

Labour Party MARXISTS

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The culture we need comes with thorns

The Labour Representation Committee is in danger of adopting a thoroughly bureaucratic, intolerant and dangerous approach to what are legitimate political differences. **James Marshall** calls for free speech, openness and democracy

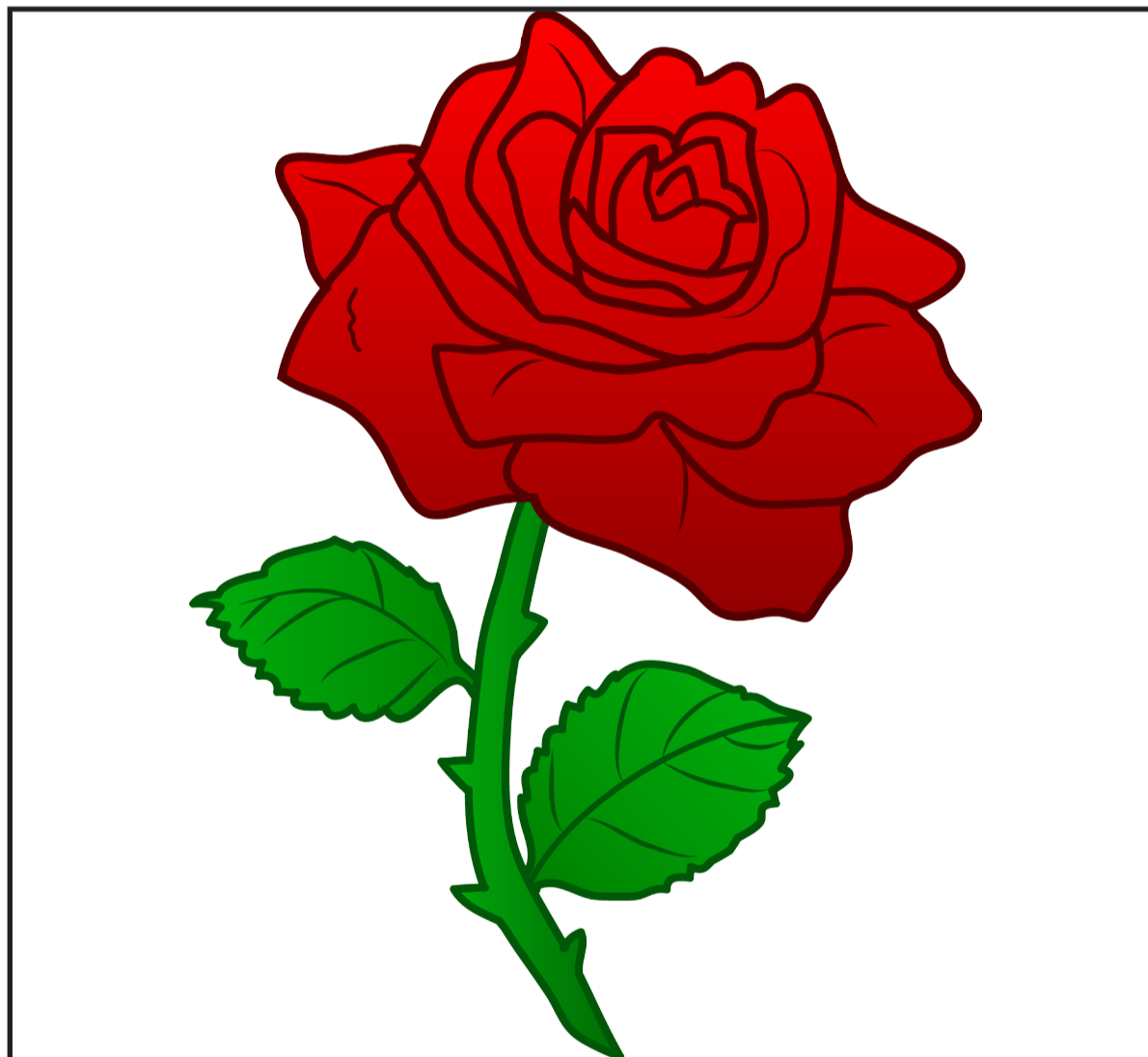
Socialism can only be the act of self-liberation for the great majority by the great majority. Therefore it follows that the working class cannot be approached or treated like little children, who are incapable of handling anything beyond the simplest propositions. If socialism is ever to be realised, the overwhelming majority of the population - ie, the working class - needs the truth in all its complexity. One of Marxism's fundamental tasks is to tell it like it is.

Great revolutions of the past - England 1642, America 1776 and France 1789 - were carried out in the interests of an exploiting minority. If wider sections were to be mobilised, used as a social battering ram, that necessitated hiding real aims, concocting elaborate subterfuges and unleashing intoxicating enthusiasms.

The workers' revolution - the communist revolution - is different. It requires the fullest democracy, active control from below and therefore transparency when it comes to political decision-making, both within our own movement and in state affairs. Without that there can only be hollow pretence, disappointment and failure.

Appearance and essence interpenetrate. Never exactly correspond though. So discovering the truth sometimes requires a long, hard, difficult struggle. Things can get bitter. Even with mathematics, biology, geology and physics that is the case. Established reputations, vested interests, those occupying well rewarded official positions, the conservatively minded - all conduct a stubborn rearguard action. They do everything in their power to sideline, block and silence bearers of dangerous insights and concepts. Baruch Spinoza, Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, René Descartes, William Harvey, William Paley, Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein and Stephen Jay Gould all faced campaigns of disinformation, ridicule and non-publication, if not outright persecution.

That being the case with the natural sciences, it is perfectly understandable that campaigns of disinformation, ridicule and non-publication, if not outright persecution, are magnified a thousandfold when it comes to Marxism. Why should that be so? The answer is obvious. Marxism is unequalled in revolutionary ambition and yet is soberly realistic. Marxism



threatens the monarchy, the judiciary, the secret state, the military and the labour bureaucracy. Marxism is against the market and promises to end forever the power of capital and its gilded hangers-on.

Despite being no more than 5% of the population, the bourgeoisie begins with a great advantage. The dominant ideas of society are the spontaneously generated ideas of the bourgeoisie. Exploitation is uniquely concealed behind what Marxists call commodity fetishism. Wage-slavery, unemployment, money, profit are all considered perfectly natural. Capitalists themselves are often admirably believed when they boast that they are society's wealth creators. Marxism therefore has to hack through a thicket of common sense.

But there is more confronting us

than that. Much more. Leave aside the police, army, MI5 and special branch. Marxism faces ideological opposition in the form of the many and various paid persuaders. Career politicians and church divines, TV pundits and newspaper columnists, university historians and evolutionary psychologists manufacture and disseminate a floodtide of half truths, diversionary nonsense and cynical lies about Marxism.

Inevitably, this, together with the actuality and seeming naturalism of capitalist society, colours and distorts the views of many who sincerely consider themselves to be good socialists, committed internationalists and devoted partisans of the working class.

Hence the struggle to unite the working class against capitalism

is predicated on winning the battle of ideas within the working class movement itself. And not only against overt anti-Marxism - Labourism, left nationalism and narrow trade unionism. What passes itself off as Marxism, but is patently not Marxism, must be combated too. Stalinism, Maoism, Eurocommunism, Shachtmanism, Healyism and Cliffism being glaring examples.

So Marxism can only unite the working class by conducting a protracted - sometimes aggressive, sometimes destructive, sometimes upsetting, but always edifying - struggle to establish what is truthful and what is untruthful.

Gagging

What political culture best suits the struggle for the truth? A political

culture, where, within the parameters of our basic principles, questioning is the norm, where serious study, thought and debate are encouraged.

Yet, as we all know, the advanced part of the working class is *disorganised* into numerous leftwing sects, fake fronts, halfway-house projects and unprincipled campaigns. Mostly there is nothing even remotely resembling democracy or serious debate. Too often minorities are gagged, critics threatened with disciplinary measures and public dissent branded as treason. Conferences are designed to be little more than rallies. Instead of being forums where members gather as equals, they are dominated by worthy and not so worthy platform speakers. Such a culture stultifies. The end result can only be a downwards spiral of splits, frustration and a demoralising loss of support.

It might appear encouraging therefore to read the Labour Representation Committee's National Committee statement to the November 8 conference. Section three, the section dealing with "culture", says it is committed to "preserve freedom of political debate" within LRC "meetings and activities".¹ However these fine words are mocked, insulted, flatly contradicted by the clauses that follow.

Clause A. LRC refuses to tolerate "physical, sexual or verbal abuse, attacks or harassment". Needless to say, no-one in the LRC advocates physical or sexual assaults. Such acts are, rightly, against the law and carry heavy penalties. What about verbal abuse, attacks or harassment? It all sounds beastly, crass, something to be rejected outright. Yet, I somehow suspect that rightwing members of the Labour Party - eg, Blairite MPs, Progress councillors and Brewer's Green functionaries - regard the trenchant speeches of LRC members in constituencies, policy forums and the annual conference as abuse, as harassment. Should acceptance of cuts, austerity, anti-union laws, imperialist wars, Nato, immigration controls, Trident, etc, go unattacked? Obviously not ... and our comrades do attack. To do anything else is to betray the working class and the cause of socialism.

What about clause B? LRC refuses to tolerate "discrimination or abuse on the grounds of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability or religion/belief."² No

socialist could possibly object to opposing “discrimination or abuse” on the grounds of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability.

But should “religion/belief” be included here? Let us begin therefore by separating belief from religion. Belief can be commonplace and well founded - I believe that the sun will rise tomorrow morning. Belief can be delusional - I believe I am Jesus of the second coming. Belief can also be factually incorrect and politically unacceptable. Eg, EU migrants are responsible for unemployment, the shortage of affordable housing and growing NHS queues.

What about religion? Nowadays, not least in a country like Britain, religion is a choice. It is a world view which comes with a socially established package of texts, doctrines and practices. Of course, no Marxist wants to discriminate against or abuse religious people. But we do want to end subservience to the religious hierarchy and win the widest masses to the struggle for socialism.

The fact of the matter is that religion is a fantastic reflection of earthly realities. Religion is the self-degradation of the human being. Religion is the obfuscation of class society and class exploitation. That is why Marx was so angry when the German social democrats included freedom of religion in their Gotha programme (1875). That formula was perfectly acceptable when it came to the state. But the workers’ party should, on the contrary, seek to “liberate the conscience from the witchery of religion”.³

Terminate

However, the really worrying stuff comes with clauses C, D and E. The NC threatens to “suspend or terminate” the membership of individuals, affiliates or local LRC groups who are guilty of:

(C) Wilfully misrepresenting the views of the LRC, its elected national bodies or officers, whether to other LRC members or the wider public, by any means; including but not limited to word of mouth, in writing, in printed publications, or online via electronic or digital communications or other social media.

(D) Threatening or disruptive behaviour at LRC meetings whether public or private, or at events of campaigns officially supported by the LRC.

(E) Bringing the LRC into disrepute.⁴

Almost certainly these clauses are intended to deal with the LRC’s two most notable dissidents: NC member Graham Durham and *Labour Briefing* editorial board member Stan Keable. But they are also possibly designed to exclude troublesome LRC affiliates: namely Labour Party Marxists, Brent LRC, Communist Students, the Communist Party of Great Britain and Socialist Fight. Others who might be targeted are the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty and the New Communist Party.

What have comrades Durham and Keable done to provoke the NC into proposing such draconian measures? In the case of comrade Durham it seems it is his insistence on loudly and unapologetically lambasting what he considers to be wrong-headed decisions. Eg, affiliation to the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. An organisation that basically supports the indivisible unity of Ukraine and therefore opposes Russian-speaking breakaways. Comrade Durham wants the LRC to affiliate instead to Solidarity with the Anti-Fascist Resistance in Ukraine.

He also occasionally throws in a heckle or two at LRC meetings and conferences. A time-honoured way for the weak to challenge the power of the

strong. In Homer’s *Iliad* the common soldier, Thersites, dared heckle Agamemnon, the high king of the Greeks (he was, as a result, savagely beaten by Odysseus).⁵ In more recent times there was, of course, Walter Wolfgang, an LRC member. At the age of 82 he was hauled out of the 2005 Labour Party conference because he heckled Jack Straw over the Iraq war. If the LRC NC gets its way heckling is to be deemed “threatening or disruptive” behaviour and therefore an expulsion offence.

What about comrade Keable? He has publicly reported NC and EB meetings.⁶ NC meetings, it ought to be stressed, are *open* to all LRC members. Yet because comrade Keable’s plain speaking is not to the liking of some easily offended souls, he has been accused of “wilful misrepresentation” and therefore bringing the LRC into “disrepute”. “Wilful misrepresentation” is a piece of cod legalese borrowed from contract law. What it amounts to in our context, though, is nothing more than a crude attempt to silence an inconvenient voice. No-one can seriously consider what comrade Keable wrote as an attempt to fool, rob or cheat. In other words, the NC’s “wilful misrepresentation” is comrade Keable’s honest opinion.

It is significant therefore that the facts that he supposedly misrepresented are entirely unspecified. Instead of replying to comrade Keable, instead of ‘putting the record straight’, the NC has turned to the methods of popes, kings and bureaucrats. Fear of the truth results in the claim to privileged information, the need to speak without the inhibition of public reporting, the insistence that the only version should be the official version.

For the record, the Labour Party’s national executive committee considers it entirely unproblematic to have regular public reports of its *closed* meetings. Though they are somewhat anodyne, Ann Black and Christine Shawcroft both publish monthly blogs on its votes and proceedings.⁷

Comrade Keable’s real offence seems to be that he quoted John McDonnell, LRC chair, to the effect that the November 8 AGM will be “make or break” for the organisation.⁸ He also reported that the EB of *Labour Briefing*, the official journal of the LRC, admits that it faces an “emergency” when it comes to personnel, finances, support, etc. If reporting this brings the LRC into “disrepute”, then it is a classic case of shooting the messenger.

Reporting meetings should be the norm. It was with the Bolsheviks. Lenin published detailed, often highly polemical accounts of congresses, conferences, editorial boards and central committees. Eg, in 1903-04, there was ‘Second congress of the RSDLP’, *One step forward, two steps back*, ‘Second congress of the League of Russian revolutionary social democracy abroad’, *A letter to a comrade on our organisational tasks*, etc. A model which ought to be emulated.

Sectarianism

The NC maintains that the “purpose” of the LRC is to “unite a broad section of the British left in pursuit of agreed socialist objectives”.⁹ But, while claiming to “respect the right of everyone to argue for their beliefs”, the NC seems intent on purging the awkward squad and leaving the LRC as a useless centre-left husk.

Hence in the NC’s ‘non-sectarian’ sectarian phraseology: the LRC is “not an appropriate place for any member or group to engage in sectarian activities”.¹⁰ And, therefore, any *minority* tempted to continue advocating their own, “sectarian”, course of action will find themselves excluded.

We in the LPM are presumably expected to refrain from advocating

Marxism and transforming the Labour Party into a permanent united front of the working class. Socialist Fight from advocating its version of Trotsky’s anti-imperialism. The AWL from advocating a two-state solution in Israel-Palestine. The NCP from advocating its juche version of Stalinism. Etc, etc.

Meanwhile, of course, the Graham Bash-Pete Firmin-Mike Phipps triumvirate continues with its bankrupt auto-Labourism, the narrow-minded, left Labourite objections to the European Union, the utterly weird notion that Ed Miliband and the *existing* shadow cabinet should be “leading” the Scottish *independence* and Ukip “revolt”.¹¹

Arguably, the triumvirate are attempting to explain away their own palpable failings by shifting the blame. The Labour left is historically at a low point. It has not grown, as most of us expected. Numerically it has shrunk. So has the LRC (down by around a third). But this is not because of comrades Durham and Keable. Not because LPM members report meetings, not because LPM, Communist Students and Socialist Fight repeatedly raise political differences and criticise those with whom they disagree.

The triumvirate say that such “sectarianism” has no place in the LRC. Frankly, that amounts to an attempt to delegitimise Marxism in the LRC. That is the effective content of clauses A-E.

Lenin tellingly remarked that throughout the “civilised world the teachings of Marx evoke the utmost hostility and hatred of all bourgeois science (both official and liberal), which regards Marxism as a kind of ‘pernicious sect’”.¹² Yet neither now nor in the future will we be demanding special measures to protect our sensibilities - some ‘right’ not to be attacked or misrepresented. As a principle we stand for free speech.

Does that imply that we Marxists are coldly indifferent about what is being published in the press and broadcast on radio and TV under the name of free speech? Obviously not. Using all our strength, we actively engage in the battle of ideas in order to win the mass of the population to socialism. We oppose everything which divides and therefore weakens the working class: religious hatred, sexism, homophobia, national chauvinism, trade union sectionalism, opportunism, etc. But not by prohibitions. Not by suppressing debate. Our weapon is criticism.

Censorship

Karl Marx himself, it can usefully be pointed out, was a lifelong opponent of censorship. Even as a young man, in 1842, he can be found passionately arguing in favour of unrestricted freedom of the press against the Prussian state and its censors: “Whenever one form of freedom is rejected, freedom in general is rejected,” he defiantly wrote.¹³

Marx conducted a heroic struggle, first as one of the main contributors and subsequently as editor of the Cologne-based newspaper, *Rheinische Zeitung* - the Prussian state imposed double and then triple censorship. Finally, in March 1843 the authorities closed it down.

Magnanimously, the Prussian king announced that censorship would “not prevent serious and modest investigation of the truth”. Serious! Modest! Such loaded words bring to mind Jack Straw’s injunction not “to insult or be gratuitously offensive” during the storm over the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons. Ditto, Charles Clarke’s Terrorism Act (2006), which, in the name of defending the “values of freedom and liberty”, made it illegal to “glorify terrorism”. Ditto, the NC’s strictures against “Wilfully misrepresenting the views of the LRC,

its elected national bodies or officers, whether to other LRC members or the wider public.” All have the whiff of censorship.

In reply to the Prussian authorities Marx elegantly disposed of the cant:

Is it not the first duty of the seeker after truth to aim directly at the truth, without looking to the right or left? Will I not forget the essence of the matter, if I am obliged not to forget to state it in the prescribed form.¹⁴

No writer can discover the truth if placed in a bureaucratic straitjacket. Nor did Marx want anyone telling him what words to use:

You marvel at the delightful variety, the inexhaustible riches of nature. You do not ask the rose to smell like the violet, but must the richest of all, the spirit, exist in only *one* variety? I am audacious, but the law commands that my style be modest. *Grey, all grey*, is the sole, the rightful colour of freedom ... the official colour!¹⁵

Marx claimed the right to treat the ludicrous seriously and the serious ludicrously. The truth can never be what a government commands. The state bureaucracy is not interested in the truth, only in safeguarding and extending the power and glory of the state bureaucracy: something which goes hand in hand with endemic suspicion, requirements to be responsible and a pathological fear of public exposure. Thought must therefore be manacled, placed behind high walls and guarded by prison warders.

During those times - the 1840s - Marx took delight in showing how the servile deputies of the Prussian diet (parliament) sought to put a stop to the regular reporting of their proceedings. They obviously regarded their debates as a private matter and of no business of the mass of the population (rather like the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales and the LRC’s NC).

When journalists daringly lifted the veil, they were accused of irresponsible behaviour and treated as spies who had revealed vital secrets. Members of the diet could no longer uninhibitedly express themselves. They felt constrained when they knew that some untrustworthy stranger would be publishing their unguarded words. Indeed that was the case.

And over the years, as parliamentary reporting became an established norm, as the democratic space in society has inch by inch been extended, professional politicians have perfected the art of lying, deception and double-talk.

Hence, Marx’s glowing description of the Paris Commune serves as a damning criticism of both 19th century parliaments and those on the left today who exhibit the exact same morbid fear of openness: “the Commune did not pretend to infallibility, the invariable attribute of all governments of the old stamp. It published its doings and sayings, it initiated the public into all its shortcomings.”¹⁶

Obviously, free speech comes with some unpleasant consequences. All decent people feel disgust for the bile and filth that pours out from the pages of the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun*. The same goes for the well-researched apologetics of David Irving. Notoriously, he used his considerable talents as a historian to belittle or deny the Nazi holocaust.

But the last thing we should do is call for censorship and bans. On the contrary, there must be freedom, even for sick, daft and crazy ideas. The long-term interests of the workers’ movement demands it. Marx tellingly writes:

Keep in mind that you could

not enjoy the advantages of a free press without tolerating its inconveniences. You could not pluck the rose without its thorns! And what do you lose in losing a free press? A free press is the omnipresent open eye of the popular spirit ... It is the merciless confessional that a people makes to itself, and it is well known that confession has the power to redeem. It is the intellectual mirror in which a people beholds itself, and self-examination is the first condition of wisdom?¹⁷

What of religion? In 1842 Marx was fearlessly campaigning against the Prussian state’s legal protection of the Christian faith from “frivolous” and “hostile” attack. Such little phrases were nothing but gagging devices. Replying to the censors, Marx went to the heart of the matter: “Religion can only be attacked in a hostile or a frivolous way: there is no third way”.¹⁸

Of course, he never thought that freedom of expression was a perfect thing in itself, some kind of be-all and end-all. Free speech is not the same as general freedom. But it is surely one of its preconditions. Free speech allows us to cast a sharp light on what lies under the surface of events and what is kept hidden away by inveterate bureaucrats and place-holders. Thereby we educate ourselves.

In that spirit we urge LRC members and affiliates to vote for our amendment to section three of the NC statement ●

Notes

1. http://l-r-c.org.uk/files/NC_statement_2014.pdf.
2. http://l-r-c.org.uk/files/NC_statement_2014.pdf.
3. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 24 London 1989, p98.
4. http://l-r-c.org.uk/files/NC_statement_2014.pdf.
5. Bk 2, vs 211-277, see http://www.poetrytranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/Iliad2.htm#_Toc239244709.
6. *Weekly Worker* September 9 and October 9 2014.
7. See <http://www.labourblogs.com/public-blog/annblack> and <http://www.christineshawcroft.co.uk/nec>.
8. *Weekly Worker* September 9 2014.
9. http://l-r-c.org.uk/files/NC_statement_2014.pdf.
10. http://l-r-c.org.uk/files/NC_statement_2014.pdf.
11. *Labour Briefing* November 2014.
12. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 19 Moscow 1977, p23.
13. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 1, London 1975, p181.
14. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 1, London 1975, p111.
15. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 1, London 1975, p112.
16. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 22, Moscow 1986, p340.
17. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 1, London 1975, pp164-65.
18. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 1, London 1975, pp117.

Amendment to national committee statement

Section 3. LRC Culture: Delete all after para 2 and insert:

To safeguard and deepen this political culture, we must guard against bureaucratic tendencies. Examples include:

A. Equating heckling, strong opinions and political criticisms with verbal abuse, attacks or harassment.

B. Regarding reporting NC and EB meetings as treachery. Reporting is essential to democracy, encourages political debate and collective education.

C. Anathematising minority political viewpoints. Like women, youth, disabled, etc, political minorities make a valued contribution, including in our NC and EB.

D. Censorship: minority viewpoints must find fair expression in *Labour Briefing*.

E. Sectarian ‘anti-sectarianism’. Exclusion of members, LRC groups, factions or affiliates for supposedly sectarian views.

Nation, class unity and political strategy

Despite the 'no' vote in the Scottish referendum the national question has not gone away. **Roger Freeman** argues for self-determination and a federal republic

Unlike the narrow economism that passes for common sense on too much of the left, the LPM does its best to take a Marxist approach to the UK state. As a *minimum demand* - ie, within the technical limits imposed by the capitalist system - we emphasise, bring to the fore, class (as opposed to sectional) demands that challenge the logic of the market, such as the provision of health, education and benefits based on need. We give no less emphasis to political demands which challenge how we are ruled. Hence we demand the abolition of the monarchy, the secret state and the House of Lords; we demand a people's militia, disestablishment of the church of England, election of judges, etc.

What about the national question? Once again we take an approach which seeks to forge class unity and challenge how we are ruled. Hence the demand for the abolition of the acts of union, self-determination for Scotland and Wales, and a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales (the *initial form* we envisage working class rule taking in Britain).

Doubtless, John Major, Tony Blair, Peter Hain, Gerry Adams and Alex Salmond have unwittingly done us a great service here. They have shown that the UK constitution is neither timeless nor natural. It is plastic, a product of historical making and contemporary remaking. What has been rearranged from above can be transformed from below.

While there *must* be an objective dimension when it comes to assessing what is and what is not a nation - eg, a common territory - that hardly means discounting what people think. The coming into being of a British nation in the 18th century cannot be put before the palpable feelings of masses of people in Scotland and Wales today. Millions sincerely believe they are nationally disadvantaged, held back or even oppressed. A subjective factor that only a hopeless dogmatist would discount and therefore fail to harness by offering positive solutions.

Unity

Those who rigidly adhere to third-worldist anti-imperialism cannot possibly bring themselves to countenance self-determination for 'unworthy' peoples - the most obvious example being Israeli Jews and the British-Irish in the six counties of Northern Ireland. Given its junior role in founding, administering and exploiting what was a vast British empire, that should logically include Scotland too. After all, historically even "left-of-centre" Scottish nationalists sought not to end that empire, but demanded, as a "mother nation", equal rights with England to rob and plunder it.²

Interestingly, though the motivations are transparently different, a similar argument can be heard coming from cosmopolitan liberals. According to the ethical philosopher, Allen Buchanan, self-determination for non-oppressed nations risks endless fragmentation. Unless there has been "a long train of abuses",³ there ought to be no justification in international law for the "right of self-determination".⁴ Only if "serious injustices" have occurred can a case be made for secession as a "remedial right". Without that safeguard, without that restraint, every region, every community, every street could claim their right to self-determination and thus bring about the complete breakdown of society. Territorial integrity must

therefore be upheld.

Marxists are not interested in preserving the unity of capitalist states, but in winning allies and neutralising enemies. After all, the Bolsheviks were prepared to grant self-determination even to the Cossacks. Not, of course, because the Cossacks were deserving, kind and suitably oppressed. No, on the contrary, they were the tsar's chosen oppressors. A privileged military estate or caste. But that is exactly the point. The Bolsheviks needed to split, if possible win over, the Cossacks. Hence they started to treat them as "an ethnic or national group".⁵ Without such a shift the camp of revolution could only but be weakened and the counterrevolution strengthened. In March 1920 Lenin can be found delivering a thoughtful speech on the international situation to the first all-Russia conference of working Cossacks.⁶

So the demand for self-determination is not some unwarranted sop to petty bourgeois reactionaries, or an unrealisable panacea, a cure-all for capitalism's national antagonisms. Rather self-determination is one of many weapons in the armoury of Marxists. If properly applied, it advances the interests of the working class.

One can legitimately debate whether or not the Basque country, Kosovo, Quebec, Kurdistan or Scotland tick all the boxes of a classic bourgeois nation. The main point in each and every such case is what people inhabiting each specific territory think. We neither invent nor ignore national movements. We positively deal with problems where they exist, overcome national resentments, conflict and antagonisms by ending involuntarily unity and move towards voluntary unity through the struggle for socialism. That is how the positive dialectic runs, and through winning a wider and wider democracy the majority needed to secure the proletarian revolution is engaged, organised and made ready for decisive action.

Having left no room for doubt that the right to self-determination is fundamentally a political, not a moral question, let us proceed. To state the obvious, when Marxists advocate Scottish self-determination it is not the same as advocating independence.

An oft used metaphor is divorce. Saying a woman should have the legal right to split from her husband is not the same as recommending that contented wives should end their marriages. Of course, as shown by the September 18 referendum, Scotland is far from contented. If Scotland is really 'better together' with England why did 45% vote to finish the 300-year union? What was a marriage of convenience has clearly soured.

Scotland, as a matter of principle, ought to have the right to freely decide its own future. That is elementary democracy. However, it does not follow that Marxists are indifferent to how that right is exercised. The unacceptable status quo must be ended. Nowadays it fuels division and disempowers the working class. That is why the various left-loyalist 'no' campaigns were so badly mistaken. The marriage has to be renegotiated and renewed on a democratic, socialist basis.

Marxism favours the closest possible *voluntary* unity of people in general and workers in particular. That means *accepting* the right of people in Scotland to vote for whatever constitutional arrangement they happen to choose. But at every stage Marxists should resolutely *fight* for their programme.

Under our specific circumstances the federal republic slogan fits the

bill perfectly. It encapsulates the democratic right to self-determination and the radically transformed unity of the working class in Britain against the Cameron-Miliband-Clegg devo-max constitutional monarchy. In addition, the demand for a federal republic encapsulates the unity of the working class in Britain against the divisive nationalism of Salmond, Sauter and Sheridan ●

Notes

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Party_of_Scotland.
2. The policy committee of the National Party of Scotland - one of the forerunners of the SNP - passed the following resolution on November 17 1928: "The party, having regard to the large contribution made by Scotland in building up the British empire, is desirous of increasing the affairs of the empire to the extent her contribution warrants and, as a mother nation, thereby demands complete recognition of her rights as such in the empire ... the party cannot, in these circumstances agree to acquiesce in any situation that does not permit of a mother nation excusing her right to independent status and her right in partnership in that empire on terms equal to that enjoyed by England." In other words, Scottish nationalists wanted a partnership based on the model of Austria-Hungary after 1867 (resolution quoted in C Kidd *Unions and unionism: political thought in Scotland 1500-2000* Cambridge 2008, p287).
3. American declaration of independence 1776.
4. AE Buchanan *Justice, legitimacy, and self-determination* Oxford 2003, p331.
5. P Holquist *Making war, forging revolution* Harvard Mass 2002, p121.
6. See VI Lenin *CW* Vol 30, Moscow 1977, pp380-400.

For a federal republic

Motion proposed by Labour Party Marxists

As declining post-boom British imperialism attacked post-war concessions, in the absence of a viable socialist movement resistance in Scotland and Wales often took a nationalist form, deploying a mythologised past.

We socialists stand for:

- working class internationalism, not cross-class national unity; unity with the world's working class, not with our ruling class;
- opposition to all forms of nationalism, exclusiveness or superiority; in particular, British/English national chauvinism and Scottish or Welsh nationalist narrow-mindedness: these obscure the fundamental antagonism between labour and capital;
- replacing the hierarchy of capitalist states by world socialism - working class rule - in transition to classless, stateless, communist society: socialism cannot survive in one country or continent;
- the voluntary merging of nations; the right of all peoples to fully develop their own culture; a democratic solution to the national question, wherever it arises, through upholding the right to self-determination, including the right to merge, stay together or separate.

As the immediate democratic solution to the national question in the UK, we socialists stand for:

- unconditional support for the right of the people of Ireland to reunite: the struggles for socialism in Britain and national liberation in Ireland are closely linked;
- replacing the existing UK constitutional monarchy, along with its House of Lords, established church and secret state, with a radical federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, with the right of Scotland and Wales to secede.

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

Stage-managed spectacle

This year's Labour conference confirmed once again that the union tops work hand in glove with the party bureaucracy. Charles Gradnitzer reports



Ed Miliband: are his cuts preferable?

Conference got off to a democratic start, with 65 out of the 132 contemporary motions being ruled out of order before it had even begun.

At least seven of these motions noted the August Care UK strike in Doncaster and committed a future Labour government to implementing a living wage for NHS workers. One might be forgiven for thinking that these motions were ruled out of order due to the machinations of New Labour or Progress types. However, there are five union officials on the seven-member conference arrangements committee (CAC).

Obviously the majority of the CAC's members do not think a motion that commits the Labour Party to immediately bringing in the living wage should even be allowed on the priorities ballot (although, of course, even if it had been timetabled for discussion, it would likely have been gutted during a compositing meeting).

This depressing beginning set the tone for the conference, which, as most people on the left will be aware, is a well choreographed, stage-managed spectacle. Smarmy speeches are delivered by shadow cabinet ministers; prospective parliamentary candidates are called to speak, one after the other, by a chair who pretends not to know their name; and on those rare occasions when one of the plebs is allowed to go to the podium the regional director is on hand to help write their speech.

The good

On the first day of conference the Alliance for Workers' Liberty had organised a lobby to highlight the arbitrary rejection of motions on the national health service and to demand that the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy model motion was included in the priorities ballot.¹

The NHS, having come out on top in the ballot, was scheduled for debate and the CLPD model motion emerged from the compositing meeting totally unscathed, with all its demands left in place. Unfortunately, however, the motion was quite unambitious, aiming to "end extortionate PFI charges" rather than abolishing PFI altogether and writing off PFI debt, as other motions on the NHS aimed to do. What exactly constitutes an "extortionate" charge is left open to

interpretation.

The health and care composite was carried, but, as with the NHS motion that was passed unanimously in 2012,² it is likely that the motion will be ignored by the Labour leaders, who have no intention of taking privatised services back into public ownership unless they are "failing".

All three of the CLPD's rule changes received the backing of the NEC and so were approved by conference. The first ensures that no member of parliament and no shadow minister can be elected to the CAC, the second stipulates that two of the CAC members should be directly elected by the membership of the party, and the third lays down that the 'three-year rule', which has historically been used to stop CLPs submitting rule changes, now only applies to rules that have the same purpose rather than the entire section of the rule book.

While these are small victories, compared to the mammoth task the CLPD has set itself of restoring Labour Party democracy and handing power to the members, they nonetheless put the left in a better position to make further democratic gains in the future - you never know, we might actually get to debate leftwing policy at conference.

The bad

These gains were more than outweighed by the speeches of various shadow ministers. Ed Balls was booed and jeered by some when he announced that he would be raising the retirement age, means-testing winter fuel allowance and capping child benefit, but this soon gave way to rapturous applause when he announced that a Labour government would restore the 50p top rate of tax and introduce a 'mansion tax' on properties worth over £2 million.

Most of these announcements were nothing new - they were contained in the 'final year policy' document, which had not only been available online from the end of July and had been physically mailed to delegates, but, just to make absolutely sure, was handed out during delegates' regional briefings at the start of conference. However, while the FYP document pledged to raise the retirement age, what was new in Balls' speech was the announcement on winter fuel allowance and child benefits. In this way the policy-making process, which

had been going on for the last five years, was totally bypassed and the proposals could not be voted on.

By far the most sick-making speech of conference was delivered by the shadow defence secretary, Vernon Coaker.³ Coaker began by telling conference that Britain stood for progressive values, such as humanitarianism and internationalism, before thanking his team for campaigning for our "successful and developing" defence industry. He cited the occupation of Afghanistan (responsible for the deaths of some 21,000 civilians) as an example of the UK's progressive, humanitarian and internationalist role in the world. Britain, he claimed, had helped to improve women's rights and bring stability to Afghanistan. Other examples of Britain's humanitarian role included dropping aid in Iraq "alongside US air strikes" to stop Islamic State - "a brutal terrorist organisation which poses a threat to Britain".

Taking identity politics to the point of absurdity, he confirmed that Labour would introduce an Armed Forces (Prevention of Discrimination) Bill in the first parliament after its election. This would make "discrimination" against or "abuse" of members of the armed forces a crime on a par with racism and sexism. He ended by informing us that Labour is "the patriotic party, the party of Britain".

He was followed by shadow foreign secretary Douglas Alexander, who implicitly compared Russia to Nazi Germany by claiming that "no country had seized the territory of another European country by force since 1945".

The ugly

Awkwardly delivered, full of cringe-inducing anecdotes about various people he had met and containing very little we did not already know, Ed Miliband's speech was inoffensive and unsurprising. With the exception of the windfall tax on tobacco companies, it did not reveal any policy that had not been included in the NPF document, which had been publicly available for two months.

As everyone knows, the leader was widely criticised for forgetting the section, in his carefully crafted and endlessly rehearsed speech, where he was meant to deal with the deficit

and the economy. What was more telling, though, was that he failed to mention the policy on immigration contained in the NPF document. While wrapped in empty platitudes about immigration being good for the economy and promises not to engage in a rhetorical "arms race" with Ukip, Labour's policy is to "bring it under control" by introducing a "cap on workers from outside of the EU" and prioritising "reducing illegal and low-skilled immigration". Moreover, Labour plans to do "more to tackle illegal immigration" by introducing "new powers for border staff". At present, the "situation is getting worse, with fewer illegal immigrants stopped, more absconding, fewer deported and backlogs of information on cases not pursued".

Neither Miliband nor any of his shadow ministers talked about this aspect - hopefully they would have been booed off the stage had they done so. Mind you, since the policy document runs to some 218 pages, few would have actually read it.

Futility

This parody of a conference is not just an indictment of the Labour Party, but reflects the dire state of the unions and the wider labour movement.

The unions have 30 representatives on the national policy forum - which, among other things, pledged to increase the retirement age, give more powers to the UK Borders Agency, make being rude to members of the armed forces a crime, and continue to spend billions of pounds on Trident. They also comprise more than 70% of the CAC, which, as I have already noted, blocked more than half the motions submitted by constituency Labour Parties. Finally, the unions have half of the votes at conference and typically vote *en bloc*, meaning that they could, if they wanted to, prevent a lot of this policy from going through.

This demonstrates the futility of any strategy that calls on the unions to break from Labour in order to ... forge a second Labour Party. The unions are not simply complicit in passing reactionary policy through conference: they sit on the committees that produce these policies in the first place and act as enforcers for the party bureaucracy to prevent even moderately leftwing policy from being

discussed.

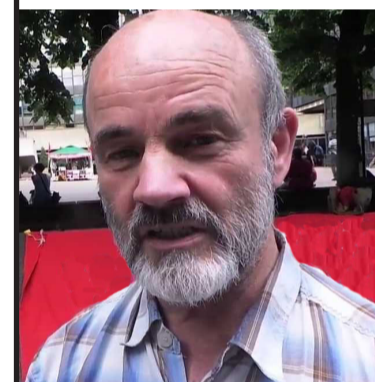
We need to be ambitious. The best outcome of the May 2015 general election is not a Miliband-Balls government that carries out Labour cuts, as opposed to Con-Dem cuts. Such a government can only but demoralise Labour voters and create the conditions for an even more rightwing Tory government.

Better to fight for a transformation of the unions, the co-ops and the Labour Party so that they can become weapons in the class war and vehicles for socialism. Meanwhile, let's stop pretending that a capitalist Labour government is preferable to a capitalist Tory government ●

Notes

1. www.leftfutures.org/2014/08/time-to-get-your-contemporary-motions-in-for-labours-conference.
2. <http://l-r-c.org.uk/news/story/labour-conference-votes-to-restore-the-nhs>.
3. <http://press.labour.org.uk/post/98135471954/speech-by-vernon-coaker-mp-to-labour-party-annual>.

Vote for Stan Keable



National Committee (Section B, individual members)

Having attended NC meetings regularly during the past year as an observer, and previously as reserve delegate representing Greater London LRC, I will continue attending, whether as an NC member or observer - and continue reporting NC meetings publicly. I believe such reporting essential to involve the whole membership in the life and democracy of the organisation, and its ability to attract new forces.

My Marxist politics may be a minority view, but I believe minorities should be fairly represented in the leadership of socialist organisations.

I am Unison branch delegate to Hammersmith CLP, and Secretary of Labour Party Marxists.

Labour Briefing Editorial Board

As a coopted member of *Labour Briefing* editorial board, I have attended almost all EB meetings, worked hard on the production and distribution of the journal, and reported NC and EB meetings publicly at labourpartymarxists.org.uk and in the *Weekly Worker*, and will continue to do so.

I believe the pages of our own journal should report the affairs of our leading committees - essential to educating and organising members and attracting new forces.

Briefing should give fair space in its pages to the views of LRC affiliates. Minority and controversial views should be welcomed and debated publicly.