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**The New Vanguardists: an analysis  
of Militant Tendency and its  
involvement in Liverpool in the 1970s  
and 1980s**

**A PhD Thesis by James Ferguson,**

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# **The New Vanguardists: an analysis of Militant Tendency and its Involvement in Liverpool in the 1970s and 1980s**

## **ABSTRACT**

The case study describes and analyses the taking of power by a Trotskyist entryist group in the Liverpool Labour Party and subsequently Liverpool City Council in the 1980s. The case study looks at the model of a vanguardist party and how it takes power and then how it exercises and retains power in a pluralist society.

It analyses the confrontation between the Conservative Government led by Margaret Thatcher and the Militant led Council. Militant claimed that it was a second oppositional front along with the miners' strike, both ending in failure in 1985. The conclusions are a critique of how the leadership of the national Labour Party failed to construct political boundaries thus allowing Militant to grow unchecked, reaching a membership of approx. 8,000 before action was taken against it. A selected number of members of Militant were expelled and together with others left the Labour party in 1991. Militant then operated as an independent organisation in various forms until 1997 when it created the Socialist Party of England and Wales and renamed its paper "The Socialist". This thesis is a case study into how a Trotskyist administration functions, albeit in one city and how the application of Trotskyist theories shaped these events.

# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The case study describes and analyses the taking of power by a Trotskyist entryist group, of the Liverpool Labour Party and subsequently of the Liverpool City Council. The case study looks at the model of a vanguardist party and how it takes power and then how it exercises and retains power. The Liverpool Labour Party in the 1970s was a shell with electoral wards stirred into activity at election time offering only an appeal to tribal loyalties to families who had always voted Labour. Into that shell walked the Militant Tendency committed to a tactic of entryism and employing a tight military structure described as vanguardism.

This tactic was successful, and their membership grew around a policy of “No Cuts in Jobs and Services” within the Liverpool City Council. In 1983 the Labour Party gained a majority on the council previously run for years by a coalition of Liberals and Conservatives. Within the Labour group there were a significant number of Militant tendency councillors. They argued successfully for their policy of confrontation with the Thatcher Government by setting a deficit budget, rather than the “Bent Shield” policy of limited legal resistance advocated by the national leadership of the Labour Party.

This was the Liverpool City Council Budget dispute, led by Militant Tendency. In the following year in May 1984, the Labour Party gained a larger majority on the council and a freer hand to set an illegal deficit budget. However, they gained concessions from the Government and settled for a legal budget in July 1984. The scene was now

set for a new confrontation with a hard-line Secretary of State Kenneth Baker, appointed in September 1985, who made it clear there were to be no more concessions and the Council had to set a legal budget or face surcharge and removal from office.

The Labour Group voted on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1985 for a deficit budget which meant that the expenditure would exceed the receipts before the financial year came to an end, the services would collapse, and employees left without pay. In September 1985, the leaders of the Labour Group miscalculated by being unaware of the legal requirement to issue redundancy notices to all the 31,000 workforce who would not be paid for the last quarter of the financial year and would have to be made redundant in December of 1985. The councillors panicked, faced with large surcharges, if they refused to comply with the Employment Protection Act, and they promptly dismissed all their workers but promised reinstatement when they had won their battle with the Government. The trade unions opposed this tactic and the National Union of Teachers (NUT), a teachers' union obtained a high court judgement a few weeks later declaring the redundancy notices illegal.

The strategy collapsed and at the October 1985 Labour Party Conference Neil Kinnock made his famous speech accusing Militant of wrecking tactics and potentially exposing the most vulnerable people to a stoppage of services. The day after the speech David Blunkett, presenting the local government report of the NEC to the national conference, agreed a compromise with the Liverpool Labour Group which resulted in an investigation into the finances by Maurice Stonefrost who completed his work on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1985 and reported that a legal budget was possible which was not as severe as the Labour group had predicted. After discussions with national trade union leaders and the leading figures of the Labour group, with the Stonefrost report as the basis of

a legal budget, it was announced by the Council that they had re-mortgaged its council houses with a foreign bank.

The trade union leaders withdrew from the talks and requested an investigation into the Liverpool Labour Party and its suspension, which was agreed and reported its findings in February 1986. The report was lengthy, and critical of the leading figures in the Labour Group who were members of the Militant Tendency and had distorted the District Labour Party (DLP) to suit their own political objectives. Sixteen members of the DLP were recommended for disciplinary procedures. In March 1986, the sixteen members were brought before a disciplinary committee of the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Labour Party and twelve were expelled from the Labour Party.

The Labour Group members who voted for an illegal budget were debarred from office following, in March 1986, the final appeal to the Law Lords, which failed, and the councillors were removed from office. A Liberal and Conservative majority assumed control of the Council until elections were held in May 1986, which returned a majority Labour Group, the composition of which was a large centre left faction and a small broad left faction of the hard- left. The confrontation was at an end and Militant slowly withdrew from the Labour Party and finally formed, in 1997, the Socialist Party of England and Wales.

The case study analyses the confrontation between the Government led by Margaret Thatcher and the Militant led Council starting in 1984. Militant claimed that it was a second oppositional front along with the miners' national strike which lasted from 6<sup>th</sup> March 1984 to 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1985. Militant argued that both forms of resistance to Government policies, operated simultaneously, would bring down the Government and force a general election. Instead, both oppositional fronts ended in failure. The

conclusions are a critique of how the leadership of the national Labour Party failed to construct political boundaries which allowed Militant to grow unchecked, reaching a membership of approx. 8,000 before action was taken against them. Although some members of Militant were expelled, and others left to form the Socialist Party of England and Wales.

This thesis is a case study into how a Trotskyist administration functions, albeit in one city. The case study analyses a political model, vanguardism, its tactic of entryism, and its application by the Militant Tendency in the Liverpool Labour Party, and Liverpool City Council.

### **1.1 Militant Tendency**

The Militant Tendency in Liverpool in the 1980s was in the vanguard against government spending cuts but became isolated and ultimately defeated. This thesis analyses the period leading up to the 1979 general election Labour defeat and beyond, where the left of the Labour Party viewed Militant as just another faction and members who argued for their expulsion were labelled witch-hunters. This accusation of witch-hunting protected Militant because the left feared a widespread attack and thought this move against Militant would engulf the whole of the left. This left of the Party, outside Militant, comprised mainly of individual party members and union officials who considered themselves socialists but undefined and usually unorganised, apart from Tribune which was small but influential. This changed with the growth of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) under the unofficial leadership of Tony Benn.

The evidence gathered by two internal Party reports, (the Underhill Report in 1975, and the Hayward report in 1982), showed that Militant was a party operating within the Labour Party, with its own rules, membership requirements, funding, newspaper,

national structure, and even a separate international grouping. It was clearly operating as a Marxist group not complying with the framework of a democratic socialist party as can be seen from the minutes of a meeting of the Blackburn branch of Militant (Appendix1, page 6) where the main item of business is a Marxist discussion.

The NEC of the Labour Party did not enforce its own constitution, which was very loose and ill-defined and allowed Militant to grow, the party failed to deal with entryism. The Labour Party eventually had to expel the entryists, but at a tremendous cost in terms of energy and the diversion of resources away from normal political activity.

It analyses the affiliated structure of the party and how it is open to infiltration by groups such as Militant and how the Labour Party dealt with this internal threat. It will examine Militant's political organisation as a vanguard party and its entryist tactic within the Labour Party.

## **1.2 Militant dominate the Liverpool Labour Party in the 1970s and 1980s**

The proposition is that the mixture of entryism and vanguardism together was an effective method of gaining power within a Labour Party structure that was decaying. Militant, a determined political group, entered the Liverpool Labour Party which had become a shell, successfully employing entryism and vanguardism as a means of gaining power. Militant supplied bold alternative fighting policies rather than a policy of reluctantly implementing Government cuts in local authority budgets. I will demonstrate how the National Labour Party was ill equipped to deal with this bold policy.

Militant's policies called for a campaign of defiance against Government cuts on a mass scale, branding any opposition as weak and collaborating in implementing the Government's monetary policy. Opposition to Militant became difficult because the

policy of confrontation and deficit budgets were put forward as courageous, unlike implementing council cuts which was labelled as a retreat.

### **1.3 Trade Unions and Militant**

The local authority trade unions were the most important element in the Militant take-over of power in the Liverpool Labour Party. The campaign to retain jobs and services with resistance to any further cuts was designed to fuse the trade unions into this alternative policy. This thesis will explain how Militant organised a surge in membership and activism by trade unionists in local Labour Party wards in the city. Attendance by trade union activists at District Labour Party (DLP) meetings gave them an assured majority for the policies of Militant.

### **1.4 Pluralist Society and Militant**

Churches and most community groups were ignored by Militant. Although these groups were outside the Labour camp, they nevertheless were opposed to the cuts and alarmed at the growing numbers of poor people in the city. One distinct group which had suffered more than any other from the economic decline of the city, were the black people of Liverpool, who because of racial discrimination, were the last to be considered for jobs.

Militant viewed this potentially broad alliance outside Labour with suspicion because this group was impossible to control. Vanguardism is a leadership political model, so groups who could not be controlled were marginalised by Militant and categorised as lacking in class consciousness.



## **1.5 The Militant Administration of the Liverpool City Council**

This thesis will show that entryism and vanguardism, whilst effective in gaining power is unsuited to exercising power in a pluralist society. Vanguardism relies on the formulation of a policy followed by its implementation. It is a rigid process aimed at cutting through opposition and refusing to adopt their suggested changes even though they might improve the policy. The groups mentioned above all experienced a fundamental shift in their relationship with Labour, when it took power in Liverpool, mainly because Militant insisted on a leading role, at all levels. Change had to come from within Militant or not at all. Militant had to protect its policy guiding it through the structure of a City Council. Militant micro-managed their policies as can be seen from the extract below.

The Council alienated community groups outside the Labour Party because it cut their funding and diverted it to other Militant flagship policy areas. Militant would not agree to positive discrimination which would increase black employment levels because Militant did not see black people as a special case. It also could not control the leadership of the black community.

“Bond a quantity surveyor and a Militant member from North London was appointed the council’s Principal Race Relations Advisor in October 1984, in spite of competition from several far better qualified candidates.” (Crick, 1986, pp. 250-251).

Militant alienated the black community with this appointment and led to a major confrontation between the council and the organised black community. The churches were supportive of better housing and were opposed to Government policies and offered to meet a Local Government Minister, but Militant refused to support any contact outside the Labour Party. The churches were seen by Militant as middle class and untrustworthy.

The District Labour Party, meeting at least monthly but often more frequently, where large meetings of delegates from affiliated sections of the Labour Party. However, it was dominated by delegates from local authority trade unions affiliated to the Labour Party. This was now the bulwark against any retreat by the Labour Group of the “No Cuts in Jobs or Services” policy and which supported the Militant vanguard, on condition that it safeguarded the interests of most of the local authority trade unions.

The alignment of Militant and the local authority trade unions came under stress when Militant controlled the City Council. Militant saw the trade unions as having a pivotal role in the use of strike action to pressurise central government into providing more funding, but they could not be controlled. Some unions did not agree with the Militant strategy others were supportive but sceptical. The sceptics saw the no cuts in jobs and services as a slogan where a detailed political programme was more realistic and achievable. The sceptics also believed that Militant was using the unions as a stage army with little or no consultation about strategy. Militant promoted local industrial relations policy formation without recourse to their national structures. The manual workers trade unions were impressed by the council’s decision to afford them nomination rights to vacant jobs which meant that vacant jobs became a form of patronage. The affiliated unions were powerful in the DLP and supportive of Militant and often aggressively drowned out any opposition.

The collapse of the Militant strategy happened when the funds from government did not cover expenditure and Militant panicked and issued redundancy notices to the entire workforce as a temporary measure. This was an extreme example of a small clique at the apex of a vanguard structure making a catastrophic decision because they have divorced themselves from normal pluralistic society. They assumed that their tactic would be understood as buying time, but most unions did not trust them.

They were not convinced that the Government would bridge the funding gap and that the Council was gambling with their jobs to keep their campaign intact.

## **1.6 Literature Review**

The difficulty with this literature review is that the academic works already written only partially deal with Militant Tendency and do not give a complete picture and there lacks an extensive comprehensive study of this extraordinary event of a major English city being administered by a Trotskyist party.

### **Liverpool on the Brink, Michael Parkinson 1985 Published by Policy Journals.**

This book by Michael Parkinson, Director of the Centre for Urban Studies at the University of Liverpool, who lived and worked in Liverpool for over twenty years. At the time of writing his book he was researching Government policy towards the inner cities. The book was published in 1985 towards the end of the Liverpool Budget Crisis. Parkinson brought forward a considerable body of work on the inner cities in order to inform the debate about the economic decline of the City. Parkinson also makes connections with the local political peculiarities grown out of Liverpool as an overspill from Irish migration. In his opening chapter he explains the underlying reasons why Liverpool declined economically as a seaport stranded on the wrong coast facing towards America rather than the developing European Common Market.

He explains the toxic mixture of a working class divided by sectarianism with Protestantism and the Orange Lodge in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church and Irish Nationalism. This made the electoral success of the city's Labour Party, enjoyed by other northern cities, elusive.

He then explains the rise of the Liberal Party in the City in the 1970s with its popular platform of holding down rate rises on or below the rate of inflation. This had the effect of locking in future low- rate support grant settlements.

The stage was now set for the entry of Militant Tendency in the 1970s and 1980s into the largely moribund branches of the Liverpool Labour Party, Parkinson explains,

*“the poverty of its organisation, the poor quality of many of its councillors, its lack of contact with the community, the demoralisation of being replaced by the young Liberals, and especially its failure to develop a coherent response to the rapid economic decline of the city-began to catch up with it.”* (Parkinson, 1985, p. 25)

Militant had a clear and simple message of “No Cuts in Jobs and Services” which made the Liverpool City Council an economic redoubt, something Militant could control unlike the City’s declining private sector. In Chapters Two and Three, Parkinson narrates the beginning of the confrontation with the Government and the negotiated settlement hailed as a great victory by the Deputy Leader of the Council, Derek Hatton.

The remainder of the book charts the lead up to the setting of an illegal deficit budget, reaching a climatic week in September 1985 when the Council was advised that there were insufficient funds to pay 31,000 employees. It complied with employment law requiring them to issue 90-day redundancy notices to the whole workforce. Ignored was the slogan on the City Councillor’s banner on numerous marches “Better to break the Law than break the Poor”. The threat of a large surcharge was enough to shift the burden of liability to the employees of the City Council.

Parkinson’s book leads the reader through the chronology of these events and has supplied a wealth of excellent detailed data on the city’s economic decline giving a rich source of material for researchers. This is the main strength of the book.

The book is an impressive contribution to the underlying reasons why Liverpool was seen by the Conservative Government as a city which could not be revived but instead needed to manage its inevitable decline. Written evidence to this effect has subsequently been put into the public domain which re-enforces Parkinson's view. (see page 191 of this thesis, letter from Chancellor Howe to Prime Minister Thatcher).

This book is an excellent economic foundation, up to September 1985, on how the City Council was denied a sound financial base by a combination of Government policy and poor rate support grant settlements. In his conclusions he blames the triggering of a formula skewed by years of unrealistically low rates by the previous Liberal/Conservative coalitions. This thesis is informed by Parkinson's analysis and takes it forward in time but also looks at the political motivations of a range of parties and groups not covered by this book which concentrates on the economics of urban decline in Liverpool.

**A City that Dared to Fight, Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn 1988, Fortress Books.**

In writing the literature review of this book I had the advantage of interviewing Peter Taaffe in 2018, one of the authors and the former editor of Militant. (Appendix 24)

A City that Dared to Fight, was written by two leading members of the Militant Tendency in 1987, Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn. The book is lengthy and detailed over twenty, three chapters. In their chapter "Road to Power" they document the growth of their organisation from a small group of dedicated Trotskyists to a real force within the Liverpool Labour Party and argued that they were a positive force for socialist policies. Throughout the book there are references to Leon Trotsky on matters of principle and tactics and he is obviously their inspiration, however it was written in

1987 when Militant members were still within the Labour party, so the book is silent about Militant's entryist activities a sensitive topic.

They are also silent on Trotsky's advice to his comrades in Britain during his exile in Mexico. That advice was to enter the Labour Party, because they were too small to have an independent life, then recruit and leave with a viable party. This was a major policy change by the Fourth International when Trotsky was still alive but not covered by the book. To any political observer they would expect an explanation or a justification of this open- secret but the authors remained mute which is a disappointment to any researchers on the subject.

The book is invaluable in that it clearly explains the politics of the Militant Tendency from the point of view of its leadership. The book largely concurs with Michael Parkinson, on the economic ills of the city as Taaffe and Mulhearn used his book as a reference work in chapters one and two.

The book does not explain who took the decision to issue 31,000 redundancy notices to the Liverpool workforce. This, was a monumental blunder and opened the flood gates of press scorn, let alone the bewilderment and anger of workers facing dismissal at Christmas time. The redundancy debacle was not fully explained in the book because Militant had still not come to terms with enormity of their error. The authors blamed local government law and legal niceties, such as a previous Labour Government's Employment Protection Act which required three months, notice of dismissal, a progressive piece of legislation aimed at protecting workers from rogue employers. This is all explained in Chapter Thirteen "On the Brink" in which the authors accuse some trade unions of opposing the redundancy plan without a plan of their own. This was rectified in the next chapter "Forced to Retreat" when the Council was persuaded

by David Blunkett to agree to the Stonefrost Report, an examination of its accounts by Maurice Stonefrost who had an impeccable reputation in local government financial affairs.

The book is written in the same style as the Militant newspaper and, in some chapters, it is a cut and paste from past editions of the weekly paper. It is aimed at its own supporters but still competes to be considered as a legitimate historical account of these events, from a particular perspective, up to June 1987. I have drawn on this book to seek an accurate explanation of Militant's political objectives on a list of issues, and to avoid crude generalisations often inaccurately reported in the press.

**Discipline and Discord in the Labour Party, Eric Shaw, 1988, Manchester University Press.**

Although this book is not entirely devoted to Militant in the Labour Party it charts dissent within the Party between 1951 and 1987, providing an invaluable historical lead up to the last two chapters eleven and twelve, which are specifically about Militant. Although the book was published in 1988, it does not cover the demise of Militant.

Shaw starts in chapter eleven with the abolition of the proscribed list in 1973, which was a list of organisations deemed to be outside the constitution of the Labour Party and were mainly friendship societies with communist countries and seen as front organisations. Membership of these organisations could lead to expulsion; Shaw explains the reasons why there was a more liberal disciplinary regime compared to previous years.

Although regional officials were feeding in information about entryist activities in the party to the national agent, the General Secretary, Ron Haywood and the Leader, Michael Foot were in principle against expulsions. Despite two reports detailing

entryist activities by two different national agents the NEC did not act upon the reports and shelved them. Shaw describes “The right-wing counter offensive” which was organised by the St Ermins Group referred to later in this thesis, but the author could not have known of its existence at the time of writing because of its covert organisation. This source of information in the form of Dianne Hayter’s book “Fightback” was published in 2005 and explains how the right of the party won back control of the NEC and conference. Shaw could not have had access to any matters relating to the St Ermins Group because the papers were confidential.

*“Apart from John Golding’s recently published memoir, virtually none of this organisational story has been documented.”* (Hayter, 2005, p. 7).

This secrecy was maintained up to the publication of Hayter’s book in 2005 so that Shaw’s book and others had no concrete explanation of how the rise of the left was halted and had to generalise.

*“In these years a tightening of Labour’s managerial regime occurred. But the process was a slow, halting and uneven one. In the area of adjudication, there was a definite retreat from the left’s approach earlier in the decade. Thus, the Executive intimated its approval for stricter Group Discipline.”* (Shaw, 1988, p. 255).

Shaw could only state the fact that the left were retreating, but the organisation of the unions in the St Ermins Group was the reason for it. Since 1988 when Shaw published his book, material has been made available which gives rise to the need for a re-appraisal of this period using new material. For example, Dianne Hayter has transcribed over 70 interviews for her book which is now available for researchers as rich source material. These transcripts of the interviews by prominent members of the Labour Party, including the leader and deputy leader, leave the reader in no doubt of the



crucial role of the St Ermins Group. Shaw painstakingly explains in detail the twists and turns of Militant's recourse to the courts and its attempts to quash the moves against it. Shaw identifies the flaws in the Labour Party's procedures which were now subject to scrutiny on the criteria of natural justice enforced by the courts. He explains how Militant had the time and money to deter a more widespread purge of Militant.

The defeat of the Labour Party in the 1983 election starts his chapter twelve, described by Shaw as a trauma throughout the party. The new leader, Kinnock, was bitterly hostile to Militant but only applied graduated pressure but was supported by a more sympathetic NEC. Shaw then charts the drift of the soft left away from the hard left towards the centre and away from the leadership of Tony Benn. Shaw describes chronological events and offers explanations throughout the two chapters with clarity and precision from which I have used as a reference work.

The chapter on his conclusions is pessimistic predicting that to expel some 8000 of Militant members would exhaust the party and it was unlikely to see it through. The book was written before events such as the Walton by-election and the Scottish Militant section's decision to oppose the Labour Party on the poll tax. This led to a split in Militant and the end of its entryist tactic. In this respect the Labour Party was extremely fortunate at this partial voluntary departure by Militant. Without this exodus, Shaw's prediction could so easily have been the correct one with a long running internal battle and regular expulsions throughout the party.

In this thesis I look, in the final conclusions, at Shaw's pessimism because although about 2000 members of Militant left the Labour Party to form the Socialist Party of England and Wales this left about 6000 behind, so in that sense his pessimism was partly justified.

**Militant Liverpool a City on the Edge, Diane Frost and Peter North 2013, Liverpool University Press.**

The book was written by two academics from the University of Liverpool, Diane Frost and Peter North to coincide with the thirtieth anniversary of the 1983 local election in Liverpool which gave the Labour Party an overall majority with a significant element of Militant supporters within its group. This book it is the only attempt to re-visit the Liverpool Militant era in modern times and for that it is a valuable re-appraisal, with a new research question.

It is built on Michael Parkinson's book this would have been positive if they had picked up from where Parkinson had left off considering the new material available. One would expect, given the reliance on Parkinson's economic material, that they would bring the reader up to date with new data, considering that the research question is an economic one. They did however assemble a focus group of Militant supporters involved in the Liverpool budget crisis but unfortunately did not use this resource to any great extent in the book. They also declined to place the transcript of the focus group in the public domain preventing any detailed analysis of their work by researchers. Little economic data in the intervening period of thirty years is used to support their research question (described below) which one would have thought is the whole point of the book.

This book uses oral testimonies, spread throughout the book, of participants in the City Council budget crisis and argues that the City Council's actions were a shout of anger at the pain of the city's economic decline and had a positive effect by declaring enough is enough and so then the recovery begins. The authors argue that the Council drew a line in the sand from which successive administrations could build.

There are oral contributions from key informants offering a retrospective view of events but very few on the research question. There are interviews, throughout the book, from individuals with only a tangential involvement with events which are interesting but lacks gravitas, researchers would not know who these people are or the depth of their involvement.

The bias in the focus group may have been intentional but the rationale for their selection is not stated or explained. The claim, on the back cover of the book, that it sets out to be even handed leaves any researcher using this book with doubts about this claim.

The research question in the book in chapter one, page four, i.e., that the economic recovery of the city began directly after the Militant confrontation and that it even triggered it off is supported by Michael Parkinson, one of the 22 interviewees, who argued in favour of the proposition stating that as there were no investors waiting in the wings so that Militant could not have put them off.

The point Parkinson was implying was that the decline was inevitable, but this was not proven because investors needed to be encouraged to invest within favourable conditions and are rarely waiting in the wings. Militant hardly created favourable conditions for inward investment which subsequent Liverpool City Labour administrations from the centre left successfully achieved, aided by the election of a Labour Government in 1997.

The authors expose themselves to a charge of writing a legacy project rather than a serious piece of research. Instead of taking the opportunity to build on the excellent foundation of Parkinson's book and update his work from thirty years ago with structured interviews and carefully argued reasons why their proposition was worthy of

consideration, it is lost due to an absence of new economic data to support their proposition. The book looks like a legacy project brought out to mark an anniversary with an attempt to pose a very thin research question.

The first three of the four books above were products of their time in the 1980s and would form the basis of any future study taken together. This fourth book written in 2013 is a useful collection of quotes from some key informants offering a retrospective view of these events but the research question and the related argumentation is not supported by any economic expertise. Potentially the most interesting part of the book is the deliberations of the focus group which lasted a whole day. There exists a transcript of the deliberations of the focus group, but it is not publically available.

**Militant, Michael Crick, 2016, Biteback Publishing Ltd.**

Portions of the book previously appeared in *March of Militant*, Michael Crick 1984, Faber and Faber, Ltd. This book is substantially similar to *March of Militant* published in 1986.

Michael Crick is an experienced journalist well known for doorstepping prominent individuals and asking difficult questions. This book, quite naturally, is written as an expose rather than an academic work. It investigates Militant's background, finances, organisation, international links, and its well- publicised involvement in Merseyside. In this review I have highlighted his exposition of Militant's operation where he has used his considerable skills to unearth facts where political researchers would have been reluctant to explore. Crick has used his expertise to provide any researcher with a wealth of information about the organisation called Militant.

The strength of this book is the enormous amount of time spent investigating an organisation which is covert and difficult to research because of its lack of openness

and aversion to publishing its documents, which potentially could be presented as evidence in any disciplinary case mounted by the British Labour party. In particular, he delves into Militant's finances illuminating the reasons why the organisation was so successful. Militant came from humble origins, and then was then gifted a large sum of money from the inheritance of Sydney Silverman to his two sons, both in Militant. This was wisely invested in a modern printing press which made money for Militant through commercial printing and subsidised the printing of Militant, their weekly paper. This propelled Militant's finances on a par with a political party far beyond what would be expected from a fringe group like Tribune or the Fabian Society.

At a human level Crick paints a compelling picture of everyday life of a person committed to Militant which would be absent from most academic works. He describes the recruitment of mainly young people, involved with the Labour Party Young Socialists. He interviewed David Mason from Hull, a member of Militant in the mid- 70s who explained how he was engaged in some intensive discussions by Alastair Tice an established Militant member over a period of about a month. The news was then broken to Mason that there was an organisation called the Revolutionary Socialist League and he was given documents including a pamphlet on "Entryism" and after a month he was accepted into membership. Mason, only lasted eighteen months in Militant departing due to policy differences but the time spent on him was considerable by Alastair Tice and others like him.

Crick devotes a large portion of the book to Militant's dominance within the Liverpool Labour Party in the 1980s and explains the process of amplification whereby a small number of Militant City councillors influence a group of broad left councillors who then use their majority to win a majority within the entire Labour Group. The caucus

within a caucus operation was also used within local Labour parties and trade unions in Liverpool.

Crick then describes how this dominance translated into the creation of a propaganda unit within the City Council called the Central Support Unit headed by a Militant member Andy Pink who organised rallies, petitions, meetings, and demonstrations in support of the Council's opposition to the Government policy of reducing council spending. Crick explains, that although Militant proclaimed a victory in 1984 by gaining concessions from the Government with a promise of more housing money to come, this never materialised because the Government was annoyed that the 1984 settlement was hailed as a victory for the Council and a humiliation for the Government.

Crick then delves into the overlapping relationships between members of Militant and their various roles. He gives an example of Ian Lowes, member of Militant who held powerful overlapping positions as a GMBATU branch official, chair of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee of the entire council workforce but also a member of the powerful District Labour Party Executive. This was compounded by the fact that his partner was Pauline Dunlop a member of Militant, City councillor and deputy chair of the personnel committee, an example of multiple conflicts of interests.

The roots of the next confrontation in the June 1985 budget, is described as accidental by Crick because Militant calculated that enough Labour councillors would not support the resolution and it would fall. According to Crick, Hatton was heard to say *"Oh my god it's going to go through"* implying an accidental deficit budget,

The leadership of Militant was concerned and sent a Militant executive member, John Pickard to sort out the comrades. However, worst was to come when the

Council issued redundancy notices to all 31,000 employees, to take effect during the Christmas period of 1985. The union reaction was predictable, Crick describes this as the desertion of Hatton's troops, the council's workforce. The book then focuses on the Labour leaderships' reaction to a highly publicised debacle in a city under nominal Labour control and the effect it was having on the electorate in the country.

The leadership of the Labour Party decided to suspend the Liverpool party and instigate an inquiry, here again Crick investigates the relationship of a key witness and Militant defector Irene Buxton as a mistress of Derek Hatton, Deputy Council Leader, who was expelled for membership of Militant but did not attend the hearing or mount a defence. Other expulsions followed leading to the demise of Militant. With Crick's journalism, this period in Labour Party history is colourful and peppered with facts and connections not usually associated with more academic works on the subject. It is a page turner using to full extent Crick's dry sense of humour aimed at a much wider audience than the political anorak.

## **1.7 Rationale**

In the 1970s and 1980s there was a possibility of the Labour Party imploding and turning in on itself, waging war between its factions and failing as a credible opposition party. The collapse of an opposition to the Government in Parliament is of vital concern to the democratic life of the country. If a large party is incapable of forming a credible opposition, let alone a government, then the democratic process is diminished. It is important to study the mechanisms whereby a small group of determined and organised entryists can disable a large democratic party and divert it from its mainstream functions. This study will add and enhance understanding of entryism by vanguard parties and individual entryists into the Labour Party.

## **1.8 Aims and objectives.**

The objective will be the writing of a single case study describing the taking of power within the Liverpool Labour Party by the Militant Tendency, an entryist and vanguard party. It will look at how this vanguardist party operated in direct opposition to the pluralist and open debates typified by the mainstream of British democratic socialism. The case study will also describe the radical changes Militant made to existing party structures at national party level and in the Liverpool Labour Party, so that it could take and consolidate power. Another objective will be to narrate the conflict, instigated by the Militant Tendency, in all its aspects, between the Liverpool City Council and the state over the funding of the City.

The thesis will aim to politically analyse the actions of a Trotskyist vanguard party in a position of power operating in the Liverpool City Council and within a pluralist Labour Party when confronted with a powerful central state. A state moreover committed to reducing local government budgets in direct conflict to Militant's slogan of "No Cuts in Jobs or Services". This case study will aim to examine and analyse the tactic of entryism and the theory of vanguardism by Militant in relation to the Liverpool Labour Party. The study will aim to examine and analyse the effects of Militant's relationship with external organisations outside of its direct control. These include trades unions, voluntary organisations, churches, the media, the national Labour Party, The Liberal Party the Communist Party, far left groups, and the black community. Militant's structure will be analysed and assessed to highlight its strengths and weaknesses and to analyse its decision making in relation to its ideology.



Apart from narrating and analysing this period in the history of the Labour Party there will be an opportunity to study the unique event of a vanguard model of party organisation in action with real power and responsibility in a large UK city.

After a period of 30 years a great deal of historical evidence has become available regarding this case study, for example Ministerial Papers, participants writing extensive biographies, together with many Labour Party internal documents which at the time of their production were marked private and confidential and unavailable. The People's History Museum in Manchester has become a repository of many collections of labour movement papers by individuals and organisations not previously available. They are a recent rich source of facts and views denied to previous authors of works on this subject, published in the 1980s and 1990s.

Participants have been interviewed and most have retired from public life and are available to recall and reflect on this event. New data has been gathered from these interviews which includes new historical information and frank admissions of misjudgements in retrospect. The academic works, already written only partially deal with Militant Tendency and there lacks an extensive comprehensive study of this extraordinary event of a major English city being administered by a Trotskyist party.

This study will add and enhance understanding of entryism in the Labour Party and how a Trotskyist vanguard party operates.

# Chapter 2

## Methodology

### 2.1 The Single Case Study

I have chosen a single case study as a methodological approach to this research study because it best describes the evidence gathering methods I will employ. The concise definition of a case study is contained in Bill Gillham's book,

*"Case study is a main method. Within it, different sub methods are used: interviews, observations, document and record analysis, work samples and so on.*

*Data accumulated by different methods but bearing on the same issue are part of what is called the multi- method approach.*

*Different methods have different strengths and different weaknesses. If they converge (agree) then we can be reasonably, confident that we are getting a true picture. If they don't agree then we have to be cautious about basing our understanding on any one set of data. That doesn't mean that one set of data is wrong (or any of them) but that the picture is more complicated than we expected.*

*This approach from different methodological stand points is usually known as triangulation. If they give you the same fix, that's fine, If not, then you have to explain that or question the adequacy of the methods". (Gillham, 2000, p. 13)*

Access to data, in particular data from interviews with participants who were decision makers, is an important issue because the research requires original data.

## **2.2 The Interview**

The interviewees will fall into two categories in this case study,

**Elite interviews**, participants who held decision making positions during the relevant period for example ex Ministers and MPs. I have interviewed most of the senior politicians involved but have had to fall back on other sources of evidence e.g. autobiographies and diaries for those I was unable to interview. However elite interviews reach beneath the surface allowing revision of motives to emerge rather than a flat and chronological approach to history. I will avoid inserting many large quotes from these interviews but quotes on some important historical events and views are essential if a new insight is to be captured in this thesis, also it would be tiresome for the reader to be referring back to transcripts in the appendices just for the sake of brevity.

**Key informant interviews**, participants who held decision making positions during the relevant period but were locally based and are not national figures. I have interviewed most of the key local decision makers and they were all candid which allowed both a revision of this event and the addition of new material. I make the same point about quotes in the above section on elite interviewing for this section in that in some cases it may not be possible to edit down quotes for the sake of brevity without losing the completeness of their argument.

## 2.3 Elite Interviewing

For the construction of this case study, some original data will be collected by means of elite interviewing best described by Peter Burnham, Karen Gilland Lutz, Wyn Grant, and Zig Layton-Henry.

*“This may be defined both in terms of the target group being studied, an ‘elite’ of some kind, and the research technique used, most characteristically what is known as semi-structured interviewing. It is often the most effective way to obtain information about decision makers and decision-making processes. More generally, elite interviewing can be used whenever it is appropriate to treat a respondent as an expert about the topic in hand” (Leech, 2002a, p663).*

*Unlike, for example, electoral studies where the balance of knowledge and expertise is usually in favour of the interviewer, elite interviewing is characterised by a situation in which the balance is usually in favour of the respondents. This is because of their high levels of knowledge of the subject matter under discussion and their general intellectual and expressive abilities”. (Peter Burnham, 2008, p. 231).*

They continue,

*“The key guideline must be not to base any piece of work entirely on elite interviewing. This is consistent with the principle of triangulation, which ‘entails using more than one method or source of data in the study of phenomena’ (Bryman, 2001, p.274). ‘The best research on elites has utilized a combination of methodological approaches to deepen the research findings’ (Hertz and Imber, (Heath, 2012) 1995,p.ix), One should also use other sources and techniques such as archives, materials on the internet and observation at meetings of, for example, legislative*

bodies. In some cases, of course, elite interviewing may serve as a supplementary technique. For example, a student may be undertaking an archive-based project but may also interview key individuals who are still alive.”

## 2.4 Key Informants

Sandra Halperin and Oliver Heath point to the risks of an overreliance on what they describe as key informants. In their chapter on ethnography and participant observation they say,

“Some informants may therefore be more useful or helpful than others, and certain informants – or **key informants** – may become more central to the collection of data than others. These key informants can be a great asset. They may understand the purpose and aims of the research, and be able to direct the ethnographer to situations, or places or people, who may be useful for research. But they also carry risks. Overreliance on key informants can create a different set of problems, to do with the reliability and validity of the information that is generated. As Bryman (2004:300) puts it, a reliance on key informants may mean that ‘rather than seeing social reality through the eyes of members of the social setting, the researcher is seeing social reality through the eyes of the key informant’. It is therefore very important for the ethnographer to continuously bear in mind representativeness of their informants, and to actively seek out different voices and speak to those who may be less forthcoming, as well as those who are helpful and amenable. The consequence of not failing to do so (or not doing so adequately) is to introduce error and bias, which can undermine the internal validity of the study”. (Heath, 2012, pp. 299-300)

## 2.5 Interview Technique

I have decided to use a semi-structured interview technique. This type of interview is best described as Depth Interviewing and I was influenced by Sue Jones. The book best describes all the issues I will face when using this type of Interview. Jones distils it down to structure and ambiguity and points to the balance of not conducting an interview with a degree of rigidity which constricts the interviewee from revealing new and interesting information.

However, she *argues*,

*“that in order to see patterns in the data researchers should have broad questions in mind. This is more crucial where the interviewee is in a position of power, as a non-directive interview would allow the interviewee to ramble.” (Jones, 1985, pp. 44-55)*

## 2.6 Testing the Interview.

It is the intention of this study to at least duplicate and if possible triplicate interviews in a certain limited category in order to test for factual accuracy and contradictory views.

Another method of testing the interview will be introducing other data sources including press cuttings, TV and radio broadcasts, archive material and minutes of meetings.

The main bodies from which interviewees were chosen, The National Labour Party (Lord Blunkett, Lord Kinnock, Clare Short), the Militant Tendency (Peter Taaffe, Derek Hatton), the Liverpool Labour Party (Prof David Robertson, Ian Williams, Peter Kilfoyle), the Liverpool Liberal Party (Lord Storey), the trade unions, (Graham Burgess,

Peter Creswell), the media (Liam Fogerty). These bodies and interviewees were chosen because they played a part in the conflict best described as the Liverpool budget crisis.

The above cohorts describe the sample size, although this is problematical as some interviews may reveal another line of relevant enquiry. This may lead to a snowball effect but is unavoidable if the research is to pursue new information or verification of multiple forms of data, not just interviews.

## **2.7 The consent process for interviewees**

All interviewees agreed to be recorded with an audio device.

All interviewees were then supplied with a verbatim written transcript of the interview.

All interviewees were requested to amend or delete any part of the transcript.

Interviewees who chose to amend or delete parts of the transcript were then supplied with an amended version and it is this version which is listed in the appendices below.

All 12 interviewees were requested to sign consent forms created and supplied by Keele University prior to the interview.

A list of the interviewees is detailed below together with their appendix reference title.

Appendix 13. Transcript of an Interview with David Blunkett, 2014

Appendix 14. Transcript of an interview with David Blunkett, 2019

Appendix 15. Transcript of an interview with Graham Burgess, 2019

Appendix 16. Transcript of an interview with Peter Creswell, 2019

Appendix 17. Transcript of an interview with Liam Fogarty, 2019

Appendix 18. Transcript of an interview with Derek Hatton, 2019

Appendix 19. Transcript of an interview with Peter Kilfoyle, 2019

Appendix 20. Transcript of an interview with Neil Kinnock, 2019

Appendix 21. Transcript of an interview with David Robertson, 2019

Appendix 22. Transcript of an interview with Clare Short, 2018

Appendix 23. Transcript of an interview with Michael Storey, 2018

Appendix 24. Transcript of an interview with Peter Taaffe, 2018

Appendix 25. Transcript of an interview with Ian Williams, 2019

## **2.8 Research Questions**

### **Main Research Question**

The main question for the case study is how and why were the Militant Tendency allowed to grow within the Labour Party in the 1970s and 1980s to such an extent that they gained control of the Liverpool Labour Party and the Liverpool City Council?

### **Subsidiary Research Question 1**

Why did the Labour Party not have a clearly defined set of Aims and Objectives in its Constitution which would have protected it from entryism?

### **Subsidiary Research Question 2.**

Militant claimed to be a legitimate voice for Marxism, within a loose open federated Labour Party structure, is this a true representation of their position?

### **Subsidiary Research Question 3**

Did entryism, a tactic, cause Militant's identity as a revolutionary Marxist Group to be diluted and compromised as an unintentional consequence of the tactic?



#### **Subsidiary Research Question 4**

What effect did a vanguard party, in office, have on the administration and management of the Liverpool City Council?

#### **Subsidiary Research Question 5.**

What effect did a vanguard party have on parties and bodies outside the control of the Liverpool District Labour Party?

#### **Subsidiary Research Question 6.**

Did Militant transform the Liverpool District Labour Party into a soviet of party and union delegates, centralising power in the vanguard model into one sovereign body from which it mandated and controlled the Labour Group?

#### **Subsidiary Research Question 7**

Why did the National Labour Party respond by suspending the Liverpool District Labour Party in December 1985, hold an Inquiry which reported to the NEC in February 1986, and then expel leading members of the Militant Tendency?

### **2.9 Ethical Issues**

I must begin by addressing the ethical issue of my identification with this research thesis and the need to fully disclose any relevant involvement.

My role in the case study was both political and industrial. I was an Executive Member of the National Union of Teachers and its Liverpool Divisional Secretary and vice chair of the National Salaries and Conditions of Service Sub- Committee. I was also a member of the Burnham Committee which was a statutory tri-partite pay body between

Government, Local Authorities, and teacher trade unions. I was chair of the National Broad Left Group on the NEC of the NUT which was then the majority group on the NEC.

I was a member of the executive of the Liverpool Joint Shop Stewards Committee (JSSC) and briefly its secretary. I was a member of the Merseyside Area Committee of the Communist Party. I considered myself at that time a supporter of the British Road to Socialism, the Party's programme for socialist change within the parliamentary democratic system of Britain. I was a candidate on three occasions in local council elections for the CPGB in Preston, Lancashire. I was a supporter of the developments within the Spanish Communist Party, described in a book called Eurocommunism and the State by Santiago Carrilio, the then General Secretary of the Spanish Communist Party. In 1990 I joined the Labour Party and in 2013 joined the Irish Labour Party when I took up residency in the Republic of Ireland.

Doing political research as a participant observer, I would argue, is more objective after a 30- year period because there are opportunities to collect data from many more sources. Thirty years on many of the participants, myself included, are no longer in those roles and it can be argued some interviewees will be more candid and prepared to be critical of their own actions, although others will always want to protect their legacy.

Essential to a researcher who has had a partisan involvement in a case study is the need to,

a) fully disclose their involvement and,

b) ensure that the research methods to be used are robust, fit for purpose and totally transparent eliminating or minimising bias. However, the issue of the ideal researcher who is value free is controversial, particularly with political research. The ideal of a value free political researcher must be a goal, but in reality, it must remain an unachievable goal. It is difficult to choose a researcher who is value neutral, and Martyn Hammersley explains why,

*“Most advocates of value neutrality, however, treat it as a principle that should guide their behaviour, recognising that commitment to this principle does not guarantee the elimination of bias deriving from practical commitments. In short, they see value neutrality as an ideal not as a fact”.* (Hammersley, 2000, p. 17)

This thesis is being written at a time when events of the 1980s are constantly being used to demonstrate what happens when civil war breaks out in the Labour Party.

It is more than ever a time to construct a case study which attempts to be accurate, credible, objective, and fair.

I have treated people, in this thesis, who are deceased with the same care as if they were still alive because they no longer can defend their reputation. I am aware that they have no legal rights of redress when their reputation is under question.

To this effect I have, where possible, tried to use evidence concerning deceased persons from their own documents i.e., diaries, autobiographies, interviews, personal papers, and biographies written during their lifetime.

During the interviews I, where possible, tried to formulate the questions in anticipation of the main arguments in the thesis and the research questions. This was not carried out in the format of standardised questions for each interviewee but adapted to their

own experience. Also, because I had conducted extensive research prior to the interview, in addition to my experience as a participant observer I was able to structure the interview so that it enabled the analysis of the results of the interviews to be more coherent and restricted to themes within the research questions. The analysis of the interviews was then a question of posing the themes and arguments against each other with the addition of new information from the interviewees.

# Chapter 3

## TROTSKYIST IDEOLOGY

### 3.1 Trotskyism

Militant Tendency in Britain claim their political heritage from their ideologue Leon Trotsky and follow his theories along with those of Marx and Lenin. This section is a brief description of the ideology of Trotskyism because this subject has been written about and analysed extensively.

Later in this thesis an analysis will be made of the application of Trotsky's theories in the context of the case study regarding Militant Tendencies' ascendancy in the Liverpool City Council in the 1970s and 1980s, but this section will confine itself to Trotsky's leadership of the left opposition whilst he was in exile and his legacy after his assassination in 1940 and specifically his advocacy of the vanguard model of party organisation and his support for the tactic of entryism in mainstream socialist parties.

### 3.2 Trotsky and his role in the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia

Trotsky, from all the overwhelming evidence was instrumental, with Lenin, in the successful transfer of power from an autocratic monarchy to a small working class in Russia. There was a brief interlude, during this period, in which Russia had a parliamentary system of government, the Duma, but it supported the continuation of an unpopular war with Germany in the Great War and was overthrown. Eric Hobsbawm explains,

*“When the provisional Government insisted on launching the army into another military offensive in June 1917 the army had had enough, and the peasant-soldiers*

*went home to their villages to take part in dividing their land with their kin. Revolution spread along the lines of the railways that carried them back. The time was not yet ripe for an immediate fall of the Provisional Government, but from the summer on radicalisation accelerated both in the army and in the main cities, increasingly to the benefit of the Bolsheviks.”* (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 63).

The Bolshevik's slogan of all power to the Soviets (Russian for committees), argued for a transfer of power from the Duma to the Soviets made up of soldiers, sailors, peasants and workers. Trotsky led the Petrograd (now St Petersburg) Soviet with his compelling and effective rhetoric and mobilised it for the October Revolution ushering in the new Soviet government and the end of the Duma.

This was a triumph for the vanguard party structure, a military structure which would then have to win a civil war. The vanguard party has a tight structure insulating itself from police spies with an educated professional leadership, recruiting workers who were likely to be illiterate.

Trotsky, as Commissar for war, overcame huge obstacles and led the Red Army to victory over Tsarist forces and interventionists. He travelled thousands of miles in a specially equipped train with its own military forces, stemming the incursion of counter revolutionary armies. By 1922 the Soviet Union was free from external military threats and the Revolution secured from external enemies.

### **3.3 The Kronstadt Mutiny.**

There was however a blemish on the reputation of Trotsky in his position as head of the Red Army. On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1921, the sailors of the naval island fortress of Kronstadt, which guarded Petrograd, mutinied. They met and were in sympathy (Payne, 1978, p. 236) with the starving and cold workers in nearby Petrograd. The Kronstadt garrison

of sailors heard reports from the workers of Petrograd of the widespread hunger and lack of fuel. The Kronstadt garrison drew up fifteen demands most of which were critical of the government's ability to prevent starvation in the harsh Russian winter. This mutiny was initiated by the same fortress that had been crucial to the success of the 1917 October revolution.

The Kronstadt mutiny was an internal matter although defenders of Trotsky's handling of the mutiny tried hard to link it to external forces such as the accusation that they had received funds from the French Secret Service. It was certainly denounced as counter revolutionary by Trotsky. The mutiny was critical of the Government's competence and dominance by the Bolsheviks. Trotsky issued a written command on the 5<sup>th</sup>, March 1921 calling on the sailors to disarm or they would be met with armed force.

Alexander Berkman, an American anarchist who was in Petrograd at this time wrote in his diary,

*"March 17<sup>th</sup> Kronstadt has fallen today. Thousands of sailors and workers lie dead in its streets. Summary executions of prisoners and hostages continues."* (Payne, 1978, p. 242)

The accusation is that Trotsky's brutal suppression of these mutinous sailors and their families set a precedent from which Stalin felt able and justified to carry forward these methods in other similar situations.

Militant's theoretician of Trotskyism is Ted Grant, he writes in his book that the mutinous sailors of Kronstadt were not the vanguard of the 1917 revolution but had been dispersed and replaced with Ukrainians from the Black Sea fleet.

*“The Kronstadt garrison of 1921 was composed mainly of raw peasant levies from the Black Sea Fleet. A cursory glance at the surnames of the mutineers immediately shows that they were almost all Ukrainians.”* (Grant, 1977, pp. 86-88)

Grant’s assumption that Ukrainians would be less loyal to the Soviet state was stated but not argued or substantiated and is surprising considering that Trotsky was Ukrainian. Trotsky has never referred to the Ukrainian composition of the mutineers in his writings, however in an interview given by Trotsky on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1921, to the foreign press he wrote,

*“A great many of the revolutionary sailors, who played a major part in the October revolution of 1917, were transferred in the interim to other spheres of activity. They were replaced in large measure by accidental elements, among whom a good many Latvian, Estonian, and Finnish sailors”.* (Trotsky, 1979, p. 88)

This is a far more credible report of the composition of the mutineer’s given that Trotsky was there at that time and could easily read Ukrainian as he was Ukrainian. The proximity to the Gulf of Finland of Latvia, Estonia and Finland makes Trotsky’s account more credible.

Grant goes on to assert that Trotsky played no direct role in the suppression of the Mutiny although Trotsky was photographed along with Lenin amongst a large group of soldiers fresh from the fighting. This photograph, reproduced below, was entitled,

*“Lenin and Trotsky in Petrograd at the centre of a group of soldiers who had taken part in the suppression of the Kronstadt rising”* (King, 1972, p. 88)

It cannot be overstated that Trotskyism’s appeal is that there was no linkage between Trotsky and the violent excesses of Stalin. The mutiny is an instance where Trotsky felt vulnerable, and his legacy challenged. In a modern context his suppression of the



mutiny with summary executions would have been prima facie grounds for war crimes. Grant seeks to obscure the facts on this chapter of history maintaining Trotsky's appeal as a less authoritarian figure than Stalin who would not have used violence in a systematic way characterised by Stalin's leadership of the Soviet Union.

Grant, in a very clumsy way, attempts to justify mass executions of mutinous sailors, by classifying them as counter revolutionary, a catch all, which could justify this repression. In fact, it is highly likely the mutineers were simply pointing to the obvious fact that requisitioning food by the red army from farms was highly inefficient and unproductive and it led to starvation. Lenin, soon after the mutiny, ended requisitioning of food and introduced measures to restore the markets in urban areas.

The suppression of the Kronstadt mutiny links their leader with violent repression. Trotskyism's appeal is that if he had not been deposed, socialism would have been untainted by Stalinism and internal opposition would have been tolerated, not liquidated.

Lenin and Trotsky at the centre of a group of soldiers who took part in the suppression of the Kronstadt rising



In a modern context, Christopher Hitchens appeared on a BBC Radio 4 programme presented by Mathew Parris. Hitchens was defending Trotsky's legacy but had to concede as a former member of International Socialists that Kronstadt, was a worry within his then circle of Trotskyists.

*“When some members resigned from the party it was known as their Kronstadt moment.”* (Parris, 2006)

Trotskyists today would claim that the Kronstadt Mutiny was counter revolutionary and linked to foreign intervention and its suppression was a repressive measure but justified. It is hard to imagine that Trotsky could have been more repressive than Stalin, but Trotsky and Lenin reacted to internal dissent with swift brutality with no attempt to negotiate, tolerate or accommodate dissenters. Trotsky had set a precedent, but would it have been carried through after the conclusion of the civil war, had he become leader of the Soviet Union? Trotsky's appeal to his followers is that he would have been different and more tolerant, today a candidate for head of state with such a reputation for repression, would be unelectable.

### **3.4 Trotsky in exile and the creation of the Fourth International**

On the 25<sup>th</sup>, October 1926 at a meeting of the Soviet Politburo Trotsky accused Stalin of being,

*“a candidate for the post of gravedigger of the revolution”* (Payne, 1978, p. 284).

Later that year at the fifteenth party congress Trotsky and his followers were expelled from the party and handed over to the secret police. On February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1929 Trotsky arrived under armed guard in Odessa and was deported to Turkey.

From October 1917 he only lived in the Soviet Union for twelve years before exile in Turkey. On July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1933 he sailed to France and settled in Barbizon but in June 1935 moved to Norway. He then was invited to stay in Mexico and sailed on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1936 to Tampico in Mexico and then on to Mexico City. Trotsky remained in Mexico City until his assassination on 21<sup>st</sup>, August 1940.

In exile he formed the Fourth International and abandoned left opposition in the various Communist Parties in the world as futile. The Fourth International (FI) was designed as an alternative for revolutionary socialists to compete with the established Communist Parties worldwide. It was launched in 1938 in France with thirty delegates from eleven countries. Even with the most favourable conditions the project was an ambitious undertaking because many European countries were seeing the rise of fascism, and an extremely difficult environment for democratic parties to exist let alone a revolutionary communist party. Patenaude in his book Trotsky describes Trotsky's attack on the Third International and advocating the formation of the new Fourth International relayed to his supporters at a rally of American Trotskyists in the Centre Hotel in New York on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1938,

*“The Bolshevik-Leninists, he continued were genuine Marxists, governed not by wishful thinking but by an objective evaluation of the march of events. Trotsky's analysis of those events, which lasted close to fifteen minutes, came across clearly, despite some hiss and the occasional crackle from the gramophone record. (Patenaude, 2009, p. 207)*

There was certainly no mistaking Trotsky's revolutionary optimism. The Communist International, he reminded his audience, had become a,

*“stinking cadaver”,*

*“The Fourth International had replaced it as the world party of socialist revolution Its victory in the coming revolution was assured.”*

It was inevitable that Trotsky would be the engine of this project, thus preserving his ideology and his ability to comment and steer this new international body on the world stage. Even before his exile he was commenting on political developments in other countries. An early example of his analysis of a revolutionary potential outside Russia is his 1925 work *“Where is Britain Going”*. This publication is interesting because he comments on Britain with its large, literate organised working class and a mature parliamentary democracy, a far cry from autocratic tsarist Russia with its huge illiterate population and tiny working class.

In his chapter *The Question of Revolutionary Force*, he comments,

*“It is necessary to understand clearly that if a real Labour Government came to power in Britain even in the most ultra-democratic manner, a civil war would be revealed as inevitable. The Labour Government brought would be compelled to suppress the opposition of the privileged classes. It would be impossible to do this by means of the old State apparatus, the old police, the old courts of justice, the old military force. A Labour Government brought into being in parliamentary fashion would be compelled to create for itself new revolutionary organs, based on the trades unions and on the workers organisations generally.”* (Trotsky, 1925, p. 71).

Trotsky advocated the transfer of power from a long-established parliament, historically defended by a civil war, the execution of the monarch and a brief republic, to trades councils. The publication of this pamphlet was met with derision in Britain and Trotsky was accused of being out of touch with British politics.

Militant however disagreed, they adhered to Trotsky’s analysis.

Ted Grant, writing in *The Unbroken Thread*, could not be more supportive and describes “Where is Britain Going” (Trotsky, 1925) as Trotsky’s,

“*masterpiece*”. (Grant, 1989, p. 433),

### **3.5 Trotsky advocates Entryism**

Trotsky created the tactic of entryism in 1933 as a means of growing many small Trotskyist groups within mass socialist parties. They would then leave, when large enough, to have an independent existence. Pierre Frank, secretary to Leon Trotsky from 1932-1933 and a central leader of the Fourth International through to 1979, describes the formation of the policy of Entryism,

*“In our efforts to move towards a stronger organisation, we were to pass through a stage in which the Trotskyist group would temporarily lose its organisational independence by entering a mass working class party. Trotsky himself raised the question of the Ligue Communiste entering SFIO (the French Socialist Party). The move was decided on in September-October of 1934. This policy, called entryism, was subsequently extended to other countries. At first it aroused a great deal of disagreement within our internal organisation, even causing splits. It was with a great deal of resistance that the October 1934 International Plenum ratified the policy of the French Trotskyists entering the SFIO. Since then, the majority of the organisation has considered this tactic admissible. For an entire initial period, the activity of the Bolshevik-Leninist group in the SFIO was conducted with remarkable political clarity”.* (Bensaid, 2010, p. 41)

During Trotsky’s remaining years he did not see success for this tactic in Britain because of the small numbers of his followers, perhaps only a few hundred. This controversial tactic had been launched, virtually unnoticed by the British Labour Party.

### 3.6 British Trotskyism

The assassination, of Trotsky, in 1940 and the death of Lenin in 1924 removed the living link with the architects of the Russian Revolution. From now on the heritage of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky would be preserved in their writings and speeches. Trotskyism would be developed and applied without the “old man” and his prolific literary output.

In Britain in 1944 Trotskyists unified forming the Revolutionary Communist Party, affiliated to the Fourth International, and published Socialist Appeal with the help and support of Ted Grant, who was later to become the theoretician for the Militant Tendency. The Fourth International published a highly contentious list of revolutionary blueprints which became fertile ground for the many differences of opinion amongst Trotskyists in Britain and caused the proliferation of groups through splits and the formation of new organisations, in opposition to the Fourth International.

Callaghan, (Callaghan, 1984, pp. 207-209) constructs three charts mapping out the complex splitting and fusing of Trotskyist groups in Britain. Almost all the splits were concerned with irreconcilable differences in theory mainly focused on the analysis of the economic status of the Soviet Union and the countries in Eastern Europe under Soviet control. By 1971 there were approximately 20 groups claiming to have inherited the true spirit of Trotsky in the British context.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), formerly the International Socialists (IS) although the largest of the groups, had split from the Fourth International because its theoretician, Tony Cliff, published his theory of State Capitalism. His theory with regards to the Soviet Union and its satellite countries argued that they had ceased to be Socialist states, but that their economies were administered through the state apparatus with

little or no worker involvement or ownership. The SWP was successful in recruiting students but found it difficult to break into the trade union movement in competition with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).

The SWP created “rank- and- file groups” or grassroots movements in the 1960s, in different occupational groups, in opposition to existing trade union structures, apart from shop stewards who they saw as the vanguard of the workers.

Rank and File movements go back to the 1920s McIlroy describes them as,

*“less successful than is sometimes assumed. Member’s dissatisfaction and periodic rebellion were recurring features of British trade unionism. However, support for ‘rank and file’ movements was sporadic uneven and temporary. Sustained organisation was typically motivated, moulded and controlled by the Communist Party. Its hegemony was far from benign and remained at some distance from Marxist ideas of revolutionary practice. The lessons are often negative.”* (McIlroy, 2016, p. 31)

It is interesting that the SWP developed ‘rank- and- file movements’ when the CPGB had abandoned them in favour of broad alliance organisations or Broad Lefts. In most trade unions, Broad Lefts were successful in capturing many trade union posts and projecting progressive policies through the unions’ national conference decisions.

The attraction for the SWP with the ‘rank- and- file’ groups was that their bulletins and pamphlets could portray the union leadership as out of touch and far too powerful, frequently quelling shop floor militancy. If the leadership had a strong CPGB influence even better, the struggle could then have an extra dimension of attacking Stalinism in its modern form. An extra attraction of the creation of ‘rank- and- file’ groups was that they were embryonic structures and could be adapted and merged into workers



organisations in a revolutionary situation such as a prolonged General Strike. This was soviet building in action.

The Trotskyist movement is often ridiculed for this lack of unity amongst small groups, ignoring the obvious advantages of becoming one organisation affiliated to the Fourth International. Had Trotsky lived longer could he have consolidated the Fourth International and prevented the splits in Britain? The answer is probably yes but whether this would have held after his natural death is another matter.

Militant Tendency alone avoided, by and large, major schisms as it grew from a small group in the 1960s to approximately 8,000 members during the 1980s overtaking its rival on the Trotskyist left, the SWP. Militant Tendency was politically successful in its tactic of entryism in the Labour Party. Its timing was right with large numbers of inactive party wards serviced by a dwindling number of Labour Party full time salaried agents.

During the 1960s, it was thought by the Labour Party that the medium of television directly communicating with the electorate, was a new and attractive way of replacing the old public hustings. It was suggested that canvassing door to door was obsolete and the electoral wards only needed a modicum of financing at election periods to deliver the candidates election address. Militant populated this decaying structure whilst other Trotskyist groups organised in the university campus and in the trade union movement.

*“Since they first adopted the practise during the student and Vietnam war movements during the second half of the 1960s the demonstration had become a hallmark of their political style” Shipley is describing the main activity of International Socialists (IS) and the International Marxist Group (IMG).” (Shipley, 1976)*

Successful and viable policies will inevitably raise the morale of the membership and deflect them from internal divisions as experienced by Militant. Conversely other Trotskyist groups failed to make headway from their student members to the trade union movement. Alan Johnson Labour MP, former Cabinet Minister, and former General Secretary of the Post Office Workers Union, describes how as a young working-class man he viewed the Trotskyist left with this encounter with a paper seller,

*“What the WRP and News Line highlighted for me was the extraordinary arrogance and intolerance of the far left. When challenged on how few followers the WRP had among us working class council house dwellers, the very people he purported to champion, Richard attributed the lack of interest to “false consciousness”. (Johnson, 2014, p. 145)*

Splits within Trotskyists groups were many and damaging allowing Militant an almost free run in the left spaces in the Labour Party and trade union movement.

The periods of electoral activity bring into stark relief the work of Militant as opposed to other groups, now called ‘sects’ by Militant, like the Socialist Workers Party who stood candidates in local and national elections against Labour.

Militant could reward its members with a seat on the local council but the SWP could only offer three weeks of hard work and then derision as their vote could only attract 1 - 2 % of the electorate. The chasm was wide and deep and led to members of other far left groups burning out, never to return to politics ever again.

The SWP made gains in membership from successes like ‘Rock against Racism’ but soon lost them in the grind of failed elections and early morning paper rounds. Militant Tendency did not have the British franchise of the Fourth International but still was the largest of the Trotskyist groups operating in Britain. It is curious that affiliation to the

Fourth International did not seem to be a priority for Militant. It was not constrained by any other outside body and was free to develop its own ideology in the specific conditions in Britain.

However, Militant in December 1981 in its pamphlet (Shipley, 1983, pp. 11-12) "Militant – What We Stand For" written by Peter Taaffe lists 19 demands. It is the omissions which are interesting as there is no mention of a transfer of power from parliament to workers organisations, only a muted demand for the abolition of the Monarchy and the House of Lords, a common demand in Republican circles outside the Marxist revolutionary movement.

Lenin's key revolutionary demand "All power to the Soviets" has been hidden from view and Trotsky's advice to Britain to replace Parliament with workers organisations is not visible within Militant's programme. It could be argued that deep entryism by Militant in the Labour Party could not co-exist with Trotsky's insistence on Soviets rather than Parliaments. Militant was building on the two MPs it already had, Terry Fields and David Nellist, and to argue in their paper that this would be replaced by Soviets was not credible. In Liverpool however Militant soon began transforming a District Labour Party into a soviet without proclaiming it as such.

### **3.7 Entryism.**

Trotsky created the tactic of entryism in 1933 by entering mass socialist parties as individual members. They would then recruit within the host party then leave when large enough to have a viable independent existence. Entryism is protected by a vanguard party structure with its need for secrecy and security, overseen by a full-time revolutionary leadership. The tactic of entryism was and is controversial as it does

depart from the spirit and text of Marx and Engel's Manifesto of the Communist Party, the final paragraph of which reads,

*"The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win."* (Engels, 1848, p. 96).

The paragraph above is a declaration of a Communist party working in the open and that they,

*"disdain to conceal their views and aims."*

I quoted the text above to Peter Taaffe during an interview with him in 2018, and asked him how does this passage fit with entryism? He replied,

*"Entryism, as applied to us in particular, the first of many issues in the Labour Party of the recent period of the last 50 years, was coined in order to give the impression of a small, sinister group entering the Labour Party to take it over. The argument was that we were not really adherents to the Labour Party, its aims and objectives. I'm quoting here the terminology the right uses. We dispute that. We joined the Labour Party in good faith because it was a federal party; it had the trade unions. If you talk about entryism, why now under Blair or under the present leader Jeremy Corbyn does the Co-op party have its own structure, have its own NEC, its own conference, and yes sends delegates to that conference? That has existed in the past in the original basis of the Labour Party."* (Appendix 24, Page 440)

In the case of Militant, it is obvious from reading the minutes of their Blackburn meetings (Appendix1) that the ideology of Marxism and Trotskyism were only fully and freely discussed to an invited audience and not openly to the mass of the workers.

This is incompatible with the final paragraph of the Communist Manifesto which I have quoted above. The opening line of which is,

*“The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims.”*

Marx and Engels could not have been more explicit, but Taaffe above does not address the issue of the contradiction between entryism and open activity promoting Marxism. He digresses into other areas not relevant to the question put to him, claiming that the right-wing elements had used the word entryism to imply a conspiracy by Militant to take over the Labour Party. He failed to mention that he himself has written about the application of entryism in his article “Entryism” published in 1973, the entire article is available on *MARXIST.NET* and an abridged version in Shipley 1983. Taaffe is far from guarded about the use of the word entryism. Below is a key quote from this article.

*“We can be justifiably proud of our achievements. But the real history of the tendency is only just beginning. We are only at the start of real entry work with the outline of those conditions laid down by Trotsky just beginning to take shape.”*

(Shipley, 1983, p. 82)

Militant did take over portions of the Labour Party where it was strong enough, for example the Labour Party Young Socialists and the Liverpool District Labour Party. Taaffe also argues that the Co-op party was an affiliate with some independence in a federal structure and Militant should be viewed in a similar way within the Labour Party.

However, the Co-op party has an identical constitution to the Labour Party apart from its specific autonomy in its retail and wholesale trading. It is highly unlikely that the Labour party would afford Militant this federated status with a clause giving a specific degree of autonomy on the issue of revolutionary Marxist activity.

I put Peter Taaffe's argument, that Militant was no different from other groups i.e., Tribune and the Co-op Party but that the only reason it was expelled was that it was better organised than the right of the party, to Lord Blunkett in an interview with him in 2019.

*"I think this is fantasy land, the RSL the Revolutionary Socialist League and the whole intent of Militant was and was declared, after their expulsion by many of their leading members to have been an endeavour to enter and take over the Labour Party within an entirely separate agenda and set of values and programme and although they hid that till sometime following the mass expulsions in 1986. Subsequently I think many of them just came clean and said yes we were, we had entirely our own agenda, we were a Trotskyite movement, namely we used cells within the Labour Party in order to be able take over branches and constituency parties in the usual Trotskyite fashion and that we had an entirely different intended outcome to the Labour Party's agreed policies." (Appendix 14 page 345)*

Lord Blunkett is clearly stating in this interview that expelled members after 1986 "came clean" and owned up to being members of an entryist group. The Communist Manifesto is an open assault on capitalism and the ruling classes in a public proclamation. Trotsky advocated a temporary suspension of this declaration in favour of a covert project born out of a failure of Trotskyist groups to grow. This now raises the question of a Trotskyist group for reasons of membership growth having to subsume,

in part or in whole, its real identity so it can remain in the host party. Does this now mean that this covert activity makes it impossible to retain its revolutionary Marxist credentials because its policies have been subordinated to take account of the policies of the host party? Can Militant describe themselves as a Marxist revolutionary tendency when their mode of operation directly contradicts Marx's Communist Manifesto in its rallying call in its final paragraph?

The covert membership growth of Militant took priority over the clear and mass dissemination of Marxist ideas. It did, however, openly sell their weekly paper and many other pamphlets but this was then prohibited at Labour Party meetings when Militant failed to register as an affiliate. Their members who gained positions within the Labour Party, including MPs, were severely constrained and inhibited by watchful critics who could refer them to a disciplinary body of the party at any time. They could not act as Marxist tribunes of the workers in parliament but had to be extremely careful not to attract attention which could prove that they had links with Militant.

In an interview with Neil Kinnock in 2019, he explained that the Labour party led by Michael Foot had already called for affiliates to register and be approved by the party, including Militant.

*“Because the way in which it conducted itself, under the terms of its own policy, programme, and philosophy, was simply not consistent with the constitution of the Labour Party. Straight forward as that. At no time did I or anybody else say ‘hey in the Labour Party you can’t have an organisation’. Specifically, in order to clarify that issue, Michael made the proposal for the establishment of the register of affiliated organisations and after that was established Militant was in any case, not registered and should have ceased operation in the Labour Party. I would have made the*

*argument even before then that Militant was transgressing against the constitution. But Labour is a live and let live Party. It's a "broad church" was the phrase widely employed. Michael then introduced, on the proposal of the National organiser David Hughes, that we have a register of affiliated organisations, and Militant of course, together with one or two others, was excluded from that register ". (Appendix 20 page 396)*

The register laid down the ground rules for affiliation to the Labour Party, but Militant was singled out for special treatment, Eric Shaw explains,

*"Rather inconsistently, instead of suggesting that Militant, like all other groups, should be invited to apply for registration and judged by the above criteria, the authors stated 'it is our opinion that the Militant Tendency as presently constituted would not be eligible to be included on the proposed Register in the light of our findings" (Shaw, 1988, p. 231)*

Any notions Militant claimed of a quasi-affiliate status in the Labour party were quashed by this measure. Militant was now excluded and driven even further underground and therefore unable to openly sell its paper at party meetings. Militant had now to be more covert and more secretive and maintain a deeper form of entryism preventing its members from openly projecting their own strain of Trotskyism.

Apart from Militant it is important at this point to explain and describe the different ways in which Trotskyist Groups and individuals operated within the broad strategy of entryism. I have named and given them a description based on their different characteristics because they have been previously viewed as a homogenous group which they are not.



### **3.8 Collective Entryism**

Collective Entryism is where I describe how a relatively small party enters a mass party as recommended by the Fourth International for reasons of recruitment of members. This is achieved as a collective policy but of course entryists apply to join the mass party as individuals and do not reveal their existing membership of a political party or group. This is a temporary tactic until the covert smaller party is large enough to survive of its own accord. The optimum size at which separation occurs is debatable and unclear but it is likely that considerations of geographical spread and size of branches would be of critical importance. A comparison with the size of other political parties does not seem to be a consideration because their cadres were far more active than members of other parties.

Other considerations for leaving the host body apart from optimum size are political in that revolutionary conditions have intensified, and class conflict has surfaced through industrial and political unrest amongst the organised working class. The decision to leave is most likely because of the lack of reaction by the host reformist party and its slow response to political change. The need for an independent vanguard party is now the priority unhindered by electoral considerations within the host party. Other Revolutionary Groups are embedded on a long-term basis and are not tempted to leave by a short period of intensified class conflict.

They are also tempted to remain because it is financially beneficial. An example of this was the International Marxist Group which produced a paper called Socialist Challenge and was sold within the Labour Party as part of its entryist work, but it also joined in the work to elect Tony Benn as deputy leader of the Labour Party in 1981. It also produced badges for his campaign. The IMG explained their successful venture.

*“We sold the first lot in bulk at around 9p or 10p when they cost us 7p or 8p. Local Labour Party groups and trade unions can buy them in bulk. If they make money that is a good thing. If we do make a few pounds, the money will go back into running the newspaper. It will not it will not be used for Mr Benn’s campaign.”* (Baker, 1981, p. 80)

The minutes (Appendix 1 page 10), of a Preston, Militant branch meeting, describes in detail, about how money can be diverted from the Labour Party to Militant.

*“All money, P.Harris, received for conference, went straight (£40) to Fighting Fund as he stopped at a comrade’s house”.*

The minutes continue,

*“The sponsored walk (given as an example) in Blackburn by Peter is a good PR exercise. We can raise money at GMCs in this manner and then get it diverted”.*  
(Appendix 1 page 10).

This fund raiser and others contributed to an income of £500,000 as at October 1982.

### **3.8 Dual- Loyalty Entryrists**

Dual Loyalty entryrists are Labour Party members I have described as having been recruited by the entryist party but started political life as Labour Party members. During the operation of the proscribed list these recruits would not have been identified for exclusion because the proscribed list was designed to prevent entryism at the point of membership application by making enquiries about their suitability to become members. Because this type of entryist was already a Labour Party member detection was unlikely. According to the evidence given to the National Labour Party by Irene Buxton (Appendix 8) and Michael Gregory (page 91 of this thesis), the focus of Militant’s

recruitment was within the Labour party and it was successful. These members are first drawn in by agreeing to buy their newspaper and then a Militant member is assigned to recruit them by engaging in political discussion around the issues contained in the paper. Following favourable contact, the potential members are invited to attend Militant meetings. However, most of these recruits are first and foremost Labour Party members who may or may not believe that Militant is a fringe group within the family of the Labour Party like Tribune. Only after intensive education by Militant can they be confident that recruits are first and foremost members of Militant.

This is not just a test of loyalty but a necessity if Militant decide to leave the Labour Party, which in fact they did in 1992. The internal debate on leaving the Labour Party led to a minority who argued that the surge in membership was not managed properly in terms of political education and that many members would choose to remain in the Labour Party rather than form a new party. The minority who were later expelled from Militant were proved to be correct and the Socialist Party failed to persuade a large majority of Militant members to transfer to the new party.

The Dual-Loyalty, Entryists were a group of entryists in which the majority saw themselves as primarily Labour Party members as well as Militant members, but they did not expect to have to make a choice between them. Many such recruits had much to lose such as positions in the Labour Party structure at local, regional, or even national level. Some of these members were either local councillors or aspired to be councillors. Some aspired to be parliamentary candidates and had spent their adult life in the Labour Party and had developed a network of friends and comrades who they would have to explain away their involvement in a now openly declared entryist revolutionary party which for years had acted covertly and with duplicity.

Trotsky assumed that his entryist revolutionaries would politicise as many Labour Party members as possible, reach a certain size and then leave. He may not have expected that Labour Party members had deep roots and loyalties which Militant's political education had not totally eradicated.

Leaving the Labour party to form a new party has unhappy precedents such as the SDP who did not survive as an independent party, taking 27 MPs with them. For the many dual loyalists this was a lot to ask, and the majority chose to stay in the Labour Party where most remain today and are now being re-energised by Momentum.

### **3.10 Individual Entryism**

This is another form of entryism I am now categorising for the first time that hitherto has not been separated out and analysed because it is difficult to research and to quantify. Individual entryists apply to join a mass party, in this case study, the British Labour Party, after leaving a Revolutionary Party but retaining their core politics of the need for revolutionary socialism. Their reasons for leaving their former party or group are usually due to differences in policy or the ineffectiveness of working long hours in a small organisation, or they have been expelled. In some cases, the organisation has merged or split and shed members or simply has folded.

Individual entryists in the Labour Party form a significant group of members who over the years have grown in number due to the organisational exodus described above. Their influence goes beyond their individual work because they interconnect and network with others who reject democratic socialism and will ally themselves and work with other revolutionary socialists and collective entryists in the Labour Party.

Eric Heffer is an illustration of an individual entryist who played a significant role in the rise of Militant in Liverpool in the 1970s and 1980s. He was the MP for Liverpool,

Walton, a former Government Minister, and a member of the National Executive of the Labour Party. Heffer, according to his autobiography "Never a Yes Man" (Heffer, 1991), written shortly before his death, describes his political development and motives in a most candid form. There are many people in the Labour Party who have had similar political journeys, but his book explains in detail his reasons for joining the Labour Party after two episodes of involvement with revolutionary Marxist organisations.

Heffer joined the Labour Party, then resigned and joined the Communist Party of Great Britain aged seventeen citing the poor support for the Spanish International Brigade by Atlee, leader of the Labour Party. In 1948 he was expelled from the CPGB as he opposed the party's move to reform its policies which later became the programme, The British Road to Socialism. Heffer described himself as a Revolutionary Socialist and was opposed to the reformism of relying on parliament to deliver socialism. Six months later he joined the Labour Party, as an individual member. In 1954 he again resigned from the Labour Party and joined the Socialist Workers Federation, formerly the Federation of Marxist Groups which collapsed in 1957.

Heffer re-joined the Labour Party, his reasons for this are not entirely clear, the closest explanation is a passage in his autobiography.

*"For me re-joining the Labour Party meant involvement again in a genuine workers' party. The membership of the Toxteth Constituency was almost all working class, with dockers, building workers, seamen, boilermakers and labourers forming the overwhelming majority. There were a few white-collar workers, but only one or two intellectuals."* (Heffer, 1991, p. page 70)

He later became a Liverpool City Councillor and then an MP in 1964. His core belief was that the parliamentary road was not the only route and that strikes, demonstrations and extra-parliamentary activity were essential to achieve socialism.

Many individual entryists join the Labour Party, like Heffer, but were unable to settle in a revolutionary group but then become informal allies with collective entryists in the Labour Party. Quantifying the number of individual entryists is not possible but each time a revolutionary group either splits or disbands I would argue a sizeable proportion would enter the Labour Party. Their entry would have a significant impact on small wards with the likelihood of involvement with other individuals and groups.

### **3.11 Partial Entryism**

This form of entryism which I have described as Partial Entryism is practised by Revolutionary Groups who arrange for a selected number of their members to join a large host party but openly retaining their own organisation.

The advantage of this form of entryism is that it allows for covert members to recruit in the host party and agitate for the policies of the Revolutionary group. Unlike Militant their organisation title is overt for example International Marxist Group and would invite automatic expulsion from the Labour Party if their membership of the covert group could be proved. Their numbers are small, and they would not be capable of taking over a ward let alone a constituency party.

They also feed information from the host party to the Revolutionary group keeping it informed about political developments in the host party. However, if priorities change either politically or industrially, as it did during the Miners' strike, then the covert members may be withdrawn to engage in what would be described as a higher level of class struggle.

### 3.12 Vanguardism

Entryism is a secretive and covert form of penetration into a large host party, but it had to balance the need to avoid detection of the organisational structure, with the overriding aim of recruitment and dissemination of their political ideology.

The vanguard organisational structure was already operating in Trotskyist groups, not as a defence mechanism to avoid detection by officials of the host party but as a hang-over from the occupied countries of Europe and beyond. Entryism was created in the 1930s and so was easily grafted on to the existing organisational model of the vanguard party with its key features of a military style structure and limited internal dissent, staffed by a core of dedicated and committed professional revolutionaries. After the second world war entryism continued because the size of the groups were still very small and incapable of thriving independently. However, the threat from an occupying force had gone but the need to grow and avoid detection remained.

I have separated Vanguardism into two distinct political forms which I have called Early Vanguardism and New Vanguardism. The early vanguardism, of the Russian revolution, encountered repression and sought to protect itself from the violence of the state and had to make internal security a priority at the expense of internal democracy. The penalties for failing to secure the safety of the cadres were severe and brutal. The moral justification for this type of organisation is understandable and probably the only way it could have survived. The Bolsheviks in Russia were constantly threatened by the state as can be seen by the results of a survey of the delegates to their congress in July 1917.

*“Out of 175 delegates, who filled out a questionnaire, 110 had spent 245 years in prison, 10 delegates had spent 41 years at hard labour, 24 had spent 73 years in*

*penal settlements, 55 delegates had been in exile 127 years; 27 had been abroad for 89 years; 150 had been arrested 549 times.”* (Trotsky, 1932, p. 583)

Cadres needed to be reasonably educated and familiar with socialist writings and able to communicate these ideas to an illiterate working class and able to withstand all that the state could throw at them as described above. New vanguardism together with entryism however was used as an expedient for Trotsky's project of the Fourth International, started in 1938, and the need to grow the size of each National Revolutionary Group.

It is understandable that in the dictatorships in Europe up until 1945 there is a justification for the continuation of a vanguard structure on the lines of pre-revolutionary Russia in those countries suffering from state repression or occupation. However, to continue with this structure in the post war period and up to the present in western democracies is hard to defend. Given that the new justification for vanguardism is no longer survival in a totalitarian police state but protecting the tactic of entryism, which secretly recruits members from the host party.

New vanguardism is an entirely different political phenomenon, I would argue that it is not a continuation of early vanguardism because the conditions in which it operated have gone. New Vanguardism has become a completely different political form. It was borne out of the need to gain membership growth with no extreme external threat other than expulsion from the host party. The physical threat level to this type of organisation is now non-existent. Cadres could operate free from intimidation but had to be vigilant so as not to provide evidence of being part of a separate organisation and risk expulsion. New vanguardism is no longer an essential form of revolutionary organisation but is a necessary political structure if entryism is to survive and avoid detection



by the host party. The secrecy of a new vanguard structure is now a defence mechanism to safeguard the entryist party against moves to expel its members, making it difficult to prove the organisational link between a member and the covert party. New vanguardism will have no hesitation in using the courts, a limited option in early vanguardism, to impede the normal disciplinary procedures of the host party which is hampered by lack of hard evidence which will survive the rigours of a judicial review with its insistence on natural justice. New vanguardism is specifically designed to deny the host party any documentation which could be used in a court of law. In addition to this, entryists may have access to the host party's internal structures and papers up to the level of the NEC and could supply confidential information and documents which would undermine the host party's case in law.

The host party is presented with a dilemma of pursuing lengthy and expensive attempts to expel the entryists or simply to try to minimise their influence through organisation, education, debate, and argument. At a crucial stage in the development of Militant in the 1970s it was gifted a Labour leader in Michael Foot who had himself been expelled and was open to charges of hypocrisy if he moved to expel entryists. However, Michael Foot's successor Neil Kinnock almost suffered the same fate, but this was not so well publicised, because of his views on nuclear disarmament. He explains this in an interview in 2019.

*"The party secretary, because he was sympathetic to me as an individual - he thought there was "a lot of work left in this boy" - defended me in front of the executive when there was talk of chucking me out of the party at the age of 18." (Appendix 20 page 394)*

As can be seen from successive party leaders above, expulsions were never going to be palatable even when necessary.

New vanguardist cadres, are now able to agitate amongst literate and in some cases highly educated members of the host party. The two obstacles to the growth of the Bolshevik Party in Russia, the police state and the illiteracy of the workers no longer exists today. New vanguardists are no longer developing good organisation in a political party or a trade union where none previously existed, but actively seeking to transform organisations from a pluralist to a vanguard revolutionary structure.

Where the new vanguardists have significant numbers in an organisation there is inevitably going to be a period of disruption and turmoil. Where the early vanguardists were working to improve or create an organisation, the new vanguardists are now working in established structures which already were well organised and effective. The frequent result was disruption to a fully functioning organisation making the organisation less effective and less unified. There are frequent cases where the new vanguardists through constant opposition and lengthy contributions wear down a Labour Party or trade union branch. The new vanguardists are prepared to disable the branch and then walk into the corpse. This now has the effect of paralysing the branch for a period and then a re-constituted branch emerging with a new leadership but with an alienated rump of the membership who cease to attend meetings.

Robert Kilroy-Silk MP wrote a political diary of his experiences in his new constituency of Knowsley North, previously he was the MP for Ormskirk which disappeared due to boundary changes. The diary is important because it describes in detail how Militant drove away traditional Labour Party members from the constituency. This quote from

his book gives a flavour of the atmosphere created by a determined group who strive for dominance and are prepared to pay the price of a loss of membership.

*“Not being political fanatics, and having their own lives to lead, my supporters do not attend meetings as diligently as the Militants do. This has to be admitted. But it also has to be said that when they do attend, they have to brazen out an aggressively hostile atmosphere, endure being hissed at, heckled and jeered at every time they speak, especially if what they say is not in line with Militant dogma. At times, they are even physically intimidated. This applies to the elderly women as much as the men..... Indeed, there are many good loyal and long serving members of the party who have stopped coming to meetings altogether because of the way they are treated by their ‘comrades’.” (-Silk, 1986, p. 8)*

One could argue that this transition is justifiable if the new leadership is better organisationally, however I am pointing out that regardless of the outcome, disruption will occur with a consequential loss of membership and smaller attendances at meetings.

### **3.13 Early Vanguardism**

Lenin created the vanguard party in Russia prior to the Russian Revolution of 1917 out of pragmatism, he had to adapt to two problems which prevented the successful expansion of the Bolshevik Party. The Tsarist secret service infiltrating the party and the illiteracy of the Russian industrial workers. The leadership became highly organised professional and full time and almost impenetrable. It was also educated and well read. It was in effect a military structure and had to be capable of driving the revolution when the conditions were favourable. The concept of a Vanguard Party emerged from necessity and idealism. The concept of an educated middle class giving a helping hand to an oppressed class is not new.

The great movement of the slave abolitionists was borne out of moral outrage and was driven by an educated middle class organising to assist another class who were incapable of liberating themselves.

The early Russian vanguardist revolutionaries I would argue were motivated by the same moral outrage of observing a working class so exploited, downtrodden and illiterate, that a distinction between their condition and slavery was simply academic. The cadre's involvement in political agitation carried a high risk of imprisonment, internal exile, or execution. A vanguardist structure can be justified if there is no other way, such a structure imposes a strict discipline so that normal internal democracy is curtailed.

The original justification for a vanguard party was,

(a) Protection from arrest and imprisonment, a must for internal organisational security in an autocratic police state.

(b) The need for an educated cadre force which could educate, inform and organise an illiterate working class.

This new vanguard party led initially by Trotsky, were no longer operating in Tsarist Russia but in the 1930s and 1940s, were still operating in some fascist or, occupied countries. Trotsky, in exile up until his murder in 1940, was not convinced that the vanguard party should be abandoned. Penetration was feared by the secret service of the Soviet Union the GPU under Stalin's direction.

Trotsky, by advocating entryism, had tied this policy to the vanguard structure because of the need for secrecy and to protect itself, not just from police spies, but from the prying eyes of the host party and the threat of expulsions from it. Trotsky, by

advocating entryism had constructed a firm organisational bond between entryism and vanguardism.

Daniel Bensaid, however feared that,

*“The revolutionary organisation itself, runs the danger of becoming dependent on- and internalizing the culture of-the very body that was meant to contribute to its strength. As for the members of the party where entryism is carried out, entryism nurtures a climate of distrust, rumours and disloyalty-creating a whole host of obstacles to political understanding and possible future convergence.”* (Bensaid, 2010, p. 77)

Vanguardism had now taken a new form as the protector of entryism and the creation of an army of cadres operating within social, democratic parties in a post war world. New vanguard cadres were no longer engaged in organising downtrodden workers on their knees but challenging established trades union structures and agitating amongst workers to set up new rank and file organisations seeking to transform the existing organisation, and in many cases, disrupting it. New vanguard cadres had long ceased to organise the overthrow of autocratic monarchies, but in the UK, the overthrow of a long-established parliamentary system of government created after a civil war in which the autocratic monarch was deposed and executed and the establishment of a republic for a brief period.

### **3.14 The New Vanguardists**

New vanguard cadres had changed from informing and educating an illiterate working class, to organising literate workers, some educated up to university degree standard. New vanguard cadres were now a self-appointed elite force of professional revolutionaries able to quote and argue their case for Trotskyism pointing out the weaknesses

of democratic socialism in their host parties. New vanguard cadres were now expected to recruit members of the host party into the covert party without attracting undue attention from party officials or the media. New vanguard cadres were now committed to selling their house publication as widely as possible.

It is important at this stage to examine the status of the cadres who were directly employed by Militant, estimated at three hundred at its peak according to Michael Crick, investigative journalist.

“At the time of writing Militant has over 300 people in the ‘full-timer’ position, many more than it has acknowledged publicly in the past few years (64). This compares well with established political parties. The Labour Party has about 200 full-time staff in all, adding together those in London, its regional offices and the constituencies. The Social Democrats now have more than 50.” (Crick, 1986, p. 123).

In 1982 it was reported by Militant that it had 133 full-time organisers, this is in addition to their HQ staff (Appendix1, page18). There seems to be a clear demarcation between the Militant workers in their head office and printing works in London and their workers in the regions. The head office staff were regularly employed even though on low wages but with contracts of employment which did not prevent an expected weekly contribution to Militant funds. The regional full-time cadres appear to have a loose contractual relationship with Militant with evidence that many were claiming state benefit and receiving only expenses from Militant. Unlike Labour Party Regional staff with regular pay and conditions and their own trades union representation, Militant’s regional staff were irregulars at the mercy of their central committee. There is no evidence of Militant’s regional staff having any trades union representation as this would have been seen by Militant as an unwelcome intrusion into their internal affairs.

Militant's regional cadres were prevented, by the strictures of entryism, to exercise any influence or a dissenting voice to the leadership for fear of internal discipline.

The regional cadres were active on the ground, but their function was to relay central committee decisions to the regions not to have independent thought or give a voice to resistance to central committee decisions. The vanguard structure is a military structure where orders are enacted with no room for dissent. Evidence for this is in the minutes of a Blackburn meeting of Militant where it was reported that,

*“on instructions from HQ the Branch is to split into two autonomous branches - A and B.”* (Appendix 1 page 6)

The word instruction was firm and clearly, a military style order.

### **3.15 Militant and Vanguardism**

Militant's need for secrecy was even more necessary if meetings of their Executive were to frankly discuss and organise their entryism in the Labour party. The threat to their very existence was publicity which exposed the true nature of their vanguard organisation.

It is revealed in the minutes of a meeting of Militant in Preston, Lancashire on the 12.11.1982.

*“Members reminded of military style leadership of MT. Examples given of Chile - failure there. Comrades need to prepare themselves in long term for possible use of force – possibly M.Gregory to give a lead off on use of violence - a socialist perspective - how can it be justified: how can we organise”.* (Appendix 1 page 11).

This tight discipline is extended to individual members thought in need of expulsion for not being up to standard. This extract from the same minutes is revealing.

*“A special meeting to be convened to decide on S.Bush, could be expelled from group, certainly he has to be disciplined in some way - his attitude is bad, lazy, not paying enough subs, not coming to all meetings, not taking his responsibilities seriously”.*

In a separate set of minutes notice of a mass contact meeting is reported but with the condition that

*“all those not a security risk will be there”.* (Appendix 1 page 19)

Militant’s editorial board was in effect a politburo and comprised of full-time workers who made day to day decisions on policy which would then appear in the weekly edition of Militant. The monthly meetings of the executive committee could only rubber stamp policies that already appeared in print in weekly copies of Militant. Internal matters would not be made public but could be raised at the executive level without the fear of a reversal of policy. Militant had a very tight secretive vanguard structure because it was conscious of the need to maintain its public stance that it was a weekly paper only and not an independent revolutionary party.

The problem that Militant had with vanguardism is that it was forced to be tighter and more secretive as the Labour Party became more pro-active against them leading up to the expulsion of the editorial board on 23 February 1983 at the meeting of the Labour Party NEC Peter Taaffe explains in an interview in 2018,

*“we were visible at the Labour Party conferences and so on, and they calculated that a lot of these Militant supporters are good young people, nice young people, but if we cut off the head – the leadership – then the body will die. So, they decided to expel me along with four other members of the Militant Editorial Board: Ted Grant, Keith Dickenson, Clare Doyle and Lynn Walsh, two of whom are in the building at*



*the moment, and they thought that was it. However, our biggest gains actually came after that. They came in Liverpool with the selection of Terry Fields as a parliamentary candidate and his subsequent election as an MP; with the selection in Bradford North of Pat Wall, a son of Liverpool, a tremendous orator and speaker; it came in relation to Dave Nellist in Coventry South-East, who also built up a colossal reputation.” (Appendix 24, Page 437)*

However, it did not reduce their membership, quite the reverse, and in Liverpool it was at its most successful, in terms of growth.

Vanguardism within Militant was now having to reconcile its rapid and successful taking of power in the Liverpool Labour Party and the Liverpool City Council with pluralist traditions in large parts of the local labour movement. When confronted over policy issues, Militant and its vanguard structure would simply freeze. It would wait for either a change of line or more often a call for more effort in explaining their position and then winning over the opposition. This was at its most acute when the City Council made the entire workforce redundant buying time and building more pressure on central government. Most of the unions disagreed and Militant’s vanguard structure froze, it was not able to persuade, and it could not compel, pluralist trade union structures to accept their strategy and agree to be made redundant for the greater cause of the fight against the government. Militant confused sacking the workers with a strike and were surprised when this was pointed out to them by Peter Cresswell, secretary of NALGO and the JSSC. in an interview in 2019 with Peter Cresswell,

*“The way Hatton and Byrne put the case forward was that when we were all made redundant, the council would continue running, well we would all be laid off, but they wanted us to carry out essential services, such as residential homes, that sort of*

*thing and various other essential services. We made it clear we had no intention of doing that, it wasn't like a strike where you had exemptions, this was them, sacking us. If we were sacked, we were out the door. I think that shook them really.”* (Appendix 16 page 364)

A change of line from the editorial board was not forthcoming as it would have required a very public denunciation of the Militant led City council, instead the Militant Vanguard structure continued to freeze, only to be overtaken by events outside of their control. The Liverpool deficit budget experience, documented later in this thesis, showed that a modern vanguard structure in a pluralist society is unable to govern because it cannot immobilise the opposition and cannot compromise and admit its mistakes even when they are catastrophic ones.

I have continued to use the word vanguardists rather than new vanguardists in the application of their methods in the post war era simply because this description has been used for the first time and is unfamiliar to the reader. I use the term new vanguardists rather than vanguardist in this thesis only when differentiating between the two terms.

### **3.16 New Vanguardism and Secrecy, the Blackburn Mole**

Militant was growing rapidly in the early 1980s so much so that some senior figures in Militant were getting worried that the vanguard structure was being diluted and members were not being trained and educated to a high enough standard. In the push for membership growth at a fast pace, vanguardism risks disaffected recruits becoming moles because their training has been rushed. Unlike the early vanguardists who were extremely careful who they were recruiting because of police spies, the new vanguard structure of Militant was now prioritising growth at the expense of a carefully nurtured

cadre force. Michael Gregory was a new member to the Blackburn Labour Party who then joined Militant, in the summer of 1982 went to see Jack Straw, the local MP,

*“He explained that he was profoundly disturbed by what he had discovered about the Tendency. It was a ‘party within a party’ maintained rigid discipline over its members, siphoned off funds collected for good causes, like the miners – and was working hard to get rid of me.” (Straw, 2012, p. 148)*

Michael Gregory agreed to be a mole and below is a confidential letter from Jack Straw to the Labour Party’s General Secretary Jim Mortimer on this sensitive matter which eventually did appear in papers presented to the NEC. Michael Gregory also provided minutes of Militant meetings in Blackburn and Preston which are summarised in the pages below and full copies are contained in (Appendix1).

JACK STRAW, M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

CONFIDENTIAL

26.1.83

Dear Jim,

I enclose a report written by a member of my S.M.C. who has just resigned as a member of Militant.

As you will see, the report is very revealing indeed about Militant. I can vouch for his veracity incidentally, and can give you some of the background sometime as well.

I have already given Michael Fort a copy, and he knows that I am sending his copy to you. I should however be grateful if you would treat the document as strictly confidential to yourself, for the time being. But I should be happy to talk to

you about whether an edited  
version, omitting the chap's name  
& address, & the material which  
is strictly internal to the Blackburn  
C.P., might be more widely  
circulated. But I'm not sure  
that it would do the Party much  
good if it got into the Press.

Yours ever,

John Shaw

The above letter was later to appear in NEC papers and then made public when they were deposited in the archives of the People's History Museum in Manchester.

Eight members of Militant in the Blackburn Labour Party were put forward in January 1984 for expulsion at a meeting of the Blackburn GMC with the information supplied by Gregory. (Appendix 1). The meeting was barracked outside by busloads of Militants from Liverpool. They also entered the building and the meeting room and were only removed when the police were called. The meeting voted to expel six of the eight accused by a two to one majority.

On 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1984, the NEC voted fourteen to twelve to confirm the expulsions. The process had taken almost two years of time and energy diverted from the normal activities of this constituency party.

I have secured copies of material collected by the Blackburn mole in (Appendix 1), from a large quantity of unsorted material deposited in the Museum of Labour History in Manchester the complete copies are contained in Appendix 1. I have attempted to extract important political and organisational points from these minutes of Militant meetings in the Blackburn and surrounding areas. The organisational references are also important because they paint a picture of what life was like inside the Militant organisation. The notes below are a brief synopsis of these minutes of the Militant meetings for a more complete picture please read the full minutes in Appendix 1.

### **Blackburn Branch Militant meeting 12.12.1982**

Finance - Target was exceeded by 33 percent which shows a commitment by members to maintain and finance a sustainable structure. Use of Full-Timers - a member was to be trained before becoming a full-timer but advised to remain on state benefit. This was a use of state of benefit, which if exposed, would seriously embarrass the

Labour Party. Reference to an Asian Brotherhood and to recruit even if religion is a feature.

### **Militant Tendency Blackburn Branch Meeting 9.1.1983**

Because the Blackburn branch has now 17 members it has been instructed by the party centre to split into two branches, it appears that geographical spread is important to them as it is laying down roots at a more local level. However, there was “strong dissension” to this decision but no explanation for this.

There is an unusual reference to a private meeting the day after where it was suggested that a member be expelled because “his political consciousness was destructive to other, newer comrades.”

The expulsion procedure was then laid out but the grounds for expulsion seem highly irregular. There is a record of caucus meetings prior to a LPYS meeting and a GMC meeting. A reference is made to a mass canvass in the Edge Hill constituency in Liverpool, this is because a Militant is standing in a parliamentary bye-election which shows that Militant concentrate their efforts where a Militant is standing. The Militant candidate was Terry Harrison who turned a Labour seat into a Liberal gain with their candidate polling over 60% of the vote. It begs the question of the effectiveness of a mass canvass of Militant supporters brought in from the North West with targets for the sale of Militant and the recruitment of members taking precedent over canvassing for votes.

In a similar campaign previously, Terry Harrison, managed to lose against the Conservative candidate where the constituency was the entire City in the election of a Member of the European Parliament.

### **Preston Branch Meeting 22.11.1982**

Although this branch meeting of Militant is outside Blackburn it does cover many political positions held by Militant and its contents are self-explanatory. However, one salient point is made, that of the position of Militant candidates for parliament who have all denied any organisational links to Militant and it appears that their security is of major importance.

Another important point is the statement “Members are reminded of military style leadership of MT.” The vanguard structure is spelt out here and there can be no doubt Militant intend to maintain strict discipline.

### **Militant Meeting Blackburn Branch 28.09.1982**

These minutes are interesting because they give a snapshot of the national membership of Militant in Nov 81– 2056, Aug 82– 3179, Sept 1982-3267 growth appears steady but out of every 112 new members of the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS) 12 joined Militant which shows why Militant is so dominant in the LPYS.

### **Meeting Lancashire Aggregate of Militant 20.10.1982**

This meeting covers the branches within the county of Lancashire, excluding the cities, and as such gives a comprehensive picture of the work of Militant across a wide geographical area.

It appears that Militant are preparing themselves for some limited expulsions but expect,

*“it will make no difference.”*

From the minutes it shows that even if their full timers are expelled this will release them from attending Labour Party meetings, which will “be a blessing”. The minutes



name Lawrence Coates as their NEC contact and he is supplying them with inside information.

### **Militant Meeting Blackburn Branch 24.10.1982**

Militant are now recording 138 full time organisers. A report from L. Coates, Militant's contact on NEC matters has named Straw as a leading member behind the expulsions. Militant have directed members to ease off Labour Party business and recruit more members. This is an example of Militant putting recruitment ahead of their political work.

### **Broad analysis of Minutes of Militant Meetings.**

1. The meetings take the format of a well organised political party in terms of work in trades unions, the Labour Party and in the community.
2. The Finances feature in the meetings as very important and there is evidence of the siphoning of money from other sources, but in the main they are self-financing and expect a high degree of commitment even from the unemployed.
3. Militant are placing importance on full-timers as the backbone of Militant, but it appears that this has been aided by persons on state benefit in whole or in part with expenses.
4. The organisation is not structured with its primary aim to sell its paper but is a fully functioning independent political party.
5. The importance and security of its Parliamentary candidates is vital, and members are reminded that there can be no organisational link to Militant and members are expected to understand that Parliamentary candidates will deny their membership of Militant.

6. Members are reminded that they are in a military structure with a strict hierarchy and that total commitment is demanded of them.

In an interview with Peter Taaffe 2018 I said that I had copies of the above minutes and that it showed beyond doubt that they were the minutes of a political party running in parallel with the Labour party. His reply was,

*“We dispute that is the case. From your point of view of what you are claiming and Jack Straw, we were a party within a party. But my contention is many other organisations had minutes, collected money, had this kind of discipline, they were organised, but I repeat they were not as well organised as us, because of the political ideas that we had. If you’re going to combat an organisation, and after all this is a broad party, it’s not a narrow party, it’s not a communist party in which the parameters are quite clear, its doctrines are quite clear, you say this is what you signed up for, this is a broad formation, with different trends and tendencies within it. Why do you think we were allowed to operate as the Militant Tendency?”* (Appendix 24, page 441)

### **3.17 Democratic Socialism, as opposed to Vanguardism.**

Whilst Trotskyists were convinced of the need to eliminate the state and replace it with soviets, the Communist Parties of Western Europe were not convinced this was any longer necessary or desirable. Democratic socialism argues that socialism in whole, or in part, can be achieved in a capitalist state without violence by democratic means and with a democratic party which is open and transparent. The revolutionary Trotskyist parties would argue that you need a vanguard party with a highly centralised structure, and be aware that the capitalist state could if threatened, react violently and abolish or suspend democratic institutions.

In the specific case of Liverpool, the two ideologies collided, disagreeing on the best way to protect the working class of Liverpool from Conservative policies of low rates, low taxes and in favour of private sector growth and low public spending. Militant was still adhering to a highly centralised vanguard party entering the Labour Party whilst the mainstream CPGB, in complete contrast was developing, through its programme of (CPGB, 1978) “The British Road to Socialism”, a democratic road to socialism.

First published in 1951 but finalised in 1977 after discussing 2,600 amendments and adopting 780, the Communist Party resolved to work within the democratic structure and abandon vanguardism. It states,

*“that this socialist revolution can be carried through in Britain in conditions in which world war can be prevented, and without civil war, by a combination of a socialist parliamentary majority and mass struggle outside parliament, ensuring a government that is determined and able to implement a socialist programme.”* (CPGB, 1978, p. 3)

This contribution from the CPGB was recognised by Santiago Carrillo as he developed his political theory of Eurocommunism. In his book, ‘Eurocommunism and the State 1977’, Carrillo, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Spain, argues that Communist Parties can no longer ignore a democratic road to socialism through the ballot box and must build a mass party to achieve this. Carrillo is realistic about the potential role of a capitalist state even though he advocates a peaceful democratic transition to socialism.

*“Unless we work out a firmly based conception of the possibility of democratising the capitalist State apparatus, thereby adapting it for building a socialist society,*

*without its forcible total destruction, we shall either be accused of unscrupulous tactics or identified with social democracy". (Carrillo, 1977, p. 13)*

Further he illustrates the potential destructive force of the capitalist state,

*"The Chilean experience shows that under the regime of popular Unity, committed to a socialist experiment, the State apparatus continued to be an instrument of capitalist rule, deeply penetrated, furthermore, by U.S. imperialism, its services and multi nationals. This apparatus overturned the whole process, abolished the democratic constitution and established a savage military dictatorship when a favourable opportunity arose." (Carrillo, 1977, p. 13)*

He argues however that clinging to a military structure is out of date and out of tune with the realities of today.

*"There are many of us historical militants of communism who have changed our way of judging a whole series of problems. I venture to say that with very rare exceptions we have all changed. And though it may seem a risky affirmation, I would add that those who have changed most are precisely those who do not appear to have changed at all, those who stubbornly go on repeating the formulas of thirty, forty, fifty and a hundred years ago. Because those formulas were then concepts, whose reality was totally different from today's. They had an inner substance of revolutionary enthusiasm different from that of today. Those same words, those same formulas, now refer to different, even contradictory, concepts: their real substance has in many cases become sterile and conservative. Although those who repeat them may be sincere and may not be aware that they have changed, they seem more like common place ministers of a religion stuck in officialdom than like revolutionaries fighting for a better world – not to mention those unworthy clerics who never do*

*anything but carry out orders so as to maintain or improve their status in the hierarchy". (Carrillo, 1977, p. 16)*

It is surprising, that Carrillo from a country just emerging from a fascist dictatorship puts forward such a bold assertion that his party had to change and embrace a democratic form of socialism. He draws on a remarkable letter to Largo Cabellero the socialist prime minister of Spain dated 21 December 1936 from Stalin, Molotov and Voroshilov in which they advise,

*"The Spanish Revolution is opening up roads which are different in many respects from the road travelled by Russia. This is determined by the difference in conditions in the social, historical, and geographical spheres, the demands of the international situation, which are not the same as those which confronted the Russian Revolution. It is very possible that the parliamentary road may turn out to be a more effective procedure for revolutionary development in Spain than it was in Russia."* (Carrillo, 1977, p. 124)

An analysis of this political change ie. Euro-Communism, in many Western European communist parties is contained in a compendium of essays on the subject called "Euro-Communism Myth or Reality" (Pablo della Torre, 1979) edited by Pablo della Torre, Edward Mortimer and Jonathan Story. The contributors are Arrigo Levy, Neil McInnes, Giovanni Russo, Diana Smith, Stuart Holland, Archie Brown, George Schopflin, Godfrey Hodgson, Peter Nicholas in addition to the editors.

The contributors traverse the experiences of the Italian, Spanish and French conversions to Euro-communism as well as explaining why Portugal did not join this consensus. They also analyse the challenge to the Soviet leadership and its effects in Eastern Europe, the US response to these changes together with the Vatican's attitude to

such a profound change, in these predominantly catholic countries, with large communist parties.

It is impossible in the space of this thesis to give justice to these essays but at least a reference is needed to the birthplace of Euro-communism on the 11<sup>th</sup>, July 1975 in Leghorn, Tuscany in Italy at a rally at which the leaders of the Spanish and Italian Communist Parties, Carrillo and Berlinguer,

*“Nearly sixty years after the October Revolution, and thirty years after the Second World War, which left the world divided into blocs, the communist parties of Spain and Italy found themselves locked into a Western camp which had proved unassailable by Soviet power. In this new world the PCI and PCE declared their intention of acting on the basis of new principles.”* (Pablo della Torre, 1979, p. 13)

The departure from the old principles in Eastern Europe is illustrated by Dalibor Hanes, a member of the central committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, writing in the World Marxist Review.

*“Every ruling class delegates the direction of the state to its political vanguard, which knows its interests and is able consistently to uphold them. This applies to the working class too. Marxist-Leninists frankly admit this historical reality. They do not have to conceal it, for the communist party’s aims and efforts fully coincide with the interests of the working class and the working people generally.”* (Pablo della Torre, 1979, p. 251)

Militant as a vanguard party still maintained a structure and ideology which was totally contrary to the political changes in the mainstream socialist parties of the democratic left as well as the major Communist Parties in Western Europe.

The Labour Party however, in the 1970s and 1980s, did not grasp the nettle of revising Clause IV as it was written in 1918. Since then, considerable economic evidence had been accumulated of how common ownership or state ownership had been applied and was developing in socialist countries with Communist Party governments. In contrast there was a large body of evidence to support the view that capitalism had changed and was changing from the raw experiences of 1918.

The Labour Party during the 1970s and 1980s was in a position to take stock of evidence, that a state command economy could not compete with capitalism in terms of supplying efficiently, high quality consumer goods for its populations.

The Labour Party drew away from the conclusion that since 1918 that there was a stark choice between an economy that was democratically accountable, controlled and administered by an elected government, the embodiment of Clause IV or a mixed economy where natural monopolies like the supply of water could be retained by the state, but that consumer goods are produced by a highly flexible market driven by a range of small, medium, and large companies providing choice to the population.

Militant is unabashed about its preferences and promotes Clause IV by arguing for the state ownership of the 200 largest companies in the UK regardless of the kind of goods or services they provide. Militant's rationale is that capitalism is immoral and cheats workers by slicing a profit from the wealth they have created and alienates them from any control of their working lives. The capitalist class then display their enormous wealth, misappropriated from the workers, by their lifestyle of owning land and property across countries. The question is will workers accept this exploitation rather than live in a command economy which is democratically controlled but inefficient?

Democratic socialists faced with Clause IV knew it was a moral argument but unattainable where the electorate would have to agree in sufficient numbers, where many electors voted Labour but were not socialists. The far left believed that voters who voted Labour but were not socialists would continue to do so even if it had a radical socialist manifesto. The growing left in the Labour Party wanted to retain Clause IV and argued that it could be implemented partially and then wholly over a period of time and that the electorate could be won over to this policy with the right person as leader.



# Chapter 4

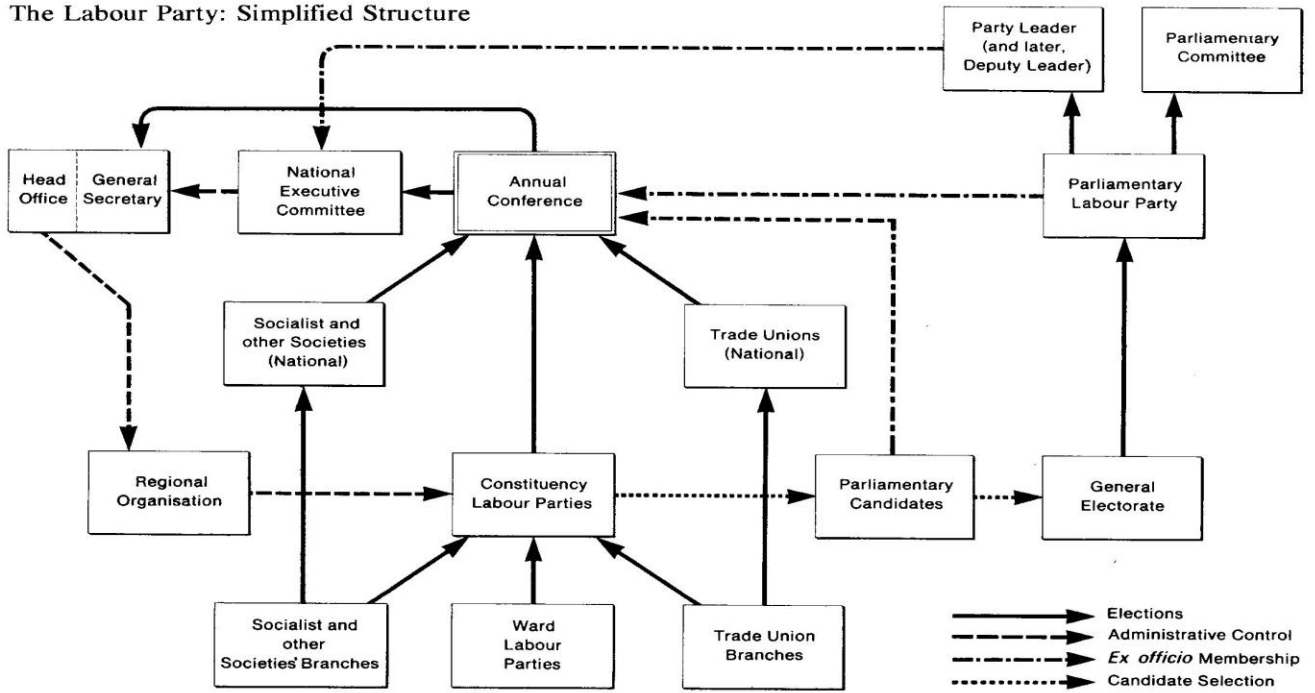
## The British Labour Party and the Rise of the Left

In this section I have tried to take a new look at a subject that has been written about and documented many times. Specifically, a re-appraisal of the role of Tony Benn, the success of the St Ermins Group, the lefts' reliance on the existence of Clause IV of the Labour Party Constitution, and the rise of the left with reference to Militant Tendency.

### 4.1 The Labour Party's Constitutional Weaknesses

The structure of the Labour Party can be likened to tectonic plates colliding and creating friction and a release of energy from time to time. The Labour Party as we know it in modern times evolved from a need for parliamentary representation for the growing trade unions at the beginning of the twentieth century. The trade unions gave birth to and financed the Labour Party which emerged in 1906 with an affiliated structure. At this stage it was understandable that its rules and procedures, were similar to a trade union rule book. The 1918 conference approved a constitution establishing local constituency parties and individual membership. All the tectonic plates were now fully formed i.e. the trades unions, the constituency parties, the affiliated bodies, the national conference and the MPs in Parliament and the National Executive Committee and so below is a diagram of the inter-relationship between the constituent parts of the Labour Party, as approved by the 1918 conference. (Minkin, 1978, p. 10).

The Labour Party: Simplified Structure



However, in October 1917 in Russia the world saw the birth of the first state proclaiming that from now on it would institute socialism and collectivism in both the urban and rural areas of their vast land area and negotiate a peace with Germany. The delegates to the 1918 Labour Party conference must have had some difficulty absorbing this political earthquake.

Sydney Webb from the Fabian Society was charged with framing a clause of the constitution which would define how the Labour party would ideally prefer the economic relations between workers and industry to change i.e., Clause 1V. reproduced below,

*“To secure for the workers by hand or 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 and service”* (Coates, 1995, p. 12)

The problem for the Labour party in the 1970s and 1980s was that Clause IV was never put into effect by any Labour Government nor was there any attempt to do so. However, it was acting as a rallying point for those members who campaigned for extending nationalisation to the point where most of the country’s industries would be controlled by the state.

Neil Kinnock knew all too well of the significance of Clause IV. Below is his view of its place in the Labour Party Constitution in a quote from an interview in 2019.

*“One of the things that always bothered me about Clause IV part IV, which is why I never referred to it, was its vagueness. The more frequently my opponents from Heffer on quoted it, the more I had to say to them “I tell you what, that was deliberately vague in 1918 and it’s just as unclear now”. Think about the circumstances in*

*which it was written in 1918. Who wrote it in 1918? The Webbs, Sydney Webb specifically. He was very cautious about being too precise about what could be called the Marxist wing of thought in the infant Labour Movement and he was equally cautious about the dangers of being too precise about defining against the Marxist strain of thought. So, we ended up with this immensely vague vocabulary “to secure for the workers by hand or brain the full fruits of their labour by the best attainable means of administration”. It was so vague it could cover anything. But by the use of evocative terminology “workers by hand and brain, “and “full fruits” Sydney Webb managed to get away with the second part of that paragraph which was so vague as to lack any form of definition. Terms like “production, distribution and exchange” were common terminology then in academic and economic discussions and circles. So, it really is a product of its time intended not to commit firmly to things but to give a very general indication of what was being proposed.” (Appendix 20, page 393)*

I then asked him why didn't he modernise it?

*“Because it would have been an unnecessary battle on another front. I worked on the big policy changes, the constitutional changes, the improvements in the finances, the changes in personnel. To open up another front, would be a stretch too far. Had I been elected in 1992 and stayed on, then the constitution would have been changed in order to do two things, firstly to clarify Clause IV part IV, and, I will go into what I mean in that in a moment and, secondly to include the term democratic socialist in the Labour Party's constitution because it had never been there before.” (Appendix 20, page 393)*

Sydney Webb wrote an article for the Observer in 1917, reproduced in his book on Clause IV explaining his proposal to write a new constitution for the Labour Party for the 1918 conference, his thoughts on common ownership are quoted here.

*“This declaration of the Labour Party leaves it open to choose from time- to- time whatever forms of common ownership from the co-operative store to the nationalised railway and whatever forms of popular administration and control of industry, from national guilds to ministries of employment and municipal management, may, in particular cases, commend themselves.”* (Coates, 1995, p. 9)

Webb was proposing a creative interpretation of common ownership and implying a degree of experimentation within which a pluralist society would contribute to this development. A different approach from Lenin’s “All power to the Soviets” proclaimed also in 1917. Previous leaders, not just Neil Kinnock, had not prioritised the need to define clearly the party’s Aims and Objectives which would have helped to prevent entryism by Trotskyist groups. It is understandable, why a small but rapidly growing organisation such as Militant was not seen as a priority for many years. Eric Shaw explains,

*“For a decade Militant went quietly about its work. Within three years of the establishment of Labour’s new youth organisation in 1967, the Labour Party Young Socialists it had fallen under Militant’s control; and it gained useful footholds in a number of constituencies. The abolition of the Proscribed List in 1973 and the more liberal regime introduced in the early 1970s removed from Militant the threat of disciplinary measures.”* (Shaw, 1988, p. 218)

During periods in the 1970s the Labour Party was in government and dealing with the oil crisis and the ailing British economy which was creating eye watering inflation and

consequential pay claims of the same order. In his first speech to the Labour Party conference in 1976, as leader, Callaghan spelt out the new reality,

*“According to Callaghan, inflation was the main enemy as it caused unemployment, Thus, tackling inflation would reduce unemployment. In his view, wage rises -supposedly the main root of inflation - had to be severely curtailed. This was not a message designed to please the unions.”* (Fielding, 1997, p. 101),

The 1970s saw the growth of Militant in the wards and constituencies and in the Labour Party Young Socialists. However, they were making little impact on the trade union movement and this was the power base of the Labour Party and where the union block votes outweighed all others at the Annual Party Conference which gave the leadership a sense of security but even this was beginning to change. There were of course party Regional officials who were reporting to their National Agent and could see that the decaying structure of the wards was being exploited and populated by the revolutionary left and were very alarmed.

Later in this section of the thesis there is an analysis of the Underhill Report (Appendix 2) compiled by Reg Underhill, a National Agent who collated reports from the regions on the worrying trends in the wards and of Militant influence. The wards were the most vulnerable parts of the structure of the party and along with the constituency parties they could sway selection committees for councillors and members of parliament. Constituency parties could also forward resolutions to the party conference and vote in the elections for the National Executive Committee. The National Executive Committee between annual conferences dealt with party business, the political composition of this committee depended on the voting of the various sections of the party.

Militant managed to install one of their members, Andy Bevin, on to the NEC via the Young Socialist section, which Militant dominated. Importantly Militant now had access to all the agenda papers and a monthly report on the discussions within the NEC, an invaluable source of information.

Militant claimed that it was a Marxist strain of thought within a broad church, of an affiliate structured Labour Party. Militant believed that this affiliated structure gave them the freedom to operate as a Marxist trend until in 1982, the Labour Party reviewed their affiliate bodies and required them to register. Militant was excluded and refused affiliation and driven underground for fear of its members being identified as Militant members and expelled. I put it to Neil Kinnock, why wasn't Militant accepted as an affiliate body like the Co-op Party or Tribune and other groups?

*“Because the way in which it conducted itself, under the terms of its own policy, programme and philosophy, was simply not consistent with the constitution of the Labour Party. Straight forward as that. At no time did I or anybody else say ‘hey in the Labour Party you can’t have an organisation’. Specifically, in order to clarify that issue, Michael made the proposal for the establishment of the register of affiliated organisations and after that was established Militant was in any case, not registered and should have ceased operation in the Labour Party. I would have made the argument even before then that Militant was transgressing against the constitution. But Labour is a live and let live Party. It’s a “broad church” was the phrase widely employed. Michael then introduced, on the proposal of the National organiser David Hughes, that we have a register of affiliated organisations, and Militant of course, together with one or two others, was excluded from that register. In those terms, therefore, it wasn’t a constitutionally acceptable organisation. I would make the argument, politically and organisationally, that even before the register that Taaffe’s*

*defence doesn't hold up. After the register was established there is absolutely nothing to support Taaffe. This has got to be put in context: the reason that only very occasionally right throughout the history of the Labour party have there been battles over which organisation or league or federation was acceptable, and which wasn't, was simply because of the reality of a live and let live party. There were attacks, for instance on Tribune in the 1950s when Michael disarmed everyone by calling the Tribune group an "open conspiracy". Everyone said yes, had a laugh and moved on. Yes, it had a paper, yes there were a few people in St John's St who were employed - Dick Clements and two others on a part-time basis that would have been about it. It never had, a paid network of sale's-persons, or regional co-ordinators, it never had a NEC or a politburo or anything like that. So, the idea that there is an equivalence between the Militant newspaper and the Tribune weekly magazine is a complete nonsense." (Appendix 20 page 396)*

Kinnock's argument is that after the register was instigated and Militant was excluded from it, there was clarity regarding the unacceptability of Militant. However, there is still a lingering argument that the register was a procedural manoeuvre and that the Labour Party did not address the issue of the legitimacy of excluding an organisation because it was arguing for a Marxist analysis of the economy. The Labour Party historically has failed to provide clarity about its aims and objectives because it has never stated them and compounded this confusion by retaining Clause IV which could easily be interpreted as a Marxist call for the workers' control of industry. This was the Labour Party's constitutional weakness, but the leadership could always rely on the trade union block vote to support the view that Clause IV was of its time and could be ignored.

I explored this with Clare Short and Lord Blunkett,



*“James Ferguson. When I interviewed Clare Short, she agreed with me that the Labour Party at some stage should surely have erected some political/ ideological barriers to prevent entryism by Trotskyist organisations. In other words, because it did not have much competition on the democratic socialist scene, unlike the continental parties, the Labour Party seemed to make do and mend and did not create those political barriers to prevent that kind of thing happening.*

*Lord Blunkett. I think that’s part of the fact the Labour Party has never been absolutely clear enough, with itself internally, about its differentiation as a social democratic party from the revolutionary left and that’s partly because we never had the upheaval the Germans had for instance in the late 1950s. It’s partly complacency built out of the belief that when you have dealt with a particular problem the problem had gone away, and its partly the third bit, is a kind of benevolence which I shared back in 83 and 84 which is, well individuals are not bad men or women and were misguided and they don’t really mean any harm, and so long as they are not organised in a formal sense then we don’t need to worry about it, and that probably has led us to the situation today. Where for perfectly understandable reasons there is a total lack of clarity about the Labour Party’s current relationship with the far left, so if we are a social movement rather than a formal political party then we should say so and that changes the terms in which we address parliamentary democracy. Involved regions and national parliament and assemblies in Scotland and Wales and obviously the regions of England, and we are not clear about that, perhaps the emergence of independent groups leaving the Labour Party in parliament..... will help to clarify that.” (Appendix 14 page 346)*

There now seems to be an acceptance amongst former prominent members of the Labour Party that successive leaderships did not prioritise and clarify the identity of the Labour Party as a Democratic Socialist Party operating in a pluralist society.

Apart from the above problem, the trade unions during the 1970s were not as loyal and pliable to the leadership of the Labour Party as in previous decades because they were thrown into industrial action in pursuit of high pay claims chasing high inflation. This created a mood of militancy amongst the rank and file who were putting pressure on the union leaderships to fight to maintain their living standards. The divisions in the trade union movement were widening on political issues which affected industry e.g., the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) lobbied for the continuation of coal fired power stations but unions representing workers in the nuclear- powered stations were opposed to pressure from the NUM to limit any expansion in their industry.

Although the Communist Party of Great Britain was outside the Labour Party its industrial department was organising, industry by industry and coordinating militant action in the trade union movement to maintain living standards, very successfully. The internal discussions of the executives of the trades unions towards Labour Party policy in the NEC and the national Conference included prominent members of the CPGB for example Mick McGahey, Vice President of the National Union of Mineworkers and Chairman of the CPGB.

The breakdown in the automatic support of trade union votes for the Parliamentary Party meant that policies constructed by the Parliamentary Party had to be argued and fought for at all levels within the structure of the party. This meant that the party showed signs of stress because the sections were moving in different directions.

This conflict in the Labour Party arose from the breakdown in the post war consensus of continuing growth in the economy and higher living standards. Labour Governments could not just be tribunes of the trade union movement but had to govern the entire country during a difficult economic period. This is documented and argued at length in Patrick Seyd's book "The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left" in which he devotes a chapter to "The Breakdown of Social Democratic Consensus". In 1976 events led to Prime Minister Jim Callaghan making a statement to Labour's Annual Conference,

*"For too long, perhaps ever since the war, we postponed facing up to fundamental choices and fundamental changes in our society and in our economy. That is what I mean when I say we have been living on borrowed time. For too long this country - all of us, yes, this conference too - has been ready to settle for borrowing money abroad to maintain our standards of life, instead of grappling with the fundamental problems of British Industry." (Seyd, 1987, p. 23)*

The days when the leadership of the TUC went to Downing Street for meetings with a Labour Prime Minister to iron out difficulties over beer and sandwiches were over, borrowing money to solve short term economic problems were also over.

*"At the behest of the IMF, Denis Healey, Labour's Chancellor of the Exchequer, imposed substantial cuts in public expenditure and committed the Government to the monetary conditions regarded as necessary to promote economic growth. These actions prepared the ground for the direct assault on social democracy by Thatcher Governments from 1979 onwards." (Seyd, 1987, p. 23)*

The tectonic plates were now moving within the Labour Party, and the factions were now fully formed, the Labour Party was heading for a factional fight and a long period out of Government.

#### **4.2 Factions in the Labour Party**

The Labour Party grew and evolved from an affiliated structure which made it very tolerant of organisations associated with it. In the 1950s during the cold war period and the revelations of Stalin's brutal leadership of the Soviet Union, the Labour Party protected itself from association with bodies that were thought to be Communist Party front organisations e.g., the numerous Anglo-friendship societies with Communist countries. The Labour Party compiled a list of organisations deemed to be incompatible with Labour Party values and called it the proscribed list. Members of the Labour Party were forbidden from membership of these organisations on pain of expulsion. The proscribed list was made redundant in 1973 because it had become unworkable mainly because organisations were springing up and changing their names, it was difficult to keep track of the many organisations that may have to be included on the list. It was Reg Underhill, the National Agent who argued at an NEC sub-committee on the 11<sup>th</sup>, June 1973 that organisations were not being scrutinised because they were not on the proscribed list and stated that under the rules of the party, organisations that had their own programme, principles and policy for distinctive and separate propaganda were ineligible for affiliation to the Party. The proscribed list was superfluous and unnecessary and was redundant.

The 1970s saw the rise and importance of factions in the Labour Party as the bitter battle between a left programme of state intervention in industry and the banning of nuclear weapons from British soil, fought with an opposing position of maintaining a

mixed economy, pro- nuclear and a strong NATO in alliance with the United States of America. Both Peter Taaffe and Neil Kinnock were brought into politics, in the 50s through the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and were radicalised by the exposure to these ideas. The factions in the Labour Party were mustering their forces for a prolonged internal battle, leaving the bewildered electorate to observe from a distance.

### **4.3. The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and the reaction from the Labour Solidarity Committee.**

I will concentrate on the 1970s and 1980s for this section and prioritise the factional struggle between the CLPD and LSC for control of the Labour Party. This struggle has been described before in many other works such as Eric Shaw's "Discipline and Discord in the Labour Party" 1988, and Patrick Seyd's "The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left" 1987, but not since the publication of "Fightback" 2005 by Dianne Hayter which describes the formation and organisational operation of the St Ermins Group, dealt with later in this section. The St Ermins group supported the Labour Solidarity Campaign by organising affiliated trades unions at a monthly meeting with an aim to recover mainstream control of the NEC of the Labour Party.

### **4.4 The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy**

The CLPD was formed in 1973 with mainly three objectives, to change the Labour Party rules on mandatory reselection of Labour MPs, the writing of the election manifestos, and selecting the Leader and Deputy Leader from the wider Party thus removing it from the sole preserve of the PLP. The assumption of the CLPD was that change in a left direction would come about only if the rank and file of the Labour Party could be brought into the decision- making process.

The CLPD was an organisation borne out of mistrust for the PLP because it argued the PLP should be a repository of the views of the party from the grass roots in the constituencies and should not have an independent existence without any controls. It rejected the notion that MPs had an overriding responsibility to their electorate. It believed in constructing as many constitutional restraints as possible so that the rank and file could control the Labour Party and wrest it from the PLP. The CLPD invited organisations on the far left, including Militant Tendency, to unite and to harmonise and pass resolutions at national conference to change the rules on the de-selection of MPs.

The Militant Tendency saw the opportunity to de-select MPs and install their own candidates. Militant Tendency put aside its reluctance to join umbrella organisations on the left for the pragmatic reason that it would be the main beneficiaries of the new rules, if passed. This reluctance was not just sectarian it was its core policy of vanguardism which usually prevailed, but the prize was a larger representation in Parliament. Its leading role had to be subsumed for a temporary arrangement with the Rank-and-File Mobilising Committee an umbrella group for those in favour of constitutional change.

In 1980 at the Blackpool Annual Conference the CLPD was tactically superior by arguing for the extension of the franchise of Labour Party members to be discussed first, and the method afterwards. The debate was then argued forcefully by the CLPD that most union General Secretaries were directly elected by their members so how could they deny Labour Party members a limited extension in party democracy in electing their leaders. Joe Ashton MP argued that the re-selection of MPs would lead to a media feeding frenzy and that de-selected MPs would use all available means to retain their seat, including the courts. He cited Tony Benn's long legal campaign to retain

his Commons seat after the death of his father which removed him from the Commons to the Lords.

The vote to widen the franchise was carried by 3,609,000 to 3,551,000 but the debate on the method was deferred to a special conference at Wembley on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 1981. Tom Jackson of the Post Office workers and David Basnett of the General and Municipal Workers Union (GMWU) argued successfully that they had to consult their Executives before casting their block votes on the issue of the method of voting. The issue at stake was how the Labour Party allocated the weighting of votes in the Electoral College between MPs, Trade Unions, and the Constituency parties.

At the Wembley Conference, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, (USDAW), a right of centre Union representing shopworkers, was the unlikely mover of a 40 per cent vote for the trade unions and 30 per cent for each of the remaining sections. The CLPD weighed in behind this moderate union which commanded 429,000 votes and the 5<sup>th</sup> largest union in the Labour Party. The CLPD was tactically astute dropping their own resolution in favour of a more mainstream likely winner. The USDAW formula was agreed by 3,375,000 to 2,800,000 and the power of the PLP diluted to a minority voice in the Party on this issue.

The day after the Wembley conference The Council for Social Democracy met for the first time and over a short period of months 27 MPs joined the Social Democratic Party, Joe Ashton's predictions at the 1980 conference came to pass and the Labour Party had split. Democratic change had come at a high price but as three of the defections occurred in Liverpool i.e., Richard Crawshaw, James Dunn and Eric Ogden, these defectors were aware that Militant was already gathering its forces, and they did not wait around for the inevitable assault on their tenure of office. This was the zenith of

the influence of the CLPD in terms of its success in mobilising support for its key objectives.

#### **4.5 Tony Benn's Leadership of the Left and his relationship with Militant**

In this section I will argue, by using the references in his own diaries, that Benn's pursuit of constitutional change was fuelled by his ambition to be leader of the Labour Party. His energies were heavily weighted towards this end, to the detriment of his constituents.

Tony Benn wrote a daily diary, which has been published giving a chronological history of his political career until his death. Benn rose to cabinet office but failed to be elected leader under the rules whereby the parliamentary party was the electorate. Joe Ashton MP was Benn's Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) and ran his campaign for leader culminating in the first ballot on 25<sup>th</sup>, March 1976 in which he secured 37 votes, 15 per cent of the vote. Benn was disappointed, Joe Ashton told him why he had lost.

*"I told him bluntly the simple fact is Tony that your policies scare MPs to death in marginal seats". (Ashton, 2000, pp. 208-209)*

He continued to explain the reasons for the defeat, an unpalatable message. *"too many of the Sun and Mail readers have now been persuaded that you are a revolutionary sent from Moscow".*

Ashton then pin-pointed this day as a turning- point,

*"It was then that he made a decision which was to change the whole future of the Labour Party for the next twenty years, and hand it over to an army of young, quite literally daft, looney left, student party activists, who couldn't run a proverbial wheel stall, never mind the country, or a big city like London or Liverpool".*



Ashton recalls the decision, in Benn's own words,

*"In that case we will change the system. Instead of the MPs choosing the Prime Minister, or the Party Leader, we will let the party constituencies and the unions do it. They and the MPs will each have a third of the votes".*

This fateful decision recorded by Ashton in his conversation with Benn is not referred to in Benn's entry in his diary dated 25<sup>th</sup>, March 1976 other than the words,

*"Did several TV and radio interviews come back and talked to Joe".* (Benn, 1995, p. 353)

The Benn diaries are abridged because there is much more material on record than can appear in a book, the editor of the diaries approximates only 15 per cent of the material appeared in print, nevertheless an entry of such importance one would expect it to appear in the diary in some detail.

Benn then embarked, with the help of the CLPD, on a course of action aimed at changing the rules of the Labour Party so that party members could re-select MPs and select the leader and deputy leader from an electoral college. Benn concentrated his energies on campaigning on these issues to the detriment, in his own words, of his constituency and parliamentary work. His leadership of the left of the party was assumed but not formalised during this period and could only be formalised by election to leader or deputy leader of the party.

The CLPD was his support machine but it attracted the far left including individual entryists and collective entryists, the largest being Militant Tendency. The mainstream of the Labour Party and members who considered themselves on the left of the party disliked the company Benn kept and his support amongst this group peeled away over time. Benn was mercurial about his socialist politics trying to persuade members that

Trotskyism and democratic socialism could exist in harmony together. Benn saw different forms of socialist thought competing for ideas within the broad church of the Labour Party. Expulsions were not a means of safeguarding the socialist democratic ideology of a party but a suppression of healthy debate within the party. Benn's association with the CLPD, and Militant moved him away from the mainstream of the Labour Party into the areas of the sectarian left.

His dependence on the CLPD to produce internal constitutional change compromised his credentials as a democratic socialist and alienated unions who were aware of the politics of the far left in their own union. In April 1982, the Agent of Tony Benn's constituency party again told him that he was not active enough in Bristol. Press criticism was also having an effect. Was Benn being threatened with de-selection? This was an unintended consequence of his own rule change. Due to boundary changes he would have to fight for a safer seat but not as a sitting member. John Golding was a founder member of the St Ermins Group and made this observation about Tony Benn's activities in his constituency.

*“He spent little time mixing with the people in his constituency day-by-day. During holidays, he was found on the family property in Essex, not in Bristol, and at other times he just made fleeting visits – overnight stops in a hotel. In other words, to my mind he was effectively an absentee MP”* (Golding, 2016, p. 242)

On examination of his daily diary Tony Benn was in Bristol from June 1980 to May 1981 a total of 19 days which included some overnight stays in a local Bristol hotel. From June 1981 to June 1982 there were 23 days spent in the constituency again including some overnight hotel stays.

Benn's constituency Agent was aware of his shortcomings as Benn writes in his diary on 28<sup>th</sup>, February 1981,

*"Travelled to Bristol and was met by Dawn, who told me I wasn't doing enough in the constituency. I tended to appear like Lord Bountiful, and I should pop into ward meetings for a bit and listen to what members were saying. I wasn't appearing at local events, wasn't involved in the Labour Group, and so on. She was nice about it, but it was a serious criticism and I have sensed in a way that, with all the meetings I do around the country, I don't do enough in Bristol."* (Benn, 1995, p. 510)

Benn also was absent from Parliament all too frequently according to his own diary entry on 30<sup>th</sup>, July 1981,

*"I'm a complete stranger in the House of Commons at the moment. I haven't been there properly for months because of my speaking engagements; my division voting record will be appalling. This whole campaign is a great risk. It may be premature, but it has involved aligning myself with the left and the rank and file outside Parliament and then making a re-entry."* (Benn, 1994, p. 142)

It is clear, on his own admission, that he neglected both his constituency and his Parliamentary duties to pursue a campaign policy of mandatory re-selection and other rule changes with the CLPD. Although not threatened by de-selection, he was because of boundary changes, competing for a safer Bristol seat. His neglect of his core duties as an MP had now caught up with him and below is a diary account of what was in effect a de-selection of a famous long-standing, sitting MP. Benn wrote in his diaries about the selection for the new seat of Bristol South, it took place on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1983, Benn wrote of the audience, (Benn, 1995, p. 544)

*“I could see a few friends, but there was a sea of trade unionists under the Golding aegis and women in their early sixties from the Co-op Women’s Guild. I swear many of them had never been to a political meeting before in their lives. I knew I was going to lose so I was relaxed, made a speech, answered a few questions and left. “*  
(Benn, 1995, p. 544)

His relationship with Militant was cooling and he was facing criticism from them, this was reported to the Preston branch of the Militant.

*“He has been distancing himself from the MT, the fact that he would not speak on the 11.09.1982 was significant”* (Appendix 1 page 14).

Tony Benn’s pitch to his many supporters is that he was always championing the cause of socialism and not his personal ambition to become leader of the Labour Party. The evidence does not concur with this. Tony Benn from the day he was defeated for leader on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1976 campaigned for the re-selection of MPs and the election of leader by an electoral college, both measures were designed to smooth the path of his election as leader. He risked his own reputation as a hard-working MP for his constituents by working for the rule changes to the detriment of his constituents and the parliamentary party. He was encouraging constituencies at speaking engagements to enact rule changes which would de-select hard- working but politically unacceptable MPs. At the same time, he was using the resources of an MP to campaign for the CLPD whilst neglecting his duties to his constituencies and parliament. This resulted in him losing the possibility of a safe seat in Bristol for his own vulnerable seat. His seat was lost at the next General election and he was therefore not eligible to stand for the vacancy left by Michael Foot. The campaigning for the CLPD by Benn

raised its profile in the country and at conference. The reaction to the CLPD was the creation of the Labour Solidarity Campaign and the St Ermins Group.

David Blunkett reflects on a wide view of Tony Benn's politics in an interview in 2014,

*"I mean I did a very short article in the Independent on Saturday about Tony Benn and an interview on the Today programme on Friday, and I was trying to reflect that it wasn't values that had to be set aside, it was a recognition of the context in which those values had to be addressed. And if the world has changed around you and you just refuse to accept that it's changed you become a munificent, very lovable anachronism. And the Labour Party at one point was in danger of becoming a sort of lovable anachronism where we'd constantly throw ourselves against a wall and then pick ourselves up after defeat and wipe the blood from our noses and have another go".* (Appendix 13 page 343)

#### **4.6 The Labour Solidarity Campaign (LSC)**

From its formation on the 17<sup>th</sup>, February 1981, the LSC quickly provided a lifeboat for the exposed MPs who opposed the CLPD and its hard-left components. A steering group of fourteen was appointed including members of Tribune, The Manifesto Group, Labour First and MPs belonging to no faction.

*"It comprised Stanley Clinton Davies (MP for Hackney Central), Joe Ashton, Martin O'Neil (Ochil, Clackmannan and East Stirlingshire), Donald Dewar (Glasgow Garscadden), Arthur Davidson (Accrington), Denis Howell, John Grant, Ken Woolmer (Batley and Morley), Frank Field, Gerald Kaufman, Austin Mitchell, Giles Radice, Roy Hattersley and me"* (Golding, 2016, pp. 180-1)

At this meeting they agreed to,

*“to regain control of the NEC by organising the union vote at conference and bolstering moderate unions in the constituencies to help in the reselection of sensible MP’s.”*

Although Roy Hattersley was its first chairman, he denied that he was the energy behind it.

*“Solidarity wasn’t my idea. Nothing about it was my idea. Denis Howell came into my office after the Wembley Conference and said, “You’ve got to take the lead. You have got to do all these things” I said, “Why me, why not Denis Healey?” He said, “Denis Healey won’t”, I suspect he had already asked him. Denis Howell called the meeting in the Grand Committee Room. Denis Howell sent out the notices; Denis Howell phoned round people; Denis Howell badgered me into phoning round people. Denis Howell attended the meeting and announced to them that I was the chairman of this new organisation” (Hayter, 2005, p. 131)*

The chairman was joined by Ken Woolmer as secretary and Austin Mitchell as Treasurer. The new group claimed 150 signatories from MPs of which 102 attended its first meeting. However, it was hit by a thunderbolt on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, April 1981 as Tony Benn announced he was going to stand against Healey for the Deputy Leadership, the first use of the Electoral College. The LSC’s support for Healey, put the organisation under strain but it held together. On 27<sup>th</sup> September 1981 at the Brighton Conference, the result was announced, Healey had won by a fraction of a percentage point, but it was the first victory for the LSC and the CLPD was thwarted. The LSC produced its first newsletter in March 1981 and began to gain support outside Parliament. Tony Blair joined along with 5,000 others, it moved into premises in June 1981 and was now staging Regional Conferences, the first in London addressed by Roy Hattersley laying

down its key objectives, a re-affirmation of faith in the Party, victory at the election, and to oppose with all the vigour at its disposal, the enemies of democratic socialism. It singled out the Rank- and- File Mobilising Committee, Militant and the CLPD as the culprits.

The Labour Solidarity Campaign was becoming a political juggernaut because the LSC had established local groups in Hackney, Islington, Lambeth, Stevenage, Ealing, Teeside, and Scotland in a short space of time and support was growing. Behind the organisation was the covert St Ermins Group mobilising the affiliated trades unions into an industrial wing of the LSC countering the CLPD in the constituency parties.

#### **4.7 Mandatory Re-selection creates constituency faction fighting.**

The effect of mandatory re-selection was put into perspective by Austin Mitchell,

*“Re-selection was automatic. The onus was on the MP to organise to stay on. He had to become a faction leader in his own constituency.”* (Mitchell, 1983, p. 49)

The re-selection rule change now placed sitting MPs on a treadmill of organising and consolidating their own position as an identifiable faction within the constituency. This was meat and drink to constituencies where Militant had strength in numbers, they could pick and choose issues close to their political programme and demand that their MP also expressed their view. Even if there was a three- line whip on an issue why not rebel even if it meant ignoring party discipline. An MP could not possibly please all the factions.

*“The real consequence of re-selection was the blow to the self-confidence and efficiency of the parliamentary party. Labour MPs had to be given time off to fight their own battles in their own constituencies.”* (Mitchell, 1983, p. 48)

## 4.8 The St Ermins Group

This section deals with the St Ermins Group's inter relationship with the LSC and its rear-guard action against the CLPD. The St Ermins group has not been dealt with before in publications written prior to 2003. This is understandable because of the covert nature of the organisation. Not until the publication of the book *Fightback* written by Dianne Hayter in 2005 have the details been put fully into the public domain. Hayter explains,

*“As a result of the self-discipline, the literature revealed little of the Group until 2003. Maintaining their oaths of confidentiality, neither Weighell, Chapple nor Howell ever mentioned the Group in their autobiographies. Even like-minded politicians knew nothing about it. Academics fare little better, Seyd makes no reference to it despite claiming that ‘Only one ... group, the Campaign for Democratic Socialism [in the 60s], on the Labour right compares for organisational ability [with the CLPD] in the history of factionalism’. Shaw does not include St Ermins in his index, though it appears twice in footnotes, both times mis-spelt as St Ermine’s. Pearce also mis-names it St Ermine’s and completes his description in five lines. Kogan and Kogan make no mention at all. The main chronicler of the unions, Lewis Minkin, makes passing references to the group and by inference mis-dates its creation.”* (Hayter, 2005, p. 101)

I have obtained tapes and transcripts of the interviews the author conducted with the interested parties including the then Leader of the Labour Party Neil Kinnock and his Deputy Roy Hattersley, and many others, from the Peoples History Museum in Manchester. In this section the St Ermins Group is described in the context of the factional fight with the CLPD.



The St Ermins Group, so named because it met in the St Ermins Hotel in London, from 10th February 1981, just 17 days after the Wembley Conference, and monthly up to 1995. The Group's function was to counter the growing far left within the Labour Party led by Tony Benn. It coordinated MPs and union leaders affiliated to the Labour Party to oppose the well organised CLPD and the Militant Tendency. It was successful at mobilising affiliated trade unions before meetings of the NEC of the Labour Party, carefully considering their agenda items, always arriving at an agreed position. In an interview with Roy Hattersley, 5th May 2004, by Hayter, he explains who did the organisational work,

*“Godsiff and Speller were crucial in organising the vote. Especially Speller, they are both less interested in policy than organisation. Those two were, absolutely crucial. There was good will in the unions, but it often got bogged down in inter-union rivalries. It was necessary for someone to say, look here, if you vote for Mr B, they'll vote for Mrs C. That sort of wheeling and dealing with unions of goodwill. And Spellar and Godsiff did that. And J Golding did it too”.* (Hayter, 2004)

It concerned itself with securing positions within the structure of the Labour Party, especially the NEC, and internal structures of the TUC. It also mobilised support for resolutions to Labour's Annual National Conference which elected the NEC and amended the National Rules and formed policy.

The aim of the group was,

*“The unions wanted a Labour Government and believed it would only come with a move to the right. The aim of the Group was to retrieve the party from the mess it was in and ensure the TUC General Council was reformed to become a better*

*representative of the unions*" (Hayter, 2005, p. 99) said Roy Grantham a founder member and union General Secretary.

The Group also mobilised its forces to call for the expulsion of members of Militant and the proscribing of its organisation. Papers were prepared by Godsiff, Speller liaised with union political officers and Golding with the PLP. Meetings were confidential and effectively leak proof, so much so that notable authors on Labour Party affairs were unaware of its existence, only Eric Shaw makes a passing reference to them. Their analysis of why the left retreated did not explain that although the left mobilised openly, mainly in the constituencies, the right where capable of mobilising in private meetings, under the radar. Union officials could command support from millions of trade union votes at closed sessions of union executive meetings.

Trade Union executives regularly caucused before meetings, so this was second nature to those who met in the St Ermins group. The effect on the members of this group was that it had carefully prepared positions on agenda items and could defeat the Benn-left organisationally and politically. This was important because Trade Union members of the NEC were accountable to their union executives and had to argue and justify the position they took. Far better to report that a cluster of trades unions were also taking a similar line to them.

Because of the union block vote the Group managed very successfully to coordinate a larger number of unions to support their candidates for the NEC and to reduce the power of the large unions who were dominating the TUC General Council. The Group did this by organising small and medium unions to alter the voting rules of the TUC General Council so that large unions would automatically have their seats reserved but other smaller unions would vote among themselves for Council seats, this would

exclude the votes of the largest trade unions. This was called automacity and it shifted the balance of power in the TUC away from reliance on the large trades unions and freed up internal debate within the Labour Party affiliated unions.

*“The effect was enormous, not just on the TUC but on the Labour Party because the myriad number of deals done for the NEC and General Council had been intertwined. Once the TUC places were released from TGWU control, unions could cast their NEC votes without jeopardising their own Council seat.”* (Hayter, 2005, p. 106)

The power of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) was reduced and the medium to smaller unions voted to remove the anomaly of the exclusion of the Electrical, Electronic Telecommunications and Plumbing Union (EETPU) from the General Council. It was the only union capable of bringing the country to a standstill because its members staffed the power stations however its right of centre political stance had kept it out in the cold.

#### **4.9 The St Ermins Group and Militant.**

The author of Fightback devotes a chapter to Militant and outlines the reluctance of the NEC to contain or expel them from the Labour Party continually suppressing reports on their detrimental activities within the Party. Peter Taaffe, editor of Militant, was not aware at the time of the existence of the St Ermins Group but was not surprised, in an interview he explains,

*“They say, Militant is organised so many full timers etc. Course we are organised, so is the right. Their complaint is that we are better organised than they are. That’s their real complaint. If its political, lets discuss the politics, we’ll face up to any question they raise about Marxism is violent and the rest of that. We’ll confront all of that on a political basis we’ll deny that. But of course, they wanted to move this on to a*

*terrain of a sinister organisation, and they linked that with money, like they are doing with Labour at the present time with anti-semitism, the tune changes but the theme is regular. That anti-semitism, that was the same as the attempt to malign us and it did not succeed within the labour movement and it did not succeed in Liverpool because the concrete facts of what was done by the Liverpool City Council was a material expression of our arguments which was that reforms are always a by-product of struggle. You don't get them just by asking for them, it's as result of struggle. So, we knew about the St Ermine hotel and the plots of the right."* (Appendix 24 page 438)

The Fabian Society came under attack for publishing a pamphlet on Trotskyism in the Party in 1981 (Appendix 3) with Francis Morrell, former political advisor to Tony Benn, leading an attempt to suppress it. (Hayter, 2005, p. 29) This is significant because the Fabian Society traditionally played a role as the party's producer of political educational material. The pamphlet is described in more detail below on the section on the Fabian Society. It is remarkable that the left of the party went to great lengths to suppress internal documents critical of Militant but then tried to extend this censorship to bodies outside the formal structure of the Party.

This was the political landscape that the St Ermins Group was determined to travail to drag the party back to the centre, in spite of the formation of the SDP, with the defection of 27 MPs. The St Ermins Group flexed its muscles in the 1981 contest for Deputy Leadership. The contest took place under the new rules successfully campaigned for by the CLPD. Tony Benn stood against the incumbent Denis Healey which turned out to be a bitter fight.

*“The Group contacted CLPs and Unions requesting them to nominate Healey but also in nominating Healey the Group were protecting MPs who were voting for him as their vote was to be recorded in other words made public. MPs cast a third of the vote in the electoral college, so each MP was under pressure from supporters of both candidates.”* (Hayter, 2005, p. 20)

The result for Healey was wafer thin but it was the first victory for the St Ermins Group. The party in the country, was seen to be divided and support tumbled in the opinion polls, dropping 17% between July and December during the contest, but the fightback had begun. The Electoral College rules were triggered again 48 hours after the defeat of Labour in the 1983 General election and the resignation of Michael Foot as leader. Tony Benn was ineligible because he lost his Bristol seat, a casualty of boundary changes and the slump in the support for Labour.

#### **4.10 St Ermins Group support Kinnock for Leader**

Neil Kinnock was a surprise choice of the St Ermins Group for although Roy Hattersley was politically closer to the Group, he had many critics. His critics cited lack of stamina and a perception that he would not make tough and unpopular decisions, he also gained a reputation as agreeing to speak at meetings outside Westminster and then declining later.

*“Leader of the Birmingham Council, Clive Wilkinson, complained that the Birmingham MP was never there. He never turned up except for advice surgeries. We could never rely on Roy Hattersley to give support”* (Hayter, 2005, p. 24)

Kinnock on the other hand had been touring the country speaking at trade union meetings and was well received and they liked what they heard. Kinnock was a democratic socialist and no friend of the far left but was of the Tribune left, his roots were in the

mining villages of the South Wales valleys and he was at ease with the rank and file of the trade union movement. Hattersley was none of the above, so the Group took the pragmatic path that Kinnock was far more likely to appeal to the trade unions and so the St Ermins Group opted for Kinnock as opposed to Hattersley. The St Ermins Group had achieved the defeat of the CLPD in both the Leader and Deputy Leader elections but the fight to expel Militant and the last vestiges of the Benn left was yet to come.

#### **4.11 The Fabian Society**

The Fabian Society was established in 1883 by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and George Bernard Shaw. In 1900 the Fabian Society became affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee, since then it has produced pamphlets and papers, from commissioned authors, feeding into the policy formation of the Labour Party. Because of this long association it is well respected even among its critics. Its early influence is marked by Sidney Webb's drafting of the 1918 Labour Party Constitution.

The Fabians argued that change would come gradually as the state became larger and more sophisticated. They thought that common ownership would incrementally replace capitalism, providing that the state was not provoked by a seizure of power and wealth it would not intervene to prevent a growth of collectivism. Critics of this approach accuse the mainly middle- class Fabians of being able to sit out this process while change takes place unlike members of the working class where poverty was destroying lives generation after generation. Time was a luxury the working class did not have on their side and impatience was understandable, because most labouring men did not see even retirement and died in the harness.

The Fabians feared that if the state were provoked it would retaliate even if the Labour Party were in power in parliament. They envisaged the Royal Assent being denied if private property was to be taken into public ownership without compensation. This would create a constitutional crisis leaving the authority of the state in the hands of the Crown and crucially the police and armed forces. These two positions are irreconcilable but co-existed within the Labour Party.

In 1981 the Fabian Society joined the factional battle in the Labour Party and published its tract 477 (Appendix3) by David Webster, on the Labour Party and the New Left. In its 33 pages it examines in detail the influence of the Trotskyist left, including Militant. Publication was opposed by Francis Morrell of the GLC and a supporter of Tony Benn. The General Secretary of the Fabian Society Dianne Hayter had powerful friends in the St Ermins Group of which she was a member, probably unknown to Francis Morrell. The notion that a Fabian educational tract be withdrawn because it was critical of Tony Benn and Militant even for that time was extraordinary. This was the second example of an attempted suppression of a document examining the activities of Militant, the first being the Underhill Report but there were to be others. The tract described Modern British Trotskyism as,

*“a doctrine of conflict: struggle and violence are wholeheartedly accepted. It is believed that capitalism (the economic and social system based on the private ownership of the means of production) is bound to collapse sooner or later. Trotskyists tend to believe that the collapse is imminent.”* (Appendix 3 page 33)

The tract continued,

*“Trotskyists believe in the overthrow of the state by force. They insist that a socialist society cannot come through Parliament, and therefore believe that Parliament must be overthrown.”* (Appendix 3 page 34)

The tract concluded that British Trotskyists were the dominant element in the Left coalition and to counter this threat it recommends.

*“The most obvious place to start with an assertion of social democratic values is the Party constitution. At present this lacks clear commitments to Parliamentary democracy, the primacy of public elections, and the rule of law, and any repudiation of political violence.”* (Appendix 3 page 63)

The tract finalises its conclusions,

*“the acceptance of violence, the glorification of conflict, could set back for a very long time any hope of achieving what generations of Labour supporters have really meant by socialism: a society in which freedom is real, in which people really do emancipate themselves, but at their own pace and in their own way; not a utopia, but a society in which the sources of inequality are constantly counteracted; a tolerant society, in which contrary beliefs are respected, and rational argument and the pursuit of knowledge are valued as much in politics as in other areas of life. For men and women to delude themselves that they are merely cogs in a Marxist history machine, and to lose or fail to develop, the capacity to respond to the personal reality of other people, is to forego part of their humanity”.* (Appendix 3 page 64)

This tract, however, does not deal with the constitutional saviour of the Trotskyist left, Clause IV, which calls for the common ownership of the means and distribution of production and was adopted in 1918 and drafted by the Fabians.



#### 4.12 Tribune

Tribune was founded in 1937 with a weekly newspaper but was based in the Parliamentary Labour Party. It was the main opposition to the right in the PLP up until the 1960s. The emergence of the Benn left in the 1970's, a far more grass roots organisation, now put pressure on Tribune from a left perspective. Tribune was not capable, on its own, of countering the Benn left so shortly after the January 1981 Wembley Conference. Denis Howell MP called a meeting in the Grand Committee Room in the Commons on 17<sup>th</sup> February to form the Labour Solidarity Campaign an umbrella group to counter the CLPD. Of the original 150 signatories 102 MPs attended the inaugural meeting under the chairmanship of Roy Hattersley, a steering committee was formed comprising of the Manifesto Group, Labour First and Tribune. They defined the LSC as being,

*“to give Labour new life as a tolerant party that believes in carrying out effective socialist policies through action in Parliament”. It also felt it was “well placed to isolate the Militant Tendency and other representatives of the hard left”. (Hayter, 2005, p. 132)*

Tribune had taken the pragmatic decision that it could no longer maintain a purely independent line because of the growing threat of the hard left and Militant. Tribune was hardening its stance on Militant, believing it to be outside the pale of Democratic Socialism. By 9<sup>th</sup> December 1981 Martin 'O Neil and Jack Straw representing Tribune were part of a cross party delegation who met the leader Michael Foot and gave him an ultimatum that he either denounced Militant or the parliamentary party would split. Shortly after the NEC voted for an enquiry into Militant compiled by Ron Hayward, General Secretary and David Hughes, National Agent and successor to Reg Underhill.

The Labour Solidarity Campaign was now speaking with one voice for MPs who could not co-exist with the hard left and their seeming contempt for Parliament. MPs who considered themselves on the left became aware of the different nature of Militant, Clare Short comments on this in an interview in 2018,

*“Obviously, we all knew they acted together that they had their newspaper. I certainly knew that they had their separate meetings. But the trouble is the left had Tribune and there were informal Tribune groups. So, you had the feeling this was much more organised but you when you first observed it you didn’t know quite how far it goes. But then I had a relative who was involved with them and went to work on the paper in London and I became very clear that they had their own structure, employed people full time, got people to go to London to work for them. So, it became clearer and clearer that they were systematically organised.”* (Appendix 22 page 417)

#### **4.13 The Underhill Report 1975**

The report to the NEC of the Labour Party on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1975, (Appendix 2) written by Reg Underhill the National Agent. He coordinated the Regional Agents who were also conduits of information from the Regions to the Centre. Below this structure were Constituency Agents but they had been substantially reduced in number since the war. Many constituencies no longer had a paid full timer and relied on volunteers who were prepared to take on many onerous tasks and crucially were answerable to the local party and not the centre.

The objectives of the Underhill report were, as follows,

(1) To remind the NEC of their Constitutional Responsibilities as guardians of the rules of the party. In particular, rules applying to eligibility for membership of the party.

(2) To draw attention to groups who were joining the party but retaining their allegiance to their group rather than the Labour Party in contravention of the rules.

(3) To inform the NEC that Militant, of all the groups that were of most concern, was entering the Party at (a) ward level, (b) constituency level and (c) within the young socialist branches.

(4) To inform and show extracts from an internal Militant document which demonstrate an external organised entry into the Labour Party, controlling organs of the Party for their own purposes.

**Objective one** of the Report, was to state the relevant rule so that the NEC could look at the evidence of entryism and decide if there was a prima facie case to be brought against the organisations listed.

To deal with this type of situation the Party Constitution includes the following provisions in Section 2 and 4 of Clause II – Membership,

*“Political organisations not affiliated to or associated under a National Agreement with the Party on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1946, having their own Programme, Principles and Policy for distinctive and separate propaganda, OR possessing Branches in the Constituencies OR engaged in the promotion of Parliamentary or Local Government Candidatures, OR owing allegiance to any political organisation situated abroad, Shall be ineligible for affiliation to the party.”*

Clearly the NEC had to be convinced that there was enough prima facie evidence to instigate an investigation into Militant based on the rule above.

Any investigation had to prove that Militant was a separate party and had a parallel structure to the Labour Party and that individual members had their first allegiance to Militant not the Labour Party.

**Objective two** of the report, is concentrated on Militant as it is relevant to this thesis and was deemed the most important and serious incursion.

The Report collated information gleaned from the regions on Militant.

Militant had its own printing works and employed regional full-time workers according to reports to the National Agent.

The Underhill Report stated that an organisation called The Revolutionary Socialist League was directing Militant although they gave no firm evidence to prove this assertion.

The central office had a copy of a 45- page document called British Perspectives and Tasks 1974 and issued on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1974. It is stated to be a Discussion Document. This document is not published in the name of Militant but there are numerous references to it being produced for discussion within the Militant Tendency. This Discussion document is most revealing when it comes to its preparation for revolution.

*“We must never forget to train our cadres to the theoretical possibility of the Unions as organisations being thrust aside, in a period of revolution, or prior to an insurrection and that workers committees or soviets could take their place, but this is a theoretical possibility only, as Trotsky says we do not make a fetish of any organisation”.*

Militant is now admitting to having cadres who in a vanguard structure are answerable to a central committee, of course the Labour Party does not have cadres and therefore

the term “our cadres” cannot refer to the Labour Party. Does a newspaper need cadres to sell its papers unless the paper is a vehicle for an organisation with a political programme separate to the Labour Party? There are other examples, in the Discussion Document where it is obvious that Militant is building a separate organisation, within the Labour Party but a thorough investigation would be needed if the evidence were to survive the inevitable reference to a court in the event of expulsions from the Labour Party.

**Objective three** of the report was to provide enough information about the scale of the entryism by Militant for the NEC to be concerned enough to act and instigate an investigation. Underhill quotes Militant’s own Discussion Document to identify where Militant is strong and areas where it is growing.

*“Already at Regional Conferences we are the only organised and articulate Left Opposition”.*

Militant also has an objective of securing the election of its own MPs.

*“we must seriously endeavour to establish a group of half a dozen or so, MPs identified with the tendency. This would powerfully reinforce our appeal as a national tendency”.*

Militant was also building at ground level they comment,

*“We must dig roots in the wards and constituencies as we have in the Y.S. Many are still shells dominated by politically dead men and women. They are now ossified little cliques. They will begin to change with an influx of new members”.*

**Objective four** of the report was to provide written evidence, see examples quoted above, from internal documents to justify the NEC authorising a detailed investigation which Underhill could provide.

It was clear that Militant was organising to take power at all levels within the party.

It was also clear from the report by Underhill that he had enough evidence to merit a further investigation properly resourced which would be capable of taking the initial report a stage further. However, there were genuine concerns that action in the courts could be time consuming, politically embarrassing, and expensive both in terms of time and money.

However, the report was shelved by the NEC from a recommendation by a sub-committee chaired by Eric Heffer. Members of the NEC who were not members of the sub-committee could not read the report although they were the guardians of the rules and constitution of the Labour Party. Militant Tendency was not even investigated let alone expelled from the party. It was feared at the time that the Underhill Report act as a contagion and encompass more aspects of left activity and anyway Militant should be dealt with politically not organisationally.

The NEC in 1975 could have dealt with Militant before it grew but the NEC did not even have a majority to invoke an investigation into a breach its own rules let alone enforce them. The ambivalence of even senior members of the NEC was demonstrated by Barbara Castle's entry in her diary for 26<sup>th</sup> November 1975.

*"The Organisation Committee had recommended us to let the report 'lie' on the table Shirley and Russell Tuck (of the NUR) moved the reference back of this. The ensuing debate was in marked contrast to Harold's near-hysteria, Mike arguing moderately and effectively that witch-hunting never solved anything and merely led to*

*the persecution of what even Reg Underhill's report admitted were legitimate pressure groups. Bryan Stanley supported him, and the reference back was lost by twelve votes to sixteen, while Harold insisted that the Organisation Committee should, give consideration to the points he had made. Much good that will do him."*

(Castle, 1980, p. 565)

Barbara Castle was the MP for Blackburn and her successor Jack Straw was the first MP to amass evidence in his constituency of damaging Militant activity and of successful expulsions. Bryan Stanley subsequently became a member of the St Ermins group who organised to expel Militant from the Labour Party. It was indicative of the time that the Labour Party was simply not ready or convinced of the need for the extreme measure of expulsions.

Lord Blunkett interviewed in 2019, was asked about Barbara Castle's reluctance to act on Militant following the Underhill report, he replied,

*"There was a reaction to what happened to the Bevanites in the early fifties of course and that affected quite a long way down the line historically, those of the broad moderate left who did not want to see persecution of people on grounds of their political difference, and were prepared to accept that they were organisationally and not just spiritually not with them, and that is difficult, and I understand that because if you think back to people of the Tribune group being suspended from the Parliamentary Labour Party, and you can see why people would balk at wanting to return to anything like that, and of course under Tony Blair there was never any suggestion of people being suspended or expelled on the grounds that they had a difference of opinion, otherwise Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Diane Abbott would not be in the Labour Party."* (Appendix 14 page 348)

During this period of the Underhill Report, there was no mood to discipline let alone expel Militant for fear of a contagion effect and memories were still fresh of a previous purge in the 1950s. At a later stage in this thesis, in the conclusions, I will look at the issue of tolerance of differing views within the party because from Lord Blunkett's interview above, it is clear Tony Blair's attitude was very liberal, unlike the three MPs above, who Blair shielded.

The two experienced politicians on the NEC Castle and Stanley were not prepared to expel Militant members as a matter of principle and voted not to see the report let alone consider any breach of the rules. Barbara Castle admitted in her diary she had seen a leaked copy of the report, other members of the NEC had not. It was evident that Reg Underhill was ahead of his time and the NEC concealed his report.

#### **4.14 Militant's Reaction to critical reports of its Labour Party membership**

I asked Peter Taaffe to expand on how elements of the left saw the expulsion of Militant as a general threat in an interview in 2018.

*"Yes, of course, we said that to the left. And the left agreed with us. People like Tom Sawyer, who was on the left at that time, coming from NUPE into the Labour Party was on the left agreed with us. But in the 1970s we were very small, and Underhill Report had the attitude, but we weren't small in the YS, and Underhill Report was calculated to cut off the head of Militant. That was completed by Hayward in the early 1980s when to begin with Michael Foot defended us and others on the left, then they came round to the position which was contrary to everything they stood for. Now these weren't general lefts - these people are Marxists - they are serious. They actually intend to do what they have said, fight cuts in jobs and services, resort to 'needs' budgets, because at that stage we were getting an echo*



*inside of the Labour Party, we were visible at the Labour Party conferences and so on and they calculated a lot of these Militant supporters are good young people, nice young people, we cut off the head and the body will die, so they decided to expel me, four other members of the Editorial Board, Ted Grant, Keith Dickenson, Clare Doyle, two of whom are in the building at the moment, and they thought that was it. Our biggest gains actually came after that. They came in Liverpool, it came with the selection of Terry Fields, it came with the selection of Pat Wall, a son of Liverpool, a very well-known son, a tremendous orator and speaker, it came in relation to Dave Nellist, who also built up a colossal reputation. He's still around, he is speaking at our socialism event later this year. He got the support on the basis in the Parliamentary Labour Party shoulder to shoulder with the likes of Jeremy Corbyn in the Parliamentary Labour Party in relation to his assiduous work, and the role he played in relation, not just to the battles in the Labour Party but on the broad front of what happened in Liverpool.” (Appendix 24 page 437)*

The attempt by Michael Foot as leader to cut off the head of Militant believing this would kill or curtail the organisation miserably failed. It was self-evident that token expulsions of Militant did not have any negative effect on their growth, but it partially appeased a section of the parliamentary party who saw a reluctant leader taking some action against them. Militant was assisted by inside information from Labour HQ to Militant HQ as reported in the minutes of the Preston Militant meeting. (Appendix 1 page 8).

#### **4.15 Militant Consolidates within the Labour Party**

The previous section describes, 4.14, how Militant was protected by the umbrella of being part of the left and feeling the benefit of the aversion to expulsions and witch-

hunts. Militant was now able to grow in terms of membership, numbers of councillors and MPs, protecting its position as a voice for Marxist socialism as reported in its weekly paper but claiming not to be a separate political party.

This position of the voice of Marxist socialism was protected in Militant's view by Clause IV Part 4 of the Labour Party constitution. In an interview with Peter Taaffe in 2018, he offered this explanation of how the trade unions were instrumental in the defence of Clause IV.

*"They defeated Gaitskell in the late 1950s, when he tried to abolish Clause IV, Part 4 of the Labour Party constitution. In contrast in Germany the Social democracy under Willie Brandt, at its Bad Godesberg conference did succeed in abolishing its clause which reflected the party's socialist aspirations. In Britain the attempt to remove Clause IV was defeated primarily by the instinctive attitude of the trade unions. It wasn't initially the left in the Labour Party, the Tribune Group who objected. In fact, it was Tribune that first flew the white flag at that particular stage. The trade unions instinctively opposed this attempt to transform the Labour Party into a pro-capitalist liberal party." (Appendix 24 page 435)*

It is clear from the quote above just how important Clause IV was seen to be, by Militant, as a political defence of their existence within the Labour Party.

#### **4.16 Militant's Membership Growth**

With any covert organisation it was difficult to arrive at accurate membership figures during the lifetime of Militant. Since Militant has ceased to exist it should be possible to assess its membership growth retrospectively by examining the estimates contained in published works on the Labour Party.

I have examined in detail the book *The Rise of Militant* by Peter Taaffe (Taaffe, 1995) Peter Taaffe was formerly editor of *Militant* but in effect was the General Secretary of the Militant Tendency up until it was disbanded. The book appears to be candid about the growth of national membership figures as the organisation no longer exists and there is no need to fabricate the figures. However, when Taaffe refers to members, he is almost certainly counting his cadres and not the supporters of the paper who were less active than the fully committed cadres. In an interview with Peter Taaffe in November of 2018 with regards to their membership peaking in the mid -1980s and he agreed with me on a figure of 8,000 members.

### **Peter Taaffe**

*“8,000, committed supporters with a much bigger layer of political supporters around us”.* (Appendix 24 page 433).

This was an impressive growth from its small roots, *Militant* was born on 13 June 1964. Michael Crick describes the birth at a series of meetings of the board of the Revolutionary Socialist League.

*“The title the board decided on was *The Militant*. The meeting knew that the Trotskyist American Socialist Workers Party had been producing a regular printed paper with that name since 1928, and they hoped that the new journal would be similarly successful.”* (Crick, 1986, p. 51)

*Militant* started in 1964 and was wound up in January 1997 when it re-launched itself as the Socialist Party of England and Wales. In 1964 *Militant* was a small grouping and according to one of its founding members Peter Taaffe,

*“In the first instance, however, the number of adherents to *Militant* was very small, no more than 40 nationally, and some were not really active. The main base of*

*Militant at this stage was in Merseyside, with small forces in London and South Wales.*” (Taaffe, 1995, p. 18)

Militant grew mainly from its base in Merseyside because Taaffe was from that area.

Militant went weekly on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1972 and Taaffe reported that,

“Between the launch of the fortnightly and the weekly 137 new supporters had been recruited.” (Taaffe, 1995, p. 54)

However, the total number of supporters was still only 354. In July of 1973 Taaffe (Taaffe, 1995, p. 74) was reporting a membership of 464 growing from 397 in March of the same year in which they held a week-long national conference. On the 10<sup>th</sup> birthday of Militant in July 1974 Taaffe declared,

*“By July 1974, the number of organised supporters stood at 517.”* (Taaffe, 1995, p. 92)

Taaffe reports further,

*“1975 represented a further increase, both in influence and numbers, for the ideas of Militant. The organised supporters of Militant increased substantially in 1975 from 517 at the beginning of the year to 775 at the end.”* (Taaffe, 1995, p. 111)

In 1976 Militant expanded its weekly paper to 12 pages and celebrated the Militant supporter Andy Bevan’s accession to the NEC of the Labour Party as a representative of the Young Socialists. Taaffe was now reporting,

*“the organised supporters of Militant had reached 1000 by May 1976.”* (Taaffe, 1995, p. 135)

*Only a few months into 1978, Militant once more expanded to become a 16-page paper.*

*“By this time our organised supporters had increased to 1,140.” (Taaffe, 1995, p. 124)*

In 1980 and 1981 further membership gains are reported,

*“led to a substantial increase in Militant’s support and numbers. The number of Militant supporters had leapt to 2360 by July and increased to 2,500 by the end of the year.” (Taaffe, 1995, p. 166)*

In November 1982 it was reported to the Preston branch of Militant (Appendix 1 page 9) that membership was now 3500. In September 1982 it was reported to the Blackburn branch of Militant Tendency (Appendix 1 page 13) that it had lost 1200 members since its formation in the 60s.

#### **4.17 Militant’s Wembley Conferences**

Taaffe reported in 1982 that the Militant was now meeting in a large venue for their annual conference, with the size of delegates in attendance it was now rivalling a large political party or trade union.

*“ 1,622 delegates from Constituency Labour Parties, 412 trade union delegates and almost 1,000 visitors.” (Taaffe, 1995, p. 201).*

The conference was designed as a show of strength, in terms of numbers and the width of the organisation. The Labour Party was moving towards the expulsion of Militant members, the size of the conference reminded the Labour Party just how daunting the task would be.

The News of the World commented,

*”By any yardstick yesterday’s rally by supporters of the Militant Tendency was menacingly impressive. Almost as big as the Labour Party itself could muster.”* (Taaffe, 1995, p. 202)

Militant consolidated their organisational strength by repeating the Wembley conference the following year showing the world that threats to its existence was having no effect.

*“In September 1983 just four months after Thatcher’s election victory, in organising another rally at Wembley, Militant gave a stunning demonstration that despite all the attacks it remained a powerful and growing force.”* (Taaffe, 1995, p. 219)

#### **4.18 Militant moves their rally to the Albert Hall.**

The growing strength of Militant saw a rally in 1985 move to an even larger venue, the Albert Hall which claimed an attendance of 5000 people collecting £26,587 on the day. This rally followed on from the 1985 Labour Party Conference in which Neil Kinnock delivered his famous speech denouncing Militant.

Taaffe does not give any further membership figures but following the expulsions from the Labour Party and the split in Militant it appears that 1985 was the peak of Militant’s growth and this was followed by a decline. Michael Crick’s book, *The March of Militant* published in 1986 tabulated Militant’s membership growth, but these were Militant’s own internal claims which he had strong reason to believe were exaggerated. Crick’s figures however largely agree with Taaffe’s retrospective figures.

#### **4.19 Summary of Militant’s growth in membership (Appendix 4)**

Because Taaffe’s figures are from a retrospective view and now of only historical interest I would not be as sceptical as Crick was in 1986 as to their accuracy. The

minutes of the Blackburn and Preston Militant meetings in the County of Lancashire are now in the public domain thanks to Michael Gregory, the Blackburn mole, see section 3.16. They show reports from Militant HQ to the branches of membership figures roughly in line with the Taaffe's account in various publications. The Blackburn minutes also show the splitting of branches as Militant grew, together with Irene Buxton's evidence in part 5.31, of this on Merseyside, growing in Liverpool from one branch to six and shadowing every constituency in the city.

#### **4.20 Militant's Regional Strength (Appendix 5)**

This measure of Militant's influence and strength throughout the UK is by its very nature transitory so I have taken two peak years, 1984 and 1985, in Militant's growth in which I will examine sources and then give a picture of their geographical spread.

In the year 1984 Militant (Taaffe, 1984) in its 19<sup>th</sup> October 1984 weekly edition published its fighting fund targets for October 1984 which gives the relative strength of the different regions and how some regions are sub-divided showing that they have a much larger membership than other regions. I have merged areas into regions, according to the Labour Party Regions in the second table to give a more accurate comparison of a conventional regional structure.

The table shows 31.2% of Militant's support is in the North West and London and is not surprising because its founding roots were in these two areas although they have built successfully, a presence in every region and their regional weaknesses mirror the Labour Party's.

Merseyside is their strongest area within the North West Region so much so that 1 in 10 of Militant's members are from Merseyside based on 1984's membership figures that would be approximately 600 members.

Their weakest area is the South West where the Labour Party is very weak. It is not surprising that as Militant was an entryist party, it would be more successful where there was a higher density of Labour Party members.

#### **4.21 Militant strength by Parliamentary constituency during 1984/5 (Appendix 6)**

The numerous references to Shipley in Appendix 6 were because it was extracted from his work on Militant involvement in constituencies. The research work is based on indicators which include, adopting Militant candidates as PPCs, sending Militant supporters to national conference, Militant motions tabled, or documented reports of Militant activity. There are also some references to a collective which is a news bulletin written by a collective of writers called Witch Hunt News in which they report on CLPs where there are moves to expel members of Militant.

#### **4.22 Reasons for the Growth of Militant, A View from Peter Taaffe**

The sections above describe the stages in the growth of Militant but how was that achieved? Peter Taaffe in an interview in November 2018 gave his view,

*“We concentrated our work at that stage in the mass influx of young people into the Labour Party and the Labour Party Young Socialists. We advocated the need for a socialist alternative to the Tories and so on at a very kind of low level if you like, of seeing the need for an alternative to the Tories and so on, and we worked assiduously not just in the Labour Party, in fact hardly ever, but really in the youth wing of the Labour Party. We built up our position from having nothing.”* (Appendix 24 page 434)

When asked if a key factor in the growth historically was building from the Young Socialists he replied,



*“Yes, from the Young Socialists and the Labour Party but moreover we had the foresight to see where the next big movement of the working class was likely to come. And the change in the objective situation, the post-war boom had not exhausted itself, that was from 1950 to 1975, had not exhausted itself. Moreover, the growth of capitalism saw wealth increase four times over. The working class experienced real material gains, in living standards, in housing and the rest, with which you are familiar and that’s no gainsaying the fact that capitalism was successful. The ideas therefore of reformism also grew. Today is better than yesterday and tomorrow will be a lot better’, had a certain material base. We nevertheless based ourselves on the perspective that capitalism would crash at a certain stage and also on the traditions of the British working class, in relation to the trade unions for instance.” (Appendix 24 page 435)*

I suggested to Peter Taaffe that within the Labour Party Militant had become a magnet because Militant was an organised opposition to what the leadership were trying to achieve with reforms aimed at moving the party to the right.

*“Well, we had rivals, we had Tribune, and then those around Tony Benn nationally. They had bigger organisations at one stage, but we managed to convince the youth, not on the basis of ‘bedsit infiltrators’, and all of that nonsense, no serious person believes that kind of propaganda. It was based upon assiduous work. It was based upon the most hard-working section of the Labour Party doing routine tasks like canvassing, working in the Labour party, moving resolutions to the local General Management Committee, to the Merseyside Labour Party and then of course fighting consistently nationally, We won over, politically the majority of the Labour Party Young Socialists, to our point of view.” (Appendix 24 page 435)*

It is clear from Taaffe's comments that the building process was from the young members of the Labour Party with the aim of retaining them and as they become adults they would mature into cadres. This was a successful strategy because it gave Militant time to educate their members as they encountered campaigns and issues in the labour movement. The later rapid surge in membership put this process under strain which is documented later in this thesis.

# THE CASE STUDY

## Chapter 5

### Militant Take Control of the Liverpool District

### Labour Party

#### 5.1 Background

The Liverpool District Labour Party had, until 1975, the status of a Borough Party, feeding information into the Labour Group and receiving information from the various committees and sub committees of the Council. This was prior to local government reorganisation when Liverpool was tied to the County of Lancashire. Liverpool City Council then became an autonomous local authority able to make its own policy free from any restraints from the County.

The Liverpool DLP was comprised of delegates from the electoral wards, trade union branches and affiliated societies. Militant changed this format to one of mandating the Labour Group with a series of resolutions binding the City Councillors to policies based on a rejection of balanced budgets and therefore a confrontation with the government because of inadequate funding. The under-funding was caused by the previous Liberal Administration. They had reduced spending by reducing rates, electorally popular in the short term but in the long term it led to a disastrous decline in much needed Council spending.

“The record of the Liberal party in limiting rate rises caused enormous, if unintended financial difficulties for the city in the 1980s, when under the Conservative Government’s new grant system, the city’s spending record in the 1970s became the basis of cuts in financial support.” (Parkinson, 1985, p. 21)

Militant instigated regular Aggregate meetings in the DLP in which in addition to a normal delegate meeting, all Labour Party members were invited who resided within the Liverpool City area. Later in this section I will include accounts of Aggregate meetings from various members of the Labour Party and extracts from the National Labour Party’s enquiry into the Liverpool Labour Party. At this stage however I will explain why the Militant Controlled DLP instigated this format of aggregate meetings.

## **5.2 Liverpool DLP Meetings Transformed into a Soviet by Militant**

Trotskyist ideology is based on a rejection of representative democracy in favour of a more direct route to decision making i.e., the soviets, soviet simply translated means committee or council. Soviets differ from town councils and parliaments who are elected for a fixed term from one to five years. Elected representatives, more usually contest elections, as a nominee of a political party, but they are directly elected by an electorate in a secret ballot with usually a wide cross section of the people.

Soviets were directly elected in Russia from usually the workers on a ratio of 500 to one and up to a thousand to one. They were elected by the workers, and were clearly delegates, bringing to the soviet the opinions of their workmates. This decision-making process was far more responsive to workers opinions in a period of rapid class conflict than the lobbying needed to gain the support of elected public representatives.

Militant’s use of the Aggregate meeting was in effect a soviet of party members and workers designed to by-pass what they would describe as the bureaucratic structures

of both the Labour Party and the trade unions. As early as 1974 in an internal Militant document entitled "*British Perspectives and tasks 1974*" this message is relayed to its supporters,

*"We must never forget to train our cadres to the theoretical possibility of the Unions as organisations being thrust aside, in a period of revolution, or prior to an insurrection and that workers committees or soviets could take their place, but that is a theoretical possibility only, as Trotsky says we do not make a fetish of any organisation".* (Appendix 2 page 25)

However, the preferred option of Militant, is a soviet where possible. Militant's view of the transformed DLP is written in their account of the Budget Crisis. This was written after the Labour Group was barred from office and would not have been stated while in office, as the DLP had clearly gone well past its remit and this would have provided more evidence for expulsions.

*"The annual Municipal Policy Conferences of the District Labour Party made binding decisions. The DLP delegates in effect elected the leader and deputy leader of the Labour group, as well as the chairpersons of the main council committees. The Economist bemoaned the fact the DLP 'through its discipline can set the policy line' but the right wing never understood that the 'discipline' exerted by the DLP was entirely based on its political authority, gained through earning the respect of its members".* (Mulhearn, 1988, p. 335)

The above statement shows that the DLP was exerting its authority gained from its affiliated unions and party delegates. Militant was the vanguard leadership and used the DLP as a soviet, going over the heads of the trade union established leaders and speaking directly to the rank- and- file trade union delegates. Members of the Labour

Group, who were not Militant members, heard or witnessed large DLP meetings and some agreed and were in support, but others were intimidated into agreeing with their mandates.

The following extract is from an interview with Peter Kilfoyle in 2019, a member of the North West's Labour Party staff.

*“James Ferguson. Didn't you think by using the DLP and their resolutions and so on they were intimidating the Labour Group? In other words, there were two hundred delegates or whatever passing resolutions quite aggressively shouting down opposition and that it would be a brave councillor who would go against those resolutions.*

*Peter Kilfoyle. There is truth in that in terms of the intimidatory effect of the way in which they operated. I would accept that unequivocally but that doesn't excuse the people who were intimidated you either have convictions and you have the courage of your convictions or you don't but so many didn't.”* (Appendix 19 page 387)

Remarkably, councillors did not resign as a way out of the inevitable personal financial crisis they may have had to face if they were surcharged. Only two chose to resign, a father and a daughter, John Mclean an Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW) full-time official, citing trade union commitments and Julie Lyon- Taylor, a well- known member of Militant who cited personal reasons. The councillors who remained probably had limited knowledge of the financial situation they were supposed to be responsible for because of the tight control Tony Byrne had on disclosure of financial information. An example of which is in an extract of an interview with Peter Kilfoyle in 2019.

*“James Ferguson. At the time it was it was one incident which showed to me his power over the Labour Group because I got the impression that Tony Byrne, he*

*really had done his homework on the maths of the city council budget and there was nobody in the Labour Group who would contradict him in any shape or form. In other words, if he said something about the budget that was it that was the truth of the matter. It came to a head when he and Derek and a few others met the Executive Committee of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee (JSSC), and I said to him look Tony we have a problem with some of our members who are maths graduates. They can do the sums as you can do them, and I've worked out that if you get us on strike for three weeks that will solve the budget problem It won't solve our problem, we will have lost three week's pay, and he said where did you get that from? In other words, he thought I had brought in some great consultant to come in and analyse the books, but the arithmetic was easy enough and none of the Labour Group were aware of it. Peter Kilfoyle. That goes back to the composition of the Labour Group and the abilities of them. It was woeful, it was absolutely woeful. I couldn't believe how bad it was." (Appendix 19 page 388)*

Only affiliated Trade Union members could attend DLP meetings which excluded non-affiliated unions, although they represented over a third of the City Council's workforce. This excluded all the City's 5,000 teachers, NUT and National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NAS/UWT) and 5,000 administrative workers, members of National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO). (The size of memberships of each union in this thesis is verified by Peter Cresswell, the former secretary of the JSSC).

This meant that the manual and skilled unions, who were the main beneficiaries of the new employment recruitment procedures, had exclusive access and power at DLP meetings and had most to gain from Militant's continued control of the Labour party.

Most aggregate meetings were called without written notices but through word of mouth and the agenda was usually a report back of the latest political position of the Labour Group and DLP Executive. This was in effect the Vanguard i.e., the Militant leadership of the Labour Group and the DLP executive committee who explained the progress of their confrontational campaign to wrest more funds from the Government.

Dissent was drowned out by sheer force of numbers in support of the Group's position, also there was a deliberate lack of a formal structure to the meetings. Although the meeting had standing orders, it meant that dissenting amendments could not easily be tabled and debated because the report back was a record of recent events given at the meeting, usually orally. The dynamics of the meeting was such that a dissenting voice would struggle to be even heard. Below is an extract from an interview in 2019 with Prof David Robertson, a member of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE), a frequent attender at DLP meetings.

*“James Ferguson. Did you go often to DLP meetings?”*

*David Robertson. “I went to all the DLP meetings.”*

*JF. “What all of them?”*

*DR. “All of them at the time yes, oh yes.”*

*JF. “In the main what was your general impression of those meetings?”*

*DR. “My general impression of Militant from the DLP meetings? That Tony Mulhearn was in the chair and Hatton used to sit next to him, and if people like me ever got up to speak we'd be howled down. We'd have 3 minutes to speak and never get a word out and then we would be told to sit down again. That's my impression of Militant. The delegate from Muesli Hill we would be called.”*



JF. *“Of course, your constituency was Mossley Hill.”* (Appendix 21 page 406)

From the extract above it is clear, that non-trade union delegates from the more affluent parts of the City were derided and their contribution cut short.

In an interview with David Blunkett in 2014 he initially took a benign view of Militant,

*“I had not taken the view that they were as powerful or as insidious as Neil felt they were. I think that in retrospect he was probably right, and I was wrong, they needed taking on”.* (Appendix 13 page 337)

His experience of the Liverpool Labour Party changed his mind he expands on his earlier comment,

*“I thought we could defeat them in the normal pattern of squeezing them out of power within party branches but reflecting back on the experience I had going to Liverpool in '83 and '84 and to some extent in '85, I think the tactics they adopted were, as all Trotskyist organisations did, so focused and pinpointed, that if we hadn't endeavoured to get them out they would have, they could well have bullied 'normal' in quotes, members of the party, out of the party. So, in the areas where they did have strength they would have, in those particular areas, they would have remained predominant just by the tactics, not by the argument”.*

### **5.3 External Dissent from Militant Policies**

Dissent was difficult, within the Liverpool District Labour Party, from the policies of Militant but there was considerable dissent from Militant outside the Labour Party, particularly from the non-affiliated unions. The main three non-affiliated unions were the NUT, NALGO and NATFHE, but NALGO was the most influential and from the initial round of negotiations with government they heavily criticised Derek Hatton for

mishandling the public relations following their first financial settlement. Derek Hatton was Deputy Leader of the Council and a member of Militant and assumed the role of the spokesperson for the council even though John Hamilton was Leader, but he was in effect a titular leader. Graham Burgess chair of the City branch of NALGO explains in an interview in 2019,

*“Certainly, the view and analysis that we did, from our members in the Treasury the group analysis of our members in the Treasury, and the group analysis of two of our members in the central support unit, who were not Militant but were sensible, and their view was that they got some very minor concessions from Patrick Jenkin that were dressed up as a great victory. Probably only worth about a million or two pounds, always useful to have, and I’m not denying that but never the less, but it made no real difference to the council’s budget, but Derek then dressed it up as a major, major, victory for the movement brought about by themselves. Which gave them the credibility. The major mistake then was that Derek came out of the meeting with Patrick Jenkin who was then the Secretary of State and he proclaimed the great victory and Jenkin had backed down and Jenkin was quoted as saying ‘Derek Hatton danced on my political grave’ which we thought was a huge mistake as we knew when we went back the next year no minister was ever going to make concessions to Liverpool because of the way they had reached it first time round.” (Appendix 15 page 353)*

When Kenneth Baker took over from Jenkin on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, September 1985 the City Council hit a brick wall and Derek Hatton explains why, when I asked him about Baker’s refusal to meet and negotiate. He disagreed about meetings not being held but agreed they were not productive and why.

*“No, he wasn’t he met us, he wasn’t particularly interested in talking to us because he had seen what had happened to Patrick Jenkin, Patrick Jenkin got sacked.”* (Appendix 18 page 378)

The implications which flowed from the above statement were serious because the sacking of Jenkins closed the door on any future increased funding. NALGO was aware of this implication and tried to prevent it, Graham Burgess was asked in an interview with him that as a senior member of a union, on the NEC, did he agree that if you negotiate with an employer and you reach an acceptable settlement the last thing you do is crow from a great height that this was a fantastic victory, because you well know you have to go back the following year and do it all again.

Burgess replied,

*“Well, that’s exactly the point. We made the point to Derek but it was too late he had done it, but really, as you say it’s a good settlement, you recommend it, but you never crow, you never go to the national press, the national TV , and basically shout how you defeated the Tory Government, and defeated that minister, because in our view that sets the seeds for the government, not unreasonably to say we are not going to move again because we would be embarrassed again , and it would do damage to us again.”* (Appendix 15 page 354)

This dissent from NALGO was serious because it exposed the Militant fault line of the contradiction between their need to be seen to be in the vanguard of the struggle against the Government, but their actions reduced the options for securing more money for the city of Liverpool by alienating a new secretary of state.

The political position of Militant came first before any other considerations and dissent was brushed aside because the vanguard line had to prevail and had to be unassailable, despite all the evidence to the contrary.

#### **5.4 Internal Dissent from the Liverpool Labour Left**

The Liverpool Labour Left was formed mainly by Ian Williams who was an NEC member of the National Union Railway Workers, (NUR), in an interview in 2019 by telephone from his home in New York, he explains how it was formed,

*“James Ferguson. What prompted you to form the Liverpool Labour Left then?”*

*Ian Williams. Well, there were like-minded people who were very depressed at what was happening in the Labour Party, it was at every level.*

*There was a culture of bullying which came down from Derek. He was bullying John Hamilton, Alec Dodswell, the Trades Council Secretary was clearly under pressure. This was an era where people like Eric Heffer, were worried that Militant wanted to de-select him and were appealing for help from people.*

*JF. Can you expand on that Ian, it's not very well known that Eric Heffer was being pressured by Militant, he seemed to give the impression he worked very well with them.*

*IW. My father knew Eric for many, many years, going way back to the building sites, and they all agreed that the one pathological fear Eric had was going back on the tools. He was petrified of losing his position. I'm not saying he was not totally principled. But he was desperately worried that he would be de-selected, and Militant was building up. The traditional CP method was to try to get people elected to strategic positions. That was what their broad lefts used to do. They rallied people*

*behind broad left candidates that would be elected to positions. Militant, were actually, more principled than others, they wanted to get political support. When I came back, I found that this process had been reversed. The CP was in retreat at every level and Militant and Derek and presumably some strategic position had been taken within the RSL were doing exactly that, they were going after strategic positions and they were relying on dominating committees and using them to rally mass support, I must say they hadn't lost total sight of the ball. This was also at a time when the confrontation with Margaret Thatcher was coming up and the various manoeuvres. Being a retired Maoist I recognised it. They managed to mesmerise most of the Labour Party into following the line. There were key decisions taken, and then it was a pretty bold councillor who stood up against them. For example, over the vote for setting the rate. A terrible atmosphere" (Appendix 25 page 454)*

David Blunkett witnessed an atmosphere of fear at a meeting attended by John Hamilton. He explained this in an interview in 2014 he describes a meeting he had in Liverpool at the time of the Liverpool budget crisis.

*"I mean I sat next to John Hamilton who was the titular leader of Liverpool and he was literally physically shaking, and it shook me in the sense that I'd not realised how terrified people were of what was happening and then I started to talk to people on the left in Liverpool, this was not the traditional right-left split. People on what I call the 'firm', some people call the 'soft' left, in Liverpool were absolutely clear with me as to the destructive nature of what their tactics were." (Appendix 13 page 338)*

Ian Williams, of the Liverpool Labour Left, then went on to say how they positioned themselves, by taking up issues that Militant either ignored or opposed.

*“It had to be a conspiracy almost. Which disturbed me to begin with. It was underground because people were intimidated and scared. We tried to organise opposition. We tried to get left wingers. We were holding public meetings in Liverpool with known left wingers and Militant took the bait and tried to stop it. I remember we had John Prescott, we had Robin Cook, and I was using my connections to call these people in. I still have profound respect for the ones who were brave enough to turn out. It was the soft left who came. It wasn’t the right wing. We had meetings on CND and nuclear power. Frankly we were cynically picking issues where Militant was at odds with most of the Labour Party.” (Appendix 25 page 457)*

He then gave examples of issues, in this interview in 2019, which Militant were opposed to,

*“IW. Well, they were completely indifferent to nuclear disarmament, that wasn’t one of their issues. Also, South Africa, we had Peter Hain along as well. These were issues on which they were deficient. Whatever their official positions, they just didn’t care.*

*JF. Did you feel they dodged the issue of race in Liverpool?*

*IW. Oh, totally. The LBO was another one, the Liverpool black organisations issue was another one. On a personal level I knew most of the ringleaders and I saw Militant come in, because I saw in Liverpool Riverside Constituency, the cavalier way Derek treated the local black community. It became clear that you had community representatives who agreed with you and you would de-legitimise those that don’t and put them out. I knew all the people from the Liverpool black organisation at the time and we maintained close relations with them.” (Appendix 25 page 457)*

## **5.5 Dissent from the Communist Party of Great Britain**

The CPGB on Merseyside had approximately 1200 members serviced by an area committee in Liverpool with an office and three full time workers. The CPGB during this period had still managed to retain its influence in the Liverpool trade union movement and in the local authority trades unions. The monthly meetings of the area committee were a forum for discussion on the unfolding budget crisis over a two- year budget cycle from 1983 to 1985. I attended most of those meetings and can give first-hand impressions of their deliberations and discussions.

The chair of the area committee was Barry Williams, chair of the CONFED which represented all the unions in the shipbuilding industry and a member of the NEC of the CPGB and so there was a link between the local and national organisation. The area committee had in membership, branch officials and shop stewards of most of the local authority trades unions in the Liverpool City Council. The deliberations of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee, the body that represented a large majority of the Liverpool City Council's local authority unions, were usually discussed, usually recording dissent and opposition to Militant, this enabled speakers to be well briefed and confident of their facts when contributing later to the JSSC proceedings.

Militant reacted badly to this organised dissent because of the sensitivity of keeping the JSSC united behind the slogan of "No cuts in Jobs and Services". Relations between Derek Hatton and CPGB members of the JSSC were cordial up to the point of the issuing the redundancy notices to all the workforce and the Sam Bond affair.

However, Militant was working hard to undermine this organised dissent by using patronage which a large employer can easily exercise. Their long- term aim was to replace all CPGB union officers by Militant supporters and to put them under concerted

pressure in the short term. By concentrating power in the DLP Militant managed to exclude the CPGB influence in the trade unions because only affiliated unions were represented, and the delegates could only be members of the Labour Party. This led to frustration within the CPGB who were used to these debates occurring in the trades council and so were side lined and had to work industrially within the trade unions but had a limited political role.

## **5.6 Dissent from the Liverpool Liberal Party**

The dissent from the Liberal Party was to be expected as it was the largest opposition party on the council when the Labour Party was in power however no attempts were made by the Labour party to forge unity of purpose on the issue of more central government financial support for Liverpool. Quite the reverse Militant could not contemplate any campaign in which it was not in the vanguard. Militant saw the Liberals, as little different to the Conservatives and decided to exclude them from any defence of the City. This took a more intimidatory turn, Lord Storey, former Deputy Leader of the Liberal Group on the Liverpool city Council in the 1970s and 1980s, recalls in an interview, in 2018,

*“I mean on three occasions my car tyres were slashed. One occasion, my parents, I took a party of kids from a school where I was working to mid-Wales for the weekend. While I was away my parents had been phoned and there was a death threat against me. Honestly. When I came back to my house in Alderson Road a police officer was standing guard, I mean my terraced house in Kensington. It was bizarre. I didn’t think anything of it. But there was that sort of fear.”* (Appendix 23 page 431)

Lord Storey went further and commented on Militant tactics at union meetings,



*“So, we can reflect on the big issues like rate support grant and education and entryism and there’s almost a comparison now with some of the Labour MPs in Liverpool who are facing real bullying and abuse, not from the Labour Party but certain members of the Labour Party. The tactics we saw in that period, at union meetings two or three people constantly attacking people, putting amendments down, people got fed up of attending union meetings. So that small group was then able to take over the branch. That was a very clever tactic, but people in the end thought why am I going to a union meeting to have all these insults hurled at me? I just don’t want to do that. Then that is the opportunity for that group with a strong political agenda to take over.”* (Appendix 23 page 431)

The vanguardism of the Militant Tendency was mainly directed at securing and maintaining power in the Liverpool Labour Party but it can be seen from the above, evidence of its activity outside the Party. The tactic of wearing down the members of trade unions who normally attended branch meetings was having an effect as members of Militant were expected to be active in both the Labour Party and their trade union.

### **5.7 The Use of Patronage**

This section looks at the two different forms of patronage which Militant used to their advantage, which I have categorised and analysed below in detail. They are Overt Patronage and Hidden Patronage.

### **5.8 Overt Patronage**

This was achieved by the misuse of the nomination rights of the manual trades unions to vacancies, which often resulted in GMBATU sifting suitable candidates who would support the Militant line. John Hamilton, the Leader of the Council, stated to me, that,

*“you don’t get a job in Liverpool unless you are a Militant.”*

However, this form of patronage would surface in the JSSC with new employees becoming shop stewards within weeks of taking up employment. The new stewards were briefed on how to vote but in a robotic way. They were also briefed on who were dissenting stewards and who should be opposed. Deviations, arising out of amendments moved on the day of the meeting caused enormous problems for Militant, this led to confusion as to which way to vote, left only with their own judgement and cursory experience.

This surfaced as open derision when new stewards were unaware of the basics of standing orders in the JSSC. An example of this occurred when I was the secretary of the JSSC and the chair was Ian Lowes, a Militant supporter and convenor of the largest branch of GMWU. A policy had been passed at the previous meeting although opposed by Militant who decided to nullify this decision by the device of challenging the minutes of the previous meeting which took the decision, in effect re-writing history. New stewards flooded the meeting to vote down the minutes which I had written. However, before the vote was taken, I insisted that the chair remind the meeting that only members who had been at the previous meeting could vote on the accuracy of those minutes. This was conveyed to the meeting but ignored by the new stewards and a forest of hands was raised to vote down the minutes. I then challenged the vote because the total vote to overturn the minutes exceeded the total attendance of the previous meeting so that it was obvious that the new stewards were primed to vote but not to think or to be truthful. There was then a mixture of derision and confusion followed by the chair having to accept the minutes. This one personal example shows the lengths Militant would use patronage to achieve a change in trade union policy but there were many others.

## 5.9 Hidden Patronage

Hidden patronage was, more subtle and difficult to prove because it was used in conjunction with appointments where councillors controlled the short lists and the eventual appointments. This surfaced when employees realised that having a reputation for opposing Militant was not good for their career and changed their behaviour accordingly. I noticed this at the branch meetings of the NUT where some members became regular attenders supporting resolutions and amendments which previously, they had opposed. Concrete examples are difficult to prove except one that I experienced at first hand in the education sector. Two teachers formed a drama advisory service to schools but outside of any formal appointment's procedure. This ad-hoc arrangement continued until the secondary schools were re-organised and all appointments had to be subject to a strict procedure embodied in a formal collective agreement between unions and the council.

The two teachers in question were reallocated to their former posts outside the agreement by personal lobbying to Councillor Felicity Dowling, DLP secretary, and former branch president of the NUT. I raised an objection to this because there were English teachers who would most certainly apply for these posts within the terms of the collective agreement. This objection was ignored but I was reluctant to hold up a reallocation of 1200 teachers over this one issue by going into dispute over a breach of the agreement when the outcome would probably not change. The two teachers then became active in branch affairs, prior to this issue they were inactive in the NUT, but were now supporting Militant policies overnight.

I use this example because I have personal first-hand knowledge of it but during the staffing reallocation process led by Felicity Dowling some branch members became

nervous about criticising DLP policy for fear of an adverse reaction from Militant. Other unions had similar experiences which showed the power of hidden patronage by Militant. In an interview with Ian Williams in 2019 he recalls Militant was manipulating appointments,

Ian Williams. *“Even at school level, I was a school governor, and it became quite clear that the cards were marked on who was going to get jobs and who wasn’t.”*

James Ferguson. *“Like jobs in schools?”*

IW. *“Yes, like the head or the principal, on every level it goes back to what I was saying before, the old days they forged their ideas and then I suddenly found they’d turned into a, jobs generating scheme.”*

JF. *“Did you feel they were doing that because they saw it as a route to more power?”*

IW. *“Yes, this is Derek’s political instincts. The others didn’t have political instincts with a small p. the others were big on the third programme of the Fourth International, but they didn’t have any political sense. But Derek was very canny, and he had them. You build on not necessarily ethical or principled Marxist positions, like giving jobs to people and buttering up people.”* (Appendix 25 page 457)

## **5.10 Militant’s creation of a new form of Industrial Relations**

Militant’s strategy in the local government context was to politicise the trade unions by the slogan of no redundancies and no cuts in services.

This overarching political position was only achievable if the unions were prepared to stage strikes at key stages in the campaign to secure more funding from central government.

In this section I draw on my involvement as a participant observer, as a member of the executive of the joint shop stewards committee, and for a short period its secretary, an organisation which represented most of the City council's employees, as well as being Liverpool Divisional Secretary of the NUT.

### **5.11 Duality of Power**

The impact of this arrangement of supportive strike action on Industrial Relations was profound. It elevated one union, GMWU, into a Dual Power relationship reducing the authority of the management structure of the City Council to a minimal level. This duality of power was now shared between the Labour Group and one trade union. This shared power was conditional on a union accepting the vanguard role of the Labour Group in relation to their political programme. Political power derived from the electorate in Liverpool, was now shared with a union who allied themselves industrially and politically with Militant's confrontational policies. The degree of power sharing with other unions depended on the commitment each trade union had to the council's strategy.

At the highest level of influence was the Militant led GMWU which I describe as allied, followed by other unions who were supportive but not wholly committed to the campaign. At the lowest level were the union branches who were openly sceptical of the council's strategy and thought it reckless and in direct opposition to National Labour Party policy and were non-allied. The non-allied unions still retained the formality of an employer employee relationship and would not sacrifice their independence for a high-risk political campaign led by a Trotskyist group.

The normal system of Industrial Relations in a Local Authority left the management almost a free hand subject to the constraints of the departmental budgets, national

collective agreements, local collective agreements and the usual grievance and disputes procedures. Local councillors would steer the implementation of their policies, at a ponderous pace, through a matrix of committees and sub committees, giving management ample time and opportunity to ensure that their advice was given the weight management thought necessary. Usually, local councillors were employed and were released from their duties as and when attendance at meetings was necessary.

Many councillors from the Liverpool broad left group of councillors, especially members of Militant, became effectively full-time councillors either by generous arrangements with their employer or by being unemployed and living off the council's attendance allowance. This created a different relationship with management and councillors were now far more involved with day- to- day policy making and implementation. These full-time councillors created space for detailed informal discussions with the trades unions it was now sharing power with. Management were excluded from this duality of power and were informed of the decisions made and then instructed to implement them.

The Inquiry team set up by the NEC of the Labour Party, investigated the operation of Industrial Relations in Liverpool City Council and reported that,

*“Detailed involvement in industrial relations of this nature appears to the investigation team to be inappropriate, particularly since it also gave the impression of bypassing normal trade unions and industrial relations procedures.”* (Appendix 7 page 81)

The duality of power between the Labour Group and GMWU changed traditional industrial relations norms. This duality of power was then formalised, where it was

possible, into council employment procedures. Below are examples of two areas of Industrial Relations which were adapted to the new dual power relationship.

### **Disciplinary Hearings**

The final stage of dismissal for a council employee was a council sub-committee at which the employee could attend but where the proceedings were usually a foregone conclusion with management advising the councillors that the employee had transgressed beyond an acceptable level and provided evidence for this. Only the councillors had a vote on this sub-committee. This sub-committee was now expanded to include non-voting trade union advisors to the council and so had now become a tripartite body of councillors, management, and trade union advisors. The management and trade union advisors had speaking rights at which the management put the case for dismissal and the trade union advisors could argue against. This created a debating chamber over which councillors would preside.

I attended a number of these sub-committee hearings, as a trade union advisor, I can describe at first hand the dynamics of this changed format. The chair of the committee was Pauline Dunlop, a member of Militant, who conducted the meetings by asking the management to put their case for the dismissal of an employee. This was followed by points of clarification arising from the management report to the sub-committee. There then followed an invitation to the trade union advisors to contribute to the proceedings. If the case for dismissal was overwhelming and impossible to defend there was a long silence and the chair moved to dismiss. If the case for dismissal was in any way flawed, even in a minor procedural way, then the trade union advisors would question the recommendation to dismiss. It nearly always resulted in disciplinary action short of dismissal.

This drastically reduced the power and authority of management and created demoralisation amongst line managers who were now reluctant to dismiss employees because they perceived that their report to the committee had to be perfect otherwise it would be rejected and their judgement and authority with it.

### **Collective Bargaining**

The effect of duality of power surfaced during collective bargaining across the council's various negotiating committees with highly polarised outcomes. Unions supporting Militant were now sharing degrees of power with the council and discussions took place between them in private and were then formalised with management simply implementing the previously agreed understandings into the language of the council's committee structure.

A prominent example of such an arrangement was union nomination rights to employment by the council. This gave unions close to Militant one hundred per cent nomination rights to employment in their sector. This practise worked by a system of, filling vacancies where the candidates could only be interviewed if they had been nominated by their relevant union branch. This replaced management's existing recruitment procedures and it is highly unlikely it would have been successfully negotiated through normal collective bargaining procedures elsewhere.

### **Duality of Power and its consequences**

The sharing of power between the Labour Group and allied and supportive trade unions compromised the Labour Party's compact with the electorate which now in effect had a veto by the allied and supportive trade unions. This veto if exercised would destroy Militant's political programme for Liverpool and so the supportive unions had real power to exercise if they so wished. The Labour group in sharing power, it could



be argued, compromised its duty to provide the best services it could to the citizens of Liverpool. The new disciplinary procedures relaxed the need to enforce standards of employee performance and inevitably led to a lowering of the quality of the service provided, and a reduction in the ability of managers to manage employees.

The new collective bargaining arrangements disregarded professional advice from management and led to recruitment procedures aimed at recruiting union members of supportive unions into vacancies rather than the best person for the job. This inevitably again would reduce the quality of the provision of services to the citizens of Liverpool and could not be described as fair recruitment. The dual power sharing between the supportive trades unions and the Labour Group compromised councillors standing for election because they failed to explain to the electorate that the manifesto was now subject to a veto by the supportive trade unions.

### **GMWU and their relationship to their National and Regional Officials.**

Militant, as a Trotskyist group, drew on the writings of Trotsky for their theoretical grounding and this was demonstrated in its attitude to the national structures of trade unions. It is important at this stage to briefly examine the guidance given to Trotsky's supporters on the question of trades unions in Britain.

Trotsky wrote in 1933,

*“The trade unions were formed during the period of the growth and rise of capitalism. They had as their task the raising of the material and cultural level of the proletariat and the extension of its political rights. This work in England lasted over a century, gave the trade unions tremendous authority among the workers. The decay of British capitalism, under the conditions of decline of the world capitalist system, undermined the basis for the reformist work of the trade unions. Capitalism can continue*

*to maintain itself only by lowering the standard of living of the working class. Under these conditions trade unions can either transform themselves into revolutionary organisations or become lieutenants of capital in the intensified exploitation of the workers. The trade union bureaucracy, which has satisfactorily solved its own social problem, took the second path. It turned all the accumulated authority of the trade unions against the socialist revolution and even against any attempts of the workers to resist the attack of capital and reaction.*

*From that point on, the most important task of the revolutionary party became the liberation of the workers from the reactionary influence of the trade union bureaucracy.” (Trotsky, 1971, p. 53)*

Militant controlled a large employer and with this power along with the supportive trade unions prioritised the work of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee. Unions who were not fully supportive of Militant saw an advantage in membership of the JSSC because it dealt with issues which affected all city council employees and otherwise would have been dealt with in sectional bargaining units. It must be borne in mind that the JSSC was formed during the previous Liberal/Conservative coalitions who were displaying aggressive attitudes to the trade unions.

All shop stewards from all unions could attend the meetings of the JSSC but the resolutions at the meetings were not binding on the individual unions because of the sovereignty of each union. Militant elevated the JSSC's deliberations to a level of authority on a par with council decisions and strove to refer as many industrial relations issues to that body, instead of the established departmental collective bargaining units.

The non- allied trade unions maintained their close relationship with their regional and national officials, briefing them on the developments within the council and calling on their advice.

GMWU viewed their national and regional officials with deep suspicion and hostility. The dual power relationship had produced great rewards for this union which could not be matched by the traditional negotiating methods in surrounding local authorities. The national trade union officials kept a waiting and watching brief through their area and regional officials but did not intervene or try to limit the power of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee. They realised that all unions had no other choice but stay in the organisation and influence it from within.

### **Allied, Supportive, and non- Allied Trade Unions**

Literature on the Liverpool Budget Crisis, when describing industrial relations during this period, refers to differences in union's policies towards the council as either blue collar or white collar, manual or non- manual. I argue in this thesis that the different attitudes of trade unions created a political divide and not an occupational one, trade unions were either allied to the council's policies, supportive or non-allied and were based on political differences not occupational ones. Michael Parkinson describes the events leading up to the issuing of redundancy notices to all the council's employees.

*“Whereas the blue- collar workers were confident of being reinstated by the Labour Council, the white-collar workers feared that many of them would not be, and they would have no legal redress.”* (Parkinson, 1985, p. 169)

The above account of the debate within the unions when the mass redundancy issue surfaced is an attempt to explain a split between blue and white-collar unions. The debate was far more politically fundamental and was about the survival of a Labour

administration, which may have been removed from office and replaced with commissioners or a rump of Liberal and Conservative councillors, it was not a divide between blue or white collars. The Employment Protection Act applied to all employees irrespective of their section within the council and the conditions of the Act on security of tenure was common to all. The decision that unions had to make was a political one with the criteria of which scenario was the more likely?

- (a) The Labour administration successfully buying time by issuing redundancy notices and collapsing the services over three months and then building a campaign which would result in the government backing down and providing the extra funding.
- (b) Commissioners taking over the City or a rump council of Liberals and Conservatives taking office if some Labour councillors were debarred from office.

The GMWU took a political position in support of the council because they were power sharing and had agreed this strategy and had broken with their national organisation, but in effect the union knew it was an inevitable consequence of the council passing an illegal deficit budget.

The non-allied unions, apart from having a fundamental opposition to redundancies, however tactical, simply did not believe that strategy (a) above, had a reasonable chance of success and so redundancy notices had to be withdrawn in favour of the Labour Group making a legal budget and staying in office.

Trade union branches in a large city are usually highly political bodies and policies are usually formed not on a basis of non-manual or manual but by the politics of the leadership groups within the branches. Liverpool is home to many political groups on the left and this surfaces in the trade union branches, so that making branch policy is not always a matter of occupational interests, but policies can and do prevail which are

outside the normal blue/white collar divide. Not all branches of manual workers supported the Militant line and not all non- manual workers opposed the Militant line. Employees who were members of the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE), were the lowest paid workers in the City Council but were hostile to the Militant-led Council and so was its secretary Jane Kennedy. During, this critical period, I was in close contact with most of the leaders of the trade union branches in the City and was aware of the mixture of political views within their branches. I describe below the main political differences between the trade unions and have placed them in three categories allied trade unions, supportive trade unions and non- allied trade unions.

### **Allied trade Unions**

**GMWU** branches together accounted for approximately 8,000 members and were mainly non- skilled manual workers, in the refuse department, parks and gardens and school caretakers and cleaners and grave diggers. They collectively accepted the political leadership of Ian Lowes branch secretary of the parks and gardens branch. He was also chair of the JSSC for all council workers and was a member of Militant and was in full support of the council's political strategy and was hostile to involvement from Regional or National GMWU officials. GMWU stewards were also active in the DLP of the Liverpool Labour Party.

### **Supportive Unions**

**Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU)** had approx. 800 members amongst drivers and some building workers. It's secretary, was Bill Jones, not to be confused with Bill Jones of UCATT, a mainstream member of the Labour Party.

This union was allied to the council's overall policy in a qualified way but was not divorced from its Regional and National structure. The T&GWU was in membership

competition with GMWU. Bob Owens was North West Regional Secretary, a member of the CPGB, and very respected by the Liverpool branch who also had some members of the CPGB on their branch committee.

**Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians (UCATT)** had approx. 800 members amongst building workers and gave qualified support to the Council, were close to their Regional and National Officials. The branch secretary was Bill Jones a member of the CPGB, highly critical of Militant, but supported the council's policy of bringing building work contracts, in house, to his members. This policy however led to UCATT members being made redundant in the private sector when the council contracts were withdrawn from local firms. However, the council house building policies of the council benefited UCATT members in the private sector. The contract compliance policy of the council also had the effect of a strong union membership of the building workers employed in the private firms.

**Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW).** Represented mainly fitters in the vehicle repair depots with approx. 300 members. They played a minimal role in the JSSC.

**National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO).** One of the largest unions in the council, with approx. 5000 members amongst a variety of administrative and professional staff right across the departments of the council. The Union was led by Peter Cresswell its branch secretary, also secretary of the JSSC and a member of the EC of the DLP, was from a Trotskyist political background and was a member of the Labour Party, but he was critical of Militant and careful not to fully commit the union to the Council's campaign. Graham Burgess was branch chair and

a member of the NEC of NALGO, a member of the CPGB, they both worked together in what appeared to be a seamless way.

NALGO had the advantage of having in membership of the union employees from the City Treasury department who kept the union leadership informed of the state of the City's financial position. NALGO also had the advantage of a direct link with the national organisation through Graham Burgess's membership of the NEC, there was no divide between the branch and Regional or National Officials.

**Electrical, Electronic Telecommunications and Plumbing Union (EEPTU)**, had a small membership with approx. 500 members and supportive of the council with a Militant branch secretary, Pat Weathers. The national officials were very opposed to Militant even though the branch was supportive, it was closely watched by the full-time officers.

### **Non- Allied Trade Unions**

**National Union of Public Employees (NUPE)** had a membership of approx. 2000 members, mainly in the care sector, with many part-time workers and were the lowest paid in the City. The branch secretary was Jane Kennedy who was active in the Labour Party and was opposed to Militant. The branch chair was Ken Dunlop a member of the CPGB who was critical of Militant. NUPE recruited members in the same sector as GMWU and was in direct competition with them. The branch had a close relationship with its regional and national structure.

**National Union of Teachers, (NUT)** had a membership of approx. 2,500 teachers and held a meeting addressed by Derek Hatton, in works time, which voted against supportive strike action by approximately 1000 to 1100.

The motion put to the members asked them to agree to conditionally support the council's strategy and was supported by the branch committee which politically was on the left, but was sceptical, apart from four Militant members. The branch was in close contact with the regional and national structure of the union. I was a member of the NEC of the NUT and the Liverpool Divisional Secretary and was in close contact with the national officers of the union. I was a member of the CPGB. Subsequently the branch did not support any strike action in support of the council.

**National Association of Schoolmaster, and Union of Women Teachers (NAS/UWT)**, had a membership of approx. 2,000 teachers and did not request a mass meeting in works time nor did it take up any offers to address their members by members of the council. They were the only TUC affiliated union who were not members of the JSSC. This union kept a low profile probably on the advice of their national structure. This was a break away union from the NUT over the issue of equal pay for women teachers and was in direct competition with the NUT for the recruitment of teachers. Their low profile was probably in the expectation that there were membership gains to be realised if the NUT policies could be criticised. Their branch committee had in membership a member of their NEC so that a close contact was maintained between the branch committee and the national officials.

**National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE)** Represented college lecturers and had a membership of approx. 1000 members. The branch secretary was Colin Forrester and the branch chair David Robertson, both were mainstream members of the Labour Party. Most times when strike action was discussed, and a date fixed it was a standing joke that NATFHE could not participate because they were on holiday. NATFHE was in close contact with their General Secretary, David Triesman.



## Political Strike Action

I have separated out this section because the issues surrounding political strike action did not surface publicly during the events covered by the case study. However, unions, even with one day protest strikes were vulnerable to a legal challenge and more so if they had escalated to extended strike action. It is important to analyse the implications of political strikes should they be considered again in the context of local authority disputes over funding with central government.

The fundamental issue here is if the allied and supportive unions pursued a prolonged strike in Liverpool, would this be a bona fide trade dispute or a political strike?

Strike action is examined by Professor Frank Burchill,

*“At a very explicit level, the reasons given for taking strike action have been classified (Knowles, 1952). Official statistics do incorporate information which can be used to allocate reasons under these headings.*

1. **Basic issues** over wages and hours of work
2. **Solidarity Issues** recognition, the closed shop or disputes between unions.
3. **Frictional Issues** disputes over discipline, redundancy, working arrangements”

(Burchill, 1997, p. 162)

The reasons above for taking strike action would all be clearly described as a trade dispute between one or more trade unions and the employer.

The Liverpool City Council employed all its staff but were asking its trade unions to mount strike action against the Government to provide more funds for the Council so that it could spend more.

It is probable, that if an interested party brought a court action against striking unions, it could be argued that it was not a legitimate trade dispute but a political action. If such an action were successful in court in favour of the interested party this would remove immunity from the unions and leave them vulnerable to a class action for damages.

Burchill explains,

*“Rights to organise industrial action have never been expressed as such in UK law; they have always been expressed as immunities from liabilities which have arisen if the actions had not been done in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute.”* (Burchill, 1997, p. 151)

The issue for a court to decide was, is it a legitimate trade dispute? The trades unions had no trade dispute with the Council but would be using industrial action as a means of putting pressure on the government for extra funds. The trade unions had no trade dispute with Government because it was not the employer.

It remains to be seen if this set of circumstances ever arises again, would the increased legal constraints on unions make legal action more likely than in 1985. This scenario of removing immunity from trade unions would have been simpler for the Government than bringing in commissioners because the national trade union leaderships would then have been under enormous pressure to intervene in their Liverpool branches by suspending them or closing them down. Politically this would transfer pressure from Government to the national trade union leaders who would have to persuade the local officials to call off their action or disband the branch.

## 5.12 Militant's Political Programme

It is necessary at this stage to reproduce extracts from a pamphlet written by Peter Taaffe, editor of Militant, in December 1981 entitled

*"What Militant Stands For"*. (Shiple, 1983, p. 11)

It is a list of nineteen demands, essential reading if Militant is to be measured by what it put into practice when it was in a position of power within the Liverpool City Council. Most of the demands are of a national nature so that it would be misplaced to translate those demands to what was essentially a local authority political structure. However, the policies below which could have had a local authority implication I have highlighted in bold lettering.

**1. The immediate introduction of a 35-hour week without loss in pay as a step towards the elimination of unemployment.**

2. Reversal of all Tory cuts and a massive programme of public works on housing, education, the health service etc.

**3. A minimum wage of £90 per week**, including for pensioners, the sick and disabled.

4. Opposition to the Tory Government's anti-union bill and reversal of all attacks on the trade unions.

5. Workers management of the nationalised industries on the basis of one third of the places on the management board coming from the unions in the industry, one third from TUC representing the working class as a whole and one third from the government.

6. Nationalisation under workers control and management of all firms threatening redundancies.

7. Opening of the books of the monopolies to inspection by committees of shop stewards, housewives and small shopkeepers.

8. Opposition to racism and fascism and all racist immigration laws, particularly the Tory government's racist Nationality Act.

We also recognise that only by unifying black and white workers in a struggle of socialist change can racism and fascism be effectively abolished.

9. Total opposition to the dictatorship of the Fleet Street Press who pour out their poison daily against the labour movement. We propose that a Labour government should nationalise the newspaper printing plant facilities, radio and TV. Access to these facilities should be given to political parties, in proportion to their votes at elections.

10. Abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords.

11. Nationalisation of the top 200 monopolies including the banks and insurance companies which control the 'commanding heights' of the economy through an Enabling Bill in Parliament with minimum compensation on the basis of proven need. This would allow a socialist plan of production to be democratically drawn up and implemented by committees involving the trades unions, shop stewards, housewives and small businessmen.

**12. Opposition to discrimination on the basis of sex. We call for equal pay for work of equal value,** for a crash programme to build nurseries, schools, etc.

13. For a 24-hour general strike to be organised by the TUC against Tory cuts and Tebbit's anti-union Bill. This is to be part of a campaign to force a general election and bring a Labour government to power on a socialist programme.

14. Opposition to the capitalist Common Market, for a Socialist United States of Europe as a step towards a World Socialist Federation.

15. Massive cuts in arms spending, now running at £12,500 million a year. Support for unilateral nuclear disarmament, but with the recognition that only a socialist change of society in Britain and internationally can eliminate the threat of nuclear holocaust.

16. Defence of mandatory re-selection of MPs.

17. Election of a Labour Cabinet/Shadow Cabinet by the Electoral College.

18. NEC, control of the manifesto, based on Party conference decisions.

19. All MPs to receive the average wage of a skilled worker plus expenses; the surplus to be given to the labour movement.

The last demand was designed to embarrass any Labour MP who was not a member of Militant by accusing them of accepting a salary and lifestyle which would divorce themselves from the working class. Members of Militant, who became MP's, had already made financial commitments to Militant so this was easily described as a contribution to the labour movement.

# The Liverpool City Council Budget

## Confrontation

### 5.13 The background to the 1984/5 Liverpool City Council Budget

Council budgets were dependant on central government for the rate support grant provided to them and this was the largest income a council received. In addition, it could raise local taxes called rates, but were limited by how much they could increase them without encountering voter resistance.

I draw heavily on these and other technical issues by referring to Michael Parkinson's book (Parkinson, 1985) which was written when he was researching government policy towards the inner cities at the University of Liverpool. The book is entitled "Liverpool on the Brink" and details in a cool and dispassionate way how Liverpool City Council historically and cumulatively became underfunded in comparison with other northern cities. The urban riots of 1981 took place in cities in Britain but in Liverpool in July of 1981 they reached an intensity when groups of policemen fled for their lives from a hail of petrol bombs thrown by hundreds of young men.

It was assumed by most political commentators that the appointment of Michael Heseltine to the post of Minister for Merseyside heralded a measured government intervention to help Merseyside's rapid economic decline and to prevent further riots. However only in the last few years has a letter (reproduced below) been put in the public domain, dated 11<sup>th</sup> August 1981. It is from the Chancellor to the Prime Minister, and in which he argues for "*managed decline*" for Merseyside. He deeply undermines the efforts of Heseltine warning that resources should not be spent trying to "*make water flow uphill*".

This letter shows that, even after extensive rioting only the month previously, the Government was reluctant to spend money on Liverpool's private sector led regeneration.

Parkinson explains the response from government, with the creation of,

*“the Merseyside Task Force, consisting of civil servants from three government departments and secondees from the much-vaunted private sector. The new team was supposed to devise innovative strategies and projects which would make an impact on Liverpool's long-term problems, especially unemployment and housing”.*

(Parkinson, 1985, pp. 15-16)

It is now clear why the initiative failed when you read the contents of the letter below. The chancellor is clearly advising the prime minister not to waste money on Liverpool and advising her not to reject the policy of managed decline for the City. This policy would accept the further de-population of the City as young well- educated people would have to leave the City to have any hope of a career. The already fragile manufacturing base of the City would be allowed to wither away and reduce the skilled working class to a rare breed. It is not hard to see why the Liverpool City Council's workforce of 31,000 was a politically sensitive issue because it was the largest provider of jobs in the City. One argument is that the Council should concentrate on high quality services whether it be provided by an in-house service or a private provider. The Militant Tendency slogan of “No cuts in Jobs and Services” saw the City Council as a citadel of public sector activity which it could control by keeping as many services as possible in-house.

SECRET



Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG  
01-233 3000

PRIME MINISTER

LIVERPOOL

Like you, I had the chance, before going off on holiday, of a short talk with Michael Heseltine about his forthcoming Merseyside report. This is obviously not the time for a reaction to the detail of what he will have to suggest. But there is one short point worth making now.

2. As you know, I have for some years had some sympathy with his idea of giving several Ministers the responsibility for individual regions. In the present context it may serve too as a useful reminder of the need to be careful not to over-commit scarce resources to Liverpool.

3. For reasons which we all understand, I fear that Merseyside is going to be much the hardest nut to crack. It will be hard to persuade prospective private sector investors to take the opposite view. Even so we do not want to find ourselves concentrating all the limited cash that may have to be made available into Liverpool and having nothing left for possibly more promising areas such as the West Midlands or, even, the North East. It would be even more regrettable if some of the brighter ideas for renewing economic activity were to be sown only on relatively stony ground on the banks of the Mersey. I cannot help feeling that the option of managed decline, which the CPRS rejected in its study of Merseyside, is one which we should not forget altogether. We must not expend all our resources in trying to make water flow uphill.

G.H.

// August 1981



## **Factors which accentuated Liverpool's budget problems 5.14-5.19**

**5.14 Unemployment**, Parkinson summarises the collapse of jobs in Liverpool,

*“From 1971 to 1985 total employment in the city fell by 33 per cent in contrast to the national figure of only 3 per cent. And this brought heavy rates of unemployment. In fact, Merseyside has had the highest rate of unemployment of any English conurbation in every decade since the 1950s. But the position worsened considerably during the 1970s as the rate of unemployment in Liverpool quadrupled from 5 per cent to 20 per cent. By 1985 it was 27 per cent, double the national average”.*  
(Parkinson, 1985, p. 13)

The effects of unemployment impact directly on local service provision i.e. social services, free school meals, housing provision and reduction of income from fee paying services such as leisure centres. Indirectly, the lower level of economic activity from less spending power leads to fewer and smaller businesses. The pressure on the City Council to maintain its employment levels is considerable as it is by far the largest employer in the City.

## **5.15 Historically Low Spending by previous Liberal Administrations**

Parkinson concludes that the seeds of the budget crisis lay with the Liberal and Conservative Party's policies prior to Labour taking office.

*“The Liberal Legacy.”*

*“Both Liberal and Conservative parties in Liverpool made their contribution to the crisis as well. During the lost decade of coalition politics, the Liberals especially failed to respond adequately to the city's long-term decline and held down council*

*spending and rate rises in a search for popularity and votes. Their endless creative accounting and consistent refusal to increase rates to cover the real cost of the city's commitments, left serious financial difficulties for the Labour council. In particular, the final Liberal budget which Labour inherited significantly underestimated the real costs of running the city." (Parkinson, 1985, p. 177)*

This issue was addressed directly to the then Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, later Leader of the Liberal Party on the Liverpool City Council, Michael Storey, now Lord Storey. In an interview in 2018, I asked Lord Storey to review his Group's decision to implement low rate rises.

*"About 35 years ago prior to the Militant era you were part of the Liberal Group on the Liverpool City Council who determined budgets. Obviously, you were not the overall majority party. These budgets were based on very low rate rises, and this is all about reflecting over the years. On reflection, did you regret this?"*

*"Did this lead to a low- rate support grant settlement when the City needed as much cash injection as possible to alleviate the pressure on services?" (Appendix 23 page 426).*

His reply at first was descriptive of the time when Tony Crosland, Labour's Secretary of State for the Environment declared *"the party is over"* which was followed by the Conservative government's reductions in rate support grant settlements. However, I pressed him on low rate rises and especially rises below the rate of inflation. Lord Storey comments on this in an interview in 2018,

*James Ferguson, "But, at the time I remember talking to Tony Travis who now is at the London School of Economics (LSE), obviously you know him. When I was a member of the NUT Executive, we commissioned him to look at Liverpool's finances,*

*so if you like we did an independent Stonefrost, and he did mention that the Liberal's low- rate policy, which I think in some years was actually below the rate of inflation, was basically triggering off a formula, an RSG formula, which then hit Liverpool harder than other authorities. Is that fair comment?"*

*His reply was "I say again that the income generated locally by council tax, and before that rates, was not as big as the amount of money received from central government. Now you might argue, you might say, and I would agree with this, that Liverpool suffered if you like a double whammy, because central government didn't favour cities when there was a Conservative Government in terms of its settlement. Perhaps having rate increases below inflation would have affected the formula. I think that's fair comment, but I think you also have to look at this in terms of a broader picture. Firstly, we wanted to govern the city, and we wanted to create a number of policies, not just in terms of income generation, but a whole host of things, where people would say "yes", not just community politics, but all sorts of things, where people would say "yes, we want to vote for them". And interestingly you're looking at the Militant Tendency period, interestingly when we took over on a temporary basis when Militant were expelled, and when we then took over permanently in 1998, when we won 50 seats and I was Leader of the Council, Liverpool was spending less on education, spending below average on education, so that Militant Tendency period, a Militant council period, Liverpool was spending less on education, spending below average on education, so that Militant Tendency period, a Militant council period, saw education budgets slashed, and we immediately, and you can check these they stand alone, we immediately increased the spending on education to become above the national average. So, during the Militant period, I don't know whether they inherited this from others, during the Militant period and the Labour*

*minority period, they were spending less, certainly below average on education.”*

(Appendix 23 page 427)

Lord Storey's reply did concede that low- rate rises did affect the RSG formula and that this meant that Liverpool had to manage on lower budgets and that it was Liberal policy to project themselves as different from Labour who would raise the rates at a much higher level maximising overall spending. Parkinson then looks at the Liberal legacy on its relations with the large workforce of 31,000,

*“The Liberal reign also encouraged the crisis in a less obvious way. Its ‘natural wastage’ policies and threats of privatisation alienated the council workforce and their unions, making them extremely defensive in their protection of the remaining council jobs. This made it more difficult for Labour to contemplate reducing the workforce to balance the books, even if it had wanted to.”* (Parkinson, 1985, p. 177)

I put this question of alienation of the council's workforce to Lord Storey in an interview in 2018.

*“I mean one thing I found quite problematic at the time, because I was a participant observer, one thing I couldn't understand because the Liberal Party must have realised with the growth of the Labour Party at the turn of the century that you'd lost your traction with trade unions and that during the Liberal era , just before Militant came in, and this is Parkinson again in his book, he talks about how you antagonised the trade unions, rather than tried to bring them along with you. You, were very much an all-inclusive party, you were trying to bring in community groups, the state sector, the private sector, why not the trade unions?”*

Lord Storey replied,

*“I think you’re absolutely right. Perhaps it’s easier for me to say this now, remember I was a young councillor who had not been involved in politics at all. I mean I never for one moment thought that I would become a councillor for thirty odd years, and a leader of a council, let alone come here, so this was not what I, I was a rookie really. Looking back on it now some of the things that we did I think, gosh that is just so mad. I mean – the famous typists’ strike. Why would we alienate those women, and they were women, who most of them would be our own supporters, who lived in local communities? They liked our community politics, they liked the fact they could go to their local advice centres, they liked the fact that we were sending a monthly newsletter and knocking on the door all year round, which we did do. We were ingrained in those local communities. Why offend those? Why have the social workers’ strike? A chilling moment for me was when I walked into 14 Sir Thomas St, and there was a picket on the gate, and one of my best friends Kath McDonnell who was a social worker, was on the picket line and I just stopped and it made me realise, obviously I have to take responsibility as well, but I think the leadership just got that totally wrong and I think that’s sometimes the nature of politics that you get so caught up in your own thinking, your own position, that you do some stupid things. Clearly, not working with the trade unions, and perhaps regarding the trade unions as the opposition, was not a sensible thing.” (Appendix 23 page 429)*

### **5.16 Dual Denominational Educational Provision**

This factor is not mentioned in Parkinson’s book or anywhere else, possibly because of its sensitivity but as the NUT’s Liverpool Divisional Secretary I was acutely aware of the anomaly of the Liverpool education provision due to its strict denominational

divisions. Approximately forty per cent of pupils attended Roman Catholic schools, the rest were sub divided into non-denominational schools, Church of England schools and two Jewish schools. The City council in effect had to duplicate primary and secondary provision across the City which was inefficient and expensive. This was compounded by falling pupil numbers as the Government demanded that Liverpool reduce the number of school places and consequentially staffing costs. The most efficient way of achieving rationalisation was to merge faith schools with the non-denominational schools on a geographical basis but this was not even considered by any of the churches.

Even with rationalisation within a denominational sector, the dual provision was still a luxury any City could not afford, let alone Liverpool. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool by insisting on this dual provision contributed to the budget problems of the City in the order of many millions of pounds over many years. The Roman Catholic Church would claim that this is not an issue elsewhere in the country, but in Liverpool it was because of the large numbers of Roman Catholics. The Archbishop could argue that the City had within it land-owning religious orders upon which the schools were built, usually near a church. This would complicate any mergers but maintaining a large and separate provision added to the City's budgetary stress.

The Liverpool City Council inherited this considerable financial problem in the education sector, but it is alleviated in the years when schools are full and become more efficient. However, when the school population falls the opposite occurs as a dual system means that each sector is dealt with separately and cannot share services. For example, each school that has dual provision in an area duplicates the management of the school i.e., head teacher deputy heads and senior teachers who are paid

at the very top of the pay scales. These become fixed costs which do not fall when pupil numbers fall.

### **5.17 General Educational Overprovision**

The Government contributed to this over provision, Parkinson explains why,

*“Since 1978, Liverpool had presented proposals to the Government for reorganising secondary schools on three separate occasions. Each time the Secretary of State had refused the city permission to implement them fully”. (Parkinson, 1985, p. 93)*

One Department of State (Department for the Environment) was demanding a cut in school places and another (Department for Education and Science) was refusing to allow them to do so.

The primary sector was equally bedevilled by drift,

*“Also, the primary school system was not rationalised because no party was willing to take the electoral risk of closing down popular but inefficient, small local schools. This was especially true of the Liberals, whose community politics philosophy made it dangerous for them to alienate voters in marginal wards by shutting schools”. (Parkinson, 1985, p. 23)*

These small primary schools were in a city not in isolated rural areas where distances were great. Often an objection to closure was that access to the school was made difficult by a major road and this was supported often by all parties who knew that per pupil spending in these schools was high, and that the City could not afford it.

### **5.18 Backlog of Housing Repairs**

Housing repairs were carried out by a Direct Labour Organisation which was an in-house repair service,

*“The Liberals were never able to re-organise the inefficient and poorly managed direct labour organisation which maintains the council houses, because Labour would ally with unions and exploit it electorally.” (Parkinson, 1985, p. 23)*

Control of materials destined for housing repairs was poor and it was an open secret in the City that there was a black market in these materials usually sold to small private builders or individuals.

### **5.19 Summary of Liverpool’s Historic Budget Problems**

Parkinson connects this poor management of services to a ten- year period from 1973 to 1983 during which there was no overall majority for any party.

*“The city’s failure to rationalise these services, means that many now cost more and are worse than those in other cities which have had long periods of Labour control, like Manchester or Sheffield. In the Governments view, this lies at the heart of the Liverpool’s current financial problems.” (Parkinson, 1985, p. 23)*

Liverpool’s religious divide surfaced causing the working- class- vote, to splinter unlike other cities which maintained Labour control for long periods. In Liverpool, the working-class support was shared with some voting for a mainly Catholic Labour Party, Unionists in the form of Orange Lodges voting Conservative and others voting Liberal. The political situation of no overall control whilst commonplace now, was an anomaly in the 1970s and 1980s and caused political paralysis and management demoralisation. Decisions were made on a short-term ad hoc basis as medium or long- term planning proved unattainable.



## 5.20 The Background to the 1984/5 Budget

The May 1984 local election resulted in an increase from 51 seats to 58 seats for the Labour Group, in a 99-seat council chamber. The previous Liberal/Conservative, coalition had failed to pass a budget. In 1984 Liverpool City Council mobilised some sections of the local authority workers to support them in their confrontation with the Conservative Government over lack of funding for their house building programme together with plans for clearing the backlog of housing repairs.

The tactic of threatening to pass a deficit budget thereby putting pressure on the Government was a high-risk strategy. Behind the scenes Jack Straw MP was asked by Neil Kinnock and John (Jack) Cunningham, shadow environment secretary, to find out about the financial position of the council and report back.

He reported,

*“Liverpool did have a case for claiming that they had been short-changed when central government grants had been allocated. Jack Cunningham and I developed an unusually close working relationship with Patrick Jenkin, the Environment Secretary. In July 1984 he came up with £30 million more in government grants. This prevented the council from going bankrupt, though it had the downside that Derek Hatton was able to claim it as a victory for his tactics, which it wasn't. It simply delayed the inevitable humiliation for Hatton and his Tendency”.* (Straw, 2012, pp. 157-8)

During this period, I was present at a pre-meeting with National Officials of the GMWU, NUPE and NUT and John Cunningham prior to a meeting with Patrick Jenkin and representatives of the Liverpool City Council at which I was also present. Straw's

version of events is credible in that Jenkin was persuaded rather than pressured to relieve the financial pressure on the council.

However, Hatton's version differs from Straw's,

*"Tony Byrne, Tony Mulhearn, John Hamilton and I travelled down on the train to London on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1984. When we got to the Department of the Environment Jenkin was obviously on the spot. Finally, he delivered the goods, a package wrapped up to preserve credibility, as money he had "found" through partnership schemes".*

Hatton, 1988, p. 84)

Hatton is convinced that the Government did not want to fight on two fronts i.e., the miners and Liverpool. There is no evidence for this view in any of the autobiographies of leading Conservative politicians of that time, in fact mention of Liverpool is limited and appears to be only in passing. In July 1984, after concessions from government, the City Council set a 17% rate rise and passed a balanced budget.

### **5.21 The Background to the 1985/6 Budget Confrontation.**

The outcome of the previous budget confrontation was short lived because of the need to continue to fund the house building programme. The Government was now aware of the mistake of agreeing to concessions with Cunningham and Straw and Militant claiming this as a victory for their negotiations and confrontation.

The previous arrangement was unlikely to be repeated because the government was determined to take a hard line with no concessions for special pleading. The two sides were now locked into a confrontation in which only one side could win, and the government was determined to be the victor.

The government had the full force of the state behind it, and they retained financial control of most of the amount Liverpool could spend. In addition, they observed a reluctant national Labour Party together with elements of the trade union movement who were not in support of the council. Also, the Conservative vote had already collapsed in Liverpool which did not return a single MP out of the six constituencies. There were no longer any political impediments in alienating the government from the people of Liverpool.

The Liverpool Labour Party did have a mandate from the previous local election and now had a majority to carry the argument to the brink. The Toxteth riots were still fresh in the memory of the government and a breakdown in services or indeed a total collapse ran the risk of serious civil disorder. Sending government commissioners was not an easy option as many council workers were unlikely to cooperate with them. The local authority trade unions, hostile reaction to a government intervention in terms of direct rule from Whitehall was the only negotiating tool the council had. The rules of engagement were now clear, and it was a matter of which side could make best use of their advantages and who would not lose their nerve. Militant believed that their struggle was on a par with the miners' strike and the dual effect would defeat the government.

I put this scenario to Lord Blunkett who was Leader of Sheffield City Council at the time in an interview 2019.

*“James Ferguson. I interviewed Derek Hatton last week, and Derek said that he did not regret anything by the way, and he said if all the local authorities that formed the loose coalition against the cuts and against the government, including Sheffield Council, which you were leader of, if they had of all stood together this opposition*

would be on a par with the miners' strike, and that the dual effect of the miners' strike and the joint opposition would have brought down the government.

Lord Blunkett. The problem for Derek's recollections for this is that the miners' strike ended on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1985 and the authorities he is referring to were still holding firm well into April and May by which time the miners had clearly been defeated. They had gone back to work, and the terms of politics had changed. The government had won and so on a practical revolutionary level he is wrong, he's wrong in the sense that the authorities he refers to, other than the leadership of Liverpool, did not see this as an objective in bringing down the Tory government that had been elected two years previously. They saw it as an endeavour to try to re-balance the power of central and local government and the right to levy a local tax at the level determined locally, and to retain the business rate and to retain other powers that the Conservative government intended to take away, including the abolition of the Greater London Council (GLC) and the Metropolitan Counties so there was a different objective, and secondly there was a different practical political outcome so I am afraid on both accounts he was completely wrong. Had the action of Liverpool the year before not resulted in Patrick Jenkin giving a modest capital outlay, which covered the fact that they had not actually won anything at all other than a small amount of freedom to use more capital, which they did effectively on house building. We would never have had the 1985 stand-off with the government at all so it's interesting it brings back memories Jim quite vividly, and we did stand out along with the GLC and some of the London boroughs for a time, but although I actually voted into the new financial year to block making a budget but enough of my colleagues on the council voted with the opposition to set a rate. Once that was done, that was that, and we sought to re-heal the wounds in the Labour group and got on with the job.

*But you see the problem with the far left is always they have to be let down by somebody and eventually this will happen to Jeremy so there has to be someone who prevented them from what they believed to be the logical outcome of their actions, and most of the time as with Arthur Scargill, it was self-delude. (Appendix 14 page 348)*

## **5.22 The Reaction of the National Labour Party**

The National Party had already decided that Militant was incompatible with membership of the Labour party as can be seen from the letter below dated 16<sup>th</sup> December 1982 from the National Labour Party to Militant. Any members of Militant were now vulnerable to expulsion from the party if the evidence could be produced. There was an added complication that it was likely that Militant was ready to use the courts if there were any procedural flaws in attempts to expel their members. The usual defence in court was that some part of the procedure was not in line with natural justice. This of course was a disincentive to constituency parties who were reluctant to engage in a long drawn-out procedural wrangle which may have resulted in officers of the Constituency Labour Party (CLP) being vilified for not exercising the rules of natural justice against its own members.

The National Labour Party was led by Neil Kinnock who although on the Tribune left, was no friend of Militant but he was aware of the political fluidity of the NEC and the reality of a city in revolt, not just an awkward constituency party. In the previous year the hard work and conciliation by Cunningham and Straw had been lost by Militant which was determined to confront the government and construct a budget which carried a deficit.

### **5.23 The Reaction of Central Government**

The Conservative Party had defeated a serious threat to its authority, the National Union of Mineworkers and was in no mood to be humiliated by a second year of concessions to Liverpool City Council. Kenneth Baker, the new Environment Secretary, appointed in September 1985 refused to negotiate unlike his predecessor Patrick Jenkin and corresponded in a formal way explaining the rules of his Department but certainly not bending them. Below is a letter from Kenneth Baker replying to a letter from Eric Heffer MP requesting a meeting regarding the second Budget Crisis. It is clear, that Baker will not meet anyone from Liverpool until a balanced budget has been set. He has now taken a hard line. He had only been appointed in September 1985 and by November 1985 he was refusing to meet the City Council until a budget had been set.



2 MARSHAM STREET  
LONDON SW1P 3EB  
01-212 3434

My ref:

Your ref:

27 November 1985

*John Chie*

Thank you for your letter of 25 November.

I have of course already met you and your Labour colleagues from Liverpool twice, and I am not sure that a further meeting would be fruitful at the moment, not least because the City Council has still not formally resolved to set a balanced budget for 1985/86. If they do so, I understand the Council are likely to seek a meeting with me themselves.

KENNETH BAKER

E Heffer Esq MP

Baker was determined not to suffer the humiliation of his predecessor Jenkins in the previous negotiations and delayed the proposed delegations from meeting him until there was a balanced budget passed by the Council. This left the Council in limbo with no real prospect of a productive meeting with Baker until they conformed and backed down which Militant could not do without ridicule and humiliation. Militant now faced the hard reality of negotiating with a tough intransigent government. However, the prospect of a total breakdown of local services in a major English City must have been a concern to the Government, Mike Storey the then deputy leader of the Liberals on the Council now Lord Storey, explained how government monitored a potential crisis if there was going to be a breakdown in services in an interview in 2018.

*“Trevor Jones was very close to Michael Heseltine and I just don’t know. If you remember Patrick Jenkin was Secretary of State for local government at the time. Michael Heseltine was minister at the time of the so-called Toxteth Riots. I would be very surprised if there were not contingency plans in place. What I can tell you and you’ll be surprised at this. I am aware that the security forces were very much involved on the ground.”* (Appendix 23 page 430)

He expands on this statement,

*“They were very nervous about where this could lead to. Remember it took the riots to bring Margaret Thatcher to Liverpool. You had these huge demonstrations, pickets, it was a very difficult time, and I think, well I know, government was nervous about where it was all going to lead to. I’m telling you on and off the record, that I think that a Liberal councillor, actually elected, was working for MI5 or MI6, whichever one it is that does that. There was evidence of that.”* (Appendix 23 page 430)



Lord Storey, continues,

*“So I think certainly, I would have thought, I’ve never said this before, certainly at a national level, of course we know government all the time keeps an eye on things, and worries about things, and has to put in place contingency plans, and I would be very surprised if there had not been contact with, even though the Chief Executive was quite a weak and vacillating person, a nice person but weak and vacillating. I’m sure there must have been some, if not through him, other officers. I would not have been surprised if there hadn’t been contact, or contact with councillors, I mean there were still Conservatives on the council as well. So, there must have been contingency plans. But certainly, the security forces were engrained in, engrained is not the right word, embedded. Were embedded in Liverpool at the time to see what was going on.”*

In an interview with Lord Blunkett in 2019, who was a former Home Secretary, I put to him a question relating to security issues,

*“James Ferguson. One last question and then I will let you go Dave, one thing that intrigues me was that, as member of an executive of a trade union at the time, I never quite got Liverpool City Council’s bargaining strategy with the government. I felt the government seem to have had all their cards in their hand against Liverpool, except one, and that is civil disruption and that if there had not been the redundancy notices the unions would have stuck together, and the commissioners would have been sent in when the money ran out. There would have been civil disorder and that’s the one thing the government were worried about. When I interviewed Lord Storey who was the deputy leader of the Liberals, and then became leader, he said one of the Liberal councillors was working for MI5 quite openly and they had people*

*working on the ground, the security service. You are an ex-home secretary, I mean did you feel that was a serious bargaining counter, that there would be civil disorder and the government would get very worried about that, and make some kind of settlement?*

*Lord Blunkett. No, I did not, in my heart of hearts I believed there might have been a modest deal that would have ensured that local authorities could raise the money to continue delivering services at a reasonable level and that was the modest objective that many of us had. Obviously, it was clear that those that believed in revolutionary as opposed to parliamentary politics were quite happy with the idea of creating civil disobedience but the contradiction within it was not only that the government held all the cards, but that the action that needed to be taken to create civil disobedience, actually damaged the workers and the recipients of services on which the argument was being based in the first place. We need to pay the wages, we need to deliver the services, but we are actually now going to destroy both of those hence the scuttling round in taxis and delivering redundancy notices. Which then changes the terms because what you are doing is you are actually damaging to the people that you represent, in order to create a situation which down the line might actually help them. That's quite a difficult ask in a normal parliamentary representative democracy. In the circumstance where other revolutionary situations, where other revolutionary breeding grounds does not exist, hence the defeat of the miners and the refusal of other major trade unions to do other than give cursory support to the miners, for all the reasons we know about. Not least the lack of a ballot actually created a situation where there wasn't a revolutionary outcome, so it was never going to happen.*

*I am interested about MI5, we all knew that MI5 were obsessed with the left in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, Harold Wilson was not totally paranoid about that. I am amazed that when we were in government in the 1960s and, late 1970s we did not get more of a grip. When I was home secretary, I can't guarantee that I understood everything that MI5 was doing but we did go into it in some detail and of course MI5's main raison d'etra was dealing with the situation post 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, and the aftermath with the situation in Northern Ireland. So, they were in a different ball game altogether. I certainly was responsible for signing off orders for intercepts and surveillance and only in very, very, rare circumstances were they to do with the political arena.” (Appendix 14 page 350)*

Despite their security concerns, the government held the City Councillors at arms-length and refused to meet them let alone start talks until they agreed to pass a lawful budget. This left the City Council, if it not to lose face, with the only option of creating a budget that continued its spending plans but without adequate funds from central government in other words a deficit budget for 1985/86 which was outside the law. In the previous budget, the Labour Party had overall control of the City Council but did not have a Labour Group majority for a deficit budget.

The 1985/86 budget making process involved a deficit and the Labour Group had now enough broad left members to carry this budget through the City Council. Central Government was determined to treat Liverpool the same as any other local authority and expected them to pass a legal budget without concessions. The Government had the power to only allocate the funds within the then rules and no more. They also had the power through the office of the District Auditor to insist that those councillors who voted for a deficit budget would be surcharged and removed from office. The Government

did not shift from this position knowing that the Council did not have the support of the National Labour Party and the national trade union leadership.

The Government played a waiting game i.e., waited for the funds to run out and waited for the District Auditor to commence proceedings where a deficit budget could be proved to be creating costs not otherwise incurred. They calculated that this was also to their political advantage portraying the leader of the Labour Party as weak and not able to control the Trotskyist elements in his party let alone expel them. The battle lines were now drawn, and the Government did not intend to move and observed from a distance the tactics of the City Council. The press and media, seizing on a good story, reported at every stage as the drama unfolded.

#### **5.24 The Reaction of the Media and Militant's relationship with it.**

A major City in the UK heading for bankruptcy was of course a media event as each week created a new story because the two sides to the conflict grew closer to a collision. Two ideologies at the extremities of UK politics, one a monetarist central government in power in Westminster and a Trotskyist led local council in power in Liverpool, and neither publicly, were going to back down. This was a story too good to miss with the national and the international media taking up residence in Liverpool.

Militant had a problem with the media and a contradiction, on one hand the publicity it attracted swelled its ranks with a surge in membership but at a cost. The national Labour Party could not ignore Militant anymore if it had any plans to gain a majority and go into Government. The preceding years saw Militant protected from expulsions because the rest of the left felt threatened too. The increased media attention was now exposing Militant as a covert party as many journalists were encouraged to spend time on investigating their activities. In an interview with Liam Fogerty in 2019, he

covered the budget crisis for BBC Radio Merseyside he now lectures on journalism at the University of Central Lancashire. I asked him about the covert nature, of Militant,

*“James Ferguson. Militant was a vanguard party, in other words, they have a very military structure, it is not a pluralist party. Decisions are taken at the top and very rarely are they questioned. They are very military, they styled themselves on the Bolshevik party, in my thesis I talked about how the Bolsheviks had to be secretive, being in a police state. Of course, Militant were not in a police state they were just being very, very, secretive because they did not want to be kicked out of the Labour Party.*

*Liam Fogarty. But that secrecy extended into you can see that in that the way that it was almost impossible to get a straight answer to a very simple question, and that question was are you a member of Militant Tendency? And you can ask very senior figures, cabinet post holders, the Deputy Leader of the Council, and not get a straight answer. It was very difficult because you had to assume everybody knows that Ian Lowes in the GMWU is one, Pauline Dunlop is definitely one, Tony is one because we have read his writings and has published them. But is Tony Byrne one? He hovers around above everything ideologically, extremely pure. His obsession with housing, but as a journalist you don't know which party or which faction these people, actually belong to. You started on the back foot and there was a lot of that but if they can't be trusted to tell us to whom they are loyal politically, how can we trust them for anything else or any other arguments they make or the facts they give.”*

(Appendix 17 page 370),

The rapid Militant membership growth did not allow them enough time to harden members into cadres which then led to lax security with members freely talking to the press

outside the norms of the disciplined vanguard structure. Militant was pleased that publicity was raising their profile but were acutely aware that their previous membership growth had been steady and covert and had not provoked the national party into decisive action against them.

The media attention was changing all that, but Militant had an internal problem with Derek Hatton, member of Militant and Deputy Leader of the City Council who could not resist the media attention and by his own admission was drawn to it. He describes his first live TV interview with David Davies of the BBC,

*“That first interview in 1983 was the one, which I suppose, sparked off my love affair with the television cameras, from then on television excited me. I enjoyed the pressure and the feeling of the adrenalin pumping. I suppose that’s the actor in me again”.* (Hatton, 1988, p. 127)

In an interview with Liam Fogerty in 2019, he covered the budget crisis for Radio Merseyside. I asked him if Hatton had fallen in love with the media?

*“he was always good for a quote and he had impact he was forceful articulate and box office. And over time that starts to trigger the anti-bodies in the reporting ecosystem. Can we get somebody else on, let’s talk to Dominic Brady or let’s talk to somebody else because you want new voices. He became identifiable as a national figure very quickly.”* (Appendix 17 page 373),

Derek Hatton had become a media figure and the public face of Militant which the National Labour Party could no longer afford to ignore. Entryists need to avoid detection, but Hatton created a dilemma for Militant by courting the media, it awakened its investigative section. It was now exposed and vulnerable to newsworthy documentaries intent on broadcasting the material they had found about Militant.

Militant on one hand was gaining free publicity and had now become high profile, which resulted in substantial membership gains, but this ran counter to the years of steady undetected manageable growth. Militant would now have to plan on the assumption that they were too big to expel, and that the leadership of the Labour Party would avoid the damaging publicity and co-exist with them.

### **5.25 Militant Brinkmanship**

Militant was now high profile and determined to show the labour movement and other Trotskyist groups how to lead with a vanguard structure and a Liverpool DLP organised as a soviet. The “bent shield” strategy i.e., protect services from financial cuts as much as possible, was to be ridiculed in favour of outright defiance and confrontation with central government. The first year of a Militant budget with its creative accountancy and supplementary grants teased out of government by Straw and Cunningham was to be replaced by a stark demand for an extra £35 million in addition to the Rate Support Grant. This was now to be enshrined in an illegal deficit budget which could only be balanced by the government publicly agreeing to fund the deficit. This was Militant brinkmanship out in the open and supported by enough Labour councillors to pass a deficit budget, risking disqualification and fines.

Below is a letter from the District Auditor making it clear the consequences of not setting a legal rate dated 21<sup>st</sup> May 1985 from the John Hamilton Archives. The District Auditor is a government appointee and normally comments on local authority’s budgets within their district giving advice and guidance. In the case of the Liverpool City Council, he is exercising his powers to direct a council to construct a budget which is credible and lawful. He is also advising individual councillors of their legal obligations

to set a lawful budget and describes the penalties he could impose if he is convinced that the setting of a deficit budget is wilful misconduct.

The councillors were now at the very edge of the brink with little time to construct a balanced and legal budget and were now relying on pressure on central government to restrain the District Auditor. The pressure was the threat of a breakdown of services and an ungovernable city which may have to be run, from Whitehall, with Commissioners, trying to manage a workforce of 31,000 mostly antagonistic to their directions. The Government, however, could wait and see if the District Auditor decided to fine and disqualify the majority of the Labour Group. Disqualification would leave a rump council of Liberals, Conservatives and a small group of Labour councillors who could then set a legal budget and administer the Council.



**The District Audit Service**

NORROY HOUSE, WATERGATE STREET, CHESTER CH1 2NB  
TELEPHONE: 0244 315571

FROM THE DISTRICT AUDITOR  
NO 5 AUDIT DISTRICT

21 May 1985

DISTRICT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE LIVERPOOL CITY COUNCIL

Ladies and Gentlemen

This report is made pursuant to my duty under section 15 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982.

**GENERAL RATE**

The Council has not yet made a rate for the financial year which commenced on 1 April 1985.

The Council's duty in this matter and my responsibility under the Local Government Finance Act 1982 have been clearly set out in reports by officers and my predecessor's report dated 19 March 1984 at the time of ratemaking for the financial year ended 31 March 1985 and his report dated 10 April 1985. I do not propose to repeat all that has been stated before.

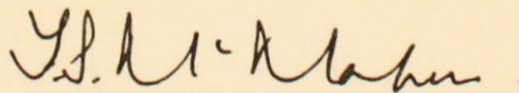
By its continued failure to make a rate the Council and individual members have placed themselves seriously at risk. Action by me under section 20, Local Government Finance Act 1982, does not have to await the annual audit. I must now give the Council notice that unless it makes a lawful rate at the earliest opportunity and in any event before the end of May I shall forthwith commence action under section 20 to recover any losses occasioned by the failure to make a rate from the members responsible for incurring them.

I must remind members that where the amount certified due exceeds £2,000 he or she will be disqualified from membership for a period of five years.

Yet again and for the last time I urge the Council most strongly to comply with its statutory duty to make a lawful rate and to do so with the utmost speed.

In view of the seriousness of this issue I am sending a copy of this report to each member.

Yours faithfully



T I McMAHON  
District Auditor

## **5.26 The Collapse of the Strategy**

The strategy of Militant in Liverpool was to threaten the government with a complete breakdown of services provided by the council if they did not fund the city with extra money. The strategy assumed the support of local authority union members who were willing to strike over a prolonged period and to pressurise the government to settle on the council's terms. The prolonged strike strategy had a basic flaw because the council would save money by not paying striking workers and thereby reduce their staffing costs. Thirty, one thousand, unpaid workers, would soon amount to millions of pounds in savings.

Many workers were supportive of one day protest strikes but were aware of the simple arithmetic of a long strike being at their expense and in fact solving the budget deficit. The vanguard leadership of Militant could not explain this away to an educated workforce and the same calculation must have been made in Whitehall.

In September 1985, the City Council issued redundancy notices to all its 31,000 staff. It was intended as a tactic and would never have been implemented, according to Militant. Council officials informed senior councillors that there was a shortfall of funds and that the council could not reasonably expect to pay staff beyond December 1985. Legally they were obliged to issue redundancy notices under the 1978 Employment Protection Act, which would terminate employment in December 1985. Failure to do so would place councillors in a vulnerable position of a large financial surcharge and possibly individual bankruptcy. Placed under this enormous pressure the Council wrote a letter to every member of staff explaining their predicament signed by John Hamilton, Leader of the Council and Derek Hatton Deputy Leader of the Council. The other side of the letter was a formal and legally valid, notice of redundancy to take

effect in December 1985. There is still confusion as to who took the decision to issue the redundancy notices and what if any contact was made with Militant headquarters in London.

Peter Taaffe was asked in 2018, in an interview, how the decision came about,

*“I opposed it as soon as I heard it publicly, on the radio one morning. First of all, people like Derek Hatton and Tony Byrne, who was not a supporter, and he was mainly responsible for that and other mistakes, proposed this as a tactic because of the exigencies of the situation with the funding gap. So, the argument was, we could get over this because by this device – our backs were against the wall, etc. This was late 1985 but it was a major mistake and we said this at the time. By the way we’ve said it to you, we’ve said it in our book we said it publicly and we said it to our comrades. When I heard that on the morning it was announced on the BBC, I held my head, when Kinnock heard it, he said to Charles Clark he was on Wigan station.”*

(Appendix 24 page 445),

I asked Ian Williams of the Liverpool Labour Left in an interview in 2018, who then took the decision to issue redundancy notices?

*“James Ferguson. I’ve recently interviewed Peter Taaffe, former editor of Militant and now General Secretary of the Socialist Party of England and Wales. When it came to mass redundancies in 1985, he completely disagreed with the decision to make everyone redundant and along with Tony Mulhearn, opposed that. But obviously I was very much on the scene then and in fact we took them to court over the redundancy notices. It never came over to me that Militant publicly were opposed to this. How did you feel?”*

Ian Williams. *“Derek was their big asset, he put them on the public map. But they created a monster. Almost all of the people we are talking about, the old- style Felicity and others, expressed private reservations about what Derek was doing. And I had a lot of personal friends in Militant. Several actually told me, we agree with you, but we have got to follow the line. So, Peter Taaffe and the others, whatever you think of it, Liverpool was their crown jewel, so they did not dare disavow him.”*

JF. *“So, you got the impression that the Militant leadership in London didn’t feel strong enough to criticise Derek.”*

IW. *“Yes, the tail was wagging the dog by then.”*

JF. *“Did you get the impression that during the time of the redundancy notices that there was a faction in Militant that were opposed to the redundancy notices, because I didn’t pick anything up, I wonder whether you did?”*

IW. *“Some were unhappy, I wouldn’t say they were opposed to it. They’d never oppose it in public. Look we’ve got to get into the democratic centralist mindset. It’s thought crime to disagree with the line. It might make you uncomfortable, but you are going to go along with it. I really saw it in operation, not just in Militant itself, but in all of the others and the Labour Party that they controlled. People were not going to break the line under any circumstances.” (Appendix 25 page 458)*

The council had already moved into illegal territory with the threat of a surcharge and disqualification from office. It is therefore difficult to see why a further breach of the law regarding failure to give dismissal notices should have panicked the leadership of the Council.

The answer lay in the scale of the losses which the councillors would have incurred with the failure to comply with employment law i.e. The Employment Protection Act 1978. The losses already identified by setting a deficit budget were approximately £100,000 shared between the entire Labour Group who had voted for a deficit budget. However, this was trivial compared with the large sums of money incurred if employees continued to be employed without any financial provision. This would have led to most of the councillors suffering individual bankruptcy and loss of any property they owned or had an interest in. It is likely that refusal to issue redundancy notices would have led to cracks appearing in the Labour Group because of the large sums of money involved.

Graham Burgess, City chair of NALGO in 1985, in an interview in 2019, recalls the event,

*“Well maybe they were opposed maybe they weren’t but certainly there was a huge amount of secrecy because we had heard rumours of redundancy notices about three or four weeks before, being suggested that’s the way to make the budget legal, on the back of the workforce, issue redundancy notices and save the councillors, and protect the councillors by doing that. So, we arranged with the council, and Peter Cresswell, the secretary of the JSSC and also secretary of NALGO wrote to the council asking for reassurances that the redundancy notices were not true. We received a letter back from the council signed by Derek Hatton and John Hamilton reassuring us that there would be no redundancies and no redundancy notices. So maybe naively we believed them. I know they were under pressure from the Treasurer of the council, I know that, I suspect they got legal advice from the City solicitor, how to make the budget legal. So massive secrecy, very tight, so when redundancy notices came out two or three weeks later after that letter, we were totally surprised*

*by that to be honest. We thought a letter from the leader and deputy leader was sufficient. I can't believe that that letter was sent without Militant group's agreement. Because the council was strictly controlled by Militant. Militant must have had, some decision-making process. Whether Tony Mulhearn or Taaffe voted in favour of that I don't know but the democratic centralism that operated within Militant must have had some say over that decision. What made it even worse was when we actually saw the redundancy letter, when it arrived, the date on it was actually printed a couple of weeks before the letter from Derek and John Hamilton was sent to us." (Appendix 15 page 355)*

I then asked Graham Burgess,

*James Ferguson. "Derek Hatton Deputy Leader of the Council and a Militant supporter he has consistently said that the issue of the redundancy notices was a red herring and that anyway nobody was ever made redundant and therefore, yes, it was an issue, but nobody was ever going to be sacked."*

*Graham Burgess. "Unfortunately, I do not believe that statement. Two issues are they knew what a big issue the redundancy notices were for the workforce. They had it in writing. They were told the unions would break from the council if they issued redundancy notices, so they knew it was not a technicality. If there was a political decision, then they made that with the full knowledge that most of the unions could well break away from them. Would break from the council if they issued the redundancy notices. So, they knew it was not a technicality it was a political decision they made to do that in the full knowledge that most of the unions could well break away from them on that basis. We were only not made redundant because of the intervention by the national Labour Party and other people that that should be the*

*position. I fully believe if for any reason the council had stayed under Militant control those redundancy notices would have been implemented. My view is we were put in an impossibly weak position to defend our members with those notices being issued.” (Appendix 15 page 356)*

I then asked him to predict what would have been the likely outcome if Commissioners had taken over the City.

*JF. “Some people would say that if Commissioners came in with all the redundancy notices still in place, they were almost going into a blank sheet situation where they could put in what they considered to be, under conservative politics, a lean, fit organisation, for the Council.”*

*GB. “I think that is quite right. Nobody would have employment rights. Thirty odd thousand workers would be unemployed. They could have chosen what services they maintained and at what level and what services they didn’t maintain and therefore what workers they retained or did not retain. I’m amazed that a Militant run Council which in effect it was, would give Conservative Commissioners that much power and free reign to carry out Conservative policies in Liverpool.” (Appendix 15 page 357)*

The threat of Commissioners was a real one because since the debacle of the redundancy notices it was likely that the National Labour party would have supported, the arrival of Commissioners rather than see a collapse of services to the most vulnerable members of society. Graham Burgess’s opinion on the matter is based on his experience, not only of having been an NEC member of NALGO, a large union, now UNISON, but has had a successful career as a Chief Executive of a District Council.

Below are the two sides to the letter sent to all council staff in September of 1985. The letter from the Leader and Deputy Leader was dated 16<sup>th</sup> September 1985 but the letters were issued on the 27<sup>th</sup>, September 1985. The other side of the page is the redundancy notice and is also dated 16<sup>th</sup> September 1985. However, the notice has been overprinted with the new date of 27<sup>th</sup> September 1985. It is clear, a decision on the redundancy issue was made sometime before the 16<sup>th</sup>, September 1985. This is significant because Hatton was giving assurances to some unions that the redundancy issue was a rumour between the 16<sup>th</sup>, September 1985 and up to 27<sup>th</sup>, September 1985 even though the notices had already been printed and signed by him. There is evidence here that the distribution of the notices was deemed to be highly controversial and not for discussion with the trade unions, an example of the worst practises of any employer, private or public.

The vanguard structure of the Militant led Council, took a decision affecting 31000 people's livelihood but was incapable of transparency, a major fault line with vanguardism. The decision is made first followed by a campaign of explanation and education followed by re-education, if felt necessary with an unpalatable policy. A reversal of policy is not in the vocabulary of vanguardism and is only contemplated after a respectable distance in time. It can then be described as an error usually associated with blame allotted to groups or bodies that have betrayed them. In this instance it was the National Labour Party's refusal to support their stance, the national trade union leaders tepid support of a council defending jobs and services and the worst crime reserved for local branches of the local authority trade unions who did not support the council. Even when important decisions are made in a clandestine manner, without any consultation, Militant's vanguard structure would still claim to have been betrayed.



FROM THE OFFICE OF THE LEADER OF THE CITY COUNCIL

P.O.BOX 88

MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS,

LIVERPOOL, L69 2DH.

Telephone: 051-227 3911 Ext.

16th September, 1985.

Dear Colleague,

Since the Labour Party was elected to power in May, 1983 we have shared a commitment with the Local Authority Unions to defend jobs and services including the capital and housebuilding programmes.

In June the Labour Council agreed a deficit budget. This tactic did not suddenly appear as a surprise. It was fully discussed and supported at hundreds of workplace and mass meetings. We all understood the options facing the Labour Council. We totally rejected cutting 6,000 jobs and decimating services or massively increasing the rates. Most people acknowledged that the City of Liverpool is massively underfunded, and that the problems had been entirely caused by the Tory Government withdrawing £350 million from the city since 1979. The campaign to force the Government to restore money taken from Liverpool always received massive support from the Council workforce. We also knew that the campaign would not be easy, nevertheless, the deficit budget was supported in full knowledge of possible consequences. Indeed the Local Authority Unions were directly instrumental in the Labour Party's decision to follow this tactic. They argued against massive rate rises or a 'fudged' budget, and made it clear that we should take the campaign forward. For our part, we have always made it clear that unless the Tory Government provided resources commensurate with the costs of services then inevitably there would come a time when the money for wages and services would run out. The time has now come when this regrettable position has been reached.

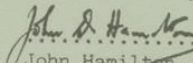
Obviously the steps we have had to take will cause concern and worry. However, this course of action provides the only way of providing wages and salaries until 18th December, 1985. Other steps would certainly result in the immediate cessation of payments and the cutting of services which we are pledged to defend. Furthermore, this course of action gives the Government three months to negotiate with Labour representatives a just settlement to our financial crisis. If the Government recognises its responsibility then all notices will be withdrawn.

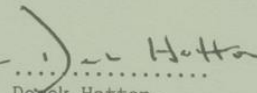
On your behalf, and all Liverpool people, we have urged the new Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, to meet us to prevent a catastrophic breakdown in local authority services.

Together we have carried the campaign forward, and it is now absolutely essential for each of us to hold our nerve and remain solid. We remain totally confident that our joint resistance to Tory policies will achieve our mutual aim to defend and create jobs, and improve services.

Yours sincerely,

Signed

  
John Hamilton,  
LEADER

  
Derek Hatton,  
DEPUTY LEADER



**City  
of  
Liverpool**

W. I. Murray, LL.B.  
City Solicitor, Secretary to the Council  
P.O. Box No. 88  
Municipal Buildings  
Dale Street  
LIVERPOOL L69 2DH

MR J P WALL

Phone: 051-227 3911 Ext: 3

EDUCATION

af

WIM/RMSK

SECTION 0126 A-21073-35

~~10th September 1985~~

27th September 1985

IMPURIANI: As the Council Meeting on the 10th September 1985 was abandoned, the following dates are substituted:

2nd paragraph 3rd line for 'Monday the 16th' read 'Friday the 27th'

2nd paragraph 5th line for 'Wednesday, 18th' read 'Tuesday, 31st'

Dear Colleague,

As you will no doubt already be aware, the City Council does not have at its disposal the resources which are required to carry out its full range of services or to meet in full its obligations to its employees throughout the whole of the remainder of the present financial year.

This means that there will be no money available very shortly to continue paying and employing you and other Council workers. As a result of this situation, the City Council, at its meeting on Monday the 16th September 1985, has instructed me to write to you to give you notice that your contract(s) of employment will therefore cease to exist with effect from Wednesday, 18th December 1985 (or Tuesday, 31st December 1985, if, immediately prior to 1st April 1974, you were employed by Liverpool City Council in a post at that time graded above A.P.4. and have been continuously employed by the Council since that date). I have written to all other employees of the Council in similar terms.

From the beginning of the next financial year, resources will be available to resume the provision of the full range of services and the City Council has decided therefore, to re-employ you, and all the other employees concerned with effect from 1st April 1986, at the latest, in your present job and on your present conditions of service. Employees should report to their normal place of work for duty on that day. If it is found possible to re-employ you beforehand, you will be informed accordingly.

You will be asked to sign a document acknowledging receipt of this letter and it is important that you do so to protect your interests.

The trade unions representing employees of the Council have been advised of the decision.

A letter from the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council explaining the necessity for this letter is set out on the reverse side.

Yours faithfully,

City Solicitor

When calling or telephoning please ask for

The distribution of the notices was initially to be undertaken from Paddington School in the city centre, but this was thwarted by council staff who refused to drive round distributing them. The Council countered this by hiring a fleet of taxis to distribute them but had already ordered headteachers to call at the school and pick up their school's notices.

The NUT balloted its members at the school to strike for the day, which was carried, and was followed by an unofficial strike by the non-teaching staff, mainly GMWU members at the school. The headteachers arrived at the school, some three hundred persons but refused to cross a picket line of NUT members and GMWU members from the school, now supplemented by officials of the NUT.

The taxi drivers many of them members of the TGWU refused to cross the picket line but informed the pickets that an empty annexe of a school in the Anfield area in the north of the city was the new clandestine centre of the distribution of the redundancy notices and was being organised by Felicity Dowling the DLP secretary and former President of the Liverpool Division of the NUT. The redundancy notices were countersigned by a former branch secretary of the Liverpool NUT but acting in his capacity of leader of the City council, John Hamilton. The Liverpool branch of the NUT had the distinction of their redundancy notices signed by a former branch secretary and distributed by a former branch president.

The taxis drove around the City dropping off bundles of redundancy notices at locations that employed council staff, mainly schools. The reaction from all the council unions was disbelief then shock and then anger. The NUT quickly held an evening branch meeting a few days later and passed a resolution by approx. 1200 to 100 authorising legal action against the Council.

It also held a collection which raised enough money to pay the wages of the GMWU members who came out on unofficial strike. Cracks were now opening in the GMWU as members in Paddington school chose to support the line of the NUT rather than their own union leadership. This was a very public humiliation for the leadership of GMWU who saw unofficial strike action, by a section of their own members, in complete defiance of their policy of supporting the tactic of issuing redundancy notices.

Their GMWU convener for members in schools, Peter Lennard, was helping to distribute redundancy notices to his own members whilst one of his school branches was on unofficial strike in opposition to their distribution. Industrial relations were far from normal. The JSSC met and demanded that the notices be withdrawn, supportive unions were now moving back to a more traditional role of employer/employee relations regardless of whether they were white or blue-collar worker. They also were listening to advice from their national leaderships because they felt vulnerable and not convinced of assurances from the Council that their dismissal and reinstatement would be seamless. They had their doubts that government would back down and provide the necessary funding to clear the deficit in the council's budget.

The High Court met urgently and ruled in favour of the NUT's petition. They ruled that the redundancy notices were null and void as this was resulting from an illegal act by councillors passing a deficit budget. The DLP refused to back down and explained that staff would receive redundancy pay from the Government and then be re-instated in April 1986, effectively a three month lay-off.

Dissent from the constituencies was widespread but the Militant dominated DLP ignored their protests until the results of the NUT high court action made the whole plan impractical. This is an example of a decision made by a small vanguard out of touch

with reality trying to impose its will on thousands of workers with a convoluted strategy aimed at keeping them in power whatever the consequences. Open and democratic debate would have soon shown the catastrophic political and legal flaws in the strategy and dismissed it as unrealistic and unworkable, but a vanguard structure has a weakness because of its tightly knit leadership of like-minded cadres who only wanted to progress the campaign and took the unions support for granted using them as a pliable stage army.

The vanguard structure made a catastrophic decision because it was too insular and did not listen to dissenting voices. If the Liverpool Labour Party had behaved like a pluralist party, it would have appraised the feasibility of a range of options before arriving at a policy, but the Militant led vanguard structure had only one policy which had now been frozen and deviation from this would amount to revisionism.

### **5.27 The 1985 Labour Party Conference and the Aftermath**

The October 1985 Labour party Conference heard Neil Kinnock, the leader of the party, use his address to conference as a full-frontal attack on Militant.

Shaw quotes from the speech,

*“I’ll tell you what happens with impossible promises. You start with far-fetched resolutions. They are then turned into a rigid dogma, a code, and you go through the years sticking to that, outdated, misplaced, irrelevant to the real needs and you end” - this to a rising crescendo of cheers and abuse in the auditorium - “in the grotesque chaos of a Labour Council hiring taxis to scuttle round a city handing out redundancy notices to its own workers.” (Shaw, 1988, p. 258)*

Kinnock had, with his speech, separated out the soft left from Militant. Clare Short sat in the hall remembers the reaction of the delegates in an interview in 2018.

*“I was in the hall, but I wasn’t on the NEC then I became an MP in 1983 and I was there. It was extremely dramatic the place went silent. It was a bit like Geoffrey Howe’s resignation speech in the House of Commons. It was like that. What did I think? Reflecting on it afterwards I think I partly admired it and partly thought it was reckless. I mean I was thinking, what was the strategy behind it? But it was brave, it was brave, and it was powerful of course. Redundancy notices by taxis, who could forget?”*

When asked about the reaction from the delegates she replied,

*“I think a lot of people were the same as me, they were silent, listening, it was very dramatic, I don’t think people were hostile, they were stunned, or at least that’s my memory, it was a long time ago. And there have been so many developments since. I don’t think there was a general hostility. I don’t think so.”* (Appendix 22 page 420)

The day after, David Blunkett, offered Derek Hatton an olive branch in the debate on local government with an independent inquiry into Liverpool’s finances, which later became the Stonefrost Report. David Blunkett recalls this in an interview in 2014,

*“As far as the Militant Tendency bit is concerned I, went for a swim in the sea because I thought I just need to get my head together on this. So, I wasn’t like Eric Heffer on the verge of walking out, but I needed to work out what to make of it and how I would deal with it given that I was speaking the following day.”* (Appendix 13 page 338)

The following day he proposed a joint inquiry into the Liverpool City Council’s finances, which became the Stonefrost Report. David Blunkett comments on this in the interview.

*“The Stonefrost Report, Yeah. Because in order for the left to understand what was going on in Militant we needed to know, because otherwise you have to take it at face value, so getting the agreement to them going in was important because if we had not got the agreement how could we possibly have got the books open and really got into what was happening there,”* (Appendix 13, page 339)

This olive branch was not appreciated by Kinnock who wanted Militant to be defeated on the floor of conference. Blunkett explains his view,

*“As you know Neil didn’t like my tactic and my speech. He came up to me when I sat down and said I was skating on thin ice. Which was true by the way, I was skating on incredibly thin ice. Gwyneth Dunwoody nearly had a heart attack in the chair and I still don’t know how I did it, because if Derek hadn’t walked to the front and said he would agree then my tactic would have fallen. I would have looked a complete and utter prat, so it was high stakes stuff.”* (Appendix 13 page 339)

Blunkett however did admit that there had been soundings prior to the conference drama.

*“We had a mini negotiation in the Gents toilet before the debate, and it wasn’t clear what they were going to do when he walked up. All I knew that it was worth a try because it would turn Neil’s rhetoric into the Stonefrost Report”.*

Hatton agreed to this and the General Secretaries of the local authority unions commissioned the report through the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. The Stonefrost report was presented to the General Secretaries at a meeting along with a delegation of city councillors at the Liverpool town hall. Later in the morning a buffet was laid out for the members of the meeting because the General Secretaries agreed a working lunch and had travelled up from London on a Sunday.

There was a small lobby outside of GMWU stewards and Militant supporters who were then admitted to the anti-room I was in the room and saw at first hand their behaviour. They ate most of the buffet, reserved for the visitors, by occupying the anti-room, the General Secretaries saw how easily Militant supporters gained access to rooms assigned to a private meeting without any security. During the lunch break Derek Hatton mingled with the protestors and was not surprised that they had gained admittance, the General Secretaries were surprised and offended by the bad manners of their hosts. The General Secretaries, at this meeting, were not aware that Tony Byrne, the City Councillor responsible for finance, had raised a loan with a Swiss bank by re-mortgaging council houses some time before the meeting. The reaction to this news was swift and hostile. Shaw explains,

*“The furious trade union leaders felt they had been conned, as, too, did Blunkett, who now gave up the role of peace-maker. After consulting Kinnock, the General Secretaries of the TGWU and GMWU, Ron Todd and David Basnett, wrote to the NEC requesting an enquiry into Liverpool Labour Party.”* (Shaw, 1988, p. 263)

The Militant vanguard would not contemplate diluting their leadership especially by putting their finances under the control of the national leadership of the Labour Party and national trade union leaders. Militant was now exposed as prioritising the campaign against the Government and a confrontation with it, rather than a solution to the funding crisis of the council. Militant had now alienated what allies they had on the soft left whose patience had run out. Some local unions now felt used, saw that the crisis was capable of resolution and not insoluble, and they no longer gave full support to the Council.



Tony Byrne had, in reserve, the option of re-mortgaging council properties all along but the only issue for him was the cost of borrowing from a foreign bank or a lower rate from an authorised loan in the public sector. Militant had now lost all support from the trade unions who were deserting from the field in droves because they felt they had been manipulated and had not been given all the options at the appropriate time. Instead, they were drip fed information by the Militant vanguard on a crisis basis, Militant assumed that the trade unions would accept their leadership. This was not the case and the trade unions asserted their independence, for some late, but assert it they did. This was followed by a complete separation from the council's campaign, the strategy had totally collapsed, and Militant was discredited and isolated.

# The National Labour Party Inquiry into the Liverpool District Labour Party

## 5.28 Background

During 1986 the National Labour Party conducted an Inquiry into the Liverpool District Labour Party. This was an outcome of Neil Kinnock's famous speech to the 1985 Brighton Labour Party Conference in which he launched an attack on the Militant leadership of the Liverpool City Council. The National Labour Party was receiving disturbing reports of intimidation, undue pressure, and threatening behaviour at DLP meetings.

The Inquiry Report (Appendix 7) is a thorough and meticulous dissection of an organisation that had changed beyond recognition from its original purpose. It also apportions blame to the persons who effected these changes. The Inquiry Team go further and accuse these persons of being members of Militant Tendency and allege that they were following different objectives to those of the Labour Party. I have obtained a copy of the Inquiry Report found in the papers deposited in the Peoples History Museum in Manchester within the papers of the late Eric Heffer MP. Two members of the Inquiry Team, Audrey Wise MP, and Margaret Beckett MP. submitted a minority report of which I also have obtained a copy. (Appendix 4).

The other members of the Inquiry Team, the majority, are listed below,

Charles Turnock, (Chair) National Union of Railway workers, trade union representative on the NEC

Tom Sawyer, National Union of Public Employees, trade union representative on the NEC

Betty Boothroyd MP

Tony Clarke, Communications Union, trade union representative on the NEC

Eddie Haigh, Transport and General Workers Union, trade union representative on the NEC

Neville Hough MP

Larry Whitty (General Secretary)

Joyce Gould was not a member of the Enquiry Team but as National Agent provided advice and technical support. This report was marked private and confidential until the NEC had concluded its consideration of the report. I have included two statements given by DLP delegates to describe the atmosphere and structure of Liverpool DLP meetings under Militant control.

Eric Heffer MP drew attention to his view that the Inquiry team should not be influenced by dissenting voices outside the Labour Party i.e., the CPGB who he accused of influencing non-affiliated unions and the Black Caucus. Below is a copy of a letter sent to Larry Whitty General Secretary of the Labour Party from Heffer making these points.

From Eric S. Heffer, M.P.



LIVERPOOL.

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

8th December, 1985

Dear Larry,

Thank you for your letter dated 3rd December replying to mine of the 2nd. Unfortunately, I did not receive your reply until late on Wednesday afternoon of the 4th, after I had received a letter from Charles Turnock.

Whilst not being totally sure on every point made, I was very much assured by the tone of your letter and thank you for the assurances you gave.

There are a few points to which I would like to draw the attention of the Committee. I saw from the press on Friday (Guardian) that Rex Makin, a Merseyside lawyer, had written to you asking to represent certain people. I trust the Committee will not agree to this. Makin is not a member of the Labour Party, and in actual fact is very politically hostile to the Labour Party. If his allegations have any substance at all, he could surely pursue these through the courts on behalf of any of his clients. If he has not done so, why not? Labour Party Enquiry Committees are not legal courts, and I believe he is mischief-making on behalf of political enemies.

Secondly, there are non-affiliated unions in the City, who have been in dispute with the Council. It should be remembered that in the case of some of them, they voted against affiliation to the Party, and quite a section of their members are also politically hostile to the Party. That is further complicated by the fact that some of the local officials of non-affiliated unions are Communist Party members. In Liverpool, the C.P. has consistently put up candidates against Labour Party candidates. The C.P. also has influence in other bodies, including the Black Caucus etc. I am not suggesting that that there is anything wrong in this, but it does mean that at times there are hidden political issues and historical questions which on the surface are not always seen or understood by outsiders.

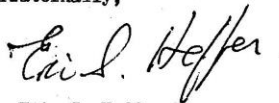
I hope that you and the Committee will bear in mind, during the course of your deliberations, that here in Liverpool, in the Municipal Elections in 1984, the turnout in the City was well above normal. The percentage voting was over 50%, and in municipal terms that is unique. Labour did extremely well. The issues of the conflict with the Government were put up front, and despite the use by the Liberals and Tories of some unfortunate quotations from our own Party Leader and Front Bench Spokesmen, the Labour supporters turned out and increased our support. A recent poll gave Labour a good lead in the City, above that of 1984. Also, at the last General Election, Liverpool had one of the best results, with a swing to Labour.

P.T.O.

The decision of the N.E.C. to halt D.L.P. activities has not only caused anger amongst some Party supporters, but confusion amongst others, and is doing great harm to the Party. There is particular concern with regard to the statements inferring corruption, in a City which has been virtually free of it, unlike certain other areas, where no such action was taken by the Party.

I trust that all these points will be taken into consideration by the Committee.

Yours fraternally,



Eric S. Heffer,  
M.P. for Walton.

Mr. Larry Whitty,  
General Secretary,  
Labour Party.

## **5.29 Statement of Pat Ferguson Regarding the Liverpool District Labour Party (DLP)**

Statement Given on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2017.

In 1985 I was the Treasurer of the Liverpool Division of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and a delegate to the Liverpool City Council Joint Shop Stewards Committee (JSSC). I was part of the union's negotiating team when we met with City Council representatives during the period that came to be known as 'The Liverpool Budget Crisis' when the Labour Councillors confronted Margaret Thatcher's Tory Government.

I was also a member of the Liverpool Labour Party in the Riverside Constituency. I attended Ward Meetings but did not hold any official position within the party. Militant Tendency was very strong and actively organised to ensure their members were the ones elected as delegates to the DLP. I was not a supporter of Militant and Militant members were well aware of this.

As the crisis progressed over a series of months it became clear to many of us that the traditional way of deciding Labour policy within the Council was being changed in a manner by which Militant would have control of the decision-making process. Previously Labour Councillors (The Labour Group) would meet to decide policy, as was consistent with national Labour Party rules. It gradually became the case that the DLP would decide policy and mandate the Labour Group to vote accordingly in Council meetings. Militant was shadowing the wards and constituencies, meeting to decide their policies which then became DLP policy, which then became Labour Group policy, which then became City Council policy.

By the autumn of 1985 the Council had run out of funds and decided to issue redundancy notices to its whole workforce. This decision went through the process as has been previously described, it stemmed from within the Militant tendency, took its course through the DLP and became City Council policy.

However, the nature of the DLP had changed throughout 1984 and 1985. What became known as 'Aggregate Meetings' were held more frequently. These were meetings which any member of the party could attend as well as the DLP delegates. Later, after the national Labour Party investigated the Liverpool party, these Aggregates were highly criticised for both being in contravention of the party's rules, and, for the manner in which they were conducted.

I attended several of the Aggregates in 1985. The meetings were highly charged and bad tempered. Leading members of Militant had the majority of the time and the Chair, a Tendency member, allowed only a token opposition response, often from Jane Kennedy, a NUPE member who was to become a Labour MP. Two branches of the GMWU, Branches 5 and 80 were usually out in force. GMWU members from the Council's Static Security Force provided uniformed 'security' standing at the sides and back of the meeting room. Why a meeting of Labour Party members, all so-called comrades, needed a security presence was inexplicable. However, in the subsequent investigation several anti-Militant members gave evidence that they found the meetings intimidatory, both with the security presence and the inflammatory language towards anyone not following the Militant line.

The meetings were often held at the TGWU building. They were usually called at the last minute because, a 'crisis' had developed, and the DLP had to decide its reaction. They were called by word of mouth, so some members were aware of them and others

found out after the event. Notices of meetings did not go through the correct process of constituency and ward secretaries because of the 'urgency of the crisis'

The GMWU, with a couple of pro-Militant branches and shop stewards with generous facility time could easily assemble a strong turnout in a way in which other unions could not compete.

The Aggregates were chaotic. Sometimes there was no membership check, on entry and it was impossible to tell who, was a delegate, and who was an ordinary member. The agendas were always hastily drawn up because the meetings were called at short notice. The purpose of the meetings was transparent – they were called to endorse the latest Militant line whatever that might be, but when this was pointed out it was viciously denied. Non-supportive trade unions such as the NUT, NALGO and NUPE were vilified and blamed when Militant's tactics badly misfired. When it came to a vote, two votes were held. In the first 'advisory' vote anybody could vote. The second vote was for DLP delegates only, but it was impossible to distinguish who was who, and as there had been no membership check it is probable that people who were not even party members turned out and voted.

The DLP meetings were in stark contrast to the meetings of the local authority trade unions, the JSSC. Although a significant number of people attended both meetings, the JSSC meetings were orderly, had agendas and minutes and proper debates were held. The difference between DLP and JSSC meetings was that Militant controlled the former but not the latter.

To sum up, the meetings were unpleasant, unproductive and a sham exercise in giving credibility to Militant's strategy of using a Labour Council to confront the Tory government. DLP meetings were widely reported in the press, particularly the reports of



violence and intimidation. They served to bring both the Labour Party and the City Council into disrepute. The senior members of Militant were thrown out of the Party, the Councillors were disqualified, and Margaret Thatcher continued in office for four more years.

### **5.30. Statement by Jane Kennedy NUPE Delegate to the DLP**

“NUPE and NALGO delegates were held to blame. The meeting was held at the TGWU offices, and when we came out afterwards, they had lined the four flights of stairs down from the room. They were kicking and pushing and shoving us. It was all very scary, but I had Malcom on one side of me and Frank Jones, my convenor, on the other. They picked me up by the elbows and just razzed me down the stairs. I can’t remember touching the floor. It was amazing, but very frightening. “ (Kilfoyle, 2000, p. 149)

The statement above was given by Jane Kennedy branch secretary of Liverpool NUPE who represented mainly low paid workers in the elderly care homes. She was explaining that because of the lack of union support for the Council it had to secure a loan from a French Bank because money was not forthcoming from Government. This was announced at the DLP meeting she describes how this created the hostility towards her. Malcom was her husband and he later became a City councillor and Lord Mayor of Liverpool. Jane Kennedy later became an MP and Minister for Northern Ireland in the Blair Government and Police Commissioner for Merseyside.

In an interview with BBC Radio Merseyside journalist Liam Fogarty in 2019, he commented on the accusations of intimidation,

*James Ferguson. “I am interested in the thesis on the issue that they were intimidating the internal opposition in the Labour party through their use of the DLP the*

*District Labour Party and that people who had legitimate concerns were either shouted down or physically assaulted.”*

*Liam Fogerty. “That was extensively reported because the.”*

*JF. “Did you report that?”*

*LF. “I can’t remember personally but it was commonly reported then that individuals had spoken out against the policy and they were shouted down ejected from meetings and abused in and out of meetings. I remember standing outside the Trade Union Resource Centre in Hardman St, and there was some crisis meeting because every meeting was a crisis meeting, and the T.V cameras were there. Newsnight was coming live from outside, and Jane Kennedy came in with her NUPE colleagues and it was pretty vile stuff.”*

*JF. “in what way?”*

*LF. “Just verbal abuse and jostling and stuff and you talk to people on the other side of the debate as it were, on the non-Militant side. They have all got anecdotes about uncomradely behaviour.” (Appendix 17 page 372)*

The question and answer, exchange, concurs with other reports of intimidation at meetings of the DLP.

### **5.31 Interview with Irene Buxton (IB) (Appendix 8)**

Irene Buxton was a former member of Militant in Liverpool who was now prepared to give evidence against them. She was a close associate of Derek Hatton and her evidence gives an insight into the heart of Militant in Liverpool and the structure and organisation of Militant branches. Her evidence was given to the Inquiry team on 24<sup>th</sup>, January 1986, they had to re-locate to Aberdeen because that is where she lived and

was reluctant to appear in Liverpool. The transcript of her evidence is reproduced in Appendix 8. Below is a summary of each page of the transcript using her initials **IB** for Irene Buxton.

**Page 146.** **IB** became a branch secretary of NALGO in 1978 until 1983 and a member of the NALGO District Executive Committee. **IB** joined the Labour Party and became chair of the Warbreck Ward and a member of the general management committee of the constituency of Liverpool Walton. **IB** was also a delegate to the Liverpool District Labour Party.

Derek Hatton approached **IB** and two others who were on the left of the NALGO branch executive and sold them copies of Militant which led to discussions about Militant's aims, views and objectives.

**Page 147.** **IB** was asked to attend readers meetings at a local hotel where she met Terry Harrison a Liverpool City Councillor and discussions took place about entryism and how they were building up a revolutionary party.

In 1980 **IB** joined Militant because it was the "only forceful group on the left" and that is her for reason joining.

**Page 148.** When **IB** joined Militant there were two branches in Liverpool but when she left there was a branch in every one of the six constituencies in Liverpool. When the branch size reached 25-30 the branch was then split into two. **IB** became chair of the Walton branch on the basis that she connected more with younger members than the older members. Branch meetings were weekly each Wednesday night and members were asked to ensure that all other bodies such as trades unions or Labour Party branches did not meet on a Wednesday, avoiding a clash.

Each branch has a chairman, secretary, treasurer, paper seller organiser and a youth worker. An important discussion at every meeting was the progress of the fighting fund so that targets were met.

**Page 149. IB** explained how Militant officers of the branch pressured members to recruit readers and convert them to members. The branch meeting was addressed by a senior member who gave the political line but arguments against were not acceptable and no votes permitted only an exhortation to explain to people the correct political line.

She reported that there was an annual Militant conference, usually held in Bridlington.

**Page 150. IB** described the Merseyside District structure to which delegates were sent from the branches. When she left Liverpool, it had a district committee, and Sefton had a district which covered St Helens, Kirby and Huyton. The Wirral also had a district committee which included Birkenhead. The delegates to these district committees were chosen annually by the outgoing district committee. The function of the district committee is to oversee the work of the branches and trades union caucuses. Above the district committees is a central committee which meets at their central office in London. The central committee, **IB** describes as the body that decides Militant policy. Even when there is an annual conference **IB** likens it to a Tory Party conference where people talk about issues but there is no debate or votes taken.

The central committee produce an internal bulletin every two or three months which is numbered so leaks can be traced.

**Page 151.** Internal bulletins are written by members of the central committee but are described by their initials in reverse and then a new name is created, Peter Taaffe the general secretary becomes Tom Patton.

**IB** started to disagree with Militant when Derek Hatton became Deputy leader of the City Council. **IB** accused him of disregarding trade union feelings on particular issues, with criticisms condemned and shot down by Hatton. **IB** then left Militant.

**Page 152. IB** was then marginalised in the Labour Party and decided to move to Aberdeen in April 1984. She then gives a view of Militant as entryist and undemocratic and that Liverpool was brought to the brink of bankruptcy not for the sake of people in Liverpool but for the sake of Militant. It was done to increase paper sales and membership and raise political consciousness of the working class.

**Page 153. IB** goes on to say that Militant although admitting defeat in the budget confrontation would say to their members that it was a victory for all the new members recruited, increase in paper sales and the size of their fighting fund.

**IB** then identified members of Militant i.e., Felicity Dowling, Tony Mulhearn, Terry Harrison, Richard Benton, and Richard Knight.

At this stage evidence from Ian Williams, not interviewed by the Inquiry, corroborates this evidence in an interview with him in 2019,

*Ian Williams. "They also by then were engaged in a very determined campaign to recruit me because of us taking positions which were similar, because they tended to be more pragmatic, they weren't for a general strike in all circumstances and on the other hand they weren't the totally wishy washy must wait broad movement. Must sign petition of the CP. In some ways we were pragmatically aligned."*

*James Ferguson. "How strenuously did they try to recruit you?"*

*IW. "Oh, very much so, I was taken to special meetings and interviewed, and they put heavy pressure on, Felicity Dowling, Terry and a few others."*

JF. "Felicity Dowling?"

IW. "Yes"

JF. "Terry Harrison?"

IW. "Yes."

*They were persuasive, they even gave me key documents to persuade me.*

JF. "Policy Documents?"

*IW. "Yes, mimeographed policies. It was an open secret, everybody knew what they were doing, that they existed, that they had this organisation. One of my problems was I was tainted with this. At one point the NUR ran me as the candidate for Liverpool Riverside and it was only afterwards, I discovered I got an abysmally low vote. I discovered Militant voted against me because they had a candidate, and everybody else voted against me because they thought I was a Militant stooge" (Appendix 25 page 455)*

**Page 154. IB** went on to name Tony Aitman, Josie Aitman, Dave Cotterell, Cathy Wilson, Ted Mooney, Roy Farrah, Len Harrison, Pauline Dunlop, Ian Lowes, and Andy Pink.

**IB** refers to a Lesley who shared a house with Felicity Dowling, was a teacher and is now a full-time Militant organiser. This is Lesley Holt who later changed her name on re-marriage to Lesley Mahmood, who was a candidate in the Walton Parliamentary Bye-election.

**Page 155. IB** then named Derek Hatton who she said held some Militant branch meetings in his house.

**Page 156. IB** describes how she was expected to argue for the Militant line at Party meetings, as a delegate, even though it was against party policy. She describes this as undemocratic and for which she would be castigated for pursuing her own policies in contravention to official party policy.

**Page 157. IB** explains how people who leave Militant are targeted for removal from office in their trade union or the Labour party. i.e., “We’ll make sure we fix you in terms of we’ll get you thrown out of office.”

**Page 158. IB** explains how full-time workers for Militant would describe themselves as journalists for their paper rather than political organisers and would secure NUJ accreditation.

### **5.32 The Inquiry’s Remit**

The Inquiry’s remit was very comprehensive covering 15 aspects of the DLP’s operations.

1. Scope of the Liverpool District Labour Party
2. Ordinary and Aggregate DLP Meetings
3. General Conduct of DLP Meetings
4. Access and Checking of Credentials
5. Voting
6. DLP Agendas and Documentation
7. Affiliations to DLP
8. Executive Committee
9. Local Government Panel

10. Finances

11. Relationship between DLP and the Labour Group.

12 Relationship between DLP and Constituencies

13 Employment Issues

14 Role of the Militant Tendency

15 Action Required.

### **5.36 The Size of the Investigation**

Oral and/or written evidence from the six CLPs in Liverpool.

Nine out of the 33 wards in the City.

One Women's section

13 affiliated organisations

5 Groups of Labour Party Members.

71 individual party members

Over 120 members gave evidence, Non-party members were not interviewed.

### **5.37 The Inquiry Report's Findings**

I have examined the Inquiry Report and written a brief synopsis of its findings.

#### 1. Scope

The DLP had been transformed, from a normal Borough Party, co-terminus with the geographical area of the local government authority and which would formulate a



manifesto, to a body which now discussed and decided on areas outside its remit. It discussed matters which were the prerogative of the Labour Group.

Areas outside the DLP's remit, which the DLP discussed,

(a) Industrial Relations, normally a matter between trades unions within their various negotiating structures, the DLP was acting in such a way it was actively by-passing these structures.

(b) The day- to- day management of the local authority e.g. planning permission.

(c) The DLP was now regarded as a sovereign body that made decisions which were binding on the Labour Group.

(d) The DLP was discussing matters far beyond local government issues.

The list is lengthy but shows how far the DLP had extended its remit.

Party Organisation, Constitutional Reform, Party Leadership, Elections, Disciplinary Action by the NEC, The Conduct of Constituencies outside Liverpool, on South Africa, Nicaragua, East/West Relations, and the sale of Militant at DLP meetings.

It is clear from the above list of discussion areas that Militant's control of the DLP was transforming a normal DLP into an organ of Militant Policy.

Referring to the issues above the Inquiry team concluded that,

*“the totality leads to a domination and unhealthy relationship between the DLP and the Labour Group, and the DLP and the six Constituency Parties.”*

## 2. DLP Meetings

Prior to the Militant control of the DLP, up until 1983, there was a conventional pattern of monthly delegate meetings and monthly EC meetings. Militant changed this to the pattern below.

	Ordinary DLP Meetings	Aggregate Meetings	EC Meetings
1983	10	0	14
1984	13	5	27
1985	9	8	31

The aggregate meetings were meetings open to all Labour Party Members as well as delegates to the DLP. These meetings were outside the rules of the DLP, but the rules were ignored. The Chairman of the DLP was Tony Mulhearn, a prominent member of the Militant Tendency and a City Councillor. The Leader of the Labour Group, John Hamilton, was given the post of Treasurer to the DLP and not Chairman as would be expected.

The timing and venues of aggregate meetings frequently changed at short notice and no formal notices were issued, instead information was circulated through the 'grapevine'.

## 3. General Conduct of District Labour Party Meetings

The inquiry found that "there were a significant number of members interviewed who claimed that at DLP meetings – and particularly at aggregate meetings there was a general air of intimidation; that verbal intimidation was rife; and that there were threats and acts of physical intimidation."

What was unusual and quite unique was the presence of the “static security service” a uniformed force employed by the council to guard public buildings but in this case were used as stewards at private meetings of the Labour Party.

The disturbing aspect of the use of the security force was who authorised their use? And who paid for their time?

#### 4. Access and Checking of Credentials

Claims were made, by two wards, that persons attending were not bona fide members and that checking of credentials was inadequate due to pressure of numbers and that there was no segregation between delegates and ordinary members.

#### 5. Voting

The report found that there were five different types of credentials for delegates but there was no voting system at all until Regional Officers started to attend the meetings.

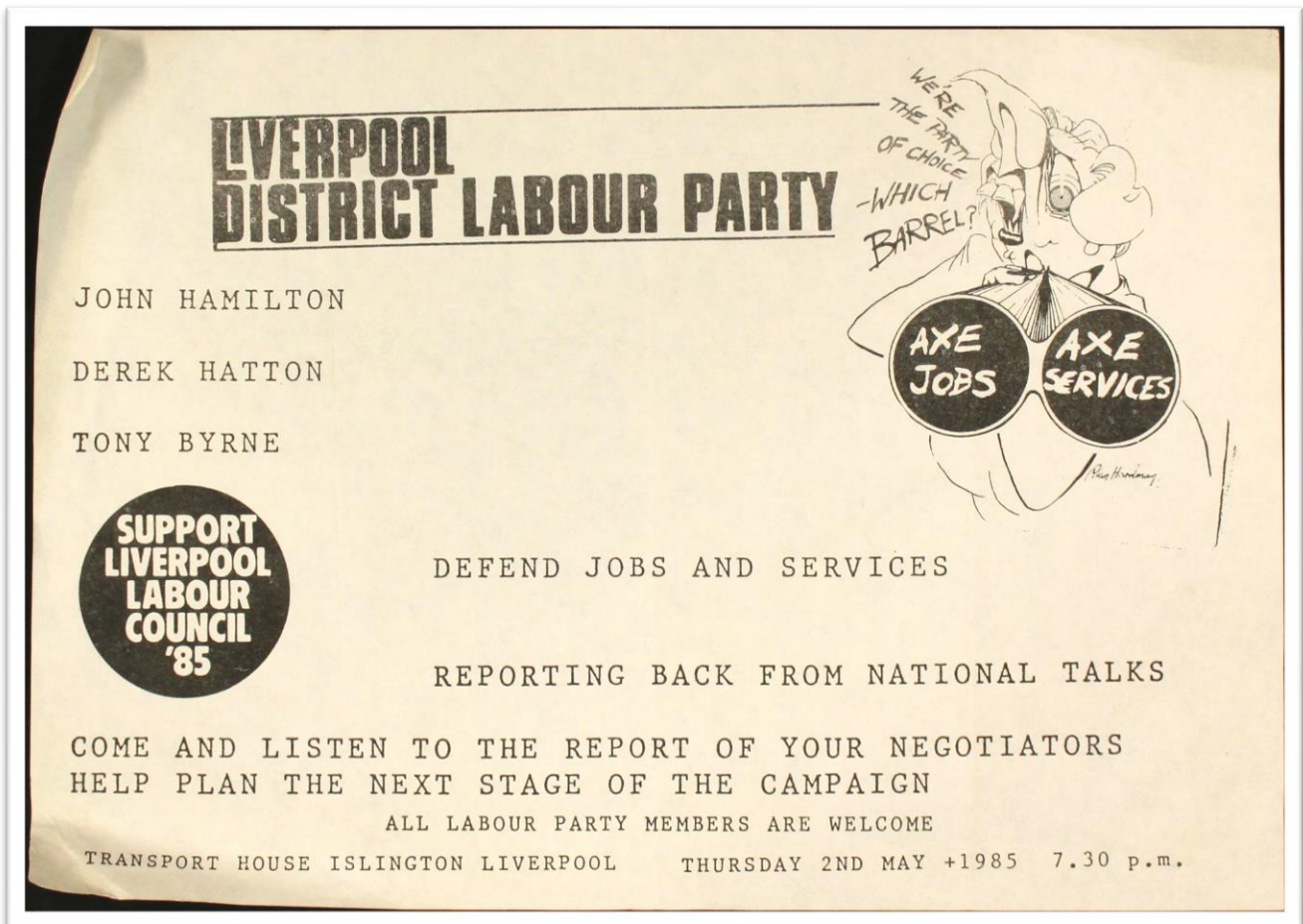
There was evidence given that voting credentials were given en-bloc to the GMWU delegation to distribute on their own account.

At aggregate meetings delegate votes were taken first followed by votes of the whole meeting but the delegate votes were not recorded in the minutes only the combined vote.

#### 6. DLP Agendas and Documentation.

The Inquiry found that the DLP meetings were totally dominated by the EC Report which was very often oral. Below is notice of a meeting of the DLP dated 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1985 which has been reproduced here from the personal papers of John Hamilton, the leader of the Labour Group. The papers were first examined by me after they had

been deposited in the archives department within the Liverpool City Library after John



Hamilton's death.

The notice does not contain an agenda and from the format of the notice it is likely that the meeting would be comprised of oral reports and suggestions on how to progress the Campaign, in effect a rallying call. There is no reference to any "normal" business of the DLP or indeed any avenue where dissent could be formalised within such a format. This format had the effect of stopping the normal business of the DLP with constituency and ward resolutions failing to be considered. The EC constructed the agenda and therefore dominated the proceedings. Also, the notice given of meetings was chaotic to those members not in the well- informed inner circle.

The Inquiry Team reported that,

*“the timing and venues of the meetings were altered from meeting to meeting, commencing anytime from 5.00pm to 7.30pm., and meeting in different premises. With the frequency of meetings and breakdown of a regular pattern, some members reported difficulty in attending - the notice given sometimes being only hours before the meeting was to commence. A similar pattern emerges of short notice being given of aggregate meetings and venues being changed without notice.”* (Appendix 7 page 84)

The normal flow of ideas embodied in resolutions from wards was essential to the intellectual development of the party because these small meetings could be fertile ground for the exchange of ideas. Liverpool had two universities from which the Labour Party attracted intellectuals together with members educated in labour colleges such as Ruskin usually sponsored by their trade union. This lifeblood of ideas was blocked because Militant had one political ‘line’ on every policy and the only forum for debate and decision making was now the DLP.

Militant would not tolerate open debate on profound questions such as why did the campaign for more funding for Liverpool constrain itself within the labour movement and not reach out to organisations which were outside the labour movement but were ready and able to give support? Militant was creating enemies in organisations which were its natural allies but were impossible to control and therefore excluded. Militant was now gaining a reputation within the City as anti-intellectual as all too often Militant set piece speeches at rallies contained a forthright statement that “if you cannot support our policy get out of the way and let us get on with the job”.

Important documentation like the Stonefrost Report (Appendix 9) was not circulated, only a summary written by the DLP Officers. The Stonefrost Report will be dealt with in a later section. It was a Report drawn up by Local Government Officers outside Liverpool into the finances of the Council giving possible options other than illegality and was instigated and funded by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. NALGO fully briefed many unions with a detailed synopsis but many DLP delegates were not sufficiently well informed to make decisions without full documentation.

### 7. Affiliations and Delegations

The two main unions, GMWU and TGWU at Regional level agreed that more members of branches were affiliated to the DLP than were registered within each branch. The Inquiry found over affiliation by the TGWU and GMWU and that this was not checked by the DLP or the unions. Similar findings were made from student Labour clubs i.e., over affiliation. Workplace trade union branches were affiliated to the DLP by the UCW (Union of Communication Workers) contrary to the rules.

### 8. The Executive Committee

The Inquiry Team found that the Agenda was dominated by the EC Report and that not all members of the EC were notified of meetings. It also was concerned that documentation was not available to the DLP and that the Agenda was prioritised in favour of EC resolutions.

### 9. Local Government Panel

Nominees for the panel were interviewed by the full Executive Committee of the DLP and the criteria for admittance onto the panel was the acceptance of the DLP as the sovereign Policy making body. This is contrary to the rules in that it is only required of nominees to accept and conform to the Standing orders for Labour Groups. The

Regional Office had drawn attention to rule breaking by the DLP, but this had been ignored.

#### 10. Finances

The Enquiry found that no significant current balances were available for the DLP accounts yet until two years previously a full-time worker was paid out of the account. It appears that there are no significant balances in any of the accounts, although the DLP had an additional delegation fee contrary to the model rules.

#### 11. Relationship between the District Labour Party and the Labour Group

The Inquiry found that there had been a shift in the day- to- day management of Council affairs by the Labour Group to the DLP and that the DLP had become involved in detailed decisions of the Council. Not only was power transferred from the Labour Group to the DLP but that some decisions were taken by the EC of the DLP and some by aggregate meetings of the DLP, by-passing the delegate DLP meetings. Important issues, such as Industrial Relations, saw the DLP intervening completely outside of its remit. Trade Union Officials representing local authority workers regarded this development as extremely damaging to their current and effective system of Industrial Relations.

Decisions on the Council's Industrial Relations Policy and inter union issues were conducted in both EC meetings and DLP meetings. This was concerning because aggregate meetings were dominated by members of the local authority's unions. This disturbing element led to unrepresentative groups of union members reporting to union branch meetings about what they had argued for at DLP meetings in many instances contrary to actual union policy.

## 12. Relationship between DLP and CLPs

The Liverpool DLP moved from coordinating constituency parties and wards to operating with a degree of sovereignty. The DLP now acted with authority on a city-wide basis and its decisions were more important than the constituencies. Wards were now by-passing the CLP and sending in resolutions to the DLP rather than the constituency. By going beyond their coordinating role and developing their own policies the DLP came into conflict with wards and constituencies. An example was given of the controversial appointment of a Race Relations Advisor, Mr Sam Bond, known to be a Militant supporter from London and under-qualified. The black community and NALGO immediately opposed the appointment and accused Militant of installing a placeman. The DLP mounted a campaign in support of the appointment contrary to the wishes of many wards and constituencies. The DLP was now overriding the views of the wards and constituencies instead of coordinating them.

## 13. Employment Issues

GMWU branch 5 and GMWU branch 80 enjoyed 100% nomination rights and it is in these two branches where abuses of this system had been discovered. Nomination rights meant that a union branch can nominate candidates for vacancies in their sphere of work. This system can be open to abuse by prioritising candidates who will conform to the union's position of supporting the Council's policy on fighting the Government's underfunding of the City. Candidates were chosen who were likely to be active politically and industrially.

A serious allegation was made that the Campaign Support Team and its members of staff seconded from their normal workplace were working for Militant. The Campaign



Support Team was set up to counter media bias against the Council's policies and it chose staff because of their political allegiance.

#### 14. Involvement in Militant Tendency

The Inquiry found that it was beyond reasonable doubt that the concentration of power in the EC and at aggregate meetings of the DLP was dominated by the Militant Tendency. Militant was the only credible force of left-wing activity within the Party in Merseyside. It found that it was an open secret that Militant shadowed the Labour Party structure.

Militant Tendency operated from their premises in 2 Lower Breck Road in Liverpool, from which full-time workers were based and their newspaper 'Mersey Militant' was printed and published by Richard Venton. Mersey Militant was a small publication and hardly merited a building on three floors to produce it, the building was an organisational hub not a publishing house. It was coordinated by its Liverpool District Committee within the establishment of branches in all six constituencies and in most wards. Key members of Militant were also members of the DLP Executive who dominated decision making. Damage was done to Race Relations by the formation of The Merseyside Action Group, a Militant front organisation designed to oppose established organisations of ethnic minorities.

The Inquiry recommended that some individuals be charged, with a view to disciplinary action, for membership of Militant Tendency.

#### 15. Action to be taken.

The Inquiry Team made many organisational recommendations arising from the 14 points above. It decided that the DLP had to be operated and returned to a normal functioning City Party, following the Model Rules of the Labour Party. This could not

be done while the Militant organisation dominated the DLP and so it was decided to recommend that disciplinary action be taken against leading members of the Militant Tendency.

The members below were referred to the NEC for disciplinary action.

Tony Mulhearn (Chair DLP) later to form the Socialist Party.

Terry Harrison (Vice Chair DLP) full time Militant organiser

Felicity Dowling (Secretary DLP) full time Militant organiser

Josie Aitman

Tony Aitman

Paul Astbury, City Councillor

Roger Bannister Knowsley NALGO

Carol Darby

Pauline Dunlop, City Councillor

Derek Hatton, Deputy Leader Liverpool City Council

Richard Knights, full time Militant Organiser

Ian Lowes, Convenor GMBATU Branch 5

Sylvia Sharpey-Shafer

Harry Smith, City Councillor

Cheryl Varley, full time Militant Organiser

Richard Venton, full time Militant Organiser.

## Inquiry Conclusions

It is clear from the Inquiry Report, that it,

- (a) Identified the ways in which the Model Rules had been subverted.
- (b) Drew attention to the concentration of power in the EC of the DLP.
- (c) Explained how the DLP downgraded the power and influence of the constituencies
- (d) Drew attention to the problems caused by the aggregate meetings and the intimidation at such meetings.
- (e) Accused the Militant Tendency of exerting control of the DLP and identified 16 persons who should be reported to the NEC for being members of Militant.

All but two members of the Inquiry Team approved the report and recommended it to the NEC.

### **5.38 The Minority Report's Findings (Appendix 10)**

Two members of the Inquiry Team, Margaret Beckett MP, and Audrey Wise MP, in February 1986 submitted a Minority Report to the NEC. It is a 12-page document which does not depart from the Main Report in any profound way apart from page 12 entitled "Final Note of Dissent" in which it opposes disciplinary action against the 16 members accused of membership of Militant contrary to Clause 2 of the Constitution. The dissenters agreed that if members did stand against the Party in an election they should be expelled. They did not agree to expulsions on political grounds and argued in evidence given many members thought expulsions were unnecessary, highly undesirable and counter-productive. The dissenters were concerned about the quality of evidence which may be needed to convict. The dissenters argued that even before a reference is made for disciplinary action all the evidence must be produced not just prima facia

evidence. In the case of Margaret Beckett, a barrister, this was an untenable position as she must have been aware that more evidence would be produced and in fact was produced.

The Inquiry Team was referring the 16 named members to the NEC not with the full evidence but with a view to disciplinary action on evidence gathered so far but more would follow at a later stage by due process. Later in the thesis which deals with disciplinary action, substantial additional evidence was gathered by the NEC. It seems that regardless of evidence the dissenters were opposed to expulsions as a political position. They were in effect arguing there was no case to answer when clearly there was substantial prima facie evidence against the accused. The assertion by the dissenters that they were opposed to expulsions on political grounds would mean that any group within the Labour Party regardless of their political policies could operate freely and without fear of expulsion. Militant were clearly a Trotskyist revolutionary group within the Labour Party with a political philosophy different to the Labour Party and had previously been denied affiliate status. The dissenters were fighting against all expulsions on political grounds. The dissenters would presumably defend their continued existence within the Labour Party if they did not stand against official Labour Party candidates in elections. This was the position of the dissenters and because the Labour Party had no clear aims and objectives to guide the party the dissenters could assert this demand.

## 5.39 The Response from Tony Mulhearn, President of the DLP.

Response to findings of investigation team into Liverpool District Labour Party.

### OUR REPLY (R)

1. THE MAJORITY REPORT OF THE INVESTIGATION TEAM CONCLUDES THAT THERE ARE VERY SERIOUS IRREGULARITIES IN THE FUNCTIONING AND PRACTICES OF THE DISTRICT LABOUR PARTY (DLP) IN LIVERPOOL WHICH HAVE PUT IT IN BREACH OF THE PARTY'S RULES.  
Our R) A sweeping statement which does not specify where activities, breaches of Party rules. Standing Order 19 says : "Any breach of a question on the rules of standing orders may be raised by a member rising to a point of order". On no occasion has a member or affiliated organisation complained of a serious breach of standing orders.
2. THESE PROBLEMS ARE UNIQUE TO LIVERPOOL AND WITHOUT PARALLEL IN THE PARTY.  
Our R) This statement makes no sense.
3. AMONGST THE IRREGULARITIES THAT HAVE OCCURRED ARE :
  - a) THE DLP HAS INTERFERED IN THE DAY TO DAY MANAGEMENT OF THE CITY COUNCIL, ASSUMING AN UNCONSTITUTIONAL 'SOVEREIGN' STATUS OVER THE ELECTED LABOUR GROUP OF THE COUNCIL:  
Our R) Verbiage. It makes no attempt to give specific examples plus does not disagree that DLP is policy making body:
  - b) THE DLP HAS WRONGLY INTERFERED WITH THE PROCESS OF APPOINTMENTS AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN THE COUNCIL:  
Our R) Statement totally inaccurate. The only time the DLP discussed industrial relations was based on resolutions received from affiliated trade unions:
  - c) THE DLP HAS TAKEN OVER RESPONSIBILITIES AND POWERS WHICH PROPERLY BELONG TO THE CONSTITUENCY PARTIES (CLPs):  
Our R) There is no attempt to qualify this sweeping statement or to give specific examples to support this allegation.
  - d) MASS "AGGREGATE MEETINGS" OF DELEGATES AND VISITORS HAVE ASSUMED DECISION MAKING POWERS IN THE DLP, OUTSIDE THE PARTY'S RULES AND STANDING ORDERS:  
Our R) It is wrong to assert that the convening of aggregates is outside the Party rules and standing orders. An aggregate is merely an extended DLP and has been a feature of Party life in Liverpool since the 50s. The purpose being to give an opportunity for all Party members to be directly involved in the decision-making process on crucial issues. On this issue the constitution is silent. It is also silent, for instance, on organising demonstrations and rallies to support policy. Is this an offence? At most, **if** not all, of these aggregates, decisions in the main sought to reaffirm already clearly established policies of the DLP or the Municipal Policy Conference.
  - e) TIMING AND VENUES OF DLP MEETINGS HAVE BEEN VARIED WITHOUT NOTICE, AND NOTICES OF MEETINGS SENT OUT SELECTIVELY EXCLUDING CERTAIN MEMBERS:  
Our R) It is totally wrong to assert that certain members were deliberately excluded from DLP meetings. Also standing orders 1a) explicitly authorises the calling of "special and emergency meetings on necessity."
  - f) THERE HAS BEEN AN AIR OF INTIMIDATION AT DLP MEETINGS INCLUDING VERBAL INTIMIDATION AND THREATS AND ACTS OF PHYSICAL INTIMIDATION:  
Our R) This is purely a subjective judgement, and it does not specify acts of violence by who against whom. At no time were any complaints made to the DLP or Regional Officers. I as Chair of the meetings insisted that all points of view were heard without heckling. At times all sections heckled. Although the heckling never reached the pitch reached at the 1985 Party Conference.

3 g) THERE HAVE BEEN ABUSES IN THE COMPOSITION OF DLP DELEGATIONS FROM TRADE UNIONS, STUDENT BODIES AND WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS:

Our R) Even if this assertion is correct, and this has not been proved, it is the responsibility of the affiliated bodies and not the DLP:

h) THERE HAVE BEEN UNCONSTITUTIONAL PROCEDURES ADOPTED BY THE DLP IN RELATION TO THE PANEL OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CANDIDATES:

Our R) This assertion is totally and utterly wrong. It is not supported by any concrete example. The constitutional procedures in relation to the Panel were meticulously adhered to.

4. AT THE HEART OF THESE ABUSES WITHIN THE DLP IS THE CONCENTRATION OF POWER IN THE DLP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. IT IS BEYOND REASONABLE DOUBT THAT THIS CONCENTRATION OF POWER HAS BEEN BUILT UP AND EXERCISED BY THE MILITANT TENDENCY ORGANISATION.

Our R) This assertion was specifically rejected by Mr. Turnock himself when the Inquiry Team met the DLP Officers on Sunday 6th February:

Tony Mulhearn to C. Turnock:

"Are you alleging that decisions of the DLP or Labour Group are decided on or influenced by an outside group?"

Turnock to Mulhearn - "No".

On both occasions when the DLP Officers met the Inquiry Team I asked the question "What are the charges against the DLP?"

On both occasions Mr. Turnock answered :

"There are no charges."

It is also a fact that a majority of those questioned expressed satisfaction with the procedures and practices of the DLP, and those who made these charges or criticisms have not been identified and are clearly the malicious figment of somebody's imagination.

Regarding the allegations of members being part of 'Militant Tendency'. The following answer was given in response to questions from C. Turnock:-

"Everyone here has consistently stated that they are not members of the 'Militant Tendency' or any organisation associated with Militant. Both the DLP and the Labour Group are run in accordance with the Labour Party's Constitution and Rules."

The decision to suspend and subsequently disband the DLP was taken based on fabrication, malicious gossip, and false allegation, and with complete disregard for the guidelines to be observed by parties taking action against units of the Party. Issued by Snr. National Officer, David Hughes, dated 26th January, 1986 Paragraphs 4 & 5 reads as follows :-

"Suspension can be used only when there is a need to take swift action to ensure the proper working of the particular organisation, and where previous warnings have failed, whilst the necessary enquiries are being conducted to establish whether further action is required.

Before a decision to close a branch is taken, those in office or the members of the branch concerned must be supplied in writing, with the details of the charges against them. In order to prepare their defence, they must be given reasonable notice of the meetings of the Executive and General Committees of the Party at which they must appear to answer those charges. The notices of the Executive Committee members convening a meeting to consider disciplinary action must contain an indication of that business in its wording. Any recommendation from the Executive Committee to the General Committee of disciplinary action

cont.....

-3-

against an organisation or individual must be on the notice for the meeting, and be sent at least seven days before the date of the meeting."

Not only were these guidelines disregarded and no warnings given, but only days before the suspension myself and the DLP Secretary asked Regional Officers Ernie Collett, Peter Killeen and Jim Mason were they satisfied with the conduct of the Party. They all answered in the affirmative: Regional Officers attended several ordinary DLPs and aggregates. On not one single occasion were any irregularities brought to my attention.

This statement serves to refute entirely the basis of the NEC's decision and their action should be condemned and reversed and the DLP re-established immediately and any threats of expulsion against members abandoned.

TONY MULHEARN,

President.

The above response is surprising because it is a very sketchy document considering what was at stake i.e., the reconstitution of the DLP and the expulsion of 16 of its most senior members. The response does not go into much detail with only three pages covering a very lengthy report. On the issue of expulsions their only rebuttal is on page 2,

*“Everyone here has consistently stated that they are not members of the Militant Tendency or any organisation associated with Militant”.*

This document did not attempt to explain why the president of the DLP, Tony Mulhearn, was a signatory of a legal document, purchasing Militant Headquarters on Merseyside, one of the most serious charges against him. It is fair to say that the response document (undated) constitutes an initial defence which would be supplemented by additional defence documents and more detailed evidence later.

#### **5.40 The DLP and its management of dissent.**

The Inquiry Report only briefly touched upon three issues which the DLP dealt with and which became a focus around which dissent was mobilised. For this reason, I have gone into far more detail than the report because it is important to analyse how a vanguardist party reacts to dissent and the inherent threat to its power and authority from a democratic pluralist society. The problem with vanguardism is when it interfaces with pluralist society, in all its diversity, it will not engage with society and accommodate its requests but instead argues for its policies without revision. Below are three examples of how vanguardism would not accommodate dissent and the ways in which it deals with opposition to it.



### **The appointment of Sam Bond.**

A race relations adviser accused of being a Militant placeman.

### **The Stonefrost Report.**

A controversial report compiled by Maurice Stonefrost into the finances of the Liverpool City Council.

### **The mass redundancies of the Council staff.**

Council officials informed some members of the Labour Group that the deficit budget would mean that funds would be insufficient to pay staff beyond December 1985. Redundancies notices would have to be issued otherwise Councillors would be liable for any unauthorised spending. These notices were issued, and this caused major dissent within the DLP.

## **5.41 The Appointment of Sam Bond**

Sam Bond was a black man from London who applied for the position of principal Race Relations Advisor to Liverpool City Council. The interview panel comprised of councillors, council officers and a union observer from NALGO and three members of the Black Caucus representing the diverse ethnic groups in Liverpool.

The candidates were, well qualified enough to justify an interview apart from Sam Bond, from London, a building surveyor, a known Militant supporter and under qualified. Questions were asked of him in the normal format of an interview but on key issues like how he would work with senior Council Officers he remained silent and was clearly unable to even attempt an answer. Sam Bond was accused of being appointed on his political affiliations rather than his ability. Soon after, the organised black and

ethnic groups in the city opposed the appointment, together with NALGO on the grounds he was underqualified and a Militant placeman.

Militant was opposed to positive discrimination on grounds of race in employment recruitment, as it would have disrupted the system of nomination rights enjoyed by some unions close to Militant. Theoretically Militant did not see race as an issue and viewed black issues in the same category as class issues. The black population in Liverpool was 8% of its total and the Black Caucus campaigned for the council to employ this proportion in its workforce. It was proposed that this would be achieved by monitoring the number of black employees already in the council (in 1986 this figure was found to be 1%) and then increasing this number until it achieved the target of 8%.

The council was accused of being 'colour blind' i.e., black people could apply for jobs or be nominated by their trade union in the same way as any other applicant but there was no positive discrimination as a method of increasing the percentage of black employees.

NALGO and the black groups in Liverpool refused to accept the appointment of Sam Bond. The NUT, as part of the reorganised secondary school's system, agreed a race relations advisor post in each of the 17 new comprehensive schools and these individuals had been appointed. The NUT supported the NALGO position that the appointment was on political grounds and not on merit. This meant that schools would refuse to cooperate with Sam Bond or his Department. Militant refused to back down and decided to set up a rival body to challenge what it described as the 'Race Relations Industry'. Militant was now entering into difficult areas of which they had little control. Bearing in mind that the Toxteth riots only occurred in 1981 it was conventional wisdom that to adopt a confrontational policy was high risk.

In 1986 the Runnymede Trust supported the publication of a book called "The Racial Politics of Militant in Liverpool. The Black Community's struggle for participation in local politics 1980-1986." (Caucus, 1986). It was edited by Gideon Ben Tovim, a sociology lecturer at Liverpool University, then a member of the CPGB, later to become a Liverpool Labour Councillor and Chair of Education. The book is a detailed analysis of Militant's refusal to bend its position on race in the teeth of overwhelming opposition. The political position of Militant had been pronounced and there was to be no deviation and the DLP was to be the body that would hold the line.

The Archbishop of Liverpool, Derek Warlock (Roman Catholic) and Bishop of Liverpool, David Sheppard (Church of England) wrote in the foreword,

*"At the time we both felt that the appointment of a Militant Tendency black Londoner, with no real experience of Liverpool and its problems, to the City Council's post of Principal Race Relations Adviser, would undo years of patient attempts to build better relations between black Liverpoolians and the Town Hall. We therefore went at once to plead with the leaders of the City Council to reverse their decision, but in vain."* (Caucus, 1986, p. 7)

Militant had a fixed policy on race and in line with their vanguardist position it was not a question of discussion and dialogue to resolve the problem but of mobilising their forces to protect the policy, whatever the cost. The DLP now organised to deliver the defence of the appointment of Sam Bond. Measures were taken to prevent an influx of black party members to an aggregate meeting of the DLP, a delegate only meeting was called. This went against the grain of numerous previous aggregate meetings. Felicity Dowling, DLP secretary, later to be expelled for being a member of Militant, stood at the door and refused entry to Labour Party members who had no delegate

credentials or whose credentials were out of date, this mainly affected the black members of the Labour Party.

Militant could now control the meeting as NALGO, NUT and NATFHE were not affiliated unions and could not attend unless individuals had delegate credentials. Many senior lay officials of the above unions were members of the Labour Party, but simply did not have space in their lives to be active enough in the Labour Party and to be delegates to the DLP. Requests from the meeting to allow members of the black caucus and NALGO to address the meeting were refused. The meeting supported the appointment of Sam Bond and then went on to set up a rival body to challenge the Black Caucus called the Merseyside Action Group. It held a meeting in a school in an area of Liverpool 8, but in a mainly white enclave called the Dingle with a large Orange Order in the neighbourhood.


The MAG was now an adjunct of the Central Support Unit and together they countered adverse publicity on council policy. The head of the MAG was now paid by the Council and was later expelled from the Labour Party for Militant membership. This stalemate continued until the 47 councillors were barred from office by the courts and a rump of mainly Liberal councillors ran the council until the May local elections. During this interregnum Sam Bond was dismissed as a political appointment and was not reinstated by the new Labour council elected in the following May election. In summation, Militant dealt with dissent on this issue by first resolutely insisting that policy be formed by the DLP and ignored any constituency and ward party's opposition. Only DLP resolutions were usually debated and were constructed by the DLP executive. The DLP retained its position as the sovereign body. The DLP departed from its normal format of aggregate meetings in favour of delegate meetings excluding many NALGO, NUT, NATFHE and black caucus Labour Party members. This was an organisational

manoeuvre which stifled debate from organised opposition bodies and calls from the meeting to allow speakers from NALGO and the Black Caucus to address the meeting were denied. The DLP prevented open debate and dissent by organisational means. The DLP refused to acknowledge established bodies representing black people and sought to replace them with their own front organisation.

#### **5.42 The Stonefrost Report**

The Stonefrost Report (Appendix 9) originated from the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, a body that coordinated policy across all Metropolitan local authorities and was cross party, but the majority of authorities, were Labour controlled, so this was reflected in the secretariat. Below is a circular to its members regarding the circumstances surrounding the creation of the Stonefrost Report.

The Stonefrost Report was handed over to the interested parties in October 1985 including the Liverpool City Council. However, the DLP did not circulate the report,

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#### AMA SUPPORT OF LIVERPOOL CITY COUNCIL

1. Following a debate within the Association at its meeting on 28 November, the Secretary was instructed to prepare a report on the activities of the Association and its Secretariat in connection with the financial affairs of Liverpool City Council. The chronology and amplification of events involving AMA appear below.
2. Prior to any involvement of AMA, in early October, a decision was taken to have an independent scrutiny of Liverpool's finances, and discussions took place on various financial measures open to the authority, including the possibility of transferring loan sanctions from authorities able and willing to do so.
3. Later that month, agreement was reached between the City Council and a group of Trade Unions within the local government sector that a small team of experts, able to analyse the background, set out issues and offer a range of options, should be brought together. On 21 October AMA was approached to see if it could produce such a team.
4. After consultation with the Chairman, and with the agreement of their authorities, a group comprising the Principal Officer GLC, two Treasurers from other member authorities and the AMA Under-Secretary (Finance) was formed, to visit Liverpool and prepare a report for the Council and the national Unions. The "Stonefrost Report", as it became known, was handed over on 29 October.
5. During the first three weeks of November a number of meetings took place, mostly at political level and with little involvement of AMA, though the Report was discussed at appropriate party meetings at that time. Two issues, as the Press reported, were uppermost:
  - a. which parts, or combination of parts, of the Report might be adopted by Liverpool, and
  - b. whether as an element of any package there would be any transfer of loan sanctions.
6. These issues were seen as involving only one section of the Association, the members of the majority party. This was made clear in all contacts with the media, as was the nature of the loan sanction exercise. Nonetheless, references were regularly made in the Press and on TV to AMA rather than its Labour members, and to the potential transfer of actual funds, rather than of loan sanctions. In a final effort to correct this, the Chairman agreed a press release immediately after the Association meeting on 28 November, as ... attached herewith.
7. The Committee will wish to know how heavy a call on the Association's resources this has all been. The preparation of the Report involved about four days' work by the Under-Secretary (Finance), including a visit by him to Liverpool. The printing of the Report cost AMA £193.50. The total of these items is about £800.

but produced a commentary which was biased towards their preferred outcomes. NALGO produced their own commentary and was in an advantageous position to do so because they had many members in the city's treasury department.

The NALGO commentary was widely circulated primarily within the trade union movement. The NALGO document was a far more credible document than the DLP commentary because of its professionalism and the fact that it was compiled by NALGO members, within the treasury, who were qualified and had day to day knowledge of the city's finances.

Vanguardism was supposed to be leading the workers, through their cadre's superior knowledge and grasp of tactics. The reverse was true, the workers in this case were highly educated Treasury staff, not illiterate industrial workers at the beginning of the 20th century in Russia. The difference was a chasm between, a respected NALGO critique of the Stonefrost Report and a predictable DLP justification of its policies. Militant was intellectually defeated by the workers who were supposed to be led by the vanguard but instead dissented with well thought out alternatives. The Stonefrost Report provided a vehicle for well-informed dissent within the DLP.

#### **5.43 The mass redundancies of the Council staff.**

This event made national news and enraged the national leadership of the Labour Party. This issue is dealt with in a previous section on the collapse of the strategy. Below is a brief description of this event as an example of dissent. Political groups make mistakes which are understandable but the issuing of 31,000 redundancy notices is hard to explain away, as a simple error of judgement. Because dissent is not encouraged in the vanguard model once a decision is made it is difficult for the leadership to own up to an error and the leadership freezes. The reaction to dissent in this model is to re-educate the dissenters not to re-examine the policy for flaws brought up in open democratic debate. Militant and its vanguard were wrong footed because the unions who they thought they were leading exercised their own judgment based on

their superior knowledge of the implications of a redundancy notice. The vanguard model assumes a greater knowledge by the cadres over the workers they are leading. The model broke down because union representatives were held in much greater esteem than Militant cadres when it came to workers' rights. New vanguardism simply cannot compete with the professionalism of modern trade unionism with its extensive legal service. Militant argued that,

*“The ruling class has deliberately framed local government law to entangle councils in such legal niceties”.* (Mulhearn, 1988, p. 281)

The Employment Protection Act 1978 was a fundamental gain for workers, enacted by a Labour Government, which instructed employers who were about to reduce their labour force that they must give three months, notice of dismissal. This legal measure was not a legal nicety but protection from instant redundancy without notice usually from small rogue employers. Using mass redundancies as a tactic was perceived as reckless by unions and workers which overwhelmed Militant with complaints about being out of touch with reality. Dissent on this issue saw Militant wounded but it had made a fatal error from which it never recovered. The issue of the redundancy notices was fundamentally different from the other two dissenting issues where the response by Militant was to by-pass the opposition and retain its leadership role. In the case of the Sam Bond issue an alternative to the established black groups was set up which by-passed opposition by only conversing with its own front organisation. Militant retained its leadership role and did not compromise.

In the case of the Stonefrost Report it ignored it and by-passed it by taking out a loan with a Swiss bank. Militant retained control within the privacy of discussions with Swiss bankers rather than the labour movement.



In the case of the redundancy notices it was not able to by-pass or ignore the trade unions because it already had cultivated the JSSC which by-passed the full-time official structure of trade unions. It could not set up another rival trade union front organisation and retain credibility. The vanguard structure could not cope with opposition from workers refusing to agree to redundancy notices under any circumstances nor could it disobey the courts when it set aside some of them as unlawful. In the three examples above I have illustrated how dissent is unwelcome by the vanguardists, and by refusing to engage in open democratic socialist debate they accumulate opposition.

The opposition are given no other option than to become a permanent opposition with a view to removing them from office and to expel them from the party. Normal healthy debate would lead to defeat on some issues supported by Militant, but this would usually be confined to a single issue and in most cases without recrimination. Militant acts in a different way in that dissenting voices are treated as enemies to be vilified and scorned and dissenters often see derogatory accounts of their actions in copies of Militant a week later when normal healthy democratic debate would have moved on without rancour. Vanguardists in a revolutionary period in history would judge dissent, in most cases, as counter revolutionary and to be dealt with swiftly often violently.

In Western democracies vanguardists are denied the more extreme remedies of their historic revolutionary role models and can only attack their enemies from the columns of the Militant and at Labour Party meetings, at times with intimidation. Militant because it was in power and exercising power could only use patronage to progress policies which met with opposition. The most serious threat to its leadership was dissenting trade unions and their leadership, Militant could not replace these organisations with their own front bodies. The solution was to use patronage to effect change from within the union. Militant began to make inroads into unions that showed dissent

and attempted to undermine or replace the current leadership. This however had to be a medium to long term policy and Militant did not achieve this objective because of the debacle of the redundancy notices and the removal from the leadership of the Liverpool Labour Party by the disciplinary actions of the NEC. Later all the Labour Group, apart from a small group, were de-barred from office by the actions of the District Auditor. Their ability to exercise patronage was ended and members of unions who had acted in support of Militant because they had been beneficiaries of their influence were no longer held to account by Militant who were now out of power without influence.

# **The National Labour Party Hold Disciplinary Hearings for some Members of the Liverpool Labour Party.**

## **5.54 Background**

Following the findings of the Inquiry into the Liverpool District Labour Party the NEC decided that there should be hearings held against alleged members of Militant. I have secured copies of the disciplinary papers from Eric Heffer's collection deposited at the Peoples History Museum in Manchester. The papers relate to four of the leading members of Militant, Derek Hatton, Ian Lowes, Tony Mulhearn and Felicity Dowling. Of the four I have chosen the papers of Tony Mulhearn, as a sample, to describe and analyse how they were tried because he was the most senior of the defendants in terms of the structure of Militant. He was also Chair/President of the DLP and responsible for changing the DLP from a liaison body to a soviet. (Appendix 11)

A minority of the NEC would use procedural tactics to delay or stop the hearings, they included Tony Benn, Eric Heffer and Dennis Skinner. The accused members were allowed a friend, not a legal representative, to attend but who were not allowed to speak. No witnesses were allowed by both sides, but the accused could submit an oral or written response to the written charges. The atmosphere in the committee was tense and partisan, a flavour of which can be experienced by reading the verbatim evidence of Tony Mulhearn (Appendix 12)

## **5.55 The Disciplinary Charges against Tony Mulhearn, Chair of the DLP**

The charges were similar against all the accused but in the case of Tony Mulhearn, as chair of the DLP he bore a responsibility to uphold the rules. I have centred on his hearing and charges because he led the transformation of the DLP from the model rules to a body which reflected the desired organisation which Militant preferred. Tony Mulhearn was the most senior of all the accused because he was a member of Militant's NEC. He was called to the hearing on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1986 at 150 Walworth Road, London.

I have summarised and commented on all 34 charges of breach of rules as set out in the charge sheets of the NEC. A small number of which would be very serious, but 34 charges leads to a conclusion, that Mulhearn was effecting a structural change to the DLP, against its own rules, and not just rule breaking in an ad hoc manner. The following is a list of charges with my commentary. It is necessary to list them all, so as to explain the extent to which Militant was fashioning the DLP into their vanguardist mould.

### Charge A

He allowed business other than local Government issues including national and international affairs and issues concerning the rejection of NEC instructions. This formalised and crafted the DLP as a left alternative to official Labour Party Policy.

### Charge B

He did not provide for adequate structured discussion on local government policy because the agendas were crowded out with business outside their remit. The chairman should have ruled these items out of order or at the very least given them a lower priority than local government business.

### Charge C

He allowed the DLP to centralise its powers from the CLPs in the selection of local government candidates.

### Charge D

He allowed the DLP to take over the role of the Labour Group in determining Group policy. The Labour Group failed to assert its authority over the DLP because it was dominated by the Militant Tendency who could mobilise the DLP against individual councillors and organise for their de-selection.

### Charge E

He allowed the downgraded role of the CLPs at financial and administrative levels, concentrating power in the DLP.

### Charge F

He allowed organisational activities in a CLP area against the wishes of that CLP. Again, the DLP view prevailed and centralised power within the DLP.

### Charge G

He did not correctly inform CLPs of their affiliation fees or names of delegates.

### Charge H

A most concerning charge is that he allowed non-members of the party to be delegates to the DLP and non-party members to attend the DLP as visitors.

In any organisation the attendance of non-members would be exceptional but Mulhearn allowed this on numerous occasions. Any chairman of an organisation would

see as a priority to restrict attendance to members only and that visitors would be the exception not the rule.

#### Charge I

He allowed an additional vice chair to be a full officer of the DLP.

#### Charge J

He changed venues, times, frequently at short notice making attendance of all EC members difficult.

#### Charge K

Taking important decisions on matters which were the property of the management committee of the DLP.

#### Charge L

Allowing discussion not associated to local government.

#### Charge M

Not carrying out correct business of the DLP.

#### Charge N

He allowed aggregate meetings to override delegate meetings.

#### Charge O

He did not adequately check delegations from two trades unions.

Charge P

Allowing delegates from workplace branches which are outside the rules.

Charge Q

He accepted delegations from student labour clubs, contrary to the rules.

Charge R

Imposed a DLP delegation fee contrary to the rules

Charge S

Did not allow a right of reply to delegates contrary to the standing orders.

Charge T

He allowed frequent aggregate meetings at short notice with selective notification and taking normal business which is the preserve of a delegate only meeting of the DLP.

Charge U

He allowed changes of venue at the short notice making attendance difficult for members.

Charge V

He allowed the non-separation of members and visitors.

Charge W

He did not have a clear procedure for registering delegates and visitors.

#### Charge X

He promoted a change to the election of EC members so removing rights of sections of delegates.

#### Charge Y

Allowing frequent changes to voting procedures.

#### Charge Z

He allowed voting slips to be distributed en-bloc to a delegation rather than individually.

#### Charge aa

This is a serious charge in that he allowed verbal and physical intimidation at DLP meetings.

#### Charge bb

He allowed nominations to the panel of candidates for council to be taken outside the agreed timetable.

#### Charge cc

He centralised the procedure by directly inviting nominations to the panel from branches, trades unions, and socialist societies in addition to the CLPs.

#### Charge dd

He allowed the procedure for nominees for the panel to include a required acceptance by the nominee of the DLP as the supreme policy making body.



Charge ee

He allowed "by endorsement of the names on the panel being the responsibility of the EC who carry out the interviews, with a report to the Management Committee".

Charge ff

He allowed the automatic inclusion of sitting councillors on the Panel.

Charge gg

He allowed a procedure which had the effect of debarring certain members from fighting safe or winnable seats.

Charge hh

He allowed the by-passing of the CLPs and submitted the panel to party branches.

Charge ii

He allowed detailed involvement by the trade unions DLP and the EC in areas which were the prerogative of the Labour Group.

Charge jj

He allowed the DLP to be involved in industrial relations matters and the granting of planning permission.

Charge kk

He allowed the DLP to interfere and involve itself in the day to day direct management of the Council.

Charge ll

He allowed the binding of Labour Group members to DLP decisions.

## **Charges Relating to Tony Mulhearn's Membership of Militant Tendency.**

Tony Mulhearn saw many items of evidence showing that he was a member of Militant.

I have summarised them below relating to involvement with Militant.

Mulhearn was charged with participating in meetings and rallies, being a signatory to leaflets, financial involvement in Militant HQ, working as an organiser and being a member of the Liverpool Area Committee as well as a member of the NEC of Militant. The disciplinary committee presented detailed evidence of his involvement with Militant through a series of documents and leaflets. The most difficult piece of evidence that Mulhearn was unable to explain away was his involvement in the purchase of a property in Liverpool which became the Militant HQ for Merseyside.

There is evidence that on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1981, Tony Mulhern was a signatory to the purchase of 2 Lower Breck Rd in Liverpool, which then became a Militant Office for the Merseyside Area. Below is the purchase document signed by Tony Mulhearn. This legal, property document had signatures on the deeds which were also used in evidence against other defendants. It was clear that buying a property for the purpose of accommodating the activities of Militant showed a high level of commitment and involvement by Tony Mulhearn. The transcript of the hearing (Appendix 12) records in detail that Tony Mulhearn was unable to defend, convincingly, his actions, with regards to this substantial legal and financial commitment to Militant by the purchase of a property for the sole purpose of consolidating Militant on Merseyside.

SIGNED, SEALED AND DELIVERED

by the said ANTHONY PAUL AITMAN

in the presence of:-

*[Signature]*  
L. E. Holt

SIGNED, SEALED AND DELIVERED

by the said ANTHONY MULHEEN

in the presence of:-

*[Signature]*  
L. E. Holt

SIGNED, SEALED AND DELIVERED

by the said TERENCE JOHN HARRISON

in the presence :-

*[Signature]*

SIGNED, SEALED AND DELIVERED

by the said JAMES DUNNING

in the presence of:-

*[Signature]*  
*[Signature]*

SIGNED SEALED AND DELIVERED

by the said PETER McALLISTER

in the presence of:-

*[Signature]*  
*[Signature]*

SIGNED, SEALED AND DELIVERED

by the said JAMES ANTHONY DUNN

*[Signature]*

## **5.56 A Summary of transcript of the Hearing against Tony Mulhearn before the NEC of the Labour Party**

Tony Mulhearn denied all the charges above and a transcript of the taped hearing is contained in (Appendix 12)

Below is a summary of the main points of the disciplinary hearing. Tony Mulhearn is thereafter referred to as **TM**.

I have grouped pages together in sequence enabling a complete summary to be made of important points and differences of opinion. The page numbers relate to the separate appendices document.

For the verbatim record of the hearing please refer to Appendix12.

**Pages 336-339** This a handwritten record of the stages in the proceedings after they had been concluded.

**Pages 223-224** The chairman seeks to clarify whether **TM** is asserting that Militant does not have a membership, or he is not a member of Militant. **TM** replies that Militant is no different to Tribune or Liverpool Labour Left. The chairman pursues his earlier question as to his membership of Militant. **TM** replies that he is not a member of a separate organisation.

Roy Hattersly made the observation that the Militant rally held in the Albert Hall looked like an organisation with a policy made at annual conferences.

**TM** reminisced about Tribune rallies but said that the ability to organise a good rally was not a test of a separate organisation.

**Page 225 TM** raises the question that for the past 20 years nobody has produced a membership list of members of Militant, especially with the advent of computers.

**Pages 226-227** **TM** is defending the right to discuss internal discussions of trade unions at DLP meetings i.e., NUPE meetings whose members were opposed to Militant's policies.

**TM** rejected NUPE reports of the policing of DLP meetings by uniformed guards.

**Pages 226-227** The next line of questioning was on the signature of **TM** as a guarantor on a deed of purchase of a property owned by Militant in Liverpool. There seemed to be no disagreement that the signature was genuine but in the light of recent Labour Party conference decisions, regarding membership of Militant, had **TM** taken steps to have the signature removed from the deeds?

**Page 227** David Blunkett raises the question of leaflets that Militant produce, especially at election times. When Militant say it is only a newspaper, is this consistent with the activities of a publication?

**TM** asserts that producing leaflets in support of a newspaper is an acceptable feature of life in the party.

**Page 228-229** **TM** was asked what national steps he took to disassociate himself from Militant and the property he had acted as guarantor. **TM** replied that he was busy rebuilding the party which led to the Labour Party gaining control of the council in 1983.

**Page 229-230** Neil Kinnock asked whether **TM**'s earlier reference to the LCC, having a similar status to Militant was accurate? and he then stated that the LCC has open membership list and invites members to join which is opposite to Militant.

**TM** rebuffs this question by stating he is not a member of Militant, so why should he comment on whether, or not it has a membership list.

**Page 230-256** The Chair asks **TM** to wind up on this section of questioning.

**TM** states that the evidence so far offered by Jim Mortimer does not show that his activities constitute membership of any organisation other than the Labour Party. Procedural wrangle regarding the status and attendance of witnesses.

**TM** argues that the investigation into the DLP was not a genuine complaint from the rank and file but came from a certain new grouping led by Mrs Kennedy and her local branch of NUPE.

Important statement by **TM** that he received a report from the chair of the Liverpool City Council Joint Shop Stewards Committee, a Mr Ian Lowes who was reporting without the permission, or authority of the JSSC because the JSSC was not affiliated to the Labour Party, half of its unions were not affiliated and would and could not have a formal link with the Labour Party.

**TM** cites varying discussions at the DLP which he maintains were within the rules of the DLP.

**TM** argues that differences of opinion between constituencies and the DLP were always resolved through fraternal discussion and not through the rule book.

**TM** explains how council business such as the issuing of taxi licences was discussed at DLP meetings.

**TM** denies that the DLP instructed the Labour Group on policy items and gives a detailed rebuttal of this charge.

**TM** defends the DLP's practice of discussing national and international issues when the DLP is formulated as a liaison body for the constituencies. Discussion of procedural matters regarding the timings of further hearings.

**TM** defends the conduct of the DLP with regards to the selection of local government candidates by the local government panel.

**TM** defends the use of aggregate meetings of the DLP as a way of mobilising the rank and file of the party and explained that attendance at meetings peaked at 700. **TM** also repudiated that there was intimidation at aggregate meetings. A continuation of discussion regarding intimidation at DLP meetings, **TM** denies the reports from Tom Sawyer of NUPE that the intimidation was fascist in character and quotes various names who **TM** claims to substantiate his version of events.

**TM** denies that short notice or word of mouth distorted the attendance of meetings of the DLP. **TM** explains that venues had to be changed at short notice due to expected large attendances.

**Pages 256-259** Tony Benn asked questions on secret membership of Militant Tendency, collective decision making, lack of complaints on the conduct of the meetings of the DLP by Regional or National Officials and the electoral success of the Liverpool Labour Party.

A question was asked by a member of the committee (unnamed) regarding an open invitation to the Joint Shop Stewards Committee. **TM** replied that the JSSC members could attend as Labour Party members but only delegates could vote.

**Page 260** Eric Heffer asked a question in terms of “would you not agree” that Hugh Dalton the Chair of the Liverpool City Council had given a supportive submission regarding **TM’s** conduct of DLP meetings. **TM** agreed with Eric Heffer’s question.

**Pages 261-264** Alex Kitson from the T&GWU asked a question about the relationship with the trade unions. **TM** replied that there were rows and internal conflict. On the

issue of the mass redundancy notices **TM** admitted it was a tactical error and in the end the notices were withdrawn and that they would never have been implemented.

**Page 264-266** Roy Hattersley asked why the DLP discussed internal matters within the Welsh Labour Party, the Blackburn Labour Party, and disputes between student bodies. **TM** replied that resolutions were submitted, and delegates voted accordingly. At this point it is important to note that **TM** does not seem to accept that a chair of a meeting has the responsibility of ruling out of order resolutions which are not within the remit of the body in question.

**Pages 264-266** Roy Hattersley then presses the point that does **TM** think it right that the DLP should discuss the three things mentioned. **TM** replied that the DLP had a tradition of taking a stance on the democratic functioning of the Movement.

Roy Hattersley commented that it always seemed to be that the DLP came down on the Militant side of the argument.

**TM** agreed that in many cases the Militant line corresponded with that of the DLP.

**Pages 267-271** Frances Curran asked about the large number of EC meetings of the DLP. **TM** replied that they called meetings according to the unfolding events e.g., if they had had a meeting with Kenneth Baker and needed to report back to the DLP.

Francis Curran asked **TM** to answer to the charge that the DLP interfered with the day to day running of the City Council including issues relating to industrial relations and planning permission which usually should only be dealt with by the Labour Group. **TM** replied that the Group Officers received a letter from TGWU, UCATT, GMWU and EEPTU calling upon the Labour Group to agree planning permission to ASDA in the free enterprise zone. The Labour Group requested the executive of the DLP to take it to the party because it was a tricky decision. The DLP voted against the proposal by



a majority of three in a meeting of about 150. The Labour Group at its next meeting rejected planning permission. The DLP took a political decision, and the Labour Group took account of this when they made their final decision.

**Pages 272-275** John Evans asked **TM** about votes taken at aggregate meetings of the DLP and was there any differentiation for voting purposes between delegates and non-delegates? **TM** replied that voting slips were given out at the meeting for voting and non-voting members. The meeting then voted twice one delegates only and a second a consultative vote of both types of members.

**TM** said the only binding vote was the delegate vote. Resolutions were put to the meeting usually from the EC, but amendments were taken.

**Page 276-277** David Blunkett asked about the failure to have normal delegate meetings in favour of aggregate meetings called at short notice by telephone. Also, should the DLP be discussing planning permission and should the DLP be involved with employment matters.

**TM** replied that a mixture of notices by first class post and then phone calls ensured a good turnout at short notice as events were unfolding at a rapid pace. Regarding planning permission **TM** argued that the constitution allowed for the Labour Group to consult the party. The issue of employment practises was explained by **TM** who said he received resolutions from affiliated branches of trade unions and cited the example of nomination rights where the DLP agreed to this policy and the Labour Group adopted the same policy.

**Pages 278-281** Dennis Skinner described issues of planning in Derbyshire County Council where the County Labour Party opposed open cast mining and told the Labour

Group to oppose planning permission. Skinner here was not questioning **TM** but providing supportive evidence for his defence. **TM** agrees with Skinner's intervention.

Dennis Skinner highlighted the fact that **TM** had answered well on each of the charges, but that Larry Whitty had said that there was a cumulative effect, but Skinner objected to this and asked for **TM's** comments.

**TM** said that the cumulative effect suggests that the DLP conducted themselves with the highest level of propriety.

**Pages 282-283** Neil Kinnock drew **TM's** attention to the model standing orders which specifically states that the Labour Group decides group strategy and action on the council. **TM** replies that he does not dispute this, but the rule does take account of the provision to consult the local party and that both statements must be taken in their entirety and not separately.

**Page 284** **TM** makes a statement summarising his defence.

**Page 285** Procedural points, **TM** withdraws from the room. Larry Whitty informed the meeting that a barrister is seeking to obtain an injunction to stop the proceedings.

**Pages 286-288** Larry Whitty requested that members of the committee do not talk to the press.

**Pages 288-293** Eric Heffer makes a long contribution in favour of **TM**.

**Pages 293-296** Dennis Skinner makes long contribution in favour of **TM**.

**Pages 296-298** Francis Curran makes a long contribution in support of **TM**.

**Page 299** Winding up of Francis Curran's contribution and discussion of legal issues.

**Pages 300-307** Neil Kinnock acknowledges that Liverpool has had a different history from the rest of the country but that does not preclude the party from looking into the operation of the City. He states that the charge against **TM** is that he is a member of Militant under the terms of the 1982 Labour Party Conference resolution. He then makes a long statement arguing that **TM** is a member of Militant and giving evidence of financial involvement.

**Page 308-309** Tony Benn makes a statement in support of **TM**.

**Pages 309-314** Cyril Ambler was not impressed by **TM's** answers and accused him of being evasive because the Militant organisation is secretive and denies its own existence. He compares Militant with MI5 by saying we know it exists despite denials. Long contribution from Cyril Ambler, critical of **TM**.

**Pages 315-319** Ted O Brian makes a lengthy contribution critical of **TM**.

**Pages 320-322** Long contribution from an unnamed member of the committee.

**Page 323** Procedural issues followed by the result of the ballots.

First charge of membership of Militant 13 votes for proven and 7 votes for not proven.

Second charge of being in breach of rules and standing orders 13 votes proven and 7 votes for not proven.

The names of the members were read out and how they voted.

**Pages 324-325** The possible disciplinary sanctions were read out i.e. No action, reprimand, suspension for a set period, exclusion from office, delegacy and candidature and expulsion.

The majority vote was for expulsion. **TM's** expulsion letter is reproduced below.

**Pages 326-328** Extensive discussion regarding press contributions.

**Pages 328-334** Discussion on procedural matters relating to the rest of the members facing disciplinary charges.

# The Labour Party

150 WALWORTH ROAD, LONDON SE17 1JT  
01-703 0833  
Giro No. 510 9213

from J.L. WHITTY  
GENERAL SECRETARY

JLW/KW

28th May 1986

Cllr. Tony Hood,  
Secretary,  
Liverpool Labour Group,  
C/o Liverpool Town Hall,  
Municipal Offices,  
Dale Street,  
Liverpool.

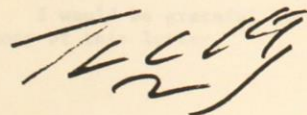
Dear Cllr. Hood,

## Liverpool District Labour Party Hearings

The National Executive Committee at a hearing held on 21st May 1986, determined that Councillor Tony Mulhearn be expelled from the Labour Party. The expulsion takes effect immediately. Councillor Mulhearn is therefore no longer eligible to participate in any meetings or activities of the Liverpool Labour Group.

A copy of the letter from the NEC to Cllr. Mulhearn is enclosed.

Yours sincerely,



J.L. Whitty,  
General Secretary.

Enc.

Although the NEC expelled Tony Mulhearn followed by eleven others who received similar letters, they refused to accept the expulsions and assumed that the Liverpool Labour Party would oppose the expulsions. This came to a confrontation when the National agent, Joyce Gould, decided to attend the Labour Group meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1986. Gould reported to the NEC on 24<sup>th</sup>, September 1986 (report below) on her failed attempt to address the meeting which was followed by a walkout in the Labour Group with the Leader John Hamilton leaving the meeting with nine other councillors leaving 23 councillors remaining in the meeting. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, December 1986 Tony Byrne replaced John Hamilton as leader of the Labour Group by 27-21 votes, the group was now split.

Militant's close union ally Peter Lennard, convenor of branch 80 of GMWU, who had distributed redundancy notices to his own members and thousands of teachers was now turning against Militant. This account is from a Militant perspective,

*“But it was not just the traditional opponents of Militant on the right but former allies in the GMBATU who began to distance themselves and attack Militant supporters. Most prominent was Peter Lennard, convenor of Branch 80 of GMBATU, responsible for education. He now collaborated with the NEC's inquiry into the DLP and was an ally of the right-wing opponents of Militant. Afraid that his union branch, which he ruled with an iron and undemocratic hand, would be broken up by the local full-time officials, he did a 180 degrees turn and began to collaborate with them.”*

(Mulhearn, 1988, p. 460)

Alliances were breaking up on the political and industrial front, this was the beginning of the end of Militant's dominance of the Liverpool Labour Party, an era was coming to an end.

PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

NEC 24 September 1986  
DO/142/9/86

LIVERPOOL LABOUR GROUP MEETING  
15 AUGUST 1986

The General Secretary and myself met the Secretary of the Labour Group on 9 July and made it clear that non-members of the party could not constitutionally participate in meetings of the Labour Group. Further, that unless that position was accepted, it would be our intention to attend the Group meeting due to be held on Monday, 28 July. That meeting was not held.

The first regular meeting of the Labour Group was called for Friday, 15 August 1986, which I attended in order to receive the response of the Labour Group to the directive given to the Secretary ~~some six weeks earlier~~. Having written to the Leader and Group Secretary informing them of my intention to attend, Tony Mulhearn and Derek Hatton were both present at the meeting.

Before the meeting it was my intention to discuss this item with the Leader of the Labour Group, Cllr John Hamilton, but was prevented from doing so by Derek Hatton.

As the meeting opened, Paul Astbury moved that I not be allowed to address the meeting and that there be consultation between myself and the Group Secretary to arrive at a mutually agreed date for me to attend.

John Hamilton ruled that I be allowed to address the meeting. After discussion, his ruling was put to the meeting and defeated by 19 votes to 13. He then left the meeting, together with nine other members of the Labour Group.

Following this action, it was clearly necessary to ensure that the Labour Group be re-constituted at a date to be agreed. All members of the Labour Group have been written to and informed of that position.

- JOYCE GOULD

# Chapter 6

## Militant split and form the Socialist Party and disband Militant.

### 6.1 The Causes of the Split in Militant

Militant unlike many other Trotskyist groups was not prone to ideological splits, maintaining their vanguard structure and the discipline that it implied. The suspension of the Liverpool District Labour Party, the publication of the Labour Party National Inquiry recommendations, followed by expulsions of leading members of Militant created an internal debate within Militant.

Trotsky, when he advocated entryism, saw it as a temporary measure until the revolutionary party could survive outside the body of its host party. Militant had grown from a double figure membership in the 1960s to approximately, 8000 members in the 1980s which was an astonishing growth rate for a revolutionary group. Ted Grant, Militant's theoretician, thought that the growth was impressive but advised caution. The following quotes are from the postscript by Rob Sewell,



*“A tendency of 8,000 was a significant force, yes but in comparison with the multi-millioned, British labour movement, it was still very small. Taaffe and his supporters did not grasp this fact. They were rapidly losing contact with reality. In the immortal phrase of Stalin, they were dizzy with success.”* (Grant, 2002, p. 222)

Peter Taaffe, in effect their General Secretary, reported that at a meeting of the editorial board of Militant on the 10<sup>th</sup>, April 1991 it voted to launch an independent organisation in Scotland to take advantage of the opposition to the poll tax. (Taaffe, 1995, p. 433) .

This was later described as the Scottish turn and it committed Militant to openly campaign in opposition to the Labour Party’s policy of opposing the poll tax short of refusal to pay. Militant urged people not to pay the tax even if it meant imprisonment but did assist non- payers with supportive action when bailiffs were called to their houses to seize goods in lieu of tax arrears. Militant calculated that this would bring in protesters and non-payers into membership of Militant. Recruiting members of the public, some of whom were not from the labour movement was a departure from a classical Marxist group. Militant was entering into civil disobedience on a large scale and must have diverted its resources away from traditional labour movement issues. It also had the effect of Militant breaking its cover as simply selling a newspaper and was now seen operating as a separate revolutionary group, in the full glare of publicity.

During May of the same year, it was agreed to stand a candidate, Leslie Mahmood, in the Walton bye-election in Liverpool, following the death of Eric Heffer, the sitting MP. She stood against the Labour candidate Peter Kilfoyle. Members of the Labour Party who were against expulsions on political grounds drew the line on Militant standing

against a Labour candidate. Militant was now highly exposed as a quite separate entity from the Labour party engaged in a high-risk strategy.

Sewell opposes this strategy,

*“It represented a fundamental break with our whole past orientation. Within the leadership with Alan abroad, only Ted and myself voted against the proposal. Dave Nellist remarked later in private that “it was turkeys voting for Christmas”. (Grant, 2002, p. 223)*

David Nellist was one of two Labour MPs who were members of Militant and would be exposed when asked which candidate they were supporting in Walton, the official Labour candidate or the Walton Militant Labour candidate? This was more serious for the other Militant MP Terry Fields because his constituency was in Liverpool and he would be expected to organise his constituency workers and join the by-election campaign in support of the official Labour candidate. This is a complete reversal of previous Militant policy of shielding their PPSs. In the Minutes of one their Blackburn Militant meetings it reports that,

*“Also, be prepared to see candidates saying they won’t sell the paper. This is only a tactic. It is not a “give in” on idealism.” (Appendix 1 page 13)*

### **The Liverpool Walton by- election**

This was an important watershed in the split within Militant because it brought the differences between Walton Militant Labour and Labour before the national media who descended on the constituency with the promise of history in the making. Taaffe and his majority on the executive of Militant judged that the organisation was capable of

winning the seat, and that the circumstances could not have been more favourable. Their candidate, Leslie Mahmood, when contesting the Labour Party nomination accused her rival of rigging the nomination ballot because, he was, in a position to do so, as a Regional official of the Labour Party. The retiring MP Eric Heffer agreed with Leslie Mahmood and called for Peter Kilfoyle to be disbarred because he had an unfair advantage.

Eric Heffer was silent on Leslie Mahmood's suitability for the nomination although he must have known that she had changed her name from Holt to Mahmood on re-marriage. Leslie Holt lived in the Walton constituency and was active in her ward which could not have escaped Heffer's notice. Under her re-married name of Mahmood, she was elected in 1987, to the Liverpool City Council for the Netherley Ward and became a frequent speaker at City Council meetings. Mahmood was high profile, yet in 1986 Heffer had written proof she had been legally involved in the purchase of the Militant HQ in Liverpool. Heffer was given papers, as a member of the NEC, showing that Leslie Holt was a signatory of a legal document purchasing Militant HQ in Liverpool (see page 289 of this thesis). As a member of the NEC, he had the responsibility to uphold the rules but failed to report to the General Secretary that a Liverpool City Councillor was sitting as a Labour member from 1987 onwards who was a member of Militant. The papers were circulated showing that Tony Mulhearn was also a signatory during his disciplinary case for being a member of Militant in 1986. Heffer did not raise this during the nomination process because he was shielding a member of Militant and was a fellow entryist himself. There was documentary proof that Mahmood was a member of Militant but Heffer failed to bring this to the attention of the National Party. She should not have been a Labour candidate for the Netherley ward, let alone a candidate for a safe Labour constituency.

Following the death of Eric Heffer on the 27<sup>th</sup>, May 1991 there followed a by-election on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1991, Peter Kilfoyle won the nomination narrowly defeating Leslie Mahmood. Leslie Mahmood then stood as the 'Walton Real Labour' candidate with literature and posters using the same colours and layout as the official Labour candidate. Leslie Mahmood did not stand as a Militant candidate but as 'Walton Real Labour'. Her supporters and workers were now exposed as Labour Party members campaigning against the official Labour Party candidate. This was recorded by loyal workers of Peter Kilfoyle for future expulsion measures.

Rob Sewell describes the Militant campaign,

*"All of our resources were mobilised to fight the bye-election. Wildly exaggerated reports were given at national meetings to the effect that victory was within our grasp. Leslie, standing as 'Walton Real Labour' candidate, came third with a derisory 2,613 votes, while Kilfoyle won the seat with 21,317 votes".* (Grant, 2002, p. 223)

The vote of 2,613 is an inflated figure of Militant support because of the confusion on the ballot paper with the titles Labour and Walton Real Labour and the deliberate similarity of posters between 'Walton Real Labour' and those of the official Labour candidate.

Taaffe, however put a brave face on the defeat,

*"The verdict on Leslie Mahmood's campaign could not be measured merely by the number of votes for her. The campaign had reached to all parts of the constituency and all sections of the Walton community. It had taken the case for socialism to workers and evoked an enthusiastic response."* (Taaffe, 1995, p. 438)

The initial threshold of contesting the by-election to defeat the Labour Party candidate changed after the result to one of mounting a successful campaign of reaching the electorate with the policies of Militant. This rationale for a decisive defeat at the polls is employed by all revolutionary groups as solace for a poor showing and the refusal of the working class to give them their support. Militant had now been politically relegated to the fringes of far-left groups and was now marginalised by an act of self-harm and had split its organisation three ways. A small splinter left to form its own organisation led by Ted Grant, and the largest group remained in the Labour Party with the rest eventually joining the Socialist Party of England and Wales led by Peter Taaffe.

The split in Militant became formal at their conference in November 1991,

*“A full and democratic debate unfolded within the ranks of Militant in which the views of the majority were overwhelmingly endorsed. At a special Militant conference in November 1991 the views of the minority received only seven per cent of the votes. Defeated, on this and other issues, the minority withdrew all financial support from Militant, started to collect funds to set up their own press and publishing facilities, and a separate organisation.”* (Taaffe, 1995, p. 441)

The minority were expelled in January 1992, Militant would not tolerate an organisation setting up its own press and publishing facilities, and a separate organisation. Militant had expected the Labour Party to be tolerant of their separate organisation with its own press and publishing facilities but swiftly expelled its own faction. Militant and its long history of entryism within the Labour Party was over. However, it is hard to measure how many members of Militant chose to remain in the Labour Party and drop out of Militant. In the next section I will look at the formation of the Socialist Party and try

to estimate how many of the 8,000 members of Militant moved over to the Socialist Party and how many entryists remained in the Labour Party.

## **6.2 The Formation of the Socialist Party and the disbanding of Militant**

The creation of a new party in Britain, with its first past the post system of elections for council seats and Parliament, is daunting as other far left parties can testify with their derisory votes. Taaffe, in 1991, was convinced that the now independent Militant Labour could make a breakthrough. The party later became the Socialist Party of England and Wales in 1997 and renamed its newspaper The Socialist. The Socialist Party has survived and benefits from easy accessibility through a website on the internet. Competition with the other main political parties based on their membership shows that the other parties have a considerable membership advantage (Jackson, 2018, p. 3) based on latest data up to August 2017 showed the following - Labour Party 552000 (June 2017), Conservative Party 149,800 (Dec 2013), Scottish National Party (118000), The Liberal Democratic Party 102000 (May 2017), The Green Party 55500 (March 2017), UKIP 39000 (July 2016), and Plaid Cymru 8300 (2017).

These figures show that only Plaid Cymru, which only organises in Wales, had a similar membership to Militant's highest membership of 8,000 in the mid-1980s. Plaid Cymru had 4 seats in parliament in 2017. The smallest UK wide party in parliament is the Green Party with one seat in 2017. It does however have a membership of 55,500 seven times the membership of Militant at its peak.

The Socialist Party membership figure is difficult to find but based on the venues for their meetings it is probable that their membership has drastically declined. Their Liverpool membership, previously the largest in the country, now meets in a room in a

pub which can only accommodate 50 or so people. The membership in Liverpool at its peak was approx. 600 so it appears that Militant has settled down to the size of other groups on the far left at 1000-2000.

### **Dual Membership**

The assumption by Peter Taaffe, their leader, that a large majority of Militant's membership would transfer to Militant Labour and then to the Socialist Party seems to be wildly optimistic. At their peak, Militant, was recruiting mainly within the Labour Party and apart from some expelled members held dual membership of the Labour Party and Militant. Internal critics of Taaffe had growing concerns during Militant's intense growth period, Robert Sewell in his postscript explains,

*“Despite these enormous successes, there were serious problems in the Tendency. The most serious was that the political level of the cadres was declining, and the leadership was doing nothing to counter this trend. In the end the reason for this became clear. Ted Grant continually stressed at editorial board meetings the need to thoroughly educate and train the new comrades who entered our ranks”.* (Taaffe, 1995, p. 441)

It is likely that when dual members had to choose between Militant and the Labour Party, it would be highly dependent on their political commitment through education and training to Militant. If this proved deficient in a significant way their loyalty to Militant would come second to their loyalty to the Labour Party. This appears to have happened in large numbers and rather than Taaffe leading out a viable group large enough to survive outside the Labour Party, he only managed to lead out a rump of cadres. An estimated 6,000 members chose to remain members of the Labour Party,

the Labour Party was favoured over a new independent party on the Trotskyist left. The reasons were predictable given that the attraction of Militant for the many recruits was that it was not just another far left group but was working within the Labour Party to change the host party rather than be a small party outside it.

Grant was proved to be correct; Militant had failed to train and educate their new cadres to a high enough standard cementing their first loyalty to Militant. Grant argued that a vanguard party had to provide leadership with its cadres and prepare for intense periods of class conflict or even a revolutionary situation if capitalism collapsed. When the split occurred, the failings predicted by Grant came to the surface and the largest faction chose to remain in the Labour Party and continue the fight for socialism within the party as individual entryists.

Vanguardism is a political leadership model and the surge in membership of Militant, particularly in Liverpool, exposed the untrained raw recruits in a political conflict zone. The trade union movement was highly developed in Liverpool and the influx of recently unemployed union members moving into shop steward's positions met with derision outside of their own union comfort zone. Their exposure to the cutting edge of the JSSC and its intensely political general meetings was a form of cruelty. Not only were they expected to represent their workplace but also put forward a high risk political and industrial strategy at large meetings of shop stewards, some of whom had years of experience and were not easily led by new vanguardists with little or no training or experience. When the split came it was understandable that apart from the new recruits gaining a council job, their experience of Militant membership was short lived and negative. The likely outcome was that they remained Labour party members or left politics, freed of the time spent on Militant activities and its financial demands.



# Chapter 7

## CONCLUSIONS

### 7.1 Research questions

I have structured the conclusions to this thesis by looking at the research questions in turn and then analysing all the evidence from the case study.

### 7.2 Main Research Question

**The main question for the case study is how and why were the Militant Tendency allowed to grow within the Labour Party in the 1970s and 1980s to such an extent that they gained control of the Liverpool Labour Party and the Liverpool City Council?**

Militant Tendency grew from approx. 40 members in the 1960s to approx. 8,000 members in the 1980s, a party the size of Plaid Cymru, operating as a separate party within the Labour Party. Such growth could not have been achieved if the fertile conditions were not present. There was also and most importantly a lack of clarity of the aims and objectives of its host, the Labour Party, by failing to define ideological and political boundaries which would be expected of a large democratic socialist party. I will start by analysing the factors in the case study which provided fertile ground for Militant's growth in the Labour party.

## **(1)The Fear of Contagion.**

Militant survived in the Labour Party even after the production of the Underhill Report, (Appendix 2) which recommended action against some groups but primarily Militant. The report was not made available to the whole of the NEC let alone acted upon. For a short description of how this happened at the sub-committee of the NEC meeting please read Barbara Castle's account in 2.34 of this Case Study. Most of the left of the party feared another Bevanite purge of the party last seen in the 1950s, see also an extract, from Lord Blunkitt's interview on page 146. The left of the party, by shielding Militant, allowed it to grow without expulsions. The left protected Militant because of the fear of the contagion of a purge engulfing the entire left.

In the early period of Militant's growth, in the 1960s and 1970s, it portrayed itself as promoting a Marxist evaluation of current events in a similar way to the Fabian Society which published thought provoking pamphlets called tracts. Militant's meetings were claimed to be for readers to discuss the views of their paper. Extinguishing this small Marxist Tendency would have been seen by the rest of the left as brutal and anti-intellectual. It is reasonable to assume that if Militant would have contented itself to contributing to important debates around policies it would not have attracted undue attention and would have sat easily within the "broad church" concept that many Labour Party members subscribed to. Militant was not very visible to the electorate or the press during this phase in its development so it could not be argued it was an electoral liability.

However, a report, compiled by the National Agent of the Labour Party, Reg Underhill into the entryist activities of Militant showed that it was now a serious threat to them. Militant was fortunate that Eric Heffer not only was a member of the NEC but was chair

of the organisation sub-committee which suppressed the Underhill report. For more detail regarding Eric Heffer's political background, as an individual entryist, (see part 2.19.) Heffer, was the MP for Liverpool Walton, which was almost the birthplace of Militant and Heffer must have been aware that it was a matter of time before Militant would expect one of their own to represent them in parliament and de-select him. Until then Heffer was severely constrained by Militant within his constituency party. The fear of contagion to other parts of the left if Militant was expelled, only held as long as Militant was viewed as a voice for Marxism within a broad church of a socialist party. The fear of contagion abated when the left in the national party rose to prominence under the leadership of Tony Benn, (see part 2.26,) The left became too large and influential for this to be a real possibility, so this fear reduced significantly.

## **Conclusions**

The fear of contagion engulfing the entire left had reduced significantly, with the rise of the left in the Labour Party. However, before the rise of the left, the fear of contagion protected Militant from expulsions. At this stage of Militant Tendency's development, it was growing, but at a steady rate, and it concentrated on the selling and distribution of its paper the Militant. They had not yet constructed a strong enough springboard which would allow them to contest for parliamentary seats.

## **(2)The Rise of the Left in the Labour Party.**

The rise of the left in the Labour Party, and the reasons for it are dealt with in this thesis (see parts 2.27-2.44)

This increase in the size and influence of the left also saw a parallel rise within Militant (see parts 2.46-2.53) of this thesis. The failure to act upon the threats to the Labour Party, described in the Underhill Report when Militant was small, was now generating problems for the party. Militant's rapid growth in the late 70s, had the effect of elevating Militant from a small Marxist pressure group to having influence in many constituency parties. This influence was recognised when the umbrella group the Rank- and- File Mobilising Committee invited Militant to formally affiliate along with the CLPD to campaign for constitutional change within the Labour Party. Militant was now seen as a significant player because of its presence in many constituency parties, was protected by the umbrella of the rise of the left, and potentially, if the left had gained power, Militant would be in coalition with other sections of the left within the leadership of the Labour Party.

### **Conclusions.**

Militant and the left in the Labour Party had become too large and influential to be threatened by expulsions, because they had entered into a formal pact with other elements of the left. Militant had benefitted from the rise of the left and had achieved a modest measure of collective security through this pact. This was a significant improvement on their reliance on a general fear of a contagion spreading, as a result of a purge of Militant.

### **(3) Organisational and legal impediments act as a deterrent to expulsions of members of Militant.**

The covert organisation, which is Militant, operating as an entryist party, by its very nature restricted the circulation of documents which could incriminate them. The vanguard structure of the party is well suited to an acceptance of a “need to know restriction on documents.” This, in turn significantly reduces the ability of the Labour Party to produce enough evidence against members of Militant to justify expulsions. In addition to this impediment, a court of law is guided by the concept of natural justice which would require substantial written evidence of a breach of the rules of an organisation or an individual member. This was a daunting task for a constituency party to undertake even if the national party had agreed to fund the costs of an inevitable legal challenge by Militant of any expulsions.

The Blackburn Labour Party, in Lancashire, knew this to their cost. See part (2.25) The Blackburn Labour Party decided to expel members of its party for membership of Militant. It was fortunate in having a member of Militant as a mole who supplied them with written evidence of rule breaking and identified members of the party as also being members of Militant. Even with this distinct advantage it took the Blackburn Party three years to expel them and only after gaining a very narrow majority on the NEC. Meanwhile the mole, Michael Gregory joined the Liberal Party presumably un-impressed with the Labour Party’s ability to put its house in order.

### **Conclusions.**

Militant was protected from expulsions because of the lack of evidence against them. This was due to the secrecy inherent in the vanguard structure and its discipline.

Recourse to the courts by Militant acted as a significant deterrent to any moves to expel their members. Militant's justification for taking legal action is in Appendix 9 (Mulhearn, 1988) explaining over four pages of their book why Marxists should take legal action. They give many examples of circumstances where recourse to the courts is justified in their view. However, in the same book (Mulhearn, 1988) in Appendix 8, the authors contradict themselves when they try to explain, over three pages, why a trade union, the NUT, was wrong to take legal action in doing so it protected all its Liverpool members from redundancy in November 1985. The most fundamental function of a trade union is to protect its members from arbitrary dismissal. Militant expected a trade union to accept the uncertainty of an assurance that the notices would be withdrawn in their entirety rather than the near certainty of a legal ruling. Their reasoning is best summed up on page 2 of Appendix 8 of their book.

*“The NUT’s legal action was based on a misunderstanding, in particular, of the mass redundancy notices, issued at the end of September, which the council clearly had no intention of implementing.”*

Militant was stating that they did issue redundancy notices but there was no intention to implement them. The notices were a legal tactic not a reality. This demonstrates how the vanguard structure can construct a policy expecting trade unions to desist from legal action to protect its members but using it themselves to protect its organisation from the threats from the host party. The vanguard structure is primarily political and had to construct convoluted arguments why it was justifiable to use the courts for its survival. Trade unions were beyond Militant's control and could not be prevented from using the courts against them. Militant and the council then exposed themselves to charges of double standards by having to oppose trade union court action,

defending jobs, but justified it when defending their right to remain members of the Labour Party.

#### **(4)The Labour Party’s constitutional Weaknesses.**

The Labour Party’s constitutional weaknesses are analysed in part (2.27) but the quote below, by Peter Taaffe who was editor of Militant at the time, explains how the Labour Party had no clear parameters in an interview in 2018.

*“..... and after all this is a broad party, its, not a narrow party, its, not a communist party in which the parameters are quite clear, its doctrines are quite clear, you say this is what you signed up for, this is a broad formation, with different trends and tendencies within it.*

*Why do you think we were allowed to operate as the Militant Tendency?”* (Appendix 24, page 441)

The statement above is largely accurate but Taaffe does not explain the contradiction of how a narrow party where doctrines are clear i.e., Militant Tendency should be allowed to function and exploit the good will of a broad formation socialist party. Militant cannot operate, with credibility and consistency, within a broad church on one hand while exercising strict discipline within a crystal-clear ideology for its own members of Militant operating within the Labour Party.

Militant is arguing that the Labour Party is a broad church and should be lenient towards them whilst systematically imposing and supporting a strict and secret discipline of an outdated vanguard structure on its own members. This contradiction leads to a charge of hypocrisy and ultimately of exploiting the open and pluralist approach to policy formation, furthering its own revolutionary Trotskyist agenda. The broad-church

view of the Labour Party only holds together if the constituent parts sign up to this tolerant attitude and do not abuse the good faith inherent in this political model.

### **Conclusions.**

The constitutional weaknesses at the time of this case study in the Labour Party, by successive leaders, did not prioritise it until it was too late. The broad-church approach to party discipline only works if there is a sincere acceptance by all groups of this concept but it is incapable of accommodating political predators operating with a vanguard structure. However, the party did not face up to the reality, early enough, that Militant was exploiting this weakness. Its organisational structure, the vanguard structure, is far removed from a broad church and is incapable of co-existing with it other than on an exploitative basis.

One remedy was for the Labour Party to have had a very public special conference where its Aims and Objectives, consistent with a democratic socialist party were agreed. The conference needed to, after debate, arrive at a set of principals which made clear what the party was in favour of but also what it was against. This special conference should have taken place in 1986 after the tipping point of Neil Kinnocks speech to the September 1985 Conference. There was enormous admiration for Kinnock after the speech and an acceptance that the Labour Party had allowed itself to be exploited by Militant for far too long. The focus after the speech was instead channelled into organisational means of expelling individual members of Militant, behind closed doors, a necessary process, but it became the only method of tackling the problem of an entryist organisation which had a political agenda as well as an organisational agenda.



The expulsions were opposed by the “Stop the Witch-hunt “campaign led by Jeremy Corbyn from his home in London. This campaign benefited from confidential and private hearings of both the Inquiry into the Liverpool DLP and the subsequent disciplinary hearings because the only propaganda was coming from the Stop the Witch-Hunt Campaign, the National Labour Party was constrained to comment because of a possible legal challenge which may have prejudged the outcome. The issues from the Inquiry into the DLP, and the subsequent expulsions, because they were held in private, did not fully surface until much later and the impetus from the Kinnock speech was lost and dissipated.

A special conference would have addressed the fundamental political issues of what the Labour Party stands for and what it would not tolerate. Stating to the electorate that this was a new start, and that democratic socialism was now defined, and it did not include Trotskyism. This would have enabled the chairing of meetings at all levels of the party to take place without the congestion of agenda items by Militant because they would be outside the Aims and Objectives of the Labour Party. This would remove most of the impediments to the progress of policy making within a democratic socialist framework.

The Militant Tendency and other entryist groups would not be able to flood the business of constituency parties with their own agenda items which would then marginalise them enough to leave the Labour Party and abandon entryism. Organisationally, any member, in any section of the Labour Party would have the certainty of a clear set of aims and objectives from which to challenge entryists and compel chairs of meetings to enact them or face disciplinary action themselves. The Labour Party failed, during the period of this case study, to act swiftly and decisively because it had no clear path and sections of the electorate became aware of this over time.

The broad-church approach had failed because it was exploited by Militant who in its early days contributed to the general policy formation. This changed when Militant grew and used language such as 'combatting the organisation' which clearly meant they were now organising to substitute their organisation for the Labour Party's. All organisations have a duty to protect themselves from predatory groups but can only do so if they have clear aims and objectives which are fully supported by the membership.

### **(5)The Jewel in Militant's Crown, The Liverpool DLP and The Liverpool City Council.**

The rise in the membership of Militant benefited their organisation in Liverpool to such an extent that it was controlling the District Labour Party, the ruling Labour Group and consequentially the Liverpool City Council. The growth in Militant's influence in Liverpool is detailed in (parts 2.54 to 2.55,) with regards to their control of the DLP, and their activities in the Liverpool City Council from (parts 2.56 to 2.64)

It is remarkable that a small Trotskyist group grew and then took over the local party and then the administration of a city, but how and why did this happen? Militant, because of its growth, was no longer content to sell and promote its paper. It now had the numbers to secure leading positions within the DLP and was gaining nominations for council seats in winnable wards. It had transformed itself from a Marxist Tendency, a pressure group, to a Marxist Party running in parallel with the existing Labour Party structure with its own premises and full-time workers. In addition to this, the Secretary of the District Party was Felicity Dowling, a Militant member, and its President Tony Mulhearn also a prominent member of Militant. Ian Lowes, a member of Militant,

convener of the largest GMWU branch supplied the foot soldiers in the form of shop stewards who were also delegates to the DLP. The number of shop stewards grew as the patronage of employment nomination rights transformed a carefully selected new employee to shop steward and DLP delegate.

Ian Williams was interviewed in 2019, he was an instigator of Liverpool Labour Left, an internal opposition group to Militant. He looks back and now as a resident of New York City, sees similarities with American boss politics, he, explains,

*“All that indicated was nepotism. That was it, Derek was the real thing. Suddenly you were flooded with people who had simultaneously got a job in the static security force, a union card, a Labour Party Card and a delegacy to the DLP. They turned up at Labour Party Meetings in their uniforms, so they were even more intimidating than we first thought. These people were somewhat naïve. They’d been given a very specialised view. They’d been recruited to a cause and this produced a strange mixture of Bolshevism and traditional labourism in the American sense, the purpose of the election is to give jobs to the people who elected you. I should have recognised it from that way.”* (Appendix 25 page 457).

This political steamroller was unconstrained by the unions nationally or by the national Labour Party. Militant was also growing its finances because, new recruits were required to pay Militant a proportion of their wages. It was opposing the party’s bent shield policy of appeasement to cuts in local government spending, and on the surface, it appeared to be working. Militant was now the only serious organised opposition to the Thatcher Government in the city. Its vanguard structure would not allow a broad front of opposition to the government to grow because it was using the DLP as the engine of this organised opposition, a very much “in-house” approach. Militant

guarded its leadership role because this was beneficial to the growth of Militant even though organisations outside the labour camp were willing to give support to a broad-based campaign.

## **Conclusions.**

The Liverpool budget crisis put Militant on the political map growing from a long-standing strong political base to achieve dominance within the Liverpool Labour Party. It achieved this when it transformed itself from a pressure group promoting its paper "Militant", to a parallel political party within the Liverpool Labour Party and then projecting itself nationally as a beacon and role model for resistance to local government cuts. The effect of this transformation was that the priority for Militant was now securing as many positions within the party as possible, gaining power and retaining it. Labour, having gained a majority on the Council, operated widespread patronage in terms of filling vacancies. The raw recruits to Militant caused problems in terms of their lack of political training which undermined the vanguard structure of Militant. This was commented on by Ted Grant, their senior theoretician, who advocated a slower rate of growth so that quality could be prioritised over quantity, his advice was ignored. This problem was demonstrated by new inexperienced shop stewards attending the JSSC and being completely out of their depth causing, in some cases derision. Rather than taking up the leading role of a vanguardist, they were struggling to master the basics of trade unionism and were certainly not impressing the growing ranks of the JSSC. However, within the JSSC structure, motions passed by its meetings were advisory only and each union exercised its sovereignty. This was not true of the DLP because although the Labour Group was separate and independent from the DLP in practice councillors were intimidated by the DLP and rarely opposed its decisions and were

afraid to exercise their sovereignty. The raw recruits from the trade union nomination system were whipped by Militant because their votes did count in the DLP.

Militant in Liverpool grew, but at a price, they sacrificed the quality of their cadres, crucial in their vanguard structure for a surge in their membership numbers. It could be argued also that Derek Hatton had risen from a young councillor to Deputy Leader too quickly and that as a leading cadre he did not appreciate fully his position in the vanguard structure of Militant i.e., subservient to the far more senior Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn. His numerous media appearances did not portray an image of a salt of the earth working class fighter which Militant would have preferred, but of a slick media-savvy personality. This surfaced when Derek Hatton along with Tony Byrne supported the issuing of the redundancy notices, but Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn opposed it, according to them, but without a public record to this effect. This incident appears to show the only instance where the leadership lost control of one of their leading cadres with disastrous results.

### **7.3 Subsidiary Research Question 1**

**Why did the Labour Party not have a clearly defined set of Aims and Objectives in its Constitution which would have protected it from entryism?**

Sidney Webb in 1918 had a daunting task to draw up a founding constitution of the Labour Party which would meet with the approval of all the affiliates, and one can only reasonably assume it was consensus driven, thereby avoiding schisms but steering away from contentious definitions. Instead of listing a clearly defined leading paragraph of the party's Aims and Objectives he constructed Clause IV of the constitution. Minkin sums it up,

*“Thus, although the party changed its formal aims from the pursuit of ‘trade union principles and ideals’ to the goal of Socialism, defined as ‘the common ownership of the means of production’ and the ‘social economic and political emancipation of the people’ these could be interpreted in terms which were fully compatible with ‘trade union principles and ideals’. Under the new constitution, the party was to seek ‘the full fruits of the labour of the producers, it was to seek a system of ‘popular administration and control of each industry and service’” (Minkin, 1991, p. 10)*

Socialism was, according to Sidney Webb explaining the 1918 constitution,

*‘no more specific than a definite repudiation of individualism’*

Although this fused the industrial and political wing of the Labour party together in a common aim of rejecting the individualism of capitalism for developing some form of common ownership. The vagueness of the wording allowed for a very wide interpretation of what the Labour Party was for, which could not preclude Marxism nor groups that would argue for it. After Gaitskell tried and failed to modernise Clause IV in 1959, imploring the NEC to,

*“try to work out and state the fundamental principles of British Democratic Socialism as we see and as we feel it today, in 1959 not 1918. And I hope that in due course another conference will endorse what they propose”. (Coates, 1995, p. 39)*

Clause IV remained and continued to be used as a political justification by Trotskyist Revolutionary groups practising entryism.

## **Conclusions.**

The Labour Party's failure to state the fundamental principles of British Democratic Socialism for modern conditions in its Aims and Objectives was simply too politically painful and convulsive to contemplate. The Party believed it to be well hidden from the electorate and could be admired but only internally. Clause IV was never creatively developed or implemented although it could be argued nationalisation was a form of common ownership. The experience however of the workers in the nationalised industries was that the management was no different to a private company and in some cases less enlightened.

Another reason for the failure by the Labour Party to create political boundaries, which would exclude Trotskyist entryism, was that the electoral competition on the democratic socialist left of politics did not exist. Unlike the western European experience, mainly with proportional representation, there was competition on the left and a necessity to differentiate and clarify their political principles for the electorate to make a judgement. The British Labour Party felt it could afford to fudge this process with successive Labour leaders in the 1970s and 1980s simply failing to prioritise the creation of a modern and coherent set of Aims and Objectives.

### **7.4 Subsidiary Research Question 2.**

**Militant claimed to be a legitimate voice for Marxism, within a loose open federated Labour Party structure, is this a true representation of their position?**

The Labour Party had a loose open federated structure with a Clause IV which was open to a wide interpretation, Neil Kinnock agrees in an interview in 2019,

*“Think about the circumstances in which it was written in 1918. Who wrote it in 1918? The Webbs, Sidney Webb specifically. He was very cautious about being too precise about what could be called the Marxist wing of thought in the infant Labour Movement and he was equally cautious about the dangers of being too precise about defining against the Marxist strain of thought. So, we ended up with this immensely vague vocabulary “to secure for the workers by hand or brain the full fruits of their labour by the best attainable means of administration”. It was, so vague, it could cover anything.”*

(Appendix 20 page 394)

So, Militant have a point about simply being another strain in the loose Labour Party family until, from the Underhill Report, 1975 and onward from that, evidence was being amassed that where Militant could take over parts and sections of the Labour Party it was doing so. Militant had moved from a pressure group, promoting Marxism and Trotskyism, to organising covertly a parallel party structure. The minutes of their meetings in Blackburn and Lancashire (Appendix 1) leave a reader in no doubt that their activities are aimed at substituting Militant for the Labour Party. I put this to Peter Taaffe, editor of Militant, in an interview with him in 2018,

*“But my contention is many other organisations had minutes, collected money, had this kind of ‘discipline’, they were organised, but I repeat they were not as well organised as us, because of the political ideas that we had. If you’re going to combat an organisation – and after all this is a broad party, it’s not a narrow party, it’s not a communist party in which the parameters are quite clear, its doctrines are quite clear – you say this is what you signed up for, this is a broad formation, with*



*different trends and tendencies within it. Why do you think we were allowed to operate as the Militant Tendency?” (Appendix 24 page 441)*

The reason why other organisations were not as well organised as Militant, was because they were not trying to “combat an organisation” or take it over it but to influence it. Other organisations were not working to substitute their organisation for the Labour Party but to move it politically in their direction.

This was clear in the case of their complete substitution policy of Militant in Liverpool, where they were numerically able to do so. From the evidence given to the National Inquiry into the DLP by former Militant member Irene Buxton (Appendix 8) that as Militant grew in Liverpool it was continually dividing into branches with the aim of shadowing wards and constituencies in Liverpool.

In the case of the DLP, Militant was shouting at and intimidating minority opposition, see (part 2.59) of this thesis which documents the experience of a small group opposed to Militant called Liverpool Labour Left. Another source was in the interview with Professor David Robertson in 2019 who was a regular attender at DLP meetings.

*“Internal opposition was muted and chilled out really, sometimes brutally shouted down. It was good training for the Corbyn period, I have to say but nothing really has changed.” (Appendix 21 page 406)*

The experience of Militant in control of a large city is not of a Marxist strain arguing for their view to prevail. It is a vanguard party gaining power and crushing opposition to it by intimidation and strength of numbers created by patronage schemes.

## **Conclusions.**

It is clear from many sources that Militant started out as a voice for Marxism seeking to influence debate in the Labour Party but as it grew, its organisational aims were to substitute their organisation for the Labour Party's. The Inquiry into the Liverpool Party found enough evidence to support this view beyond any reasonable doubt. Militant was a minority organisation in the 1960s promoting Marxism and Trotskyism.

This ceased to be true, beyond doubt, when it later, took over the Liverpool Labour Party and was no longer a pressure group but a separate political party operating within the Labour Party. It was no longer arguing for their Trotskyist view of socialism within a broad church but ignoring opposition to it from whatever quarter it came. It was using organisational tools to thwart open debate which would potentially threaten its leadership.

Militant had morphed from a small, dedicated group of, well-trained vanguardists, into a political party with an army of raw recruits inadequately trained but with pretensions to lead the working class into a battle with a government that had just defeated and humiliated the NUM. Critics of Militant made no impression on them because the policy had been fixed and the only issue was how to carry it out.

### **7.5 Subsidiary Research Question 3**

**Did entryism, a tactic, cause Militant's identity as a revolutionary Marxist Group to be diluted and compromised as an unintentional consequence of the tactic?**

Marx was clear about a message to the working class in the final paragraph of the Communist Manifesto written by Marx and Engels.

*“The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.”* (Engels, 1848, p. 96)

It is difficult to read this paragraph without seeing the glaring contradiction between this declaration and entryism where the message had to be filtered through the sieve of the host party. I drew this contradiction to the notice of Peter Taaffe in an interview with him in 2018, he replied,

*“Entryism is referred to, applied to us in particular, the first of many issues in the Labour Party of the recent period of the last 50 years, entryism was coined in order to give the impression of a small, sinister group entering the Labour party to take it over. We were not really adherents to the Labour party, its aims and objectives, I’m quoting initially the terminology the right uses. We dispute that. We joined the Labour Party in good faith because it was a federal party, it had the trade unions, if you talk about entryism, why now under Blair or under the present leader Jeremy Corbyn, does the Co-op party have its own structure, have its own NEC, its own conference, and yet sends delegates to that conference, that’s an echo, a safe echo for them of what existed in the past that was the original basis of the Labour Party.”* (Appendix 21 page 440)

Taaffe does not answer the question of the contradiction of entryism, and the Communist Manifesto instead infers that the word entryism was coined by the right of the party, but it came directly from the pre-war Fourth International. Their discussions described entryism as a method of growing small Trotskyist groups in large socialist

parties. He then compares Militant to the Co-op party but fails to explain that the constitution of the Co-op party only varies from the constitution of the Labour Party in respect of its retail and wholesale trading activities. He also fails to explain that Militant have never been affiliates, unlike the Co-op party, and members of Militant were dual members of Militant and the Labour Party.

Members of Militant never had a special arrangement with the Labour Party and could not claim, in any collective sense, to be allowed to present its own Trotskyist/Marxist message. Individual members of Militant expressing a Marxist view, albeit at odds with official Labour Party policy, could and did express such a view. This is not the same as a collective programme and message to the working class by a revolutionary party clearly expressed by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto.

### **Conclusion.**

Entryism was a compromise which traded entry into a large socialist party and its promise of a fertile recruiting ground, with partially submerging its Marxist aims and diluting them within a democratic socialist party it was now a hybrid organisation. Militant made substantial membership gains by employing the policy of entryism, but it could not then describe itself as a Marxist party because it had to dilute its views, a price it paid for entering the Labour Party.

Even if Militant claimed it was running both political programmes simultaneously it certainly was not the clear and unequivocal language of the Communist Manifesto. Because of this flaw, created by entryism, Militant forfeited their claims to be a Marxist organisation by failing to apply the word and the spirit of the Marxist, Communist Manifesto. Instead, they compromised their position and distorted and diluted their

message to the working-class movement because they had become a hybrid between two parties speaking in turn to two different audiences. To say the least this was a confused and opaque message. Militant's two tribunes in Parliament David Nellist and Terry Fields were severely constrained because of their very public role and their every word recorded in Hansard. The notion that here were two voices of Marxism in Parliament was simply not borne out by their speeches which of course had to be filtered into the language of a Labour MP certainly not a revolutionary Trotskyist. Entryism and its constraints, blunted the message of an open assault on capitalism and could even be said it confused it, leading to the charge that Militant was a political hybrid that had sacrificed its Marxist message for its own growth.

#### **7.6 Subsidiary Research Question 4**

##### **What effect did a vanguard party, in office, have on the administration and management of the Liverpool City Council?**

In (2.63,) of this thesis, I have described how Militant created a new form of industrial relations which had a significant impact on the management and administration of the city council. Some trade unions had formed an alliance with the Militant led council who were operating within a vanguard structure. The vanguard policy and slogan 'No Cuts in Jobs and Services' was a policy which the Council's administration found difficult to manage. Conventional budgeting was problematic because each department was operating on a deficit budget not a real one, the shortfall was identified as promissory note of income from a successful campaign to wrest more money from central government to fund the gap in spending. However, the political fault lines started to appear in the policy and slogan of "No cuts in jobs and services".

Although the political emphasis was on maintaining existing services and resisting cuts to these services by campaigning for more money from central government, another agenda was running parallel to it. Tony Byrne, close to Militant, but not a member and chair of the finance committee, had acquainted himself with local government finance policy and procedures beyond what was expected of a lay councillor. It was more usual to take and rely on the advice from his officers i.e., the local authority civil service. Tony Byrne was taking over, in stages, normal budgeting and substituting crisis management. This had the effect of by-passing the management of the city even on day- to- day spending to the chair of finance who was managing the vanguard policy of Militant, not the council officials. Lord Storey, at the time, the deputy leader of the Liberal Group on the council, recalls the management's reaction to this crisis management in an interview in 2018.

*“and senior officers, who you thought were ‘civil servants’, politically neutral, suddenly in fear of their jobs and their pensions, suddenly started acquiescing and doing things which they shouldn’t do. Possibly the one exception was Ken Antcliffe who just got drunk. Let it all pass over him. So, it was quite a frightening time.”* (Appendix 23 page 428)

Ken Antcliffe, referred to in the above quote was the Director of Education, the largest department in the council and responsible for approximately four hundred schools and colleges. The management of the council was concentrated in fewer and fewer managers and councillors as the budget crisis deepened and the realistic injection of government funds receded. This culminated in Tony Byrne personally authorising expenditure on an emergency basis day to day. Managers were having to make a case for spending money which was already agreed in their budgets, but the new criteria

had become, could it be justified in a crisis situation? Managers, instead of administering carefully constructed budgets were transformed into advocates for day-to-day emergency spending.

## **Conclusions.**

The dual effect of a vanguard policy led by a vanguard ruling group on the council paralysed normal budgeting and normal administration of agreed budgets in favour of crisis management. Medium and long-term planning became impossible until the promised funding gap from central government was forthcoming. Managers were demoralised, and in some cases, showed visible signs of extreme stress. The management structure had broken down not only because the budgeting norms had broken down but for all the reasons described in (2.63.) Industrial relations were transformed by the fusing of some unions with the Militant campaign which gave them a special status which management had to adjust to or lose their own jobs.

### **7.7 Subsidiary Research Question 5.**

#### **What effect did a vanguard party have on parties and bodies outside the control of the Liverpool District Labour Party?**

This research question is referred to in, (2.56) of this thesis, which deals with external dissent from Militant policies and (2.90-2.93) which deals with the DLP and its management of dissent giving three significant examples. In general terms the vanguard structure operating from a position of power seeks to pursue its policies vigorously which creates problems when it collides with external pluralistic bodies which operate on a consensus basis absorbing dissent by making compromises. Pluralist organisations expect democratic bodies like a City Council to be responsive to lobbying and

ready to make changes to policies when they draw their attention to flaws in their policies believing it to be a positive and constructive process.

When the vanguard internal decision-making process is complete it moves forward assuming the policy to be totally correct and outside bodies are either hostile to their policies or benign and misguided. The task for a vanguard structure when it encounters dissent is not to absorb it, but to repel it and to seek to explain to those external bodies, in more detail of the correctness of its policies. A vanguard group is hostile to lobbying but instead places a great emphasis on educating and persuading outside bodies and external opposition to conform and support their policies.

Pluralist bodies soon realise that dissent and lobbying is futile and either oppose outright the vanguard group or stand aside and cease to engage in any meaningful way. This leads inevitably to a polarisation where there are two camps with the vanguard group in one camp defending its undiluted policies and outside bodies implacably opposed to them because of their refusal to engage and make changes to accommodate their views but also to enhance the policy.

I give an example of this intransigence in (2.91,) the appointment of Sam Bond, an underqualified black person from London who was appointed Race Relations Advisor to the City Council. He was deemed to be a poor candidate at his interview by the opposition councillors, the NALGO observer, and the Black Caucus observers at the interview. His appointment was judged to be biased because he was a member of Militant and had no experience of liaising with senior officers across a large organisation, an important requirement of the post. His appointment was also opposed by the two senior churchmen in the City, the Archbishop of the Catholic church and the



Bishop of the Anglican church who saw his appointment as a retrograde step after the re-building of community relations following the 1981 Toxteth riots.

Despite this formidable opposition to the appointment Militant refused to reconsider because it ran counter to its own agenda of opposition to positive discrimination, a policy which would have threatened its patronage of appointments through nomination rights to politically affiliated unions. Rather than operate within a pluralist framework it chose to counter this opposition with the following consequences. First it set up its own front black organisation and integrated it into its own central support unit financed by the City Council. This enraged the Black Caucus and alienated it from the Council. Secondly relations, with NALGO city branch, a large trade union branch in the city, deteriorated, a consequence Militant could ill afford.

## **Conclusions**

The example I give above of vanguardism always moving forward with their own policies impervious to external dissent created a political mechanism where pluralism was cast aside in favour of an unwavering vanguard group unwilling to compromise. Rather than discuss problems with the dissenting body, in this example, Militant created its own front organisation. This polarised the city into pro-Militant support organisations and anti-Militant organisations with no middle ground. This was a poor basis on which to fight a united Conservative government fresh from defeating a divided National Union of Mine Workers, at one time seen as the vanguard of the trade union movement.

Vanguardism, in a colourful and diverse pluralist society is monochrome and is incapable of absorbing positive alternative views, this is viewed as revisionism by Militant

which diverts the organised working class and confuses it. A clear message when striving for power but problematic when exercising it.

### **7.8 Subsidiary Research Question 6.**

**Did Militant transform the Liverpool District Labour Party into a soviet of party and union delegates, centralising power in the vanguard model into one sovereign body from which it mandated and controlled the Labour Group?**

This research question is addressed in part (2.55) in this thesis and describes how the DLP had created for itself all the characteristics of a soviet. Its trade union delegates were mainly led by a Militant leadership together with Labour party delegates from wards controlled by Militant. The treatment of the dissenting minority is recorded in statements by Prof David Robertson, Pat Ferguson, Ian Williams, and Jane Kennedy who all speak of intimidation and lack of respect at meetings for critical voices of Militant policies. Representative democracy had broken down and the Labour Group was mandated by the DLP to carry out its policies. No longer were they to take account of the views of the DLP, but were expected to carry them out, to the letter.

This is an extreme example of vanguardism transforming a pluralistic democratic structure, the DLP, designed to coordinate the sections of the City Labour Party, and then, changing it into a soviet of unions and party members supporting Militant policies to the exclusion of all others. The President of the DLP, Tony Mulhearn, a leading member of Militant, was now mobilising the DLP as a fighting force to project the council campaign deeper into the Labour Party in a centralised manner and far from its primary function of a coordinating body within the City Labour Party. The EC of the DLP was directing the vanguard policy and presenting an inflexible line to mainly

aggregate meetings of the DLP, using these meetings as confirmatory expressions of agreement with the political actions and the political line of Militant.

Members of the Labour Group did not assert their authority at DLP meetings and were compliant and did not voice their concerns at certain aspects of DLP policy which would be quite normal in most other cities. Militant controlled and dominated the DLP and used the DLP as a modified soviet of party members and affiliated union delegates driving a campaign leading to an outright planned confrontation with central government.

### **Conclusions.**

The DLP was clearly operating beyond its remit and its chairman, Tony Mulhearn was not preventing this but encouraging it. The construction of a modified soviet enabled Militant to continually gain legitimacy on a frequent basis by the mechanism of calling DLP aggregate meetings. These meetings, rather than structured party meetings with agendas and written reports, were often called to receive an oral report back of the latest policy developments of the budget crisis and to endorse the actions of the leadership. Dissent was drowned out and constructive debate and amendment was impossible due to the lack of a formal written report to delegates. The oral report often took the form of a rallying call, instead of an appraisal, warts and all, of the state of the campaign. Militant in its vanguard role was able to use the modified soviet model for the DLP to maximise its support and minimise the opposition.

However, the soviet model used by Militant for the DLP was a restricted form of the kind of soviet Trotsky chaired in St Petersburg, in 1917. This would be nearer to a Trades Council and Liverpool indeed had a Trades Council, but it was not Militant

controlled, far from it. It had wide representation from all trade unions in the City and was not dominated by unions representing those employed by the City Council. Militant concentrated its efforts in the DLP transforming it into a modified soviet and avoided attempting the same with the trades council because it was too diverse both industrially and politically. Liverpool was home to almost all the groups on the socialist left and this percolated through to the trade unions in the Trades Council where debate was at a high level and meetings were well run and procedurally followed a trade union branch meeting. This body was ignored by Militant because they recognised the extent of their influence and preferred to completely control the DLP rather than dissipate its forces in the Trades Council. Militant could not transform the Trades Council and dominate it or even provide a leading voice, so it by-passed it using the DLP as its vehicle rather than the Trades Council. Militant is pragmatically turning against orthodox Trotskyist methods of using trades councils as embryo workers councils or soviets because it could not control it. It would have also exposed their raw recruits from their patronage schemes to a much wider range of debate from seasoned and persuasive delegates on the Trades Council.

### **7.9 Subsidiary Research Question 7**

**Why did the National Labour Party respond by suspending the Liverpool District Labour Party in December 1985, holding an Inquiry which reported to the NEC in February 1986, and then expel leading members of the Militant Tendency?**

After over twenty years of entryism by Militant the leadership of the Labour Party had reached a tipping point, and this occurred on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1985 on Preston Railway Station. Neil Kinnock bought a copy of the evening newspaper the Lancashire Evening Telegraph for a read whilst waiting for his connection to London. He was travelling

back from Blackpool after attending the Trades Union Congress, a must for any Labour leader. The headlines from nearby Liverpool, was that the Militant led City Council decided to issue redundancy notices to all its 31,000 employees and because of union picket lines could not deliver them in the usual way. It arranged for a clandestine distribution centre in the north of the city to deliver the notices using a fleet of taxis organised by a GMWU union convener Peter Lennard.

Kinnock's reaction to this astonishing news was *'I've got them'* meaning that Militant had jettisoned their main support line in Liverpool, the local authority trade unions by giving them notice of the sack and this to take effect at Christmas time. The Liverpool Echo's front-page headline on this day was more brutal,

*'Merry Christmas you're sacked'.*

This is all documented in sections (2.79 and 2.80) in this thesis.

The strategy of confronting the Government and to campaign for more financial support had collapsed because councillors were faced with crippling surcharges if the employees were not dismissed, a predictable outcome when the council was to run out of money due to the creation of a deficit budget. The Councillors slogan *'Better to break the Law than break the Poor'* no longer applied and the need to safeguard the councillors from surcharge and prevent law breaking was now imperative. The councillors decided that,

*"the employees were no longer sacred cows but sacrificial lambs"* (Kilfoyle, 2000, p. 141).

This was a retreat from everything the DLP stood for which was now a derided and discredited body. Prof David Robertson attended all DLP meetings but was normally

shouted at because of his opposition to Militant and because he was a delegate from a leafy part of the city. However, when he explained he was expert on Industrial Relations Law i.e., the Employment Protection Act he was given an unusual reception. reported in an interview with Prof David Robertson in 2019.

*“The room went silent, a packed room of 150 delegates fell absolutely silent as I explained in detail what the redundancy notices meant, the breaches of continuity of contract against the Tory industrial relations act of the time, and that no trade union leader would ever be able to accept this, even as a tactic because they could never accept trusting the role of an employer to declare a redundancy without opposing it. Everybody listened to it in absolute silence. At the end of it, Hatton said ‘well anyway’.*  
(Appendix 21 page 407)

The normally slavish GMWU delegates at the DLP gave David Robertson the floor, without interruption, because the issue was too important to shout down because he was explaining the threat to their employment in a city where a council job was not to be thrown away easily. The mood in the city had changed in days and the annual Labour Party Conference was about to take place in Bournemouth and Kinnock sensing that the party had reached a tipping point prepared a speech which politically discredited Militant and separated out the non-Militant parts of the left in the Labour Party. This separation allowed the leader to suspend the Liverpool DLP pending an enquiry followed by disciplinary hearings for 16 members of the leadership of the DLP. This was reduced to 12 members who were charged with membership of Militant and expelled from the party. This is documented in parts (2.81-2.93) regarding the Inquiry into the DLP and (2.94-2.96) for the Disciplinary hearings.

## **Conclusions.**

The tipping point i.e., the issuing of the redundancy notices and Kinnock's speech to the Labour Party Conference of 1985, separated out Militant from the rest of the left and the Liverpool Inquiry discovered large scale rule breaking in the DLP. The evidence was overwhelming, particularly from an ex- Militant Irene Buxton (Appendix 8) which explained in detail that Militant was organising as a separate political party and taking over parts of the Liverpool Labour Party where it was strong enough to do so, which included the DLP.

The Inquiry, because of its detailed evidence gathering, was not simply a vehicle from which it could expel Militant it exposed the organisation for what it was, an entryist party, expanding its own membership to the detriment of the host party. The national Labour Party would have probably tolerated Militant if it confined itself to existing as a small group on the Marxist left, selling its paper and campaigning for its policies in a friendly and comradely way which it did in its early days.

It grew however from approx. 40 to approx. 8000 members the size of Plaid Cymru, operating within the Labour Party. In Liverpool it was organised with full-time workers and its own premises and dominated the DLP. At one stage there was a possibility of four of the city's six MPs being members of Militant. The National Labour Party was hampered by the reluctance of the NEC to act but when the national trade union leaders on the NEC saw the industrial relations chaos affecting their members for example, Tom Sawyer of NUPE, they rallied behind the leader. The St Ermins Group, (2.39-2.41,) described in this thesis, played a major part in mobilising support on the NEC for action against Militant and had a significant number of their group on the Inquiry Team. This included the chairman Charlie Turnock who played a crucial role in guiding

the Inquiry team to gather enough evidence that would justify the holding of disciplinary hearings.

The Labour Party needed to win elections and Militant created news stories which made the electorate confused about what kind of Labour Party candidate they were voting for. The difference between a democratic socialist candidate and a Marxist /Trotskyist candidate is a chasm and the electorate had a right to know. The leadership had no other alternative but to end the confusion and expel Militant.



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