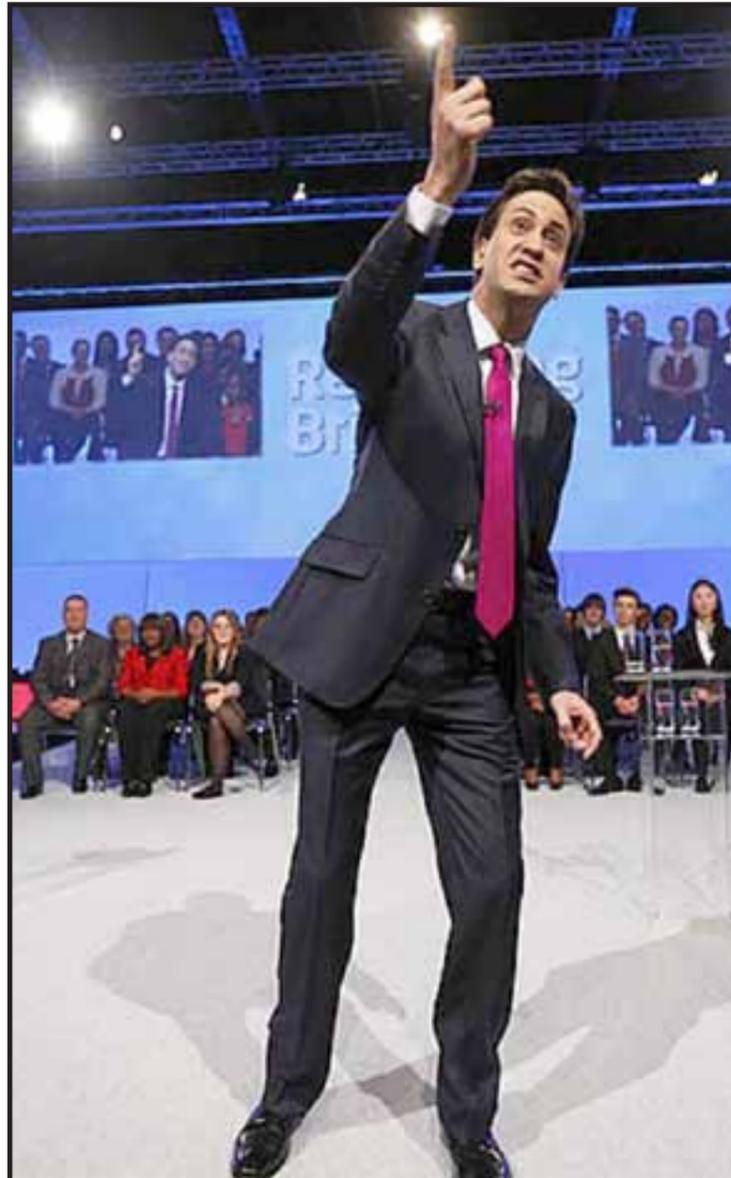
The sacrifice is ultimately the conferences themselves. By god, these events are *dull*. Every last spark of life is extinguished in them. Policy announcements are honed down to the humblest tweaks of this collapsing social order. In place of debate, there is a small and browbeaten audience (the hall is rarely full), whose every whimper of mirth or applause is as canned as on an American sitcom, and whose every vox-pop to waiting hacks thronged outside ('So what did you make of Ed's speech?') is impeccably rehearsed.

The effect, on the whole, is like playing with Victorian automata - the first time you set the thing off, some wonder is to be had at the detail in the mechanics of it all. We have had over a decade of such 'conferences' from Labour, however, and it is really starting to get tiresome.

## 'Tour de force'

What are the Eds' big ideas? We can take Miliband first, and his theme this year is a very old one indeed: "We are one nation!" he told the assembled faithful no fewer than 46 times in his speech on Tuesday. That was no accident - the patron saint of Miliband's speech was not Kier Hardie or Sidney Webb, but Benjamin Disraeli.

"Let us remember what Disraeli was celebrated for," Miliband exhorted us. "It was a vision of Britain where patriotism, loyalty, dedication to the common cause courses through the veins of all and nobody feels left out. It was a vision of Britain coming together to overcome the challenges we face." Must have been grand! "Disraeli called it 'one nation'; one nation - we heard the phrase again, as the country



Yet another rebranding

came together to defeat fascism, and we heard it again as Clement Attlee's Labour government rebuilt Britain after the war."

(And - as an aside - the response of the griping union tops to this bilge? "This is a *tour de force*. It is the best speech from a Labour leader I have heard and it will offer genuine hope to voters," gushed McCluskey. "This was the day Ed Miliband showed that he was prime minister material. He delivered a truly inspirational vision of a fairer, united Britain under the next Labour government," reckoned Prentis. "Pass the sick bag," pleaded the nation.)

This rehearsal of one-nation Toryism told us something about the ideological make-up of Miliband's inner circle. Above all else, one figure haunted the speech - Maurice Glasman, the idiosyncratic academic and founder of so-called 'Blue Labour'. The latter's basic proposition - that working class politics is small-c conservative, concerned with the construction and maintenance of a stable, organic community - is very obviously at work in the one-nation land grab.

There is more to it, though. Miliband's integral nationalism explicitly reaches out beyond the workers' movement to small business, to the south as well as the north, and so on - all important components of the indivisible British nation. All these old saws are most associated today with his brother - and in the recent period above all with Tony Blair. The 'one nation' concept is an attempt to split the

at the time and incorporated into the great, nauseating national story peddled by Miliband.

For daring even to mention Attlee, Balls got a standing ovation. Apart from that, you know a speech was deathly dull when the headline policy announcement is using the proceeds from selling off the 4G communications infrastructure to build 100,000 new houses.

## Escape to victory

It may be asked, exactly how do Miliband and Balls expect to get people excited about a possible Labour government with so little detail about what it would actually do? This would be to miss the point. The excuse offered by both, on several occasions, is that it would be irresponsible to make policy pledges now, when those pledges come due in two or three years, by which time all kinds of things might have happened.

The subtext is this: the strategy adopted by the Labour leadership is to *do nothing*, and hope that the chaotic flux of capitalist crisis makes the Tories an untenable party of government. Under those circumstances, they will sail into government with the wind behind them. For this to work, it is crucially necessary not to scare off the Confederation of British Industry or the City. Beyond that, it is necessary to have a 'big idea', or rather a branding strategy, and a key policy pledge (one-nationism and reversing the Lansley bill, respectively), which can then be picked up as the reasons for the bourgeois establishment to back Labour over the Tories in an election.

It is a long shot, and whether it will pay off or not is entirely out of the Labour leadership's hands. Still, it should be remembered that it was not the masses of the people - most of whom will not have paid any direct attention to the proceedings in Manchester - who were targeted by Miliband's rhetoric, it was not his own party and it was not the unions either. It was the press. He has made his pitch, and now he must wait and see.

Those who watch poorer football teams play against better ones will recognise this strategy - keep all the players behind the ball, building a grand defensive shield, and attack only when there is no risk of conceding a goal. Sooner or later, the opposing team will get frustrated and make a fatal mistake, which can then be exploited. As a strategy, it requires patience and discipline, and it bores the socks off the spectators. It has only the one justification: the point of football is to *win*, no more and no less.

The strategy of the two Eds is directed at exactly the same goal - and no amount of hot air about Benjamin Disraeli will fool anyone as to their true motives ●

## Notes

1. <http://labournhslobby.wordpress.com/2012/08/29/contemporary-motion-for-clps>.
2. *The Guardian* October 2.

## LRC annual conference/AGM

Saturday November 10,  
10am to 5pm, Conway Hall,  
Red Lion Square, London  
WC1.

[www.l-r-c.org.uk](http://www.l-r-c.org.uk)