

The Labour Party myth and reality

Discussion paper by Terry McCarthy

Background

New Labour proudly states it can trace its history back to the formation of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), which was formed in 1900 to promote a distinct Labour group in Parliament to represent affiliated trade unions, socialist societies and working class opinion in the House of Commons. The Co-operative Societies UK were invited to the founding conference, along with the Marxist Social Democratic Federation, the Independent Labour Party, and the Fabian Society, with only the Co-operative Union rejecting the invitation.

The minutes of the foundation report of the LRC show clearly this was not an organisation with socialism as its main goal. The rise of the new union movement of the late 1880s had, for a short time, changed the politics of the TUC from reformist to embryonic socialist in its outlook, in its policy to industrial action, and its relationship with the state (especially the Liberal Party), and for the first time socialism had a national platform. Unfortunately, by 1900, the reformist old guard of the TUC had gained back the ascendancy.

The LRC did, however, call for the franchise to be extended to all working men (a third of working men still did not have the vote, and women had no votes at all).

The pending Taff Vale judgement of 1901, when the establishment tried to wreck the trade union movement, had acted as a great stimulus in bringing the unions together to defend themselves (it's somewhat ironic that one of the main driving forces behind the LRC were the railway workers, who were later expelled from the party they helped found by Tony Blair).

It also should be remembered that there were Socialist parties, and indeed Marxist ones, that stood candidates for Parliament before the LRC was formed: by 1881 3 independent labour candidates had won seats to the House of Commons; the Marxist Social Democratic Federation was founded in 1881, with the Independent Labour Party (ILP) being formed some 12 years later in 1893.

The general election of 1906 saw the election of 30 members of Parliament from the LRC. The elected members assumed the title of 'Labour Party' and elected their first officers and whips. Policy was determined by the Labour Party through the annual conference and its executive authority, the National Executive Committee. There was no official party leader, but an annually elected chairman of the parliamentary party (Keir Hardie being its first). There were scarcely any official Labour Party constituency organisations (except for those provided by local trade's councils, groups of miners' lodges, and local branches of the ILP). In 1914 there were only two constituency associations with individual members: Woolwich and Barnard Castle, which Will Crooks and Arthur Henderson had built up on their own, and which of course they used as a power base.

During this period there were sharp divisions inside the Labour Party in its definition of socialism: this culminated in a major split over the First World War. Keir Hardie, Philip Snowden, George Lansbury and Ramsay MacDonald along with Fred Jowett were totally opposed to the war, seeing it as an imperialist struggle for power. The pro-war camp was led by Ben Tillett and Will Thorne (prominent members of the new union movement who had now turned to the right). Alongside them stood jingoists [Arthur Henderson](#), [George Barnes](#), [J. R. Clynes](#), and [William Adamson](#), who vehemently argued that the labour movement should give total support to the war effort. Socialists like Tom Mann were being prosecuted for their open hostility to the war, both in speeches and socialist publications

and the Tory press wasted no time in its vilification of Labour Party members such as Keir Hardie and George Lansbury, declaring them traitors and calling for their prosecution for treason.

On 5th August, 1914, the parliamentary party voted to support the government's request for war credits of £100,000,000. MacDonald resigned as chairman of the party. Arthur Henderson was voted in as leader of the Labour Party. Henderson got his reward: in May 1915 he became the first member of the Labour Party to hold a Cabinet post when Herbert Asquith invited him to join his coalition government.

In the 1918 General Election a large number of the Labour leaders lost their seats. This included the leaders of the anti-war movement, such as Ramsay MacDonald, Philip Snowden, George Lansbury and Fred Jowett.

Why, given the dominance of the right, did the Labour Party adopt the new radical programme in 1918? The Increased Franchise Act was passed in 1918: more working class people than ever before would be casting their votes and the Labour Party wished to appear to be the party that represented them in Parliament. The Russian revolution in 1917 had shaken the establishment throughout Europe and America and socialism and communism were gaining footholds in the Labour movement, much to the consternation of people like Ben Tillett and Arthur Henderson, and of course the TUC. The Labour party now argued that there was no need for foreign socialism, let alone Bolshevism, because the Labour Party had adopted a constitution which included Clause 4:

“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”.

This seeming move to the left was successful in parliamentary terms: in 1922 Labour polled 29.5 % of the vote, as opposed to the Conservatives 48.6%. Labour now became the second biggest party (in 1900, the LRC only managed 1.8% of the vote) so obviously a socialist platform had worked.

Henderson, along with Sidney Webb, reorganised the Labour Party: their main aims were to provide local Labour Parties in every constituency, or group of constituencies. These local Labour Parties were to be based fundamentally on individual subscribing membership, though representation was provided for trades councils, trade union branches, and socialist societies. The members of the National Executive Committee (NEC) were to be elected by the annual conference as a whole (though eleven were to be elected from candidates nominated by the trade unions and socialist societies as a single group, five were to represent the local Labour Parties, and four were to be women). The scheme also involved an increase in affiliation fees. Henderson and Web were confident they could control the party through this method.

The 1918 constitution was modified in 1937 in favour of the local constituency Labour Parties, which had repeatedly demanded a greater share in the control of party affairs. Representation of the constituency parties on the NEC was increased from five to seven. The seven were to be elected by the vote of the constituency delegates alone. The twelve trade union representatives and one representative of the socialist societies were to be elected separately by their respective conference delegations. The five women members were to be nominated by any affiliated organisation and elected by a vote of the whole party conference. The Leader (since 1929) and the Deputy Leader (since 1953) were ex-officio members of the NEC. The Treasurer of the Party was to be nominated by any affiliated organisation, and elected by the vote of the whole party conference. The original plan was amended, so that the NEC was increased to a membership of 23 (adding two to the number

specified for affiliated organisations): this was the high point in terms of democracy within the Labour party.

In the [1923 General Election](#), the [Labour Party](#) won 191 seats. Although the [Conservative Party](#) had 258 seats, the Liberal Party announced they would not keep the Tories in power.

The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was founded in July 1920: it was made up of an affiliation of Marxists and socialist parties, including the British Socialist Party (BSP) which was far and away the largest party affiliating. The BSP had been a founding member of the LRC and given the acceptance of clause 4, the CPGB sought to affiliate to the Labour Party, but was rebuffed. In 1922 J. T. W. Newbold (Motherwell) was elected to Parliament, as was S Saklatvaia (N. Battersea), but as a Labour MP (although he was a member of the Communist Party). After defeat in 1923, he was again elected in 1924, this time as a Communist. Since 1924 the Labour Party has ruled that no member of the Communist Party could be an individual member of the Labour Party, and in 1935, 1943 and in 1946 the Labour Party turned down further Communist requests for affiliation. In 1935 and again in 1945 W. Gallaher was elected as a Communist for W. Fife; and in 1945 Phil Piratin was elected for the Mile End division of Stepney.

On 22nd January 1924 [Ramsay MacDonald](#) went to [Buckingham Palace](#) to be appointed Prime Minister. He later apologised for the singing of the *Red Flag* and the *La Marseilles* at a Labour Party celebration rally, and made it crystal clear that the Labour Party was reformist and rejected social revolution. However the establishment were concerned at the rise of militancy amongst rank-and-file trade unionists, as did the TUC. The state papers also expressed their concern about Communist infiltration of the unions.

In 1924 MI5 passed a forged letter over to the Daily Mail, which it duly published, allegedly written by [Grigory Zinoviev](#), chairman of the [Comintern](#). The [Zinoviev Letter](#) allegedly urged British communists to promote revolution through acts of sedition. MacDonald went on record to state the letter was genuine. Despite all this pandering to middle-Britain, Labour lost power in the second 1924 election. [Ramsay MacDonald](#) continued with his policy of presenting the [Labour Party](#) as a moderate force in politics and refused to support the [1926 General Strike](#). MacDonald argued that strikes should not be used as a political weapon and that the best way to obtain social reform was through parliamentary elections. He was especially critical of [A. J. Cook](#) the miner's leader. MacDonald continually lobbied the TUC urging moderation.

MacDonald's moderate image was popular with middle-class voters, and he was expected to lead his party to victory in the [1929 General Election](#), although there were voices in the Labour Party that urged the party to adopt the economic programme of Maynard Keynes. This fell on deaf ears as far as the Labour Party hierarchy was concerned: it was left to the Liberal party to put forward a Keynesian solution to unemployment.

In the [1929 General Election](#) Labour once again claimed power, although as a minority government. MacDonald was faced with the problem of growing unemployment. In January 1929, 1,433,000 people were out of work, a year later it reached 1,533,000. By March 1930, the figure was 1,731,000. In June it reached 1,946,000 and by the end of the year it reached a staggering 2,725,000. Although MacDonald met with Maynard Keynes, he still felt his ideas too radical. Ironically one top Labour personality did accept Keynes: in January 1930, [Oswald Mosley](#) proposed a programme that he believed would help deal with the growing problem of unemployment. MacDonald passed the Mosley Memorandum to a committee consisting of [Philip Snowden](#), [Tom Shaw](#), [Arthur Greenwood](#) and [Margaret Bondfield](#). The committee reported back. The report concluded that state action to reduce unemployment was highly dangerous. To go further than current government policy "would be to

plunge the country into ruin". MacDonald agreed: he stated that "the rise in unemployment was caused by factors outside the government's control".

A meeting of Labour MPs took place on 21st May, where [Oswald Mosley](#) outlined his proposals. This included the provision of old-age pensions at sixty, the raising of the school-leaving age and an expansion in the road programme. [Arthur Henderson](#) appealed to Mosley to withdraw his motion so that his proposals could be discussed in detail at later meetings. Mosley insisted on putting his motion to the vote and was beaten by 210 votes. He resigned from the Labour Government in May 1930 and formed the New Party: it was renamed the British Union of Fascists in 1932.

MacDonald did give approval for several public-works projects but these were minimal and had virtually no effect on unemployment. Instead, Philip Snowden argued that it might be necessary to cut unemployment benefit. [Margaret Bondfield](#) looked into this suggestion and claimed that the government could save £6 million a year if they were to cut benefit rates by 2s. a week and to restrict the benefit rights of married women, seasonal workers and short-time workers. The government Economic Advisory Council published their report on the causes and remedies for the depression. This included an increase in public spending, and by curtailing British investment overseas. After consultation with MacDonald and other Cabinet members, [Philip Snowden](#) rejected these ideas. [Arthur Henderson](#) argued that rather than do what the bankers wanted, Labour should hand over responsibility to the Conservatives and Liberals and leave office as a united party.

Not that the Labour Party establishment did not have its critics. George Lansbury and other socialists in the Labour Party had formed themselves into a group. However, all attempts to get motions passed at the Labour Party conference were thwarted by the trade union block vote. The TUC, like the majority of unions, were controlled by the right: J. H Thomas of the railwaymen being a case in point. They also argued that if they could increase their numbers they could change Labour Party policy. The hierarchy of the Labour Party were aware of this danger: there was a great deal of pressure and arm-twisting on local constituency parties to ensure only parliamentary candidates with the right politics were chosen.

The ILP, one of the founding political parties of the LRC, had, although affiliated to the Labour Party, its own conference, own parliamentary candidates, and maintained its own policies. Differences with official Labour Party policy grew in the late 1920's, and the 37 ILP MPs elected in 1929 provided some of the Government's strongest critics. At the 1930 conference it was agreed that ILP members should vote against the Labour government and party if it conflicted with ILP policy. Although many ILP members still believed they could change Labour Party policy back to socialism by winning over Labour Party members, pointing out they had a power base of 37 members of Parliament, they rejected the arguments put up by leading communists such as Tom Mann that the Labour Party was and always would be a reformist party at best, and never a revolutionary one, and it could never be changed internally. The ILP was disaffiliated from the Labour Party at the 1932 Labour Party conference because of its irreconcilable political differences.

The King (on the behalf of the establishment) consulted the mandarins of the Conservative and Liberal parties. It was agreed to ask MacDonald to form a National Government with the right economic policies e.g. cuts in public spending and welfare. MacDonald agreed. Labour Party apologists try to give the impression that the rest of the Cabinet and the leading members of the Labour Party were not aware of MacDonald's move to the right. The endorsement of MacDonald's views in rejecting the Maynard Keynes solution to unemployment, plus the proposals to cut benefits had not led to mass resignations and a rebellion to oust MacDonald as leader. The usual suspects in the left of the Labour Party made the right noises and speeches, but still remained in its ranks.

Ramsay MacDonald's National Government's economic programme included a £13 million cut in unemployment benefit. On 26th September, the Labour Party National Executive decided to expel all

members of the National Government, including [Ramsay MacDonald](#), [Philip Snowden](#), [Jimmy Thomas](#) and [John Sankey](#). MacDonald, along with a vitriolic anti-labour press campaign, led the anti-Labour alliance made up of Conservatives and National Liberals in the [1931 General Election](#). It was a disaster for the [Labour Party](#), with only 46 members being returned to Parliament. [George Lansbury](#), [William Adamson](#), [Clement Attlee](#) and [Stafford Cripps](#) were the only leading Labour figures to win their seats. Lansbury was elected as the new leader and Attlee became his deputy. MacDonald, now had 556 pro-National Government MPs, and had no difficulty pursuing economic policies that neo liberal economists would have been proud of.

There were further splits in the Labour Party. [George Lansbury](#) hated fascism, but as a pacifist he was opposed to using violence against it. When Italy invaded Abyssinia he refused to support the view that the [League of Nations](#) should use military force against Mussolini's army. After being criticised by several leading members of the party, Lansbury resigned and was replaced by [Clement Attlee](#).

In 1940 the Labour Party joined the coalition government headed by [Winston Churchill](#). [Clement Attlee](#) was virtually deputy Prime Minister, though this post did not formally become his until 1942.

Post-war Labour

Labour won a landslide victory in 1945. 50.4 % of the vote gained on a radical manifesto. British society was immediately transformed by the nationalisation of all major industries, giving independence to India and Burma and bringing about major social reforms in housing, education and the formation of the National Health Service. Labour repealed all of the anti-trade union legislation that had followed the General Strike. However, the Labour government also agreed to take part in the Korean War, joined NATO in 1949, and developed nuclear weapons and entered the arms race: all of which these were a burden on British workers who had to bear the costs (the right still tout the myth that the formation of NATO was in answer to the Warsaw Pact: the reverse is the truth as the Warsaw Pact didn't come into being until 1955). Attlee, like the majority of his Cabinet, was vehemently anti-Communist, but he fully understood through the work of Mass Observation and British Intelligence that the overwhelming feeling of the people was that there had to be radical changes in society. If this was not offered by the Labour Party Attlee was shrewd enough to understand the people would look elsewhere. Because the Soviet Union had been such a crucial ally during WWII, the programme of disinformation and propaganda had been dropped. This coincided with rising class consciousness in Britain - one only has to look at the steep rise in membership of the Communist Party (CP) and the circulation of the Daily Worker.

Attlee's government dismissed overtures from the communist party to form an alliance, even though the CP had members in the House of Commons, and councillors the length and breadth of the country.

Given the overall shift to the left in the 1940s, the state clearly understood that reformist capitalism had to be the order of the day. Even the Conservative Party temporarily shifted its ideology, accepting most of the Labour government's post-war reforms. One of the reasons why the Labour government was defeated in 1951 was because of the economic burden that they carried following World War II, when the American government demanded the immediate payment of loans taken out with America to pay for arms and food supplies to defeat Nazi Germany and imperialist Japan. The Labour government accepted the Draconian repayment terms as a matter of course. It would be churlish in the extreme not to applaud some of the decisions made by the post-war Labour government, but so much more could have been achieved if the Labour Party at that period had been a true socialist party.

Co-operative Party

In 1917 the Co-operative Congress agreed to organise as a political party. In the 1918 General Election one MP was elected: he joined with the Labour Party benches in the house. It was not until 1926 that a formal understanding was reached with Co-operative parties who were then made eligible for affiliation to divisional Labour parties. In 1938 the co-operative party adopted a written constitution and in 1941 its representatives were invited to attend meetings of the National Council of Labour on equal terms with the Labour Party and the TUCs. In 1946, the 1926 agreement with the Labour Party was replaced, Co-operative candidates were to run formally as Co-operative and Labour candidates, and after the General Election of 1959 (when it was felt the Co-operative party was being infiltrated by the left) the decision was made that the number of parliamentary candidates should be limited to 30.

The 13 years the Conservatives were in power were rightly labelled '13 wasted years' as far as our manufacturing base was concerned. Even after the defeat of Labour in 1951 the trade unions still enjoyed industrial power. For domestic and geo-political considerations the Conservative government had accepted Keynesian economics, full employment and one nation Toryism. Throughout World War II the Communist Party developed a major network of shop stewards and conveners: this shop stewards liaison was enhanced in the post-war period when Bert Ramelson became the industrial organiser of the Communist Party. State papers now show that there was concern on both sides of the Atlantic about the power and influence the Communist Party enjoyed within the rank and file of the Labour movement. Communists were barred from office in a number of unions, including the Transport and General Workers whose boss, Arthur Deakin, took the same line on Communists as his mentor Ernie Bevin had, and Will Lawther of the Mineworkers, Tom Williamson of the General and Municipal Workers had - maintained a rigid barrier against Communists. The TUC general council barred CP members. The records show the hierarchy of the Labour Party totally endorsed this stance. The trade union block vote could be relied upon by the right wing of the Labour Party. It was said the only thing Herbert Morrison and Ernie Bevin ever agreed-upon was their hatred of the Communist Party.

A Labour government was returned in 1964 under the leadership of Harold Wilson. Its intention was to modernise British society and from 1964-70 they achieved much of what they set out to do in terms of social reform. They abolished capital hanging and flogging, brought in rights-for-women in terms of equal rights, equal pay, abortion, the Pill, education, and they also introduced the 'red-brick' universities, the Open University and the comprehensive system (ending the compulsory 11-plus exam). They brought in the Race Relations Act, the Gaming Act, ended censorship in the arts, literature and theatre, and decriminalised homosexuality.

However, the underlying class and economic structure remained the same (although credit must be given to Harold Wilson for keeping Britain out of Vietnam: state papers show Wilson and his cabinet were warned that there would be major civil and industrial unrest if Britain entered into this war).

The foundations for anti-trade union legislation were introduced, if unsuccessfully, in this period. Barbara Castle introduced a White Paper 'In place of strife' in 1966, which called for reform in the trade union movement. The unions successfully demanded that there should be no discussion on the issue, and that 'In place of strife' should be abandoned.

The Labour government tried to impose wage freezes and prices and incomes policies on the Labour Movement. Divisions were caused when the leadership of the unions accepted terms and conditions which seemed unacceptable as far as the rank and file were concerned, as by this time organisations such as the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions held, in many cases, power on the shopfloor. This was fully understood by Wilson, who, as in the case of the Seaman's strike when he ranted on about 'Reds under the bed', 'Russian gold', etc etc...

The Conservatives won a narrow General Election victory in 1970. Edward Heath introduced the Industrial Relations Act, whose purpose was to destroy the power of the trade unions. The labour movement responded with massive demonstrations against the Act and there were strikes. These

were deemed to be secondary and illegal. The Engineers Union was fined and warned that all of its funds would be seized and frozen if the strikes continued. The strikes were in fact unofficial, and the leadership had little or no control over them. Five east London Dockers were imprisoned - this led to mass demonstrations and walk outs. An unofficial general strike seemed to be on the cards, but Edward Heath relented and the Dockers were released. Joe Gormley, leader of the National Union of Mineworkers, won a successful strike against Edward Heath's government (the Labour Party called for restraint on all sides, but would not openly back the strikers). Edward Heath went to the country on the basis of the question 'Who runs the country, us or the unions?' The public didn't respond as he had hoped.

In February 1974, Wilson formed a minority government, but as there was no conclusive majority, another election was inevitable, and the October poll strengthened Labour's control only slightly – a five-seat majority. Despite the difficult political circumstances, the Labour government lasted for five years and managed to pass important trade union legislation: it repealed the Industrial Relations Act.

The right-wing were no longer as powerful as they had been in the past. The Transport and General Workers Union, along with the Engineers, were moving to the left.

The Wilson Labour government put the issue of membership of the common market to a referendum: Wilson and his close colleagues supported entry into Europe, and the pro lobby won by two to one.

Wilson was replaced in 1976 by James Callaghan. The Shop Stewards movement had grown in strength throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Often the leadership seemed remote, and as there was no voting in relation to General Secretaries there was a feeling that the leadership didn't represent the rank-and-file membership.

The Communist Party Liaison Committee had a disproportionate strength in the trade union movement relative to its size. There was also great concern in the dock industry. Many were distressed and disillusioned by the Jones Aldington agreement which had ended the jobs-for-life agreement and this was negotiated away to be replaced by permanent work status within the docks industry. Many rank-and-file members felt that they had not been consulted fully. The stevedores, who had no full-time officials, were totally opposed to the agreement. The view that the rank-and-file shop stewards ran the day-to-day working in the docks was vindicated by the Donovan report. The leadership of the Labour Party and trade unions had failed to take note of the new dynamic in Capitalism (neo-liberalism economics). Sympathetic economists' predictions that the land in the dock area, because of the potential for development for huge commercial gain, would be seized upon by entrepreneurs were ignored and even ridiculed. Sadly their predictions came true: the London docks with all their history of militancy are now a memory, and in their place the money merchants built cathedrals to monetarism.

By the end of the summer of 1976, there had been a run on the pound. The Labour government had to seek a loan from the International Monetary Fund. This was accompanied by harsh conditions which included deep cuts in public spending. There was a total rejection by the Labour Party of employing a socialist solution to this capitalist crisis. By August 1977, unemployment levels had surpassed 1,600,000. Labour unrest reached a peak in the 'Winter of Discontent' in 1978/9, when a number of major trade unions went on strike. Callaghan, like the rest of the leadership of the Labour Party, blamed red militants for the industrial dispute: the media had a field day. Every opportunity was made to discredit the trade union movement.

The Conservatives came back into power in 1979 with a new leader – Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher totally rejected the post war Conservative ideology of the one nation state. She also rejected Keynesian economics. Thatcher had a new ideology - monetarism.

Monetarists believe that in a market economy the only way to value any item is its price: therefore, education; health etc (through privatisation) can only be appreciated by their price. This then gives incentive to people to create more personal wealth. There must always be a marked differential between rich and poor, so that the poor will see the necessity to educate themselves and acquire skills.

Monetarism was acceptable to the establishment because they believed that counter revolution in the USSR and other socialist countries now gave them the green light to return to a pre-war Britain and an end to major manufacturing production, whose factories and manufacturing plants, plus the docks, had been the bedrock of trade union militancy, socialism, and indeed, communism.

An alternative source for wealth-making was to make money out of money, and to encourage the working class through soft loans and mortgages to be constantly in debt: a mechanism designed to stop militancy and give workers a false sense of their class. The sale of council houses, the privatisation of nationalised industries, the rise in property values, the promise of huge private pensions for tomorrow: all policies which were soon adopted and accepted by the Labour Party. Aided by anti-trade union legislation, the state declared war on the organised labour movement. The Miners' strike, Wapping and all the other disputes were all condemned by the Labour Party. Once organised labour was defeated, the State felt safe enough to switch from Keynesian economics to that of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman.

New Labour

The process of changing the party itself had started long before Tony Blair won the leadership in 1994. The Labour Party was transformed in the Nineties by a small but influential group working under the banner 'New Labour, New Party'. They believed that Labour's traditional values of nationalisation, Keynesian economics and an ever closer relationship with the trade unions were the very values that stop Labour coming into power in a modern age. The Labour Party had gone through a traumatic period which culminated in the expulsion of the Militant tendency by Neil Kinnock, who had become leader of the Labour Party on the left-wing ticket after the enforced retirement of Michael Foot. The Militant tendency had built a formidable political machine inside the Labour party, although it was never as powerful as the ILP with its 37 MPs, it still suffered the same fate - expulsion, as it was seen by the leadership of the Labour Party as a Trojan horse for socialist policies.

Coupled with the defection of right wing members who defected and then formed the Social Democratic Party, the Labour Party was at its lowest ebb when John Smith became leader of the Labour Party. John Smith, with the help of John Prescott, first broke the power of the union block vote.

Tony Blair was elected Prime Minister in 1997 with a landslide victory. Hopes for reform following the Thatcher years had never been higher. However, Tony Blair, and his Chancellor Gordon Brown, were firm believers in monetarism, both in its economic and philosophical dogma.

Labour did however bring in the long awaited minimum wage (but at a very low level), and restored Trade-union rights at GCHQ, but most importantly it reneged on its promises to repeal the anti-trade union legislation brought in by the Thatcher government. The trade unions were promised major reforms at the so called 'Warwick meetings' but the majority of these were left unfulfilled. The disillusionment of many Labour Party supporters culminated with Britain's leading role, using barefaced lies, to invade Iraq, ignoring a demonstration of over 2 million people (many of whom had been Labour Party supporters) yet there were no alternatives when it came to parliamentary elections, and Labour was returned for second term.

The Labour Party went on to win a third term for Mr Blair in May 2005, albeit with a reduced majority. Labour politicians boasted that Britain was the '4th largest economy in the world' while ignoring the fact that disposable income had decreased and the promise to eradicate child poverty became another aspiration. Britain became a divided society and the gulf between the rich and the poor was greater than at any time since World War II.

When Gordon Brown became New Labour Prime Minister in 2007, the lessons of Iraq had not been learned: the Labour Party increased its military role in Afghanistan. 2009 witnessed the collapse of Freemanite monetarism, and led inevitably to global recession. The New Labour Government partially nationalised the collapsed banking system, without taking it fully under state control, leaving the discredited bankers in charge. Unemployment reached 3 million. The party then adopted Ramsay MacDonald's economic philosophy, advocating cuts in welfare and state spending.

In the [2010 General Election](#), the Conservatives won 307 seats in a [hung parliament](#). Cameron formed a [coalition](#) with the [Liberal Democrats](#) and introduced draconian cuts: his overall intention was to roll back the state to pre-1945.

Labour in opposition also announced a programme of cuts in the welfare and social budget, and the belief that a gradual return to socialism, as outlined in Clause 4, was now not on the agenda.

Ed Miliband was voted in as leader of the Labour Party in 2010, ironically on the back of the trade unions, and since then he has tried to distance himself from the trade unions in every possible way - he would not support legal industrial action over cuts in workers pensions, and was booed at the TUC conference. He is in talks with the coalition partners in relation to state funding of political parties which would free him and the Labour Party from any dependency on the trade unions.

It should not be forgotten that Labour Party members voted through the changes - including the removal of Clause 4. They also voted through a set of constitutional changes which would ensure the left could never gain the ascendancy. Who was the architect of all these rule changes? Why, it was monetarist advocate Peter Mandelson, whose grandfather, cold war warrior 'Herbie' Morrison had declared war on the Communist Party (and all the left) in the post-war years. Mandelson's constitution replaced that of the 1937 Labour Party constitutional document. It is now the central office of the Labour Party who has the final say on Parliamentary candidates. NEC's now have no binding power whatsoever: the Labour Party conference is now an American-style rally, and all motions are composited and decisions are not binding. The latest nail in the 'coffin of democracy' is that the party leader will individually choose the shadow cabinet.

It is argued that we should still have very close links with the Labour Party (excepting that it is at best a reformist party) because of its links with the trade unions. I would argue that that may have been a valid case in the past, but it is New Labour who wants to sever links with the unions and lessen union power at the Labour Party conference each and every year. The leadership of the Labour Party have made it crystal clear that they would like to distance themselves even more from the trade unions, and are looking for a device where they can replace the large funding they receive from the trade union movement with state funding.

When the leader of the Labour Party is booed at the TUC because he refuses to endorse a legal strike with a just cause, perhaps the time has come to rethink our relationship to the Labour Party.