
Strategic Questions:

Problems of Communist-Labour Relationships

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“Left” Attitudes to Labour

Two extreme and opposite views about the Labour Party are found on the left in Britain. The fundamental mistake at both extremes is to see only one side of a complex, many-sided phenomenon.

One side sees only the long dismal record of right-wing leadership—betrayals, defeats, let-downs, disappointments. Seeing only that one side they conclude that there is no role for the Labour Party in the advance to socialism—it is either irrelevant, or an obstacle to be smashed. This view was expressed, for example, in an editorial article in *Socialist Worker* (20/9/75) dealing with the struggle to unseat Reg Prentice:

“... the ‘silent majority’ of Prentices on the Labour benches remains. These supporters of the capitalist system run the Labour Party, whatever its annual conference may say. We know there are still a fair number of rank and file Labour Party members who oppose the state of affairs. Their efforts to change it have our full sympathy. But we have to be honest and say that *they have no chance of success.*” (My emphasis—D.P.)

Nor is this view confined to the ultra-left. Ralph Miliband, for instance, writes (*Socialist Register* 1976, p. 128):

“... the belief in the effective transformation of the Labour Party into an instrument of socialist policies is the most crippling of all illusions to which socialists in Britain have been prone.”

One can understand the bitterness and frustration that lie behind such attitudes, but their fundamental error is the failure to see the other side of the Labour Party—its real mass base in the organised working class.

There is a diametrically opposite view also widely held on the left. Correctly seeing the mass base of the Labour Party, the conclusion is drawn that the *only* road of advance is through Labour Party membership and that other left parties should dis-

band in order to join the Labour Party. How often have older communists been urged to “come and do a better job inside the Labour Party”? But this view too is one-sided and mistaken. Its one-sidedness lies in its failure to understand the very deep-rooted nature of reformist ideas and the character of the struggle that will be needed to defeat them.

Both these extreme views find expression, in moderated forms, within the Communist Party.

The attitude that writes off the Labour Party as a potential instrument for social change is reflected in the Communist Party in persistent sectarian attitudes to the Labour Party and to the Labour left.

The opposite attitude also finds moderated expression within the Communist Party, in the form of attitudes that would play down the Party’s all-round, independent political role (including in elections) and its attempts to develop mass political work and to build a mass Party, in favour of working in a rather more narrow way within the confines of the labour movement in order to change that movement ‘from within’—the ‘ginger group’ concept.

The World Communist Movement

The view that Social Democrats, as well as Communists, could play a positive role in the socialist revolutionary process is now generally accepted in the world communist movement. The main document issued from the world communist conference of June 1969 declares:

“Communists, who attribute decisive importance to working class unity, are in favour of co-operation with socialists and social democrats to establish an advanced democratic regime today and to build a socialist society in the future. They will do everything they can to carry out this co-operation.”

This attitude contrasts sharply with positions taken in the earlier years of the world communist movement; it would be interesting to discuss how far the differences are due to changes in social democracy (the document quoted refers for example

to “the crisis of reformist concepts”) and how far they are due to advances made by communists in breaking with sectarianism. This article, however, is concerned with a different question—what are the forms that this co-operation should take in Britain and what are its future perspectives?

Social Democratic ideology is basically the same wherever it is found; but the organisational forms in which it finds expression and through which it exercises its influence on society vary from country to country. Britain is in a very special position in this respect; our labour movement has some quite unique features. The history and structure of the British Labour Party differ in important respects from those of social democratic parties in other countries.

What is the Labour Party?

The Labour Party was founded at the start of this century by a trade union movement which was beginning to realise that organised labour needed its own Parliamentary representation, organisationally independent of the political parties of the bourgeoisie.

Organisationally independent; but, as Lenin pointed out, not *politically*, not *ideologically*, independent. The dominant political tendencies in the Labour Party at its inception were a mixture of narrow ‘trade union politics’ with Fabianism and a variety of opportunist and utopian socialist trends. This opportunist dominance was rooted in the objective circumstances of the time but was further helped by the sectarianism of the revolutionary Marxist left of that time, in the Social Democratic Federation, which very early on broke away from the new organisation.

Some important changes took place in the inter-war years. The establishment of individual membership sections on a national scale in 1918 changed the previously purely ‘federal’ character of Labour Party organisation. As the individual membership sections grew to the point where they quite overshadowed the affiliated political organisations, so the Labour Party increasingly became an actual organised political party to which trade unions were affiliated, rather than a federation of trade unions together with various political groupings. At the same time, the previously rather diverse currents of opportunist theory and practice coalesced into a more or less coherent body of reformist politics.

Through all the changes in the Labour Party’s 77-year history, the extent of trade union influence has not diminished, rather the reverse. The Labour Party Annual Conference Report shows, for 1975, an affiliated trade union membership of 5½ million; other affiliated bodies numbered about 44,000. The individual membership is shown as over 600,000, but this is known to be a greatly inflated figure; in

fact individual membership is not likely to be more than half a million.

However, the bare statistics do not give the full picture of actual or potential trade union influence on the Labour Party.

Nationally, the trade union voting strength at Labour Party Annual Conferences is proportionate to their affiliated membership, giving them a decisive voice in policy. They are also directly represented on the Labour Party NEC. Locally, trade union branches send delegates, and policy resolutions, to the Constituency Labour Parties. Trade union delegates also participate in the conferences that select Labour’s Parliamentary candidates, and many trade unions also have a ‘sponsored list’ of Labour candidates whom they provide with financial support and with whom they maintain close links.

As long as the major trade unions were under right wing leadership, right wing leadership in the Labour Party was secure—indeed, in the 30s some Labour lefts argued that they could only win if the Labour Party broke with the trade union movement; an attitude strongly opposed at that time by the Communist Party, which took a longer and more optimistic view of the potentialities inherent in the Labour Party’s structure. (It is interesting to note that in more recent years the cry for a break with the trade union movement has come from some of Labour’s right wing!)

Can we then define the Labour Party as “the political expression of the trade union movement”? Lenin examined and rejected that definition in 1920 (*Speech to the Second Congress of the Communist International*) and I think today too it is an inadequate definition.

The reformist ideas that dominate the Labour Party certainly have a mass base; but they are rather more than the simple, spontaneous products of trade union activity. To the extent that reformism becomes a definite system of ideas, an ideology, to that extent it is no more the purely spontaneous product of trade union activity than is Marxism spontaneous. Fabianism, for instance, was not ‘spontaneously produced’ from within the trade union movement, but was brought into the newly-formed Labour Party by the Fabian Society. Reformism was not ‘imposed’ on the mass movement; but neither was it purely spontaneously produced from the mass movement; nor has its continued domination of the Labour Party been solely the consequence of continued ‘spontaneous production’ from the trade union movement, but has resulted from a complex combination of circumstances which I will deal with later.

The Labour Party is a mass political party based on the working class, dominated by reformist ideas, but unlike all other social democratic parties in its unique relationship with the trade union movement.

'Reformist'—'Revolutionary'—'Left'—'Right'

It is necessary at this point to attempt some definition of terms.

'Reformist' and 'revolutionary' are fairly easy to define. The main components of the reformist position are: that class collaboration is better than class struggle; that indefinite progress can be made by reforms within the system, rendering its revolutionary change neither desirable nor necessary; that *industrial action should be used only for economic and never for political objectives*; that the role of the masses in the political sphere is the purely passive role of electing the Labour Party to office; that once Labour is in office it will find the state a perfectly neutral apparatus that will serve Labour as well as it serves any other Government. Reformism also increasingly redefines socialism in vague terms of 'social equality'.

In contrast, the revolutionary position bases itself on class struggle and therefore argues that the masses should play an active role, using industrial action as one of the weapons to win political advances. Its definition of socialism includes as a vital element social ownership of the major means of production; and it argues that a revolution is needed that will end the state power of monopoly capital and replace it by state power in the hands of the working class and its allies.

'Left' and 'Right', however, are not so easily defined because there is a considerable measure of 'relativity' about them. All 'revolutionaries' are 'left', but not all 'lefts' are 'revolutionary'!

The position of the *right-wing* is, I think, clear enough. This is the section that accepts and applies the basic ideas of reformism in the most thoroughgoing and consistent fashion, taking reformism to its logical conclusion—the conclusion of acting to save capitalism in periods of acute crisis and danger; logical, because if you reject the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, if your perspective is reform within the system, then when the system is in difficulties you must try to save it, even at the cost of giving up past reforms, in the hope that once it is restored to health you can resume the path of reforms once more.

The '*left*' is not so easy to define because it is so diverse. Some of the Labour left have already come fully over to revolutionary Marxism, but as yet these are few in number. In the main, the 'left' consists of people who to varying degrees and on various different issues have made a break, even if as yet only a partial one, with the practical policies to which reformism leads; and who, in at least some cases, are beginning to question the basic ideas of reformism. (There is also, of course, a 'left' that is outside the Labour Party, but my main concern at this moment is with the Labour left.)

If this definition of the left is accepted, it is clear

that certain problems in the struggle against right-wing domination of the movement arise from the very character of the left itself—from the fact that many of them have not yet completely broken with reformist ideas, have not yet fully come over to Marxism. Inevitably, in periods of sharp crisis and complicated struggle, they face conflicting pressures to which different individuals react in different ways. Some are impelled by the logic of the first steps they have taken away from reformism to move still further to the left. Others are impelled by the logic of reformism itself, which remains a powerful ideology and with which they have not completely broken, to move back towards the right wing on certain crucial issues—as happened for instance over the social contract. External pressures can be decisive in determining which road particular individuals take. We should never underestimate the sheer weight and power of reformism on those engaged in struggling with the Labour Party machine. Miliband, in the article quoted earlier, rightly points out that "people on the left who have set out with the intention of transforming the Labour Party have more often than not ended up being transformed by it". All the more credit to those who do fight consistently for left policies in difficult circumstances! They can be strengthened by closer association with the mass movement, and by patient work by the Communist Party to build united action on all possible issues.

Sources of Right-Wing Domination

Reformism was not imposed on a reluctant working class by the Labour leadership. Reformist ideas and leaderships were from the start accepted by the majority of organised workers, and were accepted because they appeared to work. For a considerable period it appeared possible to make gains within the system. This is not simply a matter of going back to the days when Lenin was writing about the 'aristocracy of labour'; no one should underestimate the tremendous boon that the National Health Service was seen to be by a whole generation of British workers in 1948. 'Loyalty to Labour' cannot be written off as the mass brainwashing of politically backward workers; it rests on a firm material basis—in the past.

In the present stage of capitalist crisis that material basis is being eroded; past gains are being whittled away. But the erosion of the material basis of reformism does not necessarily mean either its disappearance as an ideology or its replacement by Marxism (indeed, at the present time, there is a very clear danger that the reformist illusions of some workers may be replaced by much more sinister and reactionary ideas). A complex set of factors contribute to continued right-wing, reformist domination of the movement. Some of the problems arise

from the character of the left itself; these have already been referred to. There are other factors, some internal to the labour movement, others acting upon it from outside.

Internal factors include:

Bureaucratic, undemocratic practices in the trade union movement. Much has changed since the trade union block vote in right-wing hands assured right-wing domination of the Labour Party; today there is growing support for left policies in the trade union movement. But there still remains in sections of the trade union movement bureaucratic and undemocratic practices which in the long run—and usually in the short run too—can only help the right wing. For a 'left' that rejects elitist perspectives and which bases its hopes on raising the political consciousness of the mass of organised workers, it is vital to ensure that undemocratic practices in the trade union movement should not obstruct the full and free expression of advancing political consciousness.

Bans and proscriptions in the labour movement. Important advances have been made in recent years in breaking down the bans and proscriptions, but some still remain—notably, the ban on trade unions sending delegates of their own choice to the Labour Party. This is a serious limitation of the democratic rights of the trade union movement. Over five million trade unionists who pay the political levy are barred from representing their union at Labour Party meetings because they are not also individual members of the Labour Party. This ban is an attempt to, so to speak, reverse the flow of influence. It is an attempt to make influence flow, not from the trade unions into the Labour party, but from the Labour Party into the trade unions. For all too often the delegates elected on this restrictive franchise turn out to represent the Labour Party in their trade union rather than their trade union in the Labour Party. To the extent that the Labour Party is dominated by reformist ideas, this can be a significant political influence back into the trade union movement.

The independence of the Parliamentary Labour Party from control by the Party organisation outside Parliament. Of all labour movement organisations, the Parliamentary Labour Party is both the main stronghold of reformist ideas and the slowest section of the movement to change. Annual Conference delegates are elected every year, and Conference therefore fairly quickly reflects changes in political attitudes in the movement. But the tradition has generally been that once a Labour MP is elected, he is there for life as long as he can hold the seat. All this is now under heavy challenge from the left, with its demands for the automatic re-selection of candidates at every election and for a new way of electing the 'Party leader' that would give the Party outside Parliament a say in the matter.

But continued reformist domination of the Labour Party is not just a matter of internal factors. The system of bourgeois rule developed over past decades in Britain has included as an essential feature the maintenance of Labour's Parliamentary leadership in 'safe' hands. The ruling class has therefore always taken a lively interest in the Labour Party's internal affairs, intervening in many ways in favour of the right wing. These external factors include:

Ideological pressures. Every serious battle between left and right in the movement is conducted to the accompaniment of intensive propaganda by the media in favour of the right wing, aiming to influence mass political consciousness to ensure support for the right.

Bribery and corruption. Direct bribery may be a rarity, though it certainly happens; but we should not underestimate the corrupting effect of the rewards of office that can be enjoyed by those who toe the line.

Direct state intervention. We have seen this recently in e.g. the threats of action for breach of Parliamentary privilege against trade unions trying to compel their sponsored MPs to act in their interests.

There are thus a formidable range of obstacles to surmount in any struggle to change the Labour Party into a force for revolutionary change. Nevertheless, the real question is not 'can the Labour Party change?', because it has been changing all the time. The real question is, *how* can the Labour Party be changed so as to play a positive role in the advance to Socialism?

Why the Communist Party is Needed

If this assessment of the roots of right-wing domination is correct, it follows that the right wing cannot be defeated and reformist policies cannot be changed simply by working within the present Labour Party organisational framework.

Only a hardened sectarian would deny the value and importance of the fight being waged for left policies by many left individuals and groups within the Labour Party. But their work will in the end fail unless right-wing domination is challenged at its roots—that is, in the political consciousness of masses of organised workers.

How can the political consciousness of the working class be advanced beyond its present level? All historical experience shows that it will not come about as a purely spontaneous product of trade union struggles on economic issues. It seems equally evident that it will not result from the work of left groups and factions within the Labour Party, whose efforts are necessarily concentrated within the Labour Party's organisational framework. The battle against reformism, for socialist ideas, has to

be waged amongst the mass of people wherever they are to be found—and especially in the workplaces—not just in Constituency Labour Party meetings and Labour Party Conferences.

There is no short simple answer to the question of how to win the working class for the struggle for socialism, but some essentials are clear. It requires persistent educational, political propaganda work, for socialist ideas do not come forth spontaneously, they have to be fought for. But it requires much more than just propaganda; it requires the experience of struggle. No doubt it requires still more, but even just to take those two factors, it should be clear why we argue that there is no way forward without the Communist Party, why we reject invitations to wind up and join the Labour Party as individuals. The work of groups and factions within the Labour Party structure, however sincere and dedicated, and however useful, positive and important, cannot of itself change mass political consciousness. It may contribute to that change, but by its nature it cannot be the main instrument of change. What is required, just as much in British conditions as in the conditions of any other country, is a revolutionary Marxist Party that seeks to build mass political influence by working in a broad way amongst the masses, not simply in the relatively narrow field of the active cadre force of the Labour Party itself.

However, what is different about British conditions is that, provided there is a Communist Party working correctly, the resulting higher level of mass political consciousness can find expression *directly through the trade union movement into the Labour Party* in a way that is not possible with Social Democratic Parties that are organised on entirely different lines. (It would be 'economism' to suggest that trade union activity alone, without the work of a Communist Party, would lead to heightened political consciousness. It is however not 'economism', but in accord with our experience, to argue that once political consciousness has been heightened, that will then find expression through the trade union movement, as well as in other forms. Workers do not leave their political consciousness at home when they set off for their trade union branch meeting!)

The first requirement therefore for changing the Labour Party is precisely that the Communist Party should *not* dissolve itself, but that it should seek to greatly strengthen itself in numbers, organisation, effective influence, ability to give leadership. This approach not only dictates rejection of the liquidation of the Communist Party; it also dictates rejection of the effective liquidation of the role of the Party advocated by comrades who would scale down the Party's mass political work—including its electoral work—in favour of a more limited approach geared to working in a more narrow way within the confines of the labour movement organisations; an

approach supposedly but mistakenly designed to speed the process of ending the bans and proscriptions and enabling us to take our 'rightful place' in the labour movement. Our 'rightful place' in the labour movement is a *political* place, the place of fighting to give mass leadership and change mass political consciousness; organisational consequences for our relationship with the Labour Party may indeed follow from that, but are not in themselves the priority objective.

Given this approach—that our main objective is to win the masses away from reformism, to the left, for socialism—then parallel with the direct 'politics' of the struggle must go a struggle for those organisational changes in the labour movement that are required to ensure that advances in mass political consciousness are able to find full and speedy expression in the Labour Party, by the removal of those undemocratic practices already referred to which serve to protect the position of the right wing. The struggle for democracy within the labour movement is an essential part of the broader struggle to extend democratic rights.

Left Unity

Recent years have seen a strengthening of the left trend in the Labour Party and trade union movement. The *Tribune* group in particular has gone further than have most previous left groupings in developing and winning support for a consistent alternative policy to that of the right wing.

Correct work by the Communist Party on the lines already indicated should lead to an all-round strengthening of the left within the movement.

Why do we argue for the importance of building unity with this left?

In the short term tactical sense such 'left unity' is clearly essential if the right wing grip on the machinery of the movement is to be broken. However, this 'tactical' approach to left unity is sometimes over-stressed at the expense of the deeper, more principled reasons why we are for left unity.

To refer back to my earlier definition of the 'Labour left', it is clear that this left is much more than just those particular leading individuals who at any particular moment seem to occupy the most prominent positions. However organisationally amorphous and politically diverse this 'left' may be, it does exist as a definite trend in the movement—not just at the level of the *Tribune* Group of MPs, not just at the level of the left on the Labour Party NEC, but on the level of the active forces in the Constituency Labour Parties, Trade Union Branches and District Committees, Trades Councils, Shop Stewards Committees, etc.

This left is an integral part of the labour movement and we need unity with it, not just in the struggle over positions in the movement, but in struggle on

all the major political issues. Such left unity is a requirement for the development of the widest possible mass struggle for left policies; and it is in the course of such united struggles that a closer political relationship can be built between communists and others on the left, progressively clearing up misunderstandings and disagreements.

We have also seen in recent years the growth of a number of broadly progressive and democratic movements that are to a large extent outside the framework of the traditional labour movement. These movements have much to learn from the labour movement, but also something to contribute to it. Building a relationship between these movements and the traditional labour movement is no easy task. The Women's Liberation Movement, for instance, challenges (and rightly so) many very deep-rooted ideas and practices—deeply rooted even amongst people in the labour movement, deeply rooted even amongst people on the left politically. The attempt to build a relationship inevitably at first engenders some friction, causes some problems.

Yet these problems have to be faced up to and grappled with, for these relatively newer streams of democratic struggle could be an important reinforcement to the left—broadening the scope of mass struggle, and helping to advance political consciousness by challenging deep-seated prejudices. Just as our concept of 'the role of the Party' needs to reject the narrow approach in favour of broad political mass work, so our concept of 'left unity' needs to broaden out to include these sections, not yet closely associated with the traditional labour movement, but which need to be brought into a relationship with it.

Problems of Communist Strategy

Communist strategy rejects equally the view that the Communist Party can advance to socialism over the ruins of the Labour Party, and the view that the road to socialism necessitates the disbandment of the Communist Party in order to enter the Labour Party. Our strategy recognises the possibility and the need, in our British conditions, for a stronger Communist Party working in unity with a Labour Party transformed and strengthened by the defeat of right wing policies and leaderships. But to have a correct general strategy does not mean to have no problems; it only means that there is a correct general framework within which to tackle the problems. I want now to look at four areas in which we clearly do face problems.

(1) Our Electoral Role and Our Relationship to the Labour Party

It is sometimes argued that we would advance the cause of unity and speed the removal of bans and proscriptions if we stopped contesting against Labour candidates at elections. I think this view is mistaken.

Of course our election contests do, in the short term, sometimes cause us problems in our relationship with Labour Party members. Unlike the Communist Party, the Labour Party is very much an 'election machine' seeing election contests as its be-all and end-all. When we challenge it on this front, it would be idle to deny that problems can result. But taking the longer term view, if we are seeking to change the Labour Party by changing the political consciousness of the masses, then communist election campaigning, and the experience of communist council and parliamentary representation, is an essential stage.

Pointing to our all-too-evident weakness in this field, some comrades argue that the road to communist councillors and MPs is via ending the bans so that communists may eventually stand as Labour candidates. This is indeed a future possibility, but comrades who think that a retreat *now* from our electoral work would mean an early achievement of that result are not taking account of realities. Of all the anti-democratic measures used to protect the right wing, the ban on communists being trade union delegates to the Labour Party is an absolutely crucial one. Not for nothing did the Stock Exchange enjoy a boom when that ban was imposed in 1925! Its removal would not only mean that leading communist trade unionists could be delegates to the Labour Party Annual Conference. It would mean that at all levels, in Constituency Labour Parties throughout Britain, at Selection Conferences, etc., communists would be able to attend with full speaking and voting rights.

The right wing will fight to the bitter end, with the full support of the media, to prevent any such development. And at the moment no one is fighting *for* such a development; even most of our closest allies on the left are shy of this one. That ban will be lifted—but not until the whole level of mass struggle and political consciousness has been lifted to a higher stage, with a much stronger Communist Party and a much stronger left. Such a political advance will not be won by us retreating from the election field, but by overcoming the weaknesses in our own work that hold us back in this field.

Having said that, we must also face the fact that when the lifting of the ban becomes relatively short-term practical politics, we are not going to get the Labour Party to accept a position where communists can at one and the same time attend Labour Party meetings with full rights as trade union delegates, and still contest against Labour candidates at elections. That would indeed be to claim the special privileges which we rightly do not seek! But when the Communist Party, the left, and the whole mass movement, have reached the point at which the lifting of the ban is a real possibility, then some form or another of electoral agreement would equally be a possibility, and indeed a necessity.

(2) Building the Communist Party and Our Strategy in Relation to the Labour Party

We sometimes seem caught in a Catch 22 situation. In periods when our strategy is succeeding and as a result of that strategy the left in the Labour Party is making advances, there are people who conclude that there is after all a future for the Labour Party, and for them as lefts in the Labour Party, so while they may be friendly to the Communist Party they do not join it. Then when the situation hits a downturn and the left suffers setbacks, some of them become disillusioned, conclude that there is no hope for the Labour Party after all, leave it—and do not join the Communist Party either because they have now no confidence in our perspective of a changed Labour Party.

I think we are ourselves largely to blame for this situation. In the absolutely correct and necessary struggle against sectarianism we have sometimes given the impression that we see the road forward rather narrowly in terms of working to change the labour movement from within, and have sometimes allowed—if not encouraged—illusions about the character of the struggle needed to defeat reformism.

It is vital for us to stress in theory and in practice that the success of our strategy depends first and foremost on the independent role of a Communist Party organised for mass political work amongst all sections of the people, including those not yet involved in the labour movement. There is of course a 'dialectical connection' between our independent mass work, and leftward changes in the Labour Party. Each helps the other, each reacts upon the other, and it would be a mistake to counterpose one to the other. But if one element in that dialectical relationship is more 'basic' than the other, it is the element of communist mass political work and leadership.

(3) Should We Seek Affiliation to the Labour Party?

This would require a change of Labour Party Rules, but that is not in itself impossible. There are, however, problems that in my view make it impossible for us to commit ourselves, at this stage, to affiliation to the Labour Party.

In actual fact, the revolutionary Marxist left was only ever affiliated to the Labour Party for very brief periods—the Social Democratic Federation for just a year when the Labour Party was founded in 1900, and the British Socialist Party for three or four years (1916-20). The Communist Party has never been affiliated and since Labour Party Rules were changed in 1946 has never sought affiliation. It has simply not been an issue for over 30 years. And in that period, the Labour Party itself has changed. In the period when we campaigned for affiliation (on and off, from 1920 to 1946) the Labour

Party tradition we harked back to was of a federal Party based on the affiliation of the trade unions *and of a variety of socialist political organisations*. We could then in reality base our claim for affiliation on the Labour Party's claim to be a federal body of the whole working class movement.

The Labour Party today, however, has become largely a combination of affiliated trade unions with a well-established and organised individual membership section—a section which did not exist in earlier days but which now quite overshadows the relatively few remaining affiliated political organisations. The differing political tendencies which, in the Labour Party's earliest period, were represented by separate affiliated bodies with a large measure of independence, are today largely represented by looser groups within the individual membership section of the Party (e.g. the *Tribune* group) with nothing like the real, separate and independent position of the earlier affiliated bodies. All this rather changes the context in which we might consider whether or not to seek affiliation.

More importantly, affiliation is not in any sense a 'real' issue at the moment; the conditions in which it could become a real, live issue do not yet exist. The question of establishing some form of organisational relationship between the Communist Party and the Labour Party will not now, after all these years since 1946, become a 'real' issue until the political base has been laid—that political base being both a Labour Party far to the left of its present position, and a much stronger and more influential Communist Party. When that political base has been laid we shall be in a better position than now to determine what form of organisational relationship we should seek with the Labour Party. It might well be affiliation; but this is not the only conceivable form of relationship; and to commit ourselves at this time to an 'affiliation campaign' could turn out to be a diversion from the essential task of building the Communist Party itself.

(4) 'One United Party'?

The idea of some form or another of merger between the Communist Party and the Labour Party to produce one united Party based on Marxism has a respectable pedigree in our Party. It appears in the current (1968 edition) *British Road to Socialism* and can be traced at least as far back as 1939, when it appeared in the Draft Programme produced in that year for our 16th Congress (but owing to the War never actually discussed there). It is clearly a very long-term proposition, and it sounds an attractive one. But I must confess to some doubts.

How would a Party based on an ideology 'mix' with a Party based on trade union affiliation? Our Party is based on the ideology of Marxism. Even for some long time after the victory of Socialism, the

working class—by then presumably nearly 100 per cent unionised as compared with the present less than 50 per cent—while obviously far advanced in its political thinking as compared with the present, is still likely to contain a fair degree of ideological diversity; and I find it difficult to square the idea of a Party based on Marxism with the practice of a Party whose decisions were dependent on the votes of affiliated trade unions. Unless, of course, we were to adopt precisely the same undemocratic practices now used by the right wing to maintain their position?—which is surely an untenable proposition!

And there is of course yet another angle to be considered. Given the unique historically-determined structure of the Labour Party, it is at least conceivable that its future development might take the line, not of so-to-speak 'narrowing down' to become a Marxist Party, but rather of 'broadening out' to bring into its affiliated structure some of the newer democratic movements.

All of this is of course speculation about the relatively more distant future; none of it is in the least realistic without a very much stronger Communist Party and left.

Review Articles:

The Sociology of Law

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"The Sociology of Law" edited by Pat Carlen Sociological Review Monograph

We are badly in need of a systematic study of law and the legal system conducted by people other than lawyers. The shelves of law libraries groan with self-congratulatory studies and expositions written by practitioners on the inside looking out. We have one or two studies, such as Abel-Smith's and Stevens' *Lawyers and the Courts*, which really rank as high-grade investigative journalism, written from the outside looking in.

Such writers, together with the few insiders who have tried to expose some of the system's iniquities, provoke howls of anger from the Bar and the Law Society. So sensitive and defensive is the profession that the Chairman of the Bar Council not long ago, writing to encourage members to submit material to the Royal Commission on the Legal Profession, described as 'ill-informed' the anticipated criticisms of the Bar which nobody had yet submitted.

A Reactionary Closed Shop

Michael Zander, the most persistent public critic of the profession's workings, but politically a confirmed 'moderate', is widely regarded by lawyers as a dangerous Red. D. N. Pritt, who *was* a dangerous Red, and who stood professionally head and shoulders above most of his contemporaries, was deliberately starved by the profession of every distinction he had earned.

Yet it is this insensately reactionary closed shop,

operating restrictive practices far tighter than any for which the 104 of them who are MPs sternly denounce the unions, which both controls access to and ultimately declares the law. For from the 2,500-strong Bar come practically all our judges; and the remaining few come from the ranks of established solicitors.

The questions of who declares the law and what the law is declared to be are therefore inseparable. And not only at the level of the Court of Appeal or House of Lords, where law is ordinarily thought to be laid down. Every local court or industrial tribunal is called on to declare what the law says about this or that person's claim, and to do so they have to decide what the 'facts of the case' are. At the hands of the lawyers who staff them, every tenant fighting for a home, every woman claiming equal pay, has to persuade to their side people who fundamentally do not believe in security of tenure or the equality of the sexes.

The object of a collection of essays under the title *The Sociology of Law* is, then, an important one. Not that sociology has all the answers any more than the law does; but every intelligent appraisal by outsiders, or by detached insiders, helps to break the stranglehold of lawyers on the law. No doubt there are conservative sociologies which would produce the same paeans of praise as lawyers award themselves. Equally a Marxist or a socialist sociology of law may provide valuable analyses both of our law and of the society it serves. This book sets out to be a contribution to the latter.