

Labour Party MARXISTS

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Autumn 2013

Open letter to Jerry Hicks

Stan Keable, secretary of Labour Party Marxists, calls for an end to begging and bullying in return for crumbs

Dear comrade

As someone who supported your 2013 election campaign to become general secretary of Unite, Britain's biggest trade union and biggest affiliate to the Labour Party, I am writing to offer some comradely criticism. Specifically I urge you to reconsider your negative attitude towards the Labour Party.

Your approach differs only in degree from Len McCluskey. Earlier this year he said that if Labour did not serve the interests and hopes of the working class the unions might have to find another way. This position may sound strong - threatening to withdraw vital union funding in order to get our way. But actually it reveals a weak, subservient, slavish mentality, which to all intents and purposes accepts that the rightwing, pro-capitalist, careerist politicians will always remain in control. We should not be aiming to bully or beg them into conceding a few crumbs, but winning control away from them.

Hence LPM's strategic aim of transforming the party into a permanent united front of the whole of the workers' movement. We seek to transform Labour into an organisation which includes all trade unions, socialist

groups and pro-working class partisans. Something which, for us, goes hand in hand with winning the working class to the Marxist programme of human liberation.

At a time when the fight is on to defend the Labour-trade union link your comment that Unite should stop "infiltration through recruiting members to the Labour Party" dovetails perfectly with Tory media misinformation.¹ As if trade unions are external to the Labour Party. Of course, Unite came about through a merger of constituent unions such as the engineers' and transport workers' unions which were founding affiliates of the original Labour Representation Committee back in 1900.

You say: "Unite should end immediately its disastrous 'reclaim Labour'" policy. But the only thing wrong with this aim of 'reclaiming' is the illusion that the Labour Party ever had socialist politics. The Labour Party has always been led by reactionary politicians who are committed body and soul to capitalism. Even when 'clause four socialism' was adopted in 1918, this was never more than a sop to satisfy an increasingly militant working class.

From the beginning, Fabian leaders like Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald, campaigned for independent working class political organisation (ie, independent of the Liberal and Tory parties) in order to put working class representatives in parliament. But they did not develop independent

working class politics. The first Labour MPs, mostly trade unionists, went into parliament with the same politics as the Lib-Lab MPs before them. And these professional politicians - the Parliamentary Labour Party - quickly became the dominant section of the party, politically independent of conference, albeit held in check on occasion by the trade union bureaucrats who traditionally provided most of the funds.

Your October 24 press release complains about "Labour being given members' money hand over fist and unconditionally", despite which "The man Unite gave £10,000s to become Labour leader, Ed Miliband, treated them with complete and utter contempt." In a similar vein, during the Unite election campaign, interviewed by the *Bristol Post*, you said: "I think we should stop giving the Labour Party money if they are not going to support our principles in their policies. We should keep our members' hard-earned money tightly in our grasp, and use that to negotiate with the party - we should only give the party money as a reward, because giving it as an incentive doesn't work."²

Of course, the union is free to decide how to spend its money, and whether or not to affiliate to Labour. But affiliation is about much more than money, and the debate about the Labour-trade union link should not be primarily about funding. Affiliation, like individual membership, carries rights - the right to play a part in collective decision-making, the right to democratically determine policies and practices.

With all its faults, the Labour Party is just as much a part of the workers' movement as the trade unions which created it over 100 years ago. The struggle for trade union democracy and the struggle for Labour Party democracy are in fact one and the same. The fight for working class politics (ie, Marxism) in the trade unions and the fight for working class politics in the party are inseparable from the task of winning the majority of the working class to class-consciousness and active involvement in organised political struggle.

Your September 9 complaint against Unite to the certification officer about the union's general secretary ballot magnifies possible irregularities out of all proportion, and adds grist to the mill of the Tory and media witch-hunt targeting McCluskey and (ex-) Grangemouth convenor Stevie Deans, as if they are ballot-riggers in the Labour Party and ballot-riggers in the union. They are nothing of the kind. Unite activist Charlie Pottins got it right:

"Since the election for general secretary was supervised by the Electoral Reform Society, there is surely no suggestion that one of McCluskey's minions was caught stuffing ballot boxes? If not, what we are left with is a technical irregularity, and it [ie, Jerry Hicks's complaint - SK] reminds me of the kind of objection we have seen the employers and their lawyers coming up with to challenge strike ballots."³

The aim of the Tory witch-hunt, of course, is to denigrate effective trade

unionism in general and the Labour-trade union link in particular. All part of a desperate attempt to undermine Labour's electoral support and boost Tory chances of staying in office beyond May 7 2015.

As you know, the Labour Representation Committee and its journal, *Labour Briefing*, declined to take sides between you and McCluskey. But Labour Party Marxists (an LRC affiliate) supported your campaign. That despite your attitude to the Labour Party. We stand with you all the way on the need for rank-and-file organisation and militant action to fight austerity, closures and job cuts, and confronting the anti-trade union laws which make effective solidarity illegal.

What clearly distinguishes you from McCluskey is your anti-bureaucracy, anti-careerist proposals: "The election of all officials, elected by members, not appointed by an individual or a panel ... For a general secretary to live the life of the members they represent, on an average member's wage, not a six-figure salary."⁴ But militancy in defence of workers' rights, wages and conditions - or militancy to make fresh gains, for that matter - is not enough. Any gains made can only be temporary, so long as the capitalist system of wage labour, of exploitation and oppression, remains. I am sure you agree.

Our class needs its own independent politics - not just to fight for concessions within the system, but to supersede it positively by replacing capitalist class (minority) rule with working class (majority) rule in transition to a classless society. We urge you to drop your equivocal attitude to the Labour Party, and commit wholeheartedly to the struggle to transform it into "an instrument for working class advance and international socialism"⁵ ●

Notes

1. October 24 2013 press release: www.jerryhicks4gs.org/2013/10/pressrelease-press-release-press.html.
2. www.bristolpost.co.uk/Bristol-s-Jerry-Hicks-faces-biggest-job-interview.
3. randompottins.blogspot.co.uk.
4. jerryhicks4gs.org/p/i-stand-for.html.
5. LPM 'Aims and principles'.

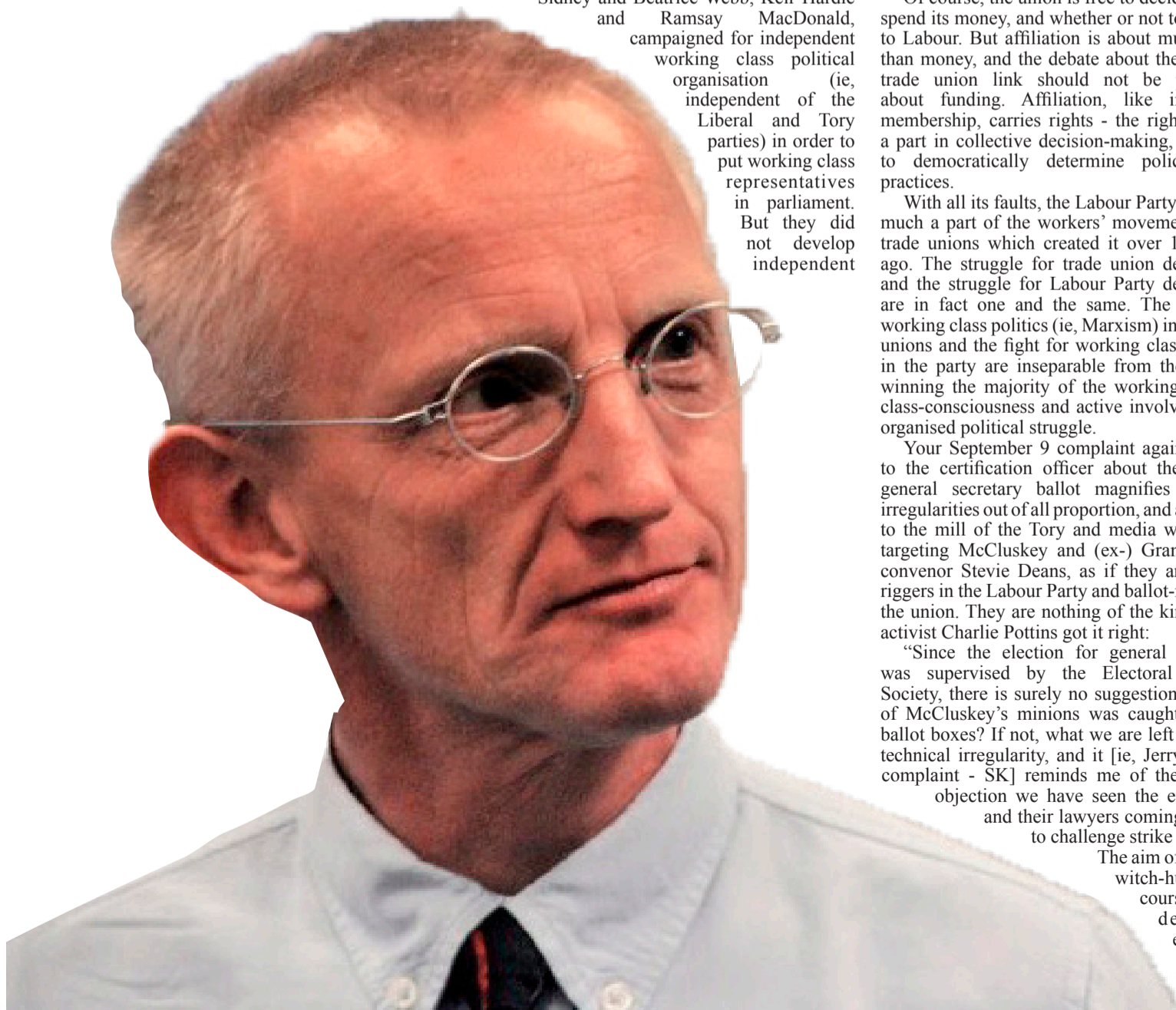
Vote Stan Keable

National Committee (section B, Individual members) and Labour Briefing editorial board.

Unison Labour Link delegate, Hammersmith CLP and Secretary, Labour Party Marxists.

The capitalist system of exploitation and oppression is in deep, prolonged crisis, inflicting poverty, inequality, war, irrational growth, pollution and ecological destruction on humanity. Only the world's working class, organised politically, can supersede capitalism, replacing minority capitalist class rule with republican democracy and majority working class rule - socialism, leading to classless society and universal liberation.

Overcome irresponsible splits with democratic unity: freedom of discussion, unity in action. Democracy must start in the workers' movement, so the rank and file controls the bureaucracy - in the left, trade unions, coops and Labour.



European Union: Bring arguments out

Opposition to the European Union continues to motivate, embarrass and vex rightwing bourgeois politicians. The present situation is easy to summarise. Under severe pressure from the UK Independence Party, David Cameron has committed the Tories to an in-out referendum following the next general election in 2015. If returned to No10, he, therefore, solemnly pledges to negotiate a root-and-branch reform of Britain's relationship with Brussels. Yet we all know, whatever the outcome, he will inevitably advocate a 'stay in' position.

Smelling blood, Nigel Farage is eager to turn the May 2014 European parliament election into a referendum against Bulgarian and Romanian migrants, Brussels corruption and continued EU membership. And, worryingly, when it comes to reported voting intentions, an Open Europe poll puts Ukip on 27% - significantly ahead of Labour (23%) and the Tories (21%).¹ Farage also has money, and in large amounts, behind him. Paul Sykes, one of Britain's richest men, has pledged "whatever it takes" to ensure a Ukip triumph.²

Meanwhile, the swelling anti-EU mood gives rise to further manoeuvre and division within Conservative ranks. Adam Afriyie - tipped by some as a future Tory leader - has been clamouring for a referendum this side of the general election.³ True, this earned him a stinging rebuke from Tory grandees. But Afriyie remains defiant ... and a recent Salvation poll showed 55% supporting his stance.⁴

Disgracefully, not a few in the labour movement have aligned themselves with the xenophobic right. Among the Labour MPs who signed up to the People's Pledge - a cross-party (now semi-defunct) campaign calling for an EU referendum - are Ronnie Campbell, Rosie Cooper, David Crausby, Jon Cruddas, John Cryer, Natascha Engel, Jim Fitzpatrick, Roger Godsiff, Tom Harris, Kate Hoey, Lindsay

Amendments changing existing LRC policy in the name of further discussion are disingenuous, argues
James Marshall

Hoyle, Kelvin Hopkins, George Howarth, Iain McKenzie, Austin Mitchell, Graham Stringer, Gerry Sutcliffe, Derek Twigg and Keith Vaz. Brian Denny, a red-brown partisan of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, sits on its national council, as does Mark Seddon, former editor of *Tribune*. Other council members include Tory MPs Zac Goldsmith and Douglas Carswell, Nigel Dodds (Democratic Unionist Party deputy leader), Marta Andreasen (Ukip MEP till February 2013, when she defected to the Tories), Jenny Jones (Green Party) and Jim Sillars (SNP deputy leader 1990-92). Bob Crow, Boris Johnson, Caroline Lucas and Bill Greenshields (CPB chair) are prominently listed as supporters.

The foul nature of the People's Pledge can surely be gathered from the protest it staged outside the treasury on July 21 2011 - the day the International Monetary Fund, EU and European Central Bank 'troika' launched its second, £96 billion, Greek bailout. The campaign insisted that there should be no further contributions from Britain. Bob Crow in particular singled out article 122 of the Lisbon treaty, which "obliges" British taxpayers to "risk" billions of pounds at a "time of cuts to public services at home".⁵ Presumably Greece should have been abandoned to a disorderly default and forced to exit from the euro zone.

For its part, the British National Party roundly condemns international bankers for "strangling the Greek economy", demands that the UK "withdraw from the European Union" and wants to reserve government funds for "more useful projects".⁶ Sadly, a position which almost passes for common sense on the left nowadays too. Both the Socialist

Workers Party and the Socialist Party in England and Wales are set to partner the *Morning Star's* CPB in the No2EU electoral bloc.⁷ According to a current No2EU bulletin, a break with the EU will allow Britain to "be rebuilt with socialist policies".⁸ A clear case of national socialism. And, unfortunately, where the CPB, SWP and SPEW have led, Socialist Resistance, Respect, the Alliance for Green Socialism, Socialist Labour Party, Solidarity, etc have followed.

What appears to be an incongruous, puzzling and unnatural alignment between left and right in actual fact stems from a common source. Uniting 28 countries, having an agreed legal framework, committed to the free movement of labour and capital, the EU stands as an existential threat to the nation-state cherished by those for whom the future lies in the past. After all, BNPer yearn for a white, 1950s Britain with traditional weights and measures and close trading relations with Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In an eerily similar way, the nation-state is viewed as the natural vehicle for socialist transformation by left reformists, 'official communists' and former Trotskyites alike. The dream is of a referendum which in due course will see a return to Keynesianism, welfarism and British "national sovereignty".⁹

As an aside, it is worth noting the deep distrust Marxists have generally had for referendums. So-called 'direct democracy' is a chimera in any complex society. Nuances have to be considered, likely consequences predicted and alternatives closely studied. That is why we advocate indirect democracy: ie, the election of recallable representatives who are tasked with debating and deciding

political positions and stratagems. Marx certainly denounced - and in no uncertain terms - Louis Bonaparte's deployment of successive referendums to consolidate his dictatorship and condone foreign adventures.¹⁰ The wording of the question is, of course, everything. Eg, to vote 'no' was to declare oneself opposed to democratic reforms, to vote 'yes' was to vote for despotism and war. Referendums bypass representative democracy, political parties and careful deliberation. Something not lost on Adolf Hitler. He managed to get a 90% mandate for his dictatorship on August 19 1934 - despite a vicious campaign of intimidation, there were millions of spoilt ballot papers.

Disapprove

Against this dire background the position of the Labour Representation Committee stands out positively. The November 2011 AGM agreed resolution 15, which reads as follows:

LRC believes:

1. That the Europe-wide capitalist crisis requires a Europe-wide working class response.
2. That we should no more oppose European capitalist integration than we would oppose the merger of two companies, even though the bosses use mergers as an excuse to attempt job cuts and other attacks. When Britain plc merges into Europe plc, the answer is to link up with other European workers in solidarity and struggle.
3. That demanding withdrawal from the EU, or opposing British entry into the European single currency, is a British nationalist position which misidentifies the enemy as 'Europe' rather than the ruling class. This is not altered by tacking on a slogan like 'Socialist United States of Europe'.
4. The road to a socialist united Europe is the road of responding to European capitalist unification by organising for cross-European workers' and socialist struggle. We advocate the following programme for this struggle:
 - Oppose all cuts; level up wages, services, pensions and workers' rights to the best across Europe;
 - Tax the rich and expropriate the banks, Europe-wide;
 - Scrap the EU's bureaucratic structures; for a European constituent assembly;
 - Against a European defence force; for a Europe without standing armies or nuclear weapons;
 - For a European workers' government.
5. In a referendum on British entry to the euro, our position will be to advocate an active abstention and our slogans will be along the lines of 'In or out, the fight goes on'; 'Single currency - not at our expense'; and 'For a workers' Europe'.

The resolution concludes with a three-point commitment:

1. To organise public meetings and debates about Europe across the country.
2. To initiate a short statement setting out this position and circulate it around Britain and Europe for signatories.
3. To produce a short pamphlet setting out this position.¹¹

Given that the resolution originated with and was moved by the social-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty, it was perhaps surprising that the AGM voted in favour. But, thankfully, it did. True, there are some problems with it. Eg, a European workers' government is perfectly fine as a programmatic position, but is a sad joke when it comes to immediate agitation. At present there is no serious revolutionary Marxist party



into the open



anywhere in Europe. Nevertheless, the resolution was eminently supportable and it was good to see it gain a clear majority.

That said, LRC leaders such as Graham Bash, Andrew Fisher and Mike Phipps obviously disapproved of the resolution ... and, as far as I am aware, the concluding three-point commitment remains unfulfilled. Of course, this may well be due to the decline and disorganisation of the LRC over the last couple of years. Anyway, a May 2014 Euro election dominated by Ukip and British nationalism certainly needs the input of the LRC and other leftwing organisations willing to challenge British nationalism and spread the message of pan-EU working class unity, democracy and socialism.

Seriously

With the May 24 elections a mere six months away, the AWL has presented this year's LRC national conference with another resolution on Europe (resolution 13). The 2011 policy, the growth of Ukip and the rerun of No2EU are noted. Ditto those "advocating" a withdrawal from the EU are criticised because it "undermines" the fight for class unity and boosts nationalism.

Admittedly, the conclusion is questionable. The AWL calls for a "campaign advocating a Labour vote" on the basis of opposing cuts, supporting the levelling up of wages across Europe, striving for the pan-European organisation of the working class, scrapping the EU's bureaucratic structures, etc. Slogans such as 'For international working class solidarity - for a workers' united Europe' are recommended.

Frankly, the conclusion does not follow from the premise. Ed Miliband and his candidates for 2014 will hardly be officially standing on the principles of internationalism and the perspective of a European workers' government. Nor will they oppose all cuts or advocate a European constituent assembly. Labour candidates will be standing on a Labourite version of British nationalism barely distinguishable from that of the Tories and the Lib Dems. In the revealing words of

deputy leader Harriet Harman, the "top priority" of Labour MEPs will be to "make sure they get the best deal" and "bring jobs and growth here in the UK".¹²

However, that does not rule out voting Labour - and most LRC affiliates and individual members are firmly within the auto-Labour fold. But surely the LRC should use the May 24 elections as an opportunity to make propaganda for its agreed vision of a Europe ruled by the working class. Instead of running a campaign "advocating" a blanket Labour vote, the LRC should single out and "organise as much support as practicable for Labour candidates supporting our statement" (Labour Party Marxists amendment to resolution 13).

However, there are two other

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amendments to resolution 13. Politically they are identical. The first, from Brent and Harrow LRC, proposes: "In the event of an in-out referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, to hold an extensive debate across the whole of the LRC movement on what position to take." In the same spirit Islington LRC says: "Should there be a referendum on withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union in the future, it is likely the Conservatives and the right wing will focus on attacking positive social reform and workers' rights. It will be difficult for an argument against a fortress and capitalist EU to get heard. LRC should further discuss its position, should a referendum be called at a future date."

Frankly, both amendments are disingenuous. What the comrades *really* want, at least in my opinion, is that the LRC should join with the xenophobic right, and reformist left, under the banner of the nationalist withdrawal campaign. However, lacking the courage to debate this out at the November 23 AGM, we see them resort to the

dishonest tactics of obfuscation and delay.

Setting aside time to explore our differences is, of course, an excellent idea. However, let us be honest, the LRC is more than prone to mimic the pinched discussion and debate permitted by the labour and trade union bureaucracy (and the bureaucratic centralist sects). Endless speeches by invited guests, long reports by officers ... and three-minute contributions from the atomised affiliates and individual members. That, regrettably, is standard fare for the LRC.

Surely, our AGM should see a full discussion and debate. So, extend the allotted slot for resolution 13 and the three amendments. Give priority to discussion and debate here and now. The LRC can, after

all, both confirm existing policy *and* organise a special conference in the event of a future government naming the date for an in-out referendum.

If the AGM is to be treated seriously, and it ought to be, then comrades from Brent and Harrow LRC and Islington LRC should have enough time to fully, honestly and openly tell us what they think. That would be good. However, attempts to overturn existing policy by what is a sleight of hand must be opposed ●

Notes

1. *Daily Mail* May 28 2013.
2. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-24983159.
3. *The Daily Telegraph* October 12 2013.
4. *Mail on Sunday* October 13 2013.
5. http://communist-party.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1377:article-9-demonstration-no-bail-out-without-a-referendum&catid=78:eu-a-popular-sovereignty&Itemid=91.
6. www.bnp.org.uk/policies/foreign-affairs.
7. www.socialistparty.org.uk/campaign/Election_campaigns/no2eu/17420.
8. www.tuaeuc.org/no2eu-wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/a5_no2eu.pdf.
9. www.tuaeuc.org/no2eu-wp/?page_id=474.
10. See Marx's *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) and *The civil war in France* (1871). Also there is Kautsky's book, *Parliamentarism, direct legislation and social democracy* (1893).
11. *Resolutions booklet* November 2011, p11.
12. www.labour.org.uk/labour-party-european-election-candidate-selection-results,2013-08-02.

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.

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Defending status quo is loser

Ken Williamson looks at Ed Miliband's attack on trade union influence

Ed Miliband told the Trades Union Congress to "show courage" by backing his proposals to further downgrade the role of affiliated trade unions.¹ But 'courage', like 'difficult decisions', are the words of praise heaped on Labour leaders when they attack the working class in the 'national interests' of capitalism.

Throughout the 13 years of New Labour governments, Progress, a shadowy organisation heavily funded by Lord Sainsbury, packed the selection meetings of Constituency Labour Parties, with never a murmur of protest from the Murdoch press or the Tories - or Labour HQ. Now the Parliamentary Labour Party has barely a genuine trade unionist in sight.

Was Miliband "panicked under ferocious Tory fire" into a knee-jerk response to the manufactured Falkirk 'scandal', as Mark Seddon, chair of the Defend the Link campaign, claims?² It seems unlikely. No, Miliband used Falkirk as an opportunity to announce long-held plans to reduce trade union influence. The Collins review was deliberately timed to pre-empt input from union annual conferences.

At Labour's September 2013 annual conference, Harriet Harman opened the 'debate' on Lord Ray Collins' interim report. "You could not have anyone better than Ray," she told us, "to listen to everyone's views and to draw them together." And there in a nutshell, is the hollowness of Labour Party 'democracy' today. You get to express your views, as in an employer's suggestion box. Those above "listen", so you are supposed to feel grateful and wanted. Then they cherry-pick the ideas they want, and tell you it's what you have collectively chosen.

Lord Collins stressed how proud he was to be a trade unionist and told us not to worry - he would "retain the constitutional collective voice of the unions". Ed wants to "mend the link, not end the link", he said, but it has to change, so it becomes "open and transparent".

The interim report covers more than the union link. It sets out 'what Ed wants' in a renewed relationship with the unions, in which, Ray assures us, collective affiliation will not be touched; the development of standardised constituency development plans (more central control?); primaries, starting with the London mayor contest; and "fairness and transparency" in the selection of candidates. Each section of the report has a series of questions along the lines of 'How shall we fulfil Ed's idea?' Everything will be settled at the special conference on March 1.

Miliband's attack on collective affiliation, by requiring individuals to 'opt in' in place of the right to 'opt out', is couched in the beguiling language of liberal individualism: "I want to make each and every affiliated trade union member a real part of their local party, making a real choice to be part of our party, so they can have a real voice in it," he told the TUC. By making those who 'opt in' to the affiliated political levy full party members, Miliband hopes to raise Labour's individual membership from around 200,000 to more than 500,000.

Collective decision-making and unity in action - ie, solidarity - is the key to working class strength, in political struggles just as much as in the battles with employers. Those of us campaigning in our unions and in the party to defend the link should take note what an easy target the status quo makes. See how Miliband was able to denigrate the existing arrangements when he spoke to the TUC: "Some people ask: what's wrong with the current system? Let me tell them: we have three million working men and women affiliated to our party. But the vast majority play no role in our party. They are affiliated in name only".³ It has to be said, of course, that this is also true of the vast majority of individual Labour Party members. Only a small percentage play an active role in the party, and even then the activists do much



Ed Miliband: courage?

Support motion 5 from Labour Party Marxists

Defend the Link - Defend collective affiliation

Conference notes:

1. Existing LRC policy "to campaign for all trade unions to affiliate to the Labour Party" (AGM resolution, January 15 2011).
2. Individual 'opting out' was not part of the original relation of collective affiliation of trade unions to Labour.
3. Trade union political donations to Labour

were banned by the 1909 House of Lords 'Osborne judgement'.

4. The 1913 Trade Union Act permitted trade union political funds but imposed individual 'opting out'.

Conference resolves to campaign for:

- (a) The end of individual 'opting out' of trade union political funds.
- (b) The end of all legal interference in the workers' movement.

more canvassing than decision-making.

So we have to have the "courage to change" - but not in the way Miliband proposes, liquidating collective political decision-making in our trade unions ('united we stand') in favour of individual choice ('divided we fall'). On the contrary, we must rebuild our collective strength. Not dismantle it. We must revitalise the trade unions by thoroughly democratising them: officials at all levels must be paid the average wage of their members, and be elected from below, not bureaucratically appointed from above. We must bring the Rail, Maritime and Transport union and Fire Brigades Union back into the party, win the Public and Commercial Services union to affiliate, bring all trade unions and all socialist and working class organisations into the party, and transform Labour into a permanent united front of the whole working class.

With this perspective, we must obviously reject Miliband's 'opting in' proposal, but also overturn the existing 'opting out' system. As Hazel Nolan of London Young Labour told the September 3 launch meeting of the Defend the Link campaign, "When you buy a bottle of coke, you can't opt out of paying the tax on it. Why should you be able to opt out of paying your share of your union's democratically agreed political spending?" The right to opt out

of the union's political fund is a legally imposed right to scab, which should be overthrown, along with all anti-trade union laws.

At the same meeting the Communication Workers Union's Maria Exall struck the right note, combating the idea that the campaign should merely defend the status quo and postpone political disagreements until this latest attack on the link had been defeated, or that criticism of union leaders who might support the campaign should be muted. "There is a problem within the trade unions - the bureaucracy. How come we still have anti-union laws? The unions let New Labour through," she said.

Trade union input into the party must not be left in the hands of overpaid trade union bosses like Len McCluskey of Unite, Paul Kenny of GMB and Dave Prentis of Unison.

A deal is being worked out behind closed doors to modify the link - a compromise designed to leave intact and unaccountable both the dominant Parliamentary Labour Party and party bureaucracy, on the one hand, and the trade union bureaucracy which finances it, on the other. The compromise deal has been or is being settled behind the backs of the rank and file, who will nevertheless be asked to endorse the deal at the March 1 special party conference.

In Miliband's October shadow cabinet

reshuffle, the three senior figures closely associated with Tony Blair - Jim Murphy, Liam Byrne and Stephen Twigg - were demoted in what has been dubbed the "cull of Blairites" (but left MP Dianne Abbott was ditched too, presumably for premature opposition to a military attack on Syria).

According to Atul Hatwal on the Labour Uncut website, the appointment of Jon Trickett as 'deputy chair' to lead on party reform tells us that Miliband is not going to appeal "over the heads of union leaders to the rank and file", but "wants to do a deal with the union bosses".⁴ The "reform pill" which the unions must swallow if Miliband is not to lose face is "the requirement for trade union levy-payers to opt in to paying some of their political levy towards Labour".

In exchange, "the union block vote at conference will remain, the unions will retain a separate electoral college in the leadership election and the union reservation of 12 places out of 33 on the NEC (compared to six places reserved for CLP members) will stay", plus "an extension and entrenchment of the electoral college at CLP level", justified by "parallel management and voting structures".

Jon Lansman admits that this kind of rotten compromise was circulated for discussion months ago by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy "as the basis for just such an agreement between Ed Miliband and the trade unions".⁵ The CLPD proposals involved "Meeting Ed Miliband's aspiration" to impose individual opting-in to affiliated membership, and "Meeting trade union aspirations for a continuing collective voice in the affairs of the party they founded, and sustainable levels of voting and representation."

This manoeuvre, politely described as "delinking the collective representation of trade unions in the structures of the party from the involvement of individual trade unionists in the life of the party" may be a happy compromise between entrenched bureaucrats, parliamentary and trade union, who function as masters, rather than servants, of our labour movement. However, it leaves both bureaucracies as unaccountable as before, and sets up collective working class political decision-making for further erosion.

In 1909, the Tory Law Lords tried to snuff out the emerging independent political organisation of the workers' movement with the notorious Osborne judgement, after which affiliated trade unions were prevented from funding the Labour Party for four years, until Herbert Asquith's minority Liberal government legalised trade union political funds. But the 1913 Trade Union Act also imposed the condition that individual members could opt out of the union's political fund - the thin end of the wedge of legally backed political scabbing.

Stanley Baldwin's Tories drove the wedge deeper into a defeated working class after the 1926 General Strike. The Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act 1927 imposed opting in. Many hard-up trade unionists stopped paying, and the party's finances and campaigning capacity suffered - but, more importantly, the working class culture of solidarity, of collective decision-making, was further undermined. This was reversed by Clement Attlee's Labour government in 1946, and the legally imposed right to opt out of the union's political fund was retained by John Major's Tory government in section 82 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

Now, as 'Red Ed' tries to put the clock back to 1927, defending the hollowed out democracy of the status quo is a losing strategy ●

Notes

1. 'No Miliband apology over Falkirk vote row - Harman':

www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-23999869.

2. 'The battle for Labour's soul' *Morning Star* September 9.

3. Full speech at www.labour.org.uk/speech-by-ed-miliband-to-the-tuc.

4. October 8, www.labour-uncut.co.uk.

5. 'Labour's reshuffle - and what it means for party reform', October 8, www.leftfutures.org.