



# Labour Party MARXISTS

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## Extraordinary times require extraordinary measures

**O**ur party must be reorganised from top to bottom. A special conference - say in the spring of 2016 - should be called by the National Executive Committee with a view to overhauling the constitution and rules and undertaking an across-the-board political reorientation.

As is well known, Labour members loathe the undemocratic rules and structures put in place by Blair. The joint policy committee, the national policy forums, the whole sorry rigmarole should be junked. The NEC must be unambiguously responsible for drafting manifestos. And, of course, the NEC needs to be fully accountable to a *sovereign* conference.

The chances are that in the immediate aftermath of Jeremy Corbyn's victory there will be another huge upsurge in membership. At the very least 100,000 more can be expected. But in order to reach out to the millions who are angry, the millions disgusted by corrupt career politicians, the millions who believe that somehow a better world is possible, the Labour Party ought to establish its own mass media. Nowadays that must include internet-based TV and radio stations. Relying on the favours of the bourgeois press and media worked splendidly for Tony Blair. But we will get nothing but lies, distortion and implacable opposition. The dull-as-ditchwater publications of the trade union bureaucracy and the confessional sects are a model of what to avoid. They turn people off. But a media which strives to tell the truth, which encourages debate, which deals with difficult questions, is another matter. We can surely do better than the BBC, Al Jazeera and Sky.

Branding people as 'infiltrators' because, mainly out of frustration, they supported the Greens, Tusc or Left Unity in the last general election, does nothing to advance the socialist cause. Such a snarling response is worryingly reminiscent of the cold war bans and proscriptions. New recruits ought to be welcomed, not cold-shouldered.

We are proud of being a federal party. Therefore securing new affiliates ought to be at the top of our agenda. Indeed we should actively seek to bring every leftwing group or party under our banner. Labour needs to become the common home of every socialist organisation, cooperative and trade union - the agreed goal of our founders. In that same spirit, unions which have either disaffiliated or been expelled must be brought back into the fold.

At the last Fire Brigades Union national conference, general secretary Matt Wrack asked those proposing reaffiliation "what their strategy" of changing Labour was, "because he had never heard it". Well, Matt, for



Keep all your powers ... temporarily

the moment that strategy goes under the name, 'Operation Corbyn'. Of course, today both the Rail, Maritime and Transport union and the FBU are backing him ... from outside Labour. Moreover, there are unions which have never had an organised relationship with us. Regrettably, Mark Serwotka, Public and Commercial Services union general secretary, was one of those turned away. But, instead of impotently complaining about it on Twitter, he should turn the tables on the Blairites by bringing in his entire membership. Mark, fight to get PCS to affiliate.

### Trade Unions

For our part, we should commit the Labour Party to reviving the trade union movement. The drop from 12 million members in the late 1970s to some seven million today can be reversed. Labour members should take the lead in recruiting masses of new trade unionists and restoring union strength in workplaces and society at large. In line with this, strikes must be unashamedly supported. There ought to be a binding commitment on councillors, MPs and MEPs to back workers in their struggle to protect jobs, pensions and conditions. Those who refuse ought to be subject to deselection.

The opt-in proposals contained in Sajid Javid's Trade Union Bill are part of a crude attempt to starve us of funds. But adversity can be transformed into opportunity. Necessity will oblige us to campaign for hearts and minds if the bill passes into law. Nevertheless, the principle we fight for is perfectly clear. All trade unionists should be *obliged* to pay the political levy. Worryingly, we have met opposition to this within the Labour Representation Committee and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. But the obligation pay the political levy was agreed practice from 1900 till 1909 and, more importantly, flows directly from the basic requirements of working class collectivism.

Because of history, because of numerical weight, because of financial contributions, transforming the Labour Party is inseparably linked with the fight to democratise the trade unions. All office-holders in the trade unions ought to be subject to regular election and be recallable. No regional organiser, no president, no general secretary should receive a salary higher than the average wage of their membership. Frankly, Len McCluskey's £140,000 pay and pension package is totally unacceptable. Rules which serve to blunt, restrict or outlaw criticism of the trade union bureaucracy must be rescinded. Put another way, no more 'monkey trials'.

Then there is the trade union vote at conference. It should not be cast by general secretaries, but proportionately, in accordance with the agreed political make-up of each delegation. We have no wish to go back to the days when conference was dominated by four or five men in suits.

Obviously the Parliamentary Labour Party has to be brought into line. No-one knows exactly what will happen after the September 12 special conference. But we should expect a campaign of manoeuvring, resistance, non-cooperation and if that fails outright war. In fact the first shots have already been fired. Blair's 'Alice in Wonderland' opinion piece in *The Observer* had nothing to do with a final plea in the leadership campaign. We all knew what the result was going to be. No, its purpose is perfectly clear. Rally the Blairites and their corporate, state and international allies.

Given present circumstances, it is unlikely that the hard right will go for a breakaway. Another Social Democratic Party is an outside possibility. But at the last general election the Lib Dems were hammered. The centre ground has virtually disappeared as a parliamentary force. Hence the Blairites have nowhere to go except the government benches. But, being dedicated careerists, they know their

constituents would turf them out at the first opportunity if they switched to the Tories. Instead of the glories of high office it would be the musty corridors of the Lords. So expect them to wage a prolonged, sophisticated and utterly ruthless fightback.

We must respond by constitutionally reversing the domination of the party by the PLP. Tory collaborators, saboteurs, the plain corrupt, must be hauled up before the NEC and threatened with expulsion. If they refuse to abide by party discipline the whip must be withdrawn. We should democratically select and promote trustworthy replacement candidates. If that results in a smaller PLP in the short term that is a price well worth paying.

Another potent weapon against the hard right is the demand that all our elected representatives should take only the average wage of a skilled worker. Here is a principle upheld by the Paris Commune and the Bolshevik revolution. 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 put a break on careerism and give a substantial fillip to our finances. It ought to be a basic principle that our representatives live like workers, not pampered members of the upper middle class.

### Reclaiming

Real Marxists, not fake Marxists, have never talked of reclaiming Labour. It has never been ours in the sense of being a "political weapon for the workers' movement". No, despite the electoral and trade union base, our party has been dominated throughout its entire history by professional politicians and trade union bureaucrats. A distinct social stratum which in the last analysis serves not the interests of the working class, but the nation, ie, British capitalism.

Labour is still a "bourgeois workers' party". With Corbyn's victory things have become rather more complex. Labour will become a chimera. Instead of a twofold contradiction we have a threefold contradiction. The left dominate both the top and bottom of the party.

Comrade Corbyn is not the equivalent of George Lansbury or Michael Foot. It would be an elementary mistake to assume he was. They were promoted by the labour and trade union bureaucracy after a severe crisis: namely Ramsay MacDonald's treachery and James Callaghan's winter of discontent. Corbyn's leadership is, in the first instance, the result of an historic accident. The 'morons' from the Burnham camp lent

him their vote. After that, however, Corbyn owes everything to the mass membership. Those already in and those coming in.

That gives us the possibility of attacking the rightwing domination of the middle - the councillors, the apparatus, the PLP - from below and above. No wonder the more astute minds of the bourgeois commentariat can be found expressing genuine concern about what will happen to their neoliberal consensus.

Of course, there is the danger that comrade Corbyn will be drawn into a series of rotten compromises. After all, many advisors will argue that he cannot form a shadow cabinet that mainly draws on the Campaign Group and keep the PLP right wing on board.

We say, do not try to stop the right if it wants to make a suicide jump. Corbyn should appoint a small, politically tight shadow cabinet. The right should be kept out. Certainly the generous offer by Labour's "most senior MPs" to make Corbyn into their prisoner ought to be rejected outright. The idea of the "most senior MPs" is to declare an 18-month truce; that is, if Corbyn agrees that the PLP should elect the shadow cabinet. They then want everything put through the shadow cabinet, so as to prevent Corbyn from pursuing "loony left policies" (*Daily Mirror* August 29 2015). Shadow cabinet collective responsibility would gag him.

While we Marxists want to see the Bonapartist position of leader abolished, it is crystal-clear that today's situation is extraordinary and therefore requires extraordinary measures.

Corbyn should be urged in the strongest terms to *temporarily* maintain the leader's power to appoint the shadow cabinet. A civil war is about to erupt and the left needs every weapon it can get its hands on. So Corbyn should appoint a shadow cabinet and - once again as a *temporary* measure - maybe seek a mandate for his choice from the NEC or the annual conference.

Corbyn is still talking in a way one would expect from a left reformist. His team have been sending emollient messages about party unity and taking on the Tory government together. But have no doubt: the right will resort to unconstitutional methods in an attempt to undermine, discredit, isolate and then finally oust him. In this it will be aided and abetted not only by the City, the military-industrial complex and the capitalist press and media. Special branch, MI5 and their American cousins will provide information, advisors and coordination. If he is going to succeed, comrade Corbyn will have to resort to revolutionary methods •



# Hoist by its own petard

The right has given us a gift and we have used it. Charles Gradnitzer looks back and reminds us how it all came about

This article attempts to explain the previous left challenges to the leadership position and why they failed; the old electoral system and the manufactured scandal that changed it; the current state of the Labour left; and the opportunities a Corbyn victory presents to the left and the grassroots membership of the Labour Party.

As most people are aware, Tony Blair won the leadership election in 1994. He was standing against John Prescott and self-professed “moron” Margaret Beckett, so it is safe to say that there was no left candidate. In 2006, anticipating that Blair would be stepping down the following year, John McDonnell announced that he intended to stand as the leftwing candidate in order to ensure there would be a debate within the party and not simply a ‘coronation’ of Gordon Brown as Blair’s successor.

In 2007, a few months before Blair set a formal date for his resignation, Michael Meacher announced his intention to stand. Meacher had been in the Socialist Campaign Group with McDonnell until 1983, when he was expelled after he joined the shadow cabinet. He was a minister for 20 years (and even voted for the invasion of Iraq) until he fell out with Blair and returned to the backbenches in 2003. After this he began to move back to the left and attack Blair over Iraq.

So in 2007 we arrived at a situation where the left was fielding two candidates in a leadership election - presumably to make up for the failure to stand anyone at all in 1994. But with two days to go before the close of nominations Meacher stepped down and asked his supporters to back John McDonnell, who was relying on nominations from Meacher’s supporters and those of the centre-left deputy leadership candidate, Jon Cruddas. However, much of Meacher’s support came from MPs who did not see McDonnell, a rebellious backbencher, as a credible candidate and the Brownites subsequently pressured 14 of Meacher’s supporters not to nominate McDonnell. Cruddas supporters also failed to back him and in the end he fell 16 nominations short of the 45-MP threshold. This meant that Gordon Brown, with a total of 313 nominations, was elected unopposed and the leadership conference was reduced to the coronation McDonnell had predicted in 2006.

When Brown resigned as both prime minister and leader of the Labour Party after the 2010 general election, which resulted in a hung parliament, the Miliband brothers and Ed Balls declared their intention to stand, while comrade McDonnell also announced that he would stand again. But once again there was a second left candidate - Diane Abbott, a fellow member of the Socialist Campaign Group - and this time McDonnell dropped out, asking his supporters to back Abbott. However, she went out in the first round, having received the lowest vote of any candidate from the parliamentary and constituency sections of the electoral college (though she did head Andy Burnham and Ed Balls in the union and affiliate section). So it was ‘Red Ed’ who won the leadership election in 2010, narrowly beating his brother, David Miliband, thanks to the “pernicious influence” of the trade unions - a truly bizarre claim, given that the vote of a union member was worth 0.13% of that of an MP.

## Experiment

What was interesting about the 2010 election was a little noticed experiment conducted by John Mann in his

Bassetlaw constituency, the outcome of which would go on to drastically alter the course of Labour Party history.

Mann, convinced that there was a need to “widen democracy” and open up the leadership election to the public, identified Labour supporters in his constituency and conducted a ‘primary’ to determine who he should vote for in the leadership election. At a cost of several thousand pounds he worked with the Bassetlaw CLP and other volunteers to conduct a postal ballot of over 10,000 people who were said to be Labour supporters.

Writing for *Progress* magazine in July 2010, Andy Burnham - who was, of course, standing as a leadership candidate - praised John Mann’s primary. In his article he stated that membership fees were a barrier to participation, that he wanted to create an affiliate membership (ie, ‘registered supporters’), and that as leader of the Labour Party he would look to include registered supporters in future internal elections and selections. (To Burnham’s dismay Labour supporters in Bassetlaw voted for David Miliband in the primary and John Mann cast his ballot accordingly.)

Stephen Twigg, the chair of the rightwing *Progress* group from 2005 to 2010 and its current honorary president, wrote a contribution to *The purple book*, published by *Progress* in 2011. In his chapter, entitled ‘Letting the people decide: redistributing power and renewing democracy’, he stated:

In 2005 only 1.3% of the electorate was a member of a political party, a fall from 4% in 1983 ... The fall in membership has resulted in fewer people being involved in selecting Labour’s MPs. The average constituency Labour Party has around 300 members. This equates to a very small percentage of the local population. When candidates were selected by large memberships 50 years ago, it was easier to see how they reflected the wishes of the local population.

How, then, could Labour seek to increase the influence of ordinary people over the decision of who represents them? One way would be to introduce closed primaries ...

He went on to advocate ending the automatic affiliation of union members in favour of an opt-in system; and abolishing the electoral college in favour of ‘one member, one vote’ (Omov) - “opening up access to the Labour Party and how it operates should be an important organisational goal”, he said.

When Ed Miliband became leader in 2010, he immediately set about reviewing the party structure - as Blair had done in 1997 - through a bogus “consultation” known as Refounding Labour. Party units and individual members were asked to make submissions to this review, but when the recommendations were published it was clear that the party had, at best, cherry-picked submissions - in all likelihood the recommendations were a foregone conclusion and the submissions were mostly ignored.

The end result of this review was the introduction of ‘registered supporters’. These did not have to pay a fee, but were largely election fodder. They were not involved in internal party selections - if they were involved in the party at all.

The Labour left saw straight through Refounding Labour: it was a step towards achieving the rule changes *Progress* wanted to make. Writing in *Left Futures*, Jon Lansman predicted



Wanted to placate the right

that registered supporters “could be given votes in leadership elections as if they were affiliated members”.<sup>1</sup> This prediction was not entirely hard to make, given that *Progress* had been pushing for primaries, using Mann’s Bassetlaw experiment as a case study on widening political engagement with the party.

## Falkirk and Collins

With *Progress* gunning for opt-in affiliation and Omov to reduce the “power of the unions” in the Labour Party, the executive committee of the Unite union adopted a new political strategy in 2011 to “reclaim Labour”. The strategy consisted of three major goals: maintaining the union link; increasing the number of trade union or “trade union-friendly” prospective parliamentary candidates; and increasing the number of trade unionists in constituency Labour Parties in order to secure the success of the first two goals.

Though *Progress* had failed to get primaries, opt-in affiliation and Omov into the Refounding Labour recommendations, its opportunity finally arrived in 2013, when Unite’s political strategy blew up in its face. In July that year, Eric Joyce, the disgraced former Labour MP for Falkirk, accused Unite of rigging the selection process.

The Unite convenor at Grangemouth oil refinery, Stephen Deans, had become the chair of Falkirk West CLP shortly after Joyce had resigned after nutting a Tory MP in the House of Commons bar. Deans began to implement Unite’s political strategy in Falkirk, recruiting union members from Grangemouth into the CLP. While Deans was chair the size of the CLP doubled from fewer than 100 members to over 200.

Falkirk West had agreed to have an all-women shortlist, which would exclude the *Progress* candidate, Gregor Poynton. However, when it was discovered that the trade union-friendly Katie Myler was Unite’s preferred candidate, *Progress* went apeshit, with Peter Mandelson warning Miliband at the 2013 *Progress* conference that the unions were trying to “take over” the party.

In March 2013 the Labour NEC created a subcommittee to investigate claims that Unite had signed up and paid for members without their knowledge and the report was published in June that year. As a result both Katie Myler and Stephen Deans were suspended from the party and Falkirk was placed under “special measures”. The report was handed to the police in the hope that Unite would be charged with fraud, but Police Scotland concluded that “there are insufficient grounds to support a criminal investigation at this time”.

In one of the most infuriating examples of the pot calling the kettle black, the report revealed that the Blairite candidate backed by *Progress*, Gregor Poynton, had paid party subscriptions

for 11 new members, which was actually against the party rules, whereas the report exonerated Unite of any wrongdoing.

In spite of the report and the police investigation, former Labour Party general secretary Ray Collins was asked to head a review to make recommendations for party reform. Collins, who had been assistant general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union until 2008, recommended most of the policies *Progress* had tried to push through in 2011: the abolition of the electoral college, the introduction of Omov, mandatory opt-in affiliation of union members, new rights for registered supporters, including the right to vote in the leadership election. In order to appease the Parliamentary Labour Party, Collins recommending raising the threshold for leadership nominations from 12.5% to 15% of Labour MPs.

The Collins review was put to a special conference, to which I was delegated in 2014. The Labour left vociferously opposed the recommendations, while they were supported by the centre and the right. In the run-up to conference delegates received numerous letters from Ed Miliband urging them to vote for the reforms. One such letter told the story of Paul, a lifelong trade unionist and figment of Miliband’s imagination, who finally joined the Labour Party after the reforms were announced - on the basis that “until now the party never felt democratic. It never felt like one I could join.”

The event itself was a stage-managed stitch-up. The first sign of this was that it turned out there had been no conference arrangements committee and therefore no CAC report. A number of CLPs had submitted emergency motions which were not on the agenda and, when this was pointed out to conference, Angela Eagle assured delegates from the chair that the CAC had met in January. But if it met in January it would not have been able to consider submitted motions or actually do any arranging, because the Collins review was not published till February.

The conference went on as planned. General secretary after general secretary stood up to denounce the reforms, but in the end it was all hot air. When it came to the vote, 96% of the unions (with the honourable exception of the Bakers Union) and 74% of the CLPs voted for the reforms, giving a total of 86.29% in favour and 13.71% against. The experiment conducted by John Mann in 2010 had borne fruit.

## Labour left

In 2015 the Labour Party suffered a crushing defeat under Ed Miliband. In Scotland the party was all but wiped out. This defeat had major ramifications for the political composition of the PLP. Seven sitting Campaign Group and Left Platform MPs were wiped out by the Scottish National Party, and five Campaign Group MPs stood down and were replaced by candidates that are not leftwing.

The 11 left ex-MPs would have been enough to put Corbyn on the ballot without any nominations from MPs who later regretted it. In addition to this 18 Left Platform PPCs were stood in Conservative strongholds, continuing a tradition of parachuting centrist and right wing candidates into Labour strongholds while sticking socialists in unwinnable seats.

One of the most striking things about the Corbyn campaign has been that it reveals how badly the parliamentary party reflects the views and wishes of

the membership and the unions. This is the result of NEC interference in constituency selections and the fact that the Labour right has been well organised for years. There is very little organisation of the ‘hard left’ or even ‘soft left’. There is no leftwing membership organisation that regularly meets, holds press conferences, tries to win important internal and parliamentary selections, and produces economic policy documents. In short the left has nothing analogous to *Progress*. A leftwing proto-*Progress* exists in the sense that the left does some of these activities, but it is not organised into one organisation.

Luke Akehurst, the secretary of Labour First, produced an interesting article on what he calls the “hard left” for his blog. The situation he describes is basically right: the ephemeral left organises through “networks” of Facebook groups, email lists, phone calls, and meetings of various established groups. However, his claim that these “networks” are an “experienced and highly motivated machine” is grossly exaggerated.

The Labour Representation Committee, set up in 2004, is not capable of organising anything on the scale that is needed. It has its conferences and some of its comrades sell *Labour Briefing* at meetings, but beyond that it does not really do a great deal. It is haemorrhaging members and looks like it is on the verge of collapse.

Andrew Fisher, who was joint secretary of the LRC with Pete Firmin, started the Left Economics Advisory Panel, which, as the name suggests, produces ‘leftwing’ (ie, neo-Keynesian) economic policy documents and press releases. Fisher has also written a book called *Austerity: the failed experiment*.

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy tends to concentrate on internal party matters: electing people to the conference arrangements committee, the NEC, the national policy forum; submitting soft-left contemporary motions to conference and rule changes aimed at making the Labour Party more democratic and accountable to the membership.

A group not mentioned by Luke Akehurst is Socialist Action. Few people know who is in SA because when it split from the International Marxist Group it began to pursue a ‘deep entryist’ strategy. It is so secretive I would wager there will be members of Socialist Action who do not know each other. It does not organise openly. You can sometimes guess who is in it - if they once worked as advisors for Ken Livingstone when he was London mayor, for example, or today they talk about deficit reduction through investment rather than public-sector cuts.

Membership of these groups tend to overlap and they mostly stand for various positions under the banner of the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance. A fact that did not go unnoticed by Akehurst, who points out how undemocratic this arrangement is. He notes that the name is ironic, given that one of the main groups in the CLGA is the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. The CLGA also has a website that carries reports from the CLPD about NEC and NPF meetings, conference, and other Labour Party internal affairs.

The Centre for Labour and Social Studies is also worth mentioning because when it was launched it was described in *The Guardian* as a “leftwing antidote to Blairite pressure group *Progress*”. Owen Jones describes it in similar, though less hostile terms, as the left’s answer to *Progress*. Considering it has



Sally Hunt from the University and College Union and Sir Paul Kenny on its national advisory panel, I would question whether this think-tank could really be considered leftwing. The advisory panel also includes the former leader of Respect, Salma Yaqoob, so it is not really even part of the Labour Party.

In addition to this there is the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs of which Corbyn is a member. It was set up in 1982 as a split from the Tribune group after Kinnock and other members of Tribune abstained in the deputy leadership election in 1981, costing Tony Benn the job. Amusingly, Corbyn's refrain that his candidacy is "not about personalities, but about policies" is exactly what Benn said in 1981 when he stood against Denis Healey for deputy leader.

Two other 'groups' worth mentioning are the Left Platform, which was actually the name used for a statement put out before the general election, signed by sitting Labour MPs and PPCs. The second consists of the 10 newly elected Labour MPs who, after winning the election, wrote an open letter committing themselves to anti-austerity politics. Among the list of signatories are Corbyn supporters such as Richard Burgon, Clive Lewis and Kate Osamor.

## Nomination

The Left Platform is worth mentioning because its post-election meeting put the dire state of the Labour left into perspective. On May 12, it met in London to discuss the prospects of standing an anti-austerity candidate. John McDonnell, having failed to get enough nominations in the last two leadership elections, immediately ruled himself out. Comrade McDonnell and other MPs thought that they could get at most 16 nominations, due to the 2015 wipe-out of the Campaign Group and the lack of new socialist MPs.

At first there was a campaign to get Jon Trickett to stand. There was even a change.org petition to put pressure on him, but once it became obvious he was not going to put his name forward, the left started searching for an alternative. Some wanted Michael Meacher to stand as the anti-austerity candidate, given that he was one of the initiators of the Left Platform, but he had already indicated that he was going to back Andy Burnham. It was then that comrade Corbyn took up the mantle.

The best anybody on the Labour left was hoping for at that point was that Corbyn would get enough airtime to put forward an anti-austerity position before the nominations closed, but after his Facebook page exploded a campaign was mounted to secure him enough nominations to get on the ballot paper. The campaign argued that the inclusion of Corbyn would widen the debate and enfranchise thousands of members who would otherwise not engage with the leadership election. Elements of the centre and the right - including Luke Akehurst - supported his inclusion on the ballot in the hopes that Corbyn would be humiliated during the leadership debate and the "hard left" would be crushed and demoralised.

Tens of thousands of Labour members and supporters bombarded MPs via email and social media in order to get him on the ballot. It was clear from some of the responses that this pressure from the grassroots accounted for at least some of the support. Other MPs clearly nominated Corbyn in order to shield Burnham from claims that he was too leftwing and in the pocket of the unions.

The morning that the nominations closed it did not look as though he was going to make it onto the ballot - in spite of the optimistic editorial in the *Morning Star* and assurances from his campaign team that they had enough support from MPs. But that morning there was a last-minute surge of nominations and as the clock struck 12 he had made it onto the ballot.

The first sign that Corbyn was reaching out to people beyond the notoriously insular world of online leftism was at the *Newsnight* Labour Party leadership hustings on June 17. During the hustings Corbyn had the most audible support, even though he did not capitulate, as the other candidates did, to one particular chauvinist in the audience.

In July YouGov dropped a polling bombshell: Corbyn would win in the final round with 53%. At first this poll was dismissed, but to the terror of the centre and the right such findings kept on coming in. Poll after poll was putting Corbyn in first place. In addition to this the supporting nominations from unions and constituency parties were also rolling in. In the end Corbyn had the support of 36 MPs, two MEPs, six major trade unions, 152 constituencies, and two affiliated socialist societies, putting him ahead of the other three candidates.

The campaign has exceeded the wildest expectations of many comrades. He has been speaking to packed-out meetings across the country and the party has doubled in size. 160,000 people registered as members, affiliates, or supporters in the last 24 hours before the registration closed.

## Opportunities

There are, as I see it, two opportunities here for the left: the first is democratic reform of the Labour Party to undo the damage Tony Blair did. The second is a serious regroupment of the left within the party.

To grasp the first opportunity, we must first understand what is undemocratic about the Labour Party. In 1997 the annual conference adopted Tony Blair's changes to the way the party programme and manifesto were developed. This was known as Partnership into Power and it remains in place to this day. The changes introduced six policy commissions, the NPF and the joint policy committee, and used these new bodies, along with 'contemporary resolutions', to reduce the role of conference in determining the party programme.

The policy commissions - which comprise 16-20 members representing the government, the NEC and the NPF - produce policy documents for the national policy forum and the joint policy committee (JPC) to discuss. The JPC acts as a steering group for the NPF, and is made up of representatives from the cabinet, the NEC and the NPF itself. It determines what policy the NPF will debate and when. The NPF is made up of 194 representatives from all sections of the party - CLP members and trade union delegates have the greatest representation, but it also includes the entire NEC.

Each year the NPF produces a report and presents it to the annual conference. Conference votes on the document as a whole, which is several hundred pages long. Each report represents one of three stages of the policy development process: stage one is a single document that considers the "big challenges" of the day; stage two outlines specific policies to tackle them; stage three produces the draft 'final year policy' document. Once the draft FYP document is passed by conference, the party is then asked to submit amendments to it. These are taken to the final NPF, where they are debated, and the final version is agreed by consensus. This document is taken to the annual conference, and once it is rubber-stamped it becomes the party programme.

At the annual conference the unions and constituency parties are able to submit contemporary resolutions, which can only address matters that the NPF could not discuss in its reports, so they have to pertain to events that have occurred in the three months between the last NPF meeting and the conference (hence the name 'contemporary resolution'). They are only added to the programme if they receive two-thirds majority support.

Once this bureaucratic process is

complete, a 'Clause V' meeting is held, where various delegates from the cabinet, the unions, the backbenches, the NEC and the NPF select which bits of the programme will go into the party manifesto. It is widely known that much of the FYP documents and almost all of the contemporary resolutions are left out or, if they are included, they are often reworded. This has yet to be quantified, but the CLPD has commissioned a report in order to identify all the differences between the party programme and last year's manifesto.

This process was supposed to widen participation in drafting the manifesto, but in reality it has shut members out of that process even more. Most delegates to conference do not know what is going on, and this lack of knowledge is compounded by the fact that the speeches in favour of the FYP document usually do not correspond to the contents of the document. And, even if delegates do understand what is happening, I would wager that only a tiny minority have actually read the FYP document. In the unlikely case that they have and they disagree with it, the only option they have is to vote for or against it: it cannot be amended or taken in parts at annual conference.

Neither is the national policy forum itself transparent or accountable. Nobody knows what goes on at the NPF: it is not live-streamed or minuted, and delegates do not give report-backs, so you cannot know how your delegates have voted. You do not know which amendments were even considered or on what basis they were accepted or rejected; nor do you know who voted for or against them. Even if you did, the Clause V meeting which determines the manifesto renders the entire exercise of creating a party programme redundant - the participants are appointed, not delegated, and the meeting is not exactly transparent.

This entire process has to be changed and Corbyn must commit himself to doing this. As previous leaders have done, he could organise a review - similar to Partnership into Power or Refounding Labour, only less reactionary - in order to simplify the process, as well as making it democratic and transparent. I am not sure that going back to cobbling together often contradictory policy from party conferences at a Clause V meeting is the best approach, but a simplified, accountable, transparent, representative body - with recallable delegates - that is responsible for drafting the party programme and manifesto would be a good start; the role of the party conference should be to debate, amend, insert and delete sections of the party programme and manifesto.

There is a whole raft of other measures that I would like to see: the abolition of trigger ballots, the ability of constituency parties to recall sitting MPs and councillors, the end of NEC interference in parliamentary selections, a serious campaign to get all trade unions and other socialist groups to affiliate to the party, and an end to bans and proscriptions of socialist groups.

The second opportunity is a serious regroupment of the left. Hundreds of thousands of people have flooded into the party since the general election. As many as two thirds of these people have joined in order to support Jeremy Corbyn. Currently a small proportion are meeting at phone banks in order to canvass for him. They are also gathering at meetings of local Red Labour groups, which were recently established and largely existed on social media until they branched out into the real world.

It would be an absolute disaster if the left failed to turn the waves of Corbyn supporters flooding into the party from an amorphous mass into something more concrete ●

## Notes

1. [www.leftfutures.org/2011/07/refounding-labour-attacks-union-influence-and-will-disappoint-members](http://www.leftfutures.org/2011/07/refounding-labour-attacks-union-influence-and-will-disappoint-members).
2. *The Guardian* August 16 2012.

# 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:  
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# A new clause four

James Marshall calls for the adoption of new principles and objectives

A review of our constitution is surely on the cards. Understandably, clause four - agreed in 1918 and then rewritten under Tony Blair in 1995 - has been singled out. It carries totemic status for partisans both of the right and left.

But should the left seek to raise the 1918 Lazarus? Or should we audaciously reach out for another future? Asked if he wanted to bring back the old clause four, Jeremy Corbyn said this: "I think we should talk about what the objectives of the party are, whether that's restoring clause four as it was originally written or it's a different one. But we shouldn't shy away from public participation, public investment in industry and public control of the railways."<sup>1</sup>

Very moderate. Nonetheless very welcome.

True, the 1918 clause four (part four) 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".

## Moment

Mistakenly, this is often fondly remembered as a defining socialist moment. But when it was first drafted - amidst the slaughter of inter-imperialist war - the calculated aim of Sidney Webb, its Fabian author, was threefold.

Firstly, clause four socialism must be implicitly anti-Marxist. Webb well knew the history of the workers' movement in Germany. Karl Marx famously mocked various passages in the *Gotha programme* (1875), not least those which declared that every worker should receive a "fair distribution of their proceeds of labour" and that "the proceeds of labour belong undiminished with equal right to all members of society".<sup>2</sup> Contradictory and vacuous, concluded Marx. What is fair? What about replacement means of production? What about the expansion of production? What about those unable to work? More than that, Marx put these and other such woolly formulations down to an unneeded concession to the followers of Ferdinand Lassalle. His *Workers' programme* (1862) called for "an equal right to the undiminished proceeds of labour". Obviously Webb wanted to give clause four a distinct Lassallean coloration not out of admiration for Lassalle, but because he wanted to distance the Labour Party from Marxism.

Secondly, by adopting clause four socialism, the Labour Party could both distinguish itself from the exhausted, divided and rapidly declining Liberal Party and please the trade union bureaucracy. Since the 1890s the TUC had been drawing up various wish lists of what ought to be nationalised; eg, rails, mines, electricity, liquor and land. Clause four socialism also usefully went along with the grain of Britain's wartime experience. There was steadily expanding state intervention in the economy. Nationalisation was, as a result, widely identified with efficiency, modernisation and beating the foreign enemy. It therefore appealed to technocratically minded elements amongst the middle classes.

Thirdly, clause four socialism could be used to divert the considerable rank-and-file sympathy that existed



We must look to refound our party

for the Russian Revolution into safe, peaceful and exclusively constitutional channels. That did not stop prime minister David Lloyd George from declaring, in his closing speech of the 1918 general election campaign, that the "Labour Party is being run by the extreme pacifist Bolshevik group".<sup>3</sup>

Almost needless to say, clause four was mainly for show. A red ribbon around what was the standing programme of social liberalism. Yet, even if it had been put into effect, clause four socialism would remain statist, elitist and antithetical to working class self-liberation. Capitalism without capitalists does not count amongst our goals. Railways, mines, land, electricity, etc, passes into the hands of the British empire state.<sup>4</sup> Capitalist owners are bought out. Eased into a comfortable retirement. But, as they vacate the field of production, a new class of state-appointed managers enters the fray. In terms of the division of labour, they substitute for the

capitalists. The mass of the population, meanwhile, remain exploited wage-slaves. They would be subject to the same hierarchal chain of command, the same lack of control, the same mind-numbing routine.

Marxism, by contrast, is based on an altogether different perspective. If it is to win its freedom, the working class must overthrow the existing state. But - and this is crucial - in so doing the proletariat "abolishes itself as a proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and antagonisms, abolishes also the state as state".<sup>5</sup> Capitalist relations of production and the whole bureaucratic state apparatus are swept away. Every sphere of social life sees control exercised from below. All positions of command are elected or chosen by lot and are regularly rotated. Hierarchy is flattened. Alienation is overcome. What is produced and how it is produced radically alters too. Need, not exchange, is the ruling principle. And alone such an

association of producers creates the benign conditions which allow for the full development of each and every individual.

Admittedly, the old clause four resulted from a far-reaching cultural shift - the Russian Revolution has already been mentioned. But there is also the 1867 Reform Act and the extension of the franchise, the considerable popularity of socialist propaganda, the growth of trade unions, the formation of the Labour Party and the horrors of World War I. Because of all this, and more, capitalism was widely considered abhorrent, outmoded and doomed. As a concomitant, socialism became the common sense of the organised working class.

Of course, what the Fabians meant by socialism was a self-proclaimed extension of social liberalism. The Fabians would gradually expand social welfare provision and harness the commanding heights of the economy with a view to promoting the national interest.

In other words, the Fabians *consciously* sought to ameliorate the mounting contradictions between labour and capital and thus put off socialism. As Fredrick Engels damningly noted, "fear of revolution is their guiding principle".<sup>6</sup> And, needless to say, the years 1918-20 witnessed army mutinies, colonial uprisings, a massive strike wave and brutal Black and Tan oppression meted out in Ireland.

## Blairisation

Nevertheless, the Blairisation of clause four in 1995 was hugely symbolic, the ground being laid by the Eurocommunists and their *Marxism Today* journal. Socialism was declared dead and buried, the working class a shrinking minority. Only if Labour accepted capitalism and reached out to the middle classes would it have a future. Neil Kinnock, John Smith and finally Tony Blair dragged the party ever further to the right. Out went the commitment to unilateral disarmament, out went

the commitment to comprehensive education, out went the commitment to full employment, out went the commitment to repeal the Tories' anti-trade union laws, out went the commitment to "the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange".

By sacrificing the old clause four in the full glare of publicity Blair and his New Labour clique sought to appease the establishment, the City, the Murdoch empire, the global plutocracy. Capitalism would be *absolutely* safe in their hands. A New Labour government could be relied upon not even to pay lip service to a British version of state capitalism. Leftwingers such as Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner, Diane Abbott and Ken Livingstone protested, trade union leaders grumbled, but the April 1995 special conference voted by 65% in favour of Blair's new clause four.

Needless to say, his version is stuffed full of managerial guff and classless nonsense. Just what one would expect from the architect of New Labour. After all, one of Blair's big ideas was to replace 'socialism' with 'social-ism'. Another was communitarianism. But, of course, the media glowed with admiration.

Demands for a return of the old clause four are perfectly understandable. But why go back to a Fabian past? ●

## Notes

1. *The Independent* August 21 2015.
2. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 24, London 1989, p83.
3. Quoted in R Miliband *Parliamentary socialism* London 1973, p64n.
4. The Fabians supported the British government in the 1899-1902 Boer War. They justified their stand in a pamphlet, edited by Bernard Shaw, *Fabianism and the empire* (1900). They did not want Britain to lose out when it came to the division of the world by the great imperial powers. As might be expected, the Fabians wanted a *civilising* British empire. The white dominions should be given self-government. However, "for the lower breeds" there should be a "benevolent bureaucracy" of British civil servants and military officials guiding them to "adulthood" (G Foote *The Labour Party's political thought* London 1985, p29-30).
5. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 25, London 1987, p267.
6. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 50, New York 2004, p83.

## Alternative proposed by LPM

### Objectives

1. Labour is the federal party of the working class. We strive to bring all trade unions, cooperatives, socialist societies and leftwing groups and parties under our banner. We believe that unity brings strength.
2. Labour is committed to replacing the rule of capital with the rule of the working class. Socialism introduces a democratically planned economy, ends the ecologically ruinous cycle of production for the sake of production and moves towards a stateless, classless, moneyless society that embodies the principle "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs". Alone such benign conditions create the possibility

- of every individual fully realising their innate potentialities.
3. Towards that end Labour commits itself to achieving a democratic republic. The standing army, the monarchy, the House of Lords and the state sponsorship of the Church of England must go. We support a single chamber parliament, proportional representation and annual elections.
4. Labour seeks to win the active backing of the majority of people and forming a government on this basis.
5. We shall work with others, in particular in the European Union, in pursuit of the aim of replacing capitalism with working class rule and socialism ●